

**FROM PIAZZA NAVONA TO GOOGLE  
OR,  
FROM LOCAL PUBLIC SPACE TO GLOBAL PUBLIC SPHERE**

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## ABSTRACT: OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF PUBLIC SPACE

Most urbanists tend to think of *public space* as three-dimensional *physical space*: Piazza Navona, the Red Square, Central Park, and so on. For urban planners, open public space is both the visible symbol of local democracy, and the quintessential *place* for it to become action.

The central square in Canton Uri, where men would gather and make decisions about common issues, is somewhere in the back of our minds as the symbol of ‘pure democracy’ the way it was practiced quite recently in Europe – gender equity issues set aside. Today’s public space, however, the village common, is not ‘pure’ any more, but filled with conflicting interests.

After the internet has rapidly turned into the information highway number one, it has become evident that *digital and virtual space* is an equally important place for public appearance and political argumentation as any other place or media. An action can *take place* at the Tiananmen Square, but it becomes truly public only after it has been broadcast on CNN, a private global news channel, and can be later traced through Google. The virtual and publicly accessible – even if commercial and thus privatized – *public domain* is invisible but omnipresent.

The ‘ground level’ of public space is the sphere of public decision making which, while under pressure to become more transparent, remains somewhat oblique and inaccessible. The post-Thatcher political debate about various modes of delivery of basic public services – whether by public or private providers – necessitates the definition of the concepts *public good*, *public sector*, *public domain*, and *public sphere*. The impacts of the globalization of economy demand looking at the *public* versus *private* spheres also through the framework of *local* versus *global*.

Does ‘Public Space’ in fact signify the public sphere, the public domain as well as the physical urban public space? Have they become *one*, a multidimensional world beyond our skin and within our heads, shaping our daily consciousness without us necessarily noticing if we’ve shifted from one dimension to another. Did you read the news in the paper at home, or hear it on the radio while driving your car, did you see the ad in the tv in your bedroom or on the street, glued on the city bus?

This essay endeavors, through literature and media research, to bring together the different overlapping spheres of public space. It aims at a multi-stakeholder definition of public space, which would be more contemporary than the one still cherished by urbanists and many others alike. Particularly from the point of view of urban development, it is increasingly important to be able to read public space in all of its manifestations.

“If the City is a text, how shall we read it?” asks Joyce Carol Oates. She also notes that in the United States the city is an expression of the marketplace struggle for individual, private success in financial and social terms. My reading is that the city – which becomes visible in public space – is sometimes fiction and sales promotion, occasionally a historical novel, but definitely always a political text. Unfortunately we cannot read it fluently, yet.

## BASIC CONCEPTS

### Public goods and common good

In his eloquent book *The Fall of Public Man*, the Chicago-born sociologist and novelist Richard Sennett<sup>1</sup> (1974) writes about the changing forms of public and city life and gives a thorough historical analysis, trying to unveil what has led to “unbalanced personal life and empty public life ... and the formation of a new capitalist, secular, urban culture”. He traces back also the etymology of *public* and *private*. “The history of the words ‘public’ and ‘private’ is a key to understanding this basic shift in the terms of Western culture. The first recorded uses of the word ‘public’ in English identify the ‘public’ with the *common good* in society; in 1470, for instance, Malory spoke of ‘the emperor Lucios... dictatour or procurour of the *publyke wele* of Rome.’ Some seventy years later, there was added sense of ‘public’ as that which is manifest and open to general observation.”

An illustrative reminder of the history of the word *common* is the connotation that it still has as “piece of public land, an area of land available for anybody to use, for example, as a public recreation area or as pasture for cattle”<sup>2</sup> or “green, park, open space, playing field, playground”.<sup>3</sup>

*Public goods* – to some extent in a similar way as *human rights* – are basically political concepts and hence highly contested at the global level. As an example, is water a human right? According to a basic definition<sup>4</sup> public goods are hard or impossible to produce for private profit. One also encounters the concepts *common good*, *collective goods* and *global public goods*. First, a public good is ‘non-rivalrous’, which means that its benefits fail to exhibit consumption scarcity, in other words, you cannot run out of it once it has been produced. Everyone can benefit from it without diminishing other’s enjoyment. Second, it is ‘non-excludable’ once the good has been created, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to prevent access to it. Natural environment (common goods), social policy (collective goods), knowledge (global public goods) national defense system, system of property rights (public goods) are typical examples.

A United Nations’ report<sup>5</sup> (Kaul et al, 2003, p. 44) lists 10 global public goods, which are at in the focus of the debate today:

- basic human dignity for all people, including universal access to basic education and health care
- respect for national sovereignty
- global public health, particularly communicable disease control
- global security, put differently, a global public domain free from crime and violence
- global peace
- communication and transportation systems harmonized across borders concerted management of the global natural commons to promote their sustainable use
- availability of international arenas for multilateral negotiations between states as well as between state and non-state actors.

Coming back to my basic question about public space, I’d like to formulate the last bullet point on the list into: availability of local arenas, public space, for negotiations between public authorities as well as between public, private and civil society actors.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Sennett is Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Cities Programme at the London School of Economics (LSE) and Professor of Social Sciences at MIT.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Encarta Dictionary: English (North America)

<sup>3</sup> MSN Encarta Encyclopedia: English (North America)

<sup>4</sup> Source: Wikipedia

<sup>5</sup> The UN Secretary General’s *Road Map* report on the implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration UN 2001)

## Public sector

The *public sector* is here understood as the dialectical opposite to the *private* sector. From the point of view of organizational theory this could be analogous to the juxtaposition of the non-profit vs. the for-profit sector. However, defining the public sector as 'not-for-profit' misses the point. Rather than that, the public sector could be specified as 'not-for-private-profit' or 'for-the-common-good', while civil society organizations (CSOs) are generally considered 'non-profit' and thus exempt from taxation. The public sector, as the collector of taxes is by definition a tax-free zone.

In our European thinking, the more developed a society, the more basic services – public services – it provides to its citizen, such as access to freshwater and sanitation, access to energy services, primary health care, basic education, public transport systems, urban planning and housing. The expression 'access to' is worth noting: the government does not have to give the energy or water for free, but it must make sure that every citizen can get it.

Why bother about the public sector and basic services, if we are interested in the public sphere and public space? In my understanding, the public sphere is where the public sector resides, and if the public sphere literally 'takes place' somewhere, this happens in public space. The public sector is also the provider and caretaker of public space. Whether the public sector is also the provider and caretaker of the public sphere in a wider sense, remains to be debated. In my opinion, yes.

## Public – Semi Public – Semi Private – Private

Chermayeff and Alexander (1963) looked at housing in an urban context when they wrote about *Community and Privacy*, and described the semi-public and semi-private zones between the spheres. Within physical space, it is more or less impossible to imagine an arrangement where private and public spaces would encounter without a buffer zone, the semi-public. However, in this context *public* is understood as an antonym to *private* meaning 'not for others', personal, confidential, concealed, even clandestine, and restricted<sup>6</sup>, not primarily as 'non-governmental' or 'privately owned'. Also Sennett (1974) notes that 'private' originally meant 'privileged'.

One's own room is a private space regardless if it is in a public housing project, or in a rental apartment owned by a multinational real estate company. *The room of one's own*<sup>7</sup>, to paraphrase the title of Virginia Woolf's book of 1929, is for most people the most private realm in the world. Woolf links together private space, ability to work and women's emancipation.

Private has also the connotation of personal and intimate. Speaking into one's mobile phone in a bus or on a street is a rather new phenomenon, one which irritates many people, if they have to witness it nearby. There is something embarrassing about the situation, as if looking into someone's closet without any desire to do so. It is a total, even if ephemeral merger of the private and the public realms into each other without any buffers, carried by voice, not by movement or spatial arrangement. Why is it so irritating, and more so to the onlooker? Is it a form of vocal audio-exhibitionism? Interestingly, in the English language, *privates* also means 'the genitals'. One is not supposed to expose one's privates in public, in fact it is a criminal act to do so.

'Private' meaning privately owned, as opposed to 'common' most likely has its roots in land ownership and industrialization. Sennett (ibid.) describes how the 19<sup>th</sup> century family, which had

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Thesaurus, Encarta Dictionary: English (North America), and English (U.K.)

<sup>7</sup> The most frequently quoted idea of the book is that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is going to write".

become a protective shield against the traumas of early industrial capitalism, was “an idealized refuge... with a higher moral value than the public realm”. An interesting correlation could be seen with the present-day U.S., where the conservative Republican rhetoric highlights traditional family values as the core of the American society. “Privacy and stability appeared to be united in the family; against this ideal order the legitimacy of the public order was thrown into question.”

Sennett (ibid.) refers to Erich Auerbach’s thorough study of the definition of “the public”. It has a similar history in English and French, from “the common good” to the way the terms are used now, as “in public” includes a broader realm than only being outside of family and friends. In France, the period of Louis XIV had brought about the expression “le public ... la cour et la ville, the court and the city”, referring to the audience in the theatre, the theatrical public, which consisted of an elite group of people. This elite was shattered first by the mass production of clothes, as an example, which made it possible that “many diverse segments of the cosmopolitan public began in gross to take on a similar appearance, that public markings were losing distinctive forms.” This mirage of social equity has of course been broken by the nouveau riche and what the French linguists call “distinction”.

### **Public sphere and public domain**

Without relying on further research at this point, in this text *public sphere* is used as the broadest blanket concept, encompassing all other sectors or layers of public space and public realm. My intention is to show that in order to be able to read cities, the concept ‘public space’ will have to be redefined to encompass more than just its traditional 3-dimensional aspects. I’ll go as far as to suggest that a paradigm shift in interpreting public space will be necessary.

“A creative work is said to be in the *public domain* if there are no laws which restrict its use by the public at large.”<sup>8</sup> Works such as the inventions of Archimedes, the Bible and the Qur’an also form part of the public domain, because they were created before copyright and patent laws. In the U.S., *public domain* is also “a term used to describe lands that were not under private or state ownership [sic!] ... as the country was expanding. These lands were obtained from the 13 original colonies, from Native American tribes, or from purchase from other countries.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, public domain was land stolen from the Indians! In contemporary talk *public domain* often refers in specific to space within the computer-generated but openly accessible digital world. A private website address, <http://www.kaarintaipale.net> as an example, is part of public domain.

The chart below outlines internal relationships of some of the applied concepts.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_domain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_domain) [16.4.2006]

<sup>9</sup> ibid.

<b>PUBLIC SPHERE PUBLIC GOODS</b>							
<b>PUBLIC SPACE</b> (space which is publicly accessible)							
<b>Urban space</b>		<b>Space in time</b>		<b>Media space Public domain</b>		<b>Political space</b>	
Urban space in 3D - streets, squares, parks - infrastructure: water pipes, energy cables, telecommunication networks, public transport networks and vehicles (buses, metro, trams, stops, stations)	Privately owned elements in urban space - cars, trucks - advertisement - noise	Movement		- press - radio, television		- political argumentation - participatory decision making processes about common goods	
		In public space - walk - bike - tram, bus, metro	In private space - car	Public broadcast	Private channels		
Publicly accessible interiors of public buildings - schools, libraries, museums (some, lobbies mostly), universities, churches...	Privately owned but publicly accessible interiors - cafes, restaurants - shops	History		The internet		Public interests - public debate - transparency - censorship	Private interests - lobbying - corruption - censorship
		Collective memories	Private memories	Public sites - public information - links to private sites	Private sites in the public domain - info - PR		
Public spaces with restricted (time, proof of identity, payment) access - the parliament - concert hall - energy and water utilities	Private spaces with public access against reimbursement - amusement part			Restricted access sites Public and/or private, accessible with - username, code - reimbursement			
<b>CIVIL SOCIETY</b>							

**PRIVATE SPHERE  
PRIVATE GOODS**

## **PUBLIC SPACE**

### **The three dimensions of physical urban space**

In the English, French (*espace*) and German (*Raum*) languages *space* has the implied additional meaning of ‘region beyond Earth’s atmosphere’. This is not the case in Finnish<sup>10</sup>. However, space has always the connotation of ‘something in-between’, even that of ‘void’, which means that something can take place in space, it is an area available for use.

<sup>10</sup> In Finnish, there are two distinct words: ‘tila’ stands for space or room, whereas ‘avaruus’ meaning outer space.

Like other broad concepts, *space* is an extremely contextual word. For architects and urbanists, it is the primary object of their work. Before they can think of any function, light or movement, planners imagine space as something demarcated from six sides. Urban space in its archaic form is space with the sky as its roof or the foliage of trees as its ceiling. In each city, the Departments of Public Works or Urban Planning have a clear understanding of what is the urban space that they are commissioned to plan, construct, maintain and administrate: roads and streets, pedestrian and bicycle routes, quays, squares, markets and parks.

## Infrastructure

The welfare state is supposed to provide its citizen access to basic services. as noted above. Until roughly 1980s and the Margaret Thatcher regime in the U.K. the provision of the services and the maintenance of the required infrastructure was considered a task of the public sector. Due to Thatcherism and neo-liberal policies worldwide there has been a trend to separate the roles of the service producer and the access provider and to outsource and privatize the production. Ownership of infrastructure and its maintenance have occasionally been left in-between and forgotten.

Today the overall picture is very complex. In some cities municipalities still own the water and energy utilities and infrastructure, keeping them within the public sphere. In others, provision of water or energy is commissioned to multinational shareholder companies, and the distribution networks may be in mixed public-private ownership. Telecommunication networks have gone through the most thorough privatization process of all formerly public services and infrastructure.

This has not passed unnoticed. Osmo Soininvaara<sup>11</sup>, an MP and former leader of the Finnish Green Party, reminds that many people have asked the City of Helsinki to build a wlan (wireless local area network) for the citizen. The Mayor's response has been that it is not a task for the municipality but for the private sector. Soininvaara disagrees: It is no different from tram tracks, it would not have been wise to have competing companies build their own lines with different widths. Wlans competing with each other make no sense, either. We'll need just one network, which, in order to avoid misuse of a monopoly position, will have to be owned by its users. There is no one else to better represent the Helsinki residents than the city itself, he notes.

As an example, the City of Helsinki could have cooperated with Helsinki Energy, the utility owned by the city, to build broadband access in connection with the electricity infrastructure. The right-wing Mayor has argued that the municipality must not interfere with 'free market mechanisms'. At the same time cities as different as Reykjavik and Tallinn have taken an opposite stand: they've decided to consider access to internet a public good, and provision of it a basic service. It has not been contested, yet, but I'd argue that since access to information is a public good (Kaul et al 2003) – and thus basic education and public libraries are considered basic services – access to internet, the highway of information, must be regarded as a basic service, as well. Who will be the first one to file a class action suit<sup>12</sup> against a city which refuses public access to information?

In Helsinki public libraries form a well maintained and dense network, and the librarians took it early on as their responsibility to provide citizen free internet access. This is also true in a developing country metropolis like São Paulo, where the municipality has put up internet kiosks in the poorest neighbourhoods to help the most disadvantaged people to bridge the digital divide.

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<sup>11</sup> Soininvaara, Osmo, colums "Langaton netti Helsinkiin" in the local newspaper *Helsingin Uutiset*. 10.4.2006

<sup>12</sup> A lawsuit brought by one party on behalf of a group of individuals all having the same grievance, according to [www.investorwords.com/869/class\\_action\\_suit.html](http://www.investorwords.com/869/class_action_suit.html) [12.4.2006]

At the same time, the most visible infrastructure – streets, roads, bridges and tunnels – while used by both private car owners, public transport and pedestrians, is for the most part publicly owned and maintained. No one questions this, even if the public sector in this way subsidizes the people driving their own automobiles. A European study<sup>13</sup> comparing three German cities showed that in 2001 the amount was between 110 and 145 Euro per inhabitant per year.

The invisible technical infrastructure – distribution networks of water, energy and communication – is the true support structure of urban life, and as I see it, should always remain in public ownership and thus be part of public space. We've, however, grown so used to having a reliable technical infrastructure that we tend to forget its existence.

### **Urban (public) space and public life**

Sennett (ibid.) writes about the growth of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cosmopolis and notes that “The focus of [this] public life was the capital city.” It becomes obvious that public life is urban and the private life has more to do with nature. Urban public space is the indispensable stage for public life. It goes without saying that urban space is public space, there is no such thing as ‘urban private space’ – or is there going to be once the multinational real estate investment companies have purchased all major city centres? According to Sennett (ibid.) “... the nature of a public square ... is to intermix persons and diverse activities”. Coincidental meeting of people from all walks of life is the social essence of urban space, which makes it public, in the end. Without people there is no urban (public) space.

The provision of basic public services – as long as they have not been outsourced or privatized – mostly happens in public spaces: schools, libraries, hospitals, and so on. When the users, people and functions occupy the public spaces and the more the space are enclosed rooms and interiors, the less architects and urbanists have control. Teachers, librarians, bus drivers, doctors, nurses, security and police take command and define the terms of reference for the use of public spaces daily.

### **Accessibility as an indicator of the public-ness of any space**

Theoretically, there seem to be two legally contestable criteria for judging whether a space is public or not: ownership and accessibility. Ownership is not always visible. If there is no sign saying ‘private road’ or ‘private property’, we assume that a street or a park is owned by the city or national government – by taxpayers – and is open for all. The front gardens of buildings are a typical exception, even a light fence keeps people off and signals that the area is off-limits, but at the same time the space is in public view and whatever happens there is public.

At a behavioural level the divide is not at all so clear. “... cafeterias were not only a restaurant genre where a cup of coffee was served in heavy china and still cost less than a newspaper. More important, cafeterias were a cheap public space downtown.” (Zukin 1991) Yes, you can enter a restaurant, a shop, a gym or a cinema, but there is a price, and the owner can deny you access.

Sharon Zukin (1991) describes how homeless people were removed from public spaces in the downtown area in New York. “The issue of the homeless dramatized the fact that ‘public space’ was no longer open to the public without conditions.” “... city authorities made ... rules to bar the homeless from the subways, Penn Station, the bus terminals, and other public spaces, while ignoring private owners’ attempts to bar the public – especially the homeless public – from such ‘public spaces’ as plazas and gallerias that enjoyed a zoning bonus.” This refers to a New York zoning

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<sup>13</sup> The study published by ICLEI-Europe in 2001 compared the city budgets in Stuttgart, Bremen and Dresden.

practice, where tall buildings are granted more floor area if they open their lobbies and make them accessible to the public.

In Toronto, in a different political climate, hoards of homeless people used to settle in front of the City Hall<sup>14</sup> in the evenings during cold winter days. Revell's design includes a car ramp leading to the 'piano nobile' where the Mayor's office and the Council Chamber are located. The ramp forms a broad canopy sheltering the ground floor entrance. The lobby of the City Hall is manned and open 24 hours every day, and also the homeless can enter the bathrooms downstairs. For some, this has been a disgrace, others have thought that the City can't chase the homeless away.

Accessibility by private car is a paradox. On the road, public space ceases to be a continuum, since within a car the exterior environment loses most of its characteristics, and the point of arrival – a parking space – becomes almost as important as the main goal of the movement, be it a public space. This aspect is discussed more closely under "movement" below.

### **Public relations and sex – private advertisement in public space**

The visually oriented people tend to take offence of urban advertisement as a visual and aesthetic hazard, or traffic planners may question whether a shocking ad distracts the focus of a car driver. The visual is not my point, because the visible is only a symptom, like a rash on the skin, which can seldom be cured with external treatments alone, but needs pharmaceuticals to be taken internally, or a wholesome diet.

Who can buy access to public space? More importantly, who can sell public space, who has been given the mandate to do so? If yes, to whose pocket does the reimbursement go to? Does it profit the public sector, the provider and caretaker of public space? It seems that in many cases public space is in fact sold by private companies to other private actors: a real estate owner allows for reimbursement the use of her/his property as background for advertisement, or a commercial television channel sells time slots between programming, or a car or bus company rents the exterior and interior of their vehicles for publicity [sic!] purposes. Advertisement is public space or time that has been sold to private stakeholders.

Public Relations, PR, is a more subtle expression for advertisement and marketing, which is "the business activity of presenting products or services to potential customers in such a way as to make them eager to buy"<sup>15</sup>. Being in charge of "relations" sounds more sophisticated, resembling diplomacy instead of more aggressive sales promotion. PR means that a private actor wants to make the public "eager to buy".

The American artist Richard Serra, who is best known as a sculptor, worked with this paradox early in his career, when he made an anti-advertisement as a piece of "public art". In the texts spanning the television screen he wrote that the spectator is the one that is being sold to the advertiser – not the product to the customer. He claimed that if advertisers can purchase time on the television, he has the same right to do so. "Richard Serra's "Television Delivers People" was shown in 1973 on a Chicago TV station under an "anti-advertisement provision" that gave ads and anti-ads equal time."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In 2004, I witnessed this personally, because my office was in the West Tower of the Toronto City Hall. The winter was particularly cold.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Thesaurus, Encarta Dictionary: English (North America)

<sup>16</sup> A comment posted by: [Jason](#) on November 1, 2005 at [03:39 PM](#) on the website of ICONODUEL, [http://www.iconoduel.org/archives/2005/11/000726\\_more\\_than\\_meets\\_the\\_eye.php](http://www.iconoduel.org/archives/2005/11/000726_more_than_meets_the_eye.php) [6 April 2006]

Robert Venturi's (1972) interpretation of the Las Vegas' main street was accurate: the billboards<sup>17</sup> which became the facades, the images of the "decorated shed", and the movement through the Strip by private car changed the contemporary city forever. The speed of the automobile was how fast the city could and should be read, and the message of the buildings and of the city was "buy!"

An aspect that makes advertisement in public space doubly offensive is its more and more blatant use of human sexuality as an eye-catcher. While the sexual act between two people is probably the most private function that one can think of, a provocative gesture or pose in an ad brings it to the open. You and I as passers-by are challenged to get involved in an act of exhibitionism. After all, at least in Finland the legislation prohibits the sale of sexual services in public space.

## **THE FOURTH DIMENSION OF PUBLIC SPACE – TIME**

### **Movement and the present**

Binary vision is the human body's tool to comprehend distance and space. In order to perceive space as a three-dimensional – not only as two-dimensional place – also movement is necessary. However, the quality, speed and means of mobility are crucial for the reading of space. For Venturi (1972), Las Vegas had been the lesson about what movement by car would mean for cities.

"... public space has become a derivative of movement," notes Richard Sennett (1974), and he is referring particularly to the motion by private car. This is why "the public space is an area to move through, not be in." People take "unrestricted motion of the individual to be an absolute right" and "space becomes meaningless or even maddening unless it can be subordinated to free movement." In connection with movement, Sennett writes also about "isolation" which means that even when a person is within public space – on a street, but in a car – she/he is in a private space: "... as one can isolate oneself, in a private automobile, for freedom of movement, one ceases to believe one's surroundings have any meaning save as a means toward the end of one's own motion."

If the French writer Victor Hugo was convinced that Gutenberg, the printing press, would kill architecture, my all too obvious conclusion is that the car will kill the city as text. De Certeau (1984) writes about speech acts: "The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered." Walking, according to him, is a space of enunciation. "The ordinary practitioners of the city life ...[are] walkers ...whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it."

### **Memory and the past**

This is what Hugo had in mind: buildings are the history of mankind written in stone and wood. Depending on how well we know our history, we have the ability to read the built environment like a book which has been left open in front of our eyes in public space. To decipher a historical timeline by looking at facades is the easiest part: from which period is this building, is it from the 1970s or 1950s, was it built in the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century, is it Gothic or pseudo-gothic? A slightly closer look tells more about the construction process and technology: is this a man-made or natural material, is the wall paneling out of timber or corrugated metal, is the wall of massive stone or a marble veneer? A deeper knowledge of history helps add invisible layers to the picture: why was

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<sup>17</sup> Reference to Robert Venturi's book is correct as such, but it is only fair to note that his wife Denise Scott Brown, who was born and grew up in South Africa, had photographed billboards there already before she had married Venturi. If I'm not mistaken, an article about Las Vegas was published prior to the book, but I've not been able to locate it, yet.

the marble chosen, instead of granite, why did they prefer pre-fabricated concrete technology to brick? This is the square where the buses used to stand, this is where the City used to organize an open-air concert, this is where the coffin of Marshal Mannerheim was carried out of the church. It is all public knowledge, fragments of collective memory.

Collective memory takes place in public space. Dead space is space without any reading or memories, a place of total alienation. There is also a private layer of memories merging with the collective ones: this street is where I used to walk with my father, this is where I went to school, this is the park where I kissed my lover.

Instead of a *nowhere*, de Certeau (1984) writes cynically about ‘a *nowhen*’ as an operational concept of a city. A *nowhen* would substitute for the “stubborn resistances offered by traditions; univocal scientific strategies, made possible by the flattening out of all the data in a plane projection, must replace the tactics of users who ... reproduce the opacities of history everywhere”.

## THE FIFTH DIMENSION OF PUBLIC SPACE – MEDIA AND THE ICT<sup>18</sup>

### “Public Appearance” and public broadcasting

If someone has “appeared in public”, it does not necessarily mean an appearance in the speaker’s corner in the Hyde Park or in the parliament, but most likely a sentence or two have been quoted in a daily newspaper, in the television or radio. The original text may have been a radio interview or a column in a personal weblog, ‘blog’.

Political demonstrators can take advantage of this very skillfully; the television screen can give the impression of whole streets and squares being taken over by masses of people fighting for their issue. In reality, a tv-camera may be deliberately assisting the activists by choosing a zoom lens and transmitting a perception that instead of 50 there have been 5000 people with their banners on the streets. But the mere fact that the demonstration, however small, is depicted in mass media, increases its effect exponentially. La rue talks via ICT.

“Broadcast television broke all existing barriers between public and private, local and global, the living room and the world, until the viewers rather than the image became the product.” (Zukin 1991) Knowingly or unknowingly Zukin is referring to Serra’s “Television Delivers People”, which was discussed above.

“Commercial radio is a jukebox”, writes Heikki Hellman<sup>19</sup>, mentioning a study<sup>20</sup> which concludes that 70% of the broadcasting of the privately owned radio stations is music. Even if they want to distinguish themselves with individualized profiles – to please different advertisers – , the often multinational channels all play the same, very limited selection of records. The shortest list of a private radio station has 550 pieces, while the three channels of the public broadcasting company YLE play annually up to 11 000 different works of music.

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<sup>18</sup> ICT stands for Information and Communication Technology, which, in addition to traditional media (press, radio, television) includes also e.g. computers, software, wireless telephones and the world wide web

<sup>19</sup> Hellman, Heikki. “Sitä samaa”, column in *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS) 14.4.2006. Dr. Hellman is the former long-time editor of the culture section, now the debate section of HS, the main daily newspaper in Finland.

<sup>20</sup> Ala-Fossi, Marko (2006), report commissioned by the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Finland.

## **Marketplace**

Market squares and halls are standard stops where tour guides recommend that tourists go when visiting almost any city or village in the world. However, today a lion's share of trading takes place in the virtual marketplace, be it stock exchange or sales of apartments or pharmaceuticals. The immaterialization of products and services and globalization of the economy contribute to the growth of the digital markets. Lawyers are now dealing with immaterial copyrights and popular music seems to have become a common rather than a private good. Even agricultural export products include virtual water. Virtual marketplaces do not trade with immaterial goods only, but they've become integral elements of heavy logistics, as well. As an example, the Port of Turku in Western Finland has its virtual portal, Logistics Turku Region<sup>21</sup>. "Got a package to deliver and searching for a service provider? Leave a request ..."

## **Taking place in fact and fiction**

Many writers have ascertained that the virtual space won't replace physical space. One of the proofs of this dependency on the 'real world' is shown daily on every news broadcast of almost every television channel: a correspondent appears 'live', holding a microphone in her/his hand somewhere in the world, against the backdrop of an identifiable public space or landmark: the White House, the Eiffel Tower, the Kremlin, the Brandenburger Tor. We'll never know if the journalist is standing in front of an image or the real building, but the message is clear: the public space gives the place a name. The image of the lawn of the White House speaks loud.

In 2002, I made a speech thanking the Mayor of Johannesburg, who had hosted a dinner for eight hundred people during the WSSD<sup>22</sup>. The location was a beautifully decorated but noisy sports hall in Joburg. "Stockholm. Rio de Janeiro. Kyoto. Basel. Montreal. Bonn. ..." I spoke loud and paused after the name of every city. The audience fell silent, because they knew that the modern history of sustainable development was intrinsically linked with the chain of these cities. "Johannesburg. Johannesburg will never be the same. Its name will always carry the memory of the WSSD."

History is – at least until now has been – made in places, but through information and communication media this history becomes part of our collective memory, and part of the memory of the places themselves. Without media the memory would be lost! However, we are yet to see the revolution that takes place in the virtual space alone, without riot police and demonstrators clashing on a street and taking command of some remarkable public space.

## **Internet as public domain – simultaneity and virtual space**

Where are you if you surf in the internet? Is it truly a highway, a portal of a shopping mall or private domain? Why would it be anything more than a glorified telephone, camera and typewriter put together? The unsettling fact is that new technological innovations tend to spark off new social practices that go far beyond the scope of the original engineering invention. They also grow their own infrastructure which continuously allows for new adaptations. Mr. Ford can't have imagined what his innovation caused to happen: it filled cities with elevated highways and their single-family house neighborhoods with two-three-car garages. But the infrastructure, the social aspirations, and economic and legal frameworks had to be put in place, first. The T-Ford did not make the urban

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.logisticsturku.fi/logistics/cms.nsf/pages/indexeng> [12.4.2006]

<sup>22</sup> WSSD stands for the United Nations World Summit for Sustainable Development, the so called Rio+10, which was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in the Fall of 2002.

revolution alone. Neither could the planners of internet imagine how rapidly it would grow into a world wide web connecting people at a speed and width incomparable to anything prior to it.

Since the emergence of printed and electronic media, a fifth dimension has been added to public space, if we regard time as the fourth one. The meaning of agora as a political space has become less obvious while the physical public space has been invaded by traffic and “criminal economy” of the inner-city ghettos (Castells 1998, 2000). Even if media and internet have been filled with entertainment and advertising, politics has moved to the audiovisual media (Castells 1997), if it does not hide behind the heavy walls of cabinets, council chambers and parliaments.

Power politics has left Civil Society fighting for unrestricted access to information via the internet, which is controlled by the same dictators who declare curfews. "We had a choice to enter the country and follow the law. Or we had a choice not to enter the country."<sup>23</sup> This is how Eric E. Schmidt, Google's chief executive, described the company's alternatives while in China to promote Google's new Chinese search engine. In recent months, Google has become one of the biggest companies in the world, measured by the net value of its stock (source ...). This is clear proof of the character of the internet as public space: political power wants to control it, and multinational companies have become equal guardians of the virtual streets, siding with governments. In a nick of time, Google has become the 27th biggest among stocks traded in the United State, bigger than Coca Cola, for example<sup>24</sup>. Investors believe that Google will revolutionize advertising as an endless global platform.

Already William J. Mitchell, Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT, questioned the character of virtual meeting places: "... most importantly, perhaps, who will pay for them, who will control them, and who will have access to them? Will they be universally accessible public property, like the streets of a city? Will they be commercially operated pseudo-public places, like malls and Disneylands? Or will they be like private clubs, with the electronic equivalents of velvet ropes and beady-eyed bouncers?" (1999) However, even when doubtful about virtual space, Mitchell takes for granted that the urban streets are “universally accessible”.

Sennett (ibid.) noted about the 18<sup>th</sup> century cities that as they grew, "... places where strangers might regularly meet grew up." There is a daunting correlation to the 21<sup>st</sup> century cities of the internet age, where people cannot meet in public life or public space any more, but instead, flirt, send virtual kisses and get to know each other on commercial dating websites. The development of these ‘soulmatestechnology’ applications, is now part of the much touted ‘creative’ ‘new economy’.

Mitchell (1995) understood how cyberspace – new forms of technology and telecommunication – will change our cities. He pointed out that it “offers new opportunities for mutual interests, new identities, and self-representation, and the people’s rights to create private and public, or semi-public spaces in cyberspace is fiercely contested. Virtual communities, the different sites where people meet, are, like grand urban designs, large-scale structures of places and connections which are organized to meet the needs of their inhabitants which are governed according to certain norms and customs” (Bridge and Watson 2002, p. 6)

Similar to Hugo predicting that Gutenberg would kill architecture, in the early 1990s it may have been trendy to prophesize that the internet would make physical space obsolete. But it did not take long to understand that a virtual encounter can only complement a face-to-face meeting. Quite the contrary, the more we learn about other people and places, the more we want to travel and see them

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<sup>23</sup> Quote of the Day in the electronic version of Today's Headlines of The New York Times, Thursday, April 13, 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/todaysh headlines> [13.4.2006]

<sup>24</sup> Source: Google and <http://moneycentral.msn.com/content/CNBCTV/Articles/Dispatches/P136522.asp> [16.4.2006]

in real life (Landry 2000). No wonder the tourism industry has become – next to entertainment and finance – one of the big global businesses.

### **A virtual Think Tank as policy space**

The internet, more than anything else, has boosted the globalization of Civil Society and thus strengthened its role and voice. Civil Society does not mean only feisty NGOs like Greenpeace or Amnesty International but also groups working in the background, such as GTI – Great Transformation Initiative<sup>25</sup>. GTI calls itself “a network for elaborating visions and strategies for a future of enriched lives, human solidarity and a healthy planet”. Rather than just a network, it functions very much like a Think Tank, producing discussion papers. GTI has both a public website and a separate “Participants Space” where invited members log in with their name and password.

In an internal discussion on the GTI platform, someone noted that “... it seems to me we need to distinguish more clearly between ‘civil society’ as a *space*, and the organizations that are active in it, especially when we start communicating outwards. I get the impression from this paper ... that we tend to equate the whole *space* with the more militant organizations active in it”<sup>26</sup> What struck me was the usage of the word *space* in this connection: describing the realm of the third sector, regardless of geographical or substantial location. The digital space of the virtual, computer generated GTI Think Tank overlapped with the Civil Society space. There were no more categories, classifications and boxes, but simply *space*.

## **THE HIDDEN SIXTH DIMENSION OF PUBLIC SPACE – POLITICS**

### **„La Rue“ and public opinion (öffentliche Meinung)**

Maybe more than in other industrialized countries, people in France are used to going to the street, if they want to express their dislike of the politics. Earlier in 2006, in a generic protest immigrant youth had burned hundreds of cars in the poorest neighborhoods of the French capital. “‘La rue’ won again”, was the title of a newspaper editorial<sup>27</sup> referring to riots in Paris a few months later. President Chirac had no way out, he had to withdraw the proposed labor law, which the students had protested against. This does not mean that the students were right or that the government was wrong and finally saw the light, it only means that *la rue* still counts. During the same weeks the peace-loving middle class of Thailand filled the streets in Bangkok and forced the corrupt Prime Minister to step down. Democracy walked its way through the streets in South East Asia, too.

A global newsletter devoted to civil society issues published an interesting comment<sup>28</sup> linking a growing number of public demonstrations to the weakening of democracy. This is in contradiction to a rather common, but obviously naïve idea of only democracy allowing for demonstrations. “The question is – was democracy ever alive? The number of people voting is declining generally. Public street dissent is rising and becoming, and/or, being suppressed more violently. That, in many cases, is a reflection of people’s feeling of powerlessness that leads to apparent apathy, widespread and growing addictions and/or vandalism emanating from despair, and street protest.” These recent

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<sup>25</sup> website of GTI – Great Transition Initiative: <http://www.GTInitiative.org> [12.4.2006]

<sup>26</sup> From a “Comment GTI Paper #17 - World Lines” message by Nicolas Lucas, distributed as an e-mail 12.10.2006 by the GTI PaperSeriesListmanager, also available on the GTI website

<sup>27</sup> “‘La rue’ voitti jälleen”, editorial in *Helsingin Sanomat*, 11.4.2006

<sup>28</sup> Comment by John Fitzgibbon in *e-CIVICUS*, Issue No. 287, 13 April 2006, published by CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation

events in France and Thailand are good reminders of the power of people united in public space. This archaic expression of public opinion has not lost its meaning in the virtual age of ICT.

### ***Ba* – space of knowledge creation<sup>29</sup>**

Japanese research has gone beyond the Western tradition of analytic, disintegrating approach to space and time. It has introduced a holistic concept which encompasses several dimensions simultaneously: the physical, the mental, the social and the virtual, all in an ongoing process of change and in dialogue with their contexts. *Ba* is yet another aspect of public space. "We believe that the single most important factor shaping the quality of knowledge creation is the quality of place. To differentiate the various aspects of place we use the concept of *ba*, a Japanese word that translates roughly as 'place'. According to the Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida, each 'ba' has a physical, a relational, and a spiritual dimension." (Nonaka, Toyama and Scharmer 2001).

The present idea of a university campus goes back to Thomas Jefferson, who planned the University of Virginia after having returned from Europe in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jefferson's concept, still valid today, was an academical village, a place where shared learning infused daily life and wealthy businessmen served food for the students. A campus can be understood both in urban and in organizational terms as a *ba*: as an open system, as a multidimensional space to spur knowledge formation and to shelter innovation 'hot spots' involving multiple stakeholders and housing a great variety of functions. *Ba* is not about physical space alone, but acquires its meaning thru its intentions and outcomes. That is why its role is strategic, it can only embody a vision that has been formulated and expressed.

The universities' prime task is the creation and sharing of knowledge within the public sphere. The private sector has a keen interest in innovation processes, and the public sector knows that it cannot survive without them. It is the "third task" of the academia to act as an interactive interface with its societal context. A business school, in particular, has the assignment to bring together businesses and researchers into a creative process that will result in new enterprises, sustainable products and innovative services. *Ba* is the enabling environment, both the physical, political and imaginary space where this can take place.

### **Democracy and media – Al Gore quoting Habermas**

In his highly critical account of the present state of democracy in America, former Vice President Al Gore<sup>30</sup> quoted Habermas. "The German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas, describes what has happened as 'the refeudalization of the public sphere'. That may sound like gobbledygook, but it's a phrase that packs a lot of meaning. The feudal system which thrived before the printing press democratized knowledge and made the idea of America thinkable, was a system in which wealth and power were intimately intertwined, and where knowledge played no mediating role whatsoever. The great mass of the people were ignorant. And their powerlessness was born of their ignorance."

Gore reminds that the founders of the United States knew all about forums and agoras. Gore makes the important link that democracy only works if people are informed. Only then can governments be accountable to people, only then can corruption become visible. But if news becomes entertainment, because of the privatization of the news media – of the public space – there are no more news. "The

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<sup>29</sup> The chapter on *ba* is based on a project proposal developed in 2005 in cooperation with Dr. Seija Kulkki, the Director of CKIR and professor Risto Tainio, both at the HSE.

<sup>30</sup> Gore, Al (October 2005) *American democracy is in grave danger*, speech at the We Media Conference in New York, source [http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap/20051006/ap\\_on\\_re\\_us/gore\\_text\\_1](http://news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&u=/ap/20051006/ap_on_re_us/gore_text_1) [13.10.2005]

advertising of products, of course, is the real purpose of television”, Gore summarizes. Let us make a hypothetical test. Would it be possible to replace the word “television” in Gore’s sentence by a word describing some other part of the public realm? How would it sound?

- The advertising of products, of course, is the real purpose of newspapers and magazines
- The advertising of products, of course, is the real purpose of the internet
- The advertising of products, of course, is the real purpose of squares, facades, streets and parks
- The advertising of products, of course, is the real purpose of buses, trams and bus stops, or any other part of public infrastructure.

### **“The public space is the city” – the Barcelona policy**

When the City of Barcelona received the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of Architects in 1999, Oriol Bohigas, a key player in the rejuvenation of the city, made a speech at the award ceremony<sup>31</sup>. He described “the city as a political phenomenon” and “as domain of the commonalty”. In Barcelona “these political and urban ideas are based on a radical statement: the city is the indispensable physical domain for the modern development of a coherent commonalty. It is not the place of the individual, but the place of the individuals who together make up a community.” He called the view that “the traditional city is going to find itself replaced by a series of telematic networks”, “a city without a site” as “a vision put forward by those who are opposed to giving priority to the collective and in favour of the privatization of the public domain”.

“If we start out from the idea that the city is the physical domain for the modern development of the commonalty, we have to accept that in physical terms the city is the conjunction of its public spaces. Public space is the city: here we have one of the basic principles of the urban theory of Barcelona’s three Socialist mayors.”

Bohigas has two criteria for the public space: identity and legibility. “The designed form of the public space has...to be easily readable, to be comprehensible.” He sees it clearly: the interpretation of a city and of public space is political, and a city can only exist as a site of the public sphere.

### **Transparency – powers under public scrutiny**

In the English language by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century “‘public’ meant open to the scrutiny of anyone, whereas ‘private’ meant a sheltered region of life defined by one’s family and friends.” (Sennett, 1974) Where is the open space for decision-making about common goods and basic services? This is the key question and the reason for me being obsessed with the question of the public sphere. No doubt, this is an extremely political question. One could argue both that there are no common goods and that there is no need for participatory decision making: goods are private and the ownership is the only thinkable mandate for decision making. But I’m arguing the opposite.

Architects like to refer to the Greek agora as the birthplace of democracy. Without analyzing ancient Greek democracy any further, let us regard the public space as the symbol of democracy: equal rights for all people, equal voice in decision making, and equal access to common goods.

If we accept the idea that there is a common good to be shared among men – not just an infinite or finite amount of private goods – there has to be an open place where decisions are made about

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<sup>31</sup> Bohigas, Oriol (1999) Ten points for an urban methodology, in *The Architectural Review*, Sept 1999  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m3575/is\\_1231\\_206/ai...](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3575/is_1231_206/ai...) [3.10.2005]

sharing the commons. The concept of curfew illustrates the point: under a dictatorship people are not allowed to meet freely, politics closes public space. The other extreme is that you cannot organize a political demonstration in “the Main Street” of a shopping mall. It is a private space, public only so far that it is accessible to most people for a limited time per day. During the municipal and presidential election campaigns where I’ve been involved myself, it has been clear that shopping centres are out-of-bounds for campaigners. Interestingly, as we are speaking of public spaces and democracy, the City of Helsinki Public Transport Authority also denies access to the subway stations. Only ‘la rue’ remains open.

The politics of space are reflected in the mix and balance – or imbalance – of public and private powers that act within a space. It is as if you were looking at a chamber of parliament or city council, where the people in their seats represent certain political powers. In the urban public space, however, the setting is different. The public and the private are mixed.

“Just as the earlier power of the state illuminated public space – the streets – by artificial lamplight, so the economic power of CBS, Sony, and the Disney Company illuminates private space at home. ... In the new era of capital reinvestment in the center, downtown emerges as a key liminal space. Institutionally, its redevelopment straddles public and private power. Visually, the redevelopment process eliminates or incorporates the segmented vernacular into a landscape of power. Since the 1970s, downtown has graphically mapped the forms of social control that we have identified as part of the inner landscape of creative destruction. These include both entrapment and fragmentation, as well as a sense of unlimited power. Downtown mediates the social transformation initiated by capital flows and public policy.” (Zukin 1991)

## **PUBLIC SPHERE AND HABERMAS**

### **Habermas’ language**

In Jürgen Habermas’ seminal book the concept ‘*die Öffentlichkeit*’ has been translated in English as ‘*the Public Sphere*’ (‘julkisuus’) (1962, 1981, 2004). Shuffling between three languages does not make the rather complex conceptual framework any easier to comprehend. In Habermas’ thinking, the Public Sphere is the antonym of privacy in two different ways: on the one hand “*öffentliche Gewalt*”, (julkinen valta), i.e. government, is the opposite of the Private Realm, “*Privatbereich*” (yksityisyysalue), all private activity. However, „*öffentliche Gewalt*“ is not the same as „*Öffentlichkeit*“ (julkisuus). According to Habermas, Public Sphere is, or used to be in its liberal form, part of the Private Realm.<sup>32</sup> The Public Sphere is also the opposite of the secret. (salassa pidetty)

The concepts are ‘categorized’ in a table below (Habermas, 2004, p. 60, 1981, p. 30)

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<sup>32</sup> The analysis of the vocabulary used by Habermas is based in also on the introductory words by Veikko Pietilä, who has translated *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* into Finnish in 2004.

Private Realm		Sphere of Public Authority
Civil Society (realm of commodity exchange and social labor)	Public sphere in the political realm	State (realm of the “police”)
Conjugal family’s internal space (bourgeois intellectuals)	Public sphere in the world of letters (clubs, press)  (market of culture products) “Town”	Court (courtly-noble society)

### Public space as the domain of dialogue, communication and democracy

This exercise about trying to understand the essence of public space would have little meaning was it not for the sake of freedom of expression and democracy, or better, participatory governance. Public space has to enable free communication, for which Habermas (1979)<sup>33</sup> has defined “four preconditions of communication: *comprehensible, true, sincere and legitimate*” Communication is itself a precondition of real democracy. (Taylor 1998, p. 124).

The question consequently arises, whether public space has to be open also for communication, which is *not* comprehensible, true, sincere and legitimate. The quintessential image of ‘a voice in public space’ is a man standing in the Speaker’s Corner in the Hyde Park of London. He is probably not always comprehensible, but most likely true, sincere and legitimate. What about commercial advertisement in public space? It is up to the skill of the advertising agency, how comprehensible the substance of the advertisement is, and how well it eventually gets communicated. Does the advertisement tell, how many toxic chemicals have been used in the production process that have left traces to the product, to the environment and to the workers involved in the production process? Does it tell if the consumable is bad for your health and adds to your risk of dieing of cancer? Is the advertisement true? Sincere? In Habermas’ terms, “the ‘validity claim’ for sincerity is that, for genuine communication to take place between two persons, the speaker must not deceive the listener” (Taylor 1998, p. 123). Who is there to analyse whether or not the ad deceives the passer-by? Is the fact that the city gets xy Euro per year as rent for the space of the advertisement panel a sufficient legitimisation for the ad being there? Is that a sufficient price for buying public space, in fact for carving out whole spheres of public space?

A diametrically opposed view of public space could be the interpretation of markets as public space – as they are in cities, where farmers and fishermen used to bring their produce to the urban dwellers. Sorenson and Day (1981, p 391 as referred in Taylor, 1998, page 135) celebrate the capitalist market economy: “Markets ... are essential for freedom because they permit the individual maximum freedom of choice...”<sup>34</sup> Based on the research about commercial radio stations, I could question this.

<sup>33</sup> Habermas, Jürgen (1979) *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, London: Heinemann (translated by T. McCarthy)

<sup>34</sup> Sorenson, A.D. and Day, R. (1981) Libertarian planning, *Town Planning Review*, Vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 129-45

## READING CITIES THROUGH PUBLIC SPACE

Kevin Lynch (1960) talks about “a public image of any given city.” He interviewed people in Boston, Los Angeles and Jersey City across the river from New York, and asked how they pictured their city, what kind of a mental map they had created in their minds in order to locate themselves in the urban landscape. This is how Lynch established the well-known five elements of urban patterns: *paths, edges, nodes, districts and landmarks*. These elements deal with people’s everyday life, how they move, orient and place themselves within the city. People prioritized different elements depending on how well they knew the city.

In my interpretation paths, edges and nodes are urban elements that are understood by most people in a similar way. Districts and landmarks, however, may have very different meanings for different people. A church spire can be a sign for someone, a hamburger restaurant for someone else. A neighborhood has a different meaning if I live there and know its characteristics better than an outsider.

In any case, Lynch’ language is based on physical forms, signs that can be apprehended visually, always linked with motion through public space. The passer-by is either an observer or enters nodes and districts. Lynch’s intention is to make planners aware of the mental image of the city and help them design a more livable city, where one does not feel lost but finds one’s way. Lynch’s language tells a story about urban patterns and structure – neither about history and meaning nor about private and public spheres. Without public space there can be no ‘image of the city’, no understanding of what the place is, for whom, by whom.

Would it be possible to develop Lynch’s language further, beyond the physical 3D public space? “If the City is a text, how shall we read it?” is Joyce Carol Oates’ (1981, p. 111) straightforward question. Looking at New York from the top of the World Trade Center at the southernmost tip of Manhattan, where the twin towers used to stand, Michel de Certeau (1984, Chapter 7) puts it much more sensuously: “To what erotics of knowledge does the ecstasy of reading such a cosmos belong? Having taken a voluptuous pleasure in it, I wonder what is the source of this pleasure of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts.” Manhattan is “a text that lies before one’s eyes. It allows one to read it...” For a writer less convoluted than de Certeau, calling a city a text would be nothing more than flattery. He plays with the idea but does not read the text.

## CONCLUSIONS

The city is not about buildings but about the space in-between. That is why public space is an enormously interesting and vast topic. Numerous issues remain to be further studied, and literature to be researched. I’ve not yet gone deep enough into the writings of Habermas and many other 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers. Neither have I touched upon recent research, both in media, politics and urban studies, done in Finland and other Nordic countries. My analysis of the elements for reading cities as political text is in its infancy.

It is all too trendy to call anything ever so slightly edgy a paradigm shift. I’ll endeavour it anyway. “As the American historian of science Thomas Kuhn (1962) has shown, fundamental changes in thought (what he calls ‘paradigm shifts’) are not just driven by the accumulation of evidence and the rational response to this evidence. Wider technological, sociological and psychological factors also play a part.”(Taylor, 1998, p. 64)

It seems to me that while we can keep seeing streets, parks and market squares as the quintessential public space, we should also understand a twofold paradigm shift that has occurred: the move from the age of horse carriages and street riots to the era of virtual portals and websites, and from a purely public space to a fuzzy mix of public and private domains. It is not possible to neglect the one or the other any more, but they have to be seen as a single public space with multiple, also private layers. This is the sphere of being public, which we'll have to guard so that it remains truly accessible for all, and can be used as a platform for open dialogue and participatory decision-making processes about common goods. Reading the city as a political text would mean being able to decipher the socio-economic and power-driven characteristics of each one of these layers of public space. But a paradigm shift in the understanding of public space is needed before cities can be read as political text.

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