

## Analytical Tools

### Semi-Public Space Conflicts and Alliances in Primary Metropolitan Centres: Sylvia Park, Mt Wellington, Auckland

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON SEMI-PUBLIC SPACE AND THE NEW URBAN AGENDA: STAKEHOLDERS AND ISSUES

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A literature review for the project Give Us Space! Augmented Public Space Geographies in the Changing Public/Private Relationships prepared in relation to the topic addressed at the official networking event – UN-Habitat’s 9th Session of the World Urban Forum, 10 February 2018, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

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### Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Public Spaces for Social Integration and Inclusion .....	3
3. Children and Youth Semi-Public Space Issues .....	3
4. Migrants and Grassroots Semi-Public Space Issues .....	5
5. Gender, “Differently Able,” and Indigenous Semi-Public Space Issues .....	6
6. Age-Friendly Semi-Public Space Issues .....	9
7. Public Spaces for Cultural Consumption: Tourism and Spectacle .....	10
8. Consumption and Spectacle in Public Spaces .....	10
9. Commodification of Culture in Public Spaces .....	12
10. Public Spaces for Economy and Empowerment .....	14
11. Conclusion .....	15
12. Bibliography .....	15

## 1. Introduction

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) was endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2016 after having been adopted by Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, Ecuador. Combined with UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the NUA provides a comprehensive roadmap for global discussion and action related to sustainable urbanisation in the coming years. The 9th Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF9), which took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February 2018, was the first large-scale event on urban development after the adoption of the NUA, which focuses on its implementation. At the WUF9, a networking session, titled "Give Us Space! Augmented Public Space Geographies in the Changing Public/Private Relationships" was held and organised by the University of Auckland. This event fostered a discussion on public space as a common good, by means of sharing and critically evaluating emerging problems in the public realm in different geographical contexts with regards to spatial conception, representation and everyday life experiences.

Focusing on socio-spatial relationality, it rethought and raised awareness of its importance in contributing to the successful implementation of the NUA, promoting well-being in cities and creating safe, inclusive, accessible, public spaces for all. Specifically, it addressed a crucial kind of public realm: the semi-private space. This space, which often presents the highest levels of relational urban life, is characterised by complex mechanisms of production and control that, whilst strongly enhancing safety and comfort, pose severe limits to the exercise of the "right to the city."

The emerging socio-spatial problems in the production of the semi-public spaces were addressed using a comparative urbanism perspective that highlights the expanding role of digital geography. The discussions addressed some of the key areas of concern raised by the NUA relating to open space. Concentrating on cities in rapid urbanisation, this drew upon the SDGs concerned with good health and well-being (3), reduced inequalities (10), sustainable cities and communities (11), and partnerships for the goals (17; United Nations, n.d.). It also articulated research that advocated the right to the city and the transformation of publicness in urban public space. It created a platform for knowledge exchange and networking amongst stakeholders to build capacity in both research and practice.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on and share the findings of the networking event regarding the identification of problems, limitations, and opportunities with respect to the various actors and stakeholders of urban public space, including: children, youth and elderly, the differently able, indigenous people, marginalised genders, migrants, and cultural producers and consumers. The networking event was attended by more than 40 participants. The audience was asked to contribute to the issue of privatisation of public space by providing insights and reflections in small groups. Groups were divided according to the categorical topics posed above. A collective question was posited as a means of starting a discussion: what is the most relevant emerging critical problem in private use of public space and what are the ways of addressing these issues in relation to the specificities of the respective group topic? Each group had to summarise relevant outcomes from their discussions which were shared and recorded at the end of the session.

The sharing of the findings of the networking event at the WUF9 intends to achieve a better understanding of the issues concerning the implementation of the NUA with respect to open spaces. It focuses on the identification of emerging problems and countering actions, building capacity in both research and everyday action, to ensure that public spaces work well for everyone.

Questions, problems, limitations, and opportunities from specific paragraphs of the NUA emerged at the networking event in relation to the topic of public space for the various actors and topics are discussed based on related bodies of studies. The topics have been re-categorised as follows: 1) public spaces for social integration and inclusion (covering aspects such as public spaces for youth, all ages, and other marginalised persons or groups); 2) public spaces for consumption and spectacle; and 3) public spaces for economy and empowerment.

This paper will also critically look at the NUA, as, although it provides for these social, cultural, economic factors in the promotion of sustainable urbanisation, it overlooks culture and consumption. The NUA does not

thoroughly address culture. Such new interpretations of current urbanisation trends and processes of socio-spatial production allow design and place-making to actively contribute to the implementation of the NUA and its vision for a more pluralistic, participative, and democratic urban space as elaborated in the working groups of the event discussed in the following paragraphs.

## **2. Public Spaces for Social Integration and Inclusion**

In paragraph 3 of the NUA, UN-Habitat (2016) affirms that social and economic exclusion and spatial segregation is often an irrefutable reality in cities. Paragraph 11 notes “the efforts of some national and local governments to enshrine this vision, referred to as ‘right to the city,’ in their legislation, political declarations and charters.” It claims a vision of cities for all, where cities are for equal use and enjoyment, promoting inclusive, safe, healthy, and affordable cities for all inhabitants without any kind of discrimination. Specific to public space, the NUA maintains that it is a privileged realm for the promotion of civic engagement of all inhabitants and the engendering of a sense of belonging and ownership. It prioritises “safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces that are friendly for families, [and] enhance social and intergenerational interactions, cultural expressions and political participation” (para. 13b). Noting that public spaces are relevant to how people can be socially excluded or discriminated in cities, whether they are children, elderly, women, differently abled, or from a foreign country, it speaks of “promoting safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces, including streets, sidewalks and cycling lanes, squares, waterfront areas, gardens and parks, that are multifunctional areas for social interaction and inclusion, human health and well-being” (para. 37).

In paragraph 37 of the NUA, it speaks of “promoting safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces, including streets, sidewalks and cycling lanes, squares, waterfront areas, gardens and parks, that are multifunctional areas for social interaction and inclusion, human health and well-being.”

Paragraph 100 states,

We will support the provision of well-designed networks of safe, accessible, green and quality streets and other public spaces that are accessible to all and free from crime and violence, including sexual harassment and gender-based violence, considering the human scale, and measures that allow for the best possible commercial use of street-level floors, fostering both formal and informal local markets and commerce, as well as not-for-profit community initiatives, bringing people into public spaces and promoting walkability and cycling with the goal of improving health and well-being.

## **3. Children and Youth Semi-Public Space Issues**

The NUA, in supporting the implementation of urban planning strategies, promotes access to quality basic services and public spaces for all, to enhance safe, diverse, and social intergenerational interaction. The NUA takes children and youth into consideration in the promotion of a “safe, healthy, inclusive and secure environment in cities and human settlements enabling all to live, work and participate in urban life without fear of violence and intimidation” (para. 39). Malone (1999), who has researched about growing up in cities, particularly in Australia, claims that children have been brought up in a society of fear about cities and outdoor environments, and preferring to stay at home watching television, only to get news of violence on the streets, exacerbating this culture of fear. Children growing up in rapidly urbanised centres are living in overcrowded, unsafe, and polluted environments, and may also have little opportunity for recreation, learning, and play (Malone, 2001).

Gregor Mews (2018), in his side networking event at the WUF9 entitled “Shaping Healthy Cities for and with Children” aimed to produce tangible actions to drive change and empower children in urban environments. His report claims that in order to create safe, inclusive, accessible, green, and public spaces for all, children’s health and well-being in urban environments is an important consideration: “A child-healthy environment is a city that embraces the ‘Right to the City’ concept to ensure that no one is left behind and where all children

have the ‘Right to Play’” (p. 4). The “right to the city,” particularly for adolescents, faces environmental injustice through the general mistrust of youth in urban areas, with youth having limited opportunities to participate in public spaces as they are perceived as a negative element (Shirtcliff, 2015). Spencer and Woolley (2000) further claim that children are often described as outsiders in urban areas and society.

The discussions at the “Shaping Healthy Cities for and with Children” event agreed on the need to engage with multiple stakeholders such as parents and neighbours, but particularly to empower children and youth in planning and co-design processes, as children are naturally the experts on the local environment and should be appreciated as such (Mews, 2018). Some of the concrete commitments identified at this event included: raising awareness of children’s right to play, safe infrastructure with tangible actions in creating slow speeds or vehicle-free spaces on local neighbourhood streets, provision of natural play spaces, involving children in co-designed place-making initiatives for enhancement of public spaces in cities, and enabling safe walking routes (Mews, 2018).

Bringolf-Isler et al. (2010), in their research on the influence of the environment on children’s health in communities in Switzerland, argue that children’s outdoor play is sensitive to neighbourhood environmental influences. Their studies found that parents’ perception of traffic, crime, and other dangers, as well as the lack of parks, were potential barriers to children’s physical activities and their playing outside in public spaces, whereas neighbourhood greenness, in terms of safe access and proximity to parks and playgrounds, was found to be associated with more physical activity in children (Bringolf-Isler et al., 2010; Spencer & Woolley, 2000; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Veitch, Salmon, & Ball, 2008).<sup>1</sup> If the whole city is made for children to explore and play in, they will no longer require specialised playgrounds (Spencer & Woolley, 2000). This is particularly the case with regard to young people engaged with skateboarding in public spaces, which, as described by Shirtcliff (2015) in “Sk8ting the Sinking City,” could “promote a grassroots form of environmental justice through play, positive attachment to place, individual accomplishment, and improved social status” (p. 2).

The research by Valentine and McKendrick (1997) shows that children’s ability to play independently and unsupervised by adults in outdoor environments is being eroded due to three issues: the decline in the provision of public play facilities, growing parental fears about child safety, and anxieties about the changing nature of childhood. They claim that “a significant amount of children’s outdoor play is taking place in ‘private’ space, rather than ‘public’ space,” (p. 227) such “that children’s play is increasingly home centred and institutionalized” (p. 230).

Mews (2018) posits that “play matters and we need to include sufficient public space for play in cities in order to ensure the health and wellbeing of children and ultimately the longer term prosperity of our urban societies” (p. 8). Veitch et al. (2008), in their research of children’s access to places in their neighbourhood, suggest that it is the joint responsibility of local governments and urban planners, as well as community groups, to improve access to and provide quality neighbourhood parks to encourage parents to allow their children greater mobility and engagement in outdoor physical activities.

The discussions of the networking session raised such suggestions as: public spaces should have plenty of leisure and natural green spaces to facilitate child health and well-being in urban environments.<sup>2</sup> This is in line with recommendations outlined in Malone’s (1999) study, particularly the need to provide a diversity of safe and secure public spaces for children to expand their spatial range, lived experiences, and their interaction with other children. Facilities should be provided which encourage and allow children to identify and connect with their physical, social, and natural environment (Malone, 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> Valentine and McKendrick (1997) describe the heightened parental perceived fears of dangers from traffic and strangers leading to their shielding of children from public spaces and lost outdoor play opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> NUA also promotes healthy lifestyles in harmony with nature, as per para. 14c, UN-Habitat (2016).

One particular case study which arose from the discussion was from Jakarta, Indonesia. In 2015, the Jakarta Capital City Government established a policy to revitalise some community parks into interactive community parks called RPTRA (child-friendly integrated public space). These revitalised parks (funded by a private company through a government and private-sector partnership), are multi-purposed child-friendly community spaces, and can typically consist of a playground, a football field, a hall, a library with WIFI, a garden, which also provides for mothers to pick fruits and vegetables or even plant their own. The Jakarta administration plans to establish 46 more RPTRA public spaces in 81 sub-districts in 2018. (“Jakarta Plans to Develop,” 2017). This reflects the NUA’s promotion of “the creation and maintenance of well-connected and well-distributed networks of open, multipurpose, safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces” (UN-Habitat, 2016, para. 67). Nevertheless, there is work to be done to engage children in public spaces in consideration of their right to play, but also to bring about change based on playful behaviour as an optimal experience for children and adults alike, to enable better health and well-being for all people in cities, as Malone (2001) writes: “A child-friendly city is after all a people-friendly city” (p. 11).

#### **4. Migrants and Grassroots Semi-Public Space Issues**

The NUA recognises and respects the full human rights of refugees and migrants, regardless of migration status. Though the movement of large populations into cities poses various challenges, the NUA acknowledges that migrants (as well as the working poor in the informal economy, particularly women, including unpaid and domestic workers) can also bring about significant social, economic, and cultural contributions to the urban environment and life (UN-Habitat, 2016).

From the discussions held, it was remarked that migrants and grassroots were often limited in their use of public spaces. Other issues raised with regard to migrants included safety, gangs, and ways in which migrants can be exploited. It was highlighted that migrants and grassroots can constitute forms of socio-spatial networks with very complex patterns of territorialisations that show unique examples of inclusionary agonistic and more-than-relational urban public space, where all have unrestricted right to participate in the production of the city. However, migrants and grassroots users must often improvise in their use of public spaces and engage in critical non-compliant informal activities. Security in public spaces is an issue, and one case study was provided regarding the unique sidewalk encroachment in the Ancient Quarter of Hanoi, Vietnam (Manfredini & Ta, 2017). Here, the intertwining and dynamics of formal and informal territorialisation of public spaces strongly contributes to the creation of successful streets that support the social, cultural, and economic well-being of citizens.

This phenomenon of grassroots encroachment and occupation of street spaces in Hanoi’s Ancient Quarter originated in rural backgrounds, whereby people consider the space immediately facing the street as domestic extensions (Manfredini & Ta, 2017). Here, reterritorialisation, through informal appropriation of sidewalks for various activities, ranging from cooking and eating to commercial practices, constitutes “informal spatial productions,” exhibiting a form of co-creative looseness and apparent unpredictability (Manfredini & Ta, 2016, 2017). The ambivalent and temporary territorial transgressive spatial practices, strategies, and tactics of local inhabitants in their appropriation and encroachment of the Vietnamese urban sidewalks lead to a partial inversion of private and public spatial phenomena – a form of privatisation of public space – whereby the limited private space hosts productive activities, turning the public spaces of the sidewalks into quasi-private spaces through practices such as the cooking and consumption of food (Manfredini & Ta, 2016, 2017).

However, these sidewalks are contested street spaces, as the Vietnamese government, as part of improving and cleaning the city’s appearance and creating efficient streets in Hanoi, introduced policies which sought to clear sidewalks, and crack down on “improper” informal occupational activities and practices, to the extent of banning street vendors (Manfredini & Ta, 2016, 2017). This consequentially produced opposing approaches of different actors, such as those imposing the state vs. territorial appropriation and arrangement of belongings of local house owners (Manfredini & Ta, 2017). This move by the Vietnamese government in the 2000s illustrates how the support of economic expansion over cultural agendas can cause problems affecting social relationships of close-knit local communities (Manfredini & Ta, 2016).

Manfredini and Ta (2016) describe how these grassroots everyday uses and production of public space resist such policies in their unique tactics of public space encroachment, which demonstrates not only social empowerment but the reflection of the local people's innate habits in their integration of living and trading activities subsequently expanded into the collective realm. The contested sidewalks, resulting from the complex relations between opposing actors in their daily struggles, are thus spaces which "integrate the multifarious grassroots activities and events generated by local inhabitants with the ones introduced by transients" (p. 142).

Acknowledging the NUA, an important point made in the forum was the celebration of differences and what migrants and grassroots users can bring in terms of socially and culturally diverse contributions to urban life. However, although migrants and grassroots users could bring new life into urban areas, their presence in public space and the areas they congregate, as discussed, could also be contested.<sup>3</sup>

Another case in point is the phenomenon of migrant workers gathering on Sundays in the vast pockets of public and semi-public spaces in Hong Kong. Since the 1980s, Filipina domestic workers have been gathering in Central, the financial district in Hong Kong Island, particularly concentrating in the Statue Square and Chater Road areas. These weekly migrant gatherings are appropriation and rearrangement of public space that, as Law (2002) observed, become enclaves representing "second homes" or even "Little Manilas;" compensatory spaces for the negated right of abode in the city.<sup>4</sup> Chater Road is one such example of a public space which changes dynamics during the week. During the working week it is a vehicular road, but on Sundays it is closed to vehicles, and migrants can use this road as a gathering spot for picnics, socialising, and even launching political rallies. However, this arrangement was not originally proposed for the migrants concentrating in this area, as, in 1982, Hong Kong Land, a large land-holder and property developer in Central, saw to close this road on Sundays, initially in an attempt to revive the area with pedestrian shopping, only to draw in another crowd. Suggestions were made in 1992 to remove the migrants, due to complaints about noise and litter, and even to relocate them in underground carparks! (Law, 2002). Owing to the resistance of highly active and organised domestic worker organisations, and their use of public spaces to voice their issues, thousands of Filipina domestic workers continue to flock Statue Square and Chater Road, as well as their immediate urban vicinities, every Sunday (Law, 2002). Even to this day, once a week, Norman Foster's HSBC building in Central continues to provide shelter to migrants within its covered but open ground floor, and thousands of Indonesian migrant workers gather in Victoria Park in Causeway Bay.

The appropriation by migrants of public spaces in Hong Kong shows not only how social spaces can provide a platform for diversity within the city, but also how a new kind of public space can be formed in which the various interested actors or parties can engage these spaces with social, cultural, economic, or even political agendas.

## **5. Gender, "Differently Able," and Indigenous Semi-Public Space Issues**

The NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) recognises that attention needs to be directed at addressing various forms of marginalisation and discrimination, particularly in relation to women and girls, children and youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as refugees and migrants. Paragraph 13c of the NUA raises the issue of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Manfredini and Ta's (2016) discussion of the commodification and bending of significant portions of public sidewalks into privately controlled and segregated domains in the historic Ancient Quarter of Hanoi in Vietnam (pp. 132–155).

<sup>4</sup> Migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong must live in the house of their employer, and given the mandatory one day off per week, migrants would take this day to gather in public spaces with people like themselves (Law, 2002).

ensuring their effective participation and equal rights, whilst preventing and eliminating discrimination, harassment, and violence in private and public spaces.

Yasminah Beebeejaun (2017), in “Gender, Urban Space, and the Right to Everyday Life,” criticises dominant contemporary urban theory and scholarship which draws upon Lefebvrian ‘right to the city’ for being underpinned by a patriarchal perspective and for rarely developing an equal-gendered approach to understanding space. There is an apparent lack of recognition and attention to the needs of women within the right to the city, grounded in their everyday experiences, whether they are workers, carers, or simply enjoying leisure activities (Reeves, Parfitt, & Archer, 2012). Women face immense challenges as their rights become restricted in their search for place and feelings of belonging in today’s cities, particularly evident in feminist geographical studies of London and Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

The NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) asserts a commitment to urban developments which are “age- and gender-responsive and to the realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, facilitating living together, ending all forms of discrimination and violence, and empowering all individuals and communities while enabling their full and meaningful participation” (para. 26). This kind of empowerment is actively sought by the London-based organisation Women’s Design Service, which has had various significant inputs into planning policies that address gender difference in housing, community facilities and public toilets, whereby they campaigned for interventions such as providing nappy-changing facilities in public toilets (Beebeejaun, 2017). Beebeejaun (2017) describes a case of women challenging the behavioural conventions in public space through street protests (with the support of public officials and planners) as a means of asserting women’s right to be in public spaces which act as potent reminders of how the choreography of the city can restrict their freedom of movement.

Women’s safety is an important aspect in urban design and planning, as raised by Reeves et al. (2012), such that parks, widths of streets, public transport, and other public spaces need to be thought about from a gender-equal perspective, as a means to acknowledge and ensure equal access to public spaces. Reeves and Zombori (2016), in their research, exemplify a few countries where gender equality has an implication in planning processes, such as in Austria, Finland, Denmark, and Ireland. In Vienna, gender has been sensitively integrated into planning approaches, such as the consideration of pavement width, shade, lighting, and seating in urban design.<sup>6</sup>

Reengaging with the multiple uses of urban spaces and developing frameworks which draw more upon women’s everyday experiences and spatial uses and which are attentive to their differences, can provide a more fine-grained understanding of the issues and has the potential to support a fuller sense of gendered rights in everyday life in urban environments (Beebeejaun, 2017). Reeves and Zombori (2016) reiterate that it is by taking account of and understanding the lived experiences, issues, needs, and priorities of both women and men, combined with urban planners and policy makers engaging with women, that planning can be gender sensitive in the design of cities and human settlements.<sup>7</sup>

Rob Kitchin (1998), in “‘Out of Place,’ ‘Knowing One’s Place’: Space, Power and the Exclusion of Disabled People,” writes that space is not only understood in physical terms as a container of life, but also as something

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<sup>5</sup> Refer to the discussion of the qualitative studies of feminist geographer Tovi Fenster, in Beebeejaun (2017, p. 327).

<sup>6</sup> See also Reeves et al. (2012) report on *Gender and Urban Planning* which exemplifies various cities and their best practices for bringing about gender equality through gender aware and gender-sensitive approaches to urban planning.

<sup>7</sup> See also Reeves et al. (2012) who define gender aware and gender-sensitive urban planning as about designing spaces which reflect and recognise the socio-cultural differences and needs of women and men, as well as girls and boys, to bring about genuine gender equality.

which is socially produced, which is dynamic, ambiguous, and contested. In today's urban environments, people who are recognised as disabled are generally marginalised and excluded from mainstream society. Spaces have become socially produced to exclude differently abled or disabled people and have been organised to keep these people "in their place" as well as textualised to convey to them that they are "out of place" (Kitchin, 1998; Steinfeld, Maisel, & Levine, 2012).

In the context of current urban planning practices and in existing public spaces, disabled people are "locked out," separated and marginalised to the peripheries. Segregation perpetuates disablism by branding disabled people as different, in need of specialised facilities. Policies prioritise the perception and values of "able-bodied" persons, and thus aim to normalise disabled people, rather than accommodating disabled people for whom they are (Kitchin, 1998). These forms of oppression and processes of exclusion lead to the creation of distinct spatialities and "landscapes of exclusion," forming a "spatiality of disability" whereby space is organised and made to convince people that they are "out of place," exacerbating disability practices (Kitchin, 1998, pp. 346, 351, 354).

Holt-Damant, Guaralda, Taylor Gomez, and Nicollet (2013), in their research on the inter-relationships between people with neurodiverse experiences and public spaces, explain that public space design can contribute to a person's physical and mental well-being, and that there is a need for such spaces which can restore both one's senses and sense of balance. People with neurodiversity are "wired differently" such that they may experience an overload or underload of senses, so that performing basic tasks in public spaces could become an insurmountable challenge (Holt-Damant et al., 2013). For instance, for someone with neurodiversity, public spaces like Queen Street Mall in Brisbane city, Queensland, Australia, can be an urban jungle rather than a well-designed place to be, which can cause people to feel mentally exhausted or disorientated (Holt-Damant et al., 2013).

Research is required to gain knowledge and awareness of how people with neurodiversity or other disabilities use and navigate public spaces, as well as to measure and adapt urban environments to enhance and integrate the health and well-being of people with the public spaces they use, in order to develop design principles and guidelines for improved design of public spaces for all. Holt-Damant et al. (2013) believe that, if urban public spaces were to be more accessible particularly to the ageing population and those with different experiential habits, cities, cities would be more liveable and healthier, with better mobility and navigation options.

Rather than denying differently abled or disabled people access to important decision making within today's cities, following the NUA's intention to "adopt sustainable, people-centred, age- and gender-responsive and integrated approaches to urban and territorial development" (UN-Habitat, 2016, para. 15c), all people should instead have the right to participate in the making of the city. Kitchin (1998) highlights one example in the UK, where an organisation called Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN) used means of direct protest to raise awareness of disability issues.

The NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) promotes equal and affordable access to sustainable basic physical and social infrastructural services which "are responsive to the rights and needs of women, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples and local communities" (para. 34). It follows that appropriate measures must be made which facilitate access for persons with disabilities in cities, on an equal basis with other inhabitants, particularly in public spaces and on public transportation (UN-Habitat, 2016).

Some concerns regarding public spaces, which were raised at the WUF9 networking session, included the lack of opportunities for social interaction, safety and participation of marginalised persons or groups (indigenous peoples, adolescent girls, etc.), and issues relating to aesthetics and the sense of belonging to a particular space, that is, how to make public spaces which are welcoming to all. The main proposal following from the discussions was that we have a duty of care to provide public spaces for the invisible, which could include persons who have been marginalised, as well as ethnic minorities, and the need to implement a practice of participatory design with duty of care principles in the production of semi-private spaces.



Globally speaking, the issues of the marginalised, particularly indigenous people, are invisible. In order to recognise the sovereign authority, rights, values, and traditional knowledge of indigenous communities in territories where semi-private public space is developed, participatory processes, which engage them and others with interest in public space as stakeholders, are needed. In partnering with indigenous communities, their values and knowledge can be incorporated into a core set of principles to inform design and development that responds to and delivers indigenous aspirations. This could include respecting indigenous sites of significance and traditional names, and regeneration of natural resources and systems, as well as working with indigenous artists and designers through the spatial-design process for distinct outcomes (Auckland Design Manual, n.d.). Having such progressive partnership models for indigenous governance will allow the invisible to become visible, with mutual benefits and inclusive accessibility for all.

## **6. Age-Friendly Semi-Public Space Issues**

The NUA seeks to address the social, economic and spatial implications of ageing populations as well as promote age- and gender-responsive planning (UN-Habitat, 2016). From the discussions at the WUF9, an “age-friendly city” was defined as “a city for all ages”; however, this is not always how it is interpreted. As they age, people can lose important elements of their identity as well as particular social and cultural connections, and experience a sense of being marginalised within urban environments (Buffel & Phillipson, 2016).

As proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the concept of “active ageing” is the idea that older people should be able to participate in social, cultural, and civic activities (Buffel, Phillipson, & Scharf, 2012). This becomes particularly relevant in terms of urban public spaces; Buffel et al. (2012), who have written extensively on the recent implementation of active ageing initiatives in cities such as Manchester and Brussels, comment that research has found that, where there are public spaces with good access to facilities like shops and cafés, there are higher levels of social involvement amongst older people.

The WHO (2007) have produced a document, *Global Age-Friendly Cities: A Guide*, which identifies some of the key factors or indicators of an age-friendly environment in terms of services, built environment, and social aspects (Buffel & Phillipson, 2016). Regarding public spaces, this guide provides a checklist for age-friendly outdoor spaces and buildings, such as provision for clean environments which have enforced regulations limiting noise levels in public spaces; green spaces which are safe, with adequate and well-maintained public toilet and seating facilities; walkways and pavements which are smooth, level, wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs, and clear from obstructions; safe pedestrian crossings with traffic lights which allow sufficient time for older people to cross with appropriate audio and visual signals; as well as other provisions regarding security and services (WHO, 2007).

A positive step in the direction of age-friendly approaches in the city is the idea of initiatives around social participation and inclusion through the development of age-friendly and intergenerational projects which seek to link the needs of younger and older people. Buffel et al. (2014) describe one case study in Manchester, where students from the School of Architecture are looking into the potential of using “shared places and spaces,” such as inner-city parks to bring younger and older residents together.

Nevertheless, certain groups of older people may face difficulties in “creating” space within urban environments, as ownership and control of public spaces in cities are increasingly vested in particular groups who may not be so interested in the age-friendly agenda. Buffel and Phillipson (2016) describe the challenge to create urban environments which support the equal rights of older people to a “share” of urban space which is both safe and inclusive.

The debate about developing age-friendly cities needs to combine Lefebvre’s “right to the city” and Harvey’s right to “make our cities and ourselves,” so that all people can participate in “urban citizenship” and make full use of urban public spaces, regardless of their age. This would afford older people the right to “appropriate” urban space, for a full and complete usage of the city, as well as the right to “participate,” and would give them a voice in decisions on the production of such spaces (Buffel et al., 2012). It is very easy to categorise

and isolate people; we should provide freedom to everyone to live in the city as they want. We categorise people according to their ages or abilities, but we do not actually ask them what they want and what they need. Following from the discussions at the WUF, what was suggested was that the main ingredient for having an age-friendly city is not to imagine what you think other people want, but to actually go to talk with them, spend time, and get to know them, find out what they would like the public space (that they would use) to be and involve them in decisions about it.

Paragraph 148 of the NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) states,

We will promote the strengthening of the capacity of national, subnational and local governments, including local government associations, as appropriate, to work with women and girls, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities, and those in vulnerable situations, as well as with civil society, academia and research institutions in shaping organizational and institutional governance processes, enabling them to participate effectively in decision-making about urban and territorial development.

A general goal of implementing the NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) and the vision of cities for all, is to involve and engage these various aforementioned groups, and for them to develop a sense of civic responsibility as well as to participate effectively in decision-making and planning processes. Paragraph 155 states:

We will promote capacity development initiatives to empower and strengthen the skills and abilities of women and girls, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as persons in vulnerable situations, for shaping governance processes, engaging in dialogue, and promoting and protecting human rights and anti-discrimination, to ensure their effective participation in urban and territorial development decision-making.

Additionally, in order to make communications technology and information accessible to the public, particularly the aforementioned social categories, and to better enable them to exercise civic responsibility, the NUA promotes “citizen-centric digital governance tools, tapping into technological innovations” (UN-Habitat, 2016, para. 156).

## **7. Public Spaces for Cultural Consumption: Tourism and Spectacle**

The NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) acknowledges the importance of culture and diversity as sources of enrichment for people and the sustainable development of cities, and recognises that culture needs to be considered in the promotion and implementation of new sustainable consumption and production patterns in cities. Although the NUA addresses social, cultural, and economic factors of sustainable urbanisation, culture is the least emphasised of the three. The words *culture* or *cultural* appear 30 times in the NUA, the word *consumption* 9 times, whereas the word *social* appears 53 times, *economy* or *economic* 73 times, *tourism* once, *youth* 12 times, *gender* 16 times, and *public spaces* 9 times.

Regarding public spaces of consumption, of particular interest today is how public spaces are reinstated into pluralistic forms of socio-spatial relationality that transform the collective realm from semi-public or public into a “meta-public” state from two different perspectives: firstly, in communication-based (digital) augmentations of the culture of consumption emerging in pseudo-public spaces (particularly in shopping malls); and secondly, in place-based augmentation of the culture of consumption emerging in public spaces with enhanced atmospheres (particularly in heritage sites).

## **8. Consumption and Spectacle in Public Spaces**

The core discussion of the event addressed the emerging spatial issues in public/private relationships in the contemporary production of the public realm. This topic has been at the centre of the discourse on cities in both humanities and social sciences for decades, with an increasing interest in spatial problems. Issues

concerning socioeconomic sustainability have been described as progressively affecting the crisis of public space.

Reference to these as : “depoliticization of the centre”(Manfredini, 2017a), disappearance of the commons (Harvey, 2012), and renouncement of the “open city” (Sennett, 2018, p. 90) vision, framed the evaluation of critical practices of spatial control and over-determination exercised by hegemonic powers. This concerned processes of civil exclusion, dispossession, segregation, and abstraction that adopt displacement and spectacle to sedate mounting fear of the “stranger” and disguise the perception of severe inequality.

In this context, design disciplines such as architecture and urbanism have increasingly struggled in engaging with some of the profound on-going transformations. Their difficulties are crucial in coping with the profoundly changing nature of space caused by the progressively expanding role of the digital sphere. The city, and its core spatialities of relational life, can no longer be addressed without redefining the approach to the changing conceived, perceived and lived conditions of publicness in the public realm. To support social, cultural and psychophysical well-being of the inhabitants of cities of the digital age, urbanists, designers and place-makers need to rethink the theoretical framework as well as adequate conventional processes, methods and practices for analysis, project and delivery of visions, strategies and tactics.

The event was designed to propose and discuss an interpretation of public spaces in the contemporary city that, instead of tending to erase the legal, cultural and performative tensions that exist between public and private domains in public space, needs to come to terms with the conflictual nature of publicness. This acknowledges the inescapable ambivalence of the public/private dyad and the impossibility of achieving a permanent and effective spatial separation of the two realms. This factual ambivalence is found in the key public space of our cities, where it complements the opposite phenomenon of pervasion of the public sphere in the private realm. The ambivalence is due to incessant appearances of private instances in public or parochial realms due to the digital augmentation of space. It defines a new kind of space, here defined as *meta-public space*.

The epitome of this new spatiality is found at the core of consumption places as evolution of their pseudo-public spaces, where the spectacular deception of civicness has gained territorial stability. Using comparative urbanism methods, the discussion of this new space concentrated on the key places of its appearance: the spatially disjoined and introverted, yet hyper-connected and digitally augmented, consumerist “malled” urban centres of rapidly developing cities. These centres have not only profoundly redefined the rules of engagement of people with their own civic realm and implemented the logics of formal and quantitative imperatives of globalisation, but they have also expanded the process that, as Henri Lefebvre (1991) posited, makes the civic fall “prey to abstraction” (p. 49), minimising distinction and repressing relationality. The presented analysis drew upon two key notions: 1) enhanced prosumption and collaborative and participatory consumption, and 2) augmented transduction and de-territorialising and re-territorialising spectacle (Manfredini, 2017a).

Steven Miles (2010), in *Spaces for Consumption*, writes that consumption spaces such as shopping malls, theme parks, and public spaces are places which simultaneously express and mirror ourselves as citizens of today’s consumer society. As tourists in the city, people on their smart handheld devices, are constantly opening up to processes of appropriation of otherness. In the dual processes of “prosumption” (participatory instance of transformative engagement intertwining consumption and production processes; Manfredini, 2017b, p. 424) and “transduction” (experiential instance of switching between realms of different contextual references; Manfredini, 2017b, pp. 424–425), people are living in a condition of being perpetually exposed to otherness and immersed in simulated realities (as per Baudrillard and *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*).

People, in pseudo-public spaces of the shopping mall, like Sylvia Park Shopping Centre in Auckland, New Zealand, with their use of social media and augmented reality apps, become tourists of their own city, whereby the digital augmentations are inscribed into their experiences. In transductive augmented reality, as spectacularised by Luc Besson’s 2017 film *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*, everyday people see the world through wearable tech, specifically goggles, which transpose a hyper-reality of a highly

sophisticated and vibrant market space over an actual condition of a barren desert wasteland. Here, the perceived hyper-reality becomes more real than the condition of living in the actual world. In today's society, these transductive hyper-mediated atmospheres of meta-public realms are mediated through social media or augmented reality apps (such as Pokémon GO) such that they are not permanent instances, but temporal, depending on their activation through multifarious technologies which combine sensorial, cognitive, analogue and digital inputs (Manfredini, 2017b). In this emerging condition of prosumption and transduction of a meta-public space conceived in the space of flows (Castells, 1999), the sense of identity of belonging to a specific place becomes suspended, whereby people today belong to a floating situation within the space of flows.

The term "space of flows" was coined by Castells (1999) to describe the dominant spatial manifestation of power and function in the globalised informational society of today where the material organisation or arrangement of time-sharing (simultaneous) social practices work through flows rather than territorial contiguity. By flows, Castells (2000) is referring to flows of capital, information, technology, organisational interaction, images, sounds, etc., which are repetitive and programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disconnected positions held by actors in various structures of society. In the supersession of places, in which places do not simply vanish, but their logic and meaning are absorbed into the space of flows, transformed at the electronic-physical interface, such that we lose our sense of belonging to any specific place or culture (Castells, 2000, 2004), our notion of place specificity has been transformed in a globalised consumerist world (Miles, 2010).

In the production and consumption of meta-public spaces in today's cities in the face of globalised spaces of flows, the distinction between private and public becomes blurred, whereby public space is transformed into a "pseudospace of interaction" (Manfredini, 2017b, p. 428). This novel spatiality of a meta-public space appears to have some form of impact on the quality of life and cities for all, which could also improve the limits of accessibility and inclusion (as promoted by the NUA), which is encompassed in the pseudo-interactions happening within the space of flows.

Communication-based digital augmented public spaces may support the re-politicisation, empowering individuals and de-privatisation. Augmented spatialities mediated through handheld devices provide, possibly, the only access to the public sphere in public spaces, constituting a form of de-privatisation. The meta-public space is open and permeable, allowing recombinant forms of appropriation or association, making productive boundaries between territories. Not only does the perpetual proliferation and transformation of prosumptive and transductive augmentations give rise to modern heterotopias of illusions in its juxtaposition of different contexts, but these processes can also de-privatise and disempower the dominant external forces whilst empowering local individuals (Manfredini, 2017b).

## 9. Commodification of Culture in Public Spaces

NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) states: "We will include **culture** as a priority component of urban plans and strategies in the adoption of planning instruments, including ... strategic development policies that safeguard a diverse range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and landscapes, and will protect them from potential disruptive impacts of urban development" (para. 124).

The NUA also makes provisions to safeguard and promote cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, in cities, particularly cultural infrastructures and sites, museums, indigenous cultures and languages, "highlighting the role that these play in rehabilitating and revitalizing urban areas and in strengthening social participation and the exercise of citizenship" (UN-Habitat, 2016, para. 38).<sup>8</sup> What follows is a discussion

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<sup>8</sup> See also Mirko Guaralda's (2017) discussion regarding the representation of cultural differences in public spaces: In outer suburbs of Brisbane, Australia, such as North Lakes, where private spaces are central to life, public spaces are generic and promote conformity, and functional but lack flavour or cultural diversity, while

regarding consumption of tangible and intangible culture and urban public spaces in Asian cities such as Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, in the space of tourism.

The NUA particularly addresses least developed countries, which can be affected by natural disasters, like Nepal, stating that attention should be given to address their unique “urban development challenges” (UN-Habitat, 2016, para. 19). The Kathmandu Valley is a major tourist destination and consists of seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and a particular set of urban public spaces rich in historic traditions, ranging from the residential squares of houses to the processional palace or market squares. Tourism is a major component of Nepal’s economy, which is dominated by small-scale manufacturing and flows of tourists. Based on the past few years, tourism’s total contribution to the GDP of Nepal is generally increasing, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2017).

The demands of foreign tourists coming to Nepal every year, particularly during the trekking seasons, in search of “Nepalness,” transforms the cultural production and consumption of everyday objects into commodities of culture (Morimoto, 2015). In the space of tourism and, indeed, today’s space of flows, cultural elements which are embedded in places, spaces, and communities, become commodified. Culture is staged and the original context is disconnected from its specific socio-cultural references. Urban spaces are transformed, decontextualised and distorted into venues for exotic spectacles. As Robert Shepherd (2002) claims, “what was once pure and authentic has become spoiled and commodified” (p. 183).

In the commodification of public space and culture for tourists, culture is staged and authenticity is challenged, as local people engage with cultural consumption and translocality of space to support the growing tourism industry (Morimoto, 2015). In the main touristic centres of the capital city, Kathmandu (Basantapur), Patan and Bhaktapur, foreign tourists come to consume *Nepalness*, whereas locals come to consume global cultures. Exotic foods established for the tourists at these localities are also tasted by the local middle class in the processes of commodification of culture. They are places where local people can experience excitement, a place which is everywhere in the world, but no longer exists in its place.

Within the daily operation and businesses of the historical urban spaces for the public, especially tourists, cultural consumption takes place in the form of making and selling handmade crafts such as pottery and wood carving as souvenirs. Processes of cultural objectification and commodification in the form of tourists seeking cultural or ethnic products and traditions may promote a renewed interest in heritage and traditional art forms amongst local crafts people, yet ironically the tourists may be purchasing from a deep desire merely to possess a souvenir, rather than possessing any genuine interest in the art form (Shepherd, 2002).

Global tourism has affected and interacted with the local society of Kathmandu Valley’s historic urban spaces. Tourism not only transforms or distorts the perception of the historic cities and public spaces through the projections of tourists’ identities, but its processes of economic and cultural changes also bring about local social transformations, whereby local people “appropriate and objectify a part of their self-image and reconstruct their identities within the space” (Morimoto, 2015, p. 310).

Authentic travel experiences become merely an ideal in today’s space of flows. Authenticity becomes challenged, and instead there is an apparent authenticity, which depends on the cultural lens of the observer, and his/her criteria of what constitutes real and original (Shepherd, 2002). What is interesting to note is that, in Nepal, Newari artisans have been producing artistic copies for many centuries, both for home and abroad (especially for China and Tibet), and nowadays for tourists. Here, the production of copies is inherently connected to the production of the art form itself, such that the notion of authenticity breaks down as criterion to distinguish original from copy (Shepherd, 2002).

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different social and cultural groups have no agency and are excluded from representing and expressing themselves in the public environment.

However, what makes some aspects of the Kathmandu model relevant to the “urban development challenge” is the socialisation form that this resilient community has developed since the major natural disasters (2015 Nepal earthquake). Here, the disruptive effects of tourism on sustainable development have been mitigated by a distinctive phenomenon of local community empowerment that has improved livelihood and expanded participation in the exercise of citizenship. Place-based touristic augmented public space generates a de-parochialisation via tourism-based economic development antagonist to conventional processes with grand plans led by hegemonic organisations that follow logics of capital accumulation and produce staging and dispossessing commodification exchange value as souvenirs.

## **10. Public Spaces for Economy and Empowerment**

The NUA (UN-Habitat, 2016) promotes safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces as drivers for social and economic development, to facilitate business as well as public and private investments with livelihood opportunities for all. It seeks to embrace diversity in cities in promoting responsible businesses based on principles of environmental sustainability and inclusive prosperity, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial and informal income-generating processes (considered as occurring outside the state’s formal and regulated income-generating framework) operating in public spaces particularly streets or plazas can consist of vendors for food, flowers, newspapers, as well as shoe-shiners, amongst others (Sassen, 1994). Such informal economic activities are very visible in a range of cities today and face common threats. For instance, in public plazas in San José, Costa Rica, municipal agents require vendors to pay for the right to sell their goods in plazas and city streets (Low, 1996). For these vendors, the plaza is an urban place of work, exchange, and coexistence, yet occasionally they have to contest for the control of the city as a means of making a living, as they can be charged a high fee for putting up a stall (Low, 1996).

Those working in the informal economy in public spaces are also prone to theft, illness, as well as police raids and seizures. In the case of Bogotá, Colombia, such vendors have little voice in policy-making in their interface with local politicians in addressing their issues (Donovan, 2008). In some cases, local policies have tried to limit informal economic activities by banning, over-regulating or even redesigning urban spaces to restrict their operations (Cross, 2000). An example is how street vendors were harassed in South Africa as a way to prevent Africans from taking control of public spaces (Cross, 2000).

Though small in size, and flexible in operation, informal income generators may pose problems for city planners as their stalls may get in the way of traffic and other uses. There are noticeable advantages in street vending, as it minimises overhead costs and rental utilities. However, it is also the source of disadvantages, including the need to withstand hostile attempts to over-regulate or eliminate their practices, such that vendors, who may lack legal protection, have to occasionally evade and avoid harassment by or conflicts with authorities (Cross, 2000).

From the discussions at the WUF, cities needed to encourage entrepreneurship and other informal economic activities through appropriation and adaptation of public spaces, such that people can create businesses and vibrancy, as well as promote social interaction between inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> These entrepreneurial and informal place-making activities, harnessing local economies, which ensure opportunities, socioeconomic and cultural diversity integrated with urban spaces (UN-Habitat, 2016), could, in turn, produce new forms of public spaces and socio-spatial assemblages, with unpredictable and chaotic evolutionary patterns yet based on dynamics of self-organisation (Mendoza-Arroyo & Chelleri, 2017).

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<sup>9</sup> See discussions in Tieben, Geng, and Rossini (2017).

## 11. Conclusion

In the wake of the increasing blur of public and private realms in today's cities, brought about by technological advancements and the inherent contradictions of hyper-consumerism, augmented spatialities mediated through communication-based digital spheres provide the main access to the public sphere in public spaces, constituting a form of re-politicisation and empowerment of the individual in a new form of open, permeable, and recombinant meta-public space.

The various socio-spatial problems in the production of these semi-public spaces were critically addressed in productive sessions that found a common need for further research. Recommendations were made to pay particular attention to the opportunities and limitations of the global spread of the new complex blurred spatiality whilst simultaneously recognising the differences of the diverse locale and range of actors and their issues in urban public spaces. This can guarantee the exercise of the right to the city and citizenship in a democratic, participative, and pluralist production of the urban space.

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