



## EDITORIAL WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM COVID?

By: Alexander R. Cuthbert<sup>1</sup>

There can be no doubt in anybody's mind that the current pandemic is catastrophic to business, politics and human relationships. As we go to press (October 30th 2020) we can briefly review just how great a disaster we still face. Current global figures suggest 43 million cases with 1.15 million deaths. Globally numbers are surging. The United States is now approaching 9,000,000 cases and 225,000 deaths. The Vietnam war that lasted 20 years from 1955 resulted in 60,000 American deaths, a figure surpassed by Covid in the USA in only four months. In Indonesia current statistics record 390,000 cases and 13,300 deaths, and in Bali some 4500 cases and 56 deaths. Bali's economy has taken an immense impact, with its economy shrinking by 80% and losing some 95% of tourist arrivals. But why has Bali been hit so hard?

Let's be categorical -Bali did not learn from the Bali bombings of 2002. It was made crystal clear both to national and local government that any disaster would radically affect Bali's economy for years. At that point, the entire economy should have been overhauled to more self-sufficient, localised industries, quality tourism and a controlled reduction in the number of tourists allowed to enter Bali. Emergency social programs should have been set in place, educational systems modified to suit a new economy, with self-sufficiency and sustainability used as governing principles. Provinces such as Bali should have been allowed full autonomy and control over its own borders in crises with social welfare being the priority guiding reconstruction, not profit from development. Instead business as usual prevailed. The same headlong rush to accrue national capital from Bali's global reputation accelerated lemming-like into the current catastrophe. Massive public spending took place (Suartika, Zerby and Cuthbert 2017). The money would have been better spent on programs to support Balinese people in times we are now experiencing, rather than plans to expand future private capital.

In 1973 Ernst Schumacher published a book named *Small is Beautiful – a study of economics as if people mattered*. It was written to counteract the whole economic philosophy that 'Bigger is better' or even worse - Milton Friedman's mandate 'that greed is good'. Schumacher's principle was that smaller appropriate technologies should be implemented to empower individuals and communities. It was a reaction to the dehumanising strategies of globalisation. Mass tourism was destroying Bali's environment before the pandemic, and in its absence has now decimated its economy. Where is the advantage? While subtly stated, Shumacher's idea was quite revolutionary. In order to implement 'smallness' changes to the

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<sup>1</sup> Faculty of the Built Environment, University of New South Wales-Sydney  
Email: a.cuthbert@unsw.edu.au

entire socio-political system were implied - 'Wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology toward the organic, the gentle, the elegant and beautiful.' Bali needs to consider a program of sustainable *shrinkage* to the economy rather than an expansion, since the next catastrophe might leave nothing behind.

Covid-19, while catastrophic to Bali, offers once again a huge opportunity to rejig its economy, infrastructure and educational systems. There is now time to consider from a point of despair, how to rekindle the things that matter about Balinese culture to recreate hope for the future. But even 'the new normal' is suspect since it is still semantically connected to the old. It cannot be used to replace imagination with incremental change. We cannot return to outdated ideas, the domination of the citizen by private capital, and urban politics that no longer work. Think small, think beautiful and do it now.

## References

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