

## Design for Diversity

Global trends and world events mean that more people are migrating to cities which are becoming more culturally diverse as a result. Most urban planners and city leaders agree that diversity and inclusion are key to creating healthy communities, but this rarely translates to the day-to-day living experience. How do we Design for Diversity?

OpenCity spent the last seven years learning about what motivates diverse people to spend time in a place and connect with others. In sharing our research findings in this emerging field, we aim to inspire others to design more inclusive places for culturally diverse communities. For us Design for Diversity is a new way of viewing, planning and designing public space. The result being that people of diverse backgrounds can feel at home in a place when it's designed with inclusion and diversity as guiding principles.

### The Inspiration

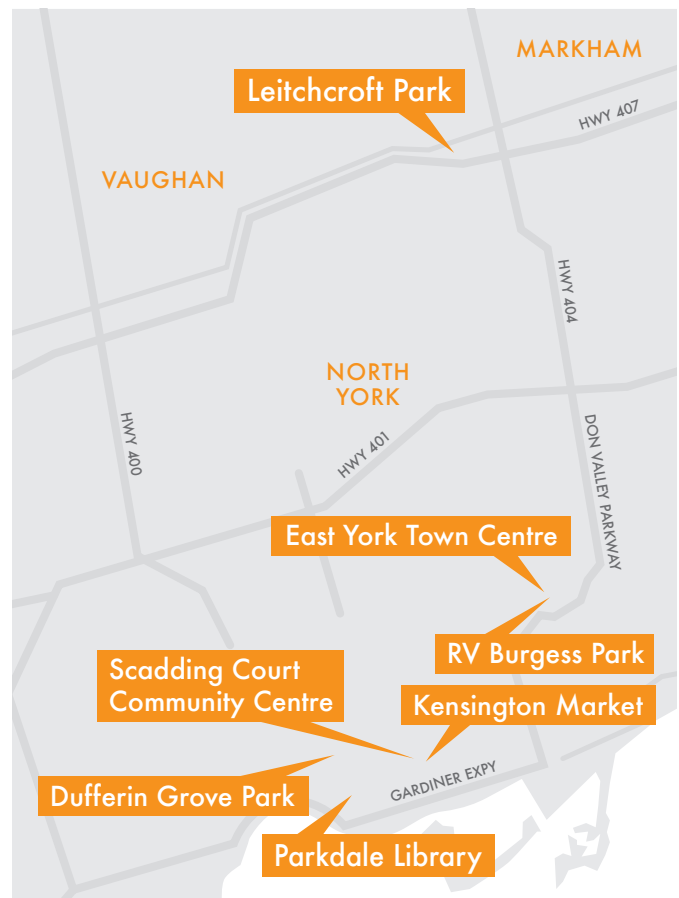
Bordering Toronto's northern boundary, Markham is a major destination for Canadian newcomers. More than 60% of residents are born outside of the country, making it one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. OpenCity Projects was engaged to help design a park that would serve as the core public space for one of Markham's most intensified neighbourhoods. Our challenge was to create an experience that would be welcoming and well-used by residents from many different cultures.

We took a unique approach, conducting comprehensive cultural and historical research, and engaging with people in a city that had favoured largely top-down development plans. Working with residents who would ultimately use the park, we conducted one-on-one interviews to understand their needs, expectations and past memories of parks from their countries of origin. Interviewees joined the Park Steering Committee that participated in a series of workshops to review and validate our cultural research findings.

Our recommendations informed every aspect of the eight-acre park design, from seating to built structures and materials, and helped to create a culturally relevant and inclusive park.

### Cases Studies

In our work on Leitchcroft Park, we searched for other global examples of public spaces, designed specifically for culturally diverse communities, but found very few. Surprised by the lack of examples, we set out to understand the elements in public space that promote cultural integration and how to use them to design more inclusive places.

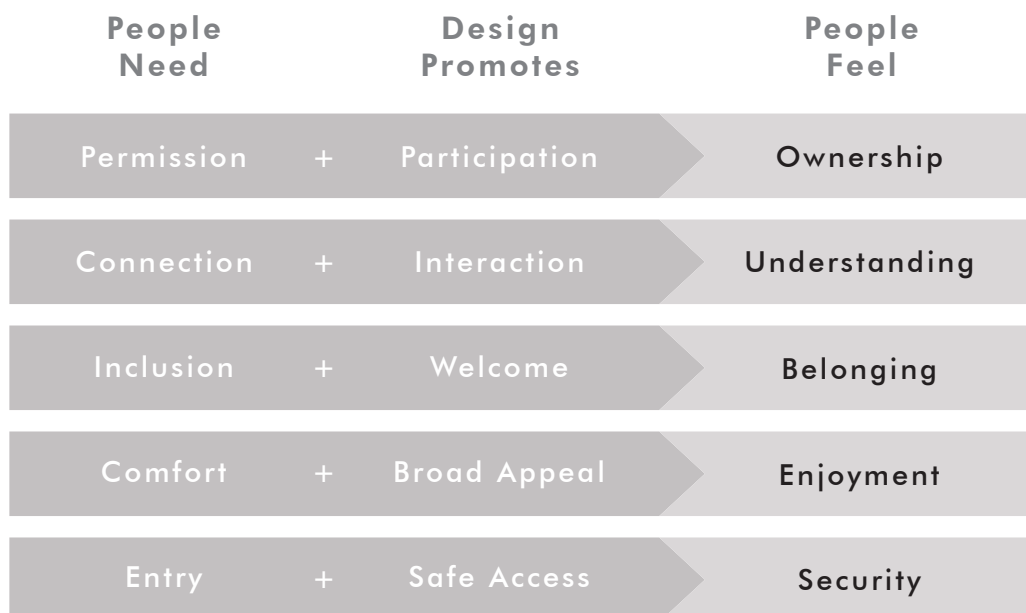


We turned our attention to existing public spaces, that have evolved organically, and found some great examples in Toronto. In this intercultural city, residents generally embrace immigration, live together peacefully and mix comfortably. We think Toronto is a living lab for cultural integration. It's a model for good practice that can help to understand how public space design can foster cross-cultural connection.

We looked across the city for vibrant public spaces where diverse people mix and interact and chose six sites for our review including an animated district, a community centre, a library and a park in the downtown core as well as a park and a mall in the city's Northeast side. They may not be Toronto's most refined or recognized places but we found that they exemplify design that fosters intercultural connection. In an iterative process, we conducted site visits, peer reviews and over 20 interviews with organizers and visitors from a range of ages and cultural backgrounds.

## Our Insights

The following framework captures our research insights, viewing public space design through the lens of cultural diversity. We're developing a toolkit, based on this framework, that will identify specific design elements we found in public spaces that can satisfy the needs of diverse groups of people and help promote interaction between them. Because every space is different, design elements can be selected and combined to align with a community's unique history, evolving demographics and values. Our intent is to inspire tactics for creating more socially integrated places.



## We Are OpenCity

Founded in 2006, OpenCity is a creative lab that explores the design of cities. We've spent the last seven years finding ways to create more vibrant and inclusive public spaces. Our aim is to inspire city-builders and citizens to Design for Diversity.