**Public Life Field Study Assignment**

**Purpose**: To investigate the interaction between life and form. In other words, how does the form of a physical space impact people’s experiences of everyday life? While we don’t have the opportunity to conduct a full ethnography in this class, this field study assignment will get you thinking about how intentional observations can lead to important insights about the lives of others as well as our own.

**Background**: Carefully read Ch. 2 and 3 of Gehl and Svarre’s book *How to Study Public Life* (on Canvas). Think about what kinds of questions you want to ask, and what tools you are going to use to answer them.

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**Assignment**: You will conduct a field study somewhere in a public space. It can be on campus or somewhere else. Try to pick somewhere that is used for a variety of functions, including leisure, movement from one place to another, work etc. This type of dynamic space will yield the best and most interesting results.

**Method**:

* Choose a space you want to observe. It can be as big or small as you like. But, try to pick something that is not empty most of the time.
* You must observe that space at least 2 times, for at least a total of 1 hour each time. Choose two different times so you can think about how that space is used differently. For example, during the day or the evening; during nice weather or poor weather; during the week or on the weekend.
* Decide in advance what tools you will use in your study, and what information you are going to record (based on the reading). This might involve doing a preliminary 10-20 minute observation of the space in order to find out what kinds of possible observations you might make there.

**Questions to ask:** in both designing and conducting your study

How many?

* How many people use this space?
* What exactly are you counting?

Where?

* Limit it to something feasible within the allotted time
* Where in the space do people move vs stay? Stand vs. sit?

When?

* Weather
* Time of day
* Relevant activities at that time of day (ie. class, meal time, social/public event etc)

Who?

* Gender, age, ability/disability, race
* On foot, on bike, etc
* Individuals
* Groups

What?

* Necessary vs optional activities
* Walk/stand/sit/play – group the activities into meaningful units – these groupings will be based on what you observe so can be defined after you collect your data.
* Interactions between people: greetings, communication, with strangers, friends, etc.

How long?

* Speed of travel
* Length of stay

**Tools to use:**

* See page 24 for a summary of the different tools you can use to record activity in the space you are observing. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of each tool.
* Be systematic in your tool choices and methods of observation, you will be asked to describe procedures.
* Think creatively about what other kinds of tools/technologies you might be able to use that aren’t specified here.
  + Ie. camera phone
  + GPS apps like Map My Run (which records map of your run, records speed etc.).

**Written Assignment** - You will turn in:

1. Your field notes from whatever kind of data you collect. Do not rewrite these, they can and should be messy if being done by hand.
2. One page presentation of your findings. See Gehl and Svarre, Pg. 33. Be creative with this. How do you want to display your information? What kinds of visuals will best display what you are trying to show? What information do you want to include? You may do this by hand, or using a computer.
3. A one page, single-spaced, typed written response answering the following questions:
   1. Describe the choices you made in conducting this field study (setting, method, times chosen and why, tools chosen and why etc).
   2. What did this observation tell you about the interactions between life and form in this particular space?
   3. What did you learn about the “culture” of this space?
   4. What changes to this space do you think would improve public life and why?