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Design for wellbeing – … when is time for design dreaming

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Design for wellbeing is a beautiful idea. It makes one think of prosperity, of possibilities, and of choices. It speaks of delivering goodness by creating a solution that increases someone's experience of being well. With the economic growth of the last decades, in western-styled industrialised societies the solution can be one of many, iterated over, differentiated by style, by the way it functions, by the materials it is made of, and by the level of joy and satisfaction it may provide. In these societies, the delivering of goodness has been perceived as a relatively simple relationship between the needs and desires of the population and available resources, skillfully formed into products. However, this perception has become considerably outdated.

Firstly, it is outdated because of sustainability requirements, – we simply have overreached the planet's capacity for resilience against our interventions in more than one of its critical elemental systems (Rockstrom 2019, Richardson 2023). The planet's safety boundaries, so to say, have been collapsed by the rapid industrialisation and unwieldy focus on economic growth (Daly 1993, Daly and Cobb 1989,

Dietz et al. 2013, Schumacher 1973, Hopwood et al. 2005), letting in possible futures of scarcity and uncertainty.

Secondly, this perception from early on has been somewhat misconstrued within mechanisms of marketing. Jackson (2016) argues that marketing repeatedly promotes a narrow and misleading view of human nature, by emphasising material accretion as central to attainment of individual wellbeing. This constructed portrayal suggests that individuals are primarily focused on satisfying their own needs and desires, which translates into the drive to consume goods and services – to which then the current economic system of production-consumption has been tailored. Such a picture of society, according to Jackson, suitably aligns with the interests of 'consumer capitalism'. Jackson points out that by focusing predominantly on consumption, marketing perpetuates a societal model that is unsustainable and fails to address the broader and more layered dimensions of human wellbeing. This misrepresentation has been the basis of an economic system that prioritises growth and consumption at the expense of environmental sustainability and social equality. Jackson's criticism of consumer capitalism lends to a conception that it is not directly needs and desires of individual members of society that have driven the global populations into the current crises, but corporate organisations that have organised the planetary resources around these needs based on a false and misleading image of a human. Based on a similar argument, critical designer Ted Hunt [2] proposes that we redefine the today's informal, nonetheless

[2] ***'Welcome to the Corpropocene' by @_Ted_Hunt is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0***

increasingly popular concept of 'anthropocene' – a geological epoch marked by significant human impact on the planet [3]– to 'corpropocene', where consequently the significant impact is marked by corporations instead of human individuals.

Thirdly and finally, we can no longer, practically nor ethically, uphold the notion that global resources for delivering goodness may be prioritised in some populations over others. Although there are proponents of the current economic system who support the idea that a well growing economy in some populations will eventually overspill, benefiting every member of the global population (Hopwood et al. 2005), new propositions for alternative economic paradigms advocate for a globally equal and just distribution of resources and goods, while keeping within the safe planetary boundaries (e.g. Raworth, 2017, Constanza et al. 2019, Spangenberg et al. 2019, Parrique et al. 2019). These paradigms emphasise a focus on universal wellbeing that is achieved by reducing material outputs while balancing their distribution globally, by this addressing the uneven development that had taken place since the rapid industrialisation of the post 2nd world war period. It is rather visible today that the scope and size of production of goods, as well as their spectrum, do not necessarily relate to their access in global populations. Elhacham et al. (2020) report that in 2020 the anthropogenic mass, i.e. the human made materials surpassed the Earth's biomass. This mass is predominately concrete, metals and plastic, basically constituting all that are our urban landscapes, roads, bridges, as well as our ships, shoes, and food packaging. Today, these goods, however, have met the needs and

[3] ***https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropocene***

assisted in obtained wellbeing only for some of the global population. The focus of the new economy paradigms, in essence, is on social justice as elemental in wellbeing of every member of the global society (Vissonova, forthcoming A).

Wellbeing is thought of as a universal idea for a quality of human life. Commonly, it is considered that factors such as democratic governance, geopolitical stability, education, access to resources and jobs, and healthcare, as well as community participation and social relationships all contribute to wellbeing. These are the leading factors by which wellbeing is measured by the global indices, as for example in Happy Planet Index, Gallup Sharecare Wellbeing index, OECD Better Life Index, UN Human Development Reports, and World Happiness Report (Vissonova, forthcoming B). These indices provide valuable insights into human wellbeing. However, directly or indirectly, the indices also elevate the perceived importance of economic performance characteristic more in some societies than others, and life satisfaction that is subjectively determined. Meaning, these quantifiable factors are not universally commensurable for determining wellbeing, as societal setups, ways of living, and preferences towards life qualities are differently shaped and nuanced by culture, beliefs, and climate. Consequently, any one worldview on wellbeing, that tends to dominate, would only inform design partially.

This approach to wellbeing aligns with Escobar's (2018) concept of pluriverse. With the notion of pluriverse, Escobar challenges the dominant Western-centric worldview by advocating for a design philosophy that regards and develops capacity to address multiple ways of being, knowing, and living. His perspective seeks to

decolonize design by recognising and valuing diverse cultural perspectives, particularly those that are marginalised as the result of economic market-dependency ideologies. It rings of 'doing well by doing good', where the one designing engages in the material wellbeing of other members of a society and reciprocally some good emerges for all. Escobar's pluriversal design proposes creation of spaces where different worlds can coexist, promoting sustainability and social justice by integrating the differently embedded knowledge systems into design processes. The notion of pluriversal design is also proposed by Noel (2020, 2022), specifically focusing on creation of pluriversal design curricula, as well as for its future integration in design for wellbeing by Vissonova and Hohl (2023).

While design for wellbeing today has mostly corresponded with product-based solutions, – product based wellbeing as Manzini (2007) calls it, pluriversal design opens the possibilities to imagine alternative ways of design to participate in enhancing positive life qualities. Through the differently embedded knowledge of social groups and communities, based on their geographical location, history, culture, beliefs, and altogether – their values, the social groups form their preferences of life-qualities and hence create the basis to inform design for wellbeing that may be particular to them. This formation, nevertheless, bears prospects of continued wellbeing when considered in a context of a just collective wellbeing, in larger social groups and in global society. Meaning, wellbeing in a pluriversal world is social justice dependent, where global resources are justly distributed and rights to attain individual and collective wellbeing are granted to every member of the global society.

Therefore, in design for wellbeing there appear to be two approaches: One where designers absorb, immerse with, and co-create with the differently embedded knowledge of the social groups. And second, where design emphasises social justice in their projections and thus creates conditions for wellbeing. Today, it may require a quiet shift from design thinking to design dreaming. Nonetheless, it may be dreaming that paves the way for design for all.

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