

# About Project for Public Spaces

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**PPS HAS HELPED NEARLY 2,000  
COMMUNITIES IMPROVE THEIR  
PUBLIC SPACES.**

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Public spaces are a stage for our public lives. They are the parks where celebrations are held, where marathons end, where the seasons are marked and where cultures mix. They are the streets and sidewalks in front of homes and businesses where neighbors meet and people come to shop and stroll. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions - city halls, libraries, schools, and post offices where a local farmers market may sell flowers and produce. When cities and neighborhoods have thriving public spaces, residents have a strong sense of community. But although public spaces are critical to creating livable cities and communities, good public spaces in cities today are rare.

Project for Public Spaces, Inc. (PPS) has an international reputation for its work on the design and management of public spaces. A nonprofit, PPS was founded in 1975 to continue the pioneering work of writer-sociologist William H. Whyte (*The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*). Using structured observations, surveys, interviews, and a unique community process that puts residents and stakeholders first, PPS has helped nearly 2,000 communities improve their public spaces. Public and private organizations, federal, state and municipal agencies; business improve-

ment districts; the private sector; neighborhood associations, chambers of commerce and other civic groups have all worked with us to create a sense of place in their downtowns and neighborhoods.

PPS programs include:

- Advocacy and research in transportation, waterfronts, parks, markets and public buildings;
- Publications, including our handbook *How to Turn a Place Around*;
- Training programs, conferences and seminars in Placemaking;
- A digital and film slide library of public space enhancements and elements;
- Websites laden with resources and active, community driven listserves ([www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org) to discover more), and;
- Awards programs that highlights the thriving places of the world ([www.greatpublicspaces.org](http://www.greatpublicspaces.org)).

To find out more, consult our website at [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org).



# The Placemaking Process

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**OUR APPROACH TO PLACEMAKING IS BASED ON OUR BELIEF THAT IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY DEVELOP DESIGN IDEAS AND ELEMENTS TO IMPROVE OR DEVELOP A PUBLIC SPACE.**

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PPS's Placemaking process allows diverse constituencies to identify how a public space can be reshaped to make it a welcome, well-functioning and attractive place for people. Our approach to Placemaking is based on our belief that it is not enough to simply develop design ideas and elements to improve or develop a public space. Improvements need to reflect community values and needs. We believe that a public involvement process that defines and responds to community conditions and needs from the outset is one of the most critical factors in achieving a public space that is truly sensitive to its context.

Thus, Placemaking, as PPS approaches it, must begin with a thorough understanding of the dynamics, desires, and conditions within a community. It involves looking at, listening to, and asking questions of the people in a community about their problems and aspirations. We work with them to create a vision around the places they view as important to community life and to their daily experience; and we help them implement their ideas beginning with short term, often experimental improvements.

Based on our work in Placemaking, we have developed a Place Diagram: What Makes a Place Great? This chart outlines the major attributes of well-functioning places along with the intangible qualities that people use to positively describe them as well as the elements that can be used to measure their success. We have found this tool to be particularly useful in helping communities discuss the issues of importance to them. The

major attributes outlined on the chart are Sociability, Uses and Activities, Access and Linkage, and Comfort and Image, considerations that consistently surface as community improvement necessities wherever we have worked. This chart, in combination with the presentation of slides showing existing conditions alongside examples of improvements in similar situations (from PPS's collection of over 500,000 images), helps crystallize ideas for betterment and the creation of a vision.



# Place Game



**Place Performance Evaluation**  
 A Tool for Initiating the Placemaking Process

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SITE #: \_\_\_\_\_

## Rate the Place:

COMFORT & IMAGE	POOR		GOOD	
Overall attractiveness	1	2	3	4
Feeling of safety	1	2	3	4
Cleanliness/Quality of Maintenance	1	2	3	4
Comfort of places to sit	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

ACCESS & LINKAGES	POOR		GOOD	
Visibility from a distance	1	2	3	4
Ease in walking to the place	1	2	3	4
Transit access	1	2	3	4
Clarity of information/signage	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

USES & ACTIVITIES	POOR		GOOD	
Mix of stores/services	1	2	3	4
Frequency of community events/activities	1	2	3	4
Overall busy-ness of area	1	2	3	4
Economic vitality	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

SOCIABILITY	POOR		GOOD	
Number of people in groups	1	2	3	4
Evidence of volunteerism	1	2	3	4
Sense of pride and ownership	1	2	3	4
Presence of children and seniors	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

## Identify Opportunities

1. What do you like best about this place?
2. List ideas that you would do to improve this place that could be done right away and that wouldn't cost a lot:
3. What changes would you make in the long term that would have the biggest impact?
4. Ask someone who is in the "place" what they like about it and what they would do to improve it. Their answer:
5. What local partnerships or local talent can you identify that could help implement some of your proposed improvements? Please be as specific as possible.

# The Place Performance Evaluation

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## HOW TO LOOK AT A “PLACE”

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Place Performance Evaluation (PPE), copyrighted by PPS, is a place-oriented approach to community improvement. It asks participants to use common sense and intuition along with structured observation and interview skills. This allows them to very quickly see the good and bad qualities of a place, and suggest improvements, both short and long term. It ignites a creative process about how to make a place vital and great. The evaluation can be done by anyone who is observant, from a highly trained professional to a layperson. Equally dramatic results have been achieved by both groups.

The Place Performance Evaluation can be done by a small planning team working individually, and it also makes an excellent workshop. By participating in this “game,” participants not only can get to know each other better but also can gain insight on ways to look at neighborhoods and the areas within them more holistically and to see their potential as “places” in communities.

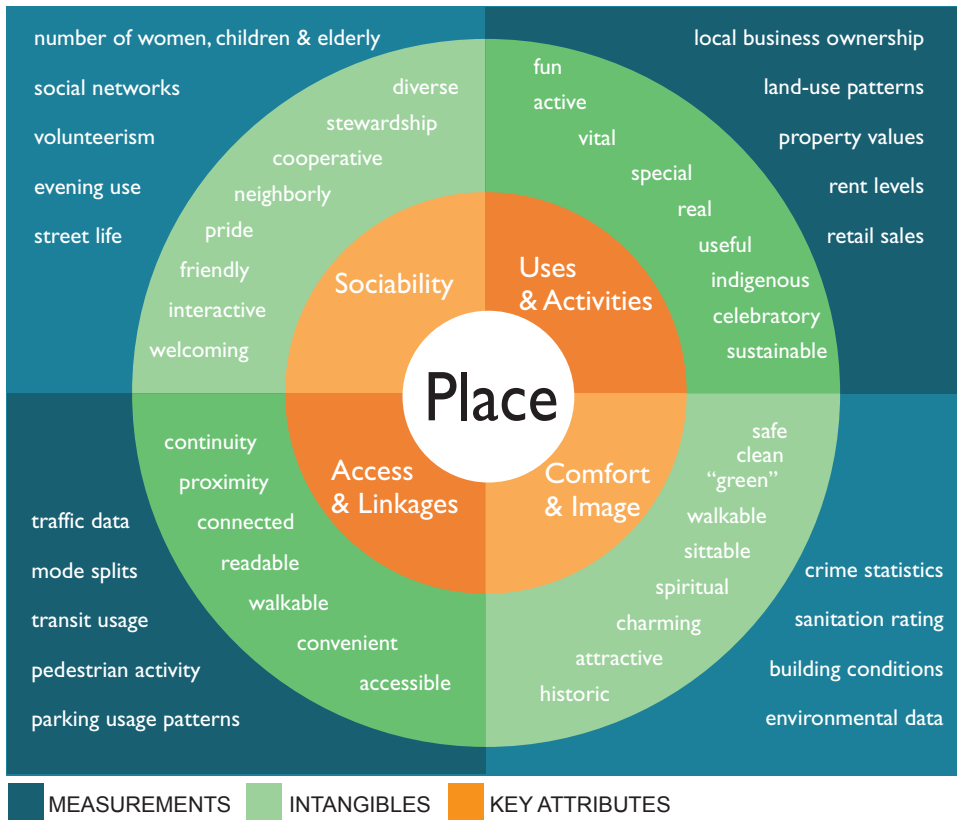
## STRUCTURING THE PPE OBSERVATIONS

The exercise begins with a slide presentation of places that people think have good and bad qualities. After the slide show, small groups of 3-8 people spend the time in the designated area observing activities and informally interviewing people. During the site visit, participants fill out observation checklists designed by PPS, and answer questions about the space, and recommendations for improving it are solicited.

## REACHING CONSENSUS

After the observations, the groups return for a discussion of what each group found. People describe their findings using slides of the observation areas for reference. PPS facilitators help to develop suggestions for improvement into a plan of action appropriate to the location.

# What Makes a Great Place?



## Place Performance Evaluation A Tool for Initiating the Placemaking Process

PPS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating and sustaining public places that build communities. We provide technical assistance, education, and research through programs in parks, plazas and central squares; buildings and civic architecture; transportation; and public markets. Since our founding in 1975, we have worked in over 1,000 communities in the United States and around the world, helping people to grow their public spaces into vital community places.

SITE #: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Builds & Supports the Local Economy

- Small-scale entrepreneurship
- More quality goods available
- Higher real estate values
- Local ownership, local value
- More desirable jobs
- Increased currency velocity
- Greater tax revenue
- Less need for municipal services

## Nurtures & Defines Community Identity

- Greater community organization
- Sense of pride and volunteerism
- Perpetuation of integrity and values
- “Mutual coercion,  
mutually agreed upon”
- Less need for municipal control
- Self-managing

## Fosters Frequent & Meaningful Contact

- Improves sociability
- More cultural exposure, interaction
- Exchanges and preserves information,  
wisdom, values
- Supports barter system
- Reduces race and class barriers
- Feeling of interconnection

# Place

## Creates Improved Accessibility

- More walkable
- Safe for pedestrians
- Compatible with public transit
- Reduces need for cars and parking
- More efficient use of time and money
- Greater connections between uses

## Promotes Sense of Comfort

- Visually pleasing
- Generally stimulating
- Sense of belonging
- Greater security
- Better environmental quality
- Feeling of freedom

## Draws a Diverse Population

- More women, elderly, and children
- Greater ethnic and cultural pluralism
- Encourages a range  
of activities and uses
- New service, retail,  
and customer niches
- Variation and character  
in built environment
- Encourages community creativity

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# The Benefits of Place