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How to Build an Intercultural City

When building an intercultural society, education should not be the main emphasis, for built environments will actively promote interculturalism. Interculturalism is the concept that with dialogue between different ethnicities, diverse societies will become more understanding, equitable, and harmonious. However, when the ideals of interculturalism are discussed, many seem to overlook the question: Where may interculturalism occur, and can these places be specifically designed to promote interculturalism? Ultimately, thoughtfully designed places are a necessity in designing an intercultural society. This is because greenery provides comfort for people, seating design can spark conversation, lighting will provide a safe environment for intercultural communication, water elements provide calmness, and unique elements spark intercultural conversation.

For example, greenery fosters intercultural communication by sparking spontaneous conversations between diverse people. Research shows that “well managed vegetation” actively “promote[s] the development of social ties” between individuals (University of Washington). Connection between people is a core principle of interculturalism, and nature actively develops “social ties.” Thus, greenery is essential to create an intercultural society. Furthermore, “the amount of social activity” can be attributed to the amount “of trees and grass” present in a certain area (University of Washington). In short, more greenery creates more conversation between people. Research has also proven that “all ethnic groups feel the need to use green spaces”

(Bieńkiewicz). If something fosters communication in a place with diverse ethnicities, intercultural communication is inevitable. Thus, for communities trying to implement interculturalism, greenery is an indispensable aspect. This is a simple measure with a highly effective outcome. The reason that greenery has this seemingly magical effect is because nature restores the brain's "ability to concentrate and pay attention, allowing cognitive defenses to lower" (Weir). Specifically, greenery reduces stress and increases focus. A calmer brain is a brain more open to converse with those around them. Therefore, greenery is an essential aspect when designing an intercultural city, as it fosters intercultural communication.

Furthermore, another way to stimulate interculturalism is by the arrangement of seats. Research explains that "circular or semi-circular [seating] formations encourages face-to-face communication, fostering interpersonal connections" (Furnitubes). The evidence shows the importance of thoughtfully designed places, as without specifically including how to form seating, cities often default to an approach that doesn't promote dialogue. The neuroscience concludes that "eye contact engages language production and reception areas" of the brain, thereby stimulating conversation between individuals (Bieńkiewicz). When designing a place, it is essential to specifically attempt to foster eye contact between various peoples. Oftentimes between strangers, being relaxed and making eye contact will lead to a more engaged conversation. Thought out seat design coupled with greenery can make this intercultural dream a reality. Moreover, thoughtfully designing seating that faces individuals towards each other will spark intercultural dialogue.

In addition to greenery and seat design, lighting design also impacts intercultural communication between individuals. Specifically, brighter lighting leads to "increased physical visibility" and therefore "greater social visibility" (Esteky). Lighting serves as an important link

between fostering an environment that people do or don't feel comfortable to communicate. One can imagine themselves in a dark area with others around them; sparking conversations feels uncomfortable. However, in places that have lighting, individuals can feel more seen and comfortable, and therefore have increased confidence to communicate with those around them. Lighting therefore makes people feel safer. Indeed, the effects of "ambient illumination … have a subtle, yet significant role in people's choices because it is often beyond conscious awareness" (Esteky). These specific design elements have the ability to play a large role in whether or not communication occurs, even if people don't realize it when it happens. In life, countless things have a subconscious effect on individuals, be it good or bad. Society should focus on implementing specific design choices that have a positive impact on people. Intercultural communication will come only when people feel comfortable to communicate with those around them. Lighting, seat design, and greenery can all foster comfort within people. Thus, lighting serves as an essential design aspect when building an intercultural society.

In addition to that, water features also enhance individuals' confidence in having intercultural dialogue. Researchers have explained that water "enhance[s] stress restoration, physical activity, social interaction, and emotional bonding" (Xie). Water features are an essential aspect in building intercultural relationships because it positively affects "social interaction" and "emotional bonding." Furthermore, the "stress restoration" effect of water shows how nature positively impacts individuals. Simple exposure to natural features provide people with a sense of calm. As previously discussed, a calm brain is a brain open to conversation. Moreover, interculturalism can only happen if spontaneous conversation between diverse people occurs. Yet, oftentimes in society, it takes something to motivate people to talk to each other. While water features, light design, seating configuration, and greenery provide the basework for

prepping the brain, it does not give a direct reason to converse. It is "external stimuli that encourage stranger interactions" (Furnitubes). These elements that encourage conversation are the ones that will go noticed in society. These features "act as social lubricants" that turn cities into more interconnected communities (Furnitubes). These features are some of the most important things to add in cities. Crucially, all ethnicities have the ability to use these facilities and see these elements. Therefore, with a well designed city that incorporates these specific features, intercultural communication is bound to happen. Thus, the implementation of water features and other stimuli encourage intercultural dialogue.

Los Angeles is arguably one of the most diverse cities in the world. However, there has been a failure in Los Angeles in implementing interculturalism, because the communities that need thoughtfully designed places the most lack them. More than "1.5 million Angelenos do not live within a 10-minute walk of a park" (Kent). Without access to parks that have features promoting interculturalism, society can't escape the cycle of racism. Furthermore, the residents who reside where there are not many parks are "predominantly low-income people of color, making the fight for park equity a fight for racial equity" (Kent). An inequitable society is a society without interculturalism. Moreover, a society without thoughtfully designed places is a society of racism. Los Angeles has a lot of work to do to reach the ideals of interculturalism. These specific design elements of greenery, seating arrangements, lighting, water features, and other elements can be implemented to promote interculturalism. None of these are absurdly expensive, especially relative to the cost of other things. Thus, Los Angeles has the ability to build a society of interculturalism. In the fight to end racism, implementing design elements that promote conversation is the way in which Los Angeles can build an intercultural community and city.

All in all, the implementation of these specific design elements is an indispensable truth in the fight to create intercultural communities. Greenery lowers stress levels, allowing the brain to be open to conversation with strangers. Building seats that face each other encourages individuals to make eye contact and spark conversation with those around them. Lighting and water features calm the brain which increases spontaneous dialogue. Unique elements can spark conversations between people as well. Most importantly, when all of these features are available to many different ethnicities, the research is clear that intercultural communication will happen. The potential cost of implementing these components is much lower than choosing to ignore them and coping with the consequences. Interculturalism does not need a utopian society, it just requires intentional design. Designing an intercultural city is by no means impossible, it is simply overdue.

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