Open Access Journal

From private to public: redeveloping private space as the way to reframe publicness of everyday life. Investigating build-by-people trials in Shanghai

Xuewei Chen

Bartlett School of Planning UCL, London WC1H 0NN, UK
xuewei.chen.20@ucl.ac.uk

The publicness discourse has been extensively explored from the perspectives of numerous disciplinary interests, multiple actors, especially the government and expert professions, and its normative ideal. This study examines how individual engagement in shaping private and semi-public space could be viewed as a means of reframing the publicness of everyday life and thereby contributing to the shaping of cities. Through examining the rationale of build-by-people trials in Shanghai, categorising in stewarding practise, DIY tactic, and informal trial, this study anticipates shedding light on the particularities of publicness in the contemporary Chinese context. Drawing on empirical data from observation and interviews, the study discusses different facets of build-by-people trials, including the combination of desire and belief to push individuals to be a part of the public, contribution to forgotten spaces, impact on social relationships, as well as concerns on privatisation. The analysis demonstrates that the current 'build-by-people' trials have manifested their capacity to proactively engage concerned citizens, develop forgotten spaces, and advance a broader sense of publicness discourse. However, additional research is needed to investigate how to maximise the value of 'build-by-people' practises in a sustainable manner, and how to strategically advocate for more 'public-isation' processes while keeping the privatisation scenario from deteriorating.

Keywords: Publicness, Public space, Build-by-people trials, People's City

Open Access Journal

Introduction

Public space, perceived as a 'cluster concept' with multiple facets according to literature (Kohn, 2004), has been discussed with varying focus through different lenses of different disciplinary interests. Democratic and human rights have been concentrated in the political field (Arendt, 1998; Mitchell, 1995; Mouffe, 2005), and the 'placelessness', the sense of place, and privatisation have been discussed a lot from the human geography perspective (Lefebvre, 1991; Low & Smith, 2005; Madanipour, 2003; Massey, 2005; Mitchell, 1995; Relph, 1976; Sennett, 1992). Historical context, the value of place, and everyday urban life have been emphasised in urban sociology studies (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 2008), and the accessibility and control management on public space are the focus of legal specialists (Briffault, 1999; Ellickson, 1996). While the present study recognises the multi-dimensional facets of publicness discourse, it takes the sociological viewpoints as the point of entry into the discussion of the publicness of public space, focusing on its relationship with everyday life and social interactions.

Besides, varying elements and metrics for defining the publicness of public space have been studied and examined. The ownership (Carmona, 2010; Magalhaes, 2010; Németh & Schmidt, 2011), accessibility (Carmona, 2010; Kohn, 2004; Magalhaes, 2010; Young, 2000), management (Carmona, 2010; Low & Smith, 2005; Varna, 2014), inclusiveness and the right to use (Madanipour, 1999, 2003; Magalhaes, 2010; Young, 2000) have been studied a lot in order to better conceptualise the multi-dimensional nature of publicness (Li et al., 2022). However, the empirical efforts generated by theoretical implications, contributing to or diminishing the publicness of public space have been thoroughly studied from the perspective of public authority (Carmona, 2022; Madanipour, 2003), private sector (Banerjee, 2001; Carmona & Wunderlich, 2013; Magalhaes, 2010; Mitchell, 2003; Sorkin, 1992), and 'to whom' (Varna & Tiesdell, 2010), whilst the standpoint of individuals and their impacts on the publicness of public space have been severely studied. Sulmontenously, Carmona (2022) pointed out that 'with rights come responsibilities', and that users of public spaces also have responsibilities to make contributions to the publicness of public space. Therefore, the present study takes the standpoint of ordinary people and focuses on their efforts in contributing to or diminishing the publicness of public space. The rest of the study will demonstrate that, despite the perception that ordinary people are primarily the users of public space, various small-scale individual experiments in Shanghai have in effect made contributions to the publicness of some forgotten public spaces.

Further, the dichotomy between publicness and privateness can be ambiguous. Privatisation and commercialisation have continuously brought impacts on public realms because of neoliberal capitalism (Wang 2019), and Kohn (2004) also points out that 'the private and public realms are becoming increasingly intertwined'. The attempts to identify publicness throughout the linear transition from public to private have been determined to be challenging and complex (Németh & Schmidt, 2011), and Madanipour (2003) unveils that various overlaps between publicness and privateness may be one of the causes. Akkar (2005) and Kilian (1998) have even proposed that publicness and privateness 'exist in every space' simultaneously, which also indicates the dynamical conception of publicness of space (Staeheli & Mitchell, 2008). Therefore, rather than solely focusing on publicness or privateness in a static manner, the literature directs this study toward a more dynamic transition process in between. The present research thereby attempts to introduce the process theory and discuss from private to public, how individuals' creativity and capacity contribute to the shaping of cities as well as the publicness of public spaces.

Open Access Journal

This perspective is meaningful in the discussion of urban regeneration in contemporary Shanghai in the post-pandemic era. Firstly, the Chinese context may supplement to the publicness discourse from another perspective, since all of the lands is owned by the state. However, as Li et al. (2022) argue that formal ownership alone does not determine whether a space serves public interests, this study has been conducted by accepting this predetermined setting and aims to examine individuals' capacity to bring impact the other metrics of publicness. Secondly, instead of widespread 'publicly owned and publicly operated' spaces, there are also many 'publicly owned and privately operated' spaces (Németh & Schmidt, 2011) like shopping malls and commercial complex (Wang, 2019). As a result, commercial space has received a lot of attention in terms of how privatisation affects the publicness of public space in the context of marketisation and globalisation (Y. Wang & Chen, 2018; Yang, 2009). Simultaneously, anti-Covid urban experiments have stimulated prosperous build-by-people practises especially during the city lockdown, which directed the focus on community ambiguous spaces as the ground to proceeding with the present study. The value of public contributions in addressing uncertainties has been recognised (Shu & Wang, 2021; C. Wang et al., 2021); rather than questioning the government's ability to deal with crises or complaining about policies, many people took an active role in collectively resolving issues during the city's lockdown. Through unveiling everyday life and trusting relationships associated with the shaping process of community ambiguous spaces, this study also aims to complement the publicness discourse in the context of challenges and uncertainties. Finally, encouragement from the 'People's City', which advocates that the city should be built by and for the people, the new paradigm of micro-regeneration has progressively posed a challenge to top-down governance frameworks while also providing space and time for bottom-up participation. A lot of build-for-people policies and guidelines have been released like the '15-minute community' plan and urban renovation law, but comparatively few build-by-people trials have been rationalised and formalised. Therefore, the individual-standpoint elaborations of this study also anticipate providing more real-world evidence to encourage further focuses to be placed to facilitate the institutionalisation of build-by-people practises.

This study's fieldwork was conducted continuously from August 2021 to December 2022, allowing the study to follow the evolution of the examined spaces at before, during, and after the activation and deactivation of the city lockdown in Shanghai. Rather than statistically analysing data, this study anticipates to qualitatively illustrating how people's efforts have impacted the publicness of public space. The following section examines how, in contemporary circumstances, city-making efforts have evolved to include more public involvement and varying types of individual involvement. The discussion is built on secondary data collected from public social media posts by individuals, policy documents, online announcements released by different levels of government offices, varying bureaus like Planning and Natural Resources and Civil Affairs, and other social organisations and institutions. Section three takes a closer look at identified experiments with frequent individual contributions to continuously shaping spaces. The elaboration derives from data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participant observations. The roles of the interviewees include owner/operator of spaces (n=5), planning and landscape designers (n=5), and residents (n=10). To protect the anonymity of interviewees, this study has established a coding method. Interviewees in the Sanlin community (Case A and C) have been assigned codes DM1 to DM10, while those in Tongji New Village (Case B and D) have been labelled as SP01 to SP10. This systematic approach allows for data analysis while upholding confidentiality and ethical research standards. The concluding section presents perspectives while also reflecting on some additional challenges related to maximising the value of individuals' contributions to the publicness of public space.

Open Access Journal

Build-by-people trials in recent Shanghai

Along with the shift from massive economic and urban development to the national promotion of city betterment and urban quality improvement, Shanghai started to experiment with the so-called micro-regeneration as an alternative to the traditional urban regeneration approach since 2015 (Cao, 2021; M. Wang et al., 2022). Instead of large-scale, time-consuming, and expensive urban regeneration programmes, micro-regeneration may provide a more practical and efficient way of solution without challenging the current regulatory plan like the land use and Floor Area Ratio (Jiefang Daily, 2021). Further, micro-regeneration programmes are actively developing a variety of inclusive participatory platforms with the goal of involving a variety of social actors, such as those in the planning and design professions, students, social organisations, and residents (Hua & Zhuang, 2022; The Paper, 2020). Encouraged by what Zheng & Zheng (2022) proposed the elite class, which includes 'governing elites' (e.g., government and political leaders who own decision-making power) (Cao, 2022) and 'non-governing elites' (e.g., expert professionals who are intellectuals) (Zheng, 2017), residents' participation in various scales of city-shaping projects has been substantially developed (Kou et al., 2019). People's efforts to proactively participate in city-shaping activities have flourished over time, and more residents are now willing to continually embrace the designer and stewardship responsibilities in city-shaping programmes. This study values varying types of public contributions, but it particularly anticipates elaborating on how individuals may shape their cities creatively and effectively. As a result, it concentrates on studies with little or no assistance or intervention from the elite class, expert professionals, or government leaders. Distinguishing the characteristics of public space and the associated operators which lead to varying build-by-people trials, this study categorises the myriad of practices into three types, namely stewarding practise, DIY tactic, and informal trial.

To stimulate individuals' willingness in participating city-shaping programmes, community organisations, professionals, philanthropies, and other 'non-governing elites' have constantly directed individual contributions. When the elite team withdrew from the field, some places have been continuously stewarded and reshaped by locals. Sanlin Community has been chosen as one of the testing grounds for interested residents to make efforts to improve the public spaces of their neighbourhood. Many community gardens have been developed as the results of the Community Planner Workshop (fig. 1) and College Student Community Garden Production Competition (fig. 2), which were community garden participatory programmes directed by expert professionals and empowered by the subdistrict government.

Figure. 1. (Left) Community Planner Workshop, group presentation. Source: author, August 2021. **Figure. 2.** (Right) College Student Community Garden Production Competition, local residents and young professionals were collaboratively working on the development of a community garden. Source: author, September 2021.

Open Access Journal

Young professionals and local residents worked together to develop these community gardens (fig. 3), which were then turned over to the locals at the completion of the programmes. Whilst the majority of the shaped gardens have been abandoned by inhabitants following the city lockdown (fig. 4), certain gardens have been observed as being carefully maintained and continuously reshaped (fig. 5&6). Therefore, those public spaces which were initially directed by expert professionals, but eventually well-stewarded by individuals have been framed as the first type of the build-by-people trials, the stewarding practice. Fazhi Garden was chosen as Case A because DM01 has consistently assumed the responsibility of stewardship since this garden was developed as a product of the Community Planner Workshop in August 2021 (fig. 6). With the empowerment from the Community Planner Workshop, DM01 was able to make a proposal regarding the anticipation to improving this decaying building corder. Assisted by expert professionals and surrounding neighbours, Fazhi Garden was developed collaboratively, and DM01 proactively took stewardship by the end of the Workshop.

Figure. 3. Community gardens developed through community participatory programmes. Source: author, October 2021.

Figure. 4. Developed gardens have been forgotten. Source: author, July 2022.

To test individuals' capacities and public awareness in making contributions to take action and contribute to improving their surrounding areas, some action plans were coming to the fore. A prominent example is the Seeding Plan, which was launched in early 2020 during the pandemic by the Clover Nature School (CNS), a non-profit organisation which specialises in leveraging community gardens as a strategy to regenerate community public space. 'Rebuilding trust, planting hope' has been shared as the advocacy of the programme, with the objective of not only greening their balconies and other semi-private spaces, but also rebuilding social connections (Kehrer, 2020). It is a special action against the covid-19 epidemic, which aims to decentralise the community garden to spot-on building rooftops and balconies, while at the same time, transferring love and trust by sharing seeds or plants (Liu, 2020). The potential sites for accommodating these mini gardens can be diverse. Private balconies, semi-private back or front yards, and semi-public community gardens or roof-top spaces are all can be the spots for initiating planting activities (Liu, 2020).

Open Access Journal

Figure. 5. (Left) A resident was managing the garden at the front of his flat. Source: author, July 2022.
Figure. 6. (Right) DM01 was stewarding the Fazhi Garden in Case A. Source: author, July 2022.

The second type of build-by-people trials in this study, referred to as DIY tactics, involves ordinary individuals continually and autonomously developing and stewarding private, semi-private, or semi-public spaces. Thousands of people have signed up for the Seeding Plan, with active participants in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, and other Chinese cities. Among thousands of seeding gardens in Shanghai (CNS, 2023), Sanfendi Garden in Tongji Village has been selected as the study field (Case B) (fig. 7). Sanfendi has made a significant impact among Shanghai's numerous practices since SP01's proactive efforts have opened up her private, or technically speaking, the ambiguous semi-private space, into a community common space. In addition, she has not only shaped and reshaped the garden but also worked with neighbours to steward additional public spaces in the neighbourhood without the ongoing assistance of trained professionals (fig. 8).

Figure. 7. (Left) Sanfendi, Case B. Source: author, September 2021. **Figure. 8.** (Left) SP01 and her neighbours were cleaning up rubbish in the neighbourhood's other public spaces. Source: SP01, October 2022.

Simultaneously, some other individuals who were not engaged in the community participatory programme in Sanlin Community and the Seeding Plan in Tongji Village were motivated to take action on their own. Those spaces are technically owned and operated by authorities, but they were claimed and shaped spontaneously and informally by surrounding neighbours, resulting in the third type, the informal trials. Such reshaped spaces in both Sanlin Community (Case C) and Tongji Village (Case D) are manifested in forms of farmland (fig. 9), collected planter boxes (fig. 10), front garden (fig. 11), or decorated by other structures (fig. 12).

Open Access Journal

Figure. 9. (Left) Transformation of public space between buildings into farmland in Case C by DM02. Source: author, July 2022. **Figure. 10.** (Right) Public space between buildings has been claimed by planter boxes in Case C by DM03. Source: author, July 2022.
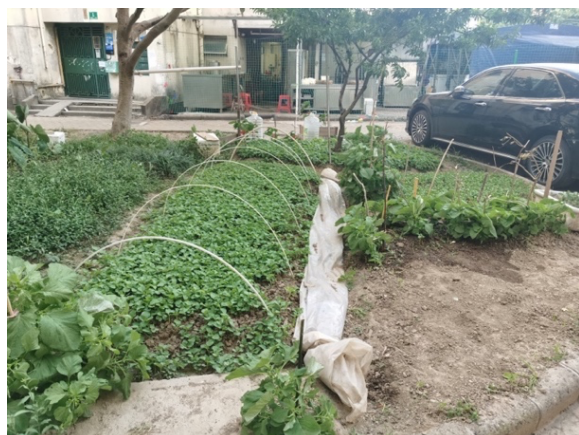

Figure. 11. (Left) Transformation of decaying space into open front garden in Case D. Source: author, December 2021. **Figure. 12.** (Right) Transformation of decaying space with decorations and temporary structures. Source: SP01, January 2023.

The rationale of build-by-people trials with space publicness

With the encouragement of micro-regeneration in Shanghai, more build-by-people experiments have increasingly demonstrated their ability to bring dynamics and diversity to the shaping of public spaces. The rationale of build-by-people trials with publicness of public space that can be derived from varying experiments includes pushing individuals to engage in public, sustaining forgotten spaces, and fostering social bonds, but also concerns about the potential privatisation scenario.

Pushing individuals to engage in public: the combination of desire and belief

In order for people to take action and contribute to the publicness of public space, encouraging them to participate in the public arena could be the key step. Taking the first step outside our personal social circle and cultivating a greater public awareness of the are challenging, specifically in the Chinese context (Liu, 2019). Based on Fei (1992), the urban structure of Chinese society is analogous to the circles that form on the surface of a lake when a rock is thrown into it. Each individual is at the centre of the circles formed by their own social influence

Open Access Journal

and relationships. As a result, Chinese society evolved around the concept of 'chaxugeju,' in which each web is centralised on the self. It emphasises a sense of differentiation that occurs as a result of the social circle 'pushing out' from the self. Confucius emphasises the 'push' action, implying that the social relationship is expanding or spreading out from the centre. Fei (1992) claims that it is critical to first recognise the importance of the self and to 'control oneself and conform to rituals.' After getting control of one's inner self, one can then push and extend oneself into other circles of human relationships. Therefore, though some refer to it as egocentrism (Fei, 1992), others prefer the term 'we-relation based egocentrism' (J. Wang, 2016), stressing self-control and self-restraint and emphasising the importance of 'from the self to the family, the family to the state, and the state to the entire world.' However, the embedded culture makes people difficult to leave their personal social relation circle and take care of the public realm. Therefore, a closer examination of the motivations of different individuals taking actions and initiating efforts is needed.

According to interviews with those individuals who are continuously developing and stewarding the spaces, desires and beliefs have been determined as strongly motivating them to make the first step. SP01 in Case B was firstly motivated by agreeing on the philosophy, which has been advocated by the 'Seeding Plan', in which individuals can make contributions to their surroundings and restore community social relationships through sharing plants and seeds. Tongji Village in which she lives was built in the 1950s and has remained a forgotten area of the city, with garbage and overgrown weeds reclaiming public spaces (fig. 13).

Figure. 13. Views of Tongji Village. Source: author, December 2021 (Left), August 2022 (Right).

Furthermore, SP01, who was living alone, noted how different from previously that in contemporary life, people even don't know their neighbours, which already upset her. The city's lockdown and quarantine also made social divides and barriers worse, further severing SP01's isolation from her neighbours. By agreeing on the 'Seeding Plan' philosophy, SP01 perceived a sense of obligation to contribute to the neighbourhood's maintenance and restore community social networks. Rather than believing, SP01 personally has a sort of desire and interest in planting, so participating in the 'Seeding Plan' can also be a way to fulfil her personal value and anticipation. A similar rationale can be found in all of the other cases, where people were inspired to act because they believed it was their responsibility to maintain order in their community and because they favoured planting as their personal interest.

To conclude, these findings have reflected what Davidson (1963) has rationalised the intended action, and he has categorised someone does something for a reason as '(a) having some sort of pro attitude toward actions of a certain kind, and (b) believing (or knowing, perceiving,

Open Access Journal

noticing, remembering) that his action is of that kind'. These experiments demonstrate that by putting a philosophy in the programme that may express people's beliefs and having the efforts' substance align with their own desires, people may be more likely to act, take the initial step, and be willing to be visible to the public.

Contributing to forgotten spaces

The tests have already revealed a variety of efforts that people have anticipated or have attempted to support neighbourhood improvement when the authority is unable to or has temporarily overlooked. Even the strongest government with absolute power and intelligence cannot provide absolute support, protection, and care, so trust and associated autonomous activities can make up for what bureaucratic control has been neglected (Gambetta, 1988). Owing to the paternalistic leadership that fosters the populace's subordinate behaviours and reliance on the state's protection (Cheng et al., 2004), phrases like 'government will figure it out' and 'government will save us, we just need to wait' have become rather commonplace. 'We are perfectly protected, and we often forget that as citizens, we also have responsibilities to help our city,' said an anonymous, referring to the low vaccination rate, particularly among people over 60 years old, which has been assumed to be one of the inherent reasons that we are still implementing a severe form of Zero-Covid policy[1].

Instead of only relying on and waiting for the government to discover a solution and take action, various trials have demonstrated that ordinary citizens, as city inhabitants, are capable of addressing some issues themselves, or at the very least making some contributions. In Case B, SP01 not only managed the ambiguous semi-private spaces in front of her flat in an orderly manner, but also opened it up to the public, turning it into a community common space (fig. 14). In Case D, SP01 and her neighbours were making the effort collaboratively to clear up trash and maintain public space in a decaying neighbourhood that has been lacking supervision for some time (fig. 15). In Case A, contrasting the various unkempt building corner spaces in the neighbourhood (fig. 16), DM01's continuous efforts have not only improved both the environment and the publicness of the space (fig. 17). Similarly, residents of Case C also make informal contributions to clear up the garbage (fig. 18), maintain public spaces, with the aim to improve their living environment (fig. 19).

Figure. 14. (Left) Neighbours were visiting Sanfendi in Case B during the city lockdown. Source: SP01, September 2022. **Figure. 15.** (Right) Residents worked together to clean trash in the neighbourhood's other public spaces in Case D. Source: SP01, October 2022.

---

1 Chenqin, 'Are we really ready for the "first shock"?', *metrodatateam WeChat official account*, 2022, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ZTi3CCjBSN9Y_3CTtImAoQ, (accessed 27 Octorber 2023).

Open Access Journal

Figure. 16. (Left) A typical building corner space in Sanlin Community. Source: author, July 2022. **Figure. 17.** (Right) Fazheng Garden in Case A. Source: author, July 2022.

Figure. 18. (Left) A typical public space between buildings in Sanlin Community. Source: author, September 2022. **Figure. 19.** (Right) The maintained public space in Case C. Source: author, September 2022.

Rather than waiting for a formal solution to impose changes, build-by-people experiments in studied cases have proved their values to contribute to what authorities have been unable to govern or manage. While not conventionally considered residents' responsibility, these trials help activate forgotten spaces and transform those spaces into visible, accessible, and interactable public spaces. The shifting roles of residents ultimately help strengthen a more publicness milieu of community public spaces, when those spaces were temporarily forgotten by authorities.

Simultaneously, people's accomplishments have been recognised by authority, which may have resulted in a broader sense of publicness. Blog posts from official professional accounts, video documentary clips from various social media platforms, reports published in newspapers, and articles produced by young scholars all serve to highlight the inherent value of the Sanfendi in Case A. The discussions and social responses have increasingly conveyed to governments the message that citizens' creativity and contributions are unique and valuable. Authority's recognition has been manifested as they have included Sanfendi and SP01's efforts in the Shanghai Manual[2]. The introduction of Shanghai Urban Renovation Law

---

[2] The Manual has been developed in partnership between UN-Habitat, the Bureau International des Expositions, and the Shanghai Municipal People's Government with the support of the Ministry of

Open Access Journal

and the launch of Shanghai Urban Space Art Season in 2021, indicate growing platforms and chances for build-by-people practises. It could be possible that more everyday spaces can be identified and released by ordinary people, making more forgotten spaces more accessible and interactable by people. However, authorities' willingness to decentralise city-shaping power and their ability to manage associated problems require further examination.

Stimulating social relationships

'Pushing' or encouraging individuals to go outside their personal circle and be part of the public discourse, there could be more chances that people may develop and strengthen community social networks. When people cooperate with their neighbours in developing and stewarding community common spaces, familiarity and mutual understanding can be established, and social ecology in the community can be developed. For example, in both Cases A and B, SP01 and DM01 became acquainted with their neighbours through daily communications and frequent exchanges regarding the design and development of the gardens. Through a variety of communication and associative activities, individuals became more familiar with one another, learning about one another's characteristics, personalities, habits, and values. As a result, emotionally, residents incrementally formed a stronger social bond based on mutual understanding and affection, resulting in friendship and trusting relationships. Besides, they encountered similarities and developed mutual acceptance and affirmation of one another as a result of their willingness to steward the neighbourhood's public space.

Conversely, trusting relationships will strengthen community cohesion, making a community more resilient when confronting challenges and uncertainties. Interpersonal trust within the neighbourhood has been manifested as mutual assistance in both neighbourhoods. The mutual support was demonstrated by the way Sanlin locals helped one another when a family encountered a daily supply shortage. Residents had expressed their faith in their neighbours, believing that they would come to their aid in an emergency, and everyone believed that it was one's responsibility to assist neighbours whenever possible. In Case A, Sanfendi has subsequently become a community healing park during the city lockdown; residents were welcomed to drop by her garden when people were quarantined in their neighbourhood (fig. 20), while people from other neighbourhoods could view the scenery and make connections through SP01's live broadcast. By leveraging the garden as a healing centre, SP01 anticipated comforting more quarantined persons and restoring social bonds. As the authority was fighting viral transmission and defending people's lives, proactive individuals and trusting social bonds served as a complement, assisting authorities in dealing with challenges.

Additionally, the cohesive and trusting relationship has also been translated as the inspiration for collectively continuously reshaping ambiguous public space. 'Flower in Sanlin' community organisation in Case A and the 'Secret Garden' conversation group in Case B were formed to better communicate ideas and steward spaces. For example, when a tree-cutting program came to Tongji Village, SP01 and her "Secret Garden" friends were able to collective voice their opinions loudly.

Housing and Urban-Rural Development of the People's Republic of China. *https://unhabitat.org/shanghai-manual-a-guide-for-sustainable-urban-development-in-the-21st-century-2022-annual-report*

Open Access Journal

Figure. 20. Residents were visiting Sanfendi in Case A during the city lockdown. Source: SP01, May 2022.

While they were unable to save all of the trees in their neighbourhood (fig. 21), they were able to make a voice, protect a few (fig. 22), clean up debris, reshape spaces, and transform some into community common spaces (fig. 23).
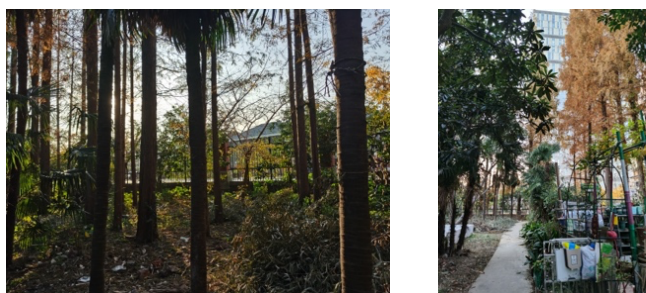

Figure. 21. An original view of spaces around Sanfendi in Case A. Source: author, December 2021.

Figure. 22. (Left, Middle) A view of spaces around Sanfendi in Case A. Source: author, March 2022. **Figure. 23.** (Right) SP01 and families in the neighbourhood were decorating the area where trees had been taken down. Source: SP01, Octorber 2022.

Counter impact: concerns about 'privatisation'

The experiments have shown that if a group of individuals were granted the right to independently develop and manage spaces, the other group would likewise be drawn to and inspired by it. However, when autonomous development flourishes due to a combination of desires and beliefs, the produced spaces may be prone to difficult-to-control departures from the predetermined plan. Individuals may spontaneously claim a space based on their personal

Open Access Journal

preferences and habits, which may not be able to align with the defined order nor satisfy the entire community.

For example, widespread banners in Sanlin Community right following the city lockdown, bearing the message 'Illegally occupying public space will result in prohibition and removal' (fig. 24), demonstrated the government's response to numerous informal reclamations of spaces. It could be the outcome of the growth of various informal places in the Sanlin Community during the city lockdown, with build-by-people practices claiming public spaces without obtaining a permit from the authority (fig. 25).

Figure. 24. 'Illegally occupying public space will result in prohibition and removal' banners in Sanlin Community. Source: author, July 2022.

Figure. 25. The scenario in Sanlin Community of informally claiming public space everywhere. Source: author, March 2022.

However, any reclamation of public space requires formal approval, so any spaces without authorisation, technically, should be considered illegal. Many Case C operators have regarded the structures, planters, and the claimed space as their private property, which their neighbours can enjoy, and observe, but cannot alter. Also, while the design and arrangement of the area may satisfy the operators, it may not be in accordance with the desires or aesthetic values of other neighbours. Therefore, concerns have been expressed specifically about the privatisation situation by some other residents, who believe that improving the neighbourhood environment should rely on comprehensive plans rather than piecemeal build-by-people experiments, which may change the neighbourhood into a fragmented set of circumstances. Consequently, this scenario may present challenges for the formal management of the neighbourhood, regulations may necessitate defining and justifying which areas are legally permitted for build-by-people trials and what are the criteria for the practises.

Conclusion and outlooks

In Shanghai, the focus on building a 'People's City' has sparked a variety of studies on 'build-for-people' plans and regulations, yet there has been limited attention given to understanding the values and aspirations driving 'build-by-people' initiatives. The preceding discussions not only unveil diverse forms of 'build-by-people' practises, but also elaborate that its rationales are intertwined with the publicness of public space. The complex interrelationship demonstrates an individual's capability in contributing publicness of community public spaces, but also reminding with the potential counter-impact. These dynamics have been elaborated in pushing individuals to be part of the public discourse, contributing to forgotten spaces, stimulating trusting relationships, and the concerns about privatisation. Simultaneously, a pattern can be observed and discerned that 'build-by-people' trials are shifting from the 'elite class' driven (Zheng & Zheng, 2022), to proactive informal and DIY activities. All of these coexisting circumstances have generated and promoted a reconfiguration of the publicness discourse in shaping cities.

Through the case studies, the following indications have been generated to supplement the publicness discourse in shaping contemporary cities. First, pushing or encouraging oneself to step outside their own network circle and be willing to participate in public conversation is critical when discussing publicness discourse in the Chinese context. Echoing and sparking people's desires and beliefs may effectively inspire them to take action, participate in public activities, and develop social relationships. Second, individual contributions may be supplemental to where the authority has overlooked, thereby releasing spaces for community common uses. It also convinced the authority of the significance of "build-by-people" trials, which might lead to additional space and opportunities for residents to take part in city-shaping activities. Third, by working collaboratively to develop community public spaces, it may be possible to foster strong, trustworthy social relationships, which can subsequently be transformed into forms of mutual assistance when confronted with Covid. Last but not least, the namely DIY tactic and informal trial have essentially indicated the 'public-isation' (Carmona, 2022) and privatisation processes. Sanfendi in Case A is essentially publicly inaccessible, but opening it up and bringing it properly into community common space where people can access and use it, even though it remains privately owned, is potentially and essentially a public gain to the community. Contrarily, Case C might represent the opposite situation; even though those areas are now cleaner and more organised than they were before, they are still essentially using public space for private purposes, such as farming and planting, which other residents are not allowed to appropriate.

The discussion on individual effort with public space publicness in the context of Shanghai's ongoing practices still leaves two questions needing further examination. The first is how to maximise the benefits of 'build-by-people' practises in a sustainable manner as opposed to remaining as randomly, sporadically and self-entertaining. Interviewees expressed their concerns regarding the scarcity of the cases under study and some additional one-off projects that might have been constrained by funding sources and other limitations. Besides, many studies have argued that even though public participation prosperous recently, it still remains mostly consultation rather than being included in the formal decision-making scheme in the Chinese context (Samara, 2015). Ultimately, publicness discourse should not be viewed as a normative ideal that depends on public authority or private actors in today's unpredictable and contentious cities, but rather as an ongoing, open process that may be shaped by a variety of actors with different beliefs and desires. Therefore, how to sustainably drive comprehensive efforts remains a challenge, since limiting 'build-by-people' practice to self-entertaining and sporadic would be a loss of publicness discourse in city-shaping efforts.

Open Access Journal

The second question is how to encourage more 'public-isation' processes while preventing the expansion of the privatisation situation. Case A has indeed transformed her private front yard into a community common space, like Carmona (2022) suggests that, 'public-isation processes have the potential to offer real benefits to society'. However, the good design strategies like using the fence to define the boundary of the garden, making it visible and accessible to passers-by, and way of management in Case A, don't necessarily fit into other cases in specific contexts. Therefore, what remains to be further studied is how to harness the context-specific resources to develop mechanisms that encourage more 'public-isation' practices in response to specific situations. Simultaneously, the case studies have revealed that some circumstances could lead to a stricter type of privatisation. Even though some informal trials may diversify the public space and satisfy the needs of some, there are still things that need to be regulated in order to fulfil the expectations of the broader public. What needs to be investigated further is how to create a flexible scheme that can be adapted in reaction to different conditions, in which 'build-by-people' trials are encouraged but must adhere to a certain regulation in a context-based manner in order to avoid the consequences of privatisation.

References

Akkar, Z. M. (2005). Questioning the "Publicness" of Public Spaces in Postindustrial Cities. Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, 16(2), 75–91.

Amin, Ash., & Thrift, N. (2002). Cities: Reimagining the urban / Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift. In Cities: Reimagining the urban. Polity.

Arendt, H. (1998). The human condition / by Hannah Arendt. In The human condition (2nd edition / introduction by Margaret Canovan.). University of Chicago Press.

Banerjee, T. (2001). The Future of Public Space: Beyond Invented Streets and Reinvented Places. Journal of the American Planning Association, 67(1), 9–24.

Briffault, R. (1999). A Government for Our Time? Business Improvement Districts and Urban Governance. Columbia Law Review, 99(2), 365–477.

Cao, L. (2021). Architectural heritage in the community | in the past 30 years of Shanghai urban renewal mode exploratio.The Paper. Pengpai News. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_13393732

Cao, L. (2022). Participatory governance in China: 'Informal public participation' through neighbourhood mobilisation. Environment and Planning. C, Politics and Space, 40(8), 1693–1710.

Carmona, M. (2010). Contemporary Public Space, Part Two: Classification. Journal of Urban Design, 15(2), 157–173.

Carmona, M. (2022). The "public-isation" of private space—Towards a charter of public space rights and responsibilities. Journal of Urbanism, 15(2), 133–164.

Carmona, M., & Wunderlich, F. (2013). Capital Spaces: The Multiple Complex Public Spaces of a Global City. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203118856

Cheng, B.-S., Chou, L.-F., Wu, T.-Y., Huang, M.-P., & Farh, J.-L. (2004). Paternalistic leadership and subordinate responses: Establishing a leadership model in Chinese organizations. Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 7(1), 89–117.

CNS. (2023). #SEEDING Action. https://mp.weixin.qq.com/mp/appmsgalbum?__biz=MzUzNjAyNDE3Mw==&action=getalbum&album_id=1430431712047382528&scene=173&from_msgid=2247540892&from_itemidx=1&count=3&nolastread=1#wechat_redirect

Davidson, D. (1963). Actions, Reasons, and Causes. The Journal of Philosophy, 60(23),

Open Access Journal

685–700.

Ellickson, R. C. (1996). Controlling Chronic Misconduct in City Spaces: Of Panhandlers, Skid Rows, and Public-Space Zoning. The Yale Law Journal, 105(5), 1165–1248.

Fei, X. (1992). From the soil, the foundations of Chinese society a translation of Fei Xiaotong's Xiangtu Zhongguo, with an introduction and epilogue / by Gary G. Hamilton and Wang Zheng. University of California Press.

Gambetta, D. (1988). Trust:making and breaking Cooperative Relations. B. Blackwell.

Hua, X., & Zhuang, S. (2022). Promoting Everyday Public Space through Design. A Review of Urban Micro-Regeneration Practices in Shanghai. Architectural Journal, Public Space and Public Construction.

Jiefang Daily. (2021). Micro-regeneration is advancing from community pilot sites to more diverse public spaces. https://www.shanghai.gov.cn/nw4411/20211213/b52479f9fa8141e8ba6d7c43db57df18.html

Kehrer, J. (Ed.). (2020). Clover Nature School Grassroots Urban Regeneration. In Eight Perspectives on Chinese Landscape Architecture Today (pp. 207–238). Birkhäuser. https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/9783035621495-011

Kilian, T. (1998). Public and Private, Power and Space. In The Production of Public Space. Rowman & Littlefield.

Kohn, M. (2004). Brave new neighborhoods: The privatization of public space / Margaret Kohn. Routledge.

Kou, H., Zhang, S., & Liu, Y. (2019). Community-Engaged Research for the Promotion of Healthy Urban Environments: A Case Study of Community Garden Initiative in Shanghai, China. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16(21), 4145.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). The production of space. Blackwell.

Li, J., Dang, A., & Song, Y. (2022). Defining the ideal public space: A perspective from the publicness. Journal of Urban Management, 11(4), 479–487.

Liu, Y. (2019). Public consciousness in Chinese traditional culture. Weixin Official Accounts Platform. Accessed from http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA4Mjk3ODU1NA==&mid=2652595541&idx=4&sn=dbc1q8xk38n6g4l9g5y20mm5ez9tkguat9pv7szu9ed&chksm=84bc1q8xk38n6g4l9g5y20mm5ez9tkguat9pv7szu9edea9bc1q8xk38n6g4l9g5y20mm5ez9tkguat9pv7szu9ed#rd

Liu, Y. (2020). From the last kilometer to the last meter, Shanghai community garden practice—Urban microinfrastructure. Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture, Land-E-Scape: Reset – Towards Healing. Accessed from http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzUzNjAyNDE3Mw==&mid=2247496164&idx=1&s n=bc1q8xk38n6g4l9g5y20mm5ez9tkguat9pv7szu9ed&chksm=fafebc1q8xk38n6g4l9g5y20mm5ez9tkguat9pv7szu9ed28f74cbc1q8xk38n6g4l9g5y20mm5ez9tkguat9pv7szu9ed#rdquanjingwan community in China. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(2), 1–12.

Low, S., & Smith, N. (2005). The politics of public space. Routledge.

Madanipour, A. (1999). Why are the Design and Development of Public Spaces Significant for Cities? Environment and Planning. B, Planning & Design., 26(6), 879–891.

Madanipour, A. (2003). Public and private spaces of the city / Ali Madanipour. Routledge.

Magalhaes, C. D. (2010). Public Space and the Contracting-out of Publicness: A Framework for Analysis. Journal of Urban Design, 15(4), 559–574.

Massey, D. B. (2005). For space / Doreen Massey. In For space. SAGE.

Open Access Journal

Mitchell, D. (1995). The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 85(1), 108–133.

Mitchell, D. (2003). The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space / Don Mitchell. Guilford Press.

Mouffe, C. (2005). The democratic paradox / Chantal Mouffe. London: Verso.

Németh, J., & Schmidt, S. (2011). The Privatization of Public Space: Modeling and Measuring Publicness. Environment and Planning. B, Planning & Design., 38(1), 5–23 Relph, E. C. (1976). Place and placelessness / E. Relph. In Place and placelessness. Pion.

Samara, T. R. (2015). Politics and the social in world-class cities: Building a Shanghai model. Urban Studies, 52(15), 2906–2921. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098015582308

Sennett, R. (1992). The conscience of the eye: The design and social life of cities / Richard Sennett. W.W. Norton.

Shu, Q., & Wang, Y. (2021). Collaborative leadership, collective action, and community governance against public health crises under uncertainty: A Case Study of the Quanjingwan Community in China" International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 18, no. 2: 598. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020598

Sorkin, M. (1992). Variations on a theme park: The new American city and the end of public space. Hill and Wang.

Staeheli, L. A., & Mitchell, D. (2008). The people's property? : Power, politics, and the public / Lynn A. Staeheli and Don Mitchell. In The people's property? : Power, politics, and the public. Routledge.

The Paper. (2020). 社区微更新的上海实践_澎湃号·湃客_澎湃新闻-The Paper. Pengpai News. https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_8380059

Varna, G. (2014). Measuring public space: The star model / Georgiana Varna. In Measuring public space: The star model. Ashgate.

Varna, G., & Tiesdell, S. (2010). Assessing the Publicness of Public Space:The Star Model of Publicness. Journal of Urban Design, 15(4), 575–598.

Wang, C., Dong, X., Zhang, Y., & Luo, Y. (2021). Community resilience governance on public health crisis in china. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(4), 1–20.

Wang, J. (2016). 自我主义与社会秩序——关于"差序格局"的再思考. Sociological Review of China.

Wang, M., Zhang, F., & Wu, F. (2022). "Micro-regeneration": Toward small-scale, heritage-oriented, and participatory redevelopment in China. Journal of Urban Affairs, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2022.2139711

Wang, Y. (2019). Pseudo-Public Spaces in Chinese Shopping Malls: Rise, Publicness and Consequences. CRC Press. https://books.google.com/books?id=SgScDwAAQBAJ

Wang, Y., & Chen, J. (2018). Does the rise of pseudo-public spaces lead to the 'end of public space' in large Chinese cities? Evidence from Shanghai and Chongqing. Urban Design International (London, England), 23(3), 215–235.

Yang, Z. (2009). Evolution, form and public use of central pedestrian districts in large Chinese cities. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Young, I. M. (2000). Inclusion and democracy. Oxford University Press.

Zheng, J. (2017). Toward a new concept of the "cultural elite state": Cultural capital and the urban sculpture planning authority in elite coalition in Shanghai. Journal of Urban Affairs, 39(4), 506–527.

Zheng, J., & Zheng, X. (2022). Does Public Participation Matter to Planning? Urban

Open Access Journal

Sculpture Reception in the Context of Elite-Led Planning in Shanghai. Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland), 14(19), 12179-.

Zukin, S. (2008). Whose culture? Whose city? In The Cultural Geography Reader (1st edition). Routledge.

Open Access Journal