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THE POST-PANDEMIC CITY: TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PUBLIC POLICY (PART II)

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In memoriam: **Sarah Snaith, a bright path that led us to metapolis.**

«**metapolis** is a pluralist space: it is a place to propose ideas that supersede the traditional borders of knowledge, mobilizing them to confront global challenges. **metapolis** is a territory of hyper-connection, liberated from past nostalgia, critical of the present and committed to a sustainable and just future. It does not wait for reform that maintains the status quo, nor does it aspire to do so, either. In fact, in **metapolis** everyone suspects that this future may never come, but still are not convinced to give it up for good. The latest political, economic, technological, environmental, sociological and health emergencies just reinforce the need for us to work harder.»

metapolis is an initiative by common action forum. A collective effort of caf's team, members, collaborators and participants. Our goal is to develop and support a progressive agenda as alternative to the current model that has led us to a world of increasing inequalities, environmental devastation and unaccomplished freedom for most of the global citizenry.

Editor-in-chief: **Rafael Heiber**
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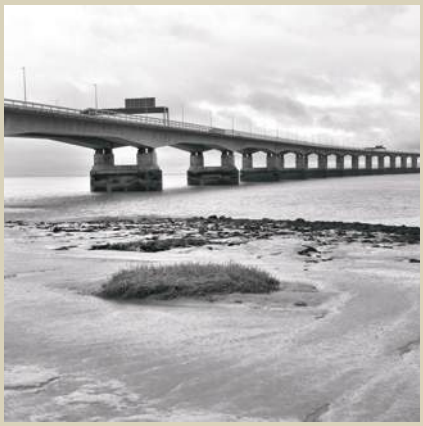

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Photo_ **Tony Vacas**_ Warnes shelter

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THE POST-PANDEMIC CITY: TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION AND PUBLIC POLICY (PART II)

Colleen Boland
Rafael Heiber

Dec, 2020*
Mar, 2021

The second number of the inaugural volume of metapolis further explores the titular theme «The post-pandemic city: transnational cooperation and public policy» in light of almost a year of experience. Communities have confronted not only the public health and economic impacts of the global crisis, but also a dramatic social reckoning precipitated by increasing inequalities, made poignantly visible via the effects and measures surrounding the pandemic.

The year 2020 began with the COVID-19 pandemic but did not end with traditional December holidays. While we find ourselves in March of 2021, to an extent we somewhat feel the spirit remains besieged by 2020. We cite this figurative *chronos* to *kairós* temporal transition as justification for the delayed closure of this second issue; to a degree it is, as we sought additional material. A year ago, there was incredulity as to this pandemic's impact. As recently as six months ago, there was doubt as to the short-term availability of a vaccine for the Sars-Cov2 virus. And finally, today, armed with available vaccines, essential tasks still remain: how to use the current tools at hand in continued response to the pandemic, and how to recapitulate and analyze the immense span of events and information with regards to what has been done so far.

A quick overview

In fact, this period marks the more difficult part of the whole pandemic for many countries and communities. The practical impossibility of maintaining a permanent lockdown has led to relaxed protective measures over several weeks and months. This situation is then compounded by end of year holidays, particularly in Western countries, and all of these factors have led to a loss of control in the management of several health systems. Countries able and willing to access COVID-19 vaccines unsurprisingly include those that possess sufficient resources and infrastructure, as part of unequal and unbalanced globalized markets and development. And, as always, the intensifying of North-South asymmetries continues.

China's supposed success in controlling the pandemic enables the country to use its vaccines as a geopolitical element, offering them to its strategic allies rather than to its own population. On the other hand, Sweden, which committed the structural heritage of a social democratic paradigm, has already faced defeat as a result of the ultra-liberal move to transfer a decision of high complexity and collective consequences to one of individual choice. The remaining Scandinavian countries coordinated their measures, imposing restrictions and avoiding thousands of deaths.

In the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson finally desisted in his denialism when he realized that proper management of the pandemic would potentially strengthen support for Brexit as freedom from European bureaucracy. Summer vacation could

The final weeks of 2020 and those beginning 2021 seem to be the synthesis of the current era: there are still old configurations lingering form the past, but the aspirational future has not yet materialized in the present. The mission of administering vaccines against the COVID-19 disease lies ahead; at the same time, it is no less important to pursue figurative vaccination against other forms of viruses that threaten democracy.

represent political redemption, with vaccinated Britons enjoying the Mediterranean Sea while the Dutch and German watch the islands on television, unless Europe establishes a new mobility protocol for its non-vaccinated citizens. The new Biden government, following the invasion of the Capitol, inherited the calamity of a country that has experienced in excess of half a million deaths. The government is mobilizing to quickly administer vaccines, even banning the local manufacturers from exporting them. And finally, with Trump now retired in Florida, Brazil has become the latest epicentre of pandemic and denialist far-right politics. One year ago, the Brazilian *backward elite* [1] were convinced that the economy could not be sacrificed for a disease that would kill at most three thousand people. At present, even with considerable underreporting, three thousand deaths from COVID-19 occur daily. This country is led by Jair Bolsonaro and guided by the military, via a strategy of minimizing the pandemic, deceiving the population with unregulated drugs, and sabotaging local governments that seek alternatives in access to testing and vaccines.

As such, the final weeks of 2020 and those beginning 2021 seem to be the synthesis of the current era: there are still old configurations lingering form the past, but the aspirational future has not yet materialized in the present. The mission of administering vaccines against the COVID-19 disease lies ahead; at the same time, it is no less important to pursue figurative vaccination against other forms of viruses that threaten democracy, as citizens become hosts of such illnesses by both their own hand, and as inscribed in failure of hegemonic neoliberalism and emerging populism.

Far-right populism, the extreme center and bureaucracy as an end in itself during pandemic times

From the standpoint of international justice and politics, two situations will require a serious reckoning. First and most obviously, there are the devastating effects of reactionary populism, which has forcefully emerged in several countries throughout the world, with some populist parties even assuming government leadership. These agendas and leaderships entail the premeditated, increased exposure of vulnerable groups to the virus, intentional misinformation leading to further infections, and the neglect of basic treatments (such as oxygen, in Brazil). The end result of thousands of preventable deaths constitutes a true post-modern holocaust, where killing takes the form of leaving for dead.

The second, graver situation (as it facilitated the conditions for the rise in the abovementioned far-right ideals and assumptions) is the recapitulation of the ultra-liberal maneuvers characteristic of the «old normal» and extreme center. [2] These include utilizing bureaucracy as a tool to control, as a market field, and finally, treating bureaucracy as an end in itself.

If the «old normal» already merited intense critique, the pandemic even further exposed its ethical deviations, and the malfunctioning hegemonic model. Germany (the heartland of the extreme center [3]) is an emblematic case of thinking and acting in a manner that is steeped in bureaucracy as an end in itself. From an individual point of view, to abide by mundane disciplinary rules is an efficient strategy with which to reaffirm a sense of everything in its right place. From the collective standpoint, an obscure framework becomes generated, where notions of law and order operate with cunning. There is obviously no need for pedestrians to wait for the green light on small streets where no cars pass, as the only reason for the existence of a traffic light is to address what physics teaches us: two bodies cannot occupy the same space. However, this type of disciplinary obedience threads through our social universe, suspending contextual understanding, inhibiting situational empathies, and reducing individual autonomy to simple, prescriptive operations. Societies cannot be restricted to that famous principle of general systems theory, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. On the contrary, in the universe of human practices, the complexity of the parts makes their sum greater than a whole, the latter of which will always be arranged in a provisional and unstable way.

While some countries use bureaucratic tools as a means to ensure an effective vaccination process (each dose costs between €3 and €30, depending on the manufacturer), in Germany all the operative procedures of vaccination can bring the cost of fully vaccinating an individual close to €1000. Bureaucracy as an end in itself increases spending by corporate sectors with vested interests, reduces the speed of vaccination itself, and results in more unnecessarily unprotected people that entails further infection and death. Since societal modes of operation conform to this prescriptive, bureaucratic mode, a narrative bolstered by supposed ideals of quality, confidentiality, and safety legitimizes all of these procedures, which ultimately obscure the objective reality. Business as usual, even during a pandemic emergency.

Recently, Denmark and Norway suspended the use of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine due to potentially related cases of thrombosis. Immediately, the World Health Organization and the European Medicines Agency issued statements pleading for continued administration of this vaccine, which had been approved in three phases of testing; they noted how its efficacy highly outweighed any eventual risk. Around 20 million doses of the vaccine have been administered worldwide. In Europe alone, out of 5 million doses, only 30 cases of thrombosis were detected, which does not exceed the rate of the thrombosis in populations who have not received the vaccine. Perhaps Norway, with its 5 million inhabitants and total of 600 deaths since the beginning of the pandemic, was comfortably positioned to suspend vaccination. However, France, Italy, Spain, and Germany, countries that have suffered daily deaths in the thousands, have also suspended their vaccine administration. Even with such measures being repealed a few days later, it is clear that protection of interests is prioritized over preservation of life. It can be simply put in terms of accountability: the virus cannot be prosecuted for continuing to infect and kill thousands, despite its clear potential eradication via vaccination; a country, government or local agency will not be held accountable for slow vaccination systems or for preserving more doses than administering; yet finally, the bureaucratic, legal or economic risk of being held responsible for death that has not even been evidenced as linked to the vaccine, is sufficient to justify depriving millions of people of evidence-based protection, maintaining the wave of infections and death.

Weeks before, several countries including Germany had already debated first-class (Pfizer mRNA technology) versus second-class vaccines (AstraZeneca with traditional Vector technology), with the former above 90% effective and the latter below 80%. This resulted in AstraZeneca vaccines being refused. However, effectiveness simply means the possibility of avoiding COVID-19 infection. Even if an infection occurs, both types of vaccine would achieve 100% protection against severe symptoms and death. In other words, a finite portion of the population unnecessarily applied the individual logic of consumption to a situation that demands a citizenship role. The problem should be solved collectively in the face of a highly contagious but not such a lethal disease: vaccinate as much as possible with what vaccines are available, relieve overburdened hospitals, and recover social and professional life.

More than a century ago, Max Weber had already coined the concept «iron cage» in analyzing the bureaucratization of the social order. Today, dysfunction in terms of security, privacy, liability, compliance and so many other dimensions characterize the anti-rational bureaucratic-financial model that constitutes an end in itself: a well-behaved neoliberal version of the reactionary and barbaric Thanatos of Trump and Bolsonaro.

Contributions to the current issue of metapolis

Indeed, lessons from a year of COVID-19 crisis ramifications have demonstrated how a global meta-crisis can accelerate and exacerbate inequalities, further highlighting and jeopardizing societal wellbeing. At the same time, our contributors

have observed and revealed how communal action and participation, grounded in local level experiences, initiatives and policy, has facilitated real change and initiated new processes. All of this points towards groundbreaking societal transformation, made both necessary and possible by unprecedented new technologies, as well as the mobility and exchange of knowledge and resources. In light of this, cities and local communities have been positioned to recognize and respond in the most tailored and sensitive way to the experiences and needs of their citizens, which arise in the context of this global connectedness marked by the intensification of both failures and opportunities; while this is most obvious in the case of immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis, it is not restricted to this scenario.

Undeniably, the pandemic raises questions about the current neoliberal patterns of globalization highlighted in our first number, but has also shed invaluable light and offered new perspective on potential solutions to systemic societal inequalities and injustice, rigid structural and authoritarian hierarchies, stagnant political will and environmental decline. Examples of concrete micro and meso level change within local states over the course of the past year have demonstrated how reshaping the urban landscape can have transnational implications that are key in rectifying or recharting human solidarity and progress. This turn to the potential of rooted social participation taking place at the local level avoids what Patterson describes as «the conventional orthodoxies, one-sided agendas, and intellectually paralyzing post-whatnot fads of recent decades.» [4] Enlightened by both hindsight and lived, diverse experience, our contributors have noted how local frameworks usher in an opportunistic public space, societal mobilization and authentic practices of solidarity with the potential to achieve a collective progress that has recently seemed a neglected and unobtainable objective.

The public space: an opportunity for wellbeing

The potential of the city has not been lost in the history of thought and our community life to date. In a broader sense, it is understood that public spaces create a sense of place and even belonging, linking community members to opportunities that directly affect their wellbeing, and thus the community as a whole. [5] In a world that is increasingly globalized with diverse urban environments, even the way a neighborhood is designed and the spaces it offers its members can contribute to overall improved inclusion and outcomes for both established and more recent residents, as has been cited in much of the literature on migration studies and integration in recent years. [6] At the same time, with the context of the COVID-19 pandemic fresh on the public consciousness, the public space's true potential has undeniably come to the forefront. Governance, local leadership and community interaction shaping the use of and access to public space can clearly be directed for the betterment of public wellbeing and social equity, or their obstruction and decline.

Leticia Merino, Professor at the Institute of Social Research (IIS/UNAM), Mexico, and **Simone Buratti**, former Executive Director of The International Association for the Study of the Commons, address the significance of the urban public space as interlinked with the notion of the common good. They provide our readers with illustrative examples from the Latin American experience of the COVID-19 crisis in «Cities, COVID-19 and Commons in Latin America.» In particular, they signal the effects that elite capture has had on the most urbanized region in the world. Hierarchical, detached governments and privatization can mean that urban spaces are deprived of access to important and basic public goods and services. The impact of privatization in creating further concentration of wealth among an already rich and privileged elite is obvious; at the same time, urban commons can also be exclusively coopted by the middle class, as they can better afford participation than more vulnerable populations. The pandemic brings high fatality rates to the region, as it compounds the situation for those already affected by poor health services, informal employment, lack of social security and comorbidities. While the effects of

neo-liberalization and chronic inequalities are dire, the authors outline the necessary measures to halt privatization and exclusion from public goods, for a post-pandemic Latin America that pursues and benefits from the wellbeing of the entirety of its urban populations.

In his contribution, «Work After Coronavirus,» American author and anarchist **Bob Black** offers a specific manner in which to address wellbeing, in the form of reimagined «work.» In this exercise, he notes the COVID-19 crisis impact on the labor market, before delving into a problematization of work, explaining how its traditional conceptualization is critiqued as an authoritarian social formation. He argues that until now, the economy has been virtually and arbitrarily divided into a primary agricultural and extractive industry, a secondary manufacturing sector, and a tertiary and increasingly bloated «service» sector. He explains that in addition to the constrictive nature of this old formation, unjustified jobs become an increasing burden (or the «bullshit jobs,» as coined by David Graeber). The pandemic, he observes, serves to exemplify how such authoritarian labor systems are not, in fact, a necessity. A healthier society and improved wellbeing can be achieved, he concludes, with an alternative «productive play,» nested in communities of local autonomy alongside regional diversity.

A final point integral to a discussion of the public space and wellbeing, especially in relation to the urban environment, includes resisting the city space in terms of a product for consumption, characterized by soaring and prohibitive real estate prices. In this vein, **Saskia Sassen**, Professor of Sociology at Columbia University in the United States, explores how the financial sector, with its various capacities for extraction, has taken on a global dimension that surpasses traditional banking and corporations. Such high finance profoundly impacts and influences local and household economies, as well as the organization and flow of urban space. Indeed, urbanization and the accumulation of capital has seemed to represent one and the same, and the «urban revivification» efforts of past decades have involved «public-private partnerships» that led to gentrification and intensification of inequalities. While COVID-19 also seems to resemble a global actor in the same manner as high finance, it should not disguise the financialization systems and processes that were already in place, directly affecting and driving the dynamics of cities.

However, urban life is not condemned to this restrictive relationship with capital, and in conceiving of new urban possibility it is important to divorce the urban from financial capitalism; power can and must be restored to space as public, for the wellbeing of all the forms of life that currently or potentially can dwell within the city. [7]

Participatory networks and mobilization

Of course, as the authors throughout this volume have pointed out and demonstrated, the social and economic effects of COVID-19 have inspired collective action in various communities. In addition to and as part of this, social and political action can be fostered by and built on clear avenues of communication and participation. The public space must be decided upon by the public forum, grounding its legitimacy and success in the real and diverse needs of its community, rather than overarching, detached interests. The ongoing, reciprocal relationships that occur when participating in an urban community can allow for networks based in commitment, rather than sole reliance on fixed, regulatory norms. Indeed, transforming and reclaiming the public space is a dynamic process that requires a mobilization of energies.

In recognizing the potential of the public space for improved wellbeing, and exploring how to shape it for the benefit of all, the question and challenge includes how to connect it. Here again, the city emerges as a promising potential actor, perhaps reconstituting traditional power hierarchies. As Allen notes, in conceiving of

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Urban life is not condemned to this restrictive relationship with capital, and in conceiving of new urban possibility it is important to divorce the urban from financial capitalism; power can and must be restored to space as public, for the wellbeing of all the forms of life that currently or potentially can dwell within the city.

multilateral city networks, rather than conceding to a commonly accepted paradigm that some global cities dominate others, the power behind city networks could rather be characterized by its capacity «to forge the connections and to bridge the gaps» or «secure networked relationships across tracts of space and time.» [8] This harnessed power could be directed towards achieving sustainable development, as is attempted with the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group project. [9] Such initiatives do not escape critique, however, as accomplishing this configuration and leverage of power remains susceptible to traditional challenges, including insufficient collaboration, poor knowledge sharing, or lack of financial and political support.

Architect **Fernando Carrion**, President of the Research Center CIUDAD and General Coordinator of the Latin American Cities Network, speaks to the existence of and questions surrounding these networks in his article «The global transurban system: forms it takes and new challenges.» Also using Latin America as a springboard to a broader perspective, he maps out the current configuration of global distribution, and the role of local, autonomous entities. Essentially, he argues that growing municipal empowerment is marked by the territorialization of both national and international politics, leading to a network of self-governing cities that engage in an integration process in order to pursue the best interest of their populations.

Multilateralism is now an essential tool in configuring institutional change and overall cooperation at the international, national and local levels. With an aim to addressing the environmental crisis forming a crucial part, constructing a new, «glocal» social contract for future civilization is imperative.

Carrion describes how this assembly of city networks maintains relationships, as well as how it allows for facilitation of both horizontal cooperation as well as enhancement of social movements. In particular, he outlines the various forms of association that these cities and local governments take. Carrion believes that multilateralism as understood in the post-war era of the past century is no longer relevant, but has transformed into a hybrid multilateralism; this creates order from below as a result of local to global links underpinning power networks and relations. While warning against the trap of privatized homogeneous city platforms, he urges a revival of urban planning that embraces a heterogeneous, global transurban system.

Coexistence and solidarity for a sustainable future

From the local to the global, the fissures caused by a lack of solidarity, exclusive interests and the allowing of inequity appear as multiple and amplified. National responses to the current crisis have included isolation and separatism. At the same time, collectivity and solidarity have also brought many populations through an otherwise debilitating world pandemic. To this point, **Felipe Llamas**, Madrid City Councilman, brings us «Old challenges in a new context: the pandemic accelerating city multilateralism.» He highlights how in many cases, local and regional communities and their leaders have ensured the continuity of public services and protected the public space. He also notes how this solidarity must extend to the ecological realm in order to truly, sustainable coexist. Llamas calls for transnational cooperation among these diverse localities in order to achieve this.

Finally, in Ibero-American Secretary General **Rebeca Grynspan's** «A new **glocal** social pact for recovery,» she also points to the mounting destruction of the environment as one of the systemic crises in parallel with the current one. Explaining that the COVID-19 crisis can serve as a wake-up call for humanity, she asserts that the pandemic clearly signals how long-term action and transformation have become inevitably necessary. In light of this increasingly obvious new reality, institutions are not configured to meet the new challenge. She urges to look beyond temporary political cycles, building institutions that are capable of adaptation, receptivity and resilience. Recognizing that multilateralism has had its defects up until this point, Grynspan notes that it is now an essential tool in configuring institutional change and overall cooperation at the international, national and local levels. With an aim to addressing the environmental crisis forming a crucial part, constructing a new, «glocal» social contract for future civilization is imperative.

Our authors have illustrated how in today's modern and increasingly diverse society, albeit marked by new frictions and fragmentations, it is still possible to encounter cohesion, commonalities in shared space. This past year's world crisis accentuates how homogeneous, hegemonic thought and systems, and their accompanying public policies, can exclude if not actively harm the vast majority of our populations. Meanwhile, the urban space and city can serve as a space of interaction and conviviality, allowing for different contexts and diversity to thrive. Efforts towards participatory engagement in urban neighborhoods are teachable examples that must be expounded upon; moreover, they can even be mirrored by transnational cooperation, and can inspire an institutional restructuring that prioritizes representation. We must mobilize truly equal participation in the public space in order to pursue values of solidarity and coexistence, understanding that at the same time, this does not preclude embracing the multiplicity of both the human, technological and natural world.

[1] This phrase is used by Jessé Souza to describe the historical role of Brazilian elite. See: Souza, J. (2018). *A Elite do Atraso: da Escravidão a Bolsonaro* [The Backward Elite: from Slavery to Bolsonaro]. Estação Brasil.

[2] The idea of «extreme center» was adopted by Tariq Ali in a critique of financial capitalism, which since the fall of communism has rhetorically and politically taken over Western society. See: Ali, T. (2018). *The extreme centre: a second warning*, Verso.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Patterson, O. (2014). Making Sense of Culture. *Annual Review of Sociology* 40(1): 1-30. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-071913-043123

[5] Baumann, G. (1999). *The Multicultural Riddle*. Routledge.

[6] Caponio, T., & Bokert, M. (2011). *The Local Dimension of Migration Policymaking*. IMISCOE.

[7] Moreno, L. (2018). *Always crashing in the same city*. City 22(1): 152-168.

[8] Allen, J. (2010). *Powerful City Networks: More than Connections, Less than Domination and Control*. Urban Studies 47(13): 2895–2911.

[9] See: https://www.c40.org/about

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01.

URBAN CAPABILITIES: THOSE WE WANT IN OUR CITIES AND THOSE WE SHOULD AVOID

Saskia Sassen

Jul, 2020

We tend to think of capabilities as something positive-made, developed, useful. Here I focus on a particular capability, marked by admirable modes of intelligence and impressive effectiveness, but basically functioning as an extractive sector that can destroy a variety of healthy economies in major cities.

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as an invitation to reflect on the patterns of such capabilities. What we currently face extends beyond solely a public health threat to communities throughout our planet. We could posit that this invisible virus is of course not a sentient aggressor, but does indeed resemble a global actor with corresponding function: it influences our behavior and interacts with other global actors that shape our world. Since its function is not determined only by its own nature, but also by the model of society it is immersed in, this event serves as an alert to show us the SARS-CoV-2 is not even the most dangerous global actor we must confront.

When the lockdowns were implemented, the inequalities and injustices caused by extractive sectors became all the more obvious. Privileged urban zones were suddenly empty, either because their residents had additional homes outside of the city, or because these zones already no longer functioned as habitats, but had been appropriated for more «profitable» use: in large part, such zones were absorbed by the tourism industry, almost nonexistent during the pandemic. Average citizens, meanwhile, had to endure worse living conditions during quarantine, as the market had already forced them into reduced or further removed housing.

The alarming effects of the pandemic also manifest in the fields of labor, occupation and social care. Again, the assertion holds that the problems we are facing were primarily caused by other global actors, rather than the virus.

In short, what concerns me here, to a large extent, are the negative capabilities that we must recognize and fight against. [1] To that end, I explore an aspect of high finance that functions as an extractive sector: this is a sector with often considerable capacities to destroy what are largely modest survival support systems, such as, for instance, retirement funds. I want to argue that these are significant destructions, even though they appear as benign—dressed in the clothing of support systems. Some of these have been exposed: most notable, perhaps, is the case of the major California University retirement fund, one of the largest such funds and much admired across the decades. But several years ago, this fund and several other major funds saw a new type of management team take over. It was the type of management team that was above all oriented to adding a third entity to the picture: financial firms that had their own idea of what was the way to go—and it was not simply about workers, it was also about using workers' funds to add to the advantages of major financial firms. It is this capacity to extract value, no matter what the conditions, which the financializing of more and more operations has brought about.

Can complexity camouflage violence?

One concern are the cases which are not recognized as a form of violence, because they are sufficiently complex to be almost automatically seen as admirable and trustworthy. This is, for example, what has happened with the retirement funds of modest income workers in the United States. The abuses of power are not easily visible or evident to the average retiree. I frame the analysis as a focus on modes of power that we can think of as positive (retirement funds!) but should increasingly be recognized as containing options for a range of investors that are not about enabling pensioners. In this regard they are in violation of the law as intended. Under such conditions we can frame this abuse as acts of violence. High finance has become one of the most brutal extractive sectors, but it dresses itself in the benign clothing of «commerce.»

What is alarming is that the financial system has developed the capacity to make even small amounts of money, or gold, or modest housing into something that is of interest to them. This is not good for us, the people.

Here I examine the capabilities that have enabled this financializing of more and more components of our economies. What is alarming is that the financial system has developed the capacity to make even small amounts of money, or gold, or modest housing into something that is of interest to them. This is not good for us, the people. In my reading, it has made high finance into what I conceive of as an extractive sector. And once an economic actor has the capacity to transform everything into an extraction, we the people lose, and we lose big.

It should be noted that much of that financializing is basically invisible to the average person –and, we might add, invisible also to our eyes. This is, I think, a source of concern given the «innovative» power of the sector and its capacity to financialize just about anything. Much of this financializing capacity has become a major source of the mal-distribution of resources, gains, and losses, that took off in the post-1980s period. And this continues today, with a noticeable acceleration since the 2008 financial crisis. Further, we have also increasingly seen some of this in major European countries and beyond. Given limited space, I will focus primarily on the United States, but clearly, the financial system is global, and so is its impact.

A major actor we frequently overlook: high finance

The traditional bank is in the business of selling money. Finance is quite different. It is about the capacity to financialize valuable entities. Perhaps particularly impressive (in my reading) is the fact that unlike most other sectors, it can extract value from both positives (such as capital) and negatives (such as debt). Remarkably, it has the capacity to transform negatives such as student debt into a value-producing instrument.

The traditional bank is in the business of selling money. Finance is quite different. It is about the capacity to financialize valuable entities. And this, rather than simply selling money, is its source of profit. This includes an enormous variety of items—from luxury buildings, to metal sheets, to coffee beans. In its vast range of innovations, this capacity to financialize is quite admirable. Perhaps particularly impressive (in my reading) is the fact that unlike most other sectors, it can extract value from both positives (such as capital) and negatives (such as debt). Remarkably, it has the capacity to transform negatives such as student debt into a value-producing instrument.

This is a radically different mode from that of traditional banking. In the post-World War II decades, traditional banking benefitted from an economic logic that enabled the making of large prosperous working and middle classes, and from the fact that each generation did a bit better than their parents. That period is now mostly over in the majority of the United States, though it still survives in Europe, to the comfort of the modest income classes.

We now see a sharp growth in the numbers of high-end financial experts of all sorts who become richer than they ever expected. It is not as rich as the top 1%, but it is a whole new class of the very rich that amounts to 20 or 25% of the population in more and more major cities. De facto, the impact of this 20 to 25% of new rich inhabitants on a city's population is far larger than that of the long-standing top 1%. This 25% can take over and gentrify vast stretches of a city's space for its housing, its luxury offices, shops, restaurants, and more. Together, these various expansions of the spaces of the rich and powerful have now displaced the well-established, but basically modest, older middle classes from their often long-standing urban habitats.

Photo_ **Nothing Ahead**_ CC BY 4.0

An extractive sector

As explained above, finance can best be described as an extractive sector like mining, though it does not present itself as such. For example, it resembles mining in that once you have extracted what you are after, you are done with that site and have no concern about the destruction left behind. It is a system that takes and takes, and does so in ways that make it radically different from traditional banking. The latter is in the business of selling money. In short, as previously mentioned, it is good old-fashioned commerce.

The concerning «innovative» power of the sector and its capacity to financialize virtually anything is demonstrated in the increasing mal-distribution of resources that has especially been on the rise in the wake of the 2008 crisis. This capacity has become all the more visible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

High finance, in contrast, is not about commerce and not about selling money. It was partly enabled by diverse government programs aimed at supporting its people. But largely, these positives were the result of a specific set of economic dynamics, notably the growing importance of mass consumption. In short, traditional banking was part of the larger logic of mass consumption. It had, basically, a positive function for a large number of fairly modest households, enterprises, and many other elements of the traditional economy in our major cities. These features of traditional banking do not hold for today's high finance. What took off in the late 1980s for high finance is very different: it is marked by a proliferation of financial innovations that have the power to concentrate advantage.

My concern is that this is a brutal attack on diverse key sectors in our urban economies: from housing and medical services, to savings arrangements for retired workers. In what follows, I examine particular aspects of this sector, with a focus on what I refer to as its extractive capabilities.

The rise of financialization

There is a rapidly growing critical scholarship on financial institutions and markets that has contributed to our understanding of high finance; in good part, this is because it is written by social scientists rather than «financial experts.» Within this larger context, my focus here is quite different from that scholarship (one to which I did contribute in the past) in that I examine a specific aspect: the features that have enabled the financializing of more and more components of our economies and thereby transformed much of this high finance into what I conceive of as an extractive sector. Again, it is important to remain cognizant that much of that financialization is imperceptible not only to the average citizen, but to everyone.

In this analysis, the concerning «innovative» power of the sector and its capacity to financialize virtually anything is demonstrated in the increasing mal-distribution of resources that has especially been on the rise in the wake of the 2008 crisis. This capacity has become all the more visible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the growing disparity among populations in concentrated spaces like cities has been exacerbated or highlighted by the public health crisis, underlining how the impact of financialization has extended to everyday living conditions among the vast majority of the population. It is not an isolated phenomenon.

To that point, a central consideration in my analysis is that global finance has de-bordered the narrowly defined notion of finance as simply «financial firms and markets,» and financial institutions generally. [2] It is not so much about institutions as about a larger assemblage of institutional, legal, technical, and geographical components that function as capabilities for the financialization of more and more material and non-material elements. [3] These components include the massive incorporation of experts of algorithmic mathematics—which has radically transformed and expanded the capacity to financialize more and more material elements in particular.

This also includes among others, a broad range of non-financial institutions, technical infrastructures, and public and private domains. It is precisely this larger

assemblage of complex components emerging in the last two decades that has enabled finance to shake up so much of the old established order that rose after the post-World War II era.

In conclusion, in considering our city organization beyond the pandemic, the type of finance analysis I call for entails recognizing negative elements before the crisis, such as the destruction of traditional economies and the growth strategies of traditional households. This makes it clear that finance has a radically different organizing logic than that of the typical mass consumer oriented corporation or the traditional bank. The latter needs and thrives on households doing well, on sons and daughters doing better than their parents, on governments supporting households via health subsidies so they can use private hospitals and buy expensive prescribed medications, and so on. But finance, like mining, wants to extract value it can put to work (that is, financialize) and produce additional profits. And once it has executed those operations, it leaves behind destruction and moves on to the next target—yes, again, just like mining.

Saskia Sassen

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[1] For a detailed analysis, see: Sassen, S. (2014). *Expulsions: brutality and complexity in the global economy*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

[2] In Sassen, S. (2016), The Global City: Enabling Economic Intermediation and Bearing Its Costs. *City & Community* 15(2)97-108, I have made a detailed analysis of how the financial system has, literally, built an operational space that is, yes, global, but marked by very specific insertions in diverse locations across the world.

[3] Sassen, S. (2008). *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Photo_ **Martín Campello**_ The scavenger

02. CITIES, COVID-19 AND COMMONS IN LATIN AMERICA

Leticia Merino
Simone Buratti

Aug, 2020

Now, more than ever, we need an effective alliance between governments and communities. Given the precariousness that many populations in developing countries currently face, it is worth inquiring as to the possibility of providing public and common goods «beyond markets and states» as part of collective community action. [1] This is particularly important to consider given the case of Latin-American cities, [2] where public community spaces are few and in precarious areas, and democratic practices are constantly hampered. Which drivers of collective action are found in urban contexts where mutual knowledge and trust remain scarce, and where urban communities (if in existence) tend to be based in weak linkages and limited social capital? How can commons-building movements be inclusive or attentive to the needs of vulnerable populations? Which commons are needed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic in Latin America? The COVID-19 crisis can serve to broaden awareness of complex, multi-sectoral and largely still imperceptible processes, in which different social forces move asymmetrically in achieving the common good. Cities are critical spaces within which such processes could emerge.

An increasingly urban world: the Global South and the Commons

According to United Nations data, 55% of the global population lives in cities, and in 2050, the world's urban population is expected to rise to 68% of its total. Most of this population resides in countries classified as «developing»: largely former colonies still in the process of overcoming positions of subordination in the world economy. In considering this, it is key to recognize how the value of the city derives from life in common.

Historically, cities have offered opportunities for access to education, health and employment, or have provided a setting in which creativity, innovation and political progressiveness can take place. Hence the great waves of urbanization in recent centuries. Good local governments, but also collective action, are critical for the creation and preservation of the most precious «assets» of cities: these include health services, education, knowledge, cultural resources, green areas and even security, which may become «commons.» [3] We understand commons as goods, benefits or services that are collectively used, created or preserved, whose governance requires collective action. [4] Collective action, or «communing,» can intensify when people organize: against a common adversary or adversity, like the current struggle against police brutality or collective action against urban policies of water privatization in North American cities; around a common purpose, like neighbors' organization to ensure street security; or around the use and management of a common good. In the later example, this could mean the case of natural commons as green areas protected and maintained by local groups, or alternatively, the case of knowledge commons,

including open source software, Wikipedia or traditional medical knowledge. In these examples, the experience of «communing» makes the provision of goods and services under communities' management more inclusive and responsive to their conditions and needs, and less subordinate to market-imposed rules.

In this understanding, some goods are defined as public, including those mentioned above; public property or that of public interest, which is used, valued and managed by communities, can become «commons.» Without those communities that act upon them, commons do not exist.

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Commons are composed of the people that take part in collective action, the common goods or collective purposes and the rules that set limits and distribute costs, benefits, responsibilities and access. Commons and communities are far from exclusive to rural life or indigenous people. They result from the experiences of cooperation, agreement, consensus building and rule-making that are the bases of social life; hence, they are present in the most diverse social and ecological contexts. Collective action, communities and commons can also be an important means by which to address—and seek to reverse—the effects of elite capture.

In examining communities within this context and specifically in the case of cities, the governments of megacities face the obstacle of scale and segregation. About 15% of the world's urban population resides in 42 mega-cities with at least 10 million inhabitants, and in many cases, even more. Large urban concentrations are more frequent in «developing» countries: 26 of these large centers are located in Asia (seven in mainland China), with four in Africa and six in Latin America; only three are located in Europe, and two in North America. Alongside North America, Latin America is the most urbanized region on the planet, with 81% of the population living in urban areas. [5] Decision-making processes tend to be strongly concentrated when it comes to the management of urban services, goods and spaces, with a gap between those who make decisions and those affected by them, resulting in unequal access to these goods. The governments of megacities are also prone to elite capture and poor accountability. In short, they face greater challenges in achieving true democratic governance, particularly in the highly unequal societies that exist in many Latin American cities. Today, 24% of the world's urban inhabitants, around one billion people, live in slums around the megacities of Asia, Africa and Latin America, with Latin American cities including Bogotá, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Lima, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. They jointly account for 17% of the Latin-American population. Rapid urbanization over the course of the last half century in Latin America took place in the context of insufficient or scarce resources to meet the needs of employment, housing, education, culture, health, quality and safety for both young and growing populations, many of them living in conditions of deprivation and precariousness.

In the past 30 years of structural adjustment policies, many Latin American governments (which never attained the welfare state configuration that Western European states assumed during the post-war years) largely abandoned the responsibility of providing fundamental public goods to their citizens. In many countries and cities, the provision of health, education, security and water were privatized, taken charge of by private corporations. This process meant vast groups of people were excluded from access to education, means for livelihood, security, information, culture and even water. This occurred to the extent that, in the perception of many Latin Americans, access to these services and goods are no longer rights, but privileges enjoyed only by minorities. These processes have also resulted in an unprecedented concentration of wealth among the already rich elite, whose living standards drastically contrast with those of most of their fellow citizens.

Urban commons are regarded by many as a means to provide goods and services to city inhabitants when the state or the markets fail to do so. Collective action takes the form of social movements to fight against exclusion or depletion of water, urban homes or cultural spaces. Sometimes this collective action is directed towards shared purposes (e.g. changing privatization laws, defending or restoring local natural resources, or obtaining access to medicine in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic). Moreover, if the efforts are successful, they may develop into governance structures to provide and manage urban goods. Nevertheless, commons and urban commons are not a panacea. On the one hand, states remain responsible for providing basic public goods to their citizens. And on the other, urban commons can exclude vulnerable populations and be largely appropriated by the educated middle class, as among other advantages, this group can more easily afford the cost of participation.

COVID-19 and commons in Latin America

As of June 2020, 90% of those who had fallen ill with the COVID-19 virus lived in cities. The transmission of the disease has occurred, to a great extent, in large city neighborhoods with precarious conditions. It is not surprising that the impacts of COVID-19 in Latin America are particularly intense. Six months after the pandemic began in the region, in August 2020, Latin America had the highest number of reported cases in the world, with the majority of the infected between ages 25 and 50. Latin America accounted for 64% of global deaths, despite the fact that Latin Americans only make up 13% of the world population. This high fatality, despite Latin America's largely youthful populations, resulted from factors including: poor health services coverage; the high prevalence of informal employment in the service sector making it practically impossible to remain home and reduce social contact; the lack of social security; and finally, the high prevalence of comorbidities of diabetes, obesity and hypertension, especially among the urban poor.

When the pandemic arrived in the region, most countries were already facing serious economic hardship. Economic performance has largely drawn from extractive activities (mining and industrial intensive agriculture) in the past 30 years, with little economic diversification, manufacturing and production capacity. There was never a full recovery from the global financial crisis of 2008. During the 1990s and 2000s, the prices of natural commodities (minerals, oil, soy, biofuels) were exceptionally high, driven by the exceptional economic growth in China and other emerging economies. During those years, some countries-notably Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina-elected progressive, socially oriented governments that invested in public goods, improving the living conditions of many. Nevertheless, following the financial crisis, economic growth stalled. Populist and right-wing governments were elected, and they cut public expenses and reverted the previous social gains. This made it clear that the structural economic changes that never fully took place were in fact very much necessary in order to achieve larger equity and more stable improvement of living conditions for the majority of the populations. From 2014 to 2019, the average economic growth in the region was only 0.4%. Fiscal revenues, already low, decreased, and public debt accounted for 45% of the 2019 regional gross domestic product (GDP). In addition, in July 2020, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimated that the pandemic will create an average reduction of 9.1% in the regional GDP during that 2014-2019 time frame, with some countries experiencing a decrease as great as 17%, as in the case of Mexico. ECLAC also estimates that at least 45 million Latin Americans will fall below the poverty line, increasing the regional number of poor to at least 230 million people. [6]

Poor economic performance means extreme consequences for underprivileged populations, suffering from profound inequality prevalent in the region. This inequality traces back to colonial roots and was exacerbated during the decades of economic liberalization. Today, eight out of the ten most unequal countries in the

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world are found in Latin America: Haiti, Honduras, Colombia, Brazil, Panamá, Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico. [7] The numbers of poor and extreme poor account for as much of the population in those Latin American countries considered «middle income,» as those in «low income» or «least developed»—but less unequal —countries. Inequality and control of strategic natural resources by national elites and transnational corporations have caused processes of accelerated ecological deterioration. This has led to the subcontinent representing the world's highest deforestation rates, biodiversity loss and water pollution. Inequality also creates high levels of violence towards, and criminalization of, environmental and human rights defenders. Moreover, it jeopardizes the possibility of trust and cooperation among citizens, and between citizens and governments. [8] In effect, it challenges the possibility of communities and development of commons.

Today, the impacts of COVID-19 in Latin America are exacerbated by decades of neoliberalism and by widespread, chronic inequality. During the current crisis, inequality means unequal capacities to maintain health and protect lives, including: unequal possibilities to work from home and safely limit social contacts; unequal economic impacts of the quarantine, as those working in the informal economy (the majority of the working population) suffer disproportionately; unequal access to medical attention and access to food; unequal quality of homes where families must now spend an unprecedented amount of time, with many women and children facing domestic violence; and finally, unequal access to the internet and the digital technology required to communicate and participate in educational activities. In addition to all of these conditions, misinformation is also prevalent, with vulnerability leading to the denial of the seriousness of the pandemic, or even of its existence. This diminished social capacity to manage the current crisis demonstrates both the need for a real welfare state, as well as the limitations of government intervention that would address social needs in local conditions.

In our view, the profundity of the crisis makes it necessary to redefine the roles of government, civil society, communities and markets. These roles should be oriented towards the construction of a socially, ecologically and economically viable future, and states should work towards a «new deal,» in order to create more resilient societies. Governments must address structural inequalities and assume their responsibilities as key agents for the redistribution of income and wealth, pursuing progressive fiscal policies with a regulated market subject to the public good. Collective action via social movements is fundamental in achieving such political, economic and social change. Considering the wave of social protest prevailing throughout various Latin American countries in 2019, it seems reasonable to predict that the current crisis will lead to further social unrest if not fully addressed. Whether these movements can inspire profound change, where «communing» and commons can flourish, remains to be seen.

There are several current examples of how COVID-19 affected the people of many Latin American cities, and how they have responded through collective action. For instance, there is the production and provision of food, and healthy food, by (and for) those who have lost employment and sources of income or have fallen ill. These farmer markets, with organic and local food, have proliferated in Mexico City, Bogotá, Santiago de Chile and Rio de Janeiro as a means to maintain peri-urban agriculture and agricultural jobs, as well as access to healthy diets. Since April, street stalls have flourished in various cities, inviting people to donate food, and those who need it to take it. Cooperative initiatives have supported residence homes for the elderly, bringing food and medicine, and caring for the ill. All of these practices of local solidarity can also be understood as a heritage of the recent past, when big disasters like earthquakes have occurred.

Many groups have been formed and organized through different electronic platforms, and via social media, in order to provide relevant and comprehensive information about the pandemic, as well as to report on how it is harming communities and the means and resources for protection. There have been

Foto_ **Tony Vacas**_ Warnes shelter

community practices of solidarity with health workers, recognizing and thanking them for their effort and defending them from attack. Families have organized groups aimed at gathering to maintain childrens' socialization, agreeing to collective rules of protection against COVID-19, despite explicit prohibition by local governments. [9] These «bubbles» often have to overcome the socioeconomic inequality experienced by their participants, struggling to avoid exposition to the virus. Moreover, there have been movements promoting a progressive digital culture, donating computer equipment for underprivileged children, enabling them to attend online schooling. A final example includes how communities have sustained cultural activities and restaurants in the context of social distancing, with people purchasing tickets one year in advance, or attending online theatre productions in support of cultural projects that would otherwise go under.

Social participation based on accountability and transparency is critical in order to halt trends of privatization and exclusion from public goods. These trends generate an «anti-commons» destroying cooperation and collective creativity. [10] Governments in the region should undertake measures including: monetary and

in-kind transfers; access to basic public services of water; support for small business and cooperatives; safe transportation, education and social protection for formal and informal workers; and finally, access to COVID-19 vaccines when they become available. Implementing these measures would be best facilitated via co-partnership with civil society groups.

A struggle for the future

More than ever, the COVID-19 crisis highlights the need for profound change in Latin American societies. Extreme levels of vulnerability reveal the drastic inequality prevalent in the region, which in the context of the pandemic has transformed into an inequality of means with which to safeguard life and health. In rural and urban communities, there are people suffering from hunger, with families who are not able to pay for the treatments of those infected, even in public hospitals. This crisis is unique in the sense that it has affected many areas of social life, creating new dilemmas for collective action. It has suspended deeper human interaction, as «face to face» contact is limited and dangerous, but also a manner of interaction on which building trust and understanding largely rely. Paradoxically, while extreme restriction of social contact is prescribed, social organization is a critical dimension in cooperating to protect against infection, as individual protection against COVID-19 can only be achieved via protection of the community. Clearly, in this case, one's wellbeing depends on social wellbeing.

More than ever, the COVID-19 crisis highlights the need for profound change in Latin American societies. Extreme levels of vulnerability reveal the drastic inequality prevalent in the region, which in the context of the pandemic has transformed into an inequality of means with which to safeguard life and health.

At this point in time, collective action, social movements, «communing» and commons are all the more necessary, in order to remedy the tragedy that many Latin Americans face. We need to remain open to social learning, allowing this crisis to become an opportunity to develop more resilient societies, better able to address the threats of future pandemics and global climate change. Latin America boasts a long tradition of collective action and social struggle in fighting for a better world; these struggles have even led to periods of socially-oriented governments. Nevertheless, these changes have proved insufficient, as economic structures based on concentration of wealth and economic liberalization have prevailed, and civil society has remained largely marginal in critical decision-making processes. Latin America and Latin American cities have demonstrated rich experiences of «communing,» and building cultural, knowledge, infrastructure and care as urban commons. The gravity of the current crisis calls for intensive collective action: social movements, «communing» and urban commons are key to building more inclusive and resilient societies.

[1] Ostrom, E. (2009). *Beyond Markets and State*. Nobel Lecture.

[2] In 2019, in a sample of 610 cities in 95 countries, public spaces (including streets) occupied only 16% of urban spaces, and green areas only 25% of the 16%.

[3] Putnam, R. (with Leonardi, R. & Nanetti, R.Y). (1993). *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.

[4] Merino, L., & Cendejas, J. (2017). Peace building from a commons perspective. *International Journal of the Commons*, 11(2), 907–927.

[5] In the rapid urbanization processes of the region, push factors from rural areas are related to lack of opportunities and services in rural regions are deemed as important if not more so than pull factors like employment and education opportunities.

[6] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. (2020). *Special Report: Latin America and the Caribbean and the COVID-19, Economic and Social Impacts*. United Nations.

[7] World Bank (2016). *Gini Index, World Bank Estimate*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI

[8] Wilkinson, R. & Pickett, K. (2010). *The Spirit Level. Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. Penguin Books.

[9] As the government of the Mexican state of Nuevo León has done.

[10] Heller, M. A. & Eisenberg, R. (1998). Can Patents Deter Innovation? The Anticommons in Biomedical Research. *Science, 280*(5364), 698–701.

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Photo_ **Tom Driggers**_ CC BY 4.0

03. WORK AFTER CORONAVIRUS

Bob Black

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The COVID-19 crisis may be the first completely worldwide catastrophe in human history. The Black Plague (1348-1353), which originated in Asia, killed one-third to one-half of the population of Europe. The misnamed «Spanish Flu» (1918-1919) killed tens of millions of people in many parts of the world. But these plagues also spared many parts of the world, and sooner or later they went away (almost). [1] This pandemic has already reached remote Amazonian tribes. It may never go away completely. [2] It is a «meta-crisis» which will have profound economic, social and political consequences. [3] The post-pandemic world will have to be very different. It is easy to see how it could be worse, if the new world is to be just a damaged, depleted, more regimented version of the old world. But could it be better?

The plague manifests itself immediately as a public health crisis, but it is more than that. [4] Close behind are the economic consequences, which are probably of more concern to the elite. The virus, by killing hundreds of thousands of people, and sickening tens of millions, has caused severe biological damage to the work force. Long-term physical and mental problems are increasingly identified in the survivors. Many workers have been furloughed or terminated as their workplaces shut down temporarily, or in many cases, permanently. Insofar as workers lose purchasing power, consumer demand declines, and even more marginal enterprises close down, further increasing unemployment. Many small businesses have closed permanently. Moreover, there are additional consequences, such as massive increases in government debt, even as public services are underfinanced precisely when greater demands are placed upon them.

A brief problematization of «work»

All of this is very important. But my topic is work itself. It is an economic institution, but also more than an economic institution. I believe that work has to be understood not merely as a source of products and profits, but as an institution of social control. [5] I am not the first critic of work as such. [6] Others range from Aristotle to Adam Smith, and increasing numbers of my contemporaries offer more or less radical critiques of work. [7] The most fundamental criticism is that the workplace is usually an authoritarian, and even a totalitarian, social formation. Most working adults spend the majority of their waking hours closely controlled—ordered around, kept under surveillance, humiliated—in ways that they would never tolerate anywhere else. They were trained to accept subjugation in school. Is this a status quo we want to return to, even if it were possible?

In politics, work is the elephant in the room. Everyone knows that it is there, but everyone pretends that it is not there. How is the plague affecting work? In the first place, by eliminating some of it, either by automation, or because it is no longer profitable. Automation is profoundly ambiguous. As the Situationist Asger Jorn put

it, automation, «contains two opposing perspectives: it deprives the individual of any possibility of adding anything personal to automated production, thus representing a fixation of progress, yet at the same time it saves human energies by massively liberating them from reproductive and uncreative activities.» [8] But the application of these «perspectives» to different kinds of work is very uneven.

Economists divide the economy, rather arbitrarily perhaps, into three sectors: primary (agriculture and extractive industry), secondary (manufacturing), and tertiary (the «service» sector, although this final sector is more of a heterogeneous, «everything else» category).

The primary sector is mainly agriculture. Farm workers have not received much attention during the pandemic. They never do. Everybody takes them for granted. They are the poorest and most powerless of all workers. I have found little research to date, but the virus has probably made their work more dangerous. [9] It was always dangerous. Automated agriculture (agri-business) has been displacing family-owned farms and sharecroppers since World War II, at least in the United States. Countries dominated by large-scale, absentee-owned agriculture have more poverty and unemployment, and higher rates of violent crime. [10]

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Farm work might be healthier and perhaps easier, if in the wake of land reform, factory farms and plantations were replaced by individual and family farms, and even voluntary collective farms. People who work for themselves have a greater interest in their own health and wellbeing than their bosses would have. They would also have a greater interest in labor-saving machinery (even if it was not cost-effective), and in methods of cultivation which made their work more creative and interesting.

Especially in the less developed countries, the degradation of agricultural work and the impoverishment of the working class has driven millions of country people into the cities. There, most continue to languish in poverty, and the COVID-19 pandemic has now made life even more dangerous. This migration must be slowed, and at least to some extent, reversed. And as Colin Ward notes, «One way of reducing the pressure on these exploding cities, would be to improve life in villages and small towns. But that would demand revolutionary changes in land tenure, and on starting small-scale labor-intensive industries, and in dramatically raising farm incomes. Until that happens, people will always prefer to take a chance in the city rather than starve in the country.» [11] The latest estimate is that worldwide, 80-90% of farms are family-owned or smallholder-owned, yet 1% of farms operate 50% of the farmland. [12]

The secondary sector consists mainly of industry. It is shrinking in the countries where mechanized manufacturing was established first. However, factory work has been exported to underdeveloped countries where wages are lower, working hours are longer, conditions are more dangerous, and unionization is more difficult, if not illegal. So long as these conditions persist, employers will generally not invest heavily in further automation. Machines never get sick, and they never go on strike. The promise of automation is paradoxical. It reduces the amount of work, but it also reduces, and often largely eliminates, whatever personal and creative element remains in work. There is some evidence that automation does not even reduce the amount of work. [13] Its role in the world of work after coronavirus may continue to be, at best, ambiguous. With electric power almost universally available, some automated cottage industry should be feasible. [14] That was already the opinion of the anarchist Peter Kropotkin, writing in the late 19th century. [15] As Paul Goodman aptly notes, «It is not hard to think up industrial arrangements that fire initiative, rather than dampen it.» [16]

The tertiary sector, the residuary category, has swollen to grotesque dimensions in developed countries. It is heterogeneous. It includes waitresses, garbage collectors, lawyers, janitors, sales clerks, managers, clergymen, soldiers, bank tellers, drug dealers, prostitutes, physicians, police, and elected officials. A large component

includes office workers. I do not disparage white-collar workers. However, a majority of their work would be unnecessary in a better organized economy.

As I wrote 35 years ago, referring to American workers: «Forty percent of the workforce are white-collar workers, most of whom have some of the most tedious and idiotic jobs ever concocted. Entire industries, insurance and banking and real estate, for instance, consist of nothing but useless paper-shuffling.» [17] This percentage is now higher. Many jobs, especially in the tertiary sector, are what David Graeber calls «bullshit jobs»: «a bullshit job is a form of employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence.» [18] How socially necessary is an executive assistant to an administrative vice president? And how satisfying is a job like that?

The pandemic's revelations regarding work

Among professionals, physicians are already practicing some «telemedicine.» In-person consultation is not always necessary. Lawyers are virtually attending televised courtroom hearings. Clergymen are conducting church services online. Many banking transactions were already being conducted using «automatic teller machines.» These improvisations have their limits. Barbers, surgeons (originally the same profession), and others cannot avoid bodily contact with their customers and patients. Restaurants can to some extent convert to delivery. However, the experience of dining out, and the enjoyment of the café and the tavern, or spectator sports, may never be the same. As they were for the Greeks and Romans, occasional feasts with close friends and family may return as the space of communing. If something is lost, maybe something is also gained.

But the pandemic has taught us that much work can be done from home. In the United States, because of the COVID-19 crisis, 42% of workers now work from home. [19] Why was this work not conducted from home before? Commuting is social waste. Unlike work, it produces no value. Unlike play, it is no fun. It wastes time, effort and wealth. And now the densely populated offices and factories are even more unsafe than they were before. Obviously, work was centralized in workplaces in order to subject the workers to surveillance and discipline. Even if public health is the only consideration, it is better to abolish as much work as possible, and to disperse as much work as possible. However, as I will suggest, there are other considerations, like freedom.

Indeed, humans are active by nature. We are not talking about idleness. We are talking about finding better things to do. In talking about work we are talking about a social institution.

I will be suspected of working up to a utopian proposal. I am not ashamed to say so. Ideas are called «utopian» when they seem to be useful but they propose a different style, a different procedure, a different kind of motivation from the way people at present do business. Such ideas may make obvious common sense and may, technically, be very easy to effectuate; all the more will they be called «impractical» and «an imposition on people by experts and intellectuals,» with a vehemence which indicates a powerful psychological resistance. [20]

Friedrich Engels wrote a Marxist essay, «Socialism: Utopian and Scientific.» [21] His argument—although he did not provide any argument—was that all versions of socialism before Marx were utopian, because they were not Marxist. But Marxism itself has always been criticized as utopian. [22] The fact of the matter is: «Stalinists and their ilk did not kill because they dreamed great dreams—actually, Stalinists were famous for being rather short on imagination—but because they mistook their dreams for scientific certainties.» [23]

The urban space in light of the pandemic and «work»

It has been well known for centuries (Boccaccio, *The Decameron*; Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*; Camus, *The Plague*) that plagues are most dangerous where people

are crowded together, as in cities, for example. As a result, I would argue for a more dispersed population. Many of the early socialists, such as Charles Fourier, Karl Marx, and Peter Kropotkin, advocated the abolition of the distinction between town and country. [24] They were not, as far as I know, thinking specifically about plagues, but they were calling for a generally freer, better, less hectic, more healthy way of life. [25] I agree with them, and in turn disagree with Laura Basu, who contends that the city is always «the space of freedom.» [26] That idea is disproven by the entire history of cities for over 5,000 years. [27] When was Baghdad or Beijing a space of freedom? There have been magnificent cultural achievements in Baghdad and Beijing, as there have been in many cities. But that is not the same as them being spaces of freedom.

The abolition of the distinction between town and country is not the abolition of the town by the country. It is not the vision of a pastoral Arcadia. It is the interpenetration of town and country. It implies lower population densities everywhere, but not the same density everywhere. It implies that some production activities now confined to the country, such as cultivation, could also be conducted in the city. This was often the case in pre-industrial cities. And that some production activities now confined to the cities, such as manufacturing, could also be conducted in the country. This was the situation in pre-industrial cities and countryside. This is not a new idea. It was not even a new idea when Robert Owen (1771-1858) wrote, in 1820, that small communities of 1,800–2,000 «in the neighborhood of others of similar description, at due distances, will be found capable of combining within themselves all the advantages that city and country residences now afford, without any of the numerous inconveniences and evils which necessarily attach to both those modes of society.» [28]

There is reason to believe that this is still feasible. [29] The know-how to recreate the technology of the late 19th and early 20th Century, which was not oil-based, is still available. [30] Life was good for many people. The many reformers and revolutionaries of that time were right about this: life could have been much better at that time, for most people at the then existing level of technology. Life could still be even better than that now. It is true that our population is too high, that the environment has been degraded, and that natural resources have been squandered. On the other hand, what we have learned in science, including agronomy and medicine, will not be lost, and much of it will still have practical applications. Vaccination was invented in the 18th Century.

Going forward: post-crisis reconfigurations of work

Now about that utopian solution… it consists of the *abolition* of work. Critics of work have largely not addressed public health directly. This was something of an

Photo_**Art G.**_CC BY 4.0

oversight on our part. [31] I have always contended, although not emphasized, that work, and especially (but not only) industrial work, is hazardous to your health. [32] But might it be worth the risk? What is it that we call «work»? We do not demand the abolition of breathing, as one wit pretended. [33] We do not demand the abolition of work as the physicists define work—as effort, as the expenditure of energy. [34] There will always be some of that, and it is not intrinsically undesirable. Indeed, humans are active by nature. We are not talking about idleness. We are talking about finding better things to do. In talking about work we are talking about a social institution.

Work, wrote Adam Smith (who is more respectable than I am) «corrupts even the activity of [the worker's] body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance, in any other employment than that to which he is bred.» [35] Its effect on the worker's mind is even worse. Paul Lafargue, Karl Marx's son in law, wrote (in 1880): «In capitalist societies, work is the cause of all intellectual degeneracy and all organic deformities.» [36] With modern work it is not only the manual labor, which Smith and Lafargue mainly addressed, that is stultifying. Office work is also mostly boring and uncreative. As I have noted, «Work standardizes people as it does products, but since people by nature strive to produce themselves, work wastes effort lost to conflict and stress.» [37]

To combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work—the production of use-values—with the best of play, which I take to be every aspect of play, its freedom and it fun, shorn of the Calvinist connotations of frivolity and self-indulgence… *If productive play is possible, so too is the abolition of work.*

Short definitions of work might include «forced labor» and «compulsory production,» which are correct as far as they go. But a fuller definition of work is brought out by contrasting it with play. They are both purposive, goal-oriented activity. But the purpose of work is not working, whereas play is its own purpose, as I have explained: «Work, unlike play, is done *not* for the intrinsic satisfaction of the activity but for something separate which results from it [usually a paycheck]. The anticipated goal of play is the pleasure of the action.» [38]

The utopian proposal is to transform work into a new type of free activity, [39] productive play, of which I describe: «to combine the best part (in fact, the only good part) of work—the production of use-values—with the best of play, which I take to be every aspect of play, its freedom and it fun, shorn of the Calvinist connotations of frivolity and self-indulgence… *If productive play is possible, so too is the abolition of work.*» [40] I claim no originality for this idea. It is implicit in the wonderful utopian schemes of Charles Fourier. [41] It is explicit in William Morris. He wrote (in 1884) that under socialism, «not only would every one work with the certain hope of gaining a due share of wealth by his work, but also he could not miss his due share of rest.»

He further wrote «But though the compulsion of man's tyranny is thus abolished, I yet demand compensation for the compulsion of Nature's necessity. As long as the work is repulsive it will still be a burden which must be taken up daily, and even so would mar our life, even though the hours of labour are short. What we want to do is to add to our wealth without diminishing our pleasure. Nature will not be finally conquered till our work becomes a part of the pleasure of our lives.» [42]

Friedrich Schiller wrote: «The animal works when deprivation is the mainstream of its activity, and it *plays* when the fullness of its strength is the mainstream, when superabundant energy is its own stimulus to activity.» [43] Schiller thought that man had a twofold nature: «pure intellect» (reason) in the mind, and an «empirical intellect» (nature) in the world of sense experience. [44] They are reconciled, and man becomes all that he can be, in play: «So, the play impulse, in which both combine to function, will compel the mind at once morally and physically; it will therefore, since it annuls all chance, annuls all compulsion too, and sets man free both physically and morally.» [45] If that is rather obscure, Schiller makes clear the concept of, «replacing work with pleasure, exertion with relaxation, activity with passivity.» [46]

This immodest proposal raises many questions, some of which I have tried to address in my writings on work. Someone always asks: «Who will do the dirty work?» There are answers to that question. [47] And why do we think some work is dirty? I don't have all the answers. I do not even have all the questions. The experts on work are the people who offer this. They will have ideas about what to do with the work they do, if it is worth doing at all. Very likely there will be many questions, with multiple answers. Some kinds of work are, for some people, satisfying if only done from time to time, or if done for not too long. [48] Some work (to some degree, most work), which is oppressive because of how work is now organized, could lose at least some of its oppressive character if unnecessary authority or supervision were removed, and it was carried out in safe, pleasant conditions among friends. [49] And variety in work is very important, as I explain, «To compel a man to do day after day the same task, without any hope of escape or change, means nothing short of turning his life into a prison-torment.» [50]

The general tendency will be toward local autonomy amidst regional diversity. Local neighborhoods and settlements will not be fortified, gated communities with delusions of sovereignty. Regions, cultural regions, will often focus on bioregions, with permeable boundaries. [51] Diversity will flourish locally, regionally, and internationally. We will be better off by exploring the possibilities of what is closer. Big cities have brought us together physically, but separated us socially. Big workplaces have done the same thing. Mass society has given rise to «the lonely crowd»: [52] people being alone together. Paradoxically, social distancing might complement bringing people together emotionally, in a shared way of life that is more sociable than mass society.

Is it contrived for me to promote this agenda as a response to the COVID-19 crisis? Of course, I do not think so. The virus is a challenge to other ideologies too, and maybe to all ideologies. Health issues, especially public health issues, are often not *just* health issues. Contagious disease is clearly not just a private concern for individuals and their physicians. It is a social issue. Even the physicians know that. And they know that diet, rest, safety, anxiety, insecurity, and even sociability strongly influence physical and mental health. How we live has a lot to do with how long we live, and with how well we live. Fatigue, stress, boredom, and even a touch of fear, which are often inflicted by work – they really are hazardous to your health! They adversely affect the immune system. And they just do not feel good. Maybe happiness is healthy. And maybe freedom is healthy.

Bob Black

Bob Black is an American social philosopher known for his work on anarchism. The author of various books and numerous political essays, he specializes in the sociology and ethnography of law. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Georgetown Law School. He is most widely known for his 1985 essay «The Abolition of Work,» which has been widely disseminated in at least 13 languages. His most recent publication, «Instead of Work,» includes a compendium of his writings and an update on his 1985 essay.

[1] A man recently contracted the bubonic plague in South Lake Tahoe, California; a case is reported in California approximately every five years. See: Rettner, R. (2020). California reports first human plague case in 5 years. *LiveScience*. https://www.livescience.com/california-plague-case-south-lake-tahoe.html. A human recently contracted septicemic plague from a squirrel in Colorado; the human recovered. Whether the squirrel recovered is not reported. See: O'Neill, N. (2020). Colorado confirms first human case of bubonic plague since 2015. *N.Y. Post*. https://nypost.com/2020/07/17/first-human-case-of-bubonic-plague-since-2015-reported-in-colorado/

[2] Zhang, S. (2020). The Coronavirus Is Never Going Away. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/08/coronavirus-will-never-go-away/614860/

[3] Khanfar, W. (2020). COVID-19 as a Meta-Crisis and Our Post-Pandemic Order. *Metapolis* 1(1).

[4] Sassen, S. (2020). Urban Capabilities: Those We Want in Our Cities and Those We Should Avoid. *Metapolis* 1(1).

[5] Black, B. (1985). The Abolition of Work. In *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*. Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited.; see Thompson, E.P. (1967). Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism. *Past & Present* 38(1): 76-236.; Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and Monopoly Capitol: The Degradation of Work in the 20th Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.; Edwards, R. (1979). *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century.* New York: Basic Books.

[6] See, e.g., Vernon, R. (Ed.). (1983). *Why Work? Arguments for the Leisure Society*. London: Freedom Press.

[7] E.g., Mann, E. (1990). *I Was Robot (Utopia Now Possible)*. Cushing: Little Free Press.; Bonanno, A. (2013). *Let's Destroy Work, Let's Destroy the Economy* (J. Weir, Trans.). Berkeley: Ardent Press.; Weeks, K. (2011). *The Problem with Work.* Durham: Duke University Press.; Gorz, A. (1999). *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Work-Based Society* (C. Turner, Trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.; Rifkin, J. (1995). *The End of Work.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.; Glitterbomb, L. (2020). *Bullshit Jobs and the End of Work (As We Know It).* C4ss.org; Brown, S. Does Work Really Work. In *Kick it Over 35*. www.theanarchistlibrary.org; McCallum, J. (2020). *Worked Over: How Round-the-Clock Work is Destroying the American Dream*. New York: Basic Books.

[8] Jorn, A. (2006). The Situationists and Automation. *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. & Trans. Ken Knabb (rev. & expanded ed.; Berkeley, California: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), page 56.

[9] Ho, V. (2020). «Everyone Tested Positive»: Covid Devastates Agriculture Workers in the California Heartland. *The Guardian*.

[10] Lyson, T.A., Torres, R. & Welch, R. (2001). Scale of Agricultural Production, Civic Engagement, and Community Welfare. *Social Forces*: 311-327.

[11] Ward, C. (1983). Notes on Anarchist Cities. *Housing: An Anarchist Approach*. London: Freedom Press, page 88.

[12] Watts, J. (2020). 1% of Farms Operate 50% of the World's Farmland. *The Guardian*.

[13] Black, B. (2015). Afterthoughts on the Abolition of Work. In *Instead of Work*. Berkeley, CA: 228-255.

[14] Goodman, P. & Goodman, P. (1960). *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life.* New York: Vintage Books, page 156.

[15] Kropotkin, P. (1899). *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin. There are several more recent reprints. Colin Ward produced a modern update: Ward, C. (1975). Fields, Factories and Workshops Tomorrow. New York: Harper & Row.

[16] Goodman, P. (1964). Utopian Thinking. In *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*. New York: Vintage Books, page 10. As Herbert Read put it: «I have embraced industrialism, tried to give it its true aesthetic principles, all because I want to be through with it, want to get to the other side of it, into a world of electric power and mechanical plenty where man can once more return to the land. Not as a peasant but as a lord.» Read, H. Poetry and Anarchism. In Anarchy & Order: Essays in Politics. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, page 59.

[17] Black, B. (1985). The Abolition of Work. In *The Abolition of Work*, page 29; see also Graeber, D. (2004). *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology.* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.; It is now over 50% in the United States (or it was before the pandemic).

[18] Graeber, D. (2018). *Bullshit Jobs.* New York: Simon & Schuster, page 3.

[19] Wong, M. (2020). Stanford Research Provides a Snapshot of a New Working-from-Home Economy. *Stanford News*. https://news.stanford.edu/2020/06/29/snapshot-new-working-home-economy/

[20] Goodman, P. (1964). Utopian Thinking. In *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*. New York: Vintage Books, page 5.

[21] Engels, F. (1968). Utopian and Scientific. in K. Marx & F. Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume.* Moscow: Progress Publishers.

[22] E.g., Heller, M. & Nekrich, A.M. (1986). *Utopia in Power*: *The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*. New York: Summit Books.

[23] Graeber, D. (2004). *Fragments of an Anthropologist Anthropology.* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, pages 10-11.

[24] Marx, K. & F. Engels (1968). Manifesto of the Communist Party. In K. Marx & F. Engels, *Selected Works in One Volume.* Moscow: Progress Publishers.

[25] In 1884, Errico Malatesta and other anarchists went to Naples to treat victims of a cholera epidemic. They attributed the outbreak to poverty — for which the cure was, they said, social revolution. See: The Anarchists versus the Plague: The Cholera Epidemic of 1884. *Crimethinc*. crimethinc.com/2020/05/26/the-anarchists-versus-the-plague-malatesta-and-the-cholera-epidemic-of-1884. In the United States, the rate of coronavirus infection correlates with poverty. Nazaryan, A. (2020). Odds of Coronavirus Infection Greatly Increase with Poverty. *Yahoo News*. https://news.yahoo.com/odds-of-coronavirus-infection-greatly-increase-with-poverty-cdc-says-174356048.html

[26] Basu, L. (2020). The Post-Modern City Beyond State and Market: A Thought-Experiment. *Metapolis* 1(1).

[27] *E.g.*, Sjoberg, G. (1960). *The Pre-Industrial City: Past and Present*. Illinois: The Free Press.; Strauss, G. (1966). *Nuremberg in the 16th Century.* New York: John Wiley & Sons. In ancient Sumer, where cities and civilization originated, «elites came to view and use fully encumbered laborers in the same exploitative way as human societies, over the immediately preceding millennia, had viewed and used the labor of domesticated animals. This represents a new paradigm of social relations in human societies.» Algaze, G. (2008). *Ancient Mesopotamia and the Dawn of Civilization: The Evolution of an Urban Landscape*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, page 128.

[28] Owen, R. (1991). Report to the County of Lanark. In A New View of Society and Other Writings. G. Class, Ed. London: Penguin Books, page 272. He also asserted «Under a well-devised arrangement for the working classes, they will all procure for themselves the necessaries and comforts of life in so short a time, and so easily and pleasantly, that the

occupation will be experienced to be little more than a recreation, sufficient to keep them in the best health and spirits for rational enjoyment of life.» Ibid., page 273. Note the reference to health.

[29] Kropotkin, P. (1899). *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, pages 155-174.

[30] Saxon, K. (1989). Investment in Survival. in *Rants and Incendiary Tracts*. B. Black & A. Parfrey, Eds. New York: Amok Press, page 189.

[31] See DeLeon, S. (1996). For Democracy Where We Work: A Rationale for Social Self-Management. In Reinventing Anarchy, Again. H. Ehrlich, Ed. Edinburgh, Scotland & San Francisco, California: AK Press, page 193.

[32] Black, B. (1985). The Abolition of Work. In *The Abolition of Work*, pages 26-27; Black, B. (2015). *Instead of Work*. Berkeley, CA, 18-20.; Black, «Afterthoughts on the Abolition of Work,» 255-260.

[33] Black, B. (1992). Smokestack Lightning. In *Friendly Fire.* Brooklyn: Autonomedia, pages 43-62.; *Instead of Work*, 55-76.; See my reply to David Ramsey-Steele: (1989). The Abolition of Breathing. *Liberty*.

[34] Black, B. (1992). No Future for the Workplace. In *Friendly Fire*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, page 16.; *Instead of Work*, page 80.

[35] Smith, A. (1902). *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. London: George Routledge & Sons, page 613.

[36] Lafargue, P. (1999). *The Right to Be Lazy* (L. Bracken, Trans.). Pennsylvania: Fifth Season Press, page 3. He adds: «Instead of acting against this mental aberration, priests, economists and moralists have turned work into a sacred cow.»

[37] Black, B. (1990). No Future for the Workplace. In *Friendly Fire.* Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 16-17; *Instead of Work*, page 82.

[38] Black, B. (1990). Smokestack Lightning. In *Friendly Fire*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, page 46; *Instead of Work*, page 60.

[39] Strasbourg Student Union. (2006). On the Poverty of Student Life. *Situationist International Anthology* (K. Knabb, Trans.).

[40] Black, B. (1990). No Future for the Workplace. In *Friendly Fire.* Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 48; *Instead of Work*, pages 60-61.

[41] E.g., Beecher, J. & Bienvenu, R. (Eds.). (1971). *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier.* Boston: Beacon Press.; Poster, M. (Ed.). (1971). *Harmonian Man: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier* (S. Hanson, Trans.). New York: Doubleday & Company.

[42] Morton, A. (Ed.). (1973). Useful Work versus Useless Toil. In *Political Writings of William Morris*. New York: International Publishers, page 95.

[43] Schiller, F. (1954). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters* (R. Snell, Trans.). London: Routledge, page 133. Schiller's distinction corresponds to psychologist Abraham Maslow's distinction between deficiency motivation and growth motivation; see Maslow, A. (1968). *Toward a Psychology of Being.* New York: D. Van Norstrand Co.

[44] Schiller, F. (1954). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, pages 43-45, & 70 n. 1.

[45] Ibid., page 74.

[46] Schiller, F. (2016). Letters to Prince Frederick Christian von Hardenberg. In *On the Education of Man* (K. Tribe, Trans.). Penguin Classics, page 152.

[47] Gibson, T. (1952). Who Will Do the Dirty Work? London: Pamphlets BC Quail/GIB.

[48] Black, B. (1986). The Abolition of Work. In *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*. Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Morton, A. (Ed.). (1973). Useful Work versus Useless Toil. In *Political Writings of William Morris*. New York: International Publishers, page 101.

[51] Cafard, M. (2003). The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto. In *The Surre(gion)alist Manifesto and Other Writings.* Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Exquisite Corpse.

[52] Riesman, D., Glazer, N. and Denney, R. (1950). The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press. This sociology book surprisingly became a best-seller.

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04. THE GLOBAL TRANSURBAN SYSTEM: FORMS IT TAKES AND NEW CHALLENGES [1]

Fernando Carrión Mena

Oct, 2020

COVID-19 has become a fundamentally urban disease: social interaction, so characteristic of cities, has put cities at the epicenter of the pandemic. In recent months, we have witnessed emergency and preventative measures isolating entire cities, demonstrating their essential purpose of connecting space. This purpose, on the other hand, is almost always obscured when cities operate under *normal conditions*, giving the false sensation that the city is an autarkic space.

If originally cities grew along the coastlines, rivers or natural pathways so as to access the countryside as well as regional spaces of production and consumption, today, cities relate above all to other cities, with ways and forms of communication produced socially. This transformation is marked by factors including planetary accumulation, city to city migration, the scientific-technological revolution, networks of ports and airports, and the construction of an integrationist political will; the latter stems from civil society and the local public policies themselves. In other words, we have gone from a logic of urban hierarchy, to one of a global urban system, where interurban and transurban relationships give rise to unprecedented trends of urbanization. These trends ultimately can also accelerate the spread of viral infection, which can escalate into a pandemic in a question of weeks.

In regional terms, Latin America is the most urbanized continent in the world, but at the same time has the most inequality; this is a dangerous combination when containing a disease. About 82% of the population of this continent lives in cities, which totals 8.8% of the world population, and despite the precariousness of its COVID-19 monitoring systems, the official level of diagnosed cases and deaths reach 29% and 33% of the world totals, respectively. This is almost four times higher than in the rest of the world.

While facing this pandemic, with some vaccines already becoming available and an urgency for their quick production and distribution, it is important to review some of the processes that gave rise to the current configuration of the global transurban system, as well as the forms it takes, with a special focus on Latin America. Although we still recognize their deep colonial roots, it is also true that Latin American municipalities embarked on this century empowered by transfers of economic resources as well as expanded jurisdiction, and above all, as an entity of local societal representation. This municipal empowerment has brought about the territorialization of national and international politics, and arises from *autonomy*, understood as: the «faculty or power of a territorial entity, which *forms part of a superior entity*, to govern itself according to its own laws and agencies.» [2] This implies integration via *territorial pacts*, rather than through the national imposing hierarchies on the local. At the same time, it also means the inter-city unification of various political wills simultaneously strengthens individual cities as well as the system of cities.

What follows is a description of this local integration process, identifying the main assemblies that form part of the Global Urban Network. All of this seeks to achieve the closest thing to this idea, looking to improve an integration process undertaken by the state apparatus with the closet proximity to society: the city. But this is also an attempt to provide solutions to global problems—today, pandemics—both from and for the citizens.

1. The assembly of interurban and transurban urbanization

The process of urbanization in Latin America has been characterized by two great moments, or junctures, since the beginning of the past century. The first, understood as the *urban explosion* (1900-1980), experienced its first great wave in rural to urban migration, which increased the number of cities as well as their size. This took place in a highly unequal manner, termed urban primacy. [3] This is a sort of «urban macrocephaly,» which consolidated the urbanization pattern of *city, territory and nation*. This period was marked by an absence of networks and interurban relationships, as the city's links with the immediate surrounding territory, regardless of whether regional or rural, were privileged in terms of contiguity (as a nuclear city or central place).

The second period, from 1980 to the present, is understood as an *urban transition*. [4] In this period, an interurban system and a transurban structure were established, which broke with the previous period's urban hierarchy (based on extent and size). [5] On the one hand, this was a result of a change in the direction of migration, as the cycle of rural to urban mobility ended, and that of international urban to urban migration began. On the other hand, it came about due to a new economy with an urban and global base, which linked spaces and sectors in a dispersed system of economic activities, with centralized management and operations. This required an integrated infrastructure of ports, airports, highways and, above all, new communication technologies. Moreover, it necessitated unprecedented urban centrality, operating via an integration logic based on: «the north of southern cities connecting with the northern cities.» [6]

A plurality of urbanization patterns is established (see Figure 1), where interurban and transurban relationships take shape. For example, in a region of several municipalities, there are *clusters* of several medium and small cities, which form around private mono-production in a region of several municipalities (for example, the salmon *cluster* in Chile or El Bajío in Mexico based in auto production). Additionally, there are bordering cities that are integrated into one urban unit, despite the divides of nationalism caused by physical borders (Ciudad Juárez-El Paso; Foz Do Iguazú- Puerto Iguazú-Ciudad del Este). Furthermore, there is regional urbanization consisting of multiple cities, with local and regional governments forming part of a highly diverse territorial unit (Buenos Aires City, Mexico City). Then there is *imagined urbanization*, taking place at the level of globalization. In these cases, multi-scaled territories and multilevel governments operate.

	URBAN TYPES	SPATIAL MODEL	RELATIONSHIPS	GOVERNMENT
Urbanization of Cities	Nuclear Cities		City Countryside	Municipal isolated
	Metropolitan City		Polarized City	Metropolitan
Interurban Urbanization	Urban Systems		Networked City	Municipal horizontal
Transurban Urbanization	Clusters		City Factory	Plublic-Private Multilevel
	Borders		Peer Cities	Multi-State
	Imagined cities		Multi-Site Cities	Pluri-State
	Regional Urbanization		City of Cities	Multilevel

Figure 1_ Urbanization patterns and institutional governance frameworks in Latin America

This new form of territorial organization engenders a search for new institutional frameworks that go beyond the strictly local; there is a juxtaposition of bodies from the horizontal (municipal), vertical (provinces, regions, states), national (intrastate) and international (interstate).
In the context of these new urbanization patterns and institutions attempting to adapt to this unprecedented territorial reality, decentralization becomes a principle of multilateral cooperation, generated through interurban networks and associations.

In the context of these new urbanization patterns and institutions attempting to adapt to this unprecedented territorial reality, decentralization becomes a principle of multilateral cooperation, generated through interurban networks and associations.

2. The assembly of networks

The assembly of city networks is a relatively recent phenomenon, and is growing rapidly. These networks maintain stable, integrated relationships via common objectives, developed through four components: i) spatial scales; ii) thematic groupings; iii) methodological affinities; and iv) institutional integration.

Spatial scales refer to the geography within which networks are deployed, ranging from local to regional, national and international. They have varying territorial scope, in some cases cumulative, from the local to transnational level. It can also be vice versa, with a decentralized approach going from a world organization to regional representations. In turn, thematic groupings are characterized by specialized areas and specific problem solving, from infrastructure, public services and the environment, to social and demographic matters. Spatial scales and thematic groupings mutually influence each other, both in relation to the size of the city

(a town versus a metropolis) and the spheres of government (local or regional), as well as with regards to particular areas of the city; for example, historical centers or popular establishments. [7]

Methodological affinities, the third unifying element, characterize these city networks as a platform for research, discussion, policy debate and dissemination, an interchange of actions, a positioning, or as the methodologies themselves. The fourth element, institutional integration, has diverse actors, be they public, private or civil society initiatives. For example, the Latin American Federation of Cities (FLACMA) or the Latin American and Caribbean Organization of Border Cities (OLACCIF) are local initiatives. [8] In the case of Ecuador, my country of origin, the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing is a national initiative. In turn, the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), are bilateral international initiatives; the United Nations Organization or the Inter-American Development Bank are international multilateral cooperation initiatives. IBM, with its «Smart Cities» program, the Ford Foundation or the Rockefeller Foundation, represent private and non-governmental initiatives. Finally, the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) or the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLASCO), also represent group initiatives as academic entities. The CIVITIC Urban studies network does as well, bringing together 22 Ecuadorian universities that specialize in urban studies.

Ultimately, these four elements allow for discussing the problems urban inhabitants face, as well as solutions to these problems. They contribute to cities working as strategic allies with similar interests and challenges. In short, these networks have served to enhance collaboration that extends beyond the local, facilitating horizontal cooperation with strategic allies, and enhancing social movements. [9]

3. The assembly of associations

Formally, associativism is the process of constituting organizations that represent groups of cities or local governments sharing common interests. They can take three forms: associations, commonwealths, and twin cities.

In Latin America, *municipal association* as a general phenomenon began with local governments agreeing on policies with national governments, as part of the decentralization processes in the 1980s. At first, this movement had a fundamentally corporatist vision, defending its own interests, especially with regards to the transfers of economic resources.

Subsequently, due to globalization processes, state reform, and new urbanization patterns, associativism transformed with the strengthening, democratization, modernization and autonomy of cities, and as a result, their interurban reach, at both the regional and global levels.

Currently, the new challenge is achieving true platforms of interurban integration, on a global scale. It is important to build capacity to influence global agendas. This need is abundantly clear, and is markedly absent in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). [10]

Commonwealths are a voluntary association of autonomous territorial entities on a horizontal level, such as municipal or regional organizations, to carry out one or more administrative capacities or objectives together. It is not so much creating a supra-municipal institution, but rather consists of a confluence of common interests operating at a national level, and in many cases binationally and internationally, across state borders.

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Another manner of interurban agreement is so-called *twin cities*. They have evolved from a simple instrument of friendship and cultural exchange, to become a powerful tool for horizontal cooperation in building joint capacities, in order to promote economic and social development, as well as to advance culture, sports and political activity. These twin cities can become, as in fact has occurred, an *international movement of sister cities* (Sister Cities International), in which many cities come together through their local governments.

4. Multilateralism: from the national to the local

After the Second World War, the urgent need to promote cooperation between countries in order to achieve common security and economic objectives gave rise to the concept of multilateralism. This took on an organized form with member nations—represented by their governments—in an integrated, *international* institution, the most noteworthy examples of which are the United Nations and the World Bank.

Despite its importance, there has been a profound crisis of multilateralism in recent years. Main reasons for this crisis include the decline of the state and acquisition of power by global corporations, as well as an emerging political trend of municipalism, which still lacks synergies. These three global players—states, corporations and municipalities—often dispute and defend their own interests, acting in opposition rather than building common networks. [11]

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More specifically, traditional international integration organizations have been weakened by specific agendas and interests, and by the dismantling of national governments. The general wear and tear of politics and rise in populism puts existing multilateral structures in check. At the same time, private, global corporations engage in their own logic of economic integration via highly centralized holding companies (Amazon, Alibaba, Google) that connect multiple and dispersed territories through outsourcing. This implements and feeds a pattern of capitalist accumulation, transcending almost any frontier. Finally, cities and governments begin to carry increasing weight with regards to urban integration. The largest proportional population, wealth, and power in the world is concentrated in cities, making these cities inarguable protagonists. The new capitalist model is based in cities, in what are considered strategic locations and sectors, according to a logic of capital and administrative concentration. Cities have thus managed to connect through transurban dynamics, via new ways of cooperation and solidarity, exhibited in institutions like FLACMA and OLACCIF, among others.

These three types of coalitions between global actors involve profound and specific forms of integration within globalization, which interconnect to produce unprecedented assemblies of the local, national, and above all global. This substantially modifies the original meaning of multilateralism, creating a new world order from below (hybrid multilateralism).

The local-global link allows us to understand the current power of cities, even in their relationships with nation states. [12] Consequently, the new challenges of globalization necessitate a redefinition of multilateralism: decentralization. In addition, it requires recognition that the world has become urban, entailing a transurban institutional framework.

5. The pandemic, public space, and platforms

The connectivity afforded by the transurban has facilitated a viral outbreak in Wuhan, China, transforming into a global pandemic in a matter of weeks. Beyond the urban patterns that currently shape our cities, inequality is an ingrained and profound issue in Latin America, and the crisis of multilateralism represents a more recent phenomenon that compounds the urgent situation.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), 45% of the Latin American population does not have living conditions that meet the requirements for a healthy, safe and minimally comfortable life. These conditions are exacerbated with the pressures of the pandemic, in the absence of adequate space for confinement. The COVID-19 pandemic has mainly affected the working class and public spaces. These public spaces act as an extension of domestic space, and are the most frequented sites of social interaction. Homes without refrigerators, rooms overflowing with inhabitants, economic precariousness and long commutes are just some of the factors involved in the overlap between domestic space and public space.

In other words, in these instances, public space is understood as an extension of the domestic space, or is at least a space that one attempts to domesticate, as well as one is obliged to frequent. And yet, in accordance with this new, expanding capitalism, public space is increasingly given private meaning. Companies like Uber, AirBnB, Amazon and others have converted cities into *platforms*, bringing out an

entirely different logic of public space, via the euphemism of a *sharing economy*. These platforms become active simulations of public space, although as private infrastructures, they end up appropriating both the public and domestic spheres. [13]

However, as a result of the pandemic, what remains of the public space as a concept and place has been transformed into a kind of «cursed» space, almost ghostly, as the very social interactions that take place in it ultimately act as vectors of infection that spread to the domestic space. This phenomenon has produced a true *agoraphobia*, and instruments of political cooperation have not been able to offer much more than «stay at home» campaigns, while large corporations continue to accumulate data and information on the global population. No effort is made to craft more heterogeneous policies, adapted to local situations.

On the other hand, citizen debates on urban infrastructures and city models have surged: discussions about sustainable mobility, the city-neighborhood, the housing crisis and the role of technology in public services and daily life. It would not be radical to assert that this could act as a precursor to true, multilevel cooperation, with the potential to deal with these supposedly sharing economy platforms, which in reality conduct surveillance and influence individual social, cultural and political behaviors.

A relatively recent phenomenon, these «platform» cities are the consequence of a capitalist model, functioning without sufficient regulation. Now, with the addition of an unexpected pandemic, a series of effects are taking place with an unpredictable impact: exacerbated precarity, work relocation, outsourcing of work expenses, the transformation of home into a place of work, and the worrying phenomenon of workers being completely disconnected from the territory, whether city or country.

In confronting this crisis, proposals have taken the form of homogeneous policies for all, in all countries. Moreover, in the case of Latin America, heterogeneity is accentuated by economic and legal inequality, as well as asymmetrical access to service and technology.

6. The challenge of decentralization

It is clear that today's Latin American city, with its differing urbanization trends, has become very demographically and economically important, given its highly concentrated population—which can reach up to 82%—as well as the increased influence of its economy in the region. This has come about in two ways. On the one hand, *regional cities* can hold their own weight (Mexico City, São Paulo, Buenos Aires), or are strategically located in the world market (Medellín, Monterrey, Rio de Janeiro or Panama). On the other, there is a novelty in the city system's connections, with its institutional framework constituted in different forms, demanding more space on a global level.

Cities bring a great deal to the table in terms of the economy, culture, politics and society of countries, regions, and the planet. At the same time, they continue to be the epicenter of the pandemic, while still not participating in the world's most important decision-making processes. Not only do they not participate, but a sort of ventriloquism takes place, in that it is others who decide for the city and its authorities. Moreover, in the cities' global summits, again their participation is marginal, as international cooperation functions globally, with national governments making the commitments while municipalities only act locally. At this level, municipal autonomy crumbles.

Pandemic measures have made the implications of this dynamic very clear. In countries like Brazil, we have witnessed conflicts between the President of the Republic and his denialism of the pandemic, versus the management strategy of state governors and mayors. Even the more unitary governments like those of Ecuador

and Colombia have not avoided tension between the national government and local authorities. In the general public opinion, approval for municipal authorities is on the rise, while presidents have witnessed their popularity plummet.

It is necessary to resume a process of decentralization that is consistent with the structure of the global transurban system, linked to the local level of everyday citizen life. Cities, in addition to being absent from truly overarching decisions, suffer from the pressures of traditional international cooperation policies and from hegemonic centers of power. The latter seek to direct urban policies through an «urbanism of words,» often sponsored by large, international corporations. Thus, the smart city, the educational city, the inclusive city, the resilient city, the historic city, and a multitude of other concepts, become part of an international ranking system that causes competition and not cooperation, based on criteria precisely designed to encourage competition. [14] In other words, we seek to promote competitiveness between cities, when what should be taking place is increased coordination and cooperation between them, for the collective benefit.

It is also necessary to revive urban planning. The neoliberal city is only directed towards an urban planning of projects, where large companies push for deregulation processes in order to bring capital to those sections of the city with most value.

In addition to the above, it is also necessary to revive urban planning. The neoliberal city is only directed towards an urban planning of projects, where large companies push for deregulation processes in order to bring capital to those sections of the city with most value. This valued space is the public space, and Latin America provides very clear examples. The local governments' challenge in a post-pandemic reality is not only to renegotiate their competencies with national governments, but also to find formulas for local policy in a scene dominated by private, transnational platforms.

In this scenario, one concept that is often presented is promoting interurban relations, yet according to an imprecise principle: paradiplomacy. The etymology of paradiplomacy speaks to the relationships between cities, and establishing international policies, rather than interurban, which are subordinate to national policies and allow for influencing global processes. [15] It should be noted that in practice, this becomes a contradiction, in that paradiplomacy does not recognize the current traits of the urbanization process (interurban) and the autonomous nature of municipal governments. Cities cannot engage in international relations because they are simply not nations; rather, the relationship must be interurban, as they are cities. In this vein, policies regarding the relationship between cities, enacted by local governments as autonomous entities, must be autonomous and transurban. This is not a banal feint at differentiation, but a distinction between two distinct things: international relations and interurban relations.

Recognizing the inter- and transurban logic means exploring an unchaperoned horizontal cooperation, and a modification of the city-state relationship, both nationally and internationally. In short, it is a search for a balance that modifies the centrality of power on its multiple levels, but also changes the map of political structures.

As such, we are experiencing a process of strategic alliance between cities and municipal governments. These alliances are meant to establish a broad spectrum of horizontal, interurban cooperation, where hierarchical relationships dissolve at both national and interstate levels. This is why assemblages of the global, urban network transform perspective, and position, as cities achieve prominence throughout the world. It is noteworthy how mounting advocacy in cities has been strengthened due to urban networks. This creates opportunities for participation in increasingly global, more specialized, and more effective spaces. At the same time, the pandemic has illustrated that there is still a long way to go.

[1] I would like to thank Paulina Cepeda for her contribution to and comments on the first version of this article. In the *Royal Spanish Academy's Spanish Dictionary*, there is no word for «Transurban»; however, it is a term composed of the prefix «trans,» which means: cross, pass and surpass, and «urban»: belonging to or relating to the city. That is, it takes place through various cities.

[2] Translation from the Spanish Oxford Dictionary.

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05. OLD CHALLENGES IN A NEW CONTEXT: THE PANDEMIC ACCELERATING CITY MULTILATERALISM

Felipe Llamas [1]

Nov, 2020

In the midst of a brutal pandemic, instead of caving in to selfishness and fear, we have witnessed millions of people in big cities, and even in the most remote of territories, manifest interaction, solidarity and cooperation as key ways in which to rebuild society's future.

However, we have also discovered how the COVID-19 pandemic has extended beyond its very serious impacts on global health, causing unprecedented economic crisis and social emergency. It has also accelerated nationalism, authoritarianism, and populism, which has put traditional multilateralism in check. From the United States to India, Brazil, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Turkey or China, responses have been limited to national priorities and self-interest, with cooperation and multilateralism relegated to oblivion.

The good news is that this trend has met with strong resistance from local authorities, who we view as *new, emerging players in the international system*. In a world impacted by COVID-19, so-called municipal diplomacy and the international involvement of cities works as a gear of solidarity, both opportune and necessary. It manifests as an interchange of knowledge and solutions. At the same time, this activism is fundamental in order for new leadership to merge. It will be key in finding a way out of the complex scenario in which we find ourselves.

In this sense, it is important to remember that this pandemic, of unprecedented magnitude when considering recent history, manifests humanity's elevated vulnerability and level of interdependency. A framework of uncertainty, affecting all of life, is added to this crisis. The virus has amplified or triggered several other pandemics: economic, social, environmental, cultural and political crises. Many of these are also unprecedented. Some already existed, but we refused to acknowledge them.

At this juncture, with both decimated and discredited multilateral institutions, COVID-19 has inspired domestic agendas and protectionist rhetoric. Closedness and isolationism, if not denialism, prevails. Regulation of borders and mobility, with security and economic protectionism, have increased, putting national governments at the forefront. This opposes and works to the detriment of supranational and integration mechanisms throughout all the world's regions.

Inversely, authorities governing some of the world's cities have opted for international relations as a manner in which to pursue effective solutions to the pandemic's main challenges. COVID-19 has been a predominantly urban crisis, and the challenges that cities, their governments, and their actors face have also been critical for their citizens. Sharing solutions has been key in addressing issues of mobility, management of public space, teleworking, distance education, and care

In a world impacted by COVID-19, so-called municipal diplomacy and the international involvement of cities works as a gear of solidarity, both opportune and necessary. It manifests as an interchange of knowledge and solutions.

for society's more disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. Beyond exchange, diplomacy between cities quickly transformed into an instrument of knowledge-sharing and strategic action, facilitating accelerated responses at the local level, with shared insights from both success and error. This reality invites us to rethink and redefine the concept of territory. Cities, both large and intermediate, are key as centers of demographic concentration. While the health crisis has facilitated many human diseases and deficiencies, today cities emerge as transformative elements that take command of territory. This territory serves as the raw material of a new fabric with which the future must be rebuilt. It will be increasingly impossible to conceive of isolated territory, impervious to what happens in «the rest of the world.» A new paradigm is posited: tomorrow's world is a world of global territories.

One of the most powerful instruments of positive transformation is cooperation. For decades, cooperation between cities and territories has demonstrated that together and united, societies are truly capable of facing threats and solving problems via an exchange of experience and knowledge. Cooperation has undoubtably been one of humanity's most valuable characteristics in order to achieve progress together in the spirit of collaboration, wisdom, creativity, generosity and unity; it enhances synergies among hundreds of millions of people.

From the very beginning of the pandemic, there have been constant virtual meetings between mayors and authorities of Buenos Aires with Bogota, of Belo Horizonte with Quito, of Montevideo with Ciudad de México, or all of these with Paris, Barcelona, Seoul or Montreal, for example. Bilateral cooperation between cities has been complemented with the dynamics of city and territory networks that operate by region or area, including ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability) in South America, Mercociudades, or the Euro-Latin American Cooperation Alliance between Cities (ALLAs). Together with global allies like United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) or the world organization Metropolis, they have been able to promote key initiatives like Cities for Global Health. Via this platform, over 100 municipal authorities from 34 countries have shared more than 650 concrete projects addressing COVID-19.

Contemporary diplomacy emerges as an instrument that is no longer exclusive to the nation-state: local governments have assumed a new role. Cities and regions have leveraged traditional diplomatic mechanisms, like representation, negotiation and communication, to defend their interests via international action. Cooperation is thus a powerful manner in which to utilize city diplomacy in order to confront old, unresolved challenges in the current pandemic context.

The effectiveness of this cooperation has allowed cities to move beyond public health responses, and to prepare for and anticipate the socioeconomic crisis the pandemic has brought upon the entire world.

Addressing the complexity of these challenges in isolation is not a viable option. When we cooperate, we are able to offer the very best of our shared humanity. The pandemic has illustrated the importance of forging alliances between cities, moving forward in a collaborative strategy with other transnational, governmental or private actors. Platforms like the Network of Resilient Cities or the C40 network (of cities for climate change), which bring together cities with international organizations, philanthropic foundations, businessees, civil society organizations or universities and research centers, demonstrate their relevance and usefulness as they put solutions and innovation within reach of local authorities.

Each day we witness how, despite the threat of disease, confinement and the consequences of this crisis, valuable manifestations of solidarity occur at the community level. Today's solidarity does not only revolve around the state and *the public*, which protects us from risk, disease or unemployment. Lived experiences of solidarity are also interpersonal, encountered within families, between neighbors, among friends and increasingly between territories. Associations, mutualism and

cooperation allow us to mobilize in order to provide for the basic needs of the very weakest.

We can also observe a citizen mosaic of mutual support networks, or neighborhood networks and associations, which organize and respond to immediate care emergencies. They attend to basic needs and provide food to the most vulnerable, by serving the elderly and those who live alone. They may share cultural or artistic expression via social networks in order to make the situation more bearable.

In keeping with the same logic, and taking into account the pandemic effects extending beyond health, cities have assumed a leading role in promoting and reinforcing inspired responses to urban conflict, confronting the deep scourge of urban violence and the toll it takes on human life. An example of this includes the World Forum for Cities and Territories of Peace, led by Mexico City, which calls for shared, joint efforts to effect policies for improved coexistence, which directly address and mitigate violence.

The COVID-19 response offers a clear learning point: we must adopt the principle of coexistence as the new paradigm of urban management. Defending the public and working for the commons is perhaps the most important lesson at the moment. We have the opportunity to redefine models for existence, thinking beyond what is productive. Reimagining the city in light of this social emergency, and the need for ecological transition, is both a challenge and opportunity for cities. This must be grounded in advancing towards models of multiple centralities, as is the case with the Territorial Organization Plan of Bogota, which is attempting to implement the innovative *15-minute city* developed in Paris. Another example includes how Barcelona is creating «*superblocks*» in order to increase green and pedestrian space in the urban fabric. These movements recognize population-dense spaces, and seek to ensure access to basic services like housing, health, education and work. They create transportation systems that prioritize pedestrians, as well as opt for non-pollutive vehicles, in order to provide friendly and safe public spaces. Today, this type of model has become a priority for many cities; until a few months ago, city models resembled the exact opposite of this form of urbanization.

Beyond exchange, diplomacy between cities quickly transformed into an instrument of knowledge-sharing and strategic action, facilitating accelerated responses at the local level, with shared insights from both success and error.

As such, we have an opportunity to pursue a new way of managing territory. Local governments have assumed management of the pandemic, but more funding and new systems of governance are necessary. We are facing an unprecedented spiral of increased public spending and reduced revenue, which signifies a dramatic increase in public deficit and debt. As a result, the response should take the form of a progressive taxation that allows for reducing inequalities, without detracting from the ecological transition that cities have initiated. Today, we live in a world that is wealthier, but more unequal, than ever. Too many around the world are denied social and economic rights, including the 800 million living in extreme poverty. Moreover, as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has pointed out, more than 400 million more have been added to this number as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects.

Due to scarce resources, cities will have to prioritize spending so as to ensure the continuity of public services throughout this crisis, as well as in order to resume normal economic functioning once the COVID-19 crisis is under control. Without adequate financial support to preserve and create jobs and restore production, within a framework of ecological transition, it will be difficult to return to previous levels of well-being. Moreover, we will not be able to advance forward without pointedly addressing wealth distribution in the context of scarce resources, economic *shock* and imperiled employment rates.

Those charged with city management are cognizant that they must establish new methods of reconstruction in the wake of the pandemic, bearing in mind that many threats to human security are not geographically isolated phenomena, but rather reach beyond national borders to take on international dimensions. Incorporating

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Those charged with city management are cognizant that they must establish new methods of reconstruction in the wake of the pandemic, bearing in mind that many threats to human security are not geographically isolated phenomena, but rather reach beyond national borders to take on international dimensions.

the international dimension into local management via *strategic policies* is a manner in which to mitigate the crisis' effects. This can accelerate and legitimize decision-making, streamline shared knowledge, improve collective intelligence, increase efficiency, and align public services with global guidelines. We propose this strategy in an effort to fight against social inequality, address cities' digitization and new technologies, improve urban coexistence and achieve resilience and ecological transition, among many other issues and potential local actions.

Nation-state multilateralism, so key in achieving peace and cooperation among countries after the 20th century's two world wars, faces declining legitimacy today. The pandemic has demonstrated that traditional diplomacy, involving geopolitics and national interests, has not provided immediate or effective responses to the daily needs of neighbors, families, youth, children and the elderly, who need rapid recourse. Moreover, this great crisis is taking place in a world of digitization and data, *Big Data*, in such a way that the most vulnerable groups—migrants, those in overcrowded dwellings, those in elderly residence homes, people without access to internet—are not on the radar of national policies. However, local governments can address and care for these vulnerable groups and people.

The proximity of local government, anchored in territory, and conscious of the pressing needs of its population, provides it with an unparalleled comparative advantage. This, together with formulating well-defined strategies of internationalization—strategies based on robust and diverse alliances centered around knowledge, experience and social innovation—creates pathways for a new generation of local leadership so key for the future. In this sense, big cities and their political leaders, who have already been collaborating with counterparts from all over the world, will have to engage surrounding small and medium-sized cities in this cooperation.

The pandemic and its urban impact this opens the door to a world of cities, perhaps planting the seed of a future world order. This means we must listen, globally, to the voices of cities and local governments, as we seek solutions and reimagine our daily life.

Felipe Llamas

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06. A NEW, «GLOCAL» SOCIAL PACT FOR RECOVERY

Rebeca Grynspan

Dec, 2020*
Feb, 2021

As the year 2021 begins, the crisis carries on. We continue to analyze the multiple consequences of a pandemic that has put our societies in check and exposed systemic vulnerabilities.

Everyone was of course conscious of the many short-term challenges faced by countries throughout the world, especially developing countries. In the wake of the greatest recession in centuries, we have experienced profound setbacks resulting in poverty, inequality, and increasing school dropout rates, to name a few; the list is long, and it has created discomfort for the vast majority of humanity. Citizens deservedly demand that their governments act with urgency in response to such catastrophes, in order to build dynamic, inclusive and sustainable recovery agendas that prevent social divides from deepening, or becoming more permanent, thanks to our indifference.

It would be a mistake to lead these recovery efforts without a long-term view, sensitive to the ecological crisis and climate change. Among the multitudinous, difficult lessons the pandemic has taught is, it has demonstrated how being unprepared is simply unaffordable. We must approach this experience as a wakeup call, aware of how, as my friend in Costa Rica used to say, «the short-term and long-term begin at the same time.»

The COVID-19 crisis has indeed served as devastating proof (as have the fires in Australia at the beginning of 2020, the deterioration of the Brazilian Amazon, the floods experienced this year in several countries in Africa and Southeast Asia, as well as the recent hurricane Iota devastating Central America) that the environmental crisis we are suffering has not only been cemented, but it has also been accelerating for decades.

The polar ice caps and glaciers are melting at an increasing rate, two and a half times faster than during the last century. Eighteen of the 19 years with the highest planetary temperatures recorded have occurred post-2000. In other words, virtually every year in the past 20 years has been warmer than the previous. Scientific research projects that at this rate, the planet's temperature will reach 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels between 2030 and 2050. This, in turn, will cause a substantial rise in sea levels.

In exceeding this temperature, the loss of species and biodiversity will become irreparable, and major, extreme environmental phenomena (including droughts, hurricanes, volcanoes and earthquakes) will take place more frequently, affecting millions of people throughout the planet. This will generate humanitarian crises. Examples include ones that we are already witnessing, including the so-called «dry corridor» of Central America, from which hundreds of thousands of agricultural

workers and coffee farmers are fleeing. If this trend continues, even the best-case scenario will resemble a bad scenario. We cannot delude ourselves otherwise.

One of author Elena Poniatowska's characters states, «I do not choose what is right for me.» Like her, we should remain conscious of the fact that if we continue this way, we are not choosing what is right for us, nor will we choose what is right for us. At this point in time, *humanity is not choosing what is right for itself*, because our modes of production and consumption are leading to self-destruction.

We must operate in crisis mode, without descending into panic mode. We must remain alert, but not frightened. Defeatism and pessimism are of no use, […] instead, we require the opposite. We have an immense task ahead of us, and to accomplish it as quickly as is necessary, we must nurture a sense of hope, possibility, innovation and creativity.

At the same time, while the COVID-19 pandemic is symptomatic of something greater, and serves as a wake-up call and alarm, fearmongering does nothing to fix the issue. We must operate in crisis mode, without descending into panic mode. We must remain alert, but not frightened. Defeatism and pessimism are of no use, as they are passive emotions; instead, we require the opposite. We have an immense task ahead of us, and to accomplish it as quickly as is necessary, we must nurture a sense of hope, possibility, innovation and creativity. We must call for collective, multi-actor and multi-level action. This is a cross-cutting moment for both societies and territories. Society and geography are intertwined. This is particularly the case in Latin America as the most urbanized region on the planet (with 80% of its population living in rural areas). At the height of the COVID-19 health emergency, we have witnessed cities around the world transform into epidemiological epicenters (becoming concentrations of contagion and death), and simultaneously converting into epicenters of health management and prevention, reorganizing services, closing or vacating, according to their populations' needs.

In this sense, we could venture that, «transformation will take place via cities, or not at all,» as cities concentrate population, production and environmental footprint (including at the political level) to the point that the urban and local become fundamental in facing the great challenges that lie ahead. At the same time, we must take into account the entire urban-rural spectrum, especially indigenous communities, which represent the sentinels of a quarter of the world's diversity. We can leave no one behind.

Humanity's greatest challenge in coordination

The COVID-19 pandemic has, above all, become a challenge in global coordination. The world's various countries were unexpectedly forced to share solutions and equipment, to coordinate border closures or repatriation flights, to procure urgent materials from distant factories, and to agree on different criteria. This time, more than ever, the interconnectedness of our world has led to our interdependence.

However, even though we have suddenly become aware of our common destiny, this did not prevent a beyond national, «nationalistic,» response, as political interests ran contrary to coordinated and joint action. Moreover, the international level became too overwhelming, both in terms of reacting with sufficient speed and in the international organizations' and agencies' available instruments to deal with the pandemic.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated anything, it is that we are not institutionally organized for the challenges of today. I believe it is very much linked with risk aversion within our institutions. This is an issue that is not discussed much, but in my opinion, is responsible for gradually expelling innovative talent from such institutions. In order to achieve something innovative, possessing resilience in the face of failure is key. No one can innovate without failing. This is precisely what our institutions lack. They maintain an antiquated mentality, espousing the idea that entrepreneurship is only advisable if it guarantees results, as if it were possible to predict the unknown. This mindset works at cross-purposes, representing inertia that maintains our institutions operating via outdated systems, with little or no room for potential new ideas, innovative solutions or political courage.

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This is all reinforced by a culture that penalizes failure and does not reward initiative. Our aversion to failure is to such an extent that if a public official attempts something innovative that does not work, not only will he or she not be applauded in their attempt (and for the inevitable lessons that trial and error offers), but they will have to assume all of the costs incurred. This way of thinking is incongruent with innovation and entrepreneurship, which are concepts that are usually exclusively linked with the private sector, yet remain fundamental for public institutions (including multilateral ones). We need institutions that are open: to ideas, to alliances and to mistakes.

A second problem with today's institutions includes how they often lack long-term incentive, which then makes inter-temporal justice difficult. In my country of Costa Rica, a popular saying comes to mind when discussing climate issues: «one person eats the pineapple, and then sometimes another's belly hurts.» This is descriptive of what many Global South countries may experience, as despite the fact that there CO2 emissions are relatively low as compared with those of more industrialized countries, they suffer most directly from climate change. In order words, some have reaped benefits while others are left to bear the unjust consequences of decades of excess.

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The most significant challenges facing humanity, and the great threat of environmental crisis, requires public management, both at the national and international level, with the capacity to conceive of and plan for the long term. We require an institutional framework that can be sustained over time, with the ability to strategize beyond the immediate political cycle. We do not need leaders who only manage with the next election cycle in view—rather, they should be considering the next generation.

Escaping the political ups and downs of public policies, and taking measures to safeguard the rights of future generations, is a practically unattainable goal if only transient institutions or leaders are setting the agenda. This is why the *Green New Deal* has come to prominence; the environmental crisis necessitates a new social pact. This entails a new societal project based on consensus among all sectors, not limited to the superficial trimmings of the status quo, but rather, promoting real and profound transformation from the ground up.

Such a new social agreement must truly modify our way of living and interacting with the environment. It should also manage to construct a different type of institution. It should pursue institutions that are more responsive, dynamic, adaptative and resilient. Above all, they should be capable of keeping pace with a talented citizenry, offering new and good ideas.

The main takeaway from the 1930s New Deal is that it was first and foremost a distinct social contract. At the heart of this New Deal was a normative proposal: it made assertions regarding social justice and minimum standards for quality of life. It communicated what we owed to each other, and how we should organize ourselves as a society. It was complemented with a public policy package, consisting of a series of macroeconomic measures and a plan for creating infrastructure.

It is imperative that we redouble our defense of this New Social Pact, which must be built on the principles and institutions inherent to a multilateral system.

Multilateralism for a socio-ecological transition

Rebeca Grynspan

Rebeca Grynspan has served as Ibero-American Secretary General since 2014. She is former Vice President of her country of origin, Costa Rica, where she held office from 1994 to 1998. In 2010, she was elected UN Under-Secretary-General. She is also a former Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where she additionally served as regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean. She is a member of the G20 High Level Independent Panel on financing the global commons for pandemic preparedness and response, as well as many other entities. She holds a master's degree in economics.

There is widespread awareness that multilateralism is undergoing a crisis, and that the COVID-19 pandemic has further strained certain «hot spots» in global geopolitics. However, altogether, it is still an essential tool for setting the discussed socio-ecological transition in motion. Multilateralism, with all of its mistakes and shortcomings, is nonetheless an inspiring instrument with which to tackle future challenges. It serves as a reminder that humanity can overcome its own destruction via reason, cooperation, dialogue and peace.

Multilateralism is closely related with the idea of the New Pact or Social Contract, as both engage in important conversation. It specifically involves dialogue at a civilizational level, regarding the future of our ecosystem and survival of our species; we find ourselves collectively as humans within the same realm of action, transcending sectarian, identity, partisan and national differences. This is a great, universal conversation regarding a global agreement that finds its basis in two major pre-pandemic accords: the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Climate Change agreement. These are the only two milestones up until this point that have rallied us toward solidarity and universal cooperation.

In short, we need a great, multi-level and multi-stakeholder social pact, ranging from cities and communities to the multilateral sphere, i.e., the global and local, or *glocal*. This will assist us in overcoming the great bottleneck that is preventing the measures we are currently discussing, even though science has evidenced time and time again that these measures are in need of urgent implementation. Obstruction of this implementation can take the form of perverse political economy, polarization or confrontation, all of which do not allow for solidifying agreements within political systems, structures and institutions.

For this reason, we have the tools of negotiation and political persuasion. Multilateralism is not an infallible instrument, but rather imperfect, and thus requires high levels of coordination at global, national and local levels. This of course entails a great challenge in terms of governance. At the same time, multilateralism is undoubtably the single most promising tool for returning to the common, societal project.

In sum, I believe that both the COVID-19 and environmental crises present us with «future» problems (with threats we have been forecasting for some time, and which are already upon us), and that, as «future» problems, we cannot continue to reckon with them through institutions of the past. Both crises (the COVID-19 one as a symptom, and the environmental as a major cause) also constitute systemic crises, and therefore necessitate equally systemic solutions at the institutional level.

As such, it remains urgent to build a new social contract, one in which we find ourselves in a situation of equality and freedom; with it, we can advance a new, green, inclusive agenda of solidarity, in order to face our civilization's great *glocal* challenges.

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