

The DPU (post) COVID Lexicon

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Introduction

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During the last year, the global pandemic has affected teaching, research and public engagement at the DPU. It has required our staff, students and partners to think creatively about how to continue with their work and commitments both locally and globally. In this special issue - The DPU (post)COVID Lexicon - we reflect on selected key terms at the core of the DPU's work, and share some thoughts on the related issues, challenges and opportunities that COVID-19 has brought to the fore in our academic and professional lives. The pandemic presents an opportunity to critically revisit policies and planning approaches, as well as processes fundamental to understanding current urban conditions. Generally, the last few decades of urban development have been characterised by the domination of private (capital) interests versus common good in cities, and the related privatisation (of space, services and infrastructure) versus the provision of means for collective consumption. In parallel to the policy-driven commodification of urban spaces and emerging social diversity in cities, we have also witnessed rising levels of socio-spatial inequality, hyper-segregation, poverty and homelessness. As many of the

discussions in this special issue attest, COVID-19 has exposed and reinforced (rather than necessarily created) these social gaps, and uncovered the weaknesses of this form of urbanity, especially when we talk of a 'return to normality'.

The accelerated urbanization processes of recent decades - as most of the world's population now live in cities - requires consideration and planning for the wellbeing of urban residents beyond the current health crisis. With widening social and economic gaps within and between cities, such questions of environmental and social justice increasingly shape the everyday lives of urban dwellers. It is now clear that premature deaths and diseases resulting from poor environmental conditions are disproportionately concentrated in areas where residents of certain ethnic and racial groups are concentrated. In recent decades, there have also been voices in research and practice that emphasize the need to move away from an exclusively clinical approach to health towards one that encompasses an understanding of the broader interconnected social and spatial aspects of the city that affect public health. In this context, the definitions and approaches

of urban development planning addressing some of the issues highlighted in this special issue (relating to land, housing, open spaces, transport and mobility, among others) directly and indirectly impact the health of urban populations.

As discussed in this special issue, a significant turnaround can be seen in the role of development planning in responding to immediate challenges. The diagnosis of a link between poor environmental conditions in the industrial city and epidemic outbreaks has harnessed planning for the regulation of space, addressing aspects of sanitation and hygiene which are the basis of urban life.

With the hope of returning to a 'new normality', we should work towards the flattening of the already existing curve of spatial injustice in cities. What we see from the last year is that the effects of COVID-19 vary depending on the strength of the welfare system, including health, education and housing. The response to the aggressive neoliberal policies of the last few decades is to develop urban planning that will ensure greater accessibility, better quality care and solidarity; and more diverse housing, open spaces, infrastructure and services.