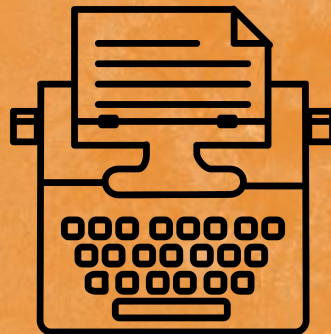


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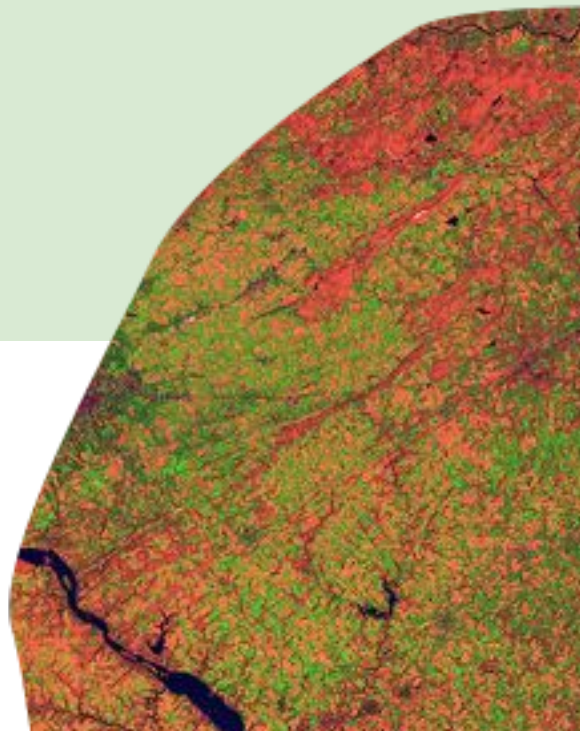
*Author:*

# Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story  
entry*



FORMAS



## The Tour

### A Visit to the Museum of Conviviality

*By Shayan Shokrgozar*

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*A tall Persian man wearing a matte red tie turned to his audience of 20 bright-eyed bachelor's students. His eyes shone as he surveyed the smiles in the crowd.*

Welcome to the Museum of Conviviality. My name is Arash Kamangir and I have been a guide here for about five years. Today, I have the pleasure of showing you around this historic building. As you all may know, we were established 50 years ago on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Limits to Growth*. A report that urged human societies to limit growth on population increase, agricultural production, non-renewable resource depletion, industrial output, and pollution generation. Its central message being that the earth cannot support the rates of economic and population growth much beyond the year 2100, if that long, even with advanced technology. Though *Limits to Growth* had strengths and weaknesses of its own, in retrospect it is difficult not to see it as a course-altering document, the effects of which one can see even today. Although *Limits* was a historic report, we must not forget that the 1970s was a decade that promised a different and rich future full of possibilities. There was the Stockholm Declaration of 1972 that sought to advance “intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth.” The rise of ecological economics through the likes of Georgescu-Roegen, deep ecology through Arne Næss, and a growing critique of development and industrialization coming from Ivan Illich among others. So, the museum is a celebration of many of those ideas, and much of what you will see here are the principles and actions that can be seen as coming from the same pluriverse as the ones inspired by it.

*A college student of perhaps 22 years stepped forward. “Hi, I'm Mehran and I was wondering if you can tell us how the museum acquired its name?”*

Good question. The name *Conviviality* is inspired by and is an homage to Ivan Illich and his book, *Tools for Conviviality*. In that book, Illich argued for a reorientation of the use of tools and the role of institutions. He called for a new type of research that is oriented toward alternatives to the dominant forms of production, which were at the time dominated by industrial forms. His hope was for these to then lead to new forms of organizing life and

society, away from industrialization and towards conviviality. Thanks for the question, just let me know if something doesn't make sense.

*Adjusting his suspender – with its paisley pattern – Arash points to the first exhibition: a wall decorated with images of David Ricardo, Jean Baptiste Say, Karl Marx, John Maynard Keynes, Friedrich August Hayek, Karl Polanyi, Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, Thomas Piketty, among many others. Filled with carefully curated graphs from some of the most prominent institutes of the late 20<sup>th</sup>-mid 21<sup>st</sup> century – the World Bank, UN Reports, trade treaties, and so forth.*

Given the centrality of economics and scarcity, we will begin today's tour with an exploration of ecological economics that holds the core premise that finite resources and ecology make the continued growth of the economy unsustainable. This ecological and scientific understanding of the world made the scholar *Joan Martinez Alier* write about attaining a *concrete utopia* through radical social change. In many ways, the ideas about a Pluriverse – or universe of universes – were very much inspired by how to make a concrete or feasible utopia. The Pluriverse brought all these different ideas of organizing societies together, right. Based on, for example, Queer Love, *Ubuntu*, *Buen Vivir*, Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, and many other thoughts, the Pluriversal thinking, especially starting in the 2030s, brought many of these worlds in conversation together. Through their collective strength, these movements managed to confront what was at the time a conception of *modernity* as universal – through which humans were expected to live in a single, globalized world with science as the only reliable truth and harbinger of progress. It followed with the certainty of *Victorian* rectitude that advanced societies had an obligation to assist the “backward”. Which conveniently, continued to play well for the needs of the wealthiest nations and entities. Any questions so far?

*Arshiya, a second-year Bachelor's student wearing a rose-colored shawl, wandered away from the group to inspect the next exhibit. It was a miniature model of the city in which they stood – Tehran, Persia. But instead of fields of rye, carrot, lettuce, intermixing with forests and cabin communities like she was used to, the city was defined by wide roads, big cars that pedestrians had to wait for. “Could you explain how it benefited the wealthiest nations and entities?”*

In short, a lot of the labor-intensive work and extraction of raw materials was carried out in countries and communities that were largely not benefiting from the exchange. They had their air and water polluted and often even contaminated in the name of development – which were well-documented by initiatives such as the Environmental Justice Atlas – and this often led to losing customary access to lands that people used for subsistence-based lives. Hope that clarifies my point a bit? So yeah, despite devastating climate disasters and a long struggle of living in the ruins of the dark days of modernity and industrialization, it took a lot for small pockets of peoples to create the thriving ecosystems based on a need-based economy that today seem normal. For example, the idea that nation-states can be abandoned in favor of bioregions and consensus-based societies – informed by local ecological dynamics – was a lengthy effort. In Tehran, today, we see people practicing permaculture and organizing themselves within grassroots communities, but in the top-down societies of the past it was very hard to imagine organizing society in this way, which some would argue sprouted from the transition town network movement of the centuries past.

*In the midst of the tour, Arvin, a young and bright lecturer in history, glances around the hall with its low-energy intensive materials, passive cooling features, gardens, and analog displays. Thinking about how the site of the museum, once a steel plant, shows the role of sociotechnical ideologies on placemaking.*

Okay, now we come to the contemplation section of the museum, displaying items that were once fetishized – cars, planes, mockups of infrastructural megaprojects, and airports – which had vast energy needs, leading to the extinction of millions of our earthlings. These items were heavily reliant on a life philosophy around Extractivism. Whether it was minerals, harnessing vital flows like the sun and the wind for reasons that had nothing to do with decent living, or serving the planetary conditions. Since we now organize our societies in ways that allow us to live our lives and attain what we need without mass logistics, and there is rarely a need for fast transportation, our cities are organized around pedestrians, but it was far from this in the vast megacities of days long gone. People lived and worked in circumstances that locked them into a car-dependent life. Because of the dominant discourses around growth and development, which were dictated by the North Atlantic countries, this model spread across the world like wildfire. And infrastructures are incredibly difficult and time-consuming to reverse because an entire chain of other elements in society then become dependent upon them. Questions?

*Mehrdad, an exchange student from the bioregion of Harat raised their hand as they began to talk: In class, Arvin told us about an agenda called “green” growth or sustainable development, and many people including prominent researchers and institutes worked on bringing it about. How does that fit in these stories?*

Good question. When the ecological and climate crisis was deteriorating, a watered-down version of the Limits debates made it to a document known as *Our Common Futures*. Sadly it became the defining document of what superseded it for decades to come, whether it was the Rio conference or Kyoto that solidified it into international conventions or many of the following UNFCCs. This warrants a long discussion, but even today eco-modernists argue if just given a little more time humans would have accomplished absolute decoupling. They are not shy about their efforts to revive industrialization. They blame degrowth and its spread for preventing a technological utopia that would have succeeded in decoupling growth from development. I would suggest going back to the exhibit on limits and scarcity, there you will find some rich materials for how the imperative of saving capitalism led to decades of discussion on ineffectual policies like carbon trading, negative emission technologies, and false energy transitions discourses. These false promises were based on reassuring citizenry that while the present and future might look dystopian, the political and economic elite can adjust policy to adequately respond to them without there being any need to alter neoliberal capitalism.

Okay, now I know you all have various projects of interest for your course essay. So, with this background, I will let you go explore the rest of the museum, but I will be around if you have any questions or comments. I would highly recommend visiting our most recent addition, the singularity exhibition. It explores how some humans were trying to make themselves immortal through biotechnoscience and visions of transhumanism.

### **Some of the works mentioned**

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