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People, Politics, and Plazas: A Comparative Analysis of Dallas (City Hall Plaza) and Copenhagen (Rådhuspladsen)

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ABSTRACT

Public plazas are an integral part of urban life and they generally take familiar forms. Yet not all public spaces function as intended and, ultimately, not all are successful. The following comparative analysis of Dallas City Hall Plaza and Copenhagen's Rådhuspladsen explores what makes public plazas "work." More specifically, while, both plazas are architecturally similar, City Hall Plaza remains largely unused and desolate while Rådhuspladsen is bustling and lively. This multi-method project begins by exploring the historical development of public space in Dallas and Copenhagen and continues with an ethnographic study of each plaza. Findings suggest that the success of public plazas can be attributed to five recurrent themes: attraction and engagement, sustainability and nature, visibility, public transportation and pedestrian accessibility, and integration. By systematically comparing the two cases, we can identify modest design changes that can soften inhospitable public plazas and make them spaces that people will use and enjoy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Walking around downtown Dallas one is struck by how eerily quiet it is. Here in the middle of a major American metropolis it is not uncommon to find oneself essentially alone. Instead of bustling with activity, downtown Dallas feels isolated and removed from social life. Public plazas are places for congregation and socialization, designed to be utilized and enjoyed by all city dwellers. Ideally, they are the heartbeat of a city, places where people and ideas can come together to produce innovative social, economic, and political change, ultimately cultivating and advancing society. Identifying what makes a plaza "work" as a social and civic space, and what does not, requires a look at the architectural and infrastructural design in a social and historical context. Social structure is important because it shapes how plazas are conceived, built, and utilized. Design is important because architecture and infrastructure can determine people's desire to congregate in any given space, and the movement of people through public spaces is a powerful indicator of the health and vitality of a city. Activating public plazas by creating attractive venues, designing comfortable spaces, and integrating the surrounding neighborhood can transform a city by revitalizing local economies, providing cultural value, and facilitating greater social interaction and integration, ultimately making cities safer, healthier and more livable places.

Situated in downtown Dallas, City Hall Plaza is a wide-open space framed by the city's majestic skyline. Opened in 1976, Dallas City Hall plaza is anchored by the

City Hall and Central Public Library, both designed by world-renowned architect, I. M. Pei. City Hall Plaza boasts a quaint reflecting pool, trees, green space, and stunning public art installations. Built in a time of racial tensions and social unrest, however, the city's main concerns were surveillance and social control. Hence, while the plaza ostensibly functions to bring people together, in reality it was designed to optimize security in front of City Hall. Rådhuspladsen, Copenhagen's city hall square, was built in 1900 by Martin Nytrop, and sits in the heart of the city center, surrounded by cultural amenities, fountains, and statues. Rådhuspladsen was originally designed to be a transportation hub. The focus on auto-centricity in the two cities were relatively similar up until the 1990s, when Copenhagen began reclaiming urban space for pedestrians. Architecturally, both plazas seem similar, yet City Hall Plaza remains largely unused and desolate while Rådhuspladsen is always bustling and lively. By comparing the two cases and looking to see what makes Copenhagen's public spaces so successful, we can implement changes that can soften the inhospitable space of Dallas City Hall Plaza and make it a space that people will enjoy.

Importantly, such changes need not be onerously large, expensive, or difficult. Rather, small, incremental design changes can make a significant difference in how public space is utilized. More specifically, a close analysis of public space in Copenhagen reveals five recurring principles of successful plazas: (1) attraction and engagement, (2) sustainability and nature, (3) visibility, (4) public transportation and pedestrian accessibility, and (5) integration. These principles can help us devise and implement small steps to revitalize Dallas City Hall Plaza

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into a more robust, animated space. Lessons from Copenhagen cannot be unthinkingly applied to Dallas and a comparative analysis of this nature must be sensitive to the social and historical context of the respective cases, and how these structural differences shape the viability of these lessons. Hence, the analysis begins with a historical overview of the Dallas case and a historical overview of the Copenhagen case. Following the historical overviews is an analysis of structural, design, and planning factors that affect and are affected by the spaces. A brief overview of the methodology for the study is then followed by supporting studies taken from successful public spaces in Copenhagen.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: DALLAS CITY HALL PLAZA

Dallas began to transform into a thriving metropolis after World War II. As in many American cities, the end of the war reshaped American culture. New inventions such as cars, and new government initiatives like the Federal Housing Association and Home Owners Loan Corporation spurred the development of housing, construction, and suburban sprawl.¹ With the newfound freedom that the automobile provided, cities began to redesign around the car, prioritizing highways and multilane streets over other modes of transportation. As part of the post-war business boom that Dallas experienced, everything got big and spread apart, creating the sprawled Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.² This included architectural developments and public spaces. Today, Dallas's population is at approximately 1.3 million, while the population of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex is more than seven million.³



Image 1. Dallas City Hall Plaza. Digital image. Luis Tamayo, flickr 16, July 2014. Web. 13, March 2017.

Dallas City Hall was conceived in the aftermath of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, a tragedy that unfolded just one mile away from the future City Hall plaza.⁴ Just a decade after the Civil Rights Act was passed, racial tensions were still widely prevalent throughout the city. Dallas was a city of racial extremism filled with “spitting mouths and political invectives” as described by reverend William A. Holmes, in a sermon he gave in 1963 in the aftermath of the Kennedy Assassination.⁵ While not the hot beds of activism like cities in Alabama and Mississippi, Dallas was still filled with racial tensions. African Americans in Texas experienced a system of racial violence and segregation as extreme as other parts of the Deep South.⁶ Schools had only become desegregated in the

1950s, only two decades before the birth of the new City Hall Plaza. Big, violent demonstrations like the one on March 1965, in Selma, Alabama, where protesters supported the national Voting Rights Act and protested the killing of Rev. James Reeb were events that Dallas did not want to happen in their city. Dallas hoped to fly under the radar and avoid the extreme upheaval that occurred in places like Alabama and Mississippi. While Dallas generally maintained a relatively mild racial climate, they still had protests and gatherings like the 1972 march to City Hall, protesting police violence.⁷

In the context of social and racial tensions, Dallas' worse fear was becoming a city filled with violence, which would disrupt lives and hinder business. *Dallas at the Crossroads* was a video created by the Dallas Citizens Council in 1961 after the integration of public schools.⁸ The video was supposed to encourage cooperation and underline the importance of abstaining from violence. The video emphasized the importance of law and order and the harmful effects of violence on children. The underlying fears of violence ring loud and clear in the video, echoing Dallas' fear of race riots and city lockdowns. Given these extremely tense times, it is no surprise that the new Dallas City Hall Plaza was designed to minimize the ability of people to gather and protest by creating a space that was easier to surveil and control.

As Dallas became known as the “City of Hate” around the world, the priority of Mayor Erik Jonsson was to reinvent the image of Dallas.⁹ Elected in 1964, Jonsson created the “Goals for Dallas” initiative that helped the development of the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, the Dallas Convention Center, the New Museum of Fine Arts and Dallas City Hall.¹⁰ One of the main themes of the initiative was to redesign the city to reflect the best of Dallas, “We demand a city of beauty and functional fitness that embraces the quality of life for all its people.”¹¹ However, steeped in the racial tensions of the time, the statement was likely intended to apply primarily to white citizens, not African Americans or other minorities. An analysis of the architect's intent furthers our understanding of the exclusionary and disciplinary nature of the plaza.

Due to close collaboration between Mayor Jonsson and one of the world's leading architectural teams, I.M. Pei & Partners, the new Dallas City Hall plaza was completed in 1976, with the building itself completed in 1977.¹² I.M. Pei was (and remains) a world-renowned architect, whose modernist styles of the time were cutting edge and innovative. I.M. Pei's signature style was modernism --undecorated neutral materials of steel, concrete and glass.¹³ Pei, more than any other architect, pushed to make modernism the official style of institutional America.¹⁴ He was an architect who believed in the power of architecture to make a statement, whether that is about power, authority, or change. According to Calvin Tsao, a former senior associate, “[Pei]’s always on this side of authority. He’s always glorifying the people with power.”¹⁵ Pei decided on an “assertive Le Corbusian edifice with a concrete façade leaning outward at 34 degrees toward a plaza enlivened by indigenous oaks and a Henry Moore sculpture [he] insisted they could not do without. It was a conspicuous case of modernism trying to convey the civic authority normally associated with classicism.”¹⁶

In the deliberation of design ideas, Pei was not only concerned with the building itself but also what would surround it. In tune with the social tensions of the time, Pei's designs reflect his own personal desire, as well as those of local officials and Dallas elites, for social and spatial control. Pei asked Jonsson, "What do you want outside the door? What is there now is not acceptable. And if you don't control it, you never know what will happen across the street. I can't design a building like this and have no control over what is on the other side of the street."¹⁷ Pei's design for the space stemmed from his desire to be able to control and police it, resulting in a plaza primarily intended for social control rather than organic community interaction.



Image 2. Dallas City Hall Plaza, Dallas, Texas. Photograph by Ashley Hong, 2016

Dallas' enormous plaza is 5.2 acres (226,800 total square feet), a space roughly double the size of St. Mark's square in Venice.¹⁸ The plaza is highlighted by three eight-story-high flagpoles, a large ornamental pool, and the Moore sculpture.¹⁹ Over 2.5 acres of the plaza are concrete, 2 acres are green space, and 0.6 acres are water from the reflecting pool.²⁰ Situated in the plaza are 3 flagpoles, 31 light poles, 19 concrete benches, 132 bollards, 2 public art pieces, and 495 feet of blank wall.²¹ The plaza is removed from and unconnected to the more vibrant parts of downtown. The vast size of the plaza is out of scale with the individual, leaving us to feel dwarfed and unprotected in the open space. The plaza is hot in the summer and cold and windy in the winter. Seating is limited and the placement of what seating is there is left completely unprotected from the elements. The role of the Henry Moore sculpture was to "balance the building at the scale of the plaza, just as the role of the building was to balance the spires of downtown at the greater urban scale"²² Pei's city hall fulfilled his "intention of establishing the public sector as a powerful presence in Dallas," but "the street-level aspects are hardly inviting to the individual citizen."²³



Image 3. Dallas City Hall Plaza, Dallas, Texas. Photograph by Ashley Hong, 2016

Modernist design pays little attention to what is going on on the street-level. Modernist architecture often has unintentional consequences resulting from its desire to design from a bird's-eye-view.²⁴ Jane Jacobs, one of the most influential urbanists of all time, emphasized the importance of designing public spaces from the ground level. People don't move around in the orderly fashion that modernists imagine. Spaces designed looking down "from above" lack the organic nature of human activity, often resulting in large, open, inhospitable spaces that are easy for surveillance but are unwelcoming for people to spend time in. The aspects that make City Hall so dramatic also make it hostile.²⁵ While the goal was to create a public square that would become a center for civic life, "The formal layout of the plaza in front of city hall created what was a bleak expanse for much of the year, serving more as a setting for the architecture than a place for promenading."²⁶ As one might expect, there was public resistance to the project as a whole, particularly about the bleakness of the plaza, and over four decades later, City Hall Plaza still sits unoccupied for most of the year.²⁷

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: COPENHAGEN'S RÅDHUSPLADSEN

Just like Copenhagen as a whole, Rådhuspladsen has undergone multiple reconstructions that reflect changing social conditions. Situated in the old medieval part of the city, Rådhuspladsen is a space that encapsulates the transition between medieval Copenhagen and today's modern era. Originally conceived in 1900, the plaza was designed as a "network" hub for the newest transportation technology, such as the cable system.²⁸

In traditional Danish fashion, the winning design for the plaza was a result of an architectural competition.²⁹ The winning design was by architect, Martin Nyrop, who modeled Rådhuspladsen after the Piazza del Campo in Sienna.³⁰ Nyrop envisioned the square to be an expression of concentration and calm in contrast to the hectic nature of modern city life.³¹ However, the design had to incorporate the new public transportation system, the Copenhagen Tramways.³² Not only did transit lines cut through the middle of the square, there were eight different streets that fed into the plaza.³³ Horse-drawn cabs, buses, bicycles, the

tram system and later automobiles essentially created a square that was virtually unmanageable.³⁴



Image 4: Thelle, Mikkel. Rådhuspladsen 1900: Det Moderne Københavns Brændpunkt. Kbh.: Gyldendal, 2015. p. 79

A recent reconstruction of the plaza came in 1996, where the street running down the middle of Rådhuspladsen was taken out, connecting the previously divided plaza. A transport information pavilion and pop-up cafés were placed in on the far end of the plaza.³⁵ Additionally, the plaza was repaved and benches were added on the sides of the plaza nearest city hall. Today, the plaza is approximately 130,000 square feet (3 acres), with half of the 3 acres under construction for the new metro extension. There are 8 benches on each side of the plaza; four placed back to back so some face the plaza and some face the neighboring streets. Beyond the benches and the fountain, Rådhuspladsen doesn't have many other amenities. In 2010, the plaza underwent another transformation as they continued construction on a metro expansion project that would open an underground metro station directly in the plaza. Despite the transformations the plaza has undergone, the historic dragon fountain in the corner of the plaza remains a central gathering point.



Image 5: Thelle, Mikkel. Rådhuspladsen 1900: Det Moderne Københavns Brændpunkt. Kbh.: Gyldendal, 2015. p. 77

Transportation was always a main focus for the design of the Rådhuspladsen. Circulation and flow was important for the functioning of the city, and the Danes believed that having the most up to date transit would propel them into a European destination. When transit lines and automobiles rose to popularity, traffic accidents had to be

taken seriously and pedestrians had to re-learn "the art of walking on the street" in this new space.³⁶ In the past few decades, Copenhagen has managed to transform the transit heavy plaza into a pedestrian hotspot and the new metro line construction reminds us how important public transportation is to the success of Copenhagen as Denmark's capital city.

With a population of about 1.2 million, Copenhagen has seen many transformations as an urban area since its founding in 1167.³⁷ Like Dallas, World War II completely transformed the city. After World War II, more streets and squares in the city were used for car traffic and parking.³⁸ However, that began to change with the pedestrianization of the city's main street, Strøget, in 1962 as an experiment.³⁹ Strøget is anchored by Rådhuspladsen, allowing foot traffic to flow right into the plaza. The conversion gave rise to much debate, with residents claiming that, "No cars means no customers and no customers means no business."⁴⁰ Others argued that "[They] are Danes, not Italians," and therefore, "there is no tradition for outdoor public life in Scandinavia."⁴¹ However, success quickly followed and Strøget proved to be a huge success. Commercially and socially, Strøget became a popular destination. Gradually Copenhagen created a cohesive pedestrian network and today 80% of movement around the inner city is represented by foot traffic.⁴² In the 1970s, Copenhagen hardly had any sidewalk cafés, but by 1996 they were everywhere.⁴³ Over time, Copenhagen has managed to develop a system of car-free and almost car-free spaces in the city. The gradual process has allowed residents to adapt to a new city culture.⁴⁴

4. WHAT MAKES PLAZAS WORK: SOCIO-STRUCTURAL FACTORS

The following analysis uses several important themes from urban studies and planning to explore and compare various structural factors of Dallas's City Hall Plaza and Copenhagen's Rådhuspladsen. The literature draws our attention to several key elements of civic spaces such as aut centrism, political and economic variables, safety and transportation, and how these elements can be shaped to transform Dallas City Hall Plaza into a robust public space.

Auto-Centric Design and Function

Downtown Dallas' public spaces and streets are surprisingly quiet and empty for such a large city. Though it sits in the heart of a thriving metropolis, Dallas is in many ways a city without people. Anthropologist James Holston describes this phenomenon as the "death of the street," and provides an architectural and infrastructural explanation for the lack of foot traffic in a city.⁴⁵ Attempts to influence social life through deliberate spatial and architectural reorganization may leave public spaces "hollowed out," despite the best intentions of architects and city planners.⁴⁶ Increasing suburbanization, white flight, and the decentralization of the urban core left many downtowns bleak. As the wealthy and middle class moved further from the downtown core and those who could not afford to move were stuck with less economic resources, downtowns became blighted and people no longer went there. Dallas grew as suburbanization was the new trend and cities

designed around the automobile tend to be less people-friendly and create larger pockets of dead space. Despite this trend occurring in America, European cities battled the rise of the automobile slightly differently and managed to avoid the same fate.

Copenhagen is a much more people-friendly city, partly due to its culture, but largely due to the infrastructure of the city. Cars also dominated plazas and public parks with the rise of the automobile, much like how they are in the United States. Yet Copenhagen decided to change that trend by redesigning the city for people, making more pedestrian-only streets, creating a strong and reliable public transit system, and building a remarkable network of bike lanes. By biking, walking, or taking public transit, people spend more time on the street than locked behind the steering wheel, making them more likely to stop in a shop, rest on a park bench, or interact with other people in public spaces. Rådhuspladsen's success is a result of design as much as it is the city's decision to reclaim these public spaces for people. Rådhuspladsen boasts pop-up coffee and food stands every day, the occasional musician, and a constant stream of foot traffic at all hours of the day.

Public Transportation and Pedestrian-Oriented Design

Great public spaces should be pedestrian-friendly. The streets surrounding the public space must be well maintained, crosswalks must be clearly marked and traffic lights timed for pedestrians and cyclists. The square must also feel open and easy to get to because, "If a public space is in an isolated, under-populated or difficult-to-access location, however well-designed and managed it may be, it will not thrive."⁴⁷ Pedestrian-only streets that funnel people into the plaza border Rådhuspladsen. Dallas City Hall Plaza, on the other hand, is removed from the bustling part of downtown, detached from the larger community.

In addition to pedestrian infrastructure, public transportation should be prioritized. Copenhagen does both of these well. Dallas does not. Rådhuspladsen is surrounded by multiple train and bus stations within a couple block-walking radius, while Dallas lacks a cohesive public transportation system. As a space designed to be a transportation hub, where everyone has equal access to the variety of transit modes, Rådhuspladsen creates a space that brings diverse groups of people into contact with each other, even if just in passing. Fort Worth is an example of how prioritizing public transit can revitalize public spaces. In Fort Worth, the public square downtown functioned as private parking lot, but redevelopment plans called for a more robust space that would include a park-like setting for lunchtime use, food and information kiosks, trees, a stage for events, a quiet, garden-like area with a gazebo and café, an entrance plaza for city hall with fountains and a café, a major focal space with a large sculpture, and a formal garden.⁴⁸ To implement this plan, Fort Worth used public transportation as the catalyst for the redevelopment of the square, putting in a bus transfer station and waiting area in the central square.⁴⁹

Public Space and Democracy

The political functions of public spaces are meant to contribute to democracy. "Public spaces are open to all and accommodate 'freely chosen' and 'spontaneous' action of people. These two characteristics enable them to develop and promote 'democracy.'"⁵⁰ Dallas City Hall Plaza does not promote spontaneous actions of random people. The security guards and police officers will question anyone who "looks out of place," asking them not to loiter. The supposed public arena is supposed to bring together diverse groups of people whose conflicts and differences can be resolved peacefully in this community space.⁵¹ City squares are the most dynamic kind of public spaces, due to the diversity of their function and use and their symbolic embodiment of the city.⁵² Civic spaces have an important role in being the stage for historical events such as the protests in 1989 on Beijing's Tiananmen Square, the parades on Moscow's Red Square, and anti-war demonstrations on Amsterdam's Museum Square and Dam Square.⁵³

Over the years, Rådhuspladsen has seen political demonstrations and protests, mostly peaceful, regarding topics ranging from climate justice to education reform. These gatherings in Copenhagen reflect the Danish collective culture as much as it reflects how Danes use their public spaces to advocate for political change. Setha Low, an American anthropologist known for her research on public spaces in the U.S. and Latin America, observes that, "civic spaces [in the United States] are no longer democratic places where all people are embraced and tolerated, but instead centers of commerce and consumption."⁵⁴ In contrast, public spaces in Latin America and Europe remain symbols of civic power and cultural centers.⁵⁵ Urban spaces are often designed with the idea of being for the common good, but in reality are designed for activities that exclude some people and benefit others.⁵⁶

The idea of "social coherence" among diverse groups of people is somehow lost in the overall design of Dallas City Hall Plaza despite Mayor Jonsson's ideals for the space to bring together the Dallas community.⁵⁷ City squares were designed to be places for democratic and cultural expression, stimulating not only civic and social relations, but also entrepreneurship and city development.⁵⁸ Most recently, there has been a trend towards reclaiming city squares as an economic booster to downtown areas, and cities like Houston, Pittsburg, and Amsterdam are leading the way.⁵⁹

Public Space and the Economy

Another important role of public spaces is economic. Public spaces are hubs of commercial activity, where flows of people are a real asset to adjacent businesses. Successful public spaces can also increase the land value that surrounds them. More and more, people seek neighborhoods that are walkable with robust public spaces they can enjoy, "Rather than being exclusively driven by material interest, economic growth is occurring in places that are tolerant, diverse and open to creativity, because these are the places where creative people of all types want to live."⁶⁰ Currently there is no commerce around Dallas City Hall Plaza. The convention center on one side seems unused and many of the buildings and parking lots are vacant.

Rådhuspladsen, on the other hand, is a commerce hub. The longest pedestrian shopping street, Strøget, sees thousands of people daily, and there are a variety of other restaurants, shops, cafes, and entertainment venues right next to the Plaza. The plaza also sits right next to Tivoli, the second oldest amusement park in the world and a major tourist and local attraction. The plaza becomes a stimulator for economic activity as people move through the space from activity to activity.

5. WHAT MAKES PLAZAS WORK: URBAN DESIGN AND PLANNING FACTORS

Urban design and planning play pivotal roles in creating the atmosphere of public spaces. Design can make or break the success of public spaces. Design can also be the ingredient that revitalizes underutilized spaces.

While the task of revitalizing public spaces is not easy, it is not impossible. The example of the City Square in Melbourne, Australia, demonstrates how it is possible for designs to change over time in order to accommodate city life. Public space designs should be flexible enough to meet evolving social, physical and environmental needs and cater to changing lifestyles. In the initial design of the square, the city council was concerned that opening up a public space in the middle of the city might invite negative activities such as mass gathering for protests and demonstrations, resulting in a design that suggested fragmentation of the space.⁶¹ The city council's initial disregard for the notion that a square should function as a place for spontaneous public interaction and their attempt, instead, to assert social control eventually led to the decay of the square's usability.⁶²

Simple design changes however, helped to mitigate some of the more unwelcoming aspects of the square. The glazed steel canopy, the hard surfaces, and the lack of green spaces increased discomfort during Melbourne's dry and hot summer climate.⁶³ Adding more green spaces, trees and water features have increased the comfort level of the square. More redesign ideas included a sunken plaza, sculpture and video screen.⁶⁴ These design elements activated the square into a vibrant social node.⁶⁵ Additionally, the sidewalk that stretches between the City Square and Swanston Street was planted with an avenue of trees and cafes on the ground level became a popular meeting spot for the locals and tourists.⁶⁶ The open and semi-open eating areas provide a more relaxed and informal atmosphere to the square. Seeing people sitting, chatting and drinking coffee signals that the square is a vibrant and active place, which is an important factor that draws other people to the square.⁶⁷ The square is also easily accessible by public transportation and in 2010, as part of the redevelopment project of Swanston Street, the city council decided to have a vehicle-free zone in this area.⁶⁸ Through the redesign process of the square, Melbourne recognized the importance of examining the relationship between the physical characteristics of the square and the need to have a strong connection with its people.

Shortly after the plaza was built, Dallas realized that the lifelessness of the space was something that needed to be addressed. In 1983, the City of Dallas hired William H. Whyte to study the use of Dallas City Hall Plaza and to

observe the way the sidewalks, parks, street corners, and plazas were used by the people working and visiting in Dallas.⁶⁹ A famous American urbanist best known for his piece titled *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, Whyte's ethnographic work studying public spaces and how people use them has made him one of the foremost authorities on public spaces. His suggestions for Dallas City Hall Plaza led to Dallas's Living Plaza projects, which were successful but not sustained. The Living Plaza projects were modeled on Whyte's suggestions; pilot programs to reactivate the space.

The Living Plaza programs aimed to activate the area between the Henry Moore Sculpture and the Reflecting Pool by following Whyte's recommendations to create a pavilion providing food, chairs and tables, a canopy overhead, shade, and protection from wind, bringing down the scale of the plaza to a human level.⁷⁰ While the weather is often an argument against such an investment, beyond July and August, Dallas experiences moderate temperatures the rest of the year, ranging from mid 40s to high 80s.⁷¹ Whyte also points out the lack of connection to the rest of downtown's commercial areas. The break in retail continuity is the source of the problem and contributes to the lack of economic stimulation.⁷² Whyte proposes giving a second chance to the empty lots and office buildings, creating street level retail that would bridge the discontinuity and make Dallas City Hall Plaza a natural extension of downtown Dallas. The Living Plaza project should be considered a good stepping-stone in the right direction, but if Dallas wants to ensure the plaza is used without the need for large special events, it might do well to consider more permanent changes to the plaza based on the suggestions of Whyte.

Realizing that American cities and European cities are vastly different, there are key design elements that can cross ideological borders. While the auto-centric design of Dallas, and most American cities, are set in stone, small, incremental design changes can be implemented to offset larger structural problems. Dallas City Hall Plaza doesn't have to be dead space. By reevaluating and redesigning the plaza and learning from Copenhagen's successful activation, integration, and design strategies, Dallas has the potential to bring life back to its streets.

6. METHODOLOGY

The study of public life and plazas requires a variety of ethnographic research methods. In order to understand the function of public spaces and the purpose of these plazas it is necessary to analyze how people move through space. Through ethnographic research we can find patterns of social behavior that replicate across urban spaces and analyze the effects of design and infrastructure on plaza usage. In both Copenhagen and Dallas, ethnographic methodologies were modeled on Jan Gehl's famous research on public life. A catalyst in the world of urban design and planning, Jan Gehl developed tools to conduct public life studies and has built a design firm whose goal is to increase the livability of our public spaces.

The main methods used in this study were mapping, tracing, counting, and picture analysis. Mapping consists of sketches done on different days, during different weather, and at different times. Mapping the spaces included drawing any street furniture, fountains, or greenery as well as marking where groups of people congregated. In addition

to personal sketches, sketches were made on a Google map aerial, marking where each item is to get a better sense of scale. The second method was tracing. Tracing was another sketching method done in conjunction with mapping in terms of day, time, and frequency. Tracing essentially traced the paths of people through each space and into the surrounding areas. Counting is another highly effective tool that was executed in 10-minute intervals, and also in conjunction with mapping and tracing in terms of day and time. Counting consisted of tallying the number of people that walked through the plaza and the number of people that stopped or remained in the same place for the 10-minute interval. Picture analysis was a method used to critically analyze the actions of the people in the space; asking questions about whether they would be sitting or standing in a specific place because there was no other option or if the space provided natural seating.

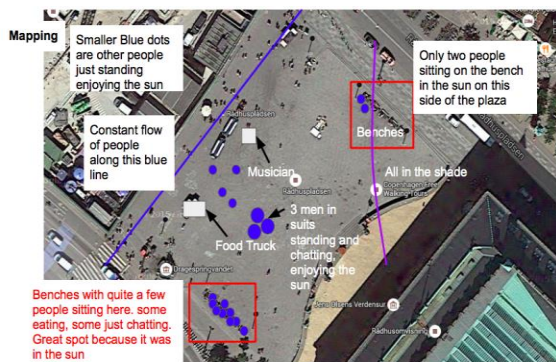


Image 6. Example of mapping ethnography notes, Rådhuspladsen, Copenhagen, Denmark, Ashley Hong, 2016

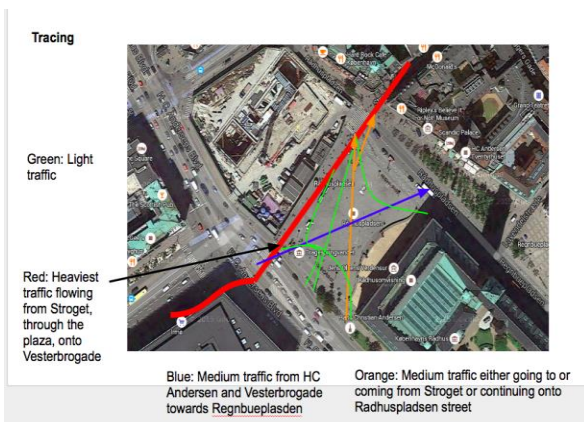


Image 7. Example of tracing ethnography notes, Rådhuspladsen, Copenhagen, Denmark, Ashley Hong, 2016

These methods yielded a trove of data, the subsequent analysis of which leads to the conclusion that successful public plazas incorporate five key principles into their design and implementation: Attraction and engagement, nature and sustainability, visibility, public transportation and pedestrian accessibility, and integration. Additional ethnographic studies of other public spaces in

Copenhagen were also conducted, which further demonstrates the successful implementation of the proposed principles.

7. PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SPACES

1) Attraction and Engagement

The first principle is to promote Dallas City Hall Plaza as a destination. Currently, the plaza sits largely unused on a daily basis. The plaza acts as a space people pass through to get to and from City Hall. By creating a comfortable and inviting space, the plaza has the potential to be a destination, a place where people want to come and spend time. Currently, unless you are visiting or work in City Hall, there is not much reason to be in the area. The neighboring streets are relatively void of activity. There are some offices, empty buildings, and parking lots nearby, which adds to the lifelessness of the plaza. In the words of Jan Gehl, “Just as cities can invite city life, there are many examples of how the renovation of a single space or even change in furniture and details can invite people to a totally new pattern of use.”⁷³ Principle one proposes to reinvigorate Dallas City Hall Plaza by bringing in popup cafes, moveable seating, food trucks, trees and art.

William Whyte stresses the importance of movable seating. Whyte’s emphasis on the importance of seating exceeds all of his other design recommendations. He argues that, “An urban space cannot become sociable if it doesn’t have the facilities about which to socialize – people won’t sit and talk to each other if there’s nowhere to sit.”⁷⁴ People like to be able to cluster in groups in a way that is natural and comfortable at any given moment. “The existence of good opportunities for sitting paves the way for the numerous activities that are the prime attractions in public spaces: eating, reading, sleeping, knitting, playing chess, sunbathing, watching people, talking, and so on.”⁷⁵ Sometimes they want to be in the shade; sometimes they want to be in the sun. By providing movable seating as suggested in the pilot project seen in image 8, instead of the uncomfortable concrete benches that are almost never in the shade or protected from the elements, the space instantly becomes a more inviting place to enjoy.

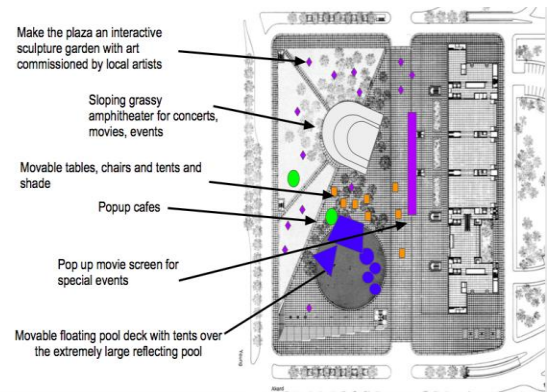


Image 8. Pilot plan, Dallas City Hall Plaza, design by Ashley Hong, 2016. Architectural Plan courtesy of Dallas Municipal Archives, City Secretary’s Office, City of Dallas.

A comparison of seating options between Dallas City Hall Plaza and Rådhuspladsen suggest that placement and design of benches and seating options is of utmost importance in creating a space people want to stay in. The benches in Dallas City Hall Plaza are concrete with no backs. They are poorly placed and rarely in the shade. During observational studies conducted as part of the methodology section of this project, no one was observed sitting on any of them. Rådhuspladsen, on the other hand, has wooden benches with comfortable backs, and depending on the time of day, usually one side of the benches in the shade, with the other in the sun, giving people options. People in Rådhuspladsen are often seen sitting comfortably in groups on the ground or on the steps in front of City Hall. Whyte suggests having at least 200 white polyvinyl-coated steel chairs, which are relatively inexpensive and can be secured with a cord to prevent a theft.⁷⁶ Good seating, both formal and informal, creates the sense that people are welcomed to stop and enjoy the space.

Additionally, food always draws a crowd. Putting in popup cafes or bringing in food trucks will draw people out of City Hall and the surrounding buildings and into the plaza. Project for Public Spaces, a New York City based non-profit and leader in public space design, use a tool called “The Power of 10,” which is the idea that all great spaces have at least 10 reasons to be there or 10 things to do.⁷⁷ By providing amenities such as food, art or a playground, paired with comfortable seating, shade in the summer and protection from the wind in the winter, people would have an incentive to come and stay.

Another way to attract and engage people is to utilize the Henry Moore sculpture as a focal piece. Make the plaza an interactive sculpture garden. People, both young and old love to interact with things. Making the plaza a playground for all ages can create a safe and fun environment that brings together children, seniors, and adults. Having a variety of age demographics not only enriches our lives, but can also act as a security measure. People tend to misbehave less in the presence of children and seniors. Commissioning interactive sculptures from local artists could keep costs lower for interactive art installations while promoting local business and culture. The local community should have a say in what type of sculptures they would like to see and what best represents them. Artists are often well connected and integrated within their local communities, and by commissioning art through them, we can avoid a scenario in which the local community is uninterested and unconnected to a given installation.

Rådhuspladsen is frequently the center of cultural events and festivities throughout the year. As the city hosts its Architecture Festival, Fashion Festival, and other cultural festivals, Rådhuspladsen is often the main gathering point. A big screen is put up, banners are hung, and people are milling around. Large city festivities should be anchored at city hall in Dallas, creating a community identity and a focal point for the city. Images 9 and 10 show a cultural event taking place in Copenhagen and the entertainment, seating, food, and tents are seen drawing quite a crowd.



Images 9. Rådhuspladsen, Copenhagen, Denmark. By Ashley Hong. 2016



Images 10. Rådhuspladsen, Copenhagen, Denmark. By Ashley Hong. 2016

Other public spaces in Copenhagen also provide examples of successful design and usage. Højbro Plads is a rectangular plaza in the center of Copenhagen. A mapping exercise of the different activities available in Højbro Plads yields cafes, food trucks, and shopping/popup stalls. A good café can be a destination to meet up with friends or spend an afternoon in the sun. Højbro Plads has two popup cafes with seating which were quite popular. Bordering Strøget, there is also the possibility of shopping and restaurants nearby. Dallas City Hall Plaza could start by having popup cafes or food trucks to draw people to the space and encourage the people who work in the area to come to the plaza during their breaks or after work. The pilot plan in Image 11 shows one design idea to incorporate popup cafes or food trucks.

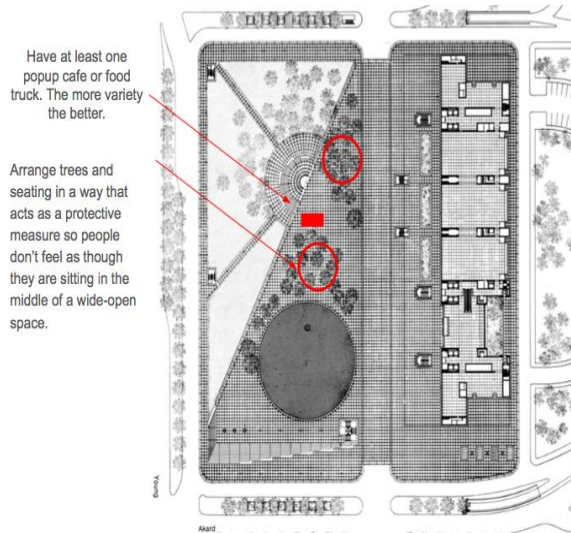


Image 11. Pop up pilot plan, Dallas City Hall Plaza, design by Ashley Hong, 2016, Architectural plan courtesy of Dallas Municipal Archives, City Secretary's Office, City of Dallas.

Using the counting method to count available seating, it can be determined that Højbro Plads has succeeded in providing seating amenities by the number of people who utilize the space. Counting included taking note of the amount of seating where people feel comfortable, observing if there is an equal amount of seating in the sun and in the shade, if the seating is suitable for the elderly (e.g. has a back rest, isn't too tall), and if seating is protected from harsh winds. Jan Gehl states that, "Simple changes such as improvements of bench seating can significantly change the pattern of use."⁷⁸ Højbro Plads has a wonderful seating arrangement where benches are situated between small trees that can provide some light shade. The benches face inwards to allow for people watching, eating, chatting, and general socialization. Implementing better benches and movable seating as well as rearranging the trees so that they are close enough together to provide some shade is one possible solution that would make the plaza more comfortable and inviting.



Image 12. Pop up café in Højbro Plads, Copenhagen, Denmark. By Ashley Hong. 2016

2) Nature and Sustainability

City centers are often described as concrete jungles, tending to lack natural amenities and green spaces. People naturally crave interaction with nature and studies have shown that being surrounded by nature de-stresses and reinvigorates. Access to green spaces is good for our health and promotes sustainability. The second principle encourages a design that incorporates more natural amenities within the plaza. This could be done simply by expanding the existing green space and adding more trees, or through bigger redesign ideas such as including a grassy amphitheater or a floating pool deck.

Sønder Boulevard is a boulevard in the neighborhood of Vesterbro in Copenhagen that was once a dilapidated thoroughfare dominated by automobiles. The recent redesign of the boulevard created a center strip of green spaces with various activities and amenities. A look at Sønder Boulevard between Dybbølsgade and Dannebrogsgade shows how green spaces can transform a public space. A mapping exercise shows a fairly equal amount of green grass space and concrete/wood in this space. Each patch of green space also had a couple of trees, which provide shade. Dallas City Hall Plaza should promote a healthier life style by encouraging people to be outside and interacting with nature. In this case, even Rådhuspladsen could use a lesson in more green spaces.



Image 13. Photo Analysis: Green Space, Dallas City Hall Plaza, by Ashley Hong, 2016



Image 14. Sønders Boulevard Copenhagen: People sitting on the grass, Denmark. By Ashley Hong, 2016

Counting the number of people in Dallas City Hall Plaza who chose to sit on the grass versus the wooden installments, there were on average, 18 people on the grass at any given moment and 23 people sitting on the wooden platform that is slightly raised to create informal seating. It is important to have both options. An inclusion of a grassy amphitheater allows for a natural seating area that can easily be maintained. An amphitheater can be utilized during events and social gatherings and can also be an enjoyable feature for anyone working in City Hall in need of an afternoon break. By encouraging people to lounge on the grass, we might be able to generate more social activity in the plaza. There is plenty of shade there from the thick trees in the grassy part of the plaza, unlike the scrawny trees currently on the concrete part of the plaza. Additionally, half the plaza has the potential to be activated by utilizing the area around the fountain by making it more people-friendly and inviting to interact with. William Whyte notes that, “One of the best things about water is the look and feel of it... Water is another fine element and designers are doing rather well with it... only one major respect is lacking: access... It is not right to put water before people and then keep them away from it.”⁷⁹ Currently the fountain acts as a “look, but do not touch” feature. Creating a movable floating pool deck enhances the use of the reflecting pool. It can still look aesthetically pleasing and be beneficial in creating social interaction and encouraging interaction with nature.

3) Visibility

The design of Dallas City Hall Plaza has the plaza separated from the street and the rest of the surrounding neighborhood. People should be able to stumble across this public plaza and be able to see what is going on inside. The openness of Rådhuspladsen, the flow of neighboring streets into the plaza and the ability to see the entire plaza from any point creates the inviting environment that is lacking in Dallas. Dallas City Hall Plaza is leveled in a way that

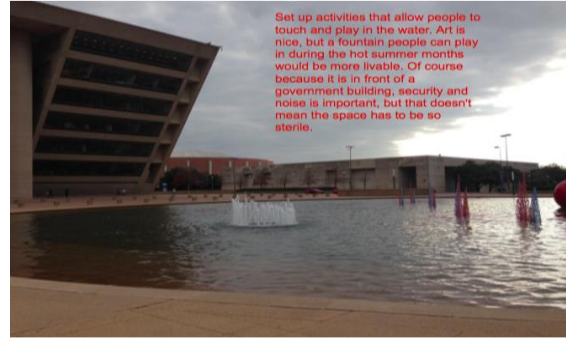


Image 15. Photo Analysis: Reflecting Pool, Dallas City Hall Plaza, by Ashley Hong, 2016

requires stairs to get to it on one end. A tall wall, as shown in image 16 cuts the plaza in half and hides it from the street and the grassy area. Removing that wall would integrate the plaza with the street, increasing visibility and sense of safety.

Using the tracing method, observations were conducted on which direction people come from and where they go while in the space. An analysis of the surrounding streets can also provide information on how accessible the space is to the by-passer. Sønders Boulevard is easily accessible from all sides and people come and go from all directions, unlike Dallas City Hall Plaza where stairs and a wall block visibility. Cars in Sønders Boulevard are parked on the side of the street opposite the park space so that it is more open and visible. Simply opening up the plaza and making it an extension of the streets rather than an enclosed entity can dramatically alter the feel and appearance of the plaza.

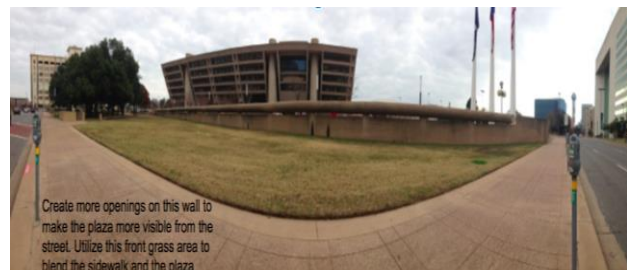


Image 16. Photo Analysis: Visibility, Dallas City Hall Plaza, by Ashley Hong, 2016

4) Public Transportation and Pedestrian Accessibility

If people can't get to public spaces easily, they won't use them. Therefore, it is important to provide people with a good, reliable public transit system, adequate parking where necessary, and to encourage people to walk and bike. Joe Cortright, writer for the City Observatory, observes that, “The role of the public space of the street has changed as well. Prior to the advent of the automobile, the street was a shared, multi-use public space, not just for vehicles (horse-drawn, self-propelled, commercial,

and private), but also for walking, cycling, playing, selling, and socializing. The legal environment of the street was changed to establish the dominance of automobiles over all other uses of the street.”⁸⁰ The most popular mode of transportation in Dallas is by automobile. Lack of strong, comprehensive walking or public transportation infrastructure makes it more convenient to drive in Dallas.

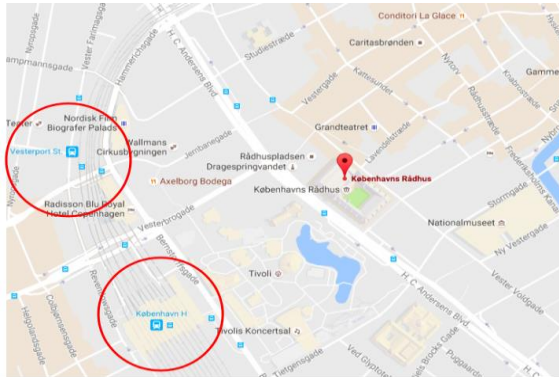


Image 17. GoogleMaps: Rådhuspladsen Transit Options Markups by Ashley Hong, 2016

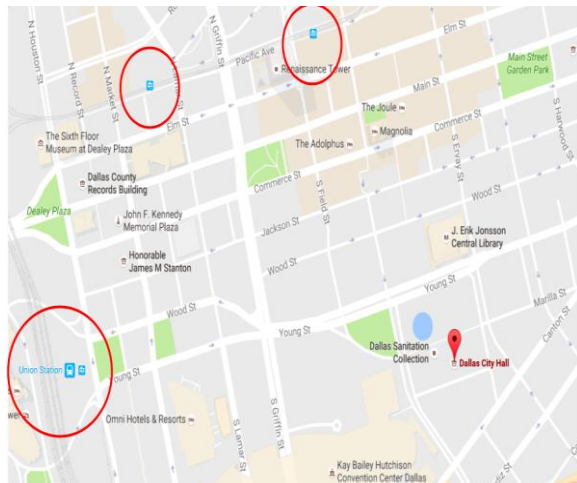


Image 18. GoogleMaps: Dallas City Hall Plaza Transit Options Markups by Ashley Hong, 2016

A walk around Rådhuspladsen shows it is within two blocks of 8 different bus lines (see image 17), about 4 blocks from Vesterport Train Station and 1 long block to Copenhagen Central Station. It is very easy to get to the square via public transportation. Dallas City Hall Plaza, on the other hand, is only serviced by 4 different bus lines within two blocks and is not within walking distance from the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) trains, which are outlined in red circles in the map images (see image 18). The scales of the maps are different to emphasize how far away the closest stops are to Dallas City Hall Plaza. Had the scales of the maps stayed the same, there would not have been any main DART stops in view. Having reliable public

transportation creates an incentive to get out of the private restraints of a car and into the public sphere of the city. The more time spent behind a wheel in a car is less time spent out on the streets. Research suggests that if a reliable public transportation system is built, people will use it. In the absence of a reliable system, however, people will continue to demonstrate a preference for their cars. Thus, the city must take initiative and commit to improving the DART system if it hopes to see an increase in ridership.

In public spaces there is often a concern about safety. But despite the possibility of having undesirables (homeless, vagrants, panhandlers), public spaces are essential to creating community and democracy. Creating a space that is utilized by many different types of people makes it far less likely for offenders to commit crimes since, “crimes are less likely to occur if potential offenders are aware that there are law-abiding citizens in the area who could witness, report or intervene.”⁸¹ Jane Jacobs would attest to that statement. Having “eyes on the street” through public characters, windows facing the plaza, or a generally open space with a lot of foot traffic creates a sense of security that essentially self regulates the space.⁸² Without people walking in the streets, cities feel like ghost towns, businesses lose potential, and cities lose their appeal. Especially today, millennials are looking for walkable communities. When things are in walking distance, people are in public spaces, and there are things to see on the streets, the value of that community is exponentially increased. Trees on the sidewalk to shade people during the heat will make a walk along these sidewalks more enjoyable. One way to encourage walking around Dallas City Hall Plaza is to simply add some trees. On one block between Carit Etlars Vej and Paludan Muller Vej on Frederiksberg Alle in Copenhagen there are 14 trees, 7 across from each other to provide maximum shade and a pretty aesthetic. This is a sidewalk people want to walk along, not next to empty buildings and parking lots.



Image 19. Walk, Frederiksberg Alle, La Citta Vita, flickr, 14, January 2011. Web. 13, March 2017



Image 20. Photo Analysis: Tree Lined Streets, Dallas City Hall Plaza, by Ashley Hong, 2016

5) Integration

Currently, Dallas City Hall Plaza is isolated from the rest of downtown Dallas. A couple of blocks removed from Main Street and Commerce Street where there are restaurants and shops, Dallas City Hall Plaza sits next to empty buildings and parking lots. Rådhuspladsen, on the other hand is immerse in activity, situated near plenty of cafes and shops, entertainment venues such as theaters, museums, and an amusement park, as well as a central business center. In contrast, Image 21 shows all the parking lots surrounding Dallas City Hall Plaza in red circles. The purple lines indicate the higher foot traffic corridors of Main and Commerce Streets. The blue square in the center indicates City Hall Plaza and the other two blue squares mark the closest “major” destinations to the plaza, the farmers market and Dealy Plaza. While distant wise, it’s only a few blocks to these destinations and to Main and Commerce Street, those few blocks are desolate and unpleasant to walk along. There is no street activity, no shops to peruse or people to see. The 104-year-old Butler Brothers Building at 500 S. Ervay, directly next too City Hall Plaza is one of the last large vacant commercial buildings downtown, but there have been recent talks to redevelop the building, which would bring more people to the immediate area.⁸³ On the other side of the plaza sits an old convention center that never seems to be in use. Right now, Dallas City Hall Plaza does not benefit from any of the foot traffic in downtown Dallas because of its lack of integration with its surrounding area. By encouraging redevelopment of some of the surrounding parking lots and empty buildings, we can create a linkage with the rest of downtown via shops, restaurants, trees, and art.

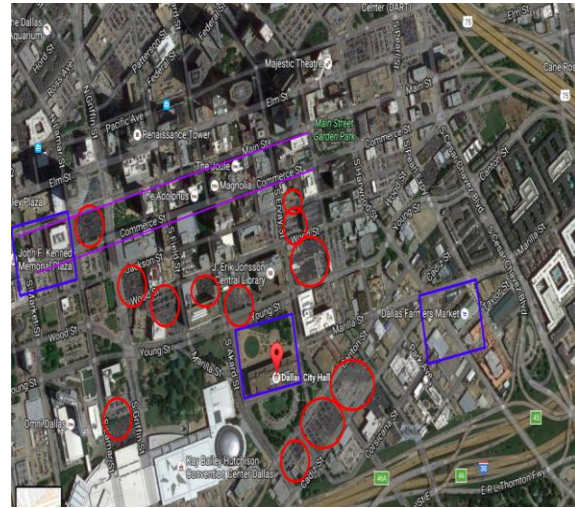


Image 21. GoogleMaps, Dallas City Hall Plaza: Parking Lots, Markups by Ashley Hong, 2016

8. CONCLUSION

Critics will argue that the original physical design of the respective plazas are difficult, if not impossible, to change. But we can in fact modify, mitigate, and reshape public spaces to reflect our vibrant, robust communities and cultures. The implementations of the five principles outlined above demonstrate some small incremental changes that could mitigate the harsh climate of the plaza and help to create a vibrant extension of downtown Dallas. Activating this otherwise wasted space is important because as the civic square of the city, the plaza holds symbolic, cultural, and political significance. The purpose of civic spaces is to help “the formation of the richest quality of a multi-class, multi-cultural, heterogeneous society.”⁸⁴ Despite being designed for social control, through creative design Dallas can reverse the effects of the desolate plaza described as a “public purgatory.”⁸⁵ Redevelopment can turn Dallas City Hall Plaza into a civic space that has educational, informative and communicative roles in strengthening public life.⁸⁶

Excitingly, there have been recent ideas floating around to redevelop Dallas City Hall Plaza. In 2015, there were tentative designs drawn out and talks in the works between the City of Dallas and Turkish developer Mukemmel “Mike” Sarimsakci.⁸⁷ Talks included the possibility of formulating a public-private partnership in redesigning the plaza in the hopes to revitalize the area for Sarimsakci’s renovation of the 104-year-old Butler Brothers Building at 500 S. Ervay Street that has long sat empty. The redevelopment plans aim to turn the 8-story former warehouse building into a 42-story mixed-use tower development that would boast a new hotel, office space and 270 condos to the neighborhood.⁸⁸ Public/private partnerships are considered, “creative alliances formed between a government entity and private developers to achieve a common purpose.”⁸⁹ These partnerships allow land owned by a municipality to be developed with the help of private funds. Discussions of plans to revitalize the adjacent City Hall Plaza would create a new destination in downtown Dallas. Design ideas include food trucks and

more shade to glass-box retail and even a swimming pool along the plaza on Young Street.⁹⁰ Sarimsakci says that, "We'll spend the money, put glass-like retail structures -- like those in Klyde Warren Park -- and lease the properties to potential restaurants, coffee shops and maybe have co-working space in there. It would create foot traffic and vitality."⁹¹ The plaza has much potential, both socially and economically. There is strong revenue potential for local businesses and the city from increased activity and development, which is an important component.

But even more importantly, the plaza has the potential to be a social center. These redevelopment ideas incorporate many aspects of the five proposed principles and understand the importance of attraction and engagement, sustainability and nature, visibility, accessibility, and integration. All of these principles can be addressed through a redevelopment project like the one proposed. However, we should not forget the bigger picture. Revitalizing public spaces is not simply implementing these small changes, but also understanding the impact of the larger urban context surrounding these spaces, such as transportation. Dallas doesn't have to be Copenhagen in order to develop a vibrant urban culture. It just has to adopt the mindset that people are important aspects to city life and that amenities for people like public spaces shouldn't be given less priority than automobiles. As cultures and practices of new generations evolve, cities must adapt in order to continue being the center of cultural, economic, and political exchange because, in the wise words of Jan Gehl, "We shape cities, and they shape us."⁹² Dallas City Hall Plaza can be the vibrant Rådhuspladsen the city deserves.

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