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SGEL36, VT 2022

LUND

UNIVERSITY

Lived and Planned Public Space

A new look at people's relation to public spaces, their scriptedness and the debate on good/bad public space

Abstract

What is 'bad' public space? Public spaces have been conceptualized as integral to urban realities. It is virtually impossible to imagine a city, town, village, or any other concentrated settlement without them. It can thus be argued that public spaces are an intrinsic part of cities to the point that a city is *not really* a city without its public spaces. It is argued that cities need high-quality public spaces however, what is meant by good/bad is not apparent. The aim is thus to understand what is meant by 'bad' and how people in urban realities relate to public spaces by problematizing the concept pair good/bad public spaces. Two methods were applied: semi-structured observation and reading the landscape. The findings were that there is little explicit treatment of 'bad' public spaces and consensus within cultural geography. People can devise five strategies to re-negotiate public spaces in order to make them usable from the perspective of the city dweller. In accordance with the findings, both practical and theoretical implications were concluded. These findings indicate that cultural geography might need to rethink the conceptualisation of good/bad public space and that planning needs to be privy to a reconceptualization as this affects urban living.

Keywords: Public space, intended use, people, alternative use, spatial quality

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1 Introduction

1.1 Presentation

What is 'bad' public space? The reader might think of a couple examples in their local environment upon reading this. Perhaps it is a small park where the benches are too close together and no one ever seems to visit, an ugly playground with only one swing-set, or the street corner which is too narrow to go side-by-side with your friend. Public spaces clearly matter, but does the same go for every public space – even the 'bad' ones? What makes these 'bad' public spaces 'bad'?

Public spaces have consistently been conceptualized as integral to urban realities. It is virtually impossible to imagine a city, town, village, or any other concentrated settlement of people without them. It can thus be argued that public spaces are an intrinsic part of cities to the point that a city is *not really* a city without its public spaces (Coelho, 2014). Public spaces importance to urban realities and the people in urban environments has given rise to arguments about the quality of our cities' public spaces. It is said that a successful public space can enhance livability on a number of accounts (Mehaffy, Elmlund & Farell, 2018) and consequently, policy papers, academics, and professionals argue that we should make more of them to improve life quality. What constitutes a good public space has hence become a discussion within the fields of cultural geography and planning studies. The discussions have resulted in varying ideals and best practices when constructing and shaping public spaces. An overarching focus within planning rationale, shaped by academics or the people in charge of planning, has been paid to this end. However, no clear definition of bad public spaces has been outlined. Thus, there is a need to analyze what is meant by 'bad' public space and how this inflects on the current understanding of what constitutes 'good' public space. There is furthermore little nuance in the narrative of how people in cities relate to these bad public spaces, in general.

1.2 Literature review

Public spaces are a central concept within cultural geography. Attention paid to them are on the rise, the concept has gained traction within academic circles. The subject has a high actuality. The idea that public spaces are indispensable key features of urban realities has been termed the new urban agenda or the public space agenda (Mehaffy, Elmlund & Farell, 2019 & Mitchell, 2017:504-507). The increasing attention to public spaces in cities is a response to the idea of de-urbanisation, meaning that cities are becoming less urban as social life retreats from public spaces creating underused public spaces in the process or that urban public space quality is declining at a rate which is alarming cultural geographers, meaning that unsuccessful urban public spaces are driving people away from cities (Haas & Mehaffy, 2019 & Antoniou, et. al. 2019). The need for revitalisation to re-populate urban public spaces by improving engagement and activity has, in regards to this, become a priority (Antoniou, et.al., 2019:89-92). There is a lack, or undersupply, of high-quality public spaces in urbanities (Spignardi, 2020). Within the debate, it is common to distinguish the successful and the un-successful public spaces. To theorize as to why some public spaces fail, what makes them bad (Project for Public Spaces, 2009). Traditional and officially planned public spaces are being dismantled or underused and this is perceived as a problem within cultural geography (Luger & Lees, 2020:82) and the new urban agenda is a response to this. The agenda is thus one of re-urbanisation through revitalizing public spaces by making better urban public spaces (Haas & Mehaffy, 2019).

Bad public space, as such, has not been treated within cultural geography under the explicit guise of 'bad' public space. However, there are popular-scientific publications which do use terms in line with this, such as 'failed' or 'unsuccessful' (Project for Public Spaces, 2009, 2005, n.d). A view is thus presented in which cultural geography, planning studies, and urban design are unified in the definition or criteria of what should denote a good or bad public space. This communicated coherency is not grounded in theoretical or otherwise academic publications.

1.3 Aims and research questions

This paper is based in a single aim. The aim is to understand how people in urban realities, city dwellers, relate to scripted public spaces by problematizing the concept pair good/bad public spaces. This is thus a study in ways in which people who visit public spaces *make* planned urban public spaces *serve new or alternative purposes,* ways in which the users renegotiate them. The research is to understand what strategies people devise to use public spaces which might be ill-fitted to their way of contemporary everyday life in cities. How people interact with their surroundings, spatial practices, to give meaning and use-value to these spaces through their way of using them. By researching in which ways public spaces are used and transformed to fulfill purposes in line with the users' own contemporary urban everyday life the role of bad public spaces can furthermore be understood.

Cultural geography's understanding of quality of public space should reflect the urban realities around us. Overall, a greater and reframed understanding of what position and role bad public space generates implications, both in a practical view *and* academically. In short, this is a critical and normative research where I problematize the way that bad/good public spaces are conceptualized within the academic literature to establish a more reflective usage of the concept pair. This will be done in accordance with my findings of how people renegotiate scripted public space. Relevance is then also to inform the planning profession about the built environment in our cites and, centrally, give nuance to the relation between people who live and use public spaces and the public spaces themselves.

The research questions are thus as follows:
- How is 'bad public space characterized within cultural geography and planning theory?
- How do people re-negotiate and navigate public spaces to fit with the user's current lifestyles?

1.4 Theoretical framework

The research approach is one of critical urban geography. The theoretical framework that underpins this thesis is influenced and draws upon the concept of the ludic city. In order to understand public space and its use from a perspective which focuses on the creativity and spontaneity with which people relate to the space around them, this idea is used. In short, how people re-negotiate and navigate spaces in ways that are beyond the scope of functions intended by formal planning process of public spaces. This is thus a contrast to the instrumental and rationalist functionality which public spaces are shaped through (Stevens, 2007). Further, the idea of loose space will be applied to highlight parallels between use and space. How a space is used is dependent on the shape of it and thus what possibilities the user identifies within the physical environment – what is perceived to be doable. This will be

applied to understand appropriation and re-shaping of public spaces in accordance with the user's perceived needs and wants.

1.5 Methodology

Briefly put, this research is normative, and a mix between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Two methods have been applied: semi-structured observation and reading the landscape. The research questions will be answered through these methods by generating and analysing material, some primary and some secondary, depending on the nature of the question, see figure 1.1.
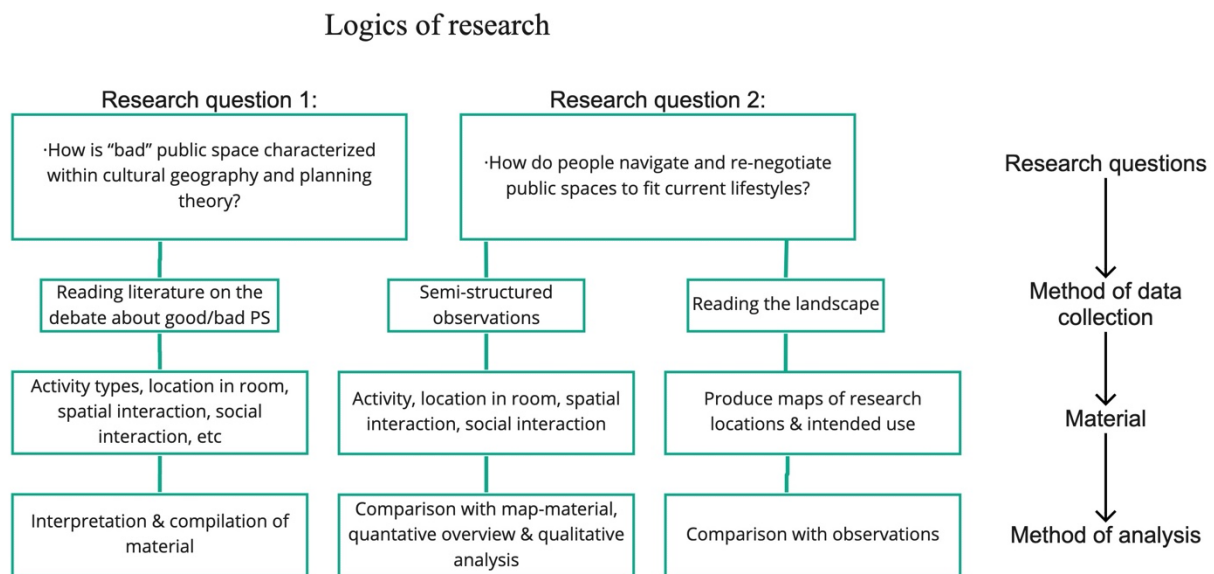
Figure 1.1 Logics of research
A description of logics of research for this thesis, how the research questions will be answered. Marte Nilsen, 2022

1.6 Delimitations

The part of this study on how bad public spaces are used is situated in Lund. The geographical scope was chosen because Lund is a city with a developed planning department and a very formal planning process which have generated highly scripted public spaces. Research was undertaken in a state of peace and within a Scandinavian context which can have implications for the generalizability of the result as public space and its definition or perceived purposes is socio-culturally and economically dependent (Panjaitan, et.al., 2020). That said, the activities observed are not inherent to any geography and the result could thus be applicable to other geographies. Further, this study is also limited in its spatial scope to two public spaces, these are *Kraftstorg* and the gardens in *Stadsparken*, (see figure 3.1). In short, these locations were picked because they are located centrally, tend to be filled with people, and are highly scripted in their form. The centrality within the street-web makes these places highly used as parts of transport routes which is an interesting context to understand actual use and their strict planning makes them rigid in a way that elevates the research on how people relate to public spaces in ways which contest the built environment, making reappropriation appear more clearly. The fact that they are frequently visited was important to facilitate the research method of semi-structured observations and the subsequent collection of data. The functional

scope is on activities and their relation to the physical environments in which they are carried out. As this study is not interested in mobility or transportation but rather actual use of the spaces and their elements, particularly the re-negotiations. Focusing on activities and not transportation highlight is put on usability of public spaces, their user-value for urban dwellers in their own right and the strategies devised to use public space. As such, neither does this thesis look at how long people spend here or how many people pass it. The conceptual scope was on both intended *and* alternative usages, in order to research spontaneity, the un-planned, and the conflictual ways in which a public space is re-negotiated by its users and through what ways and means people actively *or* passively participate with the public spaces to suit their individual lives, their strategies.

The part of this thesis that pertains to the treatment of 'bad' public space within cultural geography was limited to examining scholarly publications made public in recent times, where the line was drawn at the year 1980 with two exceptions for classic urban geographical texts. Publications older than this were excluded on the basis that their relevance for geographies of today is limited, as both the discipline and global society has changed considerably since then. Material from different parts of the world is also presented to encompass an overview which transcends and incorporates possible cultural differences.

1.7 Disposition

The thesis is structured by first introducing the subject, in the first section. After this, in the second section, background and theory are discussed in regards to 'bad' public spaces and their position within the literature. Here, different ways of understanding the dichotomy of good/bad public spaces and what is meant by 'bad' public space is explored. Newer conceptualizations of this bipolarization of spatial quality are highlighted in order to inflect on the literature as well as present the main theoretical concepts and theories on how people relate to ('bad') public spaces, in what ways people contest them through everyday use of public spaces. Next, in section three, the methodology for the thesis is outlined to describe the research process and how the findings were produced. Then, in section four, findings are presented and analyzed with respect to the conceptual framework previously outlined. In the fifth section is the author's discussions and finally, in the sixth section, conclusions are stated along with normative argumentation on how future research and discourse within cultural geography should treat 'bad' public space are given.

2 Background

Here follows a background on the conceptual framework of the thesis. Central concepts within the field and with relevance to this thesis will be outlined. This is the context of the research conducted. The academic treatment of public spaces and the dichotomous relationship between good/bad public space will also be explored, mostly pertaining to academic literature or policy-inspiring documents which implicitly or explicitly, treat good/bad public space, released after 1980 – the year Wiliam H. Whyte publicised *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, as this popularized the idea of successful public spaces, and by inference, 'unsuccessful' or 'bad' public space. The literature presented here also has a broad geographical spread, stemming from different parts of the world.

2.1 Public space

2.1.1 Definition and position within literature

Initially, it is important to outline what is meant by public space. Public space has a central position within studies of the urban, planning, and cultural geography. Increased attention has been devoted to public spaces by scholars in the last decades, since the 1980s (Mitchell, 2017:504-507). The importance allocated to public spaces by scholars has simultaneously been on the rise, as a part of what has been termed the new public space agenda. It recognises some key features of public spaces that afford increased life quality, such as ecological, creative, economic, and social benefits (Mehaffy, Elmlund & Farell, 2018). Further rise must, at least partly, also be put in relation to the recent, as of writing this, pandemic which has had immense implications for urban life, globally (Paköz, Sözer & Doğan, 2021).

For the purposes of this thesis, space is composed of three different dimensions. Firstly, the *perceived space*, meaning the built environment, a space has physical dimension, it exists and is material. Secondly, the *conceived space*, meaning the way we understand spaces, what notions are inscribed into spaces. Thirdly, *the lived space*, meaning space as used and lived, how we use space in our daily lives, how it is experienced. Space is thus, the physical room, its symbolic values, and the spatial practices which occur there. Space is material, socially filled with meaning, and actively used (Harvey, 2011:34-39, Rönnlund & Tollefsen, 2016).

To define *public* space might seem straight-forward at first but there is a lot of complexity and scholarly disagreement as to the precise understanding of the concept (Miller, 2007:ix).

One starting point is that public spaces is space which city dwellers share among themselves, effectively with strangers, that is what makes it public (Walzer, 1986:470). The definition of public space is contested. When distinguishing between the private- and public sphere, the line can be drawn at different points and with varying degrees of clarity (Luger & Lees, 2020:73). Making the distinction between private-public is further considered to be a way of organizing space. Structuring some spaces as public and others as private, by means of, for example, fences or signs, has implications for our spatial behaviour. How people act and interact with each other and participate with the physical environment is, partly, dependent on what activities and people are allowed. The distinction and physical manifestations of control influences use and non-use (Madanipour, 1999, Luger & Less, 2020:74). Moreover, the use of the dichotomy overall has not been uncontroversial, either. The separation of spaces into private or public spaces have been questioned and critiqued by different political traditions as a way of enforcing social control (Madanipour, 1999:883-886).

Cultural geographers and planning scholars might agree that squares and parks are all examples of public space, however, there is divergence in *why* that is. Public space has, consequently, been equated to different things within the field of human geography. Yet, two dominant traditions can be deciphered. Public space is understood as *publicly owned property* or as *the space between buildings*. These two viewpoints have different presumptions as to what constitutes public space. One assumes it is related to legal ownership whilst the other focuses on what spaces are available to people (Mitchell & Staeheli, 2009:511). The traditions are both based in a material understanding of public spaces, as physicalities and as relational, as socially constructed (Luger & Lees, 2020:73). A contrasting viewpoint is that squares, parks, and streets are *not* at all public spaces if they are people-empty. Through this view, the social dimension in relation to the physical environment is at the heart of the definition. Public spaces defining characteristic (Uusmann, 2000:5). I.e., here public spaces are understood through a social framing (Luger & Lees, 2020:73). In other words, public spaces are then seen as spaces where the public or publics *are*. Actual use makes public space. In this sense, a public space is as much about social interaction between people *and* with their environment (Jacobs, 1961). It naturally follows from this that although most scholars agree on what actual spaces are public spaces, they often disagree as to why, as shown.

The definition of public space that underlines this thesis draws upon both public spaces as between buildings and that people give rise to them. It is a socio-material understanding. A public space must thus be 1) outside, i.e., between buildings 2) allow open access physically, socially, and economically, and 3) have a certain degree of activity of people, a precence of public(s). Public space is further material, socially constructed, and used.

2.1.2 History of public space

Public spaces have, regardless of definition, virtually existed for as long as there have been concentrated human settlements (Madanipour, 2020:7). To further complicate matters, public spaces inhibit a multitude of meanings, purposes, and roles for urbanism. There are different narratives that have been applied to public spaces throughout history, different ideas of what these spaces should be for, what their nature is, and their position within the larger urban context and society (Madanipour, 1999:879). What the main purpose of public spaces is understood to be shapes the production and reproduction of them through both formal processes and informal practises. How we understand public space and what ends we understand it to serve. The reasons it is perceived to exists shapes how we continue to develop public spaces. This can, by extension, vary or be paradoxical. Purposes can be struggle, economy, sociability, political action, recreation, or something entirely different. This shifts over time and space as different planning trends has influenced collective understandings of public space (Mitchell, 2017:507).

Historically, for example, public space has been understood as spaces for demonstration and public opinion in the western world. Public space has been theorized as places for and of democracy, as the scene for protests and political activism. As political space, they have thus come to pertain to public life and struggle. Throughout history, public spaces have also had important roles for economic life in cities, as marketplaces – places for exchange and commerce (Mitchell, 1995). City dwellers commonly create bonds to the public spaces which they frequent. These bonds give meaning through associations to specific sites (Tuan, 2001).

Today, it has been common to perpetuate the idea that public spaces have an intrinsic value for quality of life by way of recreation. It is thought that public space enhances quality of life in urban settings, making them invaluable for city life. Parks, streets, and squares are akin to open-air living rooms which extends liveable space for people beyond the private sphere (Lipton, 2003). The ideal of 'high-quality public spaces' today for liveability and life quality has lead scholars and professionals, alike, to concern themselves with the places which are perceived to not perform as well as other places might. Improvement to public spaces is thought to be a way of intensifying use and performance, as a form of public space intervention. The argument is that better public spaces will attract more users and encourage more casual encounters and engagement with the physical environment (Antoniou, et.al., 2019:89-92). A current way of conceptualising public spaces is in the context of recognising new and creative forms of urbanism where informal or bottom-up planning plays a bigger role (Won Hwang & Jeong Lee, 2020:547-549).

2.1.3 Re-conceptualizations of public space

Public space as a concept has been repositioned and adapted by scholars in recent times. This is in response to public spaces being used in new and contradictory ways which do not conform to the traditional roles attributed to public spaces. Dominant ideas about urban public spaces are being questioned to re-connect people to these spaces. Reclaiming public spaces as spaces for people to use in the ways which fit current life is seen as a priority. Another reason for this is that official and strictly planned public spaces are continually not the only form of public spaces used, understood through the definition of public spaces as between buildings and as where the public is. Moreover, traditional public spaces are being (Luger & Lees, 2020) "privatized, enclosed, surveilled, or abandoned" (ibid:82). Meaning that not only are traditional public spaces not the only space for publics anymore but they are – to some degree – thought to also be dismantled, in different ways. Spontaneous urbanisms, is a term used to illustrate the aim to recapture urban public spaces which have been planned with disregard for the informality and spontaneity of urban life (Antoniou, et.al., 2019:89-92).

Newer perspectives on public spaces and their purposes also discuss *who* gets to decide what should denote a successful urban public space and which purposes it should serve and for whom. Public spaces are places of struggle over morphology, control, and use of them. The way we use and design as well as how we regulate or organise design and use of public spaces is synonymous with conflicts, small and large. A public space can thus be the site of conflicting interests or uses. Furthermore, there can be conflicts about the way these places are produced, by whom and for whom – who are excluded, or which behaviours are discouraged through the production and reproduction of public spaces through design and in the enforcement of norms (Mitchell, 2017).

It is suggested that public spaces cannot be homogenised as a response to people's needs, instead, they should evoke possibilities through a range of features, based in the geographical surroundings, the public spaces' context, with multifunctionality for the diverse bodies of citizen in different cities (Carraz & Antoniou, 2015). Public spaces need to evolve and change with the societies around them to allow that which people perceives that they want to partake in or need, as previous approaches may have left public spaces underused and in need of revitalization. Another point of re-conceptualisation is thus that the playful element of public spaces should be enhanced as this gives more user-value and opportunities for people to use urban public spaces in a dynamic way which is in line with the contemporary experience of living in a city (Carraz & Merry, 2022). Public spaces have thus been theorized as more

dynamic which should allow more than just instrumental purposes and facilitate more openness regarding what can and cannot, should or should not, occur in public spaces (Stevens, 2007, Franck & Stevens, 2006).

2.2 Planning ideals/trends

Throughout recent history, the planning discipline has proposed different ideals for cities overall and public space in particular. There are two relevant planning trends which have proved challenging for public spaces in the sense of understanding some public spaces as 'bad'. The two trends are thus chosen on the basis that they are common within the field of planning, especially as it pertains to our cities' public spaces. The two trends, that will be described below, stem from theorization that public spaces are worsening as a result of over-planning. The over-planning is either economic growth focused which creates spaces for consumption, making public places homogenic, *or* rationalist and function-oriented, which creates empty and very controlled environments that are less usable for people in the contemporary city (Mitchell, 1995:119-121, 125-127).

2.2.1 Challenges to public spaces
2.2.1.1 Homogenization/standardisation of public space

Firstly, within the debate of the deterioration of public space in cities, is the trend towards homogenization or standardisation of public spaces. Public spaces, in their physicality and intended uses are converging as a result of universalistic solutions or generic guidelines for planners. It has been suggested that public spaces are subjected to generic and formulaic design strategies meant to create universally 'successful urban public spaces'. However, there are risk to adapting one-size-fits-all narratives. It dismisses urbanistic reality, which is variated and nuanced (Coelho, 2013:48-50). Planning geared towards universalism, it is argued, creates poor-quality urban public spaces (Carmona, 2021:3, 2010:158-161). The physical manifestation of similar spaces can be understood through understanding how urban design is defined, for example as a means of "shaping better places than would otherwise be produced" (Carmona, 2021:1). Over-emphasis on aesthetics when it comes to public spaces might create more problems than it solves, especially if these visual preferences are grounded in particular social groups idea of beauty (Samad, Said & Rahim, 2018:128).

This is a global phenomenon, whereby public spaces across the world are being homogenized (Panjaitan, et.al., 2020) on the basis that the guidelines are the best practice. Although the idea of standardization or a one-size-fits-all approach to designing urban public spaces stems from aims to improve public spaces it has been argued to de-geographize public spaces; leads to less diversity of public spaces (Mehaffy, Elmlund & Farell, 2019:6).

Economics are relevant. Capitalist ideology tends to reproduce social spaces, such as public spaces, in homogeneous ways to sustain economic growth. These processes have shaped city planning and thereby public spaces towards rationalistic functions, to generate and promote production and consumption, drivers of economic growth (Stevens, 2007). The consequences of a neoliberal globalisation, the spread of ideas tied to privatization and profit-maximization, has been a capitalist urbanism (Carmona, 2015). This might lead to an international McWorld with less interaction in city-squares and less overall use of public spaces. Here, cultural unification, homogenisation, of space and the spatial behaviours that take place is influenced by consumerism. Meaning less variation and diversity – less urbanism (Kwitatkowska, 1999).

There are a couple of different but similar terms to describe this trend experienced by urban public spaces all over the globe. One way this has been interpreted is through the term *invented space* which denotes the placelessness of spaces which have been created in formulaic, non-contextual ways (Carmona, 2015). A second way is Sorkin's *departicularized space* or *ageographical space.* The argument is that globalized capital, among other things, universalised urbanism giving rise to ageographical, generic, places. Ageographical place refers to space with no tie to its surroundings, no grounding in space (Sorkin, 1992). A third way is the term *Disneyfication* which also highlights a decrease in geographical specificity through market forces (Lees, 1994:446).

Another criticism of this universalism in the planning of spaces for publics, is that local variations caused by geographical systems are not considered, such as climate and typography in planning (Costamagna, Lind & Stjernström, 2018). Public spaces have traditionally change with the weather – during days, weather changes and seasons – making them dialectical, changeable (Efroymson, et.al., 2009:20). Cities have been conceptualized as a temporal art due to their scale making it impossible for anyone to see all of it at one point in time. We instead traverse cities in different orders, along different routes and during or in different conditions. These factors shapes our experiences of public spaces and what we understand from their symbols, functions, and norms. Timescale is a part of the creation of meaning and purpose of the built environment (Lynch, 1960:1-13). This is in contrast with the trend to formulate precise ideals or principles to adapt cities after, globally – with little regard to geographical specificity on any level: national, regional, local, or hyper-local ones such as citywide, neighbourhood wide, or site-specific contexts. A risk is reduction of the dialectic and changeable nature which creates the uniqueness of public spaces. Cities across the globe tend to build new urban public spaces which converge aesthetically and functionally, making them less geographically or culturally sensitive. As such, a homogenisation of public spaces has been taking place, leading the world to become more homogenous (Cybriwsky, 1999).

Temporally, human needs and pleasures are not stagnant, changing as society around us evolves. Geographically, there might be variations in what is valued in different cultural, religious, life-style contexts or other ideas which have geographical dimensions. Yet another layer to this problem is that many different individualistic or societal contexts coexist in our cities, meaning that what is valued as good public space differs even within the context of any particular city at any given time (Rapoport, 1970). In short, good/bad is subjective and thus, what is regarded as better is only normative suggestions (Carmona, 2021:1). This has academic implications in so far as that any prescription of a 'universal guide' to successful public spaces will, inherently, not be as widely acceptable as it claims. What is enjoyable or beneficial is not universal across time, space, and individuals, as presented.

2.2.1.2 The overemphasis on functionality/rationality

Secondly, there is emphasis on functionality within the planning profession. There is a rationalist ideal to optimize cities for efficiency. There are benefits to this ofcourse, but *overemphasis* on efficiency and rationality may lead to a more monotonous city. Monotony induced by instrumentality and separation of functions to promote economic benefits reduces vibrancy, giving way to duller experiences and less non-transport related, actual use of public spaces (Gehl, 2011:21-22 & 102). It has been argued, today, that functional integration which was prominent in traditional cityscapes is disappearing. Functions are separated geographically, spaces are specialized. Desirable activity is strictly programmed into public spaces resulting in despatialization. Political, economic, and cultural values of urbanism are

being watered down and hollowed out. In this sense, through transforming public places into spaces with limited functions make them less nodal and more akin to routes (Madanipour, 1999:884).

In the context, public spaces can be divided into two categories, close-minded and open-minded space. A close-minded urban public space does not allow nor facilitate alternative use. Restriction are upheld through regulations such as control of admittance and performed activities or through the formal planning process, by designing urban public spaces in ways that are non-conducive to other activities than instrumental use. A close-minded public space is for pre-selected functions *not* spontaneous, unforeseen, and creative use. These spaces are structured with not only an overemphasis on functionality but also, figuratively, or literally, bans (Walzer, 1986) other non-instrumental uses (Stevens, 2007:29-36). An open-minded space, in contrast, is easily accessible an conveys, through its design, that activities can and should be performed here, that time can be spent or wasted (Walzer, 1986:475).

Functionality-driven public spaces with fixed intents which purposefully communicate to users that other uses are not supposed to take place (Walzer, 1986) thus limit possibilities of use (Franck & Stevens, 2006). Overly scripted places with explicit or implicit instructions for use, prescriptive commentary, communicates what a particular space is for, and by extension, what it is *not* for. These restrictive environments furthermore make people relate to these spaces less and use them in instrumental ways or not at all (Augé, 1995:94-96). In this way, we are reducing the dynamic and mutually constructive relationship between people and public space, meaning that formal planning shapes the environment in ways that shapes us but does not allow us to shape the environment or what it can be used for (Lees, 1994:447). This may make people see these places as superficial or artificial. This leads to underuse or non-use (Cybriwsky, 1999). For example, by implementing anti-loitering design (Franck & Stevens, 2006).

Overemphasis on instrumental usefulness is visible in the livability concept. It is reliant on categorizing uses of public spaces as either 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' which results in a narrow definition of useful functions. This framework further attempts to restricts uses identified as 'inappropriate'. As such, a public space which facilitates other alternative functions or activities than intended ones becomes – so called – 'broken' public spaces. This strict programming of public spaces is not in line with the diverse ways in which different people use and experience the urban environment. Urbanism is socially dynamic, conflictual, and negotiated. People interact with the physical environment with curiosity and creativity. A discussion on who uses these public places and for what in relation to who might use them after a livability revitalization project has occurred, is important. How this might shift the usefulness of a public space towards efficiency by reducing other user-values in the process (Stevens, 2009:385-387).

An increase in control and regulations of public spaces, their production and use, puts restrictions on public and urbanistic life (Mitchell, 1995). Contestation, different use by different people to different ends is a natural and unavoidable part of the urban environment (Franck, 2013:168). This disorder is beneficial for social cohesion within the city, by separating functions or removing the option for other uses we are reducing not just antagonism between groups but agonism. In other words, people do not get the opportunity to learn how to interact or confront each other in productive ways which reduces actual societal tensions (Staeheli, 2010). Functions and meaning – ideological, social, cultural – which are

inscribed can be a device to attract or detract people in general or certain social groups (Mitchell, 2017:503-513).

Spontaneity is being driven out of public places by regulating use – marginalizing creative use of public space (Franck & Stevens, 2006). Here, self-manageability of public spaces is raised as a tool to encourage this shift for ill-performing or ill-planned public spaces, in terms of the amount of people that interact with them or perform activities in them. Self-manageability is physical design which increases feelings of freedom to use public spaces in ways which fit people. In other words, it helps people to see the opportunities in the spatial configurations of public spaces and use them in meaningful, creative, and spontaneous ways shaped by the people *actually* using them. This can be done, it is argued, through implementing planning strategies which highlight non-instrumental participation and are generated through inclusive and community-led participation in planning processes (Antoniou, et.al., 2019:89-92).

2.3 The built environment and people

The built environment can be said to shape people and people shape the built environment, in turn. There is a mutually constructive relationship between space and humans, between a public space and the way we use it (Gehl, 2011). Space must be understood as socially constructed, both in its physicality and its meaning for everyday life. A public space is not meaningful until people collectively assign it meaning, function, and symbolic value. Before this it is empty (Madaripur, 1999:879-881). Urban morphology, i.e., the form of the urban environment in general, and public spaces in particular, shapes what can be done there and also what urban dwellers understand its uses to be. The shape of the built environment communicates to us how it is *supposed* to be used which has implications for how we use it (Franck & Stevens, 2006). Spatial behaviour is then social in nature and dialectic to the environment, which means that our everyday lives are shaped by the physical environment and vice versa. It is through our interaction with public spaces that they are given meaning and symbols (Madanipour, 1999).

Following from this reflexive and people-cantered understanding of how room affects us, and we affect room, public spaces are often constructed with specific functions in mind. Planning designers or architects often inscribe meaning into the spaces which they create, especially planned public spaces (Franck & Stevens, 2006:4). This is a form of control that is exercised by planners (Mitchell, 2017). Purposeful or accidental use is related to the physical design of public spaces (Carmona, 2021:2). What makes places spaces meaningful is people collectively assigning them values, functions, and symbolics alongside the inscribed functions (Madanipour, 1999:879-880). In this way, because of modern urban planning, public spaces are generally shaped with a set of intentions in mind, ordered. These public spaces are, however, simultaneously appropriated through spatial practices to create new or unintended uses of these spaces (Luger & Lees, 2020:82), so called alternative uses.

2.4 Usages and functions

In line with the relationship between the built environment and city dwellers, being mutually constructive and relational, it is important to understand how people interact with and in our public spaces. How we use it, what its functions are, and how city dwellers relates to these things is thus central. Here, there are four terms which are necessary to explore and define.

These are *functions*, *usages*, *alternative usages* and *appropriation* or transformation of the built environment.

2.4.1 Functions

Functions refers to fixed and intended uses of public spaces (Franck & Stevens, 2006:3).

2.4.2 Usages

Usages refers to ways in which people use and interact with the physical environment, in general. It is about what people do, human activities and behaviour (Stevens, 2007:3-4). It is also about optional activities, activities which are not necessary but rather when people stop walking for transportation to use the space because they want to. So not the necessary transport from one place to the other but when people stop to use the public space for something (Gehl, 1999:236-237).

2.4.3 Alternative usages

Then, how we relate to the built environment and importantly *against* it is linked to the fact that we can read the room differently, interpret it in different ways (Madanipour, 1999:880) which gives rise to varying understandings of what activities can be performed there. Public spaces often afford possibilities for uses that were not initially intended or inscribed into the built environment (Franck & Stevens, 2006).

Alternative uses must be understood in relation to the space in which they take place, as it is the definition, intention and design of that space which prescribes what activities are 'supposed to take place' there and which are thus *alternative*. Other times it is about spaces that do not have any intended use, a no-use place; then all activities are alternative as they go against the intention and design of that space. It is through understanding the intention, design, and regulation of spaces that we can understand the alternative use for that spot. In other words, alternative use means that activities occur in spaces that were not designed for those activities. This means that the activity either broadens which uses can be performed there or challenges the ones which were planned or have taken place there before. They can either co-exist with intended uses or differ from them in ways that makes the intended use less accessible. Different characteristics of public spaces can invite people to contest the intended use, to appropriate the space for alternative usages. For example, the openness and accessibility of a public space. People – groups and individuals – fill spaces with intended and unintended uses (Franck, 2013:54, 156-157). This creates "[a]ccidental playground[s], vibrant with various unpredictive activities that are constantly changing" (ibid:164-165, changes by author). Due to new, spontaneous, and creative ways of using public space, new meanings are inscribed into public space (Stevens, 2007:2006-2007).

Alternative uses can be described as re-negotiated behavior that does not follow the norm which planners and designers anticipated or designed the space for. Often, alternative usages are understood as unfunctional, economically unsustainable or socially abnormal. It is about adapting the space for new, less traditional uses. It is about the spontaneity of urban dwellers interactions with public spaces and the playfulness of re-negotiating public spaces for new purposes. Functionality is less obvious here – not like walking from a to b (Stevens, 2009:1).

A related conceptualization of alternative usages is that these activities are not productive or reproductive, i.e. neither create economic value nor needed to create work force. These are rather about leisure, identity, and interaction. Alternative usages are not, per definition, illegal but the way that they oppose the intended, socially accepted norms for behaviour can make them appear marginal. They are related to the room in the sense that possibilities for other actions needs to be present, but it is through people utilizing the possibilities that the alternative usages take shape. Alternative usages can either use the physical environment for different purposes or change it, temporarily, in order to allow a person or people to pursue an alternative use. These are 'forbidden' uses, either formally in terms of laws and rules or socially which planners have not prescribed into public spaces (Frack & Stevens, 2006).

2.4.4 Informal transforming of public spaces, appropriation

Another way of re-negotiating public spaces is to change aspects of them. In *Folkets Park* and *Byggaren*, Copenhagen, urban dwellers reappropriated empty lots, underutilized public spaces, to transform them into public spaces where people could perform the activities in line with their everyday lives. This was a place where people reclaimed space, making the city more livable and vivid in the process (Rutt, 2018). It re-imagines physical space by rejecting or altering the built environment of public space. Appropriation can be small or large – temporary or more permanent. Reproducing and repurposing spaces through this type of action is thus a strategy to contest strictly programmed and function-oriented spaces, or any public space (Franck & Stevens, 2006:14-15).

There are generally two types of processes – two approaches to the relationship between people and public spaces: adaptation and appropriation. Firstly, users of public spaces can adapt by changing their own response, spatial behaviour, to the physical environment. In other words, approach it differently based on its structure and shape. Secondly, people can change the environment itself. In other words, adapt the environment to fit themselves, appropriate public spaces by transforming them to suit the purposes of the city dweller. Appropriation can take place multiple times and be re-appropriated by different users – or the same users – across time. In this way our re-negotiations and navigations of public spaces which are not suited for our uses is relational, meaning that the environment communicates with us, and we communicate back through urban culture and living memory, social norms, and practices. In practice this happens though re-appropriations or adaptation. Transformation of the physical environment or appropriation in general, can be both intentional and unintentional (Aboulay, Mansour & El-Fiki, 2022).

2.5 Good/bad public space

The value of public places is often raised as important within cultural geography and planning studies, although, this is implicitly, attributed only to the good/quality public spaces (Future Place Leadership, et.al., 2020. It is frequently argued that cities need these high-quality public spaces, 'good' public spaces – *not* bad public spaces – in policy-inspiring documents (Riegler, 2020:21, Ersoy & Yeoman, 2020, Ramlee, et.al., 2018:22, Lipton, 2003) however, what is meant by good/bad is not apparent. Debates within cultural geography are informed by a bipolarizations of bad/good city or public space. This is a polarizing view which often generates strict prescriptions for form of public spaces and understandings of what constitutes these respective categories (Coelho, 2017:101).

To understand what is meant by bad public space, a good place to start is the term spatial quality. This is one way of prescribing what is bad, both quantitively and qualitatively. One way is through, *spatial quality* or *space quality*, which denotes an evaluation of weather a space is good or bad. However, the idea is highly complex – more than it might seem at first glance. The distinction between good/bad is dependent on values, cultures, and lifestyles – which can be highly subjective and contextual whilst simultaneously changing across time and across space, i.e., geographical- and temporal context. Further, it is also individualistic as it pertains to each user of public spaces' perception of the space – meaning that what is good/bad, what is seen as quality, can vary even within the same time-geographical context. In other words, what is meant by spatial quality or 'a successful public place' is not necessarily universal but rather an area of debate within the academic community. Inherently, what qualifies as a successful urban space or public place varies (Rapoport, 1970:94). This can prove problematic, as the lack of a clear definition leads to less precision in the academic field and this might have implications for formal processes to develop, reshape or build new public spaces.

Spatial quality plays an important role within planning studies as the nature of the field is to create livable environments for people (Carmona, 2021:1). The need to conceptualize places as either good or bad has thus arisen *because* of the nature of the field of planning. It is occupied with the betterment of the built environment. Naturally, this frame of perspective has led to a bipolarization between good/bad space. In short, it has been argued that the dichotomy has a necessary position within such a discipline (Coelho, 2013). It is within this context, the nature of planning studies *and* the consequential conceptualization of public spaces as either good or bad, that the popularization of the term "successful public space" must be understood (Birch, 1986). Upon popularizing the term, W. H. Whyte, wrote this influential and tone-setting phrase: "city spaces, why some work for people, and some do not." (1980:10). Evaluating public spaces in terms of good/bad has since occurred within both planning studies and cultural geography (Coelho, 2013 & 2017:99 & 101).

The quality of public spaces has been attempted to be measured by if there is enough room for people, in other words, if people physically have sufficient space to actually use those public spaces. On a more detailed level, quality has been argued to be measurable through the elements that influence user-value, which is thought to be, location and shape of the space, and its street furniture (Gehl, 1999:246-247). Public places that encourage interactions between people of different acquaintance levels, neighbours, family, friends, or strangers, is important to foster a community feel at the city-level. For a functional community, people need to see, know, and experience the other members of that community in streets, parks, and squares. A frequency of spontaneous meetings between people, socialising, in the everyday of urban life is vital. Humans are social beings, and these interactions need places to occur, where public spaces are a suitable forum for this. The casual meeting with the public, verbal or visual, generates creativity, new ideas and new perspectives (Efroymson et.al, 2009:8-13).

There is also a debate as to if the 'successfulness' of urban public spaces is a consequence of formal processes or of urban spontaneity and other informal processes generated by the public themselves, i.e., beyond the control of these formal processes. That it is the appropriation of spaces available to the public by publics themselves in order to make these spaces 'good' (Balsas, 2020:1-4). Clearly, consensus on what is good/bad is not established within the discipline, and neither is it between related fields which shape public spaces in formal processes such as architects and engineers, too (Coelho, 2013:43).

2.6 'Bad' public space

Successful urban public spaces are rare (Balsas, 2020:1) and the idea that we are unable to create or generate attractive, i.e., 'good', public spaces has been around for a long time (Lees, 1994:444). This can be illustrated through a quote from Whyte; "It is difficult to design a space that will not attract people. What is remarkable is how often this has been accomplished" (LaFarge, 2006:38). The rational nature of planning has led to attempts to theorise what constitutes good/bad public space and how we should minimize 'bad' public spaces (Balsas, 2020). However, there are different values, principles, and recommendations for how to create or re-shape public spaces into 'successful' public spaces. Here, I will outline different ways in which scholars have tried to make sense of what they have perceived as 'bad' public space.

A simple way of decerning weather a public space is good or bad, is to determine its place quality, as proposed by Jan Gehl (2011). Firstly, there are two categories of activities which we need to disentangle: *necessary* activities and *optional* activities. Necessary activities are, as the name suggests, activities which are mandatory or required to survive and/or to live within a societal context, for example, in most societies going to work is considered a necessary activity and reproductive activities such as eating are equally necessary. Opposite of this are the optional activities. Optional activities are not required but instead activities which a person or group engage in because they want to, not because they need to. With this in mind, Gehl argues that a bad public space and a good one has about the same use within the category of necessary activity – depending slightly on location within the street-web and city structure, its centrality or peripheral position. The noticeable difference between good and bad places can be found, he argues, where people engage in optional activities. In bad public spaces there is little activity that is recreational or playful in nature whilst a good public space will have a lot of this (Gehl, 2011:9-11). The presence of a range of different activities within public spaces across the city is a sign of qualities such as spontaneity and livability, among other things (Ramlee, et.al., 2018). Lack of enjoyment, little interaction with public spaces and their physicality is a sign of 'bad' public spaces (Carraz & Antoniou, 2015).

Similarly, other have argued that a successful public space attracts people. In line with this, the amount of people in a public space is an indication of the quality of that public space. In this way, researching the amount of people in any given public space has been devised as a way of categorizing its quality. A bad public space will be more people-empty (Spignardi, 2020:537: Project for public spaces, 2009: Gümüş & Erdönmez, 2021:205). However, this contrasts with the definition of public space used in this paper; as a place where the public is (Uusmann, 2000:5, Lees, 1994), which was previously outlined.

The challenge of underused or unused space in cities has been understood as a problem for a long time within the literature (Trancik, 1986:1-2). Here, bad public spaces are understood within the literature as, so called, urban voids – urban spaces which are either underused or unused. The cause of this is often thought to be ill-planning which creates these left-over spaces. To combat these types of spaces, the literature purposes different revitalization projects. Ill-planned is however not developed upon (Won Hwang & Jeong Lee, 2020). Urban voids or left-over spaces, and spaces like them, often exhibit less urban culture, it is suggested. This leads to less interaction with others and the surroundings. The literature tries to prescribe solutions against this (Antoniou, et.al., 2019). Urban voids have also been recognized as positive because they offer opportunities for users to reshape and reinterpret them (Won Hwang & Jeong Lee, 2020:548).

A challenging view upon urban voids or urban 'dead zones' has also been presented. Arguing that these places are often not people-empty at all, but rather inhabited by users which are not normally considered by the planning profession or cultural geographers (Doran, 2002). This may for example refer to what has been termed undesirables, people who are turned away from public spaces through aggressive design or policing of legal behaviors, such as loitering or sleeping. Homeless people have been discriminated against and are not considered to inhibit or interact with public spaces in the desired way. Active separation of people and varying social groups is characteristic of a bad public space (Belina, 2003 & Staeheli, 2010:71-72).

Over-managed or undermanaged public space is considered to generate bad public spaces, meaning that a decaying or overly scripted public space offers less spatial quality (Carmona, 2010:157). More creative and people-centered intervention arguments are raised; where the focus lies on re-storing or invoking a new relationship between people and their urban public spaces by creating more dynamic urban public places that afford opportunities for spontaneity, playful informality, and active engagement with the built environment instead of pre-given, strictly controlled or scripted urban spaces. In short terms, to plan for 'enjoyment factors' (Antoniou, et.al., 2019) instead of just functionality-driven applications such as transportation (Stevens, 2007). Planning which programs public spaces too rigidly has been suggested to result in the appearance of "dead public spaces", overly structured public space which has become underused. These have been termed "festive", meaning overly planned public spaces meant for consumption. Some urban geographers have strongly suggested that the quality of public spaces in a given area determine whether that area will be successful or not, livable and profitable (Cybriwsky, 1999:224).

An important idea when it comes to understanding public spaces as 'bad' is Tuan's place idea which has been widely used in relation to urban public spaces and the livability or usability of them, so called *place-making* (Whyte, 1980 & Project for Public Spaces, n.d.). Place is a concept belonging to humanistic geography that connects to relational geography. Urban dwellers feelings are at the centre (Tuan, 2001). For understanding spatial quality, this framework can be argued to propose that a public space which is not a place is 'bad'. That public spaces devoid of meaning need a human touch. Place was operationalized by Whyte, translated into a couple of functions and design principles which are supposed to speak to the betterment of public spaces (Balsley, 2006 & LaFarge, 2006). The concept of place has thus been very influential when it comes to the bipolarization of public spaces as either bad or good/successful/have high quality (Coelho, 2013).

Whyte's legacy within the bipolarization of successful (and unsuccessful) public spaces has given rise to a couple of points of action, these are, among other things, sittable space, aesthetically pleasing, filled with people, encourages new habits or use, and not guarded against undesirables (LaFarge, 2006). By way of this, we can discern that an unsuccessful public space does not offer sittable space, is ugly, people-empty, discourages new uses and attempts or manages to detract undesirables.

The place-making tradition on public space betterment is related to another academic idea – important within the context of this thesis – namely, Agué's non-places. A non-place is a place which is structured around one function, designated for a particular end, for example transport or commence which has made the place loose meaning for city dwellers. The lack of relation to people leads to solitariness or unitability for other uses. This is often a result of

global market forces restructuring closeness to public spaces to be more geared towards consumption which creates these non-places where people live less urbanistically (Augé, 1995:5-6, 73, 94-96).

Visual factors of a public space have been intimately related to its spatial quality. The physicality of the built environment – *how it appears* – is then a way of determining if it is a 'bad' public place. A public spaces legibility refers to our ability to de-code a place. If it is legible, it is effective in communicating what it is meant to be used for and what it is not meant for. This is something that affects how we perceive and understand a place, by the way that it is presented to us, visually – through symbols and other visual ques. A high degree of legibility has been argued to constitute a 'good' public space, meaning that a 'bad' public space is less effective at communicating its intended purpose. Imageability can also be related to how bad a public space is, if a public space has a low degree of imageability, if its image is unclear or ill-defined it leads to lesser place identity (Gümüş & Erdönmez, 2021). The idea of imageability and legibility have been attributed scholarly attention within the field of urban design for a long time. Another aspect which has been raised in regards to the spatial quality of public spaces is scale, where human-scale is preferable (Gehl, 2011 & Carmona, 2021:10).

2.7 Summary of conceptual framework

In this background and conceptual framework public spaces were discussed. These types of spaces have a long history, and the concept itself is complex. There are different ways in which to understand public spaces and their purpose – which influences the way they are shaped by formal processes. These formal processes have two main challenges, in regards to public space creation, which are at risk of reducing urbanism and use-value; homogenization of public spaces and an overemphasis on rationality. How we interact with public spaces is also shaped by the way they are produced and with what intentions are scripted into the physical elements and structure of them. Different ways of understanding problems with public spaces and their characteristics as 'bad' have been highlighted, described, and discussed.

3 Theory

Here the theoretical frameworks; ludic city and loose space, will be outlined.

3.1 Ludic city

Ludic city is the idea that people in cities use and interact with the built environment in spontaneous and playful ways. It is then a perspective which brings the impractical and unpredictable ways in which urban dwellers relate to public space to the forefront. A large part of urban reality, the everyday for urban dwellers, is unpredictable and changeable. As such, ludic city focuses on the spontaneity and playfulness which exists in urban settings (Stevens, 2009). This is useful in order to understand how people relate to the public spaces afforded to them by rigid planning processes or created by them through appropriation, as well as for the understanding of bad public spaces' role for cities. It puts bad public spaces position in cultural geography as a discipline in a new light.

The main presumption of ludic city is that cities tend to impose a tension between instrumental rationality and play. Here, public space is seen as the place to mend this incongruence. Although, urban settings give rise to instrumental or rational behaviors or activities, for example travels to work, they are *also* naturally suited for play. In this way, our cities accommodate two overarching types of activities: instrumental activity and play (Stevens, 2007). The nature of a city and its public spaces is such that these two opposing interests inevitably take place in the same sites at the same time, or in the same place but during different times of the day, week, or seasons (Stevens, 2009).

Play is a core concept. It is a complex concept in two ways. Firstly, its complexity stems from the diversity of people in urban areas. Play will not be the same for everyone. Secondly, its complexity also relates to the semiotic determinism of the public spaces. As such, play often has to be negotiated both in regards to other users of the public space as well as the public space, itself. What play looks like – what activities count – differs between different users and the contexts of users. However, some general principles to define and identify play can be made. That which is characterized as play is the use of time and energy or other resources in ways which are not perceived as productive – not in service of achieving an apparent pursuit or generating economic value. Play is also about seeing potential in the built environment for actions, interactions, and activities which are *not* meant to generate economic benefits; which are '*impractical*'. Briefly put, play is about what people make of and with public spaces (Stevens, 2007:2).

From this follows that play can be turned into instrumental use if it is incorporated and reappropriated to- or exploited for the economy (Stevens, 2007:2). A useful parable can be found within gaming; gaming is predominantly for fun – until it becomes something you can earn money from, at which point it becomes a job, becomes rational. This further complicates the term and attempts to map out play beforehand. An activity or use that can be categorized as play in a small student-town – such as Lund – might not be play somewhere else, because there it might have been assigned economic value, for example by fencing in a public park for a festival with the requirement of an entry ticket.

In this sense, ludic city's play-concept is broader than the more ordinary and common use of the word 'play'. It is not just a way of describing what children do in playgrounds – it is about how people relate to the built environment in ways which are not only in service of the

economic life of cities. The introduction of the idea of play for urban design and the livability of cities affords new ways to understand the multifaceted ways with which we approach and relate to the environment around us. (Stevens, 2009:4).

Public spaces attest to the non-scriptedness of social life and spatial behavior (Efroymson, et.al., 2009:16 & 20) whereby spontaneity, creativity, and using the built environment in unpredictable ways, such as through alternative uses, becomes a natural part of these environments. A new perspective on the relationship between urban design and play is thus presented through the idea of the ludic city. This aspect of public spaces is rarely recognized in planning practices or design. Activities which are not directly or indirectly productive have been less embraced in design of public spaces and within academics. The hegemonic over-emphasis on rational functions with instrumental purposes affects development of our cities' public spaces. Their locations and what they are filled with, which street furniture or shapes are present. The idea of the ludic city is a reaction to how cultural geography and planning studies have understood how people relate to public spaces, which has been centered around the instrumental values which presumes city dwellers to be overly rational. Ludic city is thus not merely the idea that spatial behaviors can be less linear or rational than they are often understood to be by different scholars and professionals but also the counter-idea that this is a positive aspect of the urbanity (Stevens, 2009).

3.2 Loose space

Loose space is the idea that spaces structure our use of them. Most spaces can be used for the intended use of them but only some spaces can be used for more diverse, new, creative purposes which where not programmed in or scripted into the spaces. The latter types of spaces are loose space. It is another way of understanding space as interconnections between meaning, use and, the space morphology. In other words, how people see a space and use it is interrelated to the shape, size, and contents of the space; its morphology and what that communicates to the user (Franck, 2006). The loose space framework has the ability to generate new knowledge, especially in regards to how 'bad' public spaces fit together with the rest of the urban fabric in which they are situated but particularly relevant to this thesis, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of what is necessary conditions in order for people in cities to renegotiate scripted public spaces.

To create loose space there are two conditions. For one, the public space must supply or inherently allow freedom of choice through it's the built environments morphology, it's physical form and what that form conveys to us. It is the opposite of fixed space. Other purposes or uses *can* take place here. Secondly, people must see these possibilities. If urban dwellers do not understand that a space can be used in different, creative, and new ways which are not inherently planned into the space they will not take advantage of the possibilities, if present (Franck, 2006). In this way, loose space draws upon tactical urbanism, "whereby people produce space through their actions in a certain spot" (Franck, 2013:168), meaning that space is continually restructured and reused in a dynamic way which is in accordance with the use.

In short, loose space is about how we re-negotiate, repurpose, or navigate public spaces in ways which are not rationalist driven but rather the emoted and performed urbanism which takes place spontaneously in these spaces when the two requirements are met. Public spaces are *produced* and reproduced through city-dwellers actual use of them. This stems from the possibilities which are perceived to be doable in that public space, weather intended or not by formal planning processes, in a sense, all space thus becomes *terrain vague* (Ibid).

3.3 Summary of theoretical framework

In short, the ludic city argument is similar to the homo-economicus critique of classic economic theory, meaning that it argues that people are not always able or willing to act rationally, people in cities use public spaces in playful ways, whilst the added value of adapting the loose space framework suggests that appropriation of public spaces, such as a playful use, requires that the space allows for it and that people decode the scriptedness of a public space in a way which sees potential to actually use it in a playful way.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The thesis is normative in nature and will suggest a new to approach the bipolarization of good/bad public spaces as well as a proposition for a re-conceptualisation of 'bad' public space and its academic treatment. The research itself was abductive, meaning that data collection and development of my conceptual framework was done simultaneously, mutually influential. Further, this thesis uses mixed methods, whereby quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were applied (Denscombe, 2014:146-149). Semi-structured observations were both quantitative and qualitative and reading the landscape was qualitative. The observations were analysed statistically where possible and interpretated qualitatively from descriptions of use. Methods of data collection were applied sequentially, so reading the landscape preceded the observations to inflect on the observation schedule and produce material to facilitate grounding the observations in the room and in relation to the physical elements of the public spaces chosen for this study, respectively.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Data collection

For data collection, two methods have been applied in respective to the two research questions. This was done in a sequential manner. The main method was a semi-structured observation, this was complimented by applying the method of reading the landscape.

3.2.2 Reading the landscape

In order to tie the observations to space, to the physical environment, reading the landscape was used for two purposes, 1) to generate map-material to ground the observations and 2) to understand the intended use of the various elements present in the research locations. Reading the landscape entails a method which is akin to reading literature, as both are infused with meaning, themes, and intentions. This is especially suitable as the research areas are public spaces which have been re-shaped and repurposed many times and are continually changed and transformed as time passes, both through formal planning and everyday use of them. This refers to public spaces' physicality and their symbolism and meanings (Duncan & Duncan, 1988). This method is suited to understand the meaning of physical elements in the built environment and how they relate to people and intentions of planned public spaces (Campbell, et.al., 2014).

This was done in order to assign observations to location in space which gives more context to the relationship between people and the built environment, the scripted public spaces. This method was used to produce maps for visual communication and the recording of observations. It facilitated grounding observations in space, to record the position in space of activities performed, which was the main purpose. Sketching research locations and determining the intended use of elements was conducted on the 3/5 2022 which laid the basis for illustrating figure 3.1 and figure 3.2. It also allowed for an identification of the intended use of elements in the physical structure of the research locations, coding is showcased in table 3.1.
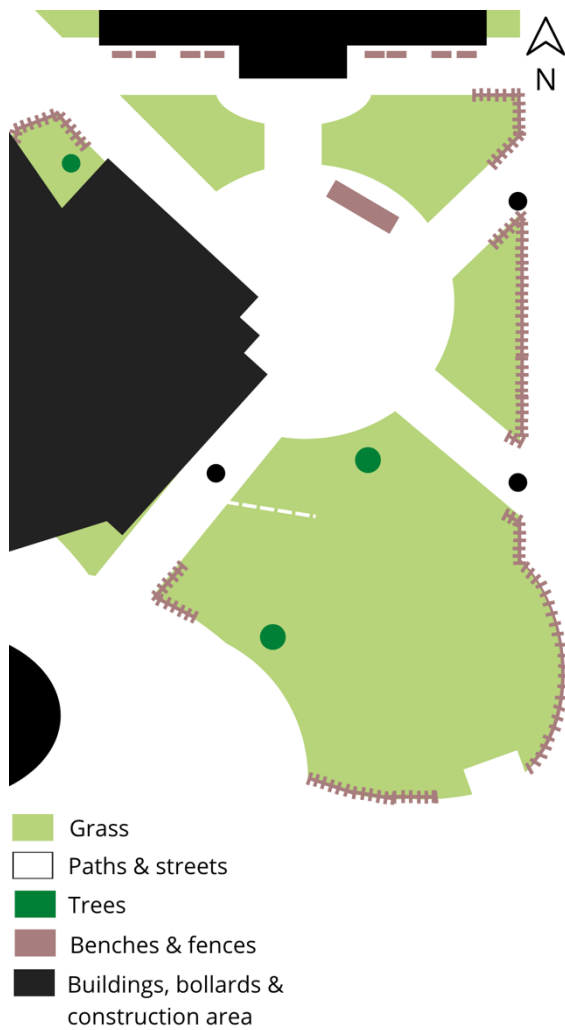
Figure 3.1 Map of Kraftstorg
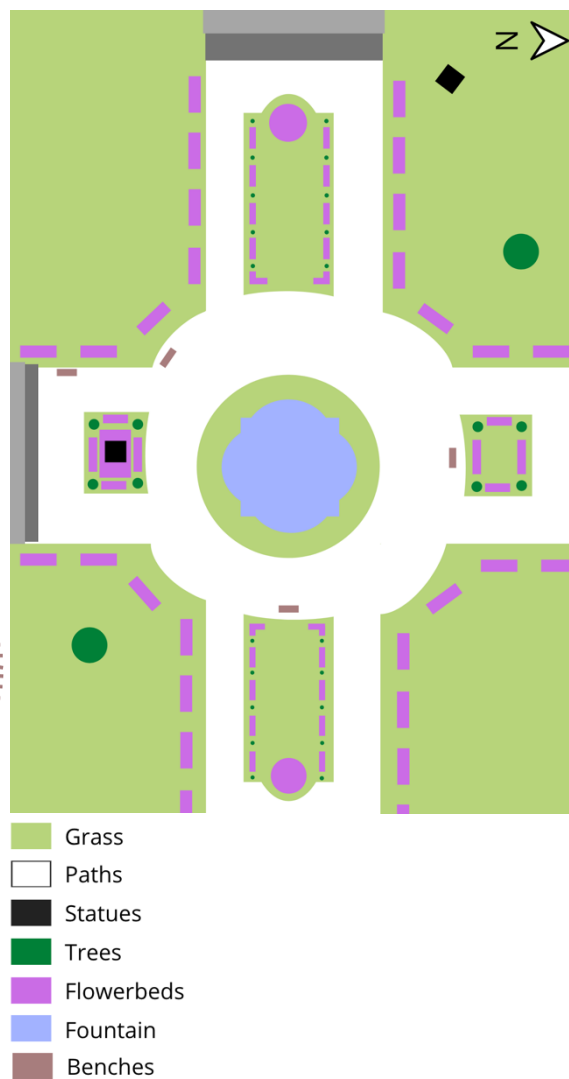*Map showing Kraftstorg, Lund. Marte Nilsen, 2022.*

Figure 3.2 Map of Stadsparken's Gardens
Map showing the gardens in Stadsparken, Lund Marte Nilsen, 2022.

Intended use coding was done restrictively, as to minimize any of the author's biases (see table 3.1). This was done by tightly relating the physical elements observed to mostly a single use value. However, this means that what is coded as intended use could potentially be more restrictive than what was planned for. The elements observed were grass, paths, trees, benches, fences, flowerbeds, fountains, bollards, statues. For example, mapping the benches represents what positions in the physical environment were planned for sitting. An element that has been attributed one or more intended uses is used in a way that is unintended if it is used for an activity which is not listed. Meanwhile, for an element that has not been attributed an intended use, any use is categorised as unintended. On the basis that the two research locations being strictly planned, scripted, with paths that indicated where one was allowed, or should, travel, *any* travel on the grass or any activity on the grass was deemed as unintended.

Table 3.1 Intended use coding

Element	Intended use	Colour on maps
Paths	Walking, biking, standing	
Grass	No intended use	
Trees	No intended use	
Benches	Sitting	
Fences	No intended use	
Flowerbeds	No intended use	
Fountain	No intended use	
Bollards	No intended use	
Statues	No intended use	
Construction area	*Not public space*	
Buildings	*Not public space*	

Codes of intended use of elements observed in the physical environments. Marte Nilsen, 2022.

3.2.3 Semi-structured observations

Observations is an appropriate research method for understanding people's interactions with public space; its physical elements and strategies of re-negotiation and navigation of it. In other words, what activities are performed in public spaces and how these relate, or contest the planned built environment in which the activities take place (Bryman, 2011). Observations were carried in two locations during four occasions à two hours, both in the late evening and around midday, see table 3.1. Four occasions were conducted to capture each location during the day *and* late evening because time of day may affect spatial behaviours: re-negotiations and the relation between people and scripted public spaces in general. Two hour-observations gave enough time to represent the usage of places in a more representative fashion than a shorter occasions would have.

Table 3.2 Occasions for observations

Place of observation	Date and time for observation	Weather conditions
Kraftstorg, Lund, Sweden	8/05/2022: 11:00 – 13:00 (2h)	Mostly sunny, around 16°C
	5/05/2022: 20:00 – 22:00 (2h)	Sunset, 14 C→9°C
Stadsparken Gardens, Lund, Sweden	4/05/2022: 11:00 – 13:00 (2h)	Sunny, around 16°C
	8/05/2022: 20:00 – 22:00 (2h)	Mostly sunny, sunset, 17°C → 9°C

An overview of the observation occasions, where and when they were conducted as well as their weather conditions. Marte Nilsen, 2022.

These were structured around an observation schedule, see table 3.2, where the variable of activity is non-structured. Observation schedules are a tool to ensure that observations are recorded accurately and similarly across the research, here, the use of one observer further ensured that relevant activity were recorded in a similar manner (Denscombe, 2014:207-209).

Table 3.3 Observation schedule

Observation-number	Activity	Is the physical environment used as intended?	Is the physical environment changed?	Social interactions
n	Free text	Yes, No	Yes, Yes, temporarily No	In-group Out-group No

The structure of the observation schedule used and possible inputs. Marte Nilsen, 2022.

3.2.4 Research locations

Two research areas were picked for this study, both are located centrally in the town of Lund, in the south of Sweden. The places were picked because of popularity among people, they are well-used, something that is a prerequisite to observe people's interactions with public spaces and because of their central location in the city, see figure 3.3. The two research locations are also easily surveyed, meaning that one can observe them and what takes place there without moving around, which could cause people to become aware of the observer. Awareness of being watched can affect behaviour.
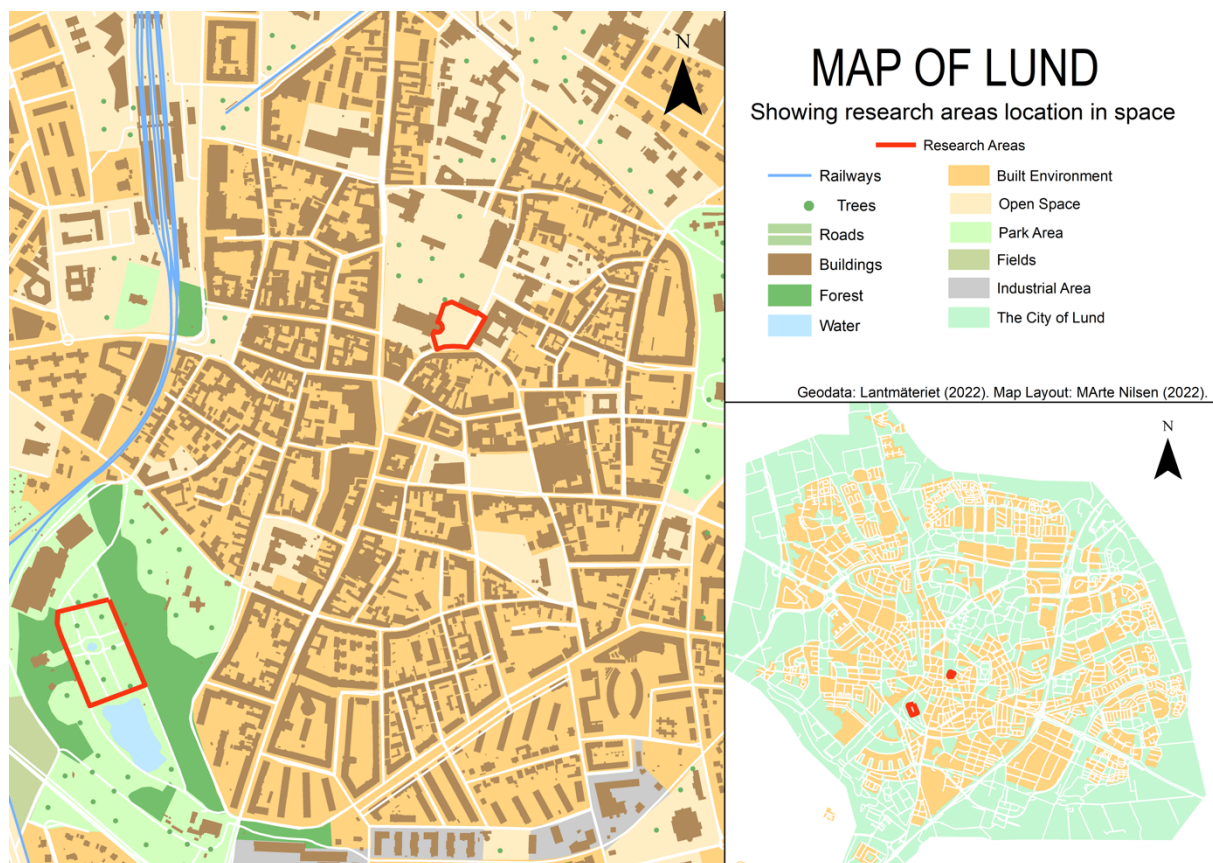
Figure 3.3 Map of research areas in Lund

A map of Lund outlining the research locations position in the cityscape. Geodata: Lantmäteriet, 2022, Map-maker: Marte Nilsen, 2022

Another consideration is that these are different types of public spaces, a square and a park. This allows for a wider breath of public spaces to be researched. Another way could have been to research two parks or two squares in order to view depth of a certain type of public

space, but as this was not in line with the aim to research public spaces in general. To view renegotiations in scripted public space, overall, breath was prioritized. Both research locations were in line with the definition of public space which underpins this thesis.

It is important to note that the public spaces which were picked to conduct the research on, my research locations, are *not* said to be 'bad'. This is motivated through four reasons. For one, to understand how people relate to public spaces, namely how people renegotiate and navigate them, no such delamination must be made. Secondly, no definition of 'bad' public space could be given to make any such selection. In other words, epistemologically, it would not be possible to identify any 'bad' public space. Then, selecting research locations on the basis that they are 'bad' would further not be scientifically just, resulting in an unethical thesis. This was, furthermore, not in line with the aim of the research.

3.2.5.1 Kraftstorg

Kraftstorg is a square with green elements in central Lund, see 3.1. Historically, it has been the centre of Lund and has served several different purposes, these have been political, religious, economic, and everyday ends. The planned square that resides here, today has been re-shaped on several occasions during half a millennium (Manhag, 2016:91-92, 111, 125-127, 159). There are art instalments on the square. '*Intigheten*' (the nothing) are two plaques in the centre of the cobblestone street, put up by Uardaakdaemin 1984 and 1987, a student union, as a humoristic appropriation of this space (Kulturportalen, 2020). Another is the memorial bench for Åke Hägerdahl in the middle of the cobblestone circle where several paths intersect, raised in 2016 by Stuart Wood and Ellen Hägerdal (Kulturportalen, 2017).

At the time of researching, the cathedral, *Domkyrkan*, located by Kraftstorg was under re-construction which meant that substantial parts of the square had restricted access, barriered off. This may have impacted the study by either attracting or detracting activity here.

3.2.5.2 Stadsparken's Gardens

Stadsparken was situated outside of the old city walls. The land was bought by *Lunds Stad,* the municipality of Lund, in 1904 and 1909. Official opening of the park took place during 1911 (Kulturportalen, 2019). The great city-parks were built in Europe during a period where inhabitants were thought to need an escape from the modern and industrialized city, as a part of the urban park movement (Jordan, 1994). The research location can be read as a formal French garden with its strong geometric shapes to signal order of humans on nature and other symbols. A city park garden has historically been indented for promenades and flower-watching (Mukerji, 1990), admiring but not touching.

3.3 Methods of analysis

The method of analysis for the first research question was a qualitative compilation of the written material of cultural geographical publications, articles in journals and books. Cultural geography literature seldom treats 'bad' public spaces as its own subject whereby the method of analysis had to interpret 'bad' from what is not termed 'good/successful' public space, in order to generate the findings, here both a discourse and content were analysed to generate the findings. This was done by first compiling and then interpreting the literature, its explicit content and also its way of discussing, the semiotics, 'bad' public space by contrasting this to

descriptions of 'good' public spaces, or implicit treatment and attitude towards the concept pair of good/bad public space.

Reading the landscape was qualitatively used to generate material for maps and also to identify intended use, as described above. Furthermore, the empirical research conducted through observations were analysed both quantitively and qualitatively. Statistical review of materials was made by adding two categories of metadata for each observation, *site* and *time*, which could then be aggregated through SPSS software to see wider patterns and frequency of types of usages. Qualitatively, these were also analysed in-depth by interpretating and describing observation results (Farthing, 2015:149-174).

3.4 Discussion of ethics and generalizability

As for generalisability, even if this study was conducted in a Scandinavian context during spring season and peace time, it can still be generalisable. This shortcoming is minimized, as previously mentioned. The results are partly adaptable to different geographies, meaning that the urban geography literature used originates in different parts of the world and the observation schedule can be used in varying socio-geographical context. In the vein of this, the research locations chosen for this study share similarities in that they are both formally planned and maintained, meaning that the results are likely indicative of these types of public spaces which are publicly managed and owned. This makes the study niched on planned public spaces and people's relations to those types of public spaces. The types of negotiations found may not apply to a public space which not the result of formal planning process.

One shortcoming of the mapping of where observations took place in the room is that the record is static, meaning that people's activities are only bound to one point on the maps even if they perform activities in other parts of the public spaces: the park or the square. This had to be done, as it was decided that it was more important to minimize the risk of observers recording the same activity in different ways by using one observer than to create a completely dynamic record of people's movements in space.

It has already been touched upon, but the categorisation of intended use attributed to the physical elements of the research environments, my research locations, is restrictively produced. This might mean that some of the intended uses were not read and thus not coded into the thesis analytical tools. This can lead to less validity in the results and findings of this thesis. Intended use is further geographically specific to individual public spaces, meaning that the same element might be intended differently depending on in what context it is employed or designed for. A patch of grass might be meant as a football pitch in one public space and intended to be avoided in another public space, for example if it is fenced off or by deploying a sign asking city dwellers not to walk on the grass, even if these functions can be explicit, they are often implicitly communicated.

The decision to exclude reporting gender and age-group within the observations schedule was made on the basis that the importance for this thesis, in accordance with the aim outlined, was not to understand which social groupings use the room differently but rather generate knowledge about what types of strategies were devised in order to navigate, how people move within the room as a consequence of and in relation to the physical elements of the public spaces, and re-negotiate, contest or abide by the inscribed and intended uses of a place. These categorisations could benefit further research to understand if the findings from this thesis is

spread differently across different social groups. However, within the context of this thesis, they were deemed unnecessary and were thus not taken into account. This also meant that the observed participants are anonymized and cannot be identified from this study.

4. Result and analysis

Here, the findings from the two research questions will be presented and subsequently analysed.

4.1 How is 'bad' public space characterized within cultural geography and planning theory?

Bad public spaces seemingly have a position within literature only as the shadow to successful public spaces or public spaces with high spatial quality, meaning that it is rarely treated as its own entity and not at all as the main focus within cultural geography, planning or urban design studies. It is constituted only as the opposite of what is described as positive. That said, no common understanding of good public spaces exists either. On the basis of this, outlining what is considered bad public space within academic fields is not entirely straight forward, and is in fact a challenge which needs treatment. To encircle the meaning of bad public space must then be conducted carefully.

Although, there is a red thread within the debate relating to the idea of place introduced by Tuan and later popularized in regards to public space quality by Whyte.

Three planning trends that continue to shape conceptions of good/bad public spaces and the future of our cities are, as follows:

Firstly, by creating an universalistic ideal, a standard recipe, to shape or re-shape urban public spaces means, by extension, that places which do not adhere to this ideal proponed by scholars and the planning profession, are 'bad'. As a result, public spaces converge within cities across the globe reducing the uniqueness of public spaces which risks affecting the inherent diversity of urbanism and the urban experience as well as geographic contextuality.

Secondly, the rationalist approach inherent to the planning of public spaces, today, means that 'bad' public space are public spaces which are non-instrumental. Instrumental or necessary functions denotes behaviours and activities which are considered socially or morally good in their societal context. The presumption is that public spaces which are not built to facilitate certain instrumental functions, necessary for economic growth, such as transport to and from workspaces, can be considered 'bad'. In short, places that are not programmed to serve use which generates revenue – directly or indirectly – can be considered bad according to the dominant discourse within cultural geography.

Thirdly, overemphasis on rationality has also given rise to the idea that separation of functions for different user groups in order to build-away conflicts that could arise from intermingling between perceived user groups (age-related, gender-related, or otherwise based in types of identities) is important for a successful public space. From this ideal within cultural geography and planning studies, it can be deciphered that public spaces where different people interact across user groups are considered 'bad' public spaces.

Circling what is meant by 'bad' public space by scholars is complex. Initially, 'bad' public spaces and our understanding of them must be influenced by a human-centered perspective which accounts for actual everyday life within urban spaces. 'Bad' characteristics, trends, designs, and types of public spaces which have been found are, as follows:

- **A public place where there is no, or very little, optional activities performed** (Gehl, 2011)
- **Underused, unused, or miss-used public space** (Carraz & Merry, 2022: Cybriwsky, 1999, Trancik, 1986, Whyte, 1980, Mitchell, 1995, Staeheli, 2010, Belina, 2003) */ Urban voids* (Wong Hwang & Jeoing Lee, 2020, Doran, 2002, Antoniou, et.al., 2019) / **people-empty places** (LaFarge, 2006) / **Dead public space** (Cybriwsky, 1999, Doran, 2002)*
- **Non-sociable – discourages spontaneous meeting** (Mitchell, 2017, Staheli, 2010) / **little room for visual or verbal communication with strangers – disables seeing or talking to the community** (Walzer, 1986, Efroymson et.al, 2009,)
- **Over-managed public spaces** (Balsas, 2020, Stevens, 2007 & 2009, Franck & Stevens, 2006, Walzer, 1986, Antoniou, et.al., 2019) / **controlled** (Mitchell 2017 & 1995, Belina, 2003) / **festive space** (Cybriwsky, 1999) / **instrumentalist** (Stevens, 2007: Franck & Stevens, 2006).
- **Lack of urbanistic possibilities for play** (Stevens, 2007 & 2009, Franck & Stevens, 2006)
- **Left-over public spaces – not formally planned and small scale** (Won Hwang & Jeong Lee, 2020, Antoniou, et.al., 2019) / **under-managed public spaces**, **decaying or unregulated** (Carmona, 2010)
- **Not sufficient room for people** (Gehl, 1999) / **small scale** (Carmona, 2021, Whyte, 1980)
- **Too large scaled – not people scaled** (Gehl, 2011)
- **Little enjoyment of or participation with the built environment / little urban culture / lack of urbanism – little diversity, spontaneity, creativity** (Stevens, 2007, Franck, 2013, Franck & Stevens, 2006, Madanipour, 1999, Mitchell, 1995 & 2017, Tuan, 2001, Won Hwang & Jeong Lee, 2020, Luger & Lees, 2020, Antoniou, et.al., 2019, Mehaffy, Elmlund & Farell, 2019:6, Carmona, 2015, Kwitatkowska, 1999, Sorkin, 1992, Lees, 1994, Efroymson, et.al., 2009, Rapoport, 1970, Gehl, 2011, Walzer, 1986, Staeheli, 2010, Carraz & Antoniou, 2015, Carraz & Merry, 2022, Panjaitan, et.al., 2020, Rapoport, 1970).
- **Separation of social groups** (Belina, 2003, Staeheli, 2010, Mitchell, 1995 & 2017) / **restricted access* (related to social status)** (Belina, 2003, Mitchell, 1995)
- **Consumption-focused to the point that access or participation is contingent on consumption (economical barriers/pay walls restricting access)*** (Mitchell, 1995, Kwitatkowska, 1999, Carmona, 2015, Stevens, 2009).
- **Placeless public spaces – not filled with meaningful or difficult to cultivate a relationship to** (Tuan, 2001, Whyte, 1980, Cybriwsky, 1999) / **Non-places – instrumentality and non-relation, nodal-ification of public spaces** (Agué, 1995, Madanipour, 1999)
- **Aesthetically displeasing** (Whyte, 1980, Samad, Said & Rahim, 2018:128) / Ugly (Carmona, 2010 & 2021) / **Low visibility – hard to identify** (Lynch, 1960) / **No imageability – no distinct character, symbolism, or association** (Lynch, 1960:)
- **Low legibility – hard to read what is meant to take place here** (Lynch, 1960, Gümüş & Erdönmez, 2021)
- **Does not offer sittable space** (Whyte, 1980)

The asterisk marks characteristics and principles which are not in line with definition of public space underpinning this thesis. This list showcases the complexity of the problem, how many different factors which have been conceptualized as bad public spaces, implicitly or

explicitly as well as the contested nature of the debate on the bipolarization of public space quality. Some of these are immediately contradictory. There is incongruence here which suggests that cultural geography is little coherency or consensus. Another point to be made in regards to this list is that aesthetics is highly individually dependent, meaning that visual preference is not universal between people, times, cultures, geographies or other factors.

To summarise, there is little explicit treatment of 'bad' public spaces within the literature although many within cultural geography and planning studies are adamant that building good public spaces is imperative for cities and city dwellers alike; and thus, not build 'bad' ones or to reshape those public spaces which are seen as bad to improve them. In other words, a lot of academic attention is paid to public spaces and a lot of policy inspiring work argues for high quality/successful public spaces, yet what is meant by 'bad' has not been sufficiently researched. Even so, there are a number of ways in which scholars have argued that certain phenomena, processes, designs of public space which they have identified as problematic, or less good – listed above.

4.2 How do people re-negotiate and navigate public spaces to fit current lifestyles?

Cumulatively, more people performed activities and interacted with their surroundings in Stadsparken's Garden (208 people) than on Kraftstorg (178 people) and during the day 11:00-13:00 (228 people), than the late evening, 20:00-22:00, (158 people). Interactions that took place were mainly in-group (291 people) or not at all (83 people), whilst few interacted with people from outside their group (10 people) or both within and outside their group (2 people).

Most people did not change the physical environment in any way (300 people). Although, from those who did, most did so temporarily (70 people) as compared to changing it long-term, i.e., not 'restoring' it to how it was before they changed it (16 people). Among those who changed the environment, there were three main ways of changing it. Firstly, and most commonly, people did so by bringing something to the public space. This could for example be blankets or toys. Secondly, people left things that they had brought with them, like trash on the ground or forgetting things behind, for example a toy. Although, this was quite rare and even more seldom a substantial transformation of the space. Thirdly, and finally, people moved or in other ways altered the physical environment and the elements of it that were already present in the public space by the time they arrived. For example, moving benches to face towards the sun, picking flowers or moving a traffic cone as to make it easier to climb onto it. Changing the environment, both temporarily and more permanently, which here is taken to mean not 'restoring' the physical environment to how it was before the alterations that were made were made, was quite evenly distributed between the late evening (46 people) and during the day (40 people). When it comes to unintended, alternative usages, these were more common during the day (79 people) as opposed to late evenings (38 people).

Altering the physical environment is one type of strategy used to re-negotiate public spaces, which can further be subdivided into 1) bringing props, 2) leaving props, or, 3) changing something already present in the public space.

Among people who performed unintended activities (118 people) – used the public space for alternative usages, i.e. optional activities – there was an even distribution between altering the physical environment and not. Meaning that 58 people did and 60 people did not. 46 of those

who did change the environment to perform an alternative usage only did so temporarily, see table 4.1. These people saw potential in the environment for it to be used in non-traditional ways which were not intentionally scripted into the spaces, either as the space was or through changing it. These are appropriations which co-existed with the intended uses, such as between people playing and others inspecting the flower garden, for example. Further, other alternative uses contested the intended uses in ways which forced the intended uses to take place in other areas of the public spaces or not at all, for example the nature-related group activity in Kraftstorg which occupied most of the spaces for people here and to a lesser extent the boule game on the gravelled paths in Stadsparkens Garden, which rerouted other activities without making them non-doable.

Table 4.1. Unintended use related to transformation of physical environment

Unintended use, total	Unintended, non-change	Unintended, changed it temporarily	Unintended, changed it
118 people	60 people	46 people	12 people

Frequency of unintended use across Stadsparken's gardens and Kraftstorg comparing frequency of transformation or non-transformation of the physical environment. Marte Nilsen, 2022.

A common activity among the observed people was performing relatively simple activities, for example, 87 people just stood at some point during their visit, taking in the environment or people-watching, pointing, talking whilst doing so. These observations could suggest three different findings, these people were either content with the physical environment, could not perceive other activities, or did not feel free to perform other activities and interactions with the public spaces they were standing in. Here, 38 people admired the flower garden, 3 people inspected the church restoration whilst just standing, although some just stood without doing anything else. Another interpretation of this might be that people are highly visual creatures, whereby this is a form of play, enjoyment of the environment, although a more passive form of play. Furthermore, to these people, these spaces might not have appeared as loose spaces, which could have created this response to the public spaces observed. They only perceived the instrumental usages. Public displays of affection were recorded, 4 people kissed and 2 cuddled during a picknick.

Taking photos or having a photo-shoot was also common: 37 people took photos of the environment and 9 people took participated in photo-shoots by either taking photos of the people they were with or being taken pictures of, or both. Another activity was picknicks (25 people), these claimed parts of the public spaces and is indicative of people perceiving the end of public spaces, ultimately, as a way of extending their living rooms, spaces to live in for publics. Photo-taking may perhaps indicate that people enjoy the scenery, that the public spaces are aesthetically pleasing and shows a relation to the public spaces imageability.

Some people were observed performing activities which are usually not done whilst walking on foot, such as eating, reading a newspaper or reading poetry aloud for a friend. This approach to public spaces, to enjoy them whilst moving is another way of making public spaces work for the people using them. They are in a hurry or are participating in seeing the wider city – much like a temporally and geographically changeable art piece. This is a combination of necessary and optional activities, which thus becomes a form of play and reproductive activity – simultaneously. This attests to the dynamism, duality, conflictual and coexisted nature of city life. Urbanism is then comprised of three things, in regards to public space use, it is the rational side, the spontaneous side, resulting in the mosaic side. Further, less traditional usages were observed. To change shoes, remove clothing or to put on clothes

in public spaces signifies a comfort with public spaces which could described as a form of understanding public spaces as an extension of the private sphere's living room. Related, others would tie their shoelaces with a foot on a bench, or sat on a fence, or put their bags on the ground to rummage through them.

Some seasonal or otherwise temporally dependent and weather-related activities took place, such as: cloud-watching, sun-bathing, touching cherry blossoms, trees, flowers, and on occasion, picking flowers. Here, seasonal possibilities of public spaces were utilized in spontaneous and creative ways. People who touched green elements showcase a relation to the physical environment which is akin to curiosity and a feel for sensory interaction with space.

Some more playful activities were recorded, as well, these are, for example:
- Dancing or playing music
- Circling around a fence or on-top of fountain ledge
- Spinning around lampposts
- Running around, jumping over benches, fences, and flowerbeds
- Balancing on fences, ledges, and other things
- Walking through flowers or bushes
- Playing with animals such as ducks or dogs
- Playing with objects present in the built environment such as traffic cones, sticks, grass, and pebbles/gravel
- Climbing trees
- Playing a ball-game, such as playing catch or boule

These instances showcase that people can treat the built environment as a playground, even if it is not explicitly intended that way or planned to facilitate these types of more creative and fun, alternative activities. These activities sometimes contest the built environment in this way and the expectations which are inscribed into it. Here, the relationship between people and environment is clearly interdependent. We shape the environment and it shapes us and our spatial behaviours. The people who partook in or performed identified opportunity in these public spaces to undertake these activities and by doing so, highlight one type of the urbanistic experience: spontaneity and playful.

As for the spread of activities in the public spaces, people seem to concentrate to paved pathways. Although some disregarded these types of signals as to where one should be in the park or square, most notably, observations 7, 8 and 52 in Stadsparken during late evening, who purposefully utilized space which was visually communicated as barriered off with flowerbeds as well as observation number 10, 11, 57, 62, 74 and 98 in Kraftstorg during midday who use the fences of the square to either sits- and balances on or jumping over it during play. However, others also walked across grass or over fences.

Geographical Spread of activities

Observations, Stadsparken gardens, 11:00-13:00   Observations, Kraftstorg, 11:00-13:00

Observations Stadsparken gardens, 20:00-22:00   Observations, Kraftstorg, 20:00-22:00'

Legend (left map):
- Grass
- Paths
- Statues
- Trees
- Flowerbeds
- Fountain
- Benches

Legend (right map):
- Grass
- Paths & streets
- Trees
- Benches & fences
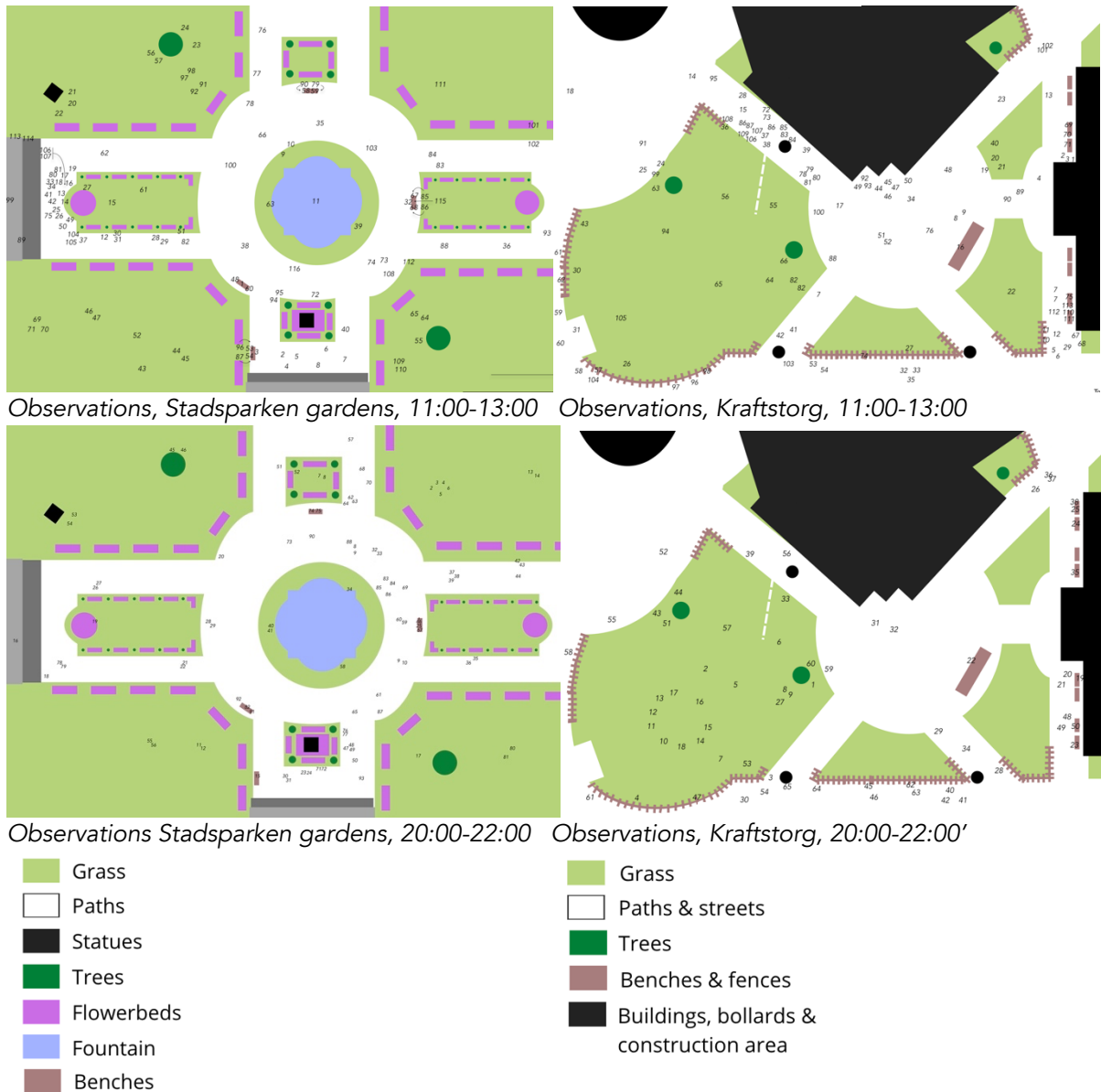- Buildings, bollards & construction area

Figure 4.1 Geographical spread of activities

Maps of research locations showing the spread of observed in public spaces. Marte Nilsen, 2022.

Repurposing elements of the physical environment to use it for unintended uses was another strategy. For example, a bench could be used as a obstacle to jump over, a fence or bollard could be used to balance on, a tree could be climbed, street signs can be used as backboards for writing, one could sit on the spine of a bench instead of sitting on it 'properly' or even sit on the cobbled ground or grass, instead. Further, one could temporarily turn a public bench into a work-environment where documents could be read or use one's computer here. This is not in line with the purpose of either the square or the park, it is not for leisure nor used for socialization in that sense. To use elements for uses which they were not intended for is thus a way of appropriating public spaces and utilizing the opportunities which the user perceives.

Even simple activities, such as sitting, is thus not always in line with planning. People will sometimes actively sit on places not meant for seating or use planned seating for entirely different objectives, such as here, on a fence, on the cobbled path and in the grass.

Since public spaces are open, it is the space between buildings where the public can be and are, this gives incentives to appropriate them; a game of boule in the graveled path re-scripts the space and a group activity centered around scout-like activities can be held in the middle of a square centrally in a small town where equipment can be spread across large parts of this square in a way that marks this area as the place for this private gathering. These types of activities can gather spectators as well as detract people, re-routing them elsewhere. A temporary group-use can thus be another strategy of reclaiming public space for that group and the activity which they want to perform. This territoriality can also be seen through picknicks, whereby the act of putting down a blanket also creates the perception that this space, the blanket, is off-limits to others.

Onto position in space. In Stadsparken's garden, some people would contest the rigid and geometrical structure of the space, such as walk straight through flowerbeds or be seated on patches of grass which were encased by flowerbeds (see, 7, 8, 52, 19 observation map 4, 15, 27, 51 and 61 observation map 2). Others would cross patches of grass instead of walk on graveled or cobbled paths, which could be seen as a form of contestation. The constesting of the built environment, either through strategically or intentionally avoiding pre-made paths or in other ways stray from intended uses or patterns in public space morphology says something about the world in which planning operates, about what the purpose of public spaces should be within the field of cultural geography.

Briefly put, there are different strategies of reclaiming and appropriating public space or challenging inscribed meaning and intended uses. The strategies found here, are changing the environment either by brining props, leaving props, or altering elements already present in the public space. Another strategy is to repurpose elements of the physical environment without changing them, just changing their use-value. And lastly, there is the strategy of orchestrating a group activity which marks barriers for people outside of the user-group. Territorial behaviors such as soft *and* temporary land-grabbing, is thus also a strategy to re-negotiate public spaces. Furthermore, the act of intentionally using public spaces in ways which they were not intended for is also another strategy to negotiate public spaces. Smaller acts of contesting the physical environment, such as disregarding planned paths and geometrically strict environments is also a way of re-shaping the perception and thus the usage value of a public space. This contestation is an act of navigating public spaces and using them for purposes which are not necessarily in line with what the physical environment inscribes. Going off script, through the means of any of these strategies, are examples of how people navigate and re-negotiate public spaces to fit current lifestyles.

5 Discussion

In light of my findings, which have critically examined the way in which cultural geography understands the concept of 'bad' public spaces and how people re-negotiate, navigate and overall interact with public spaces to use them in more creative ways which befitting of their everyday urban life, there are some implications. A re-framing of the concept pair good/bad public space might be in order.

This exploration into what is meant by 'bad' public space highlights a couple of points:

- It may be time to let people speak as to the defining characteristics of good/bad public space, even if people are able to adapt public spaces to serve purposes which they either need or want, or both.

- Functionality is necessary but should not be the only goal for planning. The nature of planning is rational as it has a very clear end-goal: to improve the built environment for people. However, this should not overshadow the core of urbanism, which is varied, spontaneous, fun, creative, striving for new possibilities, activities, and ideas. The city has always been heterogenous and as such, planning theory should embrace the same qualities by not building heterogenous and one-dimensional public spaces that only communicate or facilitate certain instrumental and necessary functions. Planned public spaces should allow unplanned use which can used both for playful activity *and* the reproduction of work-life or economy.

- People tend to be deterred from generic or universalising public spaces which offer limited opportunities as this is perceived as superficial and regulates public life strictly. This tends to lead to under-use of public spaces instead of promoting sociability, recreation, leisure, politics, economics, or other benefits.

- We need a mix of public spaces in our cities to accommodate all urban dwellers, further these spaces should be flexible and open to interpretation. Not only because of geographic contextuality and the diversity of preferences that can be found within any given city but also because planning trends and contemporary everyday practices shifts. Supplying differentiated public space is a necessity.

- People are adaptable and so should our urban public spaces be in order to allow more than the bare necessities afforded by public spaces. In other words, although functions for productive behaviors is needed, such as mobility and other more instrumental functions to allow walking to work or eating lunch, a 'bad' public space supports other dimensions of human lives other than livelihood. Playfulness, liveliness, and looseness facilitates more dynamic city life.

More importantly, I have shown that people in cities have many, multifaceted ways of re-negoting space to fit new purposes for those people. These strategies can be combined or devised on their own. There are many nuances to the way in which people restructure, repurpose, reuse, reinterpret, reimagine, recreate, or recommunicate the public spaces which they visit and use. This is a socio-geographical process undertaken by individuals and groups which continually occur. A park can be one thing for someone and a completely different thing for someone else, a square can allow many uses which changes how the people walking by

sees the space. One night these places might be used for partying or star gazing and the next morning they may be spaces where people takes a picknick or pick flowers. It is not so much the public spaces which are at the centre of their own meanings, but rather the people using them who create them with every activity, at any time, with any element, in any spot within these places.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, all public spaces are meaningful in a city – not because we have *given* them a purpose but because we *fill* them will purpose through our everyday interactions with them and our re-negotiations with any initial intent that has been communicated by structuring these places in certain ways, physically. I found five different strategies which were devised to navigate public spaces in ways that made them more dynamic to the individual constraints, needs, and wants of the users of them. These were, 1) bringing equipment/props, 2) changing things already in the public spaces, 3) leaving stuff behind, 4) re-purposing elements already existent in public spaces, and finally, 5) to claim space for group-activities in semi-territorial ways. These all seem to have one thing in common, they are, different ways of challenging the built environment and the scriptedness of public spaces to create an extension of living spaces that fit with many, varying, current lifestyles.

People are adaptable and are formed by as well as form the environment around them in their relation to public spaces but are also able to shape the environment, informally. However, most people use public spaces as they are intended, this might be a result of societal norms or showcase that the script built into the researched public spaces is adapted to the majority's needs and perhaps wants, although that is outside the scope of this thesis and might be a viable option for further studies. There was evidence to suggest that public space is also used in ways which are unplanned/unintended, creating new types of place-making. With this in mind, a 'bad' public space might be appropriated for creative urban habits and might actually give more room for seeing potential.

Transformations of the urban environment only occurs as a result of two preconditions, firstly, there must be the ability to change the environment, for example flexible street furniture and non-fixed elements, or viability to bring props, and secondly, people must perceive the opportunity to change the built urban environment. Once these two prerequisites are fulfilled, people have the capacity to alter the urban environment, to re-appropriate it by informally altering it in order to performed activities in the way which fits them. This is a sort of mutual relationship between public spaces and the public, where a dynamism occurs. A public space, much like any places, spaces, or landscapes, is continuously changed and transformed, this is the art of space. Public spaces will be appropriated and re-appropriated, formally changed and informally altered, they will change depending on season, weather, time of day and who inhabits and uses them.

As I have illustrated, our current understanding of what constitutes bad public space is divisive within the literature. Varying aspects are raised which focus on both social aspects and physical ones. Bad public spaces should not be viewed through a lens of universalism, rationalism, separation of function, and/or conflict avoidance. Instead, we need to go back to basics. To the people who use or could potentially use a public space – to the city dwellers. A bad public space must be defined by its users,
  ➢ Public spaces, 'bad' *or* 'good' ones, can be used in creative ways,
  ➢ An appropriate re-conceptualisation of 'bad' public spaces might be in order.
  ➢ The dichotomy of the concept pair good/bad should have a more marginal role within urban geography.
  ➢ What is good/bad is contextual, for the planning profession this might mean more participatory public discussions and bottom-up planning, not generically prescribed

Furthermore, urbanity facilitates an incredible possibility through its character as simultaneously dense and diverse which needs to be realized and utilized when it comes to

public spaces. A dense urban fabric, geographically, means that different public spaces can be developed within cities, they do not all need to be good in the same way for the same user groups but can rather cater to different uses and be shaped differently, whilst still being made in an open-minded and user-friendly way. Every square, park or street does not need to be shaped in the same way. Giving people access to choose instead of applying a one-size-fits-all variant of producing public spaces is a viable option and solution to the problem of less useability and use of public spaces.

In regards to the rationalist approach, necessary functions and usages are intrinsically vital for our society, that cannot be questioned, it follows that these *should* be planned for. However, we need to incorporate an approach which generates more possibilities, more open spaces, more street furniture which is adaptable, flexible and can be repurposed. In general, we need to incorporate a way of thinking that maximizes and capitalises on people's natural creativity, spontaneity, that inspires people to think outside the box in order to give them the spaces which makes them able and know to use public spaces in the ways which fits them. Spatial behaviour is not static. In line with that, neither should the possibilities for play afforded to urban dwellers. We should also design public spaces in ways that promote intermingling within and between different social groups or types of public space users to create room for smaller conflicts which foster societal cohesion – something that is important also in the broader perspective of democracy, empathy, and community feelings within cities and society overall. My findings showed little active interaction outside of one's own group, however, visual interaction took place, such as through people-watching and also by way of being and using the same public space, simultaneously as others, which means that people have to think about not walking into each other, or similar accidents.

Finally, this thesis has, through research on both the academic treatment of 'bad' public spaces and use of public spaces which is re-negotiating or navigates public spaces which dwellers use in ways that contest the scriptedness of public spaces and inscribed functions revealed something about what position and role the concept of 'bad' public space has within the academic literature *and* in lived everyday life.

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