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REVITALISING STREET CULTURE AGAINST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Abstract

The position of the street in the social life of a city is important and it is possible to develop a systematic description of social behaviour through careful observation and study of particular streets. The street helps us examine environmental and ecological psychology and some aspects of human behaviour, as well as providing both a comprehensive account of the role of space in social change and a reflection of the history of cultural and historical space. Taking this into consideration, it can be argued that understanding both necessary and complementary human need with space syntax can guide the design of social streets. Therefore, developing vibrant and inclusive urban environments and strategies that increase the efficiency and enjoyment of streets are crucial. Like any urban human behaviour, social behaviour on the street ultimately reveals the interaction between people and space. Among the factors that influence social behaviour, the characteristics of individuals (age, gender, cultural affiliation, past experiences, needs and expectations and emotional state) and characteristics of the environment (location, access, configuration, situation, facilities, sensory qualities, activities and people within them) are among the most important qualities. Without over-emphasising the role of space as the determinant of urban behaviour, it is possible to argue that social relations can be formed through space, can be limited and mediated by space. In other words; urban designs can act as a catalyst for the display of a behaviour if people are inclined to a certain behaviour, or even to try something new that they may have seen or heard

about. It is understood that the role of planning and design is to provide the best possible conditions to support new social behaviours which will be affected by the design to cause the desired behaviour. This study will discuss the barriers and opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic to revitalise streets.

Keywords: pandemic, COVID-19, street culture, street design, and revitalisation.

Introduction

Due to the continuous global spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) since the beginning of 2019, effective prevention and control measures should be adopted against the long-term pandemic for public transport, which serves as the main mode of urban transport for many citizens. The risk of infection of the disease can be extremely high due to the length of exposure to the virus, the route of transmission and the structural features of travel or work. This could cause the pandemic virus to spread more rapidly. Based on the transmission characteristics of COVID-19 coronavirus and the nature of street areas, comprehensive counter measures have been identified for the prevention and control of COVID-19. These include changing traffic management, personal protection, cleaning and sanitisation of the surroundings and health education. Diversified strategies can increase safety during mass gatherings. Prevention and control of the spread of the virus during mass gatherings will be particularly important when all countries restart production. The aim of this study is to promote the global fight against COVID-19 and to introduce the necessary design proposals and measures to revitalise street experiences.

Space is one of the main elements of a cultural system. The street can be instrumental in some aspects of a social system in which cultural heritage is produced as artefacts (Duncan, 1990). However, social distancing measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic have changed the use of space. The pandemic has limited street and public life, with businesses, education, entertainment, shopping and many other venues closed. However, those living in medium- and low-density neighbourhoods experience streets differently in their neighbourhoods. Streets, sidewalks, parking lots and other areas have been redesigned and the neighbourhood space has been transformed for active living, play and socializing. In many neighbourhoods, social distancing creates a new social space. It seems essential to develop our creativity to restore neighbourhood spaces for public life and the physical and psychological health of our communities (Mehta, 2020). Edward T. Hall coined the term proxemics and suggested that the relationship and distance of human bodies from each other determines the range of social behaviour. Hall (1966), in his book *The Hidden Dimension*, defined four scales of distances between people: intimate (less than 1.5 meters - shared with loved ones), personal (1.5 - 4 meters - shared with good friends and family), social (4 to 12 meters - shared with acquaintances) and public (from 12 to 25 meters and more - shared with everyone). These four culturally focused scales are determined by the increasing physical distance between bodies, and each distance drives a different sensory perception among people.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, we have been asked to maintain social distance. We must undertake home-based actions and stay largely within our neighbourhoods. For many of us, this meant we could not share space with our close friends or even family member in many cases. For many in the city centres, COVID-19 brought daily life to a standstill to a great extent. Because commuting on public transport is a risk, open public spaces are crowded and even

taking a walk to get some fresh air does not allow for a safe distance. Nevertheless, in medium to low-density areas throughout the city, a large population is experiencing the pandemic differently on the streets. In short, the human sense of space and distance is not static. It should be emphasised that the perception of space is related to action because it is dynamic. How people feel towards each other changes in different dimensions of space and distance. Distance is a decisive factor in this regard.

The use of space and its interactions changed as people started to spend more of their time on the streets. Two trends emerged. The first, in public distance, over time, more people walking toward each other intentionally and approaching each other to socialise within five to eight feet, resulting in a much friendlier social distancing. The second, casual and long-lasting social interactions with acquaintances and neighbours can often be seen from distances beyond 12 feet, from entrances to the curb, verandas to curb, from the front yards to the street, curb to the street, curb to curb and many more examples. Both approaches are changing urban etiquette and people are socially accepting many more people these ways. In this interesting socio-spatial phenomenon, people are both expanding the social space and narrowing public distances to create a more social experience. In social distancing, the word distancing seems to imply keeping away, as in distancing oneself from something or someone. There is a good reason why many recommend physical distancing, as social distancing denotes separation, being the opposite of social participation and interaction. Conversely, Hall's social distance refers to a dimension where eye contact and active social behaviour can occur. A new social space is created with social distancing, which is what is being experienced on the street. This alludes to the new street culture.

Street Culture as a life of diversity

The collapse of street culture during COVID-19 also resulted from the nature of the functional activities around it. The distribution of some commercial activities and services to new sub-centres and online venues in the city core has led to a reduction in the importance and density of streets that were originally connected to these activities. In addition, the movement of middle- and upper-income populations away from city centres added to the decline of the vitality of street culture. The revitalisation of streets is crucial, not only to increase the quality of life but also to improve the socio-economic well-being of the city. In recent years, there has been significant policy debate on how to facilitate the revitalisation of neighbourhoods (Greenberg, 1999; Temkin & Rohe, 1996). A commercial rationale must be found to invest in the improvement of the physical fabric of historic urban neighbourhoods. The buildings have economic value potential due to their historical quality and their frontage to the main shopping street in the central locations of a city. In addition, streetscapes provide important physical assets that the city utilises to attract investment and change the image of streets. Further, the mixed land use character of these streets are favourable for revitalisation and reconstruction. Having a more competitive position provides more opportunities for business development. So, what are the elements that make up street culture; let's examine this.

The location of shops, namely the marketplace and main streets, in early modern and nineteenth-century cities are the earliest commercial places. Traditionally, the marketplace was the primary area of retail activity; on busy streets, artisans and other retailers could capture the attention of potential customers and persuade them to make purchases in more or less sophisticated ways. Accessibility was, and still is, a vital factor in the location of retail

operations. Accessibility was optimal for marketplaces and along main streets. For centuries, the old streets of these cities remained prime locations for shops and other retail facilities. Maps also show that, with the growth of these cities, main streets leading to and from the city centres have also become important shopping streets. But things do not remain the same. With the demographic and spatial growth of cities, there became a bigger need for more marketplaces. These were also attractive places for artisans and other retailers. Main roads and streets in newly developing districts were in fact at the centre of the urban network structure and concentration of activities and where public institutions created a dense flow of movement. The growth of cities also led to a spatial differentiation between the various sectors of the retail industry. Yet in these British, French, German, Belgian and Dutch cities, the street remained the shopping heart of the city throughout the early modern period and the nineteenth century (Furnee & Lesger, 2014).

In many ways, culture is one of the timeless tasks of cities (Zukin, 1995). The wealth that creates majestic buildings is concentrated in the cities, the elite build their monuments there and tourists visit to experience cultural pleasure. Yet, safely preserving urban architectural forms and ritual practices presents specific challenges. While governments have the tendency to protect historical monuments that promote local and national identities alongside their own interests, there is less consensus on the need to preserve local cityscapes or the authentic lifestyles that thrive within them (Amit-Cohen, 2008; Zukin, 2010). Cities of dynamic market economies have a structural resistance to protection. However, local urban areas that cannot be exhibited in museums (areas such as streets, street corners and public parks) are important foundations for the ongoing social interactions in which cultural heritage is developed. Both places and interactions – and the interdependence between places and interactions – are sources of identity, belonging and emotional qualities that the idea of intangible cultural heritage expresses, develops and sustains. There is an overlap between social capital developed in social interaction networks and cultural capital as an abstract form, namely the idea of cultural ecosystems (Throsby, 2011). Shared cultural networks and relationships that facilitate cultural, social and economic interaction among members of a group form street culture and are part of street culture.

Urban cultural ecosystems are created by ordinary city dwellers in interaction with local spaces. Historically, the most important of these were streets and marketplaces of various types (Agnew, 1986; Low, 2000). Equally important is the conjoining of small retail businesses found concentrated in local shopping streets. However, unlike the intimate interiors of shops and cafes or the external focal points of public squares, local shopping streets are rarely considered important public spaces in their own right. Due to their daily use and the local self-sufficiency they support, streets are local areas where modern cultural ecosystems are formed (Deener, 2012; Hall, 2012; Zukin & Kosta, 2004). Local shopping streets are also an area of social, economic and cultural exchange. They provide a facet of local social and cultural identity, unlike the standardised architectural designs and trans-national ownerships of both central shopping streets and suburban malls. They do this through small-scale social interactions. As local shopping streets support the cultural ecosystem within these cities, they should be seen as an important part of the urban cultural heritage. On the one hand, this extends the interpretation of intangible cultural heritage to social practices that develop in local urban spaces. On the other hand, it provides an opportunity to develop realistic public policies to protect local practices against the moral displacements brought about by economic modernisation and the global

culture of consumption. However, local shopping streets are not just places of economic transaction; they are social areas where cultural identities are established, learned and reproduced. These are both local and global identities; the shopping street bear both traditional ethnic homogeneity and new ethnic diversity become embedded in a limited geographical terrain. In this sense, the social space of the street is a melting pot of cultural heritage to which both long-term residents and recent immigrants belong; it is a suitable space for bonding. The gradual lack of visibility of local shopping streets leads to overlooking their important role in the reproduction of cultural identity and ownership. Revitalising both a visual image and a historic community as a public space of civil society makes them more environmentally sustainable and provides the component of walkability in the city depends on the revitalisation of the streets. Although different actors play a role in this revitalisation over time, all can maintain their sense of identity and ownership. Artisans and their customers may even develop performances that could reinforce the social production of an authentic historical community (Zukin, 2010).

Emerging new socio-spatial challenge in the streets

Cities are home to the majority of the world's population and are centers of economic growth and innovation. However, the high population and activity density in cities makes them vulnerable to various stressors such as natural and man-made disasters. However, in the last few decades, a great deal of research has been published on the effects of a wide variety of disasters on cities and the necessary planning and measures to be taken (Sharifi, 2020). Urban research on previous pandemics has focused on inequalities that make poor and marginalized groups more vulnerable during pandemics (Wade, 2020). In this respect, the Covid 19 pandemic has brought the problem of urban fragility to the fore and revived the interest in this issue. Their impacts on cities require preparedness, response and adaptation measures, as various forces such as climate change and human intervention in natural wildlife habitats may increase the frequency of pandemics, the patterns and dynamics underlying pandemics in the future (Connolly et al., 2020). In this context, the Covid 19 pandemic offers an unprecedented opportunity to understand how cities can be affected by pandemics and what actions are needed to minimize its impact and increase urban pandemic resilience. As might be expected, most studies focus on medical issues such as the diagnosis and treatment of disease. But since the beginning of the pandemic, the effects of the pandemic on cities and how they are responding to it have also received a lot of attention. In fact, the pandemic has brought to the fore the old debate about the potential vulnerability of cities to pandemics and infectious diseases (Matthew & McDonald, 2006). The challenges posed by the pandemic, and the recommendations provided to deal with them, can inform city planners and policy makers about the measures that need to be taken to develop cities more resilient to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted issues related to the desirability of compact urban development. The initial hypothesis was that densely populated and well-connected areas could become hubs for the rapid spread of the pandemic due to high levels of face-to-face interaction. However, the reported evidence on the relationship between population density and COVID-19 is contradictory and inconclusive. More research has been done on the effect of population density, but high sprawl rates have not been found in high-density metropolitan areas. However, some studies have shown significant relationships between the density of the virus and its rate of spread. This was explained by the more difficult social distancing in high-density, crowded areas. The tentative evidence for the relationship between intensity and the rate of COVID-19

infection is in line with previous findings reported for other infectious diseases. In fact, while increased density is a contributing factor to the transmission of infectious diseases, high-density cities are often better prepared and have greater access to the resources needed for the timely response needed to prevent the spread of viruses. In contrast, urban periphery and suburban areas with lower population densities have limited access to resources and may increase the chance of exposure to new types of viruses and diseases that can be transmitted through increased human-wildlife interactions due to human interaction with natural ecosystems.

Since the early days of the COVID-19 crisis, the scientific community have continually sought to shed light on various issues, including the mechanisms by which the virus spreads, its environmental and socio-economic impact and the necessary recovery and adaptation plans. Given the high population density and economic activity in cities, these are often hotspots of COVID-19 infections. Accordingly, many researchers have attempted to explore the dynamics of the pandemic in urban areas to understand the effects of COVID-19 on cities. It is necessary to understand the effects of the pandemic on cities and highlight important lessons that can be learned for post-COVID urban planning and design. It also offers suggestions regarding socio-economic factors, urban management and governance and transportation and urban design that can be used for post-COVID urban planning and design. In general, current information indicates that the COVID-19 crisis presents an excellent opportunity for planners and policymakers to take transformative steps towards creating more equitable, resilient and sustainable cities.

Design has become a trendy term during the pandemic in various business sectors and education. A designer's methods and sensitivities connect people's needs, technology feasibility and visible business strategy to create increased client value and market opportunities (Brown, 2008). User experiences initiated by design thinking, characterised as the intuitive power of the designer are central to design performance (Cross, 2006). The designer tackles ill-defined problems based on solution-oriented problem-solving modes. In general, design is associated with designers' sensitivities and problem-solving methods regardless of the type of challenge (Lockwood, 2010). In order to revitalise streets during the pandemic period, designers should work with public health experts to identify the challenges and find solutions.

Traditional street markets are the backbone of the local economy (Witkowski, 1993; Kikuchi & Ryan, 2007) and are important in developing solidarity within the community. They are also tourist attractions, because such street markets serve as an example of the locals and preserve their cultural atmosphere. In terms of government efforts to promote tourism, street culture is prominently featured in their efforts to present the image of culturally diverse cities (Ryan & Cave, 2005).

Cafe culture shows us that people will occupy public spaces even when they want to be on their own. But the majority of these social behaviours are passive. For example, what is seen in neighbourhoods, residential streets and parks is a mix of passive and active social behaviour. Local has a new meaning, as the areas the streets are confined to the neighbourhood. In a study by Bowles and Clifford (2020), it is reported that the Bernal Heights neighbourhood in San Francisco brought the streets to life by opening a local newspaper, preparing food, organising artistic activities and events, by offering song and musical performances, poetry recitals, among others. In neighbourhoods across cities, motorways have become gathering places as there was little use by vehicles. The pedestrian area is no longer limited to inadequate sidewalks, and the

sidewalk has become a space for walking, running, biking, chatting and active play. Street intersections, dead-end streets and parking lots are places for spending happy hours; sidewalks have allowed chalk to become a common activity for displaying art; the linear typology of the street has now easily transformed into a gathering space. Many streets have now gone from being socio-fugal to socio-petal spaces.

Even though we may miss the freedom and choice to interact at any distance, and we do not consciously consider distance, social distance (or the space of a social area) has many benefits. Because there is more time on hand but with a limited area to distribute it, much more temporal social behaviour and interaction is seen in this social space in varying durations, with well-known neighbours and familiar strangers, as well as complete strangers. While the 6-metre social distancing barrier may seem like a wall to prevent interaction with close friends or even some of our family members, the same distance has also provided a comfortable reference point for interactions with the known and the unknown. Social distance has created a new social space in many streets. At the same time, not everyone can participate in this new proxemia. There are obvious social inequalities. As mentioned in the examples mentioned above, the 'stay-at-home' situation can be alleviated by those with access to private open spaces or nearby public spaces, including sidewalks, streets and parks. However, the order to stay at home can become intolerable for those living in neighbourhoods with little or no private outdoor space, limited access to the outdoors due to inadequate public spaces or unsafe and/or poor conditions caused by crime or traffic. For some, it may turn into finding (mandatory) time to enjoy being outside, while for others it means lockdown or taking serious risks. The pandemic has dilapidated individuals and upset families. The current situation is dire and it should not be romanticised. More importantly, the extended use of the street's public space gives way to social interactions and provides socio-psychological benefits that help alleviate social isolation - which researchers have found causes serious illness, depression and has effects on premature death (Steptoe et al., 2013; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Valtorta et al., 2016; Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017).

In fact, cities need to re-evaluate their policies for different sectors. For example, improvements observed in air and water quality during quarantine periods once again highlight the significant environmental impacts of human-induced activities and provide awareness call for the adoption of eco-friendly development options. The pandemic has also exposed the existing socio-economic inequalities that exist in cities. It was discussed how such inequalities could threaten public health due to difficulties in implementing protective measures such as social distancing. Clearly, tackling such inequalities is critical and must be prioritized as cities recover from the pandemic. The pandemic is expected to fundamentally change the way cities are governed, now and in the future. In this context, the measures to be taken in the next few years are important and will determine whether cities can be developed more sustainably after COVID. As cities begin to revive, their main priority will likely be economic development. In fact, the pandemic has actually provided an opportunity that can be exploited by planners. It has been observed that public transportation has been seriously affected during the pandemic process and many people have turned to private vehicles and cycling/walking as safer alternatives. While the growing interest in private vehicles poses a threat to sustainable development, the increase in cyclists in many cities around the world offers a unique window of opportunity to further promote cycling culture in cities. This can turn casual cyclists into long-time highway users. As discussed earlier, the impact is context-specific and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges arising

from the pandemic. Therefore, it is necessary to develop context-specific integrated approaches to develop and implement effective planning, response, and remediation and adaptation actions.

Suggestions to Revitalise Street Culture during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The pandemic has not only disrupted social life, but it has also led to the taking of human relations more sensitively, instead of eliminating it. Open spaces in cities have become more and more valuable. Especially since the vehicle traffic within the scope of work and travel has ended, human relations have spread to the streets. The number of areas used by the citizens and the spaces created has increased. However, it is still necessary to consider and implement measures to minimise the risk of virus transmission. For this reason, urban designers and planners should create new spaces by taking precautions against the COVID-19 pandemic in existing and newly emerging ways. This is especially important and essential in regard to street designs and the revival of street culture.

The parking areas in the city no longer host vehicles used for going to the workplace or for shopping visits. These areas occupy idle space in the city. Whereas, it is possible for these areas to host different artistic activities during the day or evenings. In the evenings, these spaces can be offered to the citizens who travel to outdoor theatre performances or film screenings. Or we can think of these areas as concert venues. It will be useful and beneficial to use vehicle concentration in this way. In this way, the areas that will serve again in the post-pandemic period will not be changed, and the areas during the pandemic period will host an enjoyable use for these new spaces.

In cities, streets are generally designed to serve vehicles. However, due to the reduced vehicle traffic during the pandemic period, many streets have become suitable for the use of pedestrians. In particular, it is possible to pedestrianise the streets, in parallel to the main streets. We can also provide necessary mobility with bicycles. In particular, intra-neighbourhood cyclist traffic can be achieved by increasing the scope of bicycle paths or by reconstructing them. By doing so, vehicle traffic can be eliminated and a considerable amount of free space can be opened to pedestrians. Since the spaces to be created in these areas will be open-air spaces, citizens will be able to gather within the scope of pandemic measures. At the same time, green areas and spaces can be created by using vegetation methods in these areas.

The spaces to be created in the empty areas that will emerge can be pleasant meeting points for concerts, events and recitals. However, considering that there will be a high number of participants, it is essential to distance the participants from each other within the scope of pandemic measures. To this end, artificial 'islands' can be created by drawing different geometric shapes on the ground. These artificial islands, which will be formed in different square metre areas according to the number of different people it may 'house', providing an area for limited numbers of friends or family members within the same ring or square. And the next 'island' can be drawn at a distance in line with measures to restrict the transmission of COVID-19 in the open air. Going further with this space design, the artificial islands can be painted. Perhaps street artists can decide on the patterns and colours of the artificial islands to be designed. For daytime activities, these islands can also be equipped with umbrellas. Umbrellas of different designs and colours would add vitality to the space. They would both protect people from the sun and act as a kind of shield for COVID-19 particles. These umbrellas can even be used at night. Umbrellas to be decorated with lighting fixtures can bring a more creative and lively atmosphere to the space.

Virtual islands can also be created on streets and parking lots. The circle or square shaped kiosks constructed of transparent materials would enable people to see and hear each other, while providing security. The visual aspect would be fulfilled and unification of people would occur in these islands, which we can think of as glass chambers, would lead to the revival of the streets in safety. As previously suggested, these islands can be diversified with design ideas and lighting.

The same method can be used in green areas. Artificial islands consisting of various geometric shapes in various colours, which will be created by painting the large areas within the green areas as far as possible, would allow citizens to watch a performance, have fun with friends or give opportunity for picnics within that border. In fact, these artificial islands may rise topographically in some places and may descend to below ground level in certain places. Thus, a more fun and elegant space design is achieved in the area by implementation small landscaping 'tricks'.

Considering again the streets; some festival vehicles can be organised to drive through the streets. Citizens would participate in activities from within their own homes, and entertainment opportunity would be provided to residents of the neighbourhood through dance performances and music. There may also be small performances and concerts for children. At the same time, the idle areas within the pedestrianisation activities can be transformed into sporting venues or be used as entertainment areas for families or friends. These sporting activities can be based on team individual games, but which avoid close contact. Sports that are possible within the scope of COVID-19 can be turned into venues for sporting activities. For example, tennis courts can be built. Due to the necessary distance required, citizens who are not able to gather would still be able to have fun playing tennis, for example. Tournaments to be organised can provide fun activities for the residents of the neighbourhood. The spring and summer months are suitable periods for such activities.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that we desire everyday public life for socializing and interacting with our neighbours and others, and we have the creativity to use these spaces in line with the necessities of public life. Streets are the basic building blocks of residential areas. A large amount of public space in cities consists of residential streets, neighbourhood parks, playgrounds, community gardens, community centres, and a large number of non-private spaces in neighbourhoods. These spaces may not be primary public spaces that encourage political action, but they can be planned or designed as valuable spaces that create the social glue of our society and help us live healthier. Urban planners and designers must advocate for transformative changes in neighbourhoods that support new proxies. We must rethink the role of streets as active and social spaces. Perhaps radical change and urban etiquette could be advocated to preserve the expanded social space.

This study examines the pedestrianization of streets and avenues, the revitalization process that is intended to be created for the functional transformation around it, and the changes in land values after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of cities in 2020. Street revitalization projects have completely changed the demands of the city and the demands of the citizens during the COVID-19 era. Since the revival process began, the streets have transformed from a neglected flow zone into bustling commercial and entertainment centres. Pedestrianization of main streets, along with the restoration of buildings and facades, can ignite the revival of streets.

Decreased noise and exhaust fumes, an expanding parking lot and increased volume of development along the street have led to a resurgence of areas. The urban area and the marketplace can act as a catalyst for the revitalization and development of adjacent areas. These combined efforts can help gain momentum in terms of economic recovery. The success of a revitalization project can be achieved through cooperation between residents and public and private investors. It is possible to take action to revive old idle spaces and create new cultural, recreational and commercial corridors by giving livelihood and vitality to old streets. These results show that pedestrianization and restoration projects can increase property values and thus support economic development.

Despite this overall success of the revitalization project, there appears to be a significant number of buildings in some neighbourhoods that are poorly restored, abandoned and in need of serious repairs, often with temporary surface-level parking spaces on vacant lots. These neighbourhoods offer potential investment areas for contractors in the future. Therefore, it has been shown that pedestrianization and environmental improvements are necessary but offer insufficient preconditions for significant private investment in buildings to revive aging areas. Physical improvements are only one of several incentives rather than the sole catalyst for development. Social and economic development plans should support physical rehabilitation projects. In addition, policy makers should encourage investment in undeveloped areas to create spatial equity between developed and undeveloped areas. Therefore, marketing strategies should aim to develop on the street, based on the identity and strengths of each neighbourhood. A hierarchical analysis of spatial effects on streets where revitalization is desired is suggested as a recommendation for further research.

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