

VISION STATEMENT for The Planet in 2050

We are a diverse group and we envision a diverse world. Although we are outlining a vision for 2050, we are aware of the fact that the world will look very different in different places based on history, culture, and perspectives. Our vision attempts to outline some guiding principles, values, and hopes and aspirations for the world, but in no way do we envision a homogenous utopia. We believe, and we hope, that these principles will manifest themselves in diverse ways in different parts of the world.

In 2050, our societies will transcend the narrow focus on material goods and wealth generation that we see today. They will instead, strive to meet the deeper needs of human beings, addressing happiness and spiritual and emotional fulfillment. Indicators of success, now often measured in purely financial terms, will instead look at ideas of happiness and satisfaction. The world will reallocate its energy and resources away from merely pursuing economic growth to addressing issues of poverty, equity, gender equality, and access to health care and education. Political structures will no longer disenfranchise those with limited social and economic standing, instead empowering all who wish to participate in determining their future with the right to do so.

Resources that are unvalued, or undervalued, in many of our current systems – notably the environment, the family, the community, culture, and cultural heritage – will grow to be the centerpiece of our societies. These will allow us to place ourselves in a more holistic vision of the world, bringing understanding of our interconnectedness and relationships not just to each other but to the natural and historical world.

The city is, in many ways, a reflection of society. Cities are built with and evolve with societal structures in mind, in ways that best meet the demands of our societies. Yet in the course of this evolution, many cities have lost touch with needs of their own inhabitants, instead filling only a role in the political or economic systems of their countries. Cities of 2050 will hold links to history, tangible pieces of the past, to remind us of our place within time and space, and confer a perspective of the future.

Today the world is focused on the individual. In 2050, communities, relationships between people, and personal responsibilities to the society will be the key principle in the construction of our cities. The structure of the city will support stronger communities by bringing people together in more cohesive spaces, which are then tied together in larger and larger webs. This idea of a polycentric city and urban nodes renders the issue of mobility moot; people will have greater access to urban functions not only within their own nodes, but through convenient mass transportation connections between cities. Denser urban nodes will also eliminate the need for cars within these communities and provide more space for parks, urban agriculture, and places for social interaction.

Cities of all sizes will also be more self-sufficient. Provision of necessary city services like food, water, waste handling, and energy will be more localized, integrating these services into the fabric of the city. Bringing these services closer will also reconnect people with the earth, giving people better insight into their resource use and impacts. On the other side, cities will require drastically fewer resources through the wide-scale implementation of bioclimatic building design. With solar power generation, wind power, super insulating windows, natural ventilation systems, grey water usage and rain water collection, buildings will annul the need for the massive infrastructure which sustains cities today. Waste volumes will be further reduced through highly efficient waste sorting, recycling, and composting. Additionally, wastewater will be processed locally, using natural wetlands and treatment processes.

Food production is one of the greatest limiting factors for self-sufficiency in cities, big and small. However, cities of the future will be built to overcome as many of the challenges as possible. People will eat lower on the food chain, thus decreasing the energetic requirements for food production. Likewise their diets will better reflect local growing conditions and seasonality. Additionally, small cities and rural areas will provide not only for themselves, but also form symbiotic relationships with larger, neighboring cities, augmenting the urban agriculture that will take place in most cities. These cities will form unofficial regional units that will allow for residents to benefit from both urban and rural lifestyles.

Bringing service provisions back into the city will be just one component of a radically different economic structure. In 2050, the economy will be based on product services, not products. This servicised economy will shift from selling goods (like electronics or appliances in today's world) that are designed for disposal, to selling the services that these goods provide. This will have the effect of not only reducing waste, but also encouraging manufacturers to design for reuse. The economy will no longer focus on producing the most products with the fewest resources, valuing instead the contributions of people. This will help mitigate unemployment in parts of the world and create stronger social and professional communities.

In these ways, cities will be more sustainable and more self-sufficient. Just as nodes in a city create a greater whole, so will the cities of the future play a role in a better, more equitable, more satisfying world.