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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Heritagutopia: a new utopian paradigm

Luca Donner<sup>1\*</sup>  and Francesca Sorcinelli<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The progress of humanity has always, and sometimes even unconsciously, been confronted with the concept of utopia at the social, economic, political, and urban level. The strength of every utopian vision lies in the disruptive factor inherent in the idea of metamorphosis of the *status quo*. In the urban context, it represents the pillar on which the vision of modern society and its city are based and understood as potential and progress for mankind. Authors such as Bauman, Bloch, Calvino, More, Mumford, Tafuri, and others, have formed the theoretical framework of the dialectic on which this study is based. As we know, the history of architecture and urban planning provides multiple models of utopia that have alternated over time, such as the ones proposed in the 60 and 70 s by Archigram, Superstudio, Yona Friedman or the Japanese Metabolist movement, just to name a few. Starting from these experiences at the urban scale, and supported by contributions from disciplines such as philosophy, literature, and sociology, this research defines a new model of utopia called “Heritagutopia”. It is a new utopian paradigm, and not dystopian as it will be demonstrated, which is based on the symbiosis between urban historical heritage and abandoned industrial areas or run-down infrastructures. The first one, due to the centripetal economic dynamics, leaves its current location to find exile in the second one, through parasitic urban tactics. It is a migration, or an exile in some ways. However, in both cases this new condition allows the two contexts not to vanish and to regain possession of their lost identity, or rather to regenerate themselves, acquiring a new life. It allows to break into custom with a vision that undermines the state of affairs, subverts its factors, by proposing an alternative vision, sometimes dreamlike, but deliberately provocative as every utopia wants to be.

**Keywords** Utopia, Dystopia, Heterotopia, Heritage, Futuristic City, Ideal City

## Introduction

Utopia, in its phenomenal dimension, encompasses two distinct areas: the place and the promise. It is the manifestation of an ideal place, not only in physical terms, but also in social, economic, and political terms, effectively defining a non-place. A coveted place, which does not exist immanently, but to strive for. Thomas More, already at the beginning of the sixteenth century in his

*Utopia* (2020) introduced the term and outlined its general characteristics which will subsequently also recur in other forms. However, the common denominator of many utopias proposed over the centuries by philosophers, architects, urban planners, writers, and sociologists is the proactive drive for a change in the *status quo*, which springs from these. It is a driving force that aspires to subvert the present condition in the name of an ideal and desirable future, often based on principles of equality and sharing for a happy future. This has sometimes made the ideological principles at the basis of utopia coincide with those of communist inspiration. In other cases, some proposals of utopian paradigms, especially the ones based on a classical matrix (e.g. Republic by Plato), have instead resulted in closed social and political models of

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an authoritarian ideology, often characterized by a high degree of aversion to change (Mumford 2008, pp.5–6). Change is inherent in the future but is often feared for its possible intrinsic excesses. We don't always trust our collective management skills to be able to control them and so we prefer to take refuge in tradition and its implicit nostalgic and reassuring visions (Bauman 2020, pp. 51–54). Therefore, we developed our proposal, named “*Heritagutopia*”, for a new urban utopian vision starting from authors such as More, Bloch, Mumford, Choay and Bauman, among others.

It is a form of urban utopia that is part of a long tradition of ideal cities, starting from the Renaissance up to the radical proposals of modernity. Some of them were born as visions of a possible world, albeit temporally distant and far from contingent reality. Others express dreamlike visions, unattainable, not feasible in reality and, at times, deliberately provocative. “*Heritagutopia*” falls into the second typological narrative and finds its *raison d'être* in certain conditions present in the contemporary historical city. *In primis*, it comes from the observation that many historic centres, in Europe and beyond, are gradually depopulating due to the unsustainable cost of living. Secondly, it is evident that more and more large industrial areas are being abandoned and have fallen into disuse. The overall scenario therefore appears desolate and compromised in both cases. From these two conditions, apparently unconnected, the utopian vision arises that the historic centre, now uninhabited, emigrates and

finds refuge in another abandoned place, or rather in the former production infrastructures. From this parasitic combination both areas benefit from a second life. That is, they have a chance not to disappear, but rather to reaffirm their identity and their role. In this sense, the role of any urban fragment as a contingent memory plays a fundamental role in the theoretical structuring of “*Heritagutopia*” (Fig. 1).

### Utopia and its declensions

The term utopia derives from Utopo, the founder of Utopia Island (More 2020, p. 76), which in turn, as Mumford points out, represents a skillful lexical exercise based on two Greek words: “*eutopia*” and “*outopia*”.

The first one indicates a happy, healthy, and prosperous life, the second one a non-place, or rather an environment that does not exist, but which is still yearned for (Mumford 2008, p.3). In this terminological relationship lies the true essence of the very concept of utopia which over the centuries has been declined in a multitude of meanings, often opposed to each other. In this regard, Plato conceives the ideal society described in the *Republic* as an exercise in metaphysical dialectic, while More claims its real feasibility (Mordacci 2020, p.9). And again, the eternal dichotomy between individual and community becomes visible.

Thus, Thomas More criticizes Plato for grounding his ideal society on private property. More in fact denies it in the final instance, basing Utopia on principles of equality,



**Fig. 1** Heritagutopia. Parasite of abandoned industrial building and infrastructure (Source Authors, 2021)

sharing and justice (More 2020 pp.59–62), which today would be defined close to communist doctrine. Obviously, when the discussion is about social and political structures, they can only be conceived as an interconnected system of relationships. And it is precisely in thinking of society as a complex, organic apparatus based on reciprocal interconnections that Mumford sees the real specificity of utopian thought. Whenever this is the case, the search for balance and integrity in its founding components becomes its most relevant virtue (Mumford 2008, pp.6–8).

Due to this systemic approach, utopian thought can be considered intrinsically modern, by being capable of combining the ideal and the real at the same time (Mordacci 2020, pp.6–7). In other words, the conceptual idea becomes a way of breaking with the past while its image defines the new physical form, precisely its realization. When, on the other hand, this dual virtue fails, the ideal city becomes dystopian and hyper-rational. It loses its proactive and fantastic component projected towards the future. Instead, it turns into an Orwellian-like place characterized by prevarication, obsessive and capillary control, where the urban space becomes the physical manifestation of its oppressive society. This is the story narrated in *The Giver* (Lowry 2014), where an apparently idyllic society embodies a dystopian reality and where individual and collective memory is denied to the population. The one described by Georges Simenon in *Le fenêtre di fronte* (2002) is another example. In this case the author narrates of a place without identity, gloomy, closely monitored and to escape from. In this case, we are seeing a dystopia born from the degeneration of the ideological principles of communism and made real by their tyrannical application. Ultimately, it's about the realization of an ideology, and as Mordacci reminds us, Mannheim himself had split the concepts of utopia and ideology, effectively placing them on different levels. The first one is revolutionary, anticipatory, and proactive, it goes beyond the *status quo* of reality, while the second one is a conservative expression of existing social and political structures, even when it is the manifestation of radical reformist impulses (Mordacci 2020, pp.21–23).

In other cases, it is nostalgia for an idealized world belonging to the past, not present anymore, that constitutes the object of our desire. A mythologized vision of what has been, in terms of social, economic, and political organization, which however does not reflect the reality of events and things in the contingent. We abandon ourselves to the dimension of positive memories, appropriately selected, leaving out the negative ones. Bauman defines this utopian propensity of regressive and nostalgic matrix as "*Retrotopia*" (2020), which Purini (2022, p.79) identifies in the urban projects of Krier, Duany and Plater-Zyberk. In this sense, by referring to the past,

retrotopia deviates from the usual meaning of utopia understood as an anticipatory form within a contingent time-related sequence. Utopia and historical context chase each other according to a form of latent temporal relativity where utopia is such today, but probably will no longer be so tomorrow, as Karl Mannheim explains to us (1960, p.183).

Indeed, utopias can become real, concrete. They can also manifest themselves in forms of social sharing. In this sense, the case of *Het Schip* (The Ship) in Amsterdam marks an important precedent. It represents the realization of a social utopia based on the sharing of dwelling and community spaces for the working class, within the urban area of Spaarndammerbuurt.

Michel de Klerk, who was an architect belonging to the Amsterdam School movement, designed and built this social housing complex (his third one in the district) in 1920. The project represented a challenge to the *status quo* not only from a construction point of view, for the use of the "Monk bond", a particular arrangement of exposed bricks in the masonry. Rather, it marked above all a change of methodological and conceptual paradigm in the development and management (by a cooperative) of the project itself. Indeed, it became an example of social housing capable of integrating community spaces (e.g., a post office and a small meeting hall), large residences, and a kaleidoscopic aesthetic (Museum Het Schip 2012). Until then, beauty was considered a utopia, something unattainable for low-income workers' dwellings. This architecture defined an absolute paradigm shift in this sense, in fact confirming what Mannheim affirmed, namely the temporal relativism of utopia. This inevitably involves the realm of reality as a dual dimension poised between its own phenomenological meaning and the ontological one.

In this regard, Putman (2010, p.95) highlights how metaphysics and physics must necessarily interact with each other. Reality is in fact articulated and based on various levels of interpretation, and for this reason it requires a comprehensive vision. It cannot be merely explained by theoretical physics because humans are part of two types of nature: the natural science-related one and the cultural-related one. This implies that there is no single solution, it depends on the level taken into consideration, whether it is related to the natural sciences, the human and social sciences, or the normative explanations (De Caro 2020, pp.72–73, 116).

The spatial dimension of utopia is therefore only one of the factors to consider, since it involves various domains of the human sphere such as social order, politics, and religion, among others. Nevertheless, they are all projected towards a shared and proactive future vision. It can be affirmed that change is utopia's founding matrix, while immobilism is its very negation as well as factors behind



its transformation are always related to society. They are social (new emerging social classes), political (freedom and democracy), moral (individual and collective virtues), and anthropological, i.e., linked to the contingent culture (Mordacci 2020, pp.37–41). This fact presupposes a new urban dimension, capable of accommodating this metamorphosis. It's where the spatial environment, since ancient times, constitutes its real physical support, and the ideal city represents its maximum expression. The Renaissance made it one of the cornerstones of the social, political, and cultural renewal underway at that time. The artworks depicting ideal cities attributed from time to time to Leon Battista Alberti, Luciano Laurana, Fra Carnevale, or other authors, gave substance to the idea of utopia, going beyond its mere metaphysical dimension.

More's ideals took shape, on a literary level, in the island of Utopia as well as, subsequently, in other proposals for ideal cities, such as Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* or Johannes Valentinus Andreae's *Cristianopolis*. In the latter case, there is also the transition from an agricultural-type production to an industrial one, where the manufacturing processes already tend towards efficiency-type dynamics (Mumford 2008, p.64). This was true up to the Enlightenment, which finds in the design component the way to analyze social injustices and propose universal systems and structures capable of overcoming the contingent and binding to the dimension of a transversely fair and equitable society (Mordacci 2020, pp.64–69).

Community-oriented principles, already introduced by Plato, and subsequently elaborated by More (2020, p.81) in the thirty families-based districts governed by the phylarch, will only find in the Phalansteries by Charles Fourier, at the beginning of the 19th century, their direct figurative-morphological expression. Paraphrasing Le Corbusier's statement "a house is a machine for living in" (Le Corbusier 1986, p.95), Fourier's buildings might be defined instead as "machines for social life".

Settlement structures capable of merging into a single building everything that a city can offer: residences, community and leisure spaces, as well as working areas. Fourier's goal, according to Mumford (2008, pp.85–86), is not to change the essence of the human being, but rather to make possible the search for harmony and balance between the three components of life: social, physical, and intellectual. A sort of *ante litteram* socialist experiment aiming at building a new society.

A new social order which will be later the basis of the Communist doctrine itself, and of which Marx and Engels will be theorists. Theirs will be the path of realism, taken to its extreme consequences, the victory of labor over capital, sought in the immediate temporal and contingent context. The fantastic dimension of utopia will therefore be abandoned in favor of a critical and pragmatic social vision, that is to say an ideological matrix. There

were various experiments in this sense, real attempts to make community utopias concrete, including *Brook Farm* founded by John Ripley, or *Letchworth Garden City* based on the ideas of Ebenezer Howard. These were mostly unsuccessful experiments however, given that, in fact, the basic conditions of society did not change, by focusing instead on operational issues and single topics.

From this context, the architects of the Russian constructivist movement will then imagine the utopian cities of the proletarian world. In fact, socialist cities were based on egalitarian ideals to build a new society not linked to the past anymore, free from any historical memory, and potentially able to shape a new model of human being. The way to achieve such a societal target was by promoting the collective structure over the single-family paradigm (Mihaylov 2023). It was a manner to enhance forward-thinking and community-based values by means of new ideal cities directly linked to manufacturing, mining, or energy plants, according to a mechanistic narrative.

In this regard, Marinetti's futurist avant-garde, developed by urban proposals of some architects, including Antonio Sant'Elia, influenced and inspired the development of future-oriented socialist cities. These concepts will find later their concrete expression in the Megacities, as direct manifestation of the National State and its bureaucratic apparatus (Mumford 2008, p.162). Because of this fact, as well as being expression of a one-way mass-shared thought, not open to pluralism, the revolutionary component vanished. This factor also had consequences on subsequent proposals in other urban contexts, such as the *Ciudad Lineal* by Arturo Soria y Matta, designed to be extended without geographical limits, and which was partially tested only in Madrid (Choay 1973, pp.IX–X). They were anticipatory forms of modernist proposals considered utopian by some or post-utopian by others, like Manfredo Tafuri highlighted about Le Corbusier's Plan Obus for Algiers, in contrast with other scholars:

*"Since the aim was that of a revolutionizing of architecture in accord with the most advanced tasks of an economic and technological reality still incapable of assuming coherent and organic form, it is hardly surprising that the realism of Le Corbusier's hypotheses was regarded as Utopian."* (Tafuri 1976, p.134).

And again, concluding:

*"Thus our initial hypothesis is confirmed. Architecture as ideology of the plan is swept away by the reality of the plan when, the level of Utopia having been superseded, the plan becomes an operative mechanism."* (Tafuri 1976, p.135).

Other forms of utopia followed, from those of Archigram, Haus-Rucker-Co and Yona Friedman to the ones of the Japanese Metabolist movement that Agnes Nyilas defines as “Mythopia” because of the blending of the traditional Japanese myths with the progressive drives of western avant-gardes (Nyilas 2018, p.188). In the meanwhile, Archizoom proposed “No-Stop City”, a dystopian city vision as form of criticism against capitalism, not intended to be an urban change-oriented project but instead like a projection of an unavoidable future to come (Stauffer 2019, p.106). By a certain extent such critic was similar to the one raised by Superstudio in “Monumento Continuo”, which reached its most radical form in “Ecumenopolis”, the city that covers the entire earth’s surface, as theorized by Doxiadis. In the following years many other architects investigated utopia and dystopia as meaningful ways to explore the unknown, including Rem Koolhaas. In “Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture” he (together with Madelon Vriesendorp, Elia and Zoe Zenghelis) envisioned an urban strip in the center of London which represents the end of the historic city and its inhabitants.

Most recently, futurist visions are linked to new megacities in Saudi Arabia, including “The Line”, based on a Piranesi-like internal spatiality. The latter manifests itself as a “concrete utopia” in the architectural field, as Ernst Bloch would define it, which in fact brings to completion the category of possibility (2022, pp.11, 38, 48), it makes tangible its potential.

Because ultimately,

*“it is not about exercises in imagination and fantasy (...) but rather of imbuing the architectonic decision with a utopian potential.” (Ventura 2017, p.95).*

And it is in this contrast between decision and utopian potential that instead it can be affirmed that today’s real utopia is the ecological one, to the extent that Debord (2007, pp.53–55) refers the sick planet to the domination of capitalist society over nature itself. The ecological issue represents a contingent condition that can no longer be postponed, which, in the form of utopia, loses its imaginative and transgressive aura to instead deal with pragmatic questions. In fact, we are facing a double-sided modern society, which Mumford calls “Country House” (2008, pp.142–144, 150–152), when it is based only on privilege and individual free will, or “Coketown” when it is instead enslaved to industrial production and consumerism. Both cases can be traced back to the reshaping of modern society, as opposed to myths whose goal is to escape reality (Mumford 2008, p.138).

### **Heritagutopia: heritage becomes utopia**

The divergence between reality and utopia arises from the dichotomy between the immanent dimension of the first one and the imaginative and transcendent component of the second one. The physical, tangible, and social component of the city has always oscillated between these two poles, while the positivist element dominates this dual relationship. It is a tension that involves the very memory of the place, the sense of belonging and the futuristic visions that belong to the realm of conceptual and expressive radicalism. It is an unstable and fragile balance. It combines individual consciousness, sense of community and resonance of the intrinsic potential that lies in the possibilities of the envisaged future.

However, the memory of the place represents us, it is an expression of our daily idiosyncrasies. In other words, the narrative legacy of the past represents the ideological basis for tomorrow. Crespi separates the idea of utopia as a model of happy living from the one of ideal place to the point of not being real.

Living a good life and in harmony can also be achieved in the environment that surrounds us and of which we are an integral part (Crespi 2008, pp.IX-X). It is starting from this assumption that a new one-to-one relationship between real space and utopian realm, that involves the historical dimension of the city and the one of abandoned areas and of sites fallen into disuse, can be imagined. Everywhere in the world, in fact, historic city centers are subjected to the economic dynamics of real estate as well as of urban development processes that are increasingly established by investors and developers. These factors dictate the rules of settling into the territory, by escaping collective control, programming, or planning as much as possible, in the name of what Zygmunt Bauman defines as “light capitalism” which has to be contextualized within the broader situation of “liquid modernity” (Bauman 2011). At the same time, the expansion of cities seems inexorable and historic centers appear to be the ultimate victims of these uncontrolled developments that engulf and cancel them. It represents the final victory of Koolhaas’s “Generic City”, based on no-identity, no-center and monotonous repetition of the same urban structure, where “Bigness” is the main paradigm (Koolhaas 2006). Against this scenario, the need arises to wonder what would happen if, in a context of uncontrollable urban degeneration, the architectural heritage (i.e., historic buildings of Venice and its hinterland, Treviso, Pavia, Lisbon and Dubai) was marginalized to the point of being forced to find asylum outside the historic center itself. The subject investigated in this research, through a series of photomontages, reveals run-down industrial areas (Fig. 2) as well as abandoned infrastructures as the places where it should find refuge. To this end, some neglected urban areas, in some cases also characterized



**Fig. 2** Heritagutopia. Settling into run-down industrial areas (Source Authors, 2021)

by environmental criticalities (e.g. water pollution and soil contamination), have been identified in Italy and United Arab Emirates, such as: Porto Marghera (Venice), ex-Pagnan area (Silea), Mina Zayed (Abu Dhabi), Khor Fakkan (Sharjah), Al Quoz and Deira (Dubai).

It would be a new synergy-based form of settlement that would restore meaning to those forgotten, neglected, and often abandoned urban areas after being intensely exploited by the market itself. After all, Mumford (2008, p. 8) states that the past, as a life experience, can represent the genesis of a utopia as much as the future. It's not a "utopia of escape", but rather a "utopia of reconstruction". A space that is not only physical, but also social, by being capable of reconstructing human qualities and the essence of living (Mumford 2008, p.18–19) like a true seed of change and progress. A type of utopia whose model is a city which bases its dimension on the exception, as Italo Calvino describes in *Invisible Cities* through the story of Marco Polo:

*"I have also thought of a model city from which I deduce all the others," Marco answered. "It is a city made only of exceptions, exclusions, incongruities, contradictions. If such a city is the most improbable, by reducing the number of abnormal elements, we increase the probability that the city really exists. So I have only to subtract exceptions from my model, and in whatever direction I proceed, I will arrive at one of the cities which, always as an exception, exist. But I cannot force my operation beyond a certain*

*limit: I would achieve cities too probable to be real." (Calvino 1974, p.69).*

"Heritagutopia" was born from this vision. Its etymology leads back to two words, heritage and utopia, a neologism that contains an intrinsic and provocative philological paradox (Donner and Sorcinelli 2022a, b). In fact, it is a matter of establishing what is the value and dimension of the urban and cultural heritage in the contemporary city nowadays. Like any utopia, it goes beyond the immanent dimension, pointing out opportunities, through visions of the future that cut across the mere everyday life and the known. It defines a new scenario, a new utopian goal, which Bloch would define as the daughter of his time (2022, p.36). It could be argued that this vision falls rather into a sort of urban dystopia, and therefore involves the degenerative component of the positivist vision of utopia. Or, on the contrary, as writer Franco Bernardi claims,

*"[...] dystopia is the prevailing gestalt transformed into tangle; utopia is the possible disentangled" (Bernardi 2017, p. 137).*

But perhaps, it is rather something that lies in between these two opposites and *de facto* acquires forms and principles proper to heterotopia like for instance the mixing of normally irreconcilable spaces in the sphere of reality (Foucault 2006, p.18). In the specific case, the historic city separates itself from its *genius loci*, negotiating between the context of everyday life and the place of this event. It could be said that in this way it gets a new life, through a



new urban cycle based on an upcycled morphology and a new aesthetic. The abandoned liminal areas become the place of regeneration, but in this case through an unexpected component: the historic *forma urbis*. Disused infrastructures, abandoned buildings, and silos become a settlement matrix on which a parasitic-type evolutionary process is grafted and proliferates. A paradigm shift takes place: the urban heritage, free from its monumental component, from being a limiting factor becomes drenched in possibilities. It turns into an element that generates and finds its future *raison d'être* in its own exile (Donner and Sorcinelli 2022a, b). In this regard, Massimo Recalcati reminds us how Petrarch and the humanists already thought of the concepts of novelty and modernity intrinsically linked to the rethinking of the past (2022, p.104).

### Heritagutopia and its phenomenology

The regenerative function of this new settlement paradigm poses the problem of new roles and hierarchical relationships in the city itself, a question that Heritagutopia's scenario raises provocatively. In fact, the resilient component of this utopian vision transcends the ideal one, which is usually related to its intrinsic aesthetic perfection. Even the figurative ideal is transposed and amplified in an unusual space-time dimension, which is disorienting, and in some ways almost metaphysical. Yet it still places itself in the field of imagination and possibilities. Ultimately, it is a matter of abdicating from the universalist ideological conception of utopia related to radical avant-gardes. Instead, it is about embracing the *zeitgeist*, as a revolutionary act of a not-yet-being

dimension (Bloch 2022, p.11), but, in this case, based on the tangible magnitude of the cultural heritage of historic centers. In fact, their strength lies in the infinite sequence of possible cities that have stratified over time, all made up of monuments, squares and buildings that represent their cultural heritage and past identities. In this regard, Calvino writes:

*"In every age someone, looking at Fedora as it was, imagined a way of making it the ideal city, but while he constructed his miniature model, Fedora was already no longer the same as before, and what had been until yesterday a possible future became only a toy in a glass globe."* (Calvino 1974, p.32).

The city therefore always tends towards an ideal without ever reaching it. The only point of contact among these never-fully-materialized ideal cities is the sense of fascination produced by these stratifications. It's a feeling of latent wonder, inherent in the very concept of monument as a figurative-symbolic representation of a community (Molinari 2023, pp.15–20). In this sense, De Chirico has given voice, through his metaphysical works, to this intrinsic relationship. Heritagutopia also goes beyond the idea of monumentality linked to the archetype to become a widespread exception that is stratified in abandoned and run-down places (Fig. 3), effectively overcoming the concept of nostalgia that the historic city inevitably generates.

The ways in which it is declined are many. It can manifest itself in overlapping an existing structure, either



**Fig. 3** Heritagutopia. Acupuncture within run-down settlement (Source Authors, 2021)





**Fig. 4** Heritagutopia. Appropriation of abandoned building structures (Source Authors, 2021)



**Fig. 5** Heritagutopia. Parasite of a port infrastructure (Source Authors, 2021)

the skeleton of an abandoned building or a port infrastructure, in a way that could be defined as parasitic. It regenerates and gives new life to apparently sterile urban episodes, almost useless. It's a new urban realm, where two neglected environments meet and merge into a dimension that overcomes the limits of the current individual *status quo*. In this case, the main feature is the post and lintel structure, either the structural frame of never-completed buildings (Fig. 4) or the giant steel cranes

(Fig. 5) along the waterfront, and both give refuge to the heritage urban fabric.

But Heritagutopia can also reveal itself in between abandoned silos of former industrial areas (Fig. 6), by setting a new environment and the consequently induced intrinsic relationships.

The boundary is redefined, it is not the medieval wall anymore, but instead it is the former cistern where welded metal sheets substitute old bricks.



**Fig. 6** Heritagutopia. Exile within former industrial tanks (Source Authors, 2021)

The urban fabric loses its organic-like structure to become a fragmented and cell-based agglomeration.

And again, the historic city migrates and finds asylum along the coastal areas, close to the drains of industrial production processes (Fig. 7), it integrates itself with road

infrastructures (Fig. 8) or takes possession of dormitory districts (Fig. 9). The parasitic tactic manifests itself at the margins, in liminal spaces, where the physical transition happens. By doing so, the new host changes the





**Fig. 7** Heritagutopia. Asylum along coastal area (Source Authors, 2021)

relationships within the built environment, it becomes an element of discontinuity.

Therefore, it populates the suburbs and their morphological transformations, negotiates its existence between disused chimneys (Fig. 10) and industrial or residential areas undergoing demolition (Fig. 11). Either it defends itself behind a high wall or it opens to the unknown of a place under deep transformation. Ultimately, Heritagutopia introduces the concept of hybrid in urban utopia, by not making an absolute statement but instead keeping open to unexpected synergies between neglected realities.

### Conclusions

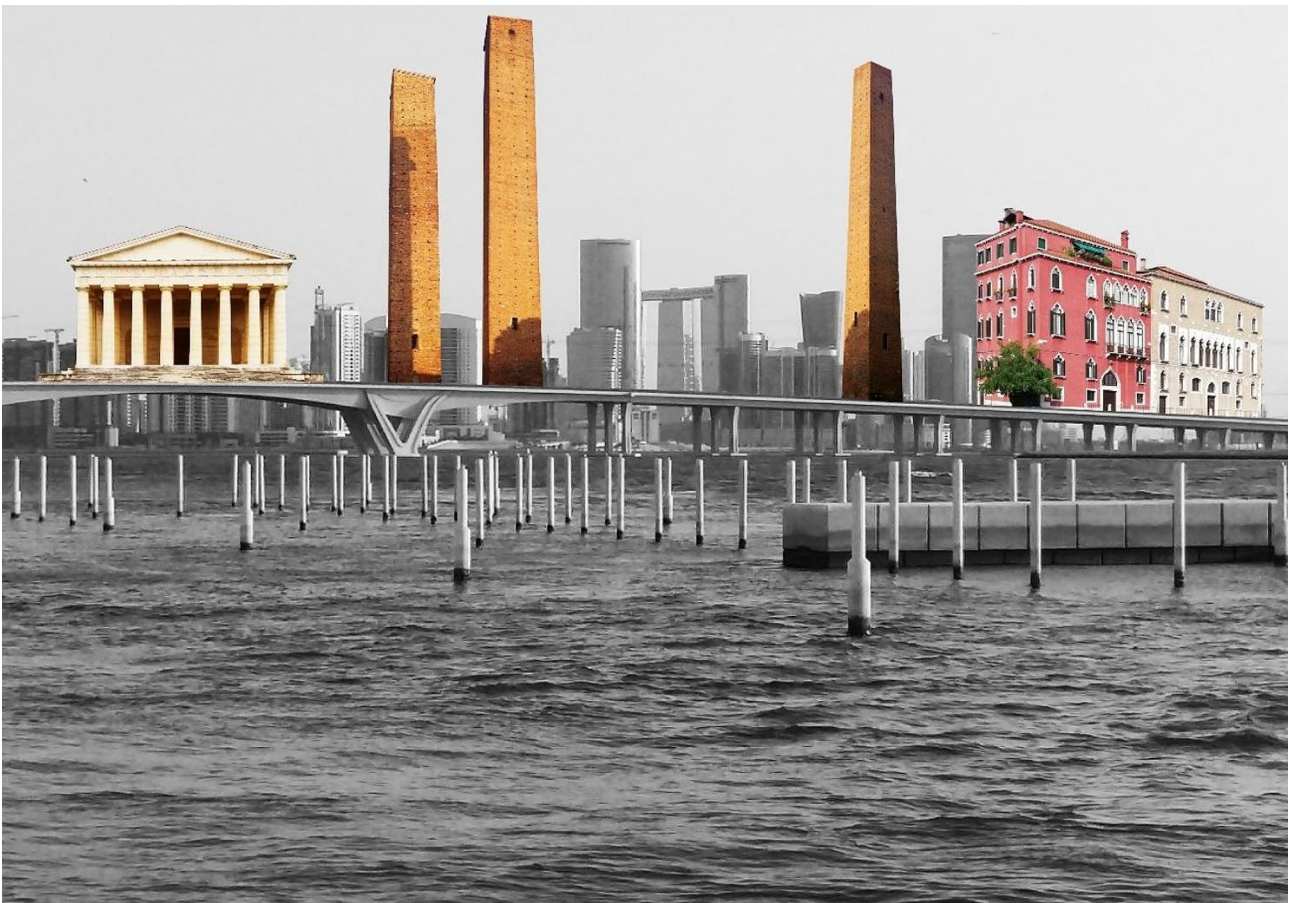
So, what is utopia and how should society relate to it? Philosopher Massimo Cacciari defines it as “secularized eschatology” (2016, p.71), or the propensity to discover the new through planning, in order to overcome the impossibility of the past. In this sense, and always outside of any ideological context, Ambrogio Santambrogio proposes, on a social level, a utopia as a collegial phenomenological act (2022, p.14). Both interpretations *de facto* mediate between the real dimension and the ideal realm. As we know, built space, by being real and tangible, affects social practices and is in turn conditioned by them. A sort of osmosis that has been going on for

centuries. However, utopian thought, unlike contingent reality, does not proceed according to an incremental process, but rather tends to undermine this dualism, it deviates from it. It does so by means of a split-up, a radical and sudden change, which through new archetypes anticipates the new, it changes route. In short, it expresses the intrinsic potential of built space.

In this regard, the proposed scenarios aim to open a discussion about contradictions of contemporary society and its urban space. They are provocative visions of hybrid-based future habitats born from the merging of unexpected dual realities, i.e., heritage buildings and abandoned infrastructures belonging to very different contexts. In times of scarcity of resources, where ecology should be at the center of human worries, these built environments have been integrated into a new paradigm made of neglected urban fragments. They were selected because of being testimonies of critical city areas (e.g. run-down sites, abandoned infrastructures, former industrial plants, contaminated areas), belonging to different contexts.

The question therefore arises spontaneously: will Heritagutopia ever be realized and made concrete?

This is a false statement of the problem, given that futurist visions in the urban and architectural field are valid for their disruptive capacity of making a change



**Fig. 8** Heritagutopia. Populating an infrastructure (Source Authors, 2021)

possible. Sometimes they do not become real at all, or when this happens decades if not centuries elapse, mainly thanks to technological progress as well as changed economic and social conditions. Their strength lies rather in the induced stimulus to thinking beyond the contingent, as well as in the impulse to change that any utopia, even the most abstract one, contains intrinsically, because, as Oscar Wilde stated:

*“A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.” (Wilde 1997, p.17).*





**Fig. 9** Heritagutopia. Infiltrating a dormitory district (Source Authors, 2021)



**Fig. 10** Heritagutopia. Negotiating between chimneys (Source Authors, 2021)





**Fig. 11** Heritagutopia. Exile within undergoing demolition areas (Source Authors, 2021)

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#### Declarations

#### Competing interests

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