Architecture: Virtues of Planned City: Model of a New Town in Finland Displayed
By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
New York Times (1923-Current file); Oct 24, 1963; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
pg. 38

Architecture: Virtues of Planned City

Model of a New Town in Finland Displayed

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

IT would be an excellent idea if Borough President Albert V. Maniscalco of Richmond and the members of the City Planning Commission — currently at odds about how to develop the rural areas that the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge will open on Staten Island — joined forces long enough to look at an excellent small show on a New Town in Finland called Tapiola. The exhibition will be on view at the Architectural League, 115 East 40th Street, until Nov. 14 and will then tour the country.

Tapiola can only awaken a frustrating combination of heartache and anger in any observer who has watched the destructive march of developers' housing across the American landscape since the war.

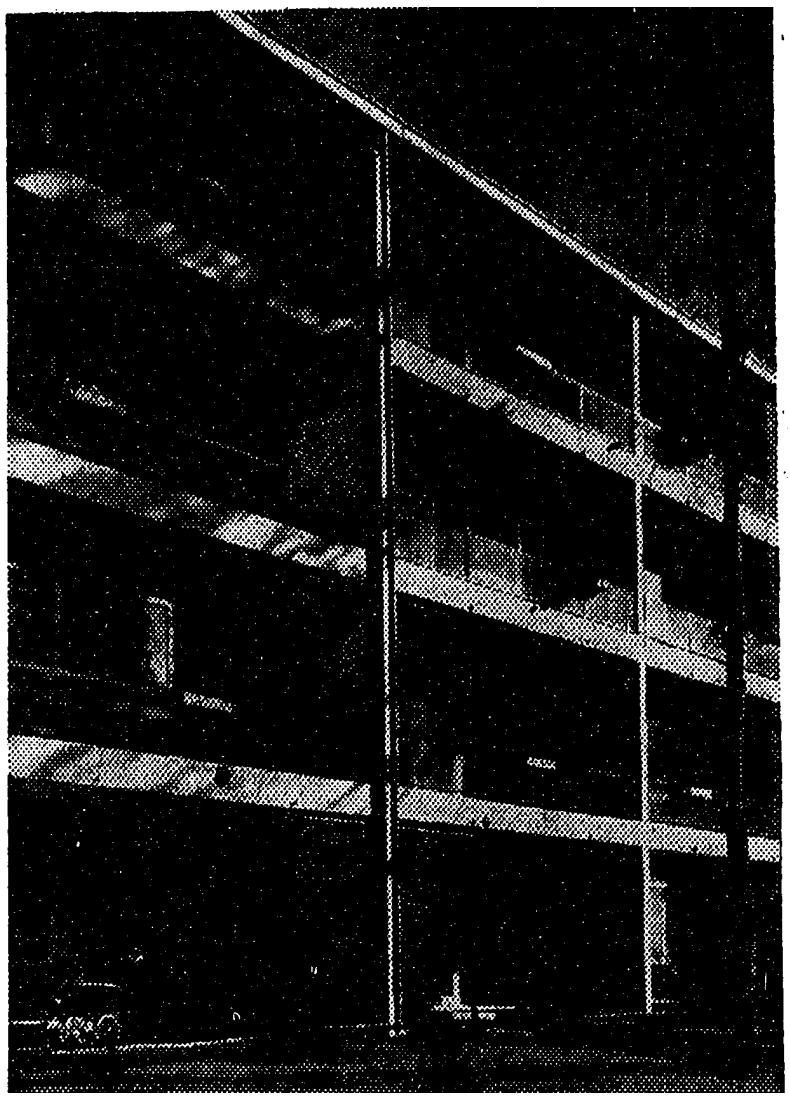
This beautifully clear, handsome and unequivocal demonstration of the virtues of the planned community is the antithesis of current practice in the United States. And Tapiola is probably the finest of the New Towns that have been a postwar phenomenon abroad, most notably in England and Scandinavia.

●

The opening up of undeveloped land—as on Staten Island, a pertinent example at home—as well as the push of population and the urgent need for housing have resulted in the greatest urban and architectural challenge of the 20th century: the creation of entire new communities in all parts of the world, from sophisticated western Europe to underdeveloped Africa.

There are two ways to go about this. The first is to plan for the best possible human environment, so that landscape is preserved, social needs are met and architectural standards are established. The second is to permit unregulated uncoordinated, piecemeal speculative development, motivated by profit rather than by concern for the human condition.

The housing units that we have flung across the country in this manner make an impressive statistic, if an appalling landscape. Conceived in gross economic terms, they add up, according to Frederick Gutheim, director of the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies, to a "gross national product for gross national people." They also add up to cumulative chaos, design squalor, urban sprawl, future slums, and the destruction of the natural scene. Call it free enterprise or short-sighted rapacity, the results are the same.



Apartment house in planned community of Tapiola, Finland

At Tapiola, the land was the first consideration. It is an area of gentle topography, tall, straight birches, dense or delicate pines and land and water vistas of consummate loveliness. To preserve this setting, situated only seven miles from Helsinki, the landscape architects made the plans that guided the entire development before a single building went up. No bulldozers. Repeat: no bulldozers.

"We were not interested in just creating housing," says Heikki von Hertzen, director of Asuntosaatio, the administrative group responsible for Tapiola. "We wanted to do more. We wanted to keep the nearness and beauty of nature, to have a town that was socially and biologically correct. More than just dwellings, we were looking for an optimum environment for modern man."

In the 10 years between 1953 and 1963, 670 acres have been developed for 17,000 people. The area is divided into three neighborhoods, the last of which will be completed in 1965. Amenities are suburban, but the atmosphere is rural. Single houses, row houses and high-rise buildings stand side by side.

●

Each neighborhood is served by a center and schools, with a larger community center for the whole town. The neighborhoods have been broken down further into 15 or 20 subordinate units, all designed by different architects and built at varying times.

The result is not conflict but coordination with variety. There is no "project" onus, stylistically. The quality of the buildings is warm, contemporary and uniformly high. Some areas were opened to competition; the winning town center, for example, is by Aarne Ervi, one of the country's leading architects. The list of credits is a "Who's Who" of Finnish design.

●

Tapiola is a privately sponsored, privately financed undertaking, supported by social organizations and federations that include welfare, civil service and trade union groups, representing a complete social cross-section. It scratched for its original mortgages (at high rates), had only its site sales as capital and received no Government assistance until recently.

Ninety per cent of the houses and apartments are tenant-owned through cooperative "housing companies." The housing companies, in turn, are stockholders in "supply companies" that provide centrally produced heat, light and power. Provisions have been made for local business and industry, which employ 30 per cent of the population now and will eventually employ 50 per cent.

Tapiola's aim was to establish a complete town in unexploited country, and to show new and better ways of doing it. Its scale is small, but its housing and planning principles are expandable. And Tapiola proved that it could be done with success and sensitivity. To American viewers of the exhibition, it is an example and a rebuke.