

New Urban Languages: Rethinking Urban Ideology in Post-Ideological Times

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In the last week of June 2014, the Second International Conference *New Urban Languages* took place in Madrid. While the first conference under this topic, held in Milan in 2013, chose “Reimagining the City after the Knowledge-based Turn” as its motto, the conference in Madrid, “Rethinking Urban Ideology in Post-Ideological Times”, was aimed at reimagining present and future cities through the lense of urban ideologies. Therefore, the two main questions presented during the Conference were: Why do we need to talk about urban ideology now? and What can be understood as urban ideology, what is urban ideology?

Following Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek’s words, if we assume the necessary existence of an ideology at the base of relationships “between visible and nonvisible, between imaginable and unimaginable”, the answer should be that our world is facing an increasingly uncertain future. When it is easier to imagine a catastrophic end of the world, rather than real alternatives that seem just and fair, when the hegemonic forces of capitalism compel us to produce generic urban spaces throughout the globe, while, paradoxically, local forces raise their voices to claim recognition, we need to discuss planning and design theory and practice more than ever, and we need to discuss politics and ideology urgently.

Since 2008, more than 50% of the world population lives in cities. The fact is that most of us live in an urban world, with new challenges and conflicts which lead evolving processes to unpredictable spatial scenarios.

The Second International Conference on *New Urban Languages* asked the academic world to debate the nature of these processes and the new role for planners and designers from a multidisciplinary point of view. During the conference the debate became structured in four loosely interrelated sessions:

- I. Ideological answers to the crisis
- II. Ideology and urban form in the 21st century
- III. Ideology in a networked urban world
- IV. Future urban narratives

In these four sessions academics coming from different countries gathered to present their dissertations under the lines proposed by the scientific committee:

I. Ideological answers to the crisis

The world is in crisis: climate is rapidly changing, economy seems unable to rise again, many areas of our planet are affected by wars, many local systems are unable to maintain their standard of living. This has happened many times before in human history, but not with this intensity. In these last years many cities tried to answer this situation with new ideological models: green economy, resilience, smart cities, urban competitions for global investment. Have these answers helped the cities in which they were applied? Have these failed? Why? In which ways?

II. Ideology and urban form in the 21st century

We know that design always carries within itself a representation of the designer's identity and beliefs, and many authors advance the idea that there is a big relationship between the *Weltanschauung* of a population and the form of its cities. In which ways can we see this phenomenon in the classical cities of Christianity, the Islamic World, old China and other recognizable dominant ideologies? In which way has this evolved or changed in the 20th and 21st centuries?

III. Ideology in a networked urban world

Today, there is a pervasive faith on social networks and ICT. Everyone can see the potentials of new technologies in the governance and the plan of space, and the ways in which this phenomenon is changing our relation with the urban space. Are there any critical aspects in this phenomenon for urban living? Is it possible to formulate a critique of this new global ideology, based on case studies?

IV. Future urban narratives

Narratives are great tools to describe the present and orient the future. In recent past, some great narratives overcame theological narrations in the West, reorienting life in the region towards rationality and the rule of secular law, with important consequences to all aspects of urban life and government. Are there any emerging new narratives, which are now taking global relevance? Which futures are planted in the seeds sown by these new narratives? In which ways these new narratives could re-orient the future of our cities?

This double issue of *Urban* journal presents the most relevant contributions to the Conference. These papers have undergone double peer reviews by the members of the Scientific Committee twice, first prior to the Conference and then specifically for this publication. After the revisions, the content and language of the papers is the author's responsibility, having the Committee given priority to the author's wishes and intentions.