Unit 3: Exercise 6

Read the information. Then read the first part of the article. Do the statements agree with the information given in the article? Choose True, False or Not Given.

Choose
True if the statement agrees with the information
False if the statement contradicts the information
Not Given if there is no information on this.

Architectural determinism

Back in the 1960s, the Welsh academic and town planner Maurice Broady came up with a new term in architectural speak: architectural determinism. This referred to what he saw as the practice of making unjustified claims that the built environment could somehow change people's behaviour in ways that could be predicted. It was a new term to describe what at the time was not uncommon. Although the idea of architectural determinism is now widely discredited, it had allowed the heroes of architecture to make all sorts of ridiculous claims in the past.

In the 1400s, one of the stars of the Italian Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti, claimed that the balanced classical forms of well-designed buildings would convince invaders to abandon their weapons and become calm, non-violent citizens.

In the early twentieth century, the British theorist and planner Ebenezer Howard developed the idea of garden cities. These were to be village-like housing schemes with substantial gardens and green areas, and were intended to provide working people with an alternative to living in 'crowded, unhealthy cities'. He envisaged a 'group of slumless, smokeless cities', in which employees, benefiting from better living and working conditions, would be more efficient.

Frank Lloyd Wright, designer of New York's Guggenheim Museum and many of the USA's most iconic houses, believed that appropriate architectural design could even save the USA from corruption and make people more virtuous.

The Swiss-born modernist architect Le Corbusier declared that one of the houses he designed outside Paris, the Villa Savoye, would heal the sick. But when it did exactly the opposite (its large windows made the house overheat, and its flat roofs let in the rain), the owners threatened legal action. Le Corbusier only managed to avoid court due to the outbreak of the Second World War.

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.

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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.

1 Alberti believed that architecture could promote peace.

- ◯ True
- ◯ False
- ◯ Not Given

2 Howard studied the effectiveness of rural housing.

- ◯ True
- ◯ False
- ◯ Not Given

3 Lloyd Wright thought that good architecture could make people behave in a morally better way.

- ◯ True
- ◯ False
- ◯ Not Given

4 Le Corbusier's claims about the Villa Savoye proved to be accurate.

- ◯ True
- ◯ False
- ◯ Not Given

5 Hellmuth, Yamasaki and Leinweber were pleased when the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex was destroyed.

- ◯ True
- ◯ False
- ◯ Not Given

6 Architects often find it difficult to get on with colleagues in the building industry.

- ◯ True
- ◯ False
- ◯ Not Given

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