

URBAN INNOVATIONS IN POST COVID ERA: A PLANNER'S APPROACH

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Abstract: *Few years ago, many nations committed "to encourage the development of healthy societies by promoting inclusive planning and quality services" through the implementation of the Agenda 2030-Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainable development goals are a collection of 17 global goals designed as a benchmark to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". They acted as a universal call to encourage the idea of quality living with equal opportunities for all by 2030. However till date, they are not successfully operationalized as we lack in empowering the urban local bodies.*

The urban local bodies are a crucial part of the urban governance of an area, and while discussing issues related to cities and urbanisation, we tend to revolve around the urban governance. And to regulate the urban governance one needs to facilitate the conceptualised and a detailed plan that would empower the urban local bodies in the long run.

It is high time that we reconsider our regions, cities and towns, so that we stop witnessing struggle and efforts country after country in the post- Covid era .

In this research paper we initiate and facilitate a discussion regarding planning challenges, goals and constraints in the modern day, keeping in mind the ancient wisdom ; acting as an opportunity . We also embrace the challenge to reinvent the meaning of our agenda of Knowledge for Better Cities.

Keywords: Urbanization, sustainable development goals, urban governance, inclusive planning, quality services and urban local bodies.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the present day the pandemic crisis "COVID-19" reminds us that we are either near an end or towards a new beginning. The government of india enforced social isolation that is the only option we are left with however these measures can be devastating for many living in urban slums where physical space is a scarce.

After over two-month-long coronavirus-induced lockdown, our country has entered the first phase of the three three-phase unlock plan announced by the Union

ministry of india. However the lockdown, will continue in containment zones where the spread of the coronavirus is easier in comparison to other places.

The year 2020 will be engraved as a pandemic year in the history of world that led to biggest public health crises of all time, threatening to take away millions of lives. The people and the government dealt with the massive economic crisis, triggering further negative consequences for human life, wellbeing and lifestyle. Cities, are disproportionately affected (for now). The covid 19 has evolved as an urban crisis, forcing us to redesign our deeply held beliefs of a good city form and the purpose of planning. We face a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty, with the urban environment under the spotlight. Now, we need to re-examine the urban planning agenda in the 'post-COVID-19 world'.

Moreover as an urban planner, we must understand that people and infrastructure of the city are the two important aspects in town planning and management.

For a better future, we need alterations to our byelaws otherwise, planet Earth will soon break its cooperation agreement with mankind if we urgently don't revise our behavior towards the mother earth. Regarding the same, some are optimistic, some are not. But almost everyone agrees that, despite a decline of such unprecedented scale, humanity will still find the strength to recover.

2. IMPOSING COMPLETE LOCKDOWN

Health is a crucial subject for the mankind and the pandemic has majorly affected that. The central and the state governments of India are trying hard to fight against the pandemic and resist the effects of the covid -19, government imposed the biggest lockdown in the country ever. The government could have avoided the spread of coronavirus by taking some preventions earlier and sealing the national borders.

2.1 LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The lack of proper utilisation of spaces, housing and town planning in India gave birth to slums. And these slums are the major hotspots of the covid pandemic in the country . In future the covid -19 will be the reason of alterations in many housing bye laws and regulations that would enhance

the idea of social distancing. The pandemic acts as a wake up call for all of us to understand that how we need to deal with the true problem of affordable housing and public spaces, present in the country.

2.2 LACK OF GREEN SPACES AND WATER BODIES

A holistic approach in planning that comprises of right proportion of all landuse types is a right approach for urban planning. Even after knowing the fact, our most of the cities are a junkyard lacking proper amount of green spaces and water bodies.

2.3 HAPHAZARD RESTRICTIONS & UNPLANNED IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES

In the early days of covid 19, India started issuing travel advisories for those flying to China. On February 5, it banned entry for foreign nationals travelling from China to India, although 25 other countries had confirmed several Covid-19 cases by January 31.

India waited another month before banning entry to nationals of Italy, Iran, South Korea and Japan on March 3. While Japan had 284 cases on that date, arrivals from several other countries with a sizeable number of cases, including the US (85 cases), France (212 cases) and Spain (166 cases) faced no entry ban in India.

2.4 SHORTAGE IN PPE KITS

The battle with covid-19 could only be fought with the Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) kits, especially masks and coveralls. And we are in a shortage of these resulting into extremely low testing rate (10.5 tests per million people).

3. THE THREE PHASES OF 'UNLOCK PLAN' OF THE NATION

Phase I: Religious places and public places of worship for public; hotels, restaurants and other hospitality services; and shopping malls; will be permitted to open from June 8, 2020.

Phase II: Schools, colleges, educational institutes will be opened after the consultation with the states and Uts. Based on the feedback with all the stakeholders, including parents, a decision in this regard will be taken in July.

Phase III: Resumption of international flights, metro services, cinema halls, gymnasiums, swimming pools,

entertainment parks etc. will be decided based on assessment of the situation.

The planning of our cities has always been a reflection of prevailing cultural and technological trends and the major crises that happened in the past. For example, the cholera epidemics in the 19th century resulted in the introduction of modern urban sanitation systems. In the post industrialization era the Housing regulations around light and air were introduced as a measure against respiratory diseases in overcrowded slums. Similarly, in the post covid era we need to understand the effects and the problems generated and, respond to current and future crises in a more systematic way. Some of the basic issues and effects related to covid -19 are discussed below:

3.1 EMERGING HEALTH HAZARDOUS HOTSPOTS

The lack of access to essential services such as water, housing and health care, has challenged the mankind in responding effectively to COVID-19 in many cities. Lack of public spaces and poor access to basic services make lockdown orders impossible to comply with, had it been the other way, people would have responded positively.

The slums of India had always been a challenge for the government, above this the pandemic has ruined the situation.

Moreover, the crowded cities, where population density played a major role in the generation of economy are know the hotspots of the pandemic.



Figure 1: Poor access to the core services make the lockdown orders impossible to comply with.

3.2 THE CASCADING ECONOMIC EFFECT

The supply and the production chain is largely an inter-regional process. No doubt that makes the world a smaller place to live in but ceasing the borders in the lockdown has largely affected cities for basic services. Covid 19 makes us realise that self-sufficient cities are a better approach for town/urban planning.

3.3 SMART TECH. AND SMART PROBLEMS

With new ideas, there are new problems. The advancement in the technology has been a boon for all but on the verge of sharing our privacy. Some strategies to beat covid-19 undoubtedly came straight from the intelligence toolbox, but on the sake of sharing personal information on the online portal.

3.4 DIGITAL PLATFORM - COMMUNICATION TOOL

During the lockdown people are connected through the digital platforms reducing the physical mobility of the people, which in turn would effect the physical strength of the human body.

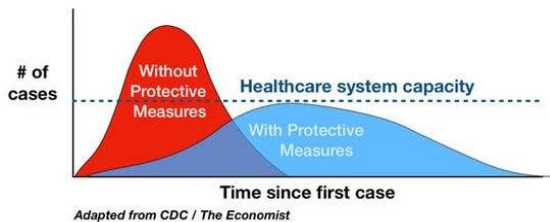


Figure 2: Curve depicting the current status of COVID-19

4. FUTURISTIC APPROACH

As lockdowns is extended in many places, we are beginning to understand how COVID-19 will affect the mankind and how we need to approach urban planning. Properly planned densification will always be a good thing for cities. But do we need more to protect the most vulnerable? Will we be more resilient to future crises? Will we make green and blue spaces front and the center of our infrastructure investments? And will we seriously address the fact that it's not just physically, but economically, socially and environmentally that cities are connected to their surrounding regions? We should definitely rebuild our crucial economic and social fabric. It's our duty to rebuild better, and to do so we need to follow certain parameters:

4.1 HUMAN CENTERED DESIGNS

Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem solving that starts with the people you're designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailored to suit their needs. It is more of a deep empathy with the people you are designing for and eventually putting your innovative new solutions out in the world.



Figure 3: Human centered designs

The world can fight only if we try to evolve from the new solutions for our problems, and human centered designs is a good approach towards the evolution of better urban planning.

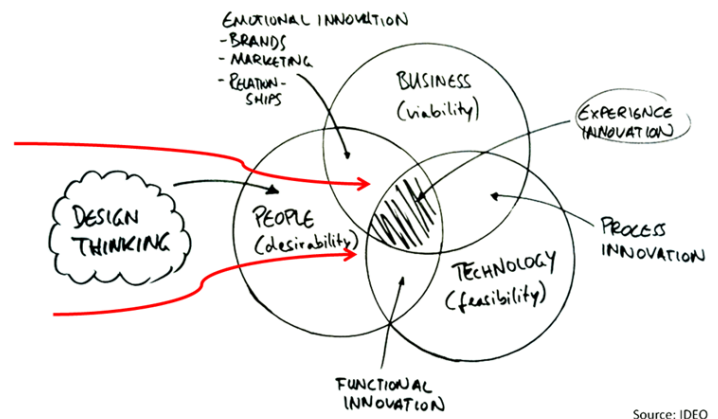


Figure 4: People, buisness and technology are interlinked

4.2 BETTER HEALTH CARE DESIGNS

Since ages hospitals has been designed, keeping in mind the safety of patients and doctors. However post covid 19 hospital designs would emphasize more on the patient safety. Some of the expected design changes in hospitals are:

- OPD rooms with video-conferencing solutions.
- Review of air-conditioning systems
- More cross ventilation and use of fresh air
- Use of anti-bacterial and porous material

- Use of touchless technology
- Automatic doors and e-switchable privacy glass
- Wider corridors and flexibility in designs.
- Redesigning of emergency wards and seating spaces.

4.3 MULTIFUNCTIONAL & FLEXIBLE SPACES

In the lockdown period, working from home became the new normal for many. A shift from structured office environments to the flexible, multi-functional spaces is the upcoming future. Not only the commercial buildings, residential ones will also become multi spacious and will provide personal office spaces for many. Moreover boom in the vertical & urban gardens, rooftop farming is also expected.

4.4 MASLOW PYRAMID

The theory brings our attention to the fundamental needs of humans in a five-tier pyramid model. And these needs in the pre covid and post covid state are different. Let us understand one by one.

- **Physiological and safety needs** in the pre covid era was taken for granted, however in the post covid era the anxiety and stress over job security, worry about the future, uncontrolled, and unorganized work environment is a new problem generated. Constant monitoring and exchange of emotional needs is the new solution.
- **Love and belonging needs** in the pre covid era was taken care by the colleagues, HR, and seniors, but in the post covid era employees going remote, the flow of communication is compromised more or less. The only solution we are left with is the virtual meetings through applications like Zoom, MS Teams, and much more.
- **Esteem needs** in the pre covid era were bosses and colleagues, but in the post covid era managers and peers could no longer keep the feedback loop going and recognize their remote employees in time. The only solution we have is to implement digital rewards and recognition platforms.
- **Self-actualization** in the pre covid era was generally managed by self but in a conducive work environment, however in the post covid era limited infrastructure and communication channels affected the pace of self-actualization, moreover motivation is compromised. The only solution is flow of self-actualization can be enhanced by providing online learning tools for remote workers.

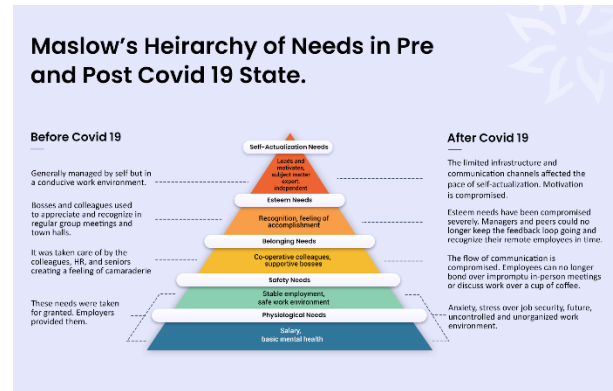


Figure 4: The new Maslow pyramid

4.5 SELF - SUFFICIENT CITIES

The government of India gave a slogan of self-dependency is important for all, if we prepare ourselves for any next pandemic. The same applies for our cities and as a town planner we must focus on the self-reliant and self-sufficient cities.

5. RESULT

Today, the Urban areas are facing a public health emergency, as the world is trapped with the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. High-density settlements, with high mobility and interactions between people are at risk and facing a physical and a mental torture by the pandemic.

India was under a national lockdown — confining citizens to their homes and eliminating their mobility — that has slowed the growth rate of infections, according to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).

The lockdown slowed the infection growth rate to doubling every 7.2 days, from doubling every 3 days (prior to lockdown), the ministry said. However the unlocking has given a boost in the no. of patients of covid-19. Urban planning processes and systems need to change and strengthen themselves to build resilience to fight against it and minimise the spread of disease outbreaks .

Urban planning must now come as a response to public health crises and give significance to sanitary issues and overall quality of life, while keeping in mind the concepts of garden cities, infrastructure networks and services and habitable spaces are attributed to the revolution in urban planning more than 300 years ago.

We must look at th aspects of urban planning that can be mainstreamed. The aspect is the decentralisation of urban services, which is based on an equitable distribution of land and resources in cities. This model limits mobility and provides space for healthy interaction in smaller scales.

Decentralised infrastructure and services also provide a range of benefits for all stakeholders as decentralised systems are more economical.

So Let us have a positive approach and think for a new beginning and understand that the cities of tomorrow will not only be judged on their productivity, investments, infrastructure, economic strengths, beautiful public spaces, heritage, and culture; but also on how responsive the cities are towards their citizens. To build such cities with an approach of an architect and a planner we need to bring alterations in our byelaws.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The definition of normal living standards has changed and there is new normal, which the world is adapting.

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has changed everything. It has forced humanity to flex and evolve, both in real-time and in the long-term. Physical- and social-distancing are buzzwords and an integral part of daily life. We must understand that self sufficient designs should be the front and centre of our infrastructure investments and we must rebuild our crucial economic and social fabric.

Mahatma Gandhi dreamt, of a self-sufficient village, and that can be reinterpreted as an organically evolved city, like a university town, supported by schools, hospitals and industries. A good example can be Nalanda as it would provide opportunities to workers in Bihar near their villages. Similar towns can be replicated in all provinces.

To achieve a city, based on solar energy with recyclable waste, is not a utopian idea. It is high time to stop copying

wasteful, energy-consuming, high-rise towers of glass from the western and evolve organic solutions for work, study and life in harmony with our surroundings.

Unfortunately, the Indian system, has allowed public buildings and low-cost housing to be designed by architects through competitions, and after that handing over the land to builders with the process of auctioning of plots without any urban design criteria. This has resulted in haphazard development. Unfortunately, city planning in India has been largely handed over to international consultancy firms, who barely have knowledge of local values. It is time to trust Indian architects, urban designers and city planners to design small towns and district centres with site-specific, local plans with detailed visual studies, which will be self sufficient and ready for any such other pandemic and lockdown in the future.

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