



a worldwide investigation
into the future of cities

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Why do you participate in the Urban Age conferences? What are you taking back to Bogotá and elsewhere that you visit?

What we are doing with cities today will determine, to a large degree, people's quality of life, sense of inclusion and happiness for hundreds of years to come. Cities are impossible to demolish and do again. It is very exciting and interesting to participate in a process that takes a look at what's happening in the large cities of the world. Urban Age tries to identify what are the good experiences, as well as the bad ones, getting to know the people who are making our cities. Our cities are not being made by computers. They are made by politicians, architects and urbanists. Urban Age brings these key creators of our urban environments together, the individuals who are determining the world's quality of life for centuries. This is true also because the very large cities become parameters for other smaller cities as well.

As we investigate the challenges of urbanisation in South America, knowing how important social mobility and physical mobility are, how can we give our urban leaders the tools to make better decisions about creating cities?

Urban Age provides a platform to stop, analyse and reflect about the cities we are creating. It is a catalyst for thinking about cities and I am certain Urban Age has helped change the mindset about the way cities are being built. Without being judgemental, Urban Age issues a call to stop and compare. It makes urban designers and policymakers think about their actions. Often there is a lot of demagoguery about designing cities, but the physical aspects determine values and behaviours. Clearly a great library in a very poor neighbourhood is a symbol that shows confidence in the residents' intelligence and the potential of our youth. If the library is more impressive, more beautiful and better designed than the shopping mall, then we create different values. The church in any European medieval town reflected the values of our society. The physical has to function, it creates the values of our society. When we have a city without sidewalks in a developing context, it shows we don't respect those without cars. High quality pedestrian spaces reflect democracy and a respect for human dignity.

It's interesting but we are richer than New York was in 1860, and we have more information and more knowledge, we are more sophisticated. But we are not creating better cities. We should have hundreds of Central Parks and green ways criss-crossing cities in all directions, with pedestrian pathways intersecting everywhere. But we are not doing this. We are not making cities as it was done 150 years ago. London has parks and football fields all over the place but then we go to Bangkok, Shanghai, São Paulo and Mexico City, and we find cities with almost no parks. This is a historic opportunity that is being missed.

You have said people do not have a clear idea about what a good city is. What makes a good city?

When people want to be out of their houses, when they want to be in its parks and its plazas, meeting in public spaces, not in enclosed malls or gated places, it is a good city. When sidewalks can accommodate at least two wheelchairs right next to each other, with parks and sidewalks within walking distance, this is a good city. The biggest problem in São Paulo and Latin America is that we continue to take into consideration only the demands of the upper income residents, those that do not use the city. The wealthy do not demand parks or plazas because they have country clubs. This is unfortunately true of any developing country city in the world.

What are the dominant trends of urbanisation in South America? What values are represented there?

In South America and the developing world, we are creating extremely segregated societies. The upper income residents, the ones with power, go from private place to private place in their car. The city is perceived as a threatening place to be crossed only by going from one private space to another, from one parking lot to another. Some people can spend months without walking one single block in their city.

So how do you change the patterns of navigating through a city?

We have to create fantastic public spaces that even the wealthy cannot resist. In New York's Central Park, on any given morning, there are people who have a billion dollars of wealth mixed with people who have no idea how they will pay their rent next month. Large parks like Chapultepec Park in Mexico City and Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo are becoming increasingly important but we should not just have one or two but hundreds of parks, high quality sidewalks and bicycle paths. These are the symbols that show that someone on a \$30 bicycle is just as valuable as someone in a \$30,000 car. We can do much better. It's almost too late in Latin America because those cities are maturing so quickly. They are almost finished.

London, a much older city, has recently been retrofitted to create greater mobility. How do you bring the imperative for change to cities? How can cities be designed to be more inclusive?

It's very simple. We have to make cities for people, not for cars. This can be seen in the amount of open green space in London compared to São Paulo. But improvements are being made. São Paulo is making positive strides to recuperate the centre of its city. Downtown São Paulo is certain to become an extremely successful central area. In general, I feel there is great potential for São Paulo. For example, it is making a lot of investment in rail transport. But rail is not enough. São Paulo will have to radically improve its bus services, transforming it into a mass transit system. There is also potential to create a great bicycle path network and sidewalks. But these are not engineering decisions. They are political decisions.