

# Cover page

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**Title page**

**Private-public Space in a Nordic Context: The  
Tjuvholmen Waterfront Development in Oslo**

## **Abstract**

Based primarily on an observational study, this article addresses privately owned and managed public space at the Tjuvholmen waterfront development in Oslo. To date, no other research has been published internationally on external private-public space in a Nordic context. The four factors or processes dealt with are planning and development, design, management, and, in particular, use. The main finding is that Tjuvholmen's public spaces are characterized by 'tightness' and reduced publicness. As such, they share key characteristics with private-public spaces described in the literature from the US and the UK, while they in some other respects also deviate from these.

## **Keywords**

Public space, private-public space, waterfront development, neoliberal urban governance, Norway

## **Acknowledgements**

None

## **Funding and grant-awarding bodies**

None

# Main text

## Introduction

A key feature of Western urban development in the last decades, has been the creation and regeneration of public spaces, first and foremost in the core of the cities (see e.g. Madanipour 2010). An important sub-trend within this broader current, is the proliferation in some countries of privately owned and managed external public spaces, so called private-public spaces. This trend has been particularly marked in the US and the UK, two countries which are most commonly known for having introduced neoliberal policies in the early 1980s. Since then, the growth in private-public spaces has raised broad concerns about how 'public' such spaces really are.

Today, neoliberal urban governance has gained a strong foothold also in Norway. Even though a particular type of privatized, semi-public space, i.e. the shopping center, has mushroomed as part of such a shift in urban policies, external private-public spaces proper are still quite rare in Norway, as they are in the other Nordic welfare states.<sup>1</sup> However, in later years they can be said to have emerged also in our part of the world, at least in Oslo and Norway.

The article examines one such case in Oslo, the Tjuvholmen waterfront project. This centrally located and posh neighborhood is among the first fully developed sub-areas in Oslo's so-called Fjord City development, one of the largest and most prestigious urban development projects ever in Norway. Tjuvholmen is a distinct post-industrial 'packaged landscape' (Knox 1993), characterized by mixed-use, a strong emphasis on culture, architecture and design, and lavish, high quality public spaces.

## Privatized public space in the literature

Not surprisingly, the UK and the US are the countries where private-public spaces and other forms of privatization of public space most extensively have been subject to scholarly attention and research. Particularly in the US case, the literature which partly or exclusively addresses the phenomenon is comprehensive (see e.g. Davis 1990; Sorkin 1992; Loukaitou-Sideris 1993; Zukin 1995, 2010; Lofland 1998; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Cybriwinsky 1999; Day 1999; Kayden 2000; Banerjee 2001; Flusty 2001; Mitchell 2003; Kohn 2004; Low 2006; Low and Smith 2006; Nemeth 2009).

In the US, and often as part of major regeneration schemes, policies and legislation have allowed large parts of many cities to be owned and managed by private interests (see e.g. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Kohn 2004). A distinctive feature in the US, and a major impetus for the privatization of public space, is the so called incentive zoning program, which originated in and has been particularly widespread in New York (see e.g. Whyte 1988; Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee 1998; Kayden 2000; Nemeth 2009). In exchange of being allowed to add extra floors to their buildings, developers commit themselves to provide and manage a designated external or internal public space at street level, a so called bonus space. Another common and related phenomenon in US cities are Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), which can have wide-ranging responsibilities and powers (see e.g. Zukin 1995, 2010; Kohn 2004). BIDs are delimited areas, most often in central parts of larger cities, in which businesses are required to pay an additional tax for the purpose of funding projects and providing additional services (sanitation, security, landscaping and other) that will enhance the general attractiveness of the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Another form of privatized public space that is widespread in many parts of the world, gated communities, are practically non-existent in the Nordic countries.

As for the interpretations of the privatization of public space in the US, they vary from Davis' (1990) dystopic reports on "fortress Los Angeles" and "militarization of urban space" to a few more positive reviews stressing individual experiences of safety and comfort in privatized public spaces (see e.g. Day 1999). In general, the literature is very much attuned in that public spaces in US' cities today are more highly managed and policed, and thus less public, as an effect of growing private ownership and/or private management of such spaces.

Carmona and Wunderlich (2012, 90–91) point out what can be regarded as some underlying trends behind the growing corporate privatization of public space in the US, UK and elsewhere: An increased acceptance of arguments around the potential of public spaces to enhance economic returns on property investment; greater concerns about issues of safety and security; weakened municipal capacities giving impetus to private companies to retain control over areas in their ownership and to take greater control over the publicly owned areas within which their interests are located; real estate investors increasingly being detached from the contexts in which they build.

A fierce critic of the extensive privatization of public space in the UK since the 1990s, and its damaging effects on their degree of publicness, is Minton (2006, 2009). She finds that the trend – which was initiated with the Canary Wharf development in London and thereafter spread to other parts of the UK – is very much based on ideas from the US. In many cases, the developments resulting from such public-led urban regeneration projects are owned and managed by a single private landlord. Echoing Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee's (1998) readings of the development in the US, Minton also links the diffusion of private-public spaces, as well as BIDs and other similar approaches to managing public space in the UK, to the fact that local councils increasingly are taking on an 'enabling' role, transferring the provision of many services (like public space management) to the private sector rather than undertaking them themselves.

Some scholars in the UK, though, disagree with the prevalent critique of contemporary public space. Drawing on a comprehensive study of the "multiple complex spaces of a global city" (London), Carmona and Wunderlich (2012) and Carmona (2014) claim to make a more balanced interpretation. With reference to London, they conclude that "the sorts of wholesale homogenisation, privatisation, securitisation, commercialisation, sanitisation, exclusionary and formulae-driven approaches to public space that are so criticized in the literature have proven to be largely illusory" (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012, 283). They criticize many of the contributions in the field – particularly those addressing negative consequences of the privatization of public space – for being overtly ideological, partisan and/or too weakly empirically grounded. Koch and Latham (2014, 144–145) articulate a similar critique, asserting that urban scholarship and commentary tend to evaluate issues of public space in overarching terms. On the background of different societal contexts, several scholars in the UK warn against letting critical claims based on case studies from the US frame accounts of public space transformations in UK and other European cities (Johnson and Fitzpatrick 2010; Carmona and Wunderlich 2012; Carmona 2014; Koch and Latham 2014).

Issues of external privatized public space do not seem to have been much researched outside the US and UK. Dimmer (2013) presents a number of cases of privately owned public spaces resulting from incentive zoning in cities on five continents. However, rather than a conclusive statement, the collection of essays is intended as an initial broad survey aiming at more systematic future research (ibid.: 3). An analysis of a few cases from Japan, where the phenomena is widespread, is also to be

found in Dimmer (2012). In Europa, Allen (2006) has conducted an interesting in-depth study of Berlin's Potsdamer Platz. He argues that power in the Berlin case works through a seductive logic, i.e. through the *experience* of the space itself and its *ambient* qualities, rather than through surveillance and rules imposed from above.

In the Nordic countries, hardly any rigorous, qualitative investigations of public space have been undertaken. Gehl's and his partners' many surveys of urban public life might count as exceptions (for a public life survey of Oslo, see Gehl Architects 2014). Actually, in several of his writings, Gehl highlights Tjuvholmen's neighboring area, and in many respects predecessor, Aker Brygge (e.g. Gehl 2009, 69). To him, Aker Brygge stands out as a well-working area in comparison with similar kinds of new urban developments internationally, especially because of its dense urban structure, mix of functions and many attractive public spaces. However, unlike the present study, Gehl's main focus is the physical and material conditions for so called well-functioning public spaces, where the principal success criterion seems to be the number of users.

### **The study**

Based on a qualitative approach centering on field observations, this study sets out to investigate in detail the public spaces at Tjuvholmen in Oslo. The main objective has been to explore four interrelated factors or processes of Tjuvholmen's public space production, namely planning and development, design, management, and, not the least, use. Following Carmona and Wunderlich (2012), the intention has been to combine perspectives from social science and design disciplines as well as to take into consideration the entire development process of public space.

Concerning use, the main focus is what people actually do – and do not do – in the area's public spaces. The aim is to document and discuss a major change in how public space is produced in the context of Oslo, by exploring the “routine activities, mundane objects and everyday events through which this reinvention emerges” (Koch and Latham 2014, 145).

In what follows, the empirical findings of the study will be presented and interpreted based on a perspective on urban spaces as ‘loose’ versus ‘tight’ (Franck and Stevens 2006). The findings are then situated within an international scholarly discourse on public space, and thereafter discussed in relation to some general tendencies in contemporary urban development and public space production both in Oslo and internationally.

The more specific study area includes a part of Tjuvholmen that was presented as the so called gift to the city and its inhabitants, constituting, as it did, a portion of the developer's payment to the municipality for the valuable land plot. The area mostly consists of what could be classified as ‘external urban squares’, e.g. the kind of public space that generally is expected to have the highest degree of publicness (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012, 7).

Data collection focused on detached, direct observation. It took place over a three and a half year period from late 2012 to spring 2016, most intensely in the period April – September 2013. Field observations were conducted on all days of the week and at all times of the day, but for the most part at midday and in the afternoon during weekends. In total, field observations were undertaken on approximately 70 occasions. The sessions lasted from 10–15 minutes (passing by on the way to/from other tasks) to half a day, though most often 1–2 hours. Based on an open-ended approach, the observations were recorded in the form of field notes (most often sketched in a notebook on site, and later systematized) and photographs. Secondary data (on the planning process and other background

issues) was collected through relevant published and printed books, reports, manuals, newspapers, and trusted websites.

As indicated, Franck and Stevens' (2006) conceptual dichotomy of public spaces as 'loose' versus 'tight' (and derived concepts) will be employed in the analysis. In public spaces people pursue a wide variety of activities not necessarily intended for the specific location. Sometimes, such unexpected activities play themselves out alongside more primary and intended uses. In this way, through people's more or less alternative activities, space becomes 'loose'. Accessibility, freedom of choice and physical features that users can appropriate all contribute to the emergence of a loose space. However, they are not sufficient in themselves. For a site to really become loose, people themselves must recognise the possibilities inherent in it and make use of those possibilities. So, while places can be more or less strictly designed, programmed and managed, it is people's actions that make a space loose (Franck and Stevens 2006, 2).<sup>2</sup>

In short, the focus is on "the virtues of loose space, virtues arising largely from the qualities of possibility, diversity and disorder. These qualities stand in direct opposition to qualities of public space that many people value: certainty, homogeneity and order" (Franck and Stevens 2006, 17). As Franck and Stevens state, whether a feature is perceived as positive or negative will depend on the needs of the viewer, and, not less important, upon one's assumptions about what is good about public space.

### **Tjuvholmen – a new type of public space production in the Nordic countries**

Tjuvholmen is a site of approximately 12 acres with a pronounced 'edge' location (Lynch), located as it is on a pier on the Western outskirts of downtown Oslo. While quite seamlessly connected to the neighboring waterfront development Aker Brygge (and thus to some extent also to the city core), access to Tjuvholmen from its hinterland is impeded by transport infrastructure (roads and railway) and a large, fallow port area awaiting development. In terms of public transport, Tjuvholmen is relatively well linked to the rest of the city.

#### *Planning and development*

In line with plans to convert Oslo's central harbor into mixed-use areas, what in the 1990s was coined the Fjord City, traditional functions at Tjuvholmen were abandoned and partly moved to other areas.

In 2002, a controversial so called concept competition was organized by the municipal enterprise Port of Oslo. Given willingness to pay the required amount, the consortium with the best and most creative plan would be offered to purchase and develop the area.

The general public was invited to vote for their favorite proposal, all of which were presented on the Internet and exhibited for some weeks. In the end, the city council decided in favor of one of the two proposals suggested by the jury, the one which also was the public's favorite, namely *Utsyn* ('The View'), a project promoted by a consortium of two leading property developers and well-reputed Niels Torp Architects. To what extent people's votes influenced the city council's decision, is not fully clear (Jenssen 2014). In the subsequent planning and development of the area, however, there were no more processes of community involvement. The construction work on the Tjuvholmen site commenced in

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<sup>2</sup> Planning and development are dimensions which Franck and Stevens do not address directly, but to which the authors of this article apply their approach.

2004, reaching its full completion in 2014.<sup>3</sup>

A requirement of the competition was that the area, even though it was to be privately owned, should be made available to the public. Another requirement was that one should plan for a so called signature building that potentially could attract people to the area. By taking on responsibility for developing cultural facilities and public spaces, the purchaser of the land (Tjuvholmen KS) was given a significant price reduction (approximately 50 million US dollars). However, how the cultural attraction and the public spaces were to be designed and developed, was not clearly defined. In general terms, it was stated that all public spaces should be fully financed and managed by private capital.

Several critics have argued that by way of this procedure, a new form of urban development was introduced to Norway, in which public authorities gave up all control (Jenssen 2008). However, such a kind of urban development was not completely unknown in Norway at the time. The adjacent area of Aker Brygge had also been developed, and was still owned and managed, by private interests.

Tjuvholmen was planned and developed as a mixed-use area, but in practice it has become so only to some extent. It has proven hard to attract and sustain retail activities. The area, however, established itself from the very start as one of the most prestigious and expensive neighborhoods in Oslo for housing (approximately 900 units) and offices. Moreover, there are many catering functions in the area, including a selection of *fine dining* restaurants, various private art galleries as well as a high-profile luxury hotel. A major attraction, and the main component in Tjuvholmen's self-branding as 'The Cultural Precinct' (*Kulturbydelen*), is a museum complex for contemporary art, Astrup Fearnley Museet, designed by Renzo Piano. In the summer season, another important attraction is the harbor bath. All in all, the Tjuvholmen area has become a popular tourist and recreational area. Symptomatically, the area has no public sector and a feeble civil sector presence.

### *Design*

Like Aker Brygge, Tjuvholmen is clearly inspired by classical urban forms. There is a classical structuring of public spaces, consisting of streets and squares, alleys, promenades, parks and semi-public spaces, and more open spaces along the waterfront. Partly due to huge underground parking spaces, the area is more or less completely pedestrianised, and on the whole – despite edifices up to 12 floors – it can be said to have a human scale. Tjuvholmen's master architect, Niels Torp, is inclined to compare the quarter with one of the most celebrated examples of classical urban form and design, namely Venice (Jenssen 2008).<sup>4</sup>

Around 20 architecture offices, including landscape architects, were given assignments so as to provide the area with a varied architectural appearance. Apart from Renzo Piano and his team, all of them were well-reputed Norwegian, and in two instances, Nordic offices.

The ground floors of the buildings in the core area of Tjuvholmen (i.e. the study area) consist of small to rather large entities, and a modest mix of functions. With some exceptions, the ground floor facades are active and equipped with large front windows. The facades themselves are given a clean and sober expression. To the extent that any advertising can be found in store and restaurant windows, it has a discreet and professional-looking character. Pavement boards and items on display in front of locales are rare.

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<sup>3</sup> The part which constitutes the study area was completed in 2007–2008.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed study of the production and design of the Tjuvholmen area, see Ellefsen (2016).



Much effort has been put into designing public spaces and physical environments of high quality. A range of design manuals have also been developed and put into use as guiding principles. All surfaces and all materials used are consistently of a high quality. The area is well equipped with street furniture, particularly benches, all of them similar looking. Other permanent objects, such as trash cans, smoke cans, bike racks, lamp posts and fence posts also have a unified design. Likewise, many of the sidewalk cafés and restaurants make use of similar or identical design elements. Careful attention is given to flowers and plants, and there is also a deliberate use of water, both as a structuring, and a design and decorative, element. At night, the area is lit in a soft and comfortable way. None of the design elements used at Tjuvholmen are standard elsewhere in Oslo.

All in all, Tjuvholmen is characterised by a highly coordinated and coherent aesthetic regime. A broad range of means are used to create a unified, singular and rather exclusive identity for the area.

### *Management and Use*

Compared to practically all other public spaces in Oslo, Tjuvholmen is extraordinarily tidy and clean. In periods of regular use, hardly any piece of trash was ever observed on the street, and never ever placards on facades, lampposts etc. On the topic, the former director of Tjuvholmen KS has commented in an interview: "Yes. Tjuvholmen has zero tolerance for trash. Not a single ice cream stick is allowed to devalue the buildings and the space» (Jenssen 2011, 166). Correspondingly, the general maintenance of the area is meticulous.

By Norwegian standards, the level of control and surveillance is also extensive. A private security company is responsible for daily security. Surveillance cameras abound, supposedly there are close to 200 of them (Færaas 2016), and their presence is clearly notified on signs. Monitoring of the area happens from a central control center, which seems to reduce the necessity of security guards at street level. Police officers were never observed.

The public spaces at Tjuvholmen are subject to private property rules. Restrictions and prohibitions on use are more extensive than usual in public spaces in Oslo. Tjuvholmen is clearly not an area made for political, religious or other forms of public agitation and discussion. The absence of any signs of political activity or campaigning in the weeks leading up to the national parliamentary election in 2013, and the municipal elections in 2015, is telling. Neither were activities like fundraising for humanitarian and other charitable purposes, or informal economical activities such as selling of street magazines (or other forms of street vending), begging or busking, ever observed. Particularly notable was the absence of beggars, given their ubiquitous presence elsewhere in the city (mainly Roma migrants). All such forms of activity seem to be unwelcome, and, under any circumstances, they would require a license from the owner or the management company.

Apart from sidewalk cafés and restaurants, which are very popular in the summer season, practically no other commercial activities were observed in periods of regular use. Bottle collectors were spotted on some occasions.<sup>5</sup> Sporadic commercial events include yearly food, wine and boat festivals. Some

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<sup>5</sup> Concerning categories of public space use, we distinguish between 'necessary', 'recreational', 'commercial', and 'idealistic' or 'non-profit' activities. 'Necessary' activities are tasks that are more or less imperative. 'Recreational activities' are characterized by freedom and the absence of coercion. 'Commercial activities' refer to sale, serving and anything else which purpose is to provide the individual, the employee or the company in question a profit, income or livelihood. 'Idealistic' or 'non-profit activities' include forms of use where promoting a particular message (preferably of a non-

free offers exist, like weekly architectural tours in the summer and occasional outdoor exhibitions and concerts. Overall, the few idealistic and commercial activities observed were strictly regulated and often also organised by the owners themselves, in accordance with the general profile of the area. As the heading of the main page of Tjuvholmen's official website read for quite a long time: "Tjuvholmen is not like other neighborhoods. Few things happen here without being part of a plan."

One can also find some explicit prohibitions against certain kinds of use. There are signs forbidding grilling and smoking. Until recently, there were also signs that banned skating and rollerblading in all of the area. However, and quite unexpectedly, these were removed. Even though no signs say so, sleeping overnight is not allowed. During fieldwork, none of the activities listed as forbidden were witnessed, except from occasional smokers (though not close to the prohibition signs) and some rare instances of skateboarding. After the ban was lifted, skating appears to have increased somewhat, but like before it is mostly of a non-experimental kind.

Tjuvholmen's actual user groups can be said to reflect the general profile of the area. Ethnic white people constitute the dominant group, including a good number of foreign tourists. The users' observable traits bear witness to little cultural and subcultural variation. Neither do more socially marginalised groups have any visible presence. All in all, the vast majority of users could be said to belong to what we somewhat inaccurately might call a mainstream Western middle class culture. In terms of age, most age groups were observed as users of the area, though not the very old and weakened, and, apart from the summer season, few youngsters. The majority of the users are visitors. Few regulars were observed.

Concerning categories of use, recreational activities are clearly the most dominant. Apart from on particular nice summer days, when the area attracts a lot of people both at day and night time, the range of activities are largest during weekends and public holidays. Activities observed include people sunbathing, reading, contemplating, resting, eating and drinking, enjoying the view and each other's company. Much of the time, a steady stream of people can be seen moving to and from the museum, adding to the impression of the area as a place for strolling around. This said, Tjuvholmen is not an area for consumption in terms of shopping, a fact that contributes to making the streetscape appear less vital than in most of the city's ordinary shopping areas. During the winter, like elsewhere in the Nordic countries at that time of the year, people's pauses or stays in public space are few and short-lived.

At Tjuvholmen, street furniture and other physical arrangements are almost exclusively used as intended. Generally, the use of the space is compliant and disciplined. Transgressive use was very seldom observed. All this suggests a lack of appropriation. A certain aloofness in people's physical and verbal conduct points in the same direction. Among adult users, bodily movement and activities in general seems to happen at a moderate pace and in a controlled and disciplined way. People's body language and ways of interacting have a fairly tempered character. Emotional outbursts or open quarreling were rarely or never observed. Furthermore, many users appear to approach the area with a combination of curiosity and a certain insecurity. They seem to make a pass at progressing slowly, as if they do not feel completely at home or have not yet made the area their own.

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commercial kind) to the general public is a main characteristic. The categories 'necessary' and 'recreational' activities are taken from Gehl (2010: 30–33), the other two are self-composed.

After the opening of the harbor bath, this part of Tjuvholmen appears in the summer time as a more vigorous space than the rest of the area, as well as somewhat more contested. The latter refers primarily to a specific incidence that received much local media attention. Due to complaints from residents about noisy bathers, the information sign prescribing peace and quiet after 23 PM (as is the prevailing practice in other residential areas in Oslo) was altered to ban bathing after 20 PM. The restrictions triggered strong protests from bathers and others, reflected in negative media coverages and critical comments from several local politicians. The owners gave in, and soon after the original signage was back.

### *Evaluation*

Recreational use itself indicates a certain looseness in a space (Franck and Stevens 2006, 12). At Tjuvholmen, this feature is most prevalent during the summer season and at big events. One can also find a range of individual activities that indicate looseness, such as taking a nap on the lawn, undressing for the purpose of enjoying the sun and the sea, or the expression of private feelings by way of bodily contact. The balance between female and male users, found at practically all hours, and the absence of any notable social control over women's use of the space, point in the same direction.

However, what primarily characterizes public space at Tjuvholmen is tightness. From the start, the development process was rather closed and exclusive. Except for the opportunity to vote over the initial proposals, there was no community involvement during the different stages of planning, development, and design, nor in the management of the space.

Issues of tightness reveal themselves in numerous ways. In general, a diversity of both users and uses is a key characteristic of loose space (Franck and Stevens 2006, 19). This, however, is not the case at Tjuvholmen. Unplanned and non-regulated meetings between strangers, which is a typical feature of loose space (ibid., 5), are almost non-existent. On this point, Tjuvholmen's tightness is particularly pronounced. Furthermore, the many restrictions and prohibitions that one can find in the area, also reflect a certain lack of freedom and possibilities. A part of this picture is that few opportunities exist in terms of pursuing commercial activities and satisfying economical needs. The area's tightness is also manifested in people's physical and verbal appearance as well as in the way individual activities play themselves out.

Many urban spaces possess physical and social possibilities for looseness, i.e. they can be regarded as open for appropriation. However, it is through people's actual use that such possibilities are put into life. People's belief in the freedom of public space, i.e. in what is considered to be appropriate, admissible or possible, can thus be considered an important prerequisite for the actual acting out of freedom through use (Franck and Stevens 2006, 10–11). At Tjuvholmen, people in general seem to have a limited faith in the freedom of its public spaces.

Actual prohibitions and restrictions on use, as well as the prevailing control and surveillance regime of the area, strengthen the impression of tightness. However, people's experience of limited freedom might also relate to the fact that Tjuvholmen's public spaces are characterised by a strict orderliness, which again is related to the relative homogeneity of activities and people, lack of unexpected events and actions, and the physical environment's rather posh and stern character. Strict visual order suggests control and absence of opportunities (Franck and Stevens 2006, 21–22). Another way of putting it is to say that there is a high degree of 'ambient power' (Allen 2006) at Tjuvholmen.

Tjuvholmen's physical form and general accessibility somehow misrepresent the area's actual content, by giving associations to a civil, vibrant and diverse city life. Symptomatically, Tjuvholmen was awarded a national urban development prize in 2014. In their announcement, the jury declared that the area «embraces classical ideas on what life in the city and urban qualities could and should be» (Norsk Eiendom 2014). In this way, Tjuvholmen's public spaces are characterized by what Franck & Stevens call 'apparent looseness' (2006, 24–25), as also the inquiry into how the area is used point to, although somewhat less pronounced at the end than at the start of the research period.

All in all, as the four dimensions of the analysis (planning and development, design, management, and use) show, public space at Tjuvholmen clearly has a more tight than loose character. Public spaces like those at Tjuvholmen, that are planned, designed and managed by narrow interests, are very likely to become exclusive and tight places in terms of use and use value (cf. also Madanipour 2010, 11).

## **Discussion**

To some extent, Tjuvholmen's tightness is related to its specific location in the city. The neighborhood is set in a part of central Oslo dominated by well-to-do, white middle classes. Limited transient use is one of the causes for the absence of necessary and commercial activities. Both the area's natural qualities and the presence of a major museum of contemporary art also make certain forms of urban recreation the most obvious types of use. If the area sometime in the future will become more integrated into Oslo's urban fabric (or the borders towards the nearby areas become more soft and blurred), it might spur more diverse forms of use and appropriation. If also a certain kind of physical decay will occur, thus making the surroundings appear less tight, this could further stimulate appropriation.

Yet, the conditions here mentioned are not the main reasons for Tjuvholmen's tightness. The extensive regulation of what can be considered acceptable forms of use implies that the area's inclusiveness and accessibility remain restricted, no matter if aspects of loosening also can be said to be present. Particularly striking is the social lopsidedness of the area. The absence of civil society and public sector institutions, as well as few low-threshold services and attractions, also contribute to the fairly limited variety of users and uses. Given the area's type of ownership and its general upscale profile, these are factors that unlikely will change in the near future.

Altogether, Tjuvholmen shares numerous characteristics with private-public spaces that are described in the scholarly literature from the US and UK: A strong emphasis on architecture, design and physical and visual order; a ditto focus on safe, clean and well-maintained environments; prohibitions and restrictions on use beyond what is common in public spaces that are publicly owned; a clear socio-economic bias; a limited range of users and uses; and, generally, a highly controlled and organized city life.

In accordance with Mitchell (2003), public space at Tjuvholmen can be regarded just as much as a kind of 'landscape' as a more traditional public space. The landscape metaphor indicates that order and control over the environment is prioritized at the expense of the more chaotic and disordered realities of everyday life. A landscape is a space dominated by the affluent classes, a space that cultivates the comfortable, harmonious and safe. Tjuvholmen is a space for repose and recreational consumption, untainted by overly intrusive images of work, poverty and social strife.

However, Tjuvholmen in some respects also deviates from many of the private-public spaces that are portrayed in the literature. This goes particularly for the US examples, where issues of control and sanctioning partly seem much stricter. Other common aspects of private-public spaces in the US, like physical enclosure, inward orientation and disconnection from the street, and ‘hostile architecture’ (see e.g. Davis 1990; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Low and Smith 2006; Nemeth 2009) are not represented at Tjuvholmen either.

Despite increasing in importance, external private-public spaces are still relatively uncommon in Oslo. It could thus be argued that a few spaces like Tjuvholmen and Aker Brygge make for a greater variety of public spaces and a more diverse and multifaceted city.

On the other hand, as has been argued on a more general basis (Low and Smith 2006; Carmona and Wunderlich 2012), it is to simplify matters to reduce the contemporary challenges of public space to questions of private ownership and management. For Oslo, the 1990s marked the start of a period in which the city's physical layout and appearance, reputation and competitiveness towards other cities and regions were given top priority (Sæter and Ruud 2005). Not the least, this is evident in the municipal plans for other parts of the Fjord City, and above all, Bjørvika, Oslo's new showcase to the outside world. According to Aspen (2013) and Aspen and Pløger (2015), these plans are largely based on conventional notions of urban surroundings, city life and urban environments, what they coin ‘zombie urbanism’, adapted to very specific user groups, primarily tourists and a culturally interested middle class (for a similar critique, see Bergsli 2015).

It is entirely legitimate and mostly desirable for planners and developers to strive for high quality in the physical environment. The challenge arises when too much priority is given to issues of physical form, aesthetics and programming of functions, at the neglect of for instance more general social concerns, and when nearly all important aspects of public space qualities are treated as if they can be designed and planned for. Especially problematic are the attempts at regulating out and removing specific user groups from public space. Several measures adopted by public authorities in Norway in recent years point in such a direction, like the collective removal of drug addicts from the area around Oslo Central Station, the general ban on outdoor sleeping in Oslo, and the government’s proposed ban on begging (which, as it turned out, did not gain enough support; it will therefore be up to municipalities themselves to decide, not a national ban).

This tendency is probably more marked in many other Western countries than in Norway. The US case is perhaps a bit extreme, due partly to fierce state repression in public space following 9/11 (see e.g. Mitchell 2003; Low and Smith 2006). But tough measures on ‘anti-social’ activities in public space, like begging and street drinking, rough sleeping, skating and other youth activities, have also been well documented in the UK (see e.g. Toon 2000; Atkinson 2003; Rogers and Coaffee 2005; Johnson and Fitzpatrick 2010; Woolley, Hazelwood and Simkins 2011). According to Smith (1996), such measures form part of a larger picture where “public policy and the private market are conspiring against minorities, working people, the poor, and the homeless as never before”.<sup>6</sup> Gentrification has, Smith asserts, typically become part of a policy of revenge, hence his notion of the ‘revanchist city’. Some scholars endeavor to nuance the picture, like Johnson and Fitzpatrick (2010), who argue that at least in the UK there is an element of ‘coercive care’ on behalf of the public sector with respect to many of these measures.

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<sup>6</sup> Smith (1996, Publisher's Note, unpaginated)

Without ignoring the latter kinds of argument, it seems that the real issue at stake is not whether public space is privately or publicly owned and managed, but the spaces in question's actual degree of publicness (De Magalhães 2010; Carmona and Wunderlich 2012; Langstraat and Van Melik 2013; Carmona 2014). Carmona and Wunderlich (2012, 285–286) argue for the adoption of a simple *Charter for Public Space Rights and Responsibilities*. Such a charter should secure a high degree of publicness, and would apply to all spaces that a reasonable person would consider as public, whether privately or publicly owned and managed.

Nevertheless, there are still some principally important differences between publicly and privately owned public spaces. Like bonus space owners in the US (Nemeth 2009, 2480), Tjuvholmen's owners have the *a priori* right to exclude anyone they would like to from their property. Admittedly, the municipal regulation of the area for public purposes assigns everyone the right to use the space. But, rules and regulations to govern user activities are largely left to the owners and managers themselves to decide and carry out. This is what makes Tjuvholmen's stricter regulations of use than what is the case for publicly owned public spaces in Norway possible. .

Furthermore, also where similar kinds of management approaches exist in both publicly and privately owned public spaces, regulations established by municipal planning departments are more accountable to rigorous public processes and oversight (Nemeth 2009, 2481). Therefore, ideally speaking, private-public space should be covered by the same regulation of use as publicly owned public space.

Whether publicly or privately owned and managed, it is people's use that ultimately determines the character of public spaces. Use can never be fully controlled and managed. Moreover, the incidence at Tjuvholmen's harbor bath illustrates that both practices of unforeseen use and protests can challenge and modify existing restrictions and prohibitions. A loosening can also be initiated by the owner of the space, like the mentioned removal of the ban on skating and rollerblading demonstrates. All in all, the extent to which Tjuvholmen's public spaces will represent a democratic challenge in the future, will depend both on how the spaces themselves as well as Oslo's other public spaces actually will evolve.

## **Conclusion**

### *Summary*

The empirical material clearly demonstrates that the Tjuvholmen neighborhood in Oslo can be considered a tight public space. Key characteristics are a closed planning and development process; physical and visual strictness and orderliness; widespread prohibitions and restrictions on use; extensive surveillance and control; lack of diversity in terms of uses and users; and, a certain tightness in people's physical and verbal conduct. As such, it shares many characteristics with private-public spaces described in scholarly literature from the US and UK. At the same time, there are some important differences, especially compared to the US, though this seems to be more a matter of degree than of kind. Many of Tjuvholmen's characteristics reflect some more general tendencies in Oslo and beyond, closely linked to the advent of entrepreneurial urban policies.

### *Contributions to the field*

This study contributes to the scholarly literature and debates on public space in several ways. Firstly, it documents some important features of a full-blown external private-public space in a Nordic context.

No other research has yet been conducted on this subject (in fact, very few in-depth qualitative studies of public space have been undertaken in the Nordic countries).

Secondly, the study nuances the ‘international formula’ criticism. While the planning, development, design and management of Tjuvholmen’s public spaces obviously are based on global models, these spaces also reflect local conditions which distinguish them from their international – especially US – counterparts. As such, they are telling examples of ‘glocalization’, the adaptation of global models to local contexts.

And thirdly, based on an in-depth, prolonged fieldwork as it is, the present study looks in detail at the actual use and management of a private-public space over a certain period of time. This has rarely been done before. What has been documented in the article is a slight loosening process over time, probably mostly due to the fact that the space under scrutiny is relatively new.

#### *Limitations and future research*

A limitation of the present study is that it leaves out user perceptions. In an evaluation commissioned by Tjuvholmen’s owners, focusing on public spaces, 92% of the users interviewed reported to be content or very content with the area (Skaufel 2014). Though it might not surprise that most users that actively seek out a public space find it attractive, it would still be valuable to explore the reasons why, as well as the meanings people ascribe to the area. On the other hand, an account of user perceptions could also have made possible more substantial claims about ‘ambient qualities’ (Allen 2006) at Tjuvholmen. An important aspect of this has to do with the extent to which power factors that impact upon people’s use could be said to work through more sensory and bodily *experiences* of the space itself, as much as through surveillance and rules imposed from above. While it has been argued that Tjuvholmen’s ‘ambient qualities’ are reflected in actual patterns of use, addressing user perceptions could have provided us with a finer and more nuanced picture, though many of the forces at play probably operate at a more unconscious level. There are many claims about subtle mechanisms of exclusion in posh areas. but detailed empirical investigations are needed. In this study, however, the scope has consciously been limited to observations of the physical context, the management of the space and peoples’ use.

#### *Policy relevance*

A lesson that could be learned from the study, is that private-public spaces like those at Tjuvholmen should be subject to more detailed public regulation. A general ‘regulation for public purposes’, which is what Oslo’s politicians and planners relied on as sufficient in this case, seems not to have been enough to secure a high degree of publicness. Thus, if more public spaces of the city are to be owned and managed by private interests in the future, local policy-makers and planners should ensure that the regulations of use are in accordance, perhaps even identical, with those drawn up by democratically elected organs and valid for the city’s other public spaces.

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