

# Utopia-likeness that utilizes the energy of true utopias activates regional development

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Utopia literally means an imaginary ideal place that in principle can never be realized. However, in practical regional development, utopia-likeness is needed, because it promotes, involves and inspires social

reforms, says Mikko Karhu, Licentiate of Administrative Sciences, who is defending his doctoral dissertation at the University of Vaasa on 22 April.

Mikko Karhu's [doctoral dissertation](#) examines the interpretation and uses of utopias in regional development. Classics of utopian and dystopian literature, such as T. More's Utopia, A. Huxley's Brave New World and G. Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four were used as material in the dissertation, alongside expert interviews in regional development.

Regional development includes both true utopias and utopia-likeness. Both emanate from people's need to dream of something better. Today, regions are being developed in a pluralistic and practical manner. Implementing large-scale idealism has become difficult. It has been overtaken by more practical utopia-likeness.

Utopia-likeness is idealization included in development and control. It involves state authorities, local government organizations, businesses, organizations, residents or other operators participating in regional development conveying a desirable or avoidable vision of the future for the region.

"Utopia-like discourse may come across as strongly reliant on the ideal future. This is a good thing when various parties are encouraged to participate in the implementation of shared goals," says Karhu.

According to Karhu, visions of the future and even institutions include utopia-likeness.

"Space settlement and other ultra-futuristic visions will not be feasible for a long time on the scale that technological utopians claim. On the other hand, the ideological idea of established institutions, such as national states, of a united nation that shares the same values and goals

can never be fully realized either," says Karhu.

## **Despite their dangers, true utopias fascinate**

As a contrast to utopia-likeness, ideal utopias and ideological utopias are considered true utopias. Ideal utopia is a fictional place detached from reality that is described in utopian and dystopian literature.

Ideological utopia is an implicit and often enforced pursuit of an ideology. Ideology utopias aim at large-scale, even totalitarian changes that can lead to a great deal of misery. The current restriction of the freedom of speech and the sovereignty of the ruler in Russia bear a strikingly close resemblance to the Ministry of Truth, Thought Police and Big Brother in Orwell's novel.

According to Mikko Karhu, true utopias will never fully disappear from regional development. Ideal utopias may be useful when speculating about distant futures and also in innovation processes. On the other hand, an unquestioned operating model enforced from above, such as blind belief in [artificial intelligence](#) or continuous economic growth as a guarantor of happiness, can be concerning if it grows into an ideological utopia.

"In polyphonic regional development, it is preferable to use utopianism as a means of challenging traditional ways of thinking rather than as design aiming for perfection," Karhu says.

**More information:** Dissertation:  
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