



MAKING THE SHIFT

The 2019 SHIFT Infrastructure/Architecture Challenge asks the architecture profession to propose new ways to understand, create or support physical or social infrastructure that links communities. The goal is to show how architectural thinking promotes social equity, reduces isolation or embodies social justice, but the possibilities are limitless.

CASE STUDY: OPEN BATHROOM POLICY



One such issue might involve the accessibility of public bathrooms. Adequate public restrooms are fundamental to human dignity and are essential for an inclusive, healthy society. However, municipalities continue to dismiss public bathrooms as a priority of urban design due to building costs and weather challenges. In 2007, for example, Toronto made a commitment to build 20 public-washroom facilities, but only three have been delivered—two of which are closed during winter due to freezing.

Joel Sanders Architect (JSA) is a New York architectural practice trying to redesign the traditional bathroom. With a focus on inclusivity, it creates innovative and sustainable environments in response to today's rapidly changing culture.

Inclusivity – Gender Neutral Restrooms

Since the early 18th century, public bathrooms have been designed around the idea that there are only two types of people: male and female. However, a growing number of people have begun to share their frustrations with sex-segregated facilities, noting that they feel forced to use public toilets that do not match their gender identity. With this frustration in mind, JSA has designed a more flexible environment by designing open-space restrooms characterized with fully enclosed stalls and a common, shared space with sinks and mirrors.

Accessibility – Bathrooms need to be accessible by all at any time

When in a place with no public bathroom, many people turn to businesses for their facilities. However, businesses retain the right to refuse access to their facilities, meaning those washrooms aren't truly accessible. In fact, a U.S. study by the National Coalition for the Homeless and People for Fairness Coalition (PFFC) found that more than 65 per cent of people experiencing homelessness had been discriminated against by a private business.

JSA's open bathroom design fosters accessibility and usability by the wider public with the option to be situated inside or outside, directly accessible from streets, parks and town squares. Its design does not discriminate and welcomes individuals of all genders and with whatever housing status.

Environmental benefits

Rather than trying to stop people from peeing in public, cities like Paris are now providing individuals with a more appropriate venue in which to do so. Officials in the City of Light have installed a new type of open-air urinal, housed in bright red flower boxes that are fully exposed on street corners and accompanied by nearby signs advertising their presence. Although accessible, these urinals are far from inclusive—they are difficult or impossible to use for most members of the public, including seniors, women, children and those with physical limitations.

When located in popular public areas, JSA's open bathroom design will prevent issues surrounding public urination by offering a safe, clean and welcoming facility for all to utilize when in need. In areas such as Toronto's downtown core, this type of open bathroom design could prevent individuals having to pee in public, limiting the amount of bacteria and odour produced by urine.

Why is this a good example for SHIFT?

- It addresses a societal need in a broader global context that is relevant to Canada.
- It has applications beyond the specific project.
- It provokes a dialogue on how we address design issues that are based on gender, age and wealth.
- The idea is realizable, practical and elevates society by creating a more equitable, engaged, culturally sensitive solutions to infrastructure problems.

CONTACT US

We'd love to hear from you! Whether you have questions you need answered or want to share stories or examples that relate to the infrastructure topic, please drop us a line at shiftchallenge@oaa.on.ca.

For more information about SHIFT Challenge, [click here](#).

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