

Review Paper on Urban Planning Theory

“Broadacre City: Frank Lloyd Wright’s Un-Built Suburban Utopia”

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Abstract:- Architecture or Town Planning of a specific nation is one of the most important indication of its social, cultural and economical legacy. At the point when moving toward this topic in reference to United States of America, referencing Frank Lloyd Wright is inescapable, as he is known as "the best American planner ever". The vision of Broadacre City was a project that consumed the greater part of the architect's life. This Review Paper investigates the technical, structural and ideological aspects of the Broadacre City concept. The principle objective of this review paper is to know and establish whether Broadacre City was designed in the way that it is associated with the fundamental American values of freedom and democracy and how those values were manifested in the Broadacre Concept itself.

Keywords: Broadacre City, Decentralization, Mobility, Rent , Organic architectu

INTRODUCTION:

Frank Lloyd Wright was keen in site and vicinity and community network planning throughout his profession. His theories and hypothesis on urban design started as early as 1900 and proceeded until his death. He had total 41 commissions for the scale of community and site planning and also on urban planning and design. His perspective on sub-urban planning and design initiated in 1900 with a proposed sub-division layout for Charles E. Roberts said this concept as the "Quadruple Block Plan."

This design structure strayed from conventional suburban lot layouts and set houses on little square blocks of four equal-sized lots covered on all sides by roads instead of straight rows or columns of houses on parallel streets.

The more ambitious planning of whole society were exemplified by his entry into the City Club of Chicago Land Development Competition in 1913. The challenge was for the development and advancement of a suburban and rural section. **This design expanded on the Quadruple Block Plan and included several social levels.** The design defines the positioning of the larger scale homes (Residences if HIGs) in the most desirable areas and the blue collar homes and apartments differentiated by parks, common spaces and playfields. The design also integrated with all the facilities of a small scale city like: institutions, rental areas and recreational facilities etc. This view of decentralized town was later reinforced by theoretical **Broad-acre City design**.

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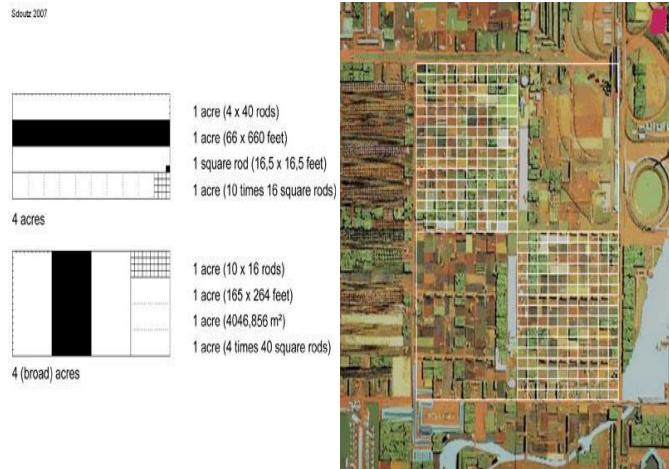


FIGURE-1
Quarter of Broadacre City model compared to a one mile grid composed of 640 (broad) acres at 264 x 165 feet (approx. 80 x 50 m) each. (Source: https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/4605/1/Stankiewicz_Emilie_Crossroads_9.pdf)

The philosophy behind his community planning was decentralization. The new advancement must be away from the urban communities. In this decentralization of American cities, all services, amenities and facilities could exist together "factories could be set side by side with farmland and residences."

Broadacre City is a concept proposed by Frank Lloyd Wright for an urban or suburban development (he worked throughout most of his lifetime on it). Following points are the important aspects of his Broadacre theory:

1. He Created a very detailed 12 by 12 foot (3.7×3.7 m) of scale model showing the hypothetical 4 square mile (10 km^2) community network. The Student interns had crafted the model, those students were working for him at Taliesin.
2. Majority of the structures designed in the conceptual physical model were completely innovative in ideas by Wright, while other buildings were a kind of renovation of old ones, some of which had been very innovative and rarely seen. **Broadacre City was the antithesis of a city and the apotheosis of the newly born suburbia, shaped through Wright's particular vision.**

3. It was both a planning idea as well as socio-political scheme by which each household (5 People) would be given a one acre (4,000 m²) plot of land from the federal lands reserves, and a Wright-conceived that society or community would be built from scratch from this.

4. In a sense it was the exact opposite of transit-oriented development. The importance was also given to the railway stations and office buildings as well as apartment buildings in Broadacre City, but the apartment dwellers are expected to be a small minority.

5. All-important transport is done by automobile and the pedestrian can exist safely only within the confines of the one acre (4,000 m²) plots where most of the population dwells. **Broadacre City was having the landscape design and garden city ideas inspired from Frederick Law Olmsted and also from Ebenezer Howard. Concept for the absence of the automobile, born much later.** The unplanned and incomplete version of Broadacre city are the Edge cities (in recent concepts of sub-urban planning).

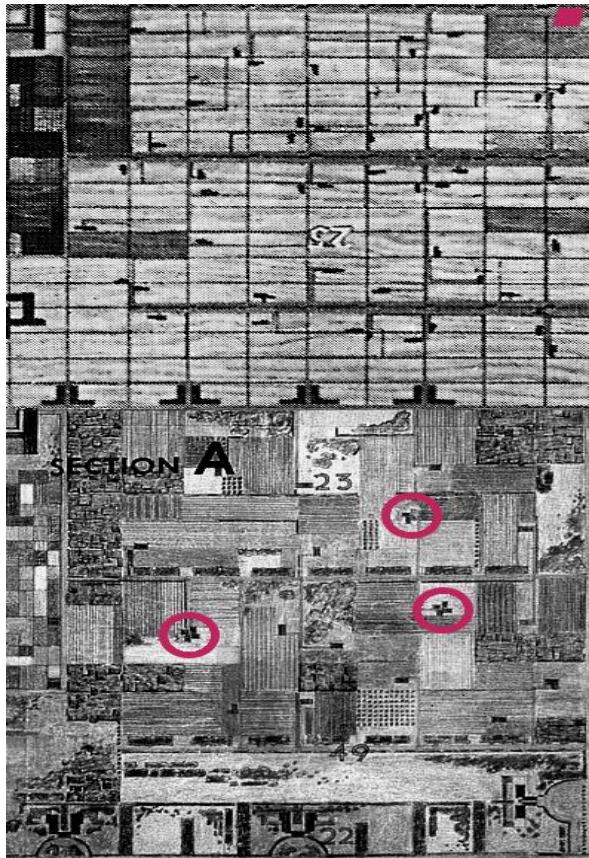


FIGURE-2 Detail of Broadacre City site plan from 1935 [UP] compared to the same region in the same scale depicted in the 1958 site plan of 'The Living City' [Down] Apparently the model
(Source:
https://www.jstor.org/stable/43030603?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The idea of ideal community by Wright was a complete rejection of the Industrialized and congested American cities of the starting 20th century. **According to him, cities**

shouldn't be centralized, rather it should be decentralized in functions; no longer it would be focused towards central business district. Broadacre City will be an experimental approach of a city development rather than a serious proposal—one where the fast moving automobile would be the important function of the city". It was a truly an utopian vision of modern America.

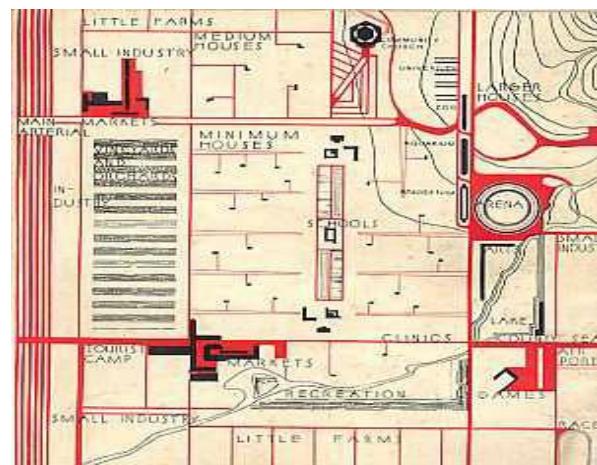


FIGURE-3 Wright's drawings for Broadacre Looked as though they had been torn From an alt-universe pulp sci-fi comic. (Source:<https://franklloydwright.org/revisiting-frank-lloyd-wrights-vision-broadacre-city/>)

Wright saw that the outmoded cities around him creating problems for the society. "To look at the plan of a great City is to look at something like the cross-section of a fibrous tumor," he wrote in 1945. The city with industrial revolution was a scourge; an outdated thought that may have been valuable previously, yet was rendered totally out of date by new innovation.

He proposed instead—Broadacre City—it was largely a romanticized fantasy of him, it was dreamt up by a self-serving and self-sufficient city.

The Disappearing City (1932), When Democracy Builds (1945), and The Living City (1958), Wright's utopian world was at last an expansion of the things that made him actually comfortable: open spaces, the car, and of course, the master architect as controller (For city and structure design and its functions). Perusing the books in sequential order, one can see the movement of American futurism from more than three decades—from the Great Depression of the 1930s with the spread of household electricity power and new information and communication technology advancement, to the post-war techno-idealistic beliefs of the 1950s, complete with streamlined vehicles and flying machines.

In 1935, Wright composed an article for **the Architectural Record** depicting the rising advances behind his vision for this new ideal world. It would be an accomplishment of present day innovation, endless supply of America's most noteworthy qualities:

A. The motor car: general mobilization of the human being.

B. Radio, telephone and telegraph: electrical inter-communication becoming complete.

C. Standardized machine-shop production: machine invention plus scientific discovery.

Anyone had to hurry into the city for work, company and entertainment, when the inventions of radio and television made things like telecommuting and mobile concerts available? At least for the middle-class white collar. People were able to migrate to something that was not quite residential, and not quite rural — a widespread collection of homes, business and government centres approximately on the scale of a modern American region.

According to Wright, **technology and planning were tools in the great struggle for social reform**. Dr. Mark Lapping at Southern Maine University said: Frank Lloyd Wright believed that the social failures of America would simply be dissolved by designing a better city. " He saw himself as someone who could overcome a large number of social issues and social problems through layout," Lapping said. " But by developing really good design, not all societal problems can be solved."

The key to Wright's utopia, of course, were the tremendous technological advances made at the dawn of the 20th century perhaps none more important than the car. In his 1932 book **The Disappearing City**, Wright explained that the answer to the problem of how the people of this utopian community might buy goods. **The gas station would become the most important marketplace of Broadacres:**

1. In the gasoline service station may be seen the beginning of an important advance agent of decentralization by way of distribution and also the beginning of the establishment of the Broadacre City.

2. Wherever the service station happens to be located naturally: these unrefined and apparently inconsequential units will develop and venture into different disseminating communities for product of numerous kinds. They are already doing so in the Southwest American region to a great extent.

This architect has defined some more important characteristics of the Broadacre City, as following:

(a) American Values of Freedom and Democracy Expressed in the Broadacre City: There is a fairly widespread desire to align the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright with American democracy architecture. Not only was Wright aware of this, but he also seemed to strive to "identify himself with the American spirit" by participating in all kinds of media and promoting an "imperial picture of plain-speaking anti-collectivist society." He advocated recasting the architectural model of the United States into

Broadacres – a design whose grounds were, according to Wright himself, **established on the American values of freedom and democracy**.

He supported refurbishment .

(b) Decentralization:- Broadacres ' key feature, which testifies to Wright's desire to uphold the values of freedom and democracy, is tied to the principle of decentralization. The Broadacre City's fundamental premise was this break from the hierarchical paradigm of a city and a return to the agricultural environment. The Broadacres, with their **automobile-oriented structure and policy of assuring a minimum of one acre of land for every dweller**, were to be a solution for the holdover, anti-democratic cities of the past.

(c) Mobility:- The Broadacre City proposal would be possible to implement due to the emergence of the automobile and telephone. According to Wright, these were the innovations that greatly contributed to the promulgation of a culture in capitalism, as they strengthened freedom of movement and interaction. Hence, given that the Broadacre City was a truly democratic dream, emerging as a cohesive component of Wright's plan became impossible for those innovations. Later alterations of the vision of the Broadacre City **involved the concept of aircraft being available to the same extent as an automobile, making total mobility a reality.**

(d) Rent:- With the abandonment of the notion of rent, which would be possible due to the widespread land ownership, freedom of employment would occur. In Broadacre City, people would no longer be forced to work on a "need-to-pay-rent basis" (Brown, 2007), based on their interests and skills they could only pick their profession. They could choose their occupation without any restrictions as their salaries would not have to be spent on rent or food. As a result, land and labour would eventually be deprived of their monetary values, as such an order of things seemed to serve only the few selected. This is another aspect of the dream of Frank Lloyd Wright which brings the concept of cities built on freedom and democracy to Broadacres ' image.

(e) Organic Architecture:- Developments of housing would be designed in line with environmental design, the main principle of which implies that each building should be constructed in such a way as to become an "extension of nature and its principles" (Cruz, 2012). Therefore, residential areas should be scattered through open countryside and should be harmonized with the natural landscape. **The architect maintained that accepting the organic architecture as the groundwork for a city would conduce to shaping the democratic life of its citizens.**

(f) Equal access to urban amenities:- the Broadacre City being the manifestation of freedom and democracy is the way in which all services, medical care, amenities, or industrial structures were to be disposed throughout

the Broadacres. Wright built and distributed them to ensure if not equal access for all citizens, and then at least close to equal access to them. Such a community structure embodied justice and equality, which are the most essential features of democracy, alongside liberty and individualism. Every individual in the Broadacres would have equal opportunities for individual development, as equivalent possibilities would be provided to each and every one of them. A minimum of one acre of land, vehicle, and access to modern city facilities, restaurants, and other areas—with all that would be given to every Broadacre City resident.

(g) Individualism:- In Wright's opinion, the development of the individual seems to be a prerequisite feature of the democratic lifestyle, as it contributes to regulating the rules of people living together and to the general evolution of the community. It is also essential, since even the "Declaration of Independence of the U.S. regards individualism as the victory of democracy" (Özpek, 2006). That is why individualism thrives in Broadacres and private state-owned companies tend to be resisted. As the supply of commodities would flow directly from the manufacturer to the customer, there would be no intermediary.

DISCUSSION:

- In the Broadacre Plan, Wright gave us a hint of his vision of the city of the future, not as a picture easily consumable, but in a manner similar to the art of landscape painting, as a glimpse of a potential point of view, or rather as a convergence of multiple points of view into a contemplative point of view.
- Wright divided the city between the landscape and the fragment, leaving the mid-scale open only for the citizen himself to bridge. Taking Broadacre merely as a vision of total suburbanization is missing the tension between the individual and his public responsibility in this division, albeit in a sublimated form.
- The town of Broadacre is today's reality. To some degree, the interstate highways, the growth of massive shopping centers, the suburbia cookie-cutter developments— they're Broadacre, and they're Broadacre in many respects. Not necessary planned but more in a piecemeal fashion.
- When we look at Broadacre City piece by piece and sketch by drawing, we can find in it almost everything that he planned. Broadacre was a testing ground for excellence, or something at least more orderly than the chaos that seemed to define life in the 20th century.
- Wright foresaw that designs for the ideal or utopian culture would likely never be based on his expectations. He thought America might have been too fractured to recover from the city's degradation; too blind for what he saw as a better way of life.
- We got the cars; the sprawl; the gas stations. Cities as diverse as Los Angeles and Houston and

Janesville, Wisconsin are in some ways versions of Wright's Broadacre dream.

Failures associated with this theory:

- Too real to be Utopian and too dreamlike to be of practical importance.
- Demands motor transportation for even the most casual or ephemeral meetings
- Didn't see the large population increase from 2B in 1930 -7B present time, increase in fuel prices, environmental repercussions.

CONCLUSION:

Like many other urban development philosophies, the theory of Broadacre tackles some key issues and overlooks others. From this concept, several ideas can be adapted and applied effectively, as necessary, to a given landscape. In addition, to achieve optimal results, it may be combined with numerous other theories. Wright reacted clearly to the idea that decentralization should take place in some form or fashion, and Broadacre City is his contribution to coordinating and formalizing the movement. His viewpoint may be architectural and therefore considered a narrow one, but there is still one man who has provided the ideal solution to the question of centralization or decentralization (in the form of sprawl).

Broadacre City's architecture, structure and socio-political scheme are clear avatars of the vision of Frank Lloyd Wright to foster freedom and democracy. Several facets of the vision are developed in such a way as to offer the possibility to live their lives according to a democratic lifestyle to the inhabitants of Broadacres. The above-mentioned features contribute to establishing the Broadacre City picture as a representation of American values of freedom and equality not only in Wright's context, but also in reference to the universal understanding of these concepts and in keeping with the ideals of one of the U.S. Founding Fathers—Thomas Jefferson.

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