

EDITORIAL

DIGNITY AND PLANNING: FRAMING THE ISSUE

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the world's population in unprecedented terms, both with regard to its economic and socio-spatial implications. Social distancing measures and restrictions on the use of public spaces are permanently changing our relationships with urban spaces. Space also represents a crucial dimension in the construction of policies for preventing, managing, and contrasting the spread of the virus.

Urban studies have often faced the challenges raised by health emergencies, natural disasters, and traumatic events, seizing the opportunities and need for radical rethinking of spaces and the processes that govern them. The spread of Covid-19, with all its consequences, requires us to imagine new urban structures capable of dealing with pandemic and post-pandemic contexts, and also to overcome some structural contradictions and injustices that characterize the current urban neoliberal regime: in particular, the need to protect the health of both individuals and communities, the increase in socio-spatial inequalities and the importance of guaranteeing forms of participation in social life.

Human dignity is the key element in this debate. The redesign of spaces must take into account the changes triggered by the pandemic and must adjust its internal organization to the needs that arise from time to time, in line with the possibilities and risks associated with the so-called temporary urbanism. In order to achieve this goal, the active participation of the population in the co-construction of common spaces can allow to strengthen a relationship of trust (which is generally compromised in times of crisis) with the institutions, and represents an opportunity to reactivate those forms of participation in social and political life without which the city would be deprived of its true essence, and people would be deprived of their dignity.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, and according to a debate promoted by Benjamin Davy, we decided to have a special issue of the Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning on the intersections of human dignity, planning, and urban spaces. The articles in this special issue were written before the pandemic emergency, but nevertheless make a significant contribution in reflecting on the mutual relationships between human dignity and control of spaces, in ordinary as well as extraordinary times.

In his contribution, Benjamin Davy explores connections between human dignity and planning, with the aim of highlighting the implications of plans and policies not just on social equity but also on the respectful treatment of human beings. A constant tension exists between notions of human dignity and social justice. Consequently, planners must not assume that equitable plans make everybody forget about human dignity. The question remains as to on which level planners should pursue human dignity.

The paper of Mee Kam Ng and Winnie W. S. Mak describes literature on spatial development for people's multifaceted well-being and the rights to the city, and argues for people's right to live a life with dignity in cities, in order to identify how we can build 'dignified' cities. Multifaceted well-being concerns not just the satisfaction of bodily needs but also the nurturing of good nature and human relationships in space and places. In order to achieve this goal, we need to examine 'claim rights' in spatial development for human flourishing, and to negotiate and review in a political arena whether the key governance regimes related to spatial development are contributing to human flourishing and ask pertinent power-related questions.

The paper of Balkiz Yapicioglu, Konstantinos Lalenis, and Charalampos Tsavdaroglou discusses how the complex issue of post-traumatic housing triggers spatial self-organization by the refugees, in contrast to the 'official' ones provided by the state, through the lens of the resilience theory. Through the analysis of the two cases of Athens and Thessaloniki, the authors highlight that the post trauma self-organization of mobile populations is a process that involves gaining dignity and self-respect in a new and often hostile environment.

The notion of public space as the space of democracy is the focus of the contribution of Sabine Knierbein, Jeffrey Hou and Angelika Gabauer. This paper examines the role of public space in reclaiming and reinstating democracy. By drawing on empirical findings from cities worldwide, the paper argues that the study of urban protest shows directions for new, dignified politics of public space and highlights how planners and designers may be able to contribute to the spatial emergence of human and civic dignity. The paper demonstrates that, in light of diminishing democratic institutions, spaces of resistance have a crucial role to play not only in holding state and governmental institutions accountable to people's interests but also in renewing and reclaiming democracy and pursuits of civic dignity.

The paper of Alcestis Rodi explores signs of dignity as well as planning and designs for disability in history. It seeks to establish new urban forms and introduce transformations that not only meet minimum requirements for access but also maximise possibilities for disabled people beyond the dichotomy of private and public realms. In order to develop this theoretical framework, case-study typologies of apartment buildings and urban tissues in Athens are comparatively analysed and evaluated through dignity and access-related criteria. Through an intense description of the case studies, the paper acknowledges that designing for disability is fundamentally a dignity issue, and gives examples of best practice for planners, designers, developers and policy makers.

The paper of Elizabeth Wyckaert, Hans Leinfelder, and Pascal De Decker describes public policies for refugee housing in Belgium. Describing the different phases of these policies, the paper focuses particularly on the reception phase, and suggests that there is a need to invest further in integration, in the light of the theoretical concept of path dependency. Through qualitative research, the contribution highlights the impact of asylum policies and the spatial characteristics of reception centres on the flow towards more permanent housing. Through the description of the case study, the paper makes a connection between the right to housing and notions of human dignity.

All these papers reflect profoundly on the concept of human dignity, and its implications for more sensitive planning. Other questions and reflections are still to be discussed and analysed, also in the light of the recent pandemic phenomenon, but the collection of papers of this special issue represent a strong first contribution to the debate.

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Guest Editor of the Special Issue 'Planning for Dignity'