

## SCTMG 2020

### International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

### THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL UTOPIA IN THE L. MUMFORD WORKS

Maria Alanovna Khasieva (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) National Research Moscow State University of Civil Engineering, 26, Yaroslavskoye Hw., Moscow, Russia  
HasievaMA@mgsu.ru

#### *Abstract*

One of the most significant representatives of the philosophy of technology and urbanism L. Mumford (1895–1990) deals with the history of urban development, designating and characterizing the main stages of European urban planning. In the book *The History of Utopias*, L. Mumford examines the urban utopia, analyzes the most iconic utopias in the history of European intellectual culture: the famous state by Plato, the utopias by T. More and T. Campanella, the model of the ideal Christian state by I.V. Andree. Mumford studies the utopian tradition of the New Age on the material of the treatise by C. Fourier “*The New Economic and Societal World*”, the works by R. Owen, D. Winstenley, T. Spence, T Gertsky. Mumford considers the 18th century a turning point in the history of European utopianism: during this period, people began to improve the life of society through changes in the political, economic and social structures. In the era of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, social inequality and injustice were considered an expression of the natural order of things or a consequence of the imperfect human nature. During the Renaissance, the genre of utopia began to develop rapidly, while social utopia was considered linked with the technological and architectural development of the urban environment. In the eighteenth century, the utopian attention was focused on the legislative and political organization of society; in the nineteenth century, the optimal economic structure was considered a key to social well-being.

2357-1330 © 2020 Published by European Publisher.

**Keywords:** L. Mumford, urbanism, utopia, ideal city.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

The problem of an ideal city formulated in Antiquity was widely discussed by the Renaissance thinkers and was accepted by the philosophers of the New Age. The social utopia was considered linked with the technological, architectural and urban development aspects of the environment. The most famous works of this period have the features of the satirical-fiction genre; in the center of the narrative, there is an issue of the ideal social structure, the system of ethical standards and morals.

In the XIX century, the spread of socialist ideas gave rise to the emergence of a separate genre of socialist utopia. In the theories developed by utopian socialists, the commune way of life was described. Charles Fourier formulated the concept of a phalanx – a house-palace intended for the commune. The carefully thought-out model of the phalanx consisted of a central part, a recreation and leisure area intended for dining rooms, living rooms, a library and studios, and two outbuildings, where workshops, production rooms, guest rooms, children's living quarters are located. The image of the phalanx became a kind of symbol of socialist utopia, the first of many different models of communal houses (Marx & Engels, 1961).

The intellectual culture of the Enlightenment is determined by a large number of heterogeneous ideological vectors and concepts. On the one hand, orientation to a rational approach to the world, reliance on science and the search for an optimal scientific method made the Enlightenment thinkers apply the same rational approach to issues of a social structure and socio-economic theory. It is evident from the socio-economic theory by Adam Smith developing the concepts "economic man" and "natural order", the theory of social contract which has become the subject of active discussions of philosophers of the XVII century (as cited in Hobbes, 1964).

A radical interpretation of this theory by Hobbes (1964) as "the war of all against all" which is the natural state of the human community does not coincide with the philosophy by E. Shaftesbury and D. Locke. Shaftesbury believes that virtue is immanent in human nature; Locke uses the concept "natural law": the government should not limit individual freedom. On the contrary, it should serve to achieve the freedom of expression of all citizens.

Quite similar ideas of social utopianism can be found in the works by French educators of the XVIIIth century. The problem of the ideal state partially echoed in the theory of progress by Condorcet (1936).

Another significant vector of European spiritual culture of the XVII century is the hedonistic denial of the sacred immutability of moral standards and the subordinate position of man before God. These nihilistic ideas shaped into a large-scale movement of libertage are reflected in the English comedy of the Restoration era, in French precision literature. The driving force of progress is human vices. In the English comedy of the Restoration era, a sharp satire on the morals of society is mixed with a cynical denial of any moral principles, giving rise to the effect of ethical nihilism.

Thus, the XVII century can be characterized as blatant irrationality and lavish hedonism. This is reflected in its architecture. Mumford (1961) wrote that "the most powerful hydraulic pumps of the XVIIth century were used in the fountains of Versailles gardens. The Fischer von Erlach steam pump was used in the gardens of the Belvedere Palace in Vienna" (p. 463). The phenomenon of liberting is associated with these processes and is a kind of rehabilitation of human physicality, a response to a long

period of the repressive attitude towards it in the past. It was anthropocentrism and anthropologism of the New Age that determined the flowering of the utopia genre in the literature and philosophy of that era.

## 2. Problem Statement

In the utopia genre, there are several key areas that focus on different aspects of life of the state and society: socio-political (or legislative) utopia, economic utopia, and technological utopia. At the same time, authors focused on various types of utopia. Their interest was determined by the nature of each individual era. In the era of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, social inequality and injustice were considered an expression of the natural order of things or a consequence of the imperfection of human nature (Gutorov, 1989). During the Renaissance, the utopia genre began to develop rapidly, while the social utopia was considered linked with the technological, architectural and urban development of the environment (Howarth, 1997). In the XVIIIth century, attention was focused on the legislative and political organization of society; in the XIXth century, the optimal economic structure was considered a key to social well-being. At the same time, many Utopian authors relied on existing works and built their ideal model on the basis or in refutation of existing ones.

In his work “The History of Utopias”, L. Mumford (1895–1990), one of the most significant representatives of the philosophy of technology and urbanism, studies the problems of social and technological utopias as interconnected in European culture. He analyzes the most iconic utopias in the history of European intellectual culture.

## 3. Research Questions

The subject of this study is sociocultural foundations of the evolution of ideas about an ideal society and an ideal city in European philosophy and literature. The article studies the works by Mumford (1944) who deals with the problems of social and technological utopia.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this work is to consider and characterize Mumford's (1944) research concept of European utopia. The works by L. Mumford had a significant impact on modern cultural studies, philosophy and urbanism which determines the relevance of the research.

## 5. Research Methods

This study applies a comprehensive methodological approach, which involves description of the concepts of utopians, a hermeneutic analysis of the terminology used by Mumford (1944), a comparative analysis of the utopian concepts. The research method involves an analysis of literature. It is necessary to compare utopian concepts of different authors, identify similar elements and ideas and specific characteristics determined by the sociocultural context of the era.

## 6. Findings

Mumford says that in his “Ideal state” which is the first utopian work, Plato focuses on the socio-political aspect: the optimal structure and organization of government should contribute to its well-being and prosperity, and prosperity of the state should make citizens happy. The idea of correlation of social happiness with scientific and technological progress is alien to the ideal state, it appears only in the European utopia of the New Age. Although Aristotle says that slavery and social inequality cannot be eradicated, none of the ancient authors connect happiness with scientific development and technical inventions (Mumford, 1922). But in the utopias by Bacon, Bergerac and other utopians of the XVII century, social well-being is considered a result of labor automation and scientific discoveries. While in the works by Campanella and More, the focus is on the architectural appearance of cities, for the utopians of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, the development of science and technology is crucial (More, 1978). Bacon tells about special apparatuses developed by Bensalema. They endow them with a flying ability. He also describes a prototype of the modern engine, super-advanced optical devices that improve human vision, devices that amplify human hearing. “New Atlantis” is devoted to the development of science. Solomon's house described in the novel is the embodiment of an ideal academic institution. Touching upon the issues of family and customs prevailing in New Atlantis, the author contrasts them with the mores of modern Europeans, condemning the latter. A censure of the moral character of European society is expressed in the tetralogy by Jonathan Swift.

Bergerac also describes inventions of the utopian society: for example, his hero admires a mechanical book that reproduces its own content through the voice (a prototype of modern audio books). These images and ideas anticipate the technological utopianism of the XVIIIth and XXth centuries. A treatise “Memoirs of S. Guadentio di Lucca ...” (1737) by S. Berington (1680–1755) is a travel novel as well as a treatise “Description of the Christian-Political Republic” (1619) by the German theologian, alchemist and philosopher I.V. Andree. The model of Christianopolis – the ideal Christian city-state – expresses the idea that the development of industry is a direct consequence of theoretical scientific research contributing to discoveries. In the social structure of Christianopolis, there is no sustainable distribution of labor functions depending on the social status of members. In addition to special professions, citizens have social responsibilities: public patrolling and guarding the city, harvesting grain and wine, working on roads, in municipal buildings and factories. These duties should be performed by all citizens, regardless of their wealth and origin: aristocrats should not shy away from physical labor. This element of labor duties distinguishes Utopia by Andree from the ideal city by Plato: physical labor is an obligation of those who cannot do other things. The model of Christianopolis involves zoning into industrial, commercial, residential and other quarters. The city was adjoined by an extensive agricultural zone containing recreational areas of gardens and parks. Industrial districts of Christianopolis are a prototype of modern districts. The main principle of Christianopolis is a balance between intellectual work and physical labor. In this regard, Andree anticipates the ideal of socialist utopia, which implied an equilibrium combination of intellectual and physical labor.

Mumford considers the 18th century a turning point in the history of European utopianism: during this period people began to improve the life of society through changes in the political, economic and social structure. In the XIX century, utopians consider economic prosperity as the main secret of social

well-being. Mumford considers an economic approach to human happiness reckless: Instead of considering a person as a set of biological, social and spiritual prerequisites, as part of the integrated community of individuals, we consider a person and society in a partial and one-sided way, allowing parts act as a whole. I believe that this generalization can cause the erroneous overestimation of the importance of industry and the production process (Mumford, 1938). The concept of "economic man" formulated by British utilitarians on the basis of the Smith's theory (1723–1790), defines a person as a creature driven by instincts for construction, profit and acquisition, having no other ultimate goal except for being a head of the production process.

In the XIXth century, this belief in science, power of the human mind characteristic of the European consciousness of the New Age was transformed into anti-utopian images of industrial cities reflected in the works of art. The image of Coctown, an industrial city described by Charles Dickens's in his novel "Hard Times", bears negative connotations and indicates the author's disappointment with utilitarianism and rationalism of that era (Mumford, 1938).

## 7. Conclusion

The patterns of European utopia identified by L. Mumford are interconnected with the sociocultural appearance of the era and reflect the history of European cities and European culture. Mumford described features of utopias of each period. The utopias of previous eras are historical prerequisites for modern models of the ideal city. The key to the successful and fruitful development of modern society is coordination, reconciliation of spiritual and material (industrial and scientific-technical) areas. Mumford believes that the dichotomy of the spiritual and the material characteristic of European culture should be overcome (Mumford, 1944). This will eliminate the traditional opposition between nature and technology: scientific and technological progress will no longer be hostile to the natural environment. This can be achieved through the transition to a higher level of scientific and technological development, which involves the implementation of environmental and energy-saving technologies. Thus, Mumford's concept is relevant and has a practical significance for modern urban planning and urban studies.

## References

- Condorcet, J. A. (1936). *Sketch of the historical picture of the progress of the human mind*. Moscow.
- Gutorov, V.A. (1989). *Antique social utopia*. Publ. House of the Leningrad State University.
- Hobbes, T. (1964). *Selected works in 3 volumes* (vol. 2). Moscow.
- Howarth, D. (1997). *Images of rule: art and politics in the English Renaissance, 1485–1649*. University of California Press.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1961). The development of socialism from utopia to science. *Compositions*, 19, 185–270.
- More, T. (1978). *Utopia*. Science.
- Mumford, L. (1922). *The story of utopias*. Boni and Liveright.
- Mumford, L. (1938). *The culture of the cities*. Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Mumford, L. (1944). *The condition of man*. Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Mumford, L. (1961). *The city in history: Its origins, its transformations and prospect*. Harcourt, Brau & World.