

12 YEARS *Shaping Cities around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.*

The United Nations says we have 12 years to take action against climate change, and keep global warming at a maximum of 1.5°C, beyond which even half a degree will significantly worsen the risks of drought, floods, extreme heat, and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

This should be seen as the greatest design challenge in history.

As Nicolas Roope has pointed out, 'the 12-year deadline the [IPCC + UN report](#) has given us all to make a meaningful reduction in emissions, is longer than it took Apple to get the concept of a smartphone in the hands of more than half the world's population'. No legislators were needed to drive this meteoric rise, just the intense allure of compelling design that changed people's behaviour.

So with an increasing population that is urban, what can the people who design our cities take from this?

Good design doesn't just make things more usable and elegant, it changes behaviour and makes things cool. If we are to meet the UN's deadline we have to design cities in a way that makes people want to do things that are good for them, good for the city, and good for the environment. In everything we do, we have to prioritise what is best for the environment and people.

Places shape behaviour, and behaviour over time is culture. The culture of many of our towns and cities across the world is one built around vehicles. This is because cars were the fashion, car companies pulled the levers of reference and narrative, to reflect the zeitgeist and create directionality - pulling people in who wanted to associate with this direction and these values. Cities and towns were shaped around the car, not because it was necessary - but because of design.

In light of the UN deadline, we need people to travel around cities in ways that are space efficient, and zero emission. So we have to rethink how we see the city - and enable the culture we need to meet the deadline. To create this culture we have to influence behaviour - we have to make what is good for the city, good for people, good for society, and good for the environment - in one word, FUN!

People do all sorts of things because they are fun and seen as cool, which they might well otherwise question. If cities need people to walk or cycle to work - make it fun. When we are shaping our cities, and designing streets and public spaces we have to keep asking ourselves if what we are doing is going to be fun and enjoyable for people. If we are creating a street that means people need to walk near lots of traffic; or without active frontages for interest; or with nowhere attractive to rest; or with no planting and trees to make it more relaxing, try again.

Make what is good for people and the environment, consistently fun and enjoyable, and we will affect behaviours, and nurture an urban culture based on happiness and sustainability.

Taking this from theory to practice, we can use the [United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) as a toolkit for helping us achieve this culture. The SDG's are over-arching targets and ambitions for everyone - governments to citizens - to help them assess and achieve a more sustainable future. They are action-orientated and ubiquitous to help align global efforts, so we should use these Goals to assess decision-making and develop design briefs for places.

The Goals of course cover issues faced by every city, but in terms of urban design and planning, the below Goals are ones that I think we can shape places around, and measure the success of proposals by.

3 Good Health + Wellbeing

We need to promote and enable people's health and wellbeing through how we shape places and cities. Enabling people to enjoyably go about their daily lives in ways that are best for their physical and mental health should be the key driver for addressing this Goal.

5 Gender Equality

We need to be acutely aware of the environments we create, and that people feel comfortable in some spaces whilst others do not. Designing cities for life is the driver, and we need to see our proposals through the many lenses of society - children, mothers, fathers, and pensioners rather than simply through our own experiences. This article is a must-read in my mind. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/27/architects-diversity-cities-designed-mothers>

6 Clean Water + Sanitation

The lack of free drinking water in cities is a growing concern, not only does it encourage the increased use of single-use plastics but also it creates less inclusive places. We should be looking to include bottle-fills and drinking fountains as standard for any scheme.

9 Industry, Innovation, + Infrastructure

As Einstein famously said, 'the definition of madness is doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results'. Innovation is key in cities - trialling and experimenting with different approaches to infrastructure should be encouraged and enabled by governments in order to expedite solutions to common urban issues.

10 Reduced Inequalities

We need to shape places that provide equal opportunities to all. Cities should be enjoyable for people from all backgrounds, with all levels of abilities, and to all ages. Again we must work with local citizens and community groups when shaping places - so the place is created through the lens of the community and set within their culture.

11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

This is clearly at the heart of what we do. We need to shape cities that enable people to go about their daily lives in a healthy and sustainable manner, as part of the community. We need to create liveable streets that engender a sense of community; we need to create liveable neighbourhoods that provide people with their daily needs within a short walk or cycle; and we need to shape liveable cities that enable people to relax, exercise, and enjoy themselves with friends.

15 Life on Land

In the most basic sense, cities need to be designed first and foremost for life. Human beings have to be the principal design driver and priority over everything else.

17 Partnerships for the Goals

We all know enough to know that we shouldn't and cannot do this alone. We have to work across sectors to co-create solutions to urban problems - working with the public and private sectors; the third sector; governments; and community groups to shape solutions that reflect the diverse qualities of our cities and places. Though doing this we can bring people together, and plot a path through the numerous views and agendas that are alive in cities.

These SDGs in particular need to be embedded into how we approach shaping cities and designing places, if we are to tackle global issues in cities and shape places for people to enjoy.



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