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Cities & Health

ISSN: 2374-8834 (Print) 2374-8842 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rcah20

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To cite this article: Maya Ljubojevic (2025) The purpose of lingering in a city: a proposition of bumping places as a tool to tackle urban loneliness, Cities & Health, 9:4, 736-747, DOI: 10.1080/23748834.2025.2504732

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2025.2504732

Published online: 05 Jun 2025.

CITIES & HEALTH
2025, VOL. 9, NO. 4, 736–747
https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2025.2504732

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The purpose of lingering in a city: a proposition of bumping places as a tool to tackle urban loneliness

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ABSTRACT

Loneliness is a pertinent public health issue which is heavily intertwined with present urban structures, cultures, and experiences. For decades, it has been evidenced that urban areas are a risk factor for mental health, yet this is where much of the global population resides. It is therefore important that focus is given to prevention and promotion measures in a city to minimise the incidence of poor mental health and promote wellbeing. By exploring bumping places and surrounding literature, this concept is given space for discussion. Given the salience of loneliness in the sphere of public health, particularly mental health, it is imperative that solutions for addressing the issue are put forward. This paper nominates bumping places in cities as a contributor to the solution and invites further exploration and research in this area. The concept of bumping places is relatively novel and under researched. There is little academic literature available on this topic. This paper seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge currently available.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 14 January 2025
Accepted 6 May 2025

KEYWORDS
Urban; Loneliness; public health; bumping places; lingering & loitering; Interdisciplinary

Introduction

There is a well-established narrative that people are social creatures; today's cities may be limiting this sociality. Those who live in our cities have experiences of loneliness, isolation, and solitude, despite being situated in the most densely populated places on Earth; with evidence of social isolation and loneliness increasing in society in recent decades (Holt-Lunstad *et al.* 2015, MacDonald *et al.* 2020). There is a salience of loneliness in the sphere of public health, particularly mental health; it is imperative that solutions are put forward. Loneliness is reportedly as damaging as substance abuse and has been framed as the *big* public health issue (Worland 2015). Victor and Pikhartova (2020, p. 2) explain that there is 'limited understanding of the geography of loneliness and how area level factors relate to loneliness'. Despite the general trends of better health outcomes in urban areas, research has shown that living in urban areas can act as a risk factor to mental health. The evidence for this has been seen in studies globally and across time (Weeke *et al.* 1975, March *et al.* 2008, Vassos *et al.* 2012, Heinz *et al.* 2013, Lederbogen *et al.* 2013, Penkalla and Kohler 2014, McCay *et al.* 2019). The fact that living in urban areas has been known to be a risk factor for over five decades (Weeke *et al.* 1975) leads to questions: why more has not been done to improve urban wellbeing since then and what preventative or protective measures are in place to mitigate these risk factors?

The location of urban residents cannot be blamed for this experience of loneliness, rather, fault lies with the planning, implementation, and social ecosystems of these human-built environments. Loneliness can be felt by those in the most sparsely populated areas as is felt by those in the most densely populated areas (Beer *et al.* 2016); places where one would assume there would be plentiful opportunity for connection. Proximity alone cannot facilitate connection (Valentine 2013); depriving people of social connection through social and spatial design of cities results in these feelings of loneliness and disconnect (Tahmasebizadeh *et al.* 2024). Urban social and infrastructural design can be utilised to creatively help address loneliness which includes the facilitation of relaxation, social support, community trust, access, and a sense of belonging and security (McCay *et al.* 2019); promoting better health and wellbeing in cities. In order to build connections, people need places and spaces in which to spend time and interact in a positive way.

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There is a conception of 'the urban' as a meeting place (Simonsen 2008). There has been research across disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and urban geography investigating mundane intercultural interactions in public spaces (Wise and Velayutham 2014, Neal *et al.* 2015, Wessendorf 2016). Much of this understanding does not explore the design of these spaces and places (Ganji and Rishbeth 2020) with research on the impact of the wider living environment on loneliness being rare (Victor and Pikhartova 2020). Instead, focus is placed on the individual as a problem and antecedents such as demographics and health factors (Victor and Pikhartova 2020).

According to Rath and Harter (2010), an individual needs six hours of social interaction a day to thrive. This may seem like a great feat considering many people's modern, digital lifestyles, living and ways of working in a post-pandemic environment. It raises the question, how can we reconnect with one another, and encourage others to do so through the design of our urban landscapes? This is the paper's core thesis and proposes facilitation of everyday, mundane, ordinary, and convivial encounters as a solution to urban disconnect and loneliness.

These encounters and interactions that Rath and Harter refer to can be, and arguably should be, quite ordinary, incorporated into the everyday of urban life. One can understand these everyday encounters as a vessel for integration, exposure to others, and an education on others which can subtly bolster existing societal support networks and pave the way for new ones. Encounters can be further understood as both a privilege and a necessity for most in the regards to building support networks, resilience, and connection; promoting positive social and health outcomes and experiences.

Impromptu encounters can be – somewhat ironically – planned into the urban space. We can look to interdisciplinary collaboration, across urban planning, policy, and public health stakeholders, to design places and spaces to be more appealing socially and structurally. Social networks are not established or maintained in a vacuum; therefore, it is imperative to have a platform or location for these networks to be built from.

The term 'bumping places' can be understood intuitively as places where people bump into one another; places where people meet spontaneously and can experience positive interactions, and places which encourage people to linger and interact in positive ways (Roe and McCay 2021). The concept is simple, places where people 'literally "bumping into" each other' (Farmer *et al.* 2021, p. 10), these can be organic or specifically designed infrastructure (Karg *et al.* 2021, Lohmeyer and Wong 2022). Bumping places are relatively novel as a named concept. Thus far, there has not been a paper dedicated to the emerging concept. This paper therefore contributes a springboard for further research and application of bumping places. It should be noted that the term bumping place is also labelled bumping 'space' in some literature. For consistency and clarity, the concept is referred to as bumping places in this piece. This paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of this matter and to nominate bumping spaces and places in cities as a contributor to the solution.

As of now, bumping places are under-researched yet their potential for contribution to wellbeing cannot be left unacknowledged (Banwell and Kingham 2023). There is little published literature on the concept, and it is an exciting area to move into for public health and other urban actors. At the time of writing, the term 'bumping place' was linked to fewer than 200 published articles, with many of these discussing a totally different concept. There is much space in this field to research in order to create meaningful impact. This paper will frame the concept in the context of loneliness but invites further research into applications of bumping spaces in various contexts and disciplines.

Loneliness in the city

Understanding loneliness

Loneliness is seen to be an epidemic across cities and cultures. In 2023, the World Health Organisation labelled loneliness a global public health concern. Loneliness does not always imply a lack of community but instead an unfulfilled idea of community (Simmel 2004). Loneliness can be summarised as 'the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way' (Perlman and Peplau 1981, p. 31); and similarly, a negative emotional state associated with deficient social connections (Weiss 1975). Svendsen discusses interesting perspectives on isolation and loneliness (Svendsen 2017). There are concepts of periodic and chronic loneliness. Chronic loneliness threatens to undermine a person's life and can be considered to be pathological (Svendsen 2017). The experience of loneliness is acutely subjective yet is almost universally experienced at some point in a person's lifetime. As identified in *The Solid Facts*, social isolation, social gradient, and social support are influential determinants of health (Wilkinson and Marmot 2003). Loneliness differs from social isolation; while social

isolation can be associated with loneliness, these are not synonymous concepts although a lack of clarity on the terms means that in research these are often used interchangeably or loosely (Valtorta *et al.* 2016, Wang *et al.* 2017). Zavaleta and Samuel (2014) define social isolation as an inadequate quantity and quality of social relations with other people at the individual, group, community, and larger social environment levels where human interaction takes place. This does not stray far from conceptualisations of loneliness but is broadly understood to be a more objective experience of social disconnect by academics.

The experience of feeling alone in a crowd is socially isolating yet is far from uncommon in cities (Bennett *et al.* 2018). In past decades, several authors have considered social isolation and a rapidly ageing population to be a primary problem facing cities in higher income countries (Mullins *et al.* 1996). This continues to be a pertinent issue that is also present globally. The experience of loneliness may depend heavily upon personal expectations of quality and quantity of interactions with others (Svendsen 2017). It may also be influenced by personality type (Teppers *et al.* 2013). It has been found that those who are more introverted, who typically are assumed to prefer their own company, appear to experience greater levels of loneliness than those who are more extraverted (Bull 2023). Women, despite generally experiencing higher level of social interaction, have been found to have a lower threshold for loneliness once again suggesting individual perceptions and expectations are most influential on experiences of loneliness and isolation (Rokach 2018). Perceptions of loneliness also change in demographics across the life course (Botha and Bower 2024). Thus, the issue of loneliness at a population scale is difficult to traverse. Solutions that allow for engagement and benefit across demographics and personality types, amongst other factors are needed.

Loneliness and health

Living in urban areas has been known to be a risk factor for poor mental health for over five decades (Weeke *et al.* 1975). Despite the general trends of better physical health outcomes in urban areas, research has shown that living in urban areas can act as a risk factor to mental health. Evidence suggests, for example, that social fragmentation – an absence or underdevelopment of connections between a society and groupings of certain members – may play a role in the increased incidences of psychosis in urban areas (Heinz *et al.* 2013). Frieling *et al.* (2018, p. 7) find that social connectedness is a key driver of wellbeing and resilience, stating that 'socially well-connected people and communities are happier and healthier, and are better able to take charge of their lives and find solutions to the problems they are facing'.

In terms of health, lonely individuals are said to consume more healthcare than those who are not lonely (Geller *et al.* 1999) and some researchers suggest that it can increase risk of death by 26% (Holt-Lunstad *et al.* 2015). Chronic loneliness and social isolation may be worse than smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Holt-Lunstad *et al.* 2010). It is also found to speed up processes of ageing and frailty (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2007, Gale *et al.* 2018). These correlates of loneliness can have huge impacts on wellbeing, with acceleration and exacerbation fuelled by loneliness. Ryan and Deci (2001) found that common indicators of a healthier mental state commonly include higher self-esteem, happiness, and less loneliness. This reflects how salient these aspects of an individual's and/or population's life outcomes and experiences are.

The association with many negative outcomes, ranging from poor physical and mental health (Luanaigh and Lawlor 2008, Cornwell and Waite 2009), to increased use of services (Lauder *et al.* 2006), and to elevated mortality (Henriksen *et al.* 2019) suggests a pertinence for interdisciplinary and city-wide action. The relative importance and significance of each of these outcomes is up for debate, with some links having varying degrees of evidence available (Reinhardt *et al.* 2021). There is consensus, however, that for certain groups or individuals the realities of loneliness are critical, in particular for those on the peripheries (Halvorsen 2005, Beller 2024). Loneliness and social isolation in the city impact efficiency, outcomes, and resources at almost every level of urban functioning from the community level to employment, from governing to budgeting (Mihalopoulos *et al.* 2020, Mokros *et al.* 2022). Williams and Braun (2019, p. 13) boldly state that 'loneliness and social isolation are threats to individuals, communities, and the nation. These two conditions kill people and cripple a democratic society'.

Conversely, positive relationships ranging from acquaintances to friends and family have demonstrably good impacts on health and wellbeing (Lu *et al.* 2021), showing the importance of protecting and supporting these to combat issues that arise from loneliness in a city. Relationships need not be strong to achieve this positive impact with Sandstrom and Dunn (2014) identifying the importance of weak, but routine, social ties for building an idea of belonging. This could be facilitated through bumping places –

accessible and usable public spaces where people can spend time and have opportunity for these casual, routine interactions with those they are not close to. Creating socially connected places and spaces through impromptu encounters, such as through bumping places, is beneficial to mental and physical health.

Places for socialising- a bumping place

Bumping places as a solution

The concept of bumping places is recent and exciting. This concept can be found in the context of novel approaches to cities for improved health such as in Roe and McCay (2021)'s book *Restorative Cities: Urban design for mental health and wellbeing*. The authors conceptualise bumping places as the spaces where people meet spontaneously and have positive interactions. These are places where there exists a sense of conviviality which encourages people to linger and interact in positive ways. These can range from public spaces such as streets and parks, to semi-public such as community gardens and markets (Ganji and Rishbeth 2020). The city itself should be a space for interactions and it should be designed and treated in this manner. The wellbeing value of these bumping places should be acknowledged (Banwell and Kingham 2023).

The origins of the idea of bumping places can be traced back to work by Jane Jacobs who emphasised the importance of public spaces such as streets, cafes, and parks as places where people can connect and interact (Jacobs 1958, 1961). The concept of third places developed by Ray Oldenburg (1999), further acts as a precursor to this emerging concept. These key abstractions of urban interactions underpin bumping places. Academic literature on bumping places that exists to date includes work by Banwell and Kingham (2023) and Roe and McCay (2021). Banwell *et al.* (2018) utilise the term bumping places and conceptualise it as places of accidental or unplanned interaction with a strong link to locality. Outside of these, there is limited use of the term. It appears to have first been utilised in academic literature in 2015, emerging from research commissioned into social isolation in London by Dr Robert Green highlighting a need for 'bumping spaces'. In New Zealand, Kingham (2016) use of the term emerged through interviews investigating people's experiences of local areas and local travel, describing how they 'bump into' others.

Since then, bumping places have begun to emerge into policy and practice discourses with grey literature on the topic primarily emerging since 2020 with the onset of the pandemic bringing ideas of urban social connection as a means to tackle loneliness to the forefront. What Works Wellbeing (2018) categorise bumping places as an aspect of public infrastructure in their briefing on 'places, spaces, people, and wellbeing'. In a blog by the Bennett Institute for Public Policy (BIPP) one can also find discussions on bumping places, describing these as providing the spaces where people can 'lead the common life', build social capital, or 'the glue that holds us together'. It is hard to find a concrete definition of bumping places and even harder to pinpoint the origins. In grey literature, a blog post by Nurture Development titled 'Creating bumping spaces where anything is possible' was uploaded in 2013 but again shows no reference to where this concept originated. Perhaps the concept emerged in a multi-discovery process fuelled by emerging discourses on social connection and interactions in recent years.

It should be noted that although space and place are differing concepts; in this context, they appear to be used both interchangeably and are seen to have much influence on each other. A space is usually a physical, if abstract, area whereas a place is imbued with a greater meaning based on experience and context. 'Places are worked by people: we make places' (Gieryn 2000, p. 465) with many seeing place as a more experienced, lived form of our encounter with our environment; space, on the other hand, is seen by many to be more mathematical, abstract, imposed (Elden 2009). Even within geography the distinctions and conceptualisations of space and place differ across schools of thought and personal perspective. It can be concluded that, despite varying definitions, together, space and place define the nature of geography (Tuan 1979).

The above discussion on the limited grey and academic literature shows examples of this combination of the terms. The BIPP blog based at the University of Cambridge describes bumping *places* as providing the *spaces*. The 2013 blog by Nurture Development also interchanges the terms space and place in relation to the term 'bumping' throughout. This is echoed in academic literature on bumping places (or spaces?). Bagnall *et al.* (2017, p. 5) further mix the terms, stating that bumping places, or in this case labelled spaces, are: '"bumping *spaces*", that is, *places* designed for people to meet up in informal settings'. Within this discourse, it should be noted that there are adjacent conceptualisations to bumping places such as 'talking points'; which are places to talk and which can be talked about (Kent and Thompson 2019) or 'gathering places'; accessible places where people can gather

(Mantey 2017). These are important concepts yet do not align entirely with the emergent idea of bumping places. Literature on these concepts, much like for bumping places, is sparse (Kingsley *et al.* 2018). In light of this, this paper acknowledges confusion that may arise from the relatively interchangeable use of space, place, and other terminology; however, based on current and preceding literature, this is deemed appropriate for discussion.

An applied example of bumping places can be found in London (City of London 2021). In this case, libraries were framed as a bumping place. In this project, it was found that people in the city 'are craving an excuse to connect, but don't want it to feel too forced, formal or scripted'. This is a strength of the informality and conviviality of bumping places. The project, despite occurring over the pandemic with restricted interactions, found bumping places to be a promising tool for social connection. Bumping places should be for all in a city, regardless of socio-economic status, locality, and ability. These places can be imbued into various contexts and environments such as at a bus stop, library, bench, water fountain, or communal delivery points. There is wide scope for what a bumping place can be and where it can occur. Geographically, the term bumping places seems to have been adopted primarily by academics and urban actors in New Zealand, Australia, and the UK.

Social networks, social capital, and encounters

Ideas of social capital become relevant here. Social capital can be thought of as the resources linked to a durable network (Bourdieu and Richardson 1986). Creating social networks and social capital through socio-spatial connection can help tackle issues of loneliness and disconnect that have large repercussions on public health outcomes. Studies suggest that people gain social capital through offline interactions such as through workplaces or neighbourhoods (Hsu *et al.* 2021). Cities can be envisioned as places of encounter (Cook *et al.* 2011), or as 'spatial formations resulting from dense networks of interaction, and as places of meeting the stranger' (Simonsen 2008, p. 145). Everyday encounters strengthen social networks, a key component of social capital. Researchers have identified that sharing space with strangers, with chance for spontaneous encounters in public spaces, is beneficial to both the individual in terms of health but also for community cohesion and urban life (Lofland 1989, Boyce 2010, Spierings *et al.* 2016, Kent and Thompson 2019, Xie *et al.* 2025). It is seen to enhance individual and social wellbeing (Cattell *et al.* 2008, Berry *et al.* 2022, Xie *et al.* 2025).

The resilience of populations is intrinsically linked with social capital, with the two mutually influencing each other (Mezzina *et al.* 2022). Relational networks strengthen attachments and establish powerful support systems which contribute to resilience and community cohesion (Nardini *et al.* 2022). Social affiliations are protective of health (Wilkinson 2006). Building in opportunity for connection through bumping places could therefore pave the way for health promotion and prevention of poor health. Conversely, hostility and 'negative' connections have been seen to negatively impact health (Marmot *et al.* 1997, Miner-Rubino and Cortina 2004), confirming the importance of social connections and networks to people.

Effective, multi-disciplinary design of public spaces can foster environments in which positive and good quality interactions can occur. Public spaces act as a vessel for facilitation of social networks, permeating most aspects of urban living. Honing in on places at an everyday scale can bring about new perspective and solutions to pertinent public health problems. Through planning and policy, urban areas can develop places and spaces that work for the population. Encouragement of use of spaces and promoting positive perceptions or experiences of places can lead to increased usage and more time spent in those locations. This would increase the likelihood of people bumping into each other; having impromptu encounters. Facilitation of voluntary and routine involvement with others in these spaces – such as the street, markets, and natural spaces – expands and strengthens social networks, forming more pathways to support and form a more resilient population.

Impromptu encounters and interactions as a solution

An encounter can be defined as an unexpected or casual meeting with someone or something. There is a mundane friendliness that characterises many urban public encounters, this can be understood from the often-overlooked geographies of kindness and compassion (Thrift 2005). These everyday kindnesses and respectful moments have the potential for leaching into the wider world (Thrift 2005). These civil exchanges are labelled 'small achievements in the good city' by Amin (2006, p. 1012). Encounters can be fleeting or meaningful, and in many instances can be both (Ganji and Rishbeth 2020). Cities should be

a hub for impromptu encounters given the amount and proximity of people.

As established, loneliness does not always imply a lack of community but instead an unfulfilled idea of community (Simmel 2004), harnessing existing community in cities but adapting how we interact with shared spaces, places, and each other could support establishment of fulfilling experiences of community. Fulfilling ideas and experiences of community through impromptu and convivial interactions, putting it at the forefront of people's lives through integrating it into the everyday, can become part of the solution for pressing urban public health issues. 'There is something vaguely oxymoronic about the idea of everyday life ... Regardless, the value of thinking about the everyday is that it signals the routine and unfolding aspects of social life' according to Back (2015, p. 820). Connection and interaction can arise from routine involvement with others – being with others and seeing others (Banwell and Kingham 2023). Seeing others provides a crucible for neighbourhood conviviality, paving the way for opportunity for connection according to Hooper *et al.* (2015). The routine, casual, and impromptu interactions that arise from spending enough time in a place to see or be with others lays foundation for positive consequences.

The urban scene has become streamlined (Gehl 2013). It strives for some level of efficiency to manage the swathes of people who exist and move within these spaces. The design of the city in recent decades has become increasingly catered towards a rushed lifestyle, pushing people to their final destinations as quickly as possible, with dominant planning ideologies rejecting city life as unnecessary (Gehl 2013). The increase in use of private vehicles and rising frustration with public transport infrastructure in some places has contributed to the disconnect of people (Gehl 2013). The streets are no longer places for connection, with the social usability of streets being somewhat lost (Singh *et al.* 2018). According to Corcoran and Marshall (2017), we are building lonely environments. the loneliness and social isolation experienced in our most densely populated areas cannot be blamed on the geographical location, rather it is on those who planned, implemented and built these ecosystems. This, however, can be understood with hopeful optimism as if it is us, as urban actors – policy makers, designers, leaders, and planners – who built the social out of cities, we can take agency and reintroduce it. In recent years, there has been a shift in attitude towards how we interact with our urban spaces. The concepts of walkability or increased use of public transport may originate in ideas of environmental sustainability but are also relevant to a socially sustainable and resilient urban environments. This shift in attitude and drive for a solution has led to the emergence of the concept of the bumping place.

Lingering & loitering

Spending time in urban places and spaces

Social interaction in shared spaces can provide relief from daily routines, sustenance of a sense of community, and opportunities for sustaining bonds (Cattell *et al.* 2008).

Inadvertently, through the streamlining of travel and time spent in urban spaces, the art of spending time has been muddied. This limits the moments in which people can bump into one another as less time spent in shared spaces means fewer chances of shared junctures. There is less opportunity and capacity for impromptu interaction. Cattell *et al.* (2008) explain that people need places of transit but also places to linger. Presently, it appears as though one may only spend time in spaces allocated for this such as cafes, pubs, the workplace, and the home. The idea of a third place has been emerging into the mainstream in recent years as a place where people can spend time outside of the workplace, home, and ideally without having to spend money (Moody 2011, Lee and Tan 2023, Wang 2024). The street itself no longer appears to be a vessel for connection in cities. It brings into question the 'publicness' of public space (Rishbeth and Rogaly 2018). This is in contrast to what may have been seen historically. Prior to modern ideas of bumping places and third places, similar concepts were built into urban environments as gathering places. This includes plazas, squares, bathhouses, teahouses. Oldenburg (1999) emphasised the importance of these gathering spots for the maintenance of a vibrant and healthy society. To gather, there is an implication of congregation, coming together, and it is neither inherently rapid or passing. For a gathering place, or a bumping place, to function – and to nurture connection and interaction – there must be an accumulation of individuals for more than a passing moment.

Stratifying people through allocation of spaces, places, and time enables a persistence of some socio-economic inequalities. A social hierarchy coupled with the presence of exclusion and stigma in society has the ability to alter life outcomes. This is supported by literature in the fields of development and economics such as in *Why Nations Fail* (Robinson and Acemoglu 2012) where explanations for inequalities and inequities

boil down to extractive – or at least inequitable – institutional and governance processes and contexts. Social stratification results in some members of society benefiting hugely whilst others are left to suffer (Oyekola and Oyeyipo 2020). Urban environments risk existing as inequitable environments if space for mobility is not created. However, an understanding and acknowledgment of this creates space for positive change and optimis m. There may be a link between policy or governance of spaces and places in cities and loneliness meaning that there is potential for impactful changes to be made. In places where one spends time, mundane actions shape ideas of occupation and reconstruct experience of place. Loitering and lingering, when reimagined, can allow citizens to occupy space and place in a new way, even in contexts of structural inequalities (Rishbeth and Rogaly 2018). Existing and spending time in a place on one's own timeline provides some level of empowerment to an individual or group and can be harnessed through multidisciplinary planning and engagement to help shape equitable spaces in cities that facilitate interaction, connection, and public health.

Reframing our perspectives, making space for solutions

Perhaps, it is time that we reframe how urban space is seen and how we perceive acts of spending time in spaces and places. A bumping place has been established to mean a place which encourages lingering and interaction. 'To linger' is to stay in a place longer than necessary because of a reluctance to leave. Here, we see an idea of what is deemed 'necessary' emerging. A person may linger in a place to enjoy a landscape, take time to rest, or have an extended interaction with another. There is an implication in this definition that there is a finite time that is seen to be acceptable or normal to spend in a place or space. There is no direct objective to this whiling away of time; 'the two temporalities seem to be mutually exclusive: she who lingers does not wait; she who waits does not linger' (Schweizer 2017, p. 80). *Urban* lingering, as defined by Gamaleldin et al. (2023), is the practice of spending time in public spaces for leisure, socializing, or simply being outdoors.

The idea of loitering is not so different, yet experiences more negative connotations (Gamaleldin et al. 2023). It has been defined as to stand or wait around without apparent purpose. There is no evidence in this definition of inherent malice, anti-socialness, or threat. Loitering, much like the word 'lurking', forms a prominent part of the language of suspicion and play a critical role of the power and policing of urban space (Bland 2022). Even in academic institutions, signs can be seen discouraging – nay banning – loitering (Figure 1). There is an exertion of control over where people are allowed to spend time and interact, limiting opportunity and capacity for 'bumping'. This is clearly not unique to a university campus. Signs such as this are apparent across urban contexts.

There may be good reasons for this as loitering can be seen to precede criminal or antisocial behaviours (Kim and Pan 2016). Historic narratives surrounding negative connotations of loitering in space may lead to debates against introduction and promotion of bumping places. However, this prejudice and suspicion surrounding time spent in place, lingering or loitering, contributes to hostility and fragmentation in urban societies. Mistrust and inequalities play a role in negative connotations and experiences of loitering (Ross and Jang 2000), this fosters the environments that go against the facilitation of bumping places. This section sets out to discuss how reframing perspectives and attitudes can support the existence and use of bumping places.

Social stratification and issues of inequality are multifaceted in regards to space, place and the social systems encompassing them. This includes inequalities in richness and in poorness in all aspects of life – from money-rich and money-poor to time-rich to time-poor. This can be particularly true for those on the margins of urban societies, or those who come under the umbrella term of 'outsiders'. Rishbeth and Rogaly (2018, p. 285) explain that 'for those who linger, sitting outside on a bench may be the outcome of marginalisation, an agentic choice for self-care or a mixture of both'. These groups tend to overrepresent those exposed to stigma and discrimination leading to increased social isolation, particularly from the wider urban community. This circles us back to loneliness, which can be particularly poignant in 'outsider' communities such as immigrant, minority ethnic, disabled, homeless, or elderly populations. The groups and individuals whom exist on the periphery of society, not experiencing whole integration for whatever reason, may be seen

Source: Maya Ljubojevic

Figure 1. Photograph of a 'no loitering' sign at the University of Strathclyde.

as existing outside of the working world. To exist outside of the working world is strongly linked to loneliness (Halvorsen 2005). This experience is subjective and context specific in regards to who is considered an outsider or experiences this prejudice or discrimination and cannot be generalised wholly to all urban areas; however, there is evidence of social stratification and this stigma and discrimination across the globe.

An aspect of this stigma emerges from a mistrust of others in the city. Loneliness therefore can also be understood in the context of trust. In countries where there is high interpersonal and institutional trust, there are lower levels of loneliness (Svendsen 2017, Rapolienė and Aartsen 2022). Savic and Savicic (2014, p. 4) summarise this phenomenon quite well. They state that this hostile design and the forethought that accompanies it 'assumes that contemporary urban design is more about prevention than encouragement and that marginal misuse is more likely to be in focus than major use'. Feelings of reciprocity and trust are vital for people; promoting mutual respect, affective support, and boosting self-esteem (Layte 2012). This can be achieved through continuous interactions and dialogues between differing individuals and demographics (WHO 2004), such as those facilitated in bumping places. Where interactions and dialogues are stilted by controlling *how* people and *which* people spend time in a place, this building of trust and reciprocity across urban groups is delayed. A social life requires overcoming this 'problem of strangeness' (Torche and Valenzuela 2011). If individuals do not get to know each other, it is unlikely that they will develop enduring and trusting relationships (Valenzuela *et al.* 2009). When there is a lack of trust it may breed anxiety, discrimination, and unhappiness within a community (Noor *et al.* 2022). There is greater worry about the 'other' and that stagnates the growth of social networks and support systems, going against what social networks are set out to do – support (Sherchan *et al.* 2013). With this understanding, bumping places can be nominated as a solution to both issues of loneliness that arise at an individual level but also determinants of loneliness at a societal level. Enabling 'bumping' through changing attitudes towards how we spend time in spaces and places can help bolster trust, social capital, sense of community, and social networks. These factors are salient to experiences of loneliness and wider health and wellbeing.

Bumping places, if supported correctly can benefit a wide breadth of people in the community including those who may suffer from loneliness but may be less likely to actively seek interaction; thus, may reap benefit from small, everyday encounters. As a concept, bumping places have potential to advantage those on the peripheries and those who already feel included and connected, further strengthening community and interpersonal connection.

Despite the optimistic outlook on how encounters can shape social dynamics and the implicit importance of social contact between different populations, there are some who argue that these mundane encounters do not translate into wider changes in relations between ethnic, demographic, cultural, social groups, and those who experience racism due to entrenched inequalities shaped by historical processes and choices (Valentine 2008). Others argue that expectations of the impacts of interactions in spaces should be more 'realistic' and instead frame these opportunities for encounters as places of intercultural learning (Amin 2013).

Conclusion

Loneliness is a pertinent issue that faces a growing urban population. The outcomes of unaddressed loneliness impact all aspects of health and society, in particular those on the periphery. The spaces and places in cities must become facilitators of connection in order to promote relationship building and connectedness, decreasing experiences of isolation and loneliness. Bumping places could tackle aspects of wider societal experiences, perspectives, and prejudices relating to some causes of loneliness. The concept of bumping spaces is proposed as both a social and structural solution. A part of this solution may be an interdisciplinary approach to implementing and introducing bumping places through planning, policy, and adaptation of habits and perceptions, creating places where people can linger in a positive way and interact with one another on a regular, yet low-effort, basis.

It would be naïve to assume that bumping places bring an easy solution to resounding urban social issues from longstanding inequalities and injustices to stigmatisation and stratification; however, given the lack of space given to research and execution of this concept thus far the potential for these places and moments to have positive impacts on urban health and wellbeing outcomes should not be discounted. This paper aims to bring attention to this concept, encouraging interdisciplinary discussion and research on how we can design and encourage our cities and citizens to be supportive and interactive at the everyday level.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the NHS Lothian; University of Strathclyde.

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Maya Ljubojevic is based at the Department of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK. Ljubojevic's background consists of geography, economics, and public health. This multidisciplinary foundation allows for an innovative, adaptable and critical research approach. Her primary interests lie in socio-spatial connectivity and social and environmental determinants of health. Identity, space, and place are further interests of Ljubojevic. Ljubojevic uses a variety of methods in her research including qualitative methods such as photovoice and interviews as well as participatory GIS. The combination of these in novel ways is a key aspect of her work.

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