Unit 3: Exercise 10

Read the second part of the article again. Choose the correct answers to the questions.

The failings of modernist architecture are well documented, and many writers and theorists have made a living out of critiquing it. But the high point of this trend was the delight that many shared over the demolition of the disastrous Pruitt-Igoe urban housing complex in St Louis in the USA. It had been designed by architects George Hellmuth, Minoru Yamasaki and Joseph Leinweber, supposedly to create 'community gathering spaces and safe, enclosed play yards'. And yet for some reason, the community declined to gather and play safely in their enclosed yards. Instead, the complex became a hotspot for crime and poverty and was demolished in the 1970s.

As with many of the modernist planning and design philosophies of the twentieth century, architectural determinism was appealing at first sight but ultimately misguided. It became unfashionable during the post-modern era and all but disappeared. One of the consequences of this loss of faith in the power of architecture is that architects are now left defenceless before the superior technical know-how of structural engineers, the restrictions placed on them by generations of planners and the calculations of project managers.

But was architectural determinism dismissed too soon? This is one question posed by Jan Golembiewski, a researcher in the environmental determinants of mental health at the University of Sydney and a consultant for Medical Architecture, a firm specialising in architectural psychology. Golembiewski's research has found that the healthier a person is, the more a well-designed environment will affect them positively, and the less a badly designed one will affect them negatively. Patients who are mentally ill react more negatively to bad environments, which means 'fewer smiles, less laughter and a reported drop in feeling the fun of life'.

Likewise, Charles Montgomery, author of Happy City: Transforming our Lives Through Urban Design, points out that some environments do affect our moods, and that they do so rather predictably. His central thesis is that urban sprawl – the unplanned spread of car-dependent, low-density development that accounts for most new housing in many parts of the world – makes us unhappy and isolated and drives teenagers to boredom. The drawbacks of urban sprawl aren't confined to psychological health; living amongst sprawl ages people by an extra four years, and there are four times as many fatal traffic accidents on suburban roads as on city streets, according to Montgomery's research.

Many progressive measures were implemented by Enrique Peñalosa during his tenure as mayor of Bogota in Colombia from 1998 to 2000. Bogota, now a city of 8 million people, had no underground rail system at that time and suffered from chronic congestion. Peñalosa's city model gave priority to children and people not using vehicles. He built hundreds of kilometres of cycle paths, pavements and parks, and set up traffic-free zones. He organised a car-free day in 2000 (now an annual event), took measures to address poverty and started a programme of urban improvement, with more than 100,000 trees being planted across the city. All of these are impressive accomplishments in themselves, but his most compelling legacy has to be the way that he transformed people's view of Bogota. Whereas previously, the city's troubles had been seen as an inevitable consequence of uncontrolled urban growth, people now began to see that they could influence change in Bogota for the better.

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Clearly, there is now a resurgence in the belief that the built environment is a key factor in how we feel, and that buildings are central to influencing behaviour. Many of the journals adopting this stance, such as World Health Design and Environment and Behaviour, focus primarily on the design of healthcare facilities, as this is where quality design can potentially have life-and-death consequences. Schools of architecture need to focus on how their students might predict how their designs can impact the users of the buildings, and give thought to including calming areas and spaces, such as gardens, in order to affect our moods, behaviours and health in as positive a way as possible.

1 What does the writer say about the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex?

- ◯ A Its residents were surprised to learn that it was dangerous.
- ◯ B People were pleased when it was destroyed.
- ◯ C The architects were praised for its design.
- ◯ D The building was criticised unfairly.

2 Jan Golembiewski and Charles Montgomery agree that ...

- ◯ A architects need to predict the moods of people who use the buildings they design.
- ◯ B mentally ill people react positively to positive environments.
- ◯ C the places people are in can affect the way that they feel.
- ◯ D ugly buildings make most people feel unhappier.

3 According to the writer, what was Peñalosa's most significant achievement in Bogota?

- ◯ A banning cars in poor areas of the city
- ◯ B beginning to build the metro
- ◯ C changing attitudes towards the city
- ◯ D encouraging children to cycle more

4 The writer suggests that there is most likely to be an increased interest in how people are psychologically affected by the design of ...

- ◯ A gardens.
- ◯ B hospitals.
- ◯ C housing.
- ◯ D universities.

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