

**The Nest Food Outlet Research Study**  
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## Table of Contents

1.	Introduction.....	3
2.	Literature Review.....	4
3.	Methodology.....	6
	3.1 Study Area and Sampling.....	7
	3.2 Data Collection Methods.....	8
	3.3 Limitations.....	9
4.	Findings and Analysis.....	10
	4.1 Verbal Textual Data.....	10
	4.2 Visual Spatial Data.....	20
	4.3 Overall Analysis.....	24
5.	Recommendations.....	24
6.	Conclusion.....	31
7.	References.....	32
8.	Appendix.....	34

## **The Nest Food Outlet Research Study**

This research study was developed in coordination with the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Student Engagement and Educational Development for Sustainability (SEEDS) program. The SEEDS program commissioned the following study in efforts to understand and establish whether the animation of the UBC's Alma Mater Society (AMS) Student Nest could be improved to ensure they are reaching their overarching goals of: (1) ensuring the center of campus remains a student-centered hub of activity with a focus on the needs and desires of all students on campus; and (2) create a welcoming space for all students to eat, shop, study and socialize while leading the way in sustainable practices and goals.

This research group was tasked with analyzing the AMS food outlet spaces located within the Nest. Since food space on a university campus can provide an important social meeting place for students to eat, socialize, and adjust to university life (Hassanain, Hassan & Aker, 2015), the main research question this study sought to answer was whether the food outlet spaces fulfill the objective of being a socially animated space, with our definition of social animation being: the lively and energetic engagement and exchange between people and their environment. Using a mixed method research approach, our study conducted a post occupancy evaluation (POE) of the food outlet space, which included conducting one on one interviews, focus group discussions and observing the food outlet space users. Through these methods, our research group extrapolated verbal and visual data relating to participants' use and impressions of the food outlet spaces; and, obtained recommendations to improve the animation, function and user satisfaction of the food outlet spaces.

## **I. Literature Review**

University campuses, while legally private, can form an important part of the public realm, contributing to both formal and informal public life (Banerjee, 2001). Public life, while traditionally associated with publicly-owned space, is increasingly occurring in private places such as coffee shops or bookstores (Banerjee, 2001). Banerjee (2001) draws on Oldenburg's (1999) concept of a third place: a place other than work or home that provides a social realm. Oldenburg (1999) argues that that informal public life is highly focused and emerges in 'core settings' or 'third places' that "host the regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work."

Successful public social spaces are characterized by presence of people (Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980) and often this presence of people is self-reinforcing by which creating a socially animated place attracts people to want to spend time there (Whyte, 1980). Montgomery (1998) characterizes this presence of people as 'vitality' and notes that it can be measured by "the numbers of people in and around the public space (pedestrian flows) across different times of the day and night, the uptake of facilities, the number of cultural events and celebrations over the year, the presence of an active street life, and generally the extent to which a place feels alive or lively." Both Jacobs and Whyte note that the diversity of activities and players contributes to the success of a public social space. Montgomery (1995) argues that underlying these diverse uses and activities, the key to successful places is to have a complex transaction base of activity at many different levels and layers – where transactions includes those that are economic, social and cultural. This diversity of uses can be more difficult to measure, but Montgomery (1998) suggests the following indices (based on Jacobs, 1961 and Comedia, 1991): variety in primary land uses; proportion of locally owned businesses and shops; opening hours; availability of public meeting places; availability of people-watching public spaces; patterns of mixed land ownership; availability of different unit sizes at varying degrees of cost;

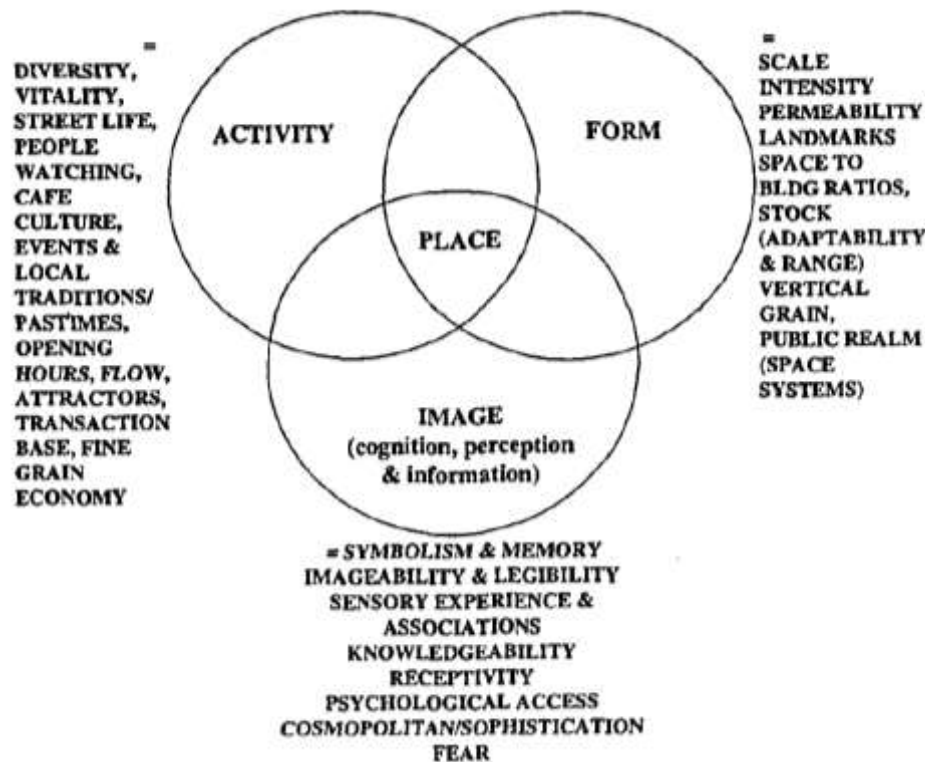
degree of innovation in architecture; and, presence of active street life and active street frontages.

Social activity, as comprised of vitality and diversity, is both influenced by and interacts with the built environment. The earliest work in the field of the creation of social animation was first-person observation by Jacobs (1961), Gehl (1971) and Whyte (1980) reflecting on which spaces worked well socially because of the built form. Jacobs' (1961) determinants for activity are a mixture of: primary use, intensity, permeability, and building types within the urban form. Gehl (1996) argues that when space is not of the optimal condition, only necessary activities take place but that when space is more enjoyable, optional activities are more likely to take place and therefore there is a greater likelihood of social activities occurring. Whyte (1980, 1988) used photographic studies of New York's open spaces and determined that use during off-peak hours could be particularly useful demonstration of people's preferred interactions with space. Whyte (1980) noted that the most sociable spaces often held the following characteristics: central location that is both visually and physically accessible; streets forming part of the social space (as opposed to physical separation by railings or walls); at grade with the pavement; providing places in the form of furniture and steps or low walls; and, by providing moveable seats.

The built form carries different meanings, for individual people personally and for the culture collectively. Montgomery (1998) deems these overlapping individual and collective meanings for a place as the place's 'Image'. An individual's conception of a place is a function of how memorable a place is (its "imageability") and therefore how much of an impression the components of the environment make on the individual (Lynch, 1960, 1981). In turn, a place is much more likely to make an impression if the elements of the city or space (e.g. paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks) are organized into a coherent and recognizable pattern (Lynch 1960, 1981). The collection of individual overlapping perceptions of a place form a

shared cultural value or identity for places, but this cultural value can also be derived from events that have occurred at a place (Montgomery, 1998).

**Figure 1 – Montgomery’s (1998) Sense of Place Diagram**



Montgomery (1998) notes that the creation of what makes a place is comprised of the intersections between activity, built form, and image; and that all three of these components interact and influence each other. Therefore, to evaluate the social animation of the Food Outlet Space of the Nest, we will measure the social activity, but will also be evaluating the built form and image of the Nest.

## **II. Methodology**

### *Mixed Method Research Approach*

A mixed method approach is the guiding methodology for our study, as it incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data to inform our analysis and recommendations. The qualitative methods within our study include verbal textual data retrieved from individual interviews and

focus groups; and quantitative data retrieved from visual spatial observation. This approach was chosen for its ability to incorporate triangulation with our mixed method findings. The core premise of triangulation as a design strategy is that all methods have inherent biases and limitations, so use of only one method to assess a given phenomenon, such as the social animation of a particular space, will inevitably yield biased and limited results (Greene et al., 1989). Alternatively, when two or more methods that have offsetting biases are used to assess a given phenomenon, and the results of these methods corroborate one another, then the validity of the findings is strengthened (Greene et al., 1989). Our research group anticipated that the ability to triangulate our verbal textual data with our visual spatial data would enhance the validity of our findings.

### *The Food Outlet Study Areas*

The food outlet area comprises a large expanse of space on multiple floors within the Nest. In order to provide a thorough representation of each food outlet area, our research group divided the food outlets open spaces into three sections, labelled food outlet space #1, #2, #3; with each researcher designated a section to gather verbal and visual data (see figure 1 and 2 in the Appendix). The Pit was also identified within the purview of the food outlet spaces; however, due to this outlet being closed off, and its nature as a pub, our research group delineated it as a separate space, with its own unique line of questioning different than the other three spaces.

### *Sampling*

The participants for the research study were selected using an opportunity sampling strategy. This strategy was chosen based on its convenience, efficiency, and ability to target



individuals as they were occupying the target spaces where in which the researchers were gathering data.

### *Data Collection Methods*

The data collection methods used within our study included individual interviews, focus groups, and spatial observation. These procedures were as follows:

1. *Individual Interviews* - each researcher approached 5 individuals located within each of the three designated food outlet spaces at varying times of day and days of the week, and asked the individual if they would like to participate in a study regarding the AMS food outlet spaces. Each participant was informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary and signed consent was obtained. The participant was then asked 18 open ended questions. The first 10 questions were designed to gather information regarding the participants use, frequency, perception, feelings and suggested improvements for the food outlet space. The participants were then asked 5 questions regarding their use, impression, and suggested improvements for The Pit. The last 3 questions were regarding what group the participant identified as (undergrad, graduate, faculty, visitor); and if the participant was a student, their year of study and academic major. Participants were thanked for their time and provided a copy of the consent form and the researcher's contact information.
2. *Focus Groups* - Two focus groups were included in the study. The researchers had difficulty recruiting individuals to participate in a focus group, and so 'impromptu' focus groups were held by approaching groups of individuals sitting together within the food outlet space. Two groups of two people each agreed to participate, and were offered a \$5 voucher to use in the Nest as token for their contribution. Both groups were asked 3 - 4 open ended questions regarding their impressions and

recommendations for improvement of the food outlet space. These focus groups were conducted in researcher dyads, with one person recording and one person facilitating the focus questions.

3. *Spatial Observation* - Visual spatial data were gathered from the food outlet spaces by each researcher throughout different days of the week and at different times of day. Within these observations, the researchers recorded in a table: the total number of users in the space; how users were using the space based on observations of eating, studying, socializing; and whether the users appeared to be demonstrating anti social behaviour (headphones on). The researchers also gathered photographic data to supplement their observational data.

### *Limitations*

It should be noted that there are several limitations with the methodology and process within our research study. These limitations are described below:

The Pit is a unique food outlet area when compared to the other designated food outlet spaces. Due to its unique nature, and the large space our research group was tasked with covering, the inclusion of this space in our research was limited.

Study participants were limited to those who were actively using the food outlet space. Individuals who choose not to use the food outlet spaces were thereby omitted from providing their opinion and recommendations to improve the space; thereby potentially missing out on a key target population: those who are currently dissatisfied with the animation of the food outlet space. Furthermore, opportunity sampling technique can produce unrepresentative samples, and can be biased by the researcher choosing people who appear to be approachable, helpful, sitting alone, or not too engrossed in studying (McLeod, 2014).

Focus groups participants were small in number, due to a lack of individuals interested in participating. Those that did agree to participate were pressed for time, and so the depth and length of the focus groups were limited as a result.

Much of the data received through spatial observations were approximations and assumptions made on behalf of the researchers. For example, the transient and populated nature of the food outlet spaces made it difficult to provide an accurate head count. Also, it wasn't always possible to determine with complete certainty whether individuals were studying or socializing solely based on their behavioral observations.

### **III. Findings and Analysis**

#### *Verbal-Textual Data Analysis*

The data gathered from the verbal interviews and focus group discussion shed some interesting insights on the habits, opinions and feelings that were shared by the participants on the Nest food outlet space.

#### *Individual Interviews*

The students who participated in the interviews were mostly undergraduate students at UBC: 11 undergraduate students, one graduate student, and one visitor. Of the ten undergraduate students, four were in their first and second year of study; and seven were in higher years (3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> year). The students were from diverse programs such as Economics, Engineering, Commerce, International Studies, Kinesiology, Physics, and Sociology. For the focus group discussions, two groups of two people participated. One group was made up of both women working as UBC staff. The other group was made up of both men in their fourth year. All were approached while using the three food outlet spaces of the AMS Nest. All participants volunteered to participate in the study, understanding that they would be

providing their thoughts and perception of the food outlet space in which they were currently using.

### *Themes*

In linking the research question concerning the AMS Nest's success in providing a socially animated space for students, three dominant themes were brought out from the information gathered. First, participants generally reported to have positive feelings and perceptions of the space. Second, most participants' choice in using the space was based on convenience, proximity, and flexibility in uses. Lastly, in regards to recommendations for improvement to the designated food outlet space, participants suggested increasing seating space, adding more food options with cheaper prices, and increasing access to microwaves. The following analysis will provide greater detail of the verbal textual data obtained, and also provide a brief summary of findings relating specifically to the Pit food outlet.

### *Analysis*

Since the interview was intended to understand how people use the food outlet spaces, the questions were straight forward and responses can be grouped into the following: (1) use of the space; (2) users' impression of the space; (3) users' suggested improvements to the space; and (4) users' view/s on The Pit. The question groupings are shown in Table 1. The focus group discussions picked up on a few of the interview questions, mainly about the participants' impressions of the space, whether it is important for the place to be lively and/or vibrant, and what suggestions they have to further improve the space to serve their needs. The result of the focus group discussions will be discussed under the broader interview question groupings.

**Table 1. Interview Questions Grouping**

<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>
<i>1. Use of the space</i>	Q1: What are you using this space for today? Q2: How often do you use the space? Q3: Is there a certain time of day that you prefer to visit the food outlets in the Nest? Why? Q4: Do you typically use it for the same purpose each time? Q5: How long do you usually stay?
<i>2. Users' impression of the space</i>	Q6: What made you choose this space on campus? Q7: What do you enjoy about this space? Q8: What word(s) would you use to describe the atmosphere of the food outlet space? Q9: What feelings do you associate with the food outlet space?
<i>3. Users' suggested improvements to the space</i>	Q10: What kinds of improvements would you like to see to this space?
<i>4. Users' view on the Pit</i>	Q11: Have you ever been to the Pit? Q12: If no, is there a reason? If yes, continue with questions. Q13: What is your impression of the Pit? Q14: Do you think the Pit is somewhere you would want to use during the day if it were open? If no, why? Q15: if the Pit were open during the day, is there any changes you think the AMS could make to the space in the Pit that would encourage people to use it during the day?

### *1. Use of the space*

The researchers sought to understand how participants are using the space, and with what frequency. What was discovered through the interview process was that the main uses of the space were for dining, studying, and socializing with friends/classmates, or a mix of these. Tables 2 and 3 below show the number of participants who mentioned their purpose for visiting the Nest food outlets. And since they were in the food outlet area, it was natural that majority responded that they use the space for dining. Aside from this, it was also found that many take advantage of being there to socialize (i.e. meet up with friends or hang out) and study. Further to this, the data showed that the majority of students preferred to bring their food from home

and use the microwave located within the space to heat their food, rather than always purchasing food from the food outlets.

**Table 2: Purpose of visit during interview**

Area	Dining	Studying	Socializing	Other*
Lower Level	5	0	0	0
Upper Left	2	1	0	2
Upper Right	3	2	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

\*charging phone and running a booth

Note: In some cases, participant mentioned more than one purpose/activity.

Dining is also the primary use of the space for the focus group participants. They come to the Nest to eat, mainly because of its proximity to their classes and offices. This is especially true for the staff who often only go to the food outlets and not on the other floors of the Nest. The only exception is when there are interesting special events held at the auditorium that are open to everyone.

**Table 3: General purpose of visits**

Area	Dining	Socializing	Studying
Lower Level	5	1	1
Upper Left	4	2	3
Upper Right	0	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

Note: In some cases, participant mentioned more than one purpose/activity.

Of the thirteen interviewed, nearly half reported that they visit the Nest food outlets five times a week (mostly all weekdays) or more (Table 4). Others visit the space less frequently. The schedule and duration of use was largely determined by the number of days the participants were on campus for class, the amount of time they had in between classes, and their classes' proximity to the Nest. Consistent with the primary use of space, participants visited the Nest food outlets mostly during dining hours. Others visit during non-dining hours, such as in the afternoon or during class breaks. More than half of the participants reported to use the space

between 1 to 2 hours. About a third say they spend less than an hour primarily just to get something to eat. Depending on the day of the week, the use and the length between classes, some stay for more than two hours – one reported to have stayed up to eight hours. But since majority spend under two hours in these spaces, the layout should continue to serve users that go in and out of the space in a span of one to two hours.

**Table 4: Frequency, time, and length of visit to food outlets**

Area	Frequency per week				Time			Length of stay			
	5x up	1-2x	3-4x	Total	Dining hours	Non-dining	Total	1-2h	under 1h	2h up	Total
Lower Level	1	3	1	5	5		5	1	4		5
Upper Left	3	1	1	5	3	2	5	4		1	5
Upper Right	2		1	3	1	2	3	2		1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>

Note: 5x up – five times or more per week; 1-2x – once or twice a week; 3-4x – three to four times a week; 1-2h – one to two hours; under 1h – under 1 hour; and 2h up – two hours or more.

## 2. Impressions of the space

The next analytical category the study wished to understand was why participants chose this specific place over others on campus, and what it is they enjoy about the specific food outlet space. This included inquiries into the type of words and feelings the participants described and associated with the space. Majority of the participants were found to have chosen the Nest food outlets over others on campus based on the availability of food choices (Table 5). Those who preferred the Nest for the ambiance that it offered said they can “get out of the dorms” (have a change of scenery); the Nest was “good for studying at night when it’s not too busy,” “has a SUB vibe during the day,” and “it’s nice and new.”

**Table 5: Reasons for choosing the Nest food outlets**

Area	Food choices	Ambiance	For socializing	Proximity	Microwave	Total
Lower Level	3			2		5
Upper Left	1	1	2		1	5
Upper Right	1	2				3
Total	5	3	2	2	1	13

It was also reported that participants enjoy the food outlet space based on its *multiple uses*, a combination of features are listed in Table 6. Many enjoy the variety of food choices and the use of the place for socializing with friends. The openness and lighting, or the place's overall ambiance, was also cited several times. Participants mentioned they "like watching/seeing what's going on," "lighting is good (indoor/outdoor feeling)," "brighter than old SUB, more sunlight coming in," "open/ architecture," "open/ windows/ able to see outside," "very spacious, good lighting." The ambiance could also include the feeling of being relaxed as one participant said he/she enjoyed feeling "no rules" in the place. One participant, a graduate student, said he/she did not like the space. This is perhaps due to the participant's strong attachment to the old SUB.

**Table 6: What participants enjoy about the space**

<b>Features</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
Food choices	4
Place for socializing	4
Lighting/openness	2
Availability of microwave	1
Don't like	1
"no rules"	1

To make recommendations to further animate the space, the researchers needed to know how the current users view the space, with the underlying assumption that the space is dull and "mall-like." Participants were asked to describe the atmosphere of the Nest food outlets and identify feelings associated with it (Table 7). Surprisingly, in most cases, participants automatically reply that the space is "lively" and good for socializing. Many also find it comfortable, "laid back," gives a "study vibe," "free, relaxing, and creative" as well as "warm, social." Out of the thirteen interviewed, two used a *negative* description of the place, stating that it "lacked a feeling of community, and interaction between those sitting at different tables," or "unwelcoming."



The focus group participants have interesting and opposing views. The group of women staff thinks that the Nest food outlets space is not cozy compared to the old SUB, which had had more places to sit, more to see. But when asked if it is important for them to feel the liveliness or vibrancy of the space, they said that one of the reasons why they were drawn to the space is because of its liveliness – they feel the students’ energy in the space. The group of men, however, thinks that the Nest is so much better than the old SUB where the walls were grey and dull.

**Table 7: Description of Nest food outlets from interviewees**

	<b>Number of responses</b>
<b>Positive – Lively:</b>	<b>7</b>
Diversified	
For socializing	
Lighting/Openness	
Lively, but lacks space	
Lively, open, busy, natural light	
<b>Positive – Comfortable:</b>	<b>4</b>
Open, comfortable, warm, social	
Study vibe; laid back	
Free / relaxing / creative	
<b>Negative:</b>	<b>2</b>
Unwelcoming	
Not a community feeling / separated tables / not a lot of interaction	
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

Consistent with the above, words and feelings associated with the space were also predominantly *positive* (Table 8), with many claiming to have feelings of being relaxed: some say the place makes them feel “laid back,” gives a “break from stress,” and a “good place to rest and have a snack.” On the other hand, two participants said that the place is “unwelcoming, unpleasant” and “lacks space.” It is worth noting that both participants were interviewed in the lower level area and they could be referring to the immediate surrounding which is made up mostly of grey chairs and tables which tend to be filled up quickly during peak dining hours.

**Table 8: Feelings associated with the Nest food outlets**

	<b>Number of responses</b>
<b>Positive:</b>	
Relaxed	5
Busy, fun, community	1
Content, happy	1
Convenient	1
Feel like a student	1
Pleasant	1
Positive	1
<b>Negative:</b>	
Lacks space	1
Unwelcoming, unpleasant	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

### 3. *Suggested improvements*

The participants were posed with the question asking what sort of improvements they would like to see to the space. Three participants said there is no need to improve because the space serves its purpose well (Table 9). Many suggested adding more seats (with tables for eating, unlike the seats on the atrium) as there seems to be a lack of seats during peak dining hours. Others suggested offering more food choices, such as adding gluten free food options, and lower prices. Two suggested adding student art to make the space more lively, especially in the lower level area. One participant appreciated the hanging wood planters on the upper right side of the food outlets area and wished there would be more spread out, especially in the lower level. More than one participant expressed frustration regarding the fact there is only one microwave located within the specified food outlet space, and that this microwave is generally kept locked up, available only when the Honour Roll food outlet is open. Microwave users must wait in long lines to use the microwave when it is open, or seek out alternative microwaves if seeking to heat up food outside of Honour Roll's opening hours of 10:00am to 6:00pm.

**Table 9: Suggested improvements to the Nest food outlets**

	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
More seats with tables	5
More food choices	3
More art, creative fixtures	2
More microwaves	2
Cheaper food prices	1
No need	3

In both focus group discussions, all participants echoed the need for more seating as well as offering lower food prices to students. One group emphasized that since the Nest is mainly for students, food pricing should take this into consideration. Current prices were around \$12-15 per meal which is not affordable to many students. Another group pointed out that food outside the Nest (from other restaurants in campus) is often cheaper than the food currently offered inside. They would also like to see more food options such as Subway or Chipotle.

#### *4. Views and suggestions on The Pit*

The final stage of the interview was designed to gather some basic information on The Pit. These questions first determined if the participant had been to The Pit, and if so, asked the participant to consider if they would want to access The Pit if it were open during the day. Out of the thirteen interviewed, eleven have been to The Pit (Table 10). Two view the new Pit as “lively” and “nice” while many gave a somewhat neutral response saying the new Pit is “good,” “okay,” and “tolerable.” Some view the new Pit as “dark and cozy” and like a “typical college bar, a social place.” A graduate student who have frequented The Pit in the old SUB referred to the new one as having “poorer food quality, very expensive, and closed during the day.” He explained that the old Pit was more affordable and fitting to students since it did not have servers, food and drinks are ordered and taken from the counter (at lower price), and anyone can hang out and watch sports, sometimes without ordering anything. He suggested that the

new Pit could adjust some of its policy (i.e. not have servers) to lower the prices and attract more students, and can offer sports viewing with a minimum purchase of any food or beverage. Participants from one of the focus groups used to frequent the old Pit and, like the graduate student, they think that the old Pit was more open, inviting, and animated. The new Pit's menu have more expensive items than in the old Pit, and also compared to another pub in campus.

**Table 10: Impressions of the Pit**

	<b>Number of responses</b>
Good	6
Busy	1
College bar	1
Dark, cozy	1
Expensive, food quality down	1
Lively	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>

Five participants expressed interest in using the Pit if it were open during the day (Table 11). They are used to going to the old Pit during daytime and one was looking forward to watching soccer on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Those who do not favor going to the Pit during daytime said they “don’t want to drink during the day” or “too dark for daytime dining” and prefers bright open space. One participant expressed that they preferred the Gallery 2.0 because of its natural light. When asked what features could be added to encourage daytime use, participants indicated *cheap food and beverage* options, and better *lighting*. One said he would consider if there is more space for dancing.

**Table 11: Will go to the Pit during daytime**

	<b>Number of responses</b>
Yes – if food/drinks are cheaper; convert to sports bar	4
Maybe – if there is more space for dancing	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

### *Visual-Spatial Data Analysis*

The visual spatial observation data contributes to the validation of the mixed-use nature of the food outlet space. The analytical categories that the participant observation aimed to address were, how many people were using the space, for what purpose and whether the participants' behaviour could be determined as social vs. anti-social.

### *Themes*

The observational data gathered demonstrated three themes. First, it appears that the primary use of common space, such as those in the upper and lower level seating area, is for studying. Second, majority of the users were observed to be sitting alone. This was evident even in the lower level area where single users occupy four-seater tables. Lastly, the time of day seems to have little effect on the number of users observed in the upper level main area.

Overall, there appeared to be a mix of social vs. antisocial participant behaviour observed within and around the food outlet space, demonstrating not only the mixed uses of the food outlet space, but also how the space fulfills the needs of those seeking and perhaps not seeking social interaction.

The observations took place on four Nest food outlets area (Figures 1 and 2 in appendix): the upper level main area (Uppercase and front area), upper level left area (Honour Roll), upper level right area (PieR2), and the lower level (Deli and Soup Market). The observations were taken at various times of the day and in different areas. The first was on Wednesday at 3:30pm at the upper level main area, upper right area, and lower level. The second was on the same day at 5:40pm at the lower level area. The third was on Thursday at 9:50am at the lower level area. And the fourth was on Tuesday at 9:45am at the main area, Uppercase, and Honour Roll. Additional data (outside Honour Roll, at around 4:10pm and

2:50pm) were provided by two graduate students from GRSJ 501 class. The observations are shown in Table 12.

**Table 12: Approximate Number of Users Observed at the Nest Food Outlets**

Location	Observation Day/Time	Alone	2 or more	Eating	Studying	Socializing	Anti-social behaviour	Total Users
MA	Wed 3:30pm	18	13	6	17	8	2	31
MA	Tue 9:45am	21	10	7	17	7	5	31
UC	Tue 9:45am	4	2	6	6	0	0	6
HR	Tue 9:45am	2	4	3	3	0	2	6
HR (outside)	4:10pm	20	14					34
HR (outside)	2:50pm	22	18					40
PR	Wed 3:37pm	19	8	12	9	7	17	27
LL	Wed 3:30pm	20	18	7	12	14	5	38
LL	Wed 5:40pm	13	18	8	11	10	0	31
LL	Thu 9:50am	11	4	1	4	0	0	15

MA – main area; UC – Uppercase; HR – Hour Roll; PR – PieR2; LL – lower level.

**a. Primary use is for studying.**

It appears that majority of the users study in the area as opposed to the basic assumption that food outlets space are used mainly for dining. This was observed in the upper level main area and lower level seating area. Some users study and eat, while some use the space mostly to study with a bottle of water or coffee on the side. Many of those who were eating appeared to be eating food brought from home. This is, however, not so evident in the seating areas within the food outlets such as those in Uppercase, Honour Roll, and PieR2. In these more enclosed areas, users are both eating and studying, and in the case of PieR2, more people were found to be eating. This observation is somewhat contradictory to the interview results where the interviewees say that they use the space mainly to eat. It is likely that the interviewees' response was due to the way they were selected by the interviewer (which was to approach those who are not intently studying).

**b. Single occupants dominate the space.**

In regard to social vs. antisocial behavior, six of the eight observations in Table 12 show that there are more users sitting alone and studying (or eating). On the upper level, the bar style seating (Figure 1) was more conducive for antisocial behaviour, such as *sitting alone*, *studying alone*, and *wearing headphones*. On the lower level main seating area, where there are about 32 four-seater tables, majority of the tables were often occupied by one person. Similar to the upper level, many of these single occupants are either studying or eating and studying, which can indicate that they are occupying the tables longer than one hour. Studying alone in this case can be considered as anti-social behavior as the users looked like they prefer to not be disturbed. In only one occasion were there five other single occupants seen to be tinkering with their phones or just had their earphones on.

**Figure 2: Photo of bar style seating on the upper level food outlet area**



The afternoons seemed to be more conducive for socializing as larger groups of users were observed to be sitting together; while the morning observation revealed a greater number of people sitting *alone*, *studying* and more displays of antisocial behaviour (*wearing headphones*). This was also noted in the researchers' observation of the Honour Roll and Uppercase outlets, in which participants appeared to be less social in their use of the space, as indicated by greater amounts of people observed to be either *studying* or *alone* and *wearing headphones*.

**c. Variation in number of users.**

It seems that the upper level main area experience only a slight variation in number of users at different times of the day. On two observations in this area, the exact same number of users were counted. It is usually full, and people would have to search for a few minutes to find a seat. On the lower level, however, there is a bigger variation in the number of users as there were very few observed during the morning than in the afternoons. This is perhaps because of accessibility – there is probably a tendency to fill up the upper level seating area first before the lower level so that the upper level is normally always filled up (Figure 2).

**Figure 3: Photo of food outlet space outside Honour Roll (left) and outside Pie R2 (right) both on the upper level**



The data received from the visual spatial research helped to quantify the approximate number of participants using the food outlet space at a given time, as well as the mixed uses the space offers. The data revealed that although the time of day did not produce a large difference in total users, it did have an impact on the over social vs. antisocial uses of the space. The data also showed that individuals sitting inside food outlets were observed to have ordered food or drink from the establishment more so than when compared to those sitting in the main food space area. The visual spatial data received supports the conclusion that the food outlet spaces can offer a socially animated space, while also catering to those seeking less social engagement and interaction.



### *Overall Analysis*

In tying this data analysis to the research question of whether the food outlet space in the Nest meets the characteristics of a socially animated space, that being, a space that promotes the lively and energetic engagement and connection between people and with their environment, the data presented above suggest that it does. The participants interviewed generally held a positive regard for the space, expressing that its *social ambiance* and *liveliness* as endearing attributes. The participants also expressed that they enjoyed the mixed uses of the space, stating that they liked how they could *eat, socialize, and study*, all in one place. The only recommendations to improve the space were in relation to the *functionality, food variety* and *affordability* within the food outlets. The observation data further supports the mixed-use nature of the food outlet space in that users were observed to be eating, studying, and socializing. There were more people found to be sitting alone than with a group, sometimes studying or eating. But in reference to the general positive feeling reported in the interviews, the people sitting alone seem to be content about this. Save for some improvements, the food outlet space serves its purpose – users can eat, study, or meet friends in a relaxed environment.

## **IV. Recommendations**

### **1. Support and enhance the Nest's mixed use nature**

#### *Support*

As outlined by Montgomery (1998), a key component of place-making is having diversity of users and uses to generate social activity. Currently, the Nest Food Outlet spaces serves many different uses – students studying, relaxing, eating, and socializing. The interviews we conducted reinforce that the reason why the students chose to come to the Nest is that unlike other spaces on campus where they are only permitted to do one activity, such as study in the library, or eat in a restaurant/coffee shop, they are permitted to and able to do all of the activities

that they desire within the Nest – study, relax, eat, socialize. Our research confirms that overall the Nest is a desirable place for students because they are free to do as they please – this should be supported, and no singular use should be prioritized over others.



**Figure 4:**

**Multiple uses outside of PieR<sup>2</sup> - eating, studying, socializing – demonstrate the success of this mixed-use space. Note that the students sitting at the bench overlooking the lower floor also have the opportunity for passive social engagement (people watching).**

### *Enhance*

There were some spaces that seemed to work better than others, based on our observations of use. Uppercase's tables almost always seemed to be very well used, and it appears to be acting as one of Oldenburg's (1999) third places – a meeting place for conversation and social interaction outside of the realms of home and work. If possible, more space should be allocated to Uppercase as it performs an important social function. Other areas seemed underutilised - PieR<sup>2</sup>, despite having many transactions often seemed empty and lacking in life. This is perhaps due to its isolation from other uses – it is surrounded by the outside on two sides, and on the third separated from a travel pathway by a wall. We recommend connecting PieR<sup>2</sup> back to the other uses by either removing the wall or animating it (with a noticeboard, TV screen showing upcoming events in the Nest, or interactive art). We also recommending removing the large group table seating in PieR<sup>2</sup> - while innovative and interesting design, these tables are not moveable, which is a key feature of making a space feel comfortable for users (Whyte 1980). To retain its unique identity, the replacement 4-person

and 2-person tables could be distinctive from the tables in the rest of the Nest. We also recommend ‘softening’ the boundary between PieR<sup>2</sup> and the exterior – currently these boundaries are sharp with a strong distinction between “inside” and “outside” (See Figure 5). We recommend adding outdoor seating outside of PieR<sup>2</sup> to enhance the diversity of uses in this space to draw people into the Nest Food Outlet Spaces from outside.



**Figure 5: The outside edges of the Nest at PieR<sup>2</sup> draw a strong distinction between outdoor and indoor spaces and uses. We recommend blurring this edge by adding outdoor seating outside of PieR<sup>2</sup>.**

## **2. Increase microwave accessibility and availability**

Several of the requests for improvement we heard from students in our interviews was to increase the number of microwaves available. Gehl (1971) notes that when people feel comfortable and their needs are met, they are more likely to stay longer and participate in optional social activities. Therefore, if there enough microwaves that more students can have access to this resource during peak times, more students will have their basic needs met and will be more likely to use the Nest for other optional activities as well.



**Figure 6: Nest users noted that there are not enough microwaves, and not all the microwaves are accessible to all users (sign reads: “This microwave is reserved for Honour Roll customers.”)**

### **3. Increase seating availability by having 20% of all tables as 1-2 person tables**

Currently, as observed in our visual surveys, the available seating is underutilized as many of the tables and chairs designed for four people are occupied by single users or groups of 2 people. Additionally, one of the most well-used spaces we observed was Uppercase, which only has 1-2 person tables with bench seating on one side. To increase the vitality of the Nest Food Outlet spaces, we recommend changing 20 – 25% of the tables to 1-2 person tables, which will increase the total number of users who are able to be accommodated at a given time. More users and less unused or underutilised tables will make the space seem more lively and vibrant (Montgomery, 1998). We recommend particularly that 1-2 person tables be added on the upper level food outlet spaces, which is more socially animated than the lower food outlet spaces, and in the areas directly adjacent to the food outlets on the lower level food outlet spaces.



**Figure 7: Often, especially during peak hours, there are not enough seats for any new users because many of the tables meant for four users are in use by one or two users only. Substituting some of the 4-person tables for 1-2 person tables would provide more seating overall.**

#### **4. Increase food options at affordable prices**

Another recommendation for improvement we heard repeatedly from Nest users in our interviews was to increase the affordability of the food items available for purchase at the Nest . An increased variety in the range of price points of items available for purchase could contribute to an increased diversity of uses and users (Montgomery 1998). There are several options available to pursue this option: provide subsidized rents for locally owned businesses or for businesses that keep their price points relatively affordable; smaller sized food outlets that therefore pay lower rents and charge less per item; or, to have regular rotating daily “specials” at each of the AMS-owned food outlets.



**Figure 8: PieR<sup>2</sup> is one of the more affordable options for food at the Nest. Providing more affordable food options would bring more users to the Nest.**

#### **5. Increase and vary student artworks seasonally throughout the Shared Spaces.**

Whyte (1980) notes that public art can act to “triangulate” individuals, that is “the process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other.” Additionally, art can contribute to the Nest’s ‘image’ or student body’s collective memories and perceptions of the Nest.

**Figure 9: The two highly visible student artworks which are currently present in the main food outlet areas of the Nest contribute to the's 'image'.**



The AMS has requested us to engage in this investigation partially because students report that the Nest is mall-like and impersonal; that is, it is not memorable or special. By hosting student art that changes throughout the year, especially pieces of art that are experiential (designed to interact with Nest users), the shared 'image' of the Nest will be one of student innovation, interaction, and experience. A local example of public art that interacts with and encourages play in viewers is the 'A-maze-ing Laughter' sculpture installed as part of the Vancouver International Sculpture Biennale in Morton Park (near English Bay, in Vancouver, BC). Similarly, pieces of art that are carried throughout the Nest will add to the sense that the Nest has a distinct and coherent design and feeling.



**Figure 10: Place-making art, 'A-maze-ing Laughter' by Yue Minjun in Morton Park, Vancouver.**

*Photo credit: Cameron Norman.*

**6. Increase wayfinding and awareness of student events and activities, shops, services, and spaces within the Nest.**

The Project for Public Space (2000), which builds on Whyte (1980), identifies that the spatial readability of a place, or the ability of a new user of the Nest to navigate it successfully, is a key contributor to the “access and linkage” component of a successful social public place. The researchers’ personal experience of the Nest was a lack of awareness of the shops and services available on the various levels, and what food products or services was available at each of these outlets. Therefore, if people have a better understanding of what is available and how to access it, they will be more likely to utilize the Food Outlet spaces. We recommend that several way-finding stations be installed at key locations that display a map, businesses, and if possible an interactive listing of events being hosted at the Nest. Another option would be to have sandwich-style boards outside of the Nest that display key events happening that day in the Nest, including if there are any food specials on at any of the AMS-run businesses. By having this way-finding serve the dual purpose of also promoting student events, the Nest will have its’ ‘identity’ as a hub for activities reinforced.



**Figure 11: The only current way-finding or provision of information on events and information of interest to students is on several poles which are not all in central locations.**

## **VI. Conclusions**

In coordination with UBC's SEEDS program, this study has aimed to uncover whether the food outlet spaces of the AMS Nest is a socially animated space that provides a lively and energetic engagement and exchange between people and their environment. Using a mixed methods research approach which included interviews, focus groups, and photo and in-person observations, the research team established that the students currently enjoy the freedom that the Nest allows them in the choice of and mix of activities. However, the Nest users also gave us some small suggestions which would increase their comfort and their needs being met: increased microwave availability, increased seating, and increased affordable food choices. Following from Montgomery (1998) and Gehl (1971) if users' basic needs are met, and the space is high quality, users are more likely to linger and participate in optional (possibly social) activities. Students generally identify the space as being enjoyable and high quality, but a limited number of microwaves, seating, or affordable food choices, means that those users are less likely to visit the Nest. Through our own observations, we have several recommendations to improve the social animation of the public space: continue to support the mixed-use nature of the Nest; add more and regularly change the publicly viewable art within the main areas of the Nest; and improve the wayfinding within the Nest to encourage and increase social mixing within the Nest. The Nest is already well-used and enjoyed by students for its central location, good lighting, and options of things to do, but our recommendations will help to make the Student Nest a socially animated space that will be recognized by both regular and irregular users as a special space that has a "sense of place."



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