What is a soft city and how can it improve people's quality of life?

When visiting **Tec de Monterrey**, prominent Scottish urban expert **David Sim** explained the concept of **soft cities** and explained that **Latin America** could be filled with these cities**.**

Presenting the Spanish translation of his **book** *Soft City*, Sim explained that these **urban centers** are characterized by using small-scale, **low-tech**, and **low-cost solutions** to **improve people's quality of life**.

*"Mexico and Latin America are **places with lots of ideas**: they're open to change and it's an incredible start. People enjoy being outside and have a culture of **using public spaces** for cultural events and markets, for example,"* said Sim at the Monterrey campus*.*

This book launch included a chat between the author and **Enrique de la Madrid**, Director of the **Center for the Future of Cities**; **Laura Ballesteros**, Monterrey's Secretary of Sustainable Urban Development; and **Rubén Segovía**, Director of the Master's in Architecture and Urban Design at the Tec.

The book was translated by civil association **CoRe Ciudades Vivibles y Amables**, and addresses challenges to cities such as **population density** and adapting to **climate change**.

Las "ciudades suaves" o "soft cities" son ciudades que implementan soluciones simples de pequeña escal width="900" loading="lazy">

How can you make a city softer?

A soft city is characterized by **green** spaces which become small **lakes** during storms to **prevent flooding**, streets designed for cycling, and buildings overlooking safe spaces for children, Sim explained.

*"If you design and build buildings around an empty space you can create a **park**, a quiet and safe place which becomes a **gift** to the **community**.*

*"It becomes a **safe space** for children and people's development,"* he said.

These actions make a city softer. It becomes people friendly, **adaptable to the climate**, **sustainable**, and it even has **more economic revenue.**

La creación de espacios comunes son algunas de estas mejoras que incluye David en su libro width="900" loading="lazy">

Sim also explained that **soft cities** seek to reduce the limits of **urbanization**, prioritizing the creation of blocks which allow their citizens to grow **without the need for long-distance travel** between cities.

Creating common spaces such as **terraces, shared courtyards, and open spaces** are some of the improvements which David includes in his book.

Sim spoke with Tec students and staff during his talk at **Tec de Monterrey**.

*"The book **'Soft City'** has been translated into several languages and, thanks to the generosity of CoRe, Ciudades Vivibles y Amables and their President **Blanca del Valle**, this fantastic book has now been translated into Spanish,"* said **Enrique de la Madrid**.

Sim gave the example of how it's been shown that people who use **bicycles** for **transportation** spend more money at local businesses, because they can stop instantly, unlike motorists.

*"There is an **economic benefit**, even in that. Even children who walk and use bicycles get **better grades** than those who are driven,"* said Sim.

He added that even **architecture** can play an **important** role in creating public spaces which have temperatures lower than that of cities.

"We have to get people out of their cars. We're living in a totally unsustainable model in which everyone wants things faster, higher, bigger - and it means you lose sight of quality of life."

El libro fue traducido al español por la asociación civil CoRe width="900" loading="lazy">

Mexico and Latin America: fertile ground for soft cities

"Do Mexicans respond to this?" asked Sim, before pointing out that in both Mexico and Latin America, there is a **predisposition** to make **use** of **public spaces**.

"There are trees, chairs, food stalls in these areas. Mexicans have a culture of using public spaces.

"One advantage is that you have a good climate: in most cases it's nice to be outside, and when you're outside, you have a healthier lifestyle, both physically and mentally," said Sim.

The stakeholders which Sim mentions must be convinced to create these cities include the **developers** responsible for building housing, adding that there are even **economic benefits**.

*"It's cheaper to create this type of city. They're **attractive**, add **value**, and are **economical**. Barcelona, for example, is one of these cities,"* he said.

David Sim added that another **challenge** facing **Mexico** and **Latin America** in this area is the **use of cars**.

*"We have to get people out of their cars. We're living in a totally **unsustainable model** in which everyone wants things faster, higher, bigger - and it means you lose sight of quality of life.*

*"We have to think about **cities that are smaller, lower, slower, simpler, and softer**,"* concluded David Sim.

Durante su charla en el Tec de Monterrey Monterrey, David compartió algunas ideas width="900" loading="lazy">

Who is David Sim?

David Sim was a partner and creative director at the international architectural firm **Gehl Architects** until 2021, responsible for driving much of the company's urban strategy and master-planning services.

He led projects such as the Christchurch **Earthquake Recovery Plan**, Melbourne Metro, Urban Strategies for Buenos Aires, Central Tokyo, and Sao Paulo, and Masterplans in Lille, Cologne, and Santiago de Chile.

Sim wrote the book *Soft City: Building Density for Everyday Life* in 2019, which proposes that the organization and design of the built environment should include improved fluid movement and comfort, a diversity of building types, and careful design in order to ensure a sustainable urban environment.

David gives lectures and teaches masterclasses. Today, he fulfils the role of **Urban Expert** on selected Gehl projects.

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