



## Event Note

Dresden,  
06 May 2020

### **COVID-19 and urban transformations: Challenges and opportunities – Online Course, 19 May 2020, 13:00 CEST**

**Does the pandemic enable or constrain more sustainable urban futures? And how can urban transformation studies contribute to explore that? This online course reviews the challenges and opportunities linked to COVID-19 emerging in urban areas worldwide, and reflects on promising approaches to conceptualize them. Join us!**

Almost overnight, the pandemic has radically changed our cities: Empty streets, vacant facilities and shops, clean air, and frantically buzzing digital connections. Underneath these surface appearances, however, disruptions in urban fabrics are profound, revealing a multiplicity of neglected or ignored vulnerabilities and inequalities, deeply entrenched in social, economic, ecological, spatial and physical structures. An urban transformation seems to be underway already - but one driven by a public health emergency and protectionist reflexes, not by concerns for a more sustainable future.

In this online course we therefore aim to expose the range of changes that the pandemic has triggered for urban areas in order to discuss possible future research perspectives from the vantage point of sustainability science and transformation studies. What knowledge is needed to understand and navigate the complex processes unfolding at present towards long-term sustainability? What theories, concepts and approaches should we mobilize to develop such knowledge? And in turn, what are the implications of these real-life transformations for theory development?

**Input statement (see below):** Anne Maassen, Ph.D., World Resource Institute, Ross Center for Sustainable Cities

#### **Discussion:**

Niki Frantzeskaki, Prof., Swinburne University, Center for Urban Transitions;  
Jonas Torrens, Ph.D., Utrecht University

**Moderation:** Marc Wolfram, Prof., Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER)

This online course is organized by the thematic group "[Urban Transitions and Transformations](#)" of the Sustainability Transition Research Network (STRN).

#### **Join Zoom Meeting:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81553709517>

Meeting ID: 815 5370 9517

Time: May 19, 2020 13:00 PM Amsterdam, Berlin, Rome, Stockholm, Vienna

The meeting room will be open from 12:30 PM to set up connections.

#### **Contact**

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Input statement

## **Cities after the Crisis – what are the prospects for sustainable urban transformation?**

**Anne Maassen, Ph.D.**

World Resource Institute, Manager, Urban Transformation &  
Global Lead WRI Ross Center Prize for Cities

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold across cities, there is increasing commentary and sense-making of the situation. In many cities, the crisis has cast the spotlight on existing – racial, spatial, and socio-economic – inequalities and injustices that manifest as deficient access to physical infrastructure, public services, and precarious livelihoods. What started as a public health crisis has quickly become an economic and social crisis. This interconnectedness has exposed the fragility of cities and their subsystems that remains hidden from view during less eventful times of relative prosperity and stability.

While crisis responses are still unfolding in real-time, there is an increasing debate about medium- and longer-term plans for recovery. Those who predict a speedy return to business as usual are getting fewer. Optimists argue that the crisis creates an opportunity to ‘build back better’ – more inclusively and with greater resilience. Yet, the challenge is substantial, given the depth of impacts that are still unfolding. It is increasingly acknowledged that the impact of COVID-19 will shape cities for many years to come.

A key question for many is whether the trajectory will include the kinds of sustainable urban transformations that are needed to meet climate and social objectives summarized (but not exhausted) by international agreements. The immediacy of temporary measures – such as restricted access to public spaces, places of work, retail and leisure – harbors many longer-term implications that may boost or destabilize transformations towards sustainability.

Multiple questions are emerging: Can recovery responses be scaled to the level necessary that they reach the millions affected? Where will spending come from, and how can it be guided such that it doesn’t simply replicate the unequal and carbon intensive economy of the past? Can cities plan for and deliver “healthy density” that is compatible with a more resource efficient urbanism and public health objectives? What will COVID-19 mean for the operation of public transportation and allocation of road and other public spaces? How can urban residents and communities be active participants of the new urban future and make themselves and their data available in ways that respect their privacy?

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**The Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development (IOER)** is a non-university research center in the field of spatial sciences, and a member of the Leibniz Association. Its subject is the sustainable development and transformation of cities and regions in the context of the global environmental crisis. [\[www.ioer.de/1/\]](http://www.ioer.de/1/)