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URBAN PUBLIC SPACES – FROM ECONOMICS TO MANAGEMENT

Abstract: Debates about urban public are multi-dimensional and multi-objective, focusing on design, environmental, social, economic and political aspects. Most writers on this issue recognize a general decline and crisis of public spaces. However, a comparison of contemporary urban public spaces only with historical patterns, and at the same time not taking into account present urban development trends, can lead to simplification in assessment of public spaces conditions. The main objective of this theoretical paper is a short overview of study approaches in urban public space economics and then identify the key challenges of urban public spaces management. This paper describes urban public space as a local public good and discusses its transformations as a result of urban development changes.

Key words: Local public goods, use and non-use values, urban public space transformation, management challenges.

Introduction

For a few reasons, it is difficult to apply one and single definition of urban public space. Firstly, this is due to the interdisciplinary nature of urban public space. Representatives of different scientific disciplines focus on various aspects of functioning these sites. Architects focus on function and form, sociologists are mainly interested in interpersonal relations taking place in public spaces, while economists undertake research on utility, value and principles of providing public space as a public good. In addition, public space can also be defined from a philosophical perspective, focusing on the concept of public sphere [Habermas 1991]. Finally public space is also considered as a legal forms, including public property, public domain and the commons [Habdas 2012].

Secondly, the problem is due to the diversity of public spaces. These kind of places can be divided by function, forms, rank or spatial range, and last but not least level of publicness as the most controversial feature perhaps. The last attribute causes controversy of responding to the question whether some place is still a public space or should not be called this way any longer.

Thirdly, during attempts of describing and defining urban public space it is necessary to take into account both cultural and historic context. Cultural conditions make differences between public spaces in cities of southern Italy comparing with cities of China or Saudi Arabia. Moreover, it does not make sense to define contemporary urban public space, by comparison with classical place such as the Greek Agora or a medieval market square. Bierwiazzonek *et al.* [2012, pp. 24-25] argue that firstly an ahistorical approach leads to trivialization of the urban public space concept, and secondly, it explains in a wrong way the crisis of contemporary public spaces because they do not meet historical standards. Therefore, the biggest challenge in a study of urban public spaces is to identify and evaluate contemporary nature of these sites in relations to trends of cities and regions development.

Despite many approaches in defining urban public spaces, there are characteristics cited by many authors, which include:

- free access [Carmona *et al.* 2008; Chmielewski 2004; Ercan 2010; Lorens 2010a; Neal 2010];
- public functions [Lorens 2010a; Madanipour 2003];
- facilitating direct social contacts and networks [Gehl 1987; Gyurkovich 2007; Lorens 2010a; *Public Space Charter* 2009];
- collective activity [Gyurkovich 2007; *Public Space Charter* 2009];
- leisure time activity [Gyurkovich 2007];
- strategic importance for local communities [Chmielewski 2004, *Public Space Charter* 2009];
- offering different products for residents and visitors [Ercan 2010; *Public Space Charter* 2009].

Carmona *et al.* [2008, p. 4] offer broad and narrow definition. In the first case “*public space relates to all parts of the built and natural environment, public and private, internal and external, urban and rural, where the public have free, although not necessarily unrestricted access. It encompasses: all the streets, squares and other rights of way, whether predominantly in residential, commercial or community/civic uses; the open space and parks; the open countryside; the public/private spaces both internal and external where public access is welcomed – if controlled – such as private shopping centres or rail and bus stations; and the interiors of key public and civic buildings such as libraries, churches or, or town halls*”. Because of private property rights and internal structures of some places above-mentioned, free access can be restricted. For this reason, a narrower definition would exclude private and internal space, such as shopping malls, restaurants or libraries.

Gehl [1987] in his influential “*Life Between Buildings*” describes essential elements that contribute to people’s enjoyment of space in the public realm. He emphasizes that life between buildings is a dimension where social interaction and perception, urban recreation, and sensory experience of city life take place. He distinguishes between necessary, optional and social activities in public spaces. While **necessary**

activities regardless of the quality of the physical environment (for instance waiting for buses), **optional activities** depend to quality and significant degree on what the place have to offer (for instance walking, jogging, window-shopping or eating lunch outside). **Social activities** occurs spontaneously when people meet (for instance children's play, conversation). The better a place, the more optional and social activities occur and stronger links are created between local society.

Table 1 presents a range of functions offering by urban public spaces. The intensity with which many spaces are used and hours in the day and night over which activities happen have multiplied. For instance the range of functions that streets or squares accommodate include: market venues, retail destinations, venues for eating and drinking, places for cultural exchange or political meeting *etc.* The result is inevitable conflicts: between the needs of drivers versus the needs of pedestrians or the needs of commercial and entertainment premises versus the needs of local residents for peace and quiet [Carmona *et al.* 2008, p. 11].

Due to the property rights, we should divide urban public spaces into:

- places and buildings owned by public sector (local, regional, national government),
- places and building owned by private sector (private property owners or NGOs).

According to narrow definition offered by Carmona *et al.* [2008, p. 5] most sites owned by private owners are not a public space. Sometimes they are called "quasi-public spaces" or commercial public spaces. Shopping malls are these type of sites, which are organized a way that both increase consumption and allow owners to control users behaviour [Jaškiewicz 2001, p. 39]. According to Lorens [2010a, p. 9] so-called centripetal architecture is the main feature of these sites. In this case the main objective is creation of multifunctional indoor spaces imitating the outdoor public sites. Owners of commercial places and buildings are trying to copy both forms and names of classical public spaces such as Agora, Forum or Plaza.

Table 1

Functions of urban public spaces and buildings

Functions	Public space examples
Communication and transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • roads, streets, squares, promenades, pedestrian sites, highways, railway stations, bus stations, airports, subway stations, car parks
Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • town halls, courts, police stations
Education and culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools, libraries, museums, theatres, galleries, national memorials
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • churches, cemeteries
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parks, urban open spaces, greenbelts, gardens, urban forests, playgrounds, beaches, seafronts, canals, riverside boulevards, skateparks, sport fields
Municipal services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water reservoirs, power lines, pipelines, sewage plants, landfills
Retail and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traditional markets, shopping malls, leisure malls

Source: Author's own work based on: [Carmona *et al.* 2008].

Due to the spatial range, we should divide urban public spaces into:

- regional/national public spaces, which are best-known sites, building image of the city, where very important regional or national events are organized;
- local public spaces, which are traditional meeting place of city residents;
- neighborhood public spaces, which organize urban life in micro-scale in various districts and housing estates.

The most important urban public spaces are these offering exogenous functions. Such areas are well-recognized by visitors, who called them “iconic” very often. In this case urban public spaces play important role in creating of a city image.

1. Urban public spaces – economic perspective

Urban public space in economic context could be consider as a **public good**. In that case it should meets two characteristics: non-rivalry and non-exclusion. ‘Non-rivalry’ means that the consumption by one individual does not lessen the quantity available to others. Put differently, good is considered non-rival if – for any level of production – the cost of providing it to additional individual is zero. ‘Non-exclusion’ means that it is not possible to prevent people who have not pay for good from having benefits of consumption. In other way, consumers can free-ride by using good without paying for it.

Urban public spaces are neither entirely non-rival nor non-excludable (Figure 1). Increase number of users in public spaces with limited capacity leads to a situation where individuals hinder each other (for instance public park during popular local festival). No one can be excluded, so consumption by one individual lessens the quantity of the good available for others. The problem is defined as a congestion (or

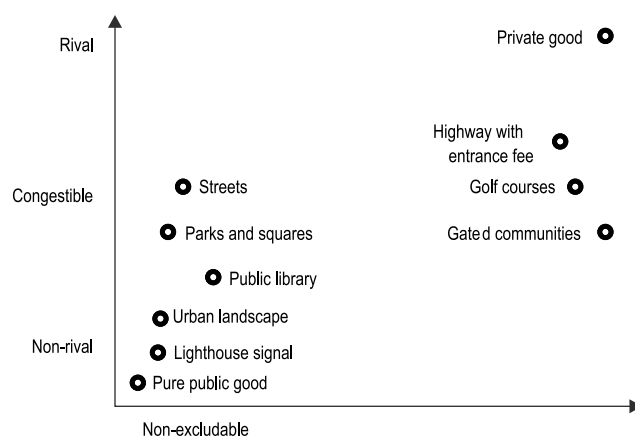


Figure 1. Examples of goods – rivalry and excludable levels

Source: Author adaptation of [Choumert and Salanie 2008].

crowding) externalities [Choumert, Salanie 2008, p. 333; Markowski 2001, p. 13]. It is most noticeable during a traffic jam or if we cannot find a parking place or free seat in the public park. On the other hand, it seems that urban landscape (for instance city centre panorama) or huge and rarely visited fallow land are the best examples of urban public spaces that meet non-rival criterion.

Exclusion is often impossible due to the high costs of access restrictions or difficulties with collection of fees (for example in case of streets or sidewalks). However, in case of many urban public spaces at least in theory, we can assume the possibility of exclusion. Places such as public squares or parks, that are relatively small and enclosed or fenced, may be available to everyone who pay entrance fee. In case of urban public spaces individuals generally are not excluded from the consumption because of cultural or historical reasons. In European cities market squares, main streets or parks are traditional places of meeting and acting of all citizens or tourists regardless of their individual characteristics. However, we must take into consideration that in the past times (for example Greek Agora) or in other cultures (for example mosque in Muslim countries) restrictions on access to certain places could be commonly accepted.

Because of immobility most of urban public spaces are better defined as a local public good. **Local public goods** provide benefits in non-rival way to individuals who are relatively close to the place where good is provided and naturally excludes from consumption individuals who are distant [Choumert, Salanie 2008, p. 334]. In case of local public goods, customer shall bear costs depending on its own location in relation to the urban public space [Markowski 2001, p. 13]. The cost of local public goods can be one-off payment (for example buying a house near public park) or can occur every time when you take a decision on consumption (for example reaching park by a car or public transport).

Considering urban public spaces in the context of the economics of public sector, we should also shortly discuss the concepts of club goods and merit goods [Polko 2006, p. 13].

In **the theory of clubs** pioneered by Buchanan [1965], there is collective consumption of good but with an exclusion principle, for example a membership fee. There are economies of scale in that additional members reduces the average costs of the club good. But additional members also lead to crowding which in the long run could be regarded as the introduction of rivalrous consumption. The existence of club goods can be explained by the need of gathering people with similar preferences and at the same time similar possibilities to meet this preferences (similar purchase power). In areas of large disparities in household incomes, very often can be seen transformation of public spaces into club goods. For example community sport and recreation area previously accessible for all, now changes into sport club, where tennis courts, golf courses or swimming pools are available only for members.

The theory of clubs can also be used as an explanation for the development of gated communities. Gated communities as a form of residential estate contain strictly-

controlled entrance and often characterized by closed perimeter of walls and fences. Additionally some gated communities are staffed by security guards. Gated communities usually consist of various residential amenities using by community members. That kind of places are enclaves, where streets, playgrounds and recreation areas are typical club goods. Based on research in Florida and California, Blakely and Snyder [1997] distinguish three types of gated communities. First one is a 'lifestyle community' bringing together households with similar status, jobs and leisure-time preferences. Second one is 'elite community'. Living on this kind of estate is a prestigious, because of the highest house prices, strategic location and famous neighbors. Third one is a 'security zone', where fear of crime was the main motivation of household who lived there. In Polish cities we can observe additional trend of limiting access to areas owned by 'community houses' (pol. *wspólnota mieszkaniowa*), which are created by privatization of public housing. Fences, gates and other barriers build up very often in city centres leads to shrinkage and fragmentation of urban public spaces.

Urban public spaces may also be considered as a merit good. The concept of this kind of commodity was introduced in economics by Musgrave. **Merit goods** are products or services which is judged that an individual or society should consume or have an open access regardless of ability and willingness to pay [Stiglitz 2004, p. 104]. Classical examples of merit goods are primary education and health prevention (for instance vaccinations). Merit good may be describe as a good that has a positive external effects associated with it. Because of social and cultural functions performed by urban public spaces, they can be treated as a merit goods. From this point of view facilities such as schools, libraries, museums or greenbelts should be provided at the certain level regardless of signals coming from real estate markets.

Nature of urban public spaces leads to market failures. It means that markets are not always efficient in allocating public spaces resources in a way that maximises social welfare. Mainly the problem arises because urban public spaces create costs and benefits that are not always taken into consideration. This costs and benefits do not have prices because they are not traded in traditional markets. They are **externalities** – no payment is made for positive external effects (e.g. beautiful view) or compensation in the case of negative externalities (for example noise produced in the crowded streets). In this case consumption of urban public space means consumption of external benefits [Markowski 2001, p. 11].

From economic point of view the main challenge is to reach the socially optimal provision of urban public spaces. In this case assessment of total economic value can be used to inform public decision makers for defining priorities and managing the necessary tradeoffs [Choumert, Salanie 2008, p. 334].

The **total economic value** consists of two main elements: use value and nonuse value (Freeman 2003a). 'Use value' designate direct uses (such as recreation activities), indirect uses (for example urban forests act as a carbon sinks) and option value (option to visit and use urban public space in the future). 'Non-use value' captures

benefits from simply knowing that a certain good exists (existence value) or refers to benefits from ensuring that certain good will be preserved for future generation (bequest value) [Freeman 2003a, pp. 137-142].

The main component of urban public spaces value is 'use value', because most of places deliver benefits through direct activities. However some public spaces may have important non-use values such as places of historical importance, very old main street trees or unique urban landscapes.

To estimate economic value, economists have developed two approaches: stated and revealed preferences methods. Stated preference methods rely on data from carefully worded survey questions asking people what choice they would make for alternative levels of a public place amenity, using presentation of hypothetical market situation. Revealed preference methods rely on data that record people's actual choices, using substitute markets [Boyle 2003; Brown 2003]. The key differences between two approaches is the types of data used to estimate values. Stated preference methods are based on intended behaviour (*ex-ante*), revealed preference methods are based on observations of decisions that had been taken.

Table 2 presents short overview of selected methods that can be use in urban public space valuation.

Nonmarket good valuation methods have their roots in the valuation of environmental resources mainly located on non-urban areas [Freeman 2003b]. However, some of this methods may be used in valuation of urban public spaces (see Table 1).

The **hedonic price method** links property values (usually housing) and the presence of urban public spaces with variables such as access or view. Housing is decomposed into features which determine price or rent. One of the extrinsic charac-

Table 2

Selected urban public spaces valuation methods

Methods	Values	Types of application
Revealed preference		
Hedonic price method	Direct uses Indirect uses	Property value (implicit value)
Travel cost	Direct uses Indirect uses	Recreation demand
Stated preference		
Contingent valuation	Direct uses Indirect uses Option value Non-use vale	Monetary value

Sources: [Boyle 2003, p. 261, Brown (2003, p. 101 and Choumert, Salanie 2008, p. 336].

teristics could be proximity of urban public space (such as park). The implicit price of each component is estimated. The basic premise of the **travel cost method** is that the time and the travel expenses that people incur to visit a site represent the ‘implicit price’ of access to the site. This method can be useful in valuation of urban parks and forests or other recreational areas. The **contingent valuation method** uses direct survey in which respondents state their maximum willingness to pay for example to access a public space for recreation or their minimum willingness to accept for example to replace public space by commercial uses. In this method people are asked about their preferences for hypothetical scenarios.

2. Urban public spaces – transformation and development challenges

Nowadays spatial structure and land-use of European cities transform because of various economic, socio-cultural and political attributes. The economic context is primarily linked with the processes of de-industrialisation, globalisation and new technologies development. Socio-cultural factors refer mainly to demographic changes, increasing social polarization and changes in consumer behavior. Political changes are based on decisions making both at the European level (regional and urban policies) and at the local level (contemporary management models of urban development).

These overall changes lead to transformations of urban public spaces. Among the most discussed changes are privatisation and fragmentation, commercialisation and theming. Table 3 presents the overview of key processes, trends, and public space transformations in contemporary European cities.

Trends presented in Table 3 can be complementary, for instance development of cultural quarters and entertainment districts. However, they also can make conflicts, for instance clashes compact city idea with land-use policy (for example building permits on greenfields causes urban sprawl effects).

In post-modern world the city is constructed as a product to be consume by visitors [Tallon 2010, p. 223]. Because of that we can observe the development of a range of architecturally innovative showpiece cultural projects that contributes to the cultural economy. Example of this style is most evident in the city of Bilbao, where Guggenheim Museum became ‘iconic’ place changing city image, driving traffic and tourism income and brought in economic growth and prestige.

Because of cultural and leisure regeneration there are some implications in terms of urban public spaces. These include establishing **cultural quarters** with new services and high-quality design, but also neighborhood effects of noise, rubbish, displacement and loss of local character. **Night-time economy** and implementation of ‘24-hour city’ concept also influence urban public space changes. Tallon [2010, p. 234] describes problems of the night-time city centre, such as: spatial and temporal fragmentation of func-

Table 3

Contemporary urban processes and land-use trends

Urban processes	Land-use trends	Public space transformations
Suburbanisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • urban sprawl • gated-communities development • beltway cities and edge cities development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • privatisation of public spaces (more private and club goods), • shrinkage of urban public space (especially street and squares free of cars), • spatial and temporal fragmentation of functions
Creative industries development – culturalled regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural districts development • creative clusters development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • festivals in urban public space scenery, • temporary use of urban public spaces • theming of urban public spaces
Night-time economy and leisure economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • temporary uses/interim uses • fun parks • urban tourism • 24-hour city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creting 'iconic' places, • spatial and temporal fragmentation of functions
Retail-led regeneration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shopping malls • main streets redevelopment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • privatisation of urban public spaces • commercialisation of urban public spaces
Sustainable development and urban resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smart growth • eco-towns • compact cities • copenhagenization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • walkable neighborhoods, • urban public space networks complementary with public transport system, • local character of public space, • mixed-used

Source: Author's own work.

tions, single activity visits or loss of residential population. This problems occur for example in Mariacka Street, Katowice. In this case, city local government initiatives lead to regeneration of the street by enhance local service provision and supporting festivals and other cultural and entertainment events, but at the same time conflicts between residents and restaurant and clubs owners became more and more visible.

Retail-led regeneration based on shopping malls development has a significant impact on urban public spaces. Firstly, retail function traditionally located in city market squares or main streets declines, leaving space for other activities such as financial or banking services. Less customers and visitors means less attractive traditional public spaces. Secondly, passages in shopping malls are design as a indoor, good quality and safety places, which very often imitate traditional urban public spaces. According to definition, this kind of places are not public, however we have to admit that behavior of many shopping malls users is similar to the activities undertaken in traditional public spaces. There are significant differences between shopping malls and main streets or market square, as in the first case it consists of control space, designed and managed in a way that encourages the consumption. Besides, social interaction and diversity of users are not important features of shopping malls [Krause 2010, p. 101].

Implementation of **sustainable development** rules in European cities is more and more important for the future of urban public spaces. Urban planning concepts such as compact city promotes efficient public transport system, walking and cycling, low energy consumption and reduced pollution. The principles include: walkability, connectivity, mixed-used & diversity, mixed housing, traditional neighborhood structure, increased density, smart transport, sustainability, quality of architecture and quality of life. Implementing compact city ideas leads to huge range of changes in urban public spaces. It includes:

- pedestrian friendly street design,
- high quality pedestrian networks and public space making walking pleasurable,
- more local production and services and local character of public space,
- services and jobs closer together for ease of walking,
- public space at centre,
- special placement of civic uses and sites within community,
- mixed-use within neighborhood (public space open for different groups of society).

Urban resilience concept has become popular because of increasing sense of uncertainty and insecurity and a search for formulas for adaptation and survival [Christopherson *et al.* 2010]. Financial crisis, political disturbance, other extraordinary events and especially the international debate about possible environmental disaster caused by climate change have a strong influence on the popularization of the term [Müller 2011]. Searching linkages between urban public spaces and urban resilience, we have to take into account all types of public space, regardless of location and rank. Depending on disturbance, both best-known, iconic urban public space and system of neighbourhood backyards can play important role in reaction and adaptation process.

Well-design, green, safety, and accessible public space could support:

- minimize the use of energy (for transportation) and maximize use of local labour, by implementing compact city principles, such as walkability, connectivity, mixed-uses and diversity, increased density, green transport and so on,
- reducing both risks of natural distress, such as flood, fires, and disadvantages caused by people activities, such as industrial noise, air pollution,
- strengthening linkages between producers, consumers and a city, taking advantages from urban public spaces, they are more conscious of risk, more responsible for a place.

During shocks urban public spaces play a crucial role, becoming a main places where people can help each other and organize themselves to face the treat. However, we must also take into account that threats such as terrorist attacks, violence or riots usually take place in urban public spaces. During shock urban public spaces become a place of provision of some goods, which are usually private but disturbance forced to deliver them as a public. For instance during the long drought period people will use public swimming pools resign from private pools or distribute swimming services within still operating private pools as a ‘commons’.

3. Urban public spaces – management perspective (conclusions)

In practice, there are no integrated approach and management tools for urban public spaces. In Poland for instance: streets, squares or parks are not treated as a urban public spaces in a holistic sense. Management of urban public spaces are very fragmented. It consists of narrowly defined activities such as street lighting and cleaning or public safety undertaken by various municipal departments. Lack of strategic approach – with a few exceptions – makes public spaces usually do not play important role in shaping urban development patterns.

In time of increasing uncertainty and deep socio-economic and political changes, we have to attempt to define development challenges facing the urban public spaces. The following list of challenges represents the conclusions of the earlier sections of this paper:

- 1) **The shift to new approach to urban public space development.** Changes in public space development are linked to an evolution in the thinking about urban regeneration and its aim of bringing sustainable vitality and viability to urban areas, and the role of public space in this process [Carmona *et al.* 2008, p. 69]. New technologies, new pattern of consumption or demographic changes force a new approach to the role of urban public space in contemporary urban economy. In case of public space the key point is the relationship between urban physical conditions and social response. Towns and cities change over time, and the process of change is both inevitable and can be view as a beneficial [Roberts 2000, p. 11]. It is beneficial because these substantial forces of change creates opportunities to adjust and improve the conditions of urban areas.
- 2) **The shift to non-market goods valuation.** The need for more widespread use of cost-benefit analysis, including valuation of urban public spaces. Assessment based on non-market good valuation methods will be helpful in decision-making process concerning the provision of urban public spaces. In this case it is possible to identify social cost and benefits obtained by different stakeholders. This methods allows practitioners to prepare both *ex-ante* and *ex-post* evaluation, so it is very useful in strategic planning of urban development.
- 3) **The shift from local government to local governance.** Need to develop the model of integrated management of urban public spaces, in which we assume co-operation between three sectors: public, business and non-governmental organizations. There are important differences between privatization of public spaces and introducing private partners into management process [Pancewicz 2010]. Governance in case of urban public spaces is a process of multi-stakeholder involvement, of multiple interest resolution, of compromise rather than confrontation. Transaction costs are minimised, trust maximised, collaborative advantage extracted [Stewart 2003, p. 76].

- 4) **The shift to more flexible land-use planning.** Cities in the process of restructuring are characterized by vacancy. As Fuhrich and Goderbauer [2011] suggest: “*in order to keep options for using existing areas or buildings open for the municipality, thinking strategically in terms of interim solution, permitting **interim uses**, and planning for them as far as possible can be a reasonable approach*”. Land formerly occupied by residential, industrial or military buildings and infrastructure, now with open access as a public space can be scenery of “temporary uses projects” from the fields of arts, culture, sport, recreation. Recessions spurs creative temporary uses of urban lots, which often grow out citizen’s involvement and build governance networks. The existence of urban public space is a prerequisite of effective land use planning and local governance. Urban public spaces are complex adaptive system within city, so – in urban resilience context – they are perfect to:
- implement more organic, adaptable and flexibly urban management,
 - test innovative tools of land use planning and local governance, more focusing on learning-by doing,
 - test better solutions in the provision public goods.

Carmona *et al.* [2010] discusses the concept of public space management and its evolution in the context of wider changes to urban governance. Four interlinked dimensions for public space management is proposed: the co-ordination of interventions, the regulation of uses and conflicts between uses, the definition and deployment of maintenance routines, and investment in public spaces and their services. They propose three models of urban public space management depending on level of public sector involvement: the state-centred model, the market-centred model and the community-centred model [Carmona *et al.* 2010, p. 72-79]. It should be starting point in discussion on urban public space management in different type of cities.

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