

Collectively, these trends represent fundamental shifts in the way public life and space are conceptualized and in the values associated with them. I argue in this article that the future designs and plans for public space must be based on an understanding of the causes and consequences of these trends and the changing nature of public life.

Social values of urban open spaces

Any discussion of the future of public spaces must necessarily begin with a retrospective view of the evolution of values and symbolism associated with urban open spaces in the past century. In the second half of the 19th century, most major cities of America—initially Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco and later Buffalo, Detroit, Kansas City, Louisville, and Rochester—acquired large chunks of land within the city and transformed them into major urban parks or park systems.² A legacy of these turn-of-the-century cities, today they continue to serve as a major civic resource. Indeed, as Rybczynski (1999) points out, the urban park systems are probably the only exception to the otherwise privatized world of city building, where private monuments, department stores, railroad stations, skyscrapers, sports stadiums, and the like have dominated the American cityscape. The park system represented an attempt to humanize the utilitarian form of American cities. This was reflected in Frederick Law Olmsted's designs for parks and his writings about creating order and structure in the expanding industrial cities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.³ According to Rosenfield (1989), a scholar of American rhetoric, "the public park served for the nineteenth-century urban democracy much the same function that civic oratory or eloquence served in traditional republican societies: to celebrate institutions and ideological principles thought to be the genius of those cultures" (p. 222). He argues further that in the American context public parks served to inspire republican virtue in several forms: civic pride; social contact, especially between people from diverse backgrounds; a sense of freedom; and finally, common sense (as in aesthetic standards and public taste). Thus the civilizing virtues of public parks extolled in Olmsted's designs and writings can be more broadly interpreted to include democratic ideals, good citizenship, civic responsibilities, and, ultimately, the essential social compact that constitutes the core of civil society.

Such rhetorical interpretations of the urban park, while elegant and uplifting, begged the very question of class, ethnicity, and income inequality. Social contact, especially with people of different backgrounds, was acknowledged as one of the values of open space, but almost in denial of the everyday reality of the class and ethnic ecology of American cities and the conflicts and contradictions it represented. For example, the urban parks created in the latter half of the 19th century served mainly as pleasure grounds of the upper-class elite (Cranz, 1989). Because many were located on the periphery of the city, they remained domains of the rich and the elite, beyond the reach of the poor and the working class.⁴

In the progressive era of the early 20th century, health, hygiene, and recreational opportunities for the public, especially the working class living in the congested inner cities, became the principal reasons for open space. Easy access to open space was often integral not only to metropolitan or regional planning concepts (see Sussman, 1976), but also to community- and neighborhood-scale design, epitomized by Clarence Stein's famous Radburn Plan (see Parsons, 1999) and Clarence Perry's Neighborhood Unit concept (see Banerjee & Baer, 1984).⁵ These secular objectives, inspired by Ebenezer Howard and the English Garden Cities, were proposed as an antidote to the crowded and polluted environment of the industrial city. In their 1933 Athens Charter, the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM [its acronym in French]) strongly endorsed the provision of urban open spaces as an essential principle of modern town planning, referring to open spaces as the lungs of the city.

Thus the Olmstedian view of civic pride and republican virtue that inspired the earlier parks systems of American cities was transformed into a more secular and communitarian view of a public realm advanced by the progressive ideas of the CIAM and Regional Plan Association of America. Since then, parks and open space in American cities have been identified with recreation, physical and mental health, communion with nature, and the like, making them a public good and service.

As a public good, standards for purveying open space would become codified through parks and recreation standards officially adopted nationwide. In the late 1940s the Committee on Hygiene and Healthful Housing of the American Public Health Association (1948) published *Planning the Neighborhood*, a book of standards that codified the open space requirements in urban areas and promoted local and neighborhood parks in proximate