Cities of the Future, Heroes of the Past: Doxiadis’ Vision of Post-WWII Modernism

Panayiota Pyla

The author is Assistant Professor of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois, USA. The document that follows is an edited version of the text on which a presentation by the author on the same theme was based at an international Workshop on the work and ideas of the architect and urban planner Constantinos A. Doxiadis, organized by the Constantinos and Emma Doxiadis Foundation, on “Space and Progress: Ekistics and the global context of post World War II urbanization and architecture,” 1-2 December, 2006, in Athens, Greece.

Introduction

In greeting cards sent to clients, associates, and friends in the early 1970s, the Athens-based firm Doxiadis Associates featured its founder, Constantinos Doxiadis, standing in front of a large drawing that depicted a methodically structured urban fabric as the authoritative response to global urban predicaments (fig. 1). Doxiadis, who launched his architectural and planning practice in the aftermath of World War II, collaborated extensively with international funding institutions and national governments to design complexes, infrastructures, urban plans and regional studies around the globe. By the time this photo had been taken, Doxiadis Associates was famous for its distant well-organized campaigns, and Doxiadis himself was receiving international awards, being hailed as a “busy remodeler of the world” or a “world designer” who changed the lives of millions.

The photograph on the greeting cards matched Doxiadis’ self-image as modernist hero who analyzed and solved contemporary urban problems from an objective distance. But the image also hints to the particularity, even uniqueness of Doxiadis’ ambition. Because, having unveiled his practice in the 1950s and 1960s when earlier modernism had already come under scrutiny, Doxiadis was a different type of architect-hero. Unlike Le Corbusier, Ludwig Hilberseimer, and other of his modernist predecessors who gazed upon cities from God-like altitudes, Doxiadis was in many ways “closer to the

Fig. 1: Photo of Doxiadis in front of "Entopia."