



## **Collaborative Urbanism – Disrupting the Paradigm for Market-Led Urban Regeneration: White Paper**

by Jason Twill, Director of Urban Apostles, UTS Innovation Fellow, and  
Chief Troublemaker at the City Makers Guild

*Rethink White Papers solely represent the opinions of the author, and do not reflect the opinion or view of the City of Austin nor the Office of Sustainability. The City of Austin does not take responsibility for the views expressed or any errors that may appear in the papers.*

*The Rethink White Papers offer up fresh, innovative thinking to Austin citizens and decision-makers about the future of our City. They are intended to present some of the best sustainability thinking from Austin's thought-leaders in a way that is fresh, accessible and compelling. We hope the Rethink White Papers will inspire us all to take action for a bright green future for Austin.*

**Find the entire series at:**

<http://austintexas.gov/department/rethink-austin-white-papers>



The mission of the Office of Sustainability is to provide leadership, influence positive action through engagement, and create measurable benefits for Austin related to climate, food, resource efficiency, and resiliency.



## **Collaborative Urbanism – Disrupting the Paradigm for Market-Led Urban Regeneration: White Paper**

by Jason Twill, Director of Urban Apostles, UTS Innovation Fellow, and Chief Troublemaker at the City Makers Guild

Today, we are living in the 'urban age'. It is also a reality that we are firmly rooted in an age of inequity: our cities are more gentrified than ever before in history. An over reliance on market-led, speculative urban development models is continuing to cause perverse social, cultural, economic and environmental outcomes. The weight and speed of investment capital fueling our rapacious urban growth is creating tremendous 'metropolitan pressure'. It is this pressure that continues to displace significant segments of our society from their city of choice: artists, local businesses, key workers, pensioners, young families and indigenous peoples to name but a few. In their place, we are observing ever expanding 'ghettos of the rich' and commodified urban landscapes across our global cities.

For the past several years I have been presenting on the topic of equity and inclusiveness in our cities and I have always started these talks with the same request: "Raise your hand if you feel frustrated by the type and style of development happening within your community." Whether there are forty people or a thousand people in the room, the response from the audience is always the same...all hands are raised, and often both. Why do we so unanimously feel such frustration by the way our cities are being shaped around us? Why is there such an enormous disconnect between what the market is delivering and what people actually desire from their places?

At one end of the spectrum we have corporate-led, mega-scale urban regeneration with its safe, franchised "could be from anywhere" style of architecture. On the other end of the spectrum we have less experienced 'cowboy' style development which most often leaves us thinking "how the hell did that get through planning approval?"

Regardless of the origins of the frustration, cities have much more to lose than just investment and talent if they continue in this way: they will lose their identity. If we think of our cities as never-ending novels with new chapters continually being written to shape their story, right now it seems we are losing the plot. The predominance of market- led 'highest and best use' urban renewal is creating a sense of 'urban sameness' where cities are beginning to lose their unique character and brand, in turn impacting their ability to attract and retain the very people that make these cities great.

*Rethink White Papers solely represent the opinions of the author, and do not reflect the opinion or view of the City of Austin nor the Office of Sustainability. The City of Austin does not take responsibility for the views expressed or any errors that may appear in the papers.*



In response, innovative civic leaders across the world who have long been attuned to these issues have started to unlock and enable new pathways for non-speculative urban regeneration. These citizen-led and community-engaged projects are changing the way equitable and inclusive communities can be delivered in our cities, demonstrating how citizen participation is the key component in making cities thrive. This is a new urban story emerging around our world, a story defined by authenticity, a sense of belonging, sharing, and sustainability. It the story of collaborative urbanism.

Collaborative urbanism is defining new pathways for city-making predicated on social resilience, economic justice, and ecological stewardship. Enabling citizens to shape their own communities and living environments, collaborative urbanism draws on lifestyle trends that emphasize sharing over private ownership, such as collaborative consumption, co-working, cooperatives, the new urban commons, maker movements, and co-living.

Our urban environments should not solely be derived from the unilateral vision of 'expert' developers, architects and planners but should include local communities and citizens as well. Collaborative urbanism offers an alternative to market-led development and can serve as a pathway to balance out the negative impacts of gentrification by providing more diverse and affordable ways for people to live, work, learn and play in our cities.

To learn more about collaborative urbanism, check out the newly established [City Makers' Guild](#) who are championing alternative development models and inclusive city making, and will be leading a tour later this year exploring collaborative urbanism in Europe.

*This content originally appeared in the March 8, 2018 edition of [The Fifth Estate](#).*

*Jason Twill is Director of [Urban Apostles](#), UTS Innovation Fellow, and Chief Troublemaker at the [City Makers' Guild](#), and at the forefront of built environment transformation. He works across private consultancy, university research and industry engagement to change conversations around sustainable urbanism, housing affordability and green building economics.*

*Rethink White Papers solely represent the opinions of the author, and do not reflect the opinion or view of the City of Austin nor the Office of Sustainability. The City of Austin does not take responsibility for the views expressed or any errors that may appear in the papers.*