

Equity and Inclusiveness in the City Center Workshop

Environmental and Socio-economic Implications in the post-covid era

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Privatisation and Commercialisation of Public Space

During the covid period, urban design literature asserted that city centres need more public space and particularly green spaces. It was aligned with physical and mental health. As the pandemic subsides, has this imperative gone with it? The pandemic brought an acceleration in the privatisation of public space, as indoor activities moved outside, but what is public space? Is it the domain of the car or networks of intriguing pedestrian routes or places of assembly, protest and entertainment? Does it have to be managed by public sector organisations? as their budgets are decreasing. Do people still need it, and if so, how much of the city centre should be dedicated to it? Can the private sector offer open space – or will that be exclusive rather than inclusive? What does green space mean? Is it more than grass? What should it be like? How large could it be? Should it be defined?

The perception of public space varies enormously between countries. In UK cities, it is safe and used. Since the pandemic, there has been a noticeable increase of public space as a kind of outdoor working environment, with meetings and discussions taking place, and in Sao Paulo there has been a renaissance of the urban environment with use of streets and squares, unlike before covid. People walk much more and make greater use of public spaces. They are like changed places. However, the public sector is incapable of looking after them. Whereas, in Portland, public space has become sleeping space – a place for the homeless. Also, private uses have taken over public spaces, and colonised them. They are unsafe places in Pretoria, and people drive through security barriers into safe areas. It is privatisation that increases safety. For Setif, Algeria, the parks were designed in a different era, and now need re-thinking. During the pandemic, mobility changed because driving needed permission. Walkability and cycling increased because they avoided local authority control. New bicycle purchases have now declined, and people have gone back to cars. The lessons were temporary.

In considering Research and Practice, collecting data in public places is illegal in some countries. Researchers should trust the community and its data, and the people should be part of the design process. Information can be derived from social media target groups within the community, residential associations, clubs, and workgroups. Ethnographic studies may be more acceptable, going back to the notion of participant observation.



City centre green space in Dallas USA

A square in Joao Pessoa Brazil

Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

How to effectively consider spatial equity and inclusion amongst some minority groups? It is estimated that around 150 million people worldwide are homeless (~2% of the global population). Usually, they choose to stay in city centers and developed neighborhoods. Although the homeless population has, in theory, the same rights as other citizens, are architects considering them or just including barriers to assure the absence of these minorities? This topic is intended to open up a wide debate around the research-design interface with evidence gained from some established patterns of urban development.

How does equity and inclusiveness manifest itself for the homeless – do they have a choice? The story is about lack of social infrastructure and cleansing the city centre. There is a need for a compassionate research agenda that provides public space to incorporate the homeless. With the worsening economic crisis, there is an inability to pay for housing. Affordability is a major issue with high land prices and changes in housing typologies to suit the wealthy. Governments could assist with more pervasive ownership. Cultural and Religious values are important. For example, Islamists are following the western dream, with disastrous outcomes for their happiness and mental health.

What is the definition of home? If people live in slums and informal settlements, without water and sanitation, they are as equally homeless as those on the streets. People's rights change according to their social group. Some have protection of property, gated communities. Schools of Architecture are interested in solving social issues, but practice is commercial, only serving those with money. However, it is a social problem that architects alone cannot solve. It requires a number of players coming together. There is a systemic failure, and the causes need to be addressed, not just providing solutions, such as shelter.

Why are there homeless people in societies that have so many resources? By contrast, in Singapore and Hong Kong for example, homeless people are not apparent because their societies view the situation differently. If people live in dense apartments with no connection to the outside, they can become mentally ill, and resort to homelessness as a means of escape. People's off-casts – mattresses, coats etc., could be recycled.



The London Skip House

A park bench in Melbourne Australia

Changes in working practices and building uses

The Covid-19 pandemic forced us into isolation and quarantine both physically and psychologically. Suddenly work and educational spaces were moved away from city centers into homes and virtual settings leaving a stretch of offices vacant in the city centers. How did the pandemic question us to consider the nature of our workplaces? What constitutes a workplace and how can it be equitable and accessible to all? What new uses or adaptive reuse opportunities can city center workplaces accommodate? How can they provide an on-demand response to environmental challenges facing city centers? What is the equity and inequity potential in remote work and education, and the implication for uses of city centers.

Commuting is wasteful in terms of time and other resources. It requires support from employers, child care, equitable and accessible workplaces. Reducing office space is more sustainable. Re-using empty buildings in the city centre can reduce residential costs, and provide shorter travel distances. The design of city centre buildings for work and living has been inadequate. The heights of buildings should be reduced, and there ought to be a return to previous design principles, such as natural ventilation. Adaptability of buildings is going to become increasingly important. How convertible are current commercial buildings for housing? The building codes need updating, and

researchers and students can become advocates. Redundant buildings can become play spaces.



City Centre Living in Berlin



Empty office in Kuala Lumpur

Where from here?

Interdisciplinary activity is needed with people not just working in silos. The city centre should be future proofed against foreseen and unforeseen changes. There may be another pandemic.