

# Building Inclusive Cities Case Study

## Toronto: Planning for Diversity, Inclusion and Urban Resilience

By: Dr. Zhixi Zhuang, Associate Professor, School of Urban and Regional Planning, Ryerson University

*Recent waves of global migration have led to profound social, cultural, economic, political, physical, and environmental effects in metropolitan regions of major immigrant settlement. As noted in the World Migration Report, more scholars are exploring the relationship between migrants and cities.<sup>1</sup> Cities play an important role in the processes of immigrant settlement and integration. Not only do they serve as reception areas for newcomers to live, work, learn, play, and socialize like other city inhabitants; they are also important places for building diverse, inclusive, resilient, and equitable communities in the long term. It has become imperative for municipalities to understand the dynamics and complexity of the global migration phenomenon and tackle the challenges and opportunities it presents locally. This report presents the key takeaways from Toronto's planning practices as part of the Building Inclusive Cities initiative.*

### From arrival cities to welcoming communities: Why do diversity, inclusion and resilience matter to cities?

Toronto has been well recognized as one of the most multicultural cities in the world: its diverse demographics bring the world to the city. The city's motto 'Diversity Our Strength' is often used in city branding and promotion celebrating its multicultural diversity. In 2017, more than half of the three million Torontonians were born outside of Canada and self-reported as a visible minority.<sup>2</sup> However, in arrival cities like Toronto, an ethno-culturally diverse population does not necessarily lead to diverse, inclusive, and resilient communities. Research has revealed that diversity adds advantages and competitiveness to cities by building social cohesion, enhancing economic vitality, fostering cultural belonging, driving innovation and promoting creativity. To realize these advantages equity and inclusion require fostering in every aspect of civic life.

The key to ensuring the success of a multiculturally diverse society is treating immigrants, refugees, racialized and marginalized members fairly. A successful welcoming community ensures all members have equal access to municipal resources, infrastructure, facilities, and services, equal rights to use of public spaces, and equal representation in decision-making processes.

Diverse and inclusive cities and communities have more social, economic and physical resilience in the face of unforeseen challenges because community members are equipped with the values of equity, diversity and inclusion to

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adapt to changes and create positive opportunities for community-(re)building.

Urban resilience is of paramount importance because it is interconnected to socio-ecological systems and is central in policy-making discourses. Recent climate-induced migration and refugee crises have triggered political and societal debates over security, newcomer settlement, risk assessment and the adaptability of cities. Urban resilience implies a capacity to respond to emergencies and unexpected events like the surge in refugee claimants crossing the

Canada-US border and overwhelming Toronto shelters.<sup>3</sup> How could cities be doing better?

Toronto is part of the global 100 Resilient Cities network created by the Rockefeller Foundation: like many other cities worldwide, it is facing unprecedented challenges associated with its diverse and fast-changing demographics, such as the need for political representation of its population, reallocating resources and services for immigrants and refugees, diversity and equity-focused policies and processes, and engaging the diverse public in city and community-building.

## Leveling an uneven playing field

Notwithstanding its well-established multicultural reputation, Toronto is still a city with missed opportunities where immigrant interests are left out. For example, the problem of no municipal voting rights for immigrants adversely affects equitable decision-making and excludes political participation for immigrants who also pay municipal taxes but have little say in municipal matters.<sup>4</sup> The number of people living in Toronto that are not Canadian citizens is greater than anywhere else in the country.<sup>5</sup> It is estimated up to 16% of Toronto's population, or more than 250,000 residents, cannot vote in municipal elections because they are not citizens.<sup>6</sup> The elected members of Toronto's city council also does not represent the city's diverse demographics, with only 5 out of 44 (11% vs. 51.5% city average) city councilors who belong to visible minority groups.<sup>7</sup>

The lack of political representation of diversity has adverse impacts on the city's diverse communities. On one hand, Toronto's population and economic growth is fueled by a high rate of immigration; on the other hand, the lack of inclusionary zoning for affordable housing and insufficient investment in public transit constrains newcomers' access to desirable places and needed resources and opportunities, many of whom were left with no choice but settle in the more distressed fringe areas typified by food deserts, poor transit and housing conditions, and insufficient infrastructure and services.

The authors of Toronto Foundation's annual Vital Signs report used an equity framework to assess the vitality of Toronto's communities with a specific focus on different subgroups by gender, race, income, geography and immigration status.<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, they found that newcomers and racialized communities in Toronto are vulnerable and at greater risk of poverty, employment and housing precarity, and poor health conditions due to systemic constraints and bias, such as unequal

*"An equity-embedded planning system ensures the well-being and long-term resilience of the community at-large"*

access to services, discrimination and racism in the labour and housing markets, and underrepresentation in political leadership and civic engagement.

Although these migration-related issues are not new, there is now a vital need to instill the values of equity, diversity, and inclusion into municipal policies, processes and planning practices. An equity-embedded planning system ensures the well-being and long-term resilience of the community at-large. Everyone benefits from a welcoming community that respects diversity and differences, cultivates inclusive and shared spaces, and promotes equity and resilience in its vision. In Toronto, city planners, the public and other community stakeholders are now working together to build a city that is inclusive, equitable, meaningful and culturally distinguishable. The next sections present key learnings from the Toronto context and best practices from a global context.

## Equitable civic engagement

Given Toronto's very diverse public interests, how should the multiple voices – especially from marginalized communities – be represented in major planning decisions? How should the planning system engage the diverse public in an equitable way? The conventional public consultation methods may not be sufficient or

suitable to equitably address the needs of the many diverse communities, as Toronto's City Planning Division has pointed out.<sup>9</sup>

*"An equity-based civic engagement approach brings people into the centre of city-building which is an important component of shaping a more inclusive city"*

Recognizing the need for a change, in 2015 the Division established a Planning Review Panel, consisting of about 30 volunteers from the public selected by a civic lottery to ensure randomization and equal representation across the city. The selection process seeks a balance of gender, age, visible minority, home renters vs. homeowners, geographic location and always ensures at least one member of Aboriginal descent. Panel members serve for two years, during which they learn about the planning process and improve public engagement by offering their perspectives to the Planning Department. Planning issues discussed at the panel include a wide range of city-building topics including transportation, housing, density, heritage, public art and community amenities. In the spirit of validating their contributions, the panel is referenced in official staff reports to city council, and the panel's reports are publicly accessible online.

This equity-based civic engagement approach brings people into the centre of city-building, which is an important component of shaping a more inclusive city. One example of equitable civic engagement is the Superkilen public park transformation in Copenhagen. The city used an 'extreme civic involvement' approach to incorporate diverse public input into the redesign of the park space. Local residents who represented more than 50 different nationalities were consulted for culturally unique ideas. Their voices were heard equitably and the objects they picked from their cultural backgrounds were reproduced or transplanted in the park. The park was transformed into a place of collective memories of migration, and now promotes

intercultural appreciation and social integration. New York City has also recognized the demographic changes in the city, including the diverse and unique needs of immigrant communities who are traditionally under-served in the public parks system. Planners are now exploring new ways to engage immigrants who have encountered different barriers to accessing parks (e.g., language, lack of information and culturally sensitive park amenities). In 2008, the New Yorkers for Parks published a report entitled "Parks for All New Yorkers: Immigrants, Culture, and NYC Parks" with actionable recommendations for city staff and community stakeholders.<sup>10</sup>

### **Equity and inclusion-embedded planning policies and programs**

City planning is regulated by legislation: it is the professional mandate of planners to follow set rules, and all planning practices must abide by planning policies. To build inclusive cities, it is critical to develop planning policies, programs and professional training that are focused on equity and inclusion to guide urban growth and change, and ensure planning practitioners are well equipped with the knowledge and skill to implement policies and deliver programs to the communities at the ground level.

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The Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 is one of Toronto's action plans designed specifically to ensure the wellbeing and long-term resilience of Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods.<sup>11</sup> It seeks to ensure that equitable opportunities exist for every neighbourhood. It designated

Neighbourhood Improvement Areas with the goal of developing strong working relationship with neighbourhood residents and community organizations, providing resources and implementing neighbourhood-friendly policies. The overall strategy establishes priorities in terms of servicing, partnership and investment opportunities, identifying the Neighbourhood Improvement Areas based on a Neighbourhood Equity Index that considers local economic, social, physical, health and decision-making factors.<sup>12</sup> Those with a low Neighbourhood Equity Index score are considered in most need of direct planning interventions. A user-friendly online mapping tool called Wellbeing Toronto was also launched to display data based on census results that informed the Neighbourhood Equity Index scores.<sup>13</sup> This tool provides transparent and equal access to data influencing policy making, investment priority and resource allocation.

Many of the Neighbourhood Improvement Areas are typified by concentrations of high-rise towers that were built 50 years ago. The modernist design of these tower neighbourhoods intentionally segregated land uses without the provision of commercial activities, meaningful public spaces, or community facilities and services for local residents, many of whom are newcomers: one example is Thorncliffe Park, an inner suburb of Toronto. In 2014, the city approved new Residential Apartment Commercial zoning which allows small-scale commercial and community uses in these tower neighbourhoods. This zoning opens up entrepreneurship opportunities for newcomers and also promotes social interactions and community vibrancy through the use of mixed residential and commercial spaces.

Municipal policies and programs play a critical role in addressing community needs and helping immigrants integrate socially and economically. Boston's Back Streets Program is a good example: it supported immigrant-owned businesses by providing zoning review guidelines, a business location finder portal and business assistance programs.

Flexibility in municipal policies and programs is also important to ensure the success of inclusive urban spaces. In Hong Kong, huge crowds of foreign domestic workers (about 300,000, mainly from Southeast Asia) congregate in primary public spaces every Sunday to socialize with their friends and families. Instead of prohibiting this mass public gathering, which could trigger conflict and public outcry, Hong Kong government accommodates this 'Sundays in the City' phenomenon to ensure that public space regulations are adaptable and flexible to accommodate the diverse needs of these workers. It provides sufficient policing, security, sanitation measures and public information to support their use of public space.

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### **Inclusive public spaces to build urban resilience**

In 2016, the New Urban Agenda was officially adopted at the UN-Habitat conference. It provides a 20-year global 'roadmap' for building sustainable cities.<sup>14</sup> It includes several key commitments related to migration issues and urban development, such as promoting accessible and inclusive public spaces. People interact with each other and city life flourishes in public places including parks, streets, public transit, markets, sports fields, community centres, schools, libraries, places of worship and retail facilities. These public spaces or 'third places' are essential social and community spaces that exist outside the 'first place' of home and the 'second place' of work. Public spaces should connect people of various cultural backgrounds, facilitate intercultural social interaction and provide positive opportunities to build community resilience. Planning and design principles should incorporate the values of equity and inclusion into these physical spaces and provide relevant and meaningful programs and services to fulfill these goals.

**Community space and cultural hub.** One example is [Toronto Public Library](#), which is an open, free, accessible resource hub for communities across the city. It has a set of Multicultural Service Goals that have been designed to guide service delivery for newcomers and those whose first language is not English.<sup>15</sup> It also has a Library Settlement Partnership program that helps newcomers gain Canadian experience via volunteer or technology training and preparation for jobs. It offers cultural programming and library collections in many languages to build an inclusive community. By providing services and resources in one location, the library meets the needs of diverse people, with equal access to information, resources, services, and the space.

Community centres are another type of important public space where culturally sensitive programs and services should be prioritized to meet diverse needs. Toronto's Regent Park is one of the Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and the oldest and largest public housing project in Canada. Over the last decade, the neighbourhood has been undergoing large-scale redevelopment and revitalization with one billion dollar public and private investment. This physical transformation has also led to critical questions about how to avoid social cleansing and how to create shared spaces to promote social cohesion, inclusion and integration for new middle-class and long-time social housing residents, many of whom are immigrants of very diverse cultural backgrounds. The [Regent Park Aquatic Centre](#) and [Daniels Spectrum](#) are the focal points of the new community: both were designed with diversity and inclusion in mind and offer culturally sensitive programs that meet the needs of residents. For example, the pool in the Aquatic Centre is screened in on Saturday evenings to provide a safe space for Muslim women to swim. Daniels Spectrum provides space for community-based agencies and local residents to work, play, learn and socialize. The neighbourhood also provides space for culturally sensitive events such as pop-up markets, night markets and programs for women and families.

The [Scadding Court Community Centre](#), located in the historically multicultural Kensington Market/Chinatown area, offers multi-faceted programming that changes seasonally. About 60% of the residents in the adjacent housing development were born outside of Canada, so programming was designed to help this diverse population interact and share common experiences. The skate park is always full, [the pool is converted into a 'fishing pond'](#) each June, and just across the street is [Market 707](#): shipping containers that have been converted and rented out to independent food vendors. For some, this is a stepping stone to having a brick and mortar store, for others a change to test new menus and build a following – but it provides all with a sustainable opportunity that may not otherwise have existed, setting them on the path to economic independence.

**Building inclusive public spaces is a two-way process** that involves public input and engagement. Many local communities in Toronto are proactive in the co-creation of culturally meaningful and inclusive shared spaces. For example, R.V. Burgess Park in Thorncliffe Park is the proud host of the first Canadian outdoor tandoori oven in a public park and has created a welcoming community environment for everyone. The transformation was driven by the [Thorncliffe Park's Women's Committee](#), which formed in 2008 to empower women to create stronger communities. This culturally diverse group encourages women to create and improve public spaces collectively.

An active residents' association can make all the difference by embracing different cultures and developing infrastructure and improvements. Toronto's [Kensington Market](#) is valued for its wide range of ethnic food offerings and promoted as a multicultural destination. To enhance a sense of community and promote social integration, local residents and businesses initiated a popular event known as Pedestrian Sundays: during the summer months the streets are closed to vehicular traffic and pedestrians socialize in the shared space.



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**Public arts build social bonds.** Public art planning is another way to connect and engage community members. It encourages urban resilience by building trust, appreciation, support and collective memories. Toronto’s St. James Town neighbourhood is another large-scale social housing project that was developed in the modernist era. Similar to other tower neighbourhoods, it has experienced physical constraints and socio-economic segregation. Through strong collaboration between the city, artists and local residents – especially local youth – the facade of one 32-storey building was transformed into the tallest mural in the world. A soaring phoenix painted in bright colours reflects the themes of diversity, accessibility, safety, happiness and local culture.<sup>16</sup> Hundreds of community members helped paint it, and the process helped build a sense of community and resilience among residents.

Another mural project in Toronto’s St. Lawrence Neighbourhood illustrates how a public art project can help a community heal.<sup>17</sup> The area features a large population of newcomers and racialized people who reside in social housing buildings. It has experienced tension between police and Black youths: for example, in 2014 a cherished basketball court was accidentally destroyed by a police cruiser during a chase. It was later repaired through a private donation, but importantly, a mural wall was also created in a partnership between police and youth. The mural celebrates local history and the values of love, peace, diversity, nature and teamwork. Building community resilience requires mutual support from various stakeholders, and public arts planning can be an effective way to form partnership, create common ground and build social bonds among stakeholders.

## Major Takeaways

In a new era of global migration, the century-old western planning system should make new and meaningful breakthroughs to respond to the challenges and opportunities brought to cities by addressing immigration-related city-building issues, including but not limited to housing, employment, transportation, public space, land use, education, community service and environmental justice that have deeply affected the well-being and quality of life of immigrant communities.

All cities, even the best of them, are both vulnerable and fast-changing. Building inclusive and resilient cities should recognize the importance of adaptation and flexibility in the construct of a common ground. Municipalities should apply an equity framework in planning to foster diversity, inclusion, and urban resilience, which can be reflected in municipal planning policies, programs, community outreach processes, and the construct of shared public spaces.

*“All cities, even the best of them, are both vulnerable and fast-changing”*

Explicit equity and inclusion-embedded planning policies and programs acknowledge each cultural group is distinct in its identity, cultural preferences, and spatial and physical needs. An equity lens and reflex planning and design regulations can help address diverse needs in urban spaces and construct a common ground for shared interests. Such flexibility can be reflected in the making of planning regulations, zoning bylaws, strategic plans and the programming of public space.

Planners should work to ensure that diverse community needs are considered, immigrants are properly and effectively outreached and consulted and continually involved in the planning process. Equitable civic engagement involves an inclusive, representative and participatory

planning process that incorporates diverse perspectives into decision-making.

Planning interventions should prioritize and invest in the public realm to celebrate diversity, ensure inclusive and equal access, and promote urban resilience. Culturally sensitive spaces, amenities, programming and services should be incorporated in the planning and design schemes, which helps to promote intercultural communication and understanding among different groups.

## About the Author



Dr. Zhixi Zhuang is an Associate Professor at Ryerson University's School of Urban and Regional Planning and a Registered Professional Planner in Ontario. Her passion for city- and community-building has led to her research on how ethnocultural diversity affects urban landscapes and municipal policies and planning. Her current research projects explore suburban ethnic place-making practices in the Greater Toronto Area and how municipalities could enhance the advantages of ethnocultural diversity for suburban retrofitting and inclusive community building.

## End Notes

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# Building Inclusive Cities Good Ideas

## Toronto: Planning for Diversity, Inclusion, and Urban Resilience

Cities of Migration shares innovative and inspiring integration practices and policy solutions from cities around the world. Stories about local governments, public institutions, grassroots organizations, businesses, employers, neighbours and ordinary people who are working together to build open, inclusive cities and spaces of opportunity. Cities that view diversity, equity and inclusion as core values and assets in today's global economy.

Recent waves of global migration have led to profound social, cultural, economic, political, physical, and environmental effects in metropolitan regions of major immigrant settlement. How we design and build inclusion into the formula for urban resilience will have enduring impact on how we live together in cultural diversity. In Dr. Zhixi Zhuang's study, *Toronto: Planning for Diversity, Inclusion, and Urban Resilience*, our distinguished contributor explores the complex, intentional and often invisible role of planning in Canada's most diverse and multicultural city. The following selection of Good Ideas on planning for urban resilience in the multicultural city includes examples from Toronto as well as international examples from the Cities of Migration collection. All these profiles of municipal leadership and community action can be viewed in full at [www.citiesofmigration.org](http://www.citiesofmigration.org).

## Re-Claiming Parc Central de Nou Barris

Barcelona, Spain

Ajuntament de Barcelona

### From rural campus to urban zone



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For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

On the rural outskirts of the city, the derelict site of the former Santa Creu Mental Institute provided inexpensive housing to migrant workers during Spain's early economic boom. The rapid growth of high-density housing radically transformed the area and the Nou Barris site was soon dominated by a disjunctive pattern of streets and a chaotic mix of spatially unconnected high-rise and low-rise buildings. Public areas were exploited for parking leaving little space for parks or green spaces that local residents could enjoy.

In the 1990s, the site was taken over by the municipality of Barcelona to house administrative offices for the rapidly expanding city. At the same time, a second wave of immigration again transformed the ethnic composition of the district and its sprawling settlements. In 1997, a new urban plan for Nou Barris aimed to integrate both the sprawling character of the urban site and the social needs of the area's diverse population. The plan included new public space, improved roads, transit and subsurface parking, and an urban pleasure park.

In 2007 the Parc Central de Nou Barris won the International Urban Landscape Award for performing an important "integrative task in a rapidly expanding and multi-ethnic quarter of Barcelona." Today, the Nou Barris is the city's second-largest park, fully embraced as a public commons, recreational facility and meeting place.

## From Boston's Back Streets to Mainstream Success

Boston, United States

Boston Redevelopment Agency

**Land use and business assistance strategies to boost local economic development**



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

“The goal of the Back Streets program is to support Boston’s many small and medium-sized industrial and commercial companies by creating the conditions in which they can grow and prosper, and attract new manufacturing and commercial businesses to the city.” – former Boston Mayor Thomas Merino.

In Boston, “back street” companies generate one in five jobs, pay over \$30 million annually in taxes and represent a key lever to the city’s economic development and success. Research shows workers in backstreet jobs are more likely to be racial and ethnic minorities since these businesses create good middle income jobs that are accessible to all levels of education. Additionally, back street businesses often pay higher salaries making them critical in achieving greater inclusion and equality for newcomers and minority groups in the city.

The Boston Back Streets program was launched in 2001 when Boston’s economic development office noted these profitable and well-established businesses were leaving the city because they lacked the resources to grow. Problems included inadequate space, competing land uses, insufficient parking and difficulty navigating the bureaucracy of City Hall. To avert economic disaster, Boston Back Streets developed a range of land use and business assistance strategies to help this hidden industrial sector, including information on zoning, help with tenant search and workforce development, and a centralized, streamlined licensing/permit application process that includes guidance through the approval process.

## Superkilen, Extremely Urban

Københavns Kommune

Copenhagen, Denmark

**An urban regeneration project re-imagines a city park as a space for living in diversity**



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

When the city of Copenhagen went looking for ideas to revitalize the old working class district of Nørrebro, it went looking for a new kind of public space. Located beyond the northern gates of the old city, the neighbourhood was disconnected from the rest of Copenhagen and better known for its violence, gang activity, social problems and lack of cultural integration. Today Superkilen is an award-winning park running a half mile through one of the most ethnically diverse and socially challenged neighborhoods in Denmark –and Nørrebro is described as Copenhagen’s coolest neighbourhood.

Superkilen was envisioned as an urban regeneration project by the city of Copenhagen and an international team of architects and designers.

“Extreme civic involvement” was the strategy flagged as key to bringing together a racialized neighbourhood representing more than 50 different nationalities. The project vision was to create a space that reflected the diversity of the local population by actively engaging their input to create the conditions for participation and inclusion.

Instead of the usual park equipment, residents were invited to nominate ideas and components from their favourite places or countries of origin. Filled with objects from around the globe, the park is a kind of ‘world exposition’ and place of pride for the local inhabitants, transforming a precarious community into a positive space for co-existence where people connect and have fun.

## Sunday in the Park

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Hong Kong, China

### Domestic workers find room for recreation and leisure in the city's public spaces



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

Visitors to Hong Kong are startled to find thousands of domestic workers congregated in the public spaces around prime real estate areas. Sunday is day-off for the 300,000 migrants from South East Asia living and working for Hong Kong families. Required by law to live in the homes of their employers, the city's maids, nannies and caregivers frequently lack privacy and personal space with the result that the city's malls, parks and retail spaces are coveted places of Sunday repose and recreation.

These Sunday outings provide a degree of self-expression and alternative identity to that of the stereotyped "foreign domestic worker." In these public spaces they can be friends, spouses, sisters, mothers, artists and so forth. The city's decision to close these areas to cars and make them fully pedestrian spaces every Sunday benefits both domestic worker and everyone else.

The right to use public space as places of leisure is not taken lightly. Without encouraging the Sunday gatherings, the government of Hong Kong nevertheless provides more leeway than many domestic worker importing cities where migrants' rights to gather freely in public are severely limited. With small but significant adjustments in their sanitation services, policing detail and signage (multilingual), Hong Kong has succeeded in minimizing conflict while accommodating a valuable part of the workforce. Hong Kong's example provides useful lessons for other cities on how to address the needs of migrant populations and support ever-increasing demand for service workers.

## Toronto Planning Review Panel

City Planning Division, City Of Toronto

Toronto, Canada

### Equity-based planning brings people into the centre of city-building



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

The Toronto Planning Review Panel aims to improve public engagement by capturing input from a broader segment of the population to help the City Planning Division guide growth and change in Toronto. Created to complement, not replace, other methods of public consultation, the city was nevertheless aware that traditional methods don't always ensure Toronto's many diverse communities are equally represented.

The Panel began in 2015 with 28 members selected via Civic Lottery to serve a 2-year voluntary term. The selection process seeks a balance of gender, age, visible minority, home renters vs. homeowners, geographic location, and always ensures at least one member of Aboriginal descent. Designed to introduce new voices into the planning process, members gain access to city planners, independent experts, and stakeholders over the course of sixteen day-long meetings during which they learn about the planning process and improve public engagement by offering their perspectives to the Planning Department. Planning issues discussed at the panel include a wide range of city-building topics including transportation, housing, density, heritage, public art and community amenities.

In the spirit of validating their contributions, the panel is referenced in official staff reports to city council, and the panel's reports are publicly accessible online. This equity-based civic engagement approach brings people into the centre of city-building, which is an important component of shaping a more inclusive city.



## Taking the Plunge

Regent Park Aquatic Centre, City of Toronto

Toronto, Canada

**Designing for cultural and gender equity enhances openness, safety and accessibility at the community pool**



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

The Regent Park Aquatic Centre is a modernist gem on the eastern edge of the Regent Park revitalization project. Completed in 2012, the multi-purpose swimming pool is the first facility in Canada to adopt the use of universal changerooms, no longer separating males and females in favour of common changerooms with private change cubicles. This progressive design feature addresses cultural and gender identity issues, creating an inclusive environment that enhances openness, safety, and accessibility for all. The Centre offers a new level of accommodation with the addition of a complete system of aquatics hall screening at designated time for those cultural groups interested in privacy swims.

Regent Park is Canada's oldest and largest social housing project. Built as planned community in the late 1940's, its affordability and central location made it an immigrant settlement community. During the 1990s, declining physical and social conditions contributed to the concentration of a socially marginalized population, over 70% of which live below Canada's poverty line. 41% are under 18. What was a model community became one the city's roughest neighbourhood. Today a \$1bn 12 year revitalization project has transformed Regent Park into a mix of subsidized housing, condos, retail shops and community amenities that attracts global attention as a socio-economic experiment in public-private gentrification. The Centre typifies the legacy commitments of the Regent Park revitalization program and provides an important civic amenity to a once marginalized neighbourhood.

## The Great Equalizer

Toronto Public Library

Toronto, Ontario

**Public libraries reach out to new immigrants with tailor-made settlement services**



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

Few institutions recognize the diversity within the City of Toronto better than the Toronto Public Library (TPL). It is one of the busiest public library systems in the world, with 98 branches, 1.3 million card-holders and a collection of 11 million items. Recent immigrants are among the library's regular patrons, with more new Canadians logged as "frequent users" than the overall Toronto average. TPL has worked hard to reach out to new immigrants, building a collection of materials in more than 40 languages, hosting English as a second language (ESL) classes, and providing dedicated online services to newcomers to Canada.

The public library is an open, free and accessible community space that has been called "the great equalizer." In Canada, TPL was the first public library system to host a Library Settlement Partnership (LSP), funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, which places settlement workers in public libraries where they provide multilingual one-on-one information and referral services, as well as group information sessions on topics ranging from how to get provincial health insurance or driver's licences, register children in school, and where to find job search assistance. Settlement workers also connect clients to library staff and special services, such as TPL's Business Development Centre or income tax clinic. Following the success of the pilot programs, LSPs have expanded to include eleven public library systems in the province of Ontario.

## Naan in the Park: Re-imagining Public Space

Toronto, Canada

Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee

**Reclaiming public space opens up economic opportunities for local women in Canada's most diverse neighbourhood**



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

Thorncliffe Park is the most densely populated neighbourhood in Toronto, a typical "arrival city" attractive to newcomers for its low rent, community networks and proximity to the city's workplaces and amenities. For an enterprising group of local women the run-down condition of the local public park in a city of such prosperity was a missed opportunity. The Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee (TPWC) was formed to re-claim the park for community participation and to explore opportunities for civic engagement. Activities range from a weekly summer bazaar to North America's first tandoor oven in a park "because food brings everyone together whatever your background."

A micro-grant from the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office helped TPWC prove its projects were good models for micro-economic development "We are building communities and supporting local enterprise," says TPWC leader, Sabina Ali. "If we don't give them opportunities, how will these newcomers feel confident and integrate?"

TPWC was awarded the 2014 Jane Jacobs Prize and recognized by the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the transformative power of local action. The R.V. Burgess Park was named the first "Frontline Park" by City Parks Alliance, an independent group of urban parks administrators and advocates across America, because the park "exemplifies the power of partnerships to create and maintain urban parks that build community and make our cities sustainable and vibrant."

## Tower Renewal Project

Toronto, Ontario

ERA Architects

**Mixed-use zoning opens doors to new opportunities for community, connection and commerce in Toronto's tower cities**



Photo Credit: ERA Architects

For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

The Toronto area contains the second largest concentration of high-rise buildings in North America. The majority are privately-owned residential buildings built during the city's post-war, car-centric suburban expansion. Imagined as utopian in the 1960's, by the mid-1990s these high-rise projects had resulted in large-scale isolation of their largely-immigrant residents. Single-use public housing prevented productive economic activity from occurring within the neighborhood. Barren spaces between towers felt unsafe and susceptible to criminal activity. Poor transportation infrastructure limited integration with the wider region, access to jobs and economic opportunity for residents.

Since 2014, a change in municipal zoning is projecting a brighter future. Toronto's new Residential Apartment Commercial (RAC) zoning bylaw permits a number of small-scale commercial and community uses previously barred on these high-rise apartment sites which represent almost 20% of Toronto's public housing stock. In immigrant neighbourhoods like Thorncliffe Park where over 70% are foreign-born, mixed use zoning is more than a planning tool: it means new opportunities for healthy, vibrant neighbourhoods that are able to respond to local needs by allowing for a full range of uses: "commercial activity, social activity, and community services – amenities that most areas of Toronto take for granted."

The Tower Renewal Project is working with the city, private developers and local residents to re-examine these buildings' remarkable heritage, neighbourhood histories, current place in the city, and future potential in a green and equitable Toronto.



## A Rising Phoenix in St. James Town

Toronto, Canada

StreetART Program, City of Toronto

### Public arts build social bonds



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

Soaring above a busy intersection, this community-led art initiative transformed a 32 story modernist social housing high-rise into a vertical canvas for the world's tallest mural. An enormous bird flies up the side of the building towards the sky. Emblematic of a phoenix rising from the ashes, the design includes a subtle reference to the six-alarm fire in 2010 that forced out over a thousand residents. The award-winning mural by artist Sean Martindale represents the new, more vibrant outlook the project hopes to bring to the building and surrounding area in one of Toronto's most densely populated neighbourhoods.

The mural and phoenix design weaves themes of diversity, accessibility, safety, happiness and other aspects of local culture into its story of community transformation. It is the result of over a year of engagement with St. James Town youth and hundreds of local community members working with the City of Toronto's StreetART Program in partnership with the St. James Town Community Corner and Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

"Beautification of our public spaces is an essential component of building and maintaining healthy communities," said Councillor Pam McConnell (Ward 28, Toronto Centre – Rosedale). "This spectacular mural is a shining example of the resiliency and creativity of the young people of St. James Town, and stands as a beacon of pride in their community on display for all of Toronto to enjoy."

## Heritage and Modernity

Singapore, Singapore

Urban Redevelopment Authority

### An urban renewal project revitalizes city neighbourhoods while reclaiming its multicultural past



For the full story, contact information, and related resources, see the [Good Idea profile at Cities of Migration](#)

Modern Singapore's Chinatown district was once considered an immigrant ghetto, troubled by poor living conditions and poverty. Today, the historic quarter has been transformed by the city's vision for revitalized neighbourhoods with potential to drive renewed economic and cultural activity back into the heart of the city.

A unique architectural feature of Singapore's historic neighbourhoods is the street-based 'shophouse' which has long served as storefront, marketplace and home to the traders and immigrants of multi-ethnic backgrounds that flocked to the strategically-placed South Asian port. With their European neo-classical columns and Chinese and Malay floral and geometric motifs, Singapore's shophouses are architecturally distinct and reflective of the region's multicultural heritage and traditions, serving variously as multi-unit residences, specialty shops, wholesaling and cottage industries, offices, eating houses and market stalls. This diversity of activity brought Singaporeans together in a busy, bazaar-like atmosphere while helping maintain the unique cultural traditions of multi-ethnic groups living in close proximity in congested city spaces.

In 1989 Singapore's new Conservation Master Plan championed the city's multicultural heritage and secured the future of the neglected buildings of Chinatown, Little India, and the old Malay quarter of Kampong Glam. Consultations with the private sector identified business opportunities to revive commercial activity and tourism in the historic areas. Restoration policies and guidelines as well as public education help preserve Singapore's unique heritage and modern multicultural identity.



# About Us

Cities of Migration showcases good ideas in immigrant integration and innovative practices and policy solutions that promote diversity, inclusion and urban prosperity. Activities include an internationally recognized collection of promising practices, city-to-city learning exchange (webinars), international conferences and a growing network of thought leaders. Cities of Migration is a program of the Global Diversity Exchange and Ryerson International at Ryerson University.

Building Inclusive Cities aims to bring the super-diversity of today's cities out of the margins and into the mainstream of urban experience and prosperity. The Building Inclusive Cities Project explores the complex and interconnected factors that contribute to open, inclusive cities in an era of global migration. Through a web-based program of activities that includes the My City of Migration Diagnostic and international best practices and expertise the project provides a dynamic learning platform to help city and community stakeholders assess the quality of inclusion across the urban landscape and gain better understanding of the conditions that can enhance (or inhibit) the integration and inclusion of newcomers in cities.

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