

Cities and Human Settlements with Quality Public Spaces



Global Platform
for the Right to
the City



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See page 79

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Content

04

A. Introduction

08

B. What is public space?

- The role of public space in contemporary urban dynamics: massive urbanisation, unsustainable mobility and privatisation.
- Reclaiming public space, from the bottom-up.

20

C. Public space in the New Urban Agenda and in the Agenda 2030

24

D. Diversity and inclusion: overcoming discrimination, sexism and violence

30

E. Complexity of public space

- Urban dimension.
- Cultural, artistic and performative dimension.
- Political dimension.
- Environmental dimension of public space.
- Virtual dimension and the millions who are left out.

50

F. Public space and COVID-19

54

G. How to design a quality public space: the process

56

H. The centrality of public space: key recommendations

60

Figures

62

References

72

Annex I: The work of UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme

76

Annex II: Additional definitions of public space

A. Introduction



Public space is a key element for sustainable urban dynamics and is vital for creating equitable and democratic urban spaces, present and futures. Parks, streets, sidewalks, markets, beaches, gardens, playgrounds, libraries, and community centres offer a wide range of functions to contribute to a city's cultural, social and economic development; and prompt civic empowerment and political engagement (Chong, 2022). However, awareness about the importance of public space has not yet been fully established, and the concept of public space remains

ambiguous and not actively promoted, both in the Global North and in the Global South. As a consequence, public spaces are often poorly designed, maintained or managed as a leftover space, while publicness is jeopardised by private interests, political regime, or improperly planned or un-planned urbanisation. Additionally, top-down decision-making processes are mostly guided by economic issues and globalisation trends, with housing policies that do not contemplate adequate public spaces.

This paper explores the complexity of public space across different dimensions: urban, cultural, artistic and performative, political, environmental, and virtual. Public space is not simply a well-designed physical space for public enjoyment; it is primarily a way of re-thinking cities and human settlements so that they can powerfully contribute to the effective implementation of the main pillars of the right to the city, such as:

- building safer cities, especially for women and girls, children, vulnerable groups and people with special needs (migrants and refugees, informal workers, street dwellers, children, youth, older persons, people with disabilities, among others);
- fostering non-discrimination, regarding gender, age, health status, income, nationality, ethnicity, migratory condition or political, religious or sexual orientation;
- meeting the needs of city's inhabitants (especially those related to livelihoods);
- enabling human rights, embracing cultural diversity and promoting socio-cultural expressions;
- shaping democracy by promoting political participation;
- promoting social cohesion and inclusive citizenship, for temporary and permanent inhabitants, by granting equal opportunities for all and ensuring access to secure livelihoods and decent work, also through a social and solidarity economy.

The Right to the City is based on the theoretical approach of Henri Lefebvre (1968) and has since inspired struggles, experiences and mobilizations. Nowadays, the concept is linked to a more complex urban scenario made of socio-spatial discrimination and exclusions, increasing inequalities and neglecting civil rights, due to globalization phenomena and neoliberal political and economic systems. As formulated by the Global Platform for the Right to the City, and endorsed by a number of civil society organisations and urban social movements, as well as national and local governments in response to decades of collective and bottom-up actions, the Right to the City epitomises a new paradigm to re-think cities and human settlements on the basis of principles of social justice, equity, democracy and sustainability, for the effective

fulfilment of all internationally agreed human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030.

This paper will present, from a global perspective, the contemporary complexities and challenges associated with the difficulties of implementation of proper public space strategies, while also discussing how to define public space as a priority for sustainable urban development, establishing new models of governance, and renewing people-oriented thinking and methodologies. As stated by the *Barcelona declaration on public space*, the right to the city is “a new paradigm that provides an alternative framework to re-think cities and urbanisation” (Habitat III 2016, 1).

Box 1. Why public space matters

Investing in public spaces is an undervalued task for many local governments: surprisingly, committing to pursuing a city-wide public space strategy is not addressed in the urban agendas of politicians and local governments. Major concerns of cities and built environments are defined through different categories and expertise related to housing, services, infrastructure, environmental issues, and technological solutions which also generate revenue and provide funding opportunities. Public space is often not listed as a primary concern, but rather as a collateral component, mostly intended as a design activity related to landscape urbanism or infrastructure facilities. While academic research on public space is well established through cross-disciplinary approaches and investigation, there is a lack of interest or an unprepared expertise in defining a comprehensive urban strategy for local implementation that is built around people and their life in the public domain. In many countries, particularly those with rapidly urbanising areas and low-income population, the proliferation of so-called informal settlements and their exclusion from basic services and opportunities make communities vulnerable and exposed to the risk of crime and violence, seriously impacting social cohesion and civic identity. Additionally, the increasing privatisation of the public domain often isolate communities, limiting their freedom to engage in the public sphere.

There is also a theoretical barrier opposing open discussions on public space: discourse is often limited to specific national or linguistic areas and related laws and regulations, and the dominance of examples from the Global West and North limits knowledge

about overall global public space by imposing oversimplified views of design, management, and use.

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) adopted at the Habitat III conference in Quito (2016) fosters public space as a human dimension within the urban context, able to provide opportunities of interaction and sharing, addressing civic identity and social cohesion, following the UN's imperative to "leave no one behind". Since 2012, the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) has promoted public space as an asset for more solid, connected, and socially inclusive cities by consolidating knowledge, approaches, and methodologies on public space for local governments. This work is being carried out through policy guides, capacity building, knowledge sharing, advocacy work, and actual implementation. Despite these efforts, public space still remains a low priority for many cities.

As a response, people and groups around the world are reclaiming public space: they actively promote bottom-up initiatives which are able to bring incremental improvements to streets, blocks and neighbourhoods through small-scale, informal urban design and spontaneous interventions of micro-urbanism. These initiatives have been rapidly hoisted to mainstream practice, since they are able to create meeting places which catalyse human interaction, and which are recognized and understood by communities as their own "urban commons", as defined by International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC).

Box 2. About the Right to the City

The right to the city is an alternative paradigm to the neoliberal forces of production of cities and human settlements, based on social justice, sustainability, democratic participation, and the guarantee of human rights. According to the Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C), it's defined as: "the right of all inhabitants, present and

future, permanent and temporary, to inhabit, use, occupy, produce, transform, govern and enjoy just, inclusive, safe sustainable and democratic cities, villages and human settlements". Therefore, it is a unified demand against urban inequalities that guide the materialisation of human rights in the territory.

A city/human settlement with **quality public spaces** and services is one of the central components of the right to the city, which must be considered in a transversal and relational perspective with the other components:

Free of discrimination

Gender equality

Enhanced participation

Social function of the city/human settlements

Inclusive citizenship

Diverse and inclusive economies

Rural-urban linkages

References:

[GPR2C The City as a Common Good: A Pillar for the Right to the City](#)

[GPR2C Inclusive Citizenship in Cities and Human Settlements](#)

[GPR2C The impact of COVID-19 on the Right to the City](#)

[GPR2C “Right to the city agenda, For the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda”](#)

[GPR2C Policy Paper on the Right to the City for the UCLG Congress 2019](#)

[GPR2C “Right to the city agenda, For the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda”](#)

[GPR2C The right to the city, building another possible world – guidelines for its understanding and operationalization](#)

[Habitat III Policy Paper - Right to the City and cities for all](#)

B. What is public space?



Despite its broad, cross-disciplinary and context-specific meaning, public space is a common good, meant to be open, inclusive, and democratic. It is the social glue that can contribute to advancing mutual trust, cooperation, and solidarity among individuals, groups and communities.

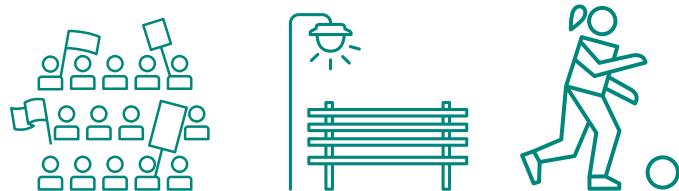
Since urban environments are primarily human environments, public space is the key urban feature which is able to create a sense of security and human well-being, promoting equity and inclusion, while serving as a crucial instrument to empower women, enabling them to participate more actively and more equally in society, and providing opportunities for youth, a healthy environment for

them to play and growth. Well-designed and well-managed public spaces can support diverse economies, both formal and so-called informal, and services, redefining urban environments with human vibrancy and livelihood, encouraging walking, cycling and play, and improving physical and mental health (Bravo, 2020a).

Box 3. *Definition of Public Space*

According to the Charter of Public Space, developed by the Italian Institute of Urban Planners in partnership with UN-Habitat (2013) “Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit

motive [...] Public spaces consist of open environments (e.g. streets, sidewalks, squares, gardens, parks) and sheltered spaces created without a profit motive and for everyone’s enjoyment (e.g. public libraries, museums).”



The role of public space in contemporary urban dynamics: massive urbanization, unsustainable mobility and privatization

Public space is a network, a system, a complex infrastructure, made of fully accessible outdoor and indoor areas, as a continuous publicly available urban commons, for encounter, transit and permanence. In Europe and most

of the Western world, there is consensus that public space contributes to the common good and that its quality has social, but also economic, environmental, and cultural impacts (Ibeling, 2015). This is the reason why public spa-

ce is part of the design, planning and policy-making activity of local and regional municipalities. However, public space is not a top priority in many cities' urban agendas. The rapid growth of cities makes urbanisation one of the most crucial challenges for city leaders all over the world. According to the 2018 Revisions of World Urbanization Prospects by United Nations DESA (2018a), 55% of the

world's population today lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to reach 68% by 2050, while at the beginning of the 20th century only 10% of the population lived in cities. The International Statistical Institute estimated that the world's population in 1920 was 1,8 billion; in 2018 it had reached 7,7 billion.¹

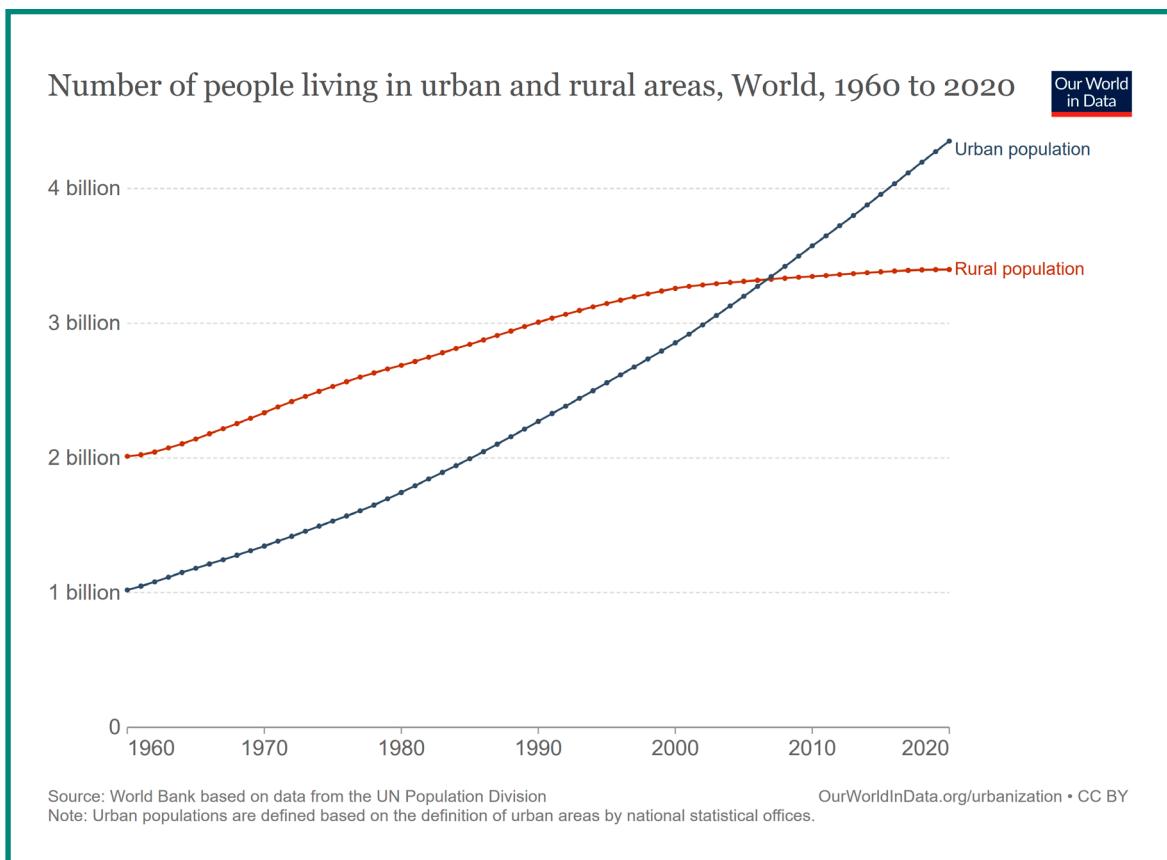
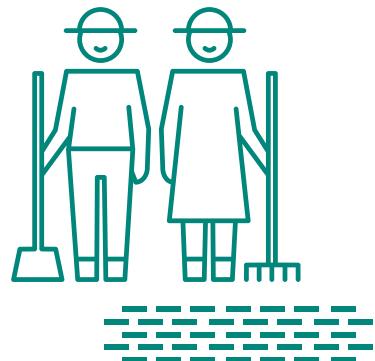


Figure 1: Our world is urban, unlike ever seen before in the history of humanity. Number of people living in urban and rural areas (1960-2020).



- In 1990, 10 urban contexts were classified as mega-cities, containing 10 million inhabitants or more. In 2014, the number of mega-cities rose to 28, home to a total 453 million people, and it is expected to reach 43 by 2030 (United Nations, 2018b). Today, Greater Tokyo is the biggest urban area, with a population of 35 million people. Projections show that urbanisation combined with the overall growth of the world's population could add another 2.5 billion people to urban populations by 2050, with close to 90% of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa. According to the *European Commission*, the world is much more urbanised than previously reported.

Throughout China there are hundreds of cities built with high-rise apartment complexes, developed water-fronts, skyscrapers, and even public art, completely built. Everything is there, except for the people to inhabit them. They are called “unborn” or “ghost” cities. Africa is currently the fastest urbanising region of the world and receives many huge Chinese investments in infrastructures and public buildings, so new settlements are established following rules of the real estate market, without a proper planning guide. African leaders hoped Chinese engagement could bring economic development, but there is no clear focus on the quality of life of these new residents.

The global real estate market is pushing out those who can't afford new urban standards, increasing spatial, geographic, and social inequalities, and widening the gap between the rich and the poor. Today, around a quarter of the world's urban population lives in slums, but soon one third of humanity will live in a slum (Davis, 2006). According to United Nations OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights) report of 2018, informal settlements are one of the most pervasive violations of human rights globally: living conditions are shocking and intolerable, residents often live without clean water, sanitation, electricity and healthcare, and face the constant fear of eviction.



New African Cities are resembling existing “ghost cities” in China. Kilamba new city in Angola, in May 2011, when it was largely empty.

Box 4. *Consequences of the lack of strategic approach to urbanization*



Figure 2: Urbanisation for prosperity, 25th Session of the Governing Council, UN-Habitat (2015).



As a counterpoint, the spatial dimension of inequalities and poverty are increasing, as it is largely documented by [satellite images from NASA Earth Observatory](#) and by drone journalism of the award-winning [project Unequal Scenes](#).

According to the United Nations World Cities Report of 2016, the number of slum dwellers increased from 689 million in 1990 to 880 million in 2014. Slums are mostly

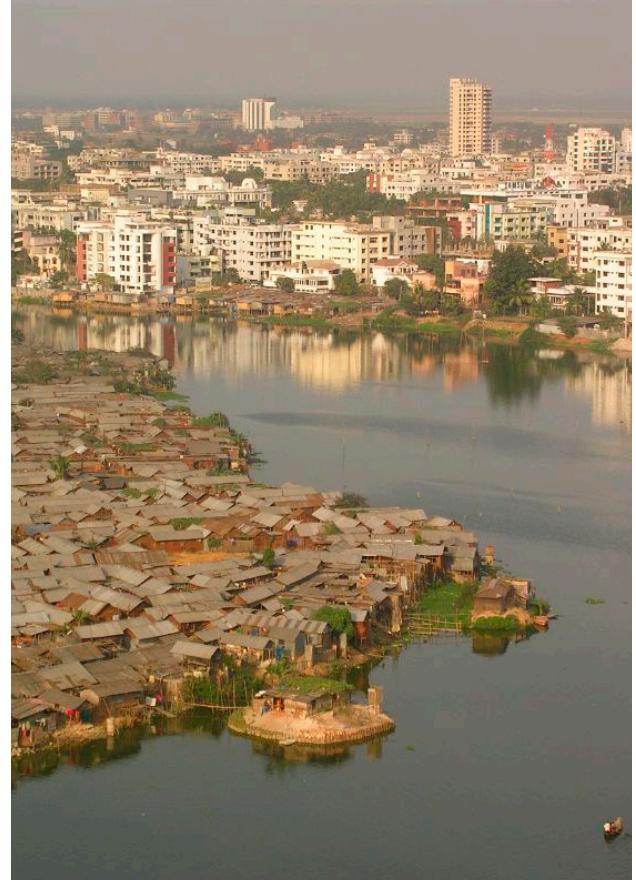
located in Africa (Kibera in Kenya is one of Africa's largest slums, with approximately 250.000 inhabitants and Makoko in Nigeria is the world's biggest floating slum), Pakistan (Orangi Town hosts 2,4 million inhabitants), India (Dharavi, Asia's largest slum with 1 million inhabitants) and Brazil (Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro houses 200.000 inhabitants) but so-called inadequate housing conditions are also evidenced in several wealthy European capitals, like Paris, Berlin and Rome.



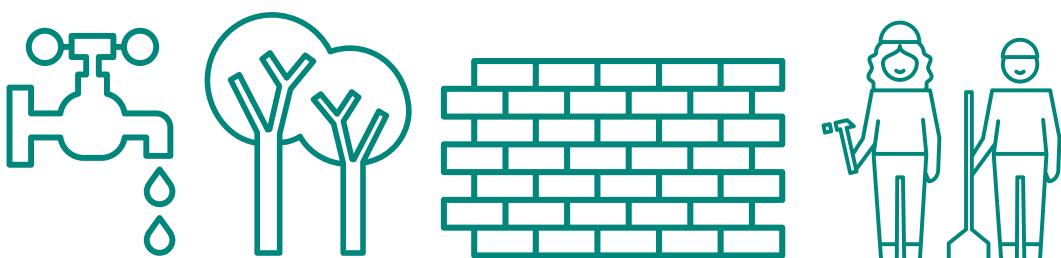
Paraisópolis favela in São Paulo, Brasil



Kibera in Kenya has a population of approximately 250.000 inhabitants, across an area of just 2.5 square kilometres.



Riverside slum in Bario, Bangladesh



In rapidly urbanising and low-income countries, the proliferation of informal settlements and their exclusion from basic services make communities vulnerable and exposed to the risk of crime and violence, gravely impacting social cohesion and civic identity. Several countries with economies in transition from the EECCA region — consisting of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia — and the Western Balkans experienced in the last decade a serious increase of informal settlements in urban contexts, as a result of an unprecedented large-scale migration (UNECE, 2016). Refugee camps in the Middle East, established as temporary clusters of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) quickly turned into real cities, while facing serious problems of sanitation, access to clean water and electricity.



Za'atari camp, established in 2012, is one of the biggest cities in Jordan, with over 80.000 inhabitants, 19,9% of whom are under 5 years old and where almost half of the school-aged children which inhabit it are not enrolled in formal education.

In recent years, scholars have questioned the definition of “informal settlements” — generally intended as opposite of the “formal” — since it is a label used to qualify those communities which are not in compliance with building norms and property and urban planning regulations. The argument is that this classification is unable to reflect the complexity of settlement processes and suggest referring instead as “social production of habitat” to describe people producing their own habitat, from spontaneous self-constructions, to collective productions that imply high levels of organisation, broad participation, and agency for negotiation and advocacy with public and private institutions (Zarate, 2016). For those communities living in extreme poverty, outdoor space serves as an extension of small living environments, where social interaction and mutual support can be established; they promote community bonds, provide children with playing spaces and can also host informal economic activities along streets and sidewalks, such as street vendors and markets traders, making cities more vibrant, secure and affordable for all (Wiego, 2020).

In Western countries and in fast growing economies, cars dominate urban environments and the industry related to gigantic mobility infrastructures has grown exponentially over the past decades, making it more and more difficult to redefine streets as public spaces, while walkability in many cities is simply no longer possible. Many streets are unwelcoming and unsafe for children as well as for their caregivers as pedestrians, cyclists and transit users. This happens because streets are mostly planned for vehicles and rapid transit, and not for humans to stop and spend

time on them. According to the Global status report on road safety (WHO, 2018), traffic crashes kill 1.35 million people every year and they are the leading cause of death for young people ages 5-29.

As a result, pollution and climate change became harmful for human health in many countries: according to the World Health Organization in 2012 air pollution is the cause of approximately 7 million premature deaths annually (WHO, 2102). Streets should be designed and built upon the idea of putting people first, taking into account the need of most vulnerable social groups, such as children, older persons and people with disabilities, in order to be safe and inclusive while fostering environmental quality, public health and overall quality of life (NACTO, Global Street Design Guide, 2016).

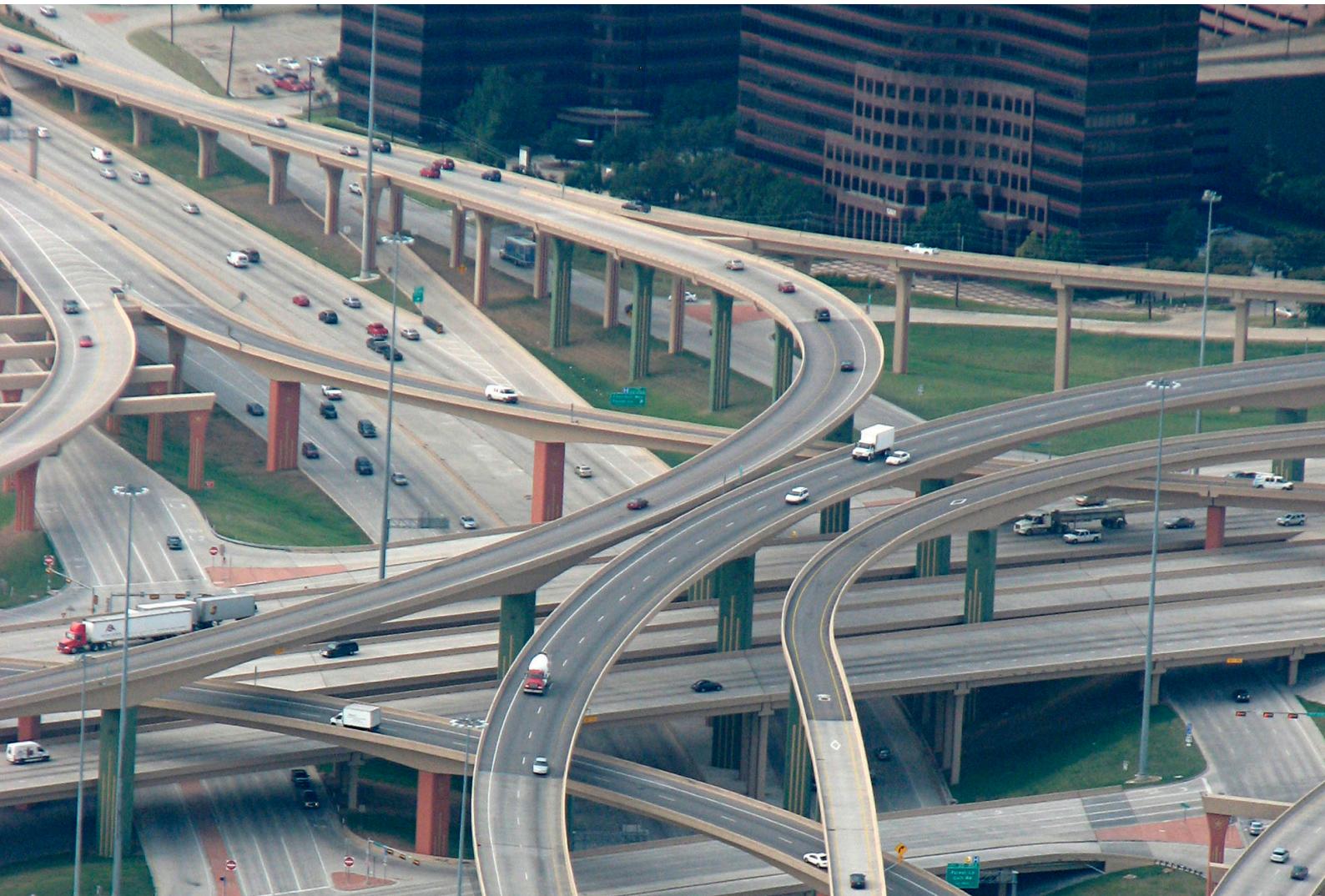


An individual city's character is defined by its streets and public spaces: from squares and boulevards to neighbourhood gardens and children's playgrounds, public space being the frame to the city's image. The connective matrix of streets and public spaces forms the skeleton of the city and defines its traits. Cities are prosperous if they have prosperous streets, meaning that at least 30% of the city should be dedicated to street patterns, not just for cars, but also for pedestrian, public transit, and bicycle use.

In the UN-Habitat (2013) report *Streets as Public Spaces and Drivers of Urban Prosperity* it is clearly stated that "those cities that have failed to integrate the multi-functionality of streets tend to have lesser infrastructure development, lower productivity and a poorer quality of life". However, out of the 40 cities studied in the report,

only 7 allocated more than 20% of land to streets in their city core, and less than 10% in their suburban areas. In Europe and North America, cities' cores have 25% of land allocated to streets, whilst suburban areas have less than 15%. In most city cores of the developing world, less than 15% of land is allocated to streets, and the statistics are even poorer in the suburbs and informal settlements, where less than 10% of land is allocated to streets.

In many European cities, the transformation of fully walkable historical districts into open air museums to welcome massive tourism and the increasingly privatised public domain in favour of commercial activities and private business often limit accessibility and social cohesion in favour of consumerism, giving room to questions regarding ownership and rights for appropriation and use of public space (Sassen, 2015).



High Five Interchange is the first five-level stack interchange in Dallas. The \$261 million project began in 2002 and was completed in 2005. Awarded as the "Public Works Project of the Year" by the American Public Works Association (2006).

Box 5. Initiatives related to inclusion

Urban 95

Urban95 is an international initiative of the Bernard van Leer Foundation that aims to include the perspective of infants, young children and their caregivers in urban planning, mobility strategies and programs and services for them. It invites leaders, public managers, architects and urban planners to think about cities from the perspective of someone who is 95 cm tall – the average

height of a 3-year-old child. The initiative aims to incorporate early childhood lenses into the management of cities, based on effective actions that promote positive interactions, contact with nature in urban spaces, proximity between services and lasting changes in the scenarios that shape the first years of our citizens' lives.

Educational Territories

An Educational Territory is a territory that, in addition to its traditional functions, recognizes, promotes, and plays an educational role in the lives of individuals, assuming a permanent role in the integral formation of chil-

dren, young people, adults and the elderly. In Educational Territories, different policies, spaces, times and actors are understood as pedagogical agents, capable of supporting the development of all human potential.

Box 6. UN-Habitat City Prosperity Initiative (CPI)

UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Index (CPI) is a tool to measure the sustainability of cities and it "considers that urbanisation, as a process, should adhere to human rights principles, while the city, as an outcome, should meet specific human rights standards that need to be measured" (UN-Habitat 2016, 3). The CPI is defined by six critical dimensions of public space, along with health, education, safety, and security, included in the quality-of-life indicator. The quality of public space depends not only on the overall quantity of public areas, but also depends on street networks, connectivity, walkability,

and public transportation, considering that the ability to access a space is just as important as the space itself. The prosperity of a city depends on the human-oriented nature of its urban form and a good design of public spaces can have a positive impact on other CPI dimensions, such as infrastructure development, environmental sustainability, and high levels of equity and social inclusion. CPI has already been tested in more than 400 cities across the world and as a monitoring framework, it has the potential to become the platform for the monitoring of SDG 11.

Reclaiming public space, from the bottom-up

In response to complex contemporary challenges, such as massive urbanisation, unsustainable mobility and privatisation, and facing the lack of interest, scope or expertise from national, regional and local governments in pursuing public space strategy, people and groups around the world are reclaiming public space and are determined to advocate for a better city and society, working independently or in collaboration with planners and politicians. Intending to act on behalf of the well-being of the community, often with limited economic resources but engaging full creativity and cooperation, design activists invest their time and ability which can be almost always distinguished for a playful component that invites participation, without age distinctions, for co-design and co-creation. They utilise existing spaces or require minimal investment, infusing places with social value and meaning.

Though in several cases the results of the intervention are merely temporary, they usually have a great impact on residential communities and succeed in fostering imagination and caring. All these approaches of urban activism can be called by different names, such as “tactical urbanism” (Lydon and Garcia, 2005), “DIY urbanism” (SPUR, 2010), “guerrilla urbanism” (Hou, 2020), “temporary urbanism” (Zhang and Andres, 2020) or “placemaking” (Project for Public Spaces, 2007) and elucidate that public space is not merely a design activity; it is rather a process of engagement, a learning experience based on shared values and co-production of content, and the opportunity to unlock aspirations of appropriation and enjoyment of different publics, and to reclaim public space as a human right.



*NIERIKA, by Boamistura in Guadalajara, Mexico (2017)*²

Intervention at the heart of the Colonia Infonavit Independencia, close to the Jalisco Stadium. The housing complex has around 2.500 inhabitants, living in 1.024 apartments, distributed in 66 similar towers.

2. The colorful star is an interpretation of Nierika, a device that allows to communicate with the spirit world, and is a transgenerational mirror of Wixárika, an indigenous community of Northern Mexico; the text on the walls FUI, SOY, SERÉ (I was, I am, I will be) represents the strength of the identity of the Mexican people.



“Parking Day” is intended to transform parking spots into places of social interaction, highlighting the potential associated with their transformation.³



Community-based intervention for the transformation of a road intersection into a vibrant public space.⁴

Policy makers and city managers are invited to confront themselves with the unpredictable dynamics produced by these bold community experts and groups who are passionately reclaiming public space as a common good, giving new meanings to the everyday space through social engagement and creative innovation (Bravo, 2020b). The active contribution of people, either through co-design

or co-production (or both) is necessary for inclusive and equitable spaces, as they foster tolerance, coexistence, dialogue, and democratic exchange. Public spaces are where all citizens can claim their right to the city, which, as Harvey (2008) points out, “is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city”



3. Occupation of a parking spot promoted by Rebar in San Francisco (2005). This single guerrilla art project and act of design activism generated a global movement, known as “Parking Day”, inspiring the creation of “parklets” in cities across the United States and beyond.

4. Interventions of tactical urbanism in the cities of Rionegro and Montería, Colombia.

Box 7. *Spontaneous interventions.*

Design Actions for the Common Good

At the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale in 2012, the United States of America pavilion's exhibition 'Spontaneous Interventions. Design Actions for the Common Good' exhibited 124 projects representing this urban activism and received a special mention for national participation from the Biennale's Golden Lion jury. Those projects celebrated widespread desire for good places and for the freedom to improve everyday public life, even when there is no client, no architect and no authority to sanction them (Lang Ho, 2012).

Box 8. *Tactical Urbanism*

In the US, the commonly named tactical urbanism promoted by The Street Plans Collaborative, namely a citizen-led approach for low cost and short-term transformation, has quickly developed into inspiring and scalable activities which succeed in catalysing long-term change, through many open-source documents and books, including a "How to" guide, aimed at inspiring and empowering self-organised individuals and communities.

Box 9. *Stand up for Public Space!*

At Habitat III, the United Nations "conference on Housing and Sustainable Development", which took place in Quito (2016), the Italian non-profit organisation City Space Architecture launched the global campaign "Stand up for Public Space!" during a networking event that gathered more than a hundred people globally. The campaign, intended to raise awareness on the importance of public space in cities, was accompanied with a [lecture by Luisa Bravo which was included in the UN-Habitat global urban lectures series \(2017\)](#), one of the UN-Habitat's most publicly shared online outreach initiatives.

C. Public space in the New Urban Agenda and in the Agenda 2030



The New Urban Agenda (NUA), adopted at Habitat III, the United Nations conference on Housing and Sustainable Development, which took place in Quito (2016), is an action-oriented document which aims pursuing a paradigm shift in sustainable development of cities and human settlements.

The NUA supports public space as a human dimension of the urban context, meant to provide opportunities of interaction and sharing, fostering civic identity and social cohesion, following the UN's imperative to "leave no one behind". The NUA clearly defines its commitment toward a new form of development promoting safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces, including streets, sidewalks and cycling lanes, squares, waterfront areas, gardens and parks. These spaces are multifunctional areas for social interaction and inclusion, human health and well-being, economic exchange, cultural expression and dialogue among a wide diversity of people and cultures; they are designed and managed to ensure human development and building peaceful, inclusive and participatory societies as well as promoting living together, connectivity and social inclusion. (UN 2016, 9).

The importance of public space is also highlighted by Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (2014). This document includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which give directives on inclusive and democratic principles. For example, SDG 11 is set out to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable", and it includes a specific target related to public space — 11.7: "by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities" (UN 2016, 14; 22) — and indicator —11.7.1: "average share of the built-up area of cities which is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities".

Public space, considered not only as a physical place, but also regarding a strategic approach to design and management of urban contexts, is included as a component in several SDGs. Next to the primary and most important SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities, its primary directive), well designed and well managed public space can contribute to SDG3 (good health and well-being), fostering strategies for SDG10 (reducing inequalities) through balancing resources and investments for SDG8 (economic growth), and can address more inclusive environments

for SDG5 (gender equality). Public space can also be resilient, from an environmental point of view, and a critical component for environmental sustainability according to the Paris Agreement (COP21, 2015 and related Nationally determined contributions - NDCs) and be projected to address SDG13 (climate action) in terms of mitigation and adaptation (e.g. net-zero carbon footprint, extreme weather events) through nature-based solutions, as part of an urban strategy for climate neutrality, based on principles of social inclusion and socio-spatial integration (UNECE, 2011). Adequately planned and designed public spaces play a critical role in mitigation and adaptation strategies to climate change, since green open spaces can minimize carbon emissions by absorbing the carbon from the atmosphere. As an example, according to UN-Habitat (2015, Urbanization for Prosperity Policy Statement, 25th Session of the Governing Council), a 10% improvement in a street's walking quality could yield a reduction of 15kg of CO₂ emissions per household per year when reducing reliance on cars. Additionally, green spaces can act as a sustainable drainage system, solar temperature moderator, source of cooling corridors, wind shelter and wildlife habitat. Many city governments are using planning and design to catalyse urban regeneration, create socially and culturally inclusive public places and promote an environmentally friendly space in the city.

As a space for democracy and civic engagement, public space is a crucial asset for SDG4 (quality education), and for SDG16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). Since the democracy's governing strength is grounded in participation and sharing, public space is also at the basis of SDG17 (partnerships for the goals), which means active contributions from different urban stakeholders.

The ambitious NUA and Agenda 2030's SDGs have been laid out to create a future where urban citizens will define public space as urban commons, a fundamental human right for civic empowerment and human coexistence. Local governments are crucial in the implementation of the NUA and the Agenda 2030, as they are directly responsible for regulating, designing, financing, building,

managing, maintaining, preserving, and defending public space. The network United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) has developed several initiatives to incentivize local governments in developing a public space policy framework, namely comprehensive high-level strategies intended to localise key SDGs targets and to assist municipalities to develop new public space policies with effective implementation (UCLG 2016).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MAXIMIZING THE PUBLIC SPACE DIVIDEND

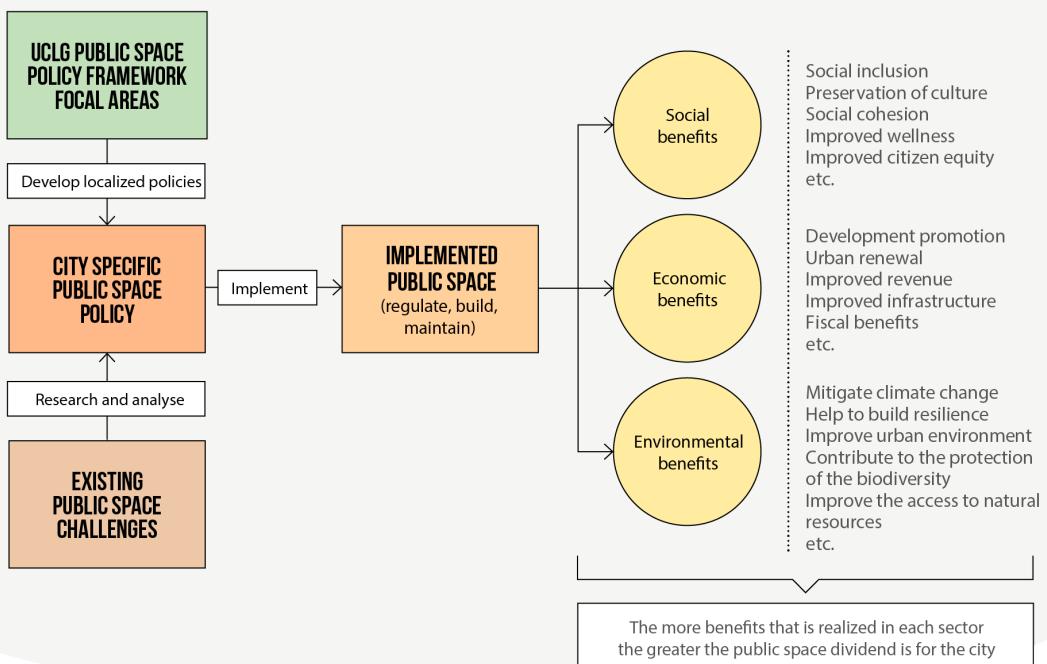


Figure 3: *UCLG Public space policy framework, 2016.*





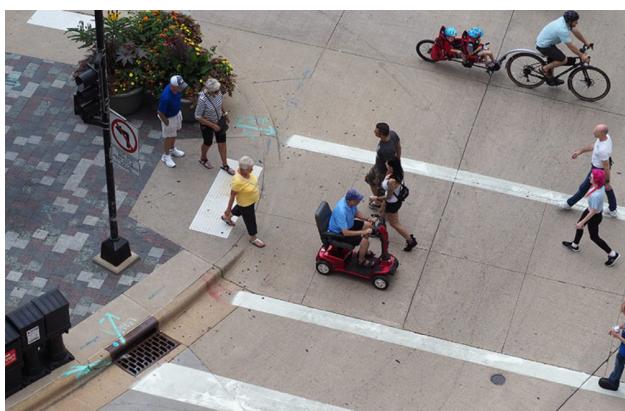
D. Diversity and inclusion: overcoming discrimination, sexism and violence



The Right to the City demands for an anti-racist, anti-colonial, non-patriarchal and more equitable urbanism: a plurality of perspectives, uses, needs and aspirations must be taken into account in the design and management of quality public spaces.

According to Western perspectives, public space mainly refers to cultural richness, identity, and community enjoyment, but it becomes more evident that public space increasingly addresses inequalities, poverty, and conflicts. Our societies are progressively multicultural and inter-generational entities: according to the United Nations, there are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10-24, and nearly 90% live in less developed countries (UNFPA 2014). As a counterpoint, the number of older persons is expected to double by 2050 (United Nations 2017; 2019). Therefore, the design of cities and public spaces, as stated by the World Health Organization, should become more age-friendly (WHO 2007). Older persons are at the centre of the planning for a *Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030*: the report associated consists of 10 years of concerted, catalytic, sustained collaboration, bringing together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media and the private sector to improve the lives of older people, their families and their communities.

Additionally, more than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability, which evidences the urgent need of creating more inclusive and fully accessible urban environments. Data indicates that in some countries, more than 30% of persons with disabilities find transportation and public spaces inaccessible (United Nations 2018c).



Universal Design is a comprehensive design approach intended to create spaces and services for everyone and anyone.

The challenge in creating public space is not just regarding quantity or location, but rather its full accessibility and safety (Pineda, Meyer, and Cruz 2017), hence, it is extremely important to embrace universal design as the holistic way to give opportunities and rights to all to live, experience and enjoy public space.

Diversity, as well as inclusion, may include different meanings and perspectives. In terms of gender, the most prominent and probably most discussed is the feminist approach, boosting the participation of women in the design and in the decision-making process of cities and public spaces to strengthen laws and policies for safer environments. According to Gutiérrez Valdivia (2021), “in most cases, the quality of life does not incorporate a gender perspective, and therefore women’s everyday life problems in the city are not taken into account. Furthermore, the very definition of quality of life contains an androcentric bias because it does not incorporate fundamental aspects of people’s everyday lives, such as care, the asymmetric distribution of time and tasks or gender-based violence”. Several cities are developing a “Caring City” model, whose aim is to implement feminist policies in urban planning and public infrastructure for community care, since it is evident that developing public spaces with a feminist approach helps everyone: women as well as older people, children, and people with disabilities. This approach is designed to no longer create places based on standardised concepts that are socially and politically restrictive, instead focusing on considering environments that place a greater emphasis on the people who use them, taking into account their needs – mostly non-productive but biological activities such as



sleeping, sitting, using a toilet, drinking free clean water, breathing uncontaminated air, having fun or walking without getting wet in a rainy day — rather than requiring people to adapt to the conditions of the space. In a caring city, public space conveys a sense of safety for women, because they are well signposted and illuminated, so that anyone can walk unhindered down the street at any time of the day or night, without fearing harassment or threats.

In many countries, sexual violence affects the way women and girls move in the urban and rural context in their daily routines: the perception of insecurity and the fear of harassment in a (male-designed) public space limits women's right to the city. For 10 years, UN Women (2019) developed a multi-stakeholder global initiative, working with leading women's organizations, local and national governments, such as Quito (Ecuador), Cairo (Egypt), New Delhi (India), Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea), and Kigali (Rwanda), as well as UN agencies to highlight how unwanted sexual remarks and gestures happening in the streets, public transportation, schools, workplaces, parks, water and food distribution sites significantly reduce the ability of women to participate in public life, negatively affecting their health and well-being.

Many grassroots organizations have been fighting and continue to fight in order to recognise sexual harassment as a criminal offense before the law: in India, after decades of legal battles, in 2018 the Supreme Court ruled

against a law from the colonial period that describes homosexuality as “going against nature’s rulings” and a punishable offense, which could warrant ten years in prison. This historic decision generated a drastic shift in mindset and a significant step ahead for civil rights.

Transformative gender norms are needed to cause change regarding cultural practices, increasing awareness and promoting respect and safety. Additionally, integration of gender perspectives into policies, projects, and programmes is a pre-requisite for sustainable urban development (UN-Habitat, 2013).

Diversity not only refers to gender, but also to:

race and ethnicity, which encompass various socioeconomic status and cultural backgrounds, and different lifestyles, beliefs and interests (particularly relevant in relation to migration crisis);
transgender people and LGBTQ+ population;
indigenous communities.

Box 10. Queering Public Space

A recent report developed by Arup and the University of Westminster on “Queering Public Space” (Azzouz, 2021) explores the relationship between queer communities and public spaces, providing guidelines for implementing safety and inclusivity, highlighting the need for collaboration and co-creation, avoiding over-designed spaces and allowing flexibility of use.



In Japan, women-only train wagons were introduced to combat lewd conduct, particularly groping.

In Australia, ever since the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* in the New South Wales Legislation, policies have progressively shepherded away indigenous communities from segregation towards integration, moving them out from reserves and back into urban areas. However, this process is not done so easily: indigenous people suffer with exclusion and marginalisation in urban enclaves, and their rights and interests remain largely invisible (Porter et al., 2018). In 2016, for the first time in the history of planning legislation in Australia, the Queensland state government's Planning Act required the land use and environmental planning system to value, protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge, culture and tradition.

In Canada, *according to OECD* in 2016, around 1.670.000 individuals self-identify as Indigenous people (corresponding to 4.9% of the total population, of which roughly 60% live in predominantly rural areas and 27% live in predominantly urban regions), but they struggle to find opportunities to be acknowledged in the public spaces. After a call to action from the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, aimed at facilitating reconciliation among former students of the Indian Residential Schools (some 150,000 Indigenous children were removed and separated from their families and communities to attend residential schools), their communities and all Canadians, in 2021 the Government of Canada announced the new funding scheme "The Cultural Spaces in Indigenous Communities Program" aiming to support Indigenous communities in re-establishing and revitalising cultural

spaces, with an investment of \$ 108.8 million over two years (2021-22).

The Right to the City demands the decolonisation of public space through the means of embracing a more caring and historical approach to city-making through the creation of narrative spaces to foster Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and experiences, including in parks, streets, theatre, museums and other cultural institutions.

The Museum of London Docklands has dedicated the beginning of its exhibition about the former port area of London to an introduction on British colonialism and slavery, under the title "London, Sugar & Slavery. 1600 – today": the museum's building was constructed at the time of the transatlantic slave trade, to store sugar from the West Indian plantations where enslaved men, women and children worked. In Australia, several museums across the country have a dedicated section to highlight the rich and diverse cultures and *experiences of First Nations* and *First Peoples*, maintained through the exhibition of the work of contemporary indigenous artists which frame the feeling of dispossession and draw attention to the unquestioned hegemony of whiteness.

Box 11. Queering the Map

The online resource Queering the Map, a community generated platform, is a global digital archive for LGBTQ2IA+ experience in relation to physical space, which allows anonymous users to drop pins on a map and write notes about moments they have lived regarding their own queer experience. This platform provides space for understanding the complex paradigm of well-designed public spaces in relation to human expression and interaction.

Box 12. *If I was white*

By Vernon Ah Kee (2002), permanently exhibited at the NGV – National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. The NGV's website homepage states: *We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung People as the Traditional Owners of the land on which the NGV is built.*

Discrimination and violence in public space are increasingly generated by the co-presence of diverse social groups, fuelled by intolerance and inability to accept “otherness”. Additionally, extreme poverty and homelessness have generated “hostile” solutions aimed at keeping out the “unwanted” public, especially in privately owned public space, namely the most vulnerable populations, discouraging public presence and use.

Current neoliberal policies require a new way of envisioning urban areas: in response to the growing and ongoing pressure of new entrepreneurial norms, cities must be more competitive and find new investment opportunities, especially through public-private partnerships. Municipalities try to bolster their image in order to attract new capital, which entails getting rid of the undesirable population (the homeless and other people perceived as problems) who tarnish the image of their public spaces (Dassé, 2019). The city of Los Angeles initiated in 2016 the Safer Cities Initiative, a zero-tolerance policy program meant to secure streets and firmly condemn misdemeanours. Camping was deemed illegal and homeless people were banned from the streets, jeopardising civil liberties and challenging the right to be different. The program not only failed to fight serious and violent crimes, but also reinforced the processes through which neoliberalism exacerbates social differences and criminalises poverty, pointing out that even if the street is commonly thought of as a public space that anybody can access, not everyone is equally welcome.



“Hostile” architecture is an urban-design strategy that uses elements of the constructed environment to purposefully guide or restrict specific behaviour, thus keeping many people out.

Reflections on the “unwanted” populations were already part of the observations of William Whyte in New York (1960). In recent years, hostile architecture has flourished in New York, under the pretext of maintaining order and ensuring public safety, reducing unwanted behaviours, such as loitering, sleeping and skateboarding.

As reported by Continuums of Care to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as of January 2020, New York had an estimated 91,271 people experiencing homelessness — among them men, women and children, on any given day, of which nearly 2,400 every night sleep on the street, in the subway system or in other public spaces, according to Bowery Mission. In Brazil, more than 100.000 people live on the streets (estimation Perseu Abramo Foundation, 2015) and 11.4 million people live in slums (IBGE’s 2010 Census).



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E. Complexity of public space



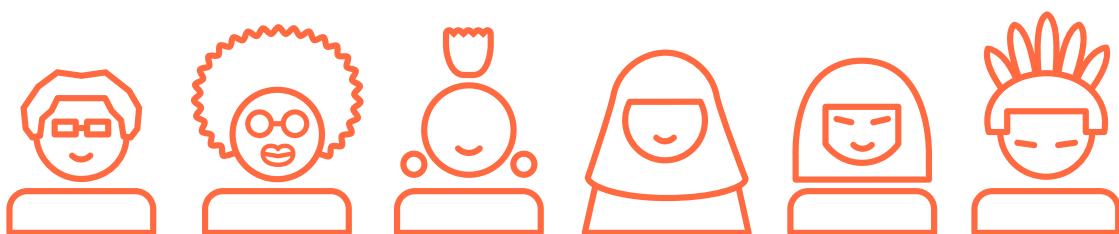
In order to understand the importance of quality public space, it is necessary to explore its complexity, analysing different dimensions in meanings and opportunities, such as the urban, cultural, artistic and performative, political, environmental and virtual aspects, and implications related to governance. The design and management of public space requires a mature understanding and a strategic ability to identify and expand its huge potential to foster the Right to the City.

Urban dimension

While city centres and downtown districts usually have a compact morphological structure and a clearly recognizable network of public spaces, suburbs are different in scale, with building types and urban patterns which are not comparable with historic morphologies: often, they lack public spaces and are marked with a fragmented and spread out urban design. Many scholars consider suburbs as a bad consequence of the application of the modern principles expressed by CIAM (the acronym stands for Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne – The International Congresses of Modern Architecture), creating issues such as different, separated functions according to zoning, exemplified through dwelling, recreation, work and circulation (Charter of Athens, 1933). The use of automobiles, related to circulation, has completely changed the balance between time and space at the urban scale. While at the end of the 19th century aesthetic codes were considered having significant values in urban composition, besides technical requests, the 20th century focused on instruments, rules and plans for modernization, expansion and transformation of existing cities, overlooking studies on symbols and landmarks, as well as with aesthetic urban purposes, unpreoccupied with design and urban composition. Since the 1900s, new economic demands and social needs have produced a radically different form of urbanisation at the urban edge.

Suburbs do not look or feel like city centres; therefore, they are considered as uninteresting and ugly places.

According to the Right to the City, regarding spatially just resource distribution, public space is not fully developed as an infrastructure in the suburbs, providing often poor design and lack of accessibility, thus significantly reducing opportunities of public life for suburban communities.





Bologna, Italy. On the left the main square in the compact historic centre, Piazza Maggiore, and on the right a suburban development, with high-rise buildings and a large green area serving as public space.

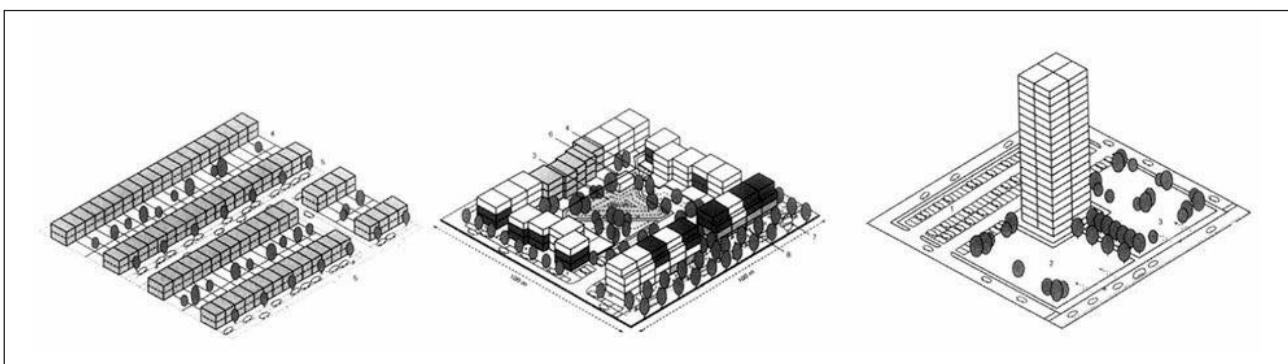


Figure 4: The paradigm of density.
Built up area and compacting of the urban form, based on aggregation of the same housing units (75units/ha) according to three different models, with consequences in terms of walkability and liveability of public space. Left: a typical sprawled and horizontal development (American model); middle: mixed-use environment (European Model); right: high-rise development (Asian Model).

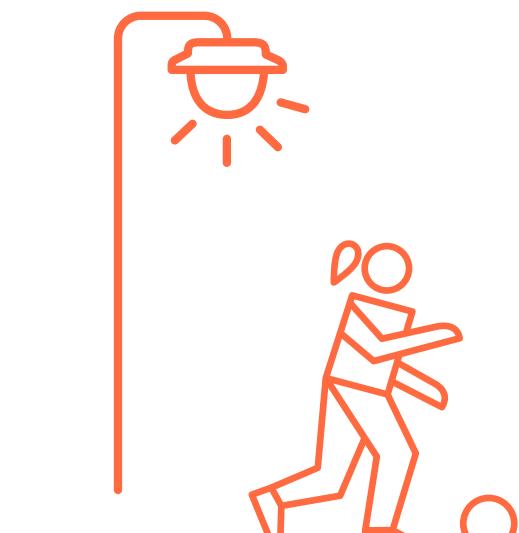
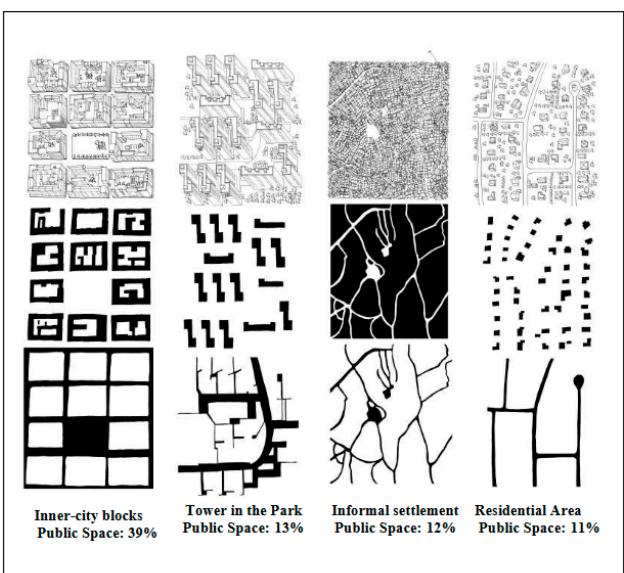


Figure 5: Figure-ground diagrams highlighting the network of open public spaces according to different urban plans.

The overpowering image of the historic city, with its beautiful squares and public spaces, especially in Europe, is how every citizen considers their own city, in a sort of mental representation of affection and belonging to the urban whole: we cannot imagine a city which we know, indeed not even the city we live in, without its historical centre, although the inhabited area outside the historical perimeter may be at least ten times as large (Sieverts 2003). From a morphological point of view, most suburbs do not have proper public spaces, unlike the historic city, and their design appears to conform to a standardised landscape. However, from a non-morphological perspective, suburbs nowadays are rich and creative environments, full of diversity and heterogeneity, able to offer new, unexpected, informal engagements for community life. Suburbs are a new kind of city, different in scale and without definite centres: suburban inhabitants use spaces

in a nonconventional way, following phenomenon of aggregation, derived not by design, through urban form, but by society, through places with specific meanings assigned by urban/suburban daily existence. Moreover, exurban developments are currently producing phenomena different from gated communities, residential and business areas with a notable cluster of a particular ethnic minority population, known as ethno-burbs, lifestyle centres, through the combination of traditional retail functions of shopping malls with leisure amenities, and restructured rural towns. Large populations exist in a multitude of partial centres, or “edge cities”, clusters of malls, office developments and entertainment complexes along major highway intersections (Fishman, 1990). These new environments are no longer subordinate to the historic city, and they are much more diverse and complicated than previously imagined.

THE MYTH OF THE HISTORIC CITY		VERSUS	THE RUDE REALITY OF THE SUBURBAN CITY
Aesthetic purpose			Functional purposes
Compact city			Sprawl city
Public life			Bedroom communities
Heritage			Shopping malls
Monuments			Modern and poor-quality architecture
Public spaces			Placelessness
Beauty			Ugliness
Urban tidiness			Incoherence of the urban form
Walkability			Domination of automobile
Sense of place			Non lieu

Figure 6: Most common stereotypes, stated as cultural prejudice, when comparing the historic city and the suburban city.

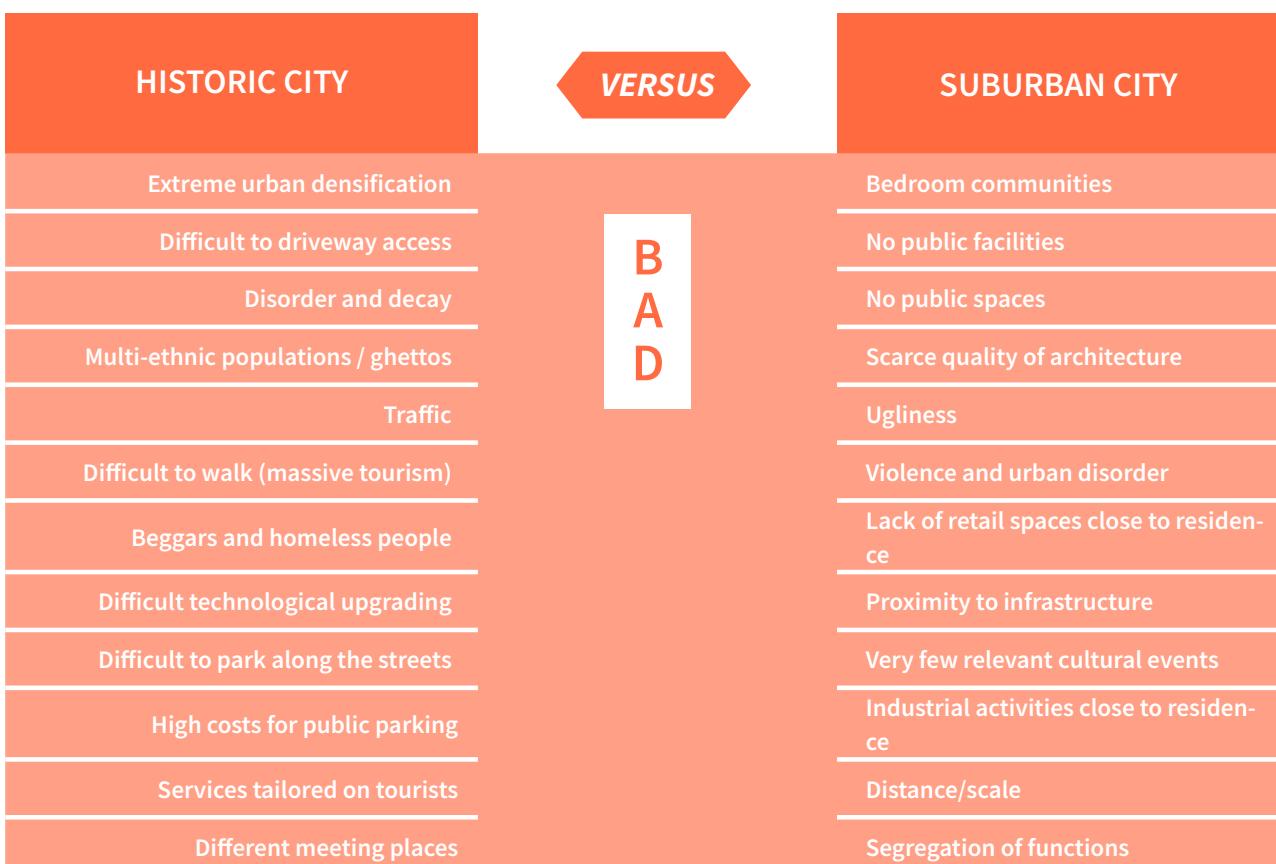
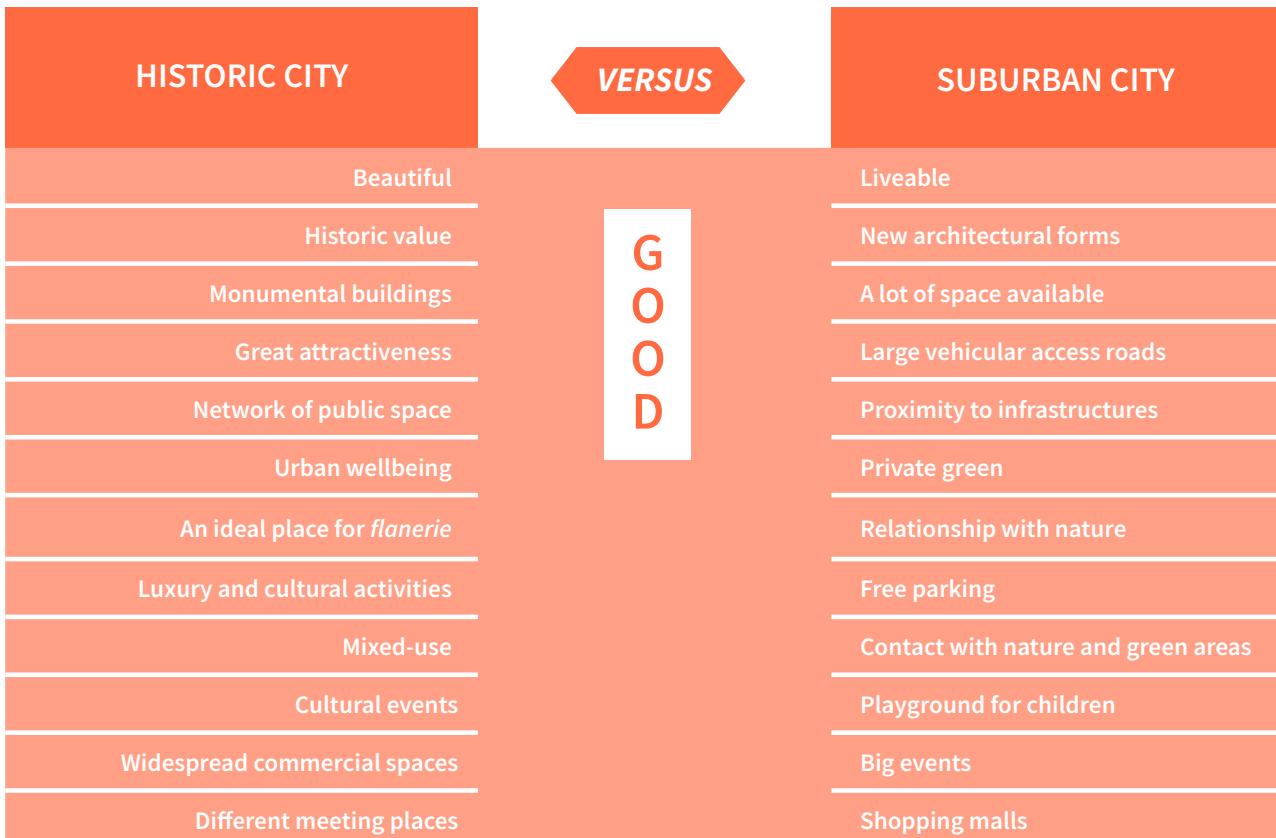


Figure 7: Good and bad aspects of living in the historic city and in the suburban city.
Elaborated by Luisa Bravo.

Connections between the city and the suburbs remain elusive if investigated only through physical form, such as conventional approaches to “public space” research, focusing exclusively on urban patterns and space. To truly see evidence, these connections must be analysed through the actual ways in which humans aggregate. Such approach will identify places whose significance has been produced by the community and its social and cultural life, both in urban and suburban settings. To do so, it is important to observe different “publics” and investigate their “everyday space” (Chase, Crawford, Kaliski, 2008), namely that ordinary places described as the “connective tissue that binds daily lives together”, although often in ways that are difficult to perceive, considering everyday activities of urban/suburban residents, such as working, commuting, walking, shopping, buying and eating food. These spaces can be ambiguous, obvious, banal, un-designed or invisible but with the potential to foster new forms of social interaction, even if they work as collective places only during a few hours of the day, or with limited hours in a week or month.



This perspective of comprehending public space reverses conventional concepts of “public” and “space”: instead of reproducing the morphology of “public spaces”, as defined by a top-down process, the examination of activities of different “publics” should be made observing the temporal rhythms and daily itineraries which define their spaces. This allows an insight into how these spaces appear, disappear and reappear, opening to short-term appropriation and dynamic transformation. Often, common places such as vacant lots, sidewalks, front yards, parks, and parking lots (Ben-Joseph, 2012) serve as public space for private, commercial and domestic purposes. Taking this into account, the social life of different “publics” produces places with communal significance, through practices of appropriation, and are able to become places of identity and belonging, even without any pre-defined urban form or intended public use.



Unexpected public space on a traffic island in front of a pizza shop during lunch time.

Cultural, artistic and performative dimension

The performative dimension of public space is the most prominent feature of our current way of life. Artists and activists are using public space to deliver powerful messages, through site-situated actions, investigating political, cultural, and aesthetic implications of practices staged in public spaces, with the primary goal to question the idea of “public” and who is excluded from this conception. Art is also a tool for the empowerment of those who are often forgotten, so that they can reclaim their right to exist and to be.

Art in public space, through site-situated interventions and performances, is a catalyst for political and social change and can create deep impact in public opinion, it can raise awareness and foster positive transformation, both at the individual and community level, and can establish new forms of solidarity and support towards marginalised groups.

Street art, born as a subversive form of art about 40 years ago, is the most important contemporary art movement:

it is the voice of unknown activists and civic movements that belong to popular culture, in opposition to an elite that experiences art inside museums, galleries or within inaccessible private collections. This street art movement aims to challenge the status quo, demand legitimacy and rights for marginalised and under-represented communities, and create works that inspire a new generation of

leaders, for a more inclusive and just future. Street art is also used as an urban regeneration tool for degraded neighbourhoods: through a process of engaging the community, citizens, entrepreneurs, and artists co-create and take co-ownership in the creative works, thus establishing a long-lasting social engagement and integration, and developing a sense of pride and belonging.



Giardino delle Culture, street artist Millo. Milan, Italy.

In recent years, creative placemaking has emerged as the use of arts and culture by diverse agents to strategically shape the physical and social character of a place in order to promote enduring social change and improve the physical environment. In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking brings life to public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public

safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired (Markusen and Gadwa, 2010). Creative practices are often process-driven and geared towards a complex and more nuanced understanding of creative placemaking, regarding the role of the artist and the social, economic and political contexts in which the artist's work is developed, throughout a dynamic process that evolves together with the practice itself. Place-based artists, while not necessarily calling themselves place-makers, hold a relational concept of space that encompasses social structure and material and embodied

dimensions. Art-led and socially concerned placemaking celebrates the capacity of the arts to address the city as a complex ecosystem, so that projects and actions can

integrate culture and community, resulting possibly in boosted local economies and increased levels of social connection and civic engagement (Courage, 2020).



“Before I Die” is a creative intervention on the wall of an abandoned building aimed at public engagement of the local community.



The temporary space created by Plastique Fantastique is monumental, yet mobile, soft and transparent. Its ephemeral skin influences the surroundings as much as its inner space offers a lucid view outward. It is a magical place that merges dance, music and nature.

The contemporary urban dimension is deeply related to the aspirations of open-minded citizens, based on negotiation practices and sensory experiences. Public spaces behave as places of multi-layered connections, sharing ideals and cultural awareness: they can grant and gather all wishes, becoming the engine of a social rebirth for common people and neighbourhoods, working on an urban imaginary to support attractive images of successful communities.

Political dimension

For decades, the economic and financial crisis, new forms of urban and religious conflicts, problems of social cohesion, discrimination and insecurity conditions have produced urban scenarios based on contradictory, unpredictable and uncertain circumstances. Widespread instability of local governments in many cities has seriously impacted urban governance, while huge protests, demonstrations and strikes in public areas have generated tensions and spiked fear and insecurity, after political protests took place in different public spaces around the world: along the streets in Clichy-sous-Bois and in different French cities' suburbs (2005), where a series of riots,

involving the burning of cars and public buildings, were led by mainly Arab, North African and second-generation immigrants; in Zuccotti Park - a privately owned public space (POPS), specifically shielded from police and government interference; in New York city (2011), the site of the Occupy Wall Street movement; in Cairo's Tahrir Square (2011), as the focal point of the Egyptian Revolution and later of the Arab Spring in North Africa and Middle-East; in the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid (2011), a stage for the Spanish protest of “los indignados”, demanding a radical change in politics after the economic crisis; in front of the Parliament House in Athens (2012), protesting and striking

for the austerity measures, after two years of social anxiety for the economic default of Greece; in Istanbul's Gezi Park and Taksim square (2013), for the Gezi movement's struggle for urban commons.

The year of 2019 marked the beginning of widespread protests in Latin America, along the streets of Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia, against inequalities, infringements of human rights, food shortages, lack of fuel and medical resources, and political corruption. The police response was frequently brutal and violent, but protests continued and were able to raise concerns about political leaderships, demanding for more inclusive laws focusing on the real need of those on the ground.

The Right to the City requires transparency, accountability, and democratic structures enabling decision making and the allocation of sufficient opportunities, mechanisms and resources for effective and equal political participation.

In contemporary society, people urgently reclaim epitomes of social justice and economic equality as a part of a general, basic requirement of the contemporary city: they defend political demands, democratic rights, struggle to preserve the uniqueness of specific places,

demand government solutions on urgent questions, such as unemployment, affordable housing, human dignity, political corruption, and austerity measures. Public spaces serve as a means for social activism: starting from a single space as a symbolic engagement, then expanding to multiple urban locations, these protests work also on a "media-space" network, mutually reinforcing relationship between physical places and social media, from a specific urban context and limited agenda to a more complex, bold and emotional human call in the public realm.

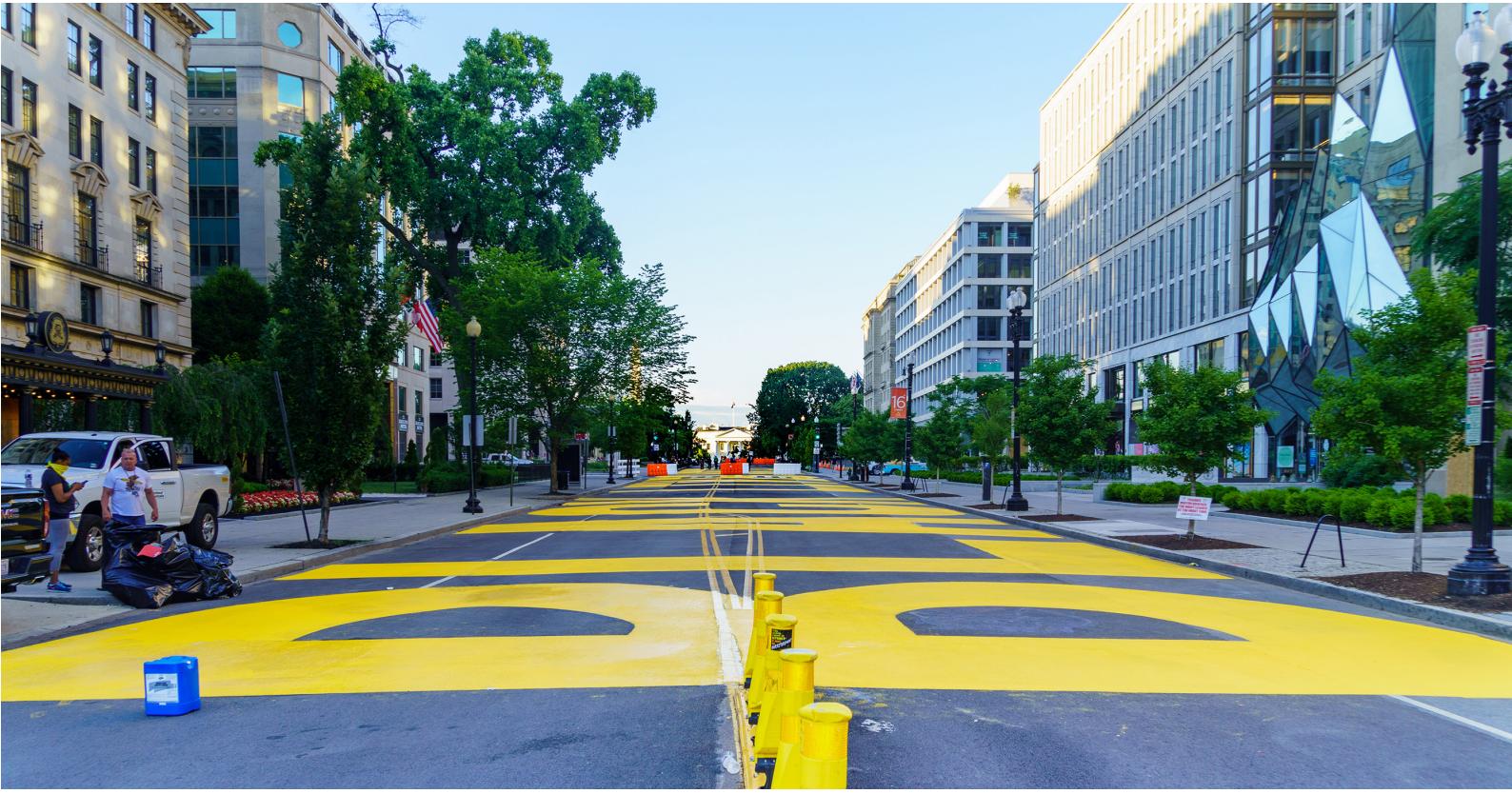
One relevant example is the Black Live Matters, a civil, non-violent movement that started online in 2013, protesting against incidents of police brutality and all racially motivated violence against black people, quickly expanding to become the largest movement in US history in 2020 when half a million people turned out in nearly 550 places across the country, on a single day, *as reported by the New York Times*. Since then, this North American-based movement was able to influence public opinion globally and obtain broader support, especially after the Washington D.C Mayor Muriel E. Bowser renamed a street in front of the White House as the "Black Lives Matter Plaza" and had the slogan painted on the asphalt in massive yellow letters, with the engagement of local artists and public work crews. This way, a grassroots movement to reclaim civil rights became linked to appropriation and transformation of public space through creative productions, expressing civic pride and powerful identity in the public space, and managing to elevate it into a strong political message.



The moutza, an insulting gesture in Greek culture (extending and spreading all fingers of the hand and presenting the palm towards the face of the person meant to be insulted with a forward motion), is extensively used in the Greek protests.



The 17th of October Revolution is a series of Lebanese civil protests, objecting the increase of taxes which quickly expanded into a country-wide condemnation of sectarian rule, stagnant economy, and unemployment, endemic corruption in the public sector, and failures of the government to provide basic services such as electricity, water, and sanitation.

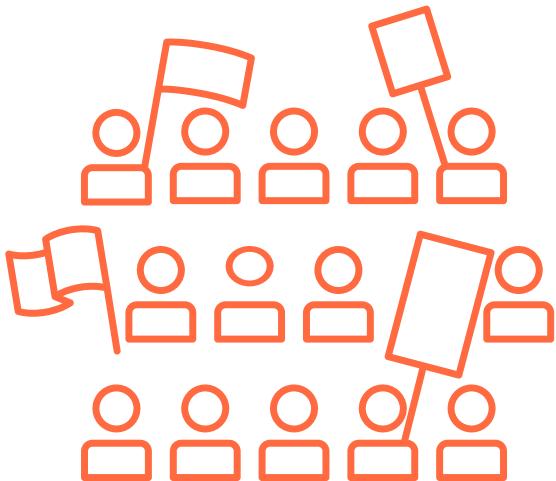


Black Lives Matter, in giant yellow letters painted on the street in front of the White House in Washington D.C.

A city/human settlement with quality public spaces should enhance political participation, by strengthening representative, direct and participatory democracy mechanisms at local level.

The United Nations adopted in 2012 the resolution “The Future We Want”, which reaffirmed the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and “the role of civil society and the importance of enabling all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development”. In the same year, UN-Habitat launched “I’m a City Changer” to advocate for a global movement focused on individual, private, and public initiatives that empower the disadvantaged and work with communities to produce solutions that will improve their surroundings. Both the resolution and the campaign were based on a clear strategy: engaging every urban citizen in sustainable development discourse, openness to grassroots solutions, and embracing civil society as an agent of change. As Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer (2012) argue, it is

increasingly important to “underscore the urgent political priority of constructing cities that correspond to human social needs rather than to the capitalist imperative of profit-making and spatial enclosure”.



Box 13. Designing for Free Speech challenge

At the beginning of 2014, Theatrum Mundi, a London-Based centre for research and experimentation in the public culture of cities, partnering up with the American Institute of Architects New York, launched the “Designing for Free Speech” challenge. This initiative asked architects, designers, activists, and artists to identify public spaces in the city of New York and propose re-designs that transform them into places that activate the rights enshrined in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. Applicants were required to propose architectural or performative designs (temporary or permanent) that transformed spaces into places for public “demonstration”. This challenge was about re-imagining existing spaces that have the potential to uplift the public, especially spaces that are not traditionally considered within this context.

Box 14. Forensic Architecture

Forensic Architecture (FA) is a research agency, based at Goldsmiths, University of London, investigating human rights violations including violence committed by states, police forces, militaries, and corporations. FA carries out investigations with and on behalf of communities and individuals affected by conflict, police brutality, border regimes and environmental violence, to uncover miscarriages of justice and international war crimes through architectural analysis of imagery, from official news, satellite footage, and crowdsourced information.

Environmental dimension of public space

Pollution and climate change are harmful factors for human health in many countries: according to the World Health Organization, in 2012 air pollution was the cause of approximately 7 million premature deaths annually while extreme weather events and natural disasters are nowadays killing millions of people globally. The number of vehicles registered worldwide has exceeded 1 billion units for the first time in 2010: in the United States of America, 239.8 million units constitute the largest volume of vehicles circulating in the world. The adoption of a bicycle mobility program in New York, which at the end of September 2015 completed 1000 miles of bicycle lanes

(equivalent to 1609 kilometres), was a real revolution in the lifestyle of the Americans, an extraordinary success that has been quickly imitated by many other cities, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and Boston, and this only considering big cities. In New York, during Mayor Bloomberg’s tenure (2002-2013) several projects reshaped the American concept of public space, although amidst resistance and harsh controversy: the iconic transformation of the High Line, from an elevated abandoned railway to a vibrant and elegant park, with more than 4 million visitors every year; Times Square, from a busy intersection of yellow taxi cabs, with over 131 million

visitors a year, to a pedestrianised area for public life; and the addition of more than 400 miles of bike lanes, currently operating with a bike sharing program called Citybike, the first-ever in the Big Apple, with 6,000 branded bikes and 330 stations.



New York, the Highline (on the left) and thousands of yoga enthusiasts celebrate the summer solstice in Times Square (on the right)

However, the story of New York's success regarding public space under Mayor Bloomberg is counterbalanced with increasing inequalities generated by policies promoting privatisation and gentrification. As an example, it was reported by the New York Times that *before the High Line was redeveloped*, surrounding residential properties were valued 8% below the overall median for Manhattan; later, between 2003 and 2011, property values near the park increased 103%, setting a crisis of affordability for middle-class residents and causing waves of displacement. These unintended consequences produced the alarming effect of widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor, since the changes are not supported by long term policies aimed at redistributing benefits to all inhabitants and keeping cultural richness and social diversity available for all.

New York City learned from pioneering public space policies implemented by South American Mayors, such as Enrique Peñalosa, elected in 1998, whose Car Free Day initiative named Ciclovia helped to transform the city of Bogota pollution and chaos into a globally lauded model of liveability and urban renewal. Peñalosa implemented several unpopular measures at the time, but which later proved very successful in reducing the traffic and environmental pollution, such as gas taxes and prohibition for car owners from driving during rush hour more than three times per week, while developing the bus rapid-transit

system TransMilenio — inspired by the Integrated Transportation Network implemented by Mayor Jaime Lerner in Curitiba, Brazil in 1974 — and building and revitalizing hundreds of parks.

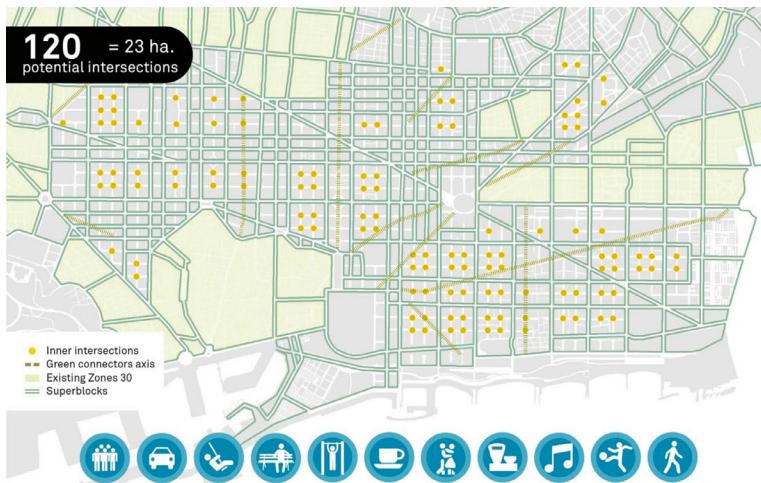
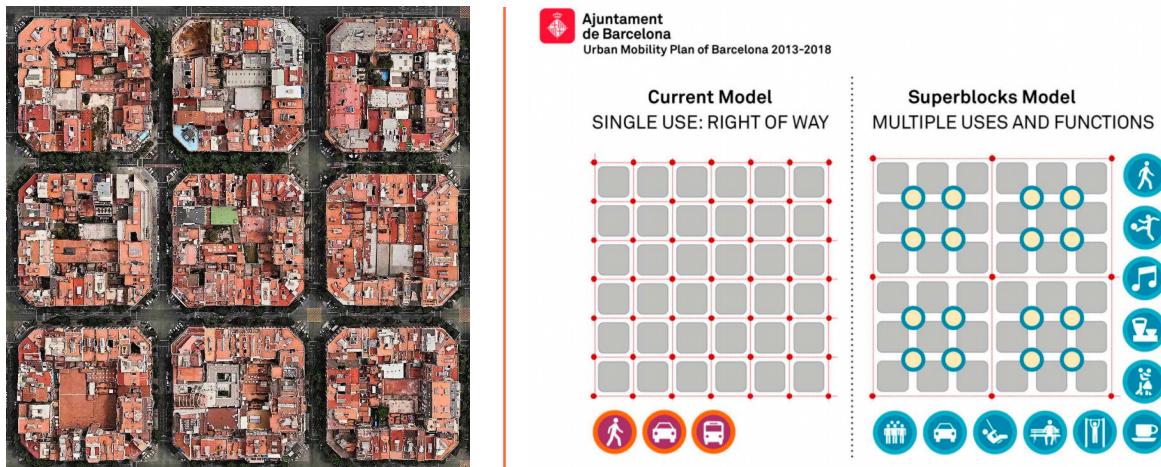


TransMilenio in Bogota (on the left) and Ciclovia in Bogota (on the right).

Box 15. *Urbanized*, produced and Directed by Gary Hustwit

Urbanized is a documentary film about the design of cities which discusses issues and strategies featuring the world's foremost architects, planners, policymakers, builders, and thinkers.

Box 16. *Superblock model in the Urban Mobility plan of Barcelona (2013-18)*



“Today’s streets need to be redefined as public spaces, as habitable places, as community spaces — as an extension of housing territory, as a space for games, greenery, history and local life of neighbourhoods”, as stated in the annex to the Sustainable urban mobility plan issued by the Municipality of Barcelona. Watch the video: [***“Superblocks: How Barcelona is taking city streets back from cars” from Vox.***](#)

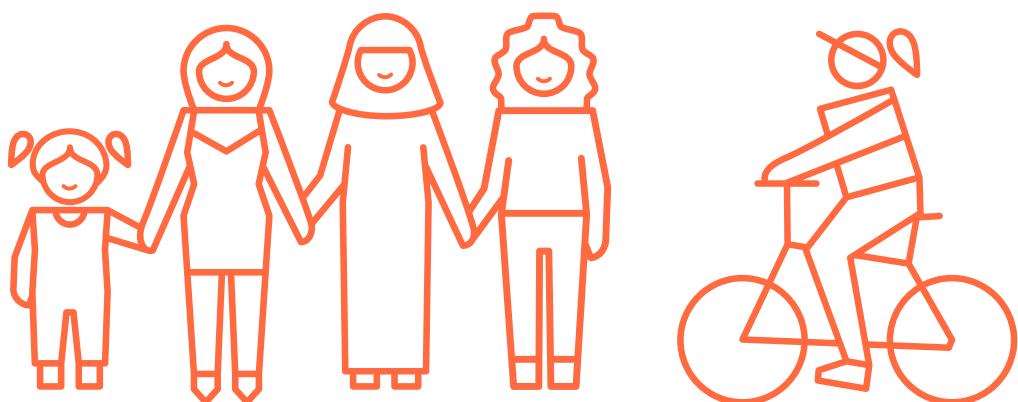


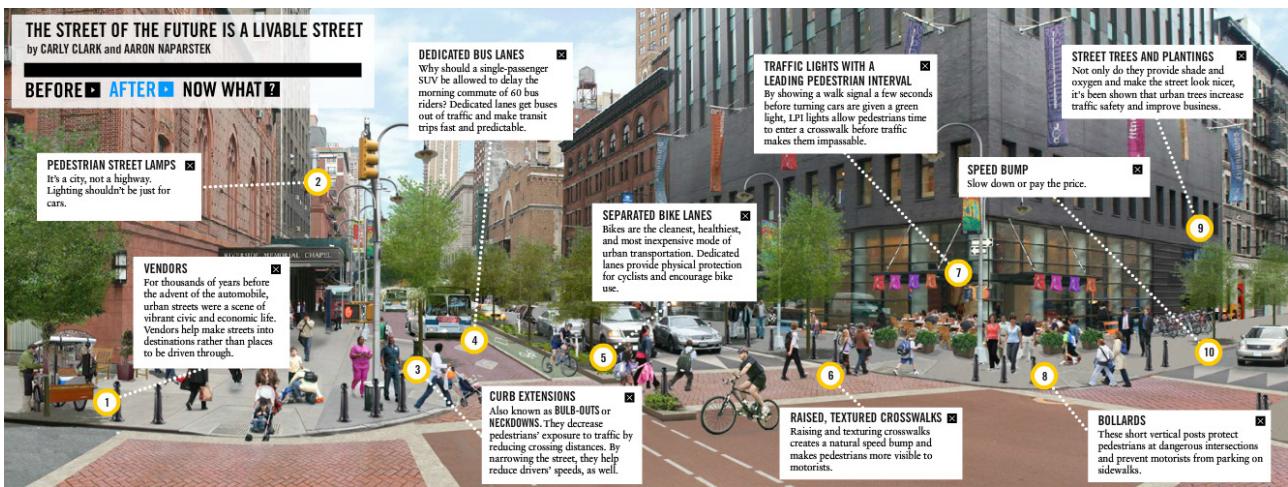
In 2019, the Municipality of Amsterdam announced that by the end of 2025, the city will remove up to 11,200 parking spaces from its streets and the cleared space will be replaced with trees, bike parking, wider sidewalks and space for public activities. In Paris, Mayor Anne Hidalgo has embarked the Municipality into the very ambitious project to transform the Haussmann monumentalized Paris into a human scale city: the program “Pedestrian Paris Initiative” includes a heavy restriction of traffic in

the first four arrondissements in the city centre and the installation of electric shuttles, the pedestrianisation of certain districts on the first Sunday of each month, a large fleet of electric bicycles aimed at encouraging commuters to cycle to work and reduce congestion and pollution, and the automobile ban on the right bank of the river Seine, from the Tuileries gardens to the Henri IV tunnel, for approximately 3km length in favour of creating a cycling and pedestrian-friendly urban highway.



In 2020, the mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, announced a €250 million plan to revamp, after the 2024 Summer Olympics, one of the city's most famous landmarks — the Champs-Élysées, often referred as the most beautiful avenue in the world. The 1.9km (1.2mile) long avenue will be transformed into an 'extraordinary garden', offering a place of experience and contemplation for Parisians and tourist alike.





New York, Amsterdam Avenue and West 76th Street in Manhattan. [Re-design of a street to accommodate walkability and cyclability, by Carly Clark and Aaron Naparstek.](#)

Box 17. Urb-I Urban Ideas

The start-up ‘Urb-I Urban Ideas’ based in Brazil has collected, starting from 2015, more than 3.000 pictures of urban transformation of places worldwide, from car-oriented to a more pedestrian friendly design, in a before/after gallery generated using the time machine of Google Street view. This gallery clearly shows how an under-designed urban space still embeds a great potential for public life, that could be activated by redefining priorities, putting pedestrians first, and by providing opportunities for temporary urbanism. The founders of Urb-I are “working towards the democratisation of urbanism”, as they state on their website, “in the creation of better places for all people”.

Virtual dimension and the millions who are left out

Public spaces are increasingly linked to globalisation phenomena: time-space acceleration, multi-presence, dissolution of personal relationships, streaming spaces, new information and communication systems, experiences connected not to sites but to images, way of quick, visual, not physical knowledge, loss of old solidarity forms and knowledge (family, community) and creation of new ones (distance and confidence), different and non-fixed scale social places. Web surfers, digital travellers or virtual citizens are all figures populating multiverses similar to the material and social spaces and places of daily life (Graham, 1998).

The highly technological tools of the digital age are able to move people’s experience from the reality of urban life to the digital networks, in which physical boundaries disappear, replaced by interconnected virtual environments. In terms of urban experience, the virtual dimension is bringing a new, multiverse layer to the physicality of the city, overlapping personal feelings, social aspects and community’s shared experiences to the existing urban tissue, through several digital levels, continuously updated and innovated by citizens themselves, establishing a dynamic idea of the city as something “unseen” from the standard point of view. We live in the so-called “network society”, namely “a society whose social structure is made up of networks powered by micro-electronics-based information and communications technologies” (Castells, 2004: 3), where the design of interactive experiences,

digital platforms and online services can contribute to public life and societal impact through playful interaction, virtual reality and civic media. This approach is developed in Europe, as an example, by *Civic Interaction Design at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences* and by private action research labs such as *Public Art Lab in Berlin* and communities of practices around the world, such as the *Digital Placemaking Institute*.

However, in many countries, even in the developed North and West, the digital divide, namely the inaccessibility to virtual platforms due to lack of internet access, digital infrastructures and technological devices, is exacerbating the existing socio-economic gap among different countries. The financial and technical ability to access computers and smartphones, and the skills to navigate the internet, use applications and software, has become increasingly important to completely immerse oneself in the economic, political, and social aspects of a globalised world. The digital divide exists within and between developed and developing countries, urban and rural populations, young and educated versus older and less educated individuals, men and women. The consequences comprise of isolation, marginalization and inequalities (for example in terms of access to job opportunities, to cultural and recreational events, to services and urban facilities), which can affect mental health, dangerously putting at risk the right to education that is largely benefitting from the digital tools as well, and worsening gender discrimina-

tion, racial, age and disability gaps.

The digital divide metaphor became popular in the mid-1990s, when the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce published *Falling Through the Net: A Survey of the 'Have-Nots' in Rural and Urban America* (1995) a research report on Internet diffusion among Americans. Later, this theory became mainstream with the publication of several books (Compaine, 2001) and the ongoing scholarly discussions on the Digital Age, namely a historical period established by a global economy relying on information technology, and the divide further generated by social media, in regard to access to, use of, and impact on society. The digital divide is escalated by the more and more pervasive use of technology for public services provided by Municipalities and National Governments, at the global level, that are not supported by proper investments to reduce the gap.

According to the 2021 report “Measuring digital development” published by International Telecommunication Union, an estimated 4.9 billion people are using the Internet in 2021, meaning that roughly 63% of the world’s population is now online — an increase of 17% since 2019— with almost 800 million people estimated to have entered the online space. Internet adherence increased

more than 20% on average in Africa, in Asia and the Pacific, and in the UN-designated Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, the number of Internet users grew by 10.2%, the largest increase in a decade, driven by developing countries where Internet use went up 13.3%. Additionally, the report explains that bridging the digital divide doesn’t simply mean making sure everyone has internet access, instead focusing on people’s ability to make meaningful use of connectivity, given the ever-more sophisticated digital platforms and services. This ability in turn depends on a myriad of factors, one of which is, of course, affordability.

Recently, the World Economic Forum (WEF) published a white paper on *Digital Justice* (2021) on the harmful consequences of fake news, deep-fake videos, defamatory content, inaccurate information, misinformation and administrative error, and suggested several meaningful ways to design technical, governance and market solutions to restore trust, integrity and justice in digital service providers, thus defining “digital rights” as a relevant component to be associated to the right to the city. As an example, WEF explained that 96% of all deepfake videos are pornographic in nature and almost all of these target women. This is a pervasive new form of online image-based sexual abuse that is not usually properly addressed in local jurisdictions.

Box 18. Deepfake Detection Challenge

In 2019, Facebook launched the Deepfake Detection Challenge, an open and collaborative initiative to spur creation of innovative new technologies to detect deepfakes and manipulated media (how deepfake technology works is safely explained [here](#). In 2020, Meta published the [**results of the challenge.**](#)

Mobile phones are becoming ubiquitous in the information society, as a daily tool and resource, and they can be lifesavers under conditions of dire emergency. As an example, for migrants and refugees, moving on the Balkan and Mediterranean routes and across Africa and Europe, mobile phones are used to share photographs

and experiences on Facebook groups, map their route and calculate expenses, helping the coast guard to pinpoint their location, and letting their families know they are safe throughout their journey. As reported by Unesco (2021), refugees can spend up to a third of their budget on internet access.



African migrants on the shore of Djibouti City at night raise their phones in an attempt to catch an inexpensive signal from neighbouring Somalia — a tenuous link to relatives abroad.

Djibouti is a common stop-off point for migrants in transit from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, who seek a better life in Europe and the Middle East.

On the other hand, virtual public spaces, overlapped on physical public spaces, and digital identities and avatars on the cyberspace are exposing users to unwanted collection of data and personal information shared on instant messaging, websites, emails and apps, and unauthorised use of this data for various purposes, including illegal activities aimed at influencing public opinion (for example, spreading misinformation on a specific subject targeting a specific audience) and supporting political parties and leaders (the *Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal* in the United States of America in 2010). The digital dimension of public space can be unsafe and unreliable: users should be skilled enough to make meaningful use of connectivity and take full advantage of it, avoiding cyber-risks, scams, fake news, or harmful content.

Digital rights can be considered an extension of the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by

the United Nations as applied to the online world, since they focus on accessibility, affordability, participation, equality, diversity, accountability, connectedness and solidarity, in regard to the digital public domain. The European Union (EU) developed a framework, regarding to the right to personal data protection, known as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was enforced starting in 2018, that ensures member countries both to preserve citizens' personal data and to allow the free movement of data. Additionally, in January 2022, the European Commission has proposed a *Declaration on digital rights and principles for a human-centred digital transformation*. Today, according to the United Nations (UNCTAD, 2021), 137 out of 194 countries have put in place *legislation to secure the protection of data and privacy*.



F. Public space and COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fundamental role of public space in our cities, not just for social life but also regarding the functioning of the economic urban system.

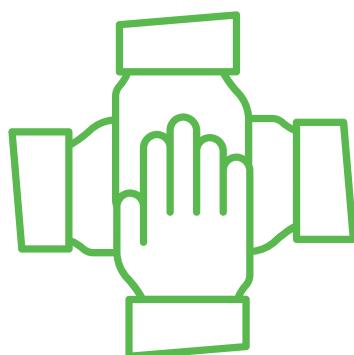
The imposed lockdown, to prevent the widespread of the contagion, combined with social distancing and health restrictions, significantly impacted public urban life while reinforcing existing inequalities, at many different levels, increasing the process of social exclusion of minorities and disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Youth, older persons and persons with disabilities experienced isolation, frustration and loneliness, with a significant raise in levels of helplessness and fear. Starting as a health emergency, the pandemic soon became an economic crisis, with huge funds made available by governments for the recovery period. COVID-19 heightened several deep urban inequalities and fragilities that existed prior to the pandemic, as a result of years of austerity, precarious labour opportunities or access to livelihoods. Women were hit harder than men: many lost their jobs — in a much faster rate than their counterpart — and had to carry out the bulk of the additional unpaid work caused by closed schools and childcare facilities, as well as caring for sick family members.

One of the most immediate and visible spatial responses at the neighbourhood level to the COVID-19 pandemic was the repurposing of public space, to be quickly adapted to support emergency services through setting up temporary hospitals, warehouses and other facilities which helped improve neighbourhood response capacities. Beyond the emergency response, the COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of public space for community and social resilience, as well as personal wellbeing and the need for a new approach to city planning to support better and more equitable distribution and access to health services, while also promoting healthy and active lifestyles in outdoor public spaces, through walking and cycling, and by making public transportation during the COVID-19 era safe. Beyond the emergency response, the COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of public space for community and social resilience, as well as personal wellbeing (UN-Habitat, 2021), where people of different classes, races, ethnicity, political and religious beliefs come together.

The pandemic has put at the forefront some alternative urban models, such as the compact city and the car-free city that several European cities have successfully implemented over the past decades, aimed at re-organizing priorities around the human scale or the city-at-eye-level experience, through hyper-proximity of services, thus shaping a human-oriented urbanism that is environmentally sensitive and pedestrian safe. Particularly, the European discussion focuses on the 15-minute city model, promoted by Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo, which will turn the French capital into a myriad of neighbourhoods where “*you can find everything you need within 15 minutes from home*”. This model is willing to reduce inequalities by mixing different populational groups (and overcoming the model of residential zoning) and reducing the need for long distance travel, CO₂ emissions, air and noise pollution, by promoting hyper-proximity of facilities and services.

However, this model has some limitations and potential counter effects: Edward Glaeser, Harvard Professor of Economics, argues that the 15-minute city is a dead end since it is not solving urban inequalities and fails to provide opportunities for all, instead focusing mostly on enabling “upper-middle-income people to walk around in their nice little 15-minute neighbourhood” so it is seems likely to worsen the aforementioned inequalities. He claims that “in the US walkable districts are basically isolated luxury items.”

During the first lockdown in 2020, the city of Milan announced the “Strade Aperte” (Open Streets) program, one of Europe’s most ambitious schemes, reallocating street space from cars to cycling and walking, in response to the coronavirus crisis (the northern Italian city and surrounding Lombardy region are among Europe’s most polluted areas). The City of Milan is currently implementing the program and has also recently published the Design Guidelines on Public Space.



Box 19. *Strade Aperte* program in Milan, Italy

Milan “Open Streets” programme. Former New York City Transport Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan said that Milan could become a model for a post-coronavirus mobility strategy.

In the so-called “new normal”, the shared civic space no longer works as we know it: the pandemic has established the 1,5-meter social distance as a new form of safe physical co-existence, while the consequence of the extended isolation raises a new awareness in terms of social and ecological resilience for public space. The Urban Land Institute’s report *“The pandemic and the public realm”* (2021), highlights that “equitable, people-centric public space has been essential during the pandemic, and continuing to prioritise equity will remain critical in the recovery period and beyond”, since the pandemic has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable groups. Simultaneously, the rapid shift towards flexible mobility in many cities and the increased use and value of green spa-

ces, fosters a more sensitive approach to climate change and to strategies that contribute to the preservation and greenness of the urban environment, through nature-based solutions and green infrastructures. On the other hand, the pandemic has moved many social interactions into the cyberspace and on multiple virtual platforms, accelerating the digital transformation of infrastructures for public and private services in the policy agenda, to ensure a resilient and more inclusive digital future, as reported by *OECD* (2020), and highlighting the growing importance of communication infrastructures in our daily lives. This will permanently change the way humans interact in the public domain in the post-COVID-19 city.

Box 20. 2020: A Year without Public Space under the COVID-19 pandemic

“2020: A Year without Public Space under the COVID-19 pandemic” is a global online initiative promoted by City Space Architecture and the School of Architecture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, developed through May to November 2020, with 20 webinars, a 2-day symposium and the publication of a special issue of The Journal of Public Space.

The Right to the City can become the driving force of post-pandemic policies aiming to enhance not only equality, but also social justice and equity, applying people-centred and environmentally-friendly city-making, encouraging the creation of more public areas and the investment in initiatives addressing a positive change for more sustainable, liveable and healthy cities for all.

Recommendation for a post-pandemic city-wide public space strategy:

re-shaping the real estate market in favour of temporary and flexible functions, using empty office spaces;

reversing the big-shopping-mall economy into small-scale and neighbourhood business development, supported by local and regional governments;

retrofitting suburbia against massive sprawl applying a human scale approach, with small-in-scale and temporary, flexible interventions, where quality public spaces can be shaped by:

adapting daily use to social distancing for unrestricted enjoyment;
re-inventing health measures for safe human interaction, also through technological devices and solutions;

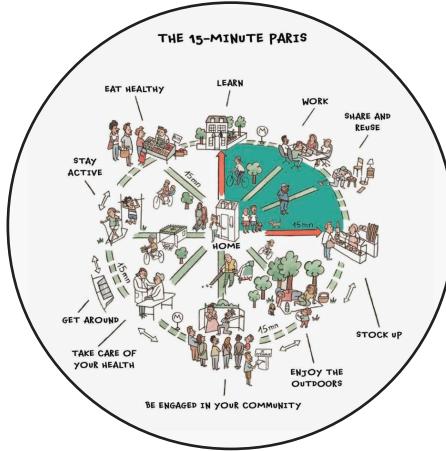
expanding walkable space with temporary interventions, engaging full creativity of activists and artists;

re-designing distribution of services for hyper-proximity, in cooperation with local businesses and the social and solidarity economy.



ADAPTING DAILY USE

Social distancing circles at Domino Park, Brooklyn, New York.



EXPANDING WALKABLE SPACE

Parklet as a temporary public space in Bologna, Italy

RE-DESIGN DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICES FOR HYPER-PROXIMITY

The 15-minute Paris, France.

G. How to design a quality public space: the process



The quality of public spaces lies not only in good design solutions but also and especially in the process behind their creation, and in the opportunities to share perspectives, dialogue with multiple and diverse stakeholders and to define common grounds for co-design and co-creation. The design and management of quality public spaces is the result of a collaborative effort able to define conditions for top-down approach to meet the bottom-up needs and aspirations expressed by different publics.

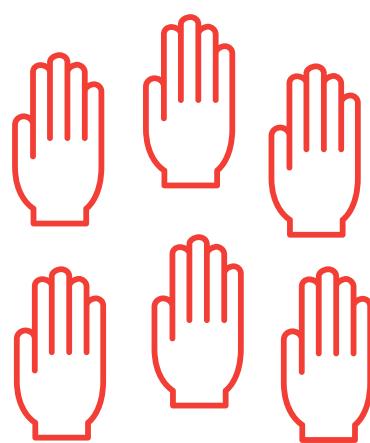
A group of American and Italian scholars have recently conceptualised the “City as a Commons” (Foster and Iaione, 2016), based on extensive investigation and experimentation of new forms of collaborative city-making, as part of the LabGov, Laboratory of the governance of the city as a commons. The project defines new frontiers of participatory urban governance, inclusive economic growth and social innovation, through peer-to-peer production, participatory design and cooperation among the actors of the quintuple helix model, i.e., social innovators, public authorities, businesses, civil society organisations, and knowledge institutions. The project, rooted in the conceptual pillars of the urban commons, has studied and collected results on several ground-breaking experiments, surveying 67 cities globally over 18 months, in order to build a Co-City index and measure the implementation of the European Union and UN Urban Agenda. Therefore, the Co-city model is working on the enhancement of social welfare and on the implementation of the right to the city through participatory governance.

In Brazil, after a long tradition of authoritarian politics, with the predominance of the state over civil society, the program on Participatory Budgeting promoted by the Municipality of Porto Alegre (adopted in 1989) defined a new model based on a public space strategy: the Participatory Budgeting was intended as “a process of decision making based upon general rules and criteria of distributive justice, discussed and approved by regular, institutional

organs of participation” (de Sousa Santos, 1998), aimed at redefining civic participation to the transformation and future of the city. It was selected by the United Nations as one of the forty urban innovations worldwide to be presented at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul (1996) and has since been adopted by more than 2,700 governments throughout the world. Following Porto Alegre, nowadays national and local governments are working to define an innovative and more responsible approach able to foster participation in the decision-making process.

The UN commitment to inclusive development is oriented around people, and therefore, public space; it is a call for country leaders to prioritize the needs of the most marginalized and disadvantaged populations, those facing poverty and discrimination. However, this goal is not only for the Global South. Economic recession, rising unemployment, and homelessness are becoming realities in the Global North, while the lingering global financial crisis and unprecedented migration are simultaneously redefining the public realm as politicised and contested space (Hou and Knierbein, 2017).

Opposing the neoliberal Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), a number of civic organisations are advocating for a Public-Private-People Partnerships (4P) approach (Perjo, Fredricsson, and e Costa 2016; Maran, Labaka, and Sarriegi, 2018). This ensures that “people” are part of the conversations and, in fact, must be included in the process to make cities and public spaces more sustainable. The architecture of the SDGs presumes that ordinary people, working alongside institutions and governments, will manage to achieve a better urban future. The active contribution of people, either through co-design or co-production (sometimes both) is necessary for inclusive and equitable spaces, as they foster tolerance, conviviality, dialogue, and democratic exchange.



H. The centrality of public space: key recommendations



Too often, public space remains a low priority in many cities' urban agenda and it is mostly seen as a collateral component, intended as design activities related to landscape urbanism or infrastructure facilities.

The Right to the City promotes a paradigm shift whose aim is to rethink cities and human settlements, considering the complex and challenging contemporary urban scenario, through prioritising actions for implementation of design and proper use of public space.

More importantly than being an end product, public space is a collective process shaped around common values and beliefs among a large variety of agents, communities and social groups, and it should be constantly redefined by:

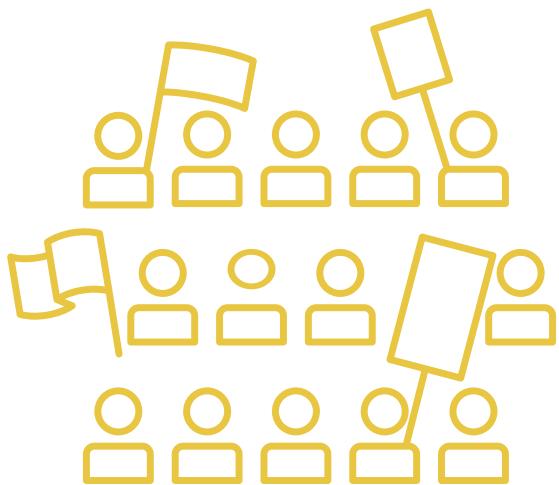
public sector (national, regional and local governments), through strategic, innovative and flexible policies able to produce short-term changes and envision long-term impact, while raising awareness on the right to the city as a new paradigm, fostering capacity building, peer-to-peer learning and political debates;

civil society (citizens, activists, NGOs and grassroots organisations), through self-managed activities, holding the right and responsibility to participate in the making and shaping of public space;

educational and research centres (Universities and higher education institutions), through proper programs and initiatives focused on the multiplicity of cross-disciplinary and theoretical meanings and design performance of public space, enabling the materialisation of the right to the city, especially for the empowerment of youth;

private sector, since city-wide public space strategies can be linked to profit activities for their implementation. For example, the rampant vacancies in malls and strip centres in the United States has generated the opportunity for public-private partnerships to create human services centres: in Memphis, Crosstown Concourse, located in an abandoned 1.5 million-square-foot Sears office and distribution centre, is an innovative vertical urban village including theatres, offices, health providers, a YMCA, a college, a high school, restaurants, and 265 apartments. Partnerships with philanthropic capital and private financing can be defined by shared principles, common goals, and should be grounded in an ethical conduct whose aim is the common good.

In terms of design and management, quality public space can be achieved through a joint commitment of bottom-up daily actions of care, improvements and management and top-down design and policies: in the spectrum of these two efforts lies a plethora of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental opportunities for all inhabitants, directly linked to the Right to the City.



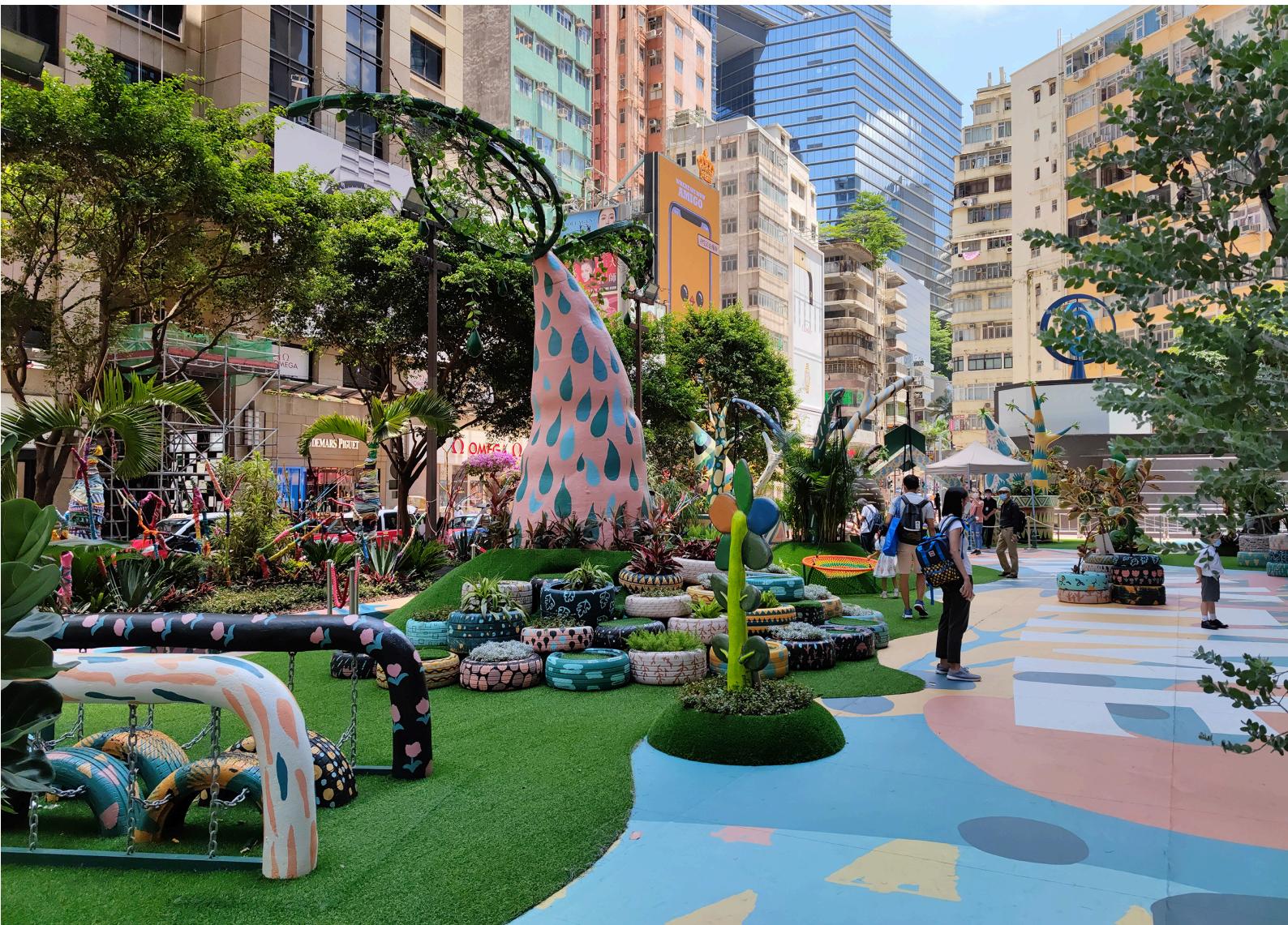
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTIVATION, USE AND APPROPRIATION (CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE):

- 1 Co-design and co-production of public space contents, with governments,** communities and other social and private partners, as part of an open and participatory process involving a variety of social groups, including in particular women, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+, migrants and refugees, and marginalised groups as well;
- 2 Intergenerational, resilient and inclusive approach for more equitable spaces,** able to foster tolerance, conviviality, dialogue, and democratic exchange, based on an anti-racist, anti-colonial and non-patriarchal values, knowledges and practices;
- 3 Encouraging publicness through creative interventions and services provided by small local businesses and the social and solidary economy,** nurturing imagination, emotional attachment, appropriation and sense of belonging;
- 4 Quality of life through public spaces for all,** free of discrimination in aspects of gender, age, health status, income, nationality, ethnicity, migratory condition, political, religious or sexual orientation.

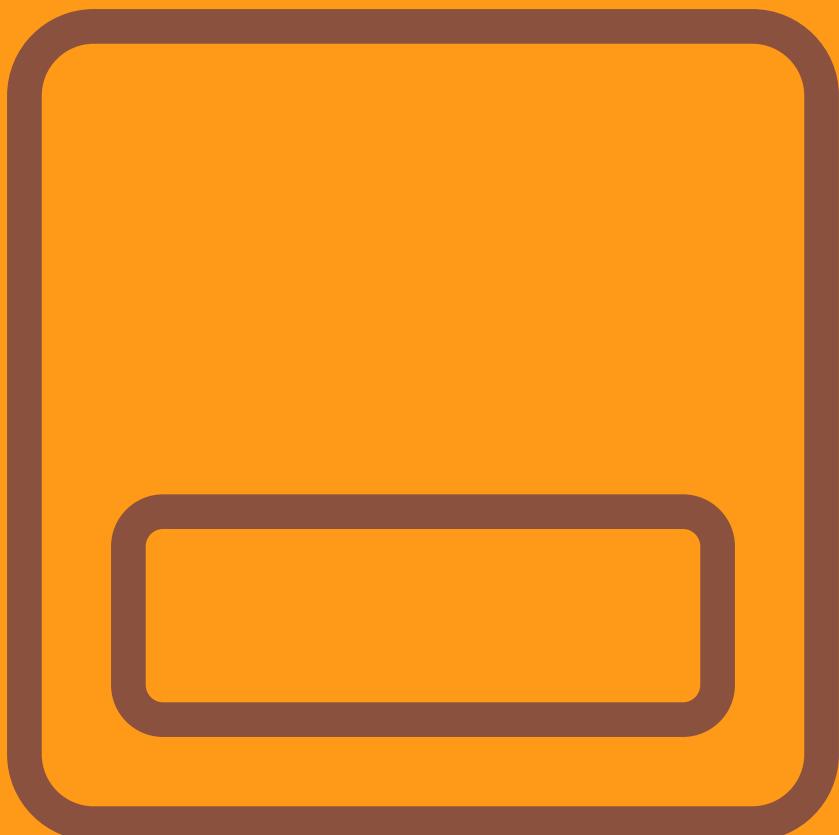
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN (PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE):

- 5 Define a city-wide public space strategy.** Well-designed public spaces are a key asset for a city's functioning and has a positive impact on its environment, safety, health, inclusion, economy, integration, and connectivity;
- 6 Public space established as a priority in the city layout.** The city's layout should start from the design of open public spaces, in order to create a more sustainable and equitable urban environment, for new designs but also for redefining connectivity in the existing urban structure;
- 7 Prioritise walkability, universal accessibility, environmental and human-scale approach,** establishing continuous and comfortable sidewalks, coupled with bicycle lanes, green and play areas, to improve public safety and citizen well-being;

- 8** **Integration with efficient public mobility.** Public spaces are the backbone of public life in cities and should be interconnected through efficient mobility infrastructures, including public transit and soft mobility;
- 9** **A public space strategy is not just about design.** Public space experts should be engaged in a multi-stakeholder and multi-perspective shared strategy, developed across different fields of expertise and in compliance with multiple laws and regulations;
- 10** **Context-based, sensitive and inclusive design solutions.** Instead of superimposing a pre-defined urban model, it is mandatory to investigate the complexity and uniqueness of the social and cultural context, avoiding rashness or pre-conceived thoughts and solutions.



Figures and boxes



Figures and boxes

Figure 1. Number of people living in urban and rural areas (1960-2020). Source: [World Bank based on the UN Population Division](#).

Figure 2. [Urbanisation for prosperity, 25th Session of the Governing Council](#), UN-Habitat (2015).

Figure 3. Conceptual framework for maximizing the public space dividend. [UCLG Public space policy framework, 2016](#).

Figure 4. The paradigm of density. Source: Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners.

Figure 5. Figure-ground diagrams highlighting the network of open public spaces according to different urban plans. Source: UN-Habitat, [Habitat III Issue paper](#) (New York, 2015).

Figure 6. Most common stereotypes, stated as cultural prejudice, when comparing the historic city and the suburban city. Elaborated by Luisa Bravo.

Figure 7. Most common stereotypes, as a cultural prejudice, when comparing the historic city and the suburban city. Elaborated by Luisa Bravo.

Figure 8. (i) adapting daily use - [social distancing circles at Domino Park, Brooklyn, New York \(May 2020\)](#); (ii) re-inventing human interaction: [social distancing stickers that demarcate the public seating areas at The Star Vista Mall in Singapore \(April 2020\)](#); (iii)expanding walkable space - [Parklet as a temporary public space in Bologna, Italy, developed by City Space Architecture \(October 2020-July 2021\)](#). Picture by Elettra Bastoni; (iv) re-design distribution of services for hyper-proximity, The 15-minute Paris, France.

Box 1. Why public space matters.

Box 2. About the Right to the City.

Box 3. [Definition of Public Space](#).

Box 4. Consequences of the lack of strategic approach to urbanization.

Box 5. Initiatives related to inclusion.

Box 6. [UN-Habitat City Prosperity Initiative \(CPI\)](#).

Box 7. [Spontaneous interventions. Design Actions for the Common Good](#).

Box 8. [Tactical Urbanism](#).

Box 9. [Stand up for Public Space!](#)

Box 10. [Queering Public Space](#).

Box 11. [Queering the Map](#).

Box 12. [If I was white](#).

Box 13. [Designing for Free Speech challenge](#).

Box 14. [Forensic Architecture](#).

Box 15. [Urbanized, produced and Directed by Gary Hustwit](#).

Box 16. [Superblock model in the Urban Mobility plan of Barcelona \(2013-18\)](#).

Box 17. [Urb-I Urban Ideas](#).

Box 18. [Deepfake Detection Challenge](#).

Box 19. [Strade Aperte program in Milan, Italy](#).

Box 20. [2020: A Year without Public Space under the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

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Recommended Reading

Age Inclusive Public Space, edited by Kristian Ly Serena and Dominique Hauderowicz

As stated by the authors, “new public spaces tend to overrepresent attention to the young and middle-aged, whereas elderly citizens are often neglected by contemporary urban design practice”. The book “Age-Inclusive Public Space” provides inspiration as well as theoretical and practical knowledge on how to design public space to meet the needs of people of all ages.

The Inclusion Imperative: Towards Disability-inclusive and Accessible Urban Development. Key Recommendations for an Inclusive Urban Agenda, by World Enabled and cbm.

As stated in the introduction of the book, “persons with disabilities are young, old, women, men, straight, gay, transgender, indigenous, and of every race and ethnicity. However, the manner in which cities are designed for too long has failed to consider the unique ways that physical and social barriers limit the participation of persons with disabilities in public life”.

The Hidden Wealth of Cities: Creating, Financing, and Managing Public Spaces, by the World Bank (2020).

“The Hidden Wealth of Cities” identifies a rich palette of creative and innovative strategies that every city can undertake to plan, finance, and manage both government-owned and privately-owned public spaces.



Glossary



City

According to the United Nations, a range of accepted definitions of “city” exist, from those based on population data and extent of the built-up area to those that are based solely on administrative boundaries. These definitions of cities, metropolitan areas and urban agglomerations vary depending on legal, administrative, political, economic or cultural criteria in the respective countries and regions. Since 2016, UN-Habitat and partners organized global consultations and discussions to narrow down the set of meaningful definitions that would be helpful for the global monitoring and reporting process. Following consultations with 86 member states, the United Nations Statistical Commission, in its 51st Session (March 2020) endorsed the Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA) as a workable method to delineate cities, urban and rural areas for international statistical comparisons. This definition combines population size and population density thresholds to classify the entire territory of a country along the urban-rural continuum, and captures the full extent of a city, including the dense neighbourhoods beyond the limits of the central municipality. DEGURBA is applied in a two-step process: First, 1 km² grid cells are classified based on population density, contiguity and population size. Following this, local units are classified as urban or rural based on the type of grid cells in which the majority of their population resides.

Regarding the Right to the City, the term “city” is to be understood in a broad sense, meaning every metropolis, city, town, village or human settlement that constitute a political community, and is generally (though not necessarily) institutionally organised as a local governmental unit with municipal or metropolitan character. It includes urban spaces, as well as rural or semi-rural surroundings which make up its territory.

City-Wide Public Space Strategy

An action-oriented approach to setting up, planning, implementing and maintaining a system of public space in a city or town. It confronts the present state of the public spaces, assesses the city’s needs and demands and ideally presents some type of collective, future-oriented vision and goals.

Creative placemaking

Creative placemaking is generally understood as the

use of arts and culture by diverse agents to strategically shape the physical and social character of a place in order to spur economic development, promote enduring social change and improve the physical environment. In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighbourhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking uplifts public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.

Equality

Involves systematic (re)distribution of the benefits of growth or development, with legal frameworks ensuring a ‘level playing field’ and institutions protecting the rights of the poor, minorities and marginalised groups.

Green corridor

A type of open space that includes coastal areas, tow-paths along canals and riverbanks, bicycle lanes, rights-of-way and disused railway lines, and whose primary purpose is to provide opportunities for walking, cycling, horse-riding and other non-vehicular outdoor activities for leisure, travel and/or wildlife migration.

Green space

Areas such as gardens, zoos, parks, forests or green areas bordered by urban areas that are open and accessible to all city residents and managed and used predominantly for recreational purposes.

Multipurpose space

A public space that can be used for many different purposes, such as leisure, interaction, playground, meeting and/or commerce.

Open public space

It is any open piece of undeveloped land or containing no

buildings (or other built structures) that is accessible to the public free of charge, and provides recreational areas for residents and contributes in enhancing the beauty and environmental quality of neighbourhoods. UN-Habitat recognizes that different cities have different types of open public spaces, which vary both in size and typology. Based on the size of both soft and hard surfaces, open public spaces are broadly classified into six categories: national/metropolitan open spaces, regional/larger city open spaces, district/city open spaces, neighbourhood open spaces, local/pocket open spaces and linear open spaces. Classification of open public space by type is described by the function of the space and can include: green public areas, riparian reserves, parks and urban forests, playgrounds, squares, plazas, waterfronts, sports field, community gardens, parklets and pocket parks.

Open space

The sum of all of the non-built-up area of a city, mainly streets and boulevards including walkways, sidewalks, bicycle lanes and the areas devoted to public parks, squares, recreational green areas, public playgrounds and the non-built areas of public facilities.

Placemaking

This term refers to a collaborative process of shaping the public realm in order to maximise shared value. More than promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place.

Potential open public space

The identification of open public spaces across cities can be implemented through analysis of high to very high-resolution satellite imagery, from base-maps provided by different organisations (eg OpenStreetMap, Esri, etc) or as crowd-sourced and volunteered data, among other sources. While these sources provide important baseline data for indicator 11.7.1 (SDG 11), some of the identifiable spaces may not meet the criteria of being “accessible to the public free of charge”. The term “potential open public space” is thus used to refer to open public spaces which are extracted from the above-mentioned sources (based on their spatial character), but which are not yet validated to confirm if they are accessible to the public free of charge.

Public facility

Spaces or amenities owned and used by the general public for their own benefit.

Public spaces

These are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without profit motive. This includes streets, open spaces and public facilities. Public space in general is defined as the meeting or gathering places that exist outside the home and workplace that are generally accessible by members of the public, and which foster resident interaction and opportunities for contact and proximity. This definition implies a higher level of community interaction and places a focus on public involvement rather than public ownership or stewardship. For the purpose of monitoring and reporting on indicator 11.7.1, public space is defined as all places of public use, accessible by all, and comprises open public space and streets.

Right to the city

It is the right of all inhabitants, present and future, permanent and temporary, to inhabit, use, occupy, produce, transform, govern and enjoy just, inclusive, safe, sustainable and democratic cities, villages and human settlements.

Urban commons

Commons were traditionally defined as elements of the environment — forests, atmosphere, rivers, fisheries or grazing land — which were shared, used and enjoyed by all. Today, the commons also include public goods, such as public space, marketplaces, public education, health and infrastructure that allow society to function.

Walkability: the extent to which the built environment is friendly to people moving on foot in an area. Factors affecting walkability include, but are not limited to: street connectivity; land-use mix; residential density; presence of trees and vegetation; frequency and variety of buildings, entrances and other sensations along street frontages.



Annex 1. The work of UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme



Since 2012, UN-Habitat, through the Global Public Space Programme, has promoted regarding public space as an asset for more compact, connected, and socially inclusive cities by consolidating knowledge, approaches, and methodologies on public space for local governments. This work is being carried out through policy guides, capacity building, knowledge sharing, advocacy work, and actual implementation. Currently active in more than 30 countries, the Programme is strategically linked to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The main objective of the Programme is to promote public space as a priority in the political agenda. This is accomplished by raising awareness on sustainable planning principles, addressing rapid expansion, retrofitting existing settlements towards

more sustainable patterns, and reducing poverty and inequality. UN-Habitat has established a database of public spaces in 289 cities in 94 countries, and in 2018, public space, as an indicator, was reclassified by UN Statistical Commission from Tier III to Tier II, meaning that there is a consensus around the concept and established research methodology, but data is not regularly produced by countries. The methodology used to identify areas of the city considered public space is based on three steps: 1) spatial analysis to delimit the built-up area of the city; 2) estimation of the total open public space; and 3) estimation of the total area allocated to streets. These assessments are directly tied to the motives of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and Agenda 2030.

UN-Habitat metadata on SDGs Indicator 11.7.1 for open public spaces (OPS). Indicator category: Tier II



The UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme regularly reviews its mission by engaging qualified professionals. In the past three years, approximately 1,200 decision makers and stakeholders have been involved in planning charrettes and training activities. It has already produced several reports and publications, like the Global Public

Space Toolkit, a practical reference for local governments with the purpose to enable specific legislation involving civil society, and in 2020, it launched a compendium of inspiring practices and a guide for city leaders related to a city-wide public space strategy.

Book. Global Public Space Toolkit, published by UN-Habitat

In 2015, UN-Habitat published the Global Public Space Toolkit in order to provide a practical reference for local governments to frame and implement city-wide principles, policy recommendations and development initiatives on public space.

Book. UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme: city-wide public space strategies (2020)

In 2015, UN-Habitat published the Global Public Space Toolkit in order to provide a practical reference for local governments to frame and implement city-wide principles, policy recommendations and development initiatives on public space.

A Guidebook for City Leaders, providing tools to approach the city as a multi-functional and connected urban system that can ensure the best chances of proactively driving good urban development.

A compendium of Inspiring Practices.

This publication summarises 26 city-wide public space strategies from around the world and provides an analysis of their context and content, intending to provide mayors, local authorities, planners and other city leaders with the appropriate knowledge to develop their own city-wide public space strategy.

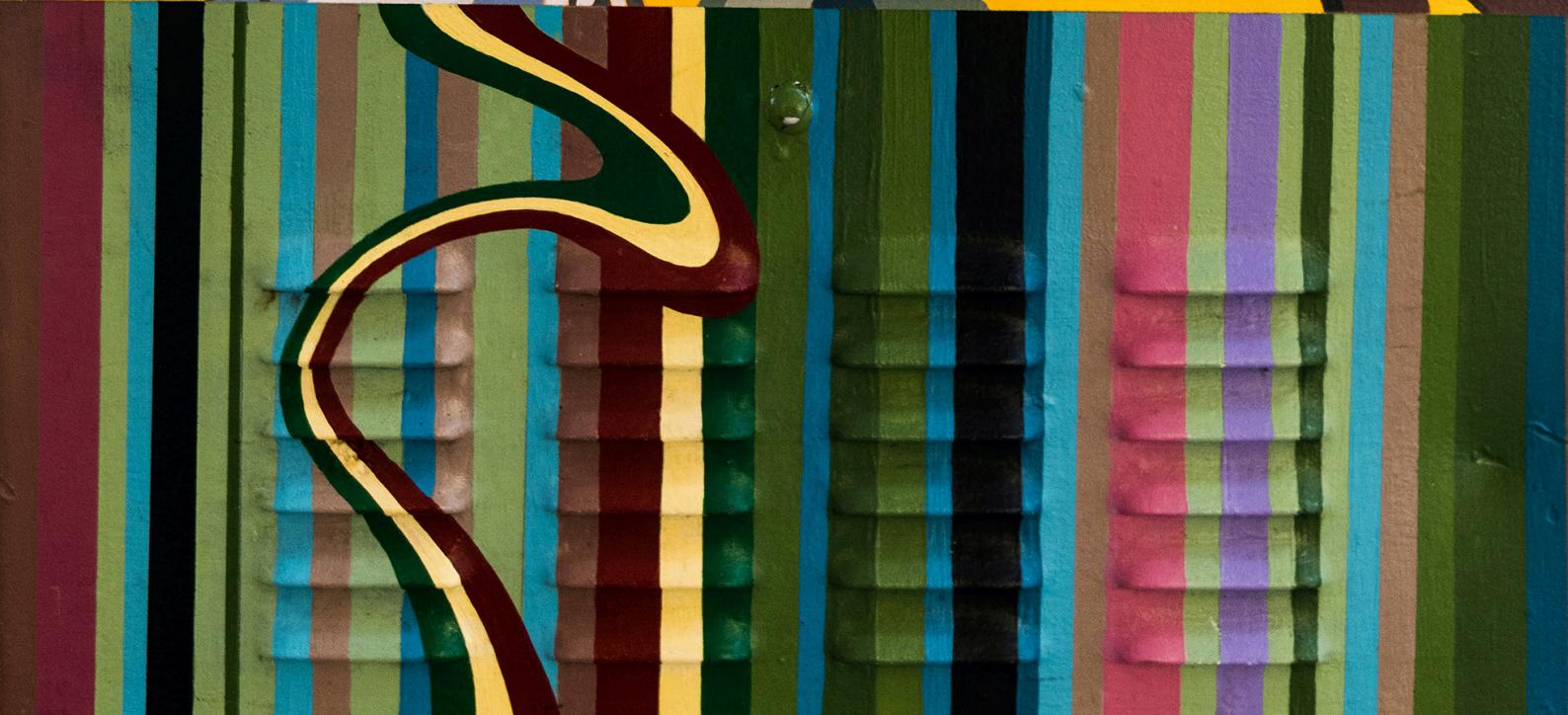
The Programme also includes projects related to the use of digital technologies and mixed reality, to increase levels of participation, civic engagement, and education of youth.

Other books.

[UN-Habitat \(2021\) The Block by Block Playbook: Using Minecraft as a participatory design tool in urban design and governance.](#)

[UN-Habitat \(2020\) City-wide public space assessment toolkit: A guide to community-led digital inventory and assessment of public spaces.](#)

[UN-Habitat \(2019\) Mixed reality for public participation in urban and public space design. Towards a new way of crowdsourcing more inclusive smart cities.](#)



Annex 2.

Additional

definitions of

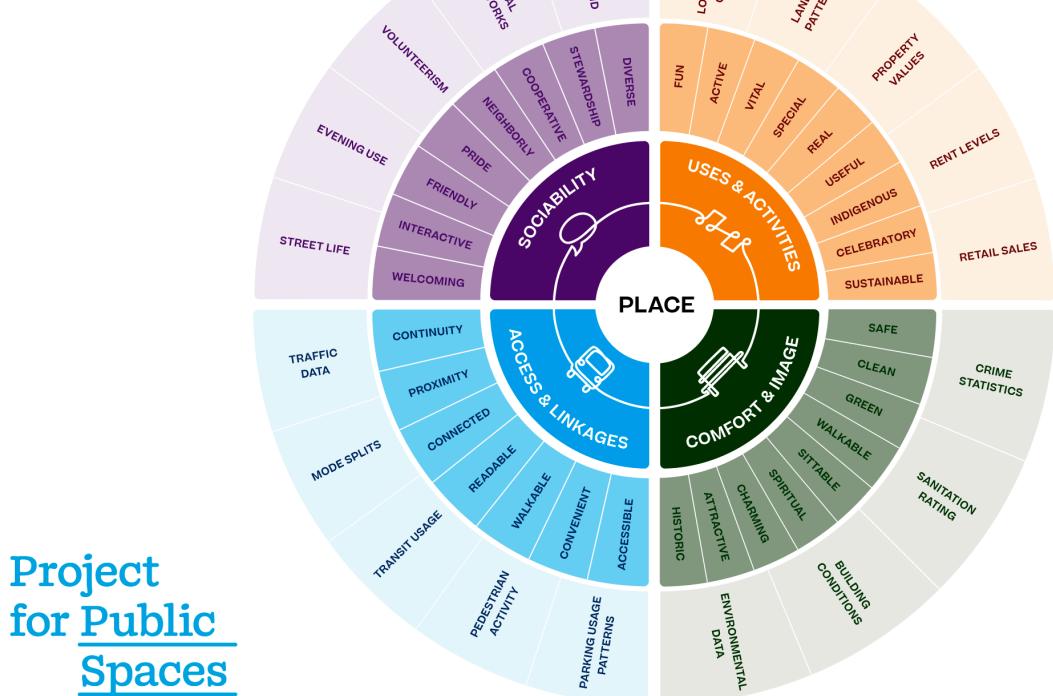
public space



Great public spaces in New York

According to the Project for Public Spaces in New York, “*great public spaces* are the places we remember most vividly, the places where serendipitous things happen, the places we tell stories about”.

What Makes a Great Place?



Project for Public Spaces

Great public spaces in New South Wales, Australia

According to the Government of New South Wales in Australia, “quality green, open and public spaces are free parks, gardens and sports fields, walkable shady streets, libraries, museums and galleries, which form the heart of our communities. They make life more welcoming and accessible. They delight and connect people. They support health and well-being, environmental resilience and prosperous local economies. Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free. They include open spaces, public facilities and streets”.

European Prize for Urban Public Space

In Barcelona, the Centre for Contemporary Culture (CCCB), established at the end of '90s the European Prize for Urban Public Space as a biennial competition organised with the aim of recognising and making known all kinds of works to create, recover and improve public spaces in European cities.

The website of the Prize also collects articles and interviews, in a section called '[Multimedia](#)', from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds, providing a rich and complex understanding of public space.

Notes

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- p. 37 "Before I Die", artwork by Candy Chang, New Orleans, USA.
- p. 37 "OEROL FESTIVAL, Terschelling, Netherlands" Artwork by Plastique Fantastique, 2017
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This Thematic Paper is part of a series of seven documents produced by the **Global Platform for the Right to the City** (GPR2C).

These documents are the result of a **process of collective learning** on the Right to the City. Each author was supported by a reference group formed by different organisations members of the Platform. These groups closely followed the drafting of the documents and provided assistance to the experts.

Additionally, a series of webinars were held for each topic in order to broaden discussions and collect suggestions and proposals from a wider range of organizations (including grassroots and social movements, NGOs, professionals, academics and local governments' representatives from different countries and regions).

The **Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C)** is an action-oriented advocacy network committed to social change and with the promotion of the Right to the City as a core value for policies, commitments, projects and actions at the local, national and international levels. We gather organizations, networks and individuals from a wide range of backgrounds: local-based and international social movements, NGOs, forums, academics, representatives from local governments, and other institutions committed to create more just, democratic and sustainable cities and territories.

For more information

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