COVID-19 Urban Thinkers Campus Series 2

1. **UTC Title:** Reimagining Public Spaces

2. **UTC Date and Time:** 7th July, 2:30 PM CET or 6:00 PM IST

3. **Lead organizer:** Red Dot Foundation

4. **Partner(s) organizations:**
   National Institute for Urban Affairs (NIUA)- India
   Catalan Agency for Development and Cooperation- Spain
   The Urban Vision- India
   Coro India- India
   Engender Consultancy- Malaysia

5. **Number of Participants:** 150+

6. **Objectives of your Campus:**
   ● Understanding the challenges of a post COVID19 scenario in urban spaces
   ● Identifying solutions for safe and inclusive public spaces
   ● Identifying and highlighting good practices on safe and inclusive public spaces

7. **List of Speakers:**
   ● Hitesh Vaidya, Director, National Institute for Urban Affairs (India)
   ● Carme Gaul, Director, Catalan Agency for Development and Cooperation (Spain)
   ● Oman Sreeni-Ong, Founder and MD, Engender Consultancy (Malaysia)
   ● Prathima Manohar, Founder, The Urban Vision
   ● Supriya Jaan, Program Manager, Right to Pee, Coro India

8. **Speakers' Key Points:**
   ● Speaker 1: Hitesh Vaidya, What policy changes are required in the new COVID-19 scenario for the public spaces?
       - There is a need to redefine public spaces to become more inclusive by incorporating virtual public spheres, for eg. Webinars, less accessed public space, etc. before altering any changes in policy.
       - Two measures that must be implemented in public spaces to restrict the transmission are: social distancing and lesser use of public spaces. All the immediate tailoring must be concerned to make these possible involving the form, function, connectivity and social density of the concerned public space.
       - Giving importance to prospects to reimagine policies; one, improving the quality of green space in the locality to create a decentralized network of smaller green spaces and two, increase the area of pedestrian and cycling space to widen the sidewalks.
       - Encouraging the Indian way of innovating "jugaad" for local solutions.

- Integrating local health departments with the sanitization facility, adequate provisions for clean public toilets, and handwashing facilities in public spaces.
- Protocols for managing queues in public spaces and use of public transport.

● Speaker 2: Carme Gual, How can we use the local community and stakeholders in the decisions for public spaces?
    - To get started with the process, public administration must be committed and the city council should be very conscious of having a clear understanding of the needs of the community for humanising the city. Urban planning, mobility, schools, etc. should constitute planning for the community which supports the local and vulnerable citizens.
    - Public spaces are not only a tool to get to places but a space for expression, protest, social engagement and places to be. Hence this social capital must be created keeping in mind the resilience of the neighbourhoods. Cities should be made to cater to the needs of low-income families, senior citizens and vulnerable workers. Local community and neighbourhood associations are a great way to decentralise decision-making. Synergies can be created between the community and government to make the process efficient. Cocreation of public policies is a need. All bottom-up initiatives for social support that have been transcendental during the pandemic must be mapped and introduced to the discussion of the new cities we want to create. Participative budgets should be promoted and so the co-responsibility of all citizens with the open government with decision making. It means that we are in a continuous process, it is not a success or a failure, it is an ongoing transformation for improving living, with equity and sustainability.
    - The pandemic has introduced a new way as to how we utilise public spaces. We should encourage citizens to walk and cycle. Sidewalks to be widened and pedestrian lanes should be constructed for the same purpose. This creates ecological cities which is very helpful. Technology should also be leveraged and inculcated in public spaces to enhance the resilience of our territories.

● Speaker 3: Prathima Manohar, What role does a planner or architect play in reimaging public spaces especially in highly dense cities? Can space be redesigned to provide public protection in the times of COVID-19?
    - It is very important to emphasize that the impact of decisions taken now, can have on the decades to come.
    - In rethinking public spaces, it is significant to focus on people-centric design, improving the quality of the public realm and investing in pop-up infrastructure, for eg. rental bike stands.
    - Long term changes in policies can include improving per capita open space; as many cities in India are under the requisite level. Congestion in such said cities is hugely problematic. Another three-dimensional prospect in improving public spaces include upgrading public transportation to make it available for a larger number, widening of sidewalks as many citizens prefer walking and investing in biking facilities.
    - Short term changes must revolve around the acknowledgement that most

economic activities take place in and around the city, so reopening it safely is not only vital for the economy but also to restrict the virus. While reopening cities, it is also important to realise the civic responsibilities of citizens to maintain social distance in public spaces.

- The most transformative idea in response to this pandemic is to build resilient cities
- In the short term we have to repurpose the public spaces and public amenities to maintain physical distancing.Reopening our public spaces safely is the critical first step to opening our cities safely.

● Speaker 4: Oman Sreeni-Ong, What role does civil society and private sector play in reimagining public spaces?
- COVID-19 has brought socio-economic inequalities and societal differences at the forefront. It is important to realise that every individual is a protagonist in ensuring everyone's safety.
- Civil society has taken active steps in Malaysia in awakening and mobilising the public from behind the scenes, from discussing haves and have nots to reach the farthest first, which is what SDGs collectively stand for.
- The private sector also played a key role by donating millions of dollars in relief funds and medical supply to provide essentials for everyone.
- COVID-19 has made us follow the new normal which has a people-centric approach with the ideology of leaving no one behind. Forming a collaborative approach by constructing meaningful and inclusive relationships among government agencies, civil society and the public to thrive in diversity and sticking to the grassroots is a must step to harness the individual potential, trusting one another in the form of moral and emotional support and forming a shared identity.
- Three critical questions which need to be addressed are
  ➢ What characterises a flourishing community,
  ➢ In what capacity social development should be released for a growing number of participants, and
  ➢ How to foster collective commitment and strengthen the vision.

● Speaker 5: Supriya Jaan, What facilities are we providing to the citizens who live in highly dense colonies?
- Reimagining public spaces for people living in densely populated areas should start with recognising and actualising claims of denied and unclaimed spaces by the marginalised.
- The settlements about which we are talking are settlements with poor housing conditions, lack of basic infrastructure, various kinds of environmental risk and this situation exists also in the normal times .
- Short term response to tackling the problem is decongesting and decentralising the spaces provided to lower-income families but there is need to go beyond this deeply.
- The lower segment of society is kept at peripheral vision even when they are

exposed the most to the risk because of the environmental conditions they live in. City density in Mumbai is 31,700 people per sq kilometres due to which social distancing is a challenge. So reimagining public space must address breaching the gaps between " we and Them" the marginalised and government authorities, to facilitate their voices.

- Redesigning neighbourhoods for post-pandemic equality should first focus on streets, informal communities include proper toilets with adequate facilities. It should confront the problem of basic health care as right to the marginalised communities , also broken drains, the absence of street lights, inadequate classrooms, open sewage system among other alarming issues.

- It is important to understand the views of people living in such conditions through participatory methods to amplify their voices because the meaning of public spaces and privacy , safety is different for them. They get the essence of a private sphere in the public realm because of congested homes they live in. COVID-19 has presented us with an opportunity to think again how there are no open spaces left in the most metropolitan cities. The market-oriented policies should be strictly challenged, Multi stakeholder and right based approach including grassroot voices , architectures, government agencies and urban planners should be paid attention and pathways to be created for participating in urban governance. We must also deal with fear, stigma , myths related to covid and ensure safety, dignity of people.

- The pandemic has highlighted again the need for building spaces that are not gettoos , but mixed use neighbourhood that allow people to support each other .which will ensure neglect and poverty is not locked into pockets and vulnerable population have access to city centre and its resources and they are not neglected otherwise and also during the crises.

- Recommendations are to create pathways for grassroot voices, to participate at the decision making tables . Urban planning system along with sex segregated data collection on number of people, number of household, pockets, and areas of vulnerability as well as availability of sanitation and hygiene amenities . Most importantly preparedness and response plan .

9. **Recommendations:**
   ● Emphasizing the need for rethinking ongoing programmes (with external funding) incorporating safety, social distancing and inclusivity. Redefining the definition of public spaces, i.e. in a barber's shop, many people are involved, the owner has been investing a lot to abide by the new rules risking not to get a return given the economic crisis.
   ● Accentuating importance of qualitative and not just quantitative data. To look not only at the square meters per capita but also at its accessibility, inclusivity, safety, types of amenities available and location (in some cases there is only 1 big park that alters the statistics yet it is not accessible to everyone). Finally, the key role of local government to consider the local community as a catalyst to reviving the economy.
   ● Introducing public toilets for the third gender. Poor sanitation of public washrooms, which affects the health of the people that are using them, should be improved. Educating

the youth regarding such issues is important. Conducting workshops with children from the slums to teach them the importance of sanitation.

- Government needs to be more transparent and provide open spaces, health care, and educational benefits to citizens of all classes. Citizens will also have to ensure that they fulfill their duties and demand open spaces for not only the elite but also the downtrodden.
- Taking into consideration the voice of all sections of society and taking steps accordingly. Making public transportation available, more trains and buses must be introduced so that people maintain social distance and take a switch from private modes, since we are the protagonists.
- Safety of women and girls as well as other vulnerable communities is critical. Having disaggregated data (sex and age related) at hyper local levels will allow for gender sensitive and holistic policies for safer cities.
- The youth have a big role to play as agents of action. Not to mention, the government also has a greater role to play. Proper planning and its execution is crucial to maintain an equilibrium between the increasing population and increasing pressure on land and in a public space.
- Land expansion is crucial given there is not enough space; small and medium towns absorption; creation of magnets for the population to facilitate decentralisation. Strategic planning and urbanism is the key to solve this challenge. Real autonomy of powers and authority has to be delegated to the lower government such as municipalities and block authorities for them to take up initiatives; digital empowerment; and surveillance.

10. Solutions and Good Practices in addressing the Covid-19 crisis:
- Repurposing public spaces to abide by social distancing norms. For example, the use of urban area markings for informal street vendors to ensure social distancing or the use of public playgrounds for vendors' zones to easily maintain distance. It is crucial to include all community groups especially those from informal settlements to ask them what is the support they need and include them at all stages of the decision-making process.
- In lieu of the high possibilities of future pandemics, public spaces can be transformed into AI-equipped smart cities to form databases about the health/security/safety etc concerns of city officials & stakeholders.
- In Mumbai, roads and safety is a big concern which has to be reimagined given the road network is very dense in Mumbai. A lot of initiatives and local government plans are already being initiated to decongest the public places in Mumbai, mainly in the suburbs like Dharavi and the countless slums. Focus is also being shifted on creating more sidewalks, open spaces and decongesting the road networks.
- Stores have plastic curtains to avoid contact to customers / Public spaces still opening up in a limited manner / District administration strictly prohibited selling vegetables and fruit along the roadside / installed safe drinking water in all offices, bus and rickshaw stands / economic activities and public transport can operate but in limited ways with several requirements like use of mask or face shield, physical distance, only 50% capacity, etc. / municipality is sanitizing all public places and offices.

11. Media:

Check our UTC video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIis-br7BH8&t=1s