

Health and Spatial Planning Policies

Health and spatial planning policies are natural allies. Most of the current urban structures are rooted in solutions, which were developed in 19th century to treat the acute illnesses of industrial cities¹. Almost two centuries ago, most of European cities and most part of urban regions in the world were inherently not very healthy, as a result of an excessive concentration of activities and people in structurally deficient territories. The resulting phenomenon of urbanization is translated into the co-location of people and activities aiming, through this convergence, to enhance economies of scale and agglomeration, convertible into wealth and well-being. However, urban planning studies have revealed the multiple dysfunctionalities produced by the unplanned acceleration of the urbanization process, causing huge costs in the health of communities².

Fierce competition for urban space produced socio-spatial stratifications, sending less favored communities to cities areas where observe simultaneously inadequate morphology and forms of housing, rarefaction of equipment, lack of sanitation and drinkable water, overcrowding and pollution, use of drugs and criminality. This scenario of urbanization, boosted by poverty and exclusion, has produced and reproduced illnesses, epidemics and pandemics.

Integrating spatial planning and health purposes remains a central requirement from which none of the actors involved in these public policies can be putted aside. Contemporary civilizational challenges (climate change, migration, ageing, crises of various natures, pandemics...) ignite this centrality and enhance its mission of helping to create preventive and therapeutic urban environments. The Covid-19 Pandemic highlighted all the extensions to which urban planning (or the absence of it) manifests itself as a key factor in health. It highlights the importance of the living conditions of the elderly population (and the pattern of their distribution), the design of public spaces, green corridors, air circulation and sun exposure, the distribution of population densities, the quality of housing, electronic communications networks, infrastructure and equipment for supply, education and health, the continuing legacy of inequalities and substantial marginalized and unhealthy urban areas.

This Thematic Issue is organized around the links between health policies and spatial planning. The articles published focus on: i) the sectoral, territorial and organizational integration of health factors in spatial planning; ii) territorial inequities in access to health care; iii) the importance of shaping models of governance, policies and decision-support systems.

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