

MEDIA RELEASE

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Give City Dwellers a Real Say

“Give city dwellers a real say”, Jane-Frances Kelly, Cities Program Director at the Grattan Institute, said today on the release of “Cities: Who Decides?”.

http://www.grattan.edu.au/pub_page/report_cities_who_decides.html

“We will need higher levels of public engagement to improve our cities. This needs to be an order of magnitude different from what we have seen in Australia. While governments are central to decision making, other actors – residents, businesses, NGOs, among others – all need to be actively involved in the tough decisions that will shape our cities. In addition, our research suggested that no particular type of governance structure was vital for success. Nor was there an ideal ‘model of development’”, she added.

Grattan’s report investigated decision making in eight of the world’s most successful cities, asking what governance arrangements accompanied their broad-based improvement. The cities investigated included: Vancouver, Toronto, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Austin, Dublin and Copenhagen. Experts were interviewed from each city, including former mayors, heads of business groups, CEOs, academics, leaders from civil society and planners.

The cities were chosen because they shared important characteristics with cities in Australia.

“Our sample of successful cities revealed a variety of experiences, but there were a number of common themes. First, there were high and sustained levels of public engagement in decision making, particularly where hard choices had to be made. Second, there was a consistent strategic direction, as well as collaboration – between levels of government, the business community, and civic organisations. Finally, there was usually a trigger for improvement, which galvanised the political will required for real, sustained improvement.”

“Our findings have two implications for Australian cities. Residents must be involved in decisions. Those cities that made tough choices, and saw them through, had early, genuine, and deep public engagement. This level of engagement is different in scale and in kind from what happens in Australia today. Also changing structures does not in itself result in success. No one particular governance structure was associated with broad-based improvement. Changing structures has the danger of being a distraction”, she concluded.

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