Ali Madanipour, “Social Exclusion and Space”

Urbanism is defined by the encounter of social difference: cities emerge as dense concentrations of people brought together through production, trade, immigration, and all the other interactions that bridge difference. Sameness and homogeneity are antithetical to urban thinking and urban life. Yet, as the architect and urban planner Ali Madanipour emphasizes, contemporary cities have become sites of competing forces of social inclusion and social exclusion. Cities concentrate diversity and difference -- and yet other processes often lead to processes of separation and exclusion. Madanipour’s goal in this short reading is to clarify what “social exclusion” means, how it takes spatial form in the city, and to reflect on some of the things planning and urban design might to do try to foster greater inclusion. One of Madanipour’s key contributions is a careful distinction between different kinds of social exclusion: economic exclusion, which involves differential access to resources -- especially employment; political exclusion produced through inequalities in access to decision-making authority and political
representation; and **cultural** exclusion, which involves tensions over shared symbols and meanings, usually embedded in differences of language, religion, and nationality.

**Questions**

1. Madanipour identifies a number of spatial dimensions of exclusion -- from the ‘forceful’ exclusion of national boundaries ‘guarded by military might’ to the subtle exclusions of ‘mental space’ that may be ‘controlled through our fears and perceptions of activities in spaces. For example, we may be hesitant to enter an expensive-looking shopping centre if we do not have access to the resources needed for the activities there, even though there may not be any physical barriers that would prevent us from going there.’ Can you describe an event in a city where you have seen or experienced exclusion? What was the role of space -- separation, surveillance, other processes -- in the exclusion?

2. Madanipour diagnoses ‘a socio-spatial geometry of difference and segregation’ that emerges at the local level. Put simply, the economics of housing can produce and reinforce social exclusion, in all of its dimensions -- economic, political, and cultural -- by dividing neighborhood spaces in the city. The ‘land and property market ... sees space as a commodity,’ Madanipour writes, ‘and tends to create socio-spatial segregation through differential access to this commodity.’ What are the examples of exclusion through access to housing that you’ve seen in any city you know well?

3. Madanipour notes that cities are sites of alternating processes of inclusion and exclusion, and that the different kinds of exclusion can sometimes reinforce one another. “The most acute forms of social exclusion,” he writes, “are those that simultaneously include elements of economic, political, and cultural exclusion. The other end of the spectrum is occupied by citizens who are fully integrated in the mainstream of society through these three dimensions. Between these two extremes, there is a wide range of variations in which individuals and groups are included in some areas but excluded in others. A major trend is that more and more people suffer from anxiety and uncertainty, as there are ever larger numbers in transition from inclusion to exclusion.” In any city you know, can you think of examples of what Madanipour describes? In your city, are there ‘ever larger numbers in transition from inclusion to exclusion’? If so, is there a widespread conversation on what can be done to foster greater inclusion?