The social life of cities

Stories about urban innovation

This collection of essays is part of the Social Life of Cities, a global program of practical, local innovation exploring the relationship between digital technology and urban development in creating socially sustainable, thriving, and resilient communities. It is a collaboration between Social Life, Cisco Consulting Services in the UK, USA and Australia, The Young Foundation, the University of Chicago, McCaffery Interests in Chicago, and the City of Malmö in Sweden. Our aim is to develop, prototype and test new tools and approaches that support city leaders, urban planners, and community organisations to think differently about creating and shaping thriving and sustainable places.

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Foreword by Simon Willis

When Michael Young set up the Institute of Community Studies, the organisation that became The Young Foundation, one of his motivations was a frustration with the failure of post war city planners, particularly in London, to take account of the growing body of work by sociologists and anthropologists that described the detail of how people actually live, with clear messages for those who plan and design cities. He was particularly interested in the ways various extended families and overlapping communities provided settings in which people were able to be resilient, to support each other and to flourish. His hunch that policy-making had become detached from the reality of the lives of those it was meant to be helping turned out to be true. It was on that basis that he advocated an approach rooted in deep ethnography that would lead to the ability to create new institutions, policies and companies.

The challenges he identified in the 50s have only become more acute. The rising inequality he foresaw now looks virtually unstoppable in many places. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the urban areas where most of us now live. Cities are under extreme stress and our institutions and services are often shown to be unfit for purpose. The need to respond to lived experience, to the multitude of different ways that people and communities live, work, enjoy and shape urban areas becomes ever more pressing. We need to listen closely and to understand but more than that we need to learn how to redesign our urban environments together with the people who will use them.

This wonderful collection of essays, originally published on Urban Times, turns many of the assumptions of policy makers, think-tanks, urbanists tech companies and city planners upside down. Instead of describing big, systematic, expensive, interventionist strategies for future cities, they look at the micro, the ordinary, at how people are responding to change and shaping their environments through myriad small interventions that are consonant with the fabric of the communities they are embedded in.

I believe that by understanding the ultra local, iterative co-design approach and by looking at these stories from 10 cities, we can learn a lot about how cities might flourish in the future. Urban life can be thrilling, exciting, full of opportunity, but it can also be lonely, atomizing, alienating, gruelling and filled with despair and isolation. We need to find ways that urban life can support individuals and communities to take advantage of the potential of cities, and become more resilient to the setbacks life throws at most of us from time to time. We need to learn greater respect for our interdependence to innovate in ways that counteract the systemic inequalities that many complex systems tend towards. By looking at urban life in places as diverse as Nakuru in Kenya, to Mumbai in India, Malmö in Sweden, Chicago and Sydney, we can observe what urban innovation really means, and what it can achieve, and understand how we can participate in new ways to make our cities flourish and thrive.

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Introduction

City streets: Urban innovation on a human scale

What is it like to live in a particular city if you are six or 60, a teacher or a taxi driver, a new arrival or a long-term resident, unemployed or homeless? What can the everyday rhythms of a place reveal about how urban communities function and what supports or disrupts local life? How can understanding community dynamics and the history of a place shed light on why one neighbourhood struggles and another thrives? These are the questions that don't make it into policy debates about cities and their future. Yet they are exactly the kinds of questions that prompt new ways of thinking about the challenges that cities face because they reveal many of the tensions and difficulties of urban living: the loneliness and isolation that many people feel; the different experiences of the city that people in the same tower block, street or neighbourhood can encounter on a daily basis; the uneven distribution of power, resources and public services throughout cities; or how contemporary urban development is shaped by economic and political decisions made decades ago.

For years urban policy and strategy has been dominated by thinking about the physical city: landmark architecture, transport, housing, urban development, and increasingly the technological infrastructure to create smarter, more productive, and greener cities. Clearly social issues like health, education, employment and public safety matter to city leaders but policy and public services deal with people in the abstract rather than the particular, which is why so often, plans diverge from reality in unpredictable and unintended ways. The social life of cities, in particular the ordinary, the small-scale and mundane aspects of urban life, are commonly overlooked as a source of insight and inspiration for city planners and decision-makers.

Looking at the everyday life of city streets and neighbourhoods provides a perspective on cities, social change and the radical variety of urban life, that is dramatically different to thinking about the city as an intelligent network or transport system with predefined ideas about how people will behave. Studying a high street, a neighbourhood park, or a local café can reveal much about the health and resilience of a community, uncovering what ideas like local, global or belonging mean in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual cities, as revealed by Suzanne Hall's research about south London's Walworth Road or Martha Radice's work on streets in Montreal. And, how focusing on lived experience in a particular place can teach us much about understanding the larger forces and changes at work in cities.

This is why the Social Life of Cities Collaborative – launched in 2012 by Cisco, Social Life and the Young Foundation - is exploring how a focus on people, streets and local needs can generate new thinking about cities and social innovation. Through research, practical projects and dialogues with communities, city and public agencies in different cities, we are looking at new, small-scale and citizen-led approaches to innovation from around the world, and are developing

new models and approaches to thinking about cities, placemaking and the role for digital technologies in supporting urban social life.

This collection of essays offers "street views" on urban innovation from cities around the world. We have invited people involved in social innovation projects in Mumbai, Buenos Aires, Seoul City, Medellín, Sydney, Chicago, Athens, and other places, to share their stories. The essays cover a wide range of problems but also opportunities: from educating street children in India to supporting Kenyan social entrepreneurs. The authors come from a wide range of backgrounds: some are at the frontline running projects, some work in NGOs and public agencies, others are researchers investigating urban change, but what brings these essays together is a shared focus on creative responses to tackling social needs that are about understanding the challenges of real places and real lives.

The articles offer dramatically different perspectives on urban life and urban development that illustrate clearly how any attempt to think about cities as anything other than fluid, ever-changing, and shaped by their own specific social and historical forces will surely fail.

Saffron Woodcraft and Nicola Bacon
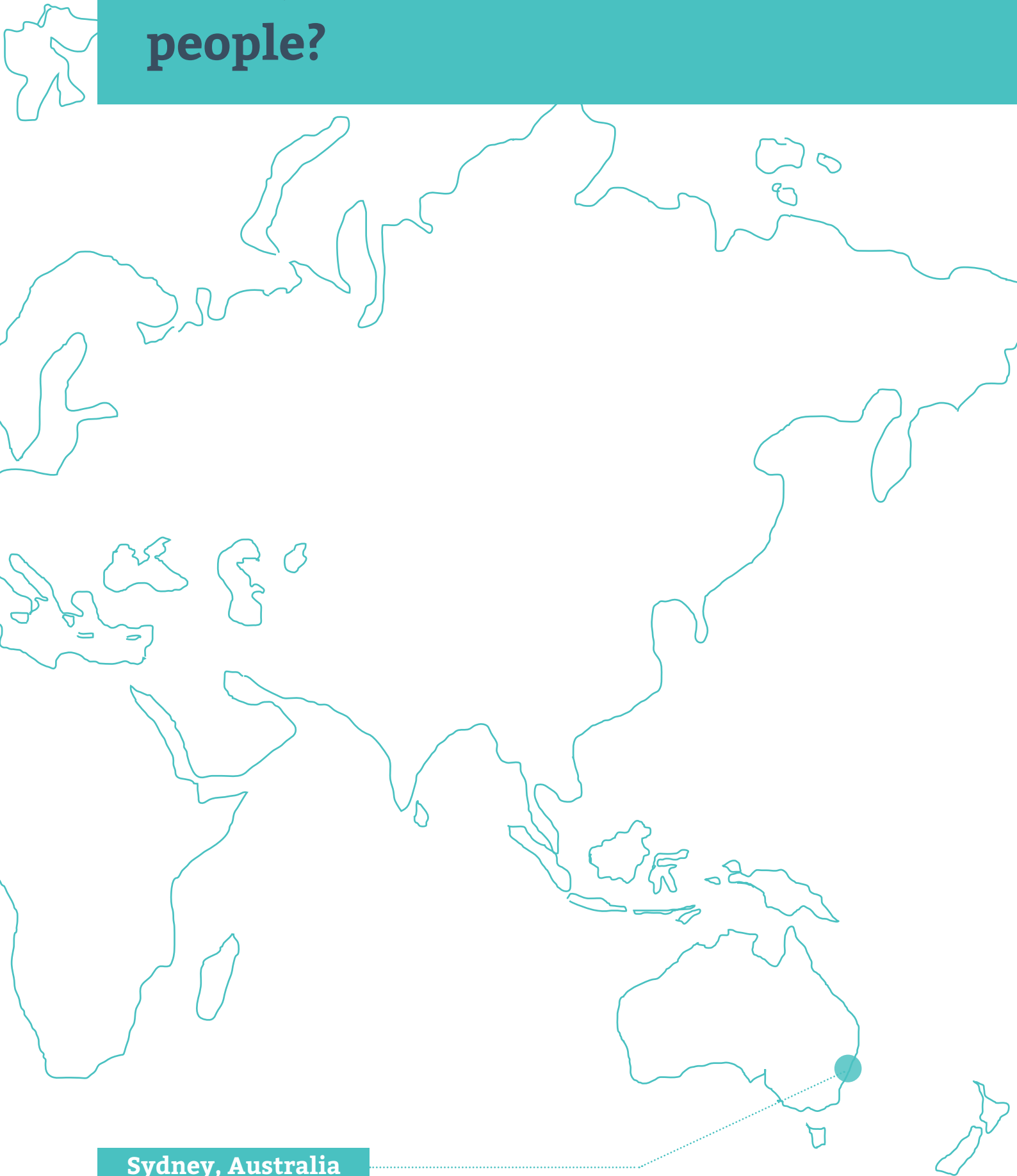*Founding Directors*
Social Life

[1] Street festival in Barcelona

Chapter 1:
Understanding the social city

1. Yes, but where are all the people?

Sydney, Australia

[2] Sydney

Yes, but where are all the people?

A couple of years ago, I was in the audience at a conference in Shanghai on urban innovation at which Geoff Mulgan spoke. Geoff was then the Director of social innovation incubator *The Young Foundation* and has since taken up the role of CEO of the UK's National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts or *NESTA*.

Geoff gave a great presentation in the course of which he posed a blunt and slightly awkward question. In all of the expositions of the art and practice of contemporary urban design and innovation, there seemed often to be something missing, a gap best summed up by the question "where are all the people?" Visions and strategies and diagrams and glossy PowerPoint presentations painted more or less alluring pictures of the urban future we might inherit, but few seemed capable of wrapping themselves around a more mundane, but more compelling vision about the way people actually lived, or wanted to live. Where, indeed, were all the people?

Even though we know that cities are all about the people who live in them, it's surprising that so much of the conversation about urban innovation and urban sustainability struggles to engage the human dimension. Why is it that the social life of cities, which most of us would accept intuitively is the foundation for all of the other lives that cities offer, seems often to struggle for recognition and attention?

I live in Sydney and work in the Asia-Pacific region primarily. That means I spend a fair bit of time in some of the world's great cities – Shanghai, New Delhi, Sydney, Melbourne, Singapore, Brisbane, Hong Kong. What I sense is city leaders, urban planners, architects and designers - not to mention people and communities themselves - all struggling to come to terms with the human dimension of city design and living. And that struggle has become more interesting under the often disruptive influence of technology.

New modes of connectedness have amplified and accelerated disruptive ways to find information, connect to each other, organise, debate and argue, shop, bank, travel and entertain ourselves. And those new modes also afford us intriguing new opportunities to contribute to the process of decision-making that determines the priorities we pursue and the way we invest money, time and effort to make those priorities happen. We tend to experience all of that as an unsettling sense that the world has become faster, more complex, and harder to understand or control.

But the same technologies of communication and collaboration that make life faster, more densely connected and apparently more complex turn out to be part of the solution.

In Sydney, there are some good examples of ways in which technology is being factored into different strategies for innovation, urban

renewal and community engagement. And almost invariably, technology blends with "office" activities to widen the mix and variety of voices and values that infuse the conversations about the social life of Sydney.

For example, the City of Sydney Council is encouraging the revitalisation of Oxford Street, one of the inner city's most important retail and cultural spaces, by providing cheap and flexible leasing arrangements for new "creative and cultural" tenants to use former offices and shops. The initiative has led to a "positive buzz" in the lower reaches of Oxford Street from Hyde Park to Taylor Square.

When the City developed its night time economy strategy under the *Open Sydney* banner it consulted with over 10,000 people using a combination of traditional consultation and newer online tools. The initiative was a powerful experiment in new ways to make effective conversations with the city more central to the policy making process.

One of the outcomes was the launch of Sydney's new *"food trucks app"* which gives people real time information about the location of the proliferating fleet of gourmet food trucks across the city.

Sydney and other Councils (for example Randwick in Sydney's eastern suburbs) are experimenting with new "apps" that make it easier for citizens to comment on, or get information about, things like development applications and other council projects. These trials of new digital engagement tools are part of a growing interest in using social media, and an *"app" model,* to forge more direct links between councils and citizens. Clearly, these experiments are going to open up new conversations about the capacity for technology to afford greater clarity, transparency and immediacy in the citizen-council interactions which are at the core of effective governance.

This focus on the city's social life, in its broadest sense, fuses with a similarly growing interest in how the city nurtures an instinct, as well as new places and practices, for social innovation. These are often

[3] Artists gallery in Platform 72

manifest in the fate of small and experimental start-up ventures which are trying to find better ways to crack entrenched and complex social problems. Not only are these challenges central to the quality of life and the character of places in which people live and work, they are also unlocking new economic opportunities and markets, including in areas like health care, aged and home care, education and household services.

Sydney is already home to significant activity in the social innovation space and many new organisations and movements are leading the way. For example:

- *Flashpoint Labs* creates spaces for young people to play around with cameras and develop a love for photography. They empower young people to become creative learners, thinkers and professionals through photography.

- *Start Some Good* encourages people from around the world to become social innovators. They've taken the crowdfunding model - which is growing in popularity world-wide - and customised it to reflect the unique needs of social entrepreneurs.

- *Open Shed* is part of a growing collaborative consumption movement animated by the simple question "why buy when you can share?".

- In a very different space, *South of the Border* creates experiences in Sydney's suburbs that are not traditionally associated with tourism. Half-day walking tours will incorporate key elements of local history: workshops with local artisans, interactions with grassroots culture, chances to hear stories from local community organisations.

- And *We Are Ultra*, which started as a blog about sustainable design, - future minded good-looking design - engaged people frustrated with the lack of innovation and who now create sustainability minded products and experiences, with a focus on ethical fashion.

In different ways, these and similar initiatives in cities around the Asia-Pacific region are exploring the intersection of urban design, technology design and social design. These initiatives are experimenting with new ways to engage the human potential of technology to create opportunities for a sense of identity, economic resilience, a more open, transparent and accountable form of government, and social inclusion across often diverse communities reaching for new levels of coherence, safety and opportunity.

In a recent visit to Brisbane, I met Keiran O'Hea, the city's new Chief Digital Officer (and, as far as I know, only the second city CDO after Rachel Sterne in New York). Clearly, Brisbane as Australia's self-styled "new world city", with its face turned firmly and ambitiously north towards Asia, is embracing the digital dimension not so much as an add-on feature to its economic, social and sustainability agenda, but in many ways as the platform on which people, place and technology combine to do things differently and to get things done.

[4] Sydney Food Trucks App

All the evidence I see is that, over the next few years, the social life of cities will steadily rise as a big priority for leaders, innovators and investors. This is not just because the social dimension of city innovation and urban sustainability has been somewhat neglected. It will also reinforce that, as urban writers, thinkers and practitioners like Saskia Sassen explain, getting the social life of cities right in all of its dimensions - culture, community and creativity - is the inescapable prerequisite to achieving the other big economic and environmental objectives they want to achieve.

[5] South of the border: Let's get social! through the Redfern walking experiences

Author

Martin Stewart-Weeks

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2. African cities: the experience of the 21st century city

Nakuru, Kenya

[6] Nakuru

African cities: the experience of the 21st century city

Conventional approaches to understanding cities have tended to start from the experience of the global North: Chicago, New York, London, Los Angeles, Paris, Berlin. But contemporary urbanism is a phenomenon of the global South. The experience of African cities is the experience of the 21st century city. In this context Nakuru, Kenya, provides an interesting example of modernity in practice, defining what urban living is all about.

The World Resources Institute estimates that 90 per cent of growth in urban populations will take place in developing countries over the coming years, and despite currently having the lowest proportion of continental urbanisation, Africa is expected to have the largest increase of any region. There has been a swell of recent work attempting to understand how this vast expansion will be played out in practice.

Over the last 18 months I have been running Balloon Kenya, a development project based in Nakuru, now the third largest urban settlement in Kenya and recently recognised as Africa's fastest growing city by UN-Habitat. It is in this rapidly changing environment that we have been supporting groups of unemployed young people to imagine, design and launch new businesses. Our work has centred on the economic empowerment of dislocated and under-represented groups through innovation and enterprise, working with local partners to provide the training, financial support and on-going guidance necessary to create and sustain locally managed ventures.

In Kenya around 65 percent of people under 35 are unemployed. Communities across the country are struggling to develop opportunities for young people to contribute in constructive ways. Equipping these young people with the tools to start their own businesses challenges this trend, providing them with a tangible and lasting stake in society, and the capacity to redefine their position in local networks - as responsible and productive citizens rather than idle dependents. So far we have worked with around 350 budding Kenyan entrepreneurs and supported the creation of 20 start-ups. Building on this success, in 2013 we are planning to increase our capacity three-fold.

As a social-urbanist at heart, I've spent a lot of time reflecting on how living and working in Kenya has affected my understanding of what it means to talk about urban development.

A lot of my work in the UK has focused on how policy-makers, architects and house builders can adapt their practices to make new places that support cohesive, engaged and just communities. So, what do we have to learn from Nakuru?

I have had the pleasure of working alongside a number of very tight knit and inspiring civic groups driven by a shared responsibility towards those most in need. In a country without the infrastructure or welfare system to provide adequate care for some of its most vulnerable citizens, local people are forced to build informal structures of support. For example, community fundraising events to pay medical bills or local lobby groups to represent minority interests in public life.

It is a culture of activism out of necessity. Successive generations take on responsibility for the wellbeing of those who are forced to rely on external sources of support, and the relationships that fall out of this process serve to reinforce shared identities.

This self-help mentality has also played a big part in the continued expansion of the co-operative movement in Kenya. We work with a particularly impressive group called Hope and Vision, and their story provides an inspirational example of how the mutual exchange of resources can empower those who are excluded from established networks of support.

Refused loans by local banks and micro-finance institutions, the six founding members registered a co-operative in 2003 and started contributing 1000KSh per month - roughly £7 - into a centrally managed fund. As the total size of this fund increased, the group were able to offer unsecured loans based purely on trust.

Ten years on, the co-operative has now provided more than £50,000 of credit to its 106 members (the repayment rate is over 97%), and was recently named Best Youth Co-operative in Kenya by the Ministry of Co-operative Development. Once again, the motivation for coming together is co-reliance. Member's needs were not catered for by existing options, and so they joined forces to design and implement their own solution.

[7] Main road in Nakuru

But cities are not just spaces of productive social interaction. If one of the sources of their vitality is the ability to bring together people from different backgrounds and absorb them into shared activities -learning to live together- then it is also important to recognise how fragile such settlements can be.

In Nakuru this was reflected in the violence associated with the national elections in 2007. The city became the site across which tensions associated with inequality, disadvantage and tribal divisions were played out in destructive ways. Buildings were burnt out, businesses were destroyed, and long established communities were torn apart. An estimated 1300 people died in violent scenes across Kenya, and 600,000 lost their homes.

It is truly remarkable to see how quickly Nakuru has recovered on the back of such devastation. Relationships between battling groups have been repaired and local people are optimistic about the city's future. This is not to suggest that all of the problems fuelling 2007's clashes have been solved. Instead, Nakuru's inhabitants seem determined to find a better way to challenge the injustices that continue to hold them back - as a community defined by unity and shared interests rather than difference.

This new mind-set was reflected in the elections that took place earlier in 2013. Despite difficulties with the new electronic voting system, and a subsequent legal challenge by defeated presidential candidate Raila Odinga, the streets of Nakuru remained safe. There has already been a surge in construction across the city since the peaceful result. Let's hope this next influx of residents can learn from the communal spirit that continues to support Nakuru's development.

[8] Balloon Kenya working with the locals

Author

Douglas Cochrane

Douglas is the co-founder and Chief Operating Officer of Balloon Kenya, a social venture that supports unemployed young people from the UK and Kenya to start micro-enterprises that create jobs and improve community wellbeing. Douglas is also an Associate at Social Life.
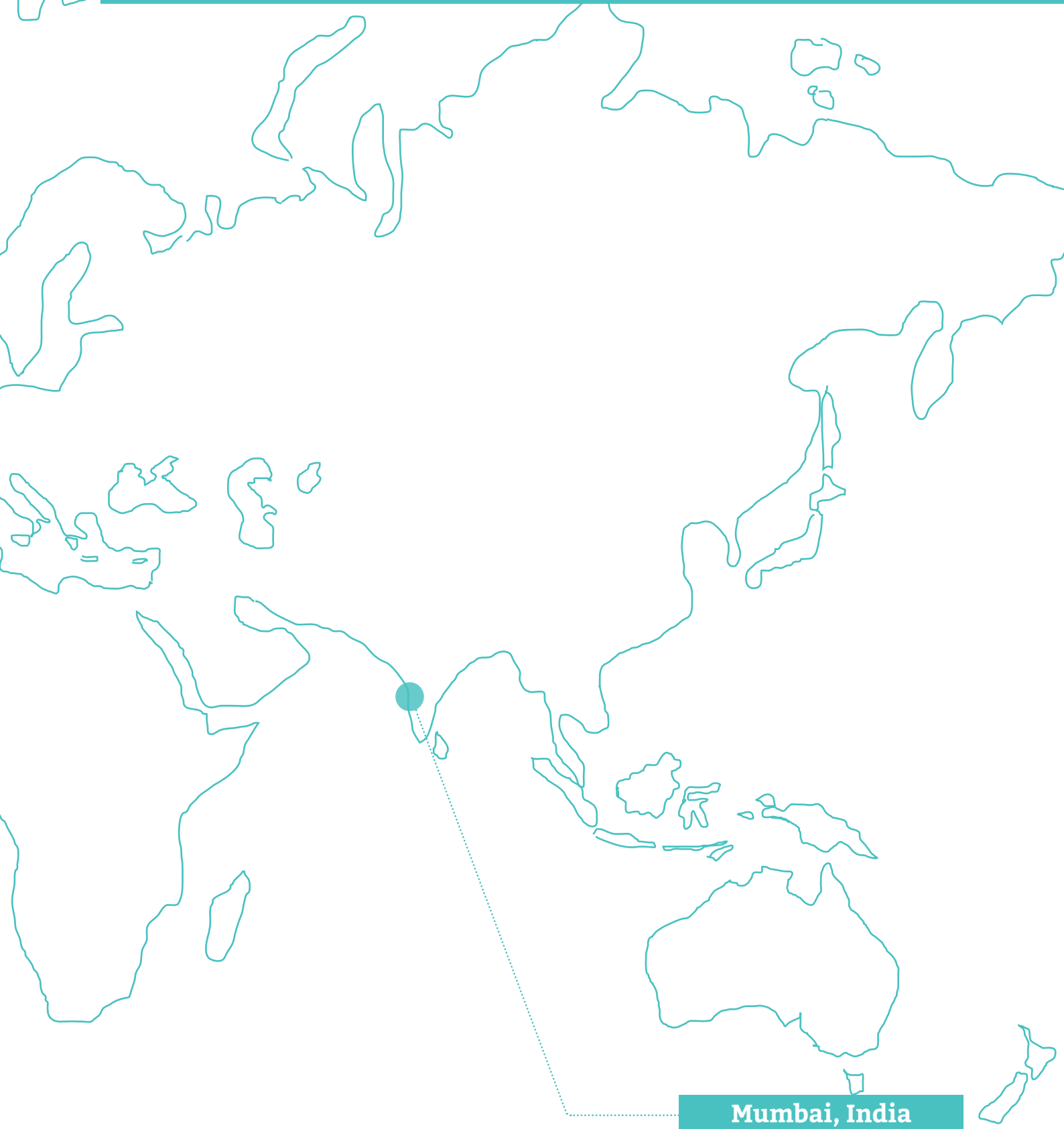
Chapter 2:
Neighbourhood perspectives

3. An Open Courtyard in the Maximum City

Mumbai, India

[9] Mumbai

An Open Courtyard in The Maximum City

"I will play with clay." The words are written carefully in a tiny hand. In another notebook, the most recent entry reads: "Today I will make a puzzle." These are personal plans, written by eight- and nine-year old children at the start of the school day. On the day I visit Muktangan, an innovative educational model serving marginalised children in seven Mumbai schools, I observe a class of 40 students putting these plans into action: writing stories, putting on performances, and even mapping multiplication equations on the floor with chalk and plastic tokens. The children are responsible, self-directed, confident and engaged. Later, they will review and reflect on their creative time, closing the circle of the "Plan-Do-Review" cycle that is at the heart of Muktangan's way of working. It is also at the heart of what makes this project so unusual, and so promising, especially in Mumbai.

Muktangan's model, and innovative education programmes like it, could be the beginning of a change in India's education system, which has so far not kept up with the country's rapid urbanisation and attending economic growth. I visit the programme to understand what makes the model so special, and so promising for a city like Mumbai with such high potential, and such significant problems.

To get to Globe Mill Passage School, I cross the city in one of the 100,000 cabs that choke its streets. The sound of honking is intense, as is the sun shining through the window. There are people everywhere: in cabs, in buses, sleeping on the sidewalk, zooming by on scooters.

It's difficult to get a firm estimate of the population of Mumbai, but most believe it is about 20 million. This is not just a mega-city, it is the "Maximum City" – an apt moniker for this metropolis so rich in hyperbole. The richest city in South, West or Central Asia with per-capita GDP of three times the national average. The home of glitzy, larger-than-life Bollywood. A city of many 'slumdogs' (about 60% of its population lives in slums), and no small number of millionaires, exemplified by Bollygarch Mukesh Ambani, with his $1bn, 27-storey personal home.

With annual population growth of roughly 3%, most of it due to migration, Mumbai is typical of India's rapid urbanisation. The 2011 census indicated that 30% of India is urban, but many believe the figure is closer to 50%. As a country urbanises, national productivity and prosperity typically increase, and cities could produce more than 70% of GDP across India.[1] The country is also in a lucky period known as "demographic dividend," a transitional phase of economic growth in which dependency on public welfare declines and productivity of the young working population increases.

This should all be good news, but government policy hasn't caught up to these important realities. Many programmes are focused on rural development, but far fewer address urban poverty. "Policy-makers'

view of India is that it is hot, dusty and rural," Mumbai journalist Aparna Piramal Raje tells me. "Yes, it's hot and dusty," she says, "but it's an urban shantytown somewhere."

This lack of effective urban policy is perhaps most noteworthy, and most troubling, in education. India is not producing enough qualified graduates to drive skilled jobs in its cities. In the OECD's 2009 PISA tests, which assess reading, maths and science, India ranked 72nd of 73 participating countries. Despite high rates of enrolment, learning in India is often disempowering and by rote, with highly competitive exams favoring wealthy children whose families can afford tutoring. The teacher's role is often simply to police a too-large classroom, which brews frustration and apathy. This, among other factors, drives teacher absenteeism of 25% or more.[2] Moreover, higher education isn't growing fast enough to deliver economic growth; The Parthenon Group found that at current rates of capacity growth India will have more college-uneducated adults in 2020 than it does today.[3] But perhaps most worryingly, children graduate without having learned the non-cognitive skills – collaboration, creative problem solving, resilience – that are so integral to life chances.[4] If trends continue, Parthenon warns, India could see its valuable "demographic dividend" turn into a "demographic deficit".[5]

Seasoned educator Elizabeth Mehta, founder of Muktangan, saw the need for change: "I had learnt that education for the majority was didactic and teacher-centred, with the child not taken into account". Mehta, a UK native who moved to India more than 40 years ago, founded the first Muktangan school in 2003 with seven teachers teaching just 90 students. They set out to create a different kind of school, one that was sustainable, inclusive of children with disabilities, child-centred, and English-medium, offering quality education to children in poor communities – those most likely to be left behind in India's rapid urban growth. Muktangan means "open courtyard" emphasising the free, safe space the programme creates for children. The schools are municipal schools, occupying a floor of a typical school building but running as an alternative track.

[10] Muktangan Library in one of the schools of Mumbai

Muktangan schools follow the government syllabus, but they function as distinct operational and pedagogical entities. The programme is an experiment, a whole-school solution intended to prove that a high-quality, English-medium education is replicable, sustainable and scalable within government constraints and for the wider sector.

While initially envisioned as a pre-school, Muktangan was so popular among parents that they asked it to add more grade levels. "They said," Mehta recounts, "the children are so confident. They cry on the weekend because they are not going to school". Later, the government asked it to expand to an additional six schools. Muktangan now reaches 2,400 children across seven schools. UNICEF has decided to spread the model further, training 10,000 teachers across the state of Maharashtra in the Muktangan method.

The "Muktangan method" is constructivist, a pedagogical style that contextualises learning in a child's own experience and discovery, moving from the immediate and concrete to the abstract and theoretical. There is a strong focus on nurturing a child's agency and latent talents – for example in the Plan-Do-Review activities, which allow children to direct their own time. Teachers are trained in how to adjust to each child's preferred pace and learning style. Rehka Ananda Tadake, a Muktangan faculty member, emphasised the method's benefits: "It helps them develop their creativity, thinking power, their interest. The teachers recognise and nurture their special talents. Then they can plan for their future. They can hope".

All Muktangan teachers are from low-income communities and are trained to become classroom teachers. They now number over 350 individuals and most are women. The teachers hail from the same neighbourhoods as the pupils they teach, in contrast to most teachers in municipal schools, which means they share the same community context as the children. Their learning is also constructivist, focused on empowering them as facilitators in the classroom. As a sign of how vital teacher training is to the programme, more than 80% of Muktangan's budget is spent on teacher education and faculty for both pre- and in-service training. Teachers' status often goes up in the community and they become more empowered in other areas of their lives. "I have grown so much with Muktangan" one said.

Muktangan also innovates in operations and design. In Muktangan classrooms, pupil-teacher ratio drops from the Mumbai average of 45-1 to just 12-1, with three teachers managing a single classroom of students split into groups. Each group has its own blackboard, cluster of desks, and resources. The furniture is light and portable, so the room can be cleared quickly for activities and play. The walls are colorfully painted and decorated with features that allow the children to "imbibe and absorb" key lessons, as Sasha Chettri, Muktangan Resources team member, tells me. For example, in a 3rd standard classroom I visit, cards reading "North, South, East, West" are taped to the relevant walls. Also, because space is at a premium, Chettri points out that the school finds ways to use it creatively: satchels line up in neat rows on a shelf outside the classroom; the floor doubles as a chalkboard.

[11] Children in Muktangan school

Muktangan's objective remains to continue to prove that this sort of holistic, high-quality, English-medium education is viable for all of Mumbai's schools. When I ask what's next for the programme in that journey, Mehta tells me that Muktangan is considering adopting another cluster of schools, this time in a rural area. Next year's SSCs - 10th standard exams for Muktangan's first class of graduating students - will prove to be an important measure of its effectiveness. The staff are quietly confident, and Mehta notes that recent test results for the Marathi language were "astounding". But Michael Cutts, who is part of the Programme Faculty, underlines a more important outcome: "Academically, we expect they'll do well. But socially and emotionally, they have already done well. Success for us is a child who has developed holistically and is resilient, as well as being a collaborative and creative critical thinker".

If any type of education outcome can drive positive change and economic growth in India's fast-growing, rapidly changing cities, it could be this one.

[1] McKinsey Global Institute, India's urban awakening: Building inclusive cities, sustaining economic growth, 2010
[2] World Bank, Missing in Action, 2006
[3] The Parthenon Group, Private Universities in India – an Investment in National Development, 2012
[4] Paul Tough, How Children Succeed, 2012
[5] Karan Khemka, Demographic Dividend or Deficit?, The Times of India, 20 June 2011

[12] The founders of Paragon Charitable Trust enjoying various activities with the children

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4. Losing the Plot in Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires, Argentina

[13] Lone House in Belgrano, Buenos Aires

Losing the Plot in Buenos Aires

The un-detached house in this photograph belongs to Gustavo D. It is located in Caballito - a traditional middle-class neighbourhood that sits at the geographical and cultural heart of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It was built at the turn of the 20th century by his grandfather who, like many skilled Europeans, migrated from Genoa in Italy. Gustavo's grandfather bought an affordable plot of land and built his family a home within the emerging urban blocks that formed Caballito. The house is basic inside but the façade that proudly greets the street could be mistaken for a mediaeval castle.

Until recently, this neighbourhood still had the social and cultural qualities of early twentieth century Buenos Aires. Now with the destruction of the old urban fabric, these homes - the petrified memories of Genoa, Naples, Odessa and Paris - have all but disappeared in many neighbourhoods.

It was in 2005 when Gustavo's home came under threat of demolition. Like many other houses, his had become the target of the "rotten tooth effect" whereby all the adjacent houses had been demolished and replaced with towers, leaving his alone in the shadows of its vast concrete neighbours. But the concerns of local residents like Gustavo go beyond their own back yards. They argue that market forces have become the dominant player in the planning and development of investment-worthy neighbourhoods in Buenos Aires, creating places that meet the short-term demands for capital rather than the long-term needs of residents for a liveable city.

The city's original grid plan played an important role in shaping the cultural identity and wellbeing of neighbourhoods like Gustavo's. Like most other cities in Latin America, the city grid was a legacy of Spanish colonisation during the 17th century. During the early 1900s the grid was extended and strongly influenced by cities and ideas from Europe.

Twentieth century Buenos Aires was designed in a way that reinforced Argentina's political vision for a European-style "open city" - promoting integration, modernisation, growth and egalitarian citizenship. This model has been the solution to periods of rapid expansion, connecting emerging neighbourhoods like Caballito to the centre of the city and also enabling them to thrive in their own right. The allocation of narrow plots of land in rows along the block created successful residential street layouts where people felt safe and knew their neighbours. What is more, the street plan was set up in such a way that it could adapt over time to changing cultures, family structures and transport needs.

From the urban grid, to the neighbourhood block, to the street plots, everything was uniform but at the same time unique, with each household tailored to meet the needs, and express the aspirations, of its residents. Some housed a single wealthy family, while others were

[14] House of Gustavo D. in Caballito

made into tenements, or "conventillos", where multiple families lived in separate rooms, connected by a shared internal street or patio.

As the historian James Scobie explains, "the barrio [neighbourhood] and the cuadra [block] provided the common denominator of urban life" for the aspiring middle class.[6] It facilitated the consolidation of self-sustaining communities with all essential amenities within walking distance from people's homes. The Spanish term used to describe a neighbourhood is "barrio", derived from the Arabic "barri" meaning "outside". The Spanish colonisers originally used this term to describe habitations outside the city walls. Today it reflects the strong self-sufficiency of each neighbourhood and the diverse identities they posses.

Now in the 21st century, Buenos Aires is becoming somewhere quite different. The main cause has been a drastic intensification of land use. Rather than extending the grid outwards, the city is now growing upwards, mainly to accommodate the growing demand from affluent sectors for residential towers. Housing the wealthy in luxury towers has been a tradition in this city for nearly a century; especially in wealthier northern parts of the city like Belgrano and Recoleta since the 1930s. However the increasing saturation of these wealthier neighbourhoods has seen this trend spread to a few low-rise middle class neighbourhoods in central and western areas like Caballito. Undervalued plots of land, with houses of only one or two storeys are being bought from residents, demolished and redeveloped into property that exploits the land to its maximum capacity. Often this is through a Fidecomiso model – a popular form of residential development whereby architects build directly for future occupiers who invest their money into a "trust" which is held by an intermediary organisation.

Since 2005 there has been a surge in construction as the economy flourished and planning regulations were loosened to enable developers and architects to build with more ease.

[15] Empty property in Caballito in Buenos Aires

This produced a very visible densification of many inner city boroughs, affecting the urban landscape and daily lives of many local residents. Caballito has experienced a particularly uncontrolled surge in the development of residential towers. According to Mario Z. a local resident, "They appear like mushrooms! You think, 'where did that building come from?'".

A recent government report on construction in Buenos Aires between 2001-2011 classifies most of this new housing as "lavish"[7] - designed for a growing population of very wealthy consumers who seek self-contained gated properties with private amenities like swimming pools, tennis courts and 24-hour security. The Dos Plaza development for example has two towers of 33 storeys. It has more than 500 homes, 400 parking spaces, a pool, solarium, gym and various other facilities. Astor Caballito is currently under construction and claims to be "targeted to mid and mid-high income segment". It will have three towers, 18, 22 and 27 storeys high that sit within 9,800 m^2 of land. A physical gesture of paranoid securitisation, these isolated buildings break away from the street and turn their backs on the social life of the neighbourhood. Some residents like Mario Z. say this has perpetuated feelings of insecurity across the neighbourhood and "now [residents] have put bars up everywhere".

Since 2005 activists like Gustavo have been campaigning relentlessly for planning restrictions on new developments. Building on the strong social ties within the neighbourhood, they have managed to form powerful groups such as Proto Comuna Caballito and SOS Caballito as well as linking with city-wide groups with shared concerns, such as Basta de Demoler! (Stop the Demolitions!).

Together (and sometimes apart) Caballito activists made the case that the day-to-day infrastructure of the community was being massively overstretched by unregulated densification. They took to the streets, used the media, neighbourhood forums and online social networks to make their voices heard.

[16] Intense land use in Caballito

Putting pressure on local government officials, the national water supplier AySA was forced to do a study on the availability of water infrastructure, such as sewers, in certain neighbourhoods undergoing densification. The results were damning. After a long legal and emotional battle, the community won their fight and in March 2008 law 2722 was passed by the Legislature of Urban Development restricting the heights of future constructions in three zones of Caballito, covering around eighty blocks in the neighbourhood.

As a result, this action has made the construction of residential towers economically unviable for many developers. Although the activists managed to successfully restrict the heights of buildings in certain areas, they are still involved in an arduous battle to ensure that law 2722 is upheld. Nevertheless, this is the first time that a group of residents has managed to divert the dominant development trend in their city. According to one resident, Rodolfo R., this crisis has even brought them closer together.

With 80% of Latin America's population now living in cities, it has now become the most urbanised region in the world.[8] As its cities continue to grow, more sustainable solutions will need to be created so that existing communities do not bear the brunt of these urban changes. Twentieth century Buenos Aires was designed to work in the long-term – adapting to the changing needs of its citizens. It was also designed to create resilient communities. In the 21st century city, it's up to these strong local communities to make sure they stay resilient and don't lose control over the changes happening in their neighbourhoods.

[6] *James Scobie, Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1974: 160*
[7] *Construccion en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires 2001-2011, Ministerio de Desarollo Urbano, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2012*
[8] *UN Habitat, State of the World's Cities, 2012/13*
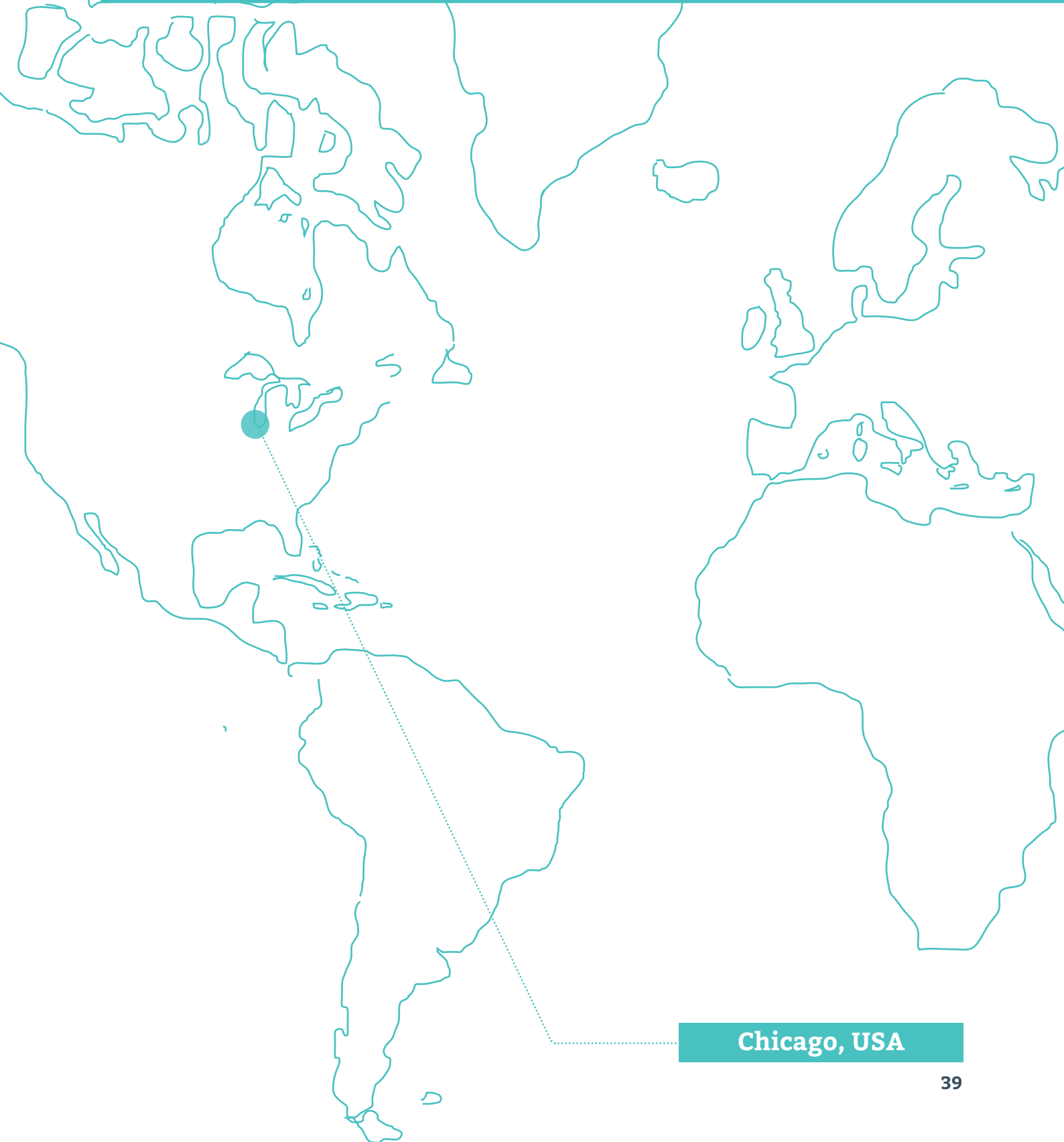

[17] High-rise building in Caballito

Author

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5. What Chicagoland's community leaders taught us about the "space in between"

Chicago, USA

[18] Chicago

What Chicagoland's community leaders taught us about the "space in between"

P atience, I hear, is a virtue. I wouldn't know; I am an impatient person by nature. While parenthood and living for a year in a Mediterranean country have done wonders to temper this, impatience remains intrinsic to my DNA. Lately I've been thinking, though, that maybe patience is overrated.

I see it reflected in our "all or nothing" focus: public funding and systems of recognition – like grand openings and awards – go toward the full realization of a space. Up and down the streets of our neighborhoods it is clear that we view the use of space in one of two ways: its highest and best use, or nothing at all. That is, either a corner in North Lawndale becomes a newly constructed, multi-family affordable apartment building, or it stays a bunch of trash-strewn vacant lots.

It seems that most of us are content to wait for the ideal, but I keep thinking that maybe there's another important place to focus our energy, creativity and funds: in the spaces that exist between the current state and the finished product.

Why not embrace our impatient side, stop waiting, and explore what could exist in between these two poles? When lenders aren't lending, when buyers aren't buying, when tax credit investors can't be found and the desired market doesn't yet exist, the question becomes what do we do with our unused, under-used, misused, abandoned, or under construction public spaces? What do we do, in other words, in the meantime?

Asking this question means acknowledging that in these tough economic times, the finished product may no longer be in sight for any given vacant lot or empty storefront. Particularly in communities that bore the brunt of the recession, the housing market remains oversupplied, lenders are still loathe to lend, and retailers are skittish. Let's face it: The ideal may take a while.

What would our communities look like if instead of turning our heads from the vacant eyesores and dilapidated fencing that dot so many of our communities, or passively waiting for investors and developers to feel comfortable in our neighborhoods again, we took it upon ourselves to embrace these spaces as transitional places? What if we deliberately sought out and created low-cost, temporary uses for these spaces?

The web site *TEMPLACE* calls it "activity in spaces currently unsuitable or undesirable in mainstream economic cycles". According to the web site *No Vacancy!*, this activity "can also catalyse the "creative economy" by…act(ing) as laboratories and incubators for art,

business, culture, and civic society by providing space for experimentation".

We knew this focus on the transitional could be incredibly powerful, and we had a sense from a few examples that people were already doing it. What if we found a way to have people tell us their transformational stories? And what if, in so doing, we were able to raise the profile of this under-heralded work and the story of many small acts that could collectively, in and of themselves, be transformational?

These questions led us to form the Metropolitan Planning Council's 2012 "Space in Between" contest, which focused energy, creativity and funds on the great potential for meaningful places to exist between a vacant space's current state and its ideal, finished state. We launched the contest to learn more about how creative people around the Chicago region were taking back long-since forgotten spaces, thereby transforming the vacant and abandoned into community assets, even if – and especially if - temporary.

We had a tremendous response. Droves of placemakers from Milwaukee to northwest Indiana sent in their pictures, their videos and their stories about how they took a vacant space and filled it not with bricks and mortar, but with people. With ideas. With art. With things that grow and feed and nurture us. Shuttered retail was transformed into art galleries and bookstores. Vacant land became a canvas for community art, tales of motherhood, and rites of passage for young women. Performances were staged in abandoned railyards and long-vacant lots. And scores of community gardens grew not only vegetables, but a sense of community.

In the process, we learned so much about the power of regular people and that when those people reject a passive stance of waiting for their community to be improved and instead decide to do so themselves – in however small a manner – there is incredible power in that.

[19] People participating in 2012 Space in Between contest

So what are we doing with this information? Well, the first thing we've done is to shout this story from the mountaintops. Part of our goal was to not only ourselves learn about the initiatives throughout Chicagoland, but to also be part of telling these stories widely, and in so doing, help to raise up this kind of work as an endeavor just as worthy of our money and attention as bricks and mortar development. To that end, we made sure that a variety of projects were featured on the news and in print, we partnered with Groupon Grassroots to assist winners with a fundraising campaign, and are working now to have a major awards ceremony for community development add an award for "the spaces in between".

I'm willing to bet that people are doing small and amazing things to transform your community every day. How are you helping to tell their story?

Adapted from an earlier article, Putting Vacant Space to Use, in the Meantime.

[20] People transforming vacant lots to community assets during 2012 Space in Between contest

Author

Marisa Novara

Marisa joined Metropolitan Planning Council in 2011. Her work directly assists communities to promote revitalization, housing in job-rich areas, sustainable development and conservation, and interjurisdictional and corridor planning. Her studies were informed by years of work on the ground in Chicago, most recently as the senior project manager for Lawndale Christian Development Corporation.

6. Social unity through urban crisis

Athens, Greece

Social unity through urban crisis

For the past five years austerity measures have taken a heavy toll on everyday life in Greece. However, as a Greek citizen, I feel that Greeks have strong social bonds and networks that are closely linked to public and communal spaces in cities and neighbourhoods, which are helping communities survive these difficulties.

Generally speaking, the social life of neighbourhoods in Greece is connected to public life and public amenities that are provided by the government. Unlike the growing trend towards the privatisation of public spaces in London and many other cities in the world, the public space in Greece remains publicly owned.

Public institutions in Greece are part of the public realm; they are tied to peoples' experience of places and play an important role in enhancing a local feeling of social unity. For instance, most of the schools are public and are open all year round to accommodate children's after school activities. Universities are the symbol of free dialogue and exchange of ideas, and thus, even today they are public and free. Another exceptional example are the public markets. Organised by the local authorities, they take place in squares or streets of all the cities and neighbourhoods of Greece. Apart from being places that sell local produce, they offer the opportunity for people to socialize, create dialogue and exchange ideas.

In this essay I will talk about the neighbourhood of Exarchia. It is an activist-led neighbourhood in the centre of the capital. I will illustrate how it is representative of contemporary Athens and show how local social life can help to build the resilience of a community.

The neighbourhood of Exarchia consists of many diverse groups of people. Although this is common in other parts of Athens, in Exarchia there is an unusual coexistence and cooperation among them. Families of Greeks and foreign migrants, students and the elderly are the most visible groups that live in this area. The social life of Exarchia is strong and the range of activities is big, from events that enhance neighbourliness to public protests, like sit-ins, that affect the entire country.

Many older residents, having grown up in this area, had the chance to witness urban changes over the last 50 years that have shaped the current space and life of Exarchia and of Athens as a whole. Nevertheless, they still walk around its streets and go to the same cafes, taverns and the public market that exist as reminders of the past. Younger families of locals and migrants enjoy the facilities that the area offers them too. Their children attend the local public schools or play on the streets, the squares or the parks; an experience that tends to disappear in downtown Athens.

Four different universities are located within the area and so there is a high number of students. Having studied architecture there

myself, I had been one of the thousands of students to move around the streets of Exarchia and hang out at the "Chartes" local cafe, "Intriga" bar, "Circus" club, "Fasoli" restaurant and the park at Navarinou Street. There has been a long history of riots and social protest that have often started at the School of Architecture. The December 2008 riots in Greece, were sparked by a fatal incident that took place in Exarchia. This has created an environment of political awareness and discussion about contemporary social issues.

The common perception of Exarchia by people that don't live in the area is that it is unsafe, particularly because there are marginalised groups visible on the street that are thought to be involved in drug use. They are seen wandering around, asking for money or food and their presence on the streets, combined with the common riots, creates an image of Exarchia as unsafe.

Despite local tensions and the economic climate, the local community is not passive. From community groups to time banks, there are many examples of what the community is doing to enhance the social life of Exarchia.

One strong community group is the Committee of Exarchia Residents Initiative". They organise children's events on the square or social activities that intend to bring people together, enhance social sustainability and wellbeing in the area. Apart from that they offer singing courses and have formed a local choir that meets on a weekly basis. Moreover, recreational nights and movie shows are organised regularly in local cafes or communal spaces. Due to the current situation, these nights now provide essential social support, offering free dinners or organising help for those who suffer the most.

As mentioned, their latest activity includes the establishment of a time bank, a new type of exchange of facilities in Greece that enables residents of Exarchia to offer their knowledge and skills to their neighbours in exchange for time credits.

[22] Kids event in Exarchia Square, organised by the community group

Having accumulated time credits they can be paid back by using the skills and knowledge of other people. Time banking not only offers a chance of survival through the current crisis; it is a way for the people to create bonds and built social unity and awareness.

Apart from the local community, this neighbourhood accommodates political and social groups that are interested in the integration of the diverse people of Exarchia into Greek society. For example, the Place for the Immigrants, which is located near the main square takes care of new migrants from overseas that have recently moved into the area. It offers Greek language and computer courses as well as recreational nights open to the public. Also, the free social centre Nosotros was set up experimentally in June 2005. It was the result of a desire to find an alternative meeting place, where people could be "free from restrains of ideological clichés and doctrines and therefore create their individual path in life".[9] It is currently organised as a space that hosts social events that aim to engage people in discussions on contemporary issues.

One local campaign resulted in the occupation of two abandoned lots that were transformed into community parks. Having little support from the local government, they had decided to do it themselves. The successful use of the spaces eventually led to the government's approval. Children can nowadays enjoy the playgrounds and grown-ups can hang out in the green space.

Finally, one of the most important spaces that holds the community together is the Kallidromiou market. Every Saturday morning, a street that stretches along 3 blocks, turns into a pedestrian area that accommodates the flows of people arriving from across the neighbourhood. Apart from providing locals with food, this public market plays a symbolic role in the community. It is a place of accidental meetings where the residents of Exarchia can talk about

[23] Navarinou Park, Athens, Greece

their problems and share their thoughts and interests. It is an opportunity for people to use the street in a different way, appreciate the use of the public space, and the social interaction that it offers them. According to the world recognised architect Ioannis Despotopoulos, the public market is the place where "the relationship between individuals was created and the need for the spread of news was discovered. The public market brought the beginning of social and ideological life".[10]

[9] www.nosotros.gr
[10] Ioannis Despotopoulos: The Ideological Structure of the City, 1997
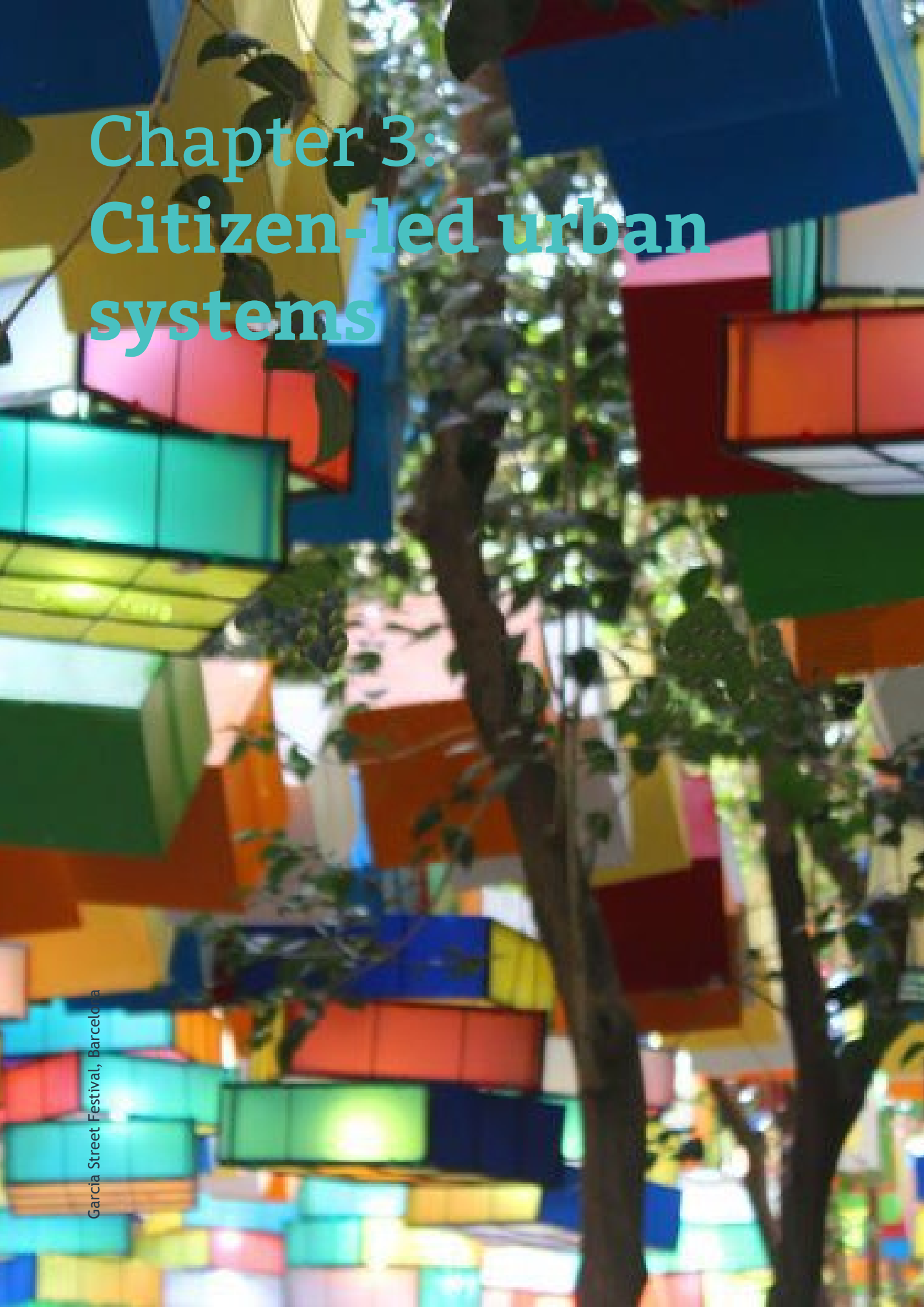
[24] Kallidromiou Public Market, Athens, Greece

Author

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Zoe is an architect and urban designer and graduated from the Bartlett School of Architecture. Sociology of space is one of her greatest interests and it has affected the way she perceives architecture and urban design.

Chapter 3: Citizen-led urban systems

7. Opening The Box on Magaliesburg

Magaliesburg, South Africa

[25] Magaliesburg

Opening The Box on Magaliesburg

"The village of Magaliesburg, lies just below the Southern Range of the Magaliesburg Mountains. The roads and rivers take similar paths, breaking though the steep ridges of the mountains in a few places, only to traverse much of the land along the valleys on either side of the two mountain ridges. The reality of Magaliesburg belies its languid village ambience. There are many places to visit and things to do in the region. A variety of accommodation and a host of fascinating people await you. Whatever your interest, you will find something to delight you as you travel the roads and experience the environment."[11]

Whilst this is true of Magaliesburg, the town currently finds itself in the same position as numerous other small towns in South Africa – one of declining economic growth, poverty, changing markets and increasing neglect – and one not particularly conducive to attracting potential investors to the area. However, if developed correctly and in a sustainable manner, Magaliesburg offers a treasure trove of opportunity – one rich in natural beauty, culture and an established and diverse community loyal to this place they call home.

Over a number of years, a core group of local individuals has tried to initiate specific interventions to breathe new life into the town – some with great success and others, less so. It has, however, been difficult for this group to sustain efforts over the long term and to obtain ongoing commitment from government and large corporate sponsors. A number of plans have also been commissioned with the intention to change or regenerate development through technical and design mechanisms.

The recently launched (June 2012) Magaliesburg Development Initiative (MDI) is a combination of technical (an approved municipal precinct plan) and professional input on the one hand, and a deliberate emphasis on the need to foster community spirit on the other. This process is based on a Community Investment Platform (CIP) model which was developed by a Gauteng-based, South African town planning consultancy, Akanya Development Solutions.

The Magalies Initiative is based on the premise that the successful upliftment and empowerment of communities and the places in which they live and work, involves a combination and collaboration of all available resources in a consistent and sequential manner. Also, the initiative strives to reflect the development vision of a community in spatial terms.

During a community work session facilitated by Akanya Development Solutions in Magalies on 10th November 2012, the community firstly identified cross-sectoral resources and assets; and secondly, identified viable projects and initiatives. Apart from utilising specific methodologies (i.e. CIP), the main purpose of the work session was, however, to assist the community in sharing their different social and cultural experiences. Some of the community came from

underdeveloped settlements in the village whilst others are from more privileged backgrounds. It was therefore important that the sessions built a sense of community identity, belonging and respect for different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs.

Since November a number of bilateral and community meetings have been held. Various project teams were established and a number of project business cases are currently being developed in terms of job creation, place-making, social and youth development, food production and greening. All of these are done in terms of a vision of creating a resilient, high quality eco-friendly destination.

At a follow-up meeting held on 30th April 2013, it was agreed to focus on four key projects - a community park, the Box youth development project, sustainable food production and place-making.

The community park will integrate the envisaged station development and the existing developments in the village of Magaliesburg. It will comprise a natural park setting with clearly delineated picnic spots, children's adventure zones, sculpture areas and walking trails. The conceptual designs will be done by a group of volunteer landscape architects from the area. The design is to be launched for input during a village wine festival being held in September 2013.

The establishment of community level and small-scale farming activities is a logical extension of the already existing commercial farming activities in the Magaliesburg area. A small group of community members that is already busy with food production activities has been identified and land is being committed for the project. The intention is to train participants in sustainable food production methods and establish local market linkages with hotels and lodges in the area.

[26] Some of the participants at the MDI work session

The aim of the Box youth development initiative is to provide the youth of the neglected areas in Magaliesburg with resources and facilities that can build their capacity to access opportunities. The Box comprises an inexpensive off-the-grid structure with a high architectural quality to strengthen the aesthetic feature of the entire neighbourhood. It is a green structure incorporating the use of waste and eco-friendly material such as shipping containers and solar panels as its energy source. It is a space where information can be accessed, youth functions can be held and where other initiatives such as sustainable food production can be showcased. Initial discussions with the Magaliesburg Development Youth Forum have been completed and a proposed site identified.

One of the key aspects of the Magaliesburg initiative is to create more jobs by more people visiting the area. However, in order to bring more tourists and visitors to Magaliesburg, the town needs to offer a more inviting experience – one which incorporates streetscape elements, streets and sidewalks, benches, lights, gardens, walls etc. The intention for Magaliesburg is to:

• 	establish entrance points (gateways and landmarks) for the village of Magaliesburg and the wider tourism region;
• 	upgrade and landscape sidewalks and road reserves;
• 	protect and enhance scenic, historic and cultural resources in the area;
• 	clean up the existing green spaces and riverways;
• 	identify a theme that can comprise a number of different elements, applied at different places in the community; and
• 	improve the general maintenance of the area.

Collaboration, synergy, dialogue, sustainability and resource management are but a handful of slogans and phrases that often feature in discussions when it comes to projects such as these. Making this happen, however, requires a very real and long-term commitment by all role-players involved – from the very grassroots level all the way up to corporates who wish to invest in initiatives of this nature.
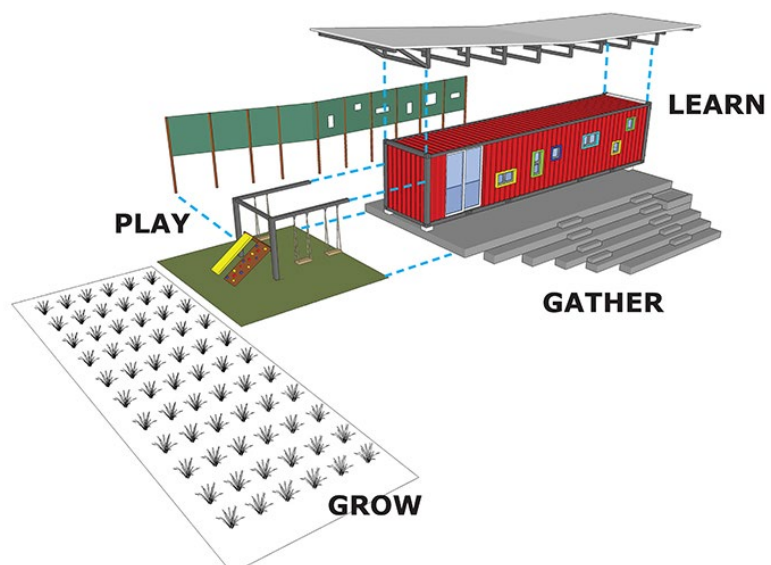
[27] Example of a basic Box structure

All too often, such initiatives have lost momentum over time as a result of an absence of some kind of umbrella organisation or project management team which constantly has the "bigger picture" in mind. Akanya is committed to playing such a role. Bringing together roleplayers. Investigating potential avenues for corporate investment. Facilitating dialogue amongst all parties. Overseeing the consistent and sustainable implementation of specific and detailed action plans which will contribute to the overall vision. Identifying opportunities and introducing individuals, community leaders, local business and corporate investors to one another. Encouraging a joint effort so that the word "synergy" does not remain a catchphrase, but a reality for a town with massive potential to become a safe, flourishing and sustaining haven for its people.

[11] *http://www.magaliesburg.co.za/history.html*

[28] Example of spaces in Magaliesburg that should form part of a "place-making" process and plan

Author

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Johan is a qualified and registered town and regional planner with 21 years experience in local government as well as the private sector. In 2005, Johan became a partner in a private development consultancy – Akanya Development Solutions. More recently, Johan has become involved with rural development plans (small town regeneration) that include community investment plans and economic development strategies combined with interventions to address spatial constraints in community development.

8. At the forefront of social innovation in Latin America

Medellín, Colombia

[29] Medellín

At the forefront of social innovation in Latin America

I t's not all about Brazil - though the media might lead you to believe otherwise. Lesser known but not less exciting things are also happening in other Latin America countries, namely Colombia. With much fanfare, Colombia's second city, Medellín, (also known as 'The City of Eternal Spring') was named the winner of the 'City of the Year' competition early this year. The competition was developed by the non-profit Urban Land Institute and supported by Citi and the Wall Street Journal, who pronounced that the city has had one of the most remarkable turnarounds in modern urban history. The city was roundly praised for its civic spaces, libraries, and art galleries, as well as its infrastructure, which famously includes a giant escalator and cable car transportation (more to come on that later), which gives residents of some of the city's poorest neighbourhoods access to the city centre.

More recently the national government is also promoting innovation – economic and social - as the key to increasing the nation's competitiveness and enabling the economic growth that will improve quality of life.

Around the world, practitioners, politicians and policy-makers are increasingly framing the drive to address entrenched social problems through the lens of social innovation which the Young Foundation describes as "innovations that are social in both their ends and their means". The Social Innovation Exchange (SIX) believes and promotes the idea that social innovation isn't a concept but a movement; it is gaining widespread attention as a driver for comprehensive social development and an engine of change. To evidence this - SIX has over 5,000 members in its network including the new Colombia Center for Social Innovation, set up in 2011, within the National Agency to Overcome Extreme Poverty, whose programmes aim to reduce poverty through innovative approaches.

Colombia is a rapidly urbanising country with the third largest economy in South America and a wide gap between the rich and the poor. Estimates vary, though it is thought that 45 to 64 per cent of the population live below the poverty line. The national government has recognised that social innovation has the potential to reduce extreme poverty and has included social innovation in a strategy to bring greater effectiveness to public expenditure, higher impacts and better quality to on-the-ground interventions benefiting mainly the poorest and most vulnerable.

The national Center for Social Innovation is coordinating pilot initiatives in San José de Saco including a community waste management scheme addressing threats posed by inadequate sanitation, as well as newly rehabilitated social housing developments implemented to respond to the housing deficit. Other projects include a community mapping initiative and a solar light project working with social entrepreneurs and young volunteers to provide low-

cost lighting. Undoubtedly, there is much learning that will emerge from these projects which needs to be taken on board if they are to be scaled-up to meet the magnitude of the challenge of reducing extreme poverty.

Social innovation has a role to play in cities which are often the stages where our greatest social challenges - isolation, ageing, disaffected young people, inadequate transportation infrastructure, pressure on sanitation and energy infrastructures, and the list goes on – play out. Economist and urban guru Edward Glaeser muses that "our culture, our prosperity, and our freedom are all ultimately gifts of people, living, working, and thinking together – the ultimate triumph of the city".[12]

In 2004, Medellín became the first city to use sky technology (the Metrocable) for public transportation, linking people from low income neighbourhoods settled in hilly and steep areas with the on ground Metro system, substantially increasing their access to opportunities and participation in the city. The Metrocable experiment was followed by a whole set of urban interventions including the rehabilitation of deprived neighbourhoods, recovering public spaces and building high quality infrastructure such as state-or-the-art libraries with iconic designs, schools and centres for entrepreneurial support.

In Bogotá, the Ciclovía (cycle-way) was created in 1974 and has become an international reference point and inspiration for urban environmental sustainability and innovation. Every Sunday and during public holidays, Colombia's capital experiences an urban transformation where 76 miles of its main roads and avenues become traffic free streets, exclusive for bike use (and for other non-motorised sports like jogging, skating and skateboarding among others). Around 2.2 million people use the Ciclovía, nearly one third of the city's population.

[30] Metrocable and Santo Domingo Library, Medellín

Innovation drives investment and attracts foreign capital. As the size and influence of corporations grows, so does the expectation of their commitment to do social good. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and sustainability programmes increasingly understand that the greatest potential for social impacts and mutual benefits lies in the bond of forces and knowledge. Thus, companies are merging and developing innovative solutions. The Innolabs, as applied in Colombia, are a Latin American regional strategy fostered by the International Development Bank, seeking to go beyond the promotion of CSR models by mobilising resources towards competitive outcomes with social returns. The strategy is the co-creation of knowledge generation and sharing innovative systems that address concrete social issues. Innolabs partners - City, Gas Natural, Microsoft, Cemex and Pespsico - have assumed the task to contribute to more sustainable livelihoods and inclusive business in Colombia.

Colombia is building on a trajectory of innovation, moving from niche to mainstream, scaling up cost-effective solutions to social problems at different levels. From major investment in public infrastructure to politically brave decisions, such as giving over the roads of the capital city every Sunday, Colombia is already leading the way. This has been made possible through a high level of experimentation backed by political, popular and institutional support. Colombia is a country facing big challenges and offering up big solutions that rest of the world would do well to take notice of.

[12] *E. Glaeser. Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier (2012)*

[31] Ciclovía, Medellín

Authors

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9. From Gangnam Style to Sungmisan Style: Creating "village" communities in Seoul City

Seoul, South Korea

[32] Seoul

From Gangnam Style to Sungmisan Style: Creating "village" communities in Seoul City

The first thing a visitor notices when arriving in Seoul is the endless rows of apartment buildings that overwhelm the cityscape. Unlike the tower block estates in deprived neighbourhoods in the UK, high-rise apartment buildings are symbol of modernity and economic wealth in Korea. The French geographer Valerie Gelezeau, author of Apartment Republic, regards Korean apartment buildings as factories producing the middle class in Korea;[13] a burgeoning class created through rapid economic growth as well as the cultural and social processes that came with wealth. It is not unusual for Korean families to move from apartment to apartment as a way to invest in property and accumulate wealth. The height of these tall buildings and even the names of these residential buildings (ranging from Lotte Castle to Trump Tower and High Palace) reflect the aspiration of the middle class in Korea – to be richer, more powerful and more modern.

There is a growing movement in Korea that challenges the cultural and economic system that encourages competition, materialism and disconnection. The recent South Korean viral sensation Gangnam Style portrayed the hyper-materialistic culture in Korea and triggered a broader conversation about growing social inequalities in Seoul.[14] People are realising that the current system of "more is better" is unsustainable and cannot solve the pressing social needs that Korean cities are facing.

Korea has one of the highest suicide rates among the OECD countries, the population is aging rapidly and the traditional arrangement of elderly care based on family/community ties is breaking down, which is putting huge pressure on the current social care system. Social isolation and loneliness is an increasing problem among the older people living in the cities.

Driven by a lack of faith in the current system and nostalgia for the ideal of the traditional village, people are coming together to build flourishing, cohesive, inclusive communities in the urban context. The Korean word "maul" (which translates to "village") is being redefined as something more than a physical space. It connotes a place where people are able to do the things that they value by developing new social relationships embedded in the localities where they live and operate.

There have been many examples of "maul-making" or "place-making" in Seoul over the past few years. Neighbourhoods such as Samgaksan village and Sungmisan village started out as childcare cooperatives where families created a space for their children to grow up together, building a sense of shared history through various community, education and cultural activities. Some neighbourhoods

began with the desire to build a children's library, others were set up to fulfil the artistic aspirations of the residents (music bands, theatre performance groups, artists). Some have a more environmental focus, while others attempt to restore trust in the community through cooperative housing models.

The common feature of these "villages" is the power of local social connections to encourage community resilience, which in turn creates opportunities and avenues for residents to thrive and realise their capabilities. At the heart of these thriving "villages" is a focus on social sustainability – "infrastructure to support social and cultural life, social amenities, systems for social engagement and space for people and places to evolve."[15]

Ever since Mr. Wonsoon Park, a well-known civil society leader, became the "social innovation" mayor of Seoul, there has been radical shift from rigid development planning to a focus on social sustainability in city-wide policies. The Seoul Community Support Centre (SCSC) was set up in August 2012 to lead the discussion and facilitate the process of creating "urban village communities" in Seoul. Furthermore, the Basic Cooperative Law has been in effect since December 2012, which makes it easier for communities to set up cooperative models of community enterprises. The legal and political framework is shifting in Korea to enable a small but growing movement of "urban villages" such as Sungmisan that are based on values of mutual support and self-help.

In this essay, I explore the Sungmisan village model using the social sustainability framework developed by Social Life and the Young Foundation. This framework focuses on the essential elements that build new communities (in new development areas) to thrive however, it is also relevant to existing communities that are striving to reclaim the cultural and social meaning of the space they are in.

[33] Samgaksan village

Case Study: Sungmisan Village

Seoul is a constantly changing and evolving city. It is full of discontinuous spaces and contradictory landscapes. Annie Koh, mentions in her blog, "What is dislocating about Korea today is the disappearance of continuous place. The 'there' that exists right now may have no linkage to the 'there' that stood there before".[16] In a city where switching apartments every two or three years is normal, it is difficult to feel a sense of belonging and community in your own neighbourhood.

Sungmisan villagers are a rare but growing breed of people who are trying to restore something that Seoul city has lost during the rapid urbanisation and redevelopment process. The origin of Sungmisan traces back to a joint childcare cooperative set up by a group of young dual-income families in 1994. The young couples were discontented with the education philosophy and the quality of childcare programmes provided by the market and the state and so they built an alternative future for their children.

Amenities and social infrastructure

Sungmisan community started with a childcare cooperative movement where young couples came together to raise their children together. The social infrastructure they created was the result of a series of choices the young couples and families made to create a nurturing and safe environment for their children. The community created local services intrinsic to daily life – ranging from cooperative childcare to elderly care, schools to community cafes and libraries, local currencies to consumer cooperatives. People also started various cultural activities that gave a sense of shared history - community theatre, radio channels, festivals and art projects.

Social and cultural life

The social sustainability framework also emphasises a community's need for shared spaces, shared rituals and support to build social networks. Sungmisan uses the power of local social connections to encourage community resilience, which in turn creates opportunities for people to lead the lives they wish. People with shared values and interests come together for self-organised/group-organised events and projects enabling a culture of self-help and mutual support.

One of the key events that brought a significant number of residents together and created a shared meaning was the "Save Sungmisan" campaign. When the Seoul Metropolitan Government announced that Sungmisan (a hill located at the heart of the community) was to be destroyed to build a new water distribution system, many residents joined the campaign to save the hill. The struggle went on for more than two years and the residents were able to create intense shared history through this experience.

Voice and influence

Another element of social sustainability is the need for residents to have a say in the shaping of their surroundings. Dialogue and

[34] Kid's event in Samgaksan village

democratic decision-making processes are a key element of building solidarity and trust in the Sungmisan community. Sungmisan community reaches a shared consensus rather than simply applying majority vote rule during decision-making processes. This process takes time and it forces people to listen and empathise with others. The democratic culture of Sungmisan not only reflects its internal decision-making process but also the way the residents engage in continuous dialogue and negotiations (or conflicts) with the local authorities to shape the place they live in.

Space to grow

The fourth element of social sustainability is about the flexibility and the adaptability of a place. The physical spaces in Sungmisan village are constantly changing to adapt to new needs and possibilities. Public spaces in Sungmisan area are places where people build shared histories of collaborative activities. People constantly redefine and change the uses of the built environment (streets, theatre, café buildings) for the purpose they want to achieve. The street converts into a festival space, cafes become public meeting places and the hill is a community garden. The theatre was built with its multi-purpose cultural functions in mind – it is an empty space with blocks of cushions that can be moved around. Physical boundaries are flexible in Sungmisan as well. The village cannot be defined by its 2km radius or by administrative divisions; rather, it is the labyrinth of social relationships that outline the ambiguous boundaries of Sungmisan.

[35] Dialogue in Sungmisan village

What next?

There are still many challenges ahead for urban neighbourhoods like Sungmisan. The Seoul government's systems and different professional sectors lie in their own silos. There seems to be a dichotomy of two very different worlds: profit-driven private sector developers obsessed with building physical infrastructures, versus "village" movements focusing on the sustainability of social life. The two forces are in constant conflict and negotiation.

Discussion and debate on social sustainability needs to be widened and capable facilitators/translators are needed in the process of negotiation and conflict between different sectors and their languages. Successful models of "village" movements should not remain as discrete examples of social sustainability in an unwelcoming physical environment but should serve as channels that open up new avenues and possibilities of creating communities that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

[13] *Why Dream of High-rise Apartment?, Valerie Gelezeau, 2010*
[14] *Is "Gangnam Style" a Satire About Korea's 1%?, Tanya Jo Miller, 2012*, ***and*** *Gangnam Style, Dissected: The Subversive Message Within South Korea's Music Video Sensation, Max Fischer, 2012*
[15] *Woodcraft, S. Bacon, N., Caistor-Arendar L., & Hackett, T., Design for Social Sustainability: A Framework for Creating Thriving New Communities, 2012*
[16] *Disappearance of Continuous Place, Annie Koh, 2010*

[36] Kids' event in Samgaksan village

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10. Large scale social innovation: the case of tower-block regeneration

Malmö, Sweden

[37] Malmö

Large scale social innovation: the case of tower-block regeneration

Neglected buildings, green-house emissions, child poverty– this is the situation in many of Europe's tower-blocks. Could these problems be turned into the foundation for new forms of cooperation, better use of public money and true place-making with people at the centre? This approach is now being tried out in the "Regeneration dialogue" in Lindängen, an area of apartment blocks built in the 1970s, with employment levels below 50% in Malmö, Sweden.

In short: the idea is to develop a prototype for an area-based investment fund for social and environmental sustainability. Developing such a fund can be the vessel to bring together actors from the private, public and civic sector in a process to jointly understand and develop solutions for local areas, like Lindängen. This will be done through a step-by-step approach that initially focuses on both values and monetary streams in these neglected areas. Since these areas generally lack bigger manufacturing or service employers, "value" is often tied to housing property. However, in Lindängen this is in risk of serious deterioration. One part of the equation is the pent-up investment needs, including investment needed for energy efficiency.

The monetary streams into Lindängen are to a large extent costs of social exclusion, paid by public actors such as social services, employment agencies, insurance agencies, health providers and law-enforcement agencies. How large are these costs in a given area? Getting the numbers in place is a huge step towards finding new ways to bring together different resources in a regeneration process aimed at creating maximum social and environmental impact.

Innovation often comes from combining existing resources and actors in new ways. In Lindängen we are doing this, engaging the actors (as of today three private housing providers, public, local social, employment, insurance and health services and a number of NGOs) in drawing up a joint "socio-economic balance sheet" for Lindängen.

This balance sheet needs to include the investment needed to "future proof" 1,700 apartments with 4,000 inhabitants and direct and indirect costs for social exclusion in Lindängen. Preliminary figures suggest a pent up investment need of €120 million (of which half is directed towards energy savings) while costs for social exclusion accumulated over four years runs at €140 million.

These numbers can then be used to find a "break-even" where a certain level of job creation and social mobilisation results in measurable savings in public systems, as well as in energy and maintenance costs. Savings that, through a social impact investment approach, can be used to put the necessary investments in these neglected areas in place.

This can be seen as a development of existing urban development funds financed by the European Investment Bank (such as Jessica), with a stronger orientation towards social mobilisation and local social and environmental impact.

So how is this being taken forward? In Lindängen, the three property owners involved in the "Regeneration dialogue" cannot make the needed investments stack up economically without huge hikes in rent (typically rises of 40 to 50 per cent). In other parts of Malmö and Sweden such large increases in rent have forced out large numbers of tenants. The irony is that it is the tenants with jobs (often low paid) that are forced out by rent rises, while for tenants on social benefits, the increase in rent is picked up by the public purse.

The process and financial instrument under development in Lindängen aims to untie this knot by creating a business model that generates opportunity for investment through local job creation and social mobilisation. The main target group are the unemployed in Lindängen.

The "Regeneration dialogue" aims at local impact by promoting regeneration work with contracts conditional on local job creation and social impact. This would include setting up a local recruitment and training company, moderate increases in rent, and realising substantial energy reductions or local energy production. The aim is to generate cashable long term savings in public transfer systems.

Impact could be measured through employment levels, number of local jobs created (for example, in construction, in maintenance, in social enterprises), number of households on social benefits, energy reductions, and levels of wellbeing.

[38] Lindängen, Malmö

But maybe the most longstanding impact will be a new culture based on social innovation and social investment, embedded among a wide variety of actors, who up till now have lacked common understanding and a common language, as well as common strategies to tackle the "wicked" problems that exist in Lindängen and "les banlieues de l'Europe".

The initial scale of the project is Lindängen, an area with roughly 7,000 inhabitants in the borough of Fosie in Malmö. If a prototype can be made to work in Lindängen, Malmö alone has more then 20 similar areas with 1960s and 1970s housing in various stages of neglect. In Sweden 650,000 multi-storey dwellings were built between 1965- 1975, many in areas with characteristics like Lindängen.

According to professor Michael Koch at the HafenCity Universität in Hamburg there are 37 million tower-block apartments in western European Union states, and 10 million in Eastern European states. The "Regeneration dialogue" is working on establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the European Investment Bank (EIB) to make them a partner in developing an area-based investment fund, building on lessons learnt from for example the Jessica urban development funds. Though local and national contexts differ among European countries, similar approaches to a successful "Lindängen model" could be used to unlock the creative potential of "les banlieues de l'Europe", contributing to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe.

[39] Lindängen, Malmö

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This collection of essays is part of the Social Life of Cities, a global program of practical, local innovation exploring the relationship between digital technology and urban development in creating socially sustainable, thriving, and resilient communities.

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Our aim is to develop, prototype and test new tools and approaches that support city leaders, urban planners, and community organizations to think differently about creating and shaping thriving and sustainable places.