KNOWLEDGE HUMAN CITIES

A Manifesto for a New Way of Thinking About Cities

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THE EVOLUTION THAT HAS BROUGHT US HERE

The history of humanity can be seen as a succession of major transformations. Each era faced its own challenges, developed new capabilities and left the next generation a different world. In simplified terms, we might trace the evolution of recent centuries as follows:

15TH CENTURY · DISCOVER
The world expands its horizons. Exploration, navigation, cartography, discoveries and encounters between civilizations transform our perception of the planet.

16TH CENTURY · THINK
The Renaissance and Humanism restore the human being as a measure of things. Science, art and thought begin to challenge inherited certainties.

17TH CENTURY · KNOW
The Scientific Revolution establishes a new way of observing reality: measuring, experimenting, demonstrating and understanding.

18TH CENTURY · REASON
The Enlightenment champions reason, knowledge, education, rights and the possibility of building better societies.

19TH CENTURY · PRODUCE
Industrialization radically transforms work, the economy, cities and our capacity to produce and move.

20TH CENTURY · CONNECT
Electricity, telecommunications, transport, computing and the Internet reduce distances and create a globally interconnected society.

21ST CENTURY · UNDERSTAND
We have more technology, more information, more data, greater computing power and more accumulated knowledge than any generation before us.

But perhaps the great challenge of our century is not to know more about things. It´s to understand people better.

To understand how we want to live; what makes us feel part of a community; how we want to relate to one another; what we expect from the places we inhabit; what we mean by well-being, progress and quality of life.

After centuries devoted to discovering, thinking, knowing, reasoning, producing and connecting, perhaps the time has come to use everything we have learned to understand ourselves better.

And if the 21st century is to be the century of cities, this transformation will necessarily have to take place within them as well: from knowledge of the world to knowledge of ourselves.

This is the territory from which **Knowledge Human Cities** emerges.

FROM THE CITY THAT KNOWS TO THE CITY THAT UNDERSTANDS

For decades, we have tried to build better cities.

First, we introduced technology. Then we connected infrastructure, digitalized services, accumulated data and developed systems capable of interpreting what was happening within cities.

The **Digital City** was born.

Then we sought to use all that technology to manage urban complexity more effectively. Sensors, data, intelligence, mobility, energy, efficiency and sustainability gradually shaped the concept of the **Smart City**.

Later, we realized that a city could be extraordinarily intelligent and yet not necessarily be a good place to live.

We began to speak of **Cities for People, Human-Centred Cities and People-Centred Smart Cities**. People returned to the centre of the urban conversation.

It was an extraordinary step forward.

But there is still one step missing.

1. THE NEXT STEP

A city can be designed **for people** without sufficiently understanding people.

We can build better streets, homes, parks, transport systems, public services and places for people to meet.

- We can ask citizens what they need.
- We can create participatory processes.
- We can analyse how people use urban spaces.

And yet, we may still be starting with the city and working our way towards the person.

Knowledge Human Cities proposes reversing the process.

Instead of beginning by asking: What kind of city should we build?

We begin by asking: How do the people who will inhabit it want to live?

The difference may seem small, It´s not.

2. KNOWLEDGE CHANGES ITS SUBJECT

Knowledge Cities made knowledge a fundamental asset for urban development.

Research, universities, talent, creativity, innovation, technology and intellectual capital became part of urban strategy.

Smart Cities developed another extraordinary capability: an ever-greater understanding of how the city itself functions. We know how traffic moves; how much energy we consume; where congestion occurs; how particular services are used; what the air quality is; and how thousands or millions of devices interact.

We have more and more knowledge about the city.

Knowledge Human Cities proposes directing a much greater part of our capacity for knowledge towards something different: the human being.

Understanding people's aspirations; relationships; behaviours; fears; expectations; bonds; perception of safety; need for belonging; relationship with nature; and the ways they work, move, meet, age, care, learn, enjoy life or experience loneliness.

It´s not simply about knowing what people do in the city; It´s about understanding what kind of life they want to live.

3. FROM PUTTING PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE TO STARTING WITH PEOPLE

Humanistic urbanism has made a fundamental contribution by restoring the human scale to our cities.

People-centred cities have taken another essential step: reminding us that technology, infrastructure and planning must serve the people who inhabit them.

Knowledge Human Cities shares this vision, but proposes going one step further.

We do not simply want to introduce people into the process of designing the city; we want deep knowledge of people to be the starting point of that process.

First, understand.

Then, decide.

Only then, design.

4. A NEW SEQUENCE

For too long, we have followed a logic similar to this:

PLAN → BUILD → INHABIT

Then we learned to introduce participation:

PLAN → LISTEN → DESIGN → BUILD → INHABIT

Knowledge Human Cities proposes starting earlier:

KNOW → UNDERSTAND → THINK → DESIGN → BUILD → INHABIT → LEARN

Because a city does not end when it is built, It begins when people start living in it.

5. TECHNOLOGY IS STILL ESSENTIAL

Knowledge Human Cities is not a reaction against technology, quite the opposite. Technology represents one of humanity's greatest capabilities for understanding and transforming our environment.

Data, artificial intelligence, social sciences, qualitative research, urban observation and new forms of participation can help us understand much better how we live.

The problem arises when we confuse the tool with the purpose. A city does not need more technology; It needs the technology required to help make a better life possible.

The question therefore ceases to be: What can we do with technology?

And becomes: What do we need to understand about people, and what tools can help us do so?

6. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS "THE PERSON"

There is an additional difficulty. People are not all the same; we don´t all want to live in the same way; nor do we have the same needs or resources throughout our lives; children, young people, families,

people living alone, older people, workers, entrepreneurs. People with different abilities, cultures, resources, aspirations and ways of understanding life.

A **Knowledge Human City** does not seek to design a city for an average citizen who probably does not exist; It seeks to understand human diversity.

Because knowing people also means accepting that a good city must allow for different ways of living.

7. THE CITY AS A CONSEQUENCE

This may be the most important transformation.

For centuries, we have thought of the city primarily as something to be built, organized, managed or improved; **Knowledge Human Cities** proposes that we also understand the city as a consequence.

A consequence of:

- How we want to live.
- How we want to relate to one another.
- How we want to work.
- How we want to educate.
- How we want to grow old.
- How we want to coexist with nature.
- How much time we want to spend travelling.
- How much space we want to devote to meeting one another.
- What we understand by well-being.

First, we imagine the life. Then we build the place capable of making it possible.

8. A CHANGE OF QUESTION

Every major stage of urban transformation has introduced new questions.

The Industrial City asked: How do we produce?

The Modern City: How do we organize?

The Digital City: How do we connect?

The Smart City: How do we optimize?

The Human-Centred City: How do we design for people?

The **Knowledge Human City** asks another question: **How do people want to live?**

Perhaps this is one of the great urban questions of the 21st century.

9. SEVEN PRINCIPLES

A **Knowledge Human City**:

1. Starts with people, not with the city.
2. Knows before it designs.
3. Understands aspirations, not only needs.
4. Recognizes human diversity and avoids designing for an abstract citizen.
5. Uses technology and data as tools, never as ends in themselves.

6. Understands the city as a living organism that continuously learns from those who inhabit it.

7. Measures its success by the quality of life it makes possible, not merely by the efficiency of its systems.

10. AN INVITATION

Knowledge Human Cities does not seek to offer a new, closed model of the city. Doing so would be contradictory. It also recognizes that there is no universally perfect city, because there is no single correct way to live.

It is an invitation to change the point from which we begin to think.

Architects.
Urban planners.
Technologists.
Sociologists.
Psychologists.
Anthropologists.
Economists.
Philosophers.
Governments.
Businesses.
Universities.

And, above all, citizens.

Each holds part of the knowledge we need.

The city of the 21st century will need to bring this knowledge together in order to understand human beings better **before transforming their territory**.

Because perhaps the next great urban advance will not be about building smarter cities.

Not even simply more human cities.

Perhaps it begins somewhere earlier:

knowing people better in order to build better places to live.

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First we understand people. Then we think about the city.

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