



A Mayor's Guide to Public Life

Gehl Institute

2017

What's in this guide?

This guide shows how mayors can encourage vibrant public life.

It's broken up into five steps: Measure, Invite, Do, Evolve, Formalize.

It features case studies from New York City, Pittsburgh, Denver, Lexington, San Francisco, St. Paul, and Copenhagen.

Five things you need to know if you don't read this guide

- 1 Public life is what happens in public spaces, on streets, and in between buildings.
- 2 Public life thrives when all people can enjoy being in public together.
- 3 A vibrant public life promotes health, makes our cities safer, can lead to more civic engagement, can create economic opportunity and mobility, builds social capital, and connects people to their local communities.
- 4 Cities that have a vibrant public life are more competitive and attract and retain talent.
- 5 Public life needs to be tended to by a) paying attention to how people feel about public spaces and what they do there; b) by designing streets and public spaces that encourage social activity; and c) by changing the policies, processes, and practices of a city to be more people-centered.

About Us

Gehl Institute's mission is to transform the way cities are shaped by making public life an intentional driver for design, policy, and governance. We believe that in order to make cities more equitable and just, public spaces should be made more accessible and welcoming to more people. Our interdisciplinary work combines research, advocacy, and network-building.

First launched in 2015 by Gehl, a privately held urban design practice based in Copenhagen with offices in San Francisco and New York City, Gehl Institute has set up independent operations as a 501(c)(3) in New York City.

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for mayors and their staff. It makes the case for why paying attention to and measuring what people do in public spaces matters. It also offers tactics and real-world case studies to help mayoral administrations get things done.

The challenges on the top of most mayors' to-do lists—from reducing crime to building the economy to promoting pride of place—are all directly related to how well our cities encourage public life. On a fundamental level, we believe that removing barriers to participation and making it easier for more people to spend time in public spaces is key to creating thriving, democratic cities. It's a legacy that every mayor should aspire to.

What is public life?

Public life is what people create when they connect with each other in public spaces—the streets, plazas, parks, and city spaces between buildings. Public life is about the everyday activities that people naturally take part in when they spend time with each other outside their homes, workplaces, and cars.

Public life is composed of fleeting moments: sharing a bench with a stranger, enjoying dinner in a park, greeting neighbors at the bus stop, or watching a live performance on a street corner. Public life can be children playing on a playground, strangers giving directions, or protesters gathering in a plaza. For public life to flourish, the city should feel safe to walk in at all times of day—which, when more people choose to do so, makes our streets and public spaces safer. Ironically, when spaces are designed to be defensive and uncomfortable to certain groups, they can become unwelcoming to everyone. Public life should be accessible to people of all backgrounds, making for a more just, equitable, and vibrant city. Everyone has a right to public life.

What we know about public life:

“[Copenhagen’s city leaders] worry about building the right kind of community to result in happier, connected people with a great sense of civic well-being. They believe if you do that, the crime rate takes care of itself.” – Teresa Tomlinson, Mayor of Columbus, GA

Public life thrives when our city leaders create streets, parks, plazas, and public spaces that put the desires and experiences of people first. Think about your favorite city besides your own. What makes that city great, and

why do you love it? Often, it will be because it is a city where people enjoy being out and about. We know this instinctively.

A robust public life can nurture a sense of community as we learn to value our commonalities and the neighborhoods we call home. It helps to attract talent to the city, increases economic competitiveness, and allows for active lifestyles by making walking and biking easier. Sharing public spaces can also promote tolerance as people who differ from one another coexist and interact. It promotes civic engagement and invites us to participate in the life of our community.

Research shows that a strong public life also builds the social capital that society needs to help people move out of poverty as well as to promote better health. The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Planning a city to facilitate all three states of health is, in essence, a way to plan for public life.

How to use this guide

We know that when mayors enter office, they inherit projects at different stages. Accordingly, A Mayor’s Guide to Public Life is broken into five sections: Measure, Invite, Do, Evolve, and Formalize. In each section, we offer tactics

and one or two relevant case studies. Reading through this material will help you incorporate people-centered design and planning techniques at any point in your projects' timelines.

Additionally, to help you make your case to colleagues and stakeholders, we've included a PowerPoint presentation of relevant case studies, available for free download online. Starting in the summer of 2017, we will also host our research tools online, making it easier for anyone to carry out people-centered public space evaluations.

If you would like to get in touch, please contact us at admin@gehl institute.org!

1 Raj Chetty and The Equality of Opportunity Project have found that the quality of our neighborhoods is the most important factor in economic mobility. Their research shows that upward mobility (moving from the bottom fifth to the top fifth of income) is more likely when children grow up in neighborhoods with mixed incomes, good schools, high percentages of two-parent families, shorter commute times, and increased access to civic life. Cities that had more neighborhoods where rich, middle-class, and poor families lived alongside each other were the cities that made it more likely for a child growing up in a poor family to experience economic upward mobility. The role of public life here is that its focus on building vibrant streets and spaces as a great equalizer provides equitable opportunity for contact and

exposure among people of different backgrounds.

2 A 2016 study in the Lancet (the prestigious U.K. medical journal) showed that the urban environment has a direct effect on people's physical activity and health. The study showed that "activity-supportive environments"—denser residential development, proximity to parks, access to public transit—increase the amount of physical activity of the people who live there by as much as 45–59% of the recommended weekly amount. (The study compared fourteen cities around the world and controlled for differences in climate and socioeconomic status.) In short, planning public life directly leads to activity-supportive environments, which in turn promote better physical health.



New

If you want to understand how to improve public spaces in your city, don't start from scratch. Start with measuring.

When you measure how many and where people choose to spend time in public spaces, as well as what they do based on their current options, you get a better sense of which design or policy changes might best contribute to a city or neighborhood's public life. People-centered metrics enable you to make an evidence-based case for change, creating buzz for projects and persuading skeptics to get on board. Such data can also reveal previously invisible or overlooked patterns to city agencies.

Of course, measuring people tells only part of the story. It should be combined with surveys, various forms of engagement, and collecting quantitative data on the physical makeup of public spaces. It's also important to be ethical about data collection—for example, keeping identities anonymous and making the data available to the public.

Tactics

Measure what people do—right where they do it

Bringing new people into the city planning process can be tough. The channels through which citizens communicate

their needs to city leaders are traditionally limited and often cater to a narrow section of the general populace. To expand and diversify the voices engaging in city-making, leaders need to find new ways of soliciting feedback and incorporating residents into the development process. One option for city leaders is to go to the people, rather than expecting the people to come to them. By meeting people where they are, as part of their everyday routine out in the city, city leaders can better understand how the built environment, policies, and regulations directly affect people's behavior and sense of place.

Define success through people-centered metrics

There is an old business adage that “you measure what you care about.” Most cities have detailed data on cars, such as the number of cars on the road, travel time, areas prone to congestion, or the number and types of traffic accidents. Cities have not, however, traditionally collected what we call people-centered metrics, or metrics based on how people use and move through public space. This has resulted in a one-sided understanding about how cities should be planned, often leading to pedestrian-unfriendly urban renewal efforts. To gain a holistic understanding of your city—including the actions, behaviors, and needs of residents—you need to collect people-centered data. Asking “when, where, and who” is the first step in understanding how to prioritize public-realm investments and how they affect people.



CASE STUDY

New York

There's No Square There—The Pedestrianization of Times Square

New York City is one of the densest urban environments in the United States, and like most American cities, it has detailed metrics for vehicular traffic and intricate plans to reduce traffic congestion. Yet before 2008, information about pedestrians, cyclists, and how people spend time in the city was not known. Working with local advocacy groups, the city engaged hundreds of volunteers to visit main streets and spaces in four of the five city boroughs. Hundreds of thousands of people were then “counted” while they went about their daily routines.

Using this methodology, city officials were able to understand how streets and other public spaces were performing for people. One key finding was that 90 percent of the space in Times Square was dedicated to cars, even though 90 percent of the movement through Times Square was actually on foot. Something was not right about the math. One of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's favorite mottos was, “In God we trust. Everyone else bring data.” Equipped with this data, the mayor now had the empirical evidence to funnel investment and channel political capital toward bold ideas like

creating new public spaces along Broadway between 14th and 57th Streets, including in Times Square.

From Times Square to Flushing, Queens, new design outcomes were subsequently developed across the city that dramatically improved public life through simplifying intersections, shortening crosswalks, organizing and defining traffic lanes, and separating conflicting mobility movements (e.g., cars turning and not yielding to pedestrians). Multiple people-centered metrics provided the framework to make bold decisions that improved public spaces and served multiple citizen interests.

The pedestrianization of Times Square—or, stated differently, its transformation into an actual public square—increased the number of people who stayed in the area’s public spaces by 84 percent and improved vehicular traffic flows along the avenues in Midtown Manhattan. Additionally, businesses saw improved foot traffic, increased sales, and decreased vacancy rates. In a survey, 42 percent more people said they shopped in the neighborhood and 74 percent said that Times Square had



improved dramatically. In terms of safety, pedestrian injuries fell by 35 percent in part due to 80 percent fewer people walking into the roadways.

Understanding the people-centered metrics in Times Square has set a precedent for cities in how to measure, achieve, and then evaluate changes being made to the built environment to better suit public life.



invite

Citizens are often asked to weigh in on how projects should take shape, but this engagement typically takes place only after the projects have already been defined. Citizens are asked, for example, whether they prefer “option 1, 2, or 3” but do not have a say in what types of projects they actually want to see implemented. The format and timing of this engagement generally caters to a narrow portion of the population and fosters an environment in which NIMBYism can flourish. By inviting more people to constructively participate in the planning process, engagement not only becomes more inclusive, but also more effective.

Tactics

Provide a deliberate invitation to people to participate in the process

People can sense where they are wanted. We are surrounded by signals large and small that tell us whether or not we are welcome. To foster public life, every person needs to feel that they are welcome to participate in the creation and design of public spaces and to participate in public life. Widespread awareness among constituents of how decisions are made, where meetings take place, and how to attend is crucial in drawing out feedback.

Invite participation by reducing barriers

Reducing barriers to participation is central to making people feel they are truly invited to be a part of the planning process. A park is only welcoming if it is easy to access and comfortable to spend time in. Similarly, people won’t speak up if they feel that they won’t be listened to. Rather than expecting citizens to come to them, city leaders must go to citizens in order to receive more diverse input. Moving public meetings directly to project sites, convening open forums on a regular basis, providing American Sign Language translators, and being flexible and open to addressing unique, neighborhood-specific agendas rather than standardized city agency priorities can all help ensure constructive insight from diverse groups.

A group of people are seated around a large, curved wooden conference table in a formal room. The room features a high ceiling, ornate wall decorations, and several framed portraits. The participants are dressed in business attire, and the atmosphere appears to be a formal meeting or a public hearing.

CASE STUDY

Pittsburgh

Calling All Constituents! The “Mayor’s Night Out/Mayor’s Night In” Programs

In 2014, Mayor Bill Peduto of Pittsburgh invited city residents to meet with him and his staff through his “Mayor’s Night Out/Mayor’s Night In” programs. Instead of expecting people to make special trips to attend hearings or meetings held by the city, he went to places where the public spent time and made an effort to let people know exactly where they could find him.

During Mayor’s Night Out, Mayor Peduto and his staff rotate through different city neighborhoods and invite residents to voice ideas and concerns on neighborhood turf. Additionally, the mayor’s staff streams meetings online and over the radio, sending a clear message that the mayor is interested in hearing from all constituents.

Similarly, on Mayor’s Night In, City Hall opens its doors for residents to visit his offices and share their thoughts. The benefits of such deliberate invitations have been tremendous.

At the first Mayor’s Night In, the mayor and other city

department directors heard concerns about quality-of-life issues that residents thought should inform mayoral priorities. Previously, the nuances of these issues would get lost in City Hall meetings, in part because they weren't necessarily important to those residents who felt welcome to attend. But in this forum, residents cited concerns about shuttered neighborhood schools, a lack of jobs and educational programs, debris on local streets, and other issues that the mayor could tackle directly.

The Mayor's Night Out/Mayor's Night In events were successful in that they nurtured two-way communication and further democratized the city-making process. Ultimately, the program gave Mayor Peduto a chance to address a lack of transparency created by the previous administration. In obtaining more of the public's trust, the mayor was able to introduce his "take action" approach to governance in a more compelling and effective way.





3



While understanding the value of public life is crucial, actually implementing design and policy changes that improve public spaces for everyone is easier said than done. In the “Invite” section, we described ways to proactively incorporate the voices of different stakeholders into the city-making process. Here, we describe action-oriented approaches to producing real outcomes in space: starting with temporary interventions that build on what already exists but always working toward long-term, systemic change.

Tactics

Be experimental with low-cost, low-risk test projects

Use simple, temporary test projects to explore design possibilities and foster public support for more long-term iterations. Such “prototypes” or “pilot projects” can take many forms—a recurring event that momentarily opens up car lanes to pedestrians, quick improvements such as painting a bike lane or widening a crosswalk, or the addition of seating and programming in an otherwise unused public space, for example. It’s important to work closely with community groups on these efforts, ensuring that they will be stewards and champions of the space. But of course, not everyone likes change; small business owners, for example, may fight projects that cater to pedestrians at the expense of parking spaces. Creating a live test of a new idea—as opposed to installing something

more costly and permanent—lowers the stakes and can win people over, lead to community empowerment, and ultimately, a shared sense of ownership.

Build on what already exists in a place

It’s easy to overlook local assets that exist in your own backyard. Landmarks, access to open space, known institutions, or community centers may not have an immediate relationship to the big vision or project guidelines, but they can be key building blocks. Similarly, people and the activities they already do in public spaces—whether or not they are permitted—can be built upon. Sitting on ledges, cutting across lawns, turning chairs around to face the street, barbecuing, even skateboarding—these are all things that signal personal desires for specific uses of public space. Rather than starting from scratch, identify existing assets and build upon what people are already doing. Welcome people and their ideas.



CASE STUDY

Denver

Fostering Foot Traffic—The 16th Street Mall Pilot Project

The 16th Street Mall is a major commercial street in the heart of Denver's commercial district. Surrounded by restaurants and shops, the mall was closed to car traffic except for a free bus shuttle that connected Denver Union Station to the Civic Center. For many years, the mall was considered highly innovative and a tourist destination. But, despite being an efficient transit corridor, a lack of foot traffic made it difficult for retailers to stay in business, and safety concerns plagued the street. Ultimately, the 16th Street Mall offered few reasons to spend time there, with the exception of the weekday lunch hour, when the sidewalks were thronged with downtown professionals. Meanwhile, continuous maintenance and repair cost the city millions of dollars a year, with little activity on the street to justify the spending. Available federal funding provided an opportunity for necessary improvements, but negotiating the competing interests of transit operations, historic preservationists, and property owners proved challenging.

To show that the street was worthy of transformation and additional investment, the Downtown Denver Partnership created a temporary pilot program for the 16th Street Mall to bring numerous parties together and move the conversation forward. Some agency leaders were dubious that the 16th Street Mall could ever be a lively place. So, beginning with just two Sundays in 2014, four Sundays in 2015, and finally five weekends in 2016, the bus shuttle on the mall was temporarily moved to other streets. The Downtown Denver Partnership collaborated with the regional transit agency to reallocate the space on 16th Street to be more pedestrian-friendly with seating and a wide range of locally produced art, food, and cultural programs.

The Downtown Denver Partnership and the Office of City Planning measured use, users, and other factors before, during, and after the pilots and found positive benefits. Before the pilots, people tended to go to the mall to catch the free bus shuttle and rarely lingered. During the special event weekends, however, overall activity levels increased by upwards of 62%,



with an average of 27 more people per block at any given time. On Saturday evenings, the average number of people increased from 57 to 93 per block. Typically, only 37% of visitors to the mall lingered at outdoor restaurants and cafes. But during the pilot project, the number of people sitting outdoors increased by 194%. Additionally, the changes led to an increase in gender and age diversity: before the pilot, the pedestrian makeup was roughly two-thirds men, and very few children or seniors were visible on the street. During the pilot, the gender demographics became more equally distributed, and there were 65% more children under 12 and 40% more older adults.

Notably, once transit agency leaders and staff experienced the benefits of having more pedestrians in the middle of their downtown, they became less strident about their primary goal of protecting the transit corridor from Denver Union Station to the Civic Center (a connection they had previously considered critical and largely non-negotiable). They saw that rerouting the bus line did not result in failed connections, and became

CASE STUDY

Lexington

Testing The Waters—SplashJAM As a Catalyst for Play



Lexington's population is growing rapidly, but its elected officials and stakeholders have struggled to create a common vision and plan of action for city investments. Mayor Jim Gray understood that to create positive change, initiatives should be designed to achieve multiple goals, including equity, public health, and safety.

A public-space analysis conducted by Gehl (the private urban design practice) in the spring of 2015 revealed such an opportunity. Children were playing in a fountain in Thoroughbred Park, despite rules prohibiting this activity. The park sits at the intersection of major routes into downtown and bisects four neighborhoods of very different socioeconomic compositions. Most of the users were children from a nearby, predominately low-income community who didn't have other places to play, especially during the sweltering summer months. The city found this behavior, while understandable, both unsanitary and dangerous.

Rather than issue tickets for trespassing, Mayor Gray

embraced this activity as a catalyst for meaningful action. The children's play in the fountain prompted the city to invest in authentic, local public life and create more plays areas for young people in Lexington. The local Downtown Development Association (DDA) initiated a process to engage a wide range of stakeholders, asking them what type of water-play facilities they would be most interested in seeing. With the support of national and community foundations, local designers, and city officials, the DDA created SplashJAM, a temporary water park near Thoroughbred Park, where the initial play was taking place. The water park included accessibility ramps, picnic tables, and beach umbrellas, as well as on-site changing rooms and restrooms.

To understand how SplashJAM succeeded and how it could be improved, the water park was evaluated using Gehl Institute research tools. The evaluations showed that SplashJAM increased the space's diversity based on education and income and attracted people of different races and ethnicities from across the city. In this way, action was not only motivated



by local culture and need, but it also provided a shared set of experiences for a diversity of stakeholders. The evaluations also found that 80% of the visitors to SplashJAM had never or had rarely visited the park before the pilot, with 71% of the visitors now returning weekly. In fact, before SplashJAM, an average of only eight people were in the park at any point throughout the day; during the pilot, this number increased to over 23 people per hour. Finally, this intervention led to significant increases in walking, with 85% more people walking and spending time in the area.

This formula—of first studying what public life already exists, then taking action to accentuate that activity, and finally evaluating the impact—is an approach that both the city and DDA are now applying to multiple projects large and small across Lexington.



4

live

Projects for improving public spaces should be approached with flexibility. They can be broken down into multiple stages, with each stage involving an evaluation process, thus allowing the projects to improve over the course of their implementation by responding to previously unknown conditions. This strategy not only makes the projects more sensitive to dynamics on the ground, but also enables greater experimentation for designers, event programmers, and agency staff. Moreover, it allows residents to voice their feedback at multiple project stages.

Tactics

Allocate sufficient funding for project evaluations at each iteration

While it's easy to embrace the ethos of the Jane Jacobs quote “the city is never finished,” it's more difficult to make this a reality with funding and resources. Breaking down the project-delivery timeline into several iterations can reveal what's possible, create memorable shared experiences for residents, and inform future concepts. Furthermore, inviting citizens to test initiatives directly (before a large investment is made) can reduce risk and help ensure investments are used most effectively to maximize positive impact. The ways in which citizens use a project—ways that are often unimagined and unintended by the project instigators—are crucial to

determining its success. Project monitoring, evaluation, and reimagining should be an ongoing process because the way people use the city is constantly evolving. Our city-making projects should embrace, and plan for, the notion that the city is never finished.

Make it easier for citizen input to be positive, meaningful, and constructive

Traditional development processes place difficult demands on citizens, expecting them to understand complex drawings and concepts and provide meaningful input with incomplete information. Instead, ask citizens questions such as, “What is your favorite place in the city and why?” And: “Which of the city qualities identified do you want to see more of in your neighborhood?” Citizens can provide feedback on topics they are experts in. Responses to these questions are naturally more action-oriented and create opportunities for citizens to define the success criteria for projects.



CASE STUDY

San Francisco

Persuasion Through Prototyping—Better Market Street and the Prototyping Festival

Market Street is one of the most congested yet direct routes through San Francisco's downtown. It serves multiple bus, transit, and trolley lines while simultaneously functioning as the civic spine of the city, connecting the Mission to the Embarcadero. In 2010, the city launched its "Better Market Street" initiative. But after three years, city agencies and Mayor Ed Lee had expended a great deal of political capital with few signs of physical improvements to show for it. A handful of scenarios were developed, yet the city's preferred option was also the most expensive one, and it remained unfunded. Concurrently, a lengthy environmental review process further delayed large-scale streetscape and transportation improvements.

The Mayor's Office of Civic Innovation and the Planning Department explored lighter forms of interventions that could show progress and capture the public's imagination, eventually informing longer-term investments. The group

developed a concept called Living Innovation Zones: it identified ten “zones” along the two-mile stretch of Market Street, found various citizen groups and cultural institutions with an interest in positively contributing to the vitality of the street, and streamlined the permitting process through which the organizations could initiate their programs. The zones along the street provided “canvasses” for a broader set of stakeholders to reimagine how the street could serve as both a public space as well as the city’s transit backbone. This initiative created an opportunity to test various ideas from the Better Market Street design concepts while the city searched for additional funding and embarked on the environmental review process.

Bit by bit, the concept evolved. The first zone, opened in 2012 and curated by the Exploratorium Science Museum, has since been scaled up to five zones, and is buoyed by the advent of the Market Street Prototyping Festival. This three-day festival was initially launched in 2013 as an activist event by the Gray Area Foundation for the Arts and was adopted more formally



as a partnership between the Planning Department and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in 2014. Its latest iteration featured 50 projects—from experimental benches to interactive fountains to public bathrooms to play areas—by community members. Leveraging funding from foundations, the city-sanctioned event provided a platform for citizen engagement that made use of the creativity, entrepreneurship, and energy of residents in a way traditional design processes cannot. To inform future events and design techniques, the city evaluated the festival prototypes with Gehl Institute tools to see which installations worked best at fostering social interaction.

The festival’s framework invited citizens to create design products for the street, while streamlining the permitting and logistics process for individual installations (as coordinated by the city). Thus, a more productive, collaborative, and inclusive platform for dialogue was developed between the design/arts community and public health and safety groups. Furthermore, these activities brought attention to the street, spurring the Department of

Public Works to fast-track repaving and lane-striping efforts. The inclusive platforms of the Living Innovation Zones and the Prototyping Festival encouraged residents to say “Yes!” to change rather than retreating into NIMBYism.

Although the preferred option for Market Street is still pending, the city has learned a great deal from these multiple iterations of engagement, activation, and infrastructure improvements. This case study demonstrates how governments can change course to enable citizens representative of the wider population to collectively contribute to brighter city life. Market Street embodies a “permanently temporary” form of city-making that reflects the rapidly evolving urban culture of San Francisco during the past five years.





CASE STUDY

St. Paul

Greenlighting the Green Line—Light Rail on University Avenue

Neighborhoods along University Avenue in St. Paul, which are largely immigrant and low-income communities, have struggled with decades of disinvestment and neglect. When the city, state, and federal governments gathered to support the construction of the Metro Green Line light rail between St. Paul and Minneapolis, the initial plans did not include any stops in these neighborhoods. Although many residents of this area are wary of government-led improvements and have voiced understandable concerns that such initiatives would lead to raised property values and retail rents, which could in turn facilitate their displacement, they did not want to be left out of this transportation development. Locals raised their voices, and Mayor Chris Coleman listened. He fought to add three stops in the neighborhoods but also recognized that residents needed to feel like the infrastructure improvements were truly for them. What was his strategy? Mayor Coleman mitigated the risks of economic loss for small businesses along the University Avenue construction zone by offering forgivable loans equal to the amount of business lost

during the time of construction. This demonstration of support killed rumors that businesses would lose 50 percent of profits during construction, and it spoke directly to a population that felt at risk. A study from the University of Minnesota has since stated that the Green Line has improved neighborhood access to approximately 2,000 jobs.

The Green Line project became much more than light rail development, prompting improvements in affordable housing, greater access for low-income communities to other areas of the city, and a deeper support of local businesses. In so doing, it gained the support of communities who might otherwise be skeptical of large infrastructure projects. Mayor Coleman has since identified this moment as pivotal in cultivating trust and reducing NIMBYism in the affected neighborhoods.





5

Formalize

While enhancing a single park or street is worthwhile, the broader goal for mayors should be institutionalizing people-centered approaches in government and civic society. Cities can be more vibrant, equitable, and livable when measuring and interviewing the people who are most affected by projects is a built-in component of the planning process. Such an approach is not only possible, but has proved highly successful at the city scale.

Tactics

Implement a culture of people-centered approaches

Use people-centered metrics and tactics to cultivate a higher quality of life for all residents. When people are made visible in the data gathering of every city agency, the built environment becomes more livable and accommodating to the human scale.

Find a method of institutionalizing change

In an era of tactical urbanism, cities run the risk of shortchanging citizens by ending projects in the trial stage. Public-realm improvements must be more substantially invested in and made permanent. Early successes during the “Do” stage of short-term projects must be leveraged into medium- and long-term policies and developments to ultimately move from evolution to formalization.

CASE STUDY

Copenhagen

Making People Count— The “Metropolis for People” Project



What began as Danish urbanist Jan Gehl's research on how people move through and spend time in Copenhagen has evolved into a method for informing city policy. For over 20 years, the City of Copenhagen has applied evidence-based approaches to strategic planning and investments based on his methodologies.

Beginning with the Bicycle Account in 1996, city leaders observed behavior and conducted extensive surveys to directly inform investment in cycling campaigns and infrastructure. The results, published every other year, do more than demonstrate the city's status as a global leader in bicycle mobility; they also illustrate municipal transparency and build trust between citizens and decision-makers. This form of evidence-based documentation captured quantitative data, like the number of children or elderly cycling, in addition to qualitative data, like the perception of safety and the motivation for cycling among citizens.

The cycle account became a formal component of the city's mobility infrastructure investment framework and began to spread to other aspects



of strategic planning. In 2010, the city launched a five-year campaign to make Copenhagen the most livable city in the world. The project, entitled "Metropolis for People," included simple yet tangible and ambitious metrics for urban quality of life. The city again committed to quantitative and qualitative targets to put people first on its agenda. In 2015, Copenhagen met its goal for people spending 20% more time in public spaces (in relation to 2010), which had been a unifying ambition across city agencies ranging from parks, transportation, planning, and economic development. Another target was for 80% of residents to feel satisfied with the quality of the public realm. Such qualitative measurements would drive investment in public life and benefit as broad a cross-section of residents as possible.

The city formalized the yearly collection of this data into a "public life account" that was inspired by the bicycle account in terms of format and approach. Every year between 2010 and 2015, the city published a wide range of people-centered data.

To collect the data necessary to transparently and effectively

monitor the city's progress toward the 2015 targets, the city established an office to annually "count" public life. A team of city employees measured people moving through and spending time in public spaces as well as monitored the demographics in these spaces and the activities of the different groups. Collecting qualitative data began as a way to inform the Metropolis for People campaign but quickly spread to many more city projects. Today, public-life metrics are a key performance indicator—along with typical project targets like "on time and on budget"—in determining a project's success. In this way, a whole culture of putting people first spread across departments, with the evaluation of public life now institutionalized across the city.



Conclusion

The strategies and case studies offered in this guide are meant to inspire mayors to take action. We hope that the prescribed formula—Measure, Invite, Do, Evolve, Formalize—can make executing projects in public spaces easier and help initiate cultural shifts at city governments that prioritize the human-scale, social dimensions of the built environment.

Today, many cities are beginning to recognize the importance of public life and are implementing policies and design interventions to foster more pedestrian-friendly commercial districts and central parks, in particular. This is an exciting development, but we want to conclude by also stressing the importance of equity in relation to public spaces. It's crucial to invest in areas far from tourist destinations, in the spaces of everyday life for non-elite residents, in ways that are always informed by local priorities. Meanwhile, public spaces that are more centrally located should belong to everyone, and their design and programming must reflect this.

Mayors have to balance many conflicting interests for their constituents and manage day-to-day operations while planning for the future. Yet all the work they do fundamentally contributes to ensuring that public spaces serve as a platform for people to thrive, and there are few greater legacies a mayor can leave behind than to invest in the city's public life.

A Mayors Guide to Public Life
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