



Revival of City Squares in Balkan Cities

Urban Notes: City Squares and Public Spaces

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When talking about squares and public spaces, in order to be clear, first of all, we will have to define their meaning. In our communication we use the term "**square**" quite frequently, and it appears that we are pretty clear what does it mean. However, if someone, using any of the languages of the Balkans, tries to find the right word to indicate the great diversity of urban areas that rightfully deserve to enter the ranks of attractive (large or small) squares / public spaces, as pearls of the city space and urban life, they will definitely experience the problem of finding the correct word.

As long as the term "square" is used for really attractive urban spaces, we can feel safe. However, sadly to say, but very often this clear and positive picture of the "square" is blurred when this extremely attractive word is used for spaces that are more often empty than used, unattractive, uncompleted, urban areas which do not even meet the basic requirement - spaciousness.

Definition: Dictionaries

With this in mind, it is necessary to clearly define what is meant by the term "square". Many of the world's famous dictionaries provide interpretations of this term, such as:

- The *Oxford Dictionary* (1995), where the term "square" is defined as: **open (usually four-sided) area surrounded by buildings**;
- The *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary* (2004) provides additional explanation of the term "square" stating that it is: **b. an open area at the meeting of streets**, and **e. US a block of buildings bounded by four streets**.
- The *Webster New World Dictionary* (1994) gives a detailed description of the term defining it as: **a) an open area bounded by, or at the intersection of, several streets, usually used as a park, plaza, etc.** and as **b) buildings surrounding such an area**.
- The *Online FREE DICTIONARY by FARLEX* provides a comprehensive explanation of the term "square", even treating its significance from the aspect of social sciences and human geography, and giving a list of different names for open spaces used in different languages, as well as interpretation of the term from historical perspective, with a review from *agora* to *market place*.
- *Wikipedia* gives an explanation of all terms associated with the term "square", that are used in many different languages. Just as an example, the English explanation is the following: **An urban square is an open area commonly found in the heart of a traditional town used for community gatherings. Other names for town square are civic centre, city square, urban square, market square, public square, plaza (from Spanish), piazza (from Italian), and place (from French). It may be a Market Square.**

Definitions:

Oxford Dictionary (1995):

Square: open (usu. four-sided) area surrounded by buildings.

Illustrated Oxford Dictionary (2004):

Square: **3 a** open (usu. four-sided) area surrounded by buildings. **b** an open area at the meeting of streets. **e US** a block of buildings bounded by four streets.

Webster New World Dictionary (1994):

Square: **4 a)** an open area bounded by, or at the intersection of, several streets, usually used as a park, plaza, etc. **b)** buildings surrounding such an area.



THE FREE DICTIONARY by FARLEX (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/square>):

square (skwâr) **6. a. Abbr. Sq.** An open, usually four-sided area at the intersection of two or more streets, often planted with grass and trees for use as a park. **b.** A rectangular space enclosed by streets and occupied by buildings; a block.

square [skwɛə] **3.** (Social Science / Human Geography) (*capital when part of name*) an open area in a town, sometimes including the surrounding buildings, which may form a square.

Noun 3. square - an open area at the meeting of two or more streets, public square city - an incorporated administrative district established by state charter; "the city raised the tax rate", piazza, plaza, place - a public square with room for pedestrians; parcel of land, piece of ground, piece of land, tract, parcel - an extended area of land;

1. town square, close, quad, market square, quadrangle, village square.

Noun 2. public square - a place of assembly for the people in ancient Greece agora; market place, mart, marketplace, market - an area in a town where a public mercantile establishment is set up.

Piazza _ **pi-az-za** (pē-āz'ə, -ā'zə) *n. pl. pi-az-zas, 1. pl. pi-az-ze* (pē-āt'sə, pyāt'sə) also (pē-āt'sə, pyāt'sä) A public square in an Italian town. **2.** A roofed and arcaded passageway; a colonnade. **3.** *New England & Southern Atlantic U.S.* A veranda. [Italian, from Latin platēa, street, from Greek plateia (hodos), *broad (way)*, feminine of platus, *broad*; see plat- in Indo-European roots.]

piazza [pɪ'ætsə -'ædzə (*Italian*) 'pjattsa] *n* **1.** (Engineering / Civil Engineering) a large open square in an Italian town. **2.** (Fine Arts & Visual Arts / Architecture) *Chiefly Brit* a covered passageway or gallery. [from Italian: marketplace, from Latin platēa courtyard, from Greek plateia; see PLACE]

Noun 1. piazza - a public square with room for pedestrians; "they met at Elm Plaza"; "Grosvenor Place"

plaza, place; public square, square - an open area at the meeting of two or more streets.

Agora _ **ag-o-ra** (āg'ə-rə), *n. pl. ag-o-rae* (ə-rē) or **ag-o-ras**. A place of congregation, especially an ancient Greek marketplace. [Greek agorā; see ger- in Indo-European roots.]

agora - *n pl -rae* [-ri: -raɪ] (Historical Terms) (*often capital*) **a.** the marketplace in Athens, used for popular meetings, or any similar place of assembly in ancient Greece. **b.** the meeting itself. [from Greek, from *agorein* to gather]

Agora an assembly place, e.g., a marketplace, *hence*, the people assembled, 1820.

Noun 2. agora - the marketplace in ancient Greece; market place, mart, marketplace, market - an area in a town where a public mercantile establishment is set up. **3. agora** - a place of assembly for the people in ancient Greece

public square; market place, mart, marketplace, market - an area in a town where a public mercantile establishment is set up.

market place _ **Noun 1. market place** - an area in a town where a public mercantile establishment is set up. mart, marketplace, market; public square, agora - a place of assembly for the people in ancient Greece

bazar, bazaar - a street of small shops (especially in Orient). food market, grocery, grocery store, market - a marketplace where groceries are sold; "the grocery store included a meat market". mercantile establishment, outlet, retail store, sales outlet - a place of business for retailing goods. market square, open-air market, open-air marketplace - a public marketplace where food and merchandise is sold. slave market - a marketplace where slaves were auctioned off (especially in the southern United States before the American Civil War). agora - the marketplace in ancient Greece.



Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/square>)

square skwɛər **noun, verb**, squared, squar-ing, **adjective**, squar-er, squar-est, **adverb**

—**noun** **1.** a rectangle having all four sides of equal length. **2.** anything having this form or a form approximating it, as a city block, rectangular piece of candy, etc. **3.** an open area or plaza in a city or town, formed by the meeting or intersecting of two or more streets and often planted with grass, trees, etc., in the center. **Origin:** 1250–1300; (noun) Middle English < Old French *esquar* (*r*) *e* < Vulgar Latin **exquadra*, derivative of **exquadrāre* (Latin *ex-* *ex-*¹ + *quadrāre* to square; see *quadrate*); (v.) Middle English *sqwaren* < Old French *esquarrer* < Vulgar Latin **exquadrāre*; (adj.) Middle English < Old French *esquarré*, past participle of *esquarrer*; (adv.) derivative of the adj. —**Synonyms** 3. place, park.

Wikipedia

Urban squares (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Urban_squares)

Deutsch: Ein **Platz** im städtebaulichen Kontext ist eine von Gebäuden umbaute, freie Fläche in Städten. Plätze sind Brennpunkte des öffentlichen Lebens in der Stadt. Sie sind daher das zentrale Thema und Raumelement des Städtebaus.

English: An **urban square** is an open area commonly found in the heart of a traditional town used for community gatherings. Other names for town square are civic center, city square, urban square, market square, public square, plaza (from Spanish), piazza (from Italian), and place (from French). It may be a Market Square.

Français: Une **place** est un espace public non bâti, desservi par des voies.

Italiano: Per **piazza in urbanistica** si intende un luogo racchiuso all'interno di un centro abitato, più largo delle strade che vi convergono, in maniera che si crei un spazio di raccolta. La piazza ricopre svariate funzionalità: può fungere da parcheggio per la sosta dei veicoli, da mercato per ospitare i venditori ambulanti; la piazza centrale il più delle volte coincide con il luogo dove si affacciano gli edifici principali sede del governo della città o quelli religiosi; le casistiche sono innumerevoli. Tuttavia

Polski: Place

Português: Praça

A **town square** is an open public space^[1] commonly found in the heart of a traditional town used for community gatherings. Other names for *town square* are civic center, city square, urban square, market square, public square, town green, platz (from German), plaza (from Spanish), piazza (from Italian), place (from French), praça (from Portuguese), plac (from Polish) and maydan (from Persian and Arabic).

Most town squares are hardscapes suitable for open markets, music concerts, political rallies, and other events that require firm ground. Being centrally located, town squares are usually surrounded by small shops such as bakeries, meat markets, cheese stores, and clothing stores. At their centre is often a fountain, well, monument, or statue. Many of those with fountains are actually named Fountain Square.

Names and Naming

Particularly interesting is the abundance of names used to denote various types of open spaces. For instance, the Italian language has plenty of names for city squares (piazza, piazzeta). On the other hand, in our languages there is lack of words used to refer to public spaces differing in shape, size and purpose. In Albanian, the most common word used for squares is **shesh**, though the official term is **katror**. In Macedonian there is only one word: **плоштад**, while in Montenegro the words used for the term square are **trg** and **skver**. In general literature the most commonly



used terms besides the word "square" are: *city square*, *urban square*, *town square*, *civil square*, *centre*, *public square*, etc.

In the literature related to cities and urban forms, the word **square** is usually used when referring to a particular square, while the term **urban public space** is used to denote any open public space. Unfortunately, in our languages the term **urban public space** is quite blurred notion. For example, in Macedonian, as it is quite difficult to define it, very often it is left out from dictionaries. Moreover, nor experts, let alone citizens, understand or use this term.

Albanian:

square - katror

agora - shesh pazari dhe mbledhjeve

Serbian-Montenegrin:

Square – trg, /skver/

Macedonian:

Square – плоштад



(<http://urbansquares.com/>)

agora, aukio, adgbum, apajs laukums, apskrita aikste, bebia yeshia, court, campo, campidoglio, campiello, chiazza, ciassa, chjazza, carseh, caernog, cudrado, carro, dataran, djemaa, drhal, el cuadro, forum, glorieta, gradina, jagadas, kicar, kancha, krizisce, körtér, largo, lan, market, markt, misrah, mesto, moedani, meydan, meydani, maidan, namasty, namestie, nytorv, okarusu, oshkuzha, ploshcad, ploshcha, platz, place, plasenn, plats, placo, placa, plac, pijaca, prato, plliaca, praca, plaza, piazza, piazza, plazuela, plein, piata, piasa, pliacetta, piasa, pieza, piazza, plass, plac, prazza, piata, plateia, pjazza, parque, park, quadrat, rundel, runddel, rynek, rond-point, square, sillju, sgwar, souk, squero, shesh, simpangan, trg, torg, torget, targ, ter, tere, toerana, tori, valjak, vliet, viereckig, winkel, ympyräaukio, zocalo, ملتقى ملتقى شوارع في مدينة، ميدان، 字路口的圓形廣場，πλατεία，円形広場，원형 광장，трг, градина, парк, пијаца, площадь

Urban Public Space

The challenge to understand the meaning of the squares is not only in defining their spaciousness and the elements that outline them (buildings and streets), but also in understanding the term "**urban public space**." The usage of this term is more suitable because of the need to recognise various urban spaces that meet citizens' needs for public space, where they can freely reside, move, communicate, act, etc. In the city space duality between the public and the private, the public is often under threat to be controlled, taken and hedged, which is in a direct contradiction of the concept of urban life and civil society. The pressure by the neo-liberal bulldozers for cancellation of that "*for all*" urban space is even bigger. Public space, in transition countries generally unrecognised as amenity and as main achievement of civilisation, is considered to be a space that belongs to those in authority, or in power.

Public space is a concept that cannot be defined easily. Historically, it is conceptualised by emphasising both its physical and its social aspects, led by two distinct philosophical schools. According to Newton's notion of space as static and detached from time, public space is



recognised as a concrete space in the city available to citizens and where actions taken by one are visible to others (Iveson, 2007). This approach is embedded in the architectural and urban traditions and practice. On the other hand, in terms of actions and activities, public space is defined as place that becomes a scene of power and collective action through political or civil actions (Benhabib, 1992). This approach is closely connected to the concept of Habermas (1989), that is, the concept of *Öffentlichkeit*, called **public sphere**, where *public sphere* can be understood as an arena of social life in which people can freely identify and discuss social problems, thus influencing political actions.

The Square

One of the three most important elements of the city, beside the *city block* and *street*, is certainly the **square**. The square is not only a space surrounded by buildings, but also a place of special privilege used for public displaying of architecture. The most magnificent urban compositions, such as Piazza San Marco in Venice, Piazza San Pietro in Rome, Concorde in Paris or the Palace Square in St. Petersburg, are unique because of the correlation between the space, surrounding buildings and the sky, stimulating emotional and mental response, which can be compared to the reaction caused by other art forms.



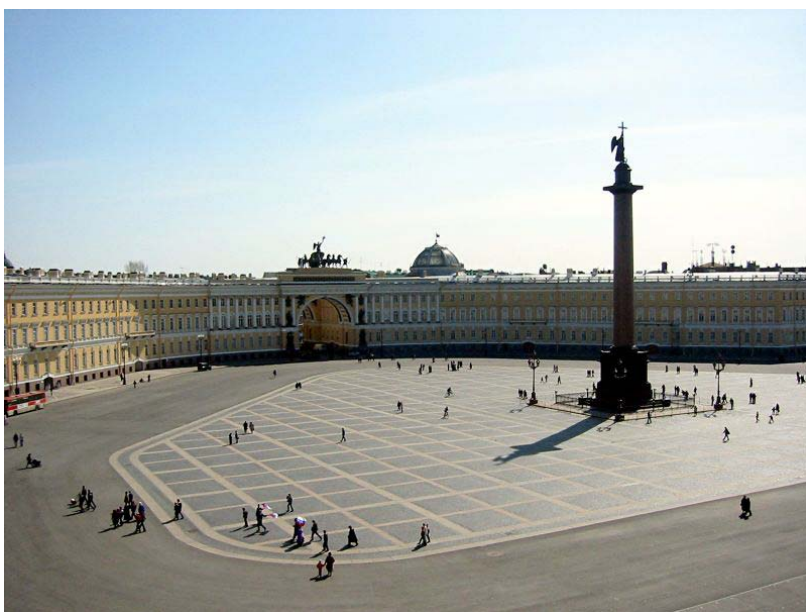
Piazza San Marco, Venice, Italy



Piazza San Pietro, Roma, Italy



Place Concorde, Paris, France



Palace Square, St. Petersburg, Russia

There are two main methods for categorisation of squares - by their **form (shape)** and by the **function**.

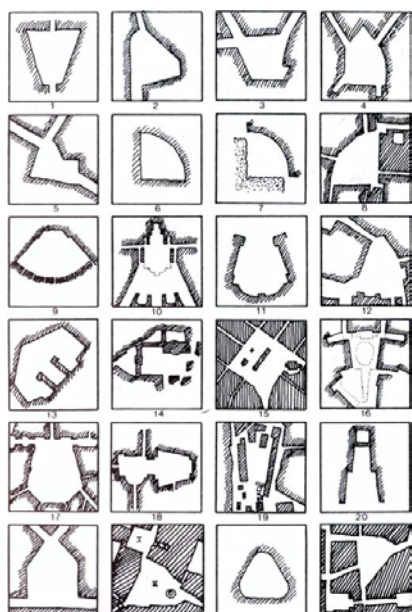
Form (Shape)

According to Kostof, one of the main issues related to public spaces is adaptability, making the connection with the form, in the broad sense of the term *physical structure*, unavoidable.¹ Every space is shaped according to the functions that are performed in it, or conversely, the shape of the space attracts certain functions. Thus, building a city house, church or park, and according to the basic standards for accessibility, visibility, etc., will shape a certain form, or vice versa, in growing

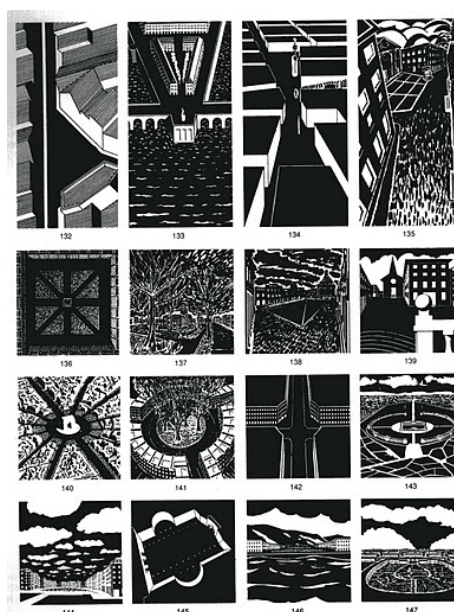
¹ Kostof, Spiro. (2005) *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History*. Thames & Hudson, London.



cities, existing free spaces, according to the form acceptable (suitable) for certain function, will adapt to the emerging needs. Zucker² distinguishes several different types of squares: "the closed square, like the Place des Vosges, where the space is static and self-contained; the dominated square, where the space is dynamic, that is, directed toward a terminal object which can be a church, a gate or an arch, a fountain (eg. the Trevi in Rome), or a view (the sea in the case of the Piazzetta in Venice); the nuclear square, where space is formed around a central statue, fountain, or other vertical accent; grouped square, the combination of spatial units as in Nancy, Bologna, or St. Petersburg; and amorphous square, Times Square in New York, Trafalgar Square in London, and the Palace de l'Opéra in Paris, whose special experience is too diffuse to be positive. Krier³ formulates a typology of urban space, which groups spatial forms and spaces derived from them in three main groups, "according to the geometrical pattern of their ground plan". Groups are arranged according to the forms of square, circle and triangle. Kostof⁴ believes that public spaces of geometrically planned cities and the new extensions of the cities produce rectilinear, regular, orthogonal design, while "organic" cities generate spaces that are able to adapt to the improvised urban matrix from their history. He subdivides squares according to the basic shapes into: triangle (Place Dauphine in Paris), trapezoid (Michelangelo's Campidoglio, Rome), rectangle (Place des Vosges in Paris), L-shaped (Piazza and Piazzeta S. Marco in Venice), circle and ellipse (Piazza del Anfiteatro in Lucca; The Citcus in Bath), and hemicycle (Place de l'Odéon in Paris).



Public space as classified by Rob Krier



Public space as classified by Spiro Kostof

Function

Activities in the squares are important for their vitality and therefore the visual attractiveness plays substantial role. Vitruvius says that the size "should be proportionate to the number of inhabitants, so that it may not be too small a space to be useful, nor look like a desert waste for lack of population". In the Renaissance, the stress is on the desirability of different squares which will serve different purposes. Thus Alberti believes that „... there ought to be several squares laid out in different parts of the city, some for the exposing of merchandises to sale in time of peace; and others for the exercises proper for youth; and others for laying up stores in time of war, ...“.⁵ According to Moughtin a city needs different types of squares that will provide: „the setting for a

² Zucker, Paul (1970) *Town and Square: From the Agora to the Village Green*. The MIT Press

³ Krier, Rob. (1993) *Urban Space*. Rizzoli.

⁴ Kostof, Spiro. (2005) *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History*. Thames & Hudson, London.

⁵ Alberti, Leon Battista. *The Ten Books of Architecture (The 1755 Leoni edn)*, Dover Publications, New York, 1986, Book IV, Chapter VIII, p.81



civic building; the principal meeting places; places for great ceremonial occasions; spaces for entertainment around buildings such as theatres, cinemas, restaurants and cafes; spaces for shopping, shopping street, arcades and markets; spaces around which offices are grouped; spaces of a semi-public nature around which residential accommodation is arranged; and, finally, the spaces associated with urban traffic junctions.⁶ Some of these areas have a primary function, for example a centre of the city, while others get more overlapping functions. Mono- functionalism, separation and emphasis of only one function is typical characteristic of the philosophy of the modern movement in architecture and urbanism. Hence, large parts of the complexes, cultural and shopping centres remain empty in the period beyond their primary time of use. Depending on their functions, Kostof⁷ divides the squares into: civic centres, the *pace d'armes*, squares that accommodate games, traffic squares, residential squares.

Squares through History

It is very likely that public squares were the first form of how people were using open urban spaces. The public squares were created by grouping of houses around an open space. This type of courtyards often carries a symbolic value and is therefore chosen as a model for formation of numerous holy places (Krier, 1979). The square is widely regarded as a "distinctive and memorable place" (Lynch, 1961) and "psychological parking place within the civic landscape" (Zucker, 1959). The square, as one of the most distinctive elements of the urban structure, has played important part in the human history for hundreds of years. Its beginnings can be followed through three main phases: a) the Greek Agora and the Roman Forum, b) the Medieval Market and b) Renaissance Square (Carr et al., 1992).

The history of squares can be traced back since the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans (Mumford, 1961). The **Acropolis**, (a fortified raised area holding a sanctuary) served as a nucleus of the early Greek cities. The development of the ancient Greek civilization brought the appearance of the **Agora** – a secular market and a meeting place that slowly gained greater social importance. Mumford (1961) stresses that one of the most important functions of the Agora was to provide space for daily communications and formal and informal meetings. Cities of the Roman Empire were organised around the **Forum**, which united the functions of the Greek Acropolis and Agora. In larger cities, the forum developed into an "area", including closed, semi-closed, and open spaces for commerce, religious events, political gatherings, athletic games and informal meetings (Mumford, 1961). Somewhere between the fifth and tenth century, with the fall of the Roman Empire, when people started to leave the cities and settle in places that could be easier defend, cities ceased to play the significant role of centres of manufacturing and trade (Mumford, 1961). Later on, around the tenth century, the two islands of security against invaders, the *castle* and the *monastery*, significantly expanded their walls, surrounding the growing settlements. Fortified cities provided the security necessary to revive the market. In the Middle Ages, the cathedral was the central point in the growing city. To use the advantage of constant activity, markets were often situated in the areas adjacent to the cathedral (Girouard, 1985). Besides the **market square**, many medieval European cities had also civic squares or plazas, situated near the City Houses. Many of these medieval squares were used for different activities, special events and major religious celebrations (Girouard, 1985). The large squares (plazas) from the Renaissance, which were carefully planned and formally designed, announced a new approach in setting up the urban public space, very much different from the organic, naturally occurring public spaces from the Middle Ages. In the late sixteenth century, starting with Livorno (Italy), the main city squares were built as unique compositions, based on designs, and in full symmetry (Girouard, 1985). However, while some of these large central spaces can be considered as subject of civil and religious pride, others are probably too large and lack connection with the city that surrounds them (Cerr et al., 1992). During the Baroque, the concept for squares was developed to uncontrollable proportions, including in particular the formal aspects of their shaping, with an exaggerated importance of the urban focal points, connected in a system of visual and spatial experiences. The tradition of

⁶ Moughtin, Cliff. (2003) *Urban Design: Street and Square, Third Edition*. Architectural Press, Elsevier Science, Oxford and Burlington

⁷ Kostof, Spiro. (2005) *The City Assembled: The Elements of Urban Form through History*. Thames & Hudson, London.



designing residential districts (primarily for the wealthy class) around the squares is most evident in central London. In the period between 1763 and 1827, over two dozen of such spaces were built, thus forming the basis of its present squares (Mumford, 1961). The next stage in the development of the square as a city element was the introduction of the criteria to take care not only of aesthetics, but also of health and sanitary qualities of these spaces (Kostof, 1992). They were shaped so as to be of good proportions, and to meet the needs for activities performed there. However, modern squares are subjected to strong criticism by historians, called the "empty spaces" without any particular form and content to attract people. The Modern Movement further extends these aspects through the concepts of isolation, separation of the city traffic, zoning and so on, thus creating conditions for the loss of the role of squares as places of mixing functions, mixing of people and most vital and most vibrant places in the city.

In the tradition of the countries that have a different history from that of the West, the term "square" has a different meaning. The appearance of public spaces is linked to local and external influences and especially with the social conditions, lifestyle, imported urban planning concepts, and so on. According to Kostof (1999) the only form of public spaces used for gathering of people were the so called "maidans" (mejdani) and "pazars" (pazari). In the culture of the oriental countries, which is closely related to the climate conditions, public spaces are in a way more "privately public" or "semi-public" areas, connected to religious buildings, covered markets (Bazaars, bezisteni), and so on. The yards of large religious buildings, like the mosques, have taken the role of meeting places, and on the level of neighbourhoods, small extensions in the cross-section of several local streets in the neighbourhood itself, or open central areas between several neighbourhoods were used for that purpose, where on certain days of the week markets were organised. Other bigger places that could be regarded as urban public spaces used for gatherings of a large number of citizens were city bazaars, which consisted of streets, rather than extensions. Besides the city bazaars, there were specific buildings that contained semi-public spaces, such as kapali carsi and bezistens.

Squares Today

Of course, although the history of squares is long, dating from the time of occurrence of the first cities, and their meaning is somewhat changed, they still have the same role in "knitting" the urban fabric and city (civic) life. Old squares in the historical cities are still used, although some are undergoing dramatic changes to adjust to the modern lifestyle and the needs of the city. At the same time creation of an impressive number of new public spaces and squares is evident.

One of the more ambitious new roles of city squares is related to the *renewal of the city* itself. The best known intervention of this kind is the project undertaken in Barcelona, in 1980. The project, led by the architect Oriol Bohigas, was focused on new parks and squares, seeing them as an opportunity for revitalisation of the abandoned (shabbier) parts of the city, but also as liberation from the outdated ideology about public spaces as places of potential threat. Creation or rehabilitation of public spaces is clearly targeted to be the basis for balancing and strengthening different parts of the city, with a vital philosophy and strategy to stimulate social and physical identification of each neighbourhood, and reintegration of fragmented parts of the city.⁸ Back in the 60s, in Copenhagen, there was a broad professional campaign led by the architecture Jan Gehl for "liberation" of the city from cars through creation of urban spaces. The campaign itself was part of a broader national program called "Improve the Public Space". Talking about this campaign Jan Gehl would say that it „will not just improve public space projects over a number of years, but it will also introduce a number of new ideas and awareness, so that the idea of "city culture", that is, the way people think about cities and conceive them, can be developed. We're going to work on all of this thinking, about how people think of public space and the joy of going into town, in a nationwide program.“⁹

⁸ Busquets, Juan (2005) *Barcelona. The urban evolution of a compact city*. Harvard University, Graduate School of Design, Nicolodi, Roberto, Italia.

⁹ *Pedestrian Cities: An interview with the Danish architect Jan Gehl on how public spaces work*. By Paul Makovsky. August/September 2002



Today, the idea of using public spaces is widespread, and in focus of a great number of professional and civic networks, both international and nationwide. Their renewal, revitalisation and reconstruction, as well as creation of new ones is regarded as stimulus and contribution to a better city planning.

Public Space - European Prize for Urban Public Space (<http://www.publicspace.org>)

The **European Prize for Urban Public Space** is an initiative of the Centre of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (CCCB). It was established following the exhibition "The Re-conquest of Europe", which was held in the CCCB in 1999, in order to offer testimony to the process of rehabilitation of public spaces that has been occurring in many European cities.

The aim of the Prize is to recognise and foster the public character of urban spaces and their capacity for fostering social cohesion. While acknowledging the ambiguities inherent in the notion of public space, this Prize – the only one of its kind in Europe – is distinctive in both recognising and promoting a public space that is at once public (open and universally accessible) and urban. The Prize, in highlighting the relational and civic aspects of the typically urban space, thus differs from other initiatives that are focused on the figure of the architect, and from awards given for landscape-centred projects.

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) (<http://www.pps.org>)

Placemaking for Communities

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is a non-profit planning, design and educational organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities. Our pioneering Placemaking approach helps citizens transform their public spaces into vital places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation and serve common needs.

PPS was founded in 1975 to expand on the work of William (Holly) Whyte, the author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Since then, we have completed projects in over 2500 communities in 40 countries and all 50 US states. Partnering with public and private organizations, federal, state and municipal agencies, business improvement districts, neighbourhood associations and other civic groups, we improve communities by fostering successful public spaces.

CABE _ Public space (<http://www.cabe.org.uk>)

CABE Space works with national, regional and local bodies to deliver well-designed and managed public spaces across England.

Role of Public Spaces

Cities are made up of public and private spaces. The public space, as an inevitable component of the city, can appear in many different forms: streets, squares, plazas, market-places, parks, etc., and they all play a significant role as main communication channels of the city (Carr et al., 1992; Gehl, 1996).

The role of public spaces as places accessible to all, and that every citizen can and is entitled to use them, is broadly recognised. Carr et al defines public space as "the common ground where people carry out the functional and ritual activities that bind a community, whether in the normal routines of daily life or in periodic festivities" (Carr et al., 1992:3). According to Walzer (1986: 470), "Public space is the space we share with strangers, people who aren't our relatives, friends, or work associates. It is space for politics, religion, commerce, sport; space for peaceful co-existence and impersonal encounter ". Also, public space contributes to mental and psychological health of each person as individual. According to Lynch (1992), public space acts as a place where individuals can express, face challenges and take risks, all of which may create a state of tension or relaxation – both of them needed for mental and psychological wellbeing of humans. On the other



hand, they are the places where one can meet other people, experience different ways of behaviour, or simply put, they are the places for "social interaction".

Public places are the space in which diverse groups of people, in terms of their class and ethnicity, gender and age, are brought together, with the possibility for interaction and communication (Madanipour, 1995). In other words, the key feature of public spaces is to stimulate and make possible: "the formation of the richest quality of a multi-class, multi-cultural, heterogeneous society" (Carr et al., 1992). According to Lynch (1992) and Rapoport (1977), public spaces are open to all people and their "freely chosen" and "spontaneous" actions. Also, they are used for demonstration of political actions and presentations of civic initiatives (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1993).

However, we should not forget the traditional role of squares, that is, their purpose to stimulate commercial activities. Even today, there is a strong connection between the commercial activities and open spaces with aim to use the benefits from their nature of places filled with people. Moreover, public spaces can positively affect the economic value of the urban land that surrounds them. In today's world, public spaces, with their role as economic generators, are considered as added value and multiplying factors of the speculative development (Thompson, 1998).

Public spaces are closely associated with the public image of the cities to which they belong, often with special significance for the city itself. Related to this, Loukaitou-Sideris (1993) would say that, by their symbolic meaning, public spaces contribute to the sense of continuity of one group or society, which connects individual members of the group or society together (Lynch, 1992; Moughtin, 1999). On the other hand, public spaces, as places in which public art is exhibited, take the function of "beautifiers" of the city (Carr et al., 1992). Besides the oldest and most common forms of public art such as monuments and statues, contemporary public art unites a wide range of methodologies, forms and contents. According to Finkelpearl (2001), "by the 1990s, public art had evolved far beyond the lonely monument on an open plaza. Now public artists might design the entire plaza, create an event to alter the social dynamics of one urban environment, or help to reconstruct a neighbourhood. "

Why Public Spaces are Important?

In the city discourse one of the key questions that need to be considered is exactly the question of importance of **public spaces / squares** and their contribution in terms of preservation and development of social, economic and environmental fabric of the city.

This can be summarised as:

- Provision of attractive living, working and playing environment
- Promotion of healthy lifestyle and wellbeing through active and passive recreation (leisure), in a form of organised activities, walking and social interaction
- Space for outdoor relaxation and pleasure, or just a short escape to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of open space
- Destination for visitors and tourists
- High quality public space attracts business and investment
- Contribution for landscape and visual amenity
- Opportunity for informal education
- Focal point for events and activities
- Opportunity for community preservation and involvement, increased public awareness and upgrading

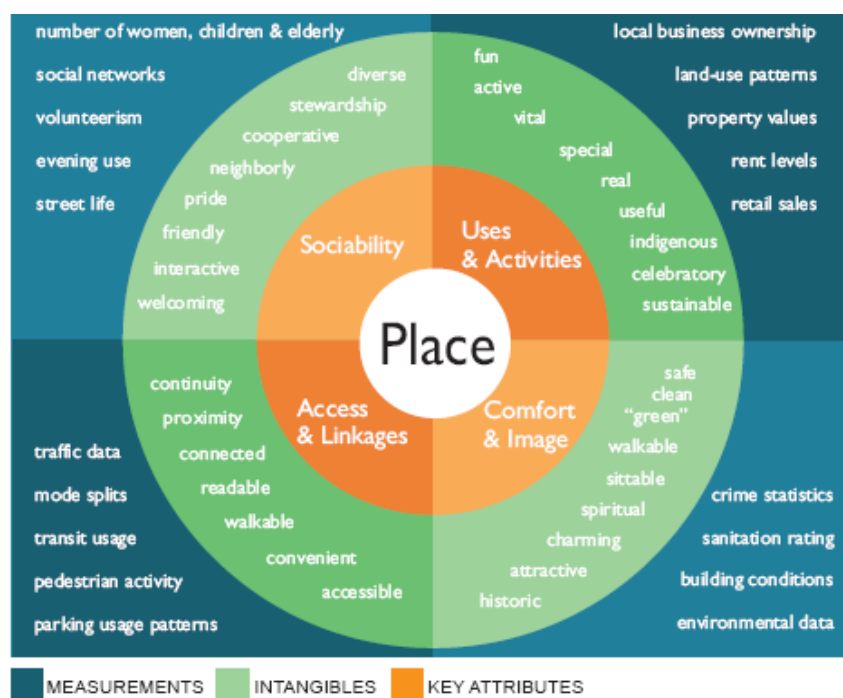


How to Make Great Public Spaces (Squares)?

The questions like: what is a "**great public space**"?, how to create them and which measures and indicators to use to evaluate their effectiveness, open a huge field for assessment, discussions and action. Considering the fundamental roles of these areas, but also in terms of what they are expected to provide for citizens and community as a whole, public spaces can be assessed according to the following criteria (qualities):

- Sociability
- Activities
- Accessibility
- Comfort
- Appearance
- Degree of satisfaction by users

Assessing thousands of open spaces around the world, Project for Public Spaces (PPS), reveals that great places have four key qualities: 1) accessibility: the space is accessible; 2) action: people are involved in the local activities; 3) comfort: the space is comfortable and attractive (it looks good), and finally, 4) sociability: it encourages social communication. PPS develops a diagram, which is to be used as a tool to help people in judging / evaluating the place, of its positive or negative sides:



Placemaking for Communities: Project for Public Spaces (PPS), 2007. (<http://www.pps.org>)

Imagine that the centre circle on the diagram is a specific place that you know: a street corner, a playground, a plaza outside a building. You can evaluate that place according to four criteria in the red ring. In the ring outside these main criteria are a number of **intuitive or qualitative** aspects by which to judge a place; the next outer ring shows the **quantitative aspects** that can be measured by statistics or research.

In order to improve and create attractive urban spaces, there is a need to establish a system for measuring the quality of public spaces. One of the possible ways of achieving this goal is through the application of methodology and guidelines provided by CABE in their User's guide (2007). This document provides guidelines and steps how to assess and evaluate public spaces, including:



- Identification of strengths and weaknesses of the space
- Detection of what is most important to people
- Comparison of different people's views
- Evaluation of how well the space meets everyone's needs
- Stimulation of new ideas for improvements
- Tracking of changes in people's views over time
- Bringing staff and users together in a structured way to discuss the space

Who is Responsible for Public Spaces?

Responsibility for public spaces, in general, and their planning, designing, equipping and organising in particular, is not at all an easy task. There is always a "tension" among (various) interested parties (stakeholders). Sometimes this "tension" is positive and constructive; sometimes it is negative and creates two opposite blocks.

Looking back in the history, it can be seen that many of the most beautiful squares we have today just "happened", spontaneously as a result of people's and communities' needs, but also that many of them "occurred" as a result and under the pressure of rulers, religions, city governments, architects, urbanists and wealthy (and powerful) people. Architect Michel Mossessian¹⁰, states that "public space has always been shaped by and served to represent political power. Public squares have traditionally been a stage for symbolic representations of personal wealth and power, through statues, columns and fountains; or, as has been the model in totalitarian countries, the military might and (strictly controlled) celebration of "the party" by "the people". These were undemocratic actions by those in power, but today is the time of democratic processes and thus the responsibility for public spaces is transferred to all actors in society.

In many cities the responsibility for planning and landscaping of public spaces is given to the urban planners and architects hired by the city governments. However, it is the city officials who negotiate with on-site or nearby land owners, interested investors, citizens and other relevant parties in order to ensure and protect the existing public spaces from possible intrusions, as well as to provide new public spaces to stimulate development of the cities.

Nowadays, citizens, civil society organisations, the independent art scene and other interested parties play a major role in the very creation, shaping, preservation and maintenance of public spaces. However, very often, especially in the neo-totalitarian societies, these players do not recognise their role, and somehow agree for others (mostly the authorities) to take care and act on their behalf. On the other hand, there are number of cases when public as the main stakeholder is deprived of their right to public spaces.

Creating New Models for Public Spaces

New time brings new challenges: how to create new models of public spaces? The main thing is that now we no longer talk about a specific public space, street, square, park, but about finding different spaces that can be used for satisfying basic social, economic, environmental, and maybe even more, cultural needs of citizens. The major focus is on giving a greater role and importance of these spaces and encouraging people to use them. Citizenship today is placed on a pedestal and instead "worshiping" the individual, the future is in emphasising the community and fellowship. Humans are social beings and their progress can only be in the interaction with other people, not in fighting and competing for individual wealth. Individual welfare, put in a collective misery, certainly is as well an individual misery. Thus, the shaping of public spaces is in the essence of building democratic civil society.

¹⁰ The Urban Room, an interview with Michel Mossessian. (<http://www.planonline.ie/page/337>)



Perhaps one of the most attractive new models is that of an "**urban room**", proposed by the architect Michel Mossessian. He develops "a new model for public space ... a space that negotiates between public and private functions, a space for meeting, greeting and exchange. The new public square should equally serve the function of acting as an open space for exchange, but inhabited by members of the public as if it were a room in their own home. As well as encouraging a sense of public ownership, the urban room provides an opportunity to rethink the function of public spaces in relation to their defining architectural elements (landscaping, public art, building facades). It is an invitation to think just as creatively of the void as of the volume."

Regarding the question of creating new models for public spaces, Project for Public Spaces (PPS), based on numerous researches and assessments of hundreds of squares worldwide, offers a set of 10 principles how to ensure creation of great and attractive squares¹¹. These principles are based on the following criteria:

1. Image and Identity
2. Attractions and Destinations
3. Amenities
4. Flexible Design
5. Seasonal Strategy
6. Access
7. The Inner Square & the Outer Square
8. Reaching Out Like an Octopus
9. The Central Role of Management
10. Diverse Funding Sources

In Conclusion

Squares (public spaces) are undoubtedly the main element that unites urban formal and informal actions of many citizens, and are the main generators of city life, affecting social, economic and environmental processes of the city. Historically, they are indivisible from the city, as all major events that deserve to be remembered have taken (and are still taking) place at the squares. On the other hand, the squares are the most impressive and most likable spaces of cities, and travels around the world and the cities can not be envisioned without visiting the main city squares.

However, for citizens, and probably even more for the development of healthy and democratic civic life, besides the well know squares, are also (if not more) important all neighbourhood's, block's and other small local public spaces, where everyday they spend part of their time and interact with others. Preservation of open city spaces and search for new ones are among the key tasks of today's urban living. Ideas for use of public spaces (squares) as generators of renewal, healing and revival of cities are challenges of the 21st century that will undoubtedly provide answers to many questions like: *Why public space is important?*, *Who is responsible for public spaces?*, *How to assess the quality of public spaces?*, and finally, *How to create great public spaces tailored for and by people?*

¹¹ 10 Principles for Successful Squares. (<http://www.pps.org/articles/squaresprinciples>)



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