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# The Journal of Public Space

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Mapping Urban Injustices  
in Public Space.  
Challenges and Opportunities

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Sabine Knierbein  
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**“Public space in cities is a common good, meant to be open, inclusive and democratic, a fundamental human right for everybody.”**

Dr Luisa Bravo

The Journal of Public Space, *Founder and Editor in Chief*

City Space Architecture, *Founding Member and President*

(from the statement submitted at the 26th UN-Habitat Governing Council held in Nairobi, Kenya, 8-12 May 2017)

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THE JOURNAL OF PUBLIC SPACE

# Mapping Urban Injustices in Public Space. Challenges and Opportunities

*Guest Editors*

Nadia Charalambous and Sabine Knierbein

*Managing Editor*

Luisa Bravo

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Cover image: Peace Bench at Inner Cyprus Border in Nicosia. Picture by Luisa Bravo.

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EDITORIAL

## **Mapping Urban Injustices in Public Space. Challenges and Opportunities**

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Cities, as human constructs, are undergoing rapid transformations influenced by economic globalization, mobility, and European integration. This dynamic evolution brings about substantial changes in European urban landscapes, marked by the intense flow of people and cultures. This social and cultural diversity challenges established notions of identity and social relationships (Phillips, 2007) directly affecting public spaces. The need to understand the evolving role of these spaces as shared resources and as a common good to exercise democratic rights, cultural demands and social needs in a diverse urban environment is highlighted.

Public spaces, seen as essential components of urban experience, do play a pivotal role in accommodating the diverse social life of various groups (Madanipour, 2003). The complexity of interactions within public spaces becomes apparent when observing the ways different user groups relate to the urban environment and to each other. Spatial dynamics further complicate the issue, as highlighted by Noussia and Lyons (2009). Coexistence in public spaces may give rise to spatial boundaries, acting as locales where diverse people, activities, and ideas come into contact, maintaining a distinctive contrast. However, this contrast can lead to the exclusion of certain groups, resulting in the colonization of urban space by dominant groups and contributing to a sense of fragmentation. Artificially constructed boundaries in cities, as noted by Hillier, can shape people's experiences of space, potentially reflecting social inequalities in the spaces they occupy (Hillier, 2005). Legeby further emphasizes that inequalities in the use of public space can influence movement flows, co-presence, and the nature of activities, directly contributing to spatial exclusion (Legeby, 2009).

The continuous and fast-paced transformation of cities has not only reshaped the physical landscape but has also sparked intricate social conflicts, sets of cultural values and beliefs and political contentions among the diverse urban groups that often assert competing claims over the decisions and processes that influence urban transformations, raising fundamental questions about the fairness and justice of these processes. A prominent concern revolves around the prioritization of affluent urban

interests, potentially neglecting the well-being of more vulnerable communities. Madanipour (2019) in this respect has differentiated between original claims in public space debates, and their rhetorical embracement by agencies catering for the wellbeing of affluent groups. In response to these perceived injustices, global initiatives have been undertaken, albeit primarily at a declarative level, to address this disparity. The New Urban Agenda, endorsed at the 2016 Habitat III Conference of the United Nations, emphasizes the pivotal role of public spaces in fostering sustainable cities that embody qualities such as inclusivity, connectivity, safety, and accessibility—fundamental components of urban justice (UN Habitat, 2016). The agenda aligns with the notion that quality public spaces are indispensable for enhancing the overall quality of life for individuals from diverse backgrounds. These environments not only cultivate a communal atmosphere but also strengthen the local economy while encouraging interactions that surpass social, cultural, and political barriers, leading to citizens well-being (Andersson, 2016).

In this dialogue, public space emerges as a pivotal focal point—a potential catalyst for a more equitable and just urban transformation. Public spaces, by their nature, possess the capacity to embrace layers of political, economic, and cultural expressions, providing platforms for diverse urban groups to articulate and assert their rights within the urban fabric. Beyond this, public spaces serve as dynamic arenas where different urban actors can engage in encounters, negotiations, and interactions, facilitating a dialogue that could lead to more inclusive and fair urban development. They hold the potential not only to foster social cohesion but also to contribute to the fair allocation of wealth, resources, benefits, and opportunities. In the ever-evolving economic, political, and social reality, there is an urgent call for a critical re-evaluation of public space as not merely a passive backdrop but as a dynamic and transformative facilitator of urban justice while acknowledging the wide spectrum of urban injustices that currently can be mapped in contemporary public space worldwide.

"Mapping Urban Injustices in Public Space: Challenges and Opportunities" is a nuanced exploration into the complex dynamics that shape contemporary cities, particularly focusing on the inequalities and injustices manifesting within public spaces. The special issue seeks to address the intricate question of how urban (in)justices can be effectively mapped. This thematic inquiry navigates the multifaceted challenges inherent in identifying and understanding urban injustices, while concurrently unveiling the opportunities that arise from employing diverse mapping strategies. The challenges embedded in mapping urban injustices within public spaces are manifold. Urban environments are intricate ecosystems influenced by historical, social, economic, and cultural factors, making the identification and representation of injustices a complex endeavour. The multifaceted nature of these injustices, spanning racialized, class-based, social, religious, national, ethnic, gendered, and other dimensions, further adds layers of complexity to the mapping process. Additionally, the rapid pace of urban development and the dynamic nature of social structures necessitate methodologies that are responsive, adaptive, and capable of capturing evolving injustices.

However, within these challenges lie significant opportunities: The act of mapping itself becomes a powerful tool for raising awareness and advocating for change. By visualizing injustices, mapping brings visibility to marginalized communities, fostering a shared understanding of the issues at hand. It becomes a form of civic engagement that empowers communities and informs policymakers, thereby initiating conversations

around the need for more inclusive, radically emancipatory, and democratic, and indeed more just urban policies. Moreover, mapping urban injustices in public spaces offers an opportunity for intercontextual and intersectional research. It encourages a deep and thoughtful examination of various forms of injustices, recognizing their interconnectedness and exploring how they intersect and impact specific urban environments. This intersectional approach enhances the depth of analysis and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play when seeking to understand the present urban experience as a catalyst of the contemporary human condition.

The special issue aims to showcase practical and case-study-based mapping experiences, offering a tangible exploration of challenges faced and lessons learned in mapping urban injustices. By presenting empirical case studies, critical thought, and real-world applications, too, the contributors aim at bridging the gap between theoretical debates and actionable strategies for addressing urban injustices by using multiple and combined research methods. "Mapping Urban Injustices in Public Space: Challenges and Opportunities" serves as an important intellectual space where scholars, practitioners, and policymakers can delve into the complexities of urban inequalities. Through thoughtful analysis and practical insights, the issue contributes to the ongoing discourse on how mapping can be a transformative force in fostering more just, inclusive, and first and foremost more democratic and equitable cities.

The articles in this issue offer an understanding of these viewpoints. The range in city sizes and path dependencies, and the unique historical and contextual elements contribute to a detailed contextual and intercontextual exploration of the topics discussed.

Public space's potential role in fostering encounters, negotiations, and interactions between urban actors, facilitating a dialogue that could lead to more inclusive and fair urban development lies at the heart of the first paper "Mapping Everyday Public Spaces in Urban Neighbourhoods. The Case of Limassol". The paper focuses on the city of Limassol, Cyprus emphasizing the often-overlooked significance of peripheral and neighbourhood public spaces in contrast to well-recognized central public spaces. While central areas are traditionally considered vital for cultural and social interactions, the paper argues that neighbourhood spaces, where daily life unfolds, are equally crucial. It aims to enhance understanding of the mechanisms shaping neighbourhood public spaces, stressing the importance of considering various factors and perspectives in their analysis. Employing relational theories, the paper explores the links between the physical and social aspects of three residential public spaces in Limassol, examining how the boundaries of public space are negotiated. Spatial analysis and social science methods are used to reveal the essential role these spaces play in fostering interactions and bridging societal divides in multicultural cities. Given the coexistence of various identities, languages, religions, and cultures, tensions and hostilities may as well arise as new points of contact, respect, and collaboration. The paper contends that the potential for interaction and meetings in these public spaces is essential for fostering encounters in the daily lives of individuals, thereby encouraging tolerance and a sense of belonging in diverse urban environments. The paper proposes that acknowledging the nuanced 'significance' of these places, influenced by local practices and behaviours, is pivotal for fostering effective urban planning and robust community development.



In a similar line of research, the second paper “Between Alienation and Revolution. Incursions into Collectives of Soirees in Metropolitan Public Spaces in Belo Horizonte, Brazil” explores the dynamics between alienation and revolution, through the realm of collective gatherings in metropolitan public spaces in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. Central to the analysis is the exploration of the role of everyday life, emphasizing the perpetual oscillation between routine and innovation, a concept elucidated by Lefebvre (2014) and Knierbein (2023). These collectives, formed by young residents proud of their peripheral identity, go beyond mere social gatherings—they represent a distinct form of political action. Within the evolving social and symbolic landscape of the peripheries, daily life takes on a transformative quality, catalysed by broader social changes. The ethnographic study employs a nuanced lens to unravel the intricate fusion of poetry, performance, and the utilization of public spaces within these gatherings. Essentially, these collectives serve as dynamic expressions of everyday resistance. Their activities, from poetic expressions to unique bodily movements and innovative organizational methods, contribute to the creation of new public spheres. In the midst of these soirees, a collaborative process of critical and political reflections unfolds, giving rise to a creative and liberating capacity that defines the essence of these gatherings. The paper sheds light on how these unique social spaces become arenas for the emergence of innovative forms of expression, resistance, and collective empowerment within the context of urban life in Belo Horizonte.

Citizen empowerment is also explored in the third paper of the issue “Participation as a Global Urban Strategy Towards Resilience. A Case of ‘Benevolent Urbanism’”. The prevailing notion in academic discourse that citizen participation in public space production is integral for democratic governance and justice is addressed here. While citizen involvement in urban planning has gained prominence, the paper focuses on its conceptualization in the context of the Rockefeller Foundation's "100 Resilient Cities" initiative. The emergence of philanthropic foundations as key players in Greek urban development, particularly during austerity politics, is explored and critically evaluated. Specific public space projects funded during the crisis reveal hegemonic discourses endorsed by these foundations. The paper then critiques the Rockefeller Foundation's initiative and the resilience strategies adopted in Athens and Thessaloniki. Despite inclusive rhetoric, the paper argues that participation, instigated by an international foundation and facilitated by global consultants, does not organically emerge from local planning processes. The analysis suggests that within this global initiative, participation becomes a matter of techno-managerial "know-how," thereby raising crucial questions about its limited potential to address socio-environmental injustices and contribute to democracy.

Finally, the concept of public space pedagogy emerges in both the fourth and the fourth paper, respectively “Discovering and Mapping Aspects of Spatial Publicness. Observations from an Undergraduate Architecture Studio in Cyprus” and “Lived Urban Form. Using Urban Morphology to Explore Social Dimensions of Urban Space”, as a transformative thread, offering new frameworks for understanding (un)just urban morphologies in the realms of urban research, planning, architectural theory, and praxis. Such a pedagogical approach challenges conventional perspectives and encourages a more nuanced examination of the complex interplay between justice and urban form.

Within the undergraduate architecture studio at the University of Cyprus (fourth paper), the focus revolves around two pivotal questions: "What fundamental design elements contribute to the success of public spaces, and how are they consciously incorporated

into the design process?" This paper endeavours to explore the concept of spatial publicness, translating observations from its inquiries into tangible design strategies and tools. The core design aspects identified in this exploration have served as the foundation for recent design briefs, rigorously tested within the architectural studio's 2nd-year coursework. Simultaneously, these aspects have been transposed into transferable values, including diagnostic and synthetic tools suitable for an undergraduate architectural studio setting. This ongoing approach, seamlessly integrated into the studio context, employs case studies derived from the students' work output. The analysis of these case studies aims to yield conclusions that guide the pedagogical approach, facilitating an iterative and evolving exploration of effective design principles for public spaces.

The fifth paper argues that the urban configuration functions as both a political and social arena, shaped by the complex interplay between lived space and the actors driving the transformative processes within urban space. Traditional studies of urban form have grappled with the intricate task of understanding a city's intricacies by closely examining its physical characteristics. In response to a growing concern about the nuanced processes and tensions inherent in the dynamics of social and cultural change, this paper explores how various urban morphological approaches conceptualize, analyse, and navigate the intricate relationship between social space and urban form. By drawing upon insights from the Erasmus+ project, *Emerging Perspectives on Urban Morphologies (EPUM)*, this study investigates how diverse approaches interpret the dimensions of lived space inscribed within the urban form. Furthermore, it engages in debates on how a multidisciplinary, open educational approach can challenge normative notions surrounding the agents, practices, and processes involved in producing lived spaces. This expanded perspective shifts the study of urban form beyond a singular focus on a static object, embracing the dynamic processes and tensions spanning changing scales. It also considers the material expressions of urban populations and their multifaceted political, economic, and cultural practices, all of which contribute to the ongoing production of the built environment.

Important key themes are highlighted in this special issue. *Everyday Practices and Locality* emerge as a key themes in mapping urban (in)justices in public space. The exploration of neighbourhood public spaces in Limassol emphasizes the transformative potential of everyday practices. It recognizes that interactions in these spaces contribute to a sense of belonging and tolerance. In *Belo Horizonte*, the paper addresses the role of collective gatherings in reshaping a broken everyday life in peripheral areas. These gatherings become arenas for creative expression and political reflection, challenging traditional notions of public space use and redefining new forms of creative and prosaic protest by marginalized subjects. The urban configuration study further acknowledges the importance of everyday practices in shaping transformative processes within urban spaces. Local practices and actions, whether in Limassol, *Belo Horizonte*, or beyond, emerge as critical factors in understanding the nuanced significance of public spaces.

Inter- and first and foremost transdisciplinary collaboration also emerge as key themes, with the papers highlighting the necessity of integrating insights from various knowledge fields and knowing subjects to address the multifaceted nature of urban challenges. The call for a collaborative approach extends beyond academic research to encompass urban design, policy formulation, NGOs, NPOS, artists activists and other forms of community engagement. The papers collectively advocate for a more differentiated understanding of urban phenomena that transcends disciplinary boundaries.

All papers discuss social justice and related intersectional research paths as a key topic of this issue. The discussion of injustices spans multiple dimensions, addressing not only the spatial but also social, racial, and economic aspects. The coexistence of various identities and cultures, emphasizing the potential for tensions and hostilities as well as for care and friendship is acknowledged in Limassol. The examination of 'just' in present-day politics highlights the ambiguity of the term, encompassing moral and ideological dimensions. It brings attention to the rise of injustices, particularly in Europe, driven by neoliberal policies and austerity politics. The critique of the Rockefeller Foundation's initiative and resilience strategies underscores the need to consider socio-environmental injustices within the discourse on fake urban participation. These papers collectively advocate for an intersectional understanding of urban inequalities, urging a comprehensive approach that considers diverse social, cultural, and political dimensions in the pursuit of social justice.

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# Mapping Everyday Public Spaces in Urban Neighbourhoods. The Case of Limassol

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## Abstract

Central public spaces in cities have always played an important role in urban experience, and continue to have a city-wide significance, often described as the meeting spaces of cultures, politics, social and individual trajectories. Peripheral and/or neighbourhood public spaces, where the everyday life of citizens unfolds, rarely enjoy any of this significance and may not receive the attention needed from the main stakeholders involved. Many researchers have highlighted the significance of these public spaces in cities, pointing out that the patterns of everyday life in residential neighbourhoods – whether it is the chance encounters in the local market or conversations in the local square– are the essential material of society and may well have integrative social functions, of an individual or collective initiative.

This paper aims at an empirical contribution to a better understanding of the synthesizing mechanisms, which shape public spaces in cities' neighbourhoods, by addressing the variety of factors involved and their relations and by highlighting the need for manifold perspectives on the localized 'meaning' of places, constructed, and shaped by local practices and behaviours. Drawing on the theoretical framework of relational theories, the paper sets out to explore the links between the physical sphere and the social sphere of three different residential public spaces in the city of Limassol, critically exploring the ways in which the boundaries of public space are challenged and negotiated. Both spatial analysis and social sciences methods are employed to map and unveil the essential role residential public spaces play, in bringing together what society divides in contemporary, multicultural cities, where multiplicities of identities, languages, religions and cultures may naturally give rise to tensions and even hostilities. The potential for interaction and meetings between different people backgrounds in the public realm is shown to be a crucial prerequisite for shaping encounters during their everyday life, encouraging tolerance and a feeling of belonging.

**Keywords:** Limassol, neighbourhood public space, everyday practices, space syntax

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### **Cities, Public Space and Public Life**

Public spaces in cities have long been a focal point of study across a multitude of academic disciplines. They have played an essential role in shaping the social and spatial fabric of urban settlements. Drawing from multidisciplinary perspectives, this paper delves into the multifaceted nature of public spaces, encompassing their historical, cultural, spatial and social significance, highlighting their crucial role in fostering social interactions and community engagement (Madanipour, 2004, 2010). Public space is viewed in this paper as a space for the people, a space of encounter and social engagement, a space that encompasses historical, cultural, and social processes, providing opportunities for meeting, fostering the capacity to live together among strangers in urban environments (Gehl, 2011).

However, this role is being redefined by contemporary dynamics, including commercialization, privatization, and urban sprawl, which raise questions about the relevance and accessibility of public spaces in modern urban life. Contemporary urban places have recently been associated with issues of alienation, fragmentation, and urban segregation, among others, that are driven by economic, technological, cultural, and political dynamics that have emerged since the 1980s. Saskia Sassen's observations on the crisis of public spaces underscore the extent to which commercialization and privatization have restricted the democratic potential of these spaces (Sassen 2008). This transformation mirrors wider societal realities, including power imbalances and social exclusion (Carmona, 2010). Such disparities often manifest in tensions, conflicts, segregation, and unequal patterns of development in the urban landscape. These factors influence the way public spaces are designed, used, and managed in different parts of the city (central, peripheral, neighbourhood), leading to significant implications for everyday urban life.

In addition, central public spaces have always been characterized by an essential role in the urban structure of the cities, and continue to have a city-wide significance, as they are regarded as a vehicle for facilitating social interactions, exchanges of thoughts, public discourses and political expressions. The plazas and central squares and parks in contemporary cities, are spaces of large investments, aiming to serve the needs of the market, making cities attractive for firms to relocate to and for tourists to visit. Public spaces in the historic cores of cities usually gather a diversity of public uses, and often act as the main arenas of public life, whereas residential areas often experience an "absence" of lively public spaces at the scale of the neighbourhood, as a result of the commodification and privatization of public space or as a consequence of the great pressure for expansion as the immense flows of immigration many times leads to unplanned urban patterns (Madanipour, 2004). Peripheral and neighbourhood public spaces lack the same significance as central public spaces and often receive less attention from local authorities.

However, it is increasingly acknowledged that neighbourhoods, often overlooked in favour of historic cores, hold equal importance in any city. Neighbourhood public spaces are vital contributors to everyday urban life and are essential for both the city's urban structure and its residents' well-being. These spaces come in various sizes, from residential streets to city squares, and play a fundamental role in fostering community engagement and a sense of belonging (Gehl, 2011). Well-provisioned, efficiently managed, and properly maintained public spaces are crucial for residents, as they provide meeting points and encourage interactions, thus nurturing emotional connections to both the

neighbourhood and the city as well as opportunities for community engagement, a sense of ownership, belonging, and overall well-being. This is particularly crucial in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where residents rely on public spaces to connect, enhance their quality of life, and create a positive neighbourhood image.

In such neighbourhoods, the neglect of public spaces often drives residents to seek alternative forms of social life. Citizens take the initiative to create bottom-up, unofficial processes like temporary structures, activities, and events within underutilized formal public spaces or vacant urban areas. So, despite the challenges discussed above, including commercialization and privatization, these spaces continue to play a crucial role in promoting residents' well-being and community development, often through grassroots initiatives that help safeguard the right to public space and advance social justice. As Mitchell rightly emphasizes, "struggle is the only way that the right to public space can be maintained and the only way that social justice can be advanced" (2003, p. 5).

Acknowledging the importance of neighborhood public spaces, this paper has a twofold objective. Firstly, it seeks to enhance the understanding of the intricate mechanisms responsible for shaping public spaces within urban neighborhoods. This involves delving into the multitude of factors at play and examining how they interact with one another. By doing so, the paper endeavors to unravel the intricate web of forces that influence the character and function of these spaces within neighborhoods.

Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of adopting a diverse range of perspectives when exploring these public spaces. In essence, it underscores the need to recognize that the significance of a place is not a fixed or universal concept but is instead a complex product of the local practices, behaviors, and interactions that take place within it. Public spaces take on unique and evolving meanings within specific neighborhoods due to the distinctive ways they are utilized, experienced, and valued by their local residents. This paper aims to shed light on the dynamic and context-dependent nature of these spaces, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of how they are constructed and shaped by the people who inhabit and use them.

### **Relational Perspectives on Public Space**

A relational perspective that can shed light on the intricate dynamics of public spaces in urban neighbourhoods is discussed in this section. The past decade has witnessed significant changes in the utilization of public spaces, involving diverse stakeholders, contextual adaptations, and innovative supply mechanisms to meet collective needs. However, the mechanisms governing the provision and evolution of public spaces remain inadequately understood. This study aims at an empirical contribution grounded in a relational perspective, seeking to elucidate the interplay of factors influencing the creation, utilization, and transformation of neighbourhood public spaces. The comprehension of these mechanisms will potentially contribute to the enhancement of the quality of public life in urban neighbourhoods.

The theoretical underpinnings relevant to this study, posit an interdependent relationship between the physical structure of the city and its societal fabric. These theories emphasize that society and space are inherently linked and mutually influential. Notable contributions by scholars such as Hillier & Vaughan, (2007); Lefebvre, (1991); Legeby, (2010); Tornaghi & Knierbein (2015), underscore the intrinsic connection between urban form and social dynamics.

Examples of the authors' own historical research into the social and cultural change in the city of Nicosia through time, revealed that the relations between these social and spatial trends may be more complex than was envisaged in the old Chicago School idea, according to which social relations can be read through their spatial attributes; the evolution of a city's spatial structure is only one component in the processes which shape the city as a social entity (Charalambous et al, 2015). Once a variety of groups, actors and processes are taken into account, the analysis still presents significant gaps in knowledge, which can be filled if greater efforts are made to widen the variety of social science approaches used in conjunction with a morphological approach. A sound grasp of the city' morphological history within its broader social context forms an important aspect of the historical concern to reconstruct the communal life of the past. When analysing the historical evolution or periods of urban form, urban theorists often tend to focus on physical aspects and actors with certain leverage on planning decisions, while sociologists may tend to highlight the impact of group formations on the city and the significance of everyday use and routine social activities in shaping the identity of a city. In this paper, we are interested in developing methods that link these two components: the physical and the human. Building on previous work, this paper maintains that space syntax, being a relational tool which identifies the lived relationality not just in terms of spatial relations but also in its practical applications (linking social phenomena to spatial characteristics) could engage with relational theories, such as the assemblage theory as developed by DeLanda (2006), opening up avenues for further methodological advances and development of its hermeneutic potentials.

More specifically, the theoretical underpinnings of assemblage theory, and space syntax theory inform the methodological framework of this paper. Assemblage theory, derived from Deleuzian philosophy, emphasizes that a city is a singular entity composed of diverse physical and social elements (De Landa 2006, 2016). Cities are viewed as a nexus of social assemblages at varying scales, with each scale offering a legitimate object of study. Assemblages comprise heterogeneous elements, which interact to generate cities and their properties, evolving through territorialization and deterritorialization processes. Space syntax theory, developed by Hillier and Hanson, examines spatial layouts and their connection to social activities, such as movement and social activities (Hillier and Hanson 1980). This theory underscores that urban space is inextricably linked to social practices and that spatial configuration plays an integral role in the experiences of individuals within space.

In line with these theoretical perspectives, the study embraces a relational interpretation of public space as an entity shaped by, and simultaneously shaping, social, economic, and political relationships. This approach challenges static spatial conceptions and introduces a dynamic portrayal of public space, emphasizing its co-creation through socio-temporal processes, and the spatial context. A conceptualization of public space from a relational perspective portrays it as multi-layered, fluid, dynamic, and continually evolving. Relational approaches suggest that space *"can only be explained by its social, political and cultural context and by the relations between people and objects, both at a given moment in time and in the course of history"* (Tornaghi & Knierbein, 2015, p. 4).

Drawing upon these theoretical foundations, this paper aims to address the methodological implications and to elucidate the mechanisms underpinning the creation, utilization, and development of neighbourhood public spaces in the city of Limassol,

Cyprus, which has undergone significant social, economic, and political transformations that have impacted its urban form and public spaces (Severis 2006).

### **Mapping Neighbourhood Public Spaces- a Relational Methodology**

To this end, a methodology is developed that proposes the study of the interrelation between a number of key parameters. These include the study of the spatial configuration and physical attributes of public spaces, such as their topography, infrastructure, and accessibility; the part-whole relations analysing the interplay between different scales and components in the city's urban structure; the everyday practices to understand the varying roles of individuals and social groups in public space through their daily activities and interactions as well as the users' perceptions; the stakeholders relations through mapping of the networks of actors influencing public space development. The analytical tools utilised include:

Spatial configuration and physical characteristics:

- Axial Map Analysis: Examining connectivity and accessibility;
- Visual Connectivity: Assessing visibility potential from various points;
- Mapping Land Uses: Identifying activities and facilities, understanding the development of the area and its users. Utilizing walking surveys and land use maps for data collection;
- Recording Physical Characteristics: Documenting lighting, shading, furniture, and more;
- Observation and Photography: Capturing infrastructure and physical attributes;

The part-whole relations - interplay between different scales and components in the city's urban structure:

- Social and demographic data (census)
- Integration of spatial (space syntax axial analysis and land use mapping) and social data (census data, historical archive information, primary and secondary sources) to understand the impact of demographic, economic, and cultural changes on the city as a whole and on local areas and public spaces.

Everyday Practices (Users' Perception - Actual Use of Space):

- Questionnaires to gain insights into the perceptions and behaviours of individuals regarding public space use
- Observations (snapshots) to identify and map movement, activities, and interactions within public spaces.

Actors/Stakeholders:

- Mapping of the network of actors involved in the production, use, and development of public spaces through interviews, study of relevant sources to assess the roles of local authorities, policy makers, and decision-making bodies.



This comprehensive methodology offers a robust framework for delving into the multifaceted nature of public spaces within urban neighbourhoods, enabling a thorough understanding of both their spatial and social dimensions. The methodology is designed to facilitate a nuanced analysis, encompassing the physical and social characteristics, as well as the dynamic interactions among various actors and users, which collectively contribute to the evolution and shaping of public spaces. The proposed methodology is applied to three distinct case studies of urban neighbourhoods in the city of Limassol and their respective public spaces.

### **Limassol neighbourhoods: the case studies**

A comprehensive understanding of the complex mechanisms that have an impact on the creation and evolution of selected public spaces in Limassol is attempted through an in-depth analysis of three neighbourhoods, each representing different spatial, historical and social characteristics. The choice of these neighbourhoods is informed by a range of criteria, including their social demographics, historical developmental timelines, noteworthy social occurrences, land use patterns, and spatial configuration.



Figure 1. The case studies. Source: Authors.

The objective is to encompass a broad spectrum of socio-economic and physical characteristics, presenting a comprehensive view of diverse urban neighbourhoods and the public spaces associated with them. This approach allows valuable insights into the intricate relationship between urban development and the social fabric of these neighbourhoods. More specifically, the chosen areas consist of a neighbourhood located

in Potamos Germasogeias under the jurisdiction of the Germasogeias Municipality, a neighbourhood known as Arnaout or Arnaoutgeitonia within the Limassol Municipality, and Apostolos Loukas, a neighbourhood situated in the Agios Athanasios Municipality as designated by the Department of Lands and Surveys (see Figure 1).

The first empirical study is conducted in the municipality of Germasogeia, situated along the city's coastal area, that has experienced significant and abrupt growth following the war in Cyprus in 1974. This locality has evolved into a prosperous tourist and residential destination, with a predominantly foreign population. In contrast, Arnaout is a deprived neighbourhood nestled in the historic core of the city, with its development dating back to the 19th century. It holds a unique historical significance as it was originally a Turkish-Cypriot neighbourhood, and post-war, Greek-Cypriot refugees from northern Cyprus exchanged their homes with Turkish-Cypriots. The third area studied is Apostolos Loukas, which was developed as refugees' settlements to house the Greek-Cypriot refugees following the 1974 war. Although this neighbourhood is located above a highway and surrounded by recently developed affluent areas, it has retained its status as a less affluent suburban region, mainly inhabited by elderly residents.

Aspect	Municipality of Germasogeia (Potamos Germasogeias)	Municipality of Limassol (Arnaout)	Municipality of Agios Athanasios (Apostolos Loukas)
Location	coastal area	old city	suburban area
Development	1960 and mainly after 1974	19th century	rapid expansion after 1974
Population	Cypriots and big proportion of foreigners	Greek Cypriots, Moslem, Roma	Greek Cypriots - refugees (locals)
Land Uses	tourist and residential zone	industrial and residential zone	residential zone
Character	beneficial area wealthy neighborhood	deprived area poor neighborhood conflict zone	poor area
Social Classes	Upper Class	Lower Class	Lower Class
Proportion of Unemployed	0% to 7.5%	14% to 18%	10% to 14%
Main type of buildings	apartment blocks	single house	row houses
Main Occupancy Status	occupied and used as usual residence high proportion of dwelling reserved for seasonal/secondary use and of vacant dwelling	occupied and used as usual residence	occupied and used as usual residence
Type of families nucleus	Married Couple Families	Married Couple Families and a high proportion of Lone Mother Families	Married Couple Families and a high proportion of Lone Mother Families
Main Ages (Mean Age)	25 - 39 (35.67)	25 - 29 and 50-54 and 80+ (43.60)	25-49 and 60 - 80+ (47.18)
Public Spaces	a coastal big linear public space (Dasoudi) and other smaller public spaces	a part of a linear park, a public park and a public square	a big number of small public spaces
Global Scale	main arteries - medium integration other areas - not integrated	main arteries - medium integration other areas - medium integration	main arteries - other areas - some integrated some not
Local Scale	main arteries - integrated other areas - medium integration	main arteries - integrated other areas - integrated	main arteries - integrated other areas - not integrated

Table I. The main characteristics of the three case study areas. Source: Authors.

Table I provides an overview of the characteristics of each urban neighbourhood. These areas have been selected as they represent diverse urban contexts in terms of the

proportion of non-Cypriot residents, unemployment rates, and the social class of their population as well as in terms of their spatial configuration within the city of Limassol. These areas, along with their respective public spaces, have evolved within distinct social contexts, resulting in variations in social dynamics and spatial attributes. The multifaceted factors contributing to the creation of public life and public spaces within these distinct socio-spatial contexts are explored aiming to shed light on essential aspects concerning their generation and development. Table 2 provides an overview of the key factors identified in each case study, based on the methodology developed.

	Public Space		
	Germasogeia	Arnaoutogeitonia	Apostolos Loukas
<b>Physical Characteristics</b>	Ps1 - public park - clean - trees - good infrastructure Users visit it because: Near their house and good infrastructure Ps2 - abandoned Ps3 - public park - clean - some infrastructure Users visit it because: Near their house Ps4 - linear park - clean - infrastructure - trees and beach Users visit it because: Near their house, its quiet and for the activities	Ps1 - public park and kiosk - unclean - trees - infrastructure - vandalism Users visit it because: Near their house and its quiet Ps2 - public park - unclean - vandalism - infrastructure Users visit it because: Near their house and in central position Ps3 - linear park - sometimes unclean - some infrastructure Users visit it because: Near their house and its quiet and for the activities	Ps1 - public park and monument - clean - some infrastructure - vandalism Ps2 - public park - unclean - vandalism - infrastructure Ps3 - public park - sometimes unclean - some infrastructure Users visit it because: Near their house
<b>Part - Whole</b>	global scale (not integrated except PS4) local scale (integrated) main and secondary roads surround the public spaces	integrated local and global scale main roads near the public spaces	global scale (not integrated) local scale (medium integration) pathways surround the public spaces
<b>Process - Time</b>	Ps1 - during afternoon (25 - 44 age) Ps2 - no users Ps3 - during afternoon (25-34 age) Ps4 - all the hours but most during mornings and afternoons (all ages and ethnicities)	Ps1 - during all the hours especially the weekends (people over 55) Ps2 - during afternoon (people under 18) Ps3 - during afternoon and night more users (all ethnicities and ages)	Ps1 - during afternoon (people over 55 and under 18) Ps2 - during afternoon and night (people under 18) Ps3 - during morning and afternoon (people over 55)
<b>Global - Local Tendencies</b>	Residents: Cypriots and many foreigners Upper Class Mean age (35.67) Coastal residential and tourist area	Residents: Cypriots refugees, Roma and Moslem Lower Class Mean age (43.60) Old City	Residents: Cypriots refugees Lower Class Mean age (47.18) Suburban area
<b>Actors Stakeholders</b>	Involvement of the municipality Absence of the residents in the production or reproduction of the public spaces	Some involvement of the municipality Some involvement of the residents	Some involvement of the municipality Intense involvement of the residents
<b>Everyday Practices</b>	- Adding of toys in Ps1 - Sometimes vandalism	- Ps1 - Greek Cypriots (organization of events, cleaning) in the past planting, and events by Turkish Cypriots) - Ps2 - Turkish Cypriots (organization of events) - Vandalization	- Ps1 and Ps2 Greek Cypriots (taking fruits from the trees, planting, cleaning) - Ps3 put flower pots, plant trees and water the greenery (with private water) - Vandalization

Table 2 – Characteristics of the public spaces in the case studies. Source: Authors.

The Germasogeia area stands out as the most affluent municipality in the city, boasting a significant population of foreign residents. In comparison to the other two neighbourhoods studied, it is well-integrated at the local scale, but not at the global scale, with the exception of the linear park of Dasoudi (Public Space 4, as shown in Figure 2). Notably, those public spaces seamlessly integrated into the city exhibited higher levels of activity and better maintenance. Interviews indicated that the municipality prioritizes the refurbishment of these particular spaces, while others are earmarked for restoration at a later stage. The municipality plays a significant role in the upkeep of public spaces, which residents actively use for various daily activities, including playing and relaxation, as revealed through interviews, questionnaires, and snapshots. Apart from some citizens' own additions of playground games to Public Space 1, no grassroots initiatives were observed.

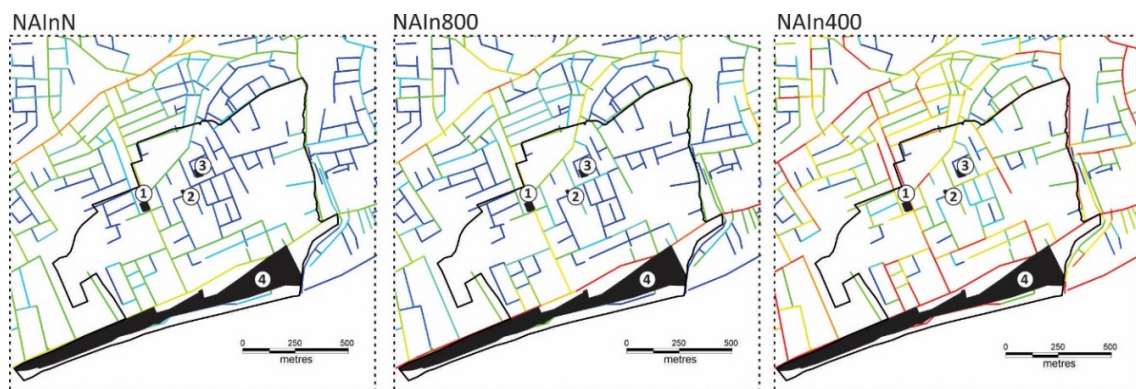


Figure 2. Integration analysis of a neighbourhood in Potamos Germasogeias (Dasoudi).  
Source: Authors.

With the exception of Public Space 2, which is located on a secondary street (as depicted in Figure 3), all public spaces are characterized by their high maintenance standards. The linear park of Dasoudi caters to a diverse range of age groups (above 25) and ethnic backgrounds at all hours. Moreover, these public spaces are frequented by individuals from various ethnicities, primarily EU citizens, non-EU citizens, and Cypriots. The consistency and interrelated nature of the results contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Germasogeia's public spaces.

In contrast, the Arnaout quarter, which is not as affluent as Germasogeia, predominantly comprises the lower social strata of the Limassol population. While this neighbourhood is integrated both at the global and local scales, possibly due to its strategic location and grid-like planning, the results of the analysis and the responses from questionnaires reveal a significant degree of spatial segregation (Figure 4). Interviews with key municipal stakeholders suggest that the municipality bears responsibility for the maintenance of public spaces. However, questionnaire responses from the residents indicate a lesser degree of municipal involvement in their upkeep. Consequently, residents often take it upon themselves to clean the parks due to their deteriorating condition.



Figure 3. Land uses of a neighbourhood in Potamos Germasogeias, Municipality of Germasogeia.  
Source: Authors.

In this neighbourhood, each public space is appropriated by distinct social groups (Figure 5): Public Space 1 primarily serves Greek Cypriot refugees over the age of 55, who share a sentimental attachment to the area. Public Space 2 is predominantly used by young people under 18, while the linear park of Garillis (Public Space 3) is frequented by diverse social groups in terms of age and ethnicity. Additionally, Public Space 1 hosts events organized by Greek Cypriots, whereas the few Turkish Cypriots living in the area usually organize any events in Public Space 2.



Figure 4. Integration analysis of Arnaoutogeitonia, Municipality of Limassol.  
Source: Authors.

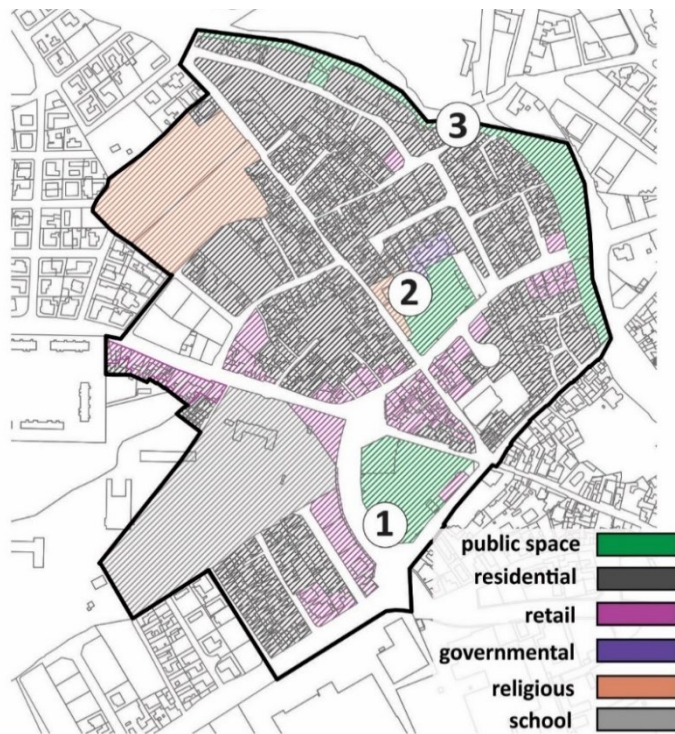


Figure 5. Land uses of Arnaout quarter, Municipality of Limassol. Source: Authors.

Apostolos Loukas, an economically disadvantaged area, is predominantly inhabited by the lower social classes of Limassol's population, and all its residents are Greek Cypriot refugees. This neighbourhood lacks integration both at the global and local urban structure scales (Figure 6). The public spaces in the area are enclosed by pathways that mainly connect to the rear of houses (Figure 7). Despite claims by the municipality regarding their involvement in the maintenance of these public spaces, the questionnaires and photographs paint a different picture: neighbours often take it upon themselves to clean the spaces, water the plants, and collect the fruit from the plants.

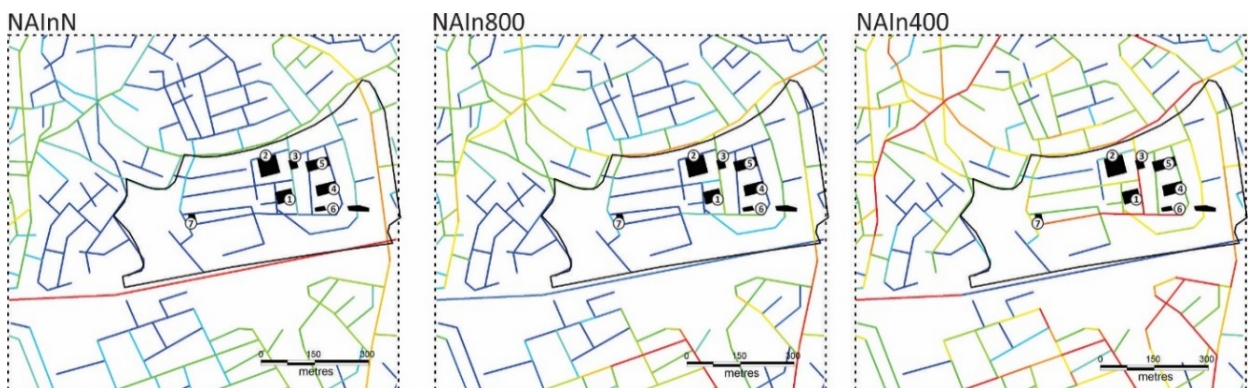


Figure 6. Integration analysis of Apostolos Loukas, Municipality of Agios Athanasios. Source: Authors.

As revealed through interviews, questionnaires, and snapshots, these public spaces typically function as extensions of residents' backyards (Figure 7). Two distinct age groups can be observed in these public spaces: the primary users of Public Spaces 1 and 2 are individuals under 18 years of age and those over 55, whereas elderly individuals predominantly use Public Space 3. Each social group frequents the spaces during specific hours, with young people primarily visiting in the afternoon and at night, while older people tend to use them in the morning and afternoon. Interestingly, while formal stakeholders in the interviews claim that the municipality is greatly involved in the maintenance of these spaces, the evidence from questionnaires, photographs, and snapshots suggests otherwise.

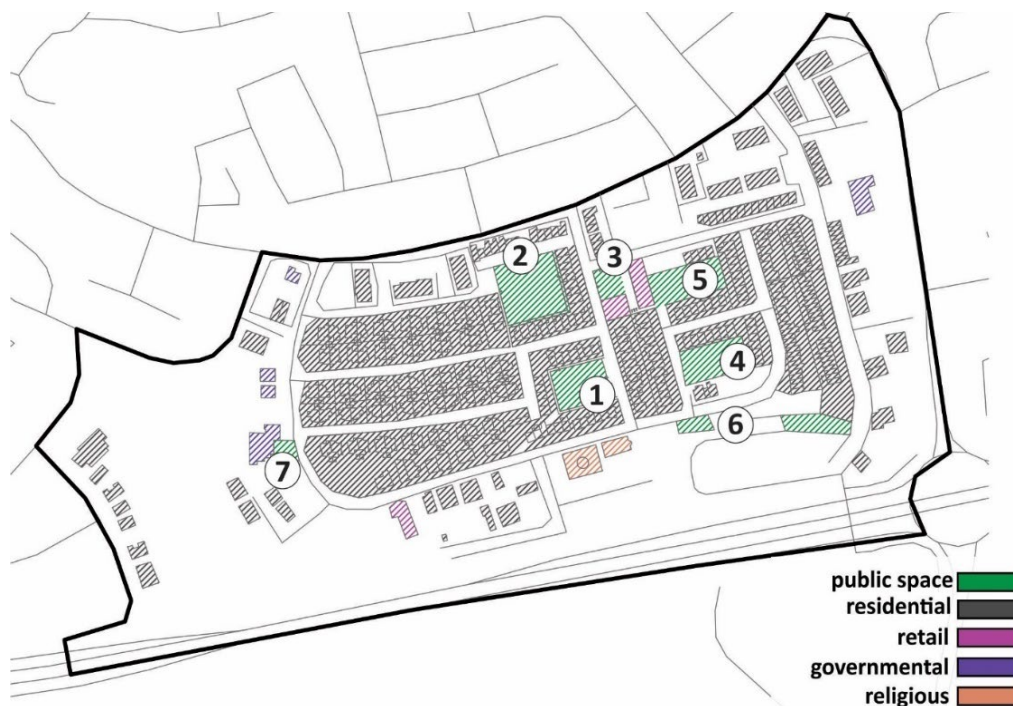


Figure 7. Land uses of Apostolos Loukas, Municipality of Agios Athanasios.  
Source: Authors.

Figures 8 and 9 provide an overview of the various types of public spaces in each neighbourhood, shedding light on their physical characteristics and the surrounding land uses, which play a pivotal role in assessing issues related to accessibility and visibility. In Germasogeia, the public spaces are predominantly situated amid main or secondary streets, buildings, and houses. Contrastingly, in the Arnaout neighbourhood, these spaces are positioned along main roads and are surrounded by retail or public buildings and houses. In contrast once again, the public spaces within the Apostolos Loukas area function as enclosed areas nestled within the heart of linear semi-detached houses, resulting in limited visibility and accessibility.

It's worth noting that there are two linear parks in these areas, namely the linear park of Dasoudi in Germasogeia, which is on one side connected to the beach and on the other side to the coastal hotels in the vicinity, and the linear park of Garilli in Arnaout,

directly linked to the street and nearby houses. However, the visibility of the linear park of Dasoudi is obstructed in several areas by the adjacent hotels, whereas the linear park of Garilli remains visible from the street due to its direct connection. In general, as observed in all areas, public spaces are intricately intertwined with their surroundings in diverse ways. These variations can have different effects on the emergence of everyday practices and the stakeholders involved in the production and transformation of these public spaces.

**Germasogeia neighborhood**



Public Space 1  
**Arnaout neighborhood**



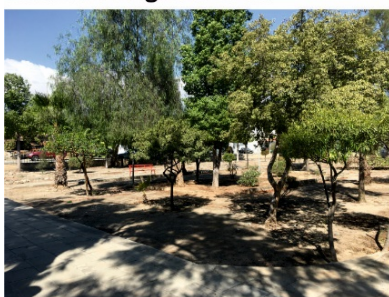
Public Space 2



Public Space 3



Public Space 4



Public Space 1



Public Space 2

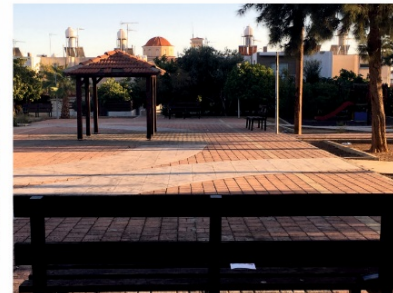


Public Space 3

**Apostolos Loukas neighborhood**



Public Space 1



Public Space 2



Public Space 3

Figure 8. Photographs of all the public spaces studied. Source: Authors.



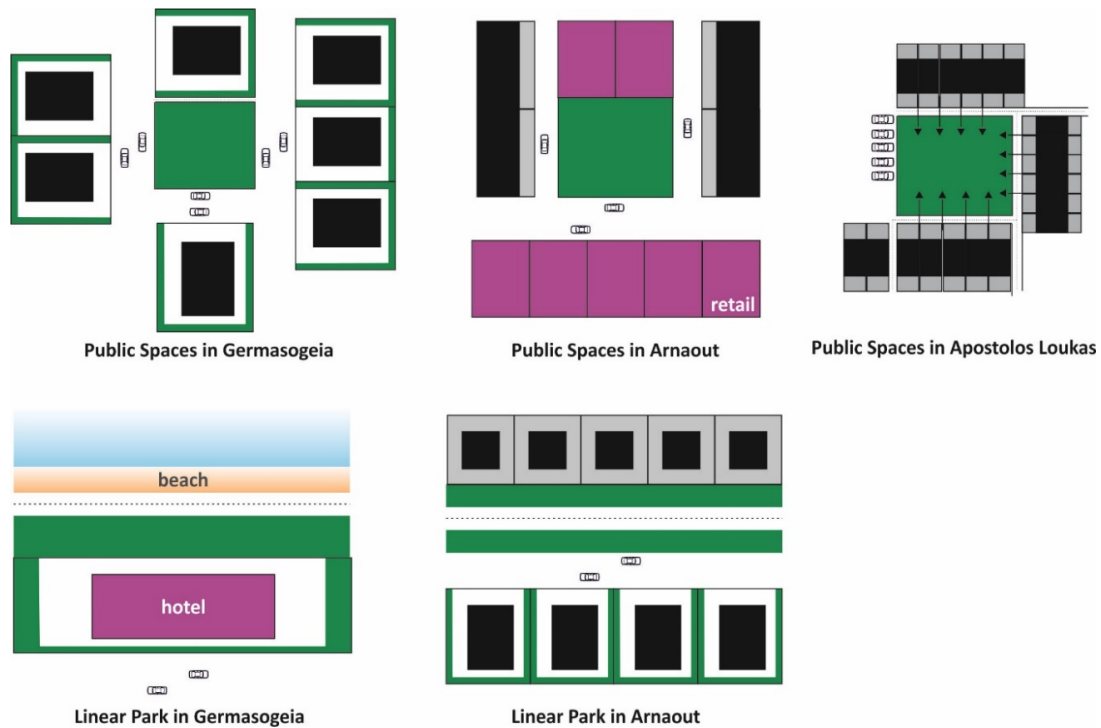


Figure 9. Diagram of the public spaces in the three areas in association with the surrounding land uses. Source: Authors.

In terms of the primary formal and informal stakeholders and actors involved in the production and transformation of these public spaces and their respective roles, it is essential to acknowledge that the formal stakeholders responsible for the construction and maintenance of these public spaces mainly include the State, the Town Planning Department, and the Housing Department. They own title deeds for the majority of these spaces and establish the legal boundaries that shape the urban landscape. Moreover, the maintenance of these spaces falls under the jurisdiction of the local municipalities in each area. While municipalities ostensibly oversee the maintenance of public spaces, in practice, they sometimes do not consistently adhere to maintenance, resulting in local residents from areas such as Arnaout and Apostolos Loukas taking on informal roles in maintaining these spaces through their everyday practices. Informal actors, instrumental in transforming the public spaces in each area, were identified and mapped through questionnaires, snapshots, and photographs. The following graphs illustrate the primary user demographics in each area, considering factors such as age, citizenship, and proximity of their residences to the public space. Notably, Arnaout quarter and Apostolos Loukas neighbourhood feature a mix of elderly and younger users, while Germasogeia quarter primarily attracts a younger and more diverse demographic (Fig. 10). Public spaces 1 and 2 in Arnaout quarter and Apostolos Loukas neighbourhood share a common user profile, with both spaces seeing a combination of younger individuals and seniors occupying them at specific times. Conversely, the two linear pathways, Garillis and Dasoudi (public space 3 in Arnaout and public space 4 in Dasoudi respectively), cater to users of various ages who visit these spaces at different hours and on different days.

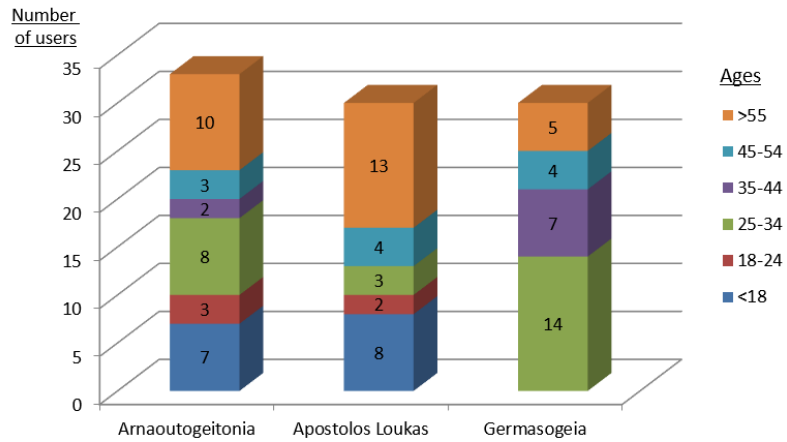


Figure 10. Graph shows the number of users according to their age in the three neighbourhoods. Source: Authors.

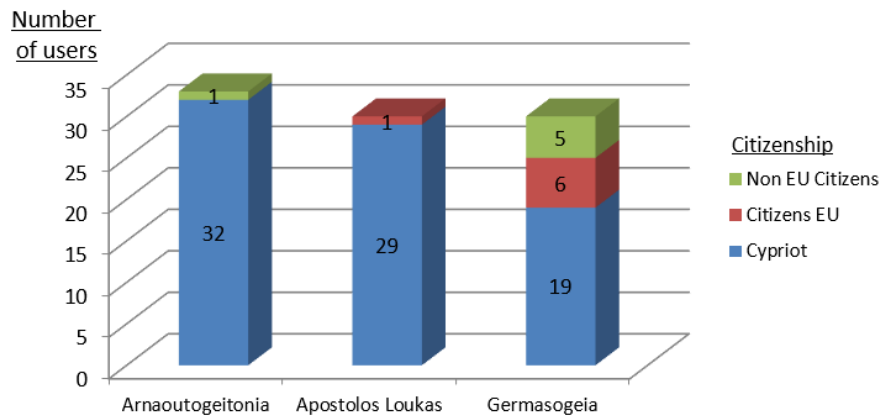


Figure 11. Graph shows the number of users according to their citizenship in the three neighbourhoods. Source: Authors.

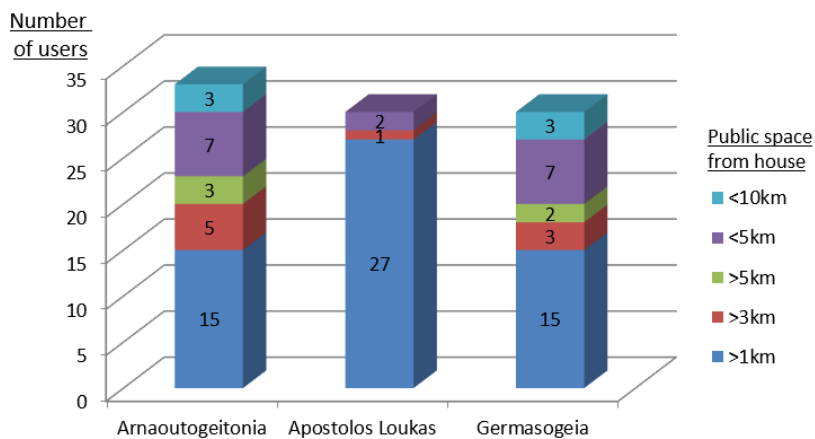


Figure 12. Graph shows the number of users according to how far is their house from the public spaces in the three neighbourhoods. Source: Authors.

Moreover, in Arnaout and Apostolos Loukas quarters, nearly all users are Cypriots, while Germasogeia's quarter attracts a more diverse group of ethnicities (Fig. 11). Notably, the vast majority of users in the public spaces of Apostolos Loukas are residents of the neighbourhood itself, whereas in the other two quarters, these spaces draw users from other parts of the city (Fig. 12).

To sum up, the analysis of the three case studies—Germasogeia, Arnaout, and Apostolos Loukas—reveals significant differences in the spatial configuration and spatial characteristics, the community engagement in maintaining these spaces, and the actual usage of public spaces within each neighbourhood.

**Germasogeia:**

- Identified as the most affluent municipality, with a considerable foreign resident population.
- Well-integrated spatially at the local scale, but less integrated in the global scale, except for the linear park of Dasoudi.
- Public spaces that are spatially more integrated exhibit higher activity levels and better maintenance.
- Municipality plays a significant role in refurbishment, upkeep, with residents actively using spaces for various daily activities.
- Minimal grassroots initiatives observed, except for citizen additions to playground games.
- The linear park of Dasoudi caters to a diverse range of age groups (above 25) and ethnic backgrounds at all hours.

**Arnaout:**

- Not as affluent as Germasogeia, populated by lower social classes.
- Area integrated both locally and globally; but different spatial characteristics between public spaces.
- Distinct social groups appropriating each public space.
- Municipality's responsibility for maintenance acknowledged, but residents often take on cleaning and maintenance duties due to neglect.
- Each public space relates to specific social groups, with events organized accordingly. Public Space 1 is primarily used by Greek Cypriot refugees over the age of 55, Public Space 2 is predominantly used by young people under 18, and the linear park of Garillis (public space 3) is frequented by diverse social groups in terms of age and ethnicity.

**Apostolos Loukas:**

- Economically disadvantaged area, inhabited by lower social classes and Greek Cypriot refugees.
- Lacks integration at both global and local scales, with public spaces enclosed and limited in visibility and accessibility.
- Residents take significant responsibility for maintenance due to municipal neglect, treating public spaces as extensions of their backyards.
- Usage patterns vary by age group, with distinct hours for different demographics. Two distinct age groups observed in public spaces: primary users of public spaces 1 and 2 are individuals under 18 years of age and those over 55, whereas elderly individuals predominantly use public space 3.

Overall, formal stakeholders like the state, the Town Planning Department, and the Housing Department have an important role in the development and maintenance of public spaces, although municipal inconsistencies often lead to informal resident involvement in maintenance. Patterns of use differ across neighbourhoods and relate to socioeconomic factors, spatial configuration (at the local scale and at the global scale of the city) and spatial characteristics. Germasogeia attracts a diverse population, while Arnaout and Apostolos Loukas primarily host local residents, albeit with different age distributions in time. These variations underscore the complex interplay between the spatial dimension, socioeconomic dynamics, stakeholders' involvement, and community engagement possibilities in shaping public spaces.

### **Everyday Spaces of Encounters: Interpreting Public Space Dynamics**

Aiming at addressing the critical need for more comprehensive research on the intricate dynamics between the physical attributes and social dimensions of public spaces this paper discusses discernible patterns in socio-spatial processes in the city of Limassol through the lens of a relational perspective.

The analysis of three case study areas illuminates the intertwined nature of important factors elucidated through relevant theoretical underpinnings, which inform the paper's methodological framework. The factors mapped in the paper encompass temporal aspects, spatial configuration and physical attributes, everyday practices, and stakeholders/actors involved. The intersections and interactions among these factors unveil the synthesizing mechanisms that shape public spaces across diverse socio-spatial urban settings and their impact on daily life, determining the extent to which they foster or hinder a sense of public life.

The connection between the various factors shaping public space is evident in the contrasting characteristics and dynamics observed in the three case study areas of Germasogeia, Arnaout, and Apostolos Loukas. Significant interrelations emerge between the factors explored.

#### *Public spaces maintenance and stakeholder involvement.*

In Germasogeia, the municipality plays a significant role in the upkeep of public spaces, resulting in higher activity levels and better maintenance. This underscores the importance of municipal involvement in maintaining public spaces, particularly in more affluent areas. Conversely, in Arnaout, although the municipality is responsible for maintenance, residents claim that they often take on cleaning and maintenance duties due to neglect. This indicates a gap between municipal responsibility and actual maintenance practices, highlighting the importance of effective governance in ensuring the upkeep of public spaces as well as the implications on use. Similarly, in Apostolos Loukas, residents take significant responsibility for maintenance due to municipal neglect. This emphasizes the role of community involvement in maintaining public spaces, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where municipal resources may be limited.

#### *Everyday use patterns, the role of time and the potential of “blurred” public spaces*

In public spaces such as in Apostolos Loukas, not very well integrated locally and globally, with low accessibility and visibility, lack of municipality involvement in

maintaining them, age but also social clustering is observed more frequently. The degree of interaction between age and/or social groups in these public spaces was found to be rather weak and confined to maintenance activities. Different groups in these cases either maintain distinct artificially constructed spatial boundaries within overlapping areas or access distinct spaces through temporal negotiations. The interface between these groups in the public spaces is found to be delineated according to social – rather than spatial – differences and the degree of place sharing seems to shift across time to the groups that claimed and negotiated ownership of each space, sometimes resulting in tensions and hostility. Usage patterns differ according to age groups; younger people tend to prefer the relatively segregated spaces whereas older people tend to occupy spaces where there is more flow of through movement and better visibility.

Public spaces such as Dasouli and Garillis, that are well integrated spatially, well maintained with an active involvement of all stakeholders and an active role of the municipality, contain a diverse population in terms of age, ethnicity, and gender. Group clustering is less frequently observed in these spaces and when it happens it is found to shift in time between the different groups.

Franzen (2009) has referred to spaces such as Dasoudi and Garillis, as ‘blurred spaces’; areas in the city where any lines of segregation are getting blurred. He finds that such spaces are of interest since they have the potential for greater integration over time. He suggests that the outcome – either greater social integration or greater hostility – depends on the stakes involved in maintaining group differences. The analysis of the synthesizing mechanisms shaping such spaces through a relational perspective, provides a test-bed for the understanding of the nature of ‘blurred’ public spaces and their social outcomes as a shared resource.

Empirical findings from the case studies reveal notable distinctions in the level of integration among public spaces, exemplified by the contrasting dynamics observed in spaces like Dasoudi and Garillis compared to those in Apostolos Loukas. The former exhibit a diverse mix of individuals engaging in spontaneous interactions, while the latter are frequented by more homogeneous groups that utilize specific areas as established social hubs. Public spaces such as Dasoudi and Garrilis could be seen as fields of maximal encounter between the maximum number of potential individuals; the more a space is integrated and diverse, the more potential it offers for inter-group connections; the more a space is segregated and uniform, the more limited and specific are the possibilities of connecting to a member of a contrasting group such as in the cases of Apostolos Loukas.

Configurational analysis provides valuable insights into the spatial utilization patterns of public spaces, contextualizing each location within the broader urban landscape. The empirical evidence underscores the significant role played by urban form and spatial characteristics in determining the advantages or disadvantages offered by each public space, aligning with Legeby's assertion that these factors directly influence everyday experiences and the social and physical utilization of public spaces (2010).

Nevertheless, mapping the dynamics shaping public spaces comprehensively reveals inherent difficulties and complexities. Usage patterns vary across neighborhoods and their public spaces, sometimes exhibiting distinct and enduring traits, while in other instances, they remain fluid and subject to continuous modification over time. This highlights the imperative of examining public spaces through their temporal dimension, integrating the analysis of different times and rhythms of practices in public space

(Knierbein, 2014) and recognizing them as dynamic entities where boundaries are constantly negotiated, bridged, and dissolved along various social lines. Interpretations of spatial phenomena must consider additional factors beyond those captured by configurational analysis. These factors are intricately interwoven, shaping public spaces in distinctive ways. They engage in a continuous process of socio-spatial transformation, influencing the production, use, and development of public spaces. The extent of spatial integration in the local and global urban context, the form of governance by public authorities and relevant stakeholders, and social conditions all contribute to shaping the utilization, the experience and sharing of public space and collectively impact the quality of public life in neighbourhoods. A detailed exploration of the interplay between spatial, social, and temporal dynamics in public spaces where activities, uses, and users blur boundaries promises to enrich our understanding of public space as a collective resource. Approaching the mapping and analysis of public space through a relational perspective is thus imperative. Each public space is a constituent part of a complex social assemblage, comprising diverse physical and social elements. The configuration and reconfiguration of these components give rise to distinct characteristics, shaping the role and function of each public space. Through these relationships, public spaces evolve and fulfil varying roles in different contexts, displaying a range of capabilities.

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## Between Alienation and Revolution. Incursions into Collectives of Soirees in Metropolitan Public Spaces in Belo Horizonte, Brazil

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### Abstract

Following the tracks of the soiree collectives in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte, this article aims at analysing the role of the dimension of everyday life, which according to Lefebvre means the constant movement between the tendency to repeat and the capacity for social transformation, the constant movement between routine and invention. These collectives are formed by young people, most of them residents of peripheral areas who have revealed themselves to be holders of a new subjectivity capable of explaining their place in the world and justifying their existence drawing from the pride of being peripheral, which results in a new way of political action. The daily life lived, perceived, and conceived in the context of their social and symbolic place occupied by the peripheries and their social actors has been reframed in the face of a set of social transformations and, consequently, it produces new public spheres and new ways of expression of emancipatory struggles. The ethnography carried out seeks to apprehend the intertwining of poetry, performance, and the occupation of public space. The critique of everyday life reveals those patterns of behaviour, organization strategies of groups and subgroups, networks of relationships and networks of meanings, as well as systems of material and symbolic exchanges. Indeed, such collectives are expressions of everyday resistance, manifested in poetry, in bodily expressions, in the way activities are organized and performed. In these soirees, critical and political reflections are collectively created, making the creative and liberating capacity emerge.

**Keywords:** everyday life, public space, collectives, youth, soiree

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“The Coletivoz soiree was a bit of a soiree that we used to go to, we crashed, me, Kadu, the guys from the hangout, who enjoyed this thing of poetry and words. This thing about the marginal soiree proposal, I think Coletivoz is a reference for everyone here in the city”  
(Reis, apud Felix, 2016, p. 34, own translation)

In Brazil, the “Jornadas de Junho”, series of street protests and demonstrations led by the youth initially against the increase in public transportation fares, reveal practices intended to face the crisis caused by neoliberalism (Caldeira, 2013; Georges and Rizek, 2016; Harvey, 2014). This context highlighted the youth collectives and their constant presence occupying public spaces, with varied socio-spatial practices, in major cities because it results in new ways of political action, indispensable to the exercise of democracy (Gohn, 2013; Frugoli Jr, 2018). These processes bring important and historical research themes to the Social Sciences: youth (Mannheim, 1968; Pais, 1990, 1993), public space (Madanipour et. al. 2014, Knierbein and Dominguez, 2014; Joseph, 1999), and everyday life (Lefebvre, 2014; Knierbein, 2020).

Since the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the wake of urban cultural phenomena such as rap, a movement or a new practice of collective action (Gohn, 2018a) has been observed, produced by young people from peripheral areas that occupy public spaces for recitation and poetic performance. This kind of gathering is called soiree, referring to the early hours of the evening<sup>1</sup>. This movement “is forming an independent “literary system” marked by the practice of recitation and the performative dimension of literature” (Salom, 2014, p. 235)<sup>2</sup>. These collectives are based on self-management, autonomy, and mutual help, not resulting from a government-led program (Paula, 2016) and without mainstream market’s editorial support (Salom, 2014; Paula, 2016). Their voices, predominantly autobiographical, echo in the public space and reveal the everyday dimensions of the lived space, the result of the socio-spatial construction of a brutally unequal, embarrassing, violent, and coercive city. From São Paulo, these practices quickly spread to other capitals of Brazilian Federal States, such as Belo Horizonte (Rena, 2016; Felix, 2018), Fortaleza (Silva and Freitas, 2020), Porto Alegre (Fontoura et al., 2016), Rio de Janeiro (Bustos, 2020), and Salvador (Santos, 2019). Indeed, this finding reveals that this everyday life goes beyond the limits of geographic space and is interconnected with other everyday lives, of young people from other large Brazilian cities who exchange with one another and shout for recognition. It is in this context that the soiree arises as an instigating object of investigation since the critique of everyday life allows to identify the way in which individuals reflexively construct their ways of conceiving-perceiving-experiencing socio-spatial inequalities.

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<sup>1</sup> The Portuguese equivalent of soiree is *sarau*, which comes from *serão*, the word originating from *seranus*, in Latin.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize that soirees are at the heart of a set of socio-spatial and political-cultural practices that are articulated around soirees, slams, poetry workshops, fairs, production of fanzines and books, added to certain forms of activism and virtual communication (Muniz Jr. and Oliveira, 2015).

Following the tracks of these peripheral youths and their ways of expressing, participating, and belonging that we take on the assumption, stated by Lefebvre, that space is a socially, historically, and relationally produced. Indeed, we let ourselves be guided by “human beings in their corporeality and sensuality, their sensitivity and imagination, their thoughts and their ideologies stand out; human beings who enter into relationships with each other through their activities and practices” (Schmid, 2012, p. 91, own translation) in order to capture the dialectical tensions between the tendency to repeat and the capacity for social transformation.

This research was carried out in the city of Belo Horizonte, whose name literally means “beautiful horizon”; horizon that can gain new contours when seen from the periphery. Empirical data was gathered by realizing participant observation in different soirees, and some informal conversations, the contents of the poems recited at soirees, and poems recently published in books edited by active members of such collectives. Therefore, anchored on the ethnographic method, the analysis takes an “up close and from within” perspective, seeking to apprehend action patterns that relate to multiple and heterogeneous, groups and subgroups, networks of relationships and networks of meanings, as well as systems of material and symbolic exchanges (Agier, 2011). As follows, we present a discussion about the urban periphery, considering its structural transformations and more emphatically the symbolic reconfigurations of the last decades. Next, a summarized history of how the soiree collectives were formed in the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte is presented. Finally, the voices and spaces of resistance are discussed in order to foster reflexive notes on these processes.

### **The dialectical process of reconfiguring the periphery**

In Brazil, the periphery is a historical object of interdisciplinary research revealing the marks that characterize such physical-geographic spaces, the peculiar forms of sociability and the way in which forms of urban struggles are configured at the margins. Since the 1990s, in the face of a set of social policies undertaken in recent years, technological changes and worldwide economic restructuring (Duram, 2010; Georges and Rizek, 2016), there has been an inflection in the social and symbolic space occupied by the peripheries and by their social actors, both individual and collective, resulting in new forms of expression, political action and new subjectivities (Kopper and Richmond, 2020).

In this article, periphery is understood, in addition to its geographical meaning, as a realm which is both a relational-material space and assumes a perspective that such spaces tend to be translated and to be configured from an interpretative position, a position that reveals distinctions, distances and exclusions, permanent or temporary. Thus, the phenomenon of reconfiguring the periphery from the point of view of analysing urban form establishes a dialectical relationship with the reconfiguration of social space, obviously in tension with the other relational-material positions present within Brazilian society. As Bourdieu (1997; 2013) indicated, the concrete urban margins context can affect the representation that the agents have of their position in the social space and, therefore, their own practice. The perception that people have of their location within the wider urban context is inseparable from the perception they have of the dialectical relationship between that space and the other relational-material spaces that make up society, at that historic moment and in its historicity.

In general, in depicting the urbanization of large Brazilian cities, two historical cycles can be highlighted: The first, from the 1950s to 1980s, relates to a phase of industrialization and the rise of precarious neighbourhoods distant from the city centre, the so-called “peripheral urbanization” (Caldeira, 2015). These are spaces characterized by: a) the joint efforts to gradually build houses in which land and construction had not yet been legalized, b) by scarce infrastructure and public services, c) by the instable conditions of land ownership, d) by the ambiguous presence of the State, whose practices are essentially clientelistic, e) and by stigmatization and discrimination. These communities experience daily vulnerability, violence, including State’s violence, and difficulties in accessing housing, health, education, and work. Indeed, in this period, the relative morphological uniformity and social segregation appear to favour the development of similar patterns of sociability, leisure, consumption, labour market evaluation and particular forms of perceiving society (Durham, 2000).

As regards the 1970s and 1980s, a second period can be framed: the authoritarian military dictatorship in which social movements and organizations emerged. Supported by the progressive sectors, e.g. the Catholic Church, they fostered the so-called “insurgent citizenship” (Holston, 2013) in the peripheries, with strong participation of women due to the significant role they played in the struggles for housing and infrastructure facilities. These movements contributed to the achievement of several social rights that gave rise to the Federal Constitution of 1988 (Gohn, 2018b) and, in the following decade, to the Statute of Cities (Fernandes, 2007). Even if in a very uneven way, these spaces started to have more services and equipment, although of low quality. Such transformations carried potential to cause a diversification of the peripheral territories, both from the intra-metropolitan perspective, and especially seen from the marginalized perspective of the peripheries of the Brazilian metropolises (Torres et al., 2003, Ribeiro, 2016).

Starting in the 1990s, the second cycle showed phenomena such as: the forces to restructure production including technological transformations; the presence of neo-Pentecostal religions (Souza, 2009), new forms of cultural production (Kowarick, and Frúgoli Jr., 2016), and its social and spatial repercussions. First, the improvement of living conditions with the access of this population to urban public services was identified: pavement, street lighting, running water, garbage collection and sewage systems, health centres and schools were installed or upgraded, and more frequent and accessible public transportation (Durham, 2000) was established. At the same time, if, on the one hand, the new public policies and democratic and participative management practices, in the three spheres of government, were minimizing clientelistic practices from previous periods, on the other hand, they also made the social movements cool down. This period is marked by the emergence of more institutionalized forms of popular organization, such as the National Forums of Struggle for Housing, Urban Reform, the National Forum for Popular Participation, Participatory Budgets and Sectorial Councils (Gohn, 2018b). Finally, but not least, this period witnessed a considerable increase of violence and deaths, which framed the emergence of the new youth cultures of the peripheries where hip-hop and funk were its first expressions (Caldeira, 2015; Diógenes, 1988; Herschmann, 1997; Vianna, 1988). As explains D’Andrea (2020, p. 23, own translation): “The main targets of the genocide were (are) black male bodies. That is why the enunciation of the periphery carried out in the 1990s

started from this social sector, seeking mainly three objectives: to denounce social conditions, to re-unite areas that had been broken up during the war, and to pacify these territories”.

It is important to draw attention to the fact that, in Brazil, violent deaths have followed a gruesome pattern over the last years: in 75.5% of the total homicides, victims are young, male, and black (Brasil, 2019). That is why the term genocide has been used widely, from the media to scientific researchers, reflecting the brutal mortal rates (Alvarenga et al, 2021). This is an outstanding aspect since all this violence is experienced by those who participate in the soirees and are the authors of the poems. Indeed, D’Andrea (2013), by covering the peripheries of the metropolitan area of São Paulo, records that from the 1990s, the term periphery gains a sense of power: a space full of possibilities and forces. However, this sense of power is quite ambivalent: while it bears the hallmark of the emancipation from its historical subordination, it is also a place tagged with stigmatization: of the poor classes and of violent disavowal. The fact is that, at that moment, "the periphery claimed the word periphery to be their own, beginning a historical process of changing its meanings" (D’Andrea, 2020, p. 21, own translation). In effect, resuming Bourdieu (2013), this change in the perception of the social place occupied by the periphery, accompanied by its “use in a political way by the natives” (Magnani, apud D’Andrea, 2020, p. 21, own translation), observed by the critique of everyday life, can reveal “(...) the possible and the impossible, the random and the certain, the achieved and the potential. The real can only be grasped and appreciated via potentiality, and what has been achieved through what has not been achieved (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 340).

In the late 2000s, young people from the periphery were growing up in a democratic context, when there was a constant presence of NGOs; they had reasonable access to education and work while there was an increased availability of goods, especially communication devices that keep them connected to global networks. This is when potent cultural production emerges (Dayrell, 2005; Libânio, 2016). The peripheries then start to be the place of rap music and marginal literature, graffiti, tagging, skateboarding, and parcs, and all of them “soon articulated the idea that the city as a whole should be their site of intervention and that they had the right to move around and enjoy the city beyond the frontiers of their own neighbourhoods” (Caldeira, 2015, p. 131).

Thus, despite the differences between peripheries and peripheral subjects that were established since the 1980s due to an unequal distribution of infrastructure and resources, these will be suspended in favour of the collective struggles. The striking characteristics are activated to represent the collective, the peripheral communities, and to give voice to the struggles for rights. In fact, territoriality emerges as a category of space analysis of neoliberal processes, which brings together the local and the global, when it is constructed and deconstructed by power relations. They involve a very wide range of actors whose actions over time can be observed through *horizontality* (organized by social interaction and territorial contiguity) and *verticality* (formed by points distant from each other, connected by all forms and social processes that configure networks) in the sense of Santos (1979; 1994). The Brazilian urban peripheries are articulated horizontally, within each space, and vertically, among the peripheral’s territoriality of each city and among cities. This perspective unfolds in the

fact that political agency is inseparable from the city's spatial configuration and reflects its changing patterns of spatial segregation and social inequality (Caldeira, 2015).

This the context where the “peripheral subject” appears, described by D'Andrea (2013) as: the individual with a new subjectivity capable of explaining his or her place in the world and anchoring their existence on the pride of being peripheral, giving rise to new ways of acting politically. Corroborating these assumptions, Caldeira (2013), when addressing the media coverage of “*Jornadas de Junho*”, draws attention to: “(...) an image that went viral juxtaposed two photographs: on one side, a middle-class young man held a poster with the words ‘The people woke up’; on the other side, a bus burning somewhere in the periphery with the saying ‘I’ll tell you a secret: the periphery has never slept’” (Caldeira, 2013, p. sp). The dialectical process of reconfiguring the periphery shows the ambivalent condition of being and living on the margins, enhancing society's new possibilities for self-organization and social mobilization. These collectives, their forms of occupation of space and their voices and bodies resonate with their socio-spatial context and these territories recognize each other, in similar conditions.

### **On the margins of Belo Horizonte: Soiree practices and broken everyday life**

In 2010, the Belo Horizonte metropolitan area comprised a population of around 5.5 million people, out of which 450,000 live in informal settlements. There are over 200 areas irregularly occupied (Libânio, 2018) which would fall into our understanding of peripheries. The city was planned under Hausmannian inspirations which is why it has been, since its beginnings, elitist and exclusive with strong socio-spatial cleavages (Harvey, 2006). Urban space was produced by following patterns of precarious urbanization.

Since the mid-2000's, the city of Belo Horizonte has witnessed cultural production growths in these informal settlements. And since the moment when these practices were mapped, the presence of an “invisible cultural network” has been revealed (Libânio, 2004), till then unknown by residents as well as ignored by the municipal and state authorities. In the “Cultural Guide of Shanty and Slums” (*Guia Cultural de Vilas e Favelas*), as part of a research project conducted by the NGO *This is slum (Favela é isto aí)*, data collected between 2002-2003 shows 7,000 people participating in 740 cultural groups, including professional and newbie artists. Most of these initiatives were free and had no institutional support or funding. Regarding infrastructure, 53% of the peripheries had no cultural facilities, even though in the other areas one may find 145 venues available for cultural practices, such as libraries, community centres, cultural centres, and adapted spaces (Libânio, 2004).

This mapping enabled to identify these practices, as well as their participants and promoters. Then people were able to get to know each other internally and externally, and as a result, the voices of the community got enhanced and amplified. As Libânio (2018) emphasizes, residents of the periphery, growing weary of waiting for changes, found new (-their own-) ways of responding to the challenges brought about unconventional forms of action and participation, navigating between resistance and resilience, using culture as an arena to build spaces for enacting their rights. Such practices even go beyond the cultural dimension and have an impact on the production

of space, since the condition of emergency lived in the peripheral territories “causes a sum of actions, political engagement, and activism to take place outside the technical, academic and institutional spaces – a sum of insurgent energies” (Velloso, 2020, p. 153, own translation).

There are, therefore, several examples coming from the peripheries in the Belo Horizonte metropolitan area (BHMA) which are expressions of power relations; some are becoming the object of academic-scientific studies, such as: Hip Hop in the town of Ribeirão das Neves (Costa and Silva, 2018), the Duel of MCs<sup>3</sup>, at the Santa Teresa bridge-(Campos, 2016), the cultural activities held at the Centre for Unified Arts and Sports in the town of Vespasiano (Reis, 2018), the atlas of the soirees of the BHMA (Felix, 2018).

It is in this effervescent context that the soiree collectives emerge, taking as reference and important hallmark the Cultural Cooperative of the Periphery (Cooperifa), founded in 2001 in the city of São Paulo by Sérgio Vaz<sup>4</sup>. This experience was an inspiration for a group of young people in Belo Horizonte who, in 2008, in connection with their working-class roots, invited activists from a neighbourhood called Barreiro to create Coletivoz (a play of words in Portuguese meaning “collectivoice”), under the lead of Rogério Coelho and Eduardo DW. This collective became the core of a network currently formed by several groups across the BHMA.

In the same year in Belo Horizonte, there were movements taking place in public space in the central area, such as rap performances and duels, at the Santa Tereza bridge, and the Station Beach, held at Station Square. The Station Beach denotes the youth protests of 2010, initiated in response to a decree by then-mayor Márcio Lacerda. The decree banned any events at Station Square, a site traditionally known for political gatherings. In response, protesters transformed the area into a playful-political space, mimicking a beach with chairs, towels, umbrellas, bikinis, and swimwear (Migliano, 2013).

From 2011 on, a swarm of sparse soiree initiatives took place: in 2011, “Mongrel soiree<sup>5</sup>” (*Vira-lata*), in 2012, “Among letters and patchworks” (*Entre letras e retalhos*), “Vagabond Soiree” (*Sarau dos Vagal*), “Brook Soiree” (*Sarau do Ribeirão*), in 2013, “Active Head” (*Cabeça ativa*) and “NoPoem” (*Apoema*), in 2014, “Soiree Common” (*Sarau Comum*). Between 2013 and 2016, a total of 12 new soiree collectives were created. Such collectives are in general organized according to their location, or as regards social demands, e.g. relating to feminist issues (*Manas* [neologism that means sisters], *das Cachorras* [bitches]), racism, environmental aspects, and others.

The central focus of this article is on the participant observation of the Common Soiree and on recent publications produced by *Coletivoz* (Machado and Oliveira, 2018) and by a

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<sup>3</sup> It is a battle rap, so MC means master of ceremonies or mic controller. It is an expression used for rapper, but the term is not limited to rap or hip hop and is being used in soirees, referring to the organizer.

<sup>4</sup> This collective informally added amateur and professional artists from different areas who used to get together weekly in a small bar in the Jardim Guarujá neighbourhood, in the south of São Paulo. The objective was to publicise art, especially poetry, without the support or visibility given by the mainstream media (Nascimento, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Mongrel means a dog of no definable type or breed.

group of young female black writers (Oliveira, 2018). In a rich fieldwork, the Common Soiree stands out for being held in a neighbourhood in the Centre-South part of Belo Horizonte and for the fact that it organizes regular monthly meetings. *Coletivo*, despite being the pioneer, did not meet regularly throughout 2017 and 2018, which made it impossible to conduct field research<sup>6</sup>. However, the group's first collection brings together texts by poets who became a reference for all the active young people participating in soirees in the BHMA. In addition, many of these authors occasionally participate in the Common Soiree.

As follows, our analysis as regards the use and occupation of public space and the way socio-spatial inequalities in the BHMA are expressed in the poems recited and published will be presented by taking into consideration basic conceptual aspects of Lefebvre's theorization of the social production of space (Knierbein and Dominguez, 2014). This analysis combines research perspectives into the spaces of everyday life – spaces of repetitive *praxis* and innovative *praxis* (Velloso, 2020) –, which are full of plural meanings that coexist, crossed by clear physical and symbolic limits. Making the point of view of temporality, daily life, on the one hand, via a 24-hour cycle denotes the character of repetition and unites us with the dynamics of nature; and, on the other hand, it reveals itself framed by a given historical time, which belongs to a historical development (Wall and Knierbein, 2022). The critical perspective of everyday life is capable of synthesizing lived time – in contrast to the hegemonic framework of Social Sciences that tended to fragment everyday into different areas of study and research – the intersection of the spheres of family, study, work, leisure etc. In the words of Lefebvre (1972, p. 11, own translation) “the history of a single day encompasses the history of the world and of society” and “in it, those relations are expressed and fulfilled which bring into play the totality of the real, albeit in a certain manner which is always partial and incomplete: friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, play, etc.” (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 97).

Actually, the critique of everyday life in the light of historicity allows to go beyond its apparent micro scale and lead to the synthesis of synchronic and diachronic orders (Viderman et. al. 2022). As Villoría (2004) points out, what interests Lefebvre is to reveal the subtle mechanisms that hide in everyday life and operate to prevent social transformation. It is at this point that we recognize ourselves, doing the observation and analysis of soirees, of the collectives and the young people who are the protagonists of these soirees, as well as the way in which this daily life is revealed through their poetry, and the path is taken here to understand the decolonization of everyday life. As Debord pointed out, since 1961, “this next attempt at a total contestation of capitalism will know how to invent and propose a different use of everyday life, and will immediately base itself on new everyday practices, on new types of human relationships (being no longer unaware that any conserving, within the revolutionary movement, of the relations prevailing in the existing society imperceptibly leads to a reconstitution of one or another variant of this society)” (Debord, 1981).

In addition, it is important to emphasize, as Martins (2012) argues, that the critique of everyday life in Latin America needs to consider the impossibility of everyday life, the

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<sup>6</sup> The ephemeral nature of the practices, the ties, and the bonds among the members are found in the contexts studied, which suggests that temporality is a core issue to be considered in urban analysis.

fragmented daily life, the difficult and broken daily life. Modernity is experienced at very uneven rhythms under the economic, social, and technological imperatives Brazilian and other societies are facing, and in terms of the fulfilment of the democratic promise. In addition, the transit between everyday life, dream, imagination, carnival, play and religion (including the very religious syncretism) generates a mixed relation towards the social world(s).

### Voices and spaces of resistance

The Common Soiree, the object of this study, started in 2014, but its history goes back to October 2013, when a group of artists decided to occupy a state-owned old and abandoned mansion. After a lot of struggles and with the support of the local community, the state government formally granted this group of artists the right to use and occupy the mansion. Thus, the *Luiz Estrela Common Space* was created as a cultural centre intended for public use, and dedicated to art, culture, education, and politics, always in a collaborative way, guided by the principles of the Common<sup>7</sup>.



Figure 1. Luiz Estrela Common Space Main Facade. Photograph by Rachel Almeida.

Until December 2019, the Common Soiree was held once a month, always on a Friday. The mansion doors open at 7 pm to anyone interested in the event. The soiree's starting point lies in the conception of the ambience, shown through the way the patio is arranged: a large free open space, with cement floor and a few small trees. The resulting environment is perceived by the active members and the audience as very

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<sup>7</sup> Luiz Estrela, a homosexual individual experiencing homelessness, resided in Belo Horizonte. He gained recognition among artists and activists in the capital of Minas Gerais due to his active participation in cultural and political events. Tragically, he was murdered on June 26, 2013, coinciding with one of the June protests that faced substantial police repression. To date, his death remains unresolved, with no official investigation conducted. For more information about the Cultural Centre, see <https://espacocomunluizestrela.org/>



welcoming and intimate, yielding a sense of familiarity and privacy. Casual comments during events repeatedly value this ambience.

For the event itself, items of furniture, made of recycled materials, are arranged to configure an appropriation in a circle or a semicircle or, sometimes, a square. There is always a central void where the performances are accommodated. Additionally, a space is organized, the "Common Library", where books are available for consultation during the soiree by those who want to choose a poem and recite it. Displaying this symbolic collection also serves as a pretext to encourage newcomers to choose poetry and recite. As the photo reveals, lighting is quite simple and, usually, the moon is the main source of brightness. Some recycled containers are used as candle holders scattered on the floor and there are a few bulbs scattered on the walls. The space is informally organized, and it is constantly changed with the use of a great deal of different ornamental details. The logic in sorting out the space is quite flexible, free, creative, with no fixed marks. The lack of available funds results in different occupational strategies. Such practices corroborate the original intention of the collectives that maintain the Common Space Luiz Estrela, revealed in Priscila Musa's statement to the Ministry of Citizenship: "(...) restoring the old mansion is not about cracks and fissures, but restoring other bodies that occupy that space: the sounds, the tracks, the scents, the swirls" (Brasil, 2017, own translation)<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, every evening of Common Soiree, bodies and forms of appropriation express a public space being constructed where decisions are made together, creating a common destiny for the collective itself. This ritual of arranging the space is very symbolic and powerful as it organizes the collective at the same time. Countless meetings are strategies to gather personal and collective experiences which configure a collection "that carries the sonar of transhistorical voices, compositions that complement each other" (Bassi, 2018c, p.8, own translation). The Common Soiree's audience consists mostly of around 15 to 20 regular members and some 10 to 15 people who gravitate around the event but do not participate all the time and hardly speak up. They are young people and adults, aged 15 to 35 years old; male and female bodies, slight female predominance, heterosexual and gay, many are university students, there are a few couples, and a great deal of black people. The vast majority of the attendants live in peripheral neighbourhoods of the metropolitan area.

At the beginning of every event, the rules are announced, and a ritual cry is chanted. This opening is conducted by a young man or woman, one of the pioneers of the collective, taking the role of some kind of master of ceremonies and mediator of the same. After the rules are introduced, he or she calls out the audience for the ritual cry consisting of an interaction between a first person who shouts "Common!" and the others answer "Soiree", several times. Thus, it is possible to realize the opening ritual as a moment when the cooperation between the collective and the audience is expressed.

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<sup>8</sup> Priscila Musa is an architect and urban planner, playing a key role in the movement that took over the abandoned mansion. She actively engages in the collective management of this cultural center and has significantly contributed to the development of the restoration methodology for the building. When the Ministry of Citizenship featured an article about the Luiz Estrela Common Space as a groundbreaking and successful example of collective public space management, Musa was among those interviewed.

This practice makes everyone feel they are part of the moment, with no separation between the organizers and the attendants: they are all united. The microphone is then made available, open to anyone. The performances are quite varied. Regular members coordinate and take the lead, consequently setting the tone of the event. They not only recite but also encourage others to participate. Usually, the more experienced speaker stands up and recites something by heart. With quick gestures and movements, he or she occupies the entire stage and approaches the audience. Some people, however, do not get up to recite or, if they do, they speak with a low voice. Others protect themselves from shyness with devices, such as a cap partially covering their faces.

Such performances are a central component of the Common Soiree, and over time we notice and follow the changes in each assiduous member in relation to the degree of confidence and bodily expression in public. These bodies expose the marks of a peripheral everyday life, as Tennina explains, referring to the Cooperifa Soiree, in São Paulo: "The ways of speaking and rhyming, of approaching the microphone, of standing, the movements of the hands and the bodies themselves - which often show scars, diseases and tiredness, or muscles -, the presence and the character are affirmations of the "peripheral being" that, through repetition, installs driving schemes that make the environment recognizable and worthy" (Tennina 2013, pp. 17-18, own translation).

Bodies and words express the hallmarks of this form of collective action through which art, culture, and politics are interwoven. In fact, in the preface to *À Luta, À Voz: Coletivos Sarau de Periferia*<sup>9</sup>, Bassi (2018c, p. 8) explains that "the literature contained in this book is a meeting place, as one friend of mine says, it is the celebration of the word"). For Coletivos, these encounters are a process of collectively building a public sphere as "a soiree [is a way of] entering pacts, [between] bar customers, peripheral residents passing by, co-workers, artists, MC's, people..." (Coelho, 2018, p. 7, own translation). As Lefebvre points out, space is considered a field of possibilities where a differential space can be built, where space contains and is contained in social relations. "Then, the real is historically constructed based on a mental representation of the urban and the city as the material expression of this representation." (Souza, 2009, p. 4-5, own translation).

The ways of understanding social position and class position are very powerful ways of expression, as already indicated by Bassi: "His electoral ward was his comfort zone."<sup>10</sup> (Bassi, 2018a, p. 96, Electoral Ward poem, own translation). The electoral ward shows how the relation of domination is sustained by the inequality of resources available to different social groups. In the urban society, power is expressed by means of the different capacity of groups and classes to unleash actions that allow them to compete for urban resources, including infrastructure, sanitation, transportation, services, and housing. In fact, this unequal distribution of resources reflects an uneven distribution of power itself. The electoral ward reveals the correlation between spatiality and the unequal access to resources and forms of political representation. Territorialities and

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<sup>9</sup> Collectivo soiree to the struggle, to the voice: of the periphery

<sup>10</sup> The electoral zone in Brazil refers to a territorial division established for the organization of the electoral process. Each voter's electoral zone is located in the neighborhood of their residence.

vital needs are literally occupying public spaces. In the soiree circles, little by little, through each new meeting, these young people build space of commoning, which allows forms of representation and expression of their territories, as their centralities, and revealing their thirst, as vital necessities<sup>11</sup>:

“My club's headquarters is on the corner,  
We don't sing ornate verses,  
We scream with a breath of aspirin,  
Our sputtered dreams,  
Through the mouth with a mint glow,  
But it bleeds and stinks,  
When, mercilessly, it places  
Dirty words in my life.

The thirst of my corner club,  
It's not of water, it's of a hundred different things,  
Destroyed by forces more ruthless than Katrina,  
So far away that they seem perverse,  
This is my clubhouse, the clubhouse of other key players,  
From footnotes of tabloids  
Notes stained with our warm blood,  
Written by the hawks that devour us.

My club's headquarters is on the corner,  
But when it rains, it's a disgrace,  
The streets get empty, with no mongrel,  
Not a lost soul, just cold and nothing else,  
Inside my shack there are only moths,  
I swallow the anger, I choke. I breathe. More aspirins,  
Thirst strikes, hunger crushes,  
And the empty streets are ugly. Murderers.” [Flor, Priscila,  
2018: 60, from the poem *Clube da Esquina* (club at the corner),  
own translation].

Thus, and generally in a dialectical fashion, the expressions of the young active participants in the soirees reveal that all and any space has been previously conceived and produces a sensory perception (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste), which is an integral component of all social practice that results from experience, from the lived space (Lefebvre, 2014).

A space in which the conception is given by the omission of the public authority and by the concrete material (im)possibilities. The space with precarious infrastructure that faces environmental problems and a life resulting from this condition, expressed by terms such as "cruel forces", "disgrace", "emptiness", "cold", "anger", "thirst", "hunger".

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<sup>11</sup> For the understanding of this poem, it is necessary to note that in Portuguese the word “sede” means both “headquarters” and “thirst”. Moreover, it sounds like the verb “to give in” conjugated in the *present tense in the first person*. As the poems are produced to be performed the effect of the sound ambiguity is very relevant.

However ambivalently, it is also a representation that hints to the symbolic power of *Clube da Esquina*, a Brazilian musical movement, appearing in the 1960s in Belo Horizonte, which brought together young musicians who little by little gained recognition and had great influence on several other young artists.

Here we find a poet shaped by a socio-spatial reality and who expresses the dialectical relationship opposing objective opportunities and conditions to subjective hopes concerning one's life. A poet whose headquarter – territoriality – is marked by his thirst – a vital need – after all, "this is my thirst, the thirst of the other protagonists". And at the same time, he shows us his ability to give in – to transfer, to borrow, to renounce, to succumb, to agree, to diminish, to end, to sink and to widen – and or to resist: "(...) I swallow the anger, I choke. I breathe. More aspirins, Thirst strikes, hunger crushes, And the empty streets are ugly. Murderers." Territoriality, corporeality, and vital need are giving way and resisting, because it is in this context that we find "these forthcoming poets who wander about, up and down, an overcrowded bus, from nine-to-nine, who poeticise dreams, loves and utopias" (Bassi, 2018c, p. 8, own translation). As suggested by Velloso (2020) in the peripheries of large Brazilian cities, these collectively organized forms of resistance, even if less visible - because they are internally consolidated within the territories -, combine duration and ephemerality, protest and occupation rationales, in addition to different social arrangements.

Thereby, the lived space reveals a reality where it is possible to observe the claims of the absence or even the discretionary presence of justice, the police, the political and religious spheres, and the very capitalist and colonial rationales. At the same time, in a contradictory manner, they are configured in contrast to narratives that express strength, resistance, and dreams.

"The black [woman] that had no room  
She is there, full of voice.  
Ancestry took over  
Now she just sings  
And no longer hides in the corners.  
No scams  
Black is just strength."  
(Bassi, 2018b, p. 96, Ubuntu poem, own translation).

This is the black, the peripheral black woman, who now presents herself with her own voice, supported by her ancestry and demanding her own embodied space. It is a space marked by a certain aspect of race/colour and gender, since the "peripheral territories do not only require their recognition and inclusion in a neoliberal state that reproduces colonialism, but that the State recognizes the epistemic, ethical and political colonial difference" (Velloso, 2020, p. 169, own translation).

### Final remarks

The black woman, who had no time, is there; she is simply strength, full of voice. Poetry and art materialise in everyday resistance and demonstrate the role played by the spatial dimension in configuring the identity of peripheral social actors. Their speech is

moulded from and based on their social standpoint, which reveals individuals with a new subjectivity. They have built the ability to explain their place in the world and the pride of being collectively peripheral is the foundation of their existence and as fundamental part of their social experience.

In the footprints of youth from Belo Horizonte, more specifically in the footprints of the poets who participate in soiree collectives, a new way of expressing the chaos of antagonistic valuations can be perceived, lived and conceived in an urban environment which carries major hallmarks of omnipresent and disruptive socio-spatial inequalities. Far from the traditional social movements fighting for urban reform, which mobilized past generations, contemporary young people unveil other dimensions of expression, organization, and mobilization. "Common Soirees" are more than poetry, they are socio-spatial practices of spatial occupation, they are expressions of everyday resistance in the face of unequal conditions of urban experience and social existence at the margins. In this context, leisure, entertainment, and culture are combined into new forms of political action. It is in this intertwining fabric that everyday life materializes, and peripheral subjectivities are elaborated.

The discourse, the appropriation of space and the performances taking shape when the everyday artists gather again and again, through every new poem, every new presentation, every new circle of poetry. The creative and strong resistance of urban peripheries is portrayed not only by proclaiming the multiple forms of voicing inequality, but also by revealing the way these marginalized territorialities work, in constant movement, by creating new places for critical and democratic speech and action. Repetitive *everyday praxis* and *innovative appropriation of lived space* reveal the dialectical tension between alienation and revolution.

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## Participation as a Global Urban Strategy Towards Resilience. A Case of ‘Benevolent Urbanism’

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### Abstract

A recurring theme in urban planning and urban design, citizen participation has been adopted by international organisations (UNECE, 1998; UN, 2016; OECD, 2022) and, has recently, been reinstated in different conceptualizations, planning scales and political meanings, both through formal processes incorporated into legal planning frameworks or led by the local authorities and through citizen-led initiatives with varying degrees of interaction and conflict with formal urban policies (Cornwall, 2009; Mirafteb, 2004; Kapsali 2023).

The paper discusses the way participation in public space production is conceptualised in prominent urban strategies towards resilience as triggered, formulated and promoted globally by the Rockefeller Foundation Initiative “100 Resilient Cities”.

First, the emergence of philanthropic foundations as new social actors of urban development in Greece, is understood as part of a new governance regime formulated in the context of austerity politics. A brief examination of prominent projects of public space creation that were funded by foundations during the crisis illuminates specific hegemonic discourses endorsed through the foundations’ granting initiatives for public space. Subsequently, the paper focuses on the initiative of the Rockefeller Foundation and embarks on a critique of the way participation is conceptualized within the initiative and in the “Resilience strategies” of Athens and Thessaloniki. Notwithstanding their inclusive rhetoric, participation is instigated by an international benevolent foundation, facilitated by global consultants acting in parallel and not from within locally instituted planning processes. It is argued that within the framework of this global initiative, participation becomes a matter of techno-managerial “know-how” and its potential to unsettle unjust socio-environmental processes and act towards justice and democracy is questioned.

**Keywords:** participation, resilience, philanthropic foundations, public space

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## **Introduction**

Participation in planning process is, as Day stated in 1997, ‘an essentially contested concept’. Arnstein (1969, p. 216) suggested that it is ‘the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set...In short, the means by which [the have-nots] can induce significant social reform which enables them to share the benefits of an affluent society’. She adds “participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process. It allows the powerholders to claim that all sides have been considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit’ (ibid). Participation therefore, according to Arnstein, entails some kind of social change. Otherwise, it reproduces existing power structures and becomes a process of legitimization of the choices of those holding power. During the last two decades, in the context of a perceived shift to open governance schemes in urban politics, it has become common understanding that citizen participation in the production of public space opens up urban space to a wide range of agents and points at the direction of democratic management and justice. However, as participation becomes part of new modes of, what Swyngedow (2005) calls “governance-beyond-the state” it is important to examine its different conceptualizations, and its role in relation to hegemonic urban policies.

A recurring theme in urban planning and urban design, citizen participation has been adopted by international organisations (UNECE, 1998; UN, 2016; OECD, 2022) and, has recently been reinstated in different conceptualizations, planning scales, methodologies and political meanings, both through formal processes incorporated into legal planning frameworks or led by the local authorities and through citizen-led initiatives with varying degrees of interaction and conflict with formal urban policies (Cornwall, 2009; MirafTAB, 2004; Kapsali 2023). Institutional changes and insurgent appropriations of public spaces (Hou, 2010, Kapsali, 2023) delineate a spectrum of agents that “invite” or “invent” (MirafTAB, 2004) participation of different forms in the production of public space. This paper draws attention on a different agent that has recently acquired prominence as a formulator of public urban space, an initiator of participation and a promoter of inclusive public spaces, namely philanthropic foundations. Philanthropic foundations of various sizes become actively involved through their granting actions in shaping urban space, thus promoting specific goals and objectives, principles and rationales of urban planning and design.

First, the paper outlines the socio-political framework of urban development within which this “benevolent urbanism” has risen in Greece. Subsequently, it discusses the way participation in public space production is framed in prominent urban strategies towards resilience as triggered, formulated and promoted globally by the Rockefeller Foundation initiative, ‘100 Resilient Cities’. The paper concludes questioning the instrumentality of participation, as conceptualised and promoted by the initiative, towards advancing democratic governance.

## **From state planning to “benevolent urbanism”**

Big philanthropic foundations have a significant global presence not only by funding cultural and social projects but also by influencing the policy agenda of international

organisations on issues of development, health, education and poverty alleviation in the global South (Martens and Seitz 2015). Moreover, they have been actively involved in actually “shaping the agenda” of UN policies in the post-2015 period i.e. in the period after the 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 were declared. As stated in the UN website, “philanthropic organisations are increasingly active in working for international development. Although it is difficult to quantify their contribution, philanthropic organizations clearly have the capacity to risk more to test and introduce innovative approaches to specific sustainable development challenges” (UN ECOSOC 2013). Large charitable foundations, most of which were established in the US, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, are globally active with a strong influence on development orientations, while at the same time enjoying special tax benefits which are in effect subsidised by tax-payers (Reich 2018). Their “capacity to risk” lies on their lack of accountability and transparency as they do not have the mechanisms to “generate honest feedback from their grantees” (ibid. p. 146). This is related to a democratic deficit on the way decisions are made and money is granted (ibid.). Finally, big foundations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have their “mantras” (Barkan, 2013, p. 639), their own policy preferences, promoting public-private partnerships, social entrepreneurship, market-driven, high technology projects with quantifiable outcomes. Big philanthropy governed like businesses, are called “venture philanthropies” (ibid p. 639). Despite their ethical missions and generosity, philanthropic foundations through their funding choices exercise power in a way that is characterised by great flexibility and operates alongside the mechanisms of democratic governance of the state (Barkan 2013; Reich 2018).

During the last decades, the increased interest of philanthropic foundations in cities and urban planning has contributed to the tendency for policy mobility and the global traveling of “best practices” (Montero, 2020). Just like in its other fields of activity, philanthropy has its own “mantras” in urban planning too, particularly when transferring models and ideas regarding urban sustainability and the adaptation to climate change. In general, it favours “quick fixes”, i.e solutions that can produce quantifiable outcomes, rather than policies that target structural problems that produce environmental degradation and climate change (ibid.)

In Greece, local and global philanthropic activity on urban policies and projects has risen greatly during the economic crisis that started in 2010. In the context of the debt crisis and successive structural adjustment programmes imposed by the ‘troika’ of the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission, the entire set of elsewhere practiced neoliberal policies has been tested on a new terrain and employed in a context-specific way (Harvey, 2006, Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Privatisation of public land, infrastructures, natural resources and services, abolition of labour laws and shrinkage of the public sector and public expenditure (Hadjimichalis, 2014; Karaliotas, 2017) formed the core of successive “memoranda” aimed at raising revenue for paying the national debt and creating a favourable ‘business environment’ (European Commission, 2012, p. 155) to attract investment in the country. Shrinkage of ‘the public’ in general is a prevailing theme that runs through multiple scales and policies.

Reform of the planning system was among the country’s obligations stemming from the second Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2012 (ibid.). This MoU stated that the planning system should be reformed with a view to ‘ensuring more flexibility in land

development for private investment and the simplification and acceleration of land-use plans'. There have been two new framework planning laws issued since then. The first Law was issued in 2014, and the second, which amended the first, in 2016. The two laws dismantled the existing planning system and introduced new ideas, and tools aiming at increased flexibility in land development. Most notable among the newly introduced tools are the Special Urban Plans, which aim at facilitating strategic investment, surpassing development and environmental restrictions as well as fixed land use designations stemming from local development plans. There is no provision in the law for participation or even public consultation at any stage of planning. The Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment is the only stage that is open to public consultation. It should be noted, however, that participation used to be part of earlier planning laws and had been introduced into Greek planning legislation as early as 1983.

The two *Organisations for Regulatory Plan and the Protection of the Environment*, for Athens and for Thessaloniki, which were the authorities overseeing and coordinating urban development at the two cities at a metropolitan level, since 1985, were abolished in June 2014 with a view to cutting down on public expenditure. Moreover, the update of *Thessaloniki's Regulatory Plan* that was commissioned, prepared and presented for public consultation in 2011, was never ratified. Hence, Thessaloniki has no authority overseeing its development at a metropolitan level and the same outdated *Regulatory Plan*, since 1985.

At the same time, private investment has shrunk during the crisis. Shrinkage of the construction sector, which had already been reported in the beginning of the crisis in 2010, came into a virtual standstill in the following years. The Hellenic Statistical Authority (2019) has been reporting decrease in both private and public building activity in Greece between 2009 and 2017.

In this limbo state of urban planning and development in Greece, new actors have acquired prominence in the production of urban space. They replace or complement local authorities and other public actors seeking to cover the ground left vacant by the shrinkage of public expenditure and the transitional vagueness of the national planning framework. The corporate sector, represented by big companies like Cosmote and multinational Lidl, inaugurated its new role as a guarantor of the safe and vivid function of public squares and streets, through donating equipment and sponsoring events, taking over maintenance, security and refurbishment, through their social responsibility programs (Athanassiou, 2017). At the same time, many researchers have documented an explosion in citizen-led initiatives in Greece during the years of crisis asserting a role in shaping urban space (Vaiou & Kalandides, 2016; Athanassiou, 2017).

Within this hybrid landscape, philanthropic foundations are new actors asserting a significant role in the way cities are shaped during the past decade. They have become very active in Greece during the years of the debt crisis, which started in Greece in 2010, expanding their granting activity into a totally new terrain, from mainly social and cultural projects, to grants aimed at big projects of urban regeneration, and smaller scale projects of refurbishment of public spaces.

There have been two prominent cases of this kind of «benevolent urbanism»: a) an architectural competition for the regeneration of central Athens, launched by the Onassis Foundation b) a large complex of cultural uses comprising a park open to the public, in Athens funded by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

The first prominent case was Onassis Foundation, whose mission is “[to] create the conditions, explore the ideas and trigger bold discussions that shape and shake society” (Onassis online). In 2012, the foundation launched an international competition for the regeneration of central Athens, centred on the pedestrianisation of Panepistimiou street. The foundation’s involvement in urban development was vindicated on financial grounds. As Tournikiotis (2015) put it, “[g]iven the financial crisis, but considering the necessity of the project, the State turned to Onassis foundation, who took over organizing the competition, under specific terms and conditions, as well as funding all necessary schemes under the supervision of the relevant state authorities”. The project, which was first proposed in *Athens Regulatory Plan* of 1985 (Triantis, 2017), was presented in the public discourse, as an urgent cure for the city’s ailing centre as well as an opportunity to improve its image to the world. Its aim, as stated in the project’s official site, was “to offer Athens a competitive edge against all other European and international metropolises as a city with a quality, optimistic and people friendly profile” ([Rethink Athens online](#)). A rich environmental agenda helped vindicate the project and granted to it a technical legitimacy. “Rethink Athens”, as the project was titled, sparked a heated debate mostly regarding its necessity and its repercussions on the character and use of the city centre. The main critique focused on the danger of gentrification as well as on the flow of economic resources to showcase projects for tourists rather than to projects for the city’s residents (Voourekas, 2014). “Rethink Athens” was finally abandoned, as the European Commission did not approve its inclusion into the National Framework Strategic Reference (NSRF), as originally expected.

Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), the second case, develops its granting activities with a global reach and, as stated in its website, has funded projects in 134 countries. It funds “organizations and projects, worldwide, that aim to achieve a broad, lasting and positive impact for society at large, and exhibit strong leadership and sound management. The Foundation also supports projects that facilitate the formation of public-private partnerships as an effective means for serving public welfare.” (SNF online) The foundation’s biggest donation so far is the flagship Stavros Niarchos Cultural Centre in Athens, hosting the Greek National Opera House and the National Library, along with exhibition galleries, a restaurant and a cafe. The complex was designed by world famous star architect Renzo Piano. It features large expanses of a carefully designed park, open to the public from 6:00 in the morning till 10:00 on weekdays and till midnight on weekends. The park has a detailed set of rules regulating its public use. Stavros Niarchos Park has been warmly embraced by the neighbourhood and is expected to have a positive impact in its surrounding area. Although discussions started earlier, the agreement between the state and the foundation was ratified with a Law 3785 in 2009 (Government Gazette, 138-A-7 August 2009), a year before the crisis started in Greece. The cultural complex has a lot in common with large scale urban development projects of late 1990s and 2000s in Europe (Brenner & Theodor, 2002), in terms of the promoted model of urban governance, its lax relation to local formal plan and planning institutions, its iconic architectural design created by an internationally famous architect, its emphasis on public space. This iconic project is to be completed and enhanced by the extensive refashioning of the sea front, also designed by Renzo Piano and funded by the foundation.

The Foundation has recently extended its activities in urban public space to fund smaller scale projects at a less prominent terrain. In 2017, the Municipality of Thessaloniki

(online) applied to the SNF and received a donation of 10 million Euros “for the alleviation of the effects of the ongoing financial and social crisis on the city”. Almost half of this donation, 5,8 million Euros, was allocated to urban projects of varying scales, most of which were projects of refurbishment and redesign of public spaces. These included, improvement of the surrounding areas of historic monuments, systems of electronic management of pedestrianised streets, extension of a central pedestrianised axis towards the seafront, and a new tourist route linking historic monuments (Municipality of Thessaloniki online). In addition, the SNF is co-funding the new Holocaust Museum which is planned to be built on a site leased by GAIAOSE to the west of the city centre.

### **Upscaling philanthropic action**

Notwithstanding their prominence in Greece and their international outreach, neither Onassis nor Stavros Niarchos Foundation are included among the world’s largest philanthropic foundations. A third case of philanthropic action related to urban space in Greece is pursued by the Rockefeller Foundation, which ranks 26th on the list of foundations, by the size of their endowment or assets (Martens and Seitz, 2015). Such cases of “big philanthropy” in most cases originate from the US. The Rockefeller Foundation’s benevolent mission, as stated in its website, “unchanged since 1913 – is to promote the well-being of humanity throughout the world. Today, the Foundation advances new frontiers of science, data, policy, and innovation to solve global challenges related to health, food, power, and economic mobility” (Rockefeller Foundation online 2019). Since its first years of action, the foundation has developed international activities promoting, through its granting priorities, a specific approach characterised by a market logic and an emphasis on technological innovation (Martens and Seitz 2015). Along with Ford and Carnegie, the Rockefeller, has focused in increasing American foreign influence and thus, has played a key role in establishing American global power (Parmar, 2015). Parmar suggests that these “big 3” philanthropic foundations, among other strategies employed to promote American influence abroad, sought to create “an integrated global elite from the 1950s to the 1970s who could serve as conduits for American interests within the institutions of each nation” (ibid. p. 676).

In 2013, the Rockefeller Foundation launched the ‘100 Resilient Cities’ initiative to celebrate 100 years since its creation in 1913 by billionaire John D. Rockefeller. According to its website, the main concern that triggered the initiative is the crisis that many cities around the world face today due to the combined effects of climate change, globalisation and rapid urbanization. Its main purpose is to assist cities in planning in advance for these challenges and building their resilience (100resilientcities online). To this end, the Rockefeller Foundation has established collaboration with “the platform” of about one hundred international partners. These are global corporate actors, public and academic organisations and NGOs, like Microsoft, Siemens and Swiss Re, the World Bank, WWF, who are eager to offer their technical expertise in issues like, for example, waste management and web crowdsourcing, and advise on issues of governance, management and communication. The foundation offers one million US dollars to each one of the participating cities. However, Leitner et al (2018) suggest that it is not clear whether this funding is directly granted to the cities’ municipalities or it is received through paid services by the platform partners.

'100 Resilient Cities' initiative has played a key role in disseminating resilience as the new buzzword of urban planning, but also in infusing it into local authorities' operational plans and administrative structures, in cities as diverse as Pittsburgh, Ramallah and Thessaloniki. However, resilience remains a rather blur concept and as Weichselgartner and Kelman suggest 'there is an inherent danger [that it] becomes an empty signifier that can easily be filled with any meaning to justify any specific goal' (Weichselgartner, & Kelman, 2015). An academic discussion has developed around both its conceptualization and its transformative potential (Davoudi, 2017), and the politics of its mainstream expressions in practice (Slater, 2014; Kaika, 2017). Nevertheless, international organizations, like the UNISDR (2012) the UN (2017), OECD ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)) and national governments have endorsed the new buzzword and developed their policy frameworks towards urban resilience.

The Foundation offers funding for hiring a Chief Resilience Officer and support for the creation of a strategy towards resilience to each participating city. All cities' strategies are produced following the guidelines of the City Resilience Framework (CRF) which was created, especially for the initiative, by ARUP, an engineering consulting company with global reach. The CRF sets the concepts and their definitions, as well as the basic structure of the cities' strategies. Although it leaves room for local difference, it works as a global template within which some issues are foregrounded and others become marginalised or hidden altogether. The CRF understands vulnerability to environmental and social risks as an intrinsic attribute of contemporary cities, north and south and not as a geographically and socially variegated issue, constantly produced by socio-natural processes. From the outset, the initiative appears indifferent to issues of uneven development between rich and poor cities and suggests a common framework of action valid for every city regardless of its position in the global hierarchy, its size, its social and cultural characteristics, its institutional frameworks of planning and governance. Depoliticising urban processes and sidelining difference, cities employ the same concepts and tools and illustrate their strategy with the same graphics, provided in the CRF. The initiative, thus, employs a post-political, strictly techno-managerial approach to urban socio-environmental problems (Swyngedouw, 1996) and remains blind to multi-scalar actors and processes that produce and reproduce the "shocks and risks" identified for each city.

Strategies produced within the Rockefeller network have an all-encompassing character. They set objectives and goals and outline specific programmes for their fulfilment. Although produced within, or rather in conjunction to, the institutional framework of one municipality they have a metropolitan scope. They depart from project-based urban regeneration, that characterized processes of neo liberalization of cities in the 1990s and 2000s, and assume the role of comprehensive strategies. They, thus, mark a shift from place-based projects to target-based strategies, as well as an upscaling of the activities of philanthropic foundations.

Both Athens and Thessaloniki, cities experiencing multiple repercussions of the financial crisis since 2010 and in the midst of a transitional vagueness in terms of the national spatial planning framework, were included in the initiative's global network, as part of the second wave of cities in 2014. It was a highly competitive entry process, as 331 cities from across the globe applied and only 35 were accepted. Cities were assessed by expert judges who looked for "innovative mayors, a recent catalyst for change, a history



of building partnerships and an ability to work with a wide range of stakeholders” (100 Resilient Cities on line).

Athens and Thessaloniki have both conducted a preliminary process of identifying their “stresses and shocks” (Resilient Thessaloniki 2016, Resilient Athens 2016) and subsequently publicized their strategies towards resilience. Seen as an opportunity to internationalise an attractive image to the world, both Athens and Thessaloniki illustrate their strategies with photos of their most visible and attractive parts, often animated with people engaged in leisure or participating in common activities and workshops. There is little sight of underprivileged and derelict areas, or of marginalized and vulnerable groups. With regard to public space, Chalastanis (2019, pp. 83-84) comments on the way political demonstrations that took place on squares and streets of Athens during the crisis, mostly expressing dissent against austerity politics, are presented in the Athens Preliminary Resilience Report. They are grouped as “riots and civil unrest” and reported among the “stresses” that have to be faced, thus neglecting their cause and political meaning and foregrounding a depoliticized idea of public space. In a similar vein, citizen initiatives and spontaneous survival strategies developed during the crisis, are “usurped” and presented as part of formal policies nurtured by the Municipality (ibid.) Employing a rhetoric of fear, and without offering any reason whatsoever, both cities are reported as vulnerable to “terrorist attack”, in their Preliminary Resilience Assessments.

The Rockefeller Foundation’s initiative is the first philanthropic action in Greece to fund strategic urban planning, rather than specific urban development projects. Sidelining differences between cities and socio-environmental inequalities within cities, it creates and promotes a global urban agenda based on the common imperative to act pre-emptively against a variety of risks. Through its funding, it achieved not only wide penetration of the concept of resilience to local authorities as the central objective of urban policies, but also specific policy priorities towards it. Technological innovation, the role of the private sector and stakeholders’ participation can be identified as key policy dimensions of resilience as promoted by the foundation. The opening up of local urban development to a wide range of stakeholders of global outreach, through the “platform of partners”, is promoted as an advantage offered to cities by the foundation and a key feature in the implementation of the strategies.

### **Participation in the ‘100 Resilient Cities’ initiative**

Participation of ‘stakeholders’ in urban governance is foregrounded as one of the dimensions of urban resilience. According to the CRF, resilient systems need to be among other things: ‘inclusive and integrated which relate[s] to the processes of good governance and effective leadership that ensure investments and actions are appropriate, address the needs of the most vulnerable and collectively create a resilient city – for everyone. Inclusive processes emphasise the need for broad consultation and ‘many seats at the table’ to create a sense of shared ownership or a joint vision to build city resilience.’ Towards this end, the strategies ‘empower of broad range of stakeholders’ (The Rockefeller Foundation & ARUP, 2015, p. 4).

Following the CRF, the Athens Resilience Strategy (Resilient Athens, 2017), was “created in collaboration with 140 organizations and 900 citizens which participated in 40 workshops, conferences or public events. In the Athens Strategy, one of the four

“pillars” towards resilience is the idea of an “open city”. When assessed for its “resilience value” this pillar is hoped “to develop synergies with city stakeholders and enhance participation”. It is interesting to highlight the partners involved in fulfilling this goal, as mentioned in the strategy. Featuring among local authorities and Greek service providers, the National Center of Social Research and public utility companies is Citymart. This is an international consultancy with the mission to empower ‘city officials to better serve their communities through access to data, insights, and peers’ (Citymart online). Also mentioned, as a partner is the Transatlantic Policy Lab (TAPL), which, as stated in its website, is ‘a global leader in Smart City solutions, city diplomacy and collaboration advancing sustainability and resilient city strategies and technologies’ (Bertelsmann Foundation, online). In effect, TAPLab is a consultancy backed by the Washington Branch of the German Bertelsmann Foundation. The TAPLab was founded in 2008 by Bertelsmann one of the world’s biggest mass media companies.

Another agent featuring in Athens Strategy is Bloomberg Philanthropies and Bloomberg Associates both founded by Michael Bloomberg, American businessman in global financial services, mass media, and software as well as mayor of New York for three consecutive terms between 2002 and 2013. Bloomberg Philanthropies promotes a ‘data-driven approach to global change’. Bloomberg Associates that were founded as a philanthropic venture, acts as a consultancy to “advise and help city governments to successfully tackle complex and difficult challenges to positively impact the quality of life of their citizens’ (Bloomberg Associates online).

Another “pillar” of the Athens Strategy is to make Athens a “green city”. Towards this end, the strategy sets the goal to “co-create public spaces” (Resilient Athens, 2017, p. 100). Activities declared as bringing this goal into materialisation are ‘public space rejuvenation initiatives’ and ‘public space co-development framework’ (ibid. pp. 107-109). The former refers to organizing ‘cultural events and small-scale cultural interventions supported by digital technologies’ (ibid). This is hoped to cultivate ‘a new approach for Athens public space and to enforce the productive collaborations between the municipal government and city’s cultural organizations’ (ibid.). The latter refers to the development of a framework that will combine several TAPL proposals along with two EU funding proposals (Urban Innovative Action and ICT-11-2017 ‘Collective awareness platform for sustainability and social innovation’) in order “to foster collaborations around public space maintenance and co-creation, and to catalyse participatory activities in the city” (ibid.). TAPL proposals for social equity, were created by a group of experts from the US and Europe, who participated in a four-day workshop in Athens, in collaboration with the local Resilience office. The aim of the workshop was to produce proposals to feed into the Athens Strategy. The report produced out of this lab identified public space and placemaking as catalysts for change and suggested the “tactics” that can activate public space, through engaging and empowering citizens. In order to promote “clean, green and safe” public spaces, the report employed the “broken windows” theory (Wilson and Kelling. 1982) and proposed citizens’ participation in their maintenance, through adoption agreements with the municipality (TAPL, 2016).

Thessaloniki also foregrounds citizen participation in shaping public space as a central axis of its strategy towards resilience, as produced within the Rockefeller initiative. Citizens have participated in shaping the strategy itself. As stated in Thessaloniki’s strategy ‘over a period of 12 months, more than 2000 people and 40 organizations

contributed in the shaping of Thessaloniki's strategy' (Resilient Thessaloniki, 2017, p. 9). This was achieved through various events, workshops, round-table discussions and public consultations organized by the municipality's specially created Resilience office. One of the strategy's four main goals is to 'co-create the inclusive city' (ibid.) which is elaborated as follows:

*“Invest in human talent, including skills, leadership and entrepreneurship; align education and training to career paths; expand the role of boroughs as social labs; empower citizens and community-led projects; make the city welcoming to new residents; and enable co-creation in open and public spaces”*  
(ibid.)

Elaborating this goal are 9 objectives one of which is “Co-creation of inclusive open spaces” (ibid. p.80). This objective in turn will be realised through the following three actions: 1) adopt of public space co-creation policy which refers to a “streamlined activation and stewardship policy” aiming at social cohesion through ‘stewardship models’ and programming of public spaces; 2) deliver a public space pilot project, which will be designed to build social cohesion and test the co-creation policy for any shortcoming; 3) launch the open schools pilot project, which aims at increasing the amount of open public space in the city's neighbourhoods (ibid. pp. 80-82).

The partners mentioned as participating in realizing the first two actions are the Municipality of Thessaloniki, Tactical Urbanism and local grassroots initiatives. Tactical Urbanism refers to Street Plans Collaborative, the American “urban planning, urban design research and advocacy firm” (Street Plans, online), which popularised the term tactical urbanism. The term groups together a variety of temporary low-budget and small-scale interventions in public spaces, usually involving citizens in their planning and/or implementation. This variegated spectrum of short-term experiments, apparently triggering a process of change to the benefit of the people, is often discussed as an antidote to neoliberal urbanization. However, it does not anticipate any long-term change, and does not affect the large scale of complex urban problems beyond the premises of the specific park or square where the experiments take place. Moreover, it can also be interpreted as fully entrenched to processes of neo liberalization, covering the ground left vacant by shrunk public services and legitimizing hegemonic policies through citizen participation (Brenner, 2015). The firm, that is based in Miami, New York and San Francisco, promotes this trend of contemporary urban design and has played a key role in disseminating it and transforming it into a dominant approach to urban design (StreetPlans online). Thus, apart from the global framework of ARUP, global experts from the “platform of partners”, are invited to test their techniques in a new urban context. Through them, urban design prototypes are promoted as transferrable. A project of tactical urbanism, designed by Street Plans, in Burlington New Jersey USA illustrates the strategy of Thessaloniki, presumably suggesting its appropriateness for the Greek context.

Drawing evidence from the CRF and the strategies developed by the two Greek cities that participate in the 100 Resilient Cities network, it becomes evident that the initiative endorses inclusiveness, empowerment, openness and stakeholder participation. Thus, through the actions of a big philanthropic foundation, participation becomes a global strategy towards resilience and penetrates into local structures of urban governance.

Notwithstanding its inclusive rhetoric, participation in public space production is instigated by an abstract benevolent foundation with global reach, acting in parallel to locally instituted planning processes. It is not a locally instituted process, initiated within local planning agents and levels of governance and institutions, hence, it does not activate or enhance mechanisms of democratic decision-making, accountability and transparency. Thus, participation becomes an isolated experiment, that lasts as long as funding from the foundation is secured, initiated by a global agent, imbued by globally agreed normative principles created by global consultants, and performed by global planning experts. Workshops of “public space co-creation” for the redesign of a particular park were performed in Thessaloniki in 2017, as part of the *Strategy*, with the technical support of Street Plans (Kapsali, 2019, pp. 279-290). However, residents’ participation was limited and as mentioned earlier, it is not institutionalized and hence it is still rarely performed.

Through participation, and other definitive dimensions of resilience, the Rockefeller initiative actively promotes global networking between cities, technology companies and consultancies. In the context of the Rockefeller initiative, participation is understood as the opening of various urban development processes, to a variety of agents, covering the variegated spectrum between citizens and global development players. The idea of «more seats around the table”, as mentioned by the CRF, illustrates a model of “governance-beyond-the-state” through which new social actors acquire voice and perform their specific agendas. Citizen participation is facilitated through activities, which are invited by the municipality and orchestrated by global consultants, specializing in urban governance and digital technologies. Through the “platform of partners”, global consultancies gained access into local processes of public space creation. Thus, “benevolent urbanism” becomes a powerful vehicle through which global agents are effectively connected to local politics, transfer their quick-fix solutions and their market-driven agendas and increase their non-contextualised, dispersed outreach to new geographies.

Indeed, as presented above, partners, consultants, planners and advocacy experts are invited to facilitate projects of citizen participation. They are actively involved in developing and using the right ‘techniques’ to orchestrate an efficient process of participation. This ‘techniques-based approach to participation”, as Cleaver puts it (1999, 600), “fails to adequately address issues of power, control of information and other resources and provides an inadequate framework for developing a critical reflective understanding of the deeper determinants of technical and social change”.

Participation, as conceptualized and proposed within the initiative, becomes a matter of techno-managerial “know-how”, designed and delivered by global elite of experts and incorporated in diversified urban contexts as a de-politicised dimension of urban resilience. Combined to monitoring and smart technologies (Kaika, 2017), participation is transferred as an urban policy model and becomes part of a global urban strategy towards resilience. Commonly perceived within planning as a democratising and potentially transformative process, citizen participation is thus co-opted by hegemonic politics, as constituted in a multi-scalar way, and reduced to a transferrable technique based on scientific consensus, what Montero (2020) calls urban “solutionism”. Thus, it loses its potential to function as a self-instituted agonistic process, unsettling unjust socio-environmental processes and acting towards justice and democracy (Mouffe, 2005).

Finally, participation as promoted in Athens and Thessaloniki is linked to particular hegemonic agendas for public space. The theory of “broken windows” is employed to explain degradation and, subsequently to vindicate suggested strategies towards “cleaner and safer” public spaces, thereby e.g. criminalizing spatial appropriation strategies of youth groups and legitimizing more policing and citizen patrols. Placemaking and tactical urbanism are adopted as effective tools towards improving public space. The dominant imaginary of public space as an attractive, orderly, clean and safe place (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2006) is embraced and promoted through “tactical” temporary interventions as well as through stewardship and adoption schemes. Responsibility for public space is thus transferred from the traditional public manager - the state or the municipality – to different kinds of citizens’ associations in order to safeguard streets and squares from “undesirable” users and uses (ibid.) and promote their vitality through consumption, recreation and cultural activities. Citizen participation, introduced through “benevolent urbanism”, is stripped from its democratic function and is transformed into a vehicle of legitimation of the various agents participating in globalized urban governance regimes, their dispersed power and their hegemonic agendas for public space. To return to Arnheim’s precondition of participation, i.e. “redistribution of power”, not only there is no challenge of hegemonic power structures, but there is support to the project of neo liberalisation to new geographical contexts. As Purcell (2009, p. 141) puts it, as neoliberal urban policies produce democratic deficits, they “coopt democratic rhetoric to legitimate neoliberalism”.

### **Concluding remarks**

The role of major philanthropic foundations is increasingly important in global urban development issues through their granting priorities and the development approach those promote. In Greece, in conditions of economic shrinkage and planning transition, philanthropic foundations have extended their granting activities to urban development projects of varying scales, from small-scale interventions to strategic planning. Complementing or even replacing the traditional roles of a shrunk state and a reluctant private sector, this kind of ‘benevolent’ urbanism is fragmentary and, often, disconnected from local planning institutions, existing public planning procedures, regulations and processes. The foundations generally defined benevolent missions are materialized in projects that employ specific hegemonic discourses and urban development paradigms and promote specific imaginaries of public space. “Benevolent urbanism” constitutes part of a new governance regime in Greece, that bloomed in the midst of austerity politics, substituting a state-centred planning regime for flexible processes of urban development open to multiple global stakeholders.

The 100 Resilient Cities initiative of Rockefeller Foundation, differs from previous examples of “benevolent urbanism” in Greece, in that it is not a place-based project but a target-based strategy. It targets urban resilience and utilizes a global template towards it, transferring a contested and blurry idea to 100 different cities around the world. Both Athens and Thessaloniki prepared their strategies towards resilience, not within the national planning framework and institutions, but within the ‘100 Resilient Cities’ network and according to the global template of the CRF.

Participation in public space production is central to the foundation’s conceptualization

of urban resilience. It is, however, a de-politicised technique-based enterprise, defined and orchestrated by global experts. Ensuring “more seats around the table” the benevolent foundation acted as a “conduit” between this global elite of consultants and local institutions. It is, also, a process that is legitimated through scientific consensus and aims at consensus. Dissent and conflict are not in the picture. Participation in public space production, inflicted by a distant benevolent foundation, performed by global experts employing globally accepted scientific techniques cannot be understood as a process unsettling unjust socio-environmental processes and promoting justice and democracy. Entrenched in techno-managerial, consensual politics, participation loses its potential to unsettle hegemonic policies of neo liberalisation, as materialised in different urban contexts. On the contrary, it becomes an effective tool for their legitimation and their expansion in new geographies.

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## Discovering and Mapping Aspects of Spatial Publicness. Observations from an Undergraduate Architecture Studio in Cyprus

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### Abstract

The value of public spaces and their social function in cities has been the source of numerous writings. The questions posed in our undergraduate architecture studio at the University of Cyprus are: “What core design aspects create successful public places, and how do they constitute conscious design processes?” and “What are core values that create successful public places and how are they consciously integrated in a design process?”. This paper will attempt to address the topic of spatial publicness within a framework of translating observations of the above into design strategies and tools. These aspects have formulated the basis for recent design briefs, tested within an architectural studio context from 2nd year coursework, while at the same time being translated into transferable values, such as diagnostic and synthetic tools, appropriate for an undergraduate architectural studio. They formulate the basis of an ongoing research project tested within the studio context and utilizing case studies from the output of students’ work to draw conclusions that guide the pedagogical approach.

**Keywords:** urban design, public space, right to the city, accessibility, urban mobility

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## **Introduction**

The premise of the studio, the discovering and mapping of aspects of spatial publicness as a primer for collaborative design of shared collective space in the public domain, as this is framed by individual interventions based on a group masterplan by students of the first semester, second year students at the Department of Architecture of the University of Cyprus, emanates from a number of readings and references that set the pedagogical framework for this design exercise. One such reference comes from Jane Jacobs' description of the qualities of living in lively cities and she is basing those observations from her personal experience living in Greenwich Village in New York City. Her observation that "cities were no longer being built as agglomerations of city space and buildings, but rather, as individual buildings," (Jacobs, 1961) finds resonance with our pedagogical mandate that quality public collective space can be the result of happenstance, but also the result of deliberately executing a masterplan where individual building proposals are also subordinated by the collective design of the space between the buildings.

Another important reference comes from Jan Gehl – a few years after Jacobs' writings – who noted (Gehl, 2010) that as we approach the turn of the century and with the majority of the global population becoming increasingly urbanized, great focus needs to be placed on the needs of urban dwellers in terms of strengthening the social function of urban spaces as places of increased physical and also social sustainability. This is a view strongly supported as well by Richard Rogers, who in his forward to Jan Gehl's latest edition of "Cities for People" also notes that cities are places where people "meet to socialize and to relax, to exchange ideas and to be creative, to work and to trade" (Gehl, 2010). Both designers and theoreticians are therefore in agreement that the urban domain is a strong catalyst for collective pastimes and activities.

Moreover, these two researchers are proponents of the concept of a compact city, which sees the integration of nodes and corridors related to urban mobility as a key and viable ingredient to the creation of socially, environmentally, economically and even culturally sustainable city form. However, for this urban compactness to be achieved, the city must offer urban spaces of a significant quantity and of a substantial quality for people to use as the outlet for collective activities juxtaposed to the expected high densities of architectural program occupying living and working spaces. It is these spaces that enable compact cities to act as proponents of public life and to encourage and accommodate diverse public activities and functions that range "from the quiet and contemplative to the noisy and busy," while at the same time they remain respectful of health, safety and the human scale of the individual city dweller.

### *Submitting a premise for investigation in the architectural studio context*

Given this premise, the studio in question examined a number of sub-themes that were then incorporated into the design narrative that was given to the students. These sub-themes were examined through relevant literature review and they were further informed by the approaches to the formulation of studio briefs, as these were attempted in similar, but also in different cultural and geographical contexts in other undergraduate architecture studio frameworks, and they are as follows:

- Spatial publicness as a consequence of public life
- Public life reconstituted
- The streets as connectors of nodes of public life

- Beyond public life and urban mobility – the healthy city
- Accommodating “the flâneur” as the opportunistic user
- Addressing the socioeconomic prerequisites to public life

Each of these sub-themes that constituted the investigative backbone of the studio brief are presented below, matched to methodological prompts from selected approaches proposed or adopted by instructors elsewhere, dealing with comparable pedagogical challenges and opportunities. In this way hopefully students may start tackling quasi-real-world challenges in the design of public space for public life and to augment their confidence in being able to sift through more complex design issues both in transdisciplinary teams but also at the same time with a higher degree of autonomy as well.

### **Constructing a theoretical and methodological framework: Outlining prongs of investigation and learning from others**

In constructing a theoretical and methodological framework for structuring the investigation of the design of public in an undergraduate architectural studio context it is important to recognize that in all public life there is a dynamic between public and private activities. Although the public-private balance is unique to each culture, it will shift under the influence of cultural exchange, technology, changing political and economic systems prevalent at the time (Carr et.al., 1992). It is therefore important to supplement and enrich the theoretical framework informed by reviewing the literature with knowledge produced by others tackling similar issues in a broad range of geographical contexts.

#### *Spatial publicness as a consequence of public life*

Early in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Canaletto’s pictures of Venice portray spaces filled with life, with energy and with a sense of enjoyment of spending time in a public setting. “This panoramic view conveys a picture of public life in this space of Venice, one in which everyone seems to have a place with ample room to engage in the varied activities that are captured by the artist. It is the public life that enriches the scene as well as the beautiful space in which it takes place” a quality also noted by Brighenti (2010) in his treatise of the publicness of public space. Moreover, according to Whyte (1988), “Public life enables the transmission of important messages for the people of a community”, which may range from the symbolic messages of the power of the state to social commentary and gossip emanating from the neighbourhood.

In the “new world”, this kind of group life was found in the barn-raising and house-building activities that were seen as public responsibilities of a community, as well as in the formation of marketplaces to sell produce and products (Low, 2000) and which led to the typology of the commons. Elsewhere in non-western cultures Qian (2014) delves on the design of public spaces and the ways in which this influences the practices of publicness in that context and the notion of socio-spatial entanglement in collective spaces. In the case of Cyprus, collective spaces, such as public parks, were influenced by nineteenth century European planning principles in the form of British colonial practices regarding town planning, in order to bring more congenial settings to people inhabiting the growing Cypriot cities. Subsequent emphasis was also placed on play settings for children followed by the spread of small community green areas that were supposed to serve the growing social and recreational needs at the scale of the neighbourhood.

In this context the work by Oz Mehmet and Alakavuk (2016) on the integration of processes introduced in theoretical courses and then transferred to undergraduate design studios was very useful to the formulation of coursework at UCy, especially discussions of studio-based design learning systems and curriculum development. As presented in that case, coursework from the second year dealing with subjects in social engagement gave support and enriched studio deliberations by tapping onto both theoretical as well as practical parameters of spatial analysis and synthesis of the theme of spatial publicness as a consequence of designing for public life.

*Public life reconstituted*

In the past couple of centuries, cities and their inhabitants have developed networks of sociability which demanded the establishment of public amenities with regards to socialization and leisure in the public space. Broader patterns of social interaction, which were suited to exchange between strangers, also came into being wherein according to Sennett (1977) the new “cosmopolis” – derived from the words “cosmos” (as in people) and from “polis” (as in city) “defines the line drawn between public and private, and on which the claims of civility – epitomized by cosmopolitan, public behaviour – were balanced against the claims of nature – epitomized by the family.” He goes on to note that since the 19th century one may come to understand the crisis of public life in terms of four psychological conditions: “the involuntary disclosure of character; the superimposition of public and private imagery; defence through withdrawal; and silence.”

In the public sphere, cosmopolitan public behaviour as described by Sennett above used to be directly connected to the public life of the ancient agora and its more contemporary translation of a city’s plaza. Thompson (2011) continues the debate in his mention of shifting boundaries in the public sphere and how this is manifested in a demarcation of public and private life in the city. However, as Chidister (1988) contends, the use of such public spaces may not constitute a continuing and recurring interest in public life as in times past, but merely an “event” in the established patterns of private life of most of its users. Still, the interest in such places may well be an indication of a renewed interest in public life. What may be questioned with regards to the traditional character of public life in the ancient agora or the contemporary plaza, is the fact that many of the traditional activities of commerce and leisure and exchange that occurred there are now occurring in places designed and built specifically in order to house these activities (Cooper Marcus & Francis, 1998). By doing so they oftentimes reconstitute public life by reversing public space from outdoor un-programmed space that may be appropriated for a variety of uses, to specific indoor and controlled programmed space. This subsequently may cause the contextual relationship between built and open space in the city – the buildings and the space between the buildings, which in itself constitutes the continuity in an urban fabric to offer possibilities for interaction and exchange – to be weakened or even to be lost.

Consequently, as a concept, a ‘life between buildings’ strategy should include all of the very different activities people engage in when they use common city space: walks from place to place, promenades, shorter and longer stays, conversations and meetings, play and entertainment. But most importantly at its core should be the facilitation of communication between people who share public space as a framework for interaction (Gehl, 2011; Lefebvre, 1996/1968), a common characteristic of life in city space between

buildings, wherein versatility and complexity of the activities allows for a much greater diversity in the uses and functions for which it may be appropriated. Such appropriations and their effect on the socio-spatial qualities of public urban space are also referenced and critiqued by Wang (2018) in the debate of the publicness of related functions in the urban space. Such functions may be: waiting for the bus on the way to work or school; accessing services and delivering goods; or functions of leisure, such as promenading or sightseeing.

The work of Natu (2020) helped to further explore the issue of the reconstitution of public life in the undergraduate studio context. In this case what was deemed important was the integration of behavioural research in undergraduate architecture education, and more specifically in the design of inclusive environments, in an attempt to bridge the gap between user needs and design decisions that cater to those needs. As in that case, students at UCy explored their sites of intervention at different times and by examining diverse groups of inhabitants in the area investigated. It is hoped that this approach helps make studio participants more sensitive to social inclusion as a prerequisite for the reconstitution of public life, with the development of a framework for introducing inclusive design strategies.

#### *The streets as connectors of nodes of public life*

Nodes of public life may exist in enclaved or even isolated conditions, but their contribution in constituting a sociable and healthy community is increased if they form part of an interconnected and synergistic network of such venues, wherein the streets as extensions of public life in the city act as connectors of these nodes of public life. In the 20th century, the way cities were planned in terms of accommodating mobility and connections amongst major trip generators kept pace with urban growth and city development as it adhered to modernist ideologies. Modernism introduced a vision of the city as a machine and planning professionals with traffic planners leading the way, tried to ensure the best conditions for managing car traffic (Rivlin, 1987) and its associated higher speeds, which oftentimes clashed with the more modest and moderate speeds of the pedestrian or the cyclist. In conventional land use planning, the design of streets was dictated by traffic flow and parking standards and treated mainly as a part of the circulation element of a city's area plan (Appleyard, 1981) rather than also doubling up as a connector of nodes of public life or as the venue of public life in and of itself.

This situation came to a head for many crowded cities in the 20th century (Gehl, 2010), as in an effort to cope with rising car traffic, substantial city space was typically appropriated for vehicular traffic and parking and led to diminishing attention being paid to the culmination or intersection of rights of ways at key locations of increased socialization and public life. Street quality, street life and street centrality in the cases of diverse urbanities and especially in the potential for increased socialization in the main commercial thoroughfares – many of which become increasingly pedestrianized in city centres – is also mentioned by Remali et.al. (2015) in the context of contemporary traffic pressures and the spatial relationship between suburbs and the central business districts. These early attempts to relieve traffic pressure by building more roads and parking garages generated more traffic and more congestion, proving that the volume of car traffic has a close correlation to available transportation infrastructure (Loukaidou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998). In reversing this trend, urban designers, such as Gehl (2011)

note that in the 21st century cities such as London and Copenhagen have taken great strides in converting highways to city streets and city streets to pedestrian ways and bicycle lanes thereby prompting conviviality in public spaces and the spontaneity of public life.

By changing such regulatory practices, the City of London in 2002 introduced road pricing for access to the city centre and the immediate effect of the new “congestion charge” was an 18% reduction in the 24km<sup>2</sup> central city zone, thereby revisiting the reconstitution of the advantages offered by both the condition of increased centrality and the key supporting advantages offered when this is coupled to better networked urban streets (Crucitti et.al., 2006) Further developing on these ideas, in 2017 Zaha Hadid Architects (2017) initiated a project called ‘Walkable London’ proposing an expansive network of pedestrian routes across the capital, in order to achieve a measurable difference in the quality of life in the city centre. Consequently, a large pedestrian network was prioritized as an integral part of the city’s transport infrastructure, thereby coupling the perceived value of public space with tangible aspects of urban connectivity, accessibility and walkability as an added responsibility in planning not only for liveable cities with respect to socialization and public life but also liveable cities with respect to public health. Similarly in Copenhagen, the city began restructuring its street network by removing driving lanes and parking places and by timing traffic signals at crossings (Gehl, 2010), deliberately creating safer conditions for bicycle and pedestrian traffic, which by 2008 accounted to 37% of all personal transport in the city to and from work to be carried out by bicycle.

In both instances, the fees gathered from these tolls are put into the improvement not only of the connectors – the rights of way that connect key trips between key urban destinations and services – but also in all associated public spaces and public venues that are the incubators of urban public life. Yet in Cyprus on the other hand, planning regulations governing the requirements for private parking keep increasing. Every housing unit exceeding 150 sq. m. should provide for two parking spaces within, something which increases and encourages the use of private means of transportation. García’s work (2017) in examining neighbourhood identity through the lens of mobility, as this is manifested in a definition of streets not only as rights of way but as quintessential public places, expanded the outlook of them as connectors of nodes of public life and community engagement. Design skills were matched to the aim of developing an understanding of the cultural, the social, the economic and the environmental forces that contribute to the evolution of neighbourhood identity. By engaging a diverse group of stakeholders in the initial contextual site analysis the students used on-site observations as part of an evidence-based approach to identify nodes of public life in the city and to understand the crucial role of the mobility corridors that (inter)connect them. These corridors were examined through the lens of the health, safety and welfare of the community residents, and how with the further implementation of community participatory practices, these could be associated as enablers in forging a neighbourhood sense of place and giving an identity to spaces of public use.

#### *Beyond public life and urban mobility – the healthy city*

The evidence above, points also to mobility and the associated rights-of-way having a significant correlation to the notion of an expanded public domain, which includes these

mobility corridors. There is also evidence that if vehicular traffic is reduced in these corridors and that space is appropriated by pedestrians and bicyclists through new patterns of use there may exist benefits associated with public health that addresses both human physiology and also human psychology. Indeed, by designing urban spaces of a public and collective nature for the “fit city” an active lifestyle with positive repercussions on public health in the cities may be possible by a (re)instrumentalization of urban space (Herrick, 2009). With this in mind, sidewalks may be expanded, trees planted and new pedestrian and bicycle ways incorporated in the expanded public zone and to ensure an extended timeframe of use into the evening hours, lighting design may also be incorporated in the design to ensure safe occupation and navigation in this connected network of open spaces and the streets that connect them even at nighttime. To this point, the office of Jan Gehl (2010) had conducted surveys in the City of Melbourne in 1994 and 2004, which indicated that there is an increased desire to locate housing and workplace developments in conjunction said network of these urban improvement strategies. Oftentimes such mandates have been the result of co-creation process between urban designers who put substance to community aspirations for a more sustainable urban metabolism and urban transformations that lead to healthier cities (Fróes and Lasthein, 2020). The potential influx of new residents would necessitate the incorporation of new squares and promenades that connect them that in turn serve urban mobility and act as centres of collective activity and socialization, while also tripling the activity level on ordinary workdays and offering the possibility of an extended stay in the area.

The study of these researchers also noted the current and potential residents’ perception that occupying these public spaces and also walking and biking from one to the other for leisure or for work, as a natural part of the pattern of daily activities, satisfied their perceptions and expectations of living not only in a more sociable city but also in a healthier one. These observations are in agreement with statistics compiled by public authorities that demonstrate a growth in public health problems resulting from large numbers of urban dwellers leading sedentary and inactive lives and relying extensively on the use of their car (Gehl, 2010). Consequently, the option and opportunity to walk and bike between nodes of public life as a natural and integrated element of one’s daily routine should constitute an important and integrated part in of any strategies integrating public health and the strengthening of public life.

A city that invites people to walk must by definition have a reasonably cohesive structure that offers manageable distances between venues of public life, connecting corridors of high spatial quality addressing user comfort and the feeling of security in and on the way to these venues (Mitchell, 2003). Lastly spatial excitement and functional heterogeneity – in conjunction with increased density – will help to ensure diverse public encounters in the urban fabric.

Similar to the work of other undergraduate studio educators mentioned above, the work of Hong and Chong (2023) in designing publicness through social architecture approaches, also found its way into UCy second year studio curricula, in looking beyond public life to the conditions associated with the creation or enhancement of healthy cities. Their work provided a reflective review of how to organize and draft aspects an architectural design studio curriculum, so as to utilize the framework of social architectural design approaches to create human-centred and context-based designs for urban public spaces. In the site analysis and architectural programming phase of their



studio project, the students were asked to employ both behavioural tracing and activity mapping as part of an architectural ethnography approach, to identify issues related to a broad definition of what constitutes a health city in the context of the value of public space to not only design new but also to improve the quality of existing public spaces. The soundscape design strategies were categorized into three groups: the introduction of desirable sounds, the reinforcement of desired sounds, and the reduction in unwanted sounds. This is hoped to enable students to better comprehend the socio-behavioural aspects involved in architectural synthesis so as to help design more comprehensive, healthy and enjoyable spaces for public life.

*Accommodating “the flâneur” as the opportunistic user*

According to Oldenburg (1989), another important aspect of a successful public space is for it to “allow the user to look, to gaze and to watch as part of normal stimulus-seeking behaviour”. In this he agrees with Gehl in that cultural and social context of this behaviour has received attention in the relevant literature, touching upon aspects focusing on the relationship between the observer and the environment and how the built form and the way it is shaped addresses its use by the opportunistic user, the flâneur, a person with no programmed or scheduled activity but rather concerned with flânerie, “the activity of strolling and looking” (Tester, 1994). For this to happen then nodes of public life and their connectors may be thought of and perhaps be reconstituted as stage sets for impromptu theatre of everyday urban public life and its irresistible attraction to the “neo- neo-flâneur amongst other urban dwellers (Laviolette, 2014).

This concept may be applied to reconstituted places of public life in the form of a stage set that can be easily appropriated and configured to accommodate spontaneous events or other such temporary activities (Schuster, 2001). Traditionally, planners have associated public life with such places and many principles of land use planning and urban design are based on this premise. Yet, increasingly public life is also occurring in private places being given to public usage (Holston, 1996), across small businesses such as coffee shops, bookstores and other similar locales or even in the public lobbies of private office buildings, which may be of use to the opportunistic user, the flâneur. The city administrators and the city dwellers might therefore be motivated to reinvent underutilized and residual urban spaces and voids and to convert underperforming corridors as viable destinations for and between venues of public life, and to look beyond enabling efficient urban mobility to planning cities for people and places (Cervero et.al., 2017) In the bigger framework of prioritizing these public works, entities may make use of such mechanisms as linkage fees to provide funding for the renovation of public spaces and the public life that occurs therein. Although many developers see linkage fees as a form of exaction, increasingly they have accepted them as the cost of doing business and they incorporate them creatively in their development strategies, as for example the contribution of a percentage of project costs toward public art or for the redevelopment of local streets and parks.

The creative incorporation of design qualities that accommodate “the flâneur” as an opportunistic user has been addressed in the work of Nguyen (2019) that looks at the social life of an esplanade as a dual identity of a pedestrian thoroughfare and a public space. This approach is also introduced in the development of second year architectural studio curricula at UCy to examine ways of supporting a wide range of public users and

uses in designated public spaces. The parameters of surveillance and control are examined through participant observation and interviews, to investigate a range of users that have defined and established a series of informal social norms for the support of public life in the city. The students are encouraged to accommodate the opportunistic city user by transforming such places of transit into meaningful public spaces that possess a vibrant social life and help in the development of informally formed public spaces.

*Addressing the socioeconomic prerequisites to public life*

Although the range of social and economic activities taking place in outdoor urban areas may be more limited than it was in the past, as a result of a number of these activities having moved indoors is what are specially programmed buildings (Carr et.al., 1992), the transformation at the neighbourhood level of chunks of the contemporary city into pedestrian precincts with walking streets is seen more often than in the past. Within these streets and the spaces between buildings are used by the urban dwellers to relax and to socialize, but also to conduct business and to deliver goods, while sharing the same right-of-way and resulting in a corridor of mixed uses and integrated activities that address both social interaction and also economic production. In achieving a more “socially integrative city” it is important not to overlook the need for increased and augmented urban liveability in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods and programs such as that of the German paradigm, as described by Altrock (2022), offer viable alternatives. To achieving this, urban design practitioners and policy makers note that it is important to approach this process of transformation incrementally, so as to make highest and best use of, strengthen and / or reconstitute existing networks of the social and economic aspects that public life depends upon.

With this in mind, researchers and practitioners such as Carr (1992) and Boeing et.al. (2014), note that a number of qualities should be incorporated for the socioeconomic viability of public places so that whenever possible these should be evaluated for their liveability potential, as perhaps indicated by the use of such rankings as LEED-ND©. Moreover, these should: be located where they are easily accessible to and can be easily seen by potential users; convey the fact that they are accessible and available for use for all city dwellers and all social groups; engage both the outdoors and the indoors; be fairly easily appropriated and equipped appropriately so as to be spatially flexible to support frequent and popular activities; be safe for their programmed functions and their potential users; offer relief from urban stress and enhance the health and wellbeing of their users; offer an environment that is physiologically and psychologically comfortable regarding environmental design parameters and user comfort; be easily and economically maintained within the limits of what is normally expected; and last but not least to be designed with attention so as to be perceived and experienced as prime settings for public life.

Like Carr, Krstikj (2021) looks at socioeconomic innovation in the formulation of undergraduate architecture studio curricula as an alternative method for defining socially constructed problems and their solutions in the context of public space production. She proposes a collaborative educational method based on a conceptual framework of social “extrapreneurs” platforms of exploration, experimentation and execution for problem-based learning. The benefit was foreseen as one that may improve social processes in the production of public space production, augmenting

socioeconomic resilience and democratizing public place design, thereby rendering it more socioeconomically equitable. Adoption of this approach in UCy undergraduate architectural studio curricula hopes to enable students to develop critical thinking, to base their design proposals on socioeconomic justice, and to introduce to them the role of “agent for social change” and providing a paradigm shift in architectural education from an object-driven to a socioeconomically-driven in support of people and their pursuit of public life.

### **The right to inhabit public space in the city – reporting from Nicosia**

For all the potential encounters described above to succeed, then the right to inhabit the city has to be actively pursued, as the place where diversity occurs, where people with a different outlook and with different ambitions struggle to shape their terms of access and their rights of citizenship in civil society. Out of this collective effort new modes of experiencing and inhabiting the city are invented and these rights are manifested in the predominant right to appropriate public space for collective use in the service of public life. Though this simply may not be sufficient to guarantee a right to inhabit the city, it is a necessary step toward guaranteeing that right (Lefebvre, 1996/1968). The right to inhabit has the potential of re-engaging the urban dwellers with the public life of their city, which as a consequence has the potential to infuse life to the public milieu and which is therefore fundamental to and a product of social justice (Smith, 1994). This connection between the quality of city space and the scope of public life has been clearly documented and makes the case for the design integration between revamped and sustainable urban mobility and with city life based on both traditional and proven but also on the potential of new and untested patterns of city space use in the service of public life.

At undergraduate design studios at CalPoly dealing with the ability of urban design to discover and raise awareness about just such new patterns of city space that may be used to support public life, Evans and colleagues (2018) report favourable results in introducing students to processes that lead to the creation of people-friendly environments. Introduction of such goals at the undergraduate stage of architectural training helps students to transition into more complex deliberations when entering graduate curricula. This is seen as the best way to support Cal Poly's learn-by-doing pedagogical approach, by allowing students in the studio coursework to engage in realistic project proposals on real sites in urban spaces in cities and in dealing with a diverse group of stakeholders and communities as clients and also guest critics in review sessions and pinups, thus helping them to become better informed and better prepared for professional practice.

At the same time an additional goal in this kind of training is to push students to become more autonomous and more confident to engage in the design of public space for public life within a transdisciplinary environment featuring a diverse group of actors and stakeholders as agents for positive change. Al Maani's work (2022) in revisiting and assessing learning styles and autonomy in the undergraduate architectural design studio, provides evidence of the significant impact of studio-based learning on both autonomy and confidence in devising a methodological approach for investigation by the students. This approach was later used by the students to identify how their findings in terms of

devising appropriate design variables and strategies relate to one another and allow them to approach the design of public place in a holistic framework.

The close connection between people's use of city space, the quality of public space and the degree of concern for the human dimension is a general pattern that can be shown at all scales of the city (Gehl, 2010) and it has been this premise that cities can again be more rigorous in attracting public life that has formulated the framework through which the following research was conducted at the University of Cyprus between the years 2011-2017. The research explores the latent potential for re-stitching the urban fabric by exploring disconnected and underutilized spatial conditions at a variety of scales. The Urban fabric is re-read through the identification, translation and re-synthesis of core spatial and social Values, which within the studio context, begin to catalyse a design process addressing topics of publicness, conviviality, scale, co-design and dynamic exchange.

In setting the tone for the investigation and in addition to the theoretical framework for as noted in the review of literature, and as referenced in the work and product of the relevant yet diverse studio works of other studio instructors, as seen in the context of the preceding subheadings above, three other linkages were made help ensure contextual relevance for the students' proposals. These are: to the LSE Cities Group – <https://www.lse.ac.uk/cities> – wherein the studio participants were exposed to methodologies related to architectural ethnography that would be useful in profiling both uses and users and formulating appropriate architectural programs for their proposals; to the HLS Case Studies Group – <http://casestudies.law.harvard.edu/> – so that students could engage in role play in negotiation exercises that may begin to approach the dynamic processes of co-creation of urban planning and design studies, as formulated in the deliberation and decision framework adopted by; the Planning Council of the Department of Town Planning and Housing – <https://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/tph/council.nsf/> – members of which were invited to pinup and intermediate studio reviews to ensure a certain degree of relevance in the application of real life institutional statutes and ordinances.

The studio is an early design studio (first semester, year two) which although it is building oriented within the studio sequence, it poses questions which are beyond the scope of the 2nd year. It addresses the complex relationship between the structured and open space, human scale and urban fabric, and a tectonic and socio-political analysis of the program in the urban context. The students are asked to reconnect the fragmented city's fabric, transforming residual spaces into dynamic public spaces which enrich the urban life of the neighbourhood and its citizens. Through this process, the work attempts to integrate the contained potential within the city centre, which includes both buildings and the space between buildings.

The selected sites are undefined residual spaces connecting streets and alleyways, flanked by a dense urban fabric within the historic neighbourhoods of Nicosia and Paphos. The continuous urban fabric consisting of mixed-use buildings built between 1920 and 1960, has seen the sporadic imposed planning setbacks and anarchic demolitions, leaving difficult edges, urban voids (used as parking lots) and planning inconsistencies alongside the continuous and harmonious sandstone facades. The untapped potential in these urban cracks, lies in their disconnection, leaps in scale and heterogeneous edge conditions, as shown in figure 1.

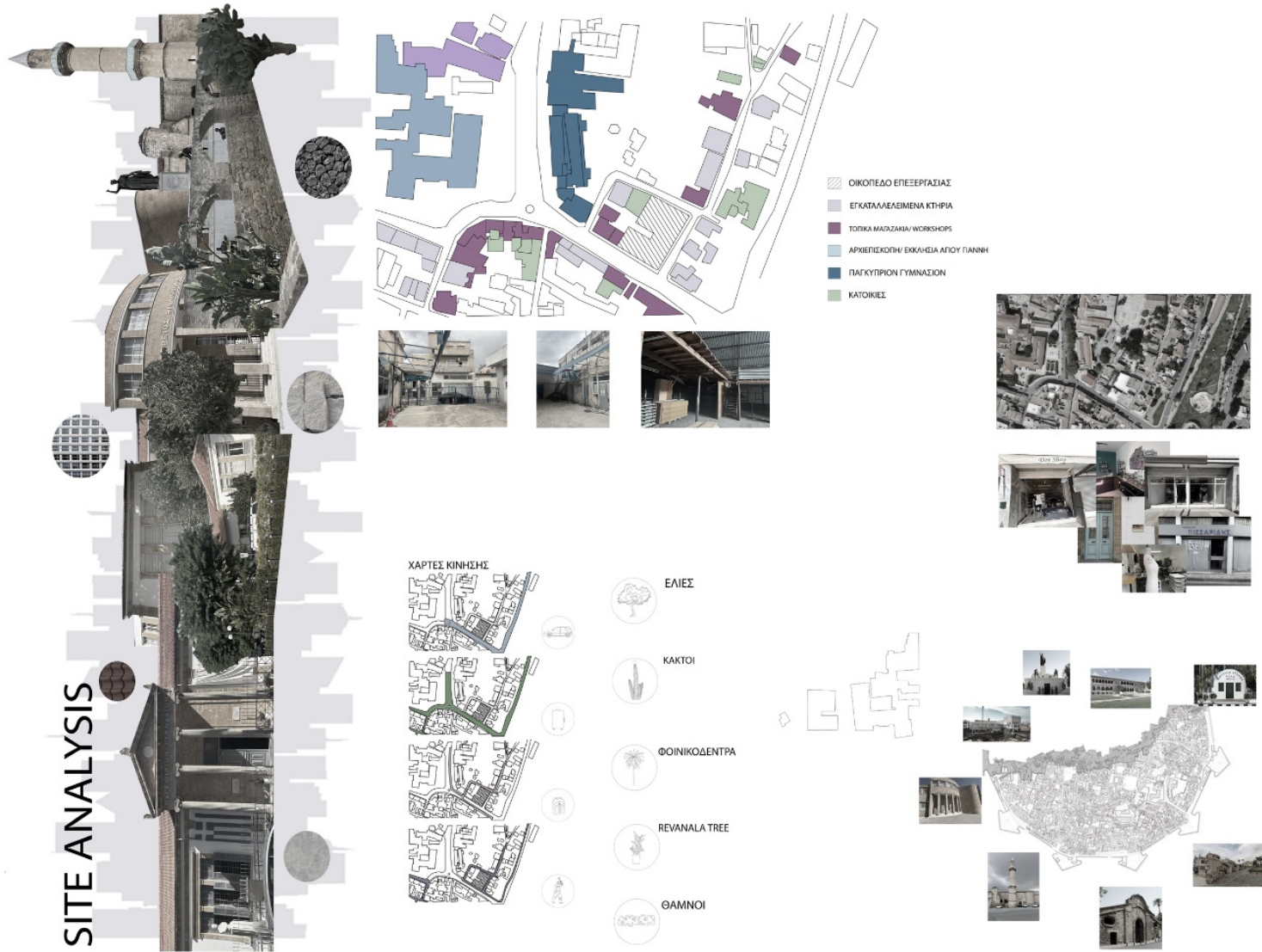


Figure 1. Site analysis shows selected sites to be undefined residual spaces connecting streets and alleyways, flanked by a dense urban fabric. The untapped potential in these urban cracks, which lies in their disconnection, leaps in scale and heterogeneous edge conditions, and is thereafter noted and tackled by the students.

The brief contains a collaborative aspect, within which the students, in teams of four, co-design the paths and public spaces within their shared site. They are asked to examine a difficult urban context and enter a co-design process of master planning and redefining the site and its internal fluid boundaries in the process. The complexity of this brief generated opportunities for questioning the boundaries of the individual in respect to the collective. Students simultaneously work on a shared plot, their proposal and the newly created in-between open spaces, as shown in figure 2.

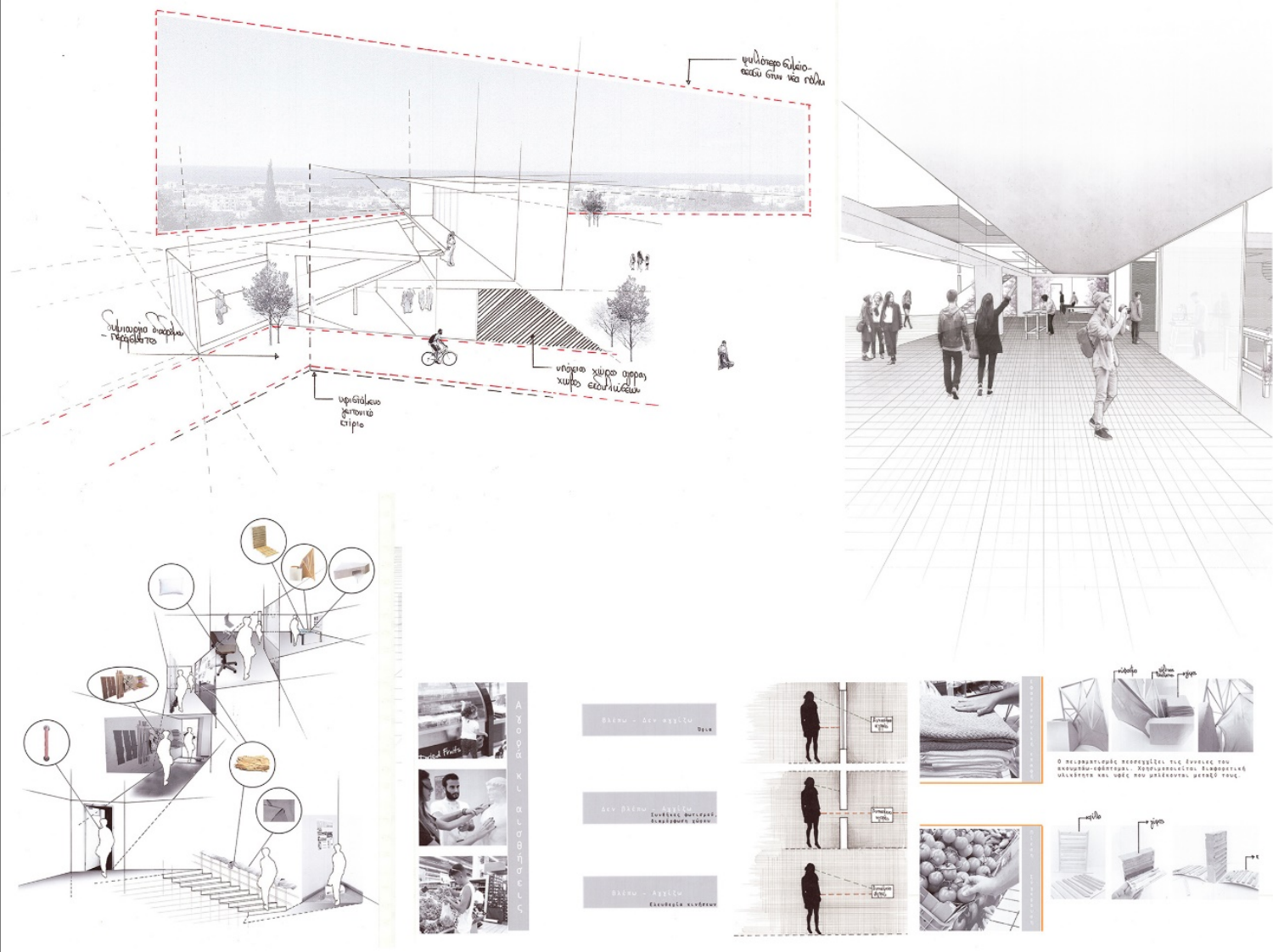


Fig. 2. The studio includes a collaborative component, within which the students, in teams of four, co-design the paths and public spaces within their shared site and they then proceed to redefine the site and its internal fluid boundaries.

Publicness is addressed through the multiple identities that entail many characteristics, a space which affects and is affected by its components. The dynamic boundaries require the students to be conscious and in direct engagement in the definition of the shared space and how it affects and can be affected by their intervention both on a small scale, but also on a neighbourhood scale. Thus, the resulting spaces possess properties of two (or more) actors, while connecting organically to a wider urban context, as shown in figure 3.

## Discovering and Mapping Aspects of Spatial Publicness

The “space between” is an organic part of the designed space. Students are encouraged to develop this space in models and mixed media, creating sectional and diagonal connections with the proposed and existing urban fabric. Paths, stops and connections become part of a wider program negotiating public space in an increasingly privatized urban fabric, as demonstrated in figures 4 and 5 below:

Figure\_03\_the shared space

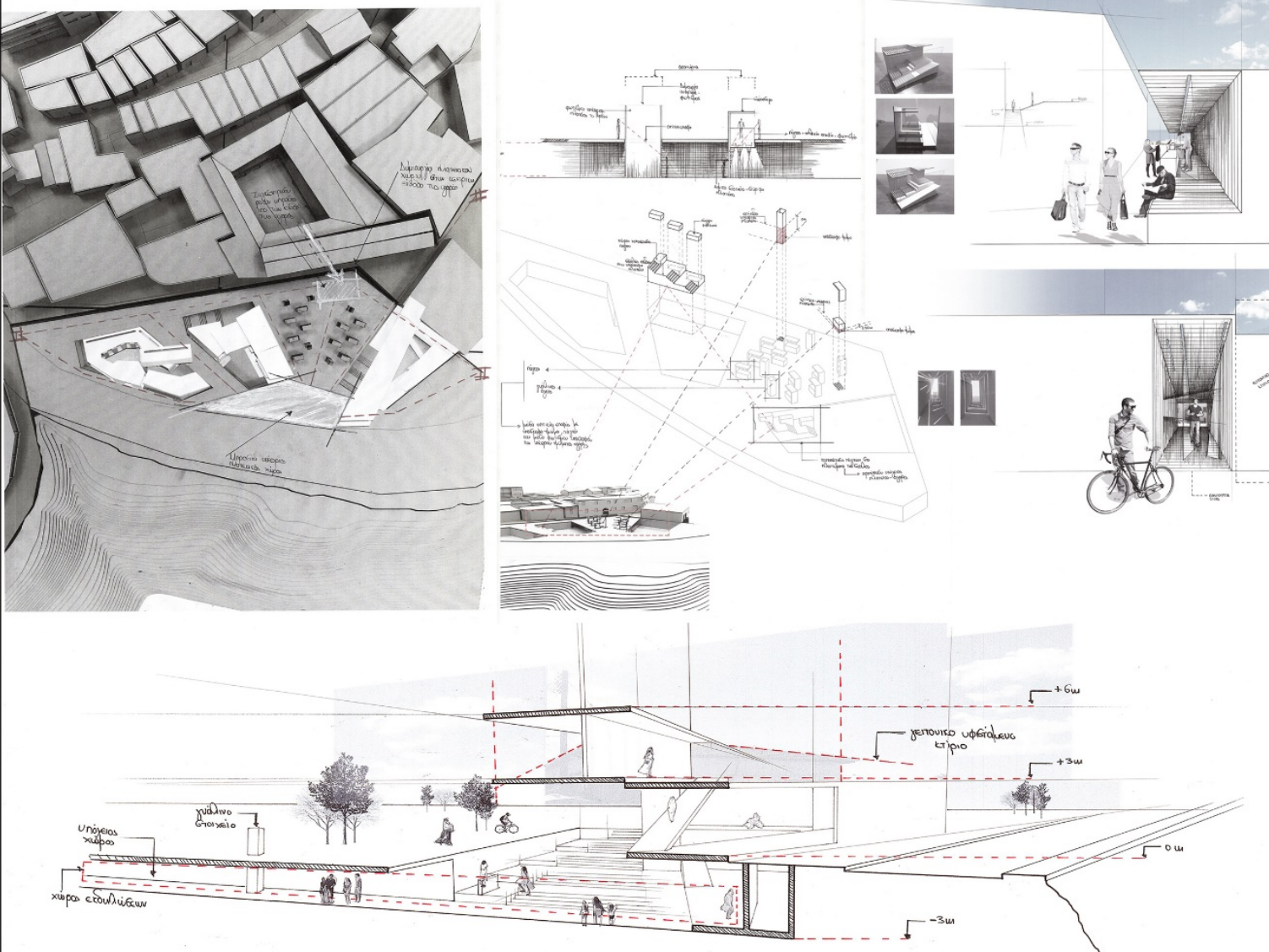
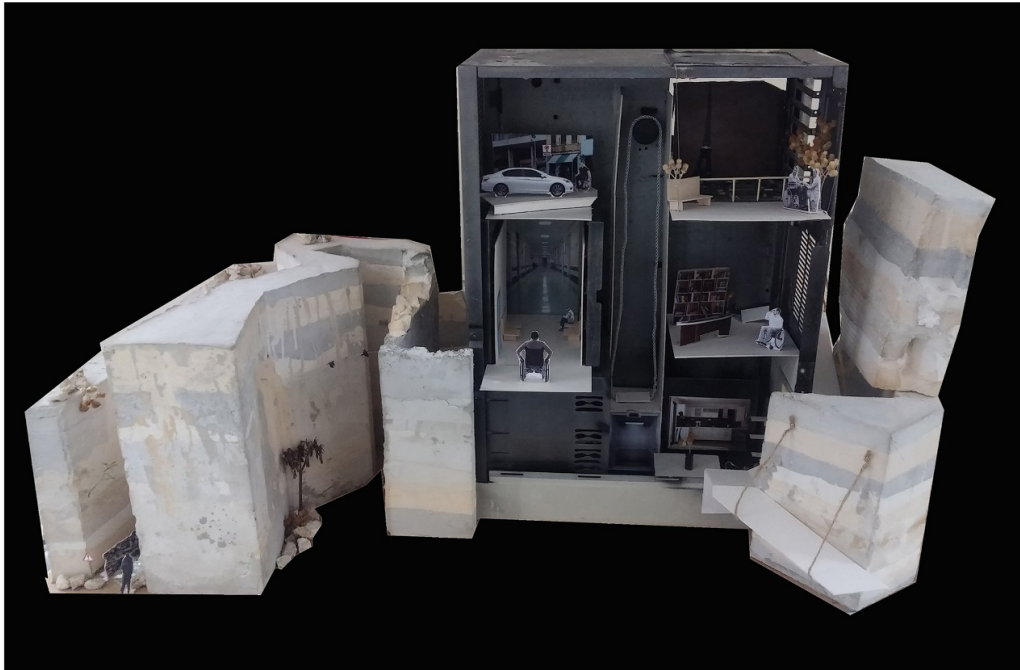


Fig. 3. Publicness is addressed through the multiple identities that entail many characteristics. These dynamic boundaries require the students to be conscious and in direct engagement in the definition of the shared space. The resulting spaces possess properties of two (or more) actors, while connecting organically to a wider urban context.

Figure\_04\_space between



Figure\_05\_space between

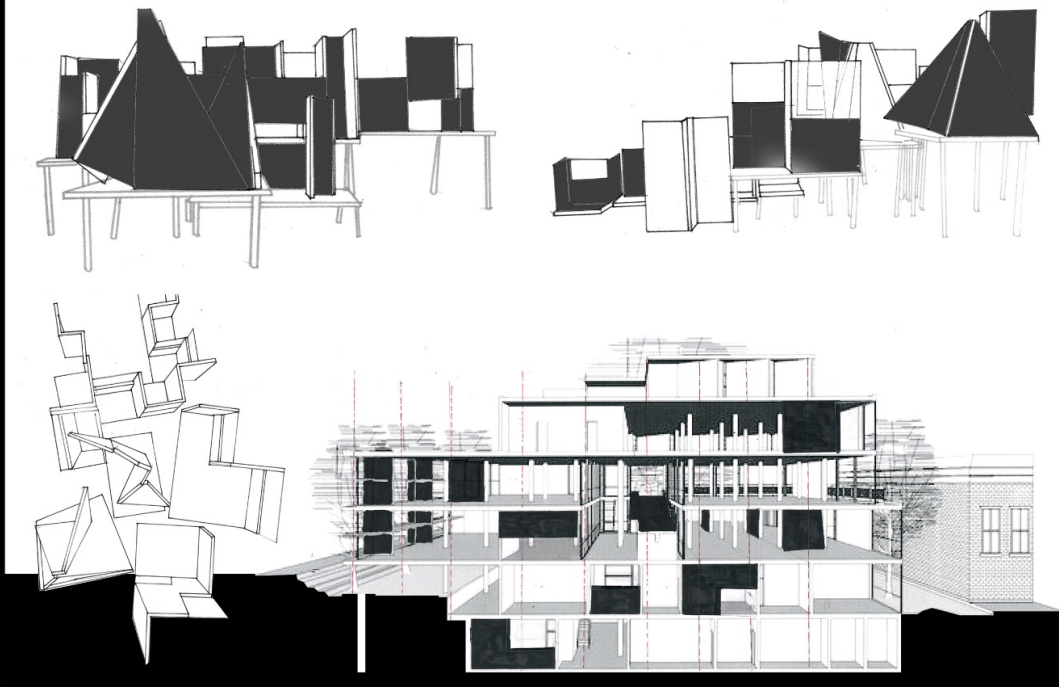


Fig. 4 and 5. The “space between” is an organic part of the designed space. Students are encouraged to develop this space in models and mixed media, creating sectional and diagonal connections with the proposed and existing urban fabric.



### **Concluding thoughts**

Reclaiming and appropriating city space for public life in the practice of city planning means a reengagement with the human dimension which demands direct connections between improvements for people in city spaces and visions for achieving lively, safe and healthy cities. Compared with other social investments – particularly healthcare costs and automobile infrastructure – the cost of including the human dimension as part of a sustainable redevelopment strategy is modest and investments in this area will be key and the benefits significant.

It is these marked benefits to a city's ability to host public life, not to mention the benefits to the economy and the environment, which lend this theme as a very appropriate subject for studio coursework for second year students in the Department of Architecture at the University of Cyprus. The questions posed in this undergraduate studio were: "What core design aspects create successful public places, and how do they constitute conscious design processes?" and "What are core values that create successful public places and how are they consciously integrated in a design process?"

This paper attempted to address the topic of spatial publicness within a framework of investigations as outlined by the subthemes introduced above and which formed interrelated investigative prongs. The analytical design strategies and tools that would become equally affective tools for architectural design synthesis in subsequent sections of the brief, benefited from a number of investigative decisions, such as:

- organizing the students in teams of 2-3 persons each, giving them individual assignments with regards to an ethnographic and evidence-based investigation as a primer for site analysis and architectural programming for individual interventions;
- introducing role playing negotiation exercises that had the double benefit of replicating co-design participatory processes as one may encounter in visioning exercises held with diverse groups of stakeholders in real life, but which were also useful in promoting teamwork and gelling the students' individual investigations into a collective project proposal; and,
- alternating between individual design tasks addressed by each student on various aspects of the mutually agreed architectural program, and collective team deliberations – as indicated by processes followed by urban planners and designers of the Planning Council team – in coming up with comprehensive proposals dealing with the design of public spaces that promote public life.

In looking at relevant examples as primers for student projects, precedents chosen to profile and demonstrate the behaviour that may have characterized public spaces such as streets and open areas in the past and also after the advent of the automobile in the 20<sup>th</sup> century also proved to be very useful tools. Students also looked at recent efforts to reverse this state of affairs and case studies were presented of cities attempting to recover public urban spaces and the corridors that connect them and to relate them to new and existing neighbourhoods of potentially high density and intensive use. Life between and through buildings and along streets and pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists spelled the importance of structuring architectural studio coursework around designing urban public spaces with the fundamental desires of people seeking to engage public life as guiding principles.

The student investigations as indicated by the sample work and analysis provided have shown that essential elements that contribute to people's enjoyment of spaces in the public realm have remained remarkably constant and their observations of public life has shown its potential of bringing diverse groups together so that they engage in creative exchange and significant cultural production.

Further work could certainly be done in the organizational framework of an undergraduate architectural studio that attempts to further integrate two important aspects that would augment a holistic approach to this type of coursework. In the first instance the effects of a strong and deliberate horizontal integration of additional coursework in technology, history, theory, criticism, representation, etc. should be further examined and their effect on interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration measured. In the second instance actual implementation in the form of community design resource projects in a framework of diverse stakeholders and goals may be coupled to integrated coursework as described above to deal with concurrent tracks of academic and practical education and project implementation. As such programs have already been in existence, and more are appearing, it would be interesting to see a comparative study of these different organizational approaches.

This is shown to be especially true where spatial flexibility for appropriation has been programmed into the structure of both space and functional program and a strong correlation is indicated between these two parameters. Lastly, the investigation has also attempted to show that public places afford city dwellers the casual encounters in the course of daily life that can bind people together and that by engaging all stakeholders, student designers and seasoned professionals are able to make significant contributions to the challenges they encounter so as to better understand the broader aspects of the public life of cities.

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## Lived Urban Form. Using Urban Morphology to Explore Social Dimensions of Space

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### Abstract

The urban form is a political and social arena. It is produced as a composite of sediments of various ways of living, of complex flow of history, of relationships and subjectivities through which people build and exercise their agency to negotiate and change contingent urban realities. Studies of urban form have so far confronted the challenge of grasping this complexity by scrutinizing a city's physical features. However, this paper puts forward a proposition that urban morphological approaches can also be resourceful tools for conceptualizing and scrutinizing dynamic relations between plural urban realities and transformations of the physical urban fabric. By drawing on the experiences from the Erasmus+ project Emerging Perspectives on Urban Morphologies (EPUM), this paper suggests a multidisciplinary, open educational framework combining various urban morphological approaches as a productive means of developing an understanding of multifaceted spatializations of lived space within urban form, as well as materializations of urban form within lived space. Such an endeavour can extend the study of urban form beyond the focus on an object, to embrace the processes, practices and agents of the production of the built environment, including multiple tensions between changing scales and material manifestations of political, economic and social relations.

**Keywords:** urban form, urban morphology, education, social space, representation

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## **I. Conceptualizing social aspects of urban form**

Urban form is perpetually imagined in countless ways and continuously reinvented. It displays how society has settled its past, has negotiated its present and how it has envisioned its futures. The urban form is a product of plural relations between the (routinized) social practices embedded in everyday life and social agents who shape the transformation processes of urban space (Viderman et al., 2022). While urban morphologists have tended to focus on physical urban fabric and actors with certain leverage on planning decisions (Larkham, 2019), sociologists have highlighted the impact of group formation, the significance of urban rhythms, patterns and routines, as well as the influence of structural factors in the shaping of urban form (Westin, 2016). To address the challenge of grasping this complexity, urban morphological approaches have primarily focused on scrutinizing a city's physical features. However, this paper suggests that the study of urban form could extend its focus beyond an object, as it allows for explaining a dynamic intertwinement between physical urban fabric and the multiplicity of urban realities. By inquiring into urban form as habitual space produced by different urban actors, epistemology of urban morphology could embrace the processes, practices and agents of the production of the built environment, and assess the built environment as a material manifestation of urban populations and their political, economic and cultural practices (Geddes et al., 2024 - forthcoming). While being more attentive to the realm of lived experiences such an epistemology would also be reflexive of trajectories of scientific production, which inevitably shape the spatiality and define the meaning of particular urban form (Feng and Hou, 2023).

Epistemology of urban morphology engages with physical elements that structure and shape a city: urban tissues, streets and squares, urban plots, buildings and voids (Oliveira, 2016). Brenda Scheer (2015, p. 2) referring to Karl Kropf emphasizes that the “reduction of the key knowledge of urban morphology to fundamental built form elements and patterns is a way of paring down the scope of the field”. She upholds that “urban morphology is a distinct field of knowledge that does not have the ambition of achieving a complete description of the complicated dynamics of the city. Rather, it is concerned with describing, defining and theorizing a single segment of urban knowledge (form and formal change) and suggesting how that knowledge is brought into specific relationship with other dynamics and conditions in a particular place (including transport, ecology, social and economic conditions, human behaviour, and political agents)” (Scheer, 2015, p. 3, original emphasis). Despite the fact that the conceptual and methodological practices of studying urban form have been extensively outlined and continuously expanded, the framework to bring this knowledge into specific relationship with other fields and agents of knowledge production, as brought up by Scheer, appears to be missing. This paper argues that an endeavour to establish such a conceptual framework is crucial not only for exporting insights from the field of urban morphology to other disciplines, but also for expanding epistemology of urban morphology beyond object-centred externalized view of the city towards reflexive engagement with the interplay between urban space and its representations (cf. Griffiths and von Lünen, 2016).

Because cities are “at once territorial, material, social and imagined” (Viderman et al. 2022, p. 5), urban form materializes not only by design and construction in various degrees of (de)regulation and (in)formality, but also through its representations (or absences from representation). Reinier de Graaf's (2017) collection of essays illustrates to what extent this often-implicit notion guides transformations of the physical urban

fabric. In this context, discursive and visual representations that shape the city as a field of intellectual speculation are embedded in and are performative of the fabric of lived space. Representations are therefore not free of power struggles. They are imbued with power, and, in turn, entrench asymmetries of power in urban realities (Davoudi et al, 2018). This unfolds at many levels; in the politics that define built interventions, in the way how space is represented and conceived through plans and maps and also in the processes of constructing the urban fabric. For this reason, any epistemology centred on urban perception inevitably entails implications for many contingencies of socially produced urban space. By proposing the concept of lived urban form, this paper introduces into epistemology of urban morphology an aspect of reflection, as urban form is inextricably intertwined with its representations and with the material dimensions of social relations, constellations and configurations.

With a reference to Jane Jacobs's activism of the 1950s and 1960s, de Graaf (2017, pp.119-121) identifies a turning point in how urban space is engaged with. Jane Jacobs's actions to save untidy and decaying neighbourhoods have become archetypal examples of linking urban form to social space in theory and practice. Her pleas for preservation of informality and unpredictability of street ballets against planning concepts based on the modernist principles of sanitation and increased mobility have emphasized that urban morphology cannot be reduced to spatial arrangement of physical elements or neat visual representations – urban morphology is also a political arena and lived social space. Not only did the activism of that period spark interest in the entanglements between built urban form, (meaningful) experiences in everyday life and the ways how scientific production and professional practices conceive and spatialize urban form, but it also made tangible the extent to which urban form is a cultural and social spatialisation of asymmetries in power relations. Although the concern of studies of urban morphology has primarily remained with the physical structure of the city (Batty, 2013), this paradigm shift is reflected in the move away from celebrating large gestures of urban markers towards attentive commitment to mundane urban fabric and people's interaction with it (Psathiti, 2018), advancing an understanding that the 'physical city' and the 'social city' "act conjointly to produce significant outcomes" (Hillier and Vaughan, 2007, p. 205). Spatial analytical approaches aim at an understanding of urban networks based on socio-economic relationships (Batty, 2013), thus (albeit implicitly) acknowledging people's agency to shape their environments (e.g. Jones et al., 2017), as well as the relevance of agency in explaining what does or does not happen in an urban environment (Larkham, 2019). However, while allowing for diligent documentation of mundane physical structures, epistemology of urban morphology is yet to depict how plural dimensions of lived space are being spatially inscribed in urban form, as well as scrutinize normative notions and dynamics as regards the agents, practices and processes of the production of urban fabric (Viderman and Knierbein, 2018). Addressing this challenge would allow studies of physical urban form to address power asymmetries inscribed in urban form and reflect on the agents and processes shaping its transformation over time, including a self-reflection on the scientific production of representations of space (cf. Lefebvre 1991). At the same time these insights would provide to broader fields of knowledge on urban transformations a visual evidence for understanding the spatialisation of plural dimensions of everyday life, political struggle, cultural expression, as well as visible and invisible structural (pre)conditions. Urban morphologies could therefore be grasped not simply as an object, but as "recurrences of

otherwise unique events, *cycles* of reproduction and seasonal celebration, and wholly particular and unique '*moments*' in which all aspects of '*l'espace*', of consciousness and embodiment are unified in a oneness with an unfolding experience" (Shields 2013: 25, referring to Lefebvre 1959, original emphasis).

Seeing how an epistemology of urban morphology is shaped by clearly defined research traditions as regards the subject matter, approach and corresponding methods, opening it up to perspectives and empirical investigation of social notions of urban form presents a conceptual and methodological challenge. The project Emerging Perspectives on Urban Morphology (EPUM) integrated through pedagogic innovation different research and teaching approaches to urban form as an explorative means of developing a nuanced understanding of multifaceted spatializations of lived space within urban form, as well as materializations of urban form within lived space. In the course of three years, from 2018-2020, EPUM fostered knowledge exchange across different approaches to urban form analysis, specifically, the historico-geographical approach, the process typological approach, the configurational approach and the relational-material approach (Charalambous, 2018).

## **2. Urban morphological approaches and how they address social dimensions of urban space**

The teaching of urban form analysis in higher education institutions across Europe has addressed contemporary cities from isolated perspectives (cf. Scheer, 2015). Various conceptions and schools of thought differentiate both the referents as well as the ways in which urban form is defined, approached, studied and analysed. Building on the field perspective of blended learning, EPUM adopted the view that cities are indeed a collection of material entities, but they are also a system of social activity, interaction, relationships and positioning (cf. Westin, 2016). This positionality allowed for resolving a tension between spatial analytical approaches primarily focusing on physical urban fabric including the materialities of urban routines, and relational-material interpretation of the making of cities engaging with heterogeneous rhythms and patterns of urban life which unfold within continuities and interstices of the changing social, cultural and political landscapes (cf. Viderman et al., 2022). Although this is neither a new nor particularly controversial idea, as it spans the work of social theorists from diverse backgrounds and approaches, such as Simmel (2004), Lefebvre (1991) and Logan and Molotch (2007), EPUM's contribution lies in exploring the methodology for systematically including different physical and social factors into a morphological interpretative analysis. Such an endeavour resonates with the current debates on urban morphology concerned with a mutually formative relationship between the organization of space and society, or more narrowly defined, between the physical form of the city and habitual ways of living, belonging and identification, which have the defining impact on social behaviours and structures, such as the reinforcement or diminishment of social differences and divisions (cf. Naik et al., 2015).

The four urban morphology approaches, part of EPUM, view the relations between social space and physical urban form differently. Each delivers its own focus, a scope of analysis and interpretations when it comes to the scrutiny of a city's physical features, the impact of agents and social practices that directly or indirectly shape the urban form, or relational dimensions of ties between people and urban space embedded in a

political and cultural context (Geddes, 2020). Through EPUM these approaches were superimposed to various degrees of integration, and in various combinations for comparison and for exploring methodologies to study urban form beyond the focus on an object, to embrace the processes, practices and agents of the production of the built environment, including multiple tensions between changing scales and material manifestations of political, economic and social relations.

The historico-geographical approach engages with the socio-political aspects of the production of urban space in two ways: through the consideration of macroeconomics which influence the development of fringe belts and the role of agents directly and indirectly shaping the urban form. The concept of a fringe belt is central to historico-geographical research in explaining the cyclical, uneven and punctuated nature of city expansions (Oliveira, 2016). This concept assumes the establishment of certain land uses at the urban fringe during periods when the built-up area is stable or growing only at a slow pace. In subsequent periods of expansion these gaps might be filled in by high-density development (for example, be absorbed by residential development in the periods of growth), and the fringe develops at a new expansion boundary. Fringe belts remain visible in urban fabric and often include large open areas, public utilities and open land attached to institutions (Whitehand, 2007). J.W.R. Whitehand's (1977) analysis establishes the relationship between building construction cycles and the formation of fringe belts, thus linking urban economy to urban transformations. Within this tradition, the socio-economic context of development is taken to be the mixture of land uses and functions, while the interaction between human activities and the built form is restricted to the planning scale of the city rather than wider political issues. The agents of transformation of urban form are developers identified as a highly heterogeneous group, with architects acting as mediators between developers and authorities and having influence in the selection of builders and determining the character of developments (Whitehand, 1984; 1992). This approach recognises the tensions between the objectives of developers, the regulations imposed by planners and the views of architects: it sees the urban landscape as a product of the interactions between these agents but does not specifically deal with the views and roles of ordinary urban dwellers beyond indirect democratic representation provided by planning authorities.

The process typological approach originated as a methodology for incorporating built heritage in architectural and urban design, and developed as a method for interpreting urban transformations in the dialectics between the continuity, change and replacement (Cataldi, 2003). This approach views the evolution of form as a dynamic process of typological transformations – the reshaping of a particular social logic is expressed in the built form through various political and economic forces. The form of buildings is dictated by a shared historical consensus and modified through the experience of previous buildings, technological development and socio-cultural changes. From this perspective, the formation of urban tissues is a resulting outcome of the aggregation of building typologies (and properties), physical features at the territorial scale (grids, nodes, spatial structures such as plots, urban patterns etc.) and socio-political elements at the urban scale (such as historical connections between settlements and place histories). The production and modification of the urban form thus results from the interaction between a population's shared socio-cultural concepts and the act of construction. This means that the process typological approach synthesizes collective cultural and social



attributes, rather than engaging with individual user groups or alternative and conflicting views of spatial organization, to provide a methodology for interpreting how leading political, socio-economic and cultural conditions generate and modify urban form (Geddes, 2017).

The configurational approach engages with space away from its architectural features, analysing instead configurations of space systems. With the focus on networks of space, rather than the properties of built fabric, this approach seeks to model how humans perceive, view, move through and use space, thus “implicitly includ[ing] the relation between humans and physical form” (Kropf, 2009, p. 111). At the foundation of this approach is theorization that urban form is being driven by two kinds of social forces: micro-economic forces shaping the global structure of settlements and socio-cultural forces defining localized spaces (Hillier, 2002). Whereas micro-economic activity will seek to be inclusive and culturally non-specific to attract trade, the localized spaces reflect socio-cultural differences expressed spatially. In this view the production of urban space is driven by local(ised) processes, which means that the organization of space is related to the distribution of uses and functions, as well as social and cultural factors embedded in the spatiality of everyday life. Seeing how the relationships within such local(ised) space are largely mediated by movement and co-presence of people in space, the configurational approach emphasizes that urban space acts as a place of encounter and form is negotiated as an outcome of the relationship between spatial structure and behaviour. In fact, this approach is based on the fundamental idea that spatial organization is an intrinsic aspect of human activity and an expression of human society, which can be understood through the analysis of how spatial structures relate to people’s use and experience of space (Hillier and Hanson, 1984). In this context the approach somewhat neglects the influence of wider socio-economic or political factors on the processes of city development. However, configurational studies acknowledge the fact that the transformation of space is a response to changing circumstances and that space is transformed to address change (Hillier 2014). Moreover, they have often highlighted and assessed the impact of design trends and social ideologies on the production of the public realm (Hanson 2000) as well as the relationship between spatial segregation and social outcomes (Vaughan 2005).

The relational-material approach engages in the analysis of the situational occurrence of spaces of everyday life (e.g. everyday routines, planning practice, materiality of design, contestations) by taking into consideration both bodily appropriations of space and often ‘hidden’ structural processes, such as poverty, exclusion, mobility or spatial displacement (Viderman and Knierbein 2018). It views urban form as continuously produced and reproduced through the multiplicity of social relations and interactions that manifest in urban space materially and discursively in a tension between changing scales (cf. Lehtovuori 2010). According to this, collective agency and individuals are entangled in the production of urban space through a series of spatial practices and encounters, which are performative of socio-politically ambivalent relations between majority and minority society as they deploy spaces of inclusions and exclusion (Hou 2010). As such, the relational-material approach considers institutions, non-institutional actors and multiple publics in the shaping of physical form and highlights how urban morphology results from socio-political struggles and, in turn, manifests and represents social hegemonies, hierarchies and power structures (Viderman and Knierbein 2018). For this reason, urban morphology has a major role in negotiating urban futures. Rather

than simply relating urban space to social and political factors, the relational-material approach aims at acting as a voice of plurality calling for enhanced capacity of research and planning to engage in emancipatory actions and stimulate change through involvement with communities and their spaces (Knierbein and Viderman 2018). The approach's methodology draws on thick empirical description to engage plural voices, including those that are often unheard, marginalized, contested or discriminated against. Figure I summarizes how each approach views the relationship between social space and physical form and deals with the political aspects, socio-cultural practices and agents of the production of urban space.

Approach	Focus	Relationship between social space and physical form	Agents	Socio-cultural practices	Political Aspect
Historico-geographical	Physical form: processes of city expansion and transformation.	Implicit as the socio-economic context and the pattern of functions and land use.	Developers, architects and planning authorities.	Tensions between objectives of agents.	Implied in role of macro-economics and agents.
Process Typological	Physical form: reproduction and modification of the urban fabric.	Implicit as the historical and cultural context.	Implicit in political and economic forces.	Collective cultural trends in intention and construction.	Implied in social, economic and cultural conditions.
Configurational	Spatial structure: growth and diversification of the street network and public realm.	Explicit in spatial perception, movement, encounter and space use.	Implicit in design trends and social ideologies.	Everyday use of space, cultural context, movement economy.	Implied in role of micro-economics, social and cultural factors.
Relational-material	Social form: production and transformation of space.	Explicit in spatial performance and encounter.	Multiple publics and non-institutional actors.	Ambivalent relations between majority and minority society.	Explicit in structural (pre)conditions and power relations.

Figure I. How different approaches address social-cultural practices and political aspects of the production of urban space.

This overview shows that all the approaches, part of EPUM, draw (albeit only implicitly) on spatial experiences to develop multiple perspectives on the mutually formative relationship between social space and urban form. The transformation of urban form is (and probably can only be) explained through social dimensions of space, including, to various degrees, the considerations of structural factors, social agents, and the spatiality of everyday life and its routines. Using different methods of visualisation and (thick) description, the reviewed approaches have established that urban form is embedded in and is performative of societal changes and the fabric of social life. At a more conceptual level of consideration, studies of urban form aim to bring the largely subjective and contextual materiality of social practices and lived experiences into relation with a synthesis of various aspects of urban form. By drawing reference to Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theorization of the tension between the lived space of everyday life and a seemingly homogenous abstract space (of capitalist production), the association of humans and non-human elements in the process of the production of urban form can be contextualized within broader structural processes and conditions. In this line of thought,

the conceptualization of lived urban form emphasizes the notions of urban form as the location where social relations unfold, thus extending the analytical reach of studies of urban morphology beyond physical features to include social and experiential dimensions. Various approaches can be superimposed and combined to various degrees of integration to provide a baseline perspective to assess social change through transformations of the built environment, while a combination of methods from different disciplinary fields, such as sociology and ethnography, would grasp nuanced relations and tensions in an understanding of how people mould and appropriate urban form.

### **3. Insights from EPUM**

The EPUM project has brought together five international partners embracing and developing different morphological approaches (University of Cyprus, TU Wien, University of Porto, Sapienza University of Rome and Space Syntax Limited) in a network for developing learning platforms for exchange of knowledge, collaboration and dissemination of findings. The coming together of researchers, educators and learners from different geographical areas and disciplines has provided the basis for a multidisciplinary exploration and the opportunity to establish a common conceptual framework. Specifically, through 3 years of a continuous teaching and learning process of meetings, activities (on-line and on-site) and workshops, EPUM has aimed at i) comparing and improving the ways in which urban form and the agents and processes of its transformation over time, are taught; ii) comparing the theoretical, conceptual and methodological foundations of the different approaches, identifying their main strengths and weaknesses, and iii) exploring the possibilities for dialogue and combination. In the series of the events, two EPUM events are particularly relevant for conceptualizing lived urban form: EPUM's fourth round table "Social Life and Urban Form", which took place in July 2019 at AESOP Annual Congress in Venice, and EPUM's second intensive workshop, held in Nicosia in September 2019.

#### *3.1 EPUM Polemics (Insights from the Fourth Round Table)*

The theme of the debate was the relationship between urban form and social life, with the focus on how this relationship is approached in teaching practice. The debate pointed to the traditional distinction between urban form debates as being weak on social, political and cultural aspects of lived space, and on urban life debates as lacking more descriptive explanations about how social relations materialize in urban form and how the interaction between social life and urban form is settled. Different scholars emphasized the need for understanding the political, social, cultural and spatial dimensions, and therefore, contextual aspects of urban form.

Understanding the role of designers and people in shaping form, and challenging perspectives on how human action affects urban form are vital in refining interpretations of form, as is the understanding of the structure of the relations between economics, society and urban form. This is because form in all its meanings is socially produced and has a history to be studied, a present which is the most important confluence between urban form and social life in cities, and a future, as aspirations of utopian and ideal-type projections become inscribed in urban form.

The physical shape of the city, therefore, is infinite: there is never an 'end' to it and unfolds as a socio-historic process. Urban form thus never comes 'alone', it comes with

structure and function, and includes (the experience of) immaterial dimensions. Therefore, both research and conceptual approaches need to be enlarged with further qualitative interests and considerations of lived space. Bridging the gap between perspectives on physical form and social life means addressing the political question of power, ways and means of inscribing and maintaining hierarchies in urban form. However, a balance must be found between the use of human intuition, the use of technology and the rights to equal access to urban morphology, to understand the social, cultural and political aspects of form. As a greater range and variety of tools and techniques come on offer for teaching through blended learning, the material relation between society and form has not diminished: 'face-to-face' interaction within the urban context remains at the core of teaching and learning about urban form as an experienced materialized manifestation of how urban society changes.

### 3.2 EPUM Application (*Insights from the Second Intensive Workshop*)

The workshop took place in September 2019 in Nicosia. The city with a prolonged history of conflict, internal displacements, migration and tourist flows, economic fluctuations and cycles of rapid, often abrupt urban transformations served as a laboratory to explore, unravel, and question urban form and find ways for collaboration among the different schools of thought and methodologies. In the course of a very limited time of 2 weeks, mixed groups of students (from the five institutional partners involved in EPUM, from Nicosia, Porto, Rome, Vienna and London) engaged in an analysis of the urban form of Nicosia's historic core. The workshop faced a twofold challenge: first, despite preparatory courses and readings, most of the participants had very little knowledge of the local context; second, the participants were versed only in an approach studied at their home institution. Insights into the local context were produced from preparatory literature, guided walks, lectures by educators, practitioners, the local authority and major stakeholders, as well as, depending on each participant's preferred approach, individual and group explorative walks, mapping, observation and recording of urban patterns, informal conversations and short interviews with locals, planned and informal encounters in public space, diaries as a means of reflection on own experiences, and analysis of (historical) maps and planning documentation. During their work participants tended to stick with the approach they were proficient in. Yet by working together they identified limitations of each of the approaches in addressing the challenges of scrutinizing urban form, while also detecting an analytical area of the potential application of combined morphological approach in the analysis of form, which has led to unexpected findings and a different type of sensory knowledge about explored and analysed spaces.

The work in a different cultural context challenged both students and teachers to think differently about their established ways of doing research, but also built awareness that each perception of reality is incomplete, and that only the search for the plurality of realities renders research findings robust. Nicosia is also the place where the participants from the very early stages of the workshop are confronted with political, social and cultural aspects of urban space, as well as visible real practices (both spatial and social) involved in the production of such an urban form. By engaging with urban form as lived space, which encompasses physical form, its cognitive dimensions as well as practices of everyday life, they were able to productively engage in gendered, age-specific, ethnic and other dimensions of urban change. While building on systematic

reflection on the analytical work, the students also proposed strategies and concepts for conservation and/or transformation of the existing urban form in the area of Ayios Kassianos, adjacent to the Nicosia's buffer zone. An example of one group's analysis is shown in figure 2, with a proposal in figure 3.



Figure 2. Example of students' analysis (neighbourhood scale): How we see the city and its organisation is defined by the routes we take through it, the memories we relate to certain places and the myths we associate with unexplored areas.

Anastasia Psoma, Isidora Šobot, Nuno Gomes, Vasiliki Papatirou and Yara Rizk.

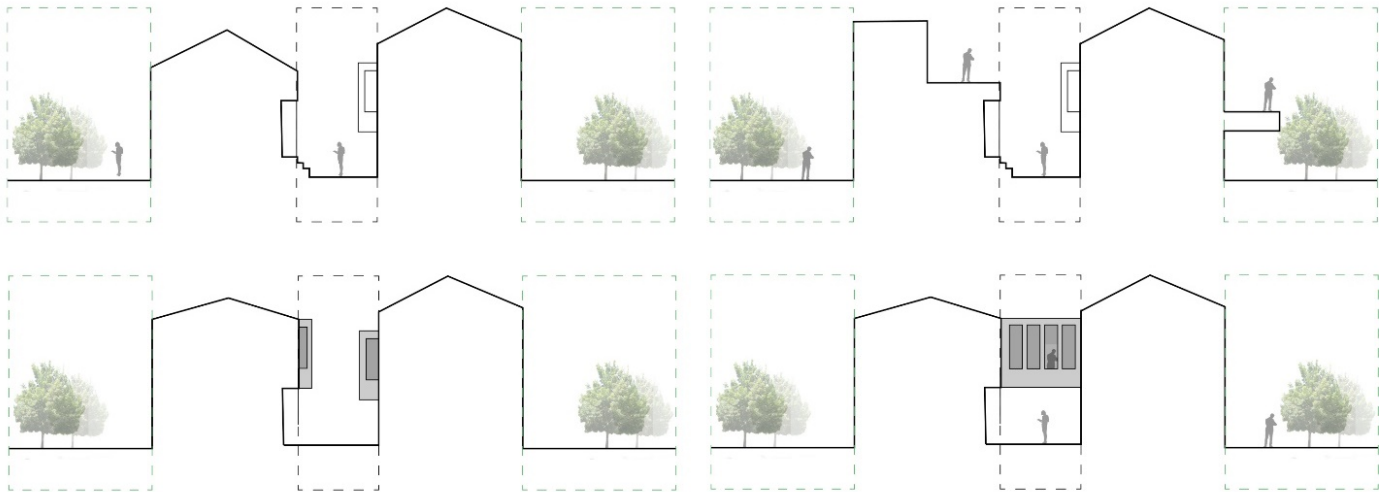


Figure 3. Example of students' proposal (neighbourhood scale) from the EPUM 2<sup>nd</sup> Intensive Workshop: Anastasia Psoma, Isidora Šobot, Nuno Gomes, Vasiliki Papatirou and Yara Rizk.

What appears to be simplified graphics are part of a study which engaged with perceived and observed tensions in urban fabric of everyday life. The study emphasized that Nicosia is a city of contrasts in terms of its spatial, social, cultural and economic composition. With the focus on gendered space, the study asserted that spatial organization reaffirmed and co-constructed dominant gender norms, by making certain gendered practices possible and obstructing other ways of organizing the reproduction of society. The tangible examples were the location of childcare facilities (neither close to home or work), segregated urban uses and functions, or car-centred mobility in the city. The differences were engaged with within a textured grid of the city, to identify four 'building blocks' of a family-friendly city: housing, public space, amenities and routes. By finding a common ground in terms of the subject matter and a selection of analytical tools, this approach demonstrated that combining different urban morphology approaches could bring to light different aspects of a city's complexity at different scales and phases.

#### 4. Benefiting from multiple perspectives of space in urban morphology studies

Epistemology of urban morphology engages with the built form of the city and the social, cultural and political processes that produce them. These processes are explored and depicted from different perspectives, which are largely based on visual analyses and rational objectivity of behaviour-based approaches. While the EPUM project has aimed for development of an innovative system for teaching the built form of cities, which would overcome disciplinary and institutional barriers, it has also raised important issues of the social and cultural dimensions of learning and teaching traditions, drawing attention to different experiences of urban form and its representations. The proposed educational model aims to enable various institutions to work both independently and collaboratively, synchronously and asynchronously, eventually formulating an

international 'community of practice' connected through embodied practical experience and face-to-face learning as well as through digital space and blended learning approaches. The experiences from the EPUM project, including the round table discussions and intensive workshops, mirror the shared normative position, that urban form is an embodiment of a plurality of particular memories, cultures and experiences, which might be institutionalized, contested, discriminated against, marginalized or rather invisible. The project also identified the research and design practice as the powerful means which can foster or curb people's social, cultural and political agency to transform their living environments. This paper reflected on these insights to suggest that opening the existing urban morphology approaches to conceptual and empirical frameworks of other disciplines would allow for establishing productive linkages between analytical approaches to physical urban form and qualitative research practices engaging in social space, and thus prepare future generations of planners and designers to meet the diverse challenges of contemporary cities.

Urban morphology as a material dimension of the production of space contains sediments of past social struggles and desires. It also occupies a prominent position in negotiations on the current urban conditions as both a matter of concern and an aestheticized imaginary of past, present and desired future. A whole range of affects and bodily experiences is inherent to knowledge and perception of urban morphology. Rob Shields (2013: 160) reminds that "[...] representations may no longer be fixed measures of stable entities out in a neutral environment, but they participate together with their referents in a dynamically animated relationship". This means that unequal experiences of (representations of) urban form and the spatial dynamics of its production might add an important layer to epistemology of urban morphology, allowing it to sensibly and productively reflect on both, the spatial dynamics of constituting, negotiating and producing different urban forms across politically charged binaries such as centrality/margin, exclusion/inclusion, boundary/opening and others, but also on implications of this research practice on the fixed and non-fixed systems defining social differences such as class, culture, gender, ethnicity or age.

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