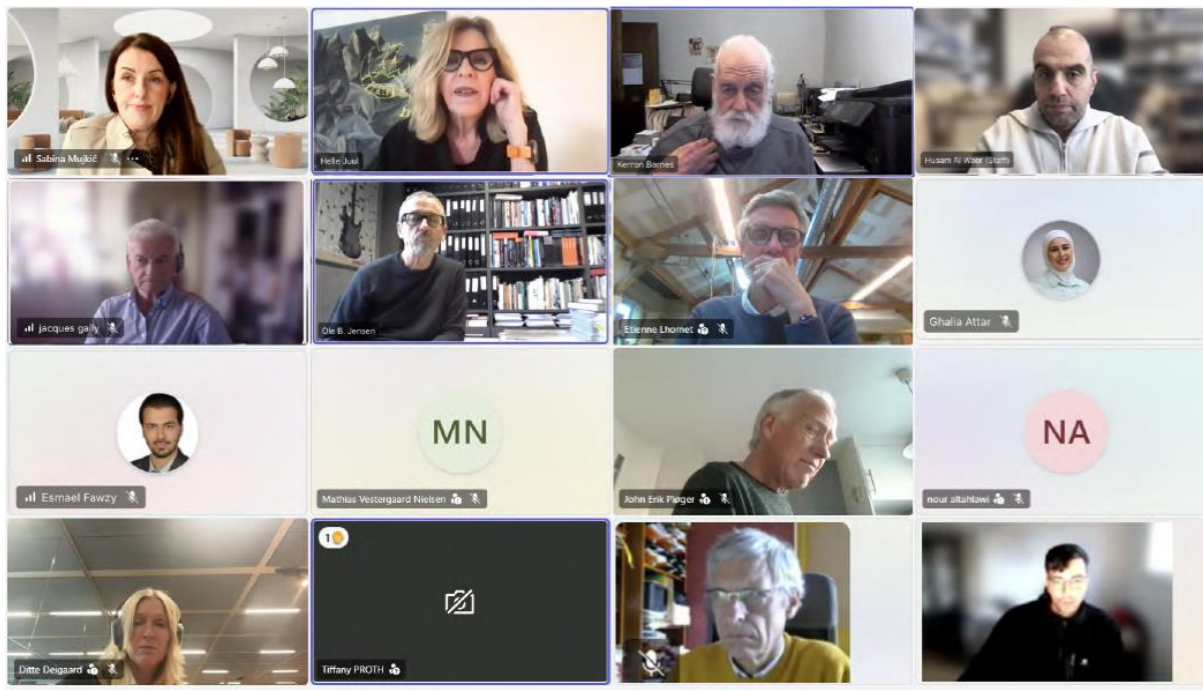


INTA WINTER SESSION 3

Urbanity, Well-Being and Crises

*How urban design choices shape mobility, accessibility
and social justice in our cities*

March 24, 2026



INTRODUCTION - HELLE (PRESIDENT, INTA)

Welcome to our third lecture of the INTA Winter Session 2026. My name is Helle Juul, I am the President of INTA. I am joined today by Sabina Mujkic, Vice-President, from Ljubljana Slovenia, Etienne Lhomet, Vice-President from Bordeaux France, and Jacques Gally, based at our headquarters in Paris.

Cities around the world are facing multiple and overlapping crises: climate change, social inequality, housing shortage, migration and public health challenges. In this context, the way we design, the way we govern and inhabit our cities becomes crucial.

The central question is: how can urban development not only respond to crisis, but strengthen resilience and human well-being? This is really at the core of our strategy.

SPEAKERS AND FORMAT

We are pleased to confirm the third session of the INTA Winter Series. Today's session brings together crossed perspectives on housing, urbanity, wellbeing and crisis.

We will introduce ideas from Ole B. Jensen's recent book, *Mobility and Justice*, and we will also hear from Husam AlWaer, who will bring a complementary perspective on sustainable urban development and infrastructure planning. Husam, you were already with us in September, and we know your energy. I think the two of you will create a very interesting discussion. Together, we will explore how the principles of the humanising city can strengthen cities and enhance resilience in times of crisis.

The format is simple. Each speaker will have a maximum of 20 minutes for the presentation. After that, we will open the floor for debate and questions.

I encourage all of you to take part, because that is how we enrich and qualify the discussion.

All attendants will receive a transcript of what we have discussed today so that we can continually exchange and debate on how we are delivering better and affordable housing.

I also encourage you to visit our website¹, which Jacques Gally takes care of, where the presentations will be made available afterwards.

INTA'S ENGAGEMENT

Before giving the floor to Ole, our first speaker, let me briefly underline that INTA has a long history of engaging with these issues. The International Urban Development Association actively contributes to strengthening the global dialogue on health, resilience and quality of life in all aspects of urban development. We achieve this through strategic advisory services, international panel discussions, expert lectures and knowledge forums, cross-sector professional networks, and dialogue between public and private stakeholders.

So, Ole, I am very much looking forward to your presentation. The floor is yours.

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¹ • <https://inta-aivn.org/en/> and our LinkedIn profile
• <https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-urban-development-association-inta-aivn>.

PROFESSOR OLE B. JENSEN

Cities, Exclusionary Design, and Mobility (In)Justice

JNTA seminar on Urbanity, Wellbeing, and the Humanizing City
March 24, 2026
Professor
Ole B. Jensen
Aalborg University



INTRODUCTION: EXCLUSIONARY DESIGN, MOBILITY AND JUSTICE

Thank you very much for inviting me. Today I will speak under the title “Exclusionary Design, Mobility and Justice.” As Helle mentioned in the introduction, I will draw on my recent book, *Mobility and Justice by Design*.

My background is in sociology, but I have worked with architects and designers for more than 25 years. What I do primarily is ethnographic research in public spaces, in sites of mobility such as shopping malls, airports, metro stations, sidewalks, and bike paths—many different places where I try to understand the interconnection between the built environment and human practices, especially those related to mobility.

Over the last ten years, I have focused in particular on the exercise and mediation of power through architecture and design, the materialisation of power through design, and the possibilities for resistance and transformation.

Today I will first provide some framing, and then I will refer to the book, where I work mainly on three empirical areas: homelessness, disability, and ageing populations. These are the three areas I will try to cover.

Let me begin with an image. Try to imagine that you are looking for a place to sleep. You have no job, no money, and no place to stay. Night is falling, and the city is shifting from its daytime phase into its nighttime phase. What do you do, and where do you go?

That is not a familiar situation for most of us, but it is the reality for millions of people experiencing homelessness around the world today.

What has interested me in this research, which is part of the book, is understanding what it feels like to be on the receiving end of interventions that are intentionally designed to exclude people.

The City's barbed cruelty

From ubiquitous protrusions on window ledges to bus-shelter seats that pivot forward, from water sprinklers and loud muzak to hard tubular rests, from metal park benches with solid dividers to forests of painted cement bollards under bridges, urban spaces are aggressively rejecting soft, human bodies. We see these measures all the time within our urban environments, whether in London or Tokyo, but we fail to process their true intent. I hardly noticed them before I became homeless in 2009. An economic crisis, a death in the family, a sudden breakup and an even more sudden breakdown were all it took to go from a six-figure income to sleeping rough in the space of a year. It was only then that I started scanning my surroundings with the distinct purpose of finding shelter and the city's barbed cruelty became clear.



Alex Andrews, *The Guardian*, 15 February 2015, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/alex-andrews>
Alex Andrews, *The Guardian*, 19 February 2015, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/alex-andrews>

I am looking at devices such as spikes, armrests, and other metal installations placed in public spaces to prevent people experiencing homelessness from taking shelter there. I should underline that my research focuses only on public spaces. I am not studying what happens on private domestic property. I am interested in what happens in the urban spaces of the city.

One quote I found years ago during my early research on this topic captures something very important: urban spaces are aggressively rejecting soft human bodies. The city's barbaric cruelty becomes clear. This contrast between hard urban spaces and soft human bodies is something I think is extremely important.

In a sense, we live infrastructured lives. Artefacts, technologies, spaces, and tools mediate our relationship with the world and with each other. At times, these affordances are compromised or curtailed. Our social participation is limited, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. That is what interests me.

Our 'infrastructured lives'

- We are living 'infrastructured lives'
- Artefacts, technologies, spaces, tools affords our relationship with the world and each others
- At times, such affordances are compromised, and societal participation is curbed – intentionally or unintentionally
- Vulnerable citizens must pull of hard work to make the world habitable as they suffer *Mobility Injustice by Design*



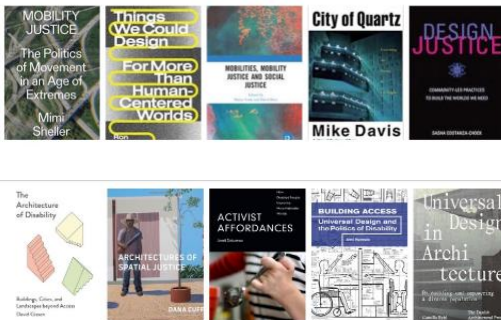
Vulnerable people in cities must work very hard to make the world habitable when they suffer from mobility injustice by design. I am also interested in the forms of resistance and opposition that certain groups develop to cope with these challenges.

As a broad umbrella term, I think of my work as a kind of critical design sociology. I do empirical work—mostly ethnographic—but I am also trying

to construct an analytical vocabulary that allows us to talk about these phenomena more precisely.

Part of that is theory-building and conceptualisation. Some of it emerges from the sites and the empirical material, but I am also very interested in the literature and in building bridges across different fields. These include mobility justice, especially through the work of Mimi Sheller, design justice, and broader conversations about justice in architecture and design. In recent years, my affiliation with the Bevica Foundation² and its work on universal design has also brought me into contact with important literature on critical disability and architecture.

Design & Mobility Justice



A very recommendable book is Jos Boys's *Doing Disability Differently*, and I have also drawn on work around activist affordances and critical disability studies.

All of this helps me develop a more accurate framework for understanding mobility injustice by design.

One of the key discussions when we talk about exclusion in the city concerns intentionality. In the book and in my work, I look at intentional or intended exclusion by design.

Further touch points in the literature

For example, the bench —photographed in Philadelphia—is not simply a bench with an armrest. It is a metal device placed in the middle of a horizontal surface in order to prevent bodies from lying down or sleeping there. This is clearly an intentional effort to disable particular practices associated with particular people. That is intended exclusion by design.

² The Bevica Foundation (Bevica Fonden) is a Danish foundation whose roots go back to 1872, originally established by Pastor Hans Knudsen under the name "Society and the Home for the Disabled."

But as I said, I also work on disability and ageing populations, and these groups are rarely excluded by direct intention. A classic example is Donald Appleyard's work on the relationship between traffic flow and social interaction across streets. When traffic is heavy, interaction across the street is low; when traffic is low, interaction increases. Traffic engineers did not set out with a sinister plot to stop children from playing across the street. But the result is still exclusionary. So, I am also interested in unintended exclusion by design.

That leads to a number of questions framed strongly in the literature. Sarah Hendren's book *What Can a Body Do?* asks a very simple but powerful question: who is the world built for?

I like questions of that kind. They are highly motivating. Hendren, who is the parent of a child with Down syndrome, uses a range of examples to show the mismatch between bodies and built environments. She illustrates the social model of disability: disability does not reside only in the body, but also in the way the environment is configured.

A similarly important question from mobility justice scholarship is: who counts as a person? Who qualifies for fast mobility, for privileged circulation, for convenient access?

I also draw inspiration from Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel's question: what needs to be made public? In my own work, what needs to be made public are these inequalities, especially when they are staged and reinforced by architecture and design.

Part of this discussion involves justice. There are many ways of thinking about justice—distributive, procedural, deliberative, restorative, recognition-based, and so on. I am interested in all of that. But in my work, I have increasingly shifted from justice to injustice.

One quote that has stayed with me argues that justice has little emotional appeal because its value lies in impartiality and universality. Injustice, by contrast, is affectively rich. It is felt. It is particular and partial. It is passionately experienced.

That matters to me because when people are subject to injustice in cities, it is not only about formal rights or procedures. It goes much deeper emotionally.

When I speak with people experiencing homelessness, the devices I have shown do not simply regulate behaviour; they tell people that they do not belong in the city. That is registered in a powerful emotional and affective way.



This brings me more directly to the book, *Mobility and Justice by Design*. It focuses on three empirical areas: people experiencing homelessness, disability, and senior citizens.



I approach all three through mobility, because mobility has been the centre of my work for nearly thirty years. I look at what happens on the street, in trains, along tracks, and in other mobile situations. I am interested in the meeting point between design, bodies, and injustice.

Let me give just a few examples.

The empirical material on homelessness comes from a research project in Copenhagen. The two other areas—disability and ageing—draw mainly on secondary literature and published accounts.

On homelessness, one informant, whom we can call Brian, said that exclusionary design is a huge obstacle, and that when you are already an outcast, it can completely crush you. He explained that people experiencing homelessness gather in the city to be among others and to feel safe around places where there are people at all hours, because they may meet

someone they know, or someone who might help them. But they are constantly moved on, pushed into places they do not want to be, and forced to comply. This gives rise to what I call an atmosphere of rejection: the sense that the city does not want you there.

For disability, one respondent described planning every journey around whether train stations have lifts and whether the lifts are actually working. Before even leaving home, you have to calculate whether the route is possible. If you use a wheelchair, the trip involves an enormous amount of pre-planning, and when something fails, you get stuck. Again, that is experienced as deeply exclusionary.

For ageing, another respondent described cracked and uneven sidewalks. She used a small shopping cart as a walker, and the cart kept getting caught in the cracks. She had to keep looking down, constantly scanning for a navigable path. This image of walking in a broken world full of cars is a powerful illustration of exclusion felt through the body. The book contains many more examples, but these give a flavour of the argument.

All this makes me reflect on design's role in society. Here I am not speaking only about architecture in the narrow sense, but also about a wider range of design systems—traffic-light algorithms, pedestrian timing, infrastructures of circulation, and so on.

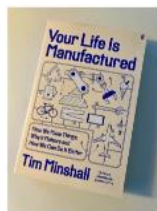
This I am interested in what Nigel Thrift once called molecular politics. Much of what happens in the everyday spaces of the city is not politics with a capital P. Rather, it is a more dispersed politics that can nevertheless draw public attention and sometimes produce wider social and political effects.

These small interventions are forms of molecular politics. So too are the acts of resistance developed by those who suffer from them.

resonates with broader ways of thinking about design, especially Arturo Escobar's work on ontological design. In *Designs for the Pluriverse*, Escobar argues that our lives are thoroughly designed. This history is sedimented and therefore often invisible, but it remains powerful.

Onto ... what?

- Churchill allegedly said "first we create the buildings, then they create us".
- Or as Tim Minshall puts it in his latest book: "*your life is manufactured*".
- In other words; design creates people and worlds ... and that comes with ethical obligations!



Sometimes I refer in teaching to a line often attributed to Churchill: first we shape our buildings, and then they shape us.

More recently, Tim Minshall has used a similar idea in the title of his book, *Your Life Is Manufactured*. The basic point is that design shapes people and ways of living, and therefore carries ethical obligations.

One thing that has become important to me as a researcher is Latour's reminder that things are made. If environments, artefacts, and systems are made, they can also be remade—or even unmade. That means the world could be otherwise. This contingency is where design's transformative potential lies.

That is not a naïve claim that design can simply remake the world. But it does suggest an opening. Much of the literature on activist hacking and counter-design by disabled people who face ableist and exclusionary design offers not only a critique of how power works, but also hints at alternative futures. Aimi Hamraie and others show how refused bodies create livable worlds despite exclusion.

That, to me, is where the conversation about transformation becomes important.

As I come to a close, I would say that because the built environment is made, a new politics of design lies in exploring what can be remade or unmade. Remaking and unmaking

environments that produce mobility injustice by design is where the transformative potential of design may lie.

In Denmark, at least, we have also seen growing conversations around ethics in architecture and the professions. Last year I received a prize from the Danish Arts Foundation for some of this work, and it was striking to hear similar conversations among people working in the arts and crafts. I think one of the key points I want to contribute is that design can be complicit in injustice, but it can also be part of the solution because it allows us to reveal, question, and transform the norms and values embedded in the built environment.

Thank you for your attention.

Q&A — AFTER PRESENTATION 1

HELLE

Thank you very much.

I think this work is remarkable, and the ethical consciousness behind it is extremely important in our times, when ethics sometimes seems to be disappearing.

When you speak about the people in your book and the quotations you use, these may come from specific places—mainly Denmark, perhaps some American examples too. How do you see their relevance at the global level? How should we think about designing for injustice in a global perspective?

OLE B. JENSEN

The material related to homelessness in the book is based mainly on Danish research, especially from the streets of Copenhagen, with a little work in Odense and Aarhus. So that part has a clearly Danish and European focus.

Many of the other examples I discuss are also European and North American. That obviously raises questions of bias, selection, and how these dynamics may differ in other urban cultures and contexts.

Sometimes people ask whether these are, in a sense, first-world problems compared with more dramatic urban challenges elsewhere. That is one limitation of a book like this: it cannot cover all urban cultures and all the different ways in which design is encountered globally.

Before starting the empirical research on homelessness, I was in contact with Robert Rosenberger from Georgia Tech, who has worked on similar questions in the United States. We talked a great deal about the fact that these practices vary considerably across cultures and places.

Some forms of exclusionary design in Denmark may appear almost benevolent compared with harsher interventions elsewhere. In Denmark, for instance, some railway-related designs make resting uncomfortable, but they are not physically dangerous. In other places, you find very sharp spikes and other devices that can cause actual harm.

So yes, there is definitely a cross-cultural comparative discussion that needs to be developed.

PARTICIPANT

Thank you very much, Ole, for this very important presentation.

I work on projects in developing countries, often with the World Bank and other development banks. We often speak about vulnerable groups—older people, women, low-income households, and so on—but we almost never use the word justice.

And it is so important. It makes me realise how necessary it is to speak explicitly about justice and injustice—to call things by their name. You are right to use these words and to show how essential they are, and how deeply they affect us in our bodies.

This is not really a question, just a comment. I have worked for a long time on mobility, but I had never thought about it in exactly these terms. So, thank you very much.

OLE B. JENSEN

Thank you for that comment.

When I was doing this work, I was reading Rawls and different theories of justice, including more recent work on epistemic justice. But I increasingly encountered literature that inverted the perspective and said that rather than beginning from abstract universal principles of justice, we should pay attention to how injustice is actually lived and felt.

Part of that shift came from a discussion I once had with a professor of ethics from Roskilde University. Some philosophers were asking abstract questions such as: what if a homeless person sleeps in front of a fire station and blocks the trucks? But no one sleeps in front of a fire station, because the trucks would come out. That kind of argument felt too detached from lived reality.

So, I moved toward asking how injustice is experienced. People do not usually say, “I need justice.” They say, “I feel this injustice.” That was both an empirical observation and something reflected in the literature.

It does not mean that justice is irrelevant. It means that adding injustice gives us access to something different—especially if we are interested in feeling, perception, and embodiment. These are multisensory and material experiences, and they become much clearer when we begin from injustice rather than abstract justice.

PARTICIPANT

Yes, thank you. My name is Tiffany, and I am an urban planner working in the urban design and landscape division of a French architectural firm.

My work focuses on climate adaptation and sustainable development. In parallel, we also work with children—for example on school-related public-space projects for the City of Paris—and we try to design inclusive spaces for children, including those with disabilities. More broadly, we also try to take account of demographic transitions, especially ageing. Since you have worked on these issues for a long time, I have several questions. Do you think contemporary design approaches are being used more effectively today than when you began your career? And in your view, what is the biggest challenge when it comes to implementing these approaches properly in real urban environments? Are there any projects or case studies you would particularly recommend?

OLE B. JENSEN

Thank you. Those are very good and very large questions.

Let me start with the middle one. Even though some of these ways of thinking about design and exclusion may seem contemporary or novel, the basic issue is very old. Cities have always been spaces of conflict and difference, and the shared use of public space has always been contested.

If we look at Copenhagen, for example, it is not a uniquely extreme case, but there is a lot of pressure on the housing market. People buying very expensive properties often come to feel that they should have influence not only over their buildings but also over what happens in nearby public spaces.

That is bad news for people experiencing homelessness and for other fragile groups.

Perhaps less so for children, because there is strong support for innovative playgrounds and family-friendly facilities, and the more resourceful parents who remain in the city can advocate effectively for those. But people experiencing homelessness and older populations face real challenges.

For older people, one issue is digitalisation. Many Danish seniors are deeply frustrated by the requirement to use an app for everything. You cannot do anything without a smartphone, and that creates exclusion.

The second issue concerns movement through the city itself. The spaces where older pedestrians can safely cross streets at a decent pace are shrinking. There is strong pressure in favour of car traffic, which means longer green phases for cars, shorter crossing times for pedestrians, and increasing difficulty for people who move slowly.

So for many reasons, and especially with the continuing growth and gentrification of cities, the willingness to share urban space does not necessarily seem to be improving.

PARTICIPANT

This was a very enlightening presentation. I am here representing an American organisation working in the field of social housing, and I would like to ask a question.

I hope this does not sound reductive given the sophistication of your work, but do you have a short-written summary—perhaps one or two pages—of your theory or your key ideas, particularly on how design can lead to exclusion?

When I saw the bench in Philadelphia, it immediately became clear to me what was happening: it was designed to prevent people from sleeping on it. In other words, it signals that certain populations are not welcome.

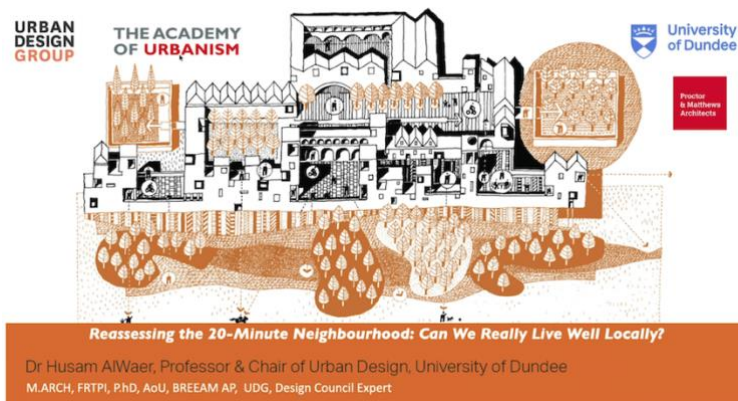
So, if you have a short abstract or summary—again, I don't mean to oversimplify your work—I would very much appreciate being able to share it with members of our international committee. Thank you.

OLE B. JENSEN

Thank you very much. I do not find that request insulting at all.

I have papers on these topics, and I can certainly extract short summaries from them if that would be useful. The easiest way would be for you to send me an email. I would be very happy to respond with written material, and I would make sure it is not written only for academics.

PROFESSOR HUSAM ALWAER



INTRODUCTION

I would like to start by asking whether living well locally can truly become a reality when we are dealing with major challenges such as climate change, health inequalities, reducing carbon emissions, and promoting healthier environments.

This reflection builds on an illustrative document that I have worked on. You may wish to scan the barcode to access it. This document is very close to my heart, as it has become a set of guidelines for the Scottish Government and for many practitioners across the UK and Europe.

This talk is not intended to be academic. Rather, it reflects the voices of the many people I have worked with over the past ten years—governments, practitioners, policymakers, and academics across the UK and Europe.



I want to begin with this question: where do we belong when everything around us is in motion? Legislation, policy, the current war, the war in Ukraine, changing lifestyles, climate repair, the inequality and injustice my colleague referred to—not only in terms of mobility, but also in relation to health—the cost of living, the housing crisis. All these macro trends, wherever we are at the moment, affect policy, its implementation, its operation, and its effects on the ground.

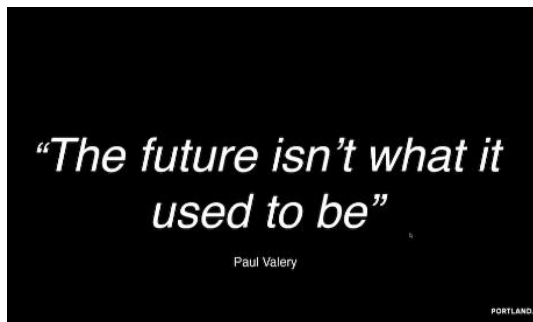
COVID and the post-COVID period also highlighted the importance of proximity and slowness. This was especially true in affluent neighbourhoods, where people had access to decent parks, high streets, affordable and mixed housing, quality public transport, and quality public spaces.

More and more, people appreciated the importance of locality in terms of accessing a better quality of life, food, green space, and cultural activities.

But this was not the case at all in deprived neighbourhoods, or in neighbourhoods that are in the middle of nowhere—that is, at the edge of the city, in suburban areas, or beyond.

This gave us, as architects, planners, and decision-makers, a new lens. How can we design for local living? How can we design for local living, especially if we are serious about reducing carbon dioxide emissions and promoting active travel?

Not only that: COVID and post-COVID showed us the importance not only of better design for the home and for dwelling, but also of the interrelationship between living and working. Hybrid work has become a reality. In the UK and across Europe, many people now spend two or three days working from home. That has implications for leisure, for mental health, for physical health, for domestic abuse, for happiness, and for wellbeing.



To me, the future is not what it used to be. This has become especially important in the current cost-of-living crisis.

That is why subjects such as liveability, the soft city, and the humanised city are becoming increasingly real and relevant, at least in Europe and in the Scandinavian countries. If you think about the soft city as a concept, it is always about ease, comfort, care, simplicity, smallness, calm,

slowness, trust, invitation, and ecology.

Or, as David Seamon said, a neighbourhood is not a place in the purely physical sense; it is also a state of mind.

So, it has an important social dimension. What matters here is that everything is changing, and the way we make, design, and plan neighbourhoods needs to change as well. We need to think again about what it means to be a neighbour. We have lost a sense of neighbourliness, and we need to reconsider the role of building blocks and density in supporting low-carbon lifestyles and hybrid work communities.

The question of how we spend our time is also becoming increasingly important. Digitalisation and information technology give us flexibility in how we control our time—how we start and how we finish. But this also raises the question of infrastructure: how we get around, how we get on, and where and how we spend our time in towns and cities, especially now, when more than ever we can work more flexibly.

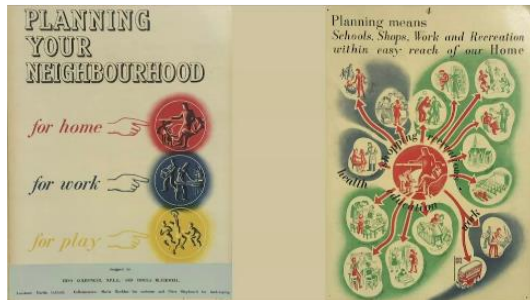
This brings me back to locality—to the power of nearness and slowness—but also to everyday life. How can we live with weather and nature, not only from the perspective of climate change, but also to support the idea of a healthy environment and a healthy neighbourhood? If you look at Scandinavian countries, they are increasingly bringing nature into neighbourhoods and cities—not simply as green space, but as a way of living with nature.



So, we are moving from far away to nearby, from filling open spaces to exploring open spaces, from mono-functional places and single uses to more integrated places. But housing by itself does not make neighbourhoods. I would like to remind everyone of this wonderful quote by Gordon Cullen, who asked: if people live in houses, where do the houses live? If they are homeless, then all we are left with is the typical, endless, futureless suburbia.

So, the question for all of us in the room is this: are we at a turning point—or a U-turn—in urban planning?

Local living needs compact neighbourhoods rather than urban sprawl. Urban sprawl will never promote local living, and I will show examples of that. Zoning, and the way we often split living from working, leisure from housing, and housing from business, will never promote local living. Getting the mixing right, and creating the right critical mass of people, is essential.



Local living is not necessarily a war against the car. Local living is not necessarily about creating isolated areas or asking communities to live in a cage. Instead, it is about creating places for people and about working with nature. This does not necessarily require a top-down planning approach; it also requires working with local communities.

And this is not new, my colleagues. The beautiful drawings you see in front of you are early sketches for a neighbourhood in London after the Second World War. What the architect said very clearly—and it seems that we have forgotten this—is that planning is for home, for work, and for play. I really like the way he acknowledged the importance of linking home, work, and play together. He also said that planning means schools, shops, work, and recreation within easy reach of our home.

And he also highlighted the interrelationship between the indoor and the outdoor. Activities taking place indoors are just as important as activities taking place outdoors.

If we move to a European example, consider the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands. I really like the way politicians there—not only architects and planners, but politicians—have adopted the concept of healthy urban living to move their city forward. Not only in a narrow sense of health, but by bringing together education, mobility, work, economy, greening, and leisure under the broader umbrella of creating a healthy urban life.

I also really value the idea of leaving nobody behind - talking about inclusivity and justice- and ensuring that healthy urban living caters for everyone while remaining attractive in terms of green space, mixed uses, liveability, and walkability.

But at the same time, there is now a huge challenge around biodiversity and greening, at least from the perspective of the EU and the UK.

How can we make better use of land while allowing more land to be set aside for nature and biodiversity?

Can urban development and ecological restoration go hand in hand?

To me, this requires a new way of thinking about how we design neighbourhoods. A neighbourhood should be an ecological habitat. It is not a fixed entity. It is a living ecological environment, like a cell. This requires a new approach to density and to the built environment when it comes to maximising land use. But we need to be careful to maintain liveability, because compact growth does not automatically go hand in hand with liveability. I will show an example of that later.



It also requires a new way of thinking about infrastructure. We have always thought of infrastructure in terms of facilities and networks for moving people and goods. But now the UK Government, and governments in Scandinavian countries, are pushing the idea of civic and social infrastructure—spaces where people can connect and have better opportunities.

For example, a library in a Scandinavian or European country is no longer simply a place to read a book. It is a place where communities come together. A library can now have mixed uses. That, to me, requires a new understanding of social infrastructure. Social infrastructure is the network of physical and social structures that build relationships and foster thriving communities. This is something Jan Gehl has also described very well. So, the question becomes: how can we create community life that genuinely supports what I call enjoying living locally?

Let me move to another important point. What relationship between environment and behaviour is assumed in the 20-minute neighbourhood? People quickly adapt their travel behaviour to suit the context of the street layouts and infrastructure they encounter. What does that mean?

If the urban structure is designed around the car, that is a direct invitation for people to own and use a car.

If the infrastructure is designed around active travel, and if the right critical mass of people is present, then you will see people using active travel.

So, we need to think very carefully about how we reinvent convenience in mobility. Private cars still often appear to be the right choice for people. Why? Because they provide flexibility and a high range. Of course, they also come with inequalities and with harmful CO₂ impacts. The problem with active travel is that it is time-bound and route-bound. To move from A to B may take two or three hours if it requires multiple forms of active travel or several changes. Yes, it has the advantage of lower CO₂ emissions, but it can take more time. Walkability and cycling are good, but they also have a limited range. There is only so much we can walk and only so far we can cycle.

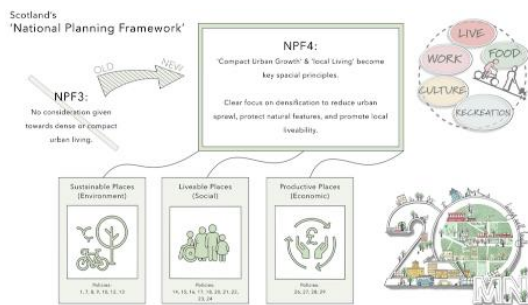


That is why the case of Copenhagen is so important. It is no surprise that Copenhagen has managed to reach 65 to 70 percent cycling mode share. Why? Because they have made cycling very convenient. Moving from A to B has become faster than one might imagine compared with using a car in many situations. That is why convenience matters so much.

The concepts we use shape how we think, how we plan, how we design, and how we act. In simple terms, the 20-minute neighbourhood enables people to meet their daily needs through safe walking and cycling routes, public transport, and wider connections between local neighbourhoods and destinations further away. It supports the idea of living more locally to enable a low-carbon lifestyle. It creates an improved sense of community because people begin to rediscover locality more deeply, and it also promotes affordability so that we do not create mono-functional neighbourhoods.

This is why getting the mix right is so important. But we must be careful: the 20-minute or 15-minute city is not only about cycling, walkability, or active travel. For the 20-minute neighbourhood and design for local living to work, you must consider all the criteria together: proximity to essential services, access to public transport, the right density, mixed land use, liveability, and inclusivity.

In Scotland, the 20-minute neighbourhood has now become part of national planning legislation. And let me zoom out a little, because this is very important to me: you cannot view the neighbourhood in isolation from the city.



In Europe, in the UK, and to some extent in the Middle East, people are often divided between two broad approaches.

On one side, there is the view that we should focus our resources, money, and investment on the city centre. If the centre flourishes economically, environmentally, and socially, then everywhere else will flourish as well.

To some extent, that is true. But the problem is that the centre becomes the focal point to which everyone aspires in terms of jobs, quality of services, and quality of life, while the role of neighbourhoods is diminished.

Over time, the centre becomes expensive. People cannot afford to live or work there. They are pushed to the edge of the city. That generates more transport demand, more land take, more pollution, and more inequality in the quality of jobs, facilities, and services.

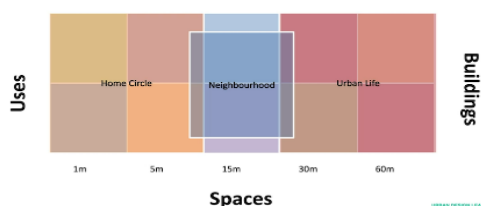
On the other side, some European cities such as Freiburg, Leipzig, Utrecht, and Copenhagen have thought differently. They have said: no, our city should be a city of connected, vibrant neighbourhoods. We should not put all our money and resources into the centre. We should distribute resources more equally by creating strong neighbourhoods.

By doing so, you shorten distances, reduce dependency on the car, create more opportunities for active travel, and promote greater equity and justice across regions and areas. At the same time, you are not creating competition with the city centre. The centre still has a specific role to play in terms of tourism, museums, cinemas, and so on.

So, this is my message to all of you, my colleagues: how can we plan for short distances? How can we plan for proximity, as Carlos Moreno says? How can we plan for convenience? These questions are essential for neighbourhood and city design.

This requires us to move away from concentrating everything in the centre and towards creating connected neighbourhoods. This is the vision for Utrecht by 2040: Utrecht as a city of connected neighbourhoods, with especially good connections between the edge of the city and the rural context.

Living Well Locally - a Multi timed neighbourhood Travel



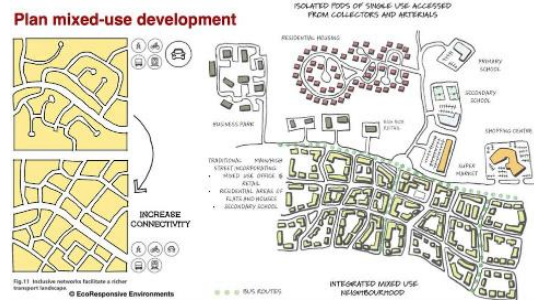
To achieve that, we need to pay attention to what happens within the home circle—within five minutes—what happens at neighbourhood level in terms of infrastructure, and what happens beyond the neighbourhood in urban life.

Why do I say this? Because not everything should be accessible within 10, 15, or 20 minutes.

But the connectivity and the quality of connectivity between the home circle, the neighbourhood centre, and the city beyond are absolutely crucial.

So, the correlation and interrelationship between uses, buildings, spaces, and travel are essential in creating that relationship between what happens within the home circle, within 15 or 20 minutes, and what happens beyond, in wider urban life.

That is my message to all of you.



So let me end with this: the way we shape urban form will really influence our society, our lifestyles, our behaviour, and our movement patterns. And here we are.

This is our choice, and it is nothing new. If you look at the figure I was showing, the lower image reflects integrated mixed use, the right density, and the right mix. When you get that mix right, you create the conditions that encourage people to walk because you shorten the distance.

Meanwhile, if you look at the upper figure, how could that possibly encourage active travel, or mobility and justice?

Thank you very much for your time.

Q&A — AFTER PRESENTATION 2

HELLE

Thank you very much, Husam. It was fantastic to listen to that level of engagement. I think one of the major issues you are pointing out is how we make sure we have a critical mass that asks politicians to take the right decisions. Many of us agree on the kinds of outcomes we want citizens to be able to achieve, but that requires the right political environment.

I would now like to open the floor to anyone who may have a question.

OLE B. JENSEN

Thank you so much. This may be a slightly odd question, but I have mostly been exposed to the idea of the 15-minute city. So, what exactly is the point of the extra five minutes in the 20-minute neighbourhood?

HUSAM ALWAER

To be honest, the 15-minute city was initially driven largely by carbon reduction goals, especially from the Paris perspective, and the aim of reducing car dependency. The reason the concept shifted toward the 20-minute neighbourhood is that people realised that not everything in a neighbourhood can realistically be within 10 or 15 minutes.

Also, the 20-minute neighbourhood corresponds more directly to a walking distance—roughly 800 metres out and 800 metres back—which is often the maximum distance most people feel comfortable walking.

So yes, the 20-minute neighbourhood is associated with distance as well. But I would also say that the 15-minute city is slightly different conceptually. For me, it is more important to think of this as a new way of living rather than becoming overly fixated on the exact number

of minutes. For example, the mayor of Utrecht has now signed on to the idea of a 10-minute city, and yes, they are actively working on that at the moment.

HELLE

I also have a question from Tiffany in the chat. Do you have an example in the UK, and especially in Scotland, of a project that incorporates ecological design and that you would recommend to the panel?

HUSAM ALWAER

As you know, the concept is still relatively new, and many cities are only just beginning to embrace it. But I could mention a historic village here. There are some historic villages, even in Scandinavian countries, but one example is Broughty Ferry. It is, in many ways, an example of a very local neighbourhood where living and everyday life go side by side.

We will write it in the chat ³.

And for those asking for the document, Husam has put it in the chat as well, for anyone who would like to access the document on the 20-minute neighbourhood ⁴.

HELLE

There is one final comment. The question is: do you think that a city with an older urban vision, which does not currently consider these ideas relevant, can still be adapted to a new urban concept?

HUSAM ALWAER

Of course. Absolutely.

HELLE — CLOSING

Friends, it has been a pleasure to host these wonderful presentations. As I mentioned at the beginning, we will make sure that you receive a summary, and you will also find the presentation on our website.

We have not yet discussed exactly how we will proceed this summer, but we will continue to explore new themes. We may revisit some individuals we have met during the last year and a half, and perhaps also invite representatives from different cities. We will come back to you with new ideas.

And if any of you are thinking of themes that might be interesting for INTA to take up, we would be very open to that. You can contact us through the same email address you used to register today, or directly through us⁵.

Thank you so much.

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³ • https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broughty_Ferry

⁴ • <https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/understanding-the-20-minute-neighbourhood-making-opp...>

⁵ • intainfo@inta-net.org