On the utopian city notion (UCN) for city image analysis (CIA): a briefing

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Abstract: *The academic literature on the utopian city notion (UTN) and city image analysis (CIA) is substantial and widely scattered in different academic journals in social sciences. The writer utilizes his own teaching materials for Housing Studies students to come up with a more focused and organized briefing on the UTN and CIA. Concept explanation (UTN and CIA) and concept association, notably between the UTN and CIA, are examined with academic references. Specifically, this briefing note sheds some light on how the UCN can be employed for CIA. Lastly, Housing Studies students are encouraged to study not only this briefing note but also the pertinent academic literature on the UCN and CIA for their long-term intellectual learning journey.*

Key words: cities, city image, city image analysis (CIA), the utopian city notion (UCN).

Introduction

This brief article makes use of this writer's teaching materials on Geographical Imagination for his Housing Studies students. It offers a concise introduction to the utopian city notion (UCN), the city image analysis (CIA), and the value of the UCN for CIA.

On city image analysis (CIA)

The theory of city image was postulated by Kevin Lynch in his 1960 milestone book of "The Image of the City". Lunch, as cited in Huang *et al.* (2021), made three imperative claims, namely, "cities have a series of public image held consistently by citizens; 2) city images can be conveniently classified into five elements: "path", "node", "edge", "district" and "landmark"; 3) the ability of the physical urban form to evoke mental images…. offers a sense of emotional security and the intensity of human experience" (Huang *et al*., 2021). These claims imply that (i) shared city images do exist; (ii) city image elements can be studied with rigor and (iii) city image can be experienced intensely, notably with regard to emotional

security. The city image notion has subsequently been further elaborated on by other writers:

A. Priporas *et al.* (2020), point out that (i) city image is "a multi-dimensional construct…. which can offer people a better perception of cities" (citing Cassia, et al, 2018) and (ii) city image can be portrayed as "the set of beliefs, idea and impressions people hold regarding any city" (citing Kotler, 1997: 607);

B. Broadway and Broadway (2018), drawing on Relph (1976) and Avraham (2004), point out that "images of places" [including cities] are conveyed by opinion leaders and distributed by journalists using stereotypes";

C. Sainz (2012), citing Avraham, 2004, reminds us that negative city image is "an obstacle that prevents it from becoming more attractive and in fact forestalls a brighter future".

In view of the accumulated literature on city image and how it can be analysed, as the examples of ideas above exemplify, city image analysis (CIA) is a conceptually sophisticated way to study the subject of city. Particularly, to this writer, it is clearly a useful topic for his Housing Studies students to learn, since the Housing Studies subject very often is examined in the context of cities. To further illuminate the city image analysis (CIA), this writer next considers what the utopian city notion (UCN) is and its value for city image analysis (CIA).

What is the utopian city notion (UCN) for city image analysis (CIA)?

Cities, according to Sandercock (2002), are "built thought" and "the containers of dreams and desires, hopes and fears". As such, utopian thinking on city, crystallizing in a particular utopian city image in a certain period of time and place by a certain utopian thinker, is an important topic of study in Geographical Imagination in general and Housing Studies in particular. For this discussion, the ideas of utopian thinking on city [***the thinking***] and the utopian city image [***the crystallized image*** *from the utopian thinking*] together constitute the utopian city notion (UCN) for city image analysis (CIA). A brief elucidation on the UCN is now presented to gain additional understanding of it. This is done by referring to a few selected points from the relevant UCN academic literature as follows:

A. To "envision possibilities for more equitable, just and ecologically sustainable urban future…. most of what passes for city planning has been inspired by utopian modes of thought" (Macleod and Ward, 2002, citing Harvey 2000);

B. Ganjavie (2015), citing Baeten (2002) and Pinder (2002), points out that "utopian planners used provocative and subversive urban designs which mostly took on dystopian forms in order to educate citizens;

C. For Friedmann (2000), principles of the good city "must be drawn from somewhere"; they "must be logically connected to some foundational value". Such value, as formulated by Friedmann (2000) as "the right to human flourishing", is: "Every human being has the right, by nature, to the full development of their innate intellectual, physical and spiritual potentials in the context of wider communities".

These three points of illustration from the literature on the UCN underline its analysis value for city planning purpose, which needs to be adequately informed by the CIA. Besides, examples of utopian (including dystopian) images abound in science fictions and movies. They are useful urban scenarios for the CIA. Using the UCN for CIA, informed by their rich academic literature, can be a highly stimulating analysis exercise; it encourages a critically-aware and idealized form of urban analysis and design thinking.

Concluding remarks

A short review of the academic literature on the UCN and CIA shows the analytical value of them for Geographical Imagination and Housing Studies. The utopian city notion offers an intellectually fruitful set of ideas for a critical, idealized and creative way to carry out the CIA exercise.

This brief note should be a useful reading for Housing Students, especially those who study Geographical Imagination. The academic literature of these two topics takes much more engaging and long-term learning effort to grasp; nevertheless, doing so in a leisurely pace should be a quite enjoyable and rewarding intellectual learning experience.

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