TRUE URBANISM

Public Places
for Community,
Democratic Dialogue,
Health & Equity

54th IMCL Conference
Santa Fe, NM, October 2-6, 2017

Suzanne H. Crowhurst Lennard, Ph.D.(Arch.)
Co-founder, Director, IMCL Conference
Mission:

The purpose of the Making Cities Livable movement is to enhance the well-being of all inhabitants, strengthen community, improve social and physical health, and increase civic engagement by sustainably reshaping the built environment of our cities, suburbs, towns and villages.

The IMCL Principles of True Urbanism were formulated in 2004 for presentation at the 40th IMCL Conference, held at the University of Notre Dame Center, London, June 13-17, 2004. They summarize the values promoted by IMCL since its inception in 1985, and presented in previous publications, such as Livable Cities Observed (1995).
INTRODUCTION

In this Conference, we will focus on public places – streets, squares, and green places in our cities and suburbs - and all the questions we must ask ourselves about how do we ensure these places:

• support social networks and the development of community, involving people of all ages and socio-economic status
• facilitate everyday political dialogue and democratic engagement, stimulating peaceful discussion among strangers
• promote social equity by being open and accessible to all, with no discrimination according to appearance, economic, religious, or ethnic status
• support contact with nature on an everyday basis
• support a healthy, active lifestyle

At this conference, we shall be looking at Barcelona’s visionary model for taking back their grid plan of car-dominated streets and transforming them into “Superblocks” of traffic-calmed streets with neighborhood squares at their intersections. Barcelona will be receiving the 2017 “IMCL City of Vision Award” for this magnificent project.

Sometimes it seems so obvious that this is the way our cities should be shaped that we wonder why we have let so many of our cities become unsafe, inhospitable, unhealthy, and inequitable.

The reason is that we are fighting against a powerful adversary.

In city-making, there are two competing value systems at work.

The first is based on GDP. In this model, the city is seen as an economic engine, and its function is to fuel growth and raise standard of living.

The second is based on the value of the Quality of Life. In this model, the function of the city is the “care and culture” (Lewis Mumford) of human being and of the earth.
The GDP Goal:
Since the early 20th century the GDP model has governed the way cities have developed around the world. Today, in our hyper-capitalist era, it has run seriously out of control. Success is measured by economic growth. The fastest way to grow the economy is through construction. Maximizing construction is therefore thought to be the solution for success.

Horizontal Sprawl
Based on the drive to increase GDP, in North America, Australia and other parts of the world we saw vast expanses of horizontal sprawl in the 20th century. The negative side effects were noticeable from the beginning: social isolation and depression of those left “home alone” (first housewives, then children); destruction of social networks and civic engagement (Putnam); unwalkability leading to obesity and related illnesses; over-dependence on the automobile and consumption of fossil fuels; over-consumption of manufactured goods and “planned obsolescence”; etc.

Vertical Sprawl
Today, suburban sprawl is recognized as unecological and unhealthy. However, the construction industry is innovative. To satisfy the huge demand for growth and profits the industry now focuses on an even more insidious form of over-development – “vertical sprawl”, as Patrick Condon calls it, that has taken hold of cities around the world – including Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. This may prove even more toxic to humans and the planet than horizontal sprawl.

The China Syndrome
China adopted the capitalist GDP model as the way to rapidly increase standard of living and national wealth. To maximize economic growth, China built over 100 tall and dense uninhabited “ghost” cities. In the process, they discovered that rapid growth threatens the ecology and public health. Their life-threatening smog is only one side effect of their breakneck economic growth, – but paradoxically, this too can be counted on to increase GDP1.

High-rise is not affordable
Hong Kong, is rapidly becoming unlivable2. Moreover, massive construction of high-rise does not make housing more affordable. In fact it does the opposite. Since 2008

---

1 Increased population ill-health increases the medical and pharma industry’s economic growth and profits
2 “For some, living in a flat in this city [Hong Kong] might not be much better than living in a cage. The average living area per capita of Hong Kong’s subdivided flats is only 47.8 square feet, with rent costing around 40% of its household income.”  
Hong Kong has had the LEAST affordable housing in the world. Prices rose 134% between 2008-2013.

As we have observed elsewhere, the extraordinarily rapid increase of global wealth at the top of the economic heap creates investors who seek “safe deposit boxes in the sky” – condos where they do not intend to live, merely a safe place to store their wealth. Kotkin has noted that the most expensive cities have the highest buildings.

Being inherently more expensive to construct, high-rise is most suitable for luxury condos. The vast profits obtainable from high-rise inflate adjacent land prices, squeezing out affordable housing, and increasing inequality. At a Vancouver, BC, conference, Sandy Garossino described how the purchase of high-rise condos as foreign investments drove up the cost of housing for all, making it unaffordable for lower income groups, especially in downtown Vancouver and Coal Harbour. In some Vancouver investment condo buildings, 75% of the units are absentee owners. This jeopardizes the economic viability of businesses dependent on a local residential population, further risking the neighborhood’s livability.

**Increasing polarization**
The phenomenal profits made by developers of these high-rise "condo-investment-banks" rapidly jack up the price of adjacent land. Future developers are then eager to

---

3 “The city’s apartments cost 18.1 times gross annual median income in the third quarter of 2016.”

4 As Jonathan J. Miller of the real estate appraisal firm Miller Samuel explained in the *New York Times* on November 4th, 2013, “We’re building the equivalent of bank safe deposit boxes in the sky that buyers can put all their valuables in and rarely visit.” Nancy Packes, a real estate consultant and marketing executive airily stated in the *New York Times* on October 16th, 2013, “Price really has no relevance . . . High net worth individuals look at real estate today not as a place to live, but as an investment . . . It’s more stable than currency, bonds or stocks.” In the same article, Jonathan Miller asserted, “Height is where the profit is . . . The higher you go, the higher the price you can get.” In Manhattan, 30% to 40% of all condo buyers are now estimated to be foreigners.

5 “Almost without exception, then, the most expensive areas are precisely those that have the most high-rise buildings: New York, San Francisco, Seattle and Miami. More to the point, these buildings don’t tend to be occupied by middle-class, much less working-class, families. And in many cases, these units are not people’s actual homes; in New York, as many as 60% of new luxury units are not primary residences, leaving many unoccupied at any given time.”

6 “...development of a building of more than five stories requires rents approximately two and a half times those from the development of garden apartments.”

7 In the high-rise condo waterfront area of Coal Harbour, Vancouver, BC, up to one in four condos is empty, according to UBC planning professor Andrew Yan. In downtown, there are so many empty condos that if you put them all together, they would make up 35 towers, each 20 stories high.
build to similar heights to achieve similar profits, encouraging destruction of historic fabric and driving out affordable housing\(^\text{10}\).

On October 16, 2013, in the *New York Times*, cultural historian at New York University Thomas Bender decried these towers as “a flouting of the social distribution of wealth around the world. ‘These are the kinds of buildings that robber barons built . . . but it’s also what you see in rapidly developing societies where billionaires seek to distinguish themselves in the midst of poverty.’” Increasingly unequal wealth distribution is likely to cause a "precipitous collapse"\(^\text{11}\) of the global industrial civilization, according to a NASA-funded study, a collapse that cannot be avoided by increasing technological efficiency. Even the World Bank President, Jim Yong Kim, warned that a failure to tackle inequality risked huge social unrest\(^\text{12}\).

Luxury condo investors are not investing in the life of the host city. They are unlikely to use these places, but their investments diminish quality of life for city residents. Their buildings throw the street into darkness and may cast a half-mile shadow across adjacent public.

As Pope Francis observes in his Encyclical: “56. In the meantime, economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.”\(^\text{13}\)

With this type of construction, profit is privatized, loss is socialized. There is a complete economic imbalance – an overinvestment in private property, and underinvestment in the public realm – the streets, squares, and green places in the city - that should belong to EVERYONE, and that represent the “common wealth”.

We have seen these unbalanced planning priorities at work for a long time, leading to streets that are inhospitable for the pedestrian, unwalkable and unbikeable. Thanks to the work of Dick Jackson and his colleagues, we know this has helped lead to the world-wide disaster of obesity and chronic diseases such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, type-2 diabetes, sleep apnea, asthma and liver disease. The wealthy

\(^\text{10}\) According to the *New York Times* on May 19th, 2013, “The growth in high-end projects in Manhattan comes as housing for the working and middle class is in increasingly short supply in the city. These buildings are proving so profitable that they are warping the local real-estate market . . . As a result, the luxury building trend is driving up the overall cost of land in the city . . . As with many of these buildings, only about a quarter of the units will be occupied at any one time.”

\(^\text{11}\) \url{http://www.theguardian.com/environment/earth-insight/2014/mar/14/nasa-civilisation-irreversible-collapse-study-scientists}

\(^\text{12}\) \url{http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/apr/03/climate-change-battle-food-head-world-bank}

\(^\text{13}\) \url{http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html}
oil-rich countries have followed these planning priorities. The United Arab Emirates, being totally auto-dependent, now has an obesity rate double the world average.

This emphasis on privacy over community has struck hard at children who have a developmental need to grow up living an active life within a thriving community. As a result, children suffer unprecedented levels of loneliness, depression, shyness, and they fail to develop good social skills. Bullying and violence are also the result of poor social skills. (But all these problems increase the GDP!)

It has long been known that high-rise creates more social isolation. While this may be welcome to some adults engaged in a high-stress, or socially fulfilling professional field (such as those in the stock market or entertainment world), for others, such as elders, small children, teenagers, and mothers raising small children, studies show high-rise living can be extremely damaging to physical and mental health\(^{14}\). Teenagers growing up in high-rises have an especially difficult time. The teenager’s chief developmental task is to learn social skills in the larger community – but high-rises do not provide a suitable environment for developing these skills.

In Tokyo, there are high levels of hikikomori – these are young people from teenagers to young adults, predominantly male, who shut themselves in their bedroom, refuse to go to school, and demand that their parents leave meals for them outside the door. There are an estimated 700,000 hikikomori in Japan, and 1.55 million more on the verge of becoming hikikomori. According to studies by Wong et al\(^{15}\), Hong Kong is following the same path, currently with an estimated 18,500 hikikomori.

**Europe**

Most European cities have protected their public realm inherited from a more democratic age, but values are changing even there. London is following Hong Kong and Dubai. As of March 2017, 455 high rises are planned\(^{16}\). Most will be luxury investment condos for foreign investors who will leave the buildings empty – doing nothing to ease the problems of ordinary Londoners who face soaring rents and house prices.

---


Instant cities?
In China, the Far East and the Middle East an even more deadly phenomenon is proliferating at an alarming rate – instant cities designed and built by global firms and corporations, then reproduced in widely divergent cultural settings. Such is the New Chengdo in China, for half a million inhabitants.

While promoted as “sustainably designed” the primary goal seems to be economic – to colonize an area, boost national economy and attract foreign investments. To Michelle Provoost who has studied these cities, the “eco-city” label appears to be largely “greenwashing”. The “public realm” in these corporately developed cities will be owned and controlled by the corporation and thus privatized, not public space.

The health of society lies in the degree to which community exists, or at least the degree to which people interact with each other in the public realm. The health of the built urban fabric lies in the degree to which buildings relate to each other, speak a common language, and facilitate communication between people inside the building and those in the public realm.

For city-makers like us, then, the KEY to undoing these ills is to focus on the public realm – the “common good” – the places that connect us, and the way buildings relate to the public realm. It is the public realm that gives all of us QUALITY OF LIFE.

Adherence to the GDP model has led us into a process that Pope Francis calls “rapidification”. We are following the fastest route to increasing profits (for developers and bankers) and, in so doing, we are making our cities unhealthy, inequitable, unlivable and unsustainable.

There are major flaws in the GDP system. Fifty years ago, Lyndon Johnson criticized unbridled growth, which he declared led to soulless wealth. “He elucidated a new dream valuing quality of life above quantity of stuff”. And Bobby Kennedy said of...

17 Designed by Adrian Smith and Gordon Gill Architects
18 See Michelle Provoost’s Strelka talk at https://vimeo.com/64392842
19 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html P. 15
20 “Worst of all, expansion is eroding the precious and time-honored values of community with neighbors and communion with nature. The loss of these values breeds loneliness and boredom and indifference… The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents … It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.” President Lyndon Johnson, May 22, 1964 to graduates at the University of Michigan.
the GDP\textsuperscript{22}: “it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”\textsuperscript{23}

We do not have to slavishly follow the GDP model. Today, there are many efforts around the world to develop an alternate index of success, an index that will reevaluate the costs – to human health and well-being, and to the health and sustainability of the planet – created by the GDP model, and that will guide a wiser municipal, national and global decision-making process. The economist Hazel Henderson led this effort with her Quality of Life Indicators\textsuperscript{24}. Another indicator is the GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator)\textsuperscript{25}. Others include the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW)\textsuperscript{26}; the World Wildlife Fund’s Living Planet Index (LPI)\textsuperscript{27}; and London’s Happy Planet Index (HPI)\textsuperscript{28}; as well as Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Index\textsuperscript{29}. IMCL also developed Quality of Life Indicators.

**IMCL Quality of Life Indicators:**
IMCL states that the goal of the city is to increase quality of life, which is not measured by an economic scale but by health, happiness, and sustainability.

This value system is characterized by Mumford’s dictum that the best economy of cities is the “care and culture” of human beings. In this view, the primary function of a city is to increase health and well-being, to civilize and humanize inhabitants. The development of each person to his or her fullest potential is given high priority. Providing a context in which attitudes of compassion and mutual responsibility can

\textsuperscript{22} Then called Gross National Product (GNP)
\textsuperscript{23} “Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product, now, is over $800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross National Product - if we judge the United States of America by that - that Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.” Robert Kennedy, University of Kansas, March 18, 1968
\textsuperscript{24} [http://ethicalmarketsqualityoflife.com/current-issues/](http://ethicalmarketsqualityoflife.com/current-issues/)
\textsuperscript{25} [http://genuineprogress.net](http://genuineprogress.net)
\textsuperscript{27} [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_Planet_Index](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Living_Planet_Index)
\textsuperscript{28} [http://www.happyplanetindex.org](http://www.happyplanetindex.org)
\textsuperscript{29} [http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com](http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com)
flourish is understood to be the city’s highest task. The well-being of some at the expense of others is not acceptable. The wisdom of cities, in this view, is the understanding of how health and well-being are affected by the built environment. This view is founded in philosophers of the human condition; it is expressed in the work of Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs, and others; and it forms the foundation for the International Making Cities Livable movement.

IMCL pays special attention to children because the environment children grow up in affects all aspects of their development, and can damage their physical and emotional health for the rest of their life. We propose that if we consider how all our city-making decisions affect children, we shall begin to create healthy, sustainable cities for all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GDP</th>
<th>Quality of Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Goal: Increase economic growth</td>
<td>• Goal: Increase quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus: Construction industry</td>
<td>• Focus: Health &amp; well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• emphasizes cities as economic machines</td>
<td>• emphasizes humanizing and civilizing functions of cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• stresses enterprise, independence and privacy</td>
<td>• stresses trust, compassion, mutual responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• favors most productive groups: neglects those less productive</td>
<td>• values wisdom; the understanding of the city as a “system”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• accepts suffering &amp; marginality as the price for progress</td>
<td>• does not accept suffering as a price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• costs of ill health, crime &amp; social problems are economically valued</td>
<td>• human processes are valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• segregates functions &amp; persons</td>
<td>• stresses mixed use: heterogeneity of population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• regulation of well being is by technology</td>
<td>• expresses hospitality and accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• high rate of crime, drug &amp; alcohol use</td>
<td>• regulation of well being is by people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• charges a fee for good experiences</td>
<td>• low rate of crime, drug &amp; alcohol use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• emphasizes experiences that are free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IMCL Principles of TRUE URBANISM

Since 1985 IMCL has proposed a holistic vision for improving health and quality of life by reshaping the built environment. As Loel Solomon from Kaiser Permanente says: “We need to create the conditions of health... This will involve changes in the way the city is being built that will affect generations.” Under Obama, the US had a national urban policy agenda that promoted Healthy Communities, and that recognizes that “How a community is designed – including the layout of its roads, buildings and parks– has a huge impact on the health of its residents.”

IMCL’s interdependent 4-part strategy is called the PRINCIPLES OF TRUE URBANISM.

1. Facilitate COMMUNITY SOCIAL LIFE
2. Facilitate CONTACT WITH NATURE
3. Facilitate INDEPENDENT MOBILITY
4. Create a HOSPITABLE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Each of these principles depends on a well designed and hospitable public realm.

1. FACILITATE COMMUNITY SOCIAL LIFE

Key to achieving a high quality of life for all is the way we treat the public realm. The most essential task is to make it possible for people to come together, form friendships and face-to-face social networks, and develop social capital and community. Public places, streets and squares facilitate these social interactions.

Social immune system
Social health is the foundation for physical health. The quality and quantity of social interaction and sense of belonging strongly influence both physical and mental health. We all need companionship, and frequent face-to-face interaction with a wide circle of people who acknowledge us as human beings, share interests, and include us as a “member”. These circles of friends and familiares form a “social immune system” to buffer stress, improve coping, and protect health. Integration in

a social network produces positive psychological states\textsuperscript{31}. Social circles “maintain, protect, promote and restore health”\textsuperscript{32} Researchers in the Netherlands concerned with negative health effects of decrease in social contacts have called for “a more developed and detailed governmental policy to promote community”\textsuperscript{33}.

**Public Realm**

We all need to be able to participate in a vibrant social life in public, but this cannot exist without a strong community and hospitable public spaces. A vibrant public realm encourages all to linger, share observations and perspectives, and get to know each other. It is essential in developing community and civic engagement, and thus contributes to a more democratic way of life. As Martin Buber emphasized: “… architects must be set the task of also building for human contact, building surroundings that invite meeting and centers that shape meeting.”\textsuperscript{34}

**Social functions of public places**

- Preventing social isolation
- Teaching social skills
- Building trust
- Cultural exchange
- Information exchange
- Social networks
- Community
- Equality
- Political dialogue

It is essential that the public realm include everyone – babies, toddlers, teens, youths, adults and older people. It must involve people from all walks of life and sociocultural backgrounds, integrating children into the complete community and building social support for elders and those less fortunate. Interaction in public builds community and social capital. It cements relations through repeated contact among inhabitants in multiple overlapping role relationships, thus strengthening the social fabric. As Lewis Mumford said, the public realm is the “ultimate expression of life in


\textsuperscript{32} Nestmann, Frank and Hurrelmann, Klaus. (1994) Social Networks and Social Support in Childhood and Adolescence. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.

\textsuperscript{33} De Vos, Henk. (2003) Geld en 'de rest': Over uitzwerming, teloorgang van gemeenschap en de noodzaak van gemeenschapsbeleid [Money and 'the rest': About sprawl, decline of community and the necessity of community policy] Sociologische gids 50, 3 285-311

\textsuperscript{34} Buber, Martin (1967). A Believing Humanism. P. 95
the city”, and according to Aristotle, is a fundamental requirement for citizens’ well-being.

**Sociability**

It is also in a well-functioning public realm that the art of social interaction – sociability\(^{35}\) – can develop. This is the playful, cordial style of interaction among a democracy of equals; a way of interacting that increases the well-being and social skills of all, and unites individuals.

**Main city squares**

Main squares at the city center can provide reasons for residents from all over the city – and visitors – to come together and to enjoy social interaction, the ambience of a market, concert or festival, and identify with their city. The main city square can be a catalyst for civic engagement. It is in the square or agora that we become aware of shared experiences, common causes, and actions that we can take as “the people” to voice our opinions, and together effect change, right wrongs, and improve our world.

**The neighborhood square - the community's living room**

A small neighborhood square or marketplace is the most important element of a healthy neighborhood – and yet this is lacking in American cities. The neighborhood square should be beautiful, lively, surrounded by buildings housing some of the main commercial and civic activities, a multi-functional space where markets and festivals take place, where cafes, shops, restaurants, cultural and religious activities spill out onto the square from adjacent buildings.

On a square, people’s lives overlap, social interaction takes place while people shop or go about their daily lives. This can be the most powerful resource for developing social networks, friendships and community. For social and individual health and well-being we desperately need traffic-free neighborhood squares - centrally located neighborhood places easily accessible by foot - that provide multiple destinations for varied errands and opportunities for all in the community to get to know others.

Social contact in the public realm is especially important for elders. Going shopping with friends, playing chess, or meeting a friend on the square provide essential social interaction to maintain a sense of being valued by others.

Children need to grow up “within a web of sustained adult relationships”, says Peter Benson36. At its best, the public realm is an incomparable teacher of social skills and attitudes. The baby is introduced to members of the community, and the toddler learns how to address strangers as an equal, even before he learns how to speak. Social skills learned early shape a person’s ability to maintain health and well-being throughout life, and strengthen resilience.

**Location and human scale architectural frame**
A square will not function unless it is located at the heart of the neighborhood, at the crossing point of pedestrian routes, allowing everyone to mix and mingle. It must be partially surrounded by a compact, human scale, mixed-use urban fabric of shops and businesses, with people living over the shops, providing eyes on the street.

**Attractions: Cafes, restaurants and food shops**
Everything to do with food - farmers markets, specialty food shops and shops with fresh local produce attract people. Outdoor cafes and restaurants make the public space safe and hospitable, even into the night. While parents and grandparents talk, children can safely play nearby. Cafes allow people to spend more time in public, facilitating meetings and extended conversations late into the evening. This is especially valuable for elders. To fulfill this socializing function, cafes require traffic free public places where conversation is not drowned out by traffic noise.

**Hospitality**
A square must be hospitable – providing formal and informal seating that allows people to sit together and talk, or sit alone, in the sun or shade, with trees for shade and flowers, and lighting at night.

**Beloved features**
There must be special features that are beloved by the community – these might be a water feature for the children, a sculpture group that tells a story about the neighborhood, or even beautiful signs for local businesses.

Water and art works are anchors in the public realm, drawing people together, offering pleasure, information, and a topic for conversation among strangers. Children play while adults sit nearby. Fountains are rejuvenating, refreshing, and calming.

---

Sense of place
There must be a strong sense of place, conveyed by one outstanding building on the square, a sense of enclosure as you cross the threshold into the square, and a special treatment of the paving.

Celebrations and festivities
The public realm must be a fun place for people of all ages, the site of celebrations and community festivities that appeal to every age. True festivals create joy and well-being, promote identity, pride, and community. They bind young and old together, and have a positive effect on health. It is especially important for community members themselves – especially children – to play important roles, dress in costume, and perform. Participation and collaboration build a sense of belonging. Eating and drinking together bind the community together and build well-being.

And then there are the grand displays to celebrate a major event – such as Canada’s 150th anniversary – where in Ottawa a 3-day battle between a giant dragon and spider pulled hundreds of thousands of spectators.

2. FACILITATE CONTACT WITH NATURE

There are so many reasons why we need contact with nature in our cities:

Air quality
Vegetation can remove up to 60% of particulates to clean the air, so we need green streets37.

Neighborhood trees
People living in neighborhoods with trees both feel, and are healthier38, and babies are more likely to be born full size

Tree and forest effects on air quality and human health in the United States
Donovan, 2011
Parks and green areas
Parks and green areas support physical activity and development of balance and coordination

Play in nature
Play in nature encourages more social play\textsuperscript{39}, reduced ADHD\textsuperscript{40}, and improves concentration\textsuperscript{41}.

Contact with nature
Contact with nature expands sensory faculties and cognitive capacity\textsuperscript{42}, teaches responsibility and nurturing skills\textsuperscript{43}, and instills biophilia – love of nature\textsuperscript{44}.

Nature heals
Hundreds of European spa towns demonstrate that being in nature helps the healing process. Many hospitals have created healing gardens to help their patients recover.

Emotional health
Being in nature protects emotional well-being in young and old\textsuperscript{45}, and promotes emotional resilience\textsuperscript{46}.

Pedestrian routes in nature
Adults and children should have traffic-free commuter routes through natural ribbons throughout the city, to walk to school and to commute to work. It is more

\textsuperscript{40}Faber T. A (2001) “Coping with ADD: The Surprising Connection to Green Play Settings.” Environment and Behavior. 22
important that green places are easily accessible – even if they are small green areas – than to have large parks that are inaccessible.

**Restore urban waterways**
We must restore urban waterways and make them accessible routes for pedestrians.

**Nature everywhere**
We need nature everywhere in the city – in courtyards and tiny back yards, on balconies and roof gardens, growing up the walls and across the street. Nature provides habitat for wild life, which also enhances our experience of the city.

**Green facades**
We need green facades to make the street environment more healthy and hospitable, to support biodiversity, and save energy. We also need green facades to hide ugly buildings, and to remediate heat loss and gain from modern architecture's glass curtain walls.

**Community gardens and farmers markets**
We need more community gardens so that community members – especially children - can be in nature, working together to grown healthy fresh food. These are particularly valuable in food deserts and poor underserved neighborhoods, not only because they help to provide essential healthy nutrition, but also because they help to build community networks, collaborative efforts and a neighborhood “voice”.

We also need more farmers markets, especially in poor neighborhoods, to ensure access to fresh, locally grown food, and to offer the sociable ambience that a farmers market brings.

3. **FACILITATE INDEPENDENT MOBILITY**

**Balanced Transportation Planning**
A healthy, balanced transportation policy must place first priority on walking, second on biking, third on public transit, and lastly on the car. Taking the trips made by children, elders, the poor and disabled as seriously as trips made by working adults helps to prioritize healthy, ecological transit modes.

Balanced transportation planning is not about movement of vehicles but about people, and how we get around. The transportation planner must accommodate the varied trips that we all need to make – to school, work, shopping, the library or
theater; and make all trips as pleasant, economical, healthy, safe, comfortable, simple and autonomous as possible. The day is past when transportation planning is simply planning for the car.

This policy requires re-shaping suburban areas to human scale so that destinations (school, shops, restaurants, cafes, workplaces, community services and public transit) are within a ten or twenty-minute walking and biking radius.

We all need exercise everyday, and the best exercise is walking. Children, elders and the disabled are safest on pedestrian routes that are completely traffic free, if only for certain hours of the day. These range from paths through parks and along rivers, to a network of pedestrian streets through the suburb and to the city center. The pedestrian network must be frequented by familiar adults, and be adjacent to buildings that provide “eyes on the street”.

**Free range kids**

Children need to be able to walk to school and around their neighborhood, play out of doors and meet friends and community members. They need free range within a safe territory to develop independence and spatial skills. They need to learn to orient themselves, identify landmarks, gauge distances and create mental maps. Kids, especially 10-14 year olds, need adventure and independent exploration of their neighborhood, whether by skate boarding, rollerskating, or on foot. Any traffic on these streets must be at 20mph or walking speed to make these activities safe.

**Pedestrian networks**

It is not enough to have just one or two traffic-free streets – they need to be interlinked in a complete network, especially in the city center. The question is not so much how far are people willing to walk, as how interesting are the pedestrian ways, and how likely is one to run into friends or familiar.

Pedestrian streets are accessible for vehicles, with restrictions: emergency vehicles have access when necessary; delivery vehicles are permitted at specific times when pedestrian activity is low; speed is limited to walking speed; some pedestrian streets permit public transit – buses, streetcars or light rail.

**Living Streets – “Wohnstrasse”**

Traffic calmed streets (Wohnstrasse, designated by the international blue sign) are easy to install all over the city. Pedestrians and vehicles have equal rights to the full width of the street. Children may play in the street. Vehicles must proceed at walking
speed. They cannot use the street for through traffic, and parking is permitted only for delivery and residents.

**Play streets**
Play streets are a – usually temporary – mechanism for transforming a street into a pedestrian-oriented street. They are valuable as a first step to accommodate children’s outdoor play, and to more permanent solutions such as Wohnstrasse and pedestrian streets.

**Quality of street play**
Research shows that when children have the choice between playing on the street where they live or on a playground they prefer the street; they spend more time and are more physically active, and their play is more sociable. Evidently, this indicates we need to make neighborhood streets safer for children.

**Pedestrian niches**
What really makes streets safe is the presence of people on the streets, particularly familiars, and community members who may frequent shops, sidewalk cafes and restaurants. Niches between the building and sidewalk, between the sidewalk and road that invite people to linger – stoops, sidewalk cafes, and parklets – make the street safer.

**Traffic Calming, roundabouts**
Traffic limits the lives of children far more than the lives of adults. If a car traveling at 30 mph hits a child, the child’s chance of survival is only 50%. If the car is traveling at 18 mph the chance of survival increases to 90%. Pedestrian and bike related accidents are the leading cause of accidental deaths for children. Suburban traffic calmed streets need wide sidewalks (at least 6’) buffered with a tree-planted verge, plantings, or rainwater gardens, and safe crossings achieved through raised crosswalks and necking, roundabouts, and jogged traffic lanes.

**Traffic calming arterials**
Throughout the city and suburbs, we need to redesign arterials to give the pedestrian priority on a continuous pedestrian network, and slow the automobile to accommodate the pedestrian.

**Promoting biking for young and old**
We are not going to be able to increase bike ridership unless we make bicycle networks that are really safe for young and old. Children depend on the bike to
explore further afield. Their increasing independence is essential to develop self-confidence. The bike provides a healthy transportation mode for people of all ages, for those who cannot afford a car, and even for very small children.

**Bicycle Networks**

Bicycle lanes need to be buffered from moving or parked motorized vehicles by a 3’ painted buffer strip AND a kerb or planters\(^\text{47}\). Seattle, Long Beach and Indianapolis are now leading the way in the US in protected cycle tracks.

At the very least, bike routes need to be clearly painted. The greatest care must be shown at the intersections. This can be done by bringing bikes into a “bike box” in front of motorized vehicles. Dangers from right-turning vehicles can be minimized by bike lanes that are painted red.

We need a city-wide network of bike paths that extend through suburban neighborhoods, as you find in Freiburg, Germany, and as is developing in Portland, Minneapolis, and other N. American cities, so that it is possible to bike from a home in the suburb to work or school, shop in the city center, deliver goods inexpensively, or ride into the countryside at the weekend.

**Public Transportation**

Transit used by everyone – rich and poor, old and young – is democratic and socially healthy. It also builds community. Those who regularly travel at the same time begin to recognize each other and develop a dialogue. Rather than bussing kids to school, a better solution is to improve public transit. For parents to be comfortable with their children taking transit, parents themselves must use it to get to work, or go shopping.

4. **A HOSPITABLE BUILT ENVIRONMENT** that frames social life

**Continuous, human scale, urban fabric**

Strong and diverse social life, and commercial diversity flourish best within a compact, human scale, mixed-use urban fabric. Contiguous buildings form continuous walls enclosing streets and creating squares. When many errands and trips can be accomplished by foot within a small radius, community networks develop. A compact urban fabric makes viable a good transit system.

To create a safe and human scale public realm, buildings must be no higher than five stories, the height at which it is still possible to identify a face at the top window or call down to a child in the street. Windows and doors, balconies and terraces give a building human scale. This creates public places where parents are comfortable letting their children roam.

At this scale the city can remain affordable because developers cannot construct luxury high-rise investment condos.

**City of short distances - Complete Communities**

Living in a complete community strengthens health and well-being, especially for the most vulnerable among us. With familiar people on the street, children have the freedom they need to develop, and elders and those with disabilities have a supportive social network when needed. A complete community requires houses, apartments, schools, workplaces and shops, and a range of resources - natural play areas, library, shops, movie theater, etc. within a compact 20 minute walking radius. This is achieved in a city with a cellular structure of walkable suburbs and urban villages. At the center of each is a public place that brings the community together; the boundary of each neighborhood may be visually defined by parks and natural features accessible and within walking distance for all.

Lewis Mumford called for us to plan cellular cities, where the neighborhood is a microcosm of the multi-functional core, containing diverse work opportunities, shopping, housing, and all necessary social and cultural infrastructure within a short radius. This goal is called in Europe the “City of Short Distances”, in England the “Urban Villages” approach, and in the US – “Complete Communities”, or “Ten-Minute Neighborhoods”. Le Plessis Robinson, a garden suburb recently transformed into a small town on the outskirts of Paris, is a Complete Community.

**Mixed Use, Mixed Income**

A healthy, walkable lifestyle is dependent on the close proximity of living and working, shops, services, social and cultural resources. The primary building block for this form of mixed use is a shop, workshop or restaurant at street level, with offices and dwellings above. Commercial activity at street level draws life onto the street, and generates a business population with daytime jurisdiction. Apartments above provide, in Jane Jacobs’ words, “eyes on the street”, nighttime jurisdiction, and a residential population to form a community, and make the street safe. The proximity of the private and public realms makes the public realm dynamic and hospitable, and the private dwelling convenient. This makes a city not only socially
healthy, but also ecologically sound. As they walk around their neighborhood, children become recognized by shopkeepers, and they begin to recognize familiar adults. For elders, going shopping is an opportunity for social interaction and serendipitous meetings.

If we are to retain our humanity, it is important NOT to segregate the wealthy and the poor. Gated compounds and luxury high-rise condos exacerbate distrust and resentment. We need neighborhoods with mixed incomes, and housing that can accommodate a variety of income levels. Buildings can happily combine larger condos with views, with rentable apartments with several bedrooms for families, and studios for young singles (as does Tanner Place in Portland’s Pearl District).

If not always in the same building, it is nevertheless important that wealthy and poor live in the same neighborhood. Next to Tanner Place is an apartment building of low cost housing, indistinguishable from surrounding market rate housing.

In the traditional city, each merchant’s house was a complete integrated social system: the wealthy merchant owned the building and lived with his family in the high-ceilinged “piano nobile”. The ground floor was the business, often with a low-ceilinged office for staff immediately above. On the top floor, all those who worked for the merchant had their home.

**Shop/Houses: Shops, services and restaurants in walking distance**
The shop/house forms the key building block of every pre-twentieth century village and town in North America and around the world. In the last century, this building type was despised. Only recently, have architects rediscovered the advantages of this type of vertical mixed use, and are learning how to do it again. Paris’ 6-story urban fabric supports a higher density than New York’s skyscrapers.

**Active street level facades**
The street level façade must emphasize interaction between interior and exterior with shop windows, businesses that open to the street, and inviting facades. Interesting details and textures, especially at ground floor, enliven the walking experience and stimulate curiosity.

**Permeable upper facades**
A high percentage of upper floors need to be residential, with windows that open, and balconies to encourage “eyes on the street” and interaction between residents and
those on the street. This makes even visitors aware that the street “belongs to” a community.

**Neighborhood squares**

Each neighborhood in the city needs to be structures around a central square that everyone in the community can use

**An urban fabric that integrates nature**

A healthy continuous urban fabric is not all raw concrete and glass. As much as possible, materials that are closer to nature and warmer to the touch (wood, stone, plaster, tile, brick) should be used, and nature should be encouraged to flourish across streets, up the walls, to pour out of balconies, and across roofs, making the city green and comfortable.

**The City as a Work of Art**

Beauty is important to everyone but perhaps, as Mayor Joseph Riley emphasizes, especially to the disadvantaged. The enjoyment of beauty may be transformed in the body into “endorphins” that increase mental and physical well-being. This healing effect of a beautiful environment has been understood for millennia. Decoration, color and interesting rooftop line engage the eye and the emotion, creating remembered landmarks that help people to find their way around.

The principles of beauty – harmony in diversity, proportion, fit and evidence of balanced growth – are prescriptions for how to live harmoniously in a community.

**The city’s DNA**

A healthy city embraces its own unique identity that grew from its historic roots, and builds on its best-loved features. This identity of place allows the most diverse population to feel they have something in common they can all take pride in – a shared identity.

In order to fit into the context, new buildings must respect this “genetic code”, reflecting at least some existing patterns, or interpreting them in a contemporary idiom. Appropriate new infill buildings respect their neighbors and create a civil architectural dialogue, echoing some of the best characteristics of adjacent buildings.

---

48 A central element of the health treatment at European spa towns such as Montecatini and Baden Baden is strolling in beautiful architecture and in contact with nature.

This mutual support from building to building illustrates a principle of relating that subtly influences human interaction.

Public places: key to community, health, and equity
Above all, we need beautiful places, squares designed specifically for social life, as hospitable settings that invite everyone, that support children's play while elders talk, young people flirt, people go shopping; places that residents feel is the most beautiful place on earth because that is where they meet friends, remember community festivals, where they are recognized and valued; places that epitomize all the most beautiful characteristics of their city and their community.

TO CONCLUDE
As I said at the beginning, if we want to make our cities healthy and livable for all, we must first make them healthy for the more vulnerable – children, elders, the disabled and the poor. If our neighborhoods, towns and cities do not sustain them, they are not sustainable. A city built on these principles of true urbanism provides the ideal environment for children’s physical, mental and social development, and generates communities that are healthy, ecologically sustainable, and socially sustainable for all.