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## **Back to the City: A Route to Urban Sustainability**

### **Introduction**

The character of the city has been changing for as long as people have been urban dwellers. Its diverse functions have included marketplace, theatrical stage, place of execution and the city has been the setting for revolutions, uprisings, coronations, massacres, celebrations . . . the list is long. Whether or not one has an over-romantic notion of the city, unquestionably the city has long been the backdrop for much human activity. In the past few decades, the environmental and social consequences of the concentrated patterns of human activity in the urban environment have been highlighted and debated, with the suggestion that present living arrangements in Western cities are unsustainable. This chapter offers some insight into the ways that the city and its form have changed over the years. It also outlines how the power over, and responsibility for, the changes in the city has shifted as the functions of the city also shift. The city should not be dismissed in the search for another more sustainable, alternative form. On the contrary, the characteristics of the city should be recognized, capitalized and built upon. Cities convey something special about civilization itself that should not be spread too thinly and reduced to banal, lifeless, endless sprawl. This chapter suggests that it is important to recognize and support the character, content and distinctiveness