

'Charta of Neurourbanism' dedicated to mental health in cities

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How can planners reduce the stress of city living and improve the mental health of city dwellers? An interdisciplinary team of researchers led by Charité - Universitätsmedizin Berlin has developed a set of

recommendations which aim to address these questions. Entitled "The Charta of Neurourbanism," their work has been published to coincide with the Berlin Mental Health Week.

We are currently witnessing a global trend toward urbanization. Growing numbers of people are attracted by what cities have to offer: high quality education and personal development opportunities, cultural wealth and a superior health care infrastructure. However, [city](#) living is also associated with increased levels of social stress, which can have negative health impacts. "Those who live in or have grown up in cities are at increased risk of mental illness," explains PD Dr. Mazda Adli, a member of the Neurourbanism Research Group at the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy on Campus Charité Mitte, and Director of the Fliedner Klinik Berlin.

He adds: "This association has been shown to be particularly strong for schizophrenia, depression and anxiety disorders. It's particularly the co-occurrence of social density and social isolation, that is placing a strain on the mental health of city dwellers." However, urban planning measures can help counteract this form of stress. "The antidote to social stress is social cohesion, connectedness and participation in a city's activities," says the stress researcher.

The Charta of Neurourbanism proposes concrete solutions for a total of nine policy areas. Public spaces are highlighted as one area with crucial importance to mental health. They include sidewalks, parks and playgrounds, but also sports and cultural facilities, and promote social cohesion within a city. Public spaces should be complemented by highly creative housing and urban planning strategies, which can help to prevent a sense of unmanageable density. Similarly, urban design measures aimed at increasing citizen participation enhance people's sense of self-efficacy and help to counteract social [stress](#).

The recommendations were developed by the Interdisciplinary Forum Neurourbanism (Interdisziplinäres Forum Neurourbanistik e.V.), a group of experts in urban planning, neuroscience, sociology, philosophy and geography. The network, whose members hail from Charité, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Technische Universität Berlin, was developed and launched in close collaboration with Alfred Herrhausen Gesellschaft. Led by PD Dr. Mazda Adli, the Forum seeks to better understand the effects of urban living on our emotions, behavior and mental [health](#). The aim is to make this information measurable and to use it in order to define and design cities worth living in.

To achieve these objectives, the Forum is working closely with representatives from civil society and community organization. Thanks to its innovative approach, the Forum was crowned a winner in the 2018 'Landmark in the Land of Ideas' competition, a national competition held as part of the 'Germany—Land of Ideas' initiative. The Charta was funded by the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe.

More information: Charta of Neurourbanism: <https://neurourbanistik.de/en/charta-of-neurourbanism/>

Provided by Charité - Universitätsmedizin Berlin

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