

# CityLab 2016: How do we create the **CITIES OF THE FUTURE?**

5. December 2016

The Danish Design Centre's Design Cities team had the pleasure of participating in the internationally renowned CityLab conference in Miami in October. The team gained interesting insights into which themes will be impacting the global urban development in the years to come and in addition gave a hands-on design-driven example of experimenting ways to develop cities.

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Citylab is a yearly conference hosted by the American enterprise Bloomberg (which is led by former mayor of N.Y., Michael Bloomberg), in collaboration with media company The Atlantic, which is also known for its leading online magazine for urban development by the same name. The conference is held in a new city every year and has previously taken place in cities like New York and London. This year the conference came to Miami, Florida.

Danish Design Centre were specially invited to the conference and made its mark on the conference by hosting a workshop under the title “Crash Course: How to use Danish-style design in city management”, where the Danish Design Centre-team of Runa Sabroe, Christian Villum and Monica Moeskjær presented in front of a room full of mayors, city developers, architects and businesses. The team gave a thorough introduction to strategic design and design methods as well as on how they can be used to create dynamic approaches towards developing the cities of the future. You can read more about the workshop in the article [Toolkit: Crash course in design and urban development](#).

In addition to this contribution in the official programme the conference was also an opportunity to put our ear to the ground on global efforts in city development and moreover discuss challenges and relevant solutions. Even more importantly it gave us the opportunity of discussing the sharing of these solutions across cities, which happens quite rarely. Changing that fact is one of the main focuses of the conference and as well a priority for the Danish Design Centre's work on the [Design Cities platform](#). In other words, we as a global community have to become better at sharing our ideas and the solutions we create.

It is not only a necessity for the sake of building better and more sustainable cities - but also simply because it is good business.

There were three main themes in particular - as well as a project - that caught our attention on this years Citylab conference:

### **The need for resilience**

All over the globe cities are threatened by climate changes and it was no coincidence that Miami had been chosen as host city for this year's Citylab conference. Due to its location in the low-lying swamp area near surface of the ocean, the big American city is facing huge problems with the rising waters. Miami is looking at a near future where a large part of the city's area will be below the waterline due to global warming and the subsequent melting of the Arctic.

This has, among other things, given rise to large construction works, currently in progress, elevating roads and buildings as well as constructing extensive drainage systems. But the complexity of the problem - namely that the water is not just coming from the sea but trickling up up from the swampy underground - makes solutions with bricks and mortar insufficient.

The only solution is of course to decelerate global warming and, through international communities, to change the massive negative environmental imprint set by bigger cities in order to radically reduce or even stop global warming. An extraordinarily ambitious plan, but none the less the only viable road forward, and at the same time a golden opportunity for the global climate improvement efforts, since big cities are estimated to have to sustain over 70% of the world population in 2050. In other words: if the cities change their mark on the environment so will mankind.

The combination of current local construction solutions on one hand, which will buy Miami and cities like it 20-30 years more of dry streets, and, on the other hand, high scale global initiatives to reduce the cities CO2 discharge, is therefore the key to secure the future of the planet.

One example of construction solutions came by the Danish architect Bjarke Ingels, who in an immensely popular Q&A told about the Dryline - also called The Big U-project - from New York, where his proposal is to build shutters and berms around Manhattan that not only shield the city from flooding, but also serve other purposes when the rising sea levels aren't approaching. He also introduced the coming sustainable incineration plant he is helping build in Copenhagen, which not only doubles as beautiful urban

skiing slope, but also will have its massive steam chimneys make artificial clouds whenever the plant has saved another ton of CO<sub>2</sub>.

One of the big take-aways from the conference was that global effort to radically reduce carbon dioxide emissions cannot not be done on political level alone. Instead we need to build a stronger cross-sectoral collaboration with a much higher level of involvement from citizens and businesses alike. And that points to the next theme of the conference that we would like to highlight: Participatory processes for creating city solutions for the future.

### **User, citizen and business participation**

The challenges of major cities are largely the same across the globe. They include increasing urbanization; the problem of being able to absorb the large amount people moving to the cities and not least the influx of people who involuntarily pushed from one place to another: The refugees. Another big challenge is solving traffic related problems, specifically with congestion of cars, which on one hand slows down basic mobility and on the other hand pollutes and lowers air quality (with a population with deteriorating health as a negative sideeffect). Lastly, but definitely not least, one of the biggest challenges is how to use new technologies to solve the above mentioned obstacles as well as man others. How do we do that?

It is clear that first and foremost you need to make use of the resources the city already have at its disposal: Namely involving citizens and businesses. The United States have been successful in onboarding the business, while they lag somewhat behind when it comes to getting citizens involved, especially when it comes to marginalized groups. A fact many different sessions at the conference reflected with titles like “City Neighborhoods Made by Everyone, For Everyone”, “Power to the People: Public Engagement and Participation in the 21st Century” and “Bridges Not Walls: Welcoming Refugees”.

An ongoing theme in the discussions was the need to find tools and methods to bring these different players together, and it was also an ideal opportunity for Danish Design Centre to talk about thos use strategic design tools

for this purpose. One example is to bring citizens and businesses to the table at the very beginning of new initiatives, as well as working with iterative approaches and prototype methods. This allows ideas and solutions to sift through through multiple rounds of real-life testing and improvements before going to full scale - and full cost. Generally such approaches also cost less and, perhaps most importantly, involving citizens and businesses in collaborations with the public sector in the development of the city creates synergy, joint ownership and brings new resources into play.

### **Artificial intelligence and autonomous cars**

Last big theme we wanted to highlight is a well known and rather debated topic: Autonomous cars and the artificial intelligence that is going to drive them. As above mentioned, cars pose a big challenge for cities around the globe, and with the new perspectives that A.I. technologies have brought to the table, it seems many of the environmental problems as well as troubles with mobility could be solved. The Americans in particular are keen on accelerating the development of autonomous cars in urban settings, but the imminent benefits may overshadow other equally difficult problems. Concretely, the debates also gave room for some European perspectives, for instance that just because the cars can drive themselves does not mean that they stop taking up space, and furthermore that until we have converted them all to run on electricity they will keep on polluting our environment. Moreover autonomous car do not contribute to solving obesity and health problems, and in that light maybe it would be wiser to use our resources to develop cities better suited for walking and bicycling? Not to mention new forms of public transportation i.e. Elon Musk's Hyperloop, which coincidentally now also have Bjarke Ingels involved.

### **Boosting urban areas with the use of street art**

One specific initiative that the conference highlighted, and which made a big impression on us, was the development of Miami-suburb Wynwood that we had the pleasure of visiting during our stay. Wynwood is a BID (Business Improvement District) - where some pretty radical experimentations have taken place in collaboration with



the city and a group of businesses led by visionary contracting company Goldman Properties.

Up until a few years ago Wynwood was a run-down and mostly empty industrial area in the northern part of Miami, which was characterized by its empty warehouses and abandoned industrial facilities. Today it's a different story.



Wynwood



Street art in the industrial and charming Wynwood area in Miami.

The Area got kick-started by initiative and a vision from Goldman Properties, who specializes in boosting abandoned urban areas through a combination of smaller investments, the attraction of businesses, creation of communities and...art. Concretely in the Wynwood-case in the form of street art, which now dominates the area with hundreds of gigantic pieces covering the facades of every building. Street art has changed the previous grey and boring area to a place full of colour, and on a scale and in an artistic quality rarely seen anywhere else. In other words the area is now a vivacious street gallery changing every day and as a result the name of the area has now changed to Wynwood Walls.

The art however is only one element amongst others that has helped boost the area: Along with the talented street artists and graffiti painters came other waves of galleries, coffee shops and micro-breweries. Later came design agencies, architect firms and other creative businesses and studios that are now filling up the spaces of the abandoned warehouses with initiative, business, jobs and opportunities.

During the visit Danish Design Centre had an inspiring talk with the Managing Director of Goldman Properties, Joseph Furst, who told about their special methods. They bought a large part of the abandoned buildings in the area and then created a set of very flexible boundaries for the different parties who moved in, thus allowing the area to evolve almost fully on the terms of the new inhabitants. Moreover they curate who can move in, and one very concrete example of that not allowing major fast-food chains to jump the bandwagon; even if they have been very eager to move into the area.

Now that the area is sprawling, next ambition for Goldman Properties is to sell the buildings to their inhabitants in co-ops and collaborative structures, so that the control of the area stays in the hands of those creative businesses and gives them the opportunity to forge a joint ownership of the area and its future. A perfect example of urban development using strategic design thinking to create a dynamic and sustainable framework for co-creation

processes between different stakeholders.

All in all, the Citylab conference was a big source of inspiration, and learnings are already being put to work in coming activities in Danish Design Centre. For instance the DesignCities-team is expanding our CitiesByDesign project to include more ambitious experiments in the use of strategic design methods for city development, and look forward to lift the veil on that soon.

[Read more about Cities By Design](#)