The library as place
Providing students with opportunities for socialization, relaxation, and restoration

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Abstract
Purpose – To provide insight and practical perspectives into the needs of university students regarding places to gather, develop community, and find restoration on the college campus. This information can be used by libraries as they seek to encourage library use by students.

Design/methodology/approach – About 44 students were sent into the field to document the location and physical characteristics of the “third place.” The questionnaire and field notes recorded by the students addressed the central questions of what spaces constituted their third places, the location of those spaces, the activities in which they participated while there, the factors that contributed to their selection of those places, and the important design features of those third places. In addition, the research team observed students in library settings and interviewed library administrators.

Findings – About 80 percent of students indicated that their favorite third place was off campus. These places were overwhelmingly coffee shops and restaurants. The major functions served by their third places included socialization and relaxation.

Practical implications – These findings provide insight into the way students now study, research, and communicate. Libraries can use this information as they design spaces that encourage students to come to the library to study, as well as socialize, converse, find restoration, and simply “hang out.”

Originality/value – The paper brings together practical information from an interdisciplinary team that can aid libraries interested in renovating spaces to accommodate students of the twenty-first century.

Keywords Academic libraries, Physical planning, Space utilization, Library users, Students, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

Introduction
The researchers consist of an interdisciplinary team of university professors and administrators representing interior design, environmental psychology and education who are interested in the role that “third places” play within the collegiate environment. The concept of the third place was introduced by sociologist Oldenburg (1989, p. 2) to describe a place that is “…a setting beyond home and work (the ‘first’ and “second” places, respectively) in which people relax in good company and do so on a regular basis.” Oldenburg (1989) outlined the functions that third places serve: a place to bring a community together, a place to welcome newcomers, a place to find individuals similar to oneself, a place to assemble, a place where individuals become familiar, a place for community diversity, a place for fun and entertainment, a place for intellectual discussions (Oldenburg, 1997) and often a place to use as an office. These places play a vital role in hosting the informal gathering of community members, in
this case, university students, and provide opportunities for the development of place attachment, or bonding with a place.

The research agenda was to consider the application of the third place concept with regard to the campus environment. Research by Waxman (2006) found that when people frequented a third place, they often experienced strong feelings of attachment to that place as well as to the community at large. The underlying concept of this research was that a university is a community unto itself and the design of spaces within the university can greatly impact the student’s experience and attitude towards college life.

Research questions
The research team started with the premise, that first place for college students would be their residential environment (e.g. residence hall, apartment, Greek house) and their second place would be the academic environments associated with classrooms and laboratories. Interests focused on those other places where students go during the day: their “third places.” This interest led to the development of the following research questions:

RQ1. What type of third places do students prefer?
RQ2. Where are they located?
RQ3. How are they used by the student?
RQ4. What makes a third place attractive to a student?

Libraries and the coffee shop
Before sharing possible answers to these questions, an additional introductory note is needed regarding why the research team is addressing these issues in a library journal. Previous research (Banning et al., 2006) indicated that coffee shops top the list of third places selected by students. A quick search for topics addressing “coffee shops” and “higher education” in library databases revealed what appears to be a lively discussion around the question of whether collegiate libraries should provide coffee shops within the library environment.

There are several factors that have contributed to the discussion of library coffee shops. With more and more research materials available via the internet, many libraries have seen a decrease in the number of users coming into the library (Gust and Haka, 2006). Many libraries have explored design options to make the library more welcoming and appealing (Gust and Haka, 2006; Lefebvre, 2002; Houlihan, 2005). A number of research studies have addressed the response by libraries to the growing number of internet resources and the need to remain dynamic and vibrant. Crawford and Gorman (1995) developed five new laws of librarianship, with the fifth stating, “Honor the past and create the future.” Horan (2000) offered advice for institutions to accommodate emerging technologies. He stated that transitions often require a “recombination” of services that reflect changes in society. Lawsen (2004) suggested one of these recombinations might include the addition of a coffee shop within the library, which has both financial and social implications.

This paper addresses the potential of the library as a community gathering place and the resulting impact on the design of libraries, specifically coffee shops within the library. The purpose of this paper is threefold. First, information regarding student
preferences in third places will be revealed. Next, the concept of the coffee shop as a third place, with the emphasis on assisting those who are considering the addition of coffee shops in their libraries, will be discussed. Finally, suggestions and considerations regarding important design features that have been shown to make library coffee shops more attractive to students will be provided.

Students and the university
Most universities place a high value on attracting and retaining talented and motivated students. Once students arrive on campus, there are many factors that impact their level of satisfaction with their university experience. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) developed a model for studying student loyalty and found that loyalty is determined largely by the quality of student relationships on campus. The study found that, in addition to high quality teaching, the emotional commitment a student makes to the university is extremely important. Part of this loyalty to the university is determined by the quality of the experience a student has with university services such as the library and computer labs. To retain students, universities need to be tuned into the factors that bind a student to the university.

University students often divide their time between a variety of roles and responsibilities. Many are living away from home for the first time and experiencing community living and new roommates in dormitories and apartments. Students often have the pressure of balancing academic life and the responsibilities of employment. A research study addressing 30 year trends by Astin (1998, p. 128) reported that a “record high percentage of freshman say that they will have to get a job to help pay for college expenses” and “record numbers say they plan to work full time while attending college.” King and Bannon (2002) reported that 46 percent of all full-time students spend 25 or more hours a week working. Research indicates that over one-third of entering college students (Keup and Stolzenberg, 2004) reported feeling frequently overwhelmed by all they had to do. In addition, the American College Health Association (2005) reports the greatest impediment to academic performance was reported by the students to be stress.

The third place and the university library
In the Hennig-Thurau et al. (2001) study on student loyalty, the library was listed as one of the campus auxiliaries that impact a student’s impressions of their university experience. The university library has the ability to serve as a foundation of the community as well as a third place (Lawsen, 2004). Like all good third places, libraries can provide a place for companionship and relaxation, while enriching the community and public life in general. Lawsen (2004, p. 126) stated, “They [libraries] each welcome members of their particular communities regardless of age and economic status and provide them with access to information, services, and a responsive, usually safe, environment.”

Methodology
This study has two parts; the first involves university students as data gatherers while the second presents findings from a case study of a library that has added a coffee cart and lounge area to accommodate students. First, in a report on third places and the campus environment (Banning et al., 2006), researchers suggested a procedure for
gathering student input on their third place preferences. This six step procedure included:

1. convening a group of students to send out into the field;
2. asking them to spend time in their favorite third place;
3. asking them to fill out a structured questionnaire as well as complete field notes regarding the space;
4. asking them to photograph the space;
5. convening the students for discussion; and
6. analyzing this data so it may be useful to those designing and redesigning campus facilities.

In this study, 44 students from a lower division interior design class at Colorado State University were asked to follow the procedures listed above. These students were selected because most were full-time students, and the majority lived on campus. The research team felt that students with these characteristics could provide insight regarding the design of the campus facilities available to them. Since, they were interior design students, the research team felt they would be well equipped to take detailed field notes regarding their third place environments. Students gathered the data during the fall of 2005. The questionnaire and field notes recorded by the students addressed the central questions of what spaces constituted their third places, the location of those spaces, the activities in which they participated while there, the factors that contributed to their selection of those places, and the important design features of those third places. The sample is not large, and, therefore findings may not be generalized to other campuses. This study was designed as an exploratory study with the goal of providing insight into the place preferences of students.

The second part of the study included field observations and interviews at the Strozier Library at Florida State University. Florida State University recently added a coffee cart to the lobby of their library. Observation sessions revealed how students used the lobby area, as well as surrounding socialization spaces in the library. In addition, library administrators were interviewed in order to understand better their views regarding the addition of the coffee carts, as well as the impact this has had on student use of the library. The following information is a summary of these findings with the data collected from students presented first.

**Findings**

When examining the location of the third places, 80 percent of students indicated that their favorite third place was off campus (Table I). These places were overwhelmingly coffee shops and restaurants. The major functions served by their third places included socializing, relaxation, eating and drinking, “getting away” and doing homework (Table II). Students reported socializing with both old and new friends. Along with seeing friends, they reported seeing familiar strangers, those people who they see regularly but only know by face. Almost a quarter (23 percent) of students visited their third place every day, 25 percent visited more than once a week, and 23 percent visited once a week. Collapsing these categories revealed that 71 percent of students visit their third place at least once a week (Table III). Atmosphere, opportunity for socialization, and location were listed as important features considered when students chose a third place.
Preferred design features included wood flooring, comfortable chairs, furniture that could be rearranged as needed, light levels appropriate to the tasks undertaken in the space, pleasant coffee and food smells, views to the outside, and ambient characteristics that could be characterized as “warm” atmosphere.

Case study
A coffee cart was added to the large lobby of Strozier library at Florida State University, in the fall of 2006. Florida State, like many other universities, was searching for ways to serve students better and attract them to the library. With more and more library services available online, the library has undergone a transformation in terms of how it provides services to students. Although many students visit the library to utilize the traditional library services, library administrators report that students also are looking for a place to meet other students, work on group projects, and seek out opportunities for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of third place</th>
<th>On campus</th>
<th>Off campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffee shops</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookstores</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student unions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation centers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services centers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percentage</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I.
Third place preferences by college students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number(^a)</th>
<th>Percentage(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Place to socialize</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to relax</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to enjoy food and drink</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to “Get Away”</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place to do homework</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \(^a\)More than one answer was possible, \(n = 44\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a month</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a month</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III.
Frequency of visit to third places

Note: \(n = 44\)
interacting with fellow students. The library has become a social environment, a place to be, and a destination, where students can experience the company of fellow students. Interviews with university library administrators revealed a desire to create spaces that provide a place where students can find rejuvenation for the mind and the spirit. The administrators also recognize that the library has become not only a place to study, but also a place to “see and be seen.” Connecting with fellow members of the university community has carried over into cyber space as well. Florida State library patrons have a face book web page called “Club Strozier” where Florida State students can interact online with those they have seen in the library as well as continue to build on the social connections that began in the library. This illustrates the need for the social connection, both face-to-face and online.

The coffee cart at Florida State, which serves Starbucks beverages, is popular with students and faculty. In addition to providing another outlet for selling coffee, the cart has helped to turn the once empty lobby of the library into a busy meeting place for students. A library administrator explained that the coffee cart has taken a space used only to enter and exit the building and turned it into a space that is full of students day and night. The space is approximately 30 × 100 inch long, and for many years it served only as a means of entering and exiting the library. However, the addition of the coffee cart, as well as tables and chairs, has transformed the space into a place for students to pause between classes, work on their laptops, or talk with fellow students and faculty. Although the design of the space is far from ideal, this simple modification, including the coffee cart, tables and chairs, has taken a space serving only as a passageway and transformed it into a space with greatly expanded opportunities.

The addition of the coffee cart is just a prelude to what Florida State University hopes to create in Strozier library. Many universities have added “learning commons” (including Indiana University, University of Kentucky, Ohio University, University of Tennessee, Georgia Tech, Emory, and University of Florida), which offer a number of services for students. These learning commons often involve the renovation of library space to create spaces in which students can casually gather, enjoy beverages, and interact with other students. In addition, many of these spaces also include a coffee shop, academic advising center, tutoring center, and reading and writing center. Florida State University hopes to add a similar space on the first floor of the library. The space will have comfortable seating and computers loaded with a variety of software packages popular with students.

In addition to the challenge of finding the funds for this project, the library also faces the challenge of convincing some faculty and administrators that this “learning commons” is appropriate for a library environment. Many think the library should be a hall of books, a quiet place, with no food or drinks allowed. The concept of students relaxing and “hanging out” between classes challenges some views of the role of the traditional library. Many “commons” areas have music, but that also challenges the traditional role of the library. Finding ways to provide music in the coffee shop or commons, but still have some areas of the library designated as a quiet space is something designers must consider. In addition, if coffee is sold in the university library, students expect to be able to bring their beverages into the library. This can be problematic for some with more traditional views of the library. Regarding this issue, a Florida State library administrator said, “We can’t function as we did in the 80’s and be relevant, so we’ll [likely] have a few stains on the carpet.”
Discussion
The research team’s interpretation of these results suggested that the third places chosen by today’s students meet some of the characteristics of third places as defined by Oldenburg (1989, 2001). These functions, as they relate to the library, have been discussed by other researchers as well and include providing the opportunity to develop a sense of place, with an emphasis on community (Rizzo, 2002); providing an atmosphere conducive to the way students now study, research, and communicate (Houlihan, 2005); providing an ultimate community centre (Gust and Haka, 2006); and facilitating social cohesion (Mullins and Linehan, 2006). However, another characteristic emerged in this study from student field notes that has not been directly addressed by Oldenburg. Students in our study appeared to be choosing a third place not only to socialize and converse but also to “get away,” and to “hang out.” This motivation seems to be more suggestive of a need to find a “restorative” environment rather than one that is focused on interacting with the community or participating in intellectual discussions.

This interpretation raises a number of interesting issues for a campus library. Although some students may seek out the library as a place for interaction with the university community, others appear to be looking for a place to find relaxation and restoration, which often includes people watching, meeting with friends and finding quiet time.

The research team would suggest that there are marketing implications for college libraries that have added coffee shops in hopes of increasing foot traffic and patron activity (Gust and Haka, 2006). The marketing of the library coffee shop as a study place, as a gathering place for group study, or as a place for good discussion and community development, will meet the needs of many students. However, it is also important to realize that this tack may not appeal to all students, specifically those just looking for a place to unwind. This interpretation does not intend to lessen the importance of the library as a major catalyst of change in the social environment (Mullins and Linehan, 2006) or its role in social regeneration (Evans, 2002). The team’s recommendation is that libraries and those involved in the design of libraries need to realize that many students are looking for a place to relax and regroup on campus. This finding would likely result in different marketing strategies as well as different design considerations.

The team is suggesting that students need a place to relax and restore their energies to balance the overwhelming complexities of balancing their multiple roles and responsibilities. They need places to be rejuvenated. If they are living on campus, it is desirable that the campus provide such areas of escape or respite. These findings indicate that not all students are able to find places to meet these needs on campuses. Research (Carlson, 2001) has shown that students are deserting libraries on many campuses. Perhaps, they are seeking third places for relaxation and restoration off campus. While the marketing of the coffee shop as a place to unwind may differ from the marketing of the coffee shop as a place for gathering and interacting with the community, the design features of the coffee shop still must be carefully considered to make the space welcoming.

Guidelines for designing a library coffee shop
The following guidelines for designing the coffee shop were based on recommendations by Waxman (2004, 2006) following detailed interviews and observations of coffee shops,
and modified for the library environment following the findings of this study. Although available space and spatial configurations in libraries may vary, the following design guidelines can provide a framework for both the evaluation of existing library coffee shops and the design of new library coffee shops. The guidelines include:

- **Layout.** Patrons enjoy being able to select seats that allow them to anchor themselves to walls and other architectural features and establish temporary territories. The concept of anchoring in a space reflects the positive feelings that come when a space provides an architectural feature that creates a feeling of shelter or security. These features can simply be walls or walls with windows, partial walls or dividers, or even large plants. Designers can take advantage of space along walls for locating seating that provides this shelter. Seating next to walls with windows provides two highly desirable features – the ability to feel anchored in a space while, at the same time, enjoying a view. The opportunity to be anchored or sheltered by the architectural features of the space, yet still view the coffee shop, “people watch,” and see people coming and going is desirable. On a more practical note, the queuing area for the coffee shop should not interfere with patron seating and should be clearly defined, especially in high-volume coffee shops. In the library, the queuing area should not block the entrance to the library or impede traffic flow into or out of the library.

- **Flooring.** Flooring should be easy to clean, non-slip, and have colours or patterns that camouflage soiling that may arise whenever food or drink is served. Flooring should be selected that will hold up to high traffic. This study found that wood flooring was found most often in third places preferred by students. This may present an acoustic problem in library coffee shops if the space is open to other areas of the library. If so, other warm floor finishes could be used.

- **Seating.** A variety of seating types is recommended. Some patrons will come to the coffee shop alone, and prefer to sit alone, while others will come in groups and look for seating that will accommodate their group. Some people prefer large comfortable chairs or sofas, while others will want to sit at tables and use laptops or spread out books. One of the issues faced by most coffee shops is that of the “campers,” who come to the coffee shop, spread out their belongings, and stay for hours. When patrons stay for hours, they often limit the ability of others to use the space. This can result in frustration by patrons and complaints to the management. If the management policy includes welcoming patrons who linger, then some comfortable furniture should be provided along with adequate lighting for reading. Tables that provide space for books and laptops, combined with comfortable chairs, encourage lingering. Smaller tables that make it harder to spread out books, along with less comfortable chairs, discourage lingering. Any upholstered furniture should allow for the camouflage of soiling and should either be vinyl or leather, or upholstery with pattern or texture. Seating should be light enough for patrons to move by themselves if desired (with the exception of the sofas).

- **Tables.** Square or rectangular tables are easy to pull together and work better in accommodating groups. If the management philosophy includes welcoming patrons who linger, tables large enough to spread out a newspaper or books would work well. Students in the library often bring laptops with them and need enough space for their laptop and books or papers.
• **Service counter.** Some coffee shops are designed in such a way that they accommodate seating along the counter where coffee is served. This seating allows patrons to interact with the staff and provides seating for those wishing to sit alone. Depending on the preferences of the management and staff, the addition of patrons at the counter may or may not be encouraged. Patron seating at the counter could potentially interfere with the staff and their ability to work. However, interaction with the staff can be part of the pleasant experience of going to a coffee shop.

• **Lighting.** Lighting is especially important in coffee shops where reading is a common activity. This is especially important in a library setting. Adequate light to read can include task lighting near seats or lighting from the ceiling strategically placed over seating. Dimmer switches can alter light as needs change between night and day, or to meet the varying needs of individual patrons. Artificial lighting should be warm in colour range. Natural light from windows is also good for reading. In all cases, the coffee shop should have some control over the natural light coming to reduce the potential for glare.

• **Aroma.** Aroma is very important to patrons and can be enhanced by venting desirable smells into the coffee shop, or even out to areas where people are passing by. This study found students reacted positively to the smell of coffee and baked goods.

• **Acoustics.** Background music that still allows reading and conversation to take place often works well in coffee shops. Background music, as well as conversation, provides noise to mask conversations to a degree and provide some acoustic privacy for patrons. When designing the library coffee shop, its location relative to the interior of the library would dictate the type of music (if any) that could be provided. Clearly, the music should not interfere with the quiet areas of the library. The same is true for conversation, with the goal being to keep the sounds coming from the coffee shop from interfering with the library’s function as a place for studying and concentration.

• **Views.** Patrons appreciate being able to see outside. Seats along windows are typically popular. If views to the outside are not possible, views to other parts of the coffee shop or into the library can enhance the space as well. Patrons like to know what is going on around them and have the ability to people-watch.

• **Visual appeal.** Many students responded that their favorite third places were “warm.” Warmth can be incorporated into a space in many ways including finish materials (flooring, walls, colour, and texture) and lighting (light sources that emit warm spectrum light). Waxman (2004) found that many patrons used the words cozy and warm when favorably describing physical attributes they preferred. It is recommended that colours and textures considered cozy and soft be chosen over those that are more hard and slick. Soft textures have tactile benefits as well as sound absorption properties.

• **Art.** Art supplied by local artists is an easy way to enliven the space, connect with artists in the community, and provide artists with a place to display their work. Students who participated in this study mentioned the artwork in their third places as an important element, although it varied greatly in genre. A campus library would likely have access to student art work and could
incorporate art into the space while providing a service to student artists looking for places to exhibit. Some coffee shops even provide “art openings” with receptions featuring the artist.

- **Access to reading material.** Coffee shops in bookstores or libraries provide the opportunity for patrons to browse through books and magazines. The opportunity to enjoy a beverage while relaxing with some reading material is highly desirable for many people. People enjoy the opportunity for personal growth that can take place while relaxing with a book or magazine. In addition, libraries with casual reading spaces, along with food and beverages have the potential to provide relaxing “down-time” for students.

**Summary**

The purpose of this paper was to inform the current discussion regarding the development of coffee shops in university libraries. This work was guided by the interdisciplinary interests of the research team and by work with students and the reporting of their behavior and preferences regarding third places. Historically, libraries were places for reading and research that enforced silence. The team believes that with the evolution of the role of the campus library, students are now looking to the library as a place to socialize, relax and to find restoration. Perhaps, the library can provide a place for students to “hang out” and “get away” from the complexities of taking classes, working, and studying.

Although the focus of this paper is on the library coffee shop as a place of socialization, relaxation, and restoration, the traditional library support functions, such as individual and group study spaces, search services, reference services and a host of other academic support services, should not be overlooked. The library coffee shop may find its uniqueness in developing a place to both relax and grow.

**References**


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