

RAPID URBAN GROWTH & THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SPACES: SHIFTING DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS & A NEW ROADMAP

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“We are faced today with a grave threat, not one solely based on the fact that we don’t have answers to burning problems in society, but even more to the point that we don’t possess a clear apprehension of what the main problems are and clear understanding of their real dimensions.”
(Žižek, 2012)

ABSTRACT

As cities grow, the task of managing them becomes increasingly complex. The unprecedented speed and scale of urban growth in the global south is often cited as the largest obstacle to achieving sustainable urban development. This paper examines the outcomes of the global urban processes, reflecting on changes in the critical thinking underpinning cities and urban regions. Given that Habitat III is the most substantial process for the future of cities, particular attention has been directed towards this. The findings of which highlight a noticeable shift in emphasis from an approach to city-building focused on the quantitative supply of urban amenities, towards a growing trend that promotes livability and the importance of enhancing quality of life in cities. At the heart of this shift, is the growing recognition of a public space mandate that has been embedded in both the New Urban Agenda that arose out of the Habitat III process and Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Based on the findings of a four year research and policy project focused on public space, this paper concludes by advancing a number of key principles for leveraging public space as a transformative element of city-building.

Keywords: Global urban agenda; public spaces; urban transformations; city building; urban regions; habitat III; rapid urban growth; sustainability

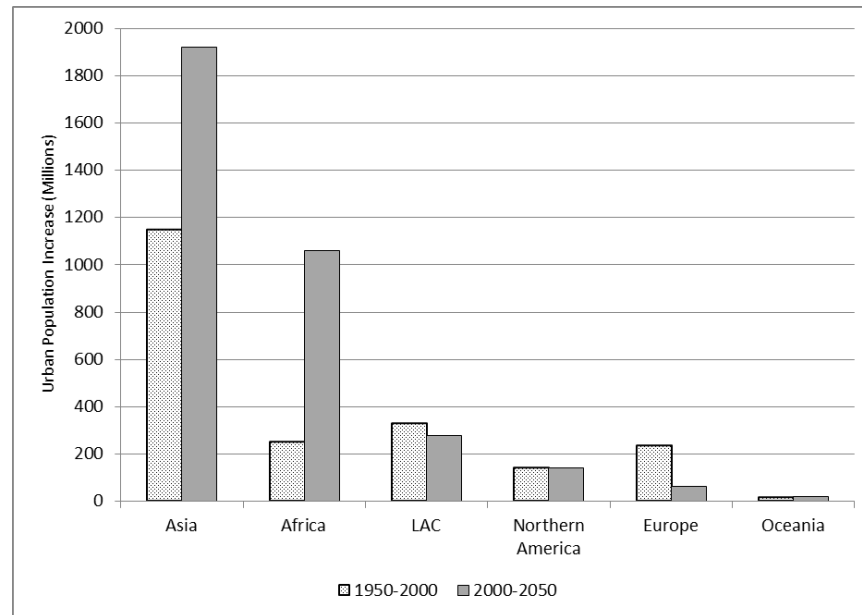
INTRODUCTION

As cities grow, the task of managing them becomes increasingly complex. The unprecedented speed and scale of urban growth in the global south is often cited as the largest obstacle to achieving sustainable urban development. This is because alongside the growth in the number of people living in cities, there is also the need to supply quality urban infrastructure and services such as housing, schools, policing, streets and public spaces. If the supply of these assets does not keep pace with the growing urban population, then the effects of urban diseconomies set in – this manifests itself in the form of crime, congestion, decaying infrastructure and the inefficient allocation of land to name a few. With the urban population projected to grow from 4 to 5 billion people by 2030, and with the total built-up area of the world’s cities projected to double in the same amount of time, there remains a high degree of uncertainty as to whether or not the cities of the future will be desirable sites of opportunity, or if they will manifest themselves in the form of urban wastelands. This threat is most prominent in the fast growing cities of the global south. Given that urban planning decisions have the ability to lock cities onto specific long term paths, the decisions (or lack thereof) of policymakers today mark a critical juncture for the future of our cities. With 2015 and 2016 having been host to multiple global development processes that have a significant influence on cities – *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG’s), the *United Nations Conference on Climate Change* (COP21) and the *Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development* (Habitat III) – it appears to a certain extent, that the urbanization story has already been written. The imperative question that remains is, will these decisions set our cities on course for a sustainable urban future, or will they deliver the ‘coup de grâce’ that will lead to their spiraling demise?

This paper examines the outcomes of the aforementioned global processes, reflecting on changes in the critical thinking underpinning cities and urban regions. Given that Habitat III is the most substantial process for the future of cities, particular attention has been directed towards this. The findings of which highlight a noticeable shift in emphasis from an approach to city-building focused on the quantitative supply of urban amenities, towards a growing trend that promotes livability and the importance of enhancing quality of life in cities. At the heart of this shift, is the growing recognition of a public space mandate that has been embedded in both the *New Urban Agenda* that arose out of the Habitat III process and *Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities*. Based on the findings of a four year research and policy project focused on public space, this paper concludes by advancing a number of key principles for leveraging public space as a transformative element of city-building.

A MOUNTING PRESSURE...

The urban transformation that unfolded in Europe and North America more than a hundred years ago was driven mainly by rural push and urban pull factors. Breakthroughs in agricultural technology led to increased productivity, creating a surplus labor force in the countryside, or as Adna Weber aptly put it, “the divorce of men from the soil” (1899, 160). Simultaneously, an industrial revolution had been taking off in the English midlands and spreading elsewhere, attracting surplus labor from the countryside to economic agglomerations in the form of cities with the promise of employment and economic gain. Historically speaking, rural to urban migration was the dominant source of urban growth during this time; as demographic factors in the form of high mortality rates placed a natural ceiling on cities, safeguarding that they would not grow excessively in scale (Davis, 1965). Subsequently, these cities were appropriately labeled ‘demographic sinks’ (Fox & Goodfellow, 2016). Since then, breakthroughs in medical technology, public health and improved sanitation resulted in changes in mortality and fertility patterns. A particularly large window between reductions in birth rates and death rates created a circumstance in which urban natural population increase has now replaced rural to urban migration as the dominant contributor to the growth of cities (Montgomery, Stren, Cohen & Reed, 2004). The cumulative combination of these drivers has given rise to unique forms of *rapid urban growth*, placing substantial pressure on cities of the global south; alternatively earning them the label of ‘mushrooming cities’ (Jedwab, Christiansen & Gidelsky, 2015). In many instances, this pressure has outstripped the capacity of local governments to respond to the needs of the city and to supply the necessary infrastructure needed to grow efficiently. Consequently, many of the over-congested megacities of the global south are plagued by features of unplanned urbanization. This is most commonly characterized by traffic congestion, infrastructure deficits, overwhelmed basic services, lack of adequate land and housing, and poor supply and maintenance of public spaces (Kumar & Kumar Rai, 2014; Jedwab et al., 2015). In 1950, there existed only 6 cities with a population greater than 5 million people, and out of those, all but one were located in developed countries; however, today, this amounts to 52 cities, of which, 42 of these are located in developing countries (Cohen, 2004). In contrast to the incremental growth experienced in North America, Europe and Oceania (and to a large extent in Latin America), the growth that is persistently unfolding in cities across Asia and Africa is of an unprecedented scale.

Figure 1. Urban Population Growth by Major World Region, 1950-2050

Source: Fox & Goodfellow (2016)

Figure 1 reflects urban population growth by all major regions of the world for the time periods 1950-2050. Between 1950 and 2000, the urban population of Asia grew by more than one billion people, with this figure projected to nearly double between 2000 and 2050. Additionally, Africa's urban population grew by nearly 250 million people between 1950 and 2000, with projections of an additional billion people set to occur between 2000 and 2050. Today, urbanization is very much a product of the global south, requiring us to rethink the challenges cities face and how to best plan and manage their growth.

Alongside the growing trend of rapid urban growth set to continue in developing countries in the coming decades, local governments are tasked to come up with innovative approaches for municipal service delivery. If the required resources and planning foresight is not realized, negative externalities in cities are likely to triumph, overrunning the benefits that accrue from agglomeration and economies of scale (Fox & Goodfellow, 2016). Although the vast majority of countries today are celebrating the fact that we have entered an urban age, most countries – especially those located in developing regions – are significantly unprepared for the challenges that will accompany it. With more than 90 percent of urban population growth between now and 2050 occurring in Asia and Africa (UN, 2014), it is these cities that will be most affected by the decisions taken in the policy arenas of today. In an attempt to cope with such intensive growth and promote the principles of sustainable urban development, experts from around the world

have joined forces under the auspices of *Habitat III* to establish a *New Urban Agenda* that aims to chart out how cities should be planned and managed over the next two decades.

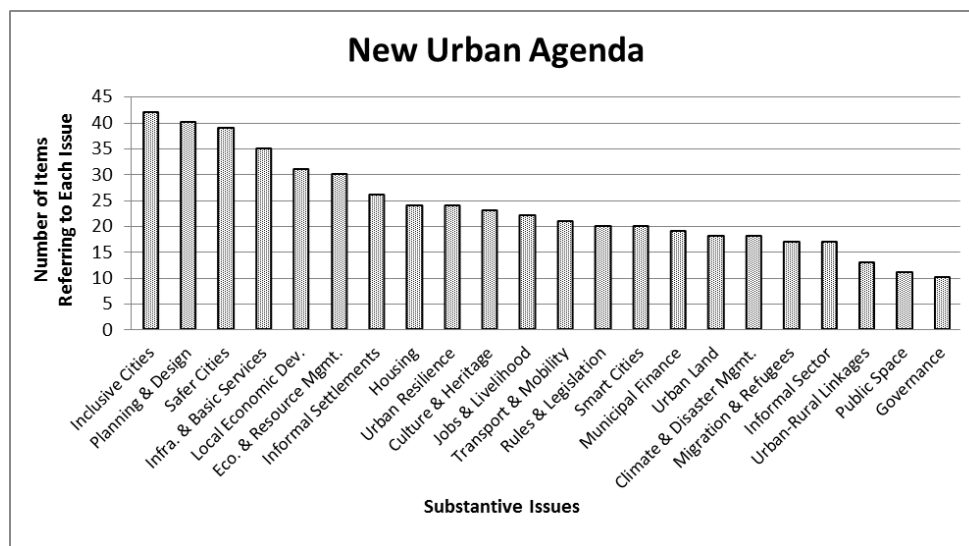
THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

The global urban agenda has undergone immense change over the past 40 years. During the 1970's, there was increasing recognition of the uncontrollable growth of cities around the world. In developing countries, the increasing pressure on cities led to high levels of unplanned urban growth, often manifesting itself in the form of informal settlements and decaying infrastructure (Bairoch, 1988). Cash-strapped local governments were unable to provide the necessary housing and basic services to accommodate the growth of cities and in many instances chose the route of forced eviction. At this time, there were hardly any international fora or collaborative dialogues to address such immense urban issues; as previous attention was focused towards rural development (Fox & Goodfellow, 2016). With growing concern over these experiences, it was decided that there would be significant value in shared cooperation, giving rise to the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I). Attended by government representatives from around the world, the challenges of slums, poverty and basic services were heavily discussed during Habitat I, leading to the adoption of the *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements*; which was primarily focused on the housing deficit and a lack of access to basic services. Merely 20 years later, economic, social and environmental concerns persisted in both developed and developing countries. Member States from around the world reconvened in Istanbul in 1996 for the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II). This gathering took the decision to reach beyond the fundamental issue of access to adequate shelter, broadening the urban development agenda to include issues related to governance, transportation, employment, and education. Given the success that followed the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, a sustainability mandate would come to serve as the backbone of the *Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements*.

Today, many of the same challenges still persist. Informal settlements are on the rise, with more than 863 million people living in slums, 1 in 10 people live without access to safe water, and 1 in 3 lack access to a toilet (UN-Habitat, 2012). Growth in personal consumption has led to growing inequality, which has spatially manifested itself in the form of segregated neighborhoods, leading to profound volumes of urban sprawl. Today, most cities are experiencing lower densities and more dispersed patterns of urban growth (Angel, 2011); this has created competition between the public and private spheres and resulted in devastating effects to forests and wetlands. Coming out of Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador in 2016, it is difficult to predict what future cities will look like; however, the adopted outcome document gives us some indication of the major concerns that need to be acknowledged and addressed. Figure 2 below showcases the substantive issues

that have received the spotlight in the *New Urban Agenda*, and have been quantified based on the number of items in the agenda pertaining to each issue.

Figure 2. Frequency of Substantive Issues in the Habitat III New Urban Agenda, 2016



Source: Habitat III New Urban Agenda, 2016. Authors own calculations.

It is largely of no surprise to see that substantive issues related to the planning and design of cities, infrastructure and basic services, and housing rank near the top of the list; as these were all key concerns in which Habitat I was founded. Additionally, as Habitat II expanded its mandate, related issues such as ecology and resource management, jobs and livelihood, governance, and transportation and mobility found itself central to the urban dialogue. That being said, the negotiations surrounding Habitat III have reflected quite a dramatic shift in mandate. Early discussions, issue papers and preliminary drafts of the new urban agenda had demonstrated a growing awareness pertaining to improved quality of life through the enhancement of the social fabric of the city. This can be seen in the recognition of issues such as inclusive cities, safety, culture and heritage, and most interestingly, public space in the New Urban Agenda. Public space has received considerable attention in recent years, also having been highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals. Target 11.7 calls for the provision of ‘universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities’. Such an inclusion marks a significant turning point in the dialogues surrounding urban development. Previously, the urban agendas had a tendency to emphasize quantitative approaches to planning cities, which focused predominantly on the supply of hard infrastructure. However, the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable

Development Goals appear to have broken this cycle, emphasizing the addition of qualitative indicators for measuring progress and the issues of how to design cities that provide structure and empower people to create and control their own lives. Although public space can be viewed as a part of the hardware of cities, it very much characterizes elements of the software of cities as well – inclusivity, health, culture, the occasion for chance experiences, and a growing sense of pride and ownership.

THE VALUE OF A PUBLIC SPACE AGENDA & BEYOND

As mentioned above, characteristics pertaining to the social fabric of the city have largely been overlooked in past agendas. This is because historically there has been a tendency to view cities as an assemblage of urban infrastructure (ie. buildings, roads, and basic services). But this is only half the story. Studies have shown that cities that place a premium on immaterial values such as accessibility, health, safety, culture and heritage have experienced significant urban transformations (UNESCO, 2016); take for example cities like Curitiba, Bogota and Seoul. Additionally, it is those cities that commit to promoting quality of life and wellbeing that consistently rank among the most livable in the world – Vancouver, Zürich and Melbourne for example. The evidence seems to indicate that the most transformative and livable cities view themselves beyond physical assets and instead strive to become lively, vibrant and dynamic places. At the center of such urban transformation and regeneration projects is the public realm. This is because public spaces – including streets, squares, parks, plazas, etc. – are complex, but also very simple multi-functional areas for human life. They have the ability to offer ecological diversity and appeal, economic exchange on multiple scales, and dynamic social interactions inclusive of cultural expression among a wide variety of people, religions, ethnicities, genders and opinions. For planners and policymakers looking to enhance the social fabric of their cities, a public space agenda can be turned to as an effective strategy. Figure 3 highlights a range of benefits that result from active investment in quality public spaces: accessibility, local economy, social interaction, health and wellbeing, sense of community and sense of comfort. A shift in focus towards a public space agenda incorporates a holistic, ecological approach to urban planning that correlates the smaller and more personal neighborhood scale with the metropolitan scale of the region. There, within a community led effort, principles of diversity, conservation, and human scale (Calthorpe, 2012) merge with the idea of economic, ecological and social sustainability, where the benefits of public spaces become crucial for the community.

Figure 3. The Benefits of Public Spaces



Source. Project for Public Spaces, 2016

It is through the formation of ‘community’ that public spaces are most noted for (re)establishing social capital in cities. Traditionally, the main function of the community (or *gemeinschaft*) was to serve as a link between the people and society creating an arena of common interest; that way citizens could relate to their societies in both a geographic and non-geographic sense. (Tönnies, 1988; Hoggett, 1997). This becomes a central concept of public space at every level of interaction and experience among people. At the backbone of ‘community-building’ is the notion of ‘the third space’. This consists of the social surroundings separate from the ‘first’ and ‘second places’ – those of ‘home’ and ‘work’. Such places are necessary for allowing diversity to flourish, and people to learn to live with and negotiate among each other. It is in these communal spaces that people generate a sense of pride, social cohesion and civic identity. Oldenburg (1991) makes the case that third places are integral elements for establishing civil society, direct democracy, engagement, and the feeling of attachment and sense of place. Such spaces serve as arenas for equity, diversity and justice. It is also in these places where marginalized groups can exercise their rights, voice their opinions and stand up against injustice in a democratic forum; even if that means in some instances a temporary or permanent loss of order, control, and comfort.

Additionally, vibrant streets and inclusive public spaces become places of economic value and benefit – promoting income, investment, wealth creation and providing employment (Andersson,

2016). The economic value of interconnected systems of quality public spaces manifests itself via direct attraction-marketing and business points in the form of bustling streets, active parks and squares and other appealing forms of public space. These spaces attract, retain, and lock people of all kinds; especially if they are well maintained and of high aesthetic quality. Public spaces and good urban places provide numerous benefits to all forms of business, innovation and entrepreneurship; spanning both formal and informal sectors. Furthermore, public spaces can be utilized as a novel approach to intensify the vitality of the city through urban renewal programs. This in turn has the ability to increase property values, which can then be captured in the form of taxes through innovative approaches to municipal finance, such as land value capture.

From an environmental perspective, public space plays an important role in reducing pollution in cities, increasing ecological diversity and reducing energy consumption (Beatley, 2010). Research has shown that increased exposure to nature and green space has proven to offer additional health benefits, thus reducing the overall public expenditure on healthcare (Kaplan, 1995). Health benefits accrue due to increased access to clean air, reduction in noise pollution, reduced exposure to direct sunlight and a decline in stress levels resulting from positive aesthetic appeal. Open space conservation and the creation of city parks and public spaces in general can thus be seen as investments that produce significant economic and health benefits for society (Wolf & Flora, 2010).

THREATS TO AN EMERGING PUBLIC SPACE AGENDA

Where a clear and proactive public space agenda exists, public spaces have demonstrated an inherent ability to bring people together. However, when planned, designed or managed poorly, they also have the ability to create or add to conflict between people and communities, and bring unattractive places of insecurity, loss and fear. It is thus important to note that it is not just a matter of building public spaces to enhance the social fabric of cities, but also ensuring their quality in order to avoid generating cycles of urban decline. Although a well-planned public space agenda has the ability to redefine the image of a city, under conditions of rapid urban growth the public space agenda still faces many impending obstacles; most noticeable is a growing tendency towards increased privatization and homogenization (Kes-Erkul, 2014). Such obstacles, threaten the effectiveness of public space as a means of enhancing quality of life in cities. According to De Magalhaes (2010) traditional functions of public spaces are frequently challenged by new approaches to and alternative forms of public space provision and management, from which several important new trends have emerged. These trends tend to concentrate on a shift towards profit building, privatization, and strict planning approaches and measures. Alongside the growing privatization of public space, the changing patterns of urban growth begin to threaten the public space agenda. Today we see more and more privatization in

the management of public space which also results in public space commodification and homogenization in cities of both the global north and the global south; this places social capital and *publicness* (the quality or state of public openness) under threat. The adverse effects of privatization, social exclusion, and increased control of space have drawn particular attention towards the concept of publicness in recent years (Németh & Schmidt 2011). This is important, because it is the overall degree of publicness, which tends to define the quality of public space and how effectively it can serve society.

A distinction between private and public is critical because it is exactly in the public realm that we find a prime drive toward more privatization, that is, residential desires for safety, security, stability, and relative social homogeneity; all of which influences the choices made on the provision of public space (Low, 2006; Haas & Olsson, 2014). That said, such choices have consequences for the people, whose sense of belonging to a specific area is based on their rights to universal access. The link between urban society, public space, and planning approaches becomes an important element in understanding the complexity of urban transformation in the public realm (Amin, 2008). The important nexus in this respect lies in the private and public domains and in what sense a public space can be defined as a public good (Haas & Olsson, 2014).

Public spaces have always been the arenas of conflict and potential struggle over claims to its control and over its accessibility to different groups in society. Public spaces are meant to characterize positive aspects of urban living – inclusivity, accessibility, the disregard of status, and serve as the domain of the common concern. However, too often, we are seeing private interests get in the way, leading to greater inequalities, growing signs of exclusivity and an overall erosion of ‘the commons’. This raises questions as to who the city is meant to serve, and whether or not the public realm, is really public (Sennett, 2013). Harvey (2008) warns of an increasing threat pertaining to the homogenization of public space in cities, to such an extent that they are no longer promoting a diversity of uses and people. The key issue is that the public realm needs to remain an open and democratic common good of transformative character and not one that is generic and stable.

Public space agendas must therefore ensure that processes are collaborative, inclusive of all actors, and strongly embedded in sustainable stewardship and a profound understanding of what urban commons and public goods really mean for the city. At the same time, to those in power, public space can be viewed as a threat, posing the risk of temporary or permanent loss of order. This is because public spaces serve as arenas for equity, diversity, and justice where marginalized groups are availed an opportunity to make themselves heard and even protest against injustice in a democratic forum (Parkinson, 2012). For the citizenry, public spaces can

serve as the primary vehicle for change when other approaches prove to be ineffective. The 'January 25 Revolution' that unfolded in Tahrir Square, Cairo in 2011 speaks to the political dynamism surrounding a public space agenda (figure 4). Thus, the struggle for the city and public space will always remain especially in light of the constant threats of neo-liberal consumerist agendas.

Figure 4. Protests in Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt



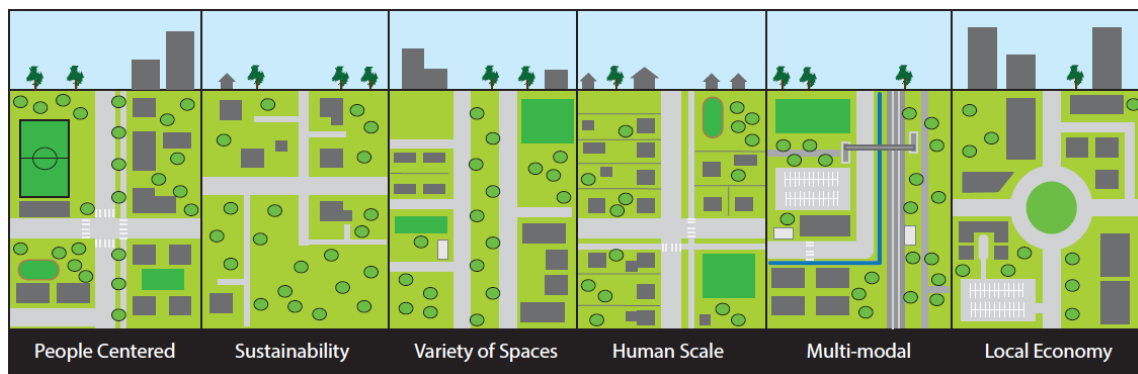
Source. Mohamed Azazy (2012), Creative Commons

MOVING FORWARD: A PUBLIC SPACE ROADMAP FOR LIVABLE CITIES

Over the past two decades, cities have gained relevance in all areas of environmental, social, cultural and economic discourse. The most thriving and livable cities as well as sustainable ones in the future will be those that encapsulate the public realm and the people who utilize these places in a vibrant, connected and dynamic way. Despite the numerous successful examples, the need for public spaces has not been given the attention that it deserves, especially in the cities of the global south. In general, public space is often overlooked and underestimated by policy makers, leaders, planners, architects and real-estate developers. That being said, the New Urban Agenda that arose out of Habitat III and the Sustainable Development Goal 11 will be the largest initiatives directed towards creating more livable cities; offering improved quality of life for its

citizens. Although, these global processes demonstrate the political will to leverage public space as a tool for making more sustainable and livable cities, the details of what such an agenda should look like have largely been neglected. The following overview provides some insight as to the necessary elements needed to generate a public space agenda capable of promoting livability and improved quality of life in cities. These represent the findings of a four year initiative titled *'The Future of Places'* aimed at elevating the importance of a public space agenda in various global policy arenas. Figure 5 below illustrates a selection of key findings from this study.

Figure 5. Selected Key Messages on Public Space from the Future of Places Project



Source: Diagram designed by authors

Firstly, as an arena for public use and social interaction, public spaces are regularly developed, managed and maintained by municipal governments, often creating a situation where other stakeholders are left out of the discussion. By adopting a *people-centered approach to urban planning*, local governments increase their potential to effectively establish a shared commitment, creating further opportunities for localized planning and maintenance of public space.

Secondly, a public space agenda is strengthened by incorporating principles of *social, economic and environmental sustainability*. Social sustainability requires security, equity and justice; economic sustainability benefits from affordable capital and operating budgets; environmental sustainability addresses ecological and health issues. Additional attention to culture and heritage will help to ensure that public space is made unique through cultural and contextual elements that complement and enrich identity. Such an approach promotes a diversity of public space typologies.

Third, in many places around the world, there has been a reduction of urban public space, a lack of clear boundaries between the public and private spheres and diminished freedom of expression and movement. This is because the market alone does not always provide a diverse range of public and private spaces. Therefore, a more nuanced approach that provides a *variety of open places*, including semi-public and semi-private space is needed. A diversity of public spaces helps to reinforce the idea that the city is there to serve a wide array of its citizens, and that it is not reserved for a select few.

Fourth, all *public space needs to be of a human scale* and respond to a variety of functions and patterns of use based on an understanding of human behavior, health, needs, sensibilities and aspirations. In doing so, it should serve vulnerable members of the population, including elderly, disabled, youth, and low income groups, to ensure their physical, social and political inclusion in the allocation and design of public spaces. Public space thus has a responsibility to be flexible and open enough to serve a variety of users and uses, ranging from informal to formal settlements.

Fifth, streets should serve as *multimodal networks* of social and economic exchange, forming the urban framework of interconnected public space. Walkability, social interaction, multimodal mobility and accessibility should be supported by a fine-grained block and street network lined with buildings providing amenities and services with a mix of uses and sizes. A holistic, evidence-based approach to the city is necessary with attention focused not only on the space itself, but its form, function and connectivity.

Sixth, investing in public space can have powerful social, economic, cultural and health benefits. If people are committed to their future in a specific place, they invest more time and capital in that place, which has a positive impact on the *local economy* and creates a virtuous cycle of economic growth. Public space stimulates the small scale, local and informal economy, as well as generates tax revenue for municipal budgets. Innovative tools such as land value capture can help to ensure that investment in public space offers an economically sustainable approach to city-building.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The common denominator that gives cities its decisive prowess is its ability to concentrate people; this is because the convenience of proximity benefits all, allowing the city to thrive by bringing people and ideas together. However, if gone unmanaged, cities can lose out to the ‘demons of density’, paradoxically giving rise to negative consequences of urban concentration (Glaeser, 2011). The advent of rapid globalization and rapid urban growth has initiated a process of urban transformation, posing new challenges for planning and managing cities. As cities grow,

the lack of infrastructure, open spaces, and public amenities begin to undermine the wellbeing of its inhabitants. Thus, as new cities and conurbations emerge globally, and older ones grow or decay in urban prosperity or urban blight, it is imperative that we be thoughtful in planning and designing their futures. The cities that will do best in the future will be those that capsulize the public realm and the people who utilize these places. This is because public spaces have the potential to systematically support a complex agenda of livability and sociability, economic prosperity, community cohesion and overall sustainability for cities. The inclusion of public space in the *New Urban Agenda* and the *Sustainable Development Goals* is a welcomed shift towards improving quality of life in cities. In doing so, it encourages urban planners and decision makers to shifts away from the natural tendency of viewing the city as an assemblage of urban infrastructure, to instead focusing on building integrated and holistic cities that deliver the experiences and interactions desired by its citizenry. However, success will not be achieved on its own. As elements of the New Urban Agenda are cemented into urban plans, strategies and frameworks around the globe, it will take bold leadership from elected officials and the public to realize the true value of public space as a tool capable of defining the image of the city. Cities, both in the north and south, have fallen short in dealing with the most burning problems of our society and also recent critical transformations in the becoming: those of mass and hyper immigrations, financial crisis, breakdown of the traditional industries, globalization and more. They simply cannot fall short or fail on the public space agenda. Those cities currently experiencing rapid urban growth, therefore need to be thoughtful in how they deal with public assets and amenities; those that do not plan ahead, will find the public realm under serious threat. There is thus a need to encourage national and local governments to establish legislation, policies, norms, and best practices that enable a public space agenda to thrive, and thus promote a holistic and integrated approach to planning and designing cities (Andersson, 2016). Unlike other infrastructure, public spaces afford a human element to the city; offering an opportunity for residents to improve their health, prosperity, quality of life, and overall to enrich their social relations and cultural understanding. Although key decisions have already been taken in the policy arenas of 2015 and 2016, the future of cities is still in the hands of the stakeholders that comprise them. Any attempt to establish a public space agenda that does not place the citizens at the center of it will face severe constraints in their attempt to build livable cities.

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