

cafés and restaurants – began to appear along the river and it became a tourist attraction, greatly increasing the user population.

The importance of natural elements, especially water, in accentuating a contrast to the urban setting is a frequent theme in open space research. Studies of New York's Exxon Minipark and Greenacre Park have demonstrated the drawing power of simulated waterfalls for people seeking "a respite from the 'hustle-bustle' of the city" (Project for Public Spaces, 1978, p. 15). In her Greenacre Park study, Burden (1977) underscores the significance of the park's waterfall by describing what happens when it is turned off: "People halt conversations abruptly and make ready to leave. The sounds of the city suddenly fill the park, absorbing it and transforming an oasis into an adjunct of the street" (p. 33).

Natural features, such as trees and other greenery, were found to be the dominant factor in Bryant Park offering opportunities for retreat and relaxation (Nager & Wentworth, 1976). This is a view echoed in people's reactions to many open spaces. The opportunities to sit on grass, bask in the shade cast by a tree, or enjoy the greenery and flowers are greatly appreciated.

Although research bears out the importance of providing opportunities for relaxation in urban public spaces, not all spaces should be designed and managed with this in mind. Some sites should accommodate persons seeking liveliness and engagement with the city and its people.

Passive engagement

Passive engagement with the environment could lead to a sense of relaxation but it differs in that it involves the need for an encounter with the setting, albeit without becoming actively involved. This category includes the frequently observed interest and enjoyment people derive from watching the passing scene. This kind of encounter is indirect or passive, because it involves looking rather than talking or doing. There are many examples of places that serve this function and a popularity that testifies to this need.

People-watching is a frequently reported activity in small urban spaces. Whyte (1980, 1988) and his associates (Lindsay, 1978) indicate that it is the most popular activity in downtown plazas. According to Whyte (1980, p. 13), "What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people." In a study of San Francisco plazas, Lindsay (1978) found that the favorite sitting places were adjacent to the pedestrian flow,

in particular, near street corners. Similarly, R. L. Love (1973) found that the most frequently mentioned activity at two Portland fountains was "watching other people." She concludes, somewhat optimistically, that "The popularity of people watching, in conjunction with the heterogeneity of fountain visitors, points to the conclusion that through their visits to the fountains people do partake of the city's urbanity by being in contact with all the social types that contribute to it" (p. 193).

Other writers suggest that physical separations can facilitate visual contacts with people. Cooper Marcus (1978) states that observing others is the most popular activity at Minneapolis's Crystal Court, and that the provision of an upper balcony from which to look down at the crowd is particularly important. This elevated vantage point allows the observer to "watch people while avoiding eye contact" (p. 39). The terrace overlooking Rockefeller Center's skating rink is another heavily frequented viewing spot, especially in cool weather when skaters are below. Even when the recessed level is a restaurant, people look down into the space below. Cascades of steps leading to public buildings such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York are popular if unplanned places for watching an array of city sights.

The open cafés of European cities, especially in France, are enjoyed as much for the opportunity to watch pedestrian traffic as for their refreshments. In the open cafés in mild weather and glass-enclosed ones in the cold seasons, patrons linger for hours over a drink or a coffee cup, which provides the excuse to observe the street scenes. This form of public activity has increased in popularity in the United States as restaurants have obtained permits to spill over onto the streets.

Another important attraction of public spaces is the opportunity to observe performers and formal activities. The scheduling of special events has become a popular management approach in many urban plazas and parks. In addition to the now commonplace scheduling of concerts and other formal events, several of the larger downtown complexes such as Boston's Faneuil Market, New York's South Street Seaport and San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square feature regular performances by street entertainers throughout the day. Although these events may strike some visitors as spontaneous, the artists generally are auditioned and issued permits by the management (Project for Public Spaces, 1984).

In parks outside downtown areas, observing games and sporting events offers a kind of passive engagement that often is sought. For example,