

# ***Introduction***

After decades of distress and uncertainty, city centers are reclaiming their prominence as the focus of business, culture, and entertainment. The abundance of life, color, variety, and surprise makes cities the place to go to seek and discover, to entertain and be entertained, to see and be seen, to meet, learn, and enjoy. As a home to millions of people and an attraction for numerous visitors, the city center facilitates a wonderful human chemistry. Cities create special settings for entertainment and tourism and have the potential to stimulate local and regional economies.

The image of a great city stems largely from the quality of its public realm—its streets, boulevards, parks, squares, plazas, and waterfronts. Individual architectural landmarks may become icons, but it is the quality of the overall public environment that makes a city livable and memorable. A well-designed and well-managed public realm evokes community pride and creates a strong, positive image. This environment, in conjunction with a strong and diversified economic marketplace, attracts the development investment needed to sustain and enhance the economic and social heart of the city.

*Creating a Vibrant City Center* sets forth planning and urban design principles and strategies centered on two characteristics that are key to the success of a city center:

- ❖ *A diverse market.* A city's unique character is defined by the diversity and concentration of complementary uses. These uses generate pedestrian activity and a lively social environment that, in turn, sustain the mix of uses.
- ❖ *A high-quality place.* A visually appealing, comfortable, and secure physical environment will create confidence, commitment, and investment in the community over the long term.

These two characteristics are closely linked and need to make equal contributions in order for successful city center regeneration to occur. The mix of uses should be analyzed to identify urban functions and activities that are missing or scarce. A program to retain or attract the desired mix of uses and amenities then can be undertaken



Bryant Park, New York City.



Morrison Street, Portland, Oregon.

offering financial and/or other incentives in order to obtain an appropriate balance of uses and activities.

In conjunction with marketing and economic development initiatives, a city needs to improve its public infrastructure, including streetscapes, plazas, parks and public spaces, signage, lighting, public transit, vehicular circulation, and parking. Of equal importance are the preservation and rehabilitation of significant buildings and a commitment to architectural design excellence for new structures.

Over the past 20 years, people have become increasingly aware of the economic and social benefits associated with well-planned improvements to the public realm. In Portland, Oregon, for example, creation of a pedestrian-friendly environment helped to spur significant private investment in residential, office, and retail development. The methods and processes used to design, build, and maintain Portland's city center provide an excellent case study of how creation of a high-quality public realm can be a

catalyst for regeneration throughout the city and the region.

The importance and value of place making and creating a high-quality environment have become more apparent to real estate professionals and community leaders committed to developing vibrant city centers, helping to fuel the growth of the city center housing market.



North Michigan Avenue, Chicago.



CIBC Bank Plaza, Toronto, Canada.

Strong partnerships between the local government and the private business community have led to some of the most successful and innovative improvements to city centers. Business improvement districts (BIDs) are demonstrating the importance of strong management structures and

community involvement in addressing and solving the most salient city center issues: public realm maintenance, security, and marketing. Cities throughout the world are recognizing the need to create public/private partnerships to manage city center development and regeneration.



Trafalgar Square, London.



Champs-Élysées, Paris.

Great cities have not evolved by accident, nor do they conform to a single planning template. This second edition of *Creating a Vibrant City Center* identifies the principles and guidelines inherent in successful place making so they can be applied to cities of any scale. Building on the re-

search and urban design work of the author in more than 50 cities in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia, this new edition provides guidance for how to develop comprehensive action programs for city center regeneration.



Marienplatz, Munich, Germany.