

Post-Pandemic Cities #12

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Hello. First of all, I would like to thank MUSAC, Eneas and Kristine for inviting me to be part of the “Post-Pandemic Cities” programme. I would also like to thank each and every one of you now listening and giving me that most valuable of things, a moment of your time.

I often reflect upon the way that my life has unfolded and I am always really surprised at certain things that appeared at just the right time and sent me off down unexpected paths. There have been many people, situations, circumstances... that have caused me to change directions and, deep down, find my way again.

Does this happen because of fate or chance? Whichever reason, the trajectories that our lives take are exciting and every milestone along the way is a learning opportunity.

While I was studying architecture I met Carmen, a wonderful woman, a tireless fighter, who, as a result of one of those twists and turns in her own life, ended up sat in a wheelchair which she never got up from again. Walking around the city with her, I could see the unfair barriers that she faced on a daily basis and a huge sense of responsibility came over me.

Architects make cities, and the city is inhabited by many different people, people who are born, grow old and die. These are people who undergo change, passing through many stages, paths, turning points and needs. However, during my time as an architecture student, we had little representation or contact with this kind of diversity, nor did we study anything on the subject. At no point was design for all people or universal accessibility taken into account; in fact, it was not even mentioned. We worked by designing from our own neurotypical experience.

And although I would eventually focus my career and final project on trying to design kinder places for Carmen and the many other people I met, I ended up feeling that I still had a lot to learn about different perspectives and experiences in order not to leave people out of my projects.

With this in mind, I went to live in London and had the opportunity to work in “centro de día” and OAP Day (Care) Centre for people with learning disabilities and later in a nursing home for the elderly. When I returned to Spain, I specialized in Universal Accessibility and became a member of ASEPAU, the Spanish Association of Universal

Accessibility Professionals. Shortly afterwards, I started working in one of Polibea's neuro-rehabilitation centres, in the Manualia workshop.

During my time at the centre, I reflected on how lucky I was to be living and learning with people with disabilities, and that this was something I was going to have to intentionally seek out by going to specific places, centres and activities. At that moment, I realized what I had to continue to develop my life towards: I had to work to bring people together.

During the pregnancy of my second child, I took the plunge and started Cazapeonzas. It was almost like having twins. I was nurturing both life and hope. I was nurturing hope that my children would grow up in a society where inclusion was a reality. I dreamt and still dream of transforming perspectives, because the biggest barriers that exist, the ones that are the most difficult to break down and that continue to separate us are these mental barriers.

To understand that people are all unique beings, all essential and all special, words alone are not enough. We need to experience it. We need to live together to enrich one another. It is vital that diversity and differing needs are made visible and thus taken into account in all designs. Not just because they have that right by law yet we are constantly discriminating and excluding, but also because by getting to know each other, we understand that it is better for each individual, that it is better for everyone.

Cazapeonzas was conceived with this objective, in order to create these environments, using appealing tools that encourage interaction: culture, art, architecture, games and experimentation. A few years after this conception, we rented a small place with a lot of soul where everything we dreamed of could become a reality. Out of all these dreams, together with my friend Verónica we realised the "Desayunos con amor para mujeres valientes" (Breakfasts with Love for Brave Women) and on Wednesday 4th March 2020, we enjoyed what we thought would be the first and which ended up being the last breakfast at Cazapeonzas.

Without knowing it, that breakfast was a farewell. Without knowing it, we were heading towards a radical change in all our lives. And, without knowing it, the picture book which we were reading and discussing had alerted us to what was going to happen to us. The book was "Search" by Olga de Dios. It features "Bu", a character who spends his life walking around, looking at the ground, "searching, searching, searching",

unaware of everything around him. One day, however, a big poop falls on his head, causing him to look up and discover the wonderful world all around him.

A few days after that breakfast, another big poop, a big shit called Covid, fell to the ground and landed on each of our heads.

Since the industrial revolution, the human species has been accelerating faster and faster. We have reached the point of leading hectic lives with overflowing agendas, endless to-do lists, clocks full of alarms:

"Searching, searching, searching..."

This liquid life makes us forget what really matters and leaves us unable to enjoy it. In general, I think, the more accelerated a society is, the more individualistic it becomes. There is no time to think about anything else, about anyone else, you just have to run on and on, just like our character "Bu": "Searching, searching, searching."

Living fast makes us forget that the most wonderful thing we have is very close to us. We spend all our time getting ahead of ourselves.

I am passionate about my work. Isn't it exciting to work hand in hand with different people and to try to change outlooks through culture, art, games? Isn't it exciting? But... Yeah, when you fill your exciting schedule to the brim with play activities to the point of running out of time to play with your own kids... Ummm, how exciting exactly is your life then? How long do you want to live like this?

Living this fast mixes up our dreams and also makes us forget that our own exciting life has an end.

When Covid took over our planet, it forced us to stop in our tracks, to stop "searching and searching", and we had to isolate ourselves and reflect on our fragility. Putting people at the centre of our lives.

We need one another. We need to feel, we need to be close, to be listened to and understood. We need each other, all of us. And we need this diversity in its broadest sense: gender, generational, functional, cultural ... Because it is our differences that enrich us, make us learn and together, help us to build a better society.

Stopping like this made us to live in the present, no longer thinking about what we would do tomorrow or where we would go in the summer.

Sadly, we watched as the numbers grew, behind which there were so many people whose lives were suddenly coming to an end. Without anything, without anyone. And that's why, right now, we need to be able to come together, to enjoy ourselves, to enrich ourselves, in whatever way we can. This is a perfect time to STOP SEARCHING, to leave fears behind and to show love to those we have with us. Let's stop yearning for or worrying about a future that we do not know will ever come about. We are here, now, fully enjoying so many valuable things that we had forgotten about, such as treading on the grass with bare feet, the sound of birds, the warmth of the sun on our skin, looking at the moon every night, and also writing, drawing, dancing and above all, enjoying sharing all this with those we love the most. Oh, and also something very important, which many of us had forgotten: taking the time to listen to ourselves.

I realized that my twins both needed their own special time and attention. And that is why it is now important to narrow down and shorten periods of full attention. My twins are very intense and, during the lockdown, and even before, I tended to lump them together, pretending to work and spend time with my children at the same time and not really being able to attend to either of them. This increased my stress levels, accompanied by the guilt that so many of us mums carry around. My twins are still intense after this period, however I think I have changed. Now I try not to mix them up and to establish those much-needed times to pay full attention to each one. Well, time goes by and from time to time I seem to speed up again. But then I see that big poop that fell on my head in the mirror and I slow down.

And ... Even though my bank account says otherwise, I have become a millionaire. I feel that now I control my life and my account doesn't control me. I try to do the things I want to do the most with my life and my time and I am more aware of the beauty surrounding me. I try to savour life and put more love into each thing I do, as if each one were the most important thing in my life. And I think it has finally become apparent that our way of living and dwelling is faltering, that what matters most to all of us is family, which is made up of a variety of people who need each other, and who now more than ever need to find a way to break down all barriers and come together. So, where can we meet again? ... In a square perhaps? In a park? In a museum? ... And do you think these places do all they can to make it easier for us to enjoy quality time together regardless of our age, gender, abilities, etc.? Or how do you think that the equal

participation of a more diverse variety of people could be encouraged and improved?
What can we do to make our space more friendly and accessible?

This is a crucial time to reflect on: Who is it designed for? For too long we have been staring at the ground, "searching, searching..." and making cities that do not bring about encounters and even discriminate against some people by restricting their use and participation. We have been assigned ways of life, specific ways of inhabiting cities, which may not be the ones we want. A city full of pieces of architecture designed to be contemplated, not to be inhabited.

Will this poop help us change? To transform our city and make it "friendlier", we would have to look at each specific place, but there is certainly one thing that is common to all. To implement improvements for diversity, we must work hand in hand with diversity, so we must enable the active participation of people with disabilities, and not only as assistants, but also as promoters, as creators.

We have been designing for a long time thinking about globalization, standardization... And now we have to focus our efforts on designing for unique people. Therefore, we must offer multiple possibilities, be flexible, adaptable and very creative. It is also important to strive to make the work we do visible. In this way, on the one hand, we can share knowledge and best practices with other places, from which we can get feedback in return. And, on the other hand, we can increase participation, as there are many people with disabilities who do not go to the places that are different. This is because, in addition to it being yet another strain for some people, many simply assume that these places will not be accessible to them, as is so often the case.

We need to remember that disability emerges from interactions between people and environments, products, services.... If disability is a relationship between people and certain environments, is it not better to try to place these labels on the environments, rather than on the people?

During the pandemic, we experienced how technology was able to give people with recognized disabilities wings, giving them the ability to participate in activities that they otherwise would not have been able to do. However it has disabled people many people who did not previously have a recognized disability, such as the many teachers who after years of skilled work have had to withdraw due to anxiety, because they cannot adapt to the new technological situation. Other people, like me, have not been

able to carry out very simple administrative procedures, since they are only accessible through I do not know how many digital platforms, which we haven't been able to get to grips with. You see, I received a request about a year ago saying that our organisation "Braining Mum", which supports the parenting of mothers that have ABI, had to have a name in Spanish in order to be accepted. This name was chosen by Celi, the president of the association, and it is a combination of the English words "brain" and "training" and this has no direct translation in Spanish. But we have not been able to come up with a solution. It can only be accessed through these electronic documents and we have not been able to contact anyone... Eventually we will have to contact an agency who will help us to solve it.

For some of the "Braining Mum" mothers, it has also been a great relief not to have to travel to rehabilitation centres and to be able to receive that rehabilitation in their own home. Unfortunately, however, even more have not been able to access the therapies at all and this period has been a major setback for them.

Anyway, I wanted to conclude by asking us to be creative and to learn from this poop that has brought down a static system that we had very much internalized and taken for granted. Diversity has no end, it is not static, it is infinite and the way ahead is also infinite, and precious.

By the way, Bu, our character, never took off the poop that was on his head, he continued to enjoy the world with it on so as not to forget.

Let's not speed up again and forget that we need our family, we need diversity to form a better society. We need each other.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH