

# Inclusion and the Ideal Space

Ulrich Gehmann, Ideal Spaces Working Group Foundation

## METADATA

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**Inclusion is essentially about building communities. If design is to be considered a tool for creating inclusion, architecture is a specific form of design. The aim is to design a space for the community in question, a space as a place for the members of that community. A real *anthropological place* (Marc Augé), a space of belonging, identity, and history. Such a space is an *ideal space* both in the sense of perfection, and of imagination.**

**To design new 'ideal' spaces for 'new' communities comes close to the sphere of utopia. The aim of every "good" utopia or eutopia is to enable communities to develop human qualities that can be considered positive. Design enables the creation of a physical environment in which these qualities may develop. The aim of inclusion by design is for eutopia, the *eu-topos* or good place, to become a realized space, a place to live, and to prosper.**

**Which types of architecture will suit which (conceived) types of human beings? This is the pivotal question underlying design. Traditionally, an eutopia is planned top-down, as a prefixed spatial and social matrix that is not meant to change. This traditional approach can be compared with a new bottom-up approach that enables future inhabitants to build their own environment, and thereby form a community.**

## Intro

If inclusion is about building communities, and if architecture – as a specific mode of design – aims to design spaces as places for communities, we are speaking about specific forms of architecture, together with their underlying assumptions. It is an architecture that aims to build an ideal space, 'ideal' in the sense of an imagined, utopian form of perfection, as a concrete *place* for communities, a place of inclusion.

This type of architecture has two dimensions to it: first and foremost, it is immaterial, the *social* architecture of a planned, 'perfect' social organization – the ultimate aim of achieving inclusion by design.

This aim is to be achieved by the second dimension of architecture, the material architecture of the built space. This type of architecture has two functions: on the one hand, it represents the social architecture behind it, as its symbolic expression. On the other hand, it is designed to influence human beings in a certain way, namely to become fully-included members of the respective utopian community. The ideal city was the epitome of this architecture of "inclusion by design." Its design was based on the central assumption that the cities' material *gestalt* does not only reflect the

functionality of a society and the behaviours of its citizens, but is also able to influence these behaviours.<sup>1</sup>

It was searched for the 'ideal' architecture, in both social and physical terms, for an 'ideal' community, an architectural design that would enable the perfect or 'ideal' level of inclusion. We need to reconsider the pivotal question addressed above, 'which architectures for which human beings?' if we are to understand the assumptions underlying this type of architecture. The assumptions concern the inner nature of the human being, the *conditio humana*.<sup>2</sup> The utopian construction, both as social organization and physical architecture, focuses on assumed positive traits of that condition, which are to be fostered through the design of the respective utopia.

Many of these assumptions refer back to what is summarized under the term of *cultural memory*,<sup>3</sup> a body of inherited ideas and concepts. These are part of a *Weltbild*, a world view made up of imaginations, or *ideas* in the literal sense – inner images.<sup>4</sup> These imaginations help people make sense of the world around them, 'constructed by how people reason, interpret and know.'<sup>5</sup> As Ernst Cassirer states, a *Weltbild* is equivalent to a cosmos of conceptions and imaginations.<sup>6</sup> The notion of a *cosmos* implies some sort of order, that these conceptions and the 'imaginations', the inner images or ideas upon which these conceptions are based are not just a random conglomerate but form a system, an order.

Of course, these orders vary in time and are culture-specific, depending on the society in question. But independent of its variations, an order is essential for the creation of imagery about a *conditio humana*, the (assumed) general human condition and therefore, for the architectural design of 'good places' for 'good' communities. The community in question should embody a cosmos of its own, reflected and enhanced by concomitant, material architecture. When a 'good' place is designed, this order of assumptions becomes essential. Whilst architecture is informed by these assumptions, the assumptions are not normally made explicit, but embody an *unthought known*, the order of tacit knowledge on a semi- or subconscious level:<sup>7</sup> We know without explicitly knowing that we know.

These assumptions determine which architectures, both social and material, are 'good' for a general human condition, or are best suited to improve it. Take for instance the modernist utopias of Le Corbusier and others, or the utopian green city-movements of today. The assumptions about a general *conditio humana* vary, as well as the intended goals of the respective architecture (which type of human condition is to be assisted/to be achieved); however, the underlying aim of these diverse attempts remains the same: to design an inclusive place for an 'ideal' community.

## Utopian Design, Intervention, and History

Utopian designs that are developed to create inclusive places for communities have to be considered as part of the wider context of history; because by their very intention, they go against history. Because of this, the relation of utopian design towards history becomes ambivalent, even contradictory.

On the one hand, utopian design is an intervention: it tries to break free from history, in an attempt to deviate from the path it has followed thus far, which seems insufficient, if not dangerous – for the positive human condition, for nature, for the climate. The idea that we are endangered as a species and that the natural systems we are inevitably embedded within are going to collapse is a firm component in our unthought known, and has become an intrinsic part of our recent *Weltbild*. To avert the risk of

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1 Eaton (2001): 11

2 Plessner (2003)

3 Assmann (1997): 52

4 To *idea* as an *eidos* or inner image: Eaton (2001): 11; Gemoll (1965): 252 (*eidos*), 383 (*idea*)

5 Naugle (2002): xix

6 Cassirer (1973): 19

7 Bollas (1987): 287f.

destruction, we need intervention: the 'world as it is' has to be changed, and we cannot remain in the status quo; this means the end of history as it was.

This is the core mission of utopia: utopia is not just a dream, literally an *ou-topos*, a nowhere-place, but to be realized, as a *concrete* utopia.<sup>8</sup> Interventionist design, expressed as an architecture for communities, has to become reality, and not just to stay merely 'utopian'. It is about the *real utopia*, which is to be introduced into the stream of past and present as an intervention, as 'a place that really exists, that was transferred from the imagination into tangible, concrete reality.'<sup>9</sup>

There is an additional aspect to consider: an ideal state is an *end* state. The history to come, once the ideal state of utopia has been realized, will be a history of the ever same – free from upheaval, the unforeseen, and sudden turns towards deterioration. That is, strictly speaking: in utopia, there is no history at all. Paradise is free of surprises. An ideal design is static.

On the other hand, utopian interventions have their own history, in the way that they have designed real utopias again and again over time. The attempt to break with history inevitably generates a history of its own.

Moreover, many key images of utopia are anchored in cultural memory, that is, in history; this type of memory amounts to more than just tradition. It is inherited, and this is a crucial component of the sources of imagery that any utopian interventionist design relies on. In contrast to tradition, *heritage* implies an active element. One actively owns heritage, as it influences our mindsets and therefore our actions; for instance, those of utopian design. One can either refuse or accept what is inherited, or transform it into something new. Regardless of which option is chosen, it is not only an individual that owns heritage, but heritage also owns the individual<sup>10</sup> – very often, as an unthought known that is rooted in myths.<sup>11</sup>

## Inclusions by Design

A myth is fundamentally an explanation of the world 'as it is', based on the genesis of the world in question. 'Like all origin stories, these narratives explain why we are on the Earth and how the world came to be. These stories tell us many things at the very foundation of our culture' (Greenblatt).<sup>12</sup> The myth of paradise is a crucial part of heritage in our Western culture.

Paradise in its Judaeo-Christian forms has to be accepted as the deepest archaeological layer of Western utopia, active in the unconscious of large segments of the population [...] testimony to the enduring power of religious belief to keep alive the strange longing for a state of man that once has been and will be again.<sup>13</sup>

According to the myth, if paradise was an original state of optimal inclusion, or the ideal space of Eden designed by God, which humans attempted to regain through utopian efforts and without godly assistance from the Enlightenment era onwards,<sup>14</sup> paradise inevitably became an issue of the future. In the words of the poet John Milton, paradise is lost and can only be regained. The mythic conception of a paradise lost is deeply anchored in our Western Judaeo-Christian heritage, together with the belief that the human being is not a natural part of a natural world but is fact separated from it, forever distinct. Compared to the West, no other culture has made such a rigid distinction between nature and culture.<sup>15</sup>

On top of this, history gains direction, and meaning: from the first paradise, an artifact designed by God, to a second paradise at the end of all days, the Heavenly City

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8 Mannheim (1929): 172. It is an irony of history that this was written shortly before the advent of the concrete utopia of a Third Reich.

9 Feuerstein (2008): 7

10 Willer et al. (2013): 8

11 Gehmann (2003)

12 Greenblatt (2017): 28

13 Manuel and Manuel (1997): 33

14 Vidler (2011): 170-173

15 Descola (2013): 107

designed by God. Between these two paradises, and after the first paradise had been abandoned, the history of civilization took shape.

It was a basic Western image of history, also supported by modern anthropology,<sup>16</sup> and informing the longing for utopia.

The new cosmos was no longer Eden but became the city, and this new expression of culture departed from nature – in both mythological and real terms. The new cosmos promised a *civilized* life, a new *conditio humana* of life in civilization: as a *citizen*.<sup>17</sup> The city became man's second nature, from its early beginnings to the asphalt jungles and growing urban agglomerations of today. The human being as the cultural animal (McLuhan) became a *zoon politikon* (Aristotle), an animal living in the city.<sup>18</sup>

The city, human histories' first inclusion by design on larger scale, proved to be an ambivalent achievement, and this must have been sensed right from the start of a civilized, urban way of life.<sup>19</sup> It is reflected in the myth. Gilgamesh, the Sumerian founder of the first city, had a friend Enkidu, who was half-animal, a being still part of nature; but Enkidu died, and with him the connection to a natural world was lost.<sup>20</sup> Biblical Kain, the cursed one, was the founder of the first city, and his descendant Tubalkain, just like Prometheus, was able to transform naturally given materials into unnatural things, namely artifacts. According to Leroi-Gourhan, the myth of Prometheus reflects both a victory over the gods and an enchainment. The technician might be the master of civilization, but others rule, and the technician helps them to ensure that the artificial world triumphs over nature, for the next 50 centuries. This, he says, is the basis of all modern societies, from Sumer onwards.<sup>21</sup> The Sumerian city was, according to Lewis Mumford, the first mega-machine in history. It consisted of people rather than mechanical parts, a machine of social organization that was, in principle, maintained until the present day.<sup>22</sup>

The symbolic expression of this city-machine was a cosmic circle, an ideal form of inclusion by design. On a Mesopotamian bas-relief, the circle is divided by four equal lines into quadrants, containing symbolic expressions of human activities.<sup>23</sup> There were four, just like the rivers from the first paradise that had been left. In fact, it was a new cosmos.<sup>24</sup> The difference between the real city and the myth was minimal (Vercelloni), '[...] and the symbol of the city was at the same time the instrument for portraying the real city.'

Today, the majority of the world's population lives in urban agglomerations,<sup>25</sup> the second, and final nature in a so-called *anthropocene*, the era of man, the newest state in the history of the human being. The city has become an uncanny place<sup>26</sup> for large parts of its population, a literal utopia of another kind: an *ou-topos* for an existence that is truly human, in a positive sense, a non-place where humans cannot, or at least should not exist. The former cosmos turned into an urban jungle – marking the beginning of new utopias.

## Searching for the Ideal Space of Inclusion

Paradise is lost. It can only be regained. Since the Renaissance, and with increasing erosion of a unified Christian *Weltbild*, it was felt that human beings needed to create their own paradises, rather than waiting for an unearthly Heavenly City to come at

<sup>16</sup> Gowdy (2004): 258-260

<sup>17</sup> The word 'civilization' recurs to the Latin *civitas*, denoting the formal as well as actual community of citizens: Summers (2003): 203

<sup>18</sup> Baumeister (2005); Aureli (2011): 3-5, to the *zoon politikon*.

<sup>19</sup> Leroi-Gourhan (1984): 226

<sup>20</sup> Schrott (2004)

<sup>21</sup> Leroi-Gourhan (1984): 226, also to Kain, Tubalkain, and Prometheus; to Prometheus also: Gehmann (2004)

<sup>22</sup> Mumford (1980): 219-221, 349

<sup>23</sup> Vercelloni (1994): 1

<sup>24</sup> Madanipour (2007): 11; Summers (2003): 203; Vercelloni (1994): 1

<sup>25</sup> BMZ (2023): 18138

<sup>26</sup> Vidler (1992)

the end of all days. After the *Illas fantasticas* of the Renaissance discoverers and the last paradisiacal territories populated by the “natural primitives” of their Western explorers and ethnologists<sup>27</sup> had vanished, and modern Western technology combined with economic growth endangers the planet. The hope to find a ‘natural’ utopia already existing, a one not to be *designed*, has become obsolete.

Paradise will only be regained in the future if humans design an ideal space of inclusion, a place for an ideal community where the human inner nature (the *conditio humana*) and the outer nature of a ‘natural’ world are reconciled. This mythic hope, and longing for inclusion by designing the ideal space, was evident in 18th century concepts of a “green” Paris,<sup>28</sup> Ebenezer Howard, modern garden cities, Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, to the 1970’s and recent approaches to a green city. With some good will, says Piet Mondrian, a pioneer of modern art and architecture, it must be possible to create an earthly paradise.<sup>29</sup>

In mythological terms, the common factor inherent to all these movements is a return to nature – the outer, ‘biological’ nature that belongs to a ‘natural’ environment – aligned with the mythic promise that humankind will no longer be separated from the rest of the natural world, but once again reunited, and included within it.

One option is to retreat from urban civilization and consequently return to nature, from Rousseau to diverse eco-communes of the past and present, from Frank Lloyd Wright’s retreat from the city<sup>30</sup> to climate protesters of the modern day. Common to all these moves away from a techno-civilization is the assumption that if we want to survive as human beings, we cannot retain the conditions of a destructive civilization, with its potential to damage nature and humans alike.

This option is brought to its point in William Morris’ *News from Nowhere* in the fin de siècle, a high tide of Western industrialization,<sup>31</sup> and again in Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* in the 1970s, almost a century later – which means that the problem remained. Both cases can be considered paradigmatic examples of the mindset of a “back to nature”-movement, as described here. In both cases, capitalism, the driving force behind the modern city as an uncanny place, collapsed, together with its city. Mumford’s megamachine ceased to exist. In both examples, the new ideal space is decentralized, meaning that it is designed by the people of its communities; there is no longer a grand design for whole cities, no capitalistic growth and destruction but self-sustainment and ecological balance. This is epitomized by the utopian design presented by Callenbach, who explicitly refers to mythological figures: Kain, founder of the city, represents the *homo faber*, ‘the man who works and tames nature to materially construct a new artificial universe’, whereas Abel is connected with the *homo ludens*, ‘the man who plays and constructs an ephemeral system of relations between nature and life.’<sup>32</sup>

This concept can serve as a blueprint for a new design of cultural, economic, and social contexts. Small self-sufficient communities live in unity with nature, having overcome the old design of inclusion: of a megamachine driven by technology, exact science, and a capitalist free market, and the descendent of the machine: the post-modernist city as an assemblage of diverse ‘heterotopias of consumption and illusion.’<sup>33</sup>

Self-sufficiency, unity with nature, and decentralization are the principles underlying the design of the new ideal space of inclusion. The myth behind, a variant of the paradise myth, is to return to the *aetas aurea*, the golden age of a retro-utopia. In relation to the paradise myth, the future lies in the past, in the very beginning; and

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27 Fink-Eitel (1994)

28 Vidler (2011): 30

29 Piet Mondrian cited in Warncke (2012): 174

30 Wright (1950)

31 Morris (2017)

32 Callenbach cited in Claeys (2011): 207

33 Shane (2013): 306f.

that past must become the future again. Nature is reconciled with human culture, after the downfall of the machine and its city.

A return to nature never lost its appeal; today, it has even become a necessity, both reflected and epitomized in the concept (and neo-myth) of the *green* city. Aligned with the mythic hope to become more human again, not only in terms of a better relationship with an outer nature, the endangered natural environment, but also in terms of a human inner nature. This kind of hope is inherent to one basic type of utopia, the so-called anarchist utopia: that it is 'natural' for the human being, i.e., that it belongs to its basic *conditio humana* to lead a life free from oppression, hierarchies, and organizational constraints. If these conditions are achieved, paradise will have been regained.

## Designing the Ideal Space for Inclusion

The alternative to pursuing a decentralized 'anarchist' utopia is to design an ideal end state, and to do this according to a master plan. It is the so-called architect utopia, the standard type of utopian design: planned top-down, with a clear and prefixed social and material architectural order.<sup>34</sup> It is not just about physical space, but about an entire *state* of existence. And this state has to be *designed*, in its entirety as both a material and social space, a space of optimal, and hence ultimate inclusion. The common assumption underlying those 'architect' utopias was that of social unity, the very aim of inclusion, which could be achieved through architectural unity, both in terms of social organization ('social' architecture) and built space ('material' architecture). The coherence between social and architectural unity, evident in the design of built spaces, might explain the predominant rigidity of architectural expression. In the first explicit utopia of modern times, Thomas Morus' *Utopia*, all 54 cities were identical.<sup>35</sup>

The symbolic epitome of this utopian end state is the ideal city, the *city of reason* as the designed ultimate inclusion. 'The source of a supreme order may have changed through millennia, but searching for the certainty of a higher order has not.'<sup>36</sup> The layout of utopian ideal cities presented an ideal space for a new *zoon politikon*, one which was tailored to the ideal "utopian" society that was yet to be achieved. The traditional architectural forms and functions of these cities were structured in a strict hierarchy, quite often in geometrical closure (star-shaped,<sup>37</sup> gridded, otherwise closed), appearing like cosmic mandalas. Geometrical rigidity was applied to the premodern forms of these cities in particular, but was not confined to them, as modern architectures such as by Ludwig Hilberseimer, Le Corbusier's Paris, Brasilia, or Auroville reveal.

The common idea underlying such designs was that architectural closure should express a perfect form of social inclusion, an inclusion adopted to an assumed basic *conditio humana*, and to foster 'positive' traits of a generalized human 'inner nature'. Referring back to the initial question of *which types of architecture for which human beings*, the social architectures of such designs varied from strict hierarchies to democratic approaches; but they shared one key idea: *colonization*, in its literal terms. Without etymology, architecture cannot be understood, according to the architect Gottfried Semper.<sup>38</sup> The term *culture* stems from the Latin *colere*, denoting a process of cultivating, of domestication, creating a space, a *habitat* in which one can live as a 'cultivated' being, a place of inclusion.<sup>39</sup> Through the process of colonization, not only the outer nature is domesticated, but also the inner nature of the human being, of the ones inhabiting the new place.

Domesticating the outer, but first and foremost the inner nature was the final intention of the architect utopia. The utopian aim is not a return to nature, but to incorporate it into culture. Such as the *Bosco Verticale*-building in recent Milan, or the modernist

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34 Seng and Saage (2012): 11, to both types of utopia

35 Feuerstein (2008): 46

36 Madanipour (2007): 9

37 Fortifications from the 16th to 18th centuries are not considered here, because they served clear military purposes.

38 Semper cited in Portoghesi (2000): 118

39 Fisch (1992): 683-687; Lefebvre (2007): 259, to the notion of *habitat*.



garden city-, and the recent green city-movements. The modernist design conception was to place the buildings in an 'immense garden' (Emile Zola), such as the designs of the socialist, car-free *Industrial City* of Tony Garnier at the beginning of the 20th century, or Le Corbusier's capitalist new Paris.<sup>40</sup>

Paradise is pre-planned, and a fixed end state of the future. Once that state has been reached, history and the world as we know it will end, very much in line with the Christian heritage of a Heavenly City. In this instance, the relevant world, that of the artificial paradise, became an ideal artifact,<sup>41</sup> a perfect design for those included. And God, the *elegans architectus* of the medieval times, who created the world based on mathematics and geometry,<sup>42</sup> had been replaced by the master plans of social and physical architects. The inhabitants of those designs, the ones that were to become domesticated, were not asked. With regard to the fundamental relationship between culture and nature (both outer and inner), the statement of a modernist utopia's designer is programmatic: 'In the beginning, and out of chaos, geometry preceded biology as a phenomenon of the universe.'<sup>43</sup>

## Alternative Designs

Through nature, no matter how it is designed, utopia is an island. It is an island of an assumed, better order that is separated from the proverbial rest of the world, an ideal Inner opposed to a non-ideal Outer. That Inner is the place of inclusion, it has to be an *anthropological place*, a place 'of identity, of relations and of history.' It is the place people want, and 'a principle of meaning for the people who live in it.'<sup>44</sup>

The problem is that utopia cannot build such a place because it is a place without history: the ideal end state, yet to be built, is *new*, by its very conception. It has not evolved through historical growth, but has been designed *anew*, also to end history as it was. The only anthropological issue that needs to be solved is how to involve future inhabitants in the process of its design, which, in contrast to archist utopias, allows individuals to make their *own* place, their own island of the better.

The new paradise is built by its own inhabitants, and therefore, may have the opportunity to evolve; it does not have to stay as the untouchable, ideal end state that defines archist utopias.

An example is architect Jateen Lad's *Sharanam* project in India, where even under the most adverse starting conditions (unemployment, lack of skilled workers, mafia, drugs) future inhabitants were trained on the job to build their own community center, on the site of a former garbage dump. This project was all about giving hope, and as Lad says, about collective social aspiration. Those who were part of the project *wanted* to see it succeed, and two criteria for an anthropological place (a feeling of identity and belonging) were fulfilled, simply by being included in the making of this better place.

Unlike in traditional archist utopias, where the ideal construction was a format that could be placed anywhere, like the Roman military camp, the *castrum*, or like the bulk of recent city architecture, *Sharanam* is anchored in the identity of the place in which it was built. It is '[...] identifiable with that landscape, that locale, the soil, the very matter of that area, its people and their culture.'<sup>45</sup>

The word *Sharanam* means *refuge* or *sanctuary* - from a life in the recent urban 'non-identifiable landscapes of placelessness' (J. Lad),<sup>46</sup> an *ou-topos* of another kind, a non-place for a truly human existence. It is the postmodernist version of Mumford's city machine in a globalized neoliberal economic context; an architecture 'of non-identity and fluidity' (Lad), but essentially the same. This is ultimately not fit for hu-

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40 Zola cited in Vidler (2011): 255; Lampugnani (2017): 200, Le Corbusier; Tony Garnier: exhibition 'Ideal Spaces' (2016), Official website Ideal Spaces Working Group, n. pag.

41 Gehmann (2022)

42 Alain de Lille cited in Mâle (1994): 21

43 Jellicoe (1961): 23

44 Augé (1995): 52

45 Lad cited in Gehmann et al. (2021): 201

46 Lad cited in Gehmann et al. (2021): 201

mans. The story of Kain and Tubalkain repeats itself, on a higher technological level (for example, the 'smart city'), and on a global scale.

We cannot always be in a state of flux, changing our identity. We need anchors and stability to sustain certain meaningful values as well as our identities. It is for this reason that Sharanam was purposefully designed and built as an idealized sanctuary against the ever-changing conditions around it. This, we hope, will help the underlying ethos of empowerment, dignity, and beauty to endure.<sup>47</sup>

Once again, it is a utopian island; but one of different kind. Perhaps, it is possible for these attempts to multiply, setting new ways of inclusion by design for the future.

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47 Lad cited in Gehmann et al. (2021): 201



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