

in the kinds of vendors present? Are they absent altogether in the winter? Does the merchandise change in type or quality? How and why do vendor behaviors, spatial distribution, sensitivity to contextual conditions, and demographics change over the year, season, month, week, weekend, day-night, and holidays? Do prices rise and fall? When is business good? Slow? What are the meaningful time intervals for understanding vendor activity in the space?

Sensitivity to contextual conditions is closely related to time. Special events, weather, seasons, business cycles, pulse of plaza population density are contextual situations, climates within which the vendors operate. Vendor behavior may be more or less sensitive to these various contexts. More or less responsive to shifts in one, several, or all situational factors at the plaza. Do the vendors show up on rainy days? How much better is business when special events happen at the plaza? Are the vendors less aggressive when police are on patrol? Are prices more negotiable when the plaza is crowded?

The demographic aspect of activity addresses characteristics of the population using the space. Demographic interests might begin with readily observable factors. Examples are total head count: counts of the various population groupings; distribution of groups by space location, gender, ethnicity, general age categories, dress, body language and demeanor; use of environmental props (benches, railings); and gravitation to spatial features (fountains, building entries). Demographic understanding of urban space can also include information requiring closer observation, interviews, survey instruments. Information not apprehendable by casual observation alone. Where do the tourists come from? Where do the natives live? What is the demographic profile of space occupants in terms of income, occupation, marital status, children, religious/political preference? How do people feel about the space? Do they feel safe? Comfortable? Inspired? Proud? Alienated? Do they know where they are and how to find what they need? Do they like the place? Why?

Our interest in the aspects of activity mentioned above may apply to a moment in time or over an extended period. The moment could be as specific as a Saturday lunch hour in the heart of the tourist season. Attention to activity over longer periods tries to understand how behavior changes in relation to time. When does the tourist season begin and end? What days and times attract the largest and smallest crowds? Is there a shift in population demographics from daytime to evening? Do people feel safe at some times but not others?

Ambience

Place ambience is shaped by the character and condition of the architecture forming the space, by the activity and energy there, and by a wide variety of contextual circumstances. Mood and atmosphere can be flavored by factors like reputation, symbolism, and place name.

The words we use to describe for ourselves the architectural character of a plaza serve to create a component of the space's ambience. Buildings may be heavy, austere, light, ornate, opaque, transparent, inviting, foreboding. We could feel intimately embraced or oppressed by the enclosing structures. Is the space completely enclosed by buildings? Are there gaps between the facades? Key buildings in plazas establish place theme, and theme translates to ambience. A church, palace, museum, city hall, or theater can set the tone and energy in a space.

Building age affects mood. An ancient place feels different from a new place. Care, maintenance, and condition influence ambience too. A plaza formed by buildings covered with pigeon droppings is difficult to soak up with our senses. Ground plane can be a strong mood-shaping element. Is the plaza floor grass? All paved? Is movement controlled by a walk system, or are we free to move in any direction? What are the texture, pattern, and condition of the paving material? The architecture of a plaza includes its landscaping. Plazas lined with trees, canopied by tree groves, spatially articulated by tree groupings have a mood unlike spaces with no landscaping at all.

Vine-covered walks, window pots, trees peeking over cloister gates, glimpses into lush private patios can soften the severity of a plaza hardscape. How do we describe the space landscape to ourselves? Tropical? Spare? Thriving? Dormant? Mature? Nurtured with care? Is the place ornamented with flowers and filled with the aroma of blossoms?

Activity pace and energy help create space atmosphere and feel. We quickly notice if a place is devoted to pedestrians or vehicles, how crowded it is, who owns the space, what people are doing, demeanor, and movement intensity. All senses appreciate the energy of plaza action. We see what's happening. Feel the jostle of the crowd and pavement under foot. Hear the tour guides, church bells, musicians, conversations. Smell the roasting chestnuts, chimney smoke, food, buggy horses. And taste the cappuccino, pastries, cafe fare.

Emotions are influenced by action. Feeling safe, threatened, invigorated, proud, joyful, confused, hassled, frustrated, peaceful can be responses to