

Marginal public spaces in European cities

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The main public spaces in European cities are the focus of much attention, whereas marginal public spaces are places of neglect and decline. The concentration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in limited spaces creates a sense of entrapment. The social fragments that have been put next to each other in deprived neighbourhoods, either by market forces or by public planning, start to crack in public places of these neighbourhoods. On the one hand, intensive use of space by some groups excludes and intimidates others. On the other hands, the limited amount of public space is under the threat of encroachment by other demands on a finite commodity. In these places of fragmentation and competition, communication is often difficult, if not impossible, as different social groups speak different languages, have different attitudes, and have different frameworks. A public space that allows this diversity to become aware of itself through free expression can be a significant asset for such a diverse population. Improving public places can improve the actual conditions of life in these neighbourhoods, while injecting a sense of hope and a better image in the eyes of residents and the outside world. Although a key part of good governance, there is no doubt that this should be put in perspective, as one among a number of issues that need addressing.

The public spaces at the core of European cities are considered as their major nodes, and as such have always received much attention and investment, embellished with artworks and perceived as landmarks in Europe's social life and cultural heritage. The cities that are attempting to recover from industrial decline are also placing much emphasis on these main public spaces. These cities are regenerating their old public spaces and creating new ones, to help them project a new image which can attract new investment through tourism and relocation of firms. Often forgotten, however, are the public spaces on the margins of the European city, on the urban periphery or in the inner city. In poorer neighbourhoods, problems of living together in extremely difficult circumstances bring to surface the harshness of disadvantage and difference. Here the inability of the residents to live together peacefully, and the failure of the public organizations to deliver the necessary services, mean public spaces are at times major battlegrounds or residual spaces, with a reality far from the glorified image of a European urban public space.

This paper draws on the author's ongoing research (Madanipour,2003a; 2003b; 2003c) and in particular on an EC-funded research project into neighbourhood governance and social exclusion, which involves ten teams of academic researchers from around Europe. Case studies were conducted of disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the cities of Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Athens (Greece), Cascais (Portugal), Dublin (Ireland), Helsingør (Denmark), London (UK), Newcastle (UK), Stockholm (Sweden), Turin (Italy), and Wuppertal (Germany). In this project, public spaces were used as one of a number of entries to analyse the

relationships between stakeholders and their capacity to deal with the problems they were facing. Residents, professionals and others with an interest or involvement in the neighbourhood were interviewed about their views and experiences of the area's public spaces. In the context of significant political, economic and cultural differences across European cities, the aims of this paper are to chart some of the key similarities of marginal public spaces, to explore the implications of the research findings for the design and management of cities, and to argue for the significance of marginal public spaces for social integration and for European cities as a whole.

Public space in European cities

Cities have always been the meeting point of different populations (Aristotle,1992; Southall,1998). Some central places, as best exemplified by the ancient agora, have acted as the meeting point of these different people. The small size of the city meant that this central public space could at the same time cater for political, economic and cultural needs, by being a place of assembly, a market place, and a place of rituals and ceremonies (Glantz, 1929; Ward-Perkins,1974). In the modern city, however, this convergence of functions has disappeared (Carr,1992). The public sphere is 'metatopical', i.e., it goes beyond physical spaces, and is established through a variety of arenas that may never converge in space or time (Taylor,1995). The result is a loss of significance for public spaces, which for long have become nodes in traffic and parking lots (Sitte,1986), or mono-functional places associated with trade or tourism.

There has, however, been a recent rush of attention to public spaces in Europe, from Berlin to Birmingham large investments are being made to reinvigorate dilapidated public spaces that lie at the heart of the city. Some have promoted public spaces as a vehicle of social integration, such as in Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, which is meant to heal the wounds of the dividing line that was imposed on the city for decades. Others promote public space creation as a counterpoint to the privatization push that has characterized neoliberal economic restructuring, in which private sector production of urban environment has been encouraged and supported by public authorities (Sorkin,1992). Many, however, appear to connect their investment in public spaces clearly to city marketing, aiming to make their cities a more desirable destination for firms to relocate and for tourists to visit. The emphasis in almost all promotion of public space is on the central, or major, public spaces of the city, which are used to project a positive image and to create new public displays for the city. The images often combine the historicity of the European city with the forward-looking sense of modernity. There is rarely, however, any attention paid to the marginal public spaces of the city, where the disadvantaged populations live. It is essential, therefore, to search for an understanding of these public spaces, whether in the inner city (in the UK) or the periphery (in mainland Europe), which are often excluded from the city marketing and public space improvement drives.

The major public spaces of the city have always had city-wide significance (Braunfels,1988; Gehl,1996; Moughtin,2003; Worpole,2000). They are used as gateways to the city, as showcases to attract investors and tourists. They are also used to support the legitimacy of the local administration, that can show it has been effective in managing the city. At times, these places are seen as nodes for social cohesion, bringing different people together in public places. However, marginal public spaces rarely enjoy any of this significance. They are not on the list of priorities of local authorities to deal with, whether in terms of political legitimacy, economic competitiveness and social cohesion of the city or its image and marketability.

Social marginalization and exclusion in Europe

Partly as a response to the challenges of globalization and to make Europe competitive in the global economy, the process of European integration has linked European economies together, creating a dynamic, unified space in which capital and labour move with ease. The effects of flexibility for the market, however, have had social consequences, running higher risks of inequality among the regions at the European level, and within the regions at the local level. This is why the European Union shows a particular interest in promoting social inclusion, to maintain the traditional European social model, to reduce and manage the negative side effects of heightened mobility, which could include social and spatial polarization (EC,1999; 2001; 2002).

The effects of increased mobility of capital and labour, new technologies, de-industrialization, and liberalization of the economy have generated new energies and economic opportunities. They have also generated severe social problems for those who are not able to compete in the new circumstances, as they lack access to resources, skills and rights. While many in the older economic sectors, especially in industrial regions, have not been able to make the transition to the new economy, the entry of new generations into the job market and the arrival of new immigrants have created new tensions and challenges for social integration.

The postwar industrial growth and reconstruction in northern and western Europe were fuelled by an invited workforce from southern Europe or former colonies. Sophisticated welfare systems were also developed to support and enable economic recovery for a war-torn continent. In southern Europe, rapid urbanization, especially in industrializing regions, attracted large numbers of people from towns and villages. Within a generation, however, industrial decline set in, and those who had not yet retired lost their jobs and the prospect of access to similar jobs for the next generation became substantially limited. At the same time they were joined by new waves of immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees from a wide range of countries that were going through political and economic turmoil. The combined effects of de-industrialization, liberalization of the economy, and continued immigration have

widened the gap between the rich and poor. The migrant poor are seen by the middle class as destabilizing and a security threat, and by the poor and unskilled workers as a competitive force for jobs and social support. The cultural as well as economic gaps have widened, while the welfare state as a support mechanism has been cut back, losing some of its ability to deal with the problems that the new conditions pose.

In all major cities of Europe, the most vulnerable groups, i.e., the poor, the elderly, children, women, and ethnic minorities have been exposed to the risks of social exclusion, a phenomenon that has come to the fore of understanding cities and developing policy for them (Andersen & van Kempen,2003; Woodward & Kohli, 2001; Atkinson,2000). Through the mechanisms of public sector housing and planning, and private sector market operations, these vulnerable groups have been clustered in poor urban neighbourhoods, which now suffer from multidimensional disadvantage and stigma. They have all suffered, with varying degrees, from the combined effects of lack of access to resources, to decision making, and to shared experiences and narratives (Madanipour, Cars & Allen,1998). As a result, all major cities of Europe have deprived neighbourhoods, which are clusters of vulnerable people suffering from multiple disadvantage (EC,1994; Room,1995). As in other parts of the world, segregation becomes the spatial expression of social polarization and the neighbourhood finds a special significance, both in understanding social exclusion and in combating it (Knox,1995; Kearns & Parkinson,2001; Meegan & Mitchell,2001). In December 2000 in Nice, the EU agreed on four common objectives which could be used in National Action Plans to fight poverty and social exclusion. These objectives were: to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services; to prevent the risks of exclusion; to help the most vulnerable; and to mobilize all relevant bodies (EC, 2001; 2002).

As the case studies of Britain, Ireland and Italy in our research showed, social exclusion is not only a feature of immigrants and ethnic minorities: the native population can also experience severe forms of social exclusion. Social exclusion is often a combination of different forms of vulnerability. Any characteristic that makes a person vulnerable can pave the way for social exclusion. The elderly, the poor, the disabled, the women, the children, the long term unemployed among the native population can be as disadvantaged as immigrants and ethnic minorities. But it is also true that the ethnic minorities suffer from an additional disadvantage, especially the recent arrivals, of not knowing the local culture and not having access to the social capital that enables individuals to navigate the social world.

Entrapment of difference within a limited space

The residents of deprived neighbourhoods may be socially, politically and culturally different from one another: they may have come from different ethnic and religious groups, from different parts of the country or from different countries of the world. They may also be from the poor sections of the population, who have lived in the area for long. What connects them

all is their weak economic position in society, which allocates them the space they inhabit. The city as a whole provides a framework for social differentiation and segregation on the basis of access to resources: the rich can choose where they wish to go and can create areas with distinctive cultural, social and political characters. This possibility, however, does not exist for the poor, who have to live together in the marginal spaces that are available to them. The result is a mosaic of difference that is trapped within a limited space, bearing enormous pressures from within and without, and with limited capacity to connect to the outside world. Inevitably this creates an explosive condition, in which disadvantaged difference is reflected in cracks that are visible in public spaces.

Entrapment within a limited space and with limited access to resources and rights disables the population to deal with the problems they face everyday. The cracks appear in the form of neglect and decline, as well as tensions along the lines of social fragmentation and stratification. As there is competition for the limited resources available, public spaces become battlegrounds. While some tend to dominate the public spaces, others are intimidated, leading to a lack of safety and withdrawal from public areas and from engagement with others.

The tensions that can be identified reflect the social fragments that live together in the neighbourhood. The public space then becomes a display of incompatibility between these groups who, in the absence of some supporting mechanisms, may find it hard to live together within the means that are available and the conditions that prevail. As most are preoccupied with sorting out some of the basic problems of life, their capacity to deal with others becomes more limited.

Some of these tensions are generated by different patterns of use. For some households, the public space is an extension of the house. This may be due to the large size of the family, small size of the dwelling, type of dwelling (flats, where outside space is not available), and access to facilities inside the dwelling. It may also be due to some cultural patterns of using inside and outside spaces, where in some countries the households are used to have access to a courtyard, which caters for a variety of activities. Some spend long periods hanging around public spaces, such as the unemployed, the homeless, drug abusers and street drinkers, who have nowhere else to go; teenagers, who use this space for socialization; and the migrants, who may have no other forum for socialization. This causes friction with others who pass through these spaces or want to use them, and those who are not used to this pattern of behaviour and are either intimidated or uncomfortable by it.

Another form of tension is between the newcomers and the old residents. This is not necessarily a racial and ethnic conflict. In Newcastle, it happened within the same racial group. It is the length of residence that distinguishes between those who have developed

emotional links with the area and those who arrive later and are considered as intruders. It is a sense of territory being invaded by unwanted newcomers. This is manifest in some forms of behaviour in public spaces and the approach to their upkeep.

Another tension is between ethnic and cultural groups or within them. Host communities may brand all the ethnic groups living in a marginal neighbourhood as foreigners. However, some of these groups may have lived here for generations. Ethnic minorities may have come from a variety of countries with huge differences. As a minority, they may have to live with the cultural and economic minorities of the host communities. The example of the sex shops next to the shopping areas of Muslim women in Rotterdam may be just one example of how different land uses are grouped together via the mechanisms of the market or social housing allocation processes. Despite the stereotype that the members of an ethnic group are a homogenous bunch, they may have come from different geographical, class, and tribal backgrounds. They may have been indeed in conflict with one another in their home country, from which they may have escaped. There are also generational differences between migrants, who carry a set of ideas and identities developed elsewhere, and their children, who are born and brought up in the new countries. These create clashes in the way they use public space and generate difficulty and confusion in the minds of the professionals dealing with them. When the sense of entrapment within a limited space and limited prospect of change reaches its extreme, the result is riots in public spaces, as was the case in Overtoomse Veld, in the middle of which lies the August Allebé Square, known for young Moroccans' riots and their clash with the police in 1998 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The regenerated August Allebé Square, which became the site of young Moroccans' riots in 1998 (Overtoomse Veld, Amsterdam).

Competition for space: use and development

Marginal public spaces are subject to severe competition between some of the stakeholders in the neighbourhood, as each group bids to dominate and appropriate the space. Public space is a limited resource, the competition for which creates tension, fear, and threat, displaying the social fragmentation that is trapped within the neighbourhood. Two types of competition can be identified for the public spaces of a neighbourhood: competition for use and competition for development, while the former is a display of incompatible public behaviour by individuals and groups, the latter is a manifestation of institutional competition for control of space.

A very serious challenge in the use of public spaces is by those who use it most, and thus tend to exclude others from it, as they are seen by others as bidding to dominate the place. The most intensive use of public spaces is perhaps by the youth, especially teenage boys.

The intensive use of public spaces, together with some incidents of problems by a minority, causes teenage boys to be blamed for a variety of problems. Teenage boys may use the public space for peaceful and legitimate purposes, such as playing football in Lisson Green, London. But by hanging around streets and at times engaging in vandalism and antisocial behaviour, if not criminality, some teenage gangs may appropriate public spaces and intimidate others, who in turn withdraw from it. This applies to ethnic minority youth (Moroccans in Amsterdam) as well as the natives (English in Newcastle, Irish in Dublin). Other groups who dominate public spaces are street drinkers and drug abusers (Stockholm, Wuppertal), who spend much of their time in public places (Figure 2). The result is a lack of safety for others who feel vulnerable, especially the elderly and the children, a pattern that can be found in almost all studied neighbourhoods. The problem of safety in European marginal public spaces is significant, but not yet as severe as some disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the United States where, for example, it is estimated that during the last two decades, 10,000 young people have died in the violence-ridden neighbourhoods of Los Angeles (Herbert,2003).



Figure 2. Incompatible use by different groups has turned Platz der Republik into a contested public space. (Ostersbaum, Wuppertal).

The institutional competition for public space revolves around the control of land. Where land is highly in demand, public spaces may be under pressure for development, seen as luxuries that are expensive to keep, which can therefore be dispensed with. The development pressure, or the difficulties of managing large open public spaces by the public authorities that have smaller budgets, tend to reduce the size of public spaces. In this sense, there is a competition over land between the different stakeholders. Where deprived neighbourhoods are targeted for gentrification, their public spaces attract new attention, as they are gateways to underused land that is expected to re-enter the marketplace.

In Lisson Green, London, public spaces have been gradually reduced in size without consultation with residents: some have been attached to the ground floor flats as private gardens, to rectify earlier problems. This is part of an ongoing programme of rehabilitation, which partly aims to create a normal street scene, hence demolishing high level walkways. Much of the rest of public space has been taken over by the Paddington Churches Housing Association to build new homes. The public space that is left is limited to a central park with a playground and a small football pitch. This area seems to be well used by children and young adults, although its size would only allow small numbers to use it at a time.

The prospect of development of an area and the way it is handled can lead to major tensions between stakeholders. Articulating a vision for the future of the area is a complex process and the residents of poor neighbourhoods are in a disadvantaged position to influence the process. At times, they are seen as the problem, rather than being able to help with the development of solutions. In Walker, Newcastle, tensions arose due to a major regeneration project for the East End of the city, of which this neighbourhood is a part. As a long term, 'urban renaissance' strategy to transform this and other troubled areas of the city, the city council developed Going for Growth, which involved large scale redevelopment in these areas. The result was a rapid and angry mobilization of the residents of these predominantly public housing areas. Tensions have continued over the alternative visions for the future of the area and how it may be developed. The public spaces of the area are at times filled with tension between the residents and the council.

The neighbourhood of Ano Liosia on the outskirts of Athens houses different groups of working class Greeks, immigrants, mainly from Albania, repatriated Greeks, mainly from the ex-Soviet Black Sea region, and Roma families. Following a recent earthquake, some rebuilding activities are taking place, although the gypsies are denied permission by the municipality to build new buildings, which has led to multi-occupancy of the existing houses. Living close to each other and to the plentiful open spaces of the area is seen as an advantage by the Roma population. However, as they feel unwanted in the neighbourhood and its public spaces, they often congregate in their courtyards and inside the houses.

Competition for space is a major source of tension, as it involves the disposition of each stakeholder in the process of spatial change. A weak disposition, as it is the case with the residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, if not taken into account in the process of development, would be reflected in tensions and explosive events, often played out in public spaces. Rather than competition for the use of public spaces, this can be competition for the transformation of the parts of, or the entire, area, with direct implications for the conditions and use of public. Rather than competition for the use of existing spaces, this is a competition for the shape of the future, for the nature and characteristics of the public spaces and the public life of the neighbourhood.

Communication within space

In deprived neighbourhoods, where a largely diverse population may be trapped within a limited space, communication between the diverse groups who live there, and between them and the outside world, becomes a major concern. It can act as a barrier to residents' ability to live together peacefully and to solve their shared problems, and a barrier to their integration into the larger society.

The residents of Tensta, Stockholm, speak in 140 different languages, creating a problem of communication and a challenge for providing education for a fast growing, diverse population, in an area with the highest level of young residents in Stockholm (40% are below 25). Entrapment within a limited space also creates a distance from the rest of society. For the immigrant population, the neighbourhood of Tensta acts as a cushion, where many others share the same experience and where the government provisions for help are concentrated. At the same time, this concentration of migrants and their problems attaches stigma to the area in the eyes of its residents, and even more so for the outsiders, who see it as a place of crime, gang trouble, fights, robbery and drugs, which has an impact on job opportunities, insurance premiums, and contact with officials. The absence of Swedish neighbours is also seen as an obstacle to integration, as children do not have Swedish friends at school and adults feel abandoned and neglected. The absence of some services, such as bank and police station, adds to this feeling (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The diversity of population creates problems of communication (Tensta, Stockholm)

Different groups in these neighbourhoods may enjoy similarity, but may also find a larger distance from the rest of society. If migrants are placed next to the poor sections of the native society, there will be clashes and competition. On the other hand, the more affluent part of the host society does not wish to live next door to the poor, whether local or from abroad, whether ethnic majority or minority. The problems of public spaces become problems of controlling behaviour in public places, rather than encouraging communication and cohesion. This is why provision and management of public housing has been the subject of intense debates in the recent past. On the one hand, the liberalizing urban economies have intensified the concentration of the poor, resulting in a declining status for public housing across Europe. On the other hand, the problems of concentrating disadvantaged populations in particular areas have led to promoting social mixing through housing allocation.

The problems of communication are exacerbated not only by the diversity of language, but also by the diverse forms of expression. In a number of neighbourhoods, graffiti is considered to be a major problem. However, graffiti for some is a form of self expression, a kind of public art through which the deprived youth find the possibility of expression. It is also a method of signification, which is used famously by gangs to mark their territories. Sometimes it is the work of individuals who need to express themselves and attract attention, especially as it may be their only outlet for such action. At other times, it is a mark to threaten others, which can be intimidating in general. For some graffiti adds meaning to the environment, whereas for others it is a sign of disorder. It transforms the shape of the public environment, and is a constant topic of controversy.

Communication within space can, therefore, be problematic if the forms of performance and expression are not shared by all. This is a feature of the areas of social fragmentation, that diverse groups have a diverse range of behaviour and performance, which can be completely incompatible. The gypsies in Ano Liosia, Athens, have an outdoor culture, but they are barred from performing their rituals, such as weddings, in the public space, which makes them feel unwanted. Public spaces are used as sites of display and performance. When public spaces allow differences to be expressed, they can contribute to the sense of wellbeing in the resident population. However, the performative element may be misunderstood or misused, so that local populations feel alienated from the performance. An example is Marxloh, a working class neighbourhood in Duisburg, Germany with a large migrant population. When local authorities wanted to celebrate the international character of the area, they set up a competition for public arts. The winner displayed statues of native Americans, to express social diversity and international character of an overwhelmingly Turkish population. This was a representation of difference that had a large gap with the reality of the population. In some instances, on the contrary, there is a clear attempt to remind people of the conditions and characteristics of life in a marginal neighbourhood, as is the case in inner city Dublin. Here a monument has been set up to remember those who have died of drugs in the neighbourhood.

One of the key features of a marginal public space is the close physical contact it can provide between residents and their built environment. Central public spaces have often suffered from the heavy presence of motor cars. Cars have also dominated middle class neighbourhoods, where people can pass through the city at high speeds (Sennett,1994). In marginal public spaces, however, whether in the inner city or on the periphery, cars are less present, as they are not affordable. The speed of movement through the neighbourhood, therefore, is much slower, offering a greater possibility of close contact with social and physical environment. These places in marginal neighbourhoods are potentially places of interpersonal contacts. Their significance is local, and so they stand in contrast to central spaces, which are impersonal showcases of the city. Marginal public spaces are less public than those at the heart of cities, by virtue of being located within areas that are mainly accessible to, and serving, a local population, which could have a neighbourhood and community effect. This can be the case in both poor and rich areas. Another aspect of the disadvantaged neighbourhoods, however, is that their residents are often tenants of public housing companies, and as such many are in a transitory condition, whereby they do not expect to settle down in the area for long, hence the strength of contact with the neighbourhood becomes limited. While the physical speed of cars may be less applicable here, the social speed of transition may have a similar effect.

Neglect and decline

There are intense competitions between individuals and organizations for some public spaces in the poorer urban neighbourhoods; at the same time these spaces often suffer from neglect and decline. Compared to the better-off neighbourhoods or major urban sites, the public spaces of deprived neighbourhoods are often run down, with vandalized furniture and full of litter, giving the impression that these are leftover and neglected spaces. This shows neglect from the main parties involved: by local authorities as reflected in poor maintenance or in planning blight, and by local residents as reflected in litter and vandalism. Furthermore, as private companies, particularly the retailers, avoid these areas, the quality of public areas is negatively affected. It seems these public spaces are not important for anyone, giving some residents the feeling of being abandoned, and displaying a poor image of the area to the outsiders.

Neglect by residents is particularly reflected in widespread litter, which in all the studied neighbourhoods is a major problem and a source of irritation, especially to long-term residents. The problem is often analysed by blaming particular groups for their conduct. In Overtoomse Veld, Amsterdam, some see the large concentration of school children in the neighbourhood as the source of the problem, as they may throw the remains of their sandwich lunches or other rubbish in the streets. In Ostersbaum, Wuppertal, children, dog owners, and immigrants are blamed for the spread of litter in public spaces. Some residents clean the areas around their homes, and some schools arrange for cleaning projects, one of which resulted in building a waste-monument. In Nøjsomhed, Helsingør, people complain about the lack of respect for common areas, especially when rubbish is thrown out of the balconies into public spaces, a practice that seems to be contagious. In Tensta, Stockholm, some residents and professionals interpret this as a cultural issue, whereby some individuals and cultures are seen to pay no regard to tidiness and are not bothered with what lies beyond their front door. The housing company that runs Tensta puts much effort into cleaning the public places, supplying cleaning tools, employing teenagers in the summer, and even providing cinema tickets as incentive. One housekeeper uses children in her building, and offers a visit to a Stockholm amusement park to those who help. But despite these efforts, litter soon comes back, which creates a negative image for these neighbourhoods in the city. In Via Fiesole, Turin, the absence of a sense of responsibility inside the neighbourhood is seen as a cause for its poor state of affairs. Some small areas are well cared for by individuals, while others are abandoned and dilapidated. There is a sense of lack of attachment, showing how individuals are either not caring about the environment, or worried that if they did the vandals would undo their work.

Neglect by local authorities is reflected in the absence of some necessary facilities and poor maintenance of existing ones. Public spaces in Ostersbaum, Wuppertal, suffer from insufficient lighting, waste, and inadequate repair. The poor conditions of open spaces in Via

Fiesole, Turin, are partly blamed on the authorities for their indifference. There are signs of poor maintenance, untrimmed trees and uncut grass, or signs of vandalism in entrances, common spaces outside and inside buildings. Public spaces are generally viewed as unsafe and dilapidated, and remain unused, due to absence of facilities such as telephone boxes and benches, which could help make them useful meeting places. Via Sospello, Turin, also suffers from lack of maintenance and a bad reputation for high rates of criminal activity, even though it was developed as a high quality residential area. The lack of maintenance, which is due to the planned redevelopment of Overtoomse Veld, Amsterdam, is causing anger and frustration. Absence of shops, playgrounds and benches explains why people do not find public spaces inviting. The few playgrounds that do exist are out of the way and do not seem to be used even in good weather.

The private sector neglect is another aspect of the picture, even though some marginal neighbourhoods are provided with good public facilities. In Tensta, Stockholm, there are several institutionalized public facilities in the neighbourhood: A One Stop Shop, a family centre and a library provide information and advice, meeting points for households and children, and information and entertainment in a variety of languages. There is a school, a swimming pool, and a lively indoor shopping centre with a range of shops and food from different countries and cultures, although some complain about the absence of mainstream shops. This is the sign of a wider phenomenon, which is the absence of the private sector investment in these marginal neighbourhoods. Most retailers seem to avoid poor neighbourhoods, fearing for low returns on their investment or for security reasons.

The inevitable result of neglect by residents, public authorities and the private sector is decline in the conditions of urban environment and life in the neighbourhood. It might be understandable why private firms avoid an area that would not be financially rewarding for their investment. It is not, however, clear why the deprived neighbourhoods should be neglected by local authorities, who in theory have to show a similar degree of concern and care for all urban areas. The unwillingness or inability of public authorities to address these problems is a sign of the changing structural parameters of European urban societies and the changing relationship between public authorities and urban populations. It is also not clear why the residents of these areas show less care towards public environments than they do towards their own private space. This lack of care is not necessarily intrinsic in low-income households, as some forms of care do not cost money. It is some times related to the length of residence in an area, which shows a degree of attachment and territoriality, but not necessarily so in all areas. Transient populations seem to pay less attention to a temporary and low quality accommodation and the public spaces around it. At other times it is neglect by one party that triggers neglect by others: neglect spreads if the public authority or the neighbours are not looking after the public environment, or if some residents effectively undo what other residents might do to care for the neighbourhood. In any case, the result of neglect

by public authorities and residents is clear: a public environment that tends to be shabby and dilapidated. This degrades the quality of life in the neighbourhood, contributes to the negative image of the area, and undermines the chances of social and economic improvement.

Public space as a catalyst for change

The significance of public spaces for social cohesion and economic competitiveness is well understood. According to the former mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall, 'It is critical to understand that improving public space is relevant to solving social and economic problems.' (Quoted in Urban Task Force, 1999, p.5). An updated version of Stockholm's Integration Programme in 2001 (first introduced in 1997) seeks a number of features for the integrated city, including access to 'joint meeting places' (Quistgaard et al, 2002, p.6). Our research showed some examples of how attention to public spaces can be a catalyst for change, through actions initiated by residents, as well as by public authorities and others.

Public celebrations and group activities have been a good way to promote social integration and to fight stigma, which is often attached to disadvantaged neighbourhoods and their residents. By setting up events that can bring the people of the area together, a sense of community and confidence is promoted, while at the same time a positive image of the neighbourhood is projected to the outside world, as was the case in Walker, Newcastle, with summer festivals in the park, or the Jubilee celebrations in the streets (Figure 4). In Ostersbaum, Wuppertal, the staircases that connect the neighbourhood to city centre are always littered and considered to be dirty and dangerous. An artist's project has been set up to illuminate the Platz and the stairs by candles once a year, to show that these are areas that can be enjoyed as public spaces. In this project, institutions, professionals, and residents have worked together, which has created a sense of community development.



Figure 4. Public celebrations have been a good way to fight stigma and bring people together (Walker, Newcastle).

In a deprived area in Coventry, forming a football team in the park was a catalyst for bringing conflicting groups together (BBC,2003). Some refugees were starting to use the only public open space in the area. The local young people, who had played football there for all their lives, considered this to be a problematic intrusion. This was indeed a classic case of competition for use of public space, leading to several fights around the use of the park. A local man organized a football team from the refugees, and he was able to persuade some local residents to join the team. The ability of the two groups to play together enabled them to come to terms with each other better. Their football team was now strong enough to defeat an established local team.

Attention to public spaces by public authorities and community groups can improve the quality of environment for local residents. In Berlin, to re-integrate the divided city, central public spaces such as Potsdamer Platz are the focus of attention. In the marginal neighbourhoods, however, attention to public spaces has been rare. However, a community development project in the Wedding district, the Kommunales Forum, has emphasized the need for the redesign and development of the neighbourhood public spaces, to support the disadvantaged residents of the area (Figure 5).



Figure 5. A community development project, the Kommunales Forum, has emphasized the need for the redesign and development of the neighbourhood public spaces, to support the disadvantaged residents of the area (Wedding, Berlin)

Participation of residents in public space maintenance and management can be a way of improving the physical environment and develop some social capital in the neighbourhood. In Overtroomse Veld, Amsterdam, a group of Moroccan fathers organized a neighbourhood watch scheme, in which they went round and tried to control the behaviour of the youth, a scheme that won national and European attention. Other specific measures have also been put in place to ensure safety, which include neighbourhood police officers, neighbourhood concierge, a Neighbourhood Service Point, and an office of Justice in the Neighbourhood. These initiatives are claimed to have stopped the growth of criminal and antisocial behaviour. A number of other initiatives were introduced, including arranging for the youth to repair what had been damaged during riots, and taking them to Morocco to see the conditions of life there. A more spontaneous example was in a deprived neighbourhood in Rotterdam: two women put some begonia flowers outside their house; as the flowers became vandalized by the youth, the women persisted by making new displays of flowers. Within two weeks, many such flowers were out by other people in the street, showing solidarity to their neighbours and commitment to the neighbourhood's public environment.

In Dublin, public space improvement combined environmental improvements with job creation for the local population. St. Teresa's Gardens, a small high-density local authority flats complex in Dublin's south-west Inner City suffered years of neglect in relation to public investment in infrastructure and the environmental regeneration of the estate, becoming an under-resourced, fragmented, alienated, isolated and marginalised community (Dublinate,2000, p.1). Since its establishment in 1999, the St. Teresa's Gardens Environment and Employment Project has been impacting significantly upon the local residents of this local authority estate through improving the quality of life of the tenants in physical, social and economic terms and creating sustainable jobs for local people. Through this project, a number of local people have been employed in improving the physical conditions of the area. The establishment of a Community Forum ensured that services are provided in a more efficient

and integrated manner by bringing people and organizations together. Through the Environment & Employment Project, an estate management agreement has been drawn up between Dublin City Council and the residents of St. Teresa's Gardens. The agreement covers such issues as maintenance of the flats and the complex in general, anti-social behaviour, future development, etc. Since the project was established, levels of anti-social behaviour, vandalism and drug dealing within St. Teresa's Gardens have been greatly reduced. The level of unemployment in the area is also down.

Although many such schemes may be isolated events in the face of the massive problems these neighbourhoods are facing, they are signs of some possibilities for improvement. Public spaces can be used to bring people together to improve the quality of life and to project a positive image for a deprived neighbourhood for its residents and for the others.

These cases show how the ability to use public space in new ways, and to mobilize resources and people around their use, can bring in some change in the social life of an area. As we have seen, in poor neighbourhoods, public open space is like other resources limited. People's ability to access other resources elsewhere is limited, due to lack of social and spatial mobility. With a lack of resources comes a competition for resources. The local poor feel threatened by the newcomers, as they have to compete for using limited resources. The only way to enable people to use the limited resources together peacefully is a framework that helps them mobilize their resources and build bridges. Public space by its nature is often neutral, which is useful in allowing different activities to take place there. However, its neutrality also means it may need extra frameworks to allow for a shared use of its space when conflict of interest arises.

Implications for urban design and management

Attention to the spatial qualities of the city can help fighting some of the key urban problems. But social exclusion is a multi-dimensional process and these problems are caused by a host of factors ranging from the changes in the global political economy and the national policies to vulnerabilities and sensitivities of individuals. It is obvious that focusing only on the urban environment cannot be a solution to these problems and the relative contribution of environmental factors to fight against social exclusion should be acknowledged. At the same time, this does not mean that attention to the urban environment should be abandoned as superficial and irrelevant, as space and society are closely intertwined and the processes that shape space are at the heart of what characterizes societies.

The essential quality of public space is its accessibility: the more open and unconditional the access, the more public it becomes. This openness should include physical as well as social accessibility: access to the place and to the activities within it; without free and open access, a public space is not quite public. This open access, however, can create tensions between

those who tend to use it more and the rest of population, a potential conflict of interest and use that needs to be managed. In disadvantaged neighbourhoods, there are not many mechanisms to mediate and manage conflict. Although many small-scale issues are resolved through common sense, there is often a need for a system of dealing with the conflicting and incompatible uses of public spaces. The best way to achieve this is to involve the residents themselves to sort out these problems, but they may need support to set up the necessary frameworks.

Neighbourhood governance, therefore, can only be improved through developing partnerships with key stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors, as well as the local residents. Good governance will be directly linked to improving the conditions of life in the neighbourhood. To ensure that public spaces are well used and well looked after, local residents need to be involved in the processes that shape the conditions of life in the neighbourhood, which can create a sense of ownership in the community. Rather than thinking that such care is someone else's responsibility, which is a widespread attitude, residents who are involved would develop a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their environment. If this involvement is supported through all stages of developing and maintaining public spaces, it could lead to a sense of emotional attachment to the area and ensuring continuity in environmental care and quality. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that these residents are entitled to a proper level of services that is equal to what other residents of the city enjoy.

Many disadvantaged neighbourhoods suffer from the absence of some basic services. The private sector service providers are reluctant to enter these neighbourhoods, as the limited financial capacities of residents do not promise much return on private sector investments. The public sector services, while in principle equally distributed among citizens, are often under-provided in these areas. Therefore, these areas are usually in urgent need of basic services such as shops, banks, etc, which is a major challenge to neighbourhood governance. To ensure the mutual support of public spaces and public services, the two must be directly linked. By flanking public spaces, these services can contribute to the liveliness and success of the public space, while they benefit from better and safer use by residents.

The use of public arts and staging of public events and festivals have been seen as good practice in involving local residents in their neighbourhoods, reversing the tide of stigma, creating a sense of confidence and promoting a sense of attachment to the local area. Many residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods may feel to be in transition from one place to another, without a sense of attachment to the place of their living. While this may be a general feature of city dwellers everywhere, it is a condition that is particularly hard for the socially marginal ones to cope with. Whether it is industrial decline or displacement that is the cause of a neighbourhood's problems, collective symbols and events in public places can inject a

sense of optimism and togetherness, which is essential in the fight to turn the tide of deprivation.

This is particularly important as the challenge of integration is a long-term challenge and requires long term solutions. It is important to acknowledge that the road to social integration often starts by economic integration. Social and cultural integration for immigrants will take a longer time, some times even lasting for generations, as this means adjusting to the rules and norms of a new society and for this society to learn to live with difference. Some ethnic and cultural groups wish to keep some of their distinctiveness as long as they can, rather than melting into the new society. So long as this adjustment or distinctiveness is transparent, takes place within the rule of law, follows democratic frameworks, and is accompanied by full economic integration, it can add to the richness of the local society, rather than diluting it. By investing in good quality buildings and public spaces, the city authorities facilitate this adjustment and enable some distinctions to be displayed in public. For a group to become aware of itself and to communicate with others, it is essential to be able to display itself in a public sphere. Public sphere, of course, goes beyond public spaces of the city; it also includes political forums and the mass media. The physical public spaces of the city, however, have their role to play.

If left to the market, the ability to pay determines where people live. This often means the poor will live in areas with lowest rent levels, resulting in a concentration of the disadvantaged population. This effect is also a result of the work of housing managers and local authority planners, who build public housing schemes or concentrate disadvantaged populations in the existing public housing areas. Throughout Europe, public housing areas have been gradually losing their initial social standing as normal housing, becoming associated with poverty and disadvantage.

Concentration of the disadvantaged households in particular parts of the city has a double-edged outcome. On the one hand, it provides the possibility that people with similar concerns and problems can relate to each other and it would be easier for the authorities to look after them in a focused way. On the other hand, the concentration of disadvantage stigmatizes a place, to the extent that other citizens and the authorities look down on these areas as trouble spots and on their residents as second class citizens. Sometimes it is difficult to find a job if a person's address is in the 'wrong' part of town. This can be the result of particular building styles (e.g., high rise flats in British inner cities), sensational reporting in the popular media about particular parts of town, or long-term presence of poverty in these areas. High quality buildings and public spaces that do not look different and spreading the affordable spaces across the city can help avoid stigmatization.

Successful cities have primary public spaces that are intertwined with their general image and function. Looking closely, however, there are also secondary public spaces that are as significant for the function and image of the city as the primary ones. In the historic cities of Europe, these secondary spaces have sometimes been embellished by monuments and have served local communities who live around them. These cities show how all neighbourhoods can be integral parts of the urban whole, and the quality of their buildings and public spaces should be as much the concern of city managers as those of the other residents of the city. A good city is good in all its aspects and not merely in its showcases.

Conclusion

Social exclusion is a multi-dimensional process and it needs multi-dimensional responses, which includes the provision of public spaces. Good quality, well-managed public spaces can play a very important role in facilitating the social integration of the disadvantaged residents: these places are essential in catering for the daily needs of households, providing places to meet and communicate with others, and developing a symbolic value which could create a sense of emotional attachment to the neighbourhood and the city. To function normally, many socially disadvantaged households need access to space beyond their dwellings. Most importantly, socially marginal households and individuals need places to meet others.

The acute and multi-dimensional vulnerabilities of weaker social groups can turn the public spaces of disadvantaged neighbourhoods into sites of conflict and disorder; at the same time, these vulnerabilities and the residents' particular needs can also be a source of strength in bringing people together and facilitating connections with the larger social environment. If urban governance functions well, public space provision and improvement should be part of an overall improvement in the management of resources in a neighbourhood. Good provision, management and maintenance of public spaces are key issues, while helping local residents to engage in their environment creates a sense of ownership and wellbeing. This can provide nodes for communication with others and displaying the symbols of their identity, and facilitate the feeling that they are legitimate recipients of services rather than unwelcome or abandoned inhabitants of the city. Due to their limited mobility, the residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods are likely to use their public spaces heavily: the use of good quality and durable designs and materials is therefore essential, so is providing institutional frameworks to reduce and resolve potential conflicts over its use. The best public spaces are the most flexible ones, which can be used for a variety of purposes. Rigid designs for single purpose spaces are often less successful in an environment where needs vary widely.

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