

Inclusive And Accessible Design in Urban Planning: Lessons from Three Global Case Studies

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Abstract- *The integration of inclusive and accessible design in urban planning is increasingly recognized as essential in creating equitable, sustainable, and socially cohesive cities. This study investigates the implementation of these principles through a detailed analysis of three global case studies: Superkilen Park in Copenhagen, the Barcelona Accessible City Plan, and New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines. These examples represent diverse approaches to overcoming physical, social, and cultural barriers in urban environments. Superkilen Park highlights the importance of cultural inclusivity by incorporating diverse cultural symbols into its design while maintaining physical accessibility. Barcelona's Accessible City Plan demonstrates a comprehensive, citywide approach to eliminating physical barriers in public spaces, streets, and transportation systems, making the entire city more navigable for people with disabilities. New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines focus on universal design principles, providing detailed standards to ensure that public infrastructure meets the needs of all individuals, particularly those with disabilities. Through a comparative analysis, the research identifies key practices that foster physical accessibility, cultural representation, and social integration in urban environments. Findings demonstrate that inclusive design removes physical barriers and promotes social equity and cohesion. The paper emphasizes the need for cities to prioritize accessibility in urban planning to create equitable and sustainable environments for all.*

Index Terms- *Accessibility, Case Studies, Inclusive Design, Public Spaces, Urban Planning*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Yang, Yaman & Ismail (2024), the concept of inclusive and accessible design in urban planning has gained increasing attention in recent years as cities around the world grapple with the challenges of rapid urbanization, population growth, and aging demographics. As urban areas become denser and more diverse, the need to create environments that accommodate people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds has become a central goal in contemporary urban planning (Scott, 2021). Inclusive design seeks to eliminate barriers that hinder individuals' participation in public life, while accessible design ensures that physical spaces are navigable and usable by everyone, including those with disabilities (Saraswat, 2023). These principles are particularly critical in urban settings, where the built environment directly influences the quality of life, mobility, and independence of residents (Szczak & Kecskés, 2020).

Historically, urban planning often neglected the needs of marginalized groups, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged populations (Stafford, Vanik & Bates, 2022). This led to the creation of public spaces and infrastructure that were exclusive by design, limiting opportunities for these groups to engage with their communities fully. In response, policymakers, urban planners, and designers have begun to prioritize the implementation of inclusive and accessible strategies, addressing the diverse needs of urban residents and promoting social equity (Oviedo, 2021). However, the successful integration of these strategies into urban development remains uneven across the globe, with varying levels of commitment, innovation, and practical outcomes (von Schönfeld & Ferreira, 2021). This paper explores the lessons learned from three global case studies that have effectively implemented

inclusive and accessible design within urban planning. Through these case studies, the research stresses the significance of a holistic approach to urban planning that goes beyond mere compliance with accessibility standards to embrace inclusivity as a guiding principle for sustainable, equitable cities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The discourse on inclusive and accessible design has evolved significantly in urban planning, driven by growing awareness of social equity, human rights, and sustainable development. Urban planning, once focused primarily on economic development and efficiency, has increasingly integrated concerns about social inclusion and accessibility as core principles in city design (Pineo, 2022). This shift is not only a response to ethical imperatives but also to the changing demographics of urban populations, where aging populations and persons with disabilities represent substantial segments (Sani & Gbadamosi, 2022).

Conceptual Foundations of Inclusive and Accessible Design

Inclusive design, also known as universal design, originated from the idea that spaces, products, and services should be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design (Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021). This concept emphasizes equity and accessibility across age, ability, and background, challenging traditional design approaches that often catered to a narrow, “average” user (Mosca & Capolongo, 2020). Mace Ronald was one of the early pioneers of universal design, advocating for environments that account for the full range of human diversity (Steinfeld, 2023).

Accessible design, while related, focuses specifically on removing physical barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing environments. Nordbø, Nordh, Raanaas & Aamodt (2020) emphasizes that access to physical space is a fundamental determinant of health, well-being, and full participation in society. The distinction between inclusive and accessible design is subtle but significant—accessible design is concerned with meeting minimum standards for disability access,

while inclusive design seeks to exceed these standards by designing for diversity in the broadest sense (Patrick & Hollenbeck, 2021).

Inclusive Design in Urban Planning

In urban planning, inclusive design goes beyond the built environment to consider public spaces, infrastructure, transportation systems, and community services. Wan, Shen & Choi (2021) and Enssle & Kabisch, (2020) stress the importance of public spaces that facilitate social interaction and community participation for all residents, regardless of age, physical ability, or economic status. Urban theorists argue that inclusive cities are not just about designing barrier-free environments but about fostering social integration, where all residents can engage meaningfully with their surroundings and their communities (Gómez-Redondo, Plaza Gómez, Obregón, Coca & Paramá Díaz, 2024).

Urban planning frameworks such as the Smart Growth approach advocate for compact, walkable, and mixed-use communities that can accommodate a diverse population. According to Pineo (2022), inclusive urban environments promote access to resources, services, and opportunities for all citizens. However, many cities continue to struggle with exclusionary zoning, infrastructural inadequacies, and unequal distribution of public services, which disproportionately affect marginalized communities (Tonkiss, 2020; Joy & Vogel, 2021).

While the conceptual and policy frameworks for inclusive and accessible design are robust, there are significant challenges in their implementation. Scholars such as Imrie and Hall (2001) argue that despite progressive policies, many urban environments remain inaccessible or exclusive due to poor enforcement, inadequate funding, and competing interests in urban development. The issue of cost is frequently cited as a barrier, as developers may perceive inclusive design as adding to construction costs, while neglecting the long-term economic and social benefits of designing cities that accommodate all residents.

Additionally, there is a gap in the integration of inclusive design principles in the early stages of urban planning and design. Tanuja and Singh (2020)

highlight the importance of incorporating inclusive design from the conceptualization stage, rather than as a retroactive measure to correct accessibility issues. Moreover, while developed countries have made more progress in implementing inclusive design standards, low-income and rapidly urbanizing nations face greater challenges in aligning inclusive design with their development agendas due to limited resources and infrastructure.

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative, multiple-case study methodology was adopted to investigate how inclusive and accessible design principles have been applied in different urban contexts. The case studies were selected based on their relevance to the topic of inclusive and accessible urban design. The selection criteria included the following: Diversity in Urban Context; Implementation of Inclusive Design Principles; and International Recognition. Table 1.0 summarizes the selection criteria for the chosen case studies:

Table 1.0: Selection Criteria

S/N	Case Study	Location	Reasons for Selection
1	Superkilen Park	Copenhagen, Denmark	Exemplifies community-driven design that fosters social inclusion and accessibility for all; Serves as an international model for incorporating diverse cultural representation into urban planning.
2	Barcelona Accessible City Plan	Barcelona, Spain	A citywide approach that showcases how accessibility can be integrated into urban infrastructure; Demonstrates practical solutions for making public transportation and street design fully

			accessible.
3	Inclusive Design Guidelines (IDG)	New York City, USA	Provides a scalable framework that cities can adopt to ensure accessibility in public buildings and spaces; Emphasizes universal design principles, making it a benchmark for inclusive urban design across diverse contexts.

Data for this study was collected from a variety of sources, including: Secondary Data and Case Study Reports. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on identifying key themes related to inclusive and accessible design in urban planning. These themes are Inclusive Public Spaces; Cultural and Social Integration; and Accessibility in Infrastructure

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its reliance on secondary data. Some nuances of the design and implementation processes may not be fully captured without direct interviews or field observations. Additionally, the focus on case studies in the selected regions may limit the direct applicability of findings to other local contexts.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

These case studies demonstrate how inclusive and accessible design strategies have been successfully integrated into urban planning to foster greater equity and usability in public spaces.

Case Study 1: Superkilen Park, Copenhagen, Denmark



Figure 1.0: View of Superkilen Park, Copenhagen, Denmark

Source: <http://edukalife.blogspot.com/2014/12/superkilen-public-park-in-copenhagen.html> (Retrieved October 2024)

Superkilen Park, located in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen, is an urban park designed to reflect the multicultural identity of its surrounding neighborhood (Werner & Evensmo, 2022). Developed by the design firm BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) in collaboration with Superflex and Topotek1, the park serves as a physical manifestation of inclusive and accessible design principles, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds (Chu, 2022). Superkilen's design centers around accessibility for all individuals, regardless of age, ability, or cultural background (Caymaz & Hamameh, 2020). Key Inclusive and Accessible Design features of the Superkilen Park are;



Figure 2.0: View of Superkilen Park, Copenhagen, Denmark

Source: <https://www.203challenges.com/superkilen-park-celebrate-diversity-in-copenhagen/> (Retrieved October 2024)

Universal Accessibility: The park according to Bhandari (2023) is designed with wide, barrier-free pathways that allow for easy movement of people using wheelchairs or strollers. Additionally, the park's clear navigation features help individuals with visual impairments (Mačikūnaitė & Kamičaitytė, 2022).

Cultural Representation: One of the most distinctive features of Superkilen is its inclusion of elements from over 60 countries, representing the diversity of the neighborhood's inhabitants. These elements include sculptures, benches, signage, and other cultural artifacts (Bhandari, 2023; Mačikūnaitė & Kamičaitytė, 2022).

Public Space for Social Integration: The design encourages interaction between different social groups, fostering a sense of inclusion. The park's open spaces invite people from various backgrounds to share the area, promoting social cohesion and a sense of community (Mačikūnaitė & Kamičaitytė, 2022).



Figure 3.0: View of Superkilen Park, Copenhagen, Denmark

Source: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/819866307150919935/> (Retrieved October 2024)

Superkilen has had a significant impact on the local community by promoting cultural understanding and social inclusivity. Its approach to blending art, culture, and accessibility in urban space has been widely acclaimed, serving as a model for integrating inclusivity in public spaces globally (Baughman, 2024). The park demonstrates how urban design can contribute to both physical accessibility and social integration, creating environments where all users feel welcome.



Figure 4.0: View of Superkilen Park, Copenhagen, Denmark

Source: <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/superkilen-park-gdk707822> (Retrieved October 2024)

Case Study 2: Barcelona Accessible City Plan, Barcelona, Spain

Barcelona's Accessible City Plan (Pla de l'Accessibilitat) is a comprehensive strategy that aims to make the city fully accessible to residents and visitors with varying abilities. Since its inception in the 1990s, the plan has transformed Barcelona into one of the most accessible cities in Europe (Anon, 2022). The city's strategy focuses on integrating accessibility into all aspects of urban infrastructure, from streets and public spaces to public transportation (Petit, Morera, Parra & Valladares, 2022). The features of this strategy are;



Figure 5.0: Features of Barcelona Accessible City Plan

Source: https://issuu.com/ambcomunicacio/docs/guia_implementacio (Retrieved October 2024)

Barrier-Free Streets and Public Spaces: The Accessible City Plan emphasizes the removal of physical barriers in public spaces (Petit, Morera,

Parra & Valladares, 2022). This includes the redesign of sidewalks, curbs, and intersections to accommodate people with reduced mobility. Tactile paving has also been installed for visually impaired pedestrians.

Accessible Public Transportation: Barcelona has implemented a range of accessibility measures in its public transportation system. All buses are equipped with ramps and spaces for wheelchairs, while metro stations have elevators and escalators, allowing people with disabilities to navigate the system independently (Magrinya, Mercadé-Aloy & Ruiz-Apilanez, 2023). All but 12 of Barcelona's 216 Metro stations are adapted for wheelchair users, making independent travel far easier for the disabled.



Figure 6.0: Accessible Buses in Barcelona

Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/375698793893911096/> (Retrieved October 2024)

Inclusive Design in New Developments: The city has made inclusive design a mandatory consideration in all new urban development projects. Developers are required to follow accessibility guidelines, ensuring that new buildings and public spaces are accessible from the outset (Petit, Morera, Parra & Valladares, 2022).



Figure 7.0: Typical Barrier-Free Street in Barcelona
Source: <https://www.cgibackgrounds.com/asset/barcelona-urban-design-alleyway-hard-shadows> (Retrieved October 2024)

Barcelona's Accessible City Plan has transformed the city into a leader in urban accessibility. The city's efforts to integrate inclusive design into its infrastructure have made it easier for people with disabilities, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups to move around the city independently. This case study demonstrates the effectiveness of a citywide approach to inclusive urban design, offering valuable lessons on how to systematically eliminate barriers in the built environment.

Case Study 3: Inclusive Design Guidelines (IDG), New York City, USA

New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines (IDG) were developed by the Department of Design and Construction (DDC) to ensure that urban spaces and public buildings are accessible to all, particularly individuals with disabilities (Samvera, 2017). The guidelines provide detailed recommendations for designing streetscapes, public buildings, and parks that are inclusive and accessible and it is in harmonization with the *New York City Building Code, the 2010 ADA Standards* (Bloomberg, 2010; Samvera, 2010). The Key Inclusive and Accessible Design Features of this guidelines are;

Universal Design Principles: The IDG is based on universal design, which aims to create environments usable by everyone without the need for special adaptations (Samvera, 2017). This includes considerations for accessible entrances, wide

corridors, clear signage, and adaptable interior layouts (Bloomberg, 2010).

Detailed Design Recommendations: The guidelines cover a wide range of design elements, such as sidewalk width, curb cuts, building entrances, restrooms, and the interior layouts of public buildings (Samvera, 2010). These recommendations are designed to improve accessibility for people with a variety of physical, sensory, and cognitive disabilities (Samvera, 2017).

Stakeholder Collaboration: The development of the IDG involved close collaboration with disability advocacy groups, architects, and urban planners to ensure the guidelines meet the needs of diverse populations (Samvera, 2010). This inclusive planning process reflects the city's commitment to equity and accessibility in urban spaces.



Figure 8.0: Accessible Walkway in New York City
Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/gallery-of-mcgee-art-pavilion-ikon5-architects-1--619245017491715077/> (Retrieved October 2024)

The implementation of the Inclusive Design Guidelines has had a profound impact on public building projects and urban spaces in New York City. It has set a high standard for inclusive design in public infrastructure, making the city more navigable for people with disabilities. Furthermore, the IDG has served as a model for other cities looking to adopt similar guidelines, highlighting the importance of a structured approach to accessible urban planning.

Inclusive Public Spaces

Across the three case studies, a common theme is the prioritization of inclusive public spaces designed to

cater to diverse populations, enhancing both physical accessibility and social interaction. Superkilen Park in Copenhagen represents a unique approach to inclusivity through cultural representation, while also ensuring that all physical elements of the park, such as pathways and seating, are accessible to people with disabilities. Its design fosters interaction among different groups by creating an inviting, multicultural space that encourages social integration.

In contrast, Barcelona's Accessible City Plan focuses more on ensuring physical accessibility in public spaces throughout the city. The redesign of streets and parks with ramps, tactile paving, and barrier-free routes ensures that people with mobility impairments, the elderly, and visually impaired individuals can navigate public areas independently. This citywide transformation underscores Barcelona's commitment to making accessibility a fundamental right in urban planning.

New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines (IDG) offers yet another approach, emphasizing universal design principles for all public spaces. While the IDG does not feature the cultural specificity seen in Superkilen, it provides a framework for creating spaces that are functionally accessible for everyone, ensuring equal usability across different urban environments. In focusing on practical elements such as sidewalks, plazas, and parks, New York City seeks to balance aesthetic design with accessibility requirements, ensuring that all public spaces are inclusive in practice, not just in concept.

While all three cities prioritize inclusive public spaces, Copenhagen stands out for its cultural inclusivity, whereas Barcelona and New York City emphasize comprehensive physical accessibility. Together, these examples demonstrate different yet complementary approaches to achieving inclusive public spaces that accommodate diverse needs.

Cultural and Social Integration

Cultural and social integration are treated with varying levels of emphasis across the case studies, reflecting different approaches to fostering inclusivity in urban design. Superkilen Park in Copenhagen explicitly integrates cultural diversity into its design by incorporating elements from over 60 countries,

representing the neighborhood's multicultural population. This approach not only makes the park physically accessible but also emotionally resonant for its users, who see their cultural identities reflected in the space. In celebrating diversity in such a visible and tangible way, Superkilen encourages social interaction across cultural lines, promoting a sense of belonging among diverse groups.

Barcelona's approach to cultural and social integration is subtler but no less effective. The city's Accessible City Plan ensures that public spaces are accessible to everyone, regardless of physical ability, which inherently promotes social integration. As a result of removing barriers to participation, Barcelona allows people with disabilities to engage fully in public life, making it easier for them to interact socially. However, the plan focuses more on physical inclusion rather than explicitly incorporating cultural diversity, as seen in Copenhagen.

New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines focus heavily on ensuring that people with disabilities are integrated into everyday urban life by designing spaces that are accessible to all. Although cultural integration is not a primary focus of the IDG, the guidelines emphasize social equity by ensuring that public buildings, transportation systems, and streetscapes are usable by individuals of all abilities. This inclusive approach contributes to social integration by enabling marginalized groups to participate in public life without facing accessibility barriers.

Thus, while Copenhagen takes a direct approach to cultural integration through design, Barcelona and New York focus more on physical accessibility as a means of fostering broader social inclusion. Each case demonstrates that cultural and social integration can be achieved through different pathways—whether by explicitly celebrating diversity or by removing physical barriers to participation.

Accessibility in Infrastructure

The integration of accessibility in infrastructure is a unifying feature across the three case studies, although each city approaches it with different priorities and scales. Barcelona's Accessible City Plan is the most comprehensive in terms of

infrastructure, with a citywide mandate to eliminate barriers in public spaces and transportation systems. Streets have been reconfigured with lowered curbs, tactile paving, and ramps, while public transportation has been made accessible through the installation of elevators and wheelchair-friendly facilities. This holistic approach ensures that people with disabilities can move freely throughout the city, contributing to their independence and participation in urban life.

Superkilen Park, though not citywide in scope like Barcelona's plan, demonstrates how accessibility can be thoughtfully integrated into the infrastructure of a specific public space. The park's pathways are wide and barrier-free, and amenities are designed to accommodate users with mobility challenges. While Superkilen's approach to infrastructure accessibility is more localized, it effectively showcases how smaller urban projects can contribute to broader accessibility goals.

New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines take a similarly broad approach to infrastructure accessibility, offering detailed recommendations for designing sidewalks, public buildings, and transportation systems that are usable by people with disabilities. The IDG's focus on universal design ensures that all aspects of the city's infrastructure are considered, from the width of corridors to the accessibility of public restrooms. By mandating these

standards across the city, New York aims to make its infrastructure inclusive at all levels, although it does not feature the extensive citywide transformation seen in Barcelona.

In comparison, Barcelona's approach is the most systemic, addressing infrastructure across the entire city, whereas Copenhagen's Superkilen Park focuses on making a single public space highly accessible. New York City, with its guidelines, provides a scalable model that can be applied to various public spaces and infrastructure projects. Together, these case studies illustrate different scales of intervention, from localized urban projects to citywide accessibility strategies, all aimed at making urban infrastructure more inclusive.

Key Findings and Lessons from Global Case Studies

In reviewing the three global case studies, several key findings emerge that underscore the importance of inclusive and accessible design in urban planning. These case studies not only highlight different approaches to achieving inclusivity but also offer valuable lessons that can be applied to a wide range of urban contexts. Table 2.0 summarizes the main findings and key takeaways from each case, offering insights for urban planners and policymakers seeking to create more inclusive environments.

Table 2.0: Summary of Findings and Lessons from Case Studies

S/N	Case Study	Key Findings	Lessons to Learn
1	Superkilen Park, Copenhagen	Inclusive public space integrating cultural diversity by incorporating design elements from over 60 countries; The park is fully accessible, with barrier-free pathways and seating that cater to individuals with mobility challenges; and Promotes social cohesion by representing the local multicultural population.	Culturally inclusive design can enhance a sense of belonging and representation among diverse communities; Public spaces should reflect the cultural identities of local residents to foster social integration; and Accessibility should be embedded in the design of all public spaces to ensure equal participation.

2	Barcelona Accessible City Plan	Citywide approach to accessibility, ensuring streets, parks, and public transportation are fully accessible to people with disabilities; Inclusive infrastructure features include lowered curbs, tactile paving, ramps, and accessible transportation systems; and Focus on eliminating physical barriers.	Accessibility should be a priority in urban planning at both small and large scales; Physical barriers in public spaces must be removed to promote independence and inclusion for people with disabilities; and A citywide accessibility strategy can transform how diverse populations engage with the urban environment.
3	New York City Inclusive Design Guidelines	Comprehensive guidelines for creating accessible public buildings, streetscapes, and infrastructure; Emphasizes universal design principles that ensure usability for individuals with different abilities; and Focus on making both new developments and existing infrastructure accessible to all.	Developing inclusive design guidelines can standardize accessibility across various urban settings; Universal design principles ensure that public spaces are usable by everyone, regardless of ability; and Continuous updates to accessibility standards are necessary to adapt to changing urban needs and best practices.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This section summarizes the key findings of the study on inclusive and accessible design in urban planning, drawing lessons from the three global case studies: Superkilen Park in Copenhagen, the Barcelona Accessible City Plan, and New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines. The recommendations provide insights for urban planners, policymakers, and designers aiming to create more inclusive and accessible cities.

Conclusion

The analysis of these case studies highlights the significance of integrating inclusive and accessible design into urban planning to foster equity, cultural representation, and social inclusion. Superkilen Park exemplifies how culturally inclusive spaces can be created by incorporating diverse elements that reflect the identities of local communities while ensuring physical accessibility. In contrast, Barcelona's Accessible City Plan demonstrates a large-scale, citywide approach to infrastructure accessibility, removing barriers and making public spaces, streets, and transportation accessible for all, regardless of

ability. New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines emphasize universal design principles, providing a

comprehensive framework for ensuring that urban infrastructure meets the needs of diverse populations, particularly those with disabilities.

Overall, the study confirms that while the pathways to achieving inclusivity and accessibility in urban design may differ, the ultimate goal remains the same: to create environments where all individuals can participate equally in public life. Cities that prioritize accessibility and inclusion not only enhance the quality of life for marginalized groups but also contribute to broader social cohesion and equity. Each case study offers valuable lessons that can be adapted to different urban contexts, demonstrating that inclusive urban design is both achievable and essential for future urban development.

Recommendation

Based on the findings from the case studies, several recommendations emerge for integrating inclusive and accessible design into urban planning. First, cities should adopt a comprehensive approach to

accessibility similar to that of Barcelona, ensuring that public spaces, streets, and transportation systems are universally accessible. This includes implementing features like ramps, tactile paving, and accessible public transportation options that accommodate people with varying abilities. Governments and urban planners should make accessibility a legal requirement for all new developments and retrofit existing infrastructure where necessary.

Second, cultural inclusivity, as demonstrated by Superkilen Park, should be embedded into the design of public spaces to reflect the identities and diversity of local communities. Urban planners and designers should engage with local communities during the design process to ensure that public spaces represent their cultural and social needs. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and promotes social integration among diverse populations.

Third, cities should develop or adopt comprehensive guidelines like New York City's Inclusive Design Guidelines, which provide detailed standards for designing public buildings, streets, and infrastructure that are accessible to everyone. Such guidelines should be continuously updated to reflect best practices in accessibility and should involve collaboration with advocacy groups, architects, and urban planners to ensure they meet the needs of all citizens.

Finally, urban planners and policymakers should prioritize inclusive design as a key aspect of sustainable urban development. Cities must recognize that inclusivity and accessibility are not optional but essential for creating equitable, livable urban environments. Future planning efforts should strive to balance cultural representation, physical accessibility, and social integration to ensure that cities serve the needs of all residents, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

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