Post-Growth Planning Collective
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Post-growth planning for post-corona times
Reinventing a growth-independent planning in times of crisis

We live in an extreme situation in most countries since mid of March 2020. It can hardly be expressed with words in any of our languages. We are moved to see impacts as well as strong collective measures taken in Europe and world-wide. Conflicting emotions and thoughts are lining up along the deadly route of the Corona virus, but also along the measures of fighting against it. Time becomes a crucial variable when quick decisions are needed – and taken. Things that were impossible before March became a necessity overnight. We currently experience the importance of system relevant infrastructures and public services and we learn what is most relevant for a good life for all members of society. A combination with a strong directive state and an ambitious self-organising society succeeds for now, instead of previously imagined positive futures in self-organisation with an enabling state. Powerful economic actors become observers of unforeseen shocks. However, our future remains so uncertain and unpredictable that it seems to be too far ahead to embrace and to see today's opportunities. We are sad to see what Corona means for less advantaged parts of our European society and less advantaged parts of the world. The current developments reveal once again the ridiculous truth of spatial injustice. In any way, we first need to get to some proven way of dealing with the pandemic before we can make future visions happen in space.

Even in times of the deepest crisis, democratic debates and thinking through alternatives should never stop. Corona forces us to so many new things at the same time – such as new rules on how to behave in public space, digital tools for communication and work and new production lines. We should use existing documents like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement as guides. We do not have to reinvent everything, but we can choose our future means to work and plan in it now.

The Corona crisis has an enormous economic and social impact that worries all of us. But it is also inherently spatial. Staying at home means that everyone has been asked to retreat from public spaces. If we decide for social distancing, this means to keep a spatial distance between members of our society. The Netherlands already talk about the '1.5 metre society' as a new normal that might stay with us for a longer time. We all live in space and we will continue to live and plan in space. We believe that the more we get knowledge and control over COVID-19, the more we will be able to think ahead and to restart a collective debate on spatial visions, their ethical/moral foundations and ways to organize and lead them. What might the current Corona crisis mean from a post-growth planning perspective? This short discussion paper aims at supporting a debate within society and spatial planning about imagining positive growth-independent spatial futures and finding ways to plan and organize for them.

Introductory remarks

The Corona crisis has focused our perspective to the importance of critical infrastructures and public services. In particular, the crisis reveals how interrelated processes are to provide even the most basic goods and services. The so-called 'heroes of Corona' (such as healthcare workers, doctors, nurses, cleaners and cashiers) whose work fulfils the needs of everyday life are collective points of attention. Water, food, mobility and local production are not a given but the work of many, often low-income, workers. Spatial aspects of our lives change rapidly at the same time. We could live everywhere and be evenly distributed in space if we live fully digital and #stayathome. Neighbours and close networks help us, but density of people becomes suspicious. Are dense cities a great achievement of the past and maybe the recent present (see authors like Edward Glaeser and Richard Florida), and now to be abandoned (again) because they raise fears of density and virus spread? What can and should we as planners do to provide and safeguard the spatial preconditions for encounter and social connections?

Society will never be completely online. Even in deep crisis, we see the importance of real-world creativity and cultural events as a coping mechanism and a sign of collective hope: singing from balconies, shopping for our neighbours and video calls with friends and relatives are signs of need for physical connections. On the other side, we must ask: who is excluded? Who are the ones that we do not see now? Our special concern must be for homeless people, some single-person households, functional or full illiterate people, children and elderly people (see also www.christian.lamker.de/2020/04/corona-the-ones-we-do-not-see-but-need-to-look-at).

Until recently, digital transformation of society and economy related to even more spatial movement at all scales and the emergence of many 'third spaces' like cafés for living and working. Now that this suddenly stops, distortions and new exclusions open that need attention. Traditional families are back as main social reference points and we do not have much to say about diverse models of living in times of Corona crisis. Post-growth planning needs to include the whole diversity of our society into planning processes and planning after Corona must engage constructively especially with those who are out of sight.

Six propositions of post-growth planning in times of crisis

The following six propositions are the cornerstone of post-growth planning according to Christian Lamker & Viola Schulze Dieckhoff in the position paper from 2019 (see www.postgrowthplanning.com, paper in German: 'Sechs Thesen einer Postwachstumsplanung'). Each of them is supplemented with a short paragraph on their meaning for spatial planning with and after Corona.

1) Post-growth planning needs new criteria for success as a basis for action!

Measuring success on growth-based criteria – like the Gross Domestic product (GDP) – is not viable in the long run. Crucial elements of today such as non-paid care work and 'home schooling' are not covered. Bold scenarios open a range of alternative futures (e. g. in German: www.zukunftsinstitut.de/artikel/der-corona-effekt-4-zukunftsszenarien). How can a crisis like Corona help us to alter criteria for recovering afterwards? The Corona crisis adds to the need to imagine a common positive future, the need for renewed collective storytelling, a way out of

social distancing and a solution for new and old conflicts that reoccur through density of physical and social closeness. Planning sees an emerging debate on density with its costs and benefits arising (see e. g. https://minnesotareformer.com/2020/04/07/will-covid-19-virus-drive-us-farther-apart-or-bring-us-together for a positive outlook by Ann Markusen). These debates need to avoid black & white thinking and putting forward clear-cut alternatives. We need to cut off extremes of past years (like overtourism and short distance flights). At the same time, we need to ensure that we develop ourselves in global relations and as a global society that cares for our environment and a good life for all. An unhealthy surrounding and a loss of biodiversity possibly supports the move of a virus from animals to humans. Healthy urban and rural surroundings help all of us to cope with such a situation and to recover.

2) Post-growth planning means just and democratic decisions!

Public squares, parks, roads and public buildings are core spaces of democratic exchange – at least in ideal terms of the European City, but also reaching back to the Agora of the Greek polis. In any case, they are spaces of encounter, of community, of collective togetherness and of living in diversity and productive conflicts. During Corona, squares and parks are closed or limited to spaces for moving around, for individual distraction and for individual sports. Post-growth planning needs local democracy and self-organization (cooperation) and enhance the interrelation of direct and indirect forms of democracy (like hackathons, see #wirvsvirus in Germany).

We see bold state actions that limit basic rights and freedom. We need to get back to an open society that encourages the individual to take its social responsibility facilitated by strong democratic leadership. The crisis points us to the unequal distribution of risks in society and should allow us to think through ways to adjust the power relations between state authorities, large economic players, civil society and science. This includes the necessary debate on vulnerability in face of (multible) crisis but also on transparency, open data, facts and fake news and our privacy rules. An open society and democracy need privacy and trust.

3) Post-growth planning triggers major transformations through small-scale interventions!

We see the importance of mixed and socially stable neighbourhoods and neighbourhood help in times of crisis. In a time where global movements come to a hold, small-scale actions shape our lives. Every helping hand even on the smallest production sites matters now if they can produce relevant goods, most importantly protective equipment like masks. Roads in some major cities around the world are blocked for motorized vehicles to give way to pedestrians and bicycles, just to ensure the possibility to move in a 'preventive' distance. Our existence is bound to space and we need spaces for self-expression, also as part of our own dignity (see also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6_cl3t1hXM). The Corona crisis as a pandemic does no longer have a specific geographic dimension. It shows effects in any place, though the impact on people vastly differs along socio-economic factors.

Beyond the urgent crises, we need to get space back in the sense of collective spaces and as spaces of interaction and learning. An equitable society can only work if we think it spatially. Planning will be about working through new feelings of closeness and distance after times of social distancing and about making spaces enabling for everyone. Planning such spaces en-

sures unexpected encounters, interaction and communication apart from digital scripts and algorithms that mainly focus on likes and preferences to widen the imaginable. Encountering the 'non-likes' is a major force for collective action. Urban emotions and urban empathy can be triggered through all five human senses. Planners might also be thinking about 'non-like algorithms' to plan a virtual urban space that sustains real world urbanity.

4) Post-growth planning needs experimental and artistic actions!

Intergenerational questions remain in the core of a debate that experiments with ideas and actions. The Corona crisis has made unimaginable ad-hoc experiments possible. Such an open and experimental attitude can also help to work on climate crisis that remains. We have seen an intergenerational divide before Corona, expressed by youth movements like Fridays for Future. We see artistic action in large-scale hackathons, smaller and larger graffities and in many artists, who share their work online and enter many living rooms for the first time. Furthermore, experiments to sell products through windows, to establish local delivery services or to improvise neighbourhood shopping support pop up around the world. Experimental and artistic actions help to bridge polarisations and to open new stories and positive futures. This includes finding a new balance between public and private and to re-learn borders and distances with questions such as: how will we be able to ride in dense buses afterwards? Which signs show us a need for distance or closeness? How will we use shops and cafés? How can the idea of the commons help going back into the future?

5) Post-growth planning must learn from failures!

The urban and social fabric is more vulnerable than expected. Corona effects every country and community, so the crisis does not allow for externalizing effects. Where can people (especially deprived) move, when they have to be physically distanced? The measures taken now must be evaluated, as they are clearly not something to redo easily in future. Appropriateness need to be ensured. It is harder than with the climate crisis not to look at problems occurring elsewhere by own lifestyles and consumption choices. Established procedures, known ways of thinking as well as national and international agreements are nevertheless failing to provide much against Corona. For a long time, we have observed what happened until Corona reached our own countries, regions and cities. The failure of existing networks, the re-emergence of national borders and of isolation are a starting point to learn for more solidarity. Agreed international goals like the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris climate agreement and alike are good starting points to work for a stronger preparedness against pandemics and other global threats.

6) Post-growth planners are all of us!

In the global north, some people enjoy free time with family, friends and in their local neighbourhoods during lock-down days. They might be able to take back control over space and society without possibilities of consumption. However, physical distancing might also affect physical health, family violence, psychological diseases and alike on the long run. In other parts of the world, people are not even able to wash their hands regularly, they are squeezed into small scale apartments and not being able to earn their daily wage. For everyone, Corona hinders personal fulfilment due to social (or better: physical) distancing. Digital interaction does not weigh up to a physical meeting, a hug or touch. It is all of us to think beyond Corona and to plan with a positive collective vision that mirrors the diversity and richness of society.

Outlook

Two 'positive' scenarios are put forward by different actors today: first scenario: we live in a Corona bubble of (happy) isolation with a lack of spatial conflicts, a lack of surprises and confrontation with challenging world views even after a lack of finance and jobs in the Corona lockdown. We want to wait and then return to the normal as it was before. However, the longer lockdown lasts, the more unlikely this option is. The threat is that we lack a clear vision as much has already changed and simply bouncing back is not an option to choose. Getting back to before is already impossible.

The second scenario: we return as an open society that emphasizes, solidary, connectedness, empathy and a lifestyle based on principles of sufficiency. We have managed to include disadvantaged groups during the crisis and have engaged with basic needs and desires. We have used the time to debate ways to develop and use spaces afterwards. Thoughts open on the change of consumption and production patterns and on mobility options. This opportunity scenario can use visioning and collective backcasting to develop measures of socio-ecological transformation and allow to plan for a smart recovery.

The advice to all of us around Easter remains to stay at home. Social distancing is of major importance. This does not and should not stop thinking: How can we, as planners, support keeping or even strengthening social contacts without spatial contacts? How can we assist a democratic debate about spatial futures and a new meaning of the spatial for the social (local, regional and global)? Time to ask: will planning past Corona be a post-growth planning? What are the new roles for planners? Get in touch with your communities, your representatives and with us! Post-growth planning means collective exploration, inspiration and leading towards new visions and goals. In words based on Star Trek: To boldly plan what no planner has planned before.

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