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# Rethinking Third Places:
# Contemporary Design with Technology

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Coffee shops, bars, and barbershops are some of the typical third places named by Ray Oldenburg (1989). According to him, these places are neither work, nor home, and are places where local communities gather to unwind and discuss a broad range of topics (e.g., current political situations, increased prices in the local grocery store, or latest sports results). These places allow for community life to unfold. As discussed by Oldenburg, third places are low profile, neutral, inclusive, accessible, accommodating, filled with regulars, conversational, and playful. These characteristics of third places were outlined before information and communication technologies (ICTs) like the Internet, mobile phones, and social networking services (SNS) - e.g., Facebook and Twitter - became widespread and integrated into the "fabric of everyday life" (Weiser 1991). Yet many of Oldenburg's properties describe characteristics of some contemporary ICTs. For example, Facebook or Twitter (Soukup 2006) have many attributes that describe third places, e.g., they are inclusive as anyone with an account can post his or her comment and opinion about any topic of interest; Facebook is accessible by allowing anyone to look up people's profiles, while Twitter allows public search for tweets; both social networks focus on allowing conversation and discussion to occur; and both networks offer a diverse range of topics that cater to different audiences.

However, much has been written on how the use of ICTs in physical places isolates people (Anacleto & Fels 2013; Turkle 2011) and how some cultures have preferences towards their use over physical contact with other persons (Turkle 2011). Contemporary ICTs provide virtual space for people to interact with each other, but sometimes they lack the design and functions that transform them from an online space to an online place, e.g., by not allowing people to adapt and appropriate the virtual space in a closer fashion as one would appropriate and adapt his/her living room (Harrison and Dourish 1996; Tuan 2001). This raises important questions:

> *Three decades later, how are Oldenburg's properties of third places relevant, operative and effective for today's third places where ICT is becoming widespread? What social and technical connections exist between today's widespread ICTs - such as the Internet, mobile phones, and social networking sites - and Oldenburg's properties of third places? What are the connections between people's interactions in third spaces and similar online spaces?*

In order to answer these questions and understand what ICTs are used at third places and how ICTs can aid in stimulating and supporting the role of physical third places we conducted a field study in Paris, France documenting affordances and properties of nine cafés and bars. Through this field study we have reconsidered and reemphasized the relevance of some of the original characteristics of third places outlined by Oldenburg, both in terms of the influence of ICTs and social impact on the functions they play. Based on our observations and findings we draw initial implications for ICTs that aim at supporting properties of third places. The contribution of this paper is two-fold:

- We discuss how ICTs and society changed the role and attributes of third places as defined by Oldenburg. Based on a field study in Parisian third places we revisit Oldenburg's properties of third places and provide new characteristics that describe contemporary third places.
- We inform how existing ICTs can be integrated into third places to support and stimulate their properties.

This paper has the following structure. After we summarize the related work on third places, we describe the conducted field studies that inspired us to rethink Oldenburg's characteristics of third places in the context of ICTs that is currently introduced into these spaces. We then revisit Oldenburg's properties of third places and discuss the proposed changes to Oldenburg's definition of third places. Finally, we provide design snippets for new ICTs and summarize how ICTs change the concept of third places before providing concluding remarks.

## RELATED WORK - THIRD PLACES AND ICTS

Oldenburg (1989) defines "third places" as places that are neither work, nor home, where people come together to socialize. Coffeehouses are the typical third places, as their openness, low key features and architectural qualities allow for lingering and conversation, and provide regulars of all ages with a home away from home and a neutral ground from where to work, rest, and converse with friends and strangers. Third places are essential to the shaping of local communities and key to the well-being of city life. Oldenburg posits that it is in third places that "the human being is a person… he or she is an individual, unique and possessing a character" (Ibid). Third places play an important role in society as they provide a catalyst space between the privacy of home and the sterility of work, allowing one to engage with "familiar strangers" (Milgram 1977), and allowing for the creation of social bridges that shape a community's social capital. Oldenburg (1989) argues that there are several key properties of third places. These include neutrality, democracy, inclusiveness, publicness, the ability to become levelers, conversational, exhibiting a low profile, playfulness, and welcoming to regulars and newcomers alike. Yet, some of Oldenburg's key properties often fall short when defining contemporary third places, virtual third places, or ICT-supported third places (Farnham et al. 2009; Karnik 2011; McLean 2013; Nyden, Hossfeld, & Nyden 2011; Paul, Jensen, Wong, & Khong 2008; Rao 2008).

When Oldenburg and Blissett (1982) introduced the concept of third place, ICTs were in an infancy stage in respect of their influence in shaping society. The fundamental idea of Oldenburg's third places, that is "a home away from home", was found in places open to the public across the world, such as the English pub, the American tavern, or the French café (Oldenburg 1989). People inspired by Oldenburg's definition have used his concept to instantiate "third places" in gardens, photo shops, and even prisons (Oldenburg 2009). Yet, many of these implementations are still attached to a notion that considers ICTs inauthentic, distant, and henceforth not compatible with third places. In fact, Oldenburg (2009) sporadically mentions ICTs in pejorative terms, like "dehumanizing", "pixilating". We argue here that the dichotomy virtual-real does not work in contemporary third places. Movements like *1tree1like* (where a tree is planted for every Facebook like), or the new possibilities opened by 3D printing are witnesses of wide adoption of the virtual as part of our physical, social and cultural environments. For example, 20% of the European Union citizens spent some time every day in the infosphere (Floridi 2011), and not for work reasons. We argue that the design of contemporary third places should include ICTs as a crucial part, along the physical design of third places, their furniture, and the walls that contain them.

The concept of "third place" has its roots in the concept of public, which has, over the years, been shaped by technologies used in places where people come together to socialize. Public is defined by Habermas as "the site of collective performance that brings together those who are different from one another precisely because they are different…" (Habermas 1956). He argues that it was the architectural nature of the classic 17th century coffeehouses (one large room with one large table) and the nature of media found therein (gazettes read aloud and discussed) that forged our contemporary understanding of public.

Today ICTs are weaving into "the fabric of everyday life" (Weiser 1991). Today they play an important role in redefining the public sphere by enhancing physical space and multiplying the informational role of places and things (Anacleto & Fels 2013). The layout and functioning of today's coffeehouse bear little resemblance to the coffeehouse of the 17th century. Tables are smaller to accommodate private media consumption, power outlets serve to control seating dynamics, and complementary wireless is used to attract customers. Visited by telecommuters, coffee enthusiasts, neighbors, students, or on-the-go visitors, third places play the roles of Internet-hub, meeting place, coffee distributor and study room simultaneously. Here, conversation is either augmented through, or replaced by, laptop computers, tablets, mobile phones, and situated displays. As a result, the classic role of the concept of third place is called into question, as is our understanding of "public". For many researchers, the concept of third place takes different shapes and plays different roles in allowing social interaction and the shaping of

communities. The following paragraphs present some of the most relevant contemporary adoptions of the concept of third places, as well as some of the proposed roles that technologies play within these places. ICTs that are tightly related to communities should emphasize social engagement, groups of people, long-term social impact, social capital, and engagement of members of a community with little or no technical knowledge (Carroll 2011).

The use of social networking services has become ubiquitous, especially through their connection with mobile phones/smartphones. Sambasivan, Rangaswamy, Cutrell, and Nardi (2009) indicate that ICTs need to address communal ownership and interactions that include the use of profiles, physical robustness, and accessibility. Hosio, Kukka, and Riekki (2010) have focused on the paradigm of "isolation-by-choice" in third places and have explored the usage of personal data (e.g. photos) found in online social networking sites to promote face-to-face interactions in serendipitous ways. Kim, Lee, Lee, and Paik (2010) have explored geo-location and social links mined to promote collaboration in public spaces.

With respect to online Social Networking Sites (SNSs), and their connection with third places, Rao (2008) claims that some social networks, like Facebook, could more closely fit Oldenburg's definition of third places - mainly because online social networks were founded on conversational affordances. Rao describes how Facebook became what can be considered a virtual third place, based on the playful nature developed from earlier iterations of online social networks like massively multiplayer online games (MMOs). Farnham et al. (2009) describe an innovative use of SNS in third places and in their CoCollage system that highlights photos and quotes from present customers' online social network profiles onto a situated large screen. Their findings show that such technology can increase the sense of belonging to a third place within people who already have a strong notion of belonging.

An interesting work is presented by Gajadhar, de Kort, IJsselsteijn, and Poels (2009), where researchers installed a Chinese-style Cyber Café in the Netherlands. While originally the café was utilized by people in China to have some privacy and time alone, the introduction of new technologies in a different country promoted people meeting friends and playing together and collaboratively. In this case, the characteristics of the promoted third place was bound to community needs and cultural values that might not be valid somewhere else.

## UNCOVERING PROPERTIES OF MODERN THIRD PLACES - A FIELD STUDY OF PARISIAN THIRD PLACES

In order to better understand how third places changed since Oldenburg coined its definition we conducted a field study in Paris, France. Places we worked on were chosen to fit the paradigms and characteristics of Oldenburg's definition of third places. The observations were performed as a brief confrontation with paradigmatic third places to understand the roles that technologies can play in such places. We carried out the investigation as part of an international meeting, so our observations were a brief encounter with a setting we did not know well.

### Methodology

Nine places were chosen based on the following criteria: a) places (often cafés) that had a long history, often founded in the early 1900s or before, b) places that are considered as prototypical third places by Oldenburg, c) places seen as "hubs" for social activity by locals, and d) places within geographic areas where historically social interaction between classes has occurred. Historical places (a) were gathered by searching for places mentioned by researchers of third places (Ellis 1956, Habermas 1956). Places considered prototypical examples of third places (b), and places considered by locals as "hubs" (c) were chosen by searching for "coffee house" and "café" in online review sites - Yelp and Google - and a final list was constructed in collaboration with two native French Parisians that volunteered for reviewing our proposed list of third places. Places with geographic importance (d) were found serendipitously during our field study; the limits of our field study were determined, in collaboration with two native French Parisians, to be within the *5th arrondissement* of central Paris.

Researchers were organized in international teams to make observations - bringing multiple cultural sounding boards to bear on what was recorded and observed. We were deliberately outsiders to the situations we observed; in fact, we spoke English between us so that Parisians perceived us as tourists. The research team was divided into three

groups; each group had three to four members. Observations were documented using an ethnographic method of participant observation, focusing on the functioning and design of third places. Researchers aimed at investigating a wide range of third places. Our selected places included a traditional Parisian café (see Figure 1) and a modern Sci-Fi themed café/bar. We documented and observed these places paying particular attention to:

- how people behave in these locations,
- how the establishment was structured,
- how technology was integrated into them.

At each location researchers took written notes, drew motion diagrams, took photographs and video, and performed architectural sketches. They documented key design characteristics, technologies found in the places, and media found within the place (e.g. news clips about the place or ratings from Trip Advisor). The field study was conducted on Saturday, Apr 27, 2013 and lasted five hours.



**Figure 1(a-c): Seating arrangement for the spectators and actors (a and b). There were also arrangements for more private talks and social interaction (c).**

## Observations

One of the most prominent characteristics of the majority of visited places was that chair seating was arranged facing outward to the public and public space. There was no sharp boundary between their border and the public space, and third places extended into the public space and had tables outside (Figure 1-a and 1-b). The seating arrangement was such that visitors of the place could easily and incidentally observe activity in the adjoining public space. One of the researchers noted the affinity to a real-time, real-world version of a "Big Brother TV show", where the majority of the third place visitors were watching the public while they were engaged in another activity, like talking and eating. Even when a close group of friends would enter the place the waiter or host would suggest that the guest sat facing the public scenery, which could be a cultural trait specific of Parisian cafés. Observing what others are doing is one of the important properties of public physical spaces (Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone 1992) and virtual spaces (Khalid & Dix 2009). However, our observations suggested that in the Parisian café setting, this seems to operate unidirectionally - people watch the street, but the street does not look inwards. There were also arrangements that invited relatively more private talk and social interaction embedded within the larger public setting (Figure 1-c).

The seating and the activities of the observed third places seemed to support the roles of spectators (café visitors) and actors (people in the public space). These two roles were distinct and autonomous: spectators sitting in the café observed the stage and the actors in a one-way communication act - the actors generally did not reply to or even acknowledge their audience. The actors carry on their normal activity as if no one was viewing them. When actors did interact with the spectators it caused disruption and unease. In one particular instance one person stepped close to the café tables and began talking loudly to all the people in the café. This person was quickly shooed away by a burly waiter. This incident challenged some of Oldenburg's named characteristics of third places, like neutrality. Yet, there were also places whose seating arrangement was such that chairs around the table were across each other suggesting close and closed group conversation.

Another observed property was ad-hoc formation of groups and the sporadic formation of third places. For example, we observed a group of people standing on a highly congested street corner as shown in Figure 2. They were facing each other in a circle, forming a transient third place. Similar characteristics can be seen online where a public space can have an ad-hoc third place (e.g. a closed group). This ad-hoc notion of third places was

also observed in more stable places like cafés. For example, we observed ad-hoc formation of groups in one of the cafés. One girl was sitting alone, enjoying her coffee. She was approached by two friends who stayed with her for a couple of minutes. After they left, and within a minute, the same girl was approached by a different group of friends. This shows how some of the observed third places support ad-hoc characteristics often mimicked online, like "staying" on Facebook and "bumping" into different people. This behavior also suggests that people tend to cope with others on SNSs and physical third places in similar ways; in other words, the distinction between the physical and the digital worlds is going to be partially blurred.



**Figure 2: Third place emerging on a busy public corner (marked with red square).**

While conducting observations at one of the cafés, we noticed the place became more crowded. As a result, people were very close to each other, and as a researcher noted: "almost sitting on top of each other." This is one of the properties of third places that is not materialized online, e.g., you cannot see how crowded Facebook is but only how many of your friends are there in a given moment.

We noted that some places were thematically decorated and offered entertainment specific to a given community. An example is depicted in Figure 3. This third place seemed to have been designed to attract and appeal to people with interest in movies and science fiction (SciFi) to sit down and have a coffee. Artifacts representing the theme could be found all around the place, ranging from restroom signs (Figure 3-a) to quite distinctive art artifacts (Figure 3-c).



**Figure 3: Thematic third places: a) restroom sign, b) the ambience, and c) art piece**

During our observations we noticed heavy presence of one type of technology in third places - mobile phones. Often times people would be occupied and interact with them, instead of interacting to a person near-by. Such an example is depicted in Figure 4-a. Sometimes this type of interaction caused curiosity from near-by people who peeked into what others are doing on their phones.

Another example of how ICTs changed third places can be seen in Figure 4-c and 4b. The observed third places had the capability to observe its visitors and record every activity. Similarly, visitors can do the same thing, e.g., take photos and videos of activities happening in the place. Some of the owners of third places are aware of that and do not appreciate this as can be seen in Figure 4-d: visitors of a book store are asked to respect the time and activities of others and are asked not to take photos in this place.

**Figure 4: Technology in third places: a) an illustrative example - people in physical third places interacting with their mobile phones instead of interacting with each other. In b) we can see a person curiously looking at a person near-by and her interactions on a mobile phone. In c) we can see how technology allows third places to observe and record its visitors, while in d) we can see that sometimes the opposite is not allowed**

The most notable change from Oldenburg's world with respect to ICTs and third places is that contemporary third places often have an online presence as shown in Figure 5. Most of the observed places had some form of digital presence. In other words, contemporary third places have a digital counterpart in the virtual world. Some of the places have a url and a website as in Figure 5-d, but some also display QR codes that are operable only if one is standing right in front of a place with a phone. Thus, we observe in this form, their digital presence is strongly place-based and operates only locally.

The most interesting example of digital identity of third places comes from a restovisio.com service (cf. Figure 5-b). This service allows place owners to describe and categorize their place according to the most prominent social activity that third places support. Visitors of the website can choose a place to visit depending on the group they are with (friends or family) or activity they are seeking (to mingle, for romance, or business). People can then pick-and-choose from a discrete menu of social functions and visit the third places catering to that need.



**Figure 5: Online/digital representation of third places: a) Trip Advisor, b) Resto Visio website that classifies third places according to their activities, c) Google map, and d) a website.**

## CONTEMPORARY THIRD PLACES

Contrary to Oldenburg's description of third places, presence of ICTs in such places is prominent, witnessing the double trend of replication of the virtual and virtualization of the real (Fernback 1999). According to our observations, this occurred in two ways: on one hand, people quite often connected to SNSs while in third places; on the other hand, third places themselves have a presence within SNSs, sometimes in order to strengthen the links between customers and aficionados. A typical example of the first phenomenon can be seen in Figure 4-a where two people are sitting next to each other, but focused on their phones. Although they are in a physical third place that affords the ability to talk to each other, these people have chosen to temporarily access a virtual place (often an SNS third place) and partake in a conversation taking place online. Examples of the second phenomenon are depicted in Figure 5, where third places can choose from a variety of digital representations, and often they have more than just one.

In rethinking third places to take into account a post-internet and globalization influence we first examine the assumptions made by Oldenburg and then offer alternative characteristics that include a larger variety of places but still serve the same functions. We draw upon and reflect on our observations during our field study in Paris and weave in examples from it. Third places remain places of contemplation and meeting for individuals wishing to develop beyond their work and home activities. However, as

today's ICTs, such as the Internet, mobile phones/smartphones, and social networking services, are becoming more pervasive, people's link to physical spaces has shifted importance, and the cultural specificity originally outlined by Oldenburg's original characteristics falls short. Our perspectives on the main characteristics that Oldenburg introduced are summarized and explained in detail below.

*Neutral ground*: originally this property states that people can leave and enter the space whenever they see fit. This was also observed in our field study where people entered and left places freely. However, we want to note here that places were not necessarily neutral, but rather formed roles between the people. For example, as shown in Figure 1-a) and 1-b), in a café in Paris, cliques of patrons form to watch people passing by in the street. In this setting, closer to theatre style seating, there are distinct roles around who is watching and who is being watched as discussed in the previous section. The people watching have a common experience to interrupt the flow of conversations and provide opportunities for reflection. Similarly, SNS spaces online may or may not be neutral depending upon the structure of the community; nonetheless, they are places for conversation or observation and contemplation.

*Leveler*: Oldenburg suggests that third places provide a level-playing field for participants where people come and interact freely. This was also observed at most of the places. However these places were not equal in terms of providing access to their online counterparts and people could access them only if they had a paid data plan, as most of these places did not offer free/complementary Internet access. An illustrative example is shown in Figure 4-b where a person "peaks" into another person's mobile phone to see what is happening (we want to note here that this is just an illustrative example and we do not know if a person peaking-in was really looking into online activities of the other person).

*Conversation is the main activity*: often many of the activities in cafés are related to watching people pass by, rather than engaging in conversation. We observed many third places where entertainment and leisure activities provide a common ground for patrons such as: electronic/board games and hobbies such as public gardening. We found these in a Sci-Fi themed bar and café in Paris shown in Figure 3. Thus, while for some groups, engaging in conversation forms a bond, others find common ground and bonding through shared activities in third places. Also, another common activity as depicted in Figure 4-a where people interacted with their mobile phones.

*Accessibility and accommodation*: in our observations, physical accessibility and accommodation were also an important part of third places. Big outside seating areas were facing outwards to the public area inviting people to sit down, and heat lamps were placed next to the (outside) tables so guests would not feel cold. There were also seating arrangements meant for more private discussions within closed groups. This can be connected to the behavior on social networking websites where, for example, one can openly invite people to comment on and like his/her status update, or can send a private message to a selected few. As noted before, although some places had also online presence in the form of Facebook or TripAdvisor pages, these locations did not provide Internet access making their "extensions" online inaccessible, unless one has a data plan.

*Having regulars*: Oldenburg suggests that an important characteristic of a third place is that regulars are available to welcome newcomers. However, in many cases, the staff or the context of a third place is sufficient for encouraging contemplation and socialization. For example, the observed Sci-Fi themed café and bar established the context for socialization of like-minded people. Thus, even if tourists interested in Sci-Fi themselves entered the third place, even when they are not welcomed by regulars they have an easy access to the rituals and customs of that particular place, without the need of regulars. Online social networks also support this ability by having explicit rules of entry. This does not diminish the importance of regulars in some third places, but it does suggest it is not a characteristic that is necessary.

*Low profile*: Oldenburg argues that a low and under-advertised profile is one of the characteristics that allows for people to feel comfortable and welcomed. However, we noticed that most of the places tried to advertise their online presence as shown in Figure 5. Similarly some of the places did not have a "low" interior profile as shown in Figure 3. For example the SciFi café had the very opposite as it tried to appeal to a certain community (in this case SciFi fans). Likewise, online social networks provide both low profile and high profile locations with many communities putting efforts to raise their profiles by providing search keywords and other advertising mechanisms. Also, there are thematic groups as well as dedicated social networks that connect communities with certain interests.

*The mood is playful*: different people derive community connectedness through serious

activities as well as playful ones. The two differences are depicted in Figures 2 and Figure 3 where we can see two third places that emit/promote different moods and/or different levels of the same mood. While the SciFi bar explicitly promotes playfulness by having board games and extraordinary artifacts, bars depicted in Figure 4-a) and 4-b) were "plain" and did not offer much for "playful" activities. In these situations guests found their interests in other third places, i.e., online.

*A home away from home*: Oldenburg suggested that third places were linked to a suburban lifestyle providing a comfortable out-of-home environment. Although there were places that offered this type of environment, there were other ones that were quite different. Figure 4-c illustrates an extreme example where ICTs reach into a third places with cameras observing its patrons, something that you would not typically find at home. Similar behavior is show in Figure -d where patrons cannot take photos of people inside. This shows the power relationship between third places and its visitors introduced by ICTs undermines a "home away from home" feeling.

We also want to point out the emergent property of third places. This is best illustrated in Figure 2 where a group of people grouped on the corner and created their own third place. Similar behavior can be observed also online where people form ad-hoc groups in otherwise "public" places such as Facebook. This emergent property is consistent with how spaces become places in virtual worlds (Harrison and Dourish, 1996).

Some additional properties have been introduced by ICTs that did not exist in Oldenburg's study. For example, before the Internet, people would have to enter the third place in order to know what that place offered, the kind of people that visit the place, or the conversations that take place therein. However, today people can get this information - *peeking into the life of a third place in advance* - through online social networking services like Facebook, Twitter, or FourSquare, which allow place owners and their customers and visitors to showcase photos, comments, and likes. Similarly, these places were previously all simply characterized as "being social", differencing themselves by the services they provided (hair dressing, coffee drinking). Nowadays services like restovisio.com allow owners of third places to declare in more details what kind of social activity they are supporting: this is a place to mingle, go out with your friends, or go on a romantic date. In other words, advances in Internet and mobile phone technology are allowing third places to be self-declared and self-documented.

Another change introduced by the technology is online and virtual activities associated with third places. For example, today people can "like" a place on Facebook, create events and invite their friends, or even see comments coming from the place itself. As illustrated in Figure 4-a, although people can be physically present in a third place, they can be detached from it and accessing their third place somewhere online, forming an ecosystem of social presence for them.

**Table 1 - Revisited and original characteristics of third places.**

| Property | Oldenburg | Revisited |
|---|---|---|
| Neutral ground | For people to socialize third places have to provide neutral ground where people from different opinions and life views feel welcomed. | Although this is still the case, we observed distinct roles between the occupants, e.g., who is watching and who is being watched. People-watching provided enough material for conversations. |
| Leveler | The place advocates the abolition of social inequities. Social distinctions are not important in third places. | With respect to interaction in physical space this was true. However as most of the places did not offer complementary Internet access some people had access to the online third places while others did not (Figure 4-b). |
| Conversation | Conversation is the main activity. | Not only conversation, but observing other people and enjoying leisure activities such as electronic/board games. Also people interacting online. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Accessibility and accommodation | Places are easy to access, both geographically and socially. | For the physical counterpart this was true. However, similarly as for the "leveler" property places did not offer free Internet access, thus limiting access to their advertised online counterparts. |
| Having regulars | Regulars shape the "tone" of a place. | Staff members and themes can equally make the "tone" of a place. |
| Low profile | Third places have a moderate style where "pretentiousness" is avoided. The design is simple, allowing their occupants comfort and relaxation. | Although there were places that had this style there were others as depicted in Figure 3 that were atypical, but still typical for a certain community of interest. Also, most of the third places heavily advertised their online presence, thus shifting from the notion of having a low profile. |
| The mood is playful | The conversation in the third place is light. | There are different moods and different levels of moods. While some third places did not offer explicitly any activities or stimuli to support playfulness other places, like the SciFi bar, did in the form of board games and extraordinary artifacts. |
| A home away from home | Third places should provide an out-of-home environment with the same feeling as home. | While there are places that support this property, the introduction of ICTs started to change this as now third places can observe their patrons and vice versa, which sometimes is not allowed. This creates a more hostile environment than a "home away from home" due to a power imbalance. Also with today's ICTs, a third place becomes an emergent property that can happen online but also in non-third places like public corners. |
| New ICT induced characteristics: Discovering a third place in advance | | With today's ICTs people can peek into a third place and discover without the need to enter it. |
| New ICT induced characteristics: Declaring type of supported social activity | | Third places can declare and advertise the type of social activities they stimulate and support. |
| New ICT in- | | People can extend engagement |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *duced charac-teristics:* Extending engagement with/within a third place | | with/within a third place, e.g., by "liking" it on Facebook |

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ICTS IN THIRD PLACES

We look first at the functions that are served by social spaces and the characteristics that afford these functions. As mentioned before, just as people appropriate ICTs (Anacleto & Fels 2013), people will appropriate places as needed to provide these functions as best as possible. However, different aspects can provide better affordances to support community socialization needs. Based on our findings and reflection on them we think four characteristics should be supported and stimulated by today's emerging ICTs. However, we want to point out here that this is not a comprehensive list of properties that should be followed blindly; rather think of them as design strategies that can enhance the notion and spirit of third places. The four characteristics are:

**1. Comfortable to observe and be observed**: third places are places for contemplation: whether it is people watching, local gossiping, talking about movies, or starting a political movement. Having a place where people feel just as comfortable entering a conversation as they are not entering is important for establishing social awareness and belonging (Goleman 2006). For example, by leveraging existing online social profiles people interested in chatting with others could announce their presence and interests on particular topics when they enter the space on a public display, similar to situated commenting described in Du, Rosson, & Carroll (2012), in order to find like-minded people.

**2. Emergent property of third places**: Boundaries between third and public places do not have to be complex and may be transient. For example, it seemed that in Paris third places leak onto the sidewalks by design. Sometimes third places become the sidewalk, as demonstrated by our observation of the group of three men standing at a corner passing round a bottle, facing in toward one another to make a human boundary, and letting the world outside their third place go on outside (cf. Figure 2). Cafés and taverns are training grounds for third places, but once people understand the characteristics of third places they can appropriate any place as a third place. Different cultures and groups establish different characteristics of their third places suited to their needs. Hence, it is important to determine these needs and support them explicitly, or provide the primary characteristics of third places above and then the third place qualities of the community will emerge. We speculate that a user-centered design (Preece, Rogers, & Sharpe 2011) for a given community will lead to appropriate affordances whether they include technology, or be physical or virtual or both. A very simple ICT enabled solution for supporting emergent properties of third places would be to allow "virtual tables" for a physical third place in the form of chat rooms where people can gather and discuss or provide digital traces of emerging physical third places, e.g., by creating the online representation of the place and supporting simple Facebook check-ins to it.

**3. Extending the notion of third places to include digital properties and create bridges between the two:** in Oldenburg's time, third places and all of its properties existed only in a physical setting. However, as we observed through our field study, this has changed: today people can access virtual third places in a physical third place (cf. Figure 4-a). Similarly, third places express their digital identity and representation online (cf. Figure 5). This can lead towards competition between the two, or complementarity and diversity. At the moment only online third places visited by the guests of a third place are invisible: when a person accesses an online third place that place is only visible to him/her. A simple solution for this that would complement a third place and would lead towards diversifying it would be to display information about online third places that people are accessing on a public screen. This could lead towards increased shared activities in the space, e.g., socializing online. Although this example might be too simplistic it can be seen as a first step towards bridging the two, i.e., offline and online third places.

**4. Playing with technology to establish a power structure/relationship between third places and its visitors:** in Oldenburg's description of third places, third places are not characterized with technology being present. Also third places should act as a leveler for its participants. However, during our field study we observed some discrepancies within established norms in third places: it is somewhat normal to expect that a third

place can monitor and even record activities of its visitors, while the opposite, i.e., visitors recording activities of happenings in a third place, is sometimes not appreciated or allowed (cf. Figure 4-d). This example shows how technology introduces a power structure within third places: it is OK for one party to observe the other, while the opposite is not. This also shows how technology can be used as a design material. This design characteristic is meant to show how technology *can* be used to create a power structure and is not meant to be seen as a *must*. While the above example shows how technology creates an unequal relationship, it can also be used to create an equal one. For example, activities recorded within a third place could be classified and displayed on a public screen and its online/digital identity, e.g., number of people in the place/how crowded it is, discussions, topics, etc. This type of transparency would support the first three design characteristics.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Twenty-four years ago Oldenburg described the need for and properties of third places. Third places such as cafés, bars, and barbershops provided the "neutral ground" for people to gather, unwind, and socialize freely. These places represented a central point in the life of local communities where people would come to discuss upcoming controversial changes in government policies/laws, success from a yearly harvest, upcoming music festivals, or the latest painting made by one of the local artists. Oldenburg described a diverse set of places that were democratic and public where people gathered to discuss various topics, both highly local and global in nature.

However, society and technology have changed these places since Oldenburg introduced the concept of third place. In order to better understand the roles of today's widespread ICTs, such as the Internet, mobile phones/smartphones, online social networks, and other technology in contemporary third places and how they can enhance its values we conducted a field study that looked into affordances of nine third places in Paris. We found that some of the characteristics of third places as described by Oldenburg have evolved, following changes in our societies and communication technologies (cf. section Contemporary Third Places and Table 1). The characteristics and affordances of third places described in this paper provide groundwork for understanding new roles, shapes and workings of contemporary third places and how ICTs might relate to them.

Based on our field study and reflection on Oldenburg's properties of third places we propose that ICTs for third places should: (1) consider the possibility to observe others and to allow others to observe you, e.g., by announcing your presence on a public display with a list of your topics and interests; (2) include the emergent nature of third places and build upon this notion; (3) and extend the notion of third places to include digital properties by, e.g., displaying online third places that visitors and regulars are accessing on a public display. Also, it is important to acknowledge that, (4) ICTs can be used as material in establishing power relationships between the third place and its residents: more often third places are the privileged ones and can record people's behavior while the opposite is sometimes not allowed (cf. Figure 4-c and 4-d). From this starting point, ICTs can be designed to support and promote the third placeness needed to evolve the critical role third places have in society.

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