Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: Towards Inclusive and Resilient Cities through Social Diversity and Participation

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Abstract:
In a world facing displacement, violent conflicts, climate change, and urban sprawl, urban settings are plagued by inequality, poverty, injustice, and racial and class divisions. These divisions exacerbate violence, crime, and racism. As urban planners, it is crucial to recognize and develop solutions for present and emerging challenges. Evaluating diverse social activities with stakeholder participation is essential for fulfilling public interests. This study aims to identify best practices for socially sustainable urban environments by leveraging urban diversity and social participation. By envisioning inclusive, resilient, and socially sustainable cities, this research investigates participatory urban design through case studies of social-diversity-focused projects worldwide. The methodology includes selecting case studies based on criteria like geographical representation and levels of community engagement. The objective is to derive implementable recommendations for creating inclusive, resilient, and socially sustainable urban environments by analyzing the impact of social diversity and participation on urban resilience.

Keywords: Diversity; Open space; Participatory Urban Design; Social Sustainability; Urban Inclusivity.

1. Introduction

In the face of rapid urbanization, how can cities embrace diversity and foster social cohesion? This question underscores the growing focus on creating inclusive and resilient cities in urban planning. Recognizing that urban diversity and social participation are crucial for sustainable cities, planners and policymakers have shifted their approaches. This shift is reflected in global development policies like the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 (World Cities Report 2022), the Paris Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda, which emphasize the role of local governments in achieving sustainable development goals. Consequently, social cohesion is now considered essential for enhancing city competitiveness and achieving sustainable development.

Historically, early perspectives on the influence of diversity on urban life emphasized assimilation and homogeneity. Émile Durkheim, for instance, viewed cities as centers for social integration where diverse populations merged into a unified culture. However, as cities have become more diverse, concerns about potential social exclusion and increased isolation among individuals from different backgrounds can affect community formation, identity, and unity. Research by Özen et al. (2023) and Salway et al. (2020) highlights these issues, showing that diversity can lead to further social exclusion.

The perception of diversity varies between optimists and pessimists. Policymakers in many European countries promote interaction between income classes and ethnic communities to improve social cohesion. Qualitative studies, such as those by Wessendorf (2014), indicate that living amidst diversity can lead to openness toward other cultures rather than withdrawal. In her influential work "The Death and Life of Great American Cities," Jane Jacobs advocated for the value of urban diversity in fostering vibrant communities. Similarly, Talen (2012) emphasized planners' ethical commitment to meeting the needs of disadvantaged populations, calling for inclusivity as a fundamental principle even when it is not profitable.

Specific examples further illustrate these concepts. The DIVERCITIES research project (2017) was a European Union-funded project to explore the potential of diversity and urban culture in European cities. The project focused on understanding the dynamics of immigrant integration and social cohesion in diverse urban environments. It was confirmed that residents in diverse neighborhoods consider diversity a given, especially in places with a long history of diversity, like Toronto and London. In Toronto, the St. James Town neighborhood has successfully integrated various immigrant communities through targeted community programs and participatory planning initiatives. Similarly, London's Brixton district has leveraged its cultural diversity to foster economic regeneration and social cohesion through community-led development projects and inclusive public spaces.

In another case, the Clinton Park initiative in Oakland, California, addressed diversity as a core issue by redesigning the park to better serve its diverse community. Collaborating with urban ecology, local organizations, and the City of

Oakland, the project aimed to enhance safety, cultural recognition, and community engagement. Resident participation in planning and design ensured their needs were met. The initiative increased park use, improved safety, reduced crime, and stronger community cohesion.

This example, along with those from Toronto and London, underscores the importance of inclusive urban design in fostering vibrant, cohesive, diverse cities. By engaging diverse community members and incorporating their input into the design process, urban planners can create public spaces that reflect and celebrate cultural diversity, ultimately enhancing the social fabric of urban environments rather than fostering isolation and withdrawal.

This raises the question: Why are diverse and inclusive cities important now? One way to address this is by understanding that social cohesion is crucial for holding society together. Recognizing and leveraging diversity is essential for enabling structural changes in urban planning models that support vulnerable populations in achieving their fundamental rights through stakeholder participation, ultimately contributing to increased resilience and social cohesion. Diverse neighborhoods are vital components against segregation and concentrated poverty (Talen, 2012).

Social cohesion applies to society at significant and different levels, such as cities, neighborhoods, open spaces, and streets. Incorporating community ideas and opinions through participatory urban design allows diverse communities to benefit from a wide range of skills, knowledge, and resources, fostering adaptability and innovation. Engaging with diverse voices and experiences helps planners create more inclusive and representative urban environments.

Inspired by the Netherlands' approach to resilience—coexisting with challenges rather than escaping them—this study aims to develop methods for creating socially sustainable urban environments by leveraging urban diversity and social participation through participatory urban design. The research hypothesis posits that involving the public in urban design can promote inclusive cities by creating open spaces that embrace social diversity as a fundamental component.

The research methodology focuses on case studies of participatory open space design projects that emphasize social diversity. It seeks to answer questions: How does participatory urban design contribute to developing inclusive and resilient cities? What are the impacts of social diversity on promoting inclusive communities in open spaces? How do different stakeholder groups perceive and interact with this process aimed at creating an inclusive environment? What are the main challenges and opportunities associated with implementing approaches prioritizing creating open spaces for all people?

Case studies on participatory open space projects focusing on social diversity show that higher participation levels contribute to creating more inclusive spaces and enhance residents' sense of ownership and pride.

In the following sections, we'll explore concepts such as inclusive cities, community sustainability, and the principles and practices of participatory urban design. We'll draw insights from case studies and experiences of diverse urban communities, to derive actionable recommendations for creating inclusive, resilient, and socially sustainable cities.

While diversity can challenge social cohesion, it also offers opportunities to enrich urban life and promote social justice. The key is to embrace diversity as a potential and necessary strength for urban spaces' resilience, vibrancy, and social sustainability. This study aims to provide practical recommendations to enhance inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities. By focusing on participatory urban design and engaging with diverse community voices, urban planners can create environments that are more inclusive and representative of the populations they serve.

2. Contextual background

2.1 Diversity in Urban Environments

Cities are centers of human diversity, encompassing various social, cultural, and economic groups, including cultural differences, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, and socioeconomic status (Talen, 2012). Indigenous residents, refugees, migrants, and people with diverse identities coexist, and embracing this diversity allows urban planners to create inclusive environments that foster belonging and social cohesion.

According to Goal 11 for sustainable cities, the benefits of urban expansion can't be achieved without prioritizing the needs of the most disadvantaged groups. (World Cities Report 2020). Cities face challenges with significant gaps and segregation between neighborhoods, often resulting from discriminatory housing policies. Over time, this segregation has led to problems like poverty, unemployment, and crime (Timmins, 2022). Poor neighborhoods struggle with social diversity as refugees often settle in the most impoverished areas, generating tensions with local populations due to

differences in religion, ethnicity, nationality, age, and gender. These tensions can worsen if international aid favors displaced people over vulnerable host communities.

A relevant case study is the situation in the Rosengård district of Malmö, Sweden. This neighborhood has historically been home to a large population of low-income residents and has faced significant social and economic challenges. The area became increasingly isolated, with residents experiencing high levels of unemployment and poverty. When a large number of refugees settled in Rosengård, tensions with the local population grew due to differences in religion, ethnicity, and culture. These tensions were exacerbated by international aid that seemed to favor the refugees, leading to increased racial segregation and social unrest.

Recognizing the urgent need to address these issues, urban planners in Malmö initiated a comprehensive redevelopment plan to transform Rosengård into a more inclusive and vibrant community. The plan included improving housing quality, enhancing public spaces, and promoting social integration.

The concentration of wealth and poverty, along with racial segregation, is unsustainable as it severely disadvantages low-income neighborhoods, making them unable to compete with wealthier areas (Turner and Rawlings, 2009). Additionally, urban development lacking social diversity and inclusion can lead to social isolation and disconnection among residents.

To address these issues, a localized strategy that starts at the neighborhood level and gradually extends to the city is essential. This approach must consider the diverse needs of various groups and the social-spatial effects of identities. Urban social sustainability is an emerging field in urban planning, focusing on policies and practices at local and regional levels. A sustainable community is one where people can live successfully and want to live.

The goal is to enhance inclusive and sustainable urban expansion by 2030, ensuring universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public spaces. The primary political priority regarding diversity should be treating everyone equally. Ensuring equal access to resources, opportunities, and services regardless of individual differences is crucial for promoting inclusive and resilient cities.

2.2 Importance of Inclusive Urban Planning

Since the global declaration of human rights following World War II, the concept of the right to a city has evolved significantly. Key developments include the Sustainable Development Goals of 2000, UN reports in 2015, coordination mechanisms, specific implementation strategies, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of 2015, drafts such as Habitat's agenda from July 25th, 2016, and publications like the World Cities Report of 2020 and UN-Habitat for a Better Urban Future in 2022. These initiatives highlight the ongoing advancement of human rights in urban development.

However, conventional urban planning often overlooks marginalized groups, resulting in cities that exclude certain people and perpetuate social injustice. Inclusive urban planning ensures fair access to city services and opportunities for all residents while addressing diverse needs within urban populations. This approach fosters lively and equitable communities. Maloutas and Malouta (2004) highlighted that inclusive planning is crucial for achieving social cohesion, which paves the way for sustainable urban development and enhances the quality of life across an entire city's populace.

Inclusive urban planning is also vital for creating resilient cities capable of effectively addressing the challenges of social diversity (More, 2017). It ensures that all residents, regardless of their social and economic backgrounds, have access to essential services, amenities, and opportunities (Liang et al., 2021). Additionally, it encourages participation from diverse groups in decision-making processes and public space planning, thereby promoting social cohesion and community engagement. This approach helps to dismantle barriers between different social groups and promote mutual understanding while fostering a sense of belonging for all residents.

Efforts are concentrated on removing obstacles and establishing inclusive environments that welcome everyone. This encompasses designing streets and public spaces accessible to residents, migrants, and elderly or disabled individuals while supporting diverse cultural expressions through public art installations and programs. Inclusive urban planning extends beyond physical design; its goal is also to strengthen social bonds among residents by creating inclusive public spaces such as parks, community gardens, and cultural centers where people from various backgrounds can interact and build connections.

An inspiring example is Praça do Pôr do Sol in São Paulo, Brazil. Once a high-crime area, it has been transformed into a vibrant community space offering stunning city views, especially at sunset, and hosting numerous community events. Inclusive cities become more vibrant and competitive, increasing economic opportunities for all residents. They also enhance resilience, enabling better disaster response and recovery.

Overall, inclusive urban planning is essential for creating fair, accessible, and socially cohesive cities. By breaking down barriers and addressing the diverse needs of all residents, urban planners can shape cities that reflect inclusivity and diversity. The benefits extend beyond social and environmental aspects to include economic growth. Embracing inclusive urban planning, starting at the neighborhood level, is crucial for designing public spaces where social interactions are at the core. (Figure 1)
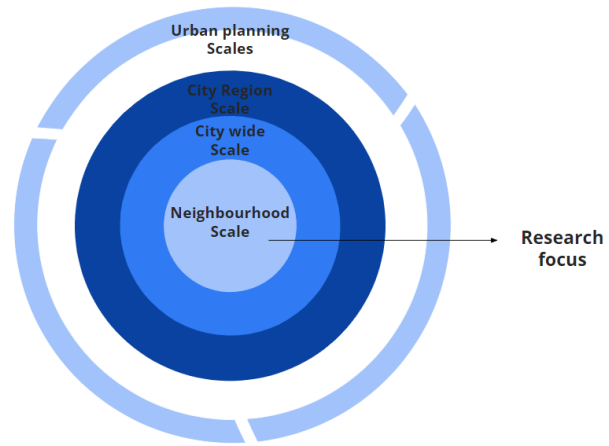

Figure 1 Urban Area Hierarchy (Source: Çelikyay ve Öztaş, 2019), developed by the authors.

Why is it Important to Have Inclusive Public Spaces?

Public spaces are the heart of urban life and a crucial part of our built environment. They are often regarded as resources for the common good, providing a range of opportunities and benefits to the public (UN-Habitat, 2015). Inclusive public spaces, often defined as "public spaces for everyone," should be accessible and welcoming to all, regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, or background. This accessibility enhances the city's social fabric, fostering a sense of belonging, resilience, and community pride.

Public spaces serve as battlegrounds for democracy and frontlines in urban social justice. Their benefits include significant contributions to physical and mental health, the local economy by attracting visitors and supporting local businesses, and opportunities to foster a sense of community.

Prominent urban theorists have emphasized the importance of inclusive public spaces. For instance, Rowe and Jacobs (1962) advocate for diverse, vibrant urban communities and criticize modernist practices that often lead to exclusion. William H. Whyte's "The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces" (1980) focuses on how public spaces can enhance social interaction through thoughtful design elements such as seating arrangements and accessibility. Kevin Lynch's "The Image of the City" (1960) explores how people perceive urban environments, emphasizing the importance of transparent and inclusive urban design. Jan Gehl's work promotes human-centered design, emphasizing pedestrian-friendly streets, plazas, and diverse seating options, all contributing to more inclusive environments.

David Harvey, in "Social Justice and the City" (1973), discusses the role of urban planning in promoting social justice and addressing inequality. As Gospodini (2004) suggested, innovative design can allow for diverse interpretations and foster new social solidarities. Proposals highlighting multiculturalism, such as those in Toronto, Canada, are gaining popularity. Sandeep and Martin (2004) propose culturally responsive design solutions, focusing on eliminating homogeneous community designs, finding common elements, and avoiding cultural commodification.

Urban planners who emphasize social interaction within the urban environment, such as Ronald Mace in "Universal Design: The Design of Environments for All People" (1980), lay the groundwork for creating spaces usable by everyone to the greatest extent possible. The concept of placemaking, as highlighted in "The Great Public Spaces" by Project for Public Spaces (1990), founded by Fred Kent, emphasizes user participation and social interaction in creating high-quality public spaces. Peggy Acevedo's "Public Space, Race, and Class: Planning for Diversity" (2000) underscores the importance of ensuring all residents have access to quality open spaces.

"Inclusive Playground Design: A Guide to Renovating Existing Playgrounds" (2021) by Williams offers practical guidance on making playgrounds more inclusive. Soja's work, "Seeking Spatial Justice" (2010), studies the spatial dimensions of justice and the need for comprehensive urban planning. Shahrour and Hijazi (2023) introduce the concept of smart public spaces, using technology to enhance inclusivity. Peinhardt and Storring (2019) highlight the principles of inclusive public space design, using projects like Broadway Corridor as examples of how public engagement and thoughtful design create inclusive environments.

Inclusive public space strategies, such as participatory design processes that actively involve community members in planning stages, ensure that the resulting spaces genuinely reflect the needs and preferences of the people they serve. In Solo, Indonesia, transforming the Kali Pepe riverbank into a vibrant public space exemplifies this approach. The "Rivers as Inclusive Common Space" program, led by Kota Kita and partners, engaged residents from diverse backgrounds, including women, older people, and people with disabilities, in co-designing the riverbank area. This initiative resulted in Mangkubumen Harmony Park, a safe, accessible, and inclusive space for all ages, enhancing community cohesion and accessibility. (Kota Kita, 2024)

Urban design can contribute to more just and inclusive cities by prioritizing these principles. Drawing from the provided sources, it is clear that urban design holds significant potential for advancing social justice and addressing inequality by applying inclusive and innovative design principles. The insights underscore the importance of human-centered design, the integration of social justice in urban planning, and the role of creative design in fostering social solidarity. Moreover, these sources highlight the necessity of user participation and the creation of inclusive public spaces to ensure the development of equitable urban environments.
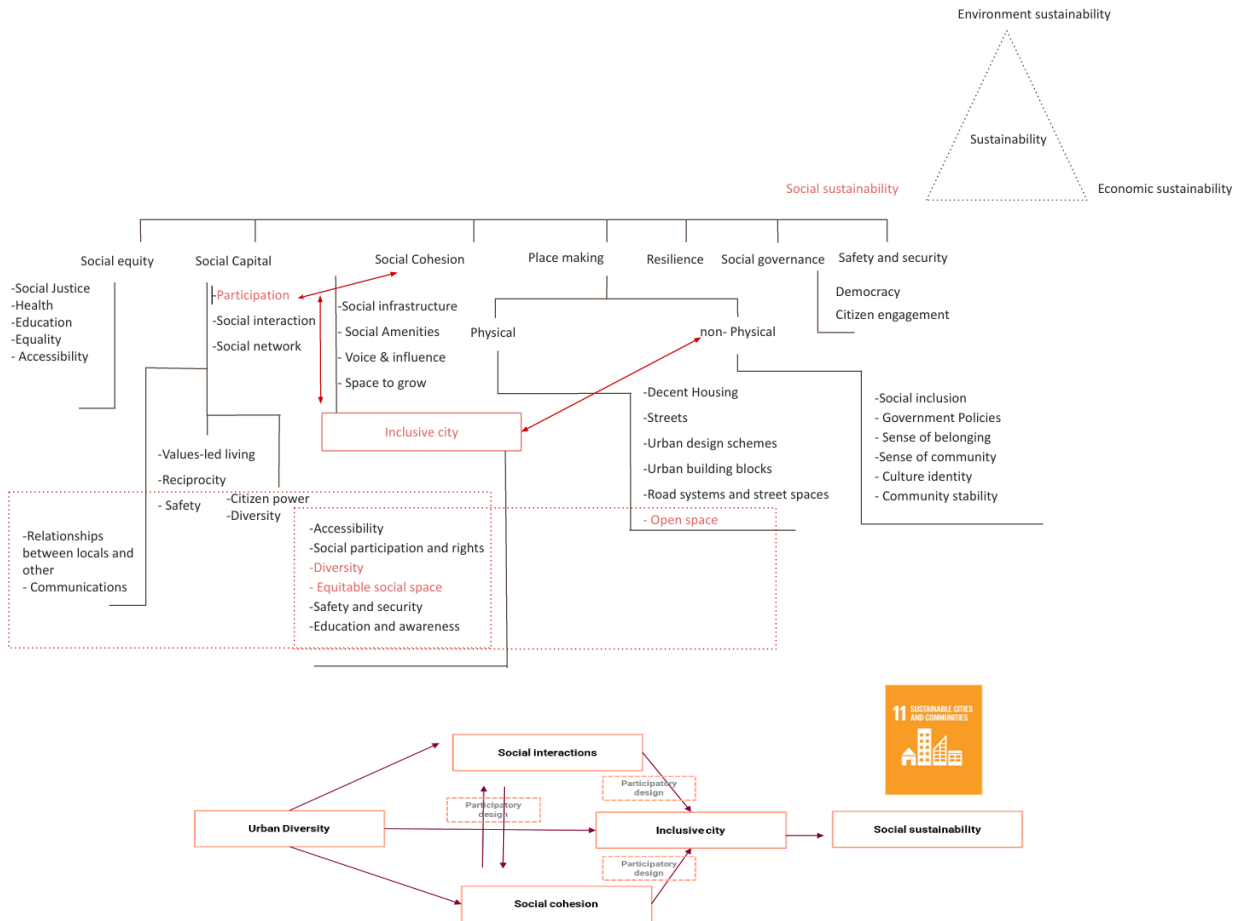

Figure 2 Developing research framework (Author)

3. Participatory Design: An Overview

Participatory design is a contemporary approach that employs multiple methods to examine, build, implement, and oversee the design's physical, functional, and participatory frameworks. This approach facilitates the creation of design models that enhance structural possibilities by considering users' daily activities and future aspirations across various dimensions. It extends beyond formal decision-making processes by emphasizing the importance of citizen involvement in shaping their built environment.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) defines public participation as "any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses public input to make better decisions." This broad concept encompasses various forms of decision-making involving multiple stakeholders, individuals, groups, organizations, or political entities interested in the outcome. Additionally, community participation is a fundamental means for society to take the initiative in achieving growth and progress. This includes the identification of needs, planning, implementation, monitoring, and benefiting from executed plans and programs.

Historically, participatory design has evolved through several key milestones. Early signs of democratic decision-making emerged post-World War II, with top-down design processes led by figures like Jacobs, Alexander, Lefebvre, and Arnstein advocating for participatory planning. Henri Lefebvre argued that space is a social construct that shapes social practices and perceptions, giving citizens the right to alter it. Sherry R. Arnstein's 1969 article, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," introduced the concept of varying levels of citizen involvement in decision-making processes, which remains influential in the field.

Social activism and grassroots movements in later years further influenced participatory urban planning, advocating for the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making. These movements highlighted the need to address social inequalities and promote community-driven solutions. In 1997, Lisa Horelli underscored the value of co-creation, involving children alongside adults in urban improvements to address challenges and promote inclusive and sustainable cities. The 1992 international agenda for sustainable development adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro also emphasized community participation in achieving sustainable development goals. In 2010, Susan S. Fainstein's book "The Just City" promoted participatory methods to tackle social and spatial inequalities.
Seitanidis's article highlighted the necessity of involving migrants and local residents in designing open spaces to reduce tensions and conflicts (Seitanidis, 2021).

As an example of how participatory urban planning can advocate for the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making, the Karantina Participatory Spatial Intervention involved both migrants and residents in designing open spaces, creating safe, accessible, and playful public areas post-Beirut explosion to address local vulnerabilities and foster community engagement. (Al-Harithy, H., & Yassine, B. 2023) The evolving understanding of participatory design has led to an increased recognition of the importance of including diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes. By incorporating the perspectives and inputs of different social groups, participatory design can lead to more inclusive and resilient cities (Arslan, 2021).

Today, digital technologies have enabled broader and more inclusive participation. Online platforms, social media, and interactive mapping tools have expanded community engagement and information-sharing opportunities, overcoming physical barriers and facilitating virtual collaboration (Dickinson et al., 2018).

Challenges and Benefits of Participatory Design in Public Spaces

Participatory design offers numerous benefits but faces several challenges that must be addressed for successful implementation. One major challenge is the time-consuming nature of participatory processes compared to more top-down approaches. Decision-makers may lack the skills to integrate participation, leading to effective design processes. Additionally, limited time and interest among individuals can hinder participation, resulting in the involvement of only a select group of people. Lack of transparency regarding the incorporation of citizen input and unclear roles for participants can also deter further engagement. Power imbalances, limited representation, resource constraints, and the complexity of technical information pose additional challenges.

It is essential to address power imbalances, ensure fair representation, provide adequate resources and support, enhance communication, and establish inclusive and supportive institutional frameworks to overcome these challenges. By addressing these issues, participatory design can produce long-lasting solutions broadly accepted by citizens and support inclusive and sustainable urban development. Successful public space participatory projects, such as transforming Times Square in New York City into a pedestrian plaza and revitalizing Superkilen Park in Copenhagen through community input, demonstrate the positive impact of inclusive design processes.

Overall, the design process must be adaptable, inclusive, equitable, and resilient to develop contextual urban plans successfully. Integrating comprehensive planning and urban design with participatory approaches is essential for democratizing urban planning and design.

Levels of Public Participation

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), founded in 1990, aims to enhance public involvement in decision-making processes. IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation outlines five stages to foster varying degrees of public engagement. (figure 3)

The initial stage, "inform," focuses on providing the public with balanced and objective information to help them comprehend issues, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions. The next stage, "consult," seeks to gather public feedback on analyses, alternatives, and decisions, ensuring that public concerns and aspirations are acknowledged and considered.

At the "involve" stage, the aim is to work directly with the public throughout the process, ensuring their concerns and aspirations are integrated into the alternatives developed and providing feedback on how public input has shaped decisions. The "collaborate" stage involves partnering with the public in each aspect of the decision-making process, including developing alternatives and identifying preferred solutions.

The final stage, "empower," delegates decision-making authority to the public, with a commitment to implementing their decisions. The IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation is widely utilized internationally to guide the selection of appropriate levels of public engagement in various participation processes. Figure
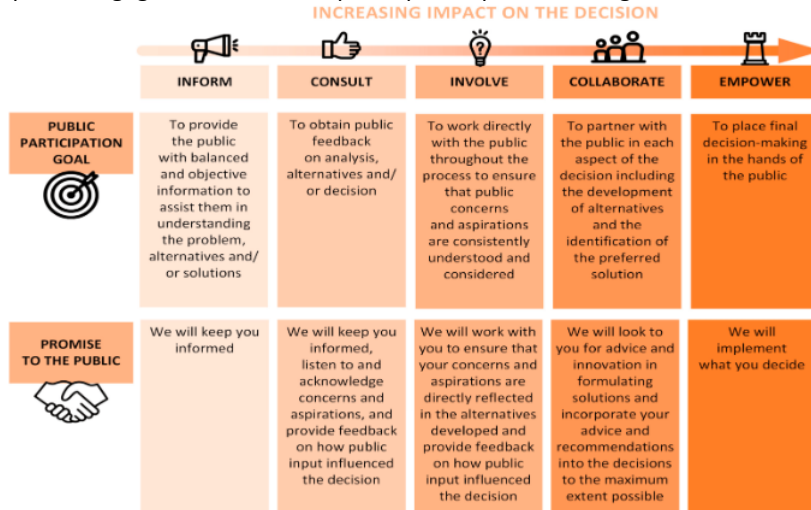

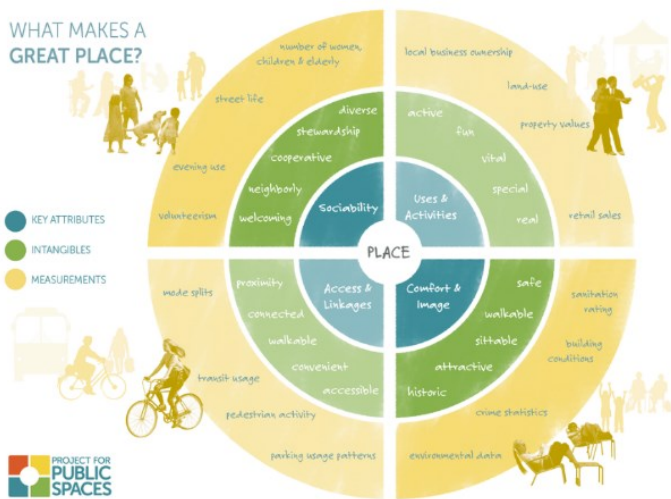*Figure 3 The Spectrum of Public Participation (Source: www.iap2.org)*

Moreover, Spectrum emphasizes the importance of adapting the engagement approach based on the specific context and goals of the project. This ensures that public participation is not a one-size-fits-all solution but a dynamic process tailored to meet the unique needs of each community and project. By employing the Spectrum, organizations can build trust with the community, enhance the legitimacy of decisions, and create more sustainable and accepted outcomes. The iterative feedback mechanisms embedded in the higher levels of the Spectrum, particularly in the "collaborate" and "empower" stages, allow for continuous improvement and responsiveness to public input. This fosters a culture of ongoing dialogue and collaboration, enhancing the quality of decisions and empowering communities as active stakeholders in shaping their environments and futures

4. Material and Methods

The methodology employed in this research is based on a comparative analysis of case studies to measure the impact of participatory design levels on diversity and inclusivity in public spaces. Five public spaces were selected to illustrate the application of inclusive, participatory design theories, which aim to integrate diverse groups and enhance design inclusivity. Indicators were developed to measure the effectiveness of public spaces across all participatory levels (Table 1), leveraging insights from leading urban planners and designers, the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) place diagram, and Gehl's inclusive public space criteria (figure 4). Public spaces were selected based on several criteria: availability of comprehensive and reliable data, ensuring diverse geographical representation (including both developed countries such as Copenhagen and Minneapolis and developing countries such as Barranquilla, Gökçeada, and Bar Elias),(Table 2) focus on open spaces ranging from 700 to 15,000 square meters, categorization according to levels of community engagement and decision-making authority (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower), and the impact of participatory design on diversity and inclusivity. Each criterion was weighted to prioritize spaces demonstrating significant community impact and diverse participatory approaches.

The categorization of public spaces into participatory levels was based on community engagement and decision-making authority: Superkilen in Copenhagen, Denmark (inform level), is known for its culturally diverse design representing over 50 nationalities; tactical urbanism in Barranquilla, Colombia (consult level), involved co-creation workshops in Villa del Mar; Open Space Gökçeada in Turkey (involve level) engaged the public through workshops; Peavey Park in Minneapolis, Minnesota (collaborate level), involved collaboration with local organizations; and public space in Bar Elias, Lebanon (empower level), gave residents final decision-making authority.

Data collection involved examining existing reports, articles, spatial analysis using tools like Google Earth, and outcomes from participatory workshops. The comparative analysis used a structured analytical framework and a quantitative approach based on the indicators specified within the study's designed framework. Ethical considerations included maintaining confidentiality and obtaining informed consent from participants in the original case studies. Limitations of the study include potential biases in the original data collection, and reports, varying levels of community engagement, and constraints related to resources and time, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. This methodology provides a comprehensive analysis of how different levels of participatory design impact the inclusivity and diversity of public spaces. It aims to identify best practices and effective strategies for enhancing public space design through participatory approaches, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of how inclusive design can promote social cohesion and resilience in diverse urban environments.

Figure 4 Place diagram (Source: PPS 2016) – Inclusive Healthy Places (Source: Gehl Institute 2018)

Case studies:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Superkilen	Tactical urbanism in Barranquilla	Open Space Gokceada	Peavey Park Project	public spacer in Bar Elias, Lebanon
Copenhagen, Denmark	Villa del mar Barranquilla, Colombia	Gokceada, Turkey	Minneapolis, Minnesota	Bar Elias, Lebanon

Table 1 Selected Case Studies - Author

			Indicator
Context	Public	vital statistics	The project area has a diverse population (income, age, sex, race and ethnicity, etc.)
	Community Assets	Economic asset	Access to market, cafes, and restaurants around the space
		Entertainment asset	Access to free public facilities (school, library, recreation, etc.)
		Local institutions	Presence of local landmarks, symbols, and local art
			Presence of cultural organizations and institutions
	Predictors of Exclusion	Inequality	Presence of inequality by race and ethnicity, and gender
			Presence of residential poverty based on income on a district scale
			Presence of place-based conditions that inhibit the formation of neighborhood social ties and exclusion
		Discriminatory practices	Presence of unfair treatment or experiences of discrimination by race and ethnicity and other relevant demographics
Process	Civic Trust	Civic participation	Civic participation (e.g., participation at political meetings, membership in political clubs, advocacy and organizing groups, participatory budgeting)
		Reported trust	Reported trust in government and civic associations
			Reported trust in fellow community members
		Participation	Implementing the ideas of participants in the design process
			Presence of community events (e.g., festivals, street fairs, sporting tournaments, etc.)
			Presence of community-led public events and programs
			Presence of community-led volunteer projects or programs (e.g., park cleanup, corporate-sponsored efforts, etc.)
		Local stewardship	Presence of grassroots organizing groups or efforts
	Social Capital	Social networks	Reported willingness to cooperate, help, and exchange
			Presence of local leadership (religious, civic, etc.)
		Recognition of diverse cultural identities	Representation of different cultures via public art, monuments, signage, and other physical symbols in public spaces
		Development or strengthening of partnerships between organizations or groups	Evidence of successful outcomes from partnerships
Design & program	Quality of Public Space	Presence of nature	Diverse natural features (Green, water) within a public space
			Space allows interactions with nature elements provided
			Has minimum impact on the environment
		User comfort	Major pedestrian pathways are covered
		Vitality	The space is active during the day and night
			The space is used frequently and permanently
		Quality of experience	Reported degree of satisfaction with the quality of the public space
			Reported perceived quality of a public space among different groups
		Presence of local culture in design elements	Distribution of space to people's demonstrated or desired patterns of use (e.g., Sufficient percentage of area dedicated to pedestrians based on volume of pedestrians)
			Reported level of positive sensory experience, sense of high aesthetic quality in the space
		Sense of place	Reported perceived sense of place value of the open space
			Reported people feel comfortable in the place
	Quality of Public Space	Walkability and quality of the sidewalk and street experience	Absence of obstructions along pathways and access points
			Provide interconnected pathways, without dead-ends
		Connectivity	Space provides well-interconnected internal pathways, without dead-end situations
			Safe and attractive routes to/from residential homes to public space/local park
		Way-finding	A main entry/exit point is visible
		Mobility means	Street network distance to the nearest (same type of) public space from a study participant's home address
			Residents within max. 10-minute walk from the public space
			Access to public transportation (up to 400M)
			Parking Lots are available (up to 400M)
			Bicycle-friendly design
		Legibility and Edges	Pedestrian network is clearly defined (major and minor pedestrian routes are clearly defined)
			At least 2 legible nodes are provided
			At least 1 visual landmark
	Use & Users	User diversity and characteristics	Different age groups use the space
			Presence of racial and/or ethnic, age, and gender diversity using the space
			Presence of socioeconomically diverse user groups within the same public space
		Spatial variety	Space fosters inclusion and regulation rather than exclusion and restriction
			Active users' participation in space management is encouraged
			Diverse users performing an activity (e.g., cycling, walking, sitting, etc.)
			Space allows, manages activities
		Evidence of social mixing	Presence of physical design features or site elements that promote diverse types of users
			Seating is available in both sun and shade
			Space is divided into sub-spaces
			Children's play areas
			Different types of physical activity
			All public facilities are free of charge or largely affordable
			Public facilities and pedestrian walkways for individuals with special needs
	Safety & Security	Lighting	Adequate lighting along main pathways and nodes is provided
		Information facilities	At least 1 public communicational facility is available in space
		Safety	Design prevents injury, crime, or violence documented within the space
		Security	Space employs security measures
		Level of perceived safety	Percentage of women and percentage of children using the public space
		Level of maintenance	Presence of features and amenities that demonstrate maintenance (staff, clean wall, presence of volunteer stewards – quality of overall condition of repair of space and features)
		Presence of site furnishings and materials that invite people to linger	Presence of basic public space features and amenities that encourage lingering and physical activity (children's playground and/or features for play – seating, formal or informal – picnic tables, etc.)
Sustain	Ongoing Representation	Engaged governance	At least 1 engagement or point of access for community participation (e.g., promotion of meetings, online communications, personal invitation, flyering, etc.)
		Accountability	Presence of tools for diverse stakeholder groups to engage (feedback boxes, hotline, emails, etc.)
		Social cohesion	Reported sustained feelings of trust towards other people, in or beyond public space
			Reported strength of personal local networks
			Reported ongoing levels of recognition among neighbors
			Reported strength of ties (being stronger) within the relevant network
	Preparedness for Change	Capacity for ongoing evaluation	Presence of a process for evaluating the space over time (e.g., use, benefits, safety)
			Presence of the capacity to evaluate the space over time
			Existence of mechanisms for evaluation to translate to future change

Table 2 Criteria developed by the Author

Inform: **Superkilen**

Superkilen, a public park in Copenhagen, Denmark, was designed collaboratively by the City of Copenhagen, Realdania, BIG, and Superflex, to celebrate local cultural diversity. The park features global design elements representing the neighborhood's diverse backgrounds. Despite its innovative design and international acclaim, the project faced criticism for superficial community engagement, offering limited influence over significant design decisions. This led to mixed outcomes in social cohesion and community empowerment. Superkilen highlights how urban design can visually celebrate cultural diversity and underscores the need for genuine community participation. Future projects should integrate multicultural elements while ensuring meaningful community involvement to foster social cohesion and empowerment.
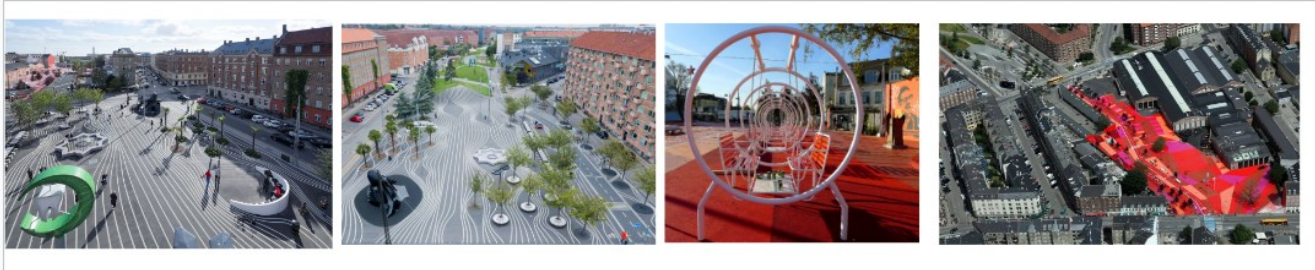

Figure 5 Superkilen - Copenhagen, Denmark (Source: Archdaily)

Consult: Tactical urbanism implementation in Barranquilla

This project in Villa del Mar, Barranquilla, aimed to revitalize an unsafe, segregated public space into a vibrant, inclusive community hub. This initiative, involving the UNHCR, IOM, and UN-Habitat and supported by the European Union, focused on fostering social integration, particularly for vulnerable groups like Venezuelan migrants. Critical physical interventions included the creation of a stage square and soccer field to improve environmental quality, installing public art and lighting to enhance safety, and developing sports facilities and community spaces for social interaction.

Workshops and participatory design sessions emphasized high community engagement. Regular activities like dance therapy sessions and the "Culture in Harmony" event promoted community integration. The project faced challenges in coordinating stakeholders and ensuring long-term sustainability, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the project improved social cohesion and public safety, transforming the space into a welcoming environment.

Figure 6 Source: ciudadesincluyentes.org

Involve: Open Space Gökçeada Project

This project transformed a neglected public space into an inclusive community hub, addressing the island's diverse culture, including Catholic and Orthodox Greek, Armenians, Turks, Syrian refugees, and Kurds. In addition to the diversity of users, children participated in the participatory design process, and consideration was given to pregnant women, the elderly, and vulnerable groups in the design process. The project emphasizes community involvement and local partnerships to create a vibrant community hub through placemaking. Residents shared their visions, experiences, and skills by organizing

workshops and digital meetings, contributing to the design process. Despite challenges like language barriers and COVID-19 restrictions, creative solutions such as digital tools and virtual tours facilitated effective participation. Spearheaded by the UNDP Accelerator Lab with a Japanese design firm and the Marmara Municipalities Union and local consultants ensured a culturally sensitive and environmentally conscious design. The implementation phase involved local craftsmen and volunteers, reinforcing community ownership. Activities included workshops, crafts, and various community events supporting urban resilience and sustainability. The project exemplifies how participatory design can enrich public spaces by incorporating diverse community inputs and fostering a sense of shared ownership and identity.
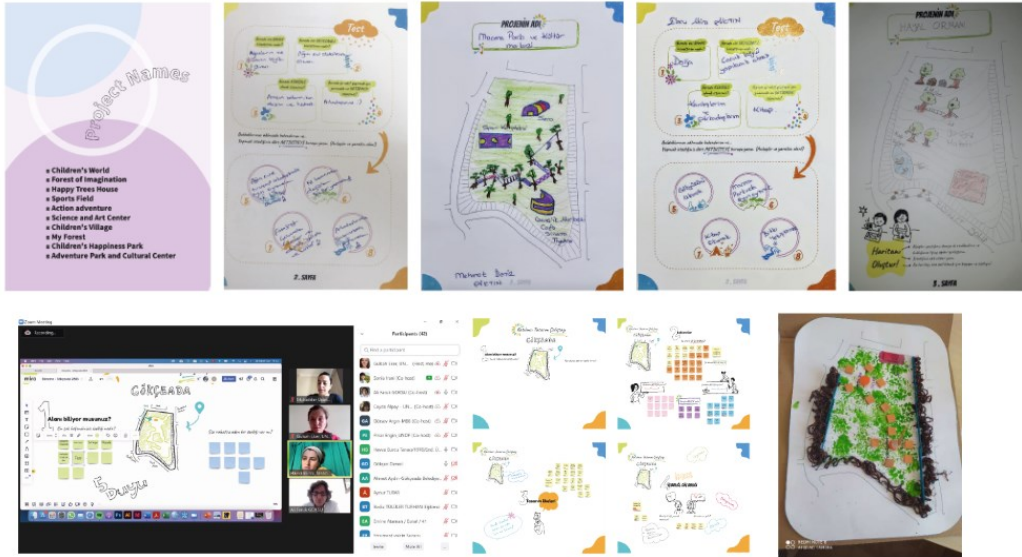

Figure 7 Source: undp.org/turkiye/blog/integrating-public-space

Collaborate: Peavey Park Project

The Peavey Park Project in Minneapolis revitalized a crime-ridden area into a safe, vibrant community space through participatory design and extensive community engagement. Community members actively participated in listening and visioning sessions, sharing their needs and dreams for the park, which guided the design of features like a recreation center, multi-use surfaces, central commons, and a community center for arts and culture. Specific initiatives like public art installations and garden creations involved direct community action, fostering ownership and pride. This active participation strengthened trust between residents and local authorities and enhanced long-term engagement. The inclusive approach ensured the park reflected the diverse Phillips neighborhood, transforming it into a welcoming space that hosts cultural and recreational activities. The project demonstrated the power of community collaboration in both the design and implementation phases, resulting in a space that genuinely met the community's needs and aspirations.
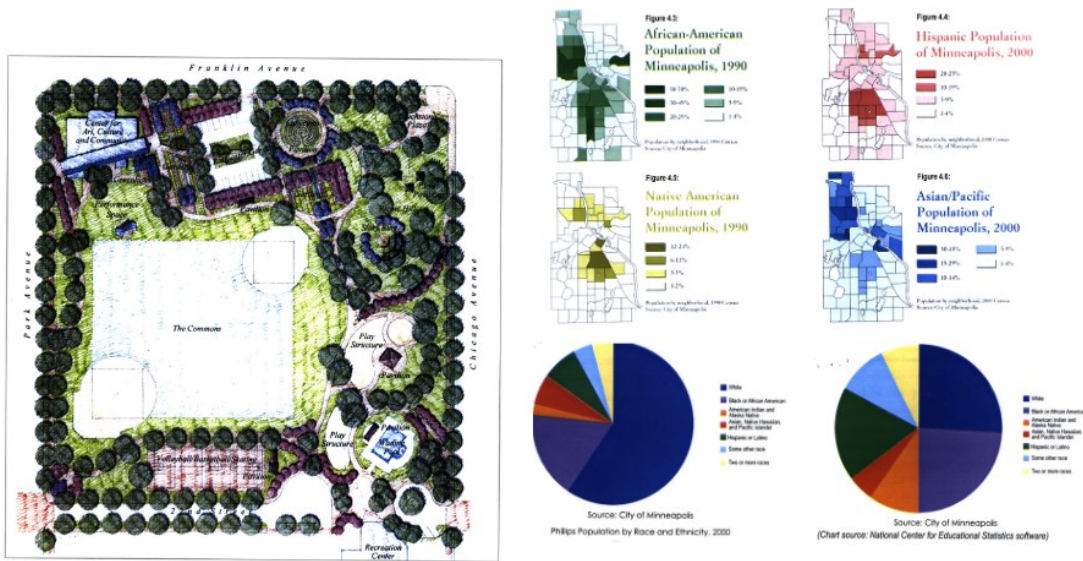

Figure 8 The Peavey Park (Source: Hope Community, Inc.)

Empower: Public space in Bar Elias, Lebanon

In Bar Elias, a refugee-hosting town in Lebanon, academics from the Institute for Global Prosperity (IGP) and UCL collaborated with residents on a transformative urban project. The initiative aimed to enhance pedestrian safety, create child-friendly spaces, and rehabilitate a public park. The participatory approach included recruiting and training local Citizen Scientists from Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian communities. These researchers conducted workshops and participatory mapping to identify and address infrastructure challenges. The project resulted in new seating areas, pedestrian ramps, speed humps, and shaded spaces, promoting accessibility and community cohesion. The revitalized park now serves as a gathering space, with added greenery and artistic elements. The project, supported by CatalyticAction and local authorities, fostered skills transfer and community engagement, transforming Bar Elias into a safer, more inclusive environment. Now, this open space hosts social meetings, parties, dialogue sessions, activities, cultural songs, and dances, bringing the community together.
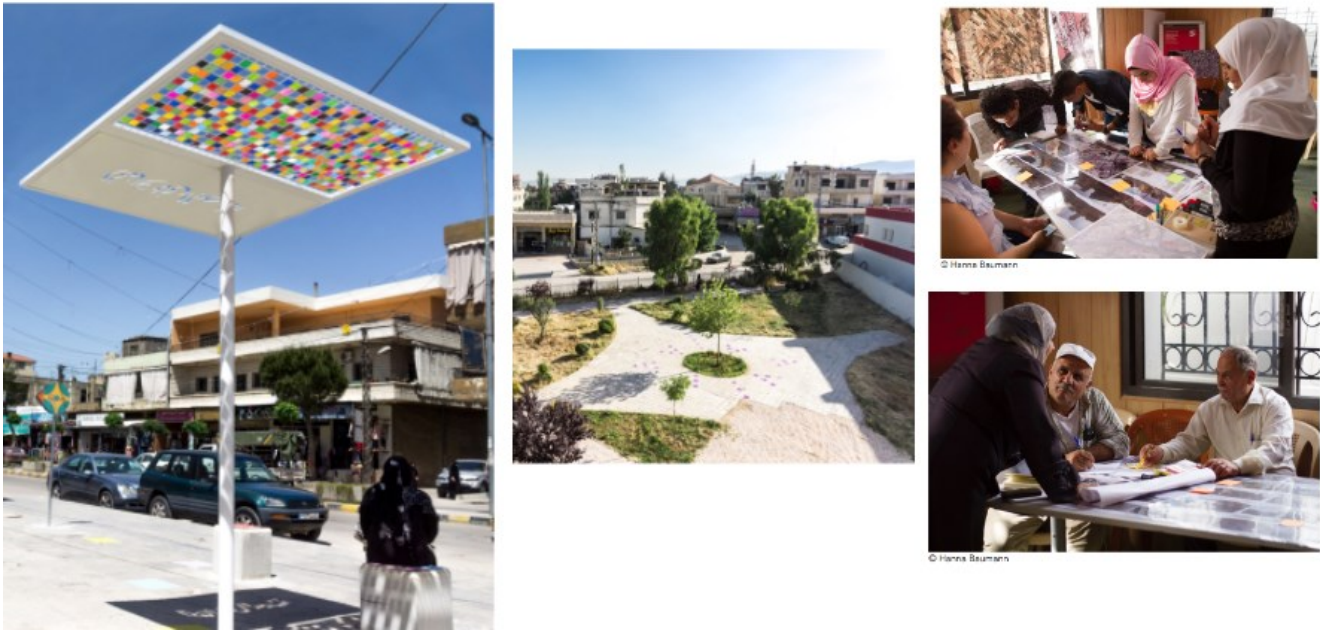

Figure 9 Source: CatalyticAction

5. Discussion of Findings

This section presents a comparative analysis of the impact of participatory design on community engagement and inclusivity across five case studies, highlighting key findings and challenges. The first table displays results regarding methods, participant diversity, and achieving objectives, while the second table presents the outcomes based on evaluating case studies according to specific indicators. By examining these varied contexts, the study identifies best practices and effective strategies for enhancing public space design through participatory approaches, emphasizing the importance of genuine community involvement and adaptability to local conditions for successful urban transformation.

*Table 3. The analysis of participatory design across five case studies reveals varying degrees of community engagement and impact on inclusivity. The Superkilen project in Copenhagen aimed to foster social integration through diverse urban design elements, yet the community engagement was criticized for being superficial, offering limited decision-making influence. In contrast, the Tactical Urbanism project in Villa del Mar, Barranquilla, effectively transformed public spaces into platforms for community integration, promoting healthy lifestyles through extensive participatory design and feedback sessions, despite challenges in sustaining engagement and maintaining facilities. Turkey's Open Space Gökçeada Project revitalized a neglected public space using workshops and digital tools, overcoming language barriers and COVID-19 restrictions to create a more inclusive and engaging public area. Similarly, the Peavey Park Project in Minneapolis focused on revitalizing the park to enhance safety and usability, resulting in reduced crime and improved community cohesion through extensive community workshops and public art projects. Finally, the Bar Elias Project in Lebanon enhanced pedestrian safety and rehabilitated a public park through extensive participatory research and feedback sessions, significantly improving community integration and safety. However, it faced challenges in managing the persistent tensions between residents. Across these case studies, the degree of community involvement and the effectiveness of participatory methods varied, highlighting the importance of genuine engagement and adaptability to local contexts for successful urban transformation.
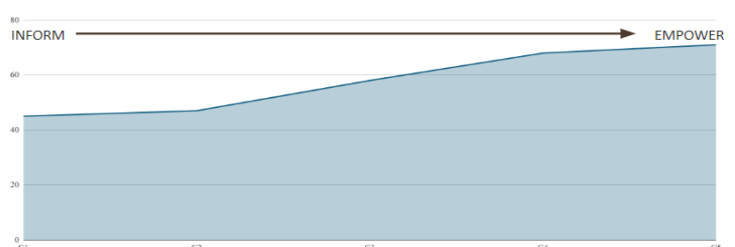
Project	Location	Degree of Participation	Participatory Method	Participants	Social Impact	Physical Interventions	Challenges
1.Superkilen	Copenhagen, Denmark	Inform	Inform sessions	Local residents, multicultural population	Promoting the community about diverse cultures via visual art	Diverse urban furniture, artworks, play equipment	Limited influence over major decisions
2.Tactical Urbanism in Barranquilla	Villa del Mar, Barranquilla	Consult	Art project, consultation sessions	Local residents, especially youth and women	Improved community integration, Promoting healthy habits, reduced fear and racism	Installation of sports facilities, theaters, shaded areas	Sustaining engagement, maintaining new facilities
3.Open Space Gökçeada Project	Gökçeada, Turkey	Involve	Workshops, digital tools, participatory mapping	Diverse local residents, Childrens, different ethnic groups	Creating sustainable, Public space, Greater community interaction	Environmental-friendly design elements, flexible spaces	Language barriers, adapting to COVID-19 restrictions
4.Peavey Park Project	Minneapolis, Minnesota	Collaborate	Community workshops, surveys, public art projects	Diverse community members, local organizations, city officials	Reduced crime, improved community cohesion	Public art installations, new playgrounds, improved amenities	Managing diverse community needs, sustaining long-term engagement
5.Public Space in Bar Elias	Bar Elias, Lebanon	Empower	Participatory research, workshops, feedback sessions	NGOs,Local Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian residents	Improved community integration, Creating inclusive, safe, and vibrant public	Pedestrian ramps, seating areas, shading structures, playgrounds	Persistent tensions between residents.

Table 3

*Table 4. Evaluation of the indicators.
This evaluation shows a clear trend: higher levels of participatory engagement correlate with better scores across various indicators. This indicates that increased community involvement enhances overall engagement and outcomes. For instance, areas with higher civic participation, trust in government and fellow community members, and representation of participants' ideas in the design process tend to score better regarding public space quality, social cohesion, and safety.
Therefore, fostering higher levels of participation and trust within a community is essential for achieving better engagement and more positive outcomes in public spaces and civic activities.

			Indicator	Case study 1	Case study 2	Case study 3	Case study 4	Case study 5
Context	Public assets	vital statistics	The project area has a diverse population (income, age, sex, race and ethnicity, etc.)	1	1	1	1	1
	Community Assets	Economic asset	Access to market, cafes, and restaurants around the space	1	1	1	1	1
		Entertainment asset	Access to free public facilities (school, library, recreation, etc.)	1	0	1	1	1
		Local institutions	Presence of local landmarks, symbols, and local art	0	0	1	1	1
			Presence of cultural organizations and institutions	0	1	1	1	1
	Predictors of Exclusion	Inequality	Presence of inequality by race and ethnicity, and gender	1	1	1	1	1
			Presence of residential poverty based on income on a district scale	0	1	0	0	1
			Presence of place-based conditions that inhibit the formation of neighborhood social ties and exclusion	0	1	1	1	1
		Discriminatory practices	Presence of unfair treatment or experiences of discrimination by race and ethnicity and other relevant demographics	0	1	1	1	1
Process	Civic Trust	Civic participation	Civic participation (e.g., participation at political meetings, membership in political clubs, advocacy and organizing groups, participatory budgeting)	0	1	0	1	1
		Reported trust	Reported trust in government and civic associations	0	1	0	1	1
			Reported trust in fellow community members	0	1	0	1	1
		Participation	Implementing the ideas of participants in the design process	0	0	1	1	1
			Presence of community events (e.g., festivals, street fairs, sporting tournaments, etc.)	0	1	1	1	0
			Presence of community-led public events and programs	0	1	1	1	1
			Presence of community-led volunteer projects or programs (e.g., park cleanup, corporate-sponsored efforts, etc.)	0	0	1	0	1
		Local stewardship	Presence of grassroots organizing groups or efforts	0	0	1	0	0
	Social Capital	Social networks	Reported willingness to cooperate, help, and exchange	0	0	1	0	1
			Presence of local leadership (religious, civic, etc.)	0	0	1	0	1
		Recognition of diverse cultural identities	Representation of different cultures via public art, monuments, signage, and other physical symbols in public spaces	1	1	1	1	1
		Development or strengthening of partnerships between organizations or groups	Evidence of successful outcomes from partnerships	0	0	1	1	1
Design & program	Quality of Public Space	Presence of nature	Diverse natural features (Green, water) within a public space	1	0	0	1	0
			Space allows interactions with nature elements provided	1	0	1	1	1
			Has minimum impact on the environment	1	0	1	1	1
		User comfort	Major pedestrian pathways are covered	1	0	1	1	1
		Vitality	The space is active during the day and night	0	1	1	1	1
			The space is used frequently and permanently	1	1	1	1	1
		Quality of experience	Reported degree of satisfaction with the quality of the public space	0	1	1	1	1
			Reported perceived quality of a public space among different groups	1	1	0	1	1
		Presence of local culture in design elements	Distribution of space to people's demonstrated or desired patterns of use (e.g., Sufficient percentage of area dedicated to pedestrians based on volume of pedestrians)	0	1	0	1	1
			Reported level of positive sensory experience, sense of high aesthetic quality in the space	0	0	1	1	1
		Sense of place	Reported perceived sense of place value of the open space	1	0	1	1	1
			Reported people feel comfortable in the place	1	1	1	1	1
	Accessibility and Access	Walkability and quality of the sidewalk and street experience	Absence of obstructions along pathways and access points	1	0	0	1	1
			Provide interconnected pathways, without dead-ends	1	1	1	1	1
		Connectivity	Space provides well-interconnected internal pathways, without dead-end situations	1	0	1	1	1
			Safe and attractive routes to/from residential homes to public space/local park	1	0	1	1	1
		Way-finding	A main entry/exit point is visible	1	0	0	1	1
		Mobility means	Street network distance to the nearest (same type of) public space from a study participant's home address	1	0	0	1	1
			Residents within max. 10-minute walk from the public space	1	1	0	1	1
			Access to public transportation (up to 400M)	1	0	1	1	1
			Parking Lots are available (up to 400M)	1	1	0	1	1
			Bicycle-friendly design	1	0	1	1	0
		Legibility and Edges	Pedestrian network is clearly defined (major and minor pedestrian routes are clearly defined)	1	1	1	1	1
			At least 2 legible nodes are provided	1	0	1	1	0
			At least 1 visual landmark	1	1	1	0	1
	Use & Users		Different age groups use the space	1	1	1	1	1
			Presence of racial and/or ethnic, age, and gender diversity using the space	1	1	1	1	1

		User diversity and characteristics	Presence of socioeconomically diverse user groups within the same public space	1	1	1	1	1
		Spatial variety	Space fosters inclusion and regulation rather than exclusion and restriction	1	1	1	1	1
			Active users' participation in space management is encouraged	0	1	1	0	1
			Diverse users performing an activity (e.g., cycling, walking, sitting, etc.)	1	0	1	1	1
			Space allows, manages activities	1	1	1	1	1
		Evidence of social mixing	Presence of physical design features or site elements that promote diverse types of users	1	1	1	1	1
			Seating is available in both sun and shade	1	0	1	1	1
			Space is divided into sub-spaces	1	1	1	1	1
			Children's play areas	0	0	1	1	1
			Different types of physical activity	1	1	1	1	1
			All public facilities are free of charge or largely affordable	1	1	1	1	1
			Public facilities and pedestrian walkways for individuals with special needs	1	0	1	1	1
	Safety & Security	Lighting	Adequate lighting along main pathways and nodes is provided	1	1	1	1	1
		Information facilities	At least 1 public communicational facility is available in space	0	1	0	0	1
		Safety	Design prevents injury, crime, or violence documented within the space	1	1	0	1	1
		Security	Space employs security measures	1	1	1	1	1
		Level of perceived safety	Percentage of women and percentage of children using the public space	1	1	1	1	1
		Level of maintenance	Presence of features and amenities that demonstrate maintenance (staff, clean wall, presence of volunteer stewards – quality of overall condition of repair of space and features)	1	1	1	1	1
		Presence of site furnishings and materials that invite people to linger	Presence of basic public space features and amenities that encourage lingering and physical activity (children's playground and/or features for play – seating, formal or informal – picnic tables, etc.)	1	1	1	1	1
Sustain	Ongoing Representation	Engaged governance	At least 1 engagement or point of access for community participation (e.g., promotion of meetings, online communications, personal invitation, flyering, etc.)	1	1	1	1	1
		Accountability	Presence of tools for diverse stakeholder groups to engage (feedback boxes, hotline, emails, etc.)	0	0	0	1	1
		Social cohesion	Reported sustained feelings of trust towards other people, in or beyond public space	0	1	1	1	1
			Reported strength of personal local networks	0	1	0	1	1
			Reported ongoing levels of recognition among neighbors	0	1	0	1	1
			Reported strength of ties (being stronger) within the relevant network	0	0	0	1	1
	Preparedness for Change	Capacity for ongoing evaluation	Presence of a process for evaluating the space over time (e.g., use, benefits, safety)	0	0	1	1	1
			Presence of the capacity to evaluate the space over time	0	1	1	1	1
			Existence of mechanisms for evaluation to translate to future change	0	1	1	1	1
Total				45	47	58	68	71

Table 4

6. Conclusions

This study's comparative analysis of five participatory design case studies—Superkilen in Copenhagen, Tactical Urbanism in Barranquilla, Open Space Gökçeada Project, Peavey Park Project, and Public Space in Bar Elias, Lebanon—reveals a strong correlation between high levels of community engagement and significant improvements in social cohesion, safety, and community satisfaction. The research aimed to understand how varying degrees of participatory design influence the inclusivity and diversity of public spaces. The findings demonstrate that robust participatory processes are crucial for transforming public spaces into inclusive and vibrant community hubs.

Projects like Open Space Gökçeada and Peavey Park, which involved extensive community participation, outperformed those with lower engagement levels, such as Superkilen, in fostering genuine community integration and empowerment. These results underscore the importance of inclusive design strategies involving diverse stakeholders, enhancing theoretical understanding and practical application of participatory urban design.

However, the study faced limitations, which may have influenced the outcomes. Future research should address these limitations by exploring broader contexts and developing standardized metrics for evaluating participatory design's impact. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into the long-term benefits of such interventions.

In conclusion, this research highlights the essential role of community engagement in public space design and advocates for policies and practices that prioritize participatory approaches to create more equitable and cohesive urban environments.

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