

generations) while also requiring a longer-term commitment. How does this impact the benefits of different programs for different population groups?

The practitioners offered their programs as "laboratories" for researchers, facilitating pertinent research into these important questions. Several collaborations are likely to come out of this symposium and most participants left with a refined sense of direction for their programs and/or research. Many of the questions that were raised have yet to be addressed by audience researchers, while some have been the focus of people/plant studies. Three books by symposium participants are particularly relevant:

- *The Role of Horticulture in Human Well-Being and Social Development: A National Symposium*, edited by Diane Relf, 1992, published by Timber Press. Contact Dr. Relf, People-Plant Council, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Blacksburg, VA 24061, to purchase.

- *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective* by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, 1989, Cambridge University Press.

- *Green Nature/Human Nature* by Charles Lewis, soon to be published by Jeremy P. Tarcher, The Putnam Berkeley Group, Inc. (Mr. Lewis, recently retired as Research Fellow at Morton Arboretum, was the keynote speaker.)

Also, many related publications are available through the North Central Forest Experiment Station, 5801-C N. Pulaski, Chicago IL 60646, (312) 588-7650, which can provide a publications list and a list of symposium participants.

Notes

1. "Plant Communities/People Communities: Developing an Agenda for Research and Action," symposium co-sponsored by the Morton Arboretum, Lisle, IL, and the USDA Forest Service North Central Forest Experiment Station, Chicago, IL, November 12-14, 1992.

1993 Visitor Studies Conference

Albuquerque, New Mexico
July 27-31, 1993

For information, contact:

Visitor Studies Association
(205) 782-5640

The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces

William Whyte (1980). Washington, DC:
The Conservation Foundation.

Whyte's book is summarized in this issue of *Visitor Behavior* because of its relevance to the topic of outdoor public places. Many of the findings from this project have parallels in visitor settings such as museums, botanic gardens, etc.

In 1970 William Whyte formed a small research group, The Street Life Project, and began studying New York City's urban spaces including parks, playgrounds, and city blocks. This book summarizes Whyte's findings from plazas, particularly those in New York City. A NOVA film was also made from this work ("City Spaces: People Places").

Methodology. His methods of study included time-lapse photography, interviews, and direct observation of users. Direct observation was the most fruitful technique.

Demographics of plaza users. Most plaza users during the lunch hours were young office workers from nearby buildings. However, workers did not generally use the plaza associated with their own place of work. Whyte suggested that the effective market radius for a plaza is about three blocks. Size of group is associated with the plaza's success: the best-used plazas have about 45% of people in groups while the least-used plazas have about 32% in groups.

Gender differences. The most-used plazas have a higher proportion of women. Men tend to take the front-row seats, while women favor places that are slightly secluded. The most conspicuous of men are the girl watchers (groups of men who gather together and overtly observe and comment on females as they pass). Lovers are usually found up front in the most easy-to-see places.

User behavior. Although people say they want to get away from the crowd, they actually do just the opposite: "What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people." When people engage in conversation they do not move out of the main pedestrian traffic flow; most conversation observed were smack in the middle of the traffic flow. Rarely do people stop to talk in the middle of a large open space. People also tend to sit in the mainstream — sometimes making it difficult for others to get around them. People are most likely to face inward with their backs toward the street.

Sittable space. Whyte examined many correlations between plaza use and the physical environment. He found that plaza use did not correlate with the shape of the plaza or the

amount of open space. One of the major factors in plaza use was sittable space ("People tend to sit most where there are places to sit"). Whyte argues that seating should be designed for people to sit, not for "architectural punctuation" like many benches found in parks and museums. People will sit on steps, ledges, etc if the dimensions are right. Whyte advocates the use of movable chairs which provide the most flexible choices for seating.

The role of natural elements (sun, wind, trees, and water). People tend to sit in the sun if the temperature is comfortable; but, people like the option of sitting in the shade when there is sun. The absence of winds and drafts are important for successful plazas. People like to sit under trees with a view of the action; thus, trees should be related closely to the sitting spaces. People like water (waterfalls, rapids, water tunnels, streams, fountains, pools). Whyte argues that water should be touchable — don't threaten to electrocute people if they put their feet in it!

Food. "If you want to seed a place with activity, put out food." Well designed food places can help give life to a space.

Relationship of the space to the main pedestrian traffic flow. "Now we come to a key space for a plaza. It is not on the plaza. It is the street... The relationship to the street is integral, and it is far and away the critical design factor. A good plaza starts on the street corner." Seating facing the street is desirable since the activity on the street corner is part of the show people like to see. The transition between the street and the plaza "should be such that it is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins." If steps are used as part of this transition, they should be low and inviting. Sightlines are important — if people do not see the space, they will not enter it. Plazas that are sunken or elevated too much are usually less used.

Capacity. One difference between plazas and museum environments is the difference in leveling capacity. According to Whyte, plazas tend to be self-leveling. People tend to keep crowding at a manageable level. This process does not appear to work as well in exhibit settings where visitor capacity must often be controlled to prevent crowding.

Triangulation. In Chapter 11 of this book Whyte describes a phenomenon he calls "triangulation" in which a stimulus provides a social bond between people. Strangers are more likely to talk to one another in the presence of such a stimulus. The stimulus might be musicians, or street entertainers, or a piece of outdoor sculpture. Museum professionals will note the relation of these stimuli to landmark exhibits which have a similar effect.

City: Rediscovering the Center

William Whyte (1988). New York: Doubleday.

This book is a more general description of Whyte's work studying outdoor city spaces (plazas, parks, streets) than was the first (*Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*). In addition to reviewing material presented in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, this more recent book summarizes observations in city spaces other than plazas. Instead of summarizing his findings, a few quotes relevant to *Visitor Behavior* will be provided:

"Observation is entrapping. It is like the scale models architects beguile you with; start lifting off the roofs and you gain a sense of power. So it is with the observation of a space: once you start making little maps of it, charting where people come and go, you begin to possess the place. You do not possess it, of course. The reality continues to exist quite independent of you or any thoughts you may project onto it. But you feel you possess it, and you can develop such a proprietary regard for it as to become pettily jealous if anyone else arrogates it." [p. 342]

"It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished." [p. 109]

"Benches are design artifacts the purpose of which is to punctuate architectural photographs." [p. 116]

"A dimension that is truly important is the human back-side. It is a dimension many architects ignore. Not often will you find a ledge or bench that is deep enough to be sittable on both sides. Some aren't sittable on one." [p. 114]

"Fixed individual seats deny choice. The designer is saying you sit here and you sit there. This is arrogant of him. People are much better at this than designers." [p. 121]

"Sight lines are important. If people do not see a space, they will not use it." [p. 129]

"Some architects do not like trees much, big trees in particular. They upstage the elevations of the architect's building. It was for this reason that one of the largest plazas in the country was planted with small, scraggly trees. They would not mar one's view of the building.In a moving view, which is the way we more often perceive spaces and structures, trees do not block out the view." [p. 359]