Cities for the Future: Where Life Meets Design

https://www.climateone.org/audio/cities-future-where-life-meets-design
Recorded on July 12, 2019

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One, changing the conversation about energy, the economy, and the environment.

As cities prepare for more heat and more flooding, they are confronting how to remake the infrastructure they run on. That could have a bigger impact than most people realize.

Liz Ogbu: Approaching climate change, particularly when it comes to our cities is this opportunity to do pretty major investments in a sort of significant retooling of cities not just in the U.S. but around the world.

Greg Dalton: But large urban projects have historically ended up displacing people of color by building freeways through their communities or pricing them out of their own homes and businesses. How do we keep from repeating the mistakes of the past?

Liz Ogbu: I think it's time that we talk about how do we be intentional about those investments and who benefits. Because I think the idea that we don't consider it doesn't mean that people don't get harmed.

Greg Dalton: Creating cities for the future. Up next on Climate One.

Greg Dalton: What does the city of the future look like?

Climate One conversations feature oil companies and environmentalists, Republicans and Democrats, the exciting and the scary aspects of the climate challenge. I'm Greg Dalton.

When Ridley Scott envisioned the dystopian Los Angeles of 2019 in Blade Runner, he probably didn't think about how much energy would be needed to run those flying cars and sky-high animated

billboards. Or what it would be doing to the climate.

We've now reached the year in which Blade Runner is set. Flying cars are still in the future. But with over half of the global population living in urban centers, and another 2.5 billion expected to join them by 2050, maybe it's time to take a step backward when it comes to getting around the city.

Jan Gehl: If you can make more bicycle lanes and do it properly, you get more bicycles. And if you invite people to walk more and use public spaces more, you get more life in the city…you get what you invite for.

Greg Dalton: Architect Jan Gehl was instrumental in helping to turn Copenhagen into one of the world's most liveable cities. His people-centric approach has influenced urban planning throughout the world. But while disinviting cars from our city streets may sound like utopia for some, it could mean big problems for others.

Liz Ogbu: So if we've removed the car from a place which actually a large number of people who don't have access to public transit who may not have access to the scooters or any of those things, are they able to actually get to where they need to go?

Greg Dalton: On today's program, we invite you to visit Tomorrowland with three forward-looking urban leaders. Jan Gehl is a founding partner of Gehl Architects and the author of Cities for People. Laura Crescimano is cofounder and principal at SITELAB Urban Studio. And Liz Ogbu is a designer, urbanist and social justice advocate, and the founder of Studio O.

We are happy to present this program with SPUR, a non-profit promoting good planning and good government in the San Francisco Bay Area.

When we talk about revitalizing our cities, making them more sustainable, climate-friendly and dynamic, it seems obvious that all of our citizens should be expected to reap the benefits. But that hasn't always been the case, as Liz Ogbu explains.

Liz Ogbu: I think the challenge is that oftentimes there are communities that have been historically more harms than others, and who are suffering from the ills that have happened. And if we don't take into account how are we addressing that as well as how are we addressing the challenges of the environment then often those communities will continue to get left behind. And frankly, they're the ones who are probably the most vulnerable from things that are coming up with climate change. And so I basically ask how do we have a like past looking view as well as a forward-looking view. So sort of both and instead of either or.

Greg Dalton: Let's talk about Detroit as an example of that. Jamon Jordan is president of the Detroit chapter of the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History. He also has deep family roots in a neighborhood that used to exist called Black Bottom. Jordan's grandparents as well as his father lived in Black Bottom before it was demolished in the 50s and 60s in a redevelopment project that created space for two new freeways I-75 and I-375. Another adjacent neighborhood called Paradise Valley was also predominantly African-American and also demolished. Now, city officials are planning on removing the I-375 freeway to make Detroit's downtown more livable. Detroit's going through quite a revival I think there's some definitely some climate dimensions to the Detroit story. Sounds great, well, Jamon Jordan says not so fast.

Jamon Jordan: When the discussion to build the freeway through Black Bottom and Paradise Valley was originally discussed in the 1950s African-Americans were against this. They knew that it was gonna be for the destruction and for the removal of their residential communities, their schools, and

of course their businesses. But it happened anyway because African-Americans in the city of Detroit at this time are politically powerless.

So now what's happening in downtown Detroit now is a massive wave of development that is predominantly young white professionals who are moving in and working in the core downtown. And they are not only wanting to work there they want to live there.

The people who are living in that area won't be able to afford to move into this new district that's going to be built once they remove the freeway. When this is paved over and re-created as a residential or business district it's not going to be inclusive at least if we look at history. Had the government not got involved in destroying the black community the development of downtown Detroit would've been an African-American downtown development because Paradise Valley was 350 black-owned businesses in the 1930s. In 2019, they would be thousands of businesses in downtown Detroit.

And so the architects and developers need to understand that they're not coming in to save Detroit. And they need to find a way to align themselves what's already been going on rather than coming in and seeing themselves as some sort of benefactors for the city.

Greg Dalton: That was Jamon Jordan who runs Black Scroll Network History & Tours in Detroit. Liz Ogbu, your reaction to that he's saying, you know, the past and the future.

Liz Ogbu: Yeah, I mean I think it echoes very much what I was saying before. I think if you look in a lot of major cities, particularly in the U.S. that in the great highway building boom of the 1950s it just so happened that a lot of times the highways were often put through the African-American communities, right. Like in the grand space of the city that always ended up being the perfect place in which to put these highways, which was an intentional act.

And so having caused these communities to experience harm once the idea that we're not looking at revitalization as a way to repair the harm and we're sort of asking some of these communities to make a sacrifice again or sort of assuming that there is, you know, we all kind of deride trickle-down economics, but it's sort of the same thing, right. Like we'll do this investment, and it'll come down to these neighborhoods. But the truth of the matter is if we don't intentionally say how do the people who've been most harmed get to be the ones who benefit the most from these changes then we're just gonna be repeating this.

And so I think, you know, approaching climate change, particularly when it comes to our cities is this opportunity to do pretty major investments in a sort of significant retooling of cities not just in the U.S. but around the world. And so I think it's time that we talk about how do we be intentional about those investments and who benefits. Because I think the idea that we don't consider it doesn't mean that people don't get harmed.

Greg Dalton: Laura Crescimano.

Laura Crescimano: I wanna add to that as well that, you know, those highway projects are a history of urban renewal, which was these massive moves that our country made. And that I think the risk in the removals of them as if they are done in a similarly sweeping manner that's top-down and I think speaking to what Liz is saying that we want to look to the past and look to more than one voice in both process but in what we're creating so that we don't repeat those kinds of singular gestures that aren't gonna actually build community.

Greg Dalton: Laura Crescimano, I wanna ask you. There's a battle in the streets for space going

on for curb space for street space. We have scooters and delivery vehicles and ride hailing, there's a real battle for urban street space. Tell us how that's playing out here in the Bay Area and elsewhere. Because every time I turn around there are some new thing on wheels, you know, going around.

Laura Crescimano: You know, it is a question that a lot of people are wondering what is the future of transportation how it's gonna transform our cities. I think a lot of people debate is car-free the better, is our place is better if they are car-free or not. And I think one answer is that the cars aren't necessarily going away just because they might be autonomous, they're still cars and they're still gonna take up space in our cities. So I think there's a little bit of a kind of wish that it was a magic bullet.

And I think but what they can do we can think about how do we use that efficiency and what do we want our streets to look like and how can we start to reclaim some of the space. So I think you know a kind of utilitarian mindset has made for wider roads, faster cars, more cars and we will just fill up as much of that, you know, and create more congestion. But if we start to think about more modes and more ways to use it and the curbside becomes really I mean we see so much drop off and pick up right now or bike share, all these other things are just being able to, you know, sit outside and have nature come into our cities more. That's what we want our cities to look like so I think it doesn't mean an eradication of cars, but it does mean to kind of reclaiming more thoughtfully how we use our streets.

Greg Dalton: Jan Gehl, you were partly responsible for getting cars or limiting cars in Times Square in New York City, which is one of the iconic examples of redistributing power and space between people who walk and people who drive. Tell us briefly the background of that and what you think of it today.

Jan Gehl: We were invited by Michael Bloomberg to come to New York to assist him with his plan to make New York a sustainable metropole. The first really sustainable metropole in the world that was his vision that was 2007. And they rush to Copenhagen actually and spend some time there some of them, Janette Sadik-Khan and Amanda Burden and we could hardly get the bicycles away from them during the night, they want it to take them into the hotel. And in the end we got the bicycles back from them at the airport and they say we want a city like this one. And that was how we were involved in advising about how they could introduce more bicycles in New York. The mayor said of course that New York is perfect for bicycling, it's flat, it's compressed it's got wide streets very easily enough room for bicycle lanes, whatever. So he said that in my city, you can take my subway it's the best in the world you can walk on my sidewalks and you can have a new bicycle system that was his vision and we were working on that. And this, while we are working on this bicycle whatever thing we decided to think about that there were hardly any nice public spaces in in New York. People were rushing all the time between the subway and the office.

And then we talk about the what about the Champs Elysee of the Americas what about having nice public spaces that they have been in there. And then we started to question whether they really needed Broadway for traffic and of course the traffic management said yes we do and mayor said, go and figure it out. And they came out a year later saying that we actually don't need Broadway for traffic and then actually the traffic would be more smooth if we haven't got Broadway. So that was the reason why they could change the Broadway. And we found in the Times Square, it was not a square, there were 11% of the area was dedicated to pedestrians and 90% of everybody passing the square was on these 11% while in 90% of the space were 10% in cars. And that was the beginning of this think that maybe we don't need all that asphalt and that was changed in 2009. And actually they made 50 other squares like that now and it's so important that we give back asphalt to public activity in our cities and that's what going on all over the world actually.

Greg Dalton: You're listening to a Climate One conversation about designing cities to cope with a growing population and a warming world. Coming up, going beyond the quick fix.

Liz Ogbu: Let's say in San Francisco there's this whole conversation about the seawall, right. Like…let's fix the seawall then everything will be fine. But it's sort of like, what do we want San Francisco 2050 to be like?

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton, and we're talking about designing the sustainable, liveable cities of tomorrow. My guests are urban designers Jan Gehl, Liz Ogbu and Laura Crescimano.

Before the break, Jan Gehl was talking about ways to make cities more welcoming to people than to cars. Some would have us get rid of the automobile altogether. But, as I asked Liz Ogbu, is that even realistic?

Liz Ogbu: Part of the challenge when we talk about how do we address these things as we often go for the single point solutions like let's remove the cars, right and that will solve it. And I guess I'm curious how do we ask the larger question and I think that points to what Laura was saying it's like aspirational, where are we trying to get to, right and what are the pieces that need to happen to be able to support that. So for like say Times Square you are asking what is it that we're trying to get to in terms of an experience and what are the pieces that need to happen in order to support that. So if car-free does plug into that I think that's great.

The one question I always ask when we sort of remove cars is are we addressing people's other mobility needs, right. So if we've removed the car from a place which actually a large number of people who don't have access to public transit who may not have access to the scooters or any of those things are they able to actually get to where they need to go. And so it goes back to that like how are we making sure that we understand the repercussions of every move that we're making in the name of sustainability. And so it's not about not being sustainable it's making sure that everybody can benefit from what we're doing.

Greg Dalton: Laura Crescimano, if car-free is too simple, what's the balance of this power between people, cars because the real idea is network ride hailing companies have increased traffic and congestion the data shows that in San Francisco. So the idea that this ride hailing is gonna have fewer cars it means more cars more traffic.

Laura Crescimano: Right. And the same thing goes for autonomous vehicles. So that idea that they will create efficiency if it can be more systematizing cars could be controlled on the highway or on the roadways it will move more efficiently than we as humans do. But we will fill that, we will just fill that with more cars. So there is a kind of, you know, I think there's a catch-22 there that we have to think about other modes. Whether it's bicycles whether it's walking whether it's other forms of transit and micro mobility and making those appealing and accessible and affordable choices. And I think that's gonna be really hard because the more technology advances the more the convenience and the cost will go down on point-to-point. And so what we I think all love about what transit can do for a city to move large numbers of people around is gonna have to compete with a very -- a difficult dynamic I would say that a number of people have access to but maybe not all

people.

Greg Dalton: Fair enough. Fair enough. So Liz Ogbu, let's think about that big picture. How cities -- world is urbanizing they need to fundamentally change for climate they're being hammered by severe weather questions about whether they're rebuilt how they're rebuilt, for whom. So take that on that big challenge of rethinking cities for the era of climate change.

Liz Ogbu: So I mean I think Jan is right that the question needs to be bigger, right. And so in our cities whenever we're taking on a new project or like let's say in San Francisco there's this whole conversation about the seawall, right. Like I think that goes against this like single-point solution. Let's fix the seawall then everything will be fine, but it's sort of like what do we want San Francisco 2050 to be like. What is the quality of life that we want to be there. How do we want those who have struggled to be able to get a good quality of life to be able to benefit.

If we think about the differences that are happening between rich and poor right now it's like how do we want to heal the divides that are coming through that. And if we can start to lay out what that is aspirationally then we can start to talk about all right so what does that mean in terms of how do we live together in community. How do we move from place to place how do we enable somebody to be able to get to their job regardless of whether they're a tech pro working for, you know, Twitter or if they are working like sort of hard labor on the construction of the next new tower like how are they actually able to live in the city. And so I think unless we're starting to willing to ask those questions and what are the investments that we're willing to do and the trade-offs that we're willing to do to be able to support that. I think it's harder, we'll just keep on being like how do we create faster cars or do autonomous vehicles or, you know, get the next solar technology. So I think it's set it up like that and then the other things flow from that.

Greg Dalton: Laura Crescimano, one thing that's been constant, you know, the coastline is gonna be dynamic. The coastline has been basically in the same place where human civilization, that's changing. Do you think that some places need to be enjoyed today that might be sacrificed in the future we can't be too conservative. So tell us about that relationship.

Laura Crescimano: I agree. And I think on what Liz said which is I think we've been away from philosophy about speed and convenience, right, to what kind of place we wanna be living in. And how that place can reveal itself to us say so that we understand the climate change and we understand the ecosystem that's underneath, or even the fact that underneath is not an ecosystem it's fill, say, in the case of some of San Francisco's coastline.

So one of the things we look at in a project that we worked on with for San Francisco it's port owned it's former shipbuilding land at Pier 70 was, you know that you have to mitigate for climate change, right. So the site is lifted. But instead of saying we're gonna remove access to the water can we allow for certain areas, particularly areas that had historic piers to be at a lower level to enjoy today and then just kind of incrementally build up. And so that may be gone tomorrow, right. But you protect so you have levels of protection. So maybe certain aspect, you know, accessible path and access at the water there might be a bike path that's a little bit higher, you know, and that could get moved up and then the buildings are even higher. So you start to think it's not one-size-fits-all and it's not one experience. It's not just what's gonna be the safe experience 50 years from now but what's the, how do we evolve with climate change as well.

Jan Gehl: It's very important this discussion that how can we prepare for the raising water. I think that's one discussion but at the same time we shall work very hard to prevent it from raising as best we can. And actually maybe some of the discussion about how high the dikes can be will take the focus away from the main problem that is that we should not accept the climate change which would

raise the water that much. So we all will have to live like the Dutch and I should say that the Dutch they are living 3 meters under water level now and done that for hundreds of years and they have rather a good life. So that can be made but we shall actually do whatever we can to prevent that situation as best we can.

And then we have to think radically about a number of things. I come from Copenhagen where they over the last 50 years have managed a lot of things to make it a better city for people more livable and also definitely much more climate friendly. They're not at all there yet but like I mentioned that 41% of everybody going to work in Copenhagen go there on the bicycle just as one example. And they have two policies two official policies: we will be the best city for people in the world that is about walking and public spaces. And we will be the best city for bicycling in the world that is about making infrastructure for bicycle which is really safe and inviting. And that has led to more and more people bicycling.

We know that if you invite more cars you get more cars. If you invite and make streets you get more traffic. And if you can make more bicycle lanes and do it properly, you get more bicycles. And if you invite people to walk more and use public spaces more, you get more life in the city. It's the same mechanism, you get what you invite for. And we have invited for actually for a number of years, hundred years, we've invited for more traffic generally and we have to change that even if we can have smart cars or we can have autonomic cars whatever. The whole focus on mobility we have to be much more interested in making good places to live rather than good places to move.

Greg Dalton: We're discussing the future of cities in the era of climate disruption and growing urban populations. I'm Greg Dalton. And my guests are Laura Crescimano, cofounder and principal at SITELAB Urban Studio. Jan Gehl, an urban design consultant and architect and Liz Ogbu, a designer, urbanist and advocate for social justice.

Liz Ogbu, let's think about what climate change is gonna bring. It's gonna be hotter it's going to be more volatile, there's gonna be some movement of people there's dislocation. What's, you know, what is that look like those cities who were able to be flexible and adapt to those kinds of shocks that climate are punching cities with.

Liz Ogbu: I think that's a really good question and I'm not entirely sure. I think that's kind of why we're all trying to put our heads towards it. I think, you know, if we look at some of the major disasters that have been happening whether it's the flooding that's been happening in the Midwest or things like Hurricane Katrina or even Cape Town a year or two ago had that giant water crisis, right. And so it's what is the ability of these places to be able to withstand those shocks but also like how do we make sure that resilience can actually happen on a day-to-day basis so that they are prepared when that is happening. I think if we actually are able to do our job and create some radical solutions then I think it means that we're just living differently, right. Like clearly this is not a technology issue, right. If it was a technology issue we probably would've solved it, right. We've invented all sorts of things to be able to fix it. And so it's really about how do we live our lives in day-to-day and what kind of sacrifices we're willing to make. And so I think it might mean that our footprint is less, right. Like maybe we aren't traveling so radically as much we are. And it gets us learning how we're consuming less resources which might mean that we reconstruct how we set up value.

All those things to me are things that we would have to start to take on to be able to make changes. But, you know, we're a society that sent somebody to the moon, right. Like we have the ability to dream something that seems really impossible. And I just think that right now a lot of our attempts have been more of like just over to here instead of over to here or instead of it's something that we can't even see yet. And so I think asking what would it mean to live radically what would it mean to

have a lesser footprint is something that we may be don't have the answer to right now, but it's something that we actually just need to start thinking about because clearly we've seen where this road is probably going to lead us it's where there's gonna be a lot more suffering than what we've already seen.

Laura Crescimano: And I also describe that as I think it's important as it's a way of living, right, how do we live differently. So I don't think the solution as you said it's not a technological one it's also not about how we design it's not gonna be all about physical structures. So much is about how we create opportunities for community in connection and resilience is about connections between people like who do you turn to when something happens is there someone that's going to check on you or share their resources with you. And how do we create and some of those things are physical, you know, being a place that people would bump into each other on the street and some of those go far beyond the physical into, you know, our policies the ways we interact and what we kind of the opportunities that people have.

Greg Dalton: Laura Crescimano, all over this country there are projects being built near the water that are basically based on business as usual. I was in Miami recently and the tallest skyscraper in Miami is going in right by the water. What responsibility do architects and engineers have for designing and creating buildings that they must know, cannot withstand the climbing climate shocks?

Laura Crescimano: Yeah, this is, you know, I think it's a tricky thing for architects and designers because I think so often architects are late in the chain. The project brief has been created, build this building on this plot of land it should be this tall and do these things. And so I think part of it is one for architects to be able to advocate or set boundaries. There been all kinds of programs architects that you know, rally together to all signoff to say they wouldn't build prisons for example like there are groups that resist from certain typologies. And I would say the more that, you know, as part of why I chose urban design versus architecture was to try to go upstream in the decision-making. And so if we can get there earlier in the choices maybe there's a different choice that could deliver the value that the person trying to build that building is looking for at the same time as find maybe a different choice than one that might, you know, might not consider everything.

Jan Gehl: And a lot of decisions of these kinds are made on the basis of if I don't take this commission the guy which is not so good at design as I will come and take it and I think it's crap.

Greg Dalton: So what responsibility, Jan Gehl, do designers and urban thinkers have to kind of really, you know, cities are kind of looked to as the vanguard where change can happen because nation states is so big and international diplomacy is so slow. People are looking to cities to lead the charge on climate and yet things are moving slowly not radical enough. What can be done to wake people up and get them to move faster, more boldly?

Jan Gehl: I have this experience from Copenhagen actually because we have found out that it's not the individual architect who shall stand up that it cannot be made because there are developers and real estate agents and whatever politicians and money and whatever. We have to make change the mindset change the way people think and that I have found that by research and finding out how things are put together and changing the way people think we have done that in Copenhagen over 50 years now and it's had a fantastic influence.

So the mayor would say that all of us we have changed now the mindset from the mayor to the younger students that we shall build citizen in other way and then we can start as architects to build. We need to have the evidence, we need to have the documentation, and we have seen that. So I would always say change the mindsets and the mind to change mindset will change the cities.

But you cannot sort of step over that about information and documentation about what the implications would be. There has to be research and understanding of what we're dealing with rather than going for the individual architect or building project and say this can be, should not be happening. So we have to dig deeper again.

Greg Dalton: You're listening to a conversation about the cities of the future. This is Climate One. Coming up, should designers play a role in solving the homelessness crisis?

Liz Ogbu: So for me it's not necessarily that it falls on us to fix it, but like we have to participate in the conversation…it's a challenge that requires all hands on deck and everybody who plays a role in shaping the built environment has a role to play in solving this.

Greg Dalton: That's up next, when Climate One continues.

Greg Dalton: This is Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton. We're talking about building sustainable cities that make public life healthier, more inclusive and more dynamic. My guests are three leaders in urban design and planning: Liz Ogbu of Studio O, Jan Gehl of Gehl Architects and Laura Crescimano of SITELAB Urban Studio.

Crescimano says that the role that cities play in public health has been a matter of growing concern.

Laura Crescimano: It's an intersection of public health, environmental justice and design in cities. And I think there's a great opportunity, even looking very closely, you know, there have been experiments to look at evidence-based design and to say, you know, there was research done to say hospital patients, patients from a surgery. After surgery if you put one group of those patients in rooms without a window, and one group in rooms that have views of nature, the ones with a view actually recovered faster, clinically recovered faster and had fewer complications.

So there is data, it's very hard at the city scale to isolate all of these variables but I think we have instincts around that too. And there is a lot of work being done and I think the more particular, I think about contact with nature, right. That's something that we often divide that there is cities and urbanism and then there's kind of nature over here. And that's something that we know is restorative in many ways, and it's educational and it's, you know, climate resilient in many ways. So I think there's a lot of work being done to bridge those together whether its community and social health or literal physical health.

Liz Ogbu: And there are a couple coalitions -- around the world there are a couple of different coalitions that are funding this kind of work. In the U.S. there is Spark which is like bringing together environmental justice, health, design. There's also Building Healthy Places which is an initiative looking at that within community development. But I think one of the things that is making this possible, is that people are also taking risk, right, like that some of the challenges that we have been doing development of any kind of project is that if we do something outside of the norm which goes to this point of like client is not wanting to take this on, and baking it up it becomes really hard. And so I think these initiatives are starting to show proof because its people willing to take risk and say, how do we put together a team that's different than the teams that we normally think of how to do these projects. How do we allow ourselves to ask different questions to hold ourselves up to different levels of success, and even the example that you talked about within Times Square initially, some of New York's work was really like let's just try it in one place and then

now it has sprung into this large program that is across the city.

And so I think part of getting at climate change is not, and addressing it isn't necessarily saying let's go for the big kahuna all at once but it's sort of saying what are ways that we can prototype innovation or risk, that we actually take this intentional thinking we take different ways of approaching the problem and allow ourselves room to fail, right. Because I think if we try to stay within our safe zones, we're never going to fix this. And so some of it is like how do we bring the people that allow us to take risk how do we find the money that allows us to invest in a little bit of risk and see where we can get to and then basically expand that.

Laura Crescimano: Or find the easy wins. I mean I think in New York it's a great example that many, you know, smaller streets they just put boulders or huge planters at the ends to close them off that was it and chairs. You know, just to prove that it could work that the traffic was fine around it. You know those little risks when people say, well it hasn't been done anywhere, I'm not gonna invest all this money or it's too risky are there ways to kind of get around that to demonstrate.

Jan Gehl: I think is very important. You mentioned that people in cities live longer than people in suburbs which is now found out in a very big worldwide research project. And that's because in the cities they walk more and there are more stairs. In the suburbs, they sit more and there are more cars and there are more driving. And we know now we have now from the doctors a very strong commitment to the city planners because they say now we have a serious sickness in the population which is sitting syndrome that people are sitting too much their life. We know that if you sit and if you do one hour or moderate exercise a day, then you could live seven years longer. And if you don't you'll have a very lousy end of your life and you are very costly for the society.

Greg Dalton: We're gonna go to audience questions but first I would be remiss, Jan Gehl, if we talked about cities and urbanism without mentioning homelessness. Because many people will hear this and say climate yes, but cities have a particularly San Francisco has a deep homelessness problem. And we're talking about all these things and you walk by it every day a little bit of us dies every time we walked past a person on the street and we don't feel that. So how can homelessness be solved by design while climate at the same time? Or is that a different problem not for designers and architects to address?

Jan Gehl: Yeah, and maybe not for European from the part of the world where I come from where it's not at all that much of a problem.

Greg Dalton: So I should ask the Americans here to solve the American problem?

Jan Gehl: Yeah, you solve your problems here.

But definitely it's a political problem it's a social economic problem which is not what designers really have the tools to address. It has to be addressed by putting demands to the politicians to make a housing policy and a hospital policy and whatever so that this problem will not be allowed to grow. It's political.

Liz Ogbu: I would say yes, and. So I think that when we -- I mean as designers we are caretakers of the built environment. And we are usually getting the hire to do some project that is intersecting with that population. And if we say that we should not be at the table as part of that conversation then we are complicit in what gets created when it's not addressed. So for me it's not necessarily that it falls on us to fix it but like we have to participate in the conversation. And yes, it goes to politicians and other folks that are involved in the problem but I think it's a challenge that requires all hands on deck and everybody who plays a role in shaping the built environment has a role to play

in solving this.

Greg Dalton: Laura, there are some projects that are made inhospitable to, you know, homeless people to benches that are made where people can't sleep on them that sort of thing. Is that part of the design process?

Laura Crescimano: I would say those are inhospitable to people and that, you know, I don't support those kinds of approaches. And I think that it is, you know, it's a human dignity issue, right. And I think to Liz's point it's how do we want to show up and treat each other and what can we do about that. But I think it's also as you were describing the resistance revolution, right. I think the revolution is at a political level and the resistance is at, you know, some of our work is just what can we do whether it's in our public places to say like, you know, our public spaces should be welcoming to all, right. They should feel safe to all. And what can we do to help support that and some of that is design and some of that is advocating for other nonprofit organizations and groups to be a part of the conversation besides us. So I think it's much more about that and how we can, you know, really, we're designing cities for people and so how do we do that for all people.

Greg Dalton: To be inclusive and address climate change. We're talking with Laura Crescimano, Jan Gehl and Liz Ogbu at Climate One. I'm Greg Dalton.

Let's go to audience questions. Welcome to Climate One.

Female Participant: I'm Eris, and I was wondering how you propose to get youth involved in climate and design.

Greg Dalton: Liz Ogbu.

Liz Ogbu: So actually in almost all the projects that I am working on youth actually play an important role because they usually are a significant percentage of the population that we're dealing with. And I often find that people don't ask youth what they want to see even though they're like we want to benefit them. So one of the things that I do personally as part of my design process is make sure that we actually carve a role for youth of all ages like I'll take a five-year-old they still have something to say about the space that they want to be able to live in. And actually set up an opportunity for them to say what they want to see in the space and I'll kind of translate it to be what it needs to be for us to design the things.

So for example in Bayview-Hunters Point here in San Francisco we did a lot of work where we had kids just come and be architects for the day at our site. And then out of that we were able to say okay this many kids ask for things having to do with nature and in particular interactivity with nature. Many kids ask for things having to do with growing food and we were able to then take that and integrate it into the design. So I think it's about creating design processes that leave room for youth to come at the table and actually give value to that voice. And I think what's great about what you guys are doing and then also about what we're seeing around is that the youth are being loud, adults are kind of idiots. And we're doing a pretty good job of mucking up the place and I think that you guys are making your voices heard and not waiting for us to ask you and I think you should continue to do that. Because I think if you wait then we're not gonna talk to you until you're our age and you're jaded, you know, continue to speak up.

Greg Dalton: Next question. Welcome.

Male Participant: Hi there. My question is, you know, I think for many of us here in the Western develop world sustainable community driven cities are definitely ideal and something that we'd like

to aspire to. But I certainly think about the many folks in the rest of the world living places like Mexico City, Dhaka, Beijing, places that seem like big ironies because air pollution is awful, environmental pollution, you know, environmental crisis are everywhere in these cities but many people are driven to them for better economic prospects.

So for these types of cities ultimately in the long-term are we gonna see their eventual decline? Because you know these environmental problems catch up with them and the populist realizes well, we're almost killing ourselves by living here. Or are we gonna see some continued growth from these cities that kind of outpace what we believe is ideal for a city to be.

Jan Gehl: Firstly we should be happy that we see the cities grow and the urban population are growing because it's much more likely and much more easy to address the climate issues if you have concentrations of people and can organize the heating and the garbage and the sewers and whatever. There's less waste so generally the urbanization is better for the climate than spreading out. But you're raising another question that is that we can talk about San Francisco and all the places in America or Europe, but the real problems of urbanization and also the real challenges to the climate are to be found in Africa, especially in Africa and Southeast Asia, in the fast growing cities which are growing enormously quickly. And also that's not the place where we can expect some technical gimmicks which automatically so smart that would be expensive and that will never be used for 20 or 30 million people in Lagos.

And there we will have as I think we should do worldwide much more to rely on the idea that man is a walking animal and that we have got muscles and we can do a lot of things and actually that's very climate friendly. And so making walkable and bicycle neighborhoods could also be which they have tried in some Third World countries with great results. That is very good to base city planning on men rather than put men into some technological something.

Liz Ogbu: One I think that in some ways it's hard to isolate what's happening in many of those countries from the Western world, right because some of the things that they're dealing with are a byproduct of the way in which we live. So to place all of the burden on them addressing it I think is the wrong place to go. It still is going to have to be a global solution and we're gonna have to talk about how we in the Western world are making some sacrifices to enable those countries that are disproportionately receiving the burden of us living our life actually being able to exist.

And then the other thing is that actually if you look a lot in the global South that there are actually a lot of innovations that have kind of come over time based on those resource constraints. So long before all of us had smart phones and cell phones it was actually, you know, I was using it in South Africa long before we were still using these giant bricks here which only like wealthy CEOs could do, right, or even figuring out how to send money via your phone. We talk about Venmo and all that stuff now, M-Pesa was coming up in Kenya long before we even thought that we could send money by phone. So out of their resource constraints is actually a tremendous amount of ingenuity that is on the ground and that's not to sort of say that there are not deep challenges that need to be addressed, but it's also to sort of say maybe some of what we're looking at in terms of innovation might be found in these places where they have had less resources and have to figure out how to actually make by because they don't have access to the wealth or the technology that we do.

Greg Dalton: I wanna end on a positive note upbeat note. Liz Ogbu tell us something that's really exciting something that you see that's inspiring the change at the speed necessary even if it's on a small scale. Change at the speed necessary to address the climate crisis.

Liz Ogbu: So the group KDI, is doing some really innovative projects in the Eastern Coachella Valley down in Southern California and also in Nairobi, Kenya. Where they're actually taking

communities that have disproportionally been impacted, not only by like harm but some of the challenges that are coming out of not having access to mobility options or particularly susceptible to like flooding. So taking Kibera which is one of the largest slums in Nairobi and they're actually working with community members to both measure and accurately assess what's going on and then training people in the whole climate conversation, so that they can be able to advocate for themselves. And so I think that, that idea of how we're working with people and giving them the tools to be able to kind of come and participate in these conversations and not just letting that be the people like many of us in the room who actually, frankly have some privilege and probably should be doing this but also those who are perhaps, the ones most impacted. And so I think that's super exciting and I think we should be looking toward some of those examples as how we can mobilize towards change and also I'm super inspired by the youth.

Greg Dalton: Jan Gehl, something that even if it's a small scale a bright spot the gives you hope.

Jan Gehl: I was thinking about I see a lot of things of initiatives being very, very fine and they're too slow, but all these things are good. The new world goals the 17-world goals of the United Nations that's fantastic, that they can decide that and we can start to advocate that. We can see the C40 the mayors of the major cities of the world saying, that the jerks in our capitals are slow but we in the cities where the problems come from, we will have to act. It was started by Bloomberg actually, but now it's going on and going on and it's not 40 anymore it's 90 mayors who inspires all. And it's too slow, but behind this is that we need to be inspired by each other there is so much going on.

I can just mention that in Denmark on a good day with wind, we can have 110% of our energy coming from windmills. And they are working on of course by 2030 there shall be no need for other energy than renewable energy. We can see a lot of things going on it's too slow, but we can learn from it from each other and we have to speed it up, and there are so much interesting things going on as you also see.

Greg Dalton: Laura Crescimano on bright spots.

Laura Crescimano: Bright spots. Two I will mention and one speaks to youth. You know, the Rockefeller Foundation funded major competitions and efforts both on the East Coast and West Coat kind rebuild by design after hurricane Sandy, and resilient by design trying to get out ahead of a major event in the Bay Area. And you know, tremendous amount of talent and brainpower went into that. And the two projects I remember hearing about that I thought were the most interesting were ones that went into the schools and actually did workshops with kids. And part of that is to learn from the kids but also to empower the kids, because this is multigenerational and I think that, thinking about this not as just what can we do right now, but how can we change sensibility is huge. And I think that also to maybe other bright spots is thinking that even we're having a conversation about a Green New Deal, right, in the U.S. And you know, you can debate the specifics, but that we can see younger politicians and veteran politicians starting to align in a way that I don't think we have before.

Greg Dalton: You've been listening to Climate One. We've been talking about building sustainable, resilient cities for the future. My guests were Laura Crescimano of SITELAB Urban Studio, Liz Ogbu of Studio O and Jan Gehl, author of Cities for People. This program was presented with SPUR, a non-profit promoting good planning and good government in the San Francisco Bay Area.

To hear more Climate One conversations, subscribe to our podcast at our website: climateone.org, where you'll also find photos, video clips and more. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a review wherever you get your podcasts.

Kelli Pennington directs our audience engagement. Tyler Reed is our producer. Sara-Katherine Coxon is the strategy and content manager. The audio engineers are Mark Kirchner, Justin Norton, and Arnav Gupta. Anny Celsi and Devon Strolovitch edit the program. Dr. Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, where our program originates. [pause] I’m Greg Dalton.