

WHAT LIES BEHIND

SUCCESSFUL, LIVEABLE CITIES?

How have some cities overcome challenges to become places that people enjoy inhabiting? Centre for Liveable Cities (CLC) researchers Pablo Vaggione and Elyssa Ludher analysed many such cities using the CLC Liveability Framework for their chapter in the book *Liveable and Sustainable Cities: A Framework*, co-published by CLC and Singapore's Civil Service College in June 2014. Here are some insights.

The United Nations estimates that by 2030, five billion people will live in cities, up from 3.6 billion in 2011. The challenge of accommodating the thousands that move to cities daily is acute to avoid the cities becoming hotbeds for social inequality and fragmentation, dis-economies of scale and environmental degradation. Urban challenges are often complex and seem insurmountable. Yet some cities are, incrementally but surely, overcoming them and turning their cities around. How did they do it?

Based on its research into Singapore's extraordinary development experience, the CLC developed the CLC Liveability Framework. This suggests the conceptual foundation that permeated Singapore's leadership,

⁰¹ Visionary leaders turned Bilbao from a declining industrial city into a gleaming cultural hub.



institutions and governance structures, which enabled the effective management of Singapore’s complex challenges and rapid growth. We used this Framework to analyse successful cities around the world, and found three underlying parallels. One, these cities have a vision of what they would like to achieve; second, there is a comprehensive plan on how to achieve them; and last, there is institutional support to carry out these plans.



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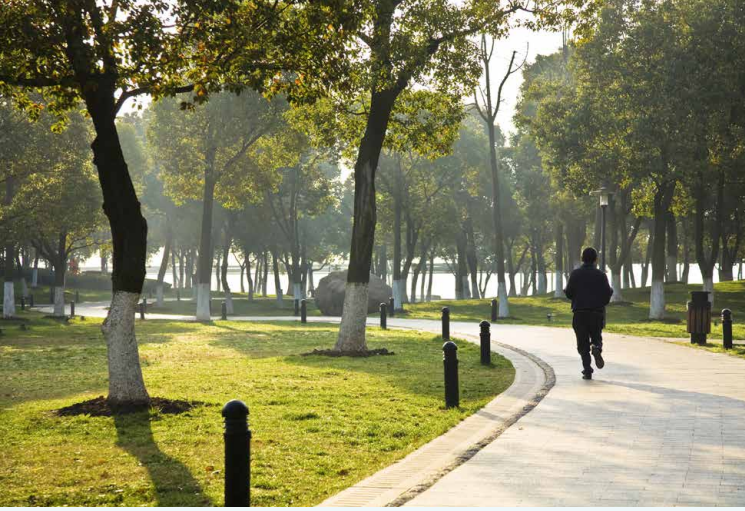
Aim High and Wide

In a 2011 interview with the CLC, then-CEO of JTC Corporation Manohar Khiatani said: “Dare to dream... One day we want to make aircraft engines, man-on-the-moon statement[s], but we don’t know when we will get there. Even if we don’t get there, maybe we’ll get a consolation prize – it’s still very good... Sometimes they say, ‘This fellow is damn naive!’ But it is okay because what is naive today, 20 years down the road, it might still happen because technology changes.” This characterises many of Singapore’s policies.

Bilbao’s leaders, too, had the audacity to dream. In the 1980s, delocalisation of the heavy steel and shipbuilding industries led to the loss of half of industrial jobs; unemployment reached a record 25% by 1985. Long years of industrial action, sometimes violent, ensued, followed by population decline and intense physical decay. Against this backdrop, Bilbao launched its urban revolution that led to one of the most miraculous transformation stories in recent history. A holistic and integrated approach was devised to deliver 25 interventions over 25 years covering high environmental, cultural, social and economic goals, including the regeneration of the contaminated river, regeneration of derelict inner city space, improving neighbourhood spaces, and introducing new architecture highlighting Bilbao as a centre for arts and culture.

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While Suzhou has experienced 2,500 years of successive rise and devastation culminating with rapid industrialisation, it has conserved its historic city and gardens, and become a first mover in inclusive social policies and environmental restoration. Over the last two decades, residents have enjoyed a nearly twenty-fold increase in annual per capita disposable household income to 41,143 yuan (US\$6,600 in 2013), and the city has achieved 42.3% city green coverage. It has introduced free compulsory education and increased social welfare benefits, thus improving the quality of life for residents and non-native residents alike. Suzhou's transformation is remarkable for the wide-ranging and ambitious standards it has worked to achieve.

Copenhagen is audaciously planning its future by committing to be the world's first Carbon Neutral Capital by 2025. By adopting the Copenhagen Climate Plan in 2009, the city has committed to a comprehensive set of 50 initiatives that would reduce motorised transport, replace fossil fuel energy/heat generation with alternatives and adopt green building standards.



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Plan Comprehensively

Without planning, visions remain on paper, and agencies lack clarity to move forward, resources are not allocated adequately, and development is imbalanced. Planning must be strategic, tangible, realistic and dynamic. To create liveable cities, it must integrate all aspects and sectors of society. A city's challenges are often complex; a coordinating body is thus important to keep view of the various cross-dimensional initiatives, arbitrate across agencies, and monitor goals.

In the early 1800s, needing to address poor street layout and air circulation, New York's Common Council concurred that a long-term framework was indispensable to manage growth. It produced the 1811 Commissioner's Plan which has defined Manhattan until today. Two centuries later in 2007, the city released PlaNYC to again address the complex needs and raise its urban vitality. PlaNYC considers a 30-year time frame, and is to be updated every four years, coordinated by the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability.



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PlaNYC's goal of achieving a greener and greater New York City, structured in 10 categories from waterways and transportation to energy and climate change, contains metrics to assess progress. Over 97% of the 127 initiatives were launched within one year of the commencement of the plan and almost two-thirds of the milestones in 2009 were achieved or mostly achieved, according to the PlaNYC Progress Report 2012. For example, planning regulations have been adopted for over 20 transit-oriented schemes with the aim of making 87% of new housing units 400 metres from a public transport stop by 2030. Another target is that 85% of New Yorkers would live within 400 metres from a park. To meet this target, more than 200 acres (0.8 square kilometre) of parkland were created, ensuring that over 74% of residents now live within a 10-minute walk of a park.

- 01 Suzhou has set, and achieved, high living and environmental standards.
- 02 Copenhagen commits to be the world's first Carbon Neutral Capital.
- 03 Thanks to PlaNYC, 74% of New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of a park.

Plans have to be adaptive and contextualised to local needs. While it is less risky to adopt tried and tested policies, innovation not only keeps cities competitive and vibrant, but also dynamically addresses challenges.

Melbourne managed to turn its “empty, useless city centre” (as described in *The Age* in 1978) to the lively, 24/7 city that it is today because of its bold decision to reinvent the city to be built around strong communities and liveable public spaces. Through its Places for People programme devised by architect Jan Gehl, the city upgraded its promenades, laneways and meeting points, and installed public art. A 10-year goal was set to increase the city’s liveability and to establish benchmarks to measure its progress. Within a decade, the city reported that there were 275% more cafes (1993-2004) and 830% more residents in the inner city (1992-2002). Thousands newly flocked to Bourke Street and Swanston Street at all hours, raising safety as well as the vitality of the city. Melbourne is now consistently named as one of the most liveable cities in the world.



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The city of Cape Town, facing high crime and violence in its expansive shantytowns, introduced Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading, a public-private partnership project in Khayelitsha in 2006. Rather than use a top-down approach, the partnership chose to create safe and sustainable neighbourhoods by reducing social, cultural, economic and institutional exclusions. It adopted a multi-solidarity methodology, based on the local concept of Ubuntu. Comprehensive community consultations raised novel proposals that adapted local resources and innovative design solutions. The benefits were multifold; not only in the physical upgrading of the environment, but also community empowerment, funding retention and local socio-economic improvement. The city’s courage to undertake new approaches not only led to better understanding of the complex issue of safety, but also surfaced new design principles which are being replicated throughout Cape Town and other South African metropolitan regions.



A 10-year goal was set to increase (Melbourne’s) liveability and to establish benchmarks to measure its progress.



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- 01 More downtown residents, cafes and public art helped make Melbourne more liveable.
- 02 Community consultation has produced multifold benefits in Cape Town.
- 03 Hong Kong prosecuted 247 public officials in its anti-corruption crackdown.



Let the Roots of Support Grow

The best intentions in planning amount to nothing if not supported by a sound urban governance system. Projects may remain uninitiated, be derailed, completed shoddily, or bring long-term harm to the city. Urban governance refers to the manner in which public leadership interacts with citizens and other stakeholders to make decisions on and have oversight of how a city plans, develops and manages its physical and environmental resources to achieve outcomes.

A visionary leader is often a key catalyst for sound urban governance. Surabaya's Mayor Tri Rismaharini, is one such catalyst. Well known for her hands-on approach – she is often found picking up litter from the streets – Mayor Risma has helped to transform Surabaya, a port city of three million in East Java and Indonesia's second largest city, from a dirty city into a green and clean city, where quality of life is being visibly raised. Not only has the green cover increased to 20% (target is 30%), her e-procurement system has saved the city 13%-24% of its budget; and the newly introduced waste management measures have formalised the income for sorters and delivered socio-economic benefits to the city's poorest.

Sound agencies are another vital ingredient for a sound urban governance system. The trustworthiness of its administration is a principal asset for a city, providing a climate for long-term value creation, investment, jobs and partnerships. In 1974, against a backdrop of rampant corruption, the Hong Kong government initiated the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). Within three years, the ICAC had eliminated all government syndicates and prosecuted 247 government officers. Hong Kong's high level of transparency continues to contribute to not only citizens' trust in its institutions, but also economic vitality as corporations choose to base offices there. New York City, too, has a long-term vision for data transparency, based on the conviction that public knowledge brings the accountability needed to empower the city's delivery-focused planning.

Creating a liveable city is a huge and complex undertaking, and its public institutions need the support of the city's people and private sectors. This also ensures all have a stake in the city's growth, together contributing to the long-term good of the city.

Bogotá's Como Vamos (BCV) ("Bogotá, how are we doing") is a prime example of how governance can be supported by the grassroots.



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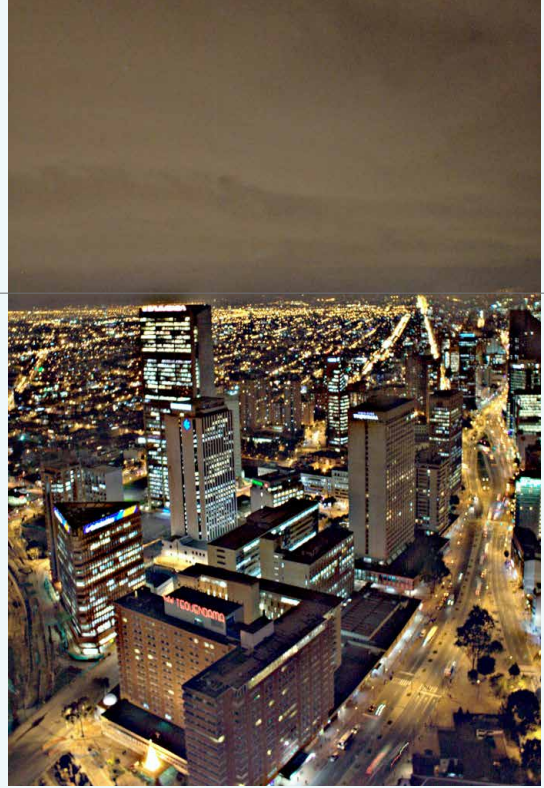


Formed in 1997 to track local election promises, it calls for citizens to exercise social oversight of public administration and budgeting. It analyses public data on areas such as health care, housing and education against citizen perception surveys. Findings, along with proposed solutions, are fed back to policymakers and experts, as well as disseminated to the public via mass media. In addition, BCV works with the Bogotá district governments to monitor the development, implementation and execution of the Bogotá Development Plan through forums and roundtables.

A Framework for Development

So what lies behind successful, liveable cities? History suggests that cities that have successfully overcome periods of decline have had a key tool in common – a framework for development. This allowed them to plan with purpose and develop the systems needed to implement such plans and operate accordingly.

The CLC offers its Liveability Framework as a lens through which city leaders can view their cities and analyse the actions or approaches open to them to achieve high liveability and sustainability. How these principles can be applied must, naturally, respond to each city's own governance structures, priorities and resources. However, cities that are able to define their framework are best placed to undertake complex and far-reaching initiatives to be one step closer to becoming successful, liveable cities.



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Pablo Vaggione is dedicated to resolving the challenges of rapid urbanisation. He was the Lead Author of UN-HABITAT's guide *Urban Planning for City Leaders*. He has worked on projects for the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, CAF (Development Bank of Latin America), Asian Development Bank, Siemens AG and the Economist Intelligence Unit. An architect by training, he studied urban planning at Harvard and sustainable development at the United Nations University.



Elyssa Ludher, an urban and regional planner, has 10 years of experience in public and private sector in Australia, China and Cambodia, including Brisbane City Council, CORDE (Cambodian Organisation for Research, Development and Education) and SKM consulting. She now conducts research at the Centre for Liveable Cities to continue to understand and share solutions on how cities manage increasingly complex social challenges in our globalised world.

01 Bogotá citizens organise themselves to monitor government and hold it accountable.

