

mutual flourishing

a design handbook







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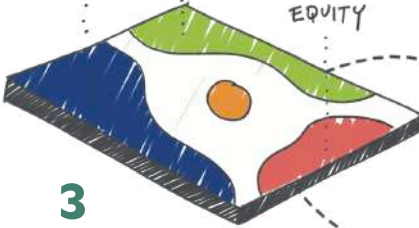


HUMAN
WELL-BEING

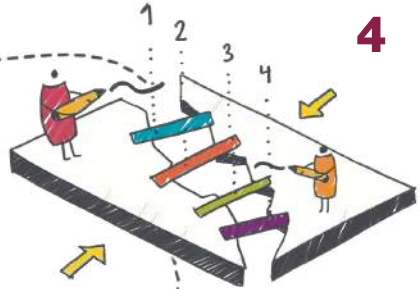
BIODIVERSITY

EQUITY

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FOREWORD

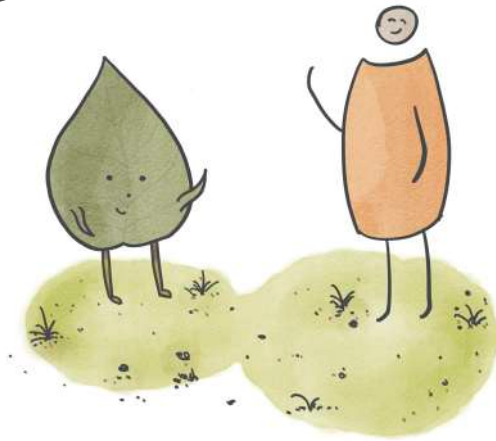
Can cities concurrently support the well-being of people and the diversity of other species and ecosystems? Investigating the concept of “Mutual Flourishing,” Green Futures Lab (GFL) Interns Matthew Jernigan and Rebecca Zaragoza argue that not only can we effectively enhance urban habitat conditions to allow both people and more-than-humans to thrive, but that intentional planning and design approaches can be applied to reciprocally and more powerfully nurture both.

Inspired by the writings and Indigenous philosophy put forth by renowned botanist and author Robin Wall Kimmerer, Matt and Rebecca have thoughtfully explored and defined the concept of Mutual Flourishing as applied to urban public space design. In this informative design guide, the pair compellingly identify and describe public space conditions that support human well-being and urban biodiversity, under the guiding ethic of holistic equity. Drawing from their research and deliberations, they have developed, illustrated and characterized actionable principles and strategies to symbiotically unite these essential qualities. Carefully selected case studies at both site design and planning scales are presented to teach and inspire possibilities. The result is this beautiful, conceptually provocative and accessible handbook that provides detailed pathways for planners, designers, municipal leaders and community members to shape our cities so that they may support and promote Mutual Flourishing.

We are profoundly grateful to the Scan Design Foundation for funding this internship which allowed Matt and Rebecca to conduct this research, and to collaborate on this important handbook while in residence in Copenhagen. We are also indebted to staff at the Schulze+Grassov office for their reflections and guidance in developing theory and praxes that will make our cities better places for all.

Welcome
to our journey
towards discovering how we
can design for Mutual Flourishing
in public space! I represent the
natural systems and biodiversity
that cities depend on and that
sometimes go unseen in
design.

And
I represent the
human experience of those
same places. As you move through
this book, we help trace how our
futures are tied together, and how
design can better support people
and nature!



Please do download this booklet from the UW Green Futures website:
<https://greenfutures.be.uw.edu/> and use it in your own practice to bring
the reciprocal benefits of biodiversity to people and other life in our
cities and towns!

Nancy Rottle, PLA, FASLA
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*"There is symbiosis at every single level of living things, and you
cannot compete in a zero-sum game with creatures on whom your
existence depends."*

- Richard Powers, author of *The Overstory* from an interview in *Emergence Magazine* January 2020, quoted in *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*

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introduction

It's becoming harder to find places in cities that truly support our health and well-being. Many places are not designed to handle the challenges we face.

And many landscapes no longer support the diversity and stability needed for life to thrive. These challenges are connected, and design may offer ways to address them together.

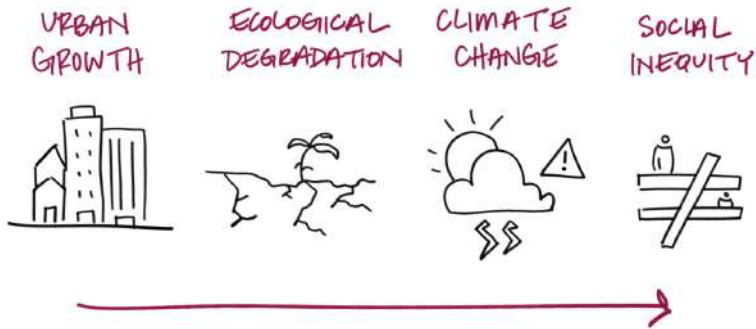


Place and Well-being hold a meaningful relationship within the built environment. It has long been established that where we live and spend our time has a direct impact on our life expectancy and quality of life.

Public space in particular is a component of the urban built environment with an enormous potential to impact people and communities. Jan Gehl, a renowned Danish architect and urban designer says, “[E]very time we build anything we affect the quality of life of people.” Gehl believes it is the life between buildings that helps foster human connection and interaction with the outdoor environment.

However, we often forget what becomes possible when we broaden our thinking beyond humans to include **more-than-humans: animals, plants, soils, and ecosystems—the multiple forms of life beyond humans that shape and inhabit the world.** Yet even when we include these life forms in design, we often treat human and ecological needs as competing priorities to balance. Instead, what if we designed for their interdependence? **Designing for Mutual Flourishing is the practice of designing and caring for shared spaces where people and nature thrive by supporting each other.**

This book explores the concept of Mutual Flourishing as a guiding pillar for landscape architects, architects, urban planners, and designers in their practice. It is built from design qualities that contribute to **Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity—three design domains that overlap and feed into each other when applied.** Through this book, we encourage all those who help shape the built environment to work towards Mutual Flourishing in the urban realm so that Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity reach us all.



TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Cities continue to grow exponentially. It is expected that by 2050, the global population living in cities will rise from 55% to 68%. Globalization and urbanization are significant forces that require cities to adapt and bend to this growth at a rapid pace, often unsuccessfully and inequitably. With these processes and the multi-dimensional challenges of global warming, cities are also dealing with the weight of climate change impacts. Urban environments are struggling to adapt to extreme heat, flooding, harmful air quality, and other climate-related impacts that affect public health; damage critical infrastructure; worsen social, environmental, and spatial inequities; and deteriorate Well-being. As cities face more extreme weather, communities are left without adequate space and resources to live, and spatial and health inequities are becoming more apparent. Urbanization has not only worsened these issues, but has created its own set of challenges. Ecosystems are demolished and cleared for industry, housing, roads, and businesses; and what little habitat remains is often fragmented, isolated, and of much poorer quality. Although these challenges and impacts have become more apparent, progress has been slow in transforming how urban spaces are built to respond and adapt.

Embracing Mutual Flourishing in the design process is a stepping stone in making cities and neighborhoods more connected, engaged, adaptable, and restorative. We like to think that design, beyond helping shape the built environment, is a powerful tool that also helps create joy. In bridging design for humans and more-than-humans in public space, we can support a more holistic and thriving future in cities.

A HANDBOOK FOR DESIGNERS

The goal of this book is to encourage designers to use the concept of Mutual Flourishing as a basis for their work.

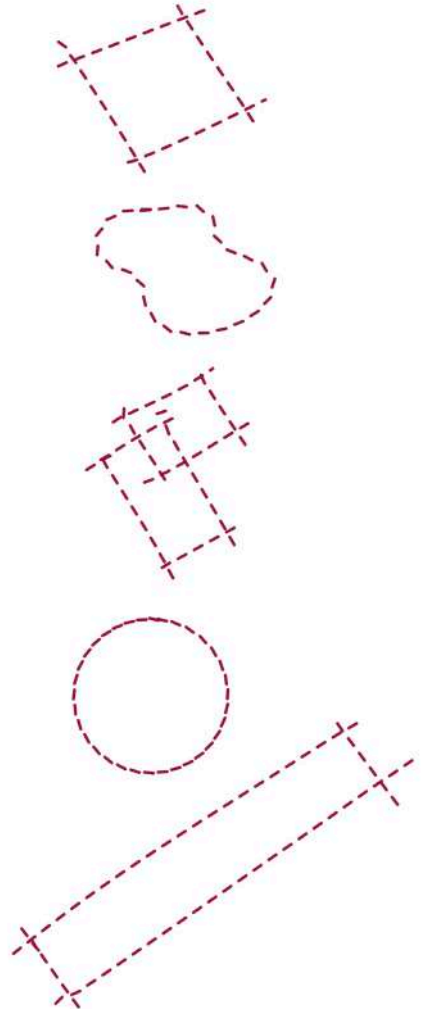
The role of Mutual Flourishing can vary. It can be big or small, or be the guiding pillar for a project. It can also depend on the context of the site. In any case, the designer has a catalytic function among humans and more-than-humans: to weave the design qualities of Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity together to support Mutual Flourishing.

This book is therefore aimed to guide students and early designers in their approach to public space design. It is not meant to provide a solution to all issues encountered when designing for Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity, but rather, serve as a motivating tool for designing with Mutual Flourishing in mind. To that end, this book may also serve as a resource for other practitioners, including landscape architects, architects, urban planners, policy-makers, and government officials. Expanding the reach and benefits of Mutual Flourishing in public space requires us to collaborate and think through different perspectives and professions.

Mutual Flourishing can happen within any physical scale. Whether the site is small or big, designing through the lens of Mutual Flourishing can help us create networks of spaces that benefit humans and more-than-humans throughout diverse environments.

Ultimately, this book is meant to remind us about the importance of thinking holistically and creatively to provide multi-benefit infrastructure and spaces that support the Well-being of all life.

- While scale and context of a site are important considerations that should inform your design, they do not have to limit the application of Mutual Flourishing strategies.
- Remember, the goal is to approach your design process with Mutual Flourishing in mind and think creatively about how even the smallest of sites, recreational or otherwise, can provide benefits to humans and more-than-humans.



the concept of mutual flourishing

I know there are ways that public space can be designed to support our health, connection, and safety, while also benefiting other forms of life that share these spaces.



I agree. Designing in ways that allow many forms of life to thrive together is what we mean by Mutual Flourishing.



DEFINING MUTUAL FLOURISHING

Designing for Mutual Flourishing is the practice of designing and caring for shared spaces where people and nature thrive by supporting each other.

Mutual Flourishing shifts design toward the cultivation of life, treating Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity not as competing interests, but as mutually reinforcing foundations of resilient urban systems.

Origins: The Gift Economy

This framework draws from a simple but radical premise, that all flourishing is mutual. Drawing from ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer's insight:

"The currency in a gift economy is relationship, which is expressed as gratitude, as interdependence and the ongoing cycles of reciprocity. A gift economy nurtures the community bonds that enhance mutual well-being; the economic unit is 'we' rather than 'I,' as all flourishing is mutual."¹

Though Kimmerer speaks of gift economies, her thinking offers a profound lens for design. Design, too, can depend on the currency of relationship, revealing and restoring cycles of gratitude, interdependence, and reciprocity that connect all beings. Designing for Mutual Flourishing reframes our approach, shifting the focus from "I" to "we".

Why This Matters Now

As climate risks, ecological collapse, and inequities accelerate, the limits of conventional approaches become clear. Sustainability frameworks often focus on reducing harm rather than cultivating life. Even celebrated landscapes can remain ecologically thin, socially exclusive, or experientially lacking when Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity are treated as separate concerns to balance.

The root of these crises is not just technical, but relational: the severing of relationships between people and place, humans and other species, city and nature. Mutual Flourishing offers a design ethic grounded in reconnection, relationship, and reciprocity. It reimagines design not as a tool to impose solutions, but to reveal and amplify mutual benefits across social, ecological, and cultural systems.



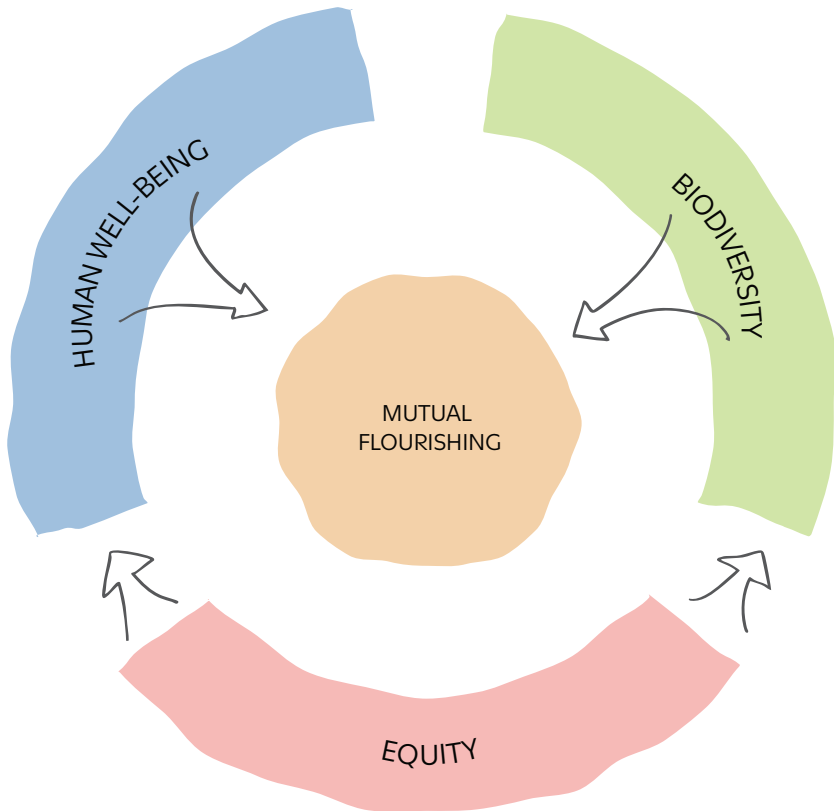
MUTUAL FLOURISHING

Design for Mutual Flourishing is an evolving framework rooted in these core ideas:

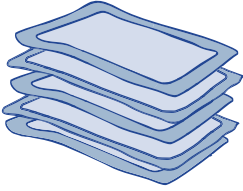
- **Mutual Benefit over Trade-offs.** Instead of designing for people or nature, this approach asks how each enables the other to thrive. How a wetland might cool a neighborhood or public life might sustain a pollinator corridor.
- **Cycles of Reciprocity and Care.** Design for Mutual Flourishing creates ongoing relationships that strengthen over time, not finished products. Nature's benefits inspire care, which supports nature, continuing the cycle.
- **Relationships of Interdependence.** Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity aren't separate goals, but interdependent conditions. Design that reveals and strengthens these connections creates more resilient systems.

Designing for Mutual Flourishing invites us to think, design, and care within a living web of relationships and shared becoming. It is a relational approach that treats design as a practice of reciprocity, interdependence, and gratitude, restoring the cycles and relationships that sustain all life.

THE 3 DESIGN DOMAINS THAT SUPPORT MUTUAL FLOURISHING



HUMAN WELL-BEING



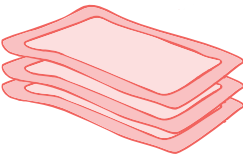
Well-being is a holistic condition in which people and communities thrive physically, mentally, socially, and environmentally. In the context of this book, Well-being also includes the structural conditions that enable health, dignity, and opportunity. This design domain includes 5 qualities that support Well-being in public space.

BIODIVERSITY



Biodiversity is the foundation of healthy ecosystems. It allows other species to live and thrive within the landscape and generates additional benefits for Human Well-being. This design domain includes 6 qualities to support a strong foundation for supporting beneficial ecosystem services through Biodiversity.

EQUITY



Equity is the pursuit of fairness and justice. In urban environments, equitable design redistributes access to the benefits of the city while reducing disproportionate burdens on vulnerable communities. This commitment can extend beyond humans to consider conditions that support the life and agency of other species in cities. Through 3 domain qualities, design can help shape more equitable urban public spaces for all.

Find Your Winning Hand!



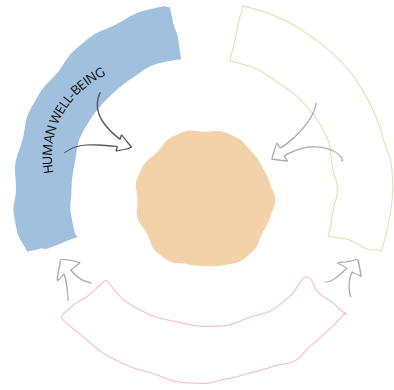
Designing public spaces where Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity flourish together is like assembling a winning hand in a card game. Each domain is represented by a set of cards, and Mutual Flourishing occurs when they are creatively played together to benefit one another rather than a single domain.

Human Well-being + Mutual Flourishing



(SCAPE)

Human Well-being is essential for individuals and communities to thrive. It also provides the motivation and emotional bridge that connects us with the natural environment. When people experience Well-being through connection with nature, they become active participants in its care and protection. In turn, they benefit from improved mental health, social connection, and a sense of belonging and purpose.



→ **Stewardship**

The process of caring for a place through stewardship creates a cycle of feedback that contributes positively to both the environment and humans.¹ When communities and individuals come together to take care of green space, they create a stronger sense of belonging, build trust, and improve both physical and mental health.³ By understanding the significance of stewardship for humans, we can better grasp the cycles of reciprocity that lead to healthy environments.⁴

→ **Long-term Connection**

When people experience themselves as part of nature rather than separate from it, the sense of belonging strengthens their motivation to care for and protect ecosystems.⁵⁻⁷ Human-nature interactions help create “nature connectedness,” a feeling of emotional, cognitive, and spiritual belonging that supports these motivations.⁸ In this way, interaction with nature cultivates connection, which supports long-term environmental stewardship, creating reciprocal benefits for both humans and ecosystems.

→ **Meaning + Value**

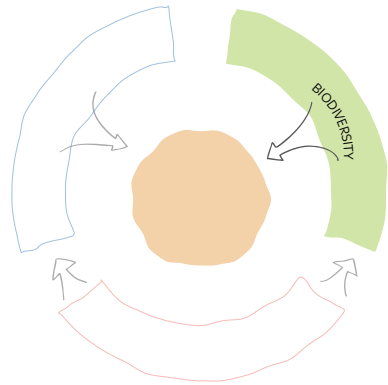
Well-being is closely supported by our connection to place, along with the meaning and value we ascribe to it. People derive psychological and emotional value when they feel a sense of belonging and attachment to a place.⁹ This bond strengthens their identity to place, enhancing Well-being by giving life more significance. These meanings and values not only benefit humans, but also work to promote care for the environment.^{10,11} In recognizing a place as meaningful, people are more likely to act in ways that preserve and protect it.¹²

Biodiversity + Mutual Flourishing



(TÉRREMOTO)

Biodiversity is considered foundational to healthy ecosystems, which provide the conditions and materials that sustain both ecological and human systems. Diverse landscapes directly provide benefits to humans through ecosystem services as well as the sensory richness that restore and inspire people.



→ Ecosystem Services

Biodiversity is essential for the provision of ecosystem services, such as air and water purification, temperature regulation, food security, and climate stability; it supports ecosystems and their benefits in three key ways. First, different species use resources in unique ways, so greater diversity often leads to higher productivity and stronger ecosystem benefits. Second, when multiple species perform similar roles, like pollination, the ecosystem becomes more stable and resilient. Finally, the presence of key or keystone species often depends on the presence of a healthy, diverse environment.¹³

→ Multi-sensory Richness

Many of the most beneficial experiences of nature occur in biodiverse environments, where multi-sensory richness, expressed through diverse sounds, colors, forms, textures, scents, and elements of surprise, invites dynamic engagement.¹⁴ This engagement helps people feel more immersed and connected to their environment, reducing isolation. These biodiverse spaces reduce stress, increase happiness, inspire, and improve the quality of life for people through their multi-sensory features.¹⁵⁻¹⁷

→ Restorative Health

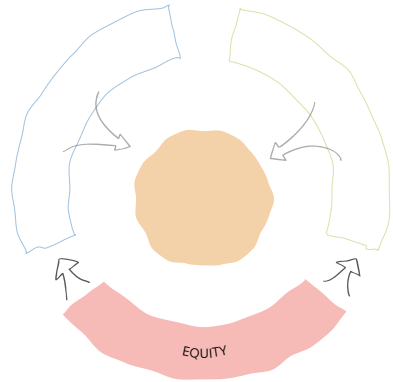
Biodiversity enhances and supports the restorative benefits present within nature. Greater Biodiversity helps people feel calmer and more mentally restored, as explained by theories such as Attention Restoration Theory.¹⁸ These natural environments restore cognitive function by allowing minds to reset through effortless engagement with sensory stimulations in nature.¹⁹ Biodiversity increases the richness and complexity of these environments allowing a greater and more diverse amounts of sensory inputs. These experiences lead to improved mental health, executive function, and Well-being.²⁰⁻²²

Equity + Mutual Flourishing



(MEMPHIS TRAVEL)

Equity in urban public space must address both environmental and multi-species justice. Marginalized communities often bear environmental burdens while being excluded from the benefits of urban greening, just as native flora and fauna are displaced through habitat fragmentation and destructive development practices. An equitable approach ensures environmental benefits support Mutual Flourishing without producing social or ecological displacement.



→ Environmental Justice

Designing public space is inseparable from the socio-economic and political contexts it exists within. Therefore, design must account for environmental justice which asserts that all people deserve healthy environments and should not bear disproportionate exposure to environmental harms. In this context, design must also ensure equitable access to, participation in, and authorship of the benefits of urban nature without displacement or increased costs.

The New York High Line, for example, has successfully transformed abandoned industrial corridors into vibrant public landscapes, but it has also caused rising housing costs, loss of cultural identity in pre-existing communities, and damage to local economies.²³ This pattern of green displacement has become known as the “High Line Effect” and is why it is important to consider Equity within the framework of Mutual Flourishing.

→ Multispecies Justice

Many forms of wildlife also find it difficult to exist within cities as waterfronts are developed, ecological corridors are severed, and habitat is increasingly fragmented. Multispecies justice insists that Equity must extend beyond humans, recognizing that animals, plants, soils, and even ecosystems, have moral and political claims to exist and flourish.²⁴

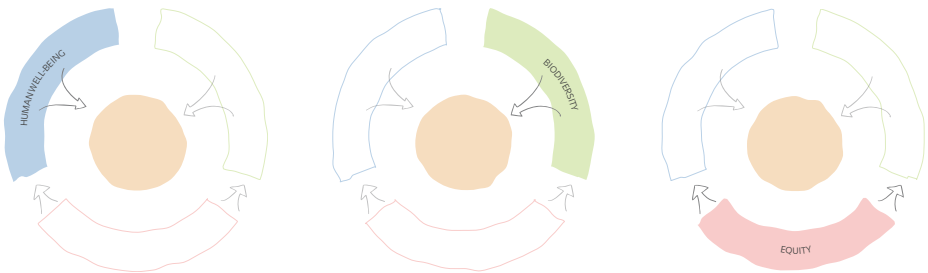
Greening interventions are not neutral: they privilege certain species, often invasives or generalists, while displacing or excluding others, creating a generic landscape and “species displacement” logic similar to social displacement.²⁵ Thus, in urban design we must ask: Whose habitat is sacrificed for human amenity? Which species are granted access, connectivity, care? And how might we redistribute ecological benefits and burdens so that human and non-humans share in Mutual Flourishing rather than competing over limited or degraded ecological space?

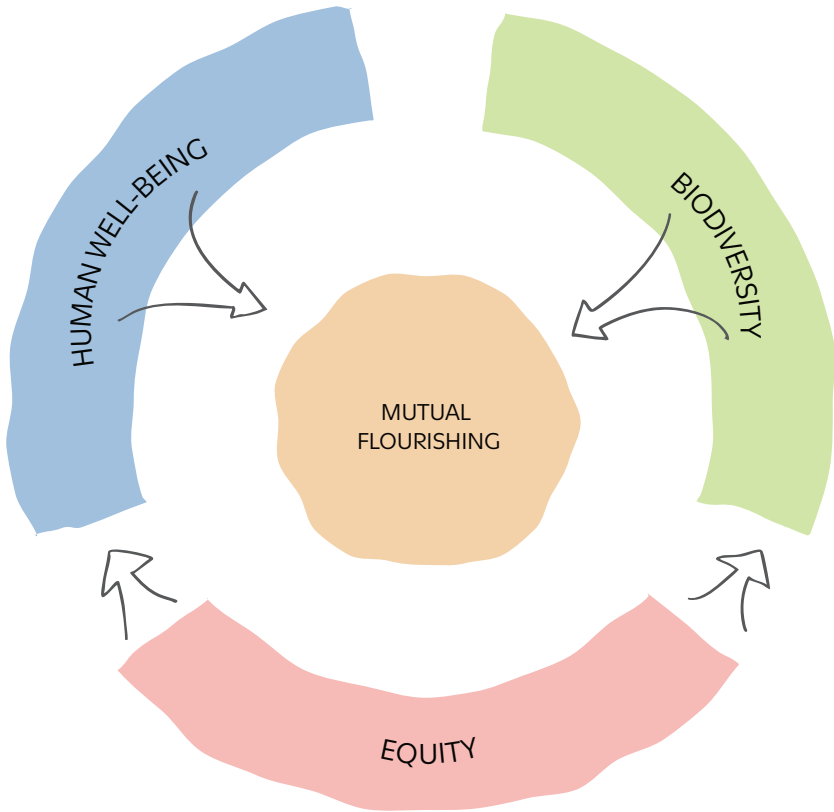
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE 3 DESIGN DOMAINS

Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity are important design domains in their own right, but each needs the others to become more meaningful:

- **Human Well-being** builds health, resilience, and connection, but without Biodiversity and Equity, it becomes unsustainable or exclusive.
- **Biodiversity** is the foundation of life, but without human connection and justice, it becomes ornamental, trivial, or inaccessible.
- **Equity** ensures care and investment are not selective, but systemic. Human Well-being and Biodiversity must benefit all communities fairly, creating shared flourishing rather than fragmented success.

Designing for Mutual Flourishing is about creating systems of reciprocity where it becomes possible to nurture the bonds between communities, species, and systems that enhance collective well-being. By shifting the stance from which we design to the collective **we**, a world where all flourishing is mutual becomes possible.





design domain qualities

I see design as a way to shape spaces so people can really thrive, whether that means connecting with neighbors, accessing play spaces, or attending community events.



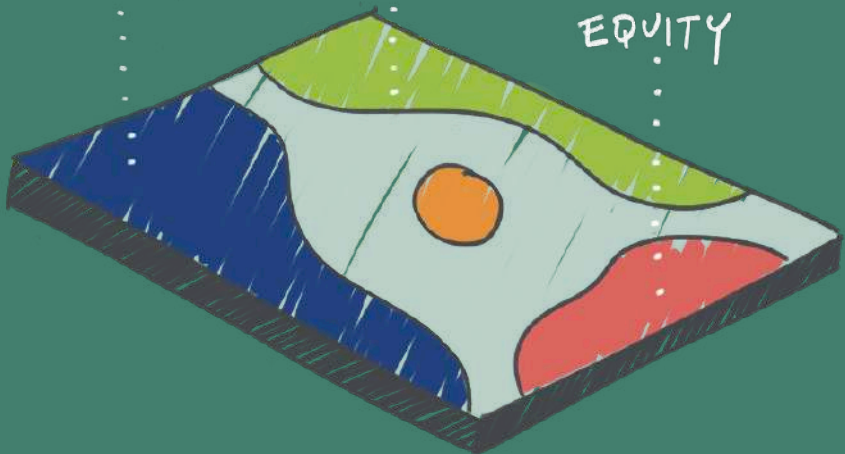
Design also supports biodiversity by creating habitats, connection, and structure. When we design for nature, it also benefits people, and equity ensures spaces are accessible and fair for all.



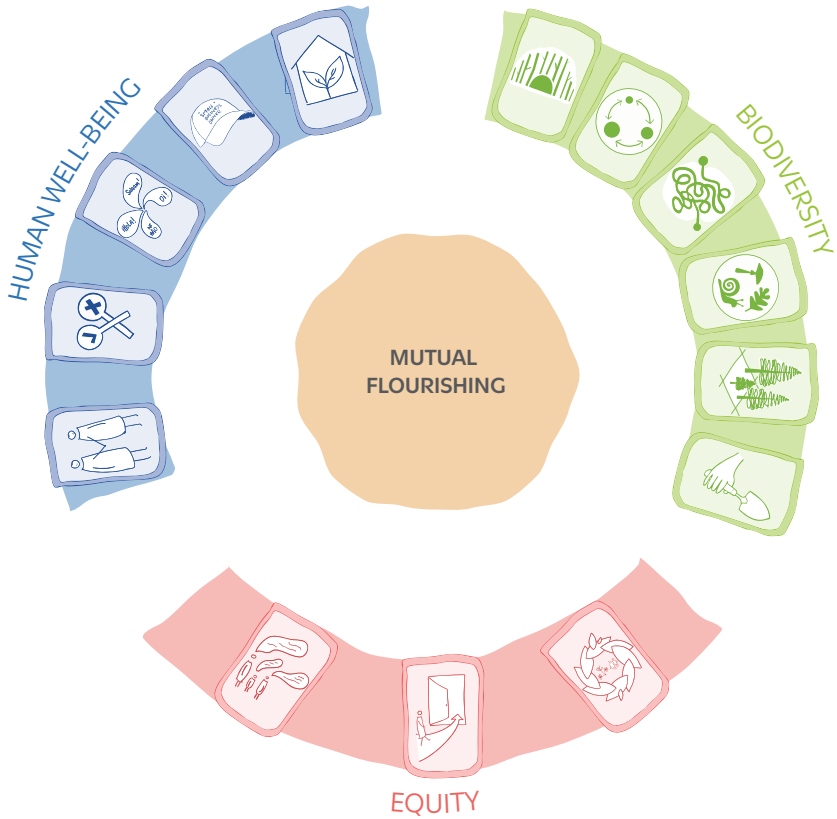
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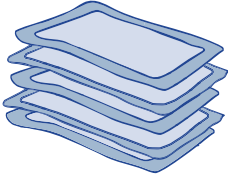
EQUITY



DESIGN DOMAINS + THEIR QUALITIES



The qualities of the three design domains each play an important role in supporting Mutual Flourishing in public space. Some qualities overlap, intersect, and compliment each other, and like a deck of cards, they become stronger when played together. These meeting points, and the strategies for combining qualities, are the foundation for the design principles presented in Chapter 4. This section outlines each design domain, defines their qualities, and provides individualized design actions for achieving site-specific objectives.



HUMAN WELL-BEING



healthy living



economic opportunity



cultural continuity



participatory governance



social resilience



BIODIVERSITY



quality habitat



connectivity



complexity



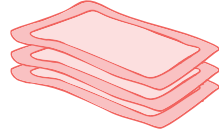
diversity



place



care



EQUITY



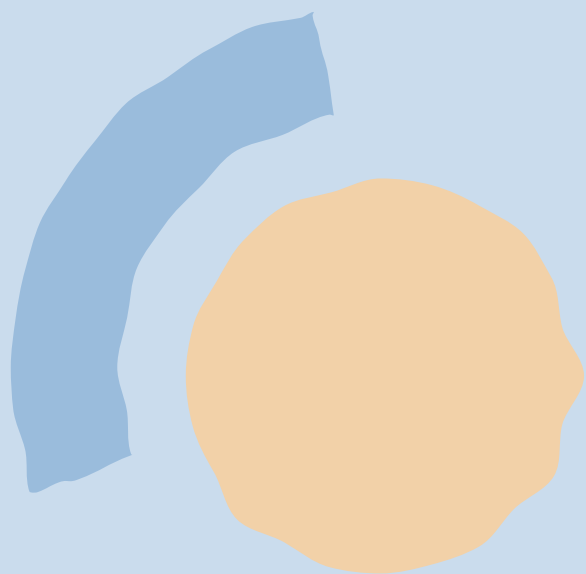
authorship + inclusion



accessibility



reparative design



qualities for

HUMAN

WELL-BEING

Where we spend most of our time matters. The use, functionality, and social aspects of public spaces play a significant role in promoting health and Well-being.

Living healthy and prosperous lives requires making where we live a better place. Human Well-being is a holistic condition in which people and communities thrive physically, mentally, socially, and environmentally.

The characteristics of Well-being range from one's material conditions like income, employment, and housing; to quality of life supported by health, education, safety, and accessibility to services. Subjective well-being represents one's broader context, like the community they are a part of and their overall life satisfaction.

In urban design, Well-being also includes the structural conditions that enable health, dignity, and opportunity. How we experience the built environment is holistic—it is physical, emotional, and multi-sensorial. The expectations we have of what we can or might not be able to do in public spaces thus affect our experience.

Public spaces of high quality convey a sense of Well-being and satisfaction to people through characteristics that can be physical, social, or symbolic.

In this section, we present the qualities of Human Well-being that support the multitude of human needs that can be enhanced through health-based planning and design.

Human Well-being

5 DESIGN QUALITIES

The following **5 design qualities** within the domain of Human Well-being identify specific design characteristics and objectives that support Human Well-being within public space.



Healthy Living

- Supports healthy lifestyles with actions that promote physical activity, mental and emotional wellness, safety, and comfort in public space.



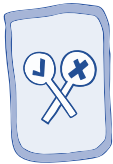
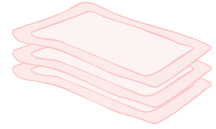
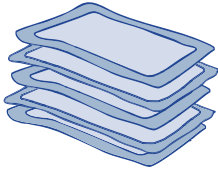
Economic Opportunity

- Facilitates the use of public space for economic activities and local income-generation, while also affording users positive social interactions.



Cultural Continuity

- Celebrates culture in the built environment and helps cultivate positive socio-cultural attitudes towards and an appreciation of nature and Biodiversity.



Participatory Governance



Respects the importance of community outreach, engagement, and stewardship in the design and maintenance of public space.



Social Resilience



Embraces the activation of public spaces into vibrant hubs to create supportive communities, a sense of belonging, and the ability to recover from and adapt to social and environmental challenges.



Healthy Living

Designing for Healthy Living considers the varying needs of individual people and the environment. The physical, mental, and emotional state of people, as well as their environmental conditions, can greatly affect their well-being in the long-term.

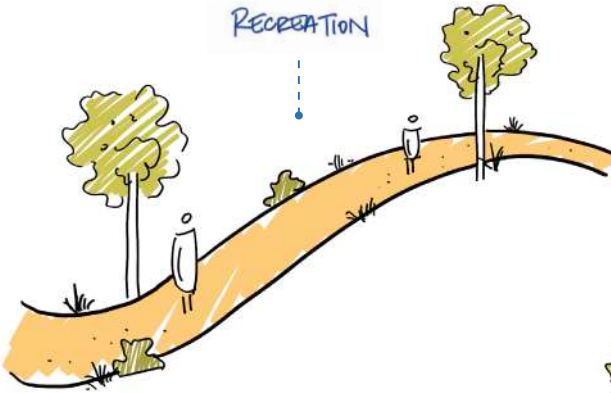
Green and public spaces are important resources for people to practice healthy lifestyles. They encourage physical activity, mental wellness, social interactions, cultural exchange, and community engagement. They provide additional opportunities for people to experience life outside of the home and workplace. Green spaces also contribute to better air quality, urban cooling, critical habitat, and an improved urban quality of life that supports Healthy Living holistically.

Public spaces can be catalysts for Healthy Living. It is therefore important to acknowledge the positive impacts that well-planned and maintained public spaces can have in building healthy communities.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Provide connections to and between recreational amenities, nodes, and pathways through multi-modal connectors.
- Offer open access to nature and green spaces at ranging scales.
- Stimulate the senses through creative and multi-beneficial infrastructure and amenities; consider how amenities can serve more than one purpose in all contexts.
- Create flexible and inviting spaces that promote physical activity and movement, while also providing spaces that promote rest and relaxation.
- Prioritize native plants that produce healthy foods and stimulate the senses. Food, agriculture, and gardening amenities can often provide educational opportunities with additional programming and community partnerships.
- Embed design elements and amenities that improve safety and comfort by increasing visibility, slow movement measures, and protection from the elements.

RECREATION



Open green space, as well as semi-private nooks with vegetation can provide for both recreational and passive activity while in nature. Proximity to diverse natural habitats helps with stress-reduction and other health benefits.

Good connectivity means good access, both within the site and around it. At the same time, multi-modal connections provide people opportunities to be physically active in diverse ways. Multi-use pathways are open for runners, walkers, bicyclists, skaters, and people using other mobility devices, like wheelchairs.



REFUGE



PLAY

Healthy lifestyles can also be supported through play elements, enhanced safety measures, greening and access to nature, lighting, seating, and amenities that protect against harsh weather conditions and provide comfort. Elements like water features, bird habitats, and textured pathways are beneficial and stimulating for the senses. People of all ages and sensory needs can benefit from these elements and thus have more fulfilling experiences in public space.

SAFETY, GREENING, LIGHTING, COMFORT





Economic Opportunity

The concept of Mutual Flourishing acknowledges public space as a resource and platform for supporting livelihoods and economic opportunities. Public spaces have the ability to become income-generating areas that serve communities and individuals facing economic hardship.

Designing for and facilitating economic activities in public space also overlaps with Healthy Living: as communities are better able to support themselves they will experience less financial worries and mental stress.

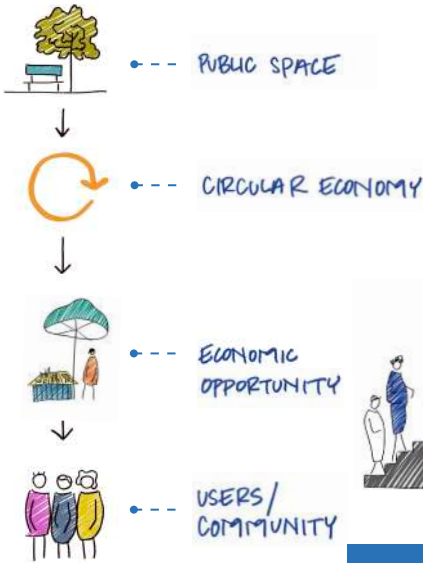
The informal economy in particular, relies heavily on the availability and accessibility of public space. Vendors, markets, events, and local artists often form part of the informal economy and would benefit from governmental support in making public space flexible enough for diverse types of income-generating activities and uses.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Provide accessible spaces for small and locally owned businesses like kiosks, stalls, micro-retail areas, and flexible open spaces for pop-up markets, food vendors, craft fairs, and seasonal marketplaces.
- Support year-round commerce with functional infrastructure by including shelters, lighting, seating, water, and power access to enable outdoor vending, events, and cultural activities in all seasons.
- Link community gardening to local food economies by partnering with local organizations to connect urban agriculture with opportunities to sell or distribute fresh, healthy food.
- Enable inclusive, culturally-rooted economic activity, supporting informal entrepreneurship, craft-making, food preparation, and cultural performance through welcoming policies, low-cost shared infrastructure, and co-working or production spaces.
- Elevate and dignify vendor spaces by using high-quality materials, lighting, and seating to enhance visibility, comfort, and the perceived value of small-scale commerce.

Outfitting the site with functional benches, tables, shelters, lighting, and other amenities is also crucial to creating a comfortable and welcoming environment for both vendors and visitors. These amenities are useful to people at all times and encourage people to linger in place and build connections with each other.

By integrating swap events, repair cafés, reuse markets, and shared resource hubs into public spaces, design actions can turn everyday areas into platforms for circular economy practices—supporting local entrepreneurship, community skill-building, and sustainable resource circulation.



CLIMATE PROTECTION



Vending can take place in different scales, but both need adequate regulatory support to allow these practices without creating too many barriers.



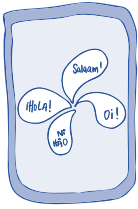
LES VALORISTES

Montreal, Canada

The Montreal Coop, “Les Valoristes,” is creatively using public space to expand job opportunities. It has created a seasonal outdoor bottle depot (and pop-up depots in parks) where Valoristes can redeem their recyclables for cash. Valoristes refers to informal workers in Quebec who earn an income collecting refundable beverage containers. This project highlights how public space can be used to support economic activity in creative ways.

This effort supports Valoristes economically, while also promoting the benefit of recycling for the environment and uplifts the contribution that Valoristes are making.

(Les Valoristes Coopérative de Solidarité)



Cultural Continuity

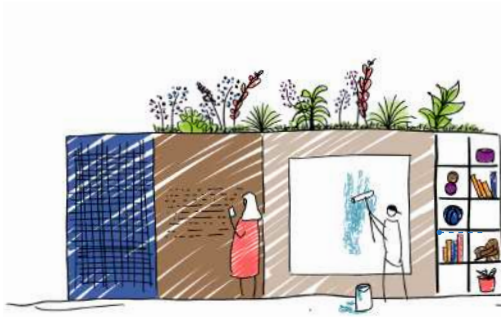
Culture is an intertwined dimension of the social, economic, environmental, and spatial contexts of public space. Planning and design therefore require a holistic approach to creating inclusive and accessible spaces that foster Cultural Continuity and exchange.

Places like plazas, parks, squares, waterfronts, and other spaces between buildings offer useful assets that can cater to a diverse urban population and foster community cohesion and appreciation for cultural diversity in the built environment. The activities that can take place in these spaces can also have a high impact beyond their borders, creating a lively urban environment that welcomes all.

It is important for shared public spaces to invite people to exercise their cultural rights in order to support social and environmental resilience, especially in times of need.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Provide amenities that support multicultural gatherings. Include flexible infrastructure, such as stages, tables, and open areas that accommodate festivals, celebrations, and cultural practices.
- Integrate culturally meaningful plants and materials through vegetation, textures, and elements that hold significance for local communities to strengthen connection and belonging.
- Create spaces for intergenerational cultural exchange by designing areas that encourage elders and youth to share traditions, skills, and collective memory, including outdoor classrooms stages, and community tables.
- Highlight cultural landmarks and community histories through murals, interpretive signage, or memory walls to preserve and communicate local heritage.
- Ensure multilingual communication throughout the space with signage, wayfinding, and programming information in languages spoken by community members.
- Celebrate emerging and evolving cultures through rotating art walls, temporary installations, and flexible platforms for expression.



Provide dedicated space for community-led cultural stewardship. Offer tool storage, bulletin boards, or community kiosks where residents can shape and maintain culturally relevant displays or programming.

REPRESENTATION
+
CULTURAL
EXCHANGE

Infuse cultural themes into play elements and spatial character by incorporating motifs, stories, and iconography from local cultures into play structures, materials, and overall ambiance.



Public spaces that celebrate culture also contribute to social resilience.

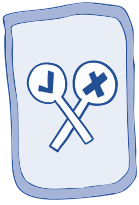
Flexibility of use is also an important feature as it allows a range of activities to happen within one place. In the same way that open and flexible space helps create economic opportunities, it can also host cultural events and celebrations of different scales.

People want to see themselves reflected in their environments enough to feel welcome and appreciated. This also supports cross-cultural exchange and friendship.

FLEXIBILITY



Collaborations and partnership with local groups and organizations can help bring about cultural celebrations to public space that encourage intercultural exchange and celebration of diversity.



Participatory Governance

Participatory Governance is also an essential quality to building a healthy and socially-integrated urban environment. Both in the planning process and in the long-term maintenance and management of the site, community engagement and governance are critical to integrating health and Well-being into public spaces.

This quality is also intertwined with Cultural Continuity. Collaborating with local communities and frequent visitors helps identify the diverse needs that may exist and ensure that they are reflected within the design, management, and use of the site. This helps reduce social and cultural isolation and instead support the rights and citizenship of people to foster a sense of ownership and belonging.

The collaborative practices that stem from Participatory Governance help build trust among people and institutions. In the long-term, these practices contribute to the ongoing Care and stewardship of shared public spaces.

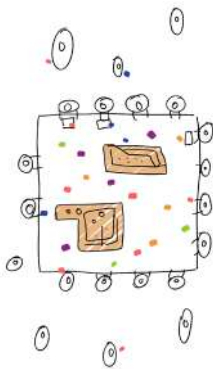
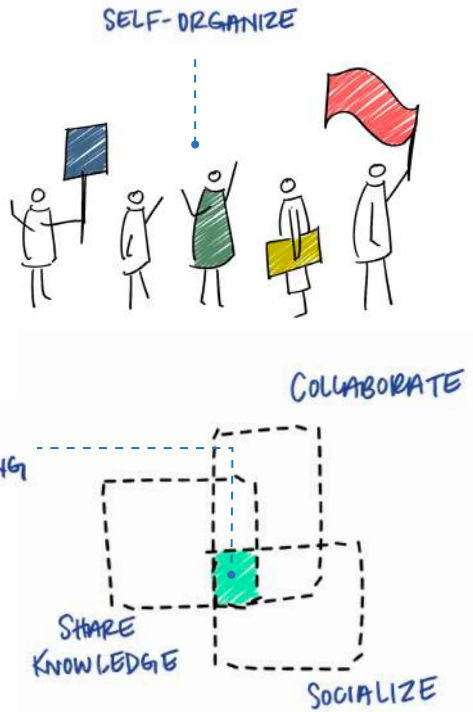
DESIGN ACTIONS

- Create representative advisory councils or stewardship boards with real authority over programming, maintenance, and budgets.
- Embed participation in all phases, using co-design workshops and ongoing feedback loops so residents shape plans, implementation, and future adjustments.
- Simplify and increase access to the permitting process, including permits, equipment, storage, and utilities, to allow people to self-organize and support plug-and-play gatherings and events.
- Build local capacity and stewardship by offering training and support so residents can lead programming, place-keeping, and long-term care of the space.
- Shape the landscape to promote visibility, trust, and collective guardianship. Include flexible seating, lighting, and shelters. Use open sightlines, low plantings, and clear paths, paired with community-led activation, to strengthen “eyes on the street” and shared responsibility.



Creating opportunities for people to provide direct input into the design, use, and maintenance of public space helps create and sustain public spaces that are important to the community. These processes can be supported through multi-purpose gathering spaces.

Public spaces are also tools or platforms for self-expression. Both policy and design can enable communities to self-organize and build local capacity for social actions.

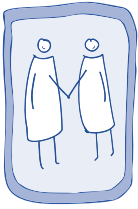


THE BENTWAY

Toronto, Canada

The Bentway exemplifies Participatory Governance because its physical design—modular stages, flexible seating, lighting, and open event infrastructure—was intentionally created so community groups can easily program and adapt the space. Its governance model pairs these design features with open calls for proposals, giving local organizations real decision-making power over events and cultural programming. By combining reconfigurable public-realm design with an operating structure that hands programming authority to citizens, the Bentway turns everyday spatial use into an ongoing form of shared governance.

(The Bentway Conservancy)



Social Resilience

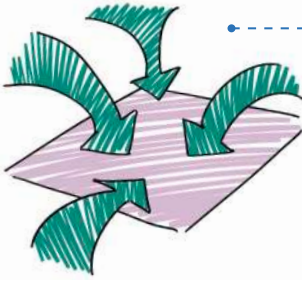
Social Resilience often relies on the availability and quality of public spaces. As an integral quality to Human Well-being, Social Resilience represents people's ability to connect, adapt, and recover from social and environmental challenges through the support of reliable social networks and accessible resources. Social Resilience is built and fostered through the layered implementation of multiple Well-being qualities within the design and accessibility of public spaces, including Economic Opportunity, Cultural Continuity, and Participatory Governance.

As these qualities blend and adapt to the needs of its users, public space is then able to support the creation of meaningful relationships and networks that communities can rely on in times of need. Beyond recovering from hardship, design that supports Social Resilience also facilitates interactions among diverse communities through leisure and intercultural exchange. These design qualities can also be used to repurpose neglected spaces and optimize urban environments for recreation, creative expression, and climate adaptation.

Overall, embracing the activation of public spaces into vibrant hubs helps create supportive communities and a sense of belonging embedded in place.

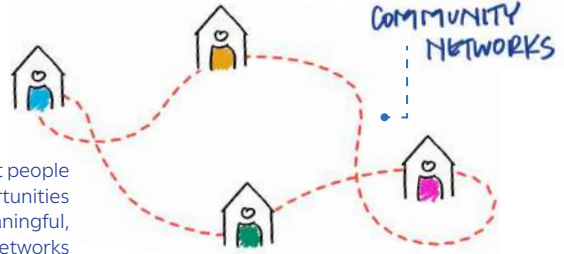
DESIGN ACTIONS

- Incorporate modular and creative installations, such as adaptable playscapes or movable components that enable diverse, spontaneous, and creative engagement among visitors.
- Design centralized, accessible gathering spaces that welcomes markets, events, recreation, and cultural programming, ensuring easy circulation and visibility for all users. Use modular, multifunctional, and adaptable features that support daily use and encourage intergenerational and cross-cultural social interaction.
- Integrate consistent public lighting to enhance safety, like pedestrian-scaled lighting to increase visibility and comfort.



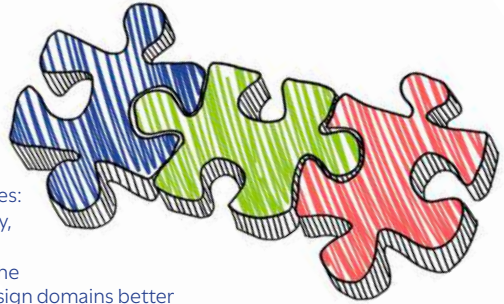
"PULL" FACTOR

Social Resilience is enhanced when public space serves as a resource for daily users and surrounding communities, especially during personal or environmental hardships; it affords opportunities for people to seek support and rely on each other.



Providing diverse opportunities that attract people to public spaces helps create more opportunities for social connection. This can lead to meaningful, long-term relationships and community networks that people can rely on.

LAYERED DESIGN



Layer and blend Well-being strategies: layering safety, comfort, accessibility, and ecological actions so they reinforce one another throughout the site. Blending qualities from the design domains better supports humans' and more-than-humans' ability to flourish as their needs are being met from different angles.



LUGAR DE ENCUENTRO PARA AMIGOS

Mexico City, Mexico

Lugar de Encuentro Para Amigos (LEA) is a temporary and modular installation in the Foro Lindbergh park of Mexico City. It contains books, games, modular tables, and benches which are available to visitors to interact with and enjoy. The structure is also part of a collaboration with the Amalia González Caballero Library to host chess workshops, storytelling and reading sessions, and a program for other arts and cultural activities. The structure is solar-powered and provides lighting at night, contributing to safety and use throughout the day. LEA is a meeting place that brings people together for entertainment and joy.

(PlacemakingX)



qualities for

BIODIVERSITY

Collaborating with the living, dynamic qualities of nature to design spaces for all life.

Designing for Biodiversity means understanding the needs of other life forms and the regional environmental conditions that support them. Biodiversity is not just important because of its benefits, but because other species have the right to live and thrive within the landscape.

In this section, we present design qualities important to Biodiversity in public space and design actions that help achieve this. These qualities aim to improve the experience and function of urban spaces so that previously inhospitable places become biodiverse.

Some actions that support Biodiversity extend beyond this section's recommendations. To effectively design for Biodiversity, designers must operate across multiple scales, collaborate with others, and navigate a range of planning, policy, and legal frameworks.

Urban space is shaped by zoning laws, land-use regulations, greening policies, and other codes that affect Biodiversity. Designers must engage planning and policy advisors about the regulatory structures that prevent meaningful ecological design. With current development expectations, limited value is placed on the ecology of landscapes. Designing for Biodiversity sometimes requires higher upfront investment so the need for developing new financial models and cost-benefit frameworks that highlights Biodiversity's importance is essential.

Biodiversity's impact in public spaces is often difficult to understand. Creating strategies to measure it not only makes benefits quantifiable, but also positively shapes public attitudes toward biodiverse spaces. People's aesthetic preferences, cultural values, and perceptions determine what forms of nature are acceptable or desirable. Creating truly biodiverse cities requires a shift in how the public understands nature and values the care of other life forms. All of the above factors, though beyond the scope of this book, form an important foundation for design that supports living systems in cities.

Biodiversity

6 DESIGN DOMAIN QUALITIES

The following **6 design qualities** within the domain of Biodiversity identify specific design characteristics and objectives that contribute to Biodiversity in public spaces.



Quality Habitat

Provides access to the resources needed for more-than-humans to survive, beginning with food, water, shelter, and space.



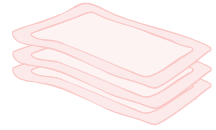
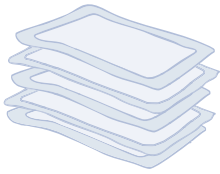
Connectivity

Weaves ecological corridors for more-than-human species to move between habitats, access resources, migrate, and adapt to environmental changes as needed.



Complexity

Allows for ecosystems to be resilient and regenerative through functional, temporal, and structural complexities.



Diversity

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Enables ecological systems to be resilient and adaptable across landscapes while supporting diverse habitats, plant communities, and environmental conditions.



Place

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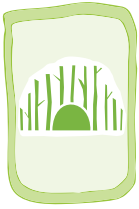
Roots design in the context of specific regions of the site, reflecting its soil, water, climate, and history; and aligning with the present ecological patterns.



Care

.....

Builds long-term relationships between people and Place to ensure that ecosystems are valued, maintained, and allowed to evolve.



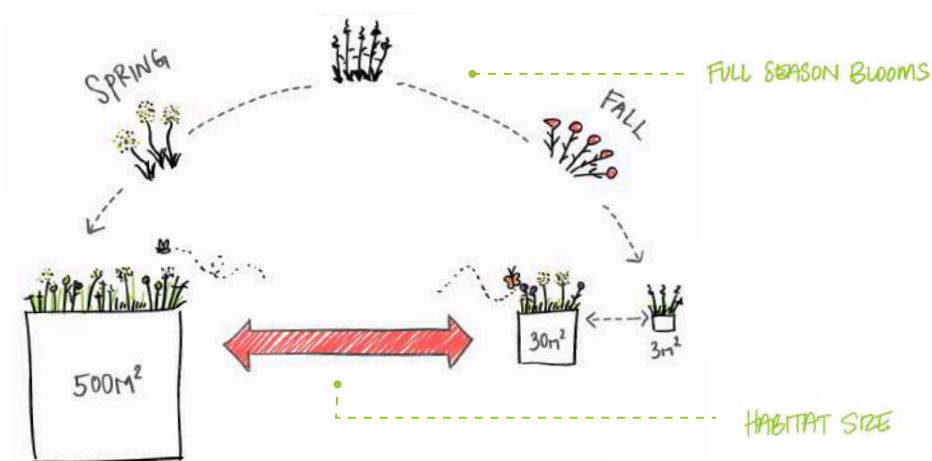
Quality Habitat

Crucial to the existence of life is access to the basic resources needed to survive. At a minimum, this includes food, water, shelter, and space. However, it is important to account for aspects of a species' full life-cycle to ensure the full flourishing of life, including aspects of species breeding patterns, raising young, successful reproduction, and general quality of life.

In addition, this includes the design for the foundational aspects of all habitat, like the soil and hydrology of a site. Regeneration of the soil, supporting its nutrient cycling and soil ecology, drives all other life within the landscape. Designing for the hydrological cycle within a site also creates opportunities for life to thrive, as both a resource and a moisture gradient to create more habitat diversity. High Quality Habitats are multi-layered, support multiple species, and function year-round.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Move beyond ornamental design to create habitat mosaics with functional plants that provide for species needs; consider plant spacing, seasonal forage, etc.
- Design for structural habitat through layered vegetation, organic material, and their spatial arrangement.
- Design for the availability of food and resources throughout the seasons and years.
- Design for soil health by understanding target plant and ecological community; consider de-compaction, adding or limiting organic matter, creating varied soil depths, adding woody debris, etc.
- Design the hydrological system on-site by considering the capture, flow, and storage of water and moisture gradients for target species.
- Research the life of specific key species on site to design for entire life cycles spatially and temporally.
- Reduce disturbance in both space and time; limit light, noise, and physical activity in areas during periods critical for species' well-being.



Space for Biodiversity should always be considered at any scale. For pollinators, optimal habitats are around 500 m², though smaller areas, down to 30 m² or even 3 m², can still be valuable when providing flower diversity, nesting sites, and connectivity. Designing for species means planning for their needs throughout the year, such as ensuring a continuous sequence of blooms from early spring through late fall.

Beyond providing food, landscapes should support a species' entire life cycle. Many, like the Monarch butterfly, rely on specific host plants for their larvae. Designing with these plants and incorporating structural habitat elements allows wildlife to feed, nest, and reproduce, creating truly sustainable habitats rather than temporary feeding stops.

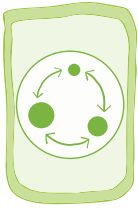
LIVING SHELTERS

London, England

This shelter bin designed by the Grass Roof Company demonstrates how habitat can integrate with the built environment of cities. One-dimensional design elements, like bin shelters, can be designed to support life by creatively integrating habitat features. Adding a simple green roof and natural materials like rocks and wood creates livable spaces within an otherwise conventional structure. Habitat in the city can be more than just planting. With creative thinking, even simple elements in the landscape can help reconnect built spaces with the larger ecosystem.

(Grass Roof Company)





Connectivity

Urban ecological landscape connections provide a lifeline for Biodiversity existing in cities with fragmented habitats. Many species spend phases of their lives in different habitats or live in territories spanning various areas. By providing connections species are able to move between fragmented habitats to access resources, seasonally migrate, or adapt to environmental changes.

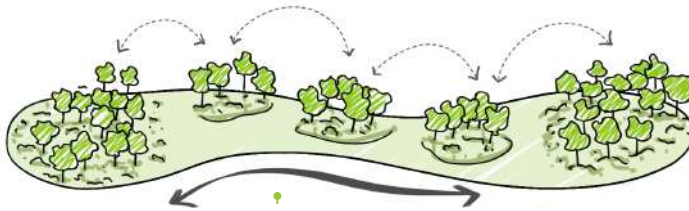
Thoughtful urban design must find ways to weave together the various ecological corridors and systems in the city. It is important to connect habitats and resources for species across multiple scales, from site to region, and understand how wildlife accesses and moves through sites.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Layer habitat Connectivity into green infrastructure: bioswales, green roofs, planted medians, and living walls that serve both wildlife movement and ecosystem services.
- Take advantage of linear spaces, like streets, riparian edges, and transit corridors to create connections and link habitats across various scales.
- Create continuous connections between green and blue spaces. If not possible, provide functional “stepping stone” connections that reduce the distance between green areas. Limit the distance between green patches to 200 meters, while the ideal distance for functional connections is 50 meters.
- Understand the needs of the specific species for which you are designing for and their mobility patterns. The needs of a migratory bird are different from a dragonfly or coyote.
- Embed habitat within the edges of spaces to encourage species drift along the boundaries.
- Align site designs with citywide and regional Connectivity plans.

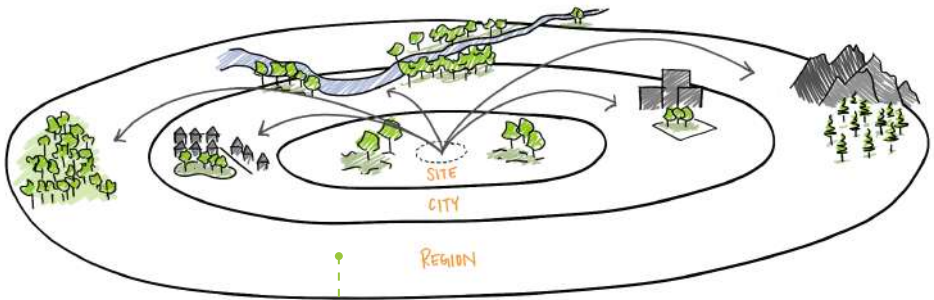
Although cities do not provide a lot of usable spaces for wildlife, design can creatively integrate habitat into existing infrastructure and buildings to facilitate connections for species and larger green spaces across the region.

GREEN CORRIDORS



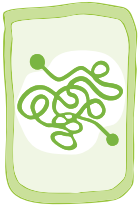
STEPPING STONE CORRIDORS

How species travel between larger green spaces needs to be considered in order to successfully link habitats. The proximity of patches and their permeability, or ease of movement for species, should ensure that the ecological Connectivity is functional.



CONNECTIONS ACROSS SCALES

When designing connections for species it is important to think across different scales. How is movement facilitated within and across the site, and how does the site connect with the greater area, region, and migration patterns?



Complexity

Ecological Complexity creates the conditions for regenerative and resilient landscapes that support Biodiversity. When habitats have various structural layers, overlapping functions, ecological redundancy, and the ability to adapt, they have the capacity to withstand disturbances and evolve over time.

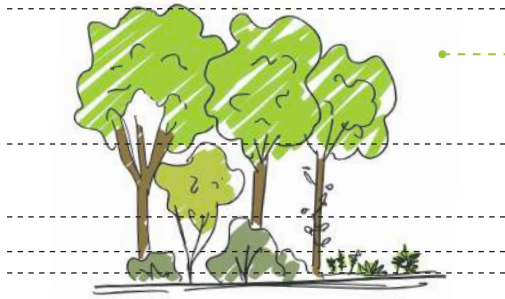
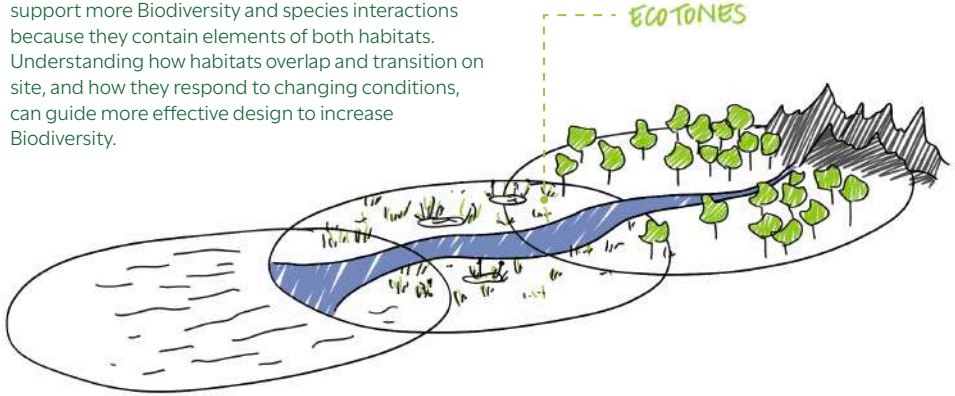
There are at least three aspects of Complexity to consider in a landscape:

- **Functional Complexity:** Creating redundancy within the functional roles of design elements, species, and habitats, like having multiple insects acting as pollinators for plants.
- **Temporal Complexity:** Building resilience through ecosystem dynamics like succession, seasonality, disturbance, and other cycles in the landscape. This allows for change in the face of shifting environmental conditions.
- **Structural Complexity:** Creating vertical Complexity, horizontal heterogeneity, and ecotones, involving various layers that change and overlap to increase suitable habitats within a landscape.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Design transitional edge zones between ecological typologies to create interfaces that support more resources, species interactions, and Connectivity.
- Design for vertical Complexity by layering vegetation from groundcovers to canopy trees for more diverse habitats, microclimates, and resources for wildlife.
- Create horizontal heterogeneity by varying habitat types, increasing spatial diversity and rich edge conditions across the landscape.
- Provide habitat redundancy by repeating key ecological typologies across a site to ensure wildlife survival if some areas are disturbed.
- Design for ecological process Complexity by incorporating processes like succession, disturbance, and seasonal cycles, using a “safe-to-fail” approach that allows systems to adapt and evolve.
- Make Complexity understandable by incorporating legible design cues, like selective mowing, borders, and planting patterns, to communicate and convey the value of ecological Complexity.

Ecotones are transitional zones between distinct ecological communities. These areas often support more Biodiversity and species interactions because they contain elements of both habitats. Understanding how habitats overlap and transition on site, and how they respond to changing conditions, can guide more effective design to increase Biodiversity.



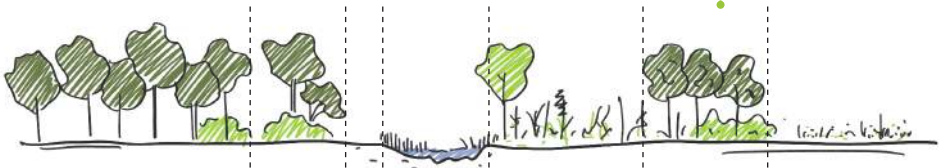
VERTICAL LAYERING

Landscapes with multiple vertical layers provide more diverse habitat for a wide ranges of species. This layering allows different organisms to coexist in the same area, increases ecological niches, and strengthens the resilience of ecosystems by supporting species' interactions and natural processes.

Designing edges in the landscape can create Quality Habitat through Complexity. Rather than having abrupt transitions from forest to meadow, a gradual transitional zone that brings the canopy to the ground adds structural diversity and more opportunities for wildlife habitat.



EDGES



Across the landscape, the variation among these habitats and edges creates horizontal heterogeneity.



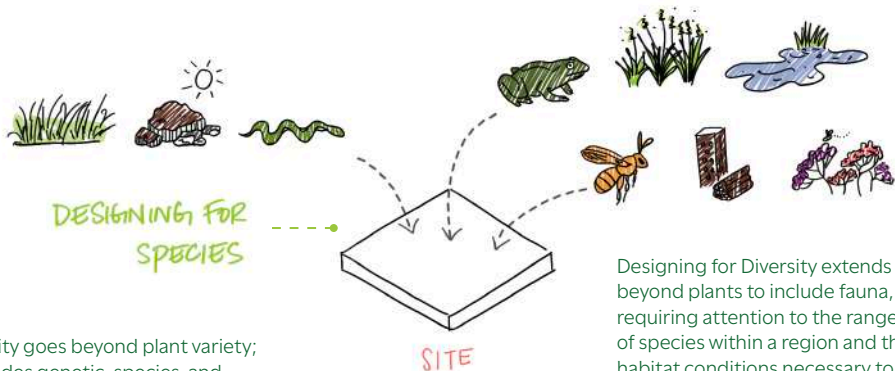
Diversity

Diversity is another quality that increases resilience and adaptation within the landscape. Variations within an ecological system, whether through the Diversity of genetics, species, or habitats, creates more niches, supports more species, generates richer experiential spaces, and facilitates foundational ecosystem services.

In urban landscapes, this means designing spaces with diverse habitats, plant communities, and micro-climates that support numerous species while building resilience to climate change. Beyond simply increasing species counts, designing for variation involves analyzing the unique conditions and opportunities of a landscape and selectively introducing variety across multiple scales, including at the level of species, biological communities, and landscape types.

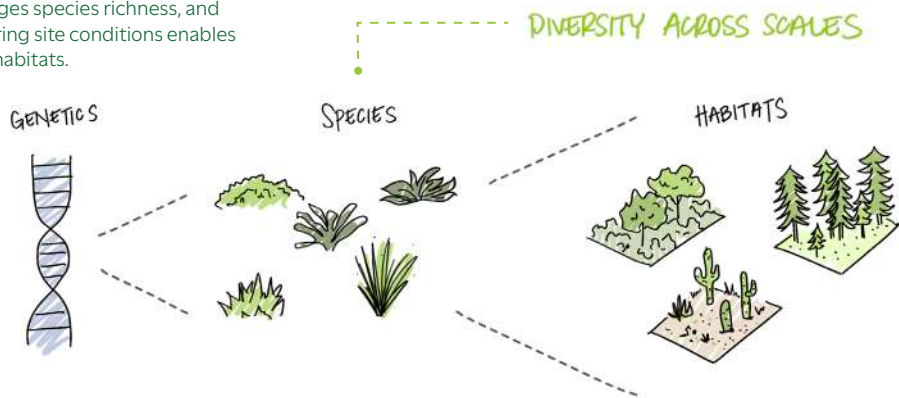
DESIGN ACTIONS

- Diversify plantings by using seed-grown, locally sourced material to promote genetic Diversity. Avoid relying on cloned nursery stock.
- Support flora and fauna Diversity by designing habitats that meet species-specific needs, including features like rock piles, logs, substrate, moisture gradients, etc.
- Increase the number of habitats within and across the site, even in small mosaics. Think about the variety of open to closed and wet to dry spaces you are creating.
- Support cultural and experiential Diversity by linking ecological variety to social use.



Diversity goes beyond plant variety; it includes genetic, species, and habitat Diversity. Using genetically varied seed supports resilient plant populations, understanding local flora encourages species richness, and considering site conditions enables diverse habitats.

Designing for Diversity extends beyond plants to include fauna, requiring attention to the range of species within a region and the habitat conditions necessary to support their unique needs.



PARC DES ATELIERS

Arles, France

Parc des Ateliers in Arles, designed by Bas Smets, demonstrates how plant Diversity can create conditions favorable to life. With over 80,000 plants representing 140 species, the site now supports 55 new bird species as well as other vertebrate species. This Diversity also creates microclimates that support more life, as plant growth and evapotranspiration help moderate and stabilize temperature and moisture across the site. The design created a diverse and stable landscape where there are more opportunities to support Biodiversity.

(Adrian Deweerdt / LUMA)



Place

Flourishing urban landscapes are rooted in Place. They reflect the soils, waters, climates, and histories of the spaces they occupy. To work with Place means learning about the plant communities and materials regional to the area, aligning with the ecological patterns that are present, and the social and cultural connections to land and nature.

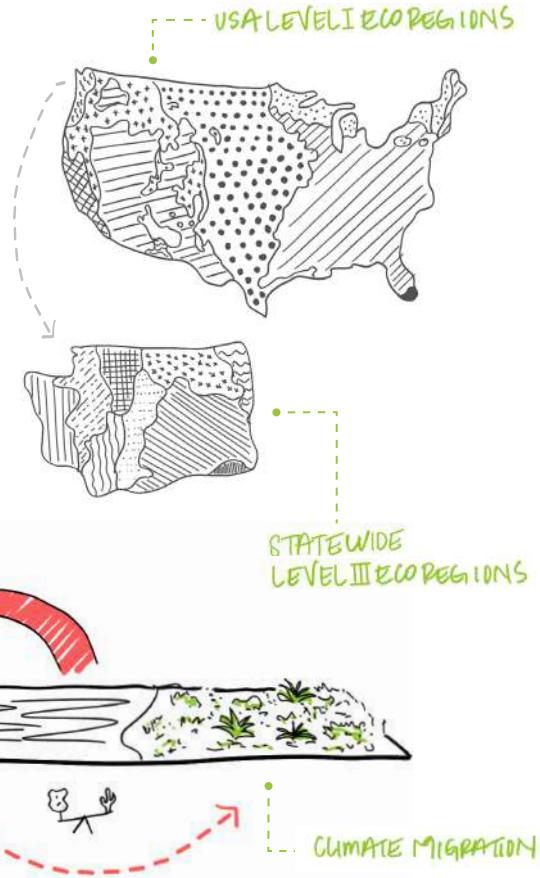
Thoughtful urban design must seek to understand and work with the historic ecological contexts that have supported the local flora and fauna, materials, and cultures of Place. Designing with a place's ecological and cultural fabric in mind ensures that landscapes are context-rooted spaces that support Biodiversity. Locally and regionally adapted species and designs support co-evolved relationships, stronger ecological function, and deeper socio-ecological connections.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Align with local ecological patterns by designing with a reference or “template” habitat. This involves understanding a site's existing and historic hydrology, geology, social and natural history, topography (slope, aspect, elevation), and other ecosystem dynamics.
- Restore historic ecological patterns and habitats where possible through site observation and research of the site's history.
- Reduce homogenization by creating spaces tailored to the site's distinct habitats, microclimates, and local ecological and cultural characteristics.
- Incorporate climate-responsive strategies when designing plant communities. While native species should be prioritized, it can be valuable to include species that reflect current and projected climate conditions, carefully weighing the costs and benefits of their introduction.
- Engage with local communities and honor Place-based, local knowledge. Respect lived experience and design to cultivate and preserve more reciprocal relationships with the land.

Take simple steps to understand the ecological context of the site. Ecoregions are geographic areas defined by distinct ecological patterns, including climate, soil types, topography, vegetation, and flora and fauna. They are used to group regions that share broadly similar ecological characteristics and environmental conditions, rather than political or cultural boundaries.

Where possible, use a reference ecosystem, reflecting the site's historic ecology before disturbance, to guide design decisions. Historic references act as ecological guides, showing what the site is capable of supporting. Consider incorporating climate adaptation and climate migratory species after weighing the benefits and risks.



AL FAY PARK

Abu Dhabi, UAE

SLA's design for Al Fay Park demonstrates a deeply Place-based ecological approach. As part of the process, the team led a year-long research initiative mapping and categorizing native plant species of the UAE, including their living conditions, cultural significance, and cultivation requirements. This knowledge guided the park's design, which features over 2,000 native trees and shrubs, including the ecologically keystone Ghaf tree. Rather than imposing an imported vision of nature, SLA grounded their design in the existing ecology, learning from the region's flora to create a landscape that adapts to and regenerates its desert environment.

(Landezine)



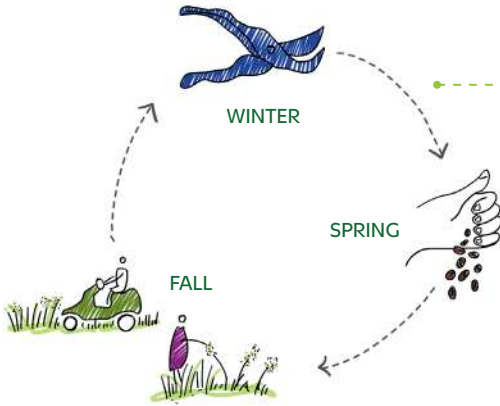
Care

Biodiversity in cities will not thrive without Care. Stewardship, maintenance, and adaptive management are as important as initial design. Care builds long-term relationships between people and Place, ensuring urban ecosystems are valued, maintained, and allowed to evolve along with the communities that care for them.

Designers must consider how to support the ongoing care of a space after its initial construction. This can involve negotiating with clients to ensure their continued involvement, providing short and long-term stewardship plans, collaborating with existing communities or organizations connected to the site, and coordinating with skilled horticulturists and gardeners who understand how to work with the living, dynamic qualities of nature. Continued Care and relationships should be intentionally designed for when creating authentically biodiverse urban spaces.

DESIGN ACTIONS

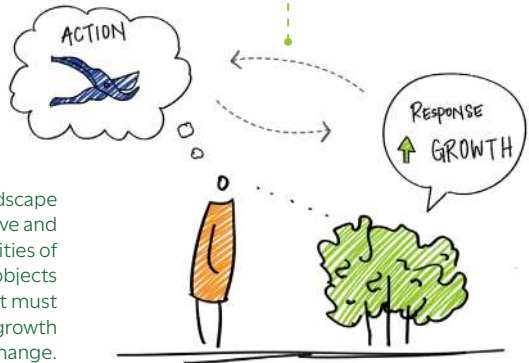
- Start the design process with Care in mind. Early involvement cultivates deeper long-term connections and lasting value.
- Design stewardship into projects through community involvement and support projects like community gardens, citizen science, and co-design.
- Collaborate and network support for stewardship through institutional partnerships with schools, NGOs, or other agencies.
- Call for resources to be dedicated to a space's Care and management, and/or the designers' continued involvement after construction.
- Include historically excluded communities and cultures in the authorship and management of spaces. There needs to be Equity in caring practices.
- Design should invite and demonstrate Care by making space for ritual, encouraging interaction, and revealing the labor needed to care for a site.
- Understand that Care is seasonal and adaptive. Landscape management should not be generic, rather, it should respond to environmental conditions and cues throughout the year and the evolution of the site.



MAINTENANCE BY SEASON

Maintenance and Care should not be a generic prescription applied to the landscape. Stewardship must respond to the seasonal changes that take place, performing specific actions when the time of year and growth cycle calls for them.

ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT



It is important for landscape management strategies to evolve and adapt to the dynamic, living qualities of landscapes. They are not static objects and our Care and management must respond thoughtfully to their growth and change.



BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK

Brooklyn, USA

Management at Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York City departs from conventional maintenance practices. Horticulturists apply adaptive and ecological methods, caring for the park as a dynamic ecosystem that evolves over time. They respond to the success or failure of native plantings, limit pruning, leave seed heads and stems for wildlife, minimize disturbance, and time their work around the behavior of other species. Through experimentation and observation, they continually learn how to better support the park's interconnected flora and fauna.

(Joe Gardener)



qualities for
EQUITY

To design equitably means to justly support the quality of life of all living things in the built environment.

Equity is a critical component of designing and building public spaces that support Human Well-being and Biodiversity. As a principle, Equity ensures that the benefits of Well-being and Biodiversity are justly shared and distributed across communities, generations, and more-than-humans in urban environments.

Urban areas, often by design, develop in ways that disproportionately impact and marginalize certain populations over others. Low-income communities, communities of color, and people of different abilities are more likely to bear the burden of environmental racism, discriminatory land-use practices, hostile design, and underinvestment which perpetuate inequitable and socio-economically challenged societies.

To that effect, public spaces are an important tool and resource for advancing Equity in a holistic way. Humans, more-than-humans, and the environment all have the right to thrive without the impacts of poor planning and design.

Equity

3 DESIGN DOMAIN QUALITIES

The following **3 design qualities** within the domain of Equity identify specific design characteristics and objectives that help equitably design for Human Well-being and Biodiversity.



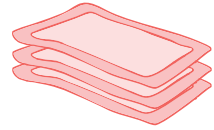
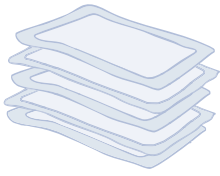
Authorship + Inclusion

Reflects local community identities and natural characteristics to create a sense of belonging, representation, and diversity through engagement.



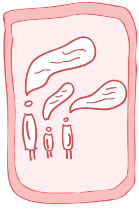
Accessibility

Supports the ability of humans and more-than-humans to move easily within the site and connect to the broader public realm, as well as accessing key destination points, like play areas and habitats.



Reparative Design

Recognizes and responds to historic injustices that impact people and nature to support the evolution of public spaces and the Well-being of humans and more-than-humans moving forward.



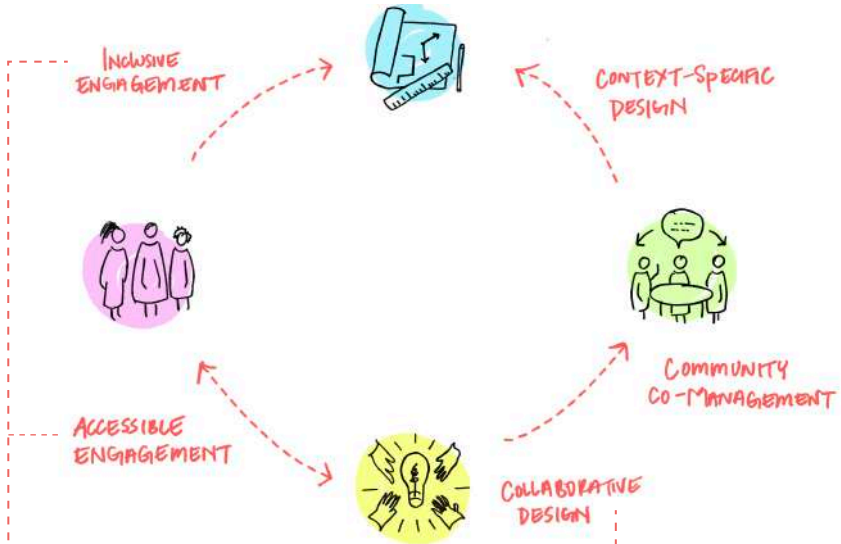
Authorship + Inclusion

Similar to Participatory Governance for Well-being, Authorship and Inclusion in designing the built environment are key to building Equity. Participation plays a role both in the design phase of public space projects, but also in the post-implementation phase where stewardship and Care are continuously needed. The quality of engagement is also critical: effective outreach and engagement activities help people actively participate in ways where they can share their experience, ask questions, and propose ideas. These are the critical insights needed to ensure that planning and design reflect local needs and wants which fuels belonging through Authorship and Inclusion.

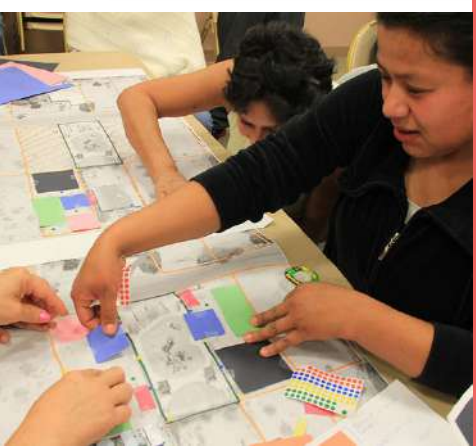
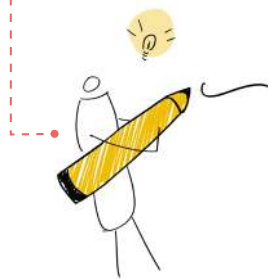
In applicable cases, feedback from more-than-human use and activity is equally necessary. Consulting ecologists, wildlife biologists, and entomologists can greatly support the inclusion of more-than-human needs in public space planning and design.

DESIGN ACTIONS

- Ensure engagement is accessible through translation, childcare, food, stipends, and varied formats to reduce participation barriers.
- Co-create amenities that reflect local identities and practices, partnering with community leaders and cultural practitioners to ensure equitable and contextually grounded design.
- Support regular programming—clean-ups, cultural events, repair cafés, shared gardening—while providing training and micro-grants that empower residents and businesses to lead maintenance, activation, and peer-led management.
- Use safety strategies centered on community presence, visibility, and natural surveillance rather than solely enforcement.
- Maintain feedback loops to gather user insights and conduct Equity-focused evaluations to keep the space responsive, accessible, and resilient.



Outreach and engagement are key, especially when trying to connect with hard-to-reach communities. Strategies like door-knocking, phonebanking, distributing flyers, and using social media are good practices for inviting people to meetings.

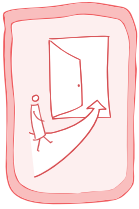


NUESTRO LUGAR

North Shore, USA

Kounkey Design Initiative's approach to engagement enables residents to transform their communities. In Southern California, KDI and the North Shore community designed "Nuestro Lugar"—a new park born out of a participatory process to meet the needs of a rural area. In providing amenities for health and wellness, the park reflects the power of co-designing.

"KDI Recognizes that participation is key to equitable and sustainable development. Those experiencing the complexities of poverty and in Equity not only deserve a say in decisions that affect them, but also have the most sophisticated understanding of what they need and why." (KDI)



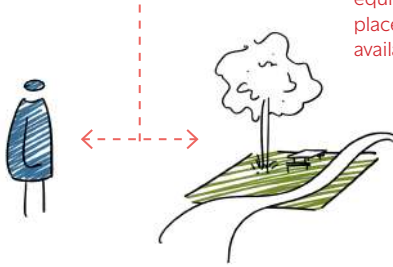
Accessibility

Equitable access to multi-functional, inclusive public spaces is essential to Mutual Flourishing. This includes the ability for people to move easily within a site, as well as the site's Connectivity to the surrounding area. Access is shaped by how spaces are placed and distributed, influencing who feels welcome, safe, and able to participate. These decisions affect the Well-being of both humans and more-than-humans. True Equity also recognizes the distinct movement, sensory, and habitat needs of more-than-human life, enabling all to thrive within the site and its broader ecological context over time.

DESIGN ACTIONS

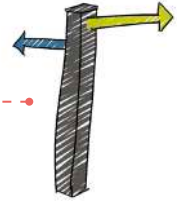
- Provide clear, smooth, and navigable paths that support walking, wheeling, cycling, and mobility devices for users with varying physical abilities.
- Ensure direct, intuitive links to public transit, bike routes, and shared-mobility systems to improve access for all users.
- Embed safety and comfort into all movement infrastructure by incorporate lighting, clear sightlines, rest areas, shade, and weather protection to support safe, easy, and comfortable travel across the site.
- Integrate Well-being and Biodiversity through layered design using native planting, shade trees, pollinator habitats, and sensory landscapes to create welcoming, calming environments that support ecological health and human comfort.
- Enhance ecological Connectivity and Quality Habitat through green corridors, permeable surfaces, and wildlife-friendly features that improve stormwater management and strengthen local Biodiversity. Ramps for baby ducks are an example of how to ease Access to habitat for animals.

PROXIMITY

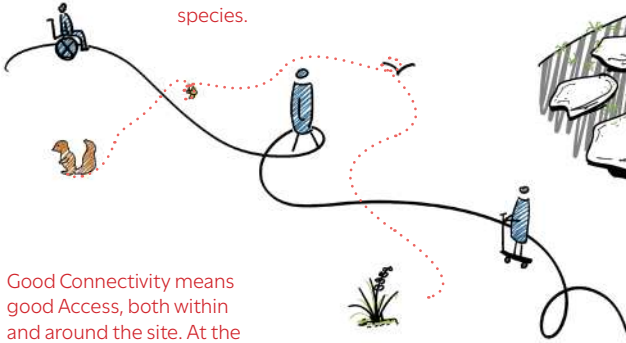


Connections to the surrounding community is crucial for equitable Access using different modes. This also means placement of public spaces is important and must be made available across communities.

SIGNAGE



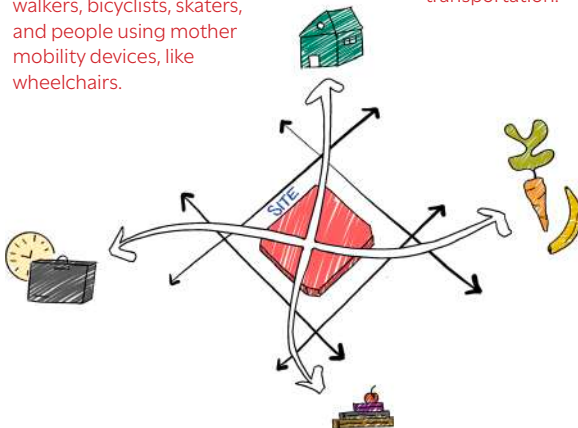
Pathways should be thoughtfully aligned with the natural elements of the site that also support movement and protection for more-than-human species.



Low-carbon materials, reuse, and permeability are ways that can support climate resilience and adaptation.

Good Connectivity means good Access, both within and around the site. At the same time, multi-modal connections provide people opportunities to be physically active in diverse ways. Multi-use pathways are open for runners, walkers, bicyclists, skaters, and people using mother mobility devices, like wheelchairs.

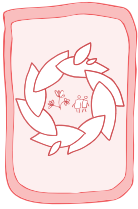
Connectivity to the broader public realm makes it easier for people to visit the site using public transit or other modes of active transportation.



Easy Access and proximity make it easier and more convenient for people to spend time in public spaces, engage with each other and nature.

Movement patterns for more than-humans can also contribute to the design and materiality of connecting pathways.

Design interventions should also tailor to slow mobility to support active lifestyles and movement at different paces.



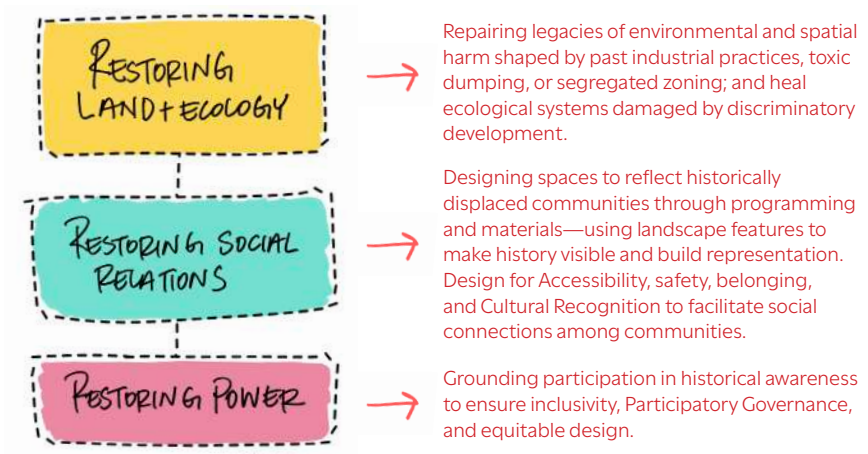
Reparative Design

Fostering Equity in the built environment also requires a holistic approach that addresses historic and structural harms to humans and more-than-humans. Degraded environments, landscapes, and infrastructure that have previously caused harm require thoughtful restoration in order to support Mutual Flourishing moving forward. Through the blending of Accessibility, Participatory Governance, Diversity, and other multi-beneficial design qualities, Reparative Design in public space can help address social and environmental inequities that have impacted people and nature’s ability to flourish.

DESIGN ACTIONS

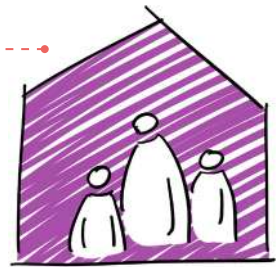
- Prioritize locating new or improved green spaces in neighborhoods historically excluded from investment, using mapping and community input to guide equitable placement.
- Specify durable materials, clear maintenance zones, and simple, repeatable systems that support consistent Care and preserve site quality over time.
- Integrate multi-species needs into the design framework by including habitat-supportive elements—native plant palettes, shelter structures, pollinator zones, and wildlife passage routes—directly into the site design.
- Plan for seasonal and long-term ecological change by using native, climate-adapted species; design dynamic planting layers; and shape micro-habitats that evolve over time, ensuring the landscape remains resilient, engaging, and ecologically productive.

Reparative Design requires a focused look at the context and history of Place and people. Policy and design interventions are tools you can use to ensure that past damage begins to heal and your project provides long-term restorative benefits to people and the environment.



POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Policy interventions also have a great impact on Reparative Design. In addition to built interventions, your design practice should also consider how policy can support your goals. For example, prioritizing anti-displacement strategies and practices to keep families in their homes long-term is a key consideration for urban and landscape design.



KIBERA PUBLIC SPACE PROJECT

Nairobi, Kenya

The Kibera Public Space Network (KPSN) led by KDI transforms small, underused sites into community-led public spaces that combine social infrastructure, essential services, and economic opportunities. Each space is co-designed with residents, enabling local stewardship, strengthening social ties, and ensuring the spaces reflect community priorities. Together, the network forms a resilient urban system—one where public spaces actively support health, safety, livelihoods, and collective agency in a context of chronic infrastructural inequality.

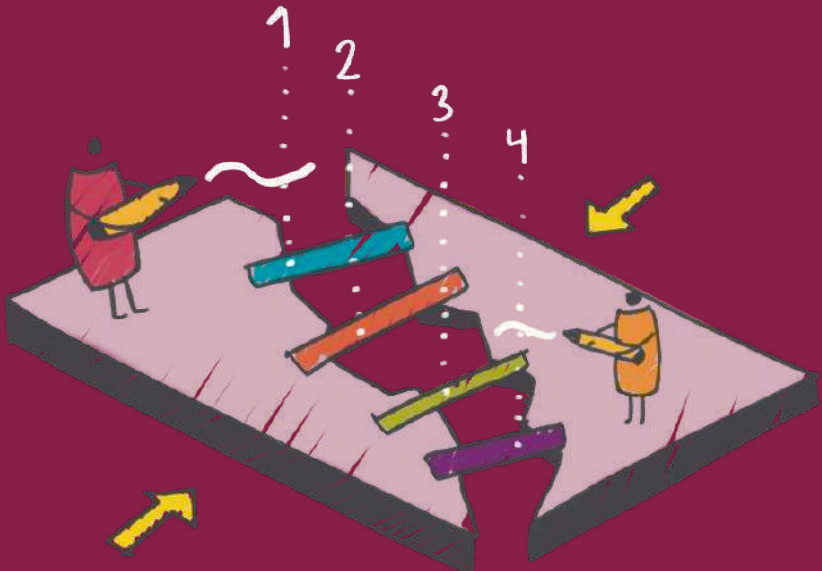
(KDI)

**design
principles +
strategies
for mutual
flourishing**

What should designers prioritize in public spaces that bring together what matters most to both human and ecological well-being?



The design principles in this chapter can help designers find new and creative ways to combine and connect qualities from the 3 design domains that support Mutual Flourishing.



4 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

These 4 design principles guide the integration of Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity as connected priorities in resilient public spaces, creating shared environments where people and nature can thrive together.

CONVENE + CONNECT



Invite people and nature to connect in public space

This principle highlights the importance of access and Connectivity of spaces that invite humans and more-than-humans to interact and be present in public space. It presents design strategies that help identify and analyze nodes, placement, orientation and form, edges and transition, legibility, scale and hierarchy, flow, and networks.

BLEND + ENGAGE



Diversify spaces for meaningful encounters and experiences

This principle highlights the importance of designing across space, time, intensity, and with gradients to support coexistence and meaningful encounters. This approach enables multi-functionality, accessibility, and helps create fruitful experiences from engaging in diverse spaces and activities.

GROUND + ADAPT



Build resilience through identity, growth, and change

This principle highlights the importance of place-based design to ensure that spaces do not exist in isolation from their direct surroundings and relationships. It focuses on grounding spaces in local species, practices, and community identities to make sure landscapes become meaningful, adaptable, and resilient over time.

REPAIR + CARE



Restore places and bonds to foster care and resilience

This principle highlights the importance of acknowledging the historic injustices that have caused harm to humans and more-than-humans. It centers reciprocity between people, community, nature, and land to help restore and care for shared spaces over time while also providing the opportunities for them to grow and regenerate.



CONVENE + CONNECT

Invite people and nature to connect in public space

Public space is a vital resource that supports people's ability to gather, connect, and build community, resilience, and overall Human Well-being, while also providing essential habitat and refuge for other forms of life.

Convene + Connect organizes compatible uses while respecting areas needing more space, optimizing the site for all. By thoughtfully grouping and stacking compatible uses in shared spaces and protecting areas needing refuge, design creates room for everyone. Connecting these organized spaces into networks ensures movement and relationships across sites and scales.

This means accommodating diverse needs: people of different abilities, ages, and preferences; and species with different habitat requirements and sensitivities. Both humans and more-than-humans should be able to share certain spaces while having areas to thrive independently. For example, grouping sports and active recreation together protects more restorative or ecologically sensitive zones. Similarly, wildlife breeding grounds and seasonal habitats should receive protection during critical times.

Public space design should also extend beyond site boundaries, connecting to the wider urban fabric and ecological networks.

In practice, this principle works through creating activity nodes that respond to local context, then linking them within and across sites to ensure safe, accessible connections for all life.

How to CONVENE + CONNECT

→ Identify + Analyze

- Map existing and potential spaces for both people and other species
- Analyze site patterns and flows to reveal and better understand social and ecological tendencies.
- Collaborate and co-design with community members, planners, maintenance staff and other stakeholders to align design with social and ecological needs.

→ Placement

- Develop nodes to host activities based on interests or types.
- Assess proximity and adjacency of nodes through spatial overlays of activity, movement, and habitat to create easy transitions and movement between nodes.



Plaça de les Glories (p. 127) seamlessly **places** ecological and active areas that support movement through the site, while offering spaces for people and nature to meet. (Agence Ter)

→ Orientation + Form

- Shape each node according to primary function taking into account access, area, movement, and potential overlaps.
- Place and orient ecology-focused nodes with respect to key environmental factors (sun, aspect, water, soil, species movement).
- Orient amenities like shade structures based on environmental factors to provide comfort and protection to people.



Parque Prado (p. 131) favors soft **edges** and gradual **transitions** between areas, accommodating the habitat needs of wildlife while providing enriching nature experiences for visitors. (Connatural)

→ Edges + Transitions

- Create areas of transition between nodes to create distinction while allowing permeability between spaces.
- Plant low vegetation or groundcover along edges to create soft borders and gradual thresholds between spaces.
- Place safety elements where needed to protect between active and less-active nodes.

→ Legibility

- Differentiate nodes by using design elements like materials, planting, lighting, or signage.
- Consider representing local identities and ecologies through topography, vegetation, and material choices.
- Connect nodes through ecological and social infrastructure.

→ Flow

- Make it easy to move between nodes by reducing barriers.
- Provide multiple routes to maintain Connectivity and create options.
- Place connecting pathways based on species' movement and human comfort to allow easy flow.



The Ningbo Ecological Corridor (p. 129) provides pathways for both wildlife and humans, creating a **network** that connects people and nature while allowing each to choose how they move through the site. (WLA)

→ Network

- Link spaces through multi-modal networks to connect people, places, and resources.
- Align Biodiversity Connectivity and human mobility (greenways, bike paths, etc.).
- Consider Accessibility needs when placing nodes.

→ Scale + Hierarchy

- Support broad Connectivity to the site's surroundings by linking to neighborhood access points, habitat corridors, ecosystems, and transit systems through a hierarchy of primary, secondary, and tertiary connections.



Tuzla Stream Co-Habitat (p. 139) links together habitat corridors, regional trails, and neighborhood connectors to enhance circulation and co-habitation across **scales** from site to region. (Openact)

Designing to **Convene + Connect** helps invite people and nature to connect in public space.

Through applying design actions found in the three design domains, this principle organizes public space to serve diverse needs efficiently: grouping compatible uses, protecting areas requiring refuge, and linking spaces into accessible networks that support both human and ecological communities.

List of design strategies that support **Convene + Connect**:

Identify + Analyze

Understand existing social and ecological conditions before design

Placement

Strategically organize activities based on compatibility and connections

Orientation + Form

Arrange and shape spaces to work with environmental factors and intended uses

Edges + Transitions

Design gradual transitions between spaces to create distinction while maintaining connections.

Legibility

Create clarity and distinction for designed spatial nodes and connections

Flow

Design for easy circulation and Connectivity throughout the site

Network

Create layered networks that link people, places, and ecological systems

Scale + Hierarchy

Design layered connections from site to neighborhood to region



What CONVENE + CONNECT Can Look Like

Public spaces provide opportunities for humans and more-than-humans to gather and connect. This principle brings activity and movement together through programmed spatial nodes that support coexistence, respect, and access. Below is an example of what this could look like in practice.



DESIGN QUALITIES AT PLAY



Healthy Living
Cultural Continuity
Social Resilience



Quality Habitat
Connectivity
Complexity



Diversity
Place
Care



Accessibility
Authorship + Inclusion



native habitat restoration
+
gardening and stewardship

shelter and viewpoint
+
access to water



play and recreation areas
+
inclusive access

What CONVENE + CONNECT Can Look Like

The examples below show some of the principle's **strategies** in action and how they combine qualities across the three design domains to support Mutual Flourishing.



POSSIBLE DESIGN QUALITY COMBINATIONS



Legibility

Social Resilience
Complexity
Care
Accessibility



Placement

Healthy Living
Quality Habitat
Connectivity
Authorship + Inclusion



Flow

Healthy Living
Quality Habitat
Connectivity
Accessibility



Legibility ■ ■ ■ ■

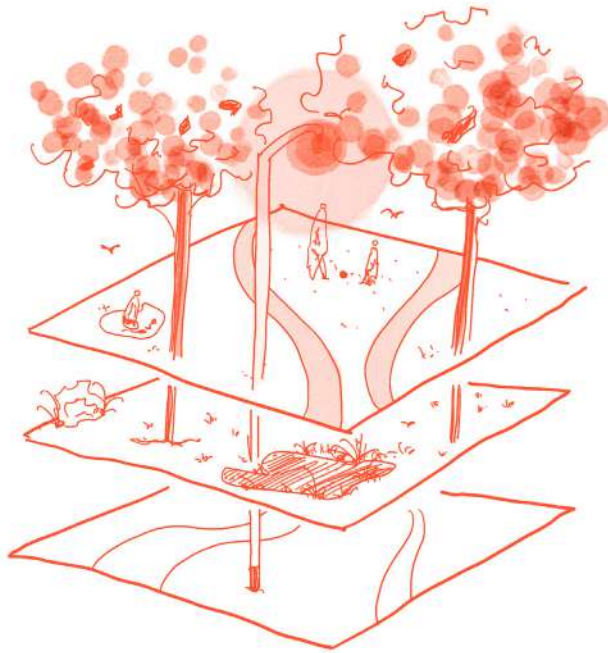
These native planting nodes create distinct wildlife zones. Beyond signage, path materials and permeable fencing maintain their **legibility** as intentional spaces while guiding movement, providing structure, and signaling uses.

Placement ■ ■ ■ ■

By concentrating sports and play in dedicated zones, strategic **placement** of grouped activities can leave quieter areas for things like sensitive wildlife habitat. This preserved habitat provides shade, cooling, and beauty that enhance the experience for visitors, creating reciprocal benefits through thoughtful arrangement.

Flow ■ ■ ■ ■

Diverse, multi-layered plant buffers of groundcovers, shrubs, and trees create corridors for wildlife movement while providing sensory richness, visual buffers, and seasonal interest. By designing for **flow**, one strategy serves both: corridors for wildlife, experience for people.



BLEND + ENGAGE

Diversify spaces for meaningful encounters and experiences

Cities thrive when their outdoor spaces layer compatible human and ecological uses in shared landscapes. Blend + Engage creates multifunctional spaces where a single feature can offer both ecological benefits and social value. This happens when designers intentionally overlap compatible human and more-than-human activities. When these blended spaces are designed to be legible and accessible, people understand how they function, value the ecological processes at work, and develop stronger connections to place.

This blending happens through various strategies: spatial layering, temporal sharing, and gradients of intensity. For example, a wildflower meadow might be selectively mown to create paths and gathering areas while maintaining wildlife habitat. Seasonal management allows spaces to shift between human activity and ecological refuge. These approaches make human-nature relationships visible and tangible, creating opportunities for awareness, encounter, and meaningful engagement.

At the core of this design principle is intentionally blending, layering, and integrating spaces and activities into multifunctional landscapes that welcome coexistence. Making these systems legible encourages deeper engagement. When ecological processes and shared benefits are visible, people are more likely to form lasting relationships with nature and with each other.

How to BLEND + ENGAGE

→ Overlay

- Map together layers of ecological and social activity to find new relationships and programming opportunities.
- Safely place micro-habitats (logs, pollinator pockets, etc.) within active human spaces.
- Match landscape types with potential human programs, from active, open prairies to enclosed, intimate forest spaces.



Gellerup New Nature Park (p. 135) creates novel interactions from the **overlay** of ecological and social spaces. (SLA)

→ Harmonize

- Match human and ecological patterns to pair compatible programs and spaces, creating co-habitat spaces (i.g. restorative zones by sensitive habitat or active areas with vertical ecological layers).
- Design plant communities that work well near human activity, using plants that are earlier successional species that specialize in regrowth and/or stress tolerance.
- Locate human presence in areas with unique ecological or wildlife activity (blooms, birds, shade, etc.).



Ningbo Ecological Corridor (p. 129) **harmonizes** seamless transition zones between wild, multi-sensory natural elements, that allow people to “peek in” on nature (WLA)



Terremoto's Denver Plaza (p. 143) provides multi-use furnishings that **multiply** the benefits for humans and wildlife, and **soft** edges that allow humans and nature to interact. (Terremoto)

→ Multiply

- Design for multi-function and multi-beneficial amenities that are also adaptive and usable year-round.
- Hybridize infrastructure, like bioswales and tree-lined green streets, to combine ecological services with wildlife habitat and public use.
- Create multi-use furnishings and structures that serve human uses while also providing habitat.

→ Soften

- Use gradients to blend spaces, soften hard edges, and signal spatial shifts through a hierarchy of path networks, material changes, or variations in vegetation density.

→ Interact

- Design spaces that invite respectful engagement with wilder nature, from playful elements and pathways to quiet reflection zones.
- Use vegetation and natural elements to spark curiosity and learning and help guide interactions with nature through gentle cues, tonal shifts, and planting density.
- Create thresholds to wilder zones that offer 'peek-in' moments, using boardwalks, viewing platforms, and other design elements

MAKE MEANINGFUL



For the Girona Framework Plan (p. 121), **meaning** is made through artful selective mowing that creates patterns, reveals new spaces, and protects habitat, making ecology meaningful by bringing humans closer while keeping space accessible. (Landezine)

→ Make Meaningful

- Create programming that allows people to engage meaningfully with nature through stewardship, environmental education, and other events.
- Use signage, visuals, and art to inform visitors of the socio-ecological history of the site.
- Co-design habitat, social spaces, planting areas, or art installations with local stakeholders to meet their needs and enhance representation
- Provide small, informal invitations like edible landscapes, ephemeral installations, and areas for observation.

→ Make Visible

- Design for sensory and seasonal changes to enhance people's experiences and interactions with the landscape.
- Use management strategies to also support legibility and reflect community care in certain areas.
- Layer seasonal cycles (blooming, fruiting, dormancy) with community programming and events to provide diverse engagement opportunities between people and nature.



Test Plot (p.133) **makes visible** acts of Care through management strategies and materials that highlight the mutual benefits of community-led restoration of public green spaces. (Terremoto)

Designing to **Blend + Engage** helps invite people and nature to connect in public space.

Through applying design actions found in the three design domains, this principle blends compatible uses and reveals their relationships: integrating human and ecological functions through spatial layering, temporal sharing, and gradients of use that create visible, accessible spaces that support mutual understanding and engagement

List of design strategies that support **Blend + Engage**:

Overlay

Layer ecological and social uses together to find where they can share space

Harmonize

Pair compatible human and ecological patterns to create spaces where both can coexist without conflict

Multiply

Create spaces and elements that serve multiple functions, providing benefits for both humans and ecology

Soften

Use gradients to create gradual transitions between spaces rather than hard boundaries

Interact

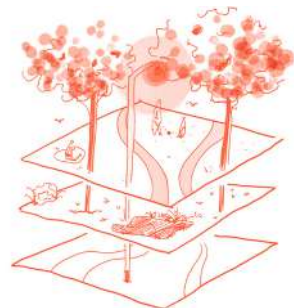
Facilitate respectful engagement with wild nature through spaces that invite curiosity, discovery, and Care

Make Meaningful

Design opportunities for deeper engagement, from informal encounters to structured programming and participation

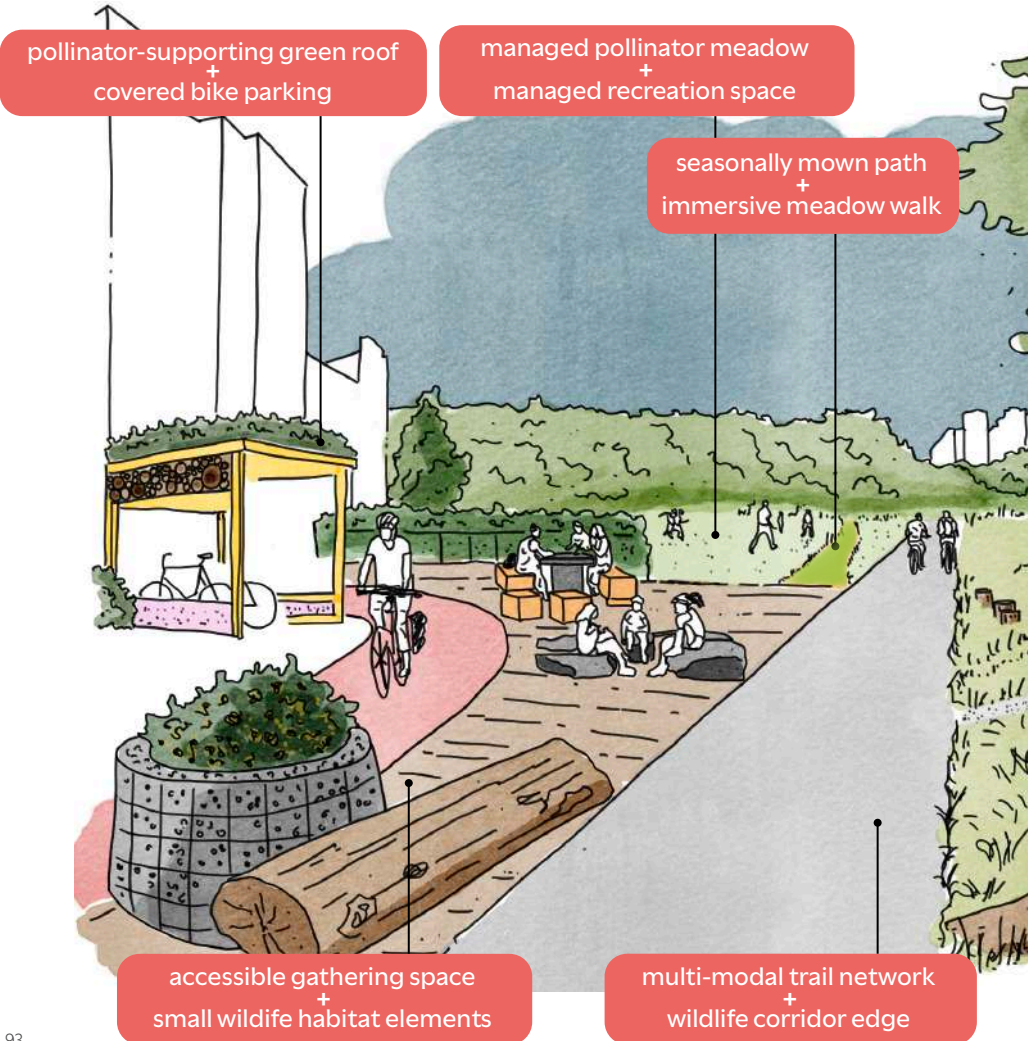
Make Visible

Make blended spaces legible through creative, experiential methods that reveal connections



What BLEND + ENGAGE Can Look Like

Public spaces work best when they support both people and nature. Blend + Engage brings together plants, habitat, and human activity in ways that are easy to use and understand, helping people feel more connected to the landscapes they share with other species. Shown below is an example of this in practice.



DESIGN QUALITIES AT PLAY



Healthy Living
Cultural Continuity
Participatory Governance
Social Resilience



Quality Habitat
Connectivity
Complexity
Place



Accessibility
Reparative Design



multi-use gathering platform
+
cooling native urban forest

natural play element
+
insect habitat log

What BLEND + ENGAGE Can Look Like

Shown here are examples of some of the principle's **strategies** and how they bring together qualities across the three design domains to support Mutual Flourishing.



POSSIBLE DESIGN QUALITY COMBINATIONS



Multiply

Participatory Governance
Quality Habitat
Care
Accessibility



Harmonize

Healthy Living
Connectivity
Place
Reparative Design



Interact

Healthy Living
Quality Habitat
Complexity



Multiply

An open lawn planted with diverse species becomes mutually beneficial, supporting wildlife habitat and public use through intentional management. Seasonal mowing creates recreation space and walking paths, while unmowed areas provide habitat, **multiplying** the space's functions and benefits.

Harmonize

A platform within this urban forest **harmonizes** low-impact activities with sensitive habitat preservation. Space designed for quiet gathering and reflection creates Well-being through nature connection while building appreciation that protects these wild spaces. Here, a plant conservation group meets to identify native plants.

Interact

Natural play elements made from habitat logs invite people to **interact** with wild spaces in open and curious ways. This joyful engagement builds respect and connection, while the logs provide insect habitat, generating mutual value through shared space.



GROUND + ADAPT

Build resilience through identity, growth, and change

Every landscape holds unique ecological and cultural history while having the capacity to change over time. For public spaces, this means design cannot happen in isolation. These shared landscapes must respond to their ecological, climatic, and cultural surroundings. Ground + Adapt roots design in local context (native species, cultural practices, community identities) while building in capacity for change. Spaces that are both place-based and adaptable become more meaningful, resilient, and responsive to evolving conditions.

Grounding means designing from Place: prioritizing native species that support regional Biodiversity, honoring cultural practices that connect people to land, and responding to community needs. Adapting means designing for change: accommodating seasonal cycles, ecological succession, shifting priorities, and climate uncertainty. These aren't opposing forces but complementary. Deep rootedness enables healthy adaptation.

Ground + Adapt creates spaces that reflect local ecosystems and cultures while remaining open to reinterpretation. By balancing specificity with flexibility, these public spaces can foster resilience and shared flourishing across generations and species. Communities see themselves in these spaces and trust them to evolve alongside their changing needs.

How to GROUND + ADAPT

→ Collaborate

- Lead with a meaningful community engagement process that allows multiple points of feedback and interaction to create meaningful designs.
- Honor and work with indigenous communities to identify culturally significant plants, materials, programming, and land practices.
- Identify plantings with both social and ecological contexts in mind, including culturally relevant and/or ecologically beneficial plants when possible. Favor plants that serve both functions.
- Host on-site events with communities to map memories, uses, and future desires. Include elders, youth, and cultural groups.



Tom Lee Park's (p. 123) designers **collaborated** with youth, schools, community, and local ecologists. (SCAPE)

→ Inquire

- Observe current ecological patterns—prioritize seasonal site observations to look at sun, water, microclimate, wildlife, and human use patterns. Ideally, observe the site through all seasons of a year before intervening.
- Research the historic ecology: land uses, former ecosystems, and past disturbances.
- Use citizen science and participatory practices to gather data, like pollinator counts, phenology tracking, soil health monitoring, wildlife cameras, or plant community surveys.

→ Leave Space

- Leave space for openness, change, and flexibility as communities and environments evolve.
- Keep some path networks informal or unpaved, allowing them to shift with desire lines or changing needs.



Parc Cligny-Batignolles (p. 119) offers designed and unprogrammed spaces that allow for free play and recreation, **leaving space** for the park to evolve with community needs. (Martin Ar)



Stay Flexible

- Reduce permanent fixtures; multiply elements; rely on movable seating, modular planters, or things with modular components (benches, decks, shade structures) that can be rearranged or expanded.
- Establish a site-improvement fund to support changing needs.
- Include a diversity of uses and spaces so that the design remains relevant despite shifting needs.



Spaces in Plaça de les Gloriès (p. 127) adapt to different programs and activities, allowing them to **stay flexible** and respond to users' needs. Buffer vegetation around these areas provides habitat. (Urbidermis)



Test plots (p. 133) for community-led restoration of public green space began as small initiatives that **scaled** up to more plots across California and eventually led to the creation of a nonprofit organization. (Landezine)

→ Scale Interventions

- Begin with small projects and build on their success.
- Implement ideas on scales that are “safe-to-fail” to continue learning and adjusting design interventions.
- Invite community members to test prototypes (temporary seating, shade structures, play elements) and give feedback before finalizing design.

→ Allow Feedback

- Design ways for community feedback to influence the spaces through community meetings, workday, or seasonal events.
- Design ways for ecological feedback to influence spaces through continued environmental monitoring, management and stewardship practices.



The new design at 103rd St. Community Garden (p. 125) was based on how the space was used before the renovation and directly integrated community **feedback** to reflect their needs. (SCAPE)

Designing to **Ground + Adapt** helps build resilience through identity, growth, and change

Through bringing together design actions from the three design domains, this principle grounds design in place while planning for change: rooting spaces in regional ecology and community identity while incorporating flexibility for seasonal shifts, ecological succession, and evolving community needs that foster resilience and shared flourishing over time.

List of design strategies that support **Ground + Adapt**:

Collaborate

Co-design with communities and local ecologies by centering local, Indigenous, and environmental knowledge

Inquire

Observe and learn from ecological patterns and site histories to guide design decisions rooted in time and place

Leave Space

Design with spatial openness and flexibility that allow for evolving needs, informal use, and ecological change

Stay Flexible

Design shared spaces and elements that can be reconfigured, expanded, or repurposed as social and ecological needs change

Scale Interventions

Trial small-scale interventions with communities that allow learning, adjustment, and growth

Allow Feedback

Create spaces that evolve with communities by integrating human and ecological input into design decisions



What GROUND + ADAPT Can Look Like

Every landscape is shaped by its ecological and cultural history, but it also changes over time. Ground + Adapt envisions spaces rooted in local species, practices, and community identities while remaining flexible to evolving needs. Below is an example of this in practice.



DESIGN QUALITIES AT PLAY



Healthy Living
Cultural Continuity
Social Resilience



Quality Habitat
Diversity
Place
Care



Authorship + Inclusion
Reparative Design

flexible community space
+
modular seating and shade

seasonal play feature
+
seasonal wetland habitat



citizen science projects
+
small-scale habitat restoration

What **GROUND + ADAPT** Can Look Like

Shown here are a few **strategies** of the principle in action and how they combine qualities across the three design domains to support Mutual Flourishing.



POSSIBLE DESIGN QUALITY COMBINATIONS



Collaborate

Cultural Continuity
Participatory Governance
Care
Reparative Design



Stay Flexible

Healthy Living
Social Resilience
Diversity
Authorship + Inclusion



Scale Interventions

Participatory Governance
Quality Habitat
Place
Reparative Design



Collaborate ■ ■ ■ ■

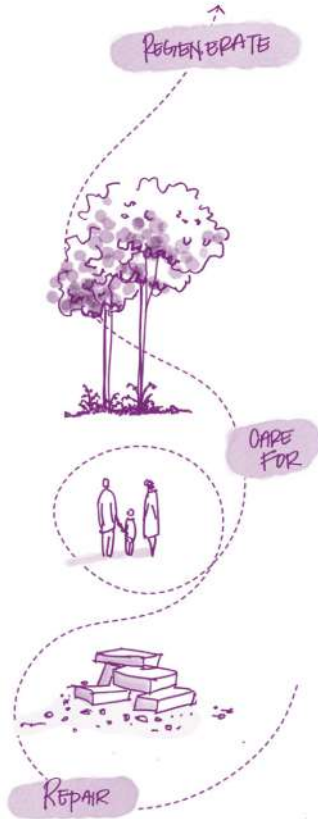
Land-based practices, like harvesting, tending, and seasonal burning, can sustain cultural traditions and ecological health. By **collaborating** with communities who hold this knowledge, designers create spaces where these practices continue, benefiting both Cultural Continuity and ecological Care.

Stay Flexible ■ ■ ■ ■

Gathering spaces that **stay flexible**, whether movable or modular, adapt as community and ecological needs evolve. This allows activity to shift away from sensitive habitats when needed while accommodating growing programs, supporting both Social Resilience and habitat protection.

Scale Interventions ■ ■ ■ ■

Small-scale interventions keep costs low and invite community participation, making projects easier to start and **scale** iteratively. Here, citizen scientists track plant growth, demonstrating how accessible involvement and rapid testing create solutions better suited to both people and wildlife



REPAIR + CARE FOR

Restore places and bonds to foster care and resilience

Meaningful design begins with recognizing and addressing the historic and ongoing injustices present in a place. It centers on rebuilding reciprocal relationships between people, communities, and the land. Through acts of repair, Care, and stewardship, design can help regenerate local ecosystems, strengthen human communities, and restore the beneficial relationships between them.

Before proposing solutions, it is essential to acknowledge and confront both social and environmental harms. While growth and regeneration are slow and ongoing processes, design can be a tool for rectifying urban injustices, such as degraded landscapes, fragmented habitats, and social relationships fractured by exclusion, environmental racism, and harmful development practices. Without Repair, new designs risk repeating past harms and continuing inequities, limiting the ability of humans and more-than-humans to heal and flourish.

At the heart of this principle is the idea that connection to Place and nature, expressed through Care, supports healing. Acts of stewardship strengthen the bond between community and land and help landscapes regenerate. Design can nurture this connection by working alongside communities to cultivate reciprocity; creating spaces that invite engagement, making ecological processes legible so people understand what needs Care and why, and shaping landscapes that evolve as environmental and community needs shift.

People protect what they care for and actively tend. Restoring the relationship between people and land supports shared benefits for both humans and more-than-humans. Regeneration becomes possible when communities regain ownership, authorship, and stewardship of their spaces, fostering reciprocity and creating conditions where all life can thrive.

How to REPAIR + CARE FOR

→ Address

- Investigate past social and ecological harms that have occurred in and around the site.
- Map current and past injustices, like heat islands, redlining, displacement, pollution, ecological degradation.
- Incorporate ceremony, acknowledgment, and community representation and leadership when strategizing and initiating significant site changes dealing with injustice.



Volunteers **addressed** the lack of green space together by designing and building the 103rd St. Community Garden (p. 125). (SCAPE)

→ Combine

- Co-create design strategies that address both community regeneration (shade, safety, Economic Opportunity, climate resilience, etc.) and ecological repair (habitat, soil health, Biodiversity, etc.).
- Utilize ecological strategies to repair environmental impacts, like phytoremediation, soil-building, restoration.
- Design multi-use spaces where human activity, like community gardening, citizen science, craft projects, and eco-art, can contribute to ecological flourishing.

→ Redistribute

- Explore co-management or land back agreements with local nonprofit organizations, Tribal Nations, and other local communities.
- Allocate land, program areas, and resources specifically for cultural practices, ceremonies, performance, intergenerational gathering, and for supporting wildlife so environmental benefits are shared by all.



Parque Prado (p. 143) **restores** a neglected car park into a sensory-rich green space in a working-class neighborhood as part of Medellín's efforts to **redistribute** nature's benefits citywide. (Connatural)

→ **Restore**

- Prioritize restoring the ecological functions of public spaces alongside social regeneration, to support public and environmental health.
- Re-establish access to land-based practices, cultural plant species, and gathering areas that reconnect communities, land, and culture.

→ **Connect**

- Bring people together to connect with Place by integrating community programming, thoughtful spatial design, and shared stewardship practices.
- Support universal access through accessible design, multilingual signage, and free or low-barrier programming.



The community transformed an empty lot into the 103rd Street Community Garden (p. 125), a space that **connects** the neighborhood to nature through opportunities to grow food together. (SCAPE)



Test Plot (p. 133) practices community governance to **cultivate** collective decision-making that supports the restoration and Care of public green spaces in California. (Test Plot)

→ Cultivate

- Create community governance models for long-term Care (stewardship councils, neighborhood care-taking groups, youth-led green teams).
- Design or partner with programs and organizations that build skills and training for people while caring for the land (community college horticultural programs, youth ecological education, environmental monitoring, etc.).

→ Regenerate

- Design systems into the site that work to continue Repair and Care actions indefinitely through the design of programs, activation of communities, and establishment of strategic partnerships.
- Keep acts of Care going by integrating ecological repair actions with community events, celebrations, ceremonies, and other culturally significant activities.
- Embed multi-generational strategies by using succesional plantings, embracing disturbance and regrowth, designing poly-cultures, and fostering youth stewardship and intergenerational learning.

The Girona Framework Plan (p. 121) nurtures multi-generational systems of Care that **regenerate** places, including youth stewardship programs. (Landezine)



Designing to **Repair + Care for** helps restore places and bonds to foster Care and resilience.

Through integrating design actions of the three design domains, this principle recognizes past and ongoing harm while actively nurturing ecosystems and communities. Through acts of repair and Care that heal and generate reciprocity, design rebuilds relationships between people and Place, creating conditions where humans and more-than-humans flourish together.

List of design strategies that support **Repair + Care for**:

Address

Investigate and acknowledge injustices to communities and ecosystems as a first step in design

Combine

Design spaces where community and ecological repair can mutually benefit one another

Redistribute

Allocate land and resources to support shared ownership, Care, and flourishing for communities and wildlife

Restore

Repair past social and ecological harm to regenerate relationships between people, communities, and land

Connect

Foster ongoing engagement by enabling communities to experience, steward, and participate in land and cultural practices

Cultivate

Enable communities to care for land and people by supporting stewardship, skills-building, and long-term governance

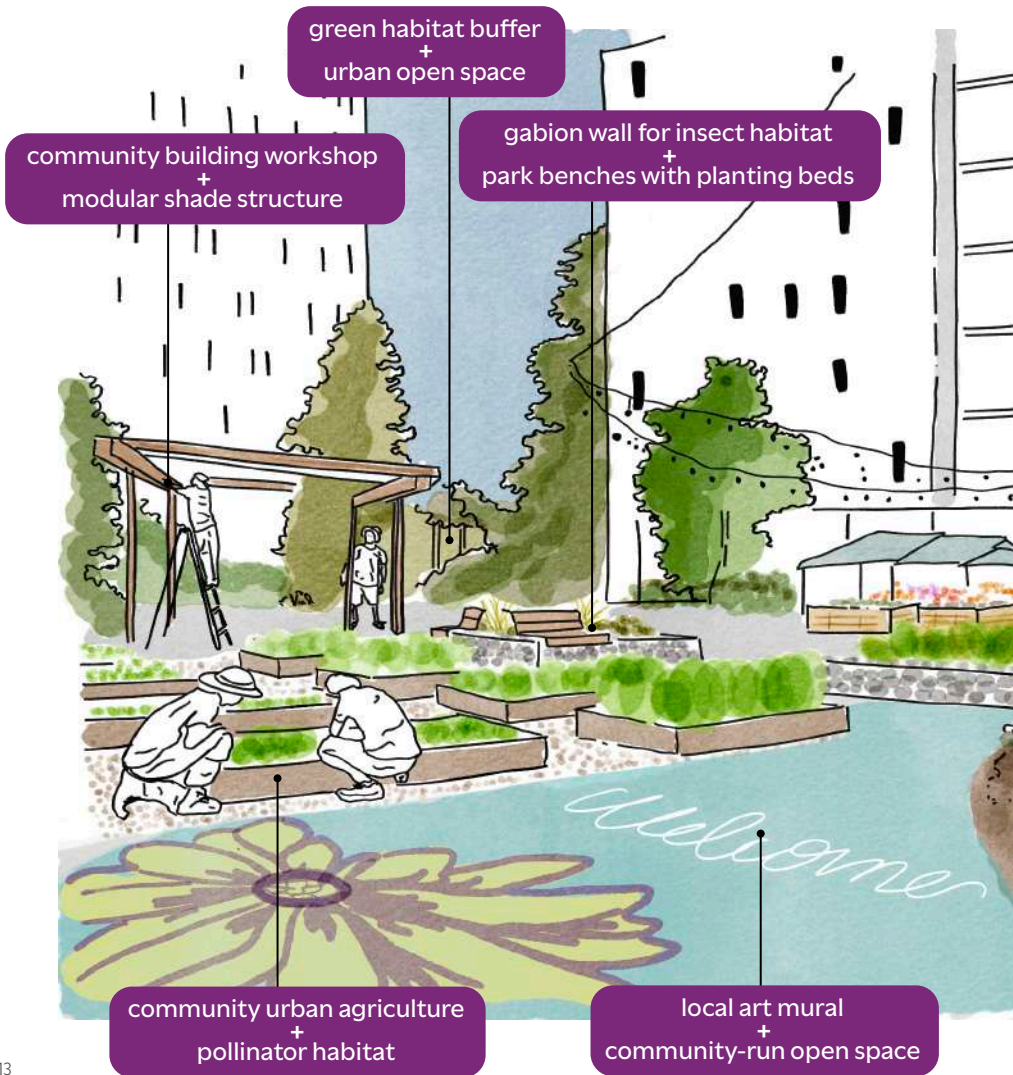
Regenerate

Design systems and practices that sustain long-term ecological and social Care across generations



What REPAIR + CARE FOR Can Look Like

Designing with Repair + Care in mind means creating new, mutually beneficial relationships by reconnecting people with Place, including both human and more-than-human. Below is an example of actions that address past harms while supporting regenerative systems for the health and Well-being of all.



DESIGN QUALITIES AT PLAY



Healthy Living
Economic Opportunity
Cultural Continuity
Social Resilience



Quality Habitat
Diversity
Place
Care



Accessibility
Authorship + Inclusion
Reparative Design

shaded vending area
+
local economic opportunities



community depaving
+
collective ecological restoration

What REPAIR + CARE FOR Can Look Like

Shown here are some of the principle's **strategies** in action and how they combine qualities across the three design domains to support Mutual Flourishing.



POSSIBLE DESIGN QUALITY COMBINATIONS



Connect

Cultural Continuity
Place
Care
Authorship + Inclusion



Cultivate

Economic Opportunity
Social Resilience
Diversity
authorship + inclusion



Restore

Healthy Living
Social Resilience
Place
Care
Reparative Design



Connect



When communities organize to reclaim space, hands-on work rebuilds **connection** to Place. Here, residents build planting shelters and cultivate food, transforming underutilized land into productive habitat while creating food access, ecological knowledge, and belonging.

Cultivate



This street market **cultivates** community-ecology relationships by supporting small farms, gardens, and food businesses. Economic Opportunity keeps these productive landscapes from development while reducing reliance on industrial agriculture, protecting both livelihoods and Biodiversity.

Restore

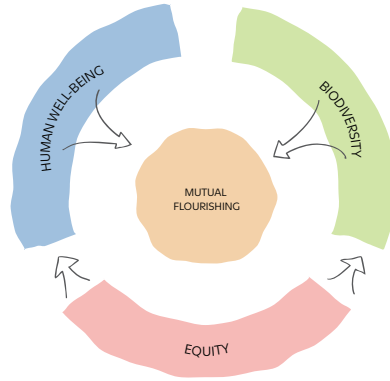


Community action transforms degraded spaces. Here, residents depave impervious surfaces and plant native species, **restoring** inhospitable pavement as habitat. This work rebuilds ecological function while creating community connection and ownership of Place.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

design domains →

define the core social, ecological, and justice-based areas that design must engage to make Mutual Flourishing possible



design qualities →

describe key conditions that contribute to the success of each design domain

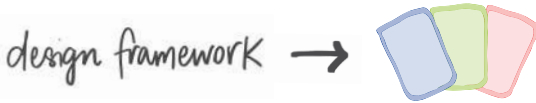


design principles →

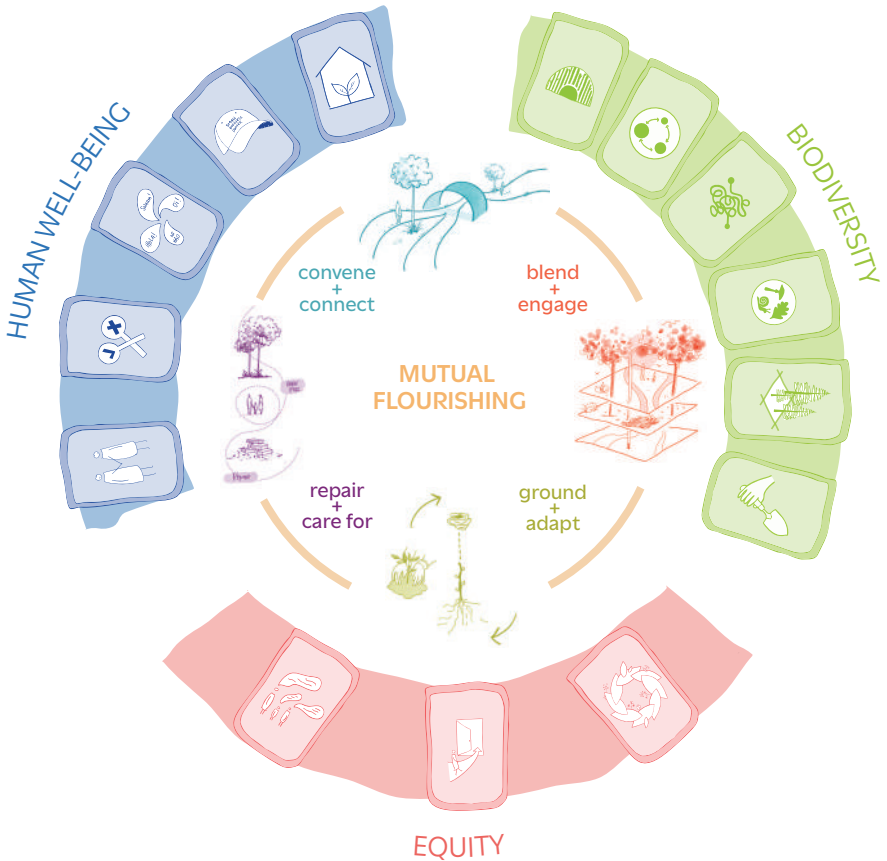
guide how design domains and their qualities are integrated, balanced, and activated together to support Mutual Flourishing



This layered framework demonstrates how design principles guide the integration of Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity, treating them not as separate goals but as mutually reinforcing aspects of resilient public spaces. When these design domains support one another through thoughtful design, Mutual Flourishing emerges as shared spaces where people and nature thrive together.



This framework uses design principles to guide how qualities from different domains, shown as cards, can be combined to shape public spaces for Mutual Flourishing.



case studies + resources

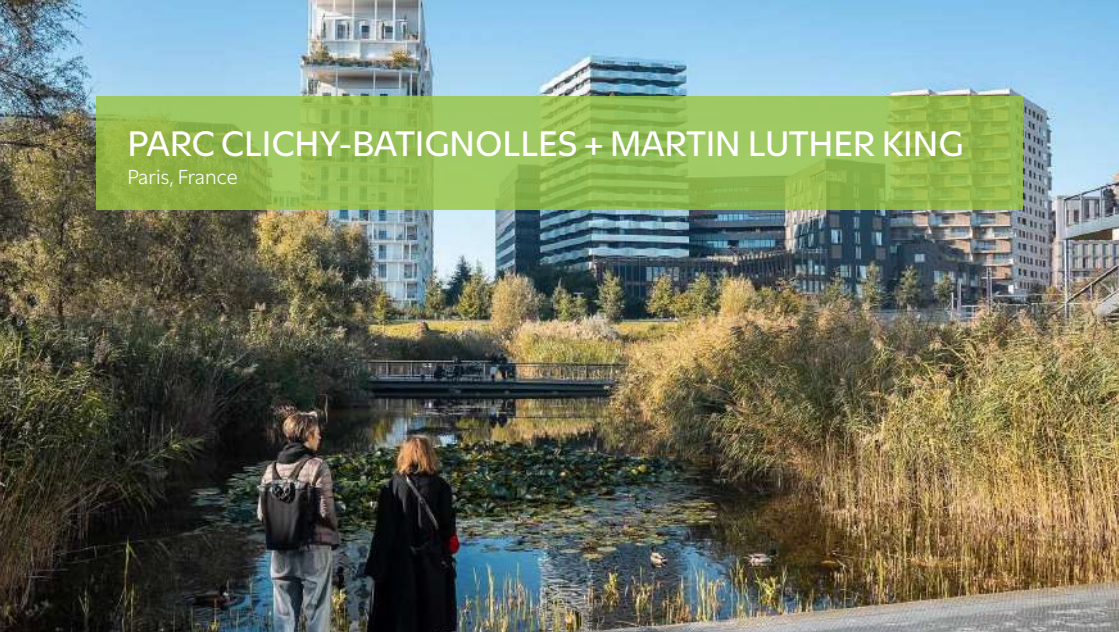
Design for Mutual Flourishing is definitely possible and already happening in many places!

These case studies and resources highlight real efforts we can learn from and build upon.



PARC CLICHY-BATIGNOLLES + MARTIN LUTHER KING

Paris, France



(The Parisian Guide)

Project Designers

City of Paris, Paris & Métropole Aménagement, Espaces Ferroviaires, SNCF Immobilier, François Grether, Jacqueline Osty, and OGI

This Paris eco-district project, situated on a former rail yard, prioritizes carbon neutrality and sustainability through bioclimatic buildings, significant renewable energy production (solar and geothermal), and extensive green spaces including a large park and green roofs. The development features the first Parisian smart grid, eco-friendly transport like pedestrian zones and a public transit hub, and vacuum waste collection to reduce private car use and emissions. Designed for about 7,500 residents and 12,700 jobs, the project involved extensive community engagement and achieved Stage 4 EcoQuartier Certification, with full completion by 2025.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- open and flexible spaces that allow for diverse physical activity
- diverse and inviting programming activities for users



- visual and auditory stimulation through plantings and water features
- educational signage for ecological elements on site
- diverse plantings and strong presence of other species



- multiple points of entry and diverse mobility
- Connectivity part of a larger effort to redevelop a former industrial site with healthier and socially-beneficial uses

Open space in nature allows people to gather to socialize, celebrate, play, exercise, and so much more (Jared Chulski)



The site has 14 entrances and multiple walkways that support diverse modes of mobility. Pathways blend through the different activity nodes throughout the project. The park also embodies 3 themes: water, seasons, and body. With a mix of wet ditches, ponds, woods, meadows, the site serves as a haven of Biodiversity and a natural urban air conditioner.



The park provides great access to natural spaces that support Biodiversity on site (Sergio Grazia)

The location of the park makes it a great convener of diverse recreational and cultural activities for workers and residents of the surrounding neighborhoods.



The parks proximity to housing, businesses, and industry invites people across time and seasons, providing Diversity and options for all (The Parisian Guide)

GIRONA'S SHORE + FRAMEWORK PROJECT

Girona, Catalunya



(Estudi Martí Franch)

Project Designers

Estudi Martin Franch, City of Girona

Estudi Martin Franch's work in Girona is a forward-looking green infrastructure framework that spans approximately 600 hectares of peri-urban and urban fringe across the city. The project reimagines the city's edges as a continuous "naturban" network of 13 loops, 30 parks, and dozens of small, low-cost interventions. Through small pilot projects (gathering platforms, furnishings, selective mowing, nature art installations, differentiated management regimes, and participatory processes, the team used affordable, replicable strategies to upgrade neglected green spaces, improve Biodiversity, enhance access, and promote social cohesion. By integrating ecological Connectivity and place-making into a large-scale yet modular system, the framework embodies a city-wide vision for connecting people with nature.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- promotes healthy lifestyles by connecting the city's open spaces and providing more options to gather in high quality green spaces



- design and management that protect wildlife habitat and accommodate human activity
- enhances regional habitat and Connectivity through Care and maintenance practices such as selective mowing and pruning.



- increases access to the green spaces across the city
- collaborates with maintenance staff and participation of the community supports stewardship of the city's natural spaces

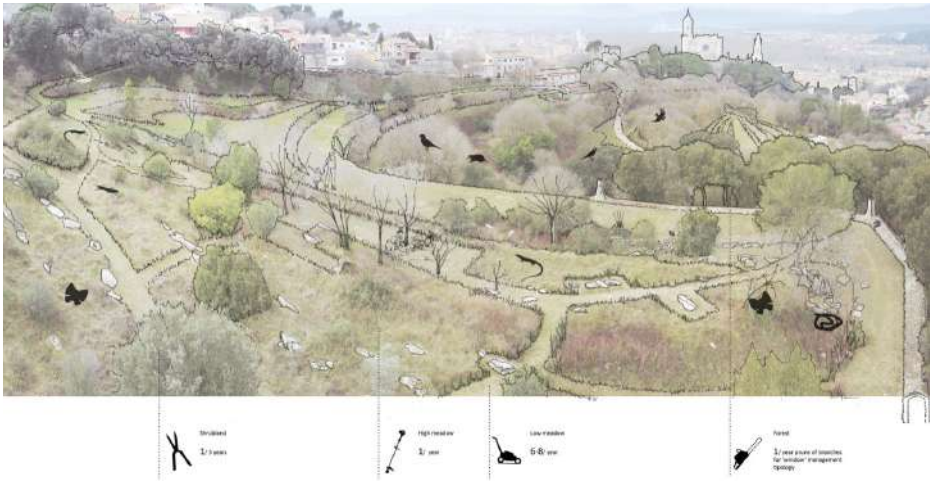


Diagram showing how management practices can create space for human connection and access while also promoting habitat and Biodiversity (Estudi Martí Franch)

This project successfully demonstrates many of the Mutual Flourishing principles. The city of Girona and Martin Franch worked to create spaces and habitat for both humans and more-than-humans to co-exist, while ensuring that these spaces connect to the larger area and are managed for the long-term.

The project's light touch allows the design to stay reflective of the region while leaving room for it to grow and adapt based on future social and environmental changes. Not only does the space reconnect the residents with nature, but it also demonstrates the importance of caring for our environment. People and organizations in the area now regularly volunteer to keep improving the natural spaces of the city's green space network.



Residents start to use the green space more after small interventions and management practices are implemented (Estudi Martí Franch)

TOM LEE PARK

MEMPHIS, TN, USA



(USGBC)

Project Designers

SCAPE, Memphis River Parks Partnership, Studio Gang

Reimagined as a resilient riverfront landscape, Tom Lee Park transforms an underutilized park into an active, biodiverse public space that reconnects Memphis to the Mississippi River. The design introduces varying topography, a network of winding paths, and distinct spatial zones inspired by the river's hydrology, from active civic spaces to contemplative habitat terraces.

Key interventions include the Sunset Canopy, a large timber and steel pavilion that shelters multi-use courts; sculptural playgrounds inspired by the river; the first ADA-accessible pathway down to the river; and a series of spatial nodes that frame views and support flexible use. Across the space, over 1,000 native trees and plantings create meadows and riparian habitats supporting wildlife along the Mississippi Flyway. Through extensive community engagement, the park was designed to repair historic environmental and social inequities and regenerate the community's relationship with nature. Nearly 700 native trees were planted, creating a well-loved space that supports recreation, events, and year-round wildlife habitat while expanding access to underserved communities nearby.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- offers amenities for sports, fitness, multi-generational play, events, and environmental education, guided by community input
- inclusion of culturally significant gathering spaces, histories, and public art significant to the community



- a diverse mix of plants was chosen to provide functional habitats for birds and insects along the river.
- 300 oaks, a keystone species supporting numerous ecological relationships, were planted along the bluff to restore historic regional habitat.



- park sits next to five racially and economically diverse zip codes and seeks to address structural inequality by reconnecting disinvested communities with high-quality nature
- expands access to green space and opportunities for free-form engagement with the environment in historically under-served neighborhoods



Balancing ecological and cultural regeneration (SCAPE)



Space given to natural processes alongside spaces of recreation and cultural activities (USGBC)

103RD STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN

East Harlem, NY, USA



(SCAPE)

Project Designers

SCAPE

This project transformed a previously empty lot into a multidisciplinary garden and community space in East Harlem. As part of the design-build process, the project stakeholders worked directly with community members to develop the design through public charrettes. The project is split into four quadrants which helped preserve existing trees and added vegetable plots, refurbished basketball courts, an open picnic area, and a playground with shade structures. The project serves as a vital community asset that offers diverse programming for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- provides multi-purpose spaces and programming that allow people to stay active and access healthy food which support Healthy Living
- engaged community members in the design, construction, and management of the project



- gardening, planting beds, and other landscaping interventions support Biodiversity and habitat and foster caring and stewardship



- increases access to green park space in an under-resourced neighborhood
- the participatory design of the project created a sense of ownership and belonging for the community



Volunteers working together to build the project (SCAPE)



Community members tending to the garden (SCAPE)

Community engagement was a significant force in the development and construction of this project. Members from the East Harlem community were able to provide input on the site design which helped incorporate local knowledge about the existing context within the neighborhood and identify what was needed.

The community's collective effort helped transform an empty lot into a public commons rooted in Place and people.

Although it is formally known as a community garden, the project provides opportunities for everyone to recreate and spend time outdoors.



People playing basketball and others relaxing on the open lawn (SCAPE)

PLAÇA DE LES GLORIÈS - CANÒPIA URBANA

Barcelona, Spain



(Urbidermis)

Project Designers

Agence Ter, Ana Coello Paisaje y Arquitectura, La Invisible Lighting Design Studio Lab

Canopia Urbana sits at a vital intersection in Barcelona that has become a large contemporary urban park and ecosystem aimed to increase Biodiversity and drastically reduce congestion in the heart of the city, making the park a powerful climate regulator. It fosters dense natural areas and provides human-scale lighting that allows equal use throughout the day and night. The park offers a wide range of leisure space, including areas designed for more specific use like sports and play. Other elements in the park provide water features for kids and sensory-stimulating experiences in nature.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- improves air quality through greening which benefits Healthy Living
- multifunctional spaces and amenities support active lifestyles
- recreational activities for people of various ages
- uses human-scaled lighting that invites use and activity at all hours



- diverse and dense vegetation that creates ecological resilience
- system of vegetated nodes that provide protection for sensitive wildlife habitat



- addresses historic Accessibility challenges and supports the ranging needs of people from different age groups

The park's design addresses the Connectivity and Accessibility challenges that previously existed due to traffic and other infrastructural challenges. Now, the regrading of the site makes it accessible to all, including different modes of active transportation. The park's diverse furnishings, activity nodes, and natural elements make it inviting for people of all ages, abilities, and interests.



People resting, sunbathing, and exercising on multi-purpose seating platform (Urbidermis)



People playing various sports in an open space that allows flexible events (Urbidermis)



Welcoming spaces for both active and restful activities (Urbidermis)

The park provides heavily activated spaces that support recreation and physical activity, including play spaces for children.

It also provides spaces for slow mobility and moments of relaxation and engagement with natural elements.

NINGBO ECOLOGICAL CORRIDOR

Ningbo, China



(Turenscape)

Project Designers

Turenscape

The Ningbo Ecological Corridor functions as a living filter, combining ecological strategies with educational, recreational, and cultural programs to transform a former agricultural and industrial site into urban green infrastructure. The project's objective to systematically repair the ecological and environmental problem also work to provide public green space that meets the demand of urban life and contributes to the growing identity of a newer district. The project is built upon four strategies: preservation, reuse, and regeneration; hydro-ecological process-based terrain design; diverse vegetation; and immersive experiential facilities.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- strong circulation system connects users to different spaces that offer intimate experiences of nature



- includes diverse and layered vegetation with attractive wildflowers providing habitat for pollinators
- blends waterbodies with both viewpoints and wildlife habitat space
- reconstructed waterway with rich native habitats that provides multiple Biodiversity benefits



- repairs a degraded ecological system while providing social and cultural services to surrounding communities

The project provides a boardwalk system that facilitates easy Connectivity for walking and cycling, and directly links the site to the surrounding city greenway. Its design also supports access to various key points of interest.

Site design incorporates terraces, curbed banks, and isles which help slow down the water flow and purify the water body, restoring healthy wildlife habitat. The plants are also placed strategically to absorb nutrients from the water bodies as much as possible. The isles also increase the interface between water and land, while still allowing access to people through the interconnected boardwalk.



Various pathways connecting the different natural landscapes on the site (ASLA)



Green spaces and pavilions connected by an accessible boardwalk (World Architects)



Visitors engaging with the wildflower meadow (ASLA)

The site's boardwalk system also provides various opportunities for immersive nature experiences. The pavilions on site are both artistic and functional, creating inviting shelters for people to rest, observe, and take pictures. These viewing and refuge points allow people to engage with the ecological aspects of the landscape.

PARQUE PRADO

Aranjuez, Medellín, Colombia



(Connatural)

Project Designers

Edgar Mazo

This former parking lot was redesigned to create a green oasis and enchanting public park in an underserved neighborhood. 70% of the material found on site was reclaimed and used in the park's new form, while also preserving some of the old structures to create a rugged backdrop to the lush vegetation and platforms to enjoy city views. The park invites people of different backgrounds and interests, creating a unifying location for social engagement and exchange in an area that lacks public green space. The scale and layout of the site allows flexibility of use and the amount of greening creates a natural escape from its urban context.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- multi-functional space allows for recreational activity and cultural events to take place
- refuge spaces create social nooks and opportunities for community-building



- rainwater is retained and used for irrigation
- dense vegetation and structural habitat supports the return of animal species to urban spaces



- restores and reinvents a decaying parking lot into a vibrant park in an underserved neighborhood

The park's design is also based on communication behaviors from the areas earliest settlers—using stepped terraces and elevated platforms to connect with others. The structure adds height and increases safety as visitors have a clear view from above as they move upwards.

This project is a strong example of how restoration and reclamation can lead to reigniting formerly degraded spaces in urban areas. It is also representative of how impactful these projects can be when done in underserved and marginalized areas.



Restored site that blends native diverse plantings in an underserved neighborhood (Connatural)



Lush greening surrounds the site's structure and welcomes activity at different levels (Connatural)

TEST PLOT

Various sites across California, USA



(Terremoto)

Project Designers

Terremoto, Saturate, Test Plot

The first Test Plot was created by Terremoto and Saturate as an experimental restoration garden for a degraded public park. Not long after, Test Plot became an organization for ecological stewardship and Care that partners with designers, community members, and land managers to create restoration gardens that build Care-based relationships between communities and public land. They view small-scale ecological restoration with native plants as a way to address the ecological and climate crises by regenerating people's kinship with the land, fostering a return to the commons, and reviving the practice of Care. Through collective stewardship and experimental restoration practices, they repair urban public landscapes.

Test Plot works with communities to re-establish people's relationship to place through the act of stewardship. Through community-based restoration they ground their work in both social and ecological context while working to encourage acts of mutual Care and regeneration. People and landscapes are healed through this process as public parks become more biodiverse and supportive of human health.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- Active care fosters reciprocity and connection to nature which supports Well-being
- Hands-on stewardship builds community bonds and Social Resilience



Spaces of restoration are legible for park users while also revealing the process of restoration (Terremoto)



- Community restoration of native habitat supports local flora and fauna
- Stewardship practices regenerate native ecosystems



- Community-led restoration creates participatory ownership
- Volunteer-driven work gives residents authorship over public space



Small fences define clear and legible boundaries for the restoration process (Terremoto)



Community members regain healthy connections with the land through stewardship (Terremoto)

GELLERUP NEW NATURE PARK

Aarhus, Denmark



(SLA)

Project Designers

SLA, EFFEKT, Brabrand Boligforening, Gadeidræt, Social Action, COWI

SLA and EFFEKT's project transforms one of Denmark's largest social housing districts into a thriving landscape of Biodiversity and community. Designed through an intensive participatory process, the project uses nature as an active agent to enhance residents' quality of life, strengthen social cohesion, and restore ecological health. Gellerup's open spaces now host diverse habitats, fruit groves, and community gathering areas that reflect local cultural identities. Through what SLA calls "social nature," the project demonstrates how ecological restoration and design with nature can drive social and urban regeneration.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- post-design anthropological interviews evaluate the social impact of the biodiverse landscape
- Overlaying programmed activities with vegetation increases exposure to high-quality, multi-sensory nature



- continual post-design biological surveys measure ecological success
- use of highly diverse and broad vegetation types to increase wildlife habitat



- spaces reflect local cultures through materials and programming
- collaborative design process included citizens, maintenance staff, gardeners, and biologists

Through the layering of both social and ecological nodes, the blending of multi-functional spaces occur and people begin to have meaningful encounters with nature. Spaces are designed to support recreation, social interaction, and engagement with nature.

Ecology and plants play a supportive role in some spaces. The enhancing qualities and health benefits of biodiverse nature are leveraged to restore and regenerate social spaces within a community that has experienced historical disinvestment.



Habitat and playful elements blend together throughout the site (SLA)



Kids experiencing nature with various senses (SLA)



Activity nodes and connecting pathways placed throughout the site (Archello)

DENVER PLAZA

Denver, CO, USA



(Terremoto)

Project Designers

Terremoto

When Terremoto was tasked with designing an urban plaza in Denver, they set out to do more than simply create a well-designed space for downtown workers and residents. As a principle-driven firm committed to making gardens that support all forms of life, they established an aspirational framework to guide the design process. This framework shaped a vision for Mutual Flourishing. Their approach honored regional native ecosystems by sourcing hyper-local materials for every element of the project, collaborating across disciplines with local horticultural specialists and ecologists to gain context-based knowledge, and extending beyond plant Diversity to design for bird habitat. Ultimately, they created a place within the urban core that seeks to reconnect people and natural systems, emphasizing Biodiversity and its relationship to human life.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- multi-sensory nature experiences provide health benefits to users
- Provides green space for workers and residents to gather and enjoy lunch



- designs diverse plant structure, type, and bloom to support bird nesting habitat and cover
- designs for life down to construction details: depressions in boulders serve as water sources for insects and birds



Structural habitat features and diverse plant communities provide Quality Habitat while blending together spaces for both human and nature to interact (Terremoto)



- Focuses exclusively on local and regional materials, plants, and ecotypes
- increases access to quality green space within the urban center
- demonstrates multi-species Equity by prioritizing more-than-human habitat within a human dominated space



nodes of human and more-than-human activity (Terremoto)

Areas for nature and other species to convene are carved out within a human-dominated landscape. Within these planting areas, birds and insects can find habitat. In return, the enriched environment offers multisensory, high-quality experiences of nature for people.

TUZLA STREAM CO-HABITAT

Istanbul, Turkey



(Openact)

Project Designers

Openact

In response to the channelized and degraded Tuzla stream in Istanbul, Openact decided to use the restoration of the river as a way to connect ecological regeneration with human recreation. Through a collaborative co-design process with local residents, the project transformed the stream into a vibrant green recreation corridor that restores riparian habitats, improves stormwater management through green infrastructure, and reconnects fragmented neighborhoods. The result is a green urban landscape that balances ecological regeneration with Human Well-being, linking nature, mobility, and community life.

Site Features that Promote Mutual Flourishing:



- creates clustered play and sports areas in addition to green space to provide access to Healthy Living activities



- connects habitats across various scales from city to watershed
- uses diverse sets of native plant species that included 90% native plants and a riparian corridor planting matrix of 75 different species



- connecting neighborhoods with social institutions, while providing all-age recreational opportunities
- use of co-design and participatory design with the local community to increase equitable participation and authorship of spaces

Openact demonstrates the use of convene and connect by the strategic placement and intentional overlap of social and ecological activity nodes across the Tuzla stream corridor. They base their design and programs on both the needs and desires of the human communities and more-than-human community through the use of participatory design and environmental analysis.

Through this intentional design framework that centers Mutual Flourishing we see how the biodiverse natural spaces contribute to the repair and regeneration of a degraded urban public realm. This multi-functional corridor now brings people and nature into a space of co-existence, where collective Well-being can be shared.



Multi-purpose nodes are overlaid to create a co-habitat between wildlife and people (Holcim Foundation)



There are ample opportunities for human and nature interactions along the path networks (Holcim Foundation)



Nodes are created to convene recreation activities (Holcim Foundation)

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

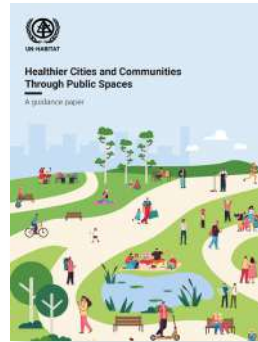
Thoughtful design can be quite transformative, but it cannot always function on its own. Policy and programming frameworks are critical to ensuring the efficacy of designs across phases. The following resources are examples of policy frameworks and formal guidelines that vary in scale and purpose.

Biodiversity Primer for Landscape Architects



American Society of Landscape Architects | 2025

Healthier Cities and Communities Through Public Spaces



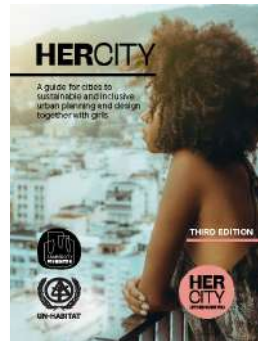
United Nations Habitat 2025

Achieving Well-Being



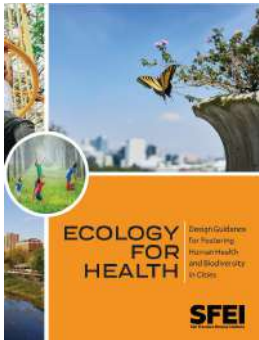
World Health Organization 2024

HerCity



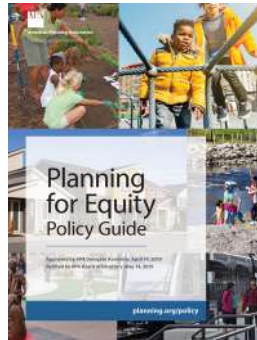
United Nations Habitat 2023

Ecology for Health



San Francisco Estuary Institute
USA | 2023

Planning for Equity



American Planning Association
USA | 2019

SB 1000 Implementation Toolkit



California Environmental Justice Alliance
+ Placeworks
USA | 2018

Parameters for Public Spaces in Copenhagen



Schulze + Grassov
Denmark | 2015

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

The following are three resources from the UW Green Futures Lab developed by former Scan Design Interns that focus on climate, sustainability, and well-being. Each of these guides can be downloaded here: <https://greenfutures.be.uw.edu/2023/10/04/climate-responsible-city/>

Defining the Climate Responsible City

By Erin Irby + Sarah Lukins



Materials Matter: Designing the Climate Responsible City

By Constantine Chrisafis + Brianna Weekes



Climate Mitigation and Social Well-Being in Urban Design

By Neha Chinwalla + Clelie Fielding



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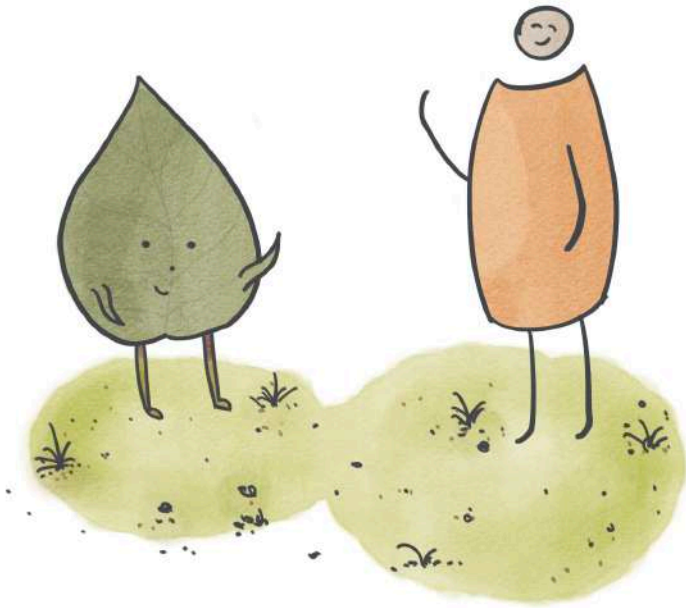
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Working towards a future of Mutual Flourishing requires us to be intentional in how we design spaces that support both nature and people!

By creatively bringing Human Well-being and Biodiversity together through thoughtful and equitable design, we can shape public spaces that are welcoming, joyful, and sustainable!





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Designing for Mutual Flourishing is the practice of designing for shared spaces where people and nature thrive by supporting each other.

This design handbook explores the concept of **Mutual Flourishing** as a guiding pillar for practicing planners and designers. It is based on design qualities that contribute to **Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity**—three design domains that overlap and feed into each other when applied. The purpose of this book is to encourage all those who help shape the built environment to work towards Mutual Flourishing in the urban realm so that Human Well-being, Biodiversity, and Equity reach us all.

