



COVID-19 AND CITIES. BUILDING RESILIENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

(Organized in collaboration with the Journal of Comparative Urban Law and Policy and the International Journal of Human Rights)

CONCEPT NOTE

A. BACKGROUND

1. The Covid-19 Pandemic

“The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War II. Since its emergence in Asia late last year, the virus has spread to every continent except Antarctica. Cases have rapidly risen daily in Africa, the Americas, and Europe. Countries are racing to slow the spread of the virus by testing and treating patients, carrying out contact tracing, limiting travel, quarantining citizens, and cancelling large gatherings such as sporting events, concerts, and schools. The pandemic is moving like a wave — one that may yet crash on those least able to cope. But COVID-19 is much more than a health crisis. By stressing every one of the countries it touches, it has the potential to create devastating social, economic and political crises that will leave deep scars” (*COVID-19 pandemic. Humanity needs leadership and solidarity to defeat the coronavirus*, in UNDP.org).

2. The GPN

GPN is an international network in the field of human sciences, aimed at bringing together academics as well as distinguished experts, with a view to mutually exchange research and information on pandemics, engage in deep-rooted discussions and bring forward solutions for decision-makers based on analysis of best practices and comparison of experiences. To this end we have identified the following thematic focuses: Covid-19 and government response, human rights, environment, cities, competition, digital society, taxation, healthcare systems, public management, international organizations, international investments and virtual teams. As a newly established Global Network, the GPN will be shaking the global debate on political-legal-socio-economic recovery, supporting and enhancing the role of the Research, with several actions and team working as one across different aspects of the response. Therefore the GPN will undertake a series of academic activities through 2022. GPN’s activities will include webinars, drafting of scientific reports, and academic

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publications. Moreover, the GPN will serve as a unique forum to collect relevant contributions on global responses to COVID-19 and its legacy, to prompt further debate and enable knowledge-sharing among high-level academic institutions worldwide, and to spur future cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research collaborations.

3. Journal of Comparative Urban Law and Policy

The Journal of Comparative Urban Law and Policy (ed.-in-chief Julian Conrad Juergensmeyer, Georgia State University College of Law) is a tool for lawyers, planners, policy-makers and scholars working on metropolitan growth issues and interested in learning more about how cities around the world tackle the same issues. Articles focus on issues such as equitable and sustainable development; taxation and infrastructure finance; social mix, affordable housing, and housing finance; historic preservation; and climate change, environmental law, and greenspace preservation.

4. The International Journal of Human Rights

The International Journal of Human Rights (Taylor & Francis online) is affiliated with the Human Rights Researchers Network of the University of London. It covers an exceptionally broad spectrum of human rights issues: human rights and the law, race, religion, gender, children, class, refugees and immigration. In addition to these general areas, the journal publishes articles and reports on the human rights aspects of: genocide, torture, capital punishment and the laws of war and war crimes. To encourage debate, the editors publish Forum pieces and discussion papers from authoritative writers in the field. They also welcome comments, reflections, thematic essays and review articles and critical surveys of the literature.

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B. THE WEBINAR: CITIES, ENVIRONMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS

1. Overview

I. The difficulties and sometimes the failure of international, national and local policies to prevent and respond effectively to Covid-19 pandemic has brought attention to the need to provide a workable framework for risk prevention and health emergencies management. Apart from being merely a global public healthcare system failure, Covid-19 has highlighted, at all institutional levels, deficiency in terms of economic, social and institutional resiliency and environmental and human rights protection.

Among different institutional levels, cities, as the main site of the pandemic, deserve particular attention.

As the recent experience demonstrates, unsustainable cities, urban lifestyles, polluted and degraded environment as well as rising inequalities and compression of human rights represent the context for the spread of the pandemic and the aggravation of its impact on health and quality of life for people.

II. In this scenario the virus has challenged the very future of cities and the question today is whether there will be a death of cities or whether urbanism will continue, how city life will be transformed, between contact tracing and social distancing and what will be the new business models, which activities will survive. There are different points of view and different predictions: the current phase is dominated by uncertainty about the prospects for the city (2020, R. Florida et al.)

III. The explosion of Covid-19 is pushing towards a systemic rethinking of urban policies around some essential and indisputable lines of change in order to orient them towards more effective sustainability and resiliency (SDGs 11) based on the linkages between health emergency, environmental issues and human rights and on the use of the artificial intelligence.

IV. Covid-19 has, in fact, immediately brought attention to the environmental issue.

First, as widely acknowledged, the risk of emergence and spread of infectious diseases increases as nature is destroyed. Loss of biodiversity and collapse of ecosystems are disrupting barriers and increasing contact and the transmission of diseases from animals to humans. The main causes include deforestation, unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, intensive agriculture and

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farming, soil consuming, climate change, pollution of air, water and soil, linear economy, (EU Commission 2020; IPBES 2019).

Second, researchers are linking air pollution with the risk of death from COVID-19 showing that higher pollution levels will result in higher numbers of hospitalizations, higher numbers of deaths, and need for more resources (Xiao Wu, Rachel C. Nethery, Benjamin M. Sabath, Danielle Braun, Francesca Dominici 2020).

Moreover, as WHO recognized, “the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygienic conditions is essential for protecting human health during all infectious disease outbreaks, including coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Ensuring evidenced-based and consistently applied WASH and waste management practices in communities, homes, schools, marketplaces, and health-care facilities will help prevent human-to-human transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19” (WHO FAO, 2020).

Finally, it is commonly recognized that environmental degradation and deprivation affect in particular the most vulnerable communities in cities and these inequalities pose a dramatic problem of environmental and social justice.

V. The priority of environmental issues is also linked to the human rights perspective. Covid-19 has indeed strengthened the dependence of many of our fundamental human rights on a healthy environment. Access to a healthy environment and to natural resources such as water and basic sanitation is a precondition for the same possibilities of defence against the virus and the connected rights to life itself and dignity.

COVID-19 has also impacted a wide range of economic and social rights including the rights to an adequate standard of living, food, housing, working, to livelihood and way of life.

Other rights including freedoms of movement, autonomy, family life, education and to social security and social protection non-discrimination and privacy, are limited due to the measures adopted as response to the pandemic, such as lockdowns, quarantine, or contact tracing.

VI. In the face of these challenges, strengthening governance infrastructure in terms of participation, transparency and accountability, making multilevel governance efficient and including major groups and stakeholders in the pandemic response, are essential drivers for building resilience: as the recent experience demonstrates, weak systems of governance and lack of coordination and cooperation have been at the root of inefficiency in dealing with emergencies and their social and economic impacts.

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VII. Smartness is crucial for pandemic and post pandemic cities. Lockdown, social distance, contact tracing and testing have been the main responses to the outbreak. The use of technologies and artificial intelligence has been the tool to avoid the blockage of economic, institutional and social activities: smart working, online sales, distance learning, social e-meeting, e-government are examples of a great and sudden experiment for the Smart City induced by Covid-19. At the same time, this experiment has also shown its potential for protecting the environment and primarily for reducing pollution.

In addition to these multiple benefits, critical issues have also emerged, mainly in terms of the digital divide, that may become a social, economic and biological inequality, or privacy (and related freedoms) concern.

In the restarting phase, the greatest opportunity seems to depend on the capability to build resilience combining sustainability and artificial intelligence: “the green and the blue project” (L. Floridi 2020) to address economic, social and environmental challenges with an integrated approach based on digital technology and on the principle of solidarity (UNDP 2020). Cities could give a fundamental contribution to this project.

2. Structure of the meeting

The meeting will be held as a 2 hours event on 15 July 2020, on the ZOOM web platform

The proposed structure of the meeting is as follows:

- Opening: A brief introduction
- Covid-19, Cities and Human Rights
- Covid-19, Cities and the Environment
- Covid-19, Cities and Climate Change
- Covid-19, Cities and Governance

3. Participation

Participants in the meeting will be primarily members of the GPN. Target participants include: (1) academics and students (2) representatives of international institutions (3) representatives of civil society, NGOs. (4) private sector.

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C. CALL FOR PAPERS AND WORKING GROUPS

1. Thematic areas

The present webinar calls for papers and working groups in the following fields:

I. Covid-19, Cities and Human Rights

How Covid-19 has been impacting cities and how has its spread contributed to aggravating or limiting the implementation of human rights? Is the pandemic exacerbating human rights stress? Can smartness affect the human rights dimension? Is the capability of preventing and of dealing with future sanitary risks affected by the level of protection of human rights? What solutions are possible to reshape urban resilience by strengthening human rights protection?

Reflections should be based on a critical analysis of different local situations, comparing different experiences, in order to understand the mutual link between cities, human rights and resilience to health risks.

II. Covid-19, Cities and the Environment.

What role has been played in spreading or containing the pandemic, aggravating or limiting its consequences by the level of environmental protection? What is the role of environmental protection in the resilient city? What solutions are possible to reshape urban resilience by strengthening environmental protection, and the sustainable and circular economy? Is the resilient city, capable of preventing and of dealing with future sanitary risks, a green and circular city? What is the contribution that cities could give to design a resilient world environment?

Reflections should be based on an integrated approach, comparing different experiences in order to find best practices and draw innovative solutions to combine environment protection and cities' resilience.

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III. Covid-19, Cities, Governance

What role was played by the system of governance in the Covid-19 response? How has Covid-19 impacted governance infrastructures in terms of strengthening/weakening accountability, transparency, rule of law, stability, equity, inclusiveness, empowerment, participation? How can resilient multilevel and multi-sectoral governance capable of efficient prevention and response to sanitary crisis be built? What is the role of non-state actors, such as NGOs, the private sector and civil society, including minorities? What is the role of smartness?

Reflections should be based on a critical analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on governance and/or on the impact of the system of governance on Covid-19 response, comparing different experiences, finding best practices and drawing innovative and smart solutions for sustainable and resilient governance infrastructure, considering the importance of a context-driven approach.

2. Call for working groups

Scholars are invited to join one of the following working groups:

- a. Covid-19, Cities and Human Rights
- b. Covid-19 Cities and the Environment:
 - b1 Pollution and Climate Change*
 - b2 Waste*
 - b3 Biodiversity*
 - b4 Circular Economy*
 - b5 Water*
- c. Covid-19, Cities and Governance

Participation is open at www.globalpandemicnetwork.org

3. Call for papers

2.3 Working groups' manuscripts might be published in the following journals: Journal of Comparative Urban Law and Policy and The International Journal of Human Rights. Contributions will be assessed for suitability by the editor and then peer-reviewed by expert referees.

Submission deadline: December 15 2020

The call for papers will be available at: <https://readingroom.law.gsu.edu/jculp/> and <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/fjhr20/current>

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D. OBJECTIVES

1. Objectives

The objectives of the webinar are three-fold:

(1) To promote global working groups and global partnership between universities.

- for each field of the call (Human Rights, Environment, Governance) one or more working groups will be established;
- all members of the network have the possibility to join a group, choosing one of the three fields of the call (Human Rights, Environment, Governance) and possibly indicating the topic of interest;
- the groups will be formed trying to represent scholars from all continents of the world;
- each group will have one or more coordinators;
- the groups will work in virtual teams, through web platforms;
- in October, participants in the groups will meet in an intermediate webinar open to all members of the network;
- at the end of 2020 the groups will present the results of their work in a final webinar;
- all participants in the group, alone or in collaboration with other co-authors, will publish their work in the journals that, together with GPN, have launched the call;
- the publications will be collected, after the final webinar, in a special issue of the first months of 2021, it being understood that, where there will be mature contributions already before, these will be published before the special issue;
- the most relevant contributions will finally be collected in a volume on Covid-19 at the end of 2021.

(2) To facilitate exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices between countries, and identify common perspectives, priorities and solutions at an early stage in dealing with health emergencies and in managing their impact on the environment and human rights and cities.

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(3) To promote innovative solutions and contribute to a Post-Covid-19 Agenda on Development - Environment - HRs – Cities.

2. Expected value-addition of the meeting

The Webinar is expected to add value by providing the following:

- (1) Working groups – virtual teams;
- (2) Analysis of current strategies and systems and to what extent they have contributed to the response to Covid-19;
- (3) Exchange of experiences and lessons learned on effective policies and practices to promote global academic research thereby contributing to effective response and global sustainable development implementation;
- (4) Proposals.

3. Documentation

As a follow-up to the meeting, an analytical summary and a report will be circulated and uploaded on the GPN website.

4. Expected Outcomes

The meeting is expected to have the following main outcomes.

1. An analytical summary capturing best practices and lessons learned from the comparative analysis
2. A second webinar hosting the results of the working groups
3. Position papers for policy makers
4. Publications
5. Partnerships

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(2020) UNDP, Covid-19 pandemic. Humanity needs leadership and solidarity to defeat the coronavirus

(2020) UNHabitat, Covid-19, African Cities, Governance and Institutional Dimensions, Working paper

(2019) Intergovernmental science-policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

(2018) Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment, UN (Doc. A/HRC/37/59)

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