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Scott Baum · Emma Baker · Amanda Davies · John Stone · Elizabeth Taylor

Pandemic Cities

The COVID-19 Crisis and Australian Urban Regions

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Foreword to Pandemic Cities by Baum et al

Viral infections and other transmissible diseases have forever shaped cities, literally and metaphorically. The recent or perhaps still current COVID pandemic prompted many commentators and politicians to speak of its scale and impact as unprecedented. This revealed their lack of historical understanding and exemplified a rather disturbing tendency to neglect important lessons from history.

This latest contribution to the *Cities Research Series* provides a valuable corrective to such a limited historical awareness. As a unique collaboration among some of Australia's leading scholars of city life and urban processes, it explores many of the most important areas impacted by the pandemic, including housing, work, mobility and population change.

It is sometimes said that momentous events like the pandemic act like Barium Meals, revealing features that otherwise are not visible or apparent. While many urban scholars have been cataloguing the inequalities and inequities of urban life for centuries, the last few years have shown us the extent of many urban vulnerabilities that have often been ignored by policymakers and city leaders. We have become more acutely aware of the essential services delivered by some of our lowest paid workers, of the mental stresses that occur when we are unable to socialise, especially in green spaces, and the fragility of many of the supply chains on which we have come to depend. But we have also learnt that when we have to, we as individuals and as members of communities and our governments can choose to do things very differently. We can house street homeless people in inner city hotels, we can provide financial support to everyone without means of testing, we can change the way we work (including academics) very quickly, and we can develop vaccines and other medicines much more quickly than we have done previously. Of course, many of these measures are extremely costly, and building those costs into ongoing budgets might not be feasible. But, we have learnt that these are choices we make rather than impossibilities.

I am delighted that this book, drawing on the collective expertise of five renowned urban scholars in Australia, provides some historical insights, trenchant contemporary analysis of the impact of the pandemic on Australian cities and provocative

questions about the future of our cities. While focussed on the Australian experience, the book will be of interest and value to those who live in and study cities around the world.

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Preface

This book highlights the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cities. The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic and social impacts have been felt around the world. In large cities and other urban areas, the pandemic has highlighted a number of issues from pressures on urban labour and housing markets, shifts in demographic processes including migration and mobility, changes in urban travel patterns and pressures on contemporary planning and governance processes. Despite Australia's relatively mild COVID exposure, Australian cities and large urban areas have not been immune to these issues. The economic shutdown of the country in the early stages of the pandemic, the sporadic border closures between states, the effective closure of international borders and the imposition of widespread public health orders that have required significant behavioural change across the population have all changed our cities in some and the way we live and work in them in some way. Some of the challenges have reflected long-standing problems including entrenched inequality in labour markets and housing markets; others such as the impact on commuting patterns and patterns of migration have emerged largely during the pandemic. This book, co-authored by experts in their field, outlines some of the major issues facing Australian cities and urban areas as a result of the pandemic and sets a course for the future of the cities we live in.

Brisbane, Australia — Scott Baum
Adelaide, Australia — Emma Baker
Perth, Australia — Amanda Davies
Melbourne, Australia — John Stone
Melbourne, Australia — Elizabeth Taylor

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Scott Baum is trained as an economist and sociologist with research interests in labour market economics, urban sociology and urban and regional development and change. He is currently a member of the Cities Research Institute and the School of Environment and Built environment at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia. He has published widely in the international literature, and his latest book 'Methods in Urban Analysis' was published by Springer in 2021.

Emma Baker is a Professor of Housing Research at the University of Adelaide. Her work examines the health and human impacts of housing and location in urban and regional environments, producing academic, as well as policy-relevant research. Driving this work is a conceptual focus on housing and location as a social determinant of health and an interest in analyses that utilise longitudinal, spatial and administrative big data.

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John Stone is a Lecturer in Transport Planning in the Urban Planning Program in the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne. His research seeks to improve public transport performance in Australian cities through a greater understanding of the professional practice and the political and institutional context for public transport planning in similar cities in Canada and in German-speaking Europe. Since completing his Ph.D. in 2008, his work here and at the Swinburne Institute for Social Research has been funded through grants including an ARC Discovery Project and a Commonwealth Endeavour Research Fellowship. This work follows over 20 years of engagement with public transport management in Melbourne that has included work in local government and the community sector.

Elizabeth Taylor is a Senior Lecturer in Urban Planning and Design at Monash University. Taylor's research explores links between urban planning, housing markets and locational conflict. Often using spatial and historical perspectives, her research develops an understanding of long-term urban change and the role of policy settings in it. She was previously a Vice Chancellor's postdoctoral research fellow in the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT University and a McKenzie fellow at the University of Melbourne, as well as working in consultancy and government research roles.

Chapter 1
COVID-19 and Australian Cities: When the Pandemic Came to Town

1.1 Introduction

As we sit to write these opening lines, it is incredible to think back over the last two years and realise that you never really know what is coming around the corner. January 2020 and Australia had just come off one of the most prolonged droughts in history and was coming to the tail-end of catastrophic bushfires that impacted urban and country people alike. On the political front, our then Prime Minister had gone AWOL to Hawaii for a family holiday. Then in a relative blink of an eye, things changed. And changed in a big way. Although many, including journalist Laurie Garrett (1994), predicted the arrival of a new global pandemic as far back as the 1990s, no one really could have known when, how and what form such a new pandemic might take. Like another addition to the four horsemen of the apocalypse, Australia and the world was now faced with a global pandemic. We didn't know it at the time, but we would be living with the virus for a considerable period.

In late December 2019, the Chinese government notified the World Health Organisation of a mysterious cluster of pneumonia cases in the city of Wuhan in the Hubei province. Cases of the virus, which became known as COVID-19, began to increase—seemingly slow at first, then very rapidly from late January. The Chinese Government responded on 23 January 2020 by rolling out a massive program of testing, contact tracing and home-quarantining of people. Residents of the Hubei province were required to follow strict spatial isolation. Travel, employment, education, recreation and social gatherings were restricted to prevent the spread of the new virus. To some extent, the measures introduced in Hubei province were a sign of what was to come in cities worldwide. While these measures undoubtedly curbed the geographic spread of the virus, by 30 January, following 7,711 reported COVID-19 cases in China and 170 deaths, the World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus a Global Public Health Emergency. It was not until March 11 2020, that they announced the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak as an international pandemic (Cucinotta and Vanelli, 2020).

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