

New Urban Planning Model Seeks to Save Lives

ISGlobal and BCNecologia launch a Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action to optimize the new 'Superblock' model under health criteria

'Superblocks' propose a revolution in the way cities are planned with the focus shifting from cars to people

According to the UN Population Fund, almost 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050. Scientific evidence about the negative health consequences of city life is mounting. A [recent study](#) estimated that almost 20% of natural all-cause mortality could be postponed each year if cities complied with international recommendations for performance of physical activity, exposure to air pollution, noise, heat, and access to green space. That is the goal of a new Commitment to Action presented at the 2016 Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Annual Meeting: to develop a new urban planning model that improves citizens' health and wellbeing.

This new commitment is being led by the [Barcelona Institute for Global Health](#) (ISGlobal) and the [Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona](#) (BCNecologia), in close collaboration with Barcelona's City Council, and begins with the new 'Superblock' model currently being implemented in Barcelona. The objective of the commitment is to optimize this model to create healthier cities and make it replicable to other urban areas worldwide.

The Superblock concept developed by BCNecologia seeks to revolutionize the way cities are designed. It presents an opportunity to rethink urban planning by putting people at the center and using health and wellbeing as the driving forces for urban design. The model shifts prioritization from motorized transport, creating citizen spaces, improving public and active transport, and reallocating space previously used by cars for green areas and community use.

"In healthy and livable cities, the use of cars and motorbikes should be minimized and alternative means such as public and active transport strongly promoted", says Mark Nieuwenhuijsen, director of the Urban Planning, Environment and Health Initiative at ISGlobal. "Furthermore there should be sufficient public and green space", he adds.

The Superblock will help Barcelona to reach the objectives outlined in its 2013-2018 Mobility Plan, including the reduction of motorized trips by 21% and compliance with European Union environmental quality parameters for NOx and PM10 and greenhouse gases.

Over the next three years, ISGlobal and BCNecologia commit to refine the Superblock model taking health into account. Environmental epidemiologists and public health specialists from ISGlobal will provide scientific evidence to maximize health and wellness benefits. Its global approach to health equity and public health interventions is particularly relevant, as the CTA is intended to be replicable in low and middle income countries, where the fastest urbanization is occurring.

“Unfortunately, modern cities aren’t designed taking into account rigorous health criteria. Now we have both the obligation and the opportunity to reverse this situation and to apply all the available scientific evidence to transform urban spaces and to create cities that make us physically and mentally healthier”, states Dr. Antoni Plasencia, general director of the Barcelona Institute for Global Health. “The city can be become a place to promote health, rather than be detrimental”.

"Until now, people have only had the right to move from one place to another on the sides of the street. We want to give them back the right to claim broader ownership of street space and enjoy many different activities, passing from being only pedestrians to citizens. This should have a variety of benefits. In the case of Barcelona, we expect the number of people exposed to acceptable levels of air pollution increase from 56% to nearly 94 %. Regarding noise, the implementation of Superblocks will improve the number of people exposed to recommended noise levels from the current 57,5 % to 73,5 %", says Salvador Rueda, director of BCNecologia.

Barcelona has one of the highest air pollution and noise levels in Europe, causing an estimated [3,000 premature deaths](#) annually in its metropolitan area.

This CGI Commitment to Action is directly linked to [Sustainable Development Goal 11](#) and the [New Urban Agenda](#). It offers an innovative approach, bringing together urban and transport planners, public health professionals and policy makers to produce transformative change in the way cities are designed and lived.

About the Barcelona Institute for Global Health

The Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal) is an innovative alliance between academic, government, and philanthropic institutions to contribute to the efforts of the international community to address the challenges in global health. ISGlobal is a centre of excellence that has grown out of work first started in the world of health care by the Hospital Clínic and environmental public health at the Parc de Salut MAR and in the academic sphere by the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. A pivotal role of its work model is the transfer of knowledge generated by scientific research to practice, a task undertaken by the institute’s Training and Policy and Global Development departments.

www.isglobal.org

About BCNecologia

BCNecologia (the Urban Ecology Agency of Barcelona) is a public consortium consisting of the City Council of Barcelona, the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona and the Barcelona Provincial Council. BCNecologia applies a systemic approach to the management of cities to encourage a more sustainable model.

www.bcnecologia.net

About the Clinton Global Initiative

Established in 2005 by President Bill Clinton, the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI), an initiative of the Clinton Foundation, convenes global leaders to create and implement solutions to the world's most pressing challenges. CGI Annual Meetings have brought together 190 sitting and former heads of state, more than 20 Nobel Prize laureates, and hundreds of leading CEOs, heads of foundations and NGOs, major philanthropists, and members of the media. To date, members of the CGI community have made more than 3,500 Commitments to Action, which have improved the lives of over 430 million people in more than 180 countries.

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