



*Illustration 1: Space between buildings on the MM Complex, Lisbon (own illustration, 2016)*

# ADDING PUBLIC SPACES TO INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

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## ABSTRACT

“How can a former industrial complex without public spaces be transformed into a public space?” In this paper a historical overview of three influential ideas in the last 50 years in urban strategies on public space will be discussed. After this historical overview a position regarding the issue of the need for public space will be taken.

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## Introduction

This position paper is about the space between buildings, more precisely the public space near buildings. This paper and research are linked with my graduation studio “Lisbon - Disclosing the military city”, focusing on a former military complex (MM Complex) that has fallen out of use. For Docomomo International we were asked to come up with a plan to revitalize the area and give it a new use. One of the main problems of the complex became clear during the site visits. The urban design of the plot was made for machines and labour and not so much for human interaction. Nowhere on the plot are benches for resting or street lanterns found to indicate a relationship with people in general (see Illustration 2).



Illustration 2: Space between buildings on the MM Complex with and without people (own illustration, 2016)

The central question for this paper is: *How can a former industrial complex without public spaces be transformed into a public space?* In this paper a historical overview of three influential ideas in the last 50 years in urban strategies on public space will be discussed. After this historical overview a position regarding the issue of the need for public space will be taken.

## Background

The historical overview of the urban strategies regarding public space is based on three authors. Which have all been influential in the research on public space. In the 1960s Gordon Cullen wrote *Townscape*, which was first published in 1961. Later this book has been republished as “The concise townscape” which became the most popular book on urban design in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Unknown, Gordon Cullen, 2016). In the 1980s William H. Whyte wrote *The Social Life Of Small Urban Spaces*. This book has been followed by a documentary with the same title. His book and research on the plazas in New York caused a small revolution in urban planning and design of plazas (Kent, 2016). The most recent well known writer on urban development is Jan Gehl, his book *Life Between Buildings* was published in Danish in 1971, with the first English translation published in 1987. For this research the 2011 edition of this book will be used. The first 1970s version of this book was written to point out the short comings of the functionalistic architecture and city planning that dominated the period. The book has been updated over time, with each new publishing.

This specific period of time is chosen on one hand because it relates with the expansion times of the military complex, on where they could have paid attention to create public space on the site but did not. Another reason is that the most recent and influential book refers to them both as being good pioneers for public space theories. The following paragraphs will give an outline of the ideas on public space, as presented by the authors mentioned before. After the historic outline, my own position among them will be explained.

## Historical overview

To start in chronological order we start in the 1960s. The technological advancements changed how people spent their leisure time. Due to the increase of employment and factories, the increase in money

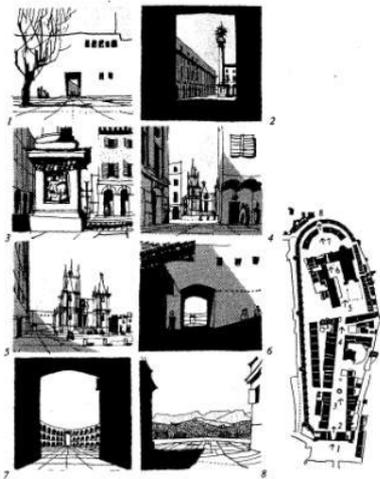


Illustration 3: *Townscape* by Gordon Cullen (Cullen, 1961)

allowed people to spend more money on leisure activities (Watson, 2016). During the 1960s Portugal and England lost their colonies in India. At this time the Manutenção Militar Complex (MM Complex) was still expanding, opening up stores to serve the families of the soldiers that were fighting the colonial wars. The critical point mentioned in *Townscape* (1961) is, that today the environment is fragmented into separate pieces, he makes them visible in his serial views (See Illustration 3). The position taken in the book is to try to bring all parts of the environment together, Cullen wants to achieve this by using of the person's sense of position. The sense of position is the unspoken reaction of a person to the environment. An enclosure (or: outdoor room) is seen by Cullen as the most powerful and most obvious of all devices that could be used to instil a sense of position, of identity with the surroundings. An example is the historic centre, which is tightly built-up and mainly focused on the pedestrian with its enclosures, focal points and enclaves. The outsides of this centre are the express ways for cars, trucks, trains

and ships. Existing to serve the boundaries of the centre and have less to do with the pedestrian (Cullen, 1961). This point of view has been quite favourable over time, since the book still is one of the most popular books on urban design, so much that my graduation tutor (now in 2016) still recommends it as a good book to read on public space. Since 1961 the government of New York City has given bonuses to builders that provided a plaza with their buildings in the city. This resulted in a lot of public spaces being added, one more used by people than the other.

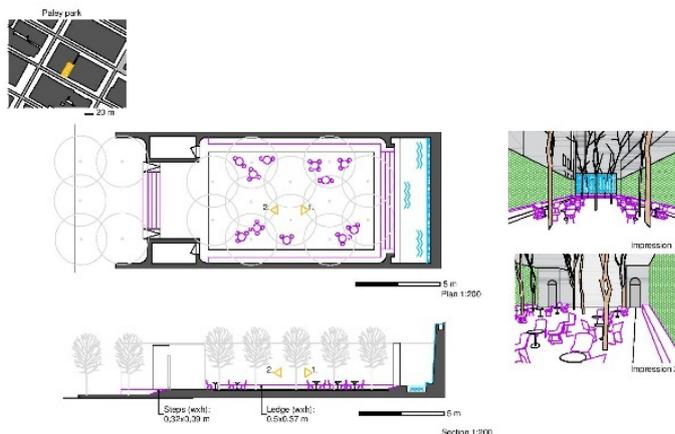


Illustration 4: *Analysis of Paley Park, NYC* (Author, 2016)

During the 1980s the cold war was still active. A global economic recession marked this time period in the USA and in Europe (Unknown, 1980s, 2016). In the 1980s all colonies became independent, leaving the Portuguese state to close down the supermarkets run by the MMC for the military families. Slowly they started to demolish buildings they no longer needed at the site. The position taken in *The Social Life of Public Spaces* (1980) is that the social life in public spaces contributes to the quality of life of individuals and society as a whole.

Whyte points out that we, as designers, have a responsibility to create places that facilitate

social engagement and community interaction. He defines, by doing field researches, a few key factors that lead to a successful public space. The factors defined are: available sitting space, access to sun, trees and water, if there is a place to get food nearby and the relationship with the street. According to Whyte, there shouldn't be any distinction between the street and the public (Whyte, 1980).

In the five decades that have passed since 1961, many researchers and urban planning theoreticians have contributed to the research on public spaces in cities. Since the 1980s the public sector kept growing, while the other industries kept suffering from the global recession that hit in the 1960s (Henriksen, 2016). It's also during this time that the needs for production of the MM Complex has decreased. And finally in 2011, the last machine on the site was shut down. Marking the end of the active history of the Military food industry. According to Gehl, there have been two big shifts in the view on town/city planning. The first shift is in the Renaissance, where the city was no longer a tool formed by use but started to be

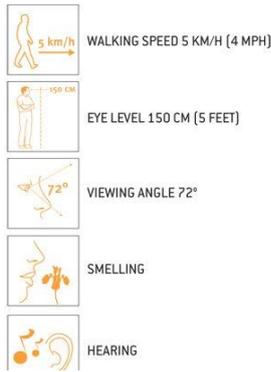


Illustration 5: Factors of a human scaled urban design (llp, 2016)

planned. The spatial effects, buildings and artists were the new points of interests. The second big shift was around the 1930s, that came with the functionalism. This is also the time that a strict separation of functions were encouraged, this had a huge impact on the street life. An example for this and how it had a less favourable outcome is the design for the Bijlmer (Amsterdam, the Netherlands). Due to the separation of functions, there was no one present during the day. Leading to no social control and criminal activities had free range (Unknown, de geschiedenis van een verguisd utopia, 2016).

In *Life between buildings* (2011) Jan Gehl points out that there are three types of activities that happen in public spaces: the necessary-, optional- and social activities. Like Cullen, Gehl refers back to the medieval city, which was not planned, and was ruled by pedestrians. These city centres are still working really well, looking at the three activity types mentioned before. Life in the buildings and between the buildings seem to nearly always be more relevant than the spaces and buildings itself (Gehl, 2011). Like Whyte, Gehl defines a few important design factors, to take into account on big and small scales: *walking, sitting, standing, seeing, hearing and talking*.

The next part of this paper is discussing the three points of view with each other and placing myself within this discourse. After this a potential solution will be presented on how to add public space to the Military Complex to make it suitable for a new use.

## Discussion and Active positioning

In the previous part three of the most influential books on the discourse of public space were presented. These books were picked because they've had a great impact on the urban strategies regarding the development and treatment of public space. In the following parts the statements on public space will be discussed and compared, followed by my own statement. In the concluding part of this paper a solution for the presented issue (transforming a space with no public space into a public space) will be given, based on my position in the discourse.

The critical point mentioned in *Townscape* (1961) is, that the environment is fragmented into separate pieces. The position taken in the book is to try to bring all parts of the environment together, Cullen wants to achieve this by using of the person's sense of position. The sense of position is the unspoken reaction of a person to the environment. An enclosure (or: outdoor room) is seen by Cullen as perhaps the most powerful and most obvious of all devices that instil a sense of position, of identity with the surroundings.

In *The Social Life of Public Spaces* (1970) Whyte defines a few key factors that lead to a successful public space. The factors defined are: available sitting space, access to sun, trees and water, if there is a place to get food nearby and the relationship with the street. There shouldn't be any distinction between the street and the public. In this aspect he has a different approach from Cullen, Cullen believed that a person's sense of position defines a good public space while Whyte points out certain activities that need to be available in a public space.

Like Whyte, Gehl defines a few important design factors, to take into account on big and small scales: *walking, sitting, standing, seeing, hearing and talking*. The thing they agree on is: sitting space. While Whyte sees remaining/staying at a certain spot as the main activity (and then the social part will come naturally), Gehl believes that a space should evoke more than just sitting and sees the activities that come with the social part of a public space as stand-alone factors.



Illustration 6: Enclosed area in the MM Complex (Author, 2016)

My position in the discourse is based on personal experiences in public spaces, but also on what I've taken from the books. Like Cullen I believe that enclosure helps to get a sense of position, but I'm also critical on this idea, a space can be too enclosed and feel like an island in the city instead of a part of the city. This is mainly what is the current state of the MM Complex, it is enclosed by buildings, a large road but also fences. Making it impossible for outsiders to have a relationship with the place (see Illustration 6). I do agree with the statements of activities that are needed to make something a good public space but I would like to make an addition to this needs based on

activities. Providing an event like a playground or art piece in a public space is a good way to attract people and keep people there for a while. An example of this is Parc de l'Espanya Industrial in Barcelona. Here the art piece and playground are integrated into one, allowing kids to play on the art pieces while their parents have a rest nearby (see Illustration 7). In this paper I have done research on how a good public space is made and found my own position within this discourse. Because the complex doesn't have any public spaces now, the first action is to add this to the site. Opening up some of the borders and adding activities and functions into the buildings that attract people to come and stay at the site. In the conclusion this will be elaborated more specifically in a sketch idea for the site.



Illustration 7: Parc de l'Espanya Industrial (Unknown, Parc de l'Espanya Industrial – a park full of history, 2015)

## Conclusion

In this concluding part a solution for the presented issue (transforming a space with no public space into a public space) will be given, based on my position in the discourse. The focus on question "How can a former industrial complex without public spaces be transformed into a public space?" has been the directory for this research and position paper. One of the main problems of the complex is that it's has been designed for machines

and labour, not for residing or human comfort. Based on this research on the discourse of public space is conducted, using three influential publications on public space.

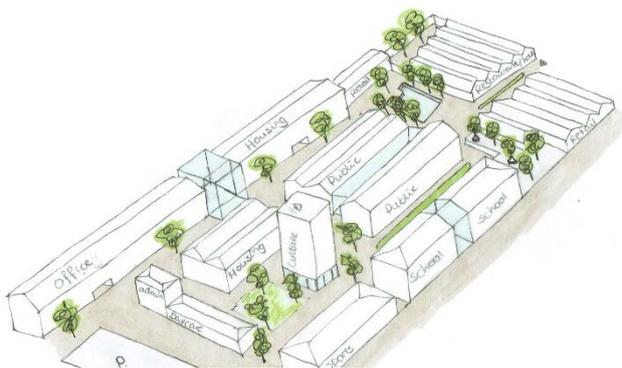


Illustration 8: Possible solution for the public space in the MM Complex based on my position to the discourse (Author, 2016)

My own position summarized is: enclosure is good, but when overdone it alienates people from the space. The adding of functions that make a good public space (also according to Whyte and Gehl) and an event happening in the place should attract people to come and stay there. So for the redesigning of the public space of the Military complex some openings

to the surroundings need to be made to allow people in, but also the adding of spaces to sit, eat, talk, some vegetation and water and an event to the space should make it a better place for staying and meeting people.

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