

Enabling the Capabilities to Live a Good Life



Lia Ghilardi

Creative Strategist and Cultural Planner, London, UK, 2023

I've collaborated with Lia Ghilardi on diverse projects, valuing her intellect in crafting uniquely authentic and complex places. Lia is a polymath living in London, renowned globally in the field of cultural urban development, in particular for her work in enhancing liveability and cohesion through place mapping and cultural planning. I shared my book draft, and had a conversation with her, here's my condensed synthesis of her insights.

Lia Ghilardi says: "Reading your book, I was struck by its emphasis on the present. For only by truly understanding our current moment, can we envision a future for our societies that is in tune with our aspirations and desires."

"I admire the participants' emphasis on the need to develop a collective consciousness in shaping our societies beyond our narrow professional lenses and routines. I can see that out of the conversations you have had, we could envision a city where human development takes precedence."

"Our current society prioritises economic growth, often at the cost of welfare, the planet, and the growth of fulfilling lives. Alejandro Aravena wisely suggests inverting this order in the book. A good city is the one that generates a more just economy, not the other way around. In the first instance, our goal has to be to put human development at the centre of urban planning."

"In a city focused on human development, genuine citizen or community involvement arises organically. As architects and urbanists, we must critique the systemic structures our buildings inhabit. Architecture is not only constructing physical buildings; we also shape narratives, ecosystems, and city interdependencies."

Suddenly, our conversation halts. A child, perhaps three-years-old, peers closely through the café window from the adjacent kindergarten courtyard. She beautifully embodies our responsibility for the city's future.

"It is about giving agency," Lia Ghilardi continues. "This goes beyond responding merely to needs, (like housing for example), which we can professionally do even now. Yet, as a Sen, the Nobel laureate in economy, so elegantly

posited, real progress transcends mere needs – but it lies in removing the obstacles and to enabling the **capabilities of people to achieve the lives they want to live.**"

It's about empowering individuals to lead the lives they value. This perspective revolutionises how we envision progress in cities. In other words, to cultivate thriving communities, our aim should be deeper than addressing immediate needs and functions. This applies to our ability to share learning beyond the boundaries of traditional education systems that organise professions such as architecture. "Learn beyond the school buildings." Another example from the book of this kind of empowerment is echoed when Piero Pelizzaro, who says that "we need **capacity** to address climate change."

An example from the book that Lia finds fitting is Guy Standing's view of a sharing society (and city) through the introduction of a universal basic income. "Such a foundation forces us to question our current values which are based on individual competition and human and planet exploitation, in order to open our minds to a future that sees cities and places developing around more caring, symbiotic relationships between humans and our surroundings. In short, to empower us to address disparities, we must prioritise our commons and human development, rather than relying solely on wealth to "purchase" our **capabilities**, as the current system suggests," she remarks.

But how do we start? Reflecting on my three decades working with cities, Lia says, "it's evident that the most transformative shifts often originate from modest initiatives. To truly nurture a community, a city, one must deeply engage first of all with its broad cultural context – understanding its trajectory and inherent potential. Within the very 'DNA' of every locale lies the inspiration for its future growth. Then, through gradual, holistic experimentation and insights, we can find the way of building cities and communities that mirror our shared aspirations. Growth rooted in human and planetary nurture, not their exploitation. This is what comes to mind reading the book."

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"ENGAGEMENT WILL COME NATURALLY AND ORGANICALLY IN A SOCIETY THAT IS BASED ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT."

/ Lia Ghilardi



SYNTHESIS

- Emphasize the need to analyse the present in order to create a vision for a future we can all share.
- Foster an awareness of the collective in order to give everyone the capability to live a fulfilling life.
- When thinking of growth, prioritise human development and the commons, not economic wealth for the few.

The artworks of this book, portrays the present moment and people. It does not necessarily reflect the interviewee's opinion and it does not try to explain architecture or urbanism.