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Headline: People need to rethink their lifestyle in post-Covid era

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The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) will create a fundamental shift in the way homes and establishments will be designed as they will need to learn to be flexible and adapt to changes quickly, said speakers at an Institute of Policy Studies online forum here Wednesday.

Titled “Bouncing Back from Covid-19,” the forum explored what the public, business and community leaders can do to ensure that short-term responses for survival also prepare society for longer-term resilience and growth.

The panel was led by Gillian Koh, deputy director of research and senior research fellow of Institute of Policy Studies.

Already, some business models and industries have seen “radical changes” amid the Covid-19 pandemic, said panelist Loh Lik Peng, founder of Unlisted Collection, an umbrella group of over 20 restaurants and five boutique hotel properties.

For instance, the restaurant industry will undergo changes, such as segregated kitchens and hotels adopting “zero-touch” technologies such as RFID (radio frequency identification) locks, automated check-ins with QR (quick response) codes and so on.

“The old way of operating is going to disappear, at least for the next year,” he said.

The future design of cities will also evolve in different ways, said fellow panelist and architect-planner Cheong Koon Hean.

On a national scale, countries will see more travel bubbles, while within the country, there will be more decentralization and more self-sufficient regions at a more “local level,” she said.

Singapore has already developed satellite towns — large-scale satellite housing developments are designed to be self-contained, with workplaces, amenities and parks located closer to homes. This minimizes traveling and reduces the density in the city and commercial hubs, she said.

In the workplace, offices are likely to incorporate more sensors and spaced out work stations, while more co-working and shared conference facilities are likely to emerge to ensure remote working. Layouts for communal living spaces such as foreign worker dormitories, nursing homes and student hostels will have to be redesigned to allow for greater segregation, she added.

Beyond innovative urban design solutions, good leadership, inter-agency collaboration as well as “social buy-in of safe distancing measures” by citizens is needed, said Cheong.

In this evolving situation, businesses need to be flexible and rethink the old way of doing things, said Neo Boon Siong, former dean of the Nanyang Business School at Nanyang Technological University.

Panelist David Chan, director of the Behavioral Sciences Institute at the Singapore Management University, said that in future, citizens have to be prepared to live alongside the Covid-19 virus and an uncertain world.

This means not just adapting to changes, but to “learn to do the same thing in more than one way,” such as workers being prepared to switch between working from home and the office, or offices being converted into mixed-use developments, he said.

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Vernon Lee, associate professor at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at National University of Singapore, noted that until a vaccine is available, Singaporeans will have to adjust their lifestyles to cope with the new normal, and adopt safe management techniques.

“We have to adapt to the virus and change, because the virus is not going to change for us,” said Lee, who is also the director of communicable diseases at the Ministry of Health.