



image courtesy of Nicolas Fayad

IASTE 2010 AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

15-18 DECEMBER 2010

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

In recent years IASTE scholars have examined traditions and their multitude of built forms in an increasingly interconnected global landscape. To advance this effort, this conference seeks to study how tradition inspires and informs changing concepts of utopia in theory and space. Utopian theories and plans emerge from a complex symbiotic relationship with traditions that are based on notions of the ideal. Indeed, utopias cannot be understood without understanding the traditions from which they develop.

At its etymological root, utopia embodies both the theoretical paradox of an ideal place, *eu-topia*, and a non-place, *ou-topia*, rendering it an impossibility. As an ideal place, utopia relies on tradition, but as a non-place it attempts to negate it. Although most utopias have spatial manifestations, they often attempt to harness and make static the traditions used to create these spaces. The geographies of utopia physically ground tradition, but tradition simultaneously controls these very same geographies. This contemporary moment of economic crisis necessitates a re-examination of this dynamic.

The word "utopia" is no longer as commonly referenced in professional practice as it was a few decades ago. However, architects, planners, and politicians continue to look for and disseminate notions of ideal forms. Regulated by ethnicity, religion, or race, the identity enclaves of many modern nations use territory to perpetuate visions of perfect communities based on specific traditions. The continuation and strengthening of tradition, cloaked in the language of utopia, may thus be seen to provide the focus for new gated communities in the developing world, the dreamscapes in cities around the Persian Gulf and the Pacific Rim, and the faux-colonial homes in American suburbs. On the other hand, there is an emerging discourse that reconceptualizes utopia itself, not as a product but as an open process aimed at transforming, rather than transcending, the existing condition.

Perhaps the relationship between utopia and tradition can best be understood by examining dystopia, utopia's twin other. Dystopia finds its clearest manifestation in literary and filmic representations, such as *1984* and *Blade Runner*, which embody complex imageries of terror, control, and urban anxiety. Tradition, in these brave new worlds, has often been explicitly rejected, and new forms are introduced as alternatives.

The historical development of utopia both draws upon and creates anew traditions of space, citizenship, and government. Those engaged with the idea of utopia have always come back to its physical realization within space, however elusive and/or illusory. In writing his *Republic*, Plato drew heavily on Greek traditions of warfare, civic engagement, and physical form, while Augustine of Hippo's *City of God* was a response to a particular moment of empire and decadence. Thomas More created a sketchy ideological geography of "no place" as a mythical island with a-spatial intonations. Since the Renaissance, when architects and artists such as Vitruvius searched for the *cittè felice*, practitioners have tried to create physical spaces that would provide Eden-like environments for humankind. In more recent times, the modernist schemes of Ebenezer Howard and Le Corbusier envisioned ideal spaces that claimed to erase difference. This IASTE conference will focus on the theme of utopia and tradition in the twenty-first century.

The conference will attract an interdisciplinary group of scholars and practitioners from around the world working in the disciplines of anthropology, architecture, art and architectural history, city and regional planning, cultural studies, geography, history, landscape studies, sociology, and urban studies. They will present papers related to the following three themes:

Track 1 | Utopian Ideals versus Traditional Physical Realities

Central to the conference theme is the main tenet that utopias use tradition in their formulation and perpetuation of the ideal. Inquiries regarding attributes of utopia that may be rooted in traditional practices are encouraged in this line of inquiry. This track seeks to explore the convergence of ideals and realities as well as the underlying concepts of utopia and how they relate to a given traditional context or are manifested in space.

Track 2 | The Practices of Utopia and the Politics of Tradition

The deployment of tradition demands a certain selectivity that negates some forms of the past while celebrating others, making this exercise inherently political. In constructing utopias, practitioners also draw upon traditional discourses, practices, and forms, thus politicizing the quest for ideal communities. A key component in interrogating utopia and tradition is the political backdrop against which they occur. Examining the linkages between utopias, politics, and tradition, papers in this track are encouraged to investigate how tradition is deployed within the political sphere and the role the state plays in formulating notions of community and governance.

Track 3 | Utopia and the Space of Difference

By the end of the twentieth century, the crisis within modernism and the critical opposition to authoritarianism had caused a retreat from the idea of utopia as an ideal and perfected spatial form. This track seeks to examine new concepts of utopia that have risen to question its previous incarnations and established traditions. Papers in this track are encouraged to explore how the latest utopias have become more of an open process that engages both the present condition and the forbidden, the unseen, and the marginalized, straying from the imagined idyllic landscapes towards a new politics of difference.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Please refer to our website www.ced.berkeley.edu/iaste for detailed instructions on abstract submissions. A one-page abstract of 500 words and a one-page CV are required. For further inquiries, please email IASTE Coordinator Sophie Gonick at iaste@berkeley.edu.

Proposals for complete panels are welcome. All papers must be written and presented in English. Following a blind peer-review process, papers may be accepted for presentation in the conference and/or publication in the Working Paper Series.

Contributors whose abstracts are accepted must pre-register for the conference, pay registration fees of \$400 (which includes a special discounted \$25 IASTE membership fee), and prepare a full-length paper of 20-25 double-spaced pages. Registered students may qualify for a reduced registration fee of \$200 (which includes a special discounted \$25 IASTE membership fee). All participants must be IASTE members. Please note that expenses associated with hotel accommodations, travel, and additional excursions are not covered by the registration fees and have to be paid directly to the designated travel agent. Registration fees cover the conference program, conference abstracts, and access to all conference activities including receptions, keynote panels, and a tour of the Beirut Central District.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

February 12 | Deadline for receipt of abstracts and CVs

May 5 | Notification of accepted abstracts for presentation

July 15 | Deadline for pre-registration and full paper submissions for possible publication in the Working Paper Series.

October 5 | Notification of accepted papers for the Working Paper Series

December 15-18 | Conference program

December 19 and 20-22 | Optional trips

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Department of Architecture and Design, American University of Beirut
College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley
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School of Architecture and Allied Arts, University of Oregon

CONFERENCE SITE & ACCOMMODATIONS

The conference will be held at American University of Beirut's West Hall, with accommodation at nearby hotels. In order to be able to obtain special room rates, reservations should be made online, over the phone, or through email at the conference hotel:

Gefinor Rotana Hotel, Hamra, Beirut, <http://www.rotana.com/property-6.htm>
E-mail: gefinor.hotel@rotana.com

Other accommodations with a special IASTE discount:

Casa d'Or Hotel, Hamra, Beirut, <http://www.casadorhotel.com>
E-mail: Info@casadorhotel.com

POST-CONFERENCE TRIPS

Two optional one-day trips are offered at participant's expense to Byblos and Tripoli, or to Baalbek and Anjar, on Sunday, December 19, 2010.

A two day/two night trip to Damascus, Syria, is also available from Monday, December 20 to Wednesday, December 22, 2010.

To participate in any of the three additional trips, please contact:

Mr. Charbel Salem, Nakhal Travel, <http://www.nakhal.com>
E-mail: tours@nakhal.com.lb or charbel@nakhal.com.lb

Note: An additional visa may be necessary for travel to Syria. Please check with your local consulate.

INQUIRIES

Please use the following information when making inquiries regarding the conference.

MAILING ADDRESS:

IASTE 2010

Center for Environmental Design Research
390 Wurster Hall #1839, University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-1839

Phone: 510.642.6801 | Fax: 510.643.5571 | E-mail: iaste@berkeley.edu
Website: www.ced.berkeley.edu/iaste

THE UTOPIA OF TRADITION

