

The miracles of Curitiba



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MIRACLES happen even where cities are concerned. Cities that are condemned with the excesses of urban ills can come around and show that "the city is not a problem but a solution."

Jaime Lerner is the president of the International Union of Architects (UIA). Lerner is trained as an architect and his current position is a prestigious one, but his claim to fame is being the mayor of Curitiba for nearly thirty years.

Lerner was speaking recently in Honolulu to a gathering of policy makers, architects and planners at an

event hosted by the Mayor of Honolulu, Jeremy Harris. He was specially invited by Mayor Harris to bring a new enthusiasm for a sustainable and humane city design for the city of Honolulu.

Lerner is convinced that the future is in cities, and that cities can be the most beautiful collective dream. He rejects the pessimistic and tragic projections of urban life that usually cite the horrors of cities like Mexico City and Mumbai.

So what about Curitiba? In terms of its location, population and urban conditions, Curitiba is no different from many Latin American cities. Curitiba has trebled in size in just 25 years and now has a population of 1.6 million.

In 1971, Lerner was just a young architect who was concerned for the future of his city, for its environmental and human needs.

ABOUT CITIES

You have to have a concept of a city to be able to do something about it. What the story of Jaime Lerner tells me is that if urban miracles can happen in Curitiba, miracles can happen anywhere...



A transportation node, Curitiba.

build high-profile projects such as shopping malls, big highways, and other glittery buildings that do little to the overall quality of life of the city.

The mayor of Honolulu, like officials from many other cities, has visited Curitiba to study the new systems and the transformed quality of life there.

Parks and gardens as civic spaces

combined with innovative social programmes are the highest priority in Lerner's plans. Curitiba has now 17 new parks, 90 miles of bike paths, and trees everywhere.

The social programmes target urban poor, especially the orphaned or abandoned street children which is an endemic problem all over Brazil.

Lerner initiated was to have each industry, shop and institution to "adopt" a few children, providing them with a daily meal and a small wage in exchange for simple maintenance gardening or office chores.

The management of trash is another important innovation. Curitiba recycles two-thirds of its garbage -- one of the highest rates of any city anywhere.

Lerner converted the shopping district in the city center into a pedestrian zone. Initially he met resistance from the shop-owners but the project became so successful that commerce in other streets demanded the same.

But the most crucial and radical innovation was in the area of transportation (Lerner points out that among the people who can destroy a city are the traffic engineers).

There are five arteries that radiate from the centre city with each containing one two-way lane devoted exclusively to express buses.

without the hazards and delays inherent to mixed-traffic bus service. On certain arteries, triple-compartment buses in their own traffic lanes carry three hundred passengers each.

Lerner himself designed the Plexiglas tube bus stations. There, passengers pay their fares, enter through one end of the tube, and exit from the other end.

"Every child should be able to



A bus stop in Curitiba (designed by Jaime Lerner)

draw their city," is what Lerner preaches. It means that you have to have a concept of a city to be able to do something about it.

well, invited Lerner to the gathering--I had the privilege of going to--so that he could learn a few more things from his colleague's vision.

Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, an architect and writer, currently teaches at the University of Hawaii, Honolulu.