

CONSTRUCTING UTOPIAS



EUROPEAN VISTAS

by the DANUBE FOUNDATION

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New Ending

2010

Photo prints, oil paint and grey board

New Ending shows a growing city. The work consists of several layers of city fabric that are wholly or partly covered by each other. It symbolises the passage of time, where parts of history disappear and other parts live through the cultivation of memory in objects and stories. The materials used in the piece make a reference to the image of the city (the photographs), its building blocks (the grey board referring to concrete, as well as architectural model making) and the imagination of the inhabitants (the white oil paint). The centre of the piece is the core of life, visualised as the green area in the city.

This Never-ending city keeps expanding its boundaries as time passes by, multiplying its self-similar forms, which are always the same but generating an endlessly changing outcome.

**Lay-Out Design
by Wendela Heering**

PREFACE

This project has been interesting and exciting, taking different forms along the way. Utopias, unattainable by their very nature, certainly can inspire and we were inspired by the ideas & energy of the participants in every single workshops we gave. I hope this energy and inspiration transpires from the pages of this work, and that light is shed on the power and function of utopian thinking. We are grateful to all the people who worked with us and helped us with this utopian city project, many of whom were just as enthusiastic as us to explore dreams and connect on an idealistic level. We did not find utopia, but we most certainly found some components of it.

- **Sophie Bloemen**



**CONSTRUCTING UTOPIAS:
EUROPEAN VISTAS**

by the DANUBE FOUNDATION

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“With the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history, and there with his ability to change it.”

Karl Mannheim¹

¹ Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 1954

SUMMARY

Constructing Utopias presents the Danube Foundation's findings and impressions of a three-year utopian tour through European cities.

With Europe in a deplorable, technocratic state and utopian thought discredited, we sought to contribute to the revival of both of them. Danube set out to bring Europe new ideas and stories, and to reinstate utopian thought to facilitate the development of ideas, vision and alternatives. Danube carried out this project through a bottom up process, in which we gave space to the innovative, young and truly European generation that has come of age in the last twenty years.

Danube traveled to twelve cities with our Utopian City workshop and we found a wealth of ideas, spirit, energy, initiatives and stories. The city is an appropriate proxy for society: most people live in cities, and increasingly so. In the next few decades the percentage of people living in cities will rise to over 70% worldwide. From London to Sofia, from Moscow to Lisbon, workshop participants passionately threw themselves into the debate, shared their dreams of the ideal city, and argued about what was best for society.

Confounding critics, **the young generation we encountered does have plenty of ideas about the future, as well as energy and enthusiasm, and it is ready to engage and build their societies.** This generation is not settling for halfway solutions, and has great expectations. Very practical ideas on quality of life issues contrast with more abstract wellbeing concerns, while vision of justice range from urgent practical matters to vision and dreams.

What do young Europeans find important? We present European Vistas: the dreams, visions and desires of representatives of the European generation. We present European stories that are to be reckoned with, on openness and tolerance, community and participatory politics, ecology and technology and alternative economic incentives. Danube in addition presents the idea of small utopias, a way to transform the world in which we live.

Happily, **we encountered many projects that embraced a utopian spirit**, and Danube believes it is an ideal moment to engage in small and larger projects that can alter our societies and Europe as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Danube stands for a new perspective. We find cultural diversity is central to Europe and it will not be captured by one grand narrative. Yet Europe can be captured in a bundle of stories or visions, stories of Europe. **What we imagine is a continuing discussion, a continuous exchange of ideas.**

The first time the Berlin Wall was brought to our generation's attention was when people were standing on top of it, and the Iron Curtain came down. For us, the generation born in the late seventies and eighties, the Soviet East has never felt as a threat, and the Second World War only lived in history classes. We knew very little about the Europe that had long been on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

For **a generation to whom Europe has always been one** and that is unstained by the Cold War, our ignorance and the general ignorance of our society regarding Central and Eastern Europe is disturbing. This thought led a small group of recently graduated students from the University of Amsterdam to found the Danube Foundation in 2007. Our idea was to address the void of ties between Western, Central and Eastern Europe. We aimed to contribute to a cultural European dimension. Danube then set out to stimulate the exchange of ideas between young Europeans in East and West. We sought to break through the boundaries of the European nation states, which though made physically irrelevant in the age of the Schengen Agreement, are still firmly entrenched in the minds and perceptions of people.

Danube never wanted to discuss the topic of Europe itself so much. We would presume Europe and discuss other interesting and urgent matters with young Europeans across the continent. We would facilitate and take part in this dialogue by both being a platform for exchange as well as a think tank. Utopia was chosen as a key topic of discussion, as there is so much to this inspiring and encompassing concept. **Utopia would allow us to discuss many different topics, but from a fundamentally positive perspective.** We wanted to bring something positive to Europe, in a time where it lacks inspiration and direction.

Although Danube is a European organisation with members in various EU Member States and strong network reliance, Amsterdam has always been the nexus. The

first half year Danube's activity consisted mainly of nights of loud discussions on Utopia, with an infinite reading list. It was during these nights, however, that the foundations of ideas were established on which we would build for years. In 2009 we published our manifesto Europe 2.0: the Next Generation. The idea of Utopia grew into our main project, renamed the European Vistas project.

This publication is a description and finalisation of a part of that project, 'The Utopian City', in which we enabled young Europeans to develop their own utopian cities in a series of workshops. With the Utopian City project we toured European cities and collected ideas, dreams, stories and art from young Europeans all over the continent about their ideal society.

Having people formulate their own ideals while thinking about their cities and societies critically is a goal in itself and a very fun and inspiring exercise. But these ideas have also been collected by us for the rest of the world to hear, presented in such a way as to inspire a broad audience. In line with our idea of what Danube can and should do, the Utopian City project is a bottom up effort to improve the European project. **This report aims to communicate all the stories and ideas we collected throughout Europe during our quest.**

This report, while covering our findings and experiences, mostly takes the format of an essay. It does not seek to equal an academic publication. It contains many subjective elements and presents personal observations. It is in fact as much a documentation and report of Danube's tour, as an essay where we set out our ideas and hope to inspire our readers to embrace Utopia.

Utopia, a Movement?

During Danube's travels we have met many people and other organisations, always keeping an eye open for projects which also embraced Utopia. There were quite a few exciting projects and initiatives we encountered that overlap or touch on Danube's. A selection is presented throughout the report.

1. COLLECTING STORIES AND THE CASE FOR UTOPIAN THOUGHT

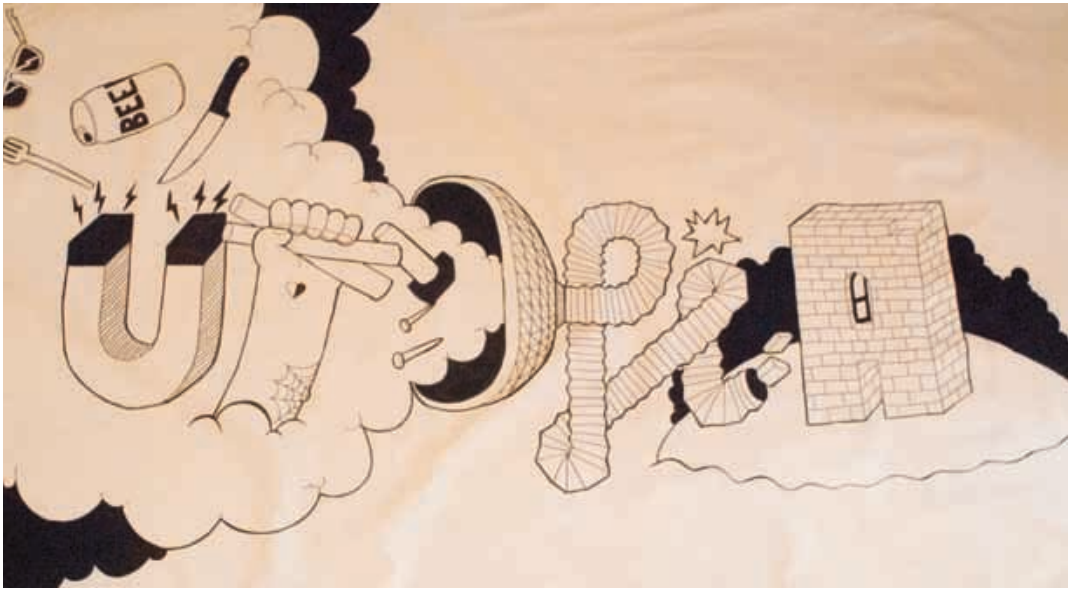
Utopian thought inspired many in the past but has lost credibility over the last century. Totalitarianism, fascism and the Gulags have left strong and lasting scars. Stalin and his like murdered millions in an attempt to reach their utopias. Postmodern thinkers announced the end of Grand Narratives, and with that the possibility for inspiring visions. We argue, however, that **utopian thought remains an essential tool to create new visions**. Moreover, utopian thought has not been completely erased from modern political thought, but presented in different ways such as the inevitable and only rational option of the market. Having a vision for society is crucial, and when used in the right way utopian thought can be a powerful and essential tool. This section explores the idea of the role for Utopian thought, its usefulness, and necessity.

Talking About Europe

Apart from discussions on Utopian thought, Danube found itself in a certain discourse on Europe. When discussing Europe, there is a fixation on the past, on stories that have long lost their momentum and appeal to younger generations. **Europe strongly focuses on its history, while it should focus on the future**. In cultural-political analysis and discourse, stories about the War and the Holocaust, stories about European identity and European heritage are tirelessly told and retold. People engage in endless discussion about whether we have a Judeo-Christian heritage, a Greek-Christian, or maybe a Christian-Muslim one. Are the borders of Europe found somewhere in the Caucasus or at Constantinople? Is Russia in or out, culturally speaking?

Danube finds that these discussions are perhaps not very useful for the objective of providing Europe with inspiration and vision, nor do they appeal to the majority of European citizens. Besides that these discussions lock Europe up in the past, they are also dominated by a perspective that is focused on negatives motives for the European Project (e.g. never again). **The focus on negative events in the past in particular leads us to be afraid and withdrawn within our local or national borders. We argue that we need both positive and forward looking stories in order to reach a more inclusive and inspiring Europe.**

Moreover, most political discussion is financial-economic, and **Europe struggles to find the unity to make important decisions, lacking a sense of community.** Admittedly it is hard to have a community without common ideals and stories. We need ideals and positive stories to which the younger generation of European can relate. To quote Karl Mannheim: **“With the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history, and there with his ability to change it?”**



‘Utopia’ (2009) by Stefan Unkovic, Belgrade

Utopian Thought As A Necessity

Europe is in a crisis, not only financially but also culturally. While the financial crisis is of recent date, an ideological disaster has actually been present for a longer period. Europe is not able to develop new perspectives and is caught in a political-ideological vacuum with no communal imagination or solidarity. **The younger generation, undisturbed by Cold War memories and not awed by a need for relativism, has to provide new dreams for Europe.**

The European project was inspired by the utopian ideal of peace between all nations, in the aftermath of two World Wars and horrible crimes against humanity. Despite this lofty goal with time, Europe lost its ideals, its story, and has become

2 Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia, 1954

a soulless technocratic establishment. Rising nationalism and backlashes against the European Project are testament to this. **The crisis feeds nationalistic and anti-European sentiment**, both on the national level as well as on the European level in Brussels. The principles of pluralism, tolerance and cooperation have formed the basis of the European project.

Yet **the danger exists that the surge of nationalistic political movements leads to stagnation of the European project and loss of fifty years of achievements in promoting these associated values**. Europe in its present state cannot withstand these negative developments. The technocratic, soulless construction lacks ambition and persuasiveness. Not surprisingly, solidarity and leadership today in the handling of the financial crisis are hard to find. Clearly, Europe is in dire need of common narratives and vision. **Danube sees an important role for utopian thought in filling this gap and questions whether a society can actually progress without a notion of Utopia.**

Change Utopia! – European Alternatives

European Alternatives is a European civil society organisation that challenges the current state of Europe and insists there are alternatives. In 2009 they organised Change Utopia! which was a transnational series of public events touching on crucial themes for a new understanding of culture and politics. The series saw events in London, Paris, Berlin, Barcelona and Warsaw.

European Alternatives is engaged in idealistic and progressive campaigns on transnational and European levels, including initiatives on media pluralism, social justice, and economic alternatives to neo-liberalism. They have members and staff throughout Europe who invest in the causes locally, yet European Alternatives engages in advocacy at the European Parliament as well. www.euroalter.com

The Concept Of Utopia

In order to explain this bold statement it is helpful to go back to the original concept of Utopia as coined by Thomas More in his equally titled publication. **The word Utopia was used by him as a compilation of Greek terms having a double meaning: the ‘no place’ and the ‘good place’, a place that does**

not exist and that is perfect at the same time. It is unable to exist exactly because it is perfect. Both these connotations are important in order to fully and correctly grasp the function of Utopia. More's utopian society was not a society he considered within reach but rather a model of the ideal society and a critique of the society in which he lived: England in the early 16th Century. Ever since Plato's Republic and most likely before, visions of ideal societies have been used to fulfill these functions. The concept of dystopia is at first-glance the antonym of utopia, but fulfills a similar function. Dystopias also offer critiques on current society, yet do so by extrapolating negative and worrisome trends in society.³

Utopian thought has become discredited chiefly in response to certain strands of socialism and communism where people actually believed a perfect endpoint was achievable: the Socialist Utopia, the Third Reich, or the Workers' Paradise – each was believed by many to be an attainable society and any means necessary to achieve it were acceptable. Socialist thought has a close relationship with modernism. Central elements of modernism were the rejection of history and tradition. A utopian desire to invent a better world, accompanied by a strong faith in the possibilities of technology was central to these now discredited movements. These principles mixed with social and political ideologies, and gave art and design a large role in solving the problems of society. Modernist master plans both in the West and the East were packed with ideology and ideas about the new human. **It was widely believed that human nature could be altered by a certain system of incentives or overall context.** This is something considered incredibly naïve nowadays. In the late 19th Century and the first half of the 20th Century however, this type of utopianism was widely present. **With this belief one of the two original senses of Utopia was lost: it was no longer considered a 'non place'.** This legitimized violence while grand visions were forced upon society. **For if paradise is within reach than the end will surely justify all means.**

We can see how history has led people to effectively reject all utopian thought. We can certainly entertain the idea of a better future and work and fight to get there. **It is critical to dare to dream again and jointly believe in something.** But the end can never justify the means. Utopian visions have to incorporate both connotations of the original concept of Utopia: the ideal place and the non place.

3 Consider the story of *1984* by George Orwell or *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

Utopian visions give us direction as a lighthouse at the horizon does, but they are by definition unattainable. A ship will wreck on the rocks if it attempts to reach the lighthouse itself.

One Upon A Time ... Postmodernism And The End Of History

Utopian thought has not been particularly en vogue over the last decades. **On the contrary, postmodernism has been dominant in political intellectual discourse and post-modernists have declared the end of grand narratives.** Society is rightly skeptical when it comes to grand visionary plans for a better world. Even recently, the utopian belief in the market has contributed to a disastrous financial crisis of which we are still suffering the



'Utopian City Sarajevo' (2009) by N.E.K.O, Sarajevo

consequences today, and **fundamentalists in the White House with a utopian interpretation of destiny pulled the world into a horrific war against 'evil'**. Interestingly, these convictions were never presented or perceived as utopian by its proponents: both ideologies were depoliticized and were presented as the only 'rational' or 'pragmatic' option. Although certain utopian ideas, principally that of an endless belief in the market, shaped the political

paradigm of the last few decades, we saw the end of history being announced.⁴ History completed itself as the ultimate synthesis had apparently been reached: there was no more ideology, the current state of the (western) world, of capitalism and democracy represented the end stage of human development. The cracks in this paradigm have since then become increasingly apparent, not least due to the financial crisis.

Postmodernism, apart from its resistance to grand narratives, promotes radical relativism, celebrating individualism instead of universalism, chaos and not order, reaction instead of a master plan, and intrinsic insecurity instead of rational solutions. With the loss of grand narratives, vision and direction has disappeared as well.

Politicians and policy makers are reacting to situations, instead of shaping them on our behalf. It would not be utterly audacious to say this attitude has led to an empty pragmatism which has firmly rooted itself in political culture. These developments have contributed to the lack of vision in Europe, leaving Europeans without dreams. **Pragmatism might work well for technocrats, but it is not conducive to true coherence and a shared imagination and identity.**

How Dreams Turned Into Nightmares

Looking into some recent discussions on utopian thought it seems it is often equated with European nightmares. **John Gray's** bestseller 'Black Mass' on utopian thought had just been published when Danube set out to explore Utopia. **Black Mass states that all modern secular thought is in fact utopian and has roots in Christian eschatology.** Christian eschatology is the study of the destiny of man as revealed in the Bible, the study of the end of things. Belief in progress is false, Gray argues, and the modern utopian impulse is derived from the notion of progress initially coined in the Enlightenment. This notion of progress is misguided: scientific knowledge and technological power increase over time, but there is no reason to think that politics or morality can progress in the same way. Gray targeted the then ruling neoconservatives in the White House, who accordingly had a 'utopian understanding' of good and evil, in the sense that they believed good could be reached and evil eradicated, creating heaven on earth.

4 Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, 1992.

Speculative Peculiars - A Collective Day Dream

2059 Speculative Peculiars consisted of five public events where artists, writers, scholars, scientists, designers, politicians, etc. gave their impression of their cities in 50 years from now. They were asked to research trends from today, something they see as important, or maybe even irreversible, and extrapolate these trends to the not so distant future. The idea was for them to use the tools they have acquired on the job – writing, designing, art directing, inventing, strategizing, to express their time travelling, mind altering vision of the Amsterdam and Montreal in 2059.

2059 Speculative Peculiars is an imaginary and visionary glance at the future of urban landscapes, it is an interdisciplinary program about the possible and the impossible, the politics, subcultures, developments and conventions that will govern and shape Amsterdam and Montreal 50 years from now. They sought to explore how we live, work and socialize in the future, what kind of places we would frequent and what kind of people we would meet. Aiming to map how we would give meaning to our surroundings, the impressions were published in a series of booklets: Amsterdam 2010. speculativepeculiars.blogspot.com

Gray's interpretation of utopian thought is much too broad, encompassing just about all modern political ideology and Western political philosophical thought. He forgets the non-place. Denying the notion of progress altogether, as Gray does, is hard to defend. Visions for a better world have certainly altered the world throughout history. The abolition of slavery, the development of democracy, universal suffrage, and the recognition of human rights are prime examples. The point however, is that **Gray voices the prevailing sentiment regarding utopian thought. While his analysis is quite extreme, his dismissal of utopianism was not out of tone with the prevailing view at the time of Black Mass' publication.**

Nevertheless there are also some academic developments that revive utopian thought. Fortunately, these take a more positive approach, underpinning both the need for utopian thought as well as the progress it has brought humanity. The academic project Envisioning Real Utopias series by **Eric Olin Wright**⁵ is worth mentioning here. Wright **calls for 'Real Utopias': "utopian ideals that are**

5 Wright, Eric Olin; Envisioning Real Utopias, 2010, Verso

grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible way stations, utopian destinations that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change.” Wright takes a socio-economical approach to presenting alternatives to the current capitalist system and embraces a political ideology of radical democratic egalitarianism. Within the Marxist tradition the belief exists that the wholesale design of social institutions is within the grasp of mankind. Yet, this does not mean a blueprint for an alternative society can be designed in detail beforehand. Wright argues the core organizing principles of alternatives to existing institutions, the principles that would guide the pragmatic trial and error task of institution building, can be worked out.

Wright defines three criteria for an idea to work, to be a real utopia: First, is it desirable? Second, is it viable? And third, is it achievable? This pragmatic approach seems at odds with the notion of Utopia as employed by More, who emphasizes the unachievable no place: it is not achievable, it is not viable, and maybe it is not even desirable. It is a vision to inspire change, to recognize what can be improved, and to give direction.⁶ Yet, the projects as envisioned by Wright could be taken as way-stations, as projects inspired by utopian vision in the notion of More.

Wright’s approach has a resemblance to the idea of ‘minor utopias’ as presented by **Jay Winter. In Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian movements in the 20th century** Winter argues that over the past century visions for an alternative society have brought humanity not only nightmares but progress as well. He maintains the twentieth century is filled with moments of possibility when groups of people rejected the logic of inertia and began to believe in the transformation of the world in which they lived. He presents a range of initiatives which tried to alter the world or society, believing an alternative was possible, where significant accomplishments were obtained. As important achievements he identifies the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the establishment of the League of Nations, the movement of ‘68 and the rise of NGOs in the 90’s as found in the environmental movement. In Winter’s view global citizenship and civil society advocating for human rights have replaced the class struggles and

6 For a comprehensive analysis of More and his intentions with the concept of and his book Utopia, see Stephen Duncombe; <http://theopenutopia.org>

civil rights campaigns of earlier decades. He further emphasizes the absence of a blueprint, which can lead to rigidity and dogmatism, calling these visions ‘minor utopias’ separating them from the grand communist and fascist projects.

Both the idea of ‘real utopias’ and ‘minor utopias’ present a modest approach to utopian thought. Wright argues that a clear vision of an alternative society combined with an incremental development is needed, while Winter argues that one needs to believe in an alternative society and have some sort conception of it. The minor utopias of Winter show that it has indeed been possible to achieve progress on the basis of a vision. Indeed significant progress for humanity as been made. Both approaches reject the idea of a blueprint, recognizing that grand designs for social reconstruction have often ended in disaster.

In contrast to these two approaches **Danube at this point proposes more of a focus on what is desirable and a more prominent role for the non-place, staying away from achievability and policy. This approach allows for grand visions, for dreams, for the inspiration which is so important for our project.** Yet elements of both Wright and Winter’s ideas are absolutely of use and will be explored again in Section 3 of this document.

Back To The Future

The younger generation of Europeans, who have never feared the Russians or a nuclear Bomb, and for whom the Iron Curtain is no more than a historical term, is in a position to to dream again and create truly new ideas for Europe. Danube wishes to be part of a more meaningful dialogue about creating a Europe we want to live in. The pitfalls of post-modernity need to be overcome and Danube refuses to be held back by skepticism and relativism. **Therefore we employ utopian thought as an instrument, as a tool for generating visions for the future, inspiration and direction.**

Finding Europe stranded in an age of anti-utopianism, pragmatism and technocracy while embedded in the firm paradigm of neoliberal democracy with a worrying dash of nationalism, Danube considers it is time to go beyond postmodern skepticism and the impossibility of grand narratives. **Building on post-modern insight but going beyond it, we entertain the idea of not one grand story**

but of a bundle of multiple stories that co-exist in Europe.

Are dreams and grand visions not the necessary building blocks of society? Is this not exactly what current society is missing: visions and ideals with which it can fend off individualism and indifference?

Danube believes this is the case and in the following sections presents how we can again reject the logic of inertia and believe in the transformation of the world in which we live.

The Cloud – Utopian Theatre by Space

Some of us were lucky enough to see a performance of the inspiring theater piece 'Cloud' by the group Space in Brussels in May 2010. In Cloud the performers welcome the public in the historical museum of the future. "We are in the year 2060, fifty years after the great change, which saved us from our down-fall. To mark this anniversary, the world looks back at the year 2010, and the preceding period in which humanity seemed to be heading towards an inevitable catastrophe. Over time we gradually forgot our history and got so accustomed to the good and harmonious life in the year 2060, that it is hardly appreciated anymore. Are we heading for a new catastrophe?"

The Cloud starts with a prologue in the theatre, after which Petra Ardai and Luc van Loo guide the visitors through an open-air exhibition in the given city. The piece reflects and casts doubts on current society through comments on the surrounding and by showing it through the eyes of someone living in a utopian society. Some of the themes touched upon were human relationships, communication, loneliness and inequality. The play was very effective in making us think, in 'waking us up'. The distance gained to the surroundings by the narrative of the utopian world in the future, combined with the stories and comments on those same surroundings by the performers, enabled a deep realization of some of the structural defects of our current society.

The Cloud is an international coproduction, for each site a custom made version was developed that was tailored to the realities of the particular city or place. The four coproducing countries are the Netherlands, Hungary, Germany and Belgium. www.tgspace.nl

2. CITIES, STORIES, DREAMS & IDEAS

With Europe in a political ideological vacuum and in dire need of ideals and stories, the Danube Foundation felt it should look for stories and bring them together, developing a collection of these new European stories. **Danube set out to collect these stories in different cities all over Europe, just as the Brothers Grimm once collected Germanic folktales and bundled them.** The method chosen is a playful one. A workshop on the Utopian City was organized in 12 cities, where young Europeans formulated their ideals and perfect societies. With this method Danube moves away from the political-academic discourse. **The initiative is completely bottom up, not starting from a theoretical or policy perspective.** Danube considers this the only way to truly include representatives of the excluded, younger generation and take the creation of ideas as the starting point.

The project had a variety of findings: **confounding stereotypes, the younger generation does have ideas, energy and enthusiasm and are ready to build their society.** All over Europe participants debated fiercely, built their cities, and argued what was the best possible society. Danube collected collages, interviews, short films, pictures, artist perspectives, and artworks in the different cities. These ideas, stories, and trends are presented below. A surprising and inspiring finding was the numerous other initiatives working on the topic of Utopia. It is almost as if there is an underground movement on Utopia operating in parallel to current policy and academic debates.



'Utopian City Moscow' by Stas Shuripa, Moscow

The Tour & The Cities

Every city Danube visited for the Utopian City workshop project is described in the Cities section of this report with anecdotal impressions, snippets of interviews, pictures, and other visuals.

	Amsterdam	Abstract visions
	Zagreb	Hopeful and resourceful
	Sarajevo	Minimal Utopia
	Belgrade	Serious planning in edgy surroundings.
	Moscow	Nostalgia and technology
	London	Civil participation in East End institution
	Berlin	An open space city in constant flux
	Lisbon	The South in crisis
	Rome	Calls for normality in a depressed country.
	Sofia	Tango on a broken pavement.
	Istanbul	Small dreams and cosmopolitanism
	Prague	A sleeping beauty

Presentation & Workshop

Each workshop started with an introductory presentation of 20 minutes by one of the Danubians. The presentation runs the participants through the history of utopia, discussing Plato's Republic, Thomas More, the double meaning of utopia, modernism, grand narratives and their disasters, Stalin, communism and the loss of no place. It goes further in describing modern city improvements and projects, postmodernism, and ultimately; the imagined city. The introduction reflects on important societal elements to think of when creating an ideal society: the notions of work and leisure, integration and segregation, property relations, civil participation, public

and private domain, a place for art and creativity, and top-down versus bottom-up inputs and policies. The presentation is accompanied by relevant images and colourful examples.

After the introduction the workshop participants are divided into groups. Each group creates a collage of their utopian city by using photos, drawings and text. Throughout the workshop, participants are stimulated to think about themes that are relevant to every city, including their own. At the same time, the participants are completely free to design their own utopian city.

The groups engage in approximately two hours of brainstorming, thinking and creating. The Danube organisers go around, posing and answering questions. A local artist will attend and follow the workshop, on the basis of which he or she will create an artwork later.

In a plenary session at the end all groups present and discuss their concepts with each other and with the jury, consisting of the artist, one Danubian and a representative of the local partner organisation. Apart from the presentation each group delivers a written one page description of their city. The jury will declare a winner, and the participants of the winning group will all receive a present: a copy of Utopia by Thomas More. The local artist starts his creative process of making an artwork based on the results of the workshop.

Each workshop includes approximately 25 participants. The number of participants is limited in order to create enough time for an interesting discussion among the participants and the jury. The workshop focuses on young Europeans (ages 16-30).

The output from the workshops varies. They include the stories told by the participants, the collages depicting the utopian cities, and the artworks made by local artists. Furthermore, in most cities Danube conducted interviews with people from the partner civil society organisations, local intellectuals or the participating artists.

The reports of the cities give our general impression of each city. We are presenting only several of the collages developed in cities though we did analyse all the collages and accompanying stories by the participants. On our website all the collages can be found.

See section City Reports for city impressions & images.

A. Analyzing The Cities: Trends & Ideas

In each city Danube visited groups of participants developed their own unique utopian city. These concepts give an impression of the dreams and concerns of young Europeans and together form an alternative imagined Europe. The utopian cities are instructive because they not only express concerns about today, but also suggest alternatives for the future. Just like architects, who often develop projects without the intention to realize them, these ideas go beyond the horizon and are meant to inspire and give direction for some type of eventual implementation. As such, the imagined cities can function as an inspiration for future policy.

As expected, every workshop yielded a wide variety of utopian ideas. Between cities the difference in utopian concepts could be subtle, but often they varied widely. For instance, the utopian cities created in Sarajevo in a way represented the current state of affairs in Amsterdam, whereas those in Amsterdam consisted of futuristic transcendental cityscapes. These differences are reflections of the states of affairs in the respective cities: our local partner organization in Sarajevo was for example, involved in creating a 'Kriterion Sarajevo', a student run cinema modelled after Kriterion Amsterdam, which is over fifty years old. Still, **besides these differences Danube is strongly interested in the commonalities of the collected utopian visions.** Going beyond the surface **Danube, has been able to distil a set of unifying elements, reflecting regional and European trends** in the utopias of the groups of participants we worked with.



Belgrade, 'All The Same Behind Different Windows'

Surely, we only collected the ideas of the participants in our workshop, a limited representation of a city, let alone a country. We do not imagine to give an comprehensive and fully accurate account of the dreams of the young generation in the countries we visited. Yet we believe even this small representation has given us an impression of the main ideas, dreams and concerns of the young generation in a city, and that what surfaced in these three and a half hour workshops was not random. The group discussions and accompanying interviews we had with local artists, curators, and intellectuals often confirmed and framed the trends we picked up.

In the following section we have listed the most salient trends and indicated where they were most prevalent (e.g. Western Europe, Central or Eastern Europe). Trends were categorized in the following two broad clusters:

- Wellbeing, Quality of Life & Ecology
- Access, Equality & Participation

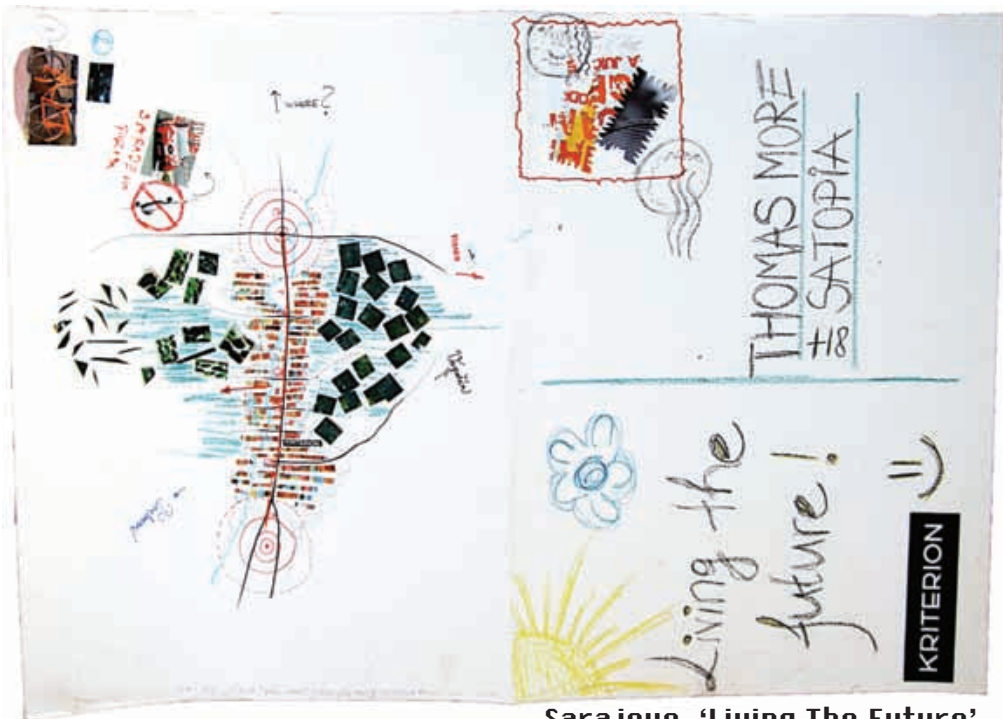
Wellbeing, Quality of Life and Ecology

Wellbeing relates to quality of life, both from societal and individual perspectives and perceptions. Quality of life relates to material conditions, but also to people's mental states and overall happiness. Spirituality is an important element of wellbeing and also situated in this section. Ecology concerns the way human life relates to nature and its overall environment and here we situate ideas about sustainability and harmony with nature.

Main features:

- The fulfilment of personal dreams and individual development, something we saw predominantly in Eastern Europe.
- Ecology and sustainability, harmony with nature, which surfaced in all cities in different variations.
- Transport issues: making commuting time shorter, more space for bikers and pedestrians, and improved public transport systems

- Other issues: technology, zoning, lifestyle communities, multiculturalism, life-work balance, religion, self-sufficiency and autonomy, alternative economies.



Sarajevo, 'Living The Future'

When these features were analysed Danube found tensions and differences between regions. For example there are clear differences when considering the extent to which participants engage in abstract or more practical ideas. We asked participants to build their ideal city: of course they would look at what is wrong in their current city or society and often that would be the first thing they would like to see improve. Yet, apart from addressing omissions and coming up with practical ideas, there were many grand, abstract and futuristic visions. We found that the less ideal or harder life is in a given city, the more practical the utopian creations would be, while better quality of life resulted in more abstract utopian cities. Edi Rama, the former major of Tirana, in this context at our opening conference made the point, “stories and European identity are great but we need visas and money for public institutions first.” It seems that often basic quality of life issues need to be taken care of before one easily engages in ideas that go beyond the horizon.

We found that in the cities of the Balkans, the participants were concerned with solutions for their low Quality Of Life in material

terms, but also to some extent cultural improvement. The young Europeans we encountered want comfort. They want technology to help them, and they want short commutes and a nice environment. Actually young Europeans want a great deal, and they expect a lot in terms of quality of life. In the Balkans it seems young people want to have the same quality of life as their counterparts in Western Europe, and they have plenty of ideas on how to get there. What's more, they are willing to invest and take action in order to achieve their goals.



Istanbul, 'Bizim City' (Our City)

Sustainability And The Environment surfaced as key issues in all the European cities we visited.

The calls for sustainability are loud and clear. The European future in the eyes of the young generation tends to be clean and green, with innovative ways to keep it sustainable. There seems to be a general anticipation of a clean environment, sustainable solutions, green spaces and low emissions. **The question is not whether this is going to happen, rather how this is going to happen. What transpired is that young people are generally willing to make quite some radical changes in lifestyle to that end.** There is a deep awareness that we will have to adapt our behaviour and lives to create a sustainable society. Of course we have to think about the real implications of this commitment. Natural resources like water and oil are increasingly scarce. How do we build our houses, how do we make our trips, and how much do we invest in public transport and what cars do we buy?

Interestingly **the idea of Harmony With Nature also surfaced.** It should be noted **however that this is a different concept than that of sustainability.** Sustainability takes a fundamentally anthropocentric perspective:

in its essence it concerns improving our life, humans' wellbeing. Harmony with nature, on the other hand, is about respect for nature, the recognition of nature as an entity with which humanity can be in balance. Although sustainability is in essence about improving our wellbeing and differs in that sense from the ideas of respect for and harmony with nature, the policy implications of both approaches are very similar.

Technology has greatly contributed to the material wellbeing of people. How does it relate to the desire for nature and sustainability? Many participants identify an increased role for technology, although there is also a certain wariness of technology to be seen. Both trust and scepticism in relation to the possibilities of technology are present. Some depict their city with technology facilitating a harmonious relationship with nature, while others see these two as juxtaposed. This is an old dualism, fluctuating in intensity over the decades. Martin Heidegger was famously sceptical about the role and dominance of technology and how the technological perspective makes the human relationship with nature a calculative and exploitative one. After World War II a great deal of scepticism was to be found in relation to technology in light of the disastrous effects of its use in mass war. However, the last decades have seen an embracement of technology and an acceleration of its development. The overall trend to be seen in the utopian cities corresponds with the latter. **Aversion of technology was generally absent; a belief in its possibilities and opportunities takes precedence.**

In several cities, but especially in Moscow, participants displayed a need for Rebalancing Life, Leisure, And Work. One example of the positive role for technology is the belief or recognition that technology can facilitate flexibility regarding workplaces and working time, improving quality of life in that regard. This is something effecting our generation on a grand scale, the number of people who work from home or cafés is rising steadily and apparently with a positive effect on productivity. On the other hand the possibilities of modern technology also allow one to always be in touch with work and never fully leave it, upsetting a health life-work balance.

City Design, Lifestyle, And Personal Development transpired as key elements for the quality of life. Being able to live in a certain community or centre having a specific atmosphere which allows for a certain lifestyle is an important issue for many of

the young Europeans in the workshops. They find it very important to be able to make lifestyle choices by choosing their environments. This can be noticed in many modern cities where there are different areas that cater to different needs and different people: some to the young and hip, some to students, some to young families. Some appeal to the styled and fashionable, some to the scruffy and alternative. Yet this seems to have happened randomly and organically, with city planning playing a minor role. It is interesting to see that the facilitation of certain lifestyles is something that is highly valued by young Europeans all over the continent.

The idea of Zoning, where a city offers areas with distinctive functions, also came back in some of the utopian cities. The physical separation of life, work and recreational areas in a city is a modernistic concept that has proved successful in some cases and less successful in others. Quality of life and wellbeing can improve, but not when zoning brings with it long commutes. Not accidentally, **transport turned out to be a major issue. Particularly in Moscow this was the case, but participants in Sarajevo and Prague prioritized transport as well.** Transport also featured strongly in relation to the need for more opportunities for bikes and pedestrians and for a cleaner environment. Hence, the transport issue was both an issue of convenience, as well as an environmental concern.



Belgrade, 'City of Winds & Lights'

Individual or personal development and the possibility to fulfil one's dreams were given an important role in many utopian cities. What is meant here is the need for opportunities and the freedom to develop in a way one believes in or feels comfortable with. This relates to the just mentioned lifestyle-choice ideal, but goes beyond that and also relates to socio-economic opportunities. Individual development featured particularly strong in the utopian designs of the Balkan cities, as well as in those of Moscow and Rome. These are all environments where choices may be restrained either through strong societal or religious values that can be repressive, or a by lack of socio-economic opportunity. **Many concepts featured a society of life spheres, of bubbles in which people's framework of values is reflected by their environment.**

Religion came up in many ways, either because there should be a role for religion or because there should be no place for it in society, and at least not play a divisive role. In Istanbul this issue was subject to major discussion. Agreement was not found. Some of the participants strongly desired a community without religion, where there was respect for everyone, while others could not see how a community without religion could have a moral system in place and foster respect. This intensity and topic of conversation differed strongly with, for example, the ideas put forward in London or Amsterdam, where the role of religion in society was assumed as purely spiritual.

Access, Equality and Participation

This cluster relates to the way society is organised in matters related to justice. Here the most explicitly political themes have been situated, including both social economic issues and the politics of diversity.

Main features

- Tolerance, harmony, and openness instead of segregation are popular in especially South Eastern and Eastern Europe.
- Inclusive and participatory society: citizens having responsibility and bottom-up processes are also something that is valued by many participants and widely included in the utopian cities. This was most prominent in Western European cities.

- Equality, fairness and equal access to institutions was something mostly at play in Western European cities like London and Berlin.
- Other issues: radical democracy, small-scale communism, and freedom.

As with wellbeing, quality of life and ecology, when it comes to access, equality, and participation utopian concepts tend to comprise first and foremost those aspects that are missing or failing. A Dutch person is for example not likely to ever have problems during his or her life trying to get into a country for whatever purpose, certainly not for visiting family. This is very different for someone from for example Bulgaria or Serbia, who still encounters difficulties travelling around Europe.

Across the board, but peaking in the workshops **in Central and Eastern Europe, Tolerance And The Ideal Of ‘No Conflict’ came up as a major issue**. Many perceive this ‘politics of diversity’ as the most prominent matter in society, more so than socio-economic matters. Looking at the trends found in the stories across the continent, this is the most frequently returning theme. The young Europeans we encountered feel very committed to openness and tolerance. Lack of tolerance and disturbing conflict is apparently what feeds most fear and brings back dire memories. This trend is most salient in the East, in regions with recent conflicts. Participants drew up cities that were multicultural societies with a



Sofia, 'Urban Colorama'

high level of diversity, yet where segregation did not exist and openness or 'no nationality' as a state of mind was a favoured concept, which should aid to overcome second-class European citizenship and segregation problems. **The possibility to move freely from city to city, or country to country, to have no borders or 'no key', surfaced many times.** Related to this we found a craving for cosmopolitanism expressed in Istanbul, taking openness to another level and pointing towards a possible avenue for overcoming resentment of the Other.

A strong interest was found in matters of Socio-Economic Justice And Participatory Politics during the workshops in cities in Western Europe. There was attention for equality and a fair society in the tradition of John Rawls, whose theory of justice as fairness envisions a society of free citizens holding equal basic rights cooperating within an egalitarian economic system. London participants in particular emphasize these issues and the concepts of equal access to institutions and participation were expressed in several of the utopian cities here. Participation goes a qualitative step further than access: with access one is just granted access to predesigned institutions, while through participation citizens are granted the possibility to take part in the design of these institutions. Although access is the gateway for participation, the latter adds a level of democracy and equal rights which alters the dynamic of society. Clearly participation is easier to realise in small communities, and a yearning for this type of small-scale democratic societal organisation turned out to be present in many forms. Prague, where equality was an important issue as well, was in a way an outlier in joining the Western European workshops in this focus. Of course, while geographically part of Central Europe, the Czechs have always been and felt close to Western Europe culturally.

Many people in the region regret what has happened in the former Soviet countries where people lost a sense of community and equality after the fall of Communism and everything seems to be focused on money and getting ahead. Values of public good and community that once existed have been lost. A question which comes to mind is how can a society be organised so that these values to thrive again without losing our current attainments?

More on the radical side, in Prague participants developed ideas for Alternative Incentive Systems for the economy, rewarding respect and altruism rather than greed. They also incorporated a barter economy where money would be absent and exchange of goods the alternative. This

idea is not entirely off the map: **there is a variety of initiatives across the world and in Europe that engage in barter. Some are born out of idealism, some out of necessity.** There are also initiatives for different incentive schemes and economic models in the field of innovation, particularly in software and medicines. One must also think about the commons, 'Creative Commons' licenses, and the access to knowledge movement.

Bottom-up organisation is generally favoured over top-down imposed governance. This preference manifests itself quite strongly with participants across the board, yet a bit more in the Eastern European cities. Again, a clear connection is present with small-scale participatory politics, democracy, and choices in lifestyle and environment. Bottom-up organisation goes hand in hand with small communities and participatory civil society. This also relates to the general importance given to a strong and active public sphere and a strong civil society. Both are vehicles for citizen involvement, democracy and participatory politics.

This clear preference is somewhat remarkable, as there is relatively little mass engagement in civil society initiatives. But maybe small-scale civil society initiatives hold the future as belief and engagement in mainstream party politics decreases. NGOs and civil society movements have over the last decade played an important role in bringing issues to the political agenda and taking a progressive stance on issues like human rights and the environment.

Based on the many Utopian cities constructed, the trends we found and the relating underlying ideas, we have constructed three Utopian European societies. These Utopian visions give a sense of what is considered desirable and with that some direction for projects to develop.

B. Sketching Utopia: Three Visions

Openness and Ecology

In this Europe **all internal borders have dissolved.** Citizens from the various countries have full equal rights and citizenship. All citizens can move freely between countries. Openness and Tolerance are highly held values, and the idea that a society exists of and is shared by many different people from diverse places is widely embraced. **Diversity is universally recognized as something that makes a society rich, dynamic and beautiful.** Prejudices have

The powerful norm setting by civil society and political leaders eventually led to a political agreement between Europe and Latin America, which was then globalised through multilateral organisations. These **institutions put policies in place that translated into massive behavioural change as well as binding laws that forced vested interest to adapt to the new realities of this human progress.**

Public and private initiatives have managed to close most production-waste-cycles, resulting in a minimal ecological footprint. Local energy collectives have forced large centralized power companies into a marginal position. The big conglomerates now only provide the infrastructure necessary for prosumers to trade and exchange their locally generated energy. The agricultural sector has also seen a major overhaul. **Local farming and organically produced foods now constitute the majority of foods.** Generally, all food comes from within 400 kilometres of the place where it is sold. **Europeans have a mostly vegetarian diet and people produce most of their vegetables their selves through small local cooperatives.** Urban farming often by means of rooftop farming is very common, this close engagement has had the effect that people are much more connected to what they eat and rarely throw food away.

Utopia in 4 movements – Sam Green & David Cerf

“A brilliantly witty, but also moving meditation on our loss of faith in the dream of progress. Completely original a new form of live story-telling. I loved it.” — Adam Curtis Director, The Power Of Nightmares

Danube spotted this film in the IDFA programme 2010 and went to see it. It had been screened twice at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival earlier that year. In this “live” documentary; Green himself narrates the 75-minute film while a live band provides the sound track. The movie set up, the use of pictures and examples and the rationale behind it were all amazingly similar to the presentation Danube gives in it workshop. By showing images of different utopian impulses throughout history, the documentary stressed there had been the grand inspiring ideas in the past that mobilized so many people, these ideas not all turn out for the good, but there was an inspiring belief in human progress and the possibility of alternatives. The point they make very convincingly is that these beliefs and the accompanying dreams are now painfully missing, there is no vision of an alternative or even the believe that an alternative might exist. utopiainfourmovements.com

Community Life and Perfect Politics.

In this Europe people mostly live in communities that fully reflect their personal value framework. The principle of personal freedom to choose one's life and to design and live it according to ones' believes takes prominence. The acceptance of this freedom and the ideas of moral equality and tolerance are basic values. **Society stimulates radical self-development and expression and rejects repression through rigid morals or dogmas. People are encouraged to be their selves entirely, to develop their sense of individuality while at the same time valuing a sense of community and belonging to one.**



Amsterdam, 'Sense City'

Being a nature lover, raver, hippie, shopper, conservative gay man, dog-loving lesbian, family oriented banker or a trendy yuppie, there is always a place where one will feel at home. Within cities different neighbourhoods cater to different needs, outside of cities towns represent several subcultures and small villages tend to be communities of a certain subculture. Through the internet and the ample transport and travel opportunities, people easily learn about communities that fit their desires and needs and move there without difficulty. At the same time, there are also plentiful mixed communities, where people of very different lifestyles live together.

Communities govern themselves on many levels as governance is radically decentralized. Basic needs and regulations are taken care of by central European or national governments, but issues like schooling, integration, provision for the community, and childcare are to a large extent organized locally. People participate in the governance of their communities and institutions and organization is mainly bottom up.

Civil society plays a prominent role in overall governance. **Interests of citizens are represented through strong and representative civil society networks that operate on a community level, a national level, and the European level.** There is a voting system, through which citizen can indicate their allegiance with the different groups and goals. Based on these votes civil society organizations (Cso's) gain a certain amount of weight in political contributions. **Cso's no longer just provide checks and balance to the parliaments, executive and judiciary, but have a more formal role.** They are now always formally consulted, in a number of cases their consent

Occupy and the Global protests - Utopia Revived

"Sous la pave, la plage"

During the finalisation of this project, reality somewhat changed! From the Arab spring starting in Tunisia to the indignados in Spain, and to the youth finally awaking from their complacency in Moscow, the world this year has experienced a comeback of utopian thought. In all these places young people do no longer accept the system they are in and believe they can change it into something better. We have seen it with Occupy Wall street protestors NYC, Oakland and in countless other cities in the US and around the world. The movement questions social inequality and the financial-economic system, calling for a more fair and just society.

Why can these movements be considered utopian? Because they made it possible to imagine alternative futures, to liberate people from societal structures that do not work for the majority. Occupy changed the conversation, in the US it put inequality more firmly on the agenda and made the middle class more self conscious and it did influence the political programs of both democrats and republicans. Change is being achieved. **occupywallst.org**

is necessary and their agenda setting power is formal. They are however still very distinct from political parties as they remain mostly based around single or a cluster of issues, representing sometimes overall public good issues and sometimes specific interest group issues. **Cso's are concerned with a wide variety of issues, from clean water in a certain region, the treatment of the prison population, poverty in developing countries to the quality of the digital environment.** Cso's tend to be quite decentralized and specific individuals do not play a very dominant role in decision-making or representation.



London, 'Ongoing Changes'

Cso's that represent specific citizen interest groups are not to be confused with corporate interests. In this society corporate interests take much more of back seat, as it is universally recognized corporations do not represent public interests but only themselves and that their interests can well be in contra of the public good. **This is in sharp contrast with the old Europe, where the interest of corporations where commonly equalled with the public good and dominated political decision-making.**

A widely spread dissatisfaction of the general population with this bias of interest presentation in politics, facilitated by online information sharing, eventually reached a tipping point. This allowed Cso's to gain this position which once obtained, seems such a natural one. **The corrupted and democratically deficit system of the old times eventually had to be replaced with true participatory,**

inclusive and representative democracy. More than ever every citizen here feels he or she is part of the society by actively engaging or truly being represented.

Technological Savvy and Public Good Europe

In this Europe technology radically contributes to the improvement of human wellbeing. Everyone has equitable access to technology, internet is free and no longer owned by private companies, but is considered a public good. This facilitates and promotes equal opportunity and social mobility. Privacy concerns on the internet are taken care of and people surf the online public sphere without hassle.

Technology has allowed for increased efficiency, clean energy and less working hours per person per day. It has increased quality of life for the majority of people, having allowed for efficiency but also a healthy work life balance. A fast and comfortable transport system consisting of sky trains, underground trains, and land trains connects neighbourhoods and cities. Bike routes, which rarely intersect with other traffic, are also widely used. At the same time, people often work from a distance and at their own time schedule. Rush hours and commuting times are not really issues anymore.

In this European society alternative economics that serve the public good have gained ground. A special momentum that culminated in the 2020's led structural changes to take place in the European economies and beyond. **The global protests against the injustice and inequality of the capitalist system a decade earlier effectively announced the change. The negative externalities of dominant value accumulation and financial mechanisms were widely recognized.** Alternatives to an intensely capitalized society where everything was valorised in money were welcomed.

An organized barter economy and gift economy operate parallel to the monetary system, allowing for people to trade or share goods, labour and time.

Experiments with barter economies and time-sharing happening already on a small

scale throughout Europe served as an example. People can for example spend time fixing someone's car and receive the same amount of time in help with their taxes. The barter & gift system radically diminished the spilling of goods and has dampened the consumerism as known in the old Europe.

Apart from this in many instances the incentives of the reward system have been changed in order for actions that contribute to the public good to be rewarded rather than those that contribute mainly to corporate or the interests of the few.



'Diversity', Lisbon

The ideas of the commons or public goods are the major economic reference points in this society. The access to knowledge movement, which started as a loose collection of civil society groups, governments, and individuals succeeded in changing the way knowledge is handled. It considered intellectual property rights, which in the old Europe were seen a main asset for the European economy, as major obstacles for access to invaluable public knowledge goods. **From being the property of the few and enclosed by intellectual property rights, knowledge has become recognized as a public good, universally accessible by law. The idea that access to knowledge should be linked to fundamental principles of justice, freedom, and economic development has become a political and legal reality.**

DREAM - Stephen Duncombe

Stephen Duncombe is a social activist, author and professor at New York University who wrote the book *Dream: reimagining progressive politics in an age of fantasy*. The book describes how there is a vacuum of ideas on the progressive side with a lack of inspiring alternatives. There is a need for imagination and dreams of alternatives, ideals and stories. Danube interviewed Stephen in New York City. We had recognized much of the thinking of Duncombe, although he has taken the need for dreams into an even more practical direction, showing how compelling stories and attractive narratives could be connected directly to politics. We were interested to learn whether his book had been picked up by politicians, whether the ideas had been developed. But no, Duncombe explained, sure in progressive circles the book did well but left wing progressive theory is very far removed from mainstream politics in the US. Even though Obama's change campaign did resonate with Duncombe's ideas. He noted this is very different in Europe where the connection between progressive intellectuals and mainstream politics is most certainly there.

Regarding the lack of ideas Duncombe agrees there are many parallels with Europe, where the vacuum of dreams and inspiration is most urgent in the discussion about tolerance and openness. Xenophobia and national retreat have been gaining ground, using powerful narratives of fear and nostalgia, and intensified by the financial economic crisis. There has been little the centre and the left did against the surge in far right parties and sentiment across the European continent. Here Duncombe sees a role for utopian thought and dreams, even nostalgic dreams, and the creation of a vision for an attractive Europe or nation state that is reconcilable with the ethic of openness and tolerance.

Funny enough, the interest with the concept of Utopia as coined by Thomas More was also shared. It turned out Duncombe is now working on *OpenUtopia*, a new edition of Thomas More's *Utopia*. *OpenUtopia* is an open-source, open-access, web-based edition of the book with an extensive introduction. One of the main concepts of Thomas More is honoured here, no property: the edition is licensed under an open access creative commons license. Duncombe also sees the essence of the no place in the function of utopia. One of the principles that lead his Centre for Artistic Activism also states: 'We believe in Utopia, not as a destination but as a direction.'
theopenutopia.org

3. QUO VADIS?

In the Utopian City project young people were given a blank slate to think about their futures and sketch a desirable one. Cities are a colourful playground and an apt proxy for society as life is increasingly lived in cities, over half of the world population now doing so. Danube believes this exercise has unveiled something unique and distinctive, something that does not reveal itself when thinking on a more practical policy-oriented level. This chapter presents voices of a new European generation, their dreams, concerns, and expectations. **The stories told are not just those of the participants, but also of other people we met and worked with along our venture, and of other groups engaging in initiatives in the same realm.**

From the previous sections it becomes clear that **next generation of Europeans has a great deal of energy and is easily inspired to generate ideas for the future.** Young people today do have plenty of ideas about the future, as well as energy and enthusiasm and are ready to do things and improve their societies. Moreover, quite heartening different actors across the globe came to the same conclusions regarding the need for utopian thinking, by means of a similar analysis of intellectual history and contemporary society.

Throughout Europe, workshop participants passionately threw themselves into the debate, built their cities, and argued about what was the best possible society. One thing to consider is that **this generation is not settling for halfway solutions,** yet expects a great deal. There are differences across the regions to be noticed. Very practical ideas on quality of life issues contrast with more abstract wellbeing concerns as well as a range of political justice ideas differ from dreams on solving urgent practical matters. Yet everywhere we encountered a craving for original thinking and truly new ideas.

Related to this Danube unexpectedly found a wealth of other initiatives on Utopia. It is almost like there is a movement on Utopia operating in parallel to current policy and academic debates. So not unsurprisingly, the recent developments of the protests around the world and the Occupy movement have in a way broken further through the earlier presumed End of History. We can see the belief in the possibility of an

alternative is quite powerful, even though there is no clear vision or design of that alternative. In the course of this project reality has changed and alternatives are again being imagined and fought for.



‘New Ending’ by Maaïke Anne Stevens, London

Moving Forward: Small Utopias

It is necessary to think about ways to progress without getting lost in policy minutia. A discussion is needed on what is desirable and what deserves attention, without being forced to give policy recommendations just yet. **A fruitful course would be to remain in the domain of utopian thought, to stimulate creativity and original thinking, before disqualifying ideas based on possible practical limitations.** This strategy has proven to lead to inspirational engagement and a type of pure concepts that Danube found across Europe. We suggest that an imaginative cross-border discussion is continuously held between young Europeans, civil society, politicians, and journalists to generate new ideas and a sense of direction for Europe.

There are many questions to be addressed like:

What are useful ways to think about small community based democracy? How can we organise participatory politics, and an active public sphere?

Is there a role for an organized barter of gift economy next to our monetary system?

How can the incentives of our rewards system be changed or tweaked?

What is the role of technology? Is the hope for and belief of the younger generation in the power of science and technology reasonable?

How can these calls for sustainability be translated into behavioural change?

Of course, we do need to think about how these ideas may contribute to the discourse in and around Europe, and which topics need to be on the political agenda. The utopias of Eric Olin Wright and Jay Winter described in the first chapter, real and minor utopias, suggest there might be some room for pragmatism. Both the idea of real utopias and that of minor utopias represent modest approaches to utopia. Wright argues that a clear vision of an alternative, viable society and its underlying principles is needed, and that we should go about it step by step. Winter, on the other hand, argues that the need to believe in an alternative society is most important, even if we only have a vague notion of what that alternative may look like. Notably, what both approaches have in common is that they reject the idea of a blueprint.

We propose a framework which combines the approaches of minor and real utopias. We call our variation on this type of approach ‘small utopias’. Small utopias are defined by 1) the belief in the possibility of an alternative, 2) a firm grasp of the principles that the ideal alternative is based upon, and 3) a clear vision of a project that contributes to that alternative.

Unlike Wright’s real utopias the small utopias are initially not constrained by a clear concept of a viable, achievable endpoint. On the contrary, small utopias are essentially conceived by an unconstrained imagination. The creation of this non attainable, but ideal place will provide direction for subsequent thought and action.

Moreover the small utopian projects do not all contribute to institution building, nor are they all part of the same larger encompassing narrative. Instead, **many small utopias may co-exist, tell different stories and can also be of a temporary nature. These stories exist in parallel to each other and can present conflicting visions. As with the different stories of the brothers Grimm, the morals of the different stories can be incommensurable.**

Examples of these temporary existing stories are the play *The Cloud*, or the live documentary *Utopia in Four movements*. In that sense small utopias can be similar to the minor utopias as described by Jay Winter. There are other examples of small utopias, such as projects of civil society groups, political projects, human rights groups. The difference with other public good initiatives is that these projects do not just criticise the current state of affairs, they also have a clear idea of the direction in which we should head, a lucid idea of the alternative and its underlying principles.

The topics raised in the utopian workshops hold many potential small utopias. Some of those represent a clearer vision of an alternative society than others. When there is a vision of an alternative, the next step is to try to derive a clear view of the principles underlying these ideas, and to develop projects based on these principles. When enough people put their minds to it, this can be done.

The visions and ideas presented above, and the ensuing small utopias, are European stories. We hope this publication will inspire people to further develop insights into the pertinent issues identified and furthermore to develop initiatives on the basis of the vision and dreams presented. Finally, we also hope to inspire the reader to develop his own vision of the future.

-END-



CITY REPORTS

by the DANUBE FOUNDATION



AMSTERDAM - Happy and abstract people

May 2008

Our first Utopian City was in Amsterdam. Danube was preparing the conference on Utopia and making contacts in different European cities. Investing time and energy on a project that we ended up not getting off the ground, Danube was in Budapest in February 2008. Danube was also there to meet the Minister of Culture of Hungary, who was Danube's advisory

board, to see if she had funding to organise

our Utopia European Vistas conference in Hungary. She loved our manifesto; she loved the idea, but could not promise anything..

However, Danube also met cultural organiser Elroy Thumler in Budapest, organising the mini festival *My City Amsterdam* that weekend. Danube already had the idea for the Utopian City workshop but hadn't finalised it nor had it found a platform yet. Elroy invited us to hold a workshop during '*My City Budapest*' in Amsterdam in May which was a great opportunity. We further developed the idea and went for it. We asked urban strategist Kai van Hasselt to give an introductory lecture, and scoured Amsterdam for old magazines and input.

The workshop was organised at the Sugar Factory, a club just off popular of Leidse Plein. The venue was dimly lit, with various screens for the specially made utopia city movie, by artist Mathijs Hoitsma playing and an excellent sound system to provide music during the workshop. As this was the first time the workshop was held, it was quite a test and exciting to find out whether it would inspire people participants. Luckily, the people joining loved it. They were all very engaged and did not want to stop developing their city

once it was time. The winning group, although having never met before the event, danced a joint victory dance. This spirit was inspiring and we realized we had a pretty

good concept going that was worth repeating and developing further.



The concepts developed by the Amsterdam groups were quite abstract.

Concerned mainly with technology, democracy, and comfort

there was also the recurring theme of tolerance and pluralism. Wireless Water World, is an example – practical in a way, but very telling in its non-addressing of what were in other cities pressing issues, like transport, dirt, or equality. Another City, which ended up winning

was Brain City: *The population of this Utopian city is bound together by ties sustained through strong participation*

of its members in civil society. In Brain City, characterized by a culture of tolerance, a plethora of religious, ethnic and cultural differences exists. This is part and parcel of the vision of Utopia of its architects. Such differences are overcome through continuous debate, being at the root of a lively, yet ultimately harmonious society.

Subsequently, Elroy invited us to be part of a Balkan Tour. The tour went to three major cities, together with the band Voicst, accompanied by huge old garbage truck which functioned as a ad hoc stage. There was no doubt about it that we would accept.

– by Sophie Bloemen

BALKAN road trip -

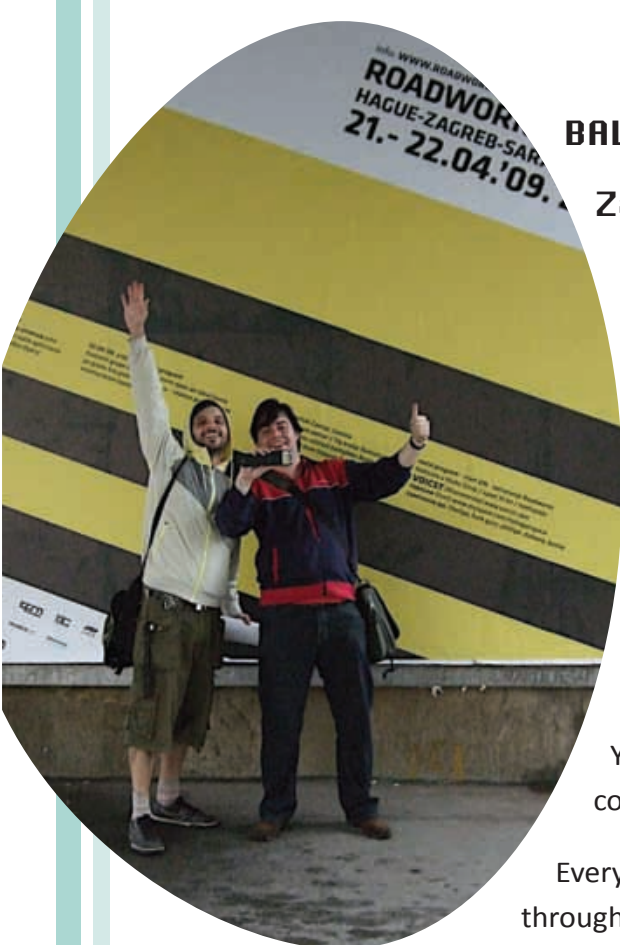
Zagreb > Sarajevo > Belgrade

April 2009

Hopeful and resourceful Old Yugos parked along the streets of the tree-lined streets of the old city centre are one of the few reminders of **Zagreb's** recent history. The cars built in nowadays Serbia were Yugoslavia's answers to Russia's Lada. They were cheap, easy to maintain, and their simple design made them nearly indestructible. Nearly twenty years after Yugoslavia fell apart, the vehicles are still a common sight in Croatia's capital.

Everything else has changed; the city went through rapid transition. Zagreb survived the civil war with hardly any damage done. Nowadays the centre is well preserved, buildings are being restored, and Zagreb has an air of grandness. The city survived the Yugoslavia conflict of the 1990s almost without a scratch. Not only did the stunning red-yellow facade Habsburg buildings survive, the massive concrete blocks of Tito's communist era also made it into the 21st century.

The Studentski Centar, the venue where the Danube Foundation organized the Utopian City Zagreb workshop, is one of the latter. Hidden behind an impressive street front only a small underpass gives access to the centre, which is part of the university campus. Apart from ten chairs furniture is missing, but students



actively use the slightly run-down venue. Art works decorate the walls. Groups are talking, drinking coffee, or just reading a book. One corner serves as a radio station, aired live online. It feels like the right place to kick-off the Utopian City workshop series in the Balkans.

The Danube Foundation was invited to join the Dutch band Voicst and Natwerk, specialized in modified event-vehicles, on the Roadworks tour. This cultural program, organized by BKB and financed by the city of The Hague, aims to strengthen the relations between the former Yugoslavian countries and the Netherlands.

The relation is particularly complex because of the Dutch involvement in the 1991-1995 civil conflict, the 1999 war over Kosovo, and Holland hosting the Yugoslavia War Tribunal. Hence, improvement of the relation between the countries is more than welcome.



While Natwerk tried to get their garbage-truck-turned-into-mobile-stage through Croatia customs, Danube kicked off with the Utopian City workshop.

Despite the rainy weather an interesting mix of young Croats showed up. Most of the participants had a background in the arts. After Jan ter Burg's inspiring talk on utopian thought the groups started working on their ideal societies with hardly any additional instructions needed.

It was stunning to notice the groups worked in almost complete silence. Quiet voices, contemplating faces. Whereas during most workshops the participants discuss loudly, the people from Zagreb kept volume low – what contrast with the bustling city outside. But despite this silence three concepts steadily emerged.

The City Under Human Measures, as one of the concepts is called, takes the human body as a template. As the name indicates human being defines the scale on which a city or society develops. In addition the city grows and evolves as a human being. Planning is virtually absent and the development is defined and led by its inhabitants.

Organic growth is also present in the Tree House-concept. Children's perception of the world forms the core of Tree House. Utopia is presented as a child, without prejudice or framed notion of reality. A tree house serves as a metaphor of this perception. However Tree House is not entirely disconnected of reality. The real world is present at its roots, serving as utopia's foundations.

Communitopia, the third concept, strongly stands out and was selected as the best collage. Although this conception of utopia does not resemble a city at all, the group takes one of the most important aspects of a city and of modern society as starting point. Cities nowadays function as spaces of communication. People communicate with people, people communicate with systems, and systems communicate with systems. Despite all modern technology, a lot of potential in exchanging ideas remains unused because most communication follows readily available paths. Being channelled many gaps are present in everyday society. An unchanneled, organic mode of communication solves these problems and will be able to cover currents gaps. Not only will people be better able to interact, an organic mode of interaction will increase innovation and the emergence of truly new ideas brought to a higher level.

In summary the three concepts resulting from the Zagreb workshop can be defined as fairly abstract. They combine strong philosophical references with everyday challenges. As such they connect with the actual city. Since the wars wrecked the Balkans Zagreb reinvented itself, developed quickly, and allows for new daring dreams once more.

Minimal Utopia

After a lengthy bus drive over winding two-lane roads the contrast with **Sarajevo** is huge. Situated at the heart of the Balkans the city used to be the centre where all cultures and religions met. The city is still recovering from the war. Many buildings still bear the scars of gunfire and exploding mortar shells – craters are ironically called Sarajevo Roses. Foreign project developers have flocked to the city; shopping malls and skyscrapers are popping up everywhere.



The war not only impacted the city physically, but also changed the composition of its inhabitants. The mostly Serbian Orthodox Christians left for Serbia, with Islamic Bosniaks making up the lion share of the community nowadays. This does not make Sarajevo a boring place. On the contrary the relatively small city is still very lively, with people filling the streets both in day and night time.

Sarajevo still has catching up to do, which was also expressed during the workshop, which Danube organized together with Kriterion Sarajevo at the crumbling university campus. The relatively young participants – about half of them were under twenty – presented concepts mainly focusing on improving basic everyday life.

Two concepts stand out because they strikingly seem to grasp the twofold struggle Sarajevo. Rainbow City addresses the challenges of physical redevelopment as well as new material dreams. There are places for leisure, concerts, carnivals, good food and drinks. Rainbow City is organized and structured, with buildings and housing of good quality, vast squares and ponds. However, as the name symbolically implies, the city represents the pluriformity of its population. All nationalities, religions, and ethnicities live in close harmony.

This social aspect is elaborately addressed the concept Living the Future. Presented as a giant post card for Thomas More the plan lays out a scheme to reunite the two city centers. Housing distinct social and ethnic communities bringing the centers together would be a way to also reintroduce Sarajevo's famous multi-ethnic character. Catholic and Orthodox churches are still within walking distance of Ottoman mosques in the Stari Grad, the old center, yet most



orthodox residents have moved to a Sarajevo neighbourhood situated next to the airport, since this quarter is officially part of the Republika Srpska, to show that the city is still clearly divided along religious lines

Apart from the interesting concepts, the enthusiasm of the Sarajevo participants was truly heartwarming. The city might still have a long way ahead, but it is clear that the positive and constructive spirit is truly there.

Serious planning in edgy surroundings

From Sarajevo the Roadworks tour took Danube to Serbia's capital **Belgrade**. Also scarred by war – NATO planes bombed the city as recent as 1999 – the city has embraced its grandeur as it had before. Impressive buildings dominate the city centre, and Hotel Moscow still stands as a legacy to the capital's days under communist rule. The city is lively, galleries sport interesting abstract artwork, book shops are filled with beautiful books.

Danube found itself privileged to organize the Utopian City workshop at the Grad cultural centre, a former warehouse located on the shore where the Danube and Sava rivers join. It was at this spot where the Habsburg empire met Serbia in the 19th century and the grand old bridge overlooking the quarter used to have a border customs station. Precisely for this reason, this area of Belgrade prospered, since entrepreneurs settled here, establishing warehouses. Since then borders have shifted; Yugoslavia came into being, and to this day borders seem to be on the walk in this complex region. The audience was a mix of art students, architects, and social scientists.

Interestingly all five groups took the city of Belgrade as a starting point for their concepts in a concrete way. They used their city as a framework, like a laboratory set for daring experiments. An example is the concept City of Light and Winds which can be typified as modernist in its approach of shaping the physical environment. Large building blocks on the slopes surrounding the Sava and Danube rivers are pierced by tunnels. These pipes can be used by transportation systems, connecting or disconnecting city blocks. But they can also house wind turbines, or other power generating machines. Wind and light pass freely through them.



The most interesting and therefore winning concept is called Trash Magnet. This plan will emerge in the midst of Belgrade, functioning as a city within the city. Situated on an island where the Danube and Sava rivers join, the island is crucial for the city. It

has its own ecosystem and works as filter for the city. In its utopian conception Trash City will be used by people who just arrive in the city, not having a place to live yet. They will construct this temporal city using old materials and trash. It's in constant motion and continuous development, because the inhabitants are supposed to leave the island when they find a regular place to live in the city.



All socio-economic layers of society are present on the island, striving for diversity. Since the island adapts to the new inhabitants and the new inhabitants adapt to the island a new sustainable ecosystem will emerge. Therefore the island keeps its valuable role for the city of Belgrade.

Zagreb, Sarajevo and Belgrade each left its own lasting impression. It is hard to think of these cities once being part of one country. Since the wars they have developed or strengthened their own identities. Identities that were once an amalgam, providing Yugoslavia with its own unique sense of being. Since then each country appears to have adopted one element; the Croatians content themselves with Habsburg grandeur, as many of the Zagreb streets convincingly do. In Bosnia the long Ottoman influence is felt in its mosques and oriental architecture, while in Serbia the orthodox faith is being acclaimed as the new unifying factor. Overlooking Belgrade, the largest orthodox cathedral in the world, St Sava still unfinished, has become one of the new landmarks of Belgrade. These identities, still in motion and hopefully will keep moving, were expressed vividly during the three workshops. It shows the strength of its inhabitants. Unfortunately, at the same time the fascinating mix of cultures, religion and culture that once defined the cities is waning.

- by Thijs van Uelzen

BALKAN

BERLIN – Open spaces in constant flux

February 2010

Could a city have too much history? An overload of utopian thought? If so Berlin would be a certain candidate. Few European cities can boast such a dramatic past over the course of the last century. Elements testament to this can be found all across the city; Wilhelmian Berlin, with grand Gründerzeit structures, built to impress, or the buzzing frantic Bauhaus metropolis of the 1920s. This happy period was followed by bleaker times, Nazism and Communism, two totalitarian ideologies that both left their marks on this city. The last fights of

World War II took place in its streets with many bullet and mortar holes are still silent reminders to this.

It was the sheer destruction of war and subsequent division that tore the traditional city centre apart creating a multi-layered and multi-centered cityscape. Yet in 1989 a new era started. The famously rebuilt Potsdamerplatz is a well-known example. Another building certainly worth mentioning, although not particularly large, is the Collegium Hungaricum, built in 2007, just off Unter den Linden. The Utopian City workshop took place here, as the Collegium not only provides space for Hungarian culture, but specifically aims to be an institute in a broader European perspective which is why we were welcome to hold the workshop on their premises.

The workshop started with a short opening by Miss Gönczy, our contact person at the Collegium and was also attended by Martin Wilhelm, President of the Berlin-based Citizens for Europe Foundation. A recurring element in the discussions that took place is the multitude that Berlin is. Berlin is perceived to be not so much as one city, but a wide variety of cities, which each having its own distinct particular atmosphere, be it bourgeois, bohemian or punk adding to a sense of incompleteness. As was already famously stated by art historian Karl Scheffer in 1910: *'Berlin is a city condemned always to become, never to be.'* Stating a frame of



mind, conveying a Berlin that seems to be perpetually reinventing itself, yet at the same time incapable of simply being.

This lack of one single centre gives room for uncertainty and a desire to be taken seriously, both being powerful drives for creativity. This can be seen in architecture, but also in the realm of thought. Berlin is a good place for alternative ways of living. There is an imagination to change existing formulas and social boundaries. That is why artists and young creatives from all over Europe move here. Vast open spaces are abound, waiting to be re-used, questioning the function and use of urban space. Given its turbulent history this can produce interesting insights, the Utopian City workshop revealed. Danube rented a down-town apartment, just off Pariser Platz with its Brandenburger Tor.

Yet the building the team stayed at was an example of Plattenbau, a DDR prefab flat. It was not, however, a regular form of Plattenbau, but one of the more upscale kind, because it was specifically build for the DDR elite, as the building stood directly by the wall, gazing out over West-Berlin. In front of the building there was a car park. Yet, for an ordinary car park it attracted an unusual amount of people, since this was the location where Hitler spent his last days in his bunker. Nowadays it is adjoined by the Holocaust memorial, a women-only hotel, sport tracks, various political institutes and a men-only sauna around the corner. Surely only in Berlin, can such an eclectic mix exist right at the heart of the historical centre.

In such an environment it is easy to give free way to utopian thought, as everything seems to



be in a constant flux. Buildings appear and disappear and so do ideologies. During our workshop this led to some inspiring out-of-the-box thoughts. Visions of floating zeppelins containing large forests and lush gardens are one example. The duality of city versus countryside was embraced, and 'open spaces in Berlin should remain', just that, open spaces, since they give people a chance of discovery.

Berlin is currently perceived to be a party place for youngsters, attracted by its energy and low costs, as the mayor phrased it: 'Arm, aber sexy.' However Berlin is not centrally located as it once used to be, it is now only a one hour drive to Poland. This and the decentralization that took place after 1945, resulted in a shift of economic power to other parts of Germany. People may love to study in Berlin, finding a job here is difficult.

A city that was home to many influential thinkers such as Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno will continue its quest for identity and shaping its urban space as each generation adds new layers of Berlin, a battlefield where conflicting Utopias met and fought.

- by Jan ter Burg



LONDON - Civil participation in an East End institution

May 2010

Danube travelled to London by plane and because of delayed flights in Schiphol, only arrived late in the evening in Brixton, South London. The neighbourhood manifested itself that night as more or less living up to its tricky reputation. After recovering from nearly being aggressively robbed of an iPhone we nonetheless played a great table football match in a local bar.



The London Utopian City workshop would take place the next day in Toynbee Hall, in Whitechapel, East London. Toynbee Hall is a centre for social reform with a rich social history and was opened in the late 19th century when it facilitated and housed progressive leaders moving to the poor east side of the city to live among the lower classes and connect to the community. These leaders would return to their respective fields and careers after this experience. William Beveridge, the famous British economist and social reformer who was closely associated with the development of the welfare state was one of its most famous residents. The stay at Toynbee Hall had an important influence on his thinking. The centre has always retained its function, still acting as a local community centre offering assistance programs to the neighbourhood residents.

The Hall is located by Aldgate East Metro Station, near the infamous Brick Lane. Being the centre of a massive Indian community this street is home to seemingly thousands of Indian restaurants, but also to artsy London. Brick Lane and the surrounding area feature popular upscale flea markets

on Sunday, and a variety of organic coffee shops, clubs and many very fashionable but shabby people.

Danube organised this workshop in collaboration with European Alternatives, a civil society organisation devoted to exploring the potential for transnational politics and culture. Danube has been in contact with the organisation for years and shares with them the values of trans-nationalism, the need for a European public sphere and real European democracy. The workshop formed part of the Trans-Europa Festival that European Alternatives organises every year, a cultural festival and a political event, happening in 12 cities simultaneously.

Niccolo Milanese, of European Alternatives opened the festival day, after which a report on democracy building in Romania was given followed by an interview with sociologist Saskia Sassen, noted for her term The Global City. She spoke about Global democracy, clearly a Utopian idea which deserves to be developed and entertained, and very connected to our discussions.

Representative for London the workshop participants were a very international group, highly educated and transmitting an air of certainty that contrasted a great deal with some of our experiences in other cities. The location was quite something. While the main room was beautiful, bearing stature with paintings of important men and decorated ceilings, the building overall was and old not especially well kept. The workshop took place in an adjacent part, here ceilings were low, the space had a couple of small rooms separated by thin walls with large windows and a sort of hallway running through them. The small rooms were large enough for two tables and some chairs, perfect for building a utopian city with a little group of people.

Catching the eye was the ample attention for issues regarding equality, participation and fairness. More concretely possibility for all to have access to institutions was prioritized.



The cities created were quite abstract, focusing on governance and participation, the past and consciousness, values and progress, rather than on transport and physical wellbeing. There was also quite some attention for never ending progressive change and different life spheres.

Ongoing Changing City

As its title reflects the Ongoing Changing City is about change and dynamics. Its collage consists of a spiral portraying the ever-continuing process of change within a city and society. Utopia is the end-goal of this spiral, even though it may never get there, Utopia serves as a lighthouse to attract the spiral.

This change is displayed within architecture, with buildings have the capacity to adapt and change. Society and people are in a constant state of flux as well, constantly adjusting and changing. Impetus is put upon bottom-up processes since this is a democratic inclusive society where strong legislation exists in order to build up this city.



It has a pragmatic approach and this city slowly emerges during a never ending conceptual dialectic process. Creation takes place upon the principle of common accept of the community. It's the people that make this city and everyone has a right to participate, which includes equal access to institutions.

One of the Cities was a Dystopia—the city of reversed values-being led by the libertarianism, where free will reigns supreme. As such everything is permitted which brings along the question where one's freedom ends and another begins. A critique on nihilism, but also on morality?

London participants brought us what is to be expected from this sophisticated thoroughly international metropolis: a complex and sophisticated take on utopia

and society. Their imagination was testimony of awareness of the past and the encountered pitfalls, while at the same time there was an idealistic and optimistic look forward. This contrast was exemplified by one of the cities that bore modernistic and postmodern elements in its physical structure and lay out, complementing each other and taking the best of both schools of thought.

- by Sophie Bloemen



SOFIA - Tango on broken pavements

June 2010

The Red House is Bulgaria's capital Sofia is literally a red building. Housing a exhibition spaces, a large room for lectures and a cozy bar with library, the Red House contrasts strongly with Sofia's otherwise grey soviet era high rises and the fast food capitalism that hit the city after the collapse of communism.

The place feels like the perfect location for the Utopian City workshop. This feeling turns out right, when an interesting mix of people shows up. Architects, artists, designers, one or two philosophy students. Above all, everyone really participates, adding insights during the presentation, talking about their own Sofia and what makes the city special.

As the Red House stands out in Sofia, so does the concept Urban Colorama during the workshop. Taking the form of coloured heating radiator the concept comprises one big urban structure composed of sub cities shaped by interest and needs. All sub cities are defined by people's specific interest or characteristics, i.e. sport, age, industrial production, gaming, arts. All sub cities will have its own administrative and social services core. People can switch between sub cities, but the related constrains, its social and physical structures of each sub city should be accepted. Represented by a radiator the Utopian City of Europe radiates heat and comfort.

The wining concept is called Mahala. The scheme gives everyone the opportunity to build their house in their own way using sustainable, nature friendly materials in order to stimulate creativity and independence of all citizens. The city is organized in Mahalas, in 'neighborhoods' of two types, which offer housing in blocks as well as family houses. They can be local communities, with a high level of social cohesion. The cityplanning does not provide any infrastructure for cars, since Mahala is off-territory for cars, because everything lies within walking distance. Walking is stimulated by



the layout of the city. Every Mahala is centred around a cultural core, where galleries, cinemas, museums, etc. are located. People can travel from Mahala to Mahala by a air-metro. Energy sufficiency can be considered another fundamental aspect of Mahala. Solar panels provide most of the required energy. The bond between man and nature is always kept in mind.

After the fruitful workshop, most of the participants stay for drinks in the Red House bar. 'If you are interested in city planning, you should walk a little westwards from the centre', says Gradinko, a local Sofia based designer. 'What for? It is awful, and people are crazy there. Why don't you just join tonight for this event of the Sofia Design Week. It is just a ten minute walk from here.'

We opt for the latter, and a little later join a couple of participants. It turns out that Sofia has much more to offer than grey high rises and the Red House. Entering a music flooded park, the festival shows up like our workshop multiplied by a factor hundred. Numerous creative souls are talking, exchanging ideas and dancing until late. Sofia turns out to be a vibrant place where the arts thrive and new ideas are born.

On our way back to hotel, searching for a nightcap, we are confronted by the fast food capitalism once more. Most bars sport large lcd-screens, while visitors watch MTV or soccer in boredom. We will have to do without a last drink, we fear. But then, close to our hotel from a side street from the large synagogue some softly played classical tunes can be heard. Entering the street, we run into a modern looking wine bar. But it is not the wine that is attracting the 30 or so people. They dance flamenco or watch the people dancing. And they are dancing tremendously well. How come people dance flamenco in this far southeast corner of Europe? No one can explain.



When walking around the city the day after, heading westwards as Gardinko advised, I wonder where the vibrancy of last night resides in daytime. Grey looking people walk the broken sidewalks. I have difficulty matching their sluggish way of walking with the elegant choreography we watched last night at the wine bar. The area Gardinko talked about indeed a little edgy but also fascinating. It has some elements of the winning Mahala-concept to it. Passing by a huge new build shopping mall, we walk into neighborhood dominated by dozens of grey high rise flats. Broken cars are left in the parking lots between the buildings. Weeds grow high on the abandoned playgrounds. Laid out as a model neighborhood for people to live and spend their free time, the top down design obviously failed.

But a second look on the buildings reveals people have done their utmost to make the place work for them: Mahala. Whereas in most western European countries it is not done to modify your own bit of an apartment block, adapting seems the norm in Sofia. Almost every balcony has undergone changes. Some have constructed little green houses, others turned their little place outside into an dovecot. They make best out of what they have, and they seem to cope well.

That night, looking for a restaurant to have dinner, the number of fast food serving restaurants seems even bigger than the night before. But again, Sofia seems to keep her beauties well hidden. Entering a large restaurant with a little fountain in the centre and a pianist playing light classical music, we feel as if entering a different Sofia. A different era.

Half way dinner people start dancing flamenco once again. What is up with flamenco and Sofia? Everything feels out of place here. The dancers turn out the same as last night though. 'Sofia is a small city', explains one of the female dancers, when she steps aside for a minute. 'The engaged and culturally interested run into each other all time. It is a small scene.'

- by Thijs van Uelzen





ISTANBUL - Small dreams

October 2010

Walking down the Bosphorus, enjoying the wide horizon and smelling the soft November wind, makes it awkward to realise being on the frontier of two continents. Apparently a significant place, but at once so ordinary and comparable to many other places. The fog impedes the view on the exotic, Asian side of Istanbul, but the uneven contours of the buildings feed the expectation of a busy, lively and dynamic part of the city.

Istanbul is impregnated by the immemorial idea of a bridging city. Its geographical position and the historical developments made Istanbul a controversial connection between East and West, modern and traditional, rational and mystical, secular and sacred. Visiting the city for the first time makes it challenging to explore to what extent citizens of Istanbul recognize themselves in this image of their city. In how far does this romanticized picture of Istanbul apply to the impressions of the city by its citizens?

Wherever you look, the impressive mosques with their minarets and domes dominate Istanbul's skyline. Standing straight, courteously and lonely in a way, those minarets are carefully watching over Istanbul, as being the pearl of Eastern Europe. Its name, meaning in or to a city according to a Greek phrase and having been known as Byzantium, Nea Roma and Constantinople, bares witness to the significant role the city has had in ancient history of Europe. Nevertheless, even when looking at the more recent history, the inner relation between Europe and Turkey is noticeable in the streets of Istanbul. One of the must-see spots of the city, the Hippodrome, speaks little to imagination, but houses the unnoticeable Alman

Çeşmesi, the German Fountain. The fountain, being a present from Wilhelm II (King of Prussia) to Sultan Abdülhamid II, when he deployed the German construction of the Baghdad Railway which would run from Berlin, through Istanbul, to Persian Gulf and is one of the examples which underlines the long history of business relations that Turkey has with other countries in Europe.



Despite its rich history these days the general image of Istanbul is dominated by ordinary city ingredients: the grocery around the corner, a veiled neighbour and kids hanging around the apartment. Shaking off this dominant popular discourse present in our own country seems to be harder than expected even when visiting Istanbul. We catch ourselves unconsciously looking for signs of conservatism, lack of freedom in relationships and lacking freedom of speech. All the confirmations of this discourse which cunningly underpin the arguments behind the hostile attitude towards EU-membership of Turkey are easy to find. Hopefully, our visit to Istanbul is more an exploration of the unknown than a confirmation prejudices.



During our Utopian City workshop, we met the new generation of Turkish citizens, born and raised in Istanbul. Students who just finished high school and eagerly attend university. Young, energetic faces, brave enough to take the stage and impatiently present their ideal picture of Istanbul. Despite so much positivity, the imperfection of Istanbul turned out to be the main issue in most of the developed concepts during the Utopian City Workshop. The traffic chaos, religious and socio-economic inequality, and lack of green space appeared to be the other side of the economical growth and increasing mobility of citizens of Istanbul.

One of the striking elements when walking the city's streets is the huge amount of trade in the open air: from the open air restaurants in Kumkapi, grilled chestnuts

cars and many kiosks with their protruding windows, to ordinary street sellers who display their modest assortment on Chiquita Banana boxes. By emphasizing nature, a serene environment and mutual equality in their concepts, participants of our workshop pointed out an other side of Istanbul.

In the interview with the writer Asli Erdogan the dystopic character of Istanbul turns out to be the unusual starting point for a talk about dreams. In her work cities are often having this grim role and for that it does not surprise that Asli Erdogan sees Istanbul as a creature full of wounds, being liked by the sea. The interview has been influenced by a certain disappointment at one side, but in the meantime a certain trust in the future generation Turks: 'In Turkey we had this generation of the eighties. A generation with big revolutionary dreams. They believed in Utopia and wanted to change everything at once. But they failed. They lost their ideas. The fundamental values of those revolutionaries seemed to have disappeared and what stayed, was a certain lack of empathy and bitterness. What happened to the values? Nowadays generations have smaller, practical dreams. Realizable dreams. That is probably why it seems like we have fewer dreams now.'

What we encountered talking to our hosts was a nostalgic craving for a re-bloom of cosmopolitanism. Apparently architecture in the Ottoman style was important for making Istanbul an cosmopolitan city. It gave it a quintessential style of doing things with its open public spaces and cafés where political-public participation was facilitated while aesthetics, art & life intermingle. Also today people talk about politics openly and engaged, mostly discussing party politics, politics of the day. Our hosts tell us that

there is still so much diversity in Istanbul, so much



interaction between different cultures all the time. Like that night our hosts are an Armenian, a Jew and a Muslim. Yet it would be good if there were more opportunities for aesthetics, art & life to intermingle again. Europe has actually helped a revival of cosmopolitanism: in 2010 Istanbul was one of the European capitals of culture, which meant a lot of funding for small cultural projects in Istanbul. Its diverse cultural scene came to life, it was European funding helping Turkish culture to revive. Crucial values that act as conditions in accession process were very much at play.

The area of Ottoman Empire, the palaces of Sultans and big ideas of Atatürk were generally not so recognizable in the dreams of the new generation of citizens of Istanbul. Their dreams are not as ambitious as the ideas behind those significant parts of Turkish history, but dreams are small and can be understood as a realistic reaction to the lack of perspective. The overlap seen in ideas concerning nature, no cars and technology, more attention for an organic development of the city and inner relations of its inhabitants, make clear that the new generation of citizens of Istanbul, do not recognize themselves in the city policies. They miss attention for their needs: a broad horizon, inspiration and emotional connection with each other.

- by Tanja Bubic & Sophie Bloemen



UTOPIAN CITY ROME

ROME - Past, present and future in a three dimensional city

March 2011

A small Danubian delegation arrived in Rome at the end of March, two days prior the Utopian City Workshop, giving them a chance to get acquainted with this city and its vibes.

Walking through Rome we could breathe its historical heritage, with its mix of ruins, palazzos, and churches, our senses were confused by the sounds created by traffic, yelling, ringing mobiles and the palpable smell of spring combined with car fumes.

With all our five senses awakened and stimulated, we were ready to experience Rome in its utopian and contemporary ways.

For our workshop we had chosen the Chiesa Valdense as our venue. One would expect Italians to be familiar and at ease with churches, but to our big surprise our participants were not. In fact, here churches are known and used merely for religious purposes. Danube having a workshop at a Valdense church immediately put an association with this particular kind of Christianity. The first question we received when starting the workshop was indeed what being Valdensian meant to us. First lesson learnt in Rome: churches are churches and despite the fact that in various northern European countries they are currently used as clubs, cinemas or libraries, in Italy they are still closely bound to their archetypes and origins.

As the workshop kicked off our contestants gave us better insight on what living here means. "Rome wasn't built in a day" is not just a saying in this case, but a reality: almost being an open-air archaeological site, this metropolis is constantly confronted with its immense cultural and artistic heritage and the needs of becoming a modern and sustainable capital. The abundance of cultural heritage is at times a burden. Participants explained that like other large cities Rome would like to have a well-developed metro-system in order to fight air pollution and traffic congestion, yet digging a new tunnel proves to be a costly and especially slow process, since every time an old artifact is discovered, the

entire project grinds to a halt, as the spot has to be archeologically investigated. From this perspective past, present and future overlap in la città eterna.

Another recurring theme was the economic uncertainty that young people face in Italy. There is a clear economic division in Italy between the affluent north and its impoverished south, which explains why the majority of our participants originate from il Mezzogiorno (Southern Italy). Due to the lack of job opportunities they had all moved to Rome in search of better living conditions. A widely addressed problem was the lack of affordable housing. Peculiar enough, the Roman Catholic Church also plays a role in this. It was mentioned, the church should have a less dominant factor on society, yet not only socially, but also on a very pragmatic level. Large tracts of land and buildings in Rome are owned by the church, deterring possibilities for new housing projects.

As this workshop took place in Italy, aesthetics were naturally brought up by various participants. In contrast to contemporary Rome, its idealized vision would be brand clean, devoid of all the litter that tarnish its streets and alleys caused by tourism. Another approach was more truly Utopian; Rome as one large hypermodern art exhibition. Each building would contain touchable iPod-like walls displaying information. This would combine two important markers, the respect for the cultural heritage and a strong desire for innovation and progress.

By interacting with these young Romans one could not help but notice that their desires and longings are strongly interrelated with what makes Rome marvelled and known; its heritage and the church. Due to all the world heritage sites cramped within Rome's historical centre, the city is flooded on a daily basis by tourists, adding to traffic congestion, pollution, litter, a lack of metro-lines, and diminishment of affordable housing. What's more the role of the Catholic church is not to be underestimated in this city. Newspapers still give accounts of the pope's weekly speech on their page two on Monday morning. The average age at which youngsters leave their family housing is the highest in all of Europe. Living together without a wedding certificate is still a no-no in this country. Not to mention the poor record on LGBT rights, in comparison to other western European countries, Italy scores disappointingly low. Yet a new metro-line is being constructed, slowly as it may be, and the streets are getting cleaner. New projects arise: La Città dell'Altra Economia is a new cultural centre on the former city abattoir grounds, creating new thought and vision. A better and more Utopian Rome is underway; our participants are testament to this.


- by Giusy Chierchia & Jan ter Burg

LISBON - Crisis in the south

March 2011



The bus from the airport to the city centre of Lisbon stops halfway. Subway station Campo Grande is the final stop. 'We can't go any further because of the demonstration', the bus driver explains. 'It the biggest demonstration so far', a girl says excitedly, while walking down the subway stairs. Something is on indeed. The train is full of young Portuguese holding banners and cardboard plates.



Portugal's economy is in poor shape. It has been already for some time and the recent financial crises made things even worse. People fresh out of university

find themselves waiting tables and working for as little as 3 or 4 euro an hour. Many Portuguese move back in with their parents after having studied for 4 or 5 years. Lacking perspective they feel useless.

Deolinda, a popular band rooted in the fado tradition, caught this tragic position of young Portugal in the protest song Parva que Sou, What a fool am I. Singing about the generation living with their parents, the generation killing time with television, Deolinda epitomizes the wandering young generation. They perform at demonstrations and unite the dissatisfied. Fado cannot be more fitting to sing about the economical malaise.

Deolinda is not in Lisbon today, but demonstrators have gathered en masse. More than 100 000 protesters fill the streets of downtown Lisbon. The Danube Foundation did not travel from Amsterdam to Lisbon to join the protests. We only heard of the demonstration days before we were stage the Utopian City

workshop at the cultural centre Fábrica do Braço de Prata. Unfortunately, the former metal workshop is located way out of city centre. Leaving the demonstration filled streets behind to the Fábrica, roads get every more quiet.

When the workshop is scheduled to start, nobody has showed up yet. This we more or less expected, schedules are more flexible in southern Europe than in the northern countries. We do not worry. Not yet. But of course we think of all the people demonstrating for their future, and wonder if just a couple dozen would Be willing to leave the mass for our European utopia.

A handful of people do show up. They have not attended the demonstration, but rather think about an even more distant future, which might never be attained. Although happy with the small turnout, I catch myself asking why these people are here at the workshop and not joining forces in the city centre. They do sympathize with the demonstrators, they say, but just did not feel like taking the streets.

After the workshop we head back to where Portugal is still demonstrating. Committed to their cause many stay out in the streets well after sunset. Small parties are formed, with people playing music and dancing. The atmosphere is friendly. One thing is certain: the young generation of Portuguese have not lost their spirits.

- by Thijs van Uelzen



MOSCOW – Land of Tsars, Billionaires and low expectations

May 2010

Danube travelled to Moscow to gain insight in the dreams of the young Russian generation. Russia being the land of Marx, revolution the grand Utopia, Danube was intrigued, to learn how the young Russians would respond to the ideas in the workshop and how they would give shape to their utopian cities. Would they reject the feasibility of utopias all together, how would they reflect on their turbulent past and how did it shape their future?

A first answer to these questions arrived when meeting contacts at the local partner organization; the Garage Centre for Contemporary Art, a former bus remise of 800 m2 at the northern side of Moscow. The trendy modern art gallery is owned by Daria Zhukova, the wife of oligarch and billionaire Roman Abramovich. Not coincidentally the topic of the current exposition was Future Utopias. Danube had arranged to interview the young curator of the exposition Yulia Aksenova, who offered an extensive tour of the exposition.

Yulia Aksenova had an air of disillusion when showing us the different artworks of the exhibition. Russian Utopias was a dual show,





for the first part *'Tributes: On the Ruins of Great Utopias'*, artists had been asked to look back on the great utopian visions that have left such a mark on Russia. The second part, *'Future from Here'*, was intended as a quest for new ideals and utopias. The expectations, especially for the second part, were high. Yet Yulia commented:

"But the future turns out not to have anything new to offer. Young artists get inspiration from the past, while the older generation tries hard to forget the past. After the fall of the Soviet Union the grand utopian ideas have been declared forever broken and ever since were associated with totalitarianism and negativity. Though actually these utopian visions are very much needed, as only then people are capable of change. The current generation of young artists seems to be liberated of negative associations with the past, but at the same time is not capable to develop new visions for the future". Taking in the works, which were sparsely laid out, the exposition transpired a sense of self censorship and apathy. *"We are living in a crisis of the future",* concluded Aksenova with dissatisfaction, *"everybody is looking for stability and not for change. At the same time our desired stability is nowhere to be found. It is rather like we find ourselves in this downward spiral."*

This conversation, although fascinating, was not very uplifting and contributed to the intrigue regarding the anticipated contributions to the workshops. Would the participants have ideas and dreams for an ideal society at all?

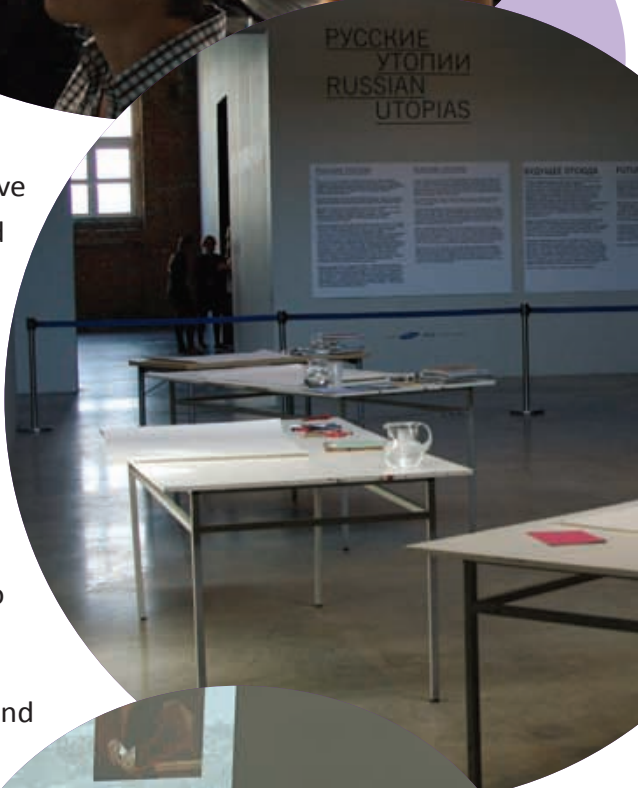
Moscow is probable one of the most impressive and grandest cities in the world. The historic Arbat district with its lively Arbat street, used to house nobility like the Tolstoys, now features mainly shops and tourist oriented restaurants, with youths leisurely walking through it. Arbatskaya, where commodity capitalism reigns, seems to provide an illustration of the state of Russian utopia.

Moscow is not always easy to navigate, be it because of unexpected desolate areas near the airport, or taxi drivers



who do not speak English and demand skyrocketing prices when realising you are not a routine. Compared to a decade ago however there is now clearly a great deal of wealth, which has found its way to the buildings, the shops, the cars. On Saturday, the impressive Moscow underground metro delivered us to the Garage. This time there was a legion of security armed with machine guns, standing in front of the gallery and wandering inside, with an attitude as if running a military camp. Inside though, the people working for the Garage were wonderfully helpful, arranging everything and setting up the room exactly according to our instructions.

The audience was very quiet, deferent, and serious looking. Danube tends to fold in some jokes here and there during the presentation, but it was hard to make the young Russian audience laugh. Once started with the collages, the participants initially had some difficulty with the extent of conceptual freedom, finding it hard to start without clear instructions. This contrasted with experience in other cities, yet after a while they became lively and engaged, although the seriousness never left them entirely. As more or less foreseen ever since the depressing conversation with the curator, the Russian Utopian Cities developed by the participants transpired a certain blind spot vis a vis grand visions or dreams about a perfect society. Criticism





on current society was more or less absent, which seems strange in a society where so many issues are at play. A country which has semi autocratic governance, where the murder of journalists is not a rarity, which is at war with a neighbouring country, and has experienced a savage transition to capitalism which has made the few very rich but had the majority suffer.



On the other hand, the Utopian Cities were much more positive than the artworks in the exposition and many interesting ideas came up. The Russians tended towards a technocratic, wellbeing oriented account of their utopian city. There was quite some emphasis on how technology could make life better, how transport would be improved to dampen the commute times and how there should be centres in all the city areas as that would be convenient. The idea of the need for the possibility of personal development was brought forward a couple times, and there were some cities which included some notion of communism, mostly with regards to life in small scale communes. This is interesting and confirms the idea that there is still nostalgia for the communist era, even with the young fairly elite generation in Moscow. Diversity, openness and multiculturalism were also on the minds of the young Moscovites, something which is in tension with the killings of immigrant and racist tendencies in Russia vis a vis immigrants from the Caucasus of which Moscow counts so many.



Another striking finding was that the relationship to governance seems to be one of complete apathy. It was almost like this element of society was a lost cause; it simply wasn't mentioned, only when pressed hard for it. Neither was there a discussion about the distribution of capital or wealth nor we did not get a sense of aversion to the extremely rich that so vulgarly expose their wealth in Moscow and beyond, the well known 'new Russians'.

Finally, religion was also a topic that was surprisingly absent in most presentations, while there are recently quite some major developments in Russia in that respect.

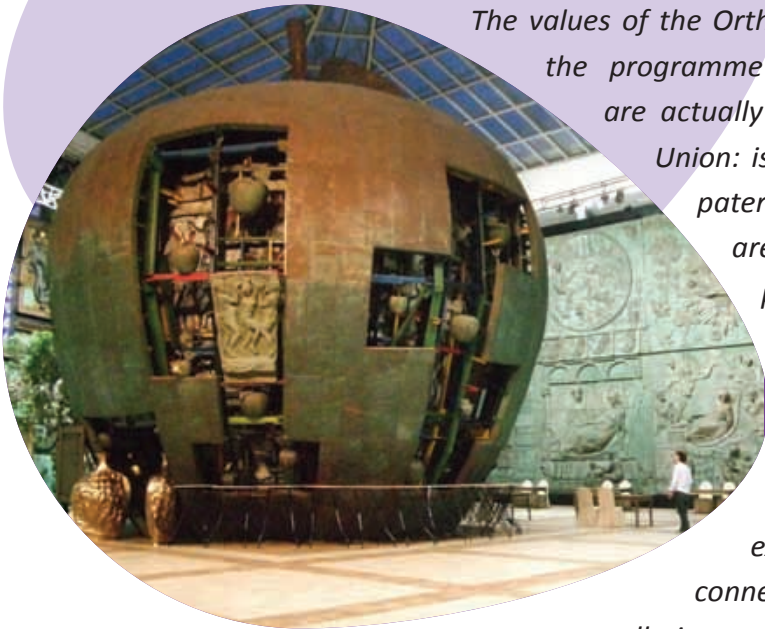
While the religious in the Soviet Union were repressed, the church is now a loyal ally of the government.

Danube spoke with the infamous curator Erofeev after the workshop, and he explained a great deal about the revival of religion and how the Kremlin exerts influence through the Orthodox Church. Erofeev, former curator of the Tretjakov Gallery, lost his job and was put on trial because of the contents of his expositions. *Erofeev: 'The church enjoys support from the government because religion is an instrument to unite people again. The Kremlin is not fussed about the faith, but about emphasising the contrast between Russia and the West.*

The values of the Orthodox Church fit perfectly into the programme of the government. These are actually the old values of the Soviet Union: isolationism, moral superiority, paternalism and deference. These are quite consistent with the political program and the church is willing to voice this message.'

'At the same time the Orthodox Church attempts to exert influence through diverse connected organisation on what galleries and museums expose, Erofeev stated. 'this happens in a very subtle way and never explicitly. This development is really new and had started three four years ago. It should be explained as a revival of censorship.'

This all sounded quite troubling and Danube decided to take a closer look at the work of one of the artists having a close relationship with the church; the famous Zurab Tsereteli. Originally from Georgia, Tsereteli is part of the Russian elite establishment, with many commissioned works by the church and the city of Moscow. His works have been the object of strong public critique for being inappropriately pompous and out of proportion. One of his galleries is located in an historic building in the centre of town, and it was unlike anything one would have ever seen before. Tsereteli's works were placed in a gigantic room with a removable roof. His copper frescos were all placed along the walls, there were huge sculptures everywhere. In the middle of



the space there was the most attention grabbing work of all, a huge copper apple. You could enter the apple and coming in, this was obviously the apple of fertility, with little active couples of bronze covering the walls. Although the megalomania of the whole thing was mind blowing, aesthetically it wasn't really pleasing. The apple was pretty cool though.



Reflection is hard to find in Russian contemporary art, although not banned, it is not welcomed to say the least. According to Eroveev there some are interesting, mostly radically left wing initiatives to be found that are able to confront or ignore the repression. The Art collective PG is an example of this, another one is the Voina collective (meaning war). *'Working with manifestations, posters and performances, they attempt to present Russia with a mirror. They have a clear political and societal message, employing art as an instrument to criticise society'*, Eroveev enthusiastically describes. Yet again there is the painful absence of vision, and the lacking of inspiration for the future: it is clear what is wrong with Russia anno 2010, but they do not see an alternative. Keeping within the art scene but moving to the other side of the spectrum Sunday was the day to visit the art centre Winzavod, which is located in a former winery at the edge of town. Along the way from Kursky metro station to the art centre there were a surprising amount of drunks dozing in parks in a state of apathy, music blasting from worn down speakers, ugly graffiti on the walls.. Quite an interesting walk. Artist Stas Shuripa, the artist that worked with Danube in Moscow had his atelier in the Winzavod centre. Winzavod is a cool hipster place, where the skinny jeaned and creatively dressed hang out and buy or sell second hand or 'upcoming' designer items or cruise the different galleries and art spaces. The atmosphere was laid back and people are just enjoying the Sunday afternoon, it resembled Brick Lane in London 6 years ago where artistic and different London found each other, only on a much smaller scale and a bit less crazy.

We went up to Stas' atelier and he showed us our works and we talked about Utopias and Russia. Stas spends quite some time in Sweden, which enables him to take some distance from his home country. He agreed with the analysis that people seemed to have lost their engagement after what happened in the 90's and in the last decade and that most people more or less just want to have a nice and comfortable life now. He could barely stand it, he could barely stand the way people walked slowly on the street, almost aimlessly. He wished things were different.

Leaving the city the next, after a 60 euro breakfast, the analysis was mixed. Moscow, a city which overwhelms, surprises and impresses, hosting an exposition on Utopias in one of the leading galleries is almost contradictory. The young generation seems engaged and ready to enjoy and grasp life, yet not really ready to defy the system or cross boundaries. On the one hand there was enormous interest in the workshop and utopia, it was the city where there the applicants for the workshop, we had to send over 30 people home, participants were truly engaged and took their utopian city extremely serious. On the other hand, real new vision, true believe in a better future was not to be found and self censorship and apathy will have to be overcome for real Russian dreaming to come to fruition.

- by Sophie Bloemen



PRAGUE – A sleeping beauty

May 2011

It is late, already past midnight. Two strangers are on a quest to the heart of Prague. Empty streets echo their steps. The sound zigzags from one delightful façade to another. Inescapably their gaze is caught by the sheer beauty and affluence of all the details and enormous sculptures, positioned at the edges of buildings without any sign of effort. The glorious history of the city is showing its face around each corner, it drops down from its church towers, and is almost palpable in the reflection of the city as seen in the river Vltava.



Hypnotized by the atmosphere on this dark and empty hour, the strangers cross the threshold of the Charles Bridge, the epic centre of Prague. Under a cautious and strict eye of Saint Joseph, Jesus, and John the Baptist, they are having their first rendezvous with this sleeping town. An intimate moment of solitude on the bridge is under scribing the mysterious and impenetrable character of this city. It is a welcome feeling to this Sleeping Beauty.

In contrast to the alluring mysterious and magnificent impression of Prague, its inhabitants are frequently encountered as distant, austere, indifferent, or even inhospitable. These distinctly opposite impressions seem almost surreal. While the city creates an elementary living environment and its conditions, it is the citizens who shape the atmosphere and dynamic of a city. It is a silent cooperation which leads to certain unpredictable outcomes which are not directly relatable neither to the city, nor its inhabitants.

A remarkable observation was made on the lack activity in Prague's public space. This characteristic way of life in Southern and Eastern Europe appears to be

completely absent in this city. The streets of Prague seem to be filled mainly with strangers, while real Prague people spend their leisure time in underground bars hidden deep under the picturesque streets. As a citizen noticed: 'They just love their cellars!' Even during the weekends most inhabitants of Prague escape the city and find their way to their stern cottages in the countryside. It seems that the attractions of Prague, its architectural beauty, the presence of history, its fairy tale appearance, are actually repulsive to its inhabitants.

Reminiscing on one of the best-known works from this region, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being' by Milan Kundera, I wonder to what extent the inhabitants of Prague are fearful of enjoying their surroundings. To which extent are they too aware of the possibility that things might just be too beautiful to be true. So why bother, appreciating and being involved, for it will not last. It is this cynical, indifferent tone that is often noticed but rarely understood by people visiting Prague.

Even if this remains an enigma for me too, this attitude made this remarkable detachment to the city a bit more understandable. Prague, just like Venice, is practically an open-air museum, not necessarily a compliment in this case. Embracing so much beauty, as Prague does, has as a consequence few possibilities for change, development and innovation. A young generation of citizens seems almost obliged to honor the beauty of this



city, without having a chance to be part of it. A museum is inspiring only as long as you have the chance to escape it.

By having permanent residence in such a beautiful place, one might suffer from the awareness of impotence on top of the effect this city already has. A drive for change, enthusiasm and innovation is slowly but surely being discouraged and subsequently followed by indifference to and detachment of the city.

As in the case of Narcissus, beauty may lead to rigidity, stateliness and finally death, a fate that hopefully will not happen to this sleeping beauty. Prague probably will not manage to become an creative incubator like Berlin or Belgrade, but it does have its lively underground steams which will hopefully find its way to daylight and be courageous enough to let its voice of the Sleeping Beauty be heard.

- by Tanja Bubic

