

SOFT SPOTS

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The Starbucks Company in analyzing the success of their coffeehouse franchise (particularly in Manhattan) talk about their ability to provide "the third place". The "first place" is the home- often small and crowded, the "second" is the workplace usually a cubicle or shared desk space. The "third place" is the social respite space which Starbucks quite rightly suggest they provide in their stores where it is possible to have an informal meeting, meet a friend, do homework or just hang as well as buy coffee.

I think of these three categories of place -home, work, social space (from stores to community centers) as soft spots in the framework of cities- the places that people use on a daily basis. They are our area of design investigation.

The convention theme is Networking in the Global Economy and unfortunately words like "network" and "global economy" have become part of the depersonalizing vocabulary of detachment which in turn legitimizes impersonal and standardized built solutions for a city's soft spots. It is key, as cities develop exponentially, to invest credibility in invention and idiosyncrasy - to make things personal and enhance the daily quality of life.