

SECOND EDITION

DESIGN FOR SOCIAL DIVERSITY

EMILY TALEN
AND SUNGDUCK LEE

ROUTLEDGE EQUITY, JUSTICE AND THE SUSTAINABLE CITY SERIES



DESIGN FOR SOCIAL DIVERSITY

Emily Talen and Sungduck Lee

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Design for Social Diversity, 2nd edition

Emily Talen and Sungduck Lee

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*To my children
Emma, Lucie, and Thomas
And to Peter Talen (1984-2007), their cousin*

To Tejas and Arjun

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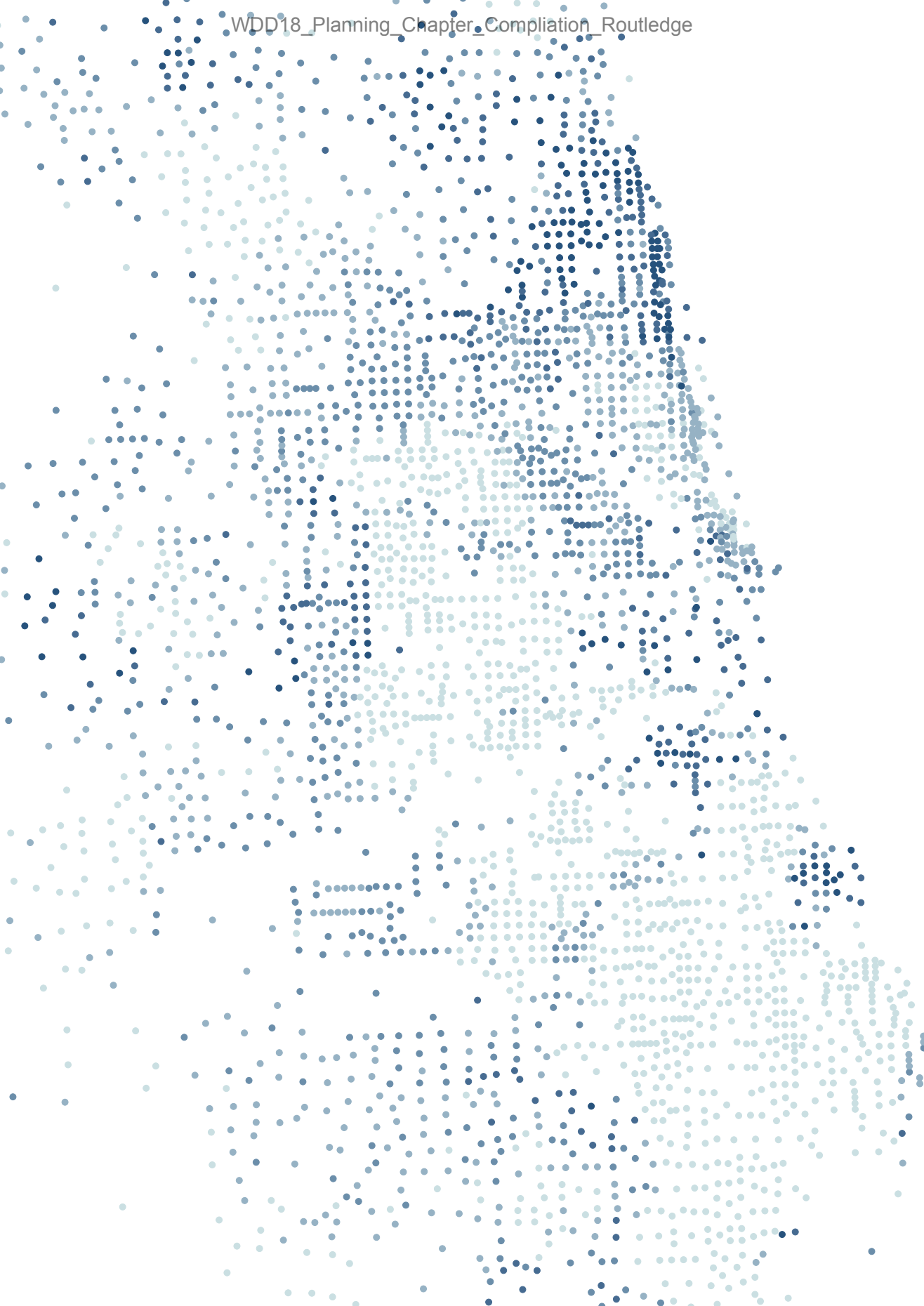
– Emily Talen

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– Sungduck Lee



PART ONE

THE ARGUMENT

This part sets the stage: how separated are we, and how prevalent are diverse neighborhoods? Where diversity or segregation prevail, what explains these phenomena? Most importantly, why is diversity important, and why is design important as a method for achieving and sustaining it?

We review how the normative ideal of diversity in city planning and design originates from distinct, though inter-related, sources: vitality, economic growth, sustainability and justice. We also chronicle the recurrent difficulties that arise in attempting to develop a normative argument for fostering diversity via city design. As a result, even though the connection between diversity and the physical environment is potentially powerful, the connections have been inadequately developed and the level of effort required underplayed.

4. WHY DESIGN?

The design of the built environment affects choice, access, opportunity, interaction, movement, identity, connection, mix, security, and stability. One urbanist put the connection this way: “Every minute detail of urban design determines whether the creative geniuses in our minds are welcomed or excluded from participation in city life” (Engwicht, 2003, p. 2). Jonathan Tarbatt’s *The Plot: Designing Diversity in the Built Environment* (2012) showed how something as rudimentary as the arrangement of parcels in a block can enable or stifle a mix of land uses and functionalities. Environmental psychologists and public health experts have shown how the design of the built environment can have a profound impact on human behavior and feelings (Tuan, 1981; Gallagher, 1994; Koohsari et al., 2013). Spaces can be thought of as embodied, gendered, inscribed, or contested (Low, 2004; Lipsitz, 2004), such that designed spaces are capable of conveying, reinforcing, legitimizing or overcoming social divisions.

Design for social diversity combines the designer’s interest in things like pedestrian quality and aesthetic vitality with the urban planner’s interest in social principles (the problem of social inequality is central to the urban planner’s code of professional conduct, see Table 4.1). Design for social diversity is a way of making the urban designer’s proposals more firmly rooted in social justice, and the urban planners’ concern with social justice more design-based.

There are four specific reasons why planning and design of the built environment are critically important for social diversity. First, diverse neighborhoods tend to have a high number of physical transitions. Juxtapositions of difference are visible because in a diverse place there are different kinds of people doing different kinds of things. This can often be a cause of stress, particularly since the meaning and implication of various physical elements can get accentuated in diverse neighborhoods: boundaries can take on special significance, connectivity can clash with a heightened need for privacy, or visual coherence can conflict with diverse tastes and styles.

Second, diverse neighborhoods are often the target of policies aimed at either increasing investment or slowing down displacement.

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Public and private investment takes place alongside rent control, tax relief, zoning changes, or regulations on the size of new developments. Planning and design are therefore needed to help channel these policies and investments into a diversity-sustaining environment rather than one of constant conflict and tension between competing interests.

Third, design can act as a catalyst for focusing people's attention on the public realm. This is particularly important in diverse places since maintenance of social diversity requires special attention to the public realm. If neighborhood issues are framed in civic terms, residents may be motivated to think about their similarities and connections rather than their differences and conflicts. It keeps the discussion more broad, instead of focusing on particular populations (like gentrifying "yuppies", recent immigrants, or the homeless). Design puts the public realm literally in view.

A fourth reason design is important is that inattention to design – the absence of any thought given to place quality – could undermine diversity. Social diversity is often fragile, sensitive to context. This means it can be destabilized. There are recognizable ways that the form, pattern, structure (i.e., the design) of places has thwarted the maintenance of social diversity; for example, by failing to accommodate new development appropriately. As previously outlined, the tools of urban planning and design, like zoning, street standards and other kinds of regulations, have consistently played a role in undermining diversity. To reverse this requires paying more attention to planning and design.

Table 4.1. American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (Source: www.planning.org (emphasis added))

Our primary obligation is to serve the public interest and we, therefore, owe our allegiance to a conscientiously attained concept of the public interest that is formulated through continuous and open debate. We shall achieve high standards of professional integrity, proficiency, and knowledge. To comply with our obligation to the public, we aspire to the following principles:
a) We shall always be conscious of the rights of others.
b) We shall have special concern for the long-range consequences of present actions.
c) We shall pay special attention to the interrelatedness of decisions.
d) We shall provide timely, adequate, clear, and accurate information on planning issues to all affected persons and to governmental decision makers.
e) We shall give people the opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the development of plans and programs that may affect them. Participation should be broad enough to include those who lack formal organization or influence.
f) We shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration. We shall urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decisions that oppose such needs.
g) We shall promote excellence of design and endeavor to conserve and preserve the integrity and heritage of the natural and built environment.
h) We shall deal fairly with all participants in the planning process. Those of us who are public officials or employees shall also deal evenhandedly with all planning process participants.

WHY DESIGN?

For these reasons, design strategies in diverse neighborhoods take on special significance. It's not just about putting in a new facility, having more locally owned businesses, or developing a certain kind of housing. It's about directing those efforts toward the explicit goal of supporting diversity.

It is important to note that the relationship between design and social diversity is not always direct. For example, establishing social networks in a diverse neighborhood is essential, and it may be that these social networks (rather than diversity directly) are what are most impacted by design. Researchers have shown that social networks are important for combating crime and improving safety (Sampson, 2011), for increasing resilience to natural disasters (Adger et al., 2005), for improving educational outcomes (Gamoran et al., 2012), and for producing better health outcomes (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2010).

These neighborhood-based social networks are impacted by design. For example, walkability is associated with higher rates of social interaction (Kim & Kaplan, 2004), as well as sense of community (Wood et al., 2010; Gen & Pendola, 2008). Surveys have utilized Robert Putnam's scale measuring social capital to show the link between walkable neighborhoods and higher levels of social capital (Putnam, 2007; Rogers et al., 2010), social engagement (Leyden, 2003), and sociability (Brown & Cropper, 2001; Wood et al., 2008). Walkable places tend to include public spaces that support casual or spontaneous interaction that promotes social ties (Skjaeveland & Garling, 1997), positive social interaction effects that are especially important in mixed-income areas (Roberts, 2007). Mixed uses (related to walkability) facilitate the exchange of information, services and goods (Carlini et al., 2006; Glaeser, 2011; Hall & Hesse, 2012). Frequent destinations help to create "safe and social" neighborhoods (Wood et al., 2008;



Figure 4.1
Adjacent, varied housing types are a common feature in diverse neighborhoods. The photo was taken in Irving Park, on the northwest side of Chicago.

THE ARGUMENT

Levasseur et al., 2015). Mixing public and quasi-public facilities and neighborhood-level commercial enterprises is considered essential for sustaining socially mixed communities (Myerson, 2001; Nyden et al., 1998). Increased serviceability explains the finding that long-term residents of gentrifying neighborhoods are able to see positive gains, despite rising rents and the threat of displacement (Freeman, 2005).

Design Neglect

Understanding the design implications of social diversity necessarily brings together two realms: neighborhoods viewed in social terms and neighborhoods viewed as physical settings. While it's right to be cautious about the relationship between social phenomena and the built environment, the translation of social diversity to principles of physical planning and design seems unnecessarily underplayed. Books that connect urban planning and diversity often avoid design completely. For example, Sandercock (1998, p. 5, 119) stresses that the "normative cosmopolis", the "utopia with a difference", is something that planners must try to evolve, but something to which she "will not ascribe built form". Dory Reeves' *Planning for Diversity* (2005) is focused mainly on methods of public participation, and Thomas' (1997) approach to supporting diversity is predominantly a matter of making sure that planners are better educated. Texts on "social sustainability" through diversity are likely to call for "planning and social processes" like fiscal equality, regionalism, public transportation, and "open and democratic local governing" (Polese & Stren, 2000; see also Innes & Booher, 2010). Friedmann's call for an "open city" of diverse peoples goes somewhat further by advocating a reduction in the urban ecological footprint, chartering local citizenship, meeting basic human needs, and promoting new forms of governance (2002), but specific physical design ideas are kept at a distance.

Given the way in which physical solutions have been cast as cures throughout much of planning's history, critics are right to guard against letting planners get away with "place" remedies at the expense of people, institutions, and political process. And yet, entire books on the benefits of neighborhood planning will include barely a mention of the critical importance of design or place (see, for example, Wright, 2001). And the usual array of recommended policies to alleviate the inequitable "geography of opportunity" leave out the design dimension almost entirely. Policies like mixed income, fair share, and mobility housing programs are more often than not articulated in terms that do not address physical character and the design of place.

Social scientists have an interest in pointing out the connections between physical environment and social phenomena, often focusing on the strong links that can be made between social and spatial isolation (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson, 2011). They often emphasize neighborhood as the context of social problems, from high unemployment (Granovetter, 1990), to crime (Sampson et al., 1997). But their interest is not the design of neighborhoods and cities, and when social scientists speak about the "context" of neighborhood they are speaking about the traits of the people who live there. They may emphasize the "political economy of place" (Logan & Molotch,

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1987) or the “social production of space” (Castells, 1979), but this excludes any specific recommendations about the design of place or space. Thus Massey & Denton repeatedly point to the fact that southern areas are often better at integration because of their “distinctive ecological traits” (1993, p. 73), but nowhere is physical change pursued as a target for reform. Human geographers study intently “the importance of spatiality in the processes of social reproduction”, but the spaces to be studied, the “discourse-producing sites” like prisons, schools and hospitals are largely decontextualized (Livingstone et al., 1998, p. 145). In the social sciences, the physical environment is relied on as an explanation for social segregation, but whatever remedies are proposed steer clear of its rehabilitation.

City planning, whose purview specifically includes the rehabilitation of the physical environment, has not spent much effort filling in this missing perspective. Witold Rybczynski recounts the history of planning’s retreat from design, asserting that planning’s many design mistakes – superblocks, high-rise public housing, slum clearance, government complexes – and their astounding failure caused planners to withdraw from the task of city design altogether. Planners now “mediate, animate, negotiate, resolve conflicts, find the middle ground”, which may be “honorable”, but “it leaves the creation of an urban vision entirely to others” (Rybczynski, 2000, p. 216).

Detachment from the physical context of diversity may be related more generally to the loss of localized form as a context for production and consumption – the substitution of “flows and channels” for real places (Castells, 2003, p. 60). We consume without being affected or inhibited by the context of production, including whatever behind-the-scenes social and economic realities our consumption may require (Borgman, 1987). Perhaps under these circumstances, leveraging place to support diversity seems illogical. Or it may be that using



Figure 4.2
Diverse areas often have abrupt land use mixtures. This home is next to a car dealership on a main road in Blue Island.

THE ARGUMENT

place to support diversity seems too determinist and controlling, in danger of requiring the construction of what Harvey (1989, p. 303) calls a “localized aesthetic image” that supports the “capitalist hegemony over space”. Even the use of “spatial metaphors” like “concentration” or “deconcentration” of poverty is seen as superficial in that it disguises the underlying political and economic processes of poverty and provides “justification for simplistic spatial solutions to complex social, economic, and political problems” (Crump, 2002, p. 581).

By default, architects have assumed the role of linking diversity to physical structure. Rem Koolhaas, in *SMLXL* (Koolhaas & Mau, 1998), devised an architecture for the multicultural city of difference, but it is a disjointed perspective employing an urbanism of “Neitszchian frivolity” that few are likely to find accessible or actionable. Some want to glamorize “the authenticity of disequilibrium”, an urbanism pitted against the “humanly alienating, mechanistic, equilibrium” of a city plan (Akkerman, 2003, p. 76). In what seems like a desperate attempt, there have been calls to foster diversity using “creative destruction” as a means (Sorkin, 2006). Missing from these approaches is consideration of daily life needs, elements that are crucial to sustaining diversity in urban settings. We are left with an attempt to inspire social diversity based on disequilibrium and destruction, devoid of careful understanding of the physical elements and neighborhood structure required for everyday life.

While there is recognition that neighborhoods that support diversity must be safe and have good access to schools, employment and other services, there seems less recognition of the reality that these conditions require a concerted focus on the design of place. Design is critical in calls for promoting “place-based initiatives” like community and economic development, worker mobility and household mobility strategies, or the reduction of service inequities. But without paying



Figure 4.3
Commercial main streets in diverse neighborhoods are vibrant, but also struggling. Portage Park, right, and West Ridge, left, are two of the diverse areas studied in this book.

WHY DESIGN?

attention to neighborhood-level effects, to how these programs play out in physical terms, or how they are to be nurtured and sustained in a material context, a vitally important piece is overlooked.

In fact, many studies of deliberate attempts to create diverse neighborhoods consistently identify design as a key factor in their success. There are findings, for example, that “the size, design, condition, location, and cost” of mixed-income housing “are extremely important” (Ding & Knaap, 2002; see also Talen & Koschinsky, 2014). Galster found that design issues were critical for sustaining mixed-income housing, especially site layout, concentration, development type and scale (Galster et al., 2003, p. 175; see also Chaskin & Joseph, 2015). A Massachusetts study of mixed housing type showed that tenant satisfaction did not have to do with “subjective evaluations of neighbors”, but was instead related to “the quality of the development’s design, construction, and management” (Schwartz & Tajbakhsh, 1997, p. 76, 80). In addition to addressing programmatic concerns like tenant screening, counseling, and project management, there is a corresponding need to address context, place, and design.

Connecting design to social goals like diversity may require pro-action. History has shown that neighborhood form does not always keep up with social change (Hillier & Hanson, 1984). Social transitions in the latter half of the 20th century, such as “lifestyle and cultural diversification”, women in the labor force, and smaller households, were not adequately accommodated in the physical environment – and still aren’t (Filion & Hammond, 2003; Miles & Song, 2009). Now, we need an approach that can be responsive to a society growing more and more diverse. By the mid-21st century, one-half of the population of the U.S. is expected to be composed of today’s “minorities” (O’Hare, 1992; Spivak & Monnat, 2013). Planners will need to consider whether the residential structure used to house an increasingly diverse population will intensify segregation, or help to accommodate diversity.

Pursuing the objective of place diversity through the mechanisms of planning and design will require a nuanced understanding of the interconnections involved. It will require knowledge of the difference between redevelopment that contributes to loss of diversity and redevelopment that sustains diversity. To work toward stability and discourage displacement, to simultaneously support homeownership and rental housing, to successfully integrate a range of housing types and densities, levels of affordability, a mix of uses, and neighborhood facilities and social services – all of this together requires holistic attention that includes the physical form and design of neighborhoods.