



# The City is the Site for Activism

**'Town plans are thus no mere diagrams, they are a system of hieroglyphics in which man has written the history of civilization, and the more tangled their apparent confusion, the more we may be rewarded in deciphering it.'**

*Cities in Evolution, p. 170*

**For Geddes, knowledge is spatial and the city is a knowledge environment. Geddes was an activist, not a scholar. With his wife, he financed the renovation of tenement slums in Edinburgh, he participated in founding the town planning association, and he founded civic education centres. The purpose of the City Survey and the Civic Exhibition was to produce a proactive electorate. The purpose of the Cities Exhibition was to produce informed city plans. The central problem for activism is not knowledge *per se*, but how knowledge can be put to work. For Geddes, this was a problem of organisation. If the Survey was about the acquisition of knowledge, the Exhibition and Outlook Tower were about how to organise it spatially so it can be made instrumental. The key was to integrate the specialist disciplines that go into planning cities, what Geddes called the *synoptic view*.**