

Editor's Note

The events of the last few months surrounding the spread of COVID-19 have redefined the world at the beginning of the year 2020. Although we now know the science behind the virus, it has been tempting to go beyond this to speculate about why the world was not ready to combat it. Some have used its emergence to advance specific conspiracy theories about national intentions or religious doctrines about the end of the world. Others have used its spread to rally against globalization, lament the disappearance of borders and checkpoints, or advocate for a return to heightened nationalism. Yes, powerful others have even attempted to use the virus politically by naming it after particular places or nations, despite full knowledge that viruses do not discriminate where and who they attack.

Of course, we must recognize that the world today is totally interconnected, and that globalization is here to stay, despite the virus having temporarily forced us to retreat behind national borders, shelter in our immediate places, and, for some, accept being locked down in our homes. Indeed, the connection between the real world and the virtual world, the subject of IASTE's upcoming 2020 conference, is irrevocable. We should also remember that other human beings invented digital viruses, so that none of us can use the Internet safely unless we arm our devices with virus-protection software.

In IASTE, we have always labored to understand globalization and its impact on people and the built environment. It is very clear that people's relationship to their immediate environments are being fundamentally challenged and changed as a result of this global health crisis. However, from an IASTE perspective, it is further interesting to note the role that traditional societies are playing during this pandemic. At first, developing countries did not appear to be affected, a condition some attributed to their poverty or lower level of integration into the global system. But this idea was quickly discarded when the virus reached nations that seemed totally isolated. And, with time, it became clearer that many developing countries are likely to suffer greater impacts from the virus because they lack the resources to manage a health crisis.

Recovery in all forms will be long and hard, but it will happen. At the moment we must proceed with the conviction that one major health crisis cannot and should not blind us to the many positive aspects of globalization because it has made us aware of its perils. The challenge we face today is one of effectively dealing with this virus and all the restrictions that will come with it without compromising our freedoms and liberties. This is indeed a big challenge, in which both culture and the built environment, the two principal concerns of our research in IASTE, will play a major role.

This issue of *TDSR* was already in production before the coronavirus appeared, and before shelter-in-place orders, lockdowns, and curfews were imposed on movement in many countries. And, in part, it is because of this that we have kept its content intact, literally as a reminder of what the world was like before February 2020. We start with an article on the city of Gurgaon, India, where emerging patterns of neoliberal urbanism are provoking a critical reappraisal of theories related to the dispossession of village peasants through processes of capital accumulation. We then proceed to Africa and Latin America. First, we learn about how diamond mining shaped a colonial built environment in the Lunda district of Angola that combined references to both European and African cultures and traditions. Then we present an investigation of a famous mid-twentieth-century housing complex in Rio de Janeiro, and how its designation as heritage has raised important questions related to the preservation of modern traditions. We conclude the issue with two articles about North America. Our fourth article compares the fate of Freedmen's Town and Frenchtown, two black settlements in Houston, Texas, that have differed over the last century and a half in terms of racial self-identification. And, in our Field Report section, we provide a reading of the hill town of Cuetzalan, Mexico, and how aspects of its form and culture embody a hybrid condition that has facilitated the survival of its minority indigenous community.

Finally, IASTE is taking measures to deal with the current impact of the coronavirus, and we can only hope that the global situation will improve enough to allow the IASTE 2020 conference to proceed as planned in Nottingham on September 3–6, 2020. We hope you all stay safe till then.

Nezar AlSayyad
