

Public spaces brainstorming and speaking

Work together to brainstorm as many things as you can into the categories below. Move onto the next category whenever you get stuck, going back if you have more ideas later if you like.

What public spaces can you think of?

Places that can be defined as public spaces

How would you define a public space?

Definitions of a public space

What are the criteria of a good public space?

Criteria of a good public space

What can people do in public spaces?

Actions in public spaces

What are the potential problems with public spaces?/ What are the characteristics of a bad public space?/ What should people not do in public spaces?

Negative things connected to public spaces

What things could there be in public spaces?

Things in public spaces

What special events could be held in public spaces?/ What things could be put there temporarily?

Special events in public spaces

What could you use/ change to make a public space distinctive?

Things to vary to make public spaces distinctive

Brainstorm examples of each of those things in the last category above.

Go through the whole list again, using things you've suggested later on to help improve each section, e.g. expanding the places which could be public places by thinking about the uses you brainstormed.

Suggested answers and speaking tasks

What other public spaces can you think of?

- (On or under) bridges
- Airport concourse
- Avenues/ Tree-lined streets, e.g. ones with street front cafés
- Beaches/ Seawalls
- Bus station concourse/ Bus stop/ Bus shelter
- Station concourse
- University campus/ University grounds
- Canal sides
- Cemeteries/ Graveyards
- Elevated walkways
- Flood defences
- Gardens of historic buildings
- Hilltops
- Jetties/ Piers
- Libraries
- Museums and the squares in front of/ inside them
- Pedestrianised streets
- Playgrounds
- Public dining areas in office blocks
- Religious buildings (and the space around them)
- Reservoirs
- Riverbanks/ Riverside walks
- Roads, e.g. verges between traffic
- Rooftops
- Ruins
- Shopping malls (apart from the actual shops)
- Smoking areas
- Spaces between buildings
- Spaces in front of historic buildings
- Squares
- The centre of roundabouts
- Under overpasses/ Under elevated expressways
- Underpasses/ Tunnels
- Wide pavements
- Anywhere with public seating, e.g. benches
- Anywhere anyone can eat their own food

Do you disagree with any of the places mentioned above, e.g. think that they are not or should not be considered public places?

Choose one of the places above and say why you think restrictions should be placed on public access/ public use. Your partner(s) will argue the other side.

Choose an unusual one above and say how that could be made into a public space in your country/ town.

How would you define a public space?

- Anyone can spend time there, usually for free.
- You can sit there for free, e.g. at picnic tables, on benches or on steps
- You can sit outside
- People want to meet there, e.g. outside stations, or hang out there, e.g. in public squares

Which is the most important, e.g. for your town?

What are the criteria of a good public space?

- A good place for people watching
- Clean
- Easy to maintain
- Accessible, e.g. to wheelchair users and by public transport
- Attractive/ Beautiful
- Changes, e.g. by season or during special events
- Distinctive/ Unique
- Divided into a mix of small and large areas
- Ecologically friendly
- Educational
- Enclosed/ Provides a sense of arrival/ Has clear entry and exit points
- Encourages chance encounters/ unexpected encounters
- Enjoyable/ Fun
- Feels welcoming to all
- Fits in well with the surrounding area
- Flexible, e.g. with movable chairs and tables
- Good atmosphere
- People want to meet each other there
- People want to spend time there
- Photogenic/ Popular with tourists/ Iconic
- Related to local culture
- Relaxing
- Safe
- Suits the (range of) weather, e.g. shady and sunny
- Suits the likely users and attracts new people
- The right scale
- Views from the space and/ or of the space

Do you disagree with any of the things above, e.g. think they are not important or could actually be bad things?

Can you think of any good examples of the things above?

Which is the most important, e.g. for your town? Choose things from above and try to think of how to achieve them, including in new/ original ways.

What can people do in public spaces?

- Chatting/ Gossiping/ Hanging out/ Killing time/ People watching
- Cycling
- Drinking and eating, e.g. picnic, lunch, street food or a snack
- Feeding pigeons
- Helping people, e.g. giving free meals to homeless people
- Having a walk/ stroll
- Meeting up to go off to do something else
- (Children) playing
- Playing chess, backgammon etc
- Reading/ Studying
- Religious meetings
- Sitting/ Resting/ Relaxing
- Stretching their legs/ Getting some fresh air/ Clearing their heads (e.g. after using a computer for too long)
- Skateboarding/ Rollerskating
- Walking dogs

Design a new/ interesting way of doing things from above.

What are the potential problems with public spaces?/ What are the characteristics of a bad public space?/ What should people not do in public spaces?

- A lack of respect, e.g. for patriotic monuments
- Bad smells
- Begging
- Bland/ Looks the same as everywhere else
- Climbing things they shouldn't
- Crazy people shouting at passersby or proclaiming the end of the world
- Crime and other dangers, e.g. pickpocketing, bag snatching, mugging or assault
- Crowds
- Disruption of traffic
- Dogs, e.g. dog's mess
- Drinking/ Drunkenness
- Dust
- Eating during Ramadan
- Feeding pigeons
- Feels empty
- Homeless people
- Illegal commercial activity, e.g. leafleting, selling or surveying people
- Illegal parking, e.g. of bicycles
- Inconveniencing neighbours
- Is mainly used by one group of people, e.g. teenagers or old men, and that puts off other kinds of people
- Kitsch
- Lack of disabled access
- Loitering
- Noise, e.g. traffic noise coming into the space or crowd noise coming out of it
- People (or kinds of people) using them too little, e.g. because of technology at home
- Political actions, e.g. protests/ demonstrations, sit-ins/ occupations and speeches
- Pollution
- Public displays of affection, e.g. kissing and holding hands
- Religious activity
- Rubbish
- Saving spaces, e.g. seating, to be used later
- Sexual harassment
- Sleeping
- Smoking/ Smoking drugs
- Too commercialised
- Unmarried men and women spending time together
- Vandalism, e.g. graffiti
- Walking where you shouldn't, e.g. on plants
- Wild dogs and cats
- Wind/ Cold
- Women with parts of their body showing

Are any of the things above not problems? Prioritise the others.

Think of solutions to the most important problems, trying to think of new ideas if you can.

What things could there be in public spaces?

- Amphitheatre
- Animals
- Ashtrays/ Smoking areas
- Bicycle racks
- Bikes for rent
- Billboards
- Bins
- Drinking fountains
- Flagpoles/ Flags
- Food vendors, e.g. small outdoor cafes, stalls, carts, kiosks
- Handrails
- Historical artefacts (or copies of them, or things representing them)
- Information and educational markers
- Landmarks
- Lighted paths
- Parasols
- Plants, e.g. grass and trees
- Public art, e.g. statues/ sculpture, murals, war memorial
- Ramps/ Slopes
- Rickshaws
- Security cameras
- Shelter from the rain
- Signs/ Maps
- souvenir shops/ souvenir sellers
- Stage/ Platform
- Steps, e.g. Spanish Steps in
- Tables
- Things dividing the space, e.g. trellises, fences or walls
- things for children to play on
- Toilets
- Vending machines
- Water features, e.g. fountain

Try to argue why one of the things above isn't a good idea. Your partner(s) will take the opposite position.

Try to combine the functions of two of the things above.

What special events could be held in public spaces?/ What things could be put there temporarily?

- Art show/ Temporary art/ Performance art
- Autograph signing
- Ball pool/ Bouncy castle
- Ballet/ Dance performance
- Beauty contest/ Talent contest
- Beer festival, e.g. Oktoberfest
- Blimps floating above
- Blossom/ Seasonal flowers/ Flower show
- Car show
- Clowns/ Balloon artists
- Concert (opera, classical, pop, rock, jazz, dance or world music)
- Drama performance
- Dry ice
- Events to commemorate anniversaries, e.g. of historical events
- Events to encourage civic involvement
- Events to encourage pride in the country/ city/ area
- Events to mark seasons, e.g. switching on of the Xmas lights
- Events to raise awareness of minority groups, e.g. ethnic minorities
- Face painting
- Fairground
- Finals of inter-school competitions, e.g. national spelling bee
- Fireworks
- Folk dancing (local, national and/or international)
- Ice rink
- International festival, e.g. an Indian festival during Diwali (the festival of lights)
- Market, e.g. farmer's market, antiques fair, book fair or flea market
- Parades, e.g. military parades or changing of the guard
- Political speeches, e.g. during election periods
- Public sports
- Putting clothes on statues
- Release of balloons/ doves
- School festival
- Seasonal decorations, e.g. Xmas decorations
- Son-et-lumiere show/ Laser show
- Sponsored events to raise money for charity
- Temporary beach/ lawn
- Tent/ Pavilion/ Big top, e.g. a circus
- Town meeting
- Traditional festival
- Viewing of event elsewhere, e.g. World Cup match, on big screen(s)

Argue why one thing above actually isn't a good idea. How could you make one of the above distinctive and successful, without causing too much nuisance or expense?

What could you use/ change to make a public space distinctive?

- art
- colours
- combinations of things
- interactions between people
- interactions between people and things
- kinds of people/ mix of people
- light
- lines/ directions
- materials/ uses of materials
- movement/ changes
- nature
- objects/ uses of objects
- positions
- shapes
- sizes
- smells
- sounds
- tastes
- technology
- textures/ feelings underfoot

Brainstorm examples of things from above, including original ideas if you can.

Suggested examples of ways of making a public space distinctive

- art – installation art, performance art
- colours – Day-Glo colours
- combinations of things
- interactions between people
- interactions between people and things
- kinds of people/ mix of people – the very old, disabled people, eccentric people, artists, bohemians/ hippies
- light – sunlight, reflected sunlight, dappled sunlight, lasers, UV light, spotlights
- lines/ directions
- materials/ uses of materials – e.g. rubber
- movement/ changes
- nature – fish tanks, bird cages, exotic plants
- objects/ uses of objects – see above
- positions – the landmark sculpture being sunken into the square
- shapes – square, rectangle, triangle, semi-circle
- sizes – child-sized, huge, tiny
- smells – food, flowers, herbs, local and exotic, traditional and new
- sounds – birdsong, insects (e.g. crickets), music (e.g. buskers), street noise from another place, voices (e.g. by creating a place with an echo), flowing water, splashing water, local and exotic, traditional and new, wind chimes/ bells, sounds from the surrounding area
- tastes – local and exotic, traditional and new
- technology – laser displays, audio guides, spotlights
- textures/ feelings underfoot – wooden planking, soft surfaces, sculpture you can touch

How important do you think public spaces, e.g. those in this town, are?

What things can you think of that are more of a priority for local government spending?

What things can you think of that are less of a priority for local government spending?

What kinds of public spaces and changes to them should be priorities?

Decide if these things should be provided free or commercially:

- Toilets
- Drinking water
- Cycle parking
- Cycle hire
- Seating, e.g. deckchairs
- Tables
- Exercises classes, e.g. group aerobics

Of the ones that you decided should be free, which would you allow to become commercial first if there was a financial shortfall?

Are these good or bad ideas?

- A Speaker's Corner
- Allowing artists to paint and sell portraits/ caricatures
- Allowing buskers
- Allowing charities to collect money
- Banning feeding of cats and pigeons
- Allowing fortune telling
- Allowing people to play in the water features (e.g. fountains)
- Controversial art
- Forcing all large construction developments to include a public space
- Forcing publicly-funded organisations like universities, the royal family and museums to open their gardens, squares etc to the public for free
- Obvious security guard/ police presence
- One wall for graffiti
- Periodical cleaning of the area with hoses, to also move people on

Take one side of the argument each of one of the things above and debate it until one of you gives up or you reach a compromise.