

VOICES FROM LOCKDOWN ON FUTURE CITIES in leading magazines and online resources

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, epidemics have often generated advances in architecture and urban development. Today, Covid-19 has questioned housing by undermining the certainties of modern culture. The pandemic has forced us to slow down the pace and change our priorities: private and public spaces have revealed their shortcomings, both in quantity and quality. The paper listens to the voices that have appeared in the press and on websites in recent months on the relationship between architecture, city, and Coronavirus, intersecting critical issues and proposals for the future from different perspectives. The visions are sometimes opposed but often converge on the need for urban renewal at every scale. Following the sociologist Sennet, it could represent an unmissable opportunity to rebalance spaces and relationships, smooth out social and economic inequalities and guarantee a more sustainable existence for all.

KEYWORDS

coronavirus, city of the future, post-pandemic home, guidelines, debate

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Throughout history, epidemics have often generated advances in architecture and urban development as inevitable responses to changing human needs and new hygienic requirements (Colomina, 2019). Houses and cities have adapted and shaped their forms and functions as a result of infectious or bacteriological diseases that have affected our communities (Pareti, 2020). On several occasions, the health emergency has proved to be an extraordinary opportunity for intervention, improvements, and modernization of living and public spaces (Jensen Carr, 2014). This transformative power results from the fact that contagious and ubiquitous illnesses have always indifferently afflicted and touched all social strata of the population, forcing the entire world to recalibrate needs and priorities. In a lecture given in 1993 on the transformation of urban space from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, the famous architect Giancarlo de Carlo recalled how one of the first rules established in the modern era was «[...] che le strade debbano essere più larghe, per consentire la ventilazione trasversale, e pavimentate, perché la mota facilita il trasmettersi delle malattie, in particolare la peste, il flagello che aveva profondamente coinvolto e scosso tutti gli esseri umani» (Tuscano, 2019, p. 105). The urban transformation of Paris made by Haussmann's administration was a famous and significant project aimed at controlling the lack of hygiene, but especially cholera that had devastated the city on several occasions in the first half of the 19th century (Orazi, 2020). The measures that led to the metamorphosis of the French capital touched heterogeneous spheres, affecting the urban context (road network, green areas, etc.), infrastructures (sewage, electricity and water systems), but also the home environment (ventilation, layout planning, etc.). The same pathology was also behind the famous 'sventramento' of Naples carried out by the Depretis government thanks to the 1885 Law for the Rehabilitation (Alisio, 1981). But at the end of the 19th century, tuberculosis also triggered a reflection on the need for more hygienic spaces, prompting architects to improve ventilation and the water system, as well as to reduce dust by removing the overabundance of curtains and carpets in favour of white walls (Teyssot, 1987).

As Beatriz Colomina has stated, «[...] l'architettura moderna ha più che altro a che fare con la difesa della salute» (Rodriguez Martinez, 2020). The Spanish flu, often considered to be the last great pandemic, somehow influenced the hygiene reform of the 1920s, implicitly dictating the rules of the clean, essential and antiseptic rationalist home. Similarly, the Covid-19 has questioned housing by undermining the certainties of modern culture and forcing us to slow down our pace and adjust our priorities. Private and public spaces have revealed their shortcomings, both in quantity and quality. And so, press – specialized magazines or widely circulated newspapers – websites and social networks all over the world have generated a lively debate involving architects, designers, urban planners, sociologists, philosophers, etc, second only to that of doctors, virologists and epidemiologists (Fig. 1).

From activities carried out by the *Corriere della Sera* (*Cambiare la città? Dialoghi sulla vita, l'ambiente, la letteratura e l'architettura dopo il Coronavirus*, 29/05/2020)

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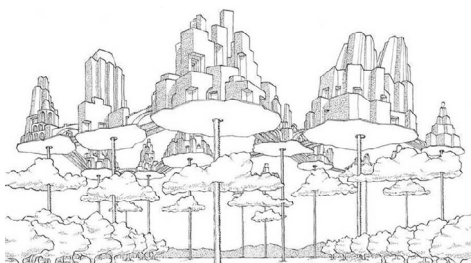


Fig. 1 | A virus-proof city (source: www.lastampa.it; B. Camerana, 2020).

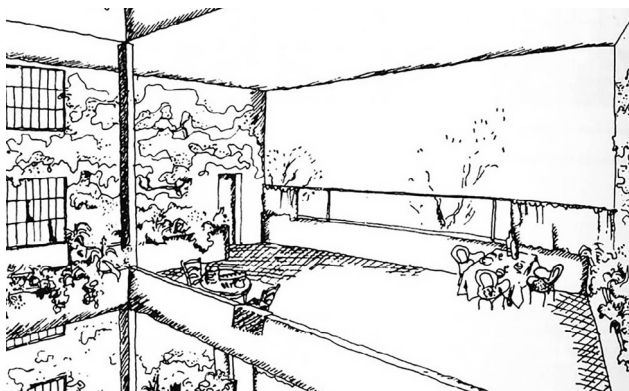


Fig. 2 | Dining between balconies (source: www.ilrestodelcarlino.it, 2020).

to the Observatory on the Coronavirus emergency realized by the Fondazione Innovazione Urbana in Bologna, from the numerous surveys accomplished by *Il Giornale dell'Architettura* to the set-up of the multidisciplinary online platform DOPO (Design Oriented Postpandemic Opportunities) or the architettiperilfuturo.it – inaugurated with a 24-hour marathon of thematic events – the considerations on the living environments in Covid-19 emergency times have inevitably shone a light to the inequalities and vulnerabilities of today's society (Chipperfield, 2020), rekindling the spotlight on the housing issues. The analysis focuses on debates about the impact of health emergency on our daily lives, paying particular attention to the domestic and urban environment in Covid times, deliberately omitting other spaces such as work and care ones. The study of the views taken by the many actors of the urban transformation process will allow us to identify the current limits and future outlooks of the contemporary city. The critical re-reading of these topics will bring out convergences and oppositions resulting from different geographical and cultural contexts.

Living the pandemic | Perhaps, most of all, the pandemic has undermined current housing models that have proved inadequate to face the sudden changes imposed by the emergency. The need to overturn consolidated design schemes and invent new ones has triggered an intense multidisciplinary debate, including not only architectural, construction and design issues, but also technological, biological, psychological ones (Biolchini and D'Ambrosio, 2020). This unexpected 'domestic cult' arising from the confinement (Di Caro, 2020a), has revealed the inadequacy of our 'performing' townhouses – characterized by small sizes and minimal or sometimes non-existent open spaces of relevance (Magnago Lampugnani, 2020) – increasingly experienced as hotels rather than shelters (Lambertucci, 2020). As Carlo Sini, one of the greatest Italian philosophers, observes, the lockdown has offered new perceptions of our everyday spaces: these rooms sometimes unknown, which we often cross without experiencing them because in the throes of our 'runs and chases without rest', reveal their 'suffocating repetitiveness' (Sini and Bonalume, 2020).

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tion to the quantitative aspects, it would be necessary to consider the qualitative ones, including parameters of structural, constructive and plant eco-compatibility (Pica Ciarrarra, 2020).

These criteria, moreover widely shared, also converge in the Guidelines developed during the emergency by the famous Italian architectural firms Fuksas and Archea and even sent to the Italian President Sergio Mattarella as a request for reflection on the new requirements of living (Maciocchi, 2020). The recommendations for the design of new less isolated and safer pandemic habitats, developed with the advice of an international multidisciplinary team, include the use of new technologies but also the recovery of old habits (Fig. 3). The aeration systems with automatic open-air changes are flanked by natural ventilation ones (Lambertucci, 2020), while the need for a connecting space between inside and outside leads back to the tradition of the vestibule of the ancient Roman Domus or the genkan, typical antechamber of the Japanese dwelling (Fiorino, 2020). In the post-pandemic house of Fuksas and his colleagues (Lambertucci, 2020), therefore, the entrance hall becomes a precious and fundamental area where storing objects (shoes, clothing, masks), but also placing devices to sanitize (hand basin, lamps for ultraviolet ray) and medical instruments for the remote diagnosis (pressure gauge, pulse oximeter).

And other distribution spaces, gradually eliminated from our homes in the name of surfaces optimization and on the basis of increasingly stringent market logic, are also back in vogue. The corridor, dating back to the 19th century, defined by Rumiz (2020a, 2020b) in his quarantine diary as the new 'empty place', today could satisfy the needs of privacy and constitute 'a modern sorting center' among other spaces overloaded with functions (Marcante and Testa, 2020). The service rooms would also be susceptible to renovation: if liquid crystal screens in the kitchen (Fig. 4) could trigger a visual connection with the rest of the family (Fiorino, 2020), the 'fragmentation' of the bathrooms would allow its simultaneous use by more people (Ferri, 2020). The living room continues to be the undisputed fulcrum of the dwelling: the multifunction-

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Fig. 5 | Immeuble-villas by Le Corbusier, 1922 (source: www.ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com, 2020).

Fig. 6 | Nemausus by Jean Nouvel in Nîmes, 1985-87 (source: www.jeannouvel.com, 2020).

Fig. 7 | Renewal of a building in Bordeaux by Lacaton & Vassal (source: www.lacatonvassal.com, 2019).



al place where it is possible to gather or isolate oneself, thanks to new technologies and special modular and removable furnishings, that allow different uses, even contemporary, of the same environment (Fiorino, 2020).

In the long months of confinement, even the ‘borders’ of our homes, representing an alternative to the virtual sociality and allowing the search for real relationships, have assumed renewed importance (Fusco and Saitto, 2016; Fig. 5). The threshold, as Agostino Bossi already predicted in 2016, from simple «[...] piano di calpestio materialmente differenziato interposto tra la pavimentazione di due spazi comunicanti tra loro [si è trasformata nel] luogo dove s’incontrano e interagiscono spazi abitativi, punti di vista, stati d’animo, aspettative, sentimenti» (Bassanelli, 2020b, p. 49). The windows, like telescopes oriented towards the horizon, (Fiorino, 2020), have constituted privileged observation points and with their sills, sometimes transformed into seats or small gardens, they seem to have renewed the concept of ‘furnished window’ conceived by Giò Ponti in the 1950s (Fiorino, 2020; Arditi and Serrato, 1994). Terraces and balconies, safe floating microcosms, have been at the same time symbol of privacy and connection with the world, representing a sort of ‘hand outstretched towards others’, as the French philosopher Paquot states (2020; Origoni and Origoni, 2020).

The presence of spaces projecting outwards has shown that they could have a deep impact on the life quality of the inhabitants, especially the elderly and children (Mello 2020b). And this issue, already subject of reflection in the past – as shown, among others, by the experiences of Jean Nouvel in Nîmes (Fig. 6), who had granted public apartments a double view and terraces (Suigo, 2020); or architects Lacaton & Vassal in Bordeaux (Fig. 7), who renovated an old post-war building by removing the original facades and adding a layer of balconies and winter gardens to ensure air, light and greenery (Bassanelli, 2020b) – has become today still more current (Bassanelli, 2020a). In light of what has happened the provision of open spaces, preferably with shape and size that allow them to be livable, appears to be an essential requirement for post-pandemic housing. And that could also constitute an opportunity to renew the re-

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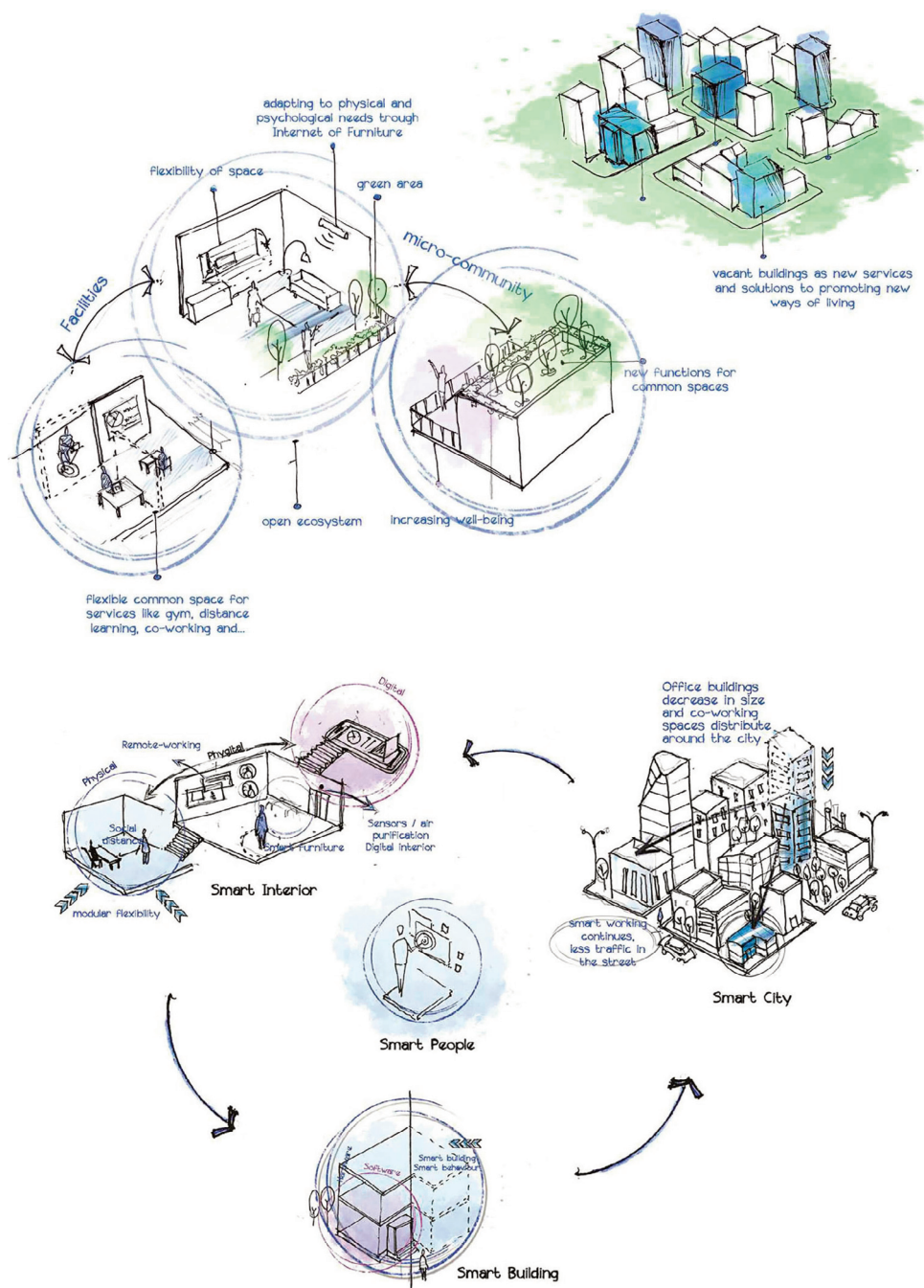


Fig. 8 | 'Living' according to Matteo Fantoni Studio (source: thedesign.tech/it/, 2020).

Fig. 9 | 'Workplace' according to DEGWLombardini22 (source: thedesign.tech/it/, 2020).



Figg. 10, 11 | Feel Up Town in Milan
by Sio Engineering and Labics (source:
[www. impresarusconi.it](http://www.impresarusconi.it), 2020).



Fig. 12 | Milan Tower by Studio Berretta Associati (source: www.impre-sarusconi.it, 2020).

lationship with nature, thanks to condominium gardens on the roof or greenhouses on the terraces (Spremberg and Ferrari, 2020). But perhaps, today more than inventing new forms, it would be enough to rediscover the traditional ones, already characterized by a certain continuity between inside and outside, as Giò Ponti underlined in 1928: «[...] Nella casa all'italiana non vi è grande distinzione di architettura fra esterno ed interno: altrove vi è addirittura separazione di forme ed i materiali: da noi l'architettura di fuori penetra nell'interno, e non trascura né la pietra né gli intonaci né l'affresco; essa nei vestiboli e nelle gallerie, nelle stanze e nelle scale, con archi, nicchie, volte e con colonne regola e ordina in spaziose misure gli ambienti per la nostra vita. Dall'interno la casa italiana riesce all'aperto con i suoi portici e le sue terrazze, con le pergole e le verande, con le logge ed i balconi, le altane e i belvedere, invenzioni tutte confortevolissime per l'abitazione serena e tanto italiane che in ogni lingua sono chiamate con i nomi di qui» (Ponti, 1928, p. 7).

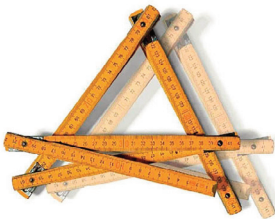
The search for continuity between inside and outside has also contributed to the rediscovery of those condominium spaces (courtyards, stairwells, roof terraces) often neglected, which instead in the phase of confinement have revealed all their effectiveness, transforming themselves into places of aggregation, socialization, physical well-being and leisure (Molinari, 2020). That suggests the opportunity to exploit its multiple potentials in the future, enriching them with appropriately equipped areas to be used for numerous activities (smart working, e-learning, gym and kindergarten), perhaps also providing sanitation facilities and first aid equipment (ventilation, oxygen tank, defibrillator). Even the existing buildings, wisely reorganized, could provide adequate responses to current needs and new spaces, possibly recovered from courtyards, porches, attics and roofs.

The results of the ongoing debate already seem to converge on the concept of a post-pandemic home based on requirements of flexibility, hygiene and sustainability. These criteria are well explained also in the programmatic document DesignTech for

Future – Design and Technologies to Design the World after Covid-19, promoted by the DesignTech Hub of Mind (Milan Innovation District) to renew the social coexistence rules and identify new models of spaces to live and inhabit, both private and public (Whitepaper, 2020; Figg. 8, 9). Arising from a multidisciplinary analysis and articulated in different areas of intervention, the guidelines proposed by MIND, show the convergence between design and technology as the answer to all current emergencies and suggest the characteristics of tomorrow's buildings: choice of germo-repellent materials, sustainable and assemblable solutions; usability of open spaces to making homes 'open ecosystems'; great attention to the wellbeing of the inhabitants by monitoring many parameters (air quality, water, thermal, light and acoustic comfort) and using appropriate sanitation systems (Editoriale, 2020a; Whitepaper, 2020).

And precisely in this direction the first Milanese experiments, now in the implementation phase, seem to go (Peretti, 2020). The new Feel Up Town complex (January 2021-2023), arising from the collaboration between Sio Engineering and Labics, involves the construction of four buildings composed around a large internal courtyard of about 3,000 square meters, a sort of exclusive garden raised above the road (Figg. 10, 11). Based on the principles of 'wellbeing city' and 'healthy city', the residences will be equipped with diversified condominium services (swimming pool, gym, co-working rooms, cinema, children's play area, collective lockers) that can be booked via an app and sanitized after the use (Editorial 2020b). Even the type of skyscraper seems to be able to satisfy the renewed needs of the pandemic. The Milan Tower (Fig. 12), near the Central Station, designed by Studio Beretta Associati, with its 24 floors for residential use, as well as including state-of-the-art condominium equipment, will give particular attention to sustainability (photovoltaic panels, rainwater collection for irrigation purposes; controlled ventilation systems that provide air exchange and exploit the heat of the expelled one) and the sanitation systems (UV lamps that kill virus-

PIERLUIGI NICOLIN ARCHITETTURA IN QUARANTENA



SKIRA



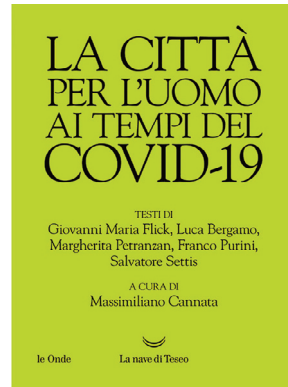
Fig. 13 | 'Architettura in quarantena' (2020), book cover.

Fig. 14 | The day after by Stefano Boeri (source: www.larepubblica.it, 2020).

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Fig. 15 | 'Cucinella: con il Post-Covid la rivincita della periferia e delle città medie' (source: www.assoinar.it, 2020).

Fig. 16 | 'La città per l'uomo ai tempi del Covid-19' (2020), book cover.



es and bacteria, Pco active sanitation, borrowed from the aerospace sector; Galli, 2020).

City vs Countryside | The impacts of the pandemic are not limited to residential spaces and associated areas, but also affect the city. And in this process of transformation on an urban scale, the architect also plays a fundamental role: he reshapes the places of sociality, mobility, and services, responding to the renewed needs resulting from the management of health emergencies that have even changed the relationship between public and private life (Spada, 2020). Pierluigi Nicolini (2020, p. 27), however, warns against «[...] tentazioni che vedono nel crudele distanziamento interpersonale un precedente da cui partire per costruire gli schemi urbanistici del futuro» (Fig. 13).

The old 'city vs. countryside' opposition is back. Stefano Boeri (Fig. 14) with his slogan 'away from the cities' (Giovana, 2020) and Massimiliano Fuksas (Musillo, 2020) who sees the countryside as an 'alternative for all', are the supporters of a return to life in those abandoned villages of which our peninsula is so rich. Thus, the change in our lifestyles could also be a valuable opportunity for the regeneration and rediscovery of places worthy of enhancement (D'Argenio, 2020). As the Milanese architect explains, this is not a 'nostalgic or romantic' operation but a 'totally contemporary' one (ANSA editorial office, 2020), which does not disregard the use of new technologies to overcome the digital divide and make existing buildings environmentally friendly, avoiding further land consumption and triggering a circular economy. In the exhibition that opened in New York in February 2020, Countryside – The Future, Rem Koolhaas had already identified the countryside as the site of the next urban utopia (Mello, 2020a). Emphasizing the 'silent modernity of the countryside', the Dutch architect highlighted the change in perception of a space that has always been considered uncivil and to abandon, and which is now gradually being transformed into a place of civil redemption, a guarantee of survival, even becoming beautiful and attractive.

Proponents of the rediscovery of the countryside contrast with advocates of bringing nature back into the city by introducing greenery into open areas, roofs, roads, and

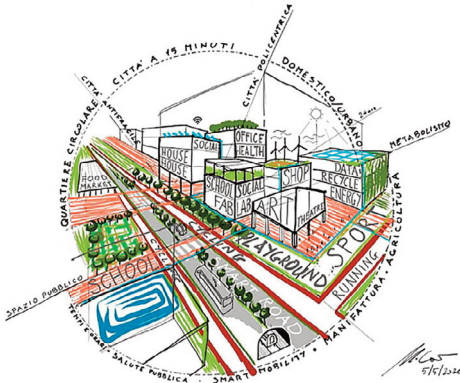


Fig. 17 | 'La città della prossimità aumentata' by Maurizio Carta (source: www.ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com, 2020).

unused railways, as suggested, among others, by the famous Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron (Editoriale 2020c). Mario Cucinella himself is somewhat perplexed about the happy move to the countryside saying «Green, no grazie» (Masneri, 2020). For the Sicilian-born architect, moving to the rural areas would be «[...] difficile, faticoso, mancano reti e collegamenti fisici. In Italia abbiamo questa risorsa magnifica che sono le città medie. Credo che il futuro passerà da lì e dalle opportunità offerte dalle periferie» (Borangini, Bond and De Fabiis, 2020, p. 17; Fig. 15). It is therefore a question of rethinking the shape of the future city and its relationship with the countryside. Many actors of the current debate believe that the solution could be found by stopping the overbuilding of agricultural land, combating urban segregation, discouraging overcrowded neighbourhoods and buildings, and finally protecting the historic landscape «[...] come pegno vivente di una vita urbana che non intenda divorziare dalla natura» (Settis, 2020a, p. 9; Fig. 16).

To reconcile city and countryside, the historian Salvatore Settis believes is indispensable «[...] la piena coscienza della loro necessaria complementarietà e il ripristino, fra l'una e l'altra, di confini chiari alla mente, ma anche fisicamente percepibili» (Settis, 2020a, p. 7). Renzo Piano also tries to imagine a world where there are no differences between urban and rural, the center and the suburbs: «[...] Esiste, dice lui: basta progettarlo. Ed è da qui che possiamo ripartire» (Piano, 2020, p. 4). Still intending to recompose the city/countryside dichotomy to find new balances and ways of life, the '15-minute city' model, developed by Professor Carlos Montero (2016) and already tested by several French municipalities, is back in vogue. Osmotic and polycentric, it appears as one of the most welcome and relevant solutions at this particular moment in our history (Fig. 17). It is essentially based on the 'circular metabolism of all functions' (Carta, 2020), where people are closer to places of production and essential services (schools, shops, restaurants, urban green and public spaces).

This functional mix could also reduce traffic circulation, thus cutting CO₂ and fine particulate matter down, and adhering to the recommendations on sustainable mobility

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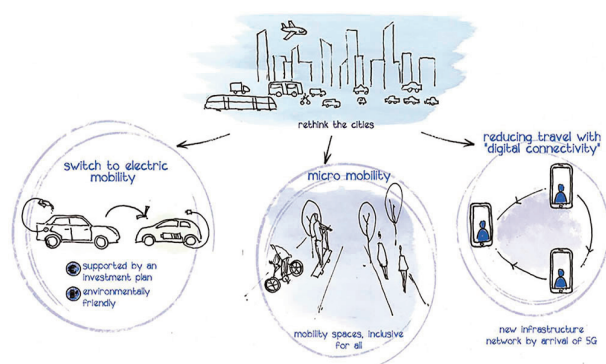


Fig. 18 | 'Mobility' according to MIC Mobility in Chain (source: thedesign.tech/it/, 2020).

Fig. 19 | The 'elastic city' of the future according to Eleonora Carrano (source: www.ilfattoquotidiano.it, 2020).

Fig. 20 | 'Cambiare la città? Dialoghi sulla vita, l'ambiente, la letteratura e l'architettura dopo il Coronavirus', poster (source: milled.com, 2020).

included in the MIND guidelines (Whitepaper, 2020; Fig. 18). Fragmentation into small, autonomous, and potentially isolated areas, as in health and climatic emergencies, is also the basis of the concept of the 'elastic city' defined by Jorge Lobos (Carrano, 2020). The Chilean architect, scientific head of the Emergency&Resilience master's degree course at the IUAV in Venice, suggests a series of self-sufficient urban clusters capable of opening up their boundaries and then closing them if necessary, breaking them down into small, autonomous, and isolated groups (Fig. 19). Renewing the sense of community, applying the urban model of villages also to the metropolis, seems to be the challenge for the historic centers of large cities, where civitas and the feeling of belonging are no longer present (Bertelli, 2020).

According to RiAgIta (Ripensare, Ripartire, Agire, Laboratorio città Italia) the social role of architecture is to continuously adapt open and closed spaces to new uses and with newfound coherence (Biolchini and D'Ambrosio, 2020). These goals concern the square, the traditional beating heart of our cities, but also all the other public spaces, a place of identity and community values, now searching for a new configuration as also stated by architects Michele De Lucchi and Benedetta Tagliabue (Manfra, 2020; Fig. 20). Therefore, it is not a question of realizing spaces or new public buildings, but of transforming existing ones, because, «[...] con la sua leggerezza e la sua flessibilità l'architettura moderna può facilmente rispondere a cambi di destinazione

che si rendessero necessari nei prossimi periodi» (Nicolin, 2020, p. 29). Also Cucinella argues that there are countless «[...] involucri e volumi dove basta inserire degli elementi specialistici [e che sia necessario solamente] imparare ad usarli e adattarli a nuove esigenze» (Borangini, Bond and De Fabiis, 2020, pp. 18, 19).

The urban future cannot be imagined without a preliminary rethinking of society, with a view to 'city as a common good' (Cannata, 2020), capable of increasing «[...] un'etica della cittadinanza attiva e comunitaria e che, al contempo, sia in grado di garantire ai suoi abitanti i diritti fondamentali sanciti costituzionalmente» (Cannata, 2020, p. 1). Contributing to the widespread and rapid diffusion of Covid-19 was precisely the life of proximity, especially in the metropolis, which led Settis to declare that «[...] il vero virus è la città prigioniera» (Settis, 2020b). So, it is perhaps in that revenge of the suburbs, which Cucinella names «[...] città moderna [...] dove non si vive tutti attaccati e c'è molto più spazio verde e servizi di base di prossimità» (Borangini, Bond and De Fabiis, 2020, p. 18), that a possible way out can be identified.

The city of the future will be not only smart but also safe, embodying a model where «[...] la tecnologia dialoga con la necessità di sicurezza e di controllo degli spazi, per ripristinare un senso di tranquillità nelle persone» (Whitepaper, 2020, p. 74; Fig. 21). It should also be considered a complex organism extending over a wide area, able to promote social cohesion and eco-sustainability through the use of technologies that make it possible to network and enhance local dimensions, without undermining their specific features, intensifying their strengths, and 'repairing' their weaknesses (Bertelli, 2020). While architects, town planners, and sociologists all agree that it is only outside the emergency that it will be possible to reflect collectively, weighing up the various hypotheses, Franco Purini also argues that it is essential to have «[...] conoscenza appassionata [del fenomeno urbano perché] se non ci fosse l'emozione la ragione non sarebbe infatti in grado di far sì che le idee sulla città non siano solo 'astra-

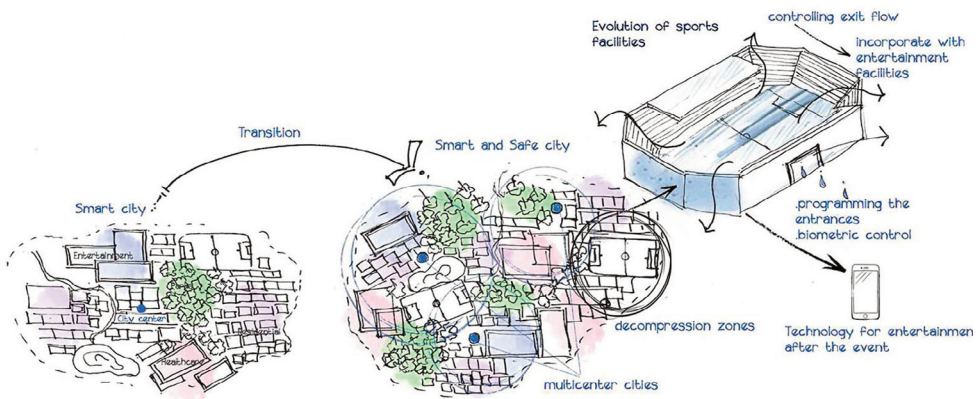


Fig. 21 | Public Spaces according to Progetto CMR (source: thedesign.tech/it/, 2020).

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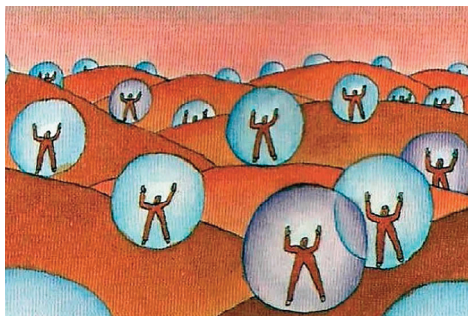


Fig. 22 | 'A distanza di sicurezza, o della prossemica'
(source: www.ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com, 2020).

zioni necessarie', ma diventino espressioni essenziali del nostro corpo, delle nostre memorie, delle speranze che vogliamo vedere realizzate e della volontà di far parte di una comunità sempre più consapevole di sé» (Purini, 2020, p. 6).

Conclusions | Initially, the voices that have filled the press and websites in recent months have focused exclusively on professional practice during the emergency (Milan, 2020; Peluso, 2020). But quite quickly they began to reflect on the relationship between architecture and Coronavirus, highlighting the limits and critical aspects of the contemporary city: from domestic to public space, from places of work to those of care, from technological networks to transport systems (Papa, 2020; Fig. 22). From these discussions, a common idea emerged of wanting to turn the crisis into an opportunity. Thus, all the actors in the urban process have begun to see the pandemic as a means of accelerating the redesign of our life scenarios, correcting the past mistakes (small surfaces, dormitories, cities without services, and green areas), and acting on the future. From this point of view, Covid-19 would represent an opportunity to rewrite spaces with greater knowledge, through multiple strategies that differ in scale, nature, and aims. The social vocation of the project, capable of making a substantial contribution to improving the life of the planet and human beings, is also becoming increasingly evident.

The awareness of the inadequacy of our homes, particularly evident in this period, has generated the new concept of the post-pandemic house: an unanimously shared model, based on maximum flexibility, revaluation of interstitial and condominium spaces and the use of new materials and technologies. The concept of sustainability, which emerges from the numerous comparisons, also seems to have expanded and no longer concerns only energy performance or compliance with current regulations: guaranteeing a life quality for the inhabitants and rebalancing the real estate market are the new priority objectives. The proposals for living in the future, therefore, converge on the need for a palingenesis (Nicolin, 2020) which could also be an unmissable opportunity to rebalance spaces and relationships, smooth out social and economic inequalities and guarantee a more sustainable existence for all (Sennet, 2020).

The urban question is still open and certainly more debated. The critique of the contemporary city, coming from many fronts, does not find a single and widely approved solution. The historical contrast between city and countryside is now again relevant: the ‘simplistic’ rediscovery of ‘insularism’, supported by many eminent protagonists of the urban process, is opposed by the perplexities of those who see this hypothesis not always easily achievable. In fact, even without defining it as a ‘past utopia’ or ‘formal exercise’ (Nicolin, 2020), many voices have highlighted all the difficulties in implementing this choice caused by bureaucratic and cultural issues and nevertheless by the ancestral infrastructural limits of the places. Therefore, recurrent mediation solutions are emerging in which nature enters the urban fabric – through green public spaces, vegetable gardens, etc – and the neighbourhoods are reconfigured according to the ‘city in 15 minutes’ model. On the other hand, as many protagonists of the debate have guessed, rurality and urbanity should not be understood as two opposing but complementary realities. Especially since living in the countryside would not always be a viable alternative and, at the end of the health emergency, cities, that are the beating heart of modernity from the time of Baudelaire to Benjamin, up to the present day (Cocco, 2017), could come back into vogue. And perhaps it is no coincidence that precisely in a metropolis like Milan, the debate is very heated and the first practical and theoretical experiments on post-epidemic living are taking place.

Numerous voices converge on the fact that probably, in the near future, we will reappropriate our private and social life, remote work will be a possibility and not a prescription. The renewed places of living will attempt to combine needs for freedom and health, currently still apparently irreconcilable paradigms. Therefore, as frequently highlighted, it is necessary to distinguish the moment of emergency from the subsequent return to normality (Di Caro, 2020b), since distancing cannot be the main requirement on which to base new projects. And therefore today, still during the pandemic, it is perhaps difficult and premature to draw conclusions, because, as Nicolin states: «[...] Dobbiamo metabolizzare, non siamo pronti a un’immediata risposta, e io su questo mi espongo. Bisogna frenare. L’architetto crede di avere la medicina universale, la panacea. Io ho preferito sposare la linea della ‘modestia’» (cit. in Moro, 2020).

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