Abstract:

Urban squares filled with sense of place are difficult to find in American cities, particularly outside the coastal metropolitan regions. They are often treated as after-thoughts or trade-offs to “open space” in exchange for more building area, resulting either in spatial voids lacking character or in privatized public spaces reflecting corporate ownership. Yet, the urban square is historically the hub of public life within the city—a void filled with the intersection of people and activity. Treated appropriately, squares drive business development, reduce crime and enhance the city’s visual and social atmosphere. Designing meaningful voids (as it were) is no simple task, but it is necessary to activate the urban realm.

What key elements ground the ethereal concept of open, public space into an urban square with sense of place? Consequently, what elements are missing in the experience of failed spaces, and how can design play a role in creating desirable urban squares for all? While myriad factors contribute to the successful design of squares, there are five fundamental roots which transform open spaces into public dwelling places—Architecture, Enclosure, Inclusion, Observation and Utility. The present paper will unpack these square roots and offer graphic examples of both successful and unsuccessful implementation, providing the reader with insight to assess design of the public realm and, more broadly, to link principles of good urban design with the overall health of the city.
Introduction

Urban squares have a long developmental history in western culture, particularly tied to public commerce and the exchange of ideas. Squares are special places where policies are protested, society is reformed, regimes rise and fall and the course of human history is sometimes altered. As a result, cultural, economic and social factors have shaped the urban form of the square over millennia into a highly nuanced public place attached with identity, meaning and memory. Such is the case for much of Europe and European-influenced cultures, but finding urban squares as densely packed with the narrative of human engagement in the United States is difficult at best, particularly outside the major metropolitan coasts. Several factors contribute to the lack of strong, centralized public space in this country, but we will only spend a few moments discussing them as this paper is focused on positing the creation of public space rather than lamenting its absence.

From its origins, the United States set out to be different from its European counterparts, wanting to explore new freedoms and innovative ways of life for the individual over community. Rather than embrace the melting pot of urban life, we chose TV dinners with portions segregated across ethnic, economic, political, racial and social lines and so chose to define the path of urban development from our earliest foundations. Such a paradigm of rugged individualism drove the westward expansion of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century and auto-centrism, suburbanization and urban renewal in the twentieth century. As a result, architects, planners and urban designers in this country are so far removed from the experience of public places there is an overall lack of understanding of what makes a vibrant urban square.

Despite our experiment with isolation, the increasing urban population in the United States is forcing us to engage in the clash of communal life. Public places are necessary to provide decompression from the city’s pace, and squares have a transcendent power to gather the human experience and connect past, present and future in the continual narrative. The famous triple bottom line of sustainability—social, environmental and financial—is only filtered through the financial lens in the bottom-line economy of American capitalism, resulting in decisions that are best for the money economy above all else. However, we must stress the importance of social and environmental impacts of sustainable growth in the urban realm. Such are the reasons why our learning curve toward meaningful urban places is steep.

While many presenters will discuss the importance of public spaces as change agents—vehicles for demonstration, civil unrest and paradigm-shifting events, this paper focuses on design principles to make urban squares vibrant places for the unchanging narrative of human history—the meaningful mundane. A square known only for a single event that changes history is not necessarily a successful square. Rather everyday life events establish community rhythms which become threads woven into the urban fabric. What are the key elements necessary for transforming open spaces into meaningful public places where such threads are woven, and what is currently missing from our understanding of urban design? Though myriad factors contribute to the design of public space, there are five fundamental roots capable of creating the framework for successful urban squares—architecture, enclosure, inclusion, observation and utility.

Architecture

Urban squares are open-air surfaces that provide a place of gathering and repose within the city. For such gathering to occur, the surrounding environment must have some measure of beauty. Though the Modern Movement in architecture sought to remove the word “beauty” from the discipline, regarding it as something too subjective to fit within the formulaic methods of efficient and functional design, humans fundamentally respond to and connect with positive sensory
stimuli. We must understand that the surroundings, if existent, are perhaps beyond the designer’s
control, as well as traffic patterns, weather conditions and the overall size of the site. However,
good designers recognize constraints as opportunities for nuanced, meaningful outcomes rather
than as obstacles blocking the easiest solutions.

When the surroundings of a square are less than inspiring, for example, the designer must
pay attention to framing views from the square, highlighting important and/or architecturally
significant buildings and landscape (fig.1). A hierarchy of view sheds creates
foreground/background relationships and provides the designer an opportunity to mirror those
relationships in the square’s layout and detailing. Approaching the square as a series of rooms
reinforces hierarchy, motion, path and scale in response to the surrounding environment while
embedding the design deeply within the site’s context. If there is opportunity to engage with
existing buildings on the site, we must look first toward renovating rather than razing because they
are a part of our story. The period of urban renewal and erasure of existing buildings created
unnecessary contextual holes in the urban fabric which now represent discontinuities in the human
narrative. New work and renovation provide opportunities to bring beauty and life back into the
forgotten architecture and represent threads that weave strength into the urban fabric, tying
together past and present. As such, existing buildings pose design opportunities to transform the
uninspired into the inspirational.

New buildings developed on and near the square should be for a specific purpose or client
rather than speculation, presenting a public-accessible program on the ground floor (cafes, shops,
galleries, etc.). As such, the architecture should avoid what has become the conventional means
of urban development, namely bland and placeless forms that could be situated anywhere at any
time. While this approach is good for a developer’s bottom line, it devalues the surroundings and
represents a net loss for the urban environment. Squares are not static entities but have a dynamic
set of experiences at different speeds—vehicles traveling at 20-30 mph; people walking at 5 mph
and people sitting within and along the square (fig.2). As such, a building’s detailing should
reflect multiple scales of visibility. Too often, we see dimensionless glass façades or unarticulated
surfaces that provide ease of construction but do not contribute to a sense of place. In the same
way an industrial building with concrete block walls does not evoke feelings of belonging inside,
dimensionless, flat facades isolate people from their surroundings outside.

The layout of new buildings situated in and around the square provides opportunity to
improve both the square and its context. Siting buildings to shield from weather exposure and
poor views can enrich the experience for people in the square and for the approach to the square.
Architecture should respond to its context instead of forcing itself to fill voids. Regarding context,
the architecture should be a product of our own time rather than historical copy because our
architecture represents our threads in the urban fabric, strengthening the continual narrative of
human history. On the same point, however, buildings should not be so avant garde as to become
devoid of context, thereby standing without meaning to the surroundings. Rather, buildings
become most meaningful when they are designed to be outstanding at fitting into the local context,
thereby contributing to the visual story of place, edifying collective identity and enriching the
sense of community (fig.3).

Materials must be durable and high-quality, focusing on timeless instead of trendy
specifications to withstand both the elements and constant abuse of people and objects. Introducing multiple materials and different scales can break the square into varying rooms to
increase versatility of use and occupancy while maintaining an overall open space for large-scale
gathering and events. If people are expected to dwell, rest and play in a place, the materials must
have textures that respond to human senses, meaning they cannot be the same stuff upon which cars are driving. Every design decision must be focused on increasing the quality of life for human interaction and occupation. Architecture is often considered to be the artful design of thresholds—interior and exterior, private and public, etc. Then the architecture of the square represents the threshold between intimacy of community life and isolation of city life.

**Enclosure**

As thresholds, urban squares must provide some sense of oasis away from the busy-ness of the city. Large, open fields with no distinguishable border (other than the street) tend to make people feel isolated, out of place and vulnerable—similar to the feeling one gets when required to cross multiple lanes of traffic, perhaps stopping at a median along the way. Establishing a defined border between the square proper and the rest of the city is fundamental to designing a sense of place where people want to be, and the concept for achieving this required separation is enclosure. Design considerations for creating enclosure include traffic, weather and social interaction.

The first consideration for establishing enclosure is separating people from the noise and speed of vehicular traffic. People and cars do not mix when it comes to providing a place of repose, and every effort must be made to shield people from the sensation of being surrounded by cars. Unfortunately, urban squares are often designed as afterthoughts when there is vacant land within the street grid. As such, vehicular traffic patterns are established and difficult to revise, which typically means four sides of traffic surround newly developed squares. While cities often use
parallel parking around a square’s borders effectively to act as a buffer to vehicular flow, such an approach should not be the only concept for achieving enclosure.

We must also consider weather exposure, and local climates provide opportunity to engage specifically with surrounding context to ensure place-based design (fig.6). The infinite ceiling of sky is a major attribute of squares, but people engaging with the site need opportunity to escape from the elements. While the sun plays a key role in gathering people outside, too much creates glare and excessive heat gain, particularly in humid climates. Siting built elements to provide opportunity for shade reduces the negative effects of sun exposure and establishes zones within the square for directed activity that will change with the sun path throughout the day, creating a dynamic set of spaces within the square’s fixed volume. Additionally, shelter from wind, rain and snow should be integral to the square’s design and orientation to encourage maximum outdoor usage regardless of the local climate.

As social animals with the unique gift of longing and desire, we have built into our primal selves a duality of prospect and refuge; that is, the desire to strive for risk and reward while simultaneously maintaining havens of comfort and safety. Though we naturally think of squares as places for large groups to gather, we must recognize that community-sized events are relatively rare. Rather, squares are places for the everyday gathering of small groups and individuals, places that can welcome quiet conversations. The square’s built environment should encourage the intersection of our social duality, having enclosing elements that are hard and thick as well as soft and thin. A blend of such elements in varying scales encourages interaction at multiple levels, from individuals to groups, and helps to create a universal sense of belonging that transforms an open space into a public place.

Elements used to create enclosure are limitless, but a few key categories provide solutions to multiple of the above considerations. Trees and planting provide excellent walls of enclosure to public squares. They generate softness and increase our perception of connection to nature, heightening the square’s outdoor experience. Large trees provide shade from the sun and elements while maintaining a level of transparency and visibility below the canopy that act as a filtered edge to the square. Evergreen trees can provide noise and wind buffering if situated properly while deciduous trees minimize sun exposure in summer and maximize exposure in winter.

Walls and hardscape elements such as bollards, fountains, seat walls and sculptures provide places to sit, gather and play while also designating hard edges to rooms within the square. Such elements are ideal for separating pedestrian traffic through and around the square from the more sedentary activity. Built high enough in some instances, hard elements also provide the sense of refuge desired at one’s back. Introducing water in the form of fountains and splash pads increases sense of place and anchors the square with something different from the rest of the city’s outdoor space. Additionally, water features help with evaporative cooling in warm weather and attract people of all ages to gather for both play and rest.

One of the simplest solutions for separation and enclosure within a square is to incorporate elevation changes, perhaps as little as six inches. Just as a six-inch curb automatically separates the vehicular street from the pedestrian sidewalk, another elevation change introduces the square as something set apart from regular flow of the city. More drastic elevation changes within the square have the power to create additional rooms and opportunity to highlight or hide key landmarks but should be carefully considered to avoid creating a sense of exclusion. Designed improperly, elevated squares can appear as private spaces that deter people from entering for fear of not belonging. The best solution involves small elevation changes at different points within the square to break up the overall space while keeping it visually and physically connected.
Finally, buildings with a public function meant to draw people to the square provide strong, hard borders. While the primary function is to gather people, a supporting backdrop of retail and commercial space further fosters the square as a place of repose connected to the hustle and bustle of city life. While much about buildings is previously discussed, the sense of scale and detailing in buildings on the square cannot be overstated. Buildings detailed to be “read” are key to the experience of enclosure (fig. 7).

Ultimately, the concept of enclosure is about two functions. The first is to create separation, a special place set apart from the rest of the city and meant to gather people. Design elements foster the sense of separation using borders of varying thickness and hardness to form an outside room in the city, essentially its living room. The second function of enclosure is to create a sense of belonging for the people using the space. To belong implies an inside and an outside, and belonging means one is on the inside of whatever threshold is in question. Given the public nature of squares and the desire to create community engagement, the only way to design a successful square is to create opportunity and encouragement for all members of the community to belong.

fig. 6 Climate-based enclosure
Source: Author.

fig. 7 Some basic design tools to achieve enclosure
Source: Author.

fig. 8 Pioneer Plaza, Portland, OR (GOOD)
the sunken plaza, its geometry and tree line provide a sense of enclosed space within the city
Source: Author.

fig. 9 Logan Circle, Philadelphia, PA (BAD)
though possessing a beautiful feature, the circle requires passing through a roundabout of traffic, leaving it exposed and undesired
Source: Google.

Inclusion

The concept of inclusion is one often discussed but seldom addressed from a design perspective, other than accessibility to meet code minimums. While questions about who belongs and what economic drivers can promote cross-cultural interaction come up in public charrettes, they rarely make it to the drafting table, dismissed as social problems too complex to solve with design. However, if we desire to create cohesive communities and bring healing to deep cultural
and social divides, we must design public spaces where the intersection of difference is welcomed and encouraged. If we plan to design inclusive urban squares, we must address three specific topics: the public/private relationship, universal design and emphasis on local economic development.

Our increasingly commercial culture is limiting inclusion through the privatization of public space. Most often, this looks like a corporation constructing a “public” square in exchange for greater floor area within a building footprint. Yet, the use of corporate materials, increased levels of security and surveillance and concentration of middle-class and higher socio-economic status result in a corporate plaza that only serves people tied to the building itself. Additionally, the corporate building maintains a private functional program on the ground floor, which further discourages public engagement with the site. Such an urban space is one of isolation rather than belonging and reflects the same mentality as the suburban development of gated communities (fig.10).

From a political and regulatory perspective, regulations for commercial development could require the use of materials and design that are not directly associated with corporate branding because public spaces that look like adjacent skyscrapers automatically project themselves as private and exclusive. Additionally, developers could be required to program the ground floors of their buildings with public-accessible functions such as shops, restaurants and galleries to encourage public presence, and such requirements could be incentivized through tax vehicles for the developers. Finally, connecting the square’s signage, lighting, public art and programming to the rest of the city’s public infrastructure would enhance sense of belonging.

Economic inclusion from the development side helps kickstart a project, but ensuring a square’s success requires universal design. The concept of universal design includes more than accessibility as it is typically discussed, focusing on the creation of space that is accessible and pleasant for all people regardless of ability, age, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status. As such, designers must consider innovative approaches to meeting the needs of all with limited budgets and materials. Unfortunately, many designers think of universal design as a hindrance to executing a clear vision, feeling that accommodating the needs of small minorities of a population devalues the experience for the majority. Such thinking is not only inaccurate, but it represents an almost willful negligence of our responsibility as licensed professionals to uphold the public’s health, safety and welfare in highest regard. On the contrary, considering the needs of all at the outset of a design project presents opportunity to employ creativity to make spaces more diverse, richer in detail and more integrated to the site and to society.

Including textured and tactile materials, water features and plants that create habitat foster a multi-sensory environment to enhance the experience for all people. Minimizing the presence of security and surveillance, or at least the perception of such presence reduces the feeling of exclusion that often marginalizes people who feel part of “the other” culture. In addition, encouraging retail and commercial development spanning across ethnic identities and social classes promotes intersection among different people groups. Finally, we must design for all ages. Although urban revitalization is most commonly advertised as a Millennial Generation trend, the reality points to advanced urban population growth among all age groups, especially the elderly who wish to age in place within proximity to their needs and services. Places for young children to play at the square provide opportunity for them to learn social engagement among different people groups and to learn not to fear what is different.

The last major consideration for inclusion relates to development of the local economy. Closely related to the issue of privatization of public space is the proliferation of national and
global influence in the commercial environment. When such chains make up the architecture of the square, the entire visual backdrop loses its sense of place identity and context, becoming an urban version of the universal suburban strip mall. Anchoring urban squares with local commercial enterprises fosters pride of place and encourages design to respond to specific client needs and enrich the place narrative. Not only should businesses be local, but they should be diversified to reflect and support the local economy.

When designers, officials and the public collaborate to create inclusive environments, truly public squares emerge, and they become places where all people feel welcome (fig.11). Such places become nodes of activity and engagement in the city, and they contribute to the overall health of the urban environment as people gather to share their lives. The meaningful mundane of everyday existence takes root in the city and contributes to the strength of the urban fabric, elevating the place from a simple void in the city to a hub of interaction. Places of inclusion are places of belonging, and people begin to see the value of community in such places, taking note of the special relationship between the square and the community.

![fig.10](image1.png) isolation, belonging, inclusion
Source: Author

![fig.11](image2.png) basic design tools for inclusion
Source: Author

![fig.12](image3.png) Washington Park, Cincinnati, OH (GOOD)
The recently refurbished public space possesses a playground, dog park, splash pad and open space for farmers markets and outdoor symphony concerts
Source: Google.

![fig.13](image4.png) P&G Plaza, Cincinnati, OH (BAD)
The plaza is designed with corporate branding and a strong security presence, leaving the public to feel unwelcome, despite the central location downtown
Source: Google.

**Observation**

The essence of observation is simple: to see and be seen. Squares, ideally situated within the core of urban development, are places where both should occur. The square itself represents a landmark location within the city and should be designed as an object of beauty to gather people. Likewise, if the surroundings are designed appropriately, the square also represents a vantage point...
from which the community can interact meaningfully with the built environment. When considering observation with respect to the square’s design, three ideas are key to achieving successful results: human interaction, public safety and approach.

While human personalities cover a range of comfort levels with social interaction, we all fundamentally desire some form of relationship beyond ourselves. People watching is a universal human trait we enjoy; our natural curiosity toward others automatically creates a situation of audience and performer within the public sphere, and there should be places for both. The performers—perhaps literal street performers, teenagers showing off for attention or simply children playing, require some measure of open, viewable space. Likewise, the audience should be able to enjoy the performance from benches, seat walls and shaded areas. Such elements must accommodate the ranges of social interaction, as we choose to feed our curiosity from differing distances based upon our social comfort levels.

Enjoying the social atmosphere of a square is only viable if there is a general sense of public safety. Unfortunately, the default solution to safety often results in heightened police presence and video surveillance. Although sometimes a harsh reality to digest, we must understand that significant portions of the population view police presence as a threat rather than as a measure of security. Likewise, if people feel as though they are being watched, particularly by an autonomous surveillance system, they feel more like visitors to another’s place instead of comfortable at home. The purpose of an urban square is to provide a public home to the whole community, and a highly visible security presence reinforces the notions of privatized public space as previously discussed.

Multiple design opportunities exist to promote public safety without employing a special security detail to monitor the square. First is Jane Jacobs’ concept of “eyes on the street.” The simple matter is that public spaces are perceived safer when people are present. Therefore, we must design programs to encourage public activation of the spaces around and within the square. Urban decay happens with stagnation, and keeping the square in motion with human activity reduces the risk of crime and vacancy. Retail and commercial development automatically generate pedestrian traffic, while beautifully designed surroundings encourage people to stop and engage with the environment. Scheduled events such as farmers’ markets, concerts and public lectures provide special opportunities to encourage both local and outside populations to interact with the square and each other.

While programming an engaging public realm on the ground floors of buildings is necessary for activating the square during the day, we must also design with night-time safety in mind. As such, the upper floors of buildings on the square should be, at least in part, devoted to residential development, preferably across social classes to include both market-rate and low-income housing. Similar to the effect surveillance systems have on making people feel uncomfortable in a space, those who wish to do harm to society feel less inclined to act if there is a fear of witnessed behavior. Residential development also promotes a sense of belonging and homeliness within the surroundings and increases the perception of safety, even during the day. Walking around the squares of Savannah, lined with their Italianate and Colonial residences, produces a pleasing and welcoming sensation that would be fundamentally different if those same buildings were offices vacated at 5:00 pm every evening and weekend.

Discussing the square’s surroundings again takes us to the third key idea regarding observation, the approach. Before programming a square or progressing toward layout, many questions must be addressed. First is the square’s scale; is it a grand gesture or a pocket park? The scale will directly determine some of the means toward achieving intimacy, which is a function
of creating corners within the rooms of the square. The second question to address is the square’s location within the city. Is it a gateway into a neighborhood, or will it be centrally located? What are the square’s boundaries, and how are they perceived both from within and from outside the square? If the square is to be a gateway, then the architecture of the square likely wants to bleed into the surrounding infrastructure to extend its welcoming presence. Framing views becomes more important as the square, in this instance, is not just a threshold within the city but also acts as a threshold to the city. If the square is to be centrally located, is it meant to stand out as a jewel, or is it a hidden gem to be discovered? Such questions drive the design team toward establishing the experiential path one takes to enter the square.

We have seen the value of squares as central places for social gathering and how the fundamental root of observation plays a role in determining public perception of a square with respect to social interaction, public safety and approach. A principle function of the square is to feed our natural curiosity toward one another with a place that is both significant and welcoming to all members of society. Of course, no square will be successful or viable if it is not properly designed to serve its unique functional requirements, and that is where the final fundamental concept of utility comes into play.

**Utility**

Utility, or usefulness, is a term currently used to imply base-level functionality and is often tied to value engineering, where the question posed is, “What is the minimum cost we can incur to achieve the functional goals of the project.” As such, the word represents a point of tension for a project, a line in the sand separating design and construction teams from owners. Masked under the false guise of value, utility relates to the economic bottom-line approach to design and rarely results in higher value for anyone, especially the project’s end users. To understand the true meaning of utility, we must explore two expressions of the term—its literal, functional meaning and its nuanced origins in Roman Antiquity which combine to create an intangible importance for community development.

First, an urban square must be able to accommodate many purposes in one space. A square with several corners separated visually and spatially may foster small, intimate gatherings, but such a layout would not support a large public event. Likewise, a large open space with no distinct corners is a suitable place for community gathering but is not necessarily ideal for small-scale interaction. Such is the complexity of urban design and especially of squares which have sometimes contradictory purposes that must simultaneously overlap and operate exclusively. To
the couple who sips coffee together and people-watch every day in the square, a large public event should enhance rather than deter from their routine. As such, the value of successful urban squares rests precisely in their ability to absorb and adapt to the changing needs of the community, and designing such dynamic places within a static locality requires significant and complex thought.

Beyond pure function, however, the word utility in this paper is taken in part from the Vitruvian trio of firmitas, utilitas, venustas and is now far-removed from its original context with reference to architectural and urban design. When Vitruvius wrote these words in the first century BCE, utilitas certainly spoke of the efficiency of design to meet functional needs, but it also carried much stronger connotations of decorum, that is the principle dealing with the appropriate level of design execution relative to a project’s importance. For example, utilitas is the principle governing the development and use of the Classical Orders of columns, from the common Doric to the elegant and noble Corinthian. In today’s money economy, however, most projects carry the same relative lack of importance with respect to anything beyond the bottom line and are designed to meet universally banal goals. The more completed and nuanced definition of utility calls to question universal approaches, and it requires us to carefully consider the meaningful purpose behind potential projects.

While the practical, functional notions of utility are relatively easy to include in the design process, the puzzle is incomplete without the nuanced concept of utilitas, which explains why some squares employing most or all the design tools lack a spirit of vitality. The integration of utility and utilitas establishes a fundamental opportunity to create intangibly meaningful places from the open spaces in our urban environments. Decorum is what connects design tools to the community and its surrounding context. Squares designed for public accessibility to all and responding to the site, its history and its physical form enhance the surroundings and the life of people who engage them. Establishing such connections with the community creates a place full of meaning that contributes to community identity and collective memory, and only then does the term utility relate to added value beyond the bottom line, as its meaning is intended.

fig.16 Fountain Square, Cincinnati, OH (GOOD)
fig.17 Public Square, Cleveland, OH (BAD)

Fountain square possesses all the characteristics of utilitas—it is set apart with special materials, activated by commercial space, contains trees and water and an infrastructure that allows for multiple uses. Source: Google.

This central space, taking up four city blocks in the heart of downtown, could be an amazing place with plenty of room; yet, each quadrant is segregated from the rest with each devoted to a limited number of uses. Source: Google.
Conclusion:

Urban squares are historically the city’s great rooms, places where people gather to experience the best of public life. However, the American context has typically treated them as basements, sometimes worth finishing but mostly just storage for ignoble experiences. As our urban population density grows, however, we must learn to design squares that will accommodate the shift in American culture from rugged individualism to a hybrid of individualistic communities. Successful squares are places where the meaningful mundane of everyday life within those communities creates a collective identity that becomes a catalyst for social change, and there are five fundamental roots to consider when designing the square.

Architecture is the artful design of the threshold between city and community life. The square itself and its surroundings must possess a contextual beauty to link the continual narrative of human history from past, present and future within the urban fabric. Enclosure is the means of setting the square apart as a special place, a border to create the framework for belonging on the inside of a meaningful community experience. Inclusion is the guiding principle for design decisions to ensure the built environment enhances all lives within the community. Observation builds a foundation of visibility for the square as a public place—a place to see and be seen where people gather under the safety of public presence within a backdrop of beautiful surroundings. Finally, utility represents both the functional efficacy of the space and its greater meaning of decorum, quality design for the significant value a square adds to the community environment.

Understanding the fundamental roots of successful squares will aid designers, officials and planners in creating the potential of place within our urban environments. The measure of success cannot be obtained through metrics and objective data, however. Rather, success is measured solely by the presence of people and whether they belong to the space. When people experience belonging, borders are broken, masks are removed and authentic relationships are formed. We will recognize successful squares when, in those places, rugged individualism and collective identity weave stronger threads into the urban fabric.
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