

Master Innovation & Development Plan

Technical Appendix

TITLE: North of the Water

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ABSTRACT

North of the Water is a qualitative research study that explores how Torontonians use public space, with a focus on reaching people normally not included in public consultations. The research participants included a diverse mix of roughly 40 respondents from across the city, weighted toward respondents who live more than 30 minutes from the waterfront by public transit.

Most relevant sections: Vol 1 (Quayside Plan) / Vol 2 (Public Realm)

NORTH OF THE WATER

A look at life in Toronto's public realm



We are lucky and humbled to have worked with a group of incredible Torontonians who opened their eyes and hearts and took a closer look at the public spaces they interact with every day. We are grateful for the stories and thoughts they shared with us.





Executive summary

This report is a special collaboration between Doblin, the Deloitte human-centred design practice; Park People, Canada’s leading charity devoted to improving public space; and Sidewalk Toronto, a joint effort by Waterfront Toronto and Sidewalk Labs to create a new kind of mixed-use, complete community on Toronto’s Waterfront. The report was born out of a shared understanding that when designing anything, we have to start with people. We wanted to go deeper than big data sets, existing academic research, and demographic studies to answer the question: what factors contribute to a sense of belonging in public space? We sought answers from a diverse group of Torontonians not typically engaged in public consultation processes. This research is a starting point and contributes to ongoing discussions around public realm design in Toronto. It can and should evolve and adapt with the voices of the city. We offer it as a living document to be debated, marked-up, used, and shared.

Approach

What does it take to create a neighbourhood where a diverse mix of residents and visitors feel welcome and invited to make it their own? To answer this, we used tools from ethnography and design research to engage participants and solicit their day-to-day experiences, aspirations, and observations. This helped us to understand the ways that public space impacts a sense of belonging and ownership.

Recognizing that traditional public consultation does not always reach a wide enough audience or allow for depth of understanding, we chose to work with Torontonians whose voices may be missed in traditional engagement strategies for reasons such as geography, awareness, interest level, and access. We thoughtfully selected 40 individuals who had not previously participated in formal public engagement processes, but who are active users of public space. This group

represents 23 different Toronto neighbourhoods and is made up of individuals of various ages and backgrounds, including people who are new to Canada and people who were born here.

We used three qualitative research methods: research diaries, a remote tool that gives researchers insight into participants’ daily lives over a specified period of time; in-depth interviews and observation sessions conducted in participants’ homes featuring questions and activities designed to elicit hard-to-articulate perspectives; and research walks, a series of excursions through public spaces in Toronto intended to draw out participants’ perspectives and emotions in context. We conducted over 30 hours of in-person research and seven days of remote research that led to over 200 diary entries and 6,000 pieces of coded data. The data was recorded and analyzed using digital analysis tools and analogue methods.

Findings

We synthesized our findings into a set of six design propositions, which can be understood as the building blocks of great public space. We also identified a set of behaviour modes, which represent six of the most common behaviours our participants exhibited while engaging with public space.

Propositions

1. Design a living room, not a sitting room

People want to feel like they can have a hand in shaping their public spaces, and the job of design is to invite people to participate in the process. People are more motivated to interact with public spaces when they recognize evidence of their use, indicating that a place is ever evolving. While it is important that public spaces stay well maintained, small imperfections—or even a bit of patina or grit—add a human quality that helps people understand that they are invited to contribute.

2. Foster small interactions

People crave face-to-face human experiences and the job of design is to encourage people to meet, spend time, and share a moment together in public space. That means building in interactive features that prompt conversation. For example, dynamic public art, communal picnic tables, or playgrounds with activities for parents that make it enticing to stay present and engage with others.

3. Build in sensory variety

Variety in public space is far more than what a person can see. The job of design is to give people the full spectrum of sensory experiences. Smells, sounds, tastes — these are the traits people remember about a space, and they are often overlooked during the design process in favor of exterior architectural variety. But sensory variety helps people experience a single space in a personalized context, increasing the appeal to a more diverse community.

Lastly, we developed a tool called “mode maps” to communicate our findings using narrative and make it easier for designers to connect the dots between behaviour modes and propositions for public space design.

4. Celebrate slowing down

Part of the beauty of public space is its ability to help us escape from the speed of everyday life. The job of design is to help us celebrate cherished moments of pause, which are increasingly lost to the on-demand nature of society. If we strive for a perfectly seamless experience, we eliminate the magic of chance. The chance to see an old friend or stumble onto a new treat. Public spaces are actually better when there is a bit of friction.

5. Promote unique, but not illegible

The best public spaces include familiar elements but still manage to surprise and delight. The job of design is to strike that balance, helping people orient themselves while still delivering a unique experience. That involves placing the known in the unknown—artifacts of the past in novel contexts—as well as the unknown in the known—signs of the future in familiar contexts.

6. Set positive rules

Signs filled with lists of don’t are stifling, but spaces governed by rules that are hard to decipher are just as problematic. The job of design is to create legible rules that lead with positivity and inclusion. Setting positive rules includes subtle cues, like lights that indicate a space is still open, as well as explicit encouragement — rules that lead by telling community members what they can do, not what they cannot do.

Behaviour modes and maps

By looking at how people behave we gain a deeper understanding of their motivations and desired outcomes as well as what drives the decisions they make. These observations provide clues about how peoples’ behaviour may change across time, due to mood or life stage, and help us to identify patterns that we all share regardless of our demographic segment.

Drawing on the stories we heard and the fresh insights they provided, we created a tool called a

“mode map,” which harnesses the power of narrative to present behaviour modes. These maps are a simple tool to help designers see prospective public spaces through the eyes of those who will use them. These maps make it easier for designers to understand how spaces can amplify certain behaviours or support shifts from one mode to another.

The most commonly shared behaviour modes that we identified were:

Serenity seeking

When I’m serenity seeking, public space is an escape from the everyday.

Discovering

When I’m discovering, public space is a way to have new experiences and learn new things.

Gathering

When I’m gathering, public space is a place where people can come together.

Spectacle seeking

When I’m spectacle seeking, public space is where I go to take part in an event.

Wearing kid goggles

When I’m wearing kid goggles, public space is my favourite babysitter.

Trip chaining

When I’m trip chaining, public space is a one-stop shop.

The City has the chance to make significant investments in public space, which prepare us for the future. The waterfront is a fantastic opportunity to explore public space’s potential. Today, we know that people love interacting with water and will go out of their way to do so. But in our study, we saw how there was a perceived difference between “Toronto’s Waterfront” and the rest of the lakefront.

Most people in our study connected Toronto’s Waterfront solely with the occasional events they attended in the Harbourfront Centre area. It felt like a destination for festivities, rather than a place for

everyday life. By contrast, places like Ashbridge’s Bay and Rogue Beach were very much part of our respondents’ weekly rituals. Getting there still required travel, but they went out of their way to make the trip—to connect with nature, play in sports leagues, picnic with friends, and more.

At Quayside, we have the opportunity to change how the whole city relates to and engages with the lake on a regular basis. We can collapse these two waterfront experiences, making a place that is at once a neighborhood for locals, as well as a destination.

A note on privacy

The research team took caution to respect the privacy of respondents and safeguard their personal information. Respondents were pre-screened through an initial survey, and then vetted through a phone call from a researcher. Before the research began, the researchers met each respondent, by phone or in-person, to walk through a detailed consent form, which each respondent then signed. Following the interview, respondent data was uploaded to a secure server, and respondents were given pseudonyms to ensure an extra layer of anonymity during research analysis. After the report was compiled, the research team followed up with respondents, offering them the option to grant permission for the report to include select photos that were taken as part of the research process. Once the final photos for the research report were chosen, the rest of the respondent data was securely destroyed.

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WE LOVE TORONTO



No single public space will be everything to everyone at once. This work is a guide to creating places where more people can feel like themselves and share in that experience together. We hope that you will find yourself in this work and that you will continue the conversation.

WE LOVE PUBLIC SPACE

Introduction

When we think about public space, we usually think of recognizable outdoor spaces like parks, plazas, streets, and waterfronts. Or we think of interior spaces, whether privately or publicly owned, that we use as extensions of work or home: cafés, libraries, community centres, and even the neighbourhood pub. But what about spaces that assume a role other than the one they were designed for, such as a parking lot that becomes a place to sit and eat lunch during a work break?

For us, public space encompasses all of these. In these places, we engage in what Jane Jacobs called the “ballet of the everyday,” negotiating, exploring, and learning with others and generating formative experiences both positive and negative. These shared spaces can connect us and divide us—our memories, backgrounds, personal experiences, places in life, and values can significantly influence our comfort levels and behaviour in public space. With our kaleidoscopic identities, we look for cues to guide us on how to behave. Am I safe? Are my needs met? Do I belong here?

Often when we design public space, we start by asking people what they want to see. Arts programming, a playground, a sports field, a skating rink? Our ‘North of the Water’ research provided an opportunity that many city planners do not have: to dive deeper into people’s underlying motivations. We gathered a diverse group of Torontonians and studied the cues they looked for in the design and unspoken social norms of public space. We then observed how these cues affected their behaviour and decision-making. We wanted to understand what our public

spaces tell us about who can use them and in what ways; and how we might use this knowledge to better accommodate multiple overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, public needs, thereby fostering a greater sense of belonging and engagement.

We started by asking people how and why they use public space and by observing them in their everyday lives. How do they know what to do and where to do it? Why do they choose to go to one place rather than another? What draws them outside their neighbourhood? Where do they feel like they belong, or not, and what makes them feel that way? Some of these insights are beautiful in their simplicity, obvious even, and you may wonder why we do not see them represented more often in public spaces. We are bringing together a collection of time tested no-brainers along with new ideas to remix bold, thoughtful, people-centred designs for Toronto’s public realm. This work is not about inventing the new; it is about integrating the known.

The Sidewalk Toronto Quayside development is an opportunity to think holistically about public space. As more and more of our time is spent in close proximity to our neighbours—and amid our city’s public spaces—now is the moment to consider how best to share space in our ever-densifying city and how to create meaningful connections between people. Our approach was to develop a set of evolving propositions for designers to use as guidelines. We wanted to generate tools that reflect an evolving reality, in which our needs from public spaces may depend on the day or the time; on a person’s mood, responsibility set, or lived experience.

Research methods

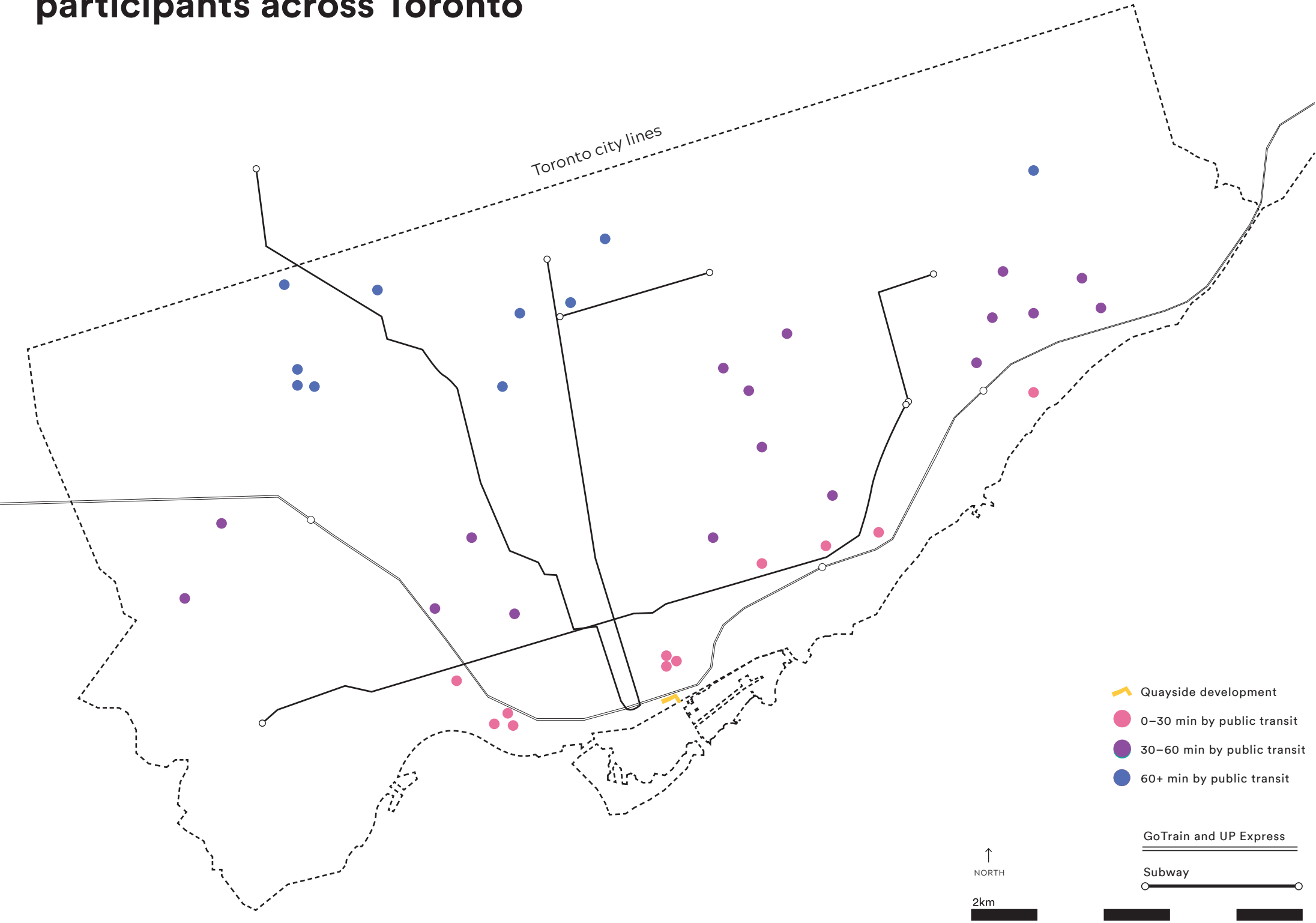
We started our research with people. For this project, we borrowed methods from ethnography—a discipline that focuses on the qualitative study of people and culture—to identify shared behaviour patterns and experiences regardless of demographic segment. We wanted to learn about the behaviours people share in public spaces and how these behaviours are supported by the spaces in which they take place. What do we do, how do we feel, and what triggers us to switch from one behaviour to another?

Our goal was to study people’s needs, desires, and motivations based on what they were doing, not on what they were saying, because it is human nature to say one thing and feel or do another. When someone says “how are you,” our automatic response might be “fine, thanks,” even when we feel poorly. This tendency extends into a research setting. People may say they visit the local park “once in a blue moon” without realizing that they cut through it every day on the way to work. Our research methods sought to avoid this problem.

To carry out our study, we selected 40 participants from the more than 200 respondents who passed an initial screening. This small sample size enabled us to work closely with the participants and deeply engage their behaviours and perspectives. We worked with participants who are geographically diverse, focusing especially on areas outside of the downtown core; who are engaged in their communities but not regular participants in public consultation processes; and who cover a wide range of ages, life stages, and backgrounds.

The depth of our findings combined with the diversity of the sample help to form a rich understanding of Torontonians’ experiences in public spaces. And while it is important to note that this research does not represent all of Toronto, our goal was to represent more of Toronto—and more deeply—than what we might have captured through a more traditional consultation.

Geographic diversity of participants across Toronto



Note: Some locations shown above correspond to participants' neighborhoods but not their exact addresses.

Research question

What factors contribute to a sense of belonging or ownership in public space?

Our definition of public space

We defined public space as any indoor or outdoor spaces that people spend time in, such as coffee shops, co-working sites, libraries, and parks; or spaces that people pass through, such as a sidewalks or apartment lobbies.

Research participants

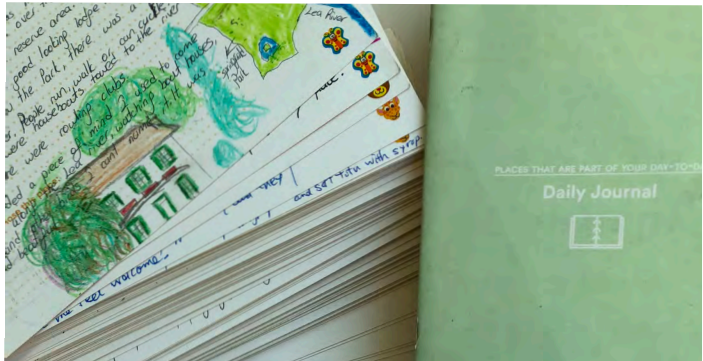
We worked with 40 people who met the following criteria:

- Engaged in their community, but do not regularly partake in formal public consultation processes.
- Located in geographically diverse neighborhoods, especially outside the downtown core.
- Culturally diverse, including people who were new to Canada.

Research diaries

We began by using a remote method called research diaries. These helped us understand the relationship participants have with public space in their daily lives, as well as how they perceive public space, and how it does or does not support their needs. We asked a select group of participants to complete seven days' worth of journal entries and reflection cards and to go on a single visit to a public place that is significant to them. They drew sketches, jotted down notes, and took photographs and sent them to us each day. We gave participants wide latitude in sharing information that is significant to them and used what we learned to create interview guides.¹

¹ While we gave prompts to the participants, we also asked them to share whatever additional information they chose, allowing us to learn about their mental models of public space and how participants chose to prioritize spaces.



Completed reflection cards from the participants



Research diary packages received by each participant.



A map activity that was completed during the IDIs.

In-depth interviews

After a week of collecting diaries, we spent a morning or afternoon interviewing and observing the same group of participants in their homes.² We used a semi-structured interview guide, meaning we arrived with a set of questions and activities but were open to unstructured discussion and storytelling by the participants. The goal of the interviews was to learn about the participants' experience of their neighbourhood and the city. We dove deeper into what we had learned throughout the week from their diaries and discussed more complex topics such as belonging, community, and identity. The interviews helped us uncover the various attitudes, mental models, and values participants hold about public space.

² Two participants requested that their interviews be conducted in alternative locations. One was conducted at a local library and the other was conducted at the Dublin office.



Participants homes



Research walks

We conducted research in context through four walks in four locations. We asked participants to describe their experiences of the spaces as we passed through them—where they felt safe, what they noticed, what they heard and smelled. We used these immersive experiences to elicit insights about the participants’ various motivations for using or engaging with public space. For example, a fire pit sparked a conversation about night-time park use and an outdoor stage got people talking about what events or programming they would like to see. We selected parks in neighbourhoods with varying built forms and with characteristics similar to those envisioned for Quayside—higher density, mixed use, and mixed income.



Research walk with participants in the Toronto Music Garden



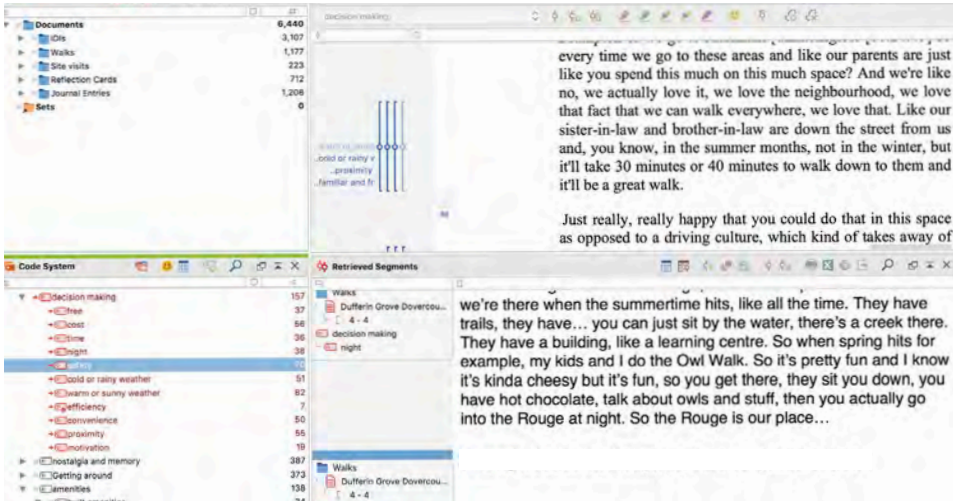
Participants pause to react to the Toronto Music Garden.

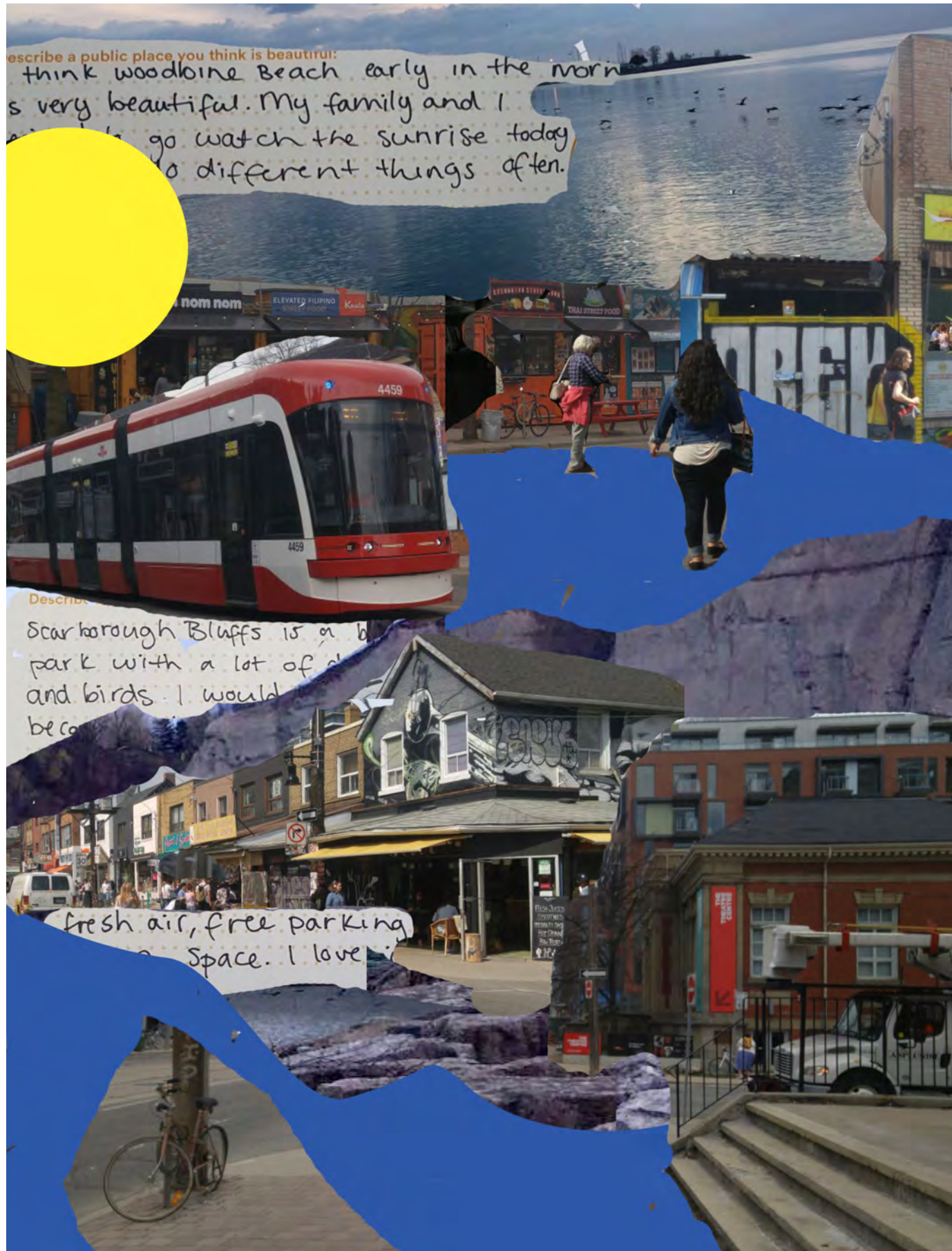
Coding and validating

We analyzed the data using a qualitative analysis program (MAXQDA) with an open coding method: an interactive, inductive method that organizes the codes. Once coded, we searched for themes and patterns, wrote analytic memos, and drew preliminary conclusions. We then validated our conclusions by searching for data that empirically supported our positions. We also used the data to try and disprove our conclusions as a method to ensure we were reading the data correctly.



After coding in MAXQDA we synthesized the data into insights.





QUAYSIDE THE EVERYDAY WATERFRONT

Vibrant neighbourhoods are destination worthy.

Create a vibrant neighbourhood for residents, and it will inadvertently become a place people want to visit.

The water will always be a valuable destination.

People will gravitate towards natural water features, and events or festivals can add extra incentive to make the trip.

A waterfront neighbourhood is unique.

There is an opportunity to integrate daily life with the waterfront experience and make the waterfront a defining feature of the neighbourhood.



HTO Park is a popular waterfront destination

When we started this research, we grappled with how best to frame the Quayside development. Is Quayside a waterfront destination or a waterfront neighbourhood? Are we designing the area for future residents or future visitors? We thought about vibrant Toronto neighbourhoods that are popular destinations for both locals and tourists, such as Kensington Market and the Beaches, and realized the opportunity we were facing: to create a vibrant community along the waterfront that will support the daily life of residents and welcome visitors.

We envision Quayside as an “everyday waterfront,” where the water is an integrated part of the hustle and bustle of daily life instead of simply a backdrop. For many of the participants in our study, the downtown waterfront is a place they visit only occasionally—for specific activities such as organized sports, for special events such as concerts or festivals, or for yearly “bucket list” trips to spots like Toronto Island or Harbourfront Centre. It is a trip they

plan in advance.

Quayside presents an opportunity to imagine the waterfront as the unifying force of a neighbourhood that supports everyday life. We imagine Quayside residents running their errands along a boardwalk, taking in the view as they load up their groceries, or pausing to skip rocks with their kids on the way home from school. We imagine workers grabbing a bite with friends after leaving the office and ending up at the fire pit on the beach to watch the day slip away as the stars rise. We imagine the water as a sports field dotted with players in colourful kayaks and as a classroom with residents exploring the natural shoreline ecosystem. We imagine celebratory events that bring people from the city’s outer edges to a place where they can find reprieve and reconnect with nature. We imagine a neighbourhood in which water grabs hold of all the senses to mediate the mental fatigue so often an unwelcome by-product of urban living. We could not have imagined any of these things without the participants who

shared with us stories about their neighbourhoods and reflections on what provides them with a sense of belonging in both their communities and the public spaces where they spend time. Together, their insights form the building blocks of a great neighbourhood. In the following pages, we describe these building blocks and offer them as propositions to be used as the foundation of the Quayside development.

Barriers to enjoying the waterfront

Toronto is a city with a far-reaching shoreline, yet residents often experience a disjointed connection to the water. For example, most participants self-reported visiting “Toronto’s waterfront” one to two times per year in our screening for the study. But when asked about it in person, many described going to places on the waterfront but outside the downtown core, such as Rouge Beach or Ashbridge’s Bay, on a weekly basis. Most of our participants connected “Toronto’s waterfront” to the Harbourfront but did not have a good sense of the geographic area.

This made us curious about how Torontonians conceive of the downtown waterfront and whether they understand it to be different than the public spaces they frequent on a regular basis. What are the key issues that keep people away from the downtown waterfront or drive them to visit it?

Incentive to go

Access to the water

The ability to interact with the water can be a remarkably important part of urban and suburban life. It is a way to connect with nature, find peace and enjoyment, and maintain positive mental and physical health. Over and over, participants use words such as “relaxing,” “calm,” “therapeutic.” and “meditative” when describing their experiences being near or on water. However, people were less drawn to waterfront places where access to the water isn’t easy. For example, on the topic of Sugar Beach where swimming in the inner harbour is prohibited, one participant remarked on not being able to do anything but look at the water: “I was confused but it was a cool idea...I mean, I understand the concept. You can still see the water but you can’t touch it.”

Getting there

Cost, parking, and transportation

The hassles and cost associated with visiting the waterfront sparked frustration. Participants observed that public transit either took a long time or was altogether absent and that parking was overly expensive. One participant noted that he would rather spend \$20 on gas to drive his family to a waterfront location out of the city than \$20 on parking downtown. Waterfront parks on the east and west sides of the city were visited more frequently by participants who live in these areas and own a car, as parking is free and traffic is not an issue. However, especially for participants forced to navigate public transit, downtown lakefront parks remained on their list of places they would like to visit more often but can’t fit into their lives: “As a child, it was always that trip that you looked forward to, like, we’re going to the island, always very exciting. And then as I got older, I began to realize how much of a hassle it is.... Now it’s like, if I’m going, I’m either taking transit, or I’m paying for parking, which is super expensive.”

Staying there

Access to amenities and services

Throughout a single day, our needs and desires change. Places participants stay tend to provide a variety of activities or features. When there is a lack of diverse amenities—from the basics, like washrooms, to more nuanced needs, like a quiet place to relax after a high-energy get together—it’s a major barrier that prevents people spending a long period of time in one place, or from returning to that place on a regular basis.

We envision Quayside as an inviting neighbourhood that everyone wants to visit and no one wants to leave. As Jan Gehl says, “A good city is like a good party: people stay longer than really necessary because they are enjoying themselves.”

The building blocks of public space



Research Findings

Designing good public space requires navigating tensions: busy is good, but too busy is bad; privacy can feel luxurious, but exclusivity is unacceptable; rules can be enabling, but too many can feel restrictive; well-maintained spaces are alluring, but sometimes an over-designed space can come across as uninviting. The places that offered a sense of belonging and ownership were those that successfully managed these tensions. The job of designers is not to choose between two poles, but rather where to sit on the spectrum between them and how best to leverage each side.

We see the following six propositions as the building blocks of good public-space design. They are suggestions for navigating the relevant tensions and for creating spaces where peoples' sense of belonging and community can thrive.

We found...

People feel more welcome in and motivated to engage with spaces that show a bit of wear and tear.

Helen prefers spaces made for communities by communities.

On all of the research walks, participants were drawn to sites that highlighted the presence of the community, including wall murals, fire pits, and even a tree wrapped in a cozy that someone had knit. “A lot of people worked hard to get this here,” Helen remarked of the community kitchen in Dufferin Grove Park. “It shows that, you know, people care.” Pegah agreed, adding that it shows the park is “very people oriented, very community... close knit.” For those who took part in the walks, the “grungy,” cobbled-together, and somewhat ad hoc nature of Dufferin Grove enticed them.

Participants’ perceptions of Dufferin Grove Park contrasted starkly with those of Dovercourt Park, which they felt was “utilitarian” and “planned.” Whereas Dufferin Grove Park seemed to have been designed by the community, Dovercourt seemed to have been designed by professionals who dictated what would go where. At Dufferin Grove, according to one participant, “The City is not sitting down saying, ‘We want a kitchen area.’ No, that was all the people around there, and the community coming together to make that happen.”

Damon opts for spaces that he can program.

Damon gravitates towards spaces that leave themselves open to interpretation. One of his favourite places is a city park where he often spends his time chatting with local community members. “Sometimes I go there to read [but] it makes no sense because [other park goers] are going to talk you out, and I’ll just put away the book and give them my time.”

Damon often sits at the edge of the park’s concrete platform, part stage/part seating, and interacts with people of all ages and backgrounds, some familiar, others new. They share stories, play games, and eat lunch together. Sometimes they watch movies on his laptop. The space is informal enough that he can switch activities without moving more than 20 feet. “I’m a social being and I love to talk, and I think these people...some of them are really understanding the therapeutic thing that is coming from just talking to me.... So after conversing and understanding who they are, I say, ‘Would you like to have lunch?’ or ‘Do you play cards?’”



Damon's drawing of his favourite community park



Bake oven in Dufferin Grove Park



Informal seating at HTO Park



Tree cozy in Dufferin Grove Park



A mural in Damon's neighbourhood

We propose...

Design a living room, not a sitting room

People are more motivated to interact with places that show evidence of use—spaces that have a lived-in quality or a worn finish after being out in the world. Benches painted bright colours, a community bake oven, and a garden with a hand-painted sign were just some of the features that made a space feel ever-evolving—a place to which we are all invited to contribute. These features give people permission to move things around or add their own flair. Think about how you act in a formal sitting room versus in a living room. When spaces feel over-designed, they risk coming across as too polished or complete and offer little room for participation. One participant used the word grungy to talk about the quality of spaces that feel used: “‘Grungy’ is sort of connecting for me with when I was saying ‘people-place.’ Like it’s not all polished. It feels so great to me.”

This does not mean that we should let spaces fall into disrepair. In fact, we found that polished features can feel aspirational and that maintenance levels greatly impacted feelings about a space, especially the health of natural features like trees and flowers. When things are not well taken care of, people notice. The most successful public spaces balance the tension between being manicured and being messy. They include aspects that are more informal and elements that invite imagination.

Don’t be afraid of a little grit.

Spaces or features that come across as informal, or that leave room for wear and tear, tend to feel welcoming.

Balance formality with softness.

Use natural materials, multiple textures, curved shapes, and soft edges to balance the formality of spaces or features suited to a heavier design hand.

Make things easy to modify and adapt.

Invite people to make small adjustments to a space. This ensures the space can suit the needs of many users and helps tell the story of those who have used the space before.

We found...

People crave face-to-face human experiences and use public space to reinforce membership in a community through social bonding, even when it is as simple as a head nod.

Michael and Anit enjoy interactions sparked by objects.

Michael generally prefers to keep to himself, but he appreciates watching people interact and enjoy themselves in public space. He likes visiting the playful fountain in Berzy Park that is made up of dog sculptures. Its unusual design feature tends to draw crowds, and although Michael does not stay too long, he intentionally stops in to see the kids running around and the tourists having fun: “Yeah, yeah, it seems like tourists, that’s for sure. I wouldn’t want to spend too much time there, but it does make you happy to see it, because it is a cute little park and there’s kids running around, that kind of thing.” It makes him feel good “knowing that people are happy and enjoying [his] city.”

Anit enjoys public art like Chicago’s famous “bean” sculpture in Millennium Park. He wants to see art that affords “an opportunity for people to meet each other through interaction.”

Amrita values brief interactions she finds through online trades.

Amrita trades used items online, in part to save money and find new things, but also because she enjoys the opportunity to “meet some really cool people.” Though none of her brief interactions have turned into friendships, she’s “had some great conversations—the opportunity to meet people that I normally wouldn’t meet or cross paths with in life.” She described a shared moment between herself and a stranger after a tragic event took place in the city: “In the afternoon, before the announcements and news really came out I noticed there [were] a lot of cops.... And the person I was meeting for the trade was like, ‘Hey, are you okay? Do you know what happened?’ And I was like, ‘I’m getting bits and pieces of information but I’m not really sure what’s going on.’ And she’s like ‘Well, I hope you’re okay.’... It’s just nice people. Like I met some really nice people.”

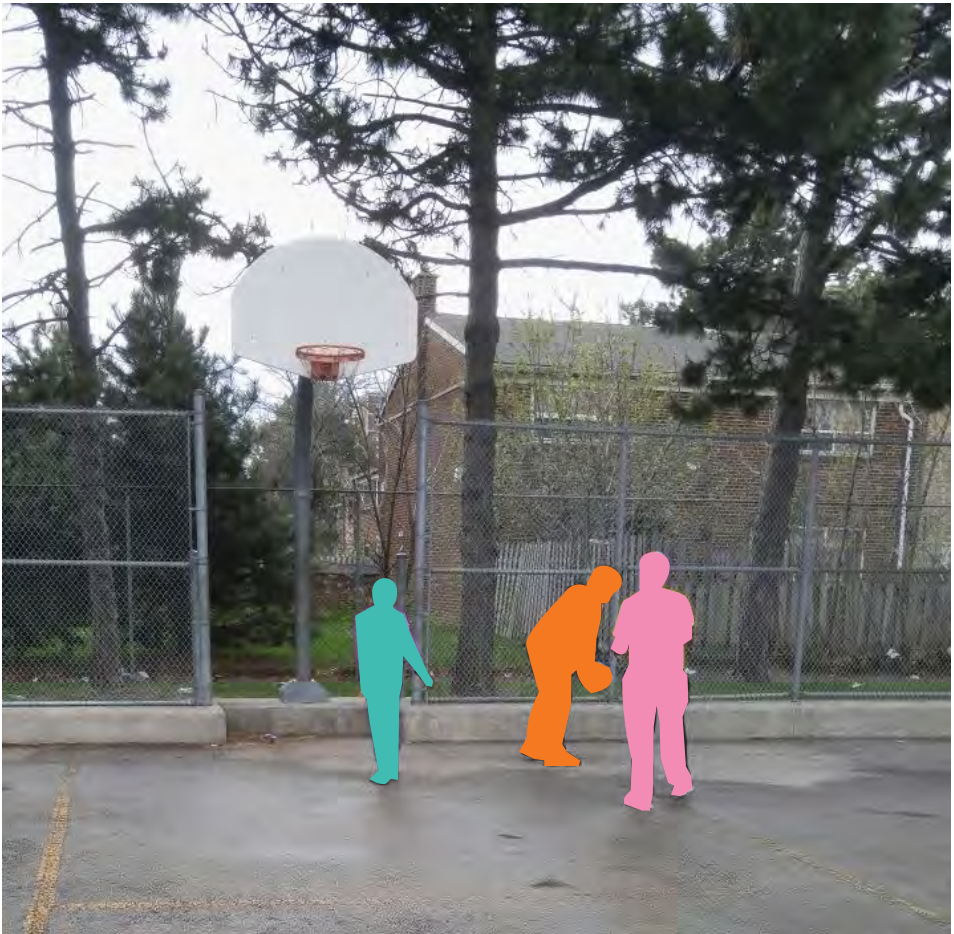
Seth connects to community by helping people.

Seth enjoys being around the “ebbs and flows of the urban environment,” and taking the time to help people. “I try to be very nice and helpful when people need help, and not just rush through everybody and all of the crowds.” Because Seth works at large public events in the busy downtown core, he spends a lot of time people-watching and figuring out who to help. “Almost everybody you see in [the city square] is from somewhere else. I’m usually trying to figure out where they’re coming from or just watching their reactions. And that’s often where I’ll figure out someone needs help.”

This attitude also translates to his own community. “Last year while I was BBQing [in his building’s shared common space], a big family wanted to use the table beside me that I didn’t need, so I welcomed them over, and we talked for almost half an hour. They gave me a beer and let me sample some of the dishes they had made.” Though brief, the interaction left a lasting impression on Seth and heightened his sense of the building’s community.



Seth watching the ebb and flow of the city’s daily commute



A game of pick-up basketball in Damon’s neighbourhood

flowers paved the earth like yellow stars and the trees are now beaming with “evergreen” leaves and blossoms. While walking around, three individuals came to play on the basketball court. I did not bother to join them but instead I complimented them about their wonderful hooping skills. I hesitated to take part because I am ignorant to hooping 😊. I also observed an area where families can have picnics if they want or “bar B Q”. Children do not have to worry about thirst nor dehydration; instead a water cooler is there and is also out a height for almost everyone. Despite the fact that it rained for a few minutes it did not stop my walk neither the

We propose...

Foster small interactions

As creators of public space, we need to provide opportunities for face-to-face human experiences, which are at risk of being lost due to increasing urban isolation. Small interactions go a long way to foster a sense of belonging. But as our cities increase in size—and personal technology frequently takes us out of our daily lives—it can become harder to experience the small interactions and connections that matter.

Participants told us they felt the daily pleasantries they exchanged in their younger years were missing from their lives today, citing cellphones, tablets, and other technologies as the cause. “Most people are on their phones,” one participant said. “People even bring their tablet to the park. And then because they’re doing it, you kind of feel like, well, I don’t have anyone to talk to, maybe I’m just going to do it too.” As designers we can integrate objects into public spaces that allow people to look up, catch each other’s eye, and enjoy a moment of interaction.

These interactions do not have to be long or particularly meaningful. Participants felt that a simple “Hi, good morning” or “Hey, how are you?” was enough to give them a sense that a place was friendly and safe, and that someone would notice if they were missing. In fact, brief encounters, with an easy exit point and no sense of obligation to continue a conversation, formed the preference. These experiences were elevated even further when they were altruistic in nature, such as when a kind stranger notices you look lost and points you in the right direction.

As city dwellers, we find ourselves going through life’s daily activities—riding the bus to work, grabbing a morning coffee, sitting on a bench in the park—as part of a collective whole. Being a face in the crowd, knowing you are part of a shared experience, can be a pleasant feeling at times. But those moments when anonymity gives way to recognition and you are acknowledged feel the most special. Public space is a forum for small connections that can have a big impact. For designers, every storefront, bench, street corner treatment, and artwork is an opportunity to foster interaction.

Integrating objects create a reason to connect.

Include objects that encourage interaction such as community boards or physical wayfinding elements. Successful object integration will allow people across generations and cultures to share a moment together.

Friendly customer service counts.

Think about how you can integrate friendly faces into community services. For example, a maintenance person could also be someone to chat with about the flowers in bloom. Even a simple T-shirt that says “Hi! Ask me questions” would mark that person as congenial and approachable.

Give people an in as well as an out.

The commitment to engage should be low. Make it easy for people to enter and exit an interaction without causing too much fuss. For example, objects located in spots that are easy to come and go from are more inviting to check out.

We found...

Variety fosters a sense of connection between people and place—particularly when it is experienced through multiple senses.

Yasmin looks for places that go beyond the visual experience.

When Yasmin told us about her favourite place to go sit along the lakeshore near Sunnyside Pavilion, she began by describing what the air smells like, what sounds she hears, and what treats she tastes while there. Breathing in fresh air and hearing birds chirp and water lap are as important to her experience as the view. The visual pleasure of seeing the lake is inconsequential if it is overshadowed by the noise of heavy traffic. “Imagine that you’re watching a movie without a sound, what do you get? Nothing, you know?... It’s not one experience...one nice chocolate that you’re eating and giving you a taste of. Of course, that’s a part of it, but [so is] where you buy, what kind of place is that, how it smells, which colour it was.”

Peter and others like public spaces that are multipurpose.

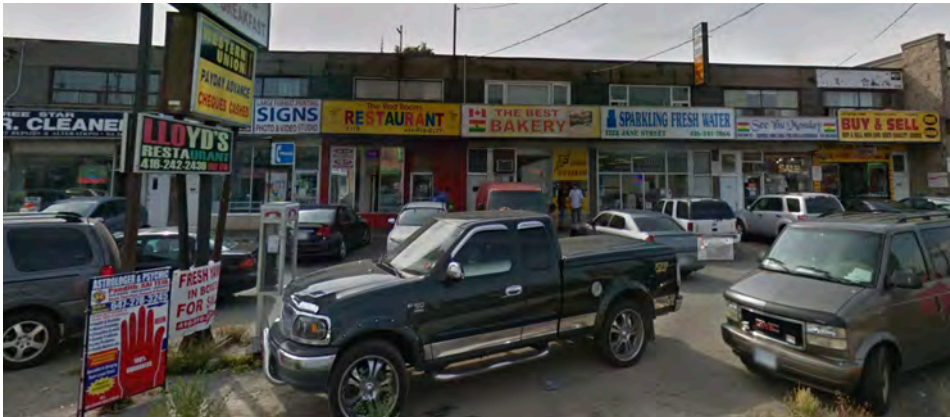
For Peter, Dufferin Grove Park offers a variety of experiences housed in one space. “It seems like there are so many different little things,” he said. “You can skateboard, you can play baseball, there’s a spot for the kids, there’s a ping pong thing, you can have a fire. Like it just seems like there’s a lot of different kind of options within a park that really isn’t that big. It’s nice.”

Josh feels the same way about Village of Yorkville Park, which is divided up in a way he likened to different rooms: “There’s a lot of diversity of form in one area. So, if you want to eat your lunch or whatever, you have your different spots. If you want to sit and talk on your phone, you can do it on a corner.”

Bonnie enjoys the “two-for-one” deal she gets at her local library, which is attached to a park. “I love that I can go and check out books at the library and then also spend another half an hour or so going around the park,” she told us.

Alicia uses variety as a way to connect to her old neighbourhood.

Alicia identifies with the variety in her former neighbourhood even long after moving away. Being able to describe each shop—its name, owner, smell, and the products found within it—is proof the neighbourhood belongs to her and that she belongs to it. “Across from my [old] building, there’s a convenience store named Bridges. [The owner of the store] usually does burgers and fries for seven bucks, but back then it was like five something. So, every time you smell fresh fries. You go further down, the next plaza over, they’re closed down now, I think they’re turning it into a vegan place, but there was a hut. He sold the best patties.... If you go further down [to the] Dollar Store, nine times out of ten there’s always at least one can of pop that breaks in there, so you’re always smelling something sweet like pop.... Across from that there’s a Mexican place. You could always tell when they make fresh pupusas.”



A few of the family-owned businesses that make up Alicia's old neighbourhood



Genevieve and her daughters visit Rouge Park for the variety of activities they can do there



Jié loves to cook and try the diversity of cuisines in his neighborhood



Yasmin considers the holistic experience of an outing with her daughter



Yasmin considers the holistic experience of an outing, including taste

We propose...

Build in sensory variety

A public space designed with built-in variety allow different people to take maximum advantage of what the space has to offer. Visual variety is of course important; but the variety within a space should also extend beyond the visual to include smell, sound, taste, and touch. This leaves visitors with more options, creating opportunities for people from all walks of life to experience a place in a customized context.

Places with built-in visual variety draw you back because there is always something new to see. Participants responded positively to spaces that offered a range of different housing styles, building scales, landscapes, and pavement and brick textures, for example. In contrast, they described visually homogeneous places as “cookie cutter” and “plain.”

But we learned that variety extends far beyond colour and texture. People want variety in what they hear and smell, where they go, what they do, and how they use and move through space. People are proud to hold intricate knowledge of the paths, parks, small shops, and people that make up their neighbourhoods. Variety renders their experiences enjoyable, satisfying, and also deeply personal. Variety is the patchwork fabric of a vibrant city.

Variety in shops and stores.

Include affordances that will enable small shops and local convenience stores to thrive—these places form the core of a unique and vibrant neighbourhood.

Engage all the senses.

Don’t ignore texture, flavor, scent, and sound. The quality of a public space is measured by its sensory experience. Imagine sitting on the grass, listening to the water, and smelling the sweet scent of baked goods.

Don’t underestimate food and seating.

Choice matters *a lot* when it comes to what to eat, where to eat, where to sit, and how to sit!

We found...

The most valuable or memorable experiences in people’s days were often caused by an inefficiency.

Genevieve and Alicia turn wasted time into memorable moments.

Killing time between classes, standing in line, or waiting for laundry is a pain. But for both Alicia and Genevieve, time that may have otherwise been wasted turned into wonderful new memories and lasting friendships.

On an unseasonably warm spring day, Genevieve and her oldest daughter made a stop at a friend’s house, having had a little time to kill between lessons. They spent the hour running through the sprinkler and playing basketball in the cul-de-sac. This unplanned hour became the highlight of her week. “What a glorious day!” she wrote in her journal.

Growing up, Alicia knew people on every floor of her apartment building and felt as if she lived in a small village. When asked how this tight-knit community came to be, Alicia observed, “Honestly the elevators were crap. So we’d be standing there for at least a good 5, 10 minutes—it was just like playing the waiting game on an elevator. Then you just start holding conversations and conversations kind of lead to friendships I guess.”

Jié discovered a community while waiting for appointments.

Jié, who manages a chronic illness, structures his days around running errands, attending appointments, and taking some time to rest. Getting from place to place, waiting for a prescription to be filled, anticipating his name at the doctor’s office—these events make up the drum beat of his day and offer opportunity for social connection.

Jié knows he could get his prescriptions online, for example, but he would rather speak to “his” pharmacist. “I mean, yes the robot can probably do everything technically the people can do,” he said. “But the robot, I mean I don’t know how well a robot can...greet you with enthusiasm. I don’t know how much a robot can put on a smile.”

In between his scheduled tasks, Jié spends time at a local community health centre. “I can just sit and rest for a period of time,” he remarked approvingly. On his first visit he discovered the centre’s range of programming, and now he is an active member, taking cooking classes and volunteering as a patient advocate. His neighbourhood community health centre has become a pit stop between

the grocer’s and his home.

He likes the airy and bright lobby and takes a moment to look over the notice board to see what events are coming up.

The pauses in Jié’s day have provided entry points to places of community and belonging. Jié admits he is now one of the faces of his community: “I think I recognize a lot of familiar faces and I probably am one of the familiar faces that people see on the street.”



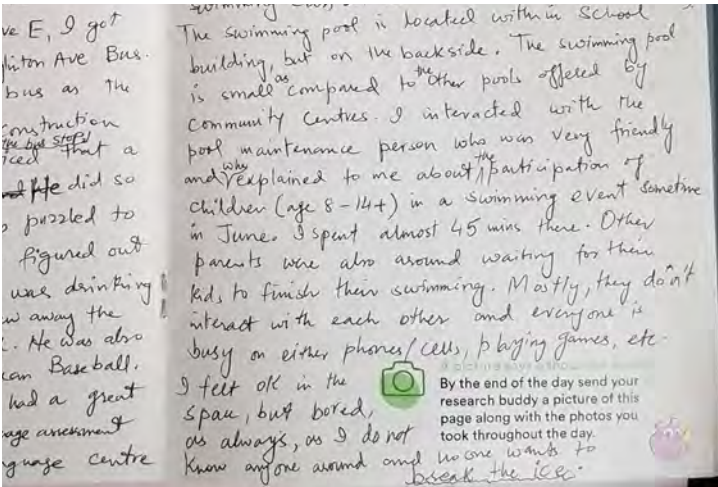
Alicia met one of her best friends while waiting for her washing to finish at the laundromat



Jié stops in at the community health centre between errands to check out the notice board



Genevieve’s children joined in the fun while waiting for taekwando to start



Naveed learned about an upcoming event while waiting for his daughter to finish swimming



Genevieve sitting on the front steps while she watches the neighbourhood kids enjoy the weather

We propose...

Celebrate slowing down

Efficiency can improve urban living, but striving for perfectly efficient systems at all times should not be the end goal. In fact, sometimes slowing down can create memorable experiences. Removing friction from daily life risks eliminating the magic of chance: the chance to see an unexpected view, stumble onto a special treat, run into an old friend or make a new one.

Ordinary inefficiencies, such as missing a bus, returning home for a forgotten item, or waiting in line, can feel frustrating, as if you are wasting your time instead of doing something worthwhile. When the time spent on an experience outweighs its value, it can feel like we're missing out. But this feeling of wasted time is only a perception. If done thoughtfully, designed moments of pause or prolongation can lead to serendipitous moments, social connections, and joy.

As designers, our instincts might tell us: People do not like wasted time! Remove any friction from the experiences we design! Our everyday lives are full of events conceived to speed things up. For example, we can order a meal through or phone and have it delivered to our home without waiting in line or talking to an employee. We have become so good at reducing the time spent to complete a task—often enabled by technology—that we forget there are other approaches: we can provide opportunities for people to linger; we can find ways to inject value into unavoidable moments of pause.

Participants told us that they often opted for the slower alternative, choosing a winding path through the park instead of a straight one or a roundabout route to their favourite shop instead of a direct one, because the improved experience was worth the time spent. We also learned that moments of pause can lead to moments of connection. These moments brought unexpected value to participants’ days. Do not default to designing away friction; instead, look for ways to celebrate the value of slowing down.

Get creative with the role of technology.

Technology can be employed to increase efficiencies, but make sure these technologies do not eliminate opportunities for moments that matter.

Invite people to slow down and take the scenic route.

The fastest way is not always the preferred way, especially in a natural setting or a new neighbourhood. Provide the option to prioritize experience over speed.

Think about adjacencies.

If a space includes something that people need to wait for, provide stimulation that visitors can focus their attention on, such as an attractive view, or provide icebreaker elements that make it easier for strangers to interact.

We found...

People were delighted with a sense of novelty when it was presented in a familiar context.

Louis and Naveed look for a sense of novelty in-tune with their expectations

After the research walk through HTO Park, Louis described his favourite moment: “What I really liked is, you know the section with the sand? Where it felt like a resort? I really liked that,” he said. “I’ve never seen that in a park, it was a big surprise in this one.” He was surprised to see a sandy beach strip dotted with bright yellow umbrellas in the midst of a park, but it was a feature he could easily connect to his own experience of being on vacation.

Naveed finds just the right amount of newness and delight each time he visits Niagara Falls. The hotel he stays in, the journey to get there, and the cost of the trip are generally without surprises. But his experience of the falls is ever changing. “The view of the falls itself is just so unique; it looks so different in every season ... Sometimes we go in June, sometimes in July, and every time we feel the difference.”

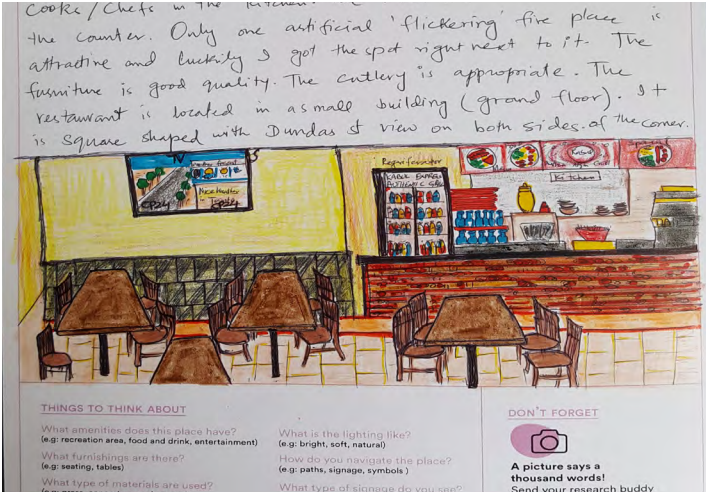
Familiar attributes help Monica engage with an unfamiliar object

On our walks along the waterfront, the Wave Decks were a popular point of conversation. Despite being a feature that people were not exactly sure what to do with, everyone was drawn to their playfulness, smooth undulating curves, and warm wood.

“I think the most memorable thing for me was the Wave Deck,” Monica said. “I’ve walked by it, biked by it; I’ve noticed it and thought, That’s cool. But today it actually stopped me, and I wanted to engage.” She said she loves the “curve of the benches, which are really beautiful. Just the design of them is really sleek.” Others on the walk agreed and pointed out that the decks have a playfulness. Their unusual shapes, paired with matching materials along the familiar waterfront trail is just enough to draw people in.



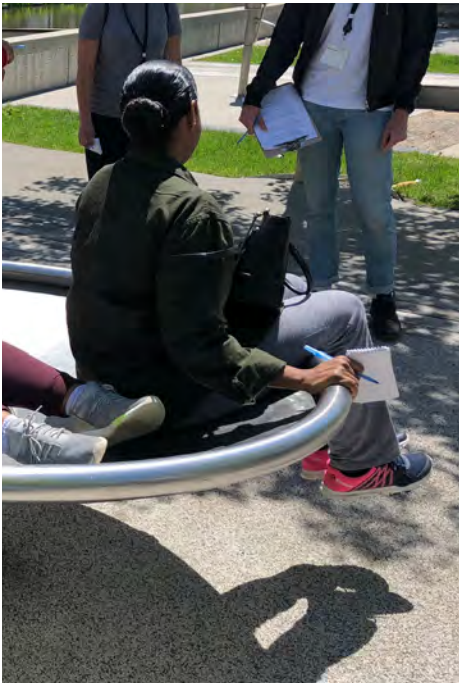
Research walk participants enjoyed the Wave Decks’ novel form, yet familiar materials



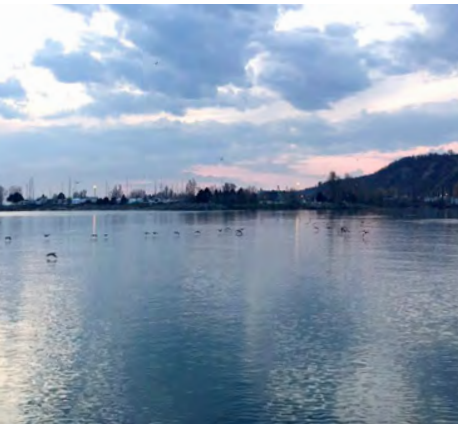
Naveed sought out memories of home through familiar food



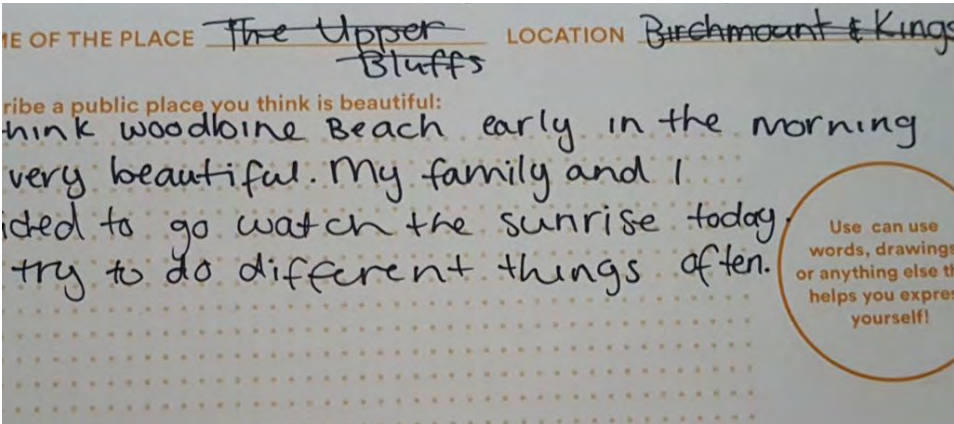
Damon recognized the spaceship design of his local movie theatre



Research participants could not help themselves from climbing on the playful saucers



Kendra watching the sunrise at Woodbine Beach



Kendra and her family try to experience something new every month

We propose...

Promote new, but not illegible

The best public spaces include familiar elements, which help communicate purpose, while allowing for surprise and delight. Human nature tells us to seek comfort in the known. When we’re out in the world, we’re constantly scanning for things we recognize—familiar cues, designs, signs, people, or objects to tell us we belong or instruct us on how a space is meant to be used.

A place that lacks all familiarity can feel disorienting and leave people longing for what they already know and love. For example, when people go to a park, they expect it to feel like one. Of a park whose design is particularly contemporary, one participant commented that “they are trying to...modernize something that [doesn’t] really need to be modernized.” Another lamented that “even the merry-go-round was different, as opposed to the one that I played on when I was a kid.” For her, the park’s “futuristic” and “modern” design negated the sense of childhood familiarity that she was looking for. On the flip side, when we’re surrounded by too much familiarity, venturing into unknown territory can be enticing. One participant told us she loves trying new and scary activities, but only with her family. She is willing to go out on a limb (literally—one year they tried bungee jumping!) as long as she has the safety and comfort of her family alongside her.

Designers need to strike the balance and help people orient themselves while still delivering a unique experience. This involves placing the known in the unknown—artifacts of the past in novel contexts—as well as the unknown in the known—signs of the future in familiar contexts. A quirky playground can transform a routine park visit into a special outing; an outdoor harvest table can encourage people to dream up new possibilities. The magic lies in experiences that feel commonplace but also fresh.

Place the known in the unknown.

In spaces that are new or that include novel programming, incorporate recognizable elements that help people connect to past experiences and feel oriented.

Flip the script: place the unknown in the known.

Placing unique features in a familiar surrounding can add fresh life to an old space and draw new people to it, even if the space is far away from their neighbourhood.

The more unusual it is, the more guidelines we need.

A unique amenity requires a clear set of instructions. Assume no prior knowledge and provide enough information for anyone to be able to navigate its use.

We found...

Rules allow people to take temporary ownership of a place and control how they engage with it.

When new to a public space, Genevieve relies on unwritten rules

On Genevieve’s first visit to her local library, she looked for cues around her to understand the norms or expectations of how to engage with the space: “I notice that the chairs, the way that they’re set up...the library staff structure them as four chairs around one table. But then when people come in, they start pushing them around. They find their own way to kind of make it comfortable. At first when I came, I was like, I don’t know if I’m allowed to move the chairs; I’ve never sat here before, so I’d just sit wherever the chair is. But then, now, observing people, I’m like, Oh, okay, I can move the chairs around.”

Jié looks to signage that says yes

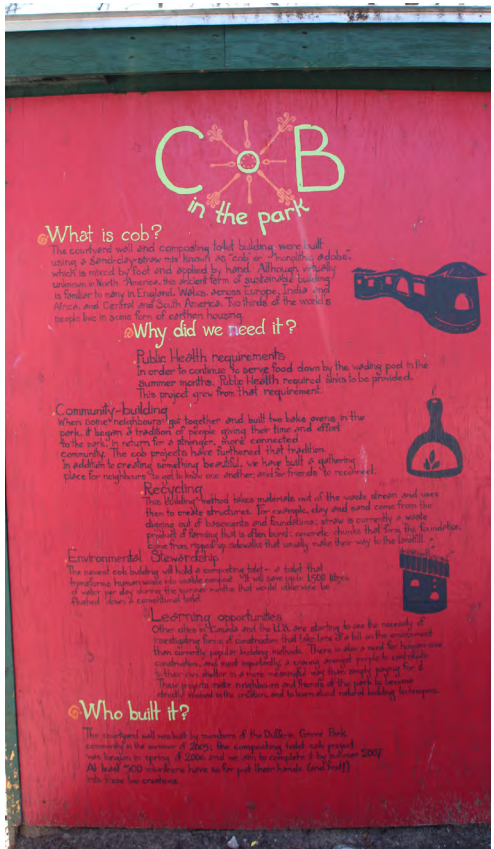
Jié told us about a feature that helped him find a little order in the chaos of the big city. He references a trip to Montreal, where there are “certain designated spots inside the metro or a certain street corner that you have a sign with a harp on it—that’s where the busker can perform.” He reflected on his decision to watch the buskers after seeing the sign, impressed that the buskers were “actually quite professional.” A clearly articulated rule that supported busking gave Jié permission to become a spontaneous audience member.

Cynthia feels uncomfortable without clear rules

People were excited by the outdoor oven in Dufferin Grove Park, but it also prompted questions about who was allowed to use the amenity and how. One person pointed to the kitchen’s locked cupboards and asked who had the key. Others crowded around hand-painted signs that explained the features and provided a contact email address. Cynthia wondered if a similar feature would work in her community and expressed reservations about the time and effort it would take to understand how to use the bake oven and whether she would even be allowed. “As an owned community thing, I don’t know if that would work. Even I’m hesitating to embrace it. I like it, but I’m still not familiar with it,” she said. “When I saw this, I [thought], This is a great idea. What are the rules and does anybody use this? I just come at any time and use this? It seems too good to be true.”



Dividing a park space into “rooms” lets visitors know what kind of activities those spaces are meant for



On the research walks and in experiences recorded in their journals, participants gravitated towards information boards and signs about the park or its features



Written rules helped people feel safe in new environments

We propose...

Set positive rules

When we hear the word rules, often the next phrase to come to mind is “no fun.” Rules get a bad rap. Indeed signs filled with all the things you can and cannot do in a space are stifling. Parks shouldn’t feel like a secret club where you need to know the handshake to get in. But spaces without easily interpretable rules can be just as unwelcoming. Participants made assumptions about the presence of unwritten rules they were not privy to in spaces that were left open to interpretation. Not knowing these rules made them feel like outsiders. They were constantly scanning both for written and unwritten rules explaining how to engage with a space.

Unwritten rules are expectations that people have about how to behave in a place. Throughout our lives, we learn these rules via experience and by looking to people around us for cues on how we should act. By contrast, written rules clearly indicate what we need to know about how to engage with a space or an amenity. These indicators may not always show up as words on a page or a sign in front of us; they may appear in the form of something like a fence, which tells us if we are allowed to climb on a structure or painted lines on the road, which tells us we can cross. And some rules are a hybrid of both: think about a wide path made of smooth pavement next to a thinner path made of gravel—the former is clearly for bikes, the latter for pedestrians.

Whatever form they take, these rules give people the confidence to engage with a space—especially when the rules are positive and encourage use. This is particularly important when it comes to new spaces or amenities, which people are still learning how to use. Rules can help people overcome the guesswork around whether they are allowed to move a chair or to enter a street-side garden. Rules are valuable design tools that can be used to encourage engagement and relieve anxieties generated by assumptions.

Make it simple to understand.

Simple instructions that are universally understood can go a long way towards helping everyone feel welcome. Rules are more familiar to us than total freedom—especially in Canada!

Rules don’t have to be on a sign post.

Think of features that help people intuitively interpret the use of a space, like lights that come on after dark. The lights signal, “This place is still open for use.”

Lead with positivity!

Rules should be framed in a way that enables or encourages use instead of promoting restriction or exclusion.



A PLACE FOR **ME** A PLACE FOR **EVERYONE**

Same place, different experience.

People can experience the same place in different ways. As designers we need to think outside of our own encounters and consider where people's various identities intersect.

Practicing place-based empathy.

No place can meet everyone's individual needs. But well-designed spaces tap into our sense of empathy and help us understand that a particular amenity or place may be important for someone else.

Community can feel inclusive or exclusive.

Community events and activities can bring us together—but they can also reinforce feelings of being an “outsider” if they are not designed well.

Throughout our research, the topic of inclusion arose naturally. Participants described public spaces in which they felt welcome and public spaces from which they felt excluded. They also recounted times when their feelings about a space were based on who else was present or notably absent. Inclusion in public space is a complex topic, and by no means do we suggest having all the answers. However, because it is very much on the minds of everyone we spoke to in some way, shape, or form, and is intrinsically connected to shared space in our city, we see great value in sharing the things we observed, heard, and learned from our research.

Public spaces are technically open to everyone, but as our participants noted, it is more complicated than that. Creating a public space that is welcoming is not as simple as putting on a community event or including interactive design elements. We learned that places that seem welcoming to one person can seem isolating to others and that places that feel threatening to some people can make others feel safe. Navigating this dynamic requires being thoughtful about what it means to be inclusive; it also requires being open to the various ways that people experience the same place, design, and programming. As creators of public space, we must remember that even seemingly small decisions can have unintended consequences on how others experience inclusiveness and belonging.

When we feel welcome

On the whole, participants told us that in order to quickly gauge a sense

of belonging in public spaces, they look for similarities in the people around them—whether they live in the same neighbourhood, speak the same language, share the same socioeconomic background, enjoy the same activities, or are at the same life stage. One participant we spoke with said she felt unsure of how to connect with neighbours in her new area. “How do I get to know you better? Because I’m not at your level at this moment, and how do I get to know my neighbours better? Because I don’t have a kid and I don’t have a dog.”

Many of our participants described working towards a shared goal, such as cooking or playing sports, in order to overcome points of difference. For example, after some coaxing and a little encouragement, one of our participants tried his hand at cooking in the shared community kitchen. “I was pretty nervous. It’s always weird when you first start working with people to know how

they’ll react, what they expect, and try to work within their expectations. And the community, it’s a lot of Afghani, Iraqi, Somali kids and mothers. And so, I was like, Oh, are the dishes that I’m familiar with going to appeal? Like, are people going to kind of like the flavours or want to eat what we’re cooking?”

Another participant found that sports helped him connect with people he did not otherwise know. “Like, let’s say someone’s holding a soccer tournament and then you get to make your own team, bring your own friends, and play against another team, and then you make friends with the other team. I’ve actually been a part of something like that, and I feel like that helps a lot of immigrants to mix into Canadian people and mix into people from different communities.”

When it came to connecting with a new group of people, participants felt most comfortable and successful when there was a shared experience

or common purpose, like dancing: “We’re all different backgrounds, but then we all blend in together because eventually your end goal is all to be a good dancer.... So, we all have to work together in order for us to make a good dance. Right?”

Nearly everyone we spoke to cited Tim Horton’s as a place where they feel welcome. They use it as a meeting place, a late-night hangout, a place to spend time with family, or to catch a break from the hot sun or the cool winter air. It has free washrooms, cheap snacks, and clean tables. We heard only one negative comment about it: a particular location has chosen to stack its outdoor chairs at the end of the night, preventing people from spending time there after hours. “The Tim Horton’s here shuts down at 10,” a participant told us, “and basically puts up a barrier and pushes all their tables to the back so no one can hang out in it.”

When we feel unwelcome

Community events can foster connections between people through shared experiences, but we also heard from participants about events and activities that made a place feel exclusive. As one participant put it, events where everyone seems to already know each other can make newcomers feel “a little isolated.” Another participant said of his own neighbourhood, “Communities that exist [like a church group] take advantage of parks, but I don’t see parks creating communities.”

Participants also told us that they felt unwelcome when they understood they were being watched—by security officers, police, or other officials. For example, on a walk through the Harbourfront area, one participant remarked on the absence of police—a comment that got heads nodding. “A friend of mine, we were walking in Trinity Bellwoods, and she said ‘Oh [it’s] so interesting here because there are no cops.’

She said in [her neighbourhood], there were always cops walking in the park. That has an impact on how you feel in the park.” Another participant recalled being forced to pass time in the parking lot outside a movie theatre before the film started, because security would not let him and his friends hang out inside until they had purchased tickets, which left them feeling unwelcome.

Finally, issues around affordability and spaces that look and feel “wealthy,” as one participant noted, sparked conversations about how welcoming a place felt. On our walk along the central waterfront, one participant observed that the “elephant in the room” was that the area “looks very rich.” Another participant said she wished she could see the same kind of investment in her own neighbourhood: “We also need vitality in [my] area. We also need beautiful trees and flowers. So I would like to see more justice in that. Like it doesn’t matter where you live.”





For another participant, the affordability of local businesses signaled an area’s inclusiveness. “I’m on disability pension, so [I have a] fixed income,” he said. “I can sympathize a lot with people with really limited income and I think these people actually, they make a community more vibrant because they—the shops—they keep everything affordable instead of having the fashionable restaurant, [of] which we have a few, or coffee houses. But you’re able to get your donut shop kind of coffee houses and your restaurant and your mom-and-pop restaurants [where] you can still get a \$7 meal.... And I think that’s accessible.”

The empathy test

We observed that empathy was often at the heart of how people approached public space—if a place

did not meet their needs, they tried to imagine how it might work for someone else.

Even when people disliked a particular place, they thought about what it might offer to others. For example, on one of our walks, a participant noted that a particularly unconventional set of playground equipment may actually be really inviting for children on the autism spectrum because of the design’s focused use of colour and texture. Another told us that although her local mall is too small and lacks any of the stores she likes, she wouldn’t want it to change because she knows that seniors in the community use the food court as a safe and accessible hangout: “We always say we wish they would just break it over, and build something else.... Like, one of those outdoor malls would be OK. But there are a lot of seniors who sit in the

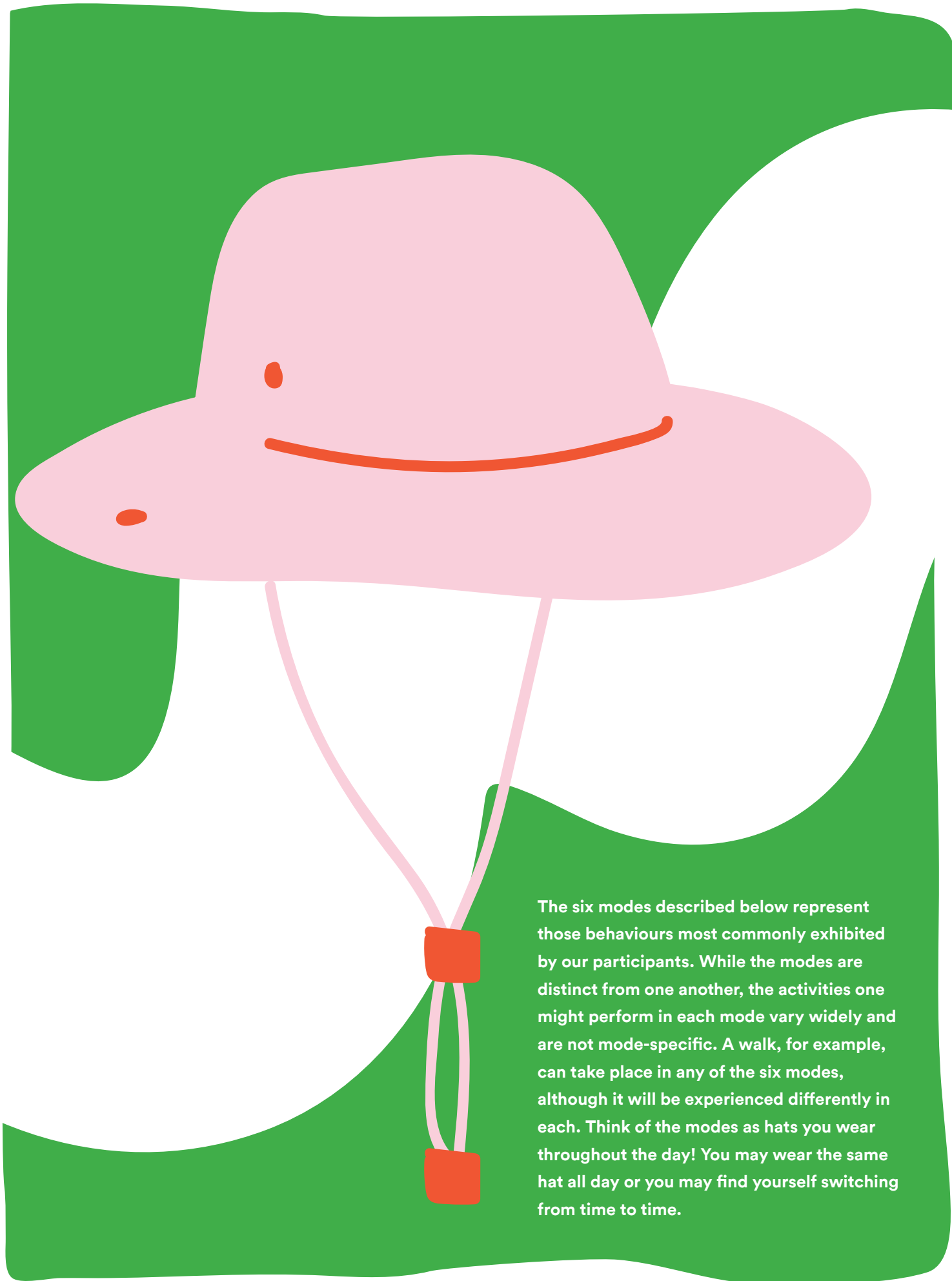
food court all day, right? So then for them, they wouldn’t have anywhere to go.”

We also found that people are incredibly conscious of who is and is not using a place—and the absence of certain groups does not sit well. On one of our research walks, participants noted the absence of people visibly experiencing homelessness and wondered with concern whether they had been “asked to move along.” In fact, for some people we spoke with, interactions with strangers experiencing life challenges made up valuable moments of social connection. “So when I share my experience it allows them to say ‘OK I’ve been into a situation,’” one person told us. “Sometimes they said they wish they had someone like me to be talking to all the time.... So that’s a big part of it, but they like having me

there, and I like having and talking to them too.”

People pick up on subtle and not-so-subtle cues in the spaces around them to determine whether they belong. When those cues suggest that a space is not for them, or that it is not for someone else, they notice—and that matters. This is the key to failing or succeeding at designing for inclusion. Although our research cannot answer precisely how to design for inclusivity, we can advise designers to consider what spaces tell us about who is and is not welcome. Every object, activity, amenity, service, design feature, and indeed every person in a place sends a loud and clear message. The best public spaces shout from the roof tops: “You belong here!”





The six modes described below represent those behaviours most commonly exhibited by our participants. While the modes are distinct from one another, the activities one might perform in each mode vary widely and are not mode-specific. A walk, for example, can take place in any of the six modes, although it will be experienced differently in each. Think of the modes as hats you wear throughout the day! You may wear the same hat all day or you may find yourself switching from time to time.

Behaviour modes in public spaces

We used our research to identify behaviours shared by multiple participants. By looking at how participants behaved in public spaces, rather than making assumptions based on demographic information, we gained more insight into participants' motivations and objectives, as well as what was driving their decision-making. We began to better understand why participants acted a certain way and how their behaviour might change across time, whether because of changes in mood, or, over the longer-term as they age .

The following six behaviour modes cut across participants, despite differences like life stage. For example, both Imran, an 18-year-old college student, musician and soccer player, and Jié, a 58-year-old retiree with a chronic illness, wander through the city looking for tucked-away places to sit and find serenity. When Jié wants to take part in an event, he seeks out the hustle and bustle of a crowded concert or festival, just like Genevieve, a 34-year-old mom often in search of activities to enjoy with her kids.

Behaviour modes:

Serenity seeking

Discovering

Gathering

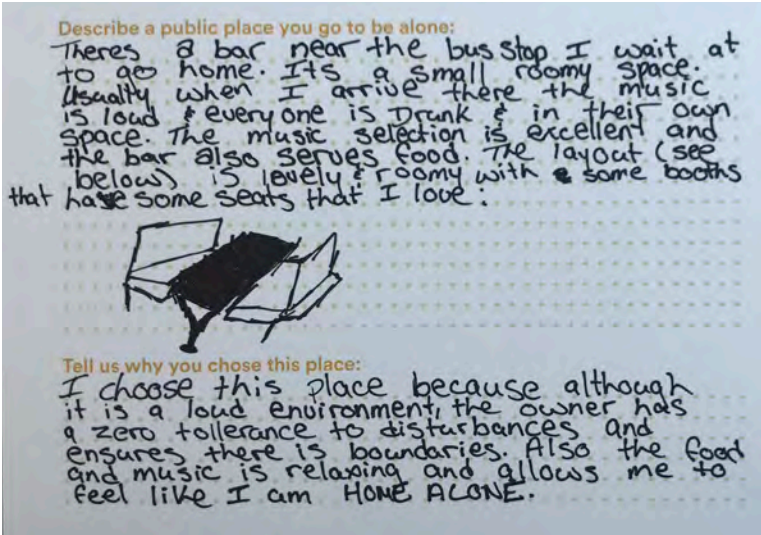
Spectacle seeking

Wearing kid goggles

Trip chaining

Serenity seeking

When I’m serenity seeking, public space is an escape from the everyday.



The people we spoke to often defined public space as a place of retreat, an escape from the everyday where they can escape the bustle of the city, or as one participant said: “forget about the hardships of life.” This was especially true of public space along the water. Participants said they regularly seek out natural landscapes, views of the water, elevated vantage points, or spots that allow them to be hidden in plain sight. Sometimes serenity seeking lasts only a few moments, as when passing through a park on the way home from work, whereas other times it can provoke an entire day’s journey.

Serenity seeking isn’t always about a quiet location. In fact, we often found that people went to busy places like crowded malls or late night bars to find alone time in a crowd.

Discovering

When I’m discovering, public space is where I can find new experiences and learn new things.



Many of the people we spoke with consider public space a site for learning, growth, and exploration. Whether trying out a new class such as *Zumba*, taking the kids on a nature walk, or wandering around a new spot without a plan, participants were driven by their desire to accomplish or discover something new.

Discovering is as much about finding new places as it is about relaying these findings to others. People love sharing stories of their new discoveries with friends and family.

Gathering

When I’m gathering, public space is a place where people can come together with friends and family.

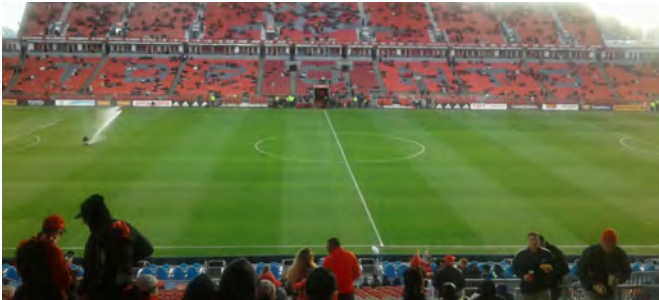
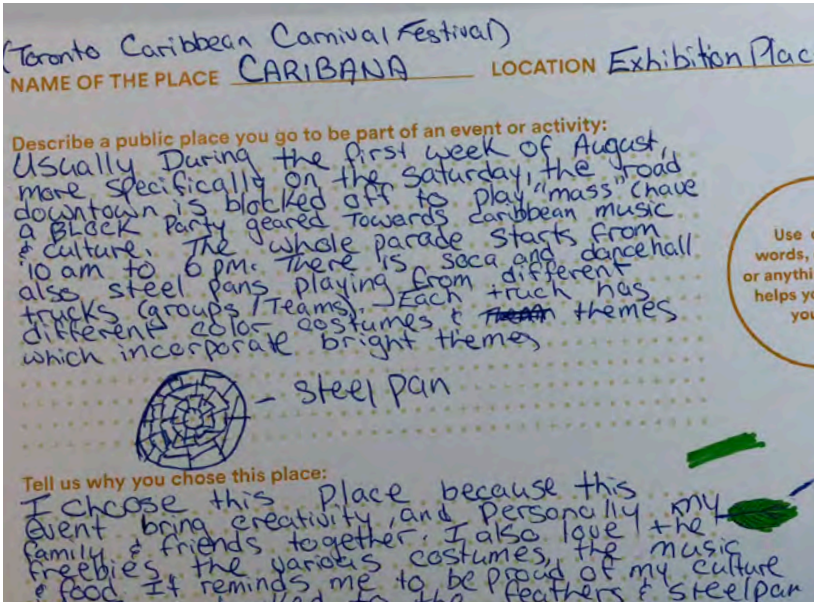


From one-on-one hangouts to group gatherings, participants sought out public space as meaningful venue for socializing, as well as participating in meet-ups, conferences, discussion panels, or political rallies. Taking part in shared experiences in public space lead them to feel more connected to their community. These shared experiences also helped them broaden their understanding of their community’s potential, and filled gaps in existing local programming.

Gathering mode isn’t just for large groups of people who want to make a bunch of noise. People come together to share all kinds of different experiences, including ones that may be quieter and more intimate.

Spectacle seeking

When I’m spectacle seeking, public space is where I go to be a part of an event.



There is nothing quite like the buzz and energy of a big event, particularly in Toronto’s summer months. Everyone we spoke with said they enjoy taking part in large events and that the feeling of being part of something larger than one’s self combined with the pleasures of people-watching, listening to music, dancing, and eating and drinking, was particularly worthwhile. Festivals and large events can create important memories and host defining life moments.

Spectacle seeking is a mode enjoyed by all participants at times. Even our more introverted participants relayed their desire to experience a big crowd or festival on occasion.

Wearing kid goggles

When I'm wearing kid goggles, public space is my favourite babysitter.



The parents or caregivers we spoke with were driven by the needs of their children as well as their desire to create experiences for them. That means constantly scanning surroundings for places to play, watch, learn, take a bathroom break, stay safe, rest, cry, change a diaper, snap a photo, have a snack, or entertain. Outings with children are guided by a search for certainty as well as the inherent unpredictability that comes with children. Public space can provide opportunities to make memories, pass along values, and keep both caregivers and children entertained while feeling safe.

It is not just about kids! Parents or caregivers want a cool experience for themselves too. That could mean a beautiful view, a drink and a snack, or simply a pleasant interaction with another person.

Trip chaining

When I'm trip chaining, public space is a one-stop shop.



The people we spoke with rarely made a round trip from place A to place B without making a stop along the way. Participants were more likely to add an additional stop or two (and sometimes more!) to render the time they spent more worthwhile. This can show up in playful ways such as tacking on a stop for ice cream on the way to the park, and it can show up in task-oriented ways such as stopping at the bank on the way to the gym or grabbing a few groceries before picking up the kids from school.

Trip chaining is about more than running practical errands such as shopping or banking. It is also about stopping for little things like ice cream, rock skipping, or swing sets—especially when parking is easy.

Bringing the research to life using mode maps

How do we weave together everything we learned and imagine it in action? A mode map is a practical tool that helps designers turn their research into actionable ideas. Mode maps are made up of narratives told through the viewpoints of single users as they experience the physical space around them and the impact it has on their behaviour. What are they trying to do and how is the space supporting their needs? Using our behaviour modes, we mapped out potential use cases for how people may interact with public space in Quayside. To design the features of the space, we relied on the propositions as guiding principles.

For example, perhaps you drop by a friend's house, and he offers to watch your kid for an hour so you can run a few brief errands. You determine your route based on ease of access, proximity, and comfort level. While you are leaving the grocery store, you notice a new play park across the street—it is free and safe looking, and there are family washrooms nearby. You make a mental note to bring your kid there another day. Near the end of your chores, you spot a bench with a view of the waterfront and take a quick breather while you put your bags down. Next to the bench is a water fountain, and you hydrate in the hot sun and enjoy a moment of relaxation.

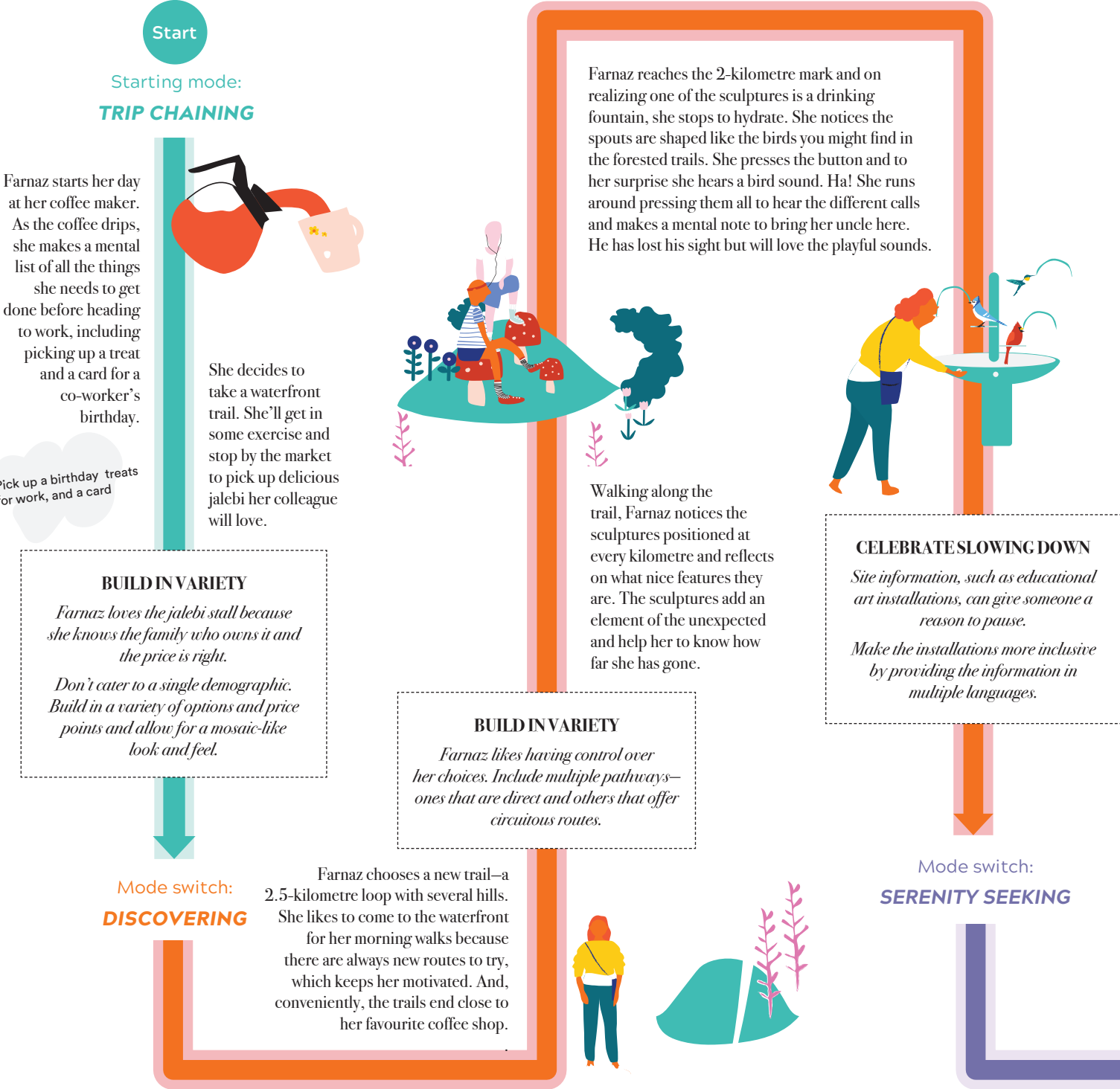
In this short hour, you switched behaviour modes multiple times, from trip chaining to wearing kid goggles back to trip chaining and then, unexpectedly, on to serenity seeking. You were able to successfully finish your tasks and find a moment to yourself because the amenities supported your needs. Your ability to access the places you needed to go, along with the innate knowledge that you were welcome in those spaces, contributed to your sense of community and belonging.

We have created three illustrative mode maps based on the stories we heard and the behaviours we observed. Each map weaves together two propositions and three behaviour modes.

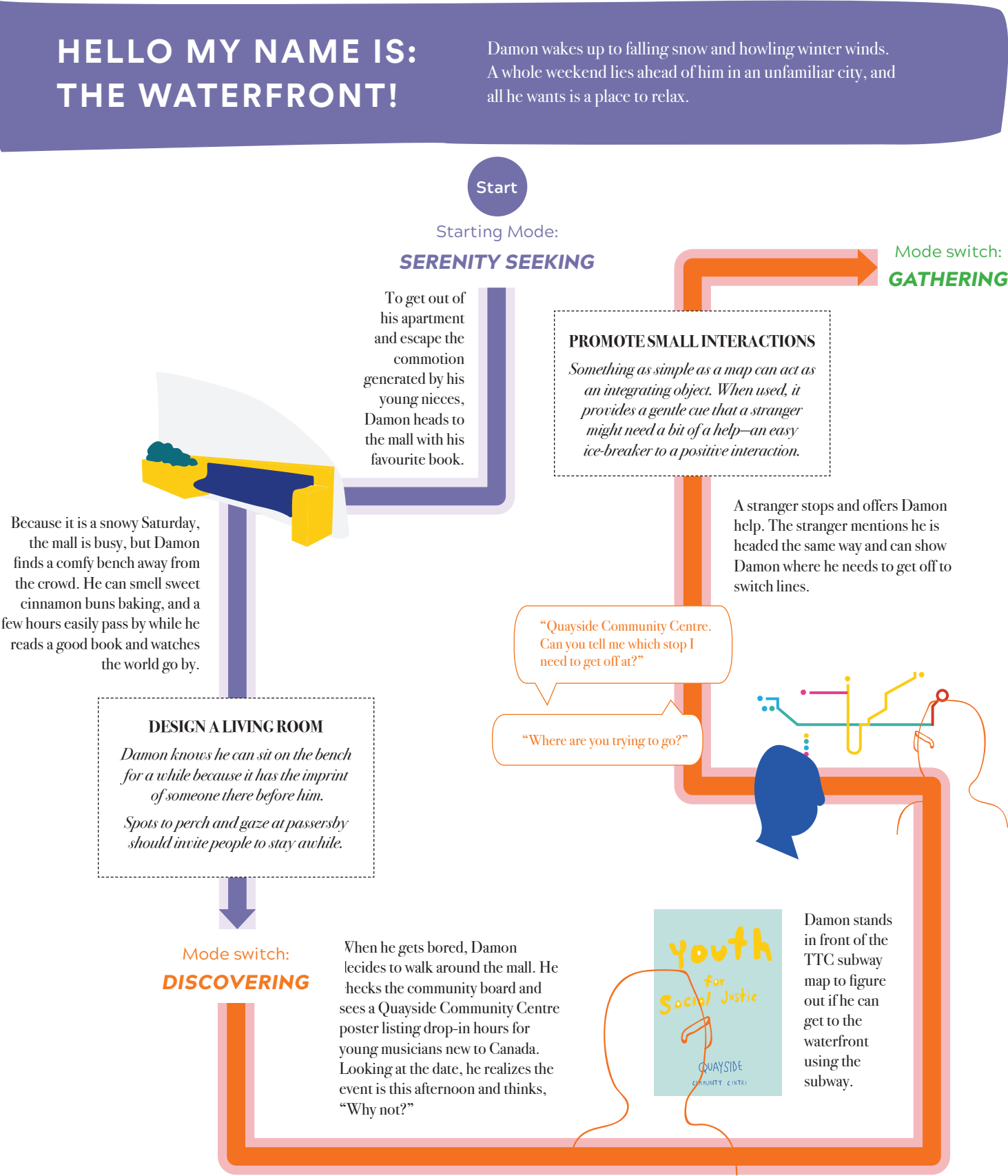
The following map is an example of how **celebrating slowing down** and **building in variety** may impact the experience of **trip chaining**, **discovering**, and **serenity seeking** based on stories we heard.

AN EARLY MORNING
BY THE WATER

It is a beautiful morning and Farnaz does not start her shift at work until 1 p.m. She walks into the kitchen and opens the window. It is one of those early spring days where you can feel the air beginning to warm and smell the greenery coming to life.



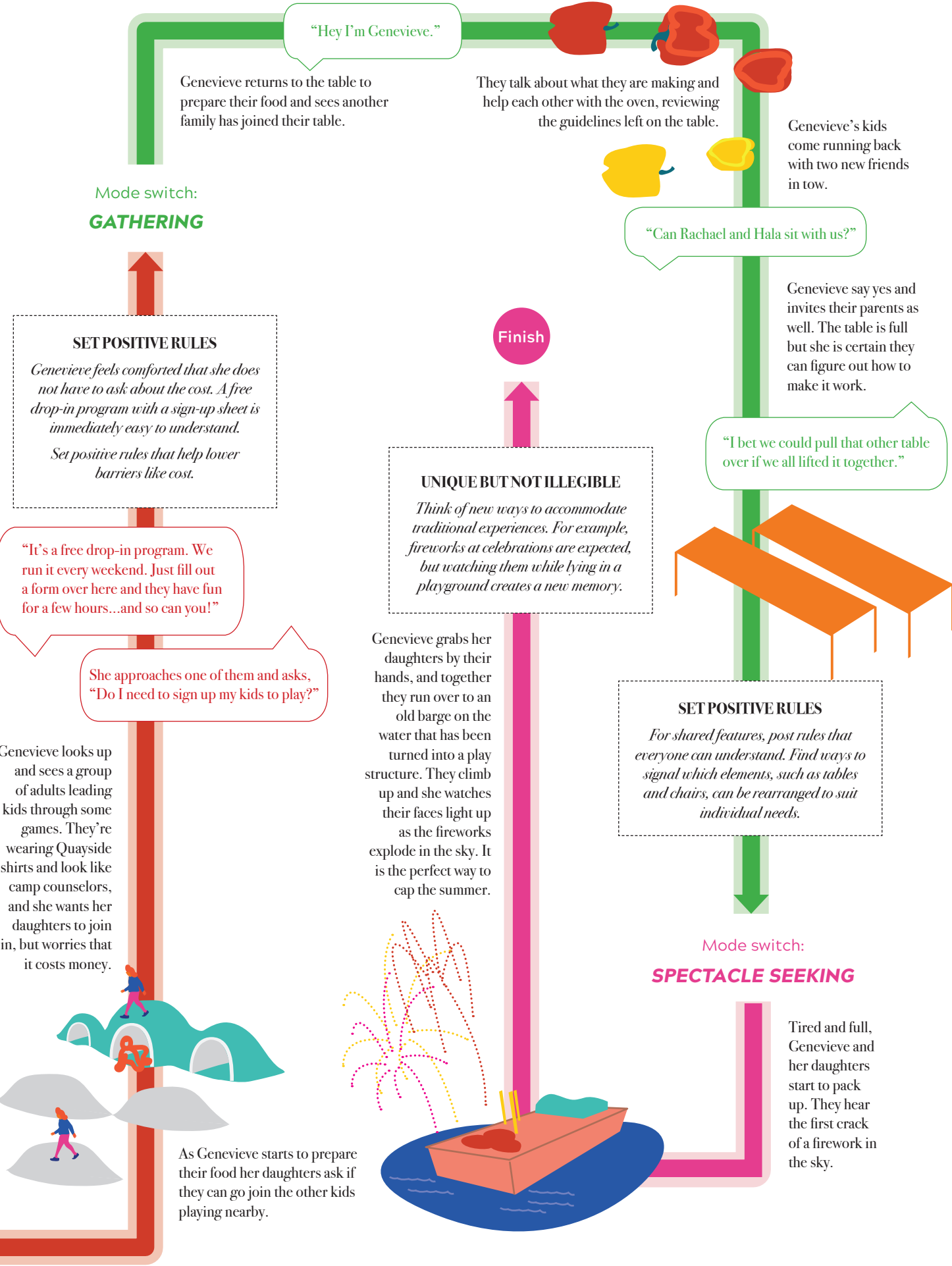
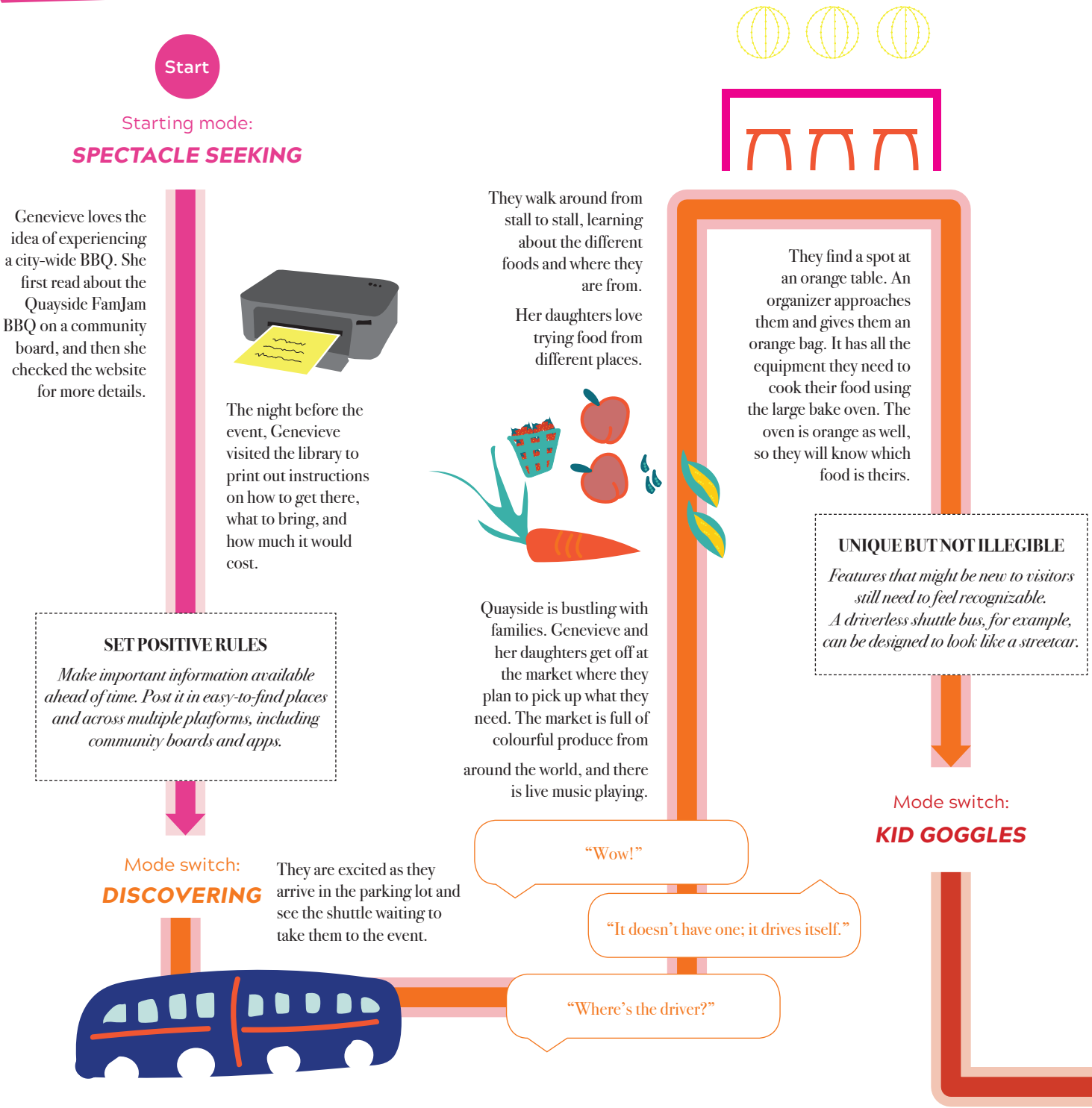
The following map is an example of how **designing a living room** and **promoting small interactions** may impact the experience of **serenity seeking**, **discovering**, and **gathering** based on stories we heard.



The following map is an example of how making something **unique, but not illegible** and **setting positive rules** may impact the experience of **spectacle seeking, wearing kid goggles, discovering**, and **gathering** based on stories we heard.

NEW TRADITIONS AT THE WATER’S EDGE

It is the last weekend of the summer. It was a busy one, and the only thing left on Genevieve’s bucket list is the end-of-summer festival she promised she would take her girls to. They usually go to the CNE, but this year they opted to try the Quayside FamJam BBQ instead.





APPENDIX

FROM THE DESK OF THE OBVIOUS
DEPARTMENT

RESEARCH WALK ROUTES

INTERVIEW BONUS:
ON COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

FROM THE DESK OF
THE OBVIOUS DEPARTMENT

The ideas in this section should not come as a huge surprise but we would be remiss not to mention them. These use-related features can make or break an urban public space—no matter how beautiful it looks or how close to nature it feels.

Washrooms

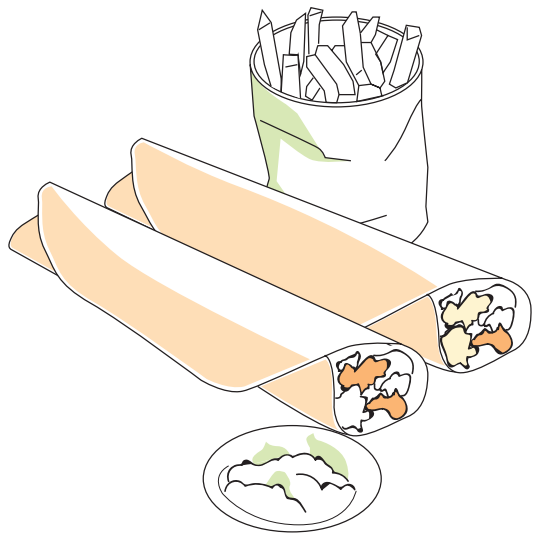
Participants universally expressed their desire for clean, accessible washrooms open year-round. We found that washrooms are key to people’s decision-making processes when choosing where to go and for how long. During our walks, participants looked for washrooms and noticed if they were absent. Washroom access allows people to plan for longer stays and also provides a necessary space for people with children to change diapers or clean off after a messy day at the playground.

“We just stay there for the whole day. [We could because] they have washroom facilities...”



WHAT DO YOU NEED TO BE HAPPY ON A PORCH?

“Food or snacks. And that’s it. Because you’re just people-watching and something will happen. You’re just relaxing. You don’t need your phone or anything.”



Food and drink

Unsurprisingly, access to food and drink came up in nearly every conversation and on every walk. Many participants identified food as an important way to feel connected to their own cultures but also as a way to explore the cultures of other people. In the city’s neighbourhoods and along the waterfront, participants remarked on the importance of being able to find diverse restaurant options; in parks, they expressed their desire for amenities supporting outdoor meals, such as tables, chairs, BBQs, and campfires. Many people’s park visits, especially longer ones organized with friends, family, and community members, were organized around sharing food.

Safety

Everyone wants to feel safe in a space, making safety a big driver of use. The presence of other people leaves users feeling safe, as do features such as well-lit pathways, uninterrupted lines of sight, and, in playground areas, clearly defined boundaries. What feels safe is not the same for everyone—on one walk, a spot that felt safe for a man did not feel safe for a woman, who noted the lack of lighting and the park’s adjacency to an alleyway. Taking these kinds of differences into account is important for creating spaces that feel safe for everyone.

“This one’s safe ’cause there’s a lot of people around.... Everyone’s walking through the park if something were to happen. So, everyone’s around to see it, and they can help out, you know?”

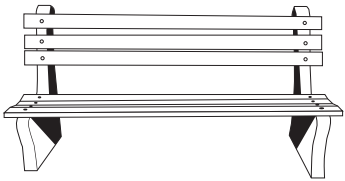
Local shops and convenience stores

Local retail is a major part of neighbourhood community and character. People who own small retail shops play an important role in a community, offering everything from welcoming hellos to eyes on the street to affordable and easy food options. Again and again, participants suggested small grocery and convenience stores contribute significantly to their sense of belonging. Local shops are the most at-risk in high rent and changing neighbourhoods.



“More in the sense of how the store owners act. Because all of the store owners, they all act as though they’re our parents or they act as if they know everyone. They’re more welcome to seeing faces, welcome to seeing people.”

“I have met a lot of nice people there while sitting on the benches.”



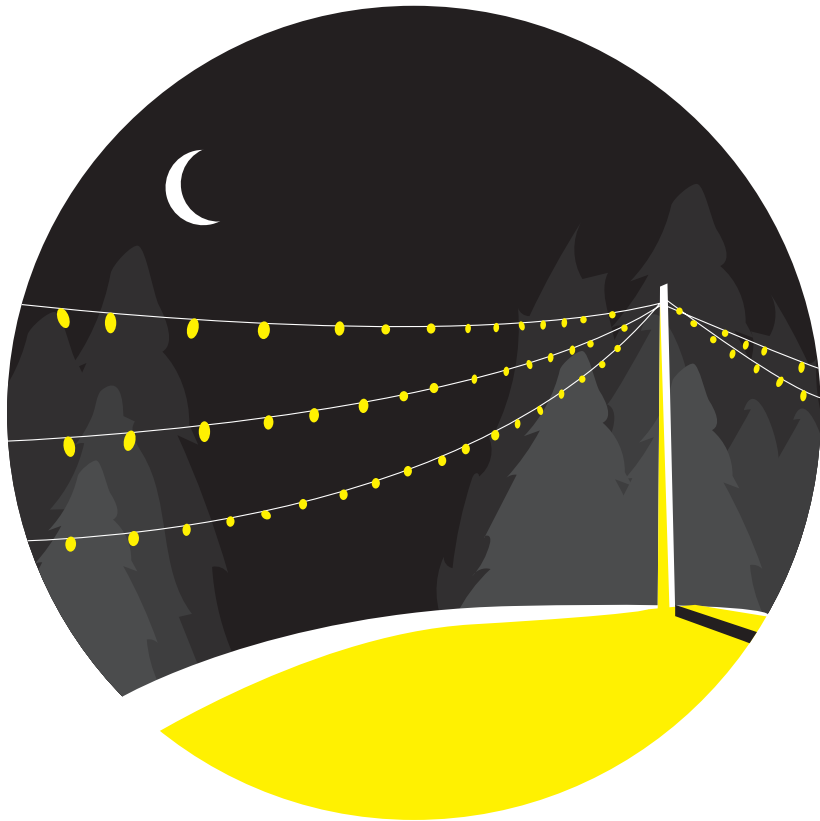
Seating

There is nothing like a good old-fashioned bench to indicate that this is a place to take a load off and stay awhile. The presence (or absence) of seating and its quality can dramatically affect how people feel about a public space and whether it seems social, welcoming, and people focused. Not all seating is created equal. A row of standard benches facing the same way makes a very different statement from curved or movable seating designed to encourage social interaction. Pay attention to what seating design and its placement say about a space.

Nighttime

Conversations about night-time use of public space tend to focus almost exclusively on safety—but this need not be the case. When the sun goes down, our favourite public spaces can exhibit unique and sometimes magical features. Night-time park users spoke excitedly of the rainbow lights in Barbara Hall Park, the warm glow given off by fire pits, and night-focused programming such as owl walks. There are challenges to night-time park use, however, like balancing the desire of nearby residents wanting to sleep with the desire of people wanting to play a night game of basketball.

“What does it look like at night? I feel this could be a romantic place to come for two lovebirds to be here, with all the little lights.”



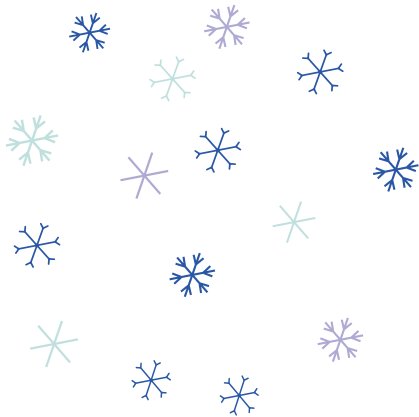
Good busy versus bad busy

People notice the presence of other people. Many of the places we went on our walks were bustling with activity, such as the waterfront or Yorkville—something that everyone commented on. People tended to appreciate the lively atmosphere of crowded sidewalks and park paths if there were opportunities to duck away into smaller spaces or green areas with seating. These brief respites from the crowds transformed potentially overwhelming experiences into positive ones.

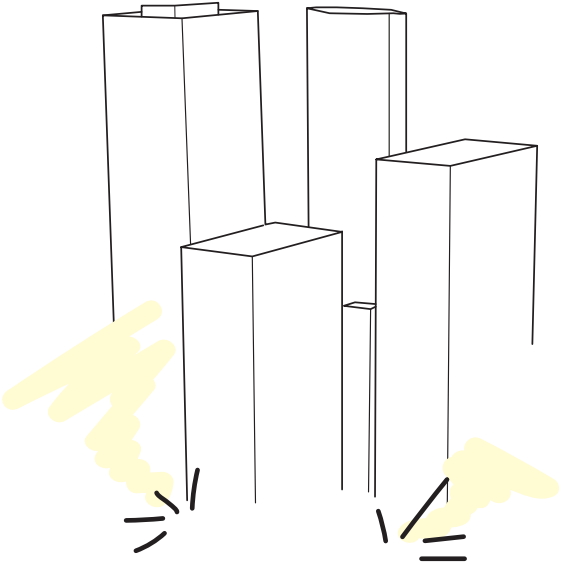
“My area is busy but, like, family-busy. And downtown is just business-busy. Lots of cars, lots of people, lots of briefcases.... No one really smiles or says anything. It’s just everybody’s on the go.”

Fair-weathered Canadians

It goes without saying that even in the Great White North, public spaces are our fair-weathered friends. This research took place as a cold spring (think ice storms) transformed into a warm summer (think T-shirt and jeans). No doubt our participants would have spent a lot more time indoors had we chosen to study public space in December. When asked about public spaces they might venture in the winter, for the most part participants said they preferred to stay at home. For such a cold city, participants were hard pressed to name warm, comfortable, weather-proof public spaces.



“[If we did this research when it was cold] it would be like, well, where would we be going? We wouldn’t really be going anywhere, you know.”



Noise and traffic

Traffic and noise are particularly important to consider along the lakeshore. In fact, the subject came up most during discussions about visiting the waterfront. Lake Shore Boulevard emerged as a huge barrier for people—not only due to its inadequate pedestrian and transit access but also because of its traffic. Both noise and safety were cited as concerns. Busy roads loom large in people’s mental models of neighbourhoods and can serve as a barrier to their willingness to travel.

“The lakeshore is beautiful. It’s really nice to cycle, but the noise is again very disappointing. You wonder—we said why [do] people put these highways? Such a beautiful lakeshore. I mean, you can physically be there; but because of the noise, you can’t experience the nature.”

WALK ROUTES

Yorkville to Queen’s Park

This walk took participants through the busy streets of Yorkville to several small parks, plazas, and public spaces such as Village of Yorkville Park and Townhouse Square before heading south along Bloor Street. From there we walked south through Philosopher’s Walk, a green linear park on the University of Toronto campus, and ended up at Queen’s Park, a large, circular green space with mature trees and one of the largest parks in downtown Toronto.



Music Garden to Harbourfront Centre

This walk took participants along several connected waterfront parks and the Queen’s Quay boardwalk, including the Music Garden, HTO Park, WaveDecks, and Harbourfront Centre. Participants walked along the water’s edge and along the newly redesigned Queen’s Quay, a street that includes a streetcar right-of-way and a separated cycling path. The parks we passed through featured garden areas, green space, beach fronts, event areas, and plazas.



Dufferin Grove to Dovercourt Park

This walk took participants through several neighbourhood parks in Toronto’s West End, including the much used Dufferin Grove Park. This park contains many community- created features, including a bake oven, an outdoor community kitchen, and a fire pit. We walked past busy Bloor Street shops then north through Salem Parkette, a small linear park with outdoor exercise equipment along a laneway behind the shops. We ended up in Dovercourt Park, a mid-size neighbourhood park with a focus on sports.



David Crombie to Sherbourne Common

This walk took participants through David Crombie Park, a linear park located in the mixed-use, mixed-income St. Lawrence Market neighbourhood. The park includes playgrounds, a baseball diamond, garden areas, public art pieces, and a basketball court. From there we walked south on Sherbourne Street, alongside a separated bike lane, and under the Gardiner Expressway to Sherbourne Common. This newer park includes water features such as a splash pad and an open canal. We ended the walk at the lake.

ON COMMUNITY
& BELONGING

At the end of every interview we asked participants to define community and belonging for us in their own words. Here is what they said:

DOBLIN: **How would you describe a feeling of belonging? What words come to mind?**
RESPONDENT 1: A feeling of belonging. That would feel like, I know I say it a lot, but it would feel like a safe space, a feeling of belonging. Being able to have an opinion to say what you feel and, you know, it's okay to express yourself, to not be judged.... My shirt was inside out and the elder came, and she's just like, "I know you're a mom 'cause your shirt is inside out." She's like, "It won't stop till ever." I'm just like, oh, that's okay now, I'm just going to leave it 'cause it's just not that big of a deal. But, yeah, just having that safe space."

DOBLIN: **In your own words, define *community* or what you think community is about.**
RESPONDENT 2: I think community is a sense of belonging. And I don't want to say ownership, but like, sort of a pride and—yeah, ownership is the word that keeps coming to mind. Like...kind of a deeper relationship and a sense of responsibility too, that it's not just somewhere you are but somewhere that you're making and building with your actions and your presence.

D: **What kind of feelings do you associate with belonging?**
R2: I guess, like, a familiarity. And a sense of acceptance. Like, the question you were asking about how I feel comfortable just talking to people, like at a bar, or just that kind of welcoming sense that, while you might not be the same kind of people, you're still welcome and there is a place for you.

DOBLIN: **How do you know if you belong in a group, or how do you know if you belong in a community? And how does it feel if you do belong?**
RESPONDENT 3: You know, you have a certain personality, you like certain people, and if you like certain people then I would think that I probably belong to that group, or to the family, or to the community. But if I have a feeling that people don't understand me, I would definitely say I don't belong here, for sure not, and this is the wrong place for me. So, it's all about personality and, you know, respect of each other's ideas. So, if those things are missing, then I don't belong. Like, respecting each other's ideas. You have your point of view about certain things, I have my own point of views about the same things, but I respect your ideas too because you are a person, you may have different ideas. But if you are opposing that idea, that no, that's wrong, or this or that, so you don't let other person, you know, express the feeling, that will be...like, the thing that I would think that I don't belong, right?

DOBLIN: **I'm curious about how you would define *community* or how you would describe the feeling of community?**
RESPONDENT 4: Despite everything, I'm not that involved in this community. I mean, I don't participate in any groups or anything like that...so it's hard to define it that way. But I do have my community which is less bounded by geography but more bounded by [the] condition that I have, a community of people living with [a] chronic condition that supports groups—well, it can be a support group or something like that. So that would be part of my community, yeah.

D: **That's the community you feel like you belong to?**
R4: Yeah, that I can belong to, that there are people [and] we can talk to each other, that we can—people can have questions, and someone can try to give answers and so on. I mean, as you know, we have [a] very good health support system in Canada, or in Ontario, but sometimes it's not immediately obvious what is available to who, and what, and how you go about getting it. So, having a community like that can be very, very important—that people can say, 'Okay, you should try this one,' or 'That place may be able to help you,' and so on.

D: **It sounds like you feel like there is a sense of community in this neighbourhood?**
R4: I think so. I think there [is a] community in the area.

D: **What do you think ties it together? Because, as you said, it is really diverse—what's the shared thing that makes this a neighbourhood? Or, what do you think makes it feel like a community?**
R4: Part of it is just, I think—well, first of all, I mean, there are still the high-rises [and] I think a lot of people live quite close together. And then there are the schools so that if people with children—parents and children who have a lot of interaction together. And then I think the—I think the shops too because they're smaller, that they know the customers.
My pharmacist...and the assistants know me by name. My barber knows what haircut I want, remembers what haircut I want. And so it's a few things like that, that it's like, yeah, you feel comfortable moving in.

DOBLIN: **What words come to mind when I say having a sense of belonging?**
RESPONDENT 5: Individualism.

D: **Tell me what you mean by that.**
R5: Like where you still have your individual traits, individual characteristics. Your own little identifier, but you're still a part of it as a whole.

“I do have my community, which is less bounded by geography but more bounded by [the] condition that I have”

“If I felt lonely then that would really challenge my sense of belonging and my sense of community.”

DOBLIN: I’m just curious about that feeling of having a sense of belonging and what that means?

RESPONDENT 6: So a sense of belonging...for me, it’s feeling connected to the place, and so that can even be like you’re connected to your natural environment, your earth. You’re feeling the ground that you walk on and that’s your sense of belonging as well.

And then the other aspect is people or people in your circles as well. I have a very strong supportive network around me. So that’s family, but that’s also friends that I grew up with, and that’s friends that are not too far away from me in the GTA that I can call up or I can go out with or rant or have good times with. And so that contributes to my sense of belonging. Because if I didn’t, if I felt so lonely then that would really—if I felt lonely then that would really challenge my sense of belonging and my sense of community in this place too.

DOBLIN: What do you think of when you hear the word *belonging*?

RESPONDENT 7: Okay. Well, I think in general Canada is a very—it’s, like, a place where people kind of feel like they belong. But I feel like, on my level, belonging...I guess we could use the Village as an example. I know I’ve probably used that [as] an example a hundred times.

D: That’s okay. That’s fine; talk about it all you want.

R7: *[laughs]* But I guess just, like, having people who have the same views as you, having friends that are, like, similar to you. That’s, like, belonging, having a family. But, like...yeah, see, I don’t...if there’s anything specific you want me...

D: Is there a time in your life where you felt—

R7: Belonging?

D: Yeah.

R7: I guess I feel like I belong when I’m with my friends; I feel like I belong when I’m in the Village.

D: What tells you that, like, how do you know?

R7: Well, I’m just comfortable to be myself, I guess you could say. And I guess that’s why I’m not really a social person, because I kind of just want to talk to people who I know I can talk to, the way I want to talk to them. So, I guess, like, yeah, the best thing I can say about belonging is that, like, when you’re similar to people and you can talk to them on a level and relate to them. So that’s what I would say belonging is.

DOBLIN: If you just think about the word *belonging*, can you tell me what comes to mind?

RESPONDENT 8: Belonging somewhere is like being a part of something. If I’m on a soccer team, if I belong to a soccer team, that means I’m a part of the soccer team. If I belong to a community that means I’m a part of the community. But the thing is, if I belong to a soccer team, that doesn’t involve only me thinking that I belong to the soccer team. That also means that the rest of the players also think that I belong to that soccer team, right? Because even in a community, a community’s like...I feel like it’s not a one-sided thing.

If I feel like I’m a part of the community and everyone else doesn’t think the same thing, then I wouldn’t really feel like I’m the part of that community, and then I would go out and find a different community. And that’s one of the things that I actually—this goes [on] in university too. If you don’t feel welcome in high school or in your community, and you don’t have any ways to go find and seek friends elsewhere, then you gravitate towards, like, online friends and stuff like that, and then you would become depressed and stuff like that, but I don’t suffer those things because—especially in Toronto, because there’s so many immigrants, and I feel like even the non-immigrants are so used to us immigrants and they’re so welcoming nowadays, rather than back five years [ago] when I was here. When I came back in 2013, I didn’t feel as welcome as I feel now and as some immigrants feel now too.

D: What kind of indicators or what—like, how do you know when people want you on the soccer team and when it’s that reciprocal relationship?

R8: Let’s say if we talk about [being] in a community, right? If we’re sharing the same public space, and if I see someone using the same public space every time I go there or, like, pretty often, and if I go there and I’m like, ‘Yo, hey, what’s up? How you doing?’ and the next time if I don’t say it, and they come to me and they ask me, then I feel like, yo, they actually care about me, and they actually want to ask, like, how I’m doing, right? Instead of just me asking how they’re doing. So, at that point I would feel like I belong to the community and I belong to the public space.

DOBLIN: The last one we have is about the word *belonging*, and kind of similar to how we talked about community with the word *belonging*. Can you describe what it feels like?

RESPONDENT 9: It would feel like you’re included, and you’re safe, and you’re appreciated, and you’re valued. And you’re not shunned, and you’re not bullied. And you feel like you have a purpose, and that your position in that community or organization or whatever, that it matters, that if you weren’t there, it would make some sort of a difference. Yeah, you just feel like you are a part of something and that people really want you to be there, you know. You’re not just there, they actually want you to be there, so...

“But the thing is, if I belong to a soccer team, that doesn’t involve only me thinking that I belong to the soccer team. That also means that the rest of the players also think that I belong to that soccer team.”

“But I don’t know whether I’ll fit in or not or how friendly or how unfriendly they will be. So, I’m nervous. But as soon as I see people from my community, regardless of age, I will always be excited.”

DOBLIN: **Can you describe what belonging means to you?**
RESPONDENT 10: Belonging. I would say I belong to my mosque because as I said, I am [a] very religious person and—let’s say, if somebody says, let’s go on a trip, my first question [is] who’s on that trip? And if I see anybody from my community, you would see my—ah, yes, I’m coming.

All the strangers, like, whites, blacks, Asians, whatever, they’re okay. But I don’t know whether I’ll fit in or not or how friendly or how unfriendly they will be. So, I’m nervous. But as soon as I see people from my community, regardless of age, I will always be excited. Because I think I belong to them. I feel very comfortable with my own people. Yeah. Because ever since I was a kid, my mother used to take me to the mosque. So, I’ve grown up going to the mosque. And when I came to Canada my mother wasn’t there, my aunts—I was staying with the aunts—they weren’t going to the mosque, but I continued with my religion.

DOBLIN: **When I say “sense of belonging,” what comes up for you?**
RESPONDENT 11: The memories that I collect...it creates a feeling of belonging.... Because maybe [I] don’t feel that I belong here, but if I leave this place and start to live somewhere else, actually I start to realize that, ah, I [did] belong there because my memory is there. I did this, my daughter did that, my husband [did] this. I have gone through this. I have gone through difficulties, and then the summer came and, ah, in summer we done this, you know? The chapters that you collect, you create in your life—if it’s happening in one place, I mean, it belongs to you because that’s the stage, yeah.

DOBLIN: **Can you just describe a little bit why colour makes such a difference for you?**
RESPONDENT 12: Colours help you to get a sense of belonging sometime, depending on the colour. Colour, the way it has been used, it’s a—you know this is a nice space, this is a bad space, or whatever. Because if I’m going to see a rainbow colour, I’m going to say, “Oh, this is a nice space. This somewhat defines who I am, and I’m going to work for you.” If I only see black, dark colours, sad colours like dark brown, black, whatever, places [without] lots of green or vegetation, like, I’m going to stay away. [It] seems like nature is calling or something. I just don’t feel myself with dark colours, really.

D: **Can you talk more about that? How does colour give you a sense of belonging?**
R12: Because colour, the rainbow, that represent[s] LGBTQ people. So, if I’m seeing that, okay, I think there are more people like me here, then I’ll feel more comfortable in the space.

“When you go there, people are happy to see you.”

D: **One of the other things—and you said this too, you used the word belonging a couple times and we’re really interested because that’s kind of this big complex idea, what it means to have a sense of belonging**
R12: Okay. Sense of belonging in the sense [of feeling you belong] somewhere. Okay, when you go there, people are happy to see you, people are happy to exchange words with you, and then a place where you go and people, you know, they shy away from talking to you and so forth. I’m like, okay then, I think I’m not going—I do not feel [I] belong here. I feel I belong here because these people accept [me] for who I am when we are talking, and we share our experience, our past or whatever, anything that comes up randomly.

