

Small Town Public Life

Abstract

A line in urban space discourse measures ‘publicness’ by numbers of people. The rationale seems to be: the more people registered in urban public space, the better public life, and hence the better urban spaces.

This quantification of ‘publicness’ is supported by the increasing use of tracking methods, where people are tracked via GPS and smartphones. The data collected may be combined with maps, and illustrated in diagrams. These often persuasive and easily digested diagrams are used as arguments and as proof–evidence–of the success of specific design or of the quality of advice on such. The quantification of ‘publicness’ may thus accommodate an increasing demand for evidence-based solutions and proposals that also planning and architectural design are met with.

By this, the question of ‘publicness’ is reduced and simplified to graphs and numbers, but this seems too superficial when talking about people, and qualities in public life and urban space. A public square in front of a railway station may not be a nice place to be even though there are a lot of people.

Such a quantification of ‘publicness’ might be relevant as documentation and argumentation discussing public life in urban space in major cities and metropolises, but applied to smaller towns and villages, it seems out of scale. Often there are not enough people to fill the spaces, except for special occasions or at specific times of the day. Small town public life may very well take place in other towns and sites, and in other forms than seen in the major cities. This article describes and discusses forms of small town public life and public space and suggests increased site sensitiveness in dealing with ‘publicness’ in minor towns and settlements.

Keywords

Publicness, Local, Villages, Network, Site-Specific