Doomscrolling, Doomsurfing, Post-Pandemic Urbanism and Silver Linings

“Doomscrolling and doomsurfing are new terms referring to the tendency to continue to surf or scroll through bad news, even though that news is saddening, disheartening, or depressing. Many people are finding themselves reading continuously bad news about COVID-19 without the ability to stop or step back” (Merriam-Webster).

Yes, 2020 has had plenty of bad news. Let’s face it. Globally, it was the most difficult year in recent memory and in most readers’ lifetimes. There were few if any signs that climate change dynamics are in any way under control. We experienced a global pandemic totally out of control, racial and religious intolerance became illuminated around the world, and most economies are reeling from a combination of all these exigencies. Reason enough to be disconcerted as we enter 2021. And then, as we do enter 2021, we have a mob in Washington D.C. storming the United States Capital! There is little doubt that the confluence of the challenges above will change our urban landscape in many and untold ways.

The terms Pandemic Urbanism and Post-Pandemic Urbanism have turned up as titles of writings, discussions and webinars around the world with a fair share of negativity attached. But, we should not lose sight of the fact that much of the good that has happened in 2020 has been eclipsed by the problems and it is important as we enter 2021 to see the positive, the silver linings, as well. Many of the ideas and actions below will have effects lasting well beyond the pandemic and have been greatly accelerated, in a positive way, by the challenges we are experiencing...
Public spaces are at the core of cities’ engagement in the fight against the pandemic and climate emergency. The fourth edition of CSU NEWS showcases innovative ideas on how public spaces are being transformed turning the coronaified city into a solution-based laboratory for energy efficiency, public transit and urban and environmental sustainability.

From the 15-minute-city of the Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo and her announcement to turn the Champs Elysée into a grand park-like boulevard, introduced by CSU President Lance Jay Brown in his message, to the Green Urbanism reminiscence and the opportunity of streetscapes’ design in New York City, CSU contributors demonstrate how street spaces become new hubs to respond to COVID-19 lockdown measures. In Elblag, Poland, a public lawn was turned into a green chessboard to encourage outdoor activities while keeping safe distancing zones, whereas in Beirut, an all-or-nothing approach to public space access condemned Lebanese to get outside.

This edition further presents the impressive community efforts of the Sustainable Favela Network in Rio de Janeiro and clear solutions on how Africa can implement the 2030 Agenda and the New Urban Agenda, as well as the informative AEC Industry Lecture series of the Center for Buildings, Infrastructure and Public Space (CBIPS) of Columbia University, with which CSU collaborates.

I am pleased to share a new section of CSU NEWS, CSU Publications and invite you to read the 5 books that CSU has published since 2015 celebrating the key role of resilient design and sustainable urbanization in the planning of our cities.

On behalf of CSU, I invite you to watch our successful recent online dialogues and look forward to welcoming you to our upcoming events, the First CSU Lecture series on Green Cities on March 4 and our annual CSU Award Gala that takes place on March 18 virtually. The Gala is part of CSU fundraising efforts and we are grateful for your donation to support CSU activities.

**Articles**

**Streetscapes in Pandemic Mode: A Shock of Opportunity**

*Bill Millard, Guest Contributor, New York City, USA*
The COVID-19 pandemic caught cities by surprise, and the eerie silence that fell over the streets of New York last March scared some people into thinking we might see the end of urban life as we knew it. (read more)

**Social Distancing Lawn Brings People Together**

*Ada Kotynska* and *Lukasz Kotynski*, Guest Contributors

In the midst of COVID-19-related uncertainty, Galeria EL Art Centre in Elblag (Poland) came up with a simple yet clever idea, turning a spacious lawn in its publicly accessible courtyard into a green chessboard. The aim is to encourage outdoor activities while keeping safe distancing zones and combating drought at the same time... (read more)

**Outside is Outlawed: Lebanon’s All-Or-Nothing Approach to Public Space Access**

*Sara Hamzeh*, Guest Contributor, Beirut, Lebanon

While cities around the world are working to provide their citizens with more public space to safely practice social distancing, Beirut approaches COVID with a harmful all-or-nothing approach. Not only is Beirut notoriously lacking in terms of green spaces, it is also reeling from the aftermath of a deadly explosion in August 2020 that ate up much of its most bustling urban spaces... (read more)

**Africa and Agenda 2030: The Challenge of Creating Growth and Opportunities during a Period of Rapid Change and Urban Transformation**

*Rolf Wichmann*, Guest Contributor, Nairobi, Kenya

Of all the emerging regions, Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is the region that has the longest path to go to develop, where doing so sustainably, with an eye towards Agenda 2030, as well as the New Urban Agenda, will be the greatest challenge... (read more)

**(Re)Actions to the Pandemic from Rio de Janeiro’s Sustainable Favela Network**

*Theresa Williamson*, CSU Advisory Board Member and *Natalia Meléndez*, Guest Contributor, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Rio de Janeiro’s Sustainable Favela Network (SFN), managed by non-profit Catalytic Communities, is a
community-based network that connects, strengthens and multiplies sustainability and resilience-building initiatives across the city’s favelas (about 24% of its population). Over the course of 2020, favela communities organized intensively to prevent the worst... (read more)

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**CSU News**

“Columbia CBIPS New Perspectives on the Future”, by Rick Bell, FAIA, CSU Board Member (read here)

“Are You Ready for the Next Catastrophe - The State of Resilience Planning”, online Dialogue (read here)

“The United Nations Renewal: a Sustainable Retrofit of a Modern Era Landmark”, Virtual event (read here)

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**Upcoming Events**

Green Cities 2021 Lecture #1, 4 March 2021 (register here)

CSU 2021 Award Gala, 18 March 2021 (register here)

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**CSU Publications**

*Sustainable Urbanization at the UN, for Architects and other Design Professionals* (purchase here)

*Gateway Portals to the City: Infrastructure for Sustainable Urbanization* (purchase here)

Public Spaces for Sustainable Urbanization
Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants: Challenges for Sustainable Urbanization
(purchase here)

The Future of Cities: An Integrated Approach to Urban Challenges
(purchase here)

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