



In response to changes we all experienced in 2020, the [Smart Cities Research Institute](#) hosted panel discussions where academics, government and industry experts analysed the future of the city across themes of decision-making and participation, mobility and public transport, design of places for living, and energy and infrastructure.

MTalks: Exploring New Ways of Urban Living for a Post-Pandemic World was held at MPavilion on 29 March 2021 with facilitated audience participation to identify cooperatively better ways of urban living for a post-pandemic world.

Panel discussion topics:

A Citizen Jury: Striving for Zero Emissions in Urban Living
The Hydrogen Promise in Transport: Hope or Hype?
The Future of Social Spaces
Sounding Out the City

The following is a report from the panel **The Future of Social Spaces**.

The **Future Places for Living** program ran an interactive and participative session at the MPavilion at Parkade this year entitled **The Future of Social Spaces**, hosted by the Program Leader, Jeni Paay. The speakers, associate members of this program, were:

- Flavia Marcello, Theme Leader for Learning from Past Innovation, with an activity on *Spatial Social Histories*
- Sean Gallagher, Theme Leader for Future Workforce, with a discussion on *Social Spaces for Work*
- Bridgette Engeler, Stream Leader for Participative Citizens, with an activity on *Designing in Uncertainty*
- Gregory Quinn, Theme Leader for Humanitarian Design, with an activity on *Responsive Architecture*
- Sonja Pedell, Theme Leader for Designing with Users, with an activity on *Connected Digital Spaces*



After a brief introduction from each of the activity leaders, the audience were then invited to divide into 5 groups, based on their areas of interest, and join one of the activities or discussion groups happening in different nearby areas of the carpark.

The Social Spaces for Work group discussed the role physical workspaces play in enabling connections between people, especially from different parts of an organisation. We simulated the water cooler conversation by pairing random people. Each person was asked to think of a complex problem or issue they have in their work or lives and to discuss what was challenging about it to their partner. The partner was encouraged to think about ways they could add value to helping solve the problem, from their diversity of experience, expertise, perspective, background, etc. In this way we aimed to demonstrate the value of serendipity of connections arising from proximity, something which has suffered through virtual working.

The Participative Citizens group explored the theme of 'Designing in Uncertainty' through a participatory game. We started by discussing the concept of futures literacy and how design shapes futures. Then through The Polak Game, we introduced our individual perspectives on futures, observing differences and our capacity to effect change. Each person was asked to 'take a stand' on different aspects of futures so that we could reflect on how an individual stance varies from those of others. We discussed agency and design's role in effecting change, the challenges for design when there is no shared singular vision or roadmap to a preferred future, and the risks of designing for one pre-determined future. We concluded by noting that designing in uncertainty is more about making sense of emerging possibilities and asking better questions about the consequences of decisions made today.

The Responsive Architecture group explored the impact of COVID-19 on urban, medical and humanitarian dwellings. By first reflecting on how COVID-19 had impacted on the programmatic realignment of architecture in our personal lives and habitats, we then questioned the role of national and local government in policy making. Ultimately the objective of this session was to reflect on the ways in which architecture has responded to the pandemic (and other humanitarian challenges) and how such responses might be adapted in the future.

In thinking about Connected Digital Spaces, this group used role play and acting with props to envision different future urban scenarios, and how digital technologies might be embedded in those environments to support users as they go about their daily activities. Participants in this group were asked to choose one object they are currently carrying along with them. Objects chosen included a paper diary, a wallet filled with cards and a bike helmet. The group discussed how these everyday objects could be enhanced through technology to provide smart information and activities in the future. Concepts were acted out on the kind of desired information and how to spark social interactions. It was explored how these interactions could take place in different scenarios in more detail and what challenges could arise as well. For example, the bike helmet would provide information on safe and less travelled routes or could facilitate communication with younger children cycling together in a

group. The diary became a prop to inform about people with similar interests. In order to make strangers comfortable to meet the focus would be on the locations and areas of interest. People could share an activity together without the need to reveal information about themselves. E.g. a joined tour on plants in the botanical garden or the history of buildings in the city. Addressing safety concerns also the network would be set up with profiles that were not publicly shown but would enable to meet around interests and leave comments on how successful and comfortable encounters were (“creep blocker”).

The Spatial Social Histories group were interested in designing public spaces to encourage covid safe social distancing. They started by talking about the conundrum of whether architectural spaces are designed to accommodate people and their needs, or whether people are influenced in how they use a space by the design of that space. Armed with movable stools, trestle tables, masking table and 1.5m lengths of string, the group then decided to work on the problem of designing seating for a public park to prototype a space where single people, pairs and groups would always have a 1.5m separation based on the furniture and walls of the space. In the end, the group reflected on and enjoyed the fact that they had actually designed a potential MPavilion space for 2022.



In the last part of the session, the host visited each of the groups, giving them the opportunity to report back to the main forum, giving a summary of their activity and interest points and realisations that came out of doing it and collaborating with each other.