

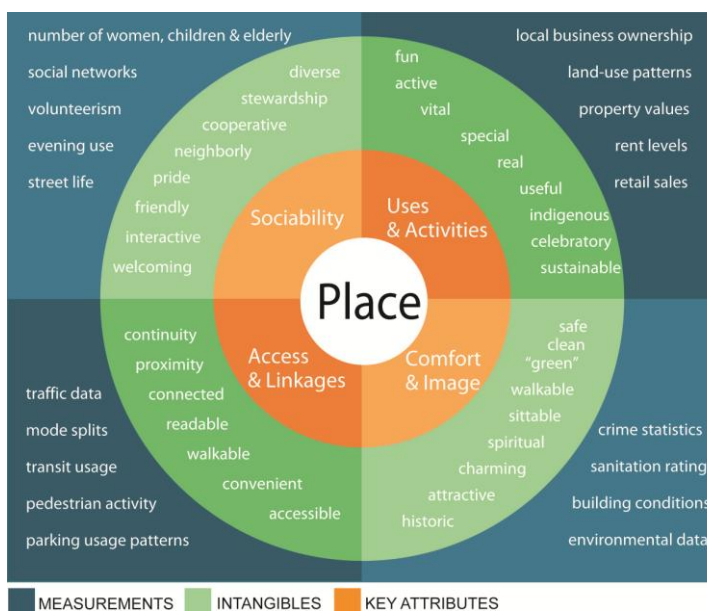
What Makes a Place Great?

It's surprisingly simple.

Public places are a stage for our public lives. They are the downtown streets where celebrations are held, where marathons end, and where cultures mix. They are the sidewalks in front of homes and businesses where friends run into each other and where exchanges, both social and economic, take place. They are the transit stations where we interact with each other and with government. When cities and neighborhoods use their transportation facilities as gathering places, residents have a strong sense of community; conversely, when they are devoted to vehicular traffic, we turn away from these public places and feel less connected to each other.

Most great places—whether a grand downtown plaza or humble neighborhood park—share four key attributes:

1. It is **accessible** and well-connected to other important places in the area.
2. The space is **comfortable** and projects a good **image**.
3. People are drawn to participate in **activities** there.
4. It is a **social** place where people like to gather, visiting it again and again.



The Place Diagram was developed by Project for Public Spaces Inc. (PPS) to help communities evaluate their own places. The inner ring represents key attributes, the middle ring intangible qualities, and the outer ring measurable data.

Access and Linkages



You can easily judge the accessibility of a place by noting its connections to the surroundings – including the visual links. A great public space is easy to get to, easy to enter, and easy to navigate your way through. It's arranged in a way so you can see most of what is going on there, both from a distance and up close. The edges of a public space also play an important role in making it accessible; a row of shops along a street, for instance, is more interesting and generally safer to walk along than a blank wall or an empty lot. Accessible spaces are conveniently reached by foot and, ideally, public transit, and have a high parking turnover.

Questions to consider about Access and Linkages:

- Can you see the space from a distance? Is its interior visible from the outside?
- Is there a good connection between this place and adjacent buildings? Or is it surrounded by blank walls, surface parking lots, windowless buildings, or other alienating elements that discourage people from entering the area?
- Do occupants of adjacent buildings use the space?
- Can people easily walk to the place? Or are they intimidated by heavy traffic or forlorn streetscapes?
- Do sidewalks lead to and from the adjacent areas?
- Does the space function well for people with disabilities and other special needs?
- Do the paths throughout the space take people where they actually want to go?
- Can people use a variety of transportation options – bus, train, car, and bicycle – to reach the place?

Comfort and Image



A space that is comfortable and looks inviting is likely to be successful. A sense of comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness, and the availability of places to sit. A lack of seating is the surprising downfall of many otherwise good places. People are drawn to places that give them a choice of places to sit, so they can at various times of day or year be either in or out of the sun. Women are good judges of comfort and image, because they tend to be more discriminating about the public spaces they use.

Questions to consider about Comfort and Image:

- Does the place make a good first impression?
- Are there as many women as men?

- Are there enough places to sit? Are seats conveniently located? Do people have a choice of places to sit, either in the sun or shade?
- Are spaces clean and free of litter? Who is responsible for maintenance?
- Does the area feel safe? Are there security personnel present? If so, what do these people do? When are they on duty?
- Are people taking pictures? Are there many photo opportunities available?
- Do vehicles dominate pedestrian use of the space, or prevent them from easily getting to the space?

Uses and Activities



A range of activities are the fundamental building blocks of a great place. Having something to do gives people a reason to come to a place – and return. When there is nothing interesting to do, a space will sit empty. That's the best measure that something is wrong. A carefully chosen range of activities will help a place attract a variety of people at different times of the day. A playground will draw young kids during the day, while basketball courts draw older kids after school and concerts bring in everyone during the evening.

Questions to consider about Uses and Activities:

- Are people using the space or is it empty?
- Is it used by people of different ages?
- How many different types of activities are occurring at one time – people walking, eating, playing baseball, chess, relaxing, reading?
- Which parts of the space are used and which are not?
- Is there a management presence, or can you identify anyone in charge of the space?

Sociability



This is the most important quality for a place to achieve—and the most difficult. When a place becomes a favorite spot for people to meet friends, greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, then you are well on your way to having a great place.

Questions to consider about Sociability:

- Is this a place where you would choose to meet your friends? Are others meeting friends here?
- Are people in groups? Are they talking with one another? Do they talk to people in other groups?
- Do people seem to know each other by face or by name?
- Do people bring their friends and relatives to see the place? Do they point to its features with pride?
- Are people smiling? Do people make regular eye contact with each other?
- Do many people use the place frequently?
- Does the mix of ages and ethnic groups generally reflect the community at large?
- Do people tend to pick up litter when they see it?