Foreword

By Josyane Franc and Olivier Peyricot

As the world is changing, we are faced with new paradigms. Rapid urbanisation throughout the 20th century has led to more than half of the world's population now living in cities. Within decades, this number will rise to over 70%. Cities will need to find ways to accommodate this growth. They will also need to seek solutions for a range of other challenges: economic and cultural globalisation, environmental crises, inter-city competition to attract investments and changes to the ways people live, work and spend their leisure time. All this means that cities are facing a new reality.

In the past decades, urban form itself has also changed dramatically. Researchers now speak of the “after-city”, the “non-city” and, perhaps most remarkably, point at a newly emerging form of generic urbanity. What is clear is that the traditional city, with a centre and suburbs, is disappearing. It is being replaced by a world of networks, connections and multipolarity. “Flows”, facilitated by land-based, maritime and digital infrastructures, now prevail over places. New scales have emerged too. Many cities, including small and medium sized ones, have developed strategies to adapt themselves to this increasing complexity. Design, with its capacity to improve living standards, plays a key role in these strategies.

This is the context in which, between 2014 and 2018, *Human Cities_ Challenging the City Scale* has questioned the scale and co-creation of the contemporary city. Based on a concept created in 2006 by Brussels-based international creative consultancy Pro Materia,

the project is now managed by Cité du design Saint-Étienne. The project was co-funded by the European Commission's *Creative Europe / Culture Programme* and has involved 12 partners from 11 European cities: Tallinn, London, Brussels, Belgrade, Cieszyn, Saint-Étienne, Graz, Helsinki, Bilbao, Ljubljana and Milan. The partners included universities, design centres and creative design consultancies. They shared a common goal: to identify practice that challenges the way cities are co-designed. In four years the project has seen a rich programme of activities and outputs: an investigation of 90 state-of-the-art case studies, collected in a book; 9 co-creative sessions, 18 experiments in 13 cities, 12 international workshops, 11 international conferences, 6 master classes, 9 exhibitions including digital exhibition catalogues; a website and blog; and this book.

The project started with an investigation of bottom-up initiatives conducted by all partners. This state-of-the-art research resulted in a collection of nearly 90 European case studies of projects. They include redeveloping public space, strengthening social cohesion and preserving natural, architectural and culinary heritage. Three teams of researchers (from Milan, Ljubljana and Saint-Étienne) followed a methodology conceived by the research department of Cité du design Saint-Étienne to compare and analyse the case studies. The work was published in the book “Investigation”.

The case studies showed us that many citizens are actively looking for solutions to make their city more pleasant to live in. They

do this with a desire not only to improve the quality of the built environment, but also to improve the city from a social perspective. For some this was a necessity; they tried to mediate situations of economic precariousness or fill the gaps left by public actors. Others were motivated by the prospect of exploring new horizons or enjoying new encounters, and thus became involved on a voluntary basis. We concluded that public space clearly is no longer exclusively the domain of specialists, but in numerous European cities subject to debate among citizens. Within these debates, designers and architects often play a role as empathic mediators.

The lessons learned fed into the action-research part of the project, for which Cité du design proposed using experimentation. In our view, cities have become “living laboratories”, in which experimentation is an indispensable tool. If done well, it provides a valuable tool to listen to the needs of citizens and respond to people’s multiple identities and lifestyles, and thus helps to strengthen the socio-cultural assets of our cities. Moreover, experimentation provides people with the opportunity to be creative and help enhance the vitality of their cities. Experiments are inherently less defined than other types of initiatives (projects, programmes, etc.). Despite their openness in terms of actions and outcomes, they nevertheless observe rigorous protocols regarding both their planning and their practical implementation. Equally important is the accurate collection of data and the interpretation of results.

Many of our partners had not worked with experimentation before. Therefore, we decided to ask Alice Holmberg, a designer and co-creation expert, to help each partner start their experiment through co-creative sessions. On her tour, she met with various stakeholders in each city. Together they shared, compared, analysed and developed a wide range of (new) methods and tools. The work resulted in a new approach to participatory design, and established a co-creation framework that is applicable in a variety of contexts.

After the co-creative sessions, each partner departed on their own journey. For example, our partners in Saint-Étienne, Graz, Bilbao, Helsinki and London worked with citizens to turn vacant or underused spaces into test sites for new solutions for work, service provision, education and communication. In Ljubljana, Belgrade, Cieszyn, Tallinn, Brussels and Milan, our partners joined forces with citizens to contribute to the development of a neighbourhood through improving the quality of public spaces. We invited two journalists, Côme Bastin and Fleur Weinberg, to capture the stories of the experiments in each of the 11 partner cities. These stories comprise the main part of this book. The variety of experiments allowed us to learn from each other. These learnings are shared in the third part of the book.

We asked two urban experts to provide a context for our stories. John Thackara, a writer-philosopher, explains the importance of understanding the notion of the city “as a living system”. His chapter emphasises the need to take care of our commons, a term that includes the spaces, memories, knowledge, skills, culture and biodiversity that we all share. One aspect seems to be crucial for this around the whole world: one must listen to the people.

Anya Sirota, founder of and architect at Akoaki, shares with us her experiences from Detroit, USA. In a context of severe urban decline, Akoaki designs architectural interventions, art objects, and social environments that aim to make an impact far beyond their physical appearances.

Since its start, the Human Cities project has led to a network of “Human Citizens” distributing their knowledge and skills across Europe, and beyond as well by making use of the network of UNESCO Creative Cities of Design. Human Citizens include residents, architects, artists, students, the unemployed, the retired, and many others. Coming from various backgrounds and driven by different motivations, but sharing similar values, they prove to be the real force behind bottom-up initiatives. They are often led by leaders and facilitators (many of whom are architects, designers and artists), who bring people together for meaningful conversations by employing various techniques, ranging from theatre and performance to music and cooking.

By writing this book, we hope to expand this network of Human Citizens even further. We hope that by sharing our enthusiasm and experiences, the book will be an inspiration and a valuable reference for those inclined to become involved themselves. Moreover, we want to convince policy and decision makers of the value of these initiatives and inspire them to take action to facilitate them better in the future.

The Human Cities partners for 2014-2018

Cité du design, Saint-Étienne [France] – Leader, UNESCO City of Design	Pro Materia, Brussels [Belgium]
Politecnico di Milano, Milan [Italy] UNESCO City of Literature	Aalto University, Helsinki [Finland] UNESCO City of Design
Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, Ljubljana [Slovenia] UNESCO City of Literature	FH Joanneum, Graz [Austria] UNESCO City of Design
Clear Village, London [United Kingdom]	Association of Estonian Designers, Tallinn [Estonia]
Zamek Cieszyn, Cieszyn [Poland]	Bilbao Ekintza, Bilbao [Spain] UNESCO City of Design
Association Design Week Belgrade [Republic of Serbia]	Culture Lab, Brussels [Belgium]

Human Citizens Office in Rue de la République du Design – Biennale Internationale Design, Saint-Étienne 2017 – organised by Cité du design. © Pierre Grasset

Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale has been cited in the case studies in the UNESCO Global Report on Culture for Sustainable Urban Development: Culture Urban Future as an exemplary case of cooperation between creative cities¹.

It is a policy guidance document, intended to support governments in implementing

the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda. The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and between cities, having identified creativity as a strategic factor in sustainable urban development. The network currently includes 180 cities from 72 countries covering seven creative fields:

Crafts & Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Music and Media Arts.

In 2018, 31 ambassador Cities of Design from 25 countries were appointed as part of this initiative².

- ¹ See the UNESCO website: "Culture for sustainable urban development"; www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/culture-for-sustainable-urban-development/
- ² Discover the Cities of Design on www.designcities.net/design-cities and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network on <https://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home>