# Making Places Better for People

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| Public space is a city’s literal common ground - the spaces where people come together as friends, neighbours and citizens. They are the places we share; streets, parks, markets, public buildings and more, and are the sites whereby most human exchange occurs. An exchange that the social, cultural, environmental and economic values of our communities depend upon for survival.Yet, for decades our urban planning ideologies have placed little value on the human dimension and the effect that the built environment has on people - their movements, behaviours and quality of life. Nearly every major urban centre records data for traffic volumes, average speeds, vehicle occupancy, delay times, heavy traffic, light traffic and more, yet very little data is recorded about people in the built environment - who they are, how they move, where they go, or how long they stay. Despite this, we spend billions of dollars on public spaces, often with very little appreciation for who our users are and what needs they might have.Representing a shift in this trend, and focusing their research instead on the human dimension, a number of international and national cities, Dunedin included, have initiated studies of public life, to better understand who their city’s users are and what their needs are. Why? Because once we have a clearer understanding of how people interact with public space we are better equipped to help make these places better meet the needs of the people who live, work and visit them. Drawing on public life studies of Auckland, Queenstown, Nelson and Dunedin, this talk will examine the techniques for gathering measurable, human-centred data, and how this data can be applied to inform active transport and recreation outcomes, and the social, cultural environmental and economic roles that these play within our urban communities. |