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Challenging the 'End of Public Space': A Comparative Analysis of Publicness in British and Dutch Urban Spaces

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ABSTRACT *The increasing involvement of the private sector in the design and management of urban public space has prompted some critical scholars to predict the 'end of public space'. This study reassesses the implications of private sector involvement through a comparative analysis of British and Dutch urban spaces, based on a threefold critique of the existing literature on the privatization of public space. The analysis is governed by a new model of pseudo-public space that consists of four dimensions of 'publicness': ownership, management, accessibility and inclusiveness (OMAI). The findings suggest that, while there are significant differences between the British and the Dutch cases, neither context supports the notion of a possible 'end of public space' in any literal sense.*

Introduction

Urban public spaces, such as squares, streets, plazas and parks, have been the subject of considerable debate over the last two decades. Some critical urban scholars have argued that public space is under threat (Sorkin 1992; Mitchell 1995, 2003; Banerjee 2001; Voyce 2006; Madden 2010). They paint a rather bleak picture of modern urban life, one that is characterized by social exclusion, sanitized consumerism and restrictive security measures. In his critique of American urbanism, Sorkin (1992) even spoke in terms of the 'end of public space' when he compared the contemporary American urban landscape to Disneyland: a place that provides regulated pleasure for its target group, but at the same time a soulless place which is stripped of its sting, cleaned of undesirables, heavily controlled and, ultimately, a place that proves to be an illusion. Recently, some popular media, such as Britain's The Guardian (2012), have also raised concerns about "new outdoor spaces [that] favour business over community".

If we are convinced by this depiction of contemporary public space, an important question is *why* its nature is changing. One of the main reasons the literature points to is the increasing involvement of the private sector; in other words the 'privatization' of public space (Loukaitou-Sideris 1993; Banerjee 2001; Kohn 2004; Voyce 2006; see also London Assembly 2011). Local authorities have

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traditionally been responsible for managing the public spaces of city centres. However, they are increasingly unable and unwilling to bear the sole responsibility of the provision of public goods. They are unable because confronted with decentralization, deindustrialization, rising structural unemployment and a shrinking fiscal capacity of the state, their financial abilities to invest in public space are limited (MacLeod 2002; De Magalhães 2010). They are unwilling because the increasingly 'entrepreneurial' local authorities realize they need to cooperate with the private sector in order to not just offer public goods, but to create spectacular, well-designed public spaces that help to attract higher-income residents, tourists, investments and businesses to the city (Madanipour 2003). Handing over responsibility for providing public space to the private sector would thus save government expenses on the one hand, and lead to more spectacular and well-maintained spaces on the other hand, following the argument that it is more efficient to put the production of goods and services in the hands of the market (Needham 2006).

An ever-growing number of urban parks, plazas and shopping centres worldwide are now both owned and managed by for-profit enterprises. The crucial point here is that, while these spaces may *look* like public spaces on first sight, they are always managed and controlled with private interests in mind, and are therefore not *truly* public. As Banerjee stated:

> There is a presumption of 'publicness' in these pseudopublic spaces. But in reality they are in the private realm .... Access to and use of the space is only a privilege, not a right .... Any expectation that such spaces are open to all is fanciful at best. (Banerjee 2001, 12)

However, the 'end of public space' depiction has become increasingly contested in recent years. It has been argued that what we see happening is not a simple straightforward privatization of public space, but instead a varied and complex set of new arrangements for public space provision (De Magalhães 2010). The 'conventional wisdom' has also been criticized for "interpret[ing] the 'publicness' of publicly accessible spaces along ownership lines only", which is too narrow a definition (Németh and Schmidt 2011a, 6). Others have even stated that unjustified fear of privatization may cause local governments not to capitalize on otherwise effective and cost-efficient opportunities for city-centre regeneration (Van Melik 2010). Therefore, whether the increasing privatization of urban public space is truly resulting in the end of that public space is still open to debate.

The present paper contributes to this ongoing discussion about 'pseudo-public spaces' (Banerjee 2001) – spaces that serve a public function, but are characterized by various forms of private-sector involvement, be it in ownership or management. More specifically, it aims to add to earlier contributions that have revisited the 'end of public space' (Paddison and Sharp 2007; Madden 2010) in two ways. First, it provides a theoretical consolidation of existing critiques of this proposition. Second, it uses a comparative, cross-national empirical analysis to scrutinize the validity of the proposition of the 'end of public space'.

The next section identifies three flaws in the current literature. Subsequently, based on three earlier studies, this paper proposes a new model for analyzing the publicness of urban public space. This model is then applied to case studies in Britain and the Netherlands.

Public Space Research: Three Shortcomings

The increasing presence of pseudo-public space in city centres has attracted substantial interest from urban scholars (e.g. Mitchell 1995; Banerjee 2001; Németh and Schmidt 2011a). However, a number of conceptual issues remain. The analysis here indicates three particular flaws: (1) a tendency to define 'publicness' in narrow terms; (2) a bias towards well-known primary (or 'flagship') urban spaces; and (3) a bias towards the Anglo-American world.

What Makes Public Spaces 'Public'?

The transfer of responsibilities for the provision of public space from the government to private parties has often been described as "the demise of *truly* public space" (De Magalhães 2010, 560, emphasis in original). This, of course, raises the crucial question what 'publicness' exactly entails. Urban scholars have defined it in a variety of ways (see Staeheli and Mitchell 2007). Early studies of public space often departed from a list of desirable features of public space. This approach has been criticized on the basis that it assumes an 'ideal' public space that cannot exist in practice, because it ignores the fact that different users of public space have different ideals of openness and inclusiveness; no public space can fulfil the needs of *everybody*. Assessing the publicness of public space must therefore involve "ask[ing] *to whom* a space … might be more or less public" (Németh and Schmidt 2011a, 9, emphasis in original; see also Mitchell 2003; Staeheli and Mitchell 2007).

Others have argued that the publicness of a certain space can be located on a single continuum from completely public to completely private (De Magalhães 2010; Németh and Schmidt 2011a). Ownership is often taken to be the defining criterion, so that spaces can be ordered from publicly-owned to privately-owned (Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). Yet such an approach also has its limitations. The boundary between public and private has become increasingly blurred in recent years, which Kohn (2004, 11) labelled as the 'hybridization' of private and public space. This has important implications for understanding the privatization of public space. As De Magalhães observed for the UK, the picture we see emerging is:

> … not so much one of a corporate take-over and the intensification of processes of exclusion, but instead one of complex redistribution of roles, rights and responsibilities over provision and governance to a range of social actors beyond the state, … with varying effects on essential public space qualities. (De Magalhães 2010, 560)

A single public-private ownership dichotomy cannot capture these hybrid forms of public-space governance accurately. A more comprehensive definition must, as Németh and Schmidt (2011a, 9) argued, "involve multiple, interrelated definitions, in order to avoid the tendency either to create a list of desirable features or to reduce the concept to a single continuum". Some studies have offered such a multifaceted understanding of publicness. For example, Kohn (2004, 11) used three criteria in her definition: ownership, accessibility and intersubjectivity. De Magalhães (2010, 571) proposed that rights of access, rights of use and ownership/control determine the public nature of a particular space. Varna and Tiesdell (2010, 580) defined public space along five dimensions:

ownership, control, civility, physical configuration and animation. Finally, Németh and Schmidt (2011a, 10) interpreted publicness as consisting of three main criteria: ownership, management and uses/users.

All these definitions share similarities, although their terminology is often slightly different. Each definition considers ownership to be one of the dimensions of publicness. Another important component is the way a space is managed. A third component that most of the above definitions share is accessibility (called rights of access in De Magalhães's terminology, and physical configuration in Varna and Tiesdell's). This dimension is not just about whether a space is open to the public or not, but also how much effort it takes to enter the place. A fourth dimension can be taken to be what will be labelled here 'inclusiveness', that is, the extent to which a place is designed for and used by different types of users. This is related to Kohn's notion of intersubjectivity, and Varna and Tiesdell's concept of animation. Thus the paper has arrived at four central dimensions of 'publicness': ownership, management, accessibility and inclusiveness. The paper will return to these dimensions below, when a new model of public space is proposed.

Focus on Flagships

It has been argued that critical visions of contemporary public space (such as MacLeod 2002; Mitchell 2003) are flawed because the picture they paint "is skewed by the concentration of research in . . . the recapitalised, flagship spaces associated with urban restructuring" (Paddison and Sharp 2007, 88; Burgers et al. 2012). This bias is hardly surprising, as these types of highly spectacular, flagship projects are of natural interest to urban geographers. Indeed, from a critical perspective, it could well be argued that the main focus of research *should* be aimed at these types of central urban spaces, as it is in these spaces that we can see the effects of neoliberal urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey 1989) most clearly.

However, the criticism remains that primary 'flagship' spaces associated with neoliberal urban renewal remain only a small proportion of the total number of public spaces in any city. Most public space is in fact located outside the city centre and is not as well-known or spectacular, but nevertheless has an important function for its neighbourhood. Processes such as privatization might work out differently in these so-called 'secondary' (Burgers et al. 2012) or 'banal' (Paddison and Sharp 2007) spaces. Overly pessimistic interpretations proclaiming the 'end of public space' should therefore be treated with caution. As Paddison and Sharp (2007) demonstrated for two neighbourhoods in Glasgow, there are indeed important differences in the way changes in public space are implemented and resisted in the city centre compared to more residential neighbourhoods. We must wonder if the idea of an 'end of public space' can be upheld if we shift our focus to the 'banal' spaces of the everyday residential neighbourhood, or if such claims should only be made, if at all, for a very limited number of newly regenerated inner-city areas.

Overcoming Anglo-American Dominance

Next to the flagship bias, the majority of literature is focused on pseudo-public spaces in the Anglo-American world (e.g. Loukaitou-Sideris 1993; Mitchell 1995; Banerjee 2001; Voyce 2006; Paddison and Sharp 2007; Madden 2010). As De Magalhães (2010, 560) argued, "the particular North American context that

underpins many… overpessimistic interpretations [of public space] makes generalization problematic". There are not a great number of exceptions to this Anglo-American dominance, although some studies have been conducted in Cairo (Abaza 2001), Berlin (Allen 2006), Madrid (Fraser 2007), and the Netherlands (Van Melik 2008). This poses the question to what extent the conclusions drawn from the Anglo-American world are relevant to European cities. Indeed, British and, even more so, American governance systems are often characterized as 'liberal' systems compared to their Western European socio-democratic 'welfare-state' counterparts. Logically, one would expect a liberal governance system to be more open to private-sector involvement in public space than a centralized comprehensive welfare state. Carmona (2010) also stated that public space is the result of historical and cultural trends, diverse modes of governance, regulation, political priorities and the balance between political and market forces. This implies that privatization will work out differently depending on the local context.

How can the bias towards the Anglo-American world be overcome? The present study attempts to do so by comparing two different contexts – Britain and the Netherlands. Conducting a meaningful comparison between two countries is easier said than done (Kantor and Savitch 2005). This is especially true for research on public space. Most of the literature has taken a strictly qualitative case-study approach (e.g. Akkar 2005; Németh and Schmidt 2011b). While this methodology has the advantage of being able to study a particular place or city in great detail, such thick descriptions of particular spaces make generalizing across different contexts difficult (Varna and Tiesdell 2010). This is not to dismiss qualitative approaches to the study of urban public space altogether; on the contrary, if the involvement of the private sector in public space is indeed as complex and as hybrid as has been argued (Kohn 2004; De Magalhães 2010), purely quantitative methodologies might tell us very little about how this privatization unfolds in practice.

The resulting challenge is therefore as follows: on the one hand, in-depth analysis of specific cases is required if we are to understand how the involvement of the private sector affects the 'publicness' of these places. On the other hand, a relatively systematic and rigorous approach is needed in order to compare public spaces in different contexts. Therefore, Németh and Schmidt (2007, 283) called for a more 'pragmatic' strand of research on the publicness of public space. They argued that a more systematic methodological approach is needed: results must be "empirically quantifiable lest [they] dissolve into a set of anecdotes or personal observations" (Németh and Schmidt 2011a, 9–10). This is no doubt a difficult balance to achieve, but attempts have been made to reconcile qualitative observations with a more systematic approach (Van Melik, Van Aalst, and Van Weesep 2007; Varna and Tiesdell 2010; Németh and Schmidt 2011a). These studies do not dismiss the use of qualitative methods, but use them as input for a more or less 'quantitative' model of public space. The next section draws on these earlier publications in developing a model of pseudo-public urban space.

Towards a Model of Pseudo-Public Urban Space

At least three models of urban public space have been developed so far: the 'cobweb' model (Van Melik, Van Aalst, and Van Weesep 2007), the 'tri-axal' model

(Németh and Schmidt 2011a) and the 'star' model (Varna and Tiesdell 2010). All three are set up as a tool for comparison (Figure 1).

The *cobweb model* is – to the authors' knowledge – the first to use a pictorial representation of public space. It focuses on two particular types of urban space: 'secured' and 'themed' public space (Van Melik, Van Aalst, and Van Weesep 2007). Each type is operationalized through three observable characteristics. The higher the score on a particular indicator, the bigger that part of the web becomes (Figure 1a). As the authors are quick to admit, quantified diagrams have their limitations: it is based on a limited number of criteria, and it depends on the researcher's interpretations for meaningful input. One weakness of this particular model, as pointed out by Varna and Tiesdell (2010), is that the shape of the web in question is determined by the position of the six criteria relative to one another (the web would look different, for example, if dimensions 1 and 4 were positioned on the opposite side).

The *tri-axal model* models public space along three criteria: ownership, management and uses/users (Németh and Schmidt 2011a). Spaces can be plotted along these three lines as 'more public' or 'more private' (Figure 1b). Compared to the cobweb model, the tri-axal model uses more general criteria. A potential drawback of this particular representation is that it is not exactly clear what the middle of the diagram represents, or where on the axes a particular node should be located. The model also does not allow for more than three dimensions of publicness or the graph would get visually confusing. Moreover, unlike the cobweb model, this model has not yet been tested in empirical research.

In the *star model* each of the five dimensions of publicness is the limb of a star: the more 'public' the place on a particular dimension, the bigger the limb (Figure 1c). Although it is visually more intuitive than the tri-axal model, it suffers from a similar problem in that it does not show discrete scales, which makes comparisons more difficult.

These three models are all based on a multifaceted interpretation of what 'publicness' entails. As argued earlier, such an approach is more effective than reducing publicness to a single concept. Previously, four dimensions of publicness were identified: ownership, management, accessibility and inclusiveness (OMAI). One way of translating these four dimensions into a model of public space is by using a pie chart (Figure 2). In this new OMAI model, each of the four dimensions forms an equal part of the circle. A bigger 'slice' represents a more 'public' space; a small slice stands for a more private space in that particular dimension. The concentric rings allow each of the four dimensions to be measured on an ordinal, four-point scale ranging from 1 (fully private) to 4 (fully public). Table 1 shows the

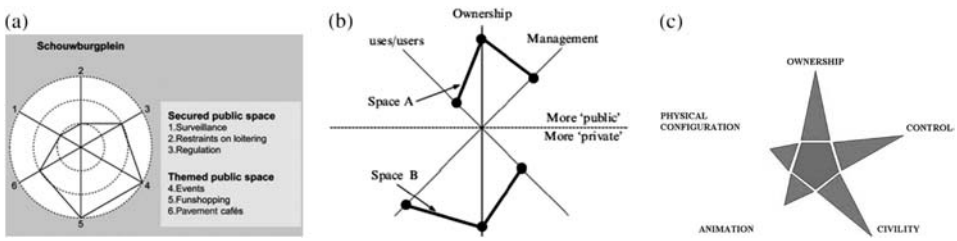

Figure 1. (a) The cobweb model (Van Melik, Van Aalst, and Van Weesep 2007); (b) tri-axal model (Németh and Schmidt 2011a); and (c) star model (Varna and Tiesdell 2010).

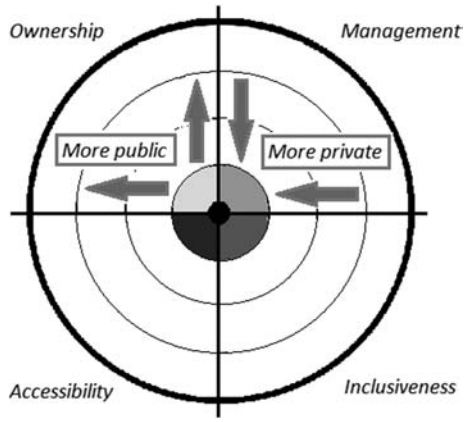

Figure 2. The OMAI model of publicness.

criteria that were used for this operationalization. It shows that ownership and management are easier to measure ('hard' factors), while accessibility and inclusiveness are more ambiguous to define ('soft' factors).

Ownership is the most straightforward dimension to define; it refers to the legal status of a place. *Management* refers to the way the place is cared for on a day-to-day basis, as well as to practices of control such as the presence of CCTV and security guards. *Accessibility* has two main components. The physical connectivity of a public space is obviously crucial to its accessibility, but accessibility is also related to the design of the public space itself. For example, entrances may be deliberately obstructed to make a place appear less public. *Inclusiveness* is about the degree a place meets the demands of different individuals and groups. It relates to what Varna and Tiesdell (2010) have called 'animation': meeting human needs in public space. As Németh and Schmidt (2011a, 12, emphasis in original) suggested, this "can be measured both *quantitatively*, by the diversity of uses and users of the space, and *qualitatively*, by the behaviours and perceptions of the users themselves". In practice, one might look at factors such as the availability of restrooms, seating and lighting and the presence of events, creating "a welcoming ambience" (Varna and Tiesdell 2010, 585).

Naturally, the OMAI model shares important similarities with the three existing models. They are all intended as 'pragmatic' research tools that can be used to compare public spaces by making the differences between them visible. In addition, the OMAI is also based on a multifaceted interpretation of public space. Notwithstanding these similarities, it is argued here that the model does represent an improvement, especially regarding the tri-axal and star model (as the cobweb model is actually not about publicness). These models lack discrete scales, which makes it difficult to compare different cases and to see how different nodes on an axis (of the tri-axal model) or different limbs (of the star model) stand in comparison to one another. Moreover, it is argued that the main concern in the 'end of public space' debate is not private ownership or management per se, but the *consequences* thereof. Indeed, private-sector involvement might not be that problematic if it does not lead to reduced inclusiveness or decreased accessibility. Due to its focus on ownership and management, the tri-axal model covers the arrangement of public space better than it deals with its consequences. The OMAI model compensates for this by explicitly combining Ownership/Management (upper part of diagram) and

Table 1. Operationalization of the OMAI model

Dimension of publicness	Defining components	1. Fully private	2. Private with some public characteristics	3. Public with some private characteristics	4. Fully public
Ownership	Legal status; public accountability	Legal ownership rests solely with a for-profit organization that is not publicly accountable	Majority of legal ownership rests with a for-profit organization, but local government has a minority stake; or legal ownership rests with a private not-for-profit organization	Majority of legal ownership rests with local government, but for-profit organizations have a minority stake; or legal ownership rests with an independent not-for-profit organization that is democratically accountable	Legal ownership rests solely with the local government
Management	Day-to-day maintenance; security/control	Security and maintenance are provided by independent private parties only	Security and maintenance are provided by a combination of public bodies and independent private parties	Private parties are involved in maintenance and security, but local government and the police have ultimate authority	Maintenance and security are the responsibility of local government and the police alone
Accessibility	Physical and legal barriers to access; visual access and obstacles through design	Physical barriers to access; a visually inaccessible design, resulting in a 'stealthy space'; a geographical location that makes it difficult for certain groups to reach the space; lack of accessibility by public transport	Meeting most, but not all of the criteria under (1)	Meeting some of the criteria under (1)	Meeting none of the criteria under (1), in other words, the place is equally accessible to all members of the public
Inclusiveness	Diversity of uses and users; facilities; welcoming ambience	There is a restrictive policy on activities allowed in the public space, and street furniture is completely absent or intentionally 'sadistic'	Seating and lighting are available, but no other attempts are made to welcome non-consuming visitors, and a restrictive policy on activities allowed is still in place	Seating and lighting are available, but no other attempts are made to welcome non-consuming visitors; no explicit restrictive policy on activities allowed is in place	Meeting the demands of a wide variety of users is an official policy goal

Sources: Dimensions based on Kohn (2004); Németh and Schmidt (2011a); De Magalhães (2010); Varna and Tiesdell (2010); and others; components inspired by Van Melik (2008).

its consequences regarding Accessibility/Inclusiveness (lower part) in one model with four discrete scales. The star model contains more variables than the tri-axal model and therefore gives a more comprehensive view of publicness. Yet some variables have the same weakness as the tri-axal model. For example, 'physical configuration' rather focuses on the design of a place than on the consequences of this design for accessibility or inclusiveness. Therefore, the star model juxtaposes design/physical and managerial/social (Varna and Tiesdell 2010, 589), while it is argued that 'supply' (ownership and management) versus 'demand' (consequences for users) is a more relevant juxtaposition in the debate on the privatization of public space. Although these faults might seem minor at first, it is believed that the existing models are insufficient when challenging the 'end of public space'.

Methodology

Now that the OMAI model has been established, it should be tested in practice. The appropriate response to an Anglo-Saxon bias is not to turn away from empirical research in the Anglo-Saxon world altogether, but instead to overcome this bias through comparisons with other contexts. Therefore, a decision was made to compare pseudo-public spaces in Britain and the Netherlands. Similarly, a bias towards 'flagship' projects does not mean that these spaces should be dismissed from empirical study altogether. Rather, it is argued that flagship or primary spaces should be complemented by more 'banal' or secondary forms of public space on the neighbourhood level.

The study has concentrated on four locations in Britain (more specifically, in London) and three in the Netherlands (Table 2). These cases were selected as follows. First there was an attempt to find as many potentially 'pseudo-public' spaces as possible based on searches in general newspapers and other sources (e.g. London Assembly 2011), using search terms such as 'privatization', 'public-private partnership' and 'private ownership'. From this list, spaces were chosen that could reasonably be expected not to score '4' on each of the indicators, based on personal observations and secondary sources. Subsequently, the seven case studies were selected with the intention of obtaining a diversity of different spaces, ranging from primary spaces (often in prominent, inner-city locations) such as Potters Fields Park, Central Saint Giles and ArenA Boulevard to secondary spaces (in less prominent, 'banal' locations within the city) such as Bermondsey Square, Proefpark De Punt and Mercatorplein (with Spitalfields Market somewhere in between) to ensure the model could be tested across a wide variety of public spaces. All of these seven cases are characterized by the involvement of the private sector, although in the case of Mercatorplein that involvement lasted from 1998 to 2008 and has now come to an end.

While this paper compares Britain and the Netherlands, it is virtually impossible to detect and qualitatively research all pseudo-public spaces within these countries. The primary aim of this study is to reassess the hypothesis of the 'end of public space' by applying the OMAI model across a variety of public spaces, not so much as to conduct a statistically representative comparison. Hence, the outcomes should be regarded as the means to a specific end, rather than as results that have universal validity across the two countries.

As is common in case-study research, each case has been researched by a mix of methods, including observations, analysis of secondary data and in-depth

Table 2. Overview of case studies

Name	Location	Function	Description
Spitalfields Market	Spitalfields, London (UK)	Market	This historic market, and the small square next to it, was redeveloped by a private investment fund. It is currently home to a fashion market, an arts market, as well as restaurants and other retailers.
Potters Fields Park	Southwark, London (UK)	Park	Opened in 2007, this park, right next to Tower Bridge, is managed by an independent but not-for-profit trust, which raises funds by hosting events in the park.
Bermondsey Square	Bermondsey, London (UK)	Square	This square is part of a recent redevelopment project by a private investor. It includes apartments, offices and retail space. It is also home to an antiques market.
Central Saint Giles piazza	Holborn, London (UK)	Square	This piazza is a small open space that is part of a development consisting of high-rise office towers and apartment blocks, but the piazza is open to members of the public.
ArenA Boulevard	Zuidoost, Amsterdam (NL)	Boulevard	This boulevard is home to several megastores, restaurants, and entertainment venues. Its website lists 31 participating organizations.
Mercatorplein	De Baarsjes, Amsterdam (NL)	Square	This square was redeveloped in 1998 by a public-private partnership. This partnership came to an end in 2008, when the square was redeveloped again. Unless otherwise specified, references to this case refer to that period.
Proefpark De Punt	Delfshaven, Rotterdam (NL)	Park	This small park, which was formerly a strip of wasteland on the edge of the neighbourhood, is run by an independent organization that aims to get the local community more involved in the park.

interviews. In the tradition of Whyte (1980) and other researchers such as Low (2000), each location has been observed and photographed on multiple occasions. Observation is particularly suited to investigate the users of public space ('demand'), more so than the role and objectives of the owners and managers ('supply'). Therefore, the observations have been complemented with secondary data analysis, notably of management plans. The cases are further illustrated by locally gained insights obtained through eight semi-structured interviews with crucial stakeholders: four site managers, two local government representatives, a city marketer and a park supervisor. These interviewees were chosen because they were most closely involved in the day-to-day management of the particular public space, which makes it possible to investigate their semantics regarding publicness of public space. All interviews were held in the spring of 2012 and were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using NVivo. The interviews in the Netherlands were conducted in Dutch, quotes used in this paper are the authors' translation. The information obtained from all of these sources combined was used to create a thick description of each location, which was used to allocate values (ranging from 1 to 4) to the four criteria of the OMAI model (Table 3).

Results

Ownership

When looking at the seven case studies (Figure 3), it becomes immediately apparent that there is a variety of forms through which the ownership of public space can take place. Some spaces are completely privately owned, while others are fully owned by the local government but (to some extent) privately managed, such as ArenA Boulevard and Mercatorplein. There are also other legal structures that might be called 'intermediate' forms of public-space ownership. A good example is Potters Fields Park: the local borough still owns the freehold of the site, but has leased it to an independent trust for 30 years, which takes on full responsibility for it.

In some cases, the privatization of ownership of public space has been a 'gradual privatization', instead of a straightforward takeover by private parties. The Potters Fields Park Management Trust, for example, is a legacy organization originating from a regeneration partnership that was formerly active in the area. The Trust's Board of Directors consists of the local borough, which has two members, the Greater London Authority, a local residents association, a housing corporation, the local Business Improvement District and More London Development, who own the adjacent city hall (PFPMT 2011). In the case of Spitalfields Market, the initial redevelopment was planned as a joint venture between the City of London and a private developer. Later on, the City of London gradually departed from the scheme, eventually leaving the market place in fully private hands.

Management

Most respondents were keen to address the advantages of private management of public spaces compared to traditional municipal forms of management, such as the ability to maintain the space to a higher standard or the ability to increase participation from the local community:

Table 3. Applying the OMAI model to seven cases

	Ownership	Management	Accessibility	Inclusiveness
Spitalfields Market	1: owned by a private investment fund	1: maintenance and security in private hands	4: very accessible to a wide general public	4: extensive programmes that target the inclusion of a wide variety of groups and ethnicities
Potters Fields Park	3: owned by local government, leased to a partially independent but not-for-profit trust	2: private management, a mixture of external public and private parties provide security	3: park is normally accessible to all members of the public, but it can be closed off for events	3: no rules on behaviour different from other local parks, some links with local community but events are mostly commercial
Bermondsey Square	1: owned by a private developer	1: managed by an independent property management company	4: very accessible location, explicitly designed so that it cannot be closed off – preserving an 'open' feel	4: local community is involved through a community fund, no rules different from other public squares, seating for the general public to use
Central Saint Giles	1: owned by a joint venture of property investors	1: managed by an independent property management company	2: open to the general public, a very 'stealthy' space, private security can remove undesirable groups	1: piazza, and events organized in it, are aimed at office workers and local residents – people who pay to be there
ArenA Boulevard	4: fully owned by local government	3: very loose form of public-private cooperation, local government remains in control	4: fully accessible to the public as a public thoroughfare	4: boulevard is used by a very diverse group of people, local community has recently become a lot more involved
Mercatorplein	4: fully owned by local government	2: management of the square was handed down to an independent trust, but local government remained the most powerful player financially	4: fully accessible to the public as a public thoroughfare	4: square has an important 'neighbourhood function', providing a meeting space for the local community
Proefpark De Punt	3: owned by a local housing association, who finance the park's upkeep together with local government	1: park is run and managed by an independent bureau, who are fully responsible	4: park is open 24/7, management has opted against placing gates around the estate; even binge drinking at night is tolerated	4: the bureau's very method is to foster local community participation at every opportunity; local residents feel that the park is theirs

Notes: 1 = fully private; 2 = private with some public characteristics; 3 = public with some private characteristics; 4 = fully public.

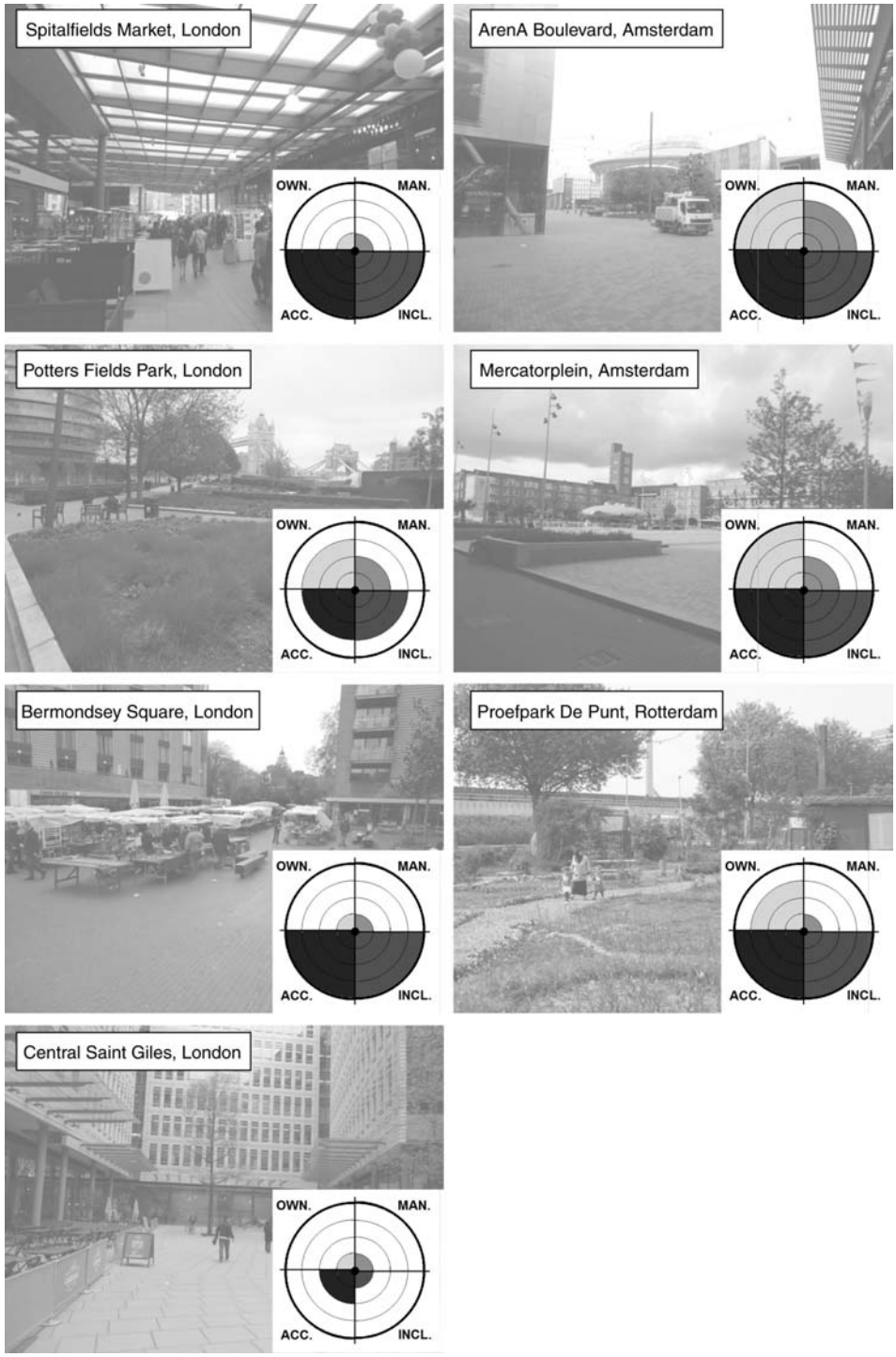

Figure 3. The OMAI model applied to four British and three Dutch cases. *Sources:* all photographs by Langstraat, except Proefpark De Punt (2012).

> … the money that we raise was ring-fenced, so we can take a much more strategic, longer-term view about the park than, say, a local authority, which is governed by the political cycle, if you like. (Interview Potters Fields Park)

> There's more and more talk of citizen participation, citizen initiatives. Well, that has to be supervised in some way. So they [local government] are beginning to see that we are a good partner. (Interview Proefpark De Punt)

What is particularly striking is that very similar forms of public-space management can lead to very different approaches to security. Both Bermondsey Square and Central Saint Giles piazza, for example, are managed by independent property management companies, but while the former has no formal security presence on site, the Central Saint Giles management employs a round-the-clock security team.

In general, private management of public spaces seems to be viewed quite differently in the British cases than in the Dutch cases. In Britain, three interviewees claimed that local government was happy not to be in control of the space (the exception being Potters Fields Park). In the Dutch cases, the local authority often wants to retain primary responsibility. In the case of Mercatorplein, for example, an independent organization called *Stichting Beheer Mercatorplein* [Mercatorplein Management Foundation] was set up to redevelop the square (Witman and De Haan 2010), but their powers in terms of management were very limited:

> In fact the borough was the big initiator … Most of the money still came from local government … They [Mercatorplein Management Foundation] didn't really have a lot of responsibilities … and no own budget for upkeep. In the bigger picture it was fairly marginal, to be honest. (Interview Mercatorplein)

Mercatorplein is not the only Dutch case where primary responsibility for the management is still in local government hands; the same is true for ArenA Boulevard (Witman and De Haan 2010). Proefpark De Punt represents an exception. Here, management of the park is completely in the hands of an independent company, which manages the site on behalf of the municipal government and the local housing association (Proefpark De Punt 2012). Such an approach is still fairly unique in the Netherlands, at least outside the realm of indoor shopping centres, which makes it difficult to find many examples of fully privately managed outdoor spaces (Van Melik 2008).

Accessibility

The seven case studies show varied levels of restrictions on accessibility (Figure 3). Potters Fields Park is usually open to the general public, but can be closed off for events. Central Saint Giles piazza is open to the public, but its 'stealthy' design (Flusty 1997) gives it a private appearance. Figure 4 shows that some entrances are not very welcoming and can give the public the impression they have to consume in order to spend time there. Accessibility does not seem to be much of an issue in the Dutch cases, as none of them can physically be closed off, and none officially limits access for certain groups through regulation. This might not be entirely true

Figure 4. 'Stealthy' character of one of the Central Saint Giles entrances. *Source:* photograph by Langstraat.

for the British cases, although all British site managers claim that their public spaces are open to all – as one of them states:

> I think that 99 percent of the people that use it would never notice the difference. (Interview Potters Fields Park)

However, it might be precisely the 1% of users to whom there is a marked difference. Three of the British spaces do not allow protestors or demonstrations. Another 'sensitive issue' are vendors of homeless newspapers:

> ... we wouldn't want it to be, you know, a regular pitch ... we're not keen on somebody standing selling Big Issue, but we do support homelessness as a charity, and we prefer to deal with it that way. (Interview Central Saint Giles)

Of course, whether such restrictions are problematic depends on whether or not one believes holding demonstrations and selling homeless newspapers in public space are legitimate activities at all times. Crucially, however, these limits to access are determined by a private party rather than a public body. In sum, it seems that these types of limits to accessibility vary from space to space, and are fairly subtle and not immediately apparent. However, in some cases, it can quite possibly be argued that these spaces are not as accessible to everyone as they appear to be at first sight.

Inclusiveness

Nearly all cases can be said to be fairly inclusive, although there is one exception, Central Saint Giles piazza, which is dominated by offices and upmarket restaurants catering mainly to office workers. As the site manager explains:

> Some developments do have that as a requirement, for example having events for the community, we don't do that, essentially we're here to look after the people who pay to be here. (Interview Central Saint Giles)

However, it cannot be claimed that privately owned and/or managed public spaces are by definition exclusive. Spitalfields Market, for example, has an extensive events programme that encourages the local community to get involved:

> We actually put on events that encourage the different nationalities of the local areas to come .... it means that there isn't this divide, or this animosity towards this kind of very corporate looking site. (Interview Spitalfields Market)

In other words, Spitalfields management has an incentive not to make the space a more exclusive space, as doing so would make the space less vibrant, with possible negative consequences for retailers on the site. Something similar can be observed in Bermondsey Square:

> Even though this is private land we believed it fundamental to the integration of all the uses into the immediate neighbourhood that the space 'feels' in common ownership. We felt that this would engender respect and desirability, creating a space where people feel comfortable and want to spend their time, as opposed to a place unloved and resented. (Interview Bermondsey Square)

The Potters Fields Park Management Trust also tries to cater to a wide variety of users within the local community, as is stated in its management plan (PFPMT 2011, 10):

> The chief executive has had meetings with local Tenants Associations to get input for plans for future community events on the site in order to draw more users from local housing ... [and] links are being developed with Tower Bridge Primary School.

However, in terms of benefits to the wider community, this strategy seems to be only partially successful: most events taking place in the park are related to commercial filming, photography, marketing and product promotion. It is hard to see how the local community benefits from these activities, although it could be argued that there is still an indirect benefit to the community, as the funds that are raised from these events are reinvested in the park itself.

In all three Dutch cases, inclusiveness can be characterized as 'fully public'. In that sense, it might be argued that there is a link between ownership and inclusiveness: government-owned spaces are inclusive. On the other hand, the examples of Spitalfields Market and Bermondsey Square clearly show that being privately owned or managed does not mean that such a space is by definition exclusive.

General Findings

What findings can be drawn from these seven case studies? First, there seems to be no clear relationship between one aspect of 'publicness' and another. In other words, it cannot be said that a privately-owned public space is by definition less accessible, or a privately-managed space automatically more exclusive. In the Netherlands, Proefpark De Punt is a clear example of a space under fully private management that is, if anything, even more inclusive than many government-owned parks:

> What's special about this is precisely that there is no gate, so yes, in the evening you get youths hanging around, and at night you get the Bulgarians drinking their whisky until the morning. Well, they are just as welcome as the good citizens. (Interview Proefpark De Punt)

Second, there is a significant difference in governance culture between the British and the Dutch cases with regard to the relationship between public and private parties. As mentioned, many British site managers argue that local governments were happy to see new private developments as it represented an improvement of the particular site. In the Dutch cases, local government is often far more wary of handing over responsibilities to the private sector. This can be seen most clearly in the case of the ArenA Boulevard, where the only involvement of the private sector is a very loose and informal form of public-private cooperation. As a local government official put it:

> If you give them too much influence, that means that you cannot really weigh the common good anymore. Well, that is what you just shouldn't do as a municipality .... At the end of the day it's a case of he who pays the piper calls the tune in this country. You have to be reasonable and fair as a municipality, and that would be very hard to maintain .... It's an illusion to say in this country private parties pay for it because they like you. That's not going to happen. There is something in return. (Interview ArenA Boulevard)

Consequently, responsibility for public space in the Dutch cases is still very much the responsibility of local government, and exceptions to that rule seem to be a much rarer than in the British context. This might explain why public spaces that are completely privately owned or managed are more difficult to find in the Netherlands than they are in Britain.

Discussion: Reflecting on the OMAI Model

By applying the model to seven case studies, the study has highlighted the fact that there is significant variation in patterns of ownership, management, accessibility and inclusiveness, both between Britain and the Netherlands and within these two countries. As indicated above, there is no clear-cut relationship between these four factors. The study has already alluded to some of the advantages of the OMAI model compared to previous models, but one particularly distinctive feature of the model warrants repetition. The OMAI model, more so than other models, explicitly contrasts the main *indicators* of the involvement of the private sector in public space (ownership and management), with the *consequences* of this involvement (accessibility and inclusiveness). Hence, it should primarily be regarded as a tool for the analysis of private-sector involvement in public space rather than as overarching operationalization of public space. The OMAI model is particularly suitable for this specific task.

A couple of caveats are nevertheless in order at this point. First, it must be stressed that the model is not meant as a tool for making moral judgements. The argument has not been that less accessible or less inclusive spaces are by definition 'bad' spaces, nor that 'publicness' is the only standard by which the quality of public space should be judged. For example, urban public spaces that are fully public might still be criticized for being overly commercialized, which is a separate line of argument.

Similarly, it should be emphasized that while 'fully public' space might exist in the model, such spaces will be hard to find in reality. As indicated earlier, no space is ever equally accessible to all members of the public and no space will ever meet the demands of all users, as some of these are bound to be conflictive. It

might be said that in reality, there is no such thing as 'the public' – a space that feels open and inclusive to some might convey the opposite feelings to others. Even for a single user, it might be difficult to rank emotions such as feelings of inclusiveness. It is suggested that there is significant scope for future research to more fully investigate the feelings, perceptions and subjectivities behind the publicness of public space for different user groups.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that while it is thought that ownership, management, accessibility and inclusiveness are essential aspects of 'publicness', its definition and operationalization could be more fine-grained. For example, future comparative research might theorize on how 'publicness' is defined amongst different cultural contexts. Staeheli and Mitchell (2007) have already discussed different definitions of 'the public' (in literature, by academics and by practitioners), but only within one national context (the United States). In the four dimensions, the involvement of the local government is an important determinant of the degree of publicness. However, government-involvement should not be taken for granted and may differ per context. For the Dutch cases, it proved to be essential in defining 'public' space, but that parameter is different in Britain and probably elsewhere. The question of what makes public space 'public', posed earlier in this paper, might be formulated again from this cultural perspective.

Despite these limitations, the OMAI model is a useful tool for bringing the differences between the 'publicness' of spaces into view in a relatively objective way, in order to compare different cases in terms of ownership, management, accessibility and inclusiveness. The public-space debate profits from this more nuanced view on privatization which, it is argued, is not as black-and-white as some of the 'literature of loss' seems to suggest.

Conclusions

It has become almost commonplace in writings about public space to bemoan the decline of its quality and public character due to increased private-sector involvement. Both in scholarly debate (Mitchell 1995, 2003; Banerjee 2001), policy discourse (London Assembly 2011), and the popular media (The Guardian 2012) concerns have been raised about the erosion of 'publicness' in public space. The present study has tried to challenge this image of loss. A threefold critique of the existing literature has governed the empirical analysis, as the study has attempted to overcome narrow definitions of 'publicness', a bias towards the Anglo-American world and a bias towards 'flagship' regeneration projects.

What the results of the comparative analysis point to is that, while there are significant differences between the British and the Dutch cases, neither context supports the notion of a possible 'end of public space' in any literal sense. Public space will never disappear completely, although the number of public spaces that are privately owned and/or managed is increasing. Local governments, especially in the Netherlands, are still reluctant to hand over total responsibility to private parties, but rather wish to join forces. Therefore, privatization of public space should not be understood as a straightforward corporate takeover, but, as De Magalhães (2010, 560) also stated, as "complex redistribution of roles, rights and responsibilities… with varying effects on… public space". By combining ownership/management and inclusiveness/accessibility in the OMAI model and testing it in seven public spaces, the research has complemented and corroborated

governance-oriented perspectives such as De Magalhães's (2010). Analysis of the seven diagrams shows that there is no clear-cut relation between ownership/management and inclusiveness/accessibility. Not only are the case studies privatized through a complex variety of arrangements, but similar ownership or management regimes have proven to have very different effects on the accessibility and inclusiveness of public space. Privately owned and managed spaces may be exclusive and exclusionary in some or even many cases, but the case studies here show that this is not true for all spaces. Particularly in the non-flagship or secondary cases here, private-sector involvement has not led to reduced accessibility or inclusiveness.

There seems to be a bigger reluctance from the part of Dutch local governments to involve private parties in public space than in Britain. Perhaps this could be explained by differences in welfare state regimes, with governments playing a more central part in urban planning in social-democratic Holland than in liberal Britain. However, the definition here of pseudo-public space might also have contributed to this finding. Following Banerjee (2001), the study investigated spaces that serve a public function, but are characterized by private-sector ownership or management. However, transfer of responsibilities could also imply having a role in the decision-making process or a voice in the design of public space – without immediate changes in ownership or management. Completely privately owned or very exclusionary public spaces are very hard to find in the Netherlands, but there are ample examples in which the private sector plays a role in initiating, designing, financing or maintaining public space that is owned by the local government (Van Melik 2008). The observations here thus confirm the need for a comparative approach to the study of pseudo-public space, as it highlights the differences between two contexts and shows that the 'end' of public space – if at all real – is certainly not as near outside the Anglo-American world.

How, then, should we evaluate the proposition of a possible, or perhaps even inevitable end of public space? The findings that result from this comparative study suggest that such a scenario is unlikely to become reality in any literal sense. This is not to say that the privatization of public space is unproblematic – to the contrary, there are good reasons to continue to study privatization from a critical perspective, scholarly or otherwise. To suggest that the increasing involvement of the private sector may lead to the 'end of public space' may be intended as a hyperbole alone, but, as Paddison and Sharp (2007) noted, the use of hyperbole harbours its own power. Portraying the privatization of public space in such overarching terms, it is argued, is not the most productive approach to the study of pseudo-public space. Instead of talking about 'end' or 'loss', the privatization of public space and its consequences for access and inclusiveness should be researched in more nuanced terms.

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