

# BLUE URBANISM



While we are increasingly the *planet of cities*, we must not forget that we live and share space on *the blue planet*. We rarely put these two realms (or words) together, but we must begin to. By some estimates, two-thirds of our global population lies within 400 kilometers of a shoreline. As oceanographer and National Geographic Explorer, Sylvia Earle, wrote in her important book, *The World is Blue*, “Everyone, everywhere is inextricably connected to and utterly dependent upon the existence of the sea.”

There are dangers associated with rising sea levels, of course, presenting a need to grow and plan cities in ways that better respect these increasingly dynamic edges. But we are drawn to water, to the sights, sounds, smells of marine environments, and there is a deep biophilic impulse and need at work here that visiting the seashore starts to satisfy. There is at once calmness and intensity and a mysterious world just beyond our reach. Research by Michael DePledge and his team at Exeter University demonstrates what we have always known, which is that we enjoy visual and physical proximity to water and that these settings deliver immense emotional and therapeutic benefit.

Our human fate here on the blue planet is, not surprisingly, intimately tied to ocean health. And oceans are suffering in many ways—acidification and other impacts of global warming, industrial over-harvesting of fish and seafood, the accumulation of the immense detritus and pollution of modern life, from plastics to chemicals to crude oil.

Is there a chance that growing cities can muster their wealth, creativity and political influence to come to the aid of oceans? The vision of *Blue Urbanism* suggests yes! From the redesign of coastal edges and the promise of blue urban design, to new approaches of promoting sustainable, local seafood, to a variety of ways to build new emotional connections to the sea, there is much that cities can do.

At the heart of an urban-ocean agenda is the belief that cities, and the people who inhabit them, can and must exert the leadership needed to protect, conserve and care for the marine world. It is in our self-interest to do so, of course, but there is a broader ethical duty to the immense marine life found there and to all the life on the planet that depends on healthy oceans.

How then, and in what ways, can cities be profoundly ocean-friendly? What does a deep blue urbanism suggest about the ways in which we occupy space near oceans and the many different ways in which urban consumption and lifestyle impact the ocean world? Oceans, moreover, harbor immense amounts of biodiversity, and hold the promise of stoking our collective sense of wonder and enhancing in important ways the quality and meaning of our lives.

Source: <http://ipfieldnotes.org/blue-urbanism/>