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The Public Space: Architecture and Social Meanings - An Analytical Approach to the Concept and Historical Development of Urban Public Space Formation

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Abstract:

The concept of public space has evolved from a geographical notion to a multidimensional social construct intersecting geography, politics, economics, and culture. It is a central focus in urban studies, offering insights into the sociological significance of daily urban practices. Key theoretical contributions include Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, along with insights from Émile Durkheim and Pierre Bourdieu. Drawing on Manuel Castells, this study examines the architectural and social dimensions of public spaces as symbolic reflections of societal interactions and conflicts, adopting an analytical approach to the public sphere's formation.

Keywords: Public Space; Spatial Forms; Urban Space Management; Urbanization; Urban Governance.

1- Introduction

The city is a fertile field for social practices, serving as a multi-layered environment that encompasses diverse cultural, economic, social, scientific, and technological dimensions. However, behind this blend lies the strength of urban experiences in shaping the urban social space and helping city residents discover their identity. A city is more a spirit or a state of mind than a set of rules, regulations, or considerations applied to a population. Researchers and specialists point out that every city is a layered mixture of objective components, such as history, topography, architecture, and planning, alongside social and cultural characteristics and traits. The focus has been on the individuality and uniqueness of each city and its experiences: "Everything contributes to making a city distinct and unique, especially in the era of globalization and global branding."¹

Urban studies have thus emerged to address the issue of public space—urban space—by increasing attention to the physical streets of the city and the daily interactions of citizens rather than merely spaces for discourse or discussion. Public space is considered the primary component of the city, with its location, dimensions, proportions, and treatments naturally contributing to creating spatial boundaries to varying degrees. Public space is measured by its accessibility, whether in physical, psychological, or social terms.

According to Richard Sennett, "The city is an instrument of impersonal life, the mold in which the diversity and complexity of people, interests, and tastes become accessible as a social experience."² The concept of public space—the public sphere—has sparked extensive debate and discussion across various branches of social sciences, including philosophy, anthropology, sociology, political science, urban geography, urban planning, and others. In recent years, this concept has become the focus of numerous critiques, primarily targeting the definition of public space as a space for social interaction and achieving equality among individuals in societies. This perspective was affirmed by Stéphanie Tonella, who argued that public space is a domain that allows for the emergence of social representations through which images of the city are produced.³

Social representations within the city are embodied in what is known as the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere was formulated in the 1950s by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who studied the formation and decline of the bourgeois public sphere, which sought to influence governmental authority by developing cultural and social relationships. Habermas characterized the public sphere as an immaterial entity that employed reason to

1- Francisco Javier Carrillo, *Knowledge Cities: Approaches, Experiences, and Perspectives*, trans. Khalid Ali Yusuf (October 2011), 418.

2- Gerard Hauser, *Civil Society and the Principle of the Public Sphere* (n.d.), 4.

3- Stéphanie Tonella, trans. Idriss Al-Ghazwani, "Sociology of Public Urban Spaces," *Idafat Journal*, no. 46 (Spring 2019): 3.

critique political power and served as a space for deliberations and discussions, which he termed the "communicative public sphere." Accordingly, Habermas considered the "public space" and the "public sphere" as two distinct yet interconnected dimensions of social life. The former—public space—pertains to urban geography and refers to any space accessible to all, capable of representing the diversity of the population and the functions of urban society. The latter—public sphere—refers to the material and immaterial space of neighborly relations between individuals and groups within a society.

In this context, many researchers have noted that the diverse perspectives on the use of public space reflect varying experiences and conceptions imbued with conflictual meanings, such as citizenship and the manner of envisioning participation within a political and social community. Consequently, public spaces have shaped new forms of participation, solidarity, and public interest. Urban protests against the privatization of spaces and conflicts over the use of major infrastructure connecting contemporary metropolitan areas, among others, have demonstrated that public space can serve as an arena for conflicts and enhance civic engagement.

Public space also emerges as a venue for the production of public opinion, where the state's performance is reviewed and evaluated through rational discussions based on serious dialogue and logical argumentation. Public space thus becomes a contested arena among people and institutions, influenced by money or power. The media plays a dual role in this context, acting as both a platform for showcasing competition and a source of news and diverse discourses fortified with propaganda and persuasion mechanisms. This serves the political entity while considering the reality that independent citizens respect the interests of others based on just principles, not merely for self-interest—achieved through the public use of rationality.⁴

In light of these practices, a new concept appears to be emerging: "the pragmatism of public space." This approach views the presence of actors in public space as an indicator of their desire to assert their existence and identity in the public sphere, rather than a mere pursuit of consumption or short-term objectives. This reclamation of public space manifests in forms such as protest, conflict, or peaceful action. Accordingly, public space should be understood as the result of expressions and affirmations of all social components.

If we consider that material practices and behaviors have explanatory power in producing geographical space, Jürgen Habermas's conception of public space falls within a modernist vision that values not only the methods through which this space is produced but also the positive value associated with it. In contrast, Hannah Arendt argued that public space is where everyone can engage in politics or practice citizenship. Unlike Habermas's public sphere, Arendt's public sphere is not a place for building consensus, rationality, or homogeneity; rather, it is a space where differences find their place.

This study, therefore, focuses on examining the issue of public space and its social implications through new perspectives that explore the urban domain and its management mechanisms. It draws upon the contributions of numerous researchers who have made significant contributions to defining the conceptual framework of public space, starting from Jürgen Habermas to Henri Lefebvre in their works on the production of urban space. There are multiple ways to conceptualize public space, and it is essential to develop an appropriate understanding of it if we are to comprehend urban phenomena and society as a whole. Nevertheless, the nature of space has remained somewhat ambiguous in social inquiry. The concept of public space does not merely pose the question, "What is public space?" but rather investigates the meaning of public space, which reflects various interpretations.

Hence, the concept of public space can be discussed in light of the following proposition: How do different human practices create and use distinctive perceptions of public space? To answer this question, we have posed the following issues, which examine the theoretical foundation of the concept and its social representations.

- What is meant by public space in urban studies, and what distinguishes it from the urban public realm?
- What is the socio-historical context of the concept of public space, and how is urban space produced according to sociological perspectives?
- What are the representations of public space, and what are its architectural and social implications?

2- Concepts, Definitions, and Frameworks of Public Space and the Urban Public Realm:

4- Boubaker Al-Siddiq Bin Shweikh, "The Bourgeois Public Sphere Between Habermas's Perspective, Arendt's Criteria, and Fraser's Vision," *Journal of Research and Studies in New Media*, vol. 1, no. 4: 82.

To begin, I would like to point out that studying topics such as these, where perspectives on defining the concept vary, leads us to raise several variables related to the subject. The concept of public space encompasses numerous terms, most notably the public realm, urban realm, public sphere, or public places. Despite the diversity of studies, shaped by the varying viewpoints of researchers and theorists concerning the concept of public space, there is consensus on the interconnectedness of its elements and components. This interconnectedness will be the focus of our study.

2-1 Definition of the Urban Public Realm:

The concept of the public realm is one of the most significant concepts associated with terms bearing diverse meanings and dimensions, such as public space, community participation, public interest, discourse, and discussion. It is defined as:

"A social space that allows individuals in a society to engage in unrestricted, collective dialogue to form public opinion regarding shared interests and issues, with the aim of reaching consensus on the public interest and how to achieve it."⁵

This definition indicates that the public realm has always represented a social space rather than merely a physical one, given the multitude of issues and topics discussed among its participants, particularly concerning the public interest of the community. This perspective is reinforced by the following definition:

"It is, first and foremost, a geometric domain defined by dimensions, spaces, and densities; it is also a physical domain characterized by terrains, elevations, slopes, and the geological structure beneath the surface. Moreover, it is a social domain intersected by housing, activities, functions, and work. It is a domain whose perception and feeling vary among individuals depending on their standard of living, age, place of residence, and work."⁶

According to *J. Hariot*, "The city asserts its presence if it is capable of organizing the surroundings of its domain⁷." By this, Hariot refers to the notion that urban characteristics and the city's development become evident when one can interpret the phenomena and behaviors exhibited by its urban population. This challenge can only be met by creating or enforcing planning policies to organize the city's domain, delineate its boundaries, and address its problems.

The public realm is not merely a technical term found in architectural sciences, urban planning techniques, and the preparation of geographical spaces. Nor is it simply a legal designation for places belonging to public ownership. It is, instead, an exemplary field for social interaction, a framework for socialization, and the construction of societal belonging. Therefore, it represents a geographical, physical, and conceptual space, providing both a physical and social framework for the various practices of urban populations. Within this space, societal issues are addressed, and community matters are discussed with the goal of achieving the public interest.

2-2 The Concept of Public Space:

The concept of public space has gained wide traction in sociological research, with varying definitions depending on the field of study and focus area. However, there is a general consensus regarding the evolution and development of the concept. Researchers widely associate the concept with public places and the social practices of urban residents. In this context, we will present a series of definitions to explore the concept more comprehensively and precisely.

Public space is a term with multiple meanings, encompassing both intangible and tangible dimensions. Intangible public space refers to the public realm or public discourse, while tangible public space sometimes aligns with areas of social interactions and encounters, geographical spaces open to the public, or even specific types of actions.⁸

5- Somayya Abdel Mohsen, "On the Concept of the Public Sphere and the Feasibility of Its Study in Our Societies," (n.d.).

6- Marie-Noëlle Tenaerts, *Milieu Urbain et Déviance: Analyse UFAPEC* (2008), 3.

7- BaiaBouzghaya, "Urban Expansion and Sustainable Development Projects: The City of Biskra as a Model," PhD diss., University of Biskra, 2015–2016, 32.

8- François Tomas, "L'espace Public: Un Concept Moribond ou en Expansion?" (n.d.).

For Jürgen Habermas, public space refers to a domain within our social life where something akin to public opinion is formed, and access to this domain is guaranteed for all citizens.⁹

Another definition states:

"Public space is a symbolic space that serves as a mediator between the state and civil society. It is an environment that allows diverse social classes and groups to freely and critically deliberate on the actions undertaken by the state."¹⁰

Therefore, public space refers to a domain within social life where something resembling public opinion can be formed. Public space emerges in every conversation where private individuals gather to shape a collective opinion. These individuals act not as businessmen or professionals managing private matters, nor as members of a constitutional system bound by the legal constraints of governmental bureaucracy. Instead, they act as citizens forming public opinion. This involves freely consulting—ensuring freedom of assembly, association, expression, and dissemination of opinions—on matters of public interest.

Jürgen Habermas supports this perspective, defining public space as an intellectual and semantic term he coined to refer to spatial arenas, such as discussion and dialogue forums. These were historically convened by members of the bourgeoisie in modern Europe, who enjoyed significant social influence. These public forums were used to discuss issues of mutual concern and shared interests. Over time, these spaces evolved into venues for defining and regulating the relationship between society and the state. Public space became a political arena that voiced opposition to the government and served as a stronghold against state dominance, granting individuals the right and courage to hold authorities accountable for their performance concerning society. This accountability is achieved through the public use of reason in rational and critical discourse.¹¹

American sociologist Erving Goffman defined public spaces as *"areas of unfocused interactions among anonymous strangers."¹²*

According to Goffman's definition, public spaces refer to public places such as streets, parks, restaurants, theaters, stores, dance floors, meeting halls, and other communal areas within any society. These spaces shape an individual's behavior in daily life.

Louis Quéré defined public space as *"a symbolic space that allows individuals to position themselves within society and its orientations."* This definition comprises two ideas: first, that it is a public domain for free expression, viewed as a space for communication; and second, that individuals within it express their opinions during public discussions, often employing rational arguments in an effort to find suitable solutions to public issues.¹³

Terry Baco described public spaces as *"voids, areas, and structures intended for public use that are accessible either free of charge or for a fee. The most significant and widely utilized include road networks, streets, squares, courtyards, parks, and all pathways accessible to the public, whether in cities or urban settlements."¹⁴*

2-3 Definition of Urban Form:

Urban form refers to a spatial language that translates and embodies the distribution of elements comprising the urban domain, according to principles—primarily geometric ones—such as roads, axes, and façades.¹⁵

9- Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," *New German Critique*, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 49–55.

10- Ahmed Al-Razaki, "Managing Contemporary Public Space," *Journal of Studies and Research*, no. 19 (Fall 2022): 113.

11- Bin Shweikh, "The Bourgeois Public Sphere," 80.

The Agora: Often conceptualized as a public square, it is regarded by many as the ideal framework for achieving free and fair civil discourse.

12- Erving Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Basic Books, n.d.).

13- L. Quéré, *Agir dans l'espace public: Les formes de l'action* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1991), 101.

14- Charles Perraton and Maude Bonenfant, *Vivre ensemble dans l'espace public* (Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2009), p...

Urban form constitutes a fundamental aspect of the urban environment's components. It shapes the impression received by individuals interacting with that environment. The perception and comprehension of urban form by the observer are central to understanding the city as a whole, which is a collection of interwoven forms.¹⁶

Handy demonstrated that urban form results from the functional relationships between the service facilities of the urban environment and the daily needs of households.

Similarly, Newman and Corn highlighted that the form of a city is determined by the size of urban settlements and their spatial structure.

Stead and Marchal emphasized that urban form emerges from a continuum of objectives, represented by two dimensions: the first pertains to the scale of spatial structure, and the second to patterns of mobility. Banister elaborated on the relationship between urban space design and its usage, as well as how individuals access these spaces, underscoring the importance of the human scale in ensuring the sustainability of the spatial structure within the urban environment.¹⁷

Urban form is defined as the relationship between built or vacant areas, also referred to as spaces or appendages.¹⁸ This definition offers a comprehensive concept of urban form, which is considered a fundamental element of urbanization and urban production. It plays a critical role in the study of spatial organization and in defining the general appearance of the city, which in turn reflects the living standards of its inhabitants.

Among the indicators that define urban form¹⁹ is the continuity or connectedness of buildings. These indicators are categorized into:

- Continuous or connected systems, where buildings are aligned from one boundary to another with shared or adjacent walls.
- Semi-continuous systems, where buildings are positioned along a single boundary line.
- Discontinuous or disconnected systems, where buildings are set back from boundary lines, such as in individual layouts.

3- Previous Literature and the Sociological Context of Public Space – Between Institutionalization and Practice:

Given that urban domains are inherently shaped by cities, the diversity within urban spaces has shifted the focus of urban studies. This shift moved from a primary interest in urbanization and urban growth to exploring the urban forms that characterize these spaces. Accordingly, sociological inquiries into urban studies have taken a different direction, moving beyond questions like: *What are the factors of urban growth and its challenges?* or focusing solely on physical aspects. Instead, attention has turned to examining the social practices within urban spaces and how these practices manifest in the urban forms that these spaces adopt. These forms act as arenas for social practices and as expressions of identity and culture.

This study seeks to discuss these issues by presenting prominent sociological perspectives and arguments that have analyzed and debated the concept of public space.

Jürgen Habermas acknowledged that the roots of this concept are deeply historical, originating in the Greek city-state, where a clear separation existed between the domain of the state or government and the domain of the public

15- SaidouniMaouia, *Les Éléments d'introductions à l'urbanisme: Histoire, Méthodologie, Réglementaire* (Algiers: Casbah Éditions, n.d.).

16- FawziMashnan, "Urban Forms in the City of Batna Between Reality and Challenges (A Case Study of Neighborhoods in the City of Batna)," *Journal of Urban and Spatial Planning*, vol. 2, no. 7 (March 2021): 80.

17- Sanaa Satea Abbas and YahyaTaieh Imran, "Sustainable Transportation and Urban Form," *The Iraqi Journal of Architecture*, no. 1 (March 2016): 189.

18- Jean-Claude Doubrère, *Cours d'urbanisme appliqué*, 2nd ed., revised (Paris: Éditions Eyrolles, 1979).

19- Doubrère, *Cours d'urbanisme appliqué*, 66.

or populace. This separation was particularly evident in the marketplace and perhaps in other venues as well.²⁰ The idea of the public sphere fundamentally relies on the concept of action, joint discussion, and negotiation in legitimate ways as part of the pursuit of common interest. This process also requires a reasonable degree of transparency in communication among the actors involved. It is a complex concept that intersects with legal, civic, and religious traditions, as well as with the emergence and institutionalization of modern secular ideas of power.²¹

In essence, if we can speak of a "history of space," and if space can be said to be defined based on historical periods, societies, modes of production, and relations of production, then there is a type of space distinct to capitalism—a space emblematic of a society controlled and managed by the bourgeoisie, as Habermas recognized.

When examining and discussing the theoretical heritage and historical literature of the public sphere, the first significant step toward developing a history of public space was undertaken by the Bauhaus School. One of its most notable representatives, Siegfried Giedion, suggested that successive historical periods shaped the conceptualization and execution of architectural dimensions in relation to their social contexts.

During the earliest periods (such as Ancient Egypt and Greece), architectural dimensions were conceived and implemented in the context of their external social relations. The Roman Pantheon represented a second phase, wherein the interior space of the monument gained prominence. The current era, however, seeks to transcend the dichotomy of interior and exterior through an understanding of the interaction or unity between these spatial dimensions.

Giedion effectively reflected the reality of social space through these examples. For instance, the Pantheon, as a representation of the world (*mundus*), serves as a gateway to light, while the *imago mundi*—its internal hemispherical dome—symbolizes the exterior. In contrast, the Greek structure encircles a sacred and consecrated space, dedicated to local deities, serving as a divine site and the political center of the city.

The historical interest in spatial studies began with its archaeological construction in the 17th century. Philosophically, the idea of public space was crystallized by Habermas in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, where he viewed it as a fundamental component of bourgeois society. This space held cultural, political, and social significance, with advertising and public opinion playing crucial roles, representing an initial framework for pluralistic free discourse.²²

In addition to the contributions of Giedion, there are works by other pioneers and researchers in the field of architecture that relate to space. One theorist noted: "*Geometric space is activated through the gestures and actions of its occupants, based on the fundamental fact that every structure has an interior and an exterior. This means there is an architectural space defined by the relationship between the inside and the outside, serving as a tool for the architect in their social work. The visual perception of space relies on a physical (gestural) element, which the trained expert's eye must take into account.*" The works of Giedion are among the most prominent contributions to the development of the history of space, as they highlight its problems.

Subsequent research and studies on public space have become more specific and comprehensive. This is evident in Richard Sennett's attempts to understand the public realm. Sennett points out that in the modern era, there has been a division into three "schools" of thought. One of the key figures in its early stages is Hannah Arendt. Her view of the public realm is described as somewhat political. In the ideal public realm, people should have an equal voice as

20- YounusAsmaiel and TaherHassoZebari, 432.

*The Bauhaus School: A modern design and architecture school founded by the German architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969). Its central concept revolves around bridging art with architecture and engineering, countering the separation that characterized these disciplines in the 19th century and earlier periods.

21- Armando Salvador, *The Public Sphere: Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, and Islam*, trans. Ahmed Zayed (Cairo: National Center for Translation, 2007), 29–30.

22- Mohamed Al-Arabi Al-Ayyari, "The Public Sphere and the Question of Freedom: The Debate of Habermas, Honneth, and Fraser," *Tabayyun Journal*, vol. 11, no. 44 (Spring 2023): 40, <https://doi.org/10.31430/xvtt6880>.

*The Agora: Regularly conceptualized as a public square, it is widely regarded as the ideal framework for achieving free and fair civil discourse, serving as a manifestation of democracy.

citizens, regardless of their origin, gender, lifestyle, or class. To achieve this, individuals must distance themselves from their private individual circumstances, which are not permissible in the public realm.

Sennett argues that Arendt's ideal concept of the public realm found specific expression in city centers, referring to her as *"the quintessential advocate of the urban center—the Agora in ancient Greece, the Piazza della Signoria in Renaissance Florence, and Trafalgar Square in modern London."* Arendt's assessment of the value of urban space is tied to its density, as she believes that density fosters the freedom of ambiguity in her thinking.²³

The second perspective on the public realm, according to Sennett, can be attributed to Jürgen Habermas, which he considers a broader approach compared to Arendt's. Habermas is less focused on the physical aspect of public space as being tied to a material location. He suggests that "the public" can also exist within media contexts, such as newspapers, and that public space can, in fact, be any medium, occasion, or event that facilitates communication between strangers. Unlike Arendt, Habermas emphasizes that the public realm is connected to economic, ethnic, and cultural interests.

However, Arendt and Habermas share a certain common ground in their ideas, as Habermas believes that the free flow of communication within the public realm can lead to collective interests, mutual understanding, and shared goals. Habermas's ideal vision of the public realm also contributes to raising awareness among urban planners.²⁴

The third perspective on the public sphere, according to Sennett, focuses on how people express themselves and the places where they gather—or, perhaps more significantly, do not gather. According to Sennett, these types of behaviors are the main components of the public sphere. To bridge the gap between the visual and social aspects, architects must consider how effectively their buildings or spaces serve as tools for people's social expression.²⁵

Building on these perspectives, the concept of the public space—or public sphere—remains one of the most debated concepts in the fields of social and political sciences. This is due to the sociological implications and connotations it carries, which reflect and explain the nature of social interactions among urban populations. Sociologists agree that the emergence of the public sphere is largely credited to the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, who developed it within a clearly defined theoretical framework. In this regard, Habermas states:

"The public sphere is, first and foremost, a domain of our social life in which something akin to public opinion comes close to being formed. Access to this sphere is open to all citizens. Part of the public sphere is manifested in everyday conversations, where private individuals come together to form a public entity. These individuals do not act as members of a constitutional system subject to legal constraints within state bureaucracy. Instead, citizens act as a public entity when they deliberate freely—ensuring freedom of assembly, association, and expression of their opinions on matters of public concern."²⁶

Based on Habermas's framework and the views of Hannah Arendt and Richard Sennett, the historical development of the public sphere can be distinguished by the following points:

- Historical Formation of the Public Sphere: Public space historically emerged within private domains (e.g., coffeehouses, clubs, salons), which transformed into public domains due to political and cultural factors associated with the modernization of the 18th century.
- The Public Sphere as a Political Domain: The public sphere is inherently political, as it relies on critical reasoning and argumentative evidence. It represents a realm of public discourse that transcends state control, often criticizing and opposing it.
- The Bourgeois Nature of the 18th-Century Public Sphere: In the 18th century, the public sphere was predominantly bourgeois, comprising individuals with material and symbolic capital that enabled them to

23- Reconsidering Public Space: Serving the Public Realm at the Intersection of Digital and Physical Public Space, research report, January 2019, 7.

24- Reconsidering Public Space, 7.

25- Reconsidering Public Space, 7.

26- Suha Younus Asmaiel and Taher Hasso Zebari, "Habermas's Public Sphere Theory: An Analytical Study," *Lark Journal*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2022): 431.

participate in public debates. This excluded the general populace and marginalized groups who lacked the economic and cultural capital to engage in such spaces of public discourse.

While much focus has been placed on Habermas's work, other attempts to understand the public sphere also exist. For instance, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim addressed the concept of space through his work on social morphology. He explored the relationship between social phenomena and space, demonstrating that the use of space is one of the few social facts that a sociologist can directly analyze and divide. According to Durkheim, the use of space is a result of the conflicts that occur within social organization and a reflection of the implementation of ideologies and collective representations.

The use of space is considered one of the few social phenomena that sociologists can directly analyze and classify. This is because the utilization of space is merely the outcome of conflicts occurring at the level of social organization, as well as a consequence of the implementation of ideologies and collective representations. Hence, space—particularly urban space—constitutes the optimal field for observation by sociologists. In this context, it can be argued that there is a relationship between spatial distance and social distance, a connection that *Durkheim* emphasized the need to clarify.²⁷

Émile Durkheim defined social morphology as the various ways in which individuals within a society are distributed across space and the forms of their social interactions. Urban morphology, in this context, becomes the material foundation of societies, encompassing the physical and cultural forms of people's settlement within a specific, limited area and the totality of components that define the settings of social life.²⁸

Urban morphology facilitates the understanding of the general characteristics of cities and their implications by studying growth patterns, ecological processes, and land-use patterns.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu distinguished between geographical space and social space and the human relationship with both. He stated:

"People, as biological bodies and human beings, like objects, are always located somewhere. They occupy a part of space. Therefore, human space is social space, whose structure manifests in various contexts—either as spatial contradictions or as an appropriated space functioning as a spontaneous symbolic expression of social space. Every territorial society inevitably produces a territorial space that reflects social differences and distances."²⁹

If we can achieve a historical understanding of the deep structures of what we consider today to be the "public sphere," we may hope to clarify its social concept and gain a systematic understanding of our society from the perspective of one of its central categories.³⁰ Accordingly, the public sphere has functioned as a domain of social mediation, bringing together a collective of individuals and linking them through specific relationships. It also establishes a shared symbolic framework that unites diverse individuals.

In conclusion, the concept of the public space—or public sphere—has undergone a semantic shift. It is now often used in an exclusive urban context to denote a physical space with specific characteristics that define its use and accessibility. Drawing from the sociology of urban life, public spaces appear as arenas that host social experiences, reflecting interactions formed within the anonymity of the city. While the topographical shape provides the public space with its physical structure, its use is ultimately determined by the practices of its users and the actors managing its various relationships. This means that understanding public space is not limited to its geographical appearance, legal status, or associated regulations. Instead, it is primarily defined by how it is used by people, how it is perceived, represented, labeled, symbolized, and reshaped. Thus, the public space serves as an exemplary arena for social interaction, a framework for socialization, and a foundation for constructing societal belonging.³¹

27- Asmaiel and Zebari, "Habermas's Public Sphere Theory," 433.

28- Marcel Mauss, *Anthropologie et sociologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, n.d.), 389.

29- Asmaiel and Zebari, "Habermas's Public Sphere Theory," 434.

30- Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (n.d.).

31- Abdel Latif Mazzouz, *City Policy: Reality and Prospects for Activation*, Publications of the Cultural Forum of the City of Sefrou, 23rd session, May 2012, 114–115.

4- The Production of Urban Space:

Henri Lefebvre is one of the most prominent researchers in the study of urban space, as demonstrated in his influential work, *The Urban Revolution*. This book remains one of the most critical urban studies examining the nature of urban space. It offers an in-depth analysis of how urban spaces are produced through social, economic, and political interactions, providing a crucial reference for understanding the evolution of cities and the relationships that define their social structures.

In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre maintained the idea of heterotopia (urban practices) as being in tension—rather than in opposition—with isotopia (the spatial order legitimized by capitalism and the state). He states:

"The difference between isotopia and heterotopia can only be understood through movement... Marginalized groups in society establish heterotopic spaces that, in the end, become subject to dominant practical applications."³²

Like many sociologists before him, Henri Lefebvre viewed the concept of space as having multiple meanings. He posited that there are various approaches and methodologies for addressing space, spanning multiple levels of thought. This led Lefebvre to ask the fundamental question: *What is space, and what is the theoretical status of the concept of space³³?*

Henri Lefebvre is considered one of the pioneers in advancing the idea that urban space is not merely a geographical location but a social product, shaped through the social relationships between individuals and groups. Accordingly, the city is not a static space but a dynamic process.

Lefebvre's theories, particularly those articulated in his work *The Production of Space*, form the cornerstone of understanding the stakes of space and its actors, as well as the epistemological status of space. The central premise of *The Production of Space* is that space is a field of study for various sciences. However, some of these sciences approach space in a purely abstract and conceptual manner, offering no realistic engagement with space, failing to delve into its essence and dynamics to deconstruct and reconstruct it through a theoretical lens disconnected from reality.

In his vision for *The Right to the City*, Lefebvre articulates: "...the right to urban life, which later evolved in his writings into a more general issue—the right to produce urban space." Lefebvre's concept of *heterotopia* (alternative or differing spaces) fundamentally differs from Michel Foucault's interpretation. Lefebvre envisions heterotopias as liminal social spaces where the occurrence of something different is not only possible but foundational for defining revolutionary pathways. This "something different" does not necessarily result from a conscious plan but emerges naturally from people's actions, feelings, and expressions as they seek to make sense of their daily lives. These practices generate heterotopian spaces across various locations, eliminating the need to await a grand revolution to establish such spaces.³⁴

Lefebvre's works on the city, from *The Right to the City* to *The Urban Revolution*, also indicate that he would have critiqued nostalgia for an urban past that never truly existed. His central conclusion was that the city as we once knew it was rapidly disappearing, making its recovery impossible. Moreover, Lefebvre does not dwell on the misery of the masses in some of his favored historical cities, such as those of the Italian Renaissance in Tuscany, nor does he elaborate on the fact that the majority of Parisians in 1945 lived in poor housing conditions, in dilapidated neighborhoods, without indoor plumbing.³⁵

This raises a renewed question about the production of urban public space under conditions of poor housing: what is the urban alternative for creating an urban space equipped with all the physical and social characteristics necessary to accommodate urban populations? Such a space would enable inhabitants to exercise their right to participate in discussions and raise issues, particularly concerning the public interest.

5- Public Space as an Embodiment of Collective Participation and the Public Interest:

32- David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, trans. Lubna Sabri, 1st ed. (Beirut, 2018), 26.

33- Asmaiel and Zebari, Habermas's Public Sphere Theory, 435.

34- Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 25.

35- Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 22.

Public spaces—including streets—are multifunctional areas for social interaction, economic exchange, and cultural expression among diverse groups of people. Urban planning is tasked with establishing and organizing these public spaces, while urban design facilitates and encourages their use, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and identity.³⁶

Public space remains a prototypical arena for revealing social or interpersonal conflicts. It is both the site where these conflicts occur and where social transformation takes place. When public spaces are standardized with architectural elements that exclude the marginalized, social conflicts erupt. For this reason, advocating for more inclusive urban spaces—spaces shared even by vulnerable members of society—becomes essential. The removal of marginalized individuals raises questions about who constitutes "the public" and for whom these facilities are intended. It is important to note that debates about inclusivity often center on the shrinking and loss of public spaces due to privatization.

Public space can therefore be discussed as a foundation for forming public opinion. It is also one of the critical and favored points for economies and social innovation, given its intrinsic nature as a relational space. Public space represents a specific type of public interest. Traditionally, public space is collectively owned, and from a broader perspective, it encompasses not only the spatial domain but also cultural and behavioral domains, reflecting a holistic view of "public interest." Thus, public space represents a social, political, and physical area.

To determine its importance as a form of public interest and to analyze it as a concept tied to public interest, one researcher posed a central question:

What motivates informal groups to take action regarding public space?

When public space is viewed as a unit where meaning, spatial context, and the social and technical conditions produced by groups of active citizens are inseparable, traditional boundaries between private and public goods become invalid. While private goods fall within the market's scope, public goods are the domain of the state.

Consequently, public space is regarded as the place where social processes and public life occur. It is inclusive when individuals from different backgrounds and references come together. However, public space only becomes beneficial to society when people use it. This use involves conscious and collective practices, where users recognize one another. Hence, there is an intrinsic relationship between space and people, as space embodies the shared values of a community.

The privatization of urban public spaces transforms them into controlled and consumption-driven environments. Urban planning can no longer guide development according to public needs or specialized directives, as it becomes entangled with investors' interests. Reforms that tie expertise to economic goals undermine the autonomy of public spaces and their capacity to critique spatial interventions driven by capital, which often lack a solid foundation.

This form of urban planning leads to a specific representation of public space, involving the deliberate management of the community that uses it. Activities in these areas are carefully planned and precisely defined. However, the informal efforts of civil society serve as a form of resistance to the commodification of public space. Cultural practices and participation address urban issues as a means to stimulate the development of programs in diverse urban environments. This approach prevents the monopolization of specific activities by encouraging visits to neglected urban areas, which often suffer due to various urban, social, and economic processes.

6- Urban Space Between a Domain for Social Liberation and Urban Governance:

Public spaces are a vital part of daily urban life. Streets used by city residents on their way to school or work, places where children play, and local parks where urban dwellers relax all raise several critical questions: Can urban residents, or more specifically, urban space occupants, be considered urban managers? Can their activities and actions carry social meaning and function?

Ensuring high-quality, multifunctional, and well-connected public spaces that reflect class, gender, and racial differences in how people use them is essential. Such spaces foster social cohesion, build social capital, and promote collective engagement in the design, management, maintenance, and enjoyment of public spaces. These are ideal

36- Manuel Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (Paris: *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, n.d.).

opportunities for all citizens to participate, transforming individual and diverse interests into cooperative practices. Leveraging the collective wisdom of those who know their communities best is of critical importance.³⁷

Henri Lefebvre highlights the potential of the city as a space for social liberation, suggesting that cities can be sites of social and cultural change through community participation and innovative space usage. Organized urban actions within public spaces have historically served as responses to social, cultural, and spatial inequalities. Independent initiatives have begun emerging in urban settings, presenting specific urban issues to the public while simultaneously encouraging the formation of public opinion. These actions marked the beginning of the "Situationist International" movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Within their framework, interactions, associations, interventions, and event interpretations were created and presented for broader public consideration, aiming to create new components for public space and thus establish a dynamic site for encounters.

6-1 Social Space and Urban Forms: The Duality of Culture and Place:

Richard Sennett presents the notion that the public sphere is traditionally associated with a physical location. However, in contemporary society, he argues that the public sphere can equally exist in cyberspace as in actual locations, due to the radical transformation of the concept of place brought about by communication technologies. Whether in physical or digital spaces, Sennett emphasizes that the most significant aspect of the public sphere is the activities that occur within it—activities founded on encounters between strangers, which are absent in private spaces. He contends that the public sphere fosters individual participation and development within the collective entity and social order of the city.³⁸

In this context, George Nicholson states:

"Every city is unique in itself; its cultures, functions, and history, when combined, are what give it its distinctiveness and identity."³⁹

The intermingling of times within a space is read through its architecture and the movement of bodies within and across urban spaces, such as the hammam, the mosque, the market, the zawiya, the jami' (congregational mosque), and the courtyard.

At this juncture, Sharon Zukin, through her propositions, attempts to provide cohesive insights between place and culture to embody the meanings and connotations inherent in social space, reflecting the nature of urban social life. Sharon Zukin notes:

"Cities have increasingly focused on culture as a foundation for attracting tourism and as an indicator of their competitive capacities. Today, it has become commonplace for cities to invent numerous cultural events and symbolic products. With cities incorporating these cultural trends into their urban redevelopment strategies, cultural consumption of arts, cuisine, fashion, music, and tourism has grown, alongside the related industrial sectors. In recent years, urban growth efforts in cities like London and New York have been significantly tied to their importance as centers of creativity, innovation, and cultural and social activities."⁴⁰

Various studies conducted by Castells and Simmel have highlighted the significance of geography, place, and location in shaping the new urban economy. In his work *The Network Society*, Castells emphasized the importance of the spatial logic of a culture-based economy by considering the influence of a city's location on its competitive performance and creative potential. Similarly, Michael Porter argued that places hosting creative clusters and networks of people generally achieve competitive success.⁴¹

37- United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), *Public Space* (Nairobi: UN-Habitat, n.d.).

38- Reconsidering Public Space: Serving the Public Realm at the Intersection of Digital and Physical Public Space, research report, January 2019.

39- George Nicholson, The Rebirth of Community Planning, in Andy Thornley, *The Crisis of London* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 94.

40- Carrillo, *Knowledge Cities*, 154.

41- Carrillo, *Knowledge Cities*, 154.

According to Marcel Mauss, shared symbols and signs serve as essential mediators that bring people together and facilitate communication within a society. The sociological implications of urban form are evident through its classifications, which can be summarized as follows:⁴²

6-1-1 Walled Block Urban Form:

This form consists of streets surrounding residential blocks. Each block is subdivided into plots along the streets, on which large houses are built. These houses are often expanded or renovated into multi-unit apartments or replaced by new multi-story apartment buildings. Each building is surrounded by a garden or paved yard, with plots typically enclosed by walls or clearly marked boundaries.

6-1-2 Connected or Semi-Connected Urban Form:

This form is similar to the walled block urban form but with a key difference: houses or multi-story buildings are built in connected rows along the streets. Each building typically has a backyard and a front yard, often enclosed by walls or clearly marked boundaries. Buildings are usually very close to the street or have no front yard, with entrances directly opening onto the street. In the semi-connected variation, every two or three buildings are connected, with gaps separating them from other buildings.

6-1-3 Mixed-Use Connected Urban Form:

This form is similar to the second type, with a distinct difference: buildings, whether houses or multi-story structures, line the street or sidewalk with only a backyard. The ground floor frequently features diverse commercial uses, while residential units occupy the upper floors. In some cases, parts of the upper floors extend over the street or sidewalk.

6-2 Non-Traditional Urban Forms:

Non-traditional urban forms can be categorized into two main types:

6-2-1 Arbitrary Urban Form:

This form is characterized by residential areas consisting of apartment buildings in the form of towers or mid-rise structures, sometimes intermixed with clusters of houses. These are scattered arbitrarily with varying distances between them and are often surrounded by gardens or paved areas with unclear ownership boundaries. These spaces are interspersed with parking lots and utility buildings such as garbage collection rooms and electrical transformer rooms. While the apartment buildings may sometimes line a street network resembling traditional urban forms at first glance, closer inspection reveals distinctive features of the arbitrary urban form.

6-2-2 Platform Urban Form:

This form consists of a structure that covers most or the entire project site, forming a platform of one or more levels. Residential buildings—ranging from towers to mid-rise structures and sometimes including houses—are constructed on top of this platform. The platform's surface is used as a public space or garden for residents, often including amenities located on this surface. The platform may house parking lots or residential units and sometimes features recreational services or commercial outlets, which may be located within or atop the platform at the same level as the buildings.

Certain examples of platform urban form include multiple interconnected platforms beneath the residential buildings, linked by bridges at various levels. This urban form is typically characterized by another feature: multiple entrances and exits for the residential complex.

Accordingly, the analysis of social space and the duality of culture and place can be summarized in the following elements:

42- Faisal Hamid, Mohammed Arar, and ImadMushtaha, "Urban Form Patterns and Some Social Problems Associated with High-Rise Housing Projects in Britain and the Gulf," *The Iraqi Journal of Architecture*, nos. 22–24 (October 2011).

Social space represents an intermediary domain where social actors from various fields (civil society, central authority, and the formal economic fabric) come together. It is an open space accessible to the public without discriminatory considerations related to language, race, color, religion, or identity. Additionally, it is a domain that allows freedom of expression and critical opinion. It can also serve as a space for symbolic exchanges, including rational communication, argumentative persuasion, emotional and affective exchanges, and adherence to a minimum set of shared values governing public affairs.

In this sense, the public square and public space represent the central consideration enabling the possibility of participatory public life. According to Lewis Mumford, the primary function of cities is what he terms the "human assimilation and qualification" of their inhabitants. On another level, public space constitutes a vital component of daily urban life. Urban dwellers must understand how to utilize these spaces, which enhance social cohesion and build social capital within the city. This is achieved by involving the community in the design and management of public spaces and providing opportunities for social and cultural interaction, thereby fostering a sense of belonging.

Conclusion:

From the preceding discussion, public space refers to shared public areas in cities and urban regions that are accessible for general public use. These spaces include squares, plazas, parks, streets, walkways, and other locations that are not owned by individuals or private entities but are instead collective property of the community as a whole. Public spaces are vital as venues for social interaction, cultural exchange, and fostering social integration. They play a significant role in enhancing the social and cultural life of cities by offering opportunities for gatherings, participation, and the celebration of cultural and social events.

Public space can also serve as a domain for symbolic exchanges, encompassing rational communication, argumentative persuasion, emotional and affective exchanges, and adherence to a minimum set of shared values governing public matters. In this sense, the public square and public space represent a central consideration for enabling participatory public life. According to Lewis Mumford, the primary function of cities is what he calls the "assimilation and human qualification" of their inhabitants.

On another level, public space constitutes a vital component of daily urban life. Urban dwellers must understand how to utilize these spaces to enhance social cohesion and build social capital. This is achieved by engaging the community in designing and managing public spaces and providing platforms for social and cultural interactions, thereby fostering a sense of belonging.

Thus, the public sphere becomes a domain of social mediation, bringing together a collective of individuals and linking them through specific connections. It also establishes a shared symbolic framework that unites diverse individuals. Public space can be summarized in the following elements:

- An Intermediary and Inclusive Domain: A public space is an intermediary and open domain where social actors from various fields—civil society, authority, the economic sector, and the cultural sphere—convene.
- Non-Discriminatory and Publicly Accessible: It is accessible to the general public without discriminatory considerations related to language, race, color, religion, or identity. It enables urban residents to achieve the public interest through collective participation, involving both formal and informal groups.
- A Domain for Symbolic Exchanges: Public space facilitates symbolic exchanges, including rational communication, argumentative persuasion, and adherence to a minimum set of shared values governing public or general interest matters. It also bridges the duality of place and culture by analyzing and understanding the implications of urban forms.

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