



Third Spaces

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“Third places” are the spaces we frequent between our home and work, or our “first” and “second” places (Oldenburg, 1989). This term was coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in the 1980s, but the concept of third spaces has existed for centuries. These places have ranged historically from grand places to contemporary and human-scaled places in a rapidly urbanizing world. Oldenburg (1989) describes these places as **“the core settings of informal public life”** (p. 16) which can be the local coffee shop or pub, bookstores, and other establishments. While his focus was on established businesses, third places also include outdoor environments that can achieve the same experience – a public place to gather, a venue for conversation with others, and a physical location beyond home and work.

Outdoor Third Places

The following precedents summarized here will focus on outdoor third places as they present features that address the common concerns older adults commonly express regarding social participation in urban living, as outlined in the World Health Organization’s *Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide* (2007). These concerns include **accessibility, affordability, range of activities, and fostering community integration** (WHO, 2007). Specifically, outdoor third places should have long open hours, convenient locations, and easy physical access. They should have low to no cost to ensure affordability, and lastly, they should offer or provide opportunities for a variety of activities to cater to different interests and foster the integration of people from different demographics.

The Three-Generation Playspaces, Singapore

In Singapore, most clusters of flats built by the Housing Development Board of Singapore have three-generation playspaces. **Although the primary focus of these places is on communal activities for children, the ‘playspaces’ are conveniently located for easy access by residents of the flats and neighbouring homes to incorporate play into everyday life** (Krystiak, 2020). These spaces offer exercise equipment for older adults, game zones for youth, and open playgrounds for children, which are often adjacent to eateries and other community facilities in the area. These playspaces fosters interaction among parents, children, and older adults and makes it easy for people of all ages to exercise and socialize.



Figure 1: Exercise equipment for older adults in three-generation playspaces.



Figure 3: Bryant Park in the summer

Bryant Park, New York City, USA

Located in New York City is the vibrant Bryant Park, an urban park that offers visitors a wide range of amenities and activities to enjoy. The park includes an expansive green open lawn which provides space for unstructured activities. The seating area, complete with movable chairs and tables situated under a canopy of trees, presents a third place to relax or socialize with other patrons.

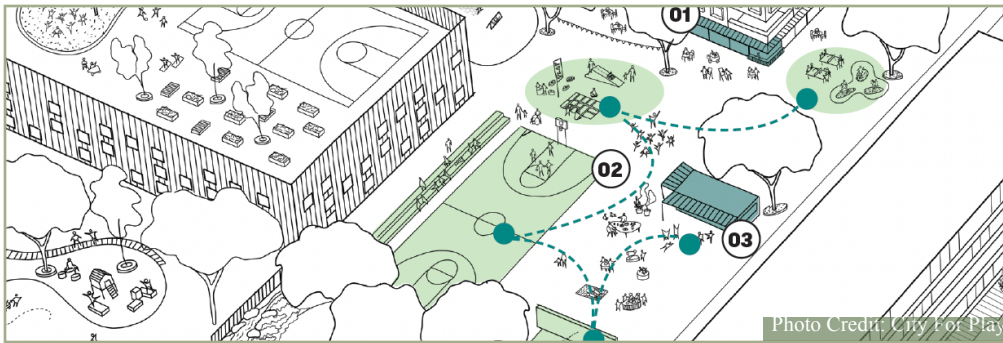


Figure 2: Illustration of the elements of intergenerational play in Singapore's playspaces

- 1.) Direct visibility to playspaces from the adjacent shops & amenity
- 2.) Spaces for children located adjacent to recreational spaces for the elderly and youth
- 3.) Adjacent shaded sitting areas

When spaces provide movable chairs, Whyte (1988) notes that this enables choice for its user to situate themselves where they please and provide comfort. The park presents is place for a casual meeting, a game of cards, and even a picnic in solitude or with friends.

In addition to unstructured activities, Bryant Park provides opportunities for more formal ones as well. Visitors can engage in a range of activities such as playing games, attending literary classes, or listening to music performances (Sim, 2019). In the winter months, the park transforms into a Winter Village, complete with an ice-skating rink, offering visitors seasonal variety.

The park caters to individuals of all ages and interests, making it a destination for fostering intergenerational and cultural interaction. People looking to this park as a third place can come as early as 7 a.m. and as late as 11 p.m. and can travel along the subway lines that stop at this park.

Moveable furniture in public spaces allows for personal comfort and choice.



Figure 4: Bryant Park skating rink during Winter Village

Oishii Park, Shingū, Japan

Oishii Park is situated in Shingū, Japan. It is a small-scale outdoor public space that accompanies the nearby "Youth Library Engawa" which caters to both travellers and locals as a library and lodge. The park is relatively modest in size, located within a property lot in a rural town and provides a place for reading, socializing with other travellers and locals, and farming in its communal garden. Oishii Park translates to "Delicious Park" where the farming provides fresh produce to eat. Its location allows residents access to an interesting place in the neighbourhood, adjacent to a library that provides toilet amenities, new visitors to the town whom locals can interact with, and the nearby elementary school across the street which feed children into the park looking to play. **The park offers the opportunity for communal activity of growing food and sharing knowledge among visitors of different ages.**



Figure 5: Oishii Park visitors reading, farming, playing and simply hanging out.

Vester Volgade, Copenhagen, Denmark

Small-scale third places can even be as simple as a street. When the street conditions are poor, only necessary activities such as walking occur. But if the physical environment of the street goes beyond just being a thoroughfare, it invites more activities to take place (Gehl, 2011, pp.11). Vester Volgade is a street located in the inner city of Copenhagen. The street has been transformed to provide a widened walkway that includes a designated bike lane and ample



Figure 6: Vester Volgade is a bustling pedestrian thoroughfare

Figure 7: Dining and seating spaces along the street are safely separated



Figure 8: The river trail busy with people walking, biking, and skating



Figure 9: Older adult on the walking path



Figure 10: Warming Hut installations along the walking path

Parks located near public buildings offer convenient amenities to visitors.

space for people to enjoy their time in a bustling place that connects multiple city landmarks. **The street prioritizes the pedestrian experience with various amenities such as seating and wide lanes for walking and cycling.** Despite its function as a thoroughfare, Vester Volgade provides social opportunities for people to meet new individuals and spend leisure time on the sunny side of the street (Sim, 2019).

Warming Huts, Winnipeg, Canada

Cities and communities located in winter climates also offer opportunities for third places that embrace snowy conditions. The Nestaweya River Trail in Winnipeg, Manitoba provides a way for people to travel on the river and spend time outside of work or home. The approximately 10-kilometre trail invites visitors to walk, skate, snowshoe and cross-country ski while offering Warming Huts installations placed along the trail. Warming Huts: An Art + Architecture Competition on Ice is an open contest for designers and artists to build innovative huts where visitors, both locals and tourists, can gather to stay warm when visiting the trail. The Nestaweya Trail is accessible from various points on the river, including The Forks, a well-known public meeting place that is conveniently located in the heart of downtown. The Forks provides amenities such as provisions, public seating and washrooms when a break is needed indoors. The Warming Huts is an annual event that usually takes place on the river trail during the ice skating season, offering a **seasonal outdoor third place**, when most people are more inclined to stay indoors.

Final Thoughts

If Oldenburg (1989) describes third places as places of **neutral ground** where no one should be required to play host, **outdoor third places provide a more even playing field that eliminates the server-customer dynamic found in establishments.** Outdoor third places such as parks and streets are usually public in nature which can provide free spaces for the community to gather and spend time at almost any time of day and present possibilities for different activities to occur and allow people to meet others in the neighbourhood, both familiar and unfamiliar. However, **when a third place set outdoors is in proximity to the original third place establishments as described by Oldenburg (1989), then the place becomes that much more accessible and well equipped for all ages.** As shown in these precedents, third places set outdoors and can provide age-friendly settings for informal public life that are essential for the health and well-being of people. If our first and second places are indoors, our third places should offer a respite from the indoor environment.

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