

Transcript of Interview with Olivier Duguet by Alice Duguet

Interviewee: Olivier Duguet

Interviewer: Alice Duguet

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Abstract:

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Alice Duguet 0:01

It is Tuesday 11th of May 2021. And it is 10:13pm. So what is your full name? And what are some primary things that you do on a day to day for example, like your job your extracurricular activities or anything like that.

Olivier Duguet 0:22

My name is Olivier Michel Rene Duguet. And I am actually the CEO of my own company in renewable energy in Southeast Asia, based in Singapore, and active in Southeast Asia. So every day, I'm in touch with my teams, in different parts of Southeast Asia, different countries, trying to run, run the operations from abroad, depending on where I am. Yeah, that's basically it.

Alice Duguet 0:58

Do you have any extracurricular activities that you do on a day to day?

Olivier Duguet 1:02

I try to stay in shape and do sports. And, and read, read and read and read.

Alice Duguet 1:11

Okay. Where do you live right now? And what's it like to live there?

Olivier Duguet 1:19

Right now I'm for a short period in France, near Paris. And we are under lockdown, or partial lockdown, after seven o'clock, I think. We will not have to, we have to stay home and not move not moving from home. And until lately, we were not able to move outside of the district, or the department, in France. So not moving out of, from a 10 kilometers radius around a home. Unless you have reasons to do it, professional or family reasons to do it.

Alice Duguet 2:06

Right. Do you have any idea of when that lockdown will be lifted or not at all?

Olivier Duguet 2:13

Yes. Yes, the President of France just announced that it's going to be lifted soon. I think it's next, next week for the regional, the regional lockdown, or the local lockdown, is lifted already. I think we can now move out of, from last weekend, we can move out of this, you know, 10 kilometers radius without any proof, and reason. And so that that's good. And the actually, you know, actually the non-essential activities and non-essentials shops and activities are closed and will be reopened for only the outdoors part next week. So next week, all the outdoors, cafes, restaurants, exhibitions, everything will be open again. So it's, it's on the way to the partial reopening. That should happen mid-June, by mid-June the restaurants will be able to reopen again in, you know, limited with limited seating capacity. But, but you know, there is a national plan to reopen the country here in France. I will not be in France anymore very soon, because I will move back to Southeast Asia. And that's where the situation is much more difficult because there is a third wave of COVID-19 infections going in, in nearly all the countries in Southeast Asia. So that means that they are quarantines, so I will have to quarantine 14 days upon arrival, even if I'm vaccinated. I've been vaccinated last week with the J&J vaccine, so I'm fully vaccinated already. But even though, even so, I will have to be quarantined 14 days upon arrival, with of course a negative test before arrival, upon arrival, and after 14 days so and that's for, I will go to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, for my business but it would be the same if, it is exactly the same requirements for Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand, well nearly all the countries in Southeast Asia. Of course, and of course, because I'm not a tourist, I have a business visa, tourists are not about for the moment to visit all these countries.

Alice Duguet 5:10

Right, that makes sense. When you first learned about COVID, what were your thoughts about it? At the very beginning?

Olivier Duguet 5:20

At the very beginning, we, of course, we never envisioned that it will be such a widespread pandemic, and worldwide, and will affect worldwide operations. And that's, I think that's the thing. We thought it was okay. It's in China. Okay. Right. It's maybe going to spread a little bit, you know, outside of China, and maybe in the US first, maybe in Europe also, but it will be contained. And, in fact, of course, we know that it was not the case.

Alice Duguet 5:57

Right. My next question actually goes with that. And how have your thoughts changed on COVID-19, since you first heard about it?

Olivier Duguet 6:08

Well, the dangerousness of the disease is also something, you know, it's something difficult to grasp. We know that it's spreading very, very easily. And so, that's frightening, of course, and it's, you know, affecting all human activity, I think on the planet. But on the other hand, in fact, the actual morbidity, or death rate, is not that high, or doesn't seem to be that high. And so, of course, of course, it's impacting some part of the population much more than others. But in fact, you know, the given the number of infected people, the death rate is quite small. But of course, the infected people numbers are absolutely enormous, gigantic. So, but in fact, yeah, the morbidity, compared to other pandemics, this doesn't seem to be really deadly, I would say, or with a high death rate. Anyway, we must, of course, protect ourselves, of course, of any risk. But in fact, the death rate right now is not that high.

Alice Duguet 7:35

Right. Has the pandemic affected your job? And if so, in what ways?

Olivier Duguet 7:43

Yes, of course. Yes, of course. First of all, myself, I used to travel every week, from one country to another, because we are operating in different countries in Southeast Asia, namely Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore, Philippines, I would say mainly. And, and also, Myanmar, and Indonesia, and Laos on the side. But I used to travel nearly every day between these countries, to follow and to have meetings, business meetings, and follow our operations. And, you know, because of what I just mentioned, because of the quarantine rules and restrictions in travel, that these countries put in place very, very early, to stop the pandemic, it has affected, of course, my personal, professional life, and our operations, meaning that all our teams have been stuck basically in their own country. Not moving, no moving between the countries possible anymore. Excepting these 14 days, you know, each time, so very few. So we have cut a lot in our travel expenses, travel budget, in our business dealings, of course. So, moving everything online, which was not particularly easy at first, just because in Southeast Asia, you know, the level of development of these countries is unequal, I would say, to say the least, and most of them are not used to this kind of, you know, zoom dealings, or online conference calls. It much, still, relies much on personal relationship, and personal relationship where you face-to-face in face-to-face meetings. So, so yeah, so, I participated in one of the biggest meeting I had in last year was an inter-ministerial meetings with two ministers. And a lot of Secretaries of State's in Cambodia, and it was the first, the first meeting held online, because I was not able at that time to be present in Phnom Penh. And I was, you know, again, very big screen in a very big meeting room with a lot of people. You know, we did it, it was a little bit more difficult than, you know, of course, face-to-face, for face-to-face meeting, but we did it, it was a main official one. But since then, no other of these type of official meetings have been held. So it was postponing in fact, basically, the impact on our operations, was to slow down, a lot, all our business dealings, mainly with the governments, government entities, in all the countries. So, they, in some countries, like Thailand, for example, they shut down any face-to-face meetings, it was not possible anymore with officials. So just online, and again, slowing down tremendously, all our operations. So that's more on the day to day basis. On the macro picture, all the governments in these countries, in our countries of operations, are facing, of course, a decrease in energy consumption and energy demand. Because of all the activity, you know, the overall activity, economic activity going down. So they started questioning, really, the need of renewable energy, and that we, we're working in renewable energy and implementing new projects, new generation capacity, and nearly everywhere, all the governments, you know, paused, in fact, all their plans to expand and to develop renewable energy. In the future, waiting for more visibility, waiting for energy demand to resume, which for the moment, it's starting, starting, coming back in Vietnam, for example, but in other countries like Thailand, or Cambodia, it's still very low. And the recovery, the economic recovery is still very slow. So they're still, for the moment holding, holding up their expansion plans and energy expansion plans, and, you know, in development energy, but development, long term development plans, waiting for more visibility to come back. So that's, in fact, that will impact operations and is starting to impact our operations this year, in fact, instead of last year, it has a lag effect, lagging effect. Because we are we're dealing with, you know, multi-years development time and many years projects.

Alice Duguet 13:24

Right. What concerns do you have about the effect of the pandemic on the economy more broadly?

Olivier Duguet 13:34

I think we have turned the corner. I think with now vaccination being implemented, you know, very quickly, in most developed countries, just coming in the emerging countries. That's the answer of course, that's the answer to end this pandemic and to return to a safer world and to resume economic operations, of course. So, I think that we have turned the corner, definitely, we can see that, we can see that in the US, we can see that in Europe coming, again with a lagging effect coming to the emerging countries in Southeast Asia. Singapore, of course, being in the lead, but, being a very open economy, if all around Singapore, all the economies are closed, Singapore will stay closed. So, in fact, there is nothing that they can really do. So, yes, we have turned the corner, I think economy will come back and I think with a vengeance, I think it will come back even stronger than before, the rebound will be very pronounced. And the issue for me, for us, for my sector, is will, and that's the real question, it's a real, you know, very important question I think for the future is, will the countries, will the governments take this opportunity, as in the US they said to "build back better", you know, to bring economic activity back with lower co2 content and co2 emissions? And will they take that opportunity to rethink or to think, again, of the future. And of a low carbon future, so that could have a direct impact on, of course, our activities. Some countries are doing it. Like the US, like the EU, the EU has also a Green Deal, it's not a new Green Deal but it's a Green Deal. And the way, which is really comprehensive, really impressive, and massive. So, as usual, I think, on this, Europe is ahead of the rest of the world, with China, and with some part of the US, I would say, of course, California is ahead. But, with now President Biden, it's seems that the US will come back also on the scene. So that's great. That's great to see. Unfortunately, I'm not working in these countries. So it remains to be seen when, because it's not if, it's when, when it will reach the shores of Southeast Asia. And so that remains to be seen. So we're seeing part of it. Thailand, for example, the most, of course, advanced economy, it's the second largest economy after Indonesia, but the most advanced country after Singapore. Thailand, is definitely thinking about it, and will implement drastic changes in their energy consumption and the co2 emissions they are thinking of. So it's, they're going to be much more ambitious, in renewable energy, their renewable energy plans. And that's good for us. We've been waiting for that for the last, you know, six years, so it's great. Long, long wait, but it was maybe worth the wait. And, yeah, and the interesting part is that, just also the macro picture, they're doing it because of the Paris Agreement, because of, you know, in this year, we'll see again, in Glasgow, as you know, in Glasgow at the end of the year, the COP26. So, another UN, big gathering, to fight climate change. But it's not really these commitments, which are pushing the Southeast Asian countries to do it. It's more in case of Thailand, private companies, in fact, the private companies, or private manufacturers are saying, you know, we need to buy renewable power, we need to buy green power, we cannot you know, continue to produce our goods to export to the west, to the US, to Europe, while using coal power, for example. So, we need to go beyond you know, the goods we are producing, to see how they are produced, and which is their carbon content. And that's very new, that's very positive, of course, and that means that, for example, for Thailand, they are really thinking, rethinking, the way they can attract, or keep, or retain, their industrial base, so, all the manufacturers, or all the factories. To do so, they need to procure carbon free energy, or low carbon energy, and in the case of, of Thailand, again, as they are one of the largest car manufacturers in Southeast Asia. They are, of course, thinking of the EV revolution, electric vehicles. And for themselves, they are

implementing also targets for themselves to, for example, by 2035, 50% of the new cars sold in Thailand will have to be EV, which again, might be comparable in different ways, but might be comparable to the EU targets. So yeah, but that's very, very aggressive. And they are thinking of 100% of all new vehicles sold in Thailand 10 years later. So that's really, really impressive. And they know that it's, why are they doing this, because they know that it means jobs, jobs are the future, our TVs, our renewable energy, so they want to jump on it. But again, Thailand is maybe ahead of the pack. Vietnam is of course, has a very big manufacturing, base a lot of factories. And again, same thing, Samsung, for example, Samsung, one of the largest factory operator in Vietnam, is its Samsung invites coming from Samsung, going to the Vietnamese government saying we need, you know, renewable power, we need to be able to, to buy renewable power, because we cannot, again, continue to build our phones, with your, you know, coal based energy production. So, so that, again, is coming from from the corporations, the big corporations of this world. And that's, that's the biggest change changing, you know, and, and means of change. Because the governments have to listen, otherwise the companies will move their factories outside. That's pretty good. Yeah.

Alice Duguet 21:25

I'm actually curious, because you obviously know a lot about Southeast Asia. But do you know anything about like, Latin America or Africa, in terms of, like, their government and, like, renewable energy and the effect of COVID? Or not at all?

Olivier Duguet 21:42

Ah, yeah, well, a little bit. Of course, we were looking at, I'm looking at it on a worldwide basis, of course, and you know, renewable energy world is in fact quite a small world, because there are not so many companies active, or at least producing, we are a producer, we are an independent producer. So out of renewables, there are not so many doing this, at least on the large scale, so we know all the players and all the players are everywhere in the world, and looking at moving things, moving along with this energy revolutions everywhere. So yes, in Latin America, very different situations from country to country. The most advanced ones, you know, just to have an idea, a worldwide view, the most advanced countries of a size, in renewable energy, again, outside of the EU and the UK, also, and the US, are Australia, on one side, and Chile, on the other side. So these two countries, Australia, and Chile, will soon, and in some part are already running 100% on renewables, and will soon run 100% on renewables. I mean again, talking about of course, sizable countries, smaller countries like Costa Rica, or Bhutan, are already working, already running on 100% renewables, because it's, you know, tiny countries and tiny populations. So larger countries, Chile and Australia are on the forefront of renewable energy revolution. And, it depends, you know, Brazil also is doing a lot, but of course, it's a huge country and a huge population. But they're doing a lot, you know, the energy revolution is, is everywhere. I would say the last continent, last frontier, is of course Africa. In Africa, South Africa is at the forefront, South Africa in the south and Egypt, in the north. Egypt is also doing a lot, a lot, a lot of solar, of wind. But again, huge population, so they have a lot of needs. In South Africa also, same thing, a lot of wind, a lot of sun. So they're doing a lot. The rest of the region, yes, of Africa. It's, it's moving, but it's moving very slowly. So, and I think they're also concerned of level of development, the level of corruption, and effectiveness of government. So you know, all of the issues before, before talking about energy, and renewable energy, but yes, we are looking, we have a broad view, of course, and we know what's going on outside.

Alice Duguet 24:46

Right. So now we're going to go more into your personal life and not so much your employment. How has COVID-19 affected you, or your family's, day to day activities, like extracurriculars that you do with your family?

Olivier Duguet 25:02

Yeah, with family? Yes. Well, first of all, as I mentioned, it affected a lot my travel plans. And that's the first time, you know, I've ever, of course, lived through quarantine. So I've been quarantined in Singapore for more than a month. So meaning very, you know, nearly restricted to staying in an Airbnb, so in an apartment. Not 100% of the time, but I would say 90% of the time. And then, by traveling, also, I've been also through other quarantines, in Vietnam, and in Cambodia. So, again, how it affected me personally, that's the first time I spent an entire 14 days, in a room, not being able to get out, and not moving from a single room, a single hotel room, you know, several times in different countries. So, so that's, that's a very new experience. And that's changing the way you, definitely, you see, you see life and you see things, yes, of course. So maybe, in personal relationship, maybe putting more value to the time being spent, then with your relatives, and your family, your friends, because it's, you know, scarce, more scarce, or it has been scarce. So more valuable, of course, and maybe also restrict your universe, to, you know, the close friends, close family. Because you have, again, limited time, in that case, to spend. So that's changing, changing definitely the relationship, and then changing differently the way that you see, you see the world going forward. And maybe morbidity also, you know, death, death is also something, you know, a subject coming back with this. And you're glad to be, to be alive. You're glad that your relatives and friends are staying alive. And going through, also, of course, COVID, COVID-19 illness, because some of my friends got COVID. So it was, of course, concerning. Some of our employees. Well, no direct employees, employees of my corporations have been infected. Just their parents basically, some lost their parents. In Vietnam, especially. So that was in Vietnam and in Thailand. So yeah, so it affected again, some of our employees directly. But other than that, yeah, that's, I think that's all I can say.

Alice Duguet 28:21

Has the COVID-19 outbreak affected how you communicate with your friends and your family?

Olivier Duguet 28:29

Of course, of course, of course, definitely. Conference, you know, teleconferencing, whatever is the mean. It was funny because, you know, we, in that case, discovered new names, of course, Zoom or Blue Jeans. And so we looked at everything, we tested, we tried a lot of these software, because with Southeast Asia also, again, it's a little bit different. The connection, the internet connection, sometimes is difficult. So you have to try different software to see which one is using the network the best. So and now, you know, one year, more than one year after we're down to, in fact, or back to, I would say, the main ones. It's funny, because we tried, you know, Zoom, or newcomers, Zoom, Blue Jeans, you know, different ones. And now in fact, we're back to Google, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams. Because that's the ones who are the most effective, in fact, in reality, so it's funny. But yes, definitely, we changed that. I think it's, it's also changing the way you think you can upgrade businesses. You know, I haven't been to Vietnam for one year, even if it's our main center of operations, and we're building, we have been, we have built two wind farms in the meantime. But I was not able to go there. So, and it's working. So in fact, yeah, maybe, you know, it's going to change in the future, the way it will limit, definitely, our physical transportation,

much more than we can think of, because a lot of things could be done online, in fact, and remotely. A lot more than what we think. We are also implementing collaboration software. So tools, again, new tools, in our business operations. Tools which were existing, I think, prior to the pandemic, but which now are absolutely essential, you know, to be more effective, and to use your time more wisely, because it's easy, you know, at first, also, it's easy to lose time, to get distracted, to have so many things to do, and so many freedom to use your time, because, of course, if you're in a room, not able to move much, you know, the only interest you have is, is to interact with your business partners, with your employees, staff, family, friends, so you're much more, you know, at your desk, or on your phone, on your computer. So meaning that your hours, the number of hours, you're in front of your screens per day have increased, you know, dramatically. And even more, we're, you know, we're dealing nearly 24/7, because between our friends in the US, in Europe, and our business dealings in Asia it's nearly covering 24 hours. So it's extending the business hours, extending the friends and family hours, much more than before. So you know, it's, you have all this time, suddenly available. So at first, I think you lost a lot of your efficacy, efficiency, you're a bit lost on how you use your time. But after, again, I think one year you get accustomed to that and, and you change your priorities and the way you manage your time. So definitely new tools have emerged. And we're using now, I think, trying to be more efficient, and using internal tools, software tools, to collaborate with our different, and we have been putting that in place. And we're putting that in place right now. So it took time. But that's the new way to organize our work. And, I think, it will be much better, I think, you know, again, using our time more efficiently, going directly to the point, or trying to, knowing where to find documents, find, you know, trace of history of emails, opinions, and decisions. So that's pretty, pretty meaningful. Yes, definitely a meaningful impact on, on how we are running our businesses. And that may be one of the pandemic conclusions is that the world will run, I think, faster and more efficiently. Thanks to that. Hopefully with less carbon emissions, of course. But, that, well, definitely is the case already. You know, when you look at the air transport, air transport, you know, it's absolutely amazing. It's incredible the impact it has, it had, on our transportation. Again, now when we're looking at the skies, we're surprised to see a plane. You know, frankly, not maybe the case in the US anymore, but in Europe or in Asia, you're surprised when you see a plane because for nearly six months or one year, no planes at all. Nothing, zero. So and that's a massive, massive massive, of course, change. And this will not come back as fast, as much as, before I think.

Alice Duguet 34:44

I'm actually curious about that, because, I've personally heard around me that the airplane companies are expecting like 150% of people in the next like year. So I'm curious, like, is that just your feelings, that it's not going to come back to 100%? Or is it like, throughout your community like France or in your family? Or is it just a personal opinion?

Olivier Duguet 35:13

No, it's numbers. You know, and you have to, I think, there are two things here, the regional, or national flights, in some countries, or the more open, countries are back to normal, even back to, or above the pre pandemic times. Example, in the US, in China, in Vietnam, national, domestic, I mean, domestic flights are higher now than they were pre pandemic. Which, again, it's, yeah, the main, new situation, but it's directly linked to international traveling, which in most of the cases, and we have the numbers, we're looking at this also as a, from an energy point of view and energy consumption point of view, are at 30%, at best, from earlier pre pandemic levels internationally. So, you know, people are traveling more domestically, but they are not, or nearly not, traveling internationally anymore. So and this, I

think, the long haul flights and inter continent, I would say, flights, I see that, I don't see that coming back to the pre pandemic times. I think people will have now difficulty to move continents, I think, you know, we're done, or most of the people who could travel during the last six months or a year, maybe are done with that domestic, you know, flights, domestic travel. They have explored everything they could explore, I think nationally and most of the time in international countries. So they will start flying to neighbour countries, and neighbouring countries, but going back to Asia, going flying to Africa, flying, you know, to Australia or, you know, or South America, this will not resume. I think this will take time. I think people will still be scared, you know, from maybe new pandemic coming, or new situation, maybe also scared to be caught outside of their region, or continent, as some have been caught, you know, outside of the countries by the pandemic, have been very, very difficult to come back in some cases. So this will leave some lasting, lasting impressions on people and will not, won't change their habit tomorrow. So the mass, the time of mass transportation, you know, mass holidays abroad, and very far abroad, I think are over and will not come back. So people will travel again, yes, of course. But I think not that long haul. And that's what we're seeing. So the impact on the travel, you know, travel business and travel air transportation for example, I think yeah, it will be structural, a structural shift towards more domestic than international, and more short term, short haul than normal.

Alice Duguet 39:14

Okay, interesting. Um, how are the people around you responding to the Covid-19 pandemic? And that's in France and in Southeast Asia?

Olivier Duguet 39:24

How are they responding? Again, I think as I am responding, so meaning, you know, closing the world to just, I guess, the closer, their closer relationship. So I think it's broadly bringing people more together. Because, again, we are facing a common enemy. We're facing a, you know, common adverse situation. So it's bringing, it's bringing people together, bring friends and business also, or staff and teams together. So that's, I think, something shared by everyone in Europe or in Southeast Asia. I think also that the, seeing the differences, I think it's also raising your sense of community participation, you're, you know, you're part of a community, you have to obey to the rules. Because one outsider, one, only one, you know, maverick, can wreak havoc, everything, if only one's got the infection, and don't follow the rules, he can threaten the whole population. So, and that's what we're seeing, you know, everywhere, and especially in Southeast Asia, where they really track people down very, very effectively. And they see, they give the names, they show the name, they show them on TV, showing where in the papers, saying, you know, this, these are the guys not following the rules. And because of them, we have this outbreak in this part of the country. So this, I think, you know, it's a heightening the sense of community, you know, participation, you know, it's, we are part of a community and we have to follow the rules to protect ourselves. And all of us, you know, we're all in this together, I think that's mainly the main point. It's mainly, I think, a Southeast Asian thing, it's a really Asian thing, because they have, you know, Asian countries have populations, have this sense of community participation, you know, they know that they are part of a broader scheme. In Europe, it's less of a thing, you know, we are more individualist, so we are more thinking of ourselves first. And the other ones are, you know, something else. So, especially in France, we are, you know, critical of a lot of things, so, we're always questioning the authority, we're always questioning decisions. Maybe like in the US, maybe a little bit, a little bit more than the US, I think. So, this sense of community, you know, participation is less, definitely less in Europe, but we have seen also, you know, the role of governments and roles of rules, you know, being crucial to go through these these

pandemic moments. So, I think also, yes, basically, again from a macro picture, I think, the current, or the past few months, or few quarters of this pandemic world, have put in the forefront, the need of a decision maker, you know, we need a vision, we need a leader, or at least, you know, a decision making process, to go through, and to take the good decisions, the right decisions to fight this. And we have seen that, you know, again, the very big difference between the countries which have this leadership, you know, they take harsh measures in some times, compared to the ones who have done nothing. And, or who could not do nothing. And for example like India, the most populous country on the planet, where they're totally overwhelmed. There's nothing they can do basically. So it's spreading like wildfire, and the death toll will be enormous. It's starting to be enormous, but it will be enormous even more tomorrow. Brazil, same thing. You know, they did nothing, so it's a disaster. But yeah, compared to countries where one death from Covid is too much, you know, is one too much. So they're really really very protective. Of course, like Singapore, but, you know, it's easy because it's small, small population and small country. But even Vietnam, 95 million inhabitants, or Cambodia, you know, there's just below, you know, 500 deaths, so which is, for these types of countries pretty impressive. And they're very very very careful of, only, again, one life lost is one too much. Whereas in other countries, you know, they don't care, even if it's reaching millions. So, so yeah it's, I think it has changed the way we see our societies' organization, and maybe, yeah, the way decisions are taken, or should be taken. And again, we're, I think, reassessing, all of us, reassessing our expectations from the state, basically, and the role of the state. And again, it's obvious in the US, where you have the shift, of course, of, you know, administration and way to look forward. But that's the same nearly everywhere.

Alice Duguet 45:56

Awesome. In what ways do you think the pandemic is affecting people's mental health, and their physical health?

Olivier Duguet 46:05

Yeah, well, physical health, I think everybody also have been aware that being, you know, sitting on the desk, you know, every day in front of your screen is not good for your health. So, I think, everybody knows that now, and, you know, yoga, gym, or whatever you call it, in front of your screen also, but at least moving and doing things, have been exploding. People are being more health conscious, I think, or self-health conscious, thanks to that. Also because the pandemic is more affecting, you know, people overweight, or with difficult physical conditions. So that's also, you know, bringing more attention to your health. You know, you have to take care of it if you want to go through the next pandemic if you want. So I think yes, the level of health consciousness, I would say is higher, definitely. Yeah, so, I think that's the main, one of the main, impacts of the pandemic.

Alice Duguet 47:32

Did you want to comment on people's mental health, or do you not want to?

Olivier Duguet 47:37

Huh, mental health. Yeah, it's more difficult to say, because, again, your interaction with people is through mails, through screens, messages, so it's, you know, it's limiting your interactions anyway. So it's, to talk about mental health is more difficult because you don't see the people. Well of course, you see them, maybe sometimes the body language on the screen, but you know that, of course, it's just the top, you know, you see the face, you see just the torso, but not the rest, so it's not the same exactly, of course, as being in person. So I

don't think, I think it's restricting your way to assess, you know, the mental health, or the, yeah, of your friends, family, staff, colleagues. So it's, I think it's restricting your interactions, so your assessment also, of course, of the others. So I don't know if, again, I can comment much more than that. It has changed your perceptions of interaction, human interaction for sure. So mental health, I don't know, people have been definitely looking, or watching more screens, and even for their leisure time. So is it good or not, I don't know. Yeah, it's changing things anyway. For the better, I don't know.

Alice Duguet 49:22

Yeah. I definitely know that from, like, social media, people are definitely, the pandemic is taking a very heavy toll on their mental health. And that's just from social media, which is interesting that it's not portrayed as much in, like, the news, or primary news, of how Covid is affecting people's mental health, because that's such a big, a big thing to talk about right now. Do you have any thoughts on how your local, or state, or federal leaders are responding to the crisis? And how do you think they should have done it differently, if you do?

Olivier Duguet 50:08

Well, yeah, it's a difficult question, but, again, I've seen the, really, the two different ways to handle this, from Southeast Asia to Europe. And basically it comes down to, of course, the population readiness to obey or, you know, to abide to the rules. You know, it's, in Southeast Asia, of course, it's much easier to implement, and decisions are harsh. And have been very effective. But at the end, in fact, you wonder which one was the best, because, you know, most of the countries in Southeast Asia have been very effective to keep the pandemic out of the countries, to keep the death rate, of course, as you mentioned, the death toll very low, and infection rates very very low, by just shutting down. They shut down, they didn't, you know, discuss this, and they definitely shut down the country. And had no problem with that at all, to shut down, to close the borders, shut down the operations, you know, ordered the people to stay at home, and don't move. And people have done it. And have been very effective to stop the pandemic. So, countries like Vietnam, for example, they have been very very effective, you know, closing everything down, tracking every case. So that, for 95 million population operation, you know, life was really back to normal for their six months. Really back to normal inside of Vietnam. No more pandemic, no more cases, nothing. Again, domestic flights higher than before, you know, people taking holidays, everything, you know, life exactly as before. Excepting that the country was closed to foreigners, closed to any travel from, or in and out, outbound and inbound. So, it was very effective to one particular stage, whereas now, of course, all these countries need to reopen. Because, again, now we're starting to be vaccinated, the rest of the world is starting to be vaccinated, so we start to be reopen. And that's another, you know, set of issues, where now, in these countries, they are facing a surge infections because they have to reopen the country, of course, to reopen to travel, international travel. And that's bringing new cases, of course, and that's bringing a new set of, another, you know, round of quarantine and restrictions and everything. While the rest of the world, which have not been so strict from the beginning, which have, you know, as in Europe for example, have experiences very rapid, and a lot of, a big death toll and a lot of infections, are now going through it, because we know what it is, we have, you know, vaccination underway. Big big big big time, so now again the herd immunity is maybe coming somewhere, but anyway, all the numbers are going down, and we can see post-pandemic. The problem is in these countries, in the Southeast Asia countries, the level of vaccination is very low, very very low. And it was also difficult to explain to the population that you have to be vaccinated when, in the countries there were, you know, 10 cases, you know, 5 cases, 10 cases, 20 cases, like in Thailand or Cambodia or, so, the vaccination rate

have been very slow, very low. So of course, now, very prompt to new infections. And now it's a little bit the reverse of before. You know, before these countries were, you know, pointing at the west saying, you know, look at this, look at what's happening when you don't do anything, and, so, you know, your death toll is very high, the pandemic is running wild. Yes, but now it's exactly the opposite. Now we're, in the west, we're turning the corner, I would say, yes, but now 30% of the population, nearly 40, 50% of the population will be vaccinated tomorrow. So again, it's not over, but, you know, it's on the way to be over. Whereas in these countries, again, the vaccination rate is very small. Excepting the small countries, like Singapore of course, for example, or Bhutan. But the rest of the region, vaccination is very slow, very low, so they are very prone to new cases. And the new cases are coming, so they're reclosing, I would say, or still closing, or continuing to close the countries, where the rest of the world is opening up. So, to come back to your question, what was best, I don't know, I can see again the reasoning and the reason why the west have done this and the east have done this, or Southeast Asia have done this also. But now, to merge the two and to go into the new world, the new situation, is difficult. And, again, of course, the end of it is, need to, I think, we need to get to herd immunity, so everybody gets vaccinated so there is no more pandemic. Of course, but to get there, you know, now you have two blocks of thinking, and two attitudes towards the pandemic, you know, facing each other, and it will not be easy. So for countries especially which are very tourist dependent, you know, like Thailand, like Indonesia, that's, or of course Singapore, that's going to be affecting them very, you know, deeply, deeply. The economic situation is very very difficult for, you mentioning, mental health. You know, millions and millions of people who have been working under travel sector, Cambodia also for example, are out of jobs, and have been out of jobs for the last 6 months, and if things continue, will continue to be out of jobs for the next 6 months. So, how long could they live like this? I don't know, and the states are not very rich, so they don't, they cannot pay, they cannot give benefits, like in the west or like in Singapore. So, that's maybe, now, the beginning of the problem for these countries.

Alice Duguet 57:51

What do you think about the US' way of doing it? Because obviously they didn't have a full lockdown, they never really had a quarantine, and there was a huge panic at the very beginning, where we all saw the pictures of the toilet paper running out, and, you know, no more pasta, no more bread, things like that. And I'm just curious, because you also mentioned Australia, who is now open, like clubs are open, restaurants are open, everything, it's post-pandemic, pre-pandemic, sorry. So I'm just curious of like, there's such a disparity there that it's like, what was the right way of doing it?

Olivier Duguet 58:35

Uh yes, careful, careful, Australia is, again, also back to, back to normal life inside of Australia. But Australia is closed to the world. Closed, totally closed. And have been closed even for Australians, and it was, you know, a big big debate, because, you know, for some, you know, Australia nationals being locked up outside of Australia, and even with the passport, cannot go in. Because they say no, nobody can enter Australia anymore, for quite a while, even if you're a passport holder. So, just to protect themselves. So, yes you're right, they're now back to normal, but because they totally shut down the country from international travel. So, and that could be, again, the same case as Vietnam, as I was just mentioning. So, but the problem is really ahead of them in fact. What's going to happen tomorrow. Because if they reopen, they will import cases. And it will, you know, it's just delaying, for me, it's just delaying the issue. In the case of the US, it's a little more difficult because, you know, you have nearly as many answers as states, in the US. So, I think, you

can see, if you follow the situation closely, you have seen also the different, you know, ways to handle it from New York to California on one hand, to, on the other hand, of course, Texas, or, you know, the Midwest states where, you know, there were not doing much, or not doing anything about it. So, yeah, it's really down to, down to the usual American question, you know, if you want to have a motor bike and go on the highway without a helmet, without any protection, anything, and kill yourself at the first accident, yeah, if you want to do it, do it. But, because it's, again, supposed to be the land of freedom, but on the other hand, you know, I think, what we have seen is that, facing this kind of pandemic, you need to have a government response, you need to have someone in the leadership and, again, for example to run the vaccination, because, again, the way out, I think the only way out, is vaccination. To get this vaccination, you have to have rules. You have to have, you know, government dealing with large corporations, large pharma corporations. And if you do nothing, you get nothing. So, definitely, I think, the freedom for all and gold for all, I think, didn't work. And you really had, you have to have someone taking decisions, in that case, maybe not for your individual freedom, but at least to get out of the pandemic. So, I would say more on the vaccination front, definitely the federal decisions were key, and have been key, to get out of this situation. Then, of course, lockdown, not lockdown, you know, closing the schools, not closing the schools, you know, it's maybe down to the local community decision, and local state decision, which have been handles very very differently from one place to another. So, that's maybe, yeah, the right answer, it's local, so let local decide. But definitely to get out of this, you need to have a federal decision, you know, national decision definitely. And, you know, also, I think something which you didn't mention and have not been stressed out enough is the Covid checks. You know, the money which has been spent by the states, by the government, to try to compensate the loss of revenues implied by the pandemic. This is massive, this is absolutely gigantic. Never been seen at this level before, for a numerous of countries. And the US, of course, being one of the very first. I think, Singapore, in that case, we could think of also Singapore, which I have, we have never seen and never heard of such support scheme and states using debt mainly, but, you know, raising money to give, to give money, to give grants, for free. You know, in France it's loans, they give you loans, long-term loans, to businesses, to small businesses, to state afloat. But I don't know if it exists, I think it exists also in the US, but it's more the checks. You know, every American citizen received a check, to compensate maybe, or to, you know, to try to help through this period. So, this is major. This is absolutely major, and it will have, and it's starting to have an implication, of course, on the economic rebound of the different countries involved. And the bigger the check, I would say, the bigger the rebound. And, of course, it goes with the vaccination. If you have the check with the vaccination, as the current administration apparently in the US is implementing, that's the way out. And I think maybe that's the lesson, the lesson out of it. You cannot leave that to the freedom, and leave that to everyone's decision, somebody has to take care of the group, and of the society for you. So, yeah, I guess that's the answer, talking about the US, I think. Definitely, the checks with vaccination were the way out, and the only way out.

Alice Duguet 1:05:27

Right, I would agree. This is a more personal question, but how does this pandemic compare to other big events that have happened to you in your lifetime?

Olivier Duguet 1:05:41

I think one, you know, macro picture again, one of the other big events which have changed the world, I think, is, well, could be related to the US also, but it's a worldwide issue which is terrorism and 9/11. Of course, 9/11 has changed the world, for sure, and the way we can see

religions, or extremism, and terrorism for sure. So, this ,I think, I would compare the two. Because, again, 9/11 or terrorism have the changed the way we look at things and part of the world. Pandemic has done the same, I think. So, yeah, you know, we mentioned the way we work now, the new organization, you know, corporation organization. One to mention, I didn't mention that before, but for example, people get used to work at home. And that means also in terms of, you know, corporate organization. In Singapore, for example, we had three offices, three different offices, we closed down two, and we are using only one now. We asked our employees do you prefer to stay at home and work from home, you know, 90% of the time, 50% of the time, 0% of the time, and they said, you know, nearly 50 to 60% of the time I prefer to stay at home and work at home, and I'm more effective at home because I can, you know, manage my thing, of course, my time, my family, whatever. And in fact, we're seeing as a corporation also that they are more effective, because longer hours, they stay, you know, they work more outside of business hours, and they're more effective. So, in fact, we are using our offices only for meetings, mainly, only for meetings. Or really, meet with colleagues one or two days per week, and that's it. So, that's a big change, that's a big change which is, you know, last, and that's worldwide impact, it's not only us, I think it's everywhere the same. The way we see, you know, work, and especially office work, will change, has changed, because of the pandemic for sure. So, that's maybe, that will maybe be the major lasting impact of the pandemic. Other than that, I think tomorrow we'll get used to get shots, you know, for whatever new disease will be around, you know, very regularly. For the moment, my generation we get shots every ten years basically, at best, even if you think about it, if you don't think about it you, you know, get shot when you're young and that's it, it's over. Now, I think, it's going to come and we'll get used to getting a shot of whatever vaccine is there every, you know, year, six months, two years, I don't know, but much more regularly, to be protected. So, I think that's also here to stay. Small thing, just a habit, but that's here to stay also for millions and millions of people, I think, all around the world. I'm hoping, I'm really hoping and dreaming of having this, kind of, vaccine passport to be able to resume, of course, international travel, it's important for me. So, I hope that's it's going to be restricted to, of course, vaccinated people tomorrow, and that everybody will be vaccinated, so it will not be an issue anymore. At one stage, but still, not there yet, people are resisting it, people are not seeing the use of it, so, I think, if they don't comply and they don't want to, they have to stay at home. And don't travel, in that case. Don't put me or put others in danger. So, but that would be here to stay. That's the main one I can see today.

Alice Duguet 1:10:15

That's actually a huge debate within all communities, I think, of whether you should be to get your vaccine in order to go and eat at a restaurant, or to go travel, so it's interesting that you're talking about the vaccine passport, because in all countries, mainly in the US I've heard, many people don't want to get vaccinated. And don't believe in the vaccine. So then, what's your, like, take on that, and what would be the answer to that, if people are just refusing to get vaccinated, what happens to them?

Olivier Duguet 1:10:53

I think, the answer to this is just education. People who don't want to be vaccinated are not educated. They have no idea of what they're talking about. No no, but, again, in France, we are the country of Pasteur. Pasteur invented vaccination. Why some diseases have been eradicated from the surface of the planet, because of this, because of vaccination. So, you know, plague, you don't hear about the plague anymore. Polio, polio is also something you don't hear about anymore, and it was a huge disease before. Because of what? Because we got a vaccine. So people, you know, just forget about it. But that's crucial. That's, you know,

part of the human evolution and beating the diseases and finding a cure to diseases. So, I don't understand, you know, I absolutely don't understand people who don't want to be vaccinated. Yeah, okay, of course, you can be Amish. I don't know the Amish, but you can, you know, refuse the progress, the technology progress, you can refuse that, yes, you can stay in your hut in the forest, and, you know, stay with your horses, if you want, and don't use, you know, modern life. You know, be out, stay out of modern life, yes. But if you go into modern life and want to live in modern life, you have to be vaccinated, there's no other way, you know. It's, for me, has to be mandatory, for sure. Like voting. You know, voting must be mandatory also. Some countries have, it's mandatory, for example in Belgium, in Europe, it's mandatory to vote, if you don't vote you get a fine. I think, again, here it's the same thing, if you're not vaccinated you get, you have to get fined, and you have to be restricted in your freedom. There's no point on this, no debate possible. Again, matter of education, people who are discussing the vaccination are just not educated, have nothing, they don't know what they're talking about.

Alice Duguet 1:13:18

So, in terms of the vaccine, obviously people were scared at the beginning because of how fast it was, like, created. Because normal vaccines take years and so much testing that, this came up in 6 months, something like that. So, were you personally scared of the vaccine and its long-term effects, or even short-term effects, that it could have on your body?

Olivier Duguet 1:13:45

No, I think, well you can question it of course. You can, you know, as you just mentioned, yes it has been, you know, turbo charge and the time development has been totally compressed, of course. But, also maybe, the urgency was there, compared to before. So, no, I believe in scientific progress. So, maybe, of course, of course, nothing is perfect, so everything has drawbacks and maybe, you know, we'll discover tomorrow that, and we're starting to discover that the coverage is not 100%, so the effectiveness is not 100% for sure. That there will be variants of the virus that will not be, you know, vaccination will be not effective against. Yes, sure, but the big picture is, we need this. And, you know, even if there are flaws in the technology, it will be refined, you know, one day or another. So, that's definitely best to have it even not 100% sure and protective, than having nothing. So, no, I think definitely, whatever scientific progress there is, you must take it, you know, and go for it. You know, it's, I have not been scared about it, even by the, you know, second impact, second effect, side effects, side effects of some of the vaccines. Yes, of course, there will be always side effects. And every medication you take, you know, you look at the conditions, of course there are side effects, so there will be always side effects. But, is it a reason not to take the medication itself? No, or most of the time, no. so, I think no, vaccination is exactly the same. Yes, they have some side effects, yes, will not cover 100% of the cases, but it's definitely, definitely better than nothing. So, we definitely need to embrace technology. And as you mentioned, these kind of situations, these also bring forward some new technology, which might have taken years and years to be developed, but in that case it was weeks and weeks, because we cannot afford to wait. So, that's good also, and it was impressive. You know, absolutely impressive, absolutely stunning to see that it's a worldwide, of course, effort, or financed effort, by some corporations and some researchers. And new technologies have been found, new vaccine technologies have been discovered and implemented very very large scale. And that's, you know, again, maybe that's the way humanity have been always, you know, going. You have a crisis, and to overcome this crisis you have to find new solutions, technology, or organizational, or whatever, and new leaders. And that's how it works. And it worked quite well in this one, I think.

Alice Duguet 1:17:26

Yeah, I would definitely agree that it worked well. I think also, the amount of money that went into the vaccine preparation was absolutely incredible, insane amount of money. I also wanted to ask you, and this is one of my last questions, one of them, what is your thoughts on nurses and doctors? Because I remember at the beginning of the pandemic, everyone was clapping at their windows at a certain hour for the health practitioners who were dedicating all their time to this, like, saving our lives. And now, it's, they don't even, they are not recognised, they are depressed, it's, like, scientifically proven that they are, like, the suicide rates are through the roof, the depression rates are through the roof. What are your thoughts on that, on like, the community decision to ignore health professionals after 6 months?

Olivier Duguet 1:18:28

Well I don't think we ignore them, we just take them as granted. You know, they are offering a service to the society, and we're paying for the service, or I hope that they are well paid or well compensated for their service. But, again, we cannot, you know, continue forever to thank them for what they're doing, because that's their job. They decided to do it, their job. Of course, again, there are some different levels in dedication, of course, the level of dedication they had and they put into it at the first is amazing and, of course, again, impressive and we have to thank them, most of them, for that. But, you know, it's here to stay. The issue, the problem is, these health issues and these pandemic issues are here to stay, obviously. So, they have to organize themselves and their life and their dedication also for the long run. So, we cannot, as society, you know, continue to clap every, I don't know, Saturday or Sunday or whatever, because they are brave, yes, they are brave, yes, it's fantastic, but again, we are here for the long run. So, think twice, you know. Yes, you have to be brave, but if it's part of the job, it's part of the job. That's it. You need to organize, and we need, as society, to organize, to provide them a good care, good pay, good working environment, because they're going to be their working environment for the next, you know, centuries. So, I think, yeah, it was great at first, but we need to find a more long-term organization where we don't rely on only the fantastic dedication or braveness of, I don't know, of few of them going forward. We need to find a whole organization of the healthcare services to respond to such an event in the future. So yeah, again, could be comparable to war, you know. At war, you're very, you know, proud and you support your troops, of course, the first day, the second day, the first month, yes, fantastic, go for it boys, you know, protect us. But, after two years, you say, okay, you know, yes, fantastic, but if you're here to have a war for a hundred years, yeah, maybe we'll think twice of our organization, our support. We have to continue to support you of course, but, again, you choose it, you have to be paid for it, compensated for it, you have to be organized for it, but, it's not, we're not counting on your, you know, exceptional disposition every day. It needs to be common, common practice, and common organization also. So I think yes, it was great at first, but now we need to have something more long-term. Long-term thought and long-term organized.

Alice Duguet 1:21:38

Yeah, that's, I would definitely agree. I think it wasn't going to be sustained in the long run.

Olivier Duguet 1:21:47

Exactly yeah.

Alice Duguet 1:21:49

So my last question actually of this interview is one that's going to be thought provoking. What can you imagine your life being like in a year?

Olivier Duguet 1:22:01

I think it will be pretty much back to normal, in fact. Because, again, we'll be, I hope, you know, most of us will be vaccinated and the pandemic will be over, or most of the pandemic will be over. I think as I mentioned that, you know, international travel will be stay less than before. So it will be good for me, because I will have more rooms in my planes, so that's great. But, because I will personally continue, of course, because, again, my life is between continents, different continents, so I don't see myself restricting me much in my international travel. Of course, in my travelling, my everyday travel, I think I will restrict myself. I will, you know, don't, I will not travel as much as before. Again, I was travelling every week, you know, in the past, internationally, so from one country to another. So I don't think I will travel that much in the future, in one year time, or more. I think I will work also more remotely. Less time at the office, that's for sure. I think it proved that, you know, we can, or I can, or most of us, with our office work, we can work nearly wherever we are. So, that's good, I think, that's here to stay also and might continue to, or even more, work from anywhere I could be. So that's in one year time, I think, what I'm thinking of. But, yes, it's basically back to normal, and for my business, I hope not back to normal, back to more than normal. And, resume our growth, the growth of our sector, growth of our activities. So, that's not back to normal, in that case, it's more back to the growth, or even better growth, better growth than before, I think. I hope so, yeah.

Alice Duguet 1:24:25

Okay, awesome. Thank you very much for answering all my questions and taking the time.

Olivier Duguet 1:24:32

You're welcome, you're welcome, thank you for your questions, and thought-provoking questions, yes.

Alice Duguet 1:24:39

Thank you.