

Making it happen

The Urbanism Awards provide important inspiration and lots of good ideas for what a great city, neighbourhood or street should look like. But how to get there from here remains largely unresolved and involves tackling social and economic as well as physical issues. So in this review, Dr Nicholas Falk AoU considers a few recent guides, before suggesting what place leadership might involve.

The seven emerging principles set out in the Academy's Agenda for the Future of Urbanism – drawn from 2016's Congress – are all highly relevant to creating better new neighbourhoods: 'forget utopia; understanding place; mix of uses, streets and permeability; walkable scale; plot-based urbanism; and flexible and loose fit'. But having visited most of the cities that qualify for the European City of the Year award, I wonder how do some places manage to transform themselves while others fail to make the grade?

Furthermore, as any city is made up of many parts, good and bad, you must first take account of their history as well as their geography. As Patrick Geddes memorably stated, "But a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time". Perhaps planners and architects tend to focus too much on the physical – what you can see, touch and even smell – as opposed to the more ephemeral qualities that comprise social, economic and natural capital? So here are a few recent books that offer fresh viewpoints.

Psychology and the City

Charles Landry AoU has teamed up with Chris Murray, who once worked in psychiatry before eventually ending

up as chief executive of the Core Cities group. This provocative booklet, one of a series of eight, provides a whirlwind review of the different schools of psychology and their urban potential. It contrasts human drivers that evolved from surviving in the natural world with urban realities, and explores how we can tap into the 'soul of a city'. A personality test provides a convenient tool for classifying cities, as curious or driven, for example, and should provide a better means of opening up a useful conversation than simply talking about transport or housing in boxes.

While simple insights like Maslow's hierarchy of needs remind us of the importance of fixing the basics first, as do concepts such as 'space to grow'. What interested me most was the possibility of moving from closed to more open cities, that is cities that question themselves and strive to do better for all. It is surely not enough to preach the value of 'a mix of uses', when so many places are better described as 'mixed-up' with unresolved conflicts between, say, cars and pedestrians, or young and old. Perhaps we are in danger of 'paralysis by analysis' where we end up with ever more boxes to tick, without being able to get out of them. So, understanding what makes a great city tick must help

us in developing the leadership to face up to and overcome obstacles, such as lack of resources.

City of Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are fast replacing 'sustainability' as a measure of what makes a good city. Hugh Barton AoU is well-placed to produce a radical guide to planning, having retired from his position at the University of the West of England, bridging the worlds of neighbourhood planning and place-making, and what creates healthier lifestyles. In his book *City of Wellbeing* he introduces a simple reality check under the economics of land and development, where plots have a lifecycle, shows how 'players in the game' interact to produce different types of urban form, and points out that, like transport 'Good urban form is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for improvement'.

This is a book that every urbanist should read if they want a highly readable synopsis of what is known, as well as a practical summary of how to apply the lessons, with some excellent diagrams and pictures. It calls for a different approach to planning education and an updated set of values, drawing on evidence from exemplars.

Interestingly, Barton first published a memorable diagram putting the human settlement in a global context back in 2006. This diagram looks remarkably like the 'doughnut' which has recently taken the world by storm, according to the author of *Doughnut Economics*. The book's author, Kate Raworth, shows not only the power of a good diagram, but also that the economic values that drive our capitalist system are being seriously questioned. By starting with the "big picture", rather than the numbers presented, everyone should see that we are on a journey to nowhere and on a precipice, to use two other analogies. Though acclaimed by *the Guardian*, I am not so convinced by her metaphor. To me the doughnut city is a city like Detroit with a hole in the middle where its heart (or the jam) should be, but of course she is right to reiterate the "limits to growth" and the importance of diagrams in understanding how things work.

Natural Capital

There are no diagrams or pictures in Dieter Helm's latest book *Natural Capital: Valuing the Planet*, but it is no less important, as he puts environment at the heart of the economy. Development planners complain that their masterplans are often disregarded when they come up against local objections, and political short-sightedness. Helm acutely argues for evaluating options in terms of their impact on assets or capital; what we inherit or get for free are particularly important. The UK's coalition government aimed to leave the environment in a better state and the then chancellor George Osborne asked Helm to advise them on how it should be valued. His answer requires maintenance to be properly funded. The concept might also be used to consider how any losses to the greenbelts, for example, can adequately be compensated for.

This is a beautifully written and logical book, and it is great pity that economics does not receive more consideration in training planners and would-be urbanists. Large-scale restoration of damaged land could be used to recharge our failing local economies, and rebalance our increasingly unequal society. As it is the Treasury, not Communities and Local Government, that holds the main cards, urbanists need to rethink the relationship between town and country as Ebenezer Howard once did. Few others will dare to cross the disciplinary and professional barriers.

Future Cities

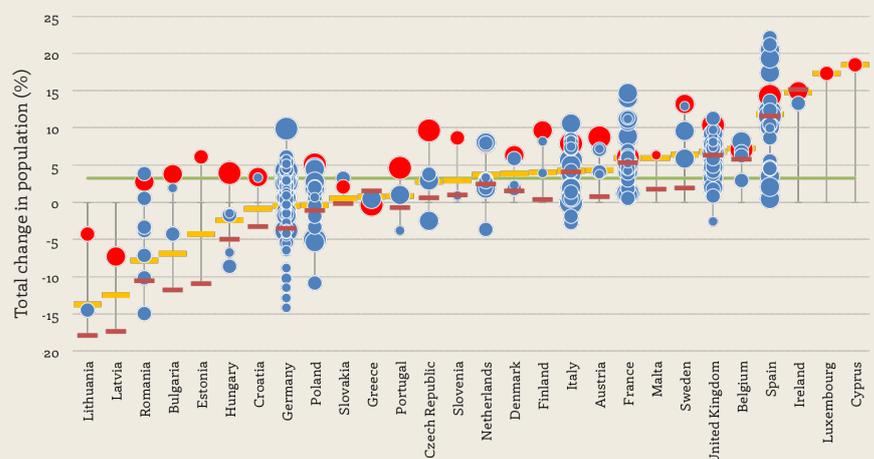
One urbanist who has managed to bridge architecture, development planning and transport is Camilla Ween AoU, and her concise book *Future Cities* provides a powerful set of stories of how to bring about or manage change in difficult circumstances. What is particularly good about this book is not only that it is very affordable, but also that the electronic version is full of web links that direct you to the source material for the many case studies. Ween states in the introduction: "This book sets out to explain the issues that will face rapidly growing cities in the next 20 to 30 years and how, building on sustainable practice already being introduced around the world, cities can and will grow and flourish". With no

fewer than 100 ideas to choose from, as well as masterful summaries of all the key issues, if you were to read one book, this would be it.

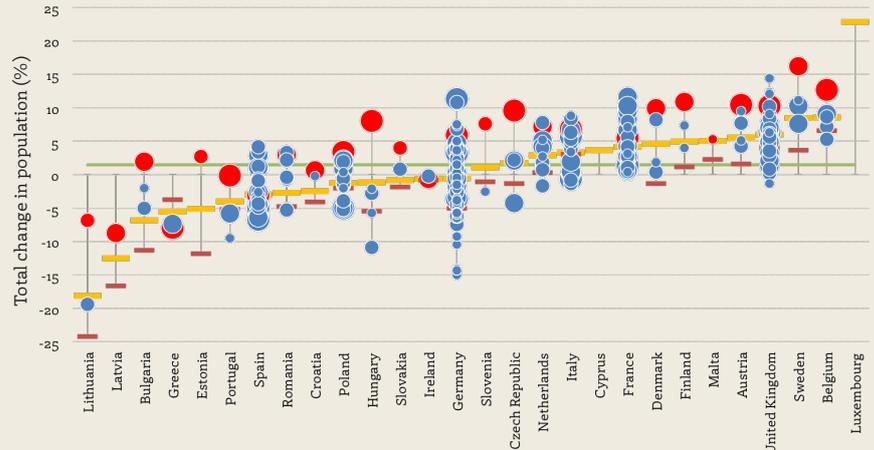
The Creative City

Every urbanist will have read something of Jane Jacobs, but there is now a superb collection of her short works, under the title *Vital Little Plans*, which shows the breadth of her achievements. As the editors say, she sought a world of markets without capitalism and focussed on "the struggle of humans to forge new work from old in a society that favours established interests". Unlike most academics, she spent her life learning from what she saw from walking around and then from

Total population change by metro regions, 2002 - 2012



Projected population change by metro regions, 2015 - 2025



Source: Eurostat

- National Average
 - Metro Region Capital
 - Other Metro Regions
 - Non Metro Regions
 - EU-28 Average
- Metro Region Population:
- < 500,000
 - 500,000 - 1,000,000
 - 1,000,000 - 2,500,000
 - > 2,500,000



Jane Jacobs © Phil Stanziola

writing to explain why some cities grew while others languished. She was successful as a campaigner in stopping expressways being built across Manhattan and Toronto, but never won the full support of urbanists, like Lewis Mumford, who dismissed her as a housewife, or economists such as Edward Glaezer, who saw her as unrealistic. I think that was because she was as much a poet or philosopher, relying often on assertions based on anecdotes. She is quoted as saying “City growth patterns, in sum, are messy”, which is why she was loved by community activists, but dismissed by many professionals.

So how do we inject creativity into cities that are failing? Impressed as I have been with the arguments for going to scale, as the physicist Geoffrey West does in his epic study, and for accelerating the rate of development in places with real growth potential, I am struck by the greater importance of valuing quality over quantity, and going for ‘great ideas, small projects’. So in answering the AoU’s challenge of how to make ‘it’ happen, I suggest we reflect on how quality (or complexity) can be fostered over time, and how to avoid what we really value being needlessly lost. In particular, this means analysing what leaders do in getting others to follow them, and also understanding what enables people to behave in more collaborative ways.

For those wanting to widen their leadership skills I suggest one of the many books dealing with the art of war. Correlli Barnett ably explains The

Collapse of British Power between the two world wars as the failure of business and government to face up to reality – a criticism that applies equally to the Brexiteers. “They continued to lack the inner restlessness of American and German businessmen and the pleasure of these nations in efficiency and growth”. That was first published in 1972, but writing in 2013, David Reynolds, a historian of the First World War, warns that “For two decades after 1945 the British lived, more or less contentedly, in the reflected glory of the Second World War”.

So complacency and the tendency to look for simple short-term answers are the real enemies. A simple ABC of place-making leadership can be explained using case studies as Ambition, followed by Brokerage, but above all applied over time, through Continuity. The cities that have had the will to transform themselves, such as Freiburg or Rotterdam, have stuck at it, and continued to learn from the best. How tragic that the UK should be turning its back and disappearing into a black hole, when investing in transforming our cities could provide the most practical means to a better life for all. ‘Making it happen’ should be our rallying cry.

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU is executive director of The URBED Trust.

1. Charles Landry and Chris Murray, *Psychology & The City: the hidden dimension*, Comedia, 2017
2. Hugh Barton, *City of Wellbeing: a radical guide to planning*, Routledge, 2017
3. Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: seven ways to think like a 21st century economist*, Random House, 2017
4. Camilla Ween, *Future Cities: all that matters*, Hodder and Stoughton, 2014
5. Samuel Zipp and Nathan Storning editors, *Vital Little Plans: the short works of Jane Jacobs*, Short Books Ltd, 2017
6. Geoffrey West, *Scale: the universal laws of growth etc*, Penguin, 2017
7. Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, Eyre Methuen 1972, paperback reprinted Alan Sutton, 1997
8. David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: the Great War and the Twentieth Century*, Simon and Schuster, 2014
9. Nicholas Falk and Barry Munday, *The ABC of Housing Growth and Infrastructure*, The Housing Forum, 2014