INTRODUCTION

Urban Plazas

Urban plazas can be found in most cities worldwide and offer unique amenities for pedestrian traffic. Plazas are designed open public spaces that offer refuge to pedestrians in an urban environment. Often located throughout the central business district of its respective city, urban plazas provide a traffic-free zone that can be used for leisure activities, events and markets, social gatherings, and cultural experiences.

According to the Project for Public Spaces (2005), a public place is accessible by all, open to all, concerning people as a whole, reflects the city culture and the city image and identity, human contact and interaction points form groups, creates community and consults the social body, a point of exchanging ideas. They convey meanings and opens the minds to new insights, and promote people to understand their places.

Pedestrian movement is at the core of basic transportation and is invaluable when it comes to moving about the city. Whether it is the morning commute, afternoon lunch breaks, or evening entertainment pedestrian traffic within a city needs a plaza and other pedestrian amenities. Urban plazas placed within city centers not only breakup pedestrian congestion on sidewalks but also invite pedestrians into the space with the lure of various amenities, such as benches and water features (Whyte, 1980). Urban plazas provide a form and function that is distinct to walkable environments while beautifying the surrounding cityscape. These natural environments are often considered restorative environments (Kaplan, 1993).
This project evaluates an urban plaza in Downtown Gainesville, Florida. Using pedestrian observation and behavioral mapping, the quality and effectiveness of the Bo Diddley Community Plaza is evaluated. In addition to this evaluation, factors such as American cultural values, Gainesville’s target audience, design qualities of urban plazas, the surrounding features and land-use of Downtown Gainesville, and traffic circulation around Bo Diddley Community Plaza are considered. The objective, therefore, is to use this research to develop suggestions for improvements to the downtown plaza and propose elements for a redesign.