

Master's Blog

## Liveable Cities for the 21st Century



James Campbell, Project Manager at Mace reflects on WCCA's 35th Annual Milo Lecture by honoured guest professor Jan Gehl, discussing the importance of making cities that feel good.

Worshipful Company of Chartered Architects (WCCA) hosted their 35th Annual Milo Lecture at The Athenaeum Club in Pall Mall. The honoured guest professor Jan Gehl gave a lecture on "Liveable Cities for the 21st Century"; where he discusses the importance of making cities that feel good and are more human-friendly. Gehl is not interested in designing flashy skyscrapers but instead aims to "create cities that people will want to stay in, just like a good party".

Gehl is the author of numerous books such as; "Cities for People" and "Towards a Fine City for People", which outline the need for a more people-oriented approach to city planning. Gehl has received numerous awards and distinctions throughout his extensive career.

In 2004, Gehl advised the city of London and has seen the city change over the past 20 years. London was once a city where the car was king, and walking was an obstacle course due to a lack of space, complicated crossings, poor access, lack of seating, cluttered streetscapes, and it was not safe for cyclists. The commissioned report was made to improve the pedestrian environment.

Gehl explains that throughout history, the two basic building blocks of cities were streets and squares, similar to rivers and lakes accordingly. Where people would speed up in the river and slow down in a lake. Before the modern era, there was a focus on creating spaces for people, such as markets and other public spaces. With the introduction of modernism and the motorcar, cities changed their focus to objects, such as buildings, and forgot about creating spaces for people. The motorcar confused the scale of cities, as everything was designed for a speed of 60km/h (cars) instead of 5km/h (walking). Modernism focuses on objects, which led to the goodbye of people, social life, and human scale. Gehl highlights it has taken 65 years to realise the shortcomings of modernism, and in 1998, an updated charter was signed in Athens that emphasised keeping functions together for life, work, and play. Copenhagen is a great example of how cities can be transformed to become more people-oriented. The city has had 60 years of people-first policies, and in 1962, they created the first pedestrianised street. The more space is given to people, the more life the city had. Gradually, Copenhagen changed, and all canals and waterfronts changed from parking spaces to people spaces. Two important strategies were implemented to make the city the best for people and cycling. They started with one street, and now there is a whole network, and the city has completely changed. Copenhagen is an excellent example of how a people-first approach can transform a city.

In 2023, we face new challenges in creating cities for people, such as the need for public spaces, places for people to walk and meet, and creating a city that is attractive to people. Gehl advises cities and mayors after his decades of research, and he uses case studies to illustrate the importance of putting people first. For example, in Melbourne, the city centre was once an empty and un-utilised space, but now it has a distinct Paris-like feel with street life and ambience. In Sydney, a new traffic plan and citywide bike scheme were introduced, while in New York, they transformed Broadway into a car-free space and reshaped Times Square and Madison Square.

I would like to thank the WCCA for hosting the insightful lecture. As we leave the Covid world, the importance of people-focused spaces has never been more pertinent.

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