

## APPLICATION FORM FOR PROSPECTIVE WORKSHOP DIRECTORS

This form should be used for applications to run a workshop at the Joint Sessions of Workshops. *The deadline for applications is 15 February each year.*

Title of proposed workshop

**The Politics of Utopia: Intentional Communities as Social Science Microcosms**

Name of workshop director(s): **Nicholas Deakin**

**Nir Tsuk**

(maximum of 2 persons)

Name and address of institution(s):

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**Please note that the information above is VERY important as it will be used in all future correspondence and printed in the academic programme.**

*The proposal should be typed using 1.5 line spacing on three/four A4 pages using this sheet as the first page, and should cover the points outlined in the guidelines (see over).*

Please send this form, together with your **workshop proposal**, to both:

a) ECPR Central Services  
University of Essex  
Wivenhoe Park  
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For further information, please contact either of the above.

# The Politics of Utopia: Intentional Communities as Social Science Microcosms

Proposal for a workshop in ECPR's Joint Sessions in Uppsala, April 2004

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*'Soyons realistes, exigeons l'impossible'*

(Let us be realists and demand the impossible)

1968ers' slogan

Utopia is not attracting many tourists these days. Perhaps this is because it has had such a bad press recently. Sweeping denunciations of Utopian thinking as setting goals that are either chronically unattainable or if attained, profoundly undesirable are commonplace: the brutal formula 'Utopia = Gulag' (Dahrendorf 1968, but also Popper 2002 and Hayek 2001) sums up this approach. But there are other Utopias in the guidebooks and it is on these that we wish to focus. They are the *realised* utopias – intentional communities that are the incarnation of utopian ideas in bricks and mortar and flesh and blood – which can be taken as milestones of (and admittedly sometimes tombstones for) social notions and political developments.

These intentional communities, unlike circumstantial communities, bring together (usually in geographical proximity) people who share a common political objective, religious belief, ecological idea or social vision, and who wish to fulfil their objectives through collective means (Goodwin & Taylor 1982). Such self-conscious and orchestrated societies – let them be rural or urban, egalitarian or elitist, contemporary or historical – can serve as valuable case studies or even yardsticks for many of the heated debates and contested concepts of today's politics (Deakin 2001).

Yet intentional communities have been overlooked by most scholars in the last two decades in their search for new insights or data. A perusal of the literature of the 1970s and early 1980s yields a plethora of books on intentional communities, their

historical roots and meaning, their unique sociology and politics and their interesting relation with the social sciences (Goodwin 1978, Goodwin and Taylor 1982, Hardy 1979, Manuel 1973, and Richter 1971 would serve as good examples). A search for more recent publications on intentional communities, on the other hand, would leave one with a handful of items that mainly serve as practical guides for establishing a good Christian or alternative community (see for instance, Christian 2002, Janzen 1996, or Selth 1986).

The ECPR Joint Sessions of the last four years reveal a similar picture. In the panels that have considered matters epitomised by intentional communities, the latter received no attention.<sup>1</sup>

How should this disregard be explained? Does association with images from Huxley's *Brave New World* infect these societies? Is this due to antipathy to the whole concept of 'planning'? Should we blame it on methodological fashions which prefer abstract models? Does it have to do with the eccentric image of such communities (as in George Orwell's unkind caricature)? Or could lessons emerge from closer scrutiny that might threaten some 'mainstream' theoretical assumptions or rewrite some of the findings of empirical research?

Intentional communities – as deliberate attempts to create the social world anew – exhibit many characteristically modern political and social tensions. Moreover, such communities can serve as another useful bridge across the gap between two corpuses of writing that have emerged since the 1970s – one (political theory) dealing with theory of democracy, deliberation, participation etc., and the other (political science) addressing changes in national and local political systems of advanced industrial societies.

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<sup>1</sup> Intentional communities are resoundingly absent in workshops on: deliberation, citizenship, representation, and participation ('Innovation in Democratic Theory' in Mannheim, 'Citizenship in a Historical Perspective' in Copenhagen and 'Political Participation and Information' in Turin), on associations, social capital, civil society and civic voluntarism ('Voluntary Associations, Social Capital and Interest Mediation: Forging the Link' and 'Associational Engagement and Democracy in Cities in Copenhagen, 'Rescuing Democracy: The Lure of the Associative Elixir' in Turin), on local policy, politics and government ('Gender and Local Politics or Governance: Structural and Institutional Changes in the 90's' in Copenhagen, 'Local Autonomy and Local Democracy: Exploring the Link' in Grenoble, and 'Institutional Innovation in Local Democracy' in Turin), or even on welfare policy and studies ('The Welfare State: Pros and Cons' in Turin), democratic theory ('Competing Conceptions of Democracy in the Practice of Politics' in Copenhagen, 'Deliberative Democracy in Theory and Practice: The Roles of Political Information, Thought and Discussion' in Turin) and environmental issues ('The Politics of New Environmental Policy Instruments' and 'Environmental Politics at the Local Level' in Grenoble and 'The End of Environmentalism' in Turin).

The varying trajectories of realised utopias (towards both successes and failures) suggest a wide range of relevant ideas and conclusions. Scientific and primitivist communities, religious and secular, 'open' and totalitarian, libertarian and coercive communities – can all be found in abundance, encapsulating the *zeitgeist* or rejecting it, epitomising their socio-political context or bitterly criticising it (Kumar, 1991). Discussions that can be found latent elsewhere show up here explicitly, compactly and mundanely: revolution as opposed to gradual change; property and hierarchy as causes of social malaise; associationalism and co-operation as routes to human and civic virtue; top-down or bottom-up; statism and communitarianism; democracy, bureaucracy and authoritarianism – they are all there.

The proposed workshop would therefore be innovative in two senses. First, it would bring back on to the agenda substantive issues about the connections between ideals and realities – connections and insights that reactions to the failure of the communist experiment seem to have occluded. Second, it would introduce to the ECPR workshops a series of themed, strategic case studies that together constitute a rather different way of approaching political research.

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The focus of the workshop will be on the interplay between social and political concepts and realised utopias. Papers are therefore invited from a wide range of disciplines – politics, sociology, and history among others – as long as they explicitly address forms of past and present intentional communities and the ways in which the study of these communities can speak to current debates in the social sciences. We are interested in theoretical and empirical contributions alike, and, as the interdisciplinary nature of the topic may suggest, we encourage applications from researchers drawing on diverse methodological perspectives. We are especially interested in four types of possible papers:

- *Deductive papers*, which study one or more political concepts (such as government, participation, technocracy or any other) and look at their embodiment in a specific intentional community.
- *Inductive papers*, which choose one specific intentional community and while examining its social reality attempt at making a contribution to a more generalised theory regarding social and political phenomena.

- *Comparative papers*, which involve two intentional communities (or more) in a comparative scrutiny aiming at analysing the similar and dissimilar patterns, or comparing the same community diachronically, in two very different points in time.
- *Methodological papers*, which offer new ways of, or techniques for, looking at intentional communities as social science microcosms, both qualitative and quantitative.

Scholars who have already expressed their interest in taking part in the workshop are:

- Ze'ev Emmerich, Cambridge University, UK
- Zeynep Kadirbeyoglu, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
- Vlad Mykhnenko, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
- Ya'acov Oved, Tel Aviv University, Israel
- Begum Ozkaynak, Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain

Applications for supporting funds will be made when the result of the proposal is known.

## **Bibliography**

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### **Biographical notes:**

*Nicholas Deakin* is Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics' Centre for Civil Society. He previously taught and researched at Birmingham University. He has written widely on local and central government in Britain and on the voluntary sector there. His most recent book is *In Search of Civil Society* (Palgrave 2001).

*Nir Tsuk* is an Israeli doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge. In his dissertation, comparing the English Garden city and the Israeli Kibbutz, he analyses the effect of national policy on local social cohesion, examines the nature of 20th century utopian communities and criticises the overly simplistic notions of social capital. He also consults to the Community Development Foundation in London.

A paper for the European Consortium for Political Research Joint Sessions Workshop on The Politics of Utopia: Intentional Communities as Social Science Microcosms Uppsala University, Sweden, 13-18 April 2004. Dr Adrian Smith SPRU (Science & Technology Policy Research Unit), University of Sussex, UK Email: [a.g.smith@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:a.g.smith@sussex.ac.uk); Telephone: 044 (0)1273 877065. It is here that AT intentional communities offer microcosmic lessons of relevance to the wider social cosmos. The BRAD and CAT initiatives (later section) reveal how important it is to secure a constituency of material and nonmaterial support around a vision. The Politics of Utopia: International Communities as Social Science Microcosm. [View Paper Details](#). Utopia and Intentional Communities. [View Paper Details](#). Virtually Perfect? Narratives of optimism in the theory and experience of "cyberspace". [View Paper Details](#). Share this page. The European Consortium For Political Research. Intentional communities, utopian communities, communes, alternative communities, collectives, cooperatives, experimental communities, communal societies, and communitarian utopias are some of the more popular terms used to describe what many consider to be nonconventional living arrangements. The definitions of these terms vary from study to study but, for the most part, the term intentional community is broad enough to encompass all of those listed above. These terms are often used interchangeably. According to Geoph Kozeny, "An 'intentional community' is a group of people who