Will the Future of Planning Change Due to the Pandemic?

[00:00:00.36] So welcome, everybody. My name is Julie Rudner. I'm the convener of the Urban and Regional Planning Program at La Trobe University. And my colleagues and I've decided that we should have an international conversation about what's happening with regards to the future of planning.

[00:00:18.89] And so just before we start and get into the conversation, there's something that might be unique to Australia. It might happen in other places. But we always do something that we call it a recognition of our indigenous peoples. So I'd like to run through that, first. And I've changed the words a little bit to also recognise indigenous peoples elsewhere.

[00:00:41.16] So La Trobe acknowledges that all of our campuses and those of our guests are located on the lands of many traditional custodians. And we recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to the university and wider society. As a university, we're committed to providing opportunities for Indigenous people, both as individuals and communities through teaching and learning, research, and community partnerships. La Trobe University pays our respect to Indigenous elders, past and present, and emerging, and will continue to incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems and protocols as part of our ongoing strategic and operational business. So, thank you.

[00:01:18.74] We're all really excited about the event today, all in different time zones, and excited about learning what is happening in each person's country and where planning is going. Planning has long been associated with the desire to improve health and well-being And the separation of land uses, the development of sanitation systems, ensuring greater political inclusion of minority groups. The provision of public housing for the poor is part of this, as are supporting economic systems and addressing climate change.

[00:01:48.69] However, COVID 19 has revealed multiple tensions in our modern world about what's working and what's not working and individual contexts. So we'll be discussing these things. And what we'll bring out are some of the questions that we all have, which is, what is the relationship between population and housing density with regards to containment or spread of disease? Will social society retreat or transform the use of public spaces and public transport? What happens to our tourist infrastructures, and will they help in post-pandemic

recovery? These are all issues, not only of governance, but of populations and of citizenship. So our expert panel will grapple with these.

[00:02:30.85] And before I pass over, I will introduce each one. We have Associate Professor Shauna Brail. She is the director of the Urban Studies Program as well as associate director of Partnerships and Outreach, School of Cities at the University of Toronto. She's fantastic. Because it's 6:30 in the morning or just past that. And she rose early for the occasion.

[00:02:51.41] As an economic geographer an urban planner, Brail's research focuses on the transformation of cities as a result of economic, social, and cultural change. And her current research examines the disruptions taking place in urban mobility, particularly focused on the emergence and shifting strategies of ride hailing firms and associated impacts on cities.

[00:03:11.06] Dr. Michael Martin is assistant professor in urban design at Aalborg University in Denmark. His research focuses on the design, planning, and development of cities, with a particular emphasis on urban vacancy, regeneration, and temporary use, child-friendly cities, and the promotion of playful spaces, as well as processes and practices of sustainable placemaking. He has undertaken funded research in the UK and Denmark by the ESRC as well as Capital of Children/Lego Foundation and published his results in leading international journals.

[00:03:44.02] Dr. Rangajeewa Ratnayake is the head of the Department of Town and Country Planning at the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka. Rangajeewa received his PhD from La Trobe University. So he's one of our alumni. His research involves a sense of safety in urban settings, planning education, and urban informality. He's served on numerous editorial boards, is the co-editor of Bhumi, which is a planning journal, and has served as a consultant to various public organisations.

[00:04:10.01] We also have with us Dr. Jagath Munasinghe who is a senior lecturer Department of Town and Country Planning at the University of Moratuwa in Sri Lanka. He'll bring some practice experience with him. He's the current president of the Institute of Town Planners, Sri Lanka and the former Chairman of the Urban Development Authority and Director General of the National Physical Planning Department of Sri Lanka. His research focuses on the urban design, planning, and development of cities with an emphasis on urban definition, regeneration, conservation, and practices of sustainable placemaking.

[00:05:05.23] To start this off, I really will turn to the question of what are resilient cities doing to deal with this crisis? And I'll ask Shauna to please start.

[00:05:16.86] First of all, good afternoon and good evening to all those of you not on the sort of east coast or central Canada, where it's bright and early. But I'm really pleased to be here. And thank you so much for the invitation to join in this global conversation.

[00:05:37.41] I think an answer to your question about what are resilient cities doing - there is no one-size-fits-all solution. And that's part of what makes this conversation both so important, but also such a wonderful opportunity to learn. Because those of us who study cities really understand that we need to be able to look at the bigger frameworks that matter that make a difference, but to be able to implement change very much in a place-based kind of way.

[00:06:06.19] The other thing about what are resilient cities doing, well, part of it is, were they resilient before? What made them resilient? And even if they were not necessarily resilient, if they hadn't prepared for a pandemic of this nature, of the nature of coronavirus, do they have the requisite infrastructure-- both the physical infrastructure and the social infrastructure-- required to be able to respond and to adapt.

[00:06:35.67] And so I think that one of the really important things is that even if a city wasn't already well prepared for a pandemic, well placed to respond to a pandemic-- and I'll say that much has been made in Toronto of the fact that we were one of the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities Challenges. We, as a city, released our resilient strategy. And nowhere in that strategy did it say the word Pandemic, did we attempt to understand what might happen in the event of a pandemic. And yet, it doesn't mean that we don't have the right sort of background, the right infrastructures to support us during this time.

[00:07:17.58] Part of that is being able to respond appropriately and rapidly. And I think that's one of the big learnings for me and for many people is, even if you didn't have the exact plan in place that if you have the teams and the people and the underlying kind of strength and ability and also the flexibility, that those are all things that contribute to being able to develop resilience during the pandemic.

[00:07:46.77] And then the last thing I'll say is that what's really-- I think coronavirus is a tremendous tragedy on a global scale. And even though in many of our countries, we're

starting to come out, at least, the other side of phase 1 and to start to see potential to return to some new normal, there have been hundreds of thousands of deaths around the world and really tremendous destruction. But at the same time, if there is a silver lining, it's an opportunity to rethink-- to rewrite our story and to rewrite the story of cities, but of each of our cities. And this is provides some inspiration, I think, during a very difficult time.

[00:08:39.40] Julie, you're on mute, I think.

[00:08:43.93] I was going to say, Michael, would you like to respond to that? And then we'll go to Rangajeewa and Jagath before we have the open discussion.

[00:08:51.67] Absolutely, yes. First, hello. I'm Michael. I do have to apologise. I'm not Danish. I'm actually Irish. I'm an Irishman in Denmark. So apologies to anybody who's disappointed at that. But, yeah. I do have some points to add to what Shauna is saying, in the sense that one of the biggest issues is the fact that many cities were not prepared for the prospect of something like this to happen. And I have a couple of points that I can say, for me, represent the key things.

[00:09:22.95] And to start that off, really, one of them is to think about how temporary measures have been an active response to what has happened, to effectively create capacity for emergency uses and to bolster resilience. And attached to that, then, there's also been innovation and experimentation in land uses with open streets, clay streets, streeteries, all sorts of different examples of, very much, health, well-being, sustainable mobility oriented practices. And there is a need to focus on the creativity bred by crisis.

[00:10:00.55] Many things that have happened, in terms of what Shauna has said, in terms of silver linings, political decisions, projects, and ideas that were once unviable, they were undesirable, are now very much a real prospect. And that's a fantastic thing to take forward. And that's the kind of 'but', because there is a slight issue with some cities that are emerging in a sort of unlocked context of just attempting to return to business as usual and trying to fast-track development and infrastructure in a way which doesn't attempt to create new practices, it just simply tries to restore previous ones. And that's a huge issue and challenge in going forward.

[00:10:44.95] And then, there's a need to set out the intention to transform permanently. Some cities have already set out that intention. Copenhagen is one such city that has set out an

intention to transform permanently, in terms of sustainable mobility, as well as car removal. And that brings me to one of the final points I think I would make at this early outset is that there is a need to prioritise the local project, the local response as a way to promote longer term growth, rather than relying on a return to the desire for mega projects, big political statement pieces.

[00:11:26.47] There's actually a need to go to the small scale, go to the local scale in the way in which we twist planning in the future for going forward.

[00:11:39.11] What's the Sri Lankan perspective on this from both of you and Rangajeewa?

[00:11:45.41] When I got this invitation, I was thinking of this situation that we are going to respond. Of course, thank you very much for inviting me. And also, thank you very much, the same thing, for organizing this event.

[00:12:00.38] Let me start with sharing a few slides that I prepared for this one. In case that we were to think about resilient cities and also responding to the pandemics, so where are we? Are we going to talk about things that's going to happen in future?

[00:12:26.13] In that way, let me ask a few questions with regard to this, right? Now the title here is the Will the Future of Planning Change Due to Pandemics? So, are we expecting wonders soon after this? Or, at the same time, is it a paradigm shift that we're talking about? So there are a few questions. So let's try to be conscious about what we have been doing, and at the same time, what we should be doing.

[00:13:01.20] This is what I thought. Because where do we expect the change? Is it in the norms, planning norms that we have been having throughout? Or is it in the substance of that key plan, in the public spaces, in the cities, or in the regions perse? Or it in the processes that we adopt? We have been having certain process that is unique to different places, to different countries, maybe different places. Or is it in the institutions?

[00:13:32.69] So, do we expect a paradigm shift in planning, in terms of norm substances, processes, and institutions? Or is it just a change in the way that you're doing things to understand what is it-- three important questions I have with this regard. What is planning? I mean, if we think that there will be change in the way that planning will be changed tomorrow, the way that we do change-- that we do planning will be changed tomorrow,

because of today's pandemic situation. What if something else happens tomorrow? Are we going to change the day after?

[00:14:10.37] So, is it reactive with what is it, actually? Is it a mere series of responses to incidents and situations? Is that what planning is all about? Or is it something more than that, all right? Let's try to understand it from the very essence, very bottom of the planning thinking.

[00:14:33.32] The question is, why am I saying like this, because are there any cities or any built environments or places, any kind of environment in this world that it is a clear response to a pandemic situation, not a disaster? Do we find situations like that? Is there any evidence? Do we find any evidence from the history of town planning of the history of urban planning or whatever planning we call it?

[00:15:02.72] Well, we can see there was instances like this, maybe not as grave as this what we have today, but this Bubonic Plague in the 14th century, Spanish Flu, and the even, Dengue, which is spreading very fast in this area in the region of the Asian context. But have you changed the way that they have been doing planning? Or is it the same thing that we can contend with?

[00:15:30.57] So in that sense, epidemics or disasters could have been kind of changed, have they been the kind of decisive forces in planning? I have my doubts. Well, we mostly say these images of modern town planning with this particular tactic in the UK. 1840. We'll be famous to say it. It is the beginning of it, right? So the beginning of modern town planning. Yes, true. But what is it that actually changed the way that the cities are built? Or the modern town planning to emerge? Is it the epidemic of the environment?

[00:16:08.12] Or is it the political or is it the compelling grounds of the policymakers and institutions that enable the planning to emerge? My understanding is the second because it's like fuel and fire. Now, fuel cannot burn without fire. That means if this epidemics was the fuel, there has to be a political will. There has to be some kind of initiating a change.

[00:16:34.21] That's how I see what had happened in the late 19th century Europe and the other parts of the world. The emergence of modern town planning, not because of this environmental condition that we had but mainly because the political will. That's how I see it.

[00:16:55.69] So in that sense, I'm not saying that we should be pessimistic. Let's try to be optimistic about it. Even opportunities that we got is-- because we have seen right our slow moments make the environment better. Everyone was talking about it within the last two to three months of this lockdown season, that atmosphere very clean. We had the the clean air, became less pollution, less emissions, less gases and all that. And our streets and cities are less congested, and we didn't have that much traffic jams and so on.

[00:17:32.47] At the same time, everybody was happy with the essentials, mere essentials, and not that we are talking about luxuries. So we were happy with what we had. And I know that there are certain problems and situations where the poor people could not access to basic infrastructure basic facilities and basic amenities. That's true. But still, we are managing with what we have.

[00:17:53.71] And at the same time, the technology which we have been using for most of the unwanted things have been very well-integrated into our day-to-day lives. And most of the people-- those who are not familiar with technology got familiarised. And also, we used it in many aspects like education or business, trade, and so many things. So this is an opportunity that we have seen how it has been utilised in an effective manner.

[00:18:18.92] At the same time, not that many people-- but I know most of us enjoy the family life. I mean, how good is it to be at home? So this is something that we can remember. I know most of the countries, like especially in Europe, maybe in Denmark, and also in Singapore, even, encourage people to have family lives and be at home rather than stressfully running here and there. So is this what we are looking for-- live, work, and play at home. So this is something that we got to think about.

[00:18:52.60] And at the same time, can we forget these dreams that we have about sustainable living smart cities because of our focus is different now? Are we going to change our focus? Or are these the never-changing or the eternal or the, I would say, long-term objectives of planning?

[00:19:15.94] So let's try to be clear about it. Are we going to change our focus? Or the role of planning in the plan at this moment-- what should it be? Let's try to insist on the proactive measures rather than reactive. What I am saying is that, had the governments took initiatives to control at the very beginning-- do we have to worry about this? I believe that it has gone

out of the grip of this initial action taken. Those who should have taken the actions at the very beginning made it a big disaster. We didn't close the hole at the beginning. Therefore, the water leaked, and the whole city's in water now.

[00:19:57.43] So where should we address the problem? Should we try to deal with flood? Or should we try to have the plug in the right place? This is something that we got to think about. So let's try to insist on that. And because the situation emerging out of that, the situation emerging out of what the correct action has not been taken at the right time, and we all are talking about things already with a bigger disaster.

[00:20:27.76] So always, we'd say that prevention is better than cure. So preventive actions in future situations, because we have early warning systems and we have resilience, surveillance systems and everything. So let's get them activated and do our business as it is. And in a situation like that, do we have to talk about the tinge of the mission of the planning? So because planning has a mission that is superior to dealing with pandemic. I believe it's much more than that.

[00:21:06.61] So this is an opportunity that's given to us. But it's a goal post rather than a game change, I believe. So let's take it like that. And let's not forget that we have more actor other than the pandemics. We have more threatening ones. We can't forget them. This is how I see it. Thank you.

[00:21:34.54] Thank you, Jagath. Well, I'm not quite sure whether you have actually contradicted Michael or Shauna yet. But I'd be interested, through the discussion, to find out a bit more. Rangajeewa, would you like to add anything about that because I'm a bit curious? Because Sri Lanka has had to deal with a lot of natural disasters as well as the pandemic. And I don't know whether you can comment on that in terms of what you see for resilient cities.

[00:22:01.00] Thank you, Julie. So I just need to maybe summarise what others discuss so far. Yeah. I do believe that in planning the history, we responded to pandemic and health issues in the past. As well as health issues, we have also responded to financial issues and economic matters, housing, and other issues, and so on.

[00:22:33.79] So we'll come back to the topic, how does resilient cities respond to such issues? Well, I think that, in planning, we need to have more adaptable spaces, more adaptable cities so that we can think of not only pandemic situations but a other range of

issues that we are facing and cities can respond to, such as these situations. Now, in that line of thinking, I guess what we would need is more win-win solutions, where one solution would positively impact the sectors. So just maybe now we have rules like what we said said about maybe less travel on public transport because there's the chance of spreading the disease.

[00:23:31.08] However, such missions will have maybe clouding of their policy that will now have a negative impacts on the environment and other sectors as well. So a win-win solution will definitely benefit all sectors. So in that line of thinking, I was thinking that we need to look at this issue holistically. So pandemic-driven solutions would not, I guess, work alone. Of course, they are a massively important thing to consider in planning.

[00:24:09.00] So on the resilient discussions, what sort of conservation we should do in the future? So I guess that we should be context-specific, culture-specific. And also, the other thing-- this should be economically cheap and then feasible for us to do. So it should emerge from those countries context people, those resilient strategies.

[00:24:38.50] So in that line of thinking, I would like to consider about this localism idea having sustainable local environment settings where we are talking about 15 minute city or 20 minute city, where local people can be served with the facilities and services so that they don't have to travel in class cities, and then they're less likely to spread the disease. Similarly to what we are facing here in Sri Lanka in urban areas is the lack of open spaces so that, in that local agenda, availability of green-- we'll fast-track this strategy, comes first in a situation like this. We are losing open spaces. No open spaces. So considering having alternate strategies to have open spaces will reduce people's stress not only pandemic situation but also in other situations as well.

[00:25:50.41] Similarly, a right infrastructure for people having more connections will reduce crowded situations in urban areas. I think the other thing people are talking about densities with the high density cities-- are there resilient cities? The argument is whether there should be the high density, or is it they should meet the unequal distribution of services that city provides for people. So we know that in some parts, even in Colombo, where there are areas of course, which are vulnerable for diseases as well as for quality of life as well. So we need to think about the affordability of such people and accessibility of peoples and, also, how to improve the economy so that they are not vulnerable in future, this equity aspect.

[00:26:51.20] Other aspect I want to point out is the social equity aspects in bringing the discussion forward in the discussion of resilient. Cities. Now, we know that in Colombo and in other urban areas, a lot of people live in the slum and shanty areas. Getting basic needs like water, sanitation facilities is key to stop the spreading diseases. And an aspect as well, those basic services.

[00:27:30.27] So in conclusion, my idea is that we need to have a win-win solution. It should not be pandemic driven planning strategy to deal with such a crisis. Thank you.

[00:27:50.50] Right. Now, does someone want to jump in there because there are some key themes that have come out. There's localism. There's social inequality that's come through. What we do with the public-- there's some issues that don't seem to necessarily transfer between Europe, Canada, and Sri Lankan, and that's, potentially, that of open space, which-- those countries are different. So it would really interesting to find out, carrying on some of those ideas that have come through in all of what you've said so far.

[00:28:18.08] And one of the points that I think that comes across from the four different perspectives there is that there's a need to consider lessons from previous crises and whether, actually, some of those crises are relevant to consider in the broader term because of the response of other challenges, for example. And I think what I can see, certainly within the types of responses that I've been following, is that there is a fantastic amount of new practices that are coming forward, and there is a need to consider both the long and the short-term with those types of examples.

[00:29:02.98] And those things I referred to are things like active mobility through pop-up cycle lanes or the use of public spaces for open air dining and cafes, bars, and restaurants in certain parts of Europe, for example, Lituania. And what's coming forward as a consequence of these things is an understanding of what public spaces, maybe, are supposed to be and what streets and neighbourhoods could be if you have the opportunity. And so one of the things that I think is fantastic is that there's not really an excuse at this present moment in time-- and potentially in the longer term, there's not necessarily an excuse to say, no, we shouldn't close the street for people to use it, or, we shouldn't have a play street for children to play in. And those types of things are the things that are much more localised, by comparison, to some of the things that are being referred to by my other colleagues there. And it's those things that

planning can really effectively and quickly push through as a genuine measure, a genuine response that that's both short and long-term.

[00:30:11.66] The question is whether that's going to happen or not, because obviously the removal of cars in certain areas, particularly shopping streets, is seen as a fundamental challenge to business and economic potential and growth. However, when you see some of the some of the examples in major cities like London of streets that were once car-dominated and now are being used for cycling and active mobility, the businesses have new opportunities for customers. And that is the bit that has to be channelled and that is also something that is a huge boost. And this is something that allows us to see the potentials of things that previously just weren't even on the table.

[00:30:54.57] So Shauna, in your work on transport, what do you see for your future, because it seems that you're already on the cutting edge in terms of examining this? Well, one of the things that I think ties together pretty much all cities or most cities with respect to looking at the impacts of the pandemic are, really, in two areas, which Michael has touched on, which are, first, around mobility and, second, public realm. And I want to say I really appreciated Jagath's or provocations around, what do we need to be thinking about? Do we really need to be so reactive? Isn't planning all about being proactive?

[00:31:41.17] And the third one around, shouldn't we be enjoying joyful family life? And so I guess I'll go in reverse order to say that, at least in the North American context, one of the real criticisms that's come out of a lot of these rapid responses to reorient cities around opening up streets and creating space for play, for joy, for cycling, for other ways of mobility, for looking towards the 15-minute city is that, in fact, what we're really struggling with and what the pandemic has really shone a light on so clearly is the inequities that have been baked into our cities and into capitalist society overall.

[00:32:26.65] And so, while many of us, about 30% 40% of us, are able to enjoy a life in which we can do our work from home because our work translates to home, there are, first of all, things around 30% of people who continue to have to go to work. So those are frontline workers, health care workers, grocery store clerks, et cetera. And then there is a whole other number of people, a large number of people, who have no work right now who used to have work and don't have work and have been laid off because they're required to work in public-

facing jobs. And typically, many of those frontline workers and many of those public-facing positions or frontline positions are actually very low paid.

[00:33:17.82] And so we have this challenge where we have transit that may be unsafe. It may be a vector of disease. And we have low-paid individuals who are then living-- it's not the density that's the problem. It's the overcrowding in housing that's a problem. It's multiple people per bedroom, not enough washing facilities, not enough sanitation. And so it gives us an opportunity to redress these challenges that we've built into our system of very high-paid, high-educated individuals and the opportunity to create entrepreneurship and venture as well as those who, for reasons of great inequity, whether it's connected to race or gender or place of birth or ability, are not able to either enjoy this work-from-home environment and, in fact, are very marginalised in so much of their experience. And how can we make cities better for everyone and not just those who are already relatively well-off?

[00:34:36.57] Going back to the mobility piece, again, what we see as a result of the pandemic was the complete drop off of ridership on public transit, and public transit is so critical. In all cities where public transit exists, it's critical because it provides a way for people to move from one place to another in a relatively affordable way. It also serves many climate goals, equity goals, resilience goals, goals around economy, getting people to jobs, opening up new opportunities.

[00:35:13.39] But what we saw, particularly for public transit, was it fell off a cliff. In the case of Toronto, ridership on our public transit system was down 85% from the start of the lockdown, which means not only is ridership down, but revenues are down. And as we gear back up to return to recovery, to re-imagining, we are being told, well, maybe we can have 30% capacity on this transit system, which means that other forms of mobility become increasingly important. So how can we expedite the things we were already doing to serve goals around equity and climate change and resilience, which are things like bike lanes, which are things like 15-minute city, creating more opportunities for people in areas where they live.

[00:36:05.40] I study ride hailing, and ride hailing also essentially fell off a cliff. So ridership and ride hailing vehicles went down, also, about 80%, 85%. It is starting to climb back up on recovery. And what we see on recovery is that the thing that goes up first are private automobiles and private automobile use. Studies in China have shown that there is increased

intention for people who did not previously have a private vehicle, to purchase a private vehicle because it's seen as the safest method of moving around.

[00:36:42.63] I think that it was in London where there was a government official who recommended that people who had to travel, if they could travel by private automobile. We want to move people away from their private cars, not towards them. And so if we can take these very quick, rapid, reactive measures now, we actually might get to a place we already wanted to be but far sooner.

[00:37:11.56] And so that means we need to think about a range of mobility options. Ride hailing is part of that, but so too are things like cycling, pedestrian routes, finding safe ways to operate transit so that people feel protected, that they feel they're not exposing themself to higher risk, because, right now, for the most part, people that are taking public transit are those who have no choice. We want people to be able to choose public transit rather than to feel forced into it.

[00:37:44.85] So is the essence of that-- I have a question for you guys-- trust? And is that playing out in other things, like going to the grocery store or letting children play on the playground? Because it seems, in some ways, that, like Jagath said, in some ways, it's not a planning issue. It's something else. And yet we still have some sort of task.

[00:38:09.88] If I was to jump in on that, Julie, I think one of the things that is particularly interesting is how certain entities that are typically underdesigned for are often not even considered within design processes, like children, for example, or those from ethnic minorities or other forms of inequality. Some locations, like Denmark, put those entities at the top of the agenda. So when it came to discussing the response to the pandemic at a street scale and on a neighbourhood level, play spaces and how children interact with one another and how they are not allowed to play was one of the top items on the agenda, not at the bottom. And I think that is part of the approach-- to actually consider the weighting given to certain entities over others and the way in which you report on these types of things. From a governance perspective, that is certainly a key priority because people need to feel like they're being considered, and people need to feel like they are being included, rather than being excluded and not considered. Planning has a role in that.

[00:39:33.02] I would just add, on the trust piece and in building on what Michael has just said, that there are two things in the planners' toolbox that really come into play here. The first one is evidence and evidence-based decision making. And so monitoring and tracking and providing data that can help to build trust, whether that dataset you know is something around the lines. We've heard that there have been few to no cases of the transmission of coronavirus on public transit for users of transit, so not for transit workers who need very particular protections, but for users. So how can we use that evidence to build trust? And then the other piece is around engagement, the engagement of citizens and the engagement of people for whom those decisions will matter. How do we engage people in making the decisions and therefore creating the kind of trusting environments that we need in order to move forward?

[00:40:33.85] Julie, one point I think I need to highlight is that we are now getting used to tele-mode working because of this government curfew, random demonstrations. Now we are doing some successfully; sometimes we face difficulties, as well. In planning, making maybe super-resilient environments, how can we have favourable check civil environment to facilitate such learning? So that is the issue.

[00:41:05.49] Now, a lot of home environments that we are working are not designed for tele-mode working so we need to now think about, maybe that is a work for architects and interior designers, to have flexible, adaptable spaces in future, so that you can use it for office work without any disturbances, as well less for other purposes.

[00:41:33.29] Now, the other issue that I see, one of the problems, in one of the comments that from the participant, is that whether high-rise developments are OK or not in addressing a pandemic situation health-wise now. The thing is, to me, considering the local situations, you will have different answers. So in cities and regions, we will go for different options. However, that going for mid-rise developments will provide greater connections for people, rather than going for high-rise buildings.

[00:42:17.59] So in that scenario, we will have a greater chance of reducing spreading of such diseases, as well. And even such mid-rise developments will be good for walkability and safety, as well as human-friendly designs.

[00:42:45.10] Going from what you've been talking about, then, in responding to the students but also what you're talking about, teleworking, and linking it to some of the previous

comments, is Sri Lanka going to go down the path where they use apps to help people negotiate their environments in new and different ways so they feel more trusting? Or they have a better understanding of what they're entering into, or their safety? Or is that more of North American, European-type thing?

[00:43:16.96] In terms of safety, we are heavily using-- increasingly, we are using CCTV cameras and other surveillance methods in the recent past. We don't use much of the other scanners or other devices at the moment in immediate local neighbourhoods, but in high use areas, yes. So yeah, surveillance methods are coming slowly to monitor people in terms of security and safety concerns. But for controlling pandemic and diseases, not yet applied so far.

[00:44:05.01] OK, now this is true enough that we talk about only the surveillance part of it. But it's something more than that to me. Because the use of this technology-- all this teleworking and all that that must be working-- became modern, bigger context. Starting from the childhood, I know that some of the countries-- for example, Australia-- I believe that you have this registration system in which you have everybody's history, and everything is recorded right from the very beginning.

[00:44:37.15] So that who is vulnerable in a situation like this within the system itself? Not only after that, something that kind of happens, but it's there already in the system. So that when the early warning system is there, right when there's a warning coming in, you can take care of those people those who are vulnerable in those kind of situations.

[00:44:57.01] So it's just a system like that we should be thinking about. I know some of the countries have that already. For example, health systems, right? But at the same time, education systems. If we talk about-- if you think about it in kind of a bigger perspective, we know which category are the people, in which class are the people, or which particular group is in need of that kind of facility. So we should be thinking like that. I mean, I believe that out of the discussion so far, we have got few points that highlighted what our priorities are. I mean, what should be the priorities? At the same time, this evidence based as Shauna said, that things that we help practice in planning, that is evidence based decision making.

[00:45:43.51] But as I said at the very beginning, it's not that we don't have evidence. Of course we have a lot of evidence, even this situation we have seen that things-- we had the

firsthand evidence. But it's more of my proof of what we are interested in, isn't it? I mean, most of the time, this planning-- even though it's a political process anyway-- we can't forget the fact that we meet in Denmark, meet in Australia, meet in China, where we tap into Sri Lanka. It's a political process, right? I mean, it's very much influenced by the political decision making.

[00:46:17.77] So what should be the real role of the planner? I mean, should we be influencing the political authorities or the policymakers of our priorities? These are a real priority. But meeting should be the priority. Or is it just that we plan for the priority that is decided by this political mechanism? So that's why I said it's not that we don't have evidence. We have enough evidence, but are we interested in making use of those evidence for our planning purposes? That is something that we've got to think about.

[00:46:47.88] And also, what are our priorities? And just as Rangajeewa said and many of you have mentioned, that part of the society-- I mean, as very correctly mentioned, that the criticism in European continent context is a more capitalist environment where people, those who can enjoy family life, those who happen to work, have to work is a very, very unequal situation.

[00:47:13.09] Isn't that the real question that we're trying to answer? I mean, the equality-- equity, equality, and the equal opportunities for everyone. So aren't these the bigger questions that we have? Irrespective of whether there is a pandemic or disaster or whatever? So it has to be for all. It has to be for every day, doesn't it? Either universal objectives or planning to meet. And shouldn't that be the kind of priority that we should be addressing?

[00:47:44.24] I'm talking about maybe a bigger picture. But still, within that, if you try to change your mindset-- if we try to force the policymakers to think on those lines, won't we be able to think about more opportunities? And especially-- somebody has mentioned here about the loss of jobs, loss of employment, because of this pandemic. Or this is because we took it as a kind of reactive mission. We were not resilient at all. Isn't that the view that-- I mean, aren't these the kind of bigger questions that we've got to answer?

[00:48:18.38] So that's my point, and I would like to kind of think more in those lines and try to make it make some impact on the thinking of this-- the policymakers and also the kind of

political decision makers. More emphasis, more active role from the planner's side on those aspects.

[00:48:44.42] Ok, if I could-- if I could jump in there. I don't know, Shauna, I don't know if you were going to go.

[00:48:52.11] Go for it. Go ahead.

[00:48:54.07] I think there's something really interesting coming forward by the comments made about evidence. And I think the coronavirus is such a unique situation in that everybody is now aware of statistical significance. Everybody is aware of our numbers, ratios, in a way in which they would not have been before. Which has also been something that planning can use, in that planning can be dogged-down by its kind of technocratic nature. But in thinking about how evidence can be translated in a way in which there's a new mindset for these types of information is a really brilliant opportunity.

[00:49:33.40] But I think the other thing attached to that is that planners using evidence to make decisions is often by convincing more powerful political leaders to roll out or implement the specific thing. And I think there are two things that we're seeing. One is the build back better narrative, which is just business as usual. Economic development, economic recovery is the way to get out of this.

[00:49:59.73] And then the other side of it is, ah, crap, you were so right. You already told me that inequality in the green space, inequality of the services, inequality in the housing was a big challenge. I just didn't believe you. But now I do.

[00:50:13.31] The coronavirus has shown new things that might actually convince certain people. And it's really interesting when you see when you see responses in Copenhagen, or in Oakland, or in Mexico City, where leaders have said, OK, there's a real need here to address specific things like clean air and really use what we have seen as a consequence of the coronavirus for clean air.

[00:50:38.09] And planning has a role there to try and ensure that we don't just go with fast track development. We try and use the things that we already know are challenges to begin with, and channel them into better strategies that are also able to anticipate pandemics, that also understand pandemic responses. So it's a huge opportunity.

[00:51:05.57] I would-- I agree, Michael, on the opportunity piece, on the thinking about, you know, build back better versus-- but not just better. Build back different. Build back with a different set of priorities. You know, the amplification of the challenges of the contemporary city-- the inequity, the privileging of space for private vehicles. So a complete, really, rethinking. And what this enables both planners, but also local governments, is an opportunity to again fast track some of this decision making that otherwise could take a decade or longer. And to be able to expedite towards a direction that in many places we're already trying to move.

[00:51:53.40] And so one of the things I noticed is that some of the cities that early on made some really rapid radical announcements around space-- so we might think about Milan and the repurposing of many kilometres of roads away from private vehicles and towards bikes and pedestrians. Vilnius and the creation of public space. Or the access to public space for private cafes that otherwise couldn't open. Paris and the continuation of the 15 minute city concept.

[00:52:29.35] These cities already had mayors that were already moving towards creating these kinds of initiatives. And so it's terrific that the silver lining here is that these things happened a little bit faster in these places. But I think that the real change will happen if we can look at cities that were either slower or resistant to these kinds of changes. But then ultimately were able to make them because of both the planner's toolkit and the political will as a result of responding to the pandemic. And as a result of acknowledging that, actually, these are changes that support our overarching goals around equity, around resilience, around climate change, around building a prosperous economy for all.

[00:53:18.52] And I think the other thing here that we can't really separate is the role of systems of governance, and the different layers and levels of government, and the ways in which they absolutely have to work together. So one of the things we haven't talked about is the cost to cities as a result of the pandemic and the tremendous losses. In Canada alone, cities are estimated to lose well over $10 billion in the space of the next year in revenues as a result of the pandemic. So those are user fees for community centres. They're transit revenues. They're programming revenues. Parking revenues, et cetera.

[00:54:01.72] And so we really-- our cities cannot sustain themselves without the support of more senior levels of government that have the ability to create economic recovery tools that

include very large sums of investment of funds, and very large distribution and redistribution of funds. So we need to think again more clearly about the role that the city planner plays in creating a system that connects to both the local level of government, but also the more senior levels.

[00:54:38.18] Can I pick up off the back of Shauna there, Julie?

[00:54:40.82] Sure thing. If you want to keep going for another five, ten minutes, I'm happy. I'll leave it up to you guys to decide and you can private chat me if you have any issues.

[00:54:49.84] I was just going to do something. I think the point you make, Shauna, is absolutely the correct one. Which is the major cities that often are associated with innovation have continued to innovate. But it's second-tier cities-- more local and regional cities-- that can be more stubborn to these types of innovations.

[00:55:09.72] And two big examples that are particularly close to me-- Belfast, the city in which I was born and grew up in in Northern Ireland, and Manchester in the UK-- have both shown this inherent stubbornness on the removal of surface car parking because political leaders in Belfast think that car parking is king. And in Manchester, the refusal to create pop-up cycle lanes because they think that long-term ones are better.

[00:55:35.80] And these are the types of issues planners will come across more commonly than the Milan examples, or the Paris examples, or the Bogota examples. And it's addressing those things that really is the problem. That mindset change and shift is the real challenge.

[00:55:58.58] I think there's a question from one of the participants who said that since we're never sure of the nature of any kind of pandemic or disaster that might take place, how can we as planners plan any sort of policies, norms, or strategies, and what should we keep in mind?

[00:56:12.74] And I think what's been brought up here-- because I am in a country right now that is trying to put through coal and do everything they can to keep up their global destruction of the climate-- is within this, I guess, is to know that we cannot cover everything, but we can within it have resilient thinking. To be advocates, to educate. And potentially extend our role between what we see solely as the spatial, but the psychogeography-- in that sense of terms-- of our sense of place and our sense of humanity. And that's not necessarily a role that planners are comfortable with.

[00:56:54.02] And so I wonder if you have any last comments, because it does change the nature. Within that, we have to potentially admit we don't have as much power or control as we would like. And that a lot of our job is actually trying to get buy-in from those around us.

[00:57:12.85] Just--

[00:57:14.51] Absolutely. Go ahead.

[00:57:17.93] Sorry, sorry. One comment that was made by one of the participants, in attendance here. OK, now he mentions that how much some changes you mentioned about cycling and everything, to relate to the planning, was political will. If a government wants to make a change to a city, good or bad, I've seen too often that they do that independent of plans. So that is a real fiction, I believe.

[00:57:43.93] So that's what I said, what should be our role? Is it just to talk about these policies and everything, independent of politics? Or should we have bigger force to select the priorities? As you said, of course evidence based-- collect adequate information and convince the decision makers. The politicians or whoever. And direct the kind of planning we can send toward that direction.

[00:58:10.62] Shouldn't that be the role of the planner? That's something, that question-- a big question that I have in mind.

[00:58:20.06] Right So. Yes?

[00:58:22.99] I was just going to say that often planning is hijacked as the key obstacle to major, major projects and development. Planning is often kind of the thing that politicians want to play with to remove red tape, to improve speed and efficiency. And often within planning systems, reacting to those changes takes a huge number of years. And so planners are often at a disadvantage when it comes to something that is required, that requires immediacy.

[00:58:57.46] And I can certainly see that in some of the cases that I have looked at, where-- in the UK, for example-- whereby major decisions on temporary infrastructure aren't taken by planners. They're taken by more senior civil servants and their aides. And so planning can often not necessarily be involved, which is a real issue.

[00:59:19.20] I would say that in the North American context over the last even five to seven years, we've seen a really rising profile of urban planning and urban planners both, because there is greater interest in cities and in what happens in cities. But also because there have been a number of very prominent urban planners leading city planning departments and speaking very vocally for a set of priorities that's quite different from the sort of conservative traditional norm.

[00:59:56.66] And we've started to see real change taking place, which I think is my final point, which is that what we see as a result of coronavirus-- what it amplifies also for us-- is that, just like cities are dynamic and changing places, so too is planning. And what we're seeing is some really rapid acceleration of planning ideals that we would hope to have gotten to somewhere in the not too distant future, but we're getting there a little bit sooner as a result. And as we're making these changes, let's not lose the opportunity to make sure that the changes we're making actually are benefiting a much wider group of people than they might otherwise before.

[01:00:44.01] Actually, one point I want to make here, that the role of state-- we know that the laissez faire government and in the leading private sector, implementation of land use policies and other things may not serve our purpose of having a sustainable environment with a more equitable resource allocation. So that is the one aspect that, then, the state needs to here play a major role. So this means a pack coronavirus. This is sort of a wake-up call for planners as for less state agencies to respond to such situations and issues. Strategies that we implement will have multiple implications for the sectors.

[01:01:34.36] Another thing about this, in terms of the governance one. I think that one of the issues that we are facing is the implementation of the regulations and rules. Whatever the best planning policies said. If you can't implement them, you won't have open spaces-- secured open spaces-- or secured pavements, like pavements or people. So this is one of the challenges that we are facing in not only this economy, in Sri Lanka, but also in other parts of the developing world. So we need to consider this aspect as well.

[01:02:11.61] Right. There's more and more questions, but I think we'll probably have to end it here so everyone can continue with their day. I'm sorry we didn't get to answer all the questions, but I'd like to thank each of you, the speakers, for attending today. But thank you as well for the audience for coming.

[01:02:30.65] I'd be more than happy-- you can either come on to the community planning and development Facebook page and continue discussions there, or you can send emails, and I will respond when I can. Not this evening because I'll be off to sleep soon. But I've really, actually, enjoyed the conversation, especially when we sort of get into the tricky subjects at the end.

[01:02:53.44] For everyone who is watching, and especially students, I think what you'll find in planning is that there are no answers. And that we continually have to reframe what the problems are as new things arise. Whether it's a pandemic or whether it's population decline. And so we have some tools at our disposal. But it's through these sorts of forums where we share ideas, and we discuss things, and it helps us to understand our world better. And I hope that we don't necessarily make as many mistakes as we have in the past with the responsibilities that we have in our respective roles.

[01:03:28.82] So thank you very much.

[01:03:34.71] Julie, thanks.

[01:03:35.22] Thank you.

[01:03:36.80] Have a lovely evening

[01:03:38.66] Thank you, Julie.

[01:03:40.85] Thank you very much. A real pleasure. Thank you.

[01:03:43.61] Bye, everybody.