

THE RISE OF PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPACE

Taking the latter first, as transport improved and residents of New York moved out, the headquarters of the large corporations downtown expanded in the only direction they could, up. During the first fifteen years of the twentieth century the downtown city blocks of New York were transformed into a vertical Gotham skyline. But while New York's skyline was becoming increasingly dramatic when viewed from afar, the streets below were becoming dark, airless spaces, generating the need for some form of intervention.

Kayden (2000) charts the evolution of semi-public corporate space as a reaction to changes in city planning zoning ordinances in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens, and argues 'The history of privately owned public space is inextricably linked to the history of zoning in New York City'. He describes the history of planning ordinances in the city, starting with the New York City Building Ordinance, adopted by the Commission on Building Districts and Restrictions in 1916: the first comprehensive zoning ordinance in the US. The 1916 ordinance sought to protect the interests of wealthy influential businessman as well as the health of the public. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1998: 48) observe that the former was clearly the strongest incentive, as a tactic to help stabilise or even enhance land values. Health issues were nevertheless a salient topic during the early years of the nineteenth century, and Ken Worpole (2000: 10) describes how reformers on both sides of the Atlantic 'strongly predicated the benefits of clean water, sunlight, and fresh air'. This was therefore also a major factor.

The 1916 ordinance did not, however, stop the podiums of skyscrapers from covering the full lot or site. Therefore in 1961 a new zoning resolution was created, that 'introduced a new type of space: privately owned public space, located on private property yet ... physically accessible to the public at large' (Kayden 2000: 11). The authorities were now acknowledging not only that light and air were needed in the streets but also that public urban space was required. The incentive to developers to provide this space was the offer of a greater maximum floor area for a building if ground-level plazas and arcades were accessible to the public at all times.

These public accessible areas were given as of right regardless of design as long as the spatial thresholds were upheld. However, Kayden notes that this was abused by many developers who used the plazas as loading areas or garage entries, or just built barren empty spaces. As a result, over the following decades incremental amendments were made to the ordinance to ensure that the system was not abused, and that spaces were usable and attractive. Further corporate space typologies have been added to the official city list through legislation, making a total of twelve public/private space typologies: Plaza (1961), Arcade (1961), Elevated Plaza (1968), Through Block Arcade (1969), Covered Pedestrian Space (1970), Open



2.16 The Sony Plaza, public/private space

Air Concourse (1973), Urban Plaza (1975), Sidewalk Widening (1975), Residential Plaza (1977), Through Block Connection (1982), Through Block Galleria (1982), and Other Spaces.

Each typology has design standards that were pioneered through the work of William H. Whyte (1988) in the 1970s through his research on how public spaces function (see Chapter 1). This introduced standard design elements that developers could pick such as foliage, benches, cafés, drinking fountains, sculpture, etc, and prohibited the spaces being used for car parking, loading, and other uses not benefiting the public (Kayden 2000: 21–45).

The diversity of typologies has meant a diversity of such spaces, for example the Sony Plaza that combines a plaza and covered pedestrian space to produce an entertainment mall (Figure 2.16). Zukin (1995: 3), however, cites this as an example of the negative side of this increasing 'privatisation' of public spaces; an example where a covered pedestrian space intended for the public has controlled access and contains mass advertising for Sony Products. By 2000, over 500 public/private spaces had been delivered using incentive methods. But, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, when the owners of such spaces are large commercial corporations, design and management approaches are sometimes used to reinforce a desired corporate image that leads to the exclusion of individuals or groups who do not fit.