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Sun, Wenwen

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NEGOTIATED PUBLIC: AN INVESTIGATION ON THE STREETScape OF BEIJING'S OLD CITY

Sun W.

Delft University of Technology - Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment - Netherlands - Delft

In Beijing's old city, the emergence of conflictual practices in the street life have challenged the conventional concepts of 'public' and 'private', as well as the design principles based on this normative expression. This paper proposes a novel way of reading and understanding the street spaces by exploring a traditional type of street in Beijing— namely the hutong — through its controversial and conflicting spatial practices and ambiguous social expressions. Substantiated by the practice of lived experience, it argues that instead of a given urban condition or an idealised category of urban design, public space is best understood as a dynamic realm negotiated and renegotiated by simultaneous solid and soft interventions from multiple social groups. This argument hopes to open discussions towards a more localised and inclusive understanding of public space in the Chinese city.