

Public Space in Traditional and Unusual Forms

Week 1: Introduction to the Class

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How to write an email to your lecturer

Merhaba hocam,

Ben (bölüm adı) öğrencilerinizden (Adiniz) (öğrenci numaranız). Aldığınız Ders.

Konunun içeriği

Geri Dönüşünüzü Bekler, İyi Çalışmalar Dilerim.

Saygılarımla...

Syllabus

- Week 1: Definitions of public and private, first definitions, main themes
- Week 2: Discussion of definitions and themes of public space
- Week 3: Public Space and Public Life
- Week 4: Components of Public Space
- Week 5: Traditional Public Spaces: Public Squares
- Week 6: Traditional Public Spaces: Playgrounds
- Week 7: Streets and Sidewalks
- Week 8: Midterm
- Week 9: New Types of Public Spaces: Privately Owned Public Spaces
- Week 10: New Types of Public Spaces: Parklets
- Week 11: Streets as a New Kind of Public Space: Pedestrian Plazas
- Week 12: Unusual Public Space Design: Examples from the World
- Week 13: Creating Effective Public Spaces
- Week 14: General Overview
- Week 15: Final Exam

What is public space?

“Public space (narrowly defined) relates to all those parts of the built and natural environment where the public has free access. It encompasses: all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/ civic uses; the open spaces and parks; and the ‘public/private’ spaces where public access is unrestricted (at least during daylight hours). It includes the interfaces with key internal and external and private spaces to which the public normally has free access”

“Public space (broadly defined) relates to all those parts of the built and natural environment, public and private, internal and external, urban and rural, where the public have free, although not necessarily unrestricted, access. It encompasses: all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open spaces and parks; the open countryside; the ‘public/private’ spaces both internal and external where public access is welcomed – if controlled – such as private shopping centers or rail and bus stations; and the interiors of key public and civic buildings such as libraries, churches, or town halls”

Carmona et.al (2008)

Streets and Sidewalks



Squares



Parks and Gardens



Spaces Between Buildings



Public space through history

1. European public space from antiquity to renaissance and baroque
2. Into the modern era 1: space types in London
3. Into the modern era 2: space types in New York

Public space through history

European public space from antiquity to renaissance and baroque



The acropolis of Athens

- The design and spatial arrangement of public spaces emphasized proportions, symmetry, and artistic expression, as seen in temples, colonnades, and sculptures.
- This aesthetic focus contributed to a visually stimulating urban environment, enhancing both civic pride and public enjoyment.
- Despite their democratic ethos, access to public spaces was not universally equal.
- Women, slaves, and non-citizens were often excluded from political discourse and had limited engagement in key public spaces.

Public Space in the Ancient Greek Polis

The ancient Greek polis therefore identifies several key themes

- The agora and other civic spaces in Greek cities served multiple roles, including political, religious, social, and economic functions.
- These spaces were not single-purpose but evolved dynamically based on societal needs, reinforcing their adaptive and inclusive nature.
- Public spaces, particularly the agora, functioned as a political stage, where citizens actively engaged in deliberation, decision-making, and public discourse.
- Greek city-states like Athens emphasized the role of public space in fostering participatory governance, aligning with Habermas' concept of the public sphere.
- Markets, artisans, and traders integrated economic activity into public life, making spaces like the agora key commercial hubs.
- The presence of shops, stalls, and trading zones highlights how public space was not purely civic but also central to the economy.
- Public squares and open spaces were not only for governance and commerce but also functioned as social arenas for everyday interactions.
- They provided areas for festivals, gatherings, informal conversations, and knowledge exchange, reinforcing a sense of belonging and communal identity.

The agora was the central public space in ancient Greek city-states, serving as a marketplace, political hub, and social gathering space.

Public space through history

European public space from antiquity to renaissance and baroque



The Imperial Forum in Rome

From Greece to Rome

- Roman cities were far larger than the Greek polis, Ancient Rome itself reaching a population of over one million. The Roman urban fabric was therefore richer and more varied.
- The larger forums contained open, semi-enclosed, and enclosed spaces, while their functions embraced markets, religious meetings, political events, athletics, and informal meetings. They contained piazzas, important civic buildings such as basilicas, and temples to the different Roman gods.
- The basilica was an indoor space that could be used for judicial or commercial purposes. Temples fulfilled a double role, being used as a meeting place (e.g. for the senate in the case of the Temple of Concord), as well as for religious purposes.

Public space through history

European public space from antiquity to renaissance and baroque



Medieval winding street in Assisi

The middle ages onwards

- With the decline of the Roman state, the church became the dominant force in urban life, expanding its influence over the walled settlements left behind. These defensive walls, built to protect against invasions, restricted urban expansion and shaped the organic, compact structure of medieval towns.
- These small settlements continued to contain commercial activity through the dark ages, and when international trade routes reopened, urban growth was accelerated.
- Medieval public space was framed and often controlled by the church. Often the only planned public space was in front of the church to accommodate the congregation entering and leaving, with markets often sharing the same space, and operating on a weekly cycle.
- The church was the center of the settlement and public life, with religious festivals, pilgrimages and processions used to bring the community together. Growth became organic and ad hoc with an emphasis on defense.

Public space through history

European public space from antiquity to renaissance and baroque

Renaissance and baroque



Michelangelo's Renaissance Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome

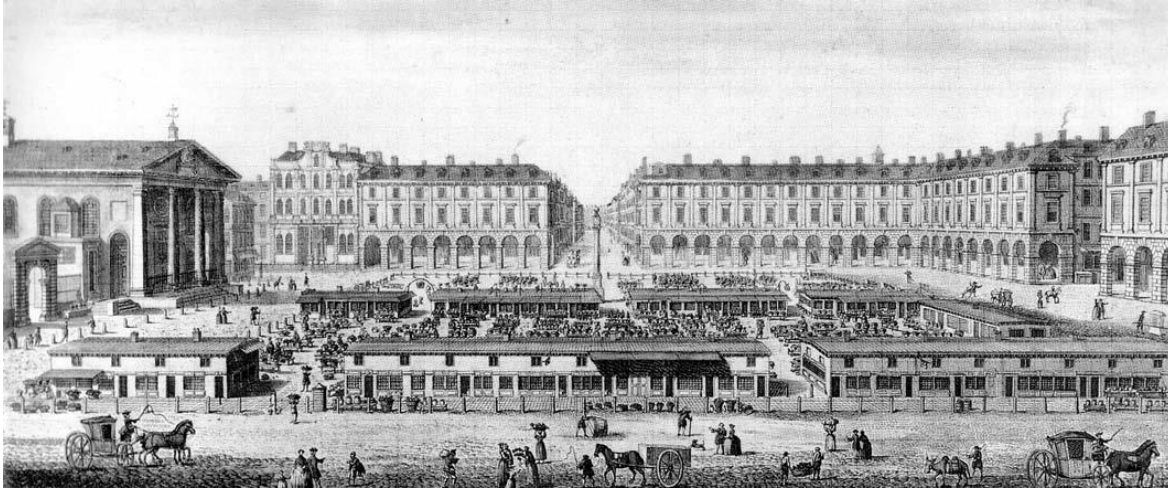


Cheapside, showing a medieval market cross and multifunctional space

- As secular rulers and wealthy elites gained power from the mid-fourteenth century, new piazzas emerged across Italian cities, reflecting a shift away from the church-dominated medieval landscape. These grand public squares were designed to symbolize political authority, cultural prestige, and economic power, aligning with the ideals of classical antiquity.
- The Renaissance piazzas were part of broader urban renewal efforts, where rulers commissioned renowned architects and artists to reshape cities in a manner that showcased order, harmony, and grandeur. This not only beautified the urban environment but also reinforced their own status and control over public life. Central piazzas such as Piazza della Signoria in Florence or Piazza San Marco in Venice became emblematic of this transformation, serving as spaces for ceremonies, political discourse, and artistic display.
- By the fifteenth century, the principles of scale, proportion, and symmetry became fundamental in urban design. Many medieval town centers were redesigned or entirely rebuilt, often through demolition of older structures to create open, monumental spaces. Markets and commercial activity were frequently pushed to the periphery, while sculptures, fountains, and grand facades became defining features of the new civic environment. These piazzas were not just functional but served as expressions of political ideology and artistic ambition.
- The legacy of Renaissance piazzas remains visible in modern urban design, where corporate and governmental power is often reflected in grand public squares, financial districts, and cultural landmarks. The tension between public accessibility and private interests—evident in Renaissance Italy—continues today in debates over gentrification, privatization of public spaces, and the role of aesthetics in urban governance.

Public space through history

Into the modern era 1: space types in London



Covent Garden piazza with church and market, 1751

The English marketplace: commerce and community

- In most historic English towns, the marketplace has long served as the primary public space, playing a vital role in economic, social, and civic life. It was not just a place for buying and selling but a hub for news, gossip, and communal interaction, shaping the rhythm of daily life.
- At the heart of the market stood the market cross, a symbolic and practical focal point, much like the Greek agora—a space where religious, political, and commercial activities converged. Weekly and seasonal markets attracted traders, farmers, craftsmen, and townspeople, reinforcing the marketplace as a site of exchange—not only of goods but also of ideas and social connections.
- Over time, the market cross evolved into market halls and town halls, reflecting the transition from feudal authority to regulated civic governance. As urban corporations, established by royal charters, replaced the influence of lords, the church, and merchant guilds, marketplaces became centers of local self-governance and economic organization.
- These historic marketplaces remain defining elements of English urban identity, influencing the design of modern shopping precincts, high streets, and pedestrianized squares. They highlight a continuity of public space as both an economic engine and a site of communal life, echoing broader global patterns of urban transformation.

Public space through history

Into the modern era 1: space types in London



St Patrick's Day in Trafalgar Square

Civic space: display and public gathering

- Public spaces designed primarily for gathering and display have played a crucial role in shaping urban life. Among them, Trafalgar Square stands out as one of London's most significant civic spaces, evolving over the centuries into both a symbolic and functional hub for public expression.
- Originally designed by Sir Charles Barry, the square was intended as a cultural and artistic landmark, but over time, it became dominated by statues of military and naval heroes, reflecting Britain's imperial past. However, beyond its commemorative function, Trafalgar Square transformed into a key site for public gatherings, protests, celebrations, and demonstrations, cementing its role as a space for collective civic engagement.
- Despite its symbolic openness, Trafalgar Square has been heavily managed and regulated throughout its history, with various measures controlling public behavior, access, and usage. Yet, one of the most significant and often uncontrolled transformations of the space came not from direct management but from the growing dominance of private cars, which increasingly shaped and constrained its urban environment.
- Today, efforts to pedestrianize and reclaim civic spaces like Trafalgar Square highlight the ongoing debate over public access, urban mobility, and the role of historic gathering places in modern cities. Similar trends can be observed worldwide, where civic spaces are redefined to balance heritage, tourism, protest, and everyday public life.

Public space through history

Into the modern era 2: space types in New York



Bryant Park with New York Public Library in the background

Town squares and parks: the Americanization of European culture

- Early North American settlers—Spanish, French, and English—brought distinct public space traditions, which evolved into a uniquely American form. Spanish and French plazas served as marketplaces and gathering spaces, while English settlements introduced common land for civic and militia use.
- As cities rapidly expanded in the 19th century, many town squares disappeared due to industrialization and speculative development. However, this period also saw the rise of planned urban parks, with Central Park (1857) as a landmark example, transforming Manhattan's dense landscape. Smaller parks like Bryant Park also emerged, repurposing urban land for public use.
- Today, town squares and parks continue to shape American cities, blending European influences with modern priorities like green infrastructure and social equity.

Public space through history

Into the modern era 2: space types in New York



The Sony Plaza, public/private space

The Rise of Public/Private Space

- As transportation improved, many New Yorkers moved to the suburbs, while corporate headquarters expanded vertically, shaping the iconic Gotham skyline in the early 20th century. However, as buildings grew taller, street-level spaces became darker and more congested, prompting urban interventions.
- The 1916 Zoning Ordinance aimed to regulate building heights but did not prevent massive podium structures from dominating the streetscape. By 1961, a new zoning resolution introduced Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS)—publicly accessible areas on private property in exchange for increased building heights. This incentivized developers to include plazas, arcades, and public seating areas, enhancing urban space despite remaining under private control.
- Today, POPS continue to shape New York's public realm, raising ongoing debates about accessibility, inclusivity, and the privatization of urban space.

Public space through history

Public Space in Turkey



Taksim Military Barracks



Gezi Park

Historical Development and Contemporary Dynamics

- ***Ottoman Era: Multifunctional Public Spaces***

In Ottoman cities, public space was shaped by bazaars, külliyes (religious complexes), caravanserais, mosque courtyards, and squares, serving multiple functions. Covered markets (Kapalıçarşı) and bedestens were the centers of commerce, while mosque courtyards functioned as semi-public spaces for religious, social, and educational activities. Fountains and open squares facilitated daily interactions and gatherings, making public spaces integral to urban life.

- ***Republican Era: Modernization and Westernization***

Following the establishment of the Republic in 1923, Turkey adopted a modern urban planning approach inspired by European cities. Wide boulevards, parks, and open squares were developed to reflect a modern, secular identity. Taksim Square in Istanbul and Kızılay Square in Ankara became major public gathering spaces, both for daily life and political demonstrations. Projects like Atatürk Forest Farm and urban parks aimed to provide green spaces for public use.

- ***Post-1980: Neoliberal Policies and Privatization***

From the 1980s onwards, neoliberal urban policies led to significant changes in public space. Shopping malls (AVMs) and gated communities started replacing traditional public spaces. The 2013 Gezi Park protests became a turning point in debates over the democratic use and accessibility of public spaces, highlighting growing concerns about privatization and urban transformation.