City, Public Value, and Capitalism
Issue Brief

Introduction

It's not far-fetched to argue that much of our human history is also that of the city—it's the place where most people live, work and start families. It's also the place where most economic activity takes place. Many cities, if not all, boomed because they were convenient, efficient transportation hubs and were also amenable to human habitation.

In other words, economic growth, at least since the industrial revolution, has dictated how cities form and how they grow. This unfettered economic growth has been accompanied by a variety of social and environmental ailments that continue to permeate our urban communities today.

Urbanization has affected the environment, public health, housing and land. The neo-liberal doctrine, in its attempt to unshackle the freedom of capital, has created poverty and economic disparities among city residents. Cities also consume most of the world's energy, and are responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions.

Effective public services have not traditionally been provided to remedy those ills, since the priority has almost always been economic growth—essentially, the satisfaction of capitalist needs at the expense of communities. In addition, there are unique social areas that cannot be covered by public services provided by the public sector.

That's why citizen-led movements emerged to bring community needs back into focus, reaffirming the "public value" that always receded in the background as economic growth reigned supreme.

In this report from Ritsumeikan University and the Northwestern's Buffett Institute for Global Affairs' Meridian 180 community, the authors explain the evolution of modern cities and offer recommendations for policymakers. Here are seven takeaways:

Key Recommendations

How to improve wellbeing in shrinking cities (based on chapter 1 & Chapter 2)
Several concepts could help improve the prospects and wellbeing of a city in decline. They include:

- **A compact city:** one that maintains the vitality of the city and reduces administrative costs by concentrating citizens in the center as the population declines
- **A smart city:** one that makes use of information technology to make up for a shrinking population and a downsized economy
- **An ecological city:** one that utilizes and regenerates the excellent natural environment in order to improve the quality of residential and industrial spaces
- **An inclusive city:** one where citizens coexist as equals regardless of nationality, gender, age, religion, etc.
- **A restorative city:** one that restores excluded citizens to pursue the happiness of each and every citizen as a community

What smart cities look like (based on chapter 3)
The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines "Smart Cities" as "initiatives or approaches that effectively leverage digitalization to boost citizens' well-being and deliver more efficient, sustainable and inclusive urban services and environments as part of a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process."

Several key attributes include: optimal management of energy, water and sewage, and recycling; complete digitalization of financial services and the realization of a cashless society; providing necessary transportation and delivery services, anytime and anywhere; utilizing IT to enhance e-learning; utilizing IT to extend healthy life expectancy; ensuring safety and security through local watching; and real-time acquisition and transmission of disaster information for quick evacuation and restoration.

How to cope with population decline (based on chapter 4)
The authors' analysis of six Japanese municipalities revealed that population decline can be avoided or eased by adopting policies that make full use of regional characteristics and paying attention to the net migration loss. In this context, private sector initiatives and bottom-up approaches could help avoid rapid population decline in these shrinking cities. Those municipalities—Kanazawa, Hirosaki, Fukui, Onomichi, Nagato and Kamiyama—used a variety of tactics, such as establishing a city center residence, conservation of historical townhouses and coping with gentrification; establishing urban regeneration projects; renovating vacant houses; public-private partnerships; and proactively inviting people from outside.

How to restore and conserve nature (based on chapter 5)

Restoring nature in residential areas cannot be effective without citizen participation. If residents do not understand or appreciate the value of nature in their residential areas, they can be instrumental in its destruction. For the city's further development, moreover, it is difficult for outsiders (e.g., other city residents, government officials, researchers) to continually visit the area and manage such nature projects instead of the local residents. For these reasons, a community-based project is preferable to a top-down project.

How to build an inclusive city (based on chapter 6)

Building an inclusive city requires a smart policy response, which should include the following: first, in such a fuzzy and sensitive area as exclusion/inclusion, epistemic accuracy and sophistication is a necessary precondition for a sound policy; second, as inclusion as a phenomenon is complex, so must be the policy response, of which a simplified scheme is to divide actions into four categories, i.e. supporting, enabling, integrating and empowering, all responding to different forms of exclusion and fostering different kinds of responses to them; lastly, rather than antagonism and divisiveness, policies should reflect holism, unity and compassion to create a genuinely constructive and inclusive atmosphere. While rarely a city encompasses these criteria perfectly, locales that provide a good example include: Zurich, Vienna, Copenhagen, Luxembourg and Helsinki (PICSA Index by D&L Partners 2019).

How to build a resilient city (based on chapter 7)

A city grounded in restorative justice norms is one in which people are socially and culturally resilient, and work to create a safer and happier society by building social cohesion and building healthy communities. This can be measured through the reduction of a number of harmful phenomena, such as: child abuse, domestic violence, work absenteeism and workplace bullying. It can also be measured through an increase in the following: satisfaction when interacting with government agencies, a sense of safety at home and outside and a sense of community belonging.

The importance of public access to data (based on chapter 11)

Easy access to data is a critical commodity for policymakers and other urban planners. In Australia, urban researchers and planners were able to address various housing challenges using the Australian Housing Data Analytics Platform, which includes open-source technologies helping to democratize the city's access to such data. In this regard, cities are advised to recognize data as a public good to help citizens support evidence-based decision making.

Read the full report here if you would like to dig deeper and learn more about how to make urban living more sustainable, equitable and inclusive.