



Q&A

City Resilience Stories - Webinar Series

COVID-19: Coping, Learning & Building Urban Resilience

3 April 2020

The webinar addressed issues related to disaster response, distribution of aid, vulnerable populations, multi-level governance, and jurisdiction competencies in the context of a sanitary crisis.

Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0bDe3NjKIVM&feature=youtu.be>

Questions addressed to the City of Milan

Answers by **Piero Pelizzaro**, Chief Resilience Officer

Do the city planning needs to move towards solving pandemics?

Of course City Planning has to develop and learn from this experience of epidemic. We think that this is once again the demonstration that cities have to be redesigned in order to allow citizens to have necessary services around their homes, which would consent the clustering of city during a Pandemic without changing life standards. And at the same time it is a call for more public spaces and larger public spaces that can be used even during time of social distancing.

In the mapping on food retail points, is informal retail also included?

In the mapping of food retail points are marked all the shops that fill a form present on the Municipality website. Then it is open to all activities that ship necessary goods home

How do you think the authorities/powers of city governments will or should change during and after this crisis?

For sure this crisis is showing once again the potential of local government in dealing with issues on the ground. The presence of inequalities in the city allows for a direct intervention to sustain the most vulnerable from the Municipality. At the same time the virus is a global



phenomenon that is hitting different cities with different strength, it is important to have measures that fit with the local situation

Do you have emerging issues such as family issues, child abuse during restricted movement or lockdown and how are you planning to overcome it?

There are many issues that at the moment are getting worse due to quarantine. As you mention family issues, child abuse but also gender violence of course. In Milan there is a number to call in case of emergency and even to find someone to speak to. This is useful in both the situation in which no violence is still in place and someone needs psychological support, and for signaling situations in which someone is harmed. At the same time, the municipality is trying to make sure that the most fragile families are not left behind, giving technological devices and assistance to children in order to guarantee they keep following their educational life and seeing their classmates, and assisting economically and with food families in poverty, to ease the stressing situation.

How do you communicate (exercise, recommendations, etc.) with people at the household level that don't have computers?

Many communications come through internet, this is true, and pretty much every household has at least one smartphone in Milan. But also main information is coming through TV and newspapers, with ads that inform citizens regarding the situation. The Prime Minister too spoke on the TV every time a new ordinance was coming out.

How is the city planning to deal with the waste produced during the pandemic, such as plastics, sanitary/hazardous material?

The city is dealing with waste in a way to avoid infections to spread through waste collection. In fact infected or suspected people have to throw everything in a trash bag and put it using gloves in an external additional bag. These people can avoid recycling, which generates an economic damage, but health of the workers who are guaranteeing this service is between the priorities to keep the city going on.

How are you planning to re-ignite the economy during the lockdown while at the same time deal with the health issues?

The economy will restart when the health concern will be less relevant, and there will be less risk of infection. It is important that when life will start again, everyone will use masks and PPE and probably it will be adopted a strategy with different steps: first younger people will restart working, and then slowly all the rest will follow. Italy has a quite old population that is between



our heritages, as it represents our past and our culture, we have to protect them from this virus that clearly hits them more drastically.

How do you categorize vulnerable population? Do you first create categories and then identify the population or do you identify Corona victims and then categorize them into different socio-economic groups?

Vulnerable populations during Corona are all the populations that already were considered as vulnerable, sadly. Elderlies and poorer families are most targeted by this virus as it kills more of the formers and damages economically the latter. Obviously we are all susceptible to the Virus, but they have an additional layer of fragility and have to be protected.

How do specific policies differ for developed and developing neighborhoods?

Policies do not really differ between neighborhoods, but there are some activities that have been mainly carried out in poorer neighborhoods, as the periphery ones. Especially for what regards food assistance for poor families, 7 hubs have been instituted in strategic position to deliver food to families who live in poverty.

Are the migrants sharing the same facility with the local? Or they are being isolated at different social facility (e.g. hospital, housing) only for migrants?

Yes, Italian Health System doesn't make discriminations based on provenience of the person who's seeking health assistance, and facilities are open to everyone.

Should the government revisit land laws as the priority in ensuring there are ample reserve lands for healthcare facility when such pandemic occurs? And spaces for "healing corridor" or buffer zone between the healthy population and ill population? By doing so will it cripple the local area from functioning not wholly but precautionary?

I wouldn't say it is a priority of the city in dealing with pandemic. We all have seen the impressive speed in which the Chinese authorities have built the hospitals in Hubei, but actually in Italy the main problem that we have is the scarcity of medical equipment. A new hospital is being prepared in the exposition hall of Milan, but it has been quite slow in preparing, as respirators and technical equipment was missing. Probably one of the priorities is to find a way to reorganize production in local factories to produce missing equipment. For what concerns buffer zones of course, the pandemic has brought out the issue of having public spaces that



allow for social distancing and reduce the movements necessary to the average citizen, in order to allow a clustering of the city in front of the emergency.

What do you think cities should have done earlier to have been able to better deal with this pandemic?

Cities to react for this pandemic should shut down and adopt social distancing measures as soon as the virus is seen in the city. At the same time spread knowledge about the symptoms and start preparing HealthCare facilities for the shock, by increasing IC units and canceling non necessary appointments.

How are the resilience strategies relating to heat stress for example being adapted for the potential ongoing restrictions related to COVID-19?

Heat hits particularly the elderlies. At the same time COVID-19 does the same. Measures taken to tackle heat waves and loneliness during the summer can be redeployed now to help who's alone in his home and needs assistance, without letting him come out.

What should be the next steps in your COVID-19 crisis management?

Milan organized the response in three phases: Emergency Management, Aid to the population not infected but forced to quarantine, Task Force for the building of a Plan Zero. At the moment we're implementing the first two steps, but the Municipality is already working for the definition of the measures for the third step, to enter a phase in which only last two steps are implemented

How does the city manage the budget in order to fight against the pandemic? Is this really affected the current year development plan and target?

It is estimated that the Municipality will lose half a billion this year from the crisis. This is a huge loss but the human capital and the economic potential stays there. It is duty of the administration to find a way to reorganize the remaining resources to still reach both development and environmental goals. This will also be done thanks to the economic assistance by the central government and European Union.



Resilience is based on being prepared and adapting to the circumstances, now it is being improvised. How important is improvisation in the concept of resilience? In Ecuador we improvise a lot, is this an advantage?

We don't think that Resilience should be based on reactions to the crisis, but it is the result of preparation. But at the same time it requires creativity and innovation, and in this moments our resilient strategy is being challenged and we have to find a way to implement the resilient actions to improve the city reaction to the shock.

How applicable are the social distancing measures in informal settlement? What would you advice to other city leaders in Africa for example who are facing the issue in very crowded informal settlements where it is not so easy to apply containment measures?

Social distancing is a mean of reducing contacts between people and slow down the spread of the virus. For what concern informal settlements or very dense settlements, I think that for sure leaders in Africa should try to cluster different zones of the city, in order to avoid that from one zone it can pass to the others. Within each zone of course it has to be seen case by case which the best option is. It's important to guarantee that everyone can access basic services; if she can't due to social distancing measures it is better to ease them in order to allow her.

What is the role of architectural and urban design in achieving resilience for fragile territory in transition and demographic contraction?

It's difficult to answer to this question as Milan has been until now the complement of contracting territories, welcoming all the people from these places. Still, here in Italy we have a lot of small towns and villages who hold most of the traditions and culture of the Country. I don't think this issue could be tackled by urban design, but it's more about guaranteeing services also outside the big cities, and stimulate the rural market and create jobs in less dense areas. I would say it's more of a political and economic issue.

Is plan zero shared with the national government? Do they communicate with the city about national plans for the future?

The Plan Zero hasn't been drafted yet, but of course it will include help from the central government and it will be shared with national and regional authorities. Until now there has been a lot of communication between different actors at different levels to deal with the emergency, and to modify ordinances after municipalities collected the reaction of the people.



How do you deal with the population who doesn't have access to online resources (such as elderly people or people with a poor connection)?

The important information has been shared also on TV and on newspapers to reach really everyone. And then hygiene guidelines are also present in supermarkets and places where we are sure most people will pass. Moreover, a form of digital solidarity has diffused, with some phone operators giving free connection to the people who needed it, and the Municipality working with privates to bring digital devices in poor families.

How long was the preparation for the lockdown on the 23 February 2020 in Milan or the whole of Italy?

The lockdown was set on Lombardy and other 14 provinces on the 8th of March, and extended to the whole of Italy the day after, and the 11th of March additional measures were taken. Before these dates, there wasn't really a preparation, most enterprises already started smart working, but it was a decision taken fast, as it should have been taken.

What do you foresee being the new normal after the end of COVID-19 situation?

I don't like the definition of "new" normal. We're going for sure to see a different life after end of the situation. In the short-term, we will have a phase of constricted normality with some rules to avoid a second wave. In the long term, we expect the major changes to happen in three areas: Digital Infrastructures, Public Spaces, and the Economy obviously. The change in production will be determinant; we have to ensure that environmental transition goals are taken into consideration.

How do you measure the priority in which vulnerable communities or areas need to be addressed first? As we know there are communities with the economic problem, on the other hand there is community with a lot of women or elderly and so on. How can we make a priority towards various vulnerabilities?

Sadly often vulnerabilities are grouped together, with most of them sharing the same area of the city. It is important to bring help to these areas where there is a kind of intersectionality of inequities. Here in Milan we're trying not to prioritize someone but to spread the help to all the population in need, but I guess that in more struggling cities this will be a choice to be made. Elderlies for sure are more hit by the virus, but probably the most important thing is to assure that everyone can eat at the end of the day.

**Can you explain more about the recovery plan for when the emergency is over?**

The recovery plan is not definitive yet. In the short-term, we will for sure have a phase of constricted normality with some rules to avoid a second wave. In the long term, we expect the major changes to happen in three areas: Digital Infrastructures, Public Spaces, and the Economy obviously. The change in production will be determinant, we have to ensure that environmental transition goals are taken into consideration, and that we manage to build a more equitable and accessible economic system.

What is the significance of social taboos or stigma associated with pandemic in establishing the partnerships with volunteers to identify the vulnerable population?

The Pandemic is posing a really big challenge: reinvent volunteering. Until yesterday it was strongly based on contact and interpersonal relations. But today contact has become a taboo and poses a threat for the spread of the epidemic. The fight is now to give to volunteers enough protections to allow them to help vulnerable people. Luckily a lot of people volunteered in this situation and haven't been stopped by the difficulties given by the virus

During the post-pandemic recovery phase, are you planning to change the way in which you've been responding to risks? How? I am thinking of response strategies of cities for vulnerable population

Until now we maintained the same response method to risk. Of course some services have been strengthened, such as phone assistance to vulnerable people or home delivery. Probably this last one will be the most determinant difference in response strategy. There will be an even stronger transition to decentralization of services to vulnerable people, especially elderlies, who will be helped most at theirs.

How many of these adaptations are a result of your resilience position or your office? What is the most significant added value of a CRO during these times?

The most significant added values of a CRO are two: the first is the ability to look at the bigger picture and be able to notice whenever some measures are ignoring some other effects on the population. Municipal departments tend to look only at their sector, it is important to act with cohesion and unity. Second, the contacts and the networks in which a CRO and his office is inserted give a lot of possibilities to share best practices and learn from other cities what they've been doing to tackle the same challenges.



Does the city government in Milan forbid residents to go out and enter the city? If yes how?

The central government forbids residents to move in and out of each Municipality, if not for important issues. Citizens are checked by the police and are asked an auto certification that states why they're moving.

How do you cross check the collected information for plausibility? (Or do you build on trust solely)

For some people these times have been defined as the "Times of Fake News". They're one of the main threats to democracy and they spread quickly thanks to social networks and internet. It's important to tackle this problem, but the most effective way to do it is to build on trust. The PA has to create a channel with citizens in which to give reliable information, and citizens have to trust that if an external info doesn't match the one received through that channel, he has to trust this latter one.