DESIGN CASE: The Inclusive City: Designing Cities That Meet Human Needs

Susan Goltsman[a,1] and Daniel Iacofano[b]
[a] *MIG, Inc.*
[b] *MIG, Inc.*

Abstract. This Design Case introduces a bold new concept – inclusivity – as the basis for socially and environmentally responsible urban environments. The *Inclusive City* illustrates how cities can be designed to support the physical, economic, cultural and social needs of all people of all abilities, of all social strata and of all income levels. This project was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and evolved into the publication, *The Inclusive City: Design Solutions for Buildings, Neighborhoods, and Urban Spaces.* The book investigates 14 successful inclusive and universally designed projects around the world. The *Inclusive City* is a textbook for planning, design and urban development that offers a practical look at successful inclusive design projects – all with positive social impacts beyond the physical project itself. This session will present case studies and inclusive design guidelines obtained as lessons learned from these projects. It will explore how to apply the Inclusive City policy framework to produce positive social outcomes in the areas of economic development, housing and neighborhoods, education, access and mobility, habitat protection, community facilities and providing cultural meaning. The result is built environments and communities that are fully inclusive, welcoming and thriving.

Keywords. inclusion, social equity, urban design

Design Case Description

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;
- Environmental disasters, such as toxic waste sites, a lack of parks and open space, and rivers that no longer resemble anything ever seen in nature; and

---

[1] Corresponding Author.

- Lack of access and inclusion, resulting in limited opportunities for people with disabilities?

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.

The solution is a focus on inclusive planning and design based on economic, social, environmental and culturally sensitive policies that provide benefits to everyone as the physical environment improves. Urban planning and design must recognize that every individual has the right to full and equal participation in the built environment regardless of ability or disability—and that residents can shape their own environment to meet their own needs through their direct involvement. To support this conversation about inclusive design for planners, designers, elected officials and community members, the *Inclusive City* details a broad policy framework to help guide urban area decision-making:

- *Economic Development:* Land use and public policy decisions that create opportunities for everyone to participate fully in the economy of the city with access to a variety of quality jobs.
- *Housing and Neighborhoods:* Codes, zoning and incentives that generate safe, healthy neighborhoods with a range of housing types and price levels to accommodate diverse socio-economic backgrounds, lifestyle choices and support independent living needs and aging in place.
- *Education:* Full access to quality education choices for all residents with shared use of facilities among schools, parks and the community.
- *Access and Mobility:* Viable, accessible multimodal and interconnected public transportation systems create seamless and friendly spaces that are inclusive of everyone: those with disabilities, young children, seniors and parents pushing baby carriages.
- *Habitat Protection and a Safe Public Realm:* Connected, safe, healthy, functional and green connections with pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets that reactivate the public realm and lead to environmental stewardship.
- *Community Facilities and Gathering Spaces:* Well-maintained and usable gathering places and open spaces that build community.
- *Cultural Meaning:* Spaces and places to create and display social and cultural rituals and symbols that have meaning for all residents, ensuring that development projects—especially large-scale redevelopment—retain a distinctive sense of place and neighborhood.

These policy guidelines are far from theoretical. Over the past decade there have been many projects that exemplify this approach and fulfill many of the policy considerations, creating urban environments that are inclusive to all people. This session will focus on presenting planning and design guidelines for creating Inclusive Cities, based on U.S. and international case study examples, such as:

- In a low income area of Berkeley, California, a transit station became the home for an 80,000 square-foot mixed use service center for people with disabilities. The Ed Roberts Campus included collaboration with eight partner organizations serving people with disabilities to create a space that celebrates independent living and includes office space for leading disability service and policy organizations, an accessible technology center, exhibition space, fitness center for people of all abilities, café and childcare facility – while providing accessible transit access throughout the San Francisco Bay area.
- 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. Everything is within walking distance to promote accessibility.
- 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 cultural 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.

These inclusive projects share two important elements that we believe are crucial to creating successful projects. The first is an emphasis on robust **public participation**. We strongly believe that each project has to fulfill the community's vision. All too often public participation is done entirely pro forma with no real input. The inclusive approach ensures that resident who will live in the area—or be affected by it—will be involved in a meaningful way. Community members have to know their ideas and comments will be incorporated into plans and designs. That kind of involvement builds community and makes a project truly inclusive.

The second common element is **equitable sharing**: the local community that is affected by the impacts of development must also get a proportionate share of the benefits. In far too many cases involving redevelopment, prices rise and the original inhabitants are forced out, destroying neighborhoods and historic communities whose roots can go back more than a century. Dollars generated from redevelopment should go directly back to the area where they are generated to produce improvements that bring real benefits – supporting parks, community facilities, ongoing costs of maintenance and operations, sidewalks, schools or transportation improvements needed for a healthy community.

All these project examples share one important result in common: the process of completing the project added value to the community beyond the physical project itself by increasing accessibility and fulfilling human needs.

About the Presenters

Susan Goltsman, FASLA, is internationally renowned for applying social science to design, creating unique environments that respond to the community, the organization, user group needs, building function and site context. By conducting original research and approaching design through inclusivity, she has established new paradigms regarding healthy human development in a wide range of urban settings. Ms. Goltsman has advised government agencies and communities throughout the U.S. and around the world. Her projects have won awards from the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, the Center for Universal Design, the American Institute of Architects, the American Planning Association, the American Society of Landscape Architects, The National Endowment for the Arts and the California Park and Recreation Society. Susan has taught at numerous universities and colleges and is the author of many books and articles.

Daniel Iacofano, PhD, FAICP, FASLA, is recognized internationally as an innovator in community-based urban planning and design, working with hundreds of cities and agencies to implement land use, urban design, economic revitalization and transportation projects. His projects have won many awards for the National League of Cities, the International Downtown Association, the American Planning Association, the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Association of Environmental Professionals. His publications include *Play for All Guidelines*, *Public Involvement as an Organizational Development Process* and *Meeting of the Minds*, which shares his innovative approach to meeting facilitation and consensus building.

Contact Information

Susan Goltsman, susang@migcom.com, 510-845-7549