

Utopian Communal Housing Concepts and Their Contemporary Applications

Eun-Ju Han* and Moo-Hyuck Choi**, Kyungpook National University

INTRODUCTION

Discussions about ideal housing and its realization is a never-ending process in every generation. Nonetheless, some fallacies in establishing the policies of ideal housing exist because efforts are driven to the mere technical progress, though non-physical factors¹ as well as physical conditions² are actually involved. Along with the industrial revolution, housing policies have been focused on the quantitative supply; and only later on the quality of living conditions. Additionally, quantitative and qualitative considerations of ideal housing production were usually restricted to the improvements of physical housing environments³, regardless of the human factors which took place in the organization process.

The purpose of this study is to investigate some basic concepts of ideal communal housing related directly to Utopian communal housing concepts and to present the scheme of the communal houses for low-income people. For this purpose, recent communal housing projects in the best use of the concepts are carefully reviewed. Taking an explanatory approach to scrutinizing contemporary applications of the ideal communal housing concepts, this study needs to be validated via more scientific analyses.

UTOPIA AND COMMUNITY IDEALS

There is a social meaning envisaged in the utopian thoughts. That is to reform social and structural problems faced by a society to create new living environment for harmony(Ho Gang Park, 1992). Developing an ideal model of communal living is a good solution from the Utopian point of view. Based on utopian thoughts, communal housing ideas are most valuable in pursuing individual happiness and social benefits. Most human values such as friendship, cooperation, authority, personality and sense of belonging can be achieved by utopian ideals. Equality, peace, virtue and order are another aspects of utopian ideals. Accordingly, many people believe that ideal societies in the traditions of utopian thoughts can be created under the communal living situations with such ideals. But a man has a freedom to make a personal decision of ideal houses regardless of communal

* PhD student in Kyungpook National University

** Professor in Kyungpook National University

values(Ho Gang Park, 1992). This is a contradiction of utopian ideals in making contemporary applications.

UTOPIAN CONCEPTS RELATED TO MODERN COMMUNAL DWELLINGS

Through the industrialization and urbanization process, social reform was required and several public welfare⁴ alternatives like Owen's Parallelogram⁵ and Fourier's Phalanx, began to appear. Under the influence of utopian thoughts and plans, accordingly, several urban planning schemes came to appear(Michael Wheeler, 1978).

Community Ideals of Utopian Communal Dwellings

Howard's garden city movement attempted to take advantage of the city's energetic and active life styles as well as all the beauty and delight of the countryside in order to realize the ancient ideals for the rural paradise. In "La Cite Industrielle" designed by T. Garnier, there are many assembly halls in various sizes as well as common gardens surrounded by houses in the 30m×150m size housing blocks. In that particular scheme, pedestrians were separated from vehicles. This is an attempt to overcome the human isolation phenomenon in city environments, as T. Garnier pointed out(Michael Wheeler, 1978).

Due to the rapid industrialization of the 19th century, sanitation and isolation were the main housing problems in the city. During the 20th century, consequently, some scientific and technical ideals began to emerge. The appearance of "The Futurism" in Italy forecasted the possibility of modern High-Tech architecture. They expressed the future images of the city which represented the capital and the technology resulting from the industrialization. Le Corbusier's "Radiant City" was a direct result of general modern technology. This is largely based on the myth that mass production resulting from industrialization would make everyone rich. In addition, Frank. L. Wright suggested the new concepts regarding modern city housing in the "Broadacre City"(Hogang Park, 1992).

The communal housing ideals which were expressed in utopian urban plans are as follow:

1. Maintaining individual autonomy.
2. Providing equal housing opportunity in terms of living environment.
3. Living with natural environment.
4. Increasing privacy.
5. Increasing communal values to overcome human isolation.
6. Increasing self-sustainability

The Properties of Utopian Community ideals

Many aspects of utopian communal ideals are contradictive as applied to actual

housing plans. For example, designing the residential environment flexible enough to maintain individual's autonomy can cause problems in entire housing estate control. The dream of the rural life results in the low-density housing environment, whereas the intensive arrangement of the facilities in the pursuit of the economical rationality leads to high density development. Also, assuring privacy is antithetical to the sense of community. Therefore, it is important to balance contradictory elements in a supplementary manner.

Table1. Utopian Communal Ideals in Contradiction

Ontological Human Needs		Utopian Communal Ideals
individual autonomy	↔	equal housing opportunity
living with natural environment	↔	increasing self-sustainability
increasing privacy	↔	increasing communal values

Table 1 analyzes Utopian communal housing concepts in the viewpoint of the ontological housing needs. Utopian communal housing concepts can be largely realized in the interaction of the six concepts as shown in Table 1. The general design guidelines of realizing the ideal communal housing concepts for the low-income classes on the basis of Table 1 are as below:

First, housing types have to maintain the variety so that personal housing needs as well as community identity are met. Community identity can be maintained through the systematic configuration of each building of the communal housing, which can also give a sense of community despite various housing types. Human beings have a tendency to prefer the environment that is not too simple or complicated. Within this context, too uniform or various housing types must not be pursued.

Second, neighborhood housing facilities are organized for the development of the communal housing complex in the context of natural environment setting for the working classes. Garden city movement suggested by Howard imply so many meanings in this respect. Howard's idea is largely based on Utopian communal housing concepts, which has all the aspects of city's energetic and active living environment and all the beauty and delight of the countryside, in the presence of the existing contradiction of cities and countrysides. However, being self-sustainable is still thought to be unattainable in the garden cities because of their increasing dependence on outside societies. Korea also failed in realizing the garden city concepts in the form of new towns in the suburbs of the metropolitan areas, due largely to the lack of self-sustainability. Therefore it is necessary to revise and complement the Utopian communal housing concepts.

Third, the minimum privacy must be maintained in terms of basic human needs whereas the inferiority and the isolation of town residents can be reduced by the development of the communal housing. Within this regard, cluster development would be a good idea. In addition to the sanitary and safety problems of Korean poor housing areas (so-called "Dal Dong Re"), one of the most serious social problems of Korean poor housing environment is the lack of privacy. Therefore, searching an appropriate alternative is an urgent need not only to enhance the sense of belonging but also to maintain the individual privacy.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS OF UTOPIAN COMMUNAL HOUSING CONCEPTS

In general, Utopian Communal Housing concepts has been applied for the low-income workers for a long time, because of their origin. These utopian concepts gave birth to the segregated community in the modern society. The development of the communal housing has been seen all around the world, in accordance with the income level of the dwellers, upper-income class, middle-income class, and lower-income class. Similarly, retirement communities are derived from the utopian communal housing ideals. The object of this study is to find and analyze the utopian community concepts revealed in contemporary low-income housing development projects around the world. Additionally, this study will pursue to present ideal approaches to developing communal housing in a supplementary manner. Ultimately, this study is expected to solve the housing problem for the low-income residents in Korea.

The Mexicali project, executed by Christopher Alexander(1985) in Baja California, the northern part of Mexico, is a good example in terms of the concrete realization of the utopian concepts in the communal housing development for the low-income workers. It has several implications for contemporary communal housing developments.

First, the sense of community is enhanced through the collective design of common land. Community identity could be realized by arranging each building around the community square. Also, the social harmony between nature and residents was obtained by the deliberate introduction of the natural elements into common land. This implies that a part can be justified in whole, which is one of the most important Utopian ideals.

Second, the cluster development of housing resulted in the equal and controlled environment for the residents. In accordance with the cluster development, several individual buildings are constructed in a small-scale complex, which in turn compose the entire community. This cluster development was useful in intensifying the community identity which is necessary for the communal housing complex for

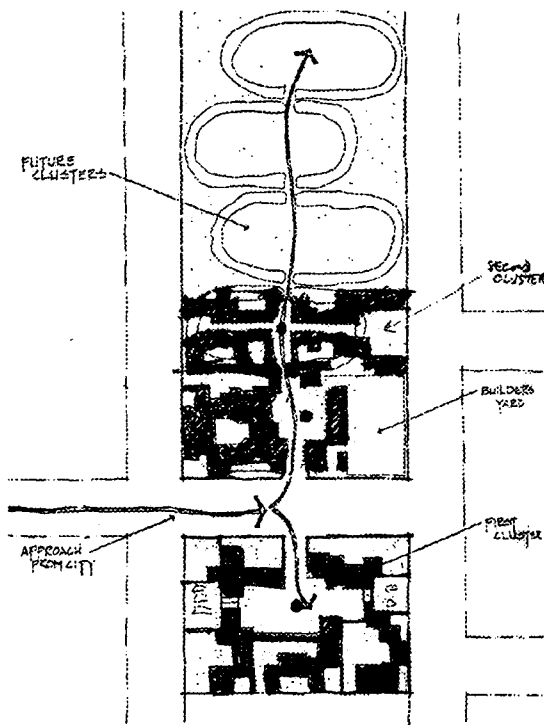


Figure 1. The layout of common land

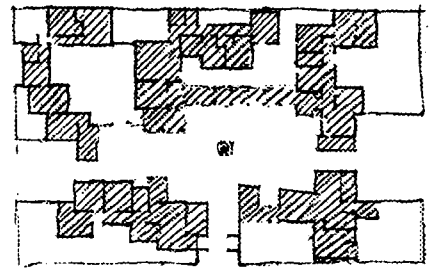


Figure 2. The first cluster of Houses

the low-income working classes. Additionally, it provided the community values and meanings, which resulted in the morphological perfection of the community. Most important, common land can be positively planned under the cluster development scheme. Privacy as well as individual autonomy in residence lives also can be maintained by organizing a couple of clusters in biological manners.

Third, the morphological and functional autonomy of individual houses can be achieved by the layout of individual houses. Individual houses in each cluster are designed to accommodate personal housing needs. The housing needs of the inhabitants can be considered in the initial planning phase without damaging the entire image of the community.

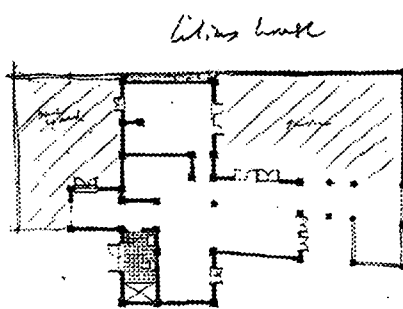


Figure 3. the collective design of common land I

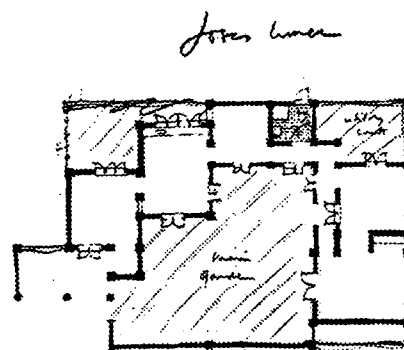


Figure 4. The collective design of common land II

John Habraken(1988) proposed in his level concept, which separate the role of

professionals and residents in the construction process. Professionals, such as architects, has a responsibility of providing main core systems such as shell, whereas residents organize sub-core systems, such as partitions, according to their personal housing needs. This is expected to make low-income housing production effective and productive. This level concept is related to the open house concept suggested by Amos Rapoport(1969). Rapoport said that the various housing needs of the inhabitants can be realized by providing resident autonomy in terms of housing forms and interior space design.

Fourth, the various concepts listed above can be actually implemented by Architect-builders who manage the entire construction process. Privacy and personal autonomy in each cluster can be maximized by the co-workshop of architect-builders and residents. Architect-builders can play a role of managing the realization of Utopian community ideals. The role includes blue-printing, cost control, revision, supplementation, control and operation.

Fifty, the human rhythm of the process is perhaps the most concrete and suitable expression of Utopian Community ideals. In Mexicali Project, Christopher Alexander pointed out that the human rhythm of the process is the most valuable concept of Utopia Community in a practical manner. To him, the spiritual aspects involved in Utopia Community ideals can be realized by the human rhythm of the process. Anthropologist walls(1990) pointed out that Utopian Communal housing is the direct result of organization activities that take place between residents(people) involved in the process. Consequently, As a product, utopian communal housing can be understood in the organization context.

John Turner(1976) has tried to establish a housing construction scheme which is originated from Utopian ideals for the low-income workers in the third world. He believed that inhabitants can realize the dream of their homes through the self-help housing concept. Turner's self-help housing concept takes into consideration the human rhythm of the process. Christopher Alexander(1986) takes over the concept in his Mexicali project. Turner's self-help housing concept is actually realized by architect-builders who have control all over the building process. The economic validity of self-help housing concept is accommodated by the step by step construction concept suggested by Alexander in Mexicali Project.

The step by step construction can be considered to be the most appropriate approach to completing the overall building process for working classes. In this regard, large-scale developments of rental apartments for Korean low-income people are problematic. Many studies have showed that the voluntary based problem solving approach results in housing satisfaction. Table2 summarizes the practical applications of Utopian communal housing concepts in the Mexicali project.

Table2. Utopian Communal Housing Concepts in Mexicali Project.

Utopian Communal Housing Concepts	Mexicali Project
▪ Equal Housing Opportunity	▶ The Collective Design of Common Land
▪ Individual Autonomy	▶ The Layout of Individual Houses
▪ Self sustainability	▶ Incremental Design ▶ Step by Step Construction
▪ Living with Natural Environment	▶ The Collective Design of Common Land ▶ The Human Rhythm of the Process
▪ Communal Values	▶ The Collective Design of Common Land ▶ The Human Rhythm of the Process
▪ Privacy Control	▶ Cluster Plan ▶ The Layout of Individual Houses

CONCLUSION

In the worldwide-spread phenomenon of segregated community developments, communal housing for low-income residents has been relatively neglected. Despite various efforts under the public and private partnership, the poor economic conditions of low-income residents makes the communal housing projects for low-income residents unsuccessful. In reality, the rental apartments built by private enterprises are not affordable for low-income residents. Moreover, the forced problem solving approach should be substituted by the voluntary base. This study is expected to provide a vision to solving the affordability problem faced by low-income residents.

This study is largely based on the lessons from the Mexicali Project in which many aspects of Utopian communal housing concepts were applied in changed or modified forms. It is possible for Koreans to learning form these lessons if an a solution is sought by housing professionals. The development of Utopian communal housing for low-income residents is expected to be activated through the years to come. Habitat spirits have already been spread all over the world, including Korea and America. Human values and affection should be reflected in the ideal house.

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NOTES

1. Indicate political, economic, and social factors as well as organization aspects involved in the selection of low-income class.
2. Indicate the overall building process or built environments as such.
3. Indicate improvements in physical and sanitary conditions.
4. Especially related to housing.
5. Owen planned a new type of agricultural community for working class, and suggested "Parallelogram," an ideal community.