relationship with the local schools. Eventually these standards became the principle for open space and the community facilities elements of general plans, required by state enabling legislation or the 701 Program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In promoting the public service aspect, parks departments were now more directly involved in programming and organizing recreational events, and their focus was more on social utility of parks than on their earlier aesthetic merits and civilizing aims. Thus, Forest Park in St. Louis, originally designed in 1880 in the Olmstedian tradition, was redone at the turn of the century as a collection of golf courses, tennis courts, museums, zoos, and other such utilitarian facilities (Heckscher, 1977).[6]

Thus, what began as part of a grand civic design movement gradually became more populist, more institutionalized, and more bureaucratized as part of planning the rational city (see Boyer, 1983). In the absence of sufficient capital budgets, however, open space requirements as postulated in city general plans remained advisory and mainly unrealized. Furthermore, budget cuts of the mid-1970s had a disastrous effect on cities' ability to even keep up the current stock. New York City, with some 26,000 acres of public parks, is a case in point: Its maintenance staff was cut almost in half during this period (Siegel, 1992). With declining maintenance, parks became vulnerable to abuses and were shunned by the public. Studies conducted in the 1970s questioned the validity of contemporary open space standards given the lack of use of parks in the inner city (Gold, 1972).

Furthermore, in recent years, market protagonists have begun to challenge the very assumption that parks and open spaces, along with such other public facilities and services, necessarily have to be a public good (see Richardson & Gordon, 1993, for example). Indeed, financially strapped cities are already forced to rely on private resources to create open spaces like the corporate plazas commonplace in downtown America today (see Loukaitou-Sideris & Banerjee, 1998). Meanwhile, privately owned shopping malls continue to capture much of the public life in America while its Main Street languishes. Privatization of public life and spaces is the focus of the following section.

Decline of the public realm: a narrative of loss

In common parlance, public space is associated with parks, playgrounds, or systems of open space that are obviously in the public realm. But not all open spaces are in the public realm, and for that matter not all public spaces may be open, in the sense of being either alfresco or accessible and free. Many years ago Kevin Lynch (1972) asked these questions quite succinctly: How open are our open spaces? Are they accessible physically as well as psychologically? Are they widely available and amenable to user control? Are they distributed equally or equitably in an urban region? If they are not, then are they all truly public or democratic?[7]

In recent years the concern for public space has extended beyond the questions of adequacy and distributive equity of parks and open spaces. They are now subsumed under a broader narrative of loss[8] that emphasizes an overall decline of the public realm and public space. Several themes characterize this narrative of loss, some focusing on the public space and public life, other on aspects of social capital and civil society. Discussions that focus on the atrophy of American public life have sought to find historical causes and culprits. These include, in chronological order, the early resistance of American Puritanism to pleasure and decadence associated with public life; the advent of industrialization that preordained the dominance of the automobile; the flight of the American middle class from the inner city; the Modern movement in architecture, which glamorized the urban grid; and the economics of cheap and expedient land development (Hitt et al., 1990). To these one could add zoning, suburban shopping malls and office parks, strip malls, and urban sprawl, all of which have been the subject of critical writings in recent years (Garreau, 1991; Kowinski, 1985; Kunstler, 1993). Others concede that the kind of social cohesion necessary for enduring public life typical of many homogeneous cultures is difficult to obtain in the U.S., where the public remains heterogeneous and pluralistic (Hitt et al., 1990; Sennett, 1988).

It has been suggested also that the decline of the public realm is paralleled by a corresponding decline in the public spirit, which resides in the very core of our collective intuitions of civil society. Using Jane Jacobs' term "social capital" to describe the civic virtue that constitutes the spirit of trust and citizenry, Putnam (1993) has argued that such civic formations as "singing groups" and "soccer clubs" actually may improve local governance in modern societies. Yet, echoing the narrative of loss, Putnam (1995, 1996) has also suggested that since World War II there has been a precipitous decline in the civic spirit in the U.S. He attributes this decline to the growing exposure