



'Space is the new place'



John Batten

"Space making is a trend that has resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic. Space is the new place and value is being redefined as we speak. Many cities are covered with roads, buildings and parking spaces. We need to convert cities into attractive destinations: for example, parking can become outdoor dining, roads can become playgrounds. This is something that we did in Rotterdam with the central train station. It became a 'go-to' space for business, for tourists and people from the city. The whole district benefits and it inspires other investments."

In the spotlight is the exuberant John Batten via camera from New York. He is the Global Cities Director for Arcadis. The Global Cities program started in 2013 and doubled in size from €500m back then to €1.1b in 2020. Arcadis earmarked 20 cities around the world to become the dedicated focus of 20 City Executives.

John and his team have built the Arcadis reputation in the city space from its inception. Now the team is a recognized thought leader in making cities more resilient (shock proof, able to withstand disaster and upheaval, climate resilient, mobile and clean). A testament to this reputation is the Global Cities Index that Arcadis periodically publishes, ranking cities around the world for their performance in all these domains.

Appointing and developing the right city executives to the cities with the greatest potential for growth was and continues to be key. "City Executives must have the pulse of the city both economically and socially, as well as be open to opinionate around all of the issues at stake in the city. They are strongly engaged with their peers and competitors, So networking is an essential part of the job. Don't work from the office but work in the city you work for. Every executive needs to be commercially competitive: be in front of the opportunities, be recognized for every selection process, be a force to deal with. They are our commercial and brand ambassador thought leaders as well as commercial leaders."

The Cities program aims to deliver three types of benefits for its clients:

- 1 **Clear value creation:** clients need to benefit financially from the services. There is a 'value analysis' for every project/program.
- 2 **Environmental benefit** (impact such as carbon or other parameters are vital to the city)
- 3 **Improve the citizens' experience** through the built and natural environment.

The City Executive reviews every opportunity in light of these three criteria. If one of these isn't met, they will go back to the drawing board and only engage in the assignment once all criteria are met.

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Leadership is key. "I encourage them to take risks and get out of their comfort zones. I mostly encourage and empower, remove roadblocks, challenge, and uplift. I want to inspire, not intimidate or be overbearing. Therefore, I want to be accessible, approachable, which is easy for me, because I am a social animal. I will do the same as I expect of them. I spend a lot of time 1-on-1 in and around client engagements. As a team, we invest heavily in peer-to-peer development: sharing our account reviews, value propositions and thought leadership in our team of City Executives. We prepare ourselves internally, to become stronger externally."