

FOR THE WORLDS WE DREAM OF BUILDING

On reimagining progress & the aesthetics of gentrification

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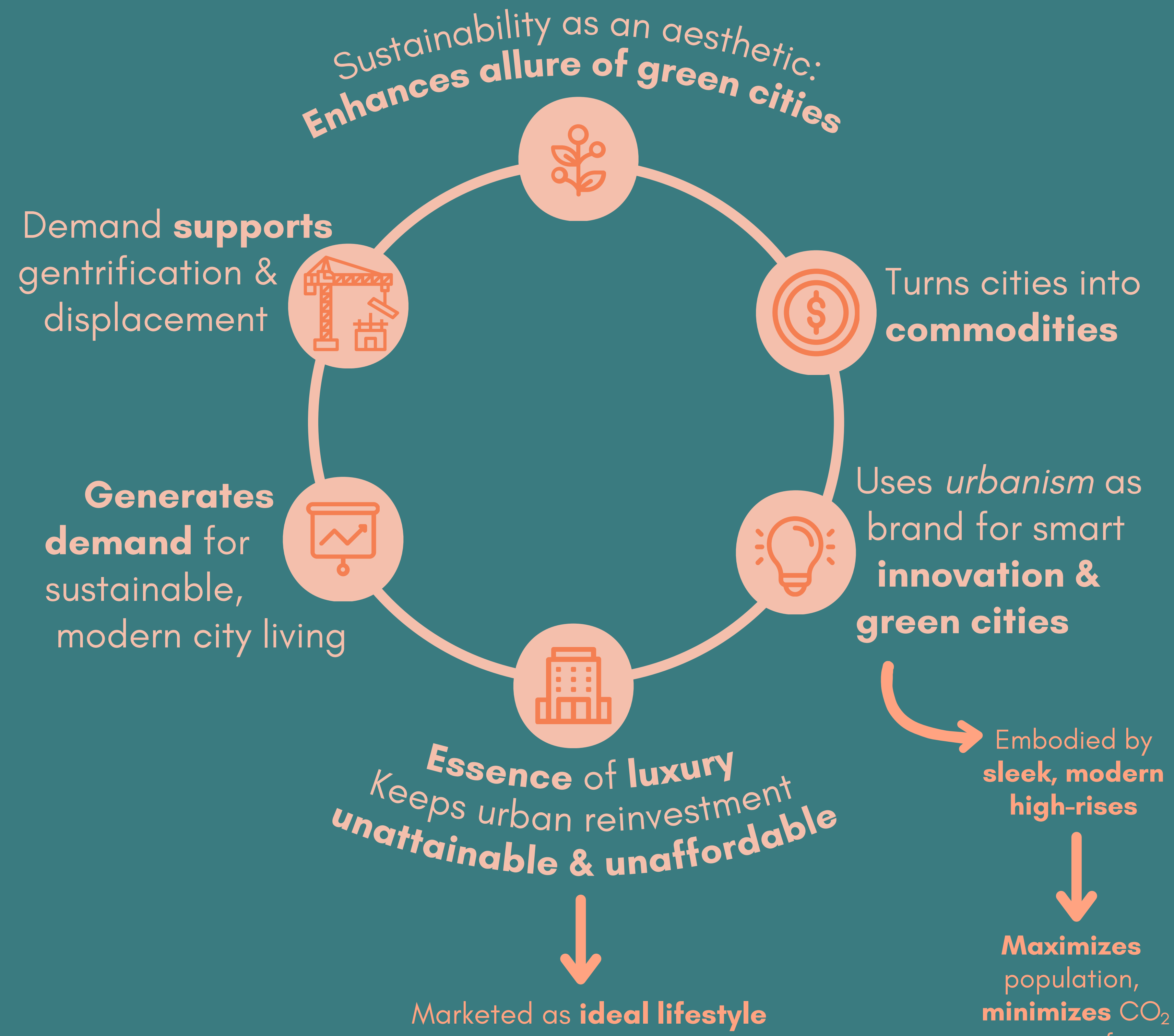
BACKGROUND

As the imminent threat of climate change intensifies, the precedence of sustainable urban planning rises to the challenge—literally, through towers boasting of ‘affordable’ luxury. Cities—as places so intimately shaped by people—are meant to reflect dreams, aspirations, and ambitious imaginations (Calvino, 1974 & Copeland, 2000), raising the question of: **Who is the city built for?** This study is informed by **observations on the aesthetics of urban environments, and conversations about the future**—in individuals’ lives, and in a collective sense.

METHODS

1. Conducted **field observations** in Surrey Central and False Creek as of 2023 to gather **visual data on the aesthetics of urban cities.**
2. Collected data from **interviews** with from 6 young adults in their early- to mid-twenties living in different parts of Surrey to **understand perceptions of progress.**
 - o Age range helped to capture different stages in early/emerging stages of adulthood (i.e. pursuing post-secondary education, graduating, moving out for the first time, starting careers, etc).

THE AESTHETICS OF GENTRIFICATION & PROGRESS: MODERNITY & SUSTAINABILITY



GENTRIFICATION IS USED TO JUSTIFY THE REINVENTION OF “UP AND COMING” SUSTAINABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS LIKE SURREY CENTRAL

FINDINGS

- Surrey Central high-rises **emphasize innovation and novelty**, evolving from previous trends in False Creek and aligning with existing studies in urban renewal aesthetics (Zuberi & Taylor, 2013, Baginski & Malcolm, 2019, Linder & Sandoval, 2021, and Leszczynski & Kong, 2022)
- Gentrification aesthetics **promote luxury and climate-conscious living**
 - o Becomes part of reinventing ‘ghetto’ neighbourhoods like Surrey Central
- Participants preferred the suburban lifestyle ingrained in their upbringing over the urban experience and new high-rises.
 - o Discussed **reconciling with inequality** and disappointment of not achieving the anticipated level of prosperity, **learning to seek out fulfillment beyond monetary success.**

DISCUSSION

Taste is inherently political, as the pursuit of luxury **enables** the displacement of low-income, unhoused populations, **exploiting and commodifying** dreams of the future in the process. This study points to the **cyclical relationship between gentrification and notions of progress**, hopes to serve as a reminder that dreams can protest against existing capitalist constraints when they strive for greater than profit and consumption.

REFERENCES

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