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Re-theorising contemporary public space: a new narrative and a new normative

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The global public spaces literature has been critical of contemporary manifestations of public space on a number of grounds. This article reports on a research project that attempted to gauge the validity of these critiques through an examination of new and regenerated public spaces in London. The article introduces the dominant critiques around public space before outlining the mixed-methods approach used to interrogate them. The key findings from this work are summarised before the nature of contemporary public space is re-theorised in a more avowedly positive and pragmatic manner than is often the case, one that celebrates a return of a public spaces paradigm through tentatively advancing a new narrative and set of normative principles for public space generation. The work concludes that a more balanced view of public space is required, one that recognises the multiple complex types, roles and audiences for public spaces in cities today.

Keywords: public space; critiques; London; re-theorisation

Introduction

From civic, leisure or simply functional spaces with an important but to some extent discrete part to play in cities and urban life, public spaces have become urban policy tools of a much wider and pervasive significance. Globally, urban policy has emphasised the potential roles of public spaces as weapons in the arsenal of global and local inter-city competition; as catalysts for urban renewal; as potential arenas for community revitalisation and participatory local democracy; and in their more traditional functions as a source of amenities and connecting tissue between the private spaces of the city (Fainstein and Gladstone 1997; Hill 2000; Low and Smith 2006; Smyth 1994). In London, for example, since the reintroduction of city-wide governance in 2000 through the auspices of the London Mayor, both holders of that office have expended considerable resources and political capital on improving the quality of the city's public spaces; this despite the strategic nature of their remits and the absence of any statutory responsibility for public space (Carmona 2012).

Yet, regardless of global policy interest, the academic literature across diverse scholarly traditions is replete with critiques of public space, many of which are centred on the implications of a retreat of the state and the consequential privatisation of public space provision and governance. London represents an ideal context in which to study these critiques of contemporary public space, not least because of the very obvious and pervasive pressures that the global property market brings to bear on the city and its local "villages" (Hebbert 1998, 90–93). In this respect it provides a microcosm for the property-led

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development processes that are now impacting on urban design process around the globe. At the same time, the resurgence of the urban square in London since its deployment in two iconic commercial schemes of the 1980s – Canary Wharf on the Isle of Dogs and Broadgate in the City of London (Carmona 2009) – provides a valuable focus for such study.

Using the phenomenon of the "new" London squares, the Capital Spaces project was launched in late 2007, with the empirical phases running until the summer of 2010 and the project finally being published in 2012 in the book *Capital Spaces: The Multiple Complex Spaces of a Global City* (Carmona and Wunderlich 2012). The project intended to achieve a better understanding of the dominant critiques of public space by gauging whether and how they relate to the design, development, use and management of new and regenerated spaces in London. This article unpacks the larger study, giving particular attention to the research methodology that underpins the findings, before summarising key evidence that fundamentally questions the critiques. From the evidence, the opportunity is taken to extend the earlier work by attempting a re-theorisation of the nature of contemporary public space, this time in an avowedly positive light, one that celebrates a return to a contemporary paradigm of public space and in so doing rejects the alternative argument that such development is simply a crude side-show of neoliberalism.

The public square was chosen as the focus for the study because of its perceived importance (rightly or wrongly) in the design of large-scale development and regeneration projects (Corbett 2004), combined with its historic role as a venue for public discourse, protest, encounter, collective experience and communication (Merrifield 1996). In this respect Goheen (1998) identifies the unique status of public squares in marking the changes and continuities in civic confidence and public life of cities, whilst Zukin (1995) identifies their role as an important interface between public, private, and community interests.

The critiques and their exploration

Within the literature, a range of recurring critiques characterise discussions about public space. These are fully summarised elsewhere (see Carmona 2010a, 2010b; see also Table 1), and space does not permit their full articulation here, but in summary, those responsible for the design, development and management of contemporary public space have been criticised for the manifestation of:

- *Neglected space*: neglecting public space, both physically and in the face of market forces
- *Invaded space*: sacrificing public space to the needs of the car, effectively allowing movement needs to usurp social ones
- *Exclusionary space*: allowing physical and psychological barriers (fear of "the other") to dominate public space design and management strategies
- *Consumption space*: failing to address the relentless commodification of public space
- *Privatised space*: allowing public space to be privatised, with knock-on impacts on political debate and social exclusion
- *Segregated space*: reflecting the desire of affluent groups in many societies to separate themselves from the rest of society, reflecting a fear of crime or simply the desire to be exclusive
- *Insular space*: failing to halt a more general retreat from public space into domestic and virtual realms

Table 1. The critiques and the literature.

Critique	Discussed in
Neglected space	Chatterton and Hollands 2002; Loukaitou-Sideris 1996; Roberts and Turner 2005; Trancik 1986; Tibbalds 2001; Worpole and Knox 2007; Worpole 1999
Invaded space	Buchanan 1988; Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and Speck 2000; Ford 2000; Garreau 1991; Gehl and Gemzoe 2000; Graham and Marvin 2001; Lefebvre 1991; Llewelyn-Davies 2000
Exclusionary space	Engwicht 1999; Gehl 1996; Whyte 1980, 1988; Hall and Imrie 1999; Imrie and Hall 2001; Johns 2001; Lofland 1998; Lang 1994; Malone 2002
Consumption space	Boyer 1994; Carmona et al. 2003; Hajer and Reijndorp 2001; Mattson 1999; Sorkin 1992
Privatised space	Boyer 1993; Ellin 1999; Kohn 2004; Low and Smith 2005; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Mandanipour 2003; Minton 2006; Nemeth and Schmidt 2011
Segregated space	Boddy 1992; Blakely and Snyder 1997; Bentley 1999; Low and Smith 2005; Miethe, 1995; Oc and Tiesdell 1997; Sennett 1977; Webster 2001
Insular space	Aurigi 2005; Banerjee 2001; Castells 1996; Ellin 1996; Graham and Marvin 1999; Mitchell 1995; Oldenburg, 1999; Sassen 1994
Invented space	Crang 1998; New Economics Foundation 2004; Sircus 2001; Wilson 1995; Yang 2006; Zukin 1995
Scary space	Atkinson 2003; Davies 1992; Ellickson 1996; Fyfe 1998; Jacobs 1961; Kilian 1998; Kohn 2004; Lynch and Carr 1991; Mitchell 1995; Murphy 2001; Minton 2009; Welsh and Farrington 2002
Homogenised space	Beck 1992; Boyer 1994; Bentley 1999; CABE 2007; Carmona 2001; Fainstein 2001; Goldsteen and Elliott 1994; Light and Smith 1998; Sennett 1990

- *Invented space*: condoning the spread of a placeless, formula-driven entertainment space
- *Scary space*: where crime, and more often fear of crime, are allowed to dominate the design management and perceptions of place
- *Homogenised space*: generally presiding over a homogenisation of the public built environment in the face of the relentless forces of globalisation, over-regulation and the claims culture

On the face of it, the critiques are damning of contemporary public space, many resting on larger criticisms of urban design as a particular form of capitalist urbanism (Hubbard 1996) that, in a neoliberal world, gives a privileged position to the market (Gunder 2011) in both shaping the built environment and delivering public services. Some authors, however, have argued that the reported decline in this realm is much exaggerated. Jackson (1998, 176), for example, observes that "in lamenting the privatisation of public space in the modern city, some observers have tended to romanticise its history", celebrating an openness and accessibility that never was. Banerjee (2001) recognises that the sense of loss associated with the perceived decline of public space assumes that effective public life is linked to a public realm where the affairs of the public are discussed and debated, whilst the desire for relaxation, social contact, entertainment, leisure, and simply having a good time may be equally as important. Lees (1994) argues that contemporary public spaces still contain important aspects of urban life, and although many primarily commercial public spaces lack wider civic functions, we should remember that commercial space has always been built into public space and vice versa.

Most of the critiques of public space are predicated on a normative notion of the public realm as an open and inclusive stage for social interaction, political action and cultural exchange. Although each of these qualities has distinct historical antecedents (Carmona, de Magalhaes, and Hammond 2008), it is also true to say that public space has rarely, if ever, achieved such a utopian state. Not least, this is because the "public" in public space is not a coherent, unified group but a fragmented society of different socio-economic (and, today, often cultural) groups, further divided by age and gender. Each part of this fragmented society will relate to pubic space (and to each other) in different and complex ways.

The local context – London

Amongst other things, the public space literature confirms that the contested nature of contemporary public space is directly affected by the complex socio-economic and political context within which it is shaped. So, although much of the discussion points to a homogenisation in the experience of public space, to its physical decline, and to trends in privatisation, commercialisation and exclusion, it is also true to say that much of the literature comes from studies of particular narrow types of public space (most notably the commercial shopping mall) and does not necessarily recognise the sheer diversity of space types that constitute contemporary cities, nor the very different political economies that exist from city to city and around the world. As such, the research reported in this article was situated in a belief that to fully understand the success or failure of space creation, an in-depth understanding of the stakeholder, development and institutional context in which it was created was first required – in this case the infinitely complex and dynamic context of London (see Carmona 2014 for a larger discussion of these processes).

Writing in the 1930s and enamoured of its heritage of Georgian garden squares, the Danish architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen described London as "the unique city". "On a summer day when the sun is shining you can walk for hours from one square to another under fresh green trees and see thousands of little circular spots cast by the sun on the green leaves. But in the dark season, the old squares are no less attractive" (1948, 200–201). Yet, whilst London's garden squares continue to receive universal praise for their restrained functionality and beauty (Lawrence 1993), an initial content analysis of the national and local popular press in London revealed that new spaces in the city were, by contrast, subject to many of the same critiques evident in the global public spaces literature: that they are privatised, exclusionary, architecturally deterministic, over-designed, and sometimes, simply cheap. Heathcote (2007), for example, writing in the *Financial Times*, argues that London's new public spaces are characterised by chain coffee and sandwich stores, fountains filled with chlorine, security guards, sculptural light fittings spiked with CCTV cameras, and signs forbidding skateboarding. For him, these spaces are public in appearance only.

The historic and contemporary processes of place

Almost 2000 years of history have left London with an immense heritage of public spaces across the city, although for the last 350 years the development processes that shaped them have changed very little (Farrell 2010, 256). In these processes, large landowners and powerful developers have typically taken the lead, guided by market opportunity, a light-touch regulatory process and a fragmented state that has often been reluctant or incapable of investing directly in the infrastructure of the city itself. This way of doing things

stretches like a hand through history, defining a particular "London way" (Carmona 2012) that continues to characterise place-shaping processes in the city.

Arguably, it is these characteristic processes of "place" and how they vary from one city to the next that, along with the particular natural and cultural context, determine the nature and qualities of space. The characteristic London way defines a dominant political economy of place (neoliberal, long before neoliberalism was invented) whose impact on the physical city and on processes of development has been, and remains, profound. Yet, even in the most stable of societies, the process of urban design will evolve over time, reflecting changes in society, the economy and the prevailing politics, and overlaying the historically defined processes of place with a characteristic contemporary polity. The period from 1980 to 2012 in London is a case in point.

From the late 1990s onwards, London's urbanism, like its politics, embraced a "third way" (Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009, 53), with the state taking a stronger role in the provision of public spaces, whilst typically still looking to the market to take the lead. This period of "urban renaissance" (Colomb 2007) contrasted sharply with the pre-1997 period (and particularly with the 1980s), with policy at national and London-wide (mayoral) scales helping to refine and direct the long-established "natural" place-shaping predilections of London.

Whilst the new spaces of the 1980s had been shaped by private investment and innovation (effectively reinventing the urban square as the heart of large-scale urban developments), and public space elsewhere by neglect (Rogers 1992), the spaces of the urban renaissance increasingly saw an active public-sector hand at work, as promoter, partner, or even direct provider. During this period, policy was shaping the dominant political economy and in doing so was more actively shaping the built environment (Punter 2010).

Mixing it up: the research methodology

To fully understand the motivations and experiences of key actors during this period, as well as the impacts of their actions, a mixed-methods research approach was devised to explore the multiple processes of designing, developing, using and managing public space and the aspirations, influence and experience of the full range of stakeholders at every stage in this urban design process.

Mixing methods in urban design

"Mixed methods" are increasingly common in social science research, for reasons implied by an alternative, less popular term for the approach: the pragmatist paradigm (Creswell and Garrett 2008, 327). In other words, "what works" is more important than the "purity" of the approach taken to the research, and researchers can pick and mix particular methods, depending on the nature of the problems to be investigated, for example addressing questions that don't sit comfortably within a wholly quantitative or qualitative genre (Armitage 2007). Creswell and Piano Clark (2006) offer the most comprehensive discussion of mixed methods and argue that using quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination will provide a better understanding of research problems than either approach used alone. For researchers dealing with the sorts of "wicked" multi-dimensional problems of urbanisation (Rittel and Webber 1973) encompassed in understanding public space, mixed methods can help give confidence that findings will be robust.

Groat and Wang (2002) link the use of mixed research methods to the conduct of case studies, arguing that it can be particularly enlightening to explore settings or circumstances

holistically by utilising a variety of data-collection and analysis tactics. They cite Jane Jacobs' (1961) foundational study of New York's urban vitality to suggest that many scholars in the built environment have gravitated to the use of case studies precisely to marshal the benefits of applying different research techniques to one or more real-life contexts. Jacobs, for example:

- Examined the complex dynamics of a particular context, New York
- Utilised different empirical methods – participant observation, informal interview and documentary evidence – to support an argument
- Built a theory from the particular case, with explanatory power for wider application.

Yin (1994), in perhaps the most widely read case-study textbook, argues that such work is ideally suited to generalise theory from, despite the arguments of some that single or small numbers of case studies can never be representative of wider phenomena. This is because the in-depth analysis they require allows the development of theory that can then be tested elsewhere through other case studies or alternative empirical investigations. This reflects the approach taken in the remainder of this article in which London forms the single-city meta–case study from which wider theory is postulated of relevance elsewhere. At the same time, as will be argued later, care needs to be taken not to over-claim when applying findings from one context (in this case London) to the next (everywhere else).

The research

Preparatory work involved a detailed literature review and analysis of London-wide and national policy to facilitate a better understanding of public space debates and of the historical context for shaping public space in London. A London-wide survey enlisting the help of London's 32 boroughs and the City of London was undertaken to map new and substantially regenerated spaces completed across the city since 1980.

The substantive phase of research began with an impressionistic on-site analysis of 130 of these spaces in 10 boroughs across Central, Inner and Outer London. During this work each space was visited by the research team and subjected to assessment against a common set of criteria covering issues such as form, accessibility, image, activities, sociability, comfort, ownership, and signs of control. The survey allowed an initial "impressionistic" assessment against the critiques of a substantial slice of London's new and regenerated public spaces. From this, typologies of space according to form, function, and rights and responsibility were generated, and these formed the basis for identifying a representative sample of spaces for the next phase of the work.

Within the single-city meta–case study, 14 mixed-methods local cases were chosen, analysis of which constituted the core of the research (Table 2). These were chosen to explore the diverse range of contemporary spaces captured in the typologies, and included stories of projects that failed to materialise in the forms originally envisaged, or at all. The approach allowed a full understanding of the context for, process of creating, and outcomes from each case, and encompassed processes and experiences of public space design, development, use and management (see Carmona 2014). The six dimensions of this work were:
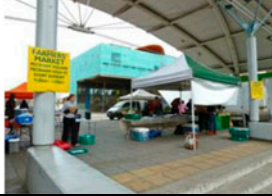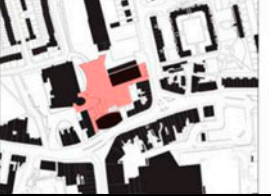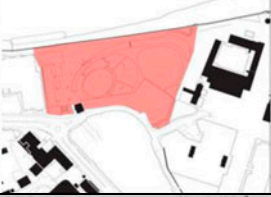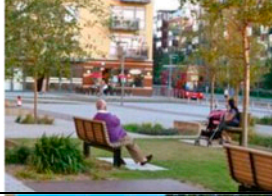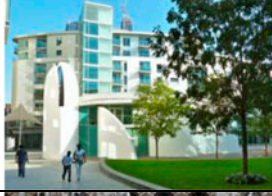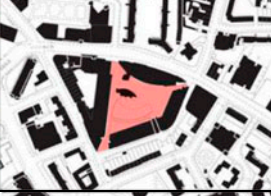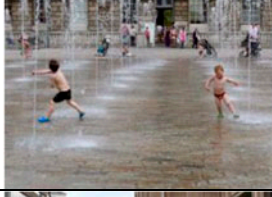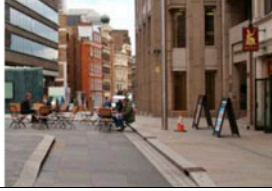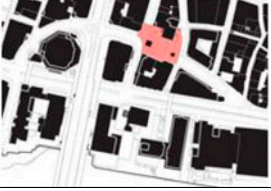
Table 2. 14 public space case studies.

Case Study			Type
Paternoster Square			Completion – 2003 Borough – City of London Geographic – central London Form – piazza Function – corporate Responsibility – private-public
Canada Square			Completion – 1998 Borough – London Borough of Tower Hamlets Geographic – inner London (but Canary Wharf treated as London CBD) Form – garden square Function – corporate Responsibility – private-public
Trafalgar Square			Completion – 2003 Borough – City of Westminster Geographic – central London Form – piazza Function – civic Responsibility – public
Sloane Square			Completion – abandoned Borough – Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea Geographic – Inner London Form – other Function – civic Responsibility – public
Euston Station Piazza			Completion – 2009 Borough – London Borough of Camden Geographic – central London Form – forecourt Function – consumption Responsibility – public-private
Festival Riverside			Completion – 2005 Borough – London Borough of Lambeth Geographic – central London Form – piazza Function – consumption Responsibility – public-private
Gabriel's Wharf			Completion – 1988 Borough – London Borough of Lambeth Geographic – central London Form – piazza Function – consumption Responsibility – private-public

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (*Continued*).

Swiss Cottage Community Square			Completion – 2006 Borough – London Borough of Camden Geographic – inner London Form – garden square Function – community Responsibility – public
Peckham Square			Completion – 1999 Borough – London Borough of Southwark Geographic – inner London Form – piazza Function – community Responsibility – public
Royal Arsenal Gardens			Completion – 2000 Borough – Royal Borough of Greenwich Geographic – outer London Form – other Function – community Responsibility – public
GMV Village Square			Completion – 2009 Borough – Royal Borough of Greenwich Geographic – outer London Form – piazza Function – domestic Responsibility – private-public
Empire Square			Completion – 2007 Borough – London Borough of Southwark Geographic – inner London Form – courtyard Function – domestic Responsibility – private-public
Somerset House Courtyard			Completion – 2000 Borough – City of Westminster Geographic – central London Form – courtyard Function – in-between Responsibility – public-private
Monument Yard			Completion – 2005 Borough – City of London Geographic – central London Form – incidental space Function – in-between Responsibility – public

- *Policy analysis*, analysing and understanding the policy and guidance framework of the 10 local boroughs.
- *Stakeholder narratives*. Stakeholders involved in the design, planning, development, and ongoing management of each space were interviewed to capture views from development, design, regulatory and political/policy perspectives. A narrative approach was employed, with stakeholders invited to tell the story of their involvement with spaces. Seventy such narratives were subjected to detailed comparative analysis to reveal the collective story of each case.
- *Popular debate and analysis*. Narratives were supplemented by analysis of views and reviews from the popular and professional press in and beyond London.
- *User assessment*, to gauge the success of each space from a user perspective. Interviews were conducted with a sample of everyday public space users broadly reflecting the user profile of spaces. Some 650 interviews were undertaken across the 13 "built" local case studies (one case study remains unrealised)[1]
- *Time-lapse observation*. How each space is actually used (as opposed to perceptions of use) was evaluated through time-lapse photography, with spaces observed across a range of representative time slots. The results were mapped and the photographs analysed to build up a complete picture of use and movement.
- *Character assessment*. Detailed analysis was undertaken of each space through analysis of historical maps and detailed contemporary analysis of the physical structure and features of each space.

With multiple local cases, and multiple analytical techniques, it was important to individually document the story of each space before attempting comparative analysis between the cases. The data was analysed quantitatively where appropriate (e.g. the impressionistic survey and user assessments) and qualitatively using standard techniques of data reduction, display, analysis, and deduction.

Two key benefits were immediately apparent from approaching the research from multiple directions via a mixed-methods approach. First, careful triangulation of the results from the different analyses allowed connections to be made between the different forms of data that (on the basis of individual methods) might otherwise not have been so obvious. Second, when compared against the critiques of public space, the different methods sometimes revealed conflicting results. The impressionistic survey of 130 spaces, for example, like the reports in the popular press, seemed initially to support a number of the public space critiques. By contrast, the more detailed and rigorous local case-study work nuanced these early findings and ultimately challenged many of the global public space critiques. Results from these two key stages of the work are summarised and discussed below, and it is on the basis of this evidence that a new set of narrative and normative generalizable principles for public spaces are tentatively advanced at the end of the article.

The squares and the critiques

Conducted in 2007 with the help of borough planning departments, the London-wide survey of "new" public squares across London mapped over 100 new and 130 substantially regenerated spaces built or re-built since 1980 (the majority since 2000 – see Figure 1). In addition, another 100 square projects (new or refurbished) were being actively proposed across London at the time of survey. This figure is remarkable in that it follows a period of nearly 150 years during which relatively few new public spaces had been built in London as the focus
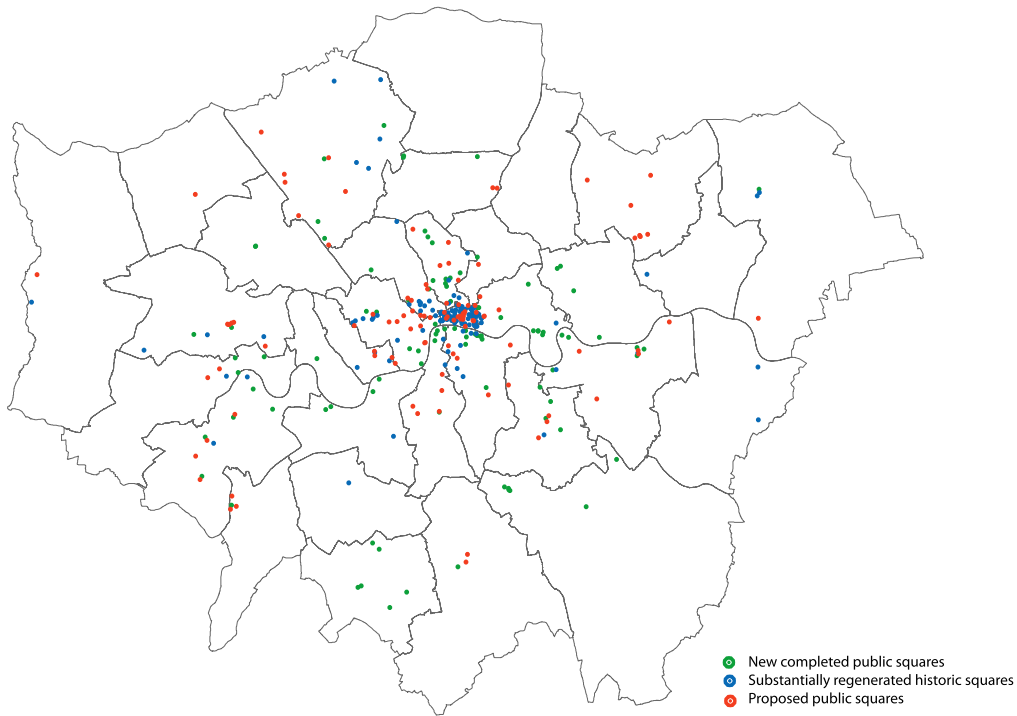
Figure 1.   The distribution of new and refurbished spaces in London since 1980.

shifted to suburban and traffic growth. Moreover, even those that were built during the postwar reconstruction have since largely been redeveloped during the "urban renaissance" development surge that swept away much of the city's postwar Modernist landscape.

Today, although almost all London boroughs can boast new or refurbished schemes, this revival in formal public space building has not been evenly distributed. Instead, it is heavy skewed to Inner and Central London, with far fewer squares (around 50) found in the 20 Outer London boroughs.

Distinguishing London's spaces geographically

Turning to the 130 spaces examined during the impressionistic on-site survey. When reviewed in relation to the geographic structure of London, some common characteristics were distinguished in the spaces of Outer, Inner and Central London[2] Commonalities largely stemmed from the influence of the single major land uses that dominate the new spaces of Central and Outer London (corporate and residential, respectively), whilst regenerated spaces, particularly in historic Westminster, were typically dominated by clear single themes or functions, be they entertainment, cultural, memorial, and so forth. By contrast, spaces in Inner London (the mixed residential and ex-industrial ring of boroughs immediately surrounding the high-value, high-density centre) more often sit within mixed-use developments or multi-functional areas and are therefore more diverse in their character and use, tending to be more obviously inclusive and sociable and suggesting a greater potential for adaptability (Figure 2).

Figure 2.   Spaces of (a) Central, (b) Inner, (c) Outer London.

Because of these broad differences, new spaces in Central London are often character-ised by contemporary buildings that lack visual interest, human scale and detail when compared with Inner and Outer London and that, as a consequence, often exhibit dead or only partially active frontages (also a feature of some Inner London schemes). Signs of
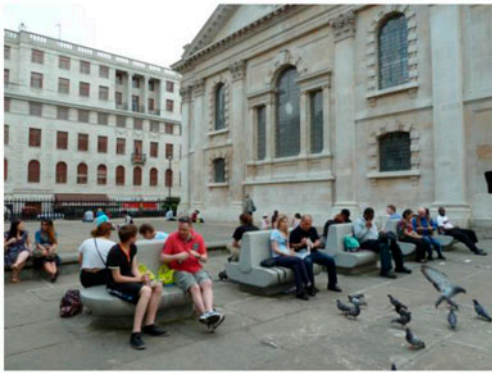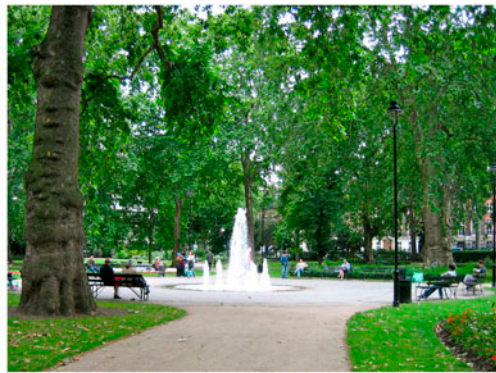
Figure 3.   A typology of physical forms. (a) Piazzas are traditional squares, often distinguished by their hard formal or semi-formal nature. (b) Courtyards are completely surrounded and enclosed by a building or buildings, requiring users to pass through or under the building to enter. (c) Incidental spaces are informal, often low-key small and/or reclaimed spaces. (d) Garden squares are character-ised by a green-grassed centre that is itself sometimes enclosed (e.g. by railings) and sometimes not. (e) Forecourts act as external pauses and transitions between the public realm of the street and the private or semi-private realm of a key building. (f) Other spaces include amorphous spaces that defy classification, and those that transcend the other physical types.

homogenisation were also most apparent in Central London: in the international architecture, repetitive landscape treatments, and ubiquitous public art, and in the types of brands that situate themselves in these high-value spaces.

Distinguishing by form, function, and rights and responsibility

Three typological classifications were made. First, focusing on the physical form of the new and regenerated spaces, six different types were identified: piazzas (36% of spaces),

Figure 4. A typology of functions. (a) Community spaces provide a focus for the local social and community functions of their surrounding neighbourhoods and often have community-type functions located in and on them. (b) Corporate spaces sit at the heart of large corporate estates or adjacent to major office buildings and are dominated by the corporate functions that surround them. (c) Domestic spaces similarly sit at the heart of residential developments and are dominated by the residential functions that surround them. (d) Civic spaces have a key representational role and provide a setting for the civic-type activities and functions located on them. (e) Consumption spaces are dominated by the retail and catering functions both within and around them. (f) Service spaces are left-over spaces that have been purposefully designed for, or more often appropriated by, service functions such as waste storage, bicycle parking, and so forth. (g) Transit spaces act as thresholds or external "waiting rooms" for the transport infrastructure located on them. (h) Undefined spaces have no dominant function, or often no obvious function at all.

Figure 4.   (*Continued*)

courtyards (18%), incidental spaces (16%), garden squares (13%), forecourts (9%) and other spaces (7%) (Figure 3). Although piazzas, courtyards and incidental spaces typically include green elements (trees and planting), overwhelmingly the sorts of spaces being created in London are hard rather than green in nature. Here, however, survey results were skewed by the large number of spaces (mainly piazzas, courtyards, forecourts and incidental spaces) being created and recreated in the City of London, which, despite its geographically diminutive size (the Square Mile), had well over double the number of new and regenerated spaces of any of the geographically much larger boroughs.[3]

When the dominant function of spaces rather than their physical form was the focus of analysis, eight types could be identified (although some spaces can be categorised in more than one type): community (45% of spaces), corporate (23%), undefined (17%), domestic (residential) (13%), civic (13%), consumption (8%), service (5%) and transit (4%) (Figure 4). Unsurprisingly, the City and Tower Hamlets (encompassing the City Fringe and Canary Wharf) had by far the largest number of corporate spaces, and Westminster the largest number of civic spaces. Inner and Outer London boroughs, by contrast, featured more community and domestic spaces. Consumption spaces are spread across London.

Turning to rights over and responsibility for public spaces, four types of space were identified: private-public (45%), purely public (27%), public-private (26%) and private
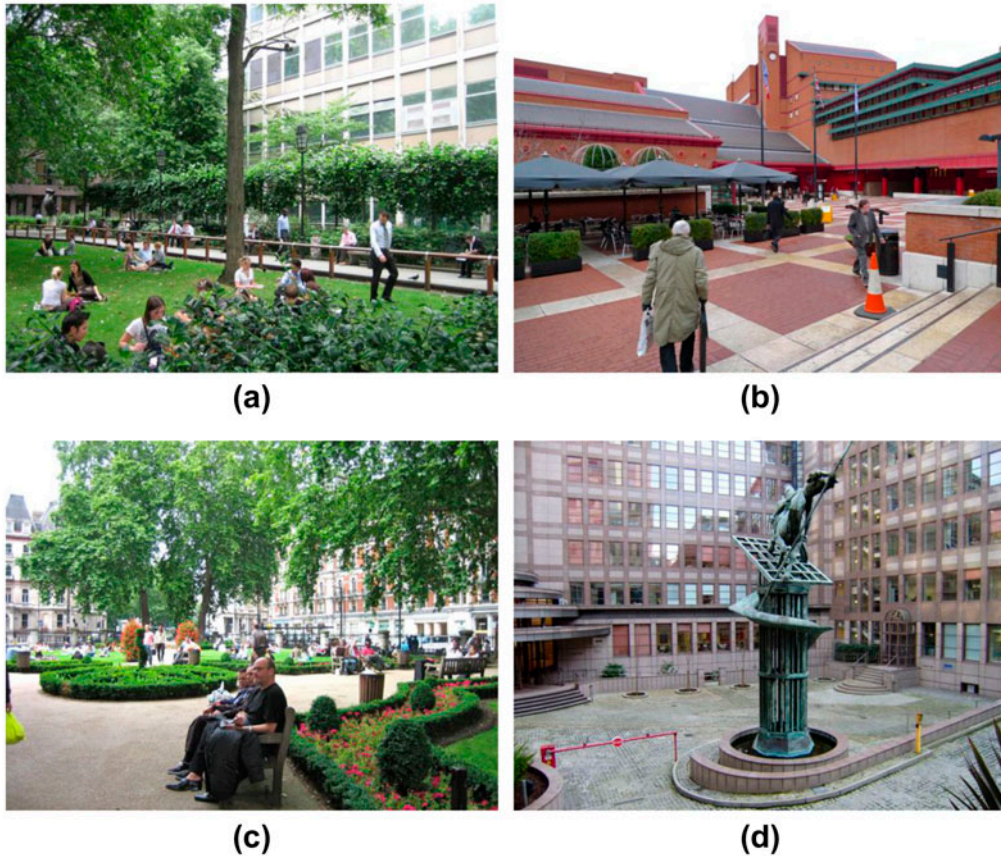
Figure 5.   A typology of rights and responsibility. (a) Public space denotes publically owned and managed space that is always open and available for use. (b) Public-private space includes space owned by the public sector or by a pseudo-public organisation (e.g. a charitable trust, university, religious institution or community organisation) where some restrictions are maintained on use. (c) Private-public space reflects space owned and managed by the private sector but where public access is allowed, typically with some restrictions. (d) Private space refers to external spaces that are private and not open to the public (spaces in this category were only counted if visible from the public realm).

(2%) (categories defined in Figure 5). Of immediate significance is the overwhelming number of privately owned and managed private-public spaces (often known as privately owned public spaces – Kayden 2000), although it should also be noted that three-quarters of these are situated in either the City of London or Tower Hamlets. The category also includes spaces such as refurbished churchyards (now public squares) and some garden squares whose ownership has long been private but which have also long been open for public use. Many are also spaces inside urban blocks that were previously private back-lands or courtyards within buildings (especially in The City), but which are now open for public use as part of commercial refurbishment projects.

The public-private category includes the wide range of spaces that now exist which are owned and managed by charitable trusts, government agencies, education, health or cultural establishments, and other organisations that might be viewed as pseudo-public (or pseudo-private), as well as spaces owned by boroughs but which are closed at night, for example

Table 3.   Correlations between space types and design features.

Correlations to physical form	Correlations to function	Correlations to rights and responsibility
• Public art is a "must-have" element of piazzas • Incidental and courtyard spaces are generally of a small scale and piazzas and garden squares of a large scale • Incidental spaces have a less coherent form than other spaces and are generally more noisy, and less clean and comfortable • Courtyards, by their nature, are less connected than other types to the surrounding street network • Piazzas tend to be more highly sanitised than other space types • Courtyards and piazzas typically feel less inclusive than other types and exhibit higher levels of control • Garden squares have a lower level of security patrols, and incidental spaces the highest degree of behavioural signage • Forecourts are often strongly themed	• Consumption, civic and transit spaces exhibit noticeably vibrant characters with active frontages • Community and corporate spaces exhibit a background level of activity; domestic and undefined spaces are generally quiet and often deserted • Significant greenery is a common feature of all space types except civic spaces • Seating is most prevalent in community squares • Corporate, civic and consumption squares most often feature public art • Community spaces tend to be designed with sandstone paving, corporate with granite and sandstone, and consumption and transit space with granite • Consumption and service spaces are typically less legible than others, with service spaces most often poorly connected to their hinterlands • Corporate and service squares are (unsurprisingly) distinguished by their highly corporate appearance • Transit spaces typically feature franchised retail outlets, as do many consumption spaces, and are often highly adaptable, with lower levels of explicit control • Civic spaces are often strongly themed, reflecting their history, and exhibit a strong sense of place • Corporate, service and domestic spaces typically feel less inclusive than other spaces, particularly community and transit spaces, and are less adaptable • Service, transit and undefined spaces feel less safe than other spaces and tend also to be the least comfortable spaces • Community, corporate, civic and consumption squares exhibit the highest levels of soft and hard controls	• Public spaces are the most active, with animated frontages; they are less enclosed and more open and inclusive in character, but often less comfortable than other spaces and less well maintained • Private and private-public spaces are usually contemporary in style, with a corporate aesthetic, and generally show less regard to historical context, whilst public and public-private squares vary more significantly in their architectural treatments • Private and private-public spaces also exhibit high levels of sanitation and soft and hard controls and a greater sense of implicit exclusion • Public and public-private spaces demonstrate a greater variety of uses and feel more inclusive than their more private counterparts • Private-public and public-private spaces both feel like very safe places to be

some of the garden squares of Bloomsbury. Excluding private gardens, the analysis revealed that very few significant new spaces are being built with no public access at all.

Types and the critiques

Together, the typologies revealed a range of distinct correlations between the identified type and the design/use qualities of spaces that were of direct relevance to the critiques (Table 3). In this, function, rather than physical form or rights and responsibility, had the strongest impact on the design of spaces, whilst overall, the analysis identified a broadly positive assessment of the huge variety of new and regenerated square types. It also revealed some evidence supporting the critiques.

At first sight, many squares exhibited a degree of homogenisation; dominance by single land uses, themes or functions; signs of control and exclusion; ubiquitous CCTV; and, in some spaces, an almost excessive sanitation, particularly in the spaces that were privately owned and managed (almost half of the total). The analysis also confirmed the strong resurgence in public and pseudo-public space types, alongside the privately owned squares.

Alongside the startling numbers of public spaces that have been created and recreated in London since 1980, it was apparent from the survey work that a new dominant type of London square had emerged, typically harder and more urban in nature, more clearly an extension of surrounding uses, and frequently well used as a result. In essence this is a more continental type of space, of the type promoted through the urban renaissance discourse (see above, and Rogers 2005); although, led by the private sector, this typology first emerged in London during the 1980s and was promoted in policy only later (Figure 6). Thus, over the period of analysis, in excess of a third of the "new" London spaces are of

Figure 6.   Flat Iron Square, Southwark – a "new" London square.

Table 4. The shaping of 14 public spaces in London.

Functional type	Case-study findings in relation to the critiques
Corporate spaces (1) Paternoster Square (2) Canada Square	**Relation to *privatised* and *invented* critiques** • Seen as value-adding elements in their investors' real estate portfolios, meeting a clear tenant demand, and guaranteeing long-term investment success • Tenants expect high cleanliness/maintenance thresholds and an active security regime • Feature a relatively narrow clientele at Canada Square (less so at Paternoster), and a tacit understanding that not all users will feel equally comfortable • For users, the spaces were well maintained, attractive and safe, and offer opportunities for relaxation and engagement • Debates about limits on access, heightened control, potential reductions in freedoms and accountability, are non-issues for users • Both offer life and activity at ground level, and flexible space, and are part of the continuous movement network – all key dimensions of "publicness" • Stylistic concerns (whilst a source of great controversy during the design process at Paternoster) are of little consequence to users • Both spaces are conscious attempts to design in place-derived meaning • Users do not question authenticity but instead engage in the carefully managed and programmed spectacle of these spaces
Civic spaces (3) Trafalgar Square (4) Sloane Square	**Relation to the *invaded space* critique** • In 2000 both spaces represented classic examples of the gradual subversion of public space by traffic, creating locally splintered and fragmented environments – Sloane Square still does • Both schemes first and foremost were traffic-management schemes, aiming to rebalance the available space in favour of the pedestrian • The fear of traffic displacement (and the inevitable but unspoken impact on property prices) represented a powerful source of opposition to both schemes, as did related criticisms around the loss of character from the detailed design • A key lesson from Trafalgar Square was that more important than any particular detailed design is the relative distribution of space for pedestrians and traffic • Once pedestrians are given enough space to thrive, and are freed from the overpowering effects of traffic-dominant environments, they can quite happily exist alongside busy traffic • A new social meaning and purpose for Trafalgar Square has been strongly encouraged by the very active management of the space, giving this most traditional of civic spaces a new lease of life, with a particular appeal to younger audiences • There remains a pent-up demand for this type of traditional public space, but also for making civic space fun

Table 4.   (*Continued*).

Functional type	Case-study findings in relation to the critiques
Consumer spaces (5) Euston Station Piazza (6) Festival Riverside (7) Gabriel's Wharf	**Relation to *consumption* and *homogenisation* critiques** • Consumption is being put to work to cross-fund the delivery of a range of public goods, including infrastructure, social housing and cultural facilities • The stage-set aesthetic at Gabriel's Wharf gives it a classic consumption feel, yet it is also a much-loved and unique space, rather than a piece of sanitised and replicated urbanism • Elsewhere, consumption has been used to give colour and a new lease on life to drab, unloved, Modernist spaces • The dominance of some spaces by national brands plays into critiques around retail cloning, although users remain generally unconcerned about such matters • Design for consumption, perhaps more than other uses in space, relies on the creation of an event that can, in turn, be used to capture users and their custom • Such strategies have wider benefits in creating more comfortable, vibrant, attractive spaces – whilst there is always the danger that those less able to consume may feel excluded • Consumption does not preclude encouragement of diverse behaviours and the creation of relaxed mixed environments • Once created, these spaces are expected to "earn their keep", whether through the units they host or the activities they contain • Rather than pastiche or sanitised urbanism, each intervention was, to different degrees and better and worse, a response to the unique commercial and physical circumstances
Community spaces (8) Swiss Cottage Community square (9) Peckham Square (10) Royal Arsenal Gardens	**Relation to *exclusionary* and *scary* critiques** • Two of the three community spaces have been overwhelming successes in creating a new locus for local public life; the third failed as an inclusive space for the wider community, but found its own (more narrowly constituted) community of users in London's skateboarders • There is an absence of concern for the elderly through a general lack of appropriate seating, shading/shelter and public toilets • Success for one group, e.g. young male skaters, may alienate others, e.g. women, whilst a strong female presence, e.g. at Swiss Cottage, confirms a space that is particularly welcoming to its users • There is a widespread concern about teenage groups and indigent communities, but little sign that communities are being atomised through decisions made about public space • High-quality community spaces are used with relish by a diverse range of users, including the young, and those with the greatest choice actively embrace such spaces • Users remain concerned with issues of safety (not least relating to children) and are appreciative of design and management measures that reassure them

Table 4.   (*Continued*).

| Functional type	Case-study findings in relation to the critiques
	• Today, almost no new public spaces are created without ubiquitous CCTV coverage, although high-quality, well-used space is largely self-policing • Public spaces are being designed to be used (not to exclude)
Domestic spaces (11) GMV Village Square (12) Empire Square	**Relation to *segregated* and *insular* critiques** • Spaces in quiet domestic (residential) settings that are subject to inappropriate communitarian aspirations for vibrant, animated uses are likely to disappoint • Many residential users (particularly families) are not looking for "exciting" designs or social interaction and entertainment but instead for grass, a safe and secure setting, and comfort in which to relax and play • Insensitive management regimes can undermine more active pursuits in domestic spaces • There is little obvious pressure to gate new public spaces, which are instead increasingly seen as adding value to developments, not least in supporting increased densities • Closing domestic spaces at night can help safeguard the peace and quiet of residents • Mixing tenures (private and affordable) can lead to competing claims on public space in high-density, high-value locations • Quiet domestic spaces are as valuable, in different ways, as vibrant social ones, and can be gently animated by the sorts of third-space venues that have situated themselves around the edge of GMV Village Square: a café, convenience store, laundry, and health and beauty spa
In-between spaces (13) Somerset House Courtyard (14) Monument Yard	**Relation to the *neglected space* critique** • Public space in a city such as London is in a constant state of flux; new spaces are created, existing ones are removed or regenerated, and long-neglected spaces are reinvented • Degraded and residual space is often dominated by parking, ancillary service functions, traffic, and dereliction – sometimes hidden inside urban blocks and sometimes exposed as part of the continuous street fabric • All offer the potential to establish positive new places from formally degraded spaces, from the grand to the everyday and incidental • The urban fabric as a whole can be scoured for opportunities to shape new spaces from the in-between, often in the form of small incidental public spaces • Public space matters to investors, workers and residents, and degraded space actively counts against the competitive position of locations • Enhancement requires both an initial investment and a considerable ongoing commitment of resources in stewardship that extends to the programming of space for activities • Organised activities can give residual space a new function • Carefully designed public space can offer the conditions for interaction and slackness, whilst degraded, in-between space offers the opportunity for thinking differently about public space
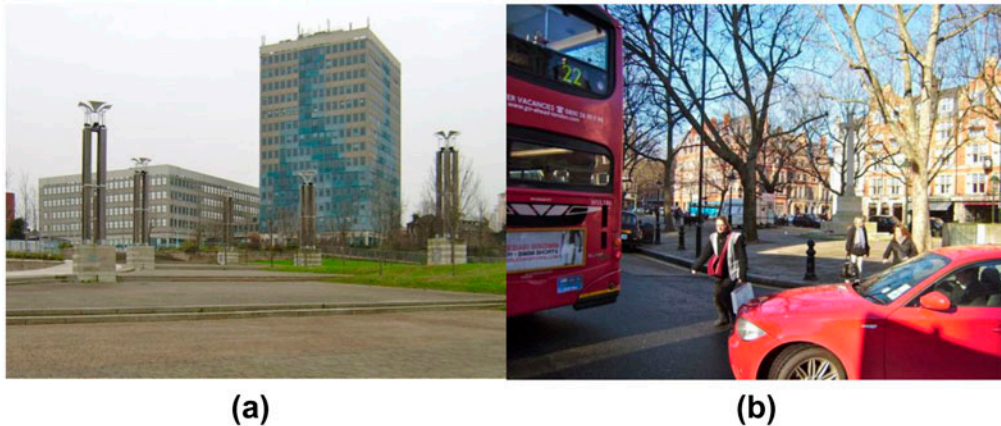
Figure 7.   Failed public space projects. (a) Abandoned and desolate Royal Arsenal Gardens. (b) The scheme that never was: Sloane Square, still a traffic island.

the piazza type (albeit often greened with trees and planting), whilst new garden squares (the traditional green London square) are rare by comparison.

From types to spaces

Turning from generic types to local specifics, and from the findings of the London-wide impressionistic survey to those from the detailed case-study work (summarised in Table 4; see Carmona and Wunderlich 2012 for more detail), the case studies suggested that public space designers, developers and managers sometimes got their design/development strategies wrong, sometimes quite disastrously, with major knock-on implications for public space projects. Most obviously, the delivery of the public realm 10 years before any development interest in Royal Arsenal Gardens (Woolwich) led to the creation of an unwanted, deserted and ultimately threatening public space on the Thames waterfront. Similarly, the mismanagement of a small, vocal group of local residents in Chelsea resulted in the complete derailing of a widely supported attempt to rebalance the traffic dominance of Sloane Square, a nationally significant public space (Figure 7).

In the main, however, the case studies suggested that the sorts of public spaces that are being created and recreated in contemporary London have found a ready constituency of users who, when interviewed, seem to greatly value these new and regenerated spaces of the city. So whilst secondary evidence suggests that much everyday public space in London remains neglected, invaded by traffic and occasionally scary, and for these reasons exclusionary (e.g. Gehl Architects 2004), no evidence was found during the research of an unwritten agenda to subvert the experience of public space for any set of users, or to make it any less public. Instead, whether public or private, it was noticeable that stakeholders typically have very clear and complimentary aspirations to deliver long-term social, economic and environmental value through their projects.

Within this context, the case studies suggested that the multiple complex spaces of the city at large each have different purposes, just as rooms in a house or buildings in a city have. Spaces take on different flavours as a result of the different groups of interests that create them or the particular range of uses they are intended to serve. What is more, these

characters change over time, just as surrounding land uses and ownerships change, or as spaces are appropriated by new groups or abandoned by old, as was the case in Royal Arsenal Gardens, which was usurped by, and eventually redesigned for, skateboarders.

Occasionally, spaces even take on a life of their own that can leave them unrecognisable when compared against what was originally intended by those who created them. This process may take many years or decades, and may be cyclical. In London, the garden squares began as glorified parking courts, and mutated into private gardens for the rich, and then (at least some) became public parks. When, however, the shapers of public space get it wrong, this process can be greatly condensed, as occurred in Paternoster Square next to St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London. Originally created as a square during the rebuilding of London following the Great Fire of 1666, the space initially housed the meat market, before its move to Smithfield. Later it hosted printers and booksellers, until the area was again burnt down during the Blitz. Rebuilt again after the war, the resulting windswept and deserted civic space in the Modernist tradition survived just 30 years. Redeveloped yet again in 2003, the space today is the focus of a new commercial office development, including the London Stock Exchange, and features cafes and shops fronting the space, and tourists mingling with office workers, giving it life (Figure 8).

This, and many of the case studies, confirmed that public space today is no longer (if it ever was) straightforwardly either open and public or closed and private, but is instead full of complexity and contradictions that defy any overly restrictive view of what public space should be. Instead, public spaces in London are often shaped through complex partnerships between a wide range of players – public, pseudo-private and private – with motivations that are equally complex. At Somerset House, for example, responsibility for the building and courtyard (formally a private car park) was transferred in 1997 from the government to a charitable trust charged with the regeneration and management of the

Figure 8.   Paternoster Square, a private space with a carefully managed "public" life.

Figure 9.   Private ice skating in Somerset House Courtyard, Westminster, over the winter months.

complex. Whilst open for much of the year, and hugely popular amongst families for its fountains, the space is watched over by private security and is closed in whole or part at times to mount fund-raising events restricted to a paying audience (Figure 9). Regardless of ownership, results from the case studies revealed that users of public spaces generally seek clean, vibrant environments, in which they feel safe and secure, and sometimes these are privately owned and managed.

Arguably, the sorts of private and pseudo-private processes shaping developments in London are nothing more than the contemporary reincarnations of the historic "London way" of developing space (see above) and of the opportunities that such interests have always sought and found in the city, and which have become set in stone (quite literally) in its public spaces (Carmona 2014). In this regard, unless the political economy of London changes radically (which seems unlikely in the near future), then the sorts of processes that have generated space in the past show every prospect of continuing into the future, as do some of the dangers of over-design and over-management they periodically give rise to. The unilateral banning by managers of ball games and celebrations (such as residents' parties) from the domestic space at the heart of Empire Square might be viewed as an example of such unnecessary restriction of user freedoms. Alternatively, it might be seen as an attempt to balance public use of a space in the centre of a residential block with the rights of the residential occupiers who surround it and who generally seek peace and quiet (Figure 10). The research suggested that such decisions are rarely straightforward.

From the detailed case-study work it was concluded that despite initial impressions, the doom-laden critiques of public space are typically far from the mark (Table 5). In fact, the sorts of large-sale homogenisation, privatisation, securitisation, commercialisation, sanitisation, and exclusionary and formula-driven approaches to public space that are so criticised in the literature prove to be largely illusory in London, at least as regards the
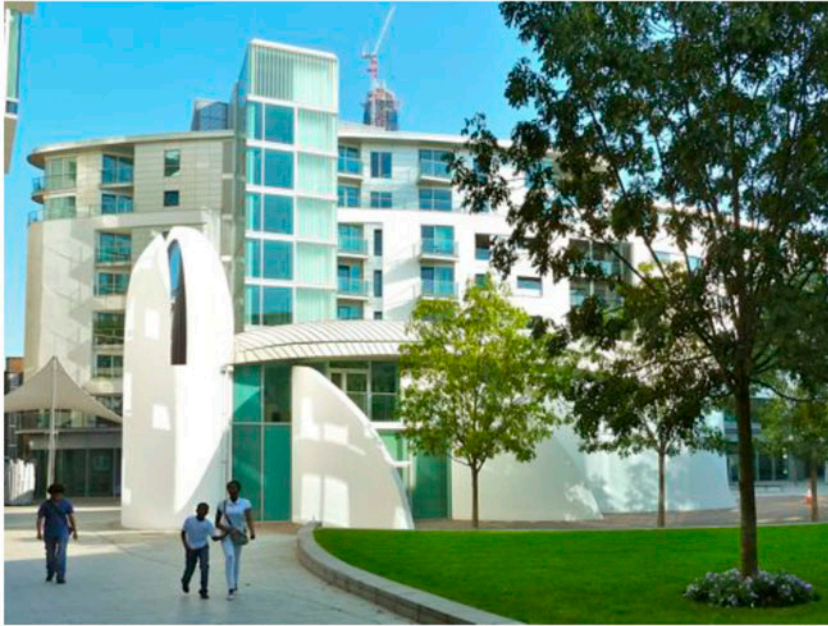
Figure 10.   Empire Square in Southwark, a privately owned public space in which management practices seek to balance resident rights with public use.

often over-inflated claims regarding their impact on the creation, regeneration and user experience of public space.

Instead, this part of the work suggested that if one looks at what sort of city London has become, and postulates about where it is going in the future, London is first a city in which public space in all its forms has increasingly become the crucible in which the public life of the city is played out. Second, it is a city in which these trends seem likely to continue into the future, with major additions to its network of public spaces in mega-developments across the city, including the Olympic Park, Kings Cross, Greenwich Peninsular, Battersea Power Station/Nine Elms, and along the new east-west Crossrail system. Some are promoted by public interests, and some by private, but all are reliant for their delivery on various combinations of the two. Moreover, despite the austerity being felt across the public sector at the time of writing, a number of London's boroughs look set to continue investing in their own public-realm networks, leaving behind others without a similar commitment. London as a whole looks set to continue on its merry, fragmented, ad hoc, public and private way.

Re-theorising public space

The empirical analysis summarised above has focused on London, but the big themes the article seeks to address, and the questioning approach it espouses to public space in general, are universal. Nevertheless, application of these London-based findings elsewhere should certainly be treated with caution if we are to avoid falling into the same trap as much public space literature, which can sometimes seem to over-generalise and over-polemicize on the basis of specific cases and/or contexts, extrapolating them as if they

Table 5. The critiques and empirical "headline" findings.

Critique	Headline findings
Neglected space	Neglected space is certainly a feature of London's historically fragmented governance, although from time to time (roughly every 50 years) this leads to periodic outrage and to better stewardship and public space renewal. The return of London-wide government has inspired such a period.
Invaded space	Invaded space still predominates in much of London, although successful reclaiming projects have been transformative across London, most notably in Trafalgar Square, demonstrating that people and traffic can coexist.
Exclusionary space	Exclusionary space is, it seems, rarely intentional. Instead it exists as a consequence of the diverse needs of London's fragmented society, although it can be exacerbated by poor design and poor management practices.
Segregated space	Overwhelmingly, public space is viewed as a value-adding element amongst private and public stakeholders. Deliberate segregation through gating, for example, is very rare.
Insular space	Evidence from the research (and elsewhere) shows a far greater engagement with traditional public space, not a retreat from it into our private realms.
Privatised space	Ownership and accessibility do not, by themselves, define "publicness", and processes of privatisation do not necessarily restrict public life; they may even enhance it.
Consumption space	Whether subtle or significant, unique or ubiquitous, consumption opportunities typically enrich public space and often cross-subsidise key "public goods".
Invented space	All spaces are consciously invented to deliver certain experiences, whether fun, imposing, relaxing, or representational. London's spaces are no different.
Scary space	"Scary" does not reflect the experience of public space users in London, who generally feel comfortable and relaxed in the city's contemporary public spaces, whilst at the same time generally welcoming visible security measures.
Homogenised space	Long design processes and complex urban situations help infuse London public spaces with character, in the process helping to avoid pressures for homogenisation.

represented global and unstoppable trends. This of course is not to argue that the critiques are redundant. Far from it. They continue to raise important issues about the nature of the "public" in public space, and of whose "space" it is. It is important, however, that the sorts of theory and assertions wrapped up in the critiques are properly tested in the light of local circumstances, and in that they have been found wanting in London, it is likely that they will be found wanting elsewhere also.

This points to an important characteristic of theory: that no matter how eminent its proposer, a theory based on theory alone is just that – theory. It can challenge us and make us question what we do, but should never be blindly accepted or unquestioningly applied to contexts far beyond the original discussion. On that basis, one might assert new generalizable theory about public spaces with a good degree of trepidation. But building on the methodological arguments made above relating to the power of in-depth mixed-method case studies as a basis from which to generate (and generalise) theory, in this final part of the article the critiques are turned on their heads to tentatively advance a new narrative and a normative set of principles for public space that draw their inspiration from the London case. Whilst based on the extensive empirical research outlined above, like the critiques that it necessarily subverts, this new theory is ripe for testing and challenging by others in the light of local circumstances elsewhere.

A new narrative

If the dominant narrative of public space over the neoliberal era has been one of loss, wrapped up in notions of "decline" and reduced "publicness" stemming from the sorts of privatisation, commercialisation, homogenisation, exclusion and other pressures that the critiques articulate, then the research in London demonstrates that this is certainly not the whole story, or even the dominant one. Whilst not everything is rosy in the garden – mistakes are made, and neglect is rife, leading to some forms of exclusion – from the positive affirmation in the London case about what has been achieved on the public spaces front, a different narrative emerges. This is situated, on the one hand, in private-sector innovation in urban design–led (or at least urban design–aware) development, and on the other hand in renewed political and public-sector interest in public space, with policy and investment focused once again on the public spaces of the city (Carmona 2012). Instead of loss, this is a narrative of renewal, one that celebrates the return of a public spaces paradigm.

On this final point, it is critical to recognise that what marks out a global city such as London is the sheer diversity of spaces on offer, as represented through the overlapping typologies already discussed. Arguably, whilst smaller cities with a less diverse range of public spaces will need a higher proportion of spaces that offer something for everyone, and where consequently the critiques may hold greater resonance, London and other large cities can afford spaces of difference and diversity that don't all attempt to cater to every member of society. In this respect, a dimension of the new narrative for public spaces is a move away from urban design as a search for an idealised blueprint for the perfect public realm that is equally appealing to all, in favour of an acceptance that users are diverse and will seek different things from their spaces: spaces of business, consumption, community, the domestic sphere, the civic city and all manner of culture and entertainment, as well as every mix of these and of course the option to shun public space altogether and retreat into the private realm.

In London, this positive picture sits within a political economy in which the state (at national and London-wide scales) has increasingly demanded more and better public spaces, whilst not always being willing to deliver or manage those spaces itself. Yet, the renewed emphasis on public space is more than simply a side-show of neoliberalism. Instead, these spaces have been central to a successful business and policy model in which public space is increasingly viewed as a critical value-adding asset to a range of economic, infrastructural, social and cultural concerns. In this context the private sector and a complex range of pseudo-private (or pseudo-public) organisations have risen to the challenge to usher in a slew of public spaces, many of which have been created anew in locations where none existed before – making the narrative of loss, based upon comparison against an idealised notion of public space from the past, even more questionable. Even in post-2010 austerity London, this new drive continues to be supported and often directed by a public sector that sees the benefits of this renewal, and that is still, intermittently, investing in public spaces itself.

Elsewhere, as cities large and small are characterised by multiple complex evolving spaces and are shaped by political economies as distinctive and complex as London's, most will present evidence of both the sorts of issues encompassed in the public space critiques (as they always have) and of the counter-narrative advanced above. This is the nature of cities. Clearly, the endlessly stimulating diversity of public spaces across the world needs to be nurtured and protected against pressures (if and where they exist) to undermine the key qualities that give a sense of "publicness" and that continue to make traditional public spaces so attractive to their users. As has been argued elsewhere (Carmona

and Wunderlich 2012), this might be secured through adoption of a charter of rights and responsibilities[4] or another similar mechanism, to guarantee fundamental rights, suitably adapted from place to place

At the same time, there will never be a one-size-fits-all universal model of public space, and critiques and celebrations of public spaces alike will always require questioning and interpreting in the light of local circumstances. The narrative advanced above, for example, having derived from research rooted in the UK, will clearly have resonance in other UK cities; also (although a little bit less so) in other European cities; and similarly (although perhaps a little less again) in cities in the United States, Canada, Australia and other Western countries. The application of the findings to developed Asian contexts will need careful interpretation, and they are likely to be least applicable in the least developed parts of the world. Equally, however, they will be more relevant to large and global cities such as London, a little less to smaller cities, and perhaps not at all to towns and other settlements in which the variety and mix of public space is more limited.

A new normative

Extrapolating from this "new narrative" back to the critiques, and from there to the empirical research in London and what this implies about the nature of public spaces in cities today, it is possible to conceive of a set of unashamedly normative principles (a "new normative") that can help to reconceptualise the nature of public space. It is with this more pragmatic and positive, less dogmatic and polemicized, but (arguably) equally powerful set of notions that the article concludes, recasting in turn each of the critiques of public space.

Good public spaces are:

- *Evolving* (sometimes neglected). Whilst neglect is written into the DNA of many cities, so are episodes of renewal and reinvestment. Space evolves through its life cycle as it is shaped and reshaped through processes of design, development, use and management. Although neglect can and should be criticised, it is also part of natural evolutionary processes that eventually (in many places) lead to renewal, either through regeneration or redevelopment, or in the meantime as loci for more marginal or temporary uses. This life cycle may be long or short, but is part of a normal place-shaping continuum[5] in which innovation and change is, and should be, a key feature
- *Balanced* (positively invaded). The challenge of traffic is a perennial problem that continues to blight everyday public space in cities across the world. The solution, however, is not an "all-or-nothing" agenda. Instead, a subtle rebalancing of space in the city is often all that is required. Traffic and pedestrians can harmoniously share space with mutual benefits. This requires that enough space is given to pedestrians for movement and socialisation; that they are not corralled and kettled but trusted to move and navigate freely; and, that to enable this, traffic is sufficiently slowed on all streets and spaces that do not form part of the strategic road network – "20's plenty"[6]
- *Diverse* (not intentionally exclusionary). The principle of "cities for all" is fundamental, yet it is also important to acknowledge that not every space will, or should, appeal equally to every citizen. This is a form of inclusion rather than exclusion: it recognises the diversity of lifestyles and preferences amongst urban populations and that cities should offer something for everyone in the right locations, rather than

everything for everyone everywhere, which may all too easily lead to lowest-common-denominator design and to nothing appealing to anyone anywhere. Inclusion, in that sense, is a strategic concept in terms of addressing the multiplicity of need. It is also a local one in terms of equality of use and access.

- *Delineated* (not segregated). Whilst the creation of large gated compounds in cities (private or public) will always be problematic in limiting free movement and access to what might otherwise be common resources and in generating an unhealthy sense of "us and them", the appropriate division of public and private spaces is a necessary and important function of good urbanism. Indeed, the problems associated with creating spaces that are neither clearly public nor clearly private has been well documented. There remains, therefore, an important need to carefully delineate the public and private spheres of the city, something that extends beyond buildings to the external spaces of the city, recognising that, in the right places, private spaces for relaxation (whether individual or communal) are as important as the shared public parts of the city. Equally, the provision of public spaces in the wrong places can be more problematic than the absence of any public space at all.

- *Social* (sometimes insular). Today the social spaces of the Internet increasingly dominate life (at least for the young), whilst the city itself is replete, as it always has been, with a host of wholly private leisure spaces as an alternative to its traditional public ones. All of these spaces are entirely compatible and part of the complex mix that is the contemporary city. Ultimately, the public life of the city goes on in multiple venues, and public spaces are an important part of this, hosting social interactions from the large-scale and gregarious to the intimate, quiet, and even insular. Far from a withdrawal from urban life, if conducive to such uses, public spaces still represent the definitive venues for public discourse, protest, encounter, collective experience, communication, and the rich and varied social life of the city.

- *Free* (public or privatised). Ultimately, the rights and responsibilities associated with spaces and what this implies about their "publicness" are far more important than who owns and manages them. How, not who, is key. In fact, the spaces of the city are owned and managed through multiple complex arrangements, many of which are not clearly public or clearly private, whilst restrictions on use apply to all spaces, regardless of ownership. Yet, if space is free – in all senses of the word (open, unrestricted and gratis) – then it should also be free to all, and for all reasonable activities, with guaranteed freedoms for users established through guaranteed rights and responsibilities for users and owners alike.

- *Engaging* (embracing consumption). The essence of cities is found in the opportunities they provide for exchange – exchange of goods and services, ideas and experiences, and social interactions of all types. A good part of this is wrapped up in activities of consumption, and typically these processes animate and enrich the public spaces of the city, filling them with life and value and allowing users to engage with them. In this regard consumption is a fact of life, although the right *not* to consume whilst still partaking in the other exchange opportunities of public spaces should be inviolable.

- *Meaningful* (often invented). Whether a space is created from scratch or evolves over time, and whether it is a simulacrum or uniquely authentic, matters little to most users, who are instead largely concerned with the experience it offers them – good or bad, engaging or repellent – and consequentially to the meaning that attaches to it over time. Just as a conscious hand shapes spaces (or choses not to, in

order to keep them, as far as possible, as they are), all spaces are invented to some degree. The challenge is to make them meaningful in a positive sense that encourages users to engage with them, including making the choice to return to them time and time again.

- *Comfortable* (confronting scary space). Spaces will have different needs in terms of safety and security, relating to a host of local contextual factors. Forecourts of major stations, for example, are intensively used by every cross-section of society, increasingly act as meccas of consumption, and feature on the list of the most securitized urban spaces. Whether über-secured and surveilled or untrammelled by such concerns, ultimately the objective should be the well-being and sense of well-being of users, and their ability to use spaces in a relaxed and comfortable manner. First and foremost, this is determined by how and with what intensity and decorum spaces are used by others, and how this is managed. Spaces that are well secured are not necessarily diminished as a result.
- *Robust* (resisting homogenisation). The character of space is shaped by many factors, not least the nine qualities articulated above. In addition, the design and redesign of spaces will almost inevitably reflect trends, styles and formats that are current at the time of their creation or recreation, most notably in the way in which spaces are programmed and in how they host uses that reflect prevailing trends (market or otherwise). Ultimately, judgements made about the success (or otherwise) of spaces should see beyond such short-term factors. The long-term success of public spaces will depend on shaping places which, through their robust design, are able to adapt and change over time in a manner that can withstand a degree of homogenisation and still feel distinct and rooted in local context.

These normative principles, alongside the narrative that precedes them, are offered as a provisional attempt to re-theorise public space discourse on the basis of the actual experiences of public space creation, use and management across the diverse local contexts of London. Collectively, they support and underpin the suggested "new narrative", but like it they eschew a definitive rubric in favour of an open and flexible reading of "good" public space for interpretation and challenge in the light of local circumstances.

Notes

1. On average 50 interviews were conducted in each space, although this varied, with fewer interviews in particularly quiet spaces. In each space interviews were conducted on a single summer day and on a randomized basis, with data recorded on the age, gender and occupation of interviewees and on whether they were resident in the area. This helped in understanding the typical cross-section of users in spaces and whether such factors impacted on their perceptions. In this article, responses are generalized to identify common overarching findings; for a more detailed discussion of each space and the differentiated perceptions of users, see Carmona and Wunderlich (2012, chapters 5–10).
2. The latter included the London borough of Tower Hamlets, the east-London borough that is home to the high-density, business-oriented Isle of Dogs (Canary Wharf) and City Fringe areas.

3. This reflects the City of London's drive, in the face of national (e.g. Canary Wharf) and international competition, to improve the quality of its public realm. The City Corporation launched its Street Scene Challenge in 2003, and by 2009 had completed over 50 projects.
4. Such a charter would apply to all spaces, both existing and new, that a reasonable person would regard as public, whether privately or publically owned. It would cover all spaces that during daylight hours are (usually) open and free to enter.
5. This notion of a place-shaping continuum is fully developed in the work of Carmona (2014).
6. The subject of an increasingly high-profile campaign in the UK (http://www.20splentyf orus.org.uk/).

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