

Section One: Overture

City-making is a complex art; it is not a formula. There is no simplistic, ten-point plan that can be mechanically applied to guarantee success in any eventuality.

But there are some strong principles that help send good city-making on its way.

- The most significant argument of *The Art of City-Making* is that cities should not seek to be the most creative city ***in the world*** or region or state. They should strive to be the best and most imaginative cities ***for the world***. This one change of word – from ‘in’ to ‘for’ – has dramatic implications for a city’s operating dynamics. It gives city-making an *ethical* foundation.¹ It helps the aim of cities becoming *places of solidarity* where the relations between the individual, the group, outsiders to the city and the planet are in better alignment. These can be cities of passion and compassion.
- Go with the grain of local cultures and their distinctiveness, yet be open to outside influences. Balance local and global.
- Involve those affected by what you do in decision-making. It is astonishing how ordinary people can make the extraordinary happen, given the chance.
- Learn from what others have done well, but don’t copy them thoughtlessly. Cities focused mainly on best practices are followers not leaders and do not take the required risks to move themselves forward.
- Encourage projects that add value economically and reinforce ethical values simultaneously. This means revisiting the balance between individual wants and collective and planetary needs relevant to the 21st Century. Too often value is defined narrowly in terms of financial calculus. This is naïve. The new economy requires an ethical value base to guide action. It will imply behaviour change to meet value-based goals such as putting a halt to the exploitation of the environment. Combining social and environmental with economic accounting helps identify projects that pass this test. The ‘fair trade’ movement is an example.

¹ Thanks to Uffe Elbaek from Kaos Pilots, who made the point about ‘for’ and ‘in’ in relation to their organisation’s goals in education

- Every place can make more out of its potential if the preconditions to think, plan and act with imagination are present. The imagination of people, combined with other qualities such as tenacity and courage, is our greatest resource.
- Foster *civic creativity* as the ethos of your city. Civic creativity is imaginative problem-solving applied to public good objectives. It involves the public being more entrepreneurial within accountability principles and the private sector being more aware of its responsibilities to the collective whole.

You will come across themes in *The Art of City-Making*. Here are some you will encounter:

- Our sensory landscape is shrinking precisely at the moment when it should broaden. Sensory manipulation is distancing us from our cities and we are losing our visceral knowledge of cities. We have forgotten how to understand the smells of the city, to listen to its noises, to grasp the messages its look sends out and to be aware of its materials. Instead there is information and sensory overload in the name of making the city a spectacular experience.
- The city is discussed in barren, eviscerated terms and in technical jargon by urban professionals as if it were a lifeless being. In fact, it is a sensory, emotional, lived *experience*. The city is more than hardware. How often do strategic urban plans start with the words 'beauty', 'love', 'happiness', 'excitement', as distinct from the words 'bypass', 'spatial outcome' or 'planning framework'?
- To understand the city and to capture its potential requires us to deal with five major blind spots: We need to *think* differently in a more rounded way in order to see the connections between things; we need to *perceive* the city as a more comprehensively sensory experience so understanding its effect on individuals; we need to *feel* the city as an emotional experience; and we need to *understand* cities culturally. Cultural literacy is the skill that will help us better understand the dynamics of cities. We need to *recognize the artistic* in all of us, which can lead us to a different level of experience.
- An understanding of culture, in contrast to economics or sociology, is a superior way of describing the world because it can explain change, its causes and effects, and does not take any ideology, institution or practice for granted or as immutable. Culture is concerned with human behaviours and as such,

cultural analysis can be expressed in human terms we find familiar and engaging. It is thus a good medium through which to provide stories about the world.

- Cities need a story or cultural narrative about themselves to both anchor and drive identity as well as to galvanise citizens. These stories allow individuals to submerge themselves into a bigger, more lofty endeavour. A city which describes itself as the 'city of churches' fosters different behaviour patterns in citizens than a city that projects itself as a 'city of second chances'. (Critics complain such cultural narratives are difficult to measure. We shall return to this contention later).
- The internal logic of the unfettered market has a limited story of ambition and no ethics or morality. It has no view of the 'good life', of social mixing, of mutual caring or nurturing the environment. There is an imperative to make the market system *serve* the bigger picture – through incentives, regulations...
- whatever. This places responsibility *on us*.
- Like a veil, the market system shrouds over our consciousness while plumping up desire and consumption. The market logic has a tendency to fragment groups into units of consumption and enclaves and in so doing to break up social solidarities. These are needed if intractable urban problems such as responsibility for the public realm or natural surveillance are to be achieved.

A conceptual framework is offered to help us unscramble complexity. It focuses on assessing deeper faultlines and problems that will take generations to solve: Traditional drivers such as IT and the ageing population; battlegrounds, the day-to-day contests about priorities; and paradoxes such as the simultaneous rise of a risk-averse culture with a pressure to be creative and to break the rules.

Some of the main points made in *The Art of City-Making* are that the overall dynamic of the system that governs city-making is far less rational than it makes itself appear. It does not look at comprehensive flows, connections or inter-relations, and downstream impacts are not seen or costed. City-making is no one's job. The urban professions and politicians believe it is theirs, but they are only responsible for a part. Because of this fragmentation and the competing rules of different professions and interests we cannot build the cities we love anymore because the current rules, especially around traffic engineering, forbid it. Six

billion people on the planet is too many unless lifestyles change dramatically.

The *Art of City-Making* proposes that we:

- Redefine the scope of creativity, focusing much more on unleashing the mass of ordinary, day-to-day, dormant creativity that lies within most of us. Equally the focus should be on social and other forms of creativity. This shifts attention from assuming creativity only comprises the creative industries and media. Creativity is in danger of being swallowed up by fashion.
- Recognise artistic thinking as helpful in finding imaginative solutions, engaging and moving people. All urban professions should consider thinking like artists, planning generals and acting like impresarios.
- Rethink who our celebrities are and what an urban heroine or hero should be. This could be an invisible planner, a business person, a social worker or an artist.
- See that there is a major opportunity for the return of the city-state and for cities to become value-driven to an extent much more than nation states can. This entails renegotiating power relations with national governments

At its best good city-making leads to the highest achievement of human culture. A cursory look at the globe reveals the names of cities old and new. Their names resonate as we think simultaneously about their physical presence, their activities, their cultures, people and ideas: Cairo, Isfahan, Delhi, Rome, Constantinople, Canton/Gúangzhǒu, Kyoto, New York, San Francisco, Shanghai, Vancouver; or, on a smaller scale, Berne, Florence, Varanasi, Shibam. Our best cities are the most elaborate and sophisticated artefacts humans have conceived, shaped and made. The worst are forgettable, damaging, destructive, even hellish. For too long we believed that city-making involved only the art of architecture and land-use planning. Over time, the arts of engineering, surveying, valuing, property development, and project management began to form part of the pantheon. We now know that the art of city-making involves all the arts; the physical alone does not make a city or a place. These include: The art of understanding human needs, wants and desires; the art of generating wealth and bending the dynamics of the market and economics to the city's needs; the art of circulation and city movement; the art of urban design; and the art of trading power for creative influence so the power of people is unleashed. We could go

on. But let's not forget community endorsement, health, inspiration, and celebration. Most importantly it involves the art of adding value and values simultaneously in everything undertaken. Together, the mindsets, skills and values embodied in these arts help make places out of simple spaces.

The city is an interconnected whole. It cannot be viewed as merely a series of elements, although each element is important in its own right. When we consider a constituent part we cannot ignore its relation to the rest. The building speaks to its neighbouring building and to the street; and the street helps fashion its neighbourhood. Infused throughout are the people who populate the city. They mould the physical into shape and frame its use and how it feels.

The city comprises both a hard and a soft infrastructure. The hard is like the bone structure, the skeleton, while the soft is akin to the nervous system and its synapses. One cannot exist without the other.

The city is a multifaceted entity. It is an economic structure – an economy; a community of people – a society; a designed environment – an artefact; and a natural environment – an ecosystem. It is an economy, a society, an artefact and an ecosystem governed by an agreed set of rules – a polity. Its inner engine or animating force is its culture. Culture, the things we find important, beliefs and habits, gives the city its distinctiveness – its flavour, tone and patina. The art of city-making touches all these dimensions. City-making is about choices, and therefore about politics, and therefore about the play of power. Our cities reflect the forces of power that have shaped them.

The Art of City-Making is quite long, but there are different rhythms in the book and I hope it is easy to read in bite sized self-contained chunks. For instance the sensory landscape of cities has one mood and attempts to be lyrical in parts; whereas the section on the 'city as a guzzling beast' is fact driven and the chapters on the geography of misery and desire have a more exasperated tone. The second half of the book seeks to bring things together and to clarify, simplify and help the reader throw light on complex bigger issues affecting cities and as we draw towards the end the 'city as a living work of art' is like a toolbox of ideas to move forward. 'Creativities across the globe' and 'creativity: Thinking through the steps' invite the reader to make their own judgements about what places are really inventive and why.

City-making and responsibility

Whose responsibility is it for making our cities? While the forms they take are usually unintentional, cities are not mere accidents. They are the product of decisions made for single, separate, even disparate purposes, whose interrelationships and side effects have not been fully considered.²

City-making is in fact no one's job. Politicians say it is theirs, but they can get too concerned with managing a party rather than a city. Elected officials can get addicted to shorter-term thinking. The imperative to get re-elected can stifle leadership, risks are not taken and easy wins or instantly visible results are fore fronted – say, the building of a bypass or as many housing units as possible. Perhaps a local partnership or a chief executive officer is responsible? Probably not.

The urban professions would claim they are in charge, but they are responsible only for aspects of the physical parts. Yet if there is no conscious overarching sense of city- or place-making, we go by default patterns and the core assumptions of each profession – their technical codes, standards and guidelines, such as those that set patterns for a turning circle or the width of pavements. Such guidelines may simply not produce tangibles that hang together cohesively to form a city. The technical knowledge of highway engineers, surveyors, planners or architects seen in isolation, while requiring rethinking on occasion, is probably fine, but a technical manual does not create a bigger picture vision of what a city is, where it could be going and how it fits into a global pattern.

It is no one's job at present to connect the agendas, ways of thinking, knowledge and skill bases. If, at present, no one is responsible, then everyone is to blame for our many ugly, soulless, unworkable cities and our occasional places of delight. And there is a pass-the-parcel attitude to responsibility. At one moment the highway engineers are the scapegoat, the next the planner or the developer. What is needed is more than being a mere networker or broker, and requires a deeply etched understanding of what essence each professional grouping brings or could bring to the art of city-making.

The spirit of city-making with its necessary creativity and imagination is more like improvised jazz than chamber music. There is experimentation, trial and error, and everyone can be a leader when it is right that they are. As if through mystery, orchestration occurs through seemingly unwritten rules. Good city-making requires myriad acts of persistence and courage that need to be aligned like a good piece of music. There is not just one conductor,

² Bartlett School guy

which is why leadership in its fullest sense is so important because seemingly disparate parts have to be melded into a whole.

Art and Science

The Art of City-Making privileges the word 'art' over 'science'. We can still be scientific in the procedures of how we approach city issues. As with natural sciences we can define questions, gather information and resources, form hypotheses, analyze facts and data and on occasion perform experiments, and we can certainly interpret things and draw conclusions that serve as a starting point for new hypotheses. But given the array of things in a city to consider, different forms of insight are needed, and these change all the time, for example, from the hard science of engineering to the soft of environmental psychology. Adhering to methodologies is inappropriate. Science assumes a predictability that the human ecologies that are cities cannot provide.

The Art of implies judgements of value. We are in the realm of the subjective. It implies there is a profound understanding of each city-making area, but also, in addition, the ability to grasp the essence of other subjects, to be *interdisciplinary*. The methods used to gain insight and to know are broad-ranging, from simple listening to more formalised comparative methods and understanding how intangible issues like image can help urban competitiveness. These arts are skills acquired by experience and acute observation, requiring deep knowledge, the use of imagination and being disciplined.

Fine judgement is key to city-making. What works in one situation, even when the factors seem the same, may not work in another. For example, to launch the long-term image and self-perception campaign in Leicester, posters saying 'Leicester is boring' worked positively because there was enough resilience in the city to both understand the nuggets of truth embodied in the campaign and to respond actively to the criticism and to appreciate irony. However, in neighbouring Derby, such a negative approach would have pushed people into their shell rather than pulled them out of it. Whilst specialised judgement in particular cases is key, there are principles that tend to work across particularities, such as going with, rather than against, the grain of peoples' cultural backgrounds in implementing projects.

The word *city-making* is preferred to *city-building*. The latter implies that the city is only that which the built environment professions have physically constructed. Yet what gives the city life, meaning

and purpose are the *acts* people perform on the physical stage. The stage set is not the play. The physical things are the accoutrements, helpful instruments and devices. The aim is to shift the balance, to increase the credibility and status of the scriptwriters, the directors and performers. Countless skills come to mind. The core professions beyond built environment people include environmental and social occupations such as conservation advisors or care professionals, economic development specialists, the IT community, community professions and volunteers, and 'cross-cutting' people such as urban regeneration experts. There are historians, anthropologists, people who understand popular culture, geographers, psychologists and many other specialists. There is a wider group that includes educators, the police, health workers, local businesses, and the media that makes a city tick. Then there is the wider public itself which is the glue that ties things together. Within these groups, there is a need for visionaries who can pinpoint what the city's prospects are and where it might be going. Unless all these people are part of the urban story, the physical remains an empty shell.

Yet too often we rely on the priesthood of those concerned with the physical, and they perhaps more than others are responsible for the cities we have. Acerbically we might ask: Do they understand people and their emotions. Do some of them even like people?

Push and pull

Transitional periods of history, like the Industrial Revolution or the technological revolution of the past fifty years, can produce confusion – a sense of liberation combined with a feeling of being swept along by events. It thus takes a while for new ethical stances to take root or to establish a new and coherent world view. For example, the link between the individual and the group is gradually being reconfigured as former bonds to traditional place-based communities have fractured, and have been further weakened by increasing mobility and decreasing provision by public authorities. Creating stable, local identities or senses of belonging in this context is difficult.

The temper of the age is one of uncertainty, foreboding, vulnerability and lack of control over overweening global forces. It is hard to see a way to a Golden Age. Amongst the present-day young, the *Zeitgeist* of the '60s generation, with its sense of 'we can change the world' is absent. A significant proportion of the young feel change is potentially threatening rather than liberating.

But what is different about the spirit of the age is the recognition that the long-term effects of industrialism have hidden real costs.

City mayors or key officials know about the contradictory demands of successful city-making in this setting. They experience and navigate the push and pull of clearing rubbish, reducing noise, curtailing crime, making movement and transport easy, ensuring urban services, housing and health facilities are up to speed, while leaving something in the kitty for culture. Day-to-day life needs to work.

But mayors and their cities have to play on a much larger canvas if they are to generate the wealth and prosperity to fund the necessary investments in infrastructures and facilities that generate the quality of life of their city.

Cities must speak to a world well beyond national government. It needs to attract investment bankers, inward investing companies, property developers, the talented the world over. It needs to court the media through which its resonance is either confirmed or generated.

To survive well, bigger cities must play on varied stages – from the immediately local, through the regional and national, to the widest global platform. These mixed targets, goals and audiences each demand something different. Often they pull and stretch in diverging directions. How do you create coherence out of wants and needs that do not align?

One demands a local bus stop shelter, the other airport connectivity across the world; one audience wants just a few tourists to ensure the city remains more distinctly itself, the other as many as possible to generate money; one wants to encourage local business incubators, the other a global brand; for some, an instantly recognisable city brand to disseminate is the way forward, for others it is merely copying the crowd. The list is endless.

Working on different scales and complexity is hard: The challenge is to coalesce, align and unify this diversity so the resulting city feels coherent and can operate consistently.

But lurking in the background are bigger issues that play on the mind of the more visionary urban leader, issues that the world cannot avoid and that cities have to respond to. Global sustainability is one. It is a consideration that should shape what cities do, how we build, how we move about, behave and how we

avert pollution. Taken seriously it requires dramatic behavioural change since technological solutions can only take us so far.

There is already an air of resignation, tinged with guilt, in individuals and decision-makers alike; we cannot face the implications of getting out of the car or refitting the economy for the period beyond the oil age. But that time is coming at us fast. It is too easy to respond only when the horse has already bolted. It is too difficult, too many feel, to argue for the switch to public transport, to generate the taxes to create a transport system that feels great to use as much for the well-off as for those at the other end of the scale. This means rethinking density and sprawl. Everyone knows the economic equation and the urban formation that makes this work as well as the tricks that seduce the user: City regions with hubs and nodes, incentives like park and ride, and disincentives to travel by car.

It has been solved in many parts of the world – think of Hong Kong or Curitiba – but it requires a different view of public investment and investment in the public good and how much the individual gives up for wider public purposes.

As mentioned, there is a tendency to pass the parcel on responsibility. Some say it should be government taking the lead, but at the same time these people do not want government to be so powerful. Yet many US cities have taken the lead over national government and signed the Kyoto agreement, reminding us of the power of cities to drive national agendas.

But sustainability addresses more than environmental concerns. It has at least four pillars: The economic, social, cultural and ecological. And there is more to add. Cities need to be emotionally and psychologically sustaining, and issues like the quality and design of the built environment, the quality of connections between people and the organisational capacity of urban stakeholders become crucial as do issues of spatial segregation in cities and poverty. Sustainable places need to be sustaining across the range.

Unresolved and unclear

There are many opinions in the text that follows and various conclusions are reached about how cities should move forward. Where do the judgements come from, what is their basis and what

is the evidence?³ What I have laid out comes from my experience of observing cities; of participating in projects in cities from the small to the large; talking to city leaders and the more powerful about how they want to make their cities better; and talking to activists and the less powerful about what they want to change and how they are going to do it.

This has made me even more curious about cities and I want to know how they work, succeed or fail, and why. I have reflected on these encounters and am left with many unanswered questions. As an example, I keep on thinking of the balances that need to be achieved and then worry that this leads to compromise and blandness: Creating urban delights or curtailing urban misery; focusing on density or being lax with sprawl; and worrying about what the world thinks of your city or just getting on with it regardless. Alternatively I have been thinking of questions like: Is it possible to create places where people from different backgrounds intermingle and where segregation is reduced? How can you tap the dormant energy of people that coexists side by side with pervasive passivity? What skills, talents, insight and knowledge are needed to make cities work? What qualities are needed to be a good city-maker? Imagination for sure, but what about courage, commitment and cleverness? Is it worth having lofty aims about cities and does this provide the motivation, energy and will to change things?

My intention is to start a conversation with whoever is reading this as if we were mutually critical friends. Because of that I have tried to write in a conversational style. I know many academics will find this irritating. Yet I have a reader in mind who is probably responsible for some field of city-making; someone who is somewhat ground down by the difficulties of getting things done, who has high-flown ideals, who wants to be active yet feels they should stand back and contemplate, but who does not want to engage with a weighty tome. I have tried to switch between the evocative, the conceptual, the anecdotal and the exemplary and I hope this rhythm works. This is not a step-by-step guide. It is an exploration that proposes we think of cities in enriched ways and I want to highlight things I think are important yet hidden.

³ At the end of the book under 'Why I think what I think' involvements with cities and background research undertaken is described or look under www.charleslandry.com or www.comedia.org.uk

Secular humanism

A final point: *The Art of City-Making* is laden with assumptions that shape what I say, the suggestions I make and the preferences I have. They will probably become clear to you as the text unfolds. Nevertheless, since the cities are such contested fields, both in terms of their actual functioning and what is said about them, I feel it is right to make my ideological position explicit from the outset.

I believe in a secular humanist position that privileges civic values, which in essence seek to foster competent, confident and engaged citizenship. Mine is an attitude or philosophy concerned with the capabilities, interests and achievements of human beings rather than the concepts and problems of science or theology. It does not decry the virtues of science or the sustenance religion or other belief systems give. It is simply that its focus is on how people live together. The world is best understood, I posit, by reasoning and conversation without reference to higher authorities. It claims life can be best lived by applying ethics, the attempt to arrive at practical standards that provide principles to guide our common views, behaviour and to help resolve conflicts. It provides a frame within which difference can be lived and shared with mutual respect.

Secular humanism as a core Enlightenment project has been drained of confidence. It feels exhausted and consequently it is mistakenly accused of being 'wishy-washy' with no apparent point of view. Its confidence needs to be restored. The confident secular humanist view proposes a set of civic values and rules of engagement, which include: Providing settings for a continually renewing dialogue across differences, cultures and conflicts; allowing strongly held beliefs or faiths expression within this core agreement; and acknowledging the 'naturalness' of conflict and establishing means and mediation devices to deal with difference. It seeks to consolidate different ways of living, recognising arenas in which we must all live together and those where we can live apart. It generates structured opportunities to learn to know The Other, to explore and discover similarity and difference. It wishes to drive down decision-making on the subsidiarity principle, which implies much greater decentralisation and devolution of power. Central government takes on a more subsidiary role. This enhances participation and connectivity at local level. It helps generate interest, concern and responsibility.

Secular does not mean emotionally barren. In fact I treasure the heightened registers of being that spirituality evokes. Indeed its

animating force may be just the thing that makes some cities more liveable in than others.

Shifting the Zeitgeist

Better choices, politics and power

City-making is about making choices, applying values, using politics to turn values into policies and exerting power to get your way. Choices reflect our beliefs and attitudes and these are based on values and value judgements. These in turn are shaped by our culture. So the scope, possibilities, style and tenor of a city's physical look and its social, ecological, and economic development are culturally shaped and culture moves centre-stage. If, for example, a culture invests its faith only in the market principle and trusts the drive of capital to produce sensible choices, the logic, interests and points of view of those who control markets will count for more than those who believe market based decision-making is an impoverished theory of choice-making.⁴ If a culture holds that individual choice is everything – individuals always know best – this impacts the city. Conversely, if it is held that there is something in the idea of a public, common or collective good that has value and is beyond the vagaries of the market, credence can be given to inspirational and emblematic projects that can lift the public spirit, buildings that are not constructed according market principles, environmental initiatives, attending to the sickly and investing in youth.

City-making is a cultural project involving a battle about power. Power determines the kind of cities we have and politics is the medium of power. What are the effects of these different values? Consider Mercer's quality of life rankings of 2005.⁵ This US company's annual survey of 350 cities focused especially on expatriates is now seen as authoritative. It considers 39 criteria covering economics, politics, safety, housing and lifestyle. European, Canadian and Australian cities dominate the rankings, with Zurich, Geneva and Vancouver the top three, followed by Vienna. Six of the top eight cities are European. The implications of the market-driven US approach on how city life actual feels to individuals is instructive. The top US city is Honolulu at 27th and San Francisco at 28th and Houston, where you cannot walk the streets even if you tried, is the worst of all large US cities at 68th.

⁴ For a review of these arguments see Amin Ash: Cultural Economy and Cities, Progress in Human Geography

⁵ Mercer Quality of Life ranking

Challenging the paradigm

The Art of City-Making wants to be a butterfly whose small movements contribute with many others to grander effects on a global scale. It feels to me that that the Zeitgeist is ready to shift and I want this book to be part of encouraging a new spirit of the times. This involves more than just altering a climate of opinion or intellectual atmosphere. A Zeitgeist is felt more deeply. It is less malleable and it is sensed viscerally so providing energy and focus. It makes every person who feels it want to be an active agent, pulling them along with a comforting and comfortable instinct bordering on faith.

In each period of history we can discern overarching qualities, never formulaic and often contradictory. Intellectual, political, economic and social trends are etched with the characteristic spirit of their era. We can say 'modern times' are characterised by an unwavering belief in a particular, progressive view of science on its inexorable journey to the truth and a faith in technology. Yet the 'rationality' of technology is being called into question and critiques of this approach are escalating.⁶ (As an instance what is rational about creating global warming and its consequences?). Postmodernism rejects the grand unifying narratives associated with the modern period that try to explain everything. The relative, multiple, culturally determined truths it upholds destabilise many who want the only answer, so unsurprisingly the truths of the Gods are back. They provide certainty and anchoring. Both the modern and the postmodern exacerbate the fragmentation of knowledge, on the one hand of specialised research and scientific data and on the other of the diversity of perspectives. The Enlightenment ideals of progress and reason have taken a battering; their confidence has been shaken.

The ethical anchor

What is the quality of the Zeitgeist seeking to emerge? At its core is a belief in thinking in a rounded way and seeing different perspectives, not in separate boxes. Thinking differently means doing things differently and sometimes means doing different things. In the struggle about what is important, those pushing this Zeitgeist seek some form of unity beyond the ding-dong of either/or

⁶ Find reference

arguments.⁷ They believe in *'seeing the wood and the trees simultaneously', 'the detail and the bigger picture at once', 'the parts and the whole together', 'the strategy and the tactics as one'*. They are able to operate both *'with the market and against the market'* and *'to assess things in terms of the precautionary principle and take risks at the same time'* or *'to go with flow of ambiguity but still be clear about where you are going.'* This allows them to see things in more depth. They work against the silo and departmental baronies. They are against reductionism which thinks about parts in isolation and sees the city in its parts, and instead consider the interconnected, overall dynamics, such as how socioeconomic exigencies and crime inextricably interconnect. It is difficult, if not impossible to understand wholes by focusing on the parts, yet it is possible to understand the parts by seeing the connections of the whole.

How we manage a city is in part determined by the metaphors we employ to describe that city. If we think of the city as a machine made up of parts and fragments rather than as an organism made up of related interconnected wholes, we invoke mechanical solutions that may not address the whole issue. And a mechanistic approach similarly impacts on public spirit. If, instead, we focus on the widest implications of a problem, on connections and relationships, we can make policy linkages between, say, housing, transport and work; between culture, the built environment and social affairs; between education, the arts and happiness; or between image, local distinctiveness and fun.

Whose truths?

The new Zeitgeisters value the subjective as well as the objective. If someone says, 'I feel good' or 'I feel bad,' this is a truth. They listen to emotions and credit these with due seriousness. They look at the effects on deeper psychology and believe these are important in city-making. They'd 'rather be vaguely right than precisely wrong.'⁸ They agree with those who believe the notion of a stable, unwavering truth waiting to be discovered has been discredited. Fritz Capra summarises succinctly the point made earlier:

My conscious decision about how to observe, say, an electron, will determine the electron's properties to some extent. If I ask it a particle question, it will give me a particle answer; if I ask it a wave question it will give me a

⁷ These conclusions are drawn from a series of research projects speaking tourban leaders, key professionals etc. Lengthier exposes are the conclusions are published in *Riding the Rapids What are we scared of*

⁸ Quote by J M Keynes

wave answer. The electron does not *have* objective properties independent of my mind. In atomic physics the sharp Cartesian division between mind and matter, between the observer and the observed, can no longer be maintained. We can never speak of nature without speaking about ourselves.⁹

The new Zeitgeisters want to encourage a conceptual shift in what we take seriously and how we view things. Most importantly they have a value base. It is based on curiosity about The Other and so is interested in cross-cultural connections and not inward-looking, tribal behaviour. It believes in bending markets to bigger picture objectives such as greater social equity care for the environment or aspirational goals. The market on its own has no values; it is only a mechanism. The emerging spirit of the times tries to think holistically.

Being lofty

These lofty aims are not unrealistic simply because they are lofty. Lofty does not mean vague. It can mean trying to see clearly and to give a sense of the direction of travel rather than the name of every station in between. Of course, this scares the pre-committed and closed-minded. Shifts in Zeitgeist are mostly triggered by the coming together of sets of circumstance: An event like Hurricane Katrina or 9/11, but even on a lesser scale, the sudden awareness of a tipping point such as the UK Government's 'Avoiding Dangerous Climate Change' report of January 2006 that makes global warming deniers seem crazily committed to being blind or the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2005 report that documents coldly the connection between segregation, deprivation, sectarian violence and lack of economic prospects. These 'events' are enhanced by media clamour. Suddenly a set of ideas feel like their time has come. And the hordes of the new Zeitgeisters are ready to pounce.

Crisp encapsulations

Most importantly Zeitgeist shifts because it becomes a better representation of reality. It chimes with 'common sense'. A contested term, the idea of common sense has been argued about for centuries. In German it means 'healthy human understanding'¹⁰

⁹ 77, Capra, F (1982) *The Turning Point*. London. Wildwood House.

¹⁰ *Gesunder Menschenverstand*

or the 'generally accepted majority view', like 'laws apply to everyone', 'peace is better than war' or 'everyone should have access to health services'. Or as noted, 'Some use the phrase to refer to beliefs or propositions that in their opinion they consider would in most people's experience be prudent and of sound judgment.'¹¹ Common sense is dynamic, not static, and what makes sense changes with time and circumstance.

Shifting common sense requires the dissemination of the starkly illustrative. New cultural narratives by their nature are more difficult to inculcate into common sense – there are few stark facts or figures that can evince an epiphany. But environmental narratives, on the other hand, constitute a more jarring challenge to received wisdom and it is not difficult to construct out of them would-be iconic soundbites that can seep into common sense. For instance, you do not need to be a scientist to understand that increasing cars by 800,000 a year in Britain cannot continue.¹² This is an equivalent increase of a six-lane highway full of bumper-to-bumper cars from London to Edinburgh every year, a length of 665 kilometres. The average European car produces over four tons of carbon dioxide every year. You do not need much skill to calculate that 800,000 times four tons equals 3,200,000 tons; nor that pumping this compound, albeit seemingly invisible, into the atmosphere must have an effect. We simultaneously acknowledge and deny the link between exhaust fumes and acid rain, lead-poisoning and a variety of bronchial and respiratory illnesses. But we don't need much insight to realise that cars, whether moving or static, clog up cities and give them an overwhelming 'car feel'. Is it therefore not 'common sense' to curtail car use and encourage less polluting forms of transport?

Would-be iconic facts as these enable the understanding of things that seem self-evidently true. Or do they? Many want to hide from 'reality'. They are wilfully ignorant, their fear often masked behind arrogant overconfidence and power play. The will to ignorance and apathy arises especially among the beneficiaries of the status quo, whether financially, through peer group or even emotionally. It takes commitment to change. The structures and incentives around us do not help, nor does the mantra of 'free choice'. Two deeply contested words that are used together as if they could never be queried. It takes behavioural change, but denial translates into avoidance activity. Glazed and open-eyed we sleepwalk into crisis. It hurts to digest the implications of facing things as they are, and to do something about it. Zeitgeist changes when the unfolding new can be described in crisp encapsulations; this gives the spirit of the

¹¹ German *Wikipedia*

¹² John Adams

times a firm, persistent push so it appears like the new common sense.

Capturing the Zeitgeist

In every age there are battles to capture the Zeitgeist, because when on your side it is a powerful ally. The goal is to portray adversaries as if they are against History in some sense. So, for instance, hardened reactionaries will accuse emergent trends of being woolly or devoid of reality in an attempt to put them down. Today the battles and dividing lines centre on your view around a series of faultlines, which determine whether you are 'one of us'.

The emergent spirit has an ethical twist and includes a concern with the following:

- Distinctiveness – fostering authenticity of places to strengthen their identity and ultimately their competitiveness.
- A learning community – encouraging participation and listening. The city becomes a place of many leaders.
- Wider accounting – balancing economic goals with others such as liveability and quality of life.
- Idealism – encouraging activism and a values-based approach to running a city. Not shying away from altruism.
- Holism – having a whole systems view so sharing a concern with ecology.
- Diversity – having an interest in difference and cross-cultural consolidation and rejecting intolerance.
- Gendered approaches – having an interest in women's perspectives on running cities.
- Beyond technology – technology is not the answer to every problem. It is not a white knight that can address all urban problems, from segregation to gang culture. We need, in addition, to encourage behavioural change while not engineering society.¹³

¹³ See also The Cultural Creatives

