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Lakshmi (00:19):

Hi folks, welcome to the future of business podcast, where we take you on a journey to explore the diverse range of sectors and stories, embedded in the Oxford and MBA, Kaha and beyond, and how they will shape the future of business. This is LA me and I will be hosting our conversation today with Dar and I just got her name wrong.

Dârini (00:37):

<laugh> it's not too bad. I pronounce it the French way, which is that Villa, but the name is originally from Tamo, which is your marathon. So I'm incapable of pronouncing it the Tamo way. So you did a pretty good job.

Lakshmi (00:52):

That is, that is a lucky coincidence. Uh, but to be fair, that is also very, very representative of who Dar is and how many Leos she comes in with, like in, in terms of her personal life, in terms of her professional life. So personally, uh, she's French, uh, she was born in the Caribbean. Is that

Dârini (01:09):

Right? Yes. In Gulu.

Lakshmi (01:11):

Nice. And she move, uh, she moved to Canada when you were 18.

Dârini (01:14):

Yes, she study. And then I never left angel Oxford.

Lakshmi (01:17):

That's brilliant. So she's also of Indian origin and I think you were brought up in south America.

Dârini (01:21):

Yes. French Vienna. It's a French territory between Surina and Brazil.

Lakshmi (01:25):

Yeah, like so many, like just, just so many cultures that come together in her. Very, very beautiful, very complex, but also very nuanced. That's what I think. Uh, also in every conversation I noticed that she understands different cultures. Like we went to Aja recently where she was able to fit in like, just right in, because she's been brought up in so many different cultures, she's able to adapt to different cultures. She just has that agility, that openness to embrace different people from different cultures. And that also helps her in her profession, uh, because she defines herself as the person who builds global networks to influence systemic change. And I have to agree, uh, that while that is very, very big and OUS, it is also the best description of what she does and her, uh, and her work so far, which we will talk about through the episode. But I mean, I also think, I, I just wanna like ask right off the bat, that is a very

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arduous task. So, uh, I mean, just, what do you think are key versus to the systemic change that you're talking about? Your or if I were to rephrase that, like what keeps you up at night?

Dârini ([02:29](#)):

Um, so, well first thank you for having me. I'm very happy to be here. Um, so I guess what keeps me up at night is how to empower the marginalized. So how can we shift the paradigm by leveraging their strengths and coloring outside the lines? And I think a fascinating way to do so is to consider cities how they impact their people, their businesses, their institutions, um, and their regional, or even national outreach. So think about it. Where are you from your influence and access to opportunities will not be the same if you come from an office city like New York or London as if you were based in, let's say an alpha minus beta or smaller city with less connectivity. So I believe changing dynamics between cities is a very interesting lever for system change.

Lakshmi ([03:12](#)):

That is very, very interesting, actually, uh, just right off the bat, I wanna ask what are alpha minor cities? Like? Can you gimme an example?

Dârini ([03:21](#)):

Oh yeah. For example, alpha, alpha minor city with new Montreal, <laugh> typically, okay. There's the classification made, uh, of cities it's like made by globalization in world cities research network, so called the go GA WC. So it's all about you have alpha cities, alpha minus data Gama, uh, and sufficiency cities. We have high sufficiencies, like, so, so it's all about, uh, the connectivity of the city and the international reach.

Lakshmi ([03:45](#)):

I mean, that is in a way, a lot more structured than I thought this domain was, but also in a, we are really sad because I actually come from this really tiny city. I mean, not tiny, it's actually big in terms of area, but I think it's, it's Madre in KA, uh, in India, you know, of Monterey, but I, I think it's like it would be considered like, I don't know, Beta be really low. Like if a city like mine were, you know, wanted like a better labeling, what am I supposed to do? Can I do something?

Dârini ([04:11](#)):

So yes, well not you personally, but the city can do something. So, so a good way to do so would be to rely on chambers of commerce whose mandate is to work on the city outreach or economic promotion agencies who target city attractivity. So if we take, for example, the, the example of Montreal, uh, it's an alpha minus city, um, and their economy promotion agency, for which I work for a couple of years as full core activities. So the first one would be attracting investment that is getting companies to open a branch in Montreal. Let's say Amazon wants to get a branch in Canada. So Montreal is gonna bid on it, for example, or you can go to other cities in the world and say, Hey, come to us where we're, we're a very fine city, uh, in the same way, second killer would be attracting international organizations. So wanting them to come and have their acquirers established to Montreal and make the city a strong hub for international relations. Uh, the third one, which is the one I worked on, um, is talents attractions. So it means getting experience workers to sustain economic development locally. And the fourth pillar, that's more of satellite branch that would be economic studies. So it's all about creating tools to support why Montreal is a city businesses, international organizations and talents who want to come.

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Lakshmi (05:24):

That is, that is just so intricate and so interesting. And, um, it's funny that you worked in talent attraction because, uh, prior to coming to the MBA, I used to work on the selection team at teacher India. And we also used to work at some kind of talent attraction, I wanna say. But more importantly, I think what London is doing right now is a lot of talent attraction. Like we have to do your visa to stay after our MBA. And there's also this, uh, new system that's come into place where, uh, graduates from the past five years from the top 37, uh, universities in the world are welcome to London, even if they don't have a job. So I think all of these do fall into talented the way you describe it is that fair.

Dârini (05:59):

It does. It does. It's one of the, so we have the same thing in Montreal. I was initially a student in Canada in Montreal and I, I was able to stay up to three years afterwards. So it gives you more than enough time to do a permanent residence and then to become a citizen. So it's all about, and especially in the case of Quebec who really wants French speakers, I'm a French speaker. I was educated there locally. So it's all, uh, in Quebec's interest to keep talent like, like me. But in the case of what I was specify talking about is about, let's say you have a strong it industry or a strong aerospace industry in Montreal. And even a director of aerospace was 15 years of experience. There's not gonna be that many around the streets of Montreal. So you may have to go unless you like steal it from your competitor, you can expand the pool of recruitment. So you could let's say go to Brussels, to Paris or other Francophone areas to find a director who's gonna come, um, and fill, fill the shoes and the role that you need.

Lakshmi (06:50):

That is, that is really cool because I think there's a few years before I used to be really mean. And I used to question like, while I want to immigrate, and I want to like, you know, live, uh, a global life and like understand what does the host city have to gain from, you know, me immigrating used to be like a very neat question that I had in my head, but I remember taking this covers and code about just how immigration is good for the host and you know, the other cities. And so that is really interesting how you put it, uh, that is really

Dârini (07:17):

Cool. Yeah. And it's one of the way those structures, like the consumers of commerce and the promotion agencies. It's how they try to move ment alpha minus to an alpha or as close as it can get to an alpha, but basically your talent. So you're a resource for the city, so you're valued and that's one of the ways you can actually move, uh, across the spectrum.

Lakshmi (07:35):

That is amazing. Um, I do have a lot of questions and we're gonna go one by one.

Dârini (07:40):

<laugh> go for it.

Lakshmi (07:42):

Uh, I love that you're open to questions as always. Uh, I think, I think when you said really like stuck to me, right? Like what can Montreal do to go from alpha minus to alpha? But I'm also thinking that is a

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Montreal thing, right? Like back to my example of Monterey, like, would Madre have the resources to say, Hey, Amazon, come here. Like, you know, would we have the kind of resources? Like what would a city that doesn't have the resources that man Montreal has, uh, do to like get to that position?

Dârini (08:06):

Well, yeah, that's exactly the core of the topic. Uh, so, so what do you do when your city development stage is not mature enough to get well established structures in place? Like what Montreal has? Um, so, well, my take is that you can still turn your identity into valuable assets, like take Oxford, for example, rather than relying on its agencies, its which is almost exclusively tied to the university. And if we take less extra cases, like, like take <inaudible> like that city that you're from, uh, it's outreach could for example, be through the mean action temple. And if Montreal did not have agencies, maybe the circuit like the circus that's very famous in Montreal would be a great strength to capitalize on. So other ways to increase like a city's international outreach would be maybe to partner up, uh, with powerful neighbors or like with regional or national governments or even maybe with the closest UN nub or like any sort of international organization or business who's covering your region. So anything that can give you more outreach. So, so look within and it's it's gonna work well.

Lakshmi (09:03):

That is, that is, that is really interesting. I think, uh, you know, you're right. You're right. Actually mother is popular for me temple and we could be doing that, but I'm also like, you know, uh, this person like, oh, of course, all of that in business school, we are trying to like, you know, uh, think about branding and like, how do you create these public clusters and things like that? Like how do you improve your own, uh, branding, your positioning? And I would love for mother to improve its positioning, but on the other hand, I'm also this communi, right? I'm also like this person who believes that actually decentralization is a solution to everything. So I'm also like always wondering should mother even have the, a power that it already has because at the end of day, it's just at the center of like a lot of villages, should the villages get all the power back? Like, you know, especially with COVID and always seeing like people move back from village cities to like villages. That's not a very interesting trend, uh, especially in India where like there's so much, you know, population in the cities. So I'm thinking, should we actually go the opposite way and say, no, no cities.

Dârini (09:55):

Yeah. That's a very big question. Cuz this world could be thing it's been a disruption, uh, for cities that very, you could have predicted. Uh, and, but to be honest, like given how recent, like this all is like, it can go either way, either the trend is gonna like increase and it's gonna be like, okay, we all these man old cities or it just gonna fizzle out. And to be honest, I really believe like cities are not going anywhere. Um, I think the clusters, they will power. Uh, and I think we're stronger when we come together and cities definitely bring a concentration of actors that influence their respective sectors. Uh, so I really think cities, as we know them have a really bright future still.

Lakshmi (10:34):

That is fair. That is fair. But also like thinking like beyond the trends, right? Like, um, what are you're saying is a very realistic take, but I'm gonna push a little bit, like from an idealistic end to say, should that, is that how it should be like, you know, from a very responsible capitalist position, like is something better for us to not have cities? Isn't it better from a pollution, uh, standpoint from a population

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standpoint, from a resource utilization standpoint, if we didn't have cities, like, you know, if it was more like equally spread out, uh, if people could work from home, if like, you know, uh, people could be with their families, if people could live in like big houses and like kids could like run around don't you think that would be good?

Dârini ([11:11](#)):

Like there's good things in anything, but the power of a steel ice needs community. So it's, it's bringing <inaudible> together. So if everybody's working silos from the, from the luxury of their own homes and they're not definitely, uh, interacting as much as like cities, like CCDs as a platform to bring people together and people just like shutting themselves in their own. Okay, great. You have a better work life balance, but things are not like ideas are not being exchanged, uh, or challenged even. So I think cities is definitely a platform to do so. So it would be a shame to, to steer away from them.

Lakshmi ([11:44](#)):

I'm loving where this debate is going, but I'm gonna push you one last time

Dârini ([11:47](#)):

There, go for it.

Lakshmi ([11:48](#)):

Yeah. So there's these like, you know, that is the cost that you're paying to it, right? Like there's pollution cost. I'm gonna stick on pollution because climate changes like a thing. And like, you know, there's been a lot of research on how COVID has actually helped with people going back and like with, so do you think that it's worth the cost?

Dârini ([12:04](#)):

No, that the, what you're saying is very true, like, uh, the like cities have an impact when it comes to pollution and so on, but I don't think this smelling cities is the answer either. I think quite the opposite, actually. I think the, the whole conversation about climate and how it's very present today, uh, more than it ever was, uh, it's an opportunity for cities to reinvent themselves. Uh, like in today's world, uh, cities would get the, actually get the importance of tackling climate related issues and act on it. They will be able to use it as a competitive advantage, uh, in comparison to other cities. So for example, I'm thinking about like coaching in CEL, India in Kerala, uh, whose airport is entirely solar powered and it's the first in the world to do so. Uh, and Derek like coaching is gaining international recognition for it. So that's another way to get outreach. So it it's, it's a letter for system change, like being able to reinvent yourself and to actually tackle, um, the needs of two days world. Um, another example that comes to mind right now is, uh, how Amsterdam and do economics as a tool for transf transformative action during the pandemic. And I, I really think cities can be pioneers of innovation on issues where national governments sometimes just tell.

Lakshmi ([13:15](#)):

Yeah, yeah, no, that's lovely. And I, I'm also like, you know, uh, I think it's because the year is coming to a close and like we're also starting to realize and reflect on the year. That's been very grateful for the year that we've had had here because you just spoke about donor economics and we have this elective

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called, um, Regener and circular economy where actually we had one of the co-founders of Don economics come and talk to us about like how Amsterdam has, uh, you know, actually adopted it. And, uh, another thing that comes to mind about cities is like recently I was reading about talent and the reason that I was reading about the smart capital of digital nation Estonia's because creative destruction lab, uh, which is one of our, uh, you know, uh, extracurricular co-curricular tracks here, uh, they're gonna start a new branch in Estonia.

Lakshmi ([13:55](#)):

Uh, and it was very interesting to just read about the innovation in Estonia. And it's, it's exciting what you talk about, like, you know, how cities can actually reman themselves because there's so many, every problem can also be seen as an opportunity to re in, like you said, and it's beautiful. Like you can read in invent from a sustainability perspective, you can reman from a technology perspective. That makes sense. And, uh, actually for people who are interested, you should totally, uh, go on deals, website, donor economics, action labs, website, read about Amsterdam, uh, how they've embraced donor economics, uh, like the mentioned. And you can also go on creative destruction lab, especially if you're part of the incoming cohort. Definitely keep an eye out for like their announcements about Estonia. And the third thing is you also have a podcast actually in April, 2019 about the future of workspaces connected devices and smart cities.

Lakshmi ([14:40](#)):

So this, uh, this is also something that I really love about this topic because it's so vast, like you can attack it from a smart cities perspective, from a sustainable city's perspective from a, a community led cities perspective. And I know given that these expertise we're discussing today a lot about just, you know, uh, how do you empower cities? Uh, but there's also so much so many layers to, and this is so exciting. And, uh, you know, just to tell you about a little bit about myself, um, uh, like I get very, very nervous when I get Sori about something, because I'm like, oh my God, there's gotta be a bias. There's gotta be a blind spot in how I'm thinking. So I tried really hard to be a devil advocate. And so my last challenge to you Dar, and this is like, uh, you know, very specific, uh, especially again, uh, there is a lot of research that's going on right now into regional leveling up here.

Lakshmi ([15:25](#)):

Uh, professor Colin mayor is leading that research at Oxford. Uh, and, uh, they talk about like, you know, can we move away from London? Like, is London like hogging on a lot of investments that come into the UK? Should we be focusing on like Birmingham for instance, because it's also like a very popular city. So do you think like a Montreal or a motherey or a Chen or an Amsterdam, like getting so much attraction, getting so much attention, sorry. Uh, is like, you know, taking away from, uh, you know, what other cities in that region could be

Dârini ([15:52](#)):

Doing? No, not really. Uh, because a mega city, like London will not compete with cities like Manchester or Birmingham, they would rather compete with other European hubs like Paris. Um, so on the country to address your point, I think London's vast outreach will benefit other UKCS and regions because they can gain positive ripple effects from London. So this is what I meant earlier when I meant partnering up with more powerful neighbors. So for example, if we go back to Quebec, uh, when Montreal was holding those in and is still holding today, this international recruiting admissions, we have three, our cities of

Quebec, uh, shero Ville, and Quebec city, uh, that are joining the initiative. So without Montreal, these three smaller cities wouldn't have the international reach that they have by tagging along with the bigger economic hub of the region. So I think a bigger hub close to you is actually a huge asset because you're gonna benefit from it.

Lakshmi (16:42):

Okay. Okay. That is fair. Um, I mean, I, I, I also, I have to acknowledge, like even before we got into this topic, even when we just started talking about like cities, you did hint regional collaboration. So I can see that you believe in it, even in the work that you've done and like, you know, uh, in the way that you express yourself. So I agree that there is a win-win that's possible here, uh, for possibility or, uh, for sure, for sure. Uh, but also like, I'm also wondering like regional collaboration, like you said, also means that, you know, London should be collaborating and technically London is not competing with Birmingham, but it's competing with like Paris, for instance. Uh, so I'm, I'm also curious, uh, to hear your take on like, you know, especially with this, uh, Brexit and everything that's going on. Yeah. Uh, do you think London will its power, do you think, like for instance, a Paris or some of the Europeans that you would like overtake London

Dârini (17:26):

<laugh> no, I don't think London is going anywhere. No, uh, no. It's capability. Repetition is very sticky. Uh, London is a competency. It's a big financial hub. Uh, so no, not just any city can pretend tomorrow to arrive in London. Uh, you're not become a European financial hub overnight. Uh, so in other regions though, it's interesting to see two hub emerge close to each other. Like if we take, for example, the, the case of thriving cities, like Dubai and IBU, DHA be there in the same country, but there are two like very thriving hubs. Uh, but in Europe, Europe is the old continent. So where cities, like let's say their life cycle is definitely not at the same stage. Uh, the dynamics are pretty much established, so you never know what might happen. Uh, but I really find unlikely that London would get replaced. Uh, no, that, that echos, uh, our previous point that cities may sometimes like have more influence than national government. So Brexit does their, like their Brexit happened, but London doesn't have to follow that. So it's different dynamics, which is actually quite interesting in that topic.

Lakshmi (18:24):

Fair fair. But also like final question, right? Like about cities and everything. Um, if, if there was a European hub to come up, like, you know, beyond London, um, which do you think would be that, uh, hub? Um, that's like one part of my question. I'm also really curious as a European city, uh, citizen yourself, which is your favorite European city.

Dârini (18:43):

Oh, oh, well, my favorite European city, like my favorite city is Montreal. Like no competition. Uh, I ran that fund in Europe, uh, to come back to the, okay. First part of the question was the hub. It is difficult to say because it depends on the sector. So Paris is one, but Paris, uh, is not Anglophone. And like English is like, London has really English for it. So it tracks talent from everywhere because, um, a lot of people speak English. Uh, but that being said, you have Geneva for international relations. You have, uh, Amsterdam, you have, uh, Frankfurt, you have Munich, you have Barcelona. So you have all those ups. And it's, it's very challenging to say, I'm not gonna get more on that one. <laugh> this is gonna, I'm

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gonna stay politically correct on that one. Cuz uh, each city goes, uh, through their own journey, um, and their politics and their economics.

Dârini ([19:30](#)):

So the challenges are very, uh, different. So, so who knows what's gonna happen? But so far, I don't think, um, the dynamics are gonna change as fast as they are in emerging economies. Uh, so, so definitely I'm not gonna pronounce myself on that one. Uh, when it comes to favorite city, I'm definitely gonna come back to Montreal. Not because it's, I know it's not in Europe, but it has very strong European vibes, European practices. But what I really like about that city, to be honest, there's a reason why I decided to settle there as an adult, uh, and to start my adult life there. Uh it's because there's a sense of, um, acceptance it's it has this more welcoming feel and it's it's to a level that I've never seen, like anywhere else, uh, mantra, let people, let's people be who they are, uh, no matter their backgrounds, their lifestyle, their choices. And like for this, I think mantra is my favorite city because it's a city where it's easy for anyone to feel at home.

Lakshmi ([20:27](#)):

Okay. Uh, but I have to admit like our Canadian classmates, including GNE, um, I like some of the sweetest people that I've met and it has increased my desire to visit Canada and <laugh> and Danny has some brilliant pictures, uh, of maybe you should blog. Like Dani's a very active blogger and she's very active on LinkedIn. She's one of our most active and authentic, uh, ambassadors of the NBA. Uh, maybe you should do a post unlike Montreal in your life there.

Dârini ([20:54](#)):

Oh, I love Montreal so much. I could be an ambassador for festival season is upon us. So I'm sure like a lot of people know about just <inaudible>, uh, we like laughter we like, uh, to have fem Quebec's, uh, that everybody should, uh, benefit from.

Lakshmi ([21:09](#)):

Absolutely. Uh, I think what I also really like about the MBA is that, you know, you can just do these, uh, little conversations and you can like really learn about something. Like, for instance, today, I feel like I've really learned about Canada. Um, though I sat down to learn about the future of cities, which also, I feel like I've learned about, uh, I think this is also one of your posts, right? That, I mean, like about just the things that you've learned through like, uh, the global opportunities and threats, uh, that, um, uh, that we do and like, you know, things like that, you've just learned different industries. Uh, so can I also ask you like, just to end on a really light note, uh, I mean, of course we did end on a slightly light note already, but to like probably end on a lighter note also acknowledging that this might be, uh, you know, uh, beginning of some of the last episodes of this year, what has been like your biggest learning from this year? What has been the biggest highlight of this year for

Dârini ([21:51](#)):

You? Oh gosh, so many that's uh, uh, let me think. Oh, I think and bats, uh, so we all went to Paris for like Paris, almost Paris. Uh, we all went for this, uh, sporting competition and I think the sense of community was there. We were all there supporting each other. We are a big court, we're 355 students. So sometimes it's not easy to speak with everybody in a one year program yet it didn't pre prevent us from sharing people. We barely knew, uh, because they were part of our community. So I think it really



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brought the communities together very nicely. Um, and the, the power of cheering each other, I think is, uh, beyond anything, uh, worth mentioning. I think it's, it's, it's definitely the, the culture of collaboration and the community that is, uh, Oxford site business school.

Lakshmi ([22:35](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Um, I think with that, we come to the end of this episode and, uh, just to, just to definitely also re uh, uh, restate this, not just that we had the public of community, we also won the NBA tournament for the fourth time. Uh, so that was amazing. Uh, so congratulations everyone in the, uh, victory there. And I think, I, I am curious after this to like, just go back and see, like, what are, if was a different European cities are taking like different cities across the world, including Indian cities are taking to like, you know, uh, reach the kind of like status that you were talking about. And actually Oxford is doing something because they should be, it's such a beautiful city. It's so gorgeous, especially now in the spring and the summer. Um, and I know you recently got said at the high table, it's St C St. Cat college. So that's amazing. Uh, but yeah, with that, we are going to come to a close of this episode. Uh, thank you, everyone for listening, like I said, do follow, uh, the on, um, LinkedIn and also, uh, do follow her blogs on, uh, SBS blogs. And if you haven't already followed us on either Spotify or apple podcast, do find us follow us. And thank you so much for listening. Um,