Prace i Studia Geograficzne
ISSN: 0208–4589; ISSN (*online*): 2543–7313
2021, t. 66.4, s. 63–72
DOI: 10.48128/pisg/2021-66.4-04

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POST-PANDEMIC CITIES: URBAN GHETTOS OR URBAN COMMONS?

Miasta post-pandemiczne: miejskie getta czy miejskie wspólnoty?

Abstract: This article examines potential impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on key aspects of urban development: the functioning of individuals in physical sense (human bodies) in a city, urban morphology and land-use, urban mobility, as well as economic activities and service provision. The goal is to answer the question on how and to what extent the pandemic might reshape the cities and what the potential post-pandemic urban scenarios are. The analysed urban phenomena are projected against major dichotomy of urban ghettos vs. urban commons. The former is defined as further social segregation and spatial isolation, whereas the latter is based on multiple ideas inspired by the original definition of a city by Lewis Mumford. The article is concluded with two basic, symbolic, and opposite scenarios highlighting the fact that the pandemic might have opened a window of opportunity for cities to rethink their development pathways and reinvent their cultural, as well as socio-economic role.

Key words: Urban development, urban sustainability, pandemic, COVID-19, commons

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is often recognised as a powerful force having the potential to reshape different aspects of socio-economic life on a global scale. The goal of this article is to critically analyse the impact of the global pandemic on cities – on ideas and pathways of urban development. The merits of this analysis are based on the traits already identified in the international context (e.g. by the United Nations), as well as on the potential scenarios derived from key areas of urban life and development, namely: conceptualization and functioning of individuals in physical sense (human bodies) in an urban environment, urban morphology and land-use, urban mobility, economic activities, labour, and service provision. Each of these points is presented with an attempt of identifying how they are being reshaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, these dimensions of pandemic and, consequently, post-pandemic urban life are projected against major dichotomy of urban ghettos vs. urban commons. The latter notion is taken from recent publication by Eduardo M. Costa (2021), whereas the first one is rather a symbolic aggregate of concepts describing the condition of cities under the neoliberal regime of accumulation ranging from David Harvey (2012), Krzysztof Nawratek (2012) to Andy Merrifield (2014). This text navigates across the plain demarcated by this major dichotomy, so the analysis uses the method of a leading metaphor. The article concludes rather with set of questions than solid remarks.

Wpłynęło: 15.07.2021
Zaakceptowano: 07.02.2022

Zalecany sposób cytowania / Cite as: Łuczak R., 2021, Post-pandemic cities: urban ghettos or urban commons?, *Prace i Studia Geograficzne*, 66.4, Wydział Geografii i Studiów Regionalnych Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa, 63–72, DOI: 10.48128/pisg/2021-66.4-04.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared an outbreak of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) global pandemic. It has been the first global pandemic caused by a coronavirus, namely SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2) – the successor to SARS-CoV-1, the virus that caused the 2002–2004 original SARS outbreak in China. The COVID-19 pandemic has been also the second truly global and deadly pandemic of an infectious, respiratory disease spreading out through contagious diffusion in the modern era. The first one was the 1918-1920 influenza pandemic caused by an A/H1N1 virus, known as the Spanish Flu, that directly affected approximately half a billion people (one third of the world population at the time) and led to estimated 50 million deaths worldwide (CDC, 2018). The Spanish Flu impacted almost every corner of the world leaving only very few isolated islands and territories unaffected. None of other influenza or Ebola outbreaks, despite being lethal, had range similar to the 1918-1920 pandemic. Not until late 2019 and early 2020 when the COVID-19 originating from the Chinese megacity of Wuhan spread across the globe. According to the WHO (WHO, 2021) as of early July 2021, COVID-19 pandemic led to over 185 million confirmed cases and over 4 million deaths worldwide. It means that the mortality measured with the usage of case fatality rate (CFR) equals 2.1% on average. It is clear that CFR is a poor measurement while the pandemic is still ongoing and clearly the number of confirmed cases is underestimated. Nevertheless, it can be carefully concluded at this point that the COVID-19 while being clearly a global pandemic has been far from becoming one of the deadliest spreads of infectious diseases in human history. However, the main reason for which COVID-19 seems to be so significant in terms of socio-economic and political relations, and is likely to become a turning point in the history of the 21st Century, is its disruptive power.

COVID-19, GLOBALISATION AND CITIES

The COVID-19 has been a pandemic not only of a modern era, but mostly a disease diffusing under the regime of globalisation marked by unprecedent interconnectedness symbolized by global value and supply chains, global travel, and global information flows. Moreover, this pandemic has coincided with two other phenomena impacting significantly the contemporary modus operandi on local and global levels, namely: environmental, especially climate crisis and accelerated digital transformation.

As suggested and proven by many works (Scott 2001; Clark 2016), the process of globalisation is mostly demonstrated in the context of urban areas shaping both: their external linkages as well as their internal spatial, social, and economic structure. The external dimension refers mostly to the notion of cities being hubs of global interactions. From this perspective cities can be seen as a system of hierarchical nodes in the global space of flows as defined by Manuel Castells (2000) with Saskia Sassen's (2006) global cities at the top – places holding most of economic and symbolic power . The internal dimension underlines the fact that the growing intensity of external interactions between cities is accompanied by social segregation and spatial fragmentation inside them. The latter phenomenon is about a profound duality introduced by globalisation – the high-skill labour vs. the low-skill labour; the privileged and affluent vs. the desperate and poor including migrant communities; the wealthy suburbs vs. the inner-city slums or peripheral informal settlements, etc. These divisions of urban areas reflect the famous Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) dichotomy of tourists and vagabonds – the ones that get to choose their lifestyles and place of residence and the ones that are forced to do so.

Moreover, the other two phenomena mentioned before: environmental crisis and digitalization are also heavily related to urban environments. Most of human contribution to enhanced greenhouse effect comes from cities which are responsible for nearly 80% of global energy consumption and for 60% of total greenhouse gases emissions (UN 2021). At the same time these are the urban areas that

traditionally have been centres of innovation and technological change and the currently observed accelerated digital transformation is also firstly about the cities and urban lifestyles.

The above overview highlights the fact that whereas COVID-19 pandemic has interfered with almost all spheres of global civilisation from cargo and passenger flows to the way we educate, work, and live, its impact has been concentred on cities. The cities host most of global interactions and their consequences and these are the cities being mostly vulnerable to such a significant disruption. Hence the question arises to what extent the cities are being and will be reshaped by the global pandemic? In more specific terms, the key issue is if cities will further serve as a scene of growing socio-economic inequalities and, consequently, spatial fragmentation or is there a chance of reinventing them based on the notion of "the commons"?

THE HUMAN BODY IN A CITY – URBAN BIOPOLITICS

Richard Sennett (1994) in his spectacular work *Flesh and Stone* has pointed out the ongoing and changing relationship between an individual understood in physical terms – a human body – and cities in Western civilisation. Among stories from ancient Athens to contemporary New York, one is of crucial importance in the pandemic context. Chapter titled *Fear of Touching* tells the story of the emergence of Jewish ghetto in Renaissance Venice where fears concerning public health (and morality) were used as an excuse to separate the Jewish minority from the Christian majority in the city. Venetians in the light of a trade and military defeat treated the separation of bodies of *Others* as an act of purification with a hope of regaining both the power on Earth, and the mercy from heaven. In the modern era physical distance and barriers have been used as means of separation of different human beings in the name of ideologies (like in the case of colonial policies towards indigenous peoples or racist actions against different ethnicities), public safety (e.g. during states of emergency, martial laws, etc.), and because of public health concerns as it has been the case recently. However, the separation of human bodies, especially in the cities, comes also as an effect of economic, social, ethnic, and political differences. These divisions are clearly demonstrated within urban environments by zoning and severe differences between various types of residential areas.

The advancement of the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed introduction of different restrictions targeted at controlling the movement and location of human bodies, as well as their separation based on the health and, to certain extent, economic status. The notion of "social distancing" – keeping a physical distance from other people, as well as the state of lockdown – being separated from other humans, as well as being extracted from urban spaces, especially the public ones are the opposite to basic idea of what a city is (or should be). According to Lewis Mumford (1970, p. 480):

"The city in its complete sense, then, is a geographic plexus, an economic organization, an institutional process, a theatre of social action, and an aesthetic symbol of collective unity."

In this context there are three major conclusions that can be derived upon intersection of cities and the pandemic. Firstly, the limited exposure to other human beings has been the luxury of high income urban areas with adequate housing and well-functioning infrastructure. The idea of keeping physical distance between urban dwellers has been mostly fictional in low income urban environments, especially in high density slums or informal settlements. The same applies to shift of economic activities, education and social interactions online. It has been possible only in areas with proper digital infrastructure density, quality, accessibility, and affordability. However, it has not been the case in areas where e.g. informal economic activities serve as basis of local urban economy and where economic interactions are based on physical and direct contacts. The same applies to "essential workers" – a topic that will be discussed further. Clearly, the pandemic has demonstrated and enhanced the income gap and the digital divide – both occurring between cities, as well as within them.

Secondly, as mentioned above, the restrictions imposed as a direct response to the pandemic are contradictory to the idea of a city – a relatively small territorial system with relatively high number

of people interacting constantly with each other. In high income environment these interactions have been mostly shifted online, but it has not been possible everywhere; it cannot be implemented in all spheres of urban life; and it cannot replace face-to-face contacts, especially in the longer perspective. This observation leads to the final point – urban biopolitics.

The pandemic allowed different agents (mostly governments) to control human bodies, introduce various restrictions, separate people from each other, limit public gatherings and, consequently freedom of speech and expression in public spaces. Some of these limitations were self-imposed as an effect of rational and evidence-based fear of getting infected with the virus. However, most of them were imposed externally based on administrative decisions and they not necessarily followed rational explanation (e.g. closing down city parks and forests in the spring of 2020 in Poland), as well as they did not have proper legal basis (e.g. banning public gatherings in Poland also in 2020). These limitations and their new versions are still being introduced based on the current epidemic status, and with a usage of new tools like digital COVID and vaccination certificates (e.g. introducing curfew or allowing to access hotels and restaurants only for vaccinated individuals in Lisbon in July 2021). Also in many countries it has become obligatory or at least strongly recommended to install mobile applications allowing to track down the location, daily routes and contacts (e.g. "Rakning C-19" issued by the government of Iceland or Ukrainian "Act at Home" applications).

While these rules are understandable from the point of view of public health, their potential sociopolitical consequences should not be ignored. In other words: has the pandemic opened a new chapter of urban biopolitics as understood by Michel Foucault allowing governments and other agents to control the movement of our bodies in a city? Has the role of the human body changed and instead of being a vehicle of freedom so deeply connected to urban life has it become an object of oppression and control?

The notion of "right to the city" underlaying multiple contemporary urban policies including the UN Habitat *New Urban Agenda* (UN Habitat 2017b) means not only equal access to adequate, safe housing and public services, but also it is about freedom of physical movement within a city. The latter has been seriously questioned by the pandemic and in order for the urban areas and assets to meet the requirements of "the commons", they have to be openly and equally accessible. Further mobility restrictions and its control might lead to ghettoization of urban areas as different bodies will be dedicated and tied to specific places based on their health, but also socio-economic status.

The medieval German saying *Stadtluft macht frei* (urban air makes you free) so accurately highlighting specific feature of urban way of life seems to have lost some of its meaning. During the pandemic it were the cities that were mostly related to limitations and obstacles, whereas rural areas have become symbols of liberty and ability to breathe, walk, and roam freely. Therefore, as a concluding remark of this section, the question arises: is the pandemic changing the meaning of what a city is? Using again the narrative of Richard Sennet: what will be the post-pandemic relationship between the "flesh" and the "stone" – will the bodies be free to move around the cities in search for expression, creativity, innovations, expanding individual freedom or will the "stone" of a city be used a material basis for restrictions and limitations?

MORPHOLOGY AND LAND-USE – URBAN SPATIAL POLICY

The above issues are directly related to urban morphology and land-use. Throughout the centuries cities have gained their cultural position, economic strength, and political power based on agglomeration benefits. However, in the light of the pandemic these benefits have become disadvantages to certain extent as the spread of the virus was much more likely to occur in large and dense urban environments, especially during the initial phase of the pandemic. Moreover, the perception of high density urban areas has been characterized by at least restraint, if not fear. In reality, the relationship between cities and COVID-19 diffusion is much more complex as there are no clear correlations identified

between the size, as well as density, and spread of the disease. There have been many other variables impacting the contagion levels and mortality rates like overall level of socio-economic development, connectivity and different forms of inequalities (UN Habitat 2021, pp. 18-27). Nevertheless, the pandemic has added a new dimension to the ongoing discussion on density, zoning, centralized urban layouts, sprawl, and land-use patterns overall. As described by Peter Hall (2014) the modern urban debate dates back to the 19th Century and is stretched between the utopian visions of garden cities (Ebenezer Howard), monumental and dehumanized planning (Georges-Eugene Haussmann), modern and, as it turned out, dystopian revolution based on functional zoning (Le Corbusier), quasi-idealistic, community-based neighbourhoods (Jane Jacobs), and finally new urbanism and transit/bicycle/pedestrian-oriented sustainability (Peter Calthorpe, Jan Gehl). All of these ideas symbolically marking the intellectual field of urban and spatial planning are focused on some key ideas, namely density, zoning, land-use patterns, and mobility. The latter will be discussed separately.

In the light of the 21st Century sustainability challenges enhanced by climate- and, consequently, energy-related issues, it is broadly accepted that both endless expansion of suburbs and urban sprawl as well as modern functional city zoning are cul-de-sacs of urban growth. At the same time, however, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated also some disadvantages and concerns related to high-density, inner-city living. "Social distancing", "home-office", "online learning", and "e-commerce" – the socio-economic pandemic phenomena – could have been and were taking place without the virtue of density and geographic proximity. The digitally mediated accessibility and connectivity seemed to replace the agglomeration benefits. Hence, second homes owned by wealthy families, as well as low density suburbs dedicated to affluent middle and upper-middle classes turned out to be pretty successful habitats during the pandemic. However, this approach to urban land-use has at least four limitations:

1. As mentioned in the section above, such standard of living is limited to high-income countries and communities and cannot be transferred to lower income environments because of severe deficits of capital. At the same time it should be underlined – clear majority of urban dwellers in the world, as well as almost all of future cities' inhabitants come from middle- and low-income countries.
2. Similarly, this low-density, rural-urban fringe way of life is also not a solution for rather low income labour including people working in retail, low-end services and the "essential workers". Relatively high households' costs related to suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation combined with a necessity of being physically within the city, close to urban infrastructure and places of employment show just another dimension of soaring inequalities observed within cities (UN Habitat, 2021).
3. Thirdly, as recognised broadly within urban studies and urban policy-making, low-density and distant way of living brings significant environmental and economic costs. Some of them are paid by the public (e.g. local governments financing infrastructure) whereas the benefits are being privatized. Moreover, some of these costs are also paid by the individuals themselves – in economic sense, as well as it comes to well-being. Such urban layout symbolically described as "sprawl" creates economic and land-use enclaves and it is based on isolating people – isolating from each other, as well as from urban infrastructure and even, paradoxically, from nature. Whereas this isolation could have worked temporarily in the pandemic context, it is environmentally, economically, and socially unsustainable in a long term (UN Habitat 2017a).
4. Finally, the "social distancing" life seemed to be an acceptable option as long as different COVID-19 restrictions were in force and the urban life was put on hold. As suggested by Costa (2021, p. 169) "once the attractions and services of the city are fully operational again, people will want to get back to them: restaurants, bars, parks, entertainment, friends, etc.".

Consequently, the peri-urbanization producing fragmented, hybrid landscapes promoted by the pandemic and its outcomes rather seems to be a temporary solution for selected professions, social

classes and income groups, not a pathway for post-pandemic cities. It is not an answer to urban challenges highlighted by the pandemic due to environmental, economic, social, and psychological reasons combined. The answer, however, is suggested by the UN Habitat (2021, p. 34) repeating some key ideas from current notions of urban sustainability and echoing postulates so firmly delivered by Jane Jacobs in the 1960s (Jacobs 1992). The names used are self-explanatory – neighbourhood, 15-minute city, walkable neighbourhood, local living, mixed-use, compact development, streetcar suburbs (Calthorpe 2011). Each of these converging ideas underlines that cities are what they are – spatially extended, socially divided, and constantly expanding. Therefore, the answer cannot be idealistic promoting contemporary green-field equivalents of Howards' "garden cities" or proposing that every city becomes like Delft in The Netherlands. Equally, it cannot advocate for absurd and grotesque "eco-cities" like Masdar City in the United Arab Emirates or Tianjin Eco-City in China as these are unaffordable, not scalable, and indeed unsustainable.

The spatial answer should be based on the existing material urban fabric with its full complexity. Firstly, it should take into account a regional perspective – the 15-minute, walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods cannot be limited to inner-city, but have to be developed across metropolitan areas. It should be emphasised: the idea is not about developing limited luxury islands within broad urbanised areas. The modern, centralised urban layout turns out to be inefficient and there is some initial evidence that it may lead to increased vulnerability to the pandemic (UN Habitat 2021, p. 37). In parallel, the uncontrolled counter-urbanisation produces unsustainable ghettos as described above. Therefore, the hitherto contradictory centripetal and centrifugal movements should lead to similar outcome – compact development, based on mixed-use and mixed-community with significant share of public spaces and crucial role of green and blue infrastructure. The new "15-minute neighbourhoods" should allow for meeting daily needs such as shopping, using local services, health care, socializing and education within walking distance from home.

The overall goal of the proposed urban design is to increase local environmental, economic and health-related resilience simultaneously reducing the contribution to enhanced greenhouse effect by limited necessity of mobility. In the context of the pandemic the public health concerns should be also highlighted. According to many findings the current COVID-19 pandemic may be the first, but not the last global outbreak of an infectious diseases, especially if humans do not change their dietary habits and maintain unsafe animal-based food systems (Cheng et al. 2007; Jacob et al. 2020). Therefore, relatively small in scale and scattered in space (yet still connected) neighbourhoods satisfying most of the needs of the inhabitants might be easier to manage in case of potential future outbreaks. It includes local lockdowns and other types of tailor-made limitations and restrictions.

Finally, the neighbourhoods by no means should become enclaves – the concept is about multiplicity of municipal areas jointly contributing to the urban commons. The alternatives are known: cities fragmented either by functional zoning or by increasing socio-economic segregation and spatial isolation. In order for the compact neighbourhoods to become a realistic urban future, there is one essential condition that has to be met. The urban authorities have to have significant powers in terms of spatial planning and zoning. The urban commons, so the spatial commons, are unlikely to be created by private investors and by forces of the market based on bid rent model. The commons can be gained only by proper, consistent, solid, and strong public policy.

MOBILITY – URBAN TRANSPORTATION POLICY

Urban mobility is strictly related to urban land-use and solutions in this field come as an effect of the urban layout. The above described metropolitan "15-minute neighbourhoods" should be integrated both internally and externally. As the names used above suggest, the internal mobility should be based on walking and cycling, whereas the external connectivity on public, preferably low-emission transport. The overall goal is to limit the necessity of using private vehicles due to broadly recognised

negative effects brought by car-oriented city, namely: greenhouse gases emissions, local air pollution, space occupancy, potential road injuries and impacts on individual health. Additionally, extensive usage of cars contributes to uncontrolled counter-urbanisation and leads to coming of isolated commuter-enclaves as described above that relay exclusively on private transportation. The types or categories of cars are of secondary importance – be it electric vehicles or autonomous ones, they remain to be cars and as some of the negative effects can be minimized (e.g. CO_2 emissions), others remain or even are enhanced (e.g. mobility inequality as the electric cars remain to be relatively expensive).

Bearing in mind the proposed transit-oriented urban transportation policy, it has to be underlined that during the COVID-19 pandemic public transportation has been seriously challenged. The mobility restrictions combined with fear of increased risk of virus transmission has led to decreased demand for public transport services, as well as significant reduction in revenues in this sphere leading to potential negative domino effect. Moreover, the "social distancing" is contradictory to the very idea of public transport and implementation of various restrictions impacted transit heavily and directly. However, based on the data available it seems that there have been no infection clusters related to public transport. Moreover, as evidence from China and Germany suggests, public transportation under the right conditions, with proper hygiene procedures, and with obligatory face masks remains safe and essential mean of urban mobility (UN Habitat 2021, pp. 28-32, 73-75; Shen et al. 2020).

The major problem and serious challenges exist in low-income and some middle-income countries where urban transportation often relies on private, informal, not integrated paratransit. For many of the business owners involved in paratransit economic effectiveness directly depends on reaching full capacity in the vehicles. Similarly, distancing or sanitizing initiatives are physically impossible. This, as well as new ideas about "Safe and Reliable Public Transportation Systems" based on digital solutions and Internet of Things (IoT) in which intelligent transportation systems fuelled with constant data feed would react in real-time adjusting frequency, timetables, routes, etc. (Darsena et al. 2020) demonstrate again major global development gap. The gap that has been enhanced by the pandemic.

At the same time, the local scale of urban transportation witnessed significant growth of non-motorized travel such as cycling and walking. These solutions have been also present throughout low-income countries as cheap and traditional alternative to vehicles-based transportation. Some cities (both in high- and middle-income countries) decided to support this trend and expanded their bicycle infrastructure, as well as implemented or at least announced further plans on pedestrianisation. The examples include Montreal (Canada), Paris (France), as well as Bogotá (Colombia), Lima (Perú) or Nairobi (Kenya) (UN Habitat 2021, p.31). It can be concluded that the pandemic has created a momentum that can be used by cities to support and encourage non-motorized transportation, especially on a local, neighbourhood scale. On the other hand, however, the pandemic has shown an ongoing necessity to invest and promote public transportation. The risk of underfunding and even withdrawing some of the transit solutions existing in pre-pandemic times that comes as an effect of decreased ridership, might lead to a positive feedback loop where initial drop in demand followed by lack of investments and growing distrust will lead to further decline in transit usage. It should be clear that only good quality, accessible, affordable, comfortable and safe public transport will serve its purpose of being the backbone of urban mobility. This in turn is one of the conditions of urban commons as it is one of the key services allowing for practical implementation of the already quoted notion of "right to the city" regardless the income and economic background of various urban dwellers.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES AND SERVICE PROVISION – URBAN SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICIES

The last section is dedicated to crucial dimension of urban environments – the inhabitants, their economic activities and services provision. Urban socio-economic policies are directly combined with land-use patterns and mobility. At the same time, the lives of urban inhabitants except for hav-

ing communal dimension are mostly about individual experience of urban space and places. As mentioned above urban areas are stage of significant inequalities. These, in turn, have been exaggerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Urban inequalities are based on ethnicity, gender, place of residence, but mostly are of economic nature. The pandemic showed, in its full starkness, the duality of contemporary urban economies with highly skilled employees hired mostly in high-end services and high-tech industries on one side and low-skilled, usually underpaid employees working in low-end services, traditional manufacturing, public services, and informal economy. Moreover, when it comes to the last group, the pandemic has significantly limited the economic opportunities of the most vulnerable – the low income groups in low-income countries – whose existence is based on informal economic activities. Different forms of lockdowns and restrictions on accessing public spaces – the physical markets of informal economic transactions – profoundly impacted this category of urban dwellers.

Additionally, the category of urban inhabitants that did not benefit from "remote working", despite the skills they had gained, includes also public sector employees and the "essential workers". This group proved to be crucial during the pandemic. Basic public services (e.g. waste collection and disposal), retail (especially food distribution), infrastructure maintenance, care workers, and, above all, health care – all of these economic activities had to function on regular basis or even in an emergency mode despite mobility restrictions, "social distancing", and health risks. According to the Economic Policy Institute (McNicholas, Poydock 2020) majority of "essential workers" are employed in health care (30%), food and agriculture (20%), and the industrial, commercial, residential facilities and services industry. This data reflects the reality of the United States, however, it can be assumed that in most high-income countries this employment structure will be similar, even if the numbers quoted above are treated only as estimates. Without these workers the urban communities would have collapsed not having basic needs satisfied, basic services provided, and not being able to cope with the pandemic. At the same time these are the individuals who are most likely to live rather in high density inner-city residential areas or modern large scale housing complexes, as well as they are most likely to depend directly on public transport. This juxtaposition proves the interdependence of different aspects of urban life and shows that post-pandemic cities have to be governed in a more integrated fashion. It also reveals the necessity of recognizing the crucial role of the "essential workers" in the public sphere. Moreover, this recognition should not be limited to symbolic dimension, but should be reflected in income distribution and – which is purely an urban initiative – proper spatial and mobility policies, as well as provision of high quality public services to the less favoured social classes.

There is also one more aspect of urban economic activities highlighted by the pandemic, except for the key role and significance of the "essential workers". As the pandemic forced more and more economic activities to be shifted online and "home-office" became the "new standard" over prolonged period of time, some questions regarding Weberian ideas on working environment in the modern society have arisen. In his work, Max Weber proposed the concept of bureaucracy – modern hierarchical labour based on separation, including geographical one, of their work and their home. This concept implemented fully by the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath survived the emergence of service economy and high-tech industries. Obviously the ideas of "remote working" or "home-office" existed before the pandemic, but the model itself has not been seriously challenged until recently. For millions of people around the globe the pandemic reunited home with place of employment (as well as with place of education) with all of its benefits alongside with negative effects. If the post-pandemic scheme of work becomes more flexible and some traces of "home-office" (as well as distant learning) are incorporated into new paradigm, it will have severe consequences for housing design requiring rethinking the hitherto model in which work has been expelled from home. The redesign cannot be limited to the apartments or houses themselves, but will impact the direct surroundings and residential areas in general, as the amount of time spent in this urban context might increase. This in turn brings us back to the idea of walkable, mixed-use (including employment and education opportunities) neighbourhoods and necessity of rethinking urban layouts and spatial planning of post-pandemic cities.

CONCLUSIONS

The above discussion allows to draw two potential scenarios for the post-pandemic cities symbolically stretching from the metaphors of urban ghettos to the urban commons.

In the first scenario wealthy individuals benefitting from flexible work schemes will be driving their (electric or hydrogen) vehicles to the physically and digitally isolated, gated communities or commuter settlements while low skilled labour and the "essential workers" using underinvested public transport and other low quality public services will inhabit not adequate housing or even overcrowded, degraded residential areas. At the same time the representatives of both of these social classes will probably experience different aspects and effects of biopolitics as the regulations on physical movement of humans might be different depending on mobility choices and habitat types, or simply – on economic status.

In the second scenario cities, which will host certain degree of inequalities as it has been the case throughout human history, will mobilize and use public resources to reflect the idea of the commons – living together – and the notion of sustainability – not limiting the future generations from living together and having their needs satisfied. This scenario requires solid urban policies and critical public investments. The COVID-19 pandemic in this context might have opened an intellectual, cultural, and political window of opportunities for the cities to rethink or even reinvent themselves.

Obviously both of the above scenarios have to be read and interpreted in a figurative sense. However, it seems that the post-pandemic cities, if "collective unity" from Mumford's definition is to be reflected, cannot continue business-as-usual scenario.

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