

shaping healthy communities



**Urban
synergies**
group

Perspective Statement
Right to the City

perspective statement

Right to the City

This paper provides an orientation and stimulus for critical reflection on cities that aspire to offer quality of life and cater for better health and well-being outcomes for all residents. It explores a possibility to translate the concept “Right to the City” into the contemporary state of our cities and offers potential pathways towards enhanced engagement of the citizenry in achieving improved health and well-being and therefore economic outcomes in Canberra, Australia.

Right to the city is a **holistic** approach to improving the quality of everyday life in cities. The initial concept originated from Henri Lefebvre in 1968 with his book *Le Droit à la ville* (Lefebvre, 1967). He saw the city as a work of art constantly being remade (Butler, 2012, p. 143 ff), as a space of encounter, generating possibilities and opportunities for collective action and requiring collective participation. Where individuals and groups are excluded from meaningful participation in the collective and creative act, optimal outcomes for the society and its environs cannot be achieved.



context

Globally more than half of us are living in cities, spending everyday life in complex and socially and economically challenging systems in pursuit of both career aspirations and personal **happiness** and well-being. Cities provide an enormous concentration of resources to facilitate these aspirations. Unfortunately, cities across the globe demonstrate systemic spatial violence where social polarisation and environmental degradation results from an urban form that disproportionately benefits the empowered and resource rich minorities at the expense of the remaining majority.

Through a lack of engagement, residents become passive rather than active participants in the city, its landscapes, social networks and economic prosperity. The very reason why people move to cities becomes an unreachable goal.

This perspective statement highlights the need to pursue evidence based models of urban renewal that drive social inclusion and environmental enrichment and that comply with Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and UN Rights of the Child (United Nation, 1989).

A great deal of **leadership** responsibility is required to ensure the long-term prosperity of this shared experience. The new urban agenda is currently in the making and can be seen as an opportunity to inform urban renewal in the nations capital. The right to the city received considerable attention and informed the development of the “Barcelona Declaration” for Habitat III on public space (United Nations, 2016). The “World Charter for the Right to the City” provides a progressive framework to rethink cities and urbanisation (International Alliance of Inhabitants, 2005) to achieve enhanced social, well-being and economic prosperity for all residents.



right to the city

To embrace the notion of progress in a meaningful way, we need to celebrate equality, **respect**, cultural diversity and appreciation of time through the creation of spaces and urban forms that capture the diverse aspirations and needs of the Canberra community.

The right to the city can be understood as a call for transformation. A renewed effort on human and environmental health and well-being as a shared responsibility in defining a new paradigm for urban prosperity with our collective bio-history in mind.

This shared responsibility can only be achieved by:

- Evidence based research;
- Open mindedness through consciousness and respect for diversity;
- Collective wisdom through collaboration and critical reflection;
- Trust between stakeholders, time for each other and the absence of domination.

perspective on Canberra, Australia

In order to underpin a meaningful definition and direction for the right to the city in the context of Canberra, Urban Synergies Group hosted an **“Ideas Hatchery”** – a grassroots event inviting individuals from across Canberra to contribute and articulate their understanding of the right to the city. The following perspective is informed by the Hatchery in addition to the collective knowledge and perspectives of the Urban Synergies Group members.

The following principles represent the shared vision of participants. They are presented here to initiate and stimulate a discussion and critical reflection of all stakeholders on the right to the city in the context of Canberra as well as to guide the development of planning principles, metrics to assess and improve performance over time. The recommended indicators for success are helpful to measure progress in the respected to the principles. Each principle is accompanied by a successful case study from around the world to illustrate tangible outcomes.



right to public spaces and places

Spaces and places that are accessible, **multifunctional** and connected, where humans can just be (with or without validation or purpose). In these spaces people are better treated than objects such as cars and have right of way.

Indicators for success

- Richness of voluntary interaction (vibrancy). Evidence through observation and behaviour mapping where engagement of the most vulnerable (indigenous, children, older people, non-human life forms) receive higher weighting;
- Level of investment in cultural activities and objects that translate to quality experiences for the widest range of people;
- Level of social connectedness in public spaces across centres and neighbourhoods;
- Reported vandalism;
- Recorded pedestrian activity;
- Traffic injuries;
- Reported violence.



right to playful quality experiences

Everyday adventure through quality spaces that inspire and afford joy, interaction and **celebration** of uniqueness based on local culture and materials. Being accepted and able to take advantage of opportunities to engage in the environment and community irrespective of age.

Indicators for success

- Evaluation and studies on quality play experiences that are not connected to commercial events but rather everyday life;
- Delivery of community based tactile urbanism across centres and neighbourhoods;
- Amount of stakeholder collaboration and meaningful engagement with residents.



right to trust and diversity

Places where humans can become custodians of places and build trust, not just as fellow citizens, but governments and business to make best decisions together based on respect and equality. Trust includes the degree of self-regulation, low community costs, **safety**, level of comfort and better access.

Indicators for success

- Level of respect of all assets (vandalism);
- The right to represent all cultures through an expression of diversity in all spaces not just emblematic spaces;
- The capacity to innovate and create alternative forms of enterprises, social entrepreneurship, co-operativism and bioregionalism.



right of time

Slow is king – connected spaces where the slowest person is the most important one. Having time for solitude or being amongst others in a natural speed where meaningful interaction with the environment and self is enabled.

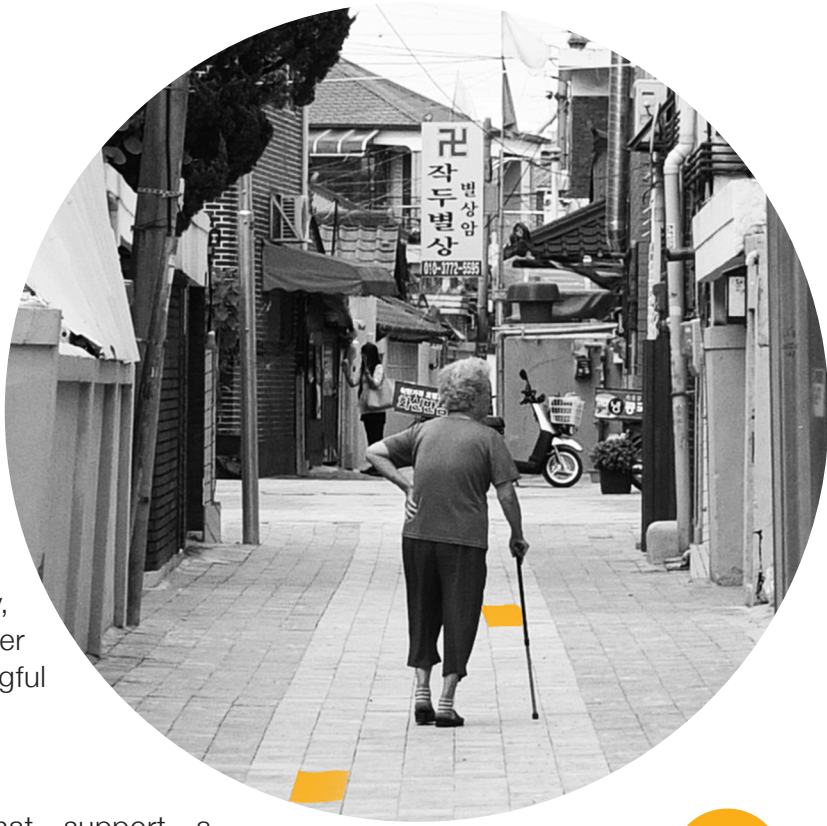
Indicators for success

- Number of slow speed streets (below 20 km/h);
- Level of people moving without rushing;
- Reflective accounts by space users.



right of movement

Being able to access ecologically sound forms of mobility that are perceived as a convenient alternative to car use. Children and **vulnerable** people should be able to move safely without harassment in and around the city. Proximity, distance, quality, legibility and microclimates matter in order to achieve meaningful impacts on the ground.



Indicators for success

- Infrastructure changes that support a reversed road hierarchy that puts people first;
- Modal split shift towards walking, cycling and other forms of ecologically sound forms of mobility;
- Feedback surveys of transit experiences with a focus on active travel to destinations including public institutions, work places, school environments and around community facilities.

right to a healthy safe environment

This includes access for all people to community services, education, health care and safe open spaces. It infers access to an environment that is rich in natural resources, exhibits habitat connectivity, biodiversity, sustainable clean water systems (including sewage systems), sustainable energy sources, recycling systems and that supports local food security.



Indicators for success

- Percentage level of renewable energy;
- Water quality;
- Level of Air pollution;
- Condition of biodiversity;
- Amount and quality of open space;
- Status support for local food produce;
- Reduction of reported violence;
- Service level of community facilities, education and health care.



successful case studies

Northmoore Homezone, Manchester, UK, 2003

In close collaboration with residents the project sought to reduce traffic flow, boost the local identity and transform spaces in the residential area.



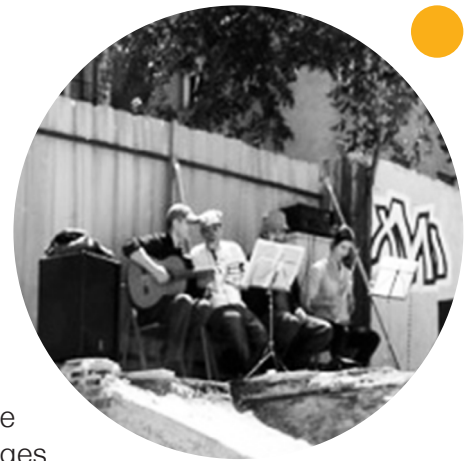
Results included increased active use of the zone by pedestrians and cyclists and a reported increase in the quality of life and a sense of belonging among the neighbours.

Fountain hacks, Guimarães, Portugal, 2012

The mid-sized city of Guimarães introduced temporary changes of its public fountains in the city centre encouraging quality play experiences that are accessible and welcoming to all residents. The intervention created a playful destination and increased civil ownership of monuments by allowing active engagement in the space.



successful case studies



The Barley Field, Madrid, Spain, 2010

The construction of a public facility transformed the neighbourhood of La Latina by converting it into a place to meet, play and engage with fellow citizens of all ages and backgrounds. The project was a result of a new model of collaboration between the government and the neighbourhood where the community were engaged in redefining, building and managing a community facility on vacant lands. The site hosts community events including an open-air cinema, concerts, breakfasts and workshops and exercise opportunities including community basketball, a summer installation of inflatable pools for 'water tai-chi' and gardening.

Suwon, South Korea, 2013

The city government of Suwon under strong leadership by the mayor and international support through ICLEI, the Urban Idea and its partners, redesigned an entire district in the heart of Suwon favoring eco mobile forms of mobility. The neighbourhood residents were asked to give up their vehicles on a voluntary basis over a one month trial period. The government invested and upgraded, streets, green and supportive infrastructure throughout the precinct with outstanding results in partnership with the community. ICLEI evaluated the outcomes of the first Ecomobility Worldfestival, which has been replicated internationally several times since Suwon.

Aménagement de l'Esplanade Vivier Merle, Lyon, France, 2000

Within the existing heart of the business district a major public road was remodeled, reorganized in order to improve the urban transport situation (walking, cycling, bus and tram) as part of an integrated effort to provide comfort, convenience and safety for the citizens. The project questions the nature of spaces and decided to turn it into a boulevard serving the adjoining railway station, shopping centre and offices. The project delivered a human friendly dimension for the intermodal node, including generous tree planting and redefined the urban entry into the city to access important community services.



references

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about urban synergies group

Urban Synergies Group is an international think tank based in Canberra, Australia, that provides services, training, inquiries and raises awareness.

Our mission is to find the best ways to improve urban systems without borders by creating effective synergies in a complex global environment that enable better health and well-being outcomes for all people.

We are creating bridges between cutting edge academic research, non-government organisations, governments and practices, enriching community spirit by sharing our success.

Urban Synergies Group is funded by donations from companions such as trusts, individuals and commissioned services. We operate internationally and offer independent advice in support of the overall health and well-being of urban systems.

become involved

Choose a pathway that suits your personality and purpose, because your **individual actions** and choices matter! Express interest now either as a friend, devotee or companion by accessing <https://urbansynergies.org/get-involved/> or by getting in touch through our email info@urbansynergiesgroup.org

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***“Tell me and I forget.
Show me and I remember.
Let me do and I understand.”***
Confucious

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