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Architecture, Economics

Edges and Encounters: Architecture for Public Life

My time studying abroad in Spain sparked my curiosity about how cities shape public life. Barcelona's pedestrian streets, parks, transit, markets, and cultural institutions felt intentionally designed and consistently lively. In contrast, many American cities often feel fragmented, privatized, or underutilized.

Inspired by the New Urbanism movement which values walkability, civic institutions, and shared public space, this thesis proposes three typologies serving as principles to guide the transformation of public spaces: seam, layer, and network.

Cities such as Bethlehem already take action to stimulate public life through investments in parks, transportation infrastructure, and community institutions, yet I argue that more creative interventions are possible. Public life thrives not only in plazas or parks, but also in the everyday intersections of work, home, and recreation.

By thickening the boundaries between public and private space, overlapping civic and domestic programs, and creating distributed yet connected points of gathering, architecture can embed public life within the unsung "between" spaces such as porches, corners, stairs, and institutional edges.

These abstract diagrams and site-based applications argue that public life in small cities doesn't only emerge from individual nodes, but from the stitching together of spaces, programs, and communities where social encounter thrives.