



ILLUSTRATION

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Cities Adapting to a New Normal

TEXT: CHONG HWEE JANE

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced cities to quickly adapt to the demands of a changing environment. See how cities have responded and the lessons that could translate into new urban practices in the future.



Food delivery couriers wait for food orders at the Central Plaza Pinklao mall in Bangkok, March 2020.
Image: © Andre Malerba 2021

Food Delivery Services – Bangkok, Thailand

Food delivery services have proliferated as cities entered various degrees of lockdown, with large numbers of delivery couriers gathering to collect food orders during mealtimes. To reduce the transmission of COVID-19, people have been encouraged to maintain a safe distance from others, which has affected how food delivery couriers gather in public spaces.

Emergency Bicycle Lanes – Bogotá, Colombia

Bogotá has expanded its bicycle network by adding 76 km of temporary bicycle lanes to enhance mobility for essential workers and reduce crowding on public transport. In other cities, COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of temporary road closures for pedestrians and cyclists, which may serve as trials for future plans to permanently go car-lite.

Cyclists use a temporary bicycle lane converted from a traffic lane.
Image: Guillermo Legaria / Getty Images

Lift Up Local – Tampa, Florida

Tampa's Lift Up Local Economic Recovery Plan temporarily waived permit applications and fees for local F&B and retail businesses to expand outdoor capacity and serve more customers safely. Such short-term policy adaptations allow cities to quickly support local businesses in post-pandemic recovery, while enriching street life and piloting Open Streets measures.

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CITY OF TAMPA'S
LIFT UP LOCAL
ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

SEATS ARE
DESIGNATED FOR
FOOD SERVICE
ONLY



TAMPA
SUNSHINE FOREVER

Diners enjoy their meal at outdoor seating on a temporarily closed lane.
Image: City of Tampa



| A father and child watch as a herd of wild boars dig up public vegetation in Haifa, Israel, April 2020.
Image: EPA-EFE / Abir Sultan



Image: Oren Chen / Israel Nature and Parks Authority

Wildlife in the City – Haifa, Israel

From Llandudno, Wales, to New Delhi, India, the lockdown-induced drop in human activity has drawn wildlife closer to urban centres but has also raised questions about altered animal behaviour in the longer term. In Haifa, once-nocturnal wild boars enter neighbourhoods in search of food throughout the day, exasperating residents concerned about safety and property damage. Haifa's ban on culling the animals has led some to take desperate measures: 11 wild boars were found poisoned to death in Nesher, a neighbouring city in the Haifa district.



| A man tends to the vegetables on his rooftop farm in Jakarta.
Image: Anton Raharjo / Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Urban Farming – Jakarta, Indonesia

Citizens are making the most of their limited space for urban farming in land-scarce Jakarta. COVID-19-induced disruptions to food supply chains have led to a growing awareness of food security issues, with many picking up gardening to boost mental wellbeing and supplement personal food supplies. Cities can ride on this ground-up interest in urban farming to rethink how land and unused spaces can be used for urban agriculture to boost their cities' food security and nutrition.

Life on Balconies – Rome, Italy

Amid COVID-19 lockdowns, apartment dwellers rediscovered balconies as valuable spaces to connect with neighbours and the outdoors while maintaining a safe distance. As cities become more dense, it is critical to rethink how living spaces are designed so that they remain liveable and resilient under any circumstance.

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| A personal trainer leads an exercise class from her balcony during Italy's lockdown.
Image: REUTERS / Remo Casilli

Drive-in Cinemas – Seoul, South Korea

Drive-in cinemas have experienced an unexpected revival as people seek out physically distanced entertainment alternatives. The drive-in format has been quickly adapted for music festivals, opera performances, political and religious gatherings and even museums, yet this increase in car-centric entertainment runs counter to the pre-pandemic movement towards car-lite cities. As cities of the future seek to reduce reliance on privately owned cars, the future of such drive-in venues remains to be seen.





Spot, the Safe-Distancing Robot – Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, Singapore

While the use of robots to increase productivity is not new, the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of robots as a means of protecting workers' health and safety. Robots like Spot not only reduce the manpower required for labour-intensive work like patrolling large areas, but also lower transmission risks by minimising physical contact between staff and park visitors.

| Spot patrols park areas with high visitorship to remind park-goers to practise safe distancing.
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