Design Thinking for the co-design of public open spaces

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Summary

I.   Introduction

Design Thinking stands as a groundbreaking approach to addressing challenges, centering around the fundamental needs and aspirations of individuals and communities. The primary assumption is that a profound grasp of human behaviors and desires is essential to crafting truly effective design solutions. This guide aims to discuss the basic principles of Design Thinking, its diverse applications, potential beneficiaries and benefits, as well as its evolving trends in both business and research contexts.

In its essence, Design Thinking is a user-centric pathway to innovation, emphasizing **empathy**, **creativity**, and **collaboration**. It goes beyond being just a method. It's a mindset prompting designers, organizations, and individuals to navigate intricate problems. This process encompasses three pivotal stages: **Inspiration**, **Ideation**, and **Implementation**. These stages present a systematic yet adaptable blueprint that assists in grasping the human dimension of challenges, framing them, brainstorming solutions, and bringing those ideas to life through prototypes and real-world tests.

Design Thinking's core principle is emphasizing human experiences during the design journey. This requires a deep dive into understanding the necessities and ambitions of those a solution aims to serve. Employing empathetic research tools, like interviews or observations, designers strive to understand end users, ensuring the solution crafted offers a holistic experience that aligns with the intended audience's expectations.

The adaptability of Design Thinking testifies to its effectiveness. It finds application across diverse sectors: from creating intuitive digital platforms to conceiving innovative healthcare interventions, up to **enhancing public spaces**. Its flexible nature encourages cross-functional teams to unite, nurturing innovative outlooks and solutions.

It is essential to note that Design Thinking is not reserved for designers alone. Its principles are accessible to anyone with a penchant for problem-solving and dedication to user-oriented solutions. Its structured approach offers pathways for innovation tailored to diverse professions.

The reasons for embracing Design Thinking are numerous. Primarily, it produces solutions that resonate deeply with users, bolstering satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, it fosters a culture of innovation, promoting teamwork, creativity, and courageous initiatives.

Regarding trends, Design Thinking witnesses dual traction in the **corporate** and **research** arenas. Companies increasingly perceive it as a catalyst for innovation to maintain a competitive profile. This acknowledgment has paved the way for roles like "Design Strategist" and "Innovation Manager." On the research front, scholars are integrating its principles into their research activities, reinventing research processes and forging deeper insights into multifaceted social challenges.

In this guide, our emphasis is on the pivotal role of Design Thinking in **co-designing public open spaces**, which are vibrant epicenters of urban life that palpably reflect a community's heartbeat. As

urban landscapes across the globe reckon with challenges of increased density, shifting demographics, and dynamic lifestyles, the imperative to co-design these spaces becomes ever more pressing.

Moving beyond traditional co-design methodologies, the integration of Design Thinking principles in co-designing public spaces offers a more human-centric, empathetic, and iterative framework for their creation and (re)design. By merging Design Thinking and the collaborative spirit of co-design, we position communities at the heart of the creative process. This inclusive method not only invites a spectrum of stakeholders to contribute to the conceptualization and refreshment of these spaces but also ensures their final form truly aligns with the aspirations and needs of those they serve.

This advocacy for a holistic approach is not merely about championing aesthetically pleasing and functional urban spaces. It underscores the essence of community engagement and inclusivity, thereby enriching the quality of urban life. The forthcoming sections delve deeper into the stages, tools, and tangible manifestations of Design Thinking, shedding light on its transformative prowess.

II.   Design Thinking essentials: core principles and primary phases

Design Thinking is rooted in a dynamic, cyclic process encompassing three foundational phases: i) **Inspiration**, ii) **Ideation**, and iii) **Implementation**. By aligning these phases to the co-design of public open spaces, we foster an approach that accentuates empathy, problem identification and definition, research and planning, creative implementation, iterative testing, and data-driven evaluation.

i)   The **Inspiration** phase urges designers to provide insights, predominantly via genuine engagement with users. Within the realm of public open spaces, this phase resonates as "empathy." The spotlight is on deeply understanding the community and its varied stakeholders. It is about tuning into the desires, preferences, and aspirations of those who utilize or inhabit these spaces, ensuring a heartfelt connection vital for shaping spaces that truly speak to the community.

ii) **Ideation** encourages the development of creative solutions and ideas without constraints. Regarding public open spaces, this phase corresponds with the identification and definition stage. Here, the aim is to pinpoint and outline the crucial challenges and opportunities tied to the space, fostering an environment that promotes creative thinking. Recognizing the community's specific concerns and drafting clear problem statements become pivotal in co-designing these spaces.

iii) The **implementation** phase revolves around breathing life into ideas, predominantly through prototypes and evaluations. For public open spaces' co-design, this phase intertwines with several stages of a broader framework: research, planning, implementation, testing, and evaluation. Research entails understanding community necessities while also weighing urban, architectural, and environmental variables. Implementation involves turning ideas into tangible designs, while Testing gauges the designs' relevance and effectiveness within the community.

Furthermore, within public open spaces, Testing and Evaluation stand as critical stages. They underscore the need for cyclical community testing, feedback collection, and design by adjusting designs accordingly. Reflecting upon the co-design journey is key, spotlighting both triumphs and areas ripe for enhancement.

In summary, co-designing public open spaces via a Design Thinking lens is intrinsically bound to empathy, collaboration, and user orientation. It embarks on a journey of understanding the community's distinct challenges (empathy), moves on to identifying and defining design challenges (identification & definition), delves into evidence-based planning (research & planning), implement these concepts by turning ideas into tangible changes (implementation), involves the community in iterative refinements (testing), and concludes with a holistic review of the co-design's effectiveness (evaluation). This cyclic and community-centric approach guarantees that public open spaces do not merely undergo a facelift but genuinely cater to their community's needs.

III. Harnessing Design Thinking in urban development

III.a. Empathy phase: deciphering community insights

The cornerstone of co-designing public open spaces lies in empathetic understanding, ensuring the crafted spaces genuinely address community aspirations. Within this phase, the task is to become deeply attuned to the perspectives and experiences of the community. Here's a systematic approach to master the empathy phase:

Tool A: Interviews

Interviews allow you to conduct in-depth, one-on-one conversations with community members to gain insight into their experiences and viewpoints concerning public open spaces.

Steps:

1. Identify key stakeholders within the community, encompassing local inhabitants, community leaders, and other pertinent groups.
2. Develop a series of open-ended questions, motivating participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to the spaces.
3. Host interviews in a comfortable and private setting, ensuring participants' ease in voicing their perspectives.
4. Exercise active listening, showcase empathy, and ask follow-up questions to amplify participants' narratives.
5. Catalog, record and analyze interview inputs to discern recurrent themes, pain points, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.

Tool B: Surveys

Surveys are a scalable way to gather insights from a larger segment of the community. They help quantify opinions and gather data on a broader scale.

Steps:

1. Draft a well-structured questionnaire with a mix of closed-ended (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) queries.
2. Use a variety of distribution channels, such as digital platforms, local gatherings, or door-to-door surveys to reach a diverse cross-section of the community.
3. Encourage participation by underlining the pivotal role of their feedback in shaping public open spaces.

4. Analyze survey responses, looking for trends, patterns, and outliers.
5. Use quantitative data for statistical insights and qualitative responses for deeper understanding.

Tool C: Participatory Workshops

Interactive workshops champion direct community collaboration, empowering them to infuse the design process with their unique insights and propositions.

Steps:

1. Identify key community members and stakeholders for workshop inclusion.
2. Design interactive activities and exercises that spur attendees to convey their aspirations, innovations, and apprehensions about the spaces.
3. Arrange these sessions in easily accessible and inviting venues, emphasizing holistic community representation.
4. Propel open dialogues, brainstorming sessions, and tactile exercises, enabling attendees to channel their creativity.
5. Document the workshop's outcomes by recording sketches, notes, and pivotal discoveries.

General notes: Remember that the empathy phase is about building trust and rapport with the community, actively listening to their voices, and uncovering their unmet needs and desires. The primary objective is deep-seated understanding, achieved through genuine engagement using tools like interviews, surveys, and workshops. This foundation is instrumental in co-designing public realms that harmoniously align with the aspirations of their beneficiaries.

III.b. Identification & definition phase: clarifying the design challenge

Having developed a deep empathy for the community, a profound understanding of the community, we transition to the Identification and Definition phase. Here, we collaborate closely with the community to identify and accurately define the specific challenges and opportunities that the public open spaces present, keeping in mind the unique urban landscape you operate within. The following instrumental tools will guide you to navigate this pivotal phase.

Tool A: Stakeholder Mapping

Mapping stakeholders furnishes a comprehensive view of the varied entities that have an interest in public open spaces, revealing the multitude of viewpoints and considerations essential to the design journey.

Steps:

1. Enumerate potential stakeholders encompassing local inhabitants, civic bodies, local government representatives, environmental organizations, and other relevant groups.
2. Categorize these stakeholders based on their influence and interest in public open spaces.
3. Engage key stakeholders through focused interviews or questionnaires to discern their viewpoints and priorities.
4. Use the stakeholder map to visualize the network of interplay, possible contentions, or synergies among them. This map ensures the right entities are factored into the co-design process and their specific interests acknowledged.

Tool B: Problem tree analysis

The problem tree analysis is a visual tool that helps uncover the root causes of challenges related to public open spaces. It helps define the core problems that need to be addressed.

Steps:

1. Start with a core problem statement, e.g., "improve community engagement in public open spaces."
2. Spotlight the key causes or factors contributing to the problem and list them as branches of the tree.
3. Under each cause, further explore the underlying problems or sub-causes by adding branches. Continue this process until you get to the root causes, which are the fundamental problems that need to be addressed.
4. This visual representation helps define the key challenges that the co-design process should address.

Tool C: Creating a user persona

User personas are fictional characters that represent different segments of the community. Creating personas helps to understand the different needs, preferences, and behaviors of people who use public open spaces.

Steps:

1. Based on the data collected in the empathy phase, identify common traits, needs, and goals of community members.
2. Create detailed personas with names, backgrounds, demographics, and narratives.
3. Describe each persona's distinct motivations, challenges, and anticipations concerning public open spaces.
4. Reference these personas consistently during the co-design process to ensure solutions resonate with the community's heterogeneity.

General notes: The identification and definition phase is paramount in setting a clear direction for the co-design process. By wielding tools like Stakeholder Mapping, Problem Tree Analysis, and User Persona Creation, you can identify key challenges and opportunities related to public open spaces in a comprehensive and community-oriented way. This phase lays the foundation for the subsequent phases of the co-design process and ensures that design efforts are focused on the most important aspects of the spaces.

III.c. Research & planning phase: shaping the vision for public open spaces

The research and planning phase plays a central role in the co-design of public open spaces. This is when designers deepen their understanding of the context, cultural dynamics, and environmental factors that influence these spaces. This phase also entails a comprehensive plan for redesign. Here are some practical tools to guide you through this integral phase:

Tool A: Context Analysis

Conducting a context analysis helps designers gain insights into the broader environment in which public open spaces exist. This includes understanding the history, demographics, and key characteristics of the neighborhood.

Steps:

1. Begin by gathering historical data about the area, including significant events or developments.
2. Gather demographic information to understand the composition and diverse needs of the community.
3. Identify existing amenities, landmarks, and infrastructure around public open spaces.

4. Analyze the social dynamics and cultural influences that shape the area.
5. Use this information to identify potential opportunities and constraints for transforming the spaces.

Tool B: Review Best Practices

Examining best practices in urban planning, sustainability, and accessibility enriches the co-design process by providing a solid knowledge base, offering proven strategies, and inspiring innovative solutions. This ensures that the blueprint for open spaces emerges not just from intuition but leans on a vast repository of globally successful methodologies.

Steps:

1. Identify successful projects pertinent to public open spaces, both locally and globally.
2. Analyze these projects to discover design elements, strategies, and principles that have led to successful outcomes.
3. Focus on key aspects of sustainability, inclusion, safety, and user engagement.
4. Document your findings and extract relevant ideas and concepts to inform your co-design approach.
5. Engage the community and key figures to discuss these standards with their aspirations for public open spaces.

Tool C: Collaborative Planning Workshops

Unlike the workshops in Phase 1, these sessions in Phase 3 are designed to bring together stakeholders, local inhabitants, and subject-matter experts to coalesce a grand vision for public open spaces. This aims to supersede immediate user concerns, casting a wider net over expansive strategies for revitalizing or redesigning public spaces. They help create a shared action blueprint, steeped in data and proven strategies.

Steps:

1. Identify key participants, including community representatives, urban planners and strategists, landscape architects, and other relevant experts.
2. Plan and facilitate workshops that encourage open discussion, brainstorming, and idea generation.
3. Deploy visual tools such as blueprints, illustrative diagrams, and sketches to fan creativity and interaction.

4. Engage participants in defining the mission, goals, and benchmarks for the spaces.
5. Document the workshop's essence, capturing the collective vision and pivotal action prompts.

General notes: The research and planning phase revolves around attaining a comprehensive understanding of the context of open space landscape, sifting through successful precedents, and collaborating with stakeholders for a shared vision. By leveraging contextual analysis, global best practice exploration, and collaborative planning workshops, you'll be primed to gather insights, pinpoint opportunities, and plan for the transformation of public open spaces to meet community aspirations. This phase lays the foundation for ensuing co-design stages, fostering a holistic community-oriented approach.

III.d. Implementation phase: bringing the vision to life

The implementation phase marks the turning point when the community's collective vision for public open spaces evolves from ideation into actuality. This stage is underscored by the coalescence of ideas, strategies, and plans into tangible designs and actions. Ensuring stakeholder involvement and fostering community interaction remains paramount. Here's a toolkit to navigate the implementation phase:

Tool A: Prototyping

Prototyping provides a platform for designers to materialize proposed changes in an economical, adaptable manner, laying the groundwork for eventual full-scale implementation.

Steps:

1. Select specific facets of the public space, be it seating arrangements, play areas, or landscaping features.
2. Create a tangible or digital representation of the envisioned change using easily accessible materials like cardboard, foam, or software models.
3. Place this prototype within the space, inviting the community to engage and provide feedback.
4. Gather feedback, focusing on the prototype's functionality, visual appeal, and user-friendliness.
5. Use this feedback to refine the design and make necessary adjustments before final implementation.

Tool B: Community co-design workshops

In contrast to the workshops of Phases 1 and 3, the community co-design workshops in Phase 4 play a distinct role. While earlier sessions aimed to foster empathy and develop a strategic vision, the workshops in the implementation phase delve deep into the tactical aspects. Here, the community is not just a contributor but becomes a central figure in the design decision-making process. Their hands-on participation ensures that the design blueprints and implementation strategies are fine-tuned to match the community's genuine aspirations and immediate needs. By prioritizing their insights and perspectives during these workshops, the final designs are molded to be both functional and resonant with the community's essence.

Steps:

1. Identify key contributors, encompassing community voices, designers, and subject-matter experts.
2. Structure the workshop to encourage creative discussion and the development of ideas.
3. Encourage participants to share their insights, preferences, and suggestions for public open space.
4. Use visual aids, such as sketches, diagrams, and mood boards, to illustrate design concepts and ideas.
5. Encourage a collaborative atmosphere where participants can actively contribute to shaping the final design.

Tool C: Pilot Projects

Pilot projects involve implementing small-scale, time-limited interventions in public spaces to test design concepts and derive real-time feedback.

Steps:

1. Spotlight specific zones within the open space as potential pilot project arenas.
2. Develop a plan for the pilot project that identifies the goals, timelines, and resources allocations.
3. Execute the pilot, introducing ephemeral changes or additions to the space, such as new seating, artwork, or greenery.
4. Motivate community members to immerse in the pilot, drawing their evaluations.

5. Evaluate the pilot's resonance, considering user engagement, safety, and aesthetics.
6. Use lessons learned from the pilot to inform the final design and implementation of larger-scale changes.

General notes: The implementation phase breathes life into the co-design of public open spaces, metamorphosing abstract ideas into concrete enhancements. Harnessing the power of agile prototyping, collaborative design workshops, and pilot projects, the community is placed at the forefront of the design evolution, instilling a deep-seated sense of pride and belonging. By merging professional design expertise with grassroots insights, the final design not only mirrors but embodies the community's needs, sculpting spaces that resonate with their ethos.

III.e. Test phase: evaluating real-world impact

The testing phase allows us to see how the implemented changes perform in a real-world context. It's a chance for the community to use and interact with the new designs, providing feedback. Through a repeated cycle of testing and refining, we make sure the changes best serve the community. Below are some tools to help you navigate this phase.

Tool A: User Experience Surveys

User experience surveys collect feedback from those who've used the updated public spaces. This method offers measurable data on satisfaction, ease of use, and their overall impressions.

Steps:

1. Design a clear and structured questionnaire asking about usability, aesthetics, safety, and overall satisfaction with the redesigned spaces.
2. Conduct surveys of community members who have used the spaces, either on-site or through online platforms.
3. Encourage participants to provide honest and detailed feedback about their experience.
4. Analyze survey responses to identify trends, common concerns, and areas for improvement.
5. Use the quantitative data to assess overall satisfaction and identify specific issues that need attention.

Tool B: Community feedback workshops

Community feedback workshops provide a platform for in-depth discussions with community members about their experiences with the redesigned public open spaces.

Steps:

1. Organize and invite community members who have interacted with the redesigned spaces to attend feedback workshops.
2. Have open and constructive discussions, and encourage participants to share their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions.
3. Use visual aids such as photos or maps of the spaces to guide discussions and gather specific feedback.
4. Document the feedback and insights shared during the workshops.
5. Encourage participants to prioritize their feedback and identify key areas for improvement.

Tool C: Observational Studies

Observational studies systematically monitor how people use the redesigned public open spaces. They provide insights into user behavior and patterns.

Steps:

1. Define specific research objectives and hypotheses related to user behavior and space use.
2. Use trained observers to discreetly observe and record user interactions with spaces.
3. Collect data on factors such as user flow, dwell time, and preferred areas of the space.
4. Analyze observation data to identify trends, patterns, and areas where design improvements are needed.
5. Combine observation results with community feedback to develop a comprehensive understanding of the user experience of the spaces.

General notes: The testing phase is critical in fine-tuning the newly designed public spaces based on actual usage and feedback. Tools like user experience surveys, feedback workshops with the community, and observational studies, provide valuable insights into how the spaces are being used, the impact they are having on the community, and areas where further adjustments are needed. By actively engaging the community in the evaluation process, designers can ensure that spaces evolve to best meet the needs and preferences of the community for which they were designed.

IV. Best practices

In this session, we embark on a journey through global landscapes to examine three outstanding public space projects that embody the essence of Design Thinking. Even if not explicitly labeled under the "Design Thinking" banner, each project is a testament to the core principles that drive this approach: understanding user needs, prototyping potential solutions, and refining them through iterative feedback, resulting in successful and vibrant spaces.

Starting with the renowned High Line in New York City, USA, whose redevelopment is considered a hallmark of co-design. The iterative and dynamic process underlying its transformation is deeply aligned with Design Thinking tenets. Prior to the transformation of the High Line, extensive workshops were held with the community to tap into local aspirations and apprehensions. A design competition was then held, which formed the stage for a variety of potential 'prototypes' for the space. Based on feedback from both the public and experts, these visions were honed, culminating in a transformative public space. Even after its realization, the High Line continued to evolve and adapt to the changing dynamics of community interaction and feedback.

Moreover, the Superkilen project in Copenhagen, Denmark, is distinguished by its promotion of diversity. The core of its co-design philosophy wasn't merely to incorporate a multiplicity of voices, but also to manifest that diversity physically. With Nørrebro's multicultural diversity, the backdrop, insights from residents spanning over 50 nationalities breathed life into the park. These locals suggested objects rooted in their heritage, effectively acting as tangible 'prototypes' for the design elements. The resultant space, segmented into distinct zones like the "Red Square" and the "Green Park," seamlessly intertwines the global tales of its local denizens.

Finally, Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin, Germany, paints a picture of a community at the forefront of its development. Once an airport, its transformation into a public space was shaped by the visions and voices of "Berliners." Their aspirations, captured through public workshops, guided the project's trajectory. Rather than diving headlong into permanent installations, the space experimented with temporary fixtures and events, serving as evolving 'prototypes.' This fluidity allowed Tempelhofer Feld to mature organically and reflect the diverse aspirations of its users while retaining its expansive spirit.

Woven into each of these projects are the distinctive threads of Design Thinking. From prioritizing user insights to experimenting with solutions and iterative refinements, the principles of Design Thinking have been instrumental in shaping spaces that resonate deeply with their respective communities. As we proceed, we will take a closer look at the intricacies of each case, shedding light on their strategies, the hurdles, and the valuable lessons learned.

IV.a. The High Line, New York City, USA: an elevated oasis in the urban jungle

The High Line is one of the most iconic urban revitalization projects of the 21st century. Rising above the bustling streets of Manhattan's West Side, this linear park transforms an old, elevated railway into a verdant, artistic, and socially inclusive space. The creation of the High Line is not just a story of reclaiming abandoned infrastructure but also of a community-driven process imbued with Design Thinking principles.

IV.a.1. Before the (re)design. thehighline.org
IV.a.2. After the (re)design. Iwan Baan
IV.a.3. Joshua David and Robert Hammond. Juliette Perry

Approach and Nuances

The vision for the High Line began as a grassroots initiative, with two local residents, Robert Hammond and Joshua David, who co-founded the "Friends of the High Line." They recognized the potential of the derelict railway and saw an opportunity to transform it into an urban green space. Rather than pursuing a top-down approach, they involved the community from the outset.

● Community Engagement: Initial efforts to gauge public opinion showed a mix of enthusiasm and skepticism. To build broader support and gather diverse ideas, multiple community engagement sessions were held. These forums allowed residents to voice their aspirations and concerns, laying the foundation for a co-design process.

● Design Competition: 'Designing the High Line' was a competition that drew entries from architects and designers globally. It functioned as a collaborative brainstorming session, with each design serving as a prototype of possible futures. The winning design by James Corner Field Operations and Diller Scofidio + Renfro seamlessly blended pathways, vegetation, and social spaces, reflecting the ethos of the community's aspirations.

IV.a.4. Project rendering S.1. thehighline.org
IV.a.5. Project rendering S.2. thehighline.org
IV.a.6. Project details. fieldoperations.net
IV.a.7. Project details. Guillermo Hevia García

Challenges Faced

As with any urban transformation, the High Line faced its share of challenges:

● Logistical Concerns: ensuring the structural integrity of the old railway, integrating it with existing urban infrastructure, and creating accessible entry and exit points posed significant engineering challenges.

● Balancing Act: while the High Line was imagined as an inclusive space, there were concerns about its potential to accelerate gentrification in the adjacent neighborhoods. Balancing economic development with equitable access and benefits for the local community was a delicate issue.

● Ecological Integration: introducing vegetation to an elevated structure required innovative solutions to ensure sustainable growth, maintenance, and adaptability to changing seasons.

Lessons Learned

The High Line project offered several valuable lessons for urban designers and community advocates:

● Inclusion Matters: the project underscored the importance of involving the community in co-design processes. The High Line's success can be attributed, in large part, to its responsiveness to local aspirations and concerns.

● Flexibility is Key: as the park evolved, there were iterative adjustments based on

user feedback. Some spaces were redesigned, amenities added, and programs tweaked to cater to changing user needs.

● Preserve History, Shape the Future: the High Line's design brilliantly preserves its industrial past while molding it for contemporary use. It stands as a testament to the possibility of harmoniously blending history with modern urban life.

IV.a.8. Project details. Guillermo Hevia García

General notes: The High Line's transformation from a neglected railway to a beloved urban park is a testament to the power of community-driven design, backed by principles of Design Thinking. Its success serves as an inspiring beacon for cities worldwide, showcasing the potential of reimagined urban spaces when rooted in empathy, collaboration, and iterative refinement.

IV.b. Superkilen, Copenhagen, Denmark: a tapestry of global cultures in a nordic setting

Superkilen, situated in the heart of Copenhagen, is a distinctive urban space that speaks to Denmark's rich cultural mosaic. Stretching over a kilometer, this public park is characterized by its bold design, eclectic installations, and deep-rooted commitment to representing global cultures. As a masterclass in co-design, Superkilen showcases how Design Thinking principles can be employed to celebrate diversity and foster inclusivity.


IV.b.1. Superkilen urban park. Iwan Baan

Approach and Nuances

Superkilen is an emblematic result of a collaboration between the art group Superflex and the architectural firms BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) and Topotek1. Their objective was not merely to design a park, but to create a space that epitomizes the area's multicultural residents.

● Engaging the Multicultural Population: The Nørrebro district, where Superkilen is located, is one of the most ethnically diverse
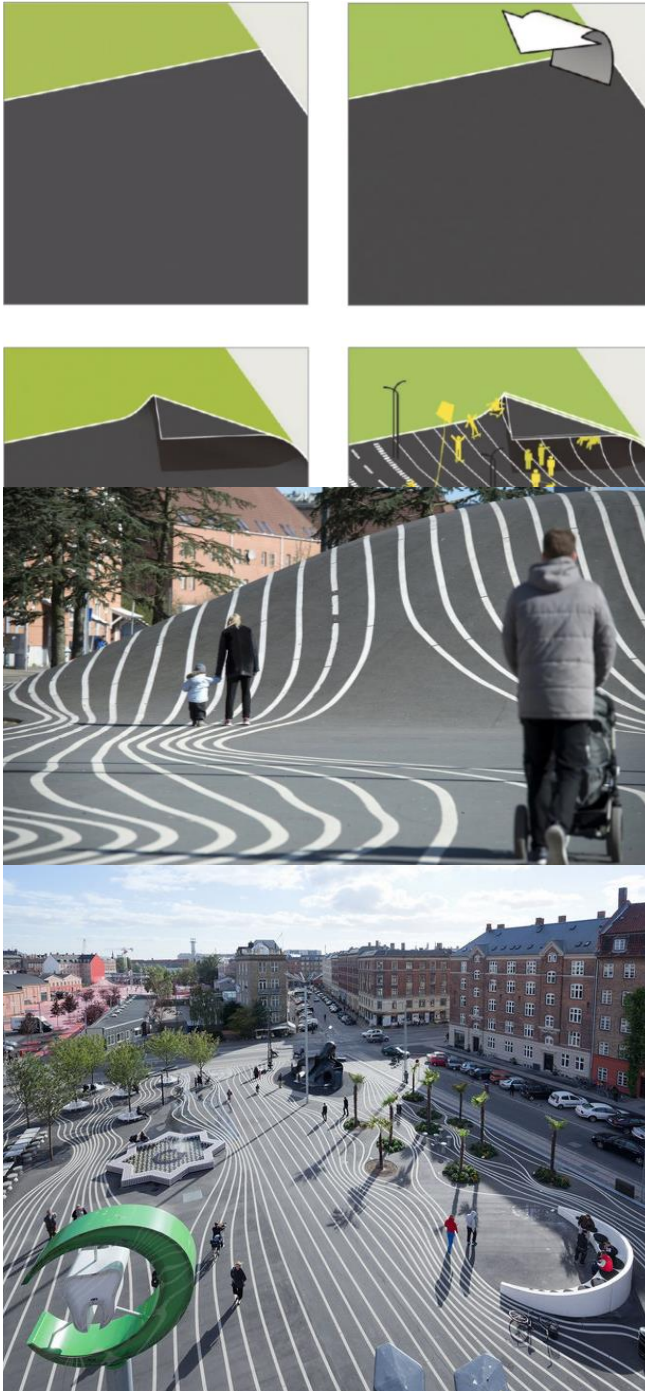
IV.b.2-5. Project scheme. BIG Bjarke Ingels Group
IV.b.6. Project details. artsandplace.org
IV.b.7. Project details. Iwan Baan

areas in Copenhagen. Designers embarked on a unique participatory process, engaging residents from over 50 nationalities. This engagement was aimed at gathering their ideas and understanding the kind of urban artifacts that resonate with their cultural identities.

● A Park of Stories: Superkilen is divided into three main zones: the Red Square, the Black Market, and the Green Park. Each zone showcases objects from various countries, ranging from Moroccan fountains to Russian playgrounds, and from Japanese benches to British lampposts. Every object tells a story, connecting the park's visitors to a global narrative.

Challenges Faced

The ambitious vision for Superkilen came with its set of challenges:

● Representation and Selection: Given the wide array of cultures and the plethora of object choices, making a selection that felt inclusive and representative was a considerable challenge. There was a risk of some groups feeling left out or misrepresented.

● Cohesive Design Language: With diverse objects from all over the world, creating a sense of cohesion and unity in the park's design was no easy feat.

● Maintenance and Durability: Some of the imported objects and installations required specific care or were unfamiliar to the local maintenance teams. This posed challenges in ensuring longevity and consistent upkeep.

Lessons Learned

Superkilen's journey from conception to realization offers valuable insights:

● Design with, not for, the Community: The park stands as a testament to the value of deeply engaging communities in the design process. It proves that spaces designed with people, rather than for them, tend to resonate better and ensure greater ownership.

● Celebrating Diversity can be Tangible: Superkilen is a physical representation of how urban design can celebrate multiculturalism. It highlights the potential for public spaces to serve as platforms for sharing stories, memories, and experiences across cultures.

● Flexibility in Design: The park's design is not static. It accommodates events, performances, markets, and spontaneous gatherings, highlighting the importance of designing flexible urban spaces that can evolve with the community's needs.

IV.b.8. Red Square. artsandplace.org
IV.b.9. Project details. Torben Eskerod
IV.b.10. Project details. Maria da Schio

General notes: Superkilen stands out as a vibrant urban tapestry woven with threads from around the world. It's a demonstration of how Design Thinking, when paired with genuine community engagement, can produce public spaces that are not just functional but emotionally resonant, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity.

IV.c. Tempelhofer Feld, Berlin, Germany: transforming historical landscapes through collaborative design

Once the grounds of the iconic Tempelhof Airport, Tempelhofer Feld in Berlin presents a unique tale of transformation. From a bustling aviation hub to a Nazi-built structure, and now a vast public park, its history is rich and layered. Its recent evolution is a product of participatory design and showcases how the principles of Design Thinking can breathe new life into historical sites while preserving their essence.

IV.c.1-3. Project rendering. baseland.fr

Approach and Nuances

The reinvention of Tempelhofer Feld was a result of a community-driven initiative. When the airport ceased operations in 2008, the vast expanse opened up the potential for various uses.

● Community's Call to Action: The Berlin Senate initially had plans to develop part of the site for housing and commercial use. However, the local community, sensing the potential of this vast open space and wanting to preserve its open character, launched a campaign. This led to a referendum in 2014 where "Berliners" voted to keep Tempelhofer Feld as an unconstructed public space.

● Versatile Usage: Today, the park is a multi-functional space catering to diverse needs. It serves as a recreational ground, urban farming site, sports hub, and a venue for events. Many of the airport's original features, like its runways, are still intact and incorporated into the park's design, serving as pathways or gathering spots.

● Organic Development: Rather than a fully planned redesign, Tempelhofer Feld has been allowed to evolve organically based on community usage and feedback. Some areas are groomed, while others are left wild, promoting biodiversity.

IV.c.4. The view of the tower control. Stephanie Braconnier
IV.c.5. Community gardens. Stephanie Braconnier
IV.c.6. DIY culture. Stephanie Braconnier

Challenges Faced

Repurposing a site like Tempelhofer Feld was not without its set of challenges:

● Balancing History and Utility: The field, steeped in history, required sensitive handling to ensure that its past was respected while making it usable and appealing for today's generation.

● Managing Vastness: The sheer size of Tempelhofer Feld (over 355 hectares) posed logistical and maintenance challenges.

● Ensuring Inclusivity: Given the diverse population of Berlin, it was crucial to ensure that the park catered to the varied interests and needs of its residents.

Lessons Learned

Tempelhofer Feld's transformation journey provides several key takeaways:

● Power of Community Voice: The fate of the field underscores the impact a unified community voice can have on urban planning decisions. The successful referendum showcased the importance of listening to and involving the community in major decisions.

● Evolution over Imposition: Instead of imposing a fixed design, allowing the space to evolve based on organic community interactions has given Tempelhofer Feld a unique, ever-evolving character.

● Preservation and Utility Can Coexist: The field serves as an example of how

historical preservation and modern utility can coexist harmoniously. The site's history hasn't been erased; instead, it's celebrated and integrated.

IV.c.7. The living project. Stephanie Braconnier

General notes: Tempelhofer Feld stands as a beacon of how Design Thinking principles, combined with community engagement, can lead to the adaptive reuse of historically significant sites. It embodies the spirit of Berlin: a city that respects its past, listens to its residents, and continuously evolves towards the future.

V. Support material

The realm of Design Thinking for co-designing public open spaces is both vast and dynamic. To provide a comprehensive understanding and actionable insights, various resources have been curated, some of which stand out for their depth, clarity, and hands-on approach. In this section, we highlight a pivotal literature and documentary that would be instrumental for enthusiasts and practitioners.

V.a. "Design & Thinking" by Muris Studio

"Design & Thinking" is a documentary that delves deeply into the concept of Design Thinking. It presents this methodology not merely as a design tool, but as a mindset and philosophy that can drive positive change in various fields, ranging from business to social challenges. With insightful interviews from industry leaders, designers, and thinkers, the documentary paints a holistic picture of how Design Thinking can be a game-changer in problem-solving. By adopting the mindset and techniques presented in the documentary, urban planners, designers, and communities can collaboratively create spaces that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also functional, sustainable, and deeply resonant with the needs and desires of the community they serve.

V.b. "Urban Challenges, Resilient Solutions" by TrancityxValiz
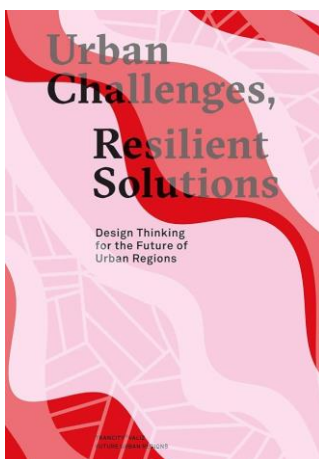
"Urban challenges, resilient solutions: Design Thinking for the future of urban regions" is an insightful book that tackles the complex challenges faced by rapidly urbanizing regions around the world. It provides a comprehensive exploration of how Design Thinking can be applied to address the multifaceted challenges of urbanization. It presents a vision of cities that are not only equipped to handle present challenges but are also resilient, adaptable, and prepared for the future. For anyone interested in urban planning, design, or the future of cities, this book provides invaluable insights and a fresh perspective on how to approach urban challenges.

V.c. "Networked Urbanism" by the Harvard Graduate School of Design
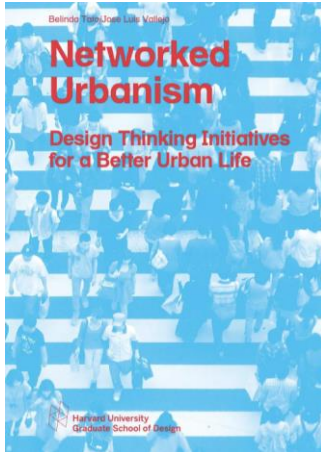
"Networked Urbanism" is a seminal work originating from the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The book delves into the transformative power of integrating urban studies with the dynamic capabilities of networking theories and practices. It provides a comprehensive look at the evolving paradigms of urban design in the digital age. It's a must-read for urban planners, designers, technologists, and anyone interested in understanding the intricate tapestry of contemporary urban landscapes and Design Thinking. The insights offered in the book are not just academic but have profound practical implications for how we design, build, and experience cities in the 21st century.

V.d. Templates

Beyond the aforementioned references and insights, this guide also introduces a set of designed templates aimed at streamlining the Design Thinking process for users. Recognizing that conceptual knowledge is greatly enhanced when paired with practical tools, these templates act as hands-on resources. Whether you're a novice or a seasoned practitioner, these templates offer a structured approach to navigate through the intricacies of Design Thinking, simplifying its application especially in the realm of public open spaces. Therefore, readers are encouraged to make use of these assets, adapting and iterating upon them to suit specific contexts and challenges.

See Annexes 1-6