

Key Messages from the Future of Places

The Future of Places is a collaborative platform for research, implementation, networking and advocacy, centered on key issues of public space as a fundamental component of sustainable urban development.

This document presents the key messages that arose out of the Future of Places I, II and III conferences, and reflects on the principles of the Charter of Public Space and the UN-Habitat Global Public Space Toolkit. The seven messages focus on the role and value of public spaces and public places: streets, alleys, squares, parks, playgrounds, gardens, open spaces, and public facilities and venues. Public *space* is any urban area that is open and accessible to all people; public *place* is urban space with social and cultural meaning. Both are locations for public activities, from informal markets and community festivals to civic events and official ceremonies.

Cities and human settlements need plans, strategies and frameworks that define coherent public space through fine-grained patterns of blocks, streets and other types of public spaces. This task is particularly urgent in cities that are challenged with accommodating rapid demographic change and spatial growth. To fulfill their civic role, public spaces need to be inclusive, connected, safe, and accessible. Public participatory processes give residents the opportunity to help plan and design their city and its public spaces.

The Future of Places affirms the role of *public spaces* as the connective network on which healthy cities and human settlements grow and prosper. Public spaces enable synergistic interaction and exchange, creativity and delight, and the transfer of knowledge and skills. Public spaces can help residents to improve their prosperity, health, happiness and wellbeing, and to enrich their social relations and cultural life.

These messages and principles are essential in the current period of rapid urbanization to inform and shape legislation, norms and practices, and is a key and integral part of the ‘new urban agenda’ for Habitat III.

Key Messages:

The following messages, in no particular order, reflect the challenges identified and addressed by the Future of Places:

1. Citywide approach

A holistic approach to the city includes the form, function and connectivity of public spaces. Streets should serve as multimodal networks of social and economic exchange, forming the interconnected framework of public space and physical mobility. Walkability, social interaction and multimodal accessibility should be supported by a fine-grained, uninterrupted network of blocks and streets, lined with buildings of mixed uses, ages and sizes. In addition to physical connectivity, cities and human settlements should provide electronic and digital infrastructure adequate for timely communication and transmission of information.

2. Human scale

Public space needs to be of human scale to respect and respond to people's values, sensibilities and aspirations. Appropriate shape, character and scale of the buildings that form the edges of public space contribute significantly to their character, aesthetics and success. Well-designed, appropriately sized public spaces improve the visual and spatial character of a city, while stimulating face-to-face social interaction.

3. Economic spillover

Investing in public space can have powerful economic benefits. If people are committed to their future in a specific place, they invest more time and money, supporting a virtuous cycle of local economic growth and resilience. Public space can stimulate the small scale, local and informal economy, while generating tax revenue for local governments. To be fully productive and effective, the space needs to be physically flexible in function over the day and seasons, and adaptable over the years.

4. Adequate public space for all

In many places there has been a reduction of urban public space, an increase in private, gated communities, and a lack of clear boundaries between public and private realms, reducing both freedom of movement and the variety of public and private spaces. A nuanced range of clearly demarcated places that provides public, semi-public, semi-private and private space is essential. Public space needs to be flexible and sufficiently open to serve both informal and formal settlements, as well as an inter-generational mix of diverse people and cultures. Methods and means to protect *all* vulnerable members of the population need to be established to secure equity in the allocation and design of these spaces.

5. People-centered approach

The task of planning is to create places that empower residents to develop their individual and collective capacities. As the arena for citizen activity and interaction, public space is typically developed, managed and maintained by municipal and metropolitan governments. A people-centered, participatory approach to urban planning by municipal and metropolitan agencies will achieve longer-lasting, more sustainable human development. Public, community, civic, charitable and private entities with differing capabilities and responsibilities must collaboratively share in the planning, design and maintenance of public space. Temporary physical interventions and demonstrations in public spaces have the ability to encourage future investment and permanent change.

6. Sustainable spaces

Public spaces and the buildings of cities and human settlements need to be socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. Social sustainability requires security, public health, equity and justice for all members of society. Economic sustainability requires balanced capital and operating budgets, and affordable but robust policies and practices. Environmental sustainability requires smaller energy and ecological footprints per capita to reduce climate change and urban heat islands, and to promote resource-efficient and resilient urban development. The sustainability of cities is enhanced by compact, mixed-use development, and dense centers served by a safe, well-connected network for pedestrians, bicycles and motorized vehicles. Renewable energy and waste recycling systems, native trees

and vegetation, clean air, water, soil and sanitary systems all serve to sustain and benefit public spaces.

7. Culture and context

Public space is made unique and meaningful through cultural and contextual elements that complement and enrich its identity. Spaces should be place-based, adaptable and responsive to geography, climate, culture and heritage. Public art and performances in public spaces can celebrate and validate a sense of community, identity, belonging and well-being. The more that our cities' architecture and urban design is admired and loved by the public, the longer it will be cared for, adapted and sustained.

Action and Implementation:

The New Urban Agenda must identify action and implementation mechanisms that establish, support and protect public space and its users.

a.) Advocacy and Mobilization

Raise awareness and create citizen planning movements to advocate for and mobilize stakeholders to build community through discussions, forums, workshops, pop-up projects and public space prizes.

b.) Measurement and Monitoring

Establish policy and frameworks at the national level for cities to allocate a third or more of their land area to public space. An inventory of public space assets will allow a city to address shortfalls and encourage an equitable balance of public spaces throughout its neighborhoods and districts.

c.) Public Space Financing

Utilize creative financing for public land acquisition, conversion of private space to public space and land value capture to produce greater amounts of economically viable public space.

d.) Policies and Legislation

Establish policies, legislation, and regulatory mechanisms for the design, provision, management and use of public spaces. Long-term structures and partnerships at the national, regional, metropolitan and local level can align government and multiple stakeholder interests. Open feedback and transparent accountability can ensure meaningful discussions among stakeholders and government officials.

e.) Tools and Knowledge Management

Promote open-source knowledge and capacity building with training workshops, tools, best practices, model legislation, big data, Smart Cities and digital methodologies for planning, monitoring and managing public space. Assure that empirical, evidence-based research on the practice and theory of public space is made understandable and widely available.