

Place-Based Economic Recovery Network (PERN)
Webinar 1 on West Yorkshire recovery strategy:

The future role of towns and cities - 7 July 2020

1. Unlocking empty properties to drive economic recovery - Phil Brown (University of Huddersfield)

Since COVID threatens to reshape our cities, housing is key to recovery and should be at the forefront of planning. New-build housing is important but can be slow and controversial, so we should look at existing (empty) homes as a policy imperative. This will yield environmental gains and will provide social and economic benefits to neighborhoods; it will react against negative place narratives and yield business/revenue gains.

Policy offer:

- Develop a systemic inventory of empty houses and of unmet housing need, especially in light of a possible ‘debt bomb’ for many households in the post-Covid period.
- Make plans for renewing and/or rebuilding housing that stabilizes neighborhoods and meets human need.
- Lead the development of a number of products (e.g. lease and repair) that can be used at the local level to bring empty properties back into use through a partnership approach with empty property owners
- In repurposing, factor in adequate (not minimum) space standards for a greater amount of post-COVID home working.

2. Psychological and infrastructure-related challenges to post-covid city-centre retail - Richard Whittle, (Productivity Insights Network and Manchester Metropolitan University)

The fear and uncertainty created by the pandemic have changed people’s habits in the direction of online consumption and work, with withdrawal from social engagement.. Standard Behavioural Strategies, such as nudging, need to be used with caution as their evidence base is generated in different more stable times. More creative methods of normalizing behavior backed by positive messaging will be essential in saving city centre retail.

Policy offer:

- Reduce fear with positive and creative messaging.
- Build a coalition of local authorities, commercial interests, and communities that can work together to renew the physical city centre
- Design behavioural strategies and nudges suitable for a COVID-19 economy.
- Specifically apply targeted behavioural insights to public transport facilitating city centre footfall in line with carbon reduction strategies.

3. Rethinking value for regional recovery - Elke Pirgmaier and Andrew Brown (University of Leeds)

In a profound crisis, the usual criterion of value – prices in money – don’t capture real worth. The other – non-monetary – dimensions of value become more important. Recovery doesn’t mean flipping back to prices alone. Using a system of system approach that considers the multiple dimensions of value can facilitate needed long-term changes not otherwise possible. The guiding criteria are long term value-creation (not short-term value-capture) as place-based strategies.

Policy offer:

- Trace the creation and capture of value from production to consumption, focusing on local links in these chains that can provide services and/or income for local residents.
- Do not just react to residents' changing preferences about how they want to live, work, and consume, but help to guide preference change through strategic investments – like effective and attractive bicycle lanes – that encourage preference shifts favourable to low-carbon transition, e.g. to cycling.

4. Lessons from and expectations of small business post-covid: productivity, growth and digital transformation - David Spicer (University of Bradford)

An extensive survey of small businesses, done post-Covid lockdown, reveals that while SMEs were unprepared for this shock, they have adapted, and are starting to turn from weathering the storm to a strategic . How?: (1) a 10-year digital transformation has been forced into a 3-month period, and will not be undone after the lockdown ends; (2) for some firms, productivity has increased due to staff cuts and reduced commuting time; (3) some businesses have seen ways to extend their market reach post-Covid, while others have had to think strategically about the business experience they offer.

Policy offer:

- Experiment with new approaches for valuing, transforming, and exchanging real estate that incorporate the social importance of its spatial location.
- Rethink the commercial/residential/industrial boundaries in planning, so as to facilitate transitions toward reduced production space and foreseeable demographic shifts.
- Plan and package needed infrastructure support: both 5G for firms, and skills and capabilities training for firms, so a higher proportion can use technology effectively.
- Incubate and roll out pilot peer-to-peer workshops for the hardest-hit sectors of business, focusing on ways to create sustainable business models for the longer term.

5. Informing decision-making in Cities and Towns: Participatory Value Evaluation (PVE), a new appraisal tool - Thijs Dekker and Manuel Ojeda Cabral (University of Leeds)

Our focus is how to make spaces safe for people, and with limited budgets. While willingness to pay from private means is a great way for determining prices of consumer goods, when it comes to public goods, we need new means for determining what citizens really want. For people are relearning, and their preferences are changing. The current context provides the opportunity to try out a new tool for helping people decide what they want collectively in spatial communities at different scales. You can use this online tool to rank preferred portfolios of different projects, with sensitivity analysis about budgets and attention to welfare analysis.

Policy offer:

- Use the PVE tool to experiment with different investment options for place-making in light of the climate emergency
- Use the PVE tool to capture some of the multi-dimensional aspects of value discussed above
- Emphasize the use of this tool as a vehicle for extending democratic voice
- Ensure that digital divides problems do not compromise the ability of households to participate. Instead participation in shared decision-making can be the payoff for digital inclusion.