



The 'publicness' of suburban gathering places: The example of Podkowa Leśna (Warsaw urban region, Poland)



Dorota Mantey

Department of Urban Geography and Spatial Management, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw, ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 30, 00-927 Warsaw, Poland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 November 2015
Received in revised form 12 June 2016
Accepted 1 July 2016
Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Publicness
Gathering places
Suburbs
Podkowa Leśna

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to present a new model that can assess the 'publicness' of not only public open spaces, but also of the wider category of publicly accessible places, called gathering places. This model was tested in Podkowa Leśna – a suburban town near Warsaw. It includes three dimensions, each of which consists of two indicators: (1) diversity (diversity of activities, and diversity of users), (2) management (type of management; and freedom of access, use and behaviour), and (3) accessibility (financial and spatial barriers). The model measures the extent of publicness and identifies if a particular place has a 'public', more 'public' than 'private', more 'private' than 'public', or 'private' character. The research shows that the role of gathering places can be successfully played by quasi-public spaces, such as: club spaces, spaces owned by various institutions (churches, railways, cultural institutions) and also private places. The study proves that quasi-public gathering places are sometimes more important than fully public places in making local social life less exclusive, especially in the suburbs where almost all developed space is private.

© 2016 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary urbanized world the issue of a living environment that engenders local social life is becoming more and more important, particularly in the suburban zone where an intensive process of suburbanization is taking place. Suburbia, which is located somewhere between a city and a village, includes: one-class housing estates having low intensity development and a high proportion of open spaces (Mayhew, 1997); urban clusters and 'bands' of one or two-family houses outside a city (Frysztański, 1997); and small towns and villages that are highly functionally dependent on the nearby metropolis. Suburbia constitutes a migration destination for so-called 'urban refugees'. A house with a garden is the perfect place to live, especially for those who are tired of the urban noise, pace of life, limited exposure to nature (Beim, 2009; Kajdanek, 2011; Mantey, 2011), and in Central and Eastern Europe also the low-standard of apartments – the product of a centrally planned economy (Grochowski, Pieniążek, & Wilk, 2005; Stanilov & Sýkora, 2014). As a consequence, suburbia is dominated by residential functions.

There is a deterministic belief among architects and urban planners that well-planned and developed public spaces generate socially desirable behaviour and attitudes (Alexander, 1977; Gehl, 1987; Project for Public Spaces, 2000; Whyte, 1980;). Truly public spaces encourage social interaction among individuals with diverse interests, opinions and perspectives (Young, 1990; Németh, 2006). Most of the research in

this area focuses on 'flagship' urban public spaces, and the changes in their level of publicness following a redevelopment or improvement process (e.g. Akkar, 2005a, 2005b; Madanipour, 1995, 2003; Van Melik, Van Aalst, & Van Weesep, 2007).

In contrast to cities, the suburbs are lacking in truly public spaces. The physical characteristics of the suburban space are far less important than a particular lifestyle based on individualism, as well as home and family-centred entertainment (Kajdanek, 2011, 2012; Miller, 1995). The negative consequences of living in a suburban zone are the limited possibilities for reviving local social life. Oldenburg (1997) claims that: 'What suburbia cries out for is the means for people to gather easily, inexpensively, regularly, and pleasurably – a "place on the corner," real life alternatives to television, an easy escape from the cabin fever of marriage and family life that do not necessitate getting into an automobile'. This does not mean that suburbia is deprived of spaces in which a local social life could take place. Quasi-public spaces that make it possible to spend free time inexpensively outside the house and build social relationships locally, can hardly be overestimated in relation to this issue. They seem to be important, especially in the suburbs where people look for gathering places that are predictable, controllable and consistent with their lifestyles. Attractive public spaces, which are conducive to the recovery of social life, at the same time attract unwanted phenomena and unwanted people. This is reflected in an attitude of reluctance among suburban residents seeking peace and quiet, concerning pro-social accessible public space (Carmona, Tiesdell, Heath, & Oc, 2010). This results in an increased interest in spaces that are available under certain terms, which are specified by the owner or administrator of a particular area (Kępkowicz, Mantey, Lipińska, & Wańkowicz, 2014).

E-mail address: d.mantey@uw.edu.pl.

All these places attain new meaning and roles in the absence of egalitarian, accessible public space. They fill a gap between the suburban home and public space, if it exists at all.

The urbanized environment is not composed of fully public and fully private spaces; instead, it is a combination of public and private places with different degrees of publicness (Akkar, 2005a, 2005b). The different levels of publicness constitute a continuum between the personal space of the body and the internal space of the home, and the external spaces where social activities occur and the public space of shared urban spaces (Madanipour, 2003). Even if a place is not publicly owned, it can still serve as a space where public life occurs (Banerjee, 2001). This means that publicness, as a feature, is an attribute of public, semi-public and sometimes private spaces. All these physical spaces with a public character in which social and civic functions are performed, regardless of ownership, can be perceived as spaces of a public nature (Ellin, 1996). Even if a place is not publicly owned, it can serve as a space where public life occurs (Banerjee, 2001).

The aims of this article are twofold. It proposes a new model that can assess the publicness of not only public spaces, but also of the wider category of publicly accessible places, called gathering places. It also presents the results of a study in which the model was tested. The model allows comparisons to be made between particular places, but also between types of places, whole settlements, districts and groups of residents. The category of gathering place includes generally accessible public open spaces, club spaces (Kępkowicz et al., 2014), third places (Oldenburg, 1999, 2000) and various types of spaces spontaneously 'appropriated' by defined groups of users and with little accessibility for others. A gathering place may therefore have the characteristics of a public, semi-public or private space. It is important for a gathering place to attract the widest possible range of users and to integrate members from one or more social groups. The thesis of the article is this: gathering places, including gathering places in the form of quasi-public and private spaces, can stimulate local social life and thus make it less exclusive, especially in the suburbs.

2. Publicness and its dimensions

There are many definitions of publicness. Each of them emphasizes slightly different, although overlapping, dimensions. The original debate on publicness started with the model suggested by Benn and Gaus (1983), offering the three criteria of: access (to places and activities), agency (the locus of control and the decision-making present) and interest (the targeted beneficiaries of actions or decisions impacting on a place). The model suggested by Akkar (2005a, 2005b) conceives of publicness through three dimensions of publicness: access, actor and interest. Her further analysis on 'inclusivity' explores the publicness of urban space through the four dimensions of access: physical access, access to activities and discussions, access to information, and access to resources (Akkar, 2005c). She highlights that broader accessibility means broader inclusivity, and it is inclusivity that constitutes the essence of a public space. In the case of inclusivity, it is not only the way in which a given space is used, but also the process of its development. The space is more inclusive, and therefore more public, when decisions on its shape and process of change are taken together by various entities, including the residents. Low and Smith (2006) assess publicness according to the rules of access, the source and nature of control over entry, the nature of sanctioned collective and individual behaviour, and the rules of use. Mitchell and Staeheli (2006) seek the essence of publicness, above all, by the rights of access for all citizens; while Worpole and Knox (2007) perceive a space as 'public' if one can share its use and activities, and if it favours meetings and exchanges regardless of ownership. According to De Magalhães (2010), the public nature of a particular space is determined by the rights of access, rights of use and ownership/control. Kohn (2004) defines public spaces as places owned by the government, accessible to everyone and that foster communication and interaction. He indicates three criteria for publicness:

Table 1
Models of publicness' assessment.

Model	Criteria of publicness
The 'cobweb' model of Van Melik, Van Aalst, and Van Weesep (Fig. 1a)	criteria of secured public space: surveillance, restraints on loitering, regulation criteria of themed public space: events, funshopping, pavement cafés ownership, management, uses/users
The 'tri-axial' model of Németh and Schmidt (Fig. 1b)	ownership, control, civility, animation, physical configuration
The 'star' model of Varna and Tiesdell (Fig. 1c)	ownership, management, accessibility, inclusiveness
The 'OMAI' model of Langstraat and Van Melik (Fig. 1d)	access, use, other people, maintenance, environment, design and appearance, community, you
The 'spider' diagram of CABE'S Spaceshaper (Fig. 1e)	sociability, access & linkages, comfort & image, uses & activities
'Place diagram' of PPS (Fig. 1f)	

ownership, accessibility and intersubjectivity. Carmona (2010) mentions two additional dimensions: function and perception. In the opinion of Young (1990), publicness includes accessibility, inclusion and the tolerance of difference; while Németh and Schmidt (2011) emphasize the role of ownership, management and uses/users.

A detailed review of the dimensions of publicness is provided by Varna and Tiesdell (2010), who synthesized various approaches and suggest publicness be considered according to five dimensions: (1) ownership, understood as the legal status of a place; (2) control, which concerns people and their safety; (3) civility, in other words so-called 'responsible freedom', it defines the level of awareness of, and respect for, other people's use of a public space; (4) physical configuration, understood as the connection of a given space with its surroundings, as well as its accessibility from the outside; and (5) animation, which is the design and arrangement of a space to meet the needs of its users.

3. The 'six-axial' model of assessment of publicness

This article proposes a new model for assessing publicness – the 'six-axial' model, which is based on the pre-existing assessment tools. It takes into account a number of assumptions. (1) The model should be applicable not only to urban public spaces, but to any kind of gathering place, including suburban. (2) The model should present publicness as a multidimensional characteristic of the space. (3) Each of the dimensions should refer to a different characteristic of the public space or gathering place. (4) The model should limit the subjectivity of the assessment of publicness dimensions by introducing measurable indicators, which are set for each dimension. In assessing the various extents of publicness and the comparison between cases, a discrete scale should be used. (5) In order to illustrate a multi-dimensional publicness, a simple graph should be introduced. Table 1 presents existing assessment tools (both quantitative and qualitative) having the criteria of publicness.

Many publicness models also outlined in the paper, do not take into consideration the design, planning and development process of public spaces, while only focusing on the state of publicness of a space for a specific moment (within the management and use process). While looking at a space within a space-time continuum, it is just a picture of a single temporality. These models do not provide a dynamic framework for the assessment of publicness of space. In addition to not providing a dynamic framework, a major limitation of methods mentioned above is the limited number of criteria, the identification and calibration of which depends solely on the researchers' observations. These are significant shortcomings and are found in all the models presented, including the new one.¹

¹ The significant remark about the dynamic perspective of the assessment of publicness and the limited number of criteria was made by one of the reviewers of this article.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1008151>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1008151>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)