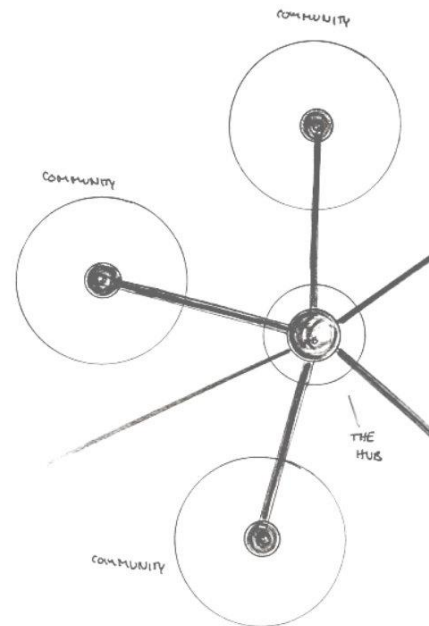
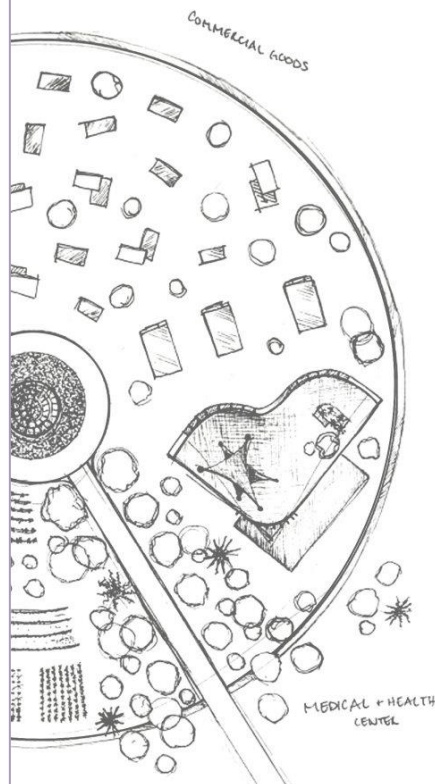


Section excerpted from:

INSIGHTS

4th-Year Students' Reflections on
Design for Social Innovation



Edited by Chiara Del Gaudio

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Social Innovation in Suburbs Through Designing Social Infrastructure

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE - NORTH AMERICAN SUBURBS - SAFE SPACES - PUBLIC PARKS - PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION - SOCIAL SEGREGATION - SOCIAL INCLUSION

In modern society, provision, and access to the network of infrastructure have become crucial for everyone to function (McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008; Graham & Marvin, 2001). This has made some sectors of society especially vulnerable to poverty and crime, aggravating the phenomenon of social segregation (Graham & Marvin, 2001). In North American suburbs, lack of consideration in design has fostered gentrification around the central neighbourhoods of cities and created a social demographic problem that impacts us to this day (Lo et al., 2015). The purpose of this paper is to discuss how to foster inclusion and to aid in the fight against segregation through designing social infrastructures when designing for social innovation. This topic will be explored by reflecting on case studies undertaken by other researchers and with a reflection on the author's experience in integrating into new societies.

Between the 1920s and 1960s, urban infrastructures such as electricity, gas, telephone lines, broadcasting and transport grids became ubiquitous over unprecedented distances through progress in science and technology (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Distance became less of a barrier to interaction, American cities decentralized physically, introducing the idea of the modern suburb (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Modern North American suburbs were designed under the influence of neoliberalism which prioritizes marketization, privatization, and competition (Lo et al., 2015). This move has affected the allocation and distribution of resources among different groups of people, making public transportation one of the many problems in the suburbs (Graham & Marvin, 2001). As Graham and Marvin (2001) explain, suburbs are located remotely from the city center, but public transportation is lacking in connections to the city, and the problem is

more apparent in poor neighbourhoods. One example of the issue, presented by Winner (1980), can be found in Long Island, a neighbourhood designed to be permanently isolated from public transportation. In this neighbourhood, the parkways and highway bridges are designed to be lower than the height of buses. The result of this design makes travelling difficult for the population without access to a car. Another problem that affects a majority of the population in suburbs is housing affordability. According to Lo et al. (2015), low-income households and recent immigrants in Toronto suburbs are living in accommodations they cannot afford because the supply of rental housing is insufficient to meet the needs of the growing low-income population. As a result, highly-skilled workers reside in gentrified, more expensive neighbourhoods and less-skilled workers are pushed to remote and cheaper locations.

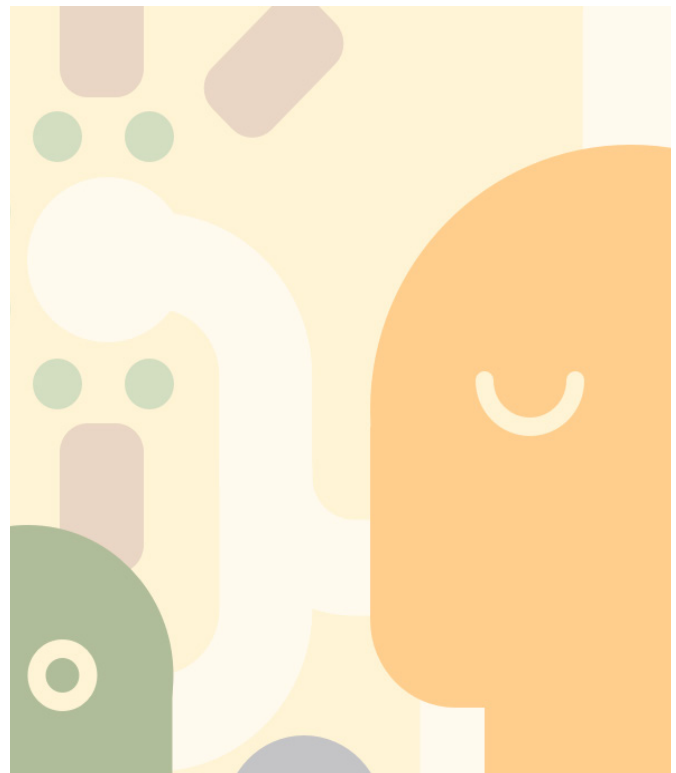
In the development of suburbs, the influence of neoliberalism has gentrified the city, fostering segregation. However, Klinenberg (2018) argues that cities can encourage interaction within society and reconnect divided communities through innovation in social infrastructure. Around the world, cities have invested in social infrastructures to encourage regeneration. Through design for social innovation, a process of recombination of existing assets to achieve socially-recognized goals (Manzini, 2015), cities have created safe spaces and public gathering places utilizing existing resources.

In the past, especially in America, abandoned buildings in poor neighbourhoods were used by the police to justify the increase of force in poor regions (Klinenberg, 2018). The broken windows theory by Kelling & Wilson (1982) states that abandoned properties in a neighbourhood are

perceived as a sign of neglect. It lowers the sense of obligation to the law, which attracts more destruction and crime. However, as Klinenberg (2018) explains, the reason why abandoned buildings exist is because of insufficient government investment in the area. In his case study of West Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society started a social science experiment by creating safe spaces. They revitalized the neighbourhood by cleaning and decorating parks and abandoned properties in randomly selected blocks. When the abandoned properties were fixed, gun violence declined by 39 percent in abandoned buildings and 5 percent in vacant lots. These changes in abandoned blocks encouraged residents to socialize in the addressed public spaces. Maintenance and care create safer spaces by giving a sense of ownership to the community, which results in fewer crimes.

Klinenberg (2018) also says that the public gathering place is a social infrastructure that brings people together. These spaces create a common ground, where people from all backgrounds interact together. The author of this article found a sign of common ground in Munich, Germany. The city has numerous public parks, which are connected through the subway and streetcars. Visitors purchase drinks from stores around a park and gather near a river or grass field to talk and play sports. For visitors and new residents of the city, it is an opportunity to get to know the town. Another example of common ground that the author found was in Japan, where every neighbourhood has an open public childcare facility called the children's hall. It offers children, and parents, opportunities to interact as they are picked up. Facilities are equipped with a playground, library, videogames, board games, and sports equipment. Through the provision of social encounters for both children and parents, it helps integrate new members into the town. Common ground is a kind of social infrastructure that encourages inclusive behaviour by providing a space for different social groups to come together.

Around the world, cities have implemented social infrastructure in different ways to address the topic of inclusion and segregation. There are different examples of social infrastructure that have been explored through design for social innovation processes in the urban space with the tools of safe spaces and common ground. Many researchers have agreed that North American suburbs have been shaped through marketization, privatization and competition, which has triggered segregation and exclusion in our society. It has been seen in several examples that, through the utilization of existing infrastructure in suburbs, such connection and inclusion in the community can be fostered through the use of safe spaces and common ground. It is critical that moving forward all future city planning feature infrastructures that support all individuals.



“Social infrastructures are like glues that bring communities together.” (Klinenberg, 2018)

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