

Case Study

SDG Climate Change and Cities Symposium

How can our future cities be more sustainable, healthy and liveable? And what do we need to do now to navigate towards these visions for the future? After more than six months of a global pandemic, these questions took on added dimensions, and perhaps even more urgency. The [2020 Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning \(ABP\) symposium](#) provided us a timely and important opportunity to sit, listen and interact with some of the world leaders in sustainable development.

Over three days we listened to what had been hoped for cities of the future from the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), and what those cities of the future now may look like as a result of COVID-19. There is hope, optimism and a lot of hard work to achieve what those goals set out to do. Guided by Symposium co-hosts the Connected Cities Lab, the event curators (Cathy Oke, Judy Bush and Anna Hurlimann) designed this year's ABP Symposium to follow in the footsteps of the two previous Symposiums¹¹, continuing a focus on unpacking solutions for sustainable development in our ever growing cities.

This year's symposium was held across three days in September and October 2020, with an additional two-day pre-symposium intensive workshop associated with the [SDGs Cities Challenge](#), making it a five day event. The virtual workshop and symposium format provided a platform for 773 delegates to listen and interact with some of the world's leading voices in urban sustainability and action on climate change, including case studies of

responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. It featured pre-recorded keynote addresses and responding interactive panel discussions, interactive workshop sessions, breakout rooms and opportunities for delegates to connect together across time zones, disciplinary and research boundaries. The Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change and Cities Symposium allowed an excellent platform for all urban actors – from academia, business, industry, civil society and government (students and professionals) – to look at partnering across disciplines and jurisdictions to deliver just, safe and climate resilient cities. – **Student writing group**

Reflections on the virtual symposium

When COVID-19 emerged at the start of the year, we first considered postponing our symposium, hoping we could hold a face-to-face event a few months later. Realising the enormity of the pandemic, we did indeed seriously consider cancelling the event entirely, but decided to proceed with a virtual symposium, an experiment to see how we could run an event that could still provide opportunities for rich discussions, meaningful connections and collaborative learning. Indeed, listening to Theresa's keynote address reinforced why it is essential that we continue to find ways to connect, to share, to encourage, to remember, and to plan. We look no further than JT Productions team for their huge efforts to pivot to an online event, and to our speakers and event team colleagues for evidence of resilience in the face of a global health crises. Living the values SDG 11 espouses. – **Editors/Curators**

¹¹ listening to and working with the design knowledge from Indigenous custodians of our cities (2018: *Go Back to Where You Came From - Past | Present | Future | Indigenous Design Symposium*) and fore fronting the strong women leaders in urban practice (2019: *Transformations: Action on Equity Symposium*)

University of Melbourne



Reflections on student participation

It was really inspiring to see how Symposium ambassador students grabbed the opportunities to participate and actively contribute! Students commented on how empowering it was listening to panel discussions, and particularly Cities' practitioners discussing the implementation of the SDGs, as this demonstrated how the knowledge and theories learned in classes and courses are actively being implemented daily in cities around the world. The SDGs stepped out of the tutorial and the lecture theatre and made practical difference, had practical influence in real world contexts globally. – **Editors/Curators**

Student Reflections

Engagement methods should be diverse and inclusive to capture as many voices as possible, in line with SDG "No one left behind." Making people feel empowered is particularly productive because it ensures that outcomes are closely aligned with expectations. It was fascinating to hear about the child-friendly city project in Dehradun, as it foregrounded a critical point about the different ways that the same city can be experienced by diverse stakeholders (in this case, children, who mind map the city according to different landmarks than their adult counterparts).

Image

(from top) MSDx SDG poster, Symposium Editors/Curators: Cathy Oke; Judy Bush; Anna Hurlimann, Localising the SDGs – Session 2D: Communication and Engagement with the SDGs breakout with Dante Di Paolo, Leah Hyland, Sabareesh Suresh, Amelia Leavesley and Jeremy McLeod.



It is fascinating to see the intergenerational difference in perspectives and the ability of people to respond entirely differently to exactly the same situation. Pairing conversations around Dehradun's Child Friendly City with discussions about the New Student Precinct allowed for simultaneous conversation about the positioning of university students and how this affects their interaction with design and their engagement with planning.

All three speakers engaged with their stakeholders through learning

institutions such as schools and universities. Interesting to hear mentions of plant-based and vegan lifestyles in the discussions too.

– **Ariana Dickey, Alexandra Whitmore and Spencer Nash (with Leah Hyland and Dante Di Paolo)**

Recorded sessions are available publicly as an important ongoing educational tool, please visit [MSD SDG Cities](#).