

Role of Utopia for Design of Future Cities: Utopia in Urban Planning Literature

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Abstract

Utopian thinking historically played a central role in the literature on urban planning. Utopians were the first planners. Many utopian projects were, throughout history and until recently, a research laboratory for both urban planners and theorists. The following research generally aims to understand the role that urban utopias can play in thinking about the structure of contemporary cities. In order to do so, this article will review a variety of literature recently published on this subject, closely examining their textual content.

Key words: Utopia; Urban planning; Planning theory

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INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, I returned to the university in hopes of continuing my studies. My aim from the start was to find an interesting subject for my master's thesis. Following Alfred North Whitehead's quote that it is more important for a proposition to be interesting than true, I spent a great amount of time in the library searching for an interesting subject. It was during one of my discussions with my director that she proposed that I research Utopia. The idea of thinking on a great and prestigious topic like Utopia pleased me, and I found it very appealing. I started my research and enormously enjoyed reading

great classical books on Utopia like that of Fishman, Le Corbusier, Howard, and Wright, who later became the heroes of my life. I enjoyed the secure feeling of a soldier surrounded by the Great Wall of China. However, my wall started to shake when, during one of my classes, I read Jane Jacobs' famous book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. The heroes of Robert Fishman, namely Le Corbusier, Howard, and Wright, were portrayed as the devil with arguments that seemed impeccable. I had to ask: Who was right?

1. WHY UTOPIA?

Following Jane Jacobs' famous book, it is difficult to find a scholar who wrote positively on Utopia in contemporary urban literature. In general, "utopia" is defined as a code word synonymous with totalitarianism or, in effect, Stalinism (Jameson, 2004). However, when reviewing recent articles in the urban design field, one can read some concerns about the current status of this field. Cuthbert argued that even after 50 years of the creation of the urban design field, we could still hardly see any good theories produced (Cuthbert, 2007). What we can see is mostly a generalized anarchy of creative ideas that bear little coherence, either internally or collectively (Cuthbert, 2007). According to his analysis, the deep theoretical issues in this field are still rare. Journals are mostly composed of case studies or design regulations. However, to paraphrase his question, what more can we squeeze out of contextualism, functionalism, figure-ground relationships, design regulations, case studies, serial vision, etc.. Following these arguments, Cuthbert believed that urban design fails to engage with any substantial theory in the disciplines of economics, social and political science, psychology, geography, or the humanities. What is needed is an external standard of criticism, a set of alternative assumptions, *a dream world* in order to discover features of the real world we think we

inhabit. Talen shared this idea (Talen & Ellis, 2002). For her, urban design was prescriptive. So, it needs a focus on substance rather than the process and especially a well-articulated theory of *good city form*. Her main argument was that in the absence of clear guidelines, the objectives of urban design will not be clear for citizens and urban designers. In addition, the actors in urban design will be left with shallow resources when engaging more-powerful and less-publicly spirited actors. To support her arguments, she suggested that some universal values are common among people such as “What does ‘beauty’ mean?”. So, she argued that some urban design guidelines and theories about good and bad urban form, like those proposed by New Urbanism, are needed for the future of urban design.

Based on these assumptions and in order to analyze some general theories about urban design, one would think that the review of current writing on Utopia would be relevant, as Utopian beliefs of universalism, the presence of the durable, time-tested truths, and discoveries are common things. Utopia is always about a good theory of urban form, and it played an important role in urban planning (Choay, 1965; Eaton, 2001; Solinís, 2006; Stauffer, 2002). One cannot forget that the current free society is formed, in part, by utopian ideas, and if we want to progress, we must still use the utopian approach (Fishman, 1977; Harvey, 2000; Moncan & Chiambaretta, 1998; Pinder, 2002; Solinís, 2006). Utopians throughout the ages, knowing that the problems of their time were growing, tried to propose a functional and universal panacea named “utopia” in order to present a better alternative for their citizens. In such an environment, Moncan (1998) argued, several attributes of our contemporary cities are the direct result of utopian thinking. The separation of pedestrians from automobiles (Cabet, Garnier, & Hénard), the separation of urban functions, zoning (Garnier), and the generalization of prefabricated systems (Le Corbusier) are just some examples generated by utopian thinkers.

For all of the reasons mentioned above, it can be argued that utopian thinking offers many benefits for urban planning. However, it is clear that in the age of the internet, the collapse of positivism, and the ravaging of our cities by urban sprawl, we must consider the role of utopian thinking in our city. But what place is there now for utopian thought, the hope for a new world and history, when we supposedly witnessed the triumph of liberal democracy and the “End of History”¹? More fundamentally, how can a contemporary urban utopia be defined? In the following article, an attempt will be

made to discuss these questions. First, in order to better understand utopia, a brief review of its history will be undertaken. Subsequently, an understanding of how this subject was discussed among contemporary thinkers will be sought.

2. HISTORY OF UTOPIA

The term “utopia” is a Greek neologism coined by Thomas More in 1516 to describe the ideal society of his novel *Utopia*. The word comes from the Greek ού, meaning “not”, and τόπος, meaning “place”, indicating that more was using the concept as allegory and did not consider such an ideal place to be realistically possible. Later, however, more used the term “Eutopia” meaning “good place” in reference to “Utopia” (Eaton, 2001; Merlin & Choay, 1988).

In general, More’s Utopia was a radically original urban and social proposal that opposed the ideology of its time period. Based on the critique of an existing society, it proposed a framework for a better world. The passage from critique to project materialized via a spatial model, the values of which offered a transformative function (Choay, 2000).

Discourses about collectivism, work, sex, education, and family constitute the essential elements of utopia (More, Logan, & Adams, 2002). In fact, private property held no meaning at all in utopia, and all citizens were equal in the eyes of More (Hawkes, 1985). Furthermore, they could access all facilities offered by their society (Desbazeille, 2008). The reduction of a worker’s time was another important element discussed by more. He believed that this reduction would lead to a more-egalitarian society. More hoped that his utopia would last for several generations. It was therefore necessary to educate and train future utopians, the children of pioneers (Paquot, 2007). In this regard, a rigorous model of education was proposed. Family structure was considered the basic unit of his utopian society. More proposed rigorous order concerning sexual relations and the rules involving the duties of married couples to society.

Beyond these common values, other aspects played a central role in utopian society. For example, “Utopia” fundamentally was set to exist in a world of peace (Desbazeille, 2008). The issue of health was also a central aspect of this project (Hawkes, 1985). Several of this society’s design guidelines, like the quality of housing or streets, were proposed to improve the health quality of its citizens (Hawkes, 1985).

¹ End of History is a famous concept proposed by Fukuyama (1992). Here, based on a theory derived from Hegel, the author discussed that the victory of Western liberal democracy at the end of the Cold War signaled the end of humanity’s socio-cultural evolution (Fukuyama, 1992). Fukuyama suggested that the basic principles of the liberal democracy resolved all prior contradictions and conflicts over “large” issues and satisfied all human needs. Thus, the liberal democracy cannot be improved or challenged by any alternative political-economic structure.

The passage from dream to a concrete project materialized by a spatial model. Regarding the spatial characteristics of this urban project, More's utopia was located in remote and inaccessible places, surrounded by a system of fortifications. The grid organization was the first distinguishable aspect in his portrayed city (Moncan & Chiambaretta, 1998; Solinís, 2006). In addition, in order to create a more-egalitarian atmosphere, standard buildings were favored (Eaton, 2001; Picon, 2008). Flat ground and orthogonal geometry were preferred to complex design models, as they helped his city be more flexible and designable (Moncan & Chiambaretta, 1998). Ideally, More preferred empty land for his utopian ventures (Eaton, 2001). In this regard, rupture with the past and the use of technologies characterized the elements of this new city (Eaton, 2001; Picon, 2008).

More proposed the first utopia, but his model was copied by other scholars throughout history. For example, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a satirical novel that consists of four separate explorations of imaginary worlds (Swift & Rivero, 2002), features a daydream that proposed a cultural and political model against the failures and flaws of the European community. Each trip is an ethnographic work that offers a detailed analysis of each visited region. Here, the character Gulliver portrayed Swift himself, who in reality was the victim of a regime where he lived. Swift's utopia denounced the bellicose ardor of his society.

The study of these other utopias shows that only a tripartite structure of More's Utopia is common among all of them (Paquot, 2007). The utopian demands changed in future models. Fourier's (1772-1837) utopia for the new industrialist society, for example, was full of praise for individualism and based on diversity, both contrary to the values in More's Utopia (Fourier, 1971).

The same logic can also be applied to other utopias. The Englishman William Morris presented *News from Nowhere, on an Epoch of Rests* as a utopian romance (Morris, 1976). It is the story of a narrator called "Guest" who meets different inhabitants of a futuristic England. According to the author, the country was divided into small-scale, decentralized units (a commune, a ward, or a parish) that were self-governing. There, large-scale factories were replaced by cottage industries and small-scale workshops. Cities were more sparsely planned, and many buildings were broken down and replaced by green areas, so the difference between town and country grew less and less. Homes are described as elegant but sparsely furnished. In fact, Morris' utopia was a severe critique of industrialization, where mechanized productions were replaced by traditional handwork.

Throughout the twentieth century, More's heritage was drawn upon by several writers. Furthermore, the idea of utopia also attracted political economy thinkers. It is supposed that Marx was against utopia. However,

as Eagleton explained, if Marxism traditionally set its face against utopia, it was not because it rejects the idea of a radically transfigured society but because it rejects the assumption that such a society could be simply parachuted into the present from some metaphysical outerspace (Eagleton, 2000). In this regard, Marxism was not a completely rejected utopia (Merckle, 2004). Some Marxist thinkers like Bloch tried to link the idea of utopia to Marxism (Bloch, 1986).

On the other hand, in the twentieth century, the task of projecting an alternative universe passed more to artistic mediums like science fiction. Architects and urban designers of the twentieth century put forward their ideas for utopian cities (Picon, 2008). The dreams of Ruskin, Morris, and Bellamy found a practical formulation in 1898 when Howard published *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.

Contrary to other utopias, these new urban projects were characterized by a radical critique of the shortcomings of their existing city (Picon, 2008). The most famous urban utopian projects of the twentieth century were those of Howard, Wright, and Le Corbusier (Fishman, 1977). Their projects were undoubtedly "Utopias" but not in the pejorative sense of the term, meaning something unrealizable and impossible. In fact, their utopias were defined as coherent programs of action, resulting from a deep reflection that sought to transcend the immediate situation – program that (if implemented) would break the structure of an established society (Fishman, 1977).

Given that it was such an *auspicious time to propose utopia*, many hoped that the time had come for the dream of an ideal world to finally materialize. Soon, however, those hopes turned to despair. Despotism, censorship, etc., were some of the unwelcome gifts granted by the Soviet regime. The fate of the utopian dream largely shattered when one of its realized expressions in USSR turned into a concrete experience of oppression and terror. The realization of this regime did not reflect people's expectations. Other aspects of such a society were identified: the standardization of life, the acculturation of society in favor of collectivism, and so on. A new kind of utopian novel was born, "anti-utopia". In the novel *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley portrayed the result of Athenian civilization as imagined by Plato 23 centuries earlier in his *Republic* (Jonas & Centre de documentation de l'urbanisme (France), 2003). Contrary to Plato's, this book showed a world where leaders who claim to act for the good of mankind instead only seek to satisfy their own personal needs (Jonas & Centre de documentation de l'urbanisme (France), 2003).

Very soon, the anti-utopia genre began to interest planners. In fact, the pressing need to ensure the mass production of houses after World War II provided a good

opportunity for planners to implement many functionalist ideas.² The mixed success of these projects, however, led many to proclaim that these models were not in harmony with the innate aspirations of people. The utopian works of Le Corbusier, Wright, and Howard were criticized by several authors. It was suggested that these projects possessed a mythical and poetic quality (Barry, 1985; Friedmann, 2000); however, once created, they lost their value. In fact, according to critics, utopians hold a deterministic view of cities, but their thoughts offer poetic qualities that are difficult to achieve with soulless buildings. The result is the failure of realized utopian projects. Besides, several critics suggested that diversity, pluralism, and tolerance do not play a role in a utopian society (Eaton, 2001; Jacobs, 1961; Merlin & Choay, 1988; Picon, 2000). In fact, according to one famous claim, utopian citizens are the prisoners of time. By assuming that Utopia is a better society, no change over time is authorized by utopians. Utopia, therefore, is in contrast with time's evolution, and there is no hope in a utopia for any other perfect form (Paquot, 1996). As Paquot proposed, the most important question regarding these projects is what will happen after the completion of these utopias after the reduction of workers' time. Citizens may question the utility of working and the benefit it brings to society (Paquot, 1996). Moreover, critics discussed the idea that utopia is the fruit of the intellect of one charismatic master (Eaton, 2001; Hawkes, 1985; Paquot, 1996). Utopian environments are formed as the results of human effort without divine assistance (Eaton, 2001). In the words of Choay, God is always absent from these projects (Choay, 2005). This model, therefore, was imposed on the city by someone who regarded himself as wise (Choay, 2005).

In this hostile environment for utopia, different architectural groups proposed different approaches. Some of them, like Megastructuralist³ projects, can be seen as the continuity of Modernist movements – whereas others, such as proposals by Constant,⁴ Superstudio,⁵ Archizoom,⁶ and Archigram,⁷ can be regarded as the critique of utopian models.

Given this historical narration, one can see that utopian thinking always played an important role in urban planning at different scales. However, according to

several scholars, including Picon (2000), utopian interest seemingly dried up in urban planning and architecture. Fertile utopian decades like 1960 did not return. Utopian projects rarely are discussed in contemporary art magazines. Is utopian thinking therefore necessarily ineffective for contemporary cities?

3. CONTEMPORARY UTOPIA

Utopia approaches are rarely discussed in current official programs in urban planning departments. It seems that there is no enthusiasm to understand the relationship between utopian thinking and urban planning. Paquot (1996) proposed that this blasé attitude towards utopia is mainly due to the fruitless results of the previous attempts. In fact, the broad consensus is that all utopian experiments generally failed (Eveno, 1998). This crisis of utopia in the contemporary era can be interpreted as the result of the evolution of time. The contemporary city has nothing to do with the preindustrial city so precisely defined with spatial figures (Choay, 2006). With the technological revolution and the ubiquity of media in culture, we can build everywhere, and everything is easy to discover today. There is no other place to discover (Baten, 2002). Here, the duality between space and time, a key element of the Utopia of More, is fading under the pressure of new technologies like the internet (Harvey, 2000). With the click of a mouse, people can visit a city on the internet, and there are fewer places left for imagination. In addition, in urban fields, the idea of discovering new horizons is no longer appealing. Many citizens wonder why it is important to know another horizon or how it can be useful (Paquot, 1996).

This lackluster attitude can be explained by the fact that contemporary society places great value on the *real* elements to the detriment of concepts defined as less real (Eveno, 1998; Paquot, 1996). A consumption society prefers the material over the spiritual, the known over the unknown, etc.. Neoliberal laissez-faire approaches and belief in the efficiency of the market augment this reaction. Capitalist ideology is firmly established as the dominant theory, and there is still little dissatisfaction with it (Eaton, 2000). Here, there is less confidence in the major urban project funded by the state (Dostaller, 1996).

² Functionalism, in architecture, is the principle that mandates that architects should design a building based on the purpose of that building. Frank Lloyd Wright pioneered the idea of functionalism. His idea consisted of houses with clean, low lines and open interiors that blended with the landscape.

³ Megastructures, an architectural concept popularized in the 1960s, stated that a city could be encased in a single building or a relatively small number of buildings interconnected.

⁴ Constant Nieuwenhuys Anton (Amsterdam, 1920-2005) was part of the Situationist movement. During the 60s he developed his utopian project named New Babylon.

⁵ Superstudio was an architecture firm founded in 1966 in Florence, Italy, by Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia.

⁶ Archizoom was a design studio founded in 1966 in Florence, Italy, by four architects (Andrea Branzi, Gilberto Corretti, Paolo Deganello, and Massimo Morozzi) and two designers, Dario Bartolini and Lucia Bartolini.

⁷ Archigram was an avant-garde architectural group formed in the 1960s based at the Architectural Association in London and was a futurist, anti-heroic, and pro-consumerist group, drawing inspiration from technology in order to create a new reality solely expressed through hypothetical projects. The main members of the group were Peter Cook, Warren Chalk, Ron Herron, Dennis Crompton, Michael Webb, and David Greene.

Today, politicians, in hopes of being re-elected, use the least-coercive governmental policies in their cities in order to avoid creating dissatisfaction among the electorate. As an example, in the field of environmental protection, more voluntary measures than coercive are used. All of these reasons suggest that the utopian approach for a city, which mobilized too many resources and too much money (not to mention introduced certain power relations), is less appealing (Baeten, 2002; Paquot, 1996; Pinder, 2001).

All of the evidence can lead us to believe that the utopian approach in the design of a city should be considered an old and dead concept. However, a clear-cut response to this hypothesis is difficult. As Pinder (2001) argued, the death of utopia is not a new concept. It was proclaimed several times during history but always seemed like a fantasy. Paquot (2007) even believed that there is a rebirth of interest in utopia in the contemporary works of ecologists and feminists. Rouillard (2008) shared this idea and proposed that the utopian approach can be seen in the work of the new generation of urban designers (Rouillard, 2008). For him, the pavilion of the Netherlands at Expo 2000, designed by MVRDV, was part of a utopian strain, which has given this type of adventure a new status since the 1970s.

What can we conclude about the status of contemporary utopia? In the following section, to better respond to this question, I will classify the contemporary authors according to their propositions about the function of utopia for a city. This classification will help us gain a better understanding of the role of utopian projects. Consequently, three families of thinkers will emerge: the engineer group, the critical group, and the proponents of a multidisciplinary approach.

Antoine Picon (2000, 2004, 2006), Francois Choay (1980, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006), Pinder (2002, 2001, 2005), Guy Baeten (2002), Patrice De Moncan (1998), Thierry Paquot (1997, 2007), Emmanuel Eveno (1998), David Harvey (2000), Leon Sandercock (1997), and John Friedman (2000) were selected for this analysis. Two factors justify their selection. First of all, all of them already contributed significantly to the field of urban utopia, either through their articles or their books; a review of articles published in this field can prove this claim. Moreover, in their articles and books, these authors propose relevant ideas for addressing the issues raised by this article like the definition of contemporary utopia and its roles. Here, the inclusion of French thinkers will provide an opportunity for English-speaking readers to become familiar with their ideas.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Utopian Thinking as a Motor of Research: Engineer Group

It can be suggested that there are contemporary thinkers

who refer to the utility of the utopian concept because of its physical impact on our contemporary lives. This is the case for Patrice de Moncan, Antoine Picon, and Emmanuel Eveno.

De Moncan, a historian and doctor of economics, argued that the current form of a city was formed in part by utopian ideas, and utopia is therefore the progress motor for a society. In his words, utopia presents a better quality of life. Still, there are *gaps* in the city to be challenged by utopian aspiration (Moncan & Chiambaretta, 1998). In order to progress in history, an urban planner can refer to urban utopias and experiment with their forms to remedy these gaps. The concept of progress was also essential for Picon. For the latter, the image of the contemporary city changed dramatically over the years (Picon, 2000). The question of the relevance of the classical definition of utopia for the contemporary city may not seem easy to address. However, Picon confirmed the relevance of a general utopian approach for city planning. According to him, Utopia, when it proposed a picture of urban future, emphasized the references and themes that already existed in the culture (Picon, 2004). So, the contribution of a utopian project is the identification of social meanings that possess imaginary potential. A Utopian project brings together different heterogeneous social aspirations and creates a new form from them (Picon, 2004). His admiration for the new technologies, partly due to his engineering background, led him to propose that the future of utopia probably depends on the Internet. The Internet provides a very comprehensive and intimately linked site in relation to our daily practices. It can give desire and meaning to individual and collective life (Picon, 2004).

Eveno also was positive about the role of the internet for the future of utopia. Professor of Geography at the University of Toulouse II Le Mirail Emmanuel Eveno published a collective book on the issue of urban utopia (Eveno, 1998). He suggested that the development of science and technology did not necessarily proclaim the death of utopian thinking. On the contrary, the development of current technology allows us to reconnect with the immemorial dreams of universal harmony, a global society, and definitive victory over the constraints of our natural environment. In this sense, vaguely, he suggested that technological utopias such as cyberspace, for example, are in fact the bearer of contemporary utopias.

4.2 Utopian Thinking as an Element of Education: Critic Group

Levitas argued that the function of utopia is not escape, compensation, or a description of a plan for the future (Levitas, 1990). But, utopia is mostly an explanatory and educative tool. By using a utopian approach, our habitual values are thrown into disarray, and we enter Utopia's proper and newfound space with an opportunity to educate ourselves. This strategy is not the same as a moral education towards a given end: it is rather a way to

aspiration – to teach the desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and, above all, to desire in different ways (Levitas, 1990).

In the urban field, Rouillard also proposed that utopia is an independent project, free from construction, which can be transformed into an object and tool for imagining and education, creating and also interrogating the contemporary society (Rouillard, 2008). In this regard, Johan Friedmann, to some extent, shared the same opinion. Friedmann, a professor on the Faculty of Urban Planning at the University of British Columbia (UBC), suggested that utopian thinking is rather an innate need that allows people to hope (Friedmann, 2000), generalizing one's beliefs about the true future of the world. So, a utopian approach would answer questions about religion, ideology, and nationalism. Furthermore, utopia in a secularized world can bring more value to daily and sometimes banal life to the benefit of a more transcendent one. Utopia allows people to appeal to the various mechanisms of their emotions with the need to think about the past and criticize.

To complete this section, we can refer to work of Francios Choay. The latter argued that utopia can be used as a tool to educate people's needs by applying dystopian strategies. Dystopia, or negative utopia, is an imaginary society described in great detail that is generally located at a specific point in time and space and presented to the contemporary reader as an infinitely worse society than the one in which he or she lives. This kind of utopia was used by several architecture groups like Superstudio and Archigram as an effective way to criticize a common ideology. Dystopian projects can be used to show the catastrophes resulting from the remarkable technical advances of our time. In this regard, moving away from More's elitist model and towards a project resulting from scenarios was an important step for Choay. More's model was a work created by a single individual, so it remained on paper, while a utopia based on a scenario is a team effort and can therefore be developed over time (Choay, 2002).

4.3 Utopian Projects as Miraculous Projects: Multifunctional Approach

In addition to the scholars already mentioned, thinkers like Pinder (2002), Baeten (2002), and Harvey (2000) offered different reasons behind their rationale for thinking about utopias. In fact, what distinguishes them is the difficulty with which they can be placed in a defined category. For example, Pinder's article on utopia identified all aspects justifying the usefulness of utopia without any system of prioritization.

David Harvey, a geographer and theorist in the field of social theory and political economy, published a number of works including *Social Justice and the City* (1973) and *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (2001). In 2000, he published *Spaces of Hope*, in which he tried to explain the relevance of Marx's thinking for

today's society (Harvey, 2000). For him, utopia was not dead. In fact, modern people dwell in the space resulting from a capitalist mode of urban intervention. Capitalists created the most-intelligent utopia ever, and people cannot desire other utopias because this form of utopia does not allow the existence of other utopias. The tourist areas, the shopping malls, the thematic areas, etc. are just some examples of built space of this utopia. These spaces help people meet the primary needs of love, sex, fun, etc. but also do everything in their power to suppress their desires to consider alternatives.

For Harvey, these spaces are the results of a new kind of utopia called the "dialectic utopia". Throughout the history of utopia, two general distinguishable categories of Utopia were realized: utopias of process and utopias of spatial form. The classical utopias, like More's utopia, are spatial utopias, because in them one can distinguish the elements of a well-defined space. By consequence, in these utopias, the evolution of form and function throughout time is not authorized. Thus, these utopias were always stable and fixed, mainly regarded as unsuccessful and paternalistic. However, throughout history, the second kind of Utopia, the utopia of *process*, was born to remedy the mistakes generated by the first category of utopia. In this form of utopia, the author does not propose anything fixed but merely puts forward some formulas and processes through which an ideal society might be reached. We are no longer frozen, therefore, in a fixed society. The interlocutor, however, is still in a state of uncertainty because the purpose of utopia is known but not the practical way to achieve it. Although this category is more viable for modern time than the first one, Harvey consequently argued that this form of utopia does not suit the society very well, as a limit and "closure" to each action is necessary if a revolutionary program is to be achieved. After comparing these two types, Harvey proposed the *utopia of dialectics*. In this kind of utopia, on the one hand, people are not prisoners of a fixed society, as evolution through time was considered, but on the other hand, some proposed limits and specific characteristics were described to orient the actions.

In the latter part of his book, the author proposed his utopia, called "Edilia". In this utopia, Harvey put the emphasis on a society without class or money. In general, his form of utopia was a marriage between individualism and the values and issues of socialist utopias. Moreover, his utopian society held more respect for sustainable development and the claims of women.

The ideas of Harvey influenced other British thinkers, especially Pinder and Baeten. Pinder, a professor on the Faculty of Geography at Queen Mary, argued that a utopian approach is still justifiable mainly because the current free society is formed in part by utopian ideas (Pinder, 2002). In addition, all utopian movements possess a disruptive, revolutionary, and transformative quality, which is important for the advancement of society. Like

Picon, De Moncan, and Harvey, Pinder advanced the idea that due to the evolution of time, several aspects of Utopia are no longer relevant. A more-democratic definition of utopia must be developed. For Baeten, professor on the Faculty of Geography at the University of Lunds, the need to resort to a utopian approach can be justified by its philosophical and social contributions (Baten, 2002). He argued that there remain a number of gaps to be addressed in society like issues related to racism, sexism, and homophobia.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Utopias Instead of Utopia

The evolution of Utopia throughout the course of history, from More's original Utopia to the contemporary utopias, leads modern thinkers to discern a "utopization" of the concept of utopia. In other words, Utopia is not a predefined concept but an evolving concept, hence the importance of referring to many utopias. Here, the difference between an old and new utopia can be described in terms of content, form, and representation form.

In terms of content

A classical utopian society presented the following benefits to its citizens: wealth for all, good education, health, etc.. However, the new, favored themes of utopian projects are sustainable development and globalization struggles. Also, according to several scholars, the question of equality between women and men is an important claim for future utopias. In general, it can be suggested that the former claims of classical utopias lost their importance, mainly because they were to some extent already implemented in current society. In this regard, the evolution of Utopia throughout the course of history, from More's original Utopia to the contemporary utopias, can lead us to discern a "utopization" of the concept of utopia. In other words, Utopia is not a predefined concept but rather an evolving concept, hence the importance of referring to many utopias.

In terms of form

Some contemporary scholars still prefer vacant lands for their ventures. For example, as Picon said, the arrival of new media such as the Internet and cinema can help utopians to present their projects in a virtual space. For some contemporary thinkers still, the rupture with the past and the praise for technology are important features of utopian projects. In fact, scholars, especially from the engineering group, still prefer to propose a project completely breaking from the past. Nevertheless, there are those like Choay who saw the future of utopia in a strong relationship with the past and cultural values. Having said this, most contemporary thinkers believe that diversity, pluralism, and tolerance must play a more central role in utopia. Hence, the use of geometry, grid organization, and standardized blocks is not so widely recommended in

modern utopias, and proposals for new cities demonstrate a greater respect for nature.

In terms of representation

The analysis showed that before the twentieth century, utopia was mostly expressed through literature. After that time, architecture took a more-central role. Today, with the ubiquity of the Internet, computer, and film, architecture lost its place on the utopian scene. Here, the use of science fiction can propel us centuries back to catch a glimpse of utopia. Science fiction blends cinema with utopia. A digital image in three dimensions is more effective at suggesting an imaginary society than an excellent description of a society on paper. Cinema, therefore, is regarded as a good medium to scrutinize in order to discover the contemporary utopian aspiration.

What can we conclude?

As I argued here, Utopia is not a predefined concept but rather an evolving one, hence the importance of referring to many utopias. So, as one conclusion of this paper, we can raise the question of the relevance of some authors' theories about urban planning seeing utopia as a model of thinking with predefined attributes. Choay (1965) suggested that the utopians were the first planners. In her view, urban planning is derived from the work of utopians. Asher (2001) offered three models for modern urban planning, the first of which included the work of utopians. In light of this article, I argue that accepting this categorization of utopia could present a danger. In fact, if society were to accept these claims, we would be putting all utopian projects in the same bag. This, in turn, would lead to the devaluation of the role of utopian thinking in contemporary urban planning due to its consideration as an approach with predefined attributes.

In fact, as Sandercock (1998) also put forward, the method of categorization proposed by several authors of history and the theories of urbanism, including the one by Hall (2002), will lead to simplified ideas about urban planning theorists without fully taking into account the differences and subtleties of each thinker. This research advances the idea that in order to enhance the power of utopian thinking, it is necessary to go beyond this simplistic method of categorizing utopia, and we must approach each project as a separate and unique work.

5.2 Functions of Utopia

My analysis here leads me to propose two functions for utopian thinking in urban planning. First, as this research project indicates, utopian models are the research laboratory for thinking about the future of the city. In fact, as some scholars of engineering groups suggested, each field has its own research laboratory. For urban planning, a utopian approach can be described as a good means of planning future projects. As previously suggested, the spatial model is an important aspect of all utopian projects. Although many utopian projects are in literary form, it is easy to imagine the ideal cities or territories

proposed due to their artistic nature. As this research project shows, many of the innovative aspects of the old utopias were constructed and visible in our contemporary cities, which in turn helped change the fate of human beings. Utopian thinking can therefore still be used as a research laboratory for urban planning.

Second, a utopian approach allows us to present catastrophic scenarios for the purpose of *educating* citizens. As Beatley's (1989) analysis demonstrated, the issue of ethics regarding the environment has become an important challenge for urban planning (Beatley, 1989). Beatley advanced the idea that because of the increase of individualism, the appropriate method for raising citizens' awareness of environmental problems is a constant challenge. Citizens may ask themselves a number of questions such as "Why should we think about the future of the planet?" and "How do we turn our attention to the fate of future generations without knowing them?" In light of this, how can a planner raise awareness for the need for sustainable development? The analysis shows that scenarios and approaches of a dystopian nature can be applied. For example, Superstudio proposed a variety of radical projects in the aim of making people reflect upon the absurdity of the functionalist movement. These patterns and techniques are used through various sophisticated textual and visual strategies. This article suggests that these models can still be used as a theoretical instrument to address the issue of ethics in urban design. In fact, as Fischler (2000) suggested, the theory should not be prescriptive (Fischler, 2000). Instead, it should help us understand the potential of a discipline. In this way, this research project suggests that through this method of asking questions, debate can be generated among citizens, helping them better understand the potential of urban planning. Both of these approaches will lead citizens to think about the alternatives brought to them by urban design.

As Ascher (2001) suggested, in order to achieve a new urbanism, it is less logical to propose one project, instead resorting to several different projects (Ascher, 2001). So why not make use of these different scenarios referred to as "utopian"? A utopian approach offers a significant advantage over conventional projects, namely the fact that utopian projects are provocative. We can therefore expect a more-sophisticated result from utopian projects in comparison with conventional models.

5.3 The Contemporary Definition of Utopian Thinking

Considering utopia offers reflection upon many aspects of contemporary life in the city such as politics, economics, social issues, and so on. Thus, by using a utopian model, the author proposes a fixed and static project. Nevertheless, as discussed by Harvey, the failure of the utopian scheme derives from its contradictory logic: Utopia is intended to control and stabilize social processes, but in order for this to happen, these processes must

inevitably remain dynamic (Harvey, 2000). Is it possible to redefine the urban utopia according to the current situation of the world? Answering this question provides an opportunity to address the limitations of utopia. In fact, through utopian thinking, problems are reviewed only generally, which makes it difficult to specify details and specific methods for implementing proposals. Moreover, with increased specialization in all areas, it has become much more difficult to take all factors into account. For example, some experts are interested in the method of tackling urban decision while other researchers are working on the morphological aspect of cities. Is it possible for a utopian to possess all of this knowledge? Perhaps this can explain why relatively advanced proposals in contemporary utopian projects are few and far between. For example, in a contemporary utopian project named *The Local Project*, Magnaghi discussed the necessary details for the development of a society that respects sustainable development. Nevertheless, his final proposals remained fairly general (Magnaghi & Kerr, 2005). How can this deadlock be broken? Perhaps with the advent of the Internet, as some authors suggested, the genesis of another kind of utopia named by Choay the "utopia of process" can be rightly assumed. In fact, as advanced by Ascher (2001), with the Internet we live in a hypertext environment. As we know, a hypertext relation assumes that each page is in relation to other pages. According to Ascher (2001), this logic of hypertext changed the way we live. For example, the social relations of today are far more numerous but most of the time more fragile. We can be in the same room as our spouses while chatting with someone else on the Internet. In this new hypertext environment, the Internet and chat rooms can be regarded as a good basis for the future of utopias. In these forums, many people can share their ideas. This method of participation and conversation may lead to the proposition of utopian projects that are both more detailed and more complete in comparison with the first type of utopian project. As Paquot (1996) suggested, all functional experiments of utopian communities in the past generally failed. Perhaps a utopia endorsed by several authors would produce more acceptable results.

At the end, this analysis about the role of utopia and the affirmative results about the positive roles for the future of urban planning can lead us to reevaluate the common pessimism about the death of avant-garde approaches. Still, in order to build contemporary cities, we can benefit from a utopian approach. Postmodernism greatly devalued utopian thinking and substituted it with a blasé attitude that jeopardizes the opportunities of Western society to renew its views on the contemporary city (Harvey, 2000). This neglect provides us with a great opportunity to use the utopian approach as a model for tackling current urban problems differently. As once Mumford (1921) beautifully stated, *A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at.*

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