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RETHINKING CITIES FOR PEOPLE

JESÚS HERNÁNDEZ GALÁN

At the end of winter 2020 our lives came to a standstill... the SYSTEM was blown up... We found ourselves locked up in our homes, restricting our activity to the bare minimum... we reconsidered essential questions regarding family, work, interpersonal relationships, spaces, ...

We had been in a model for some time for which any change required a process of adaptation and settlement that caused a slowdown, provokingin many cases that these projects of internal changes in society ended up in failure.

Only the digitization of processes at a global level, presupposed some immediacy, making technologies the immediate bastion of change or change to immediacy.

Suddenly all the processes were speededup so adaptation periods started to get shorter and shorter. Nevertheless, technology was relegated to a secondary role overnight after the appearance of COVID19, but it could appear with other "nicknames", why not?... And this new main actor, who has inevitably shortened those periods of adaptation to change, also definitely raises the need of society to immediate change if we really want the human race to endure...

Of course, in this necessary and immediate change, digitization played a fundamental role – it is one of its main intrinsic characteristics, is in its DNA – but it is not the only area whose resizing should be considered. Our cities, our homes, our

buildings, our relationships, our culture, our leisure, our tourism, our economy, our projects...

Almost 80% of European citizens live in cities. The cities have become centers of exchange and cultural, political, social and economic development, depending on them the rest of municipalities and regions, in the case of Spain. One of the greatest challenges that cities face in order to be innovative is the need to be designed according to the requirements of their inhabitants and visitors, taking into account their diversity: age, gender, functional capacities, cultural level, country of origin...And, especially to ensure that those who are at risk of exclusion have additional guarantees in order to fully enjoy their rights and participate in economic, social and cultural events in equal conditions.

People with disabilities and, due to similarity in their functional characteristics, the elderly, belong to this group of people at risk of exclusion.

For this reason, it seems clear that the public administration must be required to urgently promote several lines in order to "minimize" this possibility of exclusion due to disability:

● *To promote the development and adaptation of normative and technical regulations considering universal accessibility in all areas, from the approach of "normalizing" accessibility to the environment, products and services so that they can be used and enjoyed by all citizens;*

● *To effectively implement universal accessibility in the different areas defined by the General Law on Disability as a mechanism to guarantee the social inclusion of people with disabilities;*

● To apply the transversal management of universal accessibility in the planning, execution and evaluation of public policies;
● To promote research on universal accessibility and design for all people and spread knowledge of this subject in the professional field and among citizens as a whole.

Without this boost from public administrations, it will be difficult to carry out this necessary change from the previous model. A change based on people and their needs. A change in all areas of life that does not replicate mistakes made in previous changes.
We have a new challenge in front of us. The resizing and redesign of cities and spaces allowing their use and enjoyment to all people. A challenge in which we "should" have been involved for a long time, but now it seems urgent to recover city spaces for citizens. Spaces that are dimensioned for the different activities that people carry out in the city and that meet the different needs that people may have throughout their lives.

Our houses are like our stronghold, where we find refuge from any type of invasion or attack. Proof of this is the lockdown to which we were doomed for months. It is the space where people should feel more protected and isolated, but, are houses really prepared to assume the new functions arisen from this type of situations? The lack of versatility caused,in many cases, by their dimensional limitations, means that current homes are clearly not prepared for this kind of situations and for many others. This field needs to be rethought to adjust to the needs of sustainability, efficiency, health, ... and accessibility.

It is time to ask ourselves many questions regarding to different areas of our lives such as tourism, culture, diversity, management,... It is time to rethink goals, means and tools. Now

more than ever we will have to develop our projects and initiatives thinking 100% about people, placing the persons at the center of them, to protect them from attacks similar to COVID19 or others that could come, to ensure their integrity and not discrimination.

Even so,we don´t need to go crazy developing new rules and regulations to "resize" our society. Possibly we already have them, let's just think and redesign them.

We have strategies to face all these questions and challenges, such as the 2030 Agenda or the CSCAE's 2030 Observatory[1], which are fundamental tools to address these problems jointly through alliances between the different actors involved. Let's take them as a roadmap to work on the social inclusion of all citizens and the sewing of existing urban gaps and accessibility problems that generate unacceptable inequalities in the cities of the 21st century.

Now, more than ever, it is people´s moment, by and for people.

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[1] *CSCAE's 2030 Observatory_* *http://www.observatorio2030.com/*