

CREATING HEALTHY, LIVABLE, AND SUSTAINABLE CITIES: A GLOBAL PRIORITY FOR PLANETARY AND HUMAN HEALTH

Professor **Billie Giles-Corti** from RMIT University (Melbourne, Australia) leads a global study about creating healthy and sustainable cities. She says how the cities are built affects chronic diseases; thus, something needs to be done differently globally. In 2016, *Lancet*, a famous medical journal, published Billie's first article series: "Urban design, transport, and health." In her conference keynote, she reviewed the literature on the issue from 2016 to 2021, concluding the urgency to transition to healthy and sustainable cities.

Professor Giles-Corti explained that cities are the powerhouse of the economy, and by 2050, the estimates are that 70% of the world population will live in cities. This issue will foster unhealthy and unsustainable lifestyles, expose residents to environmental stressors, cause biodiversity loss, and widen inequities if poorly planned. In addition, cities generate 75% of global energy-related emissions, and 86% of global CO₂ emissions come from higher-income countries.

What should be done?

Therefore, in 2016, in the *Lancet* series, a conceptual framework was built about how cities affected health and wellbeing. Professor Giles-Corti believes this framework helped orient thoughts toward how things could be measured to create healthier cities supporting active and sustainable lifestyles, because what gets measured gets done.

In this framework, they argued, an integrated planning is needed across multiple urban systems like the different policies for transport, social services, education, land-use planning, housing, public open space and recreation, and public safety, which need to work together in an integrated way to achieve better outcomes on the ground. They argued that the eight Ds affect how healthy cities are designed for people, which are categorized into two: regional planning (Destination accessibility, Distribution of employment, Demand management) and local urban design (Design, Density, Distance to transit, Diversity, Desirability).

Then, in the second series, they aim to facilitate the development of a global system of policy and spatial indicators for healthy and sustainable cities.

Billie Giles-Corti believes city planning policies are "upstream" determinants of health and sustainability. She and her team argued that the best-practice policies are consistent with evidence on planning healthy cities with clear and specific actions and measurable and budgeted policy targets. They designed policy indicators focused on nine areas: integrated planning, air pollution, destination accessibility, distribution of employment, demand management, design, density, distance to public transport, and transport infrastructure investment. These policies were assessed across the globe. Some important policy gaps were identified, such as design management.

In this part, they have done a new exceptional work: they have used open data collected by citizens. This way, others can replicate the indicators, benchmark, and monitor over time then new cities jump on board. They recruited over 80 collaborators in 25 cities, 19 countries, and six continents to conduct the study. The nine indicators of urban design and transport features were depicted on maps by colors in the studied cities. This way, the amount of each indicator easily showed up itself.

In summary of the key findings, Professor Giles-Corti said that: It is feasible to measure city planning policies, urban policies lack measurable targets, there are thresholds for urban design on transport features, it is fea-

sible to create consistent spatial indicators of high health-supportive environments, and there were substantial spatial inequalities in access within and between cities.

What Next?

In the next series, more longitudinal studies showed the relationship between the built environment and chronic disease. In addition, air pollution was the fourth largest risk factor for global mortality. Besides, they showed that the aging of the global population leads to cognitive health as an emerging priority issue hand in hand with urban and transport features linked to dimension risk factors. Also, the urgency for integrated city planning to mitigate and adapt to climate change was evident.

Since the first series in 2016, COVID-19 happened, significantly impacting thoughts on how cities are built, she believes. It highlighted city vulnerabilities like crowded conditions, poor air circulation, and ambient air pollution. Also, the migration to suburbs and regions, amenity-rich areas with inequitable access, and rapid health-supportive transformations were emphasized.

Therefore, Professor Giles-Corti and her team focused on how to optimize compact 15-minute cities where most daily necessities can be accomplished by walking or cycling. They reformed their framework from 8 Ds into 11 Ds. For example, housing, biodiversity loss, air quality policies, good and integrated governance, and adding distribution were more emphasized after COVID-19.

A Call to Action

In the end, Professor Giles-Corti called to action to create healthy and sustainable cities to global agencies, national, regional, and local governments policymakers, and practitioners. She says that we need to benchmark and monitor progress in cities using policy and spatial indicators, transform urban governance horizontal and vertical integration, strengthen policy frameworks incorporating 11 Ds, and support LMICs disadvantaged communities.

Also, a call to action was made to civil society citizens and the research community. It was to create and use open data, encourage citizen science, create policy and practice relevant evidence codesign with academic policymakers and practitioners, and prioritize research funding multi-sector multi-outcome multi-country studies.

All the studies and reports are available on the "Global Observatory of Healthy And Sustainable Cities" website. ●

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- Leads the Healthy Liveable Cities Lab in the Centre for Urban Research, RMIT.
- Studies the impacts of the built environment on health and wellbeing.
- Has published over 400 articles, book chapters and reports, and by citations, has been ranked in the top 1% of researchers in her field globally.
- Fulbright Scholar.
- Awarded an NHMRC Elizabeth Blackburn Fellowship as the top ranked female NHMRC public health fellow (2016).

