

Geography 360: Urban Geography

Film Guide I: <i>The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces</i> (1988/1979)
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Whyte, W. H., Municipal Art Society of New York, Street Life Project, and Direct Cinema Ltd. 1988. *The Social life of small urban spaces: a film by William H. Whyte*. Los Angeles, CA: Direct Cinema, videorecording. (58 minutes)

This engaging film is about the open spaces of cities. Offering detailed on-site examinations, first at New York City's Seagram Plaza, then other open areas in this city and elsewhere, the film offers an analysis of why and how some spaces are popular. Based on a good look at what people actually do and the spaces they inhabit while doing so, the film presents a series of observations about the urban landscape that prove both entertaining and educational.

Questions for Discussion

1. What counts as a 'small urban space'? What examples do you know of or frequent?
2. What kinds of people, activities, physical features, and encounters make up city spaces? What makes 'good' city spaces work?
3. From your perspective, what are the most important issues to consider in planning city spaces? Rank your top three in order of importance.
4. In what way(s) is public space important to the life of a city?
5. This film shows public spaces of the 1970s – from your experiences, have city dwellers changed how they live, work, and interact in urban space, for example, due to technologies, social agendas, or other imperatives?