

ENSEMBLE Research Project: Unravelling the Dynamics of Post-Pandemic Urbanism and Social Cohesion Across Continents



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“ A groundbreaking international research project called ENSEMBLE is set to explore the intricate relationship between post-pandemic urbanism, built environments, and social cohesion across diverse cities on four continents. University of Moratuwa research team join with the team of researchers from eight universities across six countries with an aim to illuminate the impact of urban transformations on social connections, equity, and resilience in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. ”

Project Overview:

ENSEMBLE adopts a comprehensive approach, focusing on three vital facets of social cohesion, i.e., structural, relational, and cognitive. While structural aspects delve into physical features, relational components concentrate on the quality of social relationships, and cognitive dimensions consider shared attitudes and values within communities.

Methodology:

Utilizing an innovative mixed-method approach, the researchers will employ participatory photo-voice, concept mapping, and GIS story maps in six diverse cities, i.e., Montreal, Manchester, Barcelona, Colombo, Harare, and Ouagadougou. Photo-voice, a community-based research method, will capture residents' perceptions of their built environments, while concept mapping will synthesize diverse perspectives into visual representations. The resulting spatial data will be integrated into a collaborative platform, developed under the MOBILISE research project (<https://www.mobilise-project.org.uk/index.html>), facilitating decision-making for urban planners, local authorities, and community stakeholders to optimize public space utilization, enhance social cohesion, and improve resilience strategies. Sri Lankan team initiated the project by exploring suitable areas for the project and currently analysing the feasibility of the visited areas. Figure 1 depicts a view of one of the gathering places under the Ceylon Olive tree, where people used to gather during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Spatial Data Infrastructure:

The MOBILISE platform integrates environmental data layers, photos, videos, and real-time data into interactive 3D mapping. It will serve as a powerful tool for understanding local contexts and supporting decision-making processes. The researchers will organize collaborative design-thinking workshops with stakeholders in each city to discuss potential changes to the built environment and ways to scale up interventions.

Global Collaboration:

With study locations spanning high to low-income cities, the project ensures a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of built environments on social cohesion across different economic and cultural contexts. This collaboration reinforces the project's future scaling capacity and aligns with the mission of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to invest in high-quality research in developing countries.

Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+):

The research project integrates a GBA+ approach throughout its design, methodology, and implementation. By addressing gender equity, race, ethnicity, religion, age, and ability, the project aims to uncover the differential impacts of COVID-19 and urban interventions on various demographic groups.

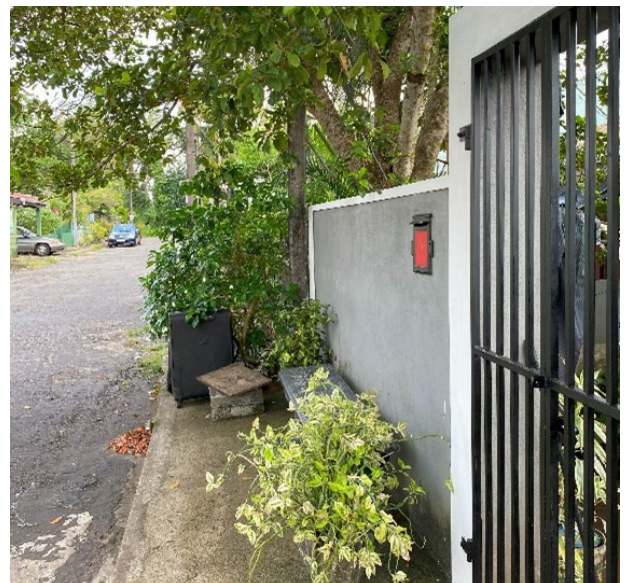


Figure 1: Pandemic Sparks: Community Spaces Come Alive (People gathering place under a Ceylon Olive tree)

Project Contribution:

The project not only contributes valuable insights into the dynamics between built environments and social cohesion but also pioneers an adaptable participatory research methodology. Through ongoing engagement and evaluation involving community organizations, local authorities, and photo-voice participants, the research aims to facilitate the uptake of its approach in future urban transformations worldwide.

This ambitious initiative aligns with the broader mission to build a more sustainable and inclusive world, making a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on resilient post-pandemic place making.

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