

**How to Build a Sustainable City**

**By Jaime Lerner**

Dec. 7, 2015

*This is an article from*[*Turning Points*](http://www.nytimes.com/spotlight/2016-turning-points?module=inline)*, a magazine that explores what critical moments from this year might mean for the year ahead.*

Global warming, drought, migration and population growth have put our cities under heavy strain. Cities have a very significant impact on climate change: It’s estimated that urban areas are responsible for 75 percent of greenhouse gas emissions.

Before the climate conference in Paris in December, developed and developing nations alike pledged to curb greenhouse-gas emissions in an effort to reach worldwide consensus. But does this consensus absorb the world’s many different realities, cultures and levels of economic development? And is looking at the issue on a country scale the best one to take effective action?

If the majority of the world’s population is living in cities, and urban dwellers’ activities have such a large environmental impact, doesn’t it stand to reason that it’s in cities where solutions that will improve people’s lives and our relationship with the planet must be sought and implemented?

I firmly believe that cities can help to provide the solutions to the challenges we are facing; that every city, regardless of its size and wealth, can significantly improve in two or three years; and that cities are our society’s last refuge for solidarity.

As the list of megacities grows and as more and more people move into cities from rural areas, every city should prioritize three issues that have great impact on the quality of urban life, beginning to find answers that will sustain our society in the long term: mobility, sustainability and socio diversity.

When planners are working on mobility issues, cities must take priority over cars; people must take priority over cars*.* Cars have been in production for a little more than a century, but the space they have seized and the amount of infrastructure investment they demand is extremely high. **Cars are the cigarettes of the future.**

Cars occupy much more space than any human does. An average parking space occupies 25 square meters. If you own a car, it occupies 25 square meters near your home; if you drive to work, it occupies another 25 square meters near your workplace, meaning that a total of 50 square meters are immobilized for parking purposes. In many places in the world, 50 square meters is the size of a family home, or of a workplace. Think of the incredible benefits if at least some of those areas were used to combine home and employment; were appropriated for small, community-building businesses like bakeries, coffee houses, bookshops, flower shops and offices — or for pocket parks.

Our priority in fostering urban mobility should be to provide comfortable, safe, reliable, affordable and easy-to-use public transportation. Every mode (train, subway, bus, tram, taxi, bike) has to operate optimally and be integrated into a transit network. Car shares and bike shares like Paris’ Autolib’ or Vélib’ also have their role.

But it’s my belief that the future of public transportation is in systems like bus rapid transit, which some think of as a “surface subway.” BRT systems make use of existing infrastructure — changes often involve designating dedicated lanes, making adjustments to right-of-way rules, and targeted technological upgrades to eliminate the delays associated with urban buses. Because of their good performance, cost effectiveness (it’s cheaper than building a subway) and flexibility in implementation, BRT systems, which started in the Brazilian city of Curitiba in 1974, are now in place in almost 200 cities worldwide including Bogotá, Seoul, Istanbul, Beijing and Rio de Janeiro, and many more could follow. I see the BRT as evolving to one day become a system of light electric vehicles with rubber tires running on exclusive tracks, re-charging at each stop.

When addressing sustainability problems, the key is to avoid wasting energy, time and resources. Some simple ways to get started are within everyone’s reach: Use your car less; live closer to work; recycle and compost. Although more efficient and energy-saving construction techniques and materials are important, 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 organization and growth.

As the urban economy has shifted toward 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 work, the more time and energy we save. Cultural amenities and quality public spaces that can be reached by public transit or on foot are also a part of this equation.

Economic prosperity brings peace and stability. But instead of seeking solutions to generate economic growth mostly through fiscal mechanisms, we should invest in quality of life. Imagine the number of jobs — and therefore income — that could have been generated all over the world if at least part of the billions of dollars that were poured into the banking system and automotive industry had been invested in education, health, culture, good infrastructure.

A city’s design must be a collective construct, a shared dream, so that a feeling of co-responsibility informs our efforts. That does not mean that consensus must be reached every step of the way: The search for absolute consensus can lead to a state of paralysis. Democracy is not consensus but a permanent conflict that society must arbitrate with great sensitivity. Long-term policies should be adjusted through constant feedback from the people.

*Jaime Lerner is an architect, urban planner and former politician in Brazil. He is the author of “Urban Acupuncture.”*

**Actividades**

1. **¿Cuál es la tesis del autor?**
2. **Explique un argumento que utiliza para justificar su punto de vista.**
3. **Explique qué quiere decir el autor con la frase *Cars are the cigarettes of the future (subrayada en el texto).***
4. **Seleccione todas las ideas planteadas en el artículo con las que el autor está de acuerdo**

a. El planeamiento de un transporte público eficiente constituye una de las posibles soluciones

b. Solo los gobernantes y planeadores urbanos pueden realizar aportes para solucionar la problemática planteada.

c. El autor sostiene que es fundamental generar consensos.

d. Las áreas urbanas son responsables de la mayoría de las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero

e. Una de las soluciones que propone el autor está relacionada con los incentivos fiscales.

1. **Explique la conclusión del autor**