

Summary

The object of my project is early socialism, also known as 'utopian' socialism. My research will explore their urban and architectural ideas, focusing on visions of urban transformation, the construction of modern infrastructure and sanitation, and a model architecture that would enable the construction of a perfect society. I analyse their aesthetic views and how these are integrated with their socio-political agendas. The research is based on a specific socio-political understanding of aesthetics, inspired by thinkers such as Jacques Rancière and Henri Lefebvre. In this view, aesthetics is mostly about taking an interest in public space and shaping it appropriately through material devices.

Many early socialists, inspired by thinkers such as Fourier and Owen, believed in transforming society through architecture. I analyse the main currents such as Saint-simonism, Fourierism and Owenism, comparing them with other social reformers of the nineteenth century to understand their views in the context of the age of the industrial revolution. I want to answer the question of where the 'utopian' socialists got their interest in architecture, which was almost absent in the later socialism of the second half of the 19th century. The analysis shows whether the use of these designs and architectural visions was practical and reformist, or whether it was merely a critique of the existing political order or a metaphor for an ideal society.

The sources I am interested in are the published theoretical writings characteristic of the history of ideas and, in support, also letters, diaries, manuscripts and testimonies of the working class, often the target audience of architectural visions, and its press organs. I also study maps, architectural plans, drawings and lithographs.

The research covers the period from 1800 to 1858, capturing half a century of urban and architectural debates, highlighting the contribution of the early socialists to architectural theory. Their influence is evident in the ideas pursued during the transformation of Paris or the factory estates of the 19th century. The research fills a gap in comparative work on the architectural and urban ideas of early socialism. They distinguish the characteristics of 'utopian' socialism among other social reformers, showing that this approach sought to change reality by modifying the material base rather than by political revolution. This ideological current presupposed the "construction" of a new order, which justifies the use of the currently discussed term "utopian socialism." The research will result in the publication of a book collecting the urban and architectural designs of the early socialists and analysing how they were used. It will be accompanied by comprehensive visual material.

Methodologically, the research integrates intellectual history, architectural history, and social history, treating architectural plans as alternative to texts as sources of value for the history of ideas. I sometimes treat architectural objects and concepts as equivalent actors of history, responsible for the transformation of ideas. By exploring the transfer of ideas, I demonstrate the instability of the relationship between artefacts and the form of action assumed for them. I demonstrate the potential for changing the symbolic and functional meanings of architectural objects. As a result, the research provides new insights into early socialist thought, revealing their contributions to architecture and urbanism. They challenge the dominant contemporary negative connotations of utopias and highlight their positive aspects and area of potential rational action.