Designing a "New Normality", Distributed and Sustainable for All

The Covid-19 pandemic crisis is increasing poverty and inequalities on a global scale. The UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that "The recovery from the covid-19 crisis must lead to a different economy. Everything we do during and after this crisis must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change and the many other global challenges we face." Sharing this approach, the recovery cannot be a return to the "old normality": it should lead to a radically better society and economy, a "new normality".

In this perspective, it is important to highlight that the pandemic crisis made particularly evident the fragility of the centralized health care models, diffused in the recent years along with the weakening of territorial medicine. This made dramatically ineffective both the containment of virus diffusion, as well as the capability to treat infected people even in higher-income contexts. It has become evident that a public health system distributed throughout the territory and accessible to all must be strengthened by financing and re-designing its infrastructure, services and products, both for the prevention and for the cure.

A shift towards so-called Distributed Economies (DE) coupled with a shift towards models where the ownership of the product and/or the life cycle services costs/responsibilities remain with the provider (i.e. Sustainable Product Service-System, S.PSS) have been studied world-wide as promising locally-based sustainable and resilient models, accessible to all. Not just for health care, but as promising models also for food, energy and water supply, for manufacturing, software development, knowledge generation and diffusion and for the design activity itself. In this way envisioning a promising characteristic of a "new normality", sustainable for all. In fact, this could be read as a common trait of the various contributions to this key Special Issue collecting and sampling a diversity of initiatives for the COVID-19 global emergency developed by the design community worldwide. This shows that a part of the design community is active and collaborative, with a shared vision in diverse approaches and levels of intervention.

There certainly is a clear and important call for a design action: for designers, design researchers, design educators, design organisations, design institutions and design journals. The Learning Network on Sustainability (LeNS), counting on more than 150 HEIs from all of the continents, took action to promote and edit this Special Issue, glad to be together with the Design for Social Innovation towards Sustainability Network (DESIS), the Cumulus Association and the World Design Organization (WDO). We would like to thank the Strategic Design Research Journal for hosting this Special Issue, the editors for leading this process and all the authors contributing to it.

An important journey is ahead of us. And this special issue is a key contribution to understand and map the state of the art as well as new visions to guide our efforts. A significant act to a larger change in the design community, for envisioning, designing and implementing a healthy, resilient and sustainable society, for all.

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