

**THE SOCIAL LIFE OF STEEPLECHASE PARK
NEIGHBORHOOD DOG-PARK AS A “THIRD PLACE”**

A Thesis
by
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ABSTRACT

In the United States, there is a growing trend towards livable cities that facilitate physical, psychological, and social well-being. According to Congress of the New Urbanism, the great American suburb served by the automobile, does not fulfill all these functions. Urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg points out three realms of satisfactory life as work, home and the 'great good place' as the third. The third place is one that facilitates barrier free social interaction, for example the American main-street, the English pub, French coffee house etc. Despite the ever existing need for such places, greater travel distances and the ever expanding needs of the automobile era have stripped our urban fabric of these.

The Charter of the New Urbanism points out that in the American suburbs, neighborhood parks have the potential to serve as 'third places.' The twofold purpose of this research was to examine Steeplechase dog-park using Oldenburg's Third Place construct as a starting point; and then to operationalize third place by establishing relationships between social characteristics and physical environment.

Participant observation, casual conversations and ethnographic interviews were methods used to examine how residents use Steeplechase Park. The observation phase was used to understand on-site behavior, user interests and then establish contacts with participants for recruitment. In-depth interviews were then conducted to examine user history, relationships and attitudes toward the place. Data was coded and analyzed in NVivo 10 utilizing Oldenburg's framework as a reference, the components of which were then examined for correlations to the physical elements.

The findings of suggest that Steeplechase Park functions as a *somewhat unique* third place in terms of user motivation, companion animal/social lubricant, neutrality and inclusiveness of the place. Findings also establish useful links between the physical design of the space and the social activity; prospect-refuge supported by vegetation and layout, topography, shade, edges and access being the most important aspects. Additionally, lack of *maintenance* was established as a major concern to sustained use.

DEDICATION

In the hopes of a richer urban life for our future generations, this study is dedicated to the cutest little member of Generation Z, my nephew *Aadit*.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. A Brief Overview

In the 21st century United States, there is a growing trend towards making towns and communities more livable by facilitating residents' physical, psychological, and social well-being. Ongoing research on smart growth and other aspects of the built environment that fall under the umbrella, suggests that parks and other public open spaces play an important role in achieving these benefits (Byrne & Wolch, 2009; Cohen, McKenzie, Sehgal, Williamson, & et al., 2007; Crompton, 2001a; Dolesh, 2010; M. Francis, 2003). Non-profit organizations like the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), Trust for public land, Smart Growth Network, etc. emphasize the potential of parks as builders of community. The additional and more widely recognized benefits being promoters of healthy outdoor living and economic benefits to their surroundings; credits and guidelines are provided by these organizations for accommodating more such spaces in new and existing neighborhoods (Duany, Speck, & Lydon, 2010; USGBC, 2009).

Neighborhood parks are the most common and numerous public open space in America; according to NRPA, *'Neighborhood Parks remain the basic unit of park system and serve as recreational and social foci of the neighborhoods'* (Mertes, Hall, National Recreation Park Association, & American Academy for Park Recreation Administration, 1995, p. 98). By virtue of the green infrastructure they support in the urban context, these parks have the potential to provide economic, aesthetic, environmental and recreational (J. Gehl, 2011; R. Kaplan, 1993; Shoup & Ewing, 2010; Ulrich, 1983) benefits to a larger area and population around them, all in addition to the psychological and recreational benefits within the park boundary (Sherer, 2006; Ulrich et al., 1991). This larger area could be the entire neighborhood, 5-8 blocks or a diameter of ½ to 1 mile depending on the context of the park (Brower, 2011; Mertes et al., 1995). Based on the nomenclature itself, it may be assumed that each neighborhood should have a neighborhood park; in the general sense a neighborhood may be considered 'to mean the geographic area that residents perceive as an extension of their home' (Brower,

2011, p. 6). These pockets of green are open and available to most Americans for leisure activities, outdoor recreation, and social interaction (Forsyth, 2005; Mertes et al., 1995). Such characteristics of neighborhood parks not only make them the most frequently encountered public open spaces, but also places that serve multiple purposes in close proximity to where people live.

In his widely popular 'The Great Good Place' urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg (1999c) articulates that life in the 21st century is highly compartmentalized in the realms of home and work, neither of which facilitate all-round, obligation free social development. He suggested that what people need, and use, to fill that gap is a 'Third Place'. The third place, according to Oldenburg is ""home(s) away from home", where unrelated people relate" (p. ix), these places provide neutral settings for casual social interaction, act as levelers in the community, foster quality conversation in a playful atmosphere, are easily accessible and accommodating, known by the regulars, and maintain a low profile (1999b, 2001). Architect and urban designer Jan Gehl pointed out the same things in the first and subsequent publications of 'Life Between Buildings', where he says that the dull and monotonous cities, segregated by land uses and building types linked by roadways create a basic need/void in human life, the *need for stimulation* (I. Gehl, 1971 cited by J. Gehl, 2011, pg. 21). J. Gehl states that the life that happens between buildings in the public open spaces fulfill part of this need, some better than the others, based on their physical characteristics (1987). The overlap between the two concepts is hard to miss. Oldenburg's examples of third places fall in the categories of German-American beer gardens of the 19th century, Main Streets of American cities, and English pubs; and J. Gehl's work adds another category of spaces to these, the public open spaces in which the neighborhood parks fall. Looking further into the overlap, J. Gehl mentions that human activities in outdoor public spaces can be classified into three basic categories, i.e. necessary activities, option activities and social activities (1987). These three differ in terms of the motivation behind them and the purpose that they may fulfill, an example of the necessary activity could be commute to work, optional could be a recreational trip to the park, and social could be a friendly chat at the café or park bench which more often than not results from either of the two activities mentioned before (J. Gehl, 2011). Thinking about the way neighborhood parks function, there is reason to

believe that they might be catering to the social activities as a resultant to the optional and acting as 'third places' in our lives.

In order to better understand the role that neighborhood parks may play in the lives of their users, the purpose of this research is to better understand if and how a neighborhood parks influence casual social interaction and relationships that may develop. A neighborhood dog-park will be examined using Oldenburg's Third Place construct as a guide to determine if such a public space operates as a third place. The overarching research question is: are dog-parks, '(public) places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work'(Oldenburg, 1999b, p. 16).

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. The Problem of Place-less-ness

The way we think about our cities, and how they must be designed and developed, is changing in the 21st century United States. There is growing emphasis that cities cannot keep growing, the more we expand, the more we encroach on nature's resources and more is the risk to tip the environmental balance (Duany et al., 2000; Duany et al., 2010; Farr, 2012; J. Gehl, 2011; Kunstler, 1993; Leccese, McCormick, & CNU, 2000; United States Environmental Protection Agency & Smart Growth Network, 2006). In addition to disturbing the ecological balance, sprawl also poses a threat to physical activity among people and the health costs that entail (Duany et al., 2000; Kaczynski, Potwarka, & Saelens, 2008; Kellert, Heerwagen, & Mador, 2008). A recent report published by the Trust for Public Land indicates that 49%of Americans do not engage in minimum required physical activity and 36% engage in no 'leisure-time' physical activity (Harnik & Welle, 2011). The minimum recommended physical activity for adults according to a 2008 report published by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, is 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (e.g., brisk walking) every week or 1 hour and 15 minutes (75 minutes) of vigorous intensity aerobic activity (e.g., jogging or running) every week or an equivalent mix of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity every week. These numbers,

which may not seem high, still fail to find their way into the lives of nearly half the American population. Does our built environment discourage outdoor recreation? Is there a lack of will? Or a lack of opportunities? Or both?

The answers to these questions are complex and multifaceted; and among the many factors that contribute to a sedentary lifestyle, development that favors the automobile and hours of transit each day comes up as a major concern in many studies (Duany et al., 2000; Farr, 2012; Jacobs, 1992; Kellert et al., 2008). The pursuit for a home out in the country, that is affordable, bigger and personal, has led many people to move farther away from the dense city centers making it mandatory to get in the car and drive. In addition to being away from the core, many areas out on the fringe of the city lack easily accessible daily services and amenities.

During the process of adding roads and other kinds of service-lines to support development, the mixture of uses and amenities was lost and so were the resources to spend on them (Duany et al., Carruthers & Ulfarsson, 2003; 2000; Speir & Stephenson, 2002). According to the famous geographer Edward C. Relph, in the times of mass communication and technological advancements, our cities have lost their distinctiveness to monotony and lack 'sense of place'(Relph, 1976). What we have ended up having are cookie-cutter subdivisions that perform a single function, with little to no attention towards creating successful public spaces (Duany et al., 2000; Leccese et al., 2000; Oldenburg, 1999a). Places that contribute to attachment and a sense of belonging, places that reflect the character and culture of the city, places that facilitate social interaction and community, have gone down in both number and prominence. (M. Francis, 2003; Leyden, 2011; Paranagamage, Austin, Price, & Khandokar, 2010). Such places make for excellent routine amenities for people and help provide the required motivation to visit every once in a while for recreation, social interaction or pure leisure. A category of such places are the urban open spaces, which according to Francis (2003) are responsive to the needs of the users, democratic in accessibility and meaningful for the larger community and society; for example parks, plazas, streets, community gardens etc.. But during this rapid suburbanization, parks have been devalued as spaces around which neighborhoods are organized. This is a matter of concern because with all the other

places for casual social encounter missing there are few opportunities for building of community through social interaction. (Leccese et al., 2000)

1.2.2. Growing Smart

The problem of sprawl and lack of meaningful places that promote activity and interaction, has been the focus of much multi-disciplinary research; and the prominent mitigation strategies that result from these studies include place-making, New Urbanism, ecological design, infill development, urban revitalization, multi-modal transportation systems, etc. (Duany et al., 2000; Duany et al., 2010; Farr, 2012; Harnik & Welle, 2011; Jacobs, 1992; Leccese et al., 2000; Lewicka, 2005; Project for Public Spaces, 2002; United States Environmental Protection Agency & Smart Growth Network, 2006).

According to the Project for Public Spaces based in the city of New York, “After years of living in isolation, where the basic activities of daily life—living, working, shopping and playing—are connected solely by ribbons of highway, many Americans express a desire for neighborhoods that offer a richer variety of experiences and help to simplify their complex lifestyles.”(Project for Public Spaces, 2012).

Non-profit organizations like Smart Growth Network, LEED-Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) initiative of the USGBC, Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), American Planning Association (APA), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and others have spent enormous amounts of time and money in efforts to create tools and guidelines for sustainable growth; all of these organizations recognize the importance of green spaces in our urban landscapes. According to Charter 18 of the New Urbanism, green spaces serve as refuges from urban density and help create a balance between the built and the un-built space (Leccese et al., 2000, p. 116). The authors go on to say that, as per the traditional scheme of things that New Urbanism hopes to re-create, the ideal neighborhood is one that provides opportunities to access a park, plaza, square or a village green within a 5-10 minute walk from its center. LEED for neighborhood development endorses efficient use of land where destinations like schools, shops and parks can be closer to people’s homes; additionally higher emphasis is placed on mixed use neighborhoods where parks are of great significance as refuges and promoters of activity (USGBC, 2009). Under the

LEED accreditation system, additional credits are given to projects that provide a park, plaza or square within ¼ mile of each home, and a recreational facility with-in ½ mile. Two of the seven principles of smart growth address the need to create communities with a strong sense of place, and a way of achieving this is by preserving the open space, the *public realm* (United States Environmental Protection Agency & Smart Growth Network, 2006). An increasing number of planners and designers are recognizing the connection to green spaces and nature as of utmost importance in livable and sustainable community development (Dolesh, 2010). Form-based codes like the Smart Code (Duany, 2009) and innovative neighborhood design projects like those exhibited in Seaside, Florida and the Mueller redevelopment in Austin, Texas have guidelines for access to green spaces and are pedestrian-biker friendly communities intended to foster social interaction and sense of place (Duany, 2009). The design checklist for Mueller states “At least 90 percent of all residential units will be within 600 feet of an open space (measured from the front entry of the unit to the open space along public streets), including a neighborhood park, pocket park, greenway, or Lake Park, and no unit will be greater than 850 feet from such an open space” (Roma Design Group, 2004).

All this emphasis on adding more green to our neighborhoods is further supported by current and ongoing research in the fields of urbanism and environmental psychology (M. Francis, 2003); according to a study of social connectedness in 10 international cities, Leyden found the most significant attribute of the built environment which contributes to neighborhood connectedness was the number of parks and sports facilities (2011). Parks and other successful open spaces affect the way people feel about their cities and the fact that people are willing to pay more for owning houses and other spaces around parks of different types and characteristics makes it clear that parks are economic assets in a neighborhood (Crompton, 2001a, 2001c; Nicholls & Crompton, 2007; Shafer, Lee, & Turner, 2000). Factors related to the location, design and maintenance of the park have a huge role to play in their ability to attract residents in a community (Gobster, 1998); therefore, despite all the evidence and potential of parks, it can't be assumed that every bit of green space can lead to an economic benefits in a neighborhood. However, it might be assumed that if a neighborhood park were to become the social center of a

community like NRPA defines it to be, economic uplift may occur in the surrounding area; a study that links these dots is hard to find.

1.2.3. The Green in Our Neighborhood

The National Recreation and Park Association has a classification system for local parks based on a size, location and function. In case of urban areas, the sizes tend to vary because building densities are higher, land is scarce, and there are many competing demands on land use. Within this system of parks, neighborhood parks are typically small in size (5-10 acres) and convenient in location (every $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ mile), play host to a variety of informal activities, and hence have the potential to be recreational and social focal points in their respective neighborhoods (Eysenbach, 2008; Kuo, Sullivan, Coley, & Brunson, 1998; Mertes et al., 1995; Project for Public Spaces, 2002). Being the basic unit of the park system and grounded in context, each park should be unique much like the neighborhood it sits in (Mertes et al., 1995). Demographic characteristics of a neighborhood have significant implications for the process of creating sense of place and a socially active park. Additionally, the physical setting that people seek on a daily basis for stress reduction, relaxation and such uses is equally important to the amount of use as well (M. Francis, 2003; Kuo et al., 1998).

There is no way to know how successful a park can be, mostly because the use is dependent on its users, their cultural characteristics, surrounding land-uses and so on; but there are some characteristics that have been found to promote use. According to Springgate, (2008) perceived safety, maintenance, quality of construction, thoughtful design, appropriate location with the neighborhood and accessibility, make neighborhood parks more inviting. Presumably as parks become more inviting the neighborhoods in which they exist become places people want to live in (Dolesh, 2010). Leccese et al (2000) have pointed out that in the dominant suburban landscape of this country, parks may have the most potential for fulfilling needs for social interaction in the next century.

Parks for the most part are composed of material that matures and transforms with time, as does its amount and quality of use. A park that receives low to moderate use, may become very popular over time, a reverse scenario may also occur. To avoid

such situations, continuous study and evaluation of parks is helpful to learn if there might be a need for redevelopment or revitalization in order to ensure they keep thriving (Marcus & Francis, 1998). We need to study how people behave in spaces to know how effective they are, ways to make them more attractive and to combat the problem of 'place-less-ness' in the United States (M. Francis, 2003, p. 18). Ties among residents of a neighborhood and ways to nurture them has been a topic of interest among community psychologists for some time; based on the characteristics and established potential of neighborhood parks, they may be some of the best places to look for such ties.

1.2.4. Oldenburg's Concept of a 'Third-Place'

Eighteenth century was the start of a new way of life (Ariès, 1977) when the realms of work and living started getting separated. It all started with need to segregate housing from incompatible uses like slaughter houses and heavy industry that posed a threat to public health (Duany et al., 2000; Oldenburg, 1999b) and the city centers never regained their charm as places to live. This reorganizing of land-uses, lead to a polarization of the working man's life between job and family as they became more segregated in time and space. The industrial revolution brought with it a hierarchy at the work-place and code of conduct that formalized interactions; home on the other hand is the realm of family that is never free from obligations. The 'Great Good Place' or the 'Third Place' (Oldenburg, 1999b) that accounted for the social tonic lost its focus. Ariès (1977) goes on to say that this segregation of work and home was a form of "surveillance and punishment" ... similar in nature to locking up madmen in asylums... In any case, it was certainly, at the very least, a means of maintaining order and control." (Foucault cited by Ariès 1977, p. 229). The rapid suburbanization and transportation revolution post world war two further extended the gap between places, necessitating additional commute time that encroached on free time for socialization and leisure, and resulted in further loss of focus on third places. The more time we spend on our necessary activities, the lesser we have left for the optional ones and the social benefits associated with them (J. Gehl, 1987).

The third place, according to Oldenburg (1999, p.16), is "a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and

happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work". These places that seem to be diminishing from our urban landscape were once given more importance than many other building types; for example the *agora* and *forum* of ancient Greek and Roman societies were more prominent than houses of the rich. But the emotional revolution that followed the industrial revolution made people focus more on immediate family than other natural or super natural objects like god, saints, orchards, gardens etc. (Ariès, 1977); in the United States, the focus shifted from beautifying one's city to beautifying one's private residence which resulted in the big mansions and enlarged lot sizes of today (Hayden, 1984). According to Oldenburg (1999, p. x), this shift is "...Pushing the individual towards that line separating proud independence from pitiable isolation", which is why he believes we need to bring them back into the fabric of development.

Time spent at third places is put in the category of leisure time because it is socialization for its own sake (Oldenburg, 1999b, 2001), the personal benefits are mostly psychological; for example feeling of novelty, casual socialization at will, extra set of friends, spiritual tonic etc.. Third places, according to Oldenburg do more for the society at large by giving middle class people a place to congregate, collective enjoyment that can also be educating and an increase in activity on the access paths, streets and sidewalks, that help enhance perceived safety (Jacobs, 1992; Oldenburg, 1999b). The element of leisure becomes more important as people get older and professionally less active; according to Cheang (2002), as people live longer healthier lives, leisure becomes an integral part of it and it becomes necessary to create opportunities for the same. In a study performed with older adults that frequent a restaurant and stayed as a group, David (a regular) mentioned to the investigator that coming to the restaurant is like his 'fix for the day' after which he goes on to do his work at home (p. 312).

For a third place to provide the benefits described above, there is a set of characteristics that Oldenburg (1999) lists as basics (chosen framework for the research):

1.2.4.1. Neutral Setting: This includes freedom to come and go at will, with an inherent component of equity. Human beings habitually like to gather in public places and age neutral settings (Cheang, 2002; W. H. Whyte, 1980), exclusion takes away the

neutral-ness from a settings. The third place lets its users' chose who they want to interact with, and to what extent (Mair, 2009; Oldenburg, 1999b), so the interactions are non-obligatory and self motivated.

1.2.4.2. Leveler or Inclusive: A place that facilitates interaction and disregards distinctions of class and race. According to a study performed by Tumanan and Lansangan (2012) on users of coffee houses in Philippines, the findings suggest that people like to be in places with suitable ambience/environment for gathering and casual encounter.; Cheang (2002) in his study with the older adults also found that they liked the large restaurant space that facilitated interaction with strangers. The ambience of the third place is cheerful and upbeat, which can make it different from a work place and conducive to conversation that serves as spiritual tonic.

1.2.4.3. Conversation as the Main Activity: as mentioned above, the life of a third place is in the conversation it fosters; like the kind that happens amongst a group of regulars at a park bench. The motive behind congregation can be different, but conversation is an essential part of third place; for example a drink with friends in the English pubs or morning coffee and news in cafes of Vienna (Oldenburg, 1999b). The conversation that happens at third places is more spirited (sometimes loud), more eagerly pursued and mostly inconsequential (Cheang, 2002; Mair, 2009; Oldenburg, 1999b; Tumanan & Lansangan, 2012). The setting of the third place has to be suitable for the conversation, which means that loud music and other types of background noise can be detrimental, which is why loud bars and discos cannot be placed in this category.

1.2.4.4. Accessibility and Accommodation: third places have to be visually and physically accessible, during both on and off hours; proximity to place of residence can be positive for access (M. Francis, 2003; Heffner, 2011; Oldenburg, 1999b; Tumanan & Lansangan, 2012). Similar to the characteristics of neutrality and leveling, minimum obligation related to whom to interact with and how much, is important for accommodation.(Cheang, 2002; Tumanan & Lansangan, 2012).

1.2.4.5. The Regulars: according to Oldenburg (1999), the regulars dominate the third place but not numerically and what attracts regulars to visit time and again is their fellow customers/users. In the study with older adults, Cheang (2002) found that it was like the regulars came to play at the restaurant with their playmates. The newcomers who

visit the place alone are the ones at the bottom of the acceptance order, but also the most likely to become regulars as they come without pre-established bonds with people at the setting. The regularity, i.e. the predictable routine, is a good thing for over-all sense of well-being. (Cheang, 2002; Kuo et al., 1998; Oldenburg, 1999b).

1.2.4.6. Low Profile: It is important for a place to be third place that they don't stand out in their surroundings, according to Oldenburg (1999), these places may even be unimpressive in some scenarios. This makes them easily approachable, accommodating in daily routine without the hassle and less prone to transient customers. The low profile of the third place discourages pretention, which supports the leveling characteristics. The restaurant in Hawaii was just a regular restaurant at a mall, which became an active third place for the older adults (Cheang, 2002).

1.2.4.7. Playful Mood: even though conversation is an important activity, it is important for the casual interaction that it remains playful. Serious conversation is discouraged by the settings and the users themselves. The conversation activities, according to Cheang (2002, p. 312), show signs of "Cinderella Syndrome" where everybody gathers, the conversation becomes more and more spirited and slowly dies down and people disperse. At the peak of this scenario, the conversation may also become loud and attention grabbing, but the people involved don't get affected by that (Cheang, 2002; Mair, 2009; Oldenburg, 1999b).

1.2.4.8. Home away from home:

"Every man, every woman, carries in heart and mind the image of an ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary. A houseboat in Kashmir, a view down Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, a gray gothic farmhouse two stories high at the end of a red dog road in Allegheny Mountains, a cabin on the shore of blue lake in spruce and fir country, a greasy alley near the Hoboken waterfront, or even, possibly, for those of a less demanding sensibility, the world to be seen from a comfortable apartment high in the tender, velvety smog of Manhattan, Chicago, Paris, Tokyo, Rio or Rome- there's no limit to the human capacity for the homing sentiment." (Abbey, 1988, p. 1)

Each individual has their own preference and definition for being at-home. The comfortable environment, the familiar setting and faces, and the warmth of a third place makes it similar to home; but the fact that third places are public spaces and support

fewer activities, makes it a completely different category. Oldenburg defines this characteristic of a third place based on Seamon's (1979) 5 sub-components for 'at-homeness': capacity to root its users which includes a feeling of belonging; appropriation which means a sense of control and possession, regeneration and restoration; at-easeness and the freedom to be and act as oneself; and warmth that comes from friendliness in the activity and environment. Homes, according to Seamon, may exist without warmth but the third place does not and routine exposure to these settings becomes more important for people living alone (Cheang, 2002).

1.2.5. Human-Interaction friendly Neighborhood Parks

At the beginning of the U.S. Urban Parks movement, "The purpose of parks was not solely to cater to leisure, but to provide a "natural" setting in the community to achieve larger social goals"(Springgate, 2008, p. 16). The well documented use of the park is for outdoor-recreational purposes; and the frequency of neighborhood parks in our urban fabric provide multiple opportunities to interact with nature, on a regular basis and closer to their homes (R. Kaplan, Kaplan, & Ryan, 1998).

Parks represent a spectrum of spaces from very heavily used to completely abandoned (Jacobs, 1961); despite the potential to be community anchors, not all parks fulfill that need. The way a park sits in the neighborhood and its surrounding land-uses affect the use of the park to a great deal (Watson, Plattus, & Shibley, 2003). While looking at the studies done on successful parks and their components, it may be noticed that the guidelines for creating successful parks seem to coincide with Oldenburg's characteristics of third places. Jacobs (1961, 1989) points out four elements of neighborhood parks that influence use: *Intricacy*, which means a variety of spaces and activities that encourage small or large groups; *Centering*, which is a flexible open space that facilitates lingering and casual encounter(Springgate, 2008); *Sun*, which has to be present (direct or indirect), a tall opaque building that cuts it off completely may destroy use of the park; *Focus*, which can be created by suitable location in the neighborhood that makes it easy for people to find it and use it, or a specialized activity that may help the place become a magnet for users in such cases where the location may not be appropriate.

Whyte's work that led to an urban open space design revolution in New York City (1980) adds more dimensions for creating lively urban spaces to the list: *Seating*, that allows for unstructured gatherings or solitary use, the more flexible the better (Forsyth, Musacchio, & Fitzgerald, 2005; C. Francis & Marcus, 2003; W. H. Whyte, 1980); *Food*, that acts as an inviter and reason to linger and socialize; *Triangulation*, which can happen over any object/activity that grabs attention, a water fountain in a park can assume this role (Jacobs, 1992); *Wind, Trees and Water* (in addition to Sun) components of nature that people seek in outdoor spaces for comfort. Aside from these components within the park, the aspect of Access comes up in many of these studies as a key component of park use; more than physical, it is also the visual access to and from the park that is of great importance in drawing people in and adding on to perceived safety. (Forsyth et al., 2005; M. Francis, 2003; Jacobs, 1992; Kuo et al., 1998; Watson et al., 2003; W. H. Whyte, 1980). According to Whyte (1980), the park should not be more than few steps up or down for it to be visually appealing and accessible; during the redesign of Bryant Park in New York City, taking down the fence and clearing some of the understory foliage to create visual access, were two of the main suggested improvements (M. Francis, 2003; Watson et al., 2003; W. H. Whyte, 1980) that seem to have worked. The *regulars and users* become even more important in case of neighborhood parks, than Oldenburg's third places (1999), because most times these people are providers of resources, surveillance and concern that help sustain the park (Forsyth et al., 2005) which is a different breed of consumer goods.

Some writers and researchers have indicated that neighborhood parks have characteristics that suggest that Oldenburg's "third place" concept may be a useful tool for examining them. Eysenbach (2008), in her work on defining the park systems and the various functions that they perform, states that 'parks connect people to each other. They reflect the great melting pot of American Society, where people gather regardless of income, ethnicity, age or profession' (Pg. 20). She goes on to say that parks where mothers congregate to watch their children play, or **dog-parks** (emphasis added) where owners gather and socialize, perform the third place functions that lead to a greater sense of belonging and community. The 18th Charter of New Urbanism states that parks are *the* third places of suburbs that lack the other amenities in their neighborhood like a

small café or a tavern (Leccese et al., 2000), which makes them an excellent case-study for this research.

'Parks are human artifacts'(Forsyth et al., 2005), and what we are looking for is if the vision that in a perfectly functional neighborhood unit, the weekly free time should be spent in prepared places; for example parks, has been realized or not. (Corbusier; & International Congress for Modern Architecture, 1973; Watson et al., 2003).

1.2.6. Case in Point: a Neighborhood Dog-Park

W. H. Whyte's work is a classic example of merging the concepts of social sciences and planning and design. His study of vest pocket parks and plaza in New York city marks a great beginning for further research on a variety of areas/spaces in order to understand what works best, not only aesthetically, but also functionally(1980) . This study is an attempt towards doing just that with a dog-park.

According to a survey done by the Humane Society of the United States, 39% households in the country own at least one dog. 28% of these households own multiple dogs turning to a total of 78.2 million dogs in the country (The Humane Society of the United States, 2011-12). People bring these dogs into their homes and into their lives for various reasons ranging from watch dogs, hunting dogs, show dogs, to social dogs and so on (Méry, 1970), and these reasons guide their level of attachment to the animal. For the great number of people that own a dog as a domestic pet, this level of attachment and concern for their wellbeing is particularly high (McLean, 2000). Researchers have found correlations between owning a dog and the level of physical activity among the owners (Cutt, Giles-Corti, Knui-man, Timperio, & Bull, 2008; Toohey & Rock, 2011) by virtue of walking their dogs and being more active in general. The concept of walkability explains the importance of destination or focal points in making a place more inviting for pedestrians (Grant, 2011); so for a dog owner, a dog-park is like a destination that they would walk to or drive to in order for their dog to get the exercise and socialization benefits. Some people visit dog-parks more often than the others depending on a variety of factors, so how much do these visits matter in their own lives depends on this frequency. If multiple people visit these parks at the same time and get to be in the same place while their dogs play, there is bound to be some interaction unless the physical

environment prohibits this from happening. The benefits that the owners draw from their visits to a dog-park based on their interactions with other people, seems like a topic worth investigating.

In the book *People Places*, Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis have listed features/elements of design that make urban open spaces conducive to human use and interactions, based on both research and practice. The authors see dog-parks as great places for human interaction and more. In the chapter on neighborhood parks, an example of Ohlone Dog-park in Berkeley, CA is given where an experiment was conducted by fencing off a portion of the park for unleashed activity with a few basic rules to maintain cleanliness and order in the park. The experiment resulted in a large number of people (as many as 25 dogs and their owners) using it in the evenings, formation of a dog owners' association and finally a permanent dog-park (Marcus & Francis, 1998). The authors then go on and provide the reader with lists of design guidelines for successful neighborhood parks and another one for dog-parks, as tools to aid the planning and design process.

For the purpose of this study and to understand the design components of a successful dog-park that also fosters human activity & socialization a combined list of guidelines is created in two steps:

Step 1: The guidelines provided by Whyte for small urban spaces, Jacobs's guidelines for neighborhood parks, Springgate's list for successful parks and M. Francis's guidelines for public open spaces are combined to create a more complete list of guidelines for human-interaction friendly neighborhood parks. No matter how functional a design is, a functional maintenance system is essential to sustained use (M. Francis, 2003; Springgate, 2008). If the maintenance system degrades or fails, the place loses it users to an alternative; hence maintenance is added to the list as a key requirement.

Step 2: Additionally, to make the park conducive to dog activity and socialization, the guidelines provided by Marcus & Francis (1998) are added to create a more exhaustive list.

The resultant list (Table 1 below) is used as a guiding framework later in the course of the study for design analysis.

Category	William H. Whyte (for Small Urban Spaces)	Jane Jacobs (Neighborhood Parks)	Lee Springgate (successful park)	Mark Francis (Public Open Spaces)	Clare C. Marcus & Carolyn Francis (Dog Friendly Neighborhood Park)
Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wind • Trees • Water • Sun (Direct or Indirect) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sun • Aesthetic Intricacy 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Flowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sun • Shade • Wind • Rich & Varied Aesthetics • Preserving Trees (as possible) • Area for free nature • Large trees , • Avoid intensive shrubbery
Context			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate • Serve denser populations 		
Layout		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorable & sustainable 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible for formation of groups • Visually Open (for scanning before lingering) • Large grassy open area (for free running) to accommodate at least a dog or more.
Seating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ample • Comfortable height • Accommodating • Flexible 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support the desired activity • Movable/flexible • Group seating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolated • Quiet • Peripheral • Seating with vistas • Seating for social interaction • Flexible • Group seating/picnic tables • Specific (next to activity areas)
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety and choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socially Relevant • Assortment to ensure safety & Security for various users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied (based on the user group) • More uses for safety & surveillance • Food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety for diversity (age, gender, interest etc.)
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visually linked • Easy and Accommodating 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physically Accessible • Cut off from major thoroughfares 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widen sidewalks or provide sidewalks • Comfortable crosswalks • Multi-Modal transportation linkage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and Visible • Flexible circulation (to choose between solitude and interaction)
Walkways					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meandering pathway through nature • Visually attractive
Accessories/ Additional fixtures				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support the activity • Waste receptacles • Public art • Telephones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See through fencing and gate • Water source & receptacle • Garbage bin • Interpretive signs • Information
Maintenance			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rigorous standards • Plant materials maintenance • Preserve aesthetics • Enhance community beautification 		

Table 1: Combined Design Guidelines for a People & Dog friendly Neighborhood Park

This compilation of design guidelines will be used as a second framework in order to understand how physical characteristics help foster some of the Third Place activities. If understood well enough, there may be a possibility of creating dog-parks that not only provide dogs a place to run free and play, but also encourage social interaction and gain additional importance in people's lives. This is an added goal of this study.

1.3. Purpose

Based on the literature review, the study aims to fulfill dual-purpose:

The **first purpose** of this research is to better understand if and how a neighborhood dog-park influence casual social interaction and relationships that may develop. A neighborhood dog-park will be examined using Oldenburg's Third Place construct as a guide to determine if such a public space operates as a third place.

The overarching research question is: are dog-parks '*public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work*' (Oldenburg, 1999b, p. 16).

If found to be completely or partly true, the **second goal** is to analyze various components of the physical environment (see Table 1 above) in order to understand if and how these elements of design facilitate third place activities. The intent with that is to come up with tools to inform planning and design of these places.

CHAPTER II

LOOKING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN: FIELD RESEARCH IN A DOG-PARK

2.1. Introduction to Methodology

The intent of this study is to examine use of a park to determine if and how activities facilitate socialization; such activity if observed was to be taken up for further investigation; all instruments used for this purpose were approved by the Institutional Review Board (See Appendix C). An example of such use/activity is represented in the 'Great Good Place', which according to Oldenburg fits in human life as a third place that caters to the social needs (1999a). The framework outlined by Oldenburg is a starting point for measurement and analysis, acting as a guide for understanding the way people use a dog-park. An ethnographic approach was employed to examine user perspectives and feeling towards an activity to help build theory related to park use. According to the "Positivistic Theory of Knowledge" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 183), social realities are made up of a combination of the material objects and individual knowing minds that interact with those objects; a possible product of this study is to uncover such social realities by inviting people to express their feelings and attitudes towards the activity without any constraints or preoccupations.(Johnson, 1975; Jorgensen, 1989; Northey & McKibbin, 2005; Spradley, 1979).

Ethnography, defined in many ways and contexts, in essence means trying to understand a culture from an insider's perspective by employing various techniques of attentive participant observation, empathetic listening and courageous analysis (Ely, 1991, p. 41; Northey & McKibbin, 2005). The process seeks to document the existence of "alternatives" (Spradley, 1979, p. 11) and stresses a logic of discovery (A. Kaplan, 1964), and that is why the methods themselves evolve as a study progresses. The role of an ethnographic researcher switches to one of a student in the setting, who instead of collecting data, learns from the natives in order to gain access to the "subjective aspects of human existence."(Jorgensen, 1989, p. 21) The resultant product of such a process is 'Interpretive Theory' which differs from one aimed at explanation, prediction, and control of human behavior/phenomenon, or the 'Operational Theory' (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 16 &

34). This interpretive theory has a larger goal of addressing human needs, in addition to all the other outcomes (Spradley, 1979).

2.1.1. Requirements, Strengths and Limitations of Ethnography

It is important that the researcher understand that not every research problem is suitable for this approach and vice-versa. In order to observe a phenomenon employing ethnography, there must be a concern with human meanings and interaction, everyday life settings, easy access to observation site, limited size that acknowledges observer's capabilities, an evolving study question and awareness of the limitations of qualitative methods (Jorgensen, 1989). This however, is by no means an exhaustive list of requirements; each context is different from the other much like each human being.

These methods are found to be helpful in carrying out case-studies that are less disruptive in nature, the reason for that being the observer/researcher's efforts to become a part of the activity itself. For the situation under study, the concepts tend to be grounded in insiders' perspective and hence highly valid, but because of the amount required involvement and labor, the sample ends up being smaller and broad generalizations can't be made. (Kurz, 1983; Northey & McKibbin, 2005)

This form of research by its very conception is not ideal for measuring a phenomenon or future predictions but is meant to facilitate building of a perspective. (Kurz, 1983; Spradley, 1979).

2.1.2. Bias and Other Threats to Validity in Ethnography

For ethnography, validity and reliability are interchangeable terms, and differ significantly from their quantitative counterpart. In the world of social sciences, bias is inevitable, all one can do is be aware of what kind of bias there might be and what are the possible ways to minimize it (Jorgensen, 1989). To start, social scientists are aware of the fact that their mere presence has an influence on functioning of a group, therefore great precaution is taken to be as unobtrusive as possible (Northey & McKibbin, 2005). In addition that is the induced bias; in cases where the setting is too big for one observer, the researcher makes a cautious decision about location. This decision could influence the entire study if the observer ends up missing an entire set of activities happening

somewhere else (Kurz, 1983). Thirdly, in a diverse country like America, age, ethnicity and gender of the observer might create social distance; although efforts must be made to bridge these distances, there is no guarantee of how effective they might be (Jorgensen, 1989). And lastly, every observer/researcher has a world view of their own which might shape how one sees the setting and the activity happening inside it (Jorgensen, 1989).

There is no way of ensuring complete reliability, but there are ways to maximize it (Johnson, 1975; Jorgensen, 1989; Kurz, 1983; Northey & McKibbin, 2005). For example:

- During the various phases the study, the observer should never precisely give away what they are looking for.
- The ideas coming out of the study should be cross checked by multiple processes/tactics like multiple observations, document research (e.g. achieves and records), casual interviewing, detailed ethnographic interviewing etc.
- The observer must revisit and question whether access has been gained to the insiders' world or there still is more to observe and explore.
- Explicit details of methods/procedures while documentation opens the study up to further scrutiny that is beneficial for it.
- Relationships must be established, by means of quotes and actual instances, between the procedures and the findings.
- Everyday testing of emerging concepts or a possible restudy/revisit.

Much like the requirements and limitations, the lists of possible biases and remedies are not exhaustive, and hence are kept open to development and additions during the research process.

2.1.3. Ethics in Ethnography

No two human beings in the world have the same set of values and interests, and a research method that relies on its informants for a large amount of information suffers most from this uniqueness. There are decisions that the researcher needs to make at every turn that lack certain answers, for example where should the observer stop writing notes and start audio taping? Or, how much information should be given away to the informant about the data and its future use? Or, if any sort of illegal behavior is observed, should

one just make a note or do something about it? (Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1979). These everyday dilemmas make it impossible to ensure a study completely devoid of ethical pitfalls. The American Anthropological Association has guidelines to assist field researchers about the basic requirements to carry out a study in an ethical manner; most of these guidelines ensure the welfare of informants and other participants of the study (American Anthropological Association, 1996). It is mandatory to respect the privacy of the people involved in the phenomenon under study, ensure that participation will not cause any potential physical or psychological harm, and preserve and convey their right to quit voluntarily and at any point in the study (Jorgensen, 1989; Northey & McKibbin, 2005). Additionally, the researcher should constantly focus on how the findings of the study and the methods of distribution may affect the lives of people under study; there should be no foreseen threats (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Jorgensen, 1989). Ethnographic research aims to uncover everyday phenomena based on the insiders' truth and '*as with truth, there is no way of absolutely ensuring ethical research.*' (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 29 emphasis added)

2.2. Conducting Ethnography

2.2.1. The Pre-research Research Phase

To carry out ethnographic studies, it sometimes is required to locate an interesting phenomenon or activity before formulating research questions and goals. This process of choosing a setting might require some pre-research work. The first step towards finding a study setting was to look over a project assigned to an undergraduate Park Planning and Design class in the spring 2012, in which the students were instructed to perform neighborhood park observations for a total of 12 hours, in 2 hour segments over a period of a week, in order to understand the amount and type of use that these public amenities receive (Refer to the observation instrument in Appendix A). Each student was given the opportunity to choose a park, out of a total of 18 parks in the city of College Station, resulting in teams of 2-4 students observing each park for a combined duration of 12 hours. The students were instructed to only observe without making any explicit attempts to interview people or other efforts to gain more information; in addition they

were encouraged to think about the reasons people might engage in activities they were observing. The presentations made by the students at the end of the semester revealed that the 2 dog-parks in College Station, i.e. Steeplechase Park (see Figure 1) and University Park Dog-park, hosted some of the highest numbers in terms of total visitation and simultaneous users at one point in time. There could be many possible reasons behind that, for example a potential imbalance between dog ownership and the number of dog-parks, opportunity for free-play, and demographic makeup of the neighborhood to name a few; but the fact that they were getting more use than many other parks that size in the city was enough to invite further examination.

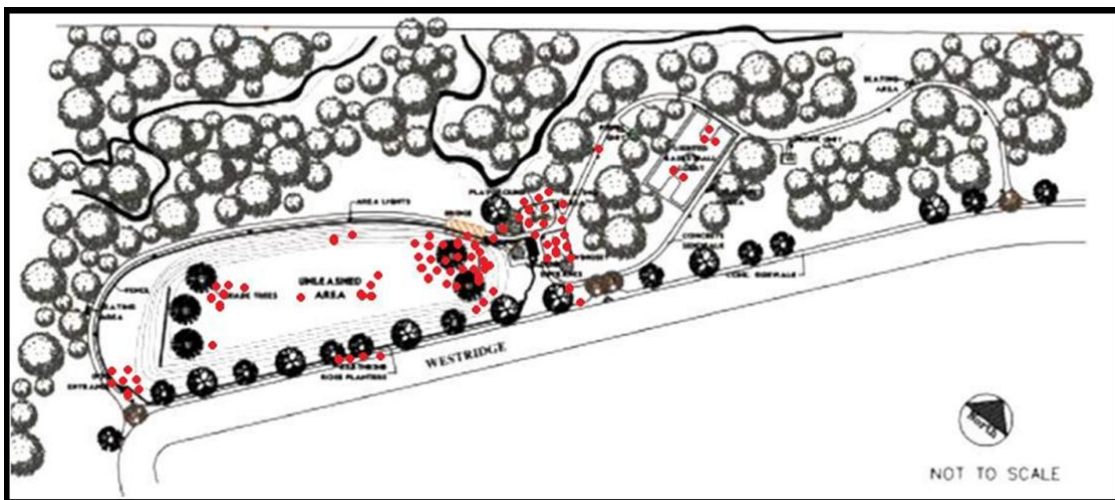


Figure 1: Saturday use at Steeplechase Park
{(April 1st, 2012) 9:00 am – 3:00 pm
User total: 82 (Campbell, Dawson, & Janke, 2012)}

At the time of the first trips to these parks, the researcher had only formulated a few broad questions; to study activities in daily life, it was thought more appropriate to observe more before jumping to exact research agendas (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Ely, 1991). It is not uncommon for ethnographers to have come upon an interesting idea as a part of their routine activities that lead to further exploration and formulation of interpretive theories (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Dunlap & Johnson, 2010; Jacobs, 1992; Jorgensen, 1989; Scott & Godbey, 1992; Spradley, 1979; W. F. Whyte, 1955; W. H. Whyte, 1980).; the stranger the idea to the observer's eye and lack of detailed

knowledge could both be beneficial for the process of formulating these theories as long as the study is conducted with an open mind towards refinement and modifications in the original idea (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Kurz, 1983; Spradley, 1979).

Keeping in mind the sole researchers capabilities and the study time frame, frequent trips were made to these 2 parks at both morning, noon (lunch hour) and evening times using the student project data as a starting point. On Monday, May 23rd, something interesting was observed at Steeplechase dog-park,

Looking inside the fenced Dog-park area at about 7:20 pm I notice that a circle is forming and people seem to be talking to one another (I can hear occasional laughter) their dogs circling around them; this is the area where the grass seems to be worn out (either by use or flooding). It almost looks like a well arranged meeting here at the park today, I wonder if it actually is an organized event of some sort. So I decide to come back the same time tomorrow. (Field notes, Appendix B)

The next day, I sat down at the picnic table outside of the fenced dog-park area, which because of the elevation seems to be a location with great prospect (Appleton, 1975) and read a book for an hour and a half (6:30 pm to 8:00 pm). A similar set of activities was observed including increased traffic after 7:00 pm and formation of a circle constantly engaged in conversation (See Figure 2 below). At this point it seemed that the behavior was not organized and that it may represent a regular occurrence. A decision was made to study this activity to find out more about what was going on in the park and how that fit into the lives of people participating in it.

2.2.2. Gaining Entry

The process of getting permission to study a group of people is not just a first step, but also a key to information. It affects the entire process by setting the ground for how the researcher's presence is received in the field. Gaining entry into a research setting has some pre-requisites, having a set research agenda is not one of those (Johnson, 1975). In ethnography, it is expected that the research interests evolve with the progress of the study itself. In this case 2 public settings were casually observed at multiple times for 3 days to make sure there was a phenomenon (social gathering)

occurring. As a second step, the city news archives were searched for relevant information and online databases were searched for user reviews¹. Each of these information sources

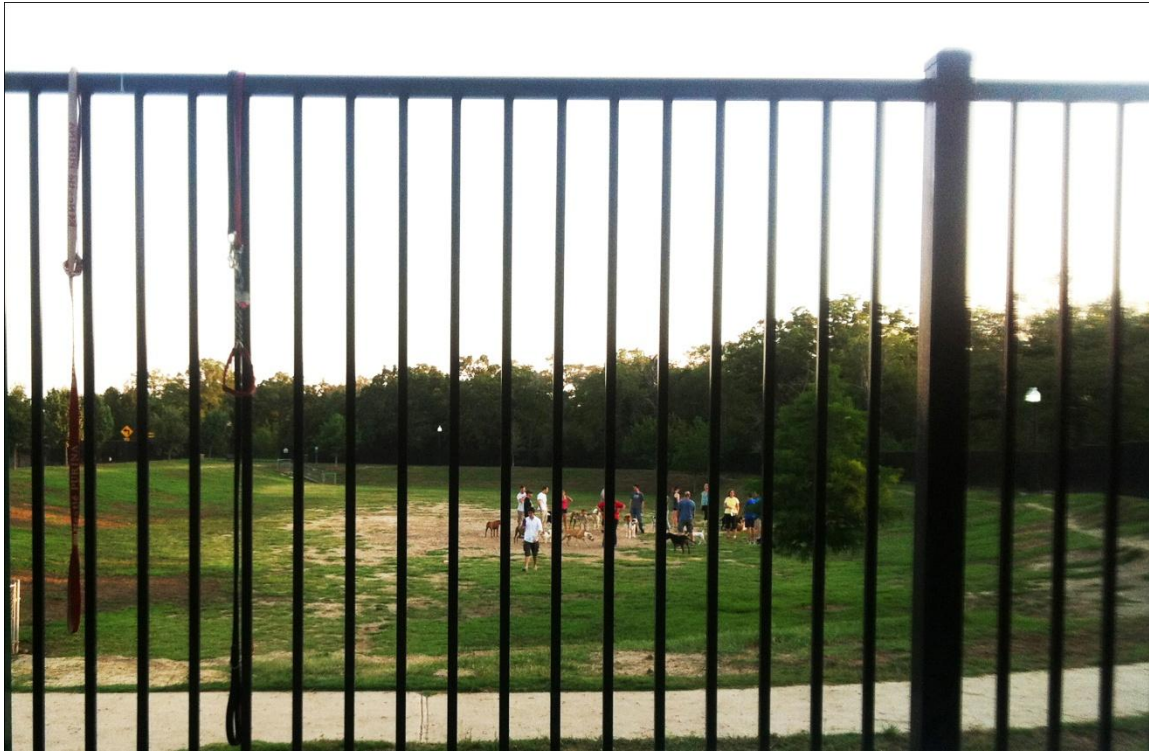


Figure 2: JPEG Image: Looking inside from the picnic area

supported the notion that informal social interactions were regularly taking place in the park and about activities occurring there.

Human activity in public areas like parks tends to be readily visible and relatively open to access/observation than settings that involve vulnerable participants; in an ideal scenario, the researcher is welcomed in the setting, if not, it is essential not to cause disturbance to the extent possible (Jorgensen, 1989). Aside from the open-hypothesis, there are some things that remain relatively stable throughout the process of entry. When asking higher authorities for permission to study a setting, in this case the Direction of Parks and Recreation, the researcher must have a clear idea of the promises to be made

¹ Source: <http://www.yelp.com/biz/steplechase-park-college-station>,
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/university-dog-park-college-station>

about the study related to participant involvement and welfare, secondly, the research role of the observer (discussed in subsequent sections), and lastly some unspoken behavioral conditions like being polite, smart about questioning and unobtrusive (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Johnson, 1975). A relative open-ended email was written by the faculty advisor of the researcher to the Director of College Station Park and Recreation Department, showing interest in studying the social activities at Steeplechase Park and asking a letter of permission to carry out the same. Until the hypothesis is finalized and even before in many cases, it is better to leave the research motives a little vague to avoid over speculations. Within a couple of days of writing that email, and one follow-up by the researcher, a letter of permission was provided (Appendix C.1).

2.2.3. The Research Role and Getting Access to Information

As mentioned earlier, the researcher should be mindful about how much to share with the *informants*, who in ethnographic research are the insiders' of an activity that act as sources of information in addition to the observations made by the researcher (Kurz, 1983; Spradley, 1979). The two ends of the role/involvement continuum are 'overt' involvement and 'covert' involvement (Jorgensen, 1989). It is important to share information with the informants because the conversations and interviews rely heavily on mutual exchange, so unless the informants are told what is needed, they may not assume those roles at all. Overt involvement requires the researcher to share all information with the insiders' and covert involvement calls for absolute secrecy, the decision for which is more appropriate for a study depends on the context and population. For the purpose of this study, researcher assumed a balanced role between the overt and the covert. At no point in time were the insiders told that it is the social activity of the park that is most important to the study, but they were informed that the researcher wanted to study patterns of use and how this use fits into the life of its users (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). In essence, all efforts to attain information were to convey to the informant "I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Would you become my teacher and help me understand?" (Spradley, 1979, p. 34). Getting entry to the setting is only the first step towards maintaining friendly relationships (discussed further in subsequent

sections) with the people in it by mutual exchange of interests and information, good relationships ensure trustworthy data (Dunlap & Johnson, 2010; Jorgensen, 1989; Kurz, 1983; Scott & Godbey, 1992).

2.2.4. Building Relationships in the Field

As mentioned in the previous section, it is only by making trustworthy relationships in the field that the researcher can count on the observations made and other forms of data collected. These relationships need not be based on mutual liking or friendship, as long as what the observer does or says doesn't make the informant uncomfortable. So many field actions are guided by common sense such as being humble, not getting too personal too soon, making efforts to fit in while respecting other's personal space, cause least to no disturbance in the routine activities etc. According to the *exchange theory of trust* (Johnson, 1975, p. 86), trust in the field is originates from reciprocal exchange between the observer and the observed; liking each other is not a prerequisite as long as there is there is a conscious or unconscious exchange of information sort by both parties. These exchanges may include topics common to the backgrounds of both parties, common current involvements, shared life experiences, other similarities etc (Jorgensen, 1989). In case of Steeplechase Dog-park, association with Texas A&M University, the observer's curiosity about dog behavior and a common interest in dog-parks helped the researcher start some fruitful conversations. It helps to be curious about the activity that the insiders' are a part of and know a lot about; the observer should passively observe for the first few days to get a feel for the interests of the group before asking them more about it (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Johnson, 1975). The researcher in this case was very aware of the fact that the role to be assumed is not *covert* and hence she always will be an outsider, this realization helps to remember one's boundaries. According to Northy & McKibbin, 'While in the setting, you must be familiar enough with the participants to win their trust and co-operation, yet detached enough to avoid being drawn into their intrigues and conflicts' (2005, p. 91) and the researcher tried to follow exactly this. In order to keep the trust intact, an effort will be made to keep the informants updated on the progress of the study, especially if it is shared or published.

2.2.5. Observing in the Field

Participant observation in the field involves systematic collection and recording of wide range of observed, spoken and overheard data. According to Bogdan & Taylor, 'one field tactic that almost any observer can use is eavesdropping' (1975, p. 60) and it was used to the extent possible.

2.2.5.1. The Setting (field notes, Appendix B): The approach to the park is fairly low profile; the access road, West Ridge Drive, is residential street with a speed limit of 30 mph. The sidewalk runs almost uninterrupted on one side of the road (eastern fringe) and within the park boundary on the other side (widens at the gateway) (see Figure 3 below). The immediate neighborhood is composed of mainly duplexes, single family dwellings and apartment complexes about ¼ mile out on Welsh Avenue; no houses face on to the park and the northwest edge of the park borders undeveloped property. The southeast border of the dog-park area has planter boxes with earth-kind roses² but no other embellishments.

The trail head towards Welsh Ave. is given away by a planter box about 8' X 8' in size (see Figure 4 below), no other form of signage can be seen. The main entry to the park and playground has 2 planter boxes with young trees (caliper about 6") and a small wall (about 2' in height) with the name 'Steeplechase Park' on it parallel to the road parking and about 15' away from the kerb, which makes the name almost invisible to somebody driving by.

The park has no dedicated parking lot; the only parking spaces available are all along W. Ridge drive for about 40 cars.

The Park has the basic amenities of any typical neighborhood park, i.e. a playground, a basketball court, a trail and a few benches, all in addition to a fenced dog-park along W. Ridge Drive created by fencing around a city detention facility. The entry to the dog park (double gates for unleashing the animals) is from the North-east and South-East, the children's play equipment and swing sets sit right next to the north-east gate to the dog-park along with a shaded area with 2 picnic tables and a trash can.

² Reference: <http://cstx.gov/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=3140>

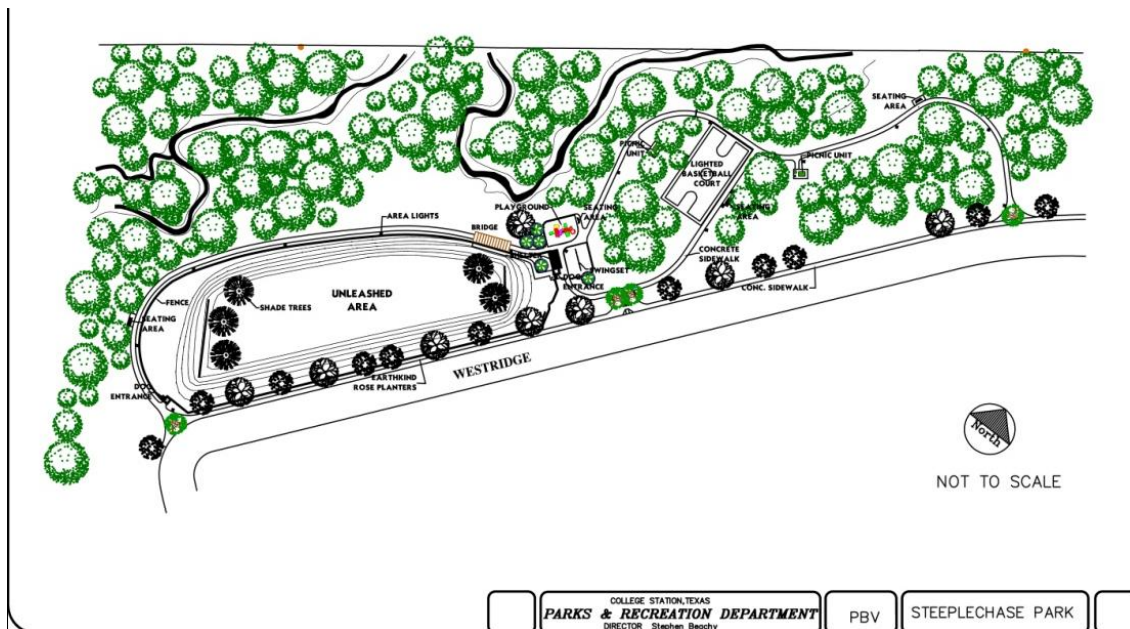


Figure 3: Site plan of Steeplechase Park³

Looking at the dog-park in isolation, its one wide open lawn with 2 benches and trash cans, one close to each gate, and two stormwater lines (lined with concrete and terminating with topography into a pipe) running through it. According to an exchange of information by email with the park planner at the Parks and Recreation Department of College Station, it was learned that the dog-park area has been performing as a stormwater detention facility before the conception of the dog-park in 2005 (Vanecek, 2012). The not so clean stormwater pipe openings have been fenced around (plain metal fencing about 5' high) apparently to keep the animals out and the rest of the park has no planter boxes or tree guards, just a blanket of grass worn by use in certain places. The dog-park sinks down about 8 feet from the level outside, not uncommon for detention facilities and hence the culvert on the northwest end of the park seems to have created a bridge situation for the trail running around the park, and a concrete bench inside the fence; at 6:30 pm on a May evening, this is the only area with a bit of shade.

The swing-set and playground each located about 20' from the northeast gate of the park (approximate distance between the starting line of the pit and the gate) has basic play equipment, i.e. tamper resistant stainless steel play equipment with bright

³ Reference: http://www.cstx.gov/docs/steeplechase_park_site_plan.pdf



Figure 4: JPEG image: Trail head, looking south

colors and 2 sets of swings with one set dedicated to babies (based on the infant seat). The surface is softened by pea gravel with no mixtures.

In relation to the dog-park and the children's playground, the shaded picnic area is conveniently located in between.

The water fountain is outside of the dog-park fence (next to the picnic area) with a lower bowl for dogs, but people have attached a hose that leads to a bucket inside the fenced dog-park area. This seems to have created a puddle of water, but the fact that the bucket almost has a permanent spot (by the look of the grass around it and the depression in ground) it looks like people don't object to it being there.

The vegetation density varies in the park with the use; the dog-park area is mostly open with a few medium size trees in the south-west and a couple of small trees on the north side (these trees seem to be fairly young and planted during the construction phase, around 2006-07), but the rest of the park has dense vegetation with a single trail (concrete paving all the way) cutting through it. The boundary of the dog-park along W. Ridge Drive is lined with new trees, all fairly young and non-contributors to shade in the park. The playground area and the swing set are treeless and have no form of canopy to

protect the area from sun. The basketball area, sitting in isolation, is tucked into vegetation from 3 sides; a set of bleachers (about 12' wide) sits in the shade and the access to the court is by a trail. The grass in front of the court looks a little worn giving a hint that people might be cutting across to the court.

2.2.5.2. Observers' Location and Observations: After inventorying the park and biking the trail twice, I decided to sit on one of the two picnic benches between the playground and dog-park. The area is nicely shaded, about 10 ft higher than the lowest point inside the fenced dog-park and hence provides good views, the fact that this area is right next to the busier fence gate, it provided ample opportunities to start casual conversations, and the view to the parking is uninterrupted as well. It was very important to choose a comfortable location with good views of the activity, that also allows for some passive use by a non-dog owner such as the observer (Jorgensen, 1989). The observer did not participate in the dog-park activity for the ease of note-taking (Dunlap & Johnson, 2010; Jorgensen, 1989), besides, the fear of being surrounded by two dogs made it almost mandatory to participate less. Field notes consisted of number of people and dogs entering and leaving the park, the activity observed between the people and the dogs, the overheard comments and casual conversations with people that showed curiosity and stopped to say hello. The observer stayed at the field for a period of 10 days (May 21st, 2012- May 30th, 2012) to observe before contacting the insiders' for ethnographic interviews; the chosen time of the day being 6:30pm to 8:00pm or until the group in the center started dispersing (Field Notes, see Appendix B). The observer's complete lack of knowledge about dogs and interest in learning more about people's pets helped with some of the casual conversation; never till the last day of observations in the field did the observer use insiders' language to avoid the risk of offending anybody (W. F. Whyte, 1955).

2.2.5.3. Early Conversations: The informal interviews or the conversations during the field research were aimed to explore people general feelings towards their visit to the park without digging for details and as mentioned in the section above, usually sparked from the park users' interest and curiosity related to observer's presence (Jorgensen, 1989; Northey & McKibbin, 2005). The things to keep in mind during these conversations were asking small routine questions, quick listening and slow talking, taking

a passive role instead of an assertive one, verbal interest in the interviewee, not using 'esoteric social science vocabulary' (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 34) and showing interest and indulgence in the conversation (Spradley, 1979, p. 46). These conversations helped with a better understanding of the activity, interests and the language to be used in subsequent interview phases (Spradley, 1979). Also, it helped the observer introduce herself to the users and show that she means no harm. As the observer introduced herself, complimented their pet with a hint of curiosity about the species, and showed interest in understanding how the park is used, the informants soon into the conversation assumed the roles of teachers who wanted to tell the observer all about their dogs and how it behaves inside the park with other dogs and people (Spradley, 1979). Good informants are the ones that know their culture so well that they can talk fluidly without thinking; such informants make for excellent participants in the ethnographic interview that followed.

The data from the informal interviews was recorded as soon as the observer left the setting; no notes were taken during the conversation for a smooth exchange of information and to improve the chances of future interviewing.

2.2.6. Sample Selection

To understand a broad range of perspectives with a smaller population usually possible in ethnography, oversampling sometimes proves key. Oversampling, in this case means looking for variety and extreme cases than would usually turn up in a random sample (Northey & McKibbin, 2005). The *judgmental sampling* technique (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 50) was used to try and capture various feelings and interests in the field and for this an effort was made by the researcher to approach different types of people in the field based on characteristics like race and age irrespective of their representation in terms of percentage. An attempt was made to balance the number of males and females (Kurz, 1983). All contacts for the interviews were made during the field observation and conversation phases.

2.2.7. The Ethnographic Interview

For the interviews, the informal interviews or conversations are key for the observer to decide which of the interviewees are knowledgeable about the phenomenon

of interest. The ethnographic interview in this case differed from the informal one by virtue of being more structured and involving descriptive questions (Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1979). Oldenburg's framework for a third place and its components were used to formulate questions; again free talk was encouraged and the framework was only an organization tool and starting point (see Appendix C.3). These interviews are aimed at creating a more complete data set that looks for the missing pieces of information that the researcher feels are necessary for the study (Dunlap & Johnson, 2010). The role assumed by the interviewee is one of informant as opposed to respondent, because all questions are left relatively open ended, allow for the interviewee to express their feelings and describe the scenario and its importance in their own words (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Jorgensen, 1989; Spradley, 1979). The descriptive questions utilize the words 'what', 'when', 'where' and especially 'how' to bring out the informants perspective. The requirements for a successful ethnographic interview remain the same as describe in the previous section for informal conversation to keep the informant engaged throughout.

The informants from the previous phases were contacted, based on judgmental sampling, and asked to participate in a detailed interview at the park as per their convenience. At the time of the interview, the observer/interviewer decided to stay at the same picnic bench that insiders' had come to relate her to. After a brief verbal introduction, the 'informed consent form' was given to the participant to read through and sign before proceeding (See Appendix C.2), the interviewee was made aware that the participation is completely voluntary and anonymous, and questions and explanations may be asked for at any point in time. In order to devote all her attention to the conversation, the interviewer decided not to take notes during the interview and audio-tape the interview, the permission for which was asked for in the consent form (Kurz, 1983). After asking a descriptive question like 'tell me something, anything about your history and relationship about the park' (see interview question, Appendix C.3) , the interviewees were allowed to touch on a variety of issues and details with the freedom to dwell on any particular piece of information. Probing questions of 'could you please explain that for me' or 'could you give me an example' were only used when a particular topic of interest was left untouched. Throughout the interview, the interviewer participated by means of nodding and giving back to the informants their answer for affirmation, both

to show interest. Explanations were not given unless asked for to avoid taking more than required (Jorgensen, 1989).

2.3. Working with the Data

Data collection and analysis is conducted side by side in ethnography, because subsequent steps rely heavily on the ones before. The entire process of analysis and synthesis can be vaguely, since the boundaries remain porous, split into four phases: **Phase 1:** For this study, the interviews were structured after the online user reviews, field notes and informal interviews were scanned for emerging categories and topics of interest. For the purpose of data analysis, NVivo 10 was used as the platform to keep all the information in one place and to effectively organize the data while analyzing it. So, as the first phase of analysis, the field notes were examined for missing pieces and clarifications where required in order to generate a complete document for analysis. The document was then entered as the first piece of the project in the software. The field notes and informal interviews were coded for relevance and then organized into categories that emerged; for all phases of analysis, the techniques employed were a combination of Spradley's Domain analysis and Coffey and Atkinson's coding strategies based on relevance for the study (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Spradley, 1979). Observations and conversations in the field were broadly categorized into social and physical comments/characteristics of the park. After splitting the data into these two categories, a second round of analysis was conducted to further breakdown the data into categories for inquiry to be translated into the interview questionnaire. The categories for social enquiry were guided by Oldenburg's framework and open ended questions were included in order to reveal additional patterns. In order to understand the influence of the physical environment on the social behavior, open ended questions about the design, access facilities and context were included in the interview. People were asked to make comments about the design of the park, the things they liked and the things they wished to modify as they got comfortable into the conversation. So the interviews were guided by the observations made at the park and the casual conversations so that the content of the interview remained interesting for the interviewee just as much it was to the

interviewer. The resultant set of questions was a combination of descriptive and structural questions in order to acquire as much relevant data as possible in the short period of time available for field research. A few questions from the semi-structured interview were:

Social:

- Tell me something about your history with the park? Your first visit and the initial impressions?
- What brings you back to the park?
- Do you think that the park has regular users? If so, do you think regulars are good for a park? Why?

Physical:

- Do you think that the park is easy to get to? What if you were to walk or bike?
- What do you think about the design of the park?
- Do you think that the way the park is laid out has an effect on the activity it caters to?

The questions related to physical setting were more open ended to be able to find relationships between the setting and the framework. The semi-structured nature of the interview was a result of acknowledging the time constraint faced by the researcher and the academic interests. All interviews were audio taped after acquiring permission from the interviewee and transcribed for usability. A fourth type of data was added for analysis, an email conversation with the park planner, Park and Recreation department of College station. The topic of the conversation was the planning process for the park and its history, the initial planning and official opening.

Phase 2: this phase of analysis was conducted in the same way as the first. NVivo 10 allows for data to be categorized into nodes with the capability to cross-reference at any point in the project, in addition to keeping all the data in one place. The interviews were coded into the same categories as the field notes to maintain consistency. The nodes/categories were then re-read to shorten the text and identify relationships among the categories. The resultant set of categories (Table 2): and the emerging overlaps and relationships are shown by the thick gray lines, the relationship in these cases is of **affect**; which means that people's responses and opinions about one aspect of the park were affected by the category linked to it. Step three in the analysis will check if and how the use of the park relates to Oldenburg's framework for a third place more specifically, by

rearranging the data according to the framework and looking for compatibility or the lack thereof.

Name	Sources	References
[-] Social Life	0	0
[-] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Outsider Looking In ○ Discovery of the Park ○ Tenure or duration of use ○ Hints of Discrimination ○ Mood Inside the Park ○ Importance of the park ○ Frequency of Visitation ○ Activity in other areas [-] Benefits & Functions of the park <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Benefits of the Park ○ User Group ○ Preferred Time for visit ○ Unique Features ○ Ways or techniques to Get in [-] Characteristics of Regular User <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Characteristics of regular Do ○ Stewardship [-] Activity inside the dog park [-] People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ User Dominance ○ Characteristics of Conv ○ Experience with People ○ Annoyances [-] Dogs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Experience with Dogs ○ Me and My Dog ○ Reasons for visit 	7	15
	11	20
	11	15
	8	12
	10	18
	12	17
	11	23
	11	42
	12	40
	5	13
	12	88
	12	20
	10	27
	12	45
	12	81
	7	10
	9	19
	0	0
	7	111
	8	20
	12	61
	12	75
	11	21
	12	79
	12	42
	6	13
	12	76
[-] Physical as a setting for Social	0	0
[-] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Things to like about the park ○ Zones in the Park 	11	43
	11	30

Table 2: Nodes at Phase II

Physical Characteristics of the Park	7	27
Basket Ball	1	4
Picnic Shed	4	8
Context	13	87
Access	11	24
Location of the Park	12	29
Children's play area	4	13
Issues with the park and Recom	13	56
Dog Park	12	90
Initial Impressions	11	31
Steeplechase Vs University	9	16

Table 2 (Continued): Nodes at Phase II

Phase 3: Data coded under ‘social life’ nodes until phase two was re-read and reorganized into new nodes were named after Oldenburg’s characteristics; a dimension was added to the 8 in the framework for *motivation behind use of the park*. Each of the 9 characteristics of a third place; i.e neutral territory, leveler or inclusive, access and accommodation, active conversation, regulars, low-profile, playful mood, home away from home, and socialization for its own sake, were further split into two nodes to contain supporting and contradictory data. The support node was further spilt into categories/components where ever they emerged. The final branching of nodes is displayed in the figure below (see Figure 5)

An example of branching of nodes: *Third Place/Social Characteristics/Regulars/Characteristics/Regular People/Friendly Associations*

Interviewees were asked whether or not the park had regular users;; respondents usually started the response by agreeing or disagreeing with the question. If the interviewee confirms, which they did every time the question was asked, they were asked for ‘reasons they thought so’ or ‘what makes you call someone a regular’. People’s response to this question could easily be categorized into general characteristics of regulars, role of regulars in bringing new users (facilitators for new users), regulars as a clique, regulars as threats or intimidators, and regulars as attractions. Further analyzing the data under general characteristics of regulars, it was found that people either talked about regular dogs or regular people, which was an easy distinction to make for division of data. All data under general characteristics of regular people was reread and

reorganized into personal characteristics, behavioral characteristics towards the park (stewardship) and behavioral characteristics towards one another (friendly associations). So the comment about regulars baby-sitting each other's dogs belongs in the 'friendly associations' category; and regulars calling the city with a complaint belongs in the 'stewardship category'.

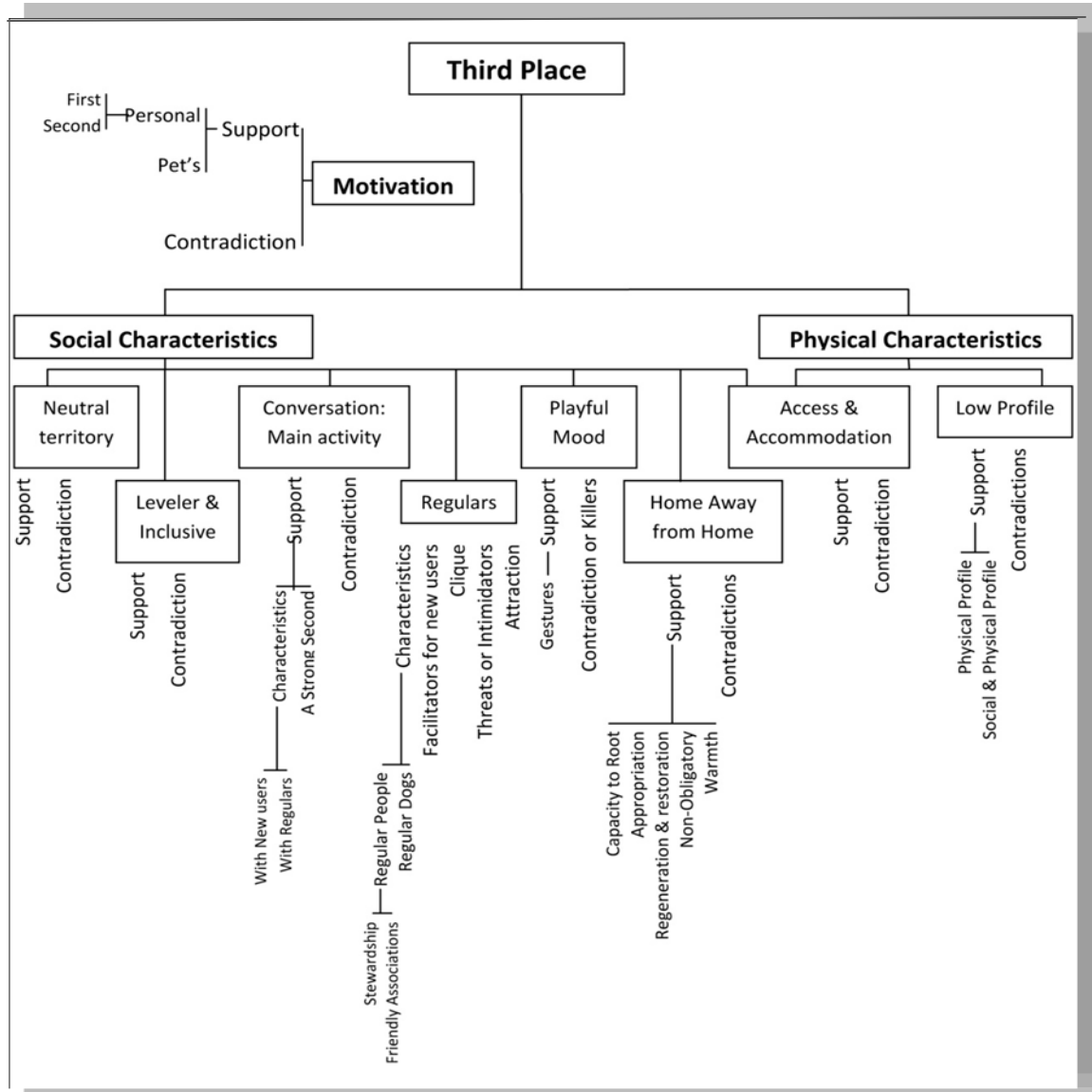


Figure 5: Branching of nodes

The percentage distribution of data coded under each one of the categories is expressed in the tree-map in Figure 6. The box sizes for each category correspond to the number of references made. All tree maps for the data were generated in NVivo 10 (Appendix D).

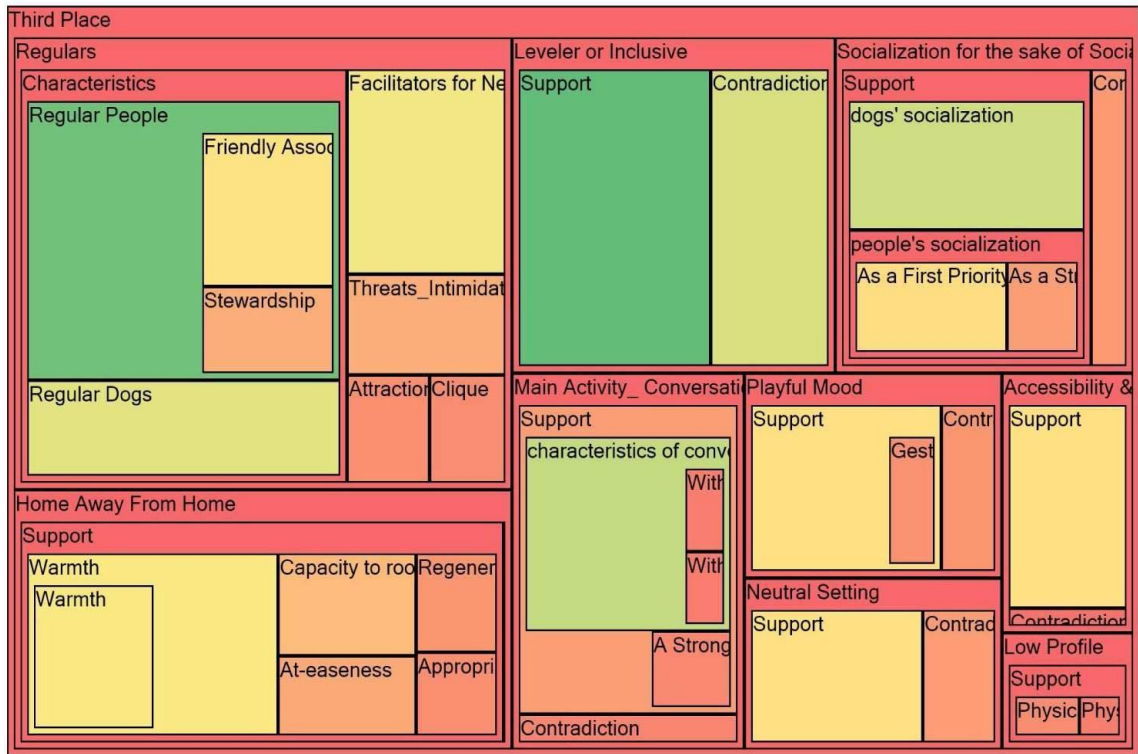


Figure 6: Tree-map for *third place* (nodes compared by coding references)

Phase 4: It's not likely that all dog-parks foster the kind of activity found in Steeplechase Park. If the park acts as a social center in people's lives it can be helpful to understand the physical environment and examine the extent to which physical characteristics support this interaction. The fourth phase of analysis was meant to breakdown the data related to physical environment and relate it to the social activities. So data in 'Physical Characteristics' nodes from phase two were re-read and broken down into categories taken from Table 1 in section 1.2.6. i.e. nature, seating, activities, walkways, focus, access, layout, and accessories/additional features. Additional categories for topography, context and maintenance were added to the list in order to learn more about people's

response and use of the retrofitted detention facility, the location of the park in the neighborhood and the city department's involvement in it. These nodes were then cross-referenced with the social activities the space fosters; i.e. the unique recipe for Steeplechase Park. During this phase of analysis, it is well understood that the findings may not be generalizable and many aspects of city planning and design play a role in how a park functions; but as Jacob's pointed out, the amount of use a park gets can vary from nearly empty to bustling with activity, so if a place that fosters some activity is encountered, the analysis may provide some interesting insights (Jacobs, 1961).

In-depth Interview	Age Group	Dog Category	Duration of Use (months)	Gender	Profession	Self Proclaimed User Status
Britney	20-25	Big	11	Female	Undergraduate Student	Regular
Charles	>50	Big	72	Male	Business Owner	Sporadic Regular
Daisy	>50	Big & Small	1.5	Female	Business Owner	New User
Doug	30-40	Big	24	Male	Graduate Student	Regular
Emma	20-30	Big	11	Female	Graduate Student	Regular
Ian	20-30	Big	0.75	Male	Undergraduate Student	Regular
Jack	30-40	Big	48	Male	Employee ISD	Regular
Jamie	20-30	Big	2	Female	Undergraduate Student	New User
Russell	>50	Big	70	Male	Professor	Regular
Sally	>50	Big	54	Female	Home-maker	Regular
Zen	20-30	Small	7	Female	Graduate Student	Unsure

Table 3: Interviewee Details (pseudonyms used)

CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION PART I: NEIGHBORHOOD DOG-PARK AS A THIRD PLACE

3.1. The 'Place' that is Steeplechase Park

3.1.1. Motivation Behind Visiting Steeplechase Park

Oldenburg's concept defines third place as a destination of its own and as significant in the life of every individual whether they currently have one or not. He also states that the third place provides social tonic and that a strong motivation for visiting such places is socialization for its own sake (Oldenburg, 1999b). Combining the third place with J. Gehl's concept of *life between buildings* that takes place in the publically owned outdoors, the social tonic that the third places provides falls under the social category of activity that occurs as a resultant of either the necessary activities, such as commute to and from work, or the optional activities that are self-motivated and non-mandatory (2011). In areas and neighborhoods dominated by residential land uses, like Steeplechase, majority of people work outside of the neighborhood and in many cases outside of the ½ mile radius of walkability. In such cases, more often than not people rely on various modes of transportation like private automobile, carpool, public transport etc. none of which include passage through a park. Hence, trips to a park are usually self-motivated and additional to an everyday commute to and from work. It appears that ***Steeplechase Park user motivations can be broadly split into three categories*** (See Appendix D.1 for tree map):

1. Pet's socialization as the first and personal socialization as a second priority
2. Personal socialization as the first priority
3. Socialization not a priority

On multiple occasions in the course of the study, users mentioned that having a dog is like having a kid whose welfare is your primary concern. Emma⁴ (see Table 4 for interviewee details), a self-proclaimed regular said that the park provides a much

⁴ Pseudonyms used for privacy concerns.

needed resource for everyday socialization, placed both her and her dog's socialization as equal priorities:

(Coming to the park) "It's very important. I mean if I didn't have it, I would feel guilty having a dog; because I don't have 2 dogs and you know having a dog is like having a kid, you have to take care of it, you can't just put it in a kennel."

Thus, it came as no surprise that some people's motivation to visit the park stems solely from their pet's wellbeing. The judgmental sampling approach taken for this study resulted in interviewees from all three categories. People's motivation behind visiting the park shapes their perceptions towards it, how it fits into their lives and the benefits that they draw from these visits. However, irrespective of one's own motivation behind using the park, the users seem aware of the other types/categories of motivation (see Appendix D.1 includes portions of responses that represent a match under the particular section). For example, Jamie, who had been using the park for a couple of months and claimed to be a new user said that the reason she visits the park is for her dog to get his exercise and she herself goes and sits in a corner; but she also said, *"Yeah I could definitely see that they (users of the park) have formed a community a little, and I can see that they come for their dogs but also for just to socialize."*

In the case of Steeplechase, it was observed that women were more willing to place personal socialization as a first priority. Britney, an undergraduate student said that from an insider's perspective and an outsider looking in, it is easy to notice that, *"People here, that you know are a group of friends, that you know come not only let their dogs play, but you know just to hang out, as well."*

When asked about what brings her back to the park Emma, a graduate student replied,

"A lot of us are in the same boat as mine, we moved here either for marriage or grad school or work so we don't know anybody, so where do you go to meet people in college station, so you have the Dixie Chicken or you have the park. I chose the park."

Men on the other hand, seemed to acknowledge the socialization as an added benefit to their visit to the park but did not state it as their first preference for places to socialize.

Doug, another graduate student who called himself a regular and had been using the park for two years, mentioned that it took him a while to get acquainted with the activities of the park, and the reason he started coming down to the center of the park

(the most active place at the time of observation) and started socializing was so that his dog could socialize more. When asked about how these visits to the park and meeting the other regulars fit into his life, he noted,

“I think it adds to our benefits, my dog’s and my benefit of coming here, you know we look forward to seeing the people and dogs that we know. I have made some friends and I talk to those friends, some of them outside of the park but I could see them outside of the park if I wanted to. If I wanted to socialize with people, I would probably go somewhere else; that’s the main reason I come here is for him.”

Doug was not the only one to express reluctance to ever visiting the park without his dog, Russell a professor and a regular user of the park for six years showed similar attitudes towards reasons to visit the park. During the interview he said,

“There have been people that come here for socialization alone; actually we have this one girl who is a psychology PhD person, she off doing internship somewhere. If she didn’t have a dog, she would come anyway because she was attached to the people that much. I would feel kind of weird doing that.”

Despite of these attitudes towards putting their own socialization at second priority, both Doug and Russell seemed to value the interactions a great deal. When Russell was asked about the importance of the park in his routine and daily life, he went on to say,

“Compared to work, it’s less important; compared to family it’s less important, but in my social life it’s a definite niche to keep in contact with people but also to continuously meet new people here.”

So for both categories of users that find their motivation in socialization, be it for the pet or themselves, the park seemed to have attained a level of importance in their lives. This further emphasizes that what makes a place socially relevant may have a different primary purpose, in this case an off-leash activity area for dogs. People that have a concern for their pet’s health and wellbeing may be benefiting indirectly from places like a dog-park; so personal socialization may be attained as an outcome. Jack, an employee of a local school district who was observed at the park both alone and with his wife and mentioned having had two different dogs during his four years of use said,

“for me conversation is not a primary reason, it is a consideration just because I know that I am not generally a very social person and this is something that I can do to even bring myself out of the shell a little bit.”

3.1.2. The Neutrality of Place

Oldenburg suggests that the first characteristic of third place is neutrality. People that visit these places are free to come and go as they please, socialize as much as they like, with whomever they like and behave in an unrestricted way. It's a place free from obligations (Oldenburg, 1999b). As good and healthy as that sounds, one might wonder whether this is possible in any place? Aren't we always bound by some code of conduct, some sort of decency and sensitivity towards others? Especially in our public spaces, is it ever really ok to be completely oneself and do as we please without the risk of offending others, or at the cost of comfort of others in the same space? In public parks people are generally free to come and go as they please, stay for as long as they like and be in areas they prefer. In this study, it appears that ***for dog owners to get along and be comfortable with each other their dogs also need to be comfortable around each other*** (see Appendix D.2 for tree-map).

Owning a dog has meant many things to mankind; from a protector to a companion to an item of conspicuous consumption (Beck & Katcher, 1983; Méry, 1970; Veblen, 1965). Since the mid 1900s, the dog has found its way into the picturesque family unit in America which is also an indication of the bonds that exist between many owners and their dogs, and hence their concern for their well-being (King, Marston, & Bennett, 2012). When people start thinking of their animals as child surrogates (McLean, 2000) it becomes obvious that they would not want their pets to be mistreated, which also appears to be one of the major concerns at dog-parks. People may get along better if their dogs get along, or not fight at the least. When Charles was asked about elements and things that disrupt his comfort at the park, he replied, *“The occasional person that would come out here who doesn't know how to control their animal disturbs people, but that's going to be any dog-park doesn't matter where you go.”*

Jack explained this by relating it to the following incident:

“(A reason) we had stopped coming was because there was an incident with our previous dog where somebody had brought out a dog that they were dog sitting for and didn’t really know the mannerisms of and it had some K9 aggression and it got into a fight with our dog, it didn’t cause any serious damage physically but it did cause her a lot of emotional trauma to the point that she didn’t like going out and playing with other dogs.”

When asked how long she took to recover from the trauma, or if she did at all, he said, *“She recovered a little bit but never quite fully.”*

At Steeplechase Park, the users seem comfortable with other people doing their own thing in different parts of the park and showed a distinct sense for *personal space and freedom*. The size of the park, they felt allowed for these various activities to happen and gave the users some choice about use, involvement and location. Russell explained the different kind of people at the park and the activities by saying,

“I see people that come only once or twice a week or once or twice a month, some people that come here only on the weekends. Come here on the weekends and they are like this is the time for their dogs; so that has been constant since the start.”

He said that the group that he socializes with the most is open to socializing with anybody, only if they are willing to do that, otherwise they respect their space and let them be.

“The usual thing is kind of like, it’s open to people who, I mean they have to come close. We are not going to go like ‘we have to make you a part of our group whether you like it or not.’”

Another interesting part of this is that the dogs choose their friends/buddies/companions at the park as freely as people do. Russell noted,

“I have actually been here one time, there were only two people here, me and one other person in the park and the dog came over to play with him and he was just like ‘no, I am not going to play with you’. ... They sniff each other then ‘ok, I’ll play with you’ and ‘not so much with you’. I don’t know how to explain this, it’s fun to watch.”

Several times he mentioned how people’s choice and space is a priority but he also pointed out that when it comes to a misbehaved pet that threatens their dog’s enjoyment, people get defensive and object. He said, *“Here it’s really more egalitarian; nobody is*

like, nobody tells people what to do with their dogs, except for them being aggressive some times.”

Thus, it appears that the dog-park is not a completely neutral territory. It does have some constraints of behavior, more so for the dogs which is not really independent of the owner. About the relationship between a dog’s behavior and the owner Emma said that *“I grew up with pits and everything else, so I kind of favor the whole nurture over breed idea”* which resonates with Russell’s statement: *“It’s not always the dog but what you are doing about it; it’s not always a reflection of the owner but some aspect of it. It’s like you are not your dog but you are responsible for your dog.”*

People are held responsible for how their dogs behave and the people that fail to control their pet from getting into trouble or causing trouble is not exactly welcome at the dog-park, especially when there is the risk of a mental trauma to their pet that in most cases is perceived as family. Emma gave an example for how it makes her feel when there is an annoying dog at the park, and the owner is not doing what they are expected to, she said,

“It’s like going to a Wal-Mart and seeing a kid screaming, and you just want to walk up and say ‘shut up, no one wants you screaming’ but you cannot say that in front of the parents. So you know, the owners right now are nice but every once in a while you get on in that’s like a mom that doesn’t want to tell her kid no.”

3.1.3. A Socially Leveled and Inclusive Park

In a third place, people congregate at the same level. Everyone is equal, there is no discrimination of any kind, and it’s inclusive. So, if a place is like that, it attracts a wide variety of people, in terms of race, social status, age, economic status and so on (Oldenburg, 1999b). Thinking about neighborhood parks, the property is owned and looked after by the city, it is a public amenity, open to use by whoever wants to. In addition to the governing structure leaving it open and free, the activities at a third place should be inclusive and open, putting everyone at the same pedestal. ***The users of Steeplechase Park had mixed opinions about its inclusiveness*** (see Appendix D.3 for tree-map); people felt that the park mirrored the inclusiveness and diversity of the city of College Station and the only other factor that affects inclusiveness is the behavior of one’s

own dog.

Settlement patterns in urban areas show that people with similar interests, cultures and races tend to live in clusters; so a park that sits inside a neighborhood and draws its identity from it too would attract nearby population with whatever variety that exists. In case of Steeplechase Park, one of only two dog-parks in the city, being a limited commodity, its physical diameter of influence may be larger than a typical neighborhood park. Hence, it may be safe to assume that there are many factors outside of the park and the immediate neighborhood that affect its user group. People in social situations are sometimes aware of this fact, and other times speculations may be made about how open a space is for use. Similar trend was observed at Steeplechase Park; the topic of whether the park is non-discriminatory and inclusive received a very wide range of responses. Russell for example, maintained throughout the interview that the park is a completely leveled field. He said,

“It’s a really neutral place... that nobody owns this place so it’s like everybody is equal. Nobody has more rights than the other so you kind of look at it that way, nobody is the boss of the park. In a social setting, there is no hierarchy. It isn’t like work or some other places where there is a definite order; the dog-park is just totally a leveled field socially. Even young and old, everyone is there on equal bases with their dogs. I like that about the park; mean I do like hierarchy at work where it belongs, it does not belong here. It’s also kind of different, being kind of one of the older people, you normally get sort of a differential like people say ‘sir’ , here it’s really more egalitarian.”

Although people noticed characteristics of exclusiveness, they did not mention any reasons to validate that assumption except the nature of the dog. Emma pointed out that sometimes if people have concerns or pre-conceived notions about the breed of a particular dog, they tend to exclude the owners based on those opinions:

“(I met a) girl here that has a very large German Shepherd, he’s only 8 months but he weighs about 90 pounds, and he’s just a big puppy, you look at him weird and he runs away from you. When she’s here, people try to grab their dog and try to get them to play with somebody else.”

Each dog owner, out of concern for their own pet, may be more attracted towards the people that are nice to their dog and not so much to others that show neither interest nor

care. It was observed on multiple occasions that as soon as somebody arrives at the park, the dogs run to the gate and greeted the visitors. Thus, people that reciprocate by greeting these dogs and pet them upfront were readily greeted by the owners. The dogs that were found to be regulars to the park seemed to know dog lovers as opposed to neutral visitors, and their zeal to greet them varied accordingly.

At Steeplechase Park, issues of homogeneity were also mentioned in the interviews. People felt a lack of diversity in terms of ages, social status and races; and being a part of the user-group themselves they said it may just be the demographic characteristics of the city. The older (in terms of age) users of the park felt that being one of the largest university towns in the country, a larger representation of students at the park was no surprise. Russell being one of the oldest (in terms of age) users of the park said that the fact that most users are students is actually a good thing. He said,

“[It] seems to be mostly students, because it’s designed for them. You usually find Dog-parks, at least in this town, they are both around apartments and rental places. It’s like they are for people that don’t have backyards for their dogs to play.”

Similar reasoning about demographics of the city was given for racial homogeneity.

However, Zen, the only African American observed at the park, felt that the representation of races affected her comfort level:

“I can attest to the tone that they set to the park, as far as it being a group of them and the insider-outsider status.... Because of the demographics of the park that I told you about, so they are white and they have middle class background, the conversations that they have typically are geared into that direction. I have heard some comments, things about race that are very biased towards their specific group, in favor of their specific group. And that would be something for me because I know that that’s a common conversation, and I have heard those sayings, and those little things, it definitely would either keep me from joining the group or keep me from wanting to join the group.”

She could not think of instances of discrimination against her or others, but she felt reluctant to try and be more a part of the group of regulars.

The gender imbalance observed and validated during the interviewees could be attributed to many behavioral observations made in the park. Based on the motivation, more girls mentioned socialization as being the primary motivation which could explain

why **women predominated**. Also, more girls and women were observed petting other dogs and playing with them, which seemed to be drawing their owners closer. So the overall indulgence may be getting translated into the user characteristics.

Ian, a user for less than a month attested to almost all the observations mentioned above. When asked about the ease to become a part of the activities at the park and how that is influenced by the user-group, he said, *“People here are just common people, it is not like abnormal people or a specific class of a society, so I don’t think that would be taken into account. No. they don’t affect you coming into the activity.”*

He described the user group by saying, *“I see different types of people. I have seen old people, I have seen couples, I have seen guys alone and girls; sometimes I would see whole family.”*

Although he said he had never seen Hispanics, Asians, and members of other races (which he counted himself), he did not think ethnic/racial discrimination was a basis for why people of color did not use the dog-park.

Thus, the aggregate observation made was that the park attracts some sorts of diversity (e.g. economic, backgrounds) more than some others (e.g. race and age), but users of the park seemed to attribute it to the demographic makeup of the city.

3.1.4. Conversation in the Park

Me: Do you talk to people in the park?

Emma: Oh yeah I have a big mouth. Everytime I am here.

Me: Do you ever take these conversations outside of here?

Emma: Oh sometimes we take them outside. I would talk to my boyfriend and tell him “oh I was at the park the other day, and this is what Brady said” and he would say like “I can’t believe you talk to people at the dog-park.”

Conversations, according to Oldenburg, are the glue that holds the third place activity together. This is the piece that facilitates regeneration and socialization while facilitating the exchange of information (Oldenburg, 1999b). It is human nature; you put several people who have something in common together and they will eventually talk. At a third place, it is typically friendly, happy, engaging conversation that makes people lose track of time. The way Oldenburg describes the conversations resonates with

Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow, or optimal engagement in a leisure pursuit (1997). Although people at a dog-park have to monitor their dogs' behavior, there are several comments that hint at a loss of sense of time during the conversations. Thus, ***there exist opportunities to engage in joyful conversations without any obligations and the dogs play a huge role as conversation starters or social lubricants*** (Kellert, 2005). (See Appendix D.4 for tree-map).

Ian, a new user of the park, described his first impressions of the conversation:

"I found it funny because people, like they bring their children and then they chat about their children. Most of the time they chat about how their dog is doing, what they had to eat, the problems they have, etc. Most of the time this is the way they chat."

His description, although amusing, is not very clear in terms of how he felt about them or if he found them inviting enough to be involved. In response to a clarification he added,

"It's nice; people are happy, they laugh, they joke about their dogs and their personalities, they would play, so there is a playful mood."

People had a variety of responses about the topics of these conversations; current events were mentioned more than once. J. Gehl (1987) in his description of social activities mentioned that they act as sources of information; with all the fancy technology and mass media resources, verbal exchange of information remains one of the most enriching ones in a community. Oldenburg (1999b) builds on this idea of exchange by saying that third places provide common people with a stage to share information and congregate, so much so that third places have been looked at as threats to the political power structure in the past. This idea of exchange of information is expressed at Steeplechase in the experiences and descriptions that Emma gave,

"We talk about everything from drinking to sports to academics. So many people have kids so we will go on conversations about the education system. I watch a lot of documentaries so I would always bring up the documentaries that I have watched, I am addicted to National Geographic. So our conversations are whatever is on that person's mind that day.... There are a few guys here that were in the army, so they come here and they have a lot of stories that they want to tell..."

Russell described his conversations as follows:

“We actually talk about dogs a lot, we have also learned a lot about dogs; there’s always a vet student as a regular, sometimes even 3 or 4 so we can learn a lot.... Other than that, most of the times about local events, I bet down there they probably are talking about the shooting that happened yesterday.”

In any public space and group situation, participation is often self-motivated. Especially when you are among a group of strangers at a dog-park, people are less likely to pull you into conversation. For these reasons, the people observed and interviewed had their own thoughts about conversations and participation. Most people seemed to be participating in conversation, while others preferred listening or silently observing. In a park that’s made for dogs to run, each individual finds his/her own space based on how much or how little they want to interact. Thus, comments like, *“oh I prefer to observe”* or *“I am not really a social person”* or *“we kind of go and sit in the corner”*, show people’s preference to stay outside of the conversation loop.

For those who did feel motivated enough to participate it appeared that the conversations followed a set pattern. Initial conversations (according to the longest term users) often revolved around their dogs (e.g., age, breed, mannerisms). The dogs seem to act as a form of *triangulation* as described by Whyte (1980) in his examination of public open spaces. According to Whyte, objects that encourage conversation are seen as triangulating and creating a connection between two people. People with active and friendly dogs are connected more easily than others. Sally explained her experiences with her dog and other people:

“It kind of depends on the dog. If their dog is open and friendly, and starts playing with several of the dogs in the group, then the person automatically kind of gets sucked into the circle, because there’s questions about the dog like ‘how old is your dog?’ ‘what kind of dog is it?’ so you start talking to the person.... If the person was to sit far off on the bench and their dog doesn’t venture away from them a whole lot, then they are probably not going to be assimilated.”

When she was asked about her participation in these conversations, she said that she does join in every time she is here and every chance she gets. She attributed this to her dog:

“Part of it is too that he (her dog) is really outgoing and friendly, so he’ll approach another dog and that will draw me over, and then strike up a conversation with the other dog’s owner. It’s just like when you have kids; at some point, most of the people you know are through your kids, and you know here we know them through our dogs.”

Interestingly, the regular users of the park (according to observations and self-proclaimed status) had a chirpy tone when they were asked to explain the kind of conversations happening in the park. The responses began with phrases like “oh goodness”, “oh lord” or “oh my god” and the adjectives that followed were “they are funny”, “very broad” or “they are weird (with a smile)”. These description starters give a hint of the amount of benefit they draw from these, or how engaging these conversations are and how vital for the park and its users. Aside from the fact that people visit the park to let their dogs play, the biggest activity among people seems to be conversations. The observer’s location was outside of dog-park fence and a good fifty feet from the center of the park, but the laughter and the occasional loud comment were hard to miss.

Despite the wide variety of topics that people talked about, park users mentioned repeatedly that the conversations were light. Doug, who claimed be less social than some other people, said, *“Conversation can be focused on dogs, work or something. I guess people talk about what’s going on in their lives.... I mean if someone is having a rough day, they mention it but they try not to dwell on it.”*

Emma pointed out her own reason behind the lighthearted chat by saying, *“These are the few chances we get to be out here and not be in a bad mood.”* Being a graduate student, she seemed well aware of the fact that her time at the park is for relaxation and not for intense discussions that could increase her stress level. Intense conversations, according to Russell, lead to people judging the other person which threatens the inclusiveness of the park. He said,

“it’s usually mostly small talk, not really serious because that kind of leads to being judgmental and that leads to, well this is a neutral zone, so we are not going to do that. We all have our opinions about other people’s opinions but we kind of don’t want to nail it on anybody, we just wouldn’t talk about that. So it’s very respectful.”

These voluntary conversations compliment the third place benefits that people may draw from their visit to the park. In 21st century, almost everyone seems to be short

on time for leisure pursuits and when you get to a place that is meant to serve that purpose, there might be general tendency to keep it light and leisurely. Britney simply put it by saying,

“I have made a couple of friends here and its very therapeutic for me as well to be here...I have struggled with things already in my life and for me coming to dog-park is therapy”

3.1.5. The Major Ingredient: Regulars

Oldenburg (1999b) described the main ingredient in third place as the regulars; they, according to him, perform several functions, for example they sustain the place, make it viable, bring in new users, give the place it's unique identity and so on. A third place, by its very name, should become a part of everyday life of its users after home and work places. Neighborhood amenities like coffee shops, convenience stores and parks are intended to cater to the neighborhood, which if populated with stable residents, fosters regular visitors/users. Heffner (2011) in her study of Watson Store in Spalding, Idaho talked about a general store acting as a potential third place in people lives where they would even come to collect their mail. People visited the store frequently enough that they reaped the benefits of socializing with the proprietor and their neighbors Neighborhood dog-parks may have similar potential to attract a local and regular crowd. However, this potential is not universal and is likely to be influenced by characteristics of design and placement. This study provided a good amount of evidence that **regulars are indeed a key piece of the activity at Steeplechase Park** (see Appendix D.5 for tree-map). Multiple statements help establish this.

Britney: *“It's so much more than just a park if you think about it because, the people make it up, [and] the dogs make it up”*

Doug: *“What makes it unique are the people that are in it”*

Sally: *“I think the thing that mostly makes is unique is just the population of the park, it's not particularly fancy or anything.”*

Daisy, whose schedule kept her from visiting often in the late evenings, said that regulars represent what the park is about. She pointed out strongly that *“It's built to have regulars; it's built to have people.”* Several others echoed this sentiment.

Being a regular to a place or an activity is a common way for people to describe their involvement. In most cases it either means frequent use or extended period of use of a space, object, activity and so on. In the case of a third place, however, it often means much more. For a neighborhood dog-park like Steeplechase, ***the word regular is not only associated with people but also with the dogs.*** People in most cases believe that the park acts almost as a *Second Place* for their dogs that need to get out of the house for physical and social benefits, more so in urban areas and student communities where large backyards are not very common. Russell mentioned several times how the park served as a common backyard. For instance he said, *“Yeah I think it is designed for the neighborhood, people don’t have backyards, this is their backyard.”*

Similarly, Charles who called himself a sporadic user for over six years mentioned how the park is used by his whole family. Having seen the neighborhood develop over a ten-year period, he said that students form a dominant portion of the population in the surroundings areas and the dog-ownership is high among them; so there was a need for an area to accommodate those dogs when most of these houses having small yards. Thus, besides their home, the park is the second most important place where their dogs can run free, play and socialize with other dogs. Much like human beings, regular dogs have characteristics of familiarity, friendship, and support. Hence they are integral part in sustaining the third place characteristics of the park (see tree-map for regulars in Appendix D.5). As mentioned above, Sally felt that the uniqueness of the park lies in its population:

“I think the thing that mostly makes is unique is just the population of the park, because a lot of people you know when they are travelling and they go to other dog-parks, and pretty much everyone will say ‘oh my dog didn’t like that park, because you know, didn’t have any friends. The people who are snobby and the dogs are snobby, it just wasn’t as nice.’ I mean it’s not especially fancy or anything, it’s just more the, more the users of it that make it what it is.”

For regular people on the other hand, Oldenburg’s description fits perfectly in this scenario. When asked about whether the park had regular users or not, there was unanimous agreement that regulars were there and when asked if that was good or bad for the park, most people agreed to them being good. Several comments were made

about the characteristics of regular users, most of which were cultivated over time of use, familiarity with the people and their dogs, conversing at the park, maintaining friendly association outside of the park, and so on. Russell and some others pointed out that the biggest thing the regulars have in common is concern for their dog's health and wellbeing, a lack of which had also been noted as a point of discrimination. He said,

"It's (behavioral characteristics of regulars) actually about them being committed to their dog's health. There are some people that are just not aware of how good it is for their dogs to come and there are some dog people here that don't know that much about dogs; people that come regularly are more knowledgeable about dogs, so it's good for dogs and that kind of sets them apart. People that understand it's good for their dog make it a priority and they kind of take advantage of the social interactions that come with that."

Jack, in a similar tone said, *"It's very obvious that they (the regulars at the park) do care quite a bit about their dogs"*. He added,

"Regulars aren't too freaked out in the instances where there are problems between the dogs. And, I think a lot of us are better able to tell when there is a problem or when the dogs are just getting too into their play and getting rough or when there is actual aggression. It's kind of a hard line to tell and a lot of that comes with the familiarity between the dogs."

Both these men mentioned that the regulars are more knowledgeable about the dogs, some of which is self acquired and a lot of which is shared at the park. Daisy made an interesting comment about the characteristics of regular users, she said that the thing they have in common is that *"(they are all) athletic. They are all very positive. I mean they all care for their dogs it's quite obvious."* Research provides evidence for the fact that people who own dogs and walk them tend to be healthier, but such an observation in a social setting suggests research opportunities exist for examining how groups that form around non-competitive activities may influence/induce healthy habits. (Cutt et al., 2008; McLean, 2000; Toohey & Rock, 2011).

As mentioned above, most people replied to the question 'whether regulars are good or bad for the park?' by picking option one. While elaborating on that choice, most comments that were made by users related to regulars acting as stewards and

sustainability of the park. Many interviewees mentioned how they had called the city with concerns and issues, observing people that were instrumental in getting things done. Ian reported an interesting observation that speaks a lot about this characteristic of stewardship:

“The other day I saw some guy trying to clean the water system down there (the drainage pipe), if he wasn’t coming regularly he wouldn’t do it. He’s coming here everyday and probably doesn’t like dirty water around him and his dog, so he was cleaning for the dogs. I found that interesting, because if he is not using it regularly he wouldn’t do it.”

Few days later, during another interview, Jack was observed entering the park with a shovel in his hand and he went down to the drainage channel and did indeed clean it up. When he came out to put it back in his car’s trunk, I asked him “was it clogged down there” and he said “yeah, that happens sometimes, we don’t want the dogs getting sick. No big deal, I have this thing sitting at home so”. And he smiled as he walked by. Sally, who also mentioned calling the city a few times to fix a mud pit that had formed in the park, nodded her head in strong support when asked if the regulars are good for the park, she did not even let me finish the question by adding ‘or bad’ and said,

“I would think that it’s probably good for the park, because if there really was some sort of issue, you know I am sure that we would.... Like if the city wanted to close the park down, I think we would do everything we could to you know, to prevent that as opposed to just like “no, I don’t really go there that much, it doesn’t really matter” .”

While several people strongly believe that the park benefits from having regulars, some individuals were more neutral. This neutral stance was later revealed in the data as the regular group intimidating people watching from the outside. In some cases, intimidation was pointed out as an initial perception that diminishes with time; however, it is hard to say that it has no effect on new users becoming regulars. Jamie, who preferred to come to the park in the evenings when it is busiest for the sake of her dog, mentioned a conversation with a lady she met in the morning at the park:

“She came in the morning because she felt like other dogs play too hard or they are too aggressive. She said that she likes it when it’s busy, but not every day.”

She also said that she herself felt intimidated the first time she brought her dog to the park, but seeing how much he enjoyed it, decided to continue to visit at least once a week. The regulars had some thoughts about this issue as well and some seemed ready to admit that their interaction at the park may seem cliquish, but they also said that it is normal for human beings to behave that way. Emma found it to be more positive when she said,

“Some people would go like ‘I see this big group of people there, they are always talking, must be some kind of club or something’ and they have said negative things about us, I don’t see anything negative with coming and socializing.”

Jack, who seemed open to the word clique being attached to their group, said that, *“I think our group in the middle is definitely very cliquish, we don’t intentionally try to exclude people except largely based on their interaction with their dogs.”* Further into the interview, he added,

“There definitely is a pack mentality between the people and the dogs, the dogs especially you can tell when there is a new dog that comes in, you can judge how the ones that are regulars are going to react to it just based on previous experience I guess.”

With regular people however, he said that it depends on who is doing the looking. A behavior or activity can have separate meaning for separate people and hence it is something that depends largely on the new users.

3.1.6. Access and Accommodation

The characteristics of access compliment all the other characteristics mentioned so far. A third place, in order to fit into a person’s life, should be easily accessible at the time and amount of effort the user prefers to spend on it. Places that are not mandatory to get to, or in J. Gehl’s words are optional (J. Gehl, 1987), need to be involve minimum trouble and compromise. When people have to compromise for/during such activities, they tend to look elsewhere for alternatives, and the place loses its charm in their lives. So, in essence, a visit to the third place should fit into its user’s life without much hassle, it should be convenient.

Looking at the Tree-map for accessibility of the park (see Appendix D.6), people don’t perceive any constraints except weather. The physical characteristics of the park

that negate use were categorized in a separate category and hence are covered in the next chapter. When asked if the park is easy to get to, the users unanimously agreed. Many users appreciated how close it is to their homes and Emma in fact mentioned how the neighborhood has benefited from it:

“We (the regulars) have a lot to do with people coming here or moving into these houses over here. I recommended a few houses over here to people because there is a dog-park and they have a dog, and they didn’t know that there was a dog-park here.”

Britney, described herself being one of the people that moved to the neighborhood to be closer to the park:

“I mean I know that living over here, is very dog friendly. So I mean I know some people that have gotten dogs or want more dogs just by moving in. And I moved here specifically to get close to such, you know, an easy atmosphere for my dog as well.”

After explaining her decision to move to the neighborhood, she added that she has driven to the park in the past and has noticed an increase in her frequency of visitation since she moved here and started walking. She pointed out that distance from her home is the possible reason. Russell also agreed that the park is accessible and walkable, even though he lived about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away. He said that the location of the park in between the rental homes and apartments facilitates accommodation, as against a neighborhood dog-park in Seattle:

“I think it is different because of the demographics, because there are so many students. I have seen many dog-parks in Seattle where the demographics are much more middle aged, and stable, my sister is there, more single family dwellings, so her dog-park I kind of feel is less neutral, people feel they have more of a stake because they are all homeowners and that attitude. Here it is like, they are all here for a few years and then they are going to gone, so why worked up about anything in the dog-park. The transitory nature of their existence I think translates to their behavior.”

Jamie, a new user, said that the way the park is situated in the neighborhood has led to formation of a community. She mentioned the reason behind it as easy encounter with the same people. When asked if she thought it was accessible and inviting to new users like her, she said,

“Because this place has been kind of situated in the neighborhood so you can’t always have a bunch of different people coming. And I think this is more like a community park, I know that some people do park and bring their dog but you need people to come.”

Planning guidelines facilitate sharing of public open spaces like neighborhood parks within walking distance of households, a concept that goes back to the planning of Savannah, Georgia and providing people the opportunities to recreate and congregate with ease before the automobiles dominated transportation (Kunstler, 1993). The motive with that is to create place for residents of a limited area within walking distance, and hence the location becomes key. People view accessibility from various angles in the 21st century, the automobile has expanded the range of facilities to choose from and not everybody wants to use the ones in their neighborhood, but the identity and use of a neighborhood parks relies heavily on the people that live nearby. A third place is a success if people appreciate it being accessible, and hence a neighborhood park is successful if it attracts local users. Oldenburg gives the example of French cafes being nameless in many instances because each one of them shared its identity with the street it was on and the neighborhood that surrounded it. So, physical access to a third place is just as important as being open/available any hour of the day and any season of the year. For neighborhood parks, being a natural setting that could play host to a multitude of undesirable activity after sundown, the nightly curfew is a limitation to that needs to be embraced.

3.1.7. A Playful Mood in the Park

The characteristics explained above are pieces that fit into an overall experience that each person has at the park. A park is a unique social setting where one’s experiences are bound to be affected by the other people in the same space, and in this case other dogs. Thus, for restorative and rejuvenating experiences, it is important for a third place to have a playful mood. The mood is affected by the interactions, conversations, the people, mannerisms and gestures among other characteristics. As noted by Oldenburg (1999b), *“The urge to return, recreate, and recapture the experience is there. Invariably the suggestion is made, “Let’s do this again!” The third place exists because of that urge.”* (Oldenburg, 1999b, p. 38)

The charm of the third place, according to Oldenburg is in a mood that is created; it's seductive and encourages people to linger. He explains this by giving the example of a playground and the unorganized, impromptu play at a playground. Not every game he said leads to the formation of a club, but the tendency is there (1999b, p. 38).

People described the mood inside Steeplechase as playful, friendly, and respectful and various synonymous words (see Appendix D.7). This mood was supported by gestures such as greetings that were observed and mentioned by the users. However, there were some contradictions/spoilers mentioned by the interviewees as well that coincided with the comments made under discrimination and social-openness of the park. People showed a lot of care for their dogs and anything that threatened their animal undermined the playful atmosphere of the park. Instances of dog fights and misbehaved dogs were cited as contributing factors to diminished moods. Emma put her answer for the mood in one simple sentence: *"I think it's pretty joyful, everybody here looks pretty happy. Only if something happens like a dog fight or something is the mood spoiled. You can look around right now and see everybody playing, it's pretty good."*

Jack, the owner of the dog that suffered from an emotional trauma as a result of a fight at the park, explained his experience at the park: *"For the most part, it's extremely positive. The only time I get uncomfortable with other people out here is when they don't have any control over their dog or they bring a dog that they are not as familiar with."*

Aside from the occasional instance of a dog fight, people reported having a wonderful time at the park and used words like egalitarian, cordial, pleasant, happy, playful and friendly to describe the mood inside the park. The fact that people mentioned the mood being positive highlights the underlying benefit of their visit. Thus, even if the mood is not as loud and uninhibited as a pub, they still leave with a joyful spirit. Britney, who was emphatic about the positive aspects of sociability in the park, almost restated Oldenburg's ideas about staying longer:

"I stay longer, if I am deep in conversation sometime or if my dog, you know, sometimes, there is this one dog that he is obsessed with and if he happens to come later you know, I just want to give him time to play with and stuff."

Brittany stayed longer to talk but also to give her dog more time to play with his friends. Russell added that *“It’s definitely a bonus, the conversation. Nobody is against it; I think people stay longer sometimes than their dogs want to because they are still talking you know.”* During the observations at the field, I noticed the same thing happening. When people arrive at the park, they first spend time taking care of their dogs and playing with them, followed by standing in the center and talking. Therefore, around sunset, the dogs would all be worn out and wandering slowly in the center while their owners would be deep into conversation. Thus, the intensity of activity for dogs and people had almost reverse patterns. Some people that walked to the park alone, left in couples or groups while still talking.

3.1.8. Low Profile

As a consumer, people often split the goods they use into fancy versus ordinary or everyday. For example, a thanksgiving meal and an everyday dinner are clearly distinct even if turkey is served at both. ***Steeplechase Park has a low profile, leaning towards being unattractive according to some of the regulars;*** and being the way that is has had an effect on the way it is used.

Oldenburg describes the third place as an everyday amenity/place and so the physical characteristics of the place must maintain a low profile (Oldenburg, 1999b, p. 36). It is for this very reason, he believes, it is hard to convince people of their importance. Third places, he goes on to say, are *“typically plain. In some cases, it falls a bit short of plain”*, but it is the activity and the people that make it what it is. The essential requirement however is that people should be able to linger in good company, and that he believes comes with age of the place. Newer places and establishments tend to be more of an attraction than the ones worn/eroded by use. The plain appearance of a place also affects the number of transient and one time users it may attract. Doug while explaining his preference for Steeplechase Park against the other park in the city said that,

“Sometimes on the weekends we go to the other park off of University [Drive], I guess the main reason I come to this one although the other park is lot nicer it’s convenient and most of the people I know come here.”

During the interview, people were asked to describe their relationship and history with Steeplechase Park. The typical response included information about their discovery of the park. People had either looked it up on the city website as they were looking for places to bring their dog, had been around during the design and opening, or heard about it from a friend. The last response ended up getting the most references during coding. Regulars of the park, as mentioned above, thought that they had a lot to do with newer people coming to the park and moving into the neighborhood. For some, it was the fence around the dog-park that gave it away while others felt that it could be mistaken for a closed city property as well; unless you see people using it at the right time of the day, you may not even know it existed. Charles pointed out the importance of the fence in making the park distinguishable from its surroundings: *“The fence probably gives it away, if you were to drive by here and see a fence and a bunch of dogs, you would probably figure out pretty quick that this is gated dog-park”*

And Britney responded to the same question by saying,

“You kind of want to know, what this huge gate is and then you are seeing random dogs and you wouldn’t think it’s a dog-park initially. I think it’s something that people check out when they are driving by when they come around the area”

Emma thought that the park had several issues with appearance, which did not stop her from coming to the park each day. When asked if the park appears inviting to people that pass by it, she said,

“No this park is not inviting at all. If you come by at the wrong time, right now we have grass but back in the winter before the rain came, it was complete sand. And, we had this one hole in the park that we called the perpetual piss hole, it was constantly wet and dogs would go and pee in it, it never went away because we had no grass or terrain to soak it up and it took months and a call to the city for it to go away. Also, if you look at it now it’s mowed a couple of months ago it hadn’t even been mowed and about a foot and half grass.”

As plain and unattractive as a third place might be, it is important for it some have some hints of warmth and friendliness displayed upfront. It is one thing for a place to be low profile and quite another for it to be hostile or scary. Russell touched on this issue of welcoming elements in the park in his description,

Russell: "I really like the pink roses they have there on the front, it feels friendly.

Me: Does it like grab attention in a flashy sort of way?

Russell: No more just a friendly way. People put flowers in front of their houses; put two houses side by side, the one with the flowers looks more friendly than without, even if it's the same house."

As a response to the open ended question about the design of the park, he said,

"This whole thing is here by law as a drainage area, so it was a pretty smart deal to put up a fence and let dogs come here, dig up and crap, why put a lot of money into stuff like that. So that kind of shows to a degree that they didn't put a dog-park for the sake of a dog-park, let's just dig a hole and put a fence around it and see what we can do."

Sally explained her take on the design and it's plainness by saying that fanciness takes something away from the activity of socialization, she believes that visiting a fancier place or a destination is for different purposes than the routine activity they appreciate at Steeplechase. She gave an example of her dog's activities at the park to support her statement:

"In comparison to the other park, here there is nothing else for the dogs to do other than play with one another and may be spend some time sniffing around, so part of it is not having neat little fancy features kind of makes it what it is. If it was a little section with some agility stuff set in for the dogs that would draw some of the dogs, they wouldn't interact with the other dogs."

Oldenburg (1999b, p.37) elaborates on this characteristic of low profile and its significance for a third place by pointing out its influence on the attitude of its users. He says that *"Plainness especially on the inside of third places also serves to discourage pretention among those who gather there."* So in order for it to serve as a neutral territory and a leveler, it must maintain the low profile.

Just because a place is plain and has a low profile does not mean that design has no role to play in how it functions. Places can be designed to serve as one thing or another, because that is the function of design, to facilitate activity and use; so it is essential to the process of creating and activity that it be designed accordingly as well (Brower, 2011). Detailed analysis of the design of Steeplechase Park and implications for use are discussed in the next chapter.

3.1.9. Feeling at-Home in Steeplechase Park

Users at Steeplechase Park felt comfortable and at home in the park, this feeling and its contributors differ from person to person. Seamon defines this feeling of *at-homeness* as “*the taken for granted situation of being comfortable and familiar with the world in which one lives.*”(1979, p. 70). For a person to be able to comfortably use any place repeatedly, it is important for them to be comfortable in the place and be able to relate to it. Third place provides a down to earth version of a *home away from home* that is easy to accommodate in one’s life. Oldenburg believes that third places compete with homes in several ways and may even end up being the winner, because a “*congenial atmosphere*” deemed as an ingredient of home, may not always be present in a home but is a staple of third place (Oldenburg, 1999b, p. 39). The five major contributors to *at-homeness* are *rootedness, appropriation, regeneration, at-easeness and warmth* (1979, pp. 78-85). These five components were used during coding to get a clear picture of people’s level of comfort at Steeplechase Park (see Appendix D.8)

Being a public space that may be used by multiple people at any given time, it is hard for one person to get the feeling of possession or dominance, which essentially forms the idea of appropriation. Understandably so, the resultant nodes for the study found least references made towards appropriation.

The most significant contributors towards people’s comfort and at-homeness in the park were rootedness and warmth.

3.1.9.1. Warmth: Is understood as an atmosphere of friendliness, support and mutual-concern that one may find in a place, like home. At Steeplechase, people used the words “*community*”, “*social-network*”, “*support system*” etc. while explaining their relationships with other users; all of these terms rely heavily on warmth in their very conceptualization. Such feeling in a place is very unique and hence these findings can not be generalized over a larger spectrum of spaces, designs, and uses.

An incident at the park may explain this better,

At 7:30 on a Sunday evening at the park, there was the usual circle of about 20 people in the center of the park and dogs swirling around, moving in and of the circle. The usual conversations were happening and people seemed to be talking and not checking their phones or listening to music. At that time in the distance there were some fireworks,

people turned towards that direction to watch but a couple of dogs were too engrossed in play to stop and notice; as a result, one loud firecracker caught the big black dog by surprise and seemed to have scared him. He ran towards the dog-park gate in the opposite direction, scared and unwilling to stay, when people and dogs rushed to his rescue. The owner, Russell gently stroked the dog while his buddies stood around in a circle. The dog slowed down but kept moving towards the gate when a few other owners came to sooth him and pet him. This activity lasted for about 15 minutes before he slowly started playing with his buddies (See Appendix B).

Emma elaborated on this feeling of warmth by saying,

“We are usually pretty supportive; I mean one girl over here, she is going through a rough time...and we all pitch in and help. She and I went out the other day and it kind of helped us form a friendship and then I know a few of the other people here have gotten together, or had them over for dinner, so we all try to take responsibility... one guy is in France right now and he’s helping somebody without a house right now, watch his house for free just to watch his dogs, they met here at the dog-park. So we kind of built a nice little support system for each other’s problems. I would have never guessed before coming here that I would get a support system/group, from people that were strangers like 8 months ago.”

3.1.9.2. Rootedness: Understood as a feeling of familiarity and the capacity of centering activities within the space (Seamon, 1979); this feeling of belongingness coincides with the psychological concept of sense of place. Sense of place is often used as an overarching concept that includes elements of perception and emotion related to a place that make it unique(Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Such capability of being able to relate to aplace and draw a unique picture for it in one’s mind, leads to an elevation in the value of the place; a reason for people to revisit or even frequent them, a source of nostalgia and probably a reason to help preserve it. For rootedness, the people at the park described it in two ways, the way their dogs interacted with the space and how they themselves interact with it. People seemed to have made peace with the low maintenance, occasional flooding and clogged drains; and found their center in the park. Closer to the spot of observation, it was noticed that some people parked their cars in the same spots unless it was taken. People also identified it having made a spot in their

social lives, not only as a place where they bring their dog, but also they also have a casual group of friends that stand in the center and talk. Doug, having spent portions of his time at the park in different areas explained his experience with the park and how that fits in his life as

“Well you know I have spent a lot of time here, so an hour a day almost 5 days a week; so it matters...just you know that he gets to socialize. He’s gotten a lot of benefits out of it socialization mainly, you know he’s really comfortable with other people, with other dogs and that’s probably attributed to a lot of the time we spent here.”

3.1.9.3. At-easeness: Based on the description of at-easeness, the coding overlapped with neutralness, inclusiveness and mood of the park. When asked if users felt like they belonged here during their visits and if there is anything that makes them uneasy, almost no contradictions were made. Some people reiterated the annoyances caused by some aggressive dogs and their owners but said it had nothing to do with them, if they feel uncomfortable, they would just leave.

3.1.9.4. Regeneration: The regenerative properties of the park are attributed not only to socialization but also to the fact that it is a little piece of nature in the built environment open to the public. Research suggests that being outdoors in the presence of nature helps reduce stress (R. Kaplan, 1993; Kellert et al., 2008; Ulrich, 1983; Ulrich et al., 1991). The concept of Biophilia suggests the instinctive bond that human-beings have with nature and the urge to be out amidst it in the rapidly graying world (Wilson, 2009). So, just by virtue of being outdoors lends some benefits and the benefits acquired by means of socialization are all additional. As mentioned before in the chapter, Britney described her visits to the park being therapeutic; Ian, a self proclaimed non-talker said that his time at the park made him feel *“happy seeing other dogs play with her and her playing with them”*. Daisy, who visited the park at an earlier time in the day because of her schedule, talked about the regenerative benefits she obtained from walking around the trail and just being with nature,

“I love the birds, the trees and the kids just run so it’s nice...And I actually enjoy that it is not excavated or anything, I like the forest, I do enjoy walking by there and thinking it’s very peaceful, makes you think you are in a different world.”

To sum his experience up, Russell said

“It’s like home, it’s like my backyard. It’s part of the neighborhood and of course the more you come the more you recognize people, and they recognize you so you know.”

3.2. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this chapter was to determine if and how Steeplechase dog-park functions as a third place in the lives of its users utilizing Oldenburg’s framework for the same. It can be said with confidence that the way the dog-park Park functions after the work day, has the definite characteristics of a third place, yet different in composition from other places mentioned by Oldenburg (Oldenburg, 1999b, 2001). This is the beauty of the concept, each example given by Oldenburg and each study performed with the concept has resulted in a unique recipe that fits in the context and serves locals. Some characteristics of the framework received more prominence than others, and some have more constraints than the others (see Figure 4 for complete Tree-map of Third Place). The following behavioral patterns became apparent:

- **Motivation:** socialization of the dogs was identified as the strongest motivation behind visiting the dog-park. Among the people that mentioned personal socialization as a motivator; some mentioned it as an equivalent consideration to their dog’s socialization and other mentioned it as a secondary consideration. Only two interviewees bypassed socialization as a reason at all. Women at the setting showed more inclination towards personal socialization and men showed a preference for alternative places for that purpose. All self-proclaimed regulars to the park mentioned some form of socialization as a motivator.

Users of steeplechase are more concerned with the socialization benefits for their dogs than themselves and people that come often and have been doing that for more than a month recognize socialization as a strong benefit.

- **Neutral territory:** Public open spaces, just by virtue of being open and free to the public have some behavioral constraints; this is what makes a third place different from one’s home that provides complete privacy and control. At Steeplechase Park, a misbehaved dog or an irresponsible owner are not welcomed by the regulars. Regulars do not hesitate to voice their concern when it comes to their pets. So as long

as the dog is friendly, or stays close to its owner; the park is neutral territory for the owner.

- **Leveler and Inclusive:** the location of the park affects the visitation patterns to a great deal. The user group at Steeplechase mirrors the diversity of the city, which being a university town is dominated by student population and is less racially diverse than some other cities; further investigation may be needed for that. The activity pattern, i.e. regulars standing in a circle in the center of the park to talk and let their dogs play with each other, seem to give the initial impression of exclusiveness. The members of the circle however denied that and thought of themselves as open and inviting.

In a country as diverse as America, it may not be possible to find a social setting that is completely free from discriminations of any kind. People in some cases stick to their pre-conceived notions about certain kinds of dogs and people, and let those notions guide their behavior. That is human nature, so a complete compatibility and mixture of all possible cultures and ethnicities may be hard to find.

- **Conversations as the main activity:** This characteristic was found to rely heavily on people's motivation to visit the park. People that mentioned socialization, personal or pets, as a motivator agreed to conversation being the main activity among the people; and those that mentioned having other reasons to visit the park either chose not to socialize or be silent observers. Regular users to the park recognized the conversations as either the main or a strong second activity that they liked to get engaged in. Being a dog-park, the conversation follows a certain pattern; starting with an interest in each other's dogs to more general topics to everyday life. The dogs provide for excellent triangulation in the park. The general mood of these conversation remains light hearted, if people have something serious/sad/intense to share they are supported but not necessarily encouraged to dwell on it. Some people mentioned having taken these conversations outside of the park to build a friendship, but participation in such activities remains completely voluntary.
- **Regular users:** the park certainly had regular users, this was unanimously agreed on. Not only does it have regular people users, but regular dogs that have distinct

characteristics of familiarity and friendship. The regulars all shared casual friendships and a facebook page called 'Steeplechase dog-park crew', which has led to added social networking and familiarity among the members. The regular people and their conversations at the park can be interpreted as intimidating or inviting at the same time depending on the on-looker's inclination. The regulars themselves mentioned bringing in new people to the park and the neighborhood; making the park an attractive amenity was often mentioned as a priority.

Regular also played a significant role in sustaining the place and getting the issues fixed. Multiple people mentioned having called the city for issues at the park, for example timing of the lights, unclogging the drain, emptying the trash etc.; all but one incident were explained as not so easy things to get done. For a park that has come to mean a great deal to its users and the neighborhood, city's lack of interest seemed a big cause of annoyance at the park. The regulars shared deep concern for the health and well being for their dogs, and some take a more active role than others in ensuring that conditions/surroundings at the park do not pose a threat to that.

- **Access and accommodation:** People mentioned how important the easy-access is to them, so people might be willing to compromise some of their preferences based on the ease of access. Emma and Sally both mentioned having a below average first experience at the park; but both of them gave it another try because of dog's exercise requirements and because of the closeness of the park to where they lived. Both ended up becoming regulars. People did not feel any constraints to access at any time of the day, except the weather constraints. People also did not seem to be bothered by a curfew at nights, as they understood that it is a park and everyone's safety is a consideration.
- **Playful Mood:** the mood inside the park depended heavily on the conversations; so as long as the conversations remains light hearted the mood is playful. The only contradiction to that takes it back to the behavioral constraints and misbehaved dogs, or the occasional serious dog fight. People mentioned very few such incidents where a serious fight lead to a dog being physically or mentally injured, but aside from that the words joyful, friendly, respectful, cordial etc. were used to describe the mood. This

seems to be a common and everyday constraint, there is a possibility of the mood getting spoilt in almost all public settings where freedom is high and the obligations are lifted.

- **Home away from home:** all regular users of the park agreed to feeling at home in the park. The frequent socialization and conversation seem to have led to the formation of a support system and an atmosphere of warmth inside the park. All five of Seamon's components of at-homeness were mentioned. More references were found for warmth and rootedness; almost all regulars mentioned being attached to the place and what it fosters. The natural setting enhances restoration and regeneration; the large open field and people's respect for each others' privacy and space makes the users feel at-ease. No contradictions were observed or mentioned.

Overall, people that visit this place with their dogs at the right time, draw some significant benefits from it. Steeplechase Park strikes as one of the places where the regulars never expected to find such benefits. For users like these and others that need a third place in their neighborhood, a little more initiative on the city's behalf could make them thrive and influence/benefit a larger area and attract bigger clientele.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION PART II:
OPERATIONALIZING THIRD-PLACE

4.1. The Design Recipe of Steeplechase Park

The built environment is the container for all social life, may it be a plaza or a park, the design of the space supports and negates a range of interactions. It is certain that the setting is not the sole criterion for the activity that happens, but it definitely plays a role. J. Gehl put together a table (see Table 5) to explain how the life between buildings depends on design of the place.

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

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

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

Table 4: Relationship between Outdoor Space Quality and Activity (J. Gehl, 2011, p. 11)

The good environment that promotes optional activities, under which a visit to the dog-park will fall, is made of various components.

According to a conversation with the Park Planner for the City of College Station,

Parks and Recreation Department, the detention facility was converted into a dog-park to get more use. The pet ownership statistics and the demographic characteristics of the neighborhood played a significant role in making that decision. As a next step, the conceptual design was prepared in late 2005 and the community was invited for input and critique to ensure the creation of a favorable environment before execution in summer of 2006 (Vanecek, 2012). In order to analyze the physical characteristics of the park and their effect on the activity, all data for physical features was coded using a combined list of guidelines (Refer to section 1.2.6 & 2.1.2) (M. Francis, 2003; Jacobs, 1992; Marcus & Francis, 1998; W. H. Whyte, 1980). The open ended questions allowed people to comment on the design and its various components, and their effect on use. This section helped with a better understanding of features/elements of design that play host to the third place activities. (Note: All graphics in this section are suggestive and not accurate for measurements)

4.1.1. Nature

Trees being one of the major components of nature in many parks were both absent and present at the site, depending upon the assigned use. The planting design and non-design in portions provides variety and options for use (See Figure 7 below). Jacobs mentioned intricacy as being an important element of a successfully deigned neighborhood park (Jacobs, 1992), having vegetation of various densities and maintenance level provides for this intricacy. Users at steeplechase seemed to enjoy this variety of vegetation and drew various benefits from it (Marcus & Francis, 1998).

For the dog-park, blanket of grass with very few trees did not seem to undermine activity. People appreciated the visual openness created by the lack of tree trunks blocking the view. Doug mentioned how people sometimes complained about the only other park in College Station as being less visually accessible. He said, *"I have heard some people complain about the other park that there's a treed area there and they can't keep tabs on their dogs, it is easier down here."* He also said that the level to which openness matters to people depends on how active their dog is in the setting. He noted that his dog prefers to stay close to him and hence he did not see trees as being problematic.



Figure 7: Vegetation zones in Steeplechase Park

In addition to trees, no significant barriers restrict the flow of *wind* and access to *sun* in the park, the surrounding structures are duplexes with no more than one floors and the frontage road (W.Ridge Drive) acts like a breezeway. One significant benefit of having a natural setting is *restoration*. Daisy succinctly expressed this benefit by saying, *“I love the birds, the trees and the kids just run so, and I actually enjoy that it is not excavated or anything, I like the forest, I do enjoy walking by there and thinking it’s very peaceful...yeah, makes you think you are in a different world.”*

Human beings by their very nature seek natural settings (E. Wilson, 2007); and spaces that allow for contact with nature lend multiple benefits of relaxation, stress-relief and so on (R. Kaplan, 1993; Kellert et al., 2008; Ulrich, 1983, 1984; Ulrich et al., 1991). This benefit of restoration helps establish the first link (see Figure 8 below) between the physical setting and third place activities:

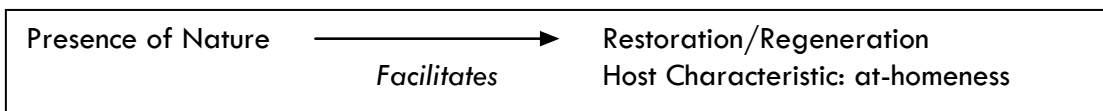


Figure 8: Link between nature and third place

Water at Steeplechase was mentioned both positively and negatively. The fact that the park used to be a city detention facility explains the existence of the stormwater channels that run through the park. People welcomed the occasional detention of water in the park that transforms it to a lake, but did not appreciate unsuccessful drainage. These channels, people mentioned, do not perform as well as they are supposed to and often remain clogged for multiple days after rain. Pools of stagnant water do provide triangulation for the dogs (W. H. Whyte, 1980), not so much for their owners who perceive them as threats to hygiene.

The welcome flooding was mentioned by Daisy and Jamie as attractions:

Daisy: *"it is nice for the dogs to swim in"*

Jamie: *"one thing we (she and her boyfriend) really like is that its sunken in, so when it rains it becomes like lake and the dogs love to play in that and I think that it's kind of ingenious that they did that."*

On the other hand, Jack, Emma, and Ian seemed more concerned with the aftermath of rain and periodic flooding. Jack called the drainage system '*frustrating*' and was seen cleaning the channels on different occasions, Emma mentioned having dealt with hygiene issues for her dog, she explained,

"Like I know they changed it as a drainage area but they could have made it more functionally draining, because it's really irritating when he wants to come here and he bothers the hell out of me but I can't come here because the park is too nasty, it's not draining well and there is stagnant water. He got a staph infection months ago because of the water here, so that wasn't very fun to pay a \$200 vet bill because.... I was not happy when we had already complained to the city about the water not draining so I couldn't bring him here for almost 3 weeks after that."

People did not seem opposed to the idea of turning a detention facility into a park for various reasons explained in the subsequent sections, but they did mind the drainage not being maintained for proper functioning.

There is another little spot with water, the **temporary bucket with a hose** kept inside the dog-park for convenience, which seems to have found a permanent spot. The use of the bucket and the puddle of water it creates is discussed under a separate category: Accessories and additional fixtures.

Shade plays an important role in outdoor settings, such as parks, in making people feel comfortable. Each list of design guidelines considered earlier, recognizes shade as an essential element. People interviewed at Steeplechase showed a preference towards late evenings because of the shade patters. The lack of shade giving trees in the park was a common complaint, although people did seem to appreciate the visual openness and unobstructed views to keep an eye their dogs; and the trees that may grown bigger and fulfill these functions in the future are used as toilets by the dogs. Jack, who seemed satisfied with the layout of the park overall had one recommendation in the end. He said, *“Perhaps a few ore shade trees would be nice especially in the summer, and really that’s really my main complaint”*

Ian explained that he liked the unobstructed view: *“The flat landscape is a good place for the dogs to run without the trees. You can see it’s so obvious, the dog can’t be hidden somewhere. That is an attraction I would say.”*

And Emma mentioned the other problem with trees inside the park (see Figure 9) and why nobody stands under them,

“The outside (fringe of the dog-park) by the trees is pretty much used as a toilet, most of the dogs that’s where they go to their bathroom at; so I would say because the trash cans are over here no dog ever goes to the bathroom here, you always have to walk across the park”

She mentioned this as one of the reasons people congregate in the treeless center, less attractive a spot for urination for dogs and had doubts about the trees becoming places to linger even after maturity. This situation creates a paradox; people want trees for shade but they may end up being used for something else or blocking the view so a possible compromise may be to place trees outside and unapproachable to the dogs and distract them with alternatives (see Figure 10). This however limits the location options for shade seekers to the fringe areas.

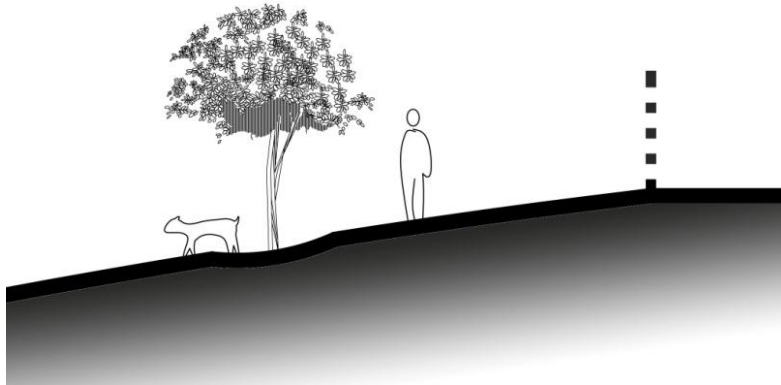


Figure 9: Tree inside the park

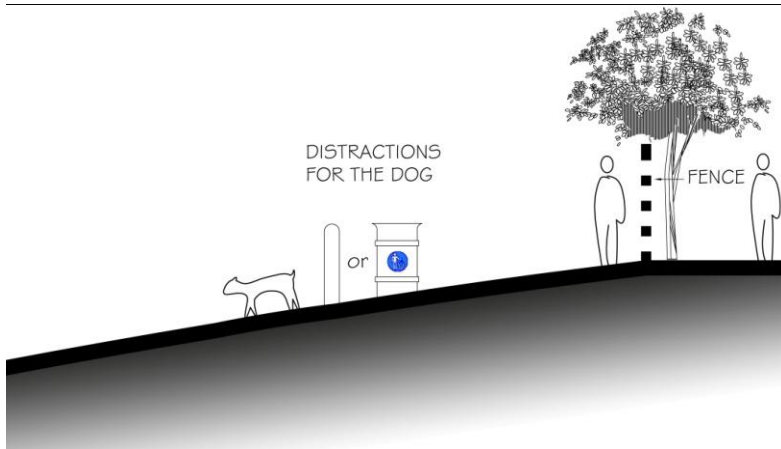


Figure 10: Possible relocation

4.1.2. Layout of the park

Planning and design of a park is an iterative process where designers come up with concepts, which are screened for relevance either by other designers, or potential stakeholders or both, and then changes are made if needed (Murphy, 2005). There is no one template that fits all situations and the layout is guided by the context and needs of its potential users. However, there are certain elements that act as useful pieces for a neighborhood dog-park (Marcus & Francis, 1998) as discussed in section 1.7. People's

responses to design and observation made at the park were categorized based on the Table 1 in section 12.6. and scanned for preferences and possible improvements.

4.1.2.1. Dog-park: according to the users of the dog-park, the layout works well. The open lawn facilitates flexible use, in terms of location within the park and with respect to other users, much like Jacobs predicted by her requirement for *centering*. For dogs, it facilitates free running for as many as 30 during high use times. The visual openness provided by the planting design is complemented by the round edged layout of the park (see Figure 10). The visual openness of Steeplechase provides a great example of **prospect** that people seek, with a large circumference to get the comfortable edge and not feel exposed. In describing *Prospect-Refuge* theory Appleton stated that for being comfortable in an environment, human beings seek the *ability to see and the ability to hide* (1975, p. 66). The unimpeded opportunity to see is called *Prospect* which has a direct impact on aesthetic satisfaction.

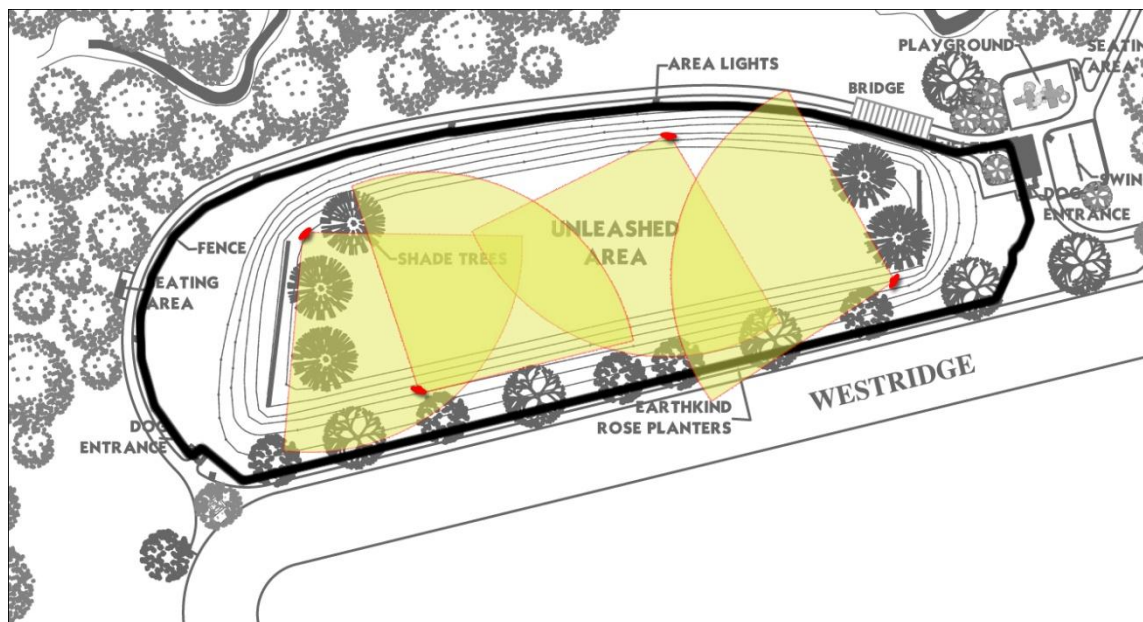


Figure 11: Prospect at Steeplechase Park as combination of layout and planting design

People mentioned the openness being a huge plus both for the activity of the dogs and for the dog owners. Openness meant they spent less time looking for their animal, which allowed them to more freely socialize. Considering her own status as a

student, Britney explained how the layout fits her needs:

“I think it’s perfectly suited for college students, you don’t need fancy.... I mean I don’t think it is one of the fancier dog-park that you have been to or I have been to you know, but it’s basically what you need, you know big piece of land fenced in.”

This large open space, according to certain users, has the potential to support more than one activity at a time. Aside from facilitating free play for the dogs and a circle of people in the center, the big oval shape provides room for segregation, solitary use and dog-training if and when required. Charles elaborated on this topic by saying,

“Only because of the way that the park was designed as an open drainage area that, you can create zones without people knowing you are creating zones. It’s big enough you can run big dogs in here or play Frisbee or catch, throw a ball or whatever.”

In making the prospect-refuge theory work at Steeplechase, **topography** plays a large part as well. The lower elevation in the middle of the space makes that area a refuge too even without the presence of an edge or trees. As noted, the park’s original function was for stormwater detention and the bowl like shape represents its design for holding floodwater for short periods. People in the center can easily look up to the perimeter and feel enclosed, not easily seen by people driving along the adjacent street (see Figure 12). This leads to another possible link between the space and the activity,

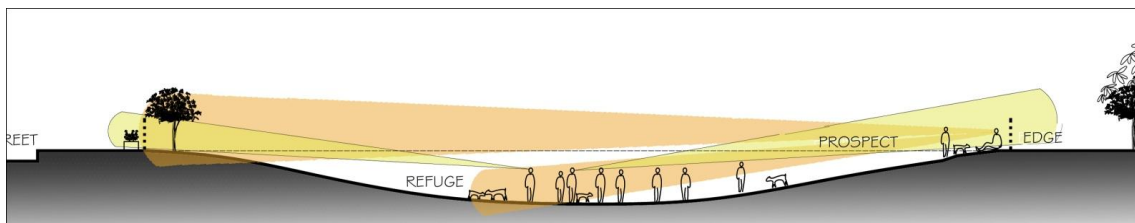


Figure 12: Prospect-refuge and edge at Steeplechase Park

Topography provides the *refuge* in Steeplechase, and does not hinder prospect. Emma feels that the shape of the park is appropriate for what it is. She explain by saying,

“I like it because it’s low set you know, I like that the dogs can be down in the center and the owners can be up on the side; no matter where you are on the site you can see them... There are no obstructions between you and your dogs. Also, the ground is a little

bit more flat, there aren't any holes, and it's obviously worn its way into that bowl shape, so it's a nice area for them to play, but the issue with the drainage area is really just it. I like the way that it's shaped, I think it's the perfect shape for a dog-park."

Ian said that the bowl shape of the park facilitates the automatic formation of the circle in the center, provided the sun is not harsh and it's comfortable to stand in the center. Being a new user at the park, but intending to visit regularly, he had been observing to make his way into the activity. He indicated, *"There is a major zone in the center as you can see where people get together and this is the major zone where people chat and dogs go in the center and away"*.

In addition to making the center more comfortable, the bowl shape accentuates the edge and the feeling of comfort associated with it. This seems to have increased the number of options/spots for lingering in the park. The concrete edge/overflow over the creek certainly enjoys these qualities and hence gets good use. Russell pointed out,

"The banks on the edges were much flatter, and people would sit around on the edges because it was more comfortable, see like the far side and how flat it is, the whole park was that way too until the rains came and you can't really do that. But people now sit on the concrete ledge (see Figure 13 below), because its more an edge kind of thing; playing with the dogs more in the middle and then standing around just kind of."



Figure 13: JPEG Image: Concrete "bench"

Whyte encountered a similar situation and findings at the Rockefeller plaza in New York City (W. H. Whyte, *Municipal Art Society of New, Street Life, Direct Cinema, & Bainbridge Brass*, 2005). Early in his study he observed that a change in level can potentially harm the activity of a public open space and so it should never be more than 3 steps up or down from the street and adjacent sidewalk. However, in case of the Rockefeller plaza, a level difference helped foster secondary use by those passing by and even helped to “invite” them in. Also, the ratio of depth to width at Steeplechase is 0.05, too low to create a feeling of entrapment. A gentler change in elevation does not block the connection to the street; as Sally mentioned “*it’s kind of down in a dip too, so you can’t really see into it very well, unless you are by that side (along the sidewalk) or driving right by*”. For physical access, the bowl shape is easy to descend into.

As mentioned earlier, it’s the topography of the park that also lead to temporary transformation of the facility into a lake after a significant rain, which some dogs welcomed as a change. Hence, the combination of topography and the layout of the park facilitates the type of use that it gets, which leads to the establishment of another link between the space and third place activity (see Figure 14 below).

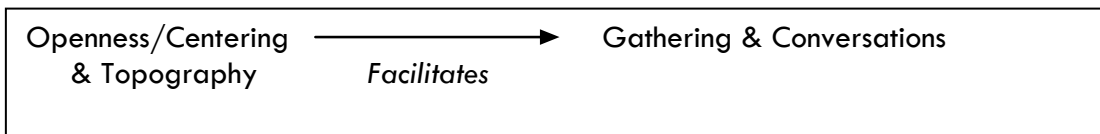


Figure 14: Link between layout and third place

4.1.2.2. Other Activities at the Park: in the fast and busy lifestyle of 21st century, Americans are becoming more comfortable hanging out in public open spaces; these experiences according to M. Francis (2003) lend people a greater sense of relation to one another and surrounding environment. A variety of activities at Steeplechase Park give users the option to switch to break monotony, and also to attract various groups for more diversity in use of the park (Marcus & Francis, 1998). An assortment of activities may also increase the number of users and hence enhance perceived safety, a very important consideration particularly for women and children (Springgate, 2008). An activity mentioned by many writers and researchers is consumption of food or beverages

(M. Francis, 2003; Oldenburg, 1999b, 2001; W. H. Whyte, 1980) as a part of successful public spaces. This was missing at Steeplechase Park. Users mentioned sharing food at the picnic area occasionally but that involves someone taking the initiative to bring something. The location of the basketball court relative to the dog-park seems to work well as they attract separate user groups. Both these activities get enough street frontages too, which is important for parking. The park does not have a separate lot for cars and the parking pattern/location along the street seems to be guided by the target activity. This choice and variety helps accommodate various interests and user groups, and so a relationship may be seen in Figure 15 below,

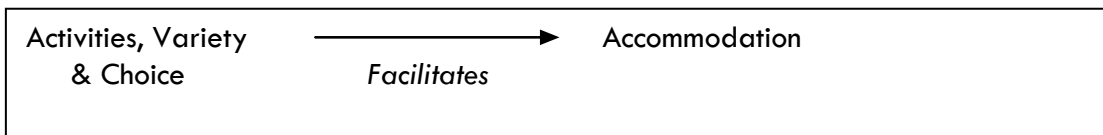


Figure 15: Link between activities and third place

Users of Steeplechase dog-park appreciated having other facilities; a few mentioned having used the trail before ever visiting the dog-park with a pet. Jamie explained how she discovered the park: *“I don’t use the playground or the basketball court but I do jog. I wasn’t aware of it till I started jogging that this was here, but I was really excited and surprised.”*

This first impression seemed to have influenced her outlook towards the overall design which she expressed further into the interview:

“I like it, I don’t have a background to tell you technical things about it but I do like it a lot. I like that you are kind of walking in and it’s all hidden in the forest kind and then you just keep walking and there’s the basketball court and everything is kind of just a little surprise.”

Some people, who did not use other facilities often, still seem to appreciate the fact that they existed. Charles mentioned having used other facilities at the park, and said that the extras never seemed to interfere with his use of the dog-park; but he also said that users of the various areas are aware of each other and appreciate their presence:

"I have used it myself. I don't use it every time I come to the park but people stroll around the sidewalk and there are kids playing out here on the playground sometimes, you can hear guys playing basketball over there like they are right now. So I would say that unless you are deaf or totally no-observant you would be aware of these other people, facilities and purposes of the park."

Britney expressed similar opinions:

"There's always people using the basketball court college kids mainly, I have seen. Sometimes you see cars parked all the way up the street and also cars parked on the street this way for the dog-park... it's pretty cool. It's nice to see like, you walking in the park, you see all the people playing basketball, just getting out. It's a nice environment as a whole."

Some other users like Russell had a more specific preference for the dog-park and said, *"I don't really care about the other uses; they are the non-dog people I think"*.

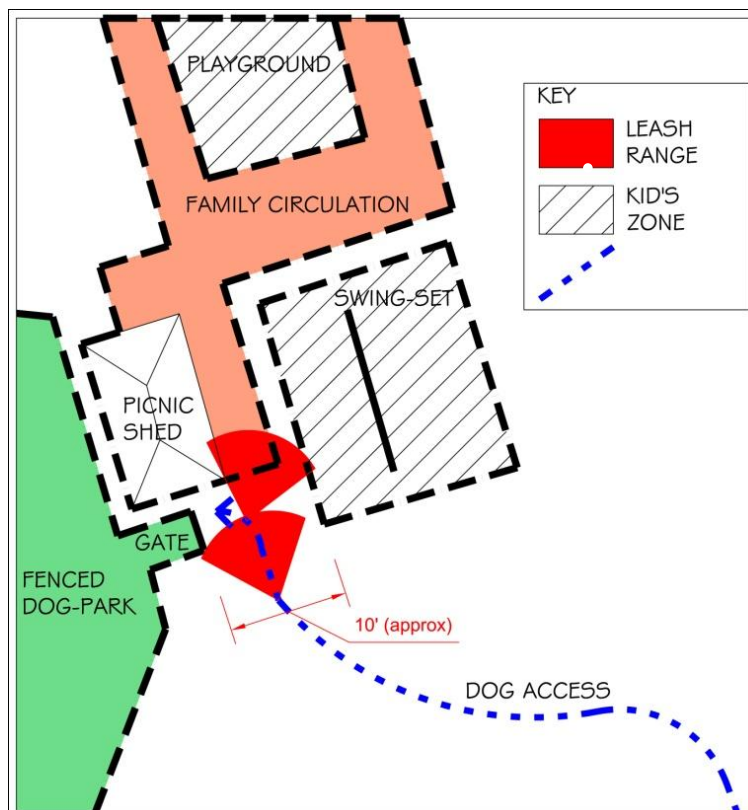


Figure 16: Placement of activities

During the entire course of this study, very few people were seen at the playground and there was not enough evidence to make any meaningful statements about people's use of that area. However, the playground and swing-set area are located on the northern end of the park, with no trees or canopies for shade. I felt that dependence on shade in the Texas summer would make late evenings an ideal time to visit, until I witnessed an incident (see Field Notes: Appendix B)

A little girl (observed on multiple occasions before) was swinging at the park with her grandmother when a big dog (unleashed) approached her before entering the park; the little girl got scared and started crying before the dog came close. (O.C: maybe the kids' playing area is too close to the dog-park gate) the owner was only a few steps behind but before she could take control of the situation, the girl was already in tears.

This issue of inadequate use of the playground was brought up by a few interviewees as a placement conflict. In the list of guidelines provided by Marcus and Francis (1998) for dog-friendly neighborhood parks, it is important to segregate off-leash dog activity from playgrounds by a physical barrier. This guideline has been followed at Steeplechase through the addition of fencing but the busiest entry point to the dog-park is less than 20 feet away from the swing-set box (see Figure 16). Emma elaborated on this relationship between the uses by saying,

"I kind of think that the playground is not a good idea to have next to the main entrance because I feel like a lot of the parents don't want to come here when it's heavy dog time. A lot of people drive their dogs here in a car, so a lot of times the dogs are excited when they pull up and they run straight for the gate. I have seen dogs running straight to the gate and if I had a little kid, my first reaction will be like 'holy crap the dog is running towards my kid' whether it's running towards the gate or my kid. So, right now will be a perfect time to have kids here because it's so cool but you'll notice that this time of the day there's hardly ever children here. Even when it starts getting dark earlier, you'll notice there are hardly any kids here; but sometimes they'll come here in the middle of the day when it's so hot and the kids are miserable but they are playing because there are no dogs at the park, so that placement isn't too good and also it distracts the dogs. Sometime where there are little kids here, you'll find a lot of dogs here at the fence just staring at everybody probably making everyone uncomfortable."

Charles mentioned having spent some time having casual conversation with people at the playground and swings, and he felt the same way about the placement. He said,

“I would probably move the swing set area only for safety because some people don’t know how to control their animal and they may have an aggressive animal and kids do play in this area right here and I have seen instances where, not that I saw anybody get hurt, but I thought it could be a bad situation if the animal gets away from this person. A 2 yr old toddler sitting over here playing in the sand and you have a pit-bull coming out the door pulling somebody around, just a little uncomfortable.”

There isn’t enough evidence to suggest alternative location for these uses at the park. Some people mentioned having noticed families with dogs and children and how the relationship of these activities seemed good for that kind of use; a few others mentioned stopping at the playground area and talking to families and their children. Kate, who used the playground with her two daughters, seemed to be comfortable with the location. She saw some benefit in being close to both activities by saying,

Me: So the dogs don’t bother you?

Kate: Oh not at all. We had a dog before we had kids and my husband loves them but it’s hard to have a pet with infants so we had to give him up. My husband wants to get one sometime in the future so we also use our time at the park to look at the various types to think about the one we may want to get in the future. Besides, my older one loves to play with dogs and is not intimidated by them unless they run real fast at her.

The mixed opinions about placement of these activities indicate further investigation.

4.1.3. Context of the Park

Public open spaces gain more prominence and use as the density of urbanization gets thicker. The lesser open space people have in their backyards, the more they seek open settings outside of their home (Walljasper, 2008). Neighborhood parks are meant to fulfill these functions of a common open space that fulfills larger recreational, health and social goals (Eysenbach, 2008; Marcus & Francis, 1998; Mertes et al., 1995; Springgate, 2008). The added benefit of going outside of one’s backyard for open space activities is that it puts one among people, which leads to fulfillment of these social goals. How well a space is going to perform depends largely on how it sits in its

neighborhood. Various questions to ask include is it easy to locate? Does it have equitable access? Does it cater to the needs of people living in the neighborhood: Does it provide aesthetics benefit to the surroundings? Are the neighboring land uses compatible?

According to the users of Steeplechase Park, it fits very well in its surroundings and functions as a common “yard.” The first dog-park in the city of College Station has made the neighborhood an attraction for dog lovers and owners. Most regular users of the park live within a 2 mile radius and valued this vicinity to the park. The idea of the park was conceived to be useful based on the needs of surrounding residents (Vanecek, 2012). Most interviewees agreed with this idea; for example, Charles a resident of the neighborhood since before the park was established said,

“It’s great for people that have been here, or most of this (points to the houses on the side) probably 95% of this is occupied by students which is great and they need a place to bring their animal, and these yards aren’t that big. So, this is the yard.”

Most people seemed aware of the fact that the park was a single purpose detention facility before being converted; and had a positive attitude towards that decision.

Britney, a student who moved to the neighborhood to be closer to the park mentioned the context several times,

“I mean, I know I guess that this is mainly made to collect water... so they kind of made it into it a dog-park which I think is a awesome idea especially for where it’s located and how convenient it is for us.”

“This park is just utilizing a necessary resource, for something that can benefit all of us that live near, I think it’s great.”

“I love the location; it is close to certain restaurants, close to even school. There’s not that much traffic on some of these streets you know.”

Neighborhood parks, based on their size, have a catchment diameter of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile uninterrupted by a major roadway (Eysenbach, 2008; Mertes et al., 1995); Steeplechase Park has fewer access barriers to its east and north. The west and south are interrupted by two major highways: Harvey Mitchell Parkway and Wellborn Road. Looking at an aerial image (see Figure 17 below), the park seems to be almost at the edge of the neighborhood with no houses looking on to it or sharing an edge. Users of the

park mentioned the park being an attraction for people to move into the neighborhood, but it does not seem to have oriented any development on the fringe area.

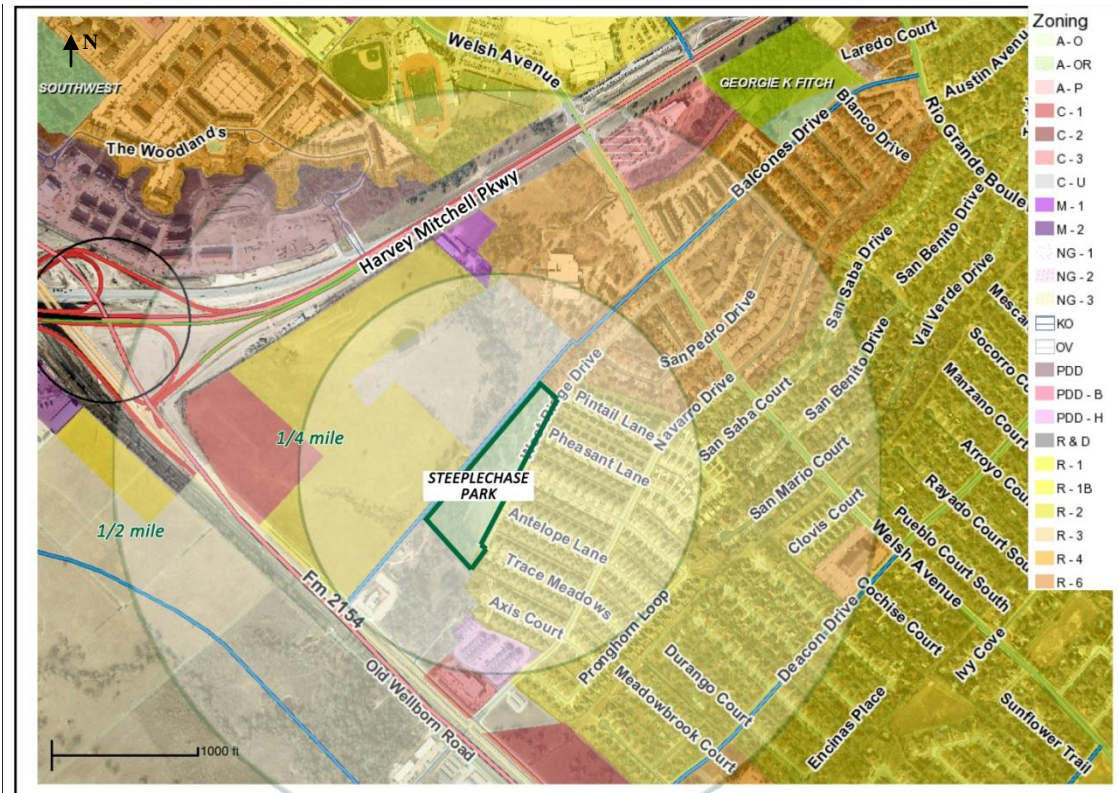


Figure 17: Zoning map, Steeplechase Park (Geographic Information Services, 2012)

Given that the dog-park was a retrofit, the constraints on location are understandable, and the zoning map of the city does mark the surrounding areas on the west as residential; the future of which remains to be seen. Ian, an international student appreciated the closeness of the park to his house but seemed to question its location; he said,

“Well yeah I haven’t seen a lot of dog-parks in college station, but the location is really important, like for a business you would see location, location, location; for a dog-park I would say it’s the same like location, location, location.” He later added, *“This location is not attractive because it is in the corner of the community. I can see that the neighborhood starts from here to there and this is like right at the corner, the location is not perfect.”*

There is evidence to support the assertion that parks, if designed to fit the needs and surroundings, can spur economic development (Crompton, 2001a, 2001b); in addition to evoking a heightened sense of place and aesthetics benefits. The development in the neighborhood so far does not seem to reflect these ideas; further investigation of the issue remains out of the scope of this study, but could certainly lead to opportunities for future research.

In terms of demographics, Steeplechase neighborhood is dominated by students that stay for shorter periods of time as compared to permanent residents of the city; outside of Steeplechase and about a mile east of the park, the demographics get much more diverse and so do the type of houses. The park, as mentioned earlier, has a catchment larger than the 1/2 mile on this side and attracts a very diverse user group. These demographic characteristics of the users make them more neutral in terms of territory. As quoted earlier; Russell said that *“(the more stable/long term residents of an area) people feel they have more of a stake because they are all home-owners and that attitude. Here it is like, they are all here for a few years and then they are going to gone, so why worked up about anything in the dog-park. The transitory nature of their existence I think translates to their behavior.”* And the fact that no houses share an edge with the park or directly face on to it may have helped make it more open to use at any time by anyone without interference. In any case, the context of a city owned park like Steeplechase, affects the user group, time of use, activities and feeling of territory/ownership (see Figure 18).

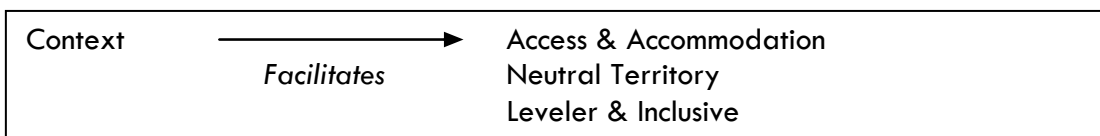


Figure 18: Link between context and third place

4.1.4. Access

The concept of access party overlaps with Oldenburg’s concept of *Access and Accommodation*; so in this section the physical and visual access is discussed. Aligned with the concepts of context and layout, is the accessibility of an amenity. In the case of a

neighborhood park, the trip to and from should involve minimum hassle and threat to one's safety and convenience. Thus the concept covers choice of modes to get to the park, convenient road crossings, well lit streets, visual connection between the outside and inside and flexible circulation (M. Francis, 2003; Marcus & Francis, 1998; W. H. Whyte, 1980).

The inventory phase of the study involved accessing the park on foot and on a bike; the location is convenient to get to by both these modes. The frontage street, West Ridge Drive, is a residential bike route and the minor arterial that links it to the city, Welsh Avenue has dedicated bike lanes. For pedestrians, both these streets have sidewalks, the frontage street however has a discontinuous sidewalk but the development plan for the city shows a proposed sidewalk on both sides (Geographic Information Services, 2012). The sidewalks have ramp access from both sides of the park and in between at a distance of 220-350 feet street parking on both sides acts as a buffer between the pedestrians and the moving traffic. The only concern to pedestrian safety seems to be a lack of crosswalks both on Welsh and West Ridge Drive and a lack of yield signs (see Figure 19). For biking, Doug pointed out: *"I could bike, I mean the only hazard, I wouldn't call it a hazard or complication, would be crossing Welsh (the street adjacent to the park). And it's not really difficult to cross; there is traffic on it so you do have to be aware."*

Users of Steeplechase felt the park is easily accessible for cars, pedestrians and bikers. Some people mentioned biking to the park is tougher with a pet than driving or walking, which coincides with the observations made at the park. Charles, having used the park for over six years by all three modes mentioned above stated,

"It's absolutely easy to walk; I am just lazy to do it. Yes it is absolutely easy to bike here, I have biked here, I could bike with my dog now, when he was younger he was a lot more distractible and it was just a safety issue for me not to bike with my dog on leash."

Emma, who prefers to walk to the park, expressed her opinions about accessibility by saying,

"I believe that there needs to be a park in walking distance just like there needs to be a bus stop within walking distance of my house, and not just a walking distance, a safe and reasonable walking distance. I don't want to be walking in unsafe areas because"

sometimes I do walk home from the park at night, so for me it's a very good placement right here. If it were somewhere else, I wouldn't probably go as much."



Figure 19: JPEG Image: Street intersection (Welsh Ave- West Ridge Drive)

Britney, who mentioned having driven to the park in the past, elaborated on access by both car and on foot. She said,

"It's easy to find actually driving from different location directions and all, and there are plenty of places to park along the street and walking is super easy. There is actually not that much traffic that comes through here, other than people that come to the park, or going home, so it's pretty nice."

Sally mentioned the visual connection, quoted earlier under layout, the park is sunken in a little bit so it is connected to the sidewalk and to the street. The lighting inside the park seemed adequate; the users mentioned having to call the city to adjust the timing on these lights as the seasons change but did not complain about them being insufficient. The trail inside the park did not seem to be lit after sunset which may not be unusual for parks. Having lights in the more wooded area may invite use after dark and

may pose a safety concern. Russell felt that the lighting on the street and sidewalks needed some improvements (see Figure 20):

“I think its fine; we have talked about having some more lights. This side is good (points to the trail head), but on that side (away of the other side) you have to rely on the street lights. Sometimes it does cool off and people do want to stay longer but you can’t when there is no light, because in the winter time it’s not late but its dark at 6, so you might want to hang out a little bit longer.”

All interviewees gave great importance to the location of the park and appreciated the short and safe distance to get there. Many mentioned closeness of the park to their homes as a main reason for choosing this park over the other parks and a few including Emma, Ian, Doug and Britney showed reluctance towards walking or driving in a hypothetical situation where the park is farther away. These observations seem to point towards a relationship between easy access and regular use of the facility.

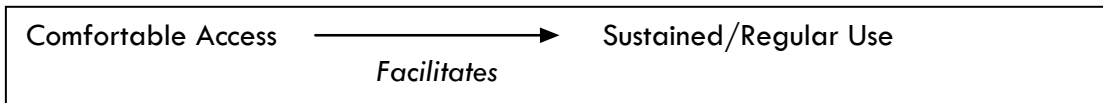


Figure 20: Link between access and third place



Figure 21: JPEG Image: West Ridge Drive looking south

Users at the park seem to have adjusted to the facilities and infrastructure available and did not see any major threats other than the few mentioned above. When asked for possible improvements, people mentioned better signage, a possible crosswalk on Welsh Ave and more street lights.

4.1.5. Walkways: Circulation within the Park

It is important to get to the park with ease, and also to be able to get around inside the park. The concept of having flexible circulation compliments access, especially in public spaces where people appreciate choice (see Figure 22 for relationship). Not everyone likes to socialize during all their visits and it is important to cater to the needs of all user groups. The layout of the park does most of this job, but the other part of it is being able to see the whole picture at the entrance, make a choice and bypass the busy zones if needed.

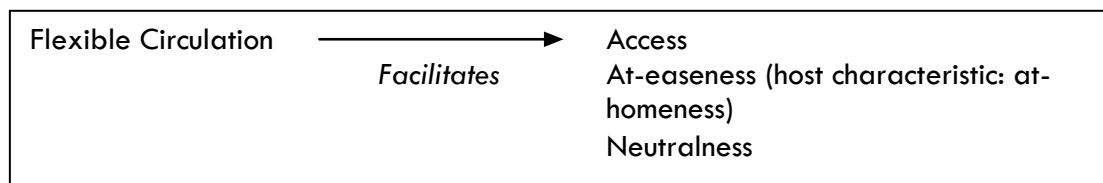


Figure 22: Link between circulation and third place

People at steeplechase seem to appreciate the path around the park for added exercise benefits while their dogs can safely play inside. This perimeter on the outside of the fence gets shade from the vegetation and a clear view inside the park at all times (see Figure 23). The other convenient choice that people seem to have made is of a dirt path inside the park. People do seem to be using all areas of the park, and the dirt path to get to those areas without having to descend into the bowl and back up.

Overall, the circulation inside the park seems to be facilitating choice of activity, involvement and location; the only place where there seems to be a mismatch between the access and activity, if by the basketball court. It almost looks like people at the court expect a more direct link between the court and the sidewalk and the curvy trail is not the best solution. The only evidence for this is the worn out grass in between the court and

the sidewalk (see Figure 24), further investigation of the issue was beyond the scope of the study.

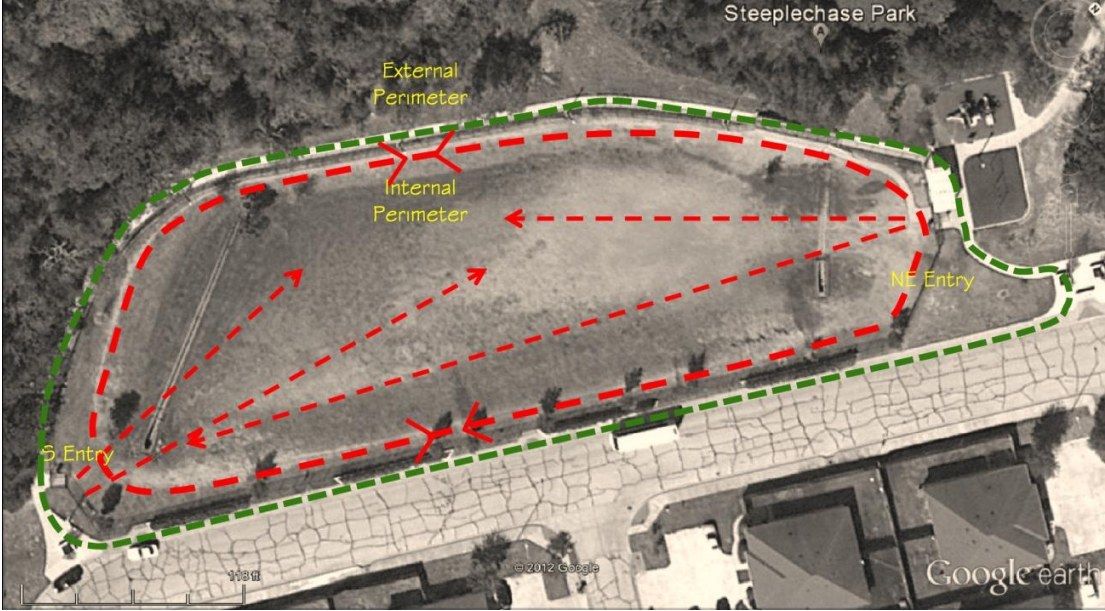


Figure 23: Flexible internal circulation

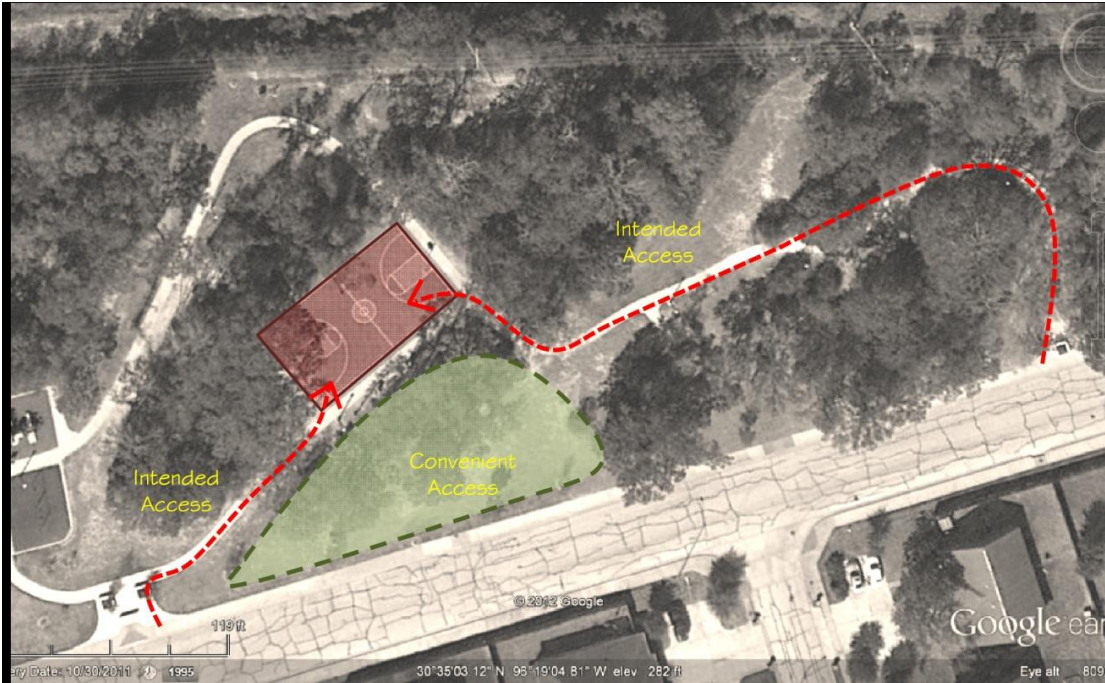


Figure 24: Circulation around the basketball court

4.1.6. Seating

Seating according to W. H. Whyte (1980) contributes tremendously to how comfortable a public space is; it affects what spaces people use, where they stay and for how long. Seating has to be flexible and ample; it should give people choice between socialization and solitude, facing onto an activity or facing away, being active in a setting or relaxation and so on. In the case of large open spaces, seating orients activity and facilitates creation of zones within the space, which are a sign of freedom and choice of activity and hence neutrality of a place. Flexibility for seating can be interpreted in several ways; for example where people sit, how many people are able to sit, which way they face and the comfort of the seat. Movable chairs and large flat benches both have elements of flexibility; which one belongs in which place is a judgment decision. A relationship between flexible seating and park use, based on the literature and data from this study, may be drawn as I Figure 25 below:

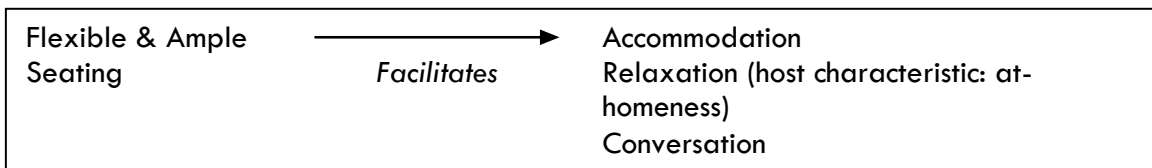


Figure 25: Link between seating and third place

Seating seems to be a major concern and contributes to the creation of zones at Steeplechase Park (See Figure 26). Russell mentioned having noticed 3 zones:

“I would say there are 3 zones; the peripheral zone where people don’t want to interact and just sit and let the dogs play or read or study, then there’s the near zone and far zone. The near zone is more towards the center here where people just hang out or its more like we are going to talk and the dogs would just surround us, the far zone is where if you actually want to work with your dog, exercise them but you can’t really do that here (near zone) because its’ busy. We don’t really have groups at the end, thats kind of where people start to exercise their dogs, throw the ball; people there are actually there to interact with their dog.”

Jack specified, on the periphery, a separate zone for interaction. He said,

“As far as the largest group goes, the largest one is us in the middle and there is a fair number of people that would congregate around the bridge and then at each of the benches there are several folks that prefer to be there. It seems that primarily in the corner and at the benches are the folks that, either because of their dogs or their own personality, would prefer to be on their own out there.”

The reason that people liked congregating in the center and the bridge has been discussed earlier as topography and edge, but there is another thing that the concrete bridge enjoys and that is place to sit and early evening shade (see Figure 27).

Combining the two comments with the observations made on the site; 4 prominent zones became apparent:

Zone 1: At the concrete non-bench where people started congregating while the park remained largely devoid of shade.

Zone 2: The center that gets most use in late evenings and plays host to the vague circle of up to 30 people

Zone 3: Training zone where people were observed playing catch and training their dogs

and Zone 4: A quiet bench under the tree on the southern fringe of the park. The bench on the northeast fringe received mixed reviews, some people called it a zone and others thought it received too much sun; no use was observed during the study so a judgment about its placement is beyond the scope.

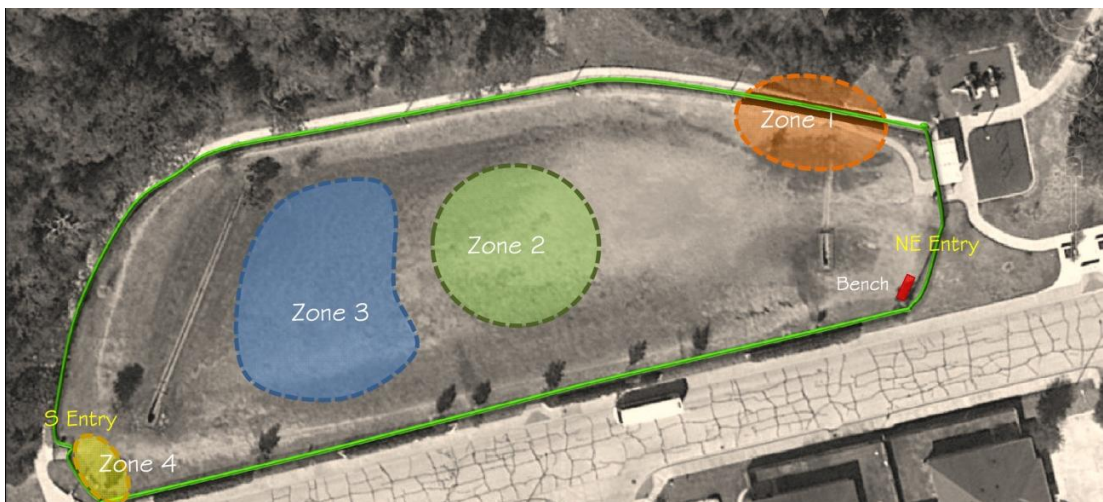


Figure 26: Zones in the Park



Figure 27: JPEG Image: Concrete bench in Zone 1

Therefore, seating guides the use of space, and remains largely inadequate at the park. Regular users of the park mentioned contacting the city on multiple occasions to get more seating in the park and felt that it would facilitate greater use. The picnic area with 2 tables gets little use despite of the convenient location between the dog-park and the playground; Emma mentioned the reason being faulty placement of the trash bin. She said,

“You’ll notice that the picnic table is right next to where the poop trash can is at and I think that kind of makes people not want to sit here, plus it’s down wind and the slide’s also downwind from the poop trash cans so it’s not a very desirable place for any of those.”

A very interesting and unique comment was made by Jack about seating in the park; he thought that giving people more choice to sit may hurt the active center of the park. He mentioned,

“The facilities for people are also more spars at this park, the dog-park area at least we really only have the 2 benches and it seems like it kind of forced people to stand in the middle or not”. He later went on and said, “Some more benches would be convenient, but again honestly I really think that would eventually detract from the social interaction.”

Based on his comment, it is the seating or lack thereof that facilitates the socialization at the park. Some people had suggestions about the possible locations for seating as all the interviewees agreed with the need for it. The few options/recommendations that came up for location are (See Figure 28):

Charles: *There could be, in my opinion, a lot more seating out here (northwest) that would require some work because seating would be a lot easier to design over here because of the way that they have designed this area. Seating on that side (southwest) might be nice because there is more shade in the late afternoon which is when it is the hottest.*

Russell: *in the middle with benches that face out and we can sit and watch our dogs that would be cool...Might invite more people to come down from the sides, unless they have benches everywhere then people will be like 'I would rather sit up here than down there'.*

Ian: *I would put benches; it's (one on NE edge) not covered so the sun really hits people.*



Figure 28: Possible locations for additional seating

Applying the idea of flexibility of use to these possible seating locations, the benches/seats may not be fancy or with back support, so one can choose how to sit and which way to face (see Figure 29, 30, 31 below).

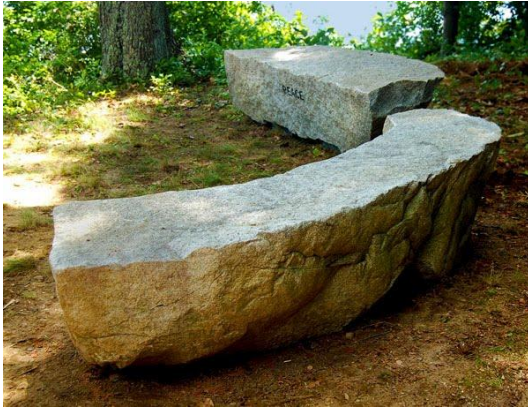


Figure 29: Flexible natural seating (Anonymous, 2010)



Figure 30: Lighter, quicker, cheaper version (mig rod's photostream, 2012)



Figure 31: Sponsored (Colen, 2012)

4.1.7. Focus

Having a focal point or activity has proven to be useful in almost every study ever performed on public open spaces. Starting from Lynch's five elements of cognitive maps (Lynch, 1960), to sculptures and triangulation in W. H. Whyte's works (W. H. Whyte, 1980; W. H. Whyte et al., 2005), focal points help create socialization opportunity by pulling people towards them and helping people orient themselves in that space.

The use and activity at Steeplechase showed a complete lack of focus in the park. There is no pond or sculpture or activity in the center to draw the people and the dogs; however, what seem to be working as a focus are the interactions among dogs. As W. H. Whyte pointed out in his film, *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, what makes Rockefeller Plaza a busy spot is the visually accessible sunken platform that acts as a stage for activity, and the people that stand at the railing are the spectators; the stairs in this case act as a mezzanine when people slowly descend and sit/stand on them (W. H. Whyte et al., 2005). This is precisely what happens at the center of Steeplechase Park, the dogs play with each other, the owners watch them play, they slowly move down the slope and start interacting. These interactions last longer than most dogs' stamina to play, and people finally disperse. What is the focus for dogs, well again nothing except each other; aside from the occasional sniffing and playing around the water-bucket (explained in the next section). The dogs have nothing else to attract them but the living souls inside the park. Sally pointed this out in this comment she made on design:

"In comparison to the other park, here there is nothing else for the dogs to do other than play one another and may be spend some time sniffing around, so part of it is not having neat little fancy features kind of makes it what it is. If it was a little section with some agility stuff set in for the dogs that would draw some of the dogs, they wouldn't interact with the other dogs."

Thus, the conversations that happen at the park are sparked by people's interest in each other's dogs and their activities. People mentioned sharing their dogs' behavior and other activities with others as a routine. Russell pointed this out as a characteristic of regulars:

"That's how it start, you ask the breed, how old is it, the name etc. we all learn the dog's name before we learn each other's as regulars, sometime we go like 'oh, Tucker's owner, what's his name'."

So the focus, that makes people remember the place and the others in it, is ‘activities of the dogs’. Dogs create triangulation at Steeplechase Park and hence the relationship in Figure 32 below.

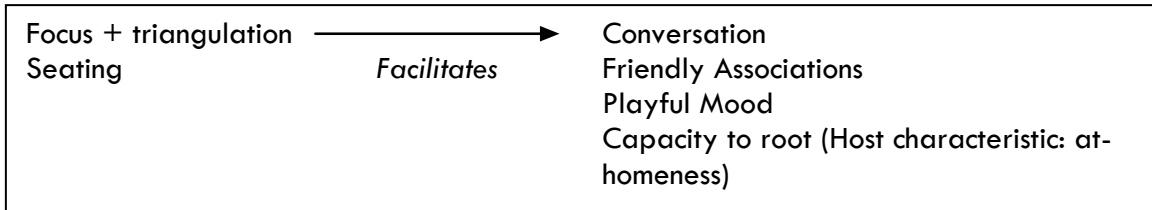


Figure 32: Link between focus and third place

4.1.8. Accessories and Extra Features

Users of the park had both good and bad things to say about the extra fixtures and accessories in the park. The purpose of accessories is to add comfort to use, for example the placement and number of trash cans for disposal of dog-trash etc., and appropriate signage to facilitate wayfinding. The availability of information enriches the experiences and makes it easy for people to maneuver through the space. It is well understood that Steeplechase Park is a neighborhood park and people familiar with the park eventually get comfortable with the design and circulation through it; but in a city like College Station that with student being the dominant user group, new users may come more often than some other places. Thus, in order to make the first visit more comfortable and easy for these new users, a map and a few signs may go a long way. This park is unique by virtue of being the first and one of the only two off-leash neighborhood dog-parks in the city; a signage on the arterial, Welsh Avenue may bring in more users. The regulars seemed willing to have more people in the park, according to Emma; it may give the city a reason to maintain the park better.

The next observation made during the study was the temporary/movable water bucket inside the dog-park. The water fountain outside of the fence has a lower bowl for dogs where people have attached a hose which is often left inside the park (see Figure 33). This bucket seems to have found a permanent spot inside the park and got maximum references for an accessory that people appreciated; people do not seem willing to take their dog outside the fence for drinking water before actually leaving the park for the

day. This clearly was a lighter, quicker, cheaper installation either by the city or a user that receives tremendous support. There is no better way of establishing need for something except a pilot project/study; this location for the water bucket has served as a successful one for years. Charles pointed out the permanence of the bucket:

“This is a good idea having that water over here, I don’t think that the city supplies that hose I think that’s just donated by the users. I have brought some of them out here; they disintegrate after a while just the nature of the hose.”

The bucket also creates a puddle of water around it, especially in the evenings as the users mentioned, which did not seem to be a bother to people. Dogs come and splash around, their owners sometimes come with them and this creates an added spot for triangulation. Marcus and Francis (1998) mentioned water as a necessary component in dog-parks; this study validates that.

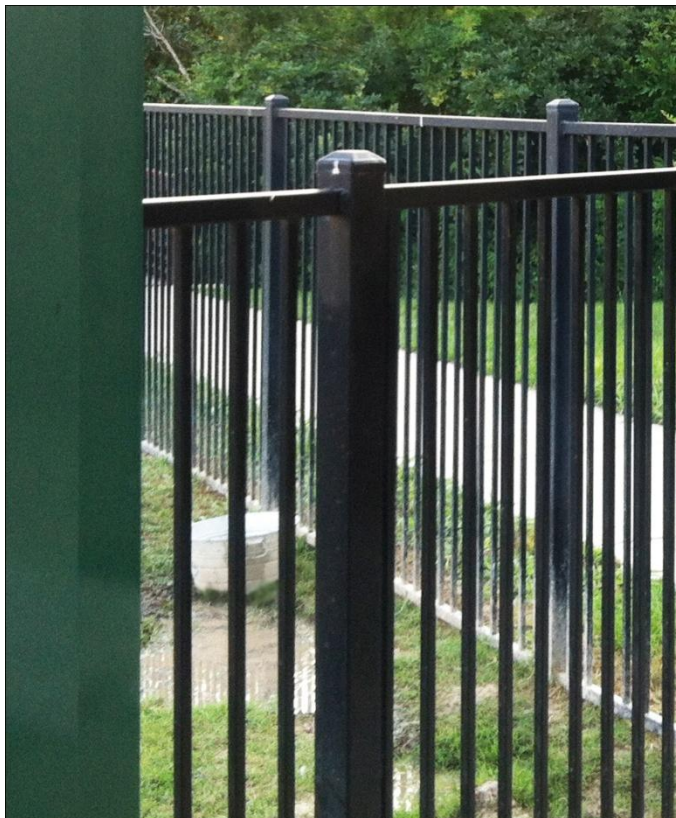


Figure 33: JPEG Image: Water bucket

People appreciate having bags available at the park to clean up after their dogs but did not appreciate the location of the disposal/garbage bins. One reason for that is the peripheral location, when the activities are happening inside; and second is the location relative to the picnic and playground areas. Emma mentioned that the amount of use the picnic area and playground gets is affected by the downwind orientation from the trash, which is never emptied on time.

The fence and the gates, serve two functions according to the users: one is generating interest among some people passing by because of the height and the dog-paw signs, and the other being flexible and comfortable unleashing area. The information and dog rules displayed on the inside gate (in the double gate system) make for a convenient location as owners tend to linger while unleashing their dogs and taking care of the leash after.

4.1.9. Maintenance

Maintenance affects how the park is used in the long term after the initial grand opening phase is over, how many regular users it will have and how many new users would care to stop by. None of the interviewees that claimed to be regular users had anything good to say about maintenance. All comments made were coded under problems, which came as a surprise given the social network that has formed here. People made several comments multiple times in the course of the interview that showed a concern for the park and its outlook. Some of these were,

“My first visit the grass hadn’t been cut in a couple of months so it kind of made me not want to come.”

“It hadn’t even been mowed about a foot and half grass. We would walk the dogs and you would find rattle snakes.”

“They don’t empty the trash until somebody complains about it.”

“The drainage ditches, they get clogged and stinky, so may be fix that or clean that up a little bit.”

“There are two of these wonderful toxic sludge- filled ditches running the width of the park for your dog to go stand in and lap up”

“The unique thing about this park is that it does not seem to be well maintained”

“If you don’t mow it soon enough the burrs grow and then and, you know, if the burrs dry and then the dogs have burrs all over.”

“The lawn frankly needs some seed put in.”

The design of the park seems to be working well for all the social interaction, as does the location and access to it. People in the neighborhood really seem to need a park to bring their dog to; the inadequate maintenance seems surprising for a well used park. Emma confirmed an appreciation for the layout, but also said that, *“It’s a great park but it’s not serving a good purpose, it’s always nasty, I like coming here but it’s always nasty.”*

The biggest complaints people have with the park were:

1. A functionally draining sewer system: people appreciate the retrofit and how the bowl shape of the park almost leads them to the center of it, but the clogged drains are seen as a major health concern. Jack noted, *“The drainage is frustrating, I know that that’s initially what this was but aside from that no I think it’s fairly well designed. I think it’s definitely a good use of space, I think it would have been a pretty large waste of space had they not converted it into something like this.”*
2. Regular mowing of the grass: people who had been using the park for more than two months mentioned this as a serious issue. The long grass brought with it the snakes, stickers and a tendency to lose track of the dog’s excreta. People faced different issues based on the breed of their dog, the dogs that have fur seem to be bothered with the burrs more than the other and the toy focused dogs tend to lose their toys. In any case, regular mowing seems to be a requirement, and not just that mowing at a stage when the mass of grass does not clog the drain.
3. Regular emptying of the trash: this was a concern for people that use the park, and those that use the areas around it. The observation location was the picnic table, and the smell that I had to endure was unpleasant enough to discourage use of the space for a picnic.

A functional design only remains functional until it is maintained to remain so. Springgate (2008) pointed out maintenance as key element of sustainable design for a park, and the study seems to agree with that statement. It is true that the regulars have gotten together for maintenance efforts, and this seem to have strengthened the bond between them but it is only matter of time before people move to a different

neighborhood or city or find an alternative.

4.2. Concluding Relationships

In the current state of development and economy; the resources are shrinking and the expectations from their usage is increasing. Spaces that cater to the needs of a single population may get lower preference and support than those that address the needs of multiple populations. Based on the study, it can be said with some confidence that dog-parks cater, if designed appropriately, can cater to the needs of more than just dogs. This is not to say that parks with special activities for dogs should not be built; but that takes us back to the routine activity vs. the special activity. Steeplechase Park has come to mean more than a place to take their dogs for several of its regular users, which makes it a good resource for the community in general.

The purpose of this chapter was to analyze various components of the physical environment (see Table 1 in section 1.2.6.) in order to understand if and how they facilitate third place activities. The intent with that is to come up with tools to inform planning and design of these places. It is well understood that the results of the study may not be generalizable to other types of parks and different locations/contexts given that only one case was studied; but what gives it value is the fact that the findings are grounded in previous research and literature. These findings are:

- **Nature: *Intricacy*** in planting design is important for a neighborhood park; people appreciate variety in density of vegetation and it enhances the restorative value of the park (See Figure 34). However, for safety purposes, dense understory/shrubbery should be avoided to maintain visual connections. For the dog-park, shade is key for comfort of people but so is visual access to one's animal. Trees should be planted in a way to avoid creating hiding spots for the animal or potential bathrooms; depending on the size of the dog-park, trees may be placed outside the fencing so the canopy extends inwards. Low height vegetation inside the dog-park may hinder the visual access, so ***sparse shrubbery*** is recommended. The lesser time people have spend on keeping track of their animal, the more time they can focus on themselves.

- Layout:** to make the park more relevant to a larger user group, an **assortment of activities** and areas in the layout are preferred. More number of activities, and hence more people also lead to enhanced safety and usability of the park, especially for women and children. The location of activities for children should be carefully planned in relation to the dog-park. The activities to be made available should be based on where the park is located. So, the design should be **relevant for its location**. Marcus and Francis (1998) point out the need for careful segregation of these two uses by physical barriers, the access routes should also consider segregation.

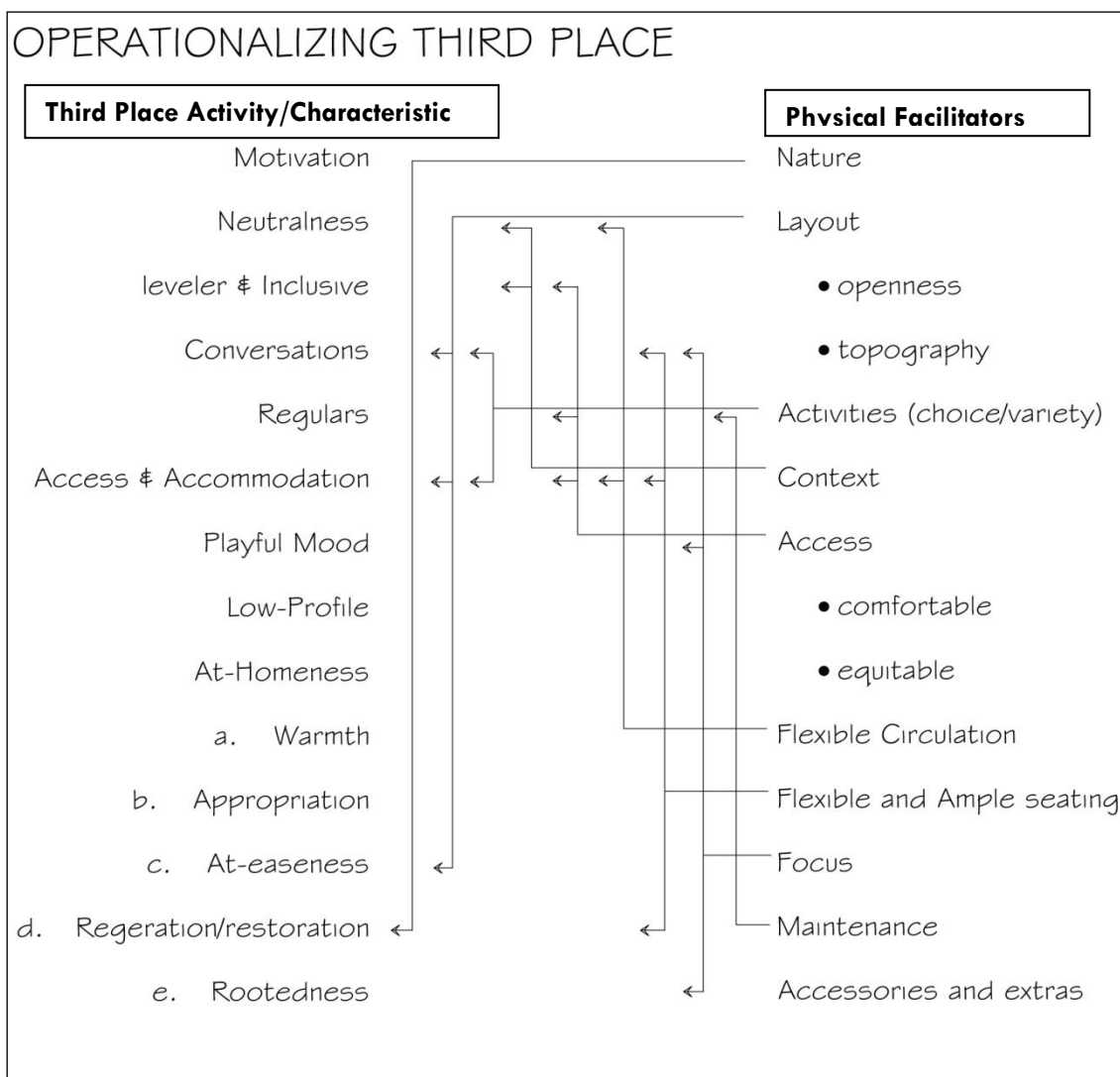


Figure 34: The relationships between third place and physical characteristics

For the off-leash dog-park, the layout should have **minimum corners** or potential hideouts. The simpler the geometry, the easier it is for people to keep an eye on their animal. The layout and vegetation at the park work in unison to create a visually open facility. The size/area available for the park determines the amount of space that can be left open but an effort should be made to leave it **as open as possible**. Open spaces facilitate flexible activity and gathering. Topographical changes have the potential to both benefit and hurt the design, keeping in mind the visual connection to life on the street for safety purposes, a gentle slope downwards can provide a great advantage. Not only does the **downwards slope** enhance prospect and refuge; but it also encourages people to move down to the center and congregate.

- **Context:** Steeplechase Park like many other such facilities has the potential to serve as a common backyard for people that don't have big yards. So areas with **denser housing** and population need such places more than the others that have the luxury of space. The park should be **centrally located** and **easy to find** in a neighborhood. Parks and green areas have the potential to spur economic growth in the surrounding areas by virtue of their restorative, aesthetic, physical and social benefits; so the context should make them readily available. As mentioned under layout, the activities and the **functions should be context-specific**.
- **Access:** the park should be conveniently accessible by its users. The catchment of a park is guided by its vicinity o major thoroughfares and natural barriers/features, because those can become potential threats to access. For the population and neighborhood that the park strives to cater to, the park should be **easy to get to** by their choice of mode. The **pedestrian and biking friendly** transit routes make it possible for people to choose between the automobiles and the alternatives thus influencing the physical activity benefits achieved. The park should be **visually accessible** from the outside; not only does that invite more people in, but also enhances perceived safety while inside. Lighting design inside and outside the park should complement the visual access and safety. In case of an off-leash dog-park like Steeplechase, the catchment is larger than conventional neighborhood parks, so appropriate signage and **wayfinding** could facilitate more use and make the resource available to a larger population.

- **Walkways and circulation within:** to compliment the various activities that the park hosts (if relevant), a *flexible circulation* should allow people to benefit from the choice without having to cut across an activity they do not want to be a part of. In case of the open dog-park at Steeplechase Park, people appreciate the choice to walk around or through the center based on their intent to socialize. Outside of the dog-park, the pathways should be designed according to the activity and user group; meandering pathways are good for forested areas and picnic locations, maybe not for sport activities.
- **Seating:** people's level of comfort inside the park is greatly affected by available seating. There should be *flexibility* in seating and their location, to honor choice. **Edge locations** make for good place for seating because of prospect and refuge; seating *in shade* is highly preferred in outdoor locations. **Group seating** should be made available for social interaction. The design of seating pattern and the seat itself should also allow for flexibility of use and orientation. In case of Steeplechase Park, the lack of seating at the periphery of the dog-park seems to have facilitated the central activity; so in this case a topographically depressed center may make for a good place for some seating.
- **Focus:** for social interaction to occur in a public open space; having a focus could make a difference. For a dog-park, the dogs themselves make for great modes of focus and triangulation. So a combination of context, layout and seating that facilitates *interaction between dogs* may make for a great focus for the owners that accompany them. Many people think of their dogs as more than pets, and many visitors at a dog-park may have that in common; the social interaction between these people benefits from this common concern and may act as a great conversation starter.
- **Accessories and Extra:** this category includes signage, information plaque, trash cans and water fountains. For dog-parks, water source for drinking and cleaning or dogs become very important; additionally plastics bags for collecting excreta becomes another important accessory. The location of these accessories is as important as their presence. People at Steeplechase Park pointed out that the location of the plastic bags was very convenient, next to the entry gate, but the trash disposal is too far. The

locations of these should be **convenient** for use, and close to the main spot of anticipated activity. The information and wayfinding should be designed keeping in mind the first time visitor, so they should be **descriptive and adequate**.

- **Maintenance:** designing a space is one part of the process, sustaining it the way it was designed is the other. Initial designing and impressions are important; but sense of place in many cases is developed over time and in some cases by frequent use. So keeping that in mind, it is important to keep the place the way it was meant to be to facilitate sustained use. Maintenance is also very important in turning new users into regulars. Places that lose their aesthetic and hygiene with time also lose their users to alternatives; users at Steeplechase did not say any good things about the maintenance of it and did not appreciate calling the city for issues as small as emptying the trash. So maintenance strategy should be **rigorous, frequent and sensitive** to the design and aesthetics.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND BEYOND

5.1. Key Findings Regarding the Social Life of Steeplechase Dog Park

The findings suggest that Steeplechase Park functions as a somewhat unique third place in the lives of its users. The park as a social place has five unique characteristics.

5.1.1. Dog as a Social Lubricant

The biggest difference between this park and the more traditional third places described by Oldenburg and others is the presence of a companion animal. As predicted by Oldenburg, people do come to the park *alone* for the anticipated socialization but they come with a pet. The pets affect the activity in the park on multiple levels; they affect people's motivation behind visitation, the neutrality of the place, inclusiveness, direct conversations and have an influence on the mood inside the park. Amenities like this need better consideration and inclusion in planning processes for the dual purpose and population they serve. In many ways dog parks are like playgrounds. Playground users are often adults with children creating an opportunity for adults to socialize over children. Playgrounds and dog parks can both benefit from design considerations that accommodate both types of users; adults and children in one situation, owners and dogs in the other.

5.1.2. A 'Public' Park

The dog-park being a city owned and maintained facility differs from other examples mentioned by Oldenburg (1999b) and others (Cheang, 2002; Heffner, 2011; Mair, 2009; Mehta & Bosson, 2010; Tumanan & Lansangan, 2012). As pointed out in the literature review; neighborhood parks, open spaces and green infrastructure are linked to physical, social and psychological benefits. The third place framework does not include an account of public versus private ownership of such places. Public ownership by its very nature suggests that access will be easy for all.

5.1.3. A 'Retrofit'

The dog park being a retrofitted stormwater detention facility had several constraints in terms of location, design, flexibility for modification and so on. These constraints seem to have affected the context and access to some extent. Oldenburg discusses the decreased potential of Taverns in the sprawling landscape; Steeplechase Park seems to be bound by the location. Hence, the effect of change of location to a denser or more diverse neighborhood remains unclear and open to further investigation.

5.1.4. Maintenance is Paramount

Steeplechase Dog Park had a functional layout that encouraged activity in a central location and supported social interaction, but the maintenance of the park seems to be a major concern. Landscapes are always in a state of change and hence need regular maintenance to stay in a useful condition. A lack of maintenance can lead to lack of use and potential of the space to be a third place. In the physical absence of the owner of the park, the maintenance and other threats to sustainability were found to be more significant than accounted for in the framework. The city authorities need to be more involved since the park does mean a lot to some of its users, and has the potential to attract more such users.

5.1.5. Simple Design

The dog park at Steeplechase Park, which drops approximately 8ft from the grade of the adjacent sidewalk, was used by people and dogs everyday in the late evenings for socialization. The corner-less shape of an irregular ellipse, the clear understory of trees, visual openness and the bowl like topography are design elements that appear to facilitate socialization. The variety of vegetation outside of the dog-park fence facilitated separation and a level of escape. Even though the park lacked adequate seating, the case of the concrete slab that people referred to and used as "a bench" acts as an example of people's preference for edge-seating and their level of adaptability. These results may be used for the design of such places elsewhere.

5.2. Concerns Related to the Third Place Construct

In the American context, where a large population relies on driving more than other modes of transport, a common interest may be essential to motivate travel to a third place. There might be a bigger need for glue (e.g., a focus activity) than discussed by Oldenburg (1999b). Contrary to Oldenburg's suggestion, the motivation for use may stem from something other than the need to socialize (Leccese et al., 2000; Marcus & Francis, 1998; Springgate, 2008) though socialization would be seen as a primary benefit.

The framework creates an image of a place that is free from societal biases in terms of class, race, gender, age etc.; however, all the examples reveal a different story. First of all, the membership and user group characteristics presented under '*Neutral ground*' and '*Leveler and Inclusive*' in the framework may need rethinking (Oldenburg, 1999b). In case of the restaurant studied by Cheang (2002), the group studied was composed of elderly people. It was the researcher's interest in the activity that facilitated access. Similarly, in her study of the Curling Clubs in Canada, Mair (2009) mentioned how men and women involved in the activity had different roles and hence different experiences; additionally, the clientele was not representative of society. In case of Steeplechase Park, having a dog that is well trained, is social and well behaved is a requirement for the user to become a part of the group of regulars. What if dog ownership has a racial element to it, how inclusive can a place like this be? Isn't self-selection always a part of a social setting? What does this selection do to the richness of experience? It is important to consider that exclusiveness is likely to occur. Based on the various interests that bring people together and potential user groups, how many of these places do we need? And what population do we cater to first?

Secondly, the concepts of inclusiveness, regular clientele and appropriation may actually contradict one another. If people visit these places for routine social tonic, anticipate seeing other regulars, and feel at home in the place with a sense of appropriation; the experience can create a sense of ownership and exclusiveness. The word '*Clique*' came up at Steeplechase Park and despite the porous boundaries of the group, people seemed comfortable with its composition. In the presence of a sense of

appropriation and ownership, inclusiveness seems to be a contradicting characteristic. Can a third place be neutral and inclusive when it has a devoted clientele? How about a sense of stewardship in publically or collectively owned places? Further research could help in understanding the balance between these characteristics and what prevails.

Oldenburg's description and framework explains third place as a place only for casual interactions and relationships. The more demanding relationships are reserved for the first and second places. However, the family dynamic and preferences are changing in the United States. This change can be seen in the ever increasing number of people in urban areas living alone or in a small family, the retiring baby-boomers, and the large number of Gen-X and Gen-Y without kids. So when the family support system starts shrinking, do the expectations from a Third-Place increase? Users of the Curling Clubs (Mair, 2009), Watson Store (Heffner, 2011) and Steeplechase Park have suggested the presence of a support-system at their Third Place. Support systems may well be an important addition to be considered in the description of Third-Place.

For the physical environment, no two studies have come up with the same template for design. W. H. Whyte's work (1980) is an example of the applicability of one study setting in different places, but constraints of context and use have to be considered. In a study done by Mehta and Bosson (2010) on businesses along three main streets, they found that shade and shelter were the two most important and common characteristics of the third places. This examination of Steeplechase Park revealed visual connection and flexible gathering space as additional characteristics of importance. Thus, each of the large variety of places that can serve as third places may have slightly or completely different composition, with no more than 3-4 elements in common. This means that further research of places that fulfill larger social goals may help understand their composition better and inform planning and design for more such places.

The low profile design of Third Places helps them remain everyday amenities instead of tourist destinations. However, each city has some of both types, routine and fancy, so an interesting study would be to see if a more high profile place is more physically accessible to someone, does the low profile place lose its charm or is the accessibility sacrificed just to be in a simpler setting? Can there be places within a bigger

place that become third places? For example a smaller location within a state park, for people that live close to it.

5.3. Future Research

The literature outlines a need for socially relevant places in our cities that are losing their sense of place to monotony. Steeplechase Park, Watson Store, the chain restaurant etc. are all small pieces in the larger urban fabric that needs to be dotted with places of social relevance. Many sprawling cities of the United States are looking to create denser, richer urban cores; which limits the number of opportunities for new development and increases the need for retrofitting. So keeping in mind the constraints and existing infrastructure available, ethnographic study of successful examples in relevant context can facilitate better understanding of user needs and hence design. The concept of sustainability relies on efficient use of available resources, which have not witnessed an increase since mankind started modifying the planet; following Whyte's approach to observe and study for better efficiency and design seems like the sustainable way to go.

Following the ethnographic approach, other possible studies may include recreational facilities, playgrounds, activity/interest groups, public open spaces amidst commercial landuses, food-courts etc. These are the places that serve more than one purpose and have a focus other than the social activity to attract people. Research, including this study, shows that people that have things in common to begin with may find it easier to socialize (Mair, 2009; Scott & Godbey, 1992). It may be worth investigating that to what extent these places with a focal activity can serve as Third Places in people's lives.

5.4. Limitations

This Study of Steeplechase park forms an essential piece in the larger urban fabric of College Station based on the significance of the park in the lives of its regular users. However, every study has constraints and limitation, this study suffered from some

of those as well. The first was the constraint of time devoted to this study, being a masters' student, the time available was too short to completely understand the use of the park through the year. Secondly, the observations at the park occurred during the month of May-June when a large population of students is not in town. The study had to be limited to one park and in the evening times when the activity was observed, despite the efforts to spot similar activities in other parks.

The sample for ethnographic interview was selected during the observation phases and hence failed to include people that used the park at other times of the day. Interviewees mentioned that the park has occasional users as well as those that stopped visiting completely, the sample failed to include those people since they were not encountered during the study.

A few interviewees mentioned a racial diversity that could not be covered in the sample. People that seemed more curious about the researcher's presence at the park were more open to conversation and interviews as well; this led to some omissions in terms of racial diversity. Efforts were made to observe as unobtrusively as possible and not to give away the research details; these may also have led to a smaller sample for the study. Also, it was mentioned that the park has two or three groups, the interviewees however either mentioned being a part of the big group or none at all. Whether the other groups merge with the bigger group in the center or behave like separate entities at the park could not be established.

And lastly, during the study, big dogs seemed to dominate the user group and two small dog owners that were interviewed had different feelings about their dog's level of comfort and the need for segregation of areas for dogs. A conclusion could not be made about whether or not the park be split into zones based on the size of the dog; a bigger sample may have helped capture this feeling better.

5.5. Food for Thought

In the words of a regular user, the facility was *made as*:

"This whole thing is here by law as a drainage area, so it was a pretty smart deal to put up a fence and let dogs come here, dig up and crap, why put a lot of money into stuff

like that. So that kind of shows to a degree that they didn't put a dog park for the sake of a dog park, let's just dig a hole and put a fence around it and see what we can do."

..and it has **become**:

"...compared to work, it's less important; compared to family it's less important, but in my social life it's a definite niche to keep in contact with people but also to continuously meet new people."

Isn't that something! About time we start looking more carefully.

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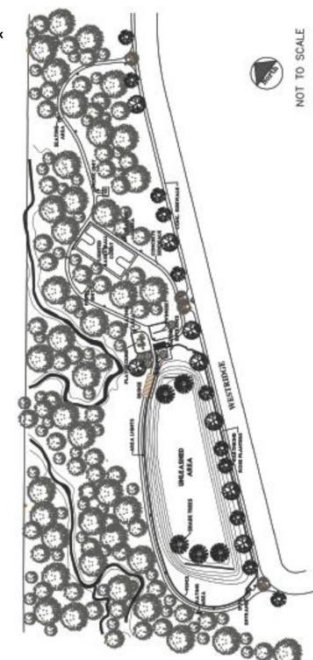
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APPENDIX A

PRE-RESEARCH INSTRUMENT



Instructions for Mapping Park Use

Find a location in the park that provides a good vantage point. In some you may be able to observe the entire park from one place. In other parks you may need to walk through the area periodically (at least once every 30 min) to observe use.

Map use in up to 30 minute segments – if use is high – using record sheets similar to those attached. If needed you would complete 4 map record sheets for each two hour segment. For example, between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. you will use one sheet from 11:00 to 11:30, a second from 11:30 to 12:00, a third from 12:00 to 12:30 and a fourth from 12:30 to 1:00. *If, on the other hand, use is low you may only need to use one or two map sheets for the two hour period.* Use your judgment.

Marking the map: (remember start a new map record approximately every 30 minutes or as needed)

X = one male, O = one female; group people using X & O up to 6. If it's a larger group use a ∇ (triangle) to depict it. For example you may have a group of 10 kids and a coach practicing soccer. Place a ∇ in that location and describe the group in the notes section. A group of 4 people might look like XXOO for two males and two females.

Number your individuals (example X1, X2, X3) and groups (example X X01, X0002 or ∇1) then describe their activity, group composition, etc by number in the notes section. Use descriptors for activities to convey the presence of dogs, peoples general ages, disabilities, etc.

You are welcome to mark and note unforeseen activities in any way you feel will help you remember them.

Take notes on the map or in the margins if it helps you to better remember locations of activities or other characteristics you want to record. For example, you may want to note traces of use like litter, trails worn in the grass or bare ground around facilities, worn equipment on playgrounds or fitness stations, etc.

Be sure to tally the total number of users for each time period and record them in the space provided.

Steeplechase Park

Day of week/date _____ Time - start _____ stop _____

Weather: Approx Temp _____, General Conditions (wind, sun, etc) _____

Total number of users for this time period _____

Description of what users are doing (by user number if possible). Briefly describe the activity, a group's composition if any (e.g., ages) and the approximate amount of time people spent in the park. Use the back of the page if needed.

APPENDIX B

FIELD NOTES

planted during the construction phase, around 2006-07), but the rest of the park has dense vegetation with a single trail (concrete paving all the way) cutting through it. The boundary of the dog-park along W. Ridge Drive is lined with new trees, all fairly young and non-contributors to shade in the park. The playground area and the swing set on treeless and have no form of canopy to protect the area from sun. The basketball area, sitting in isolation, is tucked into vegetation from 3 sides; a bench sits in the shade and the access to the court is by a trail. The grass in front of the court looks a little worn giving a hint that people might be cutting across to the court.

Activity: The basketball court is empty at this time along with the picnic area bit east of it. One boy with his dad is playing at playground equipment alone, no people in the picnic area. The dog park has 2 girls sitting and chatting at the bridge area, their dogs hanging around close by. In the strip of road parking, all but 2 spots are vacant.

The scenario remains almost the same for the 20 something minutes I spent biking the trail and clicking pictures. After making the notes above, I sat down to get a sip of water from my bottle and relax with a book open in front of me. At around 7:00 pm, people start coming to the park with their dogs. The traffic seems to have suddenly increased much like shade in the park. I try to pretend that I am reading my book and that is really the reason I am there, but the sheer size of some dogs and the fact that some of them are unleashed before entering the gates is distracting for a person like me who has never been around dogs. The people however seem friendly and some actually passed for a bit to say hi and smile. In the period of half an hour (7:00 – 7:30 pm) about 10 people have entered through the northeast gate, some with more than one dog. The frequency of people exiting the park with their dogs had decreased. There seem to be no segregation of areas for small and big dogs but its hard not to notice that the number of big dogs (18" or higher) is more than the little ones.

Looking inside at about 7:20 pm I notice that a circle is forming and people seem to be talking to one another (I can hear occasional laughter) their dogs circling around them kind of on their own; this is the area where the grass seems to be worn (either by use or flooding). At this time, there are no training activities to be seen inside the park and there is nothing else for the dogs to engage with but their owners; there are few people sitting on the benches (acting aloof) and a couple still sitting on the bridge. At the time I prepared to leave (8:00 pm) I see a distinct circle of about 20 people (more females than males) in the center, all engaged in conversation (some more than the other) and the benches/sitting areas are vacant.

It almost looks like a well arranged meeting here at the park today. I wonder if it actually is an organized event of some sort. So I decide to come back the same time tomorrow to see what the activity is really like.

Day 2: Tuesday, May 2nd, 2012

I arrive at the park around 6:30 pm and just like yesterday, took a trip on the trail on my bike. I see a small group of boys 3-4 shooting hoops in the basketball court, they seem to have come in separate vehicles (3 cars parked right in front of the court) and for the sole purpose of playing ball, no dogs or company. The bench in shade is empty, the fact that it is so close to the court makes me think that if only a family member or close friend were to accompany the player would that bench be put to use.

I see an Asian couple walking the trail (the lady is pregnant). I politely said 'excuse me' as I biked alongside to get ahead, during this process of avoiding the couple and staying on the trail, I got too close to the dog park fence which grabbed a little black dog's attention. For no reason what so ever, the dog starts running alongside (inside the fence), loudly barking at the same time for almost half the circumference of the park starting at the bridge location. Almost freaked by the experience, I slowed down as soon as the owner grabbed the dog to calm him down and try to look back and smile at the owner.

I take rest in the same spot, the picnic area, and sit down to catch my breath and drink some water before pulling out my book. The playground area is vacant except a young Asian girl on the swing set accompanied by who appeared to be her grandmother; the Asian couple on the trail had halted at the playground and the 4 looked like family. The lady (in this couple) smiled at me before starting to walk on the trail again. The picnic benches show no sign of use, same as yesterday and are covered in dust. I was wondering why might that be given that there is plenty of shade, vicinity to the parking, and good prospect; but then a gust of wind coming my way gave me a hint of the reason behind it. The benches seem to be upwind of the trail (next to the poop-bags), and so does the playground and the swing sets.

Inside the park, I see 3 girls/ladies with their 4 dogs around the bridge area, they seem to be party conversing and playing with their cell phones. The spot, the concrete bridge, is nicely shaded and definitely looks like a convenient place to sit and linger. At about 6:50, a couple with 2 dogs and an older lady with a husky enter the park through the northeast gate. The lady with the husky immediately let go of her dog after entering the gate and got busy petting 2 other dogs that ran towards her. The couple walked towards the concrete bridge area and exchanged greetings (not hard to hear at the picnic area because of the vicinity), after talking to the girls for a little bit, the couple seemed to follow their dog and the older lady a little towards the center without talking. The traffic

Location: Steeplechase Park

Notes about the park:

Day 1 (light visit/inventory)

Date: Monday, May 21st, 2012
Time: 6:30 pm

The approach/first appeal to the park is fairly low profile; the access road, West Ridge Drive, appears to be a bike route with a speed limit of 30 mph. The sidewalk however runs almost uninterrupted on one side of the road (eastern fringe) within the park boundary (widens at the gateway). The immediate neighborhood is composed of mainly single family dwellings and apartment complexes about 1/4 mile out on Welsh Avenue; no houses face on the park, the side-yards and backyards visible have 6' or higher fences around them except for the one house on West Ridge Drive right before the park begins that has a more porous edge; in addition the northwest edge of the park borders undeveloped property marked as residential landuse on the city website. The southeast border of the dog park area has planter boxes with earth-kind roses and plaques behind each box with information; no other embellishments can be seen. The trail head towards Welsh Ave is given away by a planter box about 8' X 8' in size, no other form of signage can be seen. The main entry to the park and playground has 2 planter boxes with young trees (caliper about 6") and a small wall (about 2' in height) with the name 'Steeplechase Park' on it parallel to the road parking and about 15' away from the curb, which makes the name almost invisible to somebody driving by.

The park has no dedicated parking lot; the only parking spaces available are all along W. Ridge drive. May be the expense number of visitors is not high enough for a dedicated parking lot and the larger edge of the park faces West Ridge drive which may just be adequate for parking.

Components of the park:

The park has the basic amenities of any typical neighborhood park, i.e. a playground, a basketball court, a trail and a few benches, all in addition to a fenced dog park along W. Ridge Drive created by fencing around a city detention facility. The entry to the dog park (double gates for unleashing the animals and a list of rules fixed on the inside gate) is from the North-east and South-East, the children's play equipment and swing sets sit right next to the north-east gate to the dog park along with a shaded area with 2 picnic tables and a trash can.

Looking at the dog park in isolation, its one wide open lawn with 2 benches and trash cans, one close to each gate, and two stormwater lines (lined with concrete and terminating with topography into a pipe) running through it. The net so clean stormwater pipe openings have been fenced around (plain metal fencing about 5' high) apparently to keep the animals out and the rest of the park has no planter boxes or tree guards, just a blanket of grass worn by use in certain places. The dog park sits down about 10 feet from the local outside, not uncommon for detention facilities and hence the culvert on the north-west end of the park and the natural contours seems to have created a bridge situation for the trail running around the park, and a concrete bench inside the fence; at 6:30 pm on a May evening, this is the only area with a bit of shade.

The swing-set and playground each located about 20' from the northeast gate of the park (approximately distance between the starting line of the pit and the gate) has basic play equipment, i.e. tamper resistant stainless steel play equipment with bright colors and 2 sets of swings with one set dedicated to babies (based on the infant seat). The surface is softened by pea gravel with no mixtures.

In relation to the dog park, and the children's playground, the shaded picnic area is conveniently located in between. Although there is no grill, the playground is paved and has a trash can close by. The bike rack is also close to the picnic area on the other side of the dog park gate, no bikes can be seen though.

The water fountain is outside of the dog-park fence (next to the picnic area) with a lower bowl for dogs, but people have attached a hose that leads to a bucket inside the fenced dog park area. This seem to have created a puddle of water, but the fact that the bucket almost has a permanent spot (by the look of the grass around it and the depression in ground) it looks like people don't object to it being there.

The vegetation density varies in the park with the use; the dog park area is mostly open with a few medium size trees in the south-west and a couple of small trees on the north side (these trees seem to be fairly young and



had picked up a little at this point and as I looked up around 7:15pm the girls at the bench were gone and were sort of walking around the central open space. The bridge area looks like it does get some good use because the grass seems to be rarer, aside from the fact that it looks like an almost natural stopping/resting point. Around 7:30, I can see a circle forming in the center; people are just hanging out in the center and their dogs playing around them. The conversations are not evident or engaging at this point, some people seem to be busy taking care of their dog's poop and others throwing a tennis ball around. By 7:45 as the dogs slow down a bit, people seem to be getting closer and talking more than other things (about 15 people in the center). The bench on the northwest corner seems deserted but the one in the other corner has a couple sitting and enjoying the view of the park.

As I was busy taking some quick notes and flipping through the pages of my book, a couple almost stopped by the bench to wash off their dog. As the man got busy washing off their dog, the lady asked me if I were the one on a bike chased by the small dog. After I nodded and smiled to confirm, she asked me if I were new to the area. I briefly explained that I am a graduate student in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences hoping to study some of the neighborhood parks in College Station. She seems to get excited about the fact that I might be studying her park. *Mary said "oh this park has become more of a social meeting point for some of us. We have lived in this neighborhood for a little over 2 years and this is very important for our dog. He loves it here and now that we are moving, we will have to find a dog park in that area sooner rather than later".* At this point, I asked her if she came often to the park, and she said "yeah, we or either one of us comes almost every day. Our dog really likes it here and we now know almost everybody here. It's fun to come here around sunset, more people are here and so we also get to chat when our dog plays." When I asked her if I should be staying this park, in terms of participation by its users, she said "I don't think anyone would mind you coming out here. We usually have new people come out here often, so as long as you don't scare the dogs or trigger them in some way, you should be fine[]". People may even be willing to help you with your study. We also have a facebook page, Sleepshadere crew I guess it's called, but if you want, try sending an email to the administrator and she might let you in, it is a closed group and almost all of us know each other. On the page though people talk about their visit to the park and look for baby-sitters for their dogs, so that might be something cool to check out". And of this point I asked *Mary* if she might be willing to help out if I needed for the study, she gladly gave me her email address (which she preferred since they were moving the same week and were not sure about their phone number).

After the conversation with *Mary*, I packed my bag at 8:05pm. The lights had come up in the dog park area, the trail remained dark, and dogs had slowed down a little bit but the circle was still there and the parking edge of the park was almost lined.

Day 3: Wednesday, May 23rd 2012

6:30 pm

87 °F

SSE @ 20 mph, Gusts up to 30mph

Observer Location: picnic table next to the playground, shaded, next to the water fountain and good view of both the playground and the dog park.

General Observations:

Shade: plenty of shade on the playground @ 6:30

About 1/3 of the dog park area is shaded @ 6:30

Trees on ridge drive are small, so almost no shade on the southeastern edge of the park.

• People talking in the playground area; I can hear the use of first names.

• 2 kids biking on the trail around Dog Park.

• 2 families on the playground.

• 3 people (2F & 1M) inside the fence, 3 dogs. No groups can be seen, the 2 females are sitting on the bridge but no talking.

6:50 pm

> A woman with a dog drove to the park, went straight to the 2 girls sitting inside by the northwest fence and greetings were exchanged (both with the pal and the dogs), stands close by and talks a little

6:58 pm

> 4 more girls with 3 dogs walk into the park.

O.C.: All dogs seem to know one another. There is friendly barking and greeting among the animals at the gate and they instantly start to play with the dog entering.

@ 7:00 pm

• Total of 7 girls in the dog park area, (O.C. approximate age 20-25)

• People start moving to the center from the bridge area of the park as it starts to cool down.

7:05 pm

> 1 girl and 2 boys walk in, with 1 dog talking on their way to the gate.
O.C.: People seem to know and pet each other's dogs as soon as they enter, so they linger close to the gate for few minutes as the dogs run to greet them.

> 1 girl with a dog walks in right behind the group of 3.

> Asian couple with daughter with 1 dog walk straight to the Dog Park from their car, even though the girl looks young, no stop is made at the playground.

• 2 separate groups of girls in 2 different areas.

• 2 boys in the center playing catch.

• The asian couple is sitting by the bridge.

7:10 pm

> 1 girl with 2 dogs walks in.

> 1 man with 1 dog walks in.

> 1 lady with 2 kids arrives at the playground (both girls in a stroller).

O.C.: start to hear conversation at the park.

< 1 man with 2 dogs exits the dog park, lingers at the playground area to talk to the lady and greets her daughter

7:15 pm

> 1 lady with 1 dog walks in (O.C.: looks a little older, may be late 30s or early 40s)

• Everyone starts to move to the center of the park, leaving the fringe areas as sun goes down, to form a

vague big circle, except the Asian couple.

7:20 pm

> 1 couple with 4 dogs walks straight into the dog park area.

> 1 girl with 2 dogs walks in followed by 1 more girl with 2 dogs.

7:25 pm

< 1 lady leaves (says goodbye to few others on her way out)

• About 17 people inside the park

• Most people standing in the center with the dogs around them, some talking is evident and hand gestured can be seen.

7:30 pm

> 1 girl walks inside without a dog.

> 1 couple with 1 dog

< 1 girl (one of the first ones observed at the park at 6:30 pm) leaves with dog.

@ 7:40 pm

• A circle of about 15 people in the center.

• Few people scattered here and there.

• The 2 boys still playing catch in the center.

7:40 pm

> 2 girls without a dog walk in and start playing with the other dogs, the dogs seem comfortable in their company and start to play along. (O.C. this may not be the first time they came to the park, the dogs seem to know them.)

7:45 pm

< 1 girl with the dog leaves.

> 1 man with a dog walks in, says hi to the girl standing next to the fence with her dog (first name is used)

O.C.: by this time, people seem to be involved in an actual conversation in the center of the park.

7:50 pm

> 1 girl walks in with her dog.

> 1 middle aged man (probably in his 40s) and 1 young girl walk in with 1 dog.

- 3 girls sit on the side of the park fence on the concrete bridge and talk.
 - 4-5 dogs get into a fight, owners walk in to the rescue as soon as the fight breaks. Moments later, normal playing activity is restored.
- 7:55 pm
- > 1 couple with 1 dog walk in the park and put other dogs.
 - < Asian couple leaves. (O.C. during their time at the park, they only sat and talked amongst themselves at the bench. No socialization with others is observed even with the dog.)
 - < 1 girl with dog leaves.
- O.C: girls (more in number as well) tend to greet other dogs right away, seem more excited to see other people and tend to get into conversations quickly.
- Most people seem to have driven to the park as I can hear a door closing before someone opens the park gate. I try hard not to stare at the parking area or the people walking towards the gate.
- Similar to the 2 previous days, there seem to be more big dogs in the park than small ones; smaller dogs tend not to play with big ones and stay close to their owners.
- The playground seems to be getting less use, but that could also be because of it being summer in Texas.
- The basketball area and the dog park area seem to be completely segregated both by the activity and a buffer of vegetation.

Day 4, Thursday, May 24, 2012
 6:35 pm
 86 °F

Observer Location: picnic table next to the playground, shaded, next to the water fountain and good view of both the playground and the dog park.

General Observations:
 Shade: plenty of shade on the playground @6:35
 About 1/3 of the dog park area is shaded @6:35

Trees on ridge drive are small, so almost no shade on the southeastern edge of the park.

- 2 girls in the park (including one African American) (O.C. no one seems to be talking to each other as they are standing at a distance, 2 of the 4 dogs in the park are small and hanging out close to their owners)
 - 2 boys in the park
 - Total 4 dogs.
 - One lady at the playground with little girl (asian), looks familiar from day 2.
 - Nobody sitting anywhere inside the dog park area. @6:35
 - 1 asian couple walking on the trail (the lady seems to be pregnant)
- 6:45 pm
- > 1 man with a boy comes to the playground area (asian) (O.C: looks familiar)
- 6:50 pm
- > 1 man with dog go straight to the dog area (I said Hi and he responded, had seen him on all 3 three visits to the park). His dog seems a little slow or old, looks the enthusiasm seen in some other dogs.
- 7:00 pm
- > 1 man with dog enter park (I said hey and got a response)
 - < 1 man with dog leaves.
- 7:10 pm
- Everyone moving around in the park, checking phones.
 - 2 girls standing in the center start talking, but no circle/group formation.
- > 1 man with 1 dog walks to the park (have seen him 3 times, I said Hi)
- > 1 girl with 2 dogs enters the park (have seen her 3 times, I said Hi)

- > 1 man with 1 dog walks to the gate sees me and says hello, I respond with a smile and get back to reading my book.
- Vague circle is formed in the center, no engaging activity or conversation. @7:15
 - Most of the park, including the center is shaded at this point @7:15, people stand in the shade (the ambient temperature being close to 90 °F could be the reason for lesser activity in the sun and change of positions with shade).
- 7:20 pm
- > 2 girls with 2 dogs enter the park, talking as they go in.
- 7:30 pm
- > 2 boys with 2 dogs walk straight in.
- 7:40 pm
- > 1 man (probably in his 40's, looks familiar) walks in with dog, looks at me and smiles.
 - < 1 girl (the African American walks out, stops as I say hi and we talk for about 30 mins)

Zen, grad student at TAMU
 Dog's name:.....

Said the park functions like a Day-Care Center. "I mean it's almost like you are not here for yourself but now that you are here, you may as well socialize with others your age, and in this case same species. People know each other's dogs, they pet them and play with them all the time, but I guess all of them come around the same time too so it's easier to be familiar with each other." I asked her if she came regularly, to which she responded "you know I try to do that, but when you are a PhD student it isn't always possible. I do come whenever I get time but it is always random, so I guess I am more of an outsider in the activity. These other people seem to know each other a lot better than they know me, but yeah I guess they know my face and that doesn't really make me a new user." Her dog, Maya seems to be getting very irritated with something in her fur, so Zen picked her up and started to remove stickers from her fur, I showed concern and she said "and yeah there is another reason I don't come as frequently as I could, because these horns get in her hair and trouble her. Sometimes I fail to take them all out, which is additional time, she keeps pulling at them of home and then steps on them later only to get troubled again. If I had a dog with less hair, or if the grass was free of these horns, I may come more often than I do now." After talking to Zen as a fellow graduate student of Texas A&M, I found out that she being a sociology major prefers to observe people more than actively engage with them. She said that race never seem an issue at the park, but she did say that African Americans aren't adequately represented at the park. She mentioned having seen 2 other people her race, and also felt that being African American did not help her outsider status, not that she is trying to get in on something. She also told me that being from a big city (Philadelphia), she misses being able to just walk to a park like this, but on the other hand, the size of the city is not hostile for driving either. After trying to read Maya participate in my study, she said yes and gave me her number and offered to get me in touch with her friends that use the park saying she understands how important participants are for any study.

- @ 7:45 pm
- Very large circle in the center, people aren't standing too close to each other but close enough to be able to converse.
 - People talking and dogs playing around them, not wandering to far.
 - About 16 people in the park, all white.
 - Most users about 20-30 yrs.
- @ 7:55 pm
- Almost everybody drove to the park.
 - Only about 4 people that seem to be above 30 yrs. in age (O.C: could be because of the demographic characteristics of the neighborhood and the town in general)
- O.C. at about 8:00pm when the sun is about to go down, the dogs seem less active and the people still sort of engaged but the circle that is left in the park looks diverse and homogenous at the same time, there is some apparent diversity in terms of social standard (and looking at the type of cars lined at the edge), involvement in the activity, and ages but almost an incredible homogeneity in races.

- > 1 man with 1 dog walks to the gate sees me and says hello, I respond with a smile and get back to reading my book.
- Vague circle is formed in the center, no engaging activity or conversation. @7:15
 - Most of the park, including the center is shaded at this point @7:15, people stand in the shade (the ambient temperature being close to 90 °F could be the reason for lesser activity in the sun and change of positions with shade).
- 7:20 pm
- > 2 girls with 2 dogs enter the park, talking as they go in.
- 7:30 pm
- > 2 boys with 2 dogs walk straight in.
- 7:40 pm
- > 1 man (probably in his 40's, looks familiar) walks in with dog, looks at me and smiles.
 - < 1 girl (the African American walks out, stops as I say hi and we talk for about 30 mins)
- Zen, grad student at TAMU**
 Dog's name:.....
- Said the park functions like a Day-Care Center. "I mean it's almost like you are not here for yourself but now that you are here, you may as well socialize with others your age, and in this case same species. People know each other's dogs, they pet them and play with them all the time, but I guess all of them come around the same time too so it's easier to be familiar with each other." I asked her if she came regularly, to which she responded "you know I try to do that, but when you are a PhD student it isn't always possible. I do come whenever I get time but it is always random, so I guess I am more of an outsider in the activity. These other people seem to know each other a lot better than they know me, but yeah I guess they know my face and that doesn't really make me a new user." Her dog, Maya seems to be getting very irritated with something in her fur, so Zen picked her up and started to remove stickers from her fur, I showed concern and she said "and yeah there is another reason I don't come as frequently as I could, because these horns get in her hair and trouble her. Sometimes I fail to take them all out, which is additional time, she keeps pulling at them of home and then steps on them later only to get troubled again. If I had a dog with less hair, or if the grass was free of these horns, I may come more often than I do now." After talking to Zen as a fellow graduate student of Texas A&M, I found out that she being a sociology major prefers to observe people more than actively engage with them. She said that race never seem an issue at the park, but she did say that African Americans aren't adequately represented at the park. She mentioned having seen 2 other people her race, and also felt that being African American did not help her outsider status, not that she is trying to get in on something. She also told me that being from a big city (Philadelphia), she misses being able to just walk to a park like this, but on the other hand, the size of the city is not hostile for driving either. After trying to read Maya participate in my study, she said yes and gave me her number and offered to get me in touch with her friends that use the park saying she understands how important participants are for any study.

- @ 7:45 pm
- Very large circle in the center, people aren't standing too close to each other but close enough to be able to converse.
 - People talking and dogs playing around them, not wandering to far.
 - About 16 people in the park, all white.
 - Most users about 20-30 yrs.
- @ 7:55 pm
- Almost everybody drove to the park.
 - Only about 4 people that seem to be above 30 yrs. in age (O.C: could be because of the demographic characteristics of the neighborhood and the town in general)
- O.C. at about 8:00pm when the sun is about to go down, the dogs seem less active and the people still sort of engaged but the circle that is left in the park looks diverse and homogenous at the same time, there is some apparent diversity in terms of social standard (and looking at the type of cars lined at the edge), involvement in the activity, and ages but almost an incredible homogeneity in races.

Looking from the outside in, the group does not look closed as people wander off and come back, some talk more than the other and the boundary of the circle seems porous.
Today, just like the day before, the number of girls seems higher and girls seem to interact with other dogs more than men do.

Day 5, Friday, max 25th 2012

6:30 pm
89 °F

SE @ 21 mph

Observer Location: picnic table next to the playground, shaded, next to the water fountain and good view of both the playground and the dog park.

General Observations:

Shade: plenty of shade on the playground @ 6:30

About 1/3 of the dog park area is shaded @ 6:30

Trees on ridge drive are small, so almost no shade on the southeastern edge of the park.

- 10 people in the park and 10 dogs, male female ratio 50:50.
- 1 family with 2 girls at the playground (lady looks familiar), the older child on the swing but the other is a baby in stroller comfortably asleep in picnic area shade.
- People scattered on the shaded northwestern periphery of the park, some sitting on the concrete bridge
- Some casual greeting exchange but not really a conversation group.
- Dogs seem to be wandering further off but shaded areas are receiving the action more than others.

6:45 pm

< 1 man with 1 dog leaves (wasn't really talking to others, seems to be training the dog)

6:55 pm

> 1 lady with little girl come to the playground (have seen them here before)

7:00 pm

> 1 girl with 2 dogs enters the park

< 1 girl with 2 dogs exits

Jennifer, Lingert and asks if I were a dog trainer or something. When I said no, she shows curiosity about what I was doing. I gave her the same vague explanation that I had given the two other girls that stopped by before. 2 boys walk out with her and linger in the playground area while we chat for few minutes. All 3 of them seemed happy to know that people like me work with parks and study them. They said that if I felt like I was either a trainer or someone about to buy a dog and unable to decide which one.

One of the boys said that every so often, somebody would come and play with our dogs to sort of familiarize with species before getting a dog of their own.

The group seemed eager to leave and not very eager to participate in anything more than talking for a couple of minutes. Jennifer says good luck and 'see you around then' and walks out with 2 dogs, 1 big and 1 small, and drove away in her red car.

@ 7:15 pm

< People start coming closer to the center of the park @ 7:15

• About half the crowd looks a little older (30-35) @ 7:15

7:20 pm

> 1 lady with a dog takes the leash off, lingers at the gate for a little bit (I say hi and we talk for about 5 mins)

Sally (looks like she is in her 50s)

Stops to unleash her dog and lets him go as he seemed to eager to enter the gate and his buddies had come to the gate to sort of greet him. After letting Timmy go inside, she lingers for a bit to tie the leash to the fence and sees me. With a smile she asked, 'are you a student from A&M doing a study or something?'. The first part of the question didn't necessarily need answering since I was wearing my A&M shirt, but I went ahead and said yes to both. Then she said 'its pretty fun out here isn't it? the weather is starting to get worse, but it's not so bad this time of day'. And I said 'yeah, you are right but I am still recovering from my bike ride in the 20s something wind speed ☐'. 'Do you own a dog?' she

asked and I shook my head in a no, and she said 'once we get here, it's hard to keep him outside the fence, doesn't even care where I am and takes off with his friends ☐'. After she told me that Timmy is hooked on to this place completely, I asked her 'so how long have you been bringing him out here?' and she said 'oh he was only a puppy when we brought him here, since then my husband and I have been fairly regular here and he has grown up in this place'. Based on her tone, it seemed she was assuming I know something about dogs and I would know about how old he is; I didn't know about your use of the park these past years, it will help me a lot with understanding this place' and she said 'yeah, sure. We are here everyday so whenever you want'. So I wrote down her phone number and she told me not to worry if they don't answer the phone, 'we don't have our machine set up for messages, but I do have a caller id so tell me what the first 3 digits of your number and I promise to call back'. I gave her my phone number, and Sally went inside to greet the dogs that had been waiting for her before joining Timmy in the center of the park.

7:25 pm

> 3 more people (2 girls and 1 boy) walk in with 2 dogs (1 girl looks familiar)

> 1 middle age man with dog walks in (looks like a regular)

< 1 lady with dog leaves, the dog wants to linger (so I said hey and we talk for a few mins)

Rachel, who had been in the park for about 20 minutes, had been strolling at the circumference of the park at a slow speed, halting every now and then to talk to people inside the park. Her 2 dogs were mostly beside her the whole time and did not wander off too far. She did not really look like a new user and I saw her saying hello and the dogs seemed kind of familiar with the area. She stopped in the center for about 5 minutes before slowly approaching the concrete bench to talk for a few. She sat down as 2 girls stopped to pet her dogs and have, what looked like a small cheerful conversation about her dogs. I could easily notice that she was looking at what I was doing at the picnic bench, which by now is something I have gotten used to. It looks like the picnic bench does not get a lot of use and the fact that I have been mowing it for 2 hours each day for 5 days, seemed to get some attention by the park users. As she stepped out to pet leashes around her dogs and watch off the smaller dog that enjoyed part play, part thirst quench in the puddle of water around the bucket inside the park, she smiled at me and said 'hi, why are you sitting out here?' and I responded in the same way I did every time I was asked; introductions were made before she rented one of her foot on the other side of the bench. I told her that 'I have been here for 5 days and I like this park, many pretty dogs here'. And she said 'yeah, I don't get to see them very often either. It's the busiest time in the park', just to extend her statement, I asked 'do you live far from here?' and she said 'not really, I just prefer to come when it is less crowded out here, like early mornings so I can spend some quality time with my dogs and they can get some exercise. I do like it here when it is busy, but not every day ☐'. And I started to smile and said 'well I am studying park use so I guess I like to see as much of this activity as I can ☐'. And she said 'yeah, of course. Lots of nice people here and pretty dogs, but I am still working with my dogs'. As Rachel was about to leave, I asked her if she would like to talk more about her dogs and the park, and she said 'yeah, we can set that up sometime'. And with that she left.

7:35 pm

> 3 people with 3 dogs enter the dog park (2 girls, 1 boy)

- People still standing in the center, talking (the conversation is audible)
- A lady (present when I arrived) kept circling the park with dog, looked old and spoke a different language.
- The little Asian girl got scared and started crying as a big dog (unleashed) approached her before entering the park. (O.C. may be the kids' playing area is too close to the dog-park gate) the owner was only a few steps behind but before she could take control of the situation, the girl was already in tears.

7:55 pm

< People start leaving, 3 boys and 2 girls come outside the fence. They seemed to be in a hurry but I said hey and get a response.

Day 6, Saturday, max 26th 2012 (Memorial day Weekend)

6:30 pm

90 °F

SE @ 16 mph

44%

Observer Location: picnic table next to the playground, shaded, next to the water fountain and good view of both the playground and the dog park.
 General Observations:
 Shade: plenty of shade on the playground
 About 1/2 of the dog park area is shaded
 Trees on ridge drive are small, so almost no shade on the southeastern edge of the park.

- About 8 people in the park, sitting in a group in the shaded area with the dogs circling around them (more girls, only one older lady).
 - Center of the park mostly empty.
 - Nobody on the playground area.
 - Few familiar faces in the park.
- 6-40 pm
 < a boy with dog comes out of the park (the dog seems thirsty); lingers and smiles so we start talking for few minutes, goes back after the conversation is over.

Tom, walked with his pretty black dog with crystal eyes that needed to make a stop at the water fountain. The dog stopped next to me for a moment to snort before moving on, and I couldn't help but say "your dog has the prettiest eyes." What's her name? "Maya" he said and I replied "it's a very pretty name, in my language it means a mesmerizing illusion." We each introduced ourselves and he said "yeah, when I got her, this was the first thing I noticed. I knew she was a Maya." After Maya was done drinking some water, she started walking towards the dog park gate and Tom followed her in, he said to me, "hey Sally told me you are studying the park; we all kind of come every day so let me know if you need any help. I have to go back in right now but would love to help you out." And I took his contact information.

7:10 pm
 < 1 couple with their dog leave the park.
 < 1 girl with her dog leaves the park; smiles at me (almost felt that she recognized me)
 > 1 older man walks straight to the park gate from his car. (regular to the park, have seen him multiple times before so I say hi) pets few other dogs as he walks in.
 7:15 pm
 > Couple with dog enter the park (regulars, have seen the man on all previous occasions but no smiles). Two other dogs run to greet the dog.

7:20 pm
 > 1 girl enters the park with her dog, says hi herself.
 < 1 girl leaves with her dog.

- Everyone still sitting on the side; about 70% of the park has shade now including the center.
- People start approaching and standing in the center of the park, some dogs follow their owners.
- About 6 people stand at the center of the park, 4 of them look familiar.

7-40 pm
 > Mary (met her first time I visited the park) with her husband and her dog approaches the park, stops as she sees me and we talk.
 Mary dropped by to say hi. I hadn't seen her since my second day at the park when she told me about them moving out of town. She told me about someone's post on the facebook page about Memorial Day cookout that they were hosting for the crew and several members, she said several people there have RSVPed to come. She said "I thought that might be something you would want to know" before she left. I thanked her for giving me the information and told her that I would have loved to talk some more, she said "yeah I would have helped you more but we are leaving in 2 days. I do speak to some of the users outside of the park, not all, but if you need me to, I can probably get you in touch with them", and with that she said bye and left.
 > 1 girl with 2 dogs approaches the gate (1 big and 1 small); the small dog gets stuck in the gate, others rush to help.

7-45 pm
 > 1 couple with a dog walks in.
 < Tom leaves with Maya, says bye.
 @ 8:00 pm
 • Fewer people inside the park as compared to other days, could be because of memorial day weekend.

Day 7: Sunday, May 27th 2012 (Memorial day Weekend)

6-35 pm
 91 °F
 SE @ 1.5 mph

33%

Observer Location: picnic table next to the playground, shaded, next to the water fountain and good view of both the playground and the dog park.

General Observations:

Shade: plenty of shade on the playground

About 1/2 of the dog park area is shaded

Trees on ridge drive are small, so almost no shade on the southeastern edge of the park.

Partly cloudy sky, feels cooler than other days.

- 1 family at the playground (regulars, have seen them on 4 days before).
- 5 people in the park with 3 dogs; 2 couples and 1 older adult
- 1 couple leaves with small dog.
- < Asian family (grand ma, couple and the girl); the lady is pregnant and the couple walked on the trail on most days
- > Arrives at the playground, greetings are exchanged with the other family.
- O.C.: since it's a slow day at the park, the lady of the playground (white, has 2 daughters, one is few months old) starts chatting with me.

Kate, a lady with 2 daughters, one is a toddler and the other a few months old in a stroller, come and sat down with me on the picnic bench. I had seen her a couple of times before with her daughters, but today her husband is with the family and she sat down with the little one while he played with the toddler on the swing set. Kate had seen me talking to some other people so she knew I was up here doing a study, as she sat down in front of me, she asked "so what are you doing again?" I replied with the same answer and we started talking.

Me: I see you have some support today (talking about her husband).

Kate: yeah, he tries to come with us on the weekends; other days I have to manage on my own, it gives me something to do outside of the house.

Me: and your daughter seems to love it here.

Kate: we were both raised in the outdoors I would say, so we are not a fan of letting our kids watch TV all day. I try to bring them out here almost every day so they can get acquainted with the outdoors too, as you can see my little one is asleep in the heat ☐

Me: yeah it's nice; I certainly grew up playing with my friends in the street and the parks.

Kate: us too. It's a much better experience and they get to see other people and the pretty dogs that come out here. I would have loved to have a big yard for them too, but this is not bad either.

Me: do you live close-by?

Kate: yeah we are a block from here and so we walk each day. I would love to come late and stay longer but that might delay dinner time for us.

Me: so the dogs don't bother you?

Kate: oh not at all. We had a dog before we had kids and my husband loves them but it's hard to have a pet with infants so we had to give him up. My husband wants to get one sometime in the future so we also use our time at the park to look at the various types to think about the one we may want to get in the future ☐. Besides, my older one loves to play with dogs and is not intimidated by them unless they run real fast of her.

Kate's husband came with their daughter, signaling that they had to leave so we said our goodbyes as she gave me her number and offered to help if needed.

6:50 pm
 < Other couple leaves with the dog.

6:55 pm
 > 1 older adult comes to the park, (didn't see him get out of a car so may have walked)

7:00 pm
 > 1 girl with a dog walks towards the gate (doesn't seem familiar)

7:05 pm
 • Some talking in the playground.
 • Too few people in the dog park area, scattered and strolling
 • Couple of people sitting on the bench and reading.

> 2 girls with 1 dog arrive at the park, pet another dog.
 > 1 man with a dog walk to the park (may have walked, didn't see a car)
 < 2 girls with their dog leave
 < 1 older man (been here since I arrived) leaves the park with his dog.

7:15 pm
 > 1 couple with dog arrive at the park (regulars, have seen them multiple times, don't look at me at all)

7:20 pm
 > Jennifer (the one with red car) arrives with her 2 dogs, says hi to me and greets other dogs too before walking towards the center of the park.

@ 7:30 pm
 The center of the park is shaded by now.
 A small circle has formed in the center, some audible conversation.

Incident:
 One black dog (Owner: the older adult, regular) gets scared by the fireworks and runs towards the gate, the owner pets and comforts the dog and tried to bring it back; others in the park, including dogs, come to help the scared dog. The group moves closer to the scared dog and helps the owner; the dog takes about 1.5-2.0 mins to recover and start running around again.

7:45 pm
 > 1 boy with 2 dogs arrives at the park (looks familiar, asked me how I was doing), goes inside and sits close to the fence.

7:50 pm
 > 2 girls with 2 dogs walk the trail before entering the park.

@ 7:55 pm
 • Less than 15 people inside the park.
 • Memorial Day could be one of the reasons.
 • Both familiar and unfamiliar faces seen.

Day 8: Monday, May 28th, 2012 (Memorial Day)
 6:35 pm
 92 °F
 SSE @ 7 mph
 Observer Location: picnic table next to the playground, shaded, next to the water fountain and good view of both the playground and the dog park.
 The picnic area stinks, maybe the trash is full.
 General Observations:
 Shade: The park appears to be less shaded than other days
 The slow wind may also be playing a role in high park temperature
 Trees on ridge drive are small, so almost no shade on the southeastern edge of the park.

6:45 pm
 > 1 couple with 2 dogs enter the park area.

@ 7:00 pm
 • Too few people in the park, no real circle formed.
 6:55 pm
 < couple with 2 dogs leave.
 7:00 pm
 > 2 girls with 1 dog approach the gate, let the dog in and stay outside to walk on the trail before entering the park (approx. after 10 mins)
 7:05 pm
 < Both families prepare to leave from the playground; Kate older daughter plays with the little dogs for a little while (this family likes to look at the dogs)
 7:15 pm
 > 1 lady with a dog walk the trail for about 10 mins before entering the park, stopped for a moment to say hi (I have not seen her before)

@ 7:20 pm
 • Few girls sit close to the bridge and start talking.
 • The lady with the dog goes and stands close to the bridge too, isn't talking yet.

7:25 pm
 > The couple with black and white dog (the ones who never look at me), go close to the girls sitting on the bridge and start talking (O.C. a little surprised to see them here, since the regulars are having a cookout); the lady stays and talks to the girls while the man takes the dog in the center.
 > 1 man with 2 children (boys) comes to the playground. The little one plays while the other sits under shade in the picnic area.
 < the older lady with the dog leaves the park.
 7:30 pm
 > couple with 1 dog enter the park; the dog looks familiar (Hestia)
 > Sally with her husband arrive at the park, I wave as she goes and pets other dogs before going to the center.
 7:35 pm
 > couple with small dog approach the park (I have spoken to them before about my research, so I say hi)

Incident (7:40 pm):
 One regular lady picks up some of the dog poop lying around in the park and throws it in the bin, saying 'this is why it has been stinking'.

@ 7:55 pm
 • About 4-5 people standing in the center (hint of the regular activity); I have seen all these people before.
 • < 2 girls that came together leave with their 2 dogs, still talking.

Day 9: Tuesday, May 29th, 2012 (day to talk to people)
 2 girls who were standing close to the fence/water bucket start talking to me
 Kate: so how is your study going so far?
 Me: It's good, thanks for asking.
 Amy: don't you wish you had a dog after watching them?
 Me: yeah, the person inside me from a few years ago can't believe I am saying that!
 Katie: these past few days have been good with the wind, today we you can feel the heat so biking would not have been as fun, right?
 Me: well the wind wasn't making it much fun either given the direction and my route. May be rain can cure the heat!

Andy: oh it gets nasty when it rains. Those fences around the ditches you can see, they were not here until a few years ago and dogs would get enticed by the stagnant water and get trapped down there. It took a lot of work with the city to get them up.

Al: that sounds bad, but you know it's a detention area so some stagnant water seems unavoidable.

Katie: that is there, but the people here keep trying you know. Like we are for benches ☐, those would make it much nicer.

Al: hmmm, may be.

Andy: and if we could do something about the mud here (points to the puddle next to the water bucket).

Katie: but at least we have the option of water inside the park, imagine having to take him (points to her dog) out every time he gets thirsty.

Andy: well we can go on and on about it, so we should let you work ☐

Al: don't worry about it. May be I could talk to you some more about it when I am a farther along in my study.

Andy & Katie: sure.

They preferred email so I wrote it down.

The older adult that I have seen on multiple occasions stops when I say hi and tails for few mins.

Russel

Regular to the park, always says hi so this time I talk to him about my research.

Doog

APPENDIX C
ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

C.1. Letter of Permission



Mr. David Schmitz
Director
Department of Parks & Recreation,
City of College Station

To whom it may concern,

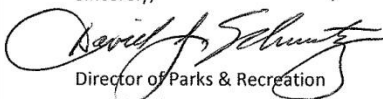
Ms. Nidhi Gulati, Graduate Student, Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, has the permission of College Station's Department of Parks & Recreation to conduct research in neighborhood parks for her thesis, "Neighborhood Parks as Third Places in Urban Areas".

We understand that Ms. Gulati will be observing parks at various times of the day and will contact park users to *recruit* them by approaching them as they enter or leave the park during her observations, giving them a brief of her study and asking permission to contact them for detailed interviews. Her plan is to recruit 15-20 people by the end of June, 2012.

Ms. Gulati will be conducting the interviews at the park as per the participants' convenience and will be sharing her thesis with the city after completion. We understand the Ms. Gulati will not coerce anyone to participate and that participation is completely voluntary. She will not attempt to shape opinions about the park or its use. Ms Gulati will provide a copy of the Texas A&M University IRB-approved, stamped consent document before conducting interviews in the parks, and will also provide a copy of any aggregate results.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Sincerely,



Director of Parks & Recreation
City of College Station
979-764-3415
dschmitz@cstx.gov

the heart of the Research Valley
P.O. BOX 9960
1101 TEXAS AVENUE
COLLEGE STATION • TEXAS • 77842
979.764.3510
www.cstx.gov

C.2. Informed Consent

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM

CONSENT FORM

Neighborhood Parks as Third Places in Urban Areas

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by **Nidhi Gulati**, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Neighborhood Parks influence the lives of people who use them.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to be in this study as a user of _____ Park.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

10-12 people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, a total of 20 people will be invited at 2 study centers.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

No, the alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

The study would rely on qualitative methods, personal interviews in this case, to understand the user perspective on the issue. The interview statements may be used to support the purpose of the study; the intent is to keep the confidential.

The format of the interview will be semi-structured with approximately 10 or less broad questions that facilitate conversation.

For example, describe your association/history with the park?

How often do you use the park and at what time?

How does the park fit in the neighborhood?

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?

The researchers will make an audio recording during the study so that the interview statements may be used accurately to support the purpose of the study; the intent is to keep the confidential. Indicate your decision below by initialing in the space provided.

_____ I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

_____ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

Texas A&M University IRB Approval IRB Protocol # 2012-0373	From: 07/19/12	To: 07/15/13 Authorized by: KM
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Version Date: 7/5/12

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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM

CONSENT FORM

Are There Any Risks To Me?

The things that you will be doing are no more/greater than risks than you would come across in everyday life.

You do not have to answer anything you do not want to.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely in the Department of Recreation, Park & tourism Sciences; no one except the interviewer (Nidhi Gulati) and the Advisor (Dr. Scott Shafer) will have access to the information.

Information about you will be stored in locked file cabinet; computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the Investigator, to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research at

Nidhi Gulati

126, AGLS

600 John Kimbrough Blvd,

College Station, Texas-77840- 77843-2261

Email: nidhigulati@tamu.edu

You may also contact the Principle Investigator/Faculty Advisor, **Dr. Scott Shafer** at 979-845-3837 or sshafer@ag.tamu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irbi@tamu.edu.

Texas A&M University IRB Approval IRB Protocol # 2012-0373	From: 07/19/12	To: 07/15/13 Authorized by: KM
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Version Date: 7/5/12

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TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM
CONSENT FORM

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your relationship with Texas A&M University. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature

Date

Printed Name

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Printed Name

Date

Texas A&M University IRB Approval IRB Protocol # 2012-0373	From: 07/19/12	To: 07/15/13 Authorized by: KM
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Version Date: 7/5/12

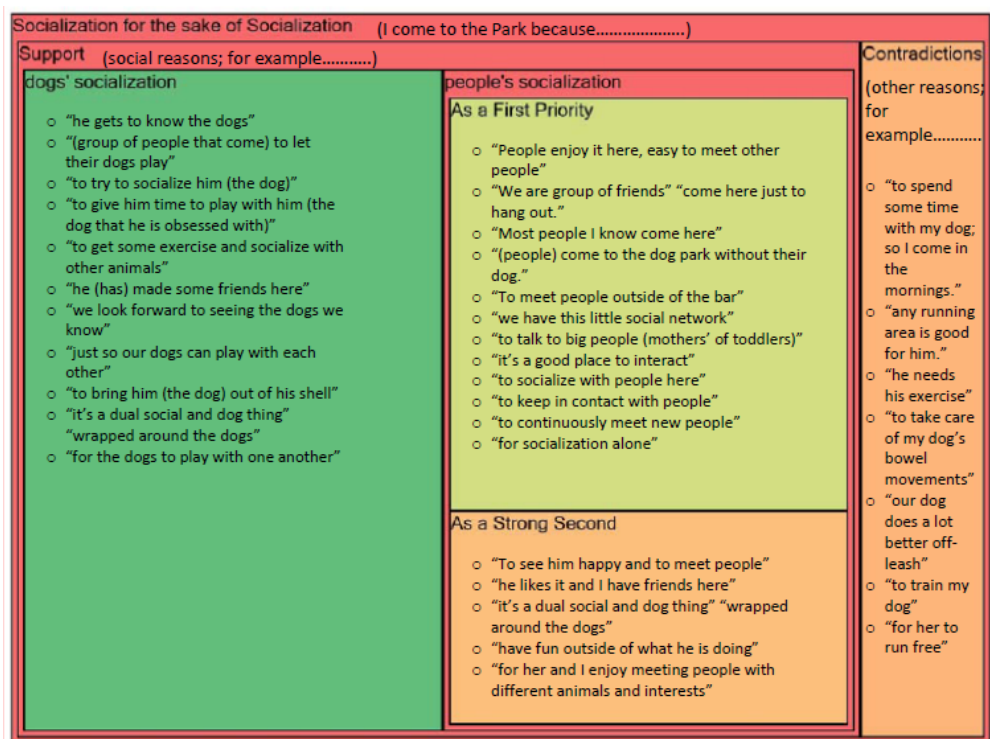
Page 3 of 3

C.3. Interview Questionnaire

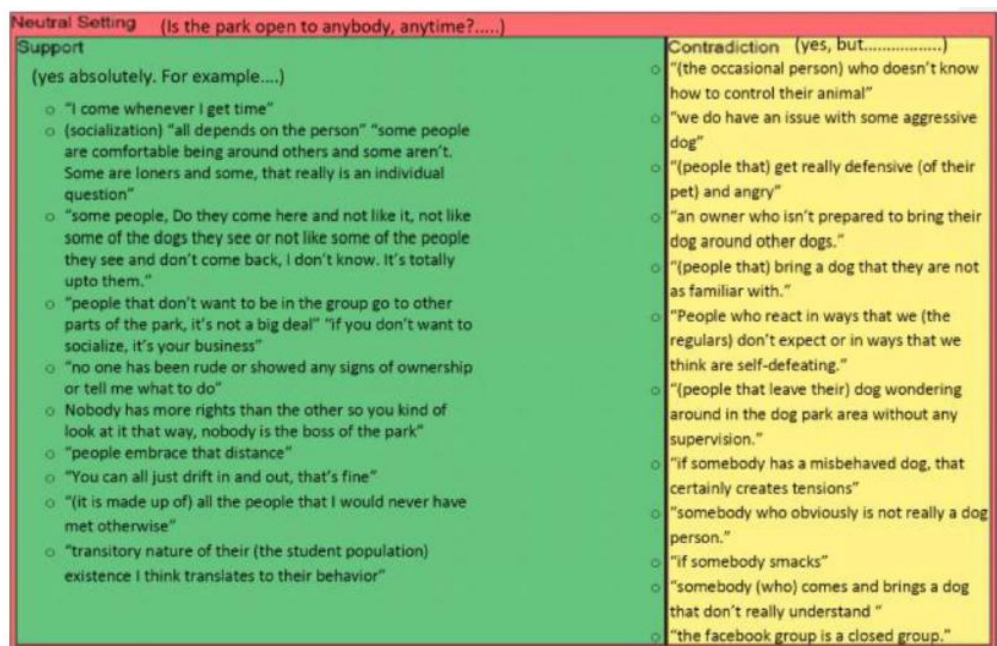
1. Tell me something about your relationship/history with the park?
How did you hear about it?
Your first visit?
How often do you visit?
Is there a particular time of the day you like to visit?
Do you feel at home in the park?
What brings you back?
How important is it in your life? What BENEFITS do you draw from the park?
2. Describe your experience with other people and other dogs?
Do you think any group of people has the ownership or power in the park? Describe the user group?
What times of the day do you prefer to use the park and why?
Do you think of any people or group of people who use the park as having more ownership than any other group?
3. *Are there people who use the park on a regular basis?*
Who are they and why do you think they are regular users?
Do you consider yourself a regular?
Are regulars good for the park?
Do you think the park is inviting to new users?
Would it be easy for someone who has not used the park before to become a part of the place and its activities?
4. Does the park provide ample opportunity to socialize with you know as well as strangers?
Can you think of any instances of discrimination?
5. *Are conversations occurring in the park?*
*How often **Do you participate?***
Is it a primary reason to visit the park?
Describe the conversations?
How would you describe the overall mood inside the park?
Can you split the park into zones based on the use/feel?
Other uses of the park that you are aware of when you come?
6. Is the location of the park important for you?
Do you think the park is easy to get to?
If you drove, how easy/comfortable will it be to walk or bike to the park?
When inside the park, do you feel you belong here?
7. Does the park fit into the neighborhood area?
Does the park stand out from its surroundings?
Does the park grab attention of the people passing by?
Is it unique, if yes, then how?
8. What do you think about the design of the park?
The influence of its layout on the way it's used?
The good and the bad? If you were to change something in the design, what would that be?

APPENDIX D

NVIVO 10 TREE MAPS



Appendix D.1: Tree map for Motivation (nodes compared by coding references)



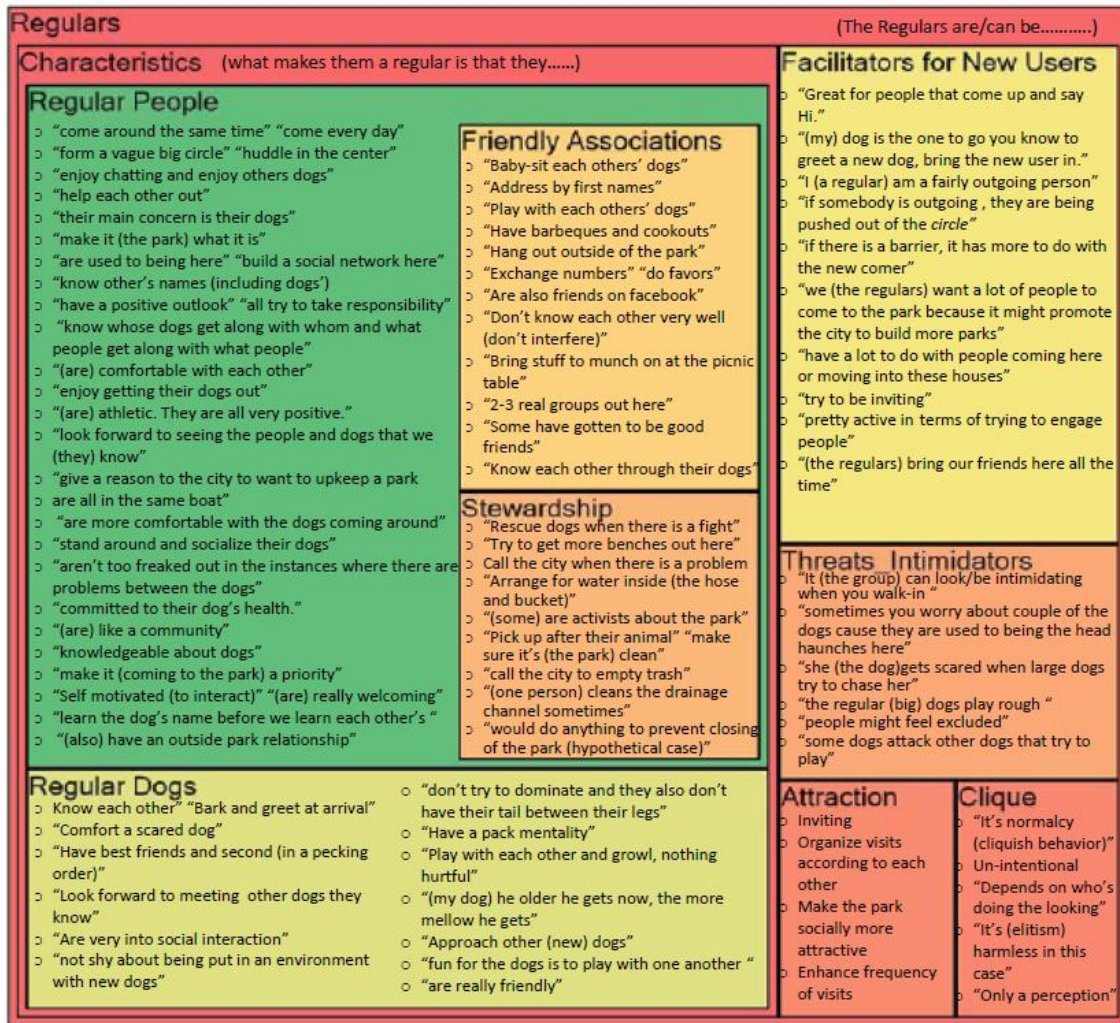
Appendix D.2: Tree map for Neutralness (nodes compared by coding references)

Leveler or Inclusive (Completely inclusive, free from discrimination...)	
Support (Yes, Absolutely. Because.....) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "race never seem an issue at the park" o "there is no hierarchy" o "apparent diversity in terms of social standard (and looking at the type of cars lined at the edge), involvement in the activity, and ages" o "people () don't, don't project that kind of attitude of discrimination" o "around here, it's a lot of population that is mainly Caucasians" "it's the city" o "It's a city park" "park is open to anyone" o "mostly students, its true with the town it just comes with the territory" o "This park I think is fairly representative of the community" o "big dogs, little dogs, everybody comes" o "fair amount of non-student people" o " reflect(s) the existing racial diversity of college station" o "none of us (the users of the park) really fall in the same class" o "park caters to a really diverse group, economic, cultural, race" o "There is always someone new here" o "interesting social mix" o "young and old, everyone is there on equal bases" o "they (dog parks) are for people that don't have backyards" o "the dog park is just totally a leveled field socially" 	Contradiction (Maybe not. Because.....) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "almost an incredible homogeneity in races." o "occasionally these groups that would come and they use it a lot and they make it like they have some ownership" o "95 % users of this park are students" o "More bigger dogs than little dogs. The big dogs play rough" o "some aggressive dog that come in" o "can't say that I have been here with a more heavily minority group" o "the nature of the dog also guides how well the person may be received " o "I rarely found Mexicans or Latinos; I rarely see Asians or other races." o "most of us are lower middle class, may be some upper middle class." o "more women than men" o "only in the area of behavior. If there's somebody who is mistreating a dog" o "I don't really care about the other uses; they are the non-dog people" o "(because of the group of regulars, the tone of) insider-outsider status" o "I have heard some comments, things about race, things about class" o "African Americans aren't adequately represented at the park"

Appendix D.3: Tree map for 'Socially Leveled park'

Main Activity_ Conversation (People socialize/interact in the park by.....)		
Support (by talking, like/because.....) Characteristics of conversation (These conversations are like.....) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "people aren't standing too close to each other but close enough to be able to converse" o "cheerful conversation about the dogs" o "Audible" o "Taking advice from other dog owners" o "Getting things off your mine, relaxing" o "Friendly and inviting" o "Small talk" o "that people don't come here to pick a fight or to intimidate" o "some flirting" o "you might talk about somebody's work" o "cordial and pleasant" o "if someone is having a rough day, they mention it but they try not to dwell on it" o "they are weird. We talk about everything" o "sometimes about the education system (with people who have kids)" o "whatever is on that person's mind that day" o "usually pretty light hearted" o "usually pretty supportive (if somebody shares a personal problem)" o "funny because people, like they bring their children and then they chat about their children" o "women don't care (about who they are talking to)as long as they can talk" o "People are happy, they laugh, they joke" o "don't get very serious as far as current events" "about local events" o "we kind of don't want to nail it (our opinions) on anybody" o "mainly Fun" " nothing real profound" o "multiple little conversations" 	With New Users (about....) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "Dog's age and breed" o "The person and where they are from" o "Curiosity about the person and the dog" With Regulars (about....) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "What's going on" Work o Plans for the night or weekend o "How's Charlie" (dog's name) o What they did last weekend o "Just about anything, because we are also facebook friends" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "they all huddle in the center and talk" o "most people here are willing to talk" o "until they started coming here, they had no one to talk to" o "that is what is unique about this park" o "I have fun outside of what he's doing" o "It's one of the reasons I come here" o "it's inviting" A Strong Second Priority (it's important in the park because.....) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "I stay longer, if I am deep in conversation" o "I tend to volunteer here if I have something to share, unlike the usual me" o "To bring myself out of the shell" o "it's definitely a bonus"
		Contradiction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "Some people just prefers to observe people" o "do more listening" o "if I wanted to talk with friends I made here, we'll go somewhere else" o "language barrier (international)" o "because I am an outsider"

Appendix D.4: Tree map for 'Conversations' (nodes compared by coding references)



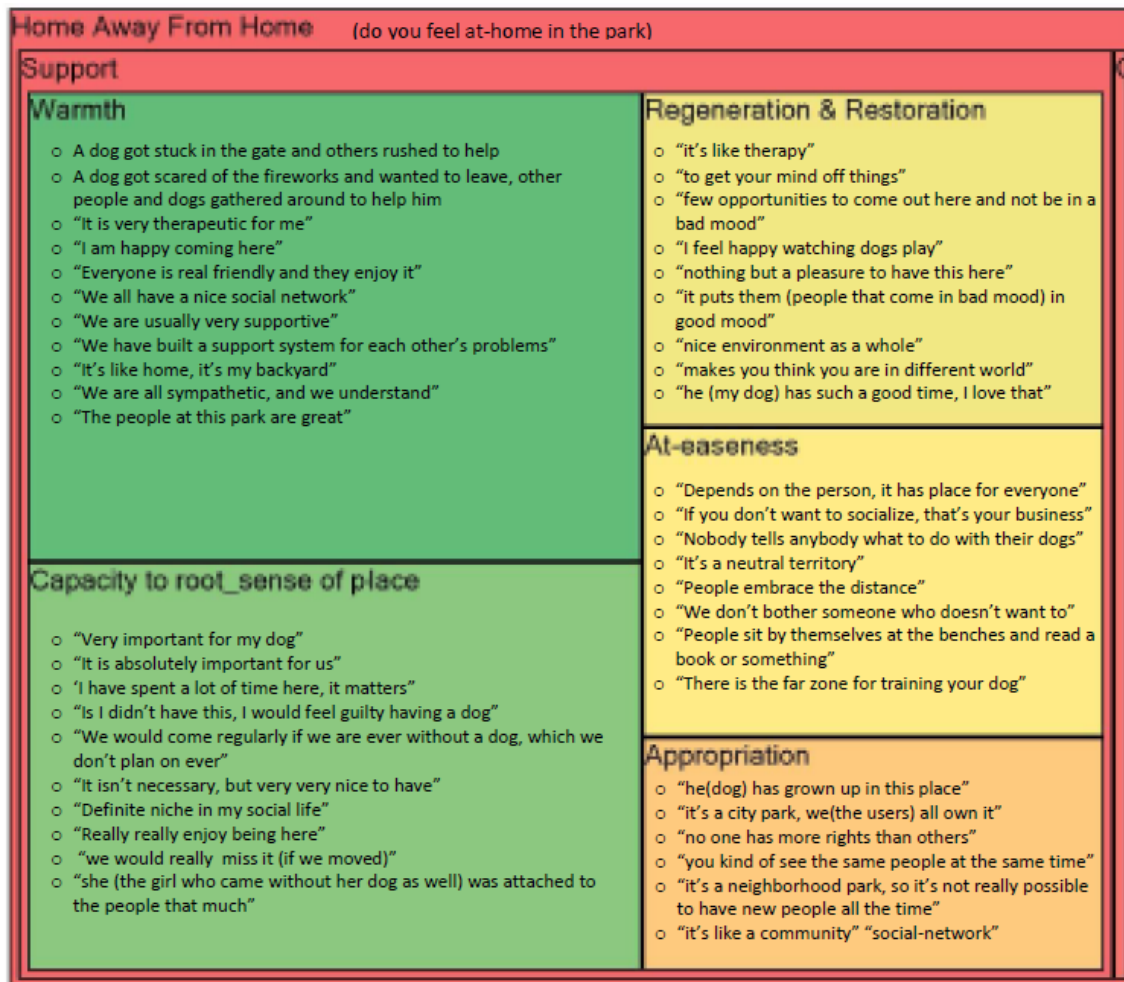
Appendix D.5: Tree map for ‘Regulars’ (nodes compared by coding references)

Accessibility & Accomodation (the park is convenient to use anytime)	
Support Yes, absolutely. Because..... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "I come whenever I get time but it is always random" o "something to do outside of the house" o "we are closer, its(our frequency) more now" o "I come whenever, changes with season" o "I moved here specifically to get close" o "(of it's) convenient location" o "I can have my dog of leash legally, without having to go somewhere else, which would be inconvenient" o "while they(the students) live here, yes." o "It fits my schedule, I own my own business" o "it is the closest park to me so kind of had no choice" o "really the plus for me that I can bring him somewhere that's larger than my yard" o "its close and it gives me something to do everyday on my terms" o "several of the folks that are regular out here, live in this neighborhood" o "this place has this kind of situated in the neighborhood so you can't always have a bunch of different people coming" o "It's part of the neighborhood" o "That's how students use it "the more they need to study, the less they can be out here" o "people don't have backyards, this is their backyard." 	Contradiction Maybe not because... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o People come when it gets cooler. o Nature determines the time

Appendix D.6: Tree map for 'Accessibility and Accommodation' (nodes compared by coding references)

Playful Mood (the mood inside the park.....)		
Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "pretty fun" o "it's great" o "great atmosphere" o "playful" o "enjoyable" o "positive" o "friendly" o "respectful" o "cordial and pleasant" o "light hearted" o "joyful" o "happy" o "different, in a good way" o "egalitarian" o "light" 	Gestures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o People smile at each other o Pet each other's dogs o First names are used o Exchange of greetings o Say goodbye o "everybody says hello" o Nodding and hand gestures o Laughing is heard o "sometimes I stay longer if I am deep in conversation" 	Contradiction or Killers of mood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o "some people get very defensive if their dog misbehaves" o "if there is dog fight, that sort of destroys the mood" o "if someone brings a female dog during heat, causes a lot of fights" o "some people get mad if you grab their dog" o "if someone brings an aggressive dog" o "When there is stagnant water and some dogs get sick" o "If someone smacks their dog"

Appendix D.7: Tree map for 'Playful Mood' (nodes compared by coding references)



Appendix D.8: Tree map for 'At-homeness' (nodes compared by coding references)