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PARKING GARAGES TRANSFORMED INTO COMMUNITY GARDENS

 ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

Bates Smart has plans to turn some of Melbourne's 1200 acres of parking spaces into much-needed community space

Spotted: With 41,000 parking spaces in the central business district of Melbourne, parking garages that sit empty most of the time are the third largest use of land in the city and take up nearly 1200 acres of space. On the other hand, the amount of community space ranks last. Architecture firm Bates Smart has come up with a potential solution to put some of that parking space into better use and turn it into much-needed community space, such as playgrounds, community gardens, and rooftop parks.

Known as a transfer of development rights, Bates Smart's proposal would create a transfer scheme, allowing developers to buy up parking garages for conversion, and transfer the additional development rights to their projects in other parts of the city.

According to Bates Smart, there are at least 20 standalone parking garages in central Melbourne that will be good candidates for reuse. The company has developed a few concepts for the garages, which involve minor structural revision, to turn into a new kind of "vertical urban space". The first candidate is located near Melbourne's main sports stadium and could be converted into a series of playgrounds and gyms, with basketball courts and other recreational spaces. A second one is located in the city's Chinatown, which can be converted into a market space on the ground floor, with a rooftop eatery that features an open-air cinema.

Bates Smart has been developing this idea in consultation with the city's design office. Currently, it is in a conceptual stage and would require formal action by the city government to be put in place.

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Takeaway:

For many cities such as Melbourne, there is a lack of space for people to relax and enjoy their surroundings. The Bates Smart idea to convert parking garages into community areas is an innovative way to inject new life into the city and make better use of underutilised space. Furthermore, this conversion could have environmental benefits, as it might ultimately discourage people from driving into the city.