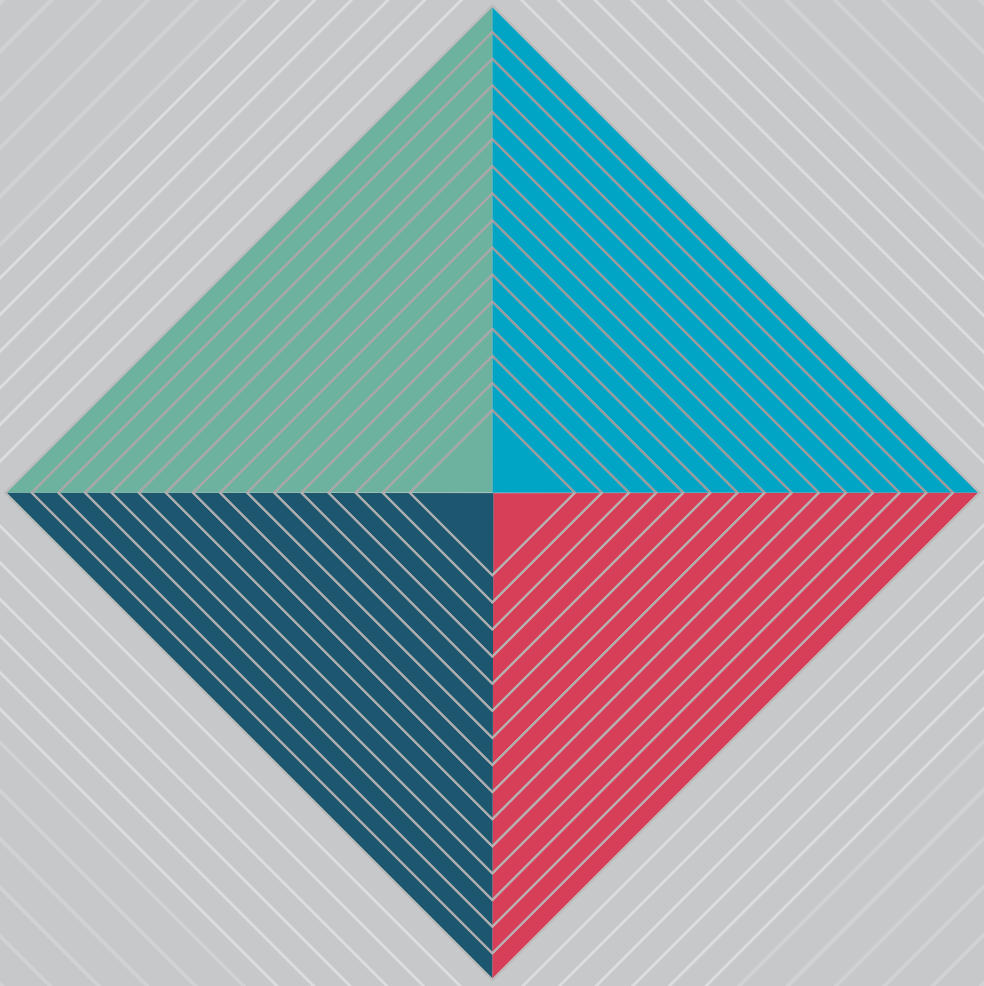
The Socio-Economic Ecological Performance Index



Gensler RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Socio-Economic Ecological Performance Index

How do we encourage a quadruple-bottom-line approach toward more responsible and holistic urban planning?

WHAT WE DID

We believe that urban planning projects need not place financial concerns above all others; social and environmental concerns can be taken up without sacrificing financial returns. To test that thesis, we set out to create a tool that both encourages more holistic development and quantifies a project's socio-economic and ecological impact. As a starting point, we reviewed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as an outline for a more just and sustainable development model.

We then identified those SDGs that coincide with architecture and planning. Next, we conducted an extensive review of the metrics of existing rating and certification systems to guide how we measure progress toward an SDG target. Ultimately, we created a set of key performance indicators that became the basis of the Socio-Economic Ecological Performance Index (SEPI)—a tool for measuring a project's performance across the quadruple bottom line of people, planet, policy, and profit.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- ◊ No poverty
- ◊ Zero hunger
- ◊ Good health & well-being
- ◊ Quality education
- ◊ Gender equality
- ◊ Clean water & sanitation
- ◊ Affordable & clean energy
- ◊ Decent work & economic growth
- ◊ Industry, innovation & infrastructure
- ◊ Reduced inequalities
- ◊ Sustainable cities & communities
- ◊ Responsible consumption & production
- ◊ Climate action
- ◊ Life below water
- ◊ Life on land
- ◊ Peace, justice & strong institutions
- ◊ Parterships

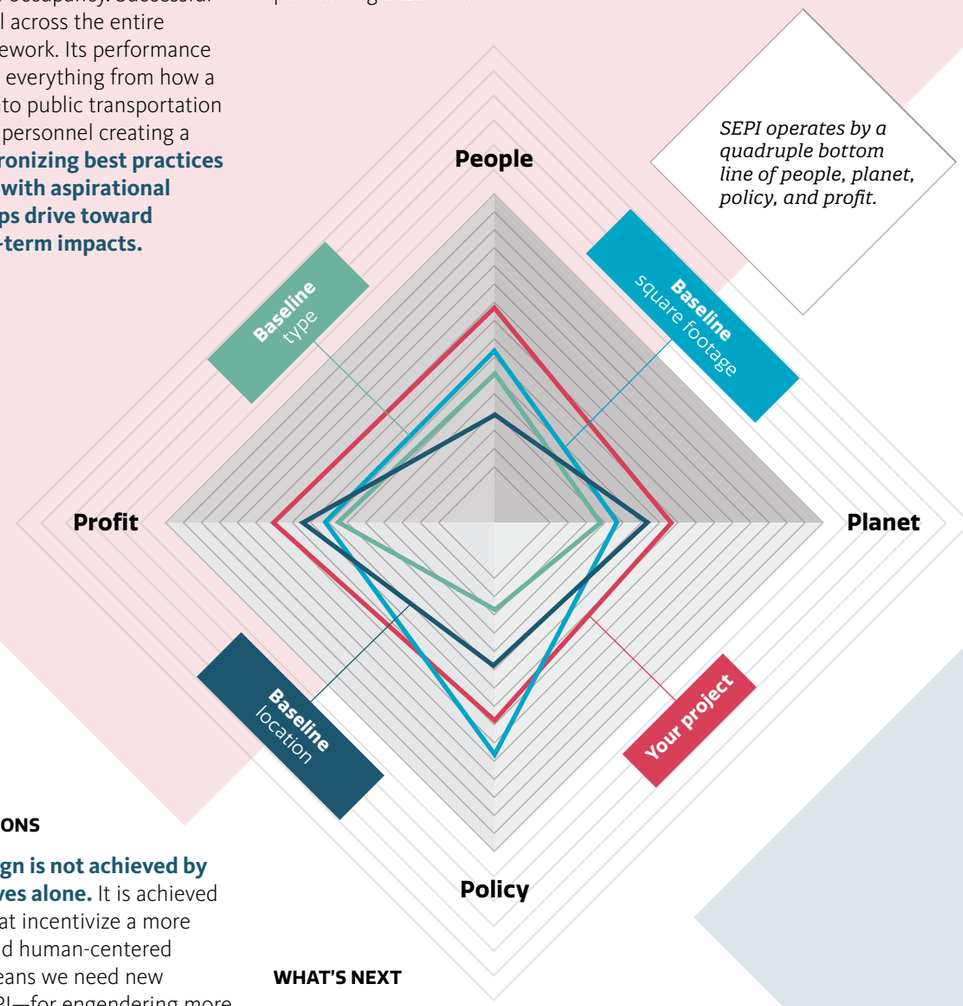
THE CONTEXT

In a future where megacities are widespread, sustainable and human-focused development should be the centerpiece of a responsible growth strategy. By 2030, there are expected to be over 40 megacities; i.e., metropolitan areas with more than 10 million inhabitants. According to the World Migration Report, the number of people living in cities will almost double by 2050, reaching 6.4 billion people. Yet many new city dwellers will find themselves in environments that are starkly unequal, as evidenced by the global epidemic of socio-economic and spatial inequality. Given these developments, we began to explore methodologies for measuring a project's socio-economic and ecological performance, and incentivizing projects to better engage with their local communities.

THE RESULTS

SEPI is designed as an anticipatory toolkit that can help any locale grow responsibly, sustainably, and justly. To gauge the impact of every new project, SEPI employs a survey tool based on 25 key performance indicators for pre-occupancy and 25 key performance indicators for post-occupancy. Successful projects score well across the entire multifaceted framework. Its performance indicators address everything from how a project will play into public transportation to the diversity of personnel creating a project. **By synchronizing best practices at the local level with aspirational targets, SEPI helps drive toward meaningful long-term impacts.**

For example, SEPI asks whether the project has a life-cycle plan to reuse, recycle, or upcycle all building equipment materials. In considering this question at a project's inception, designers will be better able to forecast costs and tap the necessary partner organizations.



DESIGN IMPLICATIONS

Responsible design is not achieved by financial incentives alone. It is achieved through efforts that incentivize a more comprehensive and human-centered approach. That means we need new tools—such as SEPI—for engendering more responsible outcomes and new guidance for how we measure those outcomes. Yet such tools cannot stand alone if we are to spur truly holistic development.

Ultimately, we envision SEPI as part of a collaborative, multipronged approach. Such an approach will involve multiple stakeholders working together and merging data streams, intellectual property, and any tools necessary for a unified system. Thus, SEPI will play a key role in helping architects, owners, developers, and others synchronize their efforts according to the quadruple bottom line of social, economic, ecological, and performance considerations.

WHAT'S NEXT

Looking to the future, we see our tool as a launch point of advocacy in pushing policy and financial incentives toward more responsible design practices, and therefore, more holistic community growth. To realize that vision, we will use SEPI to rapidly collect robust and meaningful data across a broad project portfolio. Our objective is to build a database of project information that will allow us to provide benchmarks and actionable recommendations. We believe that such data mining and benchmarking will definitively show that when projects achieve goals tied to socio-economic and ecological issues, they also open up new avenues for financial gains.

THE GENSLER RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Gensler Research Institute is a collaborative network of researchers focused on a common goal: to generate new knowledge and develop a deeper understanding of the connection between design, business, and the human experience. Through a combination of global and local research grants, and external partnerships, we seek insights focused on solving the world's most pressing challenges. We are committed to unlocking new solutions and strategies that will define the future of design.

RESEARCH TEAM

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