PUBLIC SPACES IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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It arrived invisibly, and cunningly bowled everybody over. It did not choose a country, a specific place, a social or ethnic group, or culture. It came without being invited and deconstructed the world order.

How did an assembly of molecules so small in size position itself in the world as a great imposing and harmful presence, not only killing people, but also causing an impact to the cities of all continents? Everybody had to stay at home, confined.

The fear of being infected by this virus caused the internalization of people’s lives. From this collective action, for the first time in recent history, a world reflection was necessary.

A global discussion about the space of one’s own habitat was initiated, with fighting COVID-19 being the common denominator. Without the knowledge of an immediate cure, all attention converged on the best conditions for hygiene, and the isolation of spaces occupied by patients.

As the months’ of the first half of 2020 passed and the pandemic persisted we had a new preoccupation: How could public spaces be used on re-opening? What would the concerns be?

It followed:

A GLOBAL AWARENESS

Nature, the environment in our cities, can be our ally. It is incredible how the reflection of thoughts were the same from several parts of the world. There has been a convergence of ideas for the common good:

- Our way of living would need to be reconsidered and should be related to Nature, making it possible to lead a healthy life, with more meaning;

- Cities with few free green spaces should introduce, if possible, a continuous net of these spaces, linked by axes of pedestrian and bike paths;

- An example that has appeared in New York is the N.Y.C. Project (not your car). It proposes that some wide avenues with parking spaces can be replaced with broader sidewalks beyond bike paths;

Informal trade can be brought onto the streets and all users can enjoy the city.
Along the same line of reasoning there is an ambitious project by the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, named: “City of 15 minutes”. This project reinvents the urbanism concept of Le Corbusier, that people should live, work, study, enjoy leisure, and have mobility within an arc of equivalent distance, to make life easy. The project proposes that each district “neighborhood” be equipped with trade and services to promote rapid access for the inhabitants within 15 minutes, on foot or bike paths.

Another project that reinforces this same concept is that of Barcelona, whose Mayor Ada Calau proposed the redesign of the city in order to offer to the inhabitants the possibility of more green spaces beside residential areas, as public leisure spaces.

One observes that the larger cities have the privilege of acquiring more green spaces so that inhabitants have the opportunity to be in contact with the Nature. However if we consider less fortunate places with overcrowding in cramped living conditions, it is almost impossible to introduce green public areas promoting leisure and rapid access, for example in the Brazilian favelas and African ‘informal settlements’.
In such places there is often only one public space for leisure for all. These are the inter-
spaces where children and inhabitants move and congregate simultaneously, while also
being a cultural space for music and dance.

In two Brazilian favelas in Rio de Janeiro: “Alemão”, north of the city, and “Providência”,
in the downtown area, two cable cars were introduced to make access to the hills easier
for the population. Unfortunately, after the initial positive success, there has been little
governmental maintenance. They functioned over the following periods: Favela do

In another shanty town in São Paulo, called “Heliópolis”, Architect Rui Ohtake made the
environment more humane, lifting the self-esteem of the people, initially through the
colored painting of the facades of their houses, and thereafter introducing small circular
buildings and creating cultural spaces in close proximity, placing emphasis on music.
Following this same theme, Lisbon, Portugal renewed the decadent District of Baixa within the city, through the introduction of public spaces in backstreets and squares.

The designs done in graffiti give colorful life to the degraded spaces and have contributed to the rescue of these public places.
It is interesting that when the pandemic confined the world, there became the concern of how to keep children busy during the quarantine. This need was simultaneously brought to the attention of Architects. An example came from Norman Foster’s office - an intervention named “Architecture from Home” – that offered activities including the construction of buildings or “cities of paper” for children.

“Architecture from home” – project: Arch. Norman Foster to Quarantine  Source: www.google.com.br
The pandemic has brought the need for interventions in public spaces, such as the taking of temperatures of people entering, the installation of hygiene booths, social distancing in demarcated areas in squares, marked on the floor, or through markings created by lasers and holographs at airports.

There will certainly be new ideas for advances in the protection of users in public spaces until such time as the population has access to an efficient vaccine.

It is clear that independent of continent or country, there is convergence on public spaces, valuing the elements of Nature: water, land and air.

A balanced environment is the aim of the majority of architects.

PUBLIC SPACES + PROTECTION = A HEALTHY LIFE and A BALANCED ENVIRONMENT

The pandemic has brought an opportunity for reflection - to diminish the impact of the human race on our planet.