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Corona Epidemic in 2020

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Introduction

The current coronavirus pandemic (or COVID19 referred by the scientific community) has brought upon us a global health crisis unlike any in the history of many nations of the world. Responding to such an unprecedented crisis of our recent times; serious containment measures were observed by various governments, especially in metropolitan regions, to flatten the “virus spread” curve. From schools to offices, factories to agricultural landscapes, trade, finance, sports, festivals and public events, as such all facets of socio-economic activities of various countries were ceased in the wake of coronavirus. As coronavirus continued to grow for almost the entire first half of 2020, many people around the world took the threat of this disease seriously by abiding lockdown and staying inside their homes.

The consequences of the corona epidemic in 2020

At first people started hunkering down, turning to television and internet to pass time as they wait out of the lockdown. As the days turn into weeks, the frustration began to emerge as people vacillated between being worried and bored. Deprived from all aspects of urban

social life, people eventually began to explore novel methods to fight anxiety, depression and isolation within their homes.

Consider the case of Laura Simpson from London, a mid sized city in Ontario, Canada. She is a professional accountant and lives in an apartment building on eighth floor. Her flat comprises a bedroom and living lounge that opens to a small balcony. Intimated by the thought to contract virus if she unnecessarily steps outdoors, and restricted by the building infrastructure, Laura started growing small vegetables in the available space at her balcony to spend her time effectively and to properly maintain her mental and emotional health.

Social isolation has caused people to get hinged to their homes, and according to the author, this signifies the importance of living space amenities that should be ingrained in every architectural design concept. These amenities or vital elements of life such as sunlight, fresh air via ventilation and green spaces for gardening and relaxing should be considered a rudimentary constituent in future architectural planning. The unavailability of home food delivery options has pushed a considerable number of families to rely solely on home cooking. For many, cooking was a newfound hobby. With limited outdoor activities, cooking and eating together with family members become more significant. This gave strength to the concept of having an accommodating kitchen space with appropriate dimensions and arrangement along with the dining area, that can facilitate family gathering for extended period of time in a day.

Famous urban infrastructure designer Jan Gehl depicts his observation in an interview about some modern infrastructures that are introvert style “hotel-housing” units which hardly care for outdoor activities or provide ample avenues for vital amenities such as those mentioned earlier. These hotel housing units were designed with the mindset of just having enough space to dwell, sleep and prepare for next day work.

Contrary to the idea of binding themselves to their homes, it came as an observation that people including children became involved with several outdoor activities such as, walking, hiking, biking etc., to explore natural landscapes close to their living while others actively got engaged in gardening if soft soil and grassy portions were accessible from their apartment complexes or townhouse. Open space courtyards offering sporting opportunities also become handy for some kids and adults who could get exercise while playing tennis or basketball with their family or friends.

As a result of lockdown, many small shops and mini stores had to be closed. Therefore, the public in large were left with only few options to buy their food and other consumables. It also came as an observation that access to groceries and drug stores became somewhat challenged to people of localities that were not well connected through public transport systems, such as buses, subways or trams.

Recent government measures

The countries that have successfully, and timely overcome coronavirus pandemic have taken similar measures to flatten the curve. These measures were firstly to lockdown their cities in short amount of time and all incoming and outgoing travelling nodes were sealed. Second, they build emergency testing centers and care facilities to tackle with surging number of incoming patients with new infections. Third, specific instructions of self-quarantine for 14 days were given to people who had definite or chance exposure to coronavirus patients or exhibit any symptoms related to coronavirus. Fourth, daily activities of general public were controlled, or rather minimized and only grocery and essential supply stores were kept functional; however, a social distance of 2 meters was mandated for public during any mobility outside of their residence. Finally, where appropriate, work from home and schooling from home models were instantly adopted to sustain economic activities and to avoid total economic meltdown.

Historical Background and government measures taken from 1920s to 1970s

If we look at the historic outbreaks and subsequent governmental measures to contain those pandemics, the Spanish flu or swine flu of 1918 would stand out on top and was the deadliest flu of 20th century. The Spanish flu was also contagious like coronavirus but laid waste to thousands of lives more quickly, sometimes in little as 12 hours. Similarly, the cholera outbreak of Copenhagen in 1853 and re-emergence of cholera outbreak in far east Asia, China and India in first quarter of 20th century was eventuated with loss of great many lives. Although similar measures were adopted by governments back in that time which restricted motion of people and confined them to their houses, this act alone played a role in ramping up infectious disease transfer and mortality. Later studies indicated that the

overcrowding, filthy living conditions, and lack of amenities such as sunlight and proper ventilation contributed to that calamity.

After these pandemics, 20th century architects recognize revitalization in urban living design as the panacea to the sickness spread. Famous Swiss architect Le Corbusier has once said that “a house is only habitable when it is full of light and air”. This concept started a new era of architectural modernism. Advancement in construction techniques and civil engineering lead to many high-rise buildings. These were built to cater many single unit families as well as provided space for business complexes. The Victorian style urban and rural houses also transformed into multi level, open space, window clustered housing complexes and many were provided with gardening patches. Green patches were developed between various housing colonies to accommodate healthy outdoor activities. This era began in 1920s and continued till late 1970s.

The consequences of government practices from 1980s

During modern pandemic crisis, densely populated urban centers have proved to be fertile breeding grounds for the coronavirus. For a vast majority of population, their residence could be either a reason or a solution for the illness. One significant cause was due to the change in residential development philosophy. The concept of reasonably priced family home ownership has now been replaced by profit housing. Unsurmountable land prices and construction costs have driven out the dream of open space living. From 1980s onwards, more and more detached houses were replaced by town houses, condominiums and apartment complexes. Exponential global population growth and mass migration to cities have also fanned urban density followed by diminishing available land for residential development. Consequently, all forms of housing have undergone a reduction in terms of offering available space for its residents. This approach has driven us back to 1920 where majority of urban populace was forced to live in high density clusters.

During current pandemic, resourceful city dwellers have retreated to less populated countryside areas to escape the pandemic while majority of remaining urban dwellers were observed heading for parks and conservational areas to fulfill their appetite for clean fresh air, sunlight and open landscapes. This response vividly dictates that governments should take

necessary measures to develop socio friendly urban housing schemes by taking inputs from specialists from different majors such as medicine, architecture and urban planning.

A way to the future of urban living

The recent coronavirus pandemic has invigorated us with a new thought of how we live together. The coronavirus is not here to stay forever but it will certainly transform our urban architectural mindset. As a result of this, new built design theories will likely emerge to mitigate any future pandemic emergencies, by integrating the essential amenities like light, air and openness into the architectural design philosophy while simultaneously considering the factor of equality and affordability to cater the needs of people with various socio-economic backgrounds.

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