PROMOTING SOCIAL INTERACTION THROUGH URBAN DESIGN

A pocket park in downtown Indianapolis for homeless and the local community
Delaware Street Park: A Pocket Park for Homeless at Wheeler Mission and local community

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I would like to take this opportunity to give thanks and appreciation:

To God, for the strength he has given me to pursue my degree and for the joy he in which he has filled me

To Mom, Dad, Eileen, and Erin, who have really blessed me with their love, generosity, and kindness.

To my advisor Rob Benson, for his support and dedication to this project and pushing me along in the rough parts.

To my professors Ron Spangler and Chris Marlow, for their dedication to our class and interest in the development of our projects

To my friends, who have helped me to focus, mellow out, finish strong, and fill me with joy.
The United States offers freedom to people. This country offers the opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, not all citizens experience this luxury. Not everyone can go where they please and do what they want. For example, homelessness which has existed for thousands of years has been a problem. The solution to managing this portion of society is to put them in a place where they will not pose a threat to "the rest of society". They are a marginalized people, with no place to settle. And though there could be any number of reasons that a person is homeless, we view them all as a threat. We take pity on them, maybe as a moral obligation to take care of the weak, or perhaps we fear that someday we may need a hand up. Rare is the occasion where we truly take an interest in their story, their experience, and their life. We throw money at the problem and ask government and churches to care for the less fortunate. But on the sidewalk, we ignore them, commit acts of violence against them, and choose not to address their needs. All people have the same basic needs as defined by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We have basic needs such as food, shelter, and water. Above that is our social needs. We need to feel that we are a part of a group, that someone can be a testimony to our lives. But in a society where we continually push people around to another location, and refuse to address them on a deeper level, and fail to meet the social need for a percentage of the population.

This project, is in no way meant to be a solution to homelessness, or a place for homeless to set up a living arrangement. This project is intended to meet the people where they are and serve their needs. So that hopefully, they can feel that they are a part of society and that society views them as less of a threat, and more like a valued human being. Meeting the social needs of a person can only happen after meeting the basic needs. Once those are met, then we can begin to give these homeless men and women a place in our society. You cannot force people to interact, but you can provide spaces and activities that would promote interaction (verbal or non-verbal) between different groups in a safe and inviting atmosphere.
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Landscape architects are not only stewards of the land. Additionally, we have the ability and responsibility to initiate social change through design. Ironically, a society of Ipods, cell phones, computers, television, and gaming systems, seems to have lost connection with one another. Humans are social being, and if we are to develop as individuals we need a social community. Landscape architects create parks, plazas, and other types of outdoor spaces that, if designed well, improve the quality of life and the provide a place outside of work and home to connect with others.

Unfortunately there are those that are estranged, not by choice necessarily, but rather by imposition of society. Circumstances within or outside of their control may have gotten them in their present position, but it is society that relegates them to social outcasts. Misunderstandings and a few bad experiences have caused society to label them as "undesirable". Financial support is available for this community, but rare is the person that takes a genuine interest in a homeless person's story. I propose that it is not only right to have that interaction and potentially help them, but it is possible to have an enjoyable interaction with this group in society.

Visiting and living in a few countries in Asia for a few months I was exposed to interaction between all groups of people with little regard to economic status. Business men and homeless would use the same public space at the same time. This experience sparked an interest in promoting a type of communal social experience in the United States.

This book discusses the process I went through to study and design for this project. Preliminary research aided in understanding the theory and basic principals associated with designing for social interaction. This study defines homelessness, ways to ways to promote social interaction, and case studies specifically related to social interaction of homeless and local community. After determining client needs, I established design guidelines, and posed a hypothetical model of a park.
INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study sought to understand why and how we treat the underclass the way we do. Using that understanding, it would be my hope that as designers we could look at ways of designing for all users and promote increased positive interactions between all people, regardless of economic or social background. This study also sought to look at factors of sicability and the needs that can be met for homeless that would foster interaction.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Marginalized communities are not a new phenomenon. One group consistent throughout the United States are homeless. The social stigma associated with homelessness is negative and includes behavior such as loitering, pan-handling, laziness, crime, drug and alcohol abuse problems, and mental instability. However, uncontrolled life circumstances have for many dictated their situation. This means that not everyone who is homeless poses a threat to society. I believe that with the provision of a place that equalizes the space, is safe, desirable, plays into the local venacular, designers have the potential to change the paradigm among much of society.
DEFINITION OF TERMS

*Homeless*: someone who lacks a fixed and regular nighttime residence. (Stewart B. McKinney Act, 42, USC, nationalhomeless.org) Homeless can be seen as those who are roofless or have inadequate or insecure housing.

*Hierarchy of Needs*: a theory by Maslow that categorized and prioritizes human needs. At the bottom of the pyramid are the basic needs such as food and shelter. The next step in the pyramid is the need for safety, followed by self esteem, and finally self actualization at the top.

*Self Actualization*: to find self-fulfillment and realize one’s potential

*“Third Place”*: informal gathering place that is socially leveling (Oldenburg)
THEORY

This project required an understanding of Urban Design and concepts associated with it. More specifically it required an understanding homeless in an urban context and socialization that can be promoted through design.

Urban Design:

In the book Great Good Places, Oldenburg talks about the importance of a gathering place between work and home that acts as a social leveler and creates a sense of belonging. For the upper economic levels of society it provides a get away from pressure to perform. For the lower economic level of society it provides an opportunity to feel equal. Such an informal “third place” should be inclusive, have public access, no formal or perceived criteria for membership, use conversation as a main activity, and adequate and variable seating. The principals in this book are primarily taken from setting such as cafés and bars. Some of those same principles can be used to understand the type of informal space that promotes social interaction outdoors.

Key aspects related to design, in any space, include appropriate seating, scale, texture, color, and attractions. Ford, author of The Spaces between Buildings, using photography and descriptions, in conjunction with case studies, shows the reader how space is affected by design characteristics. This book, in the same manner as Oldenburg, stresses the importance of a “third place” where people can meet on a casual basis (210). Informal gathering spaces enliven a city. Social spaces such as the sidewalk, verandah, or front porch stoop are the settings for markets, gatherings, and discussion. Facades alter the dimension of the landscape and street pattern. Fences and walls define boundaries and enclose a space making it seem exclusive. Problems can occur from poor design such as blank walls and parking lots which become an invitation for graffiti and crime. However, when color, texture, scale, and image are taken into consideration, spaces take on an improved social dynamic allowing all classes to feel comfortable.

Jan Gehl, in Life Between Buildings, discusses ways in which to improve
the success of design. Three types of outdoor activities include those that are necessary, optional, and social. Activities that are necessary involve work, waiting for transportation, or shopping. Activities that are optional include sun bathing or taking a walk. Social experiences are people watching or playing with kids. Gehl states that the physical framework does not have a direct influence on the quality, content, and intensity of social contacts, but architects and planners can affect the possibilities for meetings (15). A successful urban space allows opportunities for people to be seen, heard, and meet. Gehl recommends contact at a modest level, a possible starting point for contact at other levels, as well as possibilities for maintaining an already established contact, a source of information about the social world outside, a source of inspiration and stimulating experience, and the option for planned or unplanned activities. Recommendations include, but are not limited to, several types of seating, slowing down traffic in the city by adding visual interest and changing social distances to a more intimate scale, protection for climactic conditions, and more.

Homelessness:
Understanding homeless people's needs and how these needs can be met through design is necessary in order to make a suitable and lively urban space appropriate for people of all financial backgrounds. According to an article by Vince Hoenigman (2003) Homelessness in a Progressive City, homelessness is usually one of the following: immigrant workers, substance abusers, mentally ill, physically disabled, young people, single mother families, elderly, toddlers, or people with HIV (Hoenigman 49). Redburn and Buss in Responding to America's Homelessness say that half of the homeless have financial problems. A quarter is homeless due to personal crisis. Seven percent claim substance abuse for their reason. Six percent prefer this kind of life. The remaining twelve percent were unclear in their response.

Homeless people have the same needs as everyone else at a basic level. According to Abraham Maslow, a notable human psychologist, there are five levels of needs. These include physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-
actualization. These needs are depicted in a pyramid form with the physiological needs as the base and self-actualization at the top triangle of the pyramid. As one need is met, a person moves up the pyramid to a higher level of need. Physiological needs include basic needs such as food, oxygen, water, and comfortable temperature. As homeless people attempt to meet these basic needs they have little energy to devote to meeting higher levels of need. Once the physiologic needs are met, then they can begin to think about security. The need for belongingness, good will, and love is crucial to meet because it can affect the mental health of individuals. This need can be met by a place that is designed for equal interaction between individuals despite financial and personal situations. The movement out of homelessness can be motivated by meeting needs for belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Greenburg 1999).

Redburn and Buss (1986), in Responding to America’s Homeless, take a similar but slightly different viewpoint. They assign homeless to four need categories. These include needs for shelter, custodial care, crisis care, and development services (102). Permanent custodial care is needed for those that are disabled, cannot be employed, or have severe mental disorders. Those in need of development assistance are those that have never been employed, have been in and out of institutions, or have substance abuse problems. People in need of crisis care are in need of shelter either because of an eviction, loss of job, or situational homelessness due to natural disaster. Those in need of shelter may be homeless for no identifiable problem (100-102). Historically, the question that has been asked is who needs help and what the adequacy of the programs in place is. People are now asking how to make homeless economically stable and provide attachments to other people (109).

Current solution is to give to homeless shelters, food banks, and church missions monetary and material donations for those in need. This meets their material physical needs, but leaves a deficit in safety and higher needs. Some cities are stepping beyond the call of duty to give these people a place to be. Cities like Los Angeles, California and Portland, Oregon are making great strides in planning to
remove homelessness. Los Angeles is working to assess the needs of the homeless in order to find them employment. In Portland, Dignity Village is a unique location that provides a place in an area of parking lots and railroads. Despite the less than ideal location, it serves a need for shelter, safety, and community that would otherwise not be met for a majority for the homeless in Portland. Dignity Village is a place where married couples can be together, women don’t have to fear for their safety, someone can leave their belongings for an interview or meeting, and it also allows a place for someone to sleep comfortably for the night knowing that no one will kick them out. Whatever the reason for homelessness, people have the opportunity to either stay homeless or get out. Some may not be able to change circumstances on their own. However, others if given the opportunity and means to change their situation would. Hopefully through design, empowerment can be given to the homeless through designing for spaces such as selling, trading, or manufacturing goods (Lee 2004).

In Networks and Places, Fischer (1977) argues that communal relationships develop in corporate groups because “limitations on choice of social relations promote communal ties (12).” He places importance on interactions in terms of duration, frequency, and material interdependence which lead to communal ties (12). In the chapter Attachment to Place, the authors argue that “attachment to place is not a unitary dimension but, instead, social involvement in and subjective feelings toward a place (139).” Also they argue that “people choose to become attached to a place in different ways, depending on their personal needs, opportunities, resources, and on the characteristic of the homes and places in which they live (139).” Networks and Places emphasizes that communal interaction is a need and that design of a place of interaction is important.

Each of these sources indicate that social networks and interaction are crucial to all people and suggest ways in which it is manifested. It is these principals I implemented into my design
CASE STUDIES

A model for a good social space is Paley Park. This park doesn’t relate to the integration of homeless into the social fabric, but is successful as a place that is comfortable and is safe. A more appropriate example of good urban design that includes homeless is Lafayette Square Park in Oakland, California designed by Walter Hood, in the redesign it was created as open and informal place to do an activity of choice, allowing people of all backgrounds to feel welcome and safe.

New York City’s Paley Park success can be attributed to design characteristics such as moveable seating, shade, a variety of seating types, attraction, and white noise. It is an attractive place gathering place free from substance abuse, crime, or begging. has seen little crime since its inception, and crime has been limited to minor infractions (Whyte, 311) Paley Park is a type of “third place” that was mentioned in Great Good Places. This design demonstrates how to bring people into a site as well as make them feel comfortable and safe.
A design that merits equal attention is **Lafayette Square Park**, designed by Walter Hood, landscape architect and social activist, in Oakland, California. This park was in desperate need of an overhaul. Many of the residents nearby requested that the park allowed for the continued presence of existing users. This park was better known as “old man’s park”, for the large number of homeless men that stayed in the park. Walter Hood designed the park to be implemented in phases. The park is an informal design, a messy place if you will. This park is designed to let any person use the park for their purposes. This means that business men eat their lunch next to homeless men. This also means that a person can come with a child to play on the playground. Or perhaps someone is interested in taking their dog for a walk. This is exactly the type of gathering place that makes a place lively and allows people the opportunity to connect to others (Blum).
CONCLUSION

The dominant theme common among related to social interaction and homelessness is a need for social belonging which should be fostered through design located within the context of both work and home. Addressing the needs of the homeless empowers the social needs of others in a community as well. There is a need for a place that has no pressure to perform and allows for meetings and conversation on an equal level. Through connections and self-esteem developed through a sense of belonging, homeless people can be given something beyond shelters assist them in achieving better mental health and hopefully better opportunities for economic improvement. Many people try to address homelessness by placing them out of sight of society. Perhaps, a better solution is involving homeless in local community so that they take pride in their neighborhood and selves. This can be mutually beneficial both to the city and to the homeless individual.
CRITERIA FOR SITE SELECTION

This project focused on the promotion of interaction between homeless and the local community while addressing the social needs of the homeless and community. This means that first I located my project where the homeless and other people are in community. The site also needed to have basic needs (food and shelter) met at an adjacent facility. This site also had to be accessible so that the clients needs could be better observed and assessed, meaning it need to be located near public transportation. This brought me to downtown Indianapolis near within the same block of Wheeler Mission which has a vacant site within the same block and meets all the criteria.
SITE CONTEXT

Located in the heart of downtown Indianapolis, Indiana just a few blocks northeast of Monument Circle. Parks and vegetation are at a minimum downtown and provide little in regards to activity and intimate outdoor space. Additionally, there is a lot of parking in the surrounding area, and it is often used as a place to pass through. Just one block to the north of the site is Massachusetts Ave. which is considered the arts district for Indianapolis and will bring people to the area at night and on weekends. The land use for the surrounding few blocks is primarily commercial, which supports activity downtown during the day.

Located in Indianapolis, IN
SITE CONTEXT

The location of the park, as indicated by red dot on the map below, is in the heart of downtown. Within walking distance of monument circle, Massachusetts Avenue, city plazas and the University Park and Veteran’s Plaza. The property is just off of Washington which runs east west, connecting my site on Delaware St. to I-65.
SITE CONTEXT

As you can see, Massachusetts Ave. is only one block to the north where there are art walks in the evenings occasionally. The City markets are one block to the south and are used for different functions throughout the year. The Courthouse is two blocks to the west. To the west one block is the City Building. To the east one block are townhouses. Along Delaware are some restaurants, bail bond agencies, and other miscellaneous stores. Essentially, the site is located in a high traffic area that operates during all hours of the day either for business or pleasure.
SITE CONTEXT

The pocket park is located on a fairly major arterial through downtown Indianapolis. It also has a couple of alleys, wide enough for cars to pass through that provide access throughout site. The buildings to the north and to the south of the site enclose the site. The parking garage and City Building one block the west is tall and helps to enclose the site. Wheeler Mission’s location just to the north of the site provides close access for the users of the mission to the site. The neighboring parking lots provide a lot of cross traffic through the site. The users of the commercial buildings and the interim library also have close access to the park.

LEGEND

- Site
- Building
- Parking
INVENTORY: PARKING

Parking in downtown Indianapolis is plentiful. In the core of downtown, just around Monument Circle are parking garages. Around the location of my site parking becomes surface parking. Just across the street is a large parking facility. The site itself currently used as privately owned surface parking.

LEGEND
- Surface
- Building
METHODOLOGY

INVENTORY: PARKS AND VEGETATION

image from regional center development plan 2020 for Indianapolis
**INVENTORY: PARKS AND RECREATION**

The site is located near bicycles paths and proposed pedestrian route allowing great connection to pedestrians. The closest public outdoor spaces near the Mission are the City Markets just one block to the south, and starting a couple blocks to the northwest are the Veterans Memorial and University Plaza. These parks are on a more grand scale and are used to frame other buildings. The City Markets have activities throughout the year but don’t provide any kind of intimate space.
INVENTORY: LAND USE

The site is in the high density mixed use adjacent to the medium density mixed use. Some residential townhouses are built just to the east of the site. The governmental properties have a presence in the core of downtown Indianapolis. There are residential units just a block to the east. Because this is a high density area with mixed users nearby, there are many eyes on this area throughout the day and prevents the limitation of the park to one user group.

LEGEND
- High Density Mix Use
- Med. Density Mix Use
- Residential
- Park/ Open Space
- Public
INVENTORY: BUS ROUTES

Image from regional center development plan 2020 for Indianapolis
INVENTORY: BUS ROUTES

Bus routes are easily accessible at the site. The bus routes travel all throughout downtown Indianapolis connecting the men and women to employment opportunities.

LEGEND
- **IndyGo Blue Line**
- **Bus Route**
SITE PHOTOS

*Top:* looking into the site from the south western part of the site you can see the law office on the north side (left) with the windows over looking the property, empty skyline where the parking lot is, the interim library, the tall eight story insurance building, and the wall to the south of the property (right) is blank.

*Bottom:* from the opposite perspective you can see the eight story insurance building (left), the blank wall, the parking garage across the street, and the building to the north of the site (right). As you can see the site feels enclosed.
SITE ANALYSIS

--primary arterial has northbound traffic
--vehicular alleys bound all sides of site
--pedestrian alleys and traffic patterns pass through the site
--morning and afternoon sun primarily
--blank wall on S. building is overbearing

--visual separation should be made between the site and surrounding context
--building enclose site
--visual pedestrian gateway should be made off of Delaware
--edge should be provided between Miami St. on N. of site and the site
METHODOLOGY

ASSUMPTIONS

--All people have physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs
--There are economic and social benefits to providing for the needs of the less fortunate
--Groups are interested in site specific design for homeless people
--Landscape Architects have the ability and responsibility to bring people together

LIMITATIONS

--The problem of homelessness is not solved through the design
--The project is not intended to provide housing/night shelter
--Social programs are not planned into the design
--No cost estimate is provided
--Phasing, implementation, and construction are not addressed
--Political issues of redesigning a place downtown for homeless is not addressed
VISION

With the scale of Paley Park, I would expect that both homeless and businessmen and families could gather, people watch, play basketball, see a movie, participate in a job fair, play checkers, take a lunch, see an art exhibit in this unique and intimate gathering space. I expect that allowing people a safe and desirable place to gather, participate in activities, and cross paths, that at some point a foundation will be laid in the minds of everyone that it not only safe to interact with someone unlike yourself, but a pleasurable experience.

Through the use of planned and unplanned activities during the day and evening, cop patrols, visibility, and lighting will enhance the feeling of safety throughout the day and prevent undesirable activities within the site and area while being a desirable place to be.

Looking into the goals and objectives in relationship with the design, it will become apparent that this site enhances the quality of life for the homeless and the local community for the people in downtown Indianapolis.
CLIENT

--Homeless individuals in downtown Indianapolis
--Wheeler Mission
--The surrounding business community

PROJECT GOALS

SOCIAL: Promote interaction between different social classes
--Locate near homeless and businesses
--Link to Wheeler Mission, Mass Ave, City Market, & University Park
--Provide seating (movable, edge, right angle, near activity)
--Provide central area for crossing paths
--Planned and unplanned activity spaces
--Attract people with activity, food, water, climate control, & ambiance

USABLE: Provide a comfortable, safe, and desirable
--Maintain visibility through site
--Appropriate scale
--Compatibility and choice of activities
--Allow for change in activities because of user, time, and weather
--Spatial props/ and flat level surfaces
--Lighting in and around site

DEVELOPMENTAL: Allow for and play into continued development in downtown Indianapolis and within the site
--Provide view sheds from and to other major axis
--Allow design to reach into surrounding parking lots in the block
DESIGN PROGRAM

Total site is approx. 2000 sq. ft. and will include
  Seating (wall or moveable)
  Tables
  Open space (multi-use)
  Basketball court
  Play area
  Overhead cover
  Vegetation
  Planting Beds
  Movie Wall
  Lighting
  Link to Wheeler Mission front
OUTDOOR ROOMS
Combining passive and active space I arranged the programmed spaces and lighting in such a manner as to move people through the site and provide activities that would attract people into the site. A fountain in the center terminates entrance view
CROSSROADS
Active spaces were placed on the outside with intense lighting and lighting through the park to move people through. Central view is planting bed. Seating wall along Delaware acts as gateway. Efficient travel through the site drives form of design.
CONCEPTUAL MASTER PLAN

Concepts were combined to create a series of rooms with a cross movement through the site using intense lighting and activity on either site to bring people in and through the site and using lighting to pull people through the site. The fountain is used to terminate the view from Delaware. Seating along the street allows for people watching and gateway. Vegetation was also used extensively in the design.

Modifications were made from mid-term plan that included the movement of the planting beds to the north side of the site to allow for greater sun exposer. A connection between the site and the entrance to Wheeler Mission needed to be addressed. Utilization of the blank wall on the building to the south of the site was advantageous to the design. Movement through the site was inhibited by the central fountain and terraces. Connection between the basketball court and the park needed to be made for continuity reasons. Finally the play area was too large for the number of users and needed to be adjusted.
MASTER PLAN

- Front Gathering Area
- Dining Area
- Fountain
- Planters with Seating
- Large Gathering Area
- Playground
- Edge Seating
- Basketball Court
- Movie Wall

DELAWARE STREET

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT
DESIGN CRITERIA

1. Design allows for easy cross movement through site
2. Planters allow for movement through and around
3. Planters provide seating for movie wall
4. A central gathering area is available for crossing paths and meeting
5. Users must be able to engage in safe activities in which they already participate
6. Gateway/Entrance was defined
7. Pull users off sidewalk
8. Activity spaces must address street to bring people into the site
9. Visibility is maintained through the site
10. Lighting is located at either end intensely and through the site to bring people in and move them through the site.
11. Connection to Wheeler Mission is strengthened by change in pavement and lighting
12. Allow different types of seating for different types of gatherings
13. Design provides optimal viewing of fountain from large gathering area, dining area, and Delaware St.
14. Street Trees extent site into the sidewalk
15. Playground is located in safe area with seating
16. Movie wall is visible from Mass. Ave. to bring people into site
17. Must be able to move around fountain
18. Wide entrance prevents crowding along sidewalk and entrance
19. Site allows for continued development to the north along the backside of Wheeler Mission
20. Fence along the east side of the basketball court prevents fly away balls
SECTIONS
AERIAL PERSPECTIVE
ENTRANCE
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

DINING AREA
FRONT GATHERING AREA
CONCLUSION

This project represents a hypothetical model for an urban design that promotes social interaction in a local community. Hopefully this project justifies a deeper look and further exploration into designing places that promote more interaction within our society, included marginalized populations. Though this project does not solve homelessness, perhaps it has done something to open a dialogue about how to approach a problem as old as time in a new and practical way.


Chip (Coalition for Homeless Intervention and Prevention) 2005 http://chipindy.org


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Inventory Maps from the Regionaal Center Plan for Indianapolis 2020