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Article

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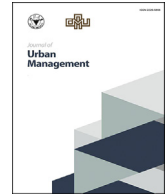
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Editorial

COVID-19 and change dynamics in the transformational cities



While Climate change has been still an insurmountable challenge, COVID-19 made its global appearance with unprecedented effects on human health and settlements (Nahiduzzaman & Lai, 2020). Mobility has been strictly controlled in the pursuit to contain the life-threatening virus. Since its outbreak as a global pandemic, the daily activities across the nation-states have been dramatically decreased, if not come to a total occasion halt. Consequently, “stay home”, “physical distancing”, and “maintaining social bubble”, among others turn out to be the “non-clinical” panacea before the vaccine could offer the needed immunity to fight against the virus. Likewise, motivational messages including “*stand together by standing apart*”, “*together, even when far apart*”, “*stand apart together*”, etc. become the key directives for people on how to behave in the public spaces.

The community and home-based private spaces are experiencing a rapid transformation, which understandably is an impact of the ongoing pandemic. While such dynamic is also conceived to be an “immediate” response to the unprecedented situation and an “indicative” pathway where the urban space could transform into the future. Home-based offices stand out to be a common feature. This has turned home into a mixed-use “semi-private” space with schooling provision for the kids; besides the conventional amenities that home offers. The house-based “semi-public” spaces e.g. back and front yards become the nuclei for daily amenities and safe interaction between the immediate neighbors. Moreover, smart technologies paved out the ways for digital socialization among the extended families, friends and colleagues. As such, this is a clear manifestation of the transformational use of spaces that could be understood as an “immediate” resilience and “adaptation” to the ongoing pandemic. That being said, such “semi-public” spaces are only available in the common areas (e.g. lobbies, entrance, etc.) of the multi-storied apartment buildings that make it quite challenging for the tenants to avoid a close contact.

In high-density community spaces e.g. neighborhood parks, it is also critically challenging to maintain the required (i.e. 2 m) physical distancing. At a larger scale, the urban public spaces, including regional parks, recreation facilities, and playgrounds are under excruciating challenge. The underlying assumptions of (i) greater cohesion and (ii) physical interaction for inclusive communities are under threat because of COVID-19 posed restrictions. This is more so when there has been a pervasive sense of inclusive and resilient community advocating for an interactive and high-density mixed-use built environment, current status quo of COVID-19 demands somewhat the opposite. While the global climate change continues to present a greater transformation dynamic, emergence of COVID-19 poses an ultra dimension of challenge on current practice and planning of the built environment.

Communities with restricted mobility yielded an extra ordinary demand for e-commerce based daily necessities, including groceries, medicines, clothes, ready foods and other non-essential items. Incredible business investments are made and directed to e-commerce in order to effectively meet the exponentially growing demand for online shoppers (Nahiduzzaman et al., 2019, 2021). The volume of logistics for home based deliveries significantly increased, if not outweighing the other regular trips on the road. Virtual visits to the health clinics, e-health or telephone based health assessment turns out to be the most effective modes for anyone living under the COVID restrictions. The rapid growth of app-based third party shopping providers such as Instacart, Skip the Dishes, Doordash, etc. is a testimony of the accelerated volume of the e-commerce users. Due to restrictions levied on dine-in option, the businesses have been trying to survive by re-directing the sale transaction via “drive-through”, “pickup” and “patio dining” facilities. In the lights of the “immediate” resilience strategy, the restaurants and fast food chains have further facilitated and expanded the “drive-through” infrastructure and designated “pick up” areas for online customers in order to compensate the loss and stay in the business, if not thriving as well. While this might be indicative, the adaptive planning and management is an incredible outcome to survive and maintain the continuum of regular actions and transactions on the backdrop of the global shock i.e. COVID-19.

If the pandemic tends to repeat by itself, many contemporary approaches to planning, development and management pertaining to communities, infrastructure and natural resources would be a subject of critical investigation. While the global climate change continues to pose an intense challenge dynamics, emergence of COVID-19 further has put the global communities into a deepening state of risk

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(Nahiduzzaman & Lai, 2020; Shrestha et al., 2020). Thus, time has never been so crucial to reflect upon the possible ways in which contemporary planning, management and development principles need to confront a complicated and uncertain shift. At this point in time, following threads of thoughts need a critical *re*-evaluation through the lens of “resilience”, “inclusiveness” and “just” against the “new” normal: planning bylaws determining population density; urbanization; mobility; building codes; land use regulations; community planning; and smart infrastructure planning and technologies in socialization and daily actions (e.g. commuting, schooling, office works, shopping, etc.). Furthermore, post COVID-19 era might be a state of prolonged psychological fear and confusion against any medium to large-scale gathering. This is likely to be adding a further impetus to the current impasse in mobility via car-pooling, and mass transit, for instance.

In the context of the above, this special issue attempted to provide a critical insight on the emerging and long term effects of COVID-19 and contemporary challenges of climate change on the global cities and how that can contribute to (*re*-)define the praxis of “resilient”, “inclusive” and “just” planning, practice, policies and management. The special issue attracted theoretical, empirical, experimental, and case study research that critically addresses both the theoretical and practical implications of the global city research.

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