

Manifesto

Make better cities

It's not always about the big idea, the tech solution or the grand plan. Sometimes all you need to make a better city is some humanity, a sense of scale and keen citizens.

1

Be wise, not smart:

The term “smart cities” is abused. What's the alternative – a dumb city? Advocates are often linked to a salesman at a Silicon Valley tech company. City halls have always collected information (or “big data”) and tried to glean truths from it. Just because techies can now crunch the data quicker doesn't make it a change that should invoke evangelical tones. The wisest cities also focus on “small data” – the incidentals that actually make our lives better.

2

Buy a pot, some soil and a seed:

If you walk the streets of London or Kyoto you'll see houses where people have chosen to ignore the risk of vandalism and theft, and placed plants outside their homes, offices and shops. A small act of faith and a belief in investing in where they live. These acts soon multiply and deliver change.

3

Branch out:

Too many cities put saplings in the ground that struggle to take hold. Trees with handsome canopies provide places to rest under on sunny days and add a splash of colour to the concrete. Trees also act as living city branding: the ginkgo is Tokyo (especially when it dazzles yellow come autumn) and the London plane is the UK capital with its bristling summer flutter.



4

Fix up, look sharp:

One of the most exciting shifts of the past decade has been to see the bulldozer retired and replaced by teams of fixer-uppers. People are starting to understand that we should embrace what we have; that today's ugly is often tomorrow's beautiful; that in every city there is a potential High Line. This shift is also propelled forward by the understanding that the young and creative need cheaper, unreformed spaces for work and play. Squeaky clean can be seriously dull.

5

Fight for diversity:

Cities are the shelters and promoters of difference. Their vibrancy and security are built on a sense of being welcoming and we have to do more to protect that.

6

Join the dark side:

The past few years have seen lots of cities appoint night mayors; champions charged with protecting the night-time economy. Too many cities see bars and clubs as dens of sin (what's wrong with that?) and clamp down on licences. But the night is a generator of money – and taxes – and cities need to let their hair down. Plus jobs in bars and restaurants are often entry points to the world of work for new arrivals.



7

Make good maps:

We need to get people walking – it saves space on packed public transport and helps us stay lean. But folk often feel lost above ground not following a subway line. Make great maps, display sharp wayfinding and we'll take a hike.

8

Talk more:

From laptop-glued nomadic workers to seniors sent into a world of self-checkout and autopay, city-dwellers are feeling more and more isolated. Urbanism can help. Look at how a great Italian piazza works, throwing everyone together. The essence of the square can be used to engineer living rooms for the city with the aid of plants, seating, a news kiosk and an outdoor gym.

9

Say yes:

Cities need rules but most also get carried away with admonishing people for all sorts of modest rebellions against their regulations. How about letting people lock their bikes to the railings, walk on the grass and skateboard where they like?



10

Be tentative with tall living:

The solution to rising populations and a scarcity of land in many cities is to build ever taller towers – and we're only just beginning to grasp the consequences. Less-considered projects can lead to people feeling disconnected, detached and depressed. There are many for whom high living will never be the solution, so don't push them in the lift.

11

See the light:

Good lighting can work miracles. Illumination helps make cities feel safe and encourages a night-time economy. But it also, like trees, acts as city branding. The rooftop neon signs for banks and watch brands in Geneva are bright sparks of creativity, while the light show that is a Hong Kong tower come dusk is a flashy display of trading might.

12

Pass the pooch test:

Individuals are getting hitched later and later in life – or not at all – and living longer, often alone after a partner has passed away. That's why we see the rise of the pampered pet. Don't be sniffy about the trend or laugh at those who spend money on dog clothes. These animals are trusted companions who help owners navigate the stresses of city life. And cities need to embrace this fact. Dog runs, parks that make space for hounds and bars that say “yes, dogs welcome” are to be encouraged. A pooch-positive city is a potent force for wellbeing.

13

Be kinky:

There's something about the curve of a lane and the twists of a street that simply adds appeal. The grid is efficient; the tangle enchanting. We build straight to allow for traffic flow but as we embrace a more walkable city, we should enjoy being kinky. These snaking routes also deliver serendipity and surprise.