WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC:
A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra

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Organização das Nações Unidas para a Educação, a Ciência e a Cultura

Universidade de Coimbra – Alta e Sofia inscrita na Lista do Património Mundial em 2013

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CITIES

Carlos Fortuna

The effect of COVID-19 on cities is profound. It has paralysed the economy and social coexistence. It has stopped transport and threatened employment. It promoted learning without a social environment. It interrupted music, suspended cinema, killed street life. It filled the hospitals. Fear set in and the urban death scene made itself felt.

Cities do not die easily. Only 42 cities have disappeared from the map from the year 1100 to the present. Although they are vulnerable expressions of human organisation, cities have been able to cope with their own decline. Whether such decline is caused by urban space disputes, war devastation or political, financial or geographical and environmental calamities, cities have sought resilient and sustainable solutions. Always with enormous asymmetries and disparities, visible in the global North and South. On their different scales, *Detroitism* and *Aleppism* are examples of the urban regeneration effort.

Cities insist on being the basis of modern society. Is this enough for a post-pandemic regeneration of the city to be expected? What other languages will have to be invented?

In the city people are together, and it is estimated that two-thirds of humankind will be urban by the year 2050, with the indelible mark of the demographic tragedy of poor cities in the global South. Only cities have the resources to focus on solutions to the crises we will be facing. Other political languages will have to emerge in the crucible of city innovation and urban culture:

- The language of *the street*, with greater intergenerational respect and easy coexistence with differences;
- The language of human-scale *mobility* and green spaces, with more cycle paths, more walking spaces and less waste;
- The language of public *transport*, with a public system that is less polluting, close by and accessible;
- The language of *buildings*, with new environmental precautions and other means of safety and internal circulation;
- The language of *work and employment,* with greater autonomy and easier adaptation to innovative production systems;
- The language of *education*, with more information and more digitality alongside social contextualisation;
- The language of *cultural health*, with consistency and openness to groups and native places of creation;
- The language of moderate, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible *consumption*;
- The language of *spatial deconcentration* of facilities and resources, with light, functional urban structures.

The perverse logic of *accelerationism* and urban *instantaneity* has to be reversed, so that new slow and collective languages of doing and being in cities can be tried out.

It is necessary to surprise the urban future, just like COVID-19 caught cities by surprise and made them inactive.

Rijeka's example is a powerful one. All of a sudden, the city saw its European Capital of Culture 2020 plan ruined. It has reinvented itself and is now offering alternative cultural languages: ballet without physical contact, concerts in unfinished buildings, conferences in ancient monuments, theatre with safe physical distance.

Other cities soon put into action urban projects planned for 2030. The confrontation with the coronavirus should serve to forge new *urbanities* and create *other* cities, different from the known urban "normality".