

## UTOPIA

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### 65.1 Introduction

Perhaps, the best way to work towards an understanding of the concept of "Utopia" is to ask a person to describe a world which he would like to live in. That is, to assume that existing world conditions are not acceptable - an assumption that probably holds true for all ages and all places. That is to assume further that the means of effecting changes are just there - an assumption that may not hold true for all ages and places. Subject to these assumptions, the person is likely to employ his imagination faculty and paint the picture of his dream world. For example, he may wish to live in a world where everybody, irrespective of colour, creed or religion has access to all needs of life, a world where nobody or group of people is oppressed, where there is international framework. He may wish to imagine his country as being prosperous, with individuals living happy and useful lives in decent environment conditions. This picture is what can be regarded as the person's utopia. Everybody has such a private dream of the ideal place he would like to live, and the type of ideal people he would like to in, and live with. As

individuals can be associated with their imaginary perfect situation, so also are families, institutions, towns and countries. Indeed, an international body like the United Nations has its own vision of an ideal world. The term "utopia" may, therefore, be perceived as being inherent in nature. This is given expression by the urge to think of, and probably to work towards an ideal life – a utopia. It is not likely that a man can live as a full human being without some form of vision. In fact, all human endeavours and achievements are necessarily the outcomes of some sorts of dreams.

The word "utopia" was first used by Sir Thomas More in 1516 to describe an imaginary ideal country. More's ideal society was an epitome of a perfect governmental, economic and social order. In this state, all men are equal, prosperous, educated, wise and morally upright. More coined the word "utopia" from the Greek word *ou-to-pos*, meaning "no place". The close relationship of *ou-to-pos* with *eutopia*, which means "good place," succinctly depicts that More actually intended to, and indeed succeeded in employing the imaginary to project the ideal (Jean-Marie et al., 2012). However, the word "utopia" and "utopian" have, over time, assumed common everyday usage. They have since come to be associated with that which is radically different from the norm. An expression of a perfect state of affairs or a proposed one that could lead to flawless situations is usually described as utopian. The usage has further assumed some derogatory connotations. For example, a suggestion which appears impracticable is often condemned as utopia. In its everyday pejorative use, it is closely related to wishful thinking, fantasies and daydreams, which, in any case, are at variance with More's intentions.

At the same time, it is certainly true that utopianism has been able to preserve its original serious connotations through time. It has represented prophecies which are expected to effect profound changes in human life; it has meant purposeful revolutionary proposals as well as great scientific speculations (Martin, 1974). That utopianism has endured through time shows itself in the abundance of the literature it has amassed. Although there seems to be a common trend of visionary attributes in all utopian literature, it is possible to view utopian thought as belonging to different polar types. Out of such attempts came the division between literary utopias and design utopias. These two traditions are also referred to respectively as institutional and artefact utopias. The former group tends to lay more emphasis on principles or government, economic structure and religion; while the latter deals more with physical arrangements to effect desired perfect life. In a way, certain utopias

combine both institutional and physical elements in almost balanced proportions. There is also the group of anti-utopians who decry the totalitarianism and rigidity of utopian characteristics, which they believe cannot bring true happiness to the inhabitants of utopia (Martin, 1974).

A consideration of the utopian characteristics shows that, there is a close relation between utopian thought and planning tradition and that the former indeed influences the latter. The 60th utopia and planning inherently seem to improve upon the present. This is to say that the existing situations are not acceptable; so the future deserves to be subjected to changes based on certain judgements and preferences. Such preferred futures are incorporated in some blueprints or a proposal which, in essence, is what both utopianism and planning are all about. Nonetheless, there difference between the two: while classical utopia depicts an ideal society without necessarily defining the means of achieving such condition, planning process is incomplete without a clear definition of how to reach future targets (Philip, 1974).

The concern of this chapter is to outline the origins of utopian thought, trace the development of utopian mentality, analyse the results of utopias put into planning practice, and evaluate the general influence of utopian tradition on town planning.

## 65.2 Origins of Utopian Thought

Although Sir Thomas More's name has always come to mind whenever utopia is mentioned, thoughts that approximate to utopian vision are known to exist much earlier (Martin, 1974). The philosophers of ancient Greece, in particular, had put forth visionary ideas which must have influenced More. Martin (1974) notes that one of the earliest such influences was Plato's *The Republic*, in which he developed his view of an ideal state. Although Plato's *The Republic* is essentially literary in character, he also touches on physical characteristics of settlements. For example, it is his belief that the city should be limited in size in order to maintain its integrity and unity. He is basically against the Athenian's pattern and opted for the Spartan pattern of dispersed population. Much more idealistic in physical description is Plato's ideal city as described in laws where he envisaged a self-reliant entity with sufficient land to feed its population. Plato's ideal state, once achieved, will not be subject to further changes; rather, the pattern is supposed to be static and maintained by punitive measures. This restrictive element appears to have spanned through subsequent visionary thoughts (Martin 1974).

Martin (1974) opines that one other influence that has been linked with later utopians is that of Aristotle. In the pages of politics, he put forth what he considered as the structure of an ideal city. He saw the city as an avenue to forge commercial interests as well as ensure adequate security. In his visionary thought, Aristotle was able to relate the institutional arrangements of the state with the ideal physical forms of its cities. However, like Plato, Aristotle's ideal society could only be sustained by strict social controls – albeit in disguised forms – in what was supposed to be democratic utopias (Philip et al., 1974). Martins (1974) argue that this trait is also noticeable in More's ideal society and that More must have been influenced by ancient Greek philosophers.

More's expositions on utopia are contained in two books. Book one begins with a castigation of the social and economic conditions prevailing during the 16th century in Europe, particularly in England. Book 2 of utopia proceeds to present an alternative pattern of life – the best form of life as he perceived it happens on an island (Philip et al., 1974). So, utopia, which he adopted as the name of an imaginary island below the equator, presents his ideal country. Philip et al. (1974) aver that, More, in his Utopia, sets out sweeping reformist ideas about the ideal governmental, social and economic system. Citizens of Utopia would participate with full equality in activities related to food, clothing, housing, education, government, war and religion. The society is basically guided by a common goal and every utopian is expected to contribute his or her quota towards the achievement of the goal. All achievements are seen as benefits to society and not to the individual since Utopia is a commonwealth where individuals' welfare and basic needs are guaranteed. The need for competition for individual advancement is absent. Individuals are, however, expected to work hard in a communal spirit to achieve expected material advance (Martin, 1974).

Martin (1974) asserts that citizens of Utopia are made to acquire the skills of 60th city and country works so that they are able to alternate certain of manual work with white collar jobs. This is to avoid monotony and to ensure fairness. He is in fact particular about city children that they should have access to the country and understand farming from youth.

More, like his Greek predecessors in utopian thought does not rely on mere human volition to bring the utopian proposals into fruition. Elaborate restrictive sanctions in the form of regulation and punishments were evolved. In particular, there were magistrates whose duties were to supervise other families and ensure that they performed their tasks. Proof of deviation from

Put in other words, utopia is essentially the apotheosis of the city. This has important implications for planning as the problems of cities. Consequently, the trend in planning has always been a reversal of city life or modification of it into the attribute of rural environment, such as ample space, greenery, freshness and healthiness.

An important question that may be posed at this stage of our discussion and which will continue to echo in the remaining sections of this chapter is: how far real worlds transform into their ideal place? Our discussions in the remaining sections of this chapter are intended to bring this out. Suffice it to say here, however, that Thomas More who later became Lord Chancellor for Henry VIII was later executed by the ruthless king and was unable to turn England into anything like utopia during his life time.

### 65.3 Development of Utopian Mentality

Several utopian writers immediately followed More and the utopian literature grew rapidly through the years up to this century. In tracing the development of utopian mentality or tradition, therefore, we necessarily have to select Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Robert Owen, Ebenezer Howard, Soria Y. Mata and Tony Garnier. Our interest in these writers stemmed from the fact that they essentially belong to the design utopian school. In addition, some of them are not only utopian designers but also utopian practitioners. Their contributions to modern town planning and practice are significant.

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1957) was one of the leading utopian architect planners. In line with the usual motivations for developing utopian ideals, he was not satisfied with the living conditions that prevailed in American cities. He blamed this for perverting society's basic social values. If the situation continued, there would definitely be down. So to avert this, a new value had to be established in a new environment. It was his conviction that the city could not be salvaged nor was it worth salvaging. Wright displayed a complete rejection of the city as a place to live in. His aversion for cities was made explicit as he proclaimed, "I do like cities. I think the city did its work a long time ago. The city is a habit, we do not need it. The more intelligent people are continually leaving it" (Wright 1966:112). He felt that the city and the industrial civilization that produced it must perish (Reissman, 1964; Katherine, 2010).

Wright (1966) envisioned a new environment based on the concept of perfect harmony between man and nature. He decided that high density vertical development should be destroyed and replaced by horizontal

Ebenezer Howards (1850-1928) also exhibited the utopian mentality through his theoretical water-tight formula to arrive at the fundamental principles of modern town planning. Ebenezer Howards is famous for his *Garden City of Tomorrow*, which has been acclaimed as one of the greatest inventions that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century (Howard, 1965). Feeling disturbed about the urban congestion (especially in London), and rural depopulation, he put forward his ideas of how people should live. The question he addressed himself was how to combine the advantages of both urban and rural lives, or how to eliminate the disadvantages of both urban and rural modes of living. Faced with this task in his search for the ideal form of living, he developed his famous diagram of *The Three Magnets*, representing the Town, Country and Town-Country. Prior to this presentation, most discussions often centred on the two alternatives of 'town' and 'country'. Ebenezer rejected this order of thinking and added the town-country dimension. This new dimension sought that all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country, might be secured in perfect combination. He pleaded that town and country must be married for it was only through this that new civilization could be forged. Through this conceptual basis, Howard came up with his idea of 'garden cities'. The population of a garden city would be limited to 32,000. When the city grows up to this level, another city is to be established and separated from the first by buffer zone of open country (Howard, 1965).

The layout design of the garden city exhibits a large central park in which is set the public buildings. This is surrounded by a shopping arcade. Around the arcade are designed the residential areas which are interspersed by a park which contains the school. The houses are beautifully designed, each in its spacious land. Beyond and adjacent to the Circle Railways are located the facilities. The whole development is in the centre of a large track of land which is reserved for agriculture and which, at the same time, serves as green belt (Frederic, 1969).

In achieving the garden city proposal, the wretched shims would have to be destroyed to make room for gardens and recreation grounds. He probably realized the immediate social consequences of this and so proposed that revolutionary measures which could cause bitterness would be avoided. Accordingly, constitutional means would be employed (Howard, 1965). Another utopian expression which has a far-reaching effect on the principles and practice of planning was provided by Soria Y. Mata (1882), who has the

reputation of having written several books on political and philosophical subjects. In direct contrast to the concentric form of cities, such as designed by Howard, Mata conceived a linear city. Since he also emphasized, among other things, the geometric regularity, it can be said that he had some things in common with Le Corbusier.

Soria Y. Mata first outlined his conception of a 'linear city' in a Spanish journal in 1882. Later, He laid down in greater detail the fundamental principles of the linear city. One of the most significant of the principles on which others probably hinge is that "All the problems of town planning stem from the problem of traffic" (Grigor, 2010:23). He asserted that a city's most appropriate shape is that in which the sum total of time needed to go from one house to all the others is the smallest (Arthur et al., 1975). Since the best means of transport at the time he wrote was the railway, he argued that towns should have a linear form. In general, the city he envisaged would have a spine made up of a street at least 40 metres wide, in the centre of which tracks of a railway would be laid. The blocks would be shaped like rectangles, while buildings would occupy not more than 20 percent of plot areas. Every family, according to Mata's utopian expression, would have its own house, and every house would have its own garden or orchard. He expected that this arrangement would facilitate a return to nature and reverse the rural-urban migration trend (Arthur et al., 1975).

Two major types of city physical forms have emerged from the utopian designers. The first is represented by Howard's concentric garden city, which relies upon their relative small size to maintain a balance between urban and rural environments. The second is represented by Mata's linear city, which employs the countryside to contain urbanization along the highway.

Tony Garnier (1869-1948), in his own utopian expression, appears to have integrated both the linear and the concentric forms. Figures 65.1 and 65.2 show Garnier's ideal city layout and shape, respectively. In 1917, he presented his ideas in a design he called 'Industrial City'. He actually started work on his dream city one year after Howard's publication; however, it is not clear whether he was aware of Howard's theory.

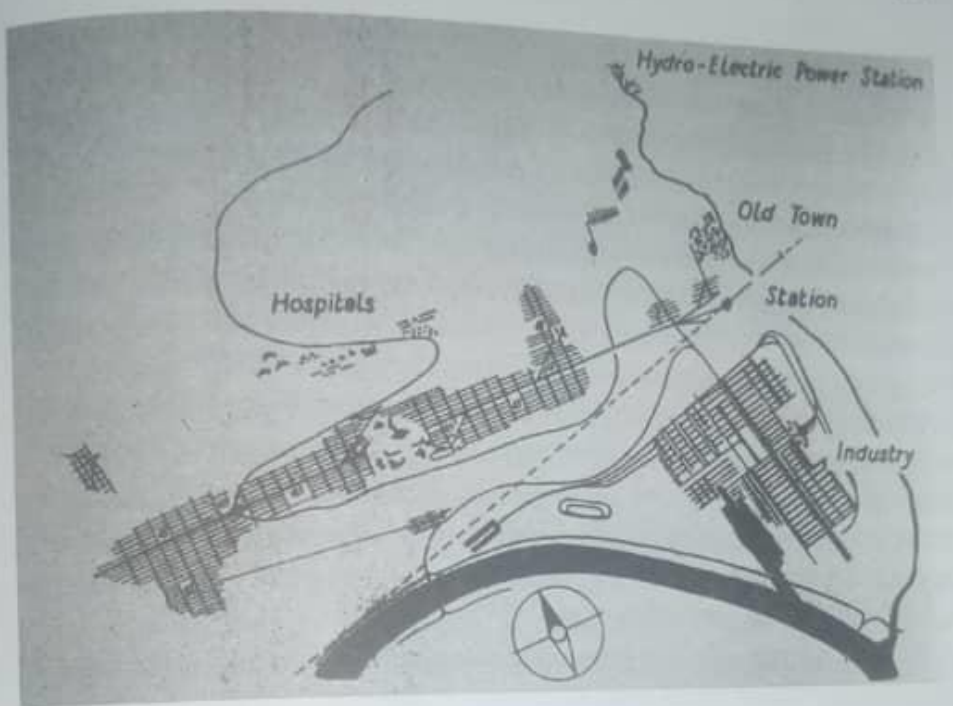


Figure 65.1: Garnier's Ideal City Layout  
Source: [www.exhibits.slpl.org](http://www.exhibits.slpl.org)



Figure 65.2: Garnier's ideal City Shape  
Source: Grigor, 2010



For Garnier, the problem of modern town planning goes far beyond adapting the shape of the city to the requirements of modern means of transport. Rather, he was more preoccupied with the architectural form of a 20th century form which would meet the requirements of social and technical progress. Garnier's Industrial City assumed a population size of 35,000, which was about the same envisaged for the garden city, but he was not emphatic or rigid about this size. One area of emphasis in Garnier's proposal is provision for industrial establishments on a grander scale than what Howard provided for in the garden city. His industrial establishments would include mines, blast furnaces, ironworks, shipyards, and car and aircraft factories. Provision was made for hydro-electric power base; and such details as museums, libraries and trade union offices were not lacking in his design. The residential quarters were located on both sides of the town centre and divided into units each with a school. Living houses were either two-storey types or detached each with gardens without fences (Arthur et al., 1975).

Garnier's proposals, in some respects, assume a substantial level of sophistication of industrial establishments and recognized the need to relate industrial establishments away from residential areas, while locating the less harmful and relatively clean ones like the textile industry close to the residential quarters. Garnier's project is also significant from the social point of view. It is the first effort to present a 20th -century town founded on the socialist principles. For example, he did not include such buildings as the law courts, the police, the prison and the church in his design. His new city ruled according to the socialist principles, it would no longer have any rogues, thieves or murderers.

#### 65.4 Utopia Put into Practice

While the word 'utopia' may connote unrealizable proposals at least by common everyday usage, it should be emphasized that evidence abound in the literature of attempts made to translate some Utopian ideas into reality in Europe. The French town of Chaux, founded in 1799, and the Scotch community of New Lanark, founded in 1799 are good examples (Arthur et al., 1975; Jean-Marie et al., 2012). Similarly in America, some scores of utopias, such as New Harmony, Oneida, Brook Farm and Love Colony, were put into actual practice (Arthur et al., 1975).

As noted in the preceding section, Owen, an industrial proprietor, was committed to eliminating the suffering of workers by turning their power to

better use and creating utopia on earth. Owen started pursuing his mission in New Lanark by building a school, a cooperative grocery a boundary, a vegetable market and houses better than what workers in Scotland had been used. As we noted earlier, he paid higher wages than any other manufacturer, reduced weekly working. His real intention was to create a community that would be "self-employing, self-supporting, self-educating, and self-governing"; and, to a large extent, he succeeded in this project. The people of New Lanark he first met in 1799 were said to be ignorant, dirty and drunken but he left them with the best schools, the best wages, and the cleanest surroundings of any workers in Britain at the time (Arthur et al., 1975; Peter, 1994). However, a visit to New Lanark today, in the words of Colin (1974), shows how situations do change. New Lanark has fallen victim of changing times, changing technology and changing values. Although the original buildings are still as solid as rock, they are totally empty, as the company that occupied them has been forced by foreign competition to close down. The textile industry has moved to other areas since the waterfall which had long been a source of power was no longer relevant. So, New Lanark is left with no economic base whatever and has become a ghost village. During Owen's days, the population was over 2,000; today, this size has reduced to less than a hundred. Of particular note is Owen's school, which he built in 1817 with a radically different philosophy (Colin, 1974). The school roof "has now caved in and the interior is a shambles" (Colin, 1974:30) as it has been in disuse for over half a century.

In order for Soria Y. Mata to put into effect his proposals about the "linear city", he established a company which started construction work in 1898. Although a substantial measure of success was achieved, building of the linear city was accompanied with a lot of problems. Among the first set of difficulty the company had to face was that of finance, as the sale of shares did not move as fast as expected. Perhaps, much more serious was the problem of securing land. As a result of the building of the first part of the linear city, the value of adjoining land went up, thus slowing down the execution of the project and eventually grinding it to a halt (Arthur et al., 1975). It should be recalled, however, that Mata in one of the principles of his linear city did stipulate an equitable distribution of land in the interest of the public (Arthur et al., 1975; Grigor 2010). In other words, Mata did not envisage that land would constitute a constraint to the development of his new city.

Apart from the problem of finance and land, Soria's project suffered some other setbacks in the course of its implementation. For instance, it was one of

Mata's intentions that the linear city be surrounded on both sides by open space since one of his main objectives was to make the inhabitants as close as possible to nature. However, this principle got lost somehow in the course of implementation. Besides, the small sector of the linear city which emerged eventually became submerged by the exposition of the existing city - Madrid (Arthur et al., 1975). In general, therefore, Mata's bold and imaginative plan got implanted with a very limited degree of success.

Ebenezer Howard will be considered next among those who sought new ways of town development through theory and practice. Howard had the singular opportunity to begin the building of two cities based on his garden city model. Construction of the first - Letchworth - which started in 1903, is generally believed to be substantially different from his original idea (Frederic, 1969). The areas of land allocated to public gardens were smaller than what was conceived on the drawing board. Similarly, the agricultural belt was not as broad as Howard originally thought possible. Letchworth, which lies some 35 miles (56 km) distance from London developed very slowly and, by the outbreak of the First World War, contained only 9000 inhabitants. The second garden city, work on Welwyn proceeded very slowly. The development of the two garden cities in general started with difficulties, most of which were financial in nature. Howard had insisted that the garden cities should be financially independent. This idea turned out an error which might have been avoided. Furthermore, Howard's conviction that, once the two satellite cities were developed, the trend of rural migration to London would be stemmed, did not materialize. This error in forecast may be attributed to Howard's underestimation of the impact of economic forces as well as transport modes on the distribution of population (Frederic, 1969). As we noted in the preceding section, the industrial establishments he provided for in his model was inadequate in relation to the scale of the city he designed.

In general, therefore, it can be concluded that Howard's Utopian ideas put to test could not achieve as much as he intended. Howard in Reissman's (1964) words, saw two garden cities begin and saw both flounder. He saw enough to show him, if not to convince him that there were more obstacles to the realization of his plans than he had imagined. Still, there were some benefits finally proven by the performance of the experiments.

Lastly, we now to discuss the work of Tony Garnier as one of the Utopian designer who had the opportunity to put into practice - albeit on a small scale - his ideas. Garnier started in 1905 to erect some public buildings as provided for



in his industrial city model. He built, for example, a hospital, a stadium, a slaughter house and schools. Some fifteen years later, he embarked on the building of residential quarters following his own theoretical concepts (Ostrowski 1970). However, what actually emerged was far from the theoretical concept. The residential quarters were more compact and the open spaces smaller than what he originally conceived in his industrial city. The idea of a town developing into a big public garden was far from being achieved. What actually emerged was akin to sub-urban workers housing estate in a large city. And so, like most other Utopian designers, Garnier found that the land and means and other prerequisites on which he based his designs could not be satisfied. Nonetheless, as Ostrowski (1970) observes, those public buildings that Garnier designed and built in Lyons were a testimony to his talent and innovative spirit. Garnier has, in fact, been acclaimed as one of the great pioneers not only of town planning, but also of modern architecture.

#### 65.5 Influence of Utopian Tradition on Town Planning

A reflection on the discussion in the preceding sections will show a close relationship between utopianism and town planning as we know it today. Basically, utopianism is concerned with the attainment of a desirable future. Similarly, town planning seeks to interfere with the existing life situation with a view to positively altering the future. Both utopianism and planning start with the premise that existing situations are undesirable. The economic conditions in the cities which inspired the Utopians to dream of better future life have been highlighted in the preceding section of this chapter. In the same way, modern town planning evolved as a result of concern for the health and sanitary condition of city workers during the Industrial Revolution. So, it can be seen that both utopianism and planning focus on the city. Hence, there are the Amaurote – capital city, the Contemporary City, the Broadacre City, the Industrial City, the Garden City, the Linear City, etc. in literal and design Utopian thoughts. If both utopianism and town planning have things in common and the former is older than the latter. It follows, therefore, that the older must have in fact influenced the more recent phenomenon in some ways. What then have been the influences of utopianism on modern town planning?

Firstly, a contribution which utopianism, through its inherent trait, has made to planning is the idea of an alternative future. This idea pervades all Utopian thoughts from the philosophers of ancient Greece to the present time

appreciable degree of expected success. Mata's linear city, suffered a setback as a result of lack of fund and inability to effect equitable distribution of land which had earlier been assumed. Similarly, Howard's proposal for financial independence for his garden cities contributed significantly to the problems of building those cities (Howard, 1965). In general, the generous space standards advocated by most of the Utopians could not be practicalized, as they seemed to have ignored their cost as well as political implications. Many a plan today acquires the same toga of utopianism. As a result, plans in many parts of the world have not enjoyed the full confidence of the citizenry.

Martin (1974) asserts that another attribute of Utopianism which has probably exerted a negative influence on planning is the tendency to be restrictive. In More's Utopia, citizens were expected to work, eat, play and sleep under the direct supervision of magistrates who were elected on a ratio of one to thirty families. Modern planning, to a large extent, is also negative in approach and consists mainly of what people should not do. Planning laws and regulations are, in essence, a negation of individual freedom and a constriction on his ability to demonstrate initiatives.

Next and akin to the above is Utopia's tendency to be inflexible. Classical Utopias do not give room for changes. Once created, they are expected to remain as conceived - after all, they are supposed to be perfect. If a state of affairs has reached a level of "perfection", can it further be perfected? Nonetheless, several Utopian formulations put to practice have fallen victim of changing circumstances. Owen's New Lanark floundered under the weight of changing technology. Master plans in both developed and developing countries now exhibit this trait of rigidity. They are projected too far into the future and they lack such safety values that could accommodate future social and political organizations, potential resources and advancing technology.

Lastly, Utopias have negatively influenced town planning in the area of imposition of individual values, ideas and aspirations are shared by other people. His conception of ideal life is therefore the best for society. He often forgets or fails to appreciate the fact that everybody has a dream of his ideal world and ideal form of living and that this may change according to circumstances. Planning shares some aspects of this trait of utopianism. What we find in the planning world, to a large extent; is a few elitist planners evolving patterns of ideal society people should live in, and actually imposing this on them.

It should be conceded that after sifting those negative aspects of Utopian influence on town planning, there remains a substantial amount of positive

influence which endures till today. In particular, some measure of utopianism is in fact called for in planning in order to encourage innovative spirit and thereby open up new possibilities in planning concepts, objectives and methodology.

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