

# PUTTING PUBLIC SPACE IN ITS PLACE

## A HARVARD CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC SPACE

THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2013

5PM - 8PM

FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2013

8:30AM - 6PM

HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DESIGN

GUND HALL, PIPER AUDITORIUM  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

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[www.gsd.harvard.edu/publicspaceconf](http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/publicspaceconf)

IN A DIGITAL AGE, people will reflect upon 2011 as the year in which physical public space reclaimed its lofty status in the public sphere. From Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park, physical public space reminded us of its multiple ambitions and capabilities for accommodating consequential political activities as well as everyday leisurely pursuits. Put plainly, place still matters. This conference at Harvard University will focus on physical (corporeal, material, tangible) public space. Physical public space comes in many flavors: publicly owned parks, streets, and sidewalks, privately owned public spaces, privately managed public parks, and temporary spaces that appear and disappear within a parking spot, under a bridge, in a surface parking lot, or anywhere else. The production of public space simultaneously implicates and transcends technical decisions with regard to design, financing, and management considerations.

Who should design public space? Should public spaces be designed at all? How should success of a public space be measured? Can the private sector participate in public space provision without a loss of "publicness"? Do achievements of democracy and equality depend on ample availability of public space? Can public space make a meaningful contribution to solving the world's environmental problems, including storm water flooding? Are temporary or informal public spaces a fad or breakthrough? Can theory inform, or better inform, practice? Are there universals of public space that define its use and appearance no matter where the space is located? Public space scholars, practitioners, and activists will discuss and debate these and other questions along with an engaged audience. Attendance at the conference is free and open to the public.



### THURSDAY, MARCH 7

#### 5:00PM WELCOME

**JEROLD S. KAYDEN**, Conference Chair and Frank Backus Williams Professor of Urban Planning and Design, Harvard Graduate School of Design

#### 5:00PM – 6:30PM CAN "PUBLIC" SPACE BE "PRIVATELY" PROVIDED?

In the wake of declining government support for public realm projects, much public space today is privately financed, developed, and/or managed. For example, developers receive zoning concessions if they provide privately owned public spaces. Organizations with "Friends of" or "Conservancy" in their titles are increasingly the day-to-day stewards of city-owned parks. Business Improvement Districts assert control over aspects of publicly owned streets and sidewalks. Are these public-private partnerships ideal or pragmatic models for guaranteeing provision of public space? Is the "public" in public space being pressured by private interests and, if so, does the pressure outweigh whatever benefits are otherwise obtained? **SPEAKERS:** **ADRIAN BENEPE**, Senior Vice President and Director of City Park Development, The Trust for Public Land; Commissioner, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation 2002-2012; **JEROLD S. KAYDEN**, Frank Backus Williams Professor of Urban Planning and Design, Harvard Graduate School of Design; **HOLLY M. LEICHT**, Executive Director, New Yorkers for Parks. **MODERATOR:** **SUSAN CHIN**, Executive Director, Design Trust for Public Space.

#### 6:30PM – 8:00PM "DESIGNING" PUBLIC SPACE: BY WHOM, FOR WHOM?

Who should design public space? Should public space be designed? For many designers, the answer is self-evident: "we" and "yes." For others, especially those critical of "high design" practice, the answer is less obvious. Some favor facilitated participatory processes that directly engage public space users. Others stress the importance of evidence-based design, including reliance on post-occupancy evaluation. Still others see "do it yourself" (DIY) solutions as the solution. This panel engages the debate. **SPEAKERS:** **ADRIAN GEUZE**, Co-Founder, West 8, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; **FRED KENT**, President, Project for Public Spaces, New York; **JONATHAN MARVEL**, Principal, Rogers Marvel Architects. **MODERATOR:** **BLAIR KAMIN**, Architecture Critic, Chicago Tribune; Nieman Fellow 2012-2013, Harvard University.

### FRIDAY, MARCH 8

#### 8:30AM – 8:45AM OPENING REMARKS: COMPOSING PUBLIC SPACE

**JEROLD S. KAYDEN**

#### 8:45AM - 10:15AM HOW RELEVANT IS THEORY?

Much discussion about public space is framed in theoretical terms, with familiar invocations of contributions from Habermas, Lefebvre, and Benjamin, among many others. The theoretical literature normally declines to tie its theory statements to a particular design or model for physical public space. This panel self-consciously asks: how may public space theory inform the design of physical public space? For example, what would a Lefebvre-inspired physical public space actually look like and how may it be used? Conversely, does the production and use of physical public space adequately inform the theorists? **SPEAKERS:** **ADRIAN BLACKWELL**, Assistant Professor, University of Waterloo School of Architecture, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada; Visiting Assistant Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Design; **JOHN PARKINSON**, Associate Professor of Public Policy, Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick, United Kingdom; **GREG SMITHSIMON**, Associate Professor of Sociology, Brooklyn College, City University of New York. **MODERATOR:** **NEIL BRENNER**, Professor of Urban Theory, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

#### 10:15AM – 10:30AM BREAK

#### 10:30AM – 12:00PM INFORMAL / TEMPORARY / DIY / SPONTANEOUS / POP-UP / EVERYDAY / ???

Everyone's making public space ... wherever ... whenever ... however. Indeed, physical places not otherwise understood as public spaces are increasingly the loci for public space production. Pavement to Parks (ing) Day recast parking spaces. Pop-up parks occupy abandoned waterfronts and other vacant land. Streets and islands within transform themselves through insertions of program and amenities. Is the informality and/or temporariness of such new uses in otherwise purposed places something to celebrate or a critical commentary on the relative absence of formal and permanent public spaces? **SPEAKERS:** **KRISTIAN KOREMAN**, Founding Partner, ZUS (Zones Urbaines Sensibles), Rotterdam, The Netherlands; **JIM LASKO**, Co-Artistic Director, Redmoon Theater, Chicago; Loeb Fellow 2012-2013, Harvard Graduate School of Design; **ANDRES POWER**, Chief of Staff to San Francisco Supervisor Scott Wiener and Creator, Pavement to Parks Program. **MODERATOR:** **DAN D'OCA**, Principal, Interboro Partners, New York; Design Critic in Urban Planning and Design, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

#### 12:00PM – 1:00PM BREAK

#### 1:00PM – 2:00PM DOES PUBLIC SPACE HOLD WATER?

Urban planners and designers have begun to envision public space as more than places of enjoyment and democracy. In a world in which coastal and river cities are increasingly susceptible to floods attributable to the effects of climate change, cities are positioning parks and plazas as places where water can come and go without permanent damage to the urban infrastructure. Is this a fad or a meaningful part of the solution? **SPEAKERS:** **FLORIAN BOER**, Founder and Director, DE URBANISTEN, Rotterdam, The Netherlands; **KATE ORFF**, Assistant Professor, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation; Partner, SCAPE, New York. **MODERATOR:** **HENK OVINK**, Director General, Spatial Planning and Water Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment.

#### 2:00PM – 3:30PM PUBLIC SPACE, DEMOCRACY, AND EQUALITY: FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, OF THE PEOPLE?

What role does or can public space play in facilitating public participation and engagement in the political process? Can public space be consequential in defining, realizing, or changing the values of societies and political systems? Does public space promote engagement with "others" and appreciation of diversity? Can public space level the playing field? What do we (and who is we) mean by public (and who is public) anyway? **SPEAKERS:** **MAURICE COX**, Director, Tulane City Center and Associate Dean for Community Engagement, Tulane University School of Architecture; **JEFFREY HOU**, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Landscape Architecture, University of Washington; **PETER MARCUSE**, Professor Emeritus of Urban Planning, Columbia University. **MODERATOR:** **MARTHA MINOW**, Dean, Harvard Law School and Jeremiah Smith, Jr. Professor of Law.

#### 3:30PM – 3:45PM BREAK

#### 3:45PM – 5:15PM IS PUBLIC SPACE FLAT?

Public space necessarily draws meaning from the specificities of the environment in which it finds itself. Individual geographies, cultures, economies, demographics, histories, politics, laws, land uses, building morphologies, and other factors deeply influence the nature, extent, and role of public space in a given society. Globalizing forces, it has been argued, are flattening the world and homogenizing the built environment. Public space, however, is not McDonalds or Starbucks. What can be learned by comparing public space production, design, and use in different cultures worldwide? Are there universal rules, or is the universal rule that there isn't one? **SPEAKERS:** **PIPER GAUBATZ**, Professor of Geography, University of Massachusetts, Amherst; **PAUL KATZ**, Managing Principal, Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, New York; **ANNETTE KIM**, Associate Professor of Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. **MODERATOR:** **DIANE DAVIS**, Professor of Urbanism and Development, Harvard Graduate School of Design.

#### 5:15PM – 6:00PM WHAT'S NEXT?

**JEROLD S. KAYDEN, HENK OVINK, SPEAKERS, AUDIENCE**



Organized and chaired by **JEROLD S. KAYDEN**, Frank Backus Williams Professor of Urban Planning and Design Harvard Graduate School of Design, Urban Planning and Design Department

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For further information, please contact [events@gsd.harvard.edu](mailto:events@gsd.harvard.edu) or 617-496-2414, [www.gsd.harvard.edu/publicspaceconf](http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/publicspaceconf)



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