

Socioeconomic Diversity in Public Spaces:
Third Places as Sites of Integration

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ABSTRACT

While academics and policy-makers seek to address historic segregation and its harmful impacts on communities, many such efforts have been unsuccessful. Therefore, this original research examines the role of public parks as potential sites of social and economic integration. These spaces serve as third places, or social spaces where community members regularly visit, similar to their regular visitation of their home and workplaces. In the City of Roanoke, three visited public parks serve as local third places where individuals of different social and economic backgrounds visit for various activities. However, visitors typically only interact with others similar to themselves. The exception appears to be when the third place provides a source of triangulation based in common interests. This form of triangulation is useful in establishing commonality among visitors, thus bridging existing gaps between communities. Said triangulation is successful when the third place provides a physically and socially comfortable environment affected by the space's design, location, and management. These three factors must combine to maintain a careful balance between welcoming visitors of diverse backgrounds, but also establishing a sense of comfort among visitors. Public spaces which achieve this balance realize their potential by becoming equitable third places.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This original research examines the role of public parks as potential sites of social and economic integration. Such sites serve as third places, or social spaces where community members regularly visit. These visits are like the regular visitation of the home and workplaces, which are likewise called the first and second places. In the City of Roanoke, three visited public parks serve as local third places where individuals of different social and economic backgrounds visit for various activities. However, visitors typically only interact with others like themselves. The exception appears to be when the third place provides a feature which stimulates conversation among visitors. The feature can establish commonality among visitors, thus bridging existing gaps between communities. However, these social interactions rely on a third place which provides a physically and socially comfortable environment affected by the space's design, location, and governance. These three factors must combine to maintain a careful balance between welcoming visitors of diverse backgrounds, but also establishing a sense of comfort among visitors. Public spaces which achieve this balance realize their potential by becoming equitable third places.

DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public spaces have historically served as an essential place for interactions among members of the community. In contemporary American cities, these spaces are vital to the integration of heterogeneous populations into a single cohesive community (Madanipour, 1999). This integration is beneficial for the creation of social capital, which serves as a public good for the local community (Musterd & Andersson, 2005). In recent discussions, social capital has been defined as the “stock of active connections among people such as the trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind the members of human networks and communities and make cooperative action possible” (Wood, Frank, & Giles-Corti, 2010: 1). Its proposed public benefits include increased economic and social opportunities (Musterd & Andersson, 2005), such as through diversifying one’s social connections to learn information (McDonald & Day, 2010). Likewise, social capital is associated with increased human capital, or the skills and talents available within a community (Coleman, 1988). Additionally, social capital promotes civic-mindedness within the community, such as through facilitating local social organizing (Knudsen & Clark, 2013) or promoting public participation in governance activities (Williamson, 2002). However, some scholars argue social capital has declined in recent years (Putnam, 2000). Yet, others suggest that social capital might be found through addressing the public built environment, such as with mixed-income housing (Chaskin & Joseph, 2010, 2011) or walkable spaces (Knudsen & Clark, 2013). These recent arguments reinforce the importance of public spaces as centers to create and maintain social capital as a public good.

However, the vital function of public spaces and their significance within the urban environment is still not fully understood, and consequently often neglected in practice. In research, this inattention has become of recent concern as scholars have sought to expand our knowledge of the social function of public spaces (Mehta, 2014), while much prior discussion focused on how to manage said spaces (Carmona, 2010a; Madanipour, 1999). Additionally, only recent research has sought to examine the social importance of how public spaces connect with one another (Aelbrecht, 2016). In practice, these gaps have resulted in disconnected public spaces which further discourage the development of local social capital (French et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2010). Furthermore, public spaces are often conceptualized in economic terms, such as features for facilitating economic investment (Sager, 2011) and attracting a high-income workforce (Florida, 2014). This economic approach is associated with an inequitable

development of public spaces, such as through the prioritization of maintaining quality parks for high-income neighborhoods while neglecting the parks in low-income neighborhoods (Hughey et al., 2016). These results indicate further need to examine how public space is conceptualized and treated as a public good.

Through these contemporary practices, it appears that disadvantaged communities have separate access to public spaces which are far from equal in terms of the quality, when compared to wealthier, privileged communities. This is alarming because it further marginalizes disadvantaged communities who receive greater benefits from access to quality public spaces for socialization (Hickman, 2013), and also because it maintains segregation between communities. Yet, when separate communities do have access to common spaces, there is still a lack of interaction between them (Cattell, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008; Chaskin & Joseph, 2011). To better understand how to bridge the continued social segregation between different socioeconomic communities, I propose public spaces be treated as third places because of their role in facilitating social interaction. As conceived within the field of sociology, a third place is a social destination that a person chooses to frequently visit during regular life, as they also visit their home and workplace. Third places are valuable because of their social function, thus can serve to address the continued gap between communities. To investigate this potential, I propose the following question: what relationship exists, if any, between the individual comfort, both physical and social, of third places and the likelihood of socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals interacting with one another in such places?

Third Places

The social and physical environments coexist and affect one another, thus are of great interest to the field of urban planning. This is observed across various “visions” of urban planning. These visions range from the early utopian ideals of early planners, such as Ebenezer Howard, to the more recent new urbanists, such as Peter Calthorpe (Calthorpe, 1993; Hall, 2014; Jabareen & Zilberman, 2017). Often, the goal of these visionaries is to promote social interaction among members of the local community, especially between members of different social groups (Aelbrecht, 2016; Cattell et al., 2008; Hall, 2014; Hickman, 2013; Jabareen & Zilberman, 2017). They recognize the benefits of a heterogeneous social environment. However, this goal often remains allusive for numerous reasons. Some reasons include attempts to segregate

socioeconomic groups, and because of inadequate public policies in favor of intergroup mixing (Carr & Anacker, 2015; Cattell et al., 2008; Schwartz, 2006). However, public spaces serve as sites for intergroup mixing (Cattell et al., 2008), even if the exact mechanisms behind said heterogeneous interactions remain unexplored (Aelbrecht, 2016; Hickman, 2013; Trudeau & Kaplan, 2016). Therefore, public spaces serve as a significant target for public policies which seek to encourage intergroup mixing.

The importance of the social environment stems from the benefits of social capital for the public interest, which urban planners ultimately promote. Social capital is generally recognized as the collection of social resources at an individual's disposal, such as information networks used to leverage information to obtain other resources such as knowledge of job opportunities, access to education opportunities, and other means of help in daily life (Boix & Posner, 1998; Coleman, 1988; Kamruzzaman et al., 2014; Lin, 1999; Lochner, Kawachi, & Kennedy, 1999; Putnam, 2000; van Oorschot, Arts, & Gelissen, 2006). Social connections between diverse groups are recognized as beneficial for bridging the gaps between communities, thus improving relations between different groups who may otherwise be separated from one another, thus contributing to a healthy, diverse society (Arneil, 2006, 2006; Coleman, 1988; Crisp, 2013; de Graaf & Flap, 1988; Forrest & Kearns, 2001; Hamdan, Yusof, & Marzukhi, 2014; Joseph, Chaskin, & Webber, 2007; Kamruzzaman et al., 2014; McDonald & Day, 2010; Portes & Landolt, 2000). These connections are particularly beneficial in overcoming segregation between communities, such as that which continues to exist between different socioeconomic groups in contemporary American society (Carr & Anacker, 2015; McDonald & Day, 2010; Schwartz, 2006; Spain, 1992). Social capital is argued to be particularly significant for disadvantaged communities, who have less forms of other capital, particularly economic resources, in comparison to more privileged groups (McDonald & Day, 2010; Stafford, De Silva, Stansfeld, & Marmot, 2008). However, recent research supports the idea that this issue may possibly be addressed through social interactions which occur within public spaces (Peters, Elands, & Buijs, 2010). Therefore, public spaces serve as a critical means to build social capital for the benefit of all members of the community.

Although government officials may currently wish to promote intergroup mixing, such an outcome is contrary to historical trends. Socioeconomic prejudices contributed to historic segregation in American cities, as infamously observed through redlining, the practice in which

home loans were denied for homes located in majority-black neighborhoods (Schwartz, 2006). Although overt racial segregation was eventually ruled illegal, it nonetheless persists, partially due to inadequate enforcement (Carr & Anacker, 2015). Additional segregation continues because of economic inequities which are correlated with racial inequities. For example, wealthier households often locate in expensive neighborhoods away from lower-income households, such as in single-family suburban neighborhoods (ibid). This residential segregation filters into school systems, thus children fail to learn to associate with other socioeconomic groups, while also missing out on opportunities available in wealthier schools. Thus, tendencies to segregate are not only historically observed, but nonetheless persist today.

Fortunately, many government officials seek to promote intergroup mixing. This may be observed through the implementation of mixed-income housing projects which contain heterogeneous populations. Yet, residents of different economic statuses often do not intermix, despite their proximity to one another (Chaskin & Joseph, 2010, 2011; Joseph et al., 2007; Musterd & Andersson, 2005). Intergroup mixing in public spaces remains similarly difficult to promote (Cattell et al., 2008; Gehl, 2010; Joseph et al., 2007; Lynch, 1981; Peters, Elands, & Buijs, 2010; Whyte, 1988). In both cases, research indicates the significance of barriers resulting from location, design, and perceptions of both physical locations and social groups (Cattell et al., 2008; Chaskin & Joseph, 2011; Peters et al., 2010). To address sites where intergroup mixing may occur, planners can use the concept of third places to understand the social potential of public spaces.

The third place, a relatively recent concept from the field of urban sociology, is a physical space an individual regularly visits outside of their time at home or work, which are respectively called the first and second places (Ramon Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Third places are generally recognized for being locations of social interaction and are therefore potential sites to build or maintain social capital. At the core, third places are about facilitating social interactions and community outside of the home or workplace (Hickman, 2013; Mehta & Bosson, 2010; Ramon Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982; St. Germain, 2001). Examples of third places include spaces such as cafes, plazas, and parks (Ray Oldenburg, 1989). These spaces are a fundamental intersection of the social and physical environments of American communities, therefore of relevance to the field of urban planning. However, the concept remains understudied in the field, as planning scholars and practitioners have only recently begun to conceptualize

public spaces in the lenses of third places (Aelbrecht, 2016; Hickman, 2013; Mehta & Bosson, 2010).

As first conceptualized, third places are chiefly characterized as being public or accessible to multiple groups, uninteresting to outsiders, integrated into daily life, and taken-for-granted. This initial sociological conception, and most later research, lacks the point of view offered by the field of planning (Aelbrecht, 2016; Mehta & Bosson, 2010). Research from the field of planning suggests that accessibility to destinations and the design of destinations affects their usage (Mehta & Bosson, 2010). Therefore, it is likely that accessibility and urban design are both crucial factors that contribute to the occurrence of intergroup interactions in third places. Existing literature suggests that the issues of accessibility and urban design are experienced by individuals through the lenses of comfort within a space (Aelbrecht, 2016; Floyd, Taylor, & Whitt-Glover, 2009; Hickman, 2013; Hughey et al., 2016; Mehta, 2014). This comfort relates to both the physical environment of a space, such as ease of entering or staying (Gehl, 2010; Mehta & Bosson, 2010), and the social environment of the space, such as the governance of the space which may deter unwanted individuals (Hughey et al., 2016). Therefore, current research suggests that third places may be understood based on the experienced physical and social comfort of visitors. These experiences reveal factors which influence the interactions within the space, and these interactions can be used to bridge divides between different socioeconomic communities.

To better understand third places, public parks can be specifically observed in relation to the social interactions within them. For the purposes of this study, public parks are government-owned public spaces which have been identified and maintained as park or green space. These spaces serve as social destinations for a wide range of communities, thus have the potential to develop into third places. I propose that intergroup interactions are associated with public parks which provide physically and socially comfortable experiences. These public parks not only succeed as quality public spaces, but as equitable third places.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Consideration of third places within the context of urban planning requires a review of two key topics. First, and most obviously, it is essential to review research indicating what hinders and contributes to social integration. This review suggests the need for further work in

overcoming continued socioeconomic segregation. Secondly, existing research indicates that social integration may be observed in third places. Public parks can serve as an example of where social interactions can occur between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals. This review of social integration, third places, and parks indicates the need for further research into how the built environment affects the presence of social interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals.

Social Integration

Whether publicly or privately owned, any publicly available space faces the issue of inclusion, which is a prerequisite for social interactions between heterogeneous individuals in these spaces. This is particularly important to third places which form due to their regular use by members of the community. The original conception of third places stated they were inherently uninteresting to said outsiders (Ramon Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), which could prevent the space from being inclusive. Exclusion is additionally affected by the friendliness of regular visitors to a space (Freeman, 2008; Hickman, 2013). This acceptance by regulars may even stem from other factors which generate an atmosphere of exclusion. These contributors include group dynamics, such as tension or distrust between racial or economic groups (Freeman, 2008), and physical limitations of the site which may suggest that certain populations are unwelcome (Hickman, 2013; Northridge et al., 2016). Assuming a community values the inclusion of all members, rather than the elite or privileged, it is imperative that community leaders help overcome these barriers (Northridge et al., 2016). This raises a question regarding what third places are associated with intergroup interactions, and which of their features contribute to said interactions.

Currently, our understanding of social interactions within public spaces generally excludes the notion that not all individuals are homogenous. At a broad level, research into the effects of the built environment often neglects to examine how said effects are mediated by socioeconomic identities (Adkins, Makarewicz, Scanze, Ingram, & Luhr, 2017). Additionally, it is only recently that research has begun to examine the effect of socioeconomic identity on the way an individual seeks out or uses public space (Derose, Han, Williamson, Cohen, & Corporation, 2015; Hughey et al., 2016; Peters et al., 2010; Rigolon, 2016). As a result, the bulk of research into public space treats all public space users as relatively homogenous. Perhaps one

notable exception is discussions regarding the presence of “undesirables” who subtract from the perceived quality of the space (Hughey et al., 2016; Kaczynski, Wilhelm Stanis, & Besenyi, 2012; McCormack, Rock, Toohey, & Hignell, 2010). Even when an individual is not perceived as “undesirable,” other individuals are still unlikely to associate with them in public spaces, unless they are of similar backgrounds or socioeconomic identities (Peters et al., 2010).

Lack of associations between heterogeneous individuals is common in public spaces, and is often attributed to a human tendency to mainly associate with those who are perceived to be similar (Peters et al., 2010). These perceptions of difference are reflected through varying ways people use public spaces, often correlated with socioeconomic identities. For example, racial minorities are sometimes found to more often use parks for socialization purposes, whereas white populations emphasize the use of parks for recreational exercise (Derose et al., 2015). This observation is similar to urban areas with large immigration populations, where immigrants are more likely to use parks for social activities. These differences in preferred use affect perceptions of the public spaces, what they can be used for, and whether they are an attractive destination (Peters et al., 2010). These different expectations contribute to perceptions of those populations one considers to be different or even undesirable. This is observed when white affluent households are upset when other socioeconomic groups engage in seemingly inappropriate uses of public spaces (Chaskin & Joseph, 2013). For example, the use of a space for social purposes by Black youth might be considered loitering by others. Perceptions of “appropriate use” consequently influence whether a space is attractive, who should be allowed, and the types of policy to be pursued (Mele, 2013; Peters et al., 2010). Ultimately, this results in a public policies which homogenize public spaces and ignore the practical implications of socioeconomic differences within the local community (Mele, 2013).

However, urban planners and researchers have addressed the significance of socioeconomic identity in a separate way. Public officials often recognize disparities in access to public spaces related to socioeconomic inequities. In the case of public parks, this issue is addressed by providing parks throughout a government’s jurisdiction with the aim to provide ample access for socioeconomic minorities, possibly even with greater access to parks than other socioeconomic groups (Rigolon, 2016). Yet, these parks are generally of poorer quality, thus not designed or maintained for regular use as a significant community space (Hughey et al., 2016). This approach is common in local government, but only provides superficial access to public

spaces for these populations. Yet, policy makers can say they have addressed local socioeconomic inequities by providing community spaces for disadvantaged populations. This is a gilded solution which poorly addresses socioeconomic inequities by covering up real problems.

One such ignored issue is that socioeconomic groups often remain segregated, both in private and public life. Primarily, said segregation is usually thought of in terms of residential location, a topic which has already extensively been covered (Carr & Anacker, 2015; Schwartz, 2006). Attempts to overcome residential segregation and facilitate intergroup mixing remain difficult and often unsuccessful, as is the case in mixed-income developments where socioeconomically heterogeneous neighbors rarely interact (Chaskin & Joseph, 2010, 2011; Joseph et al., 2007; Musterd & Andersson, 2005). In the case of mixed-income housing, interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals is discouraged because of factors such as short housing tenures in multifamily buildings and lack of common social spaces (Chaskin & Joseph, 2011). New Urbanist developments present another example of residentially integrated communities (Trudeau & Kaplan, 2016), yet the extent of social integration remains unknown in these communities (Trudeau & Kaplan, 2016). Therefore, mixed-income housing and New Urbanist developments succeed in bridging geographic barriers for socioeconomically heterogeneous populations, but further research is still needed to understand how the built environment can facilitate interactions between diverse population.

Ultimately, social integration hinges on the degree to which heterogeneous socioeconomic groups are allowed within a public space. The research discussed above seems to indicate that exclusion is, for better or worse, often a practical outcome regarding the use of public spaces. Often, said exclusion seems to relate to creating a comfortable space for visitors, such as by constructing an environment devoid of the social differences which contribute to a sense of unfriendliness or social discomfort (Hickman, 2013; Peters et al., 2010). This comfort contributes to the process by which a public space becomes a third place due to being “uninteresting to outsiders”, thus establishing a sense of familiarity among frequent visitors (Ramon Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). However, this does not preclude the possibility for newcomers, as other residents also use the space and may even become frequent visitors themselves. Therefore, inclusive third places must strike a careful balance in inviting strangers, but still maintaining a sense of comfort. Yet, research still indicates we struggle to understand this balance, thus there continues to be a need to further examine these interactions in public

spaces (Hickman, 2013; Trudeau & Kaplan, 2016; Trudeau & Malloy, 2011). Successful third places manage to balance these seemingly conflicting needs, therefore warrant further investigation to understand how public spaces can be inclusive in facilitating interactions between heterogenous socioeconomic populations.

Parks as Third Places

As previously discussed, the concept of the third place was first conceptualized within the field of urban sociology during the 1980s (Ramon Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). It serves as a space outside of the first and second places represented by the home and workplace, respectively. However, scholars point out that additional criteria are required for a space to truly serve as a third place. Rather, “A third place is a public setting accessible to its inhabitants and appropriated by them as their own” (ibid: 270). This occurs because of the following characteristics: the space is publicly accessible, taken-for-granted, uninteresting to outsiders, and integrated into daily life (ibid: 270-273). These central characteristics have served as the basis of identifying third places since the concept’s conception, even among the most recent literature (Aelbrecht, 2016; Freeman, 2008; Hickman, 2013; Mehta & Bosson, 2010; Northridge et al., 2016; Ray Oldenburg, 1989; Purnell, 2015; St. Germain, 2001). For facilitating interactions between socioeconomically heterogenous individuals, the idea that a third place is uninteresting to outsiders poses both a challenge and opportunity, which must be balanced. The challenge arises because this trait suggests that the space’s visitors are relatively homogenous. However, the trait is useful because it establishes a sense of familiarity and comfort within the space. The balance between these two observations is likely struck when “outsider” is not defined in socioeconomic terms, but instead based on who frequently visits the space or lives within the municipality. For the purposes of this current research, third places will be defined as a publicly accessible location where an individual regularly chooses to spend time outside of the workplace and home around other people, both those similar and dissimilar to them.

Despite the relevance of third places to the field of urban planning, the topic remains relatively unapplied, although it is likely a familiar term to members of the field. When planning scholars do study third places, it is within the context of learning what makes them appealing in attracting residents. For example, research indicates that urban third places are spaces that physically accommodate a wide range of social activities, such as people watching or meeting

with friends (Mehta & Bosson, 2010). Additionally, third places are distinctive and street accessible, although these traits are believed to play a smaller role in facilitating use when compared to the significance of physical accommodations, such as seating and shelter (ibid). Furthermore, a chief attraction of third places is not their intended function, such as perhaps retail, but their actual social use, such as socializing with friends or people watching (Mehta & Bosson, 2010; Purnell, 2015). Because of the significance of social context, third places mark an appropriate opportunity to learn the role of public spaces in bridging gaps between different socioeconomic groups within a community.

Park spaces serve as a significant site of public social interactions, thus can illustrate how the built environment can contribute to intergroup interactions (Peters et al., 2010). Public parks are well known to be vital public spaces which contribute to the physical, social, and mental health of their surrounding community (Floyd et al., 2009; Goličnik & Ward Thompson, 2010; Hughey et al., 2016; Kaczynski et al., 2012; Kothencz & Blaschke, 2017; McCormack et al., 2010; Moulay, Ujang, & Said, 2017; Park, 2017; Peters et al., 2010; Rigolon, 2016). Issues related to parks are often similar to other public spaces such as the need to increase accessibility (Macedo & Haddad, 2016; Park, 2017) and provide quality facilities (Goličnik & Ward Thompson, 2010; Hughey et al., 2016). Other factors include the perceived quality of both the park and the surrounding neighborhood (Hughey et al., 2016). Due to their importance, local officials and other stakeholders often assess the status and availability of local parks, such as through park audits (Forsyth, Jacobson, & Thering, 2010; Kaczynski et al., 2012). The assessments are believed to serve as a rough predictor of how visitors experience the parks. These experiences are generally shaped by both the physical and social environments.

Regarding the physical environment, park quality is often understood in terms of physical comfort. For example, park evaluations often include comfort indicators such as availability of seating, shelters, and restrooms (Forsyth et al., 2010; Kaczynski et al., 2012; McCormack et al., 2010). These indicators are used because of research conceptualizing physical accommodation in terms of opportunities to stay due to formal and informal seating, shading and cover from the weather, and spaces to stand comfortably within view of other people (Gehl, 2010; Whyte, 1988). Said physical comfort contributes to a positive sensory experience, which is further affected by factors such as perceived cleanliness and variety of available facilities (Hughey et al., 2016; Park, 2017). These standards of physical comfort are generally consistent with evaluations

of public space in general, such as the need for opportunities for a variety of activities and sensory experiences (Gehl, 2010). Physical comfort invites visitors to stay in the space, and eventually allows for the occurrence of triangulation, the process in which social interaction is facilitated by an interesting feature such a public performer or piece of art (Whyte, 1988). However, triangulation is unlikely to occur if park visitors do not feel physically comfortable staying in the space.

Likewise, social interaction is unlikely to occur unless park visitors are socially comfortable. Recent park evaluations have begun to incorporate social comfort as a factor affecting park use and quality (Hughey et al., 2016; Park, 2017). One infamous example of social comfort is the degree to which park visitors feel at ease around certain other visitors. Research indicates that parks are less frequently used if there is a concern over “undesirables” such as gangs or homeless individuals (McCormack et al., 2010). The presence, or perceived presence, of said “undesirables” contributes to a set of park “incivilities”, which may also include litter, graffiti, and a surrounding neighborhood with vacant buildings or “threatening” individuals (Hughey et al., 2016; Kaczynski et al., 2012). These incivilities are not necessarily physically unaccommodating, but rather contribute to a sense of social discomfort which makes visitors feel unsafe and perceive the park to be inaccessible (Park, 2017). Contrastingly, individuals are likely to visit a park when there is a sense of comfort or safety related to the social environment. Some of this comfort relates to the physical traits, such as meeting areas or shelters, which enable social gatherings. However, it is additionally important that these spaces be used by visitors, such as families or social groups (McCormack et al., 2010). The ability to associate with others encourages people to continue visiting the park and even develop a sense of place attachment, especially if they were involved in the park’s creation (Peters et al., 2010). These factors related to social comfort extend to other public spaces as well. Nothing attracts people to a public space better than other people (Whyte, 1988).

Therefore, prior research indicates the importance of both physical and social comfort in facilitating park use. Said park use is consequently associated with social interactions (Hughey et al., 2016; McCormack et al., 2010; Peters et al., 2010). This pattern holds true for public spaces in general, which facilitate social interactions within the public sphere (Cattell et al., 2008). Additionally, like public spaces in general, researchers still struggle to understand the relationship between parks and heterogenous populations (Adkins et al., 2017). If park use is

generally tied to physical and social comfort, what aspects of those two broad features might facilitate social interactions between heterogeneous individuals?

Chapter 3: Research Question

Based on the existing literature, the field of planning does not yet sufficiently understand how public spaces can facilitate intergroup interactions. As discussed previously, the current literature indicates ways in which public spaces attract people and facilitate social interaction in general. Well-used social public spaces can be characterized according to physical comfort dimensions, such as seating and shade (Gehl, 2010; Mehta, 2007; Mehta & Bosson, 2010), and social comfort dimensions, such as trust of other visitors and management of the space (Aelbrecht, 2016; Carmona, 2010b; Hickman, 2013). However, the desired qualities of public spaces have yet to be sufficiently linked specifically to intergroup interactions. To link desired qualities of public spaces to intergroup interactions, I tested the following research question and related hypotheses (further illustrated in Figure 1):

- Question 1: What relationship exists, if any, between the individual comfort, both physical and social, of public places and the likelihood of a socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals interacting with one another in such places?
 - Hypothesis 1: The physical comfort of public places is significantly and positively correlated with interactions between individuals of different economic statuses and racial identities
 - Hypothesis 2: The social comfort of public places is significantly and positively correlated with interactions between individuals of different economic statuses and racial identities

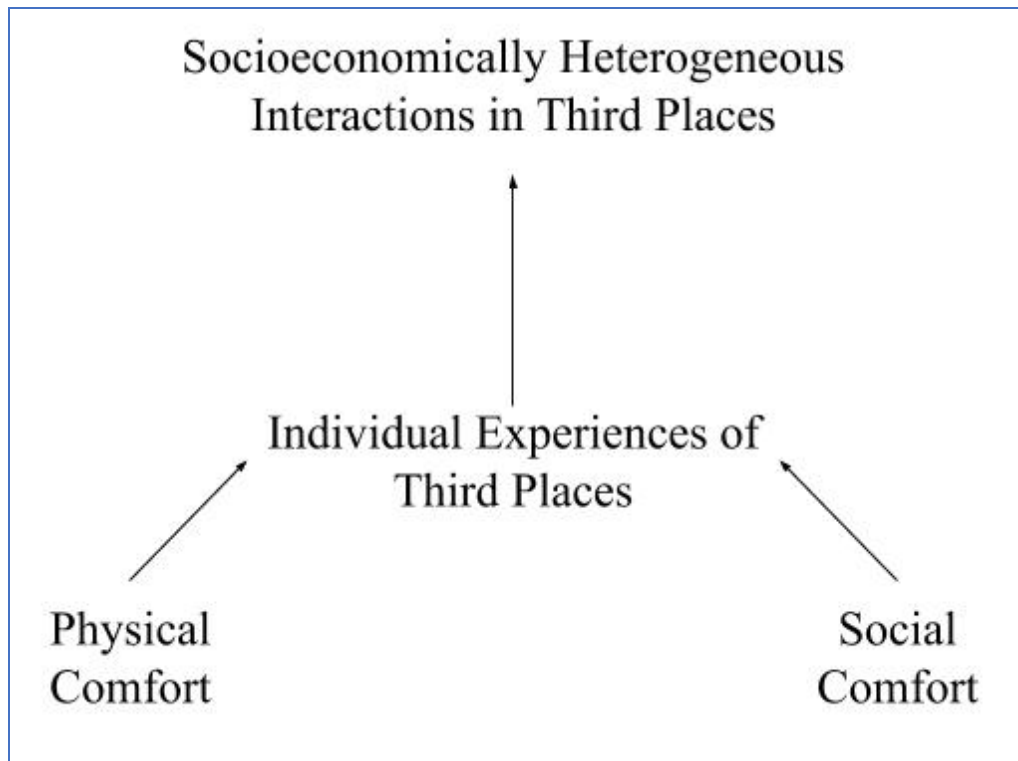


Figure 1: Concept map depicting the proposed theoretical construct and variables which affect socioeconomically heterogeneous interactions in third places.

Chapter 4: Research Design

To test my hypotheses, I investigated the relationship between individual experiences of public spaces and the presence of interactions between individuals of different economic statuses and racial identities. A sample of public parks in Roanoke served as cases from which to gather data about this relationship. For data collection, I relied on two methods of data collection: (1) a survey questionnaire administered to visitors of select public parks, and (2) observational analysis of those spaces. In the next sections, I first describe why Roanoke is a suitable location for study. I then explain the case selection process for the public parks from which I gathered data and describe the survey administration and observational process in more detail. Lastly, I review how the data were analyzed and translated to findings.

Study Area: City of Roanoke, Virginia

For this research study, I used three criteria for selection of the study area: (1) ease of accessibility for repeat data collection, (2) racial and economic heterogeneity, and (3) racial and economic segregation. I also wanted to choose a single municipality, both to control for variation

in the public governance of public parks and to ensure that policy recommendations based on the findings could be more readily tailored to a specific place.

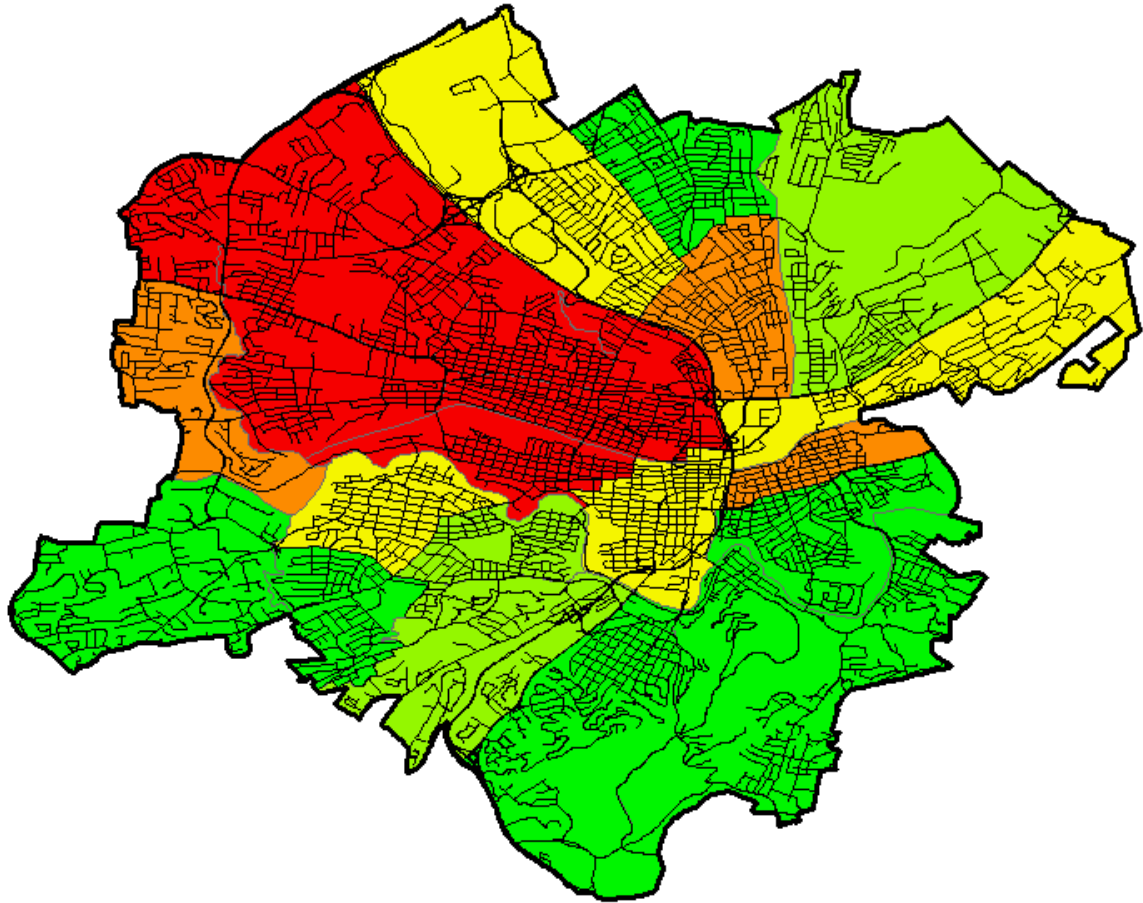
The City of Roanoke has a relatively high percentage of racial and economic minorities, as depicted in the table below using Census Data. About 36% of the city's residents identify as a racial minority, compared to about 31% of residents within the entire state of Virginia. These demographic traits are even more significant when considered in relation to other nearby municipalities, which are generally homogenous rural southern communities. In the Roanoke Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), about 18% of residents identify as a racial minority. Regarding economic traits, the City of Roanoke's median household income is about \$39,930 per year, when adjusted to 2015 dollars. This statistic is lower than the state median household income of \$65,015, as well as most surrounding municipalities. The exception is Montgomery County which houses a major university in the Town of Blacksburg and was not chosen as a case study due to potential skewing of results associated with a small university town. Finally, the City of Roanoke has a Gini Index score of 0.46, which is slightly lower than that state's score of 0.47. The Gini Index measures the dispersion of income across residents in a location. A score of 0 indicates that all residents receive the same income, while a score of 1 indicates that all residents receive different incomes compared to one another. Aside from Montgomery County, the City of Roanoke's score was the highest in the region. These statistics indicate that the City of Roanoke hosts social and economic heterogeneity (Social Explorer, 2017).

Additionally, Roanoke exhibits strong signs of segregation, observed through social and economic disparities between neighboring census tracts. The proximity of economically and racially heterogeneous tracts to one another presents a situation in which third spaces are geographically accessible to a wide variety of residents, as depicted in the maps below. These conditions are not unique to the City of Roanoke, as such inequities are relatively common across American cities, reflecting the complexity of contemporary segregation (Henricks, Byrnes, & Brockett, 2014). This can be observed in contemporary revitalization scholarship, such as studies indicating increased socioeconomic inequities associated with policies aimed to attract creative workers (Donegan & Lowe, 2008; Florida, 2014). Therefore, the results of this study may offer some generalization to other American cities currently experiencing revitalization.

*Table 1: Social and economic traits of the study area and surrounding municipalities
(Social Explorer, 2017)*

Location	Total Population	Area Total (Sq. Acres)	White Pop. (Percentage)	Black Pop. (Percentage)	Other Race or Races (Percentage)	Median Household Income (in 2015 Dollar Inflation)	Gini Index
Virginia	8,256,630	42,774.93	69%	19%	12%	\$65,015	0.47
Roanoke City	98,736	42.90	64%	28%	8%	\$39,930	0.46
Roanoke MSA	312,216	1,896.76	82%	13%	5%	\$50,340	0.44
Alleghany County	16,066	448.75	93%	5%	2%	\$45,007	0.42
Bedford County	76,463	769.25	90%	7%	3%	\$56,316	0.42
Botetourt County	33,155	545.91	94%	3%	3%	\$60,454	0.43
Craig County	5,212	330.61	96%	0%	4%	\$44,330	0.40
Franklin County	56,315	711.55	89%	8%	2%	\$46,870	0.44
Montgomery County	96,467	389.26	87%	4%	9%	\$46,663	0.50
Roanoke County	93,633	251.25	89%	6%	5%	\$60,519	0.41
Covington City	5,736	5.67	82%	14%	4%	\$34,746	0.43
Salem City	25,165	14.54	88%	8%	4%	\$50,068	0.44

White Population (Percentage) in Roanoke's Census Tracts in 2015



Map by Bryce Johnson, based on public data
from the VGIN and US Census Bureau 2011-2015 (5 Year Estimates)
(VGIN, 2017; Social Explorer, 2017)

Legend

City Boundary

Roanoke_Streets

0 0.5 1 2 3 4 5 6 Miles

White Residents (Percentage of Tract)

	7.0% - 37.0%
	37.1% - 67.0%
	67.1% - 79.0%
	79.1%- 85.0%
	85.1% - 97.0%

N



Figure 2: Racial distribution in the study area

Median Household Income (US Dollars) in Roanoke's Census Tracts in 2015

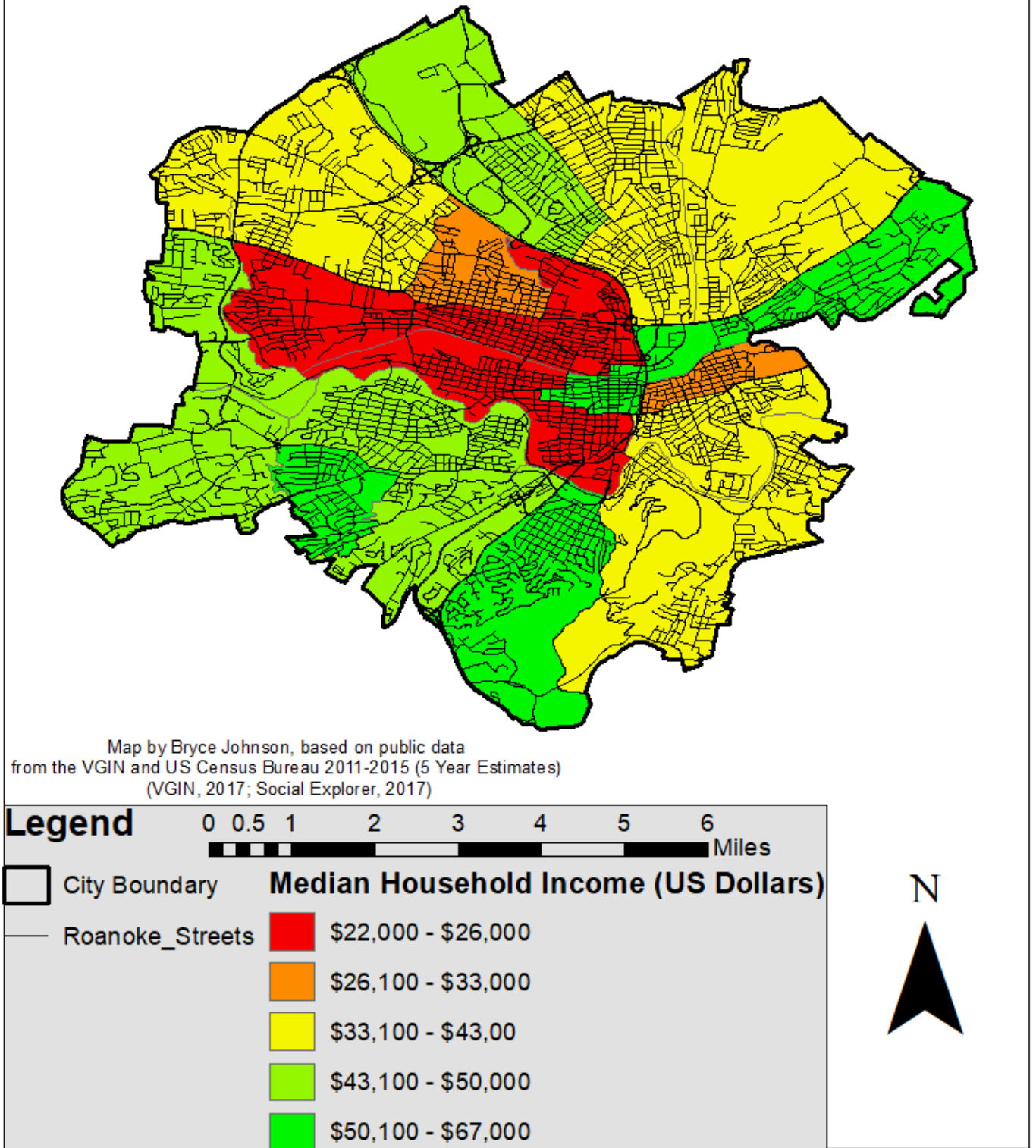


Figure 3: Economic Distribution in the study area

Case selection

Out of the potential third places, I have chosen to initially focus on public parks for a couple reasons. First, these parks already feature prominently within local city planning, as is usually the case in other cities. Therefore, parks serve as a familiar topic to use in discussing third places with planners and public officials. Secondly, park spaces are usually always publicly accessible, and are thus arguably always serve as a potential third place for any resident, regardless of economic or social status. Thirdly, despite being publicly accessible, parks are still subject to contemporary space management and ownership trends. For example, many parks are publicly owned, yet privately managed (Németh & Schmidt, 2011). Other third places are often privately managed, as is the case with coffee shops and retail locations used to originally conceptualize third places (Ramon Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). Assuming management style can affect how one experiences the space, this private management of public parks allows for better comparison between parks and other third places. Therefore, I focused on public parks as third places in the City of Roanoke.

Parks were chosen according to two criteria. First, the parks had to be in census tracts which offered a reasonable expectation of socioeconomic mixing. This proposed mixing is either from proximity of socioeconomically heterogeneous census tracts, or due to park features which allow the space to serve residents outside the nearby neighborhoods, such as ample event space. Secondly, the parks were selected due to having different physical traits in comparison to one another, which would be expected to provide different experiences from one another. For example, one park was selected for providing a dog park, which was otherwise absent at the other parks. I selected varied physical traits because existing scholarship links the design and maintenance of spaces to experienced physical (Aelbrecht, 2016; Mehta & Bosson, 2010) and social comfort (Hughey et al., 2016; Mehta, 2014) in a space. Based on these criteria, Elmwood, Fallon, and Highland Parks were selected, as shown in the map and table below. (See map and chart for info)

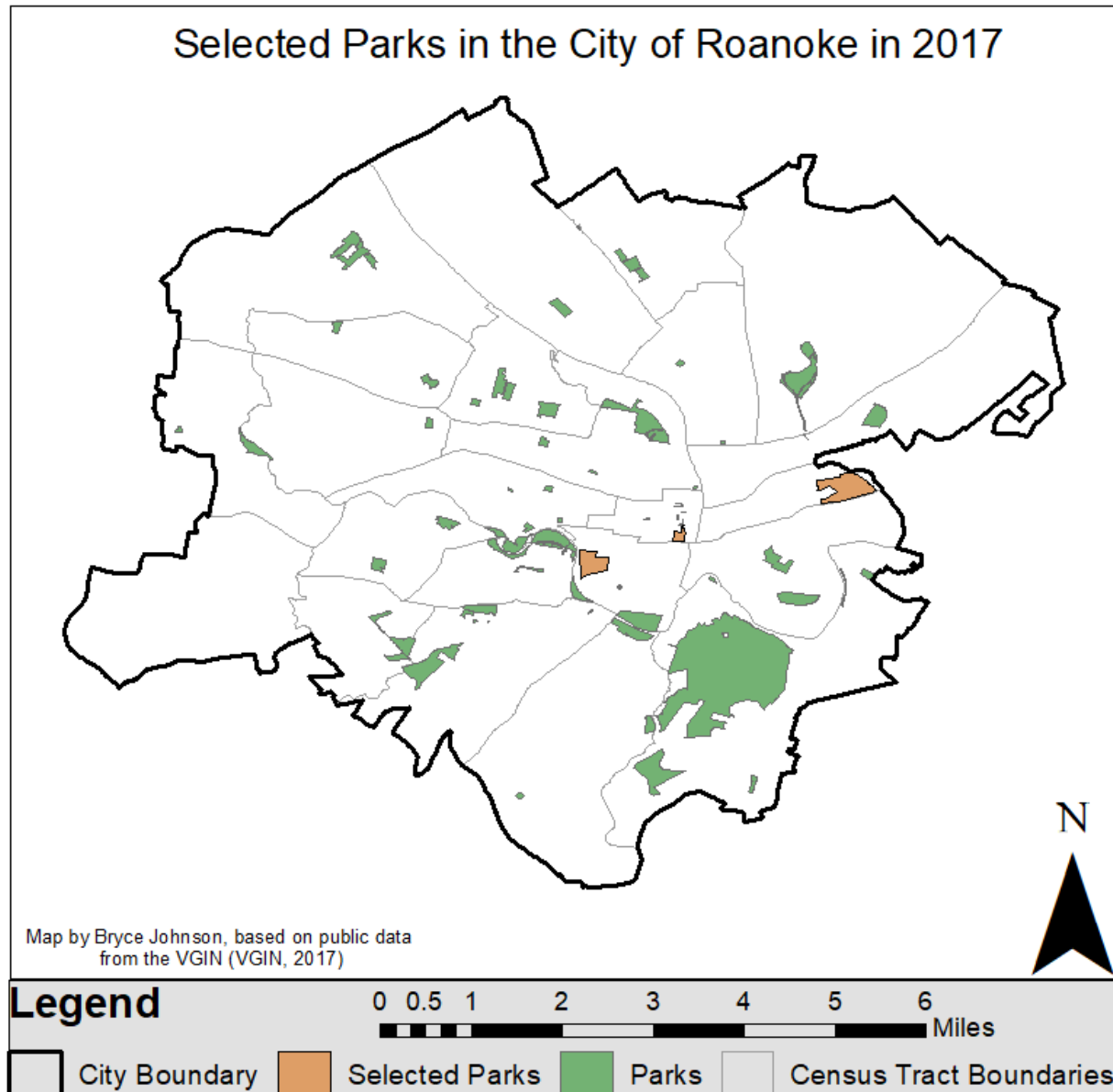


Figure 4: Selected parks within the study area

Table 2: Physical features of the selected parks

	Fallon Park	Elmwood Park	Highland Park
Amenities	Pool, Shelters, Basketball Court, Baseball Field, Restrooms, Cyclocross Course	Decorative Fountains, Amphitheater with Regular Events, Library Access, Playground, Artwalk	Disc Golf, Dog Park, Sports Fields, Playground, Restrooms

Table 3: Socioeconomic characteristics of census tracts in which selected parks are located

	Fallon Park	Elmwood Park	Highland Park
White Population of the Tract (Percentage)	67.0%	73.0%	79.2%
Median Household Income (MHI) of the Tract (Dollars Adjusted to 2015 Inflation)	\$28, 734	\$55,001	\$25,858
Average White Population of Neighboring Tracts (Percentage)	80.2%	48.4%	85.91%
Average MHI of Neighboring Tracts (Dollars Adjusted to 2015 Inflation)	\$48,872	\$25,012	\$50,264

Data Collection: Survey Questionnaire

Participants were selected during site visits to the public parks. Participants were approached and politely asked to participate in the research. These individuals were chosen based on their presence at the park, which indicated they have used the space at least once. Children were not included in data collection due to consent concerns. In total, twenty-two park visitors were successfully recruited to participate in the research. This sample number is not sufficient to be deemed statistically valid. Yet, the open-ended nature of the survey allowed it to function as a semi-structured interview. Much of the participants' responses are therefore treated as such when discussing the results. Future research should consider conducting interviews to address the nature of social interactions in third places, as is later discussed. Fortunately, the discussions with park visitors still yielded valuable information to understand the presence of socioeconomically heterogeneous interactions in third places.

The questionnaire was first tested in a public library within Roanoke County, approximately three miles from the center of the City of Roanoke. This initial test provided feedback about people's willingness to participate, and their reactions to the questionnaire. After testing, each of the three public parks was visited during weekends, weather permitting. Participants were politely recruited at each public park, based upon researcher-initiated

conversation. If an individual did not immediately decline to participate, the research scope and time commitment were explained. Next, a consent agreement was provided to be signed (see appendix), which further explained the research scope and the participant's role. This agreement contained their signature and Participant Number, which correlated with their questionnaire response, which otherwise did not contain their name. The questionnaire generally took about 10-15 minutes to complete. However, a few conversations lasted up to 30 minutes when the participant seemed to rather enjoy sharing their experiences. The responses were later typed into a spreadsheet, while the physical questionnaires were kept as back-ups.

Additional data were recorded through field observations at the visited parks. During the site visits, observations about the park were recorded, in addition to soliciting responses for the questionnaire (see appendix). These spaces were assessed according to design features related to comfort, based on criteria for physical comfort and inclusivity in previous research (Gehl & Rogers, 2010; Mehta, 2014). Once all data had been collected, it was analyzed to consider which parks are associated with social interactions between economically and racially heterogeneous individuals. Likewise, the parks were linked to traits associated with physical and social comfort. These factors were then compared to one another in order to learn which park features are associated with social interactions between economically and racially heterogeneous individuals in the City of Roanoke.

Variables

To address the proposed research questions, the relevant concepts must be explicitly defined. The proposed independent theoretical construct is the individual experience of third places (C_1). The remaining factor is the dependent construct of Socioeconomically Heterogeneous Interactions (C_2), which is predicted to have a positive relationship with the independent variables. However, these broader concepts must be broken down into more specific variables.

The operationalization of the theoretical constructs is based on prior research. The individual experience of third places was recorded via survey questionnaires completed through discussions with park visitors. The questions were based upon features known to be important for sociability in public spaces or third places. These features include both physical and social comfort, although other features may be important, such as personalization of spaces and relation to the surrounding environment (Gehl, 2010; Lynch, 1981; Mehta & Bosson, 2010; Whyte, 1988). The

presence of social interactions between seriocomically diverse individuals was similarly recorded through the questionnaire method. The questionnaire also addressed outside variables which may have influenced the presence of socioeconomically heterogeneous interactions. These control variables include an individual's age, gender, racial identity, length of residency, expected residency, income, and education level (Frank et al., 2010; Jun & Hur, 2015; Lisa Wood, Lawrence D Frank, & Billie Giles-Corti, 2010). Finally, site observation complimented the survey questionnaire by providing additional measures of physical comfort, social comfort, and observed social interactions. These methods allowed minimal intrusion into participants' lives, while also providing sufficient feedback to understand their experiences and social interactions within the park. The details of these variables and measurement methods are detailed in the tables below, while the questionnaire and site observation sheet are provided in the Appendix.

Table 4: Research variables and measurement methods

Variable	Definition	Measurement Method
Control	Background factors prior research indicates affects a person's use and experience of a space	Survey Questionnaire
Subjective Physical Experience	Qualitative assessment of the degree to which participants reported feeling physically comfortable in the third place.	Survey Questionnaire
Subjective Social Experience	Qualitative assessment of the degree to which participants reported feeling socially comfortable in the third place.	Survey Questionnaire
Objective Physical Experience	Researcher assessment of the degree to which the third place is physically accommodating based on opportunities to sit or stay, presence of a favorable microclimate indicated by shelter for shade, and absence of unfavorable noise such as car traffic.	Field Observation
Objective Social Experience	Researcher assessment of the degree to which the third place is socially inclusive based on presence of people of different socioeconomic identities, absence of official rules or security with an intimidating presence, and variety of activities.	Field Observation
Socioeconomically Heterogeneous Interactions	Qualitative assessment based upon commonalities surfacing from participant responses, focusing on the frequency, friendliness, degree/intensity, and degree of prior planning for interactions between individuals of different economic statuses and racial identities.	Survey Questionnaire and Field Observation

Table 5: Questionnaire items

Question	Purpose
Background	
How old are you?	Control
With which gender do you identify?	
With which race do you identify?	
Are you Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish in origin?	
How long have you lived at your current address?	
How long have you lived in the City of Roanoke?	
How long do you expect to continue living in the City of Roanoke?	
Approximately what is your annual household income?	
What is your highest educational level?	
I am interested in learning about your experiences when visiting this public space.	
How often do you generally visit this place?	Experience within third places
Why do you generally choose to visit this place?	
Do you consider this place to be physically comfortable? Why or why not?	
Do you feel comfortable around the people typically at this place? Why or why not?	
Do you feel safe in this place? Why or why not?	
On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very important), how important is this place to you? Why?	
What do you like about this place? Do you feel like you can do different activities at this place?	
What do you dislike about this space?	

I am also interested in learning about your interactions with other people when visiting this public space.	
In what way do you generally interact with people in this place? (People watch, casual conversation, planning meetings, etc...)	Social interactions
Do you enjoy the interactions with others at this place? Why or why not?	
Who are the people you interact with in this place? How are they similar or different compared to you?	
If you could not interact with these people at this place, how would you instead interact with them?	
Aside from yourself, who do you see interact with one another at this place? How are they similar or different compared to one another?	
A third place is a physical space in your community where you choose to visit at least once a month and is used by other people while you are there, aside from your workplace or home (Present with interactive map)	
Please list up to five locations that match this description in your life. You may instead indicate these locations on the provided map	Learn additional third places
Of the locations you mentioned, which is the most important to you? Why?	
Please list up to five locations which you consider to absolutely not match the description of a third place. You may instead indicate these locations on the provided map.	
Why do you consider these places to not be third places?	

Over the course of three separate weekends, each park was visited at least once to gather input from a total of twenty-two park visitors. Nineteen of these respondents were met at Highland Park, three were at Elmwood Park, and finally no respondents successfully recruited at Fallon Park. Highland Park was visited on two separate occasions, with successful input from visitors on each day. Elmwood Park was visited twice, with input only being collected during the second visit. During the first Elmwood Park visit, only three visitors were observed during the first hour. Due to a concern for lack of response after uncooperative weather, time was instead spent to visit Highland Park for the first time. Likewise, the first two visits to Fallon Park were

deemed unsuccessful, thus time those days spent at Elmwood Park and later Highland Park. The final visit to Fallon Park still yielded no participation, although more park visitors were observed. Unfortunately, more time could not be spent to collect input from park visitors due to weather and time constraints, which are later explained in full detail with other research limitations. However, the experience of visiting each park provided unexpected contributions to consider when discussing the research results. More information about the days when surveys were conducted is found in Table 6 below.

For data collection, the same procedure was conducted for each park visit, all of which occurred on weekend afternoons. During the visits, brief field observations were recorded in a 30-minute time window prior to conducting the surveys. Field observations continued while conducting survey questionnaires but were limited to brief notes. These observations are the basis for conducting the objective measurements of the physical and social environments in each park. Additionally, these observations gave a glimpse into the degree to which there appeared to be any perceivable socioeconomic diversity within the park, and if said diversity extended to social interactions between visitors of different racial or economic status. Together, these methods provide a glimpse into the value of the selected parks as third places. The specific results of the site visits are provided in the tables below, and further discussed in the next section.

Table 6: Site Conditions During Survey Completion.

Park Visited	Date	Time	Weather	People Observed	Surveys Completed
Highland Park	3/10/2018	1-4pm	50F, Cloudy	52	11
Elmwood Park	3/11/2018	1-4pm	45F, Partially Cloudy	96	3
Highland Park	3/26/2018	2-5pm	48F, Cloudy	37	8
Fallon Park	3/31/2018	2-5pm	58F, Sunny	16	0

Chapter 5: Findings

Before reporting the results of each individual park, I present the control measures of the findings. After the four site visits, twenty-two park visitors participated in the research. Overall, the participants represented a variety of economic and social backgrounds, as depicted in the

table below. Regarding gender, thirteen of the twenty-two participants identifying as men. Likewise, most participants have either only recently moved to the City of Roanoke within the past five years or have lived in the City of Roanoke for over a decade. Only one participant has lived in the City of Roanoke between five and ten years. A similar spread was reported for how long participants expect to continue living in the city, with nine participants reporting they plan to leave the city within the next five years. Only one participant suggesting they plan to leave within the next five to ten years, while seven participants plan to remain in the city for more than another decade. Regarding economic status, ten of the twenty-two respondents reported annual household incomes less than \$50,000, with only one of the ten reporting an annual household income under \$30,000. On the other end of the spectrum, seven of the twenty-two participants reported annual household incomes above \$90,000. Respondents indicated the least variation in regard to race. Only four participants identified as a racial minority. The lack of racial heterogeneity indicates little opportunity to interact with other visitors of a different race, while the economic heterogeneity suggests there are opportunities for park visitors to interact with others of different backgrounds. However, each park was associated with differences in actual social interactions.

Table 7: Participant demographics

Age	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
Under 26 Years	7	1	8
26 to 30 Years	4	0	4
31 to 55 Years	7	2	9
Above 55 Years	1	0	1
Total	19	3	22
Gender	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
Man	13	2	15
Woman	6	1	7
Other	0	0	0
Total	19	3	22

Length of time living at current address	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
Less than 5 Years	13	1	14
5 to 10 Years	1	1	2
More than 10 Years	5	1	6
Total	19	3	22
Length of time living in the City of Roanoke	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
Less than 5 Years	7	0	7
5 to 10 Years	1	0	1
More than 10 Years	10	3	13
Total	18	3	21*
Length of time anticipated to continue living in the City of Roanoke	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
Less than 1 Year	2	0	2
1 to 5 Years	7	0	7
5 to 10 Years	1	2	3
More than 10 Years	7	1	8
Total	17	3	20*
Highest Education Level	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
No College	3	3	6
Some College Studies	7	0	7
Bachelor's Degree	4	0	4
Some Graduate Studies	4	0	4
Graduate Degree	1	0	1
Total	19	3	22
Racial Identity	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
White	17	1	18
Racial Minority	2	2	4
Total	19	3	22
Annual Household Income	Highland Park	Elmwood Park	Total
Less than \$30,000	0	1	1
\$30,000-\$39,999	4	0	4
\$40,000-\$49,999	5	0	5
\$50,000-\$59,999	2	1	3
\$60,000-\$69,999	2	0	2
\$70,000-\$79,999	0	0	0
\$80,000-\$89,999	0	0	0
\$90,000-\$99,999	2	0	2
More than \$100,000	4	1	5
Total	19	3	22

**Some participants did not answer all questions.*

Highland Park

Highland Park was visited on two separate weekend afternoons, each time when only three or less visitors were found at another selected park within 45-60 minutes. During these visits, a total of nineteen park visitors agree to participate by providing their feedback about the public space, with eight of the nineteen visitors participating on the second day. On both days, the weather was about 50F and moderately cloudy. Regarding environmental setting, the main difference between the two visits was that some light snow had fallen within the past day before the second visit. Regarding social setting, slightly fewer visitors were observed in the park on the second visit. Despite these minor differences, the two visits were relatively similar in providing a consistent physical and social environment for visitors.

The physical comfort of Highland Park was measured through observation and questionnaire. Researcher observation of the site generally suggested that the park is physically comfortable. There were sixteen areas for seating throughout the park, along with a variety of park features for different recreational activities. Additionally, the park itself is situated within a quiet neighborhood setting with green space acting as a buffer against the nearby railroad. The only noticeable nuisances were an occasional nearby train, and a few instances of ignored dog poop. While these factors link to experienced physical comfort based on protection against unpleasant noise and opportunities for a positive sensory experience (Gehl, 2010), the original definition of physical comfort within this research sought to focus on opportunities to sit and stay within a space. Likewise, visitors remarked a general sense of comfort within the park. All research participants indicated they feel physically comfortable, although one participant made a minor complaint related to a lack of accessible restroom. When later asked what they dislike about the park, ten of the visitors made comments related to physical comfort. These comments included dissatisfaction with cheap seating, dirty sand, and broken glass. Of those ten comments, four comments could also be linked to the social atmosphere, such as the observation of litter. Again, these results vary from the original anticipation of objective social comfort based on presence of people, absence of threatening individuals, and intimidating security measures. However, the open-ended nature of the subjective social comfort measure allows participant responses to reflect additional factors which may affect their comfort with others in the park. Furthermore, these comments suggest a relationship between physical and social comfort, which makes the two concepts difficult to distinguish.

Highland Park seems to provide a social environment which is socially comfortable for visitors. The main detractors of social comfort appear to be factors which additionally affect physical comfort, as noted above. Of the nineteen visitors who provided input, four specified a dislike for some other visitors due to litter, smoking, and uncontrolled children or dogs. However, these four individuals still indicated they generally like and feel comfortable around other park visitors. When specifically asked about social comfort, twelve respondents elaborated on their answers by saying all or most other park visitors are friendly or “awesome.” Researcher observation supports these responses by recording that park visitors appeared comfortable and made use of the variety of park amenities available for various types of social activities. During the first visit, fourteen separate social interactions were recorded with a total of fifty-two recorded park visitors that afternoon. During the visit, eleven social interactions were observed while thirty-seven park visitors were recorded. These social interactions were generally among small groups of two or three individuals, and ranged from planned activities with friends or family to several casual conversations. Additionally, no formal rules or security was observed to intimidate park visitors. These factors constructed a general sense of ease, which reflects the responses of park visitors who feel socially comfortable in Highland Park.

The sense of physical and social comfort contributed to the presence of numerous social interactions in Highland Park. Of the nineteen research participants at Highland Park, sixteen reported that they interact with strangers at the park, although the strangers are often regular visitors whom the participant recognizes. However, these visitors were reluctant to indicate they felt that other park visitors are different in terms of identity. Only three participants reported that they interact with people different from them or observe such interactions. Instead, participants described those they interact with, or observe interacting, as being similar. Yet, participants generally resisted any attempt to define similarity based on race or economic status. For example, one participant reported differences by stating that he sees “all sorts of people; boys and girls; guys trying to pick up girls.” Another participant defined difference based on politics by stating “there are some political conversations which I don’t like.” Likewise, another participant complained about political differences when saying “people can be annoying; there’s some politics and bad behavior, but that happens anywhere.” Rather, they defined similarity based on interests such as dog ownership, outdoor recreation, or sports. However, the demographics of the research participants indicates that park visitors have a wide range of

incomes (see the table above). During the site visits, participants were generally observed interacting with one another, reflecting one participant's depiction that the regulars are a "gregarious lot." Based on the reported economic heterogeneity and numerous social interactions, Highland Park serves as a site for repeated social interactions between individuals of different economic status.

Elmwood Park

Visitor input was collected at Elmwood Park on one weekend afternoon, although a prior visit was deemed unsuccessful due to a lack of visitors that day. During the full visit, a total of three park visitors agreed to participate, although ninety-six individuals were observed to visit the park that afternoon. The weather that day was about 45F and moderately cloudy, which was similar to the weather when visiting Highland Park, which had a higher response rate. Despite the low participation at Elmwood Park, participant responses and researcher observation provided insight into the physical and social environments of the park.

The physical environment of Elmwood Park is physically accommodating of visitors in establishing a sense of comfort. The space includes 21 seating areas in addition to the amphitheater space which is available for public use throughout the year. However, none of these spaces were covered, except for the amphitheater stage where one park visitor was observed avoiding some sunlight. The park was additionally physically accommodating through park amenities such as public art, trashcans, and lighting. The participants reported that these factors contributed to their sense of physical comfort in this space. Aside from noting the variety of available activities and downtown location, participants declined to provide much additional comment about the physical traits of Elmwood Park. These results suggest that Elmwood Park seeks to provide a physically comfortable space, although it may not be noteworthy in this regard.

Unlike the physical environment, participants were quick to comment about their sense of social comfort at Elmwood Park. For the day of the visit, all three participants felt socially comfortable, and indicated that is generally the case. However, one participant, a young white woman, reported that she was previously not comfortable at Elmwood Park due to the presence of homeless individuals. Additional security and police presence in recent years has changed her sense of comfort. During discussion with the participant, her family member agreed in

appreciating the lack of visible homeless individuals. The participant reinforced this view by stating that she feels safe because “There are police and people around.” Her views reflect previous community perceptions and news reports related to the presence of homeless individuals in downtown (Boone, 2006). Contrastingly, another respondent, a black man, specifically complained about excess police presence. When asked what he disliked about Elmwood Park, he stated “Keep the police away. The police bother people.” He felt there was no need for the increased security over the years because “there is no trouble here,” reflecting that he liked the space for being “peaceful.” In total, all three responses reflect researcher observations about official surveillance around the park, tall intimidating gates to close spaces within the park, and official park rules governing the space. Additionally, most park visitors were resistant to participating in the research, with many even declining to verbally say no. This is remarkably different than individuals at the other locations, including those at the public library used to test the survey. Yet, more visitors, thus more potential participants, were observed at Elmwood Park during the site visit. On the one hand, these differences could be because I unknowingly behaved differently that day. On the other hand, it could be that much of Elmwood Park operates as travel space connecting other areas of downtown. These observations indicate the park’s built environment and management do not increase social comfort for visitors, although there is some social comfort within the space.

Linked to social comfort, there were few observable or reported social interactions between park visitors of different racial or economic status. Yet, researcher observation suggests that visitors appear to be of a variety of racial and economic identities. At least 25% of the park visitors appeared to be a social or economic minority. This was noted via researcher perceptions of the race of park visitors. Additionally, two park visitors appeared to be homeless, based on carrying belongings and a lack of hygiene associated with inaccess to consistent bathing facilities. Despite an apparent diversity of visitors, observation indicates that park visitors typically only interacted with family and preexisting friends. All park visitors remained in pre-established groups upon entering the park. The social groups usually lacked racial diversity, while such diversity was never observed in visiting families. Likewise, participant response indicate that these interactions are often with pre-established friends from school or the neighborhood. Due to informal economic segregation, it is likely these friend groups do not contain economic heterogeneity. There may have been social interactions between visitors of

different economic backgrounds, but economic status is difficult to gauge without more comprehensive survey collection. However, one participant reported that he interacts with anybody through casual conversations and would do so if he were to visit another park instead. This participant indicated that he felt most other park visitors were friendly and respectful, with the exception of police who unnecessarily bother and intimidate certain visitors. This suggests a slightly tense environment where visitors are hesitant to initiate conversation with strangers, which may be construed as violating a social norm. This participant's remark is not unique, as prior research likewise found negative experiences related to over policing or managing public spaces (Carmona, 2010a; Cybriwsky, 1999). As a result, the data indicates that Elmwood Park is visited by a wide range of individuals, however a perhaps tense social environment discourages interaction between individuals of different racial or economic identities.

Fallon Park

Of the three parks, Fallon Park appears to be the least used during spring, even on days with ideal weather for outdoor activities. The park was visited on three separate weekend afternoons. The first two visits were deemed unsuccessful due to a lack of visitors to provide research input. The final visit yielded more visitors, although all declined to participate. The day of this particular visit had pleasant outdoor weather, marked by being sunny and about 58F. This weather was warmer and sunnier than when Highland and Elmwood Parks were visited. However, there were still fewer people at Fallon Park, with only sixteen people being observed the day of the full visit. Six of these visitors only used the park as an entrance to the greenway, with the other ten using the park itself. Although Fallon Park has yearlong activities available such as a regional cyclocross course, it does include a pool for summer use. It is likely that the park is primarily used while the pool is open, with most visitors choosing not to visit at other times of the year. This would suggest that Fallon Park serves as a reluctant third place when it serves as a social destination. These observations are critical to understanding the general experience of park visitors, and the types of interactions which occur within it.

Like the other parks, Fallon Park is found to be physically accommodating. In fact, the park has several spaces for seating, including a large picnic shelter. However, Fallon Park is bounded by a wide road on one side, which provides constant traffic as background noise. Although park features, such as the playground and picnic shelter, are set back from the road, the

traffic still serves as a safety concern. Park space along the edge of the park is generally open without trees or other significant obstacles to act as a barrier against traffic. On its other side, Fallon Park is bounded by an elementary school and residential land. However, the park's connections to these adjacent land uses consists only of street access, without any sidewalk or trails on this side of the park. These conditions suggest that Fallon Park provides some minimal amenities aimed at physical comfort but does little to address the way it connects to its surrounding land uses.

The lack of people presents a remarkably different social environment in Fallon Park when compared to the other two parks. Visitors were reluctant to talk with strangers, and typically stuck to themselves in small groups. No casual or unplanned social interactions were observed, and only two solitary visitors were seen to people watch. There did appear to be some demographic variety within the visitor population related to race. All white visitors used the park as an entrance to the Greenway, while most Black visitors stayed within the park itself. These observed differences match prior research indicating that park activities are correlated with race, with white visitors being more likely to use parks for exercise purposes (Derose et al., 2015). Other research found that racial minorities are more likely to use parks as social spaces, as compared to white visitors (Sasidharan, And, & Godbey, 2005). Perhaps most importantly, the lack of people construed an unwelcoming environment. This social atmosphere runs counter to propositions that social comfort is aided by "eyes on the street" (Jacobs, 1961) or the general presence of other people as interesting features (Whyte, 1988). Overall, there was not a major social environment in Fallon Park. This may be because the park receives greater use during summer during warmer weather. Further data collection is necessary for additional conclusion about the social comfort of Fallon Park. However, the observed social atmosphere suggested little sense of social comfort, which reflects into a potential lack of interaction among park visitors of different racial or economic identities.

Parks Comparison

The results of the site visits paints contrasting pictures for each of the three parks. Highland Park appeared to have the most unplanned interactions among visitors, with said interactions even leading to new friendships. Meanwhile, visitors at Elmwood Park and Fallon Park typically did not interact with others, unless there was already a preexisting relationship

between the visitors. These preexisting relationships tended to be among individuals with similar racial and economic backgrounds, which suggests that visitors at these two parks are less likely to interact with others of different racial or economic identities. However, there was apparent diversity among park visitors, based on researcher observation which indicated that at least 25% of park visitors were of a perceivable minority. Contrastingly, Highland Park had little perceivable diversity, although park visitors dispute the researcher's surface perception. Visitors at Highland Park report a wide variety of visitors in terms of identity and behavior, however they typically focused on common recreational interests. Participant input suggests a variety of income statuses, which would otherwise not be detected without conversation. These results suggest that Highland Park is a third place with the potential to facilitate social interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals, although it may be primarily limited to economic heterogeneity.

A comparison of the different levels of comfort between the parks may indicate why they experience contrasting levels of social interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals. Fallon Park arguably provides the least socially and physically comfortable experience for visitors and appears least likely to facilitate interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals. Elmwood Park provides a more physically comfortable experience and a mildly socially comfortable experience. Relatedly, there is little current evidence that the park hosts social interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals. Finally, Highland Park provides a relatively comfortable experience, particularly with a welcoming social climate. However, the park provides varied degrees of physical comfort, reflected in an ideal physical location but with poor park maintenance. These results (further detailed in the tables below), suggest that social comfort plays a primary role in facilitating social interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals.

Table 8: Social interactions at the selected parks

Park	Average People Observed	Average Interactions Observed	Types of Interactions	Perceived Difference Between Visitors
Highland Park	46	13	People Watch, Casual Conversation, Planned Activities, Recreational Activities	Visitors report feelings of diversity, although researcher could see little.
Elmwood Park	96	18	People Watch, Casual Conversation, Planned Activities, Recreational Activities	Visitors did not report any diversity, although researcher observed diversity among visitors.
Fallon Park	16	5	People Watch, Planned Activities, Recreational Activities	Researcher observed diversity among park users.

Table 9: Physical comfort of the selected third places

Park	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Available Seating	Sheltered Seating
Highland Park	Benches, Large Size, Open Space, Lighting	Litter/Dog Waste, Dirty Gravel, Cheap Seating, Poor Upkeep	16	0
Elmwood Park	Beautiful	None	21	1
Fallon Park	N/A	N/A	11	4

Table 10: Social comfort of the selected third places

Park	Positive Comments	Negative Comments	Intimidating Factors	Observations
Highland Park	Friendly People,	Smokers, Uncontrolled Kids and Dogs, Litter	None	
Elmwood Park	Respectful People, Friendly People, Police Presence	Police Presence	Signage, Police, Tall Gates	
Fallon Park	N/A	N/A	None	

Chapter 6: Discussion

The collected data supports the second hypothesis, although it does not necessarily support or counter the first hypothesis which deals with physical comfort. Additionally, the results provide no notable interactions across racial boundaries. Therefore, the social comfort of third places is positively associated with interactions between individuals of different economic

status. To discuss the connection between social comfort and interactions between individuals of different economic status, I explore four topics: (1) limitations of the research, (2) unplanned social interactions which generate new relationships and shift conversation away from socioeconomic differences, (3) the effect of public space incivilities in creating a socially uncomfortable environment, and (4) implications for further research and policy. These four discussion points indicate directions for future research and policy action, thus they suggest steps to overcome historical divisions between different communities.

Limitations

As with all research, there were some unfortunate limitations which should be considered when discussing the results. First, there is sample bias regarding the site selection and participants. The external validity of the research is limited because I only collected data on three parks within one city. Additionally, the participants were somewhat self-selected due to their voluntary participation, indicating some degree of sociability. Participation also excluded city residents who avoid using parks outside of warm days associated with late spring, summer and fall. This reflects that the timing of data collection was not preferable due to uncooperative late winter weather and spring storms. This weather discouraged use of the selected parks, which meant there were several days which were unable to be spent conducting the survey, despite having planned to do so. Said limitations partially resulted from a late approval from Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (IRB) which took longer than anticipated to review research proposals for the 2017-2018 academic year. As a result, data collection was only able to occur during a narrow window of time when people were unlikely to be spending time outside. The limited number of responses reflects this research barrier. As a result, the timing of data collection may have actually helped specifically recruit people who view the parks as third places, which was the recruitment goal.

Secondly, the collected data reveal some limitations with the questionnaire used. Most notably, many respondents were hesitant to share specific locations which they frequently visit and consider to be of personal importance. Instead, they often resorted to vague responses such as "the coffee shop." This was anticipated to a certain degree by testing the use of a map to allow respondents to indicate third places. However, the map was found to be of little value to respondents when the survey was first tested. This resulted because of the small size, while

larger maps were impractical and expensive for this research project. Fortunately, many respondents, even those with some vague answers, named specific locations of importance. However, it is possible that the vague answers merely reflect respondents attempting to provide an answer when they could think of none. Fortunately, the specific locations tended to be commonly reported among respondents, which suggests their general importance as local third places.

An additional issue with the survey was the means of asking respondents with whom they interact. The survey was written to avoid a response bias which could result from individuals insisting they do not discriminate. Thus, the related questions broadly asked respondents what differences or similarities they perceive regarding those in the third places. This approach allowed most respondents to directly avoid the topic of racial identity, although this is useful when compared to contemporary scholarship on color-blind racism as previously discussed. However, several respondents still mentioned specific groups of people, including terms related economic status. Nonetheless, the survey remained limited in its ability to gauge intergroup social interactions. Fortunately, this is not a unique issue, which presents an opportunity for improvement in future related research.

Thirdly, there is an obvious response bias in that respondents were likely among the more sociable of park visitors. As long as the individual was encountered at the park, there was no additional discrimination during survey recruitment. However, those likely to agree to participate tended to be more sociable and agreeable in nature. Many other park visitors declined to participate, thus skewing responses to include less representation of less amicable people. Fortunately, some respondents could still be considered less sociable, as indicated in their answers to questions such as who they interact with and why. Additionally, the sociable park visitors are more likely to participate in public social interactions, thus helpful for quickly learning how the park influences said social interactions. An additional skew resulted based on the park visitor's comfort with research, with some respondents even striking up conversation about their own experiences doing research for school. This response bias should be considered when interpreting the data results.

As discussed here, the major limitations of the study were difficult to avoid yet presented some opportunities as well. These limitations included the timing of data collection, respondents' difficulty or hesitation to provide additional third places, general difficulty gauging similarities

and differences of identity related to social interactions, and finally an inherent response bias to overrepresent sociable park visitors. Unfortunately, these factors present a barrier to the current research and should be considered when discussing the results. However, the limitations also reflect the value of third places as community gathering spaces, which suggests that the selected parks were appropriately chosen as local third places.

Unplanned Social Interactions

Of the third places visited, unplanned social interactions were most often associated with an outside stimulating factor, which planners know as the process of triangulation (Whyte, 1988). Triangulation was often associated with the dog park in Highland Park, as the interaction of dogs prompted visitors to talk with one another. Only three respondents at the park indicated that they do not engage in casual conversations with other visitors. Conversely, the other parks seemed to lack any major triangulation features, aside from scheduled events. Respondents at Elmwood Park also reported that they engage in casual interactions with strangers, despite any associated regular triangulation. However, the main source of triangulation at Elmwood Park is the presence of scheduled events and activities, which also serves to attract a variety of visitors. These event-specific visitors likely temporarily disrupt Elmwood Park's role as a third place for regulars. Respondents at Elmwood Park were less likely to develop new relationships with other visitors, despite their interactions. Additionally, visitors at Elmwood Park were more likely to associate with those they perceive to be similar to themselves in terms of racial and economic identity. Likewise, respondents from Highland Park indicated they were likely to associate with those they perceived to be similar to themselves. However, these respondents explicitly defined similarity in terms of interests, such as common hobbies related to hiking or media. This definition of similarity stems from the sources of triangulation in the space, which enabled recurring contact with other visitors based on a preexisting common interest. These results reinforce the role of triangulation in facilitating social interaction, but indicate it has additional implications.

The differing methods of defining similarity suggest an unrecognized significance in the type of triangulation. Prior recognition of triangulation has discussed its impact on creating casual encounters such as "small talk" (Peters et al., 2010). However, even recent research which makes use of triangulation as social stimulation (Aelbrecht, 2016) includes little mention of the

effect that type of triangulation might have on the form social interaction. The observed triangulation in Roanoke suggests that the process may shape the direction of the interaction, and whether or not that interaction helps form long-term relationships with other park visitors. Several respondents from Highland Park reported that they form friendships at the park, and later hangout outside of that space. Because these friendships often originate in conversations around dogs and outdoor recreation, the source of triangulation indicates a significant common interest. Conversely, two respondents at Elmwood Park indicated they talk with others in the space, but do not later associate with each other outside the space. In this case, sources of triangulation did not seem to indicate a significant common interest. Therefore, triangulation may be more likely to help form social relationships when based on a common interest.

More importantly, the basis of triangulation on a common interest shifts perception of identity away from racial or economic status. Although respondents at Highland Park were reluctant to indicate race or economic class as factors in forming relationships, they generally specified that they interact with anyone else at the park who will talk. When race or economic status was mentioned, respondents typically expressed no discrimination in those terms. This practice supports color-blind racism, a form of racism in which common racist practices in which racist attitudes and behaviors persist, but individuals refuse to acknowledge the issue (Wise, 2010). This indicates that park visitors are unwilling to discuss continued racial segregation, which limits the ability of public policy to address racial inequities (Mele, 2013). However, park visitors suggested they appreciate the variety of visitors, and one person specifically reported he likes the park because of the different social and economic backgrounds. Possibly the one exception was a respondent who mentioned that “white-collar folks” visit the park, but he did not necessarily view this as inherently negative and still reported enjoying conversations. When Highland Park visitors did express some disdain about others, it was in the context of behaviors, such as those who left dog waste, smoked, or formed cliques. Contrast these interactions with those at Elmwood Park where a respondent reported some distaste for others based on economic status. Observations also indicated that Elmwood Park visitors were more likely to only associate with friends and family, rather than interact with others. This is particularly important considering that more people were observed in Elmwood Park. Additionally, interactions tended to be in larger groups of individuals who appeared to be relatively similar to one another. Therefore, even though Elmwood Park has people who regularly visit the space, they do not

develop any sense of camaraderie with other regular visitors with whom they may interact. Furthermore, they are more likely to acknowledge, or perhaps stereotype, based on racial or economic differences. Therefore, the form of triangulation affects the way park visitors interpret identity, with some forms of triangulation shifting perceptions of difference away from race and economic status.

Additionally, the social atmospheres of the parks were remarkably different from one another, with associated differences in social interactions. In Highland Park, the social environment was more personal and intimate, marked by more frequent casual and unplanned conversations. Visitors there were extremely willing to participate with the survey and even extend conversation long after completing the survey. Meanwhile, visitors at Elmwood and Fallon Park were less willing to participate. In the case of data collection at Elmwood Park there were nearly twice as many recorded visitors compared to an afternoon at Highland Park, yet only three individuals were willing to participate in the research at this location. No visitors at Fallon Park were even willing to participate, although it is worth noting that there were considerably fewer of them. Despite these observations, all respondents reported feeling socially comfortable in the parks, and generally felt there was little issue with other visitors. Respondents were hesitant to speak negatively of a public space which they valued and considered to be important to their daily life. This consistent response indicates that subjective social comfort, based on survey response, is unassociated with social interactions between individuals of different racial or economic status. However, these social interactions are associated with an objective sense of social comfort, indicated by observed interactions and rules. This contrast between survey response and field observation suggests that a survey questionnaire may not be the best tool to measure social interactions.

Likewise, measurements of physical comfort matter when compared to social interactions in third places. All visitors reported to be physically comfortable in the parks, despite the variety of physical features between them. The one exception was a comment about a cheap bench in Highland Park, yet this respondent still felt an overall sense of physical comfort. However, Highland Park's physical features were more conducive to being physically comfortable. Although it had 16 spaces for seating compared to the 21 spaces at Elmwood Park, Highland Park receives far fewer visitors which means for a higher proportion of available seating for park visitors. Additionally, Highland Park was the only park without any significant car traffic as

background noise. Its only possible noise deterrent was the occasional train, which was still less audible than the constant background traffic at Elmwood and Fallon Parks. Additionally, respondents at Highland Park appreciated the calm surroundings of the area, as it was surrounded by low density residential development, a school, and a railroad separating the park from additional residential development. Fallon Park was similarly situated, but with a nearby major road. Elmwood was most different from the other two parks due to it being situated within downtown high density commercial development, although respondents liked this aspect of the park. These observations suggest that location plays a large role in establishing a physically comfortable space which is conducive to allowing casual conversations to extend into eventual social relationships. Therefore, it seems that objective, but not subjective as currently measured, physical comfort is more likely to be associated with social interactions between racially and economically diverse individuals.

The objective measurements of physical and social comfort indicate that park spaces can play a significant role in facilitating interactions among park visitors. Each park had features indicating some degree of physical comfort, however Highland Park benefits from an enclosed setting with buffers against surrounding land. Elmwood lacks such a buffer, however that is part of its appeal as an urban park with access to downtown amenities. Regarding social comfort, the three parks had highly varied social settings. Fallon Park had few park visitors, and these park visitors appear to be most resistant to interactions with others. On the other end, Elmwood Park had the highest number of visitors, yet these park visitors were also resistant to interacting with others. Additionally, Elmwood Park is subject to certain security conditions which intimidate certain visitors and may reinforce social norms which discourage unplanned social interactions. However, Highland Park seems to attract park visitors who are welcoming of others, although these park visitors may offer minor complaints about one another. These results indicate that both physical and social comfort serve to attract visitors to a space, as indicated by the number of visitors at Highland Park and Elmwood Park. However, social comfort additionally facilitates interactions between park visitors, as indicated by the differences between Highland Park and Elmwood Park. In this case, the formal and informal rules of Elmwood Park establish a social environment which discourages interactions with others. As a result, park visitors may be of a variety of racial or economic backgrounds, but they are unlikely to interact in a third place if socially uncomfortable.

Therefore, I propose a reconsidered theoretical model (see image below). The results indicate that unplanned social interactions play an essential role in allowing social interactions between individuals of different economic statuses and racial identities. These unplanned social interactions are directly associated with social comfort. Physical comfort is believed to directly contribute to number of visitors, which then affects the social comfort of the space. However, physical comfort is still believed to affect the presence of unplanned social interactions, although it may be less significant than social comfort. This edited model renews the effect of the physical and social environments on social interactions, but also allows room to expand on the way comfort is defined within and around the third place.

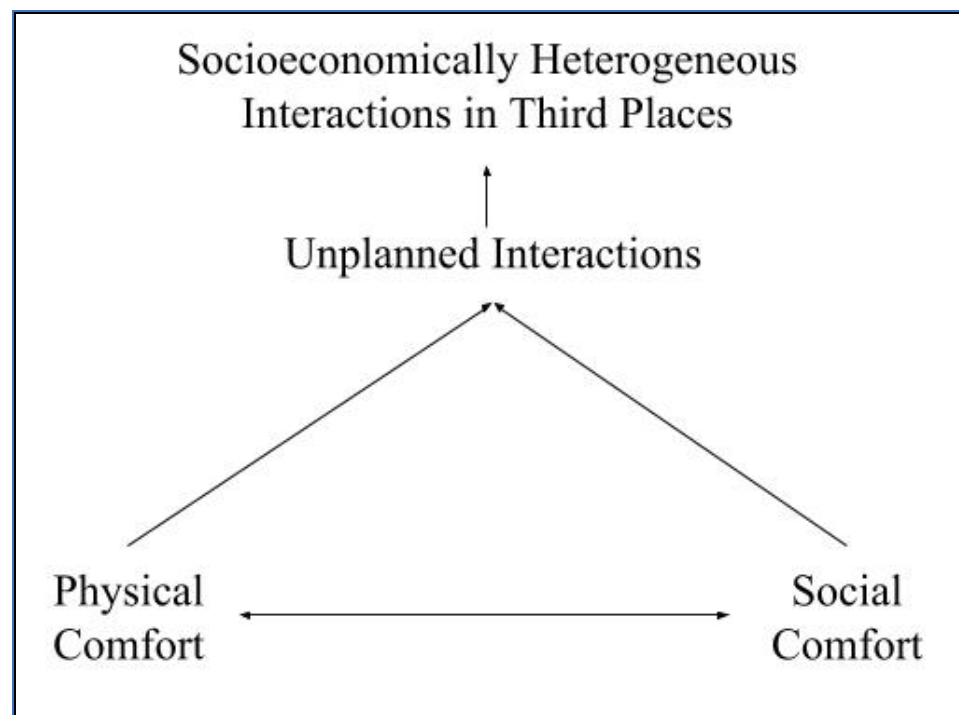


Figure 5: Revised theoretical model

Public Space Incivilities

The results from the park visits reinforce the notion that the physical and social environments of a third place both affect the presence and form of social interactions in third places. The way park visitors discussed their comfort suggest that physical and social comfort should be understood together, rather than separate factors. For example, some respondents complained about litter such as broken glass, which can indicate both direct physical discomfort, related to safety concerns, and indirect social discomfort, related to the idea that other visitors disrespect the space. These responses reflect the idea of “incivilities” as a broad concept which

incorporates a variety of issues related to comfort within a public space (Hughey et al., 2016). Aside from litter, other incivilities include animal waste, graffiti, and other conditions which indicate a space is not valued or respected by the community. Incivilities also include direct social factors, such as a lack of “eyes on the street” to suggest an area is safe. As a concept, incivilities are useful for addressing potential conflict over the use of a space, the surrounding land, and communicating with individuals.

One noteworthy incivility is the presence of unwanted or threatening individuals, which may usually be conceived as potential criminals. However, participants at Elmwood Park suggest potential conflict regarding who is unwanted. One visitor suggested that the homeless population is unwanted, thus reflecting local concerns related to public safety. Yet, another visitor complained about over-regulating the space by suggesting that police are unwanted, even if they are officially tasked with keeping undesired individuals away. This tension over a population being “unwanted” is inherent within the concept of a third place which specifies that the place is uninteresting to outsiders (Ramon Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982). The governance of Elmwood Park explicitly sought to keep “unwanted” individuals away, even if said individuals were regular visitors. This approach reflects common concerns about the “undesirables” such as homeless populations or perceived criminals (McCormack et al., 2010; Whyte, 1988). For a third place to be successful, this inherent tension must be addressed in order for visitors to feel a sense of social comfort prior to interacting with others. In the case of Highland Park, this was navigated by shifting attention to similarities among individuals as regular visitors who often have overlapping interests. Visitors at Highland Park still had minor complaints about some other visitors, however they did not require police presence to deal with these complaints. These observations reflect contemporary discussion over the degree to which public space should be officially governed (Carmona, 2010a). There will always be individuals who are unwanted in a space, however governance of that space must be carefully handled to respect social comfort, yet still maintain a safe environment.

In addition to the third place itself, incivilities can include the surrounding environment or neighborhood. These “neighborhood incivilities” include lack of nearby street and property maintenance, vacant properties, and excessive noise (Hughey et al., 2016). Of the observed parks, Highland Park had the least of these forms of incivilities due to its placement in a calm residential area. Fallon Park was also in a residential area, but with an adjacent road providing

major background noise. Elmwood Park also had significant background traffic noise, but also benefited from its placement within an increasingly well-kept downtown environment. Not only do these factors contribute to the general sense of physical comfort, but also affect the type of social environment within a space. Highland Park, which has a relatively high level of social comfort, is buffered from potential neighborhood incivilities, and also is well placed in a residential setting. This context sets a different climate when compared to Elmwood Park. Although Elmwood Park serves as a third place, as indicated by participant responses, it also attracts non-regular visitors during downtown events. These differences highlight the importance of the surrounding context in allowing a third place to facilitate social interactions between individuals of different racial or economic status.

Finally, use of the incivilities concept may be useful when discussing public issues related to third places. The concept addresses the wider context of a space, such as by including “in-between” spaces which also contribute to the social experience of public spaces (Aelbrecht, 2016). Additionally, the term has already been successfully used for park audits, and breaks down specific factors which affect one’s perception of a space (Hughey et al., 2016). In this situation, the use of an audit may be valuable in inventorying the quality of spaces and later generating public discussion over their governance and maintenance. Considering that public spaces, even third places (Freeman, 2008), can be sites of social tension, it is critical to engage in these conversations. Therefore, it is useful to be able to understand how these common issues relate to the quality of public spaces, the use of the space within its neighborhood context, and what implications this information has for future action.

Implications

The results of the research provide lessons for both future policy and research, specifically in shaping how public space is conceptualized and equitably managed. As previously discussed, planning practitioners can also use this research to collect local information about third places through space audits. Public space audits can be modified to reflect the significance of space incivilities, identify locations frequented or valued by residents, and indicate future improvements or maintenance projects. Additionally, this method may be used to predict which public spaces might serve to facilitate interactions between individuals of different racial or economic backgrounds. These spaces might be used as examples to guide local projects related

to space improvements, or even determine ideal locations for public events. Alternatively, successful third places can be identified during general community outreach. For example, a public official might identify successful third places by identifying which locations provide a greater response rate for a community survey. Future research may even provide additional insights into how to plan for successful third places.

Despite a low response rate, the results suggest steps for future research. The results suggest that park visitors do not expressly think about the role of comfort when visiting a third place, as they might when visiting other public spaces. This suggests that subjective comfort is an inappropriate concept to relate to use of a third place through survey work. However, interviews, which allow more in-depth conversation and discussion, may yield valuable information about experiences in third places. Additionally, the results support claims that public spaces cannot be understood independently, but in conjunction with their surroundings. Particularly, this reinforces calls to examine fourth places as the “in-between spaces” (Aelbrecht, 2016) which connect third places. Such places are a vital component of the broader environment in which a third place may be found, as reflected in the significance of the surrounding neighborhood on the social interactions within a third place. Finally, the results further suggest the need to reconsider the governance of public space. This has already been a contentious topic (Carmona, 2010a), which the current research suggests can discourage social interactions between different social groups. Together, these considerations not only provide suggestions for future research or policy, but also reinforce the value of third places in understanding how a community values its public spaces.

Additionally, this research provides lessons for both practitioners and academics regarding outreach methods. First, the data results reinforce the need to use a variety of outreach methods. For this research, the participant demographics were not representative of all residents in the City of Roanoke. The users of third places, and even public spaces in general, are likely not wholly representative of their surrounding communities. Public outreach, either for research recruitment or public engagement, can utilize additional methods such as brief surveys, workshops, focus groups, and discussions with neighborhood groups. Secondly, the social importance of third places may even result in easy identification of neighborhood champions who know a variety of residents, thus these individuals can help with further recruitment. The use of neighborhood champions can also help obtain feedback from residents, who may be

hesitant to engage with public officials or researchers. As sites of social importance, local third places can be leveraged to effectively engage with the community but must be balanced with a variety of outreach methods.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Public parks in the City of Roanoke provide a glimpse into the role of public spaces as community third places. As third places, the public parks serve a social function for regular visitors, thus are sites for maintaining or forming relationships with other community members. These social sites offer the potential to facilitate social interactions across persistent socioeconomic barriers, and allow for a more cohesive, healthy community. However, the conducted research found that not all public parks realize this potential. Instead, public parks which provide physically and, especially, socially comfortable experiences are more likely to be associated with social interactions between socioeconomically heterogeneous individuals. Factors affecting a visitor's sense of comfort may not be perceivable by visitors, nor limited to the immediate space itself. Finally, these intergroup interactions are aided when the space provides triangulation based on commonalities, offering an opportunity to identify with others regardless of different socioeconomic background. These results emphasize the importance of a space's design, relation to its surrounding environment, and its continued management. These factors must combine to maintain a careful balance between welcoming visitors of diverse backgrounds, but also establishing a sense of comfort among visitors. Public spaces which achieve this balance realize their potential by becoming equitable third places.

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Appendix

The following pages contain supplementary information including the survey questionnaire, consent form, IRB approval letter, and site visit form.

- Please provide this initial information while the participant reviews the Consent Form:
 - Participant Number: _____
 - Date: _____
 - Location: _____
- Please answer (circle or write in) the following questions about yourself:
 - How old are you?
 - _____
 - With which gender do you identify? (Circle one)
 - Man
 - Woman
 - Other
 - Prefer not to answer
 - With which race do you identify? (Circle one)
 - White Alone
 - Black or African American Alone
 - American Indian or Alaska Native Alone
 - Asian Alone
 - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Alone
 - Some Other Race Alone
 - Two or More Races
 - Prefer not to answer
 - Are you Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish in origin? (Circle one)
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to answer
 - How long have you lived at your current address?
 - _____
 - How long have you lived in the City of Roanoke?
 - _____

- How long do you expect to continue living in the City of Roanoke? (Circle one)
 - 0-1 years
 - 1-5 years
 - 5-10 years
 - 10+ years
 - Prefer not to answer
- Approximately what is your annual household income? (Circle one)
 - \$0,000 - \$9,999
 - \$10,000 - \$19,999
 - \$20,000 - \$29,999
 - \$30,000 - \$39,999
 - \$40,000 - \$49,999
 - \$50,000 - \$59,999
 - \$60,000 - \$69,999
 - \$70,000 - \$79,999
 - \$80,000 - \$89,999
 - \$90,000 - \$99,999
 - \$100,000 - \$109,999
 - \$110,000 - \$119,999
 - \$120,000+
 - Prefer not to answer
- What is your highest educational level? (Circle one)
 - Did not finish high school or obtain GED
 - High school diploma or GED
 - Some college studies
 - Bachelor's degree
 - Some graduate studies
 - Graduate degree
 - Prefer not to answer

- I am interested in learning about your experiences when visiting this public space.
 - How often do you generally visit this place? (Circle one)
 - Multiple times a week
 - Once a week
 - 2 to 4 times a month
 - Less than once a month
 - Why do you generally choose to visit this place? (Circle all that apply)
 - Errands
 - Recreation
 - Social Activities
 - Work
 - Other: _____
 - Do you consider this place to be physically comfortable? Why or why not?
 - Yes: _____

 - No: _____

 - Do you feel comfortable around the people typically at this place? Why or why not?
 - Yes: _____

 - No: _____

- Do you feel safe in this place? Why or why not?

- Yes: _____

- No: _____

- Do you feel you are able to do a variety of activities at this place? Why or why not?

- Yes: _____

- No: _____

- On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very important) how important is this place to you?

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- Why did you indicate that level of importance?

- _____

- What do you like about this place?

- _____

- What do you dislike about this space?

- _____

- I am also interested in learning about your interactions with other people when visiting this public space.
 - In what way do you generally interact with people in this place? (Circle all that apply)
 - People Watch
 - Casual Conversations
 - Planning Meetings
 - Recreational Activities
 - Other: _____
 - Do you enjoy the interactions with others at this place? Why or why not?
 - Yes: _____

 - No: _____

 - Who are the people you interact with in this place? How are they similar or different compared to you?
 - _____

 - If you could not interact with these people at this place, how would you instead interact with them?
 - _____

 - Aside from yourself, who do you see interact with one another at this place? How are they similar or different compared to one another?
 - _____

- A third place is a physical space in your community where you choose to visit at least once a month and is used by other people while you are there, aside from your workplace or home.
 - Please list up to five locations that match this description in your life. You may instead indicate these locations on the provided map.
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - Of the locations you mentioned, which is the most important to you?
 - _____
 - Why did you indicate that place?
 - _____

 - Please list up to five locations which you consider to absolutely not match the description of a third place. You may instead indicate these locations on the provided map.
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - Why do you consider these places to not be third places?
 - _____

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)
Informed Consent for Survey Participants**

Principal Investigator and contact:

Thomas Skuzinski
Virginia Tech
skuzinsk@vt.edu
540-231-1801

Co-Investigator:

Bryce Johnson
Virginia Tech
brycej2@vt.edu
617-842-5463

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this study is to learn more about interactions between individuals in parks and better understand how the design and activities programming in public spaces might affect these interactions. The results will be used to provide policy recommendations for local government actors who seek to design inclusive public spaces.

II. Procedures

Participants will be surveyed by a member of the study team for about 15 minutes in a public park in Roanoke. The questions will be about social interactions, park use, and park access, and your answers will be recorded on a paper questionnaire. Data from these questionnaires will be entered into a digital database accessible only to the study team. The survey will be face-to-face. No audio or video or photographic recording of the interaction will take place.

III. Risks

Should you agree to participate, the engagement with the study team member and the survey questions will present no physical, mental, social, emotional, financial, professional, or other risks to you. You will simply be asked about social interactions, park use, and park access, and your responses will remain confidential.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of direct or indirect benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. The research will benefit society by helping us better understand how park design and activities programming affect social interactions.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

No identifying information we gather from you will be published or presented; the survey is confidential and you will be identified in databases only through a participant number listed above. No audio or video recording will occur. A file linking the codes to your name on this form will be maintained under password protection accessible only to study team and later destroyed after conclusion of the study. Throughout the study, only study team members listed above will have access to all files related to the survey process. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

Please note that the Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study, and we have offered you no compensation.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact Dr. Thomas Skuzinski at skuzinsk@vt.edu or 540-231-1801.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board at irb@vt.edu or (540) 231-3732.

IX. Subject's Consent

I understand the nature and conditions of this study and my participation in it, and I have had all my questions answered. I freely consent to participate.

NAME (print)

NAME (sign)

____/____/____
DATE

**Office of Research Compliance**

Institutional Review Board
 North End Center, Suite 4120
 300 Turner Street NW
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-3732 Fax 540/231-0959
 email irb@vt.edu
 website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 6, 2018
TO: Thomas Stefan Skuzinski, Bryce Wade Johnson
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Public Space Thesis
IRB NUMBER: 18-036

Effective March 6, 2018, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2**
 Protocol Approval Date: **March 6, 2018**
 Protocol Expiration Date: **N/A**
 Continuing Review Due Date*: **N/A**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office (irbadmin@vt.edu) immediately.

Recruitment Process

Recruitment of participants for the research will occur at selected public spaces where solicitation is permitted. The recruiter should station himself at a location which receives heavy foot traffic within the space. Additionally, the recruiter will bring free refreshments to establish a friendly atmosphere to encourage participation. However, refreshments are **not compensation, but free for any visitors to the space.** These refreshments may include water, lemonade, hot tea/coffee, and fruit. When informing visitors of the research, the following script should be followed after an informal greeting (ex: “How are you today?”):

“I am conducting research for a school project on public spaces. I hope to learn what contributes to your personal experience within public spaces in order to suggest ways to improve the design and function of public spaces. Would you be interested in answering a couple questions for me? This should only take about 10 minutes at most.”

Site Check List

For each site, specify the name of the site and dates visited. Additionally, please use the following pages to detail the site, dates visited, locations stationed at the site, and any observations about the site.

1) Site Name:

- Dates visited: _____

2) Site Name:

- Dates visited: _____

3) Site Name:

- Dates visited: _____

Additional sites as needed

4) Site Name:

- Dates visited: _____

5) Site Name:

- Dates visited: _____

6) Site Name:

- Dates visited: _____

1) Name: _____

- Date: _____

- Location: _____

- Observations: _____

- _____

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- Date: _____

- Location: _____

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2) Name: _____

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