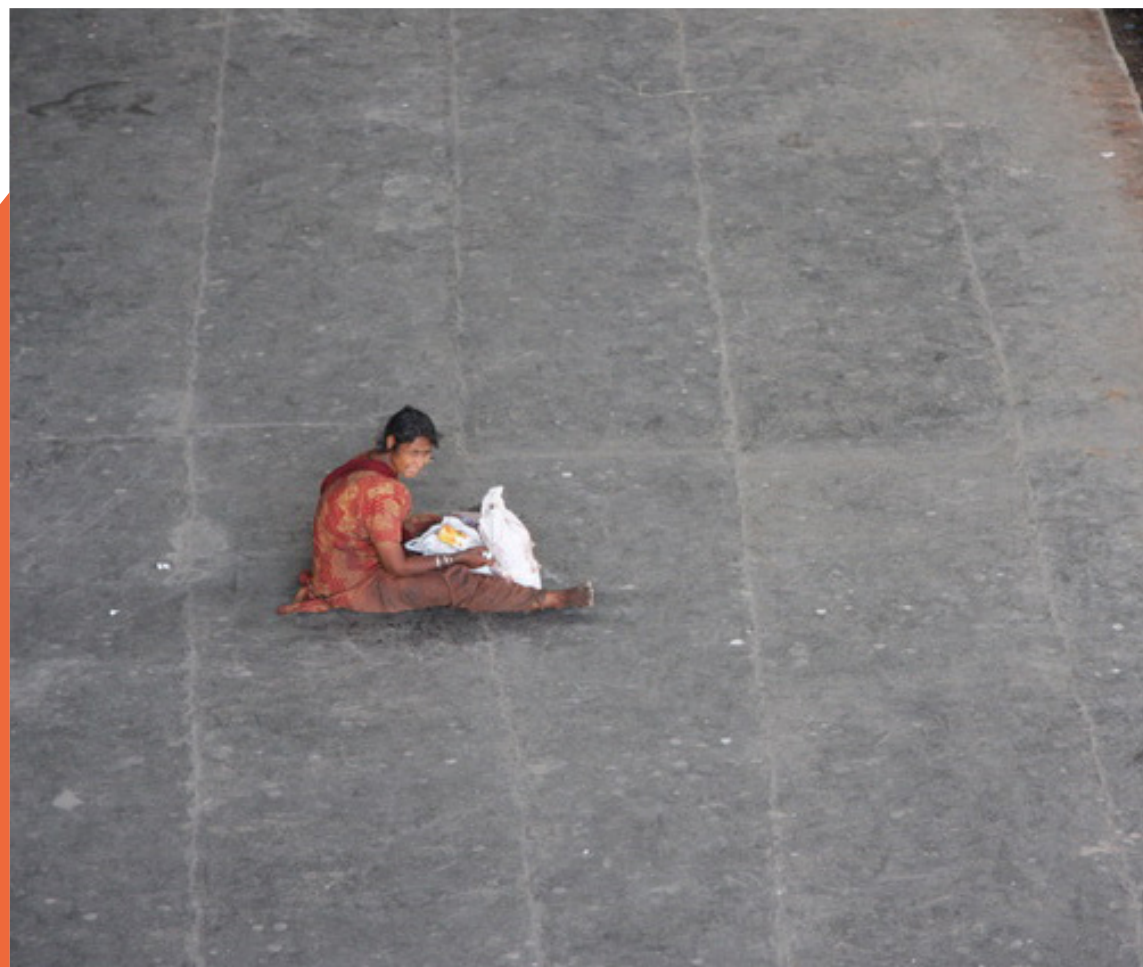




**Adapt, focus, engage,
here comes post-COVID-19**

Despite the deep pain caused by the loss of many dear ones due to this pandemic, COVID-19 can also be seen as an occasion to re-think, re-design, re-view and roll-out. To be sure, the lock-down and confinement have generated improved air quality, lower noise levels, more frequent walking, jogging, walking and cycling, shopping for fresh food and groceries in local stores as well as stepped up our digital connectivity. Many of us have thoroughly enjoyed this specific part of the pandemic while growing aware that the current health crisis will make way for a post-COVID-19 that will be very different from before. This pandemic can therefore be seen as a tipping point and, if we look beyond, provide an opportunity to give way to new criteria, different values as well as a clearer outlook and paths for the organization of cities and our urban life.

In reference to Mark Carney's statement that 'our digital and local lives extend and our physical and global ones contracted', little more is needed to strengthen the conviction that the new goals to focus on will be local resilience, green and digital awareness, there is little or no doubt that sharing and circular economies as well as short production lines can offer effective solutions. Now is therefore an excellent moment to sketch out some thoughts to come to new (strategic) perspectives.





Digital and local

Because of the lockdown, we have basically been communicating, even celebrating, digital connectivity, and frequently faced with saturated digital networks, websites and streaming services. We have sourced food supply at local stores. We have shortened our shopping radius. Proximity matters. We have grown hyper-aware of the importance of good health care and health infrastructure.

If we next agree that mobility and public health are intertwined, and together represent the backbone of cities, it is understood that active mobility is pivotal to good public health.

In this respect, it is noteworthy to remember that ample research has pointed out that car-dependent regions also reveal a higher incidence of overweight and diabetes. Therefore let us not fall into the trap of jumping back into our private cars, but maintain the newly learned habits of hand washing, improved personal hygiene and - at least until we have a vaccine - the safe distancing. Public transport operators have not interrupted their service and are stepping up their effort applying COVID-19 measures. A robust set of guidelines was released a few weeks ago by Yellow design Foundation and can be found here: <https://ydesignfoundation.org/covid-19-survey/>

More positively, research results published in the International Journal of Public Health, April 2018, indicated that there is a protective association between neighbourhood walkability and blood pressure outcomes, in other words walking positively impacts blood pressure.

Next but no less important, COVID-19 seems to indicate lower resilience and higher number of casualties amongst elderly residents of highly polluted regions. Indicating once more that there can be little doubt about the enduring public health impact of mobility and community design on individual behavior, health and lifestyle, hence the importance of upstream-level interventions in city design aimed at optimizing walkability. Good public health is determined by a number of indicators such as air quality and noise levels, and access to friendly public space, which determines the capacity to create and develop sustainable social and economic activity. Good public health next also relies on the availability of a strong and accessible collective health system, that serves to monitor, maintain and protect our communities and also on our individual upkeep and monitoring. Both sides generate an array of opportunities for e-health applications.



Last but not least, the COVID-19 newly required habits of hygiene. This has significant implications not only for public transport operators but also public space managers who cannot just address their loss in positive perception requesting passengers and visitors to wear face masks and socially distance, but are expected to: **1)** heavily invest and communicate on their interconnected service offer, **2)** step up their maintenance and cleaning activities, **3)** inform passengers on the products they use, and **4)** provide more refreshment points, sanitizers or drinking wells.

These new requirements reinforce the quality and strength of real-time data collection and use and synergies with other stakeholders. With mainly urban residents demonstrating a growing demand for mobility as a service, demand for e-modality and e-connectivity is rising. Operators, distributors and manufacturers are therefore also encouraged to step up their efforts to integrate their offer, create intermodal synergies and invest in mobility smart cards, that is, in collaborative - mobility - platforms between operators, car, scooter and bicycle manufacturers, distributors and insurers.

Similar solutions provide services that are the best fit for the specific moment, such as taking away the burden of maintenance and recharging, and allowing for more efficient space management. Individual cars stand idle for at least 60% of the time in urban conditions, during which they claim occupation of public space that might very well serve to promote walkability, physical exercise, greening, mass transit and consequently improving public health.



Finally, planning for the longer term we are faced with the unavoidable evidence that revealed higher infectability in polluted and densely populated areas. Post-COVID 19 will also demand a boost in creativity in terms of efficient land-use, planning and programming, including urban flows and regeneration, while adopting integrated approaches focusing on renovation and greening. Governance of the planning, implementation and maintenance of the spaces will also be required of our local administrations.

Green, shared and circular

Our local lives have been extended as we have now learned to shop for food locally. Supply has been less diverse in exotic food products, but fairly abundant in local farm products. Local sourcing generates less food waste. In the EU, data from 2016 indicates that around 88 million tonnes of food waste are generated annually with an associated cost estimated at 143 billion euros. Also, in 2018 some 36 million people in the EU could not afford a quality meal every second day. Local sourcing means reduction of transport emissions, elimination of intermediaries and heightens the involvement of local and small and medium sized businesses, which is 99,8% of businesses in the EU. Eating locally-grown food in season is also good for you.

Human resilience and values

In short, as long as a trustworthy vaccine is not administered to say 7 billion people, it is clear that we are still at risk of renewed outbreaks even if we obey the restrictive measures such as social distancing, wear a face mask and adopt the basic rules of hygiene. But let us be optimistic, trust scientists and medical teams will come with a vaccine and look beyond COVID-19. That's one part that is taking care of our institutions to take care of us.

There's the other part, however, that must take care of itself first, in order to take care of citizens. The positive of COVID-19 is it has shown us the limits and consequences of decisions based solely on financial considerations i.e. cost-cutting and silo thinking. Our modus operandi has been submitted for review (judgement?). Whereas before many decisions were based on silo thinking, lacking concern for integration and negating unintended consequences, a change now appears vital for all persons. We need to avoid and limit the impact of future pandemics and other related calamities. The ultimate consideration of all decisions that affect life on this planet should be tested against their human and climate impact and in accordance with TCFD recommendations and EU Green Taxonomy.

Ready, set?

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