URBAN UTOPIAS, REVOLUTIONS
and the 21st Century City

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The urban is a continuous search for utopias. It is also a framework for revolutionary practices through conflicts. One of the key thinkers about urban space in the 20th century, Henri Lefebvre, expressed in *La Révolution Urbaine* that urbanism is a social practice. Space and political organisation of space express social relationships but also reach back upon them (Lefebvre 1970; see also Lefebvre 1991).

Another theorist, Edward Soja, argues in *Postmetropolis*, the last volume of his urban trilogy (Soja 2000; see also Soja 1989, 1996) that an urban spatial specificity refers to the particular configurations of spatial relations, built forms, and human activity in a city and its geographical sphere of influence. It actively arises from the social production of cityspace as a distinctive material and symbolic context or habitat for human life.

In his early influential work, *Social Justice and the City*, David Harvey illustrated how an urbanism founded upon exploitation is a legacy of history. 'A genuinely humanising city has yet to be brought into being … to an urbanism appropriate for the human species. And it remains for revolutionary practice to accomplish such a transformation.' (Harvey 1973: 314.)

Henri Lefebvre (1970) continues that by urban revolution he means the total ensemble of transformations, which run throughout contemporary society. These transformations serve to bring about the change from a period where the questions of economic growth and industrialisation predominate to the period where urban problematic becomes decisive, and research into the solutions and forms appropriate to urban society takes precedence.

What is to be done to reach an urban revolution or revolutionary practices that would make our cities more equal? According to Lefebvre (1970) the possibility of an urban society derives from a radical critique presented by the Left.

However, since the 1970s characterised by political dialectics, the times have changed (see Castells 1983).

In the late 20th century, globalisation has forced upon individual communities and urban centres the need for sophistication in theoretical analysis and the development of counter-hegemonic practices (INURA 1998). New urban movements base their activities on the intertwining of critical urban theories and practices. By its own words INURA (1998), the International Network of Urban Research and Action, expresses, 'but ... creating your own direct environment with other people is the way to escape alienation and promote solidarity, respect and mutual support. If it is on the scale of a small village or a street in a suburb, self-organisation and direct action are the fundamentals of local action.' This is the 21st century-specified, flexible street Marxism, the concept defined by Andy Merrifield (2000).

Urban utopias and conflicts

In the history of urbanism one can find continuous attempts to achieve solutions for the urban problematic. The change from one period to another has often resulted in a conflict in urban space. The dialectics and conflicts of utopia also characterise more profound changes in urban society (Soja 2000; Hall 2002). In the following I will briefly present six examples of urban utopias and conflicts that cover the urban realm from the non-modern to postmodern periods. My aim is not to force urbanism into a linear development, but merely to discuss how the urban is present in broader societal changes.

The first case is the city Ur (6000 years ago) that illustrates the change from non-modern to pre-modern society. The development of Ur was a part of the first urban revolution. There was a particular spatiality of human geography in this early city. It was about density, innovation, socio-spatial differentiation, and spatial division of labour, leading into emerging urban classes and patriarchal urban social order (Soja 2000).

The second case is Florence (1436 AD), indicating a break from the medieval period to the Renaissance. At the same time, it is a broader shift from the pre-modern to early modern period. The development of perspective is one of the main features of this change. By perspective in the urban context we mean a fixed observer and an immobile perceptual field in a stable visual world (Lefebvre 1991). This radical rupture is visible both in the physical and symbolic urban

space. The significant examples are the masterpiece of Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Gli effetti del buon e cattivo governo* in the town hall of Siena, the construction *Santa Maria del Fiore* in Florence by Filippo Brunelleschi and the vision for the ideal city by Piero della Francesca, *Vedute della città ideale* in Urbino and Pienza.

The third case is the set of revolutions that took place in Europe in the mid-19th century. These have been most expressively discussed with the case of the city of Paris from the pre-Revolutionary period in the 1840s to the Revolution in 1848 to the post-revolutionary urban renewal. The revolution in February 1848 led to the restructuring of central Paris towards a modern town (1853–69) by Georges Eugène Haussmann with the methods of *grand travaux* and *embellisement,* aiming to calm the situation in those densely built and restless working-class areas (Choay 1969). This illustrates the change from early modern to modern urban society.

The famous events in Paris in 1968 can be used as a setting for the fourth case, representing the move from modern to high modern society. The social and political uprising took place in the central parts of this historical city. It was an expression of wider issues of social justice in the cities, broadly linked to the rise of feminism, post-colonialism, and socialism in the Western urban world. It was the era of collective urban social movements (see Lefebvre 1970; Harvey 1973; Castells 1983).

Faith in the modern and modernism as a solution for urban problems weakened during the 1970s. It is the fifth case, passing from the high modern to late modern. For many, the critique expressed towards the ideology of linear progress is mostly visible in the case of the Pruitt-Igoe (St. Louis) housing project. On July 15, 1972, at 3:32 p.m. the mindless arrogance of modernism was dismantled. Then, the Corbusians were imposed on people who could not take them and could never, given a modicum of thought, have been expected to take them (Hall 2002). The famous Modernist slogan 'form follows function' was replaced by 'form follows failure – and fiasco'.

The sixth case can be expressed in terms of space–time as precisely as the previous case. Namely, on September 11, 2001, at 09:45 the World Trade Center collapsed in Manhattan, New York. For many, this means the definitive step from the late modern to postmodern. It is possible to interpret the events of 9/11 in several ways, such as a profound critique against economic globalism (Beck 2000), a violent expression of resistance identity against the global hegemony

of Western thought and action (Castells 1997), or even a new play between the spatial tactics and spatial strategy (see the famous essay by Michel de Certeau, 'Seeing Manhattan from the 110th Floor of the World Trade Center', 1984).

The 21st century city and urban revolutions

In the early 21st century, three types of urban realities are emerging. The first can be called a 'flirtual (real-and-imagined) mobile city'. It is simultaneously t/here and re/present (Soja 1996). For marginalised urban residents, this 21st century city can exist only as an escape from the physical to virtual ghetto (Crang 2000).

The second urban reality is labelled a 'blored (bloody-boring-luring) walled city'. It is the famous city of quartz based on internal and external paranoia (Davis 1992) and the walled and framed edge city (Dear, Flusty 1998). Both definitions refer to the Greater Los Angeles area. Nevertheless, conceptually, they can also be discussed regarding other parts of the world.

The third urban reality is the 'DISPER(ATE)city™'. It is a glocal date/hate network metropolis (Sassen 2001). An exclusive alternative to rurban dispercity has been developed for peripheral areas, aiming to grasp the glocal urban and rural qualities (Ahas *et al.* 2001).

The urban revolutions of the early 21st century are occurring everywhere in different scalar contexts. A revolution in local cities is directed against the terror of trans-national enterprises and supra-regional powers. It is emphasising the politics of place by developing local social agreements and locally based consumption-chains. It means the return of the city-states and regional sustainability.

The urban revolution in global cities is against disproportionate development and increasingly more genetically engineered life. New postcolonial global city alliances emerge, such as the SEGAO network (Shenzhen, Delhi, Lagos, Los Angeles, and London). Some symptoms of the hollowing-out of the Western/ American hegemonic values have already emerged in the form of, e.g., physical violence and cultural fusion.

The urban revolution in cybercities is against the totalitarian panoptical microchip violence. The methods used are virtual blocking and virtual strikes. The theme of cyberdemocracy is increasing in virtual cities and virtual city-networks. The currently developing cyburb-agglomerations contain both pleasure

and pain. The main issues of pleasure are the (seemingly) unlimited freedom that a cybercity can provide. However, the cybercity can also evoke physical and mental dependency.

Conclusions

There is a continuous presence of revolutionary *thought* in urban space and in physical urban realms, and *action* can be found especially between the periods of societal change. The urban is a successful source of continuous search for *different* development trajectories. Ultimately, the common and collective answers have failed. A recent, painful but liberating example of this is the failure of the Modern project. The activity of urban movements in the early 21st century is intensifying towards a new *place for politics* in the urban, of the urban and about the urban.

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Linnautoopiad, revolutsioonid ja 21. sajandi linn

Kokkuvõte

Linnaruum on eriline kooslus sotsiaalsest, vaimsest ja füüsilisest. Linnaühiskonnas põimuvad sotsiaalne ja ruumiline. Selles pole tänapäeval midagi uut, sest linnad on juba aastasadu olnud oluliste ühiskondlike liikumiste tandriks.

Viimase 50 aasta jooksul on toimunud areng linnastumisest eeslinnastumise, linnastumisvastasuse ja taaslinnastumiseni. 1960. ja 1970. aastate urbaniseerumisvastasus on kõige "läänelikumates" ühiskondades viimase kümnendi jooksul asendunud taaslinnastumisega. Linnastumine toimub kõikjal ja 21. sajandi algust võib nimetada intensiivse reurbaniseerumise ajastuks. Info- ja kommunikatsioonitehnoloogiate areng, Internet ning mitmed üldisemad globaalsed protsessid osutavad uute linnarevolutsioonide hõõgumisele.

Linnaühiskonna uurijatena teame, et 1960. aastate lõpp ja 1970. aastate algus oli oluline aeg nii ühiskondlike liikumiste arengu kui uute linnateooriate tekke poolest, linnateooria ja -praktika võtmeisikutena võib mainida Henri Lefebvre'i ja David Harvey nimesid. Üsna samasugused protsessid toimuvad ka 21. sajandi

alguses. Linnad on taas oluliste ühiskondlike liikumiste ja linnasotsioloogiliste teooriate sünnipaigad: globaalsed linnad *vs.* globaliseerumisvastane kriitika, kasvav imago- ja turupõhine tarbimiskultuur *vs.* mõistlik areng ja lokaalsed väärtused, sotsiaalne polariseerumine ja etniline eraldumine *vs.* postkoloniaalne identiteedipoliitika, moodne linnaplaneerimise regulatsioon *vs.* postmodernistlik urbanism. 11. septembri järgses maailmas on täheldatav vastuoluline võitlus linnade sümboolse tähenduse pärast.

Revolutsiooniline mõte on linna füüsilises ja vaimses ruumis pidevalt liikvel, revolutsioonilist tegevust võib kohata peamiselt ühiskondlike muutuste perioodidel. Mitmesugused urbanistlikud liikumised on 21. sajandi hakul intensiivistumas uue *poliitilise koha* taotlemise suunas.