

An aerial photograph of a public square featuring a large, curved, multi-tiered concrete seating area. Numerous people are sitting on the steps, some in groups and some alone. The ground in front of the steps is paved with a geometric pattern of light and dark tiles. Several pigeons are visible on the ground. The overall scene depicts a vibrant, open public space.

new city spaces

Jan Gehl & Lars Gemzøe



new public spaces
new public life

winning back public space

New city life

It is the year 2000, a summer day in the middle of Copenhagen. The city centre, once dominated by cars, has completely changed character. Pedestrian streets, pedestrian priority streets and ordinary, narrow peaceful streets form an extensive network of comfortable walking routes. The city actually invites foot traffic. The eighteen squares in the core of the city have been stripped of parking spaces and returned to the public for recreational activities. They too invite people to come and stay awhile, and to engage in other public activities that need space.

The city has created space for many different forms of human interaction. Over the past forty years, a total of 100,000 m² once devoted to motorised traffic have been converted to 100,000 m² of traffic-free city space for pedestrians. The surfaces of streets and squares have been replaced with fine stone materials, and street lighting and furniture have been refined as well. The entire city centre now has a character and an atmosphere that invite people to walk and to spend time there. The streets seem to signal: Come, you are welcome. Walk awhile, stop awhile and stay as long as you like. City space has been given a new form and a new content.

The new reclaimed people spaces are used often and used well. On this June day the streets are almost completely filled with pedestrians moving through the city at a leisurely, almost languorous pace. In fact 80% of the movement through the city centre is foot traffic. The whole of inner Copenhagen has become an area devoted to people on foot. Copenhagen has also become a place to stop and stay awhile. On this summer weekday there are between 5,000 and 6,000 Copenhageners taking advantage of the many opportunities the city offers for recreational urban activities. 1,500 seats on benches and 5,000 sidewalk cafe chairs provide ample opportunity to sit, and they are in almost constant use. Children play, young people skate by on rollerblades and

skateboards, while street musicians, artists and agitators of many kinds attract crowds to the squares. Life on the street unfolds as a colourful and varied pageant this summer day. One common trait is that a solid proportion of the activities are recreational. Another is that most of the activities are social. The city's new car-free space is used for a special form of social recreation, urban recreation, in which the opportunity to see, meet and interact with other people is a significant attraction.

This summer day in central Copenhagen speaks volumes about renewed city spaces. In addition, the pattern of the city centre is now being followed in the surrounding residential areas of the city. The conversion of streets and squares has inspired new urban patterns, which in turn have breathed new life into old neighbourhoods. Similar patterns can be found in cities throughout Europe and in other parts of the world where room has been provided for public life.

Renewed interest in public life and the city as meeting place, as it has developed over the past 30 or 40 years, has naturally led to noticeable development in urban planning and public space architecture. This development forms the central theme of the descriptions of city strategies and projects for new public spaces in the following chapters.

Traditional uses of public space: Meeting place, marketplace and traffic space

Although the pattern of usage has varied in the course of history, despite differences, subtle and otherwise, public space has always served as meeting place, marketplace and traffic space. The city has always been a place for people to meet and greet each other, a place to exchange information about the city and society, a place where important events were staged: coronations, processions, feasts and festivals, town meetings and executions, to mention just a few.

The city was also a marketplace, where goods and services were offered

A summer day in Copenhagen, one of the many cities around the world to see a dramatic development in public life in step with improvements in public space.





1880



1960

1880. Copenhagen's main thoroughfare at Christmas time, depicted in a painting by Erik Henningsen reflecting the social and economic reality of the time. Of necessity, the street was a workplace, a place to sell or transport goods. The more privileged used the street for shopping and promenading, to see and be seen.

1960. The same street invaded by car traffic. Pedestrians are confined to two narrow pavements with almost no room for anything but to keep moving.

1968



1968. Five years after pedestrianisation. Walking, shopping and window-shopping dominate. The social function of seeing and being seen continues to be an integral part of street life.

2000. The same street on a summer day. Six times more area is available to pedestrians. People are still in transit, but now they have other options. Many are standing, sitting or sipping refreshments at numerous outdoor cafes.

2000



Traditionally there was a good balance between the city's functions as meeting place, marketplace and traffic space. This pattern continues in a number of well-preserved old cities, such as Venice, Italy, shown here.



Trade and traffic have completely changed character in the course of the 20th century. Cars have taken over the streets (Madrid, Spain, far left), and shopping has moved indoors (underground shopping concourse, Nagoya, Japan).

and exchanged. Finally, the city was a thoroughfare providing access to and connecting the various uses of the city. People walked about and goods were hauled from one place to another.

In the past, when most movement was conducted on foot, there was often a good balance between the three uses of the city. Pedestrians were able to walk where they needed to go, meeting, trading, talking and taking in the sights all in the same trip through town. The uses of the city were conducted simultaneously in the same public space.

However, in the 20th century, particularly in the industrialised nations, conditions for the three main uses of public space changed. New patterns of traffic, trade and communication were so radical that they interrupted centuries of tradition as to how people used the city.

Electric trams and bicycles, introduced at the end of the 19th century, gave people a wider range and allowed the city to expand significantly in area. Once cars were introduced at the beginning of the 20th century, transportation patterns changed dramatically. Particularly after the Second World War, car traffic in the city developed by leaps and bounds and the use of public space changed accordingly. Heavy car traffic does not coexist peacefully alongside the uses of the city as meeting place and marketplace. Uses that had been in balance for centuries were now in open conflict.

The city as marketplace also underwent dramatic changes in the 20th century. Trade from open booths was gradually moved to small shops along streets and squares, then to increasingly larger shops and supermarkets, and finally to giant shopping malls, usually far from the heart of the city. In those cases where shopping centres were established within the city, they closed in on themselves and were no longer part of the public arena. Trading takes place in indoor enclaves through a labyrinth of private walkways complete with small squares, bubbling fountains, muzak and air conditioning. In the process, the marketplace with its

attendant "public life" has become strictly controlled, with all activities and human interaction regulated by security guards. Quite literally, the market was taken from the public arena and moved to the private sphere. The 20th century also decisively changed the conditions for the city's use as meeting place and information exchange.

The rapid and extensive development of print and electronic news media has made it possible to provide people with an endless stream of information about the community and the wider world. No town crier needed here.

At the same time, a seemingly endless stream of opportunities for indirect communication from person to person emerged: first the telegraph, then the telephone, the cell phone, e-mail, the Internet. Individual mobility provided by cars and other forms of transportation and the development of cheap forms of long-distance travel provided new opportunities for people to meet other people.

The traditional role of the city as an important meeting place for its citizens had changed completely.

Here at the dawning of the new millennium, these massive changes in society within only a century make the vitality of public life in central Copenhagen of special interest. The many people on the streets and in the squares have chosen to be there, to walk and spend time in public spaces. Despite the many developments and changes in patterns of use, as a marketplace and meeting place the city continues to offer a significant alternative, a valuable supplement to the multitude of other options.

Current uses of public space

A look at different cities and cultural patterns in countries where communications, marketplaces and transportation have undergone radical changes in the last century gives a varied picture of the current uses of public space and the conditions for the use of the city as a public arena.



Types of information and communication channels have also undergone a major transformation.

Middle: Modern rendezvous, Oslo, Norway.

Left: Banks of public telephones, San José, Costa Rica.

Using a good measure of simplification, at this point in history it is possible to observe and describe four very different types of cities.

- The traditional city – where meeting place, marketplace and traffic continue to coexist in balance, more or less.
- The invaded city – where a single use, usually car traffic, has usurped territory at the expense of the other uses of city space.
- The abandoned city – where public space and public life have disappeared.
- The reconquered city – where strong efforts are being made to find a new, workable balance between the uses of the city as meeting place, marketplace and traffic space.

The traditional city

In the Middle Ages, towns emerged on the premise of pedestrian traffic. Streets were adapted to foot traffic and squares tailored to uses that needed space: markets, town meetings, military parades, religious processions and so on.

Even today, particularly in Europe, there are still many cities whose structure was formed during that period, and thus the centres of many European cities still have the character of the Middle Ages, as do many villages and small towns.

Isolated examples of intact medieval cities continue to function in traditional ways, with Venice as one of the best-known examples. Common to the cities and public space of that period is that they continue to be well suited for all types of pedestrian activities. The scale of these cities, the dimensions of the streets, the distribution of uses along streets and squares, the scale and detail of buildings are in harmony with human senses and opportunities for movement, and they support the comings and goings of pedestrians very directly.



Many traditional urban spaces were designed to emphasise the city's function as meeting place. Bollards at Piazza del Campo in Siena, Italy provide psychological and practical support as well as the perfect spot for people-watching.

In these cities throughout time, public spaces have served simultaneously as meeting place, marketplace and traffic space. In those cities in which car traffic has not been allowed to take over, we can still see modern versions of the traditional uses of public space.

The invaded city

In old cities and urban areas where car traffic has gained the upper hand, public space has inevitably changed dramatically.

Car traffic and parking have gradually usurped space in streets and squares. Not much physical space is left, and when other restrictions and irritants such as dirt, noise and visual pollution are added, it doesn't take long to impoverish city life. It becomes unpleasant and difficult to get around on foot, and spending time in public spaces is made impossible by lack of room and by environmental problems. The result in city after city is that only the most essential foot traffic battles its way between moving and parked cars, and only a severely amputated selection of other activities can be found.

Numerous studies have shown the obvious correlation between urban quality and public life.

Public spaces offering many qualities and few disadvantages inspire a broad spectrum of urban activities. Attractive walking routes and places to stop along the way encourage foot traffic which in turn promotes social and recreational activities, because people walking along become inspired to linger and enjoy the urban scene.

In impoverished public spaces, most of the social and recreational activities disappear completely, leaving only the remnants of the most utilitarian and necessary pedestrian activities. People walk there because they have to, not because they want to.

In most of the cities besieged by cars, the quality of public space has become so problematic that people avoid the city centre altogether.

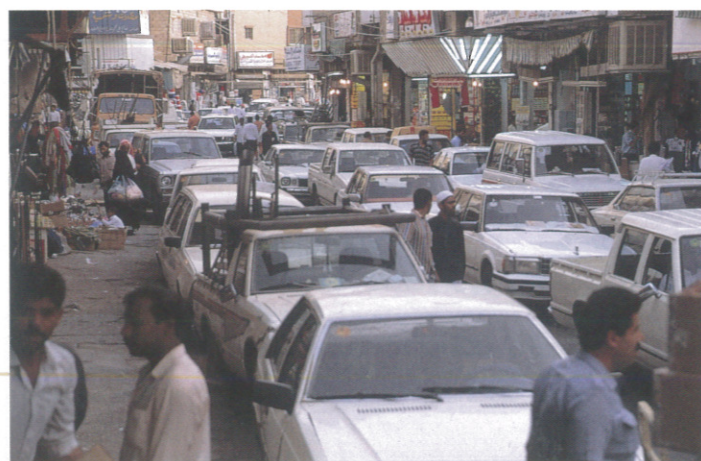




Prague, Czech Republic



Westport, Ireland



Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



Istanbul, Turkey



Naples, Italy

Above: The invaded city. Urban life is reduced drastically – or made completely impossible – as car traffic invades cities.

Right, overleaf: There are other forms of invasion, too, such as reducing the variety of urban functions. Shown here, large office blocks in Stockholm, Sweden.



In a historical perspective, the abandoned city is new. Walking is impossible or superfluous and public life in public space no longer exists.

Top: The city centre as car park, Spokane, Wa. USA

Middle: Empty street scene, Clarksdale, Miss. USA

Right: Street scene, Atlanta, Ga. USA

The abandoned city

Where urban tradition is weaker and car culture has had more time to develop without major constraints from urban planning, a new type of city develops. This city has no historical model, because for the first time in history pedestrian traffic has been made impossible or superfluous, and many of the other activities traditionally tied to foot traffic in public spaces have disappeared completely. Public life in public places is gone. There are many cities of this type in many places, although predominately in North America. City centres are a sea of asphalt with parking places marking off the space between buildings. Walking is impossible and would also be unreasonable. Distances are too great and the environments an intrepid pedestrian might encounter on his way would be ugly, dirty and possibly dangerous. Such cities are not intended for walking. Sidewalks have disappeared in the city centres as well as residential areas, and all the uses of the city have gradually been adapted to serve the motorist. Transportation and life itself are totally dependent on the car in a drive-in culture. It is difficult to describe the total consequences of this type of urban policy. However, it is important to point out that heavy dependency on the automobile means that children too young to drive, the elderly who are too old to drive and the handicapped who are physically prevented from driving are consigned to a life of being transported everywhere by others. Indeed, for young people life doesn't really start until the day they turn 16 and acquire their driving license!

People shop from drive-in stores along car-filled streets, by and large requiring the driver to drive and re-park at each destination. The alternative is to shop in large shopping centres outside the cities. And only in these centres is it still possible to walk both from the car park to the centre and inside on the walkways of the covered centre itself.

As a countermeasure to the regional shopping centres and as a strategy for maintaining turnover and uses of the city centre, numerous cities



have experimented with new forms of shopping environments adapted to car culture.

In some cities shops have been moved indoors into atriums and shopping arcades within the city centre itself. The Eaton Centre in Toronto is one example.

Other cities such as Calgary, Winnipeg, Minneapolis and Atlanta have built skywalks, systems of pedestrian bridges running one or two storeys above street level and connecting shops placed strategically inside the buildings of the city centre. Here pedestrians are lifted up a storey and can move about indoors from building to building, protected from the weather and free from streets and other public space.

A third category of centrally located, private shopping environment is "the underground city" as the phenomenon is known in Montreal and Toronto in Canada, as well as in cities such as Sapporo, Nagoya and Osaka in Japan. These cities, often in connection with underground metro stations, have set up a network of shopping centres and walkways that connect the lower storeys of buildings in the city centre.

Common to all of these types of shopping centres is that they are private and closed outside office hours, and that both pedestrian activities and other city activities are subject to heavy restrictions conditional on the commercial character of the centres. There is no room for versatility, humour and democracy on the agenda of these very standardised, modern shopping centres.

An interesting public health problem has developed in these cities where it is virtually impossible to walk or bicycle as a natural part of daily routine. Many of the urban inhabitants are overweight and in poor physical condition. Some of them try to combat the problem by jogging during their lunch breaks or spending time in fitness centres or working out on some of the many exercise machines designed by the fitness industry to fill this need.

For other segments of the population, who have neither the opportunity nor the motivation to engage in fitness activities, the problem literally grows larger and larger. Indeed, doing away with pedestrian traffic and public space – and public life to a great extent – has many direct and indirect consequences.



New problems arise when people no longer walk for daily exercise.

Above: Lunch-time fitness with landscape painting on the back wall. IT company, Silicon Valley, Ca. USA.

Right: Park-n-Sweat structure with seven storeys of parking and a two-storey fitness centre, Atlanta, Ga. USA.



The reconquered city

Over the past 30 to 40 years, interest in public spaces and public life has begun to grow again, often as a direct reaction to the increasingly poorer conditions for both, and in many cities efforts are now being made to give pedestrians and urban life better odds.

Paradoxically enough, one important source of inspiration came from shopping malls, particularly in the USA. Already in the 1920s when the first malls were built, it was clear that customers had to be lured out of their cars and into car-free shopping streets in order to have the peace of mind to concentrate on shopping. Some of the earliest pedestrian areas in Europe such as Lijnbaan, built in war-torn Rotterdam in the 1950s, and the rebuilding of many German cities in the same period, had this same starting point. Many of the other pedestrian areas established in the 1960s and 1970s throughout Europe, including the pedestrian street in mid-Copenhagen from 1962, were also based primarily on this commercial concept. While true that pedestrian streets made it easier for people to get about downtown, the primary purpose of having them was to get people to shop.

The idea of using public space as social and recreational space grew gradually and was reinforced during the decades that followed. Jane Jacob's description of the development in American cities in her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities", published in 1961, had major impact. Many American and European researchers also contributed by pointing out the importance of varied forms of public life in the public spaces of the city. The connection between city quality and the extent and character of city life was also documented during this same period. Particularly in Europe, tradition was a third and very important source of inspiration. Many European cities continued to carry on a lively tradition of using public spaces for social and recreational activities. Throughout this period, the 1960s and 1970s, more and more pedestrian streets,

areas and peaceful squares were established in European cities. Conditions for pedestrians were also gradually improved in many of the other streets in major cities. Sidewalks were widened and enhanced with street furniture, flowers and trees.

An important turning point for the traffic situation in cities was the oil crisis starting in 1973. The break in traffic expansion led to planned efforts to limit the encroachment of cars in the cities as well as other measures to ensure a better balance between motorists and other forms of transport. Interest in bicycling and public transportation grew accordingly. Throughout this whole period, the concepts for new public spaces expanded. Once confined to narrow commercial interests, concepts now had a considerably broader focus: creating space and conditions for walking under reasonable provisions and ensuring development opportunities for social and recreational urban activities.

Although many cities in Germany and Scandinavia pioneered efforts to push back cars from the city centres and create more peaceful conditions for pedestrians, it was in Barcelona, starting in about 1980, that a broader concept of public spaces was formulated in a co-ordinated public space policy. In the course of 50 years, all city space had been conquered by cars. Now the city was fighting back, both physically and culturally. It was also in Barcelona that the concept of "the reconquered city" was born. In terms of both idea and specific architectural formulation, public space policy in Barcelona came to play a major role in further developments. What happened in Barcelona was the starting point for a new, intense period in the last 20 years of the 20th century, in which increasingly more good urban spaces were created or renewed, in order to ensure good public space for new types of public life.

If we are looking for development patterns in the most recent decades, it is clear that several European cities left their mark. In terms of policy, the Dutch, German and Scandinavian cities were among the first to experiment



New ideas are adopted to regain lost public space.

Shown here: In Stockholm, Sweden new housing has been built on top of existing multi-storey car parks. Empty streets dominated by cars and concrete are changed to narrow streets lined by housing and shops.

with new types of city space. More recently, many cities in central and southern Europe have followed suit.

The policy of pushing back cars and giving urban life better conditions continues to be a European phenomenon primarily, but it is interesting to note that corresponding urban policy strategies can now be found in cities in North and South America, Asia and Australia. Precisely because of what has happened in other regions on these continents, the efforts made in Portland, Oregon and Curitiba, Brazil are remarkable, and show that we can no longer refer to public space strategies as being solely a European phenomenon.

Every part of the world has desolate, invaded and abandoned cities, and all over the world there are cities that have fought back by inviting inhabitants to return and use public space.

The marked differences from city to city within the same cultural circles underline another interesting common trait, namely that most urban improvements are carried out or at least initiated by visionary individuals or groups. It can be a mayor, a city architect, a city council, a political party or inspirational co-operation between consultants, politicians and grass-roots movements, but common to the cities that have recaptured public space is visionary, targeted urban policies.

Typically, various topics are combined in these urban visions, such as traffic safety, changes in traffic patterns, public health, a reduction in resource consumption, a reduction in noise and pollution – and efforts to strengthen the role of the city as a democratic forum. Where visions and political will go hand in hand to meet a number of these objectives, it is clear that cities actually do become better places in which to live and spend time.



Lost public space is being regained and new urban spaces established all over the world due to the desire for a better balance between the functions of the city as marketplace, meeting place and traffic space.

Above: Centre Pompidou, Paris, France.

Below from left: New public space in Seattle, Wa. USA. Public space along the reopened waterway in Århus, Denmark. Renovated pedestrian street, San José, Costa Rica.





With daily life increasingly privatised and indirect communication growing by leaps and bounds, the need for public life in public space is growing. Here people can experience direct contact with other people and the society of which we are a part. Here they can see things for themselves, experience, participate and feel a sense of community.

Examples shown from France, USA, Norway, Brazil and Denmark.



New public spaces for new public life

Although this book on new city spaces and public life starts out one summer day in the centre of Copenhagen, it is just one of many cities in which urban policy initiatives have raised urban quality. Traffic, noise and pollution have been reduced, foot traffic and bicycle traffic have been reinforced. Public life has blossomed on the streets and squares of the city in a way not seen 20 or 30 years ago, certainly not in the form it has today, which is not even a new version of an older urban tradition, but a truly new phenomenon. The overwhelming interest in and backing for the new public life in public spaces is certainly thought provoking.

In a society in which increasingly more of daily life takes place in the private sphere – in private homes, at private computers, in private cars, at private workplaces and in strictly controlled and privatised shopping centres – there are clear signs that the city and city spaces have been given a new and influential role as public space and forum.

In contrast to the many indirect communications and the many widespread and private spaces, the opportunity for people to use their senses and interact directly with their surroundings is becoming extremely attractive. The information society is providing new meaning and significance to the city as meeting place.

It is these new public spaces and public life that are the main theme for the treatment of cities and public spaces in this book.





New life in the city. A summer day at Sankt Hans Torv, a new urban square in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, Denmark.