

# **17th Organization Studies Workshop**

## **Utopias and dystopias: Organization studies in a brave new world?**

### **18-20 May 2023, Athens, Greece**

#### **Conveners:**

**Paolo Quattrone**, University of Manchester, UK (host); **Renate Meyer**, WU Vienna, Austria (host); **Diane-Laure Arjaliès**, Ivey Business School, Canada; **Ali A. Gümüşay**, University of Hamburg, Germany; **Michael Lounsbury**, University of Alberta, Canada; **Marc J. Ventresca**, University of Oxford, UK

#### **Call for submissions**

The social builds from imaginaries that vary in form, focus, and impact by era, generation, region, and community. These imaginaries can be utopias and dystopias, hopes and fears, dreams and nightmares. Partly due to technological development, partly due to social dynamism and unrest, we see large-scale disenchantment with conventional forms of social cohabitation and exchange (e.g. markets, hierarchies, family, the state). These conditions, coupled with the intertwining of the political, the social, the cultural, and the economic, are giving rise to a series of changed social orders and forms of organizing.

In the 2020s, we witness dystopic worries about the planet's destruction, utopian hopes to catalyze and build a better world, and retrotopian desires to resort to a “good old” past (Bauman, 2017). These imaginaries are currently fueled by the many crises that shake up our lives: the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian incursion on Ukraine and resulting global disruptions of energy and food, mass forced displacement, long-lasting wars and conflicts, economic turbulence and rising inflation, a looming global recession, and the reality of recurring, devastating heat, fires and floods, a new cold war, and of course, the climate crisis. These to name only the most recent and prominent ones that animate a rethinking of fear and hope in the idiom of dystopia and eschatological futures. As we have learned from history, utopian hopes paired with political will and power have often led to oppressing ideologies, surges of violence, and regimes of terror.

The liquidity of modern institutions (Bauman, 2000) and waning trust in these regimes, the acceleration of our life worlds (Rosa, 2010) and growing alienation, post-truth scenarios, the rise of authoritarianism (Adler et al., 2022), persisting inequalities, misogyny, and racism, and the risks of the Anthropocene challenge the capacity of present models of organizing and their underlying assumptions, forms, and practices. At best, they seem incomplete; worse, they may be retro and outdated, unable to foster scalable and systemic transformation, and inapt to lead the way into a sustainable future for the planet and our species (Ergene et al., 2020). At the same time, there is hope manifested in real utopias (Wright, 2010), prefigurative organizing (Schiller-Merkens, 2022), inclusive ecosystems (DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca & Creed, 2020), and collectivist forms of democracy (Chen & Chen, 2021) with organizations as key engines of collective imagination and transformation (Beckert, 2021; Chen & Chen, 2021; Bodrožić & Adler 2022). Recalling C. Wright Mills' (1959) famous call for an “organizational imagination,” where individual biographies meet

collective action, it is time to contemplate the possibilities for constructing desirable futures (Gümüşay & Reinecke, 2022) with attention to capacity and means provided by (refreshed) theories of organization, organizing and entrepreneurialism that can change societies (Eberhart, Lounsbury, & Aldrich, 2022).

In this unsettled, perturbed milieu, the *17<sup>th</sup> Organization Studies Workshop* wants to offer an opportunity to debate how a refreshed and revitalized organizational imagination could offer action strategies for research, policy, and practice. This effort has multiple facets, dimensions, spaces, and temporalities and relates to some of the most pressing sources, concerns, and responses that this imaginative effort entails.

The Workshop is interested in various kinds of utopias and dystopias of organizing that are constructed, how they are created and destroyed, and the means and modes through which envisioned collective futures are resonant as dreams get translated into practice (Arjaliès, 2021).

We are open to micro-, meso-, and macro- as well as across-level perspectives. We invite conceptual and empirical submissions from all theoretical, methodological, and epistemological views. In addition, we welcome contributions that question, challenge, and envision our discipline and our communities (Meyer & Quattrone, 2021) in the context of contingent utopian/dystopian/retrotopian futures.

We encourage new forms of communication and collaborations, including works with activists, artists, politicians, practitioners, and interdisciplinary engagement. We are also open to contributions that do not fit on a printed page, including audio and visual artifacts. Finally, we aim to hear voices from various “margins,” especially non-Western experiences and perspectives.

We encourage submissions on organizational imaginaries that engage with the following broad areas and themes, each identifying various ways of dealing with the relationships between organizing, utopias, and dystopias:

▪ **Imaginary modes of organizing and ordering, living and being**

- the rethinking of what counts as ‘progress’ and dismissal of the faith in the power of the market to secure it; the foregrounding of de-growth and post-growth as organizing principles;
- the emergence of new forms of organizing alternatives to capitalism, including social movements, moral markets, collectives, cooperatives, and communities, social and cultural entrepreneurship;
- reflections of our habitat, including cities, space/the universe, and topics of colonization and shifting frontiers/borders;
- the engagement with grand challenges such as the climate crisis to foster the transition and transformation towards imagined futures beyond what has been called the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Econocene, or Technocene;
- foci on diverse analytic temporalities: the long-term, the long now, future-making, and slow movements;
- challenges to and attempt to regain institutional trust and the infrastructural dynamics of fields and ecosystems amidst competing logics, ideologies and potential futures;
- the delegation of authority to big tech, and the associated rise of digital technologies related to artificial intelligence, blockchain, virtual reality, gamification generally, and platforms such as Metaverse, with the related faith in their quasi-magical power;

- developments such as wars, civil unrest, and genocide that redescribe the utopia/dystopia continuum.
- **The foundations, mobilizations, and implications of utopian and dystopian futures**
  - the philosophical, psychological, sociological, and political foundations of utopian, dystopian and/or retrotopian imaginaries;
  - the role of meaning, hope, despair, anticipation, and inspiration for the emergence of imaginaries of organizing;
  - the renewed enchantment with ideologies, spirituality, religion, alternative realities and transitions and transformations that have the potential to tilt the utopia/ dystopia duality;
  - the mobilizing potential and organizing capacities of imaginaries and their implications for degrees of collectivity;
  - how utopia and dystopia rely on (social) media and changing communication and discourse;
  - the role of art, culture, architecture, and fiction in the emergence, maintenance and decline of imaginaries of organizing;
  - the insights from systems perspectives, including the rethinking of the human-nature relationships;
  - the resurfacing of Indigenous thinking, settings, and perspectives;
  - the societal implications of shifting and competing for utopian and dystopian imaginaries of organizing.
- **New modes of research, methodologies, and communities**

Utopias and dystopias can be dreams or nightmares, depending on many identities and social position factors. Both confront us with something which is not there and never will be; they are ‘no-things’ (Mumford, 2022). Still, they have implications for the present and its plural trajectories into ‘tomorrow.’ This has methodological implications for studying dystopic/utopic organizing. We invite submissions that explore and advance our methodologies and methods for studying utopias and dystopias, as well as reflections about the future of our scholarly community.

This list of areas and themes is illustrative rather than exhaustive – imagination beyond is appreciated!

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022

Acknowledgment of acceptance: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Workshop date: **18-20 May 2023**, and venue: [Hotel VINCCI EVEREDEN](#), Athens, Greece.

**For further information, please:**

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