Urban development 2.0

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Co-create the city

Once upon a time, urban development was the playground of urban planners sitting behind drawing tables and designing the ideal city. Not anymore. New urbanites claim that a good city is not created by planners – it is made by its citizens. by Béla Kézy

Why cities?

Urban development has recently captured the attention of politicians and the general public. People have started talking about urban challenges – new terms like livable city, smart city and tactical urbanism have become part of the public dialogue. Once considered a fairly boring subject, urban development has now become a sexy topic. Cities have always played a crucial role in our society, and their importance with the rapid urbanization process grows by the day. Today, over 50 percent of the global population lives in cities (in Europe: 74 percent). Cities combine many good things (e. g. talented people, quality services and cultural values) but at least as many bad things (crime, waste, social problems, air pollution). So if we want to solve global problems, the best place to start is the city. No wonder politicians, experts and even people on the street suddenly became passionately interested in urban development; not just any urban development, though. We made some mistakes in the 20th century that have serious consequences regarding our cities today – so we need to reconsider urban development.

Wanted: new solutions

Fortunately, more and more cities are seeking new solutions and innovative ways to solve urban problems. They understand that we have to launch a completely new version: urban development 2.0.

1. **It's the people, silly!**
   Cities are for the people. So you have to involve people from the first ideas through planning to implementation. Instead of PR actions, though, real conversations are necessary if you want meaningful feedback. It is definitely time-consuming, but worth it. Committed citizens can transform entire cities in no time. And do not forget, successful cities are cities for everyone: for the young, the old, women, men, immigrants, the poor and the disabled. Not only that; colorful cities always triumph in the long run.

2. **Innovate (and steal ideas)**
   Instead of repeating the same old mistakes, cities need to find new solutions to their problems. They have to find creative ways to overcome their challenges. Many city leaders complain about the lack of money but in my experience, easy money actually kills creativity, while lack of money often leads to extraordinary results. Make the city a lab: experiment, start small and dare to fail sometimes. And one more thing: as city challenges are surprisingly similar, shamelessly steal ideas from others.

3. **Be friendly to the climate**
   Cities around the world are responsible for 70 percent of CO_2 emissions. If that is the case, though, then cities are the best places to start if we want to save the planet. It may sound surprising, but originally, our cities were not made to harm our climate. In fact, the density, the possibility of sharing places, goods and services, can potentially be good for the climate. Transforming our cities into walkable places, reducing the need for driving, can help a great deal. It could actually be beneficial for the local economy and the health of urbanites – not just the climate.

4. **Embrace digital**
   Urban development 2.0 embraces and actively uses new technologies to improve the city. No, it is not a silver bullet. The currently very popular smart city concept cannot be an answer to all urban problems. However, used wisely, digital solutions can contribute to building a better city. E-government tools can make citizens' lives easier and reduce their needs to travel. Citizens can provide information on various important aspects of city life through their mobile gadgets and support better decisions. The municipality can establish real-time communication channels with its residents, encouraging constant dialogue. One should not forget, though, that using digital solutions is not the goal – they are just part of the toolkit to be used to improve the city.

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Urban development is changing fundamentally. Instead of applying a top-down approach, more and more cities are choosing to work with their inhabitants. Urban development 2.0 is actually about co-creating the city. This is not easy, though. It requires a new attitude as well as the extensive use of participative methods in place of »old-school« urban planning. ●