Call for abstracts for a special issue for the Journal *of Urbanism*

'The Design of the Public Realm: Emerging Theories and Practices'

Guest editors

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Theme

This special issue focuses on the design of the public realm, a field of scholarship which was established in the 1980s within the urban design discipline but which has been long in the making in both urban design and sociology. The public realm has always been the chief concern of urban design and the most productive area of urban design thinking, however it continues to lack a solid and coherent body of knowledge. There are several key reasons for this.

First, the term 'public realm' continues to be loosely defined and applied, being often confused with public space or public life, while in essence, the public realm is the spatial and social territory of the city where public space and public life coincide (Lofland 1998). The public realm has an interdisciplinary character, both ontologically and epistemologically, focusing on the relationship between public life and design rather than on the design itself (Gehl and Svarre 2013).

Second, there is a need of further development and revision of the established theories on the public realm (Franck and Stevens 2007; Aelbrecht and Stevens 2019). The period between the 1960s and 80s was productive for thinking the design of the public realm, thanks to the studies of Lynch, White, Gehl and Alexander, just to mention a few. Their work has crossed disciplinary divides and developed new theories and methods to provide a better understanding of people's perceptions, experiences, and uses in public spaces. However, since the 1990s there has been more interest in the application rather than advancing new knowledge on the public realm.

Third, it is noticeable that most established theories were originated between the 1960-80s and are therefore the reflection of their time, a period of significant social, cultural, and political changes marked by urban race riots and feminism, but are no longer able to respond to the emerging social and technological challenges we are facing today. Cities are changing at a faster rate than ever before, alongside it, the make-up of our societies is also changing, and there is an ongoing shift in the cultural expectations and requirements of the public realm (Fraser, 1990; Madanipour, 2003; Watson, 2006; Sezer, 2020). New technological developments are spurring the proliferation of new and more mobile forms of communication, association and social relations through various mediums across the public and private realms, which means that the way urban public space is used and experienced is also undergoing significant changes (Sheller and Urry 2003). As a result, the relations between public and private realms are becoming increasingly blurred, mobile, complex, and fluid. At the same time, attitudes towards public space are changing and becoming more varied and contested.

Fourth, the established theories on the public realm are often based on a limited range of western case studies raising questions whether they can also be applied to other European contexts and parts of the world, particularly the Global South, where the design ideals and practices are arguably different.

Fifth, since the establishment of urban design as a discipline, there has been little knowledge exchange or synergy between research, practice and policymaking in the design of the public realm. Today most urban design scholarship has little engagement or knowledge on how design practices think and work, and what are the policymaker's needs and priorities (Griffiths, 2004). However, it is well known that enabling such transfer of knowledge, research can gain a better understanding of where new knowledge is needed, and enhance the prospects of being applied (Aelbrecht and Stevens, 2015). Practice and policymaking can also benefit by using research to improve built outcomes.

In this changing context, it is critical that urban design thinking continues to generate new ideas and thinking in relation to the design and management of more inclusive and cohesive public realms. Hence, there is a need to enlarge the public realm research, practice and policy agendas. If we want to better understand the complex nature, meaning, and roles of public space, we need more studies investigating new emerging types of public spaces, and which take into account the desires, interests and expectations of a wider range of stakeholders and users and the cultural variations of the contexts where they are embedded, and consider the needs and priorities of practice and policymaking.

This special issue aims to respond to these calls by bringing together existing and new emerging knowledge in the design of the public realm and taking a more global and comparative view on scholarly research, practice and policy in both the Global North and Global South. It intends to stimulate a discussion on the ongoing and future public realm practice, research and policy debates and agendas and open new avenues of enquiry in a number of areas, which include but are not limited to the following:

- To rethink the established public realm design theories and practices by examining their applicability in contexts beyond the Global North. This is the case of design theories and principles of legibility, diversity, and adaptability, just to mention a few.

- To examine and/or propose new public realm design theories and/or practices that have not yet been established or applied in public space design but have nevertheless been acknowledged to work as effective principles or tools to make more lively, inclusive and resilient public spaces. This is the case of urban design thinking related to forms of informality, temporary/tactical urbanism, congestion, just to mention a few.

- To discuss emerging theoretical and/or methodological advances in the public realm research and design with user characteristics in terms of age, gender, disability, social, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds in mind (e.g., intergenerational, elderly, women, children, disadvantageous users including ethnic minorities, deprived communities, homeless people, refugees).

- To discuss emerging issues related with the Covid 19 pandemic and its management (i.e. lockdown and social distancing measures in public space' use) and its implications on the way we think of, and design the public realm.

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Time schedule

26th March 2021: Submission of a proposal to jupublicrealm@gmail.com including:
- Paper title and keywords;
- Author(s) name, current affiliation and e-mail address;
- 300-word abstract;
- Maximum five key references;
- If applicable, two related images at a good resolution (min. 200dpi).

03 May 2021: The guest editors will inform prospective authors about the selected abstracts.

08 October 2021: Submission of full papers to guest editors. All papers need to be subject to a quality check by Journal of Urbanism editors and guest editors before formal submission.

01-15 November 2021: Submission of full papers to journal. Please note that all submitted papers should be based on' sound empirical' research and specify clearly their research questions, methods and aims, and should be carefully copy edited preferably by native speakers.

Short Biographies

Patricia Aelbrecht is a lecturer in Urban Design at the School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, UK. She holds a PhD in Urban Studies and an MSc in International Planning from University College London, and a BArch and MArch in Architecture from the Technical University of Lisbon, Portugal. She is an academic with a decade of research experience on the design and sociology of the public realm. Prior to being academic, she practiced as an architect and urban designer for more than a decade in several well-reputed international offices in the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal and Spain. She is co-author with Quentin Stevens of a book titled *Public Space Design and Social Cohesion: an International Comparison* (2019) with Routledge. She is co-founder and co-director with Hesam Kamalipour and Nastaran Peimani of the Public Space Observatory (PSO) at Cardiff University, a knowledge exchange platform between academia, practice and policy dedicated to public space provision, design and management.

Ceren Sezer is a research associate at the Chair and Institute of Urban Design of RWTH Aachen University in Germany. She holds a PhD and an MSc in Urbanism from Delft University of Technology and BArch in Architecture from Istanbul Technical University. She is joint editor of several special issues including: Marketplaces as an Urban Development Strategy (2013), Public Space and Urban Justice (2017) and The Politics of Visibility in Public Space (forthcoming). Her research interests include livability and sustainability of public spaces; urban form and social life in the city, and the impact of technological innovation in transforming city regions. Ceren is co-founder and coordinator of an international research group Public Spaces and Urban Cultures established under the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP).

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