Public Spaces, Private Spaces, and the Right to the City

Stefano Moroni, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Milan Politecnico, Milan, Italy

Francesco Chiodelli, Gran Sasso Science Institute, L'Aquila, Italy

ABSTRACT

Two arguments have recently strongly influenced the theory and practice of planning: (i) public space is what basically characterises any city (the citizen's right to the city is first and foremost a claim on public space); (ii) public space is crucial because it provides the physical fulcrum for public interaction and political debate. This article takes a critical look at these two ideas, highlighting: (i) that private spaces have also crucially contributed (and continue to do so) to defining and determining what a city is – the city cannot be conceived without considering both public and private spaces and the crucial synergy between these two spheres; (ii) that the public sphere does not come into being solely in public spaces (as testified by the Internet); furthermore, public spaces perform other roles and functions (besides making debate and confrontation possible), and these various roles may at times clash with each other. All these aspects suggest a more balanced approach to the understanding of urban spaces and their importance.

Keywords: Henri Lefebvre, Internet, Planning, Private Space, Public Space, Public Sphere, Right to the City

INTRODUCTION: RECONSIDERING THE ROLE OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPACES[1]

In recent years, a large body of analysis and research has focused on the relationship between public space and the right to the city. As well-known, the concept of the "right to the city" is fluid, complex, and open to interpretation. This is certainly also due to the fact that Lefebvre, the author who first introduced this concept, does not provide a clear definition of it. As Purcell states (2002, p. 103): "Lefebvre's right to the city raises more questions than it answers". See also Brown (2013, p. 957): "Despite popular acclaim, the content of a right to the city remains elusive". As a consequence, the concept itself has been interpreted in many different ways (McCann, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Parnell & Pieterse, 2010; Coggin & Pieterse, 2012; Chiodelli, 2013; Kuymulu, 2013; Purcell, 2014).

However, one of the most common interpretations is certainly the one which maintains that the right to the city is first and foremost a right to public space. As Mitchell (2003, p. 5)

writes: "The right to the city … is dependent upon public space"; in particular: "Debates and struggles over who has access to public space, and who is excluded, define the 'right to the city'" (ibid., p. 6). Di Masso (2012, p. 138) also writes: "public spaces can be conceived as the natural arena for the enactment of the right to the city". He continues: "Public life importantly depends on social and political contexts that make public spaces work for the common good. The public space reflects social exchanges between individual and collective affairs, featuring personal rights that are both politically and spatially grounded, such as the 'right to the city'" (ibid., p. 124; see also Low, 2000).

Public space is considered crucial principally because it guarantees the political dimension of city life: in particular, because it provides a theatre for discussion on public and civic matters, for organising debates, demonstrations, protests, etc. This political propensity is considered the most distinctive feature of mankind. The notion originates from ancient texts by Aristotle whereby man is above all a "political animal" in that he/she is a being whose nature is principally expressed through civic debate and collective confrontation.[2]

See for instance Kohn (2013, p. 107): "Public (state owned) space is the most likely setting for polemical scenes that start conversations about the public good. Public space should not be viewed only as a site for leisure or recreation but also as a place where people can come together to meet as citizens rather than as consumers or clients. Public space is a place where individuals can unite in order to overcome the disempowering effect of isolation". It is "a site where the conflict between opposing interests is made visible and subject to dispute" (ibid.). See also Di Masso (2012, p. 124): "The idea that public space has an intrinsically political significance seems to be widely supported".

To our mind, this perspective is only partially convincing. What the above-quoted authors do is seek to foreground the political dimension and the right to the city as specifically located in public spaces. But they do so in a way that, while obviously recognizing the role of other urban (private) places and of other virtual (private) spaces, seems to belittle them. In this article we will defend a partially different perspective – not an opposite view, but simply a perspective that attempts to enrich and expand a certain dominant approach.

While accepting that public space is certainly crucial for the city, we will in particular argue that: (i) private spaces have likewise crucially contributed (and continue to do so) to defining and determining what a city is – indeed, the city cannot be conceived without considering both public and private spaces and the crucial synergy between these two fields; (ii) the public sphere does not come into being solely in public spaces (as testified by the Internet); (iii) furthermore, public spaces perform other fundamental roles and functions (besides making debate and confrontation possible), and these various roles may at times clash with each other.

This article is divided into four sections. In the first section we underscore the important role played (also) by private spaces in the city; in the second section we consider the diverse functions that a public space may assume; in the third section we highlight some fundamental implications of the preceding discussion, returning to the concept of the right to the city; the fourth section sets out our conclusions. In general, our discussion will focus prevalently on (Western) contemporary cities.[3]

BOTH PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPACES ARE JOINTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING THE CITY WHAT IT IS

The distinction between public and private space is usually drawn on the basis of certain criteria, such as *ownership*, *access*, or *use* (Carmona et al., 2010). Here we will dwell mainly on the first of these three factors, namely ownership. We are obviously not claiming that ownership is "the whole story" when we speak of the difference between public and private spaces

(Low & Smith, 2006), but it is nevertheless a crucial factor. In fact, ownership determines the source and nature of control over access, and over behaviour within the space (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2013a).[4]

It goes without saying that public spaces have always played a fundamental role in the functioning and evolution of our cities, and certainly so in Europe (Madanipour, 2009). But this does not mean that private spaces have not been influential in characterising the city, particularly in Europe, originally through taverns, inns, and hostelries, and subsequently through hotels, restaurants, coffee-shops, art galleries, shops, etc. (Romano, 2005); and not least through private homes.

Let us first briefly focus on homes. On the one hand, the "home is the spatial unit that combines a number of traits of private sphere. … It provides personal space, a territory, a place for being protected from the natural elements, as well as from the scrutiny of others. … It is also a place for a social unit, which has for long been the family. It is therefore also a place of living for a handful of people in a close, intimate relationship" (Madanipour, 2009, p. 71). On the other hand, private homes continue to be a fundamental constituent of the urban landscape and environment.

It is important here to point out that home-ownership is not a trend typical of recent generations, as is often assumed, but rather a long-standing fundamental characteristic of the European city (Romano, 2005). On average 62% of European families are home-owners. In Italy the figure rises to 79% (Agenzia del territorio, 2011). The home accounts for a sizeable proportion of family assets in Italy – nearly half the country's wealth (Banca d'Italia, 2011).[5]

The home is an expression of belonging to the city, and in Europe for a thousand years it has also represented a form of "presidium" of the urban institutions (Romano, 2010).

Besides the role of private homes, also to be mentioned is the case of urban retail spaces. Private commercial spaces – shops – are an essential part of any city. Indeed, it can be argued that in many cases the use of public space (for example, the public space of the historic centres of numerous European cities) also comes about because of the presence of private spaces of commerce and entertainment.[6] In the absence of such private spaces, also a public space of quality may lose its significance for the city's inhabitants and be little frequented.

The case of the city of L'Aquila in Italy is paradigmatic. In 2009, a violent earthquake severely damaged large portions of the city. In particular, the historic centre suffered major damage. L'Aquila's historic centre is an area of great architectural value characterized by numerous public spaces of quality. The inhabitants of L'Aquila (only a small number of whom lived in the historic centre before the earthquake: in fact, the city has a rather dispersed urban structure) used to throng the city-centre streets, especially at weekends and in the evenings. Today, reconstruction of the buildings in the historic centre damaged by the earthquake is still in progress. Nevertheless, some of the more significant public spaces are already completely restored and usable – for instance, the cathedral square and the main street. By contrast, the majority of cafes, restaurants, and shops are still closed. The result is that, today, the historic centre of L'Aquila is almost always deserted. Hence, in the absence of private spaces like cafes, shops, restaurants, etc., the quality and quantity of public ones do not suffice on their own to guarantee vitality and attractiveness.

Obviously, a different issue is raised by shopping malls, which have been much criticised as anti-urban ways to use space. Even if here we cannot deal with this point in detail (see Moroni & Chiodelli, 2013 and 2014a for thorough discussion), it is important to emphasise that large part of the discussion seems to refer only to a particular type of shopping mall, namely the classic U.S. enclosed mall out in the suburbs and catering to the middle-class. But this is only one of many possible kinds of shopping centre, and it is certainly not the predominant format – at least not in Europe – nor the definitive blueprint for this type of retail complex (Salcedo, 2003). Moreover,

American consumers have recently reduced the time that they spend in enclosed malls; with the consequence that developers have opened malls via outdoor boulevards (Stillerman & Salcedo, 2012). Furthermore, new formats of (large) retailing centres are emerging.

In conclusion, the city cannot be conceived without a considerable range of private properties that mesh in various ways with the public space. As noted by Zimmermann (1996): coffee-shops, restaurants, theatres, exhibitions, art galleries, art shows, all contributed to the formation of modern city life, along with the building facades, the shop-windows, and the posters, past which the busy and curious urban public parades every day.

Moreover, private spaces are important not only for majorities but, in many cases, also for minorities (see on this the interesting studies on the spatiality of gays and lesbians in Paris conducted by Cattan & Leory, 2010, Cattan & Vanolo, 2013).

PUBLIC SPACE DOES NOT SERVE A SINGLE (POLITICAL) PURPOSE

Public space performs several functions (Carmona et al., 2010; Orum & O'Neal, 2010) (clearly, while some public spaces have one function in particular, others may have more than one). For the sake of simplicity, the various kinds of public space relevance may be grouped into three basic areas[7]:

1. **Liveability relevance:** For example, streets for pedestrian and vehicular movement, parks, hospitals, etc.; these public spaces relate to certain essential aspects of our being individuals with a body (and hence with the need to move through space to reach other places, to sit and rest, to breathe clean air, go jogging, receive medical assistance, etc.);
2. **Sociability relevance:** For example, squares, sidewalks, etc.; such spaces enable us to meet other people;

3. **Political relevance:** For instance, plazas, public halls, etc.; these spaces provide arenas for public debate on civic issues or in which people can demonstrate and protest.

In this perspective, there are four important points that should be emphasised.

First, it should be noted that all three of the functions cited above are actually of equal importance, and it would be a mistake to give especial emphasis to the third to the detriment of the other two (as sometimes happens in the current discourse on the city). As Walker (2009) observes: Those of us who like venturing into public spaces do so for many different reasons, such as to enjoy pleasure and delight, access places where we can watch life go by and street-artists perform, meet other people, flirt, and so on. And here there are those persons who have nowhere else to be, like the homeless. For individuals without property, the public space is an essential element of their existence: it is the only place in which they can perform certain vital functions (sleep, eat, and satisfy other physiological needs) (Waldron, 1993, 2000 and 2009).

Second, it should be noted that some of the above-cited functions can at times be in conflict with each other, such as when political contestation creates problems for the other two. For instance, for many people a further increase in contentious petitioners in public spaces would be a problem: contentiousness sometimes makes sociability difficult, and it may alarm and repel some people (Walker, 2009). If what we value in public life is accessibility, interactivity and sociability, then "contentiousness is likely to be problematic at least as often as it is helpful" (ibid., p. 832).

Third, some of the above functions – particularly those linked with sociability relevance and political relevance – are no longer performed solely in public spaces, but also in private ones, for instance in bars, pubs, coffee houses, clubs, etc. (Banerjee, 2001; Amin, 2008; Kirby, 2008). The public sphere and public spaces are not

therefore necessarily and univocally linked (Moroni & Chiodelli, 2013). In general terms, the assumption that private places inevitably diminish interaction and inhibit the public sphere is questionable (Kirby, 2008). At the same time, it cannot be assumed that public spaces are *per se* – always and invariably – places for encounter and interaction with diversity. As Amin (2002, p. 967) observes: "Diversity is thought to be negotiated in the city's public spaces. The depressing reality, however, is that in contemporary life, urban public spaces are often territorialised by particular groups (and therefore steeped in surveillance) or they are spaces of transit with very little contact between strangers ... The city's public spaces are not natural servants of multicultural engagement".

Fourth, it should be noted that some of the above functions that have historically pertained to public spaces are no longer exclusively or prevalently performed in physical (public) spaces – not so much those regarding liveability relevance as those regarding sociability and political relevance. They now also take place in virtual spaces online (Sisk, 2007). As technologies advance, making new ways of communication possible, the borders of what counts as a place for interaction are being redrawn (O'Neal, 2010b). In short, the Internet has created new platforms for sharing information, participation, discussion, association, and not least contestation. Our world has thus been enriched with new spaces of animated potentials and realities. But this should not prompt an over-optimistic evaluation of the Internet's role. As Papacharissi (2002) writes: it would seem that the Internet creates a new public space for political discussion; this new space "facilitates, but does not ensure, the rejuvenation of a culturally drained public sphere." In other words, fast and cheap access to more information does not necessarily render all citizens more informed, or foster their desire to participate in political discussion. Greater participation in political discussion through the Internet may help, but it "does not ensure a healthier democracy" (ibid.).[8] Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Web provides an additional (public) space in which the public debate can evolve and grow – particularly, but not exclusively, in liberal-democratic countries.[9]

The crucial point is that the Internet is not organised hierarchically – as happens with traditional media – but is intrinsically polycentric. It is a many-to-many form of interaction and communication. Moreover, the Internet is something more than simply a new type of medium (as was believed in its early years). It is more like a new space, a new location. People interact by "visiting" websites; and to get from one website to another, individuals usually "pass" through other sites connected via multiple hyper textual links, etc. (O'Neal, 2010b).

It has been observed that the Internet is a world of niches, where people frequent websites and blogs with which they agree, generally avoiding opinions that differ from their own; in short, the Internet facilitates selective exposure to like-minded others. But niche selectivity is only partially possible on the Internet: any search for a specific item on the Web, for instance, inevitably turns up other unanticipated information that may be in stark contrast with the user's expectations and preferences. Nonetheless, the user will often browse the undesired information, either out of curiosity or to see what the "other side" is saying. In short: "You are just as likely to meet difference on the web as when people try to corner you at the market" (Walker, 2009, p. 832). Individuals on the Internet, just like people walking along the streets and across the plazas of a new city, occasionally stumble across unexpected websites (O'Neal, 2010b).[10]

Moreover, besides the many "insular virtual communities" and "individualistic political websites", there are numerous informal forums on e-mail-lists, chat groups, Usenet groups, and web boards where informal public interaction takes place and people enter into rational-critical debate (Dahlberg, 2001, p. 620).

Lastly, we should not forget that the public sphere "has always been virtual, reliant upon, not opposed to, texts and technology from telephones to mass media" (Crang, 2000, p. 309). The presumed spatialisation implicit in most political theories of the public sphere actually

relies much less on face-to-face relationships than we might at first think (Chambers, 2005). In short: the face-to-face interaction model is a special, rather than a general and ideal, case (Bohman, 2004).

DISCUSSION: CITIES, RIGHTS, POLITICS

In this framework, our discussion will focus on three points: (i) the need to take more seriously the fact that cities are composed of both private and public spaces in continuous and synergic interaction; (ii) the idea that the right to the city should not be reduced only – or even mainly – to the right to public space (the fundamental role of private spaces must neither be overlooked nor denied in terms of rights to the city); (iii) the need to critically reconsider the (Aristotelian) idea that man is, first of all, a political animal – accepting the idea that the political dimension is only part of a broader social dimension of mankind.

First Issue: The Complementarity and Interdependency of Public and Private Spaces

The first point to be stressed is that planning theory and practice need to take more seriously the idea that our cities are composed of *both* private *and* public spaces, and that it is the *interaction* between these two types of space which provides the generative force of the city itself. Banal as it may seem, this crucial factor is often underestimated (or at least given second place). Indeed, it would be hard to envisage a city made up solely of public spaces, or vice versa of only private spaces.

A city owned exclusively by the public actor would entail overarching control on its residents, while also reducing experimentation in new uses for the city's spaces. (The fact that a situation of this kind ought to envisage semi-private forms of ownership – e.g., rental properties or leasing agreements – demonstrates the lack of logic and intrinsic instability of such an option).

As well known, the idea of placing all land ultimately in the public domain often crops up in the history of urban planning (see for instance Bernoulli, 1943). It is worth mentioning that also Herbert Spencer, in one of his first works, expatiated on the advantages of public ownership of all the land and of the payment of rental by those who were effectively to be its users (Spencer, 1851). Spencer wrote: "The change required would simply be a change of landlords. Separate ownerships would merge into the joint-stock ownership of the public. Instead of being in the possession of individuals, the country would be held by the great corporate body – Society. Instead of leasing his acres from an isolated proprietor, the farmer would lease them from the nation. ... Stewards would be public officials instead of private ones; and tenancy the only land tenure" (Part II, chap. 9, § 8). Subsequently, Spencer (1891, Appendix B) rectified his original position with these words: "Setting aside all financial objections to nationalisation (which of themselves negative the transaction, since, if equitably effected, it would be a losing one), it suffices to remember the inferiority of public administration to private administration, to see that ownership by the State would work ill. Under the existing system of ownership, those who manage the land, experience a direct connexion between effort and benefit; while, were it under State-ownership, those who managed it would experience no such direct connexion".

On the other hand, a city composed entirely of private ownership would deprive its citizens of the many functions and amenities that public spaces otherwise provide – particularly their liveability relevance (Moroni & Chiodelli, 2013). As Madanipour (2010b) notes: Public spaces have been an integral and fundamental constituent part of cities throughout their history, so much so that without them, urban settlements would be hard to imagine; for instance: how could individuals step out of their homes if there were no public spaces among private assets? Moreover, a totally private city deprives people without property of their own (i.e., the homeless) of the chance actually to live in the city at

all. As Waldron (1993, p. 314) observes: Some libertarians imagine that all land might be held as private property. "That would be catastrophic for the homeless… The homeless person might discover in such a libertarian paradise that there was literally *nowhere* he was allowed to be." And he concludes: "It would not be entirely mischievous to add that since, in order to exist, a person has to be *somewhere*, such a person would not be permitted to exist" (ibid.).

Second Issue: What Right to the City?

The second point to consider is the question of the "right to the city". As noted earlier, in recent decades the expression has enjoyed wide popularity in urban studies and public policy-making. And it has received a variety of different interpretations. This is not the place to attempt to establish a general definition of the concept of "right to the city", which would require far more space and more in-depth discussion, but it is worth noting nevertheless that the concept should not be reduced *only* – or even *mainly* – to the "right to public space". In particular, the crucial role of private spaces must neither be overlooked nor denied. Besides such public spaces as squares, parks, and streets, the city gains its "energy", identity and sense of participation and community also from its privately owned places such as houses, clubs, restaurants, bars and cinemas (Banerjee, 2001; Carmona, 2010; Kirby, 2008). To use the words of Henri Lefebvre, these private spaces help determine those features of "centrality" and "simultaneity", of encounter(s) between differences that are intrinsic to the definition of any city: The urban "is a mental and social form, that of simultaneity, of gathering, of convergence, of encounter (or rather, encounters)" (Lefebvre, 1968a, Eng. trans., p. 131).

Private spaces, moreover, are the places whose construction and management enables citizens to contribute to the production of the city as a living, evolving organism. In brief, the right to the city can be conceived as a set of synergic rights, rather than as a singular entitlement; and one of these rights is the right to own, use, manage, transform private places (without harming others). Sharing the fullness of urban life means also having the freedom to create, manage and frequent private spaces. This interpretation, we believe, comes close to Lefebvre's original idea.

Many have interpreted the (Lefebvrian) right to the city as comprising also a "right to housing".[11] Our perspective partly overlaps with this view, but with the specification that, more than a positive right to have an actual home, we believe that individuals must have a right (i) not to see the cost of housing increased by pointlessly invasive forms of land-use regulation and building standards, (ii) not to be prevented from building in experimental and innovative ways, (iii) not to be impeded in organizing themselves into whatever form of contractual aggregation that they wish (co-housing complexes, residential cooperatives, etc.), (iv) to be able to change the use and purpose of their private spaces without complications, extra costs, penalties, etc. [12]

To be pointed out is that, besides the "content" of the right to the city, it is also crucial to determine what "type" of right it is. As Attoh (2011, p. 669-670) writes: "What kind of right, we must ask, is the right to the city? Is the right to the city a socio-economic right or a liberty right, a legal right or a moral right, a prima facie right or an absolute right? If it is simultaneously all of these rights, are such rights commensurable? [...] In making rights-claims, whether it is a right to liberty or more aptly a right to the city, how we define rights surely matters."

This is not the place to discuss all these issues in detail. However, we would point out that the poor and the deprived are usually considered the main agents of the right to the city (Dikeç, 2005; Marcuse, 2009). But, to have a true and

cogent meaning, the right to the city – or, better a package of rights to the city – must be interpreted as a right that *everyone* has (including, obviously, the poor and the deprived – both people that are poor and deprived *now*, and people that could be poor and deprived *in the future*). In this sense, the right to the city extends to all those who inhabit and use the city.[13] It is therefore a *universal* right. Observe also that, if we want a right to the city *for everyone*, it has to be an *individual* right.

Put briefly, we interpret the right to the city as a set of universal individual rights. Some of them – those regarding the public sphere and the public space – are *positive rights* (in particular, rights to vote and participate in public decision-making, and rights to access and use certain public spaces, services and infrastructures). The other rights – those regarding the private sphere and private places – are prevalently *negative rights* (among them, the right for everyone to freely pursue their idea of the good life – using the resources and assets at their disposal as they wish – without being harmed by others, or harming others). Not to be forgotten, in fact, is the crucial role performed by freedom in the renaissance of the city from the eleventh century onwards. As Pirenne (1927/1952, p. 193) wrote: "Freedom, of old, used to be the monopoly of a privileged class. By means of the cities it again took its place in society as a natural attribute of the citizen. Hereafter it was enough to reside on city soil to acquire it. Every serf who had lived for a year and a day within the city limits had it by definite right: the statute of limitations abolished all rights which his lord exercised over his person and chattels. Birth meant little. Whatever might be the mark with which it had stigmatized the infant in his cradle, it vanished in the atmosphere of the city. This freedom, which at the beginning only merchants had enjoyed *de facto*, was now the common right of all the burghers *de jure*".

The foregoing discussion leads to two main conclusions.

First, as convincingly argued by various authors (i.e., Mitchell, 2003, 2005; Staeheli & Mitchell, 2008; Madanipour, 2010a), public spaces must without doubt be made as accessible as possible (compatibly with their particular function) and must not be "sanitised" – contrary to recent trends. Put simply, it is our duty to design and regulate public spaces so as to embrace the maximum amount of diversity possible. Public spaces should be open and inclusive (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2013b; Moroni & Chiodelli, 2013c).

Second, it is vital that private spaces be created more freely and creatively for the citizen's use (avoiding merely to cause direct and tangible damage to others: Holcombe & Staley, 2001; Holcombe & Powell, 2009; Holcombe, 2012; Moroni, 2010, 2011 and 2012) – which is again contrary to recent trends caused, for instance, by complex building regulations, oppressive zoning rules, complicated and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures.

Note that Lefebvre himself (1967, 1968b, 1972) is highly critical of the overweening controls applied by public authorities on various aspects of the citizen's daily life (and on the city's construction) which he suggests can be solved through greater self-organisation and self-management.

This does not mean that there are no serious problems in the handling of private spaces, such as – in the case of shopping centres, bars, etc. – excessive restrictions imposed on access or behaviour by the owners (for discussion of this specific point, see Chiodelli & Moroni, 2013a; Moroni & Chiodelli, 2014a).

It is worth pointing out that, generally speaking, those who campaign for more open public spaces (such as the *left-liberals*) are usually in favour of tighter controls on private spaces; and vice versa, those who push for tighter controls on public spaces (such as the *conservatives*) are generally in favour of fewer controls on the use of private spaces. Our own view on these matters differs from the left-liberal and conservative positions in that we propose less restriction on public space and at the same time greater freedom in the use of private spaces. "Freedom" is obviously not

"license", but rather the opportunity to choose and act within a framework of simple, clear, stable and prevalently negative rules (i.e., rules that prevent certain severe conflicts and predefined tangible and direct harms) (Moroni, 2010, 2011 and 2012a).[14]

Third Issue: Not Everything is Political

The third and last point concerns the political dimension of our lives. In general terms politics does not constitute the "entirety" of the human dimension and of our way of interacting as humans. The Aristotelian maxim – which has become an article of faith – needs some serious reconsideration.

Every human being is most certainly part of a broad and continuous *social interaction* "explicit" through direct dialogue with others, and "tacit" through such things as market exchanges, for instance. Hayek (1982 and 1988) in particular emphasised that the market is fundamentally a mechanism for comparing – tacitly and remotely – the opinions of what constitutes the "good" of the countless individuals who will never meet or know each other directly. As aptly observed by Kukathas (1990), Hayek, by identifying the market as a mechanism that fosters opinion and knowledge to be tested and distributed, draws our attention to the crucial fact that in this case there is an ongoing "debate" about the nature of the good. "The 'dialogue' takes place not only in verbal discourse, but also in practice as individuals adopt or reject ways of living according to their own experiments and their observations of the success and failures of others" (ibid., p. 117).[15]

The crucial point is that the explicit and tacit social confrontation extends far beyond the simple sphere of *political interaction* – which is solely explicit – in terms of both its extent and effects.

As Höffe (1987) put it: Whether one focuses specifically on the example of Aristotle or takes a wider picture, human nature may not be reduced to the mere political. The formula "not everything is political" is by no means regressive, reactionary, or apathetic (Bobbio, 1994).[16]

CONCLUSION

We began this article by questioning certain conceptions of the public space: in particular, those that interpret it as the principal constitutive element of the city and the paramount place in which the public sphere takes form and lives (Mitchell, 2003; Di Masso, 2012; Kohn, 2013). In discussing these positions, we have emphasised the crucial role *also* exercised by private spaces; the *plurality* of the (sometimes conflicting) functions performed by the public space; and the importance of certain new virtual spaces. Obviously, the authors just cited would not dispute these notions. Their difference with respect to what we have argued is therefore simply a matter of emphasis, degree, and nuance. But also emphases and nuances count at theoretical level, and they have consequences on urban policies and planning practices.

Put very briefly, the approach proposed here can be understood as an invitation to interpret the various components, functions, and activities of the city in a more balanced and comprehensive manner. In other words, our purpose is clearly not to undermine a general trend in the literature on urban spaces – to go in a totally different direction – but simply to enrich and expand it. This article, therefore, lays no claim to putting forward completely new considerations on the theme of urban spaces, but rather to restore salience to certain crucial aspects, exploring some more neglected areas of reflection.

This also applies to the discussion on the right to the city, which in some cases undervalues the fundamental importance that "negative freedom" may have (*especially for the most vulnerable*).

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ENDNOTES

1   This article is the result of the two authors' joint research. The final written version of the first, second, and fifth sections can be attributed to Francesco Chiodelli, and that of the third and fourth sections to Stefano Moroni.

2   "Man is a political animal [*zoon politikon*] in a sense in which a bee is not ... Nature … has endowed man alone among the animals with the power of speech. Speech is something different from voice, which is possessed by other animals also… Speech … serves to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is just and what is unjust" (Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1253a; see also *Nicomachean Ethics*). This notion of man as essentially a political animal was later taken up by such writers as Arendt (1958).

3   Part of what we argue in what follows could be adapted to other urban realities as well. But this would require specifications and integrations extending beyond the circumscribed scope of the present article and a great deal more space.

4   Note that if the criterion is ownership, the so-called "commons" are clearly private spaces too – a case of "collective private property" (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2013a). On this question, see also Block (2011).

5   Similarly, in the United States private housing represents a substantial proportion of the nation's wealth, around one third in this case (Smith, 2009).

6   It is no coincidence that one of the initiatives to revitalize dangerous zones of cities (dangerous because they are little frequented) concerns the attempt to extend shop opening hours. (See e.g. the debate on the 24-hour-city: Bianchini, 1995; Heath, 1997; Oc & Tiesdell, 1997; Bromley, Thomas & Millie, 2000; Bromley & Thomas, 2000; Chatterton & Hollands, 2003; Roberts & Turner, 2005; Roberts & Eldridge 2009).

7   For another interesting attempt to specify the principal functions of public space, see Varna & Tiesdell (2010). See also O'Neal (2010a).

8   Compare with Hand and Sandywell (2002). As well known, there has been considerable debate on these issues; we consider the following works of particular interest: Gimmler (2001), Cammaerts & Audenhove (2005), Dahlgren (2005), Dahlberg (2001 and 2007), Bohman (2004), Polat (2005), Calhoun (2007), Groshek (2009), Brundidge (2010), Crang (2010), Gerhards & Schäfer (2010), Jun (2012).

9   On the links among social media, public awareness, public participation, and political activism in the planning field, see for example Fahmi (2009) and Tayebi (2013). For certain aspects, see also Hampton and Wellman (2003).

10   On this point, see also Brundridge (2010) and Jun (2012).

11   At academic level see e.g. Marcuse (2009); in regard to social movements see e.g. *The Right to the City Platform* in US, and *International Alliance of Inhabit*ants; at the level of international organizations see e.g. the various initiatives of UN-HABITAT, among them World Urban Forum 5, "The right to the city: Bridging the urban divide", Rio de Janeiro 22-26 March 2010; in regard to governments see e.g. the case of Brazil (Fernandes, 2007).

12   Interesting discussions on the significant influence of certain forms of public regulation (traditional land-use regulation and building standards) on the costs of housing and its accessibility are to be found in Mayer & Somerville (2000), Glaeser & Gyourko (2002, 2003 and 2005), Downs (2005), Siegan (2005), Schill

(2005), Cheung, Ihlanfeldt & Maycok (2009), O'Toole (2009).

[13]   A similar interpretation of the right to the city has been put forward by Purcell (2002).

[14]   Clearly, many other aspects relating to public authority responsibilities are involved here, but as the present article focuses mainly on the role and use of public and private spaces, we will limit our discussion to certain specific aspects.

[15]   Compare also Raeder (2006) and, with an explicit focus on planning issues, see Pennington (2002, 2003 and 2004).

[16]   Evidently we can always redefine "politics" in a broader sense so as to encompass other aspects of social life, but in that case we would avoid certain conclusions with the risk of making the concept overly bland.

Stefano Moroni, PhD, teaches "Land-use Planning and the Law" in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies at Milan Polytechnic (Italy), and writes on planning theory and ethics. Recent publications: (with. G. Brunetta), Contractual Communities in the Self-Organizing City: Freedom, Cooperation, Subsidiarity *(Springer, 2012); (with C. Basta),* Ethics, Design and Planning of the Built Environment *(Springer, 2013).*

Francesco Chiodelli, PhD, is research fellow at the Gran Sasso Science Institute (L'Aquila, Italy), and member of the international PhD program in Urban Studies. His research focuses on themes of planning theory and urban conflicts, and on questions of liberty, pluralism and tolerance in public and private spaces. His articles have appeared in international journals such as Planning Theory, Cities, Journal of Urban Affairs, Planning Perspectives, Urban Research and Practice. *He has recently published* Gerusalemme contesa. Dimensioni urbane di un conflitto [Contested Jerusalem. Urban dimensions of a conflict] *(Carocci, 2012, in Italian), and co-edited* Cities to be Tamed? Spatial Investigations across the Urban South *(Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).*