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## The Book “Public Spaces” By Ali Madanipour

The book “Public Spaces” has been edited by Ali Madanipour, a Professor of Urban Design at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, UK. He did his Masters in Architecture from School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Iran National University, Tehran. Later he completed his PhD in Town Planning, Department of Town and Country Planning, Newcastle. He has practiced, researched and taught architecture, urban design and planning and has published many books and articles and receives many invited presentations too. His works has been translated into various languages including French, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Persian and Spanish.

Public spaces reflect the activities of urban societies and, with time, have changed from being embedded in the social fabric to being a part of more impersonal and fragmented urban environments. Can making public spaces help overcome this fragmentation? Do the public spaces serve at large or are they exclusive? Whose public spaces are they? The book author have shown various case studies that investigates the specificities of particular cities. The nature and character of public spaces are closely related to the nature and character of the cities. For most of urban history, the primary public spaces of the city were the core of the urban society, integrating the political, economic, social and cultural activities.

The key feature of public space is its accessibility. Without being accessible, a place cannot become public. In the processes of urban change, the conditions of accessibility are subject to change, hence changing the nature of public spaces. The nature and character of public space is determined by the way its boundaries are constructed. The more accessible and permeable a place is, the more public it becomes. To determine the extent to which a place or activity is public or private, Benn and Gaus (1983) suggested three criteria as dimension of social organization: access, interest and agency. The symbolic dimensions of public spaces are as significant as their functional ones. A public space is one that allows a range of necessary activities to take place, but also a place in which unnecessary social activities are performed. Provision and free access to public spaces, therefore, are essential for any society.

Public spaces in cities exist, and are needed universally. While we emphasize on the differences between cities, we can also choose to focus on their similarities, which are evident in the making and use of public spaces as a manifestation of social organization and the tensions that arise out of different perspectives engaged in a common concern. The book is divided into two parts and twelve chapters where Part I concentrates on public spaces in city centres, where public spaces have the highest level of significance and complexity. Part II focuses on case studies from peripheral residential areas, particularly low-income neighborhoods where public spaces have a significant role in the everyday life of the neighborhood. A concluding chapter narrows down the results of the studies and presents some ideas about the way forward.

This book analyses the process of urban design and development through international case studies, in which the changing character, level of accessibility and the tension of making public spaces are explored. The book uses a coherent theoretical outlook to investigate a series of case studies crossing the cultural divides to examine the similarities and differences of public

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spaces in different urban contexts, and its critical analysis of the process of development, management and the use of public space, with all its tensions and conflicts. Also the book outlines some general themes in global urban processes and shows how public spaces are a key theme in urban design and development everywhere, how they are appreciated and used by the people of the cities.

The method of approaching the issues regarding public spaces in this book is very pragmatic as it is done through the visibility of immigrant amenities such as shops, restaurants, etc. While the modern cities have undergone rapid transformation, the contemporary public space is also changing with the evolution of the cities as due to urban change, modern cities and residential developments are confronted with the problems of the loss of public space and the decline of public realm. Also the places are often located in closer proximity to financially wealthier residents. This results into weakened social capital for citizens that are unable to physically mix and interact in these spaces. Another important consideration done in this book is the disempowerment of collectives in the processes of urbanization. Internationally, this problem has been widely studied and related to limitations of public space in the fulfillment of social function concerning civic engagement, sense of ownership, inclusivity, accessibility and pluralism. In the proposed ontogenetic capacity of space that reflects the freedom to make and remake ourselves and our cities, this disempowerment is considered crucial.

The key issue is to have a clear sense of what is gained and what is lost, as an inevitable component of any development process, and have some control over this balance in favor of a wider range of people than many plans may suggest. A place, therefore, should not be seen as a cosy tool to facilitate the supply and demand of consumer goods and lifestyles. Another reductive pressure on public space is the assumptions made by the designers, developers and local decision makers concerning who the users are and what they need. The principle by which the claims are evaluated and the character of public spaces examined should be the principle of equality, where everyday needs for public spaces are met through participative processes and this results in both physical improvement and social development, laying the foundations for further enhancement of democratic practices.