

SOCIABILITY IN THE CITY

*Olivia Young
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Third places

- According to Collins English Dictionary, a third space is a “coffee shop considered as an alternative to a bar or a restaurant as a place to socialize outside the home.” In general, it is accepted that any space where people can gather to meet outside of the home ('first place') and work ('second place') can be considered a third place.
- Outside of America, people can gather freely in squares, plazas, and piazzas without feeling like they are loitering, but in the US, in order for us to be somewhere, we feel as if we must have a purpose in doing so.

Coffee and Chocolate

This hole-in-the-wall coffee shop next to Market Square only had one other patron besides myself when I visited, but this was more likely a result of the time of day rather than a reflection of Coffee and Chocolate's reputation as a third space. On a busier day, many people go to the coffee shop to socialize with their friends, do work alone, or grab dessert after dinner.



Wild Love Bakehouse

Contrary to the emptiness I witnessed at Coffee and Chocolate, this third space was packed to the brim on a Tuesday morning.

The shop was set up with several long, community-style tables, but most people were content to sit alone with their bag on the seat next to them in order to preserve their personal space. Because of this, only about six people could fit at each 12-person tabletop, preventing any new connections from being formed from the get-go.



Greenway

The Greenway by Tyson Park is an example of a third place that isn't a coffee shop. People have a place to spend time together (or alone) without the fear of feeling like they don't have a right to the space. Most of the people I encountered on the Greenway were fellow walkers, bikers, or runners who were always willing to offer a smile and a quick "Hello!"



Tyson Park

Lots of parents were with their kids when I went through Tyson Park, so while I wasn't socializing on my run, most of the kids on the playground were talking to each other. Most of the parents were standing around on their phones, but I went by right when people were getting off work, so I can understand wanting to decompress first.



Buildings system

- The city is made of two types of buildings: ordinary and exceptional. According to "The Elements of Urban Form," the difference is not always about the outward appearance; the ordinary buildings are generally related to the building utilization, and include residential and commercial buildings. On the other hand, "The second type includes only a few buildings of the city: those buildings that by their shape and eventually by their utilization—are clearly distinguishable in the urban landscape."
- While I only took pictures of buildings that looked exceptional to me, by utilization, it turned out that most of them are ordinary.

Ordinary

This YMCA has a much different look than most other workout facilities, but the building itself is still utilized for an ordinary activity.



Ordinary

Despite a peppy paint job, this parking garage is ordinary as can be.



Exceptional

The Sunsphere is a novelty in Knoxville. Built originally for the 1982 World's Fair, the Sunsphere was reopened to the public after renovations in 2014. The Observation Deck is open to the public and can also be rented out as an event space.

The building itself is exceptional, offering a statement on the skyline and a 360-degree view of Knoxville and the Smoky Mountains.



Ordinary or Exceptional?

The Knoxville Museum of Art stands out as such a large, square building, but it is exceptional?

In terms of utilization, I say the building might be considered exceptional, but in terms of design, it might be ordinary.



Ordinary

While this building might be more pleasing to the eye, it is still a commercial office space.



Monotony of Recent UT Construction

On UT's campus, some of the most interesting buildings were built long before I was born. The new construction, on the other hand, all follows the same pattern and adds no excitement to the campus. Each building is more ordinary than the last.



Sidewalk culture

- According to Jane Jacobs, the uses of sidewalks are multifold: particularly, by way of safety and contact. In terms of safety, the sidewalks are a complex system—if enough people are on the sidewalk or watching from their side of the street, then there is a network of accountability that often prevents crime. Jacobs calls this phenomenon the “eyes on the street.” If the sidewalks are empty or loitering is prohibited, then the need for police presence is increased. In terms of contact, the sidewalk is a place where people can connect without needing a reason to know each other. Jacobs cites her own life, saying there was a man whose name she did not know but whose schedule coincided with hers, so she saw him every day and noticed when he was missing.

Safety

In Market Square, this police car is stationed here around the clock despite the sidewalks often being full of people. The element of the sidewalk safety net that Market Square is missing is the network between the people who walk there. Most of them do not live in the area so they aren't able to pick out someone who might need to be watched more closely, which increases the need for police presence.



Contact

One way I've experienced contact with new people in downtown Knoxville was by participating in the Women's March. People were friendly and willing to talk to the those standing next to them while waiting on the sidewalk. Additionally, since it was a planned march, there was a heavy police presence ensuring that the roads stayed blocked off for the safety of the marchers.



How construction is destructive

In terms of sidewalk culture and growing relationships on sidewalks, the construction at UT has nearly eliminated the chance of either. When we are worried about getting bricks dropped on our heads by cranes or being run over by a bulldozer on Ped Walkway, we are far less likely to strike up a conversation with the person next to us.



Sidewalk Closed

Construction on UT's campus often inhibits



The Fort

Many relationships seem to be cultivated on the sidewalks in the Fort, especially during the late weekend hours. Everyone is around the same age and in a relaxed setting, making socialization easier than in a competitive classroom.

Additionally, the collective of college students meandering in the dark exemplifies Jacobs' definition of safety on the sidewalks. Since people can see the sidewalks from the houses they're at, crime doesn't usually occur on the street until the later night hours.



Connection

- In downtown Knoxville, there was no connection to other people on the sidewalk aside from being in the same space. The feeling of connection is much stronger on campus because all of us feel like we belong, have a right, have some commonality. Even on the green spaces near campus, there was more opportunity and openness to connecting than in Market Square.
- Jane Jacobs held the opinion that togetherness did not necessarily mean people should share everything just because they shared one thing. Additionally, she bemoaned 'private togetherness'—exclusive groups of people destroying the diversity that helps cities thrive.



YMCA

Historically known for its acceptance touted by the song "YMCA," the YMCA is one place downtown that promotes connection between people. From group workout classes to networking with acquaintances in the locker room, building relationships is one of the YMCA's main goals.

This downtown YMCA isn't as forgiving as those in the suburbs, though. They have a strict city parking lot that includes time limits on members and no entry for non-members.



Union Ave Books

I visited this bookstore briefly in the afternoon on a weekday and was surprised by how many people were there. The shop owners were readily assisting people in hunting for books they might like, or giving suggestions while learning relatives' names and sharing their own stories. I saw more connections being made during this trip into the bookstore than the entire time I roamed downtown.



Campus Connections

One of the times UT students experience the most togetherness is during football games. Like Jacobs emphasized, we are not required to all be interested in the same things just because we are interested in one similar thing. I think this is especially true during these moments—there is no way 102,455 people share the same viewpoint, but we do experience connection through the ritual of a Tennessee football game.



Waste

- After watching the documentary about Los Platanitos, I took greater notice regarding sanitation levels in Knoxville. Both campus and the Strip are well-maintained in terms of garbage pickup, and campus is equipped with recycling bins and a recycling center.
- This is a stark contrast to the conditions of those living in Los Platanitos. There, public sanitation is not a part of the infrastructure. The garbage gets thrown into the stream that flows through the village until it dumps out at the end. Now that the stream has been partially filled, this issue is slightly better, but the implementation of a sanitation system like those in the US would resolve many health issues.

Recycling

At UT, there is a 24/7 drop-off center available for anyone to use. When Knoxville stopped accepting glass recyclables, many residents began bringing them to the UT

Recycling facility. Additionally, UT promotes recycling with containers in every classroom and dorm room.



Street Maintenance

Despite the high volume of traffic on the Strip, the trashcans are rarely overflowing and the streets are not full of litter. A street sweeper comes by occasionally, and the most common form of trash is dropped food on the sidewalks. One place where litter is particularly bad, though, is beneath the construction of the new apartment building. Earlier this year when the area included a covered tunnel, it functioned as a dumping ground for Solo cups, beer bottles, and other trash.



Sociability

Overall, the city is a great place for socialization, especially for college students. There are a multitude of third spaces to visit, connections to be made, and sidewalks to stand on. The real factor in the sociability of Knoxville is how one chooses to interact with the city.

It is unreasonable to expect someone to approach you and strike up conversation in a dark, sparsely populated area just as it is equally reasonable to greet every person you see on a greenway. The way people interact with the buildings and utilize the services provided by Knoxville is up to them, but if you want to experience the sociability of the city, I recommend standing on a street in the Fort on a Saturday night, paying a visit to Union Ave Books, or walking down Pedestrian Walkway on a Wednesday morning.

The city functions at its fullest potential when every resident takes an active interest in the people and places around them. Sociability is not a necessity, but it certainly makes living in a city a lot less lonely.

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