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Jaime Lerner writes about how to build liveable cities.

- 1 Cities are experiencing an accelerating pace of urbanisation and growing in complexity. The UN estimates that 55% of the global population lives in urban areas – a figure that is projected to rise to 68% by 2050. With a few exceptions, cities are expected to become bigger and more numerous. What does the future hold for them — and all of us — in this scenario? Many are competing to be the most liveable for their people, and to do so in a sustainable manner. All face major challenges, including competing uses for land space and rising pollution. Successful ones are finding the value of close interaction and effective collaboration among the public, private and people sectors. All over, urban planners, governments and developers are increasingly interested in making cities “liveable”. 5
- 2 Cities have traditionally responded to growth by expanding the availability of land for buildings and the transport network, particularly roads, giving less attention to their citizens. More often than not, cities are designed around transport, and personal vehicles in the form of cars are prioritised. As the list of megacities grows and as more and more people move into cities from rural areas, every city should prioritise four issues that have great impact on the quality of urban life and will sustain our world in the long term: mobility, design, sociodiversity and engagement. 10 15
- 3 Cars have been in production for a little more than a century, but the space they have seized and the amount of infrastructural investment they demand is extremely high. Cars are the cigarettes of the future. They occupy more space than any human. Vast areas of land are immobilised for parking purposes. In fact, a growing number of cities are rethinking their allegiance to the automobile because of pollution, climate change and land use concerns. While there is a need for cities to look into urban mobility, the priority should still be to provide comfortable, safe, affordable and easy-to-use public transportation to reduce people’s dependence on cars. Every mode of transportation has to operate optimally and be integrated into a transit network. As such, armed with new ideas and technologies such as artificial intelligence, many cities are reshaping transportation systems to favour walking, cycling and public transit over private cars. Shared mobility, vehicle sharing, call them what you will: the potential for transport sharing is certainly there. 20 25
- 4 Another issue that impacts the quality of urban life is urban design. When addressing sustainability problems, it is a city’s layout that can make the biggest difference to the effort to create a more sustainable urban environment. The layout is the city’s structure of organisation and growth. A healthy city is an integrated structure of life, work and movement. It requires planning that respects the land and the area’s ecosystem: the topography, bodies of water and vegetation. As the urban economy shifts towards service, retail and knowledge-based industries, more jobs are now closer to people’s homes, and with the help of new technologies, many people can work from anywhere at any time. The shorter the commute between home and our place of employment, the more time and energy we save. On the other hand, fragmenting cities into areas with specialised functions such as suburbs, central business districts and downtown areas condemns these spaces and their infrastructure to be idle during long periods of the day or night. A more compact city that supports a diversity of activities leaves more land for conservation, and a mixture of other uses. 30 35 40
- 5 The conversation on liveability has also brought up the issue of diversity. It is important to remember that cities have long been seen as “melting pots” that absorb new dwellers. Many cities were built according to this recipe, and we should not forget the lessons of our past. But now,

cities are fearful of the waves of people who challenge the status quo. The world is facing problems of identity posed by increasing sociodiversity and the need for coexistence is more crucial now than ever before. 45

- 6 To deal with issues of increasing sociodiversity, a sense of shared identity has to be fostered. The feeling of recognition and of belonging to a specific place will improve the quality of life. A city must provide reference points to which people can relate and connect — rivers, parks, public buildings. Such spaces tell stories and protect memories, much like a diary or a family portrait. At the same time that a city's identity is preserved, sociodiversity must be fostered. A city cannot condone ghettos, be they intended solely for the rich or the poor, or for people from specific ethnic backgrounds or certain age groups. Walls and fences are illusory protective barriers. Safety and security are a function of the respect and civility that derive from integration and coexistence. 50
- 7 Citizens are at the heart of cities. Cities should be planned for people, not places. That was the only way it was, in cities of the past. Addressing the challenge of putting people back into the centre of city management requires some going back to basics, back to building liveable cities by starting, naturally, with where people are at, and where they want to be. Engaged citizens also make for successful cities in many other aspects. Co-creation is the only way forward, as no government is in a position to manage cities alone. There is no other option, given the complexity of today's cities and the growing desire and demand everywhere for greater consultation and representation. The city of Montreal, for example, engaged its citizens through surveys and a dedicated phone line to inform them of its smart city goals and gather more ideas. The dedicated phone line led to more than a million data points which revealed the wishes and problems of its citizens. They predominantly addressed issues pertaining to roads, parks, garbage pickups and streetlights. Indeed, a more informed citizenry means a desire for greater consultation and involvement. Making people in cities "visible" will be the challenge to achieving greater liveability and engagement will continue to play a critical role (if not more) in establishing a consensus between the government and its people. 65
- 8 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. The problems we are experiencing should fuel efforts to start building better, more liveable cities. A more cohesive and sustainable society arises from city authorities working with the people and with the private sector to implement shared solutions to common challenges. With that, there can be assurance that even as the world of the future will be more congested, complicated and challenging, it would also become more resourceful, responsive and resilient. But above all, a city is a place, as the writer Richard Sennett puts it, "where strangers meet; where new ideas are formed in a public space. A common ground." Streets, squares, parks, memorials, theatres and museums – these are a city's "living rooms". We must therefore shape its future. 70 75