HOW TO STUDY PUBLIC LIFE

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2 WHO, WHAT, WHERE?
It is necessary to ask questions systematically and divide the variety of activities and people into subcategories in order to get specific and useful knowledge about the complex interaction of life and form in public space. This chapter outlines several general study questions: how many, who, where, what, how long? An example is given showing how each basic question has been studied in various contexts.

The list of questions that can be asked about the interaction between life and form is essentially endless. The questions listed in the paragraph at left are the most basic, and, naturally, can be combined in any way. When asking where people stay, it is usually relevant to ask who they are, how long they are staying or some other combination of questions.

It is not possible to draw up a list of fixed questions that can be investigated in all areas or cities. Every city is unique, and observers must use their eyes, other senses and good common sense. Most important is that the context and site determine the methods and tools, and on the whole, how and when the study should be conducted.

However, common to all sites and situations is that at the very moment observers cast their gaze on a group of people or types of activities or otherwise fix their attention on the diversity of activities, groupings, tendencies, etc., it becomes patentely clear that the prospect is complex, overlapping and not easy to study. Different types of activities are interwoven: recreation and purposeful activities take place side by side. We can speak of chains of events -- and of continuous change. Precisely because the interaction between life and space is so complex and difficult to pin down, it can be useful to ask basic questions in an insistent, journalistic manner, and to ask them again and again.

To focus attention on who, what, where and other basic questions can provide general knowledge about behavior in public space and special knowledge of a specific issue in practice. Studying these key questions can provide documentation and understanding of a given pattern of activity or concrete knowledge about who goes where or not in a given place. Thus these elementary questions can be used in practice as well as for more basic research purposes.
New Road, Brighton, England

How many people are walking and how many are stationary? In Brighton New Road, a public life study helped to determine use before and after improvements were made. The number of pedestrians rose by 62% after the street was converted into a pedestrian-priority street in 2006. The number of stationary activities increased by 600%.

This type of before-and-after headcount quantifies the extent to which the initiative is used. In Brighton, the numbers document that New Road has shifted status from a transit street to a destination. Statistics like these can be used as a good argument for prioritizing other pedestrian projects, both local and general.
Question 1. How Many?

Making a qualitative assessment by counting how many people do something makes it possible to measure what might otherwise seem ephemeral: city life. Almost all cities have a traffic department and precise data on how many cars drive through major arteries while departments for ‘pedestrians and public life’ are almost unknown, as are headcounts of people.

Counting provides quantitative data, which can be used to qualify projects and as arguments one way or the other in decision-making processes. Indisputable measurements can often serve as convincing arguments.

Starting with the question of how many is basic to public life studies. In principle, everything can be counted, but what is often registered is how many people are moving (pedestrian flow) and how many are staying in one place (stationary activity).

The question of how many or how few comes in several varieties in public life studies, such as before and after urban improvement projects. If we know how many people are staying in a square, and we then improve the square and count the number of people again, we can evaluate the success of the renewal project. If the objective was for more people to stay at the square, counting how many using the same methodology on comparable days will quickly reveal the degree of success or failure. Usually quite a number of counts have to be made in order to be able to compare different times of day, different days and different seasons.

A number on its own is seldom of interest. It is important that results can be compared. Therefore, it is essential to register precisely and comparably. Factual conditions like weather and time of day must also be noted consistently and precisely so that similar studies can be conducted at a later date.
Question 2. Who?

We see gathering knowledge about people's behavior in public space as the cornerstone of a public life study. When we say 'people', we mean widely different groups of people measured by various parameters. It is often relevant to be more specific about precisely who uses various public spaces. While registration can be done on the individual level, it is often more meaningful to investigate more general categories such as gender or age.

Basic knowledge about the behavior of various groups of people can be used to plan more precise ways of accommodating the needs of women, children, the elderly and disabled, for example. We emphasize these groups here because they are often overlooked.

The general question of gender and age can be registered by observation, naturally allowing for a certain degree of inaccuracy in making a subjective evaluation of age group. It is difficult or impossible to categorize people with respect to job or economic situation, for example, on the basis of observation alone.

Bryant Park, New York City

Bryant Park is in the middle of Manhattan between Times Square and Grand Central Terminal. One possible indicator for whether a park is safe is the presence of a sufficient number of women. Every day at 10:00 and 6:00 p.m., the park officer walks systematically through Bryant Park and clicks on two counters to record the number of men and women, respectively. The park officer also notes weather conditions and temperature.1

In Bryant Park the ideal gender division is on the order of 52% women and 48% men. If the percentage of women falls, it could be a sign that park safety is on the wane. Weather conditions do play a role, however, as Bryant Park's data show that the number of women in the park increases in warmer weather.2
Question 3. Where?

Planners and architects can design public space on the basis of where people are expected to go and to stay. However, many trampled footpaths across otherwise pristine lawns attest to the fact that people do not always act as intended. In order to encourage crowds of pedestrians to flow smoothly and still create the best conditions for inviting people to use public space, it is vital to have basic and specific knowledge of where people move and stay in individual spaces. Studies of movement and staying can help uncover barriers and pinpoint where pedestrian paths and places to stay can be laid out.

If the study area is a delimited city space, it is often relevant to study where people stay: on the edges, in the middle or evenly distributed in the space? In public, semi public or private zones? The where question allows observers to zoom in on positioning relevant to function or elements such as furniture, garden gates, entrances, doors, bollards, etc.

If the study area is a neighborhood or quarter, it can be relevant to determine where people and activities are gathered or dispersed to a greater or lesser degree. On the city level this can mean registering or localizing numerous functions, activities, direction of pedestrian flow and preferred places to stay.

Gråbrødre Torv, Copenhagen

Microclimate, the local climate of a specific site, can heavily impact whether people stay there. If people are walking from point A to point B, they can usually live with sub-optimal wind, sun or shadow conditions, but for staying activities a place needs a higher level of climate quality.

This springtime photo from Grey Friars' Square in Copenhagen clearly shows the significance of climate on whether people stay in a given space. In cold Northern European climates, people want a place in the sun. The photo also illustrates how trees serve as a focal point, how many people use benches, and the fact that people keep a certain social distance between themselves. That people attract more people is also exemplified.

The where question can relate to where people situate themselves relative to other people, buildings and city spaces or to the climatic conditions. If we try to picture the same place on a gloomy overcast day or at night, where people stay will most probably be very different.
Necessary and Optional Activities

This illustration of necessary and optional activities comes from "People on Foot" by Jan Gehl in the architectural journal *Arkitekten* in 1968. It was part of the first large study of the correlation between public space and public life.

This early categorization of activities is part of Gehl's basic work to describe life in city spaces. Later, the general categories of necessary and optional activities were described in a historical perspective in the book *New City Life.*

In the course of the 20th century, fewer necessary activities took place in public space. If this illustration of activities had been made in 2012, it would include new activities such as talking on cell phones — while walking, standing and seated — smoking in public space due to changes in smoking legislation and many types of exercise. And the type of activities would vary widely from place to place.
Question 4. What?

Mapping what happens in city space can provide specific knowledge of the types of activities in an area, such as staying, commercial or physical activities, and the requirements these various activities make on the physical environment. This can be relevant for shop owners, for city planners with regard to designing city space, and more generally or politically, in relation to a given theme such as health or safety.

Broadly speaking, the primary activities in public space are walking, standing, sitting and playing. The list of activities that can be registered is almost endless. It is often most meaningful to note several types of activities at the same time. However, it is important to find the categories that best cover registering the various events. While activities can also be noted less categorically, being systematic will sharpen your general awareness.

In general, public space activities can be divided into two categories: necessary and optional. Necessary activities could include shopping, walking to and from a bus stop, or working as a parking enforcement attendant, police officer or postman. Optional activities comprise strolling or jogging, sitting on a stair step, chair or bench to rest, reading the newspaper, or simply enjoying life while walking around or seated. Activities that are necessary for some people may be freely chosen by others.

In a historical perspective, the use of public space has gradually evolved from activities primarily motivated by necessity to those more optional in nature. Social activities can be developed around either necessary or optional activities and are conditional on the presence of others: people in the same space, passing each other or looking at each other in connection with other activities. Examples include children playing, greetings and conversations, common activities, or the most widespread social activity of all: passive contact in the form of just watching and listening to other people.

It is important for public life studies to define and record social activities in order to support the function of public space as meeting place. Here is where people meet others who live in the quarter, community and city. Meeting others can be stimulating and interesting and, in a broader sense, heavily impact the individual’s understanding of the social context of life.

One can differentiate between social activities with people who know each other and encounters with strangers on the street. While it is less common to talk to strangers, it is easier to strike up a conversation with people standing nearby, even strangers, if you experience something together in common space. William H. Whyte uses the term triangulation to define the scenario where two people who don’t know each other start talking due to an external event. The catalyst could be a street artist or physical object like a sculpture. Or it could be an unusual condition such as hail in summer, power failure, fire in a neighboring building or anything else that spurs people who do not know each other to start talking.

Sunday morning on Swanston Street, Melbourne, Australia.
The average speed it took randomly selected pedestrians to cover 100 meters. Four registrations were made on Sroget, Copenhagen's pedestrian street, in January, March, May and July, respectively. The photographs and captions are from an article by Jan Gehl entitled “People on Foot” in Arkitekten, 1968.

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The photographs and captions are from an article by Jan Gehl entitled “People on Foot” in Arkitekten, 1968.

The 1968 study above comprises four registrations of the average speed of pedestrians covering a 100-meter stretch along the walking street in Copenhagen. The entire 1.3 km-long street can be walked in 12 minutes, but in practice, speed is influenced by weather, age, mobility, errands and whether the pedestrian is alone or part of a group.

A representative segment of pedestrians was shadowed through a 100-meter stretch and their speed registered in seconds per 100 meters. The graph clearly shows the tendency to walk slower in warmer weather. Shown at bottom is how different people walk at different speeds: "...individual pedestrians walk faster than people in groups. Individual men walk fastest (record: 48 seconds/100 meters), with teenagers and women slightly slower. Then come people in groups, and just like in any other convoy, they are forced to follow the speed of the slowest participant. The slowest time (137 seconds/100 meters) was clocked by a police officer on patrol."
Question 5. How long?

Walking speed and the amount of time spent staying can provide information about the quality of physical frameworks. It is often the case that people walk slower and stay longer in places relative to the qualities and pleasures offered.

Registering human activity in relation to the physical environment presents a number of special problems, first and foremost because the question involves processes chains of events - undergoing continuous change. One moment is not like the previous or the one to follow. In contrast to measuring buildings, for example, time is an important factor in activity studies.

The time dimension is essential to understanding life in public spaces, which makes how long a key question. In addition to the passing of days, weeks and months, the individual study also concerns how long it takes people to cover a certain distance, how long they stay in a certain place, and how long the activity lasts.

The answers to these questions are relevant for finding out how long we are willing to walk in order to use public transport, or to determine which activities contribute to the whole activity level, for example.

Basic knowledge about how long various activities last can qualify the work of orienting selected public spaces toward inviting people for longer periods of staying while allowing other spaces to have a transient character. In some places, it is desirable for people to hurry by as quickly as possible in order to make room for others.

Studies of the duration of various activities can illustrate more precisely how much time is spent on specific activities. For example, it doesn't take long to walk to and from a parked car on a residential street, and only slightly longer to empty the mailbox, while activities such as gardening or children's play can take considerably longer. Obviously, establishing numbers for the relationship between activities of short and long duration can provide new insights.

In addition, the time spent by individuals is often easy to influence through careful planning and design.

As a rule, it does not take a major expensive initiative to invite people to stay longer. However, if they do stay longer, an invitation can significantly influence their perception of whether or not a place is vibrant and worth a stay, or if they would rather move on as quickly as possible to something better.
COUNTING, MAPPING, TRACKING AND OTHER TOOLS
This chapter describes various tools for systematizing and registering direct observations of the interaction between public space and public life. A few cases of indirect observations are mentioned, such as using cameras or other technical devices to register or look for traces of human activity.

Regardless of the tools selected, it is always necessary to consider the purpose and timing of the study. General questions of this type are dealt with briefly in this chapter, and the key registration tools described. Other tools exist, of course, but we present those that the authors of this book consider the most important based on their own experiences.

Purpose of Study and Tool Selection
Purpose, budget, time and local conditions determine the tools selected for a study. Will the results be used as the basis for making a political decision, or are some quick before and after statistics needed to measure the effect of a project? Are you gathering specific background information as part of a design process, or is your study part of a more general research project to gather basic information over time and across geographic lines?

The choice of tools is dependent on whether the area studied is a delimited public space, a street, a quarter or an entire city. Even for a delimited area, it is necessary to consider the context of the study holistically, including the local physical, cultural and climate aspects. A single tool is rarely sufficient. It is usually necessary to combine various types of investigation.

Choosing Days – Wind and Weather
The purpose of the study and local conditions determine which points in time are relevant for registration. If the study area has a booming night life, the hours right up to and after midnight are important. If the area is residential, perhaps it is only relevant to register data until early evening. Registration at a playground can be wrapped up in the afternoon. There is a big difference between weekdays and weekends, and in general, patterns change on days leading up to holidays.

Since good weather provides the best conditions for outdoor public life, registrations are usually made on days with good weather for the time of year. Naturally, regional differences are dramatic, but for public life studies, the criterion is the kind of weather that provides the best conditions for outdoor life, especially staying. The weather is particularly sensitive for registering stays, because even if inclement weather clears up, people do not sit on wet benches, and if it feels like rain, most people are reluctant to find a seat. If the weather no longer lends itself to staying in public space in the course of a registration day, it can be necessary to postpone the rest of an investigation to another day with
better weather. It is usually not a problem to combine registrations from two half days into one useful full day study.

Registration can be interrupted by factors other than weather. A large crowd of fans on their way to a game or a demonstration would significantly change an ordinary pattern of movement.

The results of registrations will always be a kind of modified truth because, hopefully, nothing is entirely predictable. Unpredictability is what makes cities places where we can spend hours looking at other people, and unpredictability is what makes it so difficult to quite capture the city's wonderfully variable daily rhythm. The impulsiveness of cities heightens the need for the observer to personally experience and notice the factors that influence the urban life. Herein lies one of the principal differences between using man as registrar rather than automated tools and machines.

**Manual or Automated Registration Methods**

The observation tools described are primarily manual, which by and large can be replaced by automated registration methods. In the 1960s, 70s and 80s, most studies were conducted manually, but newer technological solutions can register numbers and movements remotely. Automated registration makes it possible to process large amounts of data. It does not require the same manpower to conduct observations, but does require investments in equipment as well as in manpower to process the data collected. Therefore, the choice of manual or automated method is often dependent on the size of the study and the price of the equipment. Much of the technical equipment is either not very common or in an early stage of development, which makes it even more relevant to consider the advantages and disadvantages. However, it is likely that automated registration will play a more prominent role in public life studies in future.

In addition, automated registration must often be supplemented by a careful evaluation of the data collected, which can end up being as time consuming as direct observation.

**Simple Tools Almost for Free**

All the tools in the public life toolbox were developed for a pragmatic reason: to improve conditions for people in cities by making people visible and to provide information to qualify the work of creating cities for people. It is also important for the tools to function in practice. The tools can be adapted to fit a specific task, and are usually developed to meet the general professional, societal and technological development.

Generally, the tools are simple and immediate, and the studies can be conducted on a very modest budget. Most studies only require a pen, a piece of paper, and perhaps a counter and stopwatch. This means that non-experts can conduct the studies without a large expenditure for tools. The same tools can be used for large or small studies.

Key for all studies are observation and the use of good common sense. The tools are aids for collecting and systematizing information. The choice of one tool over another is not as important as choosing relevant tools and adapting them to the purpose of the study.

In order to compare the results within a study or compare with later studies in the same or some other place, it is essential to make precise and comparable registrations. It is also important to carefully note weather conditions and time of day, day of the week and month in order to conduct similar studies later.
Counting

Counting is a widely used tool in public life studies. In principle, everything can be counted, which provides numbers for making comparisons before and after, between different geographic areas or over time.

Mapping

Activities, people, places for staying and much more can be plotted in, that is, drawn as symbols on a plan of an area being studied to mark the number and type of activities and where they take place. This is also called behavioral mapping.

Tracing

People’s movements inside or crossing a limited space can be drawn as lines of movement on a plan of the area being studied.

Tracking

In order to observe people’s movements over a large area or for a longer time, observers can discreetly follow people without their knowing it or follow someone who knows and agrees to be followed and observed. This is also called shadowing.

Looking for traces

Human activity often leaves traces such as litter in the streets, dirt patches on grass etc., which gives the observer information about the city life. These traces can be registered through counting, photograping or mapping.

Photographing

Photographing is an essential part of public life studies to document situations where urban life and form either interact or fail to interact after initiatives have been taken.

Keeping a diary

Keeping a diary can register details and nuances about the interaction between public life and space, noting observations that can later be categorized and/or quantified.

Test walks

Taking a walk while observing the surrounding life can be more or less systematic, but the aim is that the observer has a chance to notice problems and potentials for city life on a given route.
Counting

Counting is basic to public life studies. In principle, every thing can be counted: number of people, gender division, how many people are talking to each other, how many are smiling, how many are walking alone or in groups, how many are active, how many are talking on their cell phones, how many shop windows have metal bars after closing, how many banks there are, and so on.

What is often registered is how many people are moving (pedestrian flow) and how many are staying (stationary activities). Counting provides quantitative data that can be used to qualify projects and as arguments in making decisions.

Numbers can be registered using a handheld counter or by simply making marks on a piece of paper when people walk past an imaginary line. If the goal is to count people staying, the observer typically walks around the space and does a headcount.

Counting for ten minutes, once an hour provides a rather precise picture of the daily rhythm. City life has shown to be quite rhythmic and uniform from one day to the next, rather like a lung that breathes. Yesterday is very much like tomorrow.

Naturally, it is crucial to conduct the count for exactly ten minutes, because this is a random sample that will later have to be repeated in order to calculate pedestrian traffic per hour. All of the individual hours will then be compiled in order to get an overview of the day. Therefore, even small inaccuracies can invalidate the results. If the site is thinly populated, counting must be continued for a longer interval in order to reduce uncertainty. If anything unexpected happens, it must be noted: for example, a demonstration involving lots of people, road work or anything else that might influence the number of people present.

By conducting headcounts before and after initiatives in city space, planners can quickly and simply evaluate whether the initiative resulted in more life in the city, broader representation of age groups, etc. Counting is typically conducted over a longer period in order to compare different times of day, week or year.

Headcounts in Chongqing, China. Registering all the pedestrians who walk by. If there are many pedestrians, a counter is invaluable (right).
Mapping

Mapping behavior is simply mapping what happens on a plan of the space or area being investigated. This technique is typically used to indicate stays, that is, where people are standing and sitting. The locations of where people stay are drawn at different times of day or over longer periods. The maps can also be combined layer on layer, which gradually provides a clearer picture of the general pattern of staying activities.

In order to envision activities throughout the day, it is essential to register several samples in the form of momentary 'pictures' in the course of a day. This can be done by mapping stays on a plan of the area being investigated at selected points in time throughout the day. Thus mapping shows where the stays are made, and the observer can use a symbol (an X, a circle, a square) to represent the different types of stationary activities - what is going on, in other words. One registration answers several questions, and the qualitative aspects about where and what supplement the quantitative nature of the counting.

This method provides a picture of a moment in a given place. It is like an aerial photo that fast freezes a situation. If the entire space is visible to the observer, he or she can plot all the activities on the plan from one vantage point. If the space is large, the observer must walk through it, mapping stays and putting the many pieces together to get the total picture. When walking through a space, it is important for observers not to be distracted by what is going on behind them, but rather to focus on what is happening abreast. The point is to capture one single picture of the moment rather than several.

Original captions from "People in Cities", Arkitekten no. 20, 1968:
1. "Winter day. Tuesday, 2.25.68 (...) Plan B1, which indicates standing and seated people in the area at 11.45 a.m., shows that all the seating in the sun is occupied, while none of the other benches in the area are being used. The largest concentration of people standing is near the hotel stand on Amager Torv. The plan also shows that people standing to talk and standing to wait are either in the middle of the street or along the facades."
2. "Spring day. Tuesday, 05.21.68 (...) As in February, about 100 people on average are standing in front of shop windows, but all other forms of activity have increased. Most marked is the growth in the number of people standing and looking at what is going on. It is warmer now, and more is happening, therefore more to look at."
3. "Summer day. Wednesday, 07.24.68 (...) The number of pedestrians, about 30%, standing in front of shop windows is unchanged. This would appear to be a constant. (...) In general it can be observed that the center of gravity in the area has shifted from the commercial street Vimmelskaftet to the more recreational square Amager Torv."
Tracing

Registering movement can provide basic knowledge about movement patterns as well as concrete knowledge about movements in a specific site. The goal can be to gather information such as walking sequence, choice of direction, flow, which entrances are used most, which least, and so on.

Tracing means drawing lines of movement on a plan. People's movements are watched in a given space in full view of the observer. The observer draws the movements as lines on a plan of the area during a specific time period, such as 10 minutes or half an hour.

Tracing is not exact, as it can be difficult to represent lines of movement if there are many people moving through a given space. It may be necessary to divide the space into smaller segments. Tracing movements on a plan provides a clear picture of dominant and subordinate lines of flow as well as areas that are less trafficked. GPS equipment can be used to register movements in a large area such as an entire city center or over a long period.

Rentemestervej
Saturday the 13th of September from 12-3 p.m.
Walking patterns at noon, 1, 2, and 3 o'clock

Registration, hand drawn sketch: Movements on a plan made in the courtyard of the Emaljkaven housing complex in Copenhagen, by Gehl Architects in 2008. Every line represents one person's movements in the space. Lines were drawn every 10 minutes on tracing paper, which was then layered to provide an overall picture of the movement patterns.
Tracking

In addition to standing in one place to register movement, observers can also follow selected people in order to register their movements, which is called shadowing or tracking. This method is useful for measuring walking speed, or where, when and to what extent certain activities take place along a route. Activities could be actual stays or more subtle acts such as turning the head, stopping, making unexpected detours, etc. The method could also be used, for example, to map the route to and from a school in order to make it safer.

Speed observations can be made with the naked eye and a stop watch by following the person whose speed you want to measure. Observers must keep a reasonable distance so that the person being observed does not get the feeling that he or she is being followed. Another option is to observe speed over a measured distance from a window or other site above street level.

If the goal is to get a total picture of an individual’s movements over a period of time, a pedometer is useful. GPS registration is also useful for measuring speeds on given routes. A variation of shadowing is to follow someone who knows and agrees to being followed and observed. GPS registration can be used for remote shadowing of selected people.

Photo from the tracking registrations on Strøget, Copenhagen’s main pedestrian street, in December 2011. The observer follows randomly selected pedestrians (every third), using a stop-watch to time how long it takes the person to walk 100 meters. When the person being shadowed passes the imaginary 100-meter line, the watch is stopped. If the pedestrian does not follow the pre-measured route, tracking that particular person is abandoned.
Looking for Traces

Human activity can also be observed indirectly by looking for traces. Indirect observation requires observers to sharpen their senses just like detectives on the trail of human activity or the lack thereof.

A core tenet of public life studies is to test the actual conditions in the city by observing and experiencing them firsthand and then considering which elements interact and which do not. What is relevant for testing differs from place to place.

Looking for traces could mean recording footprints in the snow, which attest to the lines people follow when they cross a square, for example. Traces might also be found in trampled paths over grass or gravel, or as evidence of children’s play in the form of temporarily abandoned toys. Traces could be tables, chairs and potted plants left outside in the evening, which indicate a quarter where residents confidently move their living room into public space and leave it there. Traces could show just the opposite: hermetically sealed shutters and bare porches can indicate a quarter with no signs of life. Traces can be things left behind or things used in ways not originally intended, such as traces of skateboarding on park benches.

Left: Tracks left in the snow at Town Hall Square, Copenhagen, Denmark
Right: Like everyone else, architecture students take the most direct route: The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, Copenhagen, Denmark.
Photographing

Photographs are frequently used in the field of public life studies to illustrate situations. Photographs and film can describe situations showing the interaction or lack thereof between urban form and life. They can also be used to document the character of a site before and after an initiative.

While the human eye can observe and register, photographs and film are good aids for communication. Photographing and filming can also be a good tool for fast freezing situations for later documentation and analysis. By later studying photographs or film, it is possible to discover new connections or to go into detail with otherwise complex city situations that are difficult to fully comprehend with the naked eye.

Photographs often illustrate and enliven data. In the field of public life studies, photographs of public life scenes are not subjected to the usual aesthetic principles so dear to the hearts of architects generally. Here the emphasis is not on design but rather on situations that occur in the interaction between public life and public space.

Photographs can be used generally as well as in specific projects to document life and conditions for life in public space. And even though it is a bit of a cliché, one picture can be worth 1000 words, particularly because the viewer can identify with the people in the pictures, which are often snapped at eye level.

Variations include time-lapse photography or video sequences to show situations over time, with or without the presence of the observer. The angle and size of the lens is relevant if either film or photograph is to correspond to the human field of vision.

Good observation post, good company and good study objects: Piazza Navona, Rome, Italy.
Keeping a Diary

All of the tools described above provide only random samples of the interaction of public life and public space. These samples of what is taking place can rarely provide all the details. However, details can be vital additions to our understanding of how life in public space develops as sequences and processes. One way to add detail is to keep a diary.

Noting details and nuances can increase knowledge about human behavior in public space for individual projects as well as to add to our more basic understanding in order to develop the field. The method is often used as a qualitative supplement to more quantitative material in order to explain and elucidate hard data.

Keeping a diary is a method of noting observations in real time and systematically, with more detail than in quantitative 'sample' studies. The observer can note everything of relevance. Explanations can be added to general categories such as standing or sitting, or brief narratives can aid our understanding of where, why and how life plays out in an event that is not exclusively purpose-driven. Examples could include someone mowing a front-yard lawn at several times during the day, or an older woman who empties her mailbox several times on a Sunday.

Keeping a diary can also be used as a supplementary activity, with the observer adding explanations and descriptions to facts and figures.

Keeping a diary can register events that cannot easily be documented using more traditional methods. This example shows notes from a study of residential streets in Melbourne, Australia. Shown at right is a page from a diary for the Melbourne study.

The two-page spread below depicts Y Street, Prahran, Melbourne, Australia. The physical framework is described on the left-hand page—the dimensions and form of the street. The right-hand page describes the activities taking place on the street during one Sunday.
POPULATION INFORMATION

- Average estimated income: Medium
- National groups: Greek (9 houses), Australian (9 houses)
- Predominant social structure: Families with small children (Greeks) & some couples (Australians)

ASPECTS OF STREET ACTIVITY NOT SHOWN ON MAPS

- Between 8am and 6:30pm on Sunday there were:
  - 92 arrivals in or departing from the study area made by adult pedestrians
  - 71 pedestrians passing through study area without performing interactions or activities
  - 132 motor cars or bikes passing through study area
  - Many children playing on public side of houses

LIST OF ACTIVITIES ON SUNDAY

- Walking Pies
- Carrying Pet Plants
- Pick up flowers
- Washing Garden
- Grooming
- Sweeping Front Path
- Sweeping Foot Path
- Supervising Children
- Loiimping, Throwing Fence at Flowers
- Taking Grapes to Neighbours

EXCERPTS FROM SUNDAY DIARY

1:09 Five kids are now sitting in nr 12, there is a change longue on the verandah. Kids on and around it.
2:06 Mrs nr 12 comes out, chats with kids, goes into nr 10, does not knock, walks straight in.
2:16 Mrs nr 10 has been talking for the last half hour from her verandah across road to 2 ladies in nr 13, also to nr 12.
2:47 Lady blue jumper walks through from North & into nr 12 comes out of 12 into 10, walks straight in, rings bell, on the way.
12:06 3 men talking at nr 13, 2 in garden, 1 on footpath. Man on footpath bending away still chatting.
12:10 Man still bending away, man halfway down next-door fence still chatting.
12:13 Man finally walks off, one of garden men goes next door, the other stays leaning on fence 13.
1:39 Old lady in white sweep, front verandah, puts broom over gate and sweeps, footpath a bit, still standing in garden. Looks up & down stops sweeping & just stands there (30 mins)
Test Walks

To make test walks, the observer walks selected important routes, noting waiting times, possible hindrances and/or diversions on the way.

There can be great differences in walking a distance measured in sight lines and a theoretical idea about how long it takes to walk from point A to point B, and the time it actually takes to walk that distance. The actual walk can be slowed by having to wait at stoplights or by other hindrances that not only slow the pedestrian but make the walk frustrating or even unpleasant. Test walks are a good tool for discovering this type of information.

Test walks were carried out as an important element in the public life studies conducted in Perth and Sydney, Australia (1994 and 2007, respectively). In both cities, pedestrians spent a significant amount of time waiting at the many traffic lights prioritizing car traffic. The test walks proved to be a strong political tool in efforts to provide better conditions for pedestrian traffic.
Test walks in Sydney showed that up to 52% of total walking time was spent waiting at traffic lights.
GOOD PLACES TO STAND

Studying preferred places to stand at a public square

Who: Jan Gehl
Where: Piazza del Popolo, Ascoli Piceno, Italy
When: Friday, December 10, 1965, 5:30 pm
Method: Behavioral mapping
Published: Jan Gehl together with Ingrid Gehl, “Mennesker i byer” (People in Cities. In Danish), Arkitekten 21/1966

Activities in public space can be divided fundamentally into those that are transitory and those that are stationary. Transitory activities can be recorded simply by using a counter to count the number of pedestrians who walk selected stretches. Other methods of ‘counting’ are needed to get an idea about stationary activities. Behavioral mapping is a simple tool well suited for a space that is not too large.

The 1965 studies of the good places to stand at the square in the Italian town of Ascoli Piceno illustrate this method. By plotting in the position of all the people at the square who are not walking, the observer needs to make only one registration to get a good overview of the good places to stand.

On this rather cool (19°C) December day at Piazza del Popolo, 206 people were recorded at the square at 5:30 p.m., of which 105 were walking across the square, while 101 were standing. The study was carried out in less than 10 minutes.

Like similar studies, the one at the square in Ascoli Piceno shows that pedestrians typically crisscross space, while people standing have carefully chosen their spots at the edge of the space.

Clearly preference is for standing by the columns of the archways, under the archways and along the facades. On the square itself, all the people found standing are involved in conversations. If someone meets an acquaintance while walking in town, they tend to stop and talk at the place where they met, even if it is in the middle of the square.

Studies like this have helped draw attention to the importance of edges, a topic that has since played a key role in our understanding of the interaction between public life and public space.

In Piazza del Popolo, behavioral mapping was used to register stationary activity, and patterns formed where there were few and many stays relative to the buildings, design of space, other people, etc. These studies clearly show what was later described as the edge effect: the fact that people were more likely to stay at the edge of spaces. Behavioral mapping can provide a clear picture of how people stay in a selected public space.

Top: Behavioral mapping is used to show where people are standing: everyone standing on the piazza at a given point in time is indicated on the plan.
Bottom: “Here in semi-darkness or by the pillars, one can be present and yet discreet, can see everything that is going on but remain partially hidden.”
In 1965, Jan Gehl received a grant for a six-month study tour to Italy to gather basic material about the interaction between public space and public life. Situations that supported the data gathered were photographed underway.

It was clear early on in the process that people do not always have an obvious practical reason for being in public space. If you ask them directly, they might tell you that they are in town to shop or run errands. The many good reasons and sensible arguments made for being in public space often prove to be rational explanations for activity patterns that weave together errands and pleasure. In this context, rationally explained behavior can cover stays in public space for the purpose of looking at people and public life in general. The selected photographs from Italy (and one from Denmark) on the opposite page show the ambiguity of actions, including a number of excuses for staying in public space.

Later studies supported this conclusion with data, but in these early studies, it is the photographs that document a number of excuses for people to be in public space.

The observers kept their eyes and ears open while gathering data and taking photographs over a long period, which led them to conclude that people’s presence in public space can often be characterized as postponed necessity. While it is true that people leave home for a rational reason, in many situations the real reason for choosing public space is simply to be there to see and be seen, in other words.

The observations underline the importance of making sure that public space has something to offer, and that this ‘something’ need not be a huge display of flora and fountains.

A bench to sit on or a couple of pigeons for entertainment can be enough to create life in public space—but the most important element is other people.

The photographs illustrate several ways of embracing public space, various types of activities. Motifs are people in public space, and how public space and buildings can support or discourage human activity. In contrast to traditional architectural photographs, here individual architectural traits are secondary to the public life unfolding in public space.

Over the years, Jan Gehl has captured innumerable small situations that describe people’s behavior in cities. These photographs from the mid-1960s were taken before the digital age, and the motifs were carefully selected indeed, because it was expensive to take and develop pictures.
The function of the city for people

Need for social acknowledgement. Promenading is one of the ways to satisfy the need to see and be seen. (Rome, Italy)

A newspaper is a handy prop to use as an excuse for staying in an eventful place in the city. (Mantova, Italy)

The need for passivity. The city's active spaces provide highly acceptable conditions for people to be passive. (Lucca, Italy)

Supervising children at play is an excellent reason for these mothers to stay in public space. (Blagård Square, Copenhagen, Denmark)

The need for movement, light and air. These needs are secondary in the city, because they can be satisfied in so many other places. (Aiezzo, Italy)

Hungry pigeons can be the purpose of a walk as well as an acceptable excuse for staying in public space. (Milan, Italy)