

Letter from Norman Foster
Madrid, June 2023

The future of our society is the future of our cities— they are our greatest invention.

This institute, in a time of climate change, is addressed to those who wish, through practice or education, to improve the quality of life in cities worldwide. In that spirit, the course will combine practical on-site experience with academic input from the Foundation's network of international experts. These range from university professors to property developers.

It will start with tools and skills that can be used to address wide ranging issues of cities. For instance, leadership, advocacy, communication, presentation, diagramming, mapping, and the understanding and interpretation of data. These could be applicable to cities from Asia, the Middle East, South and North America to Africa and Europe, as well as informal settlements and suburbia.

The curriculum then narrows down to three pilot cities that scholars will visit to engage directly with their planners and managers. For study purposes, neighbourhoods have been selected in each city to raise an awareness of the issues that affect the living standards for those who live or visit there.

Typical issues are carbon footprints, density, mix of uses, equality and affordability, walkability, place making, townscape and landscape, public and private transport, politics and economics, energy, recycling, consultation, interest groups and decision making.

Several of these many issues will be distilled to create a small number of well-defined project assignments which will be addressed by the scholars working on site and in the studio, either in teams or individually. In this multidisciplinary approach, the scholars would use the most up-to-date digital tools in the quest to improve a sustainable quality of life.

In this first cycle of the course the pilot cities will be European, although the methodical approach will be adaptable to other kinds of cities.

Towards the end of the year the scholars will present their findings to the city administration and there will be an emphasis on advocacy and presentation skills. The lessons from these real-life experiences will be documented by film and other media, culminating in a public event. On the basis that historically cities learn from each other, it will be important for the scholars to explore the relevance of their conclusions in the wider context of global cities.

The course is like an hourglass; starting wide in its scope, then narrowing down to focus on tangible issues that can be quantified and addressed, and finally, opening up to a wider debate.