

*“Concepts such as harmony, beauty, variety, and order have been thought of as attributes of the [physical environment] itself. Designers have unconsciously relied on their own implicit values and perceptions, projecting them on the physical world as if they were inherent qualities. Not so—one begins with the images and priorities of the users of a place and must look at place and person together.”*

KEVIN LYNCH  
A THEORY OF GOOD CITY FORM

# THE CHALLENGE OF OUR CITIES

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THE MOST PROFOUND CHALLENGES FACING CITIES TODAY ALSO OFFER AN EXTRAORDINARY opportunity: how will we confront, understand and overcome the enormous economic, social and physical disparities that now divide our communities? As planners, designers, developers and managers, how can we overcome:

- Neighborhoods with vastly different qualities of life;
- Fundamentally unequal access to education and jobs;
- Virtually impassable physical barriers that cut through many disadvantaged urban neighborhoods; and
- Environmental disasters like toxic waste sites, a lack of parks and open space, and rivers that no longer resemble anything ever seen in nature?

As long as these disparities exist, they will restrict and confine groups of people, limiting their ability to make choices about how and where they live, perpetuating inequity and cutting the social connections that define vibrant and thriving cities. That is the fundamental unfinished agenda for our cities: balancing the physical improvements of urban revitalization with the goals of social equity, economic development and environmental protection for all city inhabitants.

There have been many attempts to understand what makes a good city, good form and good design. It's more than simply stating that a new building or development is "postmodern with urban edginess"—that's just architectural rhetoric. While there are some general concepts that people agree on, it has proven difficult to define the exact typology. We need a way of objectifying criteria of success, some common points of reference so independent

observers and evaluators can arrive at conclusions about what needs to happen as we plan and design cities.

Let's take a brief step back: how did we get to this point?

Since the beginning of U.S. cities, we have been challenged to accommodate and serve the multitudes of people living and working in them. Our first zoning laws, in the early 1900s, were actually developed for public health needs: to separate commercial, industrial and residential areas, with the hope of controlling the miasma of epidemics that ran rampant.

After World War II, the U.S. government offered the GI Bill and low-interest loans that allowed so many people to buy their own homes. That became the American dream: the house with the white picket fence on a tree-lined curb and gutter street. It was all very organized and planned. The suburbs had arrived. William Whyte, the great urban sociolo-

gist, wrote in *The Organization Man* how men in the 1950s were trained to buy into the social ethic that the organization is superior to the individual. The suburbs were the extension of the organization.

The new Interstate Highway system—a huge national defense project to improve mobility—also allowed cars and trucks to easily crisscross the country. And it did so in a rather unrelenting fashion. Freeways often cut through cities, creating isolated communities and pockets of unused land that later became blighted areas.

Downtowns, meanwhile, were "messy" places: high-density and lower-income, with kids playing on the streets, people living above shops, street vendors, and neighbors running back and forth. It was crowded, and for some—against the backdrop of the new suburban sensibilities—downtowns were considered unhealthy, or even irrelevant to the new way of living. We thought: the

suburbs are successful; if we make the downtowns like the suburbs, downtowns will be successful.

The concept was that *physical* planning could solve social problems. Planners embraced the idea that the new architecture itself would save the city, and they called it Urban Renewal. Many neighborhoods were razed to make way for planned public housing. But often the physical planning did not take into account how people actually use space as they live and work. Planners missed the vital community connections that “messiness” provided. In fact, the underlying design standard was based on the auto and the turning radius for fire trucks. Urban Renewal was not a success. Focusing solely on physical planning—on buildings and the spaces that connect them—did not work.

In reaction, the pendulum swung heavily toward a focus on social planning: on jobs, health care and social services—all

essential for people’s quality of life in the city. But classical city and building design were almost entirely de-emphasized. Cities were left with suburban style buildings and suburban land use patterns placed into an urban context, continued auto-dominance, and an aging physical infrastructure, leading to continued flight to the suburbs by those who could afford it.

But against the trend toward suburbia, there were other lines of thinking that continued to focus on creating urban vitality. Lewis Mumford examined the driving force behind cities, citing four human needs: protection, culture, commerce and ceremony, the need for finding meaning and value. Jane Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, detailing how urban renewal had created isolated, unnatural urban spaces that stripped the life out of cities. She advocated physical planning for dense, mixed-use neighborhoods. In his seminal book, *A Theory of Good City*

*Form*, Kevin Lynch, one of our most prominent urban theorists, put forth a series of concepts for measuring the quality of the urban environment, called “dimensions of performance.” Many planners also looked back to the great cities of Europe, that had never planned to accommodate cars, and retained vibrant and thriving downtowns.

When New Urbanism burst on the scene in the late 1980’s, it was a breakthrough in re-integrating the social and physical aspects of planning, and allowing communities to participate in planning their own futures. New Urbanism emphasized people rather than cars, with a human scale “grid” that reduced the amount of space given to cars and increased opportunities for walking and gathering. It reintroduced the concept of the mixed-use, higher-density “urban village” and neighborhoods that activate the public realm. New Urbanist principles aimed for restoring urban centers, creating real neighborhoods, conserving

the environment and preserving the built legacy.

But what about the new environments built under the rubric of New Urbanism? Do they take the principles far enough—are they truly meeting the needs of all residents?

Physically, there are well-designed projects in many cities: vibrant streetscapes, interesting architecture, housing on top of retail, people walking and sitting in cafes. But a closer look reveals that many of these isolated projects often don't connect to anything. They are usually designed, still, with cars in mind—surrounded by acres of parking with no transit connections. The housing is expensive, the shops even more expensive. The people who live there don't work there. The people who work there can't afford to live there. And the shoppers just come and go. Where are the urban parks, the true gathering places, the grocery stores, the shoe repair—where are the functional services for

real people? Chic boutiques on the corners don't make a social community.

And as people are attracted back to areas with new housing options, more interesting architecture and more vitality, what's becoming of the people who already live there?

The pendulum seems to be swinging once again to an over-reliance on a physical design approach—a set of formulaic design responses, which, when examined closely, do not address the needs of all people.

We need the pendulum to stop its swing right in the middle, if we're to achieve this. So how do we proceed?

The solution is inclusive planning based on economic, social, environmental and culturally sensitive policies that allow everyone to improve economically as the physical area improves. Cities need planning that recognizes that every individual has the right to full and equal participation in the built

environment—and that through their direct involvement they can shape their own environment to meet their own needs.

#### HEALTHY HUMAN HABITATS

Let us examine for a moment a simple ecological principle: every living thing on earth is part of an ecosystem. All successful habitats are uniquely adapted to the species that inhabit them. Our task is to design healthy human habitats. The habitat has to meet the human needs for:

- Physical comfort and safety;
- Community, connections and identity;
- Stimulation and discovery;
- Fun and joy; and
- Meaning.

How do we design the physical environment to provide for those human needs? Again, we can examine basic ecological requirements:

- *Sustenance*: We need resources to sustain us, such as food, shelter, water and sunlight.
- *Diversity*: We need a range of variation in the habitat that allows adaptive potential.
- *Adaptability*: We need the ability to adapt to variations in environmental conditions.
- *Complexity*: We need a richness of stimulation in the environment to promote healthy development.
- *Range*: We need to be able to move through the habitat to acquire resources.
- *Connectivity*: We need safe pathways for mobility to find needed resources throughout the entire urban region.

#### PROJECT DESIGN CRITERIA

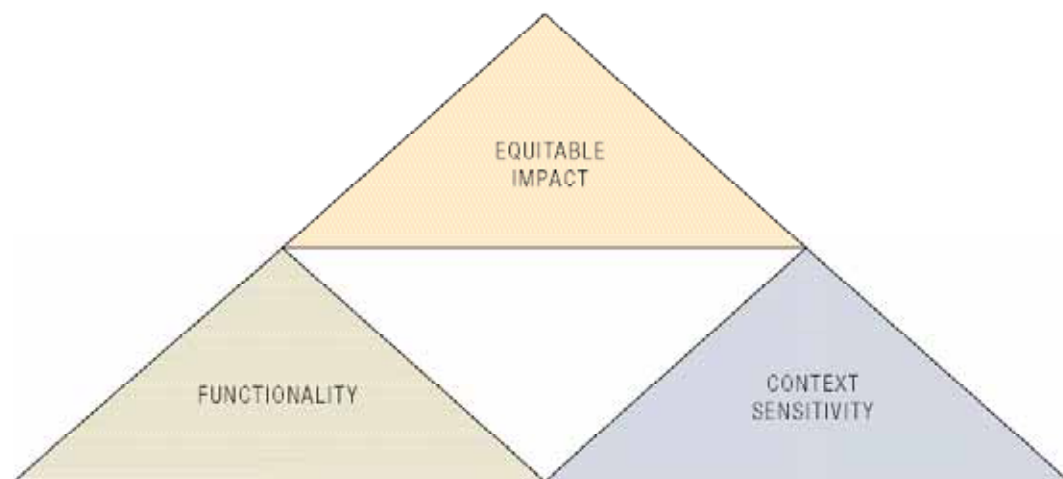
We can translate those ecological principles for a healthy human habitat into inclusive design criteria for the built environment.

Successful inclusive design projects support our unique physical, social, cultural and economic needs with clear philosophies, strategies and tactics. From the outset, these projects aim for inclusiveness in all phases. They push the boundaries of creativity and innovation, energizing and regenerating a community. They result in functional, high-quality and aesthetically pleasing environments that manage impacts and add value to cities, providing residents

with opportunities and choices to thrive and reach their full potential.

We propose three criteria that can help us systematically analyze how well environments incorporate ecological principles, and how people are affected by and can shape development projects.

1. *Functionality*. Designs are functionally based, incorporating the physical inclusiveness of universal design, which supports the unique



Inclusive design projects must meet three criteria: fulfill functional needs, emerge from the context of the community, and mitigate their own impacts.

physical needs of all types of people, and makes places and programs accessible to the widest possible audience. Universal design assumes that humans have a diverse range of abilities, that this range is ordinary, not unique, and that the range is dynamic—it will change during our lifespan. Friendly, accessible and easy-to-use environments benefit everyone: a mother holding a baby, a very short or tall person, a senior with low stamina or a visual impairment, or a child with a broken leg.

Successful projects support the functional needs of their users such as health, safety and sustenance. There must be good transportation and communication, access to goods and services, and everything must be available to all inhabitants regardless of age, income, power or rank.

It is sized and positioned correctly, or, as Lynch says, the “form and capacity of spaces, channels and equipment in a

settlement match the pattern and quantity of actions that people customarily engage in.” There must be a match between the environment and cultural constructs such as values and vision. And finally, communities must be able to influence and manage the space and activities themselves.

2. *Context Sensitivity.* Inclusive design translates the vision of an inclusive city into the physical; it enables people across the entire economic and social spectrum to participate in and receive value from the project.

The first step is helping the client and the community understand and take an active role in early strategy and project planning. The critical thinking about the real source of a problem and potential solutions is participatory, involving the entire community in hands-on planning and leveraging resources. The projects are always context-driven, emerging from the needs, assets and culture of the communities and the

environment in which they exist. With extensive participation, communities then feel strong ownership and commitment to the project.

Successful designs are aesthetically pleasing and in harmony with the surrounding community fabric; people want to live and work there. They provide a sense of place that people identify with and an environmental consciousness that respects our stewardship of the earth.

People can grasp and understand the design; it’s navigable. In the organizational sense, the project leaves the community with the capacity to accomplish more than before the project was started—the process of doing the project provides people with the tools they need to manage or control their environment.

3. *Equitable Impacts.* Every project has consequences, both intended and unintended. Successful projects mitigate the social and human

impacts, especially on the most vulnerable members of society.

A successful project manages its own impact by ensuring that the design addresses the entire environment, including the externalities beyond the project area. It ensures that there are minimal or no negative impacts and, often, that the impact actually becomes a net positive. For example, transportation infrastructure projects that increase the flow of people, goods and services, are notorious for leaving residue such as a patchwork of left-over land areas, cut-up streets that disrupt social patterns and cultural resources, and increased noise and pollution. And those impacts are far more prevalent in low-income areas.

#### INCLUSIVE PROJECTS

While it is difficult to find all elements of an inclusive city all in one place, we can find many successful projects in many cities. Here is just a sampling.

- A transit village in Oakland, California, is stimulating economic development and environmental improvement in an inner-city, moderate- to low-income Hispanic community. The Fruitvale Transit Village above a multi-modal transit station is the result of the neighborhood coming together and insisting that a new development include affordable and senior housing, offices, neighborhood-serving retail, a child-care facility—right there, for parents commuting to jobs—a library, senior center, health clinic, multi-lingual human services offices, and a public plaza. Fannie Mae calls it one of the ten “Just Right” affordable housing markets in the country.



The Fruitvale Transit Village in Oakland, California, provides functional human services while stimulating economic revitalization in an inner-city community.



Pioneer Courthouse Square in Portland, Oregon, is an active community gathering space in a fareless transit zone.

- Portland, Oregon, has one of the best public spaces in the country. Pioneer Courthouse Square was the community response to a planned ten-story

parking lot in the middle of town. There's a transit mall right next to it, featuring a fareless zone—several square miles with *free* bus, street car

and light rail service. If you want to commute to work by driving, you'll pay steep parking fees.

- In Seattle, Washington, downtown property owners have partnered with low-income housing providers. The City changed the development code to increase the housing height limit. Builders buy the extra height and that money goes toward affordable housing. And Seattle's Housing Resources Group, formed by the Downtown Seattle Association, helps property owners or businesses build housing for people who work in their businesses. This partnership has created thousands of units of affordable housing for people of all ages.
- Vancouver, British Columbia, offers a model of true high-density urban living with activity 24 hours a day. The City created pedestrian-scaled streets with three-story town homes closest to the street. Behind them are fifteen 30-story high-rise condos.

That design allows light and views with transitions to older, single-family residences and commercial office towers. And everything is within walking distance.

- In Southern California, Interstate 710 carries trucks out from the huge ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Trucks are jammed up, belching out pollution, a serious health problem. Even worse, trucks go on local streets to connect with Interstate 5 because there's no other connector. Community members came up with a solution: let's not build a connector because it would take homes and a much-needed park. Instead, let's widen the freeway with truck-only lanes and create a new truck-only off ramp that routes them onto a commercial street to the freight yard.
- The University of California in San Francisco offers economic mitigations for its huge new campus in a long-time economically disadvantaged area



Vancouver, British Columbia, offers tree-lined residential streets within walking distance of the commercial center.

just south of the City. It reserved eight acres for usable public open space, with recreational facilities

open to the public. It created high school and college programs for local residents to train for well-paid staff

positions. It helps local businesses become vendors. It's planning affordable housing for staff, adjacent to the campus. And, noting that over \$35 million in tax refunds go unclaimed in the Bay Area, it now offers a free tax service to low-income community members.

- In Washington, D.C.—where disenfranchised areas like the low-income Anacostia Waterfront have borne the brunt of political wrangling for years—an innovative new comprehensive plan is adding jobs, education, arts and culture elements. Based on its “Vision for Growing an Inclusive City,” the plan is being built on a monumental community outreach program, benefiting from the ideas of thousands of community members.

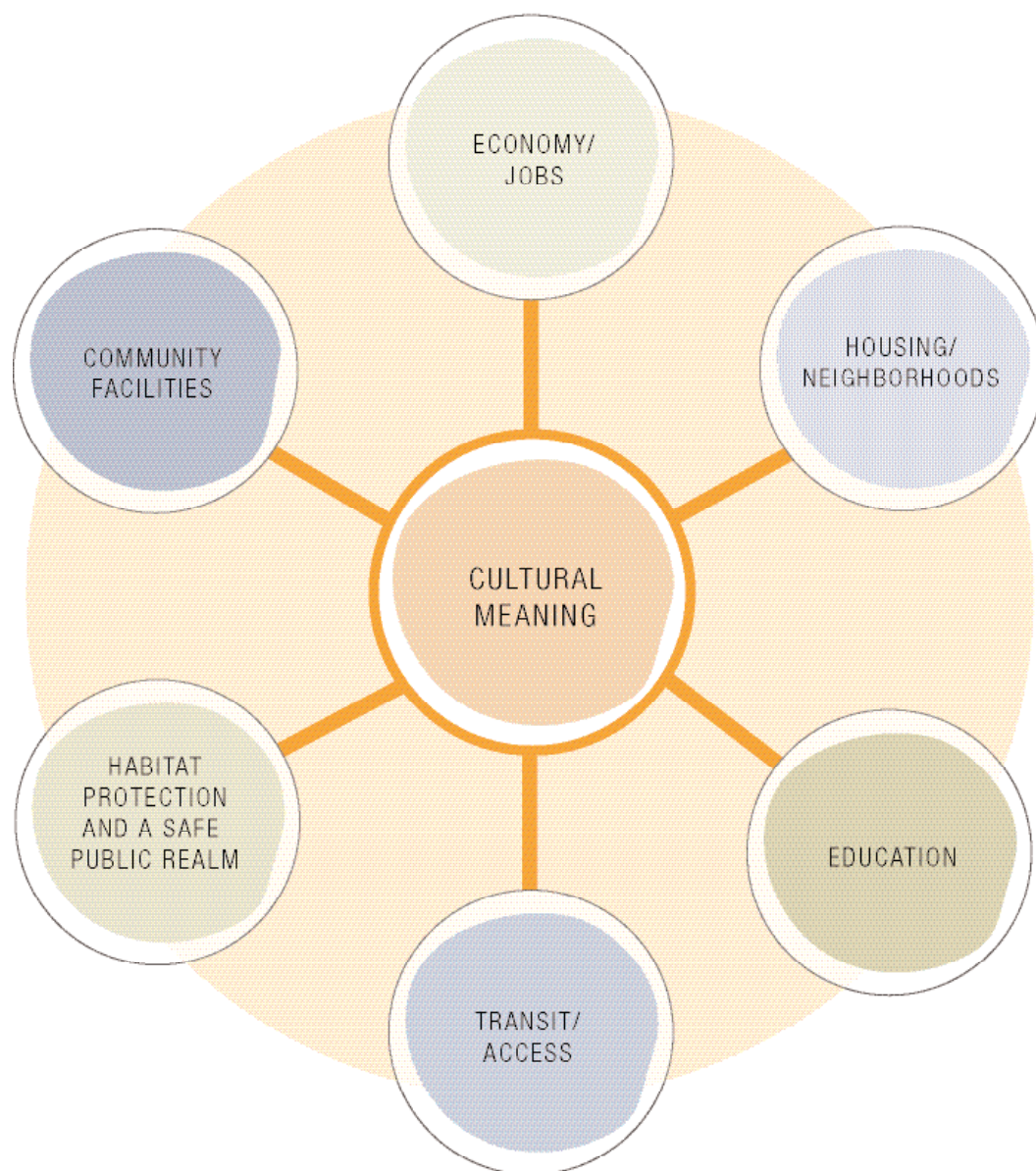
#### INCLUSIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

These successful projects offer choices and opportunities to all city inhabitants. To set the stage for formulating projects that embody inclusive design, we need a broad, inclusive policy framework that guides urban area decision-making. We need to be sure that cities provide:

- ***Economic Development***—*Opportunities for everyone to participate fully in the economy of the city, with access to a variety of quality jobs.* Land use decisions must encourage locally owned, neighborhood-serving businesses and focus on catalyst projects that generate investment and stimulate further development. Cities must insist that new developments hire locally first, develop local vendors and develop courses at colleges or high schools to train community members. New or expanding companies must provide a net gain to the community, both in

terms of numbers of jobs and quality of jobs (wages, choices, opportunities for advancement and ability to spend earnings in the community). Cities can explore the use of zoning overlays, square footage caps, business improvement districts, parking assessments, and other creative, stimulating policies.

- ***Housing and Neighborhoods***—*Safe neighborhoods with a range of housing types and price levels to accommodate diverse socio-economic backgrounds and lifestyle choices.* Cities can modernize housing and building codes to focus more on health, safety and community quality of life. They can also adopt in lieu fees, tax credits, Individual Development Accounts, developer incentives, zoning changes and public infrastructure development to stimulate private investment—ensuring a mix of affordable and market rate housing in scale with the surrounding neighborhoods.



Urban decision-making should be guided by a broad, progressive policy framework.

- **Education**—*Full access to quality education choices.* The physical condition of a school does have an impact on a child’s ability to learn—and defines the social and economic characteristics of a neighborhood. Developers can contribute to renovation, although not in return for usable open space. Cities need to build schools near where children live, explore shared use between schools, parks and community facilities, maintain those facilities, and put their full weight behind any bonds or taxes needed to properly fund them.
- **Access and Mobility**—*Viable, multi-modal and interconnected public transit systems.* Cities can create incentives to promote transit and disincentives to discourage single occupancy car commuting. They can promote transportation demand management measures and funding policies that favor transit.
- **Habitat Protection and a Safe Public Realm**—*Connected, safe, functional and green connections.* Cities can

reintroduce the human scale to create pedestrian-friendly and bike-friendly streets that reactivate the public realm. They can reintegrate land uses, rather than maintaining separation.

- **Community Facilities and Gathering Spaces**—*Well-maintained and usable open space.* Gathering spaces are virtually the only urban places where people of all socio-economic levels have equal access. Parks and open space are key tools for improved air and water quality and preserving rivers, wetlands and urban forests. In return for development rights, cities can ask for park impact fees, open space, pocket parks and plazas, green roofs, and private green space (property frontages). Cities should consider changing operating procedures to allow capital improvement dollars to be used for landscaping and maintenance and promote expanded roles for private citizens and community groups in maintenance.

- **Cultural Meaning**—*Spaces and places to create and display social and cultural rituals and symbols that have meaning for all residents.* Public events, such as street fairs and parades, contribute to vibrant neighborhood life. Cities can incorporate one-percent set-asides for arts, provide space for grassroots and community organizations in non-traditional settings and create arts districts—including culinary arts.

These progressive policies require us to go beyond the traditional land use emphasis of city planning, to integrate all the elements of inclusive design. Planners must balance community good with the “right to develop.” In return for that right, cities must require that developers deliver certain benefits, in certain ways, in a certain amount of time. Each project must be critically examined:

- Is this contributing to a real neighborhood?

- Has the community been involved; does the project actually fulfill the community’s vision?
- Does it respect social and cultural preferences?
- Does it enhance community connections?
- Is it environmentally sustainable?
- Will it allow all residents to improve economically?
- Does it mitigate its own impacts?
- Is it truly inclusive?

#### INCLUSIVE DESIGN: PROJECTS AND GUIDELINES

This book provides a practical look at a range of successful inclusive design projects with positive social impacts in urban environments.

This eclectic mix has one important result in common: doing the project has added value to the world beyond the project itself. For example, building a new bridge with community

involvement led to new ways of aligning off ramps that recreated long-lasting community connections—in addition to a stunning new bridge. Taking a fresh look at children’s zoos resulted in a nationwide movement toward involving the entire family in experiential learning. And designing the Ed Roberts Campus led to new ways that the philosophy of the Independent Living Movement for people with disabilities will inform design and architecture in the future.

All the projects demonstrate the belief that every individual has the right to full and equal participation in the built environment.

The book also offers a set of inclusive design guidelines that build on lessons learned from the projects. Reading through those guidelines will help provide an intuitive sense of how to achieve inclusive design in other, similar settings.

Since every well-designed project grows out of its own context, it’s impossible to find models that transfer exactly to other projects. But it is our hope that the reader will find some of this information useful enough to take to the next project, so that, someday, all built environments and all cities are fully

inclusive, welcoming and engaging. The basic fact that we are all connected compels us to do so.

*As we continue to search for innovative solutions to creating inclusive environments, we welcome feedback from planners, architects, landscape architects, policy makers and, most of all, from community members who share our passion for great urban places. We hope to create a clearinghouse to share ideas and successes from which others may benefit. Please contact us: [www.inclusivity.com](http://www.inclusivity.com).*