CREATING AN ATTRACTIVE PUBLIC SPACE FOR THE CITIZENS

—Ströget Street in Copenhagen, Demark
Shanxi Road Square in Nanjing, China

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## Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study area</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model for Qualitative Research Design</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street interview</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The definition and classification of space</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 The concept of space</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The categories of space</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1 Public space</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2 Private space</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.3 The transition between public space and private space</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 The importance of public space</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1 The function of public life</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2 The function of public space</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 The new trend of the public space</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How to make the public space more attractive---the case of Copenhagen</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 The transformation of public space in Copenhagen</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The reasons to this successful example- Ströget Street</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1 From a car-oriented city to a people-oriented city</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2 Creating an attractive outside space</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The experience gained from Copenhagen and the suggestion of the square in Nanjing</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 The background of Nanjing and Shanxi Road Square</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The survey conducted of Shanxi Road Square in Nanjing</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The successful factors to this square</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Accessibility</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Creating a comfortable and glamorous square environment</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 The problems of this square</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Insufficient public infrastructure</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 The whole square should express more identity</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 The suggestion to this square</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Introduction

Do we still need public space in the contemporary privatization of life when most of us have private houses or gardens? Previously, the medieval town square or piazza had a function as a place for outdoor living and meeting, a site for market, festival day, and a space for conversation on all topics, dealing goods with each other, hearing the latest news from all over the world. Gehl and Gemzöe (2003) explain that historically public space played a vital role in everyone’s life. People needed to walk or stay in the public space because of their cramped homes and no private gardens. In other words, they had no choice besides going to the public space. At that time, walking in the street or sitting in the square were the most popular activities among citizens. People also made their lives on the market in the square or the street. Children were able to play games only in the park. However all that has changed during the 20th century. In contemporary privatization of life, people are living in the privacy of their houses, where everything, from water to electricity, from newspaper to the Internet, is available to them. Friendship can be maintained by telephone or the Internet; people even are able to make new friends through the Internet. The latest news from all over the world is available on TV, radio and the Internet. The shopping mall or the supermarkets replace the open-air markets. In this context, some people contend that the revival of public life is limited. It is not necessary for us to create public space for public life. Today, public space is used mostly by the homeless, who often live in such places.

It is true that nowadays people seldom go shopping in the open-air market, hear speeches made by leaders of certain groups in the city centre or get water from a common pipe. On the other hand, others still believe that people are eager to take part in public life. As Los Angeles city councilman Michael Fever (as cited in Marcus and Francis, 1998) notes, “In a far-flung city like Los Angeles, too frequently we lead anonymous lives, isolated, confined to our cars…There is a hunger for pedestrian life. People are looking for ways to get out of their cars and live on a human level in an urban center” (p.1). The psychotherapist, Joanna Poppink (as cited in Marcus and Francis, 1998), also points out that “If we don’t leave the house, we fill ourselves up with fantasies created from television and our own fears.” While when you are “out in the real world, you get to see people as they really are: different ages, different races, different relationships that you can observe firsthand” (p.3). In her opinion, there exists an absolute connection between the spread of distrust and fear among citizens and the lack of public space, where different people have opportunity to communicate with each other.

This thesis is intended to discuss the importance of public space and conclude the guideline for making attractive public space. The thesis mainly focuses on two questions: 1. why is public space important to urban people? 2. How can an attractive place in the city be created? I will illustrate the importance of public space to urban
people, describe the development of urban space in the city centre of Copenhagen, observe the example of Strøget Street and find out the key factors to this successful example. At the end of the thesis, the case of Shanxi Road Square in Nanjing, China will be portrayed and analyzed.
Methodology

Study area

The study areas on which this thesis is based are both Ströget Street in Copenhagen, Demark and Shanxi Road Square in Nanjing, China. Ströget Street was occupied by heavy traffic, forcing people to walk along two narrow sidewalks before 1962. However it became the first pedestrian street with a width of 11 meters in Copenhagen on 17 November 1962. Defined as the main link in the pedestrian system in Copenhagen, Ströget Street is now handling an east-west pedestrian connection in the city centre. This street is a main shopping street and represents as a successful example of public space. On summer days, there are 145 people per minute walking or sitting on the street and this situation has been remained for more than 30 years (Gehl & Gemzöe, 1996).

Nanjing is the capital of Jiangsu Province which is located in the southern part of China. At the end of 2000, the population was more than 6 million, and the city area was 6596 km². The square of Shanxi Road was reconstructed in 2000, from being a park before. It is located in the city center, at the joint of Hunan Road and North Zhongshan Road. The area of this square is 90,000 m², mainly composed of 11,000 m² of water area and 15,000 m² of green space. After its rebuilding, the instruments used for citizens’ activities have been created, including the repaving of the granite corridor along the lake and flower garden.

Model for Qualitative Research Design

Maxwell’s Qualitative research design (Figure 1) has been implemented as an overarching methodology process. Maxwell (2005) points out that:

Design in qualitative research is an ongoing process that involves “tacking” back and forth between the different components of the design assessing the implications of goals, theories, research questions, methods and validity threats for one another. It does not begin from a predetermined starting point or proceed through a fixed sequence of steps, but involves interconnecting and interaction among the different design components (p.3).

This non-linear method is used continuously through the whole process in order to update the idea and the question of the research.
The book “Public Space Public Life” is written by two Danish architects named Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzöe and presents a study of Copenhagen’s city center that is distinctive and attractive. As is written in the introduction of this book, the objective “is to describe how the city center has developed over the past 34 years, from the time the first pedestrian street, Ströget, was established in 1962, up to today”. The other objective of this study “is to describe how urban life has developed and changed during this period, as well as to discuss options for future development of the city centre” (Gehl & Gemzöe, 1996, p.7). In the book, the authors have provided a comprehensive description of public space development in Copenhagen’s city center as well as public life in the public space, and made a survey about the usage of public space in the city center. In the third chapter, the street interview is referred to, which was carried out by the School of Architecture, Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, cooperating with Professor David Yencken, Department of Planning, University of Melbourne. The interview is composed by questions inquiring the background of the respondents, the purpose of the visit to the city centre, the frequency of visit to the city centre and the transport mode to the city center (Gehl & Gemzöe).

**Street interview**

I carried out the similar interview as the one conduct in Copenhagen in Shanxi Road
Square in Nanjing, China in March 2008. A total of 20 pedestrians, selected randomly in that square, were interviewed.

The questions have included:

- The background of the individual (age, occupation, hometown)
- Which activity do they perform in the square
- When they go to the square
- The advantage and disadvantage of the square compared with other squares in the city centre
- The improvement that the interviewees think should be made in the square
1. The definition and classification of space

1.1 The concept of space

The idea of space is discussed by anthropologists and geographers mostly in research of human history. It is difficult to define the concept of space because of the various perspectives of study. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Lain Borden (2000) point out that “space is socially produced, but that space is also a condition of social production” in the perspective of Marxist geographers such as David Harvey and Edward Soja (p.101). Anthropologists define space as that which “is materially and culturally produced, and architecture is here taken to be one of many culturally produced artefacts” (Rendell, Penner & Borden, p.101). In the view of anthropologists, space is not able to develop by itself, but is “an integral and changing part of daily life, intimately bound up in social and personal rituals and activities” (Rendell, Penner & Borden, p.101). From this perspective, anthropologists take the whole aspects of the environment surrounding the building into consideration. However the architects hold the opinion, which plays a vital role and is given dominating status in the urban space by architects, that space is produced by users of buildings, as well as their designers and builders. This idea, for example, proves that space is the key element in the design of architecture, and has three dimensions (Ching, 2007). Space is generated by various forms, including horizontal and vertical elements. As is shown in figure 2, the space between itself and the ground is created by a horizontal plane located overhead. Meanwhile the space is organized in front of a single vertical plane in figure 3.

Figure 2
Source: Ching, 2007

Figure 3
Source: Ching, 2007
Undoubtedly space can be articulated through various forms and there is a close relation between different forms of space and their function. Consider the Theater in Seinäjoki, Finland as an example. The whole space itself is divided into three different categories, which are the space for the offices, the space for the theater hall and the space for the lobbies. Each of these three parts has its own specific form (figure 4).

In Ching’s book (2007), he also refers the human being to the space. He notes that:

Space constantly encompasses our being. Through the volume of space, we move, see forms, hear sounds, feel breeze, smell the fragrances of a flower garden in bloom. It is a material substance like wood and stone. Yet it is an inherently formless vapor. Its visual form, its dimensions and scale, the quality of its light—all of these qualities depend on our perception of the spatial boundaries defined by elements of form. As space begins to be captured, enclosed, molded, and organized by the elements of mass, architecture comes into being (p.94).

In other words, the activities of people play an important role in defining a specific space. A space with high quality is more attractive to people than that with low quality because people prefer to sit, stop, eat or play in comfortable environments where multiple activities take place. A plurality of activities also bring vitality and a diversity of life to space.

In the context of this thesis, space is understood as a room for people to perform different activities. The concept of the space is a territory divided into different forms with various functions and the architecture within the space is the production of the connection between material and culture.
1.2 The categories of space

From the perspective of architecture, space is divided based on the different functions it may have. Generally the concept of space can be defined in terms of three different categories.

1.2.1 Public space

The word “public” implies that a space is owned by the community or the government and is used by the public, the people. That is to say, everyone has the right to access into a public space no matter their gender, social status, and regimes. In a public space, people can meet other people and the public opinion can be articulated there. In the city, for example, the park, the square and the street are typical examples of public spaces.

1.2.2 Private space

Private space, on the contrary to public space, belongs to an individual or a company, and is used for their own purposes and pleasures. People are not allowed to enter the space without the permission of the owner. The door of an apartment makes the interior space less public and the fence of a private garden prevents other people from walking into the private space.

1.2.3 The transition between public space and private space

This kind of space can also be regarded as a bridge or a cushion between public and private spaces. This is a transitional phase where people have chance to be adapt to the changing environment between public space and private space. For example, the corridor always serves as a transitional role.

1.3 The importance of public space

Before the importance of public space is discussed, it is necessary to illustrate the importance of public life in public space. Public life is composed by the activities in public space, such as squares, streets, parks and so on. However as is shown below (Figure 5), the type of outside activities referred here are mainly “passive contacts” with low intensity (Gehl, 1996, p.17).
Compared with high intensity contact, for example, close friendships can be maintained through periodical get-together or other ways of communication methods, such as telephone or the Internet. The so-called low intensity contacts, namely “see and hear” contacts are relatively insignificant and much more superficial than other forms of contacts. However these passive contacts take a vital role in generating the higher intensive communications that function as prerequisites for attaining contacts on a more complex level. Gehl (1996) has noted that:

Opportunities related to merely being able to meet, see, and hear others include:
- contact at a modest level
- a possible starting point for contact at other levels
- a possibility for maintaining already established contacts
- a source of information about the social world outside
- a source of inspiration, an offer of stimulating experience (p.17)

Gehl has explained that though passive contacts, such as glancing at a fashionable lady or hearing somebody talking about football in public space, are less intensive, they make the prerequisite for further interaction between people. If activities in public space are missing, this kind of communication disappears, and the gap between being alone and being together becomes wider. As a result, public life plays a vital role in several ways, as I discuss in the section that follows:

1.3.1 The function of public life

The generation of contact
According to Gehl (1996), “Life between buildings offers an opportunity to be with others in a relaxed and undemanding way” (p.19). Compared with being a passive stander-by watching other people’s performance on TV or movie or video, the individual being in public spaces is present and directly participating. People are able to promenade in an elegant pedestrian street on a sunny day, or sit on a bench in a beautiful park for the whole afternoon, watching people pass by. In both cases, human beings interact with others. They watch and hear others, experience other people’s activities, and thus do not feel lonely. People are able to make their lives which are in
the connection with other people. Furthermore, the passive activities give an access to contact with people at other levels. When going to a new school, every fresh student has an opportunity to introduce himself to the rest of his classmates, making a fleeting connection with others in the group. This contact at a low level makes it possible to communicate at other levels, if the students wish. Last but importantly, low level activities offer a chance to maintain an already established contact. Gehl implies that, “with frequent meetings friendships and the contact network are maintained in a far simpler and less demanding way than if friendship must be kept up by telephone and invitation” (p.21). If that is the case, it would be easy to call in or arrange a party tomorrow if the connection of neighbors or colleagues is established and persons have the chance to meet each other frequently.

Transmitting information in the society
The opportunity of seeing and hearing people in public space is a process of exchanging information. Mass media, such as TV, radio and the Internet, are the most common ways of informing people today. However the experience of social activities in public spaces can bring not only common but also authentic information to people. Participating in activities that occur in public spaces gives us the opportunity to get to learn how other people work, live, dress, relax, and thus acquaint ourselves with the people whom we work with, live with and study with. As a result of participating in public activities in public space, strangers we have often met in the street become acquaintances. Besides the chance of exchanging information, new ideas which were never thought about earlier are possible to be inspired from other people’s activities in public space. There is an example of this point. Children usually get together easily if they see other children playing. Meanwhile the idea of new games can be easily inspired by watching other children and adults (Gehl, 1996).

In the trend of industrialization, the city functions are segregated, thus the communications between cities mostly rely on automobile, which make cities duller and more monotonous. This raises another important issue, which can be called “need for stimulation” (Gehl, p.23). Gehl writes that “Experiencing other people represents a particularly colorful and attractive opportunity for stimulation” (p.23). People prefer to hear or see others moving, talking or performing other activities in public space rather than appreciate the architecture or its decoration. A lively environment in a city is achieved through colorful social activities, no matter the diverse forms and colors of buildings. In other words, people play a significant role in public life.

Creating attractive public activities and making city vitality and diversity
If there are attractive activities for people, people find it easier to gather. According to Jacobs (1994), “Nobody enjoys sitting on a stoop or looking out a window at an empty street. Almost nobody does such a thing. Large numbers of people entertain themselves, off and on, by watching street activity” (p.45). It is the other people present in the same place that can grab people’s attention. Everyone has this similar experience. Compared with sitting in a private garden, people would prefer to choose
other activities, such as walking in a lovely street. In a big family, children are likely to sit or talk with adults or other children instead of playing with toys alone. All of these activities bring many valuable possibilities both for children and adults to interact with each other. Sometimes a person may learn how to cook a typical Italian pizza or find out that there is a vacant job in a company from a conversation among friends. In other words, everything may happen through these activities in the open air. The city may become more attractive as human activities increase, even if at a low level—through the activities of seeing or hearing others—rather than through experiencing the buildings themselves.

1.3.2 The function of public space

The importance of public life as a function of interaction has been stated above, but why is public space also important for people? Is there any relationship between public space and public life? Generally speaking, public space takes a role as a stadium for public life. All activities among people need a prime prerequisite, which is meeting, or being in the same place. If there is a lack of space or place, where can they go? How can they see or hear others?

Gehl and Gemzöe (2003) has argued that the public space is traditionally used as a market place, traffic space and meeting place in balance, in spite of the different usage patterns of the city (p.10). Public space is a place where people can meet and make contact with each, exchange information, such as working experience or the economic development. In addition, a lot of vital activities occur in public space: the celebration of festivals, pageant, coronations, etc. The public space as an open market place is illustrated in figure 6. In this picture, the goods are sold and transformed in the street. Public space here is used as a workplace, with goods and services.

![Figure 6](image)

Source: Gehl & Gemzöe, 2003
In the beginning of the 20th century, the usage of cars increased, especially after the Second World War. As a result, the city was instead defined by heavy traffic and spaces were transformed into the parking place for automobiles. The balance between traffic uses of the city market and meeting uses of the city that existed for centuries was destroyed, and cars took over the streets. In addition the invention of telephones, television, and, more recently, computers and the Internet have had a far-reaching impact on people’s daily life, preventing people from actively participating in the public realm. The latest information can be transformed and spread through TV, radio or the Internet and close friends are able to meet regularly by air: distance is no longer a barrier among friends. In other words, nowadays people have more opportunities and sources to communicate with each other in order to make and keep contact than in the past. People choose to walk or spend their time in the street because they love to go there rather than because they have to go there. Accordingly, if a public space is not appealing, people would decide to go elsewhere. Indeed the quality of public space is becoming increasingly important.

According to Gehl (1996), outdoor activities have been divided into three different types according to various impact of physical environment (pp. 11-14):

**Necessary activities.** Waiting for the bus in a station or walking to the office are compulsory activities for certain people under any conditions. In other words, people, in some cases, are required to join in these necessary activities, which are more or less independent on the outdoor environment. In this context, the exterior environment has less influence on such activities which occur throughout the year in nearly any condition. A person must walk through certain streets from his home to his office even though they might be dusty, uncomfortable or degraded.

**Optional activities.** By contrast to necessary activities, these kinds of activities occur under good conditions. Usually people are invited to promenade in the park or sit on the bench outside on a sunny day. People wish to do optional activities only when the time and other conditions they want are met. Obviously there is a strong connection between optional activities and the physical environment. With a comfortable outside environment, people are pleased to do optional activities. In other words, the frequency of optional activities is definitely dependent on physical conditions.

**Social activities.** Social activities occur when other people are present in the public space. These kinds of activities include playing games with friends, chatting and greeting, or the most widespread social activity—passive contact, which is seeing and hearing others in the same place. Social activities are also termed “resultant” activities, which normally derive from the other two kinds of activities. Social activities are characterized as a connection both with necessary activities and optional activities because all people stay in the same place. That means that social activities are indirectly depend on the quality of outdoor space, where necessary or optional activities occur.

The relationship between the quality of physical environment and the frequency of these three kinds of activities is shown below (Figure 7).
The table implies that the frequencies of necessary activities are more or less the same, no matter whether the physical environment is in poor or good quality. Nobody stays longer in the environment than is necessary. However in a comfortable place, people are invited to spend more time sitting, talking, eating and seeing, when other possible activities may also happen. The quality of public space is a key element when public activities take place. Several surveys have proved that in an attractive place, people are able to spend more time outdoors, where more opportunities for meeting and talking with others are offered. This is how a diverse and lively public space is created. Furthermore, an attractive public space also has an impact on the city image, which indirectly influences the environment development. If a city is a communication system, the public space is an effective method to make the city readable and decipherable. As Jacobs (1994) argues, “If a city’s street look interesting, the city looks interesting; if they look dull, the city looks dull” (p. 39). The public space, style of architecture even its details would provide the most useful information for tourists to understand the city and its culture. The public space in the city is a stage for showing its creativity and expressing its identity.

Penalosa (as cited in Jay Walljasper, 2005) notes that “public spaces are not a frivolity. They are just as important as hospitals and schools. They create a sense of belonging. This creates a different type of society. A society where people of all income levels meet in public space is a more integrated, socially healthier one” (p.22). Compared with private space, people feel freer in public space where no individual is sovereign. A good example is the construction of Via Julia, which is located in the periphery of Nou Barris district in Barcelona. In the time of Franco’s dictatorship, Via Julia was a
marginal area of any Third World country facing poor environment and social problems. However, after the first civil democratization, the policies were made to improve the quality of public space and change the whole landscape of the area. The feelings of belonging to and identifying with the area are mentioned in the initiatives of leaders of the municipality. The public spaces were transformed into an opportunity for urban life and the inequity sphere was created there. Cape Town, in South Africa, followed the successful example of Barcelona. A program named Dignified Places Programme was initiated to heal the hurt left from the apartheid era by using public space. According to Louise Grassor, who is working in Gehl’s urban design firm, through this programme with the goal of improving the quality of public space, they hope that it can fuel the sense of ownership among the citizens in a city. Five principles have guided this activity to deal with those issues of the inequity, fragmentation and environmental degradation of the city. Now the “dignified places” is a popular and meaningful part in Cape Town. The program, receiving the support from the political power, is regarded as an effective method of communication to updating the quality of lives in poor areas of the city (Mammon, 2005).

1.4 The new trend of the public space

According to Clare Cooper Marcus and Carolyn Francis (1998), People-Oriented Environment (PEO) has been introduced in the development of public space. In other words, more attention has been paid to make the usages of public space to satisfy human needs. One trend is The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and universal design, the other is prevention of crime and improving safety in the public space (Marcus & Francis, 1998).

In America, before 1990, the Architectural Barriers Act as well as Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards were already passed aiming to allow people with disabilities in all public facilities and programme, including movie theaters, retail store, hospitals, restaurants. After the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990, this kind of protection was extending to enable disabled people to use all public facilities and take part in public programmes. Universal design means the designers have the awareness that all the specific needs of the disabled are met at the same time, which is regarded as a good change for all the users. The ADA is intended to create a fair environment in the public space, which is equal access and equal opportunities for all citizens arriving to a public realm.

The other issue is about crime and safety. As Wekerle and Whitzman note (as cited in Marcus & Francis, 1998), “Fear of crime keeps people off the streets, especially after dark, and out of parks, plazas and public transit. It is a substantial barrier to participation in the public life of the city” (p.7). In this context, crime prevention is being defined as a key problem which needs to be dealt with.
2. How to make the public space more attractive---the case of Copenhagen

2.1 The transformation of public space in Copenhagen

The centre of Copenhagen is fortunate as it has not been occupied by heavy traffic in the past 50 years. Today Copenhagen still has its medieval street pattern and aged buildings appear in a human scale. In other European countries and parts of the world, cities are becoming noisy, heavily polluted and crowded, while Copenhagen has chosen a different path. A policy with the target to reduce the impact of traffic in the city centre was not changed for 25 years. In the people-oriented city centre, the city is becoming less polluted, less noisy and more beautiful. When the first pedestrian street—Ströget Street—was finished, some people argued that it was not suitable for Scandinavian circumstances: “We are Danes, not Italians” and “Using public space is contrary to Nordic mentality” (Gehl & Gemzöe, 1996, p.11). However this pedestrian street immediately proved to be popular among citizens. In the next years, the other streets and squares followed this pattern and the city centre of Copenhagen was transformed from an overcrowded traffic environment to a peaceful but diverse people-oriented place. In the year 1996, the pedestrian areas increased to 95750 square meters, while in 1962 the figure was just 15800 square meters.

2.2 The reasons to this successful example- Ströget Street

The key factor to this successful transformation in the inner city has contributed to a gradual reform rather than a dramatic change since the 1960s. Gehl and Gemzöe (1996) have pointed out that “the Copenhagen story combines the two: Taming and controlling city traffic, as well as reclaiming streets and creating quality spaces for popular use” (p.11). For one thing, the people living in Copenhagen were encouraged to use public transportation or go by bicycle. As a result, the inner city was not crowded with heavy traffic. Moreover the quality of the space was improved, providing Danish people an opportunity to understand the role of public space in society. The citizens were invited to the attractive outside place.

2.2.1 From a car-oriented city to a people-oriented city

In the post-war era, car traffic increased around the world. The streets were full of cars and the squares were used as areas for car parking. The same happened in Copenhagen. The Ströget Street was the main link between east and west Copenhagen.
Before 1962, the street was 11 meters, half of which was crowded by heavy traffic, leaving the people walking on the two narrow sidewalks. On 17 November 1962, Ströget Street was turned into a pedestrian street. The cars were gradually pushed out of the city centre or there was a certain limit of the car volume in the city centre, which ensured to provide a comfortable and peaceful environment. This was not a dramatic process but a gradual one. In this process, the citizens came to accept public transportation or bicycles as alternatives to private cars (Figure 8). According to the book “Public space, Public life” by Gehl and Gemzöe (1996), the survey carried out in 1995 shows that in Copenhagen, 34 percent of the citizens choose to go to work by bicycle, 31 percent by private car and 31 percent by bus or train, half of whom still ride a bicycle to the station. Even during the winter or in rainy days, 60 percent to 70 percent of the citizens take the bicycle to work. To make it easier for the citizens to drive the bicycle around the city center, the City Bike was introduced in Copenhagen in 1995. It is also known as the City Bike System. In this system people pay a certain amount of money in the slot of the bicycle when they need bicycles. Then they can go everywhere in the city centre by bicycle. After they finish their trip, they can return the bicycle at any City Bike spot and get their money back. In Copenhagen, there are 125 City Bike stands located proportionally in the city centre, and the bikes of this system are easy to distinguish from ordinary ones. The widespread use of bicycles brings a lot of benefits, including the fact that less street space is needed, and the centre is less noisy and less polluted. In the past years, the area of the car-free street and the squares has increased 3.5 times. It is interesting that the growth of time spending on public space by people is also 3.5 times (Gehl & Gemzöe). In Ströget Street, citizens can easily promenade or sit on the bench without any worry, such as being disturbed by noise or run down by cars. In summer, Ströget can handle 145 pedestrians per minute in a width of 10-12 meters (Gehl & Gemzöe).

Figure 8
Source: taken by author, 2008


### 2.2.2 Creating an attractive outside space

After Ströget Street was turned to a pedestrian street, the effort was made to create a mixture of streets for moving and squares for resting. The citizens are encouraged to sit, walk, talk and rest in the squares. It is proved that when there are twice as many pedestrians walking or sitting outside, they spend four times more time in the public space. It means that the more people are present in the street, the more social activities happen, contributing to making the outside more attractive and safe.

William H. Whyte (as cited in Gehl, 1996) points out “the close connection between qualities of city space and city activities and documents how often quite simple physical alterations can improve the use of the city space noticeably” (P.36). If the physical environment is improved a little, a changing of using the city space is noticeable.

Gehl has also pointed out the features of unattractive ground floor facades:

- Large units with few or no doors
- No visible variation in function
- Closed or passive facades
- Monotonous facades
- Lack of detail, nothing interesting to look at (p.33)

In Ströget Street, the street is narrow and the squares, Gammeltorv and Nytorv square and Gammel square, are relatively small. In this limited space, people easily become close and various activities between people may take place. The buildings with small units and many doors bring a great effect, making the street more interesting. The narrow units and many doors imply different images to see and different functions to appreciate (Figure 9). In addition, the narrow buildings create a vertical façade structure, which has an important visual effect, making the street shorter. It is comfortable and pleasant for people to walk in the city centre.
Various surveys have proved the importance of seating in public space. There is a direct relationship between the numbers of seatings and the time spent in public space by people. Gehl and Gemzöe (1996) have noted in the book “Public space, Public life” that “Every time Copenhagen has added another 14 m² for pedestrian use, a new person has come along and settled in to enjoy the city” (p.59). It is obvious that the opportunity for seating is a key factor in the amount of recreational activities. Seating in public space invites people to sit and possibly communicate with each other rather than walking through the street or the square in a hurry. The more time people spend in public space, the more possibilities they have to meet and talk. As a result, street life becomes diverse and vital, inviting more people to participate in it.

Additionally the buildings have many niches, stairs, stones and recesses, which also serve the same function as seating. But first and foremost, along Strøget Street coffee shops are seen everywhere (Figure 10). This outdoor coffee culture is widespread. From the first of April to the end of October, many people prefer to have a coffee in a warm day, seeing the people walking through the street.
The life of Ströget Street at night is attractive, safe and friendly (Figure 11). Compared with other cities where the street is totally dark at night, the shop windows are lit in Ströget Street. For one thing, when people are walking at night when the shops are closed, they can also promenade along the street, enjoying the glamorous exhibitions in the windows. Further the lit environment provides a sense of safety to the pedestrians, preventing crimes such as robbings.
3. The experience gained from Copenhagen and the suggestion of the square in Nanjing

3.1 The background of Nanjing and Shanxi Road Square

Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province, is located in 32°03′N 118°46′E. It lies in Yangtze River Delta economic zone, which serves as the most dynamic zone of current China in the downstream Yangtze River drainage basin. At the end of the year
2000, Nanjing was a large city with a population of more than six million and an area of 6596 km². In history, Nanjing was the ancient capital of six dynasties with a high level of civilization as well as beautiful natural scenes. Nowadays, it has developed from a historical center to the second largest commercial center of the Eastern China next to Shanghai. In 2007, the figure of GDP was $45.2 billion and the GDP per person was $7442(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nanjing).

Nanjing is situated in the humid subtropical climate area, influenced by East Asia Monsoon, with distinguished four seasons a year. In the summer, it is quite hot in Nanjing, which is well-known as one of three Furnacelike cities in China. The average temperature through a year is around 15.7 °C. January is the coldest months and July the hottest one in Nanjing. In January the highest average temperature is 19°C while the lowest average is 2 °C. The highest average temperature in July is 31 and the lowest 25 °C (ibid).

The square of Shanxi Road, a famous place of interest in Nanjing, is located in the center of city, at the joint of Hunan Road and North Zhongshan Road. It was re-constructed in 2000 and previously was a park. The area of this square is 90,000 m², mainly composed of 11,000 m² of water area and 15,000 m² of green space. After its rebuilding, the earth is repaved by granite, a new corridor along the lake and flower garden are built. There are also some more entertainment facilities for citizens (ibid).

### 3.2 The survey conducted of Shanxi Road Square¹ in Nanjing

The survey that I conducted of this square is divided into two parts. The first part is a survey of the different activities performed by various people during a whole week. The other part of the survey includes interviews conducted with twenty persons, and has been listed in a table.

To offer an understanding of the place, the square is divided into six parts (Figure 12). Different activities performed by different persons in a week are represented in the figure below.

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¹ In western countries, such an area would be called a park. However, in China it is referred to as a square.
Figure 12
Source: designed by author, 2008
A Zone: The major part of this area is paved with cement blocks with a fountain made of copper in the centre. When the fountain is spouting water, a lot of persons are standing around and watching it. This area is the main entrance of the square, lots of people visit the square by walking through this zone. There are enough seats provided in this area, which provide people with an opportunity to take a seat and have a short rest. As a result, further activities may take place instead of walking through the square in a hurry. In the afternoon, especially from 2 pm to 6 pm, many aged people come to this zone. On a warm day, the older people enjoy the fresh air while talking to their friends. At weekdays, this area is even more crowded by lovers or parents with children who prefer to walk around the area for relaxation (Figure 13). This area also serves as a platform for public activities. For example, for the 2008 Olympic Games, the square is being decorated with many posters (Figure 14).

Figure 13
Source: taken by author, 2008
**B Zone:** This area, also covered by cement blocks, is the sub-entrance to the square. Next to this entrance, there is a bus station. If people get off the bus, they usually arrive at the square through this entrance (Figure 15).
C Zone: This is the more diverse area of the square. Facing to the lake, the white semi-round corridor held by stelae is set up, with stairs connecting to the round ground paved with granite. The place is crowded with people at two periods during a day. In the morning, it is an attractive place for aged people to do morning exercise. In the afternoon, parents with their babies in their arms come to enjoy the sunshine and the fresh air (Figure 16). At the same time, the area provides for opportunities to meet other mothers and exchange experiences about how to take care of their babies. Many children take part in activities of watching the fish in the lake or feeding the pigeons in the square, which compels them to stay in this area longer (Figure 17). During weekends or after school, young people perform sports activities in this area, such as roller skating or doing exercise on the sports ground. It becomes an attractive place where people of all walks of life can enjoy themselves.

Figure 16
Source: taken by author, 2008
D Zone: This area, which is also facing the lake, has its own advantage. Along the lake, benches are laid at a certain distance with trees or herbs at the back of them (Figure 18). It is comfortable for people to relax in this space after a busy day. In the evening, a large number of people gather here to dance.
E Zone: This area is a little far from the main entrance so less pedestrians walk around here. Usually in the afternoon, people living in the nearby residential district choose to do exercise in this relatively quiet area (Figure 19).
**F Zone:** This place is the least beautiful part of the square and is consequently always deserted (Figure 20). For one thing, this place is far away from the entrance, and people are not willing to go there as the place is not attractive. It lacks design and the land is covered by weed. People usually walk through the place in a hurry.

![Figure 20](image-url)

*Source: taken by author, 2008*

### 3.3 The successful factors to this square

I interview twenty different people of different social status in March 2008, in order to evaluate the quality of Shanxi Road Square (Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason staying in this square</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Close to commercial street</th>
<th>Enough seats</th>
<th>More seats at weekends</th>
<th>Attractive activity performed</th>
<th>Service infrastructure (toilet, commercial look etc.)</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Suggestion improving the quality of this square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aged people</td>
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</table>
3.3.1 Accessibility

The table above indicates that, one of the most important reasons why people choose to stay in this square is accessibility. It is convenient for people who live far away to take a bus to get there. When I interviewed some people who are having a rest at the square, it became clear that most of them were not living close to the square. However they like to come to the square when they are free. They point out that they choose to stay in this square instead of other places because of the convenient access. There are many bus routes going to the square and the nearest metro station is just 1 km away. Furthermore Shanxi Road Square is located in the centre of the commercial district—Hunan Road—with office building and shops. The interviewed said that they prefer to sit in the square, relaxing or communicating with their friends after a busy day at work. During weekends, hundreds of people walk to this square to have a rest after shopping. In addition, the space is attractive to people who live in the nearby residential zone. They will usually exercise in the morning or go for a walk after dinner.

3.3.2 Creating a comfortable and glamorous square environment

Another factor to have a rest in the square is that there are enough seats. Compared with other squares in Nanjing, the square is said to offer many seating opportunities. The deepest impression by the interviewed is the easy access to have a short rest there when feeling tired. It is easy for the visitors to find a place to rest, such as in the path, corridor, beside the lake or on the island. More importantly, almost every seat is on purpose arranged to face a certain place of interest. While people are sitting, they can enjoy the beautiful natural scenery, which provides an opportunity for them to relax from the fast paces of city life.

The design of seats is glamorous, some are semi-round while some are in line. They are well integrated into the surrounding natural environment. Most seats are installed on the concave side of the path, with herbs, grass land or parterre at the back of them. The trees behind the seats provide a natural shadow protecting from the sweltering sunshine in the summer days. Most seats are made of wood, which make people feel comfortable. Especially in the winter, it is much warmer to sit on wood than on stone benches.

3.4 The problems of this square

It is commonly known that this square is a successful example in Nanjing. According to the statistics, at festival days, nearly 120 thousand people per day relax or recreate themselves in the square as compared to Copenhagen where 50 thousand people visit
Ströget Street in one day during summer. However some problems inevitably exist in the square.

3.4.1 Insufficient public infrastructure

The square is established for the public citizens rather than for the government to take it as its boast. As a result, all the design aims to cater for people’s needs. We should consider the design of square from the human activity and human psychology. How do people use the square? In which condition do they use this square frequently? Though there are enough seats provided in the square during weekdays, it is still not sufficient at weekends or festival days. During these holidays, especially in the warm days, it is very hard for people to find available seats. If there is no seating available, people will not stay in the square longer. What is worse, in the whole square, there is only one public toilet. It also lacks other public services, such as a telephone kiosk, or a newspaper kiosk. The waste-bins are not arranged at a reasonable distance, which makes it hard for visitors to get rid of trash. In addition, there are not necessary lights in some distant areas where it is too dark at night, preventing people from going there for security reasons.

3.4.2 The whole square should express more identity

The city is represented by its streets, squares or even architectures. In this context, the square is one method to reflect the city culture both to the local citizens and the tourists. As is known, Nanjing represents a high level of education: 14 universities or colleges are set up in the city. In the year 2006, the total number of students studying were 0.6 million, some of whom are not local citizens of Nanjing. These students may have the opportunity to become familiar with their second hometown if a unique culture is exposed in the square. In the Yangtze River Delta economic zone, Nanjing is not the first choice for the graduated students. This phenomenon is the result of many issues, such as job opportunities, housing prices, environment as well as city identity. If a city has its own identity, it is attractive for the students to continue staying there after graduation. In fact, Nanjing is a city with a history of thousands of years; however, as has been stated by an employee whom I interviewed, people cannot enjoy the city’s culture and long history in this square. That way, the square does not differ much from squares in other cities. A mother points out that the most important reason that she brings her son to the place is the special activities of watching the fish in the lake or feeding the pigeons in the square, not for its natural beauty or cultural environment.
3.5 The suggestion to this square

Marcus and Francis (1998) assume three basic characteristics of a good public space: responsive, democratic and meaningful (p.8).

**Responsive** means that the design should serve the needs of users. In other words, the designers should put themselves in the situation of those who use the public space, and consider satisfying human needs when people are staying or sitting in the area. Actually there are some regular features which are expressed by groups of different ages. Playing games is the most popular outdoor activity among children. Boys prefer to play football or badminton in a relatively wide space while girls choose to go dancing or make performances. Youth people aged from 14 to 28 mostly study in schools or at university or even hold a job. Their daily activities are colorful, including recreation, communication and sports. The group of adults, who are under the age of 55 years, spend less time walking or sitting outdoors because of their busy work during the day time. They usually go to outdoor spaces after dinner or on weekends. In contrast to these adults, aged people have more time as they stay at home. A sense of loneliness is easily generated among them and as a result, they need outdoor space to participate in social activities even more.

**Democratic** implies accessibility for all groups in society. Every individual has a freedom to activity. In a democratic public space, no one is excluded because of physical ability, gender, culture or ethnic background. By contrast to a private space, a public space should be open to people of different social status.

**Meaningful** means to allow “people to make a strong connection between the place, their personal lives and the large world” (Marcus & Francis, 1998, p.8). A public space with meaningful features is a place with its own culture or identity. By the design of public space, such as pavement or sculpture, people are able to find the meaning of public space.

Marcus and Francis (1998) also list a set of criteria of a successful outdoor place used by the public:

- Be located where it is easily accessible to and can be seen by potential users.
- Clearly convey the message that the place is available for use and is meant to be used.
- Be beautiful and engaging on both the outside and the inside.
- Be furnished to support the most likely and desirable activities.
- Provide a feeling of security and safety to would be users.
- Where appropriate, offer relief from urban stress and enhance the health and emotional well-being of its users.
- Be geared to the needs of the user group most likely to use the space.
- Encourage use by different subgroups of the likely use population, without any one group’s activities disrupting the other’s enjoyment.
- Offer an environment that is physiologically comfortable at peak use times, in regard to sun and shade, windiness and the like.
- Be accessible to children and disabled people.
- Support the philosophical program espoused by the managers of the space, for example, the educational program of a child care center or the therapeutic program of the hospital.
- Incorporate components that the users can manipulate of or change (e.g., sand play in child care, raised garden beds in housing for the elderly, interactive sculpture and fountains in urban plazas).
- Allow users the option, either as individuals or as members of a group, of becoming attached to the place and caring for it through involvement in its design, construction, or maintenance, by using it for special events, or by temporarily claiming personal spaces within the setting.
- Be easily and economically maintained within the limits of what is normally expected in a particular type of space (e.g., a concrete park might be easy to maintain but is not what a park is expected to be).
- Be designed with equal attention paid to place as an expression of visual art and place as social setting. Too much attention focused on one approach at the expense of the other may result in an unbalanced or unhealthy place. (pp. 9-10)

The E area of Shanxi Road Square, as mentioned above, is less used by people compared with other zones of the square. Gehl and Gemzøe (1996) note that there is a direct relationship between the number of seating and the frequency of using the square by people (p.60). Secondary seating, which refers to alternative opportunities for sitting on stairs, edges, niches, monument or foundation, is also a wise choice. Another alternative method is to create a space for activities, e.g. playing chess by the aged people. Though this area is far from the main entrance, it is relatively quieter than other areas in the square. The chess playground could be set under trees, or surrounded by herbs or flowers. The service buildings, such as tea kiosk as well as toilet, are also arranged in this area, making the chess space more convenient and comfortable (Figure 21).

The A zone is covered by a huge scale of concrete and appears less meaningful. An idea is to repave the ground. For example, a transformation of the cityscape can be illustrated as a decoration (Figure 22).
Figure 21
Source: designed by author
Figure 22
Source: designed by author

decorated pavement
Conclusion

In this study I have discussed and demonstrated the importance of the public space and the guideline of creating an attractive to the citizens. We need to notice that society nowadays is different from that in the past. The open-air market in the street has been replaced by the supermarket or the shopping mall, information can be spread through TV, radio or the Internet and relationships can be maintained conveniently by telephone and the Internet as well. All these changes have decreased the opportunity for people to walk or sit in public space. Today people do not need to go to a public space unless they are attracted by the glamorous environment offered by such a space.

Another far-reaching transformation in the city is the increasing number of cars. Traffic jams as well as car parking are becoming hot issues. Land which was once used for public space has been changed to function for transportation or parking area, driving citizens from the public realm. As a result, the city centre is becoming dead, monotonous and lifeless, increasing even the possibility of crime. This trend has already been noticed by planners as well as social scientists. It is time for the designers to make public space more attractive, encouraging citizens to stay there longer.

Jacobs (1994) has pointed out that human activity is one of the basic characteristics in the city. In other words, the key factor to keep the city vibrant is to meet the human needs at a comfortable scale in line with physical, spiritual and psychological perspectives. Marcus and Francis (1998) also note that the designer should consider the function of the public space from the perspective of human needs or human psychology rather than only the form of space. In this context, a public space with high quality is no doubt a place full of a diversity of public life. Meanwhile a public space with colorful public life is as well an attractive place for the citizens and for city identity.
References

Written sources

Electronic sources