

Technique: Trace Measures

Identifying Traces

When people use a place, they leave traces: physical evidence and erosion traces. Physical evidence includes objects people leave behind, such as soda cans and other trash. Litter that accumulates during a specific time (e.g., lunch hour) can indicate the degree to which a plaza is used during that time. Erosion traces are signs of wear, both obvious and hidden, found on the surfaces of the ground, walls, furniture, handrails, etc. A path worn across a lawn is evidence many people have taken a shortcut along that route. Worn steps, handrails polished smooth, and paint worn off walls all indicate patterns of use. Identifying traces is a good way to understand activities that are not readily apparent through observations. It should be done early on, and is particularly useful in suggesting hypotheses about a place.