COVID'S METAMORPHOSES: THE FUTURE OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

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What we have been, or now are, we shall not be tomorrow
Ovid, Metamorphoses

Summary

In this article we consider the long-term impact of Covid-19 on the future of the social economy. We argue that current discourse concerning the transition from lockdown to gradual re-opening is necessary, but will be insufficient to save this important cultural and economic sector. The leisure sector was already undergoing rapid change in response to recent socio-economic trends. The coronavirus has served to catalyse those trends. The determinants of future success of the social economy will go well beyond short term fiscal fixes. Rather, there will need to be far-reaching changes at town planning, regulatory and industry level. Towns and cities which recognise these imperatives may yet thrive. Those which do not rise to the challenge will lose a key part of their economy, and with it their social and cultural attraction. The disciplines required will share characteristics internationally. The precise constituents of the programme of change will vary according to the type of urban settlement. In all cases, the growing Night Mayor movement can play a key role in sharing and disseminating best practice, formulating policy and acting as an advocate and intermediary between the sector and government.

Trends

Over the last two decades, towns and cities have faced many challenges, which were cumulative, in many instances exponential and in some cases overwhelming.

First, there has been a decrease in high street retail. This has to a large degree been due to online retail, which has undercut traditional shopping by dint of fiscal avoidance, sidestepping urban centre rent and rates and achieving economies of scale unreachable by its bricks and

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mortar counterparts. But in addition, the economy of things has been on the wane, as the younger generation, many of whom have given up aspiring to own their own homes or stuff to fill them with, have sought experiences rather than material assets.

Second, there has been a reduced interest in alcohol, for so long the mainstay of the social economy, for reasons which include faith, health and peer pressure, as the younger generation rebels against their parents' drinking habits. The downward consumption figures are masked by an element of "premiumisation," as Generation Z is going out less but trading up to top brands and products so as to curate (and Instagram) their night out.

Third, there has been a large growth in home entertainment, driven by the emergence of new platforms such as Netflix and Spotify, the rise of delivery services and virtual restaurants, the banning of smoking in town and city centre venues, the saving of cost and the relative convenience of staying put over travelling in, the possibility of finding a new partner online rather than in a night time venue and, of course, safety from assault and sexual predation.

Fourth, the phenomenon of gentrification has done great harm to the social economy, as young professionals move into urban nightspots and then complain of the very factors which attracted them there in the first place, leading to regulatory clampdown. The process of gentrification has also led to higher rents for venues, which do not trade on high margins and, in many cases, the disappearance of independent, creative operators from town and city centres.

Fifth, austerity has had a significant effect on the amount spent in the leisure economy, as people not only go out less, but consume before they do, with pre-drinking, now formally known as pre-loading by policy makers and simply pre-s by its protagonists, causing problems for public services in city centres and reducing the income of venues, particularly those which depend on a relatively narrow demographic on a small number of nights in the week.

The overall effect has been to produce significant and ultimately unsustainable income reductions in many types of venue, with drinking establishments, nightclubs, music venues and retail establishments hit particularly hard. In days gone by, pubs might have competed with other pubs for custom. Now they compete with everything, including online commerce.

Importantly, even before the advent of the virus, none of these trends looked remotely likely to be reversed. Now, just as Covid-19 is more likely to prove fatal to individuals with underlying health conditions, it is also more likely to cause permanent damage to those towns and cities which have failed to build resilience into their social economies.

This long-coming and accelerating crisis on the high street has not generally been met with a thorough or effective policy response. In some cases, the reaction of government has been to encourage change to residential units. This builds the balance sheets of investors and landlords but serves simply to accelerate the demise of the social economy, for no entertainment venue lost to housing will ever be returned to its former use, while the allure of the centre is reduced and the pressure from residents and regulators on the venues which remain is increased. It is by definition a process of managed decline.

What's in a name?

Despite, or to some extent because of, the above challenges, the night remains a highly contested space. The phrase "night time economy," which grew out of the UK's Civic Trust in the early part of the millennium, has become synonymous with negative externalities such as binge drinking and disorder. More recently, the term "evening and night time economy" has been substituted, to emphasise the importance of the early evening, as offices close and many towns and cities become deserted when workers disappear home, in most cases never to return. Many cities are now avoiding the stigma of "night" altogether by referring in policy documents to the 6-6 economy.

The Responsible Hospitality Institute has sought to go further. Recognising that many leisure venues trade all the way through the day and into the night and that it is futile and unhelpful to categorise them as day-time or night-venues, it describes cities that achieve safe and vibrant sociability as "sociable cities," and uses the term "social economy," the expression used in this article.

Nevertheless, there remains an argument for going further by replacing the term "economy" with "ecology." For the economy is only one part of an ecology going well beyond bars and restaurants, encompassing services, transport, public realm design and protection, public sector deployment and so forth. The term "ecology" recognises that not all of what we value at night has to do with money. The elderly person walking their dog in their neighbourhood after sunset, the nurse trying to get home from hospital, the police officer looking for a bathroom, the call centre worker buying a coffee—these are all an important part of the ecology of the night, involving movement, interaction and planning for safety—but they are not what we would normally think of as the social or night time economy. It is tempting to reduce human beings to economic units, whose primary purpose is to work and spend, but only by recognising the range of reasons people have to be out at night can cities plan effectively for them. So, to misquote Bill Clinton's campaign team, "It's not the economy, stupid."

Another more neutral way of putting it is to call it what it is: "life at night."

The question of nomenclature remains important, for in this case a rose by any other name will not smell as sweet. Language must be chosen which reflects both the social and economic value of night at life, and does not induce a gag reflex in listeners, be they policy-makers or local communities. The social economy needs to be seen as an asset you do something for, not a problem you do something about.

Fightback

In more recent years, there has been an institutional recognition of the role of the social economy in promoting towns and cities as places to live, work, study and invest. Its links to the creative sector—media, publishing, design, fashion, tech and the arts—have come to be appreciated. And in an increasingly footloose economic market, both government and employers have realised that the proximity of a vibrant social economy is fundamental to their ability to attract the best and brightest to their workplaces.

Furthermore, the significant contribution of the social economy to the economic base has been amply demonstrated, with the sector being a major employer of young people and an important magnetising aspect of the tourist economy. This in turn has been reflected in the inclusion of culture and cultural assets in city planning and regeneration policies, and the promotion of culture-based regeneration of urban centres. For city planners, the Bilbao effect, with regeneration centred on Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum, remains totemic. In short, towns and cities which want to compete for investment, tourism and culture-based economic growth have turned to the sustainable promotion of the leisure sector.[3]

The clearest recent manifestation of this trend has been the rapid growth of the role of Night Mayor.[4] Sometimes termed a Night Czar or Night Manager, the defining characteristic of the office-holder is that they become emblematic of, or synonymous with, the benefits of the social economy. Sometimes standing with their feet in city hall, and sometimes in an NGO outside it, the Night Mayor advocates for nightlife and sociability, helps cities to plan strategically and formulate policy, shares best practice, occasionally generates funding for the sector and mediates in disputes. Perhaps even in advance of evidence of demonstrable benefit in all cases, the idea has very much caught on, and there are now posts filled in over 50 cities across the world and growing.

Going alongside the growth of the night mayor movement have been several policy ideas to protect and develop the social economy. The Agent of Change principle provides that where the operation of an existing business or community facility could have a significant adverse effect on new development (including changes of use) in its vicinity, the applicant (or 'agent of change') should be required to provide suitable mitigation before the development has been completed. An example would be the requirement to design and sound-insulate new residential property to protect occupants from nuisance from a pre-existing music venue. Adoption of Agent of Change is one of the policy proposals of the Berlin Clubcommission to

[3] It is not to diminish this point, but it should be acknowledged, that in some case "culture-led revitalisation" policies have served tourists rather than residents, leading to intractable conflicts. Therefore, planning authorities engaged in cultural revitalisation need to do so mindful of the particular locational characteristics and the social and economic ecosystem they are seeking to support.

[4] See *Governing the night-time city: The rise of night mayors as a new form of urban governance after dark*: Andreina Seijas, Mirik Milan Gelders (Urban Studies 2020).
https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0042098019895224

combat “clubsterben” or “club dying” as a result of the pressures of gentrification, alongside planning recognition of clubs as cultural institutions, a federal fund for noise protection works and rent control. The increasing provision and diversification of night-time transport options has promoted life at night, with greater coordination and oversight of taxi queues and rideshare pick-up/drop-off hubs being a boon for workers and entertainers trying to get home. And schemes such as San Francisco Heritage’s Legacy Bars & Restaurants Initiative help to recognise and therefore protect the important contribution that long-standing entertainment establishments make to the cultural life of the city.

All the while, creative entrepreneurs have set about forging a new, diverse social economy. So we have seen the rise of “competitive socialising” (escape rooms, e-gaming bars, hi-tech table tennis, bowling, darts, mini-golf, paintballing and the like), chameleon bars, immersive theatre appealing to a new generation of theatre-goers, premiumising, elision of the concepts of bars and restaurants, the creation of instagrammable settings and pop-ups in secret and surprising locations. All of this might loosely be termed the “experiential economy.” The conceptual divisions between pubs and restaurants is fast disappearing and policy-makers who use it as a basis for their regulation are fighting a battle that has long since evaporated. Meanwhile, we have seen the growth of the super-club with super-DJs to match, and in some cases, the move of nightclubs to the outskirts to sidestep the sometimes baleful influence of gentrification or, as in the case of Amsterdam, a strategic response to highly-saturated city centres.

In summary, social economies around the world were poised between inexorable decline and a creative-led revival. Into this scene, enter Covid-19.

Microbial presence, global impact

Humankind has a tendency to forget and to regard itself as invincible. A malign microbe has woken us from our torpor. In our complacency, we had largely forgotten the human suffering caused by Ebola, SARS and HIV, let alone polio, diphtheria or the Spanish Flu. Caught on the hop, we have plunged into an economic and social recession which will only be measurable in long hindsight. However, in the USA it is reckoned that the restaurant industry has already suffered its largest impact since Prohibition. In the UK, with the closure of over 100,000 leisure businesses, staff furloughed, rental debts and mortgages building and insurers fleeing for their bunkers, the disaster is both present and incipient. No amount of government intervention is enough and, as in every crisis, the small man or woman is hit hardest, with the independent business and the gig economy worker hit hardest of all.

What is clear is that every government will have taken on mountains of debt which our children and probably theirs may be paying off for the rest of their lives. The bandwidth for social regeneration will be limited, and businesses and individuals will emerge from the lockdown much the poorer. These are the stark facts with which it is our societal duty to grapple as we plan ahead.

There is a theme running through public discourse which supposes that all will be resolved by lifting the lockdown, that with an injection of government help we will vault to full power mode, as if the social economy were like Popeye after a helping of spinach. We won't. As we explain below, businesses will be cash-poor and their customers will be more parsimonious and wary. A much larger percentage than previously will be unemployed. All things being equal, leisure venues are likely to fail on an unprecedentedly mass scale.

It will not be enough for governments to work out how to get out of lockdown. That is equivalent to moving the patient from intensive care back to the wards without considering their rehabilitation or how they will fend for themselves outside. Rather, a much more complete vision of a post-Covid-19 social economy is needed for sociable cities to re-emerge.

Structural challenges

Despite governmental proclamations, we simply do not know when or even if there will be a vaccine for Covid-19. Until that time, there will be social distancing, or rather, the preferred term of the World Health Organisation, "physical distancing." How much will depend on the government's risk appetite, which may correspondingly ride, at least to some degree, on the public's own tolerance of risk. But any physical distancing is anathema to the leisure industry, which relies on the animated vibe generated by proximity, and economically toxic for those venues which depend for their viability on a few packed hours on weekend nights.

If government prescribes too much physical distancing in leisure venues, many venues will die. If it permits venues to operate to full capacity, it risks a recrudescence of the virus, as happened in Seoul. And nor is this just a function of science. The human factor is more important than that. For it is one thing to make the public safe; it is quite another to make them <u>feel</u> safe. The greater the physical distancing enforced by government, the more customers will be tempted to return to venues, but the less viable the venue will become. In other words, the actual and perceived safety of venues stands in inverse proportion to their viability.

The impact of these factors cannot be projected with confidence or certainty, but clearly any physical distancing will reduce income. Furthermore, whatever level of human density is permitted henceforth in venues, a proportion of the normal customer base will vote with its feet and stay at home in any event, accentuating the pre-existing trends. In this respect, Covid-19 will act as an accelerant or catalyst of a process of town centre decline that was already underway.

The social economy in general and night-life in particular has always depended on densely-packed venues. But it is commonly understood that the rate of propagation of the coronavirus is directly correlated to proximity. So we have an infernal conundrum: the greater the density within venues, the greater the income, the greater the risk. There are no criteria for determining the density sweet spot, but it is clear that there will be some distancing and that it will be an economic drain on leisure economy businesses.

On top of that, if, as is expected, the government prescribes far-reaching mitigation measures such as waiters in masks, Perspex screens between tables and the rest of it, or employers do so voluntarily to protect their staff from illness and themselves from legal action, a further cohort of potential customers will decide that going out is not worth the candle and gather at home instead.

Moreover, some percentage of customers will have become habituated to receiving their entertainment online as well as welcoming the cost savings associated with a night in. Hopefully, most will be tempted to revert to their former pattern of sociability, but, inevitably, not all will do so.

Therefore, it is perfectly obvious that, all things being equal, the social economy cannot return to its former levels, let alone exceed them, at least prior to a widespread programme of vaccination. Rather, the ineluctable conclusion is that, to the degree that it returns at all, it will do so in a state of relative impoverishment both in terms of capital and income. For an industry which has traditionally operated on low margins, this is a dismal vista.

Meanwhile, it is not just a question of this pandemic, but the next and the one after that. Will entrepreneurs want to sink their savings into long city centre leases at premium rents when all the fruits of their labour, courage and creativity can be wiped out, at a stroke, by another microbe whose cousins the government failed to plan for or adequately control?

Thus it is crucial for anybody interested in the social economy to understand that this is not about how to protect users of the social economy from catching a disease. At least, it is not *only* about that. It is about how to protect the social economy from catching a disease from which it might never recover. For the one thing about which we can be certain is that, unless new ideas emerge, the social economy simply cannot return to its pre-virus level. In many places, it is destined to fail altogether, in some places incrementally and in others suddenly and irretrievably.

Therefore, of course we must consider how to get out of lockdown. But more than that, we must now work to envision a post-Covid social economy and the criteria for its renewal.

The foundations for recovery

We suggest that the return to a thriving social economy depends on four principal factors.

First, it has been observable during the lockdown that humans crave the society of their friends and family. Zoom dates and virtual happy hours, game nights and dance parties are among the ways people are connecting in digital spaces. While serving as a temporary substitute for In Real Life (IRL) connections, virtual connectivity is not quite as fulfilling as the in-person version. The social economy is therefore not just a place to drink, eat, dance and be entertained. It is where we interact with our fellow human beings in love, friendship and celebration. Post-virus, social venues are also the spaces where we will share stories, commiserate and heal. The staff of such venues are specially trained to be attuned to customers' needs and facilitate a pleasant and lively social experience. Such interaction is an essential aspect of the human condition. Thus, alluding to the earlier discussion regarding nomenclature, the social economy needs to be recognised by policy-makers as a social good. Just as clean air, parks, museums, galleries and public transportation systems are social goods, so is the accumulation of places where we share relaxation time with our fellow human beings. Often in society, high culture—opera houses, theatres and the like—are recognised and protected. It is time now to recognise that popular culture—including pubs, clubs and dance and music venues—is equally important and worthy of protection.

Second, at governmental level, the social economy should not just be seen as something which needs to be regulated. It should be something which government has a duty to <u>promote</u>; in a sustainable way, yes, but to promote nonetheless. There has been a tendency for the public sector to leave the development of the leisure economy to the market, and then to step in and regulate it, as though it were an unruly beast to be tamed. That pendulum approach to the social economy historically caused the proliferation of alcohol-led venues in some centres, which then needed to be unpicked over decades. We have sufficiently sophisticated tools now to do better than rely on reactive regulatory measures as the policy instrument of choice. There is ample experience from around the world of what works and channels of learning and communication to disseminate best practice. Sometimes the market does not produce a perfectly balanced and harmonised economy. That is when government should step in to help to plan a good society. This is one such moment.

Third, as we argue above, if nothing changes, the social economy may fail altogether in many places. Emerging from this crisis in a state of debt, it needs the scope to earn more money from a relatively poorer population. This can only be achieved by permitting it to trade profitably over more hours and/or a larger footprint, as well as rethinking our approach to planning for the social economy.

Fourth, it is not just a question of venues. We have to develop a public infrastructure that facilitates our ability to visit the social economy safely, efficiently and cost-effectively, not eventually, but *now*.

We shall consider these themes under the headings of Respond, Recover and Restore.

Respond

This is the current phase. It contains five overlapping waves:

- First wave: risk avoidance.
- Second wave: social venue response.
- Third wave: nightlife advocacy.
- Fourth wave: government response.
- Fifth wave: planning for re-opening.

We take these sequentially for convenience, while recognising that not all nations are following this same strict order.

In the first wave, the government locks the population down. It enforces physical distancing and, in some countries, implements regulations regarding assembly and group size. In many countries, citizens are effectively confined to barracks.

In the second wave, there is some qualification or subsequent relaxation. For example, venues are permitted to provide a takeaway or delivery service, including alcoholic beverages.

In the third wave, there is concerted advocacy on the part of the industry, particularly in those cities with organized nightlife businesses (e.g. New York City Hospitality Alliance) or existing advocacy infrastructure such as an Office of Nightlife or Night Mayor. They seek to procure the right to provide at least limited service. They campaign for rent and rates holidays, or grants, business loans or employee support schemes. The social value of the sector is forcefully articulated, forcing government to act.

In the fourth wave, government responds. Money is conjured apparently from thin air, at least for the time being. Tax, business rates and licence fees are deferred since few businesses have the means to pay, and enforcement means bankruptcy. Nobody believes this can last in perpetuity. Some businesses argue it is better to stay locked down until they can open on a full throttle. Meanwhile, rental and mortgage debt accrues, with businesses having to rely on the kindness of their landlords. There is fear that when the government lifeline is pulled, mass closures will ensue.

In the fifth wave, businesses plan to re-open with physical distancing, sanitation and other mitigation measures in place. Government is placed under pressure in sections of the press to accelerate its plans to end lockdown, sometimes in advance of public opinion[5]

[5] In the U.S., a particular difficulty is that restaurants in states that have allowed re-opening face a conundrum: owners no longer qualify for federal relief funds and employees can no longer receive unemployment, yet they are forced to reopen in a climate when patronage, and therefore revenue, is minimal. In this instance, hasty government action may be accelerating the demise of on-site dining.

Recover

In the recovery phase, businesses are allowed to re-open, so that they can be weaned off the drip-feed of government support.

Although there is chatter about a vast release of pent up demand and venues packed to the rafters, so that businesses return rapidly to liquidity, this is urban myth. Venues will be allowed to re-open with regulatory controls of varying degrees of certainty and enforceability and will make less money than before.

First, in most places, re-opening will be incremental. Cinemas, museums and galleries are able to control capacities effectively and will probably open first, followed by restaurants and cafes where distancing can be enforced through how customers are seated. Human density in venues will be reduced by law. Pubs and nightclubs will come last.

Second, there will need to be controls on entrance and exit to avoid over-capacity. This may come from government codes or local enforcement, but will in any case be demanded by customers. Visits to drinking establishments may even be time-limited, as they are currently in Darwin, Australia.

Third, there will be mitigation measures in relation to customers themselves, in some cases imposed and in others self-imposed in response to customer demand and to protect workers. In some jurisdictions, customers will carry proof of their good health i.e. an “immunity passport.” In others, their temperature will be taken at the door. In all cases, management will be monitoring to enforce physical distancing requirements. In some places, there will be filters and controls on entry into streets and other public spaces, so as to control capacity and restrict entry to demonstrably healthy people, enforced by security or public protection personnel. Care will need to be taken with objective entry procedures and civil rights monitors to ensure entry to highly coveted social districts and venues are not restricted to persons based on race, ethnicity or other demographics.

Fourth, new mitigation measures will be implemented in premises. Staff will be in masks and gloves. Food will be prepared and plated out of sight of customers. Menus will be shorter to reduce kitchen interaction and the progressive march of mechanisation in restaurant kitchens will be stepped up. Screens will be installed and ventilation reconsidered in the light of emerging research that air-conditioning can actually spread the virus. Sanitiser stations will be prominently located. Payment will be cashless and contactless. Surfaces will be disinfected frequently, entrances and exits may have to be segregated, and so forth.

Fifth, there will be renewed emphasis on compliance documentation and audits, since the price of failure is no longer waking up the neighbours, but multiple deaths and prosecutions.

Where cities are ill-prepared for compliance inspections on a large scale,[6] a higher degree of self-regulation will be required.

All of this will reduce the income of what are largely small and medium enterprises, while imposing significant new costs. Many security staff have disappeared to other sectors. Bar and waiting staff may have parental responsibilities if their children cannot go to school. Others will choose not to work in an environment with the antiseptic qualities of a dental surgery. In the UK, many European workers will simply choose to return to their own countries. Investment will be needed in aesthetically pleasing Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and uniforms that don't look like a hazmat suit. Extra staff will be needed for sanitation and security duties. Staff will have to receive new customer service training on how to exude friendliness and help facilitate a relaxed, positive social experience in a sterile, high-anxiety environment while their faces are obscured by PPE. They'll have to learn, as the American TV personality Tyra Banks instructs, to "Smile with your eyes."

It cannot be stated with any confidence that this regimen will save all venues from closure. The inevitably smaller customer base and larger cost base will, on a statistical basis, see off a proportion of operators. Whether there will be enthusiastic new market entrants to take their place, or whether vacated premises will be allocated to non-entertainment uses, remains to be seen. It is possible that a collapse in urban centre profit prices will stimulate new demand from entrepreneurs. This is difficult to forecast with any confidence.

The conclusion we reach is that, however well-intentioned the public sector's approach to recovery, it is in the end a numbers game in which income is down and costs are up. The pre-existing trends whereby less is spent in town centres and more at home will continue, with the losses magnified by rules on distancing, a falling customer base and rising costs. On that scenario, it is difficult to feel confident about the ability of the social economy to thrive in the immediate post-Covid era.

Restore

For the social economy to survive or even prosper in the longer term will require a new paradigm. We emphasise ten aspects.

First, leisure venues will need to expand their operation in terms of time and space.

As to time, venues are much less likely to survive if their efforts are directed at attracting a pre-loaded twenty-something crowd in large numbers on two nights a week. That is a largely defunct model. Rather, management will need to sweat their assets by extending their hours of operation. The early evening should be promoted afresh as a time for socialising. Early sittings in restaurants meeting the needs of those who no longer wish to visit in peak hours

[6] In the U.S. there is added uncertainty as to which compliance agency should be designated the lead agency.

will become more popular. Venues will also need to broaden their customer base by offering experiences which are attractive to a wider section of the community at different times of day.

As to space, many venues will need the opportunity to spread out onto tables on the sidewalk, where it is potentially easier to maintain physical distancing and customers will feel more confident since they are in the open air. Customers will be served at their tables to avoid trips to the bar, and those staples of night-venues, the crammed smoking area and densely-packed queues outside the entrance will be things of the past. Smoking will be discouraged and app-technology will be used to plan arrivals to venues, to avoid the need to queue. Spontaneity of movement around night-life centres will be tempered by a more structured approach to arrival.

A particular issue for venues will be how to eradicate queues at restrooms, particularly for women. These will need to be dealt with by building more cubicles where possible, gender-inclusive rest-rooms or even take-a-number, SMS or buzzer notification systems.

The proliferation in street-use by leisure venues will need to be the subject of legislation so as to streamline the attainment of planning and licensing approvals subject to hours which prevent undue conflict with local residents. As sociability moves outdoors in the transitional period of re-emergence, an increase in sound disturbances is to be expected, especially when the public has become accustomed to silence except for nightly solidarity howls or neighbourhood sing-alongs. We will all have to bear some pain in exchange for a vibrant social economy; the sociability of the city, after all, is what drew in many urban residents in the first place. The hours of outside uses will be controlled by public authorities according to local circumstances.

Second, the enforcement of distancing on public transport will cause an increase in car use, cycling and walking. In many town and city centres, this will not work, since sidewalks will be needed for leisure use, and more space, not less, will be needed by pedestrians. This can only be achieved by reducing car use in such centres. This is no bad thing. In the experience of the authors, every significant centre which has banned the use of cars, whether entirely or at particular times of day, benefits from an uptick in environmental quality, sociability, and user enjoyment. In due time, the allocation of 80% of the public space between building lines to motor vehicles will come to be seen as a foolish historical aberration. But if one good thing comes out of Covid-19, it should be the restoration of a right to roam, or cycle, safely in urban centres, to sit and enjoy a coffee or a cocktail on the sidewalk, to speak at normal levels, breathe the air and watch the world go by.

Third, the social economy does not depend only on bars and restaurants. We need to see a renewed emphasis on the public realm, with a premium on safety, accessibility and environmental quality. A busy street is a safe street, but the feeling of safety is demonstrably augmented by street ambassadors. The scandalous loss of WCs will be reversed, and every civilised urban centre will provide plentiful opportunity for free water. Street-scenes will be greened, pocket parks and micro-rest spaces will be installed, while town squares will benefit from free leisure activities such as play equipment, or just games such as table tennis and chess, benefiting children (who are so often forgotten in debates about the social economy) and adults alike. Heritage buildings, bridges and arches will be artfully lit. Where the public weal cannot afford improvements, corporate sponsorship will fund the gap. The buzz of a great public realm is itself a magnetic attractor of users, some portion of which will visit and help fund leisure venues. It is no pleasure at all to visit a venue via a semi-comatose street. The public and private realms are symbiotic. The success of one depends on the quality of the other. Good local administrations recognise this and provide for it.

Fourth, it will be necessary to break down rigid policy structures. In a world in which young people are drinking less, it is largely unnecessary for policies to presume against any sale of alcohol. What about a glass of champagne before the opera, a cocktail while visiting a museum, a glass of wine while shopping at a high-end clothing store, a beer after working out at the gym, or a glass of champagne while at a nail salon or beauty parlour? The contexts for drinking occasions are so multi-various that a monolithic policy is liable to frustrate operations which should be encouraged. Nor are policies which presume in favour of restaurants only when they are sit down affairs with full table meals brought by uniformed staff appropriate in a modern environment. The writers of such policies have failed to notice the revolution in eating out, including the astonishing rise of high quality street food, tapas, small plate restaurants, cocktail bars with food and a myriad of formats which do not depend on white tablecloths and silver service. Instead of asking whether a proposal ticks a preordained box, the simple question should be whether it does any harm and, if it does, how this can be mitigated without disproportionate restraints.

Fifth, local government bodies should reflect the public's aspiration for their social economy in a vision, and then set about achieving the vision through positive planning, encouragement of investment, social marketing and public realm improvements. Instead of focusing on "nightlife," ask instead what makes a "Sociable City" with vibrant social options from day to night. Local authorities should keep track of their social inventory and, in some cases, might purchase assets to achieve their vision. If high rents mean that music venues are in short supply, local authorities could purchase former car parks, stores or railway arches and convert them into rough and ready venues, protecting the use forever. Similarly, if it becomes impossible to provide for a rave or dance experience in low density venues in urban centres, authorities should scour the outskirts of their settlements for former warehouses, depots, printworks and factories, to provide a large-venue atmosphere. If the need to socialize is not anticipated and accommodated within a legal framework, DIY promoters will take advantage of market demand to host these social spaces, which may potentially endanger the health and safety of their participants. The vision of a Sociable City should be developed and promoted with the assistance of Night Mayors and through social messaging and marketing.

Sixth, it is inevitable that a portion of the population will prefer not to travel into town and city centres for work or entertainment. So authorities should seek to furnish communities with all they need within 15 minutes of their home, by way of retail, services, parks and leisure. The notion of the "15-minute city" currently advocated by cities like Paris not only seeks to reduce the need to travel, but can also help to ensure that money earned locally stays locally. This strategy should in turn be supported by the promotion of local supply lines and labour. In the years to come, there will only be so much money to go around. It will behove local government to make extra efforts to support their local economies, remembering that money spent purchasing goods and services from a distant corporation is lost to the locality for ever.

Seventh, measures will be needed to protect tenants of leisure venues and also to protect venues from a wholesale conversion to residential uses.

Town and city centre rents have risen beyond the means of many small businesses through a combination of gentrification, the purchase of urban centre properties by pension funds and other institutions which are indifferent to the needs of their small business tenants, the advent of gambling establishments into primary shopping areas and the rise of venture capital underpinning mid-market leisure chains. In many cases, rents agreed in different market conditions will become unsustainable in the post-Covid era. Sensible landlords will adjust rentals downwards to preserve the tenancy. In other cases, government should look at legislation to permit tribunals to refix rental levels in the light of these changed circumstances. The costs and consequences of this virus should not fall on tenants alone.

Similarly, the approach to city business rates or taxes requires to be fixed so as not to deter investment in town and city centre businesses, and so as to mitigate against the unfair advantage enjoyed by online providers.

Furthermore, the quick fix for landlords of converting leisure venues to housing should be resisted by planners where this would harm the potential vitality and viability of town and city centres.

Eighth, the response of the insurance industry to claims on business interruption policies is widely viewed as unconscionable. Policy-holders have paid premiums for years if not decades, only to discover that, through recourse to convoluted exegesis of obscure policy wording, insurers are able to deny liability with impunity. Government, insurers and the leisure industry will need to agree on standard wording so that it is perfectly clear in the future whether businesses are covered against future pandemics, since Covid-19 is the latest but won't be the last. Without effective insurance, the incentive to invest will no longer be there. This requires resolution.

Ninth, the industry can provide an alternative to home entertainment, but it cannot wage war against it. Streaming initiatives such as United We Stream in Manchester, or the broadcast of plays by the National Theatre in London have demonstrated how you can actually widen your customer base by taking advantage of new media, rather than railing against it. Pubs and restaurants will need to ramp up their home service, so as to provide an effective dual income stream.

Tenth, sad to say, there will be centres which will no longer be fertile soil for the growth of the social economy. Some have lost so much retail, or developed so much housing in its stead, that it is hard to see the rebuilding of a critical mass of leisure venues in the current climate. Centres which are over-reliant on big offices will suffer in the post-Covid era, since large businesses will be less keen on gathering all of their employees in one place. Strips of takeaway premises built to service such centres will themselves struggle to survive. In these cases, public authorities may well consider that they need to adapt their centres and promote alternative uses such as community hubs, artists' workshops, markets, music venues and co-operative ventures.

Conclusion

For the social economy, the gradual lifting of lockdown globally is not the beginning of the end, or even the end of the beginning. For the leisure venues which are integral to our social economy, it is a new beginning entirely. They will enter the new era saddled with debt in a society impoverished by the gargantuan public expenditure required to keep society afloat and seriously depleted fiscal revenues, and with their principal customer base—the young—hit hardest of all.

Any suggestion that the social economy will bounce back due to a release of pent up demand is magical thinking. Once lockdown is over, venues will confront a world in which customers are fewer, spend is lower and costs are higher. This will put a large percentage of operators under, and the danger is that once gone they will never be replaced.

In this article, we have argued that the social economy is a public good and is a marker of an effective, culturally-engaged human settlement. As such, it is imperative that all actors in that economy—both public and private—collaborate to re-imagine the social economy for the post-Covid era.

It is possible to envision a modern social economy set in a green, car-free environment, with animated street-scenes, an interesting and lively public realm, a more diverse offer and clientele, spread over a longer trading day. None of that thinking is new, but the impact of the virus has promoted it from a nice-to-have to a must-do. In this way too, the virus is an accelerant. Without such thinking, we anticipate that the weakest centres will enter spirals of decline. The time for action is now. The story of this crisis is that we failed to spend billions on urban resilience and are now paying the price in trillions. The failure of proactivity was reflected in the cost of reactivity. It is hoped that in planning the future social economy, we do not make the same mistake again.[7]

[7] The authors acknowledge the contribution of Andreina Seijas J., a Teaching Fellow and Doctoral Candidate at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, specialising in nocturnal governance.