

The city of the future

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I would like, initially, to thank the kind invitation that was addressed to me by my friend Ignacio Socias, and also for the moderation of this panel and my colleague Luciano.

Discourses about the city of the future project, in general, possible scenarios or dream scenarios. In any case, however, they are like gambling games. When they work, they incorporate the aura of an oracle in the figure of their authors. When they are not confirmed, no more serious consequences occur, because, generally, the author is not encouraged to rescue him from oblivion.

Recently, we have been invaded by the most varied forecasts, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some bad predictions unfortunately came to pass, and a quick analysis of events points to a greater chance of getting it right when the prediction is based on data and evidence. Others, however, have fallen by the wayside.

There is, however, an intangible zone reserved for mystery and the inexplicable, which, perhaps, will keep us trying to guess the future.

Here, I want to allow myself the appropriation of some tangible elements and season them with the intangibles of urban life, to perhaps begin to answer the question: which city are we going to design, for which family?

This is a difficult question to answer. There is not a single city. Not a single family.

There are vibrant cities, with vibrant streets, warm and generous with diversity, which provide welcome, exchange and learning. On the other hand, there are cities where the benefits and burdens of urbanization are very unevenly distributed. Likewise, there are families that fulfill their essential role and function in human societies well, while there are dysfunctional, violent and neglectful families.

I want to highlight, however, the meeting places. This goes through some basic premises, which I list below:

1. Cities are the stage on which social interactions take place. They are, simultaneously, inducers of social interaction patterns. This is a reading that has accompanied social theory since Max Weber's studies of non-legitimate power.
2. If the family is the basic cell of society, there is no way to dissociate it from the environmental conditions that the polis provides in all dimensions of family life.
3. The themes city, family and future are intertwined in what we can provide our children. This is what all development theory, from Jean Piaget and Vigotsky to Castoriadis, understands.

The city of the future, therefore, is a city that must look to families with a priority focus on children's needs. After all, if the urban space and families have important points of contact, there is a success factor to be aimed for, which has children as its main recipient.

Urban studies offer a multitude of approaches, especially when open to the winds of interdisciplinarity. Within the time limit I have, I want to organize the forwarding of this analysis to a set of 10 intuitions and provocations. I will allow myself to incorporate some of the current effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cities:

a) In the field of social interactions, walls and segregation must give way to relationships of trust and cooperation. Cooperation, by the way, is the subject of a very interesting investigation by John Dewey and Axel Honneth. It is through cooperative relationships that we strengthen the notion that we have socially useful skills and competences. Fostering networks of cooperation between families in community contexts – such as neighborhood life – is fundamental to increasing the feeling of security and mutual learning.

b) In the economic dimension, it is necessary to prioritize local businesses and family businesses, located in neighborhoods, which can be accessed on foot and which expand job and income opportunities for families. Legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic.

c) Housing policies must consider the varied needs of different families, at all times: from families who have gone through separations or economic difficulties to family planning that considers a greater number of children. Social assistance policies must act in the same direction.

d) In the field of mobility, it is necessary to invest in 15-minute city models, focusing primarily on families and their main displacements, to take their children to daycare and school, to go to the doctor or to work.

e) In the field of public services for families, their provision must be made through planning that takes into account demographic dynamics. It makes no sense to maintain day care centers in regions with few children, only if their spaces are used by the children of workers in transit.

f) Also here, it is necessary that such services accompany the families' work routines and can be offered in extended hours.

g) In the field of differences, it is necessary to look at the specificities of children and women in urban planning. Cities are made by men and for men. Safe and illuminated accessible sidewalks, smaller blocks and traffic calming policies make urban spaces safer for these audiences.

h) In the field of Education, it is necessary to look more and more to the streets, squares and parks, in addition to cultural and leisure facilities, as non-formal learning spaces. Citizenship is best learned on the streets, sometimes seeing inequality wide open. The understanding of historical facts takes on another meaning in the territory. The city can educate.

i) Playing in the city is important for successful citizen development. From the memories of playing in the street and the relationship with the territory, more affable, generous and sociable people emerge.

j) In the field of the intangible, the encounter must be prioritized. Private life is important, but limited from the point of view of the richness of interactions that the encounter with difference provides.

In the end, I want to invite you to an important reflection. We are the children that the city has shaped. We are from the families that inhabited the city, and that the city inhabited. What future city do we want?