Citizen-centric cities

41 – megacities globally by 2030

80% – of older people will live in cities in developed economies by 2050

Citizen-centric cities

Successful cities will be designed around the needs and desires of increasingly empowered and enabled citizens - who are expecting personalized services from the organisations that serve them.

If we are going to live in cities, then we will certainly expect them to suit our needs and desires. Cities, it seems, have always have been products, with citizens as the customers, but now the marketplace for cities is on the move. And in a big way.

The UN predicts 8.5 billion people globally by 2030, 9.7 billion by 2050 and more than 11 billion in 2100 and that by 2100, some 84% of us will live in cities. What's more, by 2030, just under 9% of global population will be living in 41 megacities (defined as 10m+ inhabitants).

A city will increasingly need to provide for its inhabitants, attract newcomers and compete alongside the offerings of other cities. And with direction given by the collective voice of the people that live there, as cities deal with a more connected world, one that expects to have a voice. We already expect personalization, relevance and traceability of the products we use, so surely this will be the same for the city (as a product)?

Cities face a complex stakeholder environment and will need to demonstrate an ability to work across systems and boundaries while improving co-operation and trust. The connectivity of people, governments, decision-makers and the IoT will enable each to contribute to a city as a product. In Sydney, Australia, the provision of bike parking and end-of-trip facilities for cyclists within new developments is now obligatory. In an era where the public voice is easier to access and harder to suppress, it becomes more difficult to generate support for new initiatives without taking public views into account. FixMyStreet is a rudimentary expression of this in the UK today, where citizens report local issues (like graffiti, fly tipping, broken paving slabs, or street lighting) which are then forwarded to the appropriate local council.

So what will we want as global city dwellers? The familiar issues of feeling safe, good jobs, parks and recreation, and arts, culture and nightlife - it is the interaction of these (and other) factors that make a place truly great. Some participants suggest more areas of emphasis - innovative environmental solutions, a focus on connected, healthy, efficient cities and user-friendly goods and services shaped by consumers that will transform companies and the way that cities work. We can expect that cities will become closer, more connected communities, or sets of communities that emphasise and create particulars of the environment that each community needs or wants.

Along with improved safety, and transport upgrades, ageing is one specific concern for cities because in developed countries, 80% of older people will live in cities by 2050, while in developing countries the figure is 25%. Designing with nature is another key concern. Building with nature is not about creating greenbelts and buildings as separate from each other by containing nature in specific locations, but instead working with nature - Singapore today has vertical gardens and is leading in wastewater management, water reclamation activities and drains that support biodiversity.

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The future of our habitat

The shape that our cities take will obviously differ for each situation, but there may be particular lessons to be learned today. As well as Singapore, there is Songdo, South Korea's super-connected city of the future, attracting partners like Cisco's Global Innovation Lab, among others. The UAE is another pacey city development with 'origins' (oil discovery and exploitation) around the same year as Singapore's founding. Here, Dubai is positioning itself as the hub to the UAE focusing especially on business and tourism. Abu Dhabi brings lessons of a different kind, as it launched (with great fanfare) Masdar City, a purpose-built zero carbon project, but it looks more like a green ghost town today. Finally, a US example of a city grasping the idea of 'city as product' is Chattanooga, TN. Chattanooga is building a 'Giga City' and it is the first city in the Western Hemisphere to offer 10-gigabit-per-second fibre Internet service to all residents and businesses. That ought to attract a pioneering spirit.

Cities will become closer, more connected communities.

It looks strongly like cities will be designed with more human values in mind. Each will shift from a set of well understood but siloed industries that feed the current economic models to a new, joined-up model of how we live, work and play. Expect to see demonstrations of local creative solutions and projects as well as a thirst for differentiation that will drive change. Underpinning these solutions is technology as an agent for change. New technologies will be integrated with big data to facilitate healthier, enriched and more connected lifestyles. And design? Beautiful space design and architecture will help attract people to cities, meeting the needs of consumers and/or citizens across aesthetics, functionality and experience. Future generations will be more aware of the legacy they leave for the next generations, as quality of life will be key to deciding where we want to live.

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Related insights

Care in the community

The desire to 'age-in-place' meets a healthcare reform agenda that promotes decentralization. A new care model is customer-centric, caregiver-focused and enhances coordination across care settings.

Intra city collaboration

Increasing competition between cities overrides national boundaries and drives change. They compete to attract the best but also collaborate to avoid the downside of success – over-crowding, under-resourcing and pollution.

Skills concentrations

The need to build and develop capabilities becomes increasingly challenging for companies and workers alike. Those who benefit from the high-skill reward opportunities remain a select group who move ahead of the urban pack.

Access to transport

The widespread need for individuals to travel short distances becomes a key feature of urban design and regeneration. Planners use transport infrastructure to influence social change and lower carbon living.