

Paradise Lost. From Eutopia to Atopia

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Abstract

At the origin of every architectural and city project, there is a nostalgia for Paradise or the aspiration to build this wonderful place we have lost. Visions, architecture and city projects are necessarily prophetic images in search of a happy life on Earth. Every proposal for the city, every project, and every plan is a Utopia, an ideal place which aspires to become Eutopia. However, given the many visions and proposals, we can ask ourselves whether these Utopias have fulfilled their promise to achieve a good place or are dystopias. In light of this unknown factor, this paper intends to reflect on some visions and proposals of the city. Some of them constitute the foundations of urban planning – like Howar’s Garden City, Wright’s Broadacre City, Le Corbusier’s Radiant City, the functional city of CIAM – others, elaborated by Erwin Anton Gutkind, Iannis Xenakis, Constantinos Doxiadis, Takis Zenetos, originated from different assumptions, deluding themselves that they are solving the problems of the contemporary city or represent its last frontier, such as the Smart City.

Keywords: Erwin Anton Gutkind, Constantinos Doxiadis, Iannis Xenakis, Takis Zenetos, Bernard Rudofsky.

There was a poor man who got in the wrong world. He existed, like other people, in a world of public parks, bistros, commercial cities and he wanted to persuade himself that he was living somewhere else, behind the canvas of paintings, [...] behind the pages of books, [...]. And then, after making a complete fool of himself, he understood, he opened his eyes, he saw that it was a misdeal: he was in a bistro, just in front of a glass of warm beer.

Jean-Paul Sartre

1. Introduction

In the imaginary travel memoirs of Raphael Hythlodæus (narrator of lies)¹, Thomas More (1511) describes an island whose capital is called Amauroto (anauros=invisible); it was governed by Ademos (a-demos=without people), and its form of government was the best one could imagine. However, this island could not be found anywhere; in fact, it was called Utopia (*ou tópos* = without place).

The word Utopia - coined by Thomas More himself - thanks to a play on words due to the English homophone, Eutopia (*eû tópos*), which, unlike Utopia, means good place, the value of an ideal place of impossible and – perhaps equally unattainable – the place of happiness².

With time, we have moved from the ancient *ou tópos* to the more modern Nowhere. It is from here that William Morris described, in his News (Morris 1890), a future society based on common ownership and democratic control of the means of production, a community in which there is no private property, no large cities, no authorities, no system monetary, nor marriage or divorce, nor courts, prisons, class differences—a society where people found pleasure in their work. In fact, it was thanks to scientific, geographical, and astronomical discoveries, Progress, the Industrial Revolution, and the development of technology that Utopia, an imaginary place, was transformed into the illusion of its possible realisation.

Françoise Choay (1965) stated that the fundamental models for the realisation of Utopia essentially correspond to two antagonistic attitudes, the “progressive” one³ and the “culturalist” one⁴.

However, it is not from this point of view that the project of the city - urban planning - as well as of the house - architecture - will be observed, but rather from the more general one of visions and proposals to build the place of happiness, Adam’s home in Paradise (Rykwert 1972); «It is the separate reality of utopia that we are going to explore [...] Utopia as a world by itself, divided into ideal commonwealths, with all its communities clustered into proud cities, aiming bravely at the good life». (Mumford 1922)

¹ The original title of the book was *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo rei publicae statu, deque nova insula Utopia*. Published in 1516 by Thierry Martens in Louvain; translated into Italian and printed by the publisher Anton Francesco Doni in Venice in 1548; translated into English by Raphe Robinson and published in London in 1551 by Abraham Vele.

² Me, Utopia, called in Antiquity,/void of haunt and harbor./Now I am like to Plato’s city,/Whose fame flies the world through./Yea like, or rather more likely,/Plato’s plot to excel and pass./For what Plato’s pen has plotted briefly,/In naked words, as in a glass,/The same have I performed fully,/With laws, with men, and treasure fitly./Wherefore not Utopia, but rather rightly,/My name is Eutopie: a place of felicity.

³ Which rational analysis allows us to determine a standard order applicable to any human group at any time and place.

⁴ Where the question of standards and models does not arise, where no prototype or exemplar is allowed, every part of the city, every building, unlike the progressive model, must be different and must express its specificity.

2. Utopia or Eutopia?

If, on the one hand, Utopia appears possibly achievable with the appropriate tools, something else is necessary to achieve Eutopia (Tafari 1973). In historiography (Choay 1965, Lavedan 1952, Samonà 1959, Benevolo 1963, Ragon 1964, Aymonino 1972), it is stated that the Origins of Modern Urban Planning start from the attempt to solve the problems caused by industrialisation, demographic increase, the exodus of the masses of workers from the countryside to the cities, the consequent loss of its limits and by the appalling conditions of the homes of the new arrivals and workers (Hengels 1845).

If fundamental and recognised, was the role that the urban planner and the architect had in providing rules and models (Choay 1965, Choay 1980; Amen & Nia, 2020; Aziz Amen, 2022; Auwalu & Bello, 2023; Gaha, 2023) to take care of the 19th-century city, transforming it from a nauseating agglomeration of hovels in which to sleep and work into an adequate and welcoming human settlement for living, working and profitably using one's free time (Le Corbusier 1946, 1957, 1966), what the "culture" of the city requires is different (Mumford 1922, 1938), of the house and of everything that belongs to the search for Eutopia. Such research, visions and projects for the city, in this sense, are to be understood as the testimony of the prophetic research for a happy life on Earth, in fact, even if almost all utopias implicitly criticise the civilisation in which they are born, at the same time they are an attempt to discover possibilities that existing institutions have ignored because of old habits (Mumford 1922); in fact, «It is the unmentionable secret of all architecture, even the most degraded: deep down in every architecture, no matter how naive or implausible, there is the claim to improve the world.» (Koolhaas 2004)

As is known, every intention to create Eutopia based on coercive and society-transforming assumptions - whether inspired by a New Christianity (Saint-Simon 1825), Socialist or Communist communitarianism - has failed. That was the case for Charles Fourier's Phalanstery (1808), Etienne Cabet's Icaria (1842), and Jean-Baptiste André Godin's Familistery (1859). Some of these proposals were realised for a specific – limited – number of convinced followers and supporters, such as the Mormon village of Nauvoo (The Magnificent) in Illinois designed in 1842 (Tumminelli 1985), or Robert Owen's New Harmony (1820) in Indiana, both in the New World (Reps 1965). Small millennial communities looking for places to start from scratch and build the ideal society and city for the future live far from any distraction and cultural interference from the outside in a socially closed and protected environment (Kruft 1989).

From this point of view, these communities and project proposals could not be a model for the construction of Eutopia but, at most, a personal life choice. On the contrary, proposals such as *The Garden City*, *La Charte d'Athènes*, *l'Existenz Minimum*, discussed and presented at the CIAM II (*Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*) in Frankfurt in 1929, represent and still constitute today, the nodal points of planning and the ideal solution for the home of the modern man and woman. In particular, regarding the proposals studied in the *Charte d'Athènes*, the members of CIAM IV were looking for generic projects for the functional city and, as regards living, the Charte followed the model of Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin*: residential complexes, consisting of multi-storey buildings, in which each skyscraper stood alone, isolated in its own space «in majestic isolation» (Jacobs, 1958: 157).

The *Plan Voisin* and *La Charte d'Athènes* advocated the annulment of chaotic life at street level (Jacobs 1961). The spaces in which people lived and worked, in fact, all had to be raised above the ground floor, where the system of roads and highways would be dedicated to fast traffic and trains. With this intention many large housing complex projects were conceived such as the *Pruitt-Igoe* in St. Louis (1954), the *Stateway Gardens*, Chicago (1955), (fig. 1-2) the *Glenny Drive Apartments* in New York (1958), the *Robert Taylor Homes* in Chicago (1962), (fig. 3), but also the forest of skyscrapers in Shanghai, Hong Kong, São Paulo, Lima, New Quilamba in Angola or Chongqing today (fig. 4).

The participants in drafting the *Athènes Charter* did not consider the existing plans' diversity and the thirty-three cities' historical forms examined to elaborate the agenda for the functional city.

Richard Sennett states that *La Charte d'Athènes* proved prophetic: «In the future, Paris, Istanbul and Peking should look more and more the same; they should converge in form. These cities indeed now do. The Charter proved prophetic.» (Sennett 2018: 79)

However, what Jacobs contested against Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin* refers above all to what was done under the influence and support of Robert Moses in the 1950s and by all those projects that were inspired by Corbu's urban planning proposals in name only.

Moses was responsible for urban renewal interventions in New York (Ballon, 2007; Christin, 2014). This has given rise to numerous residential interventions, such as Stuyvesant Town (fig. 5), which was only apparently "inspired" by Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin*.

Paradoxically, when Le Corbusier manages to create his Radiant City, as on the occasion of the *Unité d'Habitation de Marseille* (fig. 6-7), the result is a building that is anything but isolated, atopic and inhuman, but instead exceptionally inserted into the context. The *Unité* in Marseille, with its roof - "full of life" - creates that metaphor of the transatlantic as a space of eternal vacation: «The ship is a place of repose, of preparation, of incubation. It is a delightful life ... The ship is a joy» (Le Corbusier, 1937). With its collective services and, simultaneously, with all the spaces for meditation and contemplation, as he stated, «there are 2.000 to 2.500 persons on this liner. It is a big house. There is no confusion here, but perfect discipline. One eats, one sleeps, one dances here, one meditates, one strolls; everybody on earth, without exception, has a profound admiration for the ocean liner. We are facing a new dimension in housing» (Le Corbusier: 62). Nothing could be more distant than the buildings built as part of the Urban Renewal policies promoted by Robert Moses.

3. The End of Utopia

In the era of “late” modernisation - in which *Mechanisation Takes Command* (Giedion 1948) - thanks to science and technology, now dispensers of consumer goods and widespread well-being, so much to define the (American) society of the time, *The Affluent Society* (Galbraith 1958), we are faced with the complete confidence of the means for obtaining the city, the architecture of the universal society and the planetary Utopia.

In contrast to the first conferences, symposiums and debates, organised in the 1930s, in which there were discussions on high, medium, low, single-family or multi-family houses, transatlantic liners - the *Unitè d’Abitation* - enchanted mountains - skyscrapers - cities to be rebuilt (Sert 1942; Tyrwhitt 1952), but also of the architecture of other civilisations [Gutkind 1953a, b, c, d, e, f, Moholy-Nagy 1955, 1957, Van Eyck 1961, Rudofsky 1964]; in the early 1950s some proposals emerged that originate from an ideally achieved situation: the Utopia of a world – culturally, economically, politically – universal.

However, this situation still left room for alternative positions. On the one hand, the observation of the exhaustion of the city of Erwin Anton Gutkind and the world city of Constantinos Doxiadis. One could say both are hypotheses in the absence of ideology, the result of an inevitable logical path without Utopias to be achieved, but which originate from a condition that has partially begun.

At the beginning of the 1950s, Gutkind wrote six articles (hereafter: *Series*) dedicated to *How Other Peoples Dwell and Build*, published in the magazine «AD». In this Series, he explored the vernacular dwellings of the South Seas, Japan, China, Africa, the Middle East, and Native Americans. With these articles, he intended to criticise the modern search for a universal solution for housing. It was his opinion that homes in primitive and past societies were an integral part of people’s social and spiritual life, group and environmental experience if it were more than a mere practical adaptation to the needs of daily life.

Gutkind’s intention in the Series of articles was to raise awareness of architecture as a cultural manifestation and to show how different civilisations express themselves architecturally in other ways. For him, a standardised solution that only or mainly meets technical needs was out of the question.

From these premises, in the books *Our World from the Air* (Gutkind 1952) and *The Expanding Environment* (Gutkind 1953), Gutkind examined various aspects of the need for a reconfiguration of the relationship between people and their environment, between urban and rural landscape, as a result of man’s practices of living and building. In fact, he thought that the modern city was not just a place of chaos and inefficiency; for him, it was uncivilised and unhealthy, and the best way to solve the problems of the metropolis could only be decentralisation and abandonment.

This phenomenon consisted of a gradual process and had to be combined with the dispersion of people across the regions. Such a revolution was not only desirable or necessary; for him, it was inevitable!

In fact, the Cities had surpassed their original function and had reached the end of their usefulness. The inevitable end of the city would pave the way for the creation of a new environment, neither city nor countryside, a place that he defined as *The Expanding Environment* (Gutkind 1953).

If Gutkind, with *The Expanding Environment*, intended to announce the beginning of a new post-urban era in human history, *Ecumenopolis* – the inevitable global city of the future – was conceived by architect Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis (Doxiadis 1960; Doxiadis, C. A., Papaioannou, 1974) (fig. 8) as a single planetary city, in which almost the entire world population was connected and integrated into an urban system, like a gigantic network of urban corridors, which contained, between their axes, accessible areas and agricultural land, parks and wilderness areas, all served by ultra-fast transportation and communications devices.

The USA entrusted Doxiadis Associates with this type of world planning task. This planning presupposed that the inevitable rebirth and economic-scientific development - to be achieved with all the means of propaganda and the billions in financing of the reconstruction plans supported by the USA (*European Recovery Plan, Organization for European Economic Cooperation*) - would spread throughout the planet.

In this scenario, the configuration of *Ecumenopolis* would have been that of a continuous linear city, in which isolation was not possible, an uninterrupted structure that would have shaped an utterly anthropised space, indifferent to political and economic divisions, closely connected by a capillary connecting infrastructure.

However, Doxiadis did not consider the complexity and diversity of local cultures and societies, the complexity and fragility of the natural environment, the looming depletion of energy resources, pandemics and climate changes generated by harmful human activities; all this was not yet evident at the time. Doxiadis was a man who belonged to the post-World War II period and thought that every form of ideological and socio-cultural barrier would progressively disappear, sooner or later giving way to a globalised society in which industrial development and well-being, supported by the USA, would save the world.

Precisely from these assumptions, in the era of late international and global capitalism, the hypotheses for the solution to life on Earth arise; they originate from advanced technology.

4. From Tecno Utopia to Tecno Eutopia

As Choay (1965) states, progressive urban planners were not able to fully utilise the possibilities offered to them by technology, so, following their efforts to prefigure urban development and the human home, they attempted to conceive, in radical terms, the city to come not only about new construction techniques but above all, about new information technologies, whose effects on everyone’s lifestyle will soon be evident.

The awareness that the new city, structured by the new universal technique, will be equally suitable for all the populations of the world and will allow working and living conditions in any latitude, regardless of the natural atmospheric conditions and meteorological, thanks to information technology, messages will be immediate; transport and travel will be useless. You will work from home, and there will be no need to travel.

From this point of view, the horizon to which the builders of Tecno Utopia of the 20th and 21st centuries aimed did not only strive to propose solutions for mobile cities (see Archigram Group), floating cities (see Metabolism Group), or spatial megastructures without end (see Yona Friedman), they limited themselves to considering the city as a structure capable of solving contingent problems, generating a new techno-utopian lifestyle. According to this thought, Eutopia – the place of happiness – could only be achieved by using technology, capable of creating, conditioning and artificially transforming places to make them “favourable”.

Just as the projects of Gutkind and Doxiadis are representative of the end of Utopia as an unknown project still to be realised, but, on the contrary, considered as already underway on a known basis, the tasks for the city by Iannis Xenakis and Takis Zenetos represent the technological Utopia as a planetary Eutopian solution, or, at least, they constitute the premises of the planetary technological Eutopia of the *Smart City*.

Xenakis's proposal for a *Cosmic city of five million inhabitants* (Xenakis 1965) is an extreme proposal to solve urban planning problems. The project involves settling five million people in hyperbolic shells more than 5,000 meters high and 50 meters wide. Pressurisation and air conditioning systems will make life in these buildings possible. Once again, technology will free the city and architecture from climatic contingencies and, like *The Athens Chart*, free the soil and, above all, “concentrated”, reduced in its extensive dimensions.

Indifferent to the surrounding environment and the morphology of the territory, the megastructure included homes, workplaces and schools, within which the scenarios are thought out in advance but in an indeterminate and accessible way. With his project, Xenakis hopes to resolve the issues of demographic pressure, traffic, and congestion, which, as Gutkind stated, would make city life impossible if it were not resolved. Xenakis replaces the dispersion of modern urban planning with a concentrated solution, in which the city's space will be as limited as possible but with the most significant number of inhabitants possible, all made possible solely by technology.

Therefore, if the concentration is necessary for humanity, for Xenakis, it will be enough to replace urban planning and architecture theories with new solutions. In the Series of statements that accompany the project (Xenakis 1965), Xenakis specifies every aspect and structure, outlining in the background the creation of a single gigantic World State subjected to technology.

The proposal for territorial planning and development, *Electronic Urbanism*, by Takis Zenetos, based on the author's studies over a decade (1955-1965), expresses the hypothesis of a utopia of the “machine city”. Since the early 1960s, the Greek architect has dedicated himself to the *City of the Future*, a continuous work devoted to the new relationships between technology, the service sector, communication and territory, even if the main object of research seems to be the role of architect in the information and IT society. The project was published in the magazine *Architecture in Greece, Annual Review* and was illustrated in a series of articles between 1969 and 1973 (Zenetos 1969, 1970, 1973).

In the first article (Zenetos 1969), Zenetos begins by exposing the canonical presentation of the problems of the city, which, he states, has progressively transformed into a dehumanised space, reserved exclusively for production, while the residential areas are located in increasingly distant spaces and on the margins, thus increasing the extension of the city into peripheral areas. The need for a continuous expansion of the city circulation network, car parks and accommodation buildings for the coexistence of man and industrial plants requires huge investments and, at the same time, destroys the urban structure and the social functions it should offer. Trying to meet the expansion needs of various sectors by providing “free spaces” does nothing but form dead zones; «This vicious circle can only stop if we go to the root of the problem, that is, to the need to transport man to the very place of tertiary activities» (Zenetos 1969: 116). Zenetos is convinced that thanks to information technologies, man will be able to work from home or in special public spaces in housing units; the automation of “processes” and the application of “remote management” and “teleoperations” will allow the relocation of tertiary industries outside the city, to areas otherwise unusable for humans. For Zenetos, these measures would have eliminated the causes of all real traffic and land consumption problems; furthermore, as for Gutkind and Xenakis, “teleworking” could have put an end to the abandonment of smaller urban centres, which would thus offer the same opportunities as big cities.

The Electric city, as an alternative model developed by Zenetos, therefore replaces the house with a system of cell envelopes, the workplace with telematic activities and the traditional town with a grid-like spatial megastructure, which is suspended from the ground and immune to what happens at ground level.

5. The homologous city of Atopy

In the Postmodern era, of the solitude of the global citizen (Bauman 1999) of the late capitalistic culture (Jameson 1991), little space is available for both Utopia and Eutopia; they are replaced and imposed by the excessive power of the ¥€\$ (Koolhaas 2004). If, at the time of *The First Machine Age* (Banham 1960), technology, industrialisation and “science”, which is universal, had contributed to conceiving a standardised world, the fluid and global economy would have contributed to imposing the anonymous value, neutralising specific cultural belonging, opting for a more general matter of commercial consensus.

Rem Koolhaas identifies, in a process that began at the end of the 1970s, the absence of cultural references in the development and architecture of the city; the city and the architecture of the present are shaped by economic power, which the public administration abdicates in favour of personal power. The new metropolises and architecture have no cultural references. They only are arising. In this sense, what Koolhaas recognises in the *Generic City* (Koolhaas 1995) of our century is the absence of rules and urban plans or with legislation so weak that the exception is the rule.

In this absence of a plan, the development and reference plans of the cities will be other cities; the city will feed on other cities, trying to digest their secrets or their ecologies (Banham 1971).

Los Angeles and Las Vegas will be the prototype of the new cities of the seventies: Atlanta and Singapore, those of 2000. Los Angeles, the boundless city, a gigantic tangle of super roads; Las Vegas (Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour 1972), the city of entertainment, dotted with building facades, a Potemkin city, an endless Luna Park, a gigantic shopping centre that presages the utopian *Metabolist* project of Kenzo Tange for *A plan for Tokyo* (1960), then created in Singapore in the *Golden Mile Complex* of 1973 (Koolhaas 1995a), in which all the functions of the city, housing, leisure, tourism, work ... are swallowed up. The colossal building takes over the town; the vast building is the city (Koolhaas 1979, 1995b).

In Atlanta and Singapore, Koolhaas (1995a, 1995c) identifies the prototype of the “new-no-longer-city” built from generic architecture. A city generated by the process of parthenogenesis, by cloned towns and architecture, in which buildings do not need each other, in which the periphery and the centre are indistinguishable because each building is a centre and cannot be shared by society; it doesn’t belong to him. It is enough for him to live in isolation. In the *Hall*, everything happens inside a space that replaces the square and public areas. What happens outside is of no importance; the centre is only inside; it belongs exclusively to the buildings which, multiplied infinitely, replicated indiscriminately everywhere, cancel out the perception of the city’s existence. The cities and “counterpart” architecture of Atopia is nowhere; they don’t belong anywhere.

6. Conclusions

As can be deduced, the “progressives’ projects and proposals,” as defined by Choay (1965), lead to a completely distinct relationship between what Thomas More defined with the English homophone, Utopia/Eutopia. The ambivalent meaning given by More of Utopia, as a non-place or unattainable place, and of Eutopia, as the good place or the place of happiness, have not been or cannot be considered jointly.

The very fact that the proposals of architecture and cities were conceived as projects to transform the place artificially or to make it homogeneous and repeatable – standard? – either to make up for climatic difficulties or because they are indifferent and atopic, they make discovering the place futile. Atopy is nothing other than the inevitable outcome of the indifference and order necessary for the new social and economic order. Architecture and urban planning, since their origins, have tried to give order to the human environment. Whether in search of Utopia or the most basic necessity, they have contrasted the Nature of the places. It could not and cannot be otherwise than this. However, the discovery of Eutopia is the purpose. Be it the exclusive and limited vision of Bernard Rudofsky, for whom to live in harmony with Nature, to live in Eutopia, to build a house in Paradise, the house had to be made in places suitable for a life in the open air, in a favourable environment, defined by a mild and temperate climate, all using construction materials and devices that do not require technological and industrial aids; a garden-house, cooled by water pools, pergolas and curtains, trees and walls, in which the furniture is practically useless, as in the Japanese house, «[a house] for the summer, [which] barely allows its inhabitants to get by during the winter» (Rudofsky 1957, 1965).

In addition to the extreme case, defined by Rudofsky’s work and thought, can Eutopia perhaps be identified elsewhere? Suppose the very meaning of Eutopia, the suitable place, is decisive. In that case, it will certainly not be available everywhere, or if you prefer, it will be everywhere except in non-places, homologous places, and standardised places. Most likely, wherever we can recognise the value of a unique, non-repeatable, and particular place, a place in which, different from one another, we will be able to recognise our “personal good place”.

Just as Rudofsky thought of the Mediterranean Eutopia, of the Middle East, Latin America, and Japan for his homes, everyone has the right to their own personal Eutopia unless, in the meantime, the inexorable process of standardisation and levelling that has been underway for decades is not completed, thus giving up Eutopia forever.



Figure 1. Stateway Gardens, Chicago, 1955. External View. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Record Group 412 - Photo: John H. White.



Figure 2. Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago, 1962. External View.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Record Group 412 - Photo: John H. White



Fig 3. Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago, 1962. View.

Source: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Record Group 412 - Photo: John H. White



Figure 4. Chongqing, Yuzhong district.

Source: Creative Commons



Figure 5. Stuyvesant Town, New York. Planned in 1942, Stuyvesant Town opened its first building in 1947.
Source: Creative Commons



Figure 6. Le Corbusier, Unité d'Habitation de Marseille, 1947-1957.
Source: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Record Group 286



Figure 7. Le Corbusier, Unité d'Habitation de Marseille, 1947-1957.
Source: National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Record Group 286

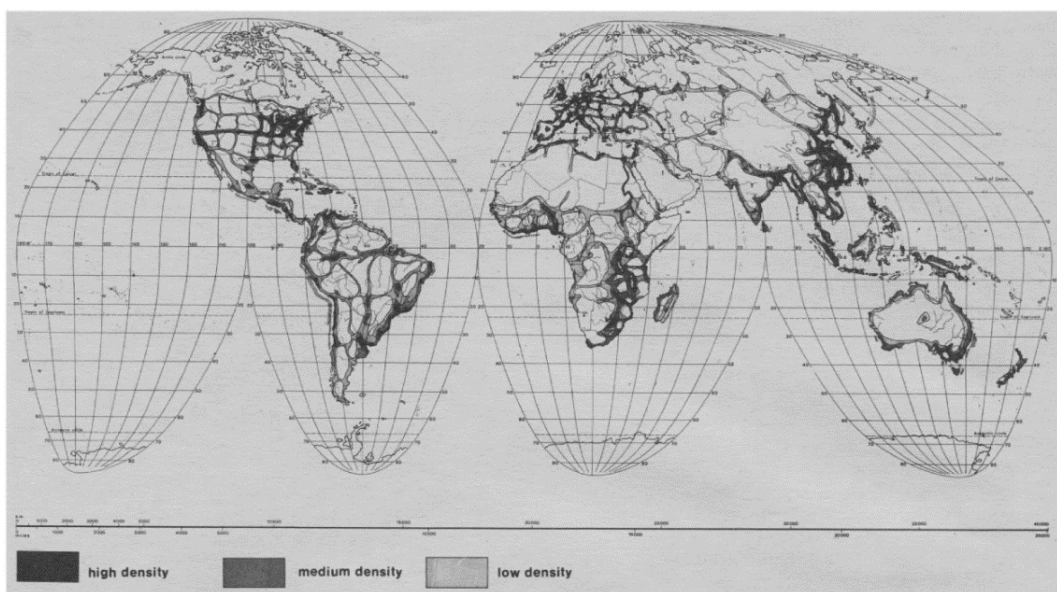


Figure 8. Constantinos Apostolou Doxiadis. Ecumenopolis, AD 2100.
Source: Ekistik 238, September 1975, p. 56.

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Conflict of Interests

The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

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