



Sverre Bjerkeset

HELLO, STRANGER?

Urban public space between interaction and attraction

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PREFACE

Exhausted by my long-held university position as an international relations officer and tempted by the prospect of combining my social anthropology background with a strong interest in urban issues, some years ago I commenced a part-time Master's degree in urbanism. Later on, I embarked on doctoral research at the same institution. This dissertation on everyday urban activities and interactions is the result of that research.

Life as I have known it for the last four years or so has come to an end. They have been years of early mornings and long hours, of occasional frustration and fatigue, of life taking sudden turns, not only for the better. But foremost, these years have been full of pleasure and reward, of feeling privileged to have been given the chance to delve into a topic of my own interest and choosing. For this, I owe thanks to many.

Thanks to my academic mentors, my supervisors, first of all. To Professor Jonny Aspen for his critical feedback, support and companionship throughout the entire process, for his attention both to detail and overview, and for a co-authorship from which I have learned a lot. To Professor Setha M. Low for taking me on despite her packed agenda, for letting me benefit from all her experience and expertise, for her enthusiasm, inspiration and to-the-point comments. And to Associate Professor Erling Dokk Holm for his encouragement and helpful input in the last phase of the work. In the same vein, to the reader, Professor Karen A. Franck, for her many suggestions to improve both this text and two of the accompanying articles.

To the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO), thanks for giving me the opportunity to pursue my research, to the institute leadership – Marianne Skjulhaug, Lisbet Harboe and Peter Hemmersam – for continued support and the chance also to teach, and to AHO's research school and library and IT services for excellent advice and assistance.

Thanks to Guillermo for inspiring company on countless wanderings of *porteño* streets, to Helene and Thomas P. for lending me their lovely summer house in Øyenkilen for periodic writing retreats, to Baard and Thomas E. for valuable remarks to the manuscript, and to Tu-Uyen for professional help putting together the text.

To Wenche, thanks for her love and moral support and for allowing me time and space to put in some extra work when needed, and to Idun, Åsta and Even for inspiration to keep going and get it all done.

Not to forget: A thank-you to all those nameless individuals of the city who, by conducting their daily affairs, and some also by sharing their thoughts, provided the material upon which this work rests.

Oslo, January 2021
Sverre Bjerkeset

ABSTRACT

A much-celebrated feature of urbanity, is peaceful face-to-face interaction among diverse strangers in public spaces. Such interaction has major civilizing effects, leading urban scholars argue. The rise in privately owned and tightly managed public spaces, tending to displace people, activities and exchanges that may discomfort target groups, has thus raised broad concerns. However, how such ‘new’ public spaces more specifically differ from ‘traditional’ ones in terms of interaction among strangers, has rarely been carefully examined.

This dissertation is concerned with contemporary urban public space and its uses and interactions. It examines the forms and frequency of peaceful, spontaneous face-to-face interactions among strangers in two contrasting ideal types of public space, ‘traditional’ and ‘new’. Three subordinate questions, dealt with in the dissertation’s four articles, guide the study: How can the diverse uses of public space be comprehensively categorized? What are the underlying circumstances that encourage or license peaceful chance interactions among strangers in public space? Additionally, more specific to one of the sites in question, what are the key – mainly use-related – characteristics of a ‘new’ public space in a Nordic context?

Primarily, the conducted field study draws on long-term close observation of everyday activities and encounters in selected public spaces – squares and adjacent spaces – in dense mixed-use areas of Oslo, Norway. The two main sites, representing respectively ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space, are set in starkly contrasting settings: One in a multicultural and partly gentrified low and middle-income neighbourhood (Grønland); the other in an up-market privately owned and managed waterfront district (Tjuvholmen). In addition, the study makes use of reference material from Argentina, mainly from Buenos Aires.

The investigation reveals that the form and amount of interaction among strangers differ strongly between the two sites. In the one case, interaction plays out on a regularized, recurrent basis. In the other, it does so in the form of more infrequent, episodic exchanges. Largely, this difference is due to the presence or absence of underlying circumstances that prompt or authorize interactions among strangers. In this analysis, the dissertation

makes use of and expands on some of pioneer sociologist Erving Goffman's lesser-known insights, that is, circumstances which expose people to contact with others, spur or license people to approach others, and open up to mutual accessibility. A close reading of the international scholarly literature indicate that these findings have a broader, more general significance with respect to 'traditional' and 'new' public space.

A key contribution of the study to research and debates on public space is the documentation and systematization of basic mechanisms that account for the often-reported differences in chance interactions between strangers in two contrasting types of public space. Thus, the study demonstrates how minor manifestations in public space reflect a fundamental shift in urban governance and planning. In this shift, attractiveness in the physical and social environment takes centre stage in prestigious urban developments at the expense of the disordered exchanges of everyday life.

One might say, as a general rule, that acquainted persons in a social situation require a reason not to enter into a face engagement with each other, while unacquainted persons require a reason to do so.

(Erving Goffman, *Behaviour in Public Places*, 1966 [1963]: 124)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A QUINTESSENTIAL URBAN RELATION UNDER STRAIN

A political activist attempts, more or less successfully, to make contact with passers-by; bystanders to a street performance exchange glances and smiles; two strangers resting on a park bench start chatting.

Cities are meeting places. Places where a diversity of people come together for a diversity of activities. This coming together of people mostly unknown to each other unfolds not the least in the city's outdoor public spaces, in its streets, squares, parks. Considered the most accessible and inclusive spaces of the city, outdoor public spaces are assumed to accommodate all kinds of people and activities. Although mere co-presence is the order of the day, the city's strangers customarily also interact more directly with one another in public space. Broad concerns have thus been raised over the increase in privately owned and tightly managed public spaces in recent decades. Urban scholars argue that, in keeping with the attractiveness focus of the neoliberal city, such public spaces tend to displace people, activities and exchanges that may discomfort target groups. However, how such spaces more specifically distinguish themselves from more ordinary public spaces in regards to interactions among strangers have rarely been carefully examined.

This dissertation is concerned with contemporary urban outdoor public space and its uses and interactions. It *examines the forms and frequency of peaceful, spontaneous face-to-face interactions among strangers in two contrasting types of public space, 'traditional' and 'new'*. For now, it suffices to note that, as ideal types, 'traditional' public space is publicly owned and variously but mostly publicly managed, while 'new' public space is privately owned and managed. Central to the examination are activities that occur in public space: Essentially, it is through the activities that people pursue in public space that they engage in face-to-face contact with unknown others. Such interactions range from subtle negotiations when people pass each other on the street to prolonged conversations. For the most part, they are quite fleeting and short-lived. Still, I contend that chance

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interaction among strangers provides an advantageous lens through which to examine key issues of contemporary public space, such as accessibility and publicness.

Historically, celebrations of urban civility and encounters have co-existed with deep anxieties about the incivility and disorder of urban life (e.g., Wilson, 1992; Fyfe et al., 2006: 854; Watson, 2006: 1–18). In contemporary Western urban settings, negative, disrespectful encounters may manifest as ‘low-level incivilities’ (Phillips and Smith, 2006) that many people experience in daily life – being bumped into, pushed, subject to bad language or prejudicial comments, and so on. They could also be more grave offences, like bullying, harassment and violence. Although boundaries between civility and incivility are often blurred, such negative forms of contact are not the focus of this dissertation. Nor are the more concrete ways in which interpersonal differences are negotiated and performed through encounters in public space.

My interest in the dissertation’s main topic of inquiry arose during a now completed thesis investigation.¹ I was intrigued by the disparity between two inner-city public spaces in Oslo, Norway, in terms of number and types of strangers’ interactions. One was set in a multicultural and partly gentrified low- and middle-income neighbourhood; the other in an upscale privately owned and managed waterfront district. Differences in urban context, management regimes, and overall neighbourhood profiles were clearly significant. However, I soon realized that a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that make strangers spontaneously interact – or not – in public space, required a more comprehensive study.

Beyond my own interests, sociability in public merits attention for diverse reasons. Commonly, the city as well as urbanity or cityness as such are defined in terms of strangers and their relations. In his classic account of urbanism, ‘Urbanism as a way of life’, Louis Wirth (1938) portrayed the contacts of the city as anonymous, impersonal and transitory – simply put, as between individuals who are strangers to each other. In the words of Lyn Lofland (2009 [1998]: xi), the city ‘provides, on an important basis, an

¹ Executive master’s thesis in urbanism at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (2014).

environment composed importantly of persons who are personally unknown to one another'. Perhaps as a consequence of this constant exposure to unknown others, ease in the company of strangers has for centuries been associated with living in a city (Sennett, 2019: 142).

There is a long record of claims about the positive interpersonal and civic effects of contact between the city's strangers. More than any other contemporary urban scholar, Richard Sennett (e.g., 1992 [1977]; 2019; Sendra and Sennett, 2020) has stressed the value of impersonal encounters in public. Such contact, he contends, has the potential to teach citizens that 'men can act together without the compulsion to be the same' (Sennett, 1992: 255). According to Young (2011 [1990]: 236–241), chance encounters in public space allows one to see people dissimilar to oneself and enables a better understanding of different groups and cultures. For Bauman (2003: 38), in cities, strangers meet as individual human beings, observe each other close-up, talk to each other, learn each other's ways, negotiate the rules of life in common and get used to each other's presence, thereby potentially reducing the anxiety and fear that strangers induce.² Sunstein (2018) similarly applauds such assertions, for slightly different reasons. As the Internet grows more sophisticated and social media divide us into echo chambers that amplify our views, creating new threats to democracy, exposure to difference and random encounters on city streets may help counterbalance this. For David Harvey, the coming together of citizens in political action and strife is pivotal to public space. Recent movements such as Occupy Wall Street and those centred on Tahrir Square in Cairo show 'us that the collective of bodies in public space is still the most effective instrument of opposition when all other means of access are blocked' (Harvey, 2012: 161–162). Then there is the issue of personal well-being. Supposedly, even passing connections can make a difference to how lonely or otherwise we might feel; micro-interactions in public (of 30 seconds) have shown to have a quantifiable effect on a person's well-being (Sandstrom and Dunn, 2014, as cited in Hertz, 2020: 62–63). This

² It is uncertain, though, whether urban *tolerance* will result from mere co-presence or chance contact. Tolerance requires nurturing through meaningful and purposeful social interaction and collective activity (e.g., Valentine, 2008; Bannister and Kearns, 2013).

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phenomenon illustrates what Granovetter (1973) called the ‘strength of weak ties’ in a seminal article.³

Based on arguments like these, a significant rationale for the extensive upgrading and construction of new public spaces in cities worldwide is to create spatial arenas for inhabitants to gather and interact. Other justifications range from issues of inclusion, local democracy, and public health, to ones of marketing and urban branding. The renewed interest in public space is also reflected in the United Nations’ *New Urban Agenda* (2016). The Nordic countries are no exception to this trend. There is a strong emphasis on public space and urban life both in major transformation schemes and in redevelopment projects in more established parts of the city.

The research that ensued from my pondering how much public spaces may vary was conducted by way of a field study. Primarily, the investigation drew on long-term close observation of everyday uses and interactions in a selection of public spaces – squares and adjacent streets, promenades or parks – in dense mixed-use areas of Oslo. The two sites revisited most often, upon which the teasing out of interactional differences between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public spaces are based, are the two referred to, set respectively in the Grønland and Tjuvholmen neighbourhoods. Additionally, I make use of reference material from Argentina, mainly from Buenos Aires. Twenty-five years ago, I did 12 months of urban ethnographic research in the country and have since visited it regularly.

Further to the overall focus of the research, the study was guided by three subordinate questions addressed in the four articles: Starting with a site-specific question, what are the key characteristics of the planning and development, design, management, and, in particular, the use, of a ‘new’, private-public space in a Nordic context? (article 1). How can the diverse uses of public space be comprehensively categorized? (articles 2 and 3).

³ Urban loneliness is said to be on the rise in cities around the world, causing damage to health (e.g. Hertz, 2020). An important aspect of isolation in cities is that urbanites live alone to an increasing extent. In European cities like Regensburg, Munich and Paris, about half of all residents live alone, according to a census from 2011. The highest proportion of single-person households recorded in this census, however, was in Oslo (52.9 %) (Eurostat, 2020).

What are the underlying circumstances that encourage or license peaceful chance interactions among strangers in public space? (article 4).

A central contribution of the dissertation is the documentation of underlying circumstances that affect the differing frequency and modes of chance interaction among strangers in two contrasting types of public space, ‘traditional’ and ‘new’. These circumstances, generally present in the first case, far less frequent in the second, prompt or authorize strangers to interact in public. While the writings of urban scholars provide evocative descriptions of the interactional differences between these two types of public space, they tend to be rather unclear as to specifics. How does the diversity of uses and people in public space more precisely impact the frequency and modes of such interaction? What is the role of regulars and marginal groups? Which activity types are most often curbed in ‘new’ public space, and for what reasons? Might the displacement of discomfiting activities and people from such spaces have any unintended consequences for spontaneous exchanges among like-minded target group users of the same spaces? Does a space’s upscale profile and location in the urban structure influence the incidence of chance interactions? This study attempts to answer such questions by a close reading of the scholarly literature and by investigating in detail how some of Oslo’s contrasting public spaces are put to use.⁴

This dissertation The dissertation at hand consists of a synopsis, containing seven chapters, and four articles.

Following this introductory chapter, chapter 2 provides a contextual background for what is to come. It gives an international and national perspective on the rise of a new urban governance regime and the so-called entrepreneurial city, as well as a brief general overview of Oslo and Norway.

⁴ The second part of the dissertation title is inspired by the title of a book chapter by Ali Madanipour (2020): ‘A critique of public space: Between interaction and attraction’. In the chapter, Madanipour argues that as public authorities have become more entrepreneurial, their approaches to public space have also changed. The rhetoric of public space as a space of civic interaction continues to be used, but increasingly as an instrument to attract attention and investment.

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Chapter 3 reviews the scholarly literature pertaining chiefly to the dissertation's main research focus, that is, literature which broadly address activities and social interactions in public space, which critique 'new' public space, or which compare 'traditional' and 'new' public spaces in terms of activities and interactions. It also briefly touches upon the literature pertaining to the subtopics.

Chapter 4 deals with the 'how' of the investigation. The chapter lays out the analytical perspective applied to explore interaction between strangers, Goffman's treatise of '[e]ngagements among the unacquainted', and presents central concepts and definitions. It describes the research process, the overall research approach and the study settings. It further presents the data collection methods, introduces and discusses the data sources and makes clear how the data was analysed. Finally, it addresses issues pertaining to the quality of the investigation as well as some ethical, bureaucratic and legal concerns.

Chapter 5 summarizes the dissertation's four articles, concentrating on the findings and outcomes of most relevance to the main investigative focus of the dissertation.

The penultimate chapter 6 documents and discusses how the depicted shift in urban governance manifests on the ground. More specifically, it shows how it manifests in chance interactions among strangers in public space. It takes as its point of departure the 'traditional' and 'new' public space of the study, Grønland and Tjuvholmen, concluding by proposing the most important underlying features that distinguish these two types of public space from each other with respect to such interaction. In so doing, the chapter synthesizes the findings and outcomes of the study, taking into consideration the four articles and the reviewed literature. It illuminates the empirical, methodological, and, in particular, theoretical or conceptual contributions of the investigation.

Chapter 7 summarizes the dissertation's main findings and contributions. It concludes that the demise or absence of 'reasons to interact' account for limited chance interactions among strangers in 'new' public spaces. Limitations of the research are touched upon, as well as ideas for future

research. The dissertation ends by considering the practice and policy relevance of the investigation.⁵

⁵ All images in the text are my own unless otherwise stated.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS THE ENTREPRENEURIAL CITY

In order to understand the uses and interactions that unfold in public spaces today, one must take into consideration the social and political context of these spaces. Otherwise stated: To put the present study into its proper context, some overall issues must be addressed. This chapter first looks at the rise of the entrepreneurial city in the 1980s in the form of transition from Keynesianism to neoliberal political forms of organization. Next, it gives a brief account of Oslo and Norway, followed by a description of how the new urban politics and the entrepreneurial city manifested on the local scene.

Inter-urban competition and the quest for attractiveness

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a number of scholars outlined the emergence of a new type of Western city (e.g., Soja, 1989; Davis, 1990; Zukin, 1991; Sorkin, 1992). According to Hall and Hubbard (1998), these scholars depicted a post-industrial, post-modern metropolis dramatically different from its predecessors. Among its characteristics are a revitalized city centre of sleek offices and secure privatized shopping malls surrounded by elite enclaves, fragmented neighbourhoods and ‘edge’ cities; striking new urban forms such as waterfront developments, heritage centres and out-of-town retail parks; and a city dividing and separating populations more than before along class, race and sexual lines. Concurrently, urban theorists and researchers note that these changes are being accompanied by a shift in how cities are run. Policies pursued by local governments are being steered away from the traditional activities associated with the city state, towards more business-like manners of governing them (Hall and Hubbard, 1998: 1–2). In an influential text, Harvey (1989) described this transformation in urban governance as a shift ‘from managerialism to entrepreneurialism’. The depictions of a ‘new city’ in Hall and Hubbard are undoubtedly biased towards a new American city. Still, they capture some key features of the development of Western cities at large, including bigger cities of small Nordic welfare states, not the least in terms of the shift in urban governance as laid out by Harvey. The common backdrop is large-scale processes of de-industrialisation, globalization and entrepreneurial urban politics.

A regulatory mechanism of world capitalism had operated from the end of the Great Depression in the late 1930s, to the late 1960s. The name given to it was the Keynesian state or Keynesianism. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, the American response to the depression, is often considered as the first practical application of Keynesian economics. During the period of Keynesianism, the old mechanisms which had always regulated the economy were replaced by new ones. The *laissez-faire* belief that markets will automatically bring about necessary adjustments came to be seen as inadequate to the new situation. In its place came economics with an emphasis on the role of the state in managing the economy, and politics aimed at comprehensive and universal welfare for citizens (e.g., Hall, 1989).

With the advent of neoliberalism, the pendulum swung back. Peck and Tickell (2007) depict neoliberalism as a distinct form of political-economic philosophy with roots in classical liberalism that took meaningful form for the first time in the 1970s, spurred by a worldwide economic crisis. Its main characteristics were the focus on market expansion and market-like forms of governance and management and control in nearly all societal sectors. The state and public planning overall had fallen into disrepute. Among other things, the new repertoire of neoliberal governmental practices included privatization, selective deregulation, outsourcing and new public management, the purpose and consequence of which was downscaling and restructuring of the state and the public sector. That is to say, not of the state as such, but of a particular type of state. In most Western capitalist countries, these practices involved a powerful attack on and cuts in diverse variants of a Keynesian welfare state. In particular, Great Britain under Margaret Thatcher and the United States under Ronald Reagan are associated with this type of a neoliberal political regime (Peck and Tickells, 2007).

About the same time, economic globalization brought about an urban transition from industrial society to a 'knowledge and experience economy'. As portrayed by Harvey (e.g., 1989), it implied, among other things, that the service, culture and knowledge sectors became far more important than before. The extensive deregulation of the economy and labour market was followed by a strengthened focus on profit, efficiency and economic growth. Urban governance became increasingly preoccupied with the exploration of

new ways to foster and encourage local development and a rise in employment. An entrepreneurial stance of this sort contrasted with managerial practices of earlier decades, which mainly focused on the local provision of services, facilities and benefits to urban populations. This shift in urban governance also entailed greater complexity in urban planning and development. A major reason was the larger entrepreneurial factor in the form of, among other things, less government control and increased involvement of public-private cooperation. Urban planning in the entrepreneurial city went from an ideal of rational, comprehensive large-scale planning with a social profile, to becoming much more piecemeal and project-focused (Harvey, 1989).

Real estate development now plays a more important role than previously in the development of cities. Admittedly, for-profit schemes have for long been a driver in urban development. Haussmann's transformation of central Paris is but one well-known example (e.g., Harvey, 2012: 7–8). Such a drive for profit has defined North American cities, with their 'speculative impulses so basic to American urbanism' (Peterson, 2003, as cited in Ellefsen, 2017: 31). However, the entrepreneurial turn in urban governance has inspired a strong accentuation of such mechanisms (e.g., Sager, 2011; Madanipour, 2020). Property development provides the physical platform and becomes a prime catalyst for urban regeneration, making real estate and property developers lead players in urban development. Property-led regeneration becomes less an alternative to development by the private sector than a call for extended private-public co-operation. Property-led initiatives are seen to facilitate economic development and enhance urban competitiveness (Sager, 2011: 171–172). At the same time, real estate has become a lucrative, prime source of investment, of financial speculation. For critical-historical scholars, property development is no longer primarily a means of urban development: It has become its purpose, a system of capitalist accumulation and class exploitation which calls for an urban revolution (e.g., Harvey, 2012; Mitchell, 2020).

In this new urban planning and development regime, there is a new emphasis on aesthetics and design; a certain shift from urban planning to urban design takes place. Key features are the aestheticization of select areas and an emphasis on spectacular urban forms, allegedly representing a

prioritization of ‘medium over message and image over substance’ (Harvey, 1989: 13). In the national and global urban competition for capital, labour, and tourists, ‘attractiveness’ becomes a new buzzword (e.g., Gleeson, 2014). Attractiveness in the physical and social urban landscape, but also in the form of innovative environments and new economic activities, knowledge institutions, arts and culture. Thus ‘the creative city’ (e.g., Landry, 2002; Pratt, 2010) is one of the forms the neoliberal city may take, and hence the importance of facilitating for and appealing to ‘the creative class’, who supposedly will help realize such a city (Florida, 2002).

Plots of land that industry and port enterprises abandon become core areas in these new, prestigious and symbolically charged urban landscapes. In terms of form and buildings, they are characterized by a mixture of lavish, contemporary architecture and design on the one hand and cultural heritage in the form of refurbished historical buildings and constructions on the other (e.g., Gospodini, 2006). Often, they include flagship institutions, preferably iconic cultural buildings.

The most emblematic of such developments are the project-based, privately developed, owned and managed precincts that now can be found along waterfronts in many port cities. Battery Park City and Hudson Yards in New York, London’s Canary Wharf and Battersea Power Station, Victoria & Alfred Waterfront in Cape Town. The list of early and more recent post-industrial waterfront redevelopments, including ones in which the public spaces mostly are in public ownership, is extensive. Conceived in the early



Where it all started. Baltimore's Inner Harbor. Source: Google Earth (2020).



Harbour promenade, Baltimore's Inner Harbor. Source: www.tclf.org (2018).

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1970s, Baltimore's Inner Harbor later provided a model that was actively branded and sold as a development concept around the world (Ward, 2006). In particular, this and a few similar waterfront revitalization projects in the US were innovative as programs, as models of functional mix and 'cultural urbanism'. Regular office, business and housing purposes were mixed with cultural programs, leisure-oriented schemes and 'events'. Such areas were marketed and sold as festive urban marketplaces. The business concept revolved around creating urban attractiveness in order to increase price levels, and as such illustrates the essence of a real estate development logic (Boyer, 1992; Ward, 2006; Ellefsen, 2013: 20).

Nordic tendencies: Oslo/Norway

Norway is a small, affluent country on the northern rim of Europe. Many factors set it apart from its Nordic neighbours as well as the rest of Europe. Its rise to great riches since the 1970s, for instance, due in large part to vast revenues from oil and gas production. At the same time, cities and urban life in Norway and Northern Europe are undergoing changes similar to those in other regions of the world in the early 21st century.

Oslo/Norway A classical Nordic welfare state, Norway is considered to be among the world's richest, safest and most democratic countries. Of its approximately 5.4 million inhabitants, close to 700,000 reside in Oslo. While the country by international standards has a homogeneous population, this is less the case for its capital city. Oslo has a substantial immigrant population (immigrants and Norwegians born to immigrant parents), accounting for 33.3% of its total population, the majority of which have a non-Western background. Pakistanis make up the single largest immigrant group, followed by Swedes, Somalis and Poles (Statistics Bank of Oslo, 2020). Despite the country's egalitarian tradition, its 'Scandinavian egalitarian ethos', Oslo is a segregated city in socioeconomic and ethnic terms (e.g., Ljunggren et al., 2017). Overall, this segregation still follows a clear geographical divide: the Aker River cuts the city into the prosperous west side and the less-so east side.

As a consequence of weather conditions, urban life in the Nordic countries varies strongly across seasons. Summer makes for the most favourable conditions for outdoor activities, and there are more people in public space

than during the rest of the year. Generally, moods are up, one talks of ‘summer joy’, people move at a slower pace, and those who stay in public space, do so for longer periods of time, often until late, as days are long.

Local entrepreneurialism In the Nordic countries, a comprehensive version of the Keynesian welfare model evolved in the post-war period. Commonly, it is referred to as the Nordic, Scandinavian or social democratic welfare state. As a political governing paradigm in Norway, neoliberalism is linked to the Conservative party government that took office in 1981, the beginning (Christensen, 2006) or the apex (Annaniassen, 2002) of the so-called right-wing wave in national politics. An overarching goal was a more open society, characterized by less public intervention, more on the market's premises. Central characteristics were less detailed public management and regulation; a main concern was deregulation. New Public Management reforms were introduced. The climate for such reforms had gradually improved, with the Labour Party's right-wing turn in management policies from the 1980's and increased pressure from international bodies such as the OECD (Christensen, 2006: 24).

In line with its strong welfare-state traditions, the public sector has maintained a strong position through shifting political coalitions in power. Still, neoliberalism as a governing rationality has had a strong impact in Norway at large (e.g., Vetlesen, 2011; Innset, 2020). Among other things, local authorities and the public sector have increasingly been taking on an ‘enabling role’, guiding the provision of services through the private sector rather than undertaking them themselves. The ‘market turn’ has not necessarily made the state less important. Rather, it is the state that has been the driving force behind the creation of new markets, ensuring Norwegian society's adaption to a competitive global economy (Innset, 2020).

The market turn is also evident in urban policy, planning and development. The effects of the neoliberal shift for urban development were probably more marked in Norway than in most other European countries (Ellefsen, 2013), partly because the country had been so thoroughly regulated, partly because neoliberalism in Norway was implemented in a very consistent

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way, and partly because the country got so rich, and, not the least important in this respect, developed a huge and powerful middle class with self-interest in the rise in housing and real estate values (Ellefsen, 2013: 18). In addition, many public agencies, especially within the infrastructural sector, haven taken on the role as real estate developers, acting just as private developers.

Neoliberal urban policy had a profound effect both on urban development as such and on how planning and production of the physical surroundings were carried out. Planning assumed a different role than before; the overall planning regime gave way to more fragmented, project-based planning (Ellefsen, 1999; Børrud og Røsnes, 2016). The role of public authorities shifted to one of controlling and occasionally encouraging projects (Ellefsen, 2013). Profit-driven real estate development governed urban transformation projects, whether under the auspices of private or publicly owned entities. This profit-driven logic determined the programs, in practice, what, when and often also where to build. Generally speaking, Norway opened up for market and network-based governance more than its neighbouring countries (Ellefsen, 2013: 18–19).

In the same period, parts of Oslo have undergone an ‘urban renaissance’. Downtown and adjacent central districts have become more attractive for housing, work and leisure, particularly so for a growing middle class. Former working-class districts are being gentrified, while old industrial and port plots are being transformed into residential and mixed-use neighbourhoods, often of more exclusive kinds. Previously inaccessible areas along the waterfront are becoming available on a large scale as public spaces. In the post-industrial era, city harbour fronts have again become important recreational arenas.



Aker Brygge and Tjuvholmen. Source: Agency for Planning and Building Services, City of Oslo/Mapaid (2014).



Harbour promenade, Aker Brygge, Oslo. June, 2019.

As a matter of fact, among the first projects to be informed and inspired by the Baltimore model of waterfront redevelopment was Oslo's Aker Brygge ('Aker Harbour') (Ellefsen, 2017: 101–108). Here construction work started in 1984. The more recent extension of Aker Brygge, Tjuvholmen, constitutes one of the two main sites of the present investigation. Outdoor private-public spaces proper such as those in these two privately developed, owned and managed precincts are still quite rare in Norway, as they are in the other Nordic welfare states.⁶ However, as part of the depicted shift in urban policy, they have emerged also in our part of the world, at least in Oslo. For Oslo at large, the 1990s marked the start of a period in which the city's physical layout and appearance, reputation and competitiveness with other cities and regions were given high priority (Sæter and Ruud, 2005; Bergsli, 2015). Not the least, this is evident in the municipal plans for the Fjord City, of which Aker Brygge and Tjuvholmen form a part. The Fjord City is one of the largest and most prestigious urban development projects in the country's history. Its core area, Bjørvika, is branded as the capital's new showcase to the outside world. Former harbour land is being converted into mixed-use, up-market neighbourhoods dominated by lavish and representative public spaces and prestigious cultural institutions, realized

⁶ Of greater concern in this respect is the limited publicness of a pseudo-urban environment in which locals spend much of their time, namely the private shopping centre. No other country has as many shopping centers per capita; in 2014, about one third of all retail in Norway took place in such centres (Stugu, 2015). 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.

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through private-public partnerships and project-based development strategies (for investigations of the processes leading up to and the plans for the Fjord City, see e.g., Aspen, 2013; Aspen and Pløger, 2015; Bergsli, 2015; Ellefsen, 2017).

A shift may now be underway, as Ellefsen (2017) suggests. A Labour party-led city government has been in power for the last five years, after 17 years of consecutive Conservative party rule. There is an increased will to explore alternative planning tools, including municipal acquisition of property for urban development purposes. On the larger backdrop of sustainability and an unstable economy, such indicators might point towards a revision of traditional entrepreneurial strategies within a new 'post-liberalist' frame of political economic practice (Ellefsen, 2017: 267-268). Present-day development trends point in different directions. Yet, recent initiatives point towards increased involvement of public bodies, such as the so-called third housing sector, public rental housing targeted at citizens with ordinary incomes (as opposed to social housing and fully market-based prices and rents). A housing offer of this kind has not existed since the 1980s, and may signal an enhanced concern for greater social inequalities.

Summary

The 1970s and 80s saw a transition from a Keynesian welfare model to a neoliberal regime, characterized by market expansion and market-like forms of governance, management and control in most sectors of society. This transition was indeed marked in urban policy, planning and development, including in a strong and rich welfare state like Norway. A shift took place from traditional activities associated with the city state to more business-orientated, entrepreneurial modes of governing cities. Often, long-term comprehensive planning was replaced by more piecemeal, project-based or property-led variants. In a state of increased inter-urban competition, attractiveness in the physical and social environment gains in importance. Not the least, this trend is notable in prestigious, mixed-use developments of former harbour and industrial sites.

According to public space scholars, a new type of public space also emerges in these and similar, often privately owned or managed environments, in

which troublesome activities and chance interactions are becoming displaced.

CHAPTER 3

‘TRADITIONAL’ AND ‘NEW’ PUBLIC SPACE: A REVIEW

As in life, so in literature: The renewed policy and practice interest in public space, is reflected in an increasing body of scholarly work. The growth in the number of articles in *Urban Studies* that deal with aspects of public space is telling: while only six articles were found for the period 1964–1990, close to 300 were published in the period 1990–2015 (Bodnar, 2015: 2090). A similar growth in published works on public space after 1990 has been identified in the geographical literature (Mitchell, 2017: 505). There is little to suggest that the rise in number of publications has slowed down in the last four to five years. Indications of the opposite are recent and upcoming special volumes on public space, including an international comparison (Aelbrecht and Stevens, 2019), a companion (Mehta and Palazzo, 2020) and a handbook (Franck and Huang, 2021).

The following review concentrates on the scholarly literature related to the overall focus of the dissertation, situating the study within a broader framework of public space research. That is, literature that broadly address activities and social interactions in public space or directly or indirectly compare ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public spaces in terms of such activities and interactions. I will come back to perspectives and insights from the review in the concluding discussion. As for the subtopics of the study, I present and discuss the pertaining literature in the dissertation’s articles. These subtopics, to recall, are private-public space, in particular use aspects; types of public space use; and circumstances that prompt strangers to interact in public space.⁷ The present review seeks to be illustrative of main topics and research approaches covered in the literature rather than exhaustive, as do the reviews of each of the articles.

⁷ More precisely, the relevant scholarly literature is dealt with as follows in the articles: Private-public space: article 1: 117–119, 127–128. Classification of public space use: article 2: 221–223, and article 3: 1–2. Circumstances that prompt strangers to interact in public space: article 4: 2–3, 16–18.

To begin with, this chapter presents general ideals and realities of public space as well as an overall change in how public spaces are used. It then addresses descriptions of activities and interactions in 'traditional' and 'new' public space, and the main features attributed to each. Thereafter, the chapter deals with the figure of the urban stranger and how scholars more specifically have evaluated interaction among strangers in the two public space types. The chapter ends with a summary of the gaps and shortages that have been singled out in the literature pertaining to the subtopics.

Ideals, reality and a major change

A city's outdoor public spaces are widely conceived to be its most accessible, inclusive and sociable urban spaces. Closely related to such notions of public space is the idea of the public. And closely related to the idea of the public is what Habermas calls a 'bourgeois public sphere' (Habermas et al., 1974). For Habermas, the public sphere is the space where private persons come together to form a public. The Habermasian public sphere is by definition inclusive; access is granted to all citizens. The public sphere is conceptualized as an independent institution in society, separated from the state, the market and other spheres of society. Like another major theorist of the public sphere in the 20th century, Hannah Arendt, Habermas mourned the passing of the integrative society in which the public sphere arose whilst lamenting the rise of mass society (Madanipour, 2010: 6–7). Habermas investigated the early modern bourgeois sphere, Arendt the ancient polis; both were presented as examples of conditions in which interpersonal communication led to a rich public life. They saw the strict routines of the industrial city as alienating and as weakening the qualities of public life. The result, according to Madanipour, has been a degree of romanticization of historic public spaces.

The notion of public space can be traced back at least to the Greek agora (e.g., Mitchell, 2003; Madanipour, 2010: 5–7). Politics, commerce, and spectacle were juxtaposed and combined in the public space of the agora. It offered a meeting place for strangers, whether citizens, buyers, or sellers, and the ideal of public space in the agora encouraged almost unmediated interaction (Mitchell, 2003: 131). In a normative ideal of public space, based on such conceptions about the agora, 'one should expect to encounter and

hear from those who are different, whose social perspectives, experiences and affiliations are different' (Young, 2011: 119).

However, in real life, public spaces have seldom met the expectations of this ideal. The streets and parks of the city, like the Greek agora itself, Roman forums, 18th century British coffeehouses or salons in Paris have never simply been places of free use and free interaction; they have always been spaces of exclusion to varying degrees (Fraser, 1990, and Hartley, 1992, as cited in Mitchell, 2003: 131–132; Madanipour, 2010: 7). Historical meeting places on our latitudes, be it the 'thingstead' (*tingsted*) of Old Norse society, the gathering spot by the church (*kirkebakken*), the taverns of the 17th and 18th centuries (Gripsrud, 2017) or the bourgeoisie promenade streets and parks (Moland, 2014) are hardly exceptions. Women in particular seem to have been subject to exclusion from and control in places of public encounter (e.g., Wilson, 1992; Solnit, 2002, 2020: 41–69). Other categories of people have had their freedom of movement limited, but limitations based on race, class, religion, ethnicity and sexual orientations are, Solnit (2002: 234–235) argues, local and variable compared to those placed on women. Although the Nordic countries today are considered among the most gender-equal in the world, women more than most other categories of people risk being subject to unwanted social control, attention and harassment in public.

An undisputed major change in the functioning of public spaces in recent decades is the growing importance of leisure and recreation activities. Historically so-called leisure time emerged as a result of processes of increased welfare, and, in particular, reduced working hours. Starting in the mid- to late-19th century, this development has evolved into what has been termed 'leisure society', supported by factors such as flexible working hours, more extended holidays and more seniors of generally good health (e.g., Stevens, 2007). At the same time, technological development and other societal changes have gradually rendered many of the everyday pursuits of urbanites on streets and squares obsolete or less frequent. The result of these changes is, as influential Danish architect and urban designer Jan Gehl oftentimes draws attention to, that 'the use of public space has gradually evolved from activities primarily motivated by necessity to those more optional in nature' (e.g., Gehl and Svarre, 2013: 17). At the same time, one should recall that the necessity-oriented activities people pursue in cities

still abound. The classification of the uses of public space that we suggest (articles 2 and 3), clearly demonstrates this.

'Traditional' versus 'new'

The debate on contemporary public space has, as indicated, crystallized two opposing types of spaces: 'traditional' and 'new'. Concerning the people, activities and human exchanges they are seen to accommodate for, these two ideal types of public space are often portrayed as respectively approaching and being opposite to the cited normative ideal of public space. To some extent, this portrayal does have some backing in empirical investigations and research.

'Traditional' The literature provides a variety of rich descriptions of what people do and how they engage with each other in particular public spaces. Foremost, this applies to everyday urban spaces on public ground such as streets, squares, parks, promenades.

Perhaps the most emblematic of all accounts of urban public life is the one by author and urban activist Jane Jacobs. In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1992 [1961]), Jacobs fiercely attacks modernist urban planning dogma and its damaging effects on cities. Based primarily on New York examples, she gives particular attention to the public spaces and urban life of her own Greenwich Village, to the 'ballet' and sociability of its streets, its variety of people and doings. A later report is that of Jacobs' compatriot, urbanist and 'people-watcher' William H. Whyte (1980, 1988). As part of New York's Street Life Project in the 1970s and 80s, Whyte and collaborators extensively observed and filmed the use of some central public plazas and sidewalks on Manhattan. Out of Whyte's endeavour came extraordinarily rich and detailed material on the finer social aspects of public space. The oeuvre of Jan Gehl in many ways is akin to that of Jacobs and Whyte. In his life-long exploration of public life in Copenhagen (e.g., 1987, 1996, 2006), Gehl has documented in great detail the variations in how people use its central public spaces and how these uses have both increased and changed over time.

Although to varying degrees, Jacobs, Whyte and Gehl all focus on both physical and social features of public space. A main concern that unites

them is the provision of physical and material conditions for ‘human-friendly’, sociable public spaces. Jacobs (1992: 178–186) makes a case for frequent streets and the short urban block, as they permit a fabric of complex mixed-uses and many human encounters follow from that form and mix of functions. Gehl does so too, as well as for the pedestrian street – and the plaza. Among those praising the social qualities of the traditional compact (European) city, particular attention is given to the small square, piazza or plaza. This is the type of public space generally expected to have the highest degree of publicness, often conceived of as the quintessential public space, the ‘contemporary agora’. In terms of physical characteristics, it is by some considered to be most successful if smaller than seventy feet in diameter (Alexander et al. 1977; Gehl, 2010: 38). In a square this size, people are able to make out the faces and hear much of the talk around them, encouraging a sense of connectedness (Alexander et al. 1977: 310–314). Moreover, both Gehl and Whyte have preoccupied themselves with material and physical conditions’ effect on use and behaviour, such as sun, shadow, light and wind, and design characteristics, like benches, chairs and integral or secondary seating.

The works of Jacobs, Whyte and Gehl have greatly influenced how the physical, human and social qualities of public spaces are perceived. This influence, on the whole, has probably been greater in policy and practice than in academia. Jacobs has inspired and is referred to by a great number of scholars, architects and planners. Whyte’s endeavours led to non-profit advocacy groups, for-profit businesses and planning policies (New York) which have shaped the built environment many a place. Still active, Gehl is to many synonymous with the efforts to create vibrant ‘cities for people’. Through public life surveys around the world, as well as research, publications, and urban design projects, Gehl and later his partners in Gehl Architects have had wide-ranging impact. Not the least, in the way one globally perceives and values public space and urban public life and which measures and solutions are adopted to achieve the desired state of affairs.⁸

⁸ Gehl and Gehl Architects’ contribution in the quest for more appealing, ‘human friendly’ cities seem beyond doubt (for an overview of Gehl’s work and its influence, see Matan and Newman, 2016). Still, some view their approach to the city and urban life as too narrowly

From within academia have also come extensive use-related studies of particular public spaces. For instance, Carmona has for a number of years investigated the 'multiple complex public spaces of a global city', London, covering design and social features in a large number of both publicly and privately owned spaces (e.g., Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012). Others have in more in-depth examined a few selected streets, squares, markets etc. of the same metropolis with a more particular focus on sociability and urban encounters (e.g., Watson, 2006, 2009b; Hall, 2012). For more than thirty years, Anderson (e.g., 1990, 2012) has conducted urban ethnography in central parts of Philadelphia on how ordinary citizens interact across and along racial lines. In terms of urban public life, Southern Europe and Latin America receive much general appraisal. Drawing from several decades of ethnographic, multidisciplinary research in Costa Rica's capital city San José, Low (e.g., 2000, 2017) has written comprehensively on the interplay between space and culture in the plaza and the manifold pursuits, behaviours and human encounters which unfold therein.

Everyday public spaces of the sort described by the referenced authors, 'traditional' public spaces as I have termed them, are highly varied. It is thus hard to pin down key overall characteristics. However, by extracting some characteristics that seem to be common to many of them, and pairing them with characteristics deduced from their juxtaposition with 'new' public space, one might arrive at some key features. The public spaces containing these key features can be considered as ideal types (Weber, 1970 [1919]), models to think with. An ideal type is composed of properties and elements of the phenomena in question, but is not supposed to correspond to all of the properties of any one particular empirical case. It is assumed to emphasize certain elements common to most cases of the given phenomenon. Thus, a 'traditional' public space, here a square or plaza, is publicly owned and variously but mostly publicly managed. In such a space, one would expect to find a diversity of users and uses; a certain looseness in terms of architecture and design, physical and visual order, and safety; an acceptance of chance, serendipity, and contested uses, including public exchange of views and opinions; a sociable atmosphere; strangers regularly getting in

focused on physical-spatial factors, quantifiable measures and recreational use (for a critique grounded in Norwegian and Danish contexts, see Aspen and Pløger, 2015: 137).

touch with each other. More often than not, it would be placed in a part of the city which has evolved over time and which forms part of the regular urban fabric. Again, it should be stressed that ‘traditional’ public space, as well as ‘new’ public space, is an ideal type which no actual public spaces can fully conform to. It should also be reiterated that, in practice, some form of exclusion will to a greater or lesser degree also be present in this type of spaces.

‘New’ Much like the neoliberal turn led to conceptions about a ‘new’ city, it also brought about talk about ‘new’ public space. Encompassing also new indoor semi-public spaces (malls, skyways, etc.), it referred perhaps foremost to the proliferation in some countries of tightly controlled privately owned and managed outdoor public spaces. References were either explicit, such as in phrases like ‘new kinds of “public spaces”’ (Franck and Stevens, 2007: 24) and ‘this new type of public space’ (Minton, 2012: 57), or more implicit, of which the titling of two key books in the field is indicative: *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (Sorkin ed., 1992) and *Brave New Neighborhoods: The Privatization of Public Space* (Kohn, 2004).

By and large, the increase in scholarly writings on public space began with Sorkin’s *Variations* anthology and Davis’ slightly earlier *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (1990). According to Mitchell (2017), these two books catalysed new sharply critical and eventually wide-ranging research on the role of public space in making more or less just cities. Both of these books seemed to name something crucial happening in American, and by extension, other developed-world cities, at the end of the 1980s, reflecting the rather stark and observable transformation of the city that marked the end of the Keynesian era. Together with Harvey’s seminal arguments about the rise of the entrepreneurial city and Soja’s (1989) propositions about the postmodern city, these books helped set off a period of intense retheorizing of the city. In this effort, the theorization and critical-historical analysis of public space formed a central part (Mitchell, 2017: 504–505).

As claimed by these critical accounts, contemporary public spaces have lost much of their traditional open and democratic character. To blame are

related processes of privatization, commercialization, aestheticization and increased surveillance and control. In particular, the growth in privately owned and managed outdoor public spaces, targeted at certain privileged audiences, have been much critiqued. Not surprisingly, the UK and the US are the countries where such public spaces and other forms of privatization of public space have most extensively been subject to scholarly attention and research. Particularly in the US, the literature which partly or exclusively addresses the phenomenon is comprehensive (e.g., Davis, 1990; Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1995, 2010; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, 1993, 1998; Cybriwsky, 1999; Day 1999; Kayden, 2000; Banerjee, 2001; Flusty, 2001; Mitchell, 2003, 2017, 2020; Kohn, 2004; Low, 2006; Low and Smith, 2006; Lofland, 2009; Nemeth, 2009; Huang and Franck, 2018).

Interpretations of the privatization of public spaces in the US do vary. They range from Davis' (1990) dystopian reports on 'fortress Los Angeles' and 'militarization of urban space', via accounts of public space as a source of capitalist accumulation (e.g., Mitchell, 2020) or sites where democratic practices and rights are curbed (e.g., Kohn, 2004), to a few more positive reviews stressing individual experiences of safety and comfort in privatized public spaces, especially women's (e.g., Day, 1999). Yet, in general the literature is very much attuned in that public spaces in US cities today are more tightly regulated, managed and policed, and thus less inclusive and public, largely as an effect of growing private ownership and/or private management of such spaces.

An early critical examination of the privatization of public space in the UK stems from Crilley (1993). In a study of 'commercial megastructures', he examines Canary Wharf in London Docklands and New York's World Financial Center (Battery Park City). Crilley stresses that designers' emphasis on the rescue of public space in these projects masks the exclusion inherent in their construction of a homogenous 'public'. Such areas, he contends, are "programmed" to filter out the social heterogeneity of the urban crowd' (Crilley, 1993: 154). Later, Minton (2006, 2012) emerged as a strong critic of the extensive privatization of public space in UK cities since the 1990s and its damaging effects on their publicness. She finds that the trend is very much based on ideas from the US. Often, 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 US trends, Minton links the diffusion of private-public spaces, as well as BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) and other similar approaches to managing public space in the UK, to new governance strategies. More precisely, to local councils increasingly taking on an 'enabling' role, transferring the provision of many services (such as public space management) to the private sector rather than undertaking them themselves. Concerns raised by Minton and others led to a London Assembly report (2011) on how to best secure inclusive public spaces in large-scale developments owned and managed by private interests.

Some UK scholars have countered the dominant critique of contemporary public space (e.g., Townshend and Madanipour, 2008; Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012; Leclercq et al., 2020). In their study of close to 150 public squares throughout London, Carmona and Wunderlich (2012: 283) end by asserting that 'the sorts of wholesale homogenization, privatization, securitization, commercialization, sanitization, exclusionary and formulae-driven approaches to public space that are so criticized in the literature have proven to be largely illusory'. They reprehend many of the contributions in the field for being overtly ideological, partisan and/or too weakly empirically grounded. They also warn against letting critical claims based on case studies from the US frame accounts of public space transformations in the UK and Europe, as do other scholars (e.g., Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010: 1714–1715; Koch and Latham, 2014: 144–145). The differences across cities and countries in Europe are notable, however. US-inspired public space critique is likely to be more apt in some cases (such as the world metropolis and neoliberal bastion London) than in others (e.g., many of the Nordic cities).⁹

⁹ As Carmona and Wunderlich (2012: 26, 30) have pointed out, privately owned public space is nothing new in the UK. Rather, it can be said to be the norm, the post-war period being an exception. Before the advent of the welfare state, much public space and public welfare arrangements were in the hands of private individuals or entities. Something similar goes for Norway. In Oslo, it was not until the mid-1870s that the municipality emerged as an administrative unit with its own apparatus; by 1900 it had taken over much of the work on streets, parks and so on from citizen associations. Until then, squares and plazas were often developed by wealthy residents and later given as gifts to the city (Moland, 2014).

Despite such controversies, the scholarly literature mostly agrees on what could be said to be key socio-spatial characteristics of an ideal-typical 'new' public space. Primarily, it is privately owned and managed, often found in larger private developments. Some central features that the literature from the UK and the US ascribe to 'new' public space, commonly a square or plaza and its surroundings, are: conspicuous and lavish architecture and design; a strong emphasis on physical and visual order; a safe, clean and well-maintained environment; prohibitions and restrictions on use beyond what is common in publicly owned space; a marked socio-economic bias in terms of users and uses; and, generally, a planned, disciplined and highly controlled city life in which spontaneous exchange between strangers is rare. In the US literature, a number of other physical-spatial aspects are also commonly ascribed to such spaces, like physical enclosure, inward orientation and disconnection from the street, and 'hostile architecture' (e.g., Davis, 1990; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, 1998; Low and Smith, 2006; Smithsonian, 2008; Nemeth 2009).

Not the least, it is with respect to the prominent feature of urbanity which is chance encounters with unknown others, that 'traditional' and 'new' public space are considered opposites.

Interaction among strangers altered

The 'father' of urban sociology, Georg Simmel, is often credited with having introduced 'the stranger' as a specific sociological category. Since the publication of Simmel's classic essay 'The stranger' (1950b [1908]), the term has been widely used in sociology and beyond. It has had varying meanings through time and there have been controversies regarding its application and interpretation (Amin, 2012). One meaning often attached to it, including Simmel's original conception of the term, is 'cultural otherness'. In this dissertation, however, 'stranger' is used in a more straightforward way, to simply denote a person that is unknown.

Strangers are not a modern invention, Bauman (2003) notes, but strangers who remain so for a long time to come, even in perpetuity, are. In a typical pre-modern village, strangers were not allowed to stay strange for long. Some were chased away or not let in through the city gates in the first place, whilst those who wished and were permitted to enter and stay longer tended

to be ‘familiarised’ (Bauman, 2003: 6). In a city like Oslo, a shift in the nature of the stranger seems to have happened by the turn of the 19th century. A new diversity now reigns on its streets, it has gone from being a small town to a big city. Those one encounters on the street are mainly strangers that remain strangers (Moland, 2014: 140–141).

Throughout urban history, anonymous strangers have often been associated with fear and danger, especially if they form groups or crowds, or, in particular mobs – large and disorderly masses of people. One of the founding fathers of social psychology, Gustave Le Bon, set out to describe the underlying psychological mechanisms that gave urbanites reasons to fear mobs. According to Sennett (2019: 52–53), Le Bon believed a profound change would come over people of various backgrounds when fused into a crowd, causing them to ‘hunt in packs like wolves’. The key lies in how the mobs take form: when a large number of people gather, individuals are more inclined to commit crimes than when operating alone.

In parts of the Western world, a new shift in the nature of urban strangers can be said to have happened after World War II. Cities have always brought together people of diverse backgrounds. The beginning of large-scale immigration is lost in time. Historians often identify the period from around 1850 to 1914 as an ‘age of mass migration’, not the least due to the transatlantic migration of Europeans to the Americas (e.g., Hatton and Williamson, 1998). Mass immigration and increased globalization after World War II have produced a diversity in city populations on an unprecedented scale, not the least so in Europe. To an ever-increasing degree, strangers in cities are now looking different, having ethnic and cultural backgrounds from around the world. This forms the backdrop of a prime contemporary urban challenge, one which has occupied urban scholars and social scientists; that of cosmopolitanism, ‘conviviality’, of ‘living with difference’.

No matter how such ‘living with difference’ play out on city streets, it is predominantly about co-presence. For the most, strangers who are in each other’s proximity in public do not speak with or otherwise interact directly with one another. One likely reason is the sheer number of people in a city. This urban experience par excellence, the omnipresence of people, of

strangers, of *feeling* crowded, was crucial for Simmel (1950a [1908]) in attributing a 'rational', 'calculating', 'reserved' and 'blasé' attitude to the city dweller; a defensive reaction to stimulus overload expressed in an apparent indifference to surrounding people, things, and events. Another important interpreter of modern urban life, Walter Benjamin (1999), also strove to capture its most typical sensations and experiences. Central to Benjamin's work was the city's seductive consumer culture and strong visual forms of expression. In the *flâneur*, Benjamin found the quintessential urban figure, constituting both a spectator and an explorer, thriving in the Parisian arcades, strolling in and out of locales amid shifting and ephemeral exchanges with unknown others.

Earlier in urban history, things may have been different. Sennett (2019: 27–28) asserts that 'in mid-eighteenth-century Paris or London a stranger felt no hesitation in coming up to you in the street, interrogating you, and gripping your arm (man to man) to hold your attention'. Stendahl's Paris marked a turning point, writes Sennett, when people on the street, or at a café, assumed that they had a right to be left alone. In public, people came to want to be protected by silence, shielded from the intrusion of strangers (something which still holds true, he remarks, adding with a truism that in the modern city, strangers relate to another more visually than verbally). This shift in turn, Sennett (1992) has previously argued, reflects the emergence of an 'ideology of intimacy' in which reigning beliefs are that intimate closeness between persons is a moral good and impersonality is among the causes of the evils of society. Hence *The Fall of Public Man*.

But obviously the city's strangers do to some extent interact, and most variously so in public space. However, neither Sennett nor those others scholars highlighting the importance of contact between strangers, deal in fine detail with how such interactions actually come about. For they do not happen out of the blue. As pioneering sociologist Erving Goffman (1966 [1963]: 124) noted two generations ago: While acquaintances in a social situation require a reason not to interact, strangers require a reason to do so. It is such an assumption this dissertation takes as its point of departure. This is an assumption that is made, though often indirectly, by much of the contemporary scholarly literature in which 'traditional' public space is

associated with spontaneous exchanges between strangers, and ‘new’ public space in the absence of such contact.

‘Traditional cities’, argues Crilley (1993: 157), have ‘connotations of vitality, social interaction and heterogeneity’. He portrays the urban spaces of new megastructures as a ‘carefully orchestrated corporate spectacle. ... producing an anesthetized social world depolluted of antagonism and social conflict. ... the resulting public is there for entertainment and there to gaze’ (Crilley, 1993: 153). For Kohn (2004: 11), there is a ‘widely shared intuition that public spaces are the places that facilitate unplanned contacts between people. These unplanned contacts include interactions between strangers as well as meetings between friends and acquaintances’. New privatized spaces, on the other hand, ‘are restricting the civic, political, and religious activity that gave city centers their dynamism and variety’ (Kohn, 2004: 2). Mitchell (2003: 140) claims that market and design considerations of powerful economic and social actors displace the idiosyncratic and spontaneous interactions of engaged people in public space. Designed and contrived diversity creates marketable landscapes, as opposed to unscripted social interaction that may threaten exchange value. Additionally, according to Minton (2012: 33), private-public spaces are ‘removing the continual, almost subliminal interaction with strangers which is part of healthy city life’. Similar distinctions between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space with respect to chance encounters, can be found in a number of other scholars’ writings (e.g. Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993: 155; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee, 1998: 175–194; Low, 2006: 47; Franck and Stevens, 2007: 24; Lofland, 2009: 208–213; Sendra and Sennett, 2020: 1–2).

All these scholars critiquing ‘new’ public space believe that limiting unwanted intermingling and interaction among strangers in such spaces is quite intentional. A main rationale ascribed to strategies of ‘purification’ or ‘sanitation’ of public space is precisely to reduce unplanned interaction that may unsettle main target groups (and therefore put owners’ business in peril). Lofland (2009: 209) labels such spaces ‘counterlocales’, ‘locales to which both entry and behavior are monitored and controlled so as to reduce the possibility for discomforting, annoying, or threatening interactions’.

There are two major strategies of controlling access to and activities in public space, to which these scholars refer. One is control via regulation (and its execution): banning and curbing pursuits such as begging, petitioning, political and religious activism, unsolicited selling and entertainment, and so on. Another major strategy is control via design. A rather extreme step in this respect is simply separating people through designing neighbourhoods for different people, gated communities being an apt example. With respect to the type of public space settings under scrutiny in this dissertation, physical exclusion is seldom so apparent. Rather, it involves measures such as extensive camera surveillance and 'hostile architecture', impeding prolonged stays, loitering and rest by undesired individuals. But exclusion is not just a matter of keeping out unwanted others and their undertakings via regulatory and concrete physical means. It also involves, as Sennett (2019: 129) notes, simplifying the look and construction of a place so that it fits one kind of person or preferences, but not others.

Yet, the more fundamental circumstances that differentiate 'traditional' and 'new' public spaces from each other when it comes to types of and frequency of strangers' interactions have rarely been thoroughly documented and analysed. Sennett has written extensively on related issues, such as urban environments marked by 'disorder' versus 'order' (e.g. 2008 [1970]) or as being 'closed' versus 'open' (e.g. 2019). Although impersonal contact and exchanges in public are a prime concern, he does not systematically explore how the opposing 'regimes' contrast in terms of strangers' interactions. One notable exception may be Lofland, who in a series of detailed sociological works (e.g., 1973; 1998), has investigated strangers' co-presence and dealings with each other in public. Both in a historical and contemporary perspective, including differences between what I have termed 'traditional' and 'new' public space. But neither does she touch upon what I contend are the more basic mechanisms distinguishing these two types of spaces. It is such mechanisms or circumstances that this dissertation first and foremost seeks to explore.

Activity types, interaction stimulus, and private-public space

As noted, the scholarly literature of relevance to the subtopics of this

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dissertation has been dealt with in the articles. Yet it is opportune here to specify some lacks in the literature that the subtopics respond to.

The first subtopic of the dissertation is ‘new’, private-public space. To my knowledge, no other research has so far been published internationally on use-related aspects of private-public space in the Nordic countries. More generally, in these countries there are few long-term field studies of public space use and sociability at all. The research presented in article 1 focuses on key characteristics, in particular use-related ones, of a private-public space (Tjuvholmen) in a Nordic context.

Types of activity found in public space constitutes the dissertation’s second subtopic. Making sense of the world by way of classifying is a prime concern in the social sciences and humanities. This extends to disciplines and fields in which public space either constitutes a research subject in itself or an object of planning, design and governance. Thus, a broad range of classifications of public space exist. However, those that address use tend to be either too partial or too general. Lacking is a classification that is comprehensive and detailed, intending to be exhaustive of all types of public space use, and that can be used as a tool for both observing and analysing the range of actual activities in public spaces. The research focus of articles 2 and 3 is how the utterly diverse uses of public space can be comprehensively categorized.

A final subtopic is interaction among strangers in public. Such interaction is a core topic in urban scholarship. However, the large majority of empirical studies on factors that encourage strangers to engage in contact in public concentrate on more limited, often singular, factors. Thus, few of them offer a comprehensive, broad understanding of the phenomenon. The investigative focus of article 4 is the underlying circumstances that encourage or license peaceful chance interactions among strangers in public space.

Summary

Actual public spaces have rarely or never lived up to the normative ideal of these as places of free use and unmediated human exchange. Yet, public spaces do differ a lot in this respect. Contemporary scholars draw a set of

distinctions between 'traditional' and 'new' public space. A major one concerns chance contact between strangers: While 'traditional' public space is claimed to support such contact, 'new' public space is said to work in the opposite direction. However, most of the literature do not address the issue in much detail. Critiques of 'new' public space on this point can thus appear superficial, absolute, ideological. The lack of a more precise thematization of the 'interaction issue' can be said to represent a blind spot in much public space research. Therefore, the criticism, and perhaps also the tributes, tend to be quite general. Both are based on incomplete and imprecise documentation and analyses of what actually goes on in public spaces. The finer mechanisms of how and why the two public space types differ in the sort and frequency of interaction have not been much explored. In chapter 6, I examine these mechanisms by closely inspecting two contrasting sites of the investigation, one being the 'new' public space site presented in detail in article 1. In doing so, I make use of the suggested classification of public space activities (article 2 and 3) as well as three concepts borrowed from Goffman (applied and elaborated on in article 4), to be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

AN EXTENDED FIELD INVESTIGATION

Before looking in more detail at the actual findings and outcomes that the investigation has led to, one essential element remains to be addressed: how the data upon which these findings and outcomes are based were gathered, processed and analysed.

The fieldwork I did on public space use prior to the doctoral research¹⁰, was scattered over a three-and-a-half-year period from late 2012 to early fall 2016. This work can be considered a pilot study which identified some more specific focus areas for the more comprehensive field study that followed in the period 2016–2019 as part of the dissertation work.

Data collected during the pilot phase formed the basis of the article on private-public space in a Nordic context (article 1). Subsequently, the investigative focus of the prospective dissertation was narrowed down to activities that occur in public space, and, in particular, interaction among strangers. The dissertation's three other articles (2, 3 and 4) resulted mainly from this part of the work. The two sites of the pilot study became the main sites of the doctoral study, with some additions.

Throughout the research, I have collaborated closely with Professor Jonny Aspen at Oslo School Architecture and Design. Aspen's main field of competence is urban theory; he has also been my main supervisor. As a rule, I have done the fieldwork and systematized the data, while we have jointly further analysed and processed the material, mostly through co-writing articles. I am the sole author of article 4 and this synopsis.¹¹

In what follows, I address the main theoretical framing of the investigation as well as some key concepts; the investigation's overall research approach and its study sites; how the data was collected; the way it was analysed; aspects pertaining to research quality; and, finally, a few ethical, bureaucratic and legal issues.

¹⁰ Part of and in the continuation of the part-time Master's degree in urbanism.

¹¹ See also appendix 'Co-author declaration'.

Theoretical leads: Goffman

At its best, theory can guide research, illuminate social realities and provide conceptual clarity to complex issues. That was the sensation I had when, in the early phase of this investigation, grappling with the messiness of urban chance encounters, I came across a part of Erving Goffman's (1922–1982) oeuvre with which I was unfamiliar.

As should be clear by now, this project is primarily empirically driven. However, it is theoretically informed from the outset, and particularly so by some lesser-known concepts and insights developed by this Canadian-American sociologist, whose novel work laid bare and systematized the minutiae of behaviour and relations in public. Goffman's perspective has been at the back of my mind for most of the length of this study. I first actively applied it, though, in my efforts to categorize the circumstances that spur or authorize strangers to interact in public space (article 4).

'Engagements among the unacquainted' Goffman's work is commonly subsumed under the widely influential sociological tradition 'interactionism'. Born out of the emerging Chicago school of urban sociology in 1920s and 1930s, a school strongly influenced by Simmel's thinking, 'symbolic interactionism' or 'interactionism' represents the study of social processes related to human interaction. Atkinson and Housley (2003) argue that we are all interactionists now, in the sense that many of the key ideas of interactionism have become part of mainstream sociological thought. Much of what today is presented as 'novel' or 'innovative' ideas only seem to be so because earlier contributions – interactionism among them – are not explicitly acknowledged.

Goffman is noted for being the one who foremost challenged long-held beliefs about the public realm's asocial character (Lofland, 2009: 3), in the tradition of Simmel. Of more particular relevance to the present study, Goffman is also the one who has most methodically endeavoured to theoretically identify the basic circumstances that spur or license strangers to interact in public. Of Goffman's many theoretical and analytical contributions to the social sciences, this is an effort that has received little

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attention. To my knowledge, neither has it to any extent been applied in empirical studies.¹²

In *Behavior in Public Places* (1963 [1966]), Goffman focuses on human behaviour in public and semi-public spaces. In chapter 8 of the book (pp.124–148), he outlines what he reckons to be the principal rules governing ‘face engagements among the unacquainted’. Goffman departs from what he defines as a general rule. According to that rule, as already alluded to, people who know each other need a reason for not entering into face-to-face interaction with each other, while strangers need a reason to do so.

There are three kinds of circumstances that Goffman sees as somehow allowing, and occasionally obliging, engagement among unacquainted individuals: ‘exposed positions’, ‘opening positions’, and ‘mutual openness’. ‘Exposed positions’ are circumstances under which persons, in the capacity of their role in public life or status in society, or for some other reason, become accessible to strangers. ‘Opening positions’ are circumstances which give individuals, due to their role in public life or status in society, or for some other reason, a kind of right to initiate contact with other people. The last main category is ‘mutual openness’. That is, circumstances under which strangers – through sharing, for instance, a physical space, a group affiliation, or an experience – can be mutually open to each other, ‘each having the right to initiate and the duty to accept an encounter with the other’ (Goffman, 1966: 131).

When I first became aware of Goffman’s perspective, the three concepts worked as ‘sensitizing concepts’ in the investigation that ensued. That is, in

¹² A few Google Scholar searches (November 2020) give an indication of the scant attention Goffman’s perspective has received. Each of the three main concepts, ‘exposed positions’, ‘opening positions’, and ‘mutual openness’ + ‘Goffman’, yield 40 to 100 search results, while each of the concepts ‘exposed persons’ and ‘opening persons’ (which Goffman sometimes used instead of ‘exposed positions’ and ‘opening positions’) + ‘Goffman’ yield even fewer results, in contrast to his more popular concepts which produce several thousand results). The work in which they are presented, *Behavior in Public Places*, also ranks among Goffman’s less-cited books. For clarity of argument, here I focus on the concepts of ‘exposed persons’ and ‘opening persons’ rather than ‘exposed positions’ and ‘opening positions’, although I do use the latter two concepts in article 4 and in the summary of the article in chapter 5.

sociologist Herbert Blumer's terms, as 'directions along which to look', reflecting the relative indeterminacy of research ideas (Atkinson and Housley, 2003: 9). As the investigation progressed, these concepts proved to have great explanatory power.

The perspective Goffman applies to engagements among strangers covers a wider range of spaces than I do in this dissertation. While I have limited my study to outdoor public spaces, Goffman's treatise covers both indoor (e.g., bars, train compartments, elevators) and outdoor 'public places' (that is to say, both semi-public and public spaces). However, all of the circumstances that Goffman ascribes to 'public places', I have found to be present in and valid for the outdoor public spaces I have investigated.¹³

Goffman's sketches of social behaviour and interactions are often referred to as subtle and insightful, yet contextually or empirically vague (e.g., Manning, 1992: 15). In categorizing and analysing circumstances under which interaction among strangers routinely occur (article 4), I draw from long-term field research to empirically substantiate and expand upon this part of Goffman's work.

Central concepts and definitions There are still a few concepts that need further clarification.

By *public space* I refer to outdoor spaces in cities that in principle (but not always in practice) are open and accessible to all: squares, streets, parks and promenades, but also more mundane spaces like parking lots, walkways and bus stops. Privately owned and managed public space, private-public space, that is open and accessible to the general public is also included here, although their degree of publicness tends to be lower than on those on public ground. So too are outdoor serving areas on streets, squares, etc., for which use requires payment, a main reason being that they have become so

¹³ Some situations are more common indoors than outdoors, though. For instance, highly enclosed settings where staring can be difficult to avoid and from which it is difficult to retreat (elevators, waiting rooms or subway carriages). Strangers rarely interact directly in such settings; many work hard to avoid eye contact and may use 'involvement shields' (Goffman, 1966: 38–42) such as digital devices. Occasionally, though, and particularly if the situation is of some duration, people may handle it by initiating conversations, facilitated by the fact that close physical proximity in itself can legitimize and encourage interaction.

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integral to outdoor public life. On the other hand, semi-public spaces such as those found in (indoor) shopping malls, are not covered. For similar reasons, I exclude public buildings. Despite strong public orientation, even an institution like the public library tends to have greater restrictions on use than outdoor public spaces.

Activity and *use* are two terms that are used interchangeably, referring to the individual or collective action of using public spaces for various intended purposes. Thus defined, activities or use are not meant to cover behavioural features, which are more related to *how* people go about, perhaps relating to social norms (e.g., 'x' behaved 'poorly' or 'well').

However, it is often difficult to distinguish between use and behaviour when it comes to certain types of activity, such as social exchanges, including interactions among strangers. While some types of interactions can be considered proper activities (e.g., prolonged conversations), others (e.g., ephemeral negotiations in passing on the street) can be seen as behavioural aspects of other kinds of use.

The concept of *the stranger* is not to be equated with 'the other'. In the present work, to repeat, a stranger simply denotes a person with whom one is unacquainted. So defined, it includes the 'familiar stranger' recognized from regular activities, but with whom one usually does not interact (Milgram and Blass, 2010). *Interaction among strangers* refers to 'focused interaction' in the form of 'face engagements' or more concrete 'encounters' (Goffman, 1966: 88–89). That includes all forms of peaceful, spontaneous interaction among strangers that go beyond the ubiquitous phenomenon of 'civil inattention' (recognition of each other's presence through brief eye contact), and ranges from subtle negotiations of the type referred to above to prolonged conversations.

The *users of public space* must also be briefly defined. In the attempt to draw a comprehensive picture of activities that people pursue in public space and what it is that make strangers interact, I distinguish between two main user groups in public space, or more precisely, between: The ones that have specific roles to play or are committed to specific tasks: vendors, street artists, activists, security guards, police, caretakers and many more, as well

as those making use of public space for their own practical and recreation purposes, that is, regular users, of which there are the most.

A central argument of this dissertation relates to this latter distinction between two main user groups: If street performers, street vendors, petitioners, religious and political activists and so forth are banned or displaced, not only will there be fewer exchanges between such individuals and regular users, but less intra-group interaction among regular users also follows. The reason is that an important circumstance under which urban strangers can be mutually open to each other, a common reference point or sharing an experience, is then significantly undermined.

From the particular to the general (and back)

Field research across the social sciences is labelled in various ways. Many of the approaches are generally similar in emphasising direct, qualitative observation of natural situations or settings, mainly applying the techniques of participant observation or intensive interviewing or both. In this study I have used both of these main techniques, with an emphasis on observation. In line with Lofland et al. (2006: 1–6), I opt for the label *field study* – perhaps the most general and encompassing of the diverse labels in use – to denote the method of research applied in this study. Anthropologists often prefer ‘ethnography’, but like, for instance, Wolcott (2009), I would reserve this term for researchers living among those that they study. In my case, I lived in one part of town, while doing field research in other parts. If I were to define a somewhat more specific research stance for myself, it would be urban sociology or the sociology oriented field study known as Chicago school sociology, centering strongly on urban life and interactions.

The epistemological foundation of field studies is the proposition that only through direct observation and/or participation can one achieve intimate familiarity with the actions and orientations of other human beings. Whatever the barriers to the validity of direct knowledge of others, they are less problematic than the difficulties engendered by inference based on indirect observation and perception (Lofland et al., 2006: 3, 15–16). In their logical and practical addressing of issues and problems, field studies can be sorted under the epistemological and ontological tradition of pragmatism

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(e.g., Atkinson and Housley, 2003: 122–123; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 2, 167).

As for the individual works of the dissertation, the investigation of the private-public spaces at Tjuvholmen (article 1) examines one particular site in some depth. The same goes for a work on the other main site, Grønland, yet which has been published in Norwegian only (Bjerkset, 2018) and hence is not included in the dissertation. The dissertation's remaining articles (2, 3 and 4) address more specific public space issues, activities in the one instance, interactions among strangers in the other, that are followed across sites or cases in order to capture some (of their) more generic features.

Overall approach The overall approach of the concluded research largely resembles what Tjora (2018) terms 'stepwise-deductive induction'. That is to say, an approach that takes empirical data as the starting point from which interesting topics, questions and concepts were deduced. Such an approach implies that if more important or interesting issues emerge as the research progresses, the focus changes accordingly. Due to time constraints, I came to focus even more on social action than initially planned, at the expense of people's experiences and perceptions. That apart, the investigative focus of the research has to a large extent remained the same throughout the project period. One likely reason is that it was preceded by a pilot phase in which some more specific topics to be pursued further were identified.

While empirically-driven, a goal in the applied approach is to develop generic propositions. Acknowledging the theoretical nature of categories and concepts used to define research topics, my project has inevitably been theoretically informed from the beginning and increasingly so as the project has progressed. Therefore, it is far from a-theoretical, having larger conceptual or theoretical ambitions than is common in much qualitative research. In short, then, the project had curiosity as a starting point and generic propositions as a goal.

The first phases of the project consisted in generating and processing data (i.e., transcription of fieldnotes and audio data). Having prepared the data for scrutiny, systematic analysis followed. This was partly done with the

help of a computer software program for coding of qualitative data (NVivo). Based on the coding, categorization and concept development followed. This ‘upwards process’ can be considered as inductive, working from data towards concepts or ‘theory’. The ‘downwards process’ is to be considered as deductive, that is, checking from the more theoretical to the more empirical. Thus, the research process has been far from linear, entailing constant ‘feedback loops’ between topics and data analysis.

Data collection took the form of fieldwork primarily consisting of a set of qualitative or ethnographic methods. Using multiple methods is not straightforward, as it can raise complicated issues of how to ‘map’ one set of data upon another (e.g., Silverman 2005). Hence, I kept it simple, applying a few methods and sources that complement and corroborate each other. The selection, use and weighting of these methods reflect that the present study is one that in essence prioritizes action over meaning, and therefore look at what people do without necessary reference to what they think or feel. A principle of data saturation guided fieldwork during the dissertation period. In practice, it implied that I more or less ceased the systematic gathering of data when it no longer provided new information (i.e., added anything new to the analytical categories).

In addition to systematic data gathering, I drew on personal experience. It was particularly so in the efforts to classify activities in public space and conditions that encourage strangers to interact in such spaces. A white male aged 51 at the time of this writing, I have lived the bulk of my life in Norway and 30 years in Oslo, most of these years as a trained anthropologist.

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Study sites in central Oslo. Main sites: Grønland and Tjuvholmen. The size of circles indicates the amount of fieldwork done at each site. Source: Google Earth (2018).

Study sites In addition to the two main sites, those that were added can be said to somehow place themselves between these two extremes. The sites were selected to reflect a range of public space profiles, in terms of location in the urban structure, urban form, overall neighbourhood profile, ground ownership and management regime, and user groups. Nevertheless, they also share some notable characteristics; they are all located in dense mixed-use areas, and each site is comprised of an urban square or plaza including adjoining streets and may include parks, promenades, or harbour fronts. As for the two main sites and two other sites that I revisited more often than the rest, each could be considered a mix of what Lofland (2009: 10-14) terms ‘public’ and ‘parochial realm’. The former term refers to urban space in which the persons present tend to be personally unknown or only categorically familiar to one another. In contrast, the parochial realm is urban space characterized by a sense of commonality among acquaintances and neighbours who are involved in interpersonal networks that are located

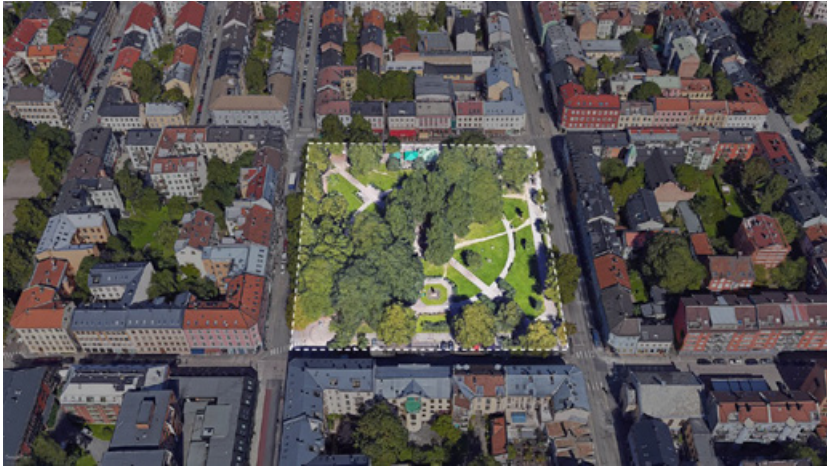


Study site in the Majorstuen neighbourhood, Oslo. Core study area: Majorstutorget ('Majorstu square') and Vinkelplassen ('The Angel Plaza'). Source: Google Earth (2018).

'within' communities. So, while public and parochial realms are physical spaces, they are socially defined. In addition to these four sites, to be described below, observations were done more occasionally at a few other sites which were either a mix of public and parochial realms or more fully public realms (Aker Brygge, Stasjonsallmenningen, Jernbanetorget, Egertorget, Youngstorget, Torggata and Tøyen torg). I also did observations, less systematically and consistent, whenever I visited central parts of town.

Located on the west side of town, Majorstuen is a well-established, affluent neighbourhood with a vibrant commercial downtown. It is a major public transport junction, served by all metro and many tram and bus lines. Elegant three- to five-storey apartment buildings, mostly from the late 1800s and early 1900s, define the neighbourhood. Facing the metro station, Majorstutorget ('The Majorstu Square') and Vinkelplassen ('The Angle Plaza) constitute the study area, both bordering the area's main shopping street yet separated by a crossing thoroughfare and commercial street. Although predominantly white, user groups are varied, particularly in the hustle and bustle in front of the metro station.

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Study site in the Grünerløkka neighbourhood, Oslo. Core study area: Olaf Ryes plass ('Olaf Ryes square'). Source: Google Earth (2018).

Grünerløkka is an inner east-side, former working-class neighbourhood. It is now fully gentrified yet with small pockets of social housing. Its street scene is lively, dominated by a chiefly youthful, white clientele and a rich offer of cafés, bars, restaurants, and small, independent shops and cultural venues. Like Majorstuen, it is typified by older apartment buildings (although more modest) organized in a grid structure. The study area is Olaf Ryes plass ('Olaf Ryes Square'), a park-like square dominated by a lawn spreading out from a central fountain and crossing footpaths. Besides serving the area's core clientele, the square is a regular hangout for groups of heavy drinkers and a gathering place for Roma people.

Although partly gentrified, Grønland is still primarily a low- and middle-income neighbourhood. Located a few minutes' walk east of downtown Oslo, it is a public transport junction and the city's multicultural hub, as well as an area which many pedestrians pass through. The area has a strong public and civil sector presence. Its public spaces are regulated and managed more or less in the same way as most public spaces in Oslo (which includes the use of private security). The study area covers the somewhat run-down Grønlands torg ('Grønland square') and a part of its extension, the pedestrianized alleyway Smalgangen ('The Narrow Lane'). A huge housing complex was built on the former square and cattle



Study site in the Grønland neighbourhood, Oslo. Core study area: Grønlands torg ('Grønland square') and Smalgangen ('The Narrow Lane'). Source: Google Earth (2018).

market in the late 1980s. When it comes to user groups, the diversity is fairly large, particularly with regard to ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Subcultural and lifestyle diversity is also notable, as is the variety in users' socioeconomic backgrounds. Socially marginalized groups are well-represented. A fairly large group of users are ethnic white and middle class. Gender-wise, the space is to some extent male-dominated. All age groups are represented. A relatively large number of regulars indicate that many users live in the area or at least have a strong affiliation to it. Tourists are few.

Tjuvholmen is a former harbour pier situated a 5–10 minute walk west of downtown Oslo. It was converted into an up-market, privately owned and managed car-free neighbourhood between 2005 and 2014. A distinct post-industrial 'packaged landscape' (Knox 1993), at Tjuvholmen there is a strong emphasis on culture, conspicuous architecture and design, and lavish, high quality public spaces open to all. Its public spaces are structured in a classical manner, composed of streets and squares, alleys, promenades, parks and semi-public spaces, and more open spaces along the waterfront. The more specific study area is limited to a part of Odden, the first of three islands that form Tjuvholmen, reaching its completion in 2007–2008. Ethnic white people make up the absolute dominant user group, and cultural and

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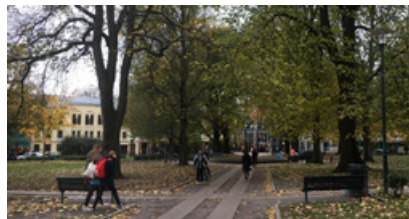


*Study site in the Tjuvholmen neighbourhood, Oslo. Core study area: a part of Odden.
Source: Google Earth (2018).*

subcultural variation is fairly small. Socially marginalized people are rarely seen. Most age groups make use of the area, though not the very old and weakened, and, apart from in the summer season, few youngsters. The majority of users are visitors.



Majorstutorget (Majorstuen), Oslo. June, 2016.



Olaf Ryes plass (Grünerløkka), Oslo. October, 2017.



Smalgangen (Grønland), Oslo. September, 2013.



Olav Selvaags plass, Odden (Tjuvholmen), Oslo. June, 2016.



The study also draws on empirical material from Argentina, mainly from Buenos Aires. Source: Google Earth (2020).



Plaza Güemes (Palermo), Buenos Aires. November, 2018.



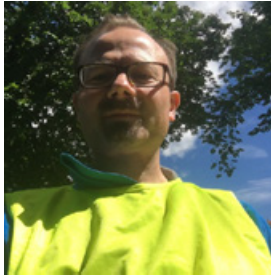
Plaza de Miserere (Balvanera), Buenos Aires. December, 2016.

I also make use of ethnographic data from a distant country I know well as reference material (in article 4 I refer to it directly). As an undergraduate student in social anthropology, in 1994–1995 I conducted a year of urban ethnographic research in Argentina focusing on football culture. Based in the city of Rosario, I travelled a lot, especially to Buenos Aires. Since then, I have been to the country on a near yearly basis, both privately and as part of my former international relations officer position at the University of Oslo, which involved close collaboration with the Universidad de Buenos Aires. In the dissertation period, I have made three week-long visits, during which I conducted test observations in Rosario and especially Buenos Aires. To this I will return when attending to the issue of generalizability towards the end of the chapter.

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Field researcher on his way to work. October, 2016.



Field researcher after failed testing (yellow vest does not equal uniform). June, 2017.



Field collaborators 1 (aged 8) and 2 (aged 3). March, 2014.



Field collaborator 2 (aged 8). January, 2019.



Field collaborator 3. August, 2017.



Field collaborator 4 (left). June, 2017.

In the field: Observing and conversing

For a field researcher, public spaces offer certain advantages over most other social settings. Neither negotiating and maintaining access to the research setting, nor handling a tension between involvement and withdrawal are issues one ordinarily has to deal with. For my part, I had practically unlimited access to my fieldwork settings, entering and leaving as I wished.

Naturally occurring activities and interactions being the project's prime focus, fieldwork chiefly consisted of observation. Detailed observation of everyday public space use, in particular social interactions, was central, mostly in the form of covert detached observation and participant observation. Observations were carried out from different spots within the spaces to be able to cover them more comprehensively and seek out relevant events and situations as they arose, as well as for my physical presence to be less conspicuous. I would sit down on benches and other objects suited to

sitting, or occupy an outdoor table or a window seat at cafés, etc. I would stand where it was acceptable to do so for some time, for instance leaned against a wall, or lay down on a patch of lawn when conditions permitted.

Alternatively, I would walk around slowly. I also ‘shadowed’ individuals prone to interact with other strangers, and made myself available to contact (e.g., by placing myself in certain spots, bringing my small children along, walking dogs, wearing a ‘uniform’, and accompanying a street performance artist over a few days). Apart from activities taking place, information recorded during observation included estimated gender, age and ethnicity of strangers engaging with each other; the time of day, place, length of time and the form of such interactions; as well as their prompting circumstances.¹⁴

If staying too long in a particular spot or coming back to the same space several consecutive days, I was at times concerned that someone would become wary of my presence. Occasionally, I also experienced people becoming suspicious of me, regulars in particular. But only on very few occasions would people ask me what I was engaged in, and then apparently more out of curiosity than of scepticism.

In inferring the nature of observed encounters, those containing no signs of mutual recognition, of ‘tie-signs’ (Goffman, 1971: 188–237), were interpreted to be between unacquainted individuals. However, such signs, involving objects, acts, expressions, can be very subtle. There is thus an evident chance that I sometimes misjudged interactions between acquaintances to have been between strangers, and vice versa.

Observations were conducted on all days of the week and at all times of the day, primarily during the warmer parts of the year, but also in winter. Altogether, fieldwork was carried out across the selected sites on some 350 occasions (of which about 100 in each of the two main sites) between 2012 and 2019, ranging from short visits to 12- to 14-hour sessions. Most, though,

¹⁴ I also conducted a simple breaching experiment, greeting random persons on the street for half a day. I did not do any such experiments again, as I found it highly uncomfortable and it only confirmed what I knew well: one does not randomly greet strangers on the street in Norway (nor in most other places).

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lasted 1–3 hours. In accordance with the research process described, observations were broadly focused in the pilot phase, before centring more and more on activities and, in particular, interaction among strangers.

Besides conversations I regularly had on-site ('informal interviews') and listening in on 'talk in action', I carried out 'intensive interviews'. These were predominantly focused, semi-structured one-to-one interviews spanning 5–10 minutes with a variety of public space users whom I approached and interviewed on the street. I conducted roughly 100 such interviews equally divided between the two main sites. A further 50 interviews were carried out with persons conducting specific tasks in public space, mostly civil society activists. All interviews centred on experiences with and perceptions of contact with or between strangers. A few so-called expert interviews were conducted as well, including with public space managers, landscape architects and a real estate agent. Given the work's eventual strong focus on social action (over experiences and perceptions), the interview material has been used less explicitly in the articles than planned. It has rather constituted background data against which observations have been checked, and as such contributed to data triangulation.

To a large extent, I used myself as a research instrument. In fieldwork, the most experience-near data stem from direct personal involvement in the social world under study. Such experience can often provide profound, nuanced and clarifying understandings of certain aspects of the topic under study (e.g., Lofland et al. 2006: 85; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 18–19). In my case, it was particularly so with respect to interaction among strangers: While sometimes unsure whether those I observed interacting were strangers to one another, that uncertainty was reasonably absent for the interactions I myself got involved in.

Observations and informal interviews were recorded first as jottings, mostly sketched discreetly on site in a notebook or on a mobile phone and later fleshed out as fieldnotes. Semi-structured interviews were mostly taped. To support observations, and for illustration purposes, I took photographs. I sometimes also recorded videos, when appropriate and commonly accepted (e.g., at events, performances, manifestations). However, video data are

complex and time-consuming to handle, and I have not made much use of this material. All transcribed fieldnotes and interviews were stored in Nvivo; the visual material was stored in computer files.

In order to obtain some numerical background data on the two main study sites, I also counted pedestrian traffic and mapped stays (i.e., people standing and sitting, by plotting these on a map). I did this over the course of almost a year (2017–2018), in spring/summer (May/June), fall (October/November) and winter (February). In each case, data were collected both on a weekday and a Saturday, every second hour from 08:00 to 22:00 (a bit shorter in winter). For more details on methods used, see Gehl and Svarre (2013: 22–27). Based on Gehl’s method of mapping stays or stationary activities, in article 3 (pp. 12–13) we have also suggested a method for using the proposed classification as an observation tool.

I have also mapped structural, spatial, physical and other relevant contextual features of each space, mostly through fieldnotes and photographs. This mapping included factors such as: location within the urban structure; urban design and morphological characteristics; degree of mixed-use; particular physical-spatial aspects of the space; design elements and aesthetics; order and maintenance; and rules of use, surveillance, and control. For the site study of Tjuvholmen, secondary data (on the planning process and other background issues) was collected through relevant published and printed books, reports, manuals, newspapers and trusted websites.

Making sense of the material

The data produced through observations and interviews, and later transcribed, stored and analysed, eventually became findings and outcomes.

All transcribed fieldnotes and interviews stored in NVivo were organized as chronological records. In practice, that meant one record or entry for each fieldwork session of observations and informal interviews, and the same for each of the structured interviews.

The research process gave rise to a lot back and forth between the empirical and analytical. This was especially true in the efforts to develop a

classification of public space uses. Instances of activities that we came across in the gathered material, whether doing fieldwork or during our ordinary pursuits in the city, were checked against existing categories. If the instances in question could not easily be assigned to any existing category, this gave us the impetus to try to develop additional categories. This process continued for approximately three years. Additionally, the creation of a new category often forced us to regroup cases or instances. Input from colleagues as well as referees' feedback on article drafts also incited us to rethink categories and grouping of instances. Thus, starting with a few, the number of categories gradually expanded. In the first draft of our first article in Norwegian, we proposed four categories; in the final version (Bjerkset and Aspen, 2018), we ended up with nine. The first article draft submitted for international publication (article 2), had 14 categories, and in the final version, it had 15. In the last, forthcoming article (article 3) the number is 16.¹⁵ While the classification to some extent rests on more or less established classes of human activities, the naming, definition and compilation of the categories are our own.

In the case of the large body of data on interactions, I also applied Nvivo to do a more systematic analysis. At this stage, I had become more familiar with the program. I did this analysis through an inductive strategy, generating first topic or thematic and then analytic code categories. In this endeavour, I leaned mostly on Richards' (2015) practical guide on how to handle qualitative data using software. I did the coding by assigning tags or labels to items or chunks of information of the chronological records. I first, then, coded the material according to topic or thematic codes. That is, sets of coding which I established that attempted to capture the central, 'empirical near' elements of the settings (actors, activities and behaviours, interactions, spaces). Next, I re-coded the whole material applying analytical codes. Here, rather than asking what kind of interaction that was in question or where it occurred, I asked analytical 'focusing' questions like what subtype of the three circumstances the interaction represented. At this point I had come to realize that practically all observed instances of peaceful chance interaction among strangers could be subsumed under Goffman's three main

¹⁵ In this listing of number of categories, I do not count the category 'other activities' which we removed from the classification after the publication of article 2.

categories. The code categories I now used were based on ideas from Goffman, some were from other scholars and others again I invented myself. In this phase, I coded items or chunks of information as extensively and pervasively as possible, reading fieldnotes and interview transcripts line by line, sentence by sentence. Each given item, unit or chunk of field data were coded in several code categories. I reorganized the code categories numerous times before ending up with the final (sub)categories.

The thematic and analytical coding partly overlapped, thematic coding dominating in the initial phase, analytical coding in the final phase. Contrary to regular advice, I started to code quite late in the research process. This was a consequence of beginning relatively late with the program, implying I had to code a lot of material at once, having a large backlog. For most of the analytical categories I ended up with, I wrote separate memos to further make sense of the data and the code category, including possible interrelations between categories (I also wrote in-process memos on other aspects of the study, on for instance practical and methodological issues). Memos could vary in length, but rarely exceeded three pages. They largely formed the basis for the description in article 4 of each of the subtypes of circumstances that spur interaction among strangers.

Indeed, the whole process of coding the material was laborious and time-consuming. It was probably made more so by the use of a software program. Importantly, such programs cannot do the hard work of data analysis. This requires intellectual and creative abilities that only the researcher can provide. Still, the use of such programs gives many advantages. My use of NVivo helped me handle the large and somewhat overwhelming body of data I had on interactions: To structure and analyse it; to search through the data and to retrieve, recode, regroup and enumerate coded items and relate them to each other in a much more rapid and consistent way than was possible to do with the topics or subjects I had not coded for. It also facilitates others' access to and inspection of my data, making the whole process of analysis more transparent.

The two classifications (on public space use and interactions) that resulted from the analysis of the data are both a combination of existing and newly conceived concepts and categories. They emerged from a long process of

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arranging and rearranging the data. In other words: the categories came after and not before the data.

Principally, there are two ways of going about when developing a classification: to make either a typology or a taxonomy (Bailey, 1994). The former is primarily conceptual, based on Weberian ideal types; the latter is empirical. A typology is generally multidimensional, the topics under study possessing some complex but systematic interrelations. In contrast, a taxonomy – which is the appropriate approach in our case – is an elaborated list of all possible types into which a meaningful, empirically observable cultural phenomenon can be subdivided. Even though both the proposed classifications are technically taxonomies, for reasons of accessibility, the more common term classification has been used. In creating these classifications, two basic rules have guided the work: the categories should be both exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Bailey, 1994). That is, the categories developed should make it possible to classify all (or almost all) of the relevant cases. The contents of the classification should also be so defined that each case only can be placed within one category. In dealing with fairly complex and ambiguous phenomena such as public space uses and interactions, the principles of exhaustiveness and mutual exclusion have here been followed more as an ideal than an absolute rule.

The two developed classifications represent different approaches to categorization. With regards to public space use, the aim is a detailed and comprehensive classification that can be used as a tool for both recording and analysis. In the other case, the categories resulted from an effort to organize, systematize and understand the diverse circumstances that encourage or authorize strangers to interact in public space.

Real life is much messier than the tidy classifications indicate. By definition, urban life is dynamic and shifting. Activities in public space may well exist concurrently or overlap, as may circumstances that spur strangers to interact. Accordingly, the classification efforts presented here can be said to represent a ‘pragmatic compromise between analytical neatness and empirical messiness’ (Manning, 1992: 52).

Notes on investigation quality

A few aspects pertaining to the character and quality of the conducted research must be addressed in some detail. More specifically, this relates to issues of cause and consequence, trustworthiness or ‘trueness’ and generic propositions. Different scholars use different terms for these aspects of the research enterprise, depending on their position or orientation, be they more quantitatively or qualitative oriented. Here, I follow the terminology of Lofland et al. (2006).

Cause and consequence The issue of interrelations or covariation particularly applies to the theme of underlying circumstances that trigger or authorize interaction between strangers (article 4). Such circumstances do not determine interaction; interaction will not automatically follow from their presence. There is, however, an evident empirical interrelationship between the two: If the identified circumstances were present, the probability of interaction taking place strongly increased. The degree of probability varied with the circumstances in question. In the case of users with a defined role in public space, such as vendors, political activists, petitioners and so forth, it is highly probable that some kinds of interaction will result from the mere fact that they carry out their regular activities. They represent both ‘opening’ and ‘exposed persons’, what I have subtyped as ‘licensed to approach’ and ‘accessible by obligation’. In the case of ordinary users, the probability is normally less. For instance, watching a street performance side by side with someone unknown, a situation of ‘mutual openness’ provided by ‘external stimulus’, may or may not trigger an exchange.

In examples of this latter kind, culture plays a part. In article 4, I argue that if the same circumstances exist in an Argentine and a Norwegian urban setting, the chances are greater in the former than in the latter case that interaction actually takes place. According to my data, there is a cultural difference in the willingness or inclination to engage with strangers when the circumstances open up, and the ease with which such contact is handled. In this respect, ethnic Norwegians (and possibly Nordic people in general) are probably at the lower end of the scale, while Argentinians (and Latin Americans more generally) are higher up.

'Trueness' The surge of postmodern approaches to ethnographic work (e.g., Clifford and Marcus, 2010 [1986]; Denzin, 2002) posed challenges to 'social realism' in fieldwork. Scholars advocating such postmodern approaches spoke of a 'crisis of representation', claiming that ethnographic texts and data are fictional. This was the case, they argued, partly because observations and fieldnotes filter rather than mirror realities, and partly because no ethnographic claims can be asserted as more true or accurate than others since all observations are filtered or interpreted. To this, proponents of a 'realist' or 'social realist' position, a position to which I adhere in this work, counter: All human observations of the world are necessary filtered. Filtering is not fabricating. The leap from acknowledging an interpretative dimension to ethnographic studies to viewing it exclusively as interpretative is huge; there are other essential aspects of fieldwork, most critically, the rigorous collection of observational and interview data (Lofland et al. 2006: 83–84; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 5–19). Within such a realist or social realist framing of qualitative research, getting at the 'truth' means securing a close approximation of the empirical world which is trustworthy in terms of the procedures applied (e.g. Lofland et al. 2006: 169–171).

In general, through fieldwork which entailed prolonged, sustained engagement and systematic observation, I trust to have reduced the chance of overlooking significant patterns or eluded interesting or important aspects of the investigated topics.

Key to achieve empirical accuracy or trueness are systematic data collection strategies. Intrinsic to such strategies are strategies to record the gathered data. The logging record actually constitutes the data; only data that has been recorded (as opposed to unrecorded memories) can be systematically accessed for rigorous analysis (Lofland et al. 2006: 82-83). For this reason, I have striven to document data in a consistent and meticulous manner. During fieldwork periods, recording data took up much of my time. In general, I spent at least as much time writing out the fieldnotes as I spent in the field. Sometimes two or three times more, depending on the level of detail opted for. This task required discipline and stamina. It was a tedious part of the work.

In the recording process, I followed some key principles of writing ethnographic fieldnotes as prescribed by Emerson et al. (2011) in their handbook on the subject. Among the most important, were: To flesh out the fieldnotes as soon as possible after an ended fieldwork session to produce fresher, more detailed and precise recollections of observed occurrences (the longer I waited, the less detailed, the more generic the fieldnotes, and the more burdensome the task). To depict observed scenes in concrete details rather than abstract generalizations, and in sensory terms rather than in evaluative labels. To clearly distinguish between two very different kinds of entries: one the hand, descriptions of observations and dialogues, and on the other, analytical writing such as asides, commentaries, and interpretive writings composed while actively producing the fieldnotes.

Central to systematic data collection strategies are also efforts to avoid error and bias in observations (e.g., Lofland et al., 2006: 90–94). These represent threats to the accuracy of one's data, and thus to the final publication. To neutralize or limit the likelihood of contaminating or distorting effects, I have employed a number of measures (for an overview of such, see e.g. Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2005: 210–220; Lofland et al., 2006: 90–94).

Sampling strategies is one such measure. Purposeful sampling of cases is appropriate when one wants to learn about select cases or variations across a set of cases. One purposive sampling strategy I have used is *maximum variation sampling*, which aim is to discover the diversity or range of the phenomena of interest. Further, sampling *extreme cases*, in my case Grønland and Tjuvholmen, cases that are outliers or unusual in comparison to what appears to be the more typical cases, helps guard against the bias that may be associated with both the researcher's role or interpretative theoretical sample. Similarly, my use of observation material from urban settings in Argentina can be considered as *theoretical sampling*. Such sampling intends to reduce the prospect of premature theorization and conclusion by encouraging the researcher to look to other situations, groups and subgroups to see if emerging understandings hold or apply.

Another strategy that I have used to reduce error and bias is *strategic selection of informants*. When interviewing ordinary public space users on the street, I made an effort to select individuals who varied in backgrounds

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based on their appearance, to capture possible differences in experiences and views. Also, I strove to both talk with and interview people who were differently positioned within the study settings and thus could provide access to different kinds of perspectives and information (e.g., passers-by, occasional visitors, regulars, sellers, activists, managers, security guards).

Three of the dissertation's articles result from *team research* between myself and my main supervisor. To some extent, this collaboration can be said to help guard against the personal characteristics and preferred interpretive stand of each of us. Also, my co-author knows several of the settings studied very well. One is next to where he lives, a space he has regularly used and passed by for the last 25 years. We did not do *team field research*, though, which involves the coordination and integration of two or more researchers each doing fieldwork.

I did not do *member checking* proper, either. That is to say, ask group or setting members to assess mine or our hypotheses, findings or analyses. Such a strategy can provide an additional check on observational and interpretative errors. At the same time, it is a strategy that must be used with caution for a variety of reasons (e.g., Silverman, 2005: 212), including the chance that setting members will neither approach nor assess the material with the theoretical concerns and issues of the research. Yet I did do a few things that resemble member checking. I have presented findings and analyses at in-house presentations, at national conferences and in publications (newspapers, journals) directed at a general, local public. These presentations produced some useful feedback. Considering that my study sites are centrally located ones in the capital city of the country, I presume a large proportion of the public was familiar with some of them. Moreover, as urbanites otherwise, I presume they have personal experiences with everyday activities and encounters. In general, many of those to whom I mentioned my research and on whom I sometimes tested findings willingly shared their experiences. In the case of the classification of the uses of public space, we made it a main topic in a master course we taught together in the fall of 2018 and 2019. As a course assignment, the students made use of the classification to record and analyse public space use. This exercise confirmed the classification's analytical usefulness, but also revealed some

challenges in using it for systematic recording purposes (see chapter 7 for a suggestion on how to mitigate these challenges).

All the data produced during the investigation is available to others in a database I created for the project in Nvivo, as raw data and, concerning the interaction material, also in the different levels of coding (thematic/analytical). The database offers a detailed account of how I coded and categorized transcripts from observations and interviews. To avoid anecdotalism, I carefully investigated all my data. I transcribed and purposely coded all the observations and dialogues/interviews. The selection of data presented in the articles is a result of thorough analysis. Three of the articles have undergone standard peer-review prior to publication or acceptance of publication in renowned academic channels. Two of these, both anthologies, are considered to be international reference works on public space. Three additional articles, on which the three mentioned dissertation articles partly are modelled, have been through peer-reviewing in Norwegian publications.

Regardless of efforts to avoid error and bias, the data could obviously have been *interpreted* differently. This may be especially true with regard to the site study of Tjuvholmen (article 1), in which we applied a normative conceptual framework. In short, the focus in this framework 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, no less importantly, upon one’s assumptions about what is good about public space. While we share Franck and Stevens’ view on the virtues of loose space, other scholars with other leanings and backgrounds may have interpreted the data differently, perhaps highlighting the latter as something positive.

Generic propositions The aim of this investigation has been to identify more generic features rather than more local or particular ones. Chiefly, I have sought to specify abstract propositions of which the local particulars are instances. I have used what I consider to be rich qualitative material as a

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foundation to develop categories, concepts and some other propositions that transcend the particular Oslo settings in which the data were gathered. Obviously, these are analytical rather than statistical propositions, concerned with the extent to which the findings from this study can be used as guides for what can happen or be the case in other situations under similar or comparable circumstances.

I have developed three major generic propositions. These relate to basic mechanisms that distinguish ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space in terms of chance interaction among strangers (synopsis/chapter 6); circumstances that spur or authorize strangers to interact in public space (article 4); and types of public space use (articles 2 and 3). I have developed these three propositions in different ways: (1) through providing a general interpretation of the interactional differences between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space; (2) through incorporating existing generic categories (Goffman’s) into my analysis of circumstances that prompt interaction among strangers, refining these categories in the process by adding subcategories; (3) and through discerning new variations of an established social or cultural phenomenon, that is, new, more comprehensive and detailed types of public space use.

Some comments on context and scale must be added. Norway is a small, functional and peaceful welfare society where levels of interpersonal trust are high. In many respects it stands out from larger, less affluent, more divided Western countries. At the same time, as argued previously, Norway is an open country with an open economy that in many respects has undergone a neoliberal shift similar to those in other regions of the world. In urban governance and planning, the neoliberal turn has been particularly marked. Among other things, this has resulted in a few large-scale private developments containing a ‘new’ type of public space which contrasts quite sharply with more traditional public spaces. So, even in the country’s particularity, full-blown ‘new’ public spaces have emerged in which designs and plans limit activities and social interactions that would normally take place in more traditional settings.

It might be objected that since Norway is such a small country, and Oslo a relatively small city, everyone must know who everyone else is. Generally speaking, the likelihood of randomly running into acquaintances is greater

in a smaller than in a larger city. Still, even in relatively small cities, most people are unknown to one another. Moreover, in our particular case, Oslo is not that small. To take the UK as a comparison, only three cities are larger (London, Birmingham and Dublin). To Oslo's around 700,000 inhabitants, one must add some 180,000 work commuters from neighbouring regions (Statistics Norway, 2020) and plentiful national and international visitors and tourists. When good weather conditions in the summer season, some 4300 pedestrians pass through the site at Grønland per hour at midday and some 3100 through the one at Tjuvholmen.¹⁶ Obviously, most of these individuals do not know each other. The numbers for some of the other investigated sites are higher, for others lower. As noted, all the investigated spaces are either a mix of parochial and public realms (Lofland, 2009: 10–14), or fully public realms.

It has been argued that civility is lower in cities than in rural areas, and that the more densely populated a city, the less civil it is (e.g., Hertz, 2020). Anonymity breeds hostility and carelessness, the reasoning goes, and the city, filled with millions of strangers, is all too anonymous and sizable, making withdrawal a widespread coping strategy (Hertz, 2020: 58–61).¹⁷ According to such an argument, one would expect urbanites in New York or Buenos Aires to be less civil towards each other than in Oslo or Stockholm. In terms of serious offences, of crime, that is quite certainly so. At the same time, Nordic urbanites have a reputation for a certain impoliteness in public, often linked to everyday incidents such as bumping into other people without apologizing, carrying on as if nothing happened. Foreigners often perceive us as socially inhibited and somewhat clumsy. Such a perception matches well with notable 'Scandinavian personality traits' (Health Research Funding, 2019) and ethnographic research on Norwegian (e.g., Gullestad, 1992: 137–164) and Swedish idiosyncrasies (e.g., Daun, 1996). People in the Nordic countries largely support such depictions, often

¹⁶ Data from my own pedestrian counting on two Saturdays of similar, good weather conditions between late May and early June 2018. The corresponding numbers for weekdays were 3500 persons per hour at Grønland and 2700 at Tjuvholmen.

¹⁷ This reminds us of Simmel's ideas of urbanites' mental withdrawal due to overstimulation from the urban environment. As I have come to realize, however, when reflecting on my own findings, and as I later also found in Sennett (2019): Simmel seems to conflate peak use with constant use. Apparently, his main reference is Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, the busy crossroads of the German capital, and in particular the crowds of its sidewalks (Sennett, 2019: 54–56).

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contrasting themselves with more extroverted and convivial Southern Europeans or North Americans.

However this might be, the balance between civility and incivility in human exchanges may of course vary between smaller and larger cities as well as between cities of the same size in different regions or countries. Still, I contend that the circumstances Goffman identified among middle-class Americans of his time, and that I have found to spur or authorize respectful interaction among strangers in today's Oslo, can also be valid in urban settings in other countries and regions. My findings and experiences suggest, as indicated, that cultural variation in a Western context is less a question of different licensing circumstances than of varying inclination and ease to interact under similar conditions. It is important to add that many of the circumstances identified as spurring peaceful interactions may well provoke less peaceful or desirable ones, the confines between civility and incivility being flexible and fleeting.

Like social interactions, activities in public space vary and play out differently across geographical and cultural contexts. Still, we contend that the categories of the proposed classification correspond to basic functions of public space in many a city, especially for post-industrial and neoliberal Western cities.

I have tested preliminary findings in very different, partly much larger urban settings than Oslo. Foremost, this has taken place in the million-inhabitant city of Rosario and the multi-million-inhabitant city of Buenos Aires, on my last three trips to Argentina. Although situated in Latin America, Argentina can in many respects be considered a Western country. Not the least culturally, a large proportion of its inhabitants having European ancestors. While in Argentina, I have specifically tried to identify instances of public space use and peaceful chance interaction in public space that in no reasonable way could be assigned to one of the categories proposed. I have not been able to identify any such instances there (nor in any of the many European cities I have visited, mostly as an attentive tourist, over the course of this study), with one notable exception. On a visit to Buenos Aires, noticing the mobile municipal health stations that had appeared in parks, I realized that such a use could not reasonably be assigned to any of the

categories of the existing classification of public space uses. That is, health or welfare services offered to the general public. Upon return home, I discovered instances of the same activity type in my Oslo material. During the COVID-19 outbreak, this type of services has increased greatly in scope (primarily, in the form of testing stations). We have added this as a new category of the classification (to be included in article 3).

The results of the described testing in Argentina of preliminary findings from Norway does not necessarily prove very much. Nevertheless, it makes it more plausible to suggest that the two sets of categories to a large extent might be valid in other countries and settings. Also, the two articles on classification of public space uses have been published or accepted in international, peer-reviewed reference books on public space edited by recognized US scholars. I take this, as well as data on the issue that I have from the international literature, as further indications that the classification not only speaks to local uses, but has some broader, more general significance.

Ethical, bureaucratic and legal issues

Observation in public space is by and large considered ethically acceptable and mostly unproblematic. As indicated, public and quasi-public places are the least restrictive and most open research settings, making it easy to assume the role of an unknown investigator. The national *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology* (2016: 13–14), state that ‘observations in public arenas, on streets and in public squares’ are exempted from the duty to inform ‘participants’ about the research. Further to the public character of these sites, there is a pragmatic side to it: Such research could not practically have been carried out were provision of research information or informed consent (see below) to be required. Also, the probability of unintended research effects or risk to participants when doing covert observation in public space is generally minor. Nevertheless, I would sometimes make my investigator role known to people I became familiar with or with whom I had prolonged chats, partly because I did not want to act under false pretences, and partly because it allowed me to direct conversations.

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In regards to intensive interviews, I informed all participants about my project and its purpose. The large majority of participants gave their informed consent for audio-recording the interviews; the few who did not, accepted that I took notes during the interview.

No specific national guidelines for the reproduction in research publications of images from public settings exist. According to the general, national Person Data Act (Norwegian Data Protection Authority, 2020), the reproduction of ‘situation images’ (*situasjonsbilder*) does not require consent from those pictured as long as the image reproduces gatherings or events of public interest. Situation images are defined as ‘images in which the activity or the occurrence in the image is the real motif’, not the persons pictured. I consider the images reproduced in this dissertation as situation images. I deem them to be of public interest to the research community, as illustrations of general arguments and points made in the text, and of low personal sensitivity to those individuals who might be recognized in the images.

No other sensitive personal information can be found in the articles or in this synopsis. The data are stored and processed according to the regulations of the national data protection body for research, the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The project itself did not require reporting to NSD. The formal interviews were conducted prior to Norway’s implementation of the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in July 2018, which require all audio-recordings (now considered personal data in itself) to be reported. Overall, I judge the project to be at the low end of the scale in terms of sensitive personal data.

Summary

The conducted field study took empirical data as its starting point, from which interesting topics, questions and concepts were deduced. The aim of this investigation has been the generic rather than the local or particular; three major generic propositions have been developed. In this, the research partly relies and expands on some lesser-known concepts and insights developed by Erving Goffman. The research draws primarily on close and lengthy observation of everyday activities and interactions in selected public spaces – squares and adjacent spaces – in dense mixed-use areas of Oslo. A

pilot phase, in which some more specific topics to be pursued further were identified, preceded the dissertation work proper. The two main sites of the investigation, representing respectively 'traditional' and 'new' public space, were set in starkly contrasting settings. Having gathered and processed the data, systematic analysis followed. Preliminary findings and analysis, in turn, were checked against the empirical, including against reference material from urban settings in Argentina. The data processing, and parts of the analysis, was done with the help of a computer software program. Based on the analysis, a site-specific study as well as categorization and concept development followed, of which the dissertation's (partly co-written) articles are the result.

CHAPTER 5

THE FOUR REPORTS IN SHORT

Article 1: Bjerkeset S and Aspen J (2017) Private-public space in a Nordic context: The Tjuvholmen waterfront development in Oslo. *Journal of Urban Design* 22(1): 116–132. *Published*

When this article was published, no research had been published internationally on use-related aspects of external private-public space in a Nordic context. Based primarily on an observational study, the article addresses the production of privately owned and managed public spaces at the Tjuvholmen waterfront development. More specifically, it explores the key characteristics of four interrelated factors of this public space production: planning and development, design, management, and, in particular, use.

The overall finding is that Tjuvholmen's public spaces are characterized by 'tightness' and reduced publicness. In particular, this relates to the curbing of certain activities and the general lack of non-regulated, spontaneous interaction among strangers.¹⁸ As such, they share key characteristics with private-public spaces described in the literature from the US and the UK. In some other respects the explored public spaces also deviate from these. This goes particularly for the US examples, where issues of control and sanctioning partly seem much stricter, and aspects like physical enclosure, inward orientation and disconnection from the street and 'hostile architecture' are more common.

The article adds to research on public space research primarily by documenting and analysing important features of a full-blown external private-public space in a Nordic context. It also nuances the 'international formula' criticism of such spaces. While the planning, development, design and management of Tjuvholmen's public spaces obviously are based

¹⁸ In the article (p.126), we state that unplanned and non-regulated interactions between strangers are 'almost non-existent' at Tjuvholmen. Chapter 6 nuances this description. Based on further fieldwork, I here document that chance interactions among strangers are more an episodic than recurrent feature of the area's public spaces.

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.

Relevance to overall investigative focus: A site study of a ‘new’ public space, with a particular focus on major aspects of use, including activities and chance encounters. Forming part of a large, upscale privately owned and managed mixed-use waterfront redevelopment, Tjuvholmen’s tightly regulated and managed public spaces can be said to represent key traits of ‘new’ public spaces. As such, they can also be considered to manifest, in condensed form, emerging features of public spaces in prestigious urban developments more widely.

Article 2: Bjerkeset S and Aspen J (2020) Public space use: A classification. In: Mehta V and Palazzo D (eds) *Companion to Public Space*. Routledge Companions. New York: Routledge, pp.221–233. *Published*

In public spaces, urbanites pursue a broad range of activities. Given the heightened importance of and concern for urban public spaces, there is, we claim, a need to develop a more detailed and comprehensive vocabulary to capture how they are used. Numerous efforts to classify characteristics of public space exist, but those focusing on types of use tend to be too partial or too general.

Drawing from long-term field investigation in Oslo, this book chapter presents a classification that is comprehensive and detailed and that can be used as a tool for both observing and analysing the uses of public space. All together it comprises 16 categories of distinct types of uses. These have been labelled: mundane activities, personal recreation, transportation, selling and buying, civic activities, culture and entertainment, ceremony and celebration, production, management, construction and renovation, teaching and learning, work-related activities, public aid, activities of the homeless, deviant activities and other activities. Since social activities and interactions, as well as people's everyday involvements with digital technology, form such an integral aspect of other kinds of public space use, we have treated them as such rather than as distinct categories.

Classifying the highly diverse and in part rapidly changing and interwoven activities that people pursue in public space is obviously not a straightforward task. In sum, however, we believe that the benefits of the proposed classification far outweigh its shortcomings.

As a recording tool, the classification can facilitate the identification and documentation of the full range of activities taking place in specific public spaces. As an analytic tool, it can be employed to compare use at different points of time within the same space as well as use across various spaces, thus contributing to a more informed, empirically based analysis of the many shifting and contrasting forms of public space use.

Relevance to overall investigative focus: The classification facilitates the identification, documentation and comparison of activities that take place in public spaces. Related to the topic of interaction among strangers, a major point is that it is through the activities that people pursue that they interact spontaneously with strangers in public space.

Hello, stranger?

A classification of uses of urban public space (article 2 and 3)



Everyday practical activities



Personal recreation



Transportation



Selling and buying



Civic activities



Culture and entertainment



Ceremony and celebration



Production



Management and maintenance



Construction and renovation



Health and welfare services



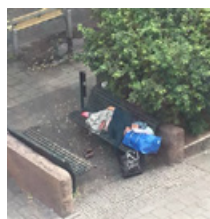
Teaching and learning



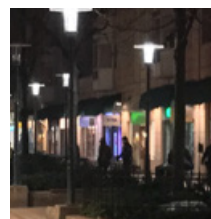
Work-related activities



Public aid



Activities of the homeless



Deviant activities

Article 3: Bjerkeset S and Aspen J (2021) The diverse uses of a city's public spaces. In: Franck KA and Huang E (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Public Space Use, Design, and Management*. Routledge Handbooks. New York: Routledge. *Forthcoming*

Like article 2, article 3 deals with our suggested classification of the uses of urban public space. However, the two articles emphasize different aspects of the classification, and thus complement rather than duplicate each other. Article 2 focuses more on background issues and previous efforts to classify the uses of urban public space. In contrast, this article more fully explains the categories and grounds them in actual field observations of public space use in Oslo (pp. 3–8). It also describes in more detail the testing of the classification and how it can be used for observation and analysis (pp. 10–11). Smaller corrections have been made, and two categories have been renamed for accuracy reasons: What was previously ‘mundane activities’ is now ‘everyday practical activities’, and ‘management’ has become ‘management and maintenance’. Additionally, in this version of the classification, the superfluous category ‘other activities’ has been left out.

However, another category will be added to the classification in the final version of the article. The number of categories, 16, thus remains the same. As of now, it is briefly alluded to in a footnote (1) as a potential new category. We have temporarily named it ‘health and welfare services’, and defined it as mostly free, non-partisan health and welfare services offered by public, civil society or private institutions to a general audience. Examples are staffed stalls, tents, mobile stations etc. in public space offering health information, health controls and testing, social services, substance abuse assistance, food supply, library services, waste recycling, election information and (pre-poll) voting.¹⁹

¹⁹ Some clarifications must be made to distinguish this new category from existing ones. For now, I simply note that ‘health and welfare services’ differ from ‘public aid’ by being of a more planned, organized nature.

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Relevance to overall investigative focus: In addition to what is listed for article 2, this article, by grounding the categories in detailed field observations, illustrates the close interconnection between particular activity types and interaction among strangers. It also provides a more detailed explanation of how the classification can be applied to record the full range of activities that place in public spaces.

Article 4: Bjerkeset S (in progress) ‘License to interact’. Circumstances encouraging chance interactions among strangers in urban public space.

To be submitted to a peer-reviewed international journal

Although much celebrated in urban scholarship and beyond, what makes chance interaction between strangers of respectful or peaceful kinds actually occur has rarely been systematically documented.

Based on the entire observation and interview material gathered in the course of the study, this article examines underlying circumstances that encourage peaceful chance interactions among strangers in urban public space.

The research reveals that a wide range of circumstances prompt, or license, such interaction, the principal ones categorized as ‘exposed positions/persons’, ‘opening positions/persons’, and ‘mutual openness’. That is, circumstances that expose people to contact with others, make people approach others or open up for mutual accessibility. For ‘exposed positions/persons’, the subtypes I have further defined are: ‘accessible by obligation’, ‘low social status’, ‘out of role’, ‘in need of help’, ‘other individuals’ actions’, ‘standing out from the crowd’, and ‘famous persons’. ‘Opening positions/persons’ is subdivided into ‘licensed to approach’, ‘no status to lose’, ‘out of role’, ‘asking for favours and information’, ‘offering apologies or explanations’, and ‘regulars’. Finally, ‘mutual openness’ has these subtypes: ‘common group identity’, ‘open regions’, ‘opening *and* exposed’, ‘physical proximity’, and ‘triangulation’.

In this, the research relies, as well as substantiates and expands, on a lesser-known part of Erving Goffman’s work. The three main types are Goffman’s own. While most of the 18 subtypes spring from Goffman’s ideas, three of them are my constructions and two of them are informed by other scholars. Most names of subtypes are my own.

The key contribution of the article is the thorough documentation and categorization of basic circumstances that make the city’s strangers engage spontaneously and civilly with one another in public. Concerning this, the

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article also signals a continuity and broader relevance of these circumstances. Despite extensive changes in society and technology, unplanned engagements between strangers in the investigated public spaces essentially comply with the 'interaction order' that Goffman claimed governed such engagements in public in American middle-class society more than half a century ago.

Relevance to overall investigative focus: This article is based on a mapping of general, basic circumstances that prompt or license interaction among strangers in public space. Such circumstances account for most of the peaceful interactions that actually take place in the investigated spaces, be they of the 'traditional' or 'new' kind.

Circumstances that prompt chance interaction among strangers in public space (article 4)

Exposed persons

Opening persons

Mutual openness



Summary and overview

Overview of research focus, empirical data and main findings of the four articles

	<i>Research focus</i>	<i>Empirical data</i>	<i>Main findings/outcomes</i>
<p>Article 1 Private-public space in a Nordic context: The Tjuvholmen waterfront development in Oslo</p>	<p>What are the key characteristics of the planning and development, design, management and, in particular, use, of a private-public space in a Nordic context?</p>	<p>Systematic observation (both detached and participant)</p> <p>Secondary data collected through relevant published and printed books, reports, manuals, newspapers and trusted websites</p>	<p>Tjuvholmen's public spaces are characterized by 'tightness', reduced publicness and scant chance interaction among strangers. As such, they share key features with private-public spaces described from the US and the UK, while in other respects differing from these.</p>
<p>Article 2 Public space use: A classification</p>	<p>How can the diverse uses of urban public spaces be categorized?</p>	<p>Systematic and unsystematic observation (both detached and participant)</p>	<p>A comprehensive classification system of urban public space use, all together comprising 16 categories of distinct types of uses</p>
<p>Article 3 Diverse uses of a city's public spaces</p>	<p>How can the diverse uses of urban public spaces be categorized (and empirically grounded)?</p>	<p>Systematic and unsystematic observation (both detached and participant)</p>	<p>A comprehensive classification system of urban public space use, all together comprising 16 categories of distinct types of uses</p>
<p>Article 4 'License to interact': Circumstances encouraging chance interaction among strangers in urban public space</p>	<p>What are the underlying circumstances which encourage or license spontaneous, peaceful face-to-face interaction among strangers in public space?</p>	<p>Systematic and unsystematic observation (both detached and participant)</p> <p>Informal and focused semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>A wide range of circumstances prompt, or license, peaceful chance interaction among strangers in the explored public spaces, the principal ones categorized as 'exposed persons', 'opening persons' and 'mutual openness'. 18 subtypes are defined.</p>

CHAPTER 6

ATTRACTION OVER INTERACTION?

As mentioned, Western urban planning in the post-war period has seen a radical shift in focus, namely from large-scale master planning to more fragmented, project-based planning. The public sector is now less a provider and more of a facilitator than before, reflecting a shift in urban governance regime. As part of this shift, and against a background of strengthened intra-urban competition, the entrepreneurial city emerges. Here, a certain conception of attractiveness takes centre stage in prestigious developments: attractiveness in physical surroundings, urban environments, cultural and leisure offers, etc. These traits are particularly pronounced in privately owned and managed developments. Unlike many other Western countries in the neoliberal era, Norway has retained a large public sector and a strong universal welfare state. Still, the described change has been marked here also, not least in Oslo, and perhaps even more than in most other places.

How does this overall shift in urban governance, planning and development manifest on the ground? More precisely, how does it manifest in chance interactions among strangers in public space? That is the focus of this chapter, taking as its point of departure the two opposing sites of the study. These two sites, Grønland and Tjuvholmen, well exemplify what I have termed ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space. More than a discussion of the concluded research as such, the chapter brings together the study’s three core themes – public space, activities and interactions. It synthesizes the findings and outcomes of the study and discusses the resulting analysis against key scholarly literature in the field. In so doing, it proposes some generic features that distinguish ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space from each other with respect to chance interactions. Strengths and weaknesses of the research have been touched upon throughout (in the methodology chapter and in the articles themselves) and will also be examined in the concluding chapter.

In what follows, I first summarize observations of chance interactions among strangers in the two sites and identify some key underlying differences. For that purpose, I employ Goffman’s three main circumstances

encouraging or licensing chance interaction among strangers, as well as the categories of public space use that we have developed.²⁰ The empirical evidence I draw on, primarily observational material, forms part of the data basis for the entire study.²¹ Next I link the essential extracted features of the two sites to the different public space types they can be said to represent. I end by discussing the presented findings and analysis in view of a core question in contemporary urbanism – whether the quest for attraction trumps interaction among diverse strangers in public space.

Two neighbourhoods, two realities

Before going into the details of the two sites to be scrutinized and compared, a brief recapitulation of the basic circumstances that license or prompt strangers to interact is needed. These are circumstances that: expose people to contact with others ('exposed persons'), make people approach others ('opening persons') or open up for mutual accessibility ('mutual openness'). Also, it is useful to keep in mind that there are, roughly speaking, two user groups in public space: those who have specific roles to play or are committed to specific tasks (often related to income-generating work or voluntary engagements), and those who use public space for their own practical and recreation purposes (i.e., regular users, of which there are most).

Grønland A five minutes' walk east from downtown sits Grønland. In the national, media-mediated consciousness, this highly diverse, multicultural neighbourhood represents most urban ills. True, the challenges it faces are many, some of which necessarily spills into the street. Here, dealers may try to push drugs on casual passers-by; here the insults may resound; here

²⁰ In order to present the main argument of the chapter and dissertation as comprehensibly as possible, I will sparsely use the developed subtypes of prompting or licensing circumstances (article 4), but mostly stick to Goffman's three main types. Also, as previously remarked, Goffman sometimes uses 'exposed persons' and 'opening persons' instead of 'exposed positions' and 'opening positions'. For clarity the argument, I will apply the terms 'exposed persons' and 'opening persons' in what follows.

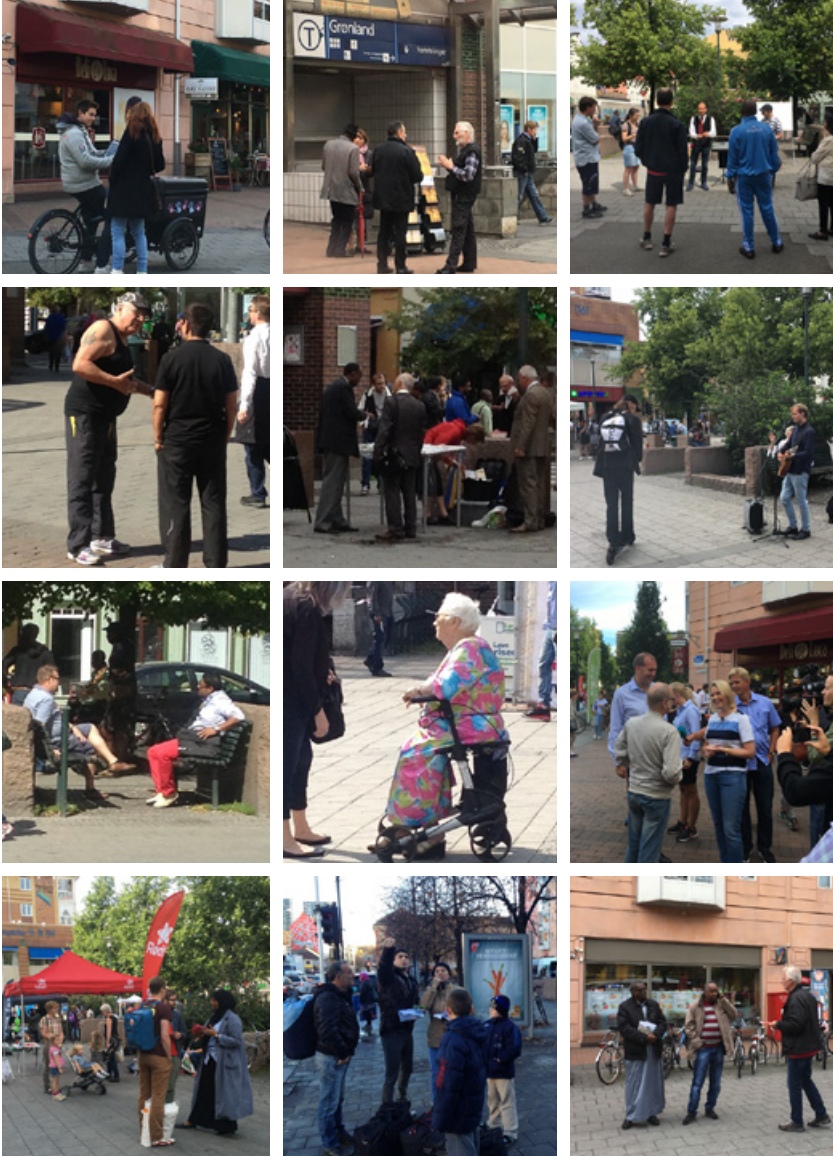
²¹ In the dissertation's articles, however, the empirical evidence presented in this chapter is rarely explicitly coupled to any of the explored sites (due in part to the rather strong analytical focus of most of the articles). Like described in chapter 4, the data material as such is stored and accessible in Nvivo, as transcripts of fieldnotes and interviews, as well as organized into thematic and analytical categories.

streets gangs may act tough, and here some end up in fights, on occasion involving weapons. From time to time, the media reports on harassment and violence against gays. Forms of power and control in the area also unfold in more subtle ways. Above all, what shows through is how many women's use of public space is less free than men's, not least in dealing with the opposite sex. This applies especially to young Muslim women, many of whom seem to be subject to strong social control. However, such hostile appearances are not what dominates the daily urban scene of the area, in the midst of which lies the square and the pedestrianized street under scrutiny here.

The area's diversity of users and activities yield a multifaceted, dynamic street scene throughout much of the day. A variety of peaceful social encounters is integral to this, including those between strangers. People with very different backgrounds, identities, beliefs and lifestyles are brought together here. Mostly, these encounters are about co-presence. People 'communicate' with each other through clothing, physical appearance and how they otherwise behave. Or they may interact in the most ephemeral ways, often in connection with more necessary pursuits, many of which are related to the central, dense and mixed-use character of the area, including proximity to public transport services, not least the subway. Such everyday practical activities involve rapid and crossing movements and transient, mostly non-verbal interactions of 'rubbing along' (Watson, 2006): eyes that meet; bodies touching lightly (or sometimes heavily and clumsily) in passing; people quietly negotiating with one another how to pass, and so forth.

Encounters of these and other kinds may also take the form of more direct, verbal interaction. This is quite commonplace, and relates to the daily presence of 'opening' and 'exposed persons' as well as well as certain types of 'mutual openness'.

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Instances of chance interaction among strangers at Grønland.

Many of the individuals frequenting these spaces have something they want to sell or ask for, or some message they want to convey. On the square, vendors and marketing people promote their products from mobile stands. Shop owners and employees and waiters at times try to invite potential customers in. More informal sales activities include the selling of street magazines and other types of occasional street vending. Individuals in need may beg for money or ask for and collect bottles. Now and then street entertainers perform on the square, trying to attract some attention. Civic activities have a strong presence. Political activists hand out leaflets and try to engage passers-by in talk. Particularly so in times of municipal and national elections, when all major parties are present for weeks or months, but also sporadically throughout the year. Strikes, protests and demonstrations of mostly peaceful kinds take place from time to time. Not least, there is much activity and soliciting by religious communities. Muslim communities dominate, yet there are others, perhaps engaging in street preaching, petitioning or the handing out of Bibles, the Bhagavad Gita or the monthly publication of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Numerous other voluntary, non-profit organizations come here regularly, too, to collect money, request signatures, recruit members or spread information on their work, ongoing campaigns, etc. During election times, a municipal 'container' is stationed on the square where people can pre-vote and get election information, and on some other occasions, municipal stands offer information and services related to social and welfare issues. Most of those being addressed by sellers, activists and so on ignore or reject them, but some accept what material they may be offered, perhaps accompanied by an exchange of comments or smiles. A few stop to listen or chat. Yet others need no invitation, but make contact themselves, ask a question or comment on something, maybe eager to talk or discuss.

Present here are also many 'exposed' and 'opening persons' without a particular role to play in public space. This includes contact-seeking, apparently lonely individuals, like 'the old and weakened', 'the heavy drinker', 'the psychologically disoriented' and 'the socially marginalized'. Another typical opening figure one encounters here is 'the regular', transmitting a sense of ownership to particular spots. Apart from around benches and other seating spaces on the square, the local regulars who act as 'opening persons' are most often found in typical 'third places' (Oldenburg,

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1997), that is, at some low-key cafés, pubs and bars with popular terraces. The pub Venner ('Friends') is one, and another is the independent chain



Sources of 'mutual openness' ('triangulation') at Grønland.

coffee bar Evita²² (both recently replaced by new concepts). Besides opening and entering into conversations with others, regulars here act as ‘hosts’. Such ‘third places’ tend also to be ‘open regions’, places of ‘mutual openness’. Alcohol undoubtedly plays a part in this, but other serving places, like Evita, may be ‘open’ too. Then there are those requesting, and receiving, small favours from others: a cigarette, light, some change, help crossing the street or climbing the metro stairs, or more particular cases, like getting help up from the bench or to manoeuvre one’s wheelchair past the doorstep of a favourite hangout. In the vicinity there are also one or two eccentric, happy-go-lucky fellows willing to talk to anyone who happens to be nearby.

The variety of activities and people, of unexpected incidents, of eccentricities, in itself engender ‘mutual openness’ in the form of ‘triangulation’. It may be organized events and activities on the square that spark listeners to engage with each other, perhaps through talk: a campaign speech by a prospective governing mayor, a Saturday morning Hare Krishna recital or a two-hour dramatization of world religions by a local theatre. Or it may be spontaneous and improvised activities and occurrences, such as vivid discussions between activists and passers-by, or more specific instances, like the man who fed a growing flock of pigeons, and the regular who, at a sudden push, took his friend in a wheelchair on a wild ride in the square. Certain physical features of the space can also unleash ‘triangulation’, such as two engaging clown sculptures and cheap goods on display outside stores.

In sum, then, much interaction among strangers take place at Grønland, of many different forms, mostly of shorter, but also of longer duration. At Tjuvholmen, the story is a somewhat different one.

²² For a detailed account of the flourishing of coffee bar culture in Oslo, including a case study of Evita, see Dokk Holm (2010).

Tjuvholmen Acclaimed for its architecture and design, Tjuvholmen has received much national and international attention. In terms of social content, of what actually happens on the ground, it represents (together with neighbouring Aker Brygge) a new type of public space in a local context. Among the most salient features is the general absence of contact and exchange between strangers.

Obviously, such interactions do occur to some extent. Much like everywhere else, children and dogs are sources of contact. The need for minor assistance and information as well, such as when visitors ask for directions. Celebrities who now and then lodge at the precinct's luxury hotel tend to attract groups of youngsters who, if lucky, get to exchange a few words and take a selfie with their idols. Episodes of 'triangulation' happen, stimulated for instance by certain weather conditions, intriguing water installations, or sights such as large cruise ships passing by or, in recent years, particularly by Pokémon Go, which brings together individuals, mostly youngsters, who normally do not frequent the area. In spring and summer, 'out of role' opening figures like the *russ* (students in their final semester of upper secondary school) and participants of bachelor parties may find their way here. In their involvements with casual others, alcohol often works as a social lubricant, as it more generally does in summer. In general, social activities and exchanges intensify in summer, to which the popular harbour bath contributes its share.²³ These exchanges also includes more fleeting forms of non-verbal interaction when crowded, most often at narrow points like pedestrian bridges and harbour promenades.

²³ See Bjerkeset (2020; in Norwegian) for a chronicle of how the coming of summer, the real Nordic summer – and, along with it, young people, *joie de vivre*, and a bit of lunacy – can soften a carefully planned, designed and otherwise flawless and thoroughly controlled urban area like Tjuvholmen, and transform the tight and orchestrated into something loose and free. In a more critical vein, here I also ask if diverse, vibrant city life in new waterfront areas of Oslo should be limited to a few nice summer days. Should we not rather strive to facilitate uses adapted to each season's distinctive character and, not least, the city's wide range of people and functions, interests and needs?



Instances of chance interaction among strangers at Tjuvholmen.

Beyond episodic incidents of this sort, interactions between strangers are often linked to events – guided tours, concerts, food festivals and so on – staged by the managers of the area. At times, uniformed hosts have walked the area, serving visitors needing assistance or in doubt about something. Effectively, security guards and service people, primarily care takers, to some extent serve the same purposes. As for outdoor entertainment, it is carefully planned, as at neighbouring Aker Brygge. Events are timetabled and choreographed to take place in certain indicated spots. For a long time, the heading of the main page of Tjuvholmen’s official website read: ‘Tjuvholmen is not like other neighborhoods. Few things happen here without being part of a plan’.

The everyday picture, then, is one of scarce chance interactions and exchanges among strangers. Of crucial importance in this regard is the lack of exposed and opening individuals with a defined role in public space: beggars, magazine sellers, street vendors, buskers, civil society activists and so on. Activities with which these are associated are more or less non-existent in this part of central Oslo. Nearly all such activities are either forbidden or strongly curbed. Under any circumstances, they would require

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a license or approval from the owner or the management company. Some few licensed vendors work from sales kiosks, but they rarely actively address potential customers.

Absent too are typical ‘opening’ and ‘exposed persons’ with no specific role in public space. Elderly residents and visitors generally look to be healthy and fit. As such, they can be considered less ‘meagre in sacred value’ (Goffman, 1966: 126) and thus less exposed to contact with unknown others than their clearly age-impaired peers. Neither do they seem particularly contact- nor help-seeking; most are in someone’s company and appear self-reliant. Completely or partially absent are also the long-time unemployed, heavy drinkers, socially declassified individuals, the psychologically disoriented and non-Westerns (non-Western tourists tend to stick to themselves, like most other tourists).²⁴ Fully in private hands, the district has no public and a feeble civil sector presence. Institutions that house and care for such marginal and vulnerable groups are all lacking, unlike at Grønland, where there are many public and civil institutions, services and activities targeted at such groups. The area’s elevated price level, up-market profile, and ‘sanitized’ ambience further seem to discourage the presence of such groups.

Nor does another typical ‘opening person’, the regular, have any visible presence. Few individuals or groups routinely linger on squares and streets, prepared to salute and talk with others that enter their ‘territory’. The area’s pleasure-consumption economy is largely geared towards tourists and visitors. This destination profile manifests in a general compliant, disciplined and unassertive use of the space, suggesting a lack of appropriation. ‘Third places’ like low-profile cafés and bars, institutions with which the regular is closely associated and where ‘mutual openness’ often reigns, are missing, too. Expensive rents and high prices work to their disadvantage, as does the lack of locals with much time to spare and the rather impersonal, polished atmosphere of the serving places of the area.

²⁴ Symptomatically, in conversations security guards at Tjuvholmen, unlike their colleagues in most other parts of town to whom I talked, told they rarely or never were approached by apparently lonely people who just wanted to talk.

The relative uniformity of users and activities; the mostly compliant use of the areas; the absence of spontaneous events, the fact that the unexpected rarely happens: all of this makes for few sources of ‘triangulation’. In other words, there are few points of common reference which might spark interactions. This also goes for physical features. Display of goods outside businesses, for instance, is largely absent, in line with the character of these in the area (of which prestigious art galleries and fine eateries dominate) and the strong ethos of a clean and ordered physical environment.

Grønland versus Tjuvholmen Beyond the most fleeting, non-verbal kinds, one can conclude that many forms of interaction among strangers take place at Grønland, and relatively few at Tjuvholmen. My own more personal experiences strongly support these findings. Face-to-face encounters with strangers in which I accidentally got involved in the two settings, almost exclusively took place at Grønland. Most often these resulted from someone approaching me for some reason, but they could also materialize in situations of ‘mutual openness’ like the ones described. A bit anecdotal, but at the same time telling incident from the other side of town: A rare instance of accidental, ordinary verbal exchange of some duration that I formed part of at Tjuvholmen transpired at a coffee bar terrace. Upon leaving, a couple spotted a crow on the backrest of a chair, which unleashed four to five minutes of broad smiles and humorous remarks among guests and curious passers-by.

Both at Grønland and Tjuvholmen, one finds numerous attributes that can be considered preconditions for chance interactions among strangers to take place in public space. That is to say, primarily physical features which bring people into some bodily proximity, sometimes perhaps fostering a sense of connectedness (e.g., Alexander, 1977: 310–314). In practice, that is a dense and a compact urban form; frequent streets and short blocks, producing many intersections (e.g., Jacobs, 1992: 178–186); a mix of functions (e.g., Jacobs, 1992: 152–177); intimate spaces such as small squares (e.g., Gehl, 2010: 38; Alexander, 1977: 310–314); seating and shelter provisions that facilitate lingering (e.g., Mehta and Bosson, 2010). At Tjuvholmen, moreover, there are additional conditions regarded as favourable to human interaction: a pleasant sound level (e.g., Gehl, 2010: 148–157), good lines of sight (e.g., Gehl, 2010: 148–157); a calm, unhurried atmosphere; safe and

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secure surroundings; many like-minded people. However, in our context few or none of these conditions alone provide sufficient reasons or prompting circumstances for strangers to interact in ways beyond the most fleeting, non-verbal kinds. As such, they can, roughly speaking, be considered necessary but not sufficient conditions for interaction of this kind to take place.

What is generally present at Grønland, but not at Tjuvholmen, are circumstances that on a regularized, recurrent basis induce or license people to engage in some form of exchange. In other words, circumstances that expose people to contact with others, make people approach others or open up for mutual accessibility. 'Exposed' and 'opening persons' at Grønland are intimately linked to activities pursued by people who have a role or are committed to particular tasks in public space: informal 'buying and selling', improvised 'culture and entertainment' activities, 'civic activities', and certain forms of 'public aid', in particular begging. They are also linked to ordinary users: 'the old and weakened', 'the heavy drinker', 'the socially marginalized', 'the regular' or those asking for and receiving assistance from others. This diversity of activities and people, of the unpredictable and somewhat quirky, in itself incites 'mutual openness', or 'triangulation'.

These differences partly have to do with location in the urban structure and area profile. At Grønland, the central location and proximity to many public transport services generate a lot of transit traffic, providing the basis for many different activities. A fairly fine-grained functional mix in the area also contributes to a relatively large scope of such 'everyday practical activities'. There are many homes and workplaces here, as well as a broad range of everyday life functions, such as a wide variety of public services and institutions and trade in basic goods, attracting customers from other parts of town. There is also a mix of housing, commerce and other enterprises and active first floors, which mostly consist of small and medium-sized stores that cater to relatively broad user groups. The many civil associations and public institutions in the area provide a certain diversity of users and users too. As for Tjuvholmen, its location on the periphery and the limited transient use that follows from that is one reason for the absence of certain activity types, such as 'selling and buying' activities and particular 'everyday practical activities'. The area's natural

qualities and the presence of a major art museum and a surplus of restaurants also make ‘personal recreation’ the most obvious type of use. Moreover, the profile of the area (and the character of the public spaces as such) contributes to the absence of certain typical ‘exposed’ and ‘opening persons’ with non-privileged backgrounds. Welfare state institutions that house and care for such groups are lacking, including ‘health and welfare services’ in public space. The area’s high price level, upscale profile, pleasure-consumption economy geared towards tourists and visitors and impeccable ambience further seem to deter the presence of such groups of individuals, including regulars.²⁵

However, not the least decisive with respect to presence or not of prompting or licensing circumstance are ‘management and maintenance’ practices of the spaces themselves. At Grønland a wide range of uses and activities are allowed, corresponding to what is permitted on public ground, as well as through a mild sanctioning regime. As documented in article 1, the strict management regime at Tjuvholmen is made possible by private ownership of the space. Largely, this regime is rooted in an overall carefully orchestrated strategy for the area that is about creating the most attractive destination for specific audiences; in terms of comfort, safety and security, a clean, tidy and visually and aesthetically pleasing environment. Central to this are regulations and control practices to reduce contact and interference from undesired others. In this way, otherwise legitimate behaviours and activities are redefined as ‘deviant activities’. On the other hand, certain forms of ‘personal recreation’, involving spending, non-transgressive uses and no troublesome interactions, are facilitated and favoured.

²⁵ Some other factors also affect the number of people, regulars and interactions in the two public spaces in question. Households are more crowded and housing quality lower at Grønland than at Tjuvholmen. Public and semi-public spaces at Grønland thus become more important as sites to gather and socialize. Reinforcing features in this respect are higher numbers of long-time unemployed and people living on social security, thus quite many people at Grønland have more time to spare for instance outdoors. To this comes a cultural dimension. Many of those with non-Western backgrounds residing at or frequenting Grønland are bearers of strong cultures of socializing in semi-public and public settings. Also (cf. article 4): When circumstances open up for it, I have noted a greater willingness among people (mostly men) of non-Western backgrounds than among ethnic Norwegians to interact with strangers; at large they also appear to handle chance interactions with more ease.

Hello, stranger?

What has been presented in the foregoing are some notable differences between our two sites with respect to underlying circumstances that spark and authorize engagements among strangers. Can these differences be said to represent some generic features of the two public space typologies in question?

‘High’ and ‘low’ interaction spaces

Both of the sites explored here are unusual in a Norwegian, and perhaps also Nordic, setting. On the other hand, they can be said to be close to the defined ideal types of ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space. Regarding the latter, I argue that a number of the attributes reported for Tjuvholmen are inherent features of many private developments. The following section will focus on general attributes of ‘new’ public space that are of relevance to chance interaction among strangers. Given the lack of detailed empirical studies on this type of interactions in ‘new’ public space, I focus on reports that touch upon how the diversity of people and activities – largely constituting the circumstances that promote interaction between strangers – are dealt with in such spaces.

Much the way Sennett (2019: 139) portrays his London vicinity in Camden, Grønland may seem to qualify – on a smaller scale – as the sort of iconic neighbourhood celebrated by Jane Jacobs (1992). In other words, it is a physically and socially mixed and diverse, sociable and vibrant neighbourhood that has evolved over time, which for Jacobs was incarnated by Greenwich Village. Over the last few decades, Grønland has been partly gentrified. However, certain elements seemingly stand in the way of further gentrification, among which is the concentration of institutions and services targeted at individuals and groups in need. Conversely, Tjuvholmen may seem to qualify as an exemplary project-based, privately developed, owned and managed upscale development in the hands of a single landlord.

In general, private owners of public spaces have some good reasons to exert strict control practices (e.g., Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993:154). For one, the burden of maintenance costs incentivises them to ban activities and people perceived as potential threats. They are also legally accountable for facilities and spaces within their property boundaries, making them sensitive to perceived risks. No less important for private interests, public space

represents a marketable commodity. Surveys and examinations among users of private-public spaces show that they often aspire to safe, protected, orderly settings (e.g., Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993: 154; Day, 1999; Minton, 2012: 44–52). Thus, it is ‘quite rational ... for owners to seek to eliminate any distraction that can spoil the image of a “perfect” environment’ (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993: 154).

Central to the realization of such environments are practices to control the diversity of people and activities. These practices of ‘new’ public space are described in such terms as ‘sorting out of diversity’ (Crilley, 1993), ‘displacement of diversity’ (Flusty, 2001), ‘control-led diversity’ and ‘contrived diversity’ (Mitchell, 2003: 139–140). Perhaps as well as revealing is a term like ‘staged diversity’. In short, like at Tjuvholmen, a planned diversity which is more about mix of functions and aesthetic variety than social diversity. In any event, by wiping out social diversity, the diversity of people and activities, one to a large extent also wipes out the circumstances that encourage chance interactions among strangers.

One obvious way in which the reduction of troublesome diversity and interactions happens is through the making of a high-end area profile. In large privately owned developments prices and rents are normally in the top tier, excluding the less well off from settling there. Further, public or other non-profit organizations and institutions that care for the weak and under-privileged – many of whom typical ‘opening persons’ – are rarely in a financial position to pay the required rents. Neither are they organizations and institutions that would have contributed to the rental value and marketability of such an area. Even in a very comprehensive and rich welfare state like Norway, with its myriad public services and institutions, such entities are absent in the most prestigious large-scale urban developments (e.g., Bergsli, 2015).

What I have called large-scale private developments, Crilley (1993) names ‘commercial megastructures’. He conceives megastructures like London’s Canary Wharf and New York’s World Financial Center (Battery Park City), as ‘total environments’. These developments embody a dual logic of spatial dissociation and insulation, he asserts: They are systematically segregated from the city outside, while at the same time attempting to recreate the

genuine popular texture of city life within themselves. They are designed as autonomous entities, with concern only for what is immediately adjacent or makes a direct contribution to their rental value (Crilley, 1993: 127). Others find a similar lack of connection with surrounding environments, both in large private developments managed by a single private landlord or managing agent (Minton, 2006, 2012) and in smaller private-public spaces (e.g., Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993: 154; Zukin, 2010: 142). In Sennett's (2019) terms, such spaces are rather 'closed'; to a limited degree permeable in terms of letting regular activities and functions of the city in. Quite likely, the typical location of large-scale private developments in former port and industrial zones, bounded by water and existing or remnants of infrastructure, strengthens this 'closed' character. Tjuvholmen's master architect Niels Torp even accentuated the isolation of the precinct through its design: It was never intended to integrate into the existing urban fabric; in the architect's own words, it was to be a 'water property', an 'island kingdom' (Ellefsen, 2017: 175).

Often, the mechanisms that disconnect such areas or spaces from its urban surroundings, discouraging the presence of less privileged groups, are of subtle kinds. Such as their upscale, often 'sanitised', 'packaged landscape' (Knox, 1993) character. Design and form seem to play crucial roles. 'Mixed forms and uses invite mixed users', argues Sennett, while 'in stripped-down environments, the more form becomes simple, clear and distinct, the more it defines who belongs there and who doesn't' (2019: 129). Of New York's Hudson Yards, he states that 'few poor Latinos and Latin Americans will be found here; they know they don't belong here' (in Sendra and Sennett, 2020: 22).

In the literature it is reported that socially unprivileged individuals also are excluded from such public spaces in more direct ways. The same goes for other individuals who do not belong to the target group, either, and also might address unknown others, such as skaters and youths more generally, by including bans on such activities and behaviours as skating, rollerblading, outdoor drinking, sleeping and so on. This exclusion can either be covert, by making people feel uncomfortable, or overt, with the list of undesirables sometimes spanning far more than the usual suspect of beggars and the homeless, including groups of young people, old people,

photographers, really anyone who is not there to shop or consume something (e.g., Minton, 2012: 45-46).

Not the least, the ‘displacement of diversity’ in ‘new’ public space applies to activities that intrinsically entail addressing unknown others. Such activities are commonly controlled through regulations that prohibit them or require a license or permit, and the use of private security to oversee that regulations are held. These activities referred to in the literature are practically the same as those documented for Tjuvholmen: begging and homeless people’s pursuits (e.g. Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993:154; Mitchell, 2003, 2020; Kohn, 2004; Minton, 2012: 46), political, religious and other civic activities (e.g. Crilley, 1993: 153; Mitchell, 2003; Kohn, 2004; Nemeth, 2009; Minton, 2012: 46), unsolicited selling (e.g. Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993:154) and street entertainment (e.g. Crilley, 1993: 153; Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993:154; Minton, 2012: 53).

On the other hand, as stated by the same literature, a favoured type of activity in ‘new’ public space is ‘personal recreation’. Or more precisely, ‘personal recreation’ of more non-transgressive kinds like the ones we have documented and described for Tjuvholmen (article 1). For one, such activities regularly involve spending of some sort – eating and drinking at cafés and restaurants, shopping, visits to galleries and museums, and so on. Also, they are mostly activities that in themselves do not involve disturbing interactions. Franck and Stevens (2007: 4) note that increasing privatization, commodification and sanitization of urban public and quasi-public space make people passive consumers rather than creators and participants. Likewise, Crilley (1993: 153) asserts that in the public spaces of commercial megastructures, most ‘activity is to be “passive”’: rest, contemplation, quiet consumption of expensive cuisine and admiration of the picturesque maritime scene in the plaza’. Much the same is said to be the case for privatized public space more widely. Investigating some of New York’s major parks, governed and largely or entirely financed by private organizations, Zukin (1995: 28) states that the ‘underlying assumption is that of a paying public, a public that values public space as an object of visual consumption’. She finds New York’s privately managed Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to be geared towards optimizing conditions

for trade and consumption (Zukin, 1995, 2010), much as Minton (2006, 2012: 37–58) does for BIDs in several UK cities.

The expulsion in ‘new’ public space of activities and interactions of traditional city life, can be shrouded in various ways. For instance, by ‘theme park’ elements, in particular architectural appearance, in buildings that rely for their authority on images drawn from the past (Sorkin ed., 1993: xiv). An ‘apparently benign environment’ but one ‘in which all is structured to achieve maximum control and in which the idea of authentic interaction among citizens has been thoroughly purged’ (Sorkin ed., 1993: back page). It can also be shrouded by the restoration of familiar urban forms and typologies common in large scale projects, including at Tjuvholmen, creating associations with civil, vibrant and diverse city life (e.g., Crilley, 1993: 148–149). As such, these spaces can be characterized by what Franck and Stevens (2007: 24–25) term ‘apparent looseness’. A feature of this sort can be hard to discern if one concentrates too narrowly on formal and aesthetic qualities. Symptomatically, the jury that granted Tjuvholmen a national urban development prize declared that the area ‘embraces classical ideas on what life in the city and urban qualities could and should be’ (Norsk Eiendom, 2014; my translation).

However, a condition that often discloses the apparent character of perceived looseness of such areas is their lack of vitality, of energy (e.g., Minton, 2012: 52–53; Sendra and Sennett, 2020: 139). For among what makes urban spaces vibrant and dynamic is not being able to control social distance or choose how and when we will interact. Possibilities are expanded and space is loosened by the wide diversity of activities pursued and the number of unplanned, unregulated encounters any one person may have (Franck and Stevens, 2006: 5–6).

Studies claiming that ‘new’ public spaces are equal or higher in strangers’ interaction than their more traditional counterparts are scarce at best. Indeed, as laid out in chapter 3, quite a few scholars disapprove of the prevalent critiques of contemporary public space. Carmona and Wunderlich (2012) likely offer the most comprehensive of these ‘critiques of the critiques’. Their entire 300-page volume on design and use aspects of London’s ‘multiple complex public spaces’, that is, its squares, can be read as an

argument in this debate. They argue that the public space critique which crudely equates private development with profiteering and a disregard for socio-economic context and wider public interests, is clearly ideologically motivated. At the privately owned Gabriel's Wharf, for instance, they find a management approach based on openness and active encouragement of positive behaviours (rather than the exclusion of negatives ones) (Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012: 274). However, they do not address sociability or social interactions in empirical detail. Their focus on breadth rather than depth suggests that observations conducted in each space were too short-term to capture patterns of social interaction. In any case, they do seem to conclude that, at least in London's large-scale commercial developments (Gabriel's Wharf is owned by a social enterprise), behaviour and activities in public space overall are more tightly regulated and controlled than in spaces in public ownership. From what has been presented, it follows that such measures more or less necessarily imply a reduction in stranger interaction.

Many are the differences between Oslo, London and New York, between Norway, the UK and the US, in terms of societal and cultural contexts, general level of trust, scale of the cities and precincts in question, tightness of management regimes and so on. Still, the referred literature from the UK and US on 'new' public spaces document many of the same features that at Tjuvholmen result in an absence of circumstances encouraging or licensing chance interaction among strangers. Therefore, if it is correct, as prominent urban scholars argue, that there is notably less chance interaction among strangers in 'new' than in 'traditional' public spaces, I argue the following: It is the respective general presence and absence of 'opening' and 'exposed persons' and sources of 'mutual openness' that account for most of these differences.

The lack of such circumstances in 'new' public space can be tentatively summarized in the following way: Most private owners, not least for marketability reasons, execute strict control practices over their public spaces. Central to this is to control and exclude people and activities that might discomfort target groups. Such control and exclusion can be achieved through elevated rents and housing prices, a high-end profile including design measures signalling who belongs and who does not, and regulation

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and monitoring of behaviour and activities through strict management practices. For these reasons, marginalized individuals, many of whom tend to be ‘opening’ and ‘exposed persons’, are largely absent, as are activities that per se entail addressing others at random. In the Tjuvholmen case, we have further seen that the absence of such ‘opening’ and ‘exposed’ persons cause few circumstances of ‘triangulation’, of ‘mutual openness’. The isolation from regular functions, activities and human exchanges of the surrounding city that many of the cited features and measures imply may be further strengthened by the physical disconnectedness of many such developments.

Having documented what I claim are some key differences between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space, the picture must be nuanced a bit. Public spaces are not absolutely ‘high’ or ‘low’ in terms of interaction among strangers. Instead, a comparison like the one undertaken here, primarily between squares in mixed-use settings, may find differences to a greater or lesser degree. Thus, in practice one will have a ‘spectrum’ from ‘high-interaction’ to ‘low-interaction’ spaces. Accordingly, the remaining spaces explored in this study could be said to be ‘higher interaction’ than one of the two focused on, but ‘lower interaction’ than the other.

Also, not all parts of a given space can be defined by such stereotypes as ‘high’ and ‘low’. An overall low interaction space may contain sections which are higher in interaction than the rest of the space, such as around an intriguing installation, fountain or sculpture. Conversely, there might be parts of an otherwise high-interaction space which is less so, for example, a green spot on a square which invites contemplation and rest. Spaces also vary internally with respect to time, for instance between times of day and times of year. Hence, concrete public spaces fluctuate in terms of where and when interaction occurs. The broad tendencies of a space are what count in classifying it on a high/low interaction spectrum. In regard to such broad tendencies, as ideal types ‘traditional’ public space tends towards the higher end of the spectrum and ‘new’ public space towards the lower end.

Spaces that are respectively high and low in interaction of peaceful or respectful kinds, also tend to be high and low in interactions of less respectful or peaceful kinds. Diversity of people and activities often

contains within itself the seeds of less pleasurable encounters. Several of the circumstances that prompt respectful interactions in diverse spaces like Grønland, may therefore well provoke less respectful or desirable ones.

Between interaction and attraction

The city has always been a site of contrasting and often conflicting identities, interests, and needs. To a large extent, this is what constitutes urban diversity. Such contrasting dimensions commonly manifest in public space. By necessity, public space reflects the city and society itself. Accordingly, the divide between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space can be seen to mirror an overall tension between disorder and order. But present-day tendencies towards comfortable, attractive, controlled and ordered urban environments are not limited to privately owned public space. Rather, they seem to reflect broader urban cultural trends which at least in part have to do with the entrepreneurial turn in urban policy. Still, as we also will return to in this section, there are some fundamental distinctions between publicly and privately owned public space which makes a real difference.

The tight management regime of ‘new’ public space obviously responds to actual and perceived fears and disorders of urban life. Many appreciate the safety, security, and comfort of such environments. To some extent, most of us want safe, secure and clean surroundings. Most of us also need spaces of peace and quiet for occasional rest and contemplation, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Parks often serve such a purpose, but other public spaces may do so as well. There are fully public squares that leave space for calm and quiet without being too controlled. Among a large share of Tjuvholmen users and visitors, it is precisely its comfortable, soothing features that appeal the most to them: the beautiful natural surroundings, the peace and quiet, the possibility for recreation and contemplation, to be able to enjoy food and drink, art and architecture in a serene environment. These features include not having to deal with unwanted others or others at all, to be left alone by random individuals or groups trying to sell them things, beg from them, ask for their contribution or vote and so on. Part of the appeal of city life has always been the freedom to be left alone, to be able to observe others without having to engage with them, to be ‘alone together’. While solitude in the city can be a curse, it is also a blessing.

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Safety and security, cleanliness and orderliness, peace and quiet, the wish to be left mostly to oneself if one so desires: These are all legitimate reasons for enjoying certain parts of a city, certain types of public space.

Nevertheless, private developments of large urban plots are often justified as extensions of traditional city centres, as giving back derelict land to the city's population for varied purposes. As such, one could expect the public spaces that result from these developments to be accessible and inclusive. It is particularly problematic if the absence of legitimate activities and interactions results from of a space being designed, managed, controlled, and curated so as to attract selected groups of users, renters, dwellers and investors. And especially so if the spaces are promoted as fully public, as in our case, in which they were presented as a gift to the city from the developer.

Two contrasting and perhaps incompatible ideological visions can be considered the dominant ways of seeing public space in cities today, Mitchell (2003: 128–129) asserts. Applied to our analysis, it can be argued that Grønland and Tjuvholmen, 'traditional' and 'new' public space, represent such two contrasting visions of the nature and purpose of public space. In the first case, public space is appropriated by a variety of users and actors. Some disorder and unpredictability are tolerated as key to its functioning, including a plethora of pursuits, chance encounters and public exchange of views and opinions. In the second case, public space is carefully planned and operated, and characterized by control, order and predictability. Users should be made to feel comfortable and safe and should not be disturbed or frightened by marginalized social groups and undesired activities and interactions. These two visions can be considered the predominant ways of seeing public space across a variety of (largely Western) societies and historical periods (Mitchell, 2003: 128).

As a matter of fact, order/disorder is an overall opposition in the conception of city life which runs right through Western urban history (e.g., Sennett, 1970; Wilson, 1992). Exactly what is to be considered as orderly and disorderly has obviously varied across time and space. The present study adds to the understanding of this constant tension of city life. It does so by documenting and analysing underlying circumstances that in a

contemporary setting account for much of the difference in urban chance encounters between more ordered and more disordered public spaces.

In some respects, ‘new’ public space might be conceived just as much as a ‘landscape’ as a public space in a more traditional sense (Mitchell, 2003). The landscape metaphor indicates that order and control over the environment is prioritized at the expense of more chaotic and disordered realities of everyday life. A landscape is a space dominated by the affluent classes, a space that is comfortable, harmonious and safe. It is a space for repose and recreational consumption, untainted by intrusive images of work, poverty and social strife (Mitchell, 2003: 186).

If one pushes the metaphor a bit further, ‘new’ public space can be considered a more confined type of landscape, namely an ‘interior landscape’. Extending Sloterdijk’s ‘principle of interiority’, Aspen and Pløger (2015: 67–71) argue that there is an increased tendency in large-scale urban development projects to treat public spaces as a kind of interior. In the Tjuvholmen case, the coupling is more than metaphorical: The articulation of Tjuvholmen’s street environment is both in organization and language of form inspired by and akin to two of master architect Torp’s formerly developed large-scale office complexes²⁶ (Ellefsen, 2017). In these, Torp conceptualized the building structures around the ‘flows’ and ‘nodes’ of its common spaces, to facilitate both movement of people and social congregation in the form of informal meetings and arbitrary encounters. Accordingly, urban outdoor spaces such as those at Tjuvholmen for Torp become ‘outdoor rooms’. ‘Rooms’ to be staged and structured so as to facilitate, among other things, both movement and chance encounters (Ellefsen, 2017: 173–187). As previously noted, however, according to the present investigation, spatial conditions like these alone rarely provide sufficient reasons or prompting circumstances for people who do not know each other to actually interact in ways beyond the most fleeting, non-verbal kinds.

Such a ‘landscape’ or ‘interior landscape’ conception of public space can be coupled to an ideology of comfort (Mitchell, 2003: 188). Or what Sennett

²⁶ The headquarters for Scandinavian Airlines outside Stockholm and British Airways outside London (Ellefsen, 2017: 173–187).

(1994) has called ‘the freedom from resistance’. The urban landscape, argues Sennett, is increasingly designed to facilitate that ‘citizens can move without obstruction, effort, or engagement’ (Sennett, 1994: 18). Arguably, any contemporary biases towards a resistance-free urban outdoor experience are particularly evident in commercial large-scale developments.

The rationale behind developments of this kind is in large part to make attractive destinations. But local residents also play an important role in sustaining such a character of order and comfort (e.g., Atkinson, 2003). Among Tjuvholmen residents, having paid a small fortune for their homes, there is strong sense of a right to be heard in matters pertaining to their ‘backyards’. Through the residents’ association, they do have a considerable say on how its urban spaces are managed. Residents and tenants also interfere directly in the day-to-day management of the area. Whether for instance occasional beggars or street sellers are allowed to ply their trades very much depends on whether residents or tenants that spot them inform security guards or not. A person involved in the management of the area tellingly characterized the residents as the ‘911 caretakers’ (corresponding to the number of apartments there).²⁷ Sennett has described the notion of this kind of public space as a purified and suburbanite sense of public space (Sennett, 1970, as cited in Atkinson, 2003: 1841). Goldberg eloquently captures these ‘anti-urban’ tendencies in portraying the private city as:

a measured, controlled, organized kind of city experience ... it disdains randomness, the difficulty, and the inconsistency of real cities. It is without hard edges, without a past, and without a respect for the pain and complexity of authentic urban experience. It is suburban in its values, and middle-class to its core (Goldberg, 1996, as cited in Atkinson, 2003: 1841).

²⁷ Based on data from interviews with individuals involved in the management of the area and a local real estate agent, informal conversations with security guards and my own observations.

To suggest, in the Tjuvholmen case, that such a ‘suburban’ spirit is influenced by occupants’ well-to-do backgrounds and relatively old age is hardly far-fetched.²⁸

All this said, contemporary challenges to the diversity and publicness of public space can surely not be reduced to issues of private ownership and management and residents’ values. The efforts and actions by public authorities in Western democracies to control and discipline ‘legitimate’ public space use are numerous. This tendency is more pronounced in many other countries than the Nordic ones. The US case is perhaps extreme, due partly to fierce state repression in public space following 9/11, and, more generally, to deep-rooted racism and extensive police violence (e.g., Mitchell, 2003; 2017; Low and Smith, 2006). However, measures on ‘anti-social behaviours’ in wholly public spaces have also been well documented in the UK. Activities targeted include begging and street drinking, rough sleeping, skating and other youth pursuits (e.g., Atkinson, 2003; Rogers and Coaffee, 2005; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2010; Woolley, Hazelwood, and Simkins, 2011). In the opinion of Neil Smith (1996: np), harsh actions on activities like these form part of a larger picture in Western countries where ‘public policy and the private market are conspiring against minorities, working people, the poor and the homeless as never before’. Gentrification has typically become part of a policy of revenge, Smith contends, hence his notion of the ‘revanchist city’.

Such possible ‘revanchist’ traits are much less notable in a stable welfare state like Norway. Still, the neoliberal shift in public policy has had significant urban impact. As laid out in chapter 2, the 1990s marked the start of a period in which Oslo’s physical layout and appearance, reputation and competitiveness towards other cities and regions were given heightened priority (Sæter and Ruud, 2005; Bergsli, 2015). In particular, this is apparent in the municipal plans for other parts of Oslo’s Fjord City, above all its centrepiece, Bjørvika. Among Bjørvika’s cultural attractions are a much-acclaimed opera house by Norwegian starchitects Snøhetta, a recent grand

²⁸ Of those that had purchased apartments until 2010 (most of the area’s apartments had been sold by then), 42% came from homogenous, affluent inner west parts of Oslo (in contrast, only 4% came from less prosperous, much more diverse inner east parts); 77% of all buyers were aged 50 or more (Jenssen, 2011: 332–333).

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public library (to some critics, the area's popular alibi) and a relocated, soon-to-open Munch museum by an award-winning Spanish architecture firm. According to Aspen (2013) and Aspen and Pløger (2015), the plans for the area are largely based on conventional notions of urban surroundings, city life and urban environments. What is missing is a notion of everyday life, an openness to and dialogue with existing urban realities. They coin such an approach 'zombie urbanism', an urbanism based on conceptions of urban life that at first glance appear to be living, but which in practice are fairly stiff and dead. By and large, it is targeted at very specific user groups,



'We are developing Bjørvika to become Norway's most attractive area for business and living'. Front page of real estate developer's web site. Source: www.osu.no (2021).



Stasjonsallmenningen, Bjørvika, Oslo. June, 2020.



Bjørvika, Oslo. The relocated Munch museum in the background. October, 2020.

primarily tourists and a culturally interested middle class (for a related critique, see Bergsli, 2015).

One of the two major developers of the Bjørvika district is a public-private real estate company. Its ambition is to make the precinct ‘Norway’s most attractive area for business and living’ (OSU, 2020). The company has rebranded a part of the area’s public spaces as ‘the urban floor’ (*bygulvet*).

In practice, it includes all ground floor premises and adjoining outdoor spaces. To Aspen (2020: 7–8), the conception of ‘the urban floor’ testifies to an increased handling of public space in Oslo, new ones in particular, as a kind of interior in Sloterdijk’s sense. Central to this is the heightened importance of stage settings and scenography: furnishing, programming of active first floors, landscape treatment, planting, lightning and so on. Aspen notes that such measurers indicate a belief that a quite fine-tuned curating of urban life is possible, citing North American BIDs as an important precursor. The 2019 selling of ‘the urban floor’ to a New York based real estate investment firm (Madison International Realty), might signal another step in the BID direction. Yet a national legal basis for a BID scheme is lacking, despite years of lobbying from business interests. In any case, it remains to see how all these developments will affect urban public life in this recent, yet-to-be-completed ritzy extension of the city core. What remains clear, though, is the continued strong local affinity for the cultural urbanism model of the 1980s and its spatial and programming aspects.

Just as Tjuvholmen speaks to larger issues, so does Bjørvika. I have personally visited quite a few prestigious large-scale developments around the world, primarily waterfront developments, for which I have a long-standing fascination and interest. Among those wholly privately owned that I have visited in person are Canary Wharf, More London, some others of London’s many such areas, Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, parts of Boston’s waterfront, New York’s Battery Park City and Seaport District and Cape Town’s Victoria and Albert Waterfront. Then there are those that are the result of private-public partnerships and which public spaces are partly privately managed, both mostly publicly owned. These include Melbourne’s Docklands, Sydney’s Darling Harbour, Rio de Janeiro’s Porto Maravilha and Buenos Aires’ Puerto Madero. This latter, vast development in the docklands of Buenos Aires I know particularly well. I have followed it

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closely since construction works started while I was residing in the country in the mid-1990s, well into Argentina's fierce neoliberal restructuring. On my 15 or so trips to Buenos Aires since, I have always dropped by Puerto Madero, often repeatedly on the same visit. It is a luxurious mixed-use, safe, comfortable, highly ordered and low-interaction neighbourhood, supposedly the most expensive in all of Latin America. It features sleek, contemporary architecture and design, with works by Norman Foster, Santiago Calatrava, Cesar Pelli and others. A refined cultural profile hosts one of Argentina's



'The tallest residential tower in Argentina'. Online advertising of new luxury flats in Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires. Source: www.alveartower.com (2021).



Harbour front, Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires. November, 2016.



Harbour promenade, Puerto Madero, Buenos Aires. November, 2016.

major private art collections and a chic art centre and hotel by Philippe Starck.

Clearly, these developments vary a lot amongst themselves. What unites many of them, though, is that they neither appear to be nor give the feeling of being part of the continuous urban fabric. One aspect of this is their physical separation from the rest of the city by water, old docks, road, rail-road or industrial infrastructure. But there is more to it. The lack of many everyday functions and activities, as well as their upscale profile and highly managed environments, play an important role, particularly in those developments which are wholly privately owned, for reasons we touched upon previously. As a result, many of these developments can be characterized as ‘high-density, low-energy’ (Sendra and Sennett, 2020: 139) areas in what are mostly vibrant cities.

To Sennett, such prestigious large-scale developments, whether wholly privately owned or not, represent the overly ordered, closed urban environments against which he has fought a life-long battle. While *The Uses of Disorder* saw modernist developments as impositions of order that were erasing city life, he holds that today the forms of order imposed come from a globalized real estate industry. Many of these are places ‘where improvised activities and social interaction do not happen because the rigidity of the urban environment does not allow this improvisation to take place’ (in Sendra and Sennett, 2020: 3). Planning for disorder is thus necessary, Sennett and his co-author Pablo Sendra argue, thus their recent publication on urban design experiments for those places where such activities and interactions do not naturally occur.

In a recent article, Madanipour (2020) summarizes public authorities’ central role in creating public spaces where interaction might be more rhetoric than reality. The growing emphasis on the importance of public space emerged as a critique of neoliberal urban development, in which urban space was increasingly being produced and controlled by private interests. The early phase of this critique was based on the idea that the lines between public and private agents should be sharply drawn. These lines, however, are increasingly blurred as public authorities adopt private sector approaches and enter partnerships with private developers, behaving as if

they were private firms. In the transition from industrial society to an experience and knowledge economy, public authorities have given urban public spaces a mediating and facilitating role, as spaces of attraction and human interactions that would stimulate innovation, investment and consumption and increase land and property values. However, the conception of public space as an economic instrument might be at odds with public space as a site of actual social and civic interaction, as we have seen. The rhetoric of public space as a place of such interaction continues to be used, but increasingly as an instrument of attracting resources (Madanipour, 2020).

A city is full of shades of public-private relations, from the most public to the most private places (Madanipour, 2003, 2020). The crucial issue, it may seem, is a public space's actual degree of accessibility, of publicness, not necessarily who owns and manages it (e.g., De Magalhães, 2010; Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012: 274–275). Tools and frameworks have been developed to measure and evaluate the quality or publicness of public space (e.g., Varna and Tiesdall, 2010; Mehta, 2014; Zamanifard et al. 2019). Most contain an 'inclusiveness' and/or 'accessibility' dimension, in which the diversity of users and uses is central. Others propose charters for public space rights (and responsibilities) to secure a high degree of publicness, independent of ownership and management conditions (e.g., Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012: 285–286). Related to such efforts, a classification of the sort proposed in this dissertation, of public space activities, could be a useful tool. For instance, in specifying categories of public space use and individual activities which one should expect to find in inclusive public spaces, be they public or privately owned and managed.

Yet, there are still some principally important differences between publicly and privately owned public spaces. Like bonus space owners in the US (Nemeth, 2009: 2480), the owners of Tjuvholmen and Aker Brygge have the a priori right to regulate use, including the right to exclude anyone they would like to from their property. The municipal regulation of the areas for public purposes assign everyone the right to use the space. Still, specific rules and regulations to govern activities, behaviours and interactions are largely left to the owners and managers themselves to decide and carry out. This is what makes possible the areas' stricter regulations of use than what

is the case for publicly owned public spaces in the country. Moreover, where similar kinds of management approaches exist in both publicly and privately owned public spaces, regulations established by municipal planning departments are also more accountable to rigorous public processes and oversight (e.g., Nemeth, 2009: 2481).

The development of Tjuvholmen, Aker Brygge and similar large-scale private developments elsewhere are based on a tricky combination. On the one hand, on: privately-owned land; an absence of public and civic sector institutions; tightly regulated and managed, curated, exclusive, well-designed, safe and secure residential, office and retail areas; refined cultural offerings, preferably in the form of flagship institutions; and, often, an overall desire to provide an attraction and perhaps a showcase to the outside world. On the other hand, on the provision of supposedly fully public spaces for the entire populace to use, enjoy, meet and interact. That combination is far more challenging than the common ‘for all’ rhetoric suggests. The much sought-after attractiveness of the social-spatial environment, by definition excludes certain groups of individuals and types of activities and encounters. Conversely, urban vitality and easy public sociability, that at least in theory are put forward as ideals, very much depend on a diversity of people and undertakings and the elements of chance and unexpectedness that they provide. On conditions that spur or permit people who are unknown to each other to engage in face-to-face exchange. As for the latter, one can learn a lesson or two from looking more closely at the sort of diverse, disordered, less-high profile everyday public spaces such as those at Grønland. One might then also become more aware of essential urban features and qualities that get lost when public spaces are ‘sanitised’ to serve private interests and the preferences of more limited user groups.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: THE DEMISE OF ‘REASONS TO INTERACT’

This study set out to examine the forms and frequency of peaceful chance interactions among strangers in two contrasting (ideal) types of outdoor public space, ‘traditional’ and ‘new’. Key to this examination was the range of activities that occur in public space, given that it is often by way of these that strangers interact. The investigation took the form of an extended field study focusing on observation of everyday activities and encounters in a selection of squares and adjoining spaces in Norway’s capital city, Oslo. The two main sites, Grønland and Tjuvholmen, well exemplified ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ public space. In addition to its overall investigative focus, the study set out to explore how the diverse uses of public space can be comprehensively categorized; the underlying circumstances that encourage or license peaceful interaction among strangers in public space; and, more specific to one of the sites in question, the key characteristics of the production, and in particular the use, of a ‘new’, private-public space in a Nordic context.

Overall findings

The investigation revealed that the forms and amount of interaction among strangers differ strongly between the explored ‘traditional’ and the ‘new’ public space. In the first case, such interaction is a *regularized, recurrent* feature of everyday life. In the latter, it plays out in the form of more *infrequent, episodic interactions*. Largely, this difference is *due to the general presence or absence of circumstances that prompt or authorize interactions among strangers*. These comprise circumstances that expose people to contact with others (‘exposed persons’), spur or license people to approach others (‘opening persons’), and open up for mutual accessibility (‘mutual openness’).

These circumstances, again, were found to be closely related to certain types of activity in public space. In particular, informal ‘buying and selling’, improvised ‘culture and entertainment’, ‘civic activities’, ‘public aid’

(begging) and 'activities of the homeless'. Activity types like these typically involve addressing unknown others, as well as often exposing those pursuing the activities to contact with the same others. While such activities form part of daily life in the 'traditional' public space, in the 'new' public space, nearly all of them are strongly regulated and controlled through tight 'management and maintenance' practices, turning them into 'deviant activities'. Further, certain groups of individuals that typically function as 'exposed' and 'opening persons' are common in the first case while largely absent in the other. Besides regulars, that is groups of marginalized, often contact-seeking individuals: old and weakened, unemployed, heavy drinkers, socially declassified individuals or the psychologically disoriented. There are several possible reasons for the absence of such marginalized groups in the 'new' public space: the neighbourhood's posh, flawless character, its lack of affordable housing, of institutions and services (including 'health and welfare services' in public space) targeted at such groups and the firm management regime. This lack of diversity in activities and people, of 'opening' and 'exposed persons', further provide few circumstances of 'mutual openness', common in the 'traditional' public space. Important in this respect: The displacement of activities such as street performances, civil society activism, street vending and other common sources of 'triangulation', has a hardly intended consequence: reduced intra-group interaction among ordinary, like-minded users. Conversely, a favoured type of activity in the 'new' public space is non-transgressive 'personal recreation', regularly involving consumption and rarely troublesome interactions or potentially annoying 'rubbing along' of everyday life.

A close reading of the scholarly literature from the US and UK on 'new' public spaces indicated the presence of many of the same features that in the case explored here lead to an absence of circumstances encouraging or licensing chance interaction among strangers. From this, I deduce that, if the much-reported lack of chance encounters in 'new' compared to 'traditional' public spaces is correct, it is the absence and presence of 'exposed persons', 'opening persons' and 'mutual openness' that account for most of these differences. A key driver in this, I suggest, is the character of 'new' public spaces – and of the environments of which they form part – of being marketable commodities. To promote business and attract target groups

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aspiring to safe, secure and ordered environments, urban disorder and diversity has to be controlled. This is achieved through various means: a high end-profile; a separation from surrounding and rougher urban fabric and functions; a curbing of people, behaviour, and activities that might discomfort target groups. While much of this is intended, locations in former harbour and industrial sites, enclosed by water and/or infrastructure, may also contribute to their reported insularity.

Consistent with key scholarly literature, my material further suggests that similar, albeit less pronounced, characteristics can be found in prestigious urban developments in which public spaces are mostly in public ownership. Tendencies towards attractive, comfortable, ordered and curated public spaces and urban environments can thus be said to express broader urban cultural trends: Those of the entrepreneurial, market-oriented city, more geared towards luring investors, sought-after tenants, well-to-do residents, visitors and tourists than facilitating the diverse activities and exchanges of everyday life.

Contributions

This dissertation expands upon research and debates on public space and urban encounters in several ways, offering empirical, methodological and conceptual-theoretical contributions. To a large extent, these contributions connect to the study's foundation in the intersection between a micro-sociological perspective (on activities and interactions) and the field of urbanism's attention to large-scale processes of urban governance, planning, and development.

A major contribution is the documentation and conceptualization of basic circumstances that account for the differences in forms and frequency of strangers' chance interactions between 'traditional' and 'new' public space. In the scholarly literature on public space, it is often pointed out that there is a notable difference between these two types of public space in terms of such interaction (e.g., Kohn, 2004: 11; Low, 2006: 47; Lofland, 2009: 208–213; Sendra and Sennett, 2020: 1–2). Common explanations are the existence in one case but not in the other of a diversity of people, behaviours and activities and certain disorder in the physical and social environment. In relation to the latter, 'new' public spaces, the absence of diversity and

disorder are considered the result of intended strategies. However, the more basic mechanisms at play – how this absence or displacement of diversity and disorder results in an erosion of fundamental circumstances that promote chance contact between strangers – have rarely been thoroughly documented and analysed. A key motivation of this dissertation has been to tease out, document and bring to light these circumstances.

Further, this study has provided a comprehensive and detailed classification of activities that people pursue in public space, grounded in actual field observations. The few existing classifications of the uses of public space have a tendency to be either too partial (e.g., Carmona et al., 2008: 9–10) or too general (e.g., Gehl and Svarre, 2013: 17). The suggested classification should make it easier to identify, record and compare uses of urban public space. It is intended to work both as a recording and analytical tool. In piecing together the study's findings and outcomes, I have made use of the classification to illuminate the differences between 'traditional' and 'new' public space in terms of the overall topic of interaction among strangers.

Another contribution is the categorization and empirical grounding of underlying circumstances that license or prompt peaceful chance interactions among strangers in public space. Though such interactions are much celebrated in urban scholarship and beyond, what conditions and processes incite them has seldom been systematically explored. Urban theorists rarely do the kind of detailed empirical investigations required to capture finer patterns of public space interaction. On the other hand, most empirical research on prompting factors has concentrated on more limited factors. Primarily of social or physical-spatial kinds, such as dogs (e.g., Wood et al., 2015); children (e.g., Cattell et al., 2008: 553); helping behaviour (Gardner, 1986); common tasks and responsibilities (Henriksen and Tjora, 2014); celebrations (e.g., Turner, 2012); infrastructure (Sendra and Sennett, 2020); 'props' (e.g., Stevens, 2007); seating and shelter (e.g., Mehta and Bosson, 2010); shared street spaces (e.g., Kaparias et al. 2015); market places (e.g., Watson, 2009a, 2009b). Rare are studies that attempt to provide a broad comprehension of the phenomenon.

In my endeavour to help fill this gap, I have empirically substantiated and expanded upon a neglected part of Goffman's pioneering work on public

sociability. In doing so, I have pointed to a stability and broader significance of the documented underlying circumstances that license or prompt peaceful chance interactions among strangers in public. For, despite large-scale societal and technological changes over the last half century or so, chance interaction between strangers in the investigated public spaces essentially conform to the ‘interaction order’ that Goffman claimed governed such interactions in public in American middle-class society two generations ago.

Overall, few long-term, in-depth qualitative studies of public space use in inner-city, mixed-use contexts have been undertaken in the Nordic countries. As such, an investigation of the presented kind can supplement the more common quantitative-orientated public life surveys, on these latitudes in particular promoted and carried out by Gehl and colleagues (e.g., Gehl and Svarre, 2013; Gehl Architects, 2014).

More precisely, the conducted study documents some key and mostly use-related features of a full-blown outdoor ‘new’, private-public space in a Nordic context. It shows how it by and large conforms to, but also deviates from, similar developments in the US and UK. Even if much of what goes on in social and urban life in a country like Norway reflects global and international trends, the Tjuvholmen case illustrates how such trends may take specific regional forms and content. Further, unlike what is possible in short-term studies, a certain evolution of the use of the space has been documented, that is, a slight loosening process over time, probably mostly due to the fact that the space in question is relatively new.

The present work has documented how certain public space phenomena manifest in a particular geographical context. Primarily, however, it has strived to identify more generic features of these phenomena. This relates foremost to activities and chance interactions that occur in public space. Despite variations in how such activities and interactions play out across geographical and cultural contexts, I have argued that they can be classified and understood in ways that largely transcend the particular setting in which the material was gathered.

These activities and interactions also mirror larger structural realities. More concretely, the study demonstrates how such minor manifestations in public

space reflect fundamental changes in urban policy. The reduced range of activities, activity types and chance encounters in the explored 'new' public space are consequences of a neoliberal turn in which the balance between public and private interests has shifted towards the latter. This also seems to hold true more widely for public space in prestigious urban developments, though maybe not that consistently. 'Small facts speak to large issues', cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1993 [1973]: 23) famously wrote, 'because they are made to'.

Limitations and future investigations

Several of the ideas presented here deserve to be further nuanced and worked out in the future.

As for the classification of public space activities, although we have aimed at making a comprehensive classification, it should be considered a proposal. Further adjustments may be needed to create a classification that is as clear and robust as possible, and that easily facilitates spatial observation and documentation. Perhaps what is particularly needed is to test and develop the classification further as a more concrete recording tool. In this regard, it might be useful to develop a separate classification scheme for practitioners based on simplified, and a reduced number of, categories. It could also prove helpful to develop subcategories, especially for some of the larger categories, such as 'personal recreation' and 'everyday practical activities' (e.g., for the purposes of distinguishing between stationary activities and those involving motion, or between pedestrians and individuals moving around by mechanical or motorized means, cars apart. With respect to 'personal recreation', a further subdivision into types such as 'play', 'romance', 'consumption', 'relaxation' might be helpful). Otherwise, this recording of activity types may certainly be combined with other types of investigations, such as on more structural features or issues of experience and cultural meaning.

The classification of activity types and the categorization of circumstances encouraging interaction among strangers have both been pilot tested and found to be largely valid in selected urban settings in a country remote from the Nordics, namely Argentina. Still, they should be tested in other regional and cultural contexts as well, to further check their more general

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significance. Also, if one managed to find ways to quantify interactions among strangers, no matter how difficult that might be, it could substantiate claims about differences between various types of public spaces.

My material also indicates, however, that there are factors of importance for face-to-face contact between strangers which could have merited further attention. This refers especially to the fact that there are aspects beyond the situational features of the encounter, physical-spatial conditions and area profiles, which influence people's inclination or readiness to interact with unknown others or perhaps to socialize in public at all. Among these are issues of gender; ethnicity; culture (including religious beliefs and practices); climate (e.g., summer versus winter); time (time available and time of day or year); motivation and purpose (for/of using urban spaces); trust and fear (related e.g., to the general climate of society, to major health issues such as epidemics and pandemics, or to specific conditions of a given space); technology; and atmosphere (of a space or place). Some of these factors, or aspects of them, could be studied through observation. Others would require in-depth interviewing as well as other types of data, including on sensory and bodily experiences. In such an endeavour, a holistic, multidimensional ethnographic approach to space and place of the sort Low (2017) proposes seems promising.

More specifically, taking into account people's experiences, perceptions and imaginations related to chance encounters in public could for instance better illuminate how interpersonal differences are negotiated in such encounters (e.g., Watson, 2006) and how these differences impact upon people's willingness to engage with unknown others. It could also lay the ground for more substantial claims about atmospheres and 'ambient qualities' (Allen 2006), and for how sensory and bodily experiences of the space itself impinge on people's behaviour and public space use (e.g., Degen, 2014). It has been indicated that the 'ambient qualities' of the explored private-public spaces are reflected in actual patterns of use (article 1). Addressing user perceptions could have provided a finer and more nuanced picture, though several of the forces at play probably operate at a more bodily, unconscious level. Many are the claims about subtle mechanisms of exclusion in upmarket areas (beyond surveillance and rules imposed from above). Detailed empirical investigations seems to be lacking though.

An additional note on 'traditional' and, in particular, 'new' public space is required. As I have emphasized throughout, these categories are to be considered ideal types. In real life, 'new' public spaces vary, as do 'traditional' ones. Also, as the term indicates, 'new' public spaces are more recent in time than their 'traditional' counterparts. It thus seems unreasonable to expect them to live up to the standards of mythical public spaces (Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012: 286), standards that even few 'traditional' spaces meet. Like all recent urban developments, 'new' and related public spaces need time to settle, find their form, be taken into use. For a shorter or longer period, the 'curating' or 'staging' of events and activities might be necessary to draw people at all. If in the future they become more integrated into the existing urban fabric, it might spur more diverse forms of use, appropriation and human exchanges. A certain physical decay, giving the surroundings a less tight appearance, could further stimulate appropriation. Lefebvre makes a distinction between 'representational space' (appropriated, lived space; space in use) and 'representations of space' (planned, controlled, ordered space). Public space often, though not always, originates as a representation of space. But as people use these spaces, they also become representational spaces, appropriated in use (Mitchell, 2003: 128–129). Hence, it is how people use public spaces that ultimately determines their character. Use can rarely be fully controlled and managed. Moreover, novel and contested uses as well as forthright protests can challenge and modify existing regulations and control practices. Loosenings can also be initiated by those owning or managing the spaces, as can tightenings. All in all, the extent to which recent public spaces of prestigious urban developments will represent democratic challenges in the future, depend both on how the spaces themselves as well as other of the city's public spaces actually evolve.

Practice and policy relevance

The findings and outcomes of the presented research may also have some bearing on practice and policy.

The proposed classification of activities that people pursue in public space is to be considered a tool that can be used by scholars and practitioners alike. As a recording tool, the classification can facilitate the identification and documentation of the full range of activities that take place in public spaces.

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As an analytic tool, it can be employed to compare uses at different points of time within the same space as well as across various spaces, thus contributing to a more informed, empirically based analysis of the many shifting and contrasting forms of public space use. By providing a vocabulary to talk about the uses of public space, the classification can also help bridge discussions both within and between different scholarly disciplines and fields of practice on a crucial urban issue. Along these lines, the classification could also aid in identifying whether specific categories of public space use are in deficit or suppressed. Although not necessarily the case, the varied use of public space is often a sign of a more inclusive and social place.

One lesson relevant to policy that could be learned from the study is that ‘new’, private-public spaces like those explored here probably should be subject to more detailed public regulation. A general ‘regulation for public purposes’ seems insufficient to secure full publicness in public space. Whether publicly or privately owned and managed, one must ensure that regulations of use are in accord with those drawn up by democratically elected bodies for the city as a whole, and as such more transparent and accountable to rigorous public processes and supervision.

Final remarks

Cities are sites of perpetual and rapid transitions. Often, they take us by surprise. That is perhaps not least so in an age of volatile and accelerated change. To predict what lies ahead is thus risky. It is hardly daring, however, to suggest that for the foreseeable future, short-lived face-to-face encounters between strangers will remain the urban social relation par excellence. Even in troubled times of pandemic disease and forced social distancing, citizens take to the streets, on their own or in large numbers, defying prohibitions or not, to get fresh air; to obtain food; to go to work or school; to be entertained and enlightened; to sell one’s stuff, beg, busk or otherwise secure a livelihood; to agitate for a cause; to protest; to celebrate; to party; to mourn. Or because one has no other place to be. Or is simply tired of screen interactions and long for encounters with human beings of flesh and blood.

Until recent events, places of public encounter were high on the urban agenda. The preponderant idea was and is for an increasingly diverse

population to rub shoulders and connect and for varied urban life to flourish. For this to happen, we must, in our enthusiasm for neat and enticing urban environments, be careful not to wipe out the very circumstances from which such encounters and such life spring.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview guide (article 4)

Interview guide focused, semi-structured interviews

(approx. interview length: 5 – 10 min.)

Use-related questions

- What do you do here? What do you normally do here?
- How often do you use the space? At what time of day/week/year?
- When do you like it the most here? When do you like it the least?
- What do you like the most about the space? What do you like the least?
- Do you feel safe here? If not, under what circumstances?
- Are there any of the other users that you don't appreciate/like? If so, whom and why?
- Grønland: Here and elsewhere in the city there are beggars, street vendors, street musicians, political activists, recruiters of various kinds. What do you think about that? / Tjuvholmen: Elsewhere in the city ...
- Have you experienced to get in contact with strangers here (i.e. people you do not know at all, or people you have seen before but do not normally greet or the like)? If so, in what situations and with whom?
- How do you experience the atmosphere of the place?
- If you were to describe the space with three words, what would those words be?

Background questions

- Area of residence, age, civil status, daily occupation

Translated from Norwegian.

Appendix B: Snapshot of NVivo coding

Topic/thematic coding

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface for thematic coding. The left-hand navigation pane shows a hierarchical structure under the 'tematisk' (thematic) category, including sub-categories like 'Data', 'Files', 'Bilder, videoer', 'Følger', 'Høringer', 'Projektbeskrivelser', 'File Classifications', and 'Externals'. The main workspace shows a tree view of nodes and a table with columns for 'Name', 'Frets', and 'References'. Below the table, a 'Medlemsliste' (membership list) shows text excerpts associated with specific nodes.

Name	Frets	References
Buk, hendler	0	0
Bukser og buk	0	0
Interaktion mellem lærerede	1	1
Andre pålær/Olo	0	0
Genland	0	0
Egn smækning	0	0
Overret	0	0
Målom stule	34	63
Målom stule og roen med røke i bygnm	85	193
Unggælder	6	7
Omski	1	1
Turkshem	0	0
Dv ander ander Olo og gemret	0	0
Dv Genland	0	0
Dv Turkshem	0	0
Egner retholger	0	0
Opfølgninger	1	1
Tællinger	0	0

Medlemsliste

Reference 1 - 8,84% Coverage
Observerte for det meste fra fortæret ved Granlund's torp, men også delik fra første stoder, jeg stod, det jeg også har siddt i sidlerne, var det mere interakjo tilkæere. Mange i toget hennende sig direkte mot tilkæerne, enkelte av di sidene hennende seg også direkte ill enkeltpersoner, bod opp ill dans a.l.h blant tilkæerne der jeg stod. Dette må være det største kammerokkoptaget med norsk præg. Mye lekshet, humor og gleder blant folk i toget, men samt seg helt løs, få som fremtrod frøe og helt ubesværende.

Reference 2 - 2,45% Coverage
-gitt på rundt 20 år med somlig skeseke som tilhørte gøllregning i kort sn beik ved siden av der gjengen satt, fikk med meg at han sa «unnskyld» (ca.

Reference 3 - 10,24% Coverage
passerte med prde-fag, fikk ikke med meg hvordan disse regnerne ekket c noe vis, så laker slum ut (ca. 10,20)
-Erika: først en ung assistent-utseende man og deretter avne spurte man utfor der jeg satt om stoler var ledige, mannen svarte ja (ca. 11,20)
-hvit mann i 30-årene med lilen jente i lengre prat med kvine på orientent's seg ned ved siden av dem på langbenk mot vegg, så dem stå ved siden av h ikke innakk da.
-manerlig stamgøst i prat med man m hund ---

Analytic coding

The screenshot shows the NVivo 12 software interface for an analytic coding project. The main window displays a table of nodes with the following columns: Name, Hits, and References. The nodes are organized into a hierarchy under 'Nodes'.

Name	Hits	References
Korrelable faktorer	0	0
Andre mulige referanse korrelable faktorer	0	0
Fysisk-romlige forhold	38	47
Motivasjon	17	26
Personlig bakgrunn	0	0
Personlig utvidet teknolog	2	2
Sundhetsting	23	36
Stemning/ atmosfære type stid	95	176
Indliggende	15	21
Tidspunkt	9	9
Var	25	35
Sosiale faktorer	0	0
Andre mulige referanse faktorer	0	0
Avvikende interaksjon	45	79
Ekspertens perspektiv	0	0
Grunnlig kjennet	0	0
Eigen grunn	9	12
Public aid	75	119
Ernæringspønsker	0	0
Mid role	160	458
Uten spesiell role	65	122

The 'Mid role' node is selected, and its details are shown below. It contains several references with their respective coverage percentages:

- Reference 1 - 7.89% Coverage
- Reference 1 - 10.03% Coverage
- Reference 1 - 10.03% Coverage
- Reference 1 - 11.24% Coverage

The detailed view of the 'Mid role' node shows a list of references with their respective coverage percentages. The references are:

- Reference 1 - 7.89% Coverage: Grenlands torg: Ingen som oppholdt seg. Mange forpasserende. En samlet biloverveidningen (virket å kunne være av styrsk opprinnelse).
- Reference 1 - 10.03% Coverage: To yngre nordlundeende jenter utleddt i luss, klar og med dyr, etterler c Max vedbod. Kvæne (Tumensk-igvender) som i luss ved nedgangen til T-50
- Reference 1 - 10.03% Coverage: Masse folk. Arrangement, Oslo Boat Festival, 5-6 bodder, biltrakterte tema: dyrel, noe teksten utstyr, kongelige norske bilforbund, reidingspønsker. I provisorisk trehygge som er ligg rundt "parkorridor". Ikke veldig mange f. Flere synes å være der av andre grunner. Mulig glømsker på noe som står redningsstøtte Naturung med bilarrangement her ved sjøen, samtidig dyr hi gikk av stabelen i sentrum, mye folk i sentrum.
- Reference 1 - 11.24% Coverage: Masse folk. Arrangement, Oslo Boat Festival, 5-6 bodder, biltrakterte tema: dyrel, noe teksten utstyr, kongelige norske bilforbund, reidingspønsker. I provisorisk trehygge som er ligg rundt "parkorridor". Ikke veldig mange f. Flere synes å være der av andre grunner. Mulig glømsker på noe som står redningsstøtte Naturung med bilarrangement her ved sjøen, samtidig dyr hi gikk av stabelen i sentrum, mye folk i sentrum.

Appendix C: Co-author declaration

Co-author Declaration *(Article 1)*

PhD candidate	Sverre Bjerkeset
Authors	Sverre Bjerkeset and Jonny Aspen
Published year	2017
Title	Private-public space in a Nordic context: The Tjuvholmen waterfront development in Oslo
Journal	<i>Journal of Urban Design</i> 22(1): 116–132
Journal level in the Norwegian NSD-system	1

Type of contribution to the article:	Who contributed and to what extent:
Data collection and systematisation and analysis of the data. Writing of all drafts. Read and approved the final version of the article.	Sverre Bjerkeset
Analysis of the data. Revision of all drafts. Read and approved the final version of the article.	Jonny Aspen

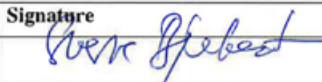
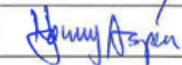
Date	Name	Signature
<i>07.12.2020</i>	Sverre Bjerkeset	
<i>07.12.2020</i>	Jonny Aspen	

With my signature I confirm that the contributions are as described above and I consent to this article, where I am a co-author, being part of the PhD thesis of the PhD candidate.

Co-author Declaration *Article 2)*

PhD candidate	Sverre Bjerkeset
Authors	Sverre Bjerkeset and Jonny Aspen
Published year	2020
Title	Public space use: A classification
Anthology	Mehta V and Palazzo D (eds): <i>Companion to Public Space</i> (Routledge Companions).
Anthology level in the Norwegian NSD-system	2

Type of contribution to the article:	Who contributed and to what extent:
Data collection and systematisation and analysis of the data. Writing of all drafts. Read and approved the final version of the article.	Sverre Bjerkeset
Analysis of the data. Revisions of all drafts. Read and approved the final version of the article.	Jonny Aspen

Date	Name	Signature
<i>1/12-20</i>	Sverre Bjerkeset	
<i>1/12-20</i>	Jonny Aspen	

With my signature I confirm that the contributions are as described above and I consent to this article, where I am a co-author, being part of the PhD thesis of the PhD candidate.

Co-author Declaration *(Article 3)*

PhD candidate	Sverre Bjerkeset
Authors	Sverre Bjerkeset and Jonny Aspen
Published year	2021 (forthcoming)
Title	The diverse uses of a city's public spaces
Anthology	Franck KA and Huang E (eds): <i>Routledge Handbook of Public Space Use, Design, and Management</i> . (Routledge Handbooks)
Anthology level in the Norwegian <u>NSD</u>-system	2

Type of contribution to the article:	Who contributed and to what extent:
Data collection and systematisation and analysis of the data. Writing of all drafts. Read and approved the final version of the article.	Sverre Bjerkeset
Analysis of the data. Revision of all drafts. Read and approved the final version of the article.	Jonny Aspen

Date	Name	Signature
07.12. 2020	Sverre Bjerkeset	
07.12. 2020	Jonny Aspen	

With my signature I confirm that the contributions are as described above and I consent to this article, where I am a co-author, being part of the PhD thesis of the PhD candidate.

Appendix D: List of figures

Omitted.

ARTICLE 1

Bjerkset S and Aspen J (2017) Private-public space in a Nordic context: The Tjuvholmen waterfront development in Oslo.

Journal of Urban Design 22 (1): 116–132.

Published

Private-public space in a Nordic context: the Tjuvholmen waterfront development in Oslo

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ABSTRACT

Based primarily on an observational study, this paper 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 in some other respects they also deviate from these.

Introduction

A key feature of Western urban development in recent decades has been the creation and regeneration of public spaces, first and foremost in the core of 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 also gained a strong foothold in Norway. Even though a particular type of privatized, semi-public space, i.e. the shopping centre, has mushroomed as part of such a shift in urban policies, fully private-public spaces externally are still quite rare in Norway, as they are in the other Nordic welfare states.¹ However, in recent years they have also emerged in the Nordic part of the world, at least in Oslo and Norway.

The paper examines one such case in Oslo, the Tjuvholmen waterfront project (Figure 1). This centrally located and up-market neighbourhood 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 built 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.



Figure 1. Aerial photo of the Tjuvholmen area (2014). Source: Agency for Planning and Building Services, City of Oslo /Mapaid.

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 have most extensively 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; Zukin 1995, 2010; Lofland 1998; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1993, 1998; Cybriwsky 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 programme, which originated in and has been particularly widespread in New York (see e.g. Whyte 1988; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Kayden 2000; Nemeth 2009). In exchange for 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.

With regard to interpretations of the privatization of public spaces in the US, they vary from dystopic reports by Davis (1990) 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 – that 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 that 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 (such as public space management) to the private sector rather than undertaking them themselves.

However, some scholars in the UK 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. Using 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 (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010; Carmona and Wunderlich 2012; Carmona 2014; Koch and Latham 2014).

There seems to have been little research about issues of external privatized public space 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. An analysis of a few cases from Japan, where the phenomenon 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, few rigorous, qualitative investigations of public space in inner-city, mixed-use contexts have been undertaken. Gehl and his partners' many surveys of urban public life might count as notable exceptions (for a public life survey of Oslo, see Gehl Architects 2014). In fact, in several of his writings Gehl highlights Tjuvholmen's neighbouring area, and in many respects its predecessor, Aker Brygge (e.g. Gehl 2010, 69). To him, Aker Brygge stands out as a well-working area in comparison with similar types 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 criteria of success seem to be quantifiable measures such as the number of users and the number and length of stays.

The study

Based on a qualitative approach centring 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 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.

With regard to 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 type 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 observations, which 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, although 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) were

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

As indicated, the conceptual dichotomy of public spaces as 'loose' versus 'tight' (and derived concepts) by Franck and Stevens (2006) 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 recognize the possibilities inherent in it and make use of those possibilities. Therefore, 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).²

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, no 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 neighbouring 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 harbour into mixed-use areas, in the 1990s what 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 favourite proposal, all of which were presented on the Internet and exhibited for several weeks. Eventually, the city council decided in favour of one of the two proposals suggested by the jury, the one which was also the public's favourite, namely *Utsyn* ('The View'), a project promoted by a consortium of two leading property developers and well-reputed Niels Torp Architects (Figures 2 and 3). It is not fully clear to what extent the general public's votes influenced the city council's decision (Jenssen 2014). In the subsequent planning and development of the area, however, there were no further processes of community involvement. Construction work on the Tjuvholmen site commenced in 2004, reaching its full completion in 2014.³



Figure 2. Model (1) of the competition winner, Utsyn ('The View'). Source: Selvaag Eiendom.



Figure 3. Model (2) of the competition winner, Utsyn ('The View'). Source: Selvaag Eiendom.

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 the plan should include a so-called signature building that could potentially 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 USD 50 million). 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 type 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. However, the area established itself from the very start as one of the most prestigious and expensive neighbourhoods 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 (Figure 4). In the summer season, another important attraction is the harbour bath. Overall, 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 pedestrianized, and on the whole, despite edifices up to 12 floors, it can be said to have a human scale.



Figure 4. The contemporary art museum Astrup Fearnley Museet, designed by Renzo Piano. Photograph by Sverre Bjerkeset, 2014.

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).⁴

Approximately 20 architecture offices, including landscape architects, were given assignments in order 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 have a modest mix of functions. With some exceptions, the ground floor facades are active and equipped with large front windows. The facades themselves have been given a clean and sobre expression. To the extent that any advertising can be found in store and restaurant windows, it is discreet and professional-looking. Pavement boards and items on display in front of locales are rare.

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, and all of them look similar. Other permanent objects, such as rubbish bins, cigarette bins, 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 (Figure 5). 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.

Overall, Tjuvholmen is characterized 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 (Figures 6, 7 and 8).



Figure 5. One of several sidewalk restaurants and cafés at Tjuvholmen. Photograph by Sverre Bjerkeset, 2014.

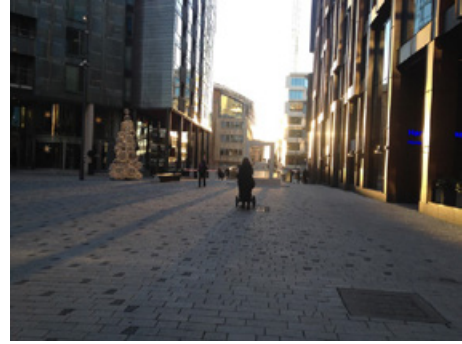


Figure 6. The area's main thoroughfare, Tjuvholmen Allé. Photograph by Sverre Bjerkeset, 2014.



Figure 7. Street sign at the main entrance point to Tjuvholmen, announcing CCTV surveillance and a ban on skating and rollerblading. Later, the sign was removed. Photograph by Sverre Bjerkeset, 2014.



Figure 8. By Oslo standards, Tjuvholmen's public spaces are extraordinarily tidy, clean, and well-maintained. Photograph by Sverre Bjerkeset, 2014.

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 litter was ever observed on the street, and never placards on facades, lamp-posts etc. On this 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 centre, which seems to reduce the necessity for 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 such as fundraising for humanitarian and other charitable purposes, or informal economic activities such as the 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. More sporadic commercial events include annual food, wine and boat festivals.⁵ Some free offers exist, such as 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 organized 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 neighbourhoods. Few things happen here without being part of a plan.'

Some explicit prohibitions against certain types of use can also be found. There are signs forbidding grilling and smoking. Until recently there were also signs that banned skating and rollerblading in the whole 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 (although not close to the prohibition signs) and some rare instances of skateboarding. Since the ban was lifted, skating appears to have increased somewhat, but as before it is mostly of a non-experimental type.

Tjuvholmen's actual user groups can be said to reflect the profile of the area. Ethnic white people constitute the absolute dominant group, including a large number of foreign tourists. The users' observable traits bear witness to little cultural and subcultural variation.⁶ Neither do more socially marginalized groups have any visible presence. Overall, 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, although 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.

With regard to categories of use, recreational activities are clearly the most dominant. Apart from on particularly good weather summer days, when the area attracts a lot of people both during the day and night time, the largest range of activities occur 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. That 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



Figure 9. Saturday-promenading along the harbour front. Photograph by Sverre Bjerkeset, 2014.



Figure 10. People enjoying the sun, the view and each other's company. Photograph by Sverre Bjerkeset, 2014.

elsewhere in the Nordic countries at that time of the year, people's pauses or stays in public spaces 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 openly arguing were rarely or never observed. Furthermore, many users appear to approach the area with a combination of curiosity and a certain feeling of 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.

Since the opening of the harbour bath, during the summer this part of Tjuvholmen seems to be a more vigorous space than the rest of the area, as well as somewhat more contested (Figures 9 and 10). The latter refers primarily to a specific incident that received much local media attention. Due to complaints from residents about noisy bathers, the information sign prescribing peace and quiet after 11 pm (as is the prevailing practice in other residential areas in Oslo) was altered to ban bathing after 8 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 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. A range of individual activities can also be found 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 almost 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 about 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). However, this is not the case at Tjuvholmen. Unplanned and non-regulated meetings between strangers, which are typical features of loose space (Franck and Stevens 2006, 5), are almost non-existent. On this point, Tjuvholmen's tightness is particularly pronounced. Furthermore, the many restrictions and prohibitions that can be found in the area also reflect a certain lack of freedom and possibilities. Part of this picture is manifested in the few opportunities in terms of pursuing commercial activities and satisfying economic 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 characterized by a strict orderliness, which again is related to the relative homogeneity of activities and people, a lack of unexpected events and actions, and the physical environment's rather up-market and severe character.

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 and Stevens call 'apparent looseness', as the inquiry into how the area is used also point to, although somewhat less pronounced at the end than at the start of the research period.

Overall, 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 such as 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 neighbourhood 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 sometime in the future the area becomes 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 certain types of physical decay also occur, making the surroundings appear less tight, this could further stimulate appropriation.

Yet, the conditions mentioned here 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 whether aspects of loosening can also 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, 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 are unlikely to change in the near future.

Overall, 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; the same 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 type 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, in some respects Tjuvholmen also deviates from many of the private-public spaces that are portrayed in the literature. This is particularly true for the US examples, where issues of control and sanctioning partly seem much stricter. Other common aspects of private-public spaces in the US, such as 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 such as 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 with other cities and regions were given top priority. Not 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 example, 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, such as 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 rather extreme, due partly to fierce state repression in public space following 9/11 (see e.g. Mitchell 2003; Low and Smith 2006). However, tough measures on 'anti-social' activities in public space, such as 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; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick 2010; Woolley, Hazelwood, and Simkins 2011). According to Smith (1996, np), 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". Smith asserts that gentrification has typically become part of a policy of revenge, hence his notion of the 'revanchist city'. Some scholars endeavour to nuance the picture, such as Johnsen 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.

Without ignoring the latter types of argument, it seems that the real issue at stake is not whether public space is privately or publicly owned and managed, but the actual degree of publicness about the spaces in question (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 like from their property. Admittedly, the municipal regulation of the area for public purposes assigns everyone the right to use the space, however, 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 is the case for publicly owned public spaces in Norway possible.

Furthermore, in instances where similar types 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 incident at Tjuvholmen's harbour 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, such as the previously mentioned removal of the ban on skating and rollerblading demonstrates. Overall, 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 neighbourhood 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, although this seems to be more a matter of degree than of type. 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. First, 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).

Second, the study nuances the 'international formula' criticism. While the planning, development, design and management of Tjuvholmen's public spaces are obviously 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.

Third, 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 paper 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). Although it might not be surprising that most users who 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 a finer and more nuanced picture, although many of the forces at play probably operate at a more unconscious level. There are many claims about subtle mechanisms of exclusion in up-market 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 people's use.

Policy relevance

A lesson that could be learned from the study is that private-public spaces such as 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 in 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 authorities and valid for the city's other public spaces.

Notes

1. 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.
2. Planning and development are dimensions which Franck and Stevens do not address directly, but to which the authors of this paper apply their approach.
3. The part which constitutes the study area was completed in 2007–2008.
4. For a detailed study of the production and design of the Tjuvholmen area, see Ellefsen (2016).
5. With regard to categories of public space use, the authors distinguish between 'necessary', 'recreational', 'commercial' and 'idealistic'/'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 whose purpose is to provide the individual, the employee or the company in question with a profit, income or livelihood. 'Idealistic'/'non-profit activities' include forms of use where promoting a particular message (preferably of a non-commercial type) 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.
6. As of 1 January 2015, 32% of Oslo's population of approximately 650,000 had immigrant backgrounds, of which a great majority from non-Western countries (Høydahl 2015).

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ARTICLE 2

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PUBLIC SPACE USE

A classification

Sverre Bjerkeset and Jonny Aspen

Introduction

Can the great mix of activities that people carry out in cities be categorized in any meaningful way? In this chapter, we shall attempt to do so, focusing on how the city's open *public spaces*, i.e. outdoor spaces that, in principle, are accessible to all, are put to use.

Public space has been a central topic in urbanism, planning, and urban design for some time now. A physical manifestation of this is the extensive upgrading and construction of new public spaces in many cities worldwide. Justifications vary from issues of inclusion, local democracy, quality of life, and public health, to ones of marketing and urban branding. This renewed interest in public space is also reflected in the United Nations' *New Urban Agenda* (2016) as well as in an increasing amount of scholarly work.¹

Given such a heightened concern for the city's public spaces, there is, we claim, a need to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive vocabulary for how public spaces actually work in terms of use. Although a range of public space classifications exists, those that specifically address issues of use tend to be either too partial or too general. This impedes finer understandings of how public spaces function. Our proposal is a more comprehensive classification system. As a recording tool, this classification system can facilitate the identification and documentation of the full range of activities taking place in specific public spaces. As an analytical tool, it can be employed to compare public space use across various settings, thus contributing to a more informed, empirically based analysis of shifting features of urban public spaces, as well as to help bridge discussions across different scholarly disciplines and fields of practice. Along these lines, the classification system can also aid in identifying whether specific categories of public space use are in deficit or suppressed. Although not necessarily the case, the more activities and varied use of public space is often a sign of a more inclusive and social place.

In brief, what follows is an outline of a proposed comprehensive classification system in which the main aim is to facilitate the identification and recording of all major types of activities that take place in urban public spaces.

Existing classifications

Making sense of the world by way of classification is a prime concern within the social sciences and humanities. This extends to disciplines and fields in which public space

either constitutes a research subject in itself or an object of more concrete planning, design, and governance. Thus, one can find a broad range of approaches for describing and categorizing features and aspects of public space. These mirror more practical concerns or disciplinary interests on contextual, morphological, or functional features of public space. Attention is also given to issues of ownership, management, and publicness, as well as topics of use more specifically. Given our particular purpose, the review focuses on the latter kind of literature.

Let it also be mentioned that, in writings on cities and urban cultural matters, one can find examples of more implicit ways of naming and classifying features of urban use. The carnivalesque (Bakhtin 2009 [1968]), the *flâneur* (Baudelaire 1970 [1964]; Benjamin 1999), and issues of play (Huizinga 1949) are but some examples. Much the same applies to research in urban studies, for instance on women's and ethnic minorities' public space use.

When reviewing existing ways of classifying public space use, one ought to look into the definition of 'use' upon which they are based. Two main approaches correspond to a basic distinction between action and behavior. The former refers to *activities*, which is our focus, and includes actions that are carried out with intent or a specific purpose. In contrast, behavior refers to *how* people go about. This might relate to social norms (e.g. 'x' behaved poorly or well), such as the range of low-level incivilities experienced in daily life that is documented and classified by Phillips and Smith (2006). One important strand of work focuses on ways of classifying issues of more normal social behaviors in public (e.g. Goffman 1966 [1963]; Lofland 1998). More recently, Mehta (2014), has attempted to classify street sociability (passive, fleeting, and enduring). Although efforts like these have limited relevance in our context, one should be aware that behavior and action often are ascribed much the same meaning.

Other classifications focus more specifically on activities taking place in public space. Topics cover public space use seen in relation to specific urban settings and contexts (Jacobs 1992 [1961]); types of public space and corresponding use (Carr et al. 1992; Franck and Stevens 2007; Carmona and Wunderlich 2012); work-related use (Whyte 1988); pedestrian use (Whyte); and playful use (Stevens 2007). Carmona et al. (2008) present a list of 17 public space uses, which in fact constitutes a mix of single activities, classes of activities, and public space-related sites or institutions. One can also find more specialized forms of use-related classifications. This goes, among other things, for categorizations of economic activities (e.g. formal versus informal) and transport activities (e.g. human-powered versus motorized), including a range of sub-categories. What use-centered classifications like these have in common is that they are partial; what is highlighted is just one or a few types of activities.

Spanning five decades and bridging academia and practice, the work of Danish architect Jan Gehl has been particularly influential. Through research and publications as well as public life surveys and urban design projects around the globe, Gehl and colleagues have had an especially strong bearing on how many planning and urban development practitioners perceive city life and public space. Gehl (1987) has classified public space use in various ways. One has been to group activities into basic categories such as 'walking, standing, and sitting,' and 'seeing, hearing, and talking' (133–172). A related approach is reflected in what is termed 'stationary activities.' These are subdivided into categories – which are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive – such as commercial activities, cultural activities, standing, secondary seating, café seating, and bench seating (Gehl and Gemsoe 1996).

The categorization Gehl most widely applies, though, and for which he is best known, is based on a distinction between necessary and optional activities. These two categories are presumed to capture all activities that transpire in public space. They roughly correspond to utilitarian and recreational activities, occasionally thought of as representing a continuum,

Public space use

but mostly treated as fixed categories. The more significant and less controversial argument is that 'the use of public space has gradually evolved from activities primarily motivated by necessity to those more optional in nature' (Gehl and Svarre 2013, 17). Although the two categories attribute significance to some essential dimensions of public space use, they are, we argue, too general to capture the sheer diversity of, or the internal variation between, such uses.

Issues of public space also tend to engage a range of community-oriented actors. Central among these is the global placemaking movement. The movement's hub, Project for Public Spaces (PPS), was founded in 1975 and inspired by the work of American urbanist and 'people-watcher' William H. Whyte. Based on an evaluation of 'thousands of public spaces around the world,' PPS has proposed a way of categorizing uses and activities: fun, active, vital, special, real, useful, indigenous, celebratory, and sustainable. These are categories that represent more 'intuitive or qualitative aspects' of activity and use (Project for Public Spaces 2018); hence, we find them of little help for our purpose.

Assumingly, a more comprehensive classification of public space use could be of value not only for research but also for local agencies involved in the planning and management of public spaces. A study of eleven cities worldwide found that public space classifications are widely used in public space management, and this sometimes extends to long-term planning. Most such classifications are based on size and function, though some also highlight issues of actual and potential uses (Carmona et al. 2008, 122). In formal land-use planning, four general classes tend to recur (retail, commercial/industrial, residential, and institutional) (Kropf 2017, 24). However, referring to land-use as such, they are not transferable to public space.

To conclude, we have not been able to find any examples upon which our efforts to build a more comprehensive classification system could be grounded. As the review shows, existing classifications are few and seldom are they comprehensive. They are often not more than a series of listings, and a common feature is that emphasis is placed upon a small selection of activity types. One exception is Gehl's broad distinction between necessary and optional activities; however, for our purpose, this represents an overly general approach. It is upon this background that we aim to develop a more complete and fine-grained way of classifying public space use. Before going into the details of this classification system, we shall provide a brief account of key concepts and of the type of classification system towards which we are heading.

Clarifications

By public space we refer to outdoor spaces in cities that in principle (but not always in practice) are open and accessible to all: squares, streets, parks, and promenades, but also more mundane spaces like parking lots, walkways, and bus stops. In terms of locational characteristics, the classification is loosely confined to dense, mixed-use urban areas.

By activity and use, we refer to the individual or collective action of using public spaces for various purposes (which, in most cases, can be observed). Thus defined, activities or use are not meant to cover behavioral features, which, to remind ourselves, are more related to *how* people go about. Neither do we take into account aspects of subjective experience, meaning, and imagination.

In its simplest form, a classification implies an ordering of cases by similarity. Principally, there are two ways of going about this: to make either a typology or a taxonomy (Bailey 1994; Lofland et al. 2006). The former is primarily conceptual, based on

Weberian ideal types; the latter is empirical. A typology is generally multidimensional, the topics under study possessing some complex but systematic interrelations. In contrast, a taxonomy – which is the appropriate approach here – is an elaborated list of all possible types into which a meaningful, empirically observable cultural phenomenon can be subdivided.

In the process of creating a classification system, two basic rules apply: the categories should be both exhaustive and mutually exclusive. That is, the categories developed should make it possible to classify all (or almost all) of the relevant cases (the rule of exhaustiveness). The contents of the classification should also be so defined that each case only can be placed within one category (the rule of mutual exclusiveness). Occasionally cases defy categorization. Residual cases should be as few as possible and explicable in terms of the setting or context in which they are embedded (Bailey 1994; Lofland et al. 2006). For our purpose, in dealing with a fairly complex and ambiguous phenomenon such as public space use, we interpret the principles of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories more as an ideal than an absolute rule.

Our proposed classification system is primarily grounded on knowledge of Nordic settings. More specifically, it is based on extensive field research on issues of public space use in mixed-use areas in central parts of Oslo, Norway, mainly in the form of observation. This research has been carried out over the last seven years. A principle of data saturation guided the fieldwork; we ceased gathering data when it no longer provided new information (i.e. added anything new to the classification). While the classification partly rests on established classes of human activities, the naming, definition, and compilation of the categories are ours. We have earlier published a simplified version of the classification (Bjerkeset and Aspen 2018; in Norwegian), which generated some useful feedback.

In sum, what we propose is the following: a descriptive and tentatively exhaustive classification of individual and collective activities taking place in centrally located outdoor public spaces. Even though technically a taxonomy, for reasons of accessibility, we stick to the more common term classification.

An alternative classification

All together 16 categories make up the classification, each representing distinct activities. The categories are listed in Table 18.1 with appurtenant definitions and examples.

Some initial remarks: We differentiate between recreational activities that individuals typically carry out alone or with acquaintances, personal recreation activities (e.g. going for a walk, reading, hanging out), and recreational-like activities where some kind of interaction with strangers is more typical (i.e. selling and buying, civic, culture and entertainment, and ceremony and celebration activities). It is useful to note that users of public space can be divided into two groups: There are those who have specific roles to play or are committed to specific tasks (often related to income-generating work or voluntary engagements), and then there are those using the city for their own practical and recreation purposes, that is, regular users, of which the city mostly consists.²

Case study

We illustrate the potential usefulness of this classification system by examining two neighborhoods that constitute Oslo's western waterfront: Aker Brygge, and its more recent extension, Tjuvholmen. Gehl has followed the Aker Brygge urban redevelopment

Table 18.1 A classification of public space use

<i>Category</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples of public space use</i>
Mundane activities	Activities that are of a daily, practical character, i.e. activities that are more or less imperative for the individual.	Passing through (e.g. walking or biking to/from home, work, school, kindergarten, supermarket). Walking the dog. Accompanying children to leisure activities. Waiting (e.g. for transport to arrive, for green lights, when queuing). Fixing and maintaining personal belongings (e.g. bikes, cars).
Personal recreation activities	Activities that are of a more optional character; which are often, but not always, related to leisure time and which are typically performed alone or with acquaintances.	Going for a walk. Sightseeing. Enjoying peace and quiet in a park. Pausing. Smoking. Reading and using the internet. Lying down. Sunbathing. Hanging out. Socializing. Flirting. People-watching. Working out. Playing. Window shopping. Eating and drinking (e.g. at outdoor restaurants, in parks). Partying.
Transportation activities	Activities that are about transporting people, goods, and products from one location to another (as well as pick-up and delivery, where relevant).	Private transportation (driving one's car). ³ Running public transport. Taxi-driving. Delivery of goods and services (mail, packages, food, etc.). Cash-in-transit. Ambulance transportation.
Selling and buying activities	Activities that are about marketing and selling goods and services (primarily economically motivated), as well as acts of buying such goods and services (motivated by varying degrees of necessity and choice).	Formal (selling): Outdoor serving. Marketing and solicitation. Sales from street and market stands (of goods, services, tickets, etc.). Informal (selling): Prostitution. Ambulatory vending. Shoe-shining. Buying: Acts of browsing, bargaining, paying, etc.
Civic activities	Activities by citizens, activists, (non-governmental) interest groups, etc. that are about expressing and representing opinions and will.	Political and religious activism. Marches. Demonstrations. Strikes. Information campaigns and petition signing. Recruitment for clubs and organizations. Non-profit fundraising.
Culture and entertainment activities	Activities that are about organizing, staging and performing events addressed to the general public – in order to entertain, enliven, enlighten, or disquiet – as well as acts of attending such events.	Organizing, staging, performing or attending: outdoor exhibitions, concerts, theatre, shows, fairs, and sports events, etc. Street performances. Sightseeing tours. Guided tours.
Ceremony and celebration activities	Activities that are about marking or celebrating important historical and contemporary events and phenomena.	Marking or celebrating: Religious and spiritual events. Historical victories and disasters. National days. Anniversaries. State visits. Newly elected office-holders. Carnivals. Parades. Graduations. Marriages. Funerals. Sports victories.

(Continued)

Table 18.1 (Cont.)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples of public space use</i>
'Production activities'	Activities of making goods and contents, mostly for later use, i.e. for sale, distribution or consumption.	Cooking (e.g. street food). Crafts-making. Urban farming. Media and film production related to movie shooting, news coverage, reporting, advertisements, information purposes, etc.
'Management activities'	Activities that are about maintaining law and order, safety and security, as well as providing general physical maintenance and attractiveness.	Street cleaning. Maintenance work. Minor repairing. Garbage disposal. Planting and gardening. Decorating. Parking enforcement. Traffic patrolling. Neighborhood watching. Security guarding. Policing. Military patrolling. Firefighting.
'Construction and renovation activities'	Activities that are about constructing, transforming, improving, renovating, re-modelling, dismantling, and demolishing buildings and other physical structures and features (for example, infrastructures).	Road works. Construction work. Earthworks. Foundation engineering. Façade renovation and repairs. Construction site inspection. Clean-up work. Setting up and dismantling provisional edifices.
'Teaching and learning activities'	Activities that are about organized teaching, learning, training, and investigation.	Open air classes and colloquiums. Excursions. Kindergarten outings. Research and training-related fieldwork. Practical outdoor training (e.g. driving lessons, apprenticeships, law and order enforcement training). Archaeological excavations.
'Work-related activities'	Activities that are about office-related work, tasks, or obligations carried out in public space settings.	Working from a café terrace or a park bench. Working 'on the go' (phoning, reading, texting). Work-related meetings, meals, etc. and social events (e.g. team building, after-work drinking) outdoors.
'Public aid activities'	Activities that represent "instances of helping behavior among the unacquainted that are the right of citizens to expect and the duty of citizens to provide" (Gardner 1986: 37).	Requesting minor favours (e.g. a match, correct change, help to cross the street, help to retrieve lost objects) and information (e.g. time, directions), and acts of complying with such requests. Acts of begging and giving money. Helping out in cases of emergency.
'Homeless activities'	Activities that are imperative for some individuals to undertake in public space due to their life situation, such as homeless people.	Taking care of basic bodily and hygienic needs (e.g. preparing food, eating and drinking, body washing, washing and drying clothes, sleeping). Bottle and trash collecting.

(Continued)

Public space use

Table 18.1 (Cont.)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples of public space use</i>
'Deviant activities'	Activities or behavior that break with social norms, be they formal rules and laws, or more informal norms and conventions. ⁴	Eccentric behavior and action. Addictive use (e.g. taking drugs, drinking). Uncivil acts and remarks. Stealing. Vandalism. Physical and sexual harassment. Violence. Terrorism.
'Other activities'	Activities that cannot be accounted for by any of the main categories.	

project closely and sees it as particularly well-working when compared with most international counterparts. The area's popularity, argues Gehl, is related to a combination of physical density, a mix of functions, and attractive public spaces (e.g. Gehl 2010, 69). That being said, Gehl does not specify what public space uses makes for this attractiveness, nor does he comment on what type of uses are absent. We suspect that Gehl's classification schemes are too general, or too partial, to capture the more specific use patterns of this area.

A more comprehensive system is needed if one is to be able to identify activity types that are present in specific urban areas, and ones that are partially or wholly missing. We



Figure 18.1 Aerial photo of the Tjuvholmen and Aker Brygge neighborhoods, 2014
Image credit: Agency for Planning and Building Services, City of Oslo/Mapaid

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undertook an initial testing of our classification system at Aker Brygge and Tjuvholmen (over two days in June 2019). We walked through the selected spaces in the neighborhoods every second hour and recorded every activity we encountered (i.e. what each person present was doing) according to the categories of the classification (for Gehl's application of this method to map stationary activities, see Gehl and Svarre 2013). In doing so, we discovered that it was often difficult to distinguish between two dominant activity types, mundane and personal recreation activities. This was especially so when a person's visual appearance gave no clear indication of the specific activity taking place.

An activity recording of this kind primarily aims to reveal the breadth of public space use, including variations throughout the day, week, or year. Applying a more fine-tuned classification system allows for a fairly precise reading of the nature and shifting character of public spaces. Such a nuanced understanding is needed in order to compare and discuss public space qualities. Importantly, by recording activities taking place, one also uncovers activities *not* taking place. Our trial run revealed that informal buying and selling activities (e.g. street vending), improvised culture and entertainment activities (e.g. street performances), civic activities (e.g. political and religious ventures, demonstrations and so on), and certain public aid activities (e.g. begging) and homeless activities (e.g. sleeping) were more or less non-existent in this part of central Oslo. This points to the little acknowledged fact (in a Norwegian context) that in privately owned and managed neighborhoods like these, nearly all such activities are either forbidden or strongly curbed, testifying to restricted publicness (Bjerkeset and Aspen 2017).



Figure 18.2 Bryggergetet ('Harbour Square'), Aker Brygge neighborhood
Image credit: Sverre Bjerkeset

Public space use

We argue that the proposed classification system can be useful beyond research. For instance, it can provide urban planning and design with an overview of activity types that should be further stimulated in order to achieve the highly valued aim of creating inclusive environments. It may also inform urban design by raising awareness of activities that can (and possibly cannot) be directly designed into the city fabric. In this way, and more generally, the classification system could also be used to build more systematic knowledge on how public spaces actually work, both understood as specific places and as a more comprehensive urban whole. Thus, it could guide policy development. For example, it may remind policymakers that a general regulation for public purposes might not be sufficient to enable certain variations in use and users, as the Oslo case shows. Some activity types may need to be specified in zoning plans to avoid being subjugated to prohibition.

Having introduced the classification and provided a brief case study, we turn our attention to some more overarching issues.

Challenges and potential

A comprehensive classification system for a complex phenomenon such as public space use does not come without weaknesses and limitations. We will now look into some of these before further considering what strengths and practical impacts the system can have.

Urban public cultures are not as plain and schematic as the draft of activity types may signal. By definition, urbanity is dynamic and shifting – and no less so in a time of expansive



Figure 18.3 Holmens gate ('Holmen's Street'), Aker Brygge neighborhood
Image credit: Sverre Bjerkeset

globalization, increasing demographic diversity, and massive digitalization. Above all, this last phenomenon complicates the picture: digital technology has become an integral part of everyday life. New layers of digital communication are interwoven with most contemporary social and cultural activities (Crang et al. 2007; Del Signore and Riether 2018), and perhaps especially so in urban contexts. Thus, people routinely engage in both online and offline activities when using public spaces. For this reason, we have chosen to treat people's everyday involvement with digital technology as an integral aspect of other kinds of public space use rather than as a separate category.

Many forms of contemporary public space uses are, as already indicated, mixed and multi-purposed. People often do several things at once or are engaged in activities of a shifting character. A woman hurrying through the streets on her way from work (mundane), might stop shortly to text a colleague (work-related), then by impulse join a crowd on a square watching a busker (culture and entertainment), before resuming her walk home (mundane) listening to music with headphones (personal recreation). A freelancer working on a laptop from a café terrace may continuously switch between practical, work-related, and recreational activities. A child on his way from school might run into some friends, get distracted in play for a while, simultaneously chat with other friends on the phone, then recall his promise to buy some items for dinner on the way home and therefore rush on. Instances such as these, where different activities quickly succeed each other or take place more or less at the same time, are many and diverse.

Moreover, the context of the situation can radically change the meaning or character of an activity. Activities that are recreational for some, like having a drink at an outdoor café, might be addictive for others. The same type of activity may also change character during the day due to alterations in purpose or pace. Take a mother walking her child in a stroller between home and kindergarten, for instance. Leaving home in the morning, she moves quickly and determinedly to her destination. On the way back in the afternoon, she might find herself walking at a much slower pace, having plenty of time to let herself and the child distract and amuse themselves by things they encounter on their way.

What all such nuances, ambivalences, and complexities add up to is that many activities might be challenging to place under one specific category or to place at all. In such instances, it can be helpful to pay careful attention to more behavioral aspects, such as walking pace or purposefulness of movement. Further, what someone wears or carries with them may provide useful clues, as may contextual factors like time of day. Sometimes it could, however, be difficult to identify what the activities are without having some knowledge about the individual's more subjective experiences or motivations. Whether walking the street is done for transit or recreational purposes (or both), it might be hard to decipher based upon external appearances alone. On such occasions, one would have to inquire with the person in question directly (even then, one may not necessarily get an answer, let alone an accurate or truthful one).

Despite all such limitations and precautions, we claim that the proposed classification system can contribute to a better understanding of what goes on in public spaces. Most importantly, it can ease the task of identifying, recording, and describing types of use in given public spaces. Consequently, it can also enable more finely tuned comparisons between public spaces in different urban settings. This may, of course, be combined with other types of investigations, such as on more structural features or issues of experience.

Urban life is constituted by a broad range of human activities, many of which are characterized by necessity, others by freedom of choice, spontaneity, and coincidence. The issue

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of necessity seems, however, often to be downplayed in many of today's discourses on public space and public life, in which recreation-oriented perspectives tend to dominate. Thus, what happens to be overlooked are everyday activities of a more prosaic kind that contribute to the 'ballet of the street,' to paraphrase Jane Jacobs (1992 [1961]). Assisted by a classification of the sort here suggested, it should be possible to break down this intriguing though often poorly understood ballet into some of its constituent parts and to identify how and why it plays itself out in different ways from one place to another.

More specifically, the proposed classification system can shed light on some core challenges of contemporary public space development, such as management and questions of over- or under-management (Carmona 2010a, 2010b). Whereas the latter might result in decay and lower use, over-management commonly reduces the public character of public spaces. This is shown in the case study from Oslo, which also demonstrates how the classification can be useful in policy, planning, and design.

More generally, the patterns of use that we have identified here, and the mainly non-technical terms applied to describe them, should make the classification simple to use as an analytical instrument for scholars and non-scholars alike. Hence, we hope this contribution also can help bridge discussions both within and between different scholarly disciplines and fields of practice on a crucial urban issue – the uses of the city's open public spaces.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have proposed a comprehensive classification system to identify and record urban public space use. In doing so, we hope to meet a growing need for analytical and methodological tools that can make for a better understanding of, and dialogue about, how urban public spaces work in terms of activities and use. Living in a time of heightened public space interest and concern, it is somewhat surprising that no similar tools exist.

The classification presented here is based on a Northern European urban setting. Even though people's use varies and plays out differently across geographical and cultural contexts, we hold that the categories can have a heuristic value of a more general kind. In our view, the categories correspond to basic features and common functions in a great many cities and public spaces, especially so for post-industrial and neoliberal Western cities, but hopefully (with some adjustments) for cities in other parts of the world as well.

Although we have aimed at making a comprehensive classification tool, what has been presented in this chapter should be considered a proposal. Further adjustments may be needed to create a classification system of public space use that is as clear and robust as possible, and that easily facilitates spatial observation and documentation.

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Notes

- 1 The increase in the number of articles in *Urban Studies* that deal with aspects of public space is symptomatic: while only six articles were found for the period 1964 to 1990, close to 300 were published in the period 1990–2015 (Bodnar 2015, 2090).

- 2 The classification system might of course be further developed. One type of activity that could deserve a category of its own (to distinguish it from other kinds of management activities) has to do with handling merchandise, organizing goods on display, decorating facades, arranging chairs and tables at café terraces, etc. The same goes for activities of free services to the general public, e.g. information campaigns, health controls, serviced (mini) recycling stations, etc. It may also prove useful to develop subcategories, especially for some of the larger categories, such as personal recreation and mundane activities; e.g. for purposes of distinguishing between stationary activities and those involving motion, or between pedestrians and individuals moving around by mechanical or motorized means (cars apart). When it comes to the category personal recreation activities, a division into types such as play, romance, consumption, relaxation might result helpful. It should here be reiterated that, due to the complexity and ambiguity of the phenomena in question, some categories will partly overlap.
- 3 Notes: Although car driving, unlike other 'transportation activities,' to a large extent has to do with personal mobility, we have chosen to define it as a transportation activity, since it, like most other such activities, normally requires separate traffic lanes.
- 4 Like 'public aid activities.' it is often difficult to distinguish between activity and behavior when it comes to 'deviant activities.. While some types of deviance are proper activities (e.g. stealing), others (e.g. verbal harassment) can be seen as behavioral aspects of other kinds of use. What is considered 'deviant' is further subject to historical and cultural variation – values, norms, and laws often vary and change across time, place, and cultures. This might also shift from one urban context to another, depending on management regimes. On the other hand, deviance may also be considered to be a positive feature, depending on circumstance and people involved, as in cases of more eccentric behavior and action.

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ARTICLE 3

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Diverse uses of a city's public spaces

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Abstract

In open public space, urbanites pursue a broad range of activities. This diversity of activities merits the close attention and analysis that a comprehensive and detailed classification can offer. Drawing from long-term field research conducted in various urban neighborhoods in Oslo, this chapter presents such a classification. All together it comprises 15 categories of distinct types of uses. As a recording tool, this classification can facilitate the identification and documentation of the full range of activities taking place in specific public spaces. As an analytic tool, it can be employed to compare use at different points of time within the same space as well as use across various spaces, thus contributing to a more informed, empirically based analysis of the many shifting and contrasting forms of public space use. In a previous publication (Bjerkeset & Aspen, 2020), the authors briefly present the classification. In this chapter, the categories are more fully explained and are grounded in field observations.

Introduction

What makes cities so intriguing is to a large extent the vast diversity of human activities that unfold in their public spaces. Can this diversity of activities be categorized in a meaningful way? In this chapter we present a system for doing so.

Although numerous classifications of public space exist, those that address use tend to be either too partial or too general. What we present here is a classification that is comprehensive and detailed and that can be used as a tool for observing and for analysing uses of public space. As a recording tool, it can facilitate the identification and documentation of the full range of activities that take place in public spaces. As an analytic tool, it can be employed to compare use at different points in time within the same space as well as use across various spaces. This way it can contribute to a more informed, empirically based analysis of the many shifting and contrasting forms of public space use.

The classification we present here was briefly described in a previous publication (Bjerkeset & Aspen, 2020). In this chapter, the categories are more fully explained and are grounded in field observations of public space use in Oslo, Norway. We also describe how the classification can be used for observation and analysis in future research.

Classifying uses of public space

Making sense of the world by way of classifying is a prime concern in the social

sciences and humanities. This extends to other fields as well in which public space constitutes a research subject or an object of planning, design, and management. A broad range of classifications of public space exists. Among these are ones that focus on their historical evolution (e.g. Low, 2000), form and shape (e.g. Kostof, 1992), and management (e.g. Carmona et al., 2008).

When reviewing existing ways of classifying the uses of public space, one ought to consider the definition of ‘use’ that is employed. Two main approaches correspond to a basic distinction between action and behavior. The former refers to *activities*, the focus of this chapter, and comprises actions that are carried out with intent or purpose. In contrast, behavior refers to *how* people go about pursuing those activities, perhaps relating to social norms (e.g. ‘x’ behaved poorly or well).

Many categorizations of use focus on particular types of activities (e.g. playful activities, pedestrian activities, or economic activities). Some classifications consider different types, such as types of public space and their corresponding uses (e.g. Carr *et al.*, 1992; Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012). Carmona *et al.* (2008) present a list of 17 public space uses, which comprise a mix of single activities, classes of activities, and public space-related sites or institutions. Neither of these classifications, however, intends to be exhaustive of all types of public space use.

Jan Gehl has classified the use of public space in different ways. The categorization for which he is best known distinguishes between ‘necessary’ and ‘optional’ activities, roughly corresponding to utilitarian and recreational activities (e.g. Gehl and Svarre, 2013: 17). Although the two categories attribute significance to some essential dimensions of public space use, they are too general to capture the full diversity of activity types and their distinct characters.

Issues related to public space also draw the interest of a range of community-oriented actors. Central among these is the global placemaking movement. The movement’s hub, Project for Public Spaces (2018), has proposed a way of characterizing activities in public space as fun, active, vital, special, real, useful, indigenous, celebratory, and sustainable. These can be considered categories, but they represent ‘qualitative aspects’ of use rather than the sort of activity types we are concerned with here.

A comprehensive classification

Before going into the details of our proposed classification, some clarification is required. In creating a classification of uses, two basic rules apply: the categories should be both exhaustive and mutually exclusive (Bailey, 1994; Lofland et al., 2006: 146–149). In dealing with a fairly complex and ambiguous phenomenon such as public space use, we interpret the principles of exhaustiveness and mutual exclusion more as an ideal than an absolute rule.

For our purposes, ‘public space’ refers to outdoor spaces in cities that in principle (but not always in practice) are accessible to all and do not require payment by the occupants. These are streets, squares, parks, and promenades, and also more mundane spaces such as parking lots, walkways, and bus stops. The classification is based on our observations of dense, mixed-use urban areas in Oslo. The terms ‘activity’ and ‘use’ (terms employed interchangeably) refer to individual or collective actions pursued in public spaces for various purposes.

The proposed classification is primarily grounded in knowledge of Nordic settings. It results from three years of field research, mainly in the form of detached and participant observation, on public space use in central parts of Oslo and from the processing of that material. In addition to fieldwork, some information is drawn from authors’ experiences of how public spaces are used in other Nordic countries and beyond.

The proposed system is a descriptive and tentatively exhaustive classification of individual and collective activities that take place in centrally located outdoor public spaces. Even though technically a taxonomy (rather than a typology), for reasons of accessibility, this chapter employs the more common term ‘classification’.

All together 15 categories make up the classification, each representing distinct activity types. The categories are listed in Table 1 with definitions and examples.

In terms of user groups, an overall distinction can be made between those who have specific roles to play or are committed to specific tasks (often related to income-generating work or voluntary engagements), and those who use the spaces in question for their own practical and recreation purposes (i.e. regular users, of which there are most).¹

Everyday practical activities

Technological development and societal changes have gradually rendered many everyday pursuits of urbanites on streets and squares obsolete or less frequent. Most of us no longer have to be in or move through public space to hear the news, deliver personal and public messages, secure water, dispose of garbage and body wastes, and so forth. However, an abundance of mundane activities persists or has emerged that

¹ It should be stressed that, due to the complexity and ambiguity of the phenomena in question, some categories will necessarily partly overlap. Also, the classification might of course be further developed. One type of activity that could deserve a category of its own are activities of free services to the general public, e.g. information campaigns, health controls, serviced (mini) recycling stations, etc. It may also prove useful to develop subcategories, especially for some of the larger categories, such as personal recreation and everyday practical activities; e.g. for purposes of distinguishing between stationary activities and those involving motion, or between pedestrians and individuals moving around by mechanical or motorized means (cars apart). When it comes to the category personal recreation activities, a further subdivision into types such as play, romance, consumption, relaxation might be helpful.

many people carry out on a regular (and often daily) basis, and which necessarily includes transient or stationary uses of public space: moving to or from one's home, work, or school; running errands; walking the dog; accompanying children to leisure activities; fixing and maintaining personal belongings (e.g. bikes, cars); and many others.

At some of the study sites, such as the hearts of the Grønland and Majorstua neighborhoods, a central location and proximity to public transport services, such as a subway station, generates much pedestrian movement. The mixed-used character of such areas produces a relatively large scope of everyday practical activities. Such activities tend to have a faster pace than other activity types. They involve rapid and crossing movements and brief interactions between people: eyes that meet; bodies touching lightly (or sometimes heavily and clumsily) in passing; people quietly negotiating with one another how to pass, and so forth.

Personal recreation

Countless urban activities are related to leisure and recreation, supported by flexible working hours, extended holidays, and more elderly people of generally good health. Individual interests shape many recreational activities and often take place during leisure time. Individuals often carry out these recreational activities alone or with acquaintances. 'Personal recreational activities' refers to activities such as going for a walk, enjoying peace and quiet in a park, and watching the urban bustle from a public bench. Such activities are distinguished from recreational activities where some kind of interaction with strangers is more typical (e.g., 'selling and buying', 'civic', 'culture and entertainment', and 'ceremony and celebration').

In this post-industrial era, city harbor fronts have again become important leisure arenas. The upscale, mixed-use Tjuvholmen waterfront development is such an area. While desolated on winter days, it fills with recreational activities as summer takes hold. People stroll around, observe the lavish architecture, rest on a bench or a lawn, contemplate, read, bath, sunbath, enjoy the view and each other's company, eat and drink, party.

Transportation

An important share of activities taking place in cities is the transporting of people, goods, and products from one location to another. Passengers may be transported across the city in cars, buses, or trams. Goods may be picked up, transported, and delivered.²

In Oslo there is now a ban on private cars from large parts of the city center. A

² Unlike other 'transportation' activities, car driving is largely about personal mobility (personal mobility is here sorted under 'everyday practical activities'). Still, we have placed it under 'transportation', since it like most other such activities, normally requires separate traffic lanes.

principal rationale is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but among the effects hoped for is also invigorated public spaces. Other related changes in city transportation: Public transport is given high priority, and goods etc. are now increasingly being transported on small electric cars, bikes, vehicles.

Selling and buying

Outdoor trade and exchange of goods and services have been a part of urban culture throughout the ages. This category refers to activities of selling and marketing (primarily economically motivated), as well as to acts of purchasing in public space. It includes formal activities – such as marketing of commercial products and sales from market stands – as well as more informal ones like prostitution, ambulatory vending, and shoe shining.

In larger cities like Oslo we find a wide array of individuals with a ‘license’ to approach others. Many are involved in some kind of commercial transaction: marketing people, street vendors, waiters, shop owners, shop employees. A hierarchy exists as to how they are perceived, with aggressive vending at the lower end. Stalls outside stores constitute an important part of selling and buying in many public spaces. A large and well-stocked fruit and vegetable store on a pedestrian street of the city’s multicultural hub, Grønland, stands out with its hectic bazaar-like ambiance. Here, and in other similar places, goods on outdoor display can spur customers to comment and discuss price, quality, selection of products.

Civic activities

Public spaces frequented by large crowds have traditionally been important sites for activities of speaking out, public debate, and conveying political messages, news, and gossip. Although many such activities have now been displaced by new communication technologies, public spaces are still important for citizens, activists, and (non-governmental) interest groups to express and represent their opinions and will. Political campaigning, demonstrations, strikes, fundraising, and recruitment (e.g. for charity purposes) are but a few examples.

The Grønland district sits a mere five minutes’ walk from Oslo’s commercial center. The challenges it faces are many (high crime rates, drug dealing), a fact the press frequently reports. Its more positive qualities are often overlooked. Civil society, for instance, has a strong presence, and particularly so in its central square. During elections, there are many intense political activities. Peaceful protests and demonstrations occur regularly. Likewise, there are many religious activities, mainly by Muslim organizations. The most persistent ones, though, are Jehovah's Witnesses, who have an unobtrusive stand next to the subway entrance. A number of other voluntary and non-profit organizations and associations are often present. During the annual gay pride parade, playful activists dominate the street scene, to some locals’ disdain.

Culture and entertainment

This category includes organizing, staging, and performing public events – in order to entertain, enlighten, or disquiet members of the public. It also includes attendance at such events. Examples are outdoor exhibitions, concerts, shows, and street performances. These events may be free, with or without an expectation of gratuities, or require payment. Such activities have become increasingly important in recent years, as reflected in the notion of ‘festivalisation’ (Cudny, 2018).

Norway is no exception to this trend; its capital boasts a widely acclaimed music and festival scene. A variety of individual street entertainers also perform in parks, squares, and pedestrianized streets. An important aspect of such activities is that bystanders engage in it through their contact with the performers or artists – or, more typically, with each other. This illustrates a widespread social phenomenon in cities: ‘triangulation’ or the “process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other.” (Whyte, 1988: 154).

Ceremony and celebration

Ceremony and celebration are those activities that, more or less routinely, mark important historical or contemporary events and phenomena. They may be religious events, recognition of past victories and disasters, national days, anniversaries, or special achievements, in sports, culture, or other fields. Such ceremonies and celebrations vary in scope and character from those of a more limited, and almost private, nature to ones having a more collective, national, or even global reach.

A most remarkable street celebration unfolded after Norway’s unexpected football World Cup defeat over Brazil two decades ago. Upon that triumph, tens of thousands poured into the city center from all quarters. People behaved strangely indeed, hugging and talking to almost anyone as if they were close acquaintances. This victory, and the celebrations it unleashed, has become part of the collective national memory. The same holds true for the mass mourning that followed the murdering of dozens in a bomb and gun terror attack in 2011, culminating in a ‘rose parade’ in downtown Oslo that drew some 150.000 people.

Production

Throughout history, public space has been an arena for the production of goods of various kinds, representing a kind of use which is strongly dependent on changes in the urban economy, demographics and technology. Today, many urban public spaces are locations for media and film production, news coverage and live reporting. ‘Production’ also refers to cooking (e.g. street food), craft-making, and urban farming. Unlike ‘culture and entertainment’, which are subject to immediate consumption, ‘production’ involves the making of goods or contents that are sold, distributed, and

used at a later stage.

For most of the day, the square outside Oslo Central Station buzzes with people and life. Individuals coming and going gives the place a characteristic pulse. A wide range of more stationary activities unfold there too, including news reporting and filming for commercials and films. One weekday in spring, a Bollywood film shooting went on for most of the day. The male and female protagonists were treated with much respect, the female star relaxing under a large sun protection umbrella supported by a crew member when she was not acting. Other less important actors, as well as the local extras, spent most of their time waiting. Among the large crew, some were filming, one or two directing, while others took care of the actors or made sure the many curious onlookers stayed back.

Management and maintenance

Maintaining law and order, safety and security, as well as providing general physical upkeep and order, are essential functions in cities. Such activities constitute an important part of the daily management and maintenance of public space. Some examples are street cleaning, maintenance and repair, garbage removal, landscaping, and policing and maintaining security.

How public spaces are managed – loosely or tightly – has a strong effect on their character. For instance, private security guards have largely replaced police on many local streets, contributing to tighter management regimes. But police, security guards, and other caretakers also serve an important social function. Among other things, many elderly and socially marginalized individuals have a low threshold for addressing them, maybe just to chat.

Construction and renovation

Cities are continuously in processes of making and remaking. This category refers to constructing, transforming, improving, renovating, remodelling, dismantling, and demolishing buildings and other physical structures (for example infrastructure). Construction works, earthworks, foundation engineering, façade renovation, road works, and the setting up, or dismantling, of provisional edifices are but a few examples. Some such activities overlap with management and maintenance activities, especially when it comes to issues of upkeep and repair.

Construction and renovation activities are rarely considered a vitalizing force in urban life. Yet such activities constitute an important part of what goes on in many public spaces, for good and bad. Even though construction sites often are fenced off from the public, many construction related activities spill out into the streets and squares, in the form of materials, machines, and equipment being moved around or placed; workers who are on the move or are taking a break.

Teaching and learning

Given their compactness and complexity, cities are fitting arenas for exploration and learning. This occurs both in organized ways and in more unorganized ones, i.e. as an integral part of ordinary urban life. 'Teaching and learning' refers primarily to the former, i.e. to more structured forms of teaching, learning, training, and examination activities, such as classes and colloquia held in the open, excursions, kindergarten outings, research and training related fieldwork, and the like.

Cutting through the city from north to south, the Akerselva river park is Oslo's green artery. During the daytime, it is frequented by individuals from the many adjacent educational institutions. Kindergarten students on excursions are regulars. So are schoolchildren partaking in gym class, jogging on trails along the river or working out on the lawns. Groups of high school or university students are guided by teachers and instructors. Occasionally pupils or undergraduates may ask passersby for comments or an interview for a project, while others, perhaps from the bordering art or architecture and design schools, make use of the space for improving their hand drawing techniques or to build an installation.

Work-related activities

A defining feature of contemporary work life is flexibility, for instance when it comes to *when* and *where* work-related tasks are carried out. Wireless internet and tools like laptops, tablets, and smartphones, allow traditional office work to be carried out practically anywhere. Many people even work 'on the go' (phoning, reading, texting). Also, work-related meetings, meals, team building events and social gatherings are common features in many public spaces.

Thursday afternoons in summer, co-workers from the many companies and businesses in the chic Aker Brygge neighborhood gather for after-work activities in one of its intimate, sleek pedestrianized streets. Like practically all street events in this public space, the first privately owned neighborhood in post-war Norway, it is organized by the enterprise managing the area. This particular Thursday afternoon the happening of the day is cornhole (a game in which players take turns throwing small bags of corn kernels at a raised platform with a hole in the far end). The atmosphere is good-tempered and animated, a few interested tourists and passersby are invited to join in. Funky tones from a DJ fill the air. When finished playing cornhole, some participants seem to return to work or head home. Most, though, continue socializing with co-workers in some nearby watering hole.

Public aid

Many actions in public space are what Gardner (1986: 37) describes as "helping behaviour among the unacquainted that are the right of citizens to expect and the duty of citizens to provide.". In the context of this chapter, 'public aid' refers to requesting

minor favors (e.g. a match, correct change, help crossing the street) and information (e.g. time, directions), and acts of complying with such requests. Acts of begging and giving money, and of helping out in cases of emergency, are also included in this category.

'Public aid' requests can be addressed to practically anyone. But people with specific roles in public space, wearing outfits that identify them, be it security guards or civil society activists, are particularly targeted. As for those potentially subject to receiving such aid, typical instances are individuals visibly in doubt about something, such as visitors looking bewildered at a map or discussing directions. More particular occurrences include the old lady collapsing on the pavement, causing several people to offer help and consolation, and the bag lady on the park bench whose notable misery apparently moved a young woman passing by to offer a bag of nuts.

Activities of the homeless

Due to circumstances of life, certain activities are unavoidable for some individuals to carry out in public space. This is especially true for homeless people. Lacking shelter, they have to take care of their most basic bodily and hygienic needs outdoors: preparing food, eating and drinking, body washing, washing and drying clothes, sleeping. Bottle and trash collecting are also common among the homeless and others in need.

Homelessness has traditionally been relatively rare in Scandinavian welfare states. An influx of Roma people from mainly Romania over the last decade, has changed this picture. In the Norwegian capital, this group now has a strong visible presence in public space, as do related activities, not the least begging (here defined as a 'public aid' activity due to its core element of asking for, and occasionally receiving, help).

Deviant activities

This category refers to uses that break with social norms, be they formal rules and laws, or more informal norms and conventions. Sex in public, drug dealing, physical and sexual harassment, and violence are considered offences in most places. However, as for 'public aid activities', it might often be difficult to distinguish between activity and behavior. While some types of deviance can be considered activities proper (e.g. stealing), other ones (e.g. verbal harassment) are often just behavioral aspects of other kinds of use. What is considered 'deviant' is further subject to historical and cultural variation – values, norms, and laws vary across time, place, and cultures.

What is considered deviant might also shift from one urban context to another, depending on, for instance, management regimes. While playful skating is tolerated in most of Oslo's public spaces, it is not in the privately owned and managed Tjuvholmen district (skating from A to B is, though). On the other hand, deviance may also, depending on circumstance and people involved, be considered to be a more

positive feature, as in cases of more eccentric behavior and action.

Table 1: A classification of uses of urban public space

<i>Type of Activity</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Everyday practical activities	Activities that are of a daily, practical character, i.e. activities that are more or less imperative for the individual.	Passing through (e.g. walking or biking to/from home, work, school, kindergarten, supermarket). Walking the dog. Accompanying children to leisure activities. Waiting (e.g. for transport to arrive, for green lights, when queuing). Fixing and maintaining personal belongings and property (e.g. bikes, cars, façade of one's home).
Personal recreation	Activities that are of a more optional character; which are often, but not always, related to leisure time and which are typically performed alone or with acquaintances.	Going for a walk. Sightseeing. Enjoying peace and quiet in a park. Pausing. Smoking. Reading and using the Internet. Laying down. Sunbathing. Hanging out. Socializing. Flirting and romance/romantic contact. People-watching. Working out. Playing. Window shopping. Eating and drinking (e.g. in parks). Partying.
Transportation	Activities that are about transporting people, goods, and products from one location to another (as well as pick-up and delivery, where relevant).	Private transportation (driving one's car). Running public transport. Taxi-driving. Delivery of goods and services (mail, packages, food, etc.). Cash-in-transit. Ambulance transportation.
Selling and buying	Activities that are about marketing and selling goods and services (primarily economically motivated), as well as acts of buying such goods and services (motivated by varying degrees of necessity and choice).	Formal (selling): Outdoor serving (incl. organizing chairs, tables, etc.). Marketing and solicitation. Sales from street and market stands (of goods, services, tickets, etc.). Handling merchandise. Organizing goods on display. Informal (selling): Prostitution. Ambulatory vending. Shoe-shining. Buying: Acts of browsing, bargaining, paying etc.
Civic activities	Activities by citizens, activists, (non-governmental) interest groups, etc. that are about expressing and representing opinions and will.	Political and religious activism. Marches. Demonstrations. Strikes. Information campaigns and petition signing. Recruitment for clubs and organizations. Non-profit fundraising.
Culture and entertainment	Activities that are about organizing, staging and performing events addressed to the general public – in order to entertain, enliven, enlighten, or disquiet – as well as acts of attending such events.	Organizing, staging, performing or attending: outdoor exhibitions, concerts, theatre, shows, fairs, and sports events, etc. Street performances. Sightseeing tours. Guided tours.
Ceremony and celebration	Activities that are about marking or celebrating important historical and contemporary events and phenomena.	Marking or celebrating: Religious and spiritual events. Historical victories and disasters. National days. Anniversaries. State visits. Newly elected office-holders. Carnivals. Parades. Graduations. Marriages. Funerals. Sports victories.
Production	Activities of making goods and contents, mostly for later use, i.e. for sale, distribution or consumption.	Cooking (e.g. street food). Crafts-making. Urban farming. Media and film production related to movie shooting, news coverage, reporting, advertisements, information purposes, etc.
Management and maintenance	Activities that are about maintaining law and order, safety	Street cleaning. Maintenance work. Minor repairing. Garbage disposal. Planting and

	and security, as well as providing general physical maintenance and attractiveness.	gardening. Decorating. Parking enforcement. Traffic patrolling. Neighborhood watching. Security guarding. Policing. Military patrolling. Firefighting.
Construction and renovation	Activities that are about constructing, transforming, improving, renovating, re-modelling, dismantling, and demolishing buildings and other physical structures and features (for example, infrastructures).	Road works. Construction work. Earthworks. Foundation engineering. Façade renovation and repairs. Construction site inspection. Clean-up work. Setting up and dismantling provisional edifices.
Teaching and learning	Activities that are about organized teaching, learning, training, and investigation.	Open air classes and colloquiums. Excursions. Kindergarten outings. Research and training-related fieldwork. Practical outdoor training (e.g. driving lessons, apprenticeships, law and order enforcement training). Archaeological excavations.
Work-related activities	Activities that are about office-related work, tasks or obligations carried out in public space settings.	Working from a bench in a park or square. Working 'on the go' (phoning, reading, texting). Work-related meetings, meals, etc. and social events (e.g. team building, after-work drinking) outdoors.
Public aid	Activities that represent "instances of helping behavior among the unacquainted that are the right of citizens to expect and the duty of citizens to provide." (Gardner 1986: 37).	Requesting minor favours (e.g. a match, correct change, help to cross the street, help to retrieve lost objects) and information (e.g. time, directions), and acts of complying with such requests. Acts of begging and giving money. Helping out in cases of emergency.
Activities of the homeless	Activities that are imperative for some individuals to undertake in public space due to their life situation, such as homeless people.	Taking care of basic bodily and hygienic needs (e.g. preparing food, eating and drinking, body washing, washing and drying clothes, sleeping). Bottle and trash collecting.
Deviant activities	Activities or behavior that break with social norms, be they formal rules and laws, or more informal norms and conventions.	Eccentric behavior and action. Public sex. Addictive use (e.g. taking drugs, drinking). Uncivil acts and remarks. Stealing. Vandalism. Physical and sexual harassment. Violence. Terrorism.

Using the classification

The usefulness of the classification as a tool for observation and analysis can be illustrated by examining public spaces in the two aforementioned neighborhoods of Oslo's western waterfront: Aker Brygge, and its more recent extension, Tjuvholmen. Both are pedestrianized, privately owned and managed neighbourhoods.

Gehl has followed the Aker Brygge urban redevelopment project closely and sees it as particularly successful compared with other international counterparts. The area's popularity, argues Gehl, arises from a combination of physical density, a mix of functions, and attractive public spaces (Gehl, 2010: 69). That being said, Gehl does not specify what kinds of activities in public space create this attractiveness, nor does he say anything about ones that are absent.

We tested our classification system by recording ongoing activities at Aker Brygge and Tjuvholmen over two weekdays in June 2019. Both were days of nice weather, mostly sunny and with temperatures around 20 degrees centigrade at midday. We walked through one major public space in each neighborhood, conducting observations every second hour between nine o'clock in the morning and five o'clock in the afternoon, recording every activity encountered (i.e. what each person present was doing) using the categories of the classification outlined above.

In brief, the testing revealed that two activity types dominated: everyday practical ones, that is, primarily people moving through the area on foot, and personal recreation. In many instances it was difficult to distinguish between these two activity types, especially when there was a lack of supporting evidence, such as a person's appearance, for instance outfit, giving additional information to determine what kind of activity the person was pursuing. Other activity types observed included: transportation (of goods); selling and buying (related to personnel at outdoor servings, some goods on display outside a few stores, and licensed food trucks/kiosks); culture and entertainment (street performance by contracted/licensed artist); management and maintenance (security guarding, street cleaning, garbage disposal); teaching and learning (kindergarten outings), and work-related activities ('on the go' phoning, after-work socializing/drinking).

The testing also documented something we were well aware of: that informal buying and selling (e.g. street vending), improvised culture and entertainment activities (e.g. street performances), civic activities (e.g. political and religious ventures, demonstrations and so on), and certain public aid activities (e.g. begging) and activities of the homeless (e.g. sleeping) are more or less non-existent in this part of central Oslo. This points to the little acknowledged fact (in a Norwegian context) that in privately owned and managed spaces like these, nearly all such activities are either forbidden or strongly curbed, which testifies to a restricted publicness (Bjerkeset and Aspen 2017).

This method of observing and classifying activities in public space provides a picture of a moment in a given place. When recording activities, the observer must walk through the space, from one end to the other. It is important for the observer not to be distracted by what is going on behind him or her; the focus must be on what is going on abreast. The point is to capture one single picture of the moment rather than several. The (main) activity that each person is pursuing is recorded on the form, which includes one column for the categories and another for noting down each incident of an activity.

In order to capture activities throughout the day, one must observe over the course of a day. This can be done by recording activities at selected points in time throughout the day (i.e. every second hour). Recording can also be conducted over longer periods to compare times of day, week, or year. Recordings should preferably be made on days with good weather for the time of year, that is, the kind of weather that locally provides the best conditions for outdoor public life. Both weekdays and weekends should be covered, given the often substantial difference in use patterns.

An activity recording of this kind primarily aims to reveal the breadth of public space use, including variations throughout the day, week, or year. Given the challenge of distinguishing certain activity types from each other and the complexity of many public space situations, it is often impossible to give a precise number for the incidence of each activity type. Rather, an activity recording helps to identify and record which activity types are present or not in given public spaces, as well as to give an approximate relative weighting between the different types present.

With such data, one can compare use at different times (of day/week/year) within the same public space as well as use between different public spaces. Thus, it also becomes a tool for analyzing public space use over time and across different settings. This in turn represents findings that may form the basis for further analysis.

Advantages and limitations

Urban public spaces host a broad range of activities, many of which arise out of necessity while others result from freedom of choice, spontaneity, and coincidence. Matters of necessity seem to be downplayed or even ignored in many discourses about public space and public life, in which recreational perspectives tend to dominate (e.g. Gleeson, 2015). What tends to be overlooked are everyday activities of more prosaic kinds that contribute to the “ballet of the street”, to paraphrase Jane Jacobs (1992 [1961]). Assisted by a classification of the sort suggested here, it should be possible to recognize and to record the more everyday features of this intriguing, often poorly understood ballet, as well as to identify how it plays out in different ways from one space to another.

The proposed classification can also shed light on challenges concerning the management of public space, including its over- or under-management (Carmona 2010a; 2010b). Whereas under-management may result in limited use and decay, over-management commonly reduces the public character of public space, as at Aker Brygge and Tjuvholmen.

More generally, the patterns of use that we have identified and codified, and the non-technical terms to describe them, should make the classification simple to use as an observational and analytical tool for scholars and non-scholars alike. By providing a vocabulary to talk about the uses of public space, we also hope that the classification can help bridge discussions both within and between different scholarly disciplines and fields of practice on the increasingly more important topic of public space use.

Using the proposed classification could also be of value for planning, practice and policy. For instance, it could provide urban planners and designers with an overview of activity types that ought to be further supported if one is to meet the highly valued aim of creating inclusive urban environments. It could also inform urban designers by raising awareness of what kind of activities might be planned for and which ones that might be harder to support. In this way, and more generally, the classification could be used to build more systematic knowledge about how public spaces actually work in terms of social features and activities. Thus, it might also give input to policy development. For example, by reminding policymakers that a general regulation for public purposes in itself often is insufficient to guarantee a certain variation in use and users. Some activity types may need to be specified in a supportive manner in zoning ordinances to avoid being subjugated to prohibition.

A comprehensive classification for such a complex phenomenon as the use of public space necessarily also has limitations.

Urban public culture is not as simple or as static as the proposed activity types may suggest. By definition, urbanity is dynamic and shifting – and no less so in a time of globalization, demographic diversity, and digitalization. Digital technology has become an integral part of everyday life which complicates most matters of urban description and analysis (Crang *et al.* 2007; Del Signore and Riether 2018). When using public spaces, many people routinely engage in both online and offline activities. For this reason, such people’s everyday involvement with digital technology is treated as an integral aspect of other kinds of public space use rather than as a separate category, much what is done with respect to social activities and interactions.

A great variety of activities occur in public space, as reflected in the classification. People also often do several things at once or frequently switch between activities. A woman hurrying along a street on her way home from work (everyday practical), might stop shortly to text a colleague (work-related), then by impulse join a crowd on a square watching a busker (culture and entertainment), before resuming her walk home (everyday practical) listening to music with headphones (personal recreation). A freelancer working on a laptop from a park bench may continuously switch between

practical, work-related, and recreational activities. A child on his way from school might run into some friends, become distracted in play for a while, while simultaneously chatting with other friends on the phone, then recall his promise to buy some items for dinner and therefore rush on. Instances such as these, where different activities quickly succeed each other or take place more or less at the same time, are many and diverse.

Moreover, shifting contexts can radically change the character of an activity. Take a mother walking her child in a stroller between home and kindergarten. Leaving home in the morning, she moves quickly and determinedly to her destination. On the way back in the afternoon, she might find herself walking at a much slower pace, having plenty of time to let herself and the child distract and amuse themselves by things they encounter on their way.

Such differences require that the researcher pays careful attention to behavioral aspects of the activities being observed, such as walking pace or purposefulness of movement. Furthermore, outfit and appurtenances can provide useful clues, as may contextual factors like time of day. Still, it can often be difficult to identify, correctly, what kind of activity that actually is being carried out without having some knowledge of the individual's subjective experiences or motivations. To determine whether a person walking along the street is walking to reach a destination or just for recreation (or both), would require asking the person in question directly (and even then, one may not get an answer, or an accurate one).

In complex public space situations, it could be advantageous to involve more than one person when recording activities. For instance, while one person is recording, another could videotape the session. This would allow for later controls of observations and recordings. Further, in some recording situations it might be useful to operate with a set of categories that is less comprehensive than in the presented classification, where the categories of this one are merged into larger aggregate categories. Which categories should be merged and how would among other things depend on the purpose of the recording.

Classifying the highly diverse and in part rapidly changing and interwoven activities that people pursue in public space, is obviously not a straightforward task. In sum, however, we believe that the benefits of the proposed classification far outweigh its shortcomings.

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ARTICLE 4

Bjerkset S (in progress) 'License to interact': Circumstances encouraging chance interaction among strangers in urban public space.

To be submitted to a peer-reviewed international journal

‘License to interact’: Circumstances encouraging chance interactions among strangers in urban public space

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Abstract

Face-to-face interaction with unknown others is integral to city life. Though much celebrated in urban scholarship and beyond, what makes interactions between strangers of respectful or peaceful kinds actually occur, has rarely been systematically documented. This study investigates underlying circumstances that encourage peaceful chance interactions among strangers in urban public space. Long-term field studies were conducted in several public spaces in Oslo, Norway. The research reveals that a wide range of circumstances prompt, or license, such interaction, the principal ones being ‘exposed positions’, ‘opening positions’, and ‘mutual openness’. In this, the research relies on, substantiates and expands upon a lesser-known part of pioneering sociologist Erving Goffman’s work. The main contribution of the study is the thorough documentation and categorisation of circumstances that provoke the city’s strangers to engage spontaneously and civilly with one another in public. The relevance of these findings on ‘licensing’ circumstances, the author claims, extends well beyond the particular setting of the study. The paper concludes by arguing that insights such as those presented here are important for policy-makers, planners, and developers to consider in their endeavor to create public spaces for the populace to meet and interact.

Keywords

Social interaction, interaction among strangers, urban encounters, civility, public space

Background: perspectives on interactions among strangers

The city essentially consists of strangers. Mainly these strangers do not interact directly with each other, but occasionally they do, and most variously so in the city’s public spaces. What are the underlying circumstances which encourage or license spontaneous and peaceful face-to-face interactions among strangers in public space? Our point of departure is the assumption that while acquaintances in a social situation require a reason not to interact, strangers require a reason to do so (Goffman, 1966 [1963]: 124).

Historically, celebrations of civility and the city have co-existed with deep anxieties about the incivility of urban life. Over the last decades, a focus on incivility has come to dominate urban policy and research agendas (Fyfe et al., 2006: 854). In this paper, however, it is manifestations of civility that are under scrutiny.

There is a long record of claims about the positive interpersonal and civic effects of contact between the city's strangers. More than any other contemporary urban scholar, Richard Sennett (e.g., 1992 [1977]; 2019; Sendra and Sennett, 2020) has stressed the value of impersonal encounters in public. Such contact, he contends, has the potential to teach citizens that "men can act together without the compulsion to be the same" (Sennett, 1992: 255). According to Young (2011 [1990]: 236–241), chance encounters in public space allows one to see people dissimilar to oneself and enables a better understanding of different groups and cultures. For Bauman (2003: 38), in cities, strangers meet as individual human beings, observe each other close-up, talk to each other, learn each other's ways, negotiate the rules of life in common and get used to each other's presence, thereby potentially reducing the anxiety and fear that strangers induce. It is uncertain, though, whether urban *tolerance* will result from mere co-presence or chance contact. Tolerance requires nurturing through meaningful and purposeful social interaction and collective activity (e.g. Bannister and Kearns, 2013).

Based on arguments like these, a significant rationale for the extensive upgrading and construction of new public spaces in cities worldwide is to create spatial arenas for inhabitants to gather and interact. However, there is less known about the specific circumstances that encourage such interaction among strangers sharing the same physical space.

Conceptualisations of circumstances that spur or license strangers to interact in public, stem mostly from different social sciences. They include phenomena and concepts such as 'communitas' (Turner, 1974), 'public aid' (Gardner, 1986), 'triangulation' (Whyte, 1988), 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1997), 'home territory' (Lofland, 2009 [1998]), 'rubbing along' (Watson, 2006, 2009), 'cosmopolitan canopy' (Anderson, 2011), and 'interaction pretext' (Henriksen and Tjora, 2014). Bakhtin's (1968) notion of the 'carnavalesque' is a seminal contribution that maintains relevance.

The scholar that has most systematically addressed our topic of inquiry, though, is sociologist Erving Goffman (1966 [1963]). As will become apparent, the abovementioned conceptualisations can be subsumed under Goffman's more generic categories: 'exposed positions', 'opening positions', and 'mutual openness'. While less known than most of his other work, Goffman's perspective on 'engagements among the unacquainted' has an unyielding explanatory power within our context. Goffman is noted for challenging long-held beliefs about the public realm's asocial character (Lofland, 2009: 3), originating from the 'father' of urban sociology, Georg Simmel. It must be remarked that Goffman's sketches of social behavior and interactions, while often referred to as subtle and insightful, are contextually or empirically vague (e.g.

Manning, 1992: 15). In categorising and analysing circumstances under which interaction among strangers routinely occur, I will draw from long-term field research in Oslo, Norway to empirically substantiate and expand upon Goffman's ideas.

An early example of a study making partial use of Goffman's perspective on 'engagements among the unacquainted', is his student Cavan's (1966) investigation of bar behaviour. A recent example is a study on intercultural neighbourly encounters (Winiarska, 2015). However, neither these works nor others that I have identified apply Goffman's perspective systematically and in its entirety.

A number of studies address more narrow and specific factors related to our topic of inquiry. Factors that facilitate or spur interaction among strangers are found to be of many kinds. They include dogs (e.g. McNicholas and Collis, 2000; Wood et al., 2015); children (e.g. Cattell et al., 2008: 553; Henriksen and Tjora, 2014: 2119); helping behaviour (Gardner, 1986); common tasks and responsibilities (Henriksen and Tjora, 2014: 2119); playful occurrences (e.g. Stevens, 2007); and more significant public events like celebrations (Turner, 2012). Among physical-spatial conditions claimed to have similar effects, are specific 'props', including intersections and thresholds (Stevens, 2007); urban design characteristics like seating and shelter (Mehta and Bosson, 2010); shared street spaces (e.g. Kaparias et al. 2015); objects such as public artwork (e.g. Whyte, 1988: 154-155); and, more enclosed public settings, for example public market places (e.g. Watson, 2009; Anderson, 2011: 58-62). We will return to these and other relevant studies in more detail.

The large majority of such empirical studies are focused on singular, concrete factors. Thus, few of them offer a broad comprehension of the phenomenon. The key contribution of the study presented here is the comprehensive empirical documentation and categorisation of underlying circumstances that license or prompt peaceful chance interactions among strangers in public.

It is to the *where* and *how* of this investigation that we first turn. Then, constituting the main part of the paper, the circumstances under which interaction among strangers regularly occur here are categorised and analysed. Subsequently, the paper discusses how the findings relate to pertinent research; how they, overall, relate to Goffman's perspective on the topic; and finally, their more general relevance.

An extended field study

My interest in this topic arose during a now completed thesis investigation. I was intrigued by the disparity between two inner-city public spaces in terms of amount and types of strangers' interaction. Differences in the urban context, management regimes,

and overall neighbourhood profiles were clearly significant. However, I soon realized that a broader understanding of the actual mechanisms that make strangers interact in public space required a more comprehensive study.

Although civility was the norm, the ensuing fieldwork also documented negative encounters. These could be “low-level incivilities” – being bumped into, pushed, subject to bad language or prejudicial comments, and so on – that many people experience in daily life (Phillips and Smith, 2006). There were also more grave offences, such as bullying, harassment, and violence. Such forms of interaction are not the focus of the study presented here.

Moreover, the concept of ‘stranger’ is not to be equated with ‘the other’. It simply denotes a person with whom one is unacquainted. So defined, it includes the ‘familiar stranger’ recognised from regular activities, but with whom one usually does not interact (Milgram and Blass, 2010). ‘Interaction among strangers’ refers to ‘focused interaction’ in the form of ‘face engagements’ or ‘encounters’ (Goffman, 1966: 88–89). That includes all forms of peaceful, spontaneous interaction among strangers that go beyond the ubiquitous phenomenon of ‘civil inattention’ (recognition of each other’s presence through brief eye contact), and ranges from subtle negotiations while passing on the street to prolonged conversations.

A classical Scandinavian welfare state, Norway is considered among the world’s richest, safest, and most democratic countries. Of its 5.3 million inhabitants, around 680,000 reside in the capital city of Oslo. The city has a substantial immigrant population (immigrants and Norwegians born to immigrant parents), accounting for 33.3 per cent of its total population, the majority of which have a non-Western background (Statistics Bank of Oslo, 2019). Despite the country’s egalitarian tradition, Oslo is segregated in socioeconomic and ethnic terms (e.g. Ljunggren et al., 2017).

The study sites were selected to reflect a range of different public space profiles, in terms of location in the urban structure, urban form, overall neighbourhood profile, ground ownership and management regime, and user groups. Nevertheless, they also share some notable characteristics; they are all located in dense mixed-use areas, and each site is comprised of an urban square or plaza including adjacent streets and may include parks, promenades, or harbour fronts.

There are two main sites that I revisited most often, each within different urban areas. One is primarily a low and middle-income neighbourhood, partly gentrified, and situated a few minutes’ walk east of downtown. It is a public transportation junction and the city’s multicultural hub. The other area is located just west of downtown, and

is a former harbor pier transformed into an up-market, privately owned and managed precinct yet with public spaces open to all. Other parts of the city where sites in the study are set, include a well-established, affluent neighbourhood with a vibrant commercial downtown, and a fully gentrified district characterised by a youthful, lively street scene.

A principle of data saturation guided fieldwork. In addition to systematic data gathering, I drew upon personal experience as a white male, aged 51 at the time of this writing. I have lived nearly all my life in Norway and 30 years in this city, most of the time as a trained anthropologist.

In the data gathering process, I applied a number of ethnographic methods. Detailed observation of everyday public space use, in particular social interactions, was central, mostly in the form of covert detached observation and participant observation. Observational methods included 'shadowing' of individuals prone to interact with other strangers, and availing myself to contact (e.g. by placing myself in certain spots, bringing my small children along, walking dogs, wearing a uniform, and accompanying a street performance artist over a few days). Information recorded during observation included estimated gender, age, and ethnicity of strangers engaging with each other; the time of day, place, length of time, and the form of such interactions; as well as their prompting circumstances.

In inferring the nature of observed encounters, those containing no signs of mutual recognition were interpreted to be between unacquainted individuals. However, such signs can be very subtle. There is thus an evident chance that I sometimes misjudged interactions between acquaintances to have been between strangers, and vice versa.

Observations were conducted on all days of the week and at all times of the day, primarily during the warmer parts of the year, but also in winter. Altogether, fieldwork was carried out across the selected sites on some 350 occasions between 2012 and 2019, ranging from short visits to longer 12- to 14-hour sessions. Most, though, lasted 1 – 3 hours.

I carried out informal conversations on-site, as well as interviews. These were predominantly focused, semi-structured one-to-one interviews spanning 5–10 minutes with a variety of public space users whom I approached and interviewed on the street. I conducted roughly 100 such interviews equally divided between the two main sites. A further 50 interviews was carried out with persons conducting specific tasks in public space, mostly civil society activists. All interviews centred on the issue of contact between strangers.

Observations and informal interviews were recorded as field notes; semi-structured interviews were mostly taped. To support observations, I took photographs and, at times, recorded videos. Observations and interviews were later transcribed and analysed through an inductive strategy, generating first thematic and then analytic categories. I applied NVivo software for qualitative analysis. The resulting classification system is a combination of existing and newly conceived concepts and categories that emerged from a long process of arranging and rearranging the data. An extract from this data introduces the lengthy section that now follows.

Circumstances under which strangers interact

In the public spaces under scrutiny here, strangers of all kinds congregate. What is usually limited to mere co-presence or ‘civil inattention’, at times results in more direct kinds of interaction. On rare occasions, it might even be quite widespread and take many forms.

One such occasion is the annual pride parade, the culmination of a ten-day festival for the LGBT+ community. Much of the city’s population take part in what is a highly sociable carnival-like event. In condensed form, this extraordinary event can tell us much about what ordinarily happens in terms of contact between the city’s strangers.

Some 50,000 participants and 275,000 bystanders. Those were the official figures for Oslo’s pride parade of June 2019, three of whom were me, my wife and my daughter.

As we joined the crowd lining the route this pleasant Saturday, a group of half-naked girls in their 20s posed happily for a man with a cell phone who had approached them to take a photo. A young girl resting on a man’s shoulder in front of us stared at me with sleepy eyes. I smiled at her and said hello, to which the man smiled back. Close by, a female parade participant tapped another girl on the head, approving of the rainbow-coloured flag she was holding.

The parade brought together people in everyday clothing with those in an extravagant show of colour and costumes. Some people marched in an orderly fashion while others, enthralled in music and dance, celebrated enthusiastically. The more catchy the music and passionate the performances, the more the audience responded. While some of those dancing and performing were loose and free, others appeared slightly stiff and awkward. Some floats or marching groups gathered hundreds of people. When the parade paused intermittently, participants would group for a quick chat, sometimes absconding to another float to do so.

Amongst the more animated onlookers was the band of young girls next to us, incessantly singing and dancing, waving flags, encouraging those parading, responding willingly to invitations coming their way. A few times, we exchanged remarks on the unfolding spectacle.

Guards walked along the route, occasionally instructing the public to stay back on the side-lines. A young woman with a stroller addressed a police officer, he responded by pointing directions. An elderly lady patiently manoeuvred her bike through the crowd. Nearby, a Roma woman asked people for empty bottles and change.

The procession brought together most of the established political parties, and the prime minister herself headed the Conservative Party contingent. The Labour Party leader, was, however, the most applauded, improvising a showgirl dance. "Jonas! Jonas!" onlookers shouted. A young woman emerged from the audience, hugged him and exchanged pleasantries.

A colleague of my wife appeared. "I'm so touched, there's so much love." I left my company, and walked to the end of the route, which was so packed I could hardly move. Trying to escape the throng, I stumbled upon a stone block, and accidentally leaned on the back of a lady so as not to fall. I apologized, she smiled back, told me not to worry. The parade was coming to an end. As I entered a side street, an imposing, corpulent drag queen sauntered towards me, approximately in her 40's and dressed in a red velvet gown, heavily made up and with a lavish, waving gray wig. A young woman grinned as she swaggered past her. "Amazing," she commented. A nearby couple likewise applauded, albeit somewhat timidly. The queen did not stop but turned half-way towards them with a blasé look.

In the next day's paper a participating TV celebrity stated that "pride is like May 17 on steroids."¹

This annual pride celebration exemplifies some common instances of interaction among strangers on local streets, squares, parks: performers and onlookers engage with each other; adults address children and vice versa; famous personalities and individuals in costumes are subject to comments and approach; beggars ask pedestrians for alms; guards and police provide directions and assistance; people apologise for bumping into one another; others negotiate their way through a crowd; individuals bond with others of the same or other subgroup; people next to each other engage in contact through a common focus.

Most observed incidents of stranger interaction in this study have certain generic

features in terms of what prompted or licensed them. To organize and present the data, I have sorted it into a few *main types* and several *subtypes*. Like the parade example shows, however, circumstances that spur strangers to interact may well exist concurrently or overlap; real life is much messier than what our tidy classification indicates. At the outset, it should also be noted that the boundary between civility and incivility can be delicate and fleeting and that some of the circumstances we have identified as spurring peaceful interactions may well provoke less peaceful or desired ones.

Our main types are based on three kinds of circumstances that Goffman (1966: 125–139) sees as somehow allowing, and occasionally obliging, engagement among unacquainted people: ‘exposed positions’, ‘opening positions’, and ‘mutual openness’. For ‘exposed positions’, the subtypes I have further defined are: ‘accessible by obligation’, ‘low social status’, ‘out of role’, ‘in need of help’, ‘other individuals’ actions’, ‘standing out from the crowd’, and ‘famous persons’. ‘Opening positions’ is subdivided into ‘licensed to approach’, ‘no status to lose’, ‘out of role’, ‘asking for favours and information’, ‘offering apologies or explanations’, and ‘regulars’. Finally, ‘mutual openness’ has these subtypes: ‘common group identity’, ‘open regions’, ‘opening and exposed’, ‘physical proximity’, and ‘triangulation’.

While most subtypes spring from Goffman’s ideas, three of them are my constructions (‘standing out from the crowd’, ‘famous persons’, ‘no status to lose’) and other scholars inform two (‘regulars’, ‘triangulation’). All subtype names are my own except for a few (‘out of role’, ‘open regions’, ‘triangulation’).

The presentation of each subtype that follows contains a brief definition, fieldwork examples, and, for a few subtypes, some additional comments.

Exposed positions

The first of the three main circumstances which in the setting of this study prompt individuals to interact with unknown others, are ‘exposed positions’: circumstances under which someone, in their capacity, role or status in society, or for some other reason, becomes accessible to strangers.

Accessible by obligation: the uniformed and their like

An extensive type of ‘exposed positions’ in cities is represented by social roles which oblige the individual to be available to strangers.

In a contemporary Oslo context, such roles are most often related to one’s employment position, other forms of income-generating work, or voluntary engagement. People in

such roles include: police officers, private security guards, caretakers, sellers, marketing people, street vendors, street performers, waiters, shop owners and employees, political campaigners, religious activists, recruiters for clubs and organisations, and several others.

Low social status: children and the elderly

Certain broad statuses in society, often ones of low social standing, can expose the individuals holding them to contact from strangers.

Kindergarteners on excursions effectively illustrate how young children are subject to much attention in public. On their way through the city, they get smiles, greetings, and comments along the way. Older adults are also subject to contact from strangers more often than most other social groups. Many elderly seem, intentionally or not, to further expose themselves to contact by apparently being in no hurry; by placing themselves on chairs, benches, or personal transport devices in ways that facilitate contact; by not occupying themselves with digital devices.

According to Goffman (1966: 125-126), children and elderly are considered so “meager [meager] in sacred value” that one might think they have nothing to lose through face engagements, and hence can be engaged at will.

Out of role

Another general circumstance that opens up an individual for contact, is that he or she can be ‘out of role’.

Visibly inebriated persons are well-known figures in the Scandinavian urban landscape, particularly so at night. Unless they appear threatening, the threshold for addressing them is quite low. Apart from more specific cases, such as the drag queen of the pride parade or participants in costume parties, two other customary ‘out of role’ types are regularly approached by strangers on Norwegian city streets. The first are the protagonists of bachelor and bachelorette parties, dressed up and instructed to behave in ways intended to make them look ridiculous to other people. Secondly, there are the *russ*, students in their final semester of upper secondary school who have a boisterous public presence each spring. The *russ* all wear coloured overalls and engage in many humorous activities, licensed by what is traditionally conceived of as a rite-de-passage into adulthood.

Individuals like these may be accosted almost at will and joked with, argues Goffman (1966: 126), on the assumption that the self projected through such activities is one from which they can easily disassociate from their more typical selves.

In need of help

Individuals who are in clear need of assistance invite contact from others, as anyone has a right and at times a duty to offer their help, according to what Gardner (1986) terms 'public aid'.

Typical instances in our urban context are individuals visibly in doubt about something, such as visitors looking bewildered at a map or discussing directions. More particular occurrences include the old lady whose collapse on the pavement caused several people to offer help and consolation; the bag lady on the park bench whose notable misery apparently moved the young women passing by to offering a bag of nuts; and the author himself being approached by a man on the street to be alerted to water that was flowing from his bag.

Other individuals' actions

There are incidents which can create a need in others to convey explanation, apology, and the like, that exposes the offended to engagement.

Bumping into other people and so on are everyday incidents on congested streets and public transport. Unless the situation is extraordinarily crowded and busy, and bumping into one another thus unavoidable, it is – despite the natives' reputation for a certain impoliteness in public – quite normal for the offender to provide apologies or explanations to the offended.

Standing out from the crowd

People that stand out from the crowd in some way beyond being 'out of role', such as by what they do, wear, or bring with them, are also susceptible to contact from others.

Dog walkers are an apt example: the fascination many have for this creature leaves them particularly exposed. Another case is individuals with a strikingly atypical appearance, such as the young Muslim woman in hijab wearing a Norwegian *bunad* (folk costume) during national day celebrations, which elicited positive remarks from fellow members of the public. Unusual behaviour may also trigger comments from curious onlookers, like the fieldworker taking pictures of uncommon situations or too visibly making notes.

Famous persons

One more class of 'exposed positions' is well-known figures; their fame attracting the attention of unknown others.

In our urban context, this covers everything from individuals of local fame to those of international renown. To varying degrees, they are addressed by people wanting to offer greetings, chat, comment on their work or achievements, get a signed autograph, or better yet, have a photograph or selfie taken.

Opening positions

Having described circumstances that expose persons to contact from unacquainted others, we shall now consider ‘opening positions’: circumstances which give individuals a right or perceived right to initiate contact with others, mainly due to their role in public life or status in society.

Licensed to approach: vendors, activists, investigators

One obvious answer to when an individual has a right to approach strangers, is that he can do so when the other is in an exposed position. Another is that some of the persons who are defined as open also tend to be defined as ‘opening persons’ – as individuals who have a “built-in license to accost others” (Goffman, 1966: 129).

As in most large cities, there is in our city a wide array of individuals with a built-in license to approach others: vendors, beggars, civil society activists, street artists, management and security officers, journalists, researchers, and many more. A hierarchy exists as to how they are perceived, with aggressive begging and selling at one end of the spectrum and non-evasive activism at the other.

Out of role (again)

A license to approach, akin to a license to be approached, can also be taken by individuals who temporarily find themselves ‘out of role’.

The regularly and more occasionally inebriated often require no reason to approach strangers. “To drink is to become more courageous”, goes a Norwegian saying. In practice, it means people drink alcohol to become more socially courageous, in particular towards those with whom one might have a romantic interest.

Likewise, other previously mentioned ‘out of role’ figures function as ‘opening persons’. The *russ* have to fulfil certain tasks to obtain points, of which several include approaching strangers: giving a rose to a person they find attractive; kissing policemen or –women; asking to buy the outfit of a passer-by. In the same vein, the protagonists of bachelor and bachelorette parties have to complete assignments commonly involving strangers.

Again we see a link between exposed and opening positions, “for the very alienation from his projected self that allows others to treat this self as approachable and

expendable allows him to misbehave in its name.” (Goffman, 1966: 130). Concerning the inebriated person, reduced judgement and a more relaxed attitude towards social norms play a role as well. For the *russ*, bachelors, and bachelorettes, breaking social norms is the whole point.

Asking for favours and information

Representing the request side of ‘public aid’, an individual has a right to ask for minor favours and information.

The kind of favours people request from strangers in the public spaces investigated here, include asking for a light, watching one’s belongings, holding a table, assistance in crossing the street or carrying something, and, on rarer occasions, assistance searching for lost objects or other cases of urgency. Requests for information are commonly inquiries about time, directions, availability of a seat or a newspaper on a café terrace, and so forth. Some types of requests are particularly addressed to people in certain exposed positions. A Labour Party activist commented that, after a day of street campaigning, he and colleagues could conclude that “today we were like a tourist office.”

Offering apologies or explanations

Similarly, if individuals feel the need to apologise or explain themselves, perhaps to appear in a proper light, they can engage others.

In our case, such instances are mostly about people, uneasy with their own behaviour, commenting or excusing themselves to others nearby. For instance, the teenage girl that scanned the park lawn for her lost keys; the elegant lady in high-heeled shoes who slipped on the pavement, almost tumbling backwards; or, the restaurant owner getting soaked by water sprouting from a defective hose while cleaning outside.

No status to lose (and some socialising to be gained)

Those exposed to contact from others due to low social status, can, for much the same reason, be said to have little to lose by themselves initiating contact.

Many elderly and socially marginalised individuals have a relatively low threshold for addressing strangers. People in especially exposed positions (activists, security guards, caretakers) consistently mentioned that many individuals in this group approached them just to chat. An experienced security guard stated he could have “written a book” about all the stories told by ill-fated beings that had approached him on the street over the years. Young children are yet more ‘opening’, having few barriers as to whom to address.

Social status is not the only issue of relevance here. Those in exposed positions particularly targeted by the elderly and socially marginalised, often categorised them as ‘lonely people’ and suggested this as the main reason for their contact-seeking. As for young children, their readiness to address strangers is undoubtedly related to not yet having acquired relevant social norms.

Regulars

As individuals who have “staked out home territory” (Lofland, 2009: 30), ‘regulars’ often take the license to address others present.

Regulars of this sort are in our setting most often encountered at ‘third places’ (Oldenburg, 1989) – informal meeting places away from home and work, such as certain bars, cafés and their terraces. Here, apart from opening and entering conversations with people nearby, regulars can take on a ‘host role’, greeting newcomers and perhaps lending them a helping hand. For instance, they may notice someone seemingly in doubt about what to order or trying to figure out the character of the place. Other regulars that function as ‘opening persons’, such as men (they are mostly men) with much time to spare, are typically found near benches in squares and parks.

Mutual openness

A final main category of circumstances represented in our data, is ‘mutual openness’. These are circumstances under which strangers – through sharing a group affiliation, a physical space, or an experience, for example – can be mutually open to each other, “each having the right to initiate and the duty to accept an encounter with the other.” (Goffman, 1966: 131).

Common group identity

An important basis of mutual accessibility is the element of informality and solidarity that can arise between individuals who recognise each other as belonging to the same select group.

The types of collective group identity that may stir mutual recognition and exchanges here, are diverse: parents with small kids, dog owners, kindergarten groups, bus and tram drivers, motorcyclists, fans of the same (or rivalling) football club, political activists and recruiters from non-profit organisations, security guards, and many others. Most such people would greet briefly, but at times interaction can be more extensive. Shared ethnic or national identity is another case in point. On May 17th locals can often be seen and heard greeting unknown others with *gratulerer med*

dagen, “happy national day”. During *Eid* (marking the end of Ramadan) it is widespread among local Muslims to salute each other with *Eid Mubarak*, “blessed festival” or “happy holiday”. Also, members of ethnic or national minority groups, including tourists, may greet or talk to one another upon recognising each other on the street.

Goffman (1966: 131) suggests that such intra-group affinity is particularly strong if those involved belong to the same disadvantaged or “ritually-profane” group. Much the same seems to be the case between members of other marginal or exclusive groups. Examples from my data are Harley Davidson riders, owners of rare cars and rare dogs.

Open regions: physical boundedness (and beyond)

Another important basis for mutual accessibility is ‘open regions’: physically bounded places where everyone has a right to initiate contact with others, to extend greetings and otherwise initiate conversation.

Foreigners in Norway regularly complain that neighbours do not greet each other. Sporadic statements among locals like “in this neighbourhood we greet”, “here we greet each other” and so on, further support the notion that such a practice is not standard. It might be that the ‘nod line’ (Goffman, 1966: 132), the number of people in a small town or area above which people stop greeting, is set lower in Norway than in many other countries.

‘Third spaces’ such as various local pubs and bars tend to be ‘open places’. Alcohol undoubtedly plays a part in this. However, other serving places may be ‘open’ too, like the independent chain coffee bar Evita with a popular terrace in a socially and ethnically mixed neighbourhood. This coffee bar encapsulates many of the characteristics of ‘third places’: a playful, informal mood; a low profile; customers from different walks of life; many regulars; filled with conversation; ‘a home away from home’ for many; and, possibly as a consequence of these and other factors, strangers easily mingle with each other.

On a larger scale, another illustration of open regions is mass gatherings of a momentous nature, such as the recounted pride parade. Demonstrations, marches, festivals, and concerts, to name but a few, can also create a rare ambience of social fluidity and ease among participants. The most remarkable event of this kind I have ever experienced was unleashed by Norway’s unexpected football World Cup win over Brazil two decades ago. Upon triumph, tens of thousands poured into the city centre from all quarters. People behaved strangely indeed, hugging and talking to

almost anyone as if they were close acquaintances.

During carnival celebrations, theorised by Bakhtin (1968) as the ‘carnavalesque’, “a roof and its rights is by social definition spread above the streets, bringing persons into contact – a contact facilitated by their being out of role.” (Goffman, 1966: 136). Much the same can be said to apply to the other mass gatherings just mentioned. The sharing at such events of both the same space and the same purpose or joy creates a sense of togetherness, of *communitas* (Turner, 1974; Turner, 2012), in which habitual boundaries between strangers recede. Events inciting *communitas* need not only be positive: strong communities can also arise in times of disaster (Turner, 2012).

Opening and exposed: fleeting negotiations and settlements

Mutual availability also occurs when those involved find themselves in a position that is both exposed and opening.

In busy and crowded urban public settings, like some of the ones studied here, subtle negotiations are pervasive. This particularly goes for spaces dominated by people passing by on foot or by some kind of mechanical or motorised means. Such mainly silent negotiations relate to where to pass, who should pass first, who should give way, who should get out of the way, and so on. Unavoidably, pedestrians sometimes bump into each other. Those involved may then engage in some form of communication, perhaps even with both taking on the guilty role.

Physical proximity

If individuals find themselves in a situation where it is hard to avoid staring at each other, they can try to cope with the matter by initiating contact.

It is mostly highly enclosed indoor environments that in our context give rise to situations where staring can be difficult to avoid: elevators, waiting rooms, buses and metros. Strangers rarely interact directly in such settings; many work hard to avoid eye contact and may use ‘involvement shields’ (Goffman, 1966: 38–42) such as digital devices. Some outdoor public settings may give rise to similar scenes, such as when people rest on benches that face each other at one of the investigated squares. Occasionally, though, people here may handle the situation by initiating conversations. Close physical proximity in itself can legitimise and encourage interaction: standing next to each other when queuing, sitting side-by-side at a café terrace or park bench, or rubbing shoulders, ‘rubbing along’ (Watson, 2006, 2009; Anderson, 2011: 34) in markets, fairs, exhibitions, etcetera.

Triangulation: external stimulus

A last, important type of ‘mutual openness’ is ‘triangulation’, the “process by which some external stimulus provides a linkage between people and prompts strangers to talk to other strangers as if they knew each other” (Whyte, 1988: 154).²

In our case, triangulation can be linked to diverse external stimuli, which could be any number of anticipated or unexpected events and incidents: processions, street performances, public announcements on loudspeakers, children playing, the abrupt sound of a tram roaring at an inattentive jaywalker, the erotic dance between groups of pride parade actors, or the possibly intoxicated person taking his friend in a wheelchair on a wild tour around the square. Weather conditions like heavy rain or snowfall can also provide the basis for triangulation. So too can intriguing physical objects, such as the tiger statue at Oslo’s central station. Kids seem unable to pass by without touching or climbing it; the same goes for many adults, frequently resulting in exchanges of smiles, laughter, and remarks among those present.

The global sensation that is Pokémon Go deserves a special mention before we end this extended section. Few single phenomena have resulted in more face-to-face contact between strangers on these latitudes than this interactive mobile game. In particular, the game’s second phase requires collaboration between players in given public spaces and at certain times to accomplish tasks (‘raids’).

Looking ahead

Having broadly presented the specific circumstances under which interactions among strangers in public spaces in Oslo regularly occur, we may now address other questions: How do the findings relate to other research? How do they relate to Goffman’s perspective on the topic overall? And, do they have relevance beyond the Norwegian context?

Enduring ‘interaction order’ in changing times?

In many respects, this research confirms findings from other studies on factors that prompt interaction among strangers in public. Some of these factors cover both what we have termed ‘exposed’ and ‘opening positions’, such as receiving or offering ‘public aid’ (Gardner, 1986); they can mostly, however, be sorted under ‘mutual openness’. They might be of a social character, like playful events (Stevens, 2007) and larger public happenings and celebrations (Turner, 2012), fostering mutual engagement with others as a result of sharing an experience. Certain physical and spatial features and institutions also open up for mutual availability. These include public artwork which provide a common external stimuli (Whyte, 1988: 154-155); ‘props’ like intersections and thresholds, where many people’s paths converge and individuals are brought closer together to share a tight space (Stevens, 2007); shared

street space, requiring negotiations between pedestrians and vehicles (e.g. Kaparias et al. 2015); public market spaces with their boundedness, intimacy and ‘rubbing along’ (Watson, 2009; Anderson, 2011: 58-62); and ‘third places’ for gathering, providing seating and shelter (Mehta and Bosson, 2010).

Furthermore, along with many other studies, this one confirms common sense experiences of the distinct ‘social lubricant’ role of dogs (e.g. McNicholas and Collis, 2000; Wood et al., 2015) and children (e.g. Cattell et al., 2008: 553; Henriksen and Tjora, 2014: 2119). However, such research seldom touches upon the varied social dynamics at work. Those walking dogs, for example, are exposed to contact from unknown others: those attracted to dogs, especially children; other dog walkers being pulled by their canine companions towards them and vice versa; and other people which the dog finds appealing and wishes to engage in play. Some of these situations can be simultaneously interpreted as ones of ‘opening positions’ or ‘mutual openness’, of being both exposed and opening, of people being forced to relate to each other. Dogs can incite mutual openness in other ways too. For instance, they may provide a common reference (e.g. among dog owners, between dog owners and others, or among the public audience watching dogs in play or fight), or by evoking a shared group identity (e.g. among aficionados of the same breed).

What regards a very different and far more wide-ranging social phenomenon, the overwhelming emergence of everything digital, its impacts on urban public life remain to be more systematically explored. Existing studies on the use of digital technology in public places, mostly point to adverse effects. This particularly applies to the use of ‘heads down’ devices (e.g. Hampton, Livio and Goulet, 2010; Hatuka and Toch, 2016). Additionally, personal stereos and headphones, while slightly older technologically, enable “sounding out the city” (Bull, 2000). However, the present study does not support the pessimistic accounts which suggest that modern technology allows public space users to reduce face-to-face interaction with strangers to a minimum (e.g. Hatuka & Toch, 2016: 2206). For one, people tend to switch continuously between online and offline activities. Moreover, as Pokémon Go has demonstrated, digital technology also holds a strong sociability potential. In this particular case, in the form of ‘mutual openness’ on a vast scale.³ More importantly, a key and inevitable feature of many public settings is that one cannot control social distance or choose how and when to interact (Franck and Stevens, 2006: 5–6).

Despite large-scale societal and technological changes since Goffman’s times: Engagements between strangers in the investigated cases essentially conform to the ‘interaction order’ that he claimed governed such engagements in public in American middle-class society two generations ago. The study records licensing circumstances

that Goffman pays little or no attention to, but their general character suggests that they were also common at the time and in the context of his writing.⁴ Still, as initially anticipated and demonstrated by the applied classification system, these circumstances or types, as well as concepts by other scholars of relevance to our topic, can find a place within Goffman's scheme. All this points to what is often considered Goffman's foremost strength: his rare ability to tease out the underlying order of everyday social behaviour and institutions.

This study also suggests that there are factors of importance for engagements among strangers which a micro-sociological approach fails to capture. There are factors beyond the situational features of the encounter that influence people's inclination or readiness to interact with strangers. Among these are issues of gender, culture (including religious beliefs and practices), climate (e.g. summer versus winter), time (time available and time of day/week), trust and fear, technology, spatial and physical form, and atmosphere (of a space or place). The relevance of such varied contextual conditions on interaction among stranger could with advantage have been explored by applying a holistic, multidimensional approach to the ethnography of space and place of the sort Low (2017) proposes.

An important contextual factor which Goffman (1966: 124-125) does refer to, however briefly, is culture. He states that there is much variation from one society to another concerning engagements among strangers, and, more specifically, that such engagements are more broadly licensed in the Latin tradition than in the Anglo-American one. A similar rough distinction has been drawn between Arabs and North Americans (Hall, 1990 [1966]: 154-164). Scandinavians, for their part, are hardly known for their ease in interacting with strangers; foreigners often perceive us as socially inhibited and reserved. This perception matches well with notable 'Scandinavian personality traits' (Health Research Funding, 2019), and ethnographic research on Norwegian idiosyncracies (e.g. Gullestad, 1992: 137-164). Scandinavians largely support such depictions, often contrasting themselves with more extroverted and easygoing Southern Europeans or North Americans.

Still, this study shows that the circumstances provoking or licensing peaceful chance interactions between urban strangers are largely the same among ethnic and non-ethnic Norwegians, and among Norwegians and those Americans described by Goffman. These circumstances are also largely the same in a Latin American state I know well, Argentina, which in many respects can be considered a Western country.⁵ Further, I have not encountered examples in the scholarly literature of such circumstances which differ substantially from those presented here. According to my data, what differs more than licensing circumstances is the willingness or inclination to engage with

strangers when the circumstances open up for it, and the ease with which such contact is handled, with ethnic Norwegians (and possibly Scandinavians in general) being at the lower end of the scale. I thus end by suggesting that cultural variation in 'engagements among the unacquainted' in a recent Western context is less a question of difference in kind than in degree. In other words, that it is less a question of different licensing circumstances than of varying inclinations and ease to interact under conditions of similar circumstances.

Summary and conclusion

This study set out to explore underlying circumstances that encourage or license peaceful chance interactions among strangers in urban public space in a Northern European setting. The gathered ethnographic material demonstrated the diversity of such circumstances. More concretely, three main circumstances were conceptualised, each with a number of subcategories. The research revealed that engagements between strangers in the explored public spaces largely conform to the order that Goffman saw as governing such interactions in public. It further suggested that what prompts or licenses interactions among strangers in public, to a great extent is the same across Western countries despite the variations in how such interactions play out.

This study contributes to research on public space and public sociability in several ways. Most importantly, it thoroughly documents and categorises basic circumstances under which the city's strangers spontaneously and civilly engage each other in public. While urban scholars and others have long praised such encounters, most empirical research on prompting factors has had a narrow focus. Primarily on social or physical-spatial factors, such as dogs (e.g., Wood et al., 2015); children (e.g., Cattell et al., 2008: 553); helping behaviour (Gardner, 1986); common tasks and responsibilities (Henriksen and Tjora, 2014); celebrations (e.g., Turner, 2012); 'props' (e.g., Stevens, 2007); seating and shelter (e.g., Mehta and Bosson, 2010); market places (e.g., Watson, 2009). Rare are studies that attempt to provide a broad comprehension of the phenomenon.

Further, this paper empirically substantiates and expands upon a much-ignored part of Goffman's pioneering work on public sociability. In doing so, it points to a stability and broader significance of the documented, underlying circumstances that license or prompt peaceful chance interactions among strangers in public. For, despite large-scale societal and technological changes over the last half century or so: Chance interaction between strangers in the investigated public spaces essentially conform to the 'interaction order' that Goffman claimed governed such interaction in public in American middle-class society two generations ago. The paper also shows that pertinent conceptualisations in the field, often without knowing or acknowledging it,

are heavily indebted to Goffman.

To end, the public space literature often suggests an essential difference between two ideally opposed types of public space representing distinct urban governance regimes. Namely, that 'traditional' public space supports interaction among strangers, whereas its new, 'sanitised' counterpart undermines it. The latter type has, for instance, been described as spaces "to which both entry and behavior [sic] are monitored and controlled so as to reduce the possibility for discomforting, annoying, or threatening interactions." (Lofland, 2009: 209). Whatever the situation may be: Public space is on the urban agenda as never before. Policy-makers, planners, and developers alike claim to create public arenas for people from different walks of life to meet, and more crucially, to interact. If one truly desires to achieve such goals, it is indeed helpful to be aware of circumstances that catalyse these encounters.

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¹ May 17 is the Norwegian national day – a symbol of community and public celebration.

² I use 'triangulation' like Whyte did, referring to outside stimulus of mostly a tangible character which people experience together, separating it from 'common group identity' and 'open regions'. A concept that touches upon all three subtypes of 'mutual openness', is 'interaction pretext' (Henriksen & Tjora, 2014) – a common reference or concern that legitimises social contact.

³ Not the least, digital technology (i.e. the Internet) holds an enormous power to facilitate *planned* encounters between strangers in public – everything from dating to mass demonstrations.

⁴ The general character of the categories added to Goffman's should mostly appear from the names given them: 'no status to lose', 'standing out from the crowd', 'famous persons', 'regulars', and, 'triangulation' (external stimulus).

⁵ I have previously conducted a year of urban ethnographic research in Argentina. On later field trips to the country, I have specifically tried to identify circumstances under which strangers peacefully interact in public space (in the cities of Buenos Aires and Rosario) that differ in substance from the ones reported on here. I have not identified any such circumstances there, nor in the many European cities I have visited as a tourist in the same period.

Sverre Bjerkeset

HELLO, STRANGER?

Urban public space between interaction and attraction

Peaceful interaction among diverse strangers in public spaces is a much-celebrated feature of urbanity. The rise in privately owned and managed public spaces, tending to displace people, activities and exchanges that may discomfort target groups, has thus raised broad concerns. However, how such ‘new’, prestigious public spaces differ from ‘traditional’, everyday ones in terms of interaction among strangers, has rarely been carefully examined.

This dissertation examines peaceful chance interactions among strangers in two contrasting ideal types of public space. It primarily draws on extensive observation and categorization of activities and encounters in a selection of squares and adjoining spaces in central Oslo, Norway plus reference material from Argentina.

The investigation reveals that in the two main study sites, representing ‘traditional’ (Grønland) and ‘new’ (Tjuvholmen) public space, strangers interact on a regularized, recurrent versus a more infrequent, episodic basis, reflecting the presence or absence of prompting circumstances. A close reading of the international literature indicates that these findings have a broader, more general significance.

Herein, the study points to an important shift in urban governance and planning. In this shift, a conventional notion of attractiveness in the physical and social environment takes centre stage in prestigious urban developments at the expense of the disordered exchanges of everyday life.

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