

## UTOPIIC URBAN PROJECTS

What makes up a city is not only the concept and the form, but also its functions and processes: a city is a mirror of civilisation. The dream of an ideal city was found so fascinating by many famous thinkers and artists of the Italian Renaissance, from Filarete and Alberti to Leonardo and Scamozzi. Filarete's *Sforzinda*, for example, represented an attempt to find a mathematical model for the organisation of the urban environment. The goal was achieving harmony and perfection by designing an ideal city. The age of the industrial development fostered further utopias, since the squalor of industrial slums urged some enlightened British employers to create model villages and towns to provide better housing and living conditions for their workers. In 1922 Le Corbusier worked out his plan for the "contemporary city". Le Corbusier wanted to provide homes for up to three million inhabitants massed into residential areas with buildings up to 60 floor high. Whereas the traditional city drew a boundary between itself and the country, divided up its activities between public streets, squares and parks, and private buildings, the modernist city would be a single, open space for living that was organised by a central state planning authority. The chance to build a completely new city occurred only rarely, however. Between 1951 and 1965 Le Corbusier was commissioned by Pandit Nehru to plan the state capital of Chandigarh, which was intended to be the symbol of modern India. Over a space of around 100 hectares he laid out a grid of through roads. In between these there were residential areas for 150,000 people, with all the 13 different castes of

Indian society living separately from each other. The only area shared by all was the line of commercial establishments along the east-west axis, in the middle of which was the civic centre.

In 1960s, as a reaction to destructive impacts of Modernism on American cities, American urban planner Kevin Lynch tried to restore the social and symbolic function of the street and other public spaces. In an attempt to restore the human dimension of the ancient city, Lynch used scientific inquiry and empirical methods, such as interviews and questionnaires. Lynch was chiefly concerned with the "image of the environment" and thought that "every citizen has had long associations with some part of the city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings. It is therefore important for citizens to build up a workable image of each part of the city where they live. In his book *L'Architettura della Città*, published in 1966, the Italian Aldo Rossi stressed that the form of the city, its ground plan, was valid for every era. Only the use that is made of it must be appropriate to each era. An example he gave was the Piazza del Mercato in Lucca, the oval form of which is based on the Roman amphitheatre that stood on that spot. In the 1970s the Dutchman Rem Koolhaas published several analyses of the metropolis of New York. In his book *Delirious New York* he celebrates the principle of mixed use. The skyscraper which accommodates offices and dwellings, as well as places of entertainment under the same roof, and which, as seen in the Rockefeller Center also creates a free space, is Koolhaas's prototype of the city building.

### READING COMPREHENSION

● Answer the following questions.

- ① When did the quest for an ideal city begin?
- ② What was *Sforzinda*?
- ③ What was Le Corbusier's contemporary city like?
- ④ What is Chandigarh like?

- ⑤ What was Kevin Lynch especially concerned with?
- ⑥ What was Aldo Rossi's view about the ideal city?
- ⑦ What was Koolhaas's prototype of the city building?

### ACTIVITIES



### RESEARCH WORK

● Here is a list of famous urban ideals of the past. Choose one of them, gather some information about it, and write a short report.

- |                                                     |                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| ① Thomas More, <i>Utopia</i> (1516)                 | ③ Francis Bacon, <i>New Atlantis</i> (1620)    |
| ② Tommaso Campanella, <i>City of the Sun</i> (1602) | ④ Ebenezer Howard, <i>Garden Cities</i> (1902) |