Innovation and Resilience: The Global Design's Community Response to COVID-19

Diseases are deeply social phenomena and COVID-19 is no exception. History teaches us that many of the major diseases of the past have catalyzed currents of change that have superseded the initial public health dimensions at their core. The 1348 bubonic plague, better known as the "Black Death", brought about drastic and permanent changes in the social mores and economic structure of Europe. The Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918-19 resulted in one of the deadliest global pandemics of the past 100 years, leaving vast misery and economic contraction in its wake. Decades later, HIV/AIDS quickly became one of the most profoundly altering epidemics of the 20th century from a social and cultural standpoint. These examples are at once similar and different from our experiences with the global surge of COVID-19 in 2020. This pandemic has become an all consuming fact of life. In many ways it is an unprecedented crisis that has thrown us into a global state of trauma. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 have represented a challenge different in scope and scale from many other natural and man-made emergencies we have experienced before. As a result, it has been difficult to rely on a "playbook" to derive guidance about how to proceed and has forced us to operate "pre-factually" in face of uncertainty.

For those of us in higher education, COVID-19 has transformed our field like no other event in recent history. The forced shift to distance learning that occurred as waves of campus shutdowns and quarantines spread like wildfire in our universities constitutes a massive educational experiment that we are still in the midst of fully assessing. An important question – especially within the arts and design disciplines traditionally so committed to face-to-face instruction and reliant upon knowledge acquisition through making – is whether this experience and the remote teaching pivot that we underwent might translate into longer-term effects. Might there be an increase in positive attitudes toward online learning as a central modality of degree-granting programs in our fields?

For Cumulus, COVID-19 has represented an inflection point. It has accelerated our resolve to build a more robust digital ecosystem for our growing global community. The Cumulus Connects microsite – *https://cumulusconnects.org* – launched in September 2020 has represented a direct response to imagining a dynamic space for members and partners to meet virtually and share experiences and expertise.

Beyond design education, the Coronavirus pandemic is also set to have a significant impact on designers and the design world in general. It is causing practitioners to flex and evolve in real-time and it is unleashing important new directions for design research and practice that range from product innovation, new service design solutions and novel approaches to reconceiving our public spaces and built environments. This two-volume Special Issue of The Strategic Design Research Journal exemplifies this multifaceted and emergent body of work that is happening all over the world. What a terrific repository it will undoubtedly offer for all of us to look back on, once the pandemic is finally over!

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