



## Preface by Editor-in-chief

**Kimmo Lapintie**

Aalto University

kimmo.lapintie@aalto.fi

The general theme of this issue—Global North—is not meant to suggest that the international variety of architecture and planning could be divided into two geographical categories, Global North and South, which would have their respective distinguishable identities. Rather we intend to open discussion on the inherent paradoxes in architectural styles and design solutions in which global, national, regional and local tendencies intersect. The keynotes from the 10<sup>th</sup> Symposium Architectural Research in Finland organized in 2018 and articles in this issue discuss some of these complex topics, from the post-war construction of ideal family models to recent challenges of welfare state planning.

Local identity of architecture in the Nordic countries is, of course, not very local. Modernism as a style and basic ethos is fundamentally abstract and international, not derived from local built heritage. Functionalism, on the other hand, with its biopolitical undertones, is also assumed to be valid everywhere. However, the specificity of the Nordic interpretations of modernism is what has often been seen as their strength, and it has also become a symbol of progressive creativity against regressive traditionality. Interestingly, as Marija Drémaitė demonstrated in her keynote, this localized modernism could in its turn inspire young Lithuanian architects to develop their own 'local' architectural identity.

On the other hand, architecture is not just the transfer and adoption of aesthetic ideals, it also participates in the construction of ideal living. As Pirjo Sanaksenaho shows in her study of the popular and professional magazines on housing design in the 1950s and 1960s, the traditional family roles are very strongly promoted in the representations of post-war design: the wife in the kitchen, the children in their own rooms or in the courtyard, the husband reading his newspaper in the living room or occasionally bringing his catch to the wife to be prepared for food. It is an interesting question how much these ideals are also imported, but the post-war era also meant the dawn of a major change family structure with women's growing participation in work life and the consequent need of welfare services, such as day-care. There seems to be no end to this development, with the idealized core family now having become a small minority of households. The

demography in contemporary cities is dominated by single person households and couples without children.

This also presents challenges to the welfare state and its original planning ideals of healthy and comfortable living close to nature, often in suburban neighbourhoods. As Ilari Karppi and Iina Sankala argue, this model is now in a major rupture, partly due to the rapid urbanization of a few larger urban regions, partly because of the environmental concerns of the expanded urban fabric and sprawl. Ideologically, New Urbanist ideals of traditional and compact 19<sup>th</sup> Century urbanism have become more dominant, instead of the “*air-son-lumière*” of modernism. The city for single households and dinkies seeking urban amenities is a different city altogether. Unfortunately, it is also a city with growing inequalities and segregation, something the modernist Utopia sought to avoid.

On the other hand, the Nordic “bird’s nest” is no longer the reality that is ahead of us. The decline of the natural growth of the working-age population necessarily means that cities and nations can only grow through migration. As ethnic and cultural minorities grow larger, planning and urban design have to reorient themselves towards a more multicultural and polyvalent thinking. This is a sensitivity that modernist planning has not prepared us for, with its emphasis on biological needs of generalized human beings (“cities for people”). In her article on humanitarian architecture, Helena Sandman discusses, through a case study of affordable housing design in Zanzibar, how the “Global North” meets “the Global South”. Exposing oneself to a totally new cultural context, the architects and students have to adapt and evolve, developing a new sensitivity. It is clear that some features of the Nordic tradition—such as participatory planning and design—are also useful in these contexts, but the challenges posed, for instance, by informal housing in the rapidly growing metropolises of the South, are something totally different from the Nordic countries where everything is designed and controlled in detail. Architects of the future can, apparently, no longer identify themselves with only local, regional or national characteristics and the established practices, not even in their own country. The doors are opened, and they will not be closed anymore.