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Editorial

Welcome to our final JFDE issue of 2020, a year defined by the global covid-19 outbreak, which has had a drastic impact on all our lives, ranging from global politics to our daily routines. Conversely, most academic activities had to switch from a physical setting to a virtual environment (a situation that is still very much the case in Europe). We have had to learn how to interact via digital tools and especially seize and promote the value of not just written information, but also the potential behind virtual conferences, workshops, and events to keep in touch with our colleagues, friends, and fellow researchers.

Well, what else can we say... it has worked surprisingly well. Although most of us are certainly looking forward to regaining the closeness that regular, daily interaction brings to our academic lives -may this be in education or research-, we are also truly aware of, and amazed by, the benefits that have come from this widespread digital conversion to virtual settings. We currently have the possibility to easily engage with researchers and students from all over the world, increasing the dissemination of relevant knowledge, and sparking the formation of new exchange networks, regardless of our physical distance. A special mention in this regard goes to the potential CO₂ emissions that may be saved by decreasing our work-related travels. Does it really make sense to fly around the globe for just one talk at a conference? - maybe not. And yes, we can even have social interaction via digital tools, which of course works, but this is one aspect in which it can be shown that things are not the same. Personal contact cannot be replaced. Organised matches at scientific events, spontaneous meetings over coffee, and, of course, the direct contact among students are all essential activities that we will be happy to resume once this crisis is over, while hopefully we will continue to reap the unintended benefits and lessons that came with it. So, expect hybrid to be the new normal!

Now, about the articles showcased in this issue: Prefab, Bricks, and Water seem to be the core topics addressed by the researchers. It is interesting to see so many different approaches when it comes to prefabrication as a general strategy for the development of a design concept. The same goes for the articles that explore the use of water, either as a thermal energy carrier, or its impact on the hygrothermal performance of buildings. Finally, it is always fascinating to see clear links between theoretical scientific developments and the design and production of components for application in real buildings. So, once again we have quite a wide range of themes throughout this issue, but as it often is with the built environment, all of these different aspects add to the general knowledge about façades, finding their way into real building envelopes that perform and function under a holistic approach.

The Editors in Chief,

Ulrich Knaack
Tillmann Klein