Architecture, Well-being and the Built Environment

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An Essay in Quest of Cultural Balance

By

Almantas Samalavičius

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations

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FOREWORD

There has been an upsurge of opinions in public discussions and realms of research during recent decades indicating that both architecture and the entire built environment do not satisfy a growing number of individuals and their communities in different contemporary urban locations, starting with some dissenting architectural professionals and ending with many users of architectural designers' products. It cannot be claimed that the problems in this area have not been addressed or that there have been no attempts to solve at least some of them. On the contrary, many of the issues related to the sphere of the built environment have already been identified and discussed on numerous occasions by critically minded scholars and practitioners who care about its past, present and future.

Nevertheless, even though there has been some sound criticism of present practices and a number of suggestions for some plausible solutions, attempts to rethink and reconstruct the present built environment still encounter great difficulties. Despite growing dissatisfaction with current mainstream architectural design based on industrial patterns and occasional calls to abandon practices that shaped the present built environment (Peter Blake, Peter Buchanan, etc.), the transition from conventional architectural design to more sustainable and resilient ways of creating buildings and urban environments is slow, clumsy and often turbulent. More than that, recurrent calls for a convivial reconstruction of our built environment are often neglected, ignored or bypassed, notwithstanding the fact that sustainability and its avatars have become popular and widespread catch-words, misused and sometimes even abused in contemporary public discourses on a global scale. Thus, there have been some controversies, as these promising concepts have gradually become "plastic words," to borrow a phrase coined by the German linguist and writer Uwe Poerksen. They mean everything and, at the same time, almost nothing. Yet, despite their plasticity, these words and categories need to be further scrutinized and critically examined rather than simply abandoned.

It is possible to assert that there are some undeniable aspects of present academic and professional communication that inhibit and limit the ability to understand the real causes and origins of many currently urgent problems. Thus, instead of addressing their roots, intellectual energy is often redirected toward concerns of a purely technical nature. However, neither climate

change nor the degradation of nature nor the maladies of our overgrown cities have been caused by technologies alone. Humans' approaches to these spheres were guided by certain beliefs and ideologies that were instrumentalized and turned into national as well as global policies. Because of their persistence, they need to be re-addressed and scrutinized.

One such problematic node that is rarely discussed is the burdensome and highly controversial legacy of architectural modernism that otherwise might be adequately labeled as industrial design. Unfortunately, architectural modernism and its impact on the built environment and nature are mostly taken for granted without any reservations. Accordingly, its principles, guiding ideology and cultural as well as social effects are rarely questioned in professional and academic circles. This moral blindness and refusal to admit that architectural modernism (or industrial design) has contributed significantly to the degradation of the current built environment and destruction of nature all over the globe makes it difficult to identify the real roots of many of our problems. Consequently, continuous ignorance does not allow people to agree on what measures ought to be applied in order to transform the present living environment of humans in such a way that instead of causing and multiplying ongoing tensions, dissatisfaction, disappointment, and even despair, it could be gradually transformed into a source of positive feelings and emotions that are vitally important for the well-being of human individuals and their societies.

The stubborn and often ideologically motivated reluctance to reassess the consequences of architectural and urban design practices that reigned for more than half of the last century and still dominate today (though often taking disguised shapes) has a huge social and cultural cost. First and foremost, people are continuously forced to live in an environment from which they are alienated, in which they feel physically and psychologically uncomfortable, and which they simply dislike or even hate. This anger and hatred occasionally erupts in various forms of vandalism. Buildings spray-painted with graffiti in both downtown and suburban areas are just one of the most visible forms of destruction directed toward architectural structures and the entire urban environment that is detested by its occupants. These and other, often more violent means of protest and dissatisfaction continue to haunt contemporary urban culture on a global scale.

However, architectural professionals mostly remain silent on these issues as if they are of no concern to their professional interests. Thus, architectural designers continue to create dead forms of a built environment that Lewis Mumford aptly called an "anti-city," without being able to breathe any life into Platonic solids that have recently acquired more and more extravagant yet equally oppressive shapes. Curiously, seemingly well-

educated, informed and certified professionals continue to create a built environment that no longer has any connections with the art of dwelling that has existed among human societies and communities for millennia. More than half a century ago, Bernard Rudofsky brilliantly documented the extraordinary potential of the human ability to construct dwellings in the most unlikely places and adapt to local topography, nature and climate in an exhibition titled *Architecture Without Architects*.

As the philosopher and historian Ivan Illich argued in his highly insightful essay "Dwelling," the unique human art that existed for millennia was abandoned as soon as the modern era and industrialism took command. Consequently, in the modern period, the art of dwelling was replaced by professionally designed strategies as well as policies and practices of mass housing. People were no longer viewed as human individuals and social beings – they became continuously identified as a workforce that simply needed to be provided with some kind of basic housing in order to be continuously productive and thus useful to industrial and commercial enterprises. This dramatic cultural rupture made people and their communities continue their turbulent existence in a completely artificial, pre-planned, bureaucratically controlled, regularly refurbished (or even recycled), and, consequently, less and less familiar or even humane environment. Illich described such a contemporary urban environment as tailored entirely according to the industrial mode:

> The resident lives in a world that has been made. He can no more beat his path on the highway than he can make a hole in the wall. He goes through his life without leaving a trace. The marks he leaves are considered dents – tear and wear. What he does leave behind him will be removed as garbage. From commons for dwelling the environment has been redefined as a resource for the production of garages for people, commodities and cars. Housing provides cubicles in which residents are housed. Such housing is planned, built and equipped for them. To be allowed to dwell minimally in one's own housing constitutes a special privilege: only the rich may move a door or drive a nail into a wall. Thus the vernacular space of dwelling is replaced by the homogeneous space of the garage. Settlements look the same from Taiwan to Ohio and from Lima to Peking. Everywhere you find the same garage for the human – shelves to store the work-force overnight, handy for the means of its transportation. Inhabitants dwelling in spaces they fashion have been replaced by residents sheltered in buildings produced for them, duly registered as consumers of housing protected by the Tenants' or the Credit Receivers' Act. (Illich 1992, 57–58)

This is a gloomy and even desperate picture. Yet it is also extremely accurate and true. In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution triggered an unprecedented urban explosion; consequently, urban growth

went beyond the control of municipal as well as national institutions in Europe's most technically and industrially advanced societies. At the same time, industrialization and urbanization produced equally unprecedented levels of urban poverty and slums and a variety of other social and cultural side effects. The twentieth century scored somewhat better; however, it played its own part in degrading the human condition while producing a global built environment that continues to damage individuals, communities and their immediate environments by producing overgrowth, homogenization, rigorous zoning, suburbanization, ghettoization, gentrification, alienation, etc., as well as inflicting a habit of treating places as spaces and thus depriving them of unique character. Finally, it produced an even larger number of slums on the global level – a phenomenon paradoxically magnified by the introduction of the doctrine of development, first adopted by US President Harry S. Truman. The remedy, however, turned into a poison. The planet of slums, as Mike Davis titled it in his well-known book, is no longer a metaphor – it is a troublesome, alarming and exponentially expanding reality.

Attempts to solve the urgent issues and problems of mass housing with the help of the mentality of industrial design also largely deformed the 'facial' qualities of our cities and continue to do so. Faceless and placeless architectural structures have replaced the edifices that have marked and symbolized the highest achievements of human civilizations for centuries and millennia. Most buildings of our era no longer even attempt to conform to other buildings, historical urban tissue or any local urban contexts. They are built precisely in the same way as garages or, for that matter, parking lots. Thus, they are always out of place everywhere and demonstrate absolute indifference toward any locality.

Despite ongoing urban degradation, the designers of the industrialized built environment often pretend to act as visual artists. Thus, they use enormous amounts of glass, ferro concrete and an array of other cheap, mass-produced materials to design twisted, deformed, unnatural, and shocking shapes to compensate for the loss of meaning, place and community. The cult of novelty created, exalted and sustained by design professionals thrives like never before, but ironically, the present architectural structures designed by adhering to modernist, post-modernist and post-post-modernist aesthetics age much faster and perform less well than most edifices built several centuries ago.

Despite the rapid development and implementation of sophisticated building and design technologies (CAD, etc.), our present buildings hardly perform any better than structures of the past: entire urban quarters constructed during the last century are routinely being demolished in order

to clear the way for new generations of equally flawed architectural structures, the lifespan of which is as brief as or even shorter than those constructed during the reign of early modernism when some building quality still persisted. The inhabitants of these 'modern slums' equipped with the most recent technologies and utilities, however, continue to complain desperately about the bad or at least ambiguous performance of these structures and their lack of character, aesthetic appeal, atmosphere, or any other qualities fit for human livelihood.

Of course, architectural designers are not the only ones to be blamed for such fundamental transformations of the built environment, especially during the second half of the last century. However, they contributed in no small part to the creation and proliferation of such an environment, believing only themselves and taking care to convince others that the industrial paradigm invented by Le Corbusier, the Bauhaus school and other pioneers of architectural modernism was synonymous with progress, well-being and prosperity. No matter how strange it might be, this stale and utterly destructive thinking became deeply entrenched in architectural schools and professional communities and continues to be reproduced on a regular basis.

The industrial paradigm socially engineered in the West was imported to its colonies and eventually rooted in decolonizing and post-colonial societies that adopted the doctrines of progress and development supplied by their former colonizers as universal remedies to deal with their situation as well as tools for creating the future. Entire generations of architectural and urban designers were trained and often continue to be schooled in this spirit in various parts of the planet. After receiving their monocultural training based on the industrial paradigm, members of the architectural profession never come to entertain the idea that by designing an environment that destroys human beings and nature alike, they significantly contribute to the destruction of the vernacular sphere and imprison their clients in a built environment that is constructed as a "homogeneous space of the garage" (Illich 1992, 58). This kind of urban and architectural environment might well be described as 'toxic,' if one applies a term from a currently fashionable global vocabulary.

Besides, it has been demonstrated that individual structures and the entire built environment designed in the industrial mode and built according to questionable principles that continue to guide architectural practice require excessive amounts of energy, necessitate enormous financial spending, and, last but not least, continue to deplete scarce natural resources and degrade the natural environment.

In addition, this kind of built environment continues to be constructed primarily with short-term housing solutions in mind, so, in principle, it cannot be considered sustainable or resilient, even in the current culture of post-truth society. Moreover, much of people's present living environment was designed and built without considering the most essential qualities of human nature, their real needs or expectations, or, finally, how this kind of planned and designed environment meets humans' physical, emotional and cognitive needs. For decades, architectural designers have continued to see themselves as demiurges endorsed with an exclusive power to create the human environment. However, the structures they continue to create most often impose their creators' images and fantasies on their clients and users. Ironically, while the last century attempted to produce 'Universal Designers' as Buckminster Fuller hoped, it instead produced large numbers of totalitarian-minded architectural *Fuhrers* who continuously attempted to impose their own narcissistic and megalomaniac visions on their tormented communities and societies.

Nevertheless, we are gradually starting to acknowledge that this kind of disabling design and building of the human environment cannot continue any longer. It has already been compromised and even caused bankruptcies in various locations today, even though it continues to pretend it has something to offer. More and more often, reasonable and informed opinions are expressed that the entire built environment, especially the heritage of architectural and urban planning of the last century, not only needs to be reconsidered but also essentially restructured, including in the academic programs that educate professionals in the fields of architectural and urban design. Unfortunately, changes in architectural education are too slow, and, as usual, praxis follows the business model.

I would like to add a more personal note to my description of the current socio-cultural reality. My own thinking about the need for essential changes in the way both architectural structures and the urban environment are conceived and constructed today has a long history. Having been raised in the context of so-called 'really existing socialism' that, in reality, was nothing but a crooked image of any communist ideals, I came to understand that the built environment, planned, designed and constructed in the Soviet realm during the last century, was largely unhuman. Despite slogans and massive propaganda efforts, the built environment constructed during this era did not even attempt to be human.

Curiously, after briefly flirting with and abruptly abandoning the modernist vanguard and eventually discarding its short-term adoption of neo-Classical patterns disguised as Socialist Realism, Soviet ideology fully embraced urban and architectural modernism, urging, encouraging and even

bribing its architectural designers to destroy and recycle the built environment created during the previous epochs that were popularly labeled as a despicable 'bourgeois legacy'. Of course, there was a certain asymmetry while dealing with the legacy of the past: artists or writers who attempted to follow modernist aesthetics were severely persecuted, censored and silenced. In contrast, architectural designers enjoyed unprecedented levels of freedom to build according to the industrial paradigm, even though the term 'modernism' was officially considered decadent, aesthetically dangerous and morally corrupt. Soon after the end of Stalinism, architectural modernism (or industrial design) completely transformed the urban landscape of the Soviet republics. To save the face of Soviet communist ideology, modernism was comfortably repackaged and covered under the neutral label of 'contemporary architecture and urban design'.

Soon after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the disintegration of the Soviet system, I came to realize that the Soviet socialist empire was, in many ways, a negative mirror image of the capitalist West it fiercely attempted to overcome and defeat. Though lacking sufficient financial and economic means and adequate technologies to compete with most advanced Western capitalist societies, it nevertheless gave itself up to the idea of progress, and after a brief period of exploiting Classicism for its own ideological and political goals, it eventually chose to pursue the path pioneered by the Modernist Movement. Thus, without making references to the Western vanguard of modernist architecture or its ideas about modern urban planning, the Soviet Union quietly yet resolutely embraced architectural modernism in order to be able to compete and overcome its political arch-enemy. Though its ideological war against capitalism and the West finally ended in failure and the country that posed as an embodiment of the socialist vanguard spectacularly disintegrated, its further design practices did not change considerably. The built environment constructed during recent decades in the post-Soviet space has very few differences (if any) from what is being designed and constructed in the Global North.

But this is the bigger picture. On a smaller scale, many of us have our own stories about being negatively affected, depressed or even tortured by our present built environment. I have my own experiences as well. One of these is worth a closer look, especially since it was partially responsible for triggering my own interest in the relationship between well-being and the built environment.

A quarter of a century ago, I received an invitation to teach at the University of Illinois at Chicago as a visiting professor, which I duly accepted. Upon my arrival, I found myself in a large urban university

campus that resembled the space of some abstract modern city that could have been located anywhere. Tall buildings, large empty spaces, brutalist concrete architecture, few trees or other vegetation – this was what my temporary workplace where I spent the whole spring semester of 1999 looked like. The setting resembled a lame copy of Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia or, for that matter, any other modernist city designed according to the ideas preached by Le Corbusier and his most dogmatic disciples. It was a bit of a relief when I found out that my graduate seminar on cultural theory would not take place in the faceless high-rise building where my office was located but in a relatively small (perhaps four-story) humanities building.

Unfortunately, it was too good to be true. When I went to my first graduate seminar, immediately after entering the building, I felt like I had entered a strange and haunting labyrinth. I wandered around the interior of what at first sight seemed to be a modest-sized building, looking for the room assigned for my class, only reaching my location after no less than twenty minutes of exhausting wandering around the entire building. After finally reaching my destination, I was overjoyed, like Odysseus was after returning home after his long wanderings. I attributed the unsuccessful search to the fatigue associated with being in a large, strange city and an otherwise completely unfamiliar environment.

When I entered the same building a week later, to my great surprise, the situation repeated itself, as if I were in a bad dream or the Hollywood movie *Groundhog Day*. Again and again I wandered around the interior spaces without being able to locate the seminar room I had been in with my students just a week previously. After the situation happened again, I decided to ask the students how they managed to find the seminar room. It turned out that they were experiencing the same difficulties; however, at the time, we all tried to downplay the problem. During the course of the semester, finding the location of the graduate seminar remained a regular challenge, and quite often, wandering around the building and getting repeatedly lost, I felt despair and frustration.

It was not until the end of the semester that I finally learned the reason for my pathetic experience: a colleague teaching on the same university campus explained to me that this particular building had been designed and constructed at a time when behaviorism was flourishing in the United States. Behaviorist researchers imagined that human behavior could be modeled by observing the behavior of smaller animals, especially mice, and they staged many experiments, forcing mice and rats to find their way through a space designed as a kind of sophisticated labyrinth. Curiously, rodents, unlike human beings, were relatively successful in escaping the labyrinth.

Reflecting on this unpleasant yet memorable experience, I tried to extract some moral from the story. The good news was that I proved to be no smarter than a mouse or any other kind of rodent. But speaking more seriously, this did not bring much comfort. I left Chicago with lots of uneasy feelings aroused by my regular weekly wandering around this particular building. There were, however, cases when a feeling of *déjà vu* came over me while staying in other locations, making me think that my Chicago experience was anything but an exception.

Therefore, this book aims to show that while thinking about the future of the built environment, we need to understand and acknowledge the causes of our present problems and reconsider alternatives that were available and developed in a timely manner yet were missed or simply discarded. I am also fully aware of the fact that it is much easier to speak about technical issues and suggest possible technical means than it is to solve them. But the problems of the built environment were not created by technology or the development of modern technologies alone. The industrial paradigm of architectural and urban design was created and modeled by people who became prey to a powerful and long-lasting ideology that disseminated and sustained it as the one and only instrument available for creating the architectural and urban forms of the modern world and its future. And that is simply not true.

It would be easy to write off many problems of the present built environment as the excesses of behaviorism or any other orthodox theory of the recent period. The problem, however, should not be downplayed: a significant portion of our modern built environment is designed as if it were specifically intended to create a stage for negative emotions and recurrent frustration. A large part of the urban mass in contemporary cities was designed during the last century according to the whims of architectural designers who were totally indifferent and insensitive to the feelings and reactions of their clients and users of their designed spaces. For decades, many architects were concerned only with implementing their personal artistic visions without taking into account what the inhabitants felt about being made to live in those spaces. The idea of a post-occupancy evaluation, which is finally gaining currency these days, did not even exist during the entire twentieth century.

Much research on the state of our built environment has been conducted in recent decades. It has identified a lot of issues that require urgent and adequate solutions not only at a local or regional level but also on a planetary level. Some approaches have already been offered, deviating and distancing themselves from the paradigm of industrial design. The latter's dogmas have been and continue to be challenged by a large and constantly

growing number of authors who seriously care about the well-being of individuals and communities and the role played in human lives by their built environment.

After becoming interested in the interactions between environment and well-being more than a decade ago, I have noticed that authors dealing with similar issues often overlook the fact that there are many similar or even related approaches at work in this field. Nevertheless, architectural writers and theorists belonging to one school of thought tend to prioritize their own approach and ignore the validity of other attitudes that could and often should be meaningfully combined in order to solve complex and intricate issues. On the other hand, important and highly prospective ideas presented in the past have frequently been forgotten or ignored, yet some of them are still valid and can be used to support the need for essential changes.

Therefore, the purpose of this concise book is to revisit and reconsider some approaches toward the quality of the built environment that are important to the prospects of securing a certain level of well-being. I have also opted to focus on the intellectual legacy of a few significant architectural thinkers who, in my view, offered timely alternatives to abandon the dominating paradigm but whose ideas and arguments have been misunderstood, marginalized, ignored or mindlessly forgotten.

The philosophy behind this book is based on the Buddhist idea that the ultimate goal of human life on this earth is happiness. Happiness, of course, includes the overall balance of senses. Though this state is hard to achieve, this does not mean that we should not try to secure at least a satisfactory level of individual and communal well-being. There is no doubt that the built environment plays quite a major role in providing and securing well-being, physical and spiritual balance, and, possibly, contributing to the feeling of happiness. Urban environments, public and private places, are sources of human satisfaction, physical and emotional balance and positive feelings. However, as we have experienced for a long time, they might also take the shape of a Pandora's box that radiates alienation, depersonalization, insecurity, fear, desperation, etc.

It should be added that thinking about the relationship between architecture, urban structures and well-being, although it has acquired momentum in the last couple of decades, is not a completely new idea. The development of the phenomenology of architecture and the environment has broadened our understanding of how we experience and perceive our surroundings and architectural structures, while recent research in cognitive architecture has offered explanations as to why we feel at home in certain spaces and enjoy particular shapes while experiencing tension and anxiety when facing others. Connections between the environment and mental as

well as physical health have become the object of a growing number of studies, the findings of which can no longer be ignored or downplayed. Speculation concerning the biophilia hypothesis has finally grown into a biophilic architecture movement that has opened the ways to explore how nature can be integrated into architecture, bringing about a new kind of symbiosis instead of elimination of natural elements in the contemporary built environment. Authors and researchers who have studied the development of historical cities, places and their architectural forms have accumulated sufficient knowledge that helps us understand that some patterns that were invented in the past do not necessarily age and disappear with their epochs. Some of them can be pursued and successfully used to create new forms of the built environment that no longer need to depend on the industrial design paradigm. Moreover, there is now enough evidence to support the claim that architectural modernism, which significantly shaped the built environment during the last century, was only one of many possible ways to look at and design our cities, towns and buildings. Some of these are discussed in this book.

However, even though the industrial paradigm still persists today, it is already dead. In fact, it died a long time ago. We have a lot of convincing evidence to understand that it cannot last any longer, even if it pretends to be alive and kicking. Metaphorically speaking, we have now arrived at the point where not one but multiple signs are warning us that we are at the end of the road. It is now for us to choose how we will continue and where we will attempt to arrive.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: WELL-BEING, ECONOMICS AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

It is generally agreed that the last two centuries have significantly reshaped the forms and conditions of human life all over the globe. New forms of material life came into being as soon as technical and eventually industrial revolutions were completed and industry came to be seen as a decisive factor for permanent and unlimited economic growth as well as supposedly endless technological and social progress. Rapid industrialization on a global scale was thus one of the most important factors in this crucial and long-term change that has affected almost all spheres of human life on the planet. As is well known, it also triggered unprecedentedly large-scale urbanization and had an enormous impact on the growth, expansion and shifting structure of modern cities. Since then, industrial principles have been applied to each and every sphere of human activity. Consequently, not only were they institutionalized by a new material landscape, but also, among many other things, the hegemony of technique and industry had a lasting impact on the modern mentality. Finally, an array of industrial mythologies consolidated modern habits of thinking and acting. No wonder they were enthusiastically and uncritically embraced by various disciplines, especially economics, and became the most important discourse of the last century, setting goals and norms for human activity on this planet.

Economics, Growth and a Call for Limits

The modern era also saw significant changes in the hierarchy of disciplines. Having acquired powers it did not have before, economics has won perhaps the highest position among all social sciences that came into being in the last century. Despite the fact that it legitimized itself as an academic discipline much later than most other branches of social sciences, economics has nevertheless managed to acquire importance and

weight that other social disciplines could only dream about. As Timothy Mitchell has emphasized, the very idea of it was a late invention that only came into being in the middle of the last century:

> Before then, economists did not use the word "economy" in its modern sense. From around the 1930s, new forms of consumption, marketing, business management, government planning, financial flows, colonial administration, and statistical work brought into being a world that for the first time could be measured and calculated as though it were a free-standing object, the economy. Economics claimed only to describe this object, but in fact it participated in producing it. Its contribution was to help devise the forms of calculation in terms of which socio-technical practice was increasingly organized. (Mitchell 2005, 298)

However, despite its inherent faults and limitations, like its innate inability to conduct experiments, it nevertheless managed to solidify its image and status during the latter half of the last century. Its symbolic status was strongly reinforced with the help of an important international prize established by the Bank of Sweden in 1968 in memory of Alfred Nobel, which soon became known as the Nobel Prize in Economics, even though economics was not originally included by the benefactor of the most prestigious international prize in the field of science.

For a number of decades, the discipline of economics generated, produced and recycled theoretical concepts that had a huge impact on institutions, governments and politics. The idea of economic growth was one of the most persistent, influential and lasting ones. Besides, it was not only a purely scholarly concept but also a self-perpetuating goal that guided the policies of all advanced countries on several continents. In the same way as other ambiguous concepts produced by the discipline did, economic growth became both a 'scientific truth' and a popular mantra, mostly because this theoretical concept was instrumentalized nationally and internationally by almost all governments for more than several decades. Needless to say, it became a powerful instrument for shaping and reshaping the contemporary world and societies. However, soon after becoming a new paradigm in economic thinking, the concept of growth turned out to be highly controversial. Accordingly, there is a considerable amount of evidence that the application of this theoretical construct to practice has done enormous harm to the relationship between humans and nature.

Intellectual historian Richard Norgaard has recently claimed that one of the effects of excessive demand for economy can be described in terms of economism – a power ideology that has acquired the most essential features of religious belief. In an insightful essay that deals with the

consequences of economism as its subject matter, Norgaard draws his readers' attention to the fact that

> Artifacts of the economy – towering buildings, sprawling shopping malls, and swirling freeways – surround the 50% of the globe's population who live in cities. A combination of smog and bright lights now obliterates the starry heavens so important to humanity's historic consciousness and so humbling to our species's historic sense of importance, focusing our attention on the economic constructs all around us. The cosmos reflected in the term *Econocene* includes not only the material artifacts of the economy, but also the market relations that bind us and define our place in the system. Urban dwellers are now fully dependent on markets for material sustenance. They awake to radio announcers discussing supposedly significant changes in exchange rates, stock markets, and the proportion of people looking for work. The dominance of the market is not just an urban phenomenon: its "invisible hand" guides rural life as well. The crops planted reflect expected future prices, and soils reflect their history of economic use. Farmers have become so specialized that they, too, buy most of their food in supermarkets. (Norgaard 2015)

Depicting the current society as one obsessed with economics to the degree that it has become an alpha and omega of human life, the economic thinker calls the economy "the world's greatest faith-based organization" (Norgaard 2015). There is a lot of truth in such a description since never in the history of humankind, despite its undeniable importance, has the economy been the one and only center of individual, communal and social life. More than that, not only has the economy moved to the center, but it has created an entire culture that rests on a few rather simple assumptions that have totally reshaped the life of human societies in all geographic localities in little more than two centuries. The economy has become the main and ultimate goal of politics, and the idea of economic growth can be described as a kind of self-perpetuating myth that creates its own reality even when it contradicts any common sense logics.

Thus, it can be reasonably concluded that the mantra of economic growth has finally become an end in itself. In addition, it has become one of the most persistent, powerful and lasting modern myths, creating and sustaining a very specific kind of society that has largely lost its guiding principles and ignored the reality created by those adhering to this almighty myth. The idea of continuous and never-ending growth was challenged back in 1972 by the authors of the internationally renowned report *Limits to Growth* (Donella Meadows et al.), who, applying the methods of computer modeling, demonstrated the futility as well as potential dangers of the growth paradigm. Among the few early opponents

Fig. 1.1. Can these urban screens enhance happiness?
A view of the new center of Vilnius, Lithuania

of the idea of economic growth was the philosopher Ivan Illich, who responded to it by arguing that both the idea and the course of growth were direct products of industrial development. According to him, among its other consequences, "Overgrowth threatens the right to the fundamental physical structure of the environment with which man has evolved" (Illich 1973, 47). He exposed the inevitable consequences of growth as both an ideological concept and an instrument of ultimate modernization by arguing that the insistence on perpetual growth finally produces a phenomenon of radical monopoly. The philosopher illustrated this phenomenon by using an example of medical services as they were proliferating in the period. According to Illich,

> Each party promises more funds to doctors, hospitals, and drugstores. Such promises are not in the interest of the majority. They only serve to increase the power of a minority of professionals to prescribe the tools men are to use in maintaining health, healing sickness, and repressing death. More funds will strengthen the hold of the health industry over public resources and heighten its prestige and arbitrary power. Such power in the hands of a minority will produce only an increase in suffering and a decrease in personal self-reliance. More money will be invested in tools that only

> postpone unavoidable death and in services that abridge even further the civil rights of those who want to heal each other. More money spent under the control of the health profession means that more people are operationally conditioned into playing the role of the sick, a role they are not allowed to interpret for themselves. Once they accept this role, their most trivial needs can be satisfied only through commodities that are scarce by professional definition. (Illich 1973, 53–54)

This wisdom, however, was basically rejected and remained on the margins of public discourse for quite a long time. Despite quite a lot of publicity for and public support of the study that argued for reasonable limits to growth, the ambiguous paradigm of growth was nevertheless embraced by members of the economic discipline and zealously implemented by the governments of developed nations all over the globe. It was also offered as a universal remedy for the so-called 'developing' societies that were forced and even bribed to join the global choir of growth worshippers. Furthermore, *Limits to Growth*, which questioned the prevailing paradigm, was routinely subjected to attacks by hordes of mainstream economists, including their most powerful leaders, immediately after its publication, and it continued to be a favorite target of those who continued to argue for more and more growth for decades.

However, despite persistent criticism and attempts to belittle the significance and meaning of the possible future development scenarios presented in *Limits to Growth*, it finally became one of the most important environmental titles and won much support from opponents of mainstream economic dogmas. Several decades after its publication, it has been acknowledged that despite certain flaws or arbitrariness in the study's methodology, the authors were right in arguing that the course of unlimited growth set by most Western and eventually non-Western economies is self-destructive and thus inevitably doomed to failure sooner or later. Additionally, several revised and updated versions of the original book have been published in recent decades, and the authors of the original title have used updated scenario-making tools to support and expand their original thesis. In the more than half a century since the publication of *Limits to Growth*, a large number of scientific studies have been conducted and published, and despite the differences in approach, they seem to agree that further economic development under the control of the growth paradigm will become impossible; thus, this route has to be abandoned for the sake of a more sane and plausible future.

More lately, the thesis of the end of growth and the rejection of this omnipotent paradigm that reigned in the sphere of economics for more than half a century has become a starting point for a new type of thinking

about the economy and provided a space for creating new visions and strategies of economic development. Focusing on the issue of the end of growth, the economy and energy analyst Richard Heinberg has provided a concise summary of reasons why economic growth was destined to meet its inevitable end no matter how persistently and stubbornly it was pursued by national and international financial and governmental institutions. He argues that there are at least three essential factors responsible for the end of growth: the depletion of natural resources (fossil fuels among them), the destructive environmental effects of the extraction and use of fossil fuels, and, finally, global financial disruptions related to current monetary, banking and investment systems built on the concept of unlimited growth (Heinberg 2011, 2–3).

It can be concluded that despite its longevity and persistence, the ideology of economic growth has lately been losing ground, and many of its supporters and adherents have gradually started to look for some more sound, reliable and promising concepts capable of helping humanity to overcome the global economic and environmental crisis – or perhaps, speaking more precisely, multiple crises caused by a multitude of various factors, including the exhausted idea of economic growth that was dogmatically nurtured for decades. Nevertheless, the future developments in the sphere of the economy remain controversial because, as the ecological economist Joshua Farley emphasized during a conversation with the author of this book, their attitude contains a mixture of ideas that contradict each other:

> Many economists increasingly do recognize limits to natural resources and waste absorption capacity, and do accept the need for steady state throughput. However, they also believe that we can continue producing ever more goods and services through the magic of greater efficiency and less resource use per unit of output. As long as proponents of this view prioritize steady state throughput, it is not worth arguing over the ability of the economy to adapt. (Farley in Samalavičius 2018a, 156)

Quite a few new approaches have been introduced and further developed as an alternative to mainstream economic paradigms that supported the concept of growth and consequently contributed to the depletion of natural resources and the disruption of natural ecologies, resulting in a number of other negative social and cultural effects, most of which have already been thoroughly discussed and no longer need to be proven. As this particular book does not purport to discuss or review all the currently proposed economic alternatives, nor does it aspire to the status of a concise compendium of all the social problems caused by the idea of economic growth, it will focus on the concept of well-being that deviates from the

paradigm of economic growth. The concept – or, to be more precise, concepts – of well-being covers a wide spectrum of contemporary concerns ranging from the economy to the built environment.

Well-being and Happiness as a New Paradigm

Well-being has recently become one of the key categories in social sciences, and its concepts have been and continue to be discussed and debated within the framework of various disciplines (economics, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, etc.) and, most recently, in various interdisciplinary domains. Well-being has been described as a state that combines feelings of overall wellness and satisfaction with one's functioning in most important spheres of human life. It is usually associated with positive feelings and emotions and a lack of negative ones. In other words, well-being is the experience of health, happiness and prosperity; it is a complex feeling that includes high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning in one's life, and, of course, good mental health with the ability and possibilities to deal with occasional stress. In general terms, the state of well-being is simply defined as feeling generally well.

In many ways, well-being can be linked to happiness or considered as one of its integral parts. In terms of such an understanding of well-being, happiness can be considered as both the goal of such a life as can be described as a good one and a state most human individuals aspire to attain during their lifetime. As His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama once famously remarked, happiness is a prime goal of human life, yet it is extremely difficult to achieve. Despite the implied difficulties, attempts to ensure well-being and overall life satisfaction have been and continue to be pursued in contemporary society by individuals and communities alike.

Concerns about the present and future of well-being have been raised by a broad variety of scholars and scientists who care about the prospects of human societies. These concerns have become more openly expressed in the era of late modernity. The interest in drafting theoretical frameworks for the sometimes arbitrary and otherwise quite fuzzy phenomenon of well-being has become especially strong recently as scholars representing different or even opposing schools of thought and ways of thinking have set their eyes on this multi-faceted and essential subject.

There have been discussions about whether well-being can be subjected to some kind of objective measurement or whether it can only be measured on an individual and therefore private basis. In the latter case, certain inevitable difficulties are encountered. Of course, it is far easier to measure economic growth, and this has been routinely done for decades.

This ongoing practice, however, has created the illusion that its results and even side effects can be calculated by applying objective measurement schemes.

On the other hand, economists studying the phenomenon of well-being have argued that growth and the accumulation of financial capital are not and cannot be considered the final goal of any economic activity. There is also something else conventional economics has habitually bypassed or simply ignored. This not-so-insignificant 'something' that economics has ignored for centuries was recently labeled 'happiness,' and discussions about the economics of happiness are no longer on the margins of the discipline of economics. As of late, they have significantly moved from the margins toward the center of economic discussions.

However, even before this, a number of students of economics questioned the validity of the dominant mainstream paradigm in economics that emphasizes growth and instead focused on happiness as a fully legitimate candidate to understand the meaning and the ultimate goal of human economic activities. At least a few important books have appeared recently that address a topic that might have been considered completely outside the paradigm of conventional economics a few years ago but is no longer surprising or confusing today. Thus, because of significant changes in the understanding of well-being and its composition, the economics of happiness has surfaced and is now scrutinized by many economists in different societies and regions, who are sometimes unable to track each other's work or impact.

Curiously, at least a couple of authors who have made significant contributions to a new way of thinking about architecture and the built environment, judging from bibliographical references to their books, seem to be unaware of each other's existence. However, both have become persistent scholarly advocates of the economics of happiness, both are deeply concerned about the future of humankind, and both have suggested that the economics of happiness is at least one of the ways to pursue the goal.

The Canadian economist Mark Anielski has made a significant contribution to this fairly new yet continuously expanding and promising sub-field of research. One of his books directly targets the issue of revising the discipline of economics and urges professionals working in this field to embrace the new approach of discussing economics in terms of happiness. He claims that musings about what makes people happy can be found in the writings of ancient Greek thinker Aristotle, who attempted to define what makes people happy and pursue what might be called a good life. According to Anielski,