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Words by the editors

Overview—Emerging Urban Perspectives

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Michal Gath-Morad
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The global COVID-19 pandemic that started in late 2019 has affected the ways in which cities are perceived. The sudden standstill of urban life raised the question what the pandemic's impact will be and how it affects the way cities are used, designed, and built. Inspired by recent events, this book provides a platform for critical discussion on alternative visions of urban futures.

In the recent crisis, cities all over the world experienced numerous lockdowns, travel bans, and some of them curfews aimed at flattening the epidemic curve. These mitigation measures resulted in various side- and after-effects, including restrictions in the use of the city, its public spaces, and infrastructure, with exceptional social and economic implications. The crisis has changed personal lives, living environments, and the urban realm as such: social distancing and remote work have fundamentally affected the way cities function and where and how people work, play, learn, and live. Fundamental characteristics of city life, such as proximity, density, and accessibility suddenly became its Achilles' heel: cities turned into infection hotspots where the virus was most transmissible and thus threatened the health of citizens, societies, and humanity.

‘A city is a pattern in time.
No single constituent
remains in place, but
the city persists.’

John Holland. *Hidden order: How adaptation builds complexity* (1995, pp. 1–2)

The pandemic crisis uncovered the vulnerability of today’s cities to disease and at least momentarily raised serious doubts regarding their resilience, as entire neighbourhoods, in particular business districts, were abandoned overnight. Offices, shops, restaurants, schools, libraries, theatres, and museums were closed. Photographs of cities such as the ‘The Great Empty’ series by The New York Times in spring 2020 (Kimmelman, 2020, March 23) showed empty streets, abandoned city squares, and dwindling public transport. This created a sudden awareness and lasting impression of how the perception of cities was transformed radically and how rigorously everyday urban life was impacted.

Undeniably, the urban crisis brought about by the recent pandemic has revealed and exaggerated many urban challenges that predated it and were apparent beforehand. Beyond its immediate urgencies, the crisis offers both opportunity and impetus for engaging again in fundamental discussion about future cities and city futures.

This book provides a platform for transdisciplinary discourse between urban designers, architects, and researchers to re-envision the future of cities in light of the challenges and opportunities presented by the recent pandemic.

So, what does the future hold for cities worldwide?

A return to a pre-pandemic status quo (Alraouf, 2021) seems illusory and even naive. The question what is a new normal, a now normal, or a next normal, even if overused as expressions, remains highly relevant, as it fuels the prevailing debate on urgent challenges that cities are facing, whether instant or fundamental, temporary, or long-lasting, imposed, amplified by the virus or pre-existing.

Aside from the challenges presented by the recent pandemic, cities increasingly face unprecedented pressures of globalization, expanding urbanization, demographic shifts, and environmental concern as identified, for instance, in the United Nations report (UN, 2018). Cities must accommodate



[West]



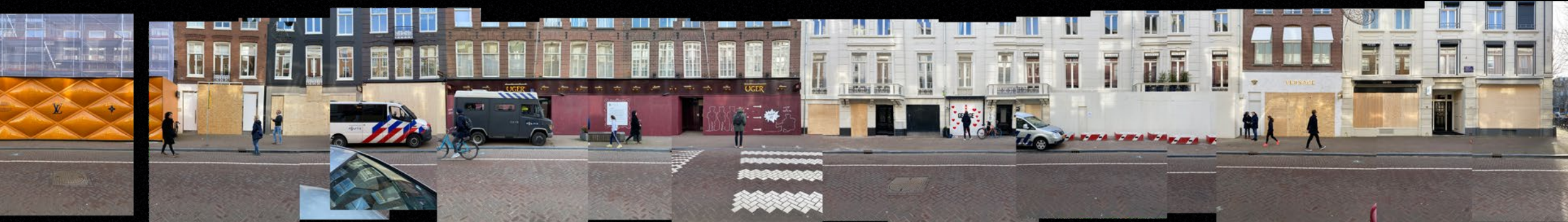
P.C. HOOFTSTRAAT (NORTH SIDE) AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS
P.C. Hooftstraat, Amsterdam, in lock-down on January 31st 2021. To prevent vandalism and destruction by riots that took place in that neighbourhood at that time, the closed luxury stores transformed into temporary fortresses.



[East]



[East]



P.C. HOOFTSTRAAT (SOUTH SIDE) AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS



[West]

a growing population and at the same time reduce pollution, waste, and the depletion of scarce resources and energy. Cities must position themselves in a competitive global market (e.g., Florida 2008; Glaeser 2011) and reflect the possibly conflicting agendas of the many stakeholders and interests involved (Batty, 2018).

Given the many challenges that cities are confronted with, the prediction of what urban futures will be like seems tempting, yet remains largely erratic. Instead of future prediction, attempts to identify and understand fundamental urban problems as factors driving urban change deserve full attention. The evaluation of scenarios of possibility, plausibility, and probability allows the exploration of a range of urban conditions and opportunities that enable the invention of alternative and desirable city futures.

A question central to this book is how to face these challenges while providing and safe-guarding positive outcomes, concerned with the improvement of the quality of urban life: How can future cities be made more liveable, sustainable, and resilient? How can cities continue to provide a wide range of opportunities for all necessities of life?

To tackle these complex questions, the book includes a collection of 25 chapters written by 37 emerging voices in urban design and research. Together, they contribute from a diverse spectrum of interest, expertise, academic disciplines, and practice. They approach the built environment from a socio-cultural, respectively socioeconomic perspective, from the viewpoint of urban policy and public health, with environmental concerns for urban sustainability and circularity in mind, and through the lens of urban computer and data science, providing a take on urban digitalization and transformation of cities into 'smart' cities. Together, their contributions reflect the complexity and diversity of challenges and opportunities underpinning future cities.

Future Cities—City Futures intends to be a platform for transdisciplinary urban discourse. The book chapters are grouped around five overarching themes, introduced in an overarching prologue. Each theme has a separate section →

PART 1 THE KIND OF PROBLEM A CITY STILL IS **[COMPLEXITY]**

addresses the phenomenon of complexity in cities, urban success throughout human history, qualities, strengths, advantages, and the pressures, challenges and threats cities are facing.

PART 2 LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION **[PROXIMITY]**

identifies the importance of proximity of place and people. It discusses both urban and social constituents such as proximity, density, and accessibility as main drivers of urban life.

PART 3 CONTRADICTION AND COEXISTENCE **[DIVERSITY]**

looks at the make-up of diversity in cities and addresses equity and inclusion, inequalities, affordability, and tendencies to segregation and gentrification.

PART 4 GROWTH AND CHANGE **[DENSITY]**

emphasizes how density forces development and shapes cities.

PART 5 FORM AND PERFORMANCE **[INGENUITY]**

questions urban ingenuity and addresses the technological urban shift from a linear to a circular economy and a predominantly material to a digital world.

The introductory prologue below firstly provides the overarching context of the five parts of the book. It connects the individual book chapters to past and present discourse on seminal urban research and practice. The prologue does not aim to provide a systematic literature review. Instead, it introduces a short overview of selected urban positions to provide a context and introduction to the book's transdisciplinary discussion on cities:

Secondly, the prologue briefly introduces the individual research trajectories provided in the book's chapters in sidenotes. We hope that the juxtaposition of established urban theories and research with the emerging perspectives in the individual authors' chapters establishes a foundation from which to discuss fundamental urban questions:

How can the city's resilience be improved in current and future crises?

How can the city be made future-proof?

How can future cities become more healthy, sustainable, prosperous, enjoyable, safe, and just?

How can the quality of future urban life be improved?

What kind of cities do we want to live in?

Notwithstanding the high degree of complexity and uncertainty inherent in attempting to answer such questions, this book is not about the prediction of the future. Instead, it aims to define the conditions that future cities would need to meet and to envisage a range of scenarios for possible, and possibly desirable, city futures.

To gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of future cities, the book presents a multiplicity of research trajectories that go far beyond the core concerns of urbanism. The transitional conditions between

and interdependencies of inhabitant and habitat, society and environment, and physical and virtual domain allow speculation about inclusion, diversity, initiative, participation, and quality of life.

The aim of this book is to collect and contrast a unique and open-ended array of individual perspectives, insights, observations, ideas, research, strategies, inventions, and solutions that are all critically engaged with several dimensions of future cities and city futures.

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