

Homogenization of Public Space in Downtown Development

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# ***Part 1: Background***

## **Introduction:**

This research looks at how new and renovated public spaces, specifically in downtown areas, have been developed in the last decade to represent the shifting needs of the people using it, and to serve the needs of those in control of it. It examines the design processes and driving factors which have resulted in the generation of seemingly homogeneous public spaces. A goal of this research is to illustrate the importance of public space as a tool for building social capital through its representation, and inclusion, of the local community.

According to Carmona homogeneous public space is the result of “globalization processes, mass culture, and the loss of attachment to place” (Carmona, 2010) which has led to uniform responses in the development of public space. Homogeneous public space is a term being used here to describe public spaces which have a high percentage of similar aesthetic qualities, measured by the use of similar design elements, strategies, spatial organization, and programming arrangements independent of their respective context. While it is unnecessary for all public spaces to be uniquely different from one another, there is the potential “danger that elements of continuity and character that might have been part of the distinctive qualities of a place are lost” (Carmona, 2010) when spaces become homogeneous across regions.

As defined by the American Planning Association, a public space may be a “gathering spot or part of a neighborhood, downtown, special district, waterfront or other area within the public realm that helps promote social interaction and a sense of community” (APA). In the same description they go on to list the guidelines for what

makes great public spaces. The ones most appropriate to understanding the social impacts that public space can have are:

- 1.4: What purpose does it serve for the surrounding community?
  - 2.4: How does this place encourage use by a diverse section of the public?
  - 3.1: What makes this place stand out? what makes it extraordinary or memorable
  - 3.5: What is the history of the space, and how is it remembered or passed on from one generation to the next?
  - 3.7: What is it about the space that contributes to a sense of community?
- (APA)

These guidelines highlight the number of social connections that individuals can have to public spaces. These factors should be given the same consideration as other economic, political, and environmental drivers during the initial design and development processes.

### **Hypothesis:**

The questions that drive this research are:

- 1: What are the driving forces behind the design processes that result in creation of homogeneous aspects of space?
- 2: How does the design of homogeneous public space cater to specific uses and management by the public?
- 3: How does the development of homogeneous public space influence the social and political environment of the surrounding area?

The working hypothesis behind these questions is that: A prescriptive process which drives design, development, and implementation favors the economic growth/revitalization of a downtown. This is leading to homogenous spaces being created which lack an appropriate relationship to their immediate context. In the book "Place-

making and Policies for competitive Cities,” Sako Musterd and Zoltán Kovács state that “Over the past decades, sense of place has become a valuable commodity and culture has become an important economic activity” (Musterd, S., & Kovács, Z. 2013). As a result, the ways in which public space is managed and its ownership roles are becoming more intricate to meet the various needs of interest groups. This in turn is leading to the “general homogenization of the public built environment” (Carmona, 2010) as communities are more likely to emulate strategies that have been proven effective elsewhere in addressing similar issues.

### **Methods:**

The first step in performing this research was to perform comparative studies of the plan and design process of four award winning, downtown civic projects. These projects include:

- Grand Park, Los Angeles, CA
- Directors Park, Portland OR
- Sundance Square, Fort Worth, TX
- Cleveland Public Square, Cleveland, OH

These projects were chosen as they represent a range of climates, cultures, and regions across the country. It is important to note that these are representative of emerging trends in public space design and implementation practices as they have all been developed/renovated within the last decade. Through project design analysis I looked into how these projects are formally conceived and situated within their respective contexts. The project design analysis consists of a qualitative and

quantitative interpretation of each project in relation to one another. By using existing images and plan drawings I will document the spatial, programmatic and contextual elements of each development to be able to make direct comparisons between the different projects.

The second step was to conduct interviews with the designers/project managers of each project. Interviews with Rios Clementi Hale Studios (designers of Grand Park), ZGF and Olin (designer of Directors Park), and James Corner Field Operations (designers of Cleveland Public Square) were conducted to learn the role of the design process in the development of homogeneous spaces. Michael Vergason Landscape Architects (designers of Sundance Square) was not able to be reached for participation in this process. The questions asked of each of the groups were as follows;

- What was the main conceptual driver behind the design?
- What were the most influential factors that drove the design (social, economic, political)?
- How much influence did the public agencies (clients) overseeing the project have on the final design?
- What was the most important outcome that was trying to be achieved through the design?
- How much input did the public have on the final design and when, if at all, did you look to receive their feedback?
- What do you believe is the most successful aspect of the design?
- What is the most unique feature of the space?

By taking answers from each of the design firms, I was able to make comparisons to determine whether or not the production of homogeneous public space is a product of a homogeneous design process, or if the level of homogeneity between each space is reached as a product of varying factors and conditions (different paths to the same conclusion).

The third step was to conduct additional interviews with the respective agencies (Group-Plan Commission for Cleveland Public Square, Portland Development Commission for Directors Park, and the City of Los Angeles for Grand Park) who had a role in the implementation process, along with research through other outside sources (news articles, websites, design publications), to learn what the respective goals were of each project. The client agency for Sundance Square was not able to be reached for participation in this process. Understanding what the goals were from city (client) perspective, whether they be social, economic, or aesthetic will be used to comparatively critique the outcome of the final product. The questions being asked were as follows;

- What was the main objective of developing/renovating the space?
- Were there any specific design features or strategies that you wanted to see implemented?
- What were the main driving forces behind the initial push to develop the space (social, economic, political)?
- How much input did you receive from the public in regards to what they wanted to see in the space?
- How was the project funded?
- How are the spaces managed in terms of security and surveillance?
- What do you believe has been the most successful aspect of the project?
- Was there any negative pushback prior to the completion of the project or since it has been completed?



By understanding what the driving forces were behind design decisions and what the goals were of the public agencies behind each project, I will be able to make comparisons between projects and learn why there might be apparent commonalities in the final products. This comparison is important to the discussion as it will give evidence as to how the processes and goals behind the creation of public spaces, whether similar or different, can lead to the creation of homogenous spaces.

From both sets of interviews and design analysis the spatial homogeneity will be determined as a percentage of overlapping elements, strategies, and configurations between projects. This measurement should be considered as a relative relationship between projects where a higher percentage of overlap represents a higher degree of homogeneity and a lower percentage represents more originality. This initial analysis will be necessary to be able to draw measurable comparisons between the projects.

A final series of investigations of Grand Park and Directors Park were done through direct observation, without interviews, to observe how the public uses the space. Through these observations I will learn how each of these public spaces caters to the local community members and see first hand who uses the spaces and how they are used. It will be most important in this portion of the research to ensure that the spaces are observed at various times throughout the week (morning and afternoon during the week and weekends) to ensure that an adequate sample of user groups can be identified. By observing how the spaces were inhabited I gained insight into the community connection to each space and addressed how the public spaces guide social interaction.

## **Contribution to the Field:**

This research will add to the academic, and professional discussion by showing how civic public spaces across the country, despite appearing on the surface to be homogeneous in the way they are portrayed, in their programmatic elements, and spatial arrangements, they are in fact responding to their unique historical and contextual conditions. The similarities which do exist come as a result of similar goals, drivers, and responses to human behaviors. The ways in which people interact not only with each other but with their environments is shifting and leading people to expect a similar function out of their public spaces. This could perhaps be a result of the extreme levels of connectivity individuals have with one another through social media, technology, and other global instruments of advertising and commerce. A higher use of similar elements, strategies, and spatial configurations between the four projects will show the appearance of an emerging trend to design in a more prescriptive manner which reuses successful schemes regardless of climate/region/history. The goal of this research will be to identify this trend in homogenization and begin a conversation about what potential outcomes, positive or negative, might come as a result of this.

## Literature Review

### History of Public Space:

Public space historically has been a place that could be used to outwardly illustrate the culture and values of a place through its reflection of its context in design and use. In the article “Future of Public Space: Beyond Invented Streets and Reinvented Places,” author Tridib Banerjee discusses that “In the American context public parks served to inspire republican virtue in several forms: civic pride; social contact, especially between people from diverse backgrounds; a sense of freedom; and finally, common sense” (Banerjee, 2001) as well as democratic values such as: good citizenship, civic responsibilities, and social understandings that make for a civil society. Public spaces whether they were city squares, parks, or simply the spaces in between, were places made available to all who wanted to use them and acted as a place to bring members in a community together.

“A city's streets, parks, squares, and other shared spaces have been seen as symbols of collective well-being and possibility, expressions of achievement and aspiration by urban leaders and visionaries, sites of public encounter and formation of civic culture, and significant spaces of political deliberation and agonistic struggle.” (Amin, 2006)

From this, public spaces were then developed into markers of “recreation, physical and mental health, communion with nature and the like, making them a public

good and service” (Banerjee, 2001). Once open space was viewed as a public service, the process of producing it became bureaucratized as planning agencies tried to manage their cities. Soon after there was an inability by the cities to maintain these spaces which left many of them to deteriorate without the help of outside resources typically stemming from private funding operations (Banerjee). In an interview Jerold Kayden, a professor of Urban Studies and Design at Harvard University, described the cities view of this shift as “almost a free lunch...a good way to get public space for free, without the city allocating any of its land, or any of its money” (Hobson, 2017). As private organizations, cooperations, and benefactors began to influence the creation of these spaces, the “divergent experiences, interests, and goals [that] were seen as grounded in the very logic of an open public sphere” began to take on a more determinist role in “ascribing forms of political unity and consensus” (Boggs, 1997).

### **Privatization of the Public Sphere:**

Banerjee points out that the feeling of loss connected with the decline of public space, which is a common critique in academic literature, makes the assumption that “public life is linked to a viable public realm...public life is inseparable from the idea of a public sphere” (Banerjee, 2001). However there may be a new idea of what public life is as technologies and socioeconomic structures change. This new idea of public life revolves around an “experience economy” in which individuals look to satisfy their desires for “relaxation, social contact, entertainment, leisure, and simply having a good time...shaped by a consumer culture” (Banerjee, 2001). This shift inherently allows the “public sphere” to be housed in new places that are no longer inherently public, (i.e cafes, shopping malls, beauty salons, etc.).

As the private sector began to grow and strengthen, the social values and behavior also began to change, placing a growing importance on consumerism. Mall culture for example is an example of an “extension of the American dream of empowerment through consumption” (Boggs, 1997) which then validates the importance of “possessive individualism and civil privatism” (Boggs, 1997). As the public's behavior and desires shifted so to did the design of the public sphere in order to cater more effectively to their needs. This, later on, combined with the rapid advancements in communication and information technology has made it increasingly easier to remove oneself from the original use of the public sphere as a democratic space for sharing and debating information, establishing culture, and civic pride even further. Citizens are now more likely to identify with the businesses and markets that are available to them in a space, highlighting the role that economic growth and development play in creation of “more and more privately-produced, maintained and controlled spaces” (Varna, Tiesdell, 2010).

In a news article written by Bradley Garret, he proposes the idea that the problem with privately owned public spaces is that “they lack that kind of energy. They feel too monitored, too controlled to allow communal activity to simply unfold” (Garret, 2015). With privatization of space comes a false assumption of access. There is likely to be more barriers, more controlling features, and more screening of who can be in a privately owned space, when they can be there, and what they can do when they are there. In London this has resulted in not being able to protest or take photos in the areas around of City Hall outside of the headquarters of the Mayor and the Greater

London Authority (Garret, 2015). This shows the impact that changes in the way public space is developed and managed can begin to affect the political environment as well.

### **Effects of Consumerism and Globalization on Public Space:**

In the paper “Contemporary Public Space: Critique and Classification, Part 1” by Matthew Carmona, Carmona discusses how over-management of public spaces could be leading to “commodification and homogenization of space” (Carmona, 2010). This can be seen through the privatization of these spaces which ultimately become exclusionary to a degree. “During the past 20 years, privatization of urban public space has accelerated through the closing, redesign, and policing of public parks and plazas” (Carmona, 2010). Designers will work to implement strategies to prohibit “negative” behavior in order to ensure that safety, which is a major concern and driving force, is maintained in public spaces. If a space is not perceived as safe then it will not appeal to the public and ultimately will be left unused, and more importantly, not profitable.

Along similar lines of privatization, globalization and consumerism play a role in the way that public space is not only used but the way in which it is created. As large multinational corporations move into city centers, they often displace smaller local companies who may have had an influence on local decision makers. This creates a “disconnect between those responsible for development and the locality” (Carmona, 2010) which diminishes any previous symbolic value of particular past developments. In situations such as this, creation of space is based on the ability to earn a healthy return on investment based on the “needs of occupiers, while views of the wider community

will be a low priority” (Carmona, 2010). The shifting of importance towards economic return ignores three of the core values innate to public spaces which are:

1. “Political/democratic...which is inclusive and pluralist”
2. “Social [which] affords common ground for social interaction, intermingling and communication: It is a site for sociability. It is a stage for information exchange, personal development and social learning and for the development of tolerance”
3. “Symbolic [which is] representative of the collective and of sociability (rather than individuality and privacy)  
- (Varna, Tiesdell, 2010)

With consumption as a driving force in this particular example, the design of public space looks to minimize political, social, and cultural actors that may hinder the desired experience of the space. Authors Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee state that the treatment resulting from over-managed spaces

“succeeds in screening the unpleasant realities of everyday life...In the place of the really city, a hyper-real environment is created, composed by the safe and appealing elements of the real thing”  
-Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998

### **Homogenization of Space:**

In a blog post written by the Director of the Urban Studies program at the University of Denver, Dean Saitta discusses the issues that were seen in a public meeting for a project to improve the campuses physical and social connections to its surroundings. He notes that the four design firm finalists had very similar approaches and responses to the design problem “right down to the language used” (Saitta, 2017). In addition to the amount of similarities in proposals there was an even more apparent lacking in factors that differentiated the finalists. While there are well known strategies for designing effective and productive public spaces, there is inherently a high amount of flexibility in determining how to implement those strategies to make an appropriate proposal in response to context. Aside from their respective presentation styles, the

proposals had few “differentiators of planning and design philosophy” (Saitta, 2017).

The lack of differentiation between projects in this instance should be acknowledged as support that the design of public spaces is becoming a prescriptive process driven by something other than site response.

Despite Denver historically being a location of cultural interaction, whether positive or negative, there was very little discussion of the history of the place and its ties to Native American land. In the book “Variations on a Theme Park”, Michael Sorkin describes this lack of connection to the history of a place as one of the qualities of new cities. “Three salient characteristics mark this city. The first is the dissipation of all stable relations to local physical and cultural geography, the loosening of ties to any specific place. (Sorkin, 1992). By not taking historical, cultural, political, or other contextual factors that ground design in a particular location, new developments become “ageographic: [they] can be inserted equally in an open field or in the heart of a town... space is deparicularized” (Sorkin, 1992). The lack of differentiating factors between proposals in this University example shows the realization of this phenomena. The firm who won the bid “implicated the project as an exercise in neoliberal economic development,” (Saitta, 2017) which begs the question what driving factors are currently behind the design of public space in todays society and what are the public agencies who play a part their approval determining as important.

A case study of Clinton Square in Syracuse, New York calls attention to the role of the designer in the process of public space development and the inability to evaluate the “social roots and effects of design” (Van Deusen, 2002). As a redevelopment project, author R. Van Deusen Jr. conducted an ethnographic study of the design process and



states that the history of the process highlighted “some of the striking social inequalities of the urban design process” (Van Deusen, 2002). Through field observations, interviews, literature searches for legal cases involving the project, it was found that there was a clear effort to engage with particular groups and avoid others and that the economics and space itself were value drivers, not the people. The end result of the process was a space ultimately being designed to cater to a particular clientele while “erasing and de-legitimizing other inhabitants” (Van Deusen, 2002) such as the hot dog vendors who were prohibited from selling in the space and instead had to go to nearby side streets.

Within this study Van Deusen Jr, cites an article written by Ali Madanipour in which he states

“The changing nature of development agencies and the treatment of space as a commodity have far-reaching impacts on the way space is understood and managed. A gap has developed and widened between exchange value and use value of space, as best exemplified by the privatization of public space in the cities” (Madanipour, 1996).

This case study is important in showing that the way in which our public spaces are designed is a product of the political and economic values which are in place and illustrates the ways in which design is used to reinforce those practices. It clearly illustrates that use value in public space continues to decline as the exchange value, the economic potential of a space, grows in importance. While it may be true that the designers tasked with the creation of these public spaces are limited by the “desires of

the clients and developers” (Van Deusen, 2002) they market themselves as “doctors of society and creators of new social relations” (Van Deusen, 2002) despite the fact that their work often times reinforces existing systems of consumption, commodification, and exculsion. While there were acknowledged limitations to this study including who was able to be reached for interviews, there was still “a consistent sense of a common economic and aesthetic purpose in redeveloping the square” (Van Deusen, 2002).

### **Summary:**

Public spaces are unique pockets of recreation, culture, and identity that are strung throughout a city. They were originally zones for expression, sharing of information, debating of politics and ideas, and cornerstones of civic pride. They were products of their context and surroundings. However within the last decade there has been a shift due to the influence of outside economic and globalizing forces in design culture, on developers, and the cities and planning agencies themselves that has resulted in a stronger emphasis on consumerism and profitability of these spaces.

New development of public squares in downtown areas are appearing to use many of the same elements, strategies, and spatial relationships in their design from one place to another. This leaves the only discernible feature of each space to be the various consumerist activities they respectively host throughout the year. They are markers of economic development and represent a new singular culture. In a similar way that shopping malls became prominent development schemes in the 50’s as a result of economic and social behavior drivers, so to has public space design become heavily reliant on a singular successful design strategy. It is for these reasons that the continual development of homogeneous spaces should be researched carefully to

analyze the way in which the social makeup and identification of a place is affected over time.

As alluded to previously, homogeneity of public space can lead to a number of negative and otherwise unwanted impacts on a location. Homogeneity between parks across different contexts creates a culture of disconnected places. These disconnected places can be placed anywhere with no regard to the surrounding community which leads to disassociation and indifference by the residents who are not specifically served by these spaces.

## ***Part 2: Analysis***

**Initial Visual Comparisons (Grand Park, Directors Park, Public Square, Sundance Square):**

In order to illustrate the qualities of new public space development as a representation of the country as a whole, projects were chosen to represent a range of climates, cultures, and regions. The goal was to identify projects that could be categorized as representing emerging trends in public space design and implementation practices under the commonality of having been developed/renovated within the last decade. In addition each of the selected projects were selected for having won awards for their overall quality and service to their respective locations.

**Project Context & Information**

Projects	Completed	Land Area	Blocks	Location	Designer	Cost
Director Park	2009	.5 acres	1	Portland, OR	ZGF	\$9.5M
Grand Park	2012	12 acres	4	Los Angeles, CA	RCH Studios	\$56M
Sundance Square	2013	1 acre	2	Fort Worth, TX	Michael Vergason	\$15.8M
Cleveland Public Square	2016	5 acres	4	Cleveland, OH	Field Operations	\$50M



The following images of the 4 selected locations: Director’s Park, Grand Park, Public Square, and Sundance square were specifically chosen to illustrate the initial

feelings of homogeneity as was described in the prior literature review. The images show a number of common features from splash pools, fountain features, cafes, canopy structures, vast hardscape, and are taken from similar vantage points to better illustrate the analysis that follows.

DIRECTOR'S  
PARK



SUNDANCE  
SQUARE



GRAND  
PARK





The first feature that is most easily seen in each of the projects is the water element. In all 4 of the projects the water feature performs as a splash area for children to play in during the warmer month. In Public square the feature shifts to provide the space for an outdoor ice skating rink. The positioning of the water feature is also worth noting as the spatial relationship between elements will be a factor later on when determining levels of homogeneity between the developments. In all 4 projects the water feature is complimented by seating at its edges (moveable in the case of Grand Park and tied down in Director’s Park) which allows users of the space to enjoy the feature without needing to physically interact with it. The relationship of the cafe to the water feature is also worth mentioning as in all 4 spaces the cafe opens up directly towards the space.

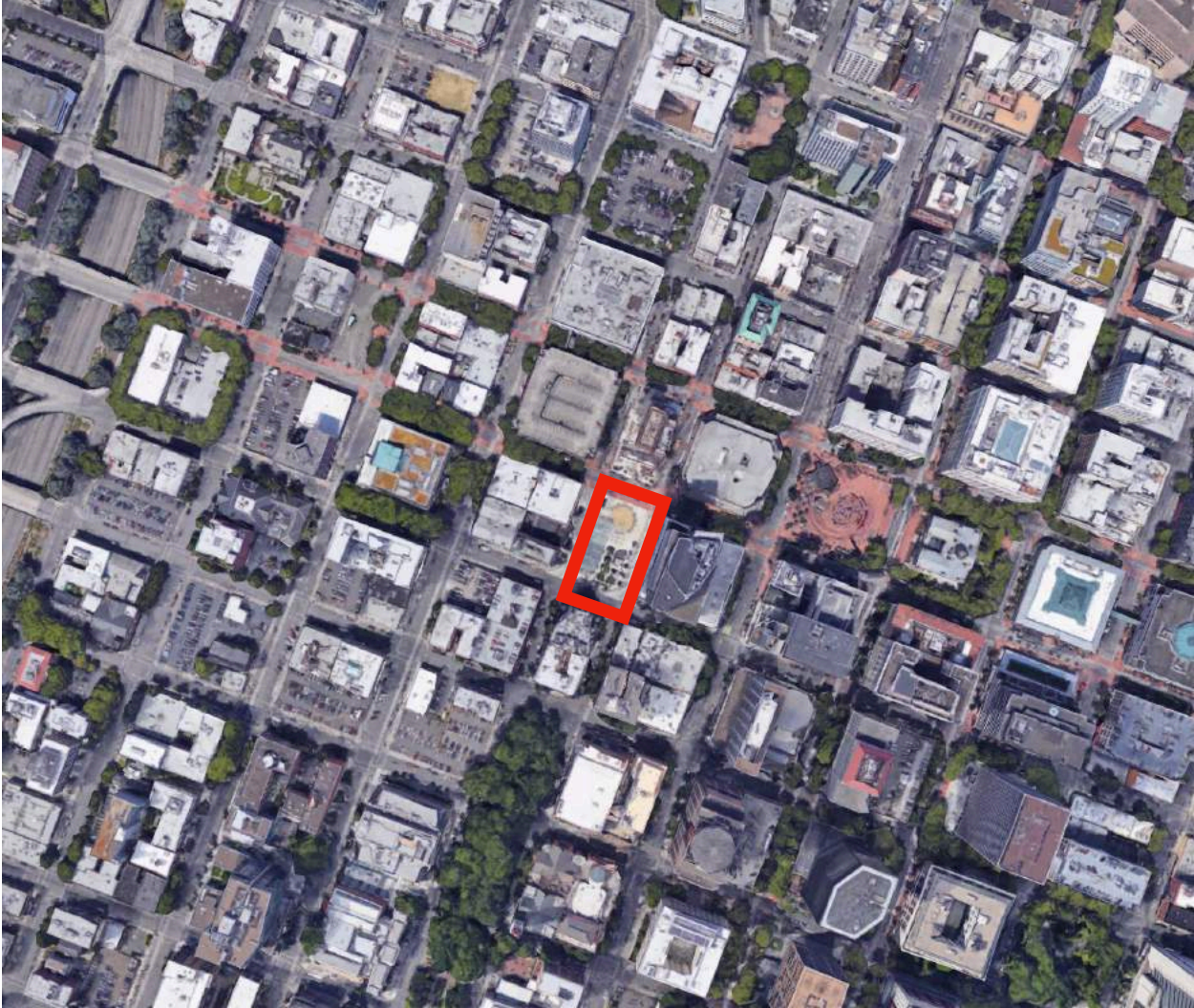


A second feature is the presence of a cafe/food spot in all 4 projects. Starbucks is the primary cafe in both Grand Park and Sundance Square. In Public Square it is a local restaurant called Rebol, and similarly a local owner operated the cafe in Director's Park when it first opened. Recently the cafe in Directors Park was closed briefly and has now reopened as "Portland Tropical Gardens: Host to Center for Art and Public Wellness." Grand Park is the exception in respect to the location of its cafe. Because of the grade change in Grand Park the Cafe is not located in close proximity to the street at a corner the way it is in the other 3 projects. By placing the cafe at the corner, it can draw people off of the street and into the space. Public Square appears to be an exception in that its restaurant is a standalone structure and does not have any other programmatic elements attached to it. In Grand Park and Director's Park, public restrooms are both located under a unifying roof/canopy structure. In Sundance Square, the cafe is part of a larger retail building which has a mural on the interior facade facing the square (this could potentially form a cultural/contextual reference that is associated with that particular cafe).

The next common element is the contextual location of each of these developments. All 4 projects are in densely developed areas of their respective locations downtown. This allows the spaces to benefit from the existing activity of the area and cater to a larger number of people than if it were developed at the edges of the downtown. Being in high traffic areas provides the basis for common elements related to transportation. In the case of Grand Park and Director's Park, both space have underground parking garages. These garages manifest themselves in the park as small vestibules at the edges. Public Square has the unique quality of being a transportation

hub however, Grand Park, Director's park, and Sundance Square are serviced very well by their respective mass transit systems and have stops that frame the boundaries of the blocks. Similar to Grand Park and Director's Park, Sundance Square has 2 associated parking garaged which are located 1 block away and multiple valet stations at its immediate edges.

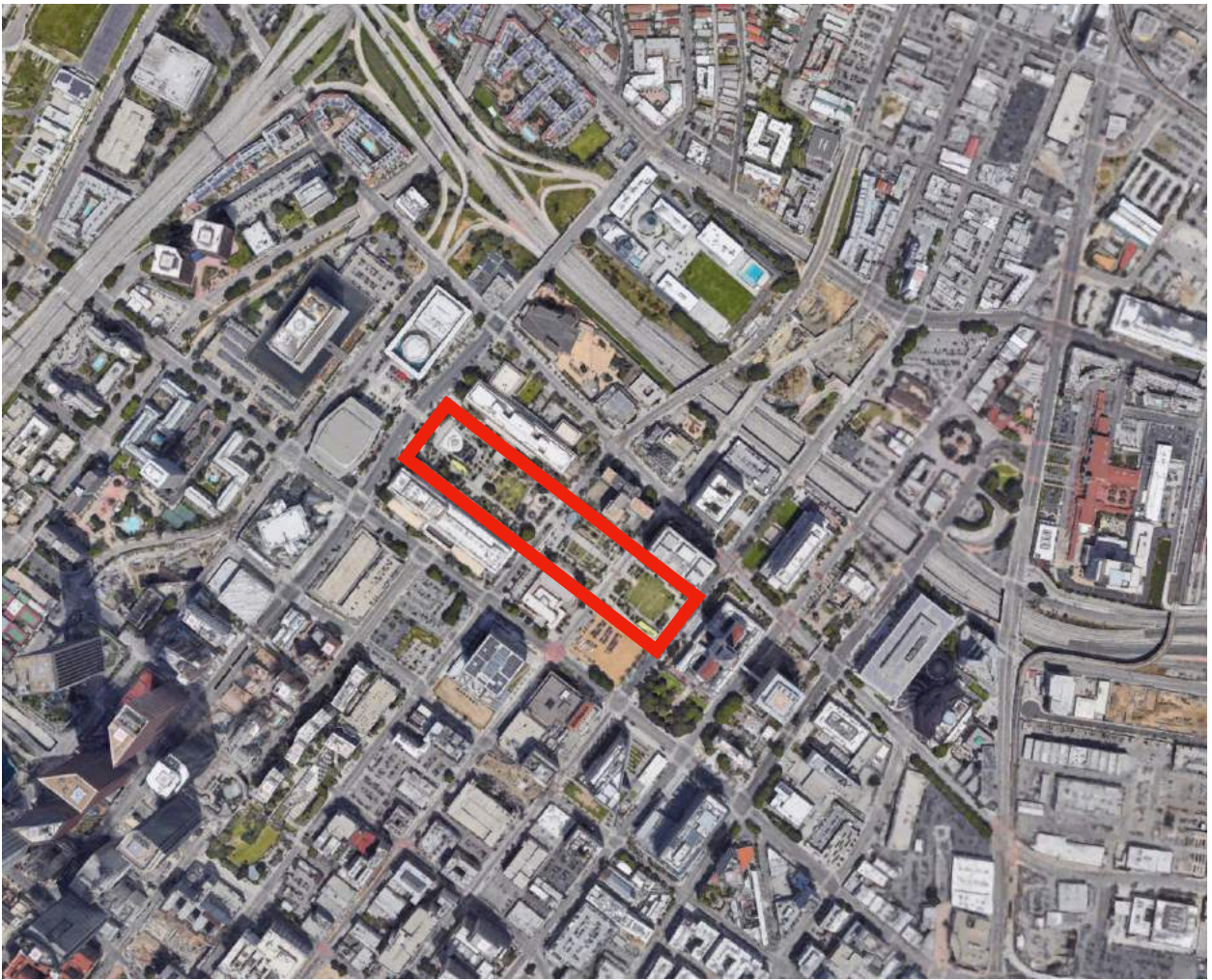
DIRECTOR  
PARK  
CONTEXT



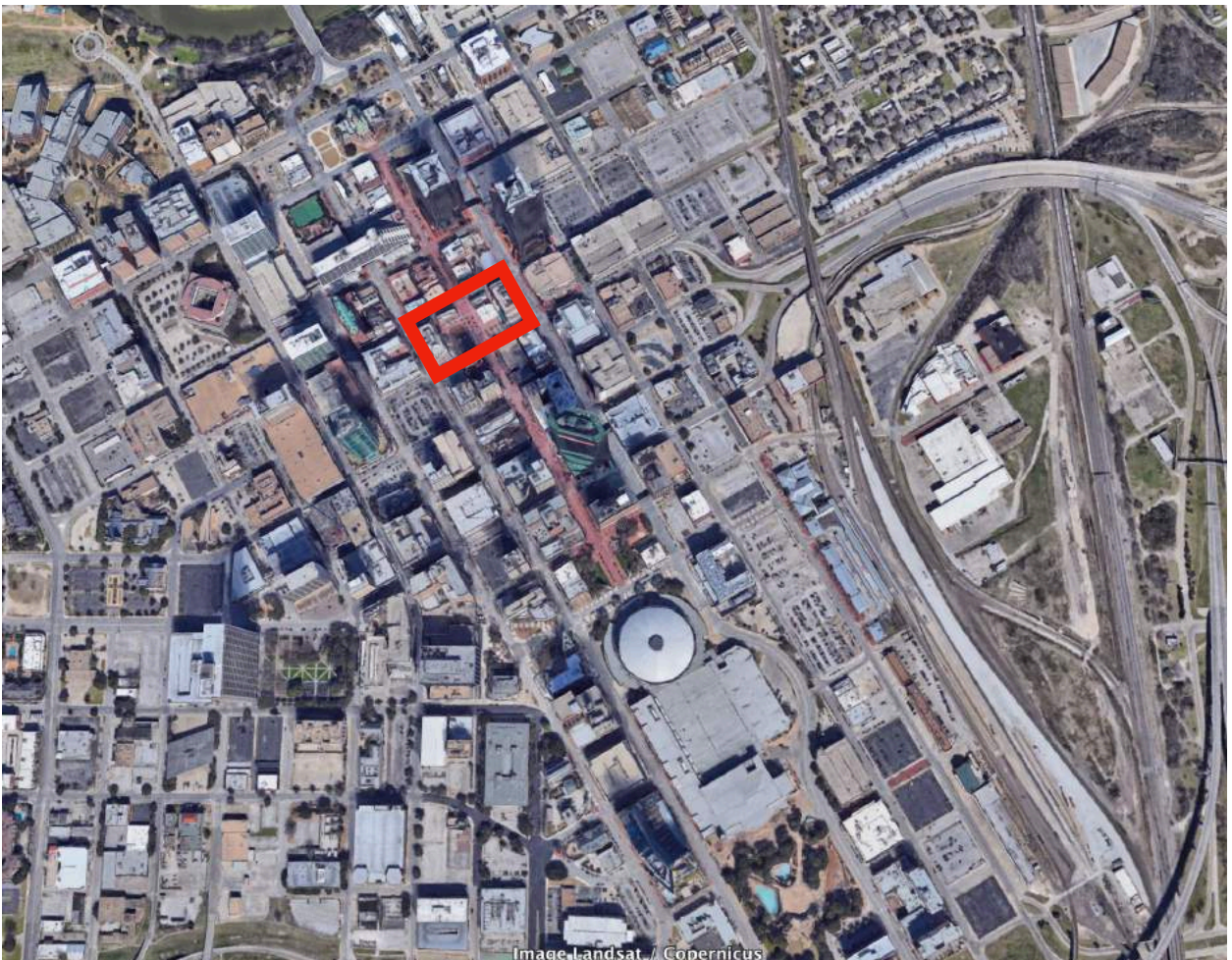


Another element is the proportion of hardscape to vegetated landscape (green space). This element begins to divide the 4 projects into 2 separate typologies. In Both Director's Park and Sundance Square the projects use hardscape as the defining ground cover. The instances where trees and green space are used is very specific to particular areas and visually can be seen as marking the outer boundary of the space. In this way the green space functions as part of the programmatic elements of the space. In Director's Park the cluster of trees at the southeastern corner provide shading over the play area (big chess set). In Sundance Square the 2 sets of tree clusters act to

GRAND PARK  
CONTEXT



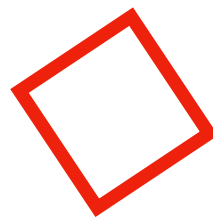
SUNDANCE  
SQUARE  
CONTEXT



shade and separate a seating area. On the other hand both Grand Park and Public Square use large amounts of green space and trees as tools to shape the space. Despite the fact that Grand park and Public Square are more heavily vegetated, much of the green space is not habitable or useable. Instead they are planted areas which provide some seating on their edge. Their primary use is as a visual aesthetic rather than a programmatic one as it is in Director's Park and Sundance Square.

### **Overall Design Analysis:**

The following series of aerial photographs of each space provides the initial diagrams of major features (seating, food, entertainment, art, etc...) in each space. Additionally they provide visual annotations of important contextual relationships (neighboring businesses, traffic patterns, proximity to public transit, etc...) between the public space and its surrounding environment.

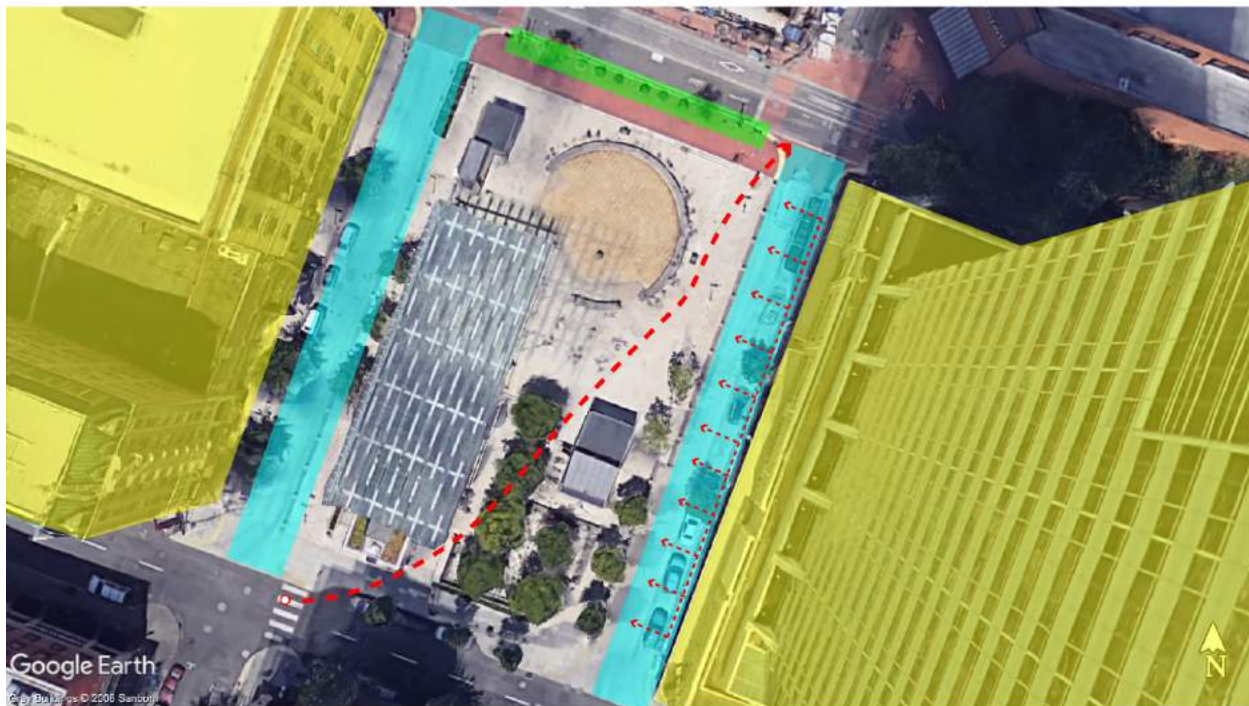


Directors Park- Portland, Oregon: Major Spatial Features



- Parking Garage Access
- Public Restroom
- Retail Space w/ Office
- Splash Pool
- Play Area (Big Chess)
- Park Attendant Office
- Canopy Structure
- Seating

Directors Park- Portland, Oregon: Contextual Annotations



- Mixed-Use (Ground Floor Retail/Commercial)
- Change in Paving (Continuation of Pedestrian Realm)
- Bike Share
- Major Pedestrian Traffic

Sundance Square- Fort Worth, Texas: Major Spatial Features



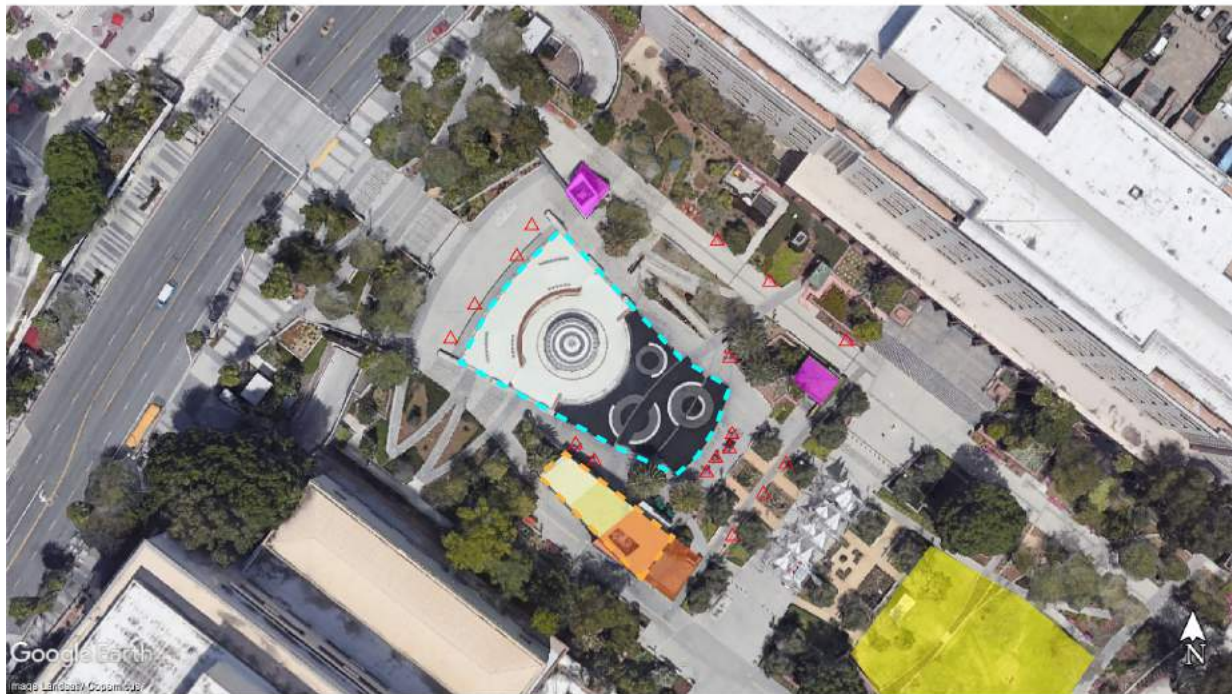
- Retail Space
- Canopy
- Restrooms
- Splash Pool/Water Feature
- Stage
- Pavillion
- Valet Parking
- Seating

Sundance Square- Fort Worth, Texas: Contextual Annotations



- Mixed-Use (Apartments, Office Retail)
- Visitors Center
- Entertainment
- Transit Stop
- Change in Paving (Extension of Pedestrian Realm)

### Grand Park- Los Angeles, California: Major Spatial Features



- Parking Garage Access
- Public Restroom
- Retail Space w/ Office
- Splash Pool/Fountain
- Play Area (Big Chess)
- Canopy Structure
- Seating

### Grand Park- Los Angeles, California: Contextual Annotations



- Government Office Buildings
- Mid Street Cross walk (Connection to Dorothy Chandler Pavillion)
- Food Trucks
- Major Pedestrian Traffic



Public Square- Cleveland, Ohio: Major Spatial Features



- Retail Space
- Transit Stop
- Splash Pool/Ice Rink
- Play Area
- Monuments
- Seating

Public Square- Cleveland, Ohio: Contextual Annotations



- Mixed-Use (Financial Institutions Senior Living, Office, Retail, etc...)
- Change in Paving (Extension of Pedestrian Realm)
- Government Building
- Casino

The overall design analysis shows each of the developments from a more holistic perspective in their immediate contexts. By looking at these projects from a birds eye view allows us to make broader comparisons on the 2D quality and arrangement of the space. It also allows the projects to be understood as a whole as opposed to pieces of a whole as was done in the initial visual comparisons. This analysis is meant to supplement the initial visual comparisons.

The design analysis shows that despite there being visual similarities at the ground level, the actual context and development of each project is quite unique upon first inspection. It also illustrates the presence of unique programmatic elements that exist in each project (or acknowledges the spaces which can be used to house additional programming on select occasions.) Perhaps the most interesting features to note are the surrounding building types in each project and the functions they serve. Understanding the differences between these uses can begin to portray how the use of each of these spaces might differ from one another and who they would serve most regularly. For instance, the location of Grand Park being situated between 2 government office buildings and across the street from 2 performance halls would indicate that its uses would be different than grand park which is situated between mixed-use office/ retail buildings.

<b>Project</b>	<b>Surrounding Land Use (Immediate)</b>
<b>Director Park</b>	Commercial/Office/Residential
<b>Grand Park</b>	Office/Entertainment/Government Buildings
<b>Sundance Square</b>	Residential/Office/Comercial
<b>Public Square</b>	Casino/Office/Commercial

## **Spatial & Programmatic Comparisons:**

By using the information gathered from the initial visual comparisons and preliminary design analysis, the projects are separated into 2 different typologies for the spatial comparisons. The typologies are “compact” and “sprawl.” I created this method of designating parks into “compact” and “sprawl” typology based on their association, placement, and arrangement of programmatic elements in the park. These typologies were created in order to better group the projects based on their relative scale, presence on the site and relation to the context. The following diagram shows the design analysis of each project in relation to one another. It is clear in this diagram that the arrangement of elements in Director’s Park and Sundance Square are situated in a way that establishes a clear boundary and places each element within close proximity of each other (compact). On the other hand, Grand Park and Public Square are more ambiguous in their regularity and structure of elements on the site and look to spread apart elements (sprawl).

Spatial Comparison Diagram



Compact

Sprawl



○ - - - - - Director's Park  
(Compact, Clear Form,  
Defined Boundaries)

○ - - - - - Grand Park  
(Sprawling form,  
Clear Separation of  
Function, Linear  
Progression)

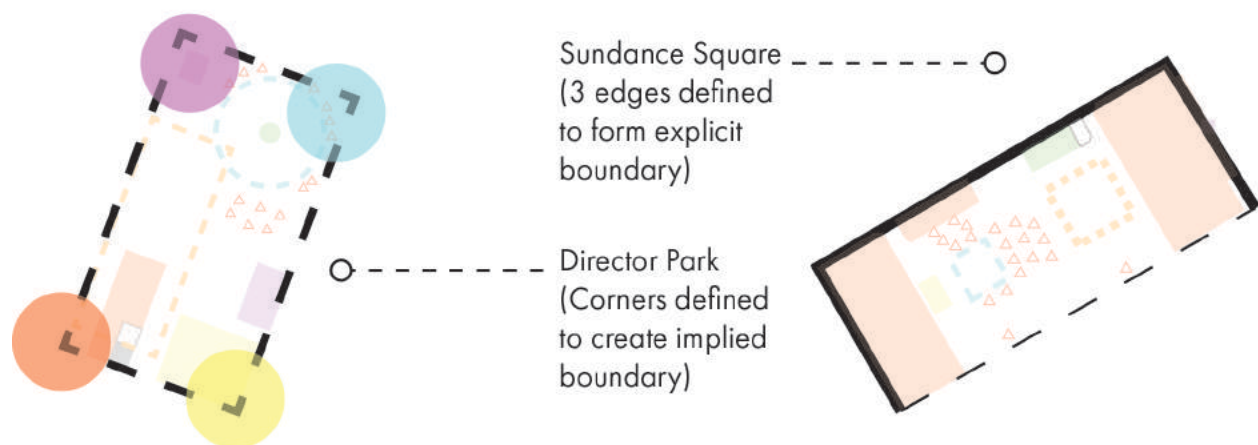
○ - - - - - Public Square  
(Sprawling Form,  
Clear Separation of  
Function, Orbital  
Progression)

○ - - - - - Sundance Square  
(Compact, Clear Form,  
Defined Boundaries,  
Clear Separation of  
Function)



Spatially, what makes both Director's Park and Sundance Square fit the compact typology is the way its edges are treated. In both of these projects there is a clear definition of space based solely on the placement of the programmatic elements. In Director's Park the edges are defined at the corners with unique elements: The water feature at the northeast, parking vestibule at the northwest, cafe and park attendant at the southwest and play area at the southeast. In Sundance Square the boundary is defined less by its unique programmatic elements but instead by creating an outer edge of retail space and placing the performance and activity spaces inside of it.

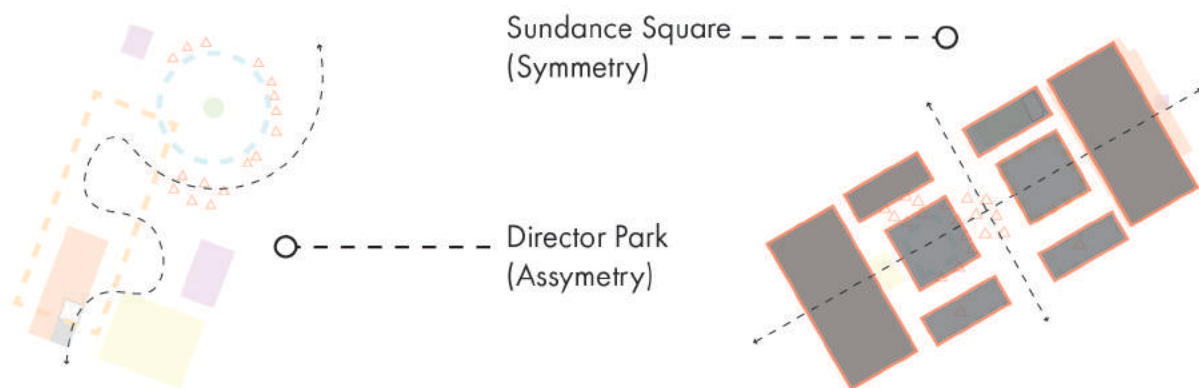
Boundary Definition Diagram



Within this compact typology, there is another subcategory that could be created which is represented by these projects. This has to do with the symmetry and placement of the programming within the block. In Director's Park, the programmatic elements are placed in an asymmetric manner which creates a unique experiences when moving through and inhabiting the space. This also allows for specific relationships to be created between programmatic elements. On the other hand, Sundance Square is much more symmetrical in its organization. Although the programmatic elements are not mirrored across both major and minor axis, the sizes

and location of elements are (i.e the fountain and retail buildings are mirrored across the minor axis and matched in the pavilion, building and canopy. The north side buildings are reflected across the major axis in the tree covered seating areas). This creates a highly organized space which allows for clear and defined use of the entire space. Both of these spatial organization strategies has benefits and can be used to create an understanding of the space and guide its function.

#### Spatial Organization Diagram



While each park uses a different organization strategy, the shared programmatic elements have similar relationships to each other spatially when analyzing the diagram above. In the compact spatial arrangement of Director's Park and Sundance Square, both of the water features are surrounded by primary seating spaces and furniture. For both projects, the water feature acts as a splash pad during warmer months for children to play in. This allows patrons to sit in close proximity to experience the water feature or for parents to sit and observe while their children play in the splash pad.

In both projects the canopy structure is located to provide a protected relationship not only to the water feature but also to performance spaces. Additionally, in both spaces the canopy acts as a distinct lighting feature which make the developments

an iconic feature at night as well. In Director's Park, the canopy provides a covered stage for performers and the steps on the north and south side provide fixed seating in addition to the seating that surrounds the water feature.

SYMPHONY PERFORMING AT DIRECTOR PARK UNDERNEATH THE CANOPY. THE CANOPY DEFINES THE SPACE OF THE STAGE AS WELL AS A PORTION OF THE SEATING.



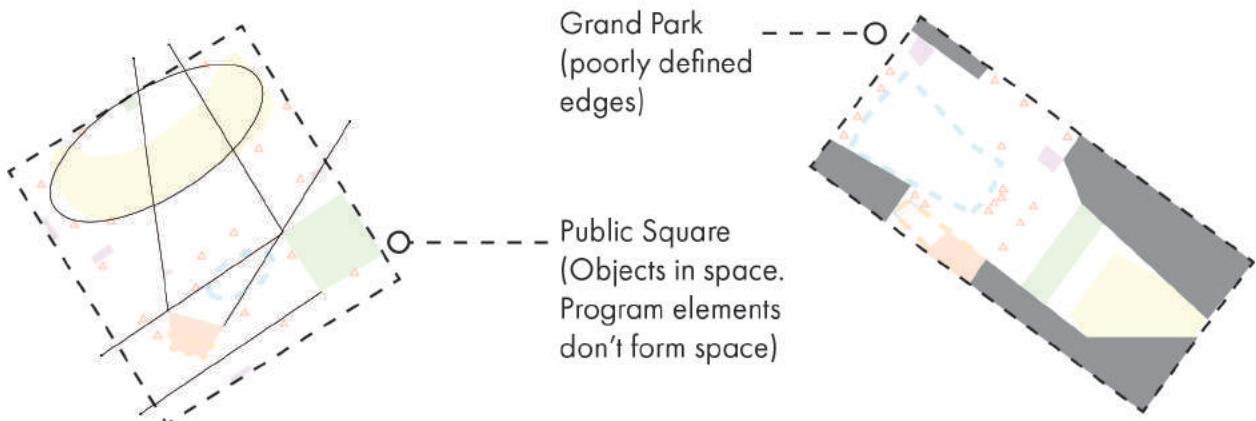
In Sundance Square the canopy Provides a sheltered seating area on axis with the main water feature (there is a smaller feature adjacent to the pavilion which acts as a buffer between both areas) as well as the performance stage which sits directly between it and the building on the west. This allows patrons to sit under the canopy and maintain direct views to whatever visual attractions may be happening at the time. During particular times of the year, the area under the canopy, more closely in connection to Director's Park provides covered "performance space". Most notably during Christmas time, the canopy provides a space for social gathering, movement, and interaction with the Christmas tree, and pictures with Santa station that are put in place.

THE CANOPY HELPS TO DEFINE SPACE AND PROVIDES A PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO INTERACT AND BE PART OF THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS EVENT AT SUNDANCE SQUARE.



Spatially what makes Grand Park and Public Square fit the sprawl typology is the lack of definition at their respective edges and the placement of objects (programmatic functions) in space as opposed to using those elements to create space as is done more effectively in the compact typology. One thing to note that is unique about both of

#### Boundary Definition Diagram

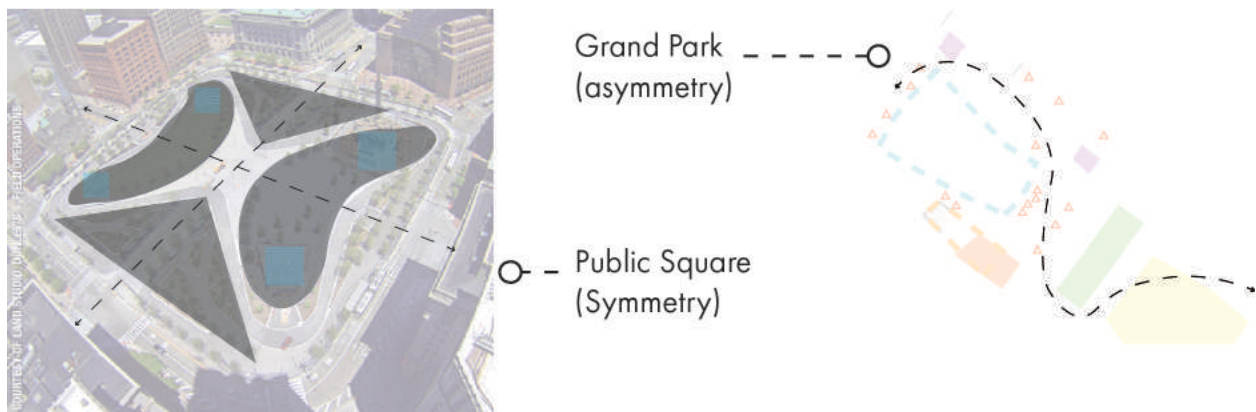




these projects which could be considered a factor as to their being categorized under the sprawl typology is their size. Both of these projects span 4 blocks and as such had a much larger project area to unify. that being said both of these projects are intended to bring major connective green/open spaces into otherwise heavily developed areas of the city. Green space is often implemented in a more organic/amorphous way which may also have led to the sprawling sense of both of these projects.

Similarly to the compact typology the subcategories of spatial organization can be applied here as well. In Grand Park, similar to the compact Director Park asymmetry is seen most evidently as an organizational strategy. While there is a sense of unilateral symmetry across the minor axis, it is not as strong as it is in Public Square and in Sundance Square and therefore should not be categorized as such. In Public square, again similar to Sundance Square, its counterpart in the compact typology, bilateral symmetry is seen fairly clearly. Although its programmatic elements lie as objects in space within the block, the formal definition of the landscape creates an identifiable balance within the blocks across both axis (this can be seen more clearly in an arial photo than in the diagrams shown previously).

#### Spatial Organization Diagram



Again, while each park uses a different organization strategy, the shared programmatic elements have similar spatial characteristics. In the sprawling spatial arrangement of Grand Park and Public Square, both of the Cafes on site act as objects in space and help to draw attention to the water feature which they each open up towards. In Grand Park the cafe is not the only building element but it does establish its own presence on the site which compliments the large water feature. In grand park the

THE FOUNTAIN AT GRAND PARK IS A LANDMARK FEATURE IN DOWNTOWN L.A. THE STARBUCKS IN THE BACKGROUND SERVES TO COMPLIMENT THE FEATURE AND DRAW/KEEP PEOPLE IN THE SPACE.



water feature serves two functions: a splash area for children to play in and a larger visual feature that stands as a landmark element in the park. In Public Square, the water feature similarly serves a dual function: again as a splash area for kids during the warmer months and then as an ice rink during the winter months. The cafe in Public square functions more as a standalone element than does that of Grand Park, in the way that the seating associated with the cafe is roped off to ensure that it is reserved for paying customers only.

Another major element in both of these projects is the play area/ large open grass area. In both Grand Park and Public Square this space is on the opposite side of

REBOL CAFE IN PUBLIC SQUARE CAN ACT AS A STAND ALONE FIXTURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND ROPES OFF IT'S SEATING AREA TO ENSURE THAT ONLY ITS PATRONS CAN USE THE SPACE.



the water feature and cafe and establishes its own spatial identity. Similar to the way in which Director Park was able to provide a play area (big chess) in the southeastern corner of the site, isolated in a way from the other major programmatic elements, so to is the play area in these two projects separated from the other activities. This could

THE OPEN GRASS AREA TO THE EAST OF THE FOUNTAIN IN GRAND PARK SERVES TO HOLD VARIOUS ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE WEEK AND MONTHS.



perhaps be seen as a strategy for addressing safety by separating disparate activity spaces. Or perhaps separating by different kinds of activity space in general allows for more even distribution of activity throughout the site.

THE OPEN GRASS AREA AT THE NORTH END OF PUBLIC SQUARE SERVES TO HOLD RECREATIONAL AND EVENT SPACE THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.



Program Element	Director Park	Grand Park	Sundance Square	Public Square
Water Feature	x	x	x	x
Play Area	x	x		x
Cafe	x	x	x	x
Park Attendant Office	x	x		
Monument (art, sculpture, statue, etc.)	x	x	x	x
Moveable Seating	x	x	x	
Performance Space	x	x	x	x
Public Restroom	x	x	x	
Pavillion			x	
Parking Garage Entrance	x	x		
Food Trucks		x		x
Ice Rink				x
Dog Run		x		
Canopy	x		x	

## **Role of the Designer:**

The design teams associated with each of these projects obviously play a critical role in the production and outcome of the final space. However it is often the case that the designers have outside forces, whether they be political, economic, environmental, social, etc...which guide their decisions. It is also the case that the designers are most often subject to the needs and wants of the clients therefore it is important to understand the process and capacity that each of the design firms associated with each of these projects (except for Sundance Square which could not be reached for participation in this research) played and how they contributed to the spatial, programmatic, and formal expression of each space.

## **Director Park:**

I was able to speak with an individual at ZGF, the lead design firm on the project, who acted as Project Manager through the beginning of the construction phase. They were able to discuss the process they went through with public engagement, design reviews, their various interactions with the city, and pushback from the local residents.

First it is important to note the history of the space and what the existing quality of the area was before the decision was made to turn the block into Director Park. In the 1920's-40's the block supported a mostly commercial role in Portland but was soon turned into parking lots as a result of diminishing activity in the Downtown area. This block along with 11 others were marked as being intended park space but due to other circumstances its ownership was lost to developers.

In terms of public engagement, the team set up a tent in Pioneer Square before the initial design phase began. This allowed people to come in and leave comments about what they wanted to see in the space and who they thought it should serve. This outreach was conducted in multiple languages to ensure that as many opinions and concerns could be documented as possible. Throughout the later development stages of the project, the firm continued to periodically update the public and receive their input through a series of public meetings.

Two items that were subject to skepticism were the cafe and lack of grass/ planting area. The public was skeptical about the cafe in that they felt it would sit empty, not be able to sustain a business in its location, and ultimately would better be suited to house a different type of function. In regards to the lack of grass/planting area the residents of Portland are so accustomed to having green space throughout their city it seemed out of the ordinary to propose a primarily hardscape design. In order to address the former issue, the design team at ZGF felt that the coffee shop was necessary to create the type of atmosphere, and create the space that everyone wanted. The space that the public wanted was one that served the local people. A place that could be inhabited throughout the day by various groups of individuals (i.e people reading the newspaper drinking their morning coffee, people having lunch on their breaks out in the sun, those stopping after work to grab a snack or a drink). In terms of the latter issue, Portland has a rich culture of existing park blocks that serve particular needs for the city, and it was decided that this block should compliment what was already existing rather than take away from them. Because many of the other existing spaces already had recognizable and functional green spaces, it was determined that what the city really

needed was something more durable in order to serve the expected influx of families in the area as well as young adults.

ZGF conducted a microclimate analysis in order to guide the programming of the site design. From this analysis it was determined that the southeast corner had a lot of wind and partial sun, the southwest corner was the worst because it received very little sun and heavy wind, and the northeast corner was the only place that received consistent sunlight throughout the day. As a design result to this, the water feature which was proposed by ZGF, originally intended to be a waterfall, was sited in the northeast corner to take advantage of the sunlight. The big chess set and only cluster of trees on the site were situated in the southeast corner to mitigate the wind in that zone and take advantage of the moments of sunlight. The cafe, office, and bathroom were placed in the southwest corner where the environmental conditions were the least favorable to being outdoors.

### *Grand Park:*

I was in contact with the Communications Manager and senior associate of Rios Clemente Hale Studios who was the design lead on this project. They were able to provide me with published interviews and project descriptions which discussed their role in the development of the project (<https://www.rchstudios.com/projects/grand-park/>).

Similar to the way Director Park was being used as nothing more than a parking lot, so to was the 4 block area that is now Grand Park. The development was intended to repurpose the space to serve a higher and better use in order to make a stronger connection between the people of the surrounding neighborhoods and cultural buildings that stand in close proximity such as the Disney Concert Hall, the Broad Museum, City

Hall, and the Music Hall. The goal of the design was to create a “front and back yard for the community, connecting people while representing diverse backgrounds” (Studio project Description).

The design team at Rios Clemente Hale also conducted community workshops during the design phases of the project and used the information gathered to inform the the development of the site. These workshops and community engagement were factors in programming the site and led to the ability to cater to many different scales of events in the park.

In order to achieve their goal of creating a space that was welcoming and accessible to the many different cultures and groups of people in LA, the designers brought in grades from each of the 6 floristic kingdoms as a tool to unite each of the blocks. Within each of the blocks the accommodations promote different activities and events which ensures that there is a space for everyone, both intimate and engaging.

Another feature that was important to the designers is the role that this project could play in promoting not only sustainable design practices but healthier lifestyles as well. In terms of sustainable practices, the historic fountain is serviced almost entirely on a gray water system to reduce the parks water usage. Additionally, other water collection, bio-filtration and a percolation zone at the lower lawn take advantage of the 92 ft grade change and the natural flow of water through the site. Lastly, an education outreach program works to inform others in the community about the benefits and function of these strategies so that the knowledge can be taken and applied elsewhere throughout the city. This begins to tie into its efforts to promote healthier lifestyles as well. The park provides a 2/3 pedestrian loop, dog run, open green space for children



and others for recreational activity, along with the splash pool for children all encourage members of the community to spend more time outdoors being active despite being otherwise removed from nature.

### *Public Square:*

In speaking with a project manager from Field Operations studio, I was able to learn of the relationship between the designers and the public who would be served by the new development. This particular project performed a great deal of public outreach and the design firm was very involved in the public process from the beginning.

The location that Public Square occupies was the original location of the park blocks in the city and a few of the elements that are featured now had been there from before. The commons have historically been a location in the city which was poorly designed and was not welcoming to pedestrians or to events. The location is a transit hub downtown and therefore was heavily dominated and designed for the automobile first. The goal of the redesign was to unify the 4 blocks and create a place that would bring together the various groups of people that exist in the city.

Early on, public presentations and meetings guided the design process and overall consideration of what the space wanted to be. In relation to this, the client was very involved in getting the appropriate stakeholders together to ensure that the design catered to what was most important to the people who would be impacted by it.

As part of the process working with the client and the public, Field Operations proposed 3 different schemes for the site, all based around pedestrian activity, access, and connectivity. Open space was a priority for all of the groups involved and so to was flexibility of the space. It was important that the site be able to provide a stage for formal

and informal events throughout the year in order to reactivate the downtown area and give a sense of ownership back to the people.

One of the biggest drivers of the final design was working with the transportation agency. Since the location had originally served as a major transportation hub in the area, the transit authority did not want to lose/give up its right of ways and already established services in the area. The thought of closing of a road to make the space more pedestrian friendly was not well received at the beginning of the process.

In terms of programming, the features on the southern half would perform as a platform to represent the cities historical past. It was important the the existing features were given more space to have their presence be appreciated and felt. This project is unique to the others in that the site is relatively flat and the designers artificially formed their own topography in order to articulate different spaces and create more intimate zones.

#### Director Park

##### How did they respond to the local context?

- Microclimate analysis** determined the location of the various programmatic elements.
- Chose to focus on hardscape to make a more durable space that would welcome the **expected influx of families and young adults**.

##### How did stakeholders/users influence design strategies?

- A **public engagement team** gathered input at Pioneer Square before the initial design phase began.
- Were **skeptical** about the cafe and lack of grassy/planted area.
- Transit authorities** had a large role in approving the change in street paving between the park and adjacent streets.

#### Grand Park

##### How did they respond to the local context?

- Wanted to create a "**front and back yard**" for the community, connecting people while representing diverse backgrounds" (Studio Project Description)
- Brought in plants from each of the 6 floristic kingdoms as a tool to unite all 4 blocks to create a welcoming space to the many **different cultures** and groups in L.A.

##### How did stakeholders/users influence design strategies?

- Community workshops** all the way through the design phases of the project which influenced the programming of the site.
- Prioritized **sustainable design** practices and **healthy lifestyles**.

#### Public Square

##### How did they respond to the local context?

- In terms of programming, the features on the southern half would perform as a platform to represent the cities **historical past**.
- Artificially created **topography** in order to articulate space and create more intimate zones.

##### How did stakeholders/users influence design strategies?

- Public presentations** and meetings guided the design process and overall consideration of what the site would be.
- The **transportation agency** was a major influence on the design because the site was an existing transit hub and there was already a high amount of infrastructure in place.

## **Role of the Client:**

The other role in the development of these spaces is the client, in these cases the public agencies who were tasked with redeveloping, reactivating, and rejuvenating key spaces in their respective downtowns. In a similar way in which the designers are held accountable to the clients needs, the client in cases such as this are held accountable to the public whom they serve. This relationship between client and public is important to understand the other social, political, economic, and long term factors that could play a role in the development of significant civic projects such as these.

## **Director Park:**

To get the clients perspective on this project I spoke with the Senior Project Manager of the Portland Development Commission, now known as Prosper Portland.

Echoing the brief history of the park from the previous section, the main goal in developing the site was to convert the existing surface parking lot into a park space. The park space was part of an earlier vision of connected park blocks in the downtown which had only partially been realized as a result of a number of external factors. Support and funding came as a result to avoid the construction of an above ground parking structure.

The elements and quality that the client pushed for in terms of the design of the space was to create a European style plaza/piazza space. There was a desire for something simple and elegant to fill this space of downtown. In keeping with this theme of the European plaza/piazza the city wanted to create a stronger interaction with the business across the street by blending the right-of-ways between the developments on either side into the park to create a single unified space and program. It was also a

desire to have a retail/cafe building on site along with a water feature. The water feature came as a result of wanting to keep in line with the rich history of water fountains in Portland parks.

In terms of the client working with and responding to the wants of the public, there was a lot of public input gathered from the Citizen Steering Committee and the Portland Design Commission. All in all the project took over 10 years from conception to completion which allowed plenty of time for the public to voice their opinions and concerns of the project as they arose.

Being that this development is a public space in the heart of the city, it is worth mentioning how it was funded. The total cost of the project was \$9.5 million with the breakdown as follows:

- \$4.5 million-Portland Development Commission
- \$1.9 million- City of Portland
- \$1 million- Tom Moyer/TMT Development
- \$2 million- Jordan Schnitzer

It is important to note how much of the funding was privately donated and whether or not the donation was made with conditions. In this case, Tom Moyer donated the land and \$1 million dollars in exchange for building the underground parking garage. Jordan Schnitzer donated his \$2 million because he viewed the park as a form of public art and was given naming rights.

### *Grand Park:*

I spoke with the individual who was head of capital projects for LA county at the time that the park was planned and built. They provided me the clients/cities perspective and role in the development of Grand Park.

Similar to the driving forces of Director Park, a major driving force behind the creation of this space was as a means to activate the otherwise “dead” space of the parking garage and surface parking lot. The ability to turn something that was concrete into a lively and engaging third space in the downtown area to bring people together and give a sense of ownership back to the residents was important. The park was also sold in conjunction with the development of another block nearby which would bring new residential and retail space into the area. The park was marketed as the green space for that development.

There was a lot of public outreach and engagement carried out during the predesign and construction phases of development. One of the major concerns in the development of this project was how to sustain community involvement and ownership over the space. In order to establish a strong relationship between the community and the space meetings and programs were held to get the opinions and input of the local community to hear what they believed was missing in the area. From these discussions, the need for sustainable practices/measures to be taken and open space were the primary concerns brought forth by the community. They were also influential in determining how to program and activate the open spaces and voiced their interest in seeing a dog park, spaces for entertainment, and art in the area.

Grand Park cost \$56 million dollars, \$50 million of which was put forth by the development agency that was planning the adjacent Grand Avenue Project. The park was supposed to be a later phase of a \$775 million Frank Gehry Designed mixed-use development. The time table for development of the project shifted priorities as a result of the great recession. This makes Grand Park a prime example of a public space that

is privately owned. However, the park is now managed by a non-profit group called Grand Park Foundation.

A unique concern on behalf of the city in regards to the current social and political climate is that of safety. There were many concerns about how to keep the park activated, welcoming, and safe for all of those who wanted to use the space, especially in a city as diverse as Los Angeles. A personal thought from this individual expressed the difficulties in controlling a space through security and surveillance. If there is too much security then the space becomes unwelcoming and has a sense of being unfriendly. If the space is not secured enough or if there is not enough of a visual presence of being watched then there is the risk of negative behavior occurring. The solution in this case was to employ park security that would patrol the area on a regular basis and were very strict in enforcing the park rules at when the park first opened to establish a standard of care and use in the space. Since it has been opened their presence has been backed off and the park remains more self monitored.

### *Public Square:*

I spoke with the Associate Director of LAND studio who oversees projects for the city of Cleveland and was the representative for the redesign of the Public Square project.

Again with this project, there were efforts to gather as much public input as possible during the early stages of design and development. What was unique to this project though is that rather than having specific elements or features that the public wanted to see in the space, the organization developed a set of design philosophies and design guidelines to direct the design and programming of the space. This ensured

that the design stayed true to the overall goals and quality of space that they wanted to create. The goal was to create a pedestrian first environment where it had originally been dominated by transit. There was a desire to establish this plaza as the psychological and physical heart of the city.

The process on behalf of the public agency began with a traffic study to learn how the area could be redesigned without negatively affecting the existing circulation network. Through this study it was determined that some of the streets could be closed completely and at the very least reducing the capacity of the others. This was the first step in determining the feasibility of creating a pedestrian friendly plaza.

Similar to Grand Park, the municipality did not have the resources to develop this project and was therefore funded by outside philanthropic and city city donors. This project was completed without any public funds. During the construction and development of the project a majority of people wanted to keep their distance because they were uncertain of what the outcome would be. Since its completion however the public sentiment has been overwhelmingly positive.

The cafe that is located on site has a unique distinction from the cafes in the other projects in that it is the first place to add a new address to the square since it was originally built. The cafe was placed in the square to represent and celebrate the rich food and cultural history of the the city.

## Director Park

### What were the goals of developing the space?

- Convert an existing parking lot into a park space.
- This space was part of an earlier vision of **connected park blocks** downtown.

### What was the importance of the space in serving local needs?

#### Any special needs?

- Wanted to create a **European style** plaza/piazza to place something **simple yet elegant** downtown.
- Wanted to create a stronger connection with the buildings across the street and form a **singular space**.
- Desire to have a water feature on-site to keep in line with the **history of fountains** in Portland parks.

## Grand Park

### What were the goals of developing the space?

- Activate** an otherwise dead space.
- This was marketed as the green space for the **development** of another block nearby which would bring in new residential and retail space.
- Safety**

### What was the importance of the space in serving local needs?

#### Any special needs?

- Give a sense of **ownership** back to the residents.
- How to **sustain community involvement** and ownership of the space was a major issue during design and outreach.
- Sustainability and open space** were primary concerns brought forth by the community and were manifested in the design.

## Public Square

### What were the goals of developing the space?

- Create a **pedestrian first** environment.
- Desire to establish this space as the psychological and physical **heart of the city**.

### What was the importance of the space in serving local needs?

#### Any special needs?

- Began with a **traffic study** to determine which, if any, streets could be closed or at the very least reduced.
- Wanted the cafe on site as the first new address since the square was originally built. It represents the rich food and cultural **history of the city**.

## Drivers and Decision Making factors:

In each of the projects that was further analyzed (Director Park, Grand Park, and Public Square) it was shown that each was developed in a response to their respective cities unique contextual history. The design of the spaces was responsive to the many client and public outreach meetings, sight analyses, and aesthetic principles of the firm. The process and reason behind the clients roles, again subject to the unique vision that the city had for each of the spaces.

While it is true that each project was subject to their own unique situations, the most fundamental drivers were similar. In all 3 projects the city wanted to reactivate land that was underutilized. All three projects received input from the immediate community members and key stakeholders. In these particular cases the community helped to define what some of the programming elements were to be.



The design and programs were all driven by the desire to reconnect areas of the city and give an identity back to the surrounding area. A major driver behind these projects was to give a space back to the community that they could use year-round and enjoy in the way they saw most appropriate. Additionally all three of these projects acted as catalysts to bring new life and energy into the downtown and had to react to the changing populations and future of the city.

Flexibility of space was key as well. The desire to accommodate as many different groups of people, activities, and events was important at getting the community to have a sense of ownership over the finished space. All 3 projects serve to accommodate formal and informal events and are designed to cater to both the youth and adult populations by providing different types of spaces, some intimate, some more public, that allows the different groups to exist in the same place.

Sustainability, is perhaps a more subtle driver behind the 3 developments. All 3 had some form of sustainability measure implemented in terms of water collection, gray water systems, micro-climate analysis, etc... that either affected or determined the location, arrangement, and function of the programmatic elements.

**Level of Homogeneity (Secondary Comparisons):**

The following table will organize the complexities of each project into simple categories in order to generate a quantitative measure of homogeneity between each of the projects. This table will include the unique programmatic elements of each design in order to determine the similarities that exist in the physical build out of the projects.

<b>Program Element</b>	<b>Director Park</b>	<b>Grand Park</b>	<b>Sundance Square</b>	<b>Public Square</b>
Water Feature	x	x	x	x

Program Element	Director Park	Grand Park	Sundance Square	Public Square
Play Area	x	x		x
Cafe	x	x	x	x
Park Attendant Office	x	x		
Monument (art, sculpture, statue, etc...)	x	x	x	x
Moveable Seating	x	x	x	
Performance Space	x	x	x	x
Public Restroom	x	x	x	
Pavillion			x	
Parking Garage Entrance	x	x		
Food Trucks		x		x
Ice Rink				x
Dog Run		x		
Canopy	x		x	

Percentage of total elements in each respective project:

Director Park: 71%  
Grand Park: 78 %  
Sundance Square: 57%  
Public Square: 50%

Percentage of overlap between Projects:

Projects	% Overlap- (Level of Homogeneity)
Director Park-Grand Park	75%
Director Park-Sundance Square	63%
Director Park- Public Square	41%
Grand Park-Sundance Square	46%
Grand Park-Public Square	50%

Projects	% Overlap- (Level of Homogeneity)
Sundance Square-Public Square	36%

Based on this quantitative level of comparison a superficial level of homogeneity can be observed between the project. I use superficial here as a means of describing the programmatic elements without accounting for the physical or aesthetic manifestation of each element within the project itself. For simplicity of determining homogeneity between projects it should be considered that anything 30% > 50% of overlap should be considered as a minimal level of homogeneity, 50% > 75% should be considered a moderate level of homogeneity, anything 75% or greater should be considered a high level of homogeneity, and anything less than 30% should be considered not homogenous.

Using this rubric, Directors Park and Grand Park show the only levels of high homogeneity between projects. This is interesting as the scales of these projects would typically make them not comparable. Director Park covers one Portland block which is about 200ft by 200ft (1 acre) whereas Grand Park covers 4 blocks in Los Angeles (12 acres). They are also representative of different spatial typologies as determined earlier in the analyses (Director Park-Compact typology, Grand Park-Sprawl Typology). This shows the scale of the development does not dictate the way in which it can be programmed. The elements that go into creating these public spaces can be scaled appropriately to serve the particular site needs. It is also important to note that this could symbolize the ability to recreate a large scale service in a much smaller space.

The two other comparisons that have notable (moderate) levels of homogeneity are Director Park-Sundance Square (63%) and Grand Park-Public Square (50%).

These relationships would have been more expected as each pairing was placed into the same spatial typology and are more comparable in terms of their scale. However, what this also shows is that there was a greater homogeneity between projects of varying scales and typologies which might pose a fruitful area for future investigation to determine how easily the development of public space can be scaled up or down to accommodate the unique requirements of the context.

The following table will document the drivers (designers role), and decision making factors (clients role) of each project to determine the level of homogeneity between the process behind development of each project in relation to one another.

<b>Drivers/Decision Making Factors</b>	<b>Director Park</b>	<b>Grand Park</b>	<b>Sundance Square (N/A)</b>	<b>Public Square</b>
Reactivate Underutilized Space	x	x		x
Sustainability	x	x		x
Future Growth	x	x		x
Community Identity	x	x		x
Transportation				x
Flexibility of Space	x	x		x
Connectivity	x	x		x
Social interaction	x	x		x
Serve Diverse User Groups	x	x		x
Safety	x	x		
Public Input/Engagement	x	x		x

Percentage of Overlap between projects:

<b>Projects</b>	<b>% Overlap- (Level of Homogeneity in the Process)</b>
<b>Director Park-Grand Park</b>	100%
<b>Director Park-Sundance Square</b>	N/A
<b>Director Park- Public Square</b>	80%
<b>Grand Park-Sundance Square</b>	N/A
<b>Grand Park-Public Square</b>	80%
<b>Sundance Square-Public Square</b>	N/A

Using the same scale as above (30% > 50% of overlap= a minimal level of homogeneity. 50% > 75% of overlap= moderate level of homogeneity. 75% or greater= high level of homogeneity. 30% or less should be considered not homogenous) it can be said that there is a high level of homogeneity in the processes that produced each of these projects. What this shows is that while the steps taken may have been the same and the issues being addressed similar, the physical homogeneity in each of these relationships was significantly less. This is important when developers and agencies are working to create new spaces to note that repeating proven methods of process do not equate to implementing the same physical strategies/attributes to their own projects. Each situation is unique and calls for a specific solution that caters to its particular context and community.

## ***Part 3: Experienced Outcomes***

## **Field Observations of Grand Park:**

I visited the park on 2 separate occasions, 1 weekday (December 20 at 3:00pm) and 1 weekend (December 23, at 11:00am). Each time I documented the site every 15 min by taking photographs and took field notes/observations for the full hour which I was there. The following analysis is based solely on my personal observations of the space.

In terms of activity, the park was much more active during the weekend in the afternoon than it was during the week just before noon. This is important in showing that the park is being used by people in the surrounding community and not just during the week by those who work in close proximity to the park. The weekend also represented a change in the age demographic of those who were visiting the park. This was marked by the presence of more children and young adults inhabiting the space. Continuing on

GRAND PARK IS A DRAW FOR ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY. INCLUDING LOCAL SCHOOLS WHO BRING THEIR CLASSES HERE FOR FIELD TRIPS.



the demographics, the park was visited by a wide range of people representing the diverse races, ethnicities, and cultures that exist in LA. This is important to mention considering that one of the design goals was to create a park that was welcoming and representative of the many different people that live within the city.

On both days, the majority of people that used the space or were passing through did so on foot. Very few people passed through on bicycles, and only 1 teenager was observed on a skateboard (almost immediately he was asked not to ride the skateboard through the park). It was not easy to determine if the people who were walking through the space had arrived on through the transit systems first which dot the edges of each block, if they drove and parked their car in a nearby lot and walk from their, or if they had walked from their original residence.

During the week, of the people who stayed in the park and engaged with, it as opposed to just passing through it on their way elsewhere, mostly used it as a place to socialize, meet, and have lunch. The location between the courthouse and the Hall of Administration makes it a prime location for employees to spend their breaks outdoors. The Starbucks is a powerful draw in the space and stays relatively full throughout all

THE  
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INTO THE  
SPACE.





times of day. Additionally the presence of food trucks just behind the Starbucks provides more substantial food options for people on their lunch breaks and many seating options and moveable furniture makes it easy to accommodate groups of all sizes and individuals.

On the weekend, the space becomes more active as a destination and activity space. The fountain is a big draw for photo opportunities and was interacted with at some level by everyone who entered the space regardless if they stayed or just passed through. Many people took the opportunity to take selfies at different location around the fountain. 1 group of people were using the park as the backdrop for a photoshoot and the ability to change in the public restrooms made it easy to change clothes in-between shots.

Security presence in the space was minimal and at most times during my visits was unnoticeable. The park security made regular rounds through the space but never interacted with anyone the entire time I was there. This goes to show that the community who uses the space has become effective at self policing and understanding the type of behavior that is expected of them when in the park. It could also be a signifier of adequate activity and eyes on the space where it discourages any type of negative/inappropriate behavior that might occur in the space. On a more personal note, it was good to see the Park security leave the few homeless individuals who I happened to observe in the park during my visit alone and let them be. They individuals were not bothering anybody and were not doing anything to cause any kind of disturbance so it was positive to see them be treated the same as any other visitor by the security as opposed to being asked to leave or at the very least to keep moving.

LEFT: THIS SIGN SIGNIFIES THAT THAT THE PARK IS FOR EVERYONE IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES REPRESENTING THE DIVERSE CULTURES OF LA.



RIGHT: THE WATER FOUNTAIN PROVIDES AN ICONIC FEATURE THAT DRAWS PEOPLE INTO THE SPACE FOR PHOTO OPPS.



Lastly, I walked the space at night on a weekday and the space was still being used by families and couples who were walking the park and using the different amenities. It should be noted that it was Christmas season and the park had special seasonal decorations up which may have increased the amount of activity that would be normal during the evening but it is important to show that the space has become a fixture in the downtown that provides an active space throughout an entire day.

Despite the fact that the park is relatively big, especially in comparison to Director Park, the feeling that one has when actually in the space is much more intimate and reflects a smaller scale. I believe this adds a quality that makes the park inviting and welcoming to people and allows the park to be inhabited by so many different people doing different things at the same time. The flexibility that was intended by the designers and desired by the city I believe has been achieved in this space.

### **Field Observations of Director Park:**

I visited the park on 2 separate occasions, 1 weekday (April 3, 11:00am) and 1 weekend (January 13, 2:30pm). Each time I documented the site every 15 min by taking

photographs and took field notes/observations for the full hour which I was there. The following analysis is based solely on my personal observations of the space.

In the case of both days, the space was mostly used by young adults and middle aged adults. There were a handful of families over both days that used the space either in the water fountain (which was dry at the time because the weather was not yet warm enough) and at the big chess play area. The demographic was much less diverse than as mostly white male/females were observed in the space however this is representative of the general makeup of the area so it was not expected that a wide range of individuals of different races, and cultures would be seen in the park.

In regards to activity of the park between the two days, The weekend was much more lively than the weekday. The weekend showed a lot of people who come to the park as a destination for socializing, eating, and in general just passing time. A majority

DIRECTOR  
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LOCATION  
THAT IS MOST  
COMFORTABLE  
FOR THEM.



of the people who were observed in the space on the weekend spent a significant amount of time there (30-45 min). During the week, at least during the early morning there was very little activity in the space. Only as it got later in the morning (just after 11:00am) did the park begin to see more significant use.

In terms of access, most people who were moving through the space or spending significant time there were on foot walking. There were more people coming in and out of the parking garage elevators than were passing through with their bikes which I found interesting considering the emphasis that Portland and the state of Oregon has placed on bolstering alternative methods of transportation.

The north end of the park around the fountain saw the most activity and grouping of people. As stated before, the fountain was dry and tables had been moved into that space to provide extra seating. It was also a place where kids could be seen running

A FAMILY GOES TO THE FOUNTAIN AND STOPS TO READ THE INSCRIPTION ON THE STONE BEFORE CONTINUING THEIR DAY.



around, bouncing a basketball, and passing a soccer ball back and forth. The edge of the fountain provides a ledge that people used when the tables and formal seating had

THE LEDGE OF THE FOUNTAIN PROVIDES ADDITIONAL SEATING IN THE SUN WHEN THERE ARE NO LONGER TABLES AVAILABLE.



been filled up. The big chess area at the south end was a more intimate space and was typically inhabited only by 1-2 small groups of people at a time.

In relationship to the design goal of connecting the park to the retail activity across the streets the design does a good job at creating a seamless transition between the park and the block on the east. It is less successful in creating this same connection with the block on the west. People could be see constantly crossing freely from the block on the east side into the park and vice-versa. The presence of both amenities in conjunction with one another creates a mutually beneficial relationship to one another in which 2 scenarios could be observed. 1: The commercial activity from the surrounding area draws people into the downtown are and Director Park keeps them in the area for an extended period of time. 2: Director Park brings people into the space as a destination space for meeting and the adjacent blocks benefit from their presence as consumers.

The café that was a point of contention during the design phase and public outreach meetings had been closed down on the first of my 2 visits. There is no way to know why it closed down but it is most likely that it was from lack of business which was a concern of the community. The second time I went the café had been replaced by the “Portland Tropical Gardens” which is programmed as a center for public art and wellness. Regardless of whether or not the café was the best function to program the space with originally, it is good to see that the space was flexible enough to accommodate this new program. This ensures that the park remains as active and inviting to various people and activities as possible.

In terms of security, the on-site park attendant was seen rather infrequently but was hands on in terms of reminding people of the rules of the space. On the weekend the attendant was seen telling kids in the park that they had to be off their skateboards and one homeless man to leave for smoking. Other than that, the attendant was seen doing general maintenance like reorganizing chairs and tables, picking up loose trash on the floor, and sweeping the grounds to keep them clean. During the weekday that I went there was no park attendant during the time that I was there.

The space overall I believe does a great job of creating a unique plaza experience that is different than any of the other park blocks in the downtown area. Many of its design features and intents have been successful and have been realized in the physical space of the park. The organization allows various groups to inhabit the same block, despite its small size, and use it for various activities. The space is conducive to supporting various sizes of groups, although I would say it is ideally suited for smaller groups.

A BRIDAL PARTY ARRIVES TO TAKE THEIR WEDDING PHOTOS ON THE STEPS AT DIRECTOR PARK. THIS PROVIDES AN INFORMAL EVENT FOR THE OTHER USERS OF THE SPACE TO VISUALLY ENGAGE WITH.



## ***Part 4: Impact***



## **Future Considerations:**

The culture around social interaction and what is expected from our public spaces is in a constant state of flux. These paradigms are constantly shifting as technology, behavior, cultural and societal norms change to meet the preferences of the time. The period we are currently in is a unique one where people have the ability to be intimately connected with anything, and anyone, at anytime, anywhere in the world. This sense of globalization has allowed cultures from various regions of the world to begin melding into a more unified culture. A global culture of connectedness through technology, social media, and consumerism has influenced a new generation of people. As this generation, and the ones that follow, continue to live in this type of reality, the way in which their physical environments respond will also change to meet their needs.

At their core, most people have similar desires and wants when it comes to physical spaces. As was demonstrated in William Whyte's video "Social Life of Small Urban Spaces" there are common aspects of successful public spaces that are appealing to serve the largest amount of people. Things like shade, water, food, places to sit. There are particular human behaviors that operate independently of differences in culture, race, identity, age, etc. Because of this, it is likely that successful public spaces can, at a quick glance, appear to be homogeneous across contexts.

It is important to not make quick judgments about public spaces and their importance to a community without first having a full understanding of the process, and history of the space. As was in the case for the projects analyzed for this research, the history gave very particular reasons for why the space was developed, functions, and looks the way they do. In the future, it is more important to understand the process that

each of these developments followed as opposed to analyzing the built space. This analysis showed that the process can be the same across projects to produce very different places. This should be the goal of future public space development.

Successful, contextually appropriate and unique.

Further research could be done in this area between planning and design to better understand how these fields can better inform and engage one another in the future. There is also a need for more direct observation of these spaces to see how these design intentions manifest themselves in the real world and to understand how people engage with the space. As mentioned before, the ways in which people engage with their environment is changing and there needs to be an intimate understanding of those relationships if we cities are supposed to continue to produce spaces that will engage the masses 20, 30, 50 years in the future.

### **Conclusion:**

Public spaces are often times what gives identity to a location. They are the places that serve all people regardless of social, economic, political, or religious positions. They are often the embodiment of a context's values and culture. Because of this it is important to understand the forces that drive and influence their development.

The current literature on homogenization of public space, although relatively nascent as a social science/planning topic, gives a number of reasons for why public spaces are beginning to look and feel very similar across contextual boundaries. Issues of safety, globalization, consumerism, culture, ownership, and social engagement have become very prevalent drivers in the design process and as such have led to a set of identifiable solutions (i.e. park attendants for security (Director Park/Grand Park), retail

stores in the public space to promote consumerism (Director Park/Grand Park/Sundance Square/Public Square), providing space for the performance of cultural events and performances in general (Director Park/Grand Park/Sundance Square/Public Square)).

At the surface it can be seen that the programmatic and spatial makeup of each of these parks are rather homogenous, but upon a deeper analyses it was shown that in fact, only 1 comparison showed a high level of homogeneity between developments (Grand Park/Director Park). However, all of the comparisons showed a high level of homogeneity in terms of the factors and drivers that led the process of development. What this would allude to is that one path does not always lead to the same destination. This is relevant in showing that studying the physical space is perhaps not the most important when analyzing a successful public space. Rather, if the drivers and engagement process that spawned its creation can be understood then the process can be replicated to produce something unique in a new place. One thing that designers can do on their part to make their projects are more unique/site specific is to think locally about their material choices and key elements. For example, if ground pavers, art pieces, metalwork, business owners can be sourced locally then the project will have a stronger tie to the community and inspire people to have a greater sense of ownership and pride about the space.

Homogeneity of public space can not be qualified based on the semblance of one factor, quality, or characteristic. It should not be qualified based solely on the aesthetic quality of the space or even the built form itself. Instead, in order to truly say that public spaces are homogenous with one another then these factors, along with its

other historical drivers, community input, programmatic elements, site location, typology need to be measured in some meaningful way as well. From this research it was determined that there are intricate relationships, drivers, and spatial organizations in each of these projects that make them fairly unique to one another despite surface level appearances of heavy similarities between projects.

Public spaces will continue to be places to unify in a city. It is important to continue to study their role in society and how they can be used as tools to represent a city's values and create identity for a community. The integration of design and public agencies to manifest these desires in physical space is an important area to continue researching. Only by doing this can we ensure that future iterations of public space can continue to be unique, meaningful, and engaging in response to changing societal needs and behaviors.

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