



Creating Community: Libraries as Third Spaces

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Ray Oldenburg c. 1954



Eric Klinenberg




8 Characteristics of 3rd Spaces in *The Great Good Place*

1. Neutral ground
2. Leveler
3. Conversation Is the Main Activity
4. Accessibility & Accommodation
5. Has Regulars
6. A Low Profile
7. Mood is Playful
8. A Home Away from Home

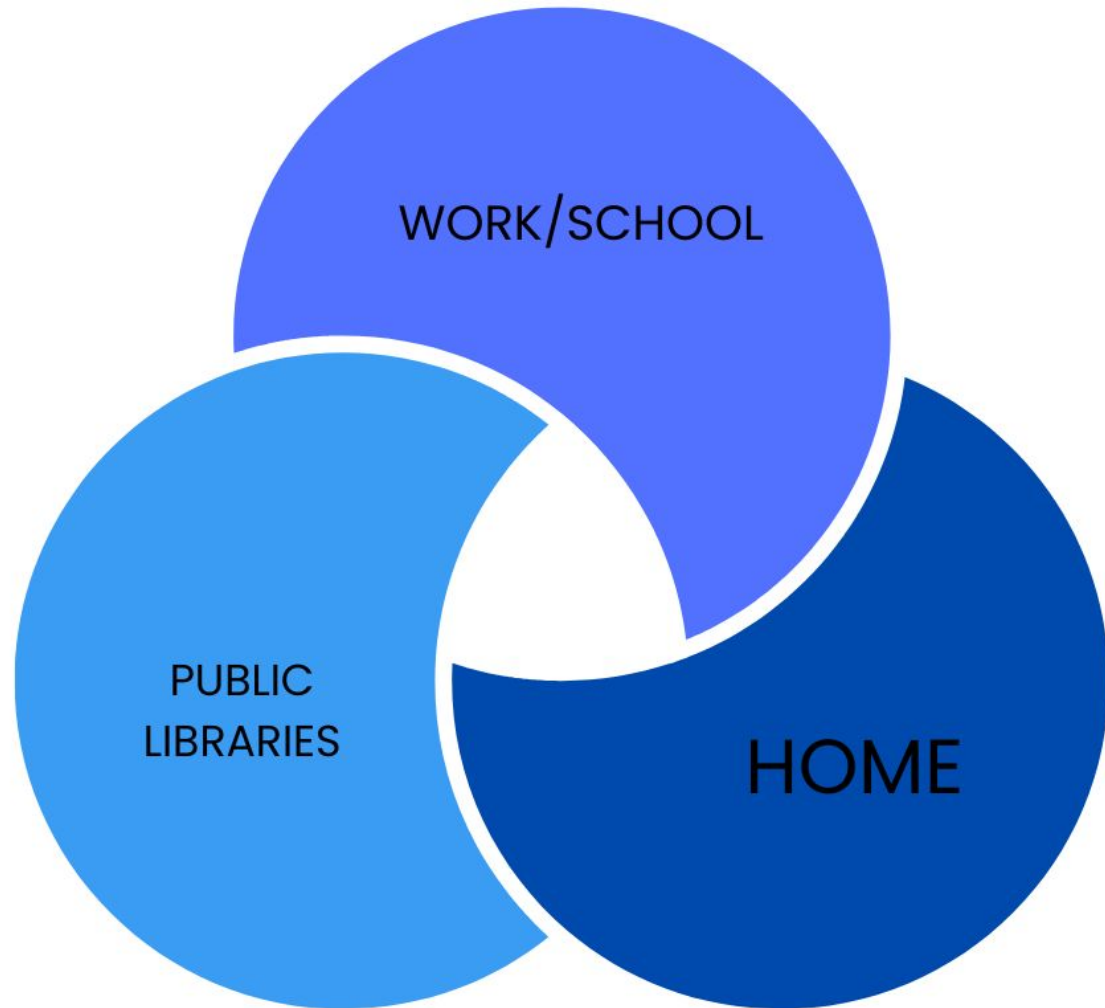
Definition

Libraries serve as third spaces when they are fundamentally social with a leveling effect of political, economic, and accessible equity.

Libraries as Third Spaces can be broken down into 3 categories:

- Information Space 
- Creative Space 
- Action Space 

THIRD SPACES



Social Impact

Access to free programming to all.

Fostering literacy – early childhood programs, adult english classes, GED classes

**Community Engagement – community center, senior center, health care resources, school visits.
Working with partnerships has allowed for the public libraries to understand the communities needs.**

Connecting to social services – job search assistance, supporting immigrants.

Social interaction with the creation of book clubs, author talks, workshops.

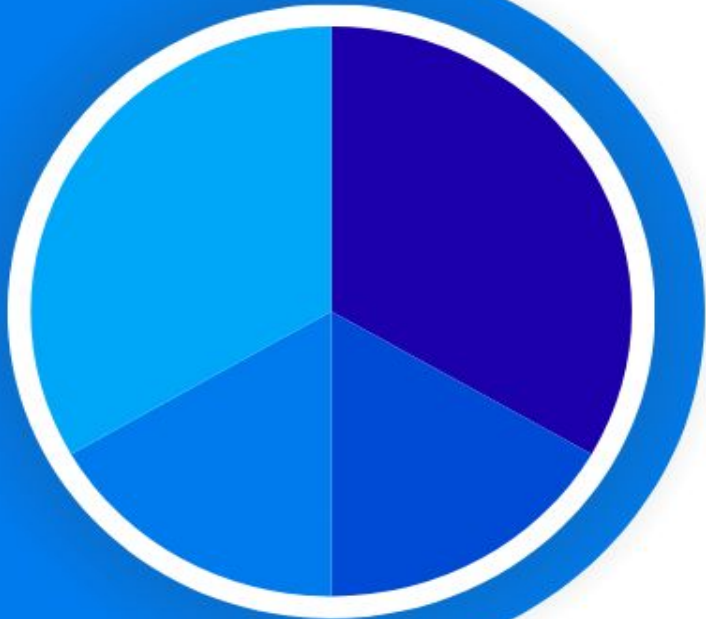
Communities Culture: libraries have culture passes (free access to museums and national parks with your library card)

Spaces to collaborate – study rooms for patrons to use as well as for local businesses and community organizations.

Accessibility and Equity – access to technology, internet, helping bridge the digital gap.

Providing a safe and welcoming environment/patrons well-being – creating social inclusion within the space and making it a place where people feel like they belong. a place where patrons feel there is a space for them. Libraries have also been places for natural disaster assistance. They are often one of the public spaces where patrons can go to in a disaster.

MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT



● **90 %**

Of public libraries provide services to job seekers

● **86%**

of public libraries have promoted these programs: Every Child Ready to Read @ your library and Brooklyn Reads for Babies

● **87,000**

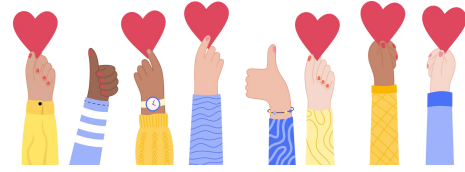
Businesses and homes have been affected by the New York State Library Broadband Technology Program Grant Project

● **95%**

Offer reading programs to prevent the "summer slide" in reading achievement

OVERVIEW

Social, Emotional, and Economic Aspects of Third Spaces



Connectedness + Belonging = Increased well-being.



Social infrastructure reinforces a sense of community solidarity and political power.



Welcoming and inclusive to everyone.



Public institution committed to resource redistribution and community building.

EMOTIONAL IMPACT



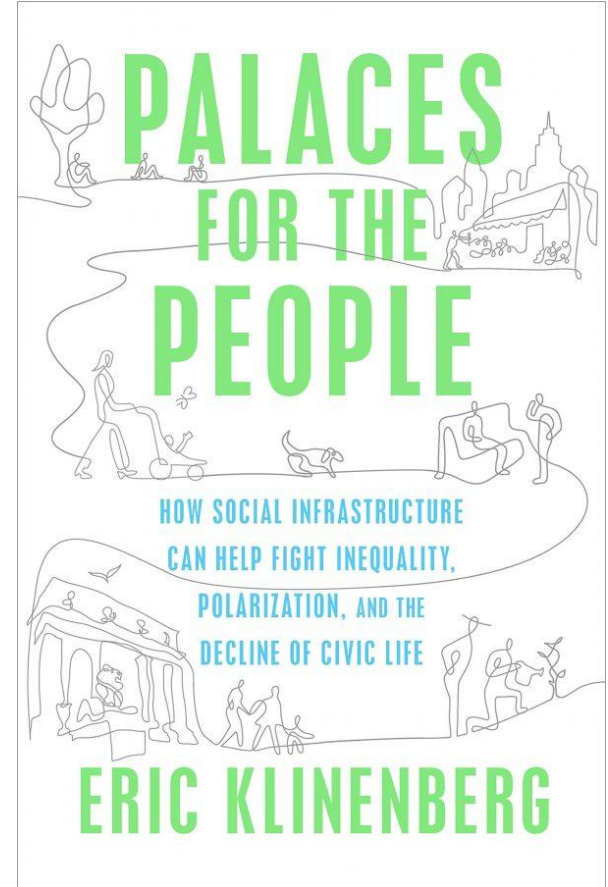
“Precious and unique benefits accrue to those who regularly attend third places and who value those forms of social intercourse found there. The leveling, primacy of conversation, certainty of meeting friends (read: strangers who become friends), looseness of structure, and...fun...all combine to set the stage for experiences unlikely to be found elsewhere. These benefits can also be derived from the sociable and conversational skills cultivated and exercised in a third space.”

– Ray Oldenburg



Social Infrastructure

- Social infrastructure is no less important than physical infrastructure like water, power, or roads—it's just not as visible.
- When we invest in social infrastructures such as libraries, parks, or schools, we're more likely to interact with people around us, and remain connected to the broader public.
- If we neglect social infrastructure, we tend to grow more isolated, which can have serious consequences.
- Bridges emotional + political effects of third places.
- Robust social infrastructure can save lives. Literally.



Political Impact



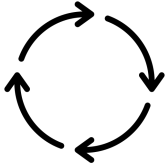
“If Americans generally find it difficult to appreciate the political value of third places, it is partly because of the great freedom of association that American enjoy. In totalitarian societies, the leadership is keenly aware of the political potential of informal gathering places and actively discourages them. Just as third places run counter to the type of political control exercised in totalitarian societies, so they are essential to the political processes of a democracy.”

– Ray Oldenburg

Economic Impacts



Free for all. All social classes mix in one space.



Resource redistribution.



Links people to information and resources across a broad spectrum of needs, from lectures to SNAP benefits.



In many communities, libraries are the only place patrons have access to the internet or computers.



Mariame Kaba on Libraries

“The public library is one of the very few remaining public places in this country where you can spend an entire day without spending one penny. You can spend hours studying, working or daydreaming in a library.

Then you can leave with an object that has the power to unleash your imagination and transport you into another world, so that you can see clearly that another world is possible. That’s magical and filled with revolutionary possibilities. And that’s why any attempts to cut back on library hours are actually a declaration of war on the commons and on our communities. Libraries are places where people not only connect to resources but with other people.”

Challenges to Becoming a Viable Third Space

- **Location, Location, Location**

- Is the library easily accessible? How do most people get here?

- **Hours of Operation**

- What are the optimal hours of operation we can offer to meet the diverse needs of our community?

- **Barriers to Access**

- How easy is it for someone to get a library card or register for a program?
- How patron-friendly are our policies?

- **Something for Everyone**

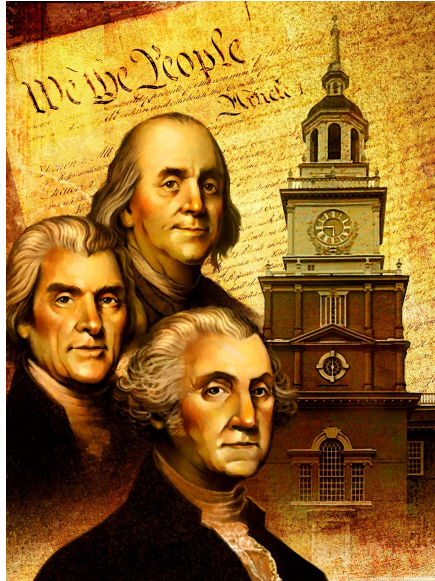
- Do we have spaces for our community members to gather, work, study, and connect?
- Do we select our programs based on the needs, interests, or cultural diversity of our community?
- What are the borrowing trends of our patrons who visit the library and those that use resources remotely?

Challenges to Staying a Viable Third Space

- **More Than Just Books (though those are important, too)**
 - Does our community know that we have or offer...
 - Meeting rooms
 - Charging stations
 - Computers-tablets-hotspots-fax machine
 - Assistive devices for visually or hearing impaired
 - Notary and/or passport services
 - A library of things (even if not named as such)
- **We are here, we are here, we are here!**
 - How well are we making ourselves known?
 - Attend civic meetings and partner with civic and social organizations
 - Host a booth/table at farmers markets, street fairs, welcome nights (K-12)
 - Distribute promotional materials (flyers, newsletters, bookmarks, pencils)
 - Sell library merch (t-shirts, reusable bags, water bottles)

Libraries & The US Constitution

Libraries are not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights as a necessary component to federal law in the United States.



What is Mentioned?

- **First Amendment**

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or **prohibiting the free exercise thereof**; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or **the right of the people peaceably to assemble**, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

- **Tenth Amendment**

The **powers not delegated** to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, **are reserved to the States** respectively, or to the people.



The US Constitution & Libraries contin'd...

- It is important to observe the fundamental legal structure that supports libraries. The language of the law at the state and federal level can support or deter library funding based on majority power. Although **the right to access information is free**, there is **no formal legislature towards that space and it's essential needs**.
- On a local level, libraries have become enshrined in our society since they are predominantly funded with property taxes.

In closing...

Democracy needs libraries to provide opportunities and safe spaces for citizens to engage one another. Librarians need to engage with community groups, making a point to include people who are not regular library users.

Ask, Listen, Empower, ALA Editions 2020

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