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Is public space privatisation always bad for the public? Mixed evidence from the United Kingdom

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Abstract

In the last four decades, public space production has shifted from being predominantly led by the public sector to include a greater variety of private actors, large and small, for-profit and non-profit. This study, set in Liverpool, England, analyses and compares three versions of the privatization of public space production: entirely private development; public private partnership (PPP); and community-led development. The purpose is to determine whether, why, and by how much 'publicness' has declined in the production of urban spaces. While most planning literature has tended to demonize privatization, this study reveals that processes which tend to be collaborative and involve multiple public and private stakeholders have a higher degree of 'publicness' compared to both entirely privately-led and entirely publicly-led processes.

Introduction

To combat post-industrial decline, many Western European cities introduced urban regeneration strategies starting in the 1990s. This ‘urban renaissance’ took place within the new economic and political paradigm of neoliberalism, which placed a strong emphasis on the virtues of the free market. Urban policies produced by the neoliberal turn transformed both the *process* of urban development and its *product*, the urban space itself.

Cities began engaging in an intense global competition (Sassen 1991). To highlight their status and success, and to attract wealthy investors, residents, and tourists, they capitalised on urban aesthetics and branding via flagship projects by international ‘starchitects’ (Gospodini 2002; Madanipour 2003). A focus on consumerism, combined with risk aversion and the rise of global urban design consultancies and investors, produced a range of commodified and generic public spaces.

Not only have public spaces become more homogeneous in form and function, but also in the type of public they attract and the behaviour they are prepared to accommodate (Sorkin 1992; Carmona et al. 2008). Safety (or perception of safety), surveillance, tidiness, and the exclusion of all ‘undesirable’ behaviour and people have become primary objectives in new, privately-managed public spaces (Low 2006). Particular forms of public sociability, such as shopping, leisure, and entertainment, are deemed acceptable while certain people who are conceptualised as a threat to those forms of sociability (i.e., the poor and homeless) are subtly excluded or outright banned (Iveson 2007).

Unsurprisingly, this state of affairs has generated much debate within planning academia, as well as in the popular media. One set of commentators argue that turning urban public space into a commodity reduces the diversity, vitality, and vibrancy of cities, and ultimately leads to decline (Minton 2009). Some authors in this camp have as much as declared ‘the end of public space’ as it has been known in the West since antiquity (Sorkin 1992; Mitchell 1995; Madanipour 2003). Another set of commentators talks about ‘transformation’ rather than ‘death’ of public space and the public sphere. In their view, the form, function, and appearance of urban spaces and institutions reflect new economic, societal and cultural narratives (Boomkes 2008; Madden 2010; De Magalhães and Freire Tigo 2017).

‘Public space’ was traditionally defined – in the West at least – as space open to all people and managed by the state on people’s behalf (Madanipour 2010). It was differentiated from private space in terms of rules of access, control, behaviour, and use (Low and Smith 2006). While the actual production of public space may have always involved private actors, the government was generally perceived as being in charge (Habermas 1989). More recently, the retreat of the state from urban development affairs and the increasing role of private actors (and, to a lesser extent, non-profit and community organisations) has resulted in new organisational structures whereby roles, responsibilities, and resources have been redefined within and beyond government structures (Carmona et al. 2008). Consequently, the classic definition of ‘publicness’ has become outdated. A number of commentators call for a revised (and broader) definition that better suits the contemporary milieu (Kohn 2004; De Magalhães 2010; Varna and Tiesdell 2010; Németh and Smith 2011; Langstraat and Van Melik 2013).

The present study examines the production of public space in the context of Liverpool, England. Historically a left-leaning city, more recently Liverpool has been welcoming a variety of private partners in urban governance and development, in conjunction with its ‘urban renaissance’ agenda. This shift has resulted in a variety of public-private partnerships for public space production, including citizen-led initiatives. In terms of public space ‘publicness’, outcomes have varied too. This comparative study is thus expected to reveal if and how private

actors influence the publicness of space production, both in the process as well as in the product, space itself.

The central research question of this study is: How do the involvement and interaction of public and private actors in the production of public space affect its publicness? We aim to gain an understanding of (a) the degree of public and/or private ownership of, and accessibility to, the *planning processes*, and (b) the degree of publicness of the resulting *planning product*, in other words public space itself. Drawing on 21 in-depth stakeholder interviews, this research contributes empirical insight to the highly ideological debate on neoliberal planning.

Theoretical background: Public space privatisation

Before proceeding to the analysis, we discuss issues of ‘process’ and ‘product’ in public space planning; therefrom we derive an analytical framework, which guides the empirical study.

Process: Ownership and control, and accessibility

Understanding governance structures in a locality is essential to the debate on the production on public space (Zamanifard et. al. 2018). This debate revolves around questions such as: Who has the right to participate in the process? How are priorities defined and ranked? By way of definition, governance refers to the processes of interaction and decision-making that take place among all actors involved in a complex collective problem (Hufty 2011; Van Bueren and Ten Heuvelhof 2005; Madanipour 2003).

Faced with severe cuts in public funding, Western European cities have called upon private actors to take a larger role in the development, management, and servicing of their public spaces. Partly in response to financial austerity, but also due to the changed understanding of the role of the state, tasks and responsibilities that previously were regarded as being within government’s purview have been outsourced to private actors (including businesses, quasi-public bodies, public-private partnerships, and not-for-profit organizations) (McLaughlin et al. 2002). Multiple stakeholders are partaking in urban development projects via new, complex arrangements (Madanipour 2010; Teisman 2000). The degree of privatisation ranges from full to partial outsourcing of responsibilities. Three different organisational modes can be distinguished in these emerging partnerships: coordination, cooperation, and collaboration (McAllister and Taylor 2015). In a coordinated process the conditions are pre-defined, whereas in a cooperative process the stakeholders operate fairly independently towards an overarching goal (Skelcher et al. 2005). In collaborative processes, the operational rules are jointly created and contested within the partnership (McAllister and Taylor 2015). In all cases, contracts are seen as the main instrument for regulating relationships.

Organizational mode notwithstanding, priority is given to economic growth, productivity, and efficiency, while other public planning concerns such as cultural heritage, socio-economic equality, multiculturalism, global warming, and citizen participation are often relegated to backburner status (Minton 2006; Hague 2001; O’Flynn, 2007; Pesh 2008). The given rationale is that privatism and managerialism enhance the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of development processes. Hence, a technocratic and apolitical ethos is becoming the norm or the aspiration – both in the public and private sectors (Kwok et al. 2018).

Dissenters have raised concerns regarding the safeguarding of public values, such as accountability, transparency, quality and responsibility, as well democratic legitimacy in a market-driven governance context (Reynaers 2014; Kort and Klijn 2013). Sharing power, responsibilities and resources with non-statutory bodies can weaken local government’s control over local policy agendas (Harding et al. 2000). Criticism does not target only private,

for-profit developers. Non-profit organisations and community groups do not always act in the public interest either. They may focus on protecting their narrow (parochial) interests, while public bodies, such as municipalities, may not always be transparent, democratic, inclusive, or accountable (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). At the same time, some private actors might act in the public interest and show concern for the public character of urban space. Finally, the public itself is far from solidary but rather split into myriad fractions (Reynaers 2014).

Product: Valued outcome and perception on publicness

What sort of product does a privatized planning process create? According to critics of neo-liberal practices, the answer is that privatisation produces a form of “public” space which is less inclusive and accessible than in the past - and therefore less ‘democratic’ (Madanipour 2010). Accessibility can be reduced by literally blocking physical access, but also through subtle manipulation. For example, positioning sharp spikes in secluded building corners or armrests along public benches prevents homeless people from sitting or sleeping in those spaces, thus signifying their undesirability. Similarly, measures which are ostensibly aimed at ensuring public safety - installing CCTV cameras, hiring private security guards, scheduling police patrols, and posting myriad regulations - discourage or remove opportunities for certain group to use public spaces (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). Both public and private actors have been known to resort to these methods; the evidence is all around our cities.

Privately produced public spaces are also under attack for their focus on commercial return and organised commercial events. They are accused of being a commodity rather than serving the wider public good (Minton 2009). In terms of urban design, such spaces are often criticised for being bland, generic, homogenous, and overly sanitized (Sorkin 1992; Langstraat and Van Melik 2013). These characteristics are seen as adding to the decline of public space in the traditional sense. A slight digression here: Some commentators note that public space was never fully inclusive and democratic. Certain groups, such as women and various minorities, were always explicitly or implicitly excluded (Gholamhosseini et al. 2018), and a Habermasian public space/sphere could be simply regarded an idealisation (Hajer and Reijndorp 2001).

In a number of cases, the use of public space as a vehicle for private investment has resulted in positive outcomes, setting in motion a virtuous circle: an attractive environment has boosted civic pride, revitalized the housing market, and led to the creation of new jobs. These are clear indicators through which one can measure the ‘success’ of a regeneration project (Madanipour 2010). In addition to economic indicators, resiliency is another element that contributes to the overall valued outcome of a development project. A project is likely to be more resilient and stand the test of time if it is well designed, used and continuously maintained and managed. In the current climate of public funding cuts, the private sector has proven to be as capable as, or in some cases even more capable than, the government at performing these tasks (Leclercq and Pojani, 2020). This has led one portion of the community to believe that the public sector is not altogether necessary in running cities (see Pojani and Maci 2015).

Analytical framework

Clearly, both *process* and *product* matter in the debate about the publicness of urban space. Based on the foregoing review of the literature, an analytical framework was constructed, which distinguishes between the process of public space production (the stages of visioning, design, implementation and maintenance) and the product or outcome of this process, in other words, the space itself (see Van Bueren and Ten Heuvelhof 2005). The framework is illustrated in Table 1. Within the framework, ‘publicness’ with regard to the *process* is deconstructed along the lines of ‘ownership and control’ and ‘accessibility’ (Madanipour 2010; Teisman

2000). The latter concepts are further articulated into questions about actors and the degree of accountability, transparency, responsiveness, responsibility, and inclusiveness of the process (Reynaers 2014; Kort and Klijn 2013). ‘Publicness’ with regard to the *product* reflects the product’s perceived success and added value (Madanipour 2010). The outcome concerns the degree to which the physical space, in its design, management and use, reflects ‘public’ values, as experienced by different groups of stakeholders. Public values may range from more recognizable ones as accessibility and safety, to more abstract ones such as aesthetic quality and inclusiveness. The outcome also concerns the potential adaptability of a space to future needs and conditions. Both the perceived success or lack thereof, and the stakeholders’ views on publicness are part of the analytical framework. This framework guided the research and the subsequent analysis presented in this article.

Table 1. Analytical framework.

	Publicness	Related Analytical Questions
Process	OWNERSHIP & CONTROL	Who <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are the actors? How they organised? - initiates, decides, controls? - pays? - is responsible?
	ACCESSIBILITY	How <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inclusive/open is the process? - much control is applied? - inclusive are applied policies?
Product	VALUED OUTCOME	Success? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quality? - whom does the outcome serve? - reason(s) for success? - sustainable in future?
	PERCEIVED PUBLICNESS	Public? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - publicness achieved in values? - publicness achieved in space?

Case studies

As noted, the present study centres on three urban development case studies in Liverpool, a city whose dominant mode of wealth generation was historically mercantile rather than industrial. Liverpool’s context is ideal for investigating the research questions set forth above because the city has sought out ways to overcome severe spatial and economic deprivation in the last few decades, coming out of a politically tumultuous period. The private sector has been given a substantial role, in line with the national Urban Renaissance agenda and its local Urban Development Plan of 1996 (E.g., (E.g., Liverpool Vision, an urban regeneration company consisting of public bodies – Liverpool City Council, English Partnerships, North West Development Agency - and local business representatives, was set up in 1999 to oversee the the regeneration of Liverpool’s city centre.) The projects - Liverpool ONE, the Ropewalks, and Granby4Streets (Figure 1) were developed around the same time and therefore within the same political regime and policy context. However, they are quite different in their type and degree of privatisation. A cursory look of each case study setting is provided below (to be expanded later on in the article).



Figure 1. Location of case studies. Map by authors based on Google Maps.

Liverpool ONE. The centrally located area now called Liverpool ONE was heavily bombed during the Second World War. Thereafter, it sat derelict and underused (as a parking lot) for decades. As such, it severed the city centre from the waterfront. In 1999, Liverpool City Council adopted a Planning Framework through which it sought to redevelop part of the area into a mixed-use precinct, with a strong emphasis on retail. The objective was to relink the centre and the waterfront and to expand Liverpool's shopping district. Ultimately, the city sought to regain its past status as a preeminent regional retail destination and outcompete suburban shopping malls (Littlefield 2009). An renowned international developer was selected by the City Council (upon a competition) to design and build the area, who in turn subcontracted a variety of private companies with specific expertise in architecture, construction, and planning. To produce an "urban feel" with small-scale shopping and leisure streets (rather than a monolithic mall), the area was divided into 34 different plots of varying sizes, and 26 different architects were hired to design individual buildings. The construction works started in 2004 and were finished in 2008, the year Liverpool was nominated 'European Capital of Culture' (Figure 2). The area remained under the private management of the developer, who set up a dedicated company (Liverpool ONE, Ltd.) to maintain both the buildings and the urban space within the area. The company was allowed to set certain 'corporate' rules governing acceptable use and behaviour within its property, although the Council retained the right to intervene through provisions set forth in a Public Realm Arrangements document if public values were neglected??. Liverpool ONE was the first 'urban privatization' project at such a large scale in the United Kingdom.



Figure 2. Paradise Street in Liverpool ONE. Photo by authors.

The Ropewalks. This district was established here to service the shipping industry during Liverpool's maritime boom (the name derives from the historic craft of ropemaking). The area is renowned for its long and narrow streets lined with large 18th century warehouses and merchants homes (Figure 3). Once the port and its related businesses embarked on a sharp decline in the mid-1970s, the area fell prey to decay. The initial regeneration initiatives were taken in the mid-1990s. The City Council sought to economically revive the Ropewalks by creating a high quality urban environment – one which would attract private investment, new workers, and new residents. The area was promoted as a 'creative quarter' in the official planning documents (Couch and Dennemann 2000). In 1998, The Ropewalks Partnership was set up between public bodies (Liverpool Council, English Partnership), private actors with a local stake in the area, and local community partners (including the Chinese community). This partnership was meant to act as the regeneration vehicle and drive the implementation of the Integrated Action Plan. The Liverpool Council, as the local planning authority, was ultimately responsible for managing the partnership and overseeing its resources. The public space works were completed in 2004. In the following decade and a half, renovation of derelict warehouses and redevelopment of vacant sites continued incrementally and organically. The original Integrated Action Plan still forms the base to which new proposals must relate, although newly created local organizations, such as the Ropewalks Residents Association, have been included in the process. Until recently, the Liverpool City Council outsourced maintenance tasks to a private company. In 2016 a newly formed public agency took over the maintenance of the Ropewalks area, because the Council was neither satisfied with the inflexibility of the terms of the contract they had agreed upon with the private maintenance company nor with the standard of the services they provided.



Figure 3. Historic long and narrow street in the Ropewalks. Photo by authors.

Granby4Streets. Once a thriving neighbourhood with flourishing shops along its main thoroughfare, Granby is now a severely deprived area. From the 1970s onwards, the disappearance of shipping-related jobs led to high unemployment rates, poverty, and physical dereliction (Uduko and Ben-Tovim 1998). In 1981, deprivation, combined with racial tensions, culminated in a clash between Granby's young (and predominantly black) population and the police. Subsequently, Liverpool City Council promised to assist the social and economic revival of area by investing in its physical regeneration. But contrary to the residents' own preferences, planning interventions took the form of demolition and urban renewal. The Victorian houses lining the street grid of northern Granby were cleared and replaced by a cul-de-sac layout and low-rise terraced housing, which bestowed a suburban character to the area. When last four remaining Victorian streets were marked for demolition, local residents put up a fierce resistance. Local activism efforts lasted for three decades, until a newly elected conservative government discontinued renewal schemes in 2010. This produced a public policy vacuum but also allowed local initiatives to blossom and eventually change governmental attitudes. Granby4Streets is now being renovated piecemeal through a series of bottom-up initiatives (Figure 4). Granby Four Streets Community Land Trust was set up as a vehicle to steward affordable housing and to create a vibrant, mixed and thriving community - the first of its kind in an urban area in the United Kingdom. The CLT has taken a leadership role here.



Figure 4. Cairns Street in Granby4Streets. Photo by authors.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to comparatively analyse public space production in complex urban settings involving multiple stakeholders. The three cases in Liverpool were selected because they vary in their managerial approach and in their degree of involvement of private actors within the urban development projects. Despite their specific local characteristics, the cases share a similar planning policy environment and socio-economic and geographical context. As such, this work can be categorized as ‘single case study research’ with multiple (three) embedded cases (Stake 2009). The cases were found to provide sufficient data for in-depth, empirical probing of the research questions. For synthesis, the research questions were organized into a priory analytical framework, shown in Table 1, which distinguishes between planning ‘processes’ and planning ‘products’.

The case study analysis is based on two main sources of data: (A) existing policy documents, newspaper articles, and census tables (secondary data) and (B) stakeholder interviews (primary data). The analysis, involving manual coding, proceeded according to a standard iterative process typically employed for qualitative data.

(A) The development process in the three cases was reconstructed through archival and online desktop research. Written and visual materials included national and local policy documents related to each case, as well as vision documents, designs, and city council’s decision notes. These were obtained from the Liverpool City Council, the Liverpool Archive, Registered Social Landlords, and urban design consultancies involved in the three case studies. Census data with the socio-economic, demographic, and housing characteristics of local

residents were also obtained in order to contextualize the cases. These are available online via the Office for National Statistics and the Liverpool Ward Census data. Finally, news items published in the local and national press were obtained through the newspapers' internet archives (Appendix 1). Together, these secondary data provided rich background information surrounding the key events during the development processes under study, the main actors involved, possible controversies, and changing regimes.

(B) Twenty one semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders who were directly involved in either one, two, or all three case studies. Interviewees were sampled based on a classic snowball strategy (Atkinson and Flint 2001). However, an effort was made to include several city council employees, designers, and developer representatives involved in the three projects (Appendix 2). For balance, for each of the three developments, a dissenting party about the project was included among the interviewees. The interviews took place between June 2014 and May 2016. At the time of fieldwork, most interviewees were still involved in urban regeneration in Liverpool, although sometimes in a different professional position. A few interviewees had become involved more recently and could therefore offer a fresh perspective. A list of questions based on the analytical matrix presented in Table 1 was used to guide the interviews. The questions focused on the process of visioning, production, and maintenance regimes; the roles, access, and influence of the various stakeholders in the development process; the relative 'success' of the case study projects; and the level of 'publicness' of these spaces. The questions also aimed to fill any gaps in the knowledge obtained through the secondary materials above. The interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed. Most interviews took place in person, but a few were by telephone or Skype. Interviews lasted between one and two hours.

Findings and discussion

To reiterate, this study explores the following research questions: How do the involvement and collaboration of public and private actors in the production of public space contribute – positively or negatively – to the publicness of public space? In terms of *planning processes*, has a shift towards a larger degree of privatization reduced their 'publicness'? Can privatized planning processes deliver successful and public urban spaces? The findings are presented below. Where direct quotes are reported, they have been edited for clarity.

Process: Ownership and control, and accessibility

The first case, Liverpool One, is a privately owned and managed urban area. The process can be considered as a 'complete' form of privatisation (rather than a public-private partnership or a type of outsourcing of public tasks to private entities). A private developer acquired the land from the Council on the basis of a 250-year lease, and coordinated the development process for a retail-led urban quarter in a top-down manner while holding most of the decision-making power. The local City Council was cast in a "collaboration" role, but still held its legal planning powers and granted formal permission for the masterplan and each individual building application. Political representatives and private actors were intertwined through their vested interests, but did not hold entirely equal power, as one interviewee remarked:

"It was supposed to be partnership, but in the end the developer was very insistent in his decision making".

Formal planning institutions (Mersey travel, English Partnerships, English Heritage, etc.) were consulted. While citizens were kept informed, they could not actively engage beyond providing comments on presentations; therefore the process can hardly be considered as participatory or inclusive. The minority voice of a local institution, a collection of alternative shops, which

protested heavily against the compulsory purchase order of their premises, was dismissed both by the private developer and by local and national government. The compulsory acquisition of the properties by the Council went ahead, and now the land was in the hands of one private corporate actor. As one interviewee put it:

Local and national authorities would not take the risk to let the complete scheme implode by exempting Quiggins [a collection of alternative shops].

This fear of failure owed, in part, to the heavy scrutiny under which the Liverpool City Council operated around 1990's - 2000. Both the national government and wider public expected the Council to take bold steps in reversing the city's economic and physical decline and deliver a successful flagship project on time for 2008, the year Liverpool would become European Cultural Capital. This event was seen as a chance for Liverpool to climb up the urban hierarchy, highlight its purported success, and attract new investors, upwardly mobile residents, and tourists.

It was also a chance for the Council to regain public trust, which was at an all-time low after decades of economic and spatial decline and a lack of adequate responses by the local authorities. Particularly, the years of 'militant Labour' had left a scar due to corruption and underinvestment in people, jobs, and the built environment during that time (Sykes et al. 2013; Lees 2011). The elected city government was viewed as a relatively weak player in a larger system of power (see Parkinson 2012).

Reliance on private investment for both design and implementation and subsequent maintenance was seen as a practical necessity. Politically, privatization implied siding with the developers when local disputes, such as the expropriation of Quiggins, arose (Littlefield 2009). Lean funding for participatory activities and a short timespan for the project completion (2004-2008) also precluded the investigation of alternative routes and the inclusion of different stakeholders. While this mode of delivery increased efficiency and productivity, it also narrowed the range of strategic actors and their considerations (see Madanipour 2003). This political stance was in line with the neoliberal ideology advocated not only by conservative fractions but also by New Labour – a left-wing party which, however, supported continued private sector involvement in development, albeit with a stronger concern for social issues (Harding et al. 2000). One interviewee explained:

The private developer regarded this development project as a military operation and removed all noise for as smooth as possible a process. Public values were discredited in the process.

The 'democratic legitimacy' (see Kort and Klijn 2013) of Liverpool ONE appears to be dubious. Public debate about the implications of privatising a large portion of the city centre has been minimal in the city according to several interviewees' statements. However, the process appeared to be reasonably transparent as the development project was based on a detailed masterplan on which public-private consensus was reached. For the most part, local residents were eager to "see something happen" in the centre; whether it was driven by public or private interests was a much lesser concern compared to the need to improve the public image of the city and clear blight.

In contrast to the privatised process that shaped Liverpool ONE, the Ropewalks redevelopment (1997-2002) was envisioned and initiated by the City Council – although the design and implementation were delivered through a PPP in which a number of public, private, and community organisations had a say. Seed funding to revitalize public spaces was provided through a public grant (European Objective One), based on the notion that appealing urban design would attract private investors to renovate buildings. Accordingly, a series of new pedestrian linkages and pocket parks landscaped to a high standard were created in 2002, based

on a new area plan. This strategy was advocated in the Liverpool Urban Renaissance policies and strategies. One interviewee reminisced:

In political terms it was quite an extraordinary process because we set the expectation of quality really high. And this at a time where Liverpool had no expectations at all: it was a very poor city, it was a city desperate for anybody to come and invest and at that time nobody came to invest in the city without a grant.

Later, it turned out that predictions regarding private investment had been overly optimistic. Most private investors took a conservative and very gradual approach to the renovation of individual buildings, which is still ongoing at the time of writing. Also, the public spaces delivered through public investment were subsequently poorly maintained. While drawing some criticism, this incremental approach has also attracted praise. One interviewee remarked that the era of “‘big is beautiful’ is over”, referring to the large-scale master-planning exercises of the post-WWII era, which planning authorities sought to revive during the Urban Renaissance era.

Initially, public involvement and participation was low in the Ropewalks, as in Liverpool ONE. Local organisations and agencies were invited by Liverpool Council and English Partnerships over a single weekend in 1997 to express their ideas and concerns. This event marked the beginning of the development process but the majority of participants were not actively engaged later on. A single-purpose regeneration agency, Ropewalks Partnership, comprised of both private and public actors, was formed and led by the Liverpool City Council to implement the area plan. The tension between retaining public values and maximising private profit had to be managed carefully.

Over the years following the implementation of the Integrated Area plan in 2002, the Council replaced this top-down approach with a more bottom up one, involving multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process. Local businesses, groups, and residents joined in various organisations, including a Community Interest Company (CIC) and a Ropewalks Residents Association, to work together on local issues. (CIC’s purpose is to offer pragmatic solutions to local concerns through a joint approach.) Some resentment was directed at the speculative attitude of some landowners in the area, who sought to stall the development until the values of their properties had risen. But the Ropewalks Residents Association was generally effective in addressing a number of local resident concerns, in particular related to noise and other nuisances attributed to the clubbing scene, without alienating bar owners.

Overall, the Ropewalks development process could be described as reasonably collaborative, inclusive, and accessible. In terms of democratic legitimacy, this project was viewed favourably throughout its life. During the initial phase of implementation, the decision-making power rested with the Liverpool City Council. Eventually, more private actors were incorporated which led to tensions. As one interviewee put it:

“Drivers of regeneration sit more and more outside any democratic process. Interestst lie more and more outside the locality and even the country. How do you then include and communicate with the community?”

Later on, the Council transferred the decision-making power to small, dedicated working groups of local businesses and residents. Therefore it could be argued that, while private investors were heavily involved, they did not antagonize residents or civil society actors but rather attempted to reach consensus over local issues endorsed by all. Owing to this approach, in both stages, democratic values appear to have been upheld. (However, the initial phases of the process may be considered more opaque here than in Liverpool ONE.)

In Granby4Streets, as in the Ropewalks, the future visioning process was initiated by the City Council. But unlike the participatory process in the Ropewalks, local residents felt marginalized here. They were “heard but not listened to” – as one interviewee put it. Their

preference for retaining and refurbishing most existing properties was ignored in favour of a top-down urban renewal scheme. Public authorities retained all the power in this case and local residents and entrepreneurs were given very limited ownership of and accessibility to the development process, which took the form of aggressive urban renewal, as noted. One interviewee said of this approach:

Simple lack of vision, absence of an understanding of the area's inherent qualities, and reluctance to meaningfully engage with the local people 'blinded' the Council to the inherent qualities and potential for the area based on a refurbishment-led masterplan.

The local authority struggled meeting the public values as described in the analytical framework (see Table 1): accountability, transparency, responsiveness, responsibility, and quality (Reynaers 2014). No consensus between the public authorities and local residents was reached on the redevelopment plans. Radically opposed ideologies put an end to the initial process of coalition building.

Once public funding for urban renewal was depleted in 2010, the area was left in a planning vacuum, which however opened up opportunities for local actors. Private but small-scale initiatives emerged to regenerate Granby4Streets, while the City Council had no option but to step back. The regeneration process shifted from top-down to bottom-up; this improved the overall accessibility of the process. However, local actors never formed formal collaborative partnerships that included public bodies. The process may therefore be characterised as a cooperation between loose actors working towards complementary and mutually beneficial goals (McAllistor and Taylor 2015).

Meanwhile, relations between the City Council and local actors improved somewhat, although levels of trust in public institutions remain low. The resentment expressed in the following quote is typical:

The Council is saying that they are working in partnership with us, but we haven't seen a penny from them. There is a total and utter lack of trust when it comes to giving us money. Because we are Liverpool 8: we are thieves, blacks and prostitutes. It is about power. If they gave us money they would lose control over it.

To summarize, the initial configuration and evolution of 'ownership and control' vs. 'accessibility' was different in the three case studies (Figure 5). The Ropewalks process was the most collaborative and conflict-free – although more heavily dominated by private rather than public interests. Both the Liverpool One and Granby4Streets regeneration processes were marked by dissent and struggle, which, however, produced very different results in the two places. In Liverpool One, protest voices from local actors were summarily dismissed in favour of private developers, without much effect on the structure of the process – which remained top-down. The city branding stakes were deemed too high to risk delays or disruptions by allowing or incorporating any alternative views. In Granby4Streets, the residents fought for, and gained a right to be heard; eventually, they took over the redevelopment process. Arguably, it was the area's poverty, dilapidated housing, and low city branding value that helped produce this outcome. As there was no sense of urgency to invest here, the urban renewal process could be stalled without placing the City Council at a political or financial disadvantage. In discussing these cases one must note that, at the start of its urban renaissance Liverpool was emerging from a politically disruptive era, which had produced a deep distrust of public institutions among both private investors and local citizens.

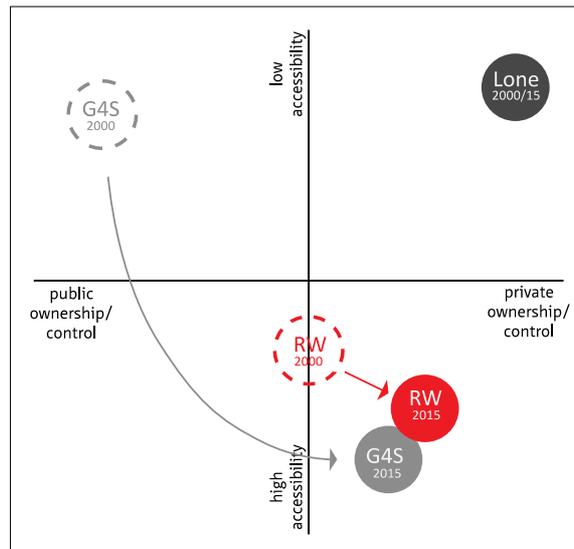


Figure 5. 'Ownership & Control' vs. 'Accessibility'

Product: Valued outcome and perception on publicness

The products (the three public spaces) are assessed in terms of both outcome value and publicness. The assessment is based on the views and perceptions of the actors who were involved in the creation, development, and management of these spaces; it is also based on an analysis of planning documents.

Liverpool ONE is generally valued by the interviewees (and local and national media) as a successful urban development, both in aesthetic and economic terms. The developer delivered an award-winning scheme, and it did so on time (before the city’s nomination as European Cultural Capital in 2008). The area has provided jobs, shops, and entertainment opportunities, and it has elevated Liverpool’s image in the eyes of the world. In terms of design, the area is considered as attractive although the buildings are hardly “magnificent” – certainly not when compared to the architectural gems of historic Liverpool. Also, the interviewees opine that the mix of uses is not such that it can create “authenticity” or “flexibility” for incremental adaptation in the future.

Overall, however, Liverpool ONE hits all the indicators that are considered as necessary to make an urban renaissance campaign ‘successful’: eye-catching design, business vitality, job opportunities, civic pride boost (see Madanipour 2010). In the words of one interviewee this trumps the fact that the development is not “public”:

It is a huge success for Liverpool as a whole. Yes, it is not public but I think that is a small price to pay for this huge success not just for the city but also for the wider region. The developer has proven to be 100% committed to the project and has not done any concessions on the quality of materials, architecture and management.

The project benefited from the leadership of an inspirational and dedicated developer, whose desire to contribute to the regeneration of the city centre was genuine. Notwithstanding the developer’s goodwill, the negative consequences often associated with privatization - commodification, surveillance, access restrictions, excessive emphasis on commercial events - are all noticeable in Liverpool ONE. Furthermore, the interviewees generally believe that ever more funding needs to be allocated for maintenance and entertainment, if the area is to remain “the same high standard of quality” as the years go by; otherwise, the Liverpool ONE model might not prove to be resilient.

Most interviewees consider Liverpool ONE as a ‘public’ space because the general public has access at all times. However, they agree that this space does not embody a true urban character. Its emphasis lies too strongly on a commercial programme, as well as cleanliness, safety and organised events. Certain groups are excluded from the area in explicit or covert ways. But for many interviewees this is an acceptable trade-off for having such an upscale and attractive development in the city centre. The following quote is representative:

[The private company] has the power to take people out. You don’t see any graffiti, no rough sleepers, no skateboarders. It has become sanitized. But so what, you don’t have to go far to find the ‘real’ Liverpool, whatever that is.

Similarly, interviewees measure the ‘valued outcome’ in the Ropewalks’ in terms of economic gains (rise in employment figures and property values, etc.) and flexibility of delivery rather than on the basis of its legitimacy and accountability to the public (Skelcher et al. 2005). Having generated investment, jobs, and quality design, the development process that took place in the Ropewalks is perceived as a success (Lally 2018). However, interviewees also express some criticism towards public authorities. First, a lack of commercial rent control is lamented because high rents, affordable only to nightclubs, have driven out small independent shops. Second, maintenance (until recently outsourced to a private company) is regarded as inadequate. Both critiques stem from a failure of the public sector to exercise control and oversight.

Overall, the resulting urban space is regarded as truly public by the interviewees; it is accessible to all and attracts a wide variety of people during all hours of the day. The Ropewalks Partnership set high expectations in terms of design and building quality. This was extraordinary at that time, as Liverpool was suffering from an inferiority complex. The project proved that private investors were willing to re-invest in Liverpool, boosting the city’s self-esteem. It also gave the courage to the City Council to step up its aspirations and be more demanding of private investors rather than settling for low offers. However, the Ropewalks has not become the ‘creative quarter’ that was initially envisaged. One interviewee sums it up:

We know what we have in the Ropewalks. It’s settled down to something. Is it exactly what our vision wanted it to be? Maybe not exactly, but is it still independent? Yes. Is it still cool? Yes. Is it still edgy? Absolutely. And it is reinventing itself. For us, it is a case now of taking some of these edges and deciding which ones to keep sharp and which ones to polish.

By contrast, in Granby4Streets the public values were not safeguarded in the early stages of the development process. The public sector, which was responsible for the regeneration of the area at the time, did not deliver any valued spatial, social, or economic outcomes. While funding was allocated, much of it was spent on the planning process (preparation of designs and reports, organisation of working groups, and other paper-pushing activities); little was left for implementation, in the form of physical improvements. As one interviewee reports:

“All the money earmarked to this area has gone to bureaucracy. The Council spent thousands and thousands on this area as long as it was spent in an office.”

The local residents, represented by the Granby Residents Association, felt that City Council administrators ignored their ideas - although their vision for the area (refurbishment of the houses within the historic street pattern) was taken up in the Granby/Toxteth Masterplan (approved in 2004). The residents, disappointed by the lack of progress, adjourned the dialogue with local institutions and embarked on renovation works themselves. First, they rebranded their neighbourhood in a positive way by carrying out small-scale public space interventions. Not only did street planting and painting initiatives enhance the visual quality of public spaces, but they also demonstrated the community’s commitment to the area. Eventually, outsiders’ perceptions changed.

In a second stage, local residents formed a Community Land Trust, through which they secured loans for the refurbishment of ten local properties. These insurgent planning initiatives regenerated the space in the way local residents had envisioned: the original street patterns were retained and the existing houses were refurbished. However, this outcome is viewed as a Pyrrhic victory, given the high toll paid by local organizers in terms of time, money, and wellbeing. Moreover: while the area feels public, maintenance is lacking because a number of properties are uninhabited. One interviewee points out that:

“At some point the rubbish stopped being collected, because, as it turned out, they thought nobody lived here anymore.”

The local residents perceived this as a failing on the part of the public sector. As the area gradually repopulates, the level of maintenance will hopefully improve.

In summary, the configuration of ‘valued outcome’ vs. ‘perception on publicness’ is different in the three case study settings, as they appear after redevelopment (Figure 6). Interestingly, all three are perceived as having delivered ‘public’ spaces – although their ownership and control modes are entirely different. In the case of the more private spaces (Liverpool ONE and the Ropewalks), this perception is likely due their high quality design, which leads commentators to overcome or ignore the loss of ‘publicness’. On balance, the Ropewalks appears to perform better than the other two cases. It is perceived as being much more ‘public’ than Liverpool ONE, and as having delivered a more valued outcome than Granby4Streets.

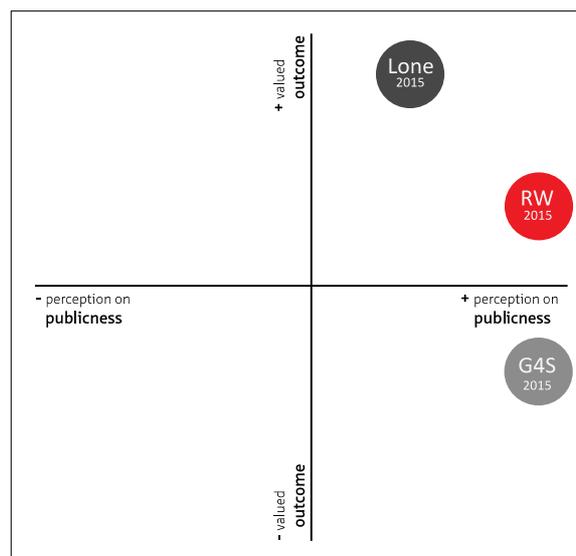


Figure 6. ‘Perception on Publicness’ vs. ‘Valued Outcome’

Conclusions

These three projects in Liverpool show that top-down planning processes, regardless of whether they are led by the public or the private sector – may reduce ‘publicness’ by virtue of being exclusive and dominated by singular entities. Local councils need to (re)gain public trust and respect while safeguarding public values through city-wide urban policies. Their being ‘public’ institutions does not automatically guarantee public support. On the contrary, they may end up being viewed as incompetent, inefficient, or authoritarian, if they disregard the needs and sentiments of the public and seek to impose their own solutions on communities. In fact, these types of perceptions have paved the way for neoliberal practices to gain a foothold in

urban space and governance (see Hague 2001; Kort and Klijn 2013), whereby private interests are likely to have an economic rather than a social interest in urban development.

On the other hand, public-private partnerships and community-led planning approaches, even if dominated by actors who are 'private', can produce a high degree of 'publicness' if trust, inclusion, and collaboration are present. In some cases, entirely private developments may garner substantial public support if 'benevolent' developers demonstrate concern for a city and its residents. Clearly, the picture is not black and white - at least not in the three cases that were examined in Liverpool. One cannot conclude that 'public' automatically equals 'good' and 'private' equals 'bad'. Urban processes are much too nuanced and complex to fit this simple dichotomy. That has been the case in the past too. Much of the civic 'patriotism' of earlier times was driven by mercantile and/or industrial elites, while in the present private investors often draw on significant subsidies from the public sector. At this juncture, some commentators even argue that public and private bodies are largely intertwined and effectively indistinguishable in terms of bureaucracy, rules, red tape, and the like (Graeber 2015). Hence, public space is probably best produced through a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process in which both public and private partners (including citizens and NGOs) have decision-making power.

While most planning literature has tended to demonize privatization, the three projects reviewed in this study suggest that the involvement of the private sector in urban space production does not necessarily undermine its publicness. On the contrary, processes may become more 'public' when a plurality of actors - including private ones - are involved in urban planning and governance. Also, private actors can bring about the resources needed to make a project happen. The challenge for the public sector is to prevent powerful private actors from exclusively carrying out their own vision and promoting their own agenda to the detriment of the public, including voiceless actors. Also, the public sector needs to ensure that urban spaces, even when 'private', remain accessible to all (within the bounds of health and safety and decorum) and continue to uphold public values (see Pojani and Maci 2015). An expanded definition of public space needs to consider not solely ownership, but also accessibility, design quality, and opportunities a space provides for a variety of use and users.

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SNAP, 1969, Shelter's Neighbourhood Action Project
Vision for Granby, 2003, Granby Residents Association

Appendix 2. List of interviewees.

Institution	Short description	L ONE	Ropewalks	Granby
1 Liverpool City Council	Empty homes manager			x
2 Liverpool City Council	Urban Design Champion, Chair Ropewalks Partnership	x	x	
3 Bluecoat	Director Art Centre		x	
4 Liverpool ONE	Project leader Liverpool ONE Management and Maintenance structures	x		
5 Liverpool City Council	Councillor Riverside Ward, Cabinet Member for Living Environment and Localism	x	x	x
6 Reshaped	Landscape architect	x		
7 Plus Dane Group	Director Neighbourhoods - Plus Dane Group, Chair CLT Granby, Director South Cluster Partnership	x	x	x
8 Engage Liverpool	Chair City Centre Residents Association	x	x	
9 HVDHA Architecture	Architect Bluecoat extension	x		
10 Community Land Trust	Member CLT and Granby Residents Association			x
11 FACT - RopeWalks CIC	Director FACT & CIC Ropewalks		x	
12 BDP - Manchester	Landscape Design Director - responsible landscape works L1& Ropewalks	x	x	
13 Liverpool City Council	Public space management	x	x	x
14 Ulewelyn Davies	Project leader Granby Toxteth Masterplan			x
15 University of Liverpool	Urban sociologist	x	x	
16 Liverpool City Council	Head of Planning	x	x	
17 Ropewalks Residents Association	Chair		x	
18 University of Liverpool	Professor Civic Design	x	x	
19 Sense of Place	Local activist/ blogger			x
20 Liverpool City Council	Urban Design consultant for LCC for Liverpool ONE 2003 - 2009	x		
21 Steinbeck Studios	Project leader Ducie Street			x