In recent months, we witnessed (and continue to witness) many empty places around the globe that are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. In some countries, there are gradual reopening of businesses, public places, and activities. Yet, these often happen under the consideration of safety measures. The surreal scenes of unoccupied places that are normally crowded with people and activities provide us with a unique opportunity to question and rethink the role and the use of public places. What measures could we apply to safeguard our public places? And to what extent, does the public place play a part in making our city and society safe for all?

The ‘flexibility’ and ‘adaptability’ characteristics of our contemporary public places give us the chance to think more inclusively and reflectively about the role of public place during the pandemic outbreak. To name a few, we could learn from temporary uses, management, multiple functionalities and the regulations of public places. The lessons learned from this event would help better preparedness and responsiveness in future disease outbreaks. Set aside matters of resilience enhancement and city management (Cheshmehzangi, 2020), we could look into methods of adaptive planning (Alterman, 1988), which requires altered behaviors and tailor-made measures. In this essay, I briefly reflect on some important points from this outbreak and suggest 10 specific adaptive measures for public places. It is important to note these suggested adaptive measures should be taken into consideration alongside the multiplicity of context-specific matters, planning regulations, specific regulatory measures, spatial arrangements and availabilities, city structures, economic conditions, social attributes, and cultural matters.
1) **Limited access nodes for better management of Public Places**

By limiting access nodes/points of public places, we can monitor better the ins and outs as well as have a better overview of human circulation. This adaptive measure is for both indoor and outdoor public places, including those of a larger scale that may require the closure of certain access nodes (such as secondary access points or other designated areas). It is also important to provide the primary access node that is visible and easily manageable.

![Figure 1](image.png)

**Figure 1**– The temporary closure of access point to public car parking areas is aimed to reduce transportation mobility to potential hotspots. This measure could be applied to all public buildings, public areas, and also to help limiting the access points to residential compounds. This is a temporary measure that could be effective in a long run.

(Source: The Author’s Own)
Figure 2 – The temporary closure of access points to public places are effective to better monitor the ins and outs of public places. The multiple access points to outdoor public places were only limited to one or two points where they could be managed and monitored when it is needed. (Source: The Author’s Own)

2) Establish a one-way mobility circulation

To enhance the management of populated public places (i.e. both indoors and outdoors), it is important to adapt a one-way mobility circulation. This means the allocation of one entry node and one exit point that could determine a potential route of access/entry, circulation, use, and exit. By learning from the broader topic of environmental determinism, it is feasible to adapt new arrangements in the physical environment, which could stimulate altered behaviors in the public place. In doing so, we are able to determine effects on the mobility as well as other behaviors (Broady, 1971; Haydn and Temel, 2006) associated with the use of the public place.

3) Checkpoint allocation for monitory and recording opportunities
Adapted from effective mobility control measures, and in combination with the earlier two measures, it is also possible to allocate checkpoints for monitory and recording the mobility in and out of public places. This approach is effective for prevention and safety checks that may be relevant to a particular disease, such as temperature checks, registration of people’s departure points, specific uses of the place, record of destination, etc. Checkpoint allocation is only feasible if the earlier suggested management measures are in place.

**Figure 3** – The management of checkpoint areas to shopping mall premises is important to monitor mobility and check for any potential cases. In this instance, as shown in the image, the person was not allowed to enter the premises and was instructed by the safety and prevention team to follow the regulations before entering the premises (Source: The Author’s Own)

4) **Making social spaces safe and viable**

Under any circumstances, it is crucial to maintain the safety and viability of the city and society. Hence, it is also important to address these at the social space level from the spatial dimension. The adaptive measures depend on contextual matters, such as density, cultural and social attributes, socio-economic opportunities, critical infrastructures, physical layout (or urban configuration), community setting, etc. The provision of safe social spaces should be
supported by regular disinfection procedures, high-level hygiene, and considerable waste management and cleansing methods. For instance, we can make use of urban parks and communal parks, without making them into over-crowded hotspots. They should then be regularly checked, monitored, and managed to ensure they are disinfected, facilities are monitored, and physical distancing guidelines are maintained.

5) Public places as informative nodes in the city

With the availability of large screens and other augmented methods in the public place (Cheshmehzangi and Ornsby, 2018), there is an opportunity to transform public places into the main nodes in the city where people can see relevant information such as prevention measures, safety procedures, guidelines, regulations, etc. The informative characteristic of public places could represent the effective role of public places for public interests and uses.

Figure 4 – Information display board at the main entry between outdoor public place and a major indoor public place enables the dissemination of information, provision of guidelines, and display of information about accessing the larger indoor public places, such as shopping malls. (Source: The Author’s Own)
6) **Flexible public places to support essential sectors**

With the flexibility of contemporary public places, it is possible to transform them into other essential uses, or to utilize them for the support of essential sectors. This is likely to be more applicable for larger public places (both indoor and outdoor) that are expected to be underused (or completely unused) during the outbreak event. For instance, such transformative or adaptive approach could turn a public place into a place of food distribution, or for other potential uses, such as medical support, emergency services, supply production, temporary healthcare services, etc. By understanding the temporariness of such uses, it is possible to transform empty public places into effective and dynamic supporting nodes in the city. Hence, the dynamism of the public place should not be forgotten.

7) **Restrictions on shared facilities in public places**

During the pandemic outbreak, shared facilities and shared uses could speed up the community disease transmission (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). Particularly for indoor public places, we suggest restrictions on shared facilities and uses, such as the use of elevators/lifts, crowded retail units, temporary food stalls, etc. It is also suggested to restrict the use of shared devices, such as centralized cooling and heating systems, large cooling fans, etc. By applying these restrictions in public places, we can minimize the potential spread of the disease through shared facilities/units, services, uses, and devices. In warmer climates, these measures are even more difficult to be adapted in practice. Hence, it is recommended to minimize the use of such places as much as possible.

8) **Closure of secondary public places**

It is important to categorize public places into primary and secondary uses. Those that fit in to the category of non-essential public places are suggested to be closed until the recovery (i.e. through full containment of the disease outbreak) is reached. Such public places could also include certain public buildings that offer public use and activities. During the pandemic outbreak, the city and society are more dependent on essential urban systems and primary services. Hence, it is important to reduce the pressure on secondary services and public facilities (including secondary public places) that may cause more problems than solving...
anything. Apart from secondary communal spaces, the other secondary public places and public services (including public buildings, such as library, museum, gallery, cinema, religious building, etc.) are identified as non-essential; and hence, they must remain closed during the outbreak progression until the recovery stage.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 5** – The temporary closure of secondary public places, especially those that are less likely to be easily manageable during the pandemic outbreak event, is a major measure to promote only the use of primary and essential public areas. This temporary closure could last for a longer period until the full recovery is reached (Source: The Author’s Own)
Figure 6 – The temporary closure of public activities, such as artificial beach areas as shown in the image, are important to reduce overpopulated areas in the city that faces any sort of disease outbreak. In this instance, the impacts are expected to be on the primary social activities of the city, but it is important to keep the society safe than to risk increasing community transmissions through popular and populated places of the city.

(Source: The Author’s Own)

9) Provision of community-level designated zones as key public places

In higher infected areas or places with higher risks, it is suggested to have designated community-level areas that are identifiable as key public places for various uses. These can be community-level parks, community healthcare services, community food supply, goods collection points, etc. The provision of such essential services and supplies with the use of public places would help to empower the role of communities and support the city and society more effectively. This also promotes community-oriented or people-oriented approaches to
support public place uses.

**10) Temporary regulations to monitor and restrict certain activities in public places**

Usually, public places offer a wide range of activities or opportunities for multiple functionalities and use. Their inclusiveness for the city and society is a major factor that requires careful attention during the pandemic outbreak. While public places are primary nodes to attract people for specific social uses and activities, they could also be places where larger groups of people could become infected and/or transmit the disease at a faster pace. Hence, temporary regulations are essential to monitor and restrict certain activities in public places. Such activities include group gatherings, intermingling in clustered areas, high-level interactions, and overcrowded events. Such regulations are only temporary but are adaptive enough to make a significant impact on the use of public places.

To summarize briefly, I emphasize the importance of adaptive measures for public places during the pandemic outbreak (or other disease outbreaks of different scales). Amid all uncertainties, the role of public place could be enhanced during the pandemic outbreak. The empty scenes of decaying public places around the globe are certainly upsetting images for those who know the values, meaning, and memories of such imperative and dynamic nodes in our cities. Nonetheless, the contingencies that could be offered through the power of public places should not be underestimated. The above recommendations of adaptive measures may seem intimidating at first, questioning issues of privacy and undermining the role of public places. Nevertheless, it is important to consider them under these special circumstances, which could not be simply handled through the operations of business-as-usual practices (Cheshmehzangi, 2020). These are temporary solutions for a period that requires extra attention and health and safety of the city and society. With many successful examples of adaptive approaches in public places around the globe, one can only recognize the importance of such hubs/nodes in the city. Undoubtedly, public places are playful for our society but are also vital for the enhancement of city’s resilience and management during the outbreak events. By reflecting on some of these examples, these 10 adaptive measures suggest opportunities for the better use of public places in cities and communities around the globe.
It is, therefore, vital for us to understand and value these adaptive measures to ensure our public places are safe, our cities are supported, and our society is healthy.

References

Alterman, R. (1988). Adaptive Planning. *Cognitive Science*, Vol. 12, pp. 393-421.

Broady, M. (1971). *People and Buildings: Social Theory in Architectural Design*. Bedford: The Bedford Square Press.

Haydn, F., and Temel, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Temporary urban spaces: Concepts for the use of city spaces*. Berlin, Germany: Birkhauser Verlag AG Publishers.

Cheshmehzangi, A. (2020) *The City in Need: Urban Resilience and City Management in Disruptive Disease Outbreak Events*. Singapore: Springer (in Press).

Cheshmehzangi, A., and Ornsby, P. (2017) Augmented Locality: The Utilisation of Urban Screens in Public Place as New Networks of the City. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, Vol. 11 (2), pp. 194-211