



Projects

**OpenCity
Projects**

Design for Diversity
Toolkit

Projects

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Diversity Framework	2
Safe Access	4
Broad Appeal	8
Welcome	12
Interaction	16
Participation	20
Places Transformed	24
Takeaways	25
Checklist	26
Resources & References	28
Acknowledgements	29

Introduction

More than half the world's population currently lives in cities and by 2050 that number will reach 70 percent. As a result, cities are becoming more culturally diverse. Urban planners and city leaders agree that diversity and inclusion are key to creating healthy communities but they often have difficulty translating that understanding into action. Budget pressures and entrenched processes can limit the ability to include unique design or programmatic elements. As a result, standardized amenities are often chosen that are easily maintained, and replaceable, but may not be locally relevant.

This results in a missed opportunity to create places that truly reflect and engage with cultural diversity—to foster places that are more welcoming, socially inclusive, and provide space for people to become actively involved in shaping their own community. This requires an intention to do things differently by re-examining engagement and design practices. But the question remains: How do you Design for Diversity?

OpenCity spent the last seven years learning about what motivates people of different cultures to spend time in a place and connect with others. Based on our research and experience as practitioners, this toolkit provides guiding principles and actionable tactics for city builders who want to create more inclusive places for culturally diverse communities.

Inclusive design is generally associated with physical accessibility, but it can't stop there. Design for Diversity is a new way to view and plan public spaces in which access is just a single factor in creating inclusive experiences. Our aim is for people of different cultural backgrounds to feel at home in places that are designed to adapt and fit their diverse needs and welcome a range of people to interact and create connections with each other.

designfordiversity.com

Diversity Framework

This framework is a set of guiding principles for designers who want to create more inclusive public spaces—both indoor and outdoor—that respond to the needs of culturally diverse communities.

At its most basic, a public space must feel safe, accessible, and welcoming in order for anyone to want to spend time there. This is why Safe Access and Broad Appeal form the foundation of this framework. Establishing this basic level can lead to a sense of belonging, which acts as a tipping point. We found that once culturally diverse groups feel a sense of belonging, they are more open to connecting with others and participating in using and shaping the space as a community.

Successful spaces may not be the ones with the most refined, polished design, but ones whose design creates a flexible environment that invites participation. This can be the difference between a public space that exists to be admired as a design object, and one that exists to be used by people.

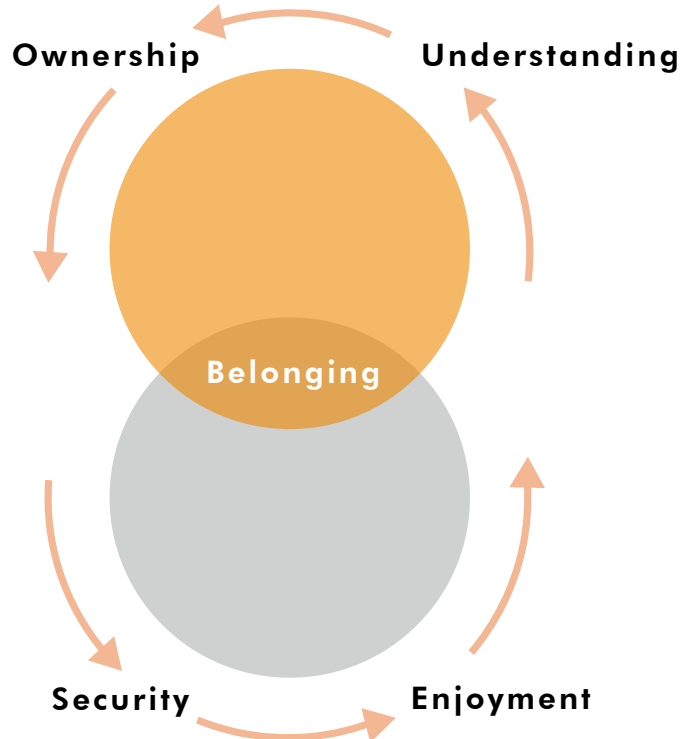
The framework builds on existing principles for people-centred public space design such as Jane Jacobs’ “eyes on the street” concept and Jan Gehl’s call for human-scale urban design. However, in this toolkit we view public space through an intercultural lens to identify ways to design public spaces specifically to invite culturally diverse audiences.

Diversity Framework

For each guiding principle, we outline both physical and programmatic design elements in public spaces that bring people together. These are interrelated. Successful design supports and promotes programming such as markets or community events. Observing activities, or asking people what they want to see happen, helps to reveal design elements that are needed such as seating areas. We also describe case studies to illustrate how these design elements have been used to achieve positive outcomes in both a local, Toronto context, and across the world.

The dimensions of this framework overlap and reinforce each other. For example, a public space with a variety of uses will inspire more opportunities for people to participate who in turn will shape the place and change how it is used to better suit their needs.

The framework should not be read as a strict menu to follow, but as a way to challenge current engagement and design practices and suggest meaningful ways to move towards a more inclusive process. Not all the elements outlined in our guidelines apply to every public space or guarantee cultural harmony. But when combined to align with a community’s unique history, evolving demographics and values, they can inspire tactics for creating more socially integrated places that work for everyone.



	People Need	Design Promotes	People Feel
5	Permission + Participation	Ownership	
4	Connection + Interaction	Understanding	
3	Inclusion + Welcome	Belonging	
2	Comfort + Broad Appeal	Enjoyment	
1	Entry + Safe Access	Security	

Safe Access

We know that well-designed public spaces are physically accessible and make people feel safe while spending time in them. This guiding principle is foundational to the design of every public space.

Design elements that promote easy entry and safety:

- Location is convenient to reach by different forms of transportation
- Multiple points of entry reassure visitors that they can come and go with ease
- Clear sightlines, and a well-lit environment, enable people to see what's happening in the space
- Storefronts, housing, and other active uses facing the space create visibility, or "eyes on the street," so that people can be seen and heard
- Free activities or affordable retail allow people of different income levels to use the space

01 Best Practice RV Burgess Park, Toronto

RV Burgess Park is situated in one of the most densely populated multicultural neighbourhoods in Toronto. The majority of residents are recent newcomers that have arrived in the city within the last seven years. Nearly 80% of residents are of South Asian descent but there is also a significant Filipino, Chinese, Greek and Romanian community.

Numerous entry points connect the park to the surrounding residences, schools and community centres. The asphalt pathways were laid based on visitors' natural movements as they stopped to use the space on the way to their destinations. Clear sightlines and built-in supervision from

"It's the heart of the community. All the paths lead here in the community and people come to the park to come together."

– Sabina Ali, Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee

parents, working at market kiosks that face the playground, make it a safe place and give children a sense of freedom to explore.

Free and affordable activities like low-cost food and recreational amenities make the park accessible for nearly everyone.



Photo: Michi McCloskey

02 Best Practice Plaza Hidalgo, Mexico City

Located in the Mexico City suburb of Coyoacan, Plaza Hidalgo is a lively public space and hub of activity. While surrounded by a neighbourhood with restaurant-lined streets, the plaza creates a safe pedestrian-only environment that is accessible on all sides and, as Project for Public Spaces notes, a buffer from the busy city life around it.

On weekends a popular market takes over the plaza but it is busy and filled with activities every day of the week. This activity helps to create a vibrant energy and contributes to feelings of safety as there is always someone there to provide “eyes on the park.”



Photo: Wikimedia Commons / LIMO 5 (4.)



Photo: Flickr / Olivier Bruchez (2.)

03 Missed Opportunity Place de la Concorde, Paris

Located in central Paris, at the east end of the Champs-Élysées, Place de la Concorde is considered one of the world’s worst public spaces.

It is difficult to enjoy the monumental obelisks and grand water fountains as the area is totally dominated by cars. The square is surrounded by a roundabout with non-stop, chaotic traffic, making it treacherous for pedestrians to access the near-by Louvre and Tuilleries. Car noise and the hard asphalt surface make the square an undesirable places to spend time.

Broad Appeal

A guiding tenet of public space design is to plan for a variety of different uses. But this guiding principle is particularly important when it comes to drawing culturally diverse groups of people to use a public space. People from different backgrounds may have different expectations of what public spaces should offer and how they should be used based on their culture and past experiences.

Design elements that help people feel comfortable and enjoy their experience using a space:

- Flexible spaces should be preserved when designing a public space to enable future uses and programming to evolve along with the community's needs
- A range of activities and services should be offered to satisfy diverse needs and interests. Even basic services, such as free internet or air conditioning in summertime, give people reasons to visit a place
- Public furniture - especially moveable seating - offers simple comfort without requiring a purchase
- Nature, or natural elements, creates an enjoyable environment for everyone. Trees and other plants also create a more comfortable climate for pedestrians



Photo: Michi McCloskey

01 Best Practice Dufferin Grove Park, Toronto

Located in the west-end of Toronto, Dufferin Grove Park is recognized as one of the most community-activated parks in the city. Dufferin Grove offers an unusual number of amenities and programs—some commonplace like bench seating and basketballs handed out by park staff, while others are more unique, like communal tables for shared meals and an outdoor pizza oven. Different zones allow people to enjoy the space in different ways. A food area includes gardening, baking and group meals. An active area offers basketball courts, volleyball, and skating in winter. A tranquil area offers seating and fire pits for lounging. Finally, a children's play area has a unique cobb playground along with basic services like baby change places and sinks. Programs include pizza dinners, children's theatre, and a farmers' market.

The "unofficial" Friends of Dufferin Grove is a community organization that has played an active role in improving and programming the park. Although there have been tensions with the City because of the community group's unstructured approach, the park has flourished under diverse and dynamic leadership.

"This space means a lot of different things to different people. For some people this is their basketball court, for some people this is their skate park, for some people this is their family space where they have every single birthday party or where they celebrate every new year's eve. It's dynamic space."

– Michelle, City of Toronto park staff



Photo : Flickr / Naotake Murayama (1.)

02 Best Practice Superkilen Park, Copenhagen

Superkilen Park is a colourful jewel in Copenhagen that snakes its way through the city's most culturally diverse neighbourhood. Local residents were engaged by architecture firm BIG to contribute cultural elements that recall the country of origin for different communities. The result is a park where Moroccan fountains stand alongside Parisian streetlamps, Japanese playground elements and Spanish benches.

From a wealth of seating to vibrant colours and engaging landscape, Superkilen Park is an excellent example of how to make public spaces appealing to everyone. Despite what seems like a haphazard collection of elements, Superkilen uses purposeful design choices that enable users to experience the park in multiple ways. There are playground structures for children, seating areas for small groups or individuals, sculptural elements for passers-by and an undulating landscape that is perfect for capturing that great selfie. Layer on the cultural touchstones that reflect the neighbourhood's diversity and you get an enjoyable experience for everyone.

03 Missed Opportunity Smithfield Square, Dublin

Smithfield Square is located in Dublin, Ireland, minutes away from the city's bustling tourist area of Temple Bar. Originally used as a trading market for livestock and horses, a revitalization program in 1997 saw the open square flanked by high-rise residential development and a light rail line. Despite the number of people living closeby, and its proximity to transit, Smithfield Square does not attract many people.

Aside from unique lighting features that give the space a warm glow at night, Smithfield Square is completely devoid of programs or activity. The space lacks seating, trees or other greenery that would make people feel comfortable lingering there. Even with the popular Jameson Distillery located on the east side, residents and visitors generally use the alleys branching off of the Square rather than the Square itself.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons / William Murphy (3.)

Welcome

We found successful intercultural spaces to be relaxed and open environments that invite people to come as they are and encourage them to be themselves. They celebrate culture and acknowledge differences.

When designing for diversity, an overt “welcome” signals that everyone belongs in a space. Reaching out to potential users is as important as creating a friendly and familiar environment. During interviews, we were told time and again that users preferred places where “people know my name” and “work together and support each other.”

Design elements that promote a sense of belonging:

- A human-scale creates a more intimate relationship between people and place
- Gently worn, comfortable spaces convey inclusion whereas over-designed and polished environments may be intimidating, viewed as exclusive, or discourage participation
- Embedded cues that celebrate culture and diversity including cultural symbols, language, colour, music, food
- Signage and communication materials in visitors’ native languages can create comfort and a feeling of respect
- Staff, volunteers, and retail vendors from different cultural backgrounds can be more in-tune with the needs of the community. Ideally staff speak languages that are prominent in the community to make people feel welcome
- Small, independent retailer vendors invest in building relationships with the community to generate repeat business

01 Best Practice Parkdale Library, Toronto

Located west of downtown Toronto, visitors at Parkdale Library reflect the diversity of the neighbourhood. The majority of people originally came from Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Southern Europe and the Caribbean.

Over the years, the library staff has worked with visitors to understand the evolving needs of this community, playing a key role in making the library a friendly place. They are encouraging and inclusive. Most staff speak multiple languages and are from different cultural backgrounds themselves.

A range of local languages are also reflected in the space, making visitors feel like they belong. Signage and services are offered in

“The staff is very culturally competent and respect people from different cultures...[They] are intentionally hired from a diverse group to represent different people in the space.”

– Deepak, Settlement Program Director

prominent languages used in the community, which helps to recognize and celebrate culture. Periodicals and books are specifically selected based on the neighbourhood’s unique demographics and available in Hindi, Mandarin, Tamil and Tibetan.





Photo: Flickr / Mark Spencer (2.)

02 Best Practice Regent Park Aquatic Centre, Toronto

Regent Park is Toronto's largest social housing project and home to many newcomer families to Canada from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Regent Park has recently been completely redeveloped with an aquatic centre as a focal point for the community. An inclusive approach was taken to design the aquatic centre to ensure that women, especially Muslim women, would feel welcome using the facilities. On Saturday evenings, the light-filled building uses mechanized screens to cover the windows for private swimming sessions that allow women and girls to feel free to use the pool without being seen by men.

This culturally sensitive programming is the result of community engagement done throughout the redevelopment of the aquatic centre and surrounding area, which has made the diverse residents feel welcome.

"We want to make sure people aren't isolated and their mental health is strong," said Pam McConnell, a deputy mayor of Toronto who lives in the neighbourhood. "You do that by offering activities that bring them out of apartments, so everyone feels like they belong."

– **New York Times**

03 Missed Opportunity Gramercy Park, New York

This small, fenced-in private park in Manhattan can only be accessed by residents who live in the upscale homes surrounding the park using a key.

The park is only open to the public once a year, on Christmas Eve, but use of the space is heavily restricted even for paying members.

Visitors cannot drink alcohol, smoke, ride a bicycle, walk a dog, play ball or frisbee, feed the birds and squirrels, or take photos. This exclusive park illustrates the opposite of a welcoming public space.



Photo: Flickr / Phillip Capper (1.)

Interaction

In the planning process, engineering and design standards are often used for physical amenities so they are easy to maintain, low cost, and replicable. Less thought goes into details of designing experiences that bring people together or adapt to the particular needs of a space.

Providing opportunities for interaction through both design and programming is a key ingredient in creating a successful intercultural public space. It gives people a common purpose to come together, engage in dialogue, play and learn. When people share experiences, they build relationships and a common sense of identity.

Design elements that promote better understanding through connection between people:

- Public furniture, including simple benches and moveable seating for people to sit together, and communal tables for group meals
- Special amenities like cooking ovens and camp fires can spark people's curiosity and promote interaction
- Programs bring people together and those with themes related to nature, food, music, art and sports have the most universal appeal across cultures

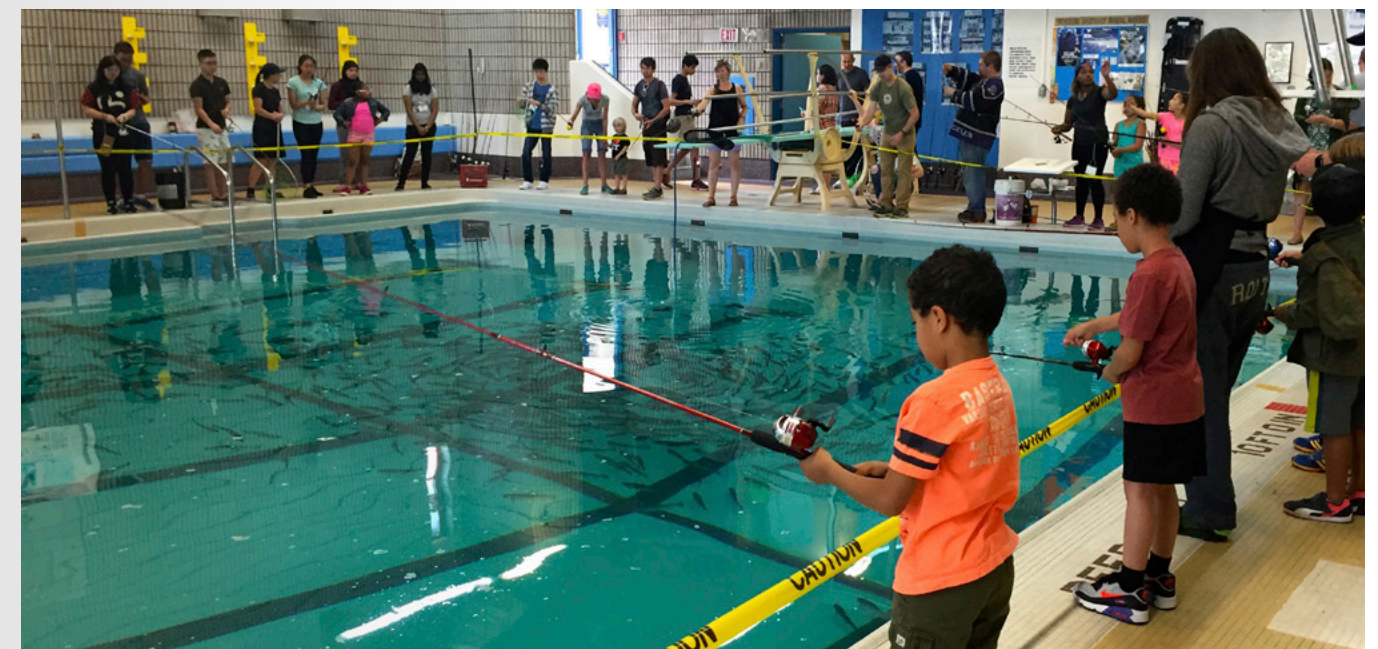
01 Best Practice Scadding Court Community Centre, Toronto

Scadding Court is a community centre in downtown Toronto that serves people from an adjacent social housing complex. Approximately 60 percent of these residents were born outside of the country with the majority from Vietnam, China, Portugal and Jamaica. People can connect with others at the many programs offered at the community centre's library, community garden, and skating rink. One program, called Gone Fishing, stands out. Every June the indoor pool is filled with live, freshwater trout and people line the pool to catch fish. The program gives urban youth and adults of all ages and cultural backgrounds a way to try an activity typically done in the Canadian outdoors. This shared experience with nature is something everyone can take part in.

After participating in the Gone Fishing program, people can bring the fish they caught to Market 707 in front of the Centre to be cooked. Vendors at this market, where stalls are made from shipping containers, offer a huge range of cultural foods for people to try. There is a series of square-shaped tables along the street where people sit facing strangers, which can facilitate conversation over a meal.

“Once people can get connected then I think there is a lot more room for communication, discussion and understanding.”

– Kevin Lee, Executive Director



02 Best Practice Turkenmarkt, Berlin

Turkenmarkt, the largest street market of its kind in Berlin, is the centre of Turkish immigrant life in the city. The market is situated along nearly a kilometre of the Landwehr Canal in Neukolln and Kreuzberg boroughs and is easily accessible by transit. Turkish immigrants make up the largest non-German ethnic group in the city and there are also many newcomers from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are on offer here as well as a variety of Turkish foods, spices and materials. While the market caters primarily to the local Turkish immigrant population, it is also a draw for the mix of Berliners eager to experience the city's diversity and to enjoy an authentic simit bread with sesame seeds.



Photo: Flickr / Cristina Bajarano (1.)



Photo: Flickr / Neil H (1.)



Photo: (6.)

03 Missed Opportunity Boston City Hall Plaza, Boston

It's been described as "barren," a "desert," and a "windswept wasteland." Paved in red brick and set in the shadow of the brutalist Boston City Hall, this public plaza is infamous for being hostile to pedestrians, providing few amenities, places to sit and little greenery. The large, open plaza with its shallow steps that cut along its length also creates uncomfortable climate conditions, allowing cold winter winds to sweep through and offering no shade from the hot summer sun. It is a design that does little to encourage anyone to stay and enjoy themselves.

There have been some recent actions to address these issues and create a more pedestrian-friendly space that would encourage people to stay and interact. In 2015, the mayor's office introduced Adirondack chairs in the plaza and rolled out fake grass over portions of the brick which the New York Times called a "kelly green band-aid."

Participation

Community consultation is sometimes seen as an obstacle to the planning process. When research is done, the outcome is often a check-the-box neighbourhood survey that doesn't translate to concrete or locally relevant design tactics.

We found that successful intercultural public spaces make room for users to participate early in the design process—whether to create something new or to evolve and adapt an existing space. Through collaborative community action, people can help shape their environment. This may mean adding programming or physical elements that change the use originally intended for the space.

Design elements that give people permission to participate and promote a sense of ownership:

- Site organizers, city officials and designers, who are from culturally diverse backgrounds themselves, engage with residents to plan and program spaces
- Residents and visitors contribute to adapting spaces to better meet the community's evolving needs. Ideally, changes are made in partnership with the municipalities but sometimes changes need to be made proactively until they are embraced by municipal leaders.
- Moveable furniture gives people control of where they spend time in the space
- Limited corporate branding enables people and independent vendors to contribute to the environment's design and visual identity



Photo: Michi McCloskey



01 Best Practice RV Burgess Park, Toronto

A huge draw at RV Burgess Park is the first tandoori oven in the country. As women bake tandoori rotis together, the park transforms into an outdoor kitchen. The Friday Bazaar in summertime also encourages residents to participate by cooking and selling food or traditional clothing. A residents' committee initiated these programs among many physical improvements made to the park playground and infrastructure.

The ability for local residents to take ownership, and implement changes that they identify as important to the community, has created a safer, welcoming, and animated public space.

“It's all about engagement. People are coming not to just show what they know, but to learn from each other... It's important to have a well-serviced public space, but more important is how to engage people and help them participate in the community.”

– Sabina Ali, Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee

02 Best Practice City Repair Project, Portland

The City Repair Project in Portland, Oregon was initiated by members of the community and eventually supported by City officials. The intervention came from a desire to transform the city's street grid pattern into a more human scale and safer design. Members of the community came together in an effort to take ownership of the street by creating public gathering places in their neighbourhood intersections.

City officials initially rejected the proposal to use public space but residents responded by collectively taking over the street, eventually winning over the City. This program fosters important relationships between residents by encouraging them to participate in activating their local public space.



Photo: Anton Legoo, City Repair Project

03 Missed Opportunity Pershing Square, Los Angeles

Pershing Square is a sterile, sparsely used public park located in downtown Los Angeles. The Square's 1994 redesign has been labeled as an "urban planning nightmare" that was drastically impacted by top-down planning practices. The space is one square block built on top of a parking garage and flanked by office buildings and hotels.

Planners designed an unwelcoming space with few practical features to make it inviting in an effort to create a sense of security and prioritize automobile traffic over pedestrians. Seasonal events occur here, but the lack of shade, adequate seating and green space do not invite people to linger or take ownership of the space. Pershing Square is currently undergoing a redesign intended to create a welcoming and well-used public space.



Photo: Flickr / Daniel Lobo (5.)

Places Transformed

When we invite people to play a collective role in shaping their public spaces, the result are places that better meet the community's evolving needs. All of the sites that we reviewed as part of our research had undergone a transformation. RV Burgess is a park turned outdoor kitchen and bazaar. Parkdale Library has become the neighbourhood's de facto community centre even though the official Centre is located across the street. When people take pride in public space, they make it a 'third' place where they spend much of their time outside of home and work, building connections with others in their community.

Takeaways

These topline take-aways outline the basic learnings from our research and are a great starting place for creating more inclusive cities.

Welcome everyone

Time and again, inclusive spaces prove Design for Diversity is simply good design for all.

Diversify your team

A team that reflects its community will build spaces that do the same.

Tap local talent

People who already use local spaces have ideas that will drive more thoughtful design.

Keep doors open

Safe entry and affordable access will keep people coming in.

Something for everyone

A variety of features and programming will attract people with a variety of needs and interests.

Speak local languages

Promoting the space in the languages of the community will make people feel welcome.

Promote universal themes

Food and nature are common to us all; exploring them in your programs will bring people together.

Celebrate the differences

Diversity draws diversity; celebrate cultures and differences to encourage a sense of belonging.

Bend the rules

Leaving room to bend the rules encourages people to shape their space.

Checklist

Welcome everyone

- Free entry
- Affordable goods
- Comfortable space
- Spaces for lingering

Diversify your team

Representation from:

- More than one gender
- Residents from ethnicities and cultures that reflect the neighbourhood
- Youth and seniors

Tap local talent

- Ongoing conversation with community
- Multiple forms of engagement with locals
- A budget for proper engagement
- Feedback used to influence design

Keep doors open

- Safe and affordable entry
- Obvious entrances and exits
- Clear sight lines
- Effective wayfinding
- Lighting

Something for everyone

- Flexible, multi-use spaces
- Variety of activities for a range of cultures and ages
- Design and programs that appeal to target audiences

Speak local languages

- Staff/volunteers reach out to prospective visitors
- Staff/volunteers speak languages of the local community
- Communication materials translated into local languages

Promote universal themes

- Food
- Nature
- Music
- Sports

Celebrate differences

- Cultural cues visually represented in the space (design elements, street art, etc.)
- Music
- Range of foods
- Cultural activities and markets

Bend the rules

- Enable people to adapt the space based on their needs
- Flexible spaces and design elements (moveable seating)

Resources & References

Arrival City

By Doug Saunders

Design for Diversity

By Emily Talen

Intercultural City

By Charles Landry and Phil Wood

Cities of Migration

<http://citiesofmigration.com>

Project for Public Spaces

<http://www.pps.org/>

Rethinking Urban Parks: Public Space and Cultural Diversity

By Setha Low, Dana Taplin and Suzanne Scheld

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This toolkit is a working prototype. To share your experience designing for diversity or to provide feedback on the toolkit, email hello@opencityprojects.com.

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We Are OpenCity

Founded in 2006, OpenCity is a creative lab that explores the role of public space in creating vibrant and inclusive cities. We are a growing community of architects, designers, urban planners and writers who believe that when diverse people mix and interact in urban environments, it creates more tolerant and peaceful places to live.

Our research approach puts people at the centre of design, by gaining a deep understanding of their day-to-day living experience. With important insights and tools, we aim to inspire city-builders and citizens to Design for Diversity.

Design for Diversity Team

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