



Places and Technologies 2015

KEEPING UP WITH TECHNOLOGIES TO MAKE HEALTHY PLACES

Nova Gorica, Slovenia, 18.–19.6.2015

PT2015

BOOK OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

*A healthy city is one that is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and developing to their maximum potential.
Health Promotion Glossary (1998)*

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Places and Technologies 2015

**KEEPING UP WITH
TECHNOLOGIES TO MAKE HEALTHY PLACES**

BOOK OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Editors:

Alenka Fikfak, Eva Vaništa Lazarević,
Nataša Fikfak, Milena Vukmirović, Peter Gabrijelčič

Nova Gorica, Slovenia



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UTOPIAN PROJECTS DRAWINGS AS INDICATORS OF MODERN SOCIETY NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores architectural drawing as a medium of representation of utopian visions, which aim to indicate needs and problems of modern society. Architectural drawing has always been a powerful tool for reviewing and representing the space, both material and mental – social space. Thus, drawings of utopian projects from the sixties and seventies of the last century had followed and generated significant social changes. Starting from that period until today, architectural drawing remained the model of detection and conceptualization of the problems each community faces and fights.

Unfortunately, modern cities are not the places that will provide a sustainable and humanized tomorrow for us. In such environment, drawings of futuristic projects and utopian visions are opening new topics and suggesting possible solutions. Also, in this process, architectural drawing is recognized as a model of creating a deflection from the recent social practices and anachronistic principles of urban development and, therefore, it is opening the possibilities of new concepts and alternatives. Hence, the aim of the paper relates to exploring and defining the parameters of the social context that caused the production of utopian projects, and thus established drawing as a medium of their presentation.

The study begins with an analysis of social conditions in the period of decades after the Second World War, which brought specific and avant-garde utopian projects. In those years, architectural drawing was recognized as a means of struggle against the repressive principles of post-war modernism. Finally, the study focuses on drawings of modern utopias and cities of tomorrow, and reviewing the characteristics of the social context in which these utopias were created.

Keywords: architectural drawing, utopia, dystopia, representation (of space), city of tomorrow, society.



INTRODUCTION - DEFINITION OF THE TERM *UTOPIA*

When we talk about utopias, there are always more questions and unknowns than answers. However, no society can survive, nor be called a community, without its construct of a utopian world, because, as Oscar Wilde states "a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at" (Wilde 2009). For understanding the phenomenon of utopia, it is necessary to present a brief historical discourse of the development of this determinant. The creator of the very concept of *utopia* is the English Renaissance writer and philosopher Thomas More, who published a book of the same title¹ in 1516. This novel, which describes fictional ideal island state *Utopia*, was created with the purpose of criticizing social and political organization of former England. Describing the ideal country, More used literary form of the novel and the language of sarcasm, and even in the very root of the word there was a double meaning, since the term utopia could mean the Greek *eutopia* (εὖ + τόπος), which means a good place, and *autopia* (αὐτὸ + τόπος) which means non-existent place. Relying on More, Lewis Mumford explains that "the word *utopia* usually indicates the end point of human folly or human hope - futile dream of perfection in the *Land of Never End* or rational attempts at reorganization of the human environment and its institutions, as well as improving its imperfect nature in order to expand the possibilities of everyday life" (Mumford 2009:6). Later, during the historical period, the word *utopia* was rooted as a term that generally describes the concept of state or arrangement that is not feasible or is unrealistic and impossible. Only in the 20th century new types of utopias appeared, *anti-utopias* or *dystopias*, which also represent a fictional society, but they are the antithesis of utopias. Such concepts were created in the atmosphere of large social tragedies and suffering, like many civil wars or world wars were. Although anti-utopia is often identified with the dystopia, the difference is that dystopia does not pretend to be a system of well-being, while anti-utopia is planned or presented as utopia, but for some reason utopian concept collapsed (Rüsen et al. 2005:230). Due to its unambiguous negative connotations, dystopia is often used to actualize problematic issues related to politics, religion, technology and the environment, that is, the society as a whole. Therefore, dystopia is related to social constructs such as poverty, pauperism, political oppression or totalitarianism.

Based on the aforementioned, if the term utopia is brought in correlation with architectural drawing, it is clear that the drawing itself, because of its imaginative nature, becomes fertile ground for design and conception of utopian visions and projects. Therefore, in the remainder of this paper the relation between architectural drawing and utopias is going to be analysed, with the purpose to indicate problems and needs of the society and the social order.

¹ Full title of the first publication of *Utopia* from 1516, which was printed in Latin, was: *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia (Of a republic's best state and of the new island Utopia)*



RELATION BETWEEN UTOPIA AND ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING

It was stated earlier that the concept of utopia refers to anything that is not feasible. However, as the Hungarian sociologist and philosopher Karl Mannheim states, this view does not completely exclude the possibility of utopia to be realized (Manhajm 1978:191). However, the realization of utopian concept is not reflected in immediate feasibility of what is presented by it, but in the destruction of the system which utopia opposes. This is a crucial determinant in the consideration of the definition of utopia and its setting in relation to the influence of the architectural drawings. Accordingly, architectural drawing can be perceived as a direct medium of utopian principles of interpretation and thus becomes an indicator of social needs. To consider a drawing a gesture of utopia, it is necessary to define the discursive elements that describe architectural drawing as a very product of utopian awareness. Speaking of utopian awareness, Mannheim states the following:

Utopian is the awareness that is not congruent with 'being' which surrounds this consciousness. This incongruity is always visible in fact that this kind of consciousness in experience, thinking and actions is oriented towards the factors that that 'being' does not incorporate as realized. But we will not consider utopian each orientation that transcends the given 'being' and that is in this respect 'someone else's' reality'. For utopian orientation, we will consider only those which 'transcendent reality' and, advances into action and in the same time partially or completely decomposes present existential order. (Manhajm, 1978:191)

If we analyse the utopian nature of settings of architectural drawing, according to Mannheim's standpoints, we come to the conclusion that it is necessary that visual display defined by drawing transcends reality. Also, it is necessary that the concept of overcoming or transcending reality by drawing takes place simultaneously with the process of destabilization and destruction of certain social (or political) system. Comprehended in this way, from the point of view of utopia, drawing becomes a means of direct representation of social relations and ideological construct, because its purpose is to change certain order. Mannheim further defines this incidence noting that "the desirable images become utopia when they get a revolutionary function" (Manhajm 1978:191).

In fact, it is these kinds of connotations, in the context of architectural drawing that we recognize in the period after the Second World War, which coincides with the optimal environment for utopian and dystopian production. Especially the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century, brought us drawings of architectural designs that were not created with the idea to be realized, but their influence is determined through the media of visual presentation. These utopian visions were a new discourse in the presentation of architectural space, which was reflected on the field of social practices as well. During this period, drawings of projects of movable and variable futuristic structures of the London group *Archigram*, the Italian *Archizoom* and *Superstudio*, *Situationists*, and the French group *Utopia*, *Buckminster Fuller*, as well as drawings of modular structures of Japanese *Metabolists* led by Kenzō



Tange, were created. All these projects were created as utopian, anti-utopian or dystopian visual provocations, and were a response to the repressive architecture and principles of post-war modernism. In this period, architectural profession was faced with a number of conceptual problems, which were reflected in the improvisation of original modernist postulates in terms of rapid economic and technological prosperity. It is important to note that CIAM itself (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*) "reinterpreted its goals, striving to work on forming a physical environment that will meet the emotional and material needs of people" (Blagojevic, 2007:175). The modernist establishment, led by Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright, in defiance of the needs of the new era and society, planned repressive and inert architecture (Genevra 1999:7). This practice was met with criticism of experts, and a large number of architects, theorists of architecture, planners, and sociologists have argued for a new position which was based on the hypothesis that the space of the city is not only a direct result of architects or urban planners, but the product of complex social relations and practices (Lefebvre 1991).

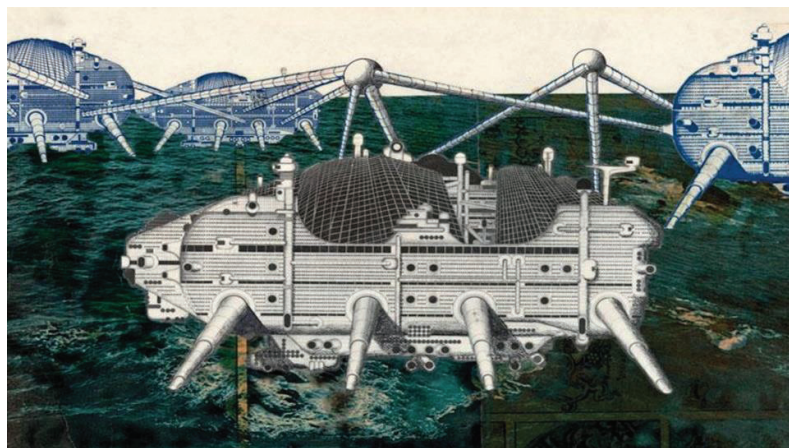


Figure 1: *Walking City on the Ocean*, Archigram / Ron Herron (1966).

Creating in avant-garde ambience of neo-avant-garde, which criticized the modernist practice, many architects produced drawings of utopian and futuristic projects that were, by their conception, far beyond needs of contemporary society and its technological development, even from the present day perspective [Figure 1]. However, as *dystopias*, these drawings were closely related with the ideology of critique and concept of production of social space. When it comes to this topic, there is a statement in Lefebvre's work that "space has no social existence independently of an intense, aggressive and repressive visualization" (Lefebvre 1991:286), which in fact defines the significance of representation of architectural drawing as a utopia, or a dystopia.



ARCHITECTURAL DRAWING AND CONCEPT OF MODERN UTOPIA

After a period of the last neo-avant-garde of late modernism, as some theorists of architecture call the period of the sixties and seventies of the last century (Lachmayer 2012:417), the production of utopian projects in their original form began, with no tendency to make them dystopias or to transform them into anti-utopias. However, architectural drawing still remains a means of detection of actual social needs and the way of representation of concepts of habitats of the future. In ambience in which there are less and less social utopias, human need to return to nature and its resources, and to develop the concept of sustainable habitat, takes precedence. "The ecological crisis, in addition to the realistic views of nature protection and sustainable development, induced so-called deep environmentalism, which is essentially a type of utopia of re-harmony between man and nature" (Kalanj et al. 2004:23). This concept of symbiosis of man and the environment is defined with the term *ecotopia* (Feireiss 2011:111).

The concept of ecotopia was elaborated and is still being elaborated upon by many architects, and one of them is Djordje Petrovic, who, back in the eighties of the last century, explored and visually conceived projects of many futuristic ecotopias in the form of paintings and drawings. It is interesting to note that some of Petrovic's drawings and projects are gaining analogues interpretations in today's time, which speaks about contemporary actuality of the questions and problems which the society faced 30 years ago [Figure 2]. These Petrovic's visions indicate the intention of the author to define essential problems of modern man in the form of drawings or paintings, which could ultimately be associated with "the fundamental questions of our existence and continuance" (Petrović, 2004:52).



**Figure 2: *Sub Marinopolis* (left), Djordje Petrovic (1986);
Ocean City (right), Arup / Alexander Hespe and Alanna Howe (2010).**



CONCLUSIONS

"We do not have any more time for mirrors of life facing the past, only for the other world, which is not similar to our own anymore, a new polis printed on an endless journeys of unpredictable secrets." Petrovic (2004:52)

With these words, Djordje Petrovic, the visionary architect, indicated the necessity of searching for utopias, as personifications of ideal habitat. We have already concluded that it is difficult to imagine a society that, in its structural-design, excludes the concept of utopia. Referring to the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur 1986:360), a contemporary sociologist, Rade Kalanj points out that "a society without utopia is unthinkable, because it would be a society without any aspirations. Utopia is a constant 'conversation' with the history which 'swallows' it, inverts it and puts it in its service, but it could not put an end to it, because it would be the end of itself" (Kalanj et al., 2004:23). In such environment, architectural drawing imposes itself as an inexhaustible source of utopianism that serves for the constant review of needs, and the boundaries of the society. Drawings of utopian visions have multi-layered and multiple-significance role, which is reflected in the indication of key social discourses. Because, regardless of whether it is about utopias, dystopias or anti-utopias, "the attitudes and beliefs that people have about the future is what in fact eventually causes any future" (Mamford 2009:119).

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