

CITIES IN THE 2020s

SOCIALISING REMOTE WORK

HUMANISING THE CITY

LOCALISING TRANSPORT

CHANGING CULTURES

RATIONALISING SHOPPING



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URBAN AGE DEBATES CITIES IN THE 2020S: HOW ARE CITIES RESPONDING TO PROFOUND GLOBAL CHANGE?

ORGANISED BY LSE CITIES AT LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND THE ALFRED HERRHAUSEN GESELLSCHAFT

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As cities around the world learn to cope with the triple crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing inequality and the global climate emergency, there is an urgent need to reflect and respond to rapidly changing and uncertain urban dynamics. Critically, urban leaders need to understand how to protect their citizens, make cities liveable, equitable and resilient while fundamentally restructuring their economies for an increasingly digital urban age. This understanding needs to build on established knowledge and experience but it also requires an appreciation of the deep uncertainties involved, the unprecedented urgency to act and the radically different global context within which cities find themselves today compared to a decade ago.

The Urban Age Programme was established as a worldwide investigation into the future of cities in 2004, not long before the headline-grabbing moment when the majority of the world’s population were urban rather than rural dwellers. At that time urban growth projections based on extrapolation of recent trends were reliable, the possibility of gradual carbon emission reduction to achieve a safe climate was still possible and urban democracy was a project motivating decentralisation reforms and city leadership. Since then, many of the certainties that were directly connected with a global narrative about cities have been challenged: the role of the financial sector, urban green growth, a cosmopolitan insulation against populism, the trickle-down potential of superstar cities, gentrification without displacement, the purpose of consumer cities, and manageable levels of planetary extraction to support city building.

The world of the 2020s is continuously adding to the list of questions about the future rather than offering a clear trajectory for positive change. This makes the shaping of our cities a daunting task and demands a new pro-active engagement to create futures rather than trying to predict them. This is the context of the Urban Age Debates. Building on the convening power and global network of the Urban Age Programme, the series contributes to the public discourse in an original and impactful way to inform an era of uncertainty and hopes of a better urban future.

This initiative was structured around a series of five live virtual events held between January 2021 and January 2022, complemented by interviews with key urban actors, new data on city dynamics and surveys on how we may live, work and move in the post-2020 city.

Our first debate focused on Socialising Remote Work, asking: Will changing patterns in knowledge work reduce or amplify the human need to meet in cities? While it is still unclear to what extent office-based work patterns will re-emerge, it is already evident that the logic of the five-day office week has been broken. With it comes a changing use of inner-city office buildings and their urban environments. A large majority of our survey of more than 800 urban practitioners and experts suggested that the location of knowledge work will undergo transformative change.

Humanising the City: Can the design of urban space promote cohesion and healthier lifestyles? was the title of our second debate. Living together has been challenged as a concept and as a reality. How we spend time at home, on the street, and in the city over the next decade is being re-framed. How we re-calibrate urban centres where people can live, work and transact is open to debate. This Urban Age Debate brought together prominent city-shapers and commentators who are committed to making cities more liveable, more democratic and more complex.

A third debate engaged with Localising Transport: towards the 15-minute city or the one-hour metropolis? It recognised the early 2020s as an inflection point for urban transport with digital connectivity for the first time having the potential to substitute certain forms of physical access. Furthermore, public transport finance requires new business models, and post-pandemic shifts are either entrenching transport-intense urban development or accelerating progress towards urban patterns based on density and mixed use. A second survey of 340 urban thinkers, leaders and practitioners suggested that hyper-localisation with greater proximity between urban functions is significantly more likely than a dispersal of urban activities.

Changing Cultures: How are cultural institutions re-framing their relationships with audiences, the community and the city? underpinned the exchange as part of our fourth debate. It recognised that over the past three decades investment in cultural infrastructure has become a familiar tool in urban strategies, placemaking and branding around the world. But it was also stressed that the context in which cultural organisations are operating today is changing rapidly and speculated whether this is stimulating a new interest in more localised lives centred around resurgent town centres and neighbourhoods.

Our last debate concentrated on Rationalising Shopping: Are new patterns of consumption an opportunity for reinventing urbanity? It appreciated that even before the pandemic, e-commerce was challenging recreational shopping in cities, ethical concerns about cheap labour were becoming more prominent and the climate and ecological emergency was prompting questions about hyper-consumerism, the accumulation of more stuff and “discard culture”. It concluded that only a robust mix of uses, a place-making approach and an increasingly repair- and maintenance-oriented economy will ensure that former retail areas remain attractive and sustainable. It also recognised the emotional and sensory function of public space in cities.

While none of the Urban Age Debates suggested that today’s uncertainties are exaggerated, they all offered a sense of a re-emerging collective ambition for shaping the future of cities.

Anna Herrhausen, Executive Director, Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft

Ricky Burdett, Director, LSE Cities

Philipp Rode, Executive Director, LSE Cities

The renovated rooftop play deck in Rodeph Shalom School, New York encourages children to play safely in the city. These outdoor, on-site play spaces are a critical component of active design strategies in cities, which supplement interior education spaces, support student wellness, and promote social cohesion during a pandemic-induced crisis.



© Francis Dzikowski

#1 HEALTH CRISIS #2 CLIMATE CRISIS #3 INEQUALITY CRISIS

Fire caused by combustible plastics makes Delhi's air quality worse. India's tallest garbage mountain, Ghazipur, also nicknamed "Mount Everest" is 65 metres high and larger than 40 football pitches. Ghazipur landfill rises by nearly 10 metres a year due to an increase in mass consumption and discard culture, which intensify the global climate emergency.



#1 HEALTH CRISIS #2 CLIMATE CRISIS #3 INEQUALITY CRISIS

Increasing inequality is captured by drone images of Mumbai, which expose polarising differences between extreme poverty and wealth. The dense informal dwellings that lack access to basic services form segregated ghettos.



© Johnny Miller

#1 HEALTH CRISIS #2 CLIMATE CRISIS #3 INEQUALITY CRISIS



DEBATE 1 SOCIALISING REMOTE WORK: WILL CHANGING PATTERNS IN KNOWLEDGE WORK REDUCE OR AMPLIFY THE HUMAN NEED TO MEET IN CITIES?

February 2021

Cities have traditionally been the sites of economic agglomeration, reaping the benefits of a high concentration of economic activity, spurred by collaboration and innovation. However, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns have forced offices to close, city centres to empty, with many knowledge workers operating from the safety of their homes.

While some trends indicate a return to office-based work patterns (which will be accelerated by access to a vaccine), some commentators welcome the greater personal flexibility and access to the global talent pool afforded by virtual technologies. This debate interrogates the impacts of the dramatic shift in working conditions, how sites of knowledge work have adapted, and how cities can maintain their economic and cultural vibrancy without negatively impacting on productivity, connectivity and personal freedom.

This first Urban Age Debate is chaired by journalist and author Camilla Cavendish, who is joined by urbanist and author Richard Florida, AI and technology expert Ayesha Khanna, and HR executive Janina Kugel.

SPEAKERS



Richard Florida is a Professor of Economic Analysis and Policy at the University of Toronto School of Cities and Rotman School of Management, and a Distinguished Fellow at New York University's Schack School of Real Estate. He is a writer and journalist, having penned several best-sellers including the award-winning *The Rise of The Creative Class*, and his most recent book, *The New Urban Crisis*. He is also the co-founder of *CityLab*, the leading publication devoted to cities and urbanism.



Ayesha Khanna is the co-founder and CEO of ADDO AI, an artificial intelligence (AI) solutions firm and incubator. She serves on the Board of Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), the Singapore government's agency that develops and regulates its technology sector, digital economy and Smart Nation vision. She is also a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Councils, a group of experts who provide leadership on the impact and governance of emerging technologies.



Janina Kugel Non-Executive Board Member, Senior Advisor and Speaker. Prior to this, she has been Chief Human Resources Officer and a member of the Managing Board of Siemens AG with global responsibility for Human Resources. She is a non-executive board member of Konecranes Oy, Finland and the German Pension Benefit Guaranty Association, and a member of the international Advisory Board of Hertie School of Governance in Berlin Germany and IESE Business School in Barcelona, Spain.

CHAIR



Camilla Cavendish is an award-winning journalist and Contributing Editor at the *Financial Times*. She was the former Director of Policy for Prime Minister David Cameron and now sits in the House of Lords as an independent peer. During the pandemic she has been working with the Department of Health as an advisor assisting on COVID-19 from March to November 2020. She is currently a Senior Fellow at the Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, where her research focuses on demographic challenges. She is the author of the 2019 book *Ten Lessons For an Ageing World*, which is now being read in 16 countries.



Click or scan to watch Debate

SOCIALISING REMOTE WORK

1 The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated trends in the nature and geography of knowledge work

Before March 2020, only around 5 per cent of knowledge workers worked primarily from home or remotely. Since then, there has been a rapid acceleration in the adoption of remote work, with more than 20 per cent of knowledge workers wanting to work remotely three to five days a week, and just 12 per cent desiring a return to full-time office work.

Further, the vast majority of the technology that remote workers have relied on existed before the pandemic; however, it was “in March 2020, I learned the noun and verb Zoom,” says Richard Florida. Remote workers have had to adapt to increasing digitalisation and new working arrangements; as Ayesha Khanna explained, “Pandemic or no pandemic, we will have to adjust to different ways of working and upskill ourselves to the new demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

While on the individual level, the disruption caused by the shift to remote work has been drastic, not all organisational changes can happen as swiftly. As Janina Kugel puts it, “when it comes to cultural change and changing corporations, you actually need much more disruption.”

2 Pre-existing inequality has meant the COVID-19 pandemic and the turn to remote work has disproportionately affected different groups

The events of 2020 have revealed like never before deep-rooted inequities that played out in cities. “What we are seeing now is an incredible socio-economic disjuncture. If you look at the two major movements we’ve seen around the world today, the rise of populism and the Black Lives Matter movement, they are both in very different ways a response to people being shut out of the future, we need some new kind of social safety net... [such as] Universal Basic Income,” says Richard Florida.

Further, while the shift to remote work has been enthusiastically adopted by some, according to Richard Florida, “we are going to see bigger divides by geography, by gender, by demography, by age, as well as by race and by class.” Janina Kugel shed light on how some groups of women have been particularly negatively affected by the pandemic: “Women were mostly losing their jobs first, and if they didn’t lose their jobs then they were coming to a shortage of work times ... I haven’t seen any state launch a financial welfare package that had a gender balancing aspect.”

Some knowledge workers have been able to work through the challenges of remote work relying on their support networks, but access to these networks isn’t universal, as Richard Florida cautions: “Coming out of this, I think work is going to be different. Some advantaged group of people, mainly the 1 per cent, can work remotely and have a wonderful support staff in the office and out of the office. But the majority of the workforce risks falling further and further behind, and without strategic and intentional action, those divides are going to widen.”

3 Technology and digitalisation can work to “remove the elitism of location”

While cities have almost always acted as sites of agglomeration and collaboration between businesses, according to Ayesha Khanna, the shift towards remote work and digitalisation in knowledge work can “remove the elitism of location if we want to be more inclusive, and these technologies do provide a way for us to do that.”

While the increasing reliance on technology for knowledge workers can open up many new opportunities, digitalisation must be accompanied by governance as Ayesha Khanna emphasises strongly: “No one can never talk about technology or data or AI without the word governance in the same sentence, because one without the other is ridiculous.”

4 While central business districts will suffer and office space will be consolidated, cities will survive

Despite the deleterious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on cities, Richard Florida thinks “there’s been far too much conversation about the decline of big urban centres: London, New York, Berlin. Cities have survived far worse than this and come back.”

While cities will come back, how urban residents live and work in cities is becoming more complex. Over the next decade, the choice to live in a city will not be guided primarily by working opportunities but by amenities. This shift requires urban leaders to think flexibly, as Janina Kugel emphasises: “I do not believe that we will work remotely forever, but I definitely hope with the reduction of office space we will come to a combination of more flexibility in inner cities.”



Hong Kong © Thomas Birke

“Since the pandemic forced offices to close, many knowledge workers have gotten used to working on Zoom with no commute, and some companies are welcoming a future where they may be able to tap into a more global talent pool because geography has become less important.”

Camilla Cavendish, Journalist and Contributing Editor, *Financial Times*

“The concept of a fourth dimension for offices is this ideal that you can work anywhere, anytime. In truly hybrid organisations, somebody who goes to the office to connect with people would have the same sort of interaction with others as those that are working from home or from some other space.”

Brian Gilligan, environmental design expert



Outdoor dining, Berlin © Philipp Rode

“What becomes of cities? What happens to buildings? It is the real estate people who are beginning to ask these questions.”

Judith Heerwagen, environmental psychologist

“The city as a workplace needs to become even more compelling, a worker might choose to work from home four days a week or one day a week [...] the delta between those two things is going to depend on how much the worker wants to be somewhere and feels like it’s fun and creative and adds value and so on.”

Rohan Silva, entrepreneur

“I think the face-to-face economy is going to become super premium and it will only work when it’s very high value. [...] What is much more difficult for people as they become independent and isolated is their development path.”

Indy Johar, architect and strategic designer

“Over the pandemic we were able to see a mindset shift where we were able to get to the level of productivity and of trust building and of relationship in a virtual setting. I certainly have more access to talent, because of this openness to work with people in different countries.”

Ayesha Khanna, technologist and entrepreneur

“More knowledge workers will be choosing to work from home or to work virtually, meaning that they have these trends of shorter tenure”

SunYoung Lee, organisational behaviour expert

“[When] Technology doesn’t exist for a hybrid meeting, that puts an incredible disparity between the people who are in the room and the people who are outside the room.”

Kevin Kampschroer, green buildings leader

“The big change will be in the geography of work. I’m very nervous about the divides across the span of demographic, gender, race and class issues widening exponentially and astronomically as we come out of this crisis.”

Richard Florida, Professor of Economic Analysis and Policy at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto

“Automation and digitisation will not disappear. A digital age will foster and challenge us more in having more flexibility in our decision making.”

Janina Kugel, Former Chief HR Officer, Siemens AG



Shibuya Crossing, Tokyo © Sean Pavone



London Bridge © Philipp Rode

“The real question is how can we redefine what mixed development looks like? How does it operate and who does it serve? I am hoping that if the workplace transforms, some of the benefits get to spill out to the larger context.”

Kyriaki Kasabalas, architect and urban designer

“You know, we need to remove the elitism of location, if we want to be more inclusive and these technologies do provide a way for us to do that.”

Ayesha Khanna, technologist and entrepreneur



Business district of Paris La Defense © Pisaphotography



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THE FUTURE OF KNOWLEDGE WORK

INTRODUCTION

This summary presents the findings of a global survey on the future of knowledge work in cities. Conducted between November 2020 and January 2021, the survey invited urban thought leaders and practitioners from around the world to share their perspectives on what could and should happen to knowledge work in cities over the next decade.

The survey is part of the Urban Age Debates: Cities in the 2020s outreach programme organised by LSE Cities and the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft. The results of the survey informed the first debate's theme, Socialising Remote Work: Will changing patterns in knowledge work reduce or amplify the human need to meet in cities?

1. THE BIG PICTURE

A total of 905 urban thinkers and practitioners from 73 countries shared their views and opinions for this Urban Age Debates Survey. Three groups of respondents with similar sentiments towards the future of knowledge work in cities were identified: the concerned, the reassured, and the ambivalent. Knowledge work is a broad term that describes professions that produce unique knowledge with an emphasis on non-routine problem-solving; for example: programmers, physicians, architects, engineers, lawyers, and academics.

The first group, the concerned, believe that knowledge workers will spend more time working from home or local offices, but fear that this shift might reduce business opportunities and considerably reduce agglomeration advantages. They are also more likely to strongly agree that the private automobile will dominate city streets once again. Overall, this group see a post-COVID future based at or near home, in which knowledge workers will spend little time working in pre-COVID offices.

Figure 1: Two Macro-Scenarios for the Future of Knowledge Work

Which of the following two macro-scenarios do you consider more likely?

Scenario A: The COVID-19 crisis will induce a major restructuring of knowledge work locations with hyper-density in primary cities being less relevant and access to high-speed and reliable internet the most important factor.

Scenario B: Once/if COVID-19 is no longer a major threat, knowledge work locations will once again follow pre-crisis trends (increasing attraction of urban/inner-city settings for office locations).

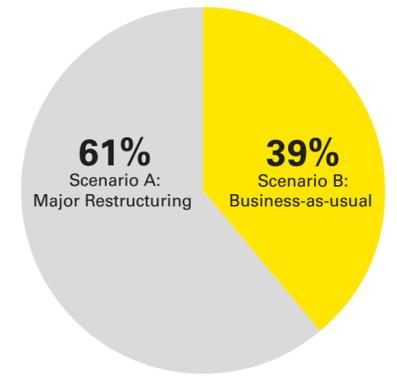


Figure 2: Future Scenarios for Knowledge Work in Cities

Post-2020, how likely are the following scenarios for the future of knowledge work in cities?

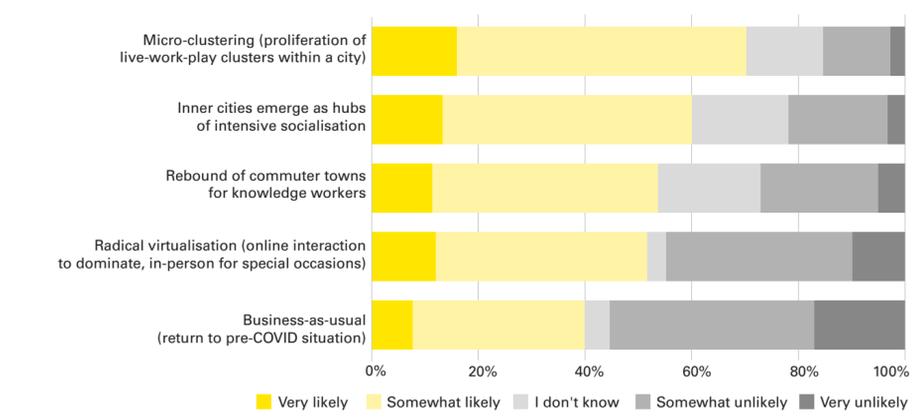


Figure 3: The Future of Offices and Collaboration

Post-2020, what percentage of time will knowledge work be conducted from each location?



Post-2020, what percentage of knowledge work collaboration time do you expect to be online, in-person, or hybrid?



Figure 4: Knowledge Work, Business Opportunities and Agglomeration Advantages

To what extent do you agree with the following statements on knowledge work and cities?

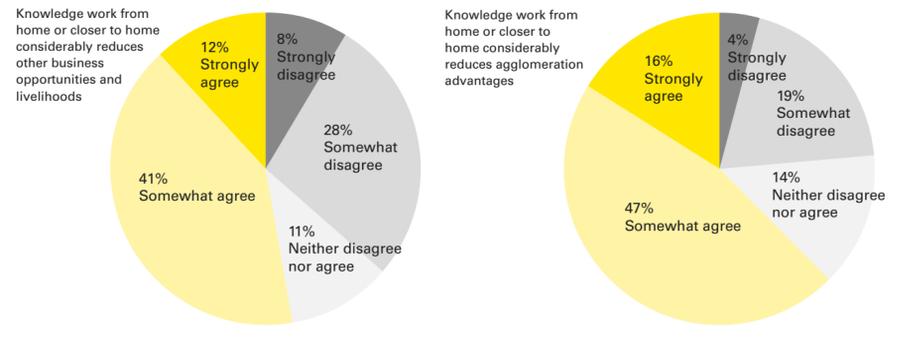


Figure 5: Critical Advantages of Knowledge Work in Cities

What do you believe to be the most critical advantages of urban settings for knowledge work in the future ranked most important (1) to least important (8)?

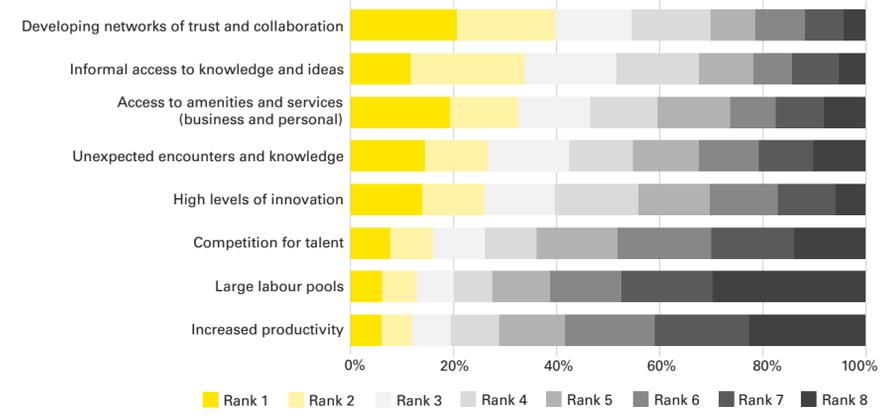


Figure 6: The Future of Knowledge Work in Cities

What do you believe should happen to knowledge work in urban settings ranked most important (1) to least important (5)?

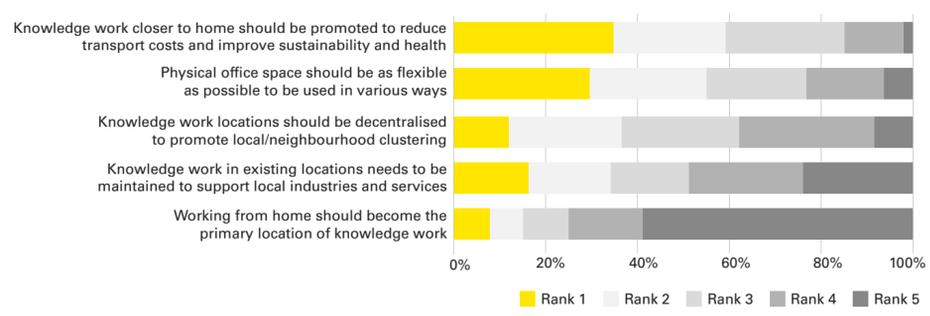


Figure 7: Survey Demographics

Top 10 Professions	Top 10 Countries	Age Groups	Gender
Urbanism	UK	30-39	Male
Architecture	Germany	40-49	Female
Climate change and Sustainability	USA	50-59	Prefer not to say
Real Estate	Ethiopia	20-29	
Arts and culture	Italy	60-69	
Sociology	India	70-79	
Development	Australia	>80	
Data and Technology	Netherlands		
Economics	South Africa		
Academia	France		

The second group, the reassured, agree with the concerned that working from home or closer to home would reduce business opportunities and agglomeration advantages and that a shift to remote work would also spark the domination of city streets by private automobiles. However, unlike the concerned, this group do not believe that knowledge workers will spend more time working from local offices, and instead anticipate a return to pre-COVID offices as more likely.

The third cluster, the ambivalent, gather around the middle and believe that knowledge workers will spend an equal amount of time working from local offices, in-person, and using a hybrid model. They are also neutral on the effects of working from home or closer to home with regards to agglomeration advantages and business opportunities. Alongside this group's ambivalence, these respondents are split on how much they believe in-person interaction impacts creativity in knowledge work.

Across all three groups, respondents' sentiments are relatively negative about the impact of abandoning the pre-COVID office, in particular regarding business opportunities, agglomeration advantages, creativity in knowledge work and the risk of furthering social divisions and spatial inequities. This may indicate that a complete and enthusiastic shift to exclusively remote knowledge work may be problematic and is unlikely to occur. While one could expect that respondents would disagree along demographic and professional divisions, interestingly, all three clusters included respondents of various demographics. No demographic feature (age, country, profession, or gender) could accurately predict being a part of any of the three groups of respondents.

2. SPECIFIC FINDINGS

From an economic development perspective, cities are commonly seen as sites of agglomeration where the concentration of economic activity, spill-over effects and large labour pools enable high levels of productivity, collaboration and innovation.² As decades of empirical work has shown, this has been particularly the case for knowledge work in cities.³

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and related policy responses have repeatedly forced offices to close, city centres to empty and knowledge workers in cities around the world to operate from home. Moving into the 2020s, this changing paradigm of work raises important questions: How will these experimental changes impact knowledge work patterns in the future? What should happen to knowledge work in cities considering wider social, economic and environmental factors?

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR KNOWLEDGE WORK

While some trends indicate a return to office-based work patterns with the inclusion of hybrid models (which will be accelerated by access to a vaccine),⁴ some commentators welcome the greater personal flexibility and access to the global talent pool afforded by virtual technologies.⁵ This opens up many issues that cities will have to face, including the impacts of the dramatic shift in working conditions, how sites of knowledge work will adapt, and how cities can maintain their economic and cultural vibrancy without negatively impacting productivity, connectivity and personal freedom.

This first section presents survey insights linked to possible scenarios that could affect knowledge work in the next decade. When asked which of two macro-scenarios for the future of knowledge work they consider more likely to occur (Figure 1), a majority of respondents (61%) believe that a major restructuring of knowledge work locations is more likely than a return to pre-crisis, business-as-usual trends (39%).

This speculation then leads to the question of what new functionalities will emerge for pre-2020 office locations and where knowledge work will occur in the future (Figure 2). Most survey respondents (70%) agreed that it is likely that micro-clustering, such as the 15-minute city model, will become more common, and 59 per cent consider it likely that inner cities will emerge as hubs for intensive socialisation. Just over half of the respondents (54%) agreed that it was likely that commuter towns for knowledge workers will bounce back, and 52 per cent

judge that radical virtualisation where online interaction dominates is a likely outcome.

Interestingly, respondents predict that there will be a close to even time split for collaborative and team-based knowledge work conducted online (36%), in-person (31%) and using a hybrid model (33%; Figure 3). This would represent a significant shift, as before March 2020, only around 5 per cent of knowledge workers in Europe were primarily working from home, which would have included some collaborative work.⁶ Based on these speculations it could be assumed that knowledge workers will increase their days working remotely and initiate a shift to online collaboration, which will endure over the next decade.

ASSESSING KNOWLEDGE WORK IN CITIES

This second section discusses survey findings based on the respondents' assessment and informed opinions on the current and future nature of knowledge work in cities over the next decade.

Regarding the effect of remote work on business opportunities and agglomeration advantages, opinions were split and relatively indifferent (Figure 4). A majority of respondents, however, agreed that conducting knowledge work from home considerably reduces both business opportunities and livelihoods (53%), and agglomeration advantages (63%). In both cases, only a small group of respondents have no opinion. From this, it seems that slightly more respondents worry about the effects of knowledge work from or closer to home on agglomeration advantages than on business opportunities.

As advantages for knowledge work in urban settings were universally accepted and thus centrally underpinned urban policy making pre-2020, it is paramount to consider various subcomponents of this urban dividend and reflect on their continued or changing importance (Figure 5). Survey respondents rank developing networks of trust and collaboration as the most critical advantage of urban settings for future knowledge work, followed by informal access to ideas and knowledge as the second most, and access to business and personal amenities and services as the third most critical advantage. Increased productivity and access to large labour pools were ranked second to last and last, respectively. These results indicate that the value and advantages of urban settings for the future of knowledge work are primarily social in nature, as networks of trust and collaboration as well as informal knowledge exchange heavily rely on in-person social interactions.

AN AGENDA FOR THE NEXT DECADE OF KNOWLEDGE WORK

This last section reviews survey insights on a more normative agenda for knowledge work in cities over the coming decade.

Here, the survey initially asked how often knowledge workers should interact in-person for a variety of functions in order to identify the most valued use of in-person interactions. Respondents answered that advancing team creativity and problem-solving, as well as building trust among team members, should occur in-person more often than other functions such as socialising with team members, improving productivity, and skill-building and professional development. This may indicate that the future use of offices and in-person interactions should prioritise advancing creativity, problem-solving, and trust-building, over others that can occur in-person less often or, through virtualisation, not in-person at all.

When asked directly about various options of what should happen to knowledge work in urban settings (Figure 6), respondents ranked first that knowledge work closer to home should be promoted, and second that physical office space should be as flexible as possible. Interestingly, respondents ranked last that working from home should become the primary location of knowledge work. This indicates that a comprehensive shift to working from home is not desirable and when considering work dynamics and other societal factors, knowledge workers should spend at least some time outside their homes. The prioritisation of either more decentralised knowledge work or the re-establishment of existing locations appears to be less clear among the respondents.

In relation to the future location of knowledge work, respondents agreed that urban leaders must act swiftly to sufficiently adapt to the dramatic changes occurring in inner cities. When asked to list actions that urban leaders must take, responses grouped around four actions:

1. Ensure safe, efficient and accessible public transportation systems and infrastructure;
2. Improve and maintain high-quality, safe and accessible public and green spaces;
3. Promote flexible office spaces and flexibility in work arrangements and structures, including working from home;
4. Upgrade information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and capabilities, and increase digitalisation.

Despite this, one respondent cautioned urban leaders, “Don’t overreact! Don’t push digitalisation too hard or just for the sake of it.” Other respondents chimed in, stating, “The geography of work will become more nuanced; it’s not either city or home, but both. This is already happening.” Other respondents were more straightforward with their responses, such as this respondent pushing urban leaders to “Prioritise urban design for walking, then cycling, then public transportation – no questions asked, no debate.”

CONCLUSION

This survey overview has shown that no consensus exists between urban thought leaders and practitioners on the future of knowledge work in cities. Instead, the analysis revealed that three main groups with varying sentiments emerged: the concerned, the reassured and the ambivalent. Despite these three different groups, respondents across all groups felt relatively negative about the impact of abandoning the pre-COVID office, suggesting that a hybrid model with an increased number of days working remotely with some days in the office may be most appropriate. The results of this survey suggest that much remains to be seen in how knowledge workers, and in turn the location of knowledge work, will react to the dramatic changes of 2020 in the long term. With this in mind, urban policy makers have an important role in shaping the post-2020 nature and location of knowledge work, as one respondent summarised: “Urban leaders must consider the cost and benefits of maintaining centralised urban central business districts, and decide whether they want to actively support these or let them die.”

¹ Reinhardt, W., Schmidt, B., Sloep, P. & Drachsler, H., 2011. Knowledge Worker Roles and Actions—Results of Two Empirical Studies. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 18(3), pp. 150–174.

² Glaeser, E., 2010. Introduction. In: E. Glaeser, ed. *Agglomeration Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 1–14.

³ Tallman, S., Jenkins, M., Henry, N. & Pinch, S., 2004. Knowledge, Clusters, and Competitive Advantage. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(2), pp. 258–271.

⁴ JLL Global Research, 2020. *Reimagining Human Experience: How to embrace the new work-life priorities and expectations of a liquid workforce*, Chicago: Jones Lang Lasalle.

⁵ Frankiewicz, B. & Tomas, C.-P., 2020. The Post-Pandemic Rules of Talent Management. [Online] Available at: <https://hbr.org/2020/10/the-post-pandemic-rules-of-talent-management> [Accessed 23 February 2021].

⁶ Milasi, S., González-Vázquez, I. & Fernández-Macias, E., 2020. *Telework in the EU before and after the COVID-19: where we were*, Brussels: European Commission.

First published for the Urban Age Programme by LSE Cities, London School of Economics and Political Science, March 2021.

REMOTE WORK, PELOTON AND ONLINE EDUCATION: WHAT THE END OF COMMUTING MEANS FOR CITIES

February 2021

City centres are currently almost empty. Richard Florida (Rotman School of Management and University of Toronto) predicts that knowledge workers will spend less time in the office – but that does not necessarily mean a boom in suburban living. Instead, they will seek out attractive, high-amenity places in cities and more remote rural areas, where they can work, play and educate their children, often within a 15-minute radius. Service workers in city centres will fall further behind, and economic and geographic divides will widen.

The pandemic and the economic and social crises to which it has given rise are not so much a disruptor as an accelerator of ongoing changes in the way we live and work. There is a great deal of talk about the changes in where people work, and the way they do it. But in my view the biggest and most fundamental change will be less about the geography of residence, and more about the geography of work.

Since the 1980s, the advanced nations have been moving from an older, industrial economy – where people work with their backs and their brawn – to a knowledge economy, where they work with their minds. This trend is apparent when you look at the percentage of people with advanced degrees and who work in the knowledge economy, or the rise of what I dubbed the creative class of scientists, techies, innovators, knowledge workers, artists and designers.

What we used to call “telework” and now call remote work grew a little prior to COVID-19. Roughly 5% of knowledge workers were working from home before the pandemic, although 20–40% would have liked to. Then came reliable broadband and the rise of new technologies like Zoom, which coincided with the pandemic. Not all these workers will return full-time to the office. Knowledge workers are currently very highly concentrated in large cities like London and New York.

The central business districts (CBDs) of large cities are also a relic of the old industrial age – these are the places that packed and stacked office workers in giant skyscraper canyons. The rise of remote work will very likely result in less demand for office space in these CBDs. Best estimates place the reduction in demand at 20–30%. This will have a significant impact, especially on lower-income service workers in the restaurants, cafes and shops that support these office economies. It will also negatively impact cities’ tax revenues and their fiscal situation.

But there is an opportunity to remake these office neighbourhoods to create actual live-work neighbourhoods, with more affordable housing. City centre housing briefly became more affordable after the 2008 financial crisis, but then prices surged again, and that may happen again this time: after all, the US economy is predicted to grow 7.5% next year. London, New York and Berlin have survived far worse than this, and they will come back. The oligarchs could decide they’re better off in Monaco and Miami Beach, but we will still see demand from knowledge workers, and that risks making city centres unaffordable for service workers and most of the middle classes. The traditional suburbs will be hit a lot harder than people think: both big cities and attractive places with special amenities will enjoy an enormous premium.

This is the moment to remake those skyscraper canyons as better, more integrated and affordable urban neighbourhoods. Paris’s mayor, Anne Hidalgo, has been anticipating and leading just such a refashioning of her city, following the model of urbanist Carlos Moreno and his notion of a 15-minute city, where you can live, work and send your kids to school within a small radius. Some of the work that used to be done in the CBD will move out into private offices, coworking or neighbourhood third spaces.

At the same time, there is an enormous opportunity to decentralise places of work, and add work and jobs to more remote suburban and rural bedroom communities, making them more self-sufficient. Taken together, these trends could help reduce commuting, save energy and reduce pollution.

Remote work also portends real challenges for workers and cities. In the US, some tech companies are using remote work as an excuse to reduce pay for workers who choose to live in less expensive areas. At the same time, the corporations themselves are threatening to move to lower-tax states, creating a proverbial race to the bottom and putting pressure on progressive cities to reduce social spending, cut regulation and create more business-friendly climates.

“The biggest change of this pandemic will not be in the geography of residence [...] The big change will be in the geography of work. We packed and stacked knowledge workers in giant office towers and they endured long commutes by car and train and bus [...] We could see a significant decline in the demand for the central business district, [but] quite tragically, it will increase work inequality.”

The new reality and geography of work accentuates class divides. The most advantaged class – the 1% – now have the resources and ability to move where they like, and in the US many are relocating to reduce their taxes. The 20–30% of knowledge and creative workers are also afforded new freedom and flexibility by creative work, though we are currently downloading far more responsibility on to these highly atomised people. They are now expected to set up technological infrastructure in their own homes and provide care and education for their children. Another two-thirds of the workforce will fall further and further behind. Without real strategic, economic action, these divides are going to widen.

If the acceleration to how and where we work is big, the disruption to traditional educational models may be even larger. With many public schools shut, advantaged families in the US have begun putting their children into pod schools with a few other families. It suits them and disrupts the traditional school environment. Personal trainers are being replaced by personalised online training such as Peloton bikes. And online university courses are now far easier to deliver at scale. Yet some people still don’t have a computer at home, and will be excluded from these shifts. While remote work has been going on for some time, we are at the very earliest changes in the shift to new educational models. It is hard to say exactly how those changes will materialise, but the moment of disruption to education has arrived.

Already, two major global movements – populism on the right and Black Lives Matter on the left – have emerged as a result of these challenges. But we need to acknowledge this socioeconomic disjuncture by introducing a new and better social welfare system that gives people material support and also enables them to find purpose and meaning in their life and work. This would include policies like a universal basic income and the ability to find and do purposeful work, whether that is start-up or community work. The progressive left has to do a much better job of engaging with these critical issues in order to gain the support of the working class and those working in service industries.

This post first appeared at the LSE COVID-19 blog.

About the author



Richard Florida is University Professor, Professor of Economic Analysis and Policy at the Rotman School of Management and Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence, School of Cities, University of Toronto.



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The Highline, New York. © Timothy Schenck. Courtesy of DS+R

DEBATE 2 HUMANISING THE CITY: CAN THE DESIGN OF URBAN SPACE PROMOTE COHESION AND HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES?

April 2021

Throughout 2020, the shape of the city – its buildings and open spaces – has taken centre stage in our experience of everyday life. Living in lockdown has confronted urban dwellers around the world with the limits of confined domestic environments yet reminded us of the benefits of a well-designed and accessible public realm.

Living together has been challenged as a concept and as a reality. How we spend time at home, on the street, and in the city over the next decade is being re-framed. How we re-calibrate urban centres where people can live, work and transact is open to debate.

Chaired by LSE Cities Director Ricky Burdett and introduced by Executive Director of the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft Anna Herrhausen, this virtual debate features presentations from three architects and urban practitioners: Rozana Montiel of Rozana, Montiel Estudio de Arquitectura in Mexico City, Amanda Levene of AL_A in London and Elizabeth Diller of DS+R in NYC – with leading urban author and commentator Suketu Mehta, who explore the deep connections between the design of public space and social inclusion as cities strive to become humane.

SPEAKERS



Elizabeth Diller is a partner of the architectural practice Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R) based in New York City. Diller has been committed to an exploration of how democracy and the public realm intersect, realising spatially inventive and socially progressive projects in cities across the world including the High Line in New York City and Zaryadye Park in Moscow, as well as educational and cultural buildings that prioritise connection with the city and the creation of social space.



Rozana Montiel leads the Mexico City-based architecture studio Rozana Montiel | Estudio de Arquitectura, which has investigated how elegant, modest architecture can contribute to the creation of socially inclusive urban spaces. She has transformed abandoned open spaces in a public housing project into active social facilities through the Common Unity project in Mexico City and completed a rural housing project for earthquake victims in Ocuilan, Mexico.



Amanda Levene is one of the United Kingdom's most respected architects and has consistently pushed the boundaries of architectural, technical and social innovation. A regular commentator on design and urban society, she is the founder and principal of Amanda Levene Architects (AL_A), which re-engaged the Victoria and Albert Museum in London with the city through its award-winning Exhibition Road project, re-animated Lisbon's waterfront with the Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, and is exploring the potential of regenerating inner cities across the United Kingdom.



Suketu Mehta is a writer, critic and urbanist who focuses on the social and ethnic complexity of the contemporary city, and the deep connections between urban form and cultural vibrancy. Author of *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*, winner of the Kiriya Prize and finalist for the 2005 Pulitzer Prize, Mehta explores how cities sustain diverse urban communities, delving deep into the dynamics of migrant communities in global cities such as New York City, Mumbai, and Rio de Janeiro.

CHAIR



Ricky Burdett is a Professor of Urban Studies at the London School of Economics, Director of LSE Cities, a global research centre at LSE, and co-founder of the Urban Age.

WELCOME



Anna Herrhausen is the Executive Director of the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft and the head of Deutsche Bank's Art, Culture and Sports department.



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1 Re imagining forgotten and underused urban spaces offers potential for connection and integration

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the value of public space for our well-being as urban citizens, at a time that investment in the open public realm has been challenged. The projects presented by the speakers revealed how simple architectural gestures have transformed forgotten or underused spaces and structures into places of connection and integration.

Suketu Mehta argued in favour of even the smallest interventions that can add value and complexity to urban life. Describing the pedestrianisation of a busy traffic junction into a people-friendly Diversity Plaza in Jackson Heights, New York City, Mehta noted, "Jackson Heights really lacks any kind of public space, there aren't any big parks, and there aren't even small parks. Diversity Plaza just got a few benches, really nothing much has been done to it. But if you want to know what's happening with the Bangladeshi elections or relationships between Tibetans and Chinese, you can go to Diversity Plaza and find little groups of immigrants debating the politics of their homelands. It's an incredibly human space in the big city."

The High Line project in New York City reimagines a two-kilometre stretch of obsolete industrial rail infrastructure into a linear park, becoming the city's most popular attraction with views of the urban landscape from eight metres "up in the air". The vision for the project, Diller explains, was "To take this piece of unused property, and bring green space into an area that was really underserved by green space, but also with an argument to serve as a catalyst."

On a smaller scale, Rozana Montiel's surgical interventions in social housing complexes in Mexico – the conversion of a redundant sewage canal in Fresnillo and a gated courtyard in Mexico City – demonstrates the value of retrofitting underused space. Describing the impact of the Fresnillo project, Montiel states, "Unclaimed urban spaces can be transformed into inclusive places, rich in function and diversity. Places of resilience where despite the surrounding violence, young people can teach their dance classes and children can play."

2 Unplanned and unexpected uses of public space contribute to social life

Versatility has been key to successful public spaces, allowing and promoting unplanned and unexpected uses that add excitement and spontaneity to urban life, while many purpose-designed spaces are overly prescriptive and constrain human behaviour.

Levete exploited the opportunity of re-engineering the entrance to the imposing Victoria and Albert Museum in London by turning a disused boiler yard into a shared space that links the museum to the city. "The way the public have used the courtyard has been transformative. It's changed the way people see the museum and it's changed the way the institution sees itself," Levete noted, reflecting that "It's sometimes the things that you don't do that allow the unexpected to happen, and the space to be appropriated by the public."

Diller expressed a similar sentiment when her studio learned that their project

for Zaryadye Park had stimulated unexpected uses from Muscovites: "There was an invitation for the public to come in and use the public space in a kind of uninhibited way, very different from other parks in Moscow. People are feeling so free in this space that they can really enjoy the space and each other. So to us, it was a victory."

3 The public realm of city is a democratic and contested right that reflects opposing interests "Urban space is public and democratic like air and water, until it is cut up and privatised" (Liz Diller)

Architects have traditionally focused on the design of the built environment in cities with limited understanding of the complex structure of public space as a social, environmental and cultural artefact.

Suketu Mehta highlights the division between the disciplines that claim responsibility over the public realm: "I've seen now that language itself seems to have become splintered. Architects talk in a particular kind of language, sociologists talk in a different language," writers talk in a different language. "To his mind, this distortion contributes to "the construction of vanity projects being declared as an essential service. It's an example of how not to humanise the city."

Underscoring the role of the designer in shaping cities, Diller states at the outset that "The work of my studio has always been guided by the principle that urban space is public and democratic like air and water, until it is cut up and privatised. All of us are responsible to protect the public realm." She further explains, "Architecture is so slow and geo-fixed, and society is changing so fast. How can we think forward in terms of building, how can we imagine architecture of distinction without generic form going forward? That's our first obligation."

Commenting on the role of designers in shaping public life in the city, Levete expresses that "It is our responsibility as architects to spark these conversations, to provoke debate about these topics and bring the private and public sector together." Nonetheless, Mehta cautioned the panel on the dangers of limiting the discussion of the public realm to rich urban areas and excluding discussion of more peripheral areas like suburbs, or public institutions that promote cohesion.

4 The significance of the relationship between the physical and the social in public space has been made more evident during COVID-19 lockdowns

Given the restrictions imposed on using the public spaces of the city during lockdown, Burdett asked the speakers whether there had been, perversely, an "intensification of the urban experience" which had in effect magnified the "relationship between the world of the social and physical". Montiel argued that her studio has always prioritised this relationship through the concept of "placemaking". In Montiel's Common Unity project in Mexico City, "Through placemaking, we built with the community, not only for it. Our design replaced [rigid] barriers with [porous] boundaries. Placemaking is understanding that the value of architecture is not only laying bricks, but activating a social construction."

Levete connected the "perfect storm" of growth in online shopping and the impact of pandemic lockdowns on the economic viability of the typical inner city high street. She focused on the plight of department stores, which are increasingly going out of business and becoming redundant as a building type. Levete emphasised that demolition constituted wastage, and argued that even large, deep buildings like department stores could play a key role in revitalising inner city areas. Her creative concept for retrofitting an empty building into a community food hub is based on the notion that, "Food brings people together. Integrating the urban and nature has never been more important and I hope this project speaks to the potential for creating new social typologies that capture the mood and the character of our time."

5 The future of public space in the city is dynamic, diverse and complex

The pandemic has intensified and diversified the uses of public space as urban residents sought refuge from constrained and often cramped living spaces. Whether these changes will endure over the next decade remains to be seen, but this debate highlights how designers can integrate the new uses of public space into long-term change.

Montiel concludes her presentation with seven principles learned through her projects to humanise the city: "We must seek content in context, change barriers into boundaries, start with a shift of perception, approach the landscape as the program, re-signify materials, work with temporality and hold beauty as a basic right. The city is humanised when the space becomes a place."

Suketu Mehta reflects, "We need to think of how to humanise three types of places: the bazaar, like Amanda re-envisioned, the park or the playground, and the library, as Eric Klinenberg has pointed out, are palaces for the people. In the post-pandemic world, we more greatly than ever need to connect."



Common Unity, Fresnillo © Rozana Montiel Estudio de Arquitectura

"Cities are changed by the small interventions or acupuncture, once you add many of them you change the city."

Rozana Montiel, architect and Director, Rozana Montiel Estudio de Arquitectura

"As a designer, you have to imagine how something is used, how it's going to be interpreted, but you can't define the way people use these spaces, sometimes they're used in novel and much richer ways that you could have never expected, so I think it's impossible to design without imagining."

Elizabeth Diller, architect and Partner, Diller Scofidio + Renfro

"One of the problems we have in cities across the world is that when we think of new public space, we concentrate where the rich live, [but] the rest of the cities and the suburbs and the exurbs also deserve this kind of humanising by our best architects and planners."

Suketu Mehta, writer and journalist

"What the pandemic has shown us is how important it is to have a greater appreciation of the small things [...] architects need to be more entrepreneurial, to understand and identify what the unmet needs of a community are, and work with the community in putting together the framework for it. Not just designing but going way beyond that."

Amanda Levete, architect and Principal, AL_A

"What has made us be here today is the shared concern of rethinking urban spaces as places to meet and connect for humans to interact, and I think we can speak for all of us here that more than ever, we want to gather together."

Rozana Montiel, architect and Director of Rozana Montiel Estudio de Arquitectura



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DEBATE 3 LOCALISING TRANSPORT: TOWARDS THE 15-MINUTE CITY OR THE ONE- HOUR METROPOLIS?

May 2021

For urban transport, the early 2020s are going to be an inflection point hard to overestimate: digital connectivity will increasingly usurp physical access, public transport finance will require new business models, and fiscal recovery packages have the potential to either entrench transport-intense urban development or accelerate progress towards urban patterns based on density and mixed use.

The greatest initial risk to sustainable urban transport could be the pandemic-induced increase in the use of private motorised modes of transport and car-centric urban development. At the same time many cities are witnessing increases in walking and cycling and are attracting significant investment to support these modes, alongside new forms of localising urban activities and transport. As a result, uncertainties exist in relation to future mode shares as well as travel distances within cities, including and beyond travel to work.

Will we witness a shift towards 15-minute walkable urban districts utilising digital connectivity for wider metropolitan accessibility or the persistence of a physically connected one-hour metropolitan region?

Supported by SAP SE and knowledge partner Teralytics, this Urban Age Debate: Localising Transport focuses on the profound changes that occurred in urban transport and mobility over the past year, featuring speculations and quick-fire statements from prominent leaders in mobility and economics: Edward Glaeser, Professor of Economics at Harvard University; Sir Peter Hendy, Chair of Network Rail; and Yolisa Kani, Chief Business Development Officer of Transnet, South Africa.

This event is co-chaired by LSE Cities Executive Director Philipp Rode and Global Transport Leader and Group Board Member of Arup, Isabel Deding.

SPEAKERS



Edward Glaeser is the Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, where he has taught since 1992. He teaches microeconomics theory, and urban and public economics. He has served as Director of the Taubman Center for State and Local Government, and Director of the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston. He has published dozens of books and papers on cities, economic growth, law and economics.



Sir Peter Hendy has been the Chair of Network Rail since July 2015, and Chair of the London Legacy Development Corporation since July 2017. He was previously Commissioner of Transport for London for nearly 10 years. He started his transport career in 1975 as a London Transport graduate trainee. He is a trustee of London's Transport Museum and of the Science Museum Group. He was knighted in the 2013 New Year's Honours List, having been made CBE in 2006.



Yolisa Kani is the Chief Business Development Officer (CBDO) of Transnet, a state-owned company that owns and operates South Africa's rail network, ports, and pipelines. Yolisa has over 22 years' experience in transport engineering, planning and operations. She previously served as Head of Public Policy in Southern Africa at Uber Technologies. Prior to that, Yolisa held senior government positions in the Ekurhuleni Metro, the Cross-Border Road and Transportation Agency as well as the City of Johannesburg.

CO-CHAIRS



Philipp Rode is Executive Director of LSE Cities and Associate Professorial Research Fellow at LSE. He is co-director of the LSE Executive MSc in Cities and Executive Director of the Urban Age Programme. As a researcher, consultant and advisor he has been directing interdisciplinary projects comprising urban governance, transport, city planning and urban design at LSE since 2003. His current work focuses on institutional structures and governance capacities of cities and on sustainable urban development, transport and mobility.



Isabel Deding is a Global Transport Leader and Group Board Member at Arup, where she is responsible for Arup's global transport agenda and cementing the firm's integrated approach to transport and urban development. She was London's Deputy Mayor for Transport from 2011–2016 where her major projects included a £1bn cycling programme, a £4bn progressive roads investment programme, and leading on major transport construction projects such as extensions to the underground and devolution of rail services.

Magenagna Roundabout, Addis Ababa © Charifia Rosser



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LOCALISING TRANSPORT

1 Over the next decade, mobility and urban transport will change dramatically, “For the first time in half a century” (Edward Glaeser)

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed how urban residents use transportation and mobility services to access the amenities of cities. All speakers emphasised that urban mobility will undergo structural changes, but what long-term effects of these changes endure remains to be seen.

Edward Glaeser pointed out that changes to transportation technology have increasingly slowed down: “The transportation that I take now is not very different than the transportation I took 50 years ago, which was incredibly different than the transportation 50 years before that. It feels as if for the first time, perhaps in half a century, that we are having important changes in transportation technology.”

While transportation technology may dramatically change, Sir Peter Hendy focused on how mobility will change day-to-day: “People might access the centre of cities three days a week, not five days a week and not no days a week. What are the transport implications not of a system that’s full of people at peak twice a day, for every day of the week, but one where actually the peak is maybe only on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday?”

Yolisa Kani emphasises the need to experiment with mobility: “There have been valuable lessons for what we’ve gone through over the past year, but we also need to use our time to play catch up and see what new ways of adapting mobility we can learn.”

2 The 15-minute city is not a catch-all model that can be applied globally with ease, but its underlying concepts should be embraced

The 15-minute city is a model for urban development and mobility developed by Professor Carlos Moreno at the Sorbonne in Paris and widely popularised by Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo during her recent re-election campaign. The 15-minute city is one in which daily urban necessities are within a 15-minute commute by bike or on foot.

Overall, none of the speakers are strong advocates of implementing the 15-minute city model: “I’m unconvinced about the 15-minute city and I haven’t seen many urban environments where it can be adapted in the near future,” stated Sir Peter Hendy.

Ed Glaeser takes a stronger stance against the 15-minute city: “I am very worried that a focus on enabling upper-middle-income people to walk around in their nice little 15-minute neighbourhood precludes the far larger issue, which is how do we make sure our cities once again become places of opportunity for everyone? I am only interested in urban planning concepts that fundamentally solve that and I cannot see how the 15-minute city does.”

Ed went on to explain that some of the underlying elements of the 15-minute city are valuable: “We should praise the good elements of the 15-minute city: accessibility, less driving, embracing congestion pricing, reducing on-street parking requirements. But ultimately, we should bury the idea of a city that is chopped up into 15-minute bits. We must embrace

connection post-COVID, we must embrace a re-emergence of the whole city, of humanity that is connected not just with the people next to you, but with all of our metropole, of all of the world.”

3 Accessibility of cities for various opportunities remains of utmost importance, especially in rapidly urbanising global contexts

When discussing the value of mobility and transportation in and around cities, Yolisa Kani claims that, “Accessing a city in South Africa is not a matter of choice. It’s a matter of survival, you have to be in the city centre.” She primarily argues that, “The 15-minute city is a very noble idea, but for me it’s an old target that we’ve been chasing as cities and is elusive for a developing South African city because of our context.” Yolisa highlights the challenge of dealing with unintegrated and multi-modal transportation systems across South Africa that would severely limit the application of the 15-minute city idea.

Ed Glaeser picked up on this idea, expressing that, “We need to make sure that people can access the wonders of the city and can access the cornucopia of joys that exist throughout an urban area. We particularly need to make sure that we enable people who live in poorer parts of the city to access jobs in richer parts of the city, and there is nothing more important than that.”

These equity concerns underline the discussion of urban accessibility, as speakers express how COVID-19 continues to reveal the inequities of transportation systems and mobility.

4 Public transportation networks must adapt to uncertain financial conditions as, “Mobility creates economic value and wealth” (Sir Peter Hendy)

Co-chair Isabel Deding asked the speakers, “Does COVID-19 create an opportunity for us to accelerate the rethinking of how we finance public transport?”

Yolisa Kani responded that, “There’s been a radical reduction in commuting and a big increase in people moving locally. That’s a threat in some ways for public transport networks, because they’ve been built up around the idea of pumping the heart of the city. If this reduction is sustained, then there needs to be a fundamental rethink of the design of public transport networks and their business models to reflect this permanent shift.”

Sir Peter Hendy highlighted the value of urban transportation networks regardless of usership: “Mobility creates economic value and wealth. In Britain, the government has spent an enormous amount of public money keeping networks running with very few people as they’ve recognised that maintaining the movement of the relatively small proportion of the population was so valuable to the economy and society.”

Speakers also discussed Hong Kong’s MTR “Rail plus Property” business model as a way that public transport could reinvent itself: “Transport doesn’t exist on its own, and the consequence of transport infrastructure and services is that property values are affected. If you look at Hong Kong’s MTR or Japanese Railways and other transport companies that make

money, they’re not transport companies at all. They’re property companies with a transport arm,” highlighted Sir Peter Hendy.

5 Urban residents will increasingly commute for leisure and social connection rather than work

Yolisa Kani explains that the shift away from commuting to work will be pervasive due to cost in the South African context. “Even though people are yearning to go back to the office, travelling in South Africa is costly, people are spending anything from 25% to 40% of their disposable income on public transport.”

The rise of remote work may shift people away from using their income on public transport to access cities, but Ed Glaeser stresses emphasis on the need to maintain accessibility as, “Cities give us the ability to share, to connect, to learn from one another. They’ve been enabling chains of creativity since Plato and Socrates bickered on an Athenian street corner.”

Rather than commuting for work, Sir Peter Hendy believes that, “The city centre and the activities in the central business district, while they’re going to change, are not redundant. People will pack into public transport and go where they want to go to enjoy themselves, and as far as I’m concerned we are going to have to think again about the use of national public transport networks for leisure.”

Isabel Deding concludes, “Thousands of years of human history tell us that people don’t start moving less [during crises]. The idea that people are going to move less because they’re going to do things virtually has not been proven, so we shouldn’t be planning for that. We should be planning for mobility continuing as a key part of being human.”



Light Rail Transit, Addis Ababa © Charlie Rosser

“The 15-minute city slogan catches the attention but it’s really about reconfiguring the city to make it more people centric.”

“There’s a certain ghettoisation that can happen, not because the rich and the poor do not live in proximity but because of active measures by public agencies to relocate the poor, and I think that is something we need to address. People in such areas do not have access to jobs and they end up being forced to travel much longer distances.”

Shreya Gadepalli, Managing Trustee, UrbanWorks Institute

Massimiliano Claps, Research Director European IDC Government Insights

“The basic concept of a 15-minute city is not really a city at all, it’s a concept of an enclave, of a ghetto, of an isolated neighbourhood.”

Ed Glaeser, Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics at Harvard University



Cyclists in Paris © Oliverogeo3

“[The 15-minute city] is a new vision, a new paradigm for developing urban polycentrism based on social mixity and the mix of the urban functions. We wanted to fight against gentrification, we need to intensify the social uses.”

Carlos Moreno, scientist and university professor

“I don’t want the Hyperloop and the flying taxis if you don’t solve the problems on the ground at the moment.”

Katja Diehl, human-centric mobility advocate

“Accessing a city in South Africa is not a matter of choice, it’s a matter of survival. If you want to survive, you have to be near a city centre [...] Mobility is extremely essential in space, otherwise people can’t thrive.”

Yolisa Kani, Chief Business Development Officer, Transnet

“We still need a lot of people to move to make this local life happen, a lot of people who will actually move around to enable other people to stay local, not to move.”

Enrica Papa, Reader in Transport Planning, University of Westminster

“I think the volume of travel for work will decrease but not by very much and the volume of travel for leisure will increase and I think it might mean that people access the centre of cities three days a week, not five days a week.”

Sir Peter Hendy, Chair, Network Rail

“We need to be looking at multiple scales at the same time where we can both zoom in and understand the very specific localised needs at the hyper-local and understand the importance of being very strategic in terms of our growth and development or decline and the kind of efficiency of our broader transit systems.”

Skye Duncan, Director, Global Designing Cities Initiative, National Association of City Transportation Officials



Kabataş, Istanbul © Emden Gercek

“One of the obvious things to do is to move away from low-density development on the outskirts of cities of several million and go back to density.”

Sir Peter Hendy, Chair, Network Rail



Pedestrians crossing a road in Rome © Alessia Pierdomenico

“I am very worried that a focus on enabling upper-middle-income people to walk around in their nice little 15-minute neighbourhood precludes the far larger issue, which is how do we make sure our cities once again become places of opportunity for everyone? I am only interested in urban planning concepts that fundamentally solve that.”

Ed Glaeser, Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics, Harvard University



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LOCALISING TRANSPORT

INTRODUCTION

This summary report presents the findings of a global survey on localising transport in cities. The survey, conducted between May 2021 and June 2021, invited urban thinkers, leaders, and practitioners across the world to share their perspectives on urban transport and mobility in cities today and over the next few decades.

This survey is part of the Urban Age Debates: Cities in the 2020s outreach programme organised by LSE Cities at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft. Initial insights from the survey informed the third debate on “Localising Transport: towards the 15-minute city or the one-hour metropolis?”

1. THE BIG PICTURE

This Urban Age Debates survey shares views of a total of 342 thinkers and practitioners from 52 countries, of whom two groups of respondents with similar sentiments towards the future of knowledge exist: those anticipating transformation, and those expecting continuity. These two groups remain split with regards to the future development of mobility and urban transport, transport infrastructure, and urban structure.

The first group, with a focus on transformation, believe that an absolute increase in active transport use (walking and cycling) is more likely to take place in post-pandemic cities, rather than an increase in personal car use. While they support the maintenance and expansion of public transport services (even if ridership does not recover), they are confident that active transport use will be in demand, as they anticipate an overall reduction in travel distances due to virtual connectivity. This group is made up mostly of respondents from Europe (where the majority of survey participants come from) and the Americas.

This transformative group also shares similar views on urban structure. They believe their cities should invest in the development of inner cities, as they will become more attractive places to live and will offer greater proximities like the 15-minute city. This group is also more likely to agree that better urban mobility can be achieved by a more pronounced shift to mixed-use, mixed-income, and higher-density development. Overall, they view their post-COVID cities as spaces based on proximity and hyper-localisation, where access to diverse amenities is available by walking or cycling. The second group, expecting continuity, anticipate an absolute increase of private car use, and agree that the need for individual motorised travel rather than walking and cycling will remain significant in post-COVID cities. Although they believe in the overall reduction of physical travel due to digitalisation, they encourage the widespread use of motorised vehicles. While the majority of this group also agree that public transport is a public good and the backbone of sustainable urban development, they are hoping

Figure 1: Two Baseline Scenarios for Localising Transport

Which of the following two baseline scenarios do you consider more likely?

Scenario A: Hyper-localisation with greater proximity between urban functions and an overall reduction of the need to travel

Scenario B: A dispersal of urban activities with a reduction of urban densities and a greater need for individual motorised travel

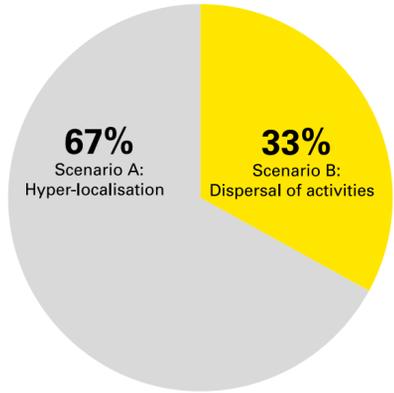


Figure 2: Future Scenarios for Localising Transport

How likely are the following scenarios for the future of mobility and urban transport?

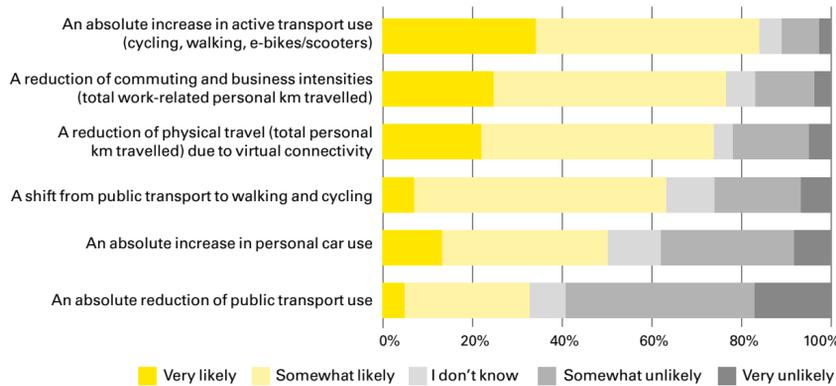


Figure 3: Expected Changes to Urban Structured Demography

Regarding urban structure and demography, how likely are the following changes to cities post-2020?

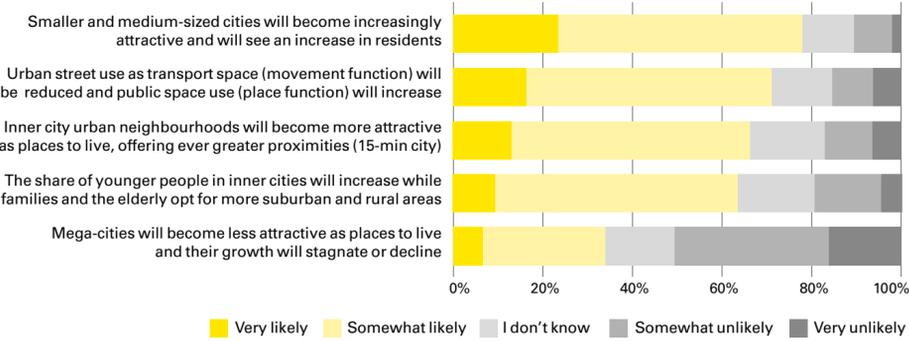


Figure 4: Normative Views and Expectations

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

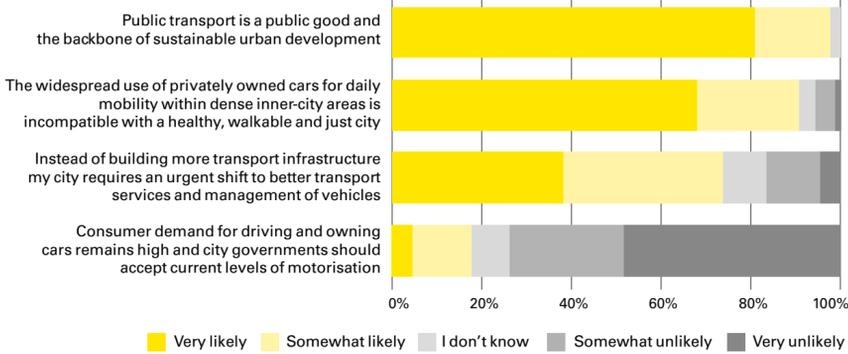


Figure 5: Priority Reforms

How should better urban mobility be achieved post-2020? Ranked from most important (1) to least important (7)

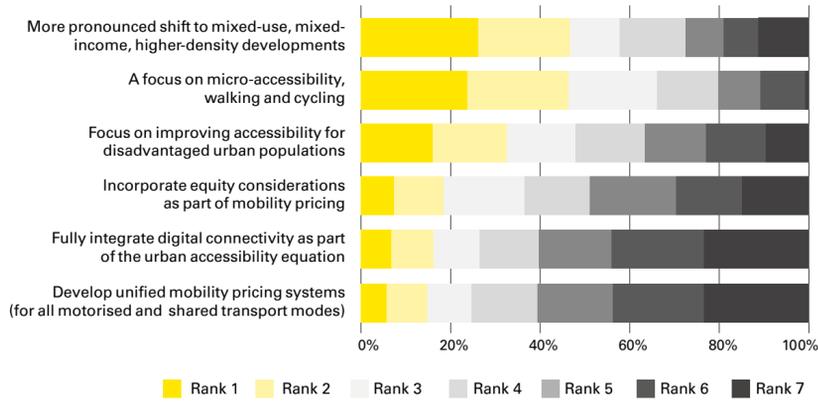
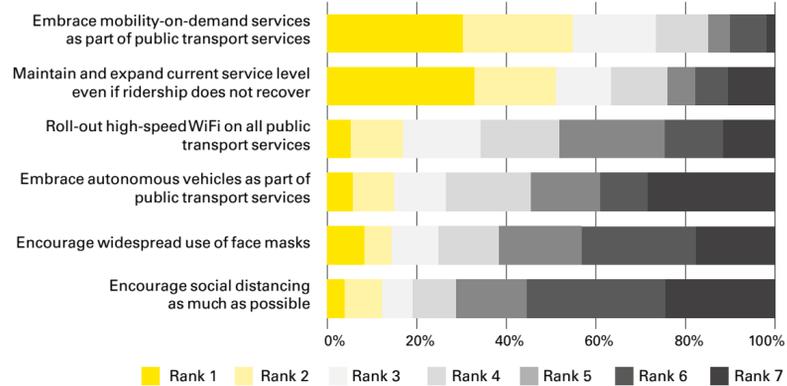


Figure 6: Public Transport Futures

What do you believe should happen to public transport in the future? Ranked from most important (1) to least important (7)



cities will embrace more mobility-on-demand services as part of public transport services. This may be due to the fact that the group expects a further dispersal of urban activities with a reduction of urban densities. The majority of respondents from this group are from Africa, Asia and Australia.

Across both groups, respondents are relatively positive about the post-COVID future of public transport. Most believe that in the future public transport providers will encourage less the widespread use of face masks, and are less likely to encourage social distancing measures. In terms of the demographic characteristics that correlate with views and attitudes expressed, only region had an impact on how respondents replied to the survey.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS

As a policy field, urban transport typically brings together issues of mobility, connectivity, land use, economic development, social inclusion, environmental sustainability and public health. More recently, concerns about climate change and unequal access have become particularly prominent aspects of urban transport policy.

Over the past decades, transport scholars and policy-makers have devoted much time to questions about the need to travel and urban proximity, arguing for transport solutions that address inequalities and environmental concerns through better urban form and connectivity. There has been a push towards models that embrace urban patterns based on locality, density and mixed use, ranging from the compact city model to the idea of the 15-minute city. These debates have further intensified in the face of a global pandemic that has destabilised passenger demand, due to a combination of government lockdowns, increased digital connectivity, and fears of contracting or spreading the virus.

The resulting conditions have brought about tensions between hyper-localisation and metropolitan living, that raise important questions about the future of mobility and transport post-2021, and its influence on urban structure.

FUTURE SCENARIOS FOR TRANSPORT

There is a plethora of research that indicates transport systems in a post-pandemic world are unlikely to see pre-pandemic levels of commuting. And as remote work has become a real option for many, some commentators view the pandemic as an opportunity to reconfigure wider relationships between transport and urban structures.

This first section presents survey findings linked to possible scenarios that could affect transport in the near future. When asked which of two baseline scenarios participants consider more likely to occur within cities (Figure 1), two-thirds of respondents (67%) are convinced hyper-localisation will take place, with greater proximities between urban functions, and an overall reduction in the need to travel. One-third (33%) believe a dispersal of urban activities with a reduction of urban densities, and a greater need for individual motorised travel, is more likely.

This speculation leads to more detailed questions about likely scenarios for the future of mobility and urban transport (Figure 2). Most survey respondents (83%) agreed that it is likely that an absolute increase in active transport use (cycling, walking, e-bikes/scooters) will occur, as well as a reduction of commuting and business travel intensities (77%). An overall reduction of physical travel (total personal km travelled) due to virtual connectivity is also likely to happen according to the survey respondents (74%). Over half of the respondents (59%) agreed that a shift from motorised transport modes to walking and cycling will occur, and 46% judge that an absolute increase in personal car use is likely. Respondents are uncertain whether an absolute reduction of public transport use is likely to take place over time.

Expanding such speculations to transport-related questions regarding urban structure and demography (Figure 3) reveals particularly clear views regarding the former. More than three-quarters of respondents (78%) agreed that smaller and medium-sized cities will become increasingly attractive and will see an increase in

residents. Additionally, most survey respondents (71%) believe it is likely that urban street use for public space will increase, as transport space (movement function) will reduce. Such perspectives align with trends towards greater localisation. Similarly, when asked if inner city urban neighbourhoods will become more attractive places to live, offering ever greater proximities like that of the 15-minute city model, over 67% considered this likely. In terms of demographic change, 63% agreed that the share of younger people in inner cities will increase while families and the elderly will opt for more suburban and rural areas. Despite the above, only 33% believe that mega-cities will become less attractive places to live and that their growth will stagnate or decline.

NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Almost all respondents (98%) agree that public transport is a public good and will remain the backbone of sustainable urban development (Figure 4). A large majority (91%) also agree that the widespread use of privately owned cars for daily mobility within dense inner-city areas is incompatible with a healthy, walkable and just city. Three-quarters (74%) concur that instead of building more transport infrastructure, their cities require an urgent shift to better transport services and management of vehicles. This also connects with widespread disagreement (74%) that consumer demand for driving and owning cars will remain high, and that city governments should accept current levels of motorisation. However, during the pandemic, active travel as well as car use has become more attractive. Despite this fact, the majority disagree that economic and employment considerations linked to the automotive industry should be prioritised during the recovery phase.

THE NEXT DECADE OF URBAN TRANSPORT

This last part of the survey reviews how better urban mobility should be achieved post-2020 (Figure 6). First, a pronounced shift to mixed-use, mixed-income and higher-density developments was ranked as a key priority. Almost equally placed was a focus on micro-accessibility, walking and cycling, opinions possibly indicating that decentralised neighbourhoods should be designed to fulfil the standards of the 15-minute city mixed-use functions. This approach offers a range of public open space and amenities for communities that fulfil the essential functions of living, working, supplying, caring, learning, and enjoying without travelling far.

With regards to equity and justice in transport, respondents ranked improving accessibility for disadvantaged urban populations in third place, and when asked questions about incorporating equity considerations as part of mobility pricing, the majority of participants seemed

indifferent. A substantial portion of participants judged that fully integrating digital connectivity as part of the urban accessibility equation and developing unified mobility pricing systems (for all motorised and shared transport modes) should be less important, placing these options last.

With regards to an agenda for public transport post-2020, participants were asked to order particular statements from least important to most important. (Figure 5). The majority placed the adaption of mobility-on-demand services to be part of public transport services first. Second was the maintenance and expansion of current service levels, even if ridership does not recover. Despite the rapid push towards digitalised solutions in our cities, the roll-out of high-speed WiFi on all public transport services was not prioritised (17% ranked it in the top two), and neither was the concept of embracing autonomous vehicles (15% ranked it in the top two) these took fourth and fifth place. Interestingly, a majority of respondents ranked the use of face masks on public transport, along with social distancing, as least important. This indicates that COVID restrictions in transport are not desirable to many, possibly because conditions might change due to accelerated access to vaccinations. The prioritisation of public transport services, however, remains key among respondents, indicating that leaders should continue exploring options that maximise individual consumers' freedom, flexibility and diversity of choice.

CONCLUSION

This survey summary has shown that a clear divide exists about the future of transport cities and its effects on urban patterns. The results revealed two primary groups with differing sentiments: those expecting transformation and those anticipating continuity. Clear demographic differences exist between respondents who believe in the shift to walking and cycling residing in Europe (74%), North America (70%) and South America (80%), and respondents who believe in the increase in personal car use residing in Africa (53%), Asia (52%) and Australia (60%).

Despite these distinct differences respondents across all groups and regions felt relatively optimistic about the impact of the pandemic on public transport in cities and view the post-COVID city as one that will continue to utilise public services even if ridership does not recover, numbers of remote workers increase, and government restrictions remain. Public transport is however more likely to take different forms as some support mobility-on-demand services, and others support existing public transit.

The findings of this survey show that much remains to be revealed in the subject of urban transportation, and hence future mobility and urban planning in the face of COVID, as we continue to react to the drastic changes that began in 2020.

Urban thinkers and policy makers thus have a significant task ahead of them in shaping the post-2021 trajectory of transport models. While some solutions will certainly provide risks, others could potentially ameliorate them. The big question lies in our ability and willingness to accept change when the time comes.

First published for the Urban Age Programme by LSE Cities, London School of Economics and Political Science, September 2021.

THE 15-MINUTE CITY IS A DEAD END – CITIES MUST BE PLACES OF OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE

May 2021

The notion of the 15-minute city, in which people can work, shop, play and go to school within a small radius of their home, has attracted some urban planners. But now more than ever, argues Edward Glaeser (Professor of Economics at Harvard University), it should be recognised as a dead end that would stop cities from fulfilling their true role as engines of opportunity.

Aspects of the 15-minute city are praiseworthy. I yield to no one in my embrace of the pedestrian city. I have long believed that walking is the best of all possible modes.

I also believe that cities should be freed from the business regulations that make it difficult to start small shops and cosy cafes in residential neighbourhoods. An exciting mixed-use neighbourhood can be one of the best gifts of urban entrepreneurship. In the US, we regulate the entrepreneurship of the poor far more than we regulate the entrepreneurship of the rich. The rich innovate in cyberspace, which is largely a regulation-free zone. The poor innovate on the ground, in real things, and local government rules micromanage the physical.

But the basic concept of a 15-minute city is not really a city at all. It's an enclave – a ghetto – a subdivision. All cities should be archipelagos of neighbourhoods, but these neighbourhoods must be connected. Cities should be machines for connecting humans – rich and poor, black and white, young and old. Otherwise, they fail in their most basic mission and they fail to be places of opportunity.

While modern American cities are engines of opportunity for adults, they are dead ends for children. Adults who come to the city – rich and poor alike – see their wages rise as they spend more time there. But as Raj Chetty's work on upward mobility has shown, children who grow up in cities end up doing much worse as adults than children who grew up outside them. One explanation for this difference is that an adult doesn't live in a 15-minute city. A lower-income adult may wake up in her tenement apartment, but then she goes to her job somewhere else. She finds opportunity with people who are wealthier and better educated. The child, however, lives in a 15-minute city. Perhaps, he wakes in a low-income housing project and then goes to a highly segregated school. That child live in a 15-minute city that is no more integrated than a poor rural village. In that world, the rich have isolated themselves from the poor, and the poor are cut off.

The view that we can duplicate real movement with virtual movement is a fantasy for less well-educated people. In May 2020, 70% of Americans were doing their work virtually, but only 5% of Americans without a high school degree were telecommuting. If we allow this virtual world to persist, our world is going to become even more catastrophically unequal.

“The view that we are improving accessibility for everyone by enabling people to work virtually is completely wrong”

We should embrace the good aspects of the 15-minute city – the idea of accessibility, perhaps driving less, and embracing congestion pricing – ultimately, we should bury the idea of a city that is chopped up into 15-minute bits. Post-COVID, we must embrace the idea of the whole city that is connected with the whole of our metropole and with the whole of the world. Ultimately, we should

learn from this terrible pandemic that all of us are in this together. We must ensure this never happens again, and we must particularly enable those people who start with less to connect to the rest of the city.

The rise of autonomous vehicles and technologies like hyperloop may make a major difference to the way we travel around cities. I'm 54, and the transportation I take is not very different from the kind I took 50 years ago. After a very slow period of change, it now makes sense to keep flexibility and to allow the future to catch up with us. It makes sense to keep our options open, so that our cities can embrace the new technologies as they come along. And as they come along, don't embrace the new, new thing uncritically. The right approach is to experiment, evaluate, and use the wisdom that comes with experience.

The principle that the user should pay is generally right, particularly for anything involving middle-income or wealthy people. Subsidising people to fly in and out of JFK airport with tax dollars is an absolutely terrible idea.

“In a sense, COVID has been an attack on our urban life”

But sometimes, because the marginal cost to provide the service for extra traveller is so much lower than the average cost (as in the case of some rail trips), it makes sense to figure out creative ways so that users can fund it, without deterring efficient use of the system. My favourite example is Hong Kong's MTR model, where they built large-scale real estate development on top of train stations. Effectively the real estate subsidises the rail, which is a beautiful way of keeping the rail price low while still having the users pay for things.

Nonetheless, in some cases it is unrealistic to expect users to pay. We will often want to subsidise services to get poorer people to their jobs or to care for their parents.

A related challenge in the developing world is that you often have two technologies coexisting – one a technology for the rich, the other a technology for the poor. For example, in Johannesburg you have the Gautrain, a fast, modern rail service coexisting with crowded minibuses that are often unsafe. Oddly, it is typically the transportation that the rich use that is subsidised. The transportation for the poor pays for itself.

Going forward, should you be trying to make the rich technology available to everyone, or should you be trying to upgrade the current, poor technology? Given that minibuses are self-financing and better targeted to serve the least fortunate, you should probably focus on improving the minibuses. Certainly, it makes sense to ensure that the minibuses become safer, have a clear schedule and work seamlessly with other modes.

There is no substitute for doing something that functionally taxes carbon. You can't just subsidise alternative uses of transportation and hope that it will work out. You need to do something that actually limits people's incentive to fly or drive, and that requires a tool like congestion pricing. Using general tax revenues to pay for highways or having free parking is unjustifiable and essentially subsidises climate change.

The genius of Ken Livingstone's London congestion charge was that it used its revenues, paid by wealthier drivers, to pay for poorer people who were taking the bus. Done right, congestion pricing means that rich people pay to make commutes faster and more comfortable for the poor. In some places, the pandemic has made road congestion much worse because people are afraid to use public transport. That only increases the urgency of adopting congestion pricing wherever possible.

In a sense, COVID has been an attack on our urban life. It has reminded us that while cities enable us to share, to connect, and to learn from one another, density also comes with considerable downsides, and the most terrible of these is contagious disease. We have had a blessed century of plague-free existence since the 1918/19 influenza pandemic, and COVID-19 has not been nearly as bad as it could have been.

But let us make sure that our governments heed this warning. We must make major investments in public health – a NATO for public health, rather than the WHO

– and that's only the first and most important step to reclaim the streets. There's no sure-fire recipe for fixing our car-crowded roadways, but a healthy embrace of congestion pricing is clearly a good place to start.

The view that we are improving accessibility for everyone by enabling people to work virtually is completely wrong. If it is only possible for people to access jobs through the internet, then we are locking out the third of the American population that is unable to do that. I cannot imagine a more unequal world than one that has eliminated real, urban face-to-face connections and tried to replace them with virtual links.

Our discussions and spending on urban mobility has over-emphasised the mobility of the rich. But we have largely ignored the mobility of the poor all together – especially in the US. I am very worried that a focus on enabling upper-middle-income people to walk around in their nice little 15-minute neighbourhood precludes the far larger issue of how we make sure our cities once again become places of opportunity for everyone. Enormous inequalities in cities are only tolerable if cities fulfil their historic mission of turning poor people into rich people. I am only interested in urban planning concepts that fundamentally solve that problem, and the 15-minute city seems likely to make that problem even worse.

This post first appeared at the LSE COVID-19 blog.

About the author



Edward Glaeser is the Fred and Eleanor Glimp Professor of Economics in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University

CAN CITIES BE HYPER-LOCAL?

October 2021

In some cities, people are not travelling as far and as often as they did in the pre-COVID era. Philipp Rode (LSE) looks at the new patterns of movement and the challenges that will emerge as hyper-localisation becomes more common.

We think of cities as locations, specific places that allow for better access to people, jobs, education, goods and services. We also acknowledge that not everything in a city can be literally in one place and accept the need to travel between the opportunities individual cities provide. This demands a clear idea of what binds a city together. Economists have long considered the functional urban areas, urban planners the built-up area, and geographers a combination of population size, density and political demarcations.

One cross-cutting idea is that of a collective territory that is accessed daily by its citizens. For work-related travel, this has led to the concept of commuter sheds – the territory from which a certain threshold level of the population travels to a city’s main activity area. Another proxy for what corresponds to “daily access” could be based on the relatively constant travel time budget, also known as Marchetti’s constant. This budget suggests that throughout history people spend about one hour per day travelling. Considering return journeys and depending on the speed of travel, this then translates to a territory ranging from a diameter of 2 km (walking) to 100 km (by high-speed rail).

But what happens when this foundational definition is confronted with citizens who no longer require or desire daily access? What if a joint territory for collective engagement is defined by weekly or even monthly travel? And what if more frequent accessibility emerges, requiring city access at much shorter intervals of just several hours on any given day? Simply put, if the frequency of accessing opportunities in cities is changing, the temporal geography of cities needs to be re-evaluated.

The disruptions associated with COVID-19 have amounted to a natural experiment. It generated much debate about the likely implications and outcomes for future urban structures, mobility and transport. While citizens were initially forced to reduce travel frequencies and distances as part of the various lockdowns, behaviour change post-lockdown is only now becoming clearer.

Figure 1: Changes of different trip length categories (short < 2 km, medium 2 to 10 km, and long > 10 km) in six European cities between 2019 and 2021 (one selected day for the indicated months).



The Urban Age Debate “Localising Transport: towards the 15-minute city or the one-hour metropolis?” polemically considered alternative temporal geographies of cities. One way of interpreting this question spatially concerns the changes in daily travel distances. City-wide average travel distances are a function of the time and speed of travel. Travel speeds for the same transport modes without new infrastructure and services usually do not change much over short periods. The changes in mobility over the last two years were mostly due to modal change such as walking instead of motorised modes, and a reduction in the time we spend travelling, such as reducing commuting times and changing trip frequencies.

“The disruptions associated with COVID-19 have amounted to a natural experiment”

So what do we know about these changes? For a simple empirical analysis of daily travel distances, it is helpful to differentiate local trips that can easily rely on walking (below 2 km), city-level trips that require some mechanised transport (between 2 and 10 km) and regional-level trips relying on higher-speed motorised travel (above 10 km). The data below shows the changes observed in week-day travel before, during and after lockdown measures in six cities in Germany, the UK and Italy (in each case the largest and a prominent second-tier city).

This information is based on anonymised mobile phone data cells and has been collected and prepared by Teralytics, a mobility data service provider and knowledge partner of the Urban Age Debate on city access. It considers all trips that either started or ended within the administrative boundaries of these cities. Teralytics data combine mobile network, road network and census data for extrapolation, which is validated via mobility partners. It considers the full population and all demographics. Importantly, observed changes relate not only to local residents but to tourists and visitors too. Five representative days were selected, the first in October 2019 and the last in June 2021.

All six cities saw a considerable reduction in medium-length and longer trips of between 55 per cent (Stuttgart) and 80 per cent (London), which has recovered in 2021, but not yet to pre-COVID levels. The patterns of short trips are more diverse, with Berlin, London and Manchester registering a considerable increase, particularly post-lockdown (with increases of 14, 26 and 17 per cent respectively). Stuttgart and Florence registered a reduction in short trips that continued post-lockdown, while Rome’s short-distance travel is back to pre-COVID levels.

One approach for conceptualising the differences in urban mobility and trip distances involves the use of a ternary plot indicating the shares of local, city-level and regional trips (Figure 2). The shares of each are plotted in relation to the three axes of the diagram. The share of two always determines the third share to make up 100 per cent. On the horizontal, the share of local trips increases from right to left; on the left-side vertical, the regional-level trips increase, moving upwards; and on the right-side vertical, the city-level mobility increases, moving downwards.

The three corners of the triangle represent three theoretical urban archetypes. Loosely, the bottom left represents 15-minute cities, with local trip shares of at least 40 per cent and regional-level mobility less than 20 per cent. The bottom right represents the one-hour metropolis, with medium-length trips making up at least 40 per cent of the total. Exurbia features in the top corner, with regional-level mobility (i.e. longer trips) of at least 60 per cent. None of these three archetypes exclude any kind of trip length. Rather, they reflect different shares of trip lengths.

This mobility ternary plot allows us to locate the patterns in individual cities and to observe changes over time and as a result of disruptions such as COVID. Empirical insights from European cities indicate that most urban regions operate within the lower part of the ternary plot, with longer-distance travel below 40 per cent of trip shares. Figures 3 and 4 contrast the overall position and changes in London and Stuttgart. Once again, the baseline data was extracted from mobile phone data based on Teralytics analysis.

In London, mobility patterns pre-COVID were solidly associated with a one-hour metropolitan region, with short-, medium- and longer-distance trip shares of 22, 56 and 22 per cent respectively. The first 2020 lockdown changed this to 48, 42 and 11 per cent, artificially shifting London into the above-15-minute city archetype. Considering evaporated trips, or those that were no longer registered as they were too short for mobile phone data cell changes, we see an even more extreme pattern of hyper-localisation (78, 17 and 4 per cent). During the slow opening-up of London up to June 2021, trip shares slowly moved back in the direction of the original pattern, but only reached halfway.

The pattern in Stuttgart, a German manufacturing hub, is quite different to the one in London. Stuttgart’s point of departure was also as a city-region with a higher share of longer-distance trips. Starting with short-, medium- and longer-distance shares of 18, 54 and 29 per cent respectively, these shifted to 26, 53 and 21 per cent before returning to the 2019 pattern by June 2021.

Figure 2: Ternary plot with travel distance shares and urban access archetypes

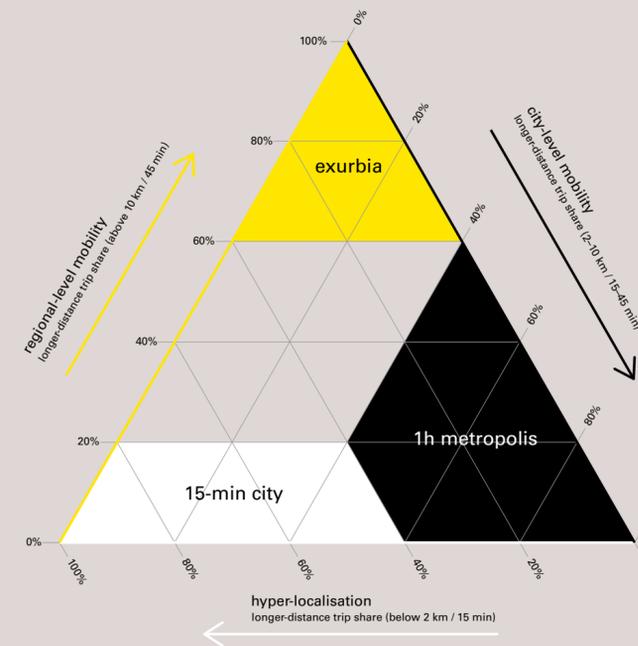


Figure 3: London mobility ternary plot with trip length changes between 2019 and 2021

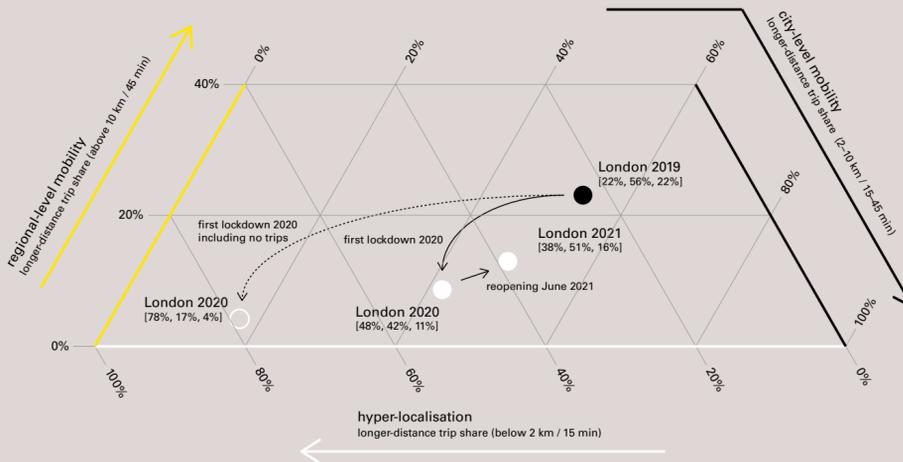
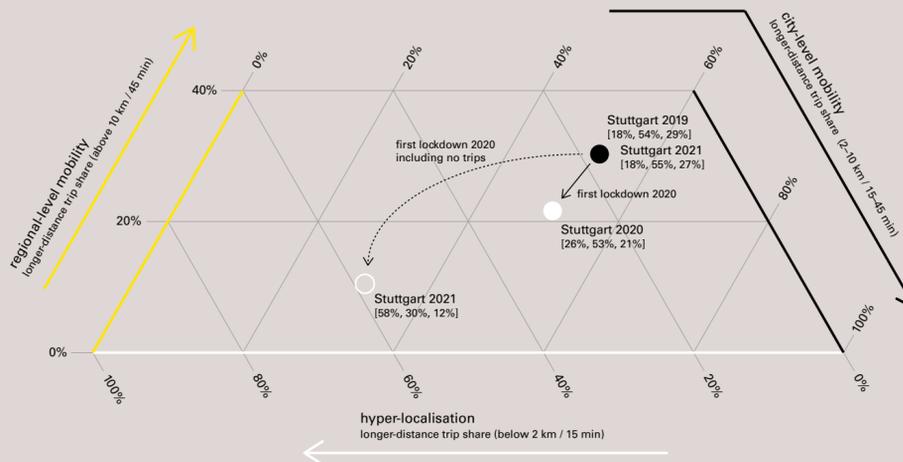


Figure 4: Stuttgart mobility ternary plot with trip length changes between 2019 and 2021



This initial data and analysis invites many questions. To what extent are these changes a result of the absence of visitors and tourists, rather than behaviour change by local residents? Was the identified hyper-localisation a consequence of everyone travelling less frequently at the metropolitan level, or just a few travelling city-wide on a daily basis? Which trip purposes were most affected by these changes? How do different cities present different patterns of trip changes? What are the key determinants that may contribute to hyper-localisation? Some of these questions will soon be addressed by follow-up research.

Most importantly, the data tells us little about what may happen next, though the recent Urban Age Debate Survey of urban experts and practitioners gave some hints. Two-thirds consider hyper-localisation in cities more likely than a further dispersal of urban settlements. According to well above 70 per cent of respondents, this will happen alongside an absolute increase in active travel (walking and cycling), a reduction in commuting and business travel, and an overall reduction in physical travel due to virtual connectivity. Most respondents also believe it is likely that the movement function of urban streets will be reduced, and their use as public space with more prominent place functions will increase.

“Metropolitan-wide trips on a weekly or monthly basis rather than daily should not threaten the unit of a city”

So, can cities be hyper-local? A high share of voluntary local trips without city-wide access restrictions in terms of travel time, costs and other mobility service parameters may be quite desirable. Clearly, any constraints in accessing the wider city and having to stay local with limited local opportunities are socially and economically problematic. A high share of longer, regional trips – or hypermobility – may not be something a city-region wants to aspire to. These come with considerable personal costs, as research into long commutes has shown, and compromise environmental sustainability. For cities, hypermobility may also require compromising place functions of public space to enable excessive movement.

But how is the city kept together as a unit between the extremes of hyper-localisation and hypermobility? Clearly, it is not achieved by everyone travelling across the city’s territory all the time, which would destroy the city as a place to dwell in. Instead, a collective political, economic and cultural space alongside a strong geographic identity will have to remain the foundation. This certainly requires physical connection, but also urban districts that blend into each other without clear boundaries, as towns and villages have. Cities may operate surprisingly well as a calm lake with a shared temperature, rather than a whirlpool with all the elements in constant motion.

In other words, barriers to city-wide access should be eliminated, and fluid movement needs to be possible across a city’s entire territory. But conducting metropolitan-wide trips only on a weekly or monthly basis rather than daily should not threaten the unit of a city, as long as it prioritises efforts to establish fair and equal local opportunities across its whole area. It is these, alongside a reduction in the need to travel, that ultimately enable street life and thus urbanity.

This post first appeared at the LSE COVID-19 blog.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Georg Polzer, Jonas Karlsson, Maja Zupan and Ann Lin at Teralytics, who enabled this Urban Age knowledge partnership and established the baseline data for the trip distance share analysis above.

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DEBATE 4 CHANGING CULTURES: HOW ARE CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS RE-FRAMING THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUDIENCES, THE COMMUNITY AND THE CITY?

October 2021

Over the past three decades investment in cultural infrastructure – new performing arts centres, museum extensions and whole cultural districts – has become a familiar tool in urban strategies, placemaking and branding around the world. Moreover, cultural organisations both large and small have sought to define themselves as much as community anchors, generators of social capital, promoters of social cohesion, as they have as hubs of artistic innovation or conservation.

But the context in which cultural organisations are operating today is changing rapidly, and this will, in turn, affect how they contribute to the quality and texture of urban life going forward. The longer-term effects of COVID-19 and growing pressures of climate change, combined with new tech-enabled possibilities of remote working, are changing the way we live, work, socialise and travel, stimulating a new interest in more localised lives centred around resurgent town centres and neighbourhoods.

Supported by knowledge partner Global Cultural Districts Network, this Urban Age Debate: Changing Cultures, brings together thoughts and remarks from renowned cultural leaders and urbanists who discuss the impacts of a global pandemic, climate change and digitalisation on urban cultural institutions.

This virtual event is chaired by Adrian Ellis, Director of AEA Consulting and Chair of the Global Cultural Districts Network, who is joined by: Gabriella Gomez-Mont, Founder of Experimentalista, and former Director of Laboratorio Para la Ciudad; Elaine Bedell, Chief Executive of the Southbank Centre; and Andreas Görden, Chief head of the German Foreign Office's Culture and Communication Department.

SPEAKERS



Elaine Bedell is the Chief Executive of the Southbank Centre, the UK's largest arts centre. She has worked for over 25 years in media, having senior roles at the BBC and ITV, where she produced some of the UK's most popular entertainment titles. Elaine served previously as Executive Chair of the Edinburgh International TV Festival and was appointed a Trustee for the V&A Museum by the British Prime Minister in 2015.



Gabriella Gomez-Mont is the founder of Experimentalista, a novel creative studio that specialises in cities, public imagination and system change. She is the former Director of Laboratorio Para la Ciudad, the award-winning and experimental think tank of the Mexico City government. Gabriella is a documentary filmmaker, visual artist and journalist. She has worked as a creative advisor to several cities, and is a TED Senior Fellow, an MIT Director's Fellow and a Yale World Fellow.



Andreas Görden is head of the German Foreign Office's Culture and Communication Department. He began his professional career in 1996 at the Berliner Ensemble Theatre before moving to the École Nationale D'Administration in France. He has worked in the public film finance sector and was a consultant to state and federal management teams. Prior to joining the Foreign Office, Andreas held senior roles in the energy sector with Siemens South-West Europe.

CHAIR



Adrian Ellis is the Director of AEA Consulting and Chair of the Global Cultural Districts Network, a network of over 50 cultural districts committed to improving the quality of urban life through knowledge-sharing in the arts and culture and creative industries. Adrian is a board member of New York's Poets House, and a past board member of the Getty Leadership Institute, and the National Museums and Galleries of Wales.



1 “Thursday is the new Friday” (Elaine Bedell) – COVID-19 is reshaping social contact in city centres

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about dramatic changes to when and how we live, work and socialise. Remote work has become a real option for many, offering hybrid models and options for more localised living. Due to this transition, we are witnessing a fluctuation in the days and times urban residents are willing to access their cities’ central culture venues. In addition, some cultural institution no longer operate seven days a week, and therefore have varied times of sociability and conviviality, which have an impact on night-time industries, dining venues and the overall life of the city.

“London is not as busy as it has been,” notes Elaine Bedell, director of one of Europe’s largest cultural venues. “We keep saying Thursday night is the new Friday night because many people are choosing to work from home now on Friday. So, we are finding the site lively on Thursday nights. We are hammering out what lasting effect this change in work patterns is going to have on us. In terms of our audiences, there is no question that deciding to go to an event after work, when you work in central London, is an easy hop and a step. If you’ve been working at home however, it involves a commute in.” Bedell notes how theatre venues are especially affected by this change, with some introducing Sunday performances. “Historically theatres never opened on Sundays here in the UK, but because of that shifting pattern we are all having to think about different ways of providing art and activity for people,” she says.

Tourism levels have decreased, and cities are observing changes in mobility patterns for specific demographic groups, such as the elderly, who are reluctant to use public transport for fears of contracting the virus. This will also eventually impact centrally located cultural venues and their ecosystems, as the majority thrive on national/ international tourism, and the consumption of specific content from those groups. Bedell explains: “I think it’s not a reluctance to come to the halls, which I think people understand are incredibly COVID safe... but people are very nervous about travel. We are impacted by a reluctance to use public transport, particularly by the older demographic. In 2019, our visitors [to the Southbank] were in the region of 4.5 million but now we have 50,000, we have seen a massive impact in terms of overseas and out-of-town tourism.”

To combat these changes museums and cultural institutions around the world are switching to digital platforms and offering hybrid solutions to consuming art, which enables a wider outreach. Despite that, there is still an appetite for urban residents to enjoy live experiences, and some venues are reverting to in-person attendance only.

2 Cultural institutions within cities are altering their DNA to “become infrastructures of imagination” (Gabriella Gomez-Mont)

Gabriella Gomez-Mont and Adrian Ellis note that while cultural organisations have sought to define themselves as community anchors and simultaneously hubs of artistic innovation over the last few decades, this aspiration has been

realised and somewhat intensified in a number of cities during the pandemic.

South American and European cultural institutions are restructuring their ethos and DNA by thinking of ways they may become “infrastructures for imagination,” says Gomez-Mont. “There has been an expansiveness in experimentation that is happening in the civic realm,” she explains. “There is new thinking about civic space which is no longer about strangers but about building communities and networks that have specific meaning to the space.”

Both Gomez-Mont and Bedell note how multiple cultural venues are engaging in the creation of makeshift spaces that work outside the normative functions of performance halls, or exhibition spaces, to become community kitchens, studios and “public living rooms”. There is a temporal dimension to these cultural spaces, as they adapt to new uses determined by the shorter- and longer-term needs of the community.

Gomez-Mont went on to say that there is a multiplicity of functions occurring within cultural spaces: “on one hand there is a multiplicity that has been happening as well as added experimentation,” she says. “Vis a vis this multiplicity is specificity, where many communities and many smaller projects are functioning as spaces where new civic typologies are possible. So nowadays we are seeing everything from a community kitchen that is also about tool sharing, or feminist communities gathering to teach skills.”

Ultimately, a symbiotic approach to placemaking and the shift towards experiments expand the possibilities of imagination that alter our understanding of culture.

3 Westernised models are changing

The pandemic has challenged the resilience of cultural institutions and their ability to adapt. Adrian Ellis asked the speakers what role cultural institutions play in urban development and if current Westernised models remain useful over the next few decades. Andreas Görgen responded first with a reflection on the pandemic, stating:

“My two lessons from the pandemic come from learning about vulnerabilities. A personal vulnerability and the vulnerability of our society, which leads us to a more enhanced thinking of our communities. What we have seen in Western Europe is a sharp decrease in attendances at museums in the public sector. There is a high amount of money spent just to maintain these infrastructures, which is good on the one hand, but on the other hand, we continue to sustain organisations which do not respond to the needs of a society.”

According to Görgen, we need to rethink monolithic institutions and their tendency to be unworkable, not easily adaptable, and rigid. We need to observe and critique how they deal with diversity and sustainability in terms of consumption, as these have been pressing issues for decades. Institutions must be flexible and respond to change.

“The effects of the pandemic will last,” says Görgen, “and we are trained in a model which will change.” Görgen mentions for example how our criteria of sustainability will be challenged and so supporting big festivals like Biennale or Cannes Film Festival might not be feasible in the near future. “What we are doing as government or cultural institutions to

try to export German culture by buying a ticket for an aeroplane and sending the film abroad will dramatically change.”

Görgen, however, remains hopeful for cities in the Global South that have more recently embarked on the “cultural infrastructure” journey. “There is still a catch-up effect,” he says: “I am confident that the desire to build public and cultural spaces in those countries who just started will slightly differ from what has been built in Europe.”

4 The next billion dollars for innovation: Innovation should expand the repertoire of culture

Innovation has been key to the success of cultural venues, allowing for disruptive ideas and unexpected moments to take place that have advanced creativity. However, many cultural institutions are caught in a restrictive loop between private investors that limit artistic freedom or underfunded public schemes that face budget cuts.

Gabriella Gomez-Mont explained: “We are caught in a Catch 22, if you are publicly funded and a crisis comes, then suddenly the huge budget cuts put so many museums at odds, and then if you are privately funded you are strapped into a corporate agenda and lose your freedom.”

Similarly, Adrian Ellis commented, “in the private sector, there is a process of creative destruction in which established institutions are pushed aside by capital markets.” Ellis went on to ask the panel if they recognise a tension between the creativity that is taking place in publicly funded arts, and the large mostly privately funded institutions who are preoccupied with surviving the pandemic.

According to Bedell both private and public organisations can thrive side by side, and the tensions can create an interesting environment where there is an overlap. “The Southbank is 37% publicly funded,” she states. This, however, raises questions about what other financial models should be in place to safeguard both large and small intuitions.

Gomez-Mont argues that city planners and institutions can collaborate to provide creative financial models. “When a cultural institution comes into specific spaces within the city, what happens in terms of real estate? Why isn’t there more thought about the surplus capture of the capital gains that are made by the cultural institution coming to make sure they are captured by the public and not by corporations and by private companies?” Similarly, Görgen calls for an action to innovate this system, saying, “You have to put into place incentives for innovation. There is still a need for more innovation.”

All members of the panel more or less agree that financial models should be expanded beyond the existing ones, into creative possibilities that address the city’s needs and therefore speak to citizens in unique ways.

Gabriella Gomez-Mont concludes, “Sometimes we come across certain ideas of what culture is and what culture does, that become monolithic in nature, but rather we need to keep the amplitude of all these ways culture add layers to society.” By adding to the growing repertoire of what culture is, we can thus reshape our understanding of culture, and redefine our relationships between cultural institutions and the city.

“We are now emerging from a period when in effect the cultural sector ground to a halt, as we do the critical question is are we emerging into the same world or are we emerging into a different world and are the cultural institutions that are emerging changed by the experience and by other things that happened.”

Adrian Ellis, Director AEA Consulting, and Chair of the Global Cultural Districts Network

“What I find incredibly interesting is how many communities and smaller projects are actually functioning as places where new civic typologies are possible. I’m quite intrigued about the symbiotic nature of the shifts and the changes in terms of experimentation.”

Gabriella Gomez-Mont, founder, Experimentalista

“There is a need for more innovation because the effects of the pandemic will last. What we are doing as governments or as cultural institutions, be it the British Council or the Goethe Institute, exporting culture by buying a ticket for an aeroplane and by sending culture abroad will change tremendously.”

Andreas Görgen, Director General Culture and Communication Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany

“The aspiration to be a community anchor in new and imaginative ways and to have a deeper social function for the community seems to be something that has come to the fore for all institutions both large and small during COVID. The question for

many is are these buildings suitable, do the organisations have the skills to do this and above all do they have the business model.”

Adrian Ellis, Director, AEA Consulting, and Chair of the Global Cultural Districts Network

“In Latin America in general I am seeing museums reaching out to other communities a lot more frequently, truly trying to build coalitions that go beyond the cultural, and very much thinking about a creative ethos as a social resource.”

Gabriella Gomez-Mont, founder Experimentalista



Southbank Centre, London © LDNPix

“The one thing that the last 20 months has taught leaders or certainly institutions is that they will sink if they’re not entrepreneurial, flexible, thinking outside the box. We have all been so challenged by business plans that are frankly totally irrelevant and most of us have had to completely rethink the structure of our organisation, as well as every business plan we might have hatched in the past.”

Elaine Bedell, CEO, Southbank Centre



Helmintho Urbs: Urban Intervention by Mexico City Lab © Laboratorio para la Ciudad, Mexico City



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CHANGING CULTURES

November 2021

Elaine Bedell, the Chief Executive of London's Southbank Centre, looks at how the venue has weathered the pandemic, the return of live audiences and the challenges of streaming.

When it was built in 1951, the Southbank Centre was an extraordinarily innovative piece of architecture. It includes three concert halls and the Hayward Gallery, but it was intended to be civic space that was open to everyone: London's living room. We open at 10am. People come in to work and to think, sometimes because they have nowhere else to go. As the day goes on they are joined by concert-goers, people attending talks, and perhaps dancers rehearsing. We have monthly tea dances for those suffering from social isolation or dementia. Community groups can use our space for free if they're local. In this way, people get an introduction to some element of our cultural programme – but if they don't want to join it, that's fine.

“Thursday night is the new Friday night”: how the pandemic has changed the Southbank Centre

Until the pandemic, we were not a very digitally savvy organisation, but we quickly discovered how much we needed digital and managed to stream events for free from behind closed doors during much of 2020. We were acutely aware that freelancers only got paid if they played, so we did as much as we could to bring orchestras back. Every cultural institution rushed to put events online during the pandemic. The effect was overwhelming, and completely uncurated, so it was hard to find the excellent in among the rest.

The Centre fully reopened to visitors in September 2021, but a digital element will continue. A number of our events are hybrid, with simultaneous streaming, and we are investing quite heavily in that digital infrastructure, even though it is still unclear what the uptake will be. During COVID we shared a streaming platform with other cultural organisations, but we are now developing our own channel and digitising our archive so we can stream that too.

“After the Second World War, the government recognised that a traumatised country needed arts and culture, alongside jobs and housing”

At the moment, no one is making a great deal of money from streaming compared to ticket sales, and like most venues these make up a large part of our income. Unsurprisingly, some regional theatres that relied on digital events last year are reverting to in-person-only events.

“We desperately want people to come back for the live experience”

But we desperately want people to come back for the live experience. Attendance at the Southbank is still pretty volatile. Contemporary music is showing every sign of being alive and kicking – pretty much every event we do is sold out – and comedy is similar. Many of the literature talks are very well attended. But classical concerts are still showing signs of caution, which suggests that a demographic issue is at work. I think this is not a reluctance to come to the halls, which are very COVID-safe – much safer than supermarkets, for example – but worries about taking public transport in central London. The congestion and parking charges that were brought in a couple of years ago have deterred some people who want to drive. Inevitably, since tourism was also a big part of our ecosystem, our visitor numbers have suffered.

The Southbank is very affected by home working. There is no doubt that going to an event after work is an easy hop and step if you work in central London. If it involves a commute, it's very different, and theatres especially are being affected by that. Thursdays in particular are much livelier than they used to be. We now say that Thursday night is the new Friday night, because many people choose to work at home on Fridays. Historically, theatres were never open on Sundays, but now the West End has introduced the Sunday performance and they are probably here to stay. We are still closed on Mondays and Tuesdays due to the financial constraints imposed by the pandemic. Everyone is having to think about slightly different ways of providing art and activity for people.

The Southbank Centre is not wholly publicly funded; the funds we get from the state are not sufficient for what we have to do. Even before the pandemic, we had to become commercially astute and innovative. All the big cultural institutions have shown that we were more than capable of pivoting when we were forced to close our doors during the pandemic. The £1.57bn Cultural Recovery Fund, which was open to established institutions as well as small companies that were struggling to survive, has helped. It is important, though, that the new funding for levelling up is not to the detriment of our very culturally vibrant and diverse capital, which continues to be a big draw.

After the Second World War, the government recognised that a traumatised country needed arts and culture, alongside jobs and housing. Culture is essential for a nation's health. I'm confident that people will return to big cultural institutions as the pandemic recedes.

This post first appeared at the LSE COVID-19 blog.

About the author



Elaine Bedell is the Chief Executive of the Southbank Centre, the UK's largest arts centre.





Empty streets, Cardiff, during lockdown © Matthew Horwood

DEBATE 5 RATIONALISING SHOPPING: ARE NEW PATTERNS OF CONSUMPTION AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REINVENTING URBANITY?

January 2022

Urban retail is being reinvented. Even before the pandemic, e-commerce was challenging recreational shopping in cities, ethical concerns about cheap labour were becoming more prominent and the climate and ecological emergency was prompting questions about hyper-consumerism, the accumulation of more stuff and “discard culture”. In the wake of the global pandemic, new lifestyles and consumption habits are emerging that will accelerate changes in the shopping and retail sector with profound implications for cities and their spaces of mass consumption.

Concrete changes are already evident: we are witnessing the displacement of physical retail spending and other multiple structural changes in the sector, such as the demand for grocery deliveries and direct wholesale delivery increases; the introduction of efficient e-commerce platforms and prompt fulfilment being developed; and product diversification pushed forward.

As non-essential bricks and mortar retail stores had no other option than to close and move their business online over the course of multiple government lockdowns, vast numbers of consumers turned to online shopping, and many customers are choosing not to go back once shops reopen.

With online retail giant Amazon emerging as one of the winners of COVID-19, we should be realistic about the future of shopping districts in our cities by asking if these new patterns of consumption are changing our cities forever, and whether they could be a catalyst for positive change.

This final Urban Age Debate aims to address fundamental questions of sustainable urban consumption, local economic development, entrepreneurship and placemaking in bringing together a diverse panel of experts and designers including Thomas Heatherwick, Founder of Heatherwick Studio; Ewa Westermark, Architect and Director at Gehl; and Andrew Murphy, Executive Director Operations at The John Lewis Partnership. The conversation is co-chaired by Jonathan De Mello, Retail Consultant and Partner at CWM, and LSE Cities Executive Director Philipp Rode.

SPEAKERS



Thomas Heatherwick is a designer and Founder of Heatherwick Studio. A British designer whose prolific and varied work over two decades is characterised by its ingenuity, Thomas founded Heatherwick Studio in 1994 to bring the practices of design, architecture and urban planning together in a single workspace. The studio is currently working on approximately 30 projects in ten countries, including 1000Trees, a mixed-use development in Shanghai; and Google headquarters in California and London (in collaboration with BIG).



Andrew Murphy is Executive Director of Operations at The John Lewis Partnership (Waitrose Supermarkets, John Lewis Department Stores & John Lewis Financial Services) and a member of the Partnership's Executive Committee, reporting to Chairman Dame Sharon White. Andrew is responsible for all of the Partnership's technology, change delivery, property estate, supply chain network and customer payments. Andrew is also a Board Director of Clicklink – one of the UK's leading eFulfillment logistics providers.



Ewa Westermark is an architect and a partner at Gehl. She focuses on consulting with cities by developing Public Life and Public Space Strategies, Public Space Plans, Masterplanning Frameworks and guidelines that inform the quality of places. At the core of her work is the development of the Gehl methodology and thinking, within fields such as regional planning, sustainable mobility, innovation quarters or smaller cities and suburban centres.

CO-CHAIRS



Jonathan De Mello is a retail consultant and Equity Partner at CWM. Jonathan specialises in providing tailored solutions to the retail, retail banking and retail property sectors. He leads CWM's Retail Consultancy team and spearheads strategic retail consultancy projects for clients worldwide, creating strategies to help clients to maximise their retail potential. He is a member of the KPMG/IPSOS RetailThinkTank and regularly provides expert commentary on the retail and property sectors in national and international media.



Philipp Rode is Executive Director of LSE Cities and Associate Professorial Research Fellow at LSE. He is co-director of the LSE Executive MSc in Cities and Executive Director of the Urban Age Programme.



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RATIONALISING SHOPPING

1 Retail streets must embrace a mix of other uses to remain robust

COVID-19 has catalysed e-commerce, with Amazon emerging as a winner; this has brought about economic challenges to shopping districts and retailers in our towns and cities who wish to operate from brick-and-mortar stores. “There is simply no need for that amount of physical retail space” explained Andrew Murphy, Executive Director Operations at The John Lewis Partnership. “So for retailers you have a choice, you can try and repurpose that space within your own business model to add sufficient value, or you can close some or all of it.”

Murphy outlined that The John Lewis Partnership, for instance, closed 16 of their 51 shops during the pandemic, yet still saw their sales increase by 2%, of which the majority was accounted for through online shopping (now making up 60% of their business). “If the overall business model is healthy the switch to online does not mean that retail as an industry is disappearing, it is simply a format change,” said Murphy.

Such format change consequentially disrupts the current monolithic functions of shopping streets in cities as retailers must pivot from offering direct transactions, into a nuanced model consisting of multiple uses in order to motivate footfall from customers. “I strongly suspect what we will see is a much more mixed mash and blend of retail, residential and hospitality, event space,” explained Murphy.

In response to Murphy’s comments Ewa Westermark, architect at Gehl, agreed that the survival of retail districts is contingent on localised needs, where a layering and mix of essential and recreational uses is necessary to strengthen shopping streets. She observed that “During COVID we could see a shift ... the retail streets that were more mono-functional, were hurting badly ... but the places that had a robust mix of uses, that had invested in adding everyday functions to their centres, such as bringing in schools, adding playgrounds and recreation, were more robust because they had wider reasons for people to come.”

2 Localised shopping habits should prompt “Placemaking Retail”

Small local grocery stores and local shopping streets were most likely to benefit from COVID-19 restrictions and government-induced lockdowns, as the majority of urban residents shopped locally. Many neighbourhood stores have been boosted by the shift to working from home, which strengthened interest in supporting local businesses that assisted communities through the pandemic. “We can see that people are spending so much more time in their local neighbourhood,” said Westermark, “we went from not even a 15-minute city to a 2-minute city, it got really local”.

Westermark argued that hyper-localised shopping habits may be a catalyst to transforming local neighbourhoods, as common everyday places can become community hubs that address specific community needs, outside of normative shopping. “Whether or not we go online and buy things there is always a place where we receive the goods,” said Westermark, “I think there is a great opportunity to think about placemaking

retail, so you can help the local community to become more attractive, to support authentic places, tapping into the needs of community in a stronger way.”

Thomas Heatherwick challenged the dominance of mass retail shops, which often create a local monopoly and don’t connect with local people and communities. Big retailers used to feel that they were “essential infrastructure,” said Heatherwick, but, with the acceleration of online shopping pushed by COVID he suggested this means “lazy placemaking can’t happen any more.” Heatherwick argued that localised placemaking should be adopted to establish a more integrated experience between local communities and shops. This would not only benefit local communities, but also strengthen cities to become more resilient.

3 “Emotion is a function” to shopping experiences and placemaking

COVID-19 heightened the importance of public space and personal connectivity, as urban citizens turned to local parks and shopping streets for interaction during lockdowns. “We are hungry to see each other,” noted Heatherwick, who went on to critique the design approach of the retail sector. “I find it incredible how insensitively most places are being made up until very, very recently,” he said. “Shops have been too big for too long, the smaller spaces are more interesting, engaging your emotion and your senses.”

In agreement with Westermark, Heatherwick argued for a “placemaking” approach to retail but also pointed to a deeper dimension to shopping experiences that is personal. “There is functional placemaking [but we] seem to forget that emotion is also a function, thinking about human motivation – why you go somewhere, and really understanding how you feel when you move around a place.” The choice to lead with emotion and sensory awareness illustrates Heatherwick’s argument that physical as opposed to digital shopping is “a way that we see each other and connect with people,” it is “an experience that jumps and grabs your emotion in a physical in the way the flat shiny screen doesn’t.” In agreement with Heatherwick, Westermark went on to comment that public life on shopping streets needs to engage with emotion in order to make people feel safe, seen and included.

4 The economics of retail is a barrier to positive placemaking

In response to the critiques and comments of the retail sector made by the design experts, Andrew Murphy cautioned the panel that due to the economic costs and current financial models, retailers wishing to develop placemaking solutions are restricted. “I would encourage designers and civic leaders to recognise that the economics of retail will limit or define what the retailers may be able to contribute, and whatever shared vision we have for the future, the cost of change is very significant ... The number of shop closures you see happening isn’t a result of people just giving up and deciding they would rather do something else. It an economic consequence.”

While Heatherwick continued to critique the nature of retail businesses

“squeezing all the public life out of the edges” and isolating neighborhoods, he stressed that governments need to find ways to incentivise “the street world and regulate the online world,” as shopping districts are being penalised by a myriad of business rates, community levies and service charges that hinder their chances of expanding public life. The increasing privatisation of public space by developers and landowners acts as an additional economic and operational barrier to the use of public space by retailers and citizens.

5 Are repair economies on streets achievable?

In the second half of the debate Jonathan De Mello raised awareness of the social and environmental cost of consumerism, discussing the harmful outcomes of electronic waste and failed fast fashion that accounts for 2.1 billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions.

Murphy explained how the precarious chain of consumption has led many retailers to offer circular solutions where consumers can rent furniture or recycle items. However, Murphy is very realistic about these solutions taking off. “To re-engineer the business model for a very big retailer takes time, and investment. Even if I chose to be optimistic about the rate of growth for those models, and even if there was some aggressive help from legislators, I would still struggle to see this representing more than 10-15% of our business activity in a decade’s time.” Murphy also mentioned that such models are delivered easily online as it is a cheaper and faster option, which may be why we will not witness the growth of the repair economy on the street.

Heatherwick felt that the culture of repairing items needed to be brought back to the streets, as it fosters relationships and connections with people. “We are programmed to think that high streets are jammed full of stuff you buy and there is a real opportunity to rethink that. It’s not just about literal repair, it’s about relationships and exchange, not just exchange of money or things, but exchange of services and emotional connections with people ... that grow each of us and make us feel integrated into something.” Westermark agreed that we need localised opportunity to repair: “there is a need to have jobs locally, to create local meeting places and hubs on a neighbourhood scale.”

Westermark also called for the repurposing of physical space as an environmentally friendly solution. She mentioned the transformation of parking spaces into green spaces and the reuse of existing dilapidated buildings, pointing to the layering of functions she had stressed earlier in the discussion. “We have a really lazy use of space; we have to use what we have more efficiently ... in the optimal way ... to reduce space and increase use.”

In response to these comments Murphy argued that there is not a unified solution to sustainability in cities. “There will be very few solutions that make sense on Oxford Street in London that also make sense in a small provincial town ... We have to think in quite a discriminating way about some of the models and opportunities that we propose.”



Brixton Market, London ©Victoria Jones

“At Gehl we look at not so much where people are spending money but where they’re spending time, so during COVID we could really see this shift. The retail streets that are more mono-functional were hurting badly but the places that had really invested in adding more everyday functions to the city centres like bringing back schools, adding playgrounds, thinking about recreation and nature as part of the city centre, they were more robust.”

Ewa Westermark, architect, Partner and Director, Gehl



ReTuna Aterbruksgalleria, the world’s first recycling shopping centre, in Sweden ©TT NewsAgency

“I’m interested in the street as a social theatre, which means you need to start really by thinking of activities rather than thinking of just one-way traffic of buying from someone.”

Thomas Heatherwick, designer, and founder of Heatherwick Studio

“COVID has forced us to look more at the everyday rhythm and routines of people. Before the retail offer might have been mediocre, now with commuting patterns being disrupted the offer has to be truly unique and special and not something that will only attract the lowest common denominator of need.”

Jeff Risom, designer and Director at Gehl

“This is an economic challenge for the retail business model it will only reverse if somebody uninvents the internet. If the overall business model is healthy the switch to online does not mean that retail as an industry is disappearing, it is simply a format change and a form change.”

Andrew Murphy, Executive Director of Operations, The John Lewis Partnership

“There’s definitely a shift towards more conscious consumerism through an awareness that the environment is deteriorating. So a lot of the retail chains are offering a level of rental or repurchasing services where you can recycle or upcycle products, though it’s still definitely not as prevalent as it should be in the market.”

Jonathan DeMello, retail consultant



Stroget Street, the main pedestrian shopping street, Copenhagen ©Yadid Levy

“People are buying 400% more clothes today than a few decades ago. Before 2008, you had fashion brands putting out two to four collections per year. But after 2008, where budgets were really under pressure, brands suddenly put out 20–30 collections per year, in order to maintain their turnover.”

Vigga Svensson, sustainable fashion E-expert and CEO Continued Fashion

“We can actually sit in our homes by ourselves buying things connecting with people so suddenly the public spaces need to be attractive. Of course it’s about emotions, about feeling safe about feeling included, about meeting other people.”

Ewa Westermark, architect, Partner and Director, Gehl

“I’m not thinking of this as a shopping conversation, I’m thinking of this as a public life conversation. Where are most people? It’s on the streets, for me the thing we call shopping has been a way that we see each other, how we come together.”

Thomas Heatherwick, designer and founder of Heatherwick Studio



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Proposal for Nottingham Development © Heatherwick Studio

WE'RE HUNGRY TO SEE EACH OTHER: THOMAS HEATHERWICK ON EMOTION IN PLACEMAKING

February 2022

As people return to high streets after the pandemic, Thomas Heatherwick argues that we underestimate the importance of emotion in placemaking.

Boredom is something we don't talk about in city planning. Yet most places are made in an incredibly insensitive way that pays no heed to how people feel about them. For a long time retailers behaved as though they were essential infrastructure. Multiples muscled their way into our high streets and thought they could get away with being above us while the people were below. But the acceleration of online retail during the pandemic means this kind of lazy placemaking doesn't cut it any more.

We don't ask ourselves why people go somewhere, or how many steps it takes for them to get there. We need to understand how people feel when they move around a place. Emotion is a function of placemaking. Think about the role of shopping centres. You walk along a street past these big places, and they're expensive partly because they're big. Whereas the smaller a place is, the more interesting it is, and the more it engages your emotions and your senses.

My practice is working on a 1970s shopping mall in Nottingham at the moment. Councils thought shopping was what people wanted, but it pushed all the other life out. Half of the centre has been demolished and we want to preserve the rest so that we can mine the existing structure, avoid wasting more carbon, and breathe life back into it.

During the pandemic, it felt as though everyone was rushing to the online world. But it's a pretty packed place to be. How do you stand out online when you start selling something? Retail is a way to connect people with each other physically. It jumps out and grabs your emotion in a way that a flat, shiny screen doesn't, no matter what you put on it. What an enormous gap there is for emotion in function-led placemaking.

I always found it funny that in the world of architecture the most prestigious commission was an art museum, because it represented culture. Yet streets are where people engage in public life. Shopping has become a way we see each other. We thought we were going to see each other online, but we discovered that the algorithms didn't really let us do the unexpected things that public life should allow us to be doing. Given the high business rates for shopping spaces, we need to find a way to apply tax fairly online and offline, because at the moment the real world is penalised.

Whether we realise it or not, we're hungry to see each other, and we need government to support that impulse.

This post first appeared at the LSE COVID-19 blog.

About the author



Thomas Heatherwick is the founder of London-based design studio Heatherwick Studio.

URBAN AGE

The Urban Age programme is an international investigation of cities jointly organised by LSE Cities and the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft. Through conferences, research, advisory work and outreach, the Urban Age explores the diverse spatial, social, economic and political dynamics of global cities in different regions of the world.

Since 2005 the Urban Age has built an extensive knowledge base with interdisciplinary expertise. It is an authoritative source of comparative data and visual information on over 60 global cities and urban regions, and a repository of critical writings, reflections and presentations by urban leaders, practitioners and experts.

Urban Age conferences have been held in cities across five continents, including Addis Ababa, Delhi, Rio de Janeiro, London, Hong Kong, Istanbul, São Paulo, Mumbai, Mexico City, Johannesburg, Berlin, Shanghai and New York City. In 2019 the Urban Age Task Force was launched to work with city governments and help deliver sustainable urban change at the environmental, social and spatial level.

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The Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft promotes a free and open society and its cohesion. Democracy, the social market economy and sustainability are the foundations of such a society. Our work is based on the values of Alfred Herrhausen: on freedom and responsibility, on competition and compassion. Alfred Herrhausen thought and acted with the aim of crossing and overcoming boundaries. In his memory, the Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft creates platforms for discussions to enrich relevant discourses during selected events, and in publications and other media. [@AHG_Berlin](https://www.alfred-herrhausen-gesellschaft.de)

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First published in 2022

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