



Patricia Melvin's painting depicts a common use of public space—a street fair—in New York City, possibly the most public city in the U.S. Are such uses of public space becoming events of the past in America? Are we destined to withdraw further into cyberspace as the popularity of the Internet expands? Will the only public spaces left be commercially invented ones? These and other related questions are examined by Tridib Banerjee in this Longer View, with a focus on what role planners can play in determining the future of public space.

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We worry these days that public space, indeed the public realm, is shrinking. This essay examines the underlying causes of such discontent, in the context of historic and recent transformations in social values and public ethos. Seemingly, three major trends—privatization, globalization, and the communications revolution—will continue to shape the future demand and supply of public space. Planners must anticipate the effects of such trends, but also focus on the concept of public life, which encompasses both private and public realms. The article concludes by reviewing the role that plan-

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The Future of Public Space

Beyond Invented Streets and Reinvented Places

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What is the future of our public space? Not an unreasonable question to ask as we stand at the threshold of a new century. A hundred years ago this question probably would not have crossed our minds. There was then no reason to be concerned about the future of public space, for it was a time when the urban park systems of many major U.S. cities were experiencing remarkable growth (Rybczynski, 1999). In contrast, we have seen very little expansion of parks and open space systems in American cities in recent decades. Amenities that contribute to the livability of cities are now in short supply. The stock of open spaces has not kept up with population growth, especially in older core cities. While some suburbs at the edges of metropolises have added new open space, the overall metropolitan outcome has been uneven and unequal. While the wealthy suburbs flaunt their bridle paths, golf courses, jogging trails, tennis courts, and nature reserves,¹ more-moderate-income, older, and inner-city communities struggle to keep up with the growing demand for baseball diamonds, basketball courts, and soccer fields.

The shortage and inequity in the distribution of urban open space are symptomatic of larger transformations of public space and, indeed, of the public realm. Under way for some time, these changes reflect political, economic, and technological changes and make us wary. Because we do not fully grasp their implications, three key and interrelated trends continue to provoke our collective anxiety.

- First, there is a general agreement that we are experiencing a steady withering of the public realm, a trend recently exacerbated by a worldwide campaign for market liberalism and downsizing governments. As a result, we are witnessing a corresponding and palpable decline in the levels of goods and services historically provided by the government. As the traditional role and the fiscal capacity of government have shrunk, the role of the private, and to a

ners may play in advancing the cause of public space and the opportunities and initiatives for the future.

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limited extent, that of the nonprofit sectors has increased. While the growing involvement of the nonprofit sector has mitigated some of the slack created by the withdrawal of government, privatization—the “commodification” of public goods and emergence of local governments as entrepreneurs—seems to be the order of the day.

- Second, emerging conflicts and tensions at the local level over the economy, environment, and equity are becoming a by-product of a larger restructuring of the global economy characterized by growth of transnational corporate power, international labor mobility, polarized local and global economies, and subservience of local public interest to interests of global capital.
- Finally, the dizzying pace of the information and communication technology revolution is contributing to profound changes in the traditional concepts of place and community, local versus global interests, individual and group identities, and the nature of daily commerce and social relations.

Collectively, these trends represent fundamental shifts in the way public life and space are conceptualized and in the values associated with them. I argue in this article that the future designs and plans for public space must be based on an understanding of the causes and consequences of these trends and the changing nature of public life.

Social Values of Urban Open Spaces

Any discussion of the future of public spaces must necessarily begin with a retrospective view of the evolution of values and symbolism associated with urban open spaces in the past century. In the second half of the 19th century, most major cities of America—initially Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco and later Buffalo, Detroit, Kansas City, Louisville, and Rochester—acquired large chunks of land within the city and transformed them into major urban parks or park systems.² A legacy of these turn-of-the-century cities, today they continue to serve as a major civic resource. Indeed, as Rybczynski (1999) points out, the urban park systems are probably the only exception to the otherwise privatized world of city building, where private monuments, department stores, railroad stations, skyscrapers, sports stadiums, and the like have dominated the American cityscape. The park system represented an attempt to humanize the utilitarian form of American cities. This was reflected in Frederick Law Olmsted’s designs for parks and his writings about creating order and structure in the expanding industrial cities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.³ According to Rosenfield (1989), a scholar of American rhetoric, “the public park served for the nineteenth-century urban democracy much the same function that civic oratory or eloquence served in traditional republican societies: to celebrate institutions and ideological principles thought to be the genius of those cultures” (p. 222). He argues further that in the American context public parks served to inspire republican virtue in several forms: civic pride; social contact, especially between people from diverse backgrounds; a sense of freedom; and finally, common sense (as in aesthetic standards and public taste). Thus the civilizing virtues of public parks extolled in Olmsted’s designs and writings can be more broadly interpreted to include democratic ideals, good citizenship, civic responsibilities, and, ultimately, the essential social compact that constitutes the core of civil society.

Such rhetorical interpretations of the urban park, while elegant and uplifting, begged the very question of class, ethnicity, and income inequality. Social contact, especially with people of different backgrounds, was acknowledged as one of the values of open space, but almost in denial of the everyday reality of the class and ethnic ecology of American cities and the conflicts and contradictions it represented. For example, the urban parks created in the latter half of the 19th century served mainly as pleasure grounds of the upper-class elite (Cranz, 1989). Because many were located on the periphery of the city, they remained domains of the rich and the elite, beyond the reach of the poor and the working class.⁴

In the progressive era of the early 20th century, health, hygiene, and recreational opportunities for the public, especially the working class living in the congested inner cities, became the principal reasons for open space. Easy access to open space was often integral not only to metropolitan or regional planning concepts (see Sussman, 1976), but also to community- and neighborhood-scale design, epitomized by Clarence Stein's famous Radburn Plan (see Parsons, 1999) and Clarence Perry's Neighborhood Unit concept (see Banerjee & Baer, 1984).⁵ These secular objectives, inspired by Ebenezer Howard and the English Garden Cities, were proposed as an antidote to the crowded and polluted environment of the industrial city. In their 1933 Athens Charter, the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM [its acronym in French]) strongly endorsed the provision of urban open spaces as an essential principle of modern town planning, referring to open spaces as the lungs of the city.

Thus the Olmstedian view of civic pride and republican virtue that inspired the earlier parks systems of American cities was transformed into a more secular and communitarian view of a public realm advanced by the progressive ideas of the CIAM and Regional Plan Association of America. Since then, parks and open space in American cities have been identified with recreation, physical and mental health, communion with nature, and the like, making them a public good and service.

As a public good, standards for purveying open space would become codified through parks and recreation standards officially adopted nationwide. In the late 1940s the Committee on Hygiene and Healthful Housing of the American Public Health Association (1948) published *Planning the Neighborhood*, a book of standards that codified the open space requirements in urban areas and promoted local and neighborhood parks in proximate relationship with the local schools. Eventually these standards became the principle for open space and the community facilities elements of general plans, re-

quired by state enabling legislation or the 701 Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In promoting the public service aspect, parks departments were now more directly involved in programming and organizing recreational events, and their focus was more on social utility of parks than on their earlier aesthetic merits and civilizing aims. Thus, Forest Park in St. Louis, originally designed in 1880 in the Olmstedian tradition, was redone at the turn of the century as a collection of golf courses, tennis courts, museums, zoos, and other such utilitarian facilities (Heckscher, 1977).⁶

Thus, what began as part of a grand civic design movement gradually became more populist, more institutionalized, and more bureaucratized as part of planning the rational city (see Boyer, 1983). In the absence of sufficient capital budgets, however, open space requirements as postulated in city general plans remained advisory and mainly unrealized. Furthermore, budget cuts of the mid-1970s had a disastrous effect on cities' ability to even keep up the current stock. New York City, with some 26,000 acres of public parks, is a case in point: Its maintenance staff was cut almost in half during this period (Siegel, 1992). With declining maintenance, parks became vulnerable to abuses and were shunned by the public. Studies conducted in the 1970s questioned the validity of contemporary open space standards given the lack of use of parks in the inner city (Gold, 1972).

Furthermore, in recent years, market protagonists have begun to challenge the very assumption that parks and open spaces, along with such other public facilities and services, necessarily have to be a public good (see Richardson & Gordon, 1993, for example). Indeed, financially strapped cities are already forced to rely on private resources to create open spaces like the corporate plazas commonplace in downtown America today (see Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998). Meanwhile, privately owned shopping malls continue to capture much of the public life in America while its Main Street languishes. Privatization of public life and spaces is the focus of the following section.

Decline of the Public Realm: A Narrative of Loss

In common parlance, public space is associated with parks, playgrounds, or systems of open space that are obviously in the public realm. But not all open spaces are in the public realm, and for that matter not all public spaces may be open, in the sense of being either alfresco or accessible and free. Many years ago Kevin Lynch (1972) asked these questions quite succinctly: How open are our open spaces? Are they accessible physically as well

as psychologically? Are they widely available and amenable to user control? Are they distributed equally or equitably in an urban region? If they are not, then are they all truly public or democratic?⁷

In recent years the concern for public space has extended beyond the questions of adequacy and distributive equity of parks and open spaces. They are now subsumed under a broader narrative of loss⁸ that emphasizes an overall decline of the public realm and public space. Several themes characterize this narrative of loss, some focusing on the public space and public life, others on aspects of social capital and civil society. Discussions that focus on the atrophy of American public life have sought to find historical causes and culprits. These include, in chronological order, the early resistance of American Puritanism to pleasure and decadence associated with public life; the advent of industrialization that preordained the dominance of the automobile; the flight of the American middle class from the inner city; the Modern movement in architecture, which glamorized the urban grid; and the economics of cheap and expedient land development (Hitt, et al., 1990). To these one could add zoning, suburban shopping malls and office parks, strip malls, and urban sprawl, all of which have been the subject of critical writings in recent years (Garreau, 1991; Kowinski, 1985; Kunstler, 1993). Others concede that the kind of social cohesion necessary for enduring public life typical of many homogeneous cultures is difficult to obtain in the U.S., where the public remains heterogeneous and pluralistic (Hitt, et al., 1990; Sennett, 1988).

It has been suggested also that the decline of the public realm is paralleled by a corresponding decline in the public spirit, which resides in the very core of our collective intuitions of civil society. Using Jane Jacobs' term "social capital" to describe the civic virtue that constitutes the spirit of trust and citizenry, Putnam (1993) has argued that such civic formations as "singing groups" and "soccer clubs" actually may improve local governance in modern societies. Yet, echoing the narrative of loss, Putnam (1995, 1996) has also suggested that since World War II there has been a precipitous decline in the civic spirit in the U.S. He attributes this decline to the growing exposure to television (and today, one supposes, the Internet) and the privatization of leisure activities.⁹

Still another aspect of this narrative of loss involves public incivilities and loss of territorial control as explanations for the retreat of the general public from spaces in the public realm. According to this view, the steady decline in the quality and supply of public spaces is a product of a general decline of civility and decorum in public spaces. The "broken window" syndrome—weakened social control and lack of enforcement—is widespread in the inner city, and panhandlers, drug-dealers,

and the homeless have expropriated public spaces. The presence of graffiti, trash, and vandalism intimidate the general public. According to one protagonist, such public spaces should be recaptured through strict regulation of land use and behavior in public (Ellickson, 1996).¹⁰

Privatization of Public Life and Spaces

For many observers, the sense that the public realm is declining is further corroborated by a growing trend of what is commonly described as "privatized" public spaces. (Or should we say "publicized" private spaces, as some might wonder?) Seemingly an oxymoron, the term is used commonly to describe the corporate plazas and open spaces, shopping malls, and other such settings that are increasingly popular destinations for the public. Of course, none of these privately owned and managed spaces is truly public, even though they might have been created through incentive zoning programs of an earlier era, in exchange for additional Floor Area Ratio (FAR) for the developer and the property owner (see Frieden & Sagalyn, 1989; Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998). There is a presumption of "publicness" in these pseudo-public spaces. But in reality they are in the private realm. In many parts of downtown business districts, a thin brass line or a groove cut in the sidewalk, often accompanied by an imbedded sign, makes it clear that the seemingly unbounded public space is not boundaryless after all. The owner has all the legal prerogatives to exclude someone from the space circumscribed by sometimes subtle and often invisible property boundaries. The public is welcome as long as they are patrons of shops and restaurants, office workers, or clients of businesses located on the premises. But access to and use of the space is only a privilege, not a right. In San Francisco, the planning department requires owners to post a sign declaring that the space is "provided and maintained for the Enjoyment of the Public [sic]"¹¹ but any expectation that such spaces are open to all is fanciful at best. Many of these spaces are closely monitored by security guards and closed circuit television cameras, which has prompted critics such as Mike Davis (1990) to refer to them as "fortress" environments. Because of their designs, locations, and management policies,¹² for the most part corporate open spaces remain insular and mostly empty, save for perhaps a lunchtime crowd and occasional clusters of smokers. Heroic efforts like San Francisco's to the contrary, limitations of public access and use of such spaces have been taken for granted in most cities.

Shopping malls, however, are a different story. Over the last 50 years, shopping malls have become the "new

downtown" (Rybczynski, 1993) and replaced the Main Street culture of America to become perhaps the most ubiquitous and frequently visited places today (Kowinski, 1985). When the kind of public activities typical of downtown public spaces—distribution of leaflets, political discussions and speeches, solicitation for funds or signatures, sale of home-baked cookies, voter registration, and the like—started to occur in the shopping malls, their managers responded by excluding such activities and people. Legal challenges ensued. The issue of public access in shopping malls has been tested in the U.S. Supreme Court and the highest courts of seven different states (for details, see International Council of Shopping Centers, 1987). The critical question in all of these court cases was whether the shopping centers, by dint of becoming a de facto downtown, could also be considered the kind of public forum that the downtowns once represented. As of 1987, only Massachusetts and Washington courts had ruled in favor of requiring public access, while Connecticut, New York, North Carolina, Michigan, and Pennsylvania allowed denial in their decisions (International Council of Shopping Centers, 1987). In sum, more often than not shopping centers are not to be construed as public forums.¹³ The same principle applies to corporate plazas.

Collectively, the shopping malls, corporate plazas, arcades, gallerias, and many such contrived or themed settings create an illusion of public space, from which the risks and uncertainties of everyday life are carefully edited out. The distinction thus created between the private and public are not unlike Mircea Eliade's (1987) notion of sacred and profane spaces, or Mary Douglas' (1980) treatise on purity and danger as the basis for separating the unwanted from our public experience. Thus the sanctity of the private spaces is preserved by excluding what Lofland (1989) refers to as the "unholy" and "unwashed"—the panhandlers, the winos, the homeless, and simply the urban poor. In many cities, in the name of pedestrian safety or extreme weather, public agencies have planned and built networks of underground tunnels, sky bridges, and pedways to connect these insular corporate spaces. This has created what Trevor Boddy (1992) calls the "analogous city," or a city of contrived urban spaces that keeps out the poor and undesirables.

It seems that proliferation of such insular and protected spaces has extended beyond the business and shopping districts of the city. In recent years we have seen a phenomenal growth of gated communities throughout the U.S. (Blakely & Snyder, 1997). When asked why they chose to live in gated communities, most respondents spoke of the need for safety and a search for community, presumably one that is based on homogeneity and cohesion. The result is the spread of a "club

phenomenon," an apt metaphor used some years ago by Charles Tiebout (1956) and his colleagues to explain the political economy of metropolitan fragmentation involving multiple autonomous municipalities (Ostrom et al., 1961).¹⁴ The study by Blakely and Snyder suggests that this tendency to live in club-like communities with common spaces and facilities arises from a fear of strangers, especially of those who come from a different class, culture, ethnicity, or national origin, and not just a concern for personal and property safety.

Interestingly, the search for utopia in such controlled communities has become both an object and a subject of the expanding domain of the entertainment industry. The life portrayed in the movie *The Truman Show*, filmed in the original New Urbanist icon of Seaside, Florida, is a caricature of programmed but insular private and public life in a controlled setting. While the utopian life may be an object of entertainment in *The Truman Show*, The Disney Corporation takes the search for utopia seriously in the planning and development of Celebration, a planned new community not too far from Disney World in another corner of Florida. Only 3 years old, this company town is an edited New Urbanist utopia that emulates the quintessence of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century American towns, and a clear departure from Walt Disney's initial dream of a high-tech utopia. Although, as Kurt Andersen (1999) points out, "Celebration is the real EPCOT—the quasi-democratic, postmodern fulfillment of Walt's totalitarian, late-modern vision" (p. 74). Entertainment-based corporate vision even provides the script for uses of the "public" realm and space, such as Disney music or Christmas carols piped in through loudspeakers installed in the streets or fake snow falling in the downtown at night (Andersen, 1999).¹⁵

If Celebration successfully combines the communitarian ideals—the "trap," as David Harvey (1997) would argue—and a hyper-reality, as suggested by Umberto Eco (1990), that only Disney can so effectively and professionally construct and orchestrate, what does it presage about the future of the public realm? Andersen (1999) speculates that Celebration may in fact set the stage for reinventing the suburb and may influence public taste to demand similar buildings and places in the future. The real question is whether such products will come packaged only in the form of insular and gated communities. If that happens to be the trend, the democratic ideals of public space and the public realm will no doubt atrophy further. Yet the brand of public life offered by Disneyland and its cohorts continues to intrigue such noted observers as Charles Moore (1965) and Umberto Eco (1990), who concede that while contrived, these settings offer clean, efficient, and predictable encounters

and experiences. The entry fee guarantees that and, in the words of Charles Moore, “You have to pay for public life” (p. 57). The public seems to agree and be willing. Disney’s command of the future of public life and space may in fact be a *fait accompli*, according to some observers (see Ghirardo, 1996).

Invented Streets: A Public Life of *Flânerie* and “Third Places”

The sense of loss associated with the perceived decline of public space assumes that effective public life is linked to a viable public realm. This is because the concept of public life is inseparable from the idea of a “public sphere” (Habermas, 1989) and the notion of civil society, where the affairs of the public are discussed and debated in public places. The domain of the public sphere is seen to exist between the privacy of the individual and domestic life and the state (or the government).

But there is another concept of public life that is derived from our desire for relaxation, social contact, entertainment, leisure, and simply having a good time. Individual orbits of this public life are shaped by a consumer culture and the opportunities offered by the new “experience economy” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The settings for such public life are not necessarily public spaces. According to Ray Oldenburg (1989), such settings can be called “third places,” as opposed to the first place of home or the second place of work or school. These are places such as bars or taverns, beauty salons, pool halls, sidewalk cafés, and the like. There are culture-specific third places—the pubs of England, sidewalk cafés of Paris, and beer gardens of Germany, for example—that have been historically associated with the culture and urbanism of different cities. Today, Starbucks’s coffee shops, Barnes and Noble or Borders bookstores, health clubs, video rental stores, and various combinations thereof have become major icons of the third place in many American cities.

Theme parks are the epitome of the invented place and capture some aspects of our collective public life, but they are not third places. Created often as facsimiles of some distant place or time—past or future—theme parks are corporate productions within the tourism and entertainment industry. The art of contrivance, the special effects, and the stage sets are all by-products of the film industry, and it should not be any surprise that many of the theme parks are created and managed by subsidiaries of Disney, Universal Studios, MGM, and the like (see Fjellman, 1992). Much has been written recently about the role of corporate theme parks in leading the way for the packaging and selling of urban places, in-

cluding the recently built fantasy environments of Las Vegas (Boyer, 1992; Gottdeiner, 1998; Hannigan, 1998; Huxtable, 1997; Sorkin, 1992). Relatively less has been said about the reasons why these contrived settings are so successful in drawing the public, other than that they provide entertainment, an essential ingredient of the experience economy (Moustafa, 1999; Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Looking, gazing, and watching are all part of our normal stimulus-seeking behavior, as any textbook in cognitive theory would confirm. The cultural and social context of this behavior, however, has received much attention in the critical literature on the urbanism of modernity. Many of the writings focus on the relationship between the observer and the environment, and how the built form was created and shaped to facilitate the display of merchandise for mass consumption. The setting for these analyses is usually Paris in the late 19th century, immediately after its Haussmanian transformation. The subject of this literature is the *flâneur*, the person who engages in *flânerie*, “the activity of strolling and looking” (Tester, 1994, p. 1). The arcades of Paris are considered the epitome of settings for such activities, and their forms and functions have become a subject of writings on comparative urbanism (see Geist, 1983). These arcades were the earliest forms of privatized public places and the precursor of modern department stores, shopping malls, and the invented streets—streets created as stage sets—of the Western world.

Today, it is the appropriate mix of *flânerie* and third places that dictates the script for a successful public life. The new shopping malls are now designed to encourage *flânerie* and “hanging out.” Horton Plaza in San Diego, CityWalk in Universal City, and Two Rodeo in Beverly Hills are all examples of these invented streets that attempt to combine *flânerie* with a third place.

The same formula is also applied to reinvented streets and places like Third Street Promenade in Santa Monica, Quincy Market in Boston, South Street Seaport in New York, Fremont Street in Las Vegas, Harborplace in Baltimore, and of course the most celebrated reinvention of the century, Times Square in New York City. Without doubt they are themed environments: Horton Plaza uses metaphors such as “Italian Hill Town”; CityWalk claims to be an interpretation of Los Angeles itself; Two Rodeo tries to look like a European shopping street; and Times Square has become a multimedia tribute to America’s communication and entertainment industries. These reinvented places usually derive their design metaphors and marketing rhetoric from the history of the place, as is the case for South Street Seaport, Quincy Market, and Harborplace. In all of these cases, the attempt is to create a public life of *flânerie* and consumer-



FIGURE 1. Interior of Passage Jouffroy, one of many Parisian arcades of the late 19 century. These original invented streets still function as settings for public life. (photo: C. Lavoie, 1995)

ism; whether it actually takes place in a private or public space does not seem to matter. The line between public and private spaces blurs very easily, as was the case in the Parisian arcades.

In the tradition of earlier civic design, American architects and planners often romanticized European urban spaces, and tried to recreate them in American cities, but without success (see Dyckman, 1962). The expectation was that if we design the space, activities will happen. This type of physical determinism proved wrong time and again, but the practice still continues in the urban design of civic centers and similar public spaces. Yet, the success of these invented streets and reinvented places demonstrates—as the developers have discovered, if unwittingly—a shift of emphasis from form to function—that being *flânerie*. Not that form does not matter, but it need not be tied to formal layouts of Apollonian spaces of exclusive civic and institutional uses. The message is that the form is only a stage set that can be easily changed and embellished to accommodate celebrations, happenings, and other such ephemera (see Schuster, 2001). There is no need to copy European urban form. The American city can be the model now: New Orleans Square in Disneyland, CityWalk in Universal City, Hollywood Boulevard or New York Street in Disney World, New York New York in Las Vegas.

“Convivial Cities” and “Insurgent Citizenship” in a Globalizing Era

Lisa Peattie (1998) has argued that while planners usually seem to be obsessed with creating or restoring a sense of community, they have given very little attention to conviviality as a planning goal. Conviviality, Peattie argues, is more than just feasting and fun, drinking and good company. Using Illich’s (1973) original definition of conviviality as “autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment” (p. 11), Peattie (1998) speaks of sociable pleasures as purposeful activities. And these may include not just singing in pubs, street dancing, or tailgate parties, but also “small-group rituals and social bonding in serious collective action, from barn raisings and neighborhood cleanups to civil disobedience that blocks the streets or invades the missile site” (p. 246). Clearly, many of these communal public actions typically happen in existing public spaces—streets, squares, parks, and other open spaces or in such public buildings as school auditoriums or community centers—thus reasserting the role and sustenance of the public realm. However, one wonders whether Peattie’s ideal of democratic conviviality that bonds people in communal public actions is becoming increasing vestigial and episodic



FIGURE 2. Universal CityWalk, Los Angeles, a contemporary invented street. (photo by permission The Universal Studios, Inc., 1996. All rights reserved.)

in the face of a market propensity to service conviviality needs in the form of a growing number of third places in invented streets and spaces. Is the typical consumer public completely co-opted by the public life of third places and invented streets?

But there is hope still for Peattie's ideal. In a perverse way this hope stems from a globalizing economy that

produces several tensions and contradictions. It is reflected in the recent demonstrations against the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, the International Monetary Fund/World Bank meeting in Washington, and the Asian Development Bank meeting in Bangkok. The tensions symbolize powerlessness of the local public over global corporate interests; inexorable trends of cul-

tural homogenization; growing income polarization; environmental degradation on a local and global scale; a crisis of cultural, local, and social identities in multiethnic urban communities; and the like. These demonstrations are expressions of frustration over a lack of local control, which increasingly leads to mobilization at the local and neighborhood level. An example of such local activism is the recent charter reform of the City of Los Angeles, which mandates the formation of neighborhood councils. As such initiatives occur, it can be expected that much of the interest will focus on improving the livability of local streets and neighborhoods and the shared public realm. In some cities, community activism helped convert abandoned or vacant lots into vest-pocket parks or neighborhood playgrounds. In many inner-city neighborhoods, immigrant communities have brought street life back into the community. There is a general growth in the neighborhood-based nonprofit groups that are taking charge of community improvements—from affordable housing to small business development—and thus infusing conviviality and creating third places even in poorer neighborhoods that the conventional market sees as too risky for investment. Thus, the claim to local public space can arise from a variety of insurgent citizenship and community initiatives (see Holston, 1995; Sassen, 1995). Could this be the beginning of a movement to reclaim the public realm at the community level?

The Communication and Information Technology Revolution

The recent revolution in communication and information technology has made it possible for us to isolate ourselves from the public life and spaces even further. We are now all citizens of cyberspace and cybercommunities (“cyborgs,” according to Mitchell, 1995) where conventional concepts of public space and place are increasingly becoming outmoded. The *terra cognita* of the “City of Bits” has very little bearing to the territorial city of senses, or for that matter our conventional concepts of public and private spaces. What concerns many is whether this cybercity and its cyberplaces may totally obviate the social life of real places and communities. For it is now possible to conduct many of our daily activities—work, shopping, business transactions, socializing—through the Internet, minimizing the need for face-to-face communication or travel. Thus, the transaction costs of living in cities can be minimized by belonging to a network society, which further reduces the need for public encounters in public spaces.

Indeed, we now wonder how communication technology might revolutionize our ways of living, and what



FIGURE 3. Horton Plaza, San Diego, another notable example of an invented street. (photo: T. Banerjee, 1996)

effect it might have on conventional urban form. We can now shop with the click of a mouse. But will that obviate construction of new shopping malls? Will e-commerce lead to the closing of older, languishing shopping centers and malls? What will be the alternative uses of such spaces? If more and more workers stay home and telecommute, will that lead to a stronger sense of localities and local public spaces? Will it lead to the revival of the community main streets and third places?

The communication technology revolution may also presage other developments that could further negate public life and the public realm. The cyborgian life might lead to greater isolation, withdrawal, and anomie. It may lead to what former Labor Secretary Robert Reich (1991) had referred to as the secession of the successful, now to an analogous city in cyberspace. Seemingly, the duality of a public city of the poor and dependent popu-



FIGURE 4. An evening view of Fremont Street, Las Vegas, a reinvented street featuring a light show on its vaulted canopy. (photo: D. Bahl, 1996)

lation and a private city of the successful will continue on the two sides of the digital divide.

What Should Planners Do?

What can we conclude about the future of public space from this overview? It is clear that there are some fundamental shifts underway in the manner in which the public realm has been traditionally conceptualized. Whether we call it a shrinking of the public realm or something else, the distinction between the public and the private will continue to blur, as intersectoral ventures—among the public, private, and nonprofit sectors—in solving societal problems will inevitably increase. It is clear that our public life increasingly will occur in private places or in cyberspace, as more and more people get connected to the Internet and benefit from the information and communication technology revolution. It is unlikely that our life as cyborgs and our membership in multiple cybercommunities will obviate

our fundamental needs for social contact and life in the outdoors. It is quite likely that the demand for parks, playgrounds, and urban open spaces will continue to increase, especially in inner-city neighborhoods with increasing numbers of school-age children and senior citizens.

Whether local governments will be able to meet the demand for such public spaces through comprehensive planning remains uncertain. Chances are that in the absence of appropriate local government responses such demands will be met through grassroots initiatives, through the nonprofit or even the private sector, through owner participation agreements in exchange for additional development rights, and the like. We will probably see continuing fragmentation of the political space of urban areas and continuing struggle for local control of public spaces. No doubt there will be pluralistic purveyors in a Tieboutian world of “club”-like municipalities, with a growing sub-Tieboutian stratum (gated communities and neighborhood councils, for ex-

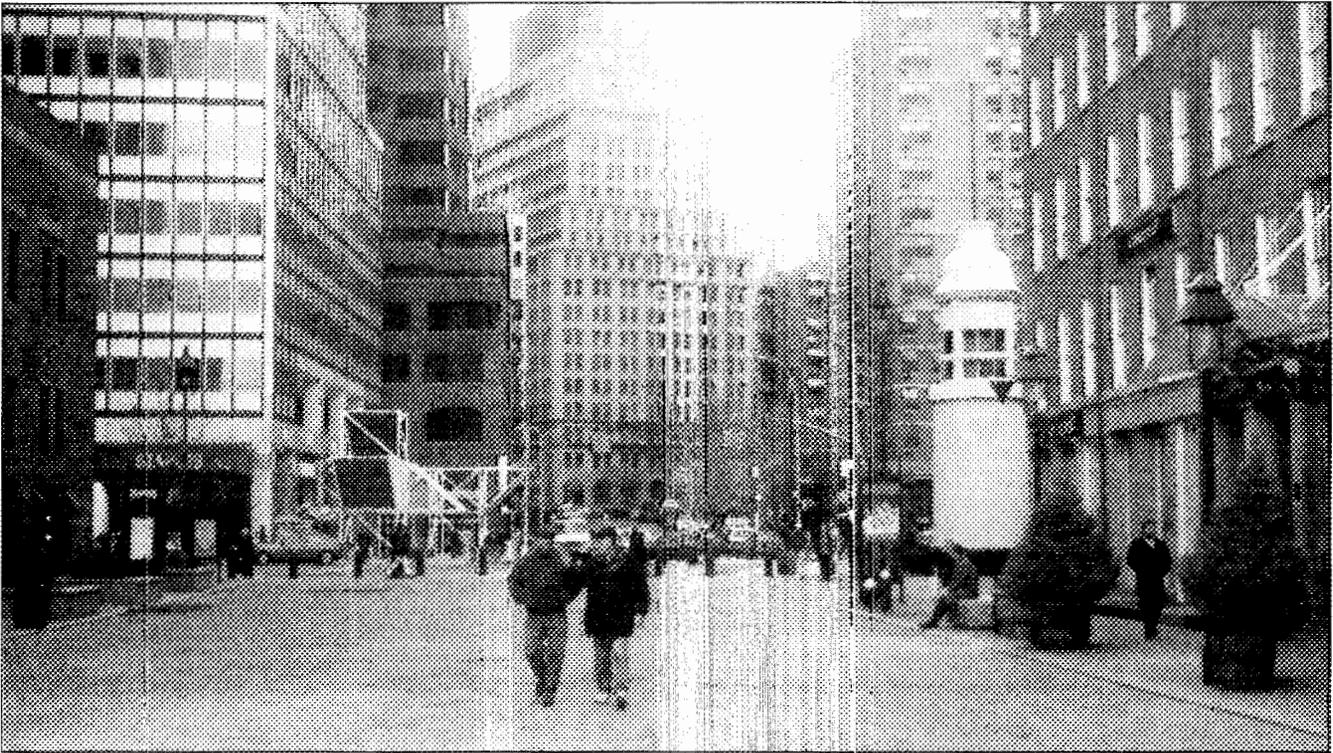


FIGURE 5. South Street Seaport, New York City, a reinvented place that has received scholarly attention.
(photo: T. Banerjee, 1999)

ample), creating considerable inequity in access to urban amenities. Ultimately, and once the fragmentation runs its course, there will be increasing demand for regional governance or other forms of redistributive authority to address intraurban inequities. Whether such regional governance will actually materialize is another matter. In effect, planners dealing with the future of public space will find themselves in the middle of these multiple and continuing tensions.

What, then should planners do? What will be the goals of public space planning? The following are some of the possibilities:

- **Engage in advocacy for parks and open spaces.** Planners should continue to serve as advocates for public space or support such grassroots initiatives, especially for neighborhoods and localities chronically short of such amenities, which have a significant number of young children or senior citizens. This requires not only being responsive to local initiatives, but also finding creative solutions in dense and built-up areas, by means such as vacating or closing streets, widening sidewalks, developing space under freeway overpasses or on underused roofs of parking structures, sharing the use of business parking lots, and the like.
- **Mediate between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.** Assuming that solutions to societal problems will increasingly be solved by collaboration among all three sectors, planners should play a critical role in defining creative solutions under specific circumstances.
- **Revisit existing open space standards.** Many open space standards were written half a century ago as specification and input standards rather than as output-oriented performance criteria that could lead to creative alternatives involving both the public and private realms. Planners should rewrite those old standards.
- **Focus on the concept of public life rather than public spaces.** Traditionally, planners have associated public life with public spaces, and the principles of land use planning and urban design are based on this premise. Yet, increasingly

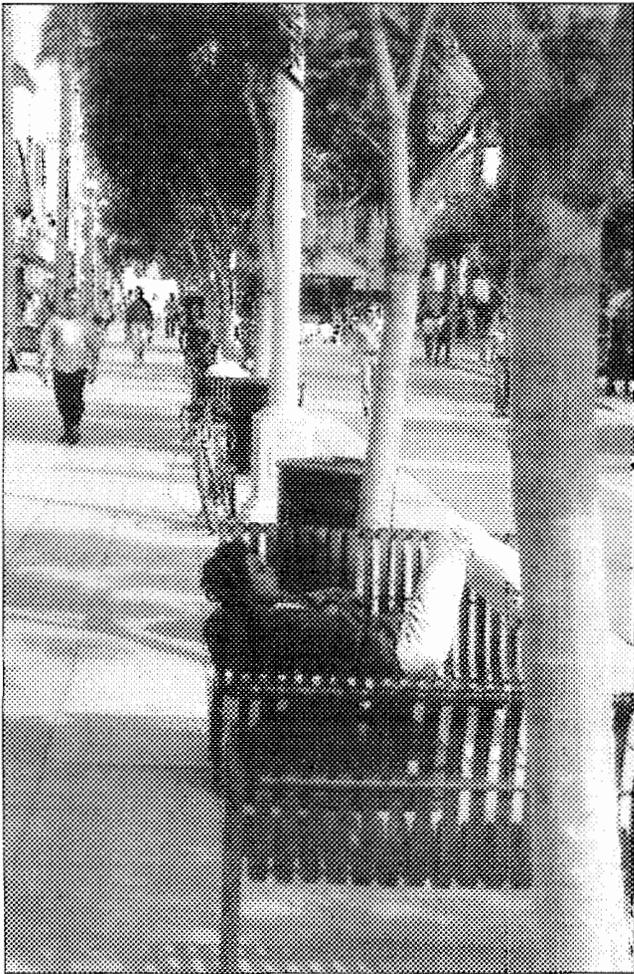


FIGURE 6. Third Street Promenade, Santa Monica, a reinvented street. (photo: T. Banerjee, 1996)

public life is flourishing in private places, not just in corporate theme parks, but also in small businesses such as coffee shops, bookstores, and other such third places. Conviviality as a planning goal can be used in urban design, community plans, and mixed-use developments. Incidentally, it could also lead to local economic development, benefiting small businesses. Perhaps it will be possible for planners to develop a conviviality rating scale for different land uses based on empirical data. Perhaps planners can make a case for third places with a high conviviality rating to be exempt from FAR calculations, thus giving developers incentives to include such settings in their schemes.

- **Resist uses of the public realm to create analogous cities.** Advocate against systems of

spaces and connections that isolate a privileged class of the public by excluding the rest.

- **Reinvent old and languishing areas.** Convert Main Street shopping districts or declining malls obviated by e-commerce as viable public spaces and destinations for vigorous public life.
- **Support small businesses of the third place variety that contribute to public life.** Here planners may draw inspiration from France, where the government subsidizes cafés that provide music and other entertainment in communities that lack viable public life. Originally used to stimulate public life in the insipid new towns outside Paris, this policy, according to Koenig (1995), has expanded throughout France. What is appealing about such an idea is that it combines local economic development with stimulating public life and community development.
- **Make creative use of such mechanisms as linkage fees to improve the supply of public spaces and the public life there.** The City of San Francisco has used linkage fees to create a trust fund for parks and open spaces. Although many developers see linkage fees as a form of exaction, increasingly they have accepted them as a cost of doing business. Indeed, in some cases linkage fee requirements can be a distinct benefit. The requirement by many cities for developers to contribute a percentage of project costs toward public art is a case in point. In Los Angeles public art is defined to include performing arts, and noontime and evening concerts in corporate plazas funded by such initiatives are a major boost for the downtown public life.
- **Focus on the design of streets as public spaces.** There is a growing literature on the role of streets in defining the quality of public life and space. Appleyard (1981), Jacobs (1993), Ramati (1981), and Moudon (1987) have all emphasized how streets and sidewalks can be captured for social purposes. Yet in conventional land use planning, the design of streets is still dictated by traffic flow and parking standards and treated mainly as a part of the circulation element of the general plan.
- **Include conviviality and public life as objectives of street design.** In recent years street improvements and pedestrian amenities along existing bus or light rail transit corridors have advanced the cause of streets as convivial public space. We are finally becoming aware that transit systems, including transit stations, can be an important element of the public realm and public space.

- **Respond to the changing demands of increasing diversity of the urban population.**

Recent immigrants have brought with them new shopping habits, entertainment and leisure behavior, uses of informal economy, and a new dependency on the public realm. Immigrants and ethnic groups are seemingly now the major users of inner-city parks (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995). We are seeing a new revival of street life and increasing popularity of mercados, farmer's markets, street markets, and street vending. Yet current zoning codes and business regulations often discourage such activities. Planners can achieve conviviality in public space and the spontaneity of public life by changing such regulatory practices.

Epilogue

I would not want to end this essay with the impression that public initiatives are totally dead as far as public space is concerned. This is not quite the case. It seems that throughout the United States, scattered efforts are underway to create new open space under local, state, and federal initiatives of various sorts. Certainly the economic growth and prosperity of the 1990s has helped to finance such initiatives. The 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and more recently the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, authorized by Congress in 1998 to fix America's aging infrastructure, have created new opportunities to transform inner-city transportation rights of way for productive public space. Boston's "Big Dig" is a case in point. Putting the city's central artery underground will create 27 acres of new ground space in a premier downtown location, of which three quarters or about 20 acres will remain open. Earlier, San Francisco created major waterfront promenades and access by demolishing the Embarcadero Freeway. The Freeway Park that Seattle built in the 1970s to link the Capitol Hill neighborhood to the downtown is another example of a creative public project to produce new open space over transportation infrastructure.

Similarly, public efforts to create parks and open spaces in conjunction with safe neighborhoods or land and water conservation programs continue, and seemingly are gaining strength. A detailed review of such programs currently existing at the federal and local levels is not possible within the scope of this article. But the recent passage of Proposition 12 in California that allows the State to raise \$2.1 billion through general obligation bonds to spend on the acquisition, development, and protection of new and existing cultural, natural, and recreational areas is a case in point. In the metropolitan



FIGURE 7. Crocker Galleria, San Francisco, created from the right of way of a vacated street. (photo: T. Banerjee, 1994)

areas of California, the State's \$854-million budget for the first year has provided a major boost for parks and recreation projects. Whether such initiatives will spread throughout the country to signal a new revival of civic and public values remains to be seen. Let's hope they do.

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NOTES

1. According to Southworth and Parthasarathy (1996) large quantities of open space are in public ownership in suburbia, but not all of it is accessible to the public. It belongs to public utilities, water districts, or is simply not suitable for development. They note also that public space is often used for ornamental or aesthetic purposes.
2. In most instances these were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux.
3. S. B. Sutton (1971), editor of Olmsted's writings, comments, "Olmsted believed, with his contemporaries, in the spiritual progress of man. As a landscape architect he tried, above all, to civilize the city; his parks simulated nature in response to the needs of an urban population" (p. 1). For a discussion on Olmsted's views implicit in his open space plan for Los Angeles, see Hise and Deverall (2000).
4. In fact, sports and games typically enjoyed by the urban working class and various ethnic groups were overtly discouraged from these urban spaces (Cranz, 1989). Scholars of modernity would also point out today that while women were considered an essential element of the family functions of the pleasure garden, they were probably not expected to be there on their own, as in any other public spaces (Fraser, 1993; Friedberg, 1994).
5. The Radburn Plan itself represented an attempt to organize housing around a public realm of a unified system of parks and open spaces. In 1928 Stein (quoted in Parsons, 1999) wrote:
The backbone of all our cities and towns has been the highways, the means of getting from place to place. In this New Town the backbone of the community will be the parks. All houses will face on gardens. Every child will be able to walk to school without crossing a single road. Every house will be within a minute's walk of a park as wide as a New York City block. Here the little tots may amuse themselves in the sand. Here the younger children may play in safety. Here the grown children and adults may enjoy themselves with tennis, quoits, or other sports, and here those who want quiet and escape from the mad movement of the automobile may walk for a mile or more in parks out of sight of highways. (p. 150)
6. In 1911 the St. Louis Parks Department ceased to exist and became the Division of Parks and Recreation of the Department of Public Welfare.
7. Although Lynch did not quite use the term "public," the sense was quite implicit in his discussions.
8. A term used by Margaret Crawford, currently at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, in a video interview conducted at USC in 1996.
9. Not all agree with Putnam's conclusion. Lemann (1996), for example, argues that while Americans might be bowling alone, they are increasingly "kicking in groups," referring to the growing popularity of youth soccer and parents' involvement in such group activities.
10. In recent years, City authorities in New York and San Francisco, have adopted aggressive programs to remove homeless people from major public spaces. Although denounced by homeless groups, these rules make it difficult for the homeless to assemble in some parks, subway stations, and bus and train terminals. In Los Angeles, Pershing Square was reclaimed through an expensive face lift.
11. From a plaque posted at the entrance to Grubhorn Park in San Francisco (see Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998, p. 204).
12. For detailed discussions of these issues, see Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1998).
13. The International Council of Shopping Centers (1987) has conducted extensive surveys of policies on what is allowed and what is not, including types of groups and various constraints.
14. For a more recent discussion of the Tieboutian club phenomenon, see Heikkila (1996).
15. For the original stories in the two books on Celebration reviewed by Andersen, see Ross (1999) and Frantz and Collins (1999).

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