

Loitering Protocols

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Problem

One of the essential functions of the urban built environment is to support a wide variety of public activities. While “pure” public spaces like parks and piazzas as well as third places like coffee shops and pubs get more attention as legible objects of urban planning and design, their less legible counterparts—the areas that are used as public space without being designated as such—do not get as much attention, unsurprisingly. City planners and business owners cannot anticipate, much less fulfill, the full range of needs or potential uses that a city’s inhabitants may have for urban space; individuals thus improvise creative and resourceful uses for marginal spaces not officially designated as “public” or designed for the informal activities they end up accommodating. The absence of official sanctioning or conscious top-down programming should not restrict such uses, to the extent that they do not produce negative externalities like safety hazards or excessive nuisance.

Participants

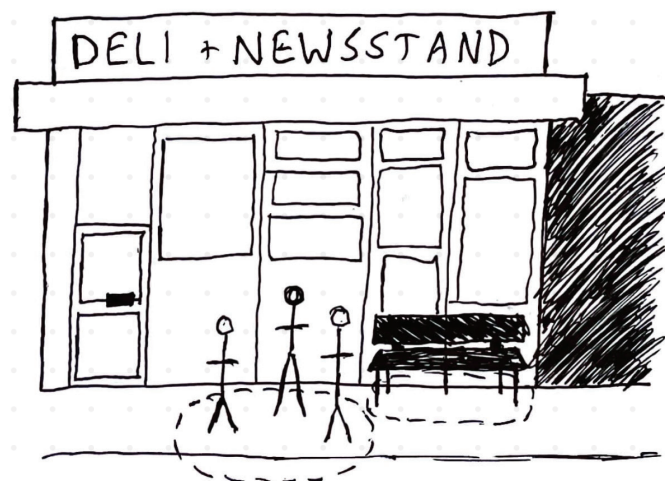
City planners, business owners, real estate owners, city dwellers who use public space

Infrastructure

“Unintentional” public space and protocols for using it in unplanned ways

Pattern

Loitering is one kind of informal and improvisational usage of marginal urban space—on sidewalks and in parking lots, for example—in a manner for which that space was not explicitly designed. The word “loitering” often has negative connotations, and is even prohibited in many places, but it is an example of an unplanned use that should be encouraged. Loitering, like related informal uses of space, has a dual benefit, meeting an unanticipated need for its participants at minimal cost while increasing the utility of spaces that may be otherwise underutilized. The stewards of spaces that organically attract such unplanned uses should develop “loitering protocols,” which lightly facilitate activities that are already happening while better aligning them with whatever other purposes a given space serves.



Micro-Offices

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Problem

Remote work, once an exception, has become mainstream over the past decade. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a broad shift toward remote work for all but “essential workers” and jobs that were inherently hands-on. In the time since, remote work has remained widespread among those who can do their jobs virtually—particularly office workers—even as many other facets of life have returned to their pre-pandemic states. This shift has produced an imbalance between the supply of office space and the demand for it. Traditional office space remain underutilized and there is a corresponding shortage of the types of office space remote workers need, perhaps accompanied by an assumption that they don’t require dedicated office space at all. Coworking alone is an insufficient solution to this problem, meeting just one narrow set of needs among many.

Participants

Remote workers, employers, owners of underutilized residential and commercial space, companies with excess office capacity

Infrastructure

Underutilized residential and commercial space, underutilized office space, a digital marketplace that individual remote workers can use to access that space

Pattern

In addition to coworking spaces and laptop-friendly third places like coffee shops, many remote workers need workspaces that satisfy a broad range of variable criteria, from cost to privacy. The growing usage of various public spaces for remote work is often unwelcome or invasive, reappropriating spaces for a purpose they aren’t meant to fulfill. Home offices, meanwhile, are not always available or viable, for reasons including the size of one’s house and the daytime presence of children or housemates. To fill these voids, individual remote workers should be able to access a marketplace of “micro-offices”—unutilized rooms and spaces in homes, commercial establishments, and other companies’ offices that are available for remote workers to use. While these micro-offices will be rented on an hourly or daily basis, employers should subsidize their cost, as they do when they provide their own office space and require their employees to work there.

