

Jury Citation – Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize 2024 Laureate

Mexico City, Mexico

Mexico City is recognised for its outstanding commitment in uplifting the lives of citizens through innovative and sustainable urban initiatives, especially for the less privileged. In navigating the challenges of a metropolis of nine million residents and a transient population of six million traveling from outside the city for work and other purposes, Mexico City's successive leadership stands out for its visionary approach, effectively tackling pressing issues on the ground with passion and dedication. The successful implementation of transformative initiatives within a short period of time reflects not only the city's capability to kickstart new initiatives, but also the commitment to see through their completion quickly. This showcases the city's remarkable ability to convert challenges into an exemplary model for urban development.

Citizen-Centric Urban and Digital Agenda

Mexico City's success is rooted in its commitment to addressing the needs of all residents, regardless of their socio-economic status. The city's inclusive policies are manifested through a series of social programmes, ranging from free education for children and youth, to dignified ageing for the elderly. In particular, the PILARES programme (Puntos de Innovación, Libertad, Arte, Educación y Saberes' or Points of Innovation, Freedom, Art, Education and Knowledge) is a highly-effective and well-utilised solution for providing a safety net for marginalised citizens. With 294 community centres established citywide within a five-year period, PILARES offers social programmes to foster community bonding, organises courses for continuing education, supports the police's youth rehabilitation efforts, and helps vulnerable groups obtain useful life skills for employment.

ADIP (Agencia Digital de Innovación Pública) is a new department that leverages digital technology to drive innovation to improve public service and reach, public participation, and productivity. The results have been extraordinary. From 2019 to 2023, the agency simplified 2,100 government transactions to 500, halved the response time, and moved 70 per cent of transactions online. This is supplemented by the provision of free Wi-Fi infrastructure and coding schools to help low-income families and at-risk youths acquire useful skills.

Improving Accessibility and Public Safety

Mexico City's willingness to experiment in the face of complex challenges has yielded innovative solutions. For example, Biblioteca Vasconcelos is a public library that allows everyone access to culture, complemented with high-quality spaces in the marginalised Buena Vista neighbourhood. Parque Lineal Gran Canal is a linear park that showcases the city's commitment to transforming degraded areas into safe and vibrant public spaces. Moreover, Mexico City's proactive stance towards learning from international communities and making difficult policy change – a key shift being the transformation of police operations that included partnership with the community. This resulted in a successful public security strategy that halved the homicide rate from its 2019 peak of 16 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Mexico City is highly commendable in integrating diverse transportation modes to serve both its resident and transient populations. The city introduced a new integrated transport card to consolidate services from multiple transport providers and provide seamless access to options like the Metro, Metrobús Bus Rapid Transit, Trolleybus, and Cablebús cable car. The world's longest cable car line in Iztapalapa is particularly impactful, by reducing travel time significantly at a low cost for the low-income neighbourhood it serves. Furthermore, the city's extensive bike share programmes and dedicated lanes underscore its commitment to affordable and sustainable transportation.

Involving Residents in Transformational Efforts

Mexico City ensures meaningful, inclusive participation by creatively engaging its disadvantaged citizens in environmental strategies. To illustrate, it employs about a thousand women as 'pollinators' under its re-vegetation efforts, which have transformed 1,500 hectares of desolate land into parks and urban forests. Residents also receive training to become installers for the city's rainwater harvesting system, prioritised for the most marginalised areas. With 4,000 on-the-ground staff to reach residents with limited access to resources, Mexico City ensures that its initiatives positively impact its citizens' lives.

Mexico City's commitment to inclusivity and sustainable transformation is a deeply inspiring story for other cities, especially those with rampant growth and significant marginalised communities. Its strategies demonstrate that significant results can be achieved within a short period of time with focus and determination. While Mexico City may continue to face many social, economic, environmental, and political challenges as a growing mega city, sustained efforts guided by a long-term vision and plan to continuously improve the quality of life of all its residents can help the city continue its positive trajectory to become a model of urban innovation and inclusivity for other cities.

Jury Citations – Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize 2024 Special Mentions

Cape Town, South Africa

Cape Town is recognised for adeptly managing climate change repercussions and other disasters, addressing their implications for daily life and future sustainability. Overcoming the challenges of a severe water crisis from 2017 to 2018, and the COVID-19 pandemic, Cape Town successfully adopted an agile governance approach to swiftly build and deliver rapid, effective systemic responses to extreme events.

Agile Governance

In 2018, Cape Town faced a severe water crisis with dams reaching critically low levels, prompting strict water usage limits to 50 litres per day. The government reacted swiftly through quick planning and budgeting, leading to the implementation of the Water Augmentation Plan to diversify and boost water supply through desalination, groundwater extraction, and water re-use. Learning from the crisis, Cape Town has turned emergency measures into permanent solutions, exemplified by the Faure New Water Scheme plant. Designed with insights from an emergency demonstration plant during the 2018 crisis, these initiatives aim to ensure long-term water security for the city.

Data-driven Decision Making and Implementation

Cape Town's robust data ecosystems have been pivotal in facilitating swift decision-making during crises, particularly in addressing the needs of vulnerable residents. Adopting a data-driven approach, the city developed the Social Vulnerability Index and Economic Nodes Index to identify vulnerable citizens during water crises. These indices guided targeted responses, including strategic water network shutdowns and the siting of water collection distribution points. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Covid Vulnerability Viewer identified infection risks, guiding public health interventions, and supporting vulnerable areas economically and socially. Additionally, in its Day Zero campaign, Cape Town utilised comprehensive data infrastructure, such as the

open and real-time 'Water Dashboard', to effectively communicate information regarding water scarcity, increasing public awareness and promoting responsible water usage. The multi-faceted campaign has effectively mobilised citizens' response to implement water conservation strategies swiftly, contributed to a commendable reduction in water consumption by 57 per cent during the crisis, and managed demand to successfully avert 'Day Zero'¹.

Futureproofing the City

Cape Town's Integrated Development Plan 2022-2027 prioritises resilience through long-term strategies, developed collaboratively with stakeholders. This strategic plan guides future development, emphasising strategic investments in urban systems and public infrastructure for economic growth and enhanced resilience with clear targets that are reviewed annually and published for accountability. For example, the New Water Programme aims to increase water supply by 300 million litres daily, diversifying sources of water and improving infrastructure for the long term. The city is also pursuing Independent Power Producers for energy diversification to increase the reliability of electricity supply. These strategies demonstrate Cape Town's commitment to sustainable development and resilience so as to build greater public confidence and support. Projects like the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, an iconic 123-hectare mixed-use precinct which supports local entrepreneurship and drives positive social and environmental change, further demonstrated the city's commitment towards fulfilling the needs of the community.

While Cape Town's efforts to become more resilient to climate change are commendable, ongoing challenges demand continuous improvements in public infrastructure and urban systems to prevent the occurrence of future severe crises similar to the previous water crisis. Other vital challenges also need to be addressed, such as tackling social housing shortages, creating jobs, managing the growth of informal settlements, and enhancing their living conditions. Sustained efforts to meet

¹ Name of campaign indicating the turning off of the water supply for water rationing purposes amid a dry season.

citizens' basic needs can improve lives, cultivate hope and community spirit, enabling Cape Town to reach its goal of being the City of Hope.

Melbourne, Australia

Melbourne is recognised for being a city emblematic of resilience and innovation and redefining the urban landscape through a series of transformative initiatives over many decades, reaffirming its status as one of the most liveable cities in the world. Confronting challenges brought forth by the pandemic, Melbourne has shown steadfast adaptability and foresight.

Post-pandemic Recovery and Liveability

In the wake of COVID-19, Melbourne adopted several innovative approaches to recovery. The Flash Forward Laneways initiative that converted neglected alleys into vibrant streets not only revitalised the economy, but also injected vibrancy and excitement into the city, bolstered local businesses and fostered a renewed sense of community and local identity. Despite the rising housing cost, Melbourne's commitment to its essential workers is evident in its innovative affordable housing strategies. Developed through public-private partnerships, these strategies allowed key workers, such as nurses, to reside within the proximity of the city, mitigating commuting challenges and strengthening community fabric. Building upon previous efforts to transform the Yarra River from an industrial waterway to a recreational corridor, a new initiative under the Greenline Project boldly celebrates Aboriginal culture and Melbourne's unique ecology, further rejuvenating the waterway. These initiatives demonstrate Melbourne as a city where society not only perseveres but also thrives with a sense of belonging through tumultuous periods.

Enhanced Infrastructure and Traffic Management

Melbourne made remarkable progress towards sustainable transportation by achieving one-third modal share between walking, public transport, and private transport through its compact and mixed-use development strategy in the city that prioritises public transportation and active mobility infrastructure. The city's dedication to constantly improve urban mobility and reduce traffic congestion is evident in ongoing ambitious projects like the Metro Tunnel and the Sub-Urban Rail Loop. These

transformative projects are envisaged to further address traffic congestion and reduce burden on existing tram lines. The Metro Tunnel is set to cut travel times by up to 50 per cent on certain routes, while the Sub-Urban Rail Loop is anticipated to generate 50,000 jobs and inject AUD 25 billion into the Victorian economy. The Metro Tunnel is nearing completion, while the construction of the first phase (26 kilometres) of the Sub-Urban Rail Loop (90 kilometres) is currently underway.

Emphasis on Design Excellence and Collaboration Across Sectors

Melbourne's well-designed public realm and urban spaces, and its Design Excellence programme, are a testament to its continued emphasis on urban design quality. This recent initiative, coupled with collaborative efforts with industry leaders, has elevated Melbourne's ambition towards building architectural design excellence. By encouraging architects and developers to subject their proposals to rigorous design review, Melbourne has established a culture of collaborative design innovation.

Melbourne, though compact, serves as the heart of Greater Melbourne, supporting over five million people in the metropolitan area. Some of its urban transformation successes can be attributed to close collaboration between State and Municipal governments, as evident in initiatives like Melbourne M9 that fosters collaborative strategies. State involvement in major upcoming projects, such as the Metro Tunnel, Sub-Urban Rail Loop, and the Southbank Art Precinct, reflects a unified urban development approach. When completed, these projects will further reinforce Melbourne's continued commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and good governance.

Melbourne's appeal attracts many to relocate for residential, professional, and educational purposes. While the city faces a shortage of affordable housing, efforts to introduce social facilities in new residential areas and innovation in high-density housing designs aim to sustain Melbourne's status as one of the most liveable cities in the world.

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Rio de Janeiro is recognised for taking bold moves to redefine its central area and waterfront, moving away from decades of a mono-functional downtown and suburban sprawl – a legacy from its historical development since the 1980s. Through strategic implementation of innovative land transfer policies, financing mechanisms and learning from other vibrant city centres around the world, the city is poised to shift public mindsets and set in motion a transformation towards a more attractive, liveable and vibrant downtown.

Redefining Urban Development Paradigms

Rio demonstrated political will in shifting its urban development paradigm, as exemplified by the 2013 removal of the coastal Perimetral Elevated Highway – a pivotal moment in its urban evolution, leading to a 3.4-kilometre pedestrianised boulevard along the waterfront. Lined with cultural institutions and event venues, this new urban corridor continues to draw visitors back to the city centre. At the same time, eight kilometres of surface roads rerouted into a tunnel 46 metres below sea level increased traffic capacity by 50 per cent. Today, the waterfront area thrives as a lively district, featuring urban plazas, pedestrian zones, sustainable tram transportation, and cultural landmarks like the MAR Museum of Art and Museum of Tomorrow.

Adopting a Multi-prong Approach to Revitalise the Centre

Rio is commendable for its focused approach to rejuvenate its dormant downtown following the pandemic. Formulated from a comprehensive benchmarking exercise, Reviver Centro is an initiative that positions the city's existing cultural assets as catalysts for transformation. To revive its economy, the Porto Maravalley project leverages technology and innovation to attract and develop tech talents and startups in a former warehouse district. Furthermore, Rio has successfully staged several global events such as 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics to draw visitors to the city. Meanwhile, the city gains momentum in converting disused sites into cultural uses and facilitated the licensing of new residential units through subsidies

and strategic land transfers for private building owners. Within its downtown Low Emission District, the promotion of active mobility and greenways, as opposed to cars, addresses emissions-related concerns while fostering a safer urban environment. Furthermore, Rio's dedication to honour its African heritage, notably through the restoration of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Valongo Wharf, emphasises its commitment to inclusivity.

Financing and Sustaining Urban Development Innovatively

Rio's innovation in financing and sustaining urban development is manifested in the sustained development of Porto Maravilha, overseen by public company CCPAR. Leveraging a new law that enables developers and landowners to acquire bonus floor area in the district, the city sold these development rights to a federal bank, which takes on the role to negotiate and assign the bonus floor areas to the appropriate sites. This initiative helped the city raise funding for critical infrastructure and other public investment for the district, and also channel physical development to realise the planned transformation of Porto Maravilha.

While Rio's current plans show promise in bringing more people back to its downtown area, many of its initiatives are at the initial phase of implementation. Continued efforts and leadership support can help to ensure that the city's urban transformation is enduring and sustainable.

Wellington, New Zealand

Wellington is recognised for its exemplary commitment towards living with nature. The city stands out for its steadfast dedication to conserving and restoring natural habitat in both urban and natural areas through innovative programmes. Wellington's success stems from extensive citizen engagement and involvement in rewilding efforts, promoting environmental conservation, social cohesion, and community spirit – an exemplary model for harmonious urban-nature coexistence.

Biophilic City at the Forefront of Ecological Restoration

As a founding member of the Biophilic Cities Network, Wellington exemplified the vision of people living in harmony with nature through initiatives like Zealandia Ecosanctuary. Just two kilometres from the Central Business District, it features the world's first predator exclusion zone, contributing to the increase in bird numbers and resurgence of the once-presumed-extinct Takahē bird over the past decade. Beyond nature areas, the Predator Free Wellington project aims for Wellington to be the world's first predator-free capital, achieving notable success in urban areas like Miramar, a suburb in Wellington, with the eradication of Norway rats and weasels and a 550 per cent increase in fantail birds. These initiatives demonstrate the success of Wellington's long-term strategy 'Wellington Towards 2040: Smart Capital' inception in 2011.

Integral Community Partnership

Wellington's achievements are deeply rooted in strong and extensive community support, aligning with the city's vision. The Predator Free Wellington initiative mobilises 58 community trapping groups with thousands of volunteers, raising awareness of the issues, fostering a sense of belonging, especially among marginalised individuals. Similarly, the Makara Peak Bike Park, a blend of recreation and conservation, thrives with community support, involving volunteers in building 40 kilometres of trails, planting 60,000 native plants, and securing funds and 2,500 volunteer hours to build a suspension bridge. Embracing the country's bicultural

identity, the city collaborates closely with local Māori groups in many of the works that they do, as exemplified by projects like public art for the Paneke Pōneke Bike Network Plan.

Novel Approaches Designed to Fulfil Strategic Aims

Wellington's ecological projects, notably Zealandia, have produced a wealth of research and knowledge, prompting the city to share its expertise globally as the patent on its fence design expires. Meanwhile, Predator Free Wellington prioritises public education, disseminating information through instructional guidebooks to enhance awareness within the community. This concerted effort not only empowers residents with the tools to participate actively in predator control but also strengthens community bonds, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of conservation efforts.

Wellington's success story in ecological restoration will serve as an inspiration for communities and cities worldwide, demonstrating that urban development and nature conservation can co-exist, is enriching and sustainable. Its other ongoing and upcoming projects, such as waterfront rejuvenation and street enhancement work, will help the city further enhance its liveability and vibrancy.