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Keynote

The Future of Cities and the Mobilisation of Citizens' Creative Potential

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Abstract

"The city and citizenship are a twin pair, they are inextricably interwoven, they have a joint evolution. Perhaps even a destiny.

What is a city but a collection of many people who by desire, circumstance and force are together. Any human settlement has in time got to ask itself 'how do we live together' and 'what are the principles or rules of engagement'.

This agenda is old, it is a cross-cultural phenomenon. Yet the precise form within which it plays itself out changes according periods of history and the cultural setting.

Evidence suggests that cities, which prosper are those, which can find a good alignment between its social differences and where relative harmony prevails.

All cities are essentially made up of different cultures. They are multicultural, but most importantly are they intercultural? Are people interacting and mixing, sharing experiences and making 'their city' one important part of their identity.

Have they indeed fallen in love with the city?

Those who love their city are engaged in it, they tend to participate, they tend to give back to it, they are generous. All as a matter of free will. They are in other words citizens.

Yet, crucially, the city is not only individual people. It is organizations each with a different mission and aim and different cultures.

It is also, furthermore, a built fabric and form made up of myriad parts. There is usually a defined centre, a series of focal points such as a square, there are varied neighbourhoods and connecting streets as well as spaces in between. There are many ordinary buildings and some extraordinary ones.

There are many institutions that express their personality through the buildings they occupy. Some buildings say 'yes' to their surrounding environments and so encourage engagement, whilst others say 'no' and exclude you.

Thus, how the city looks and feels and is put together is important. The atmosphere it creates as well as the institutions it houses and activities it fosters determine the scope for being a good citizen. They either deter or encourage.

The city in essence is an emotional experience that engenders psychological effects. If it feels comforting and inspiring it helps me want to relate to others. Relating to others lies at the core of citizenship.

Ugliness and beauty as well as quality and good design suddenly come into their own. Ugly, horrible places work against citizenship, whereas carefully considered design or good aesthetics can help it along if the conditions are right.

These conditions are often the activities fostered and how place and space operate can help make them work well. Some institutions like libraries, galleries and museums can play a special role as can festivals. Yet it is often the mundane, seemingly trivial and small interactions that build up into what becomes identity with a place.

Being a citizen ultimately means being a public person. Someone who is out there talking, communicating and ultimately participating.

My talk will explore what all this means in detail.

Charles Landry