



“Three Types of Outdoor Activities,” “Life Between Buildings,” and “Outdoor Activities and the Quality of Outdoor Space”

from *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (1987)

Jan Gehl

Editors' Introduction



With its long winters and reserved residents, Copenhagen, Denmark, seems an unlikely setting for vibrant new uses of outdoor urban spaces. When Copenhagen created one of Europe's first pedestrian-free zones – Strøget (Literally, “the sweep”) – in 1962, skeptics predicted the experiment would fail. But now the Strøget carfree zone is the longest pedestrian shopping area in the world, swarming with people shopping, walking, sitting, chatting, playing, drawing, eating, making and listening to music, people-watching, and simply being with other people.

Danish architect Jan Gehl and his followers have been at the forefront of innovative designs to promote the “life between buildings” that Strøget exemplifies. As Strøget and other innovative Danish designs for space between buildings succeeded, Gehl's ideas have been embraced by architects, urban designers and urban planners throughout the world. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription for pedestrian-only streets. Some, like New York's Times Square or the area around the Acropolis in Greece, have been extremely successful. Others have failed to attract the expected pedestrian flow and failed.

It is the millions of day-to-day interactions in ordinary neighborhoods that determine the quality of life for most of humanity: walking the dog, taking chicken soup next door to a sick neighbor, washing the car, puttering in a front yard garden, leaning over a fence to gossip with a friend, just going outside for the joy of it. Gehl argues that designs that encourage people to spend time outdoors and make interacting with other people outdoors enjoyable can make a big difference in city dwellers' quality of life.

Gehl notes that some outdoor activities – like delivering the mail and going to work or school – have to take place regardless of the quality of the built environment or how people feel about being outside. Good design will have a negligible impact on whether or not these activities take place, though they will affect how enjoyable they are and may affect how much time people choose to spend doing them. But, Gehl notes, many outdoor activities that take place in the space between buildings – taking a walk, chatting with a neighbor, sunbathing – are optional. If the physical environment makes them pleasant, people will engage in them; if it does not they won't. Gehl feels that designs that encourage contact among people at any level, from very simple and noncommittal contacts such as seeing, hearing, and being among other people to complex and emotionally involved connections, enrich people's lives.

Outdoor social interactions result from both necessary and optional activities. Since the extent to which people choose to engage in optional activities depends on how enjoyable they find them, designers can help create lively cities by designing good outdoor space, particularly ones that will encourage optional time spent outside.

The heart of Gehl's theory involves four dualities: designs that assemble or disperse, integrate or segregate, invite or repel, and open up or close in. Gehl advocates designs that assemble, integrate, invite, and open up.

Gehl likes designs that assemble. The idea of how design can assemble people is well illustrated by an everyday example. Shopping mall designers usually design mall stores to be narrow and deep so that people will pass many different store windows as they walk through the mall – a design that assembles people. Gehl made a brilliant connection. Narrower residential lots (and the houses on them) will result in more housing units per linear foot of street frontage and more people walking along the streets. People walking along streets with narrow lots will pass more of their neighbors on the way to the store, school, or bus stop than they would if house were the same size, but built on wider, shallower lots. Accordingly Gehl advocates narrow residential lots in order to assemble people and increase social contact.

Gehl favors designs that integrate. Good design can bring people in contact with one another regardless of gender, age, income, sexual orientation, occupation, and ethnic group. Gehl likes the sprawling University of Denmark campus that developed piecemeal and is mixed into Copenhagen's downtown area. He deplores the sterile campus of the newer Technical University of Denmark, built on the outskirts of the city. Students at the University of Denmark mix with other city residents, patronize public cafés, and can enjoy Copenhagen's amenities. Students at the Technical University of Denmark mix only with faculty and other students, eat in the university cafeteria, and remain separate from the life of the city. Like Jane Jacobs (p. 105), Gehl thinks a little bit of urban disorder can be a good thing.

Gehl likes designs that open up. A library with windows directly on the street, for example, will be open to passersby who can participate vicariously in the library experience by watching the librarians and browsers even if they do not go in.

Contrast Gehl's view that even fleeting, anonymous contact with other human beings is innately satisfying with Louis Wirth's view in "Urbanism as a Way of Life" (p. 96) that the transitory, impersonal contacts between people characteristic of modern cities illustrates just how disconnected people become when they move from small rural communities to large, anonymous cities.

Gehl blames the well-intentioned ideas of modernists like Le Corbusier (p. 336) for destruction of livable streets and a thinning of cities that make human contact difficult. Modernists sought to bring light, air, sun, and ventilation into residential and commercial areas. But big modernist multistory residential urban areas with long distances between different land uses destroy street life and eliminate intimate squares. Similarly the wide dispersal of people and events in low, open, single-family areas in suburbs has reduced outdoor communal activities.

At the core of Gehl's philosophy is the belief that people need and want human contact in outdoor public spaces. Is that necessarily so? Some people (illegal immigrants, runaway teenagers, people who simply want to be alone) may not want to come in contact with other people. Is the space between buildings the most important space for human contact? What about the home? The workplace? Other public spaces? Ray Oldenburg argues that "third places" like cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, and hair salons are more important venues for human contact and socializing than outdoor space between buildings.

Jan Gehl (b. 1936) is a Danish architect and urban designer based in Copenhagen. He received a Masters of Architecture degree from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1960. The first (Danish) edition of *Life Between Buildings* was published in 1971 and subsequent revised editions have been published regularly since that time, most recently in 2008. The first English language edition of *Life Between Buildings* was published in 1987 and the most recent English language edition was published in 2008.

The verb "Copenhagenize" is not yet in common parlance, but Gehl uses it to describe the design principles he hopes to export from his native city. In addition to many projects in Denmark and other Scandinavian countries, Gehl has designed projects in London, Stoke-on-Trent, and Brighton in England; Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, Wellington, and Sydney in Australia; Cork and Dublin in Ireland; New York and Pittsburgh in the United States; Belgrade in Serbia; Prague in the Czech Republic; and Rabat in Morocco. The selection here is from *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* translated by Jo Koch (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987). A coauthored book by Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzoe is *New City Spaces, Strategies and Projects* (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2008).

University of California, Berkeley, professor of architecture emeritus Clare Cooper Marcus has written and edited excellent books about the way in which people use both public and private spaces. Her books provide extensive practical guidelines for architects and planners. *People Places: Design Guidelines for Urban Open Space*, coedited with Carolyn Francis (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 1997) is an anthology that nicely complements *Life Between Buildings*. Her first book, *Easter Hill Village: Some Social Implications of Design* (New York: Free Press, 1975) documents what residents themselves liked and disliked about the design of a low-rent housing project in Richmond, California. *Housing as if People Mattered: Site Design Guidelines for the Planning of Medium-Density Family Housing*, with Wendy Sarkissien (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988) is filled with examples and principles for designing moderate income housing, particularly for single parents with children.

Other books about the design of public spaces include Lorna McNeur, *Theatre of the City: Interpreting Public Space* (London: Routledge, 2010), William Whyte, *City: Rediscovering the Center* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), Sharon Zukin, *Naked City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Roger Yee, *Public Spaces* (New York: Visual Reference Publications, 2009), Sarah Gaventa, *New Public Spaces* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2006), Raymond Gastil and Zoë Ryan, *Open: New Designs for Public Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006), Matthew Carmona, Tim Heath, Taner Oc, and Steve Tiesdell, *Public Places, Urban Spaces* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2003), Doug Kelbaugh, *Common Place: Toward Neighborhood and Regional Design* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997), Stephen Carr, Mark Francis, Leanne G. Rivlin, and Andrew M. Stone *Public Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992). A classic early critique of placeness is Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness*. (London: Pion, 1976).

Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York: Marlowe, 1999) analyzes interior public spaces. Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home* (Lake Worth, FL: Nicholas-Hays, 2006) explores the symbolic meaning of space in private homes.



THREE TYPES OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

An ordinary day on an ordinary street. Pedestrians pass on the sidewalks, children play near front doors, people sit on benches and steps, the postman makes his rounds with the mail, two passersby greet on the sidewalk, two mechanics repair a car, groups engage in conversation. This mix of outdoor activities is influenced by a number of conditions. Physical environment is one of the factors: a factor that influences the activities to a varying degree and in many different ways. Outdoor activities, and a number of the physical conditions that influence them, are the subject of this book.

Greatly simplified, outdoor activities in public spaces can be divided into three categories, each of which places very different demands on the physical environment: *necessary activities*, *optional activities*, and *social activities*.

Necessary activities include those that are more or less compulsory—going to school or to work, shopping, waiting for a bus or a person, running errands, distributing mail—in other words, all activities in which those

involved are to a greater or lesser degree required to participate.

In general, everyday tasks and pastimes belong to this group. Among other activities, this group includes the great majority of those related to walking.

Because the activities in this group are necessary, their incidence is influenced only slightly by the physical framework. These activities will take place throughout the year, under nearly all conditions, and are more or less independent of the exterior environment. The participants have no choice.

Optional activities—that is, those pursuits that are participated in if there is a wish to do so and if time and place make it possible—are quite another matter.

This category includes such activities as taking a walk to get a breath of fresh air, standing around enjoying life, or sitting and sunbathing.

These activities take place only when exterior conditions are optimal, when weather and place invite them. This relationship is particularly important in connection with physical planning because most of the recreational activities that are especially pleasant to

pursue outdoors are found precisely in this category of activities. These activities are especially dependent on exterior physical conditions.

When outdoor areas are of poor quality, only strictly necessary activities occur.

When outdoor areas are of high quality, necessary activities take place with approximately the same frequency – though they clearly tend to take a longer time, because the physical conditions are better. In addition, however, a wide range of optional activities will also occur because place and situation now invite people to stop, sit, eat, play, and so on.

In streets and city spaces of poor quality, only the bare minimum of activity takes place. People hurry home.

In a good environment, a completely different, broad spectrum of human activities is possible.

Social activities are all activities that depend on the presence of others in public spaces. Social activities include children at play, greetings and conversations, communal activities of various kinds, and finally – as the most widespread social activity – passive contacts, that is, simply seeing and hearing other people.

Different kinds of social activities occur in many places: in dwellings; in private outdoor spaces, gardens, and balconies; in public buildings; at places of work; and so on; but in this context only those activities that occur in publicly accessible spaces are examined.

These activities could also be termed "resultant" activities, because in nearly all instances they evolve from activities linked to the other two activity categories. They develop in connection with the other

activities because people are in the same space, meet, pass by one another, or are merely within view.

Social activities occur spontaneously, as a direct consequence of people moving about and being in the same spaces. This implies that social activities are indirectly supported whenever necessary and optional activities are given better conditions in public spaces.

The character of social activities varies, depending on the context in which they occur. In the residential streets, near schools, near places of work, where there are a limited number of people with common interests or backgrounds, social activities in public spaces can be quite comprehensive: greetings, conversations, discussions, and play arising from common interests and because people "know" each other, if for no other reason than that they often see one another.

In city streets and city centers, social activities will generally be more superficial, with the majority being passive contacts – seeing and hearing a great number of unknown people. But even this limited activity can be very appealing.

Very freely interpreted, a social activity takes place every time two people are together in the same space. To see and hear each other, to meet, is in itself a form of contact, a social activity. The actual meeting, merely being present, is furthermore the seed for other, more comprehensive forms of social activity.

This connection is important in relation to physical planning. Although the physical framework does not have a direct influence on the quality, content, and intensity of social contacts, architects and planners can affect the possibilities for meeting, seeing, and hearing

Graphic representation of the relationship between the quality of outdoor spaces and the rate of occurrence of outdoor activities.

When the quality of outdoor areas is good, optional activities occur with increasing frequency. Furthermore, as levels of optional activity rise, the number of social activities usually increases substantially.

	Quality of the physical environment	
	Poor	Good
Necessary activities	●	●
Optional activities	●	●
"Resultant" activities (Social activities)	●	●

people – possibilities that both take on a quality of their own and become important as background and starting point for other forms of contact.

This is the background for the investigation . . . of meeting possibilities and opportunities to see and hear other people. Another reason for a comprehensive review of these activities is that precisely the presence of other people, activities, events, inspiration, and stimulation comprise one of the most important qualities of public spaces altogether.

If we look back at the street scene that was the starting point for defining the three categories of outdoor activities, we can see how necessary, optional, and social activities occur in a finely interwoven pattern. People walk, sit, and talk. Functional, recreational, and social activities intertwine in all conceivable combinations. Therefore, this examination of the subject of outdoor activities does not begin with a single, limited category of activities. Life between buildings is not merely pedestrian traffic or recreational or social activities. Life between buildings comprises the entire spectrum of activities, which combine to make communal spaces in cities and residential areas meaningful and attractive.

Both necessary, functional activities and optional, recreational activities have been examined quite thoroughly over the years in different contexts. Social activities and their interweaving to form a communal fabric have received considerably less attention.

This is the background for the following, more detailed examination of social activities in public spaces.

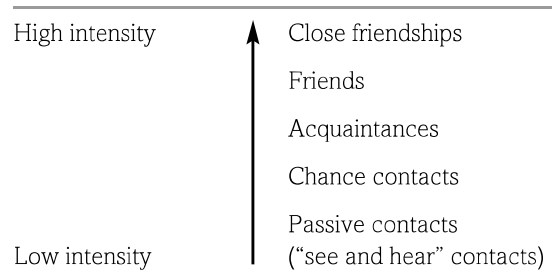
LIFE BETWEEN BUILDINGS

It is difficult to pinpoint precisely what life between buildings means in relation to the *need for contact*.

Opportunities for meetings and daily activities in the public spaces of a city or residential area enable one to be among, to see, and to hear others, to experience other people functioning in various situations.

These modest “see and hear contacts” must be considered in relation to other forms of contact and as part of the whole range of social activities, from very simple and noncommittal contacts to complex and emotionally involved connections.

The concept of varying-degrees of contact intensity is the basis of the following simplified outline of various contact forms.



In terms of this outline, life between buildings represents primarily the low-intensity contacts located at the bottom of the scale. Compared with the other contact forms, these contacts appear insignificant, yet they are valuable both as independent contact forms and as prerequisites for other, more complex interactions.

Opportunities related to merely being able to meet, see, and hear others include:

- contact at a modest level
- a possible starting point for contact at other levels
- a possibility for maintaining already established contacts
- a source of information about the social world outside
- a source of inspiration, an offer of stimulating experience.

The possibilities related to the low-intensity contact forms offered in public spaces perhaps can best be described by the situation that exists if they are lacking.

If activity between buildings is missing, the lower end of the contact scale also disappears. The varied transitional forms between being alone and being together have disappeared. The boundaries between isolation and contact become sharper – people are either alone or else with others on a relatively demanding and exacting level.

Life between buildings offers an opportunity to be with others in a relaxed and undemanding way. One can take occasional walks, perhaps make a detour along a main street on the way home or pause at an inviting bench near a front door to be among people for a short while. One can take a long bus ride every day, as many retired people have been found to do in large cities. Or one can do daily shopping, even though it would be more practical to do it once a week. Even looking out of the window now and then, if one is fortunate enough to have something to look at, can be

rewarding. Being among others, seeing and hearing others, receiving impulses from others, imply positive experiences, alternatives to being alone. One is not necessarily with a specific person, but one is, nevertheless, with others.

As opposed to being a passive observer of other people's experiences on television or video or film, in public spaces the individual himself is present, participating in a modest way, but most definitely participating.

Low-intensity contact is also a situation from which other forms of contact can grow. It is a medium for the unpredictable, the spontaneous, the unplanned.

These opportunities can be illustrated by examining how play activities among children get started.

Such situations can be arranged. Formalized play occurs at birthday parties and arranged play groups in schools. Generally, however, play is not arranged. It evolves when children are together, when they see others at play, when they feel like playing and "go out to play" without actually being certain that play will get started. The first prerequisite is being in the same space. Meeting.

Contacts that develop spontaneously in connection with merely being where there are others are usually very fleeting—a short exchange of words, a brief discussion with the next man on the bench, chatting with a child in a bus, watching somebody working and asking a few questions, and so forth. From this simple level, contacts can grow to other levels, as the participants wish. Meeting, being present in the same space, is in each of these circumstances the prime prerequisite.

The possibility of meeting neighbors and co-workers often in connection with daily comings and goings implies a valuable opportunity to establish and later maintain acquaintances in a relaxed and undemanding way.

Social events can evolve spontaneously. Situations are allowed to develop. Visits and gatherings can be arranged on short notice, when the mood dictates. It is equally easy to "drop by" or "look in" or to agree on what is to take place tomorrow if the participants pass by one another's front doors often and, especially, meet often on the street or in connection with daily activities around the home, place of work, and so on.

Frequent meetings in connection with daily activities increase chances of developing contacts with neighbors, a fact noted in many surveys. With frequent meetings friendships and the contact network are maintained in a far simpler and less demanding way

than if friendship must be kept up by telephone and invitation. If this is the case, it is often rather difficult to maintain contact, because more is always demanded of the participants when meetings must be arranged in advance.

This is the underlying reason why nearly all children and a considerable proportion of other age groups maintain closer and more frequent contact with friends and acquaintances who live or work near them—it is the simplest way to stay "in touch."

The opportunity to see and hear other people in a city or residential area also implies an offer of valuable information, about the surrounding social environment in general and about the people one lives or works with in particular.

This is especially true in connection with the social development of children, which is largely based on observations of the surrounding social environment, but all of us need to be kept up-to-date about the surrounding world in order to function in a social context.

Through the mass media we are informed about the larger, more sensational world events, but by being with others we learn about the more common but equally important details. We discover how others work, behave, and dress, and we obtain knowledge about the people we work with, live with, and so forth. By means of all this information we establish a confidential relationship with the world around us. A person we have often met on the street becomes a person we "know."

In addition to imparting information about the social world outside, the opportunity to see and hear other people can also provide ideas and inspiration for action.

We are inspired by seeing others in action. Children, for example, see other children at play and get the urge to join in, or they get ideas for new games by watching other children or adults.

The trend from living to lifeless cities and residential areas that has accompanied industrialization, segregation of various city functions, and reliance on the automobile also has caused cities to become duller and more monotonous. This points up another important need, namely *the need for stimulation*.

Experiencing other people represents a particularly colorful and attractive opportunity for stimulation. Compared with experiencing buildings and other inanimate objects, experiencing people, who speak and move about, offers a wealth of sensual variation. No

moment is like the previous or the following when people circulate among people. The number of new situations and new stimuli is limitless. Furthermore, it concerns the most important subject in life: people.

Living cities, therefore, ones in which people can interact with one another, are always stimulating because they are rich in experiences, in contrast to lifeless cities, which can scarcely avoid being poor in experiences and thus dull, no matter how many colors and variations of shape in buildings are introduced.

If life between buildings is given favorable conditions through sensible planning of cities and housing areas alike, many costly and often stilted and strained attempts to make buildings “interesting” and rich by using dramatic architectural effects can be spared.

Life between buildings is both more relevant and more interesting to look at in the long run than any combination of colored concrete and staggered building forms.

The value of the many large and small possibilities that are attached to the opportunity of being in the same space as and seeing and hearing other people is underlined by a series of observations investigating people’s reaction to the presence of other people in public spaces.

Wherever there are people – in buildings, in neighborhoods, in city centers, in recreational areas, and so on – it is generally true that people and human activities attract other people. People are attracted to other people. They gather with and move about with others and seek to place themselves near others. New activities begin in the vicinity of events that are already in progress.

In the home we can see that children prefer to be where there are adults or where there are other children, instead of, for example, where there are only toys. In residential areas and in city spaces, comparable behavior among adults can be observed. If given a choice between walking on a deserted or a lively street, most people in most situations will choose the lively street. If the choice is between sitting in a private backyard or in a semiprivate front yard with a view of the street, people will often choose the front of the house where there is more to see.

In Scandinavia an old proverb tells it all: “people come where people are.”

A series of investigations illustrates in more detail the interest in being in contact with others. Investigations of children’s play habits in residential

areas show that children stay and play primarily where the most activity is occurring or in places where there is the greatest chance of something happening.

Both in areas with single-family houses and in apartment house surroundings, children tend to play more on the streets, in parking areas, and near the entrances of dwellings than in the play areas designed for that purpose but located in backyards of single-family houses or on the sunny side of multi-story buildings, where there are neither traffic nor people to look at.

Corresponding trends can be found regarding where people choose to sit in public spaces. Benches that provide a good view of surrounding activities are used more than benches with less or no view of others.

An investigation of Tivoli Garden in Copenhagen, carried out by the architect John Lyle, shows that the most used benches are along the garden’s main path, where there is a good view of the particularly active areas, while the least used benches are found in the quiet areas of the park. In various places, benches are arranged back to back, so that one of the benches faces a path while the other “turns its back.” In these instances it is always the benches facing the path that are used.

Comparable results have been found in investigations of seating in a number of squares in central Copenhagen. Benches with a view of the most trafficked pedestrian routes are used most, while benches oriented toward the planted areas of the squares are used less frequently.

At sidewalk cafés, as well, the life on the sidewalk in front of the café is the prime attraction. Almost without exception café chairs throughout the world are oriented toward the most active area nearby. Sidewalks are, not unexpectedly, the very reason for creating sidewalk cafés.

The opportunity to see, hear, and meet others can also be shown to be one of the most important attractions in city centers and on pedestrian streets. This is illustrated by an attraction analysis carried out on Strøget, the main pedestrian street in central Copenhagen, by a study group from the School of Architecture at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. The analysis was based on an investigation of where pedestrians stopped on the walking street and what they stopped to look at.

Fewest stops were noted in front of banks, offices, showrooms, and dull exhibits of, for example, cash registers, office furniture, porcelain, or hair curlers.

Conversely, a great number of stops were noted in front of shops and exhibits that had a direct relationship to other people and to the surrounding social environment, such as newspaper kiosks, photography exhibits, film stills outside movie theaters, clothing stores, and toy stores.

Even greater interest was shown in the various human activities that went on in the street space itself. All forms of human activity appeared to be of major interest in this connection.

Considerable interest was observed in both the ordinary, everyday events that take place on a street — children at play, newlyweds on their way from the photographers, or merely people walking by — and in the more unusual instance — the artist with his easel, the street musician with his guitar, street painters in action, and other large and small events.

It was obvious that human activities, being able to see other people in action, constituted the area's main attraction.

The street painters collected a large crowd as long as their work was in progress, but when they left the area, pedestrians walked over the paintings without hesitation. The same was true of music. Music blaring out on the street from loudspeakers in front of record shops elicited no reaction, but the moment live musicians began to play or sing, there was an instantaneous show of lively interest.

The attention paid to people and human activities was also illustrated by observations made in connection with the expansion of a department store in the area. While excavation and pouring of foundations were in progress, it was possible to see into the building site through two gates facing the pedestrian street. Throughout this period more people stopped to watch the work in progress on the building site than was the case for stops in front of all the department store's fifteen display windows together.

In this case, too, it was the workers and their work, not the building site itself, that was the object of interest. This was demonstrated further during lunch breaks and after quitting time — when no workers were on the site, practically nobody stopped to look.

A summary of observations and investigations shows that people and human activity are the greatest object of attention and interest. Even the modest form of contact of merely seeing and hearing or being near to others is apparently more rewarding and more in demand than the majority of other attractions offered in the public spaces of cities and residential areas.

Life in buildings and between buildings seems in nearly all situations to rank as more essential and more relevant than the spaces and buildings themselves.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND THE QUALITY OF OUTDOOR SPACE

Life between buildings is discussed here because the extent and character of outdoor activities are greatly influenced by physical planning. Just as it is possible through choice of materials and colors to create a certain palette in a city, it is equally possible through planning decisions to influence patterns of activities, to create better or worse conditions for outdoor events, and to create lively or lifeless cities.

The spectrum of possibilities can be described by two extremes. One extreme is the city with multistory buildings, underground parking facilities, extensive automobile traffic, and long distances between buildings and functions. This type of city can be found in a number of North American and "modernized" European cities and in many suburban areas.

In such cities one sees buildings and cars, but few people, if any, because pedestrian traffic is more or less impossible, and because conditions for outdoor stays in the public areas near buildings are very poor. Outdoor spaces are large and impersonal. With great distances in the urban plan, there is nothing much to experience outdoors, and the few activities that do take place are spread out in time and space. Under these conditions most residents prefer to remain indoors in front of the television or on their balcony or in other comparably private outdoor spaces.

Another extreme is the city with reasonably low, closely spaced buildings, accommodation for foot traffic, and good areas for outdoor stays along the streets and in direct relation to residences, public buildings, places of work, and so forth. Here it is possible to see buildings, people coming and going, and people stopping in outdoor areas near the buildings because the outdoor spaces are easy and inviting to use. This city is a living city, one in which spaces inside buildings are supplemented with usable outdoor areas, and where public spaces are allowed to function.

It has already been mentioned that the outdoor activities that are particularly dependent on the quality of the outdoor spaces are the optional, recreational activities, and by implication, a considerable part of the social activities.

It is these specifically attractive activities that disappear when conditions are poor and that thrive where conditions are favorable.

The significance of quality improvement to daily and social activities in cities can be observed where pedestrian streets or traffic-free zones have been established in existing urban areas. In a number of examples, improved physical conditions have resulted in a doubling of the number of pedestrians, a lengthening of the average time spent outdoors, and a considerably broader spectrum of outdoor activities.

In a survey recording all activities occurring in the center of Copenhagen during the spring and summer of 1986, it was found that the number of pedestrian streets and squares in the city center had tripled between 1968 and 1986. Parallel to this improvement of the physical conditions, a tripling in the number of people standing and sitting was recorded.

In cases where neighboring cities offer varying conditions for city activities, great differences can also be found.

In Italian cities with pedestrian streets and automobile-free squares, the outdoor city life is often much more pronounced than in the car-oriented neighboring cities, even though the climate is the same.

A 1978 survey of street activities in both trafficked and pedestrian streets in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, Australia, carried out by architectural students from the University of Melbourne and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology found a direct connection between street quality and street activity. In addition, an experimental improvement of increasing the number of seats by 100 percent on the pedestrian street in Melbourne resulted in an 88 percent increase in seated activities.

William H. Whyte, in his book *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, describes the close connection between qualities of city space and city activities and documents how often quite simple physical alterations can improve the use of the city space noticeably.

Comparable results have been achieved in a number of improvement projects executed in New York and other US cities by the Project for Public Spaces.

In residential areas as well, both in Europe and the United States, traffic reduction schemes, courtyard clearing, laying out of parks, and comparable outdoor improvements have had a marked effect.

Conversely, the effect of the deterioration of quality on activities in ordinary residential streets is illustrated

by a study of three neighboring streets in San Francisco carried out in 1971 by [Donald] Appleyard and [Mark] Lintell.

The study shows the dramatic effect of increased traffic in two of the streets, all of which formerly had a modest rate of traffic.

In the street where there was only little traffic (2,000 vehicles per day), a great number of outdoor activities were registered. Children played on sidewalks and in the streets. Entranceways and steps were used widely for outdoor stays, and an extensive network of neighbor contacts was noted.

In one of the other streets, where the traffic volume was greatly increased (16,000 vehicles per day), outdoor activities became practically nonexistent. Comparable, neighbor contacts in this street were poorly developed.

In the third street, with middle to high traffic intensity (8,000 vehicles per day), a surprisingly great reduction in outdoor activities and neighbor contacts was noted, emphasizing that even a relatively limited deterioration of the quality of the outdoor environment can have a disproportionately severe negative effect on the extent of outdoor activities.

In summarizing the studies, a close relationship between outdoor quality and outdoor activities can be noted.

In at least three areas, it appears possible, in part through the design of the physical environment, to influence the activity patterns in public spaces in cities and residential areas. Within certain limits – regional, climatic, societal – it is possible to influence *how many* people and events use the public spaces, *how long* the individual activities last, and *which* activity types can develop.

The fact that a marked increase of outdoor activities is often seen in connection with quality improvements emphasizes that the situation found in a specific area at a certain time frequently gives an incomplete indication of the need for public spaces and outdoor activities, which can indeed exist in the area. The establishment of a suitable physical framework for social and recreational activities has time after time revealed a suppressed human need that was ignored at the outset.

When the main street in Copenhagen was converted to a pedestrian street in 1962 as the first such scheme in Scandinavia, many critics predicted that the street would be deserted because “city activity just doesn’t belong to the northern European tradition.”

Today this major pedestrian street, plus a number of other pedestrian streets later added to the system, are filled to capacity with people walking, sitting, playing music, drawing, and talking together. It is evident that the initial fears were unfounded and that city life in Copenhagen had been so limited because there was previously no physical possibility for its existence.

In a number of new Danish residential areas as well, where physical possibilities for outdoor activity

have been established in the form of high-quality public spaces, activity patterns that no one had believed possible in Danish residential areas have evolved.

Just as it has been noted that automobile traffic tends to develop concurrently with the building of new roads, all experience to date with regard to human activities in cities and in proximity to residences seems to indicate that were a better physical framework is created, outdoor activities tend to grow in number, duration, and scope.