



## **WORKING IN CIVIC PLACES:**

When entering various civic layers, journalists will see:

**People are attracted to different layers.** Some people feel very comfortable in a “third place” and yet seldom enter a “quasi-official” or “official” space. Journalists must not assume that by dropping into certain civic layers they are capturing the full dimension of civic life.

### **The purpose and nature of civic conversations differ from layer to layer.**

Conversations in “official” settings tend to be framed narrowly, focusing on technical policy or regulatory questions. Often they are polarized by the most strident voices. In “third places” journalists will find conversations that move in between gossip, community concerns and people bouncing their ideas and thoughts off one another.

**“Unspoken rules” shape civic spaces.** Journalists need to judge carefully how particular civic spaces and conversations work before plunging in, asking questions and taking notes. Here are some examples of unspoken rules:

- Each civic conversation will have its own pace.
- Some topics may be off limits; others will dominate.
- Each space will have a different feel and tone.
- People within many civic spaces may not feel comfortable talking with a journalist.

### **How to handle unspoken rules:**

- Figure out the pace of questions so as not to change the nature of a civic space.
- Figure out the natural conversation of the civic space. Only when there is a sense that enough trust has been established should journalists attempt to expand the conversation.
- Listen for how people talk in the space. For instance, the interactions within a space may be driven by a variety of factors, such as emotions, language, jokes and storytelling.

Wait to ask questions and take notes until you, as a journalist, first build a relationship with people in a civic space.