Cities at the Age of Pandemics

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For centuries, measures against epidemics, such as leprosy or plague, were based on controlling the population movement by quarantine, isolation or confinement. The advances in understanding the transmission lead, in the 19th century, to a set of methods aimed especially against tuberculosis. Prevention was based on ventilation and sunlight while treatment emphasized pure air and sunbed cures.

Along with the development of the hygiene movement in the 19th century, the sanitary regulations concerned in a high degree architecture and urbanism issues: sunlight, air circulation, ventilation, heating, openings size and orientation, building height, distances in between constructions. This interdependency was such that some of the architectural and urban modernist movement principles were directly linked to the hygiene preoccupations.

With the advances in antibiotics in the 1940’s, such as the streptomycin that treated tuberculosis, medicine and architecture liberated form their interdependency.

Last decades changes led to architectural and urban counterreactions such as the late 1960s Green Architecture or the 1980s New Urbanism and Urban Village. As they directly address health related issues, it comes as no surprise that they provide certain answers to some last two decades medical experts’ warnings about the increased risks in zoonotic pandemics.
With the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic reemerged some of the 19th century prevention methods concerning the buildings, making the interior spaces ventilation one of the key measures. Moreover, the present pandemic stretched out the importance of some architectural and urban last decades desiderata concerning not only epidemics but general health issues such as obesity and cardiovascular diseases: the role of the exterior public space for social encounters, building downscaling, proximity shopping, transportation with emphasis on walking, bicycling and share mobility, mixed use neighborhoods.

The present pandemics counterreactions may act as a catalyst in an already initiated movement towards a globally healthier built environment.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Bogdan Andrei Fezi is an architect and urbanist with studies in Bucharest and Nottingham. He holds a postgraduate diploma (DEA) in architecture and urbanism at the Ecole d’Architecture de Paris-Belleville, a PhD at the Paris 8 University and later he obtains the Habilitation to conduct researches. He is now Associated Professor at the "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest.


He participated to conferences such as L’art de bâtir aux champs, Paris, 2012, or Premier congres francophone d’histoire de la construction, Paris, 2008.

He works with and then associates with Archi-tecture design studio, Paris, and holds his own studio, Arcvision, in Bucharest.