

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report critically assesses the planning, usage and design of two squares in downtown Toronto. The objective of this study was to observe and compare the function and use of these squares supported by their original design intent and examined user needs. Based on this comparison, recommendations were then proposed for each space to improve and increase user comfort.

Chosen study spaces include: **Trinity Square** and **Yonge-Dundas Square**, located in the heart of downtown Toronto and adjacent to the Toronto Eaton Centre.



Source: City of Toronto, 2010

Both squares are located in close proximity to one another and have the same adjacent populations. Yet, their original design objectives and main target users greatly differ. Trinity Square is mainly geared to local users while Yonge-Dundas Square is designed as a space for both local and regional users. Each study area was examined for an 8 hour period over 7 days in May 2010 when there were no special events taking place in order to obtain a sample of everyday users within these spaces.

DEFINITION OF A SQUARE

For the purpose of this report, a square is defined as a hard surfaced public space from which vehicles are excluded and whose main purpose is for users to interact, sit, eat, and relax. While there may be trees, flowers, or ground cover, the predominant ground surface is hard. If grass or planted areas should exceed the amount of hard surface, the space should be qualified as a park rather than a square (Marcus and Francis, 1998:14). Both study spaces adhere to this definition of a square.

METHOD AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

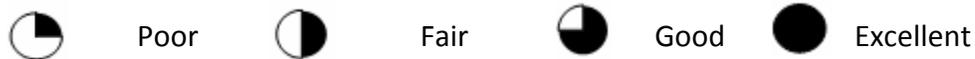
The research method employed within this report is based on an evaluation framework created by the City of Toronto Parks and Recreation Department, in 1988, entitled, *A Comparison of Five Inner City Parks*. This method was used to evaluate the effects of various social and physical features in regards to the use of small public spaces, parks and squares in downtown Toronto. The study examined five inner city public spaces in Toronto including: Harbour Square, Berczy Park, Grange Park, Crombie Park, and Commerce Court. Since the evaluation tools used in the Toronto study are somewhat dated, new similar and improved evaluation tools will also be employed from two other sources to update the 1988 framework while recognizing the original study's influence on public space design within Toronto. These include an evaluative framework developed by Project for Public Spaces in 2009 for their study *Placemaking in Chicago: A neighbourhood guide to placemaking in Chicago* and a checklist developed by

Nemeth and Schmidt, in 2007, entitled *Toward a Method for Measuring the Security of Publicly Accessible Spaces*. Data for this study has been collected using four qualitative research methods. These include: a literature review, direct observation, square user survey/interviews, and archival records and documentation. The evaluation criteria below, used to assess each space, derived from the City of Toronto study, are grouped into three categories: Contextual Support, Design Framework, and Social Milieu.

CONTEXTUAL SUPPORT	DESIGN FRAMEWORK	SOCIAL MILIEU
Surrounding Land Use Travel Time Microclimate Enclosure	Focus and Identity Centering Legibility Intricacy Street Views Seating Vegetation Safety Accessibility	100% Location Animation Attractions and Amenities Food Facilities Territories & Turf Public Accessibility Maintenance and Management

ANALYSIS

Evaluative tools were used to collect data for each study space. This recorded information was then compared by means of a four point scale (poor, fair, good, excellent).



This scale aided in comparing the public squares, based on whether they *meet, somewhat meet or do not meet* the criteria. The following table shows the overall evaluation comparison of the two public squares after analysis.

	CRITERIA	TRINITY SQUARE	YONGE-DUNDAS SQUARE
CONTEXTUAL SUPPORT	Surrounding Land Uses		
	Travel Time		
	Microclimate		
	Enclosure		
DESIGN FRAMEWORK	Focus and Identity		
	Centering		
	Legibility		
	Intricacy		
	Street Views		
	Seating		
	Vegetation		
	Safety		
	Accessibility		
	SOCIAL MILIEU	100% Location	
Animation			
Attractions and Amenities			
Food Facilities			
Territories and Turf (influential in drawing users to a space)			
Public Accessibility			
Maintenance and Management			

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Trinity Square

Trinity Square's location and surrounding land uses aid in attracting users to this hidden public space in downtown Toronto. The square's main focal point, the Church of Holy Trinity, is supported by two water features, diverse types of seating and the Toronto Public Labyrinth. The square is enjoyed by users across the city for its social charm and heritage, mature trees, labyrinth, bird population and serene environment. Although the square moderately meets users' needs and keeps them within the space, it lacks supportive design elements needed to attract users into the space from adjacent streets since its location is hidden behind surrounding buildings. The square wears its age, where crumbling interlock and peeling paint reveal poor maintenance of the space. Negative territory and turfing activity is also present where there is a clear separation between homeless people and workers that frequent the space. In the evenings, visibility is poor due to dim sparse lighting. In order to further develop the use and range of activity at Trinity Square, its relationship with the buildings that surround it must be improved. Therefore, the space must be enhanced by additional square animation, improved street views and increasing natural surveillance of the space. Proper lighting and reflective surfaces will also aid in evening visibility, while increasing user perception of safety. Design features must also be mindful of its users and include amenities such as additional seating and eating areas for peak lunch hour use. Based on the analysis of Trinity Square, the following recommendations have been proposed to improve the space.

Recommendations

- 1: Add chairs and tables
- 2: Locate ashtrays on the western edge of the square
- 3: Add additional signage
- 4: Improve lighting and evening surveillance
- 5: Repair and replace broken interlock
- 6: Improve main entrance on Bay Street and St. James Street

Yonge-Dundas Square

Yonge-Dundas Square is well-supported by its surrounding land uses. Surrounding buildings, billboards and shops face into the square and address it as a focal point at the centre of one of Toronto's busiest intersections. Users frequent the square from across the city and GTA to relax, socialize and attend daily, high profile, scheduled events. The space is highly accessible from most adjacent streets, rich in animation and offers an array of amenities for its users. In the evenings, large light fixtures and billboards illuminate the square and 24 hour surveillance ensure user safety. The square embraces all elements that characterize a city (i.e. billboards and high rise buildings) and incorporates these into its own design to provide the square's supporting elements and enclosure that attribute to its success. Accents, such as potted plants, have been added to this space overtime. However, these items have taken away from the deliberate simplistic design intentions of the square. By removing these items, users can further appreciate the square's intended design and layout. Legibility within the space can be enhanced to ensure users are aware of the plethora of amenities available to them while using the space. Although the square does exceed seating requirements, additional chairs and umbrellas can increase user comfort when utilizing the space during peak hours, especially in warm temperatures. Overall, Yonge-Dundas Square's integrated amenities, multi-use design features and accessibility make it favourable as a public space for community and regional users alike. The following recommendations have been proposed to further enhance and improve the Yonge-Dundas Square for its users.

Recommendations

- 1: Add additional umbrellas to seating area
- 2: Add additional moveable chairs
- 3: Remove potted plants
- 4: Improve signage
- 5: Incorporate natural materials
- 6: Improve views and access from Victoria Street when there are no events