

If I Ruled The World: Richard Rogers ~ Well-Designed Cities Are A Human Right



prospectmagazine.co.uk. January 2015. If I ruled the world, all our towns and cities would be civilised places, with well-designed and maintained public spaces for the meeting of friends and strangers. I

believe that shelter is a basic human right, alongside food, education and health, and that it is about more than basic dwellings. It includes the design of buildings and public spaces, and of the cities that form the heart of modern life. So it is scandalous how little attention we pay to the streets, squares, playgrounds and parks that make up our public realm.

The right to shelter should include a right to well-designed and maintained public space. Everyone should be able to see a tree from their window, or have a bench to sit on. Within a few minutes walk, you should be able to reach a small town square, park or a playground, with a few trees, benches for conversation and swings and roundabouts for children. A few minutes further and you should be in one of the magnificent parks that form the lungs of our cities; places to join friends for picnics, to walk dogs, to admire spring blossom, to meet strangers, to play softball or frisbee, or simply to spend time alone with your thoughts. And walking and cycling in the city through parks or well-paved streets is a pleasure, whether on the way to work or simply taking a stroll.

I once met a man in Verona, who told me he had moved there from Naples specifically because the beautiful streets there gave him the pleasure of the perfect evening passeggiata. When we visit new towns and cities, from Bath to Barcelona, it is the streets and squares that form the heart of our urban experience. The buildings may be beautiful in themselves, but it is the public spaces that they frame and form that create the city, forming the glue between buildings.

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