The future of cities

Professor of Urban Planning Sarah Holmes looks at the challenges of urban living

The World Health Organisation has produced a report predicting that 9.8 billion of us will be living on this planet by 2050. Of that number, 72% will be living in urban areas – a higher proportion than ever before. Presented with this information, governments have a duty to consider how best to meet the needs of city residents, and not just for the short-term. Certain problems associated with urban living have been highlighted by research company Richmond-Carver in its latest global survey. At the top of the list survey respondents' concerns is the fact that competition amongst tenants for rental properties has driven the median price up – so much so people need to hold down two or more jobs to meet all their expenses. Another issue the survey highlighted is the difficulty commuters face. Overcrowding means that seats are often not available on long journeys, but more significant is that schedules are unreliable. Many studies have shown the effect that has on a country's productivity. Interestingly, certain problems seem more common in some cities than others: respondents from increasingly crowded European cities, including Manchester and Barcelona, commented on how their quality of life was affected by loud machinery, other people's music and car alarms. Something the survey failed to ask about was the value people placed on having access to nature in urban neighborhoods. However, some countries are already moving forward. Singapore is a prime example; its rooftop gardens make the city a far more desirable place to live. It is the Singaporean government that is behind this push for sustainable living.

Perhaps some clearer government direction would benefit other cities. Take New York City, a place where I frequently meet up with other researchers in my field. Luckily for me, I am driven from the airport to the research centre, so do not need to navigate the freeways and constant congestion. Admittedly my experience of the urban lifestyle here is limited to the hotels I stay in, and the blocks within a three-kilometre walk. But whenever I leave my room in search of an outlet providing fruit or anything with nutritional value, none can be found. It seems ridiculous that this should be the case. New York has made great advances in redeveloping its museums and arts centres, but authorities must recognize that people's basic needs must be met first.

Sometimes these basic needs are misunderstood. In some urban areas, new residential developments are provided with security features such as massive metal fences and multiple gates in the belief that these will make residents safer. There is little evidence such steps make a difference in this way, but we don know they make residents feel reluctant to go outside and walk around their neighbourhood. Instead they are more likely to remain inactive indoors. Grassy

areas inside fences developments are hardly used by householders and tenants either. All this adds up to a feeling of being cut off from others.

So where are planners and developers going wrong? Inviting a group of locals to attend a consultation event is the conventional method for discovering what a community might want. The issue here is that it often attracts the same few voices with the same few wishes. But the internet now makes it possible for others to contribute. A community website can be a place where local people propose ideas for making their neighbourhood a better place to live. Developers that pay attention to these ideas can get a clearer picture of the things residents actually want and reduce the risk of throwing away money on things they don't.

An example of a project that truly meets the needs of residents is Container City – a development in London's Docklands area. Constructed from metal containers once used to transport cargo on ships, it is a five-storey architectural masterpiece. The containers have been turned into sunny work studios, and despite their limited size, some come with a bed, shower and kitchen unit. Smart planning and skillful construction mean they take up very little room. Furniture and fittings are made from recycled products. Other countries have their own versions Container City – Amsterdam and Copenhagen have created container dormitories to house students – but the Docklands site shows how work and living areas can effectively be combined. The units are ideal for young entrepreneurs hoping to establish a business while keeping costs down.

Successful development is taking place in many urban areas around the world, and city planners have a duty to see for themselves the transforming effect this can have on residents' lives. There is no better way to do this than to visit these places in person. These might be neighbourhoods constructed for the first time, or developers might have transformed what was already there. In either case, the idea of cars determining urban planning, and indeed the whole concept of private car ownership, is now outdated and must be abandoned. Instead, the layout of an area under development must make it easier for people to meet up in pedestrianized zones and community spaces. At the heart of the development should be a cultural area, providing venues for art, music and street theatre. Such activities bring communities together, and do far more for positive relations than a new mall or shopping precinct. For this reason, these kinds of performance spaces should be prioritized. Finally, planners and developers must be obliged to create, within the same neighbourhood, different types of homes for wealthy professionals, for families, for the elderly and for young people just starting out. This kind of mix is essential to ensure people can buy a home in an area convenient for work, and for a community to stay alive.

READING PASSAGE-3 Questions

Questions 27-31

*Complete the summary using the list of words, **A-H**, below.*
*Write the correct letter, **A-H**, in boxes 27-31 on your answer sheet.*

Survey on problems facing city dwellers

The world Health Organisation has recently published data concerning **27** …………….. in cities. This data should indicate the governments that they must think about ways to improve the lives of residents. According to a Richmond-Carver survey, the worst problem facing many city dwellers was **28** ……………… . The survey also indicated that in some cities, poor **29** …………….. can impact dramatically on the economy. Another issue seems to be **30** …………..… , although this is more often mentioned by survey participants in European countries. Questions on people's views on the need for **31**………….. were unfortunately omitted from the survey, but countries like Singapore already seem to be making progress in this respect.

A	noise pollution	B	recycling facilities
C	green areas	D	employment opportunities
E	population growth	F	affordable housing
G	antisocial behaviour	H	public transport

Questions 32-35
*Choose the correct letter, **A, B, C** or **D**.*
Write the correct letter in boxes 32-35 on your answer sheet.

32   When staying in New York, the writer is frustrated by the fact that
   A healthy food cannot easily be obtained.
   B bad road design causes daily traffic problems.
   C certain venues cannot be reached by foot.
   D visitors are all directed to the same kinds of place.

33 What point does the writer make about the use of security features?
A It greatly reduces levels if criminal activity.
B It helps create a sense of community.
C It discourages people form taking exercises.
D It creates unnecessary fear among residents.

34 According to the writer, the problem with some planners and developers is that they
A distrust the use of certain technologies for communication.
B create buildings using traditional construction methods.
C tend to put profits before the needs of residents.
D rely on the opinions of a narrow range of people.

35 What is the writer doing in the fifth paragraph?
A explaining which construction materials are most sustainable
B emphasising the importance of clever design in small spaces
C comparing reasons for choosing to live in an unusual building
D proposing which specific urban locations should be developed

Questions 36-40

*Complete each sentence with the correct ending, **A-F**, below.*
Write the correct letter, A-F, in boxes 37-40 on your answer sheet.

YES If the statement agrees with the claims of the writer
NO If the statement contradicts the claims of the writer
NOT GIVEN If it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

36 City planners should travel to urban areas that are good models of development.
37 It is easier to plan an entirely new neighbourhood than redevelop an existing one.
38 In the future, planners must think about the needs of car drivers as they design urban areas.
39 Cultural venues need to take second place to retail opportunities when developing a neighbourhood.
40 It is important that new housing developments encourage social diversity.