

Handling cars in cities remains a problem. Many great squares of Italy and other European countries serve as parking lots today, at least during the daytime. The original functions have been lost. Both the squares described here have parking garages below them. The garage is handled well in one case but not in the other.

Major references

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CASE STUDY

Pershing Square, Los Angeles, California, USA: a revamped urban square (1950–2, 1994)

Pershing Square (named in 1918 in honour of World War I General John Pershing) has a long history dating back to its designation as a formal Spanish plaza in 1866. It has gone through a number of redesigns since then at the hands of a variety of architects, landscape architects and gardeners: Fred Eaton's (in the 1890s), John Parkinson's (1911), Frank Shearer's (1928), Stiles Clements' (1950–1) and in 1994 those of Ricardo Legoretta and Laurie Olin. It is the last mentioned proposal that is of interest here. The history of the square's transformations shows that urban spaces in cities are surprisingly enduring despite the changes in a city's fortunes.

The 1951 building of the underground parking garage led to the square being a patch of grass with trees in planter boxes on its edges. The decision made by the city government to build a car park was predicated

on the belief that it would decongest the area and lead to a revival of the city's theatre district. Downtown Los Angeles today is remarkably uncongested by world standards but this state is due to the buildings in the area being largely abandoned above ground floor level – something that is beginning to change. The garage failed to recharge the theatre district and the entrances to the parking garage tended to cut the park off from its surroundings.

By the late 1980s, the square has become a place for the homeless, indigent and drug addicts to 'hang-out' in (see Figure 5.11). It was so despised that the Biltmore Hotel had turned its back on the square by establishing an entrance on its side away from the square. The square was decrepit and the furnishings vandalized. The surroundings, while housing a noticeable number of middle-class people, were populated heavily