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The Hermeneutics of New Towns
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The Hermeneutics of New Towns

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Introduction

For more than a century, the idea of building “New Towns” has preoccupied urban planners thought. In this context, the United Kingdom and France have been the main center of theory and experience, especially in the early years of the idea of a planned town - and in the golden age of new town development from World War II to the mid-1970s. However, over the past few decades, a new revision of the construction of new towns in Asia, particularly in Singapore and China, and increasingly in other places (such as the Arabic countries that located around the Persian Gulf), has attracted attentions. Even in European countries, a new round of neo-traditional and garden-city can be observed. Despite recent emphasis on the construction of ecological new towns, the experience of the United Kingdom and France continues to define the general framework for the planning of new towns. This effect is more noticeable in those regions that the new towns have built as satellite-towns not as self-reliant industrial-towns.

Although the building of “New Towns” was, in essence, a response to the high rate of population growth in industrial urban regions (growth centers) and the implementation of population decentralization policies from the main cities and capitals, but from the aspects of utopianism have also been a tool in planning and trying to avoid the problems of past cities and learning from their negative experiences. The plan to build new towns in the post-war period was also one of the largest public housing projects. The construction of such new towns have been required new infrastructure such as roads, water and sewage, electricity and gas networks, and a large volume of public and commercial buildings.

Materials & Methods

In this paper, the application of hermeneutic method with the aim of understanding some of the less-considered aspects of new towns is considered as a powerful way to re-reading the written texts and constructed buildings belonging to the new towns movement; Because a considerable amount of all that is needed for this hermeneutic analysis is now available (such as published texts, projects, plans, documents, statistical surveys, and case studies on new towns). In this context, we also have a lot of discussions, conferences, conversations, architectural drawings and broad design, cybernetic logic charts, confusing recordings of images and films of new towns which have produced. They all together reveal the magnetism of a romanticized urban ideal. The world of new towns has been a whole new world and a fascinating masterpiece; that is the propaganda machine of the new town movement has been full of slogans, imagery and fascinating dramas about what the future might to be. With the decline of rational planning techniques and systems analysis, new towns emerged as mass market products of media and advertisements, as a utopian theater; as happy cities of harmony and happiness which have entered the public image/mind. The material manifestations of this utopianism can be found in the thousands of planning and policy documents, films, exciting articles in popular press, and photographs of the boldness of life. The new people saw the urban future in these years.

so, these years are a wide and open field of evidence for some of the hermeneutic explorations that some of them have tried to analysis in this paper.

Discussion of Results & Conclusions

The main aim of this paper is to provide a contextual analysis of the history of “New Towns” based on the “hermeneutic method” to further inquiries in its intellectual and ideological foundations and essences. Such an attempt has been made through inquiries in the experiences of modernism and modern urban planning and understanding of the utopian presumptions of urban world. One of the implications of this analysis is to shed light on the positive and negative aspects of comprehensive urban planning/policy and to provide a framework for understanding the challenges of urbanization in today's condition. New towns, as essentially utopian projects in the twentieth century, have constructed to shape a better urban future for human. In this paper, the application of the hermeneutic method for inquiring and rethinking of the new towns shows that this movement is a very suitable historical context for discovering and understanding many hidden and undiscovered aspects of urban and regional planning during of twentieth century.

Among the results and conclusions of historical-hermeneutic analysis of new towns that obtained in this paper, the following excerpts can be mentioned:

Although the construction of “new towns” was, in essence, a response to the growing population in industrial urban areas (growth centers) and the implementation of population decentralization policies from the main cities, but in terms of utopianism, it has also been a tool in planning and trying to solve the problems that related to past cities and learn from their negative experiences.

One of the common features among the new towns is they are built on a pre-designed comprehensive plan. Accordingly, the developers of the new towns have focused on creating local communities that go beyond just building home and housing. However, the size of the population for new towns have been always one of the distinguishing features of this type of planning from “neighborhood planning” or “settlement planning”.

Among the contexts and reasons for the proposed plans to build new towns (especially after World War II) the poor living conditions in industrial cities has been determinant. The period 1945-1975 was the golden age of new towns. From the late 1940s to the late 1970s, new towns not only attracted most creative thinkers in design, planning, and urban planning, but also became the source of inspiration for similar urban developments around the world. Most of the literature published in this field dates back to the 1960s and 1970s; from the new pedestrian-oriented towns to the automobile-dependency new towns and, more recently, the green towns, smart towns and knowledge-based towns.

“New towns” have never been purely technical, but the goals such as creating a livable environment, providing employment (especially industrial or knowledge-based jobs), the ability to attract industry as a means of economic growth in areas planned which aimed to regional development and spatial planning, a more balanced distribution of population in the territorial space, and determining the size, growth rate, and spatial structure / interaction of space, have been strongly related to this project.

Hermeneutical analysis of new towns, with reference to a set of available data and resources, including published texts, policy documents, projects, plans, statistical surveys, case studies of new towns, a lot of discussions, conferences and conversations, architectural drawings and broad design, cybernetic logic charts, confusing recordings of images and films of new towns have shown that the world of new towns is a complex and masterful world which needs more inquiries; a world full of slogans, imaginaries, and fascinating dramas about what the future might be; New towns are displayed as products in the mass market of media and advertisements. New towns have been representations of successes and failures of urban planning in the regional or national scales.

In this paper, historical and hermeneutical analyzes of new towns show that the New Town movement, from the middle to the late twentieth century, represents a rich collection of ideas and experiences that framed images and social perceptions of lifestyle. New towns say a lot about global interactions over what constitutes ideal places and how this process has affected planning culture.

New town planning has helped foster a sense of consequence and confidence in professional planning as a fully rational and transferable knowledge. However, the price of this urban ideal was not low; social isolation and segregation, societal stratification, stabilization and fixing, standardization and militarization were the lowest ones. This shows why it is still important to study more and more accurately the new towns story in the historical contexts.

Keywords: New towns, hermeneutic, urban planning, regional planning, history of city

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