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Secção 1
Section 1

Invisible interstices: from social buffers to transformative potentials

Ali Madanipour[1]

[1] This paper draws on the author's two earlier papers (Madanipour 2021a and 2021b).

Espaço Público
Public Space
1ª edição - artigo número 2
1st edition - article number 2
https://doi.org/10.34626/esp.v1i1.1409

The city is a complex world of animate beings and inanimate objects. To live in the city, and to manage and transform it, a thorough knowledge of the urban environment and the workings of the city is needed. This knowledge is developed by professionals through scientific methods, and by citizens through the course of living in the city. As built environment professionals and as citizens, we may think that we know our city, at least the parts that we are engaged with, work on, and visit every day. In this paper, my aim is to draw attention to the many places that remain invisible and unknown, even when they are in front of our eyes. This invisibility, I argue, is sometimes implicit in, and contributes to, a particular social order through the mechanisms of placing and distancing. At the same time, invisible places have transformative potentials for the future of the city.

Neglected gaps

The practices of urban management and transformation have been historically based on the claim that these practitioners know the city and are able to shape it in the desirable direction. The boundaries of land and property are drawn carefully, information about all activities and movements are collected, needs are assessed, the future of the city is projected, and instructions about how to create that future are produced. This was best reflected in the comprehensive planning model, whereby planners and designers would strive to know everything about the city, and to plan for every possible activity and use of space in the city for a foreseeable future. Comprehensive plans typically were accompanied by detailed studies about the conditions of the city, based on large surveys, historical analysis, and field investigations (Hall, 1988).

The first limit to this approach was the gap between information and urban reality, whereby no amount of data could capture the city in its entirety. It is never possible to be fully comprehensive in data collection, as the life of the city is far more complex than being represented in a data set. Nevertheless, even with the demise of comprehensive planning, this desire for comprehensive knowledge and control has continued and taken new forms, especially now that digital technologies have facilitated the collection and management of data at unprecedented and unimaginable scales and speeds. But even here, the limits are obvious, leaving many parts of urban life invisible to the comprehensive survey and the big data.

In addition to the limitation in the type and extent of data, there is a limitation in the perspective with which data is collected and interpreted. Despite the claims to scientific expertise, critics have argued that this knowledge of the city has been partial, insensitive, or even biased about social needs, especially of the disadvantaged social groups (Gans, 1968). It was argued that such an approach is based on abstract concepts of the professionals, rather than on the ways in which the city is perceived and lived by its inhabitants (Lefebvre, 1991). Information and analysis were never complete, impartial, or sensitive to the qualitative aspects of life in the city. As it is widely known, identifying something as a problem is the most important step in finding a solution for that problem (Cullingworth & Caves, 2013). If something has not been flagged as a problem, it may never become part of a plan.

https://doi.org/10.34626/esp.v1i1.1409

Beyond the differences in perspective, and gaps in knowledge, that would render invisible some aspects of social life, and would ignore some social problems, there has always been a gap between information and intention, between knowledge of the existing situation and the plan for the future. Information and analysis do not determine the following action, but provide a platform for developing options to act, which would be followed by a choice. The step from knowledge to plan, therefore, is based on the positions and dispositions of those who have the power to make the choice. With the same set of information and analysis, different decision makers may come up with different plans and policies, as evidenced by how the opposing politicians tend to interpret the same set of statistics to their own benefit. There are different possible bridges to cross the gap between knowledge and plan, and many of them remain unexplored, dismissed as irrelevant, or ignored as unimportant. This would make invisible the possible alternative responses to a problem, at least to the outsiders but also to the decision makers.

The next gap that generates invisibility is the gap between intention and reality, between plan and action. Comprehensive planning was a fixed approach to temporality and potentiality, in which all the potential uses of the city were predicted and the future of the city was envisaged and determined for a set period. However, major structural social and economic changes challenged this ambition, showing how the unpredictable course of events can undermine this desire for identifying and controlling the future. Intentions may remain on paper, and those that do get implemented may be transformed in the process into something completely different. The unruliness of temporality and the endless potentialities of the city could not be easily tamed, resulting in a cartography that is not easily reduced to the four functions of the Athens Charter, or to comprehensive land use plans, or to digital predictions based on big data.

The sequence of collection and interpretation of data, developing plans, and implementing them may be based on a vision of clarity and predictability, in which every space in the city is defined for a specific function, creating a city characterized by visibility and 'legibility' (Lynch, 1960). However, the gaps between these stages, in the extent and perspective of knowledge, between knowledge and plan, and between plan and urban reality leave many spaces invisible. These spaces are ignored and bypassed in the process of planning, where the focus of attention has been placed at a higher level of resolution, leaving the details ambiguous and underdeveloped. They may be a by-product of the development process, where the speed of development leaves interstices that are ignored or forgotten. They may also be a result of the large-scale decline of the city in various waves of economic crises, whereby new gaps emerge through abandonment and loss of interest and attention. Beyond the spaces that are assigned with clear functions and measurable characteristics, there are many places that fall in between, refusing to be easily classifiable. The urban processes may not be easily reined in by the experts, leaving cities that are full of ambiguous places.

These ambiguous spaces are the outcomes of the processes of urban change, which unfold through time, through a lifespan that goes beyond all forms of planning and design.

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Planned spaces may survive for decades and even centuries, and even continue largely in their original form, but they are transformed through new physical additions and alterations, and new forms of social activities, thereby taking on new meanings and formations. Streets and major roads may remain intact for centuries, but their character and conditions may change at shorter timespans, hiding the memories of the place (Benevolo, 1980; Morris, 1994). Land and property ownership may fix the spatial boundaries for generations, but there may be spaces between them with unknown or absent owners. The result of these long and short processes of change leaves some corners as outside the market, beyond the attention of the owner, forgotten by city authorities and planners.

Every city, even the most prosperous and well managed, has many such forgotten corners, where responsibility for their care has fallen between the cracks of the society, between the public authorities, private companies, and citizens, where no organization or individual feels in charge or responsible for their upkeep. Invisible places may be neglected places, often falling into the black hole of ambiguous responsibility. It is not clear who owns or responsible for a forgotten corner, and no one seems to care for or pay any attention to it. It is the realm of ambiguity between different private owners, between the public and private control, and between different offices of public authorities. Owners of private land would pay much attention to their own spaces, but they expect the public authorities to maintain what lies beyond their front door. In many cities, private glamour coincides with public squalor, which reflects the growing social inequality and the continuous incompetence or inattention of the public authorities. The responsibility for a public space may fall on different departments of a municipality, as each is charged with one aspect of the space, and no one holds an overall responsibility for managing it. The space of an ordinary street may be run by a dozen, uncoordinated departments, each engaged in its own preoccupations. From any single perspective, the space may simply be assumed to come under the responsibility of someone else.

Mid-twentieth century public housing schemes tended to include large public open spaces, driven by generous open space standards, and justified by a commitment towards providing good quality housing for all. Many such projects proudly showed their open spaces as happy and prosperous places for a population that looked to a brighter future. These schemes, however, did not deliver their promised happiness, as the early critical reactions from the 1960s onwards showed (Jacobs, 1961; Gans, 1968). Rather than supporting local communities, they were accused of dismantling them, giving way to alienating high rise buildings and fast-moving highways. These developments generated vast car parks, unpleasant underpasses, and underused bridges, with many forgotten or unattended spaces in between them.

Deindustrialization that was aligned with the decline of the welfare state and the rise of neoliberal globalization, however, decimated the economic rationale of these housing areas, leaving large gaps in working and living spaces. The generous spaces that were provided by the social housing schemes, which followed the instructions of the modernist manifesto about the necessity of light and

https://doi.org/10.34626/esp.v1i1.1409

open space for health and recreation, became a serious problem to solve. Following the decline of their social and economic status, public authorities' negligence, and rising social inequality, these spaces could become wastelands, places of crime and vulnerability, places to avoid. In many instances, the solution was sought in subdividing, privatizing and removing them from circulation. Open spaces may shrink or be abandoned, while the social gap between these neighbourhoods and the other parts of the city grows. While the modernist reorganization of cities created new invisible interstices, the decline of modernism led to the creation of invisibility and neglect in highly designed places, expanding the range and size of neglected in-between spaces.

In-between spaces may also be the result of the restless urban development that leaves many spatial gaps on the way. This is particularly visible in the rapidly developing cities of the global south, where under-controlled urban development leaves many gaps on the way. This is also visible in urban sprawl everywhere, which has been going on for more than a century and half. As daily travel has stretched to longer distances, houses have been built further away and farther apart, leaving large holes between them. Public space in suburban areas became a rare occurrence and an anomaly, only limited to the roads for cars. Open spaces were mainly private, exclusive spaces and suburban shopping malls offered only the semblance of the social spaces that were lost.

Looking without seeing

The ambiguity and invisibility of these spaces is also shaped through the experiences of urban populations. In addition to the structural processes that leave some spaces empty and ambiguous, the course of life in the city also creates blind spots and invisible places, where people look at but do not see, where they go through but do not notice them. Beyond the view from above, the cartographic bird's eye view that is associated with spatial management and development, spaces are largely experienced at a street level by those who inhabit and pass through the city. Life in the city may be diverse and stimulating, which may appear to an outsider as random and chaotic. However, much of urban life is thoroughly structured, and made possible, by habits and routines, whereby the attention of the urban dweller is focused on some encounters and experiences, while the rest of objects and people are treated as a background, seen through the lens of habit. The experience of travelling through the city demonstrates the habitual nature of urban life, where the enormous overload of information, that is experienced even in a short urban trip, is managed by reducing the level of sensitivity and relying on a kind of autopilot in dealing with the complexities of the environment.

Habits are developed both at the personal and social levels. The development of new social habits in society has been well recorded, whereby new arrangements emerge in which some forms of thinking and behaving are spread as established social habits (Thomas, 2020; Elias, 1978). At the personal level, habits are developed through the course of life, becoming a person's 'second nature', whereby they act without thinking, and particular patterns of thinking and behaving become integral parts of their character (Aristotle, 1991, Problems, iv: 26; Bourdieu, 2000). The life of the city is largely shaped by

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these personal and social habits, on which the urban populations rely so as to be able to cope with the complexity of the urban life. Through these habits, they try to deal with any randomness and spontaneity in the city.

Relying on habit and reducing sensitivity is a defensive mechanism by the urban inhabitants, protecting them from sensory overload, adopting an attitude of indifference that makes it possible to cope with the complexities of metropolitan life (Simmel, 1950). Routines and habits provide a platform on which the autopilot operates, whereby the urban traveller may take every step of the journey without much attention to the surrounding environment. The passage of every single individual through the crowded pavements and public transport vehicles shows the force of reduced sensitivity and the prevalence of habit. In this blasé attitude, which Simmel wrote about, and in our limited power of control over the environment around us, we become adapted to what we see and experience, habitually a passive recipient of sense data, which by necessity is reduced in scale and intensity. In this loss of sensitivity, many places, circumstances, and events become invisible, taken for granted as common sense or considered as banal and unimportant. Engagement with the urban environment becomes limited to an ephemeral visual contact, which glances over thousands of people and objects in any urban trip, without really seeing them.

Even this disengaged ephemeral experience has now been cut back, edited out through continuous engagement with the screen of our mobile phones. The eyes in the city no longer search for new people and objects, as novelty is sought in a digital screen, a window into another world that is not here and now. Before the arrival of these devices, the urban travellers had already limited their engagement with each other, which appeared disheartening to the observers of the nineteenth century streets of London (Engels, 1993). Now, urban travellers look to their handheld device, not only to avoid engaging with the world around them, but also to go back to a world that is detached from here and now. Experiencing the urban space would be led by not looking and not seeing. A generation of digital flaneurs has replaced the walking flaneurs.

The figure of flaneur was celebrated in the nineteenth century as someone who would walk around the city, and who could see and experience the urban environment directly and intensely from a touching distance. This was in itself a detached relationship with the environment, reduced to a visual contact. The introduction of photographic technology was thought to have deepened this visual intensity, as the camera opened up the 'hidden details of familiar objects' into a new way of seeing and analysing (Benjamin, 1969: 229). The closed and familiar world of streets, offices, railway stations and factories were prisons that were burst asunder by the 'dynamite of the tenth of a second' that the film provided (ibid). With digital technology, this capacity has been maximized, as now we take endless photos and videos of the world around us. However, the intensity of recording the environment does not produce more visibility, or more sensitivity to the environment's details and meanings, as much of this visual recording is self-referenced, rather than a scrutiny into the world. Despite our phenomenal capacity to make visual records of

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the environment, much of this environment remains invisible.

Rather than habitual indifference, alternative ways of seeing can bring these interstices back to life. For young children, the world is completely new, full of people and places to explore and discover, and so they are always more attentive to the details of their surrounding environments, even helping their parents to discover their world with fresh eyes. As children grow up, the scale of their attention grows with them, but many details fade out, incorporated into habituality, buried in the operating mechanism of the autopilot, becoming invisible. They are places that we go through or avoid as a matter of routine, perhaps thinking about the destination rather than the path and what happens to lie on the side-line.

Invisible places are forgotten places; that is, interstices are both spatial and temporal. They are buried in the memories of the urban dwellers as temporal interstices. A place might have been interesting for a population, when it was first developed, or first encountered, but it loses its memories and freshness. They may be the unnoticed pauses in a process, like the breathing spaces and hesitations in conversation, when the speakers may take a moment to find the next word or sentence, trying to find their way in the maze of urban streets. Even when treated as invisible, banal, unremarkable, and contextual, these interstitial spacetimes are not unimportant, but their importance has been normalized and internalized, or ignored, hidden, and forgotten. Through the force of our habit, or through complex social processes, they have become invisible and yet inseparable parts of social life. They play important roles both in (re)producing a particular social order, and in having the potential for changing that order.

Placing and distancing

These forgotten corners may be seen as the victims of neglect, as the casualties of the urban development process, fallen into the cracks of a restless city. From another perspective, however, their neglect and ambiguity are embedded in the power relations that shape the city. They perform the role of social buffers, as means of allocation and separation, as instruments of 'placing' and 'distancing' that reflect and reproduce hierarchical and diversified social orders. At the same time, these ambiguous spaces could also be the spaces of emancipation and reconnection, hidden assets with potentialities for improving the conditions of urban life (Madanipour, 2021a; 2021b). They may act as barriers between social groups and therefore creating and maintaining a particular social order, but they also have the potential to act as the hinges that could reconnect the urban fragments.

The practices of 'placing' and 'distancing' play an important role in urban development. In turn, the urban development process is an integral part of a social order, reflecting and reproducing that order. Placing and distancing are the spatial instruments of developing that hierarchical and diversified social order, allocating specific places in the city to social groups, while creating and maintaining a safe distance between them. Placing occurs through the process of clustering, which brings similar activities and groups together, through the operations of the market, through land use policies, or through social

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networks and individual decisions. When a cluster of similarity is created, it generates its own dynamic and maintains its continuity through time. The existence and operations of these functional clusters have long been studied by economic, social, and spatial analysis (O'Sullivan, 2019; Fujita *et al.*, 1999; Dicken & Lloyd, 1990). In social terms, these clusters of similarity in hierarchical society become the unequal neighbourhoods in the city, which are always pregnant with explosive potential, as occasional riots and permanent tensions have shown.

Meanwhile, the idea of maintaining distinctive neighbourhoods is one of the fundamental orthodoxies of modern urban design, as it is thought to regain the lost sense of community and maintain a feeling of identity and psychological comfort for its inhabitant (Mumford, 1954; Lynch, 1960; Schubert, 2000). A long line of humanistic critics has praised the warmth and meaningfulness of the 'place' versus the coldness and abstractness of the space (Tuan, 1977). The development industry claims to make 'places', rather than houses or roads. The professional architects and planners claim to be 'place' makers. The distinction between place and space has long been known (Čapek, 1976). By now, the value of 'place' is being taken for granted, becoming a new orthodoxy. The idea of distinctive places, however, has also been criticized for running the risk of exacerbating social strife (Sennett, 1995).

The processes of social exclusion are shaped through placing and distancing, which allocate places to social groups in a hierarchy and keep them apart. The processes of social exclusion are simultaneously political, economic, and cultural, limiting access to resources, decision making powers, and shared narratives. When combined, these limitations generate acute forms of disadvantage, which find expression in deprived neighbourhoods and marginalized places (Madanipour, 2020a). Public policy and market operations work towards placing the elements of the social hierarchy into their 'appropriate' places, hence maintaining their divide. This process of 'placing' is supplemented and sustained by a process of 'distancing', which keeps the disadvantaged groups apart from the others. This is often seen in areas that are trapped behind railway lines, on the other side of waterways, behind motorways, on the edge of residential areas, in inaccessible topographies, next to undesirable land uses, all expressions of social marginalization that have found spatial form in distancing. Interstices are among the most powerful tools of distancing, ensuring that social hierarchies are created and upheld.

Different clusters are separated from each other through distancing. While some methods of distancing articulate the urban environment in explicit forms, such as locating a green space between two groups, or separating them by roads and rivers, some places are turned into unidentifiable socio-spatial gaps. In this way, many places are ignored, neglected, abandoned, or kept empty, serving as social buffers that keep the social groups apart, becoming invisible places that escape attention and yet perform an important role. In their extreme physical forms, they turn into walls and gates, protected by barbed wires and firearms, as displayed in harshly unequal cities of the world. More often, they are expressed in spatial distance between the clusters of similarity, defining a social geography of difference and inequality that, once established, survives for long. Despite their

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invisibility, and perhaps because of this invisibility, in-between spaces play an active role in the way a society is organized and its social order created and maintained.

From exclusion to inclusion

In-between spaces express the interaction of social forces, showing the power of one side over the other, or withdrawal of all sides from engagement, leaving a buffer between them, which resembles a peaceful coexistence. They may be invisible, but they may act like a sharp dividing line that, once drawn, creates a separation between its two sides. The line becomes a border; drawing it is an exertion of power, an act of fragmentation and division that removes the unity of space that existed before. At the same time, borderlands are the places of meeting and mingling, where the two sides can come together by crossing the line that separates them. In-between spaces can both separate and unite, a condition of ambiguity that is an essential ingredient of social life.

A line is an abstract expression of complex relations, at once a connection that links a series of points to each other, a barrier that separates one side from the other, but also the possibility of connecting its two sides through a bridge. The question is: who is drawing that line and on what basis? Such exertion of power includes some and excludes others. It can generate winners and losers, so the question is how this boundary was set, by whom, for what and on what basis. A line may not be drawn by a single agent, as it shows the outcome of a struggle, an interaction, an agreement or conflict between two or more parties.

The role of the boundary is to define and delineate various territories, and to communicate it through signs that are visible to others. Invisible places, however, are not clearly signposted; they are just ignored, without any notification. They may function like an invisible borderline that separates spaces and has the potential to connect them at the same time. The in-between space can be a basis for conflict, but it can also be a basis for peace, opening a new space of possibility for change. But when one side is fully excluded from any form of power to negotiate, it ends up without a boundary, completely exposed. The homeless find a refuge in the in-between spaces, where the ambiguity of power and interest provides a precarious existential space for them.

The invisible line introduces, at once, a process of 'placing' and 'distancing'. It gives shape to the space by 'placing' objects, activities, and groups into particular locations, thereby creating a sense of definition and identity for them. At the same time, it ensures 'distancing', separating groups and activities from each other. It is a tool of ordering and constructing space, operating in and contributing to the constitution of stratified and diversified societies. The ambiguous in-between spaces, together with sharp boundary lines, find spatial expression in a wall, an administrative boundary, a national border. They can also become an open space, a moat, a street, a ruin, a leftover, a place that no one sees even when they look. Even the well-articulated squares and parks can become points on this line: elements of separation and fragmentation, acting as buffer zones that keep the distances between unequal social groups. They can also be places of offering a platform

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for co-presence and constructing new possibilities of sociability and coexistence.

Invisible spaces of neglect and habit can turn into articulated public spaces that are visible and active. In this way, the invisible becomes visible, and it becomes imbued with a positive social role. Rather than spaces of absence, neglect, and avoidance, they become the spaces of presence and action, turning a negative character into a positive one. Public open spaces have the potential to transform some aspects of this socio-spatial organization, transcending the practices of placing and distancing. Rather than buffer zones that separate unequal social groups, they can be the meeting zones that are inviting and accessible to different groups. Public open spaces are historically the places of innovation and experimentation, free expression, protests and public debates, political events and cultural performance. They are the places of unplanned events, chance encounters, and temporary activities. They are the places of economic, political, and cultural power on display. Public institutions such as local libraries, community centres, parks, sports fields, and playgrounds can trigger spatial transformation and social development, acting as essential ingredients of democratic society. However, with dwindling public budgets and the metamorphosis of public authorities into pseudo-entrepreneurs, the ability and willingness of investing in these public institutions have declined.

However, in pursuit of the positive role of in-between spaces, two fallacies should be avoided: that social problems can be solved through co-presence in space and through spatial transformation. In the first fallacy, we may appear to envisage that a vibrant street life reflects a happy society. Attractive images of busy public spaces are among the standard tools of urban design and planning schemes. However, underneath the image of a busy street, there may be a highly unequal society suffering from deep social problems. How can this mismatch between an inclusive appearance and an exclusive existence be evaluated? The answer is that it finds a positive value when compared to worse conditions of social segregation and strife. We can observe societies in which extreme social segregation has shaped the urban life, where different socio-economic groups live in completely separate worlds, as they can never be together in the same space. In such a society, the possibility of different groups being present in the same space is an important step forward towards a degree of inclusiveness. It would not address the structural problem of inequality, but it could provide some of the basic conditions of access to the city (Lefebvre, 1991). The possibility of co-presence is a first step in confronting social segregation and inequality (Madanipour, 2020b).

In relation to the second fallacy, there have been longstanding debates about the role of physical space in social arrangements. The modernist discourse claimed to be able to solve social problems by spatial transformation, as famously expressed by Le Corbusier: architecture or revolution. The availability of knowledge (Dewey, 1946) and technology (Giedion, 1967) was thought to be sufficient for confronting the ills of society. In response, when the limits of the postwar modernist urban transformation became known, critics argued against physical determinism, whereby society cannot be changed through spatial change. Nevertheless, this is the road that

many urban decision makers still follow today, investing in spatial development in the hope that this would generate economic activity and prosperity. While the significance of spatial arrangements in social ordering cannot be dismissed, they are only a part of a vast array of forces that create and maintain that order. Invisible interstices emerge through the collision of these forces, and any creative use of these in-between spaces would have to be aligned with change in these forces.

Investment in people is often separated from investment in places, a split that would inevitably lead to gentrification. The mid-twentieth century, welfare-state improvement schemes deployed spatial improvement as a means of social support and development. But when the link between the spatial and the social was broken in the following neoliberal period, investment in one is inevitably disjointed from investment in the other. The discovery of the potential of in-between spaces may be used in a process of spatial improvement, bringing back to life that which was wasted and ignored. But this should also include those social assets that are being ignored and dismissed as unimportant. Without a linkage, spatial upgrading of in-between spaces may merely become an engine of gentrification, displacing one group with a higher income and status group, who can benefit from the fruits of the newly developed spaces.

There is a historical link between the public open space and retail. Since ancient times, market squares have combined the economic and social life of the city, embodying a close relationship between society and space that has continued to this day. Technological developments and economic restructuring, however, have had significant impacts on this link. Globalization and deindustrialization have changed the foundations of life and economy in former industrial cities, leaving many neglected gaps and abandoned interstices that, when regenerated, are filled with entertainment and retail. The character of the public space, which was influenced by the adjacent retail activities, has found a particular significance, now shaped increasingly at the service of a consumerist vision of society. Investment in public space dilutes its political and cultural dimensions so that its economic potentials can be magnified. For many regeneration projects, the role of the public space is limited to offering an inviting gateway into retail spaces and helping achieve a rise in the value of land and property.

When the city is primarily developed by globalized private investment, the character of the city, which was expressed in its public spaces, can no longer remain the same. Long term commitment of local merchants and industrialists, which could partly be expressed in local public spaces and institutions, gives way to a search for speedy return for distant shareholders. The invisible spaces of the interstices become visible, as an asset to be drawn into this logic of urban development. The only condition for coming alive is that they find an appropriate place in the operations of the market, from placelessness into the processes of placing and distancing.

Large scale supermarkets were already a threat to the marriage of public space and retail, but the consumerist model of retail-led urban regeneration was hit by the global financial crisis, which left many spaces empty. More importantly, it has been hit by the digitization of retail, which has been accelerated by the global pandemic, which emptied the

https://doi.org/10.34626/esp.v1i1.1409

open spaces and transferred the link between retail and public space to online transactions. The regeneration efforts of the last decades had attempted to set a new pattern of supply and demand for land and property that would utilize the in-between spaces in new ways, bringing them to the market as assets and engines of economic development. The recent economic and health crises have opened up new gaps and holes. Urban development, however, is a long process. These new leftover spaces may offer new possibilities for different, alternative uses that could benefit local communities.

Conclusion

The urban development and management processes are historically based on trying to know the city in its entirety and allocate appropriate functions to every possible space. However, the inherent limits of this attempt, and structural changes in the urban economy and society, seem to have left many places invisible as forgotten corners. Invisibility is also generated through the force of habit and routine, whereby places are no longer noticed by the urban populations. However, the invisibility of some urban spaces is not merely a result of neglect, but also an inherent part of urban social structuring, which is conducted through the processes of placing and distancing. These instruments of social sorting and structuring create places for social groups and keep them apart. The practice of distancing partly relies on the existence of interstices and forgotten corners, which may act as social buffers between different groups. At the same time, these spaces are reservoirs of possibility for the future of the city.

These spaces do not cause social transformation but can be an integral part of inclusionary social practices. Moreover, while providing the possibility of co-presence is a necessary condition for reducing spatial distances, it needs to be accompanied by other measures to help reduce social distances. In-between spaces are social assets that can be used and reused in completely different ways, as the history of cities has shown. Democratic public spaces are characterized by being open and accessible, which is a necessary condition for an inclusive society, confronting the pressures for placing and distancing that generate and maintain social inequality.

https://doi.org/10.34626/esp.v1i1.1409

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