

# A TALE OF TWO HUNDRED CITIES

*Kevin Roberts, the creator of Lovemarks, tracks the rise of cities in the world. In this article he looks at how to make cities work and how to make cities win in a rapidly urbanizing metro-competitive world.*

When it comes to wanderlust, Africa's Wildebeest are seasoned pros. Several million across the Serengeti every year warrants a satisfied snort. Beyond the savannah, it's eat your heart out Mr Gnu. A two legged smart beast is leaving the global plains at 70 million a year. 1.3 million people move into cities every week. By some time next year, more than half of the world will live in urban areas. Fifty years from now, two thirds.

It's a defining moment, a tipping point, the start of something big. Urbanization is morphing the planet paradoxically. Flight to cities is decelerating human population growth yet bringing explosive growth in secondary cities, places with exotic names like Temuco, Ghaziabad, Douala, Nanchung, Goyang, Fukioka and Bamako. Reshuffling the top 10 "mega cities" (10 million+ people) by 2015, will be three wild cards outside your vacation plans, Dhaka, Karachi and Lagos.

For Italy, with its grand tradition of city states, this may smell familiar. Welcome to renaissance unplugged, City World, where cities lead, countries listen, and enterprise inspires. In the big league of influence, London subs England off, Shanghai plays sweeper, Tokyo strikes, Delhi dances, Mumbai swerves, Seoul chips, Mexico City dives, Sao Paulo protests, Rome charms, Milan weaves, Paris head butts, China's second cities warm the line, and LA and New York? They talk with a translator.

## THE RISING

What happens in cities directs the future. The challenge is to synchronize on all levels, to harmonize participation, collaboration and competition through a market prism. At the base is a creative canvas stretched tight across risk and opportunity. Risk to wellbeing is extreme. A billion live in squatter cities. By 2050, maybe two billion more. In sub-Saharan Africa, slum-dwellers are over 70% of the urban population.

Risk is shorthand for opportunity. I grew up in a small working class city in the northwest of England. I climbed

the ladder like a Neapolitan. As a radical optimist I've believed Rome could be built in a day, that a "City of God" can be a City of God. Today, hope is rising on the wind.

First, enterprise is irresistible and it's shifting into overdrive. To see a pure creative economy, stuff your Swatch down your pants, sharpen your wits, and disappear into a slum city. No rules, no cappuccino, and you miss a 100% of the shots you don't take, with downside. The upside is inspired. Bazaars ripple with vitality, ingenuity and solidarity. Energy is pirated. Water is diverted. Slab by slab, risk by risk, idea by idea, shoulder to shoulder, progress is built from zero up. The energy is incredible and cascades outwards. The lost cities of the world are starting to self-organize.

Second, mass movement to city living has scalable advantages. Rural survival skills come alive in the city. Income opportunities are higher. Services are cheaper. Rural systems evacuated get to regenerate while enlightened coalitions take on the beast of urban pollution (I'd make Parkour – cross city racing - compulsory at school). And unshackled from rural slavery, women's natural entrepreneurship and community building talent gets unleashed (see my earlier article on this – *Enter the Age of Inclusion*).

Third, smart companies are realizing their fortune is interwoven with the informal sector. Acrobats in overalls, not Zegna suits, build City World. Construction to laundry, they feed in indispensably at the lower end. "Gated communities" a la *Traffic* are indefensible. And critically, today's freeloaders and cheapskates are tomorrow's consumers - a quarter of the planet. Hot companies design for, and price in, hardship to win these new consumers on the rise.

We have to drive the upside of the informal economy through the heart of the formal economy. To float boats, partnerships across sectors are essential, inspiration is rocket fuel, and technology the heavy lifter. Wireless is the fantastic liberator. With the world open-sourced, on-demand, off-shored and on-screen, more people get a shot at a life. Call to business? Build price and premiums *around* free stuff – not in spite of it! Unleash and inspire the mojo of squatter-entrepreneurs. Upgrade service work to help springboard desperados into the formal economy.

## CITY WORLD

Back to the big canvas, city boom. Lots of stuff feeds into jump-starting a second city: transport links, economies of clustering, decentralization of work, gentrification, retiring boomers, cheap labour rising to middle class.

But it's global integration that defines City World, not the planning department's PhDs. As fat pipes and fast bytes compress time and space, success as a city is less about where you are. Winning is about who you are, why you are, and how you tell your story to a world at your digital door.

Brand monkeys call it place branding, but the rabbit hole goes deeper and runs wider. Cities are emotional infusions. Cocktails of culture, language, style, aspiration and impulse – each with a unique flavor. Mix it cool and the world comes to the bar. Get it wrong and the fat lady starts to sing.

In previous articles I have stressed Italy's powerful attraction to people's emotions. Attraction is about people finding you, loving you, sharing you - about being so irresistible that people can't live without you, about maxing out on respect and love to create loyalty beyond reason.

Rome, Florence, Milan and Venice are magnets to we foreign barbarians, their essence dripping with style. No surprise to see Florence and Rome rank as the world's best and second best cities in a recent survey by *Travel + Leisure* magazine. My eldest son Ben flies to Rome every weekend he can (from London). Maybe for the coffee, the pasta, the wine or....? And I'm spending my birthday with Ben, daughter Bex and their partners in Milan at the most beautiful city experience in the world, The Bvlgari hotel.

For secondary Italian towns, the impact of being outside the great urban migration is that your brand – your ability to attract talent, capital, events and crowds– is your life.

Banding Italian towns together to create distinct but complementary tourist hubs feels smart. The secret is to be yourself, act local and propagate your story consistently and relentlessly. In a recent CoolBrands survey, New Zealand was voted the world's coolest destination. Key to success? Neither size nor location

(both challenges for my beloved home). Authenticity. We stayed true to an irresistible edge, and sold it hard.

In the digital age any city can rise if the idea is simple and its edge gleams. You have to hit that sweet spot of attraction, that state where people simply say "I love you". This is Lovemarks, cool fusions of mystery, sensuality and intimacy wrapped in big transformative ideas. The motherlode of emotion can emanate from anywhere: a museum (Bilbao Guggenheim), an opera house (Sydney), a movie studio (Wellington), a hotel (Burj al Arab, Dubai), an event (the Olympics).

This emotion can flow inside-out or fuse outside-in. The city planner Stefano Boeri together with Renato Soru are showing the way with a project in Cagliari. The ideas of international "starchitects" informing the experiences of *in situ* professors, researchers and student to inspire the first "Public Architecture Office". Culturally-diverse infusions of ideas from Herzog & de Meuron, Paulo Mendez to Rocha, Rem Koolhaas, Rafael Moneo and Kengo Kuma, will help make Cagliari the beating heart of a much more vital and suggestive Sardinia. A "place of the world" where tradition merges with a modern and innovative spirit.

Here are ten things that make me say: "I love you."

1. The Bvlgari hotel in Milan. The best all round sensorial experience in Italy.
2. Benesse House on the Japanese Island of Naoshima. Art work by James Turrell and a seriously hard place to get to.
3. Moss in New York City, the best design store in the world.
4. Dong Tan Eco City in China , the world's first fully sustainable cosmopolis now underway.
5. A statue of Bruce Lee in Mostar, Bosnia. The immigrant icon an ethnic split could live with.
6. Miss Sixty Hotel in Riccione, rooms fitted out by 30 individual artists to get Gen Y off the street.
7. The Woo Bar in the W Seoul. Try it.
8. Walking the Milford Track in New Zealand, the best escape from urban concrete on the planet.

9. Michaels Nook Cottage in Grasmere. My haven, and 'back to my roots' new home in the heart of England's Lake District.

10. Blanc Bleu. Headquartered in St Tropez. The most authentic casual ocean fashion on earth.

If you get to space with Richard Branson, take a look down at planet home. You'll see the urban century luminous on the sphere. If you can't see your local café, don't sweat it. As Tony Chambers at Wallpaper magazine suggests: "Cool destinations are those that people haven't thought of yet."

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*Books: Lovemarks: the future beyond brands; the Lovemarks Effect – winning in the consumer revolution; Sisomo: the future on screen (powerHouse Books)*