



THIRD PLACES: PAST, PRESENT AND POTENTIAL

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Abstract

This paper explores the context and history in which the conception of third places came about. Next, third places of today come under scrutiny, as these spaces are diminishing rapidly, and the traditional third places that remain are undergoing a change in ambiance, making them unrecognizable. The paper goes on to exemplify the conundrum that gentrification and increased third places bring to low-income communities, which both benefit and suffer from these implementations. Finally, in order to address the lack of and change to third places, this paper suggests strengthening and preserving already existing third places, as well as partnering with communities to create affordable new ones. Overall, the paper demonstrates how crucial third places are to all communities for the social capital they promote.

Keywords

Cities, Community, Consumerism, Gentrification, Social Infrastructure, Suburbs, Technology, Third Places

1. Introduction

The term “third places” was originally coined by sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his 1989 book *The Great Good Place* to describe neutral and accessible gathering places [1]. In some ways, the urbanist Jane Jacobs’s description of city sidewalks is an early example of what Oldenburg writes about [2]. Recently, third places have been disappearing, due to suburbanization, reliance on technology and land scarcity. In the third places that remain, there has been a shift in character, and the way people interact with these spaces differs from the past. These changes can be largely attributed to gentrification and increased technology attachment. Additionally, third place accessibility is unequally distributed, leaving minority and lower socioeconomic communities under-resourced, which contributes to physical and mental health disparities. While traditional third places play a vital role in fostering social connection and community engagement, urban change, digital technologies, and social inequality have transformed how people use and understand these spaces, requiring creative new enterprises and increased attention to these endangered places.

2. Cities and Jacobs

Originally, cities were places of both residence and work. Pre-industrialization, city-dwellers mainly lived within walking distance of their occupations, making cities self-sustained entities. Post-industrialization, with advances in transportation and the creation of factories outside of urban areas, more city-dwellers began commuting to work and the suburbs began to form [3]. Still, before 1945, only 13% of Americans lived in the suburbs. Post World War II, however, there was a large suburbanization boom, and as of 2010, more than half of Americans live in the suburbs [4].

Despite its popularity, suburbanization often erodes community because of its lack of traditional community spaces. In Chapter 2 of her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs illustrates how the sidewalk functions as a powerful third place, though, at the time, that phrase had yet to be conceived. The crux of this power comes from the people who populate these areas, participating in an “intricate sidewalk ballet” [4, p. 50] while simultaneously operating as eyes on the street, making sidewalks safer and more populated. An increase in the number of people present at any given time allows opportunities for passive surveillance by pedestrians, shopkeepers and homebodies with street-facing windows. As Jacobs demonstrates, the sidewalk is not only a means of transportation; in the presence of a sizable population, it can safely serve as a destination itself. Interaction between diverse peoples is crucial to sidewalk success and casual street interactions, both impersonal yet friendly, contribute to a larger neighborly feeling.

Jacobs also explores the local businesses that abut the sidewalks, which serve, along with their owners, as neighborhood institutions. Jacobs specifically mentions the delicatessen across the street from her apartment building, where she and her neighbors leave their spare keys. She goes on to detail various local establishments throughout her neighborhood where others leave spare keys. Importantly, she knows the owners of these stores by name, which increases trust while not crossing any boundaries. It is precisely because of traditional third places like sidewalks and shops that a balance between privacy and isolation is struck. Jacobs explains that, counterintuitively, the city's booming population and small square mileage actually afford more privacy than the suburbs. Invoking sociologist Sophie Watson's term, these traditional third places allow people to "rub along" with each other and coexist harmoniously while not becoming too involved in each other's lives [5]. Without a sidewalk or communal gathering place in the suburbs, the only chance to interact with neighbors entails inviting them into the private sector of the home. If a suburban declines, understandably so, to become so personal with their neighbor, they are left with virtually no other option than seclusion. There are no informal, friendly interactions between unlike individuals. It is seemingly all or nothing. The suburbs' lack of sidewalks and shops breaks down barriers between public and private life, often leaving community members estranged from one another.

2.1 Critique of Jacobs

The eclectic neighborhood Jacobs describes is seen as an urban ideal, but Benjamin Schwarz, former literary and national editor for *The Atlantic*, argues it is unsustainable and unrealistic [6]. Schwarz, while critiquing both Michael Sorkin's and Sharon Zukin's books about modern-day New York City, indirectly also attacks Jacobs, because their books build off of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, which has become the blueprint for thinking about city neighborhoods. Yet, Schwarz argues, all of these books dissect or long for Greenwich Village only, and at a very particular moment in time. Greenwich Village developed differently than the rest of Manhattan, making it an exception rather than an achievable goal for other New York locations to aspire toward. The Village was spared from urban renewal and its accompanying gentrification, allowing the area to retain its character, embodied by its cobblestone streets, mom-and-pop shops and industrial architecture. According to Village Preservation, while the 1940s tirade of urban renewal initiatives was changing the atmosphere of surrounding neighborhoods, the residents of the Village took note and girded themselves to fight against implementation in their area. Successfully, Villagers fought Robert Moses on the construction of a Lower Manhattan Expressway and around a decade later, the Village gained historical district status, which constrained redevelopment in the area [7]. For these reasons, the Village is uniquely in contrast with the rest of Manhattan. Additionally, Schwarz continues, the idyllic urban small town Jacobs describes and others yearn for exists only in a snapshot in time. It is the transient moment, as Schwarz puts it, right "before the first Starbucks moves in." The years of grungy neighborhood turnover, when rent is still cheap, and gritty, working-class locals have not yet been driven out, are what these intellectuals hanker for. This moment is, as Schwarz puts it, "inherently impermanent" and is sure to be followed by rising housing prices and big box stores seizing upon the newfound economic opportunity in gentrifying neighborhoods. Crucial to this paper's examination of third places is Schwarz's observation that urban processes of gentrification have always taken place, but, according to Schwarz, the speed at which they happen in the 21st century, because of increased consumerism in a fast-paced global market, is unprecedented.

3. Oldenburg's "Third Place"

Jacobs's exploration of communal spaces is, albeit a good start, too narrow, necessitating a broader understanding before proceeding. As Oldenburg conceptualized in a late 1990s Planning Commissioners Journal article, "Third places are nothing more than informal public gathering places" [8]. Crucial to these places is openness, accessibility and the ability to facilitate conversation. By open, Oldenburg means there should be little or no barriers to entry and anyone is welcome. For this to be true, third places that provide a good or service must be affordable. To be accessible, Oldenburg emphasizes the importance of third places existing at walkable distances from communities, because a community space cannot exist far outside the community itself. Reliance on cars and suburban sprawl poses a significant complication to this core tenet. Lastly, places that focus only on consumerism are not considered third places. Third places are about the people, the activity, or the conversation surrounding a space; the main objective is not consumption [9]. These places are an alternative to and a combination of the first place, home, and the second place, work, as it mixes both homey elements while engaging with community, resulting in a casual, social buzz [5]. Leisure scholars Felice Yuen and Amanda J. Johnson critique Oldenburg's conflation of third spaces and public spaces. Firstly, privately owned spaces can function as third spaces if they are open and accessible. Secondly, public spaces tend to be exclusive, which will be discussed at greater length later [9]. With this point in mind, developers and city planners cannot simply create a public space and expect community to flourish in it. Rather, communal spaces must be curated with seating, light, access to the street and sun, to be effective [10].

3.1 Decrease in Third Places

The number of some traditional third places are diminishing. Between 2008-2015, there was a noticeable waning of third places, like hobby-based stores, which declined by 27%, and beauty salons, barbershops and laundromats, which decreased by 23%. Similarly, eateries decreased by 23% and religious organizations dwindled by 17% [11]. Overall, “almost all categories – especially commercial establishments and privately-run organizations – declined since 2011 and 2012: a potential turning point of loss in third places” [12]. Since 2010, some scholars believe America is going through a “retail apocalypse,” which could be due to a rise in online shopping and delivery [12]. Additionally, many traditional third places have been closing due to suburbanization and the resulting reliance on automobiles. For nearly three decades, Robert Moses held power as the Parks Commissioner of New York City and in this time, he built no fewer than seven bridges and 32 expressways and parkways, which facilitated a surge of suburbanization [13]. With this kind of infrastructure, people moved away from city centers and became more reliant on cars, which creates a barrier to accessing third places. Moses, along with many other contemporary urbanists, believed quite the opposite of Jacobs and Oldenburg: to create safer, cleaner and more modern neighborhoods, the focus should be shifted away from people and onto the car. Importantly, land scarcity in densely packed metropolises poses competing interests, causing construction or maintenance of third places to often fall by the wayside in favor of more utilitarian projects. Currently, Mayor Eric Adams wants to replace the Elizabeth Street Garden in downtown Manhattan to build affordable housing for low-income seniors. His first deputy mayor, Randy Mastro, is reevaluating the project, so the future of the Elizabeth Street Garden is still uncertain. This dilemma has merit on both sides. New York City is one of the most expensive and segregated cities in the world and is currently struggling with a homelessness crisis. With these things in mind, increased affordable housing is essential to creating a more equitable city. Yet, Adams’s plan will come at the price of a beloved green space central to community fabric. Open spaces are disappearing at an alarming rate, so opposition to these plans have validity [14]. With so many competing variables, there has been a reduction of third places.

3.2 Change in Character of Third Places

While there has been a noticeable shrinkage of some traditional third places, others are not decreasing; rather, human interaction with these spaces is changing. For example, coffee shops still exist, in fact, are almost everywhere, yet their status as third places is being called into question. There is an established history of coffee shops in urban areas, with the first American coffee house appearing on the scene in 1676. Coffee houses were ubiquitous with conversation and political debate amongst men from different classes, especially during Europe’s Enlightenment period [15]. Around this time, coffee shops earned the nickname “penny universities” because anyone could partake in the high level of intellectual discussion taking place there, simply for the price of a coffee [16]. Recently, as three researchers from England’s Coventry University have found, the character of coffee shops has shifted. Cafés no longer encourage or facilitate conversation amongst patrons, since customers order their beverages to go or convert single seating into “coffices,” places to do work [17]. Also, Yuen and Johnson claim that, above all else, diversity, people with unlike social capital engaging with one another to expand social networks, is the most crucial factor of a third space. Nowadays, coffee shops are not accessible to all due to high prices. Specifically, Yuen and Johnson boldly do not consider Starbucks a third place. It caters to only those who can afford the coffee, which is usually upper-class and well-educated individuals. Historically, coffee shops were often exclusive and frequented by male-only crowds, raising questions about whether their status as a third space was ever truly earned. Additionally, places that focus only on consumerism are not considered third places. Third places are about the people, the activity, or the conversation surrounding a space; the main objective is not whatever it is that is being consumed.

Similar to coffee shops, the way people engage with restaurants has transformed. A US Foods survey analyzed by Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts found that 57% of Americans prefer takeout over dining in, the top reason being that it is “more enjoyable to eat at home” [18]. Similarly, a 2021 JD Power survey found 71% of restaurant patrons planned to continue or even increase their COVID-19 delivery habits [19]. Clearly, there has been a fundamental shift in the dining experience, with people not wanting to leave their homes or interact with society at large. It is this kind of antisocial behavior that drives people away from community and connection. Yet the fault does not only lie with consumers. As of late, restaurants have been timing their patrons, ensuring quick table turnover and increased profits. This practice eliminates restaurants as a third place and turns dining out into a more transactional experience. Eateries are no longer gathering places. Instead, they are a race against the clock. Bon Appétit Magazine, while covering this new fad, interviewed one restaurant that resisted the financial urge to time their customers. Unsurprisingly, it was Birdie’s, a husband and wife, literal mom-and-pop, local restaurant in Austin, Texas, whose owners plainly said, “It wouldn’t feel hospitable” to do such a thing [20]. What is missing in chain restaurants is just this: the feeling of commitment, accountability and respect towards one’s clientele.

The theater, too, which has long been integral to community, is becoming obsolete. Theater dates back to Ancient Greece, where performances were open to the public. So important was theater to the Greeks, the government would sponsor admission for the poor [21]. As New York Times journalist David Belcher put it, “The idea of democracy was nurtured in the outdoor amphitheaters,” meaning politics and culture were wrapped up in the performances [22]. Movie theaters are descendants of this cultural institution, and they are currently under attack.

From 2002 to 2023, ticket sales have experienced a 46% decrease [23]. Decades before the pandemic, DVD sales began threatening movie theaters. More recently, especially post-pandemic, streaming services are decimating the theater market. Watching a movie in theaters is a unique bonding experience for those in the crowd. Together, the audience laughs, cries, gasps, claps, sings along. When the lights go up, everyone has been changed, in one way or another, by what they have all experienced. These elements give it potential as a powerful third place. Streaming services, along with rising ticket prices, are to blame for decreased movie theater attendance. In 2005, the average movie ticket was \$6.41, while as of 2025, that amount rose to \$11.31. Notably, there was a large jump in ticket prices post-COVID. Priorly, prices increased by about 20 cents each year. From 2020-2021, prices skyrocketed just shy of a whole dollar nationwide [24]. With low-cost streaming services, movie enthusiasts can pay around the same price for one ticket as a whole month's subscription [25]. In light of these challenges, theaters have implemented creative ways to draw in crowds, like turning popcorn buckets into take-home movie memorabilia, but it seems like it will take more than that to reestablish the theater as the third place it once was [26].

Even outdoor spaces have newly become sites of restriction. In many outdoor spaces, there is anti-homeless architecture and a lack of public bathrooms. These things are implemented to keep out homeless people, but they negatively affect the whole community and effectively destroy a space's status as a third place. In some cases, these obstructions are even illegal. The Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) Program was introduced along with the 1961 Zoning Resolution in an attempt to incentivise developers to create more open space. The concept was, the bigger public space a building provides, the more bonus floor area it is permitted. According to the NYC Department of Planning, over 380 buildings participate in the POPS Program [27]. As stated in the NYC Planning's Current Standards for Privately-Owned Public Spaces, "Deterrents to seating, such as spikes, rails, or deliberately uncomfortable materials or shapes, placed on any surfaces, required or otherwise, that would otherwise be suitable for seating are prohibited within public plazas" [28, p. 14]. Additionally, POPS are required to be clean, with adequate seating, signage and visibility. Unfortunately, real estate developers have taken advantage of the POPS incentive and not held up their end of the bargain. Comptroller Scott Singer found that of 333 POPS he audited, more than half did not meet City requirements. Specifically, Comptroller Singer observed signs explicitly stating the area was private, as well as inadequate required facilities and private restaurants whose patrons took up the space [29]. Buildings may be employing these tactics to keep out an undesirable crowd and maintain a more upscale ambience. In this way, public space occasionally becomes exclusionary and policed. Evidently, even if a space is public, it is not necessarily welcoming or even accepting of the public.

3.3 Reasons Behind the Change in Third Places

Now that the change of a handful of traditional third places has been charted, it is time to explore some of the reasons behind these changes, including gentrification and the rise of solitary forms of entertainment. According to Zukin and her team in their research on Harlem and Williamsburg, "Since the 1990s, the share of boutiques, including those owned by small local chains, has dramatically increased, while the share of corporate capital (large chain stores) has increased somewhat, and the share of traditional local stores and services has greatly declined" [30]. Evidently, retail gentrification has begun replacing local businesses with expensive boutiques or big box stores. While certainly not all local businesses serve as third places, many of them could be thought of as neighborhood institutions and anchors, places where, as opposed to impersonal chain stores, owners and workers know their patrons. According to the Harlem Business Alliance Newsletter, between 2003 and 2005, 55 small businesses closed their doors, in no small part due to rising rent prices and evictions, making room for boutiques and chains. As Zukin and her research group observed, "Almost every day, it seems, small grocery and hardware stores are morphing into cafés and ethnic social clubs into trendy restaurants." Importantly, Zukin shows that third places are not disappearing; gentrification also brings in third places. But the character, atmosphere and price of these hip coffee shops and restaurants do not afford a source of community within the neighborhoods where they are situated. The new boutique stores that open in the wake of the local shops target a wealthier clientele than the neighborhood residents, priming the area for a change in residential demographics. The chain stores that move into gentrifying neighborhoods have both positive and negative effects. Residents could benefit from the goods at affordable prices that these stores offer. Yet, they negatively affect local businesses and make some residents feel "uncomfortable" with the "different sense of place" these new stores bring. Gentrification causes third places to change, as local establishments are replaced by chains or stores that residents simply do not use [30].

The rise of mobile smart devices is yet another contributing factor to third place transformations. Recently, people have opted for more isolated forms of recreation, like scrolling on social media from their phones or streaming a TV series or a movie from home, as discussed in the context of movie theaters. This causes third places to become less desirable. When home is filled with all the world has to offer, including information, entertainment and connection, all attractions that previously were uniquely wound up in third places, why leave? On the occasion people do decide to venture into the public, they may find it has become quieter. Because of these technological advancements, park benches are practically equivalent to the couch. Coffee shops, libraries and hair salons have all turned into places where people can gather, only to hardly interact, because they are buried in their cell phones and

laptops. A Pew Survey found that over 70% of teenagers report feeling happy and peaceful without their cell phones and 42% admitted phones make learning social skills harder. Despite these statistics, a minority of teens have attempted to curb their screen time [31]. The effects of near-constant phone use have turned community spaces into private bubbles.

4. Why The Change in Third Places is Detrimental and Unequal

Despite all these obstacles, third places are crucial and the consequences of not having them, tragic. Oldenburg outlines 10 key reasons why third places are important, including: unifying neighborhoods, bringing adults and children into contact with one another, providing social support, like elderly care, fostering political debate, yielding entertainment and nurturing casual friendship [8]. Despite the factors discussed above, which impede the proliferation of third places, some areas fare better than others in this regard. Specifically, poverty is inversely related to third space accessibility. Though people in need would benefit the most from the social network third places provide, they are the ones who are largely forced to go without them. Similarly, neighborhoods with the least amount of black people are found to have the greatest number of third places. This statistic shows how the historic unequal access to “spatial opportunity structures” for black people, harkening back to the Home Owners Loan Corporation and their redlining scheme, still plays a role today. Interestingly, predominantly black neighborhoods had a greater volume of third places than mixed neighborhoods with a moderate population of black locals. This reveals the resilience of black communities, which build third places for themselves in spaces where they are the majority [32]. In the same vein, a literature review of environmental justice research shows that, on average, poor people of color have access to smaller and lower-quality parks than their higher-class white counterparts. Unequal access to green spaces like parks, which serve as third places, contributes to higher rates of health problems among low socioeconomic and minority groups, such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes and asthma [33]. According to the National Parks Service, visiting parks promotes mindfulness and empathy while providing opportunities to socialize, all of which directly contribute to both mental and physical health [34]. Third place accessibility relates to physical health, making public space both a public health and environmental justice issue.

Both physical and psychological aspects of third places have proven to be life-saving. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg has found that social connectedness saves lives. While studying the effects of the deadly 1995 Chicago heat wave, the assumption was that poorer, typically minority, neighborhoods bore the brunt of fatalities. Upon closer analysis, Klinenberg found this assumption was incorrect. He investigated Englewood and Auburn Gresham, neighboring communities, both with 99% black residents, a similar elderly population, as well as high poverty and crime rates. Astonishingly, he found that Englewood’s population suffered 33 deaths for every 100,000 residents, while Auburn Gresham had one of the lowest death tolls of any Chicago neighborhood, with only 3 deaths per 100,000 residents. The sole factor that set these neighborhoods apart was their social infrastructure, or collections of third places that create connectedness, Klinenberg concluded. Additionally, Klinenberg found residents of Auburn Gresham lived, on average, 5 years longer than their Englewood counterparts. This trend was seen across multiple neighborhoods with varying levels of social infrastructure [35]. Evidently, sociality facilitated by third spaces keeps people healthier and increases their longevity. Robust social infrastructure has also been correlated with lower suicide rates in working-age adults. Specifically, suicide rates are higher in the American West, where there are fewer third places, and lower in the Northeast, where there are greater levels of social infrastructure and community engagement. Social cohesion and connectedness protect against suicide, making third places life-saving institutions worthy of government and community protection and prioritization [36]. The emotional support third places provide has been seen to prevent death in the face of natural disasters and mental health crises.

4.1 The Solution is Not Simple

Unfortunately, implementing third places can also cause displacement. Though urban environmental justice activists advocate for increased green spaces in underserved communities, they also recognize that these amenities jack up neighborhood prices, contributing to gentrification and potential displacement. For example, when Harlem’s Marcus Garvey Park was renovated, luxury condos as expensive as \$2 million were subsequently built nearby. New park rules were also put into place, which, among other things, banned drumming, a common cultural practice in Harlem [37]. Though third spaces like parks are beneficial for all the reasons outlined above, developers also seize upon them, changing the nature of an area. Lower-income residents have a catch-22 on their hands: rally to improve the quality of life in their neighborhood, only to risk displacement, or settle for subpar living conditions and remain in their homes. This is a choice no one should have to make. Even when low-income residents in government-sanctioned mixed-income Chicago neighborhoods experience ‘positive’ gentrification, with increased third places and quality of life, they still feel out of place, observed, and that private property is prioritized over public [38]. Third places are a welcome and positive addition to any neighborhood, but if they are not established with sensitivity to individual community dynamics, and input from the existing residents, their damage may outweigh their benefits.

5. Bolster Already Existing Third Places

In the future, civic-minded individuals and government policy should look to strengthen overlooked and underappreciated third places. One such controversial third place is digital space. Many researchers feel Oldenburg's staunch rejection of technology is outdated or unnecessarily exclusionary. Extensive studies have found striking similarities between Oldenburg's conception of third places and multi-user domains. These virtual spaces are neutral, public contexts that allow for a relaxing, joyful and social experience outside of home and work. Repeated users even function as "regulars" and many report losing track of time, both defining features of Oldenburg's third places. Yet, in many ways, online spaces are not comparable to a third place. They do not strengthen or contribute to a local community; rather, members are spread out over different locations, isolating themselves from their neighborhoods in favor of a screen. Additionally, online spaces may not be as accessible and equitable as they are thought to be. Not everyone can afford an electronic device or has mastery over a gaming console. It is also worth noting that, as of 2002, white people made up 90% of the internet. While that number is sure to have changed, it serves as a reminder that ethnicities are not evenly represented online. Lastly, the internet is an echo chamber, filled with specialized subgroups on many apps or websites. Rather than the internet representing an open environment full of free discourse as Oldenburg envisions his third places to be, it is more accurately highly atomized and exclusive. Virtual spaces have the potential to function as more powerful community spaces if some changes are implemented. As mentioned, central to a third place is its localization, its power to unite a community. Virtual chatrooms or spaces only available for neighborhood residents are a way to incorporate localization. Another proposed improvement to virtual communities, in addition to providing increased access to technology, is making the online space itself more accessible by allowing users the ability to customize. By adding pictures or specialized features to community-wide chatrooms or digital spaces, more members will feel represented and want to participate. Relatedly, these local, accessible virtual community centers should be homey, like a physical third place. Each community must decide for itself what a warm place would feel like and build the virtual spaces with this feature in mind. While Oldenburg would certainly consider "virtual third places" oxymoronic, the internet is a powerful community-building tool that should be tinkered and experimented with [39].

Additionally, marketplaces are forgotten third places. Watson examined 8 UK marketplaces and found they promote at least four distinct social functions. Firstly, marketplaces facilitate 'rubbing along.' This is the idea that when diverse people simply exist in the same space as one another, when they see others and are seen by others, stereotyping decreases. Markets allow for this kind of interaction because of the open concept of the space, enabling virtually anyone into the market. In the market, there is a casual social buzz. Stalls are right next to each other and shoppers have opportunities to talk amongst themselves about what they are viewing. The traders also facilitate easy sociality by talking with their customers about their product or engaging with other nearby traders. Especially food vendors are seen as important to the market's social aspect, since they attract many people and allow them a place to congregate. Markets also induce inclusive sociality. The market is a place where otherwise marginalized characters are taken care of by those around them, especially traders, who often help the elderly or people with physical disabilities. There is also an aspect of theater and performance in the market. Traders know that the more outlandish or theatrical they are, the more customers they are likely to attract. This makes the marketplace an experience and attracts tourists. Additionally, the traders are selling things they truly care about or are the products of their own labor. Because of this, they enjoy speaking to the shoppers and talking passionately and knowledgeably about what they are selling. This is very different from supermarket cashiers or mall salespeople, who most likely have no connection to what they are selling. Lastly, the market has potential as a space for mediating differences. In essence, markets attract a very diverse range of people - all ages, economic backgrounds, genders and ethnicities could frequent markets. While malls are carefully planned out to increase sales, with unlike stores near each other to increase the novelty of each of them, markets are not. They are not created by large companies aimed at profit. They are more personal and personable and make a more enjoyable shopping experience. While other third places are closing down or losing their spirit, the market is alive and thriving in the UK [5]. To increase third places and promote social cohesion, markets should be implemented more in America. As the world hurtles toward privatization and isolation, the market is increasingly important.

Another institution, public libraries, should be deeply valued as a third place, and protected. Contrary to popular opinion, libraries do much more than lend books. They host events, programs, speakers and classes for all ages. These initiatives facilitate social interaction and spread knowledge. Klinenberg interviewed a woman who relied on her local library during the trying first years of motherhood. She made friends who shared experiences, information and even a nanny. Her child was stimulated and able to roam free while informally supervised by other moms. This is just one example of libraries offering social lifelines that Klinenberg observed. Libraries also offer free access to desktops and the internet, allowing those without technology to benefit. They even lend movies and newspapers, and they have free, clean bathrooms; there is truly something for everyone. Importantly, libraries are public and anyone is allowed in without question, making library guests highly diverse. In this way, libraries are grounds for integration of varied racial, social and economic groups. Further, libraries, unlike restaurants,

practically encourage their visitors to loiter. This component makes libraries the perfect third place for children and teens, who want a space to exist and gather, without the watchful eye of a parent, and it keeps them off the streets. Libraries also support the elderly, looking to stave off loneliness. Really, libraries benefit anyone looking for a third place [35]. Unfortunately, the Trump administration is cutting funding for public libraries, despite the crucial communal role they play and all the amenities, services and information they provide [40]. State and community officials should fight against these budget cuts, and neighborhood residents should visit and support their local branches to ensure their survival. By doing these things, more people will recognize and appreciate libraries as the irreplaceable third places that they are.

6. Create New Third Places

Not only should established spaces be preserved to address third place deficiency and inadequacy, but new initiatives should also be implemented. One such initiative underway is New York City's Open Streets program, created in 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic [41]. Essentially, streets are temporarily closed to vehicles and converted into public space for pedestrians [42]. On the Columbus Avenue Open Streets, children play soccer on the chalk-art strewn streets, involving a nearby waiter in their game, who kicks an out-of-bounds ball back. Musicians perform for nobody in particular. A nearby plant shop has its grand opening the other week, with a balloon arch and complimentary cotton candy to match. A neighboring bagel store puts seating out front and a sizable group forms. This is community space in action. On the Columbus Avenue Open Streets website, there is a link to reserve space on the street for birthday parties, performances, or tabling opportunities for nonprofits, as well as postings about the public events taking place, like a free bouquet raffle, an obstacle course for kids, and a clarinet performance [43]. Open Streets are scattered throughout all five boroughs and there are around 200 Open Streets in Manhattan alone (42). Open Streets come in different forms: limited local access, meaning the streets are closed at specified days and times, like the Columbus Avenue location, which is only open on Sundays from 12 pm-7 pm during designated months, and full closure, where streets are continuously closed for a set period. These distinct options ensure flexibility for any neighborhood that wants to implement the initiative. New York has also administered pedestrian plazas, which are transformed streets turned into public spaces, usually with seating and other amenities [44]. Communities need to see, and be instrumental in creating, additional simple, inexpensive programs like these to supplement other factors threatening third places.

7. Conclusion

This paper begins with an examination of Jane Jacobs's monumental conceptualization of public city spaces, while acknowledging its potential biases. Next, Oldenburg and his scholarship on third places is defined, before demonstrating how these places are decreasing in the 21st century. Yet, more compelling is not simply that traditional third places are decreasing, but that they are fundamentally changing character. Specifically, the experience at coffee shops, movie theaters, restaurants and outdoor spaces lacks the sociality that used to go hand-in-hand with these places. Some reasons for these changes are gentrification and increased technology usage. In distinct ways, these factors contribute to communal disunity and social isolation. Following, the paper illustrates the unequal access to third places across different communities and how these disparities contribute to worse physical and mental health for those lacking. While underscoring the need for implementation of third places in underserved communities, this paper also recognizes the subsequent potential for displacement these initiatives could cause. Lastly, two proposed responses to these changes are offered, particularly investing in already existing third places, like online spaces, marketplaces, and public libraries, as well as creating, in conjunction with community residents themselves, new public space initiatives, like the Open Streets Program in New York. Overall, community space is changing, and public policy must rise to the occasion and respond to the needs of citizens through collaboration.

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