

# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

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## Piazza Santa Croce: Dynamics of Delight Application

The Piazza of Santa Croce has a history of being a piazza where feasts, jousts, tournaments and games were held to strengthen the ties between the population and the church. It was a central point for the followers of St. Francis to gather and listen to sermons. In Peter Smith's "Dynamics of Delight", he describes a square as "a nodal space designed to encourage sojourn and social intercourse". Today the Piazza of Santa Croce is a tourist trap during the afternoon, and not used for the purpose that it was intended for when it was created. I will attempt to dissect the patterns of this Piazza as to why it is not widely used, as well as compare it to the nearby Piazza della Signoria as well as Siena's Piazza del Campo.



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The Piazza of Santa Croce during the daytime is an Emblematic Space (Space focusing on an emblematic object). There are many streets that converge into this large space. However, the streets that lead into the Piazza of Santa Croce are used by countless tourist groups throughout the day. While observing the Piazza, all tourist groups would enter the Piazza from different streets and gather at the main emblem: the Basilica. Even with the amount of people in the space, for the most part, the Piazza space was unused, except for a couple of tourist groups that would walk through the Piazza to get to the Basilica. When comparing to the Piazza del Campo in Siena, you can see that the tourists there also use the space; whether it was for sitting in the shade, or gathering in their groups.

My first suspicions were to dissect why the space was not being used. In *Dynamics of Delight*, Smith talks about how “in very expansive piazzas the tendency is for most people to confine themselves to the perimeter of the square” (Smith, 164). In Piazza Santa Croce, all street vendors are directed away from the center of the Piazza. Not only that, but there is a height difference between the piazza and the ground level. This recalls the project that was presented to Tom about the steps leading up to a Piazza. He stated along the lines that people will more likely use a Piazza that you step down in, rather than stepping up. There is also “creative ambiguity” (the counter-point between ‘hereness’ and ‘thereness’) between the bars and cafes that surround the Piazza, and the Piazza itself. The restaurants and café bars that surround the Piazza are on the ground level. Between these places and the Piazza are the sidewalk and the street, which cars and cyclers pass through. All of these instances add to why most of the activity surrounds the exterior of the Piazza.



*Above: Front steps of Santa Croce*



*Above: Piazza del Campo in Siena*



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Observing how the space was used at night would hopefully give me a better understanding to how the locals use it when the tourists are gone. My findings however are that the locals use the space in the same pattern as the tourists: around the perimeter of the Piazza.

Looking closer at the light patterns of the Piazza, it helped paint a clearer picture. All the light in the Piazza is focused either on the Basilica itself and the steps below it or around the street edges of the Piazza, particularly on either ends of the space. We can contrast this to Piazza della Signoria where the space at nighttime is sufficiently lit, partly due to the Uffizi, as well as the plethora of neighboring restaurants and café bars that provide light to the space.

Smith also talks about strict symmetrical patterns, and how they “fail to elicit an aesthetic response because it lacks the critical minimum of unpredictability or complexity requiring to be resolved” (Smith, 22). The façade of Santa



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Croce is completely symmetrical right down the middle, and this extends to the other end of the Piazza marked by the unused fountain. In comparison to Piazza della Signoria, the Palazzo Vecchio is not symmetrical, nor are the nodes of activity around it.

The buildings that line the Piazza Santa Croce also follow a more ordered pattern. There is a lack of randomness for the most part. On one side of the Piazza, the buildings all contain overhangs with rectangular windows. There are slight variations of the windowsill surrounding it, but for the most part they follow an ordered pattern. The opposite side of the Piazza also follows an ordered pattern with a slight variation. They all have a recessed ground floor held up by buttresses, with long rectangular buildings containing arched windows.

In *Dynamics of Delight*, Smith talks about Siena's Piazza del Campo and the surprise of the Duomo that peers over the rooftops. "Whilst the Piazza is emphatically a "hereness" place, the dome and marble campanile of the Duomo which appear over the rooftops, exert their quiet magnetic attraction which eventually becomes irresistible. This example is also seen in Piazza Santa Croce. High in the background of the Piazza, the campinile of the Palazzo Vecchio also peers through the street of Piazza Santa Croce, acting as a magnetic attraction. In addition to this visual surprise, the light that was discussed earlier peers down the street that leads right into the square of Piazza della Signoria. Following the light path led me to nodes of activity away from Piazza Santa Croce.



*View from Santa Croce to Piazza della Signoria*