

# Lovable City: Maintaining Our Beliefs While Living in a Changing World and Building Towards a Better Society

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## 1 ABSTRACT

Different factors are leading to fundamental changes in the values, form, and function of cities. How to hold onto our beliefs in a changing world and toward the good society is a challenge faced by both China and the Western World. With the conception of ‘Lovable City’, the authors provide an analysis of the important socio-psychological role of love in a city. Our group explores the way to deal with the challenge of negative change by planning ‘Lovable City’ from the aspect of enhancing intimacy, arousing passion, and maintaining commitment.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Motivation

Most of the modern cities in the world are in the great tide of change led by different factors like globalization and economic crisis. And in those respective cities, people’s feelings and emotions always change with time. Take China as an example. Between 1980 to 1990, a citizen had a strong love for their city if the city could provide them a stable job, even with a low salary. Today, however, people pursue for the high quality of life provided by their city. With such change, cities bring both positive and negative influence on our daily life. As mentioned previously, how to maintain our beliefs in a changing world and build towards a better society is a challenge faced by both China and Western World. Especially in China, with the rapid urban development, people have lost their love for the city in which they have lived and the relations among people have turned from the traditional closeness into today’s coldness and indifference. Urban inhabitants tend to care only about themselves, their families, and their income level. More and more residents feel like passerbys and feel no sense of belonging though they live and work in cities. As China is still in the process of physical planning, the current planning practices focus more on aesthetic values and the need to meet the government officials’ tastes and demand of cities, which often times lead to a major problem: lack of consideration for the public’s needs. Instead, the desire to have modern aesthetically appealing structures, like impersonal large spaces or tall buildings, greatly influences China’s urban planning and design. To solve these problems, our group puts forward the concept of ‘Lovable City’ to attempt to tackle the challenge of negative change.

### 2.2 Related Work

The goal of “Lovable City” is to maintain our beliefs and build towards a better society. One of the most famous researchers in the field was Jane Jacobs, whose book “The Death and Life of Great American Cities” (1961) became a rallying point for those who wished for the enhancement of their cities in addition to holding onto their beliefs by protecting their neighborhoods and lifestyles. Another scholar, John Friedmann, believes the good society is that ordering of human relations that allows us to live more fully in the life of dialogue. The Good Society continuously creates and recreates itself within the world. The chain of people’s dialogue remains unbroken (Friedmann, 3). Jan Gehl, whose thoughtful work “Life Between Buildings” (1980), gives a foresight into the image of “Lovable City” and a useful theoretical tool for planning it such as the character of space – to invite or repel.

## 3 CONCEPTION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF “LOVABLE CITY”

### 3.1 Conception of “Lovable City”

The spirit and nature of Lovable City is love. The city can affect people and the expression of being affected is emotion. Love is the permanent and highest-level emotion of people. Lovable city is the city strongly

loved by both residents and visitors, both livable and enjoyable, and is the essence of both the good city and good society.

More than just a city, Lovable City serves as the embodiment of intimacy, a richness of passion and an eternity of commitment. Almost universally evocative, it serves as a goal in life for many, a dream vacation or business destination for those wanting to have a homey and friendly experience. Lovable city is a place to visit, a place of endless possibilities, of dreams and fantasies, a place of the future.

### 3.2 Significance of “Lovable City”

Why do we need Lovable City? Different researchers have different points of views. The main reasons are summarized as the following:

- Lovable City comprises the entire spectrum of activities, which combine to make communal spaces in cities and residential areas meaningful and attractive. How a city looks and feels and the attractions it offers both visitors and residents mark it as being different from all others – as a unique and desirable place to visit, work, live, and love. It’s hard to imagine the unique characteristic of a city could sustain development without love in such a changing world.
- Lovable City makes us imagine a world that is more beautiful than the one we actually inhabit, create positive social relationships in the urban environment, and contribute to the richness of its residents’ social life, make people become real urban life participants.
- Lovable City could meet different needs for contact. Opportunities for meetings and daily activities in the public spaces of a city or residential area enable one to be among, to see, to hear, and to experience other people functioning in various situations.

Basically, Lovable City offers an opportunity to be with others in a relaxed and undemanding way. One can take occasional walks, perhaps make a detour along a main street or side street on the way home, or pause at an inviting bench near a front door to be among people for a short while. One can even do daily shopping if they chose. There would be a plethora of options at their disposal.

## 4 THREE WAYS TO MAKE A CITY “LOVABLE”

How do we create or plan a Lovable City? Our group mainly provides three ways as enhancing intimacy, arousing passion, and maintaining commitment.

### 4.1 Enhancing Intimacy

Intimacy is the feeling of closeness. It refers to the close feeling of users (citizens and visitors) to an urban environment, both physical and mental. According to Jan Gehl’s theory, if people feel no intimacy, only necessary activities (everyday tasks like going to school or to work, shopping, etc.) will take place because these activities are more or less independent of the exterior environment. Only when people feel the closeness to a city, optional activities will occur because these activities take place only when exterior conditions are optimal, when place and situation invite people to stop, sit, eat, play, and so on. In streets and city spaces of poor quality, only the bare minimum of activities takes place. People hurry home. In a good environment, a completely different and broad spectrum of human activities is possible. Urban planners should not only love and care for the residents or visitors, but also need the consideration of ‘giving’ the city a character that make people feel intimacy. This means people can experience being loved by living, working, or visiting a city.

The relationship between distance and closeness, in various contact situations, has an important parallel in the prevalent perception of urban dimensions. Intimate distance (0 to 45 centimeters) is the distance at which intense feelings are expressed: tenderness, comfort, love. Lovable cities can be comparably perceived as intimate, warm, and personal. Conversely, cities with large spaces, wide streets, and tall buildings often are felt to be cold and impersonal. Intimacy also provides a reasonable amount of time in which to see and process visual impressions. In a city, if the speed of movement is increased, the possibility of discerning details and processing meaningful social information drops sharply. The more familiar the environment, the more intimacy and safety people feel. Because China’s urban environment changes so rapidly without rational plan, people always feel strange and have no sense of belonging.



Enhancing intimacy includes both creation of love and making the lost love return. The creation of love comprises stressing on humanistic urban planning and design to make people experience social love and increasing soft space, such as water and greenland, which can express urban emotion. Making the lost love return refers to the protection of old buildings, especially some unremarkable or even valueless broken ones. Such buildings are the valuable wealth of citizens' emotion. In addition, intimate spaces need small and simple, not large and complicated dimensions. It's the question about the choice of urban addition or subtraction in urban design. Environmental psychologists have found that street-corner gatherings in the central city can be an important part of residents' lives and a useful way to enhance intimacy. Both visible and invisible urban elements are fundamental features to make people feel intimacy. Some examples are: friendly waving of hands, smiling, nodding, etc.

#### 4.2 Arousing Passion

Passion is a uniquely stimulating and inspiring experience of the citizens. Why is passion important for Lovable City? Today's trend of living in loveless cities and residential areas that has welcomed industrialization, segregation of various city functions, and reliance on the automobile has caused cities to become duller and more monotonous. This highlights an important need, namely the need for passion. It's not enough to make people love a city only by the attractive character of city itself. People's love for a city needs to be stimulated and inspired. Even a lovable city may not be loved. The so-called 'stimulation or inspiration' by urban designers refers to the modulation of the awareness, imagining, and emotional system in the human psychological structure to make people have a strong love for their city. This includes both public experience and public participation. Public experience refers to the public cognition and evaluation for a city with a need to create ideal conditions for people's experience in cities in a practical way. The primary way includes increasing attractive public spaces. These public spaces such as the entrance gate, street, square, or waterfront is good window for exhibiting attractiveness of a city. To enhance consciousness, systematization, and optimization of public space is a major way to arouse passion. Public space optimization means not only increasing the number of public spaces, but constantly increasing the quality of urban public space. For instance, one can inspire public love for a city by adding emotional language and protecting poignant environmental elements of public space. An understanding of Lovable City begins with a consideration of its smallest elements such as walking in the street. Public participation stresses on free and flexible urban design. Both the idea of 'urban rights' by Henri Lefebvre and the calling for the 'non-plan' ideal in the 1960s provided the possibility of free and flexible choice that make users get involved and arouse their passion for planning their own cities. Planners give residents planning tools such as teaching them to do field analysis, build distribution models, and draw blueprints. They try to explain important plan details to residents clearly in a relatively easy way and help residents summarize their ideas and maintain them.

Experiencing other people represents a particularly colorful and attractive opportunity for stimulation. Compared with experiencing buildings and other inanimate objects, experiencing people, who speak and move about, offers a wealth of sensual variation. Furthermore, it concerns the most important subject in city: people. Lovable cities, therefore, ones in which people can interact with one another, are always stimulating because they are rich in experience. This is in contrast to loveless cities, which can scarcely avoid being poor in experiences and, henceforth, dull... no matter how many colors and variations of the shapes of the buildings are introduced.

#### 4.3 Maintaining Commitment

Commitment is the continuity of people's love for a city. One can build or enhance a city, but how long will the love for the city last? Three weeks, three years, three decades...? The eternity of love mainly depends on the degree of satisfaction and loyalty. The commitment includes people's commitment to a city and city's commitment to its residents. People's commitment refers to the strong feeling and desire to stay for a lifetime and/or promote and represent their city if they are forced to live elsewhere. The city's commitment refers to providing resources, places, and opportunities in order to help people make their dreams come true. Whether or not a city could help people realize their dreams is directly connected to people's love for a city. It's just like in one's family: If husband and wife have a strong commitment to both each other and to their children, all the members of the family will have a strong feeling of belonging. People will have a strong and lasting love to a city if they have such commitment.

Maintaining commitment is often difficult, but it can be done. One of the biggest keys to obtaining this love and maintenance of commitment is to balance both the need to enhance the city economically and enhance the quality of life for the citizens. This will not always be harmonious as change is constant and not everyone will be happy with certain changes. To combat this resistance of change, city leaders and officials and urban planners must be personable and address the city and acknowledge the concerns that certain changes will bring. By building this kind of personal relationship with the city and by making the residents feel as if the city officials care, the residents may trust the city officials and planners a little bit more. Then, by detailing proven methods to show that these changes will benefit the city as a whole and by confirming the benefits that most of the city's residents will receive after implementation, then, in time, most people will come to understand the need for change. Initially, everyone will not be pleased. This initial implementation of change is always the most difficult time. However, enhancing a city is never a temporary fix. As long as the residents understand that their livelihood will not be affected, the chances of unrest, formally or informally, are not likely. Furthermore, once the benefits of beneficial city planning are realized by the residents, then they will be more apt to continue to love and appreciate their city and maintain the commitment to keeping it beautiful and appealing. Enhancing the city economically while building bridges with the community and making them feel like they matter and are a part of something is a major key to a Lovable City.

## **5 DIVERSITY WITH EQUALITY**

### **5.1 The Definition of “Diversity with Equality”**

Diversity without equality addresses only difference; diversity with equality also addresses power. Both need to be addressed. So we need a concept of diversity which embraces equality. Equal opportunities and diversity are not mutually exclusive. Equality should be the normative value underpinning diversity, giving it teeth and meaning. Equality means ensuring that people with different needs have equality of opportunity and outcome.

### **5.2 Multifunction of “Lovable City”**

The nature of lovable city makes it a city of different cultures and backgrounds and will definitely maintain an international reputation for acceptance and/or tolerance of different lifestyles, especially protection of vulnerable groups. The injustice of health, wealth, and opportunities makes millions of people live in despair. To face and solve the challenge of such problem is exactly the holy duty of lovable city.

Lovable city should be designed in a way that recognizes and supports natural diversity and must guarantee the full citizenship of all users and residents—no one should be denied the right to the city because of their gender, income, familial status, sex, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or gender identity. The goal of feeling love for one should not be achieved at the expense of another. Lovable city must serve multiple functions so that people can use the same space for different purposes on different schedules. Taking the multifunction use of an urban street as an example, ‘Intricate Sidewalk Ballet’, as described by Jane Jacobs, is a celebration of heterogeneity. In the course of a day, a variety of people used the street in a range of different ways. The urban street comes alive as a result of the various uses people make of it, and the resulting serendipitous encounters enrich lives and urban experiences.

### **5.3 Concern for “Vulnerable” Groups**

Attention should be paid to urban minorities or vulnerable groups. Of all the possible Pareto Optimality scenarios, the just choice would be that whose lowest class is the most advantaged. It's vitally important to make vulnerable groups like Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT) persons or persons with disabilities felt empowered to advocate their real desires. Cleveland Pride, founded in 1989, is a weekend of activities, including a parade, a party in the park, and live entertainment - all designed to celebrate the diversity and solidarity of Cleveland, Ohio's LGBT community. Many large cities all over the world, just like Cleveland, have their own LGBT prides such as London, New York City, Tokyo, Chicago, Detroit, etc. A loveable city should advocate for this type of space and promote tolerance and/or acceptance for all people.



## 5.4 China's Current Situation on Diversity

Gender, income levels, and disability are key issues at the root of much discrimination in Chinese society and the interest of government and the public usually is blurred. The government claims that the 'Harmonious Society' advocated by them represents benefits for all different groups in Chinese society. Nobody is sure of its reality. At least in urban planning education, some college professors tend to discuss projects only with government officials or real estate landlords, not with vulnerable groups or urban users.

## 6 A LOVELESS CITY = A GHOST CITY

To prove the vital importance of creating love in today's cities, we take examples from the opposite perspective to show what a city could become without love, a ghost city. To live or escape are both optional activities, the latter situation gives birth to ghost city. In ghost cities, where social experiences are framed by calculability, detachment, and reserve, there are the ever-present conditions for loneliness and isolation. To make the analysis more universal, our group takes two cities, Dantu, China and Yebes, Spain, as examples. The vast number of vacant homes spread through each city shows that similar problems exist in both China and the western world.

### 6.1 Case Study of Dantu, China

Dantu is a typical kind of 'new city' built in China located in the south of Zhenjiang City, Jiangsu Province. China is still in the process of physical planning and the idealized planned modern cities have come to be conceptualized as a machine-like unit where every part (zone) was expected to have a specific function. The goal of Dantu planning is to be an ecological garden city. We have applied users' evaluations to explore people's feeling for Dantu. Our survey questions include: Do you work here or in Zhenjiang City? Do you often participate in outdoor activities? How's your relationship with neighbors? How's the public security here? Do you think the city fits your lifestyle well? How long are you going to stay here? And we also checked the conditions of the facilities for the elderly, disabled, and children. According to our survey, there is no shopping mall or theatre and few facilities exist for the elderly, disabled and children in Dantu. People also don't feel closeness with their neighbors or outdoor environment. Most of them go shopping and find entertainment in Zhenjiang City. Our group performed the research on Saturday, but only saw buildings (most are housing units built and building) with few cars and people and, because conditions for public areas are very monotonous, continuous squares of landscape. These bushes and trees which were shaped to resemble squares are large and impersonal. With great distance in the urban plane, there is nothing much to experience outdoors. Under these conditions, most residents prefer to remain indoors or go to downtown of Zhenjiang City to relax themselves.

### 6.2 Case Study of Yebes, Spain

Most of the units in Yebes have never sold, and though they were finished just three years ago, they are already falling into disrepair with the concrete chipping off the sides of the buildings. Vandals have stolen piping, radiators, doors - anything they could get their hands on. Those few families who live there keep dogs to ward off strangers. Óscar Lorenzo de Amo, 34, bought his home in Yebes in 2007. He is now trying to sell it, saying that the house is a nightmare for him and his wife. Over a decade, developers built hundreds of thousands of units; 800,000 went up in 2007 alone.

### 6.3 Comparison of Dantu and Yebes

The main feature of ghost city is lack of people's love with the expression of full of empty streets and vast government buildings. Nobody wants to stay and everyone try their best to flee from ghost city.

Cause of Ghost City	Dantu	Yebes
Similarity	Fast rates of expansion in construction; Outdoor space with poor quality	
Difference	Lack of infrastructure	Financial Crisis; Supply more than Demand

## 7 DOES A “LOVABLE CITY” = A PERFECT CITY?

Here's the question: should we wish for the perfect lovable city? In my point of view, not only is there no such thing as perfection, but there is no need for us to seek it. If there is perfection, the world will not evolve toward any final form or telos. Even though we may desire it, we could not make everyone love the same city. What urban planners and designers can do is only to maximize the love for as many different groups as possible. A city with all its perfection would be neither the strongest nor the most lasting. The very fact that it was perfect would rob it of its bond of union. The flaw that would destroy it would lie in its very perfection. Even two brothers living in the same house drew very different personal maps of their neighborhood. How can we expect all people to love the same city? Because of imperfection, the planning of lovable city should not be an ideal end but a dynamic process.

## 8 CONCLUSION

A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. Inevitably, Lovable City is both more relevant and more interesting to experience in the long run than are any combination of colored concrete and staggered building forms. The paper is not about the lovable city as an idea; it is about its practice. And the practice of creating a lovable city is an act of rebellion against the repressive forces of traditional cities and the social order that is planned. It is the way to hold our beliefs while living in a changing world. Our goal is to set you off on journeys of searching for your own lovable city because your lovable city may not be mine. Only with love can a city be sustained and developed; and the life of city could last forever. With the character of intimacy, passion, and commitment, Lovable City could provide opportunities for contact at a modest level, sources of inspiration, stimulating experiences, and possibilities for maintaining already established emotions.

## 9 BONUS INTERVIEW

After explaining the concept of “Lovable City” to an African-American student living in China, I asked him a question, “Which city do you think is a loveable city, and why?” This was his response:

The city I love most is New York City. I love it for a variety of reasons. I am a "city boy" first and foremost, so I love the feel of the big city. There are very few big cities like it. There are 5 parts (boroughs) of the city to which one can travel and each has its own character. Manhattan is the smallest, but most famous. Among many things, it is the financial, cultural, and tourism capital of the city. Staten Island is the most suburban of the city. Queens is the largest by area and has both urban and suburban parts as well as its own tourist friendly parts. Brooklyn is the largest by population and has very close-knit communities. The Bronx has the largest composite racial, ethnic population and, among other attributes, private waterfront homes on City island. The city as a whole has many charming characteristics. It has very large, towering buildings, a beautiful waterfront, very efficient public transportation (subway, bus, etc), and even very large parks where the town's many, many residents can partake in a variety of public activities (i.e. Jogging, walking the dog, playing games with their families, etc). However, what I love the most about New York City is the culture. There are many different people from all over the world and the city caters to all of them. The city goes beyond merely tolerating other cultures; they accept and embrace them. They welcome different cultures and, as a result, you can see many different stores and restaurant that cater to their needs. Because of the city's promotion and acceptance of other cultures, everyone benefits. I have tasted many different delicious cuisines from many different countries. I have also bought authentic merchandise from their stores as well. They always say, “If you can't find it in New York, you can't find it anywhere else in North America.“ People from all over the world flock to the city and, as a result, you can find merchanside and food from many different countries from Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and Australia. In addition to finding people of different races and ethnicities, there is a tolerance of social cultures and subcultures as well. People believe in the old adage of “live and let live“. Like most big cities, it has a very high population of lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender (LBGT) persons. However, throughout the city (in Manhattan particularly), the hostility faced by the LBGT community is not as prevalent as it is in other cities. The LBGT community is allowed to flourish and, because the community is frequently found in big money industries such as the entertainment, hospitality, and fashion industries (among countless others), the city benefits from their presence and ability to hone their creativity without hostility. There are many other cultures and subcultures found there as well. You will frequently see the hip-hop kids, the goth and emo kids, hipster kids, and many,



many others. Everyone is allowed to be themselves and the city benefits from the tolerance and acceptance of other cultures and subcultures, especially the children and young adults who will not have to face as much bullying, violence, and intolerance. New York definitely embodies the spirit of a “Lovable City“. It’s apparent as one travels to the city and sees with their own eyes how much pride New Yorkers have in their city. The fact that they have so much to offer and that you can find anything and everyone in their city is something they love to claim. The residents love not just bits and pieces of the city, they love the city as a whole. Most people there have a sense of belonging. The city is not perfect (it can be dirty due to the lack of alleys for trash pick-up), but many people will agree with my assessment that it is one of the “places to be“ when one travels the world.

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