

Three types of outdoor activities; Outdoor activities and quality of outdoor space

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Three types of outdoor activity

An ordinary day on an ordinary street. Pedestrians pass on the sidewalks, children play near front doors, people sit on benches and steps, the postman makes his rounds with the mail, two passersby greet on the sidewalk, two mechanics repair a car, groups engage in conversation. This mix of outdoor activities is influenced by a number of conditions. Physical environment is one of the factors: a factor that influences the activities to a varying degree and in many different ways. Outdoor activities, and a number of the physical conditions that influence them, are the subject of this book.

Greatly simplified, outdoor activities in public spaces can be divided into three categories, each of which places very different demands on the physical environment: *necessary activities*, *optional activities*, and *social activities*.

Necessary activities include those that are more or less compulsory – going to school or to work, shopping, waiting for a bus or a person, running errands, distributing mail – in other words, all activities in which those involved are to a greater or lesser degree required to participate.

In general, everyday tasks and pastimes belong to this group. Among other activities, this group includes the great majority of those related to walking.

Because the activities in this group are necessary, their incidence is influenced only slightly by the physical framework. These activities will take place

throughout the year, under nearly all conditions, and are more or less independent of the exterior environment. The participants have no choice.

Optional activities – that is, those pursuits that are participated in if there is a wish to do so and if time and place make it possible – are quite another matter.

This category includes such activities as taking a walk to get a breath of fresh air, standing around enjoying life, or sitting and sunbathing.

These activities take place only when exterior conditions are optimal, when weather and place invite them. This relationship is particularly important in connection with physical planning because most of the recreational activities that are especially pleasant to pursue outdoors are found precisely in this category of activities. These activities are especially dependent on exterior physical conditions.

When outdoor areas are of poor quality, only strictly necessary activities occur.

When outdoor areas are of high quality, necessary activities take place with approximately the same frequency – though they clearly tend to take a longer time, because the physical conditions are better. In addition, however, a wide range of optional activities will also occur because place and situation now invite people to stop, sit, eat, play, and so on.

In streets and city spaces of poor quality, only the bare minimum of activity takes place. People hurry home.

In a good environment, a completely different, broad spectrum of human activities is possible.