

# Transforming Urban Governance in a Post-Pandemic World

The "New Normal" in Planning and  
Participation

Aalborg University and Urban Europe Research Alliance  
20-21-22 October 2021



## Book of Abstracts

Edited by Enza Lissandrello & Janni Sørensen

# Introduction

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This ‘Book of Abstracts’ contains the works submitted to the conference organized on the 20th -22nd October 2021 at Aalborg University in Aalborg, Denmark. The conference is the result of intensive collaborative work with the Urban Europe Research Alliance (UERA), Anne Ruas (University of Gustave Eiffel), the Working Group on Urban Governance and Participation and its members, Pia Laborgne (EIFER, Germany), David Ludlow (University of the West of England, Bristol, UK), Roberta Chiarini (ENEA, Italy), Jolanta Dvarioniene (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania). The conference has been possible also thanks to a local conference board with the collaboration of Janni Sørensen, Rasmus Nedergård Steffansen, Kristian Olesen, and Lasse Schytt Nørgaard (all Aalborg University, Aalborg city campus). A special thanks to the Forskningsupport at the Department of Planning, Aalborg University and Mette Reiche Sørensen for organizational support.

This book opens with an overview of the call topic and the four different sessions that frame the discussion of the ‘New normal’ at the conference, followed by a table of contents listing each individual abstract and their relation to the relevant session.

The Chair of the UERA Conference 2021

Enza Lissandrello

Aalborg University 20 October 2021

# The ‘New Normal’ in Planning, Governance and Participation

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The topic of the conference emerged during the second wave of the COVID 19 pandemic as reflection and conversation developed among a few researchers working in different corners of Europe. We all had the opportunity and the chance to be connected in a digital world; a world facing unprecedented risks. But also, a world in which a ‘new normal’ is emerging that is probably going to change fundamental parts of researching the urban, its governance and planning ideas and the way we understand participation. In just a few weeks, during the first wave of the pandemic, the Covid-19 pandemic swept across the world and caused tremendous human tragedy and a historical economic setback for which we still do not know the full impact. The pandemic has also given rise to the notion of an emerging “new normal”, reflecting changes in attitudes and behaviors. Evidently, the pandemic has propelled cities and citizens through a decade of digital transformation overnight. Cities across Europe and the world are now facing a common challenge in planning for a deeply uncertain future to deliver carbon neutrality whilst transitioning towards the post-pandemic “new-normal”. Both climate emergency and Covid-19 have thrown into sharp focus the limitations of urban governance, demonstrating the urgency for new solutions, given EU’s commitment to define decarbonization pathways for cities by 2050.

Transforming and revising the priorities and the substantive goals of planning, as well as the silos-thinking and the disciplinary divides, are issues once again up for discussion in relation to governance and participation across local and international scales. New models of cities are taking form in the minds of urban experts to deal with the ‘new normal’. However, inclusive future responsible citizenship requires new types of professionals, that not only think and apply innovative models but also mediate and negotiate power and ethics for a just and sustainable urban future. In order to transform urban democracy for more sustainable cities and communities, it is important to question the role research can play to cross borders of representative democracy and disciplinary divides and to recreate alliances for deliberative democracy in our future urban world.

The pandemic has taught everyone that early actions are necessary to deal with unexpected events. But unforeseen consequences are impossible to prevent in ‘the risk society’. Planning as ‘to think in action’ might need to revise its substance, but also the processes and the skills to become ready to develop participation and expand urban governance in a limited time. The pandemic reminds all of us that societal change can be fast, even occur overnight and that events can accelerate transition processes. The ambition to build an urban harmonious society

requires new human capabilities to engage in common issues of health, climate and ecological crisis. In order to improve the sense of safety and security in situations of climate change and biodiversity loss, future governance models depend largely on our understanding of how the ‘new normal’ means not just to contrast, but to adapt and learn how to navigate persisting challenges. These challenges require an inclusive urban democracy as participation will be essential to develop future forms of governance for societal harmony and solidarity.

The aim of the UERA Conference 2021 is to advance new urban participatory planning and governance perspectives and strategies for Europe’s city-regions, generating a debate on challenges and opportunities in the context of the “new normal”, promoting potential pathways for EU’s spatial policy by scrutinizing critical aspects. Emerging lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic will provide a forum for partnership and consolidation of collaboration for the upcoming Horizon Europe calls and future Urban Europe policy. The UERA Conference aims to promote diverse approaches to the understanding and framing of problems generated from experience of the pandemic in cities, and to address the transformation of paradigms of participation, collaboration, governance, and creation of urban commons, to rethink urban research alliances for urban governance and participation. The abstracts are presented by scholars, researchers, practitioners, and activists engaged with issues related to citizens engagement, participation, and governance in a post-pandemic era. Frameworks and case studies of large and small cities across the EU and globally will promote networks of peer-to-peer-cities, institutions and laboratories operating across topics including the green transition, the digital transformation, stimulating economies and creating jobs, dealing with conflicts and co-producing welfare.

## Themes and Disciplines

The Conference promotes pluri-disciplinary and interdisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary research on urban studies and sciences across planning, governance, and participation. The interplay of these themes has been of interests to various disciplines including design, management, geography, the built environment, technology, data and digital innovation, ecosystem services, artistic creation, sociology, and politics. The ‘new normal’ is a multi-facet aspect that includes the digital transformations of cities, the creation of mini publics and deliberation after social distancing, climate change and citizen participation as well as issues on capacity building and sense of community across thematic issues on energy, food, mobility, biodiversity. The ‘new normal’ places research attention on partnerships and participatory strategies for urban justice and inclusiveness, on issues of conflict and agonism and creating possible mediation for new urban solidarities. The different sessions reflect the focus areas around which the conference has been developed. This includes issues on learning from new governance practice in COVID 19 times, the evolving roles of communities (and stakeholders) in participation, planning strategies adopted for more healthy and equitable cities, and new experiences of the new normal in post-pandemic cities.

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## 1.2 Rethinking participatory practices of professional planners as a response to urban governance in Serbia

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this research is to examine the new directions of democratic practices in urban governance, including public participation and multi-stakeholder involvement in Serbia. Through the reflections of Serbian planning practitioners and planners, the paper frames their historical reality of transitional, post-socialist local context as ‘somewhere in-between’ a complex system of dynamics. Therefore, the requirements of market economy, EU policies, new planning ideas and influences together with the formal participatory procedures and professional idea of the previous, socialist practice come together to this contemporary historical reality. The paper explores, through ethnographic research with professional planners (from 2007 to 2020), the application of participatory methods with the support of international programs that operated in the field of urban governance in Serbia. The research framework combines critical pragmatism and collaborative planning to shed light on daily planning practice characterized by an ongoing transition through dynamics that has shifted to governance, pluralism, and markets. These dynamics have been even more evident when the urban planning challenge during COVID-19 pandemic, have provided practitioners’ insights into ‘what can, and should we do now?’. The paper defines planning actions take form of small, pragmatic steps and alternative practices that hope to contribute to effective urban governance on specific urban challenges.