The Architecture of Inclusivity

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Openings

All buildings should have a civic component. Even a commercial high-rise should offer public spaces in which people can connect. Developers in both the public and private sectors must invest in these spaces. They are a vital component of a rich urban life - they unite a city, tie the urban fabric together. Arts centres, spa houses, dance schools, sports centres and public parks, by the very nature of their cultural and civic importance, are spaces accessible to everybody, eliminating segregation and division in our cities.

There has been a move in many world cities in recent years towards walled, private spaces. As architects, we must reject this. Over many centuries, architects have been trying to liberate the city, open it up, and make it more porous and accessible. Building closed communities, like mini Kremlins, is a huge step backwards - a very archaic way of living. Modern communities should be inclusive, with varied spaces and programmes that invite social interaction.

Material Gains

Part of architecture's job is to make people feel good in the spaces where we live, go to school or work, so we must raise standards. Having a home is a crucial issue - not only in terms of a shelter, but also for wellbeing, for a better life. There's enough wealth in society today that all people should have a good home, not just the very rich. Social housing, schools, hospitals and other vital infrastructure have always been based on the concept of minimal existence, but that shouldn't be the case today. Architects now have the skills and tools to address these critical issues, and many communities around the world are committed to resolving them.

Architecture is ultimately about wellbeing - the creation of pleasant environments for all aspects of life. But it is also important to create places that uplift, enliven and inspire people. Architecture can carry a sense of vitality and optimism, the ability to connect communities and shape their futures. Ecological sustainability and social disparity are the defining challenges of our generation, and the ‘architecture of inclusivity’ offers solutions to these key issues.

The complexity and dynamism of contemporary life cannot easily be cast into the simple orthogonal grids and blocks of the 20th century architecture of Henry Ford's era. We must move beyond these ideas of separation and compartmentalisation, towards an approach for the 21st century that addresses the richness, complexity and interconnectivity of modern day lives. More than half of the world’s growing population now lives in cities, and this figure is increasing. Cities today are much more diverse and must now cater for a range of people with different cultures, experiences and influences.

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Architecture can assist in the regeneration of living patterns in a meaningful way, so that everyone can contribute to a more ecologically and socially sustainable society. Huge advances in design technology are enabling architects to rethink both form and space, using new construction methods and materials in development, such as sophisticated architectural facades that can take almost any shape, and have the structural, weatherproofing and insulation properties compressed into a single layer. They can be easily fabricated and assembled anywhere, and 3D printing is also opening many new possibilities for the construction industry. We can now create buildings that optimise their environment to suit the needs of their users and changing weather patterns at any given moment. We are also researching new materials, design techniques and construction methods that bring significant environmental benefits. As these different developments - sustainability and the applicability of the materials - come together, we are beginning to find significant solutions to urgent ecological challenges.

Our task as architects is to continue this progress. We must marry concepts of accessibility and integration with the incredible advances in ecologically sound materials and construction practices. We must not look at the disparate parts, but understand them as a whole, working together to create integrated communities that present solutions to the defining ecological and social challenges of our time. It is only through an architecture of inclusivity that we will create a truly sustainable society.

Dame Zaha Hadid argues that all architects now have a social responsibility to create buildings that welcome the public and celebrate communal spaces.

British architect Dame Zaha Hadid is a recipient of the Pritzker Prize and two-time winner of the Stirling Prize.