

Chapter 3: Methodology

There is much literature concerning characteristics of gathering places, especially from the design perspective. These are not focused on any specific age group.

In looking at specific age groups in the existing literature, much attention has been given to the elderly and children and the spaces for their social interaction. In the past few decades, more has been written about teenagers and their presence in shopping malls and community open spaces. Young adults, on the other hand, have not received the same attention. As a group, they are only occasionally mentioned in the general literature of gathering places.

Since little is written about young adults and their places of social interaction, I conducted my own research using methods of environment-behavior research. Through the use of observations, interviews, and questionnaires, environment-behavior research investigates how qualities of the physical environment effect actions and behaviors.

The data collected are both quantitative and qualitative. “Observing behavior in physical setting generates data about people’s activities and the relationship needed to sustain them; about regularities of behavior; about expected uses, new uses, and misuses of a place; and about behavioral opportunities and constraints that environments provide” (Zeisel, 1981, 111). For example, in *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980), Whyte and a team of researchers used time-lapse cameras to observe how people use and respond to design and programming characteristics of parks and plazas. In *Death and Life*

of Great American Cities (1992), Jane Jacobs discusses the functions and qualities of urban neighborhoods. Her research is based mainly on her observations of residents and their activities in New York City neighborhoods.

To compliment the observations, interviews and questionnaires provide information into what people think, know, and feel about their physical environment. In *Neighborhood Space* (1975), Hester writes about the importance of understanding user needs in designing neighborhood parks, which are determined through observations, but also interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups.

In my exploration of what type of place Japantown is for young adults and what characteristics contribute to making inviting gathering places from the young adult perspective, I used a combination of environment-behavior research methods. In the next chapter, chapter 4, I will discuss community concerns raised regarding the limited activities for young adults in Japantown. The community concerns are identified through interviews, observations, and participation in community meetings. In chapter 5, I examine places in San Francisco and the East Bay where young adults and their friends spend leisure time. I used interviews to identify these places, and site observations to see the types of activities young adults are engaged in and to determine how the design and programming characteristics of these places support the activities.