placemaking in a tabula rasa condition


Poundbury, Dorset, 2008.

urbanistically), or, conversely, a MetroTech Commons (a reasonably successful public space, but lacking in any placemaking architectural identity).

This proposal seeks to identify the ingredients of successful placemaking in a tabula rasa condition – that is, a holistically-planned urban ensemble of new construction that lacks meaningful existing context. This is a question of direct relevance to RAMSA’s contemporary practice, as we increasingly are entrusted with the design of entire urban precincts – whether in Ohio or Chongqing – executed on aggressive schedules.

practice; most of the ‘Garden Cities’ remain bedroom communities tied by rail to jobs in traditional cities. Less well-known are the postwar English New Towns, chartered by the New Towns Act of 1946. Unlike the Garden Cities, the New Towns achieved some success in creating a successful urban space with an identifiable sense of place in a single building campaign

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After a century of looking forward, be hiding in the past?

Continental alternatives

We begin our journey in England, where Ebenezer Howard’s concept of the Garden City gave rise to the leafy twentieth-century suburb. Howard’s more radical conception of the Garden City as an autonomous economic center, however, was never realized in as standalone economic centers, even if their earnest embrace of orthodox European social modernism – whittled in execution by budget-strapped municipal councils – often result in deeply unsatisfying urban spaces.

Most recently, an offshoot of New Urbanism championed by Prince Charles has resulted in a series of planned traditional developments, including a standalone village, Poundbury, Dorset. Derided by critics as a stage set – an unfair criticism given the caliber of talent involved and attention to the craft of building – could the key to successful urban placemaking,