urbanism

The PuSH project examines publicness using exhibitions as research tools and deploying four multidisciplinary analytical categories: heritage, practices/policies, democracy, and informality.

Examining the publicness of spaces on European social housing estates: a position paper

Ellen Braae, Henriette Steiner, Svava Riesto, Marie Glaser, Eveline Althaus, Liv Christensen, Lillin Knudtzon, Melissa Anne Murphy, Inger-Lise Saglie, Beata Sirowy, Bettina Lamm, Gilda Berruti, Maria Cerreta, Laura Lieto, Paola Scala, Maria Federica Palestino, Marilena Prisco and Anne Tietjen

Introduction

Ellen Braae and Henriette Steiner

European postwar large-scale housing estates materialise various ideas about urbanity, communality, and community.[1] They are concrete spaces for encounters and shared uses among multiple people; that is, they are forms of public space. The concept of public space grows out of classical sociology's interest in urban public spaces as the main loci of modern experience, such as boulevards, urban squares, and metropolitan entertainment or commercial districts. It implies a certain normativity and has often been seen as a passive container. Yet not least due to the restructurings of urban public space brought about by physical transformations of modern urban planning projects and, more recently, by distancing policies introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability of people to convene in the open spaces of cities has snapped into focus as a defining urban characteristic.[2] Indeed, the design of outdoor meeting places points to changing spatial metaphors for what is considered a well-functioning society at any given point in time and speaks to the possibilities for a rich civic life.[3] These possibilities have to do with culture and politics as well as with opportunities afforded by the designed and built structures. According to Ali Madanipour, an investigation of urban public space must go beyond the typical urban stereotypes and address tensions such as those between the individual and the collective, public and private interests, formal and informal institutions, and legal frameworks.[4] Because of their large quantities and presence in many people's lives, and although they are often overlooked in theories of urban space, the open spaces of social housing estates provide a setting for this investigation. The paper discusses different forms of cohabitation that stimulate exchange and coherence among diverse residents and visitors.

While the modernist architectural typologies of medium- or high-rise residential buildings that make up many mid-twentieth century housing estates have generic elements that can be found across Europe, when we look at these estates as situated vehicles for public life, we can appreciate the need to approach them in their local contexts and to use mixed methods and a range of theoretical frameworks that lie outside traditional architectural research.

What we do here is to investigate social housing estates as places for public life through such situated investigations across four European contexts and in a way that acknowledges the complicated relationships between people's physical contexts and their ways of life; that is, we engage in relational understandings of public space, which we call *publicness*. In the three-year HERA-funded project 'Public Space in European Social Housing' (PuSH), four national teams from Denmark, Italy, Norway and Switzerland use the concept of publicness as a starting point for a multidisciplinary exploration of how large-scale postwar housing estates, as sites of public life, are active co-producers of cultural encounters across social and material domains. Publicness is not understood as positive per se. A site of publicness is a complex, dynamic, relational condition that is continually shaped by interactions between people and places where 'the structure of the material world pushes back on people'.[5] This is how shared life in these spaces can become a common concern that 'sparks a public into being'.[6]

This paper brings to the table an array of disciplinary perspectives, from design to anthropology, from cultural theory to planning, that have been employed in the project. The various positions outlined in this paper do not attempt to be synthesised into results. Instead, these positions demonstrate ways of studying large-scale housing estate public space. The four parallel yet distinct approaches to the investigation run along the following lines of

1a

1b

Braae et al | **Examining the publicness of spaces on European social housing estates**

1c

1d

1e

1 The PuSH project studies five postwar social housing estates that rest on a set of well-known modernist spatial norms and values for the interaction of people and place. (a) Each estate in its own way is made to foster social activities: large green spaces intended for common use in Telli, Switzerland; (b) Farum Midtpunkt, Denmark, with its private terraces and multitude of common local squares; (c) the building blocks of Fjell, Norway, placed in a rocky landscape that has been shaped into green open spaces; (d) the variety of housing types and common spaces in Tscharnergut, Switzerland; (e) the large apartment blocks with open courtyards and playgrounds in Lotto O, Italy.

Examining the publicness of spaces on European social housing estates | Braae et al

analytical enquiry: democratic, heritage, policies/ practices, and informality. Moreover, we add a methodological reflection developed through the project, proposing exhibitions as a mode of cross-disciplinary and transdisciplinary research on publicness, and as a means of practicing publicness and collaboratively creating sites of publicness.

With the aim of developing the concept of publicness theoretically and methodologically, we have applied it to the five European social housing estates that provide the empirical basis of our individual case studies: Farum Midtpunkt in Denmark, Telli and Tscharnergut in Switzerland, Fjell in Norway, and Lotto O in Italy [1]. All originate in the period between the late 1950s and the late 1980s, when a significant part of the European social housing estates were built. The selected estates encompass approximately 1,000 to 3,000 units each, thus constituting a microcosm of its own with a large portion of shared open space and of social institutions such as kindergartens, community building, a grocery etc., which allows us to study the theme of publicness to a full extent. They are located in suburban contexts often divided by heavy infrastructure in the functionally segregated new postwar city, and together are positioned along a vertical European axis from Norway in the north to Italy in the south. Each estate represents an iconic case in its national context, while all were, at the time of their erection, designated the everyday 'good life' for ordinary people. What also unites these case studies is that they were built in response to the postwar need for large quantities of affordable housing. All were created from a belief in universal design in architecture and the idea of an architectural 'standard' or the concept of a design canon. While addressing the material production of buildings and open spaces, the general standards are intended to provide a homogenous quality of living based on general ideas of comfort and attached to a specific relationship between form and function. The embedded notion of architecture as a means of 'social engineering' gave rise to playgrounds, parks, assembly rooms, and craft workshops – all spaces designed for interactions between estate residents. Design and planning were conceptualised as vehicles to stimulate people's sense of 'community',[7] 'neighbourhood',[8] and a larger 'public realm'.[9]

To varying degrees, these estates now share the designation of failed architecture. Yet each estate demonstrates how local conditions – climate, topography, culture, organisational governing schemes, sociopolitical and economic conditions and performances – all have a major impact on the living conditions on the estates. The five cases were selected as they share generic elements as well as local differences in terms of ownership, organisational style, spatial typology, function, diversity of residents, major social challenges, and current initiatives. Moreover, substantial basic information on the estates was already accessible,

which made them suitable for further developing the four categories allowing us to better understand and operationalise the concept of publicness.

This paper is a cross-disciplinary and collaborative output. We call it a 'position paper' because, section by section, groups of researchers on the project present their positions and theoretical developments and identify the analytical categories and theoretical vocabularies on which they draw. Moreover, authors reflect on potential ways in which these concepts are operationalised as well as on the synergies that develop between them. Brought together in this paper, the various positions form an approach more than offering a singular set of results. Furthermore, we have developed a method to facilitate this exchange and communication in the format of exhibition. Each national team also brings to the project the previously described case studies that e categorised according to the four proposed analytical categories: heritage, practices/ policies, democracy, and informality. This means that the categories are applied and developed to varying degrees in all cases. Altogether, this approach offers significant interpretations and addresses topics of contention in discussions of public space.

Publicness as the living heritage of social housing: Farum Midtpunkt
Svava Riesto

Soon after the erection of massive postwar housing estates that experimented with radically urban forms and spatial arrangements, critics began to lament that this kind of housing was unable to support social encounters and promote public safety.[10] Instead of architecture designed to improve life, large-scale housing estates were later seen as historical failures, according to a line of thinking that reversed some of the most optimistic ideas about architecture as a means of 'social engineering'. Both the optimistic ideals and the subsequent critical positions are generalising and, when taken to the extreme, deterministic, leaving little room for unexpected changes or diverse ways of life. The local level with its messy and non-linear temporalities is easily side-lined. This leaves us with a need to better understand the complexity of social life of specific postwar housing estates over time to attend more successfully to the living heritage of large-scale housing in nuanced and caring ways, and beyond such simple choices such as demolition or preservation.

In this light, it is problematic that official heritage bodies have generally focused narrowly on the architectural canon when addressing postwar housing.[11] Contemporary urban changes produce a pressing need to engage more broadly with the political, social, ecological, and cultural heritage issues in postwar social housing areas. Radical changes in social housing are the effect of assimilation policies, numerous renovation and renewal programmes, and the privatisation of land.

2

Changes also stem from neglect, decay, and social segregation.

In contrast to canon-oriented architectural perspectives, alternative heritage perspectives start at the local level, that is, from the histories, concerns, and values of residents and other local actors.[12] Framing large-scale housing as heritage can empower disregarded residents and promote place-making and care rather than radical physical change *ex nihilo*, in part by focusing on the unique local interaction between lives lived and their material framework.

In the Danish case study of Farum Midtpunkt, we draw on heritage work that starts at the local level, including the multiplicity of memories and concerns of residents and other local actors.[13] Such perspectives, we believe, can empower disregarded residents and contribute not only to histories and futures but potentially to much more. We trace how different residents, employees, and visitors have used the communal and public spaces, playgrounds, streets, laundries, and parks in the shared open spaces, paying special attention to the negotiation of publicness and privacy *[2]*. By investigating how publicness has been imagined, contested, and enacted in specific sites from the 1970s to the present, we map new sites of publicness that have emerged through everyday usage as well as the tensions, conflicts, and possibilities associated with them.

We have thus (1) added temporal depth and nuance to the understanding of the social

2 In Farum Midtpunkt, Denmark, the extensive car park, which covers almost the entire ground level, was originally built on the assumption of 2.5 cars per household. This optimism proved misplaced, and the car park came to be perceived as an uncanny space by many residents, while others see it as a space shielding them from the public gaze. This graffiti was part of an open space renewal project that aimed to introduce new sports activities into the car park and make it a safer space with a young, informal atmosphere.

Farum Midtpunkt (1972–5) has 1,580 housing units, is owned by the local housing association, and run by tenant democracy. Situated in Farum, an old village growing into a suburb 25 km north-west of Copenhagen, the estate was originally designed by Fællestegnestuen, a collective by Jørn Ole Sørensen, Viggo Møller-Jensen og Tyge Arnfred, and the landscape was designed by Ole Nørgaards Tegnestue. Over the years, the estate has gradually been lightly amended, including the open space transformation from 2015 by BOGL.

capacities (or lack thereof) of large-scale housing estates and (2) explored how the concept of publicness can expand and contribute to existing debates about this emerging form of heritage and its futures.

Unlike 'public space', publicness stresses the temporal, the situational. Our diachronic study, which involves archival research, oral histories, and onsite studies of materialities, shows that not only do people actively contribute to situations of publicness on social housing estates, physical contexts – including the contexts and positions of our own research – contribute to publicness too albeit not in mechanistic ways. The study also shows how living heritage is affected by policies and practices, as outlined by the next line of enquiry.

3a

3 In Telli and Tscharnergut, Switzerland, authorised and less authorised (yet very direct) signage seeks to regulate behaviour at various sites of potential publicness. Mittlere Telli (1971) consists of 2,350 units of mixed ownership and is situated in Arau, a small town between Zürich and Basel. Telli was originally designed by Marti + Kast and renovated in 2020–3 by Meili, Peter & Partner Architekten. Tscharnagut (1958–65) originally had 4,700 units, today 3,000, which, along with its open spaces, are owned by several entities: municipality association of homeowners, private investors. The estate is situated in Bern and designed by the Architecture collective Hans and Gret Reinhard, Hansruedi Leinhard, Ulyss Strasser, Eduard Helfer, Werner Kormann & Ernst Indermühle. A few blocks were recently renovated by Rolf Mühletaler & Matti Ragatz Hitz.

Braae et al | **Examining the publicness of spaces on European social housing estates**

Policies and practices of publicness: Telli and Tscharnergut
Marie Glaser, Eveline Althaus, Liv Christensen

A sociospatial analysis with a special focus on the policies and practices of publicness in a large-scale housing complex supports a long-term perspective on space as being relational and socially produced.[14] In this understanding, the housing complex appears as something beyond its built structure. It can be seen as an open system connected to everyday life and experiences as well as to public and individual narratives.[15] Over time, policies and practices shape place and space in a dynamic and performative manner.[16] This approach also enables an analysis of publicness in our case studies regarding the conditions and material structures that are (re) produced through practice as well as prevailing discourses, regulations, and attendant power relations. The imagination, transformation, and appropriation of space in everyday life has the (sometimes subversive) potential to provide meanings and visions other than those originally intended.

Although two of our case studies – the Swiss housing estates of Telli in Aarau and Tscharnergut in Bern – are often presented in a negative light in public discourse, most residents emphasise the various qualities of life on these estates and object to the widespread stereotypes about large housing complexes.[17] In order to overcome the dichotomy between outside and inside, we draw on American social scientist Lyn Lofland's concept of the lifeworld as a composite of three social realms: the private, the parochial, and the public.[18] Rather than being geographically or physically defined entities, realms are social territories that can appear anywhere. Empirically, certain realms tend to inhabit specific environments: 'To oversimplify a bit, the private realm is the world of the household and friend and kin network; the parochial realm is the world of the neighborhood, workplace, or acquaintance network; and the public is the world of strangers and the "street".'[19] Realms are the result not of immutable designations, but rather of the 'proportions and densities of relationship types present'.[20] The definition of any given space as a particular kind of space is often subject to conflict and negotiation over time.

Calling on an anthropology of policy in order to tease out publicness in large-scale housing estates in Telli and Tscharnergut, we look at how ways of living together onsite are produced, performed, and contested as processes of governance and power. Policies regarding the maintenance of outdoor space, the replacement of playground equipment, the admission of new tenants and so on are seen as control and regulation instruments that create or consolidate social, semantic, and physical spaces as well as regimes of knowledge and power. They structure action by connecting people, institutions, and concepts in specific relationships [3].[21] At the same time, policies are created and changed, consolidated, or questioned through the actions of different actors.

Under this premise, studying publicness in large-scale housing estates does not mean analysing a hierarchical process of policy formulation across

3b

various levels of top-down administration through which property managers, social workers, and facility managers ultimately 'make' policy in their interactions with people on the ground.[22] Instead, using anthropological methods, we focus on how different 'people make sense of things, i.e., what policy means to them'.[23] We are interested in the frames of reference held by diverse actors and how these affect their everyday lives, what different people make of policy and how they engage with it. In this understanding, publicness is not an attribute of specific spatial entities called 'public space' or 'green space', but rather is situational, a spatial setting that is challenged, problematised, and (re)produced by the actions of all the people involved in policymaking. In a housing context, publicness is constituted by the interplay of regulating technologies (from municipal housing policy to building laws, property rights, and local house rules) and everyday practices in the planning, management, inhabiting, and appropriation of housing estates by institutional and individual actors.

Analysing publicness in the Swiss case studies reveals everyday practices of coping with, neutralising and perhaps resisting policies, as well as transforming or improving them from the grassroots up in the physical and social realm of a large-scale (social) housing estate.[24] Our analysis of the housing policies in place in Bern and Aarau opens up for critical reflection the promotion of a social mix of inhabitants, inclusion, participation, renewal, and access to urban and neighbourhood life and with regard to the agency of all actors. This research perspective focuses on the ways in which different actors make use of local sites and engage with situations of publicness, allowing us to learn more about the dynamics in which spaces are created and policies are made in 'border-pulling orders and negotiation processes'.[25]

Publicness and democracy: Drammen
Lillin Knudtzon, Melissa Anne Murphy, Inger-Lise Saglie, Beata Sirowy, Bettina Lamm
Relational approaches broadly define publicness as social interactions intertwined with physical spaces. These interactions have different qualities that could affect social cohesion in social housing. Here, we are particularly interested in the politics related to: (1) the distribution of spatial resources (who gets to use which spatial resources, when and how?); (2) decision-making processes (who decides, and who is represented?); and (3) spatial practices (how is space adapted, performed, perceived, and used?).

Democratic theory can be applied as a tool to identify publicness, which shapes how people live together and are represented in public spaces – that is, in any physical space where multiple people interact, regardless of public or private ownership. Understanding publicness as situations where publics are sparked into being or come together to act, we define a series of 'democratic performances' within publicness. These democratic performances

can be part of processes that produce and change public spaces over time and can be spurred or inhibited by spatial organisation, whether formally or informally.

Concepts of democracy and public space have been strongly affiliated throughout Western political history. Public spaces hosted democratic discussions in the Greek *polis*; from the eighteenth century, coffee houses, parks, squares, and assembly places became arenas for a new form of interaction, described as 'public discussions about the exercise of political power which are both critical in intent and institutionally guaranteed'.[26]

Contemporary scholars claim that physical public spaces remain important for democracy, although few investigate how spaces support political formation and meaningful social exchange.[27] Parkinson, however, explores the role of spaces in the creation of a collective societal 'we' across socioeconomic and cultural differences.[28] While we acknowledge speech and action as fruitful starting points for an examination of public space's democratic importance,[29] understanding public spaces as part of democracy's material infrastructure and drawing on a range of democracy theories may offer further elucidation.[30]

Different ideas of democracy accentuate different core aspects and hold varying views on the need for the involvement of residents.[31] Four theoretical concepts applied to spatial planning are: (1) 'deliberative democracy', which emphasises argument and the involvement of residents in reasoning through relevant insights; (2) 'participatory democracy', which stresses the need to directly involve those affected locally; (3) 'radical democracy', which embraces plurality, temporality, and solutions that empower the general public; (4) 'representative democracy', which gives primacy to elected spokespeople.[32] These theories are often framed as opposing approaches, but they point towards democratic performances that can coexist and supplement each other. Focusing on social housing estates renders some democratic performances more relevant than others, as it omits central urban institutions and squares. Nevertheless, residential areas may afford democratic awareness, development, and capacity *[4]*.

Each theory suggests a type of democratic performance: deliberating, articulating mutual interests, making claims, representing electorates. These constellate publicness by depending on or forming a public, bringing people together based on specific situations and particular interactions in public spaces. In the Norwegian case, Drammen, everyday practices of neighbours regularly sharing a picnic table, of chance meetings when parents take their children to a playground, and of adolescents tagging an underpass, are all examples of formed publics that can allow forms of publicness, regardless of stability or spontaneity. Public-constructing democratic performances can thus be operationalised in fourfold ways:

4

Central to deliberative democracy is the performance of *deliberation*, a speech act oriented towards recognising and understanding diverse viewpoints and seeking new solutions that transcend differences. Deliberation processes can change constellations of publics by swaying and generating new opinions, insights, and positions. Public spaces can be sites of this performance or products of it, as planning and design processes can represent different identities and values. Insofar as spaces express differences in a way to which others can react and reform their views,[33] we can further imagine material-enabled deliberation.

The *formation and articulation of mutual interests and preferences* is central to participatory democracy. This performance depends upon a public formed through mutuality, which may be affected by shared experiences of public spaces.[34] Participatory planning processes seek local insight to better tailor new amenities to suit users' needs, seeking consensus when possible and trade-offs when not. The extent to which public spaces are shaped by the interests and preferences of specific public(s) can be scrutinised.

Making public claims, including the appropriation of space, aligns with radical democracy. This performance includes claiming shared resources, requesting action or inaction on collective problems, and defending or challenging existing rules, regulations, norms, and practices. Publics can unite around a common claim or react collectively against one. Making claims can leave material traces in public spaces, such as graffiti tags or flower gardens. Claims can represent marginalised identities and needs, such as in areas appropriated for public drinking, or outdoor art that – in the absence of a playground – is reappropriated by children climbing on it.

4 The upgrade of Dumpa, a site of publicness at Fjell in Drammen, Norway, entailed resident participation in the planning process (participatory democracy) and agreements on land use with the cooperative boards (representative democracy) The site may also instigate conversations among residents to recognise diverse viewpoints and seek solutions that transcend differences

(deliberative democracy). Fjell (1976) holds 1,509 housing units in municipal and private ownership. The estate is situated on slopy terrain 3 km south-east of Drammen's city centre and 46 km south-west of Oslo. It was designed by Nedre Buskerud Boligbyggelag and the transformations from 2012–20, including the new school and hub buildings, are by architect Ola Roald.

Representing the electorate is the performance of formal democratic roles that are central to representative democracy. On housing estates, elected boards often steer public space decisions and offer residents a means of influencing local political issues. Participating in elections, speaking at meetings and holding elected positions are performances that may change the conditions of public spaces, in both spaces that host the performances and spaces that are managed through those performances. Shifting publics are formed by who is represented and who works together in representative performances.

Democratic performances yield multiple publics, some more closed than others. Multiple senses of 'we' follow, which often construct senses of 'them'. Democratic performances can result in plural and changing 'wes', in addition to Parkinson's overarching ideal of performative democracy as one collective 'we'.[35] Analysing publicness through democracy shows the potential for public space to support meaningful interaction on social housing estates. This happens across formal institutions and informal realms as examined in detail by the next contribution.

Examining the publicness of spaces on European social housing estates | Braae et al

Publicness and informality: Lotto O

Gilda Berruti, Maria Cerreta, Laura Lieto, Paola Scala, Maria Federica Palestino, Marilena Prisco

The concept of informality is based on an implicit divide established by an authority that sets normative standards and opposes anything that falls outside its realm or does not conform to its precepts.[36] The sources of this formal authority can vary. We unfold the notion of informal publicness that combines both social and material practices of gathering in places that do not necessarily correspond to formally designed public places by drawing on empirical enquiries. Specifically, we look at: (1) planning laws (through which we can detect unplanned/spontaneous/illegal land uses); (2) cultural, moral, and religious norms (by which something can be judged as anomalous, non-belonging/alien, and even harmful); (3) design codes and rules (through which we can distinguish unexpected affordances of objects); (4) state welfare regulations (through which we can detect the self-provisioning of collective goods and services).

Public space is traditionally identified in the literature through users' perceptions (for example, a sense of protection, comfort, and enjoyment),[37] standards of accessibility and inclusiveness (such as access and linkages), uses, activities, images, and sociability.[38] More recently, with the ongoing privatisation of public space, the focus has shifted to management strategies of public or semi-public spaces,[39] formally designed as such. As an alternative, we focus on forms and practices of social production that occur in spaces other than formalised 'public space', which we identify as forms and practices of publicness.

Publicness is derived from the notion of the 'public' as theorised in the pragmatist tradition. Following John Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems*,[40] a public *arises* when people need to approach an issue that the solutions currently provided by formal institutions fail to address satisfactorily. In Dewey's perspective, a public is a process of gathering in which actors affected by actions over which they have no direct influence organise to address the matters of concern ensuing from those actions.[41]

As a relational and intersubjective condition, publicness entails that 'no such a thing as "a priori" public space exists, except as an indistinguishable mix of spaces/spatialities, interpreted and used, designed and transgressed, which cannot be unequivocally defined as *public*.'[42] Publicness is about becoming and change through different practices: creating inclusive spaces, sharing a common ground and sense of belonging, providing safety and mutual recognition whenever an issue perceived as a matter of concern sparks a public into being.[43] Publicness is a performance in sociomateriality and not a permanent condition.

As a performance, publicness arises in both spaces formally designed to accommodate collective

5 In Lotto O in Naples, Italy, informal publicness takes many forms, such as children playing around a tree. Lotto O (1985–7) is one part of the post-earthquake 'Ponticelli 167' programme hosting 1,064 housing units, a school, etc. It is situated in the large-scale uniform Ponticelli housing complex in a suburban area outside Naples next to the antique Roman villa of Caius Olius Ampliatus. Lotto O has no named architect and is designed by enterprises and the 'grandi pannelli – SPAV' leading to its uniform character both typologically and in the façades. Over the years, inhabitants have made informal appropriations while some buildings for common use have been left for abandonment.

5

functions (squares, gardens, playgrounds, car parks) and in spaces with no specific public function. Accordingly, publicness can be about enforcing formal rules as well as following cultural norms, it can be a gathering of people and things that formally belong to different realms and respond to different normativities.

Given PuSH's focus on large-scale housing estates in different European cities, the concept of informal publicness is worth exploring from two critical perspectives. One is about marginality and segregation, which frequently affect resident communities; the other is about the agency of modern design that addresses the physical form and usage of housing estates [5].

In cases of marginality and segregation, informal publicness is sometimes – as in the case of public housing in Lotto O, an estate on the eastern outskirts of Naples – a performance of practical resistance to processes of 'slow violence'. Slow violence is neither a spectacular nor an instantaneous socioecological phenomenon. Rather, it grows gradually but incessantly over time, due to a plurality of ecological vulnerabilities and social fragilities that – in contrast to sudden shocks resulting from natural hazards – converge after a long period to produce chronic degradation.[44] As we have observed in Lotto O, people and places are often afflicted by processes of slow violence without being fully aware of it. The need for quality public space, for example, has been systematically neglected by local institutions since the inception of large-scale public housing in that part of the city in the late 1960s. An incessant sense of failure has affected resident communities and eroded their expectation of ever reversing the decay of their living environment. Such forms of slow violence also have an impact on the morale of the inhabitants, who often end up not using formal public spaces (which are perceived as alien or unsafe), or even actively rejecting them through vandalism.

Under the pressure of slow violence, informality, and formality become entangled in the web of institutional practices and policy styles.[45] The need for publicness often leads to 'grey spaces' of governance that coexist with formal decision-making in the institutional sphere, entrepreneurial milieu, and local political arenas.[46]

This is the case with Fratelli De Filippo Park, located not far from Lotto O. This public facility, owned by the city of Naples, was recently transformed into a community garden intended both for the rehabilitation of people with addiction at a local healthcare centre and for food production for estate residents; a grey space of mobilisation and negotiation between formal institutions and ordinary residents emerged from the park.

Compared with standardised architecture, informal housing performs 'the ordinary':[47] it is about life that colonises spaces, transforms typologies, exceeds the uniformity of designed spaces materially and symbolically, and creates intermediate and hybrid spaces between public and private.[48] This could take the shape of shared courtyards or walkways between residential buildings becoming gathering places, or, in the case of Lotto O, sites for votive shrines. The building, conceived as an 'open work',[49] is available for countless material and immaterial possibilities arising from users' interactions which may eventually result in forms of informal publicness.

Informal publicness is a multifaceted concept, a form of resistance against slow violence, as well as an eventual result of the hybridisation of material artefacts. Publicness is a multidimensional concept too,[50] and to assess the performances of publicness in complex and contested contexts, such as the neighbourhoods we are working on, we need indicators designed to deal with both quantitative and qualitative characteristics of places and practices, spanning from demographics to the perceptions of users. Having turned informality into an analytical category, we also look at different systems of relations between actors and material objects, ranging from planned public spaces to informal, culturally oriented sociomaterial arrangements. Looking at these relationships, we can make sense of how people and things get entangled in producing 'publics', as well as how different value systems address alternative ways of conceiving, designing and managing publicness in the interplay between formality and informality. One way to negotiate these fault lines between the social and the material, and between the four analytical categories in this project, is by using exhibitions as a research method, as the final contribution will now explain.

Exhibitions as a method for researching publicness in social housing
Anne Tietjen

Across the four analytical categories, the PuSH project uses exhibitions as a collective means of and framework for exchanging knowledge. Exhibitions are a proven format for architectural communication and for stimulating dialogue and debate about architecture. With PuSH, we gain understanding through exhibitions that examine the agency of architecture for social or ecological innovation,[51] and we propose 'exhibiting' as an exploratory space in which to address urgent political challenges.[52] Our use of exhibitions reaches a wide audience, stimulates political discussion on what architecture does, could do and should do, and interrogates public spaces beyond architectural objects. Throughout the course of the project, we have made a series of physical and web-based exhibitions in which and through which the publicness of spaces in social housing is examined, mediated, and discussed with different audiences. We focus on how interactions between people and the spaces they share create sites of public life, how spaces become a public concern and 'spark a public into being',[53] how spaces enable or prevent social and cultural encounters, and how they could potentially become spaces in which living with others who are different from oneself is possible.

In exhibiting how spaces become public, how public spaces work and what they do, we have

6 Adapting and evolving throughout the research process, the exhibition works as a framework for translation of the various fields of knowledge into a shared field of reference, exchange, and negotiation.

developed new transdisciplinary methods that contribute to the understanding of public spaces in social housing, to a stimulated critical debate, and to making the care and development of public spaces in social housing a public concern. Exhibitions can 'make things public':[54] on the one hand, by examining and conveying how physical spaces become public, that is, how publicness occurs, and on the other hand, by discussing and developing our results with researchers, residents, special interest groups, politicians, planners, architects, and other stakeholders, to reveal challenges, grievances and potentials, formulate issues, and simultaneously create an engaged public who will take on those issues. They create a public space, a self-generated site of publicness.

But how to make spaces in social housing public and how to create a public space through an exhibition? Following Bruno Latour, this entails bringing together two different meanings of the word 'representation' that were previously separate, at least in theory: (1) the scientific (re)presentation of matters at hand, where empirical accuracy is important; (2) the political representation of the people concerned by those matters, where legitimacy is important.[55] The phrase 'bringing together' is key, because it is about combining ethical-political issues and approaches with empirical ones, as well as

finding suitable forms of communication and media representation.

Taking an exploratory approach, we have exhibited our continuously evolving research results as part of four transnational workshops at which we have critically discussed the research with audiences of participating researchers, non-academic project partners, other contributors, and invited guests. Through this critical dialogue during and after the exhibitions, we have clarified, rejected, and developed research questions, discussed thematic, theoretical, or methodological focal points for the next exhibition, and tried out forms of communication and media representation. The physical exhibitions are collected in edited form as a dynamic online exhibition on the website *www. pushousing.eu*.

To examine and convey dynamic sociomaterial relationships in space and time, we combine many common forms of media representation: texts, architectural drawings, maps, diagrams, photographs, aerial photos, videos, and spatial models. The basic format of our exhibitions is made up of prints in A3 portrait format, which can be reproduced inexpensively on any office printer and whose arrangement can be adapted to different spaces *[6]*.

Three exhibitions took place at the University of Copenhagen (September 2019), the University of Naples Federico II (January 2020) and the Tscharnergut community centre in Bern (August 2021). They were accompanied by site visits and onsite dialogues with local experts, residents, community organisations, associations, and institutions in the respective study areas (Farum Midtpunkt in Denmark, Lotto O in Italy, and

Tscharnergut in Switzerland). Due to COVID-19 social restrictions, the third exhibition – for the Norwegian case in Drammen, near Oslo (September 2020) – took place online with local partners. A public exhibition and discussion of our research results was held as part of the final conference in spring 2022.

Conclusion
Ellen Braae and Henriette Steiner

In this paper, scholars have brought together different lines of enquiry and methodologies to advance knowledge about social housing from a cross-European perspective. Rather than presenting a synthesis of positions, we have shown how the analytical categories of heritage, policies and practices, democracy, and informalities sustain the concept of publicness individually, in common and through the exhibition as a method. Together, the four categories can help reveal and develop our understanding of what public space is and how it is used in large-scale European housing estates. The analytical categories serve to clarify how differences in local politics, practices, and ways of living override the well-known typologies of modernist housing estates. This, in turn, calls for new forms of research organisation (exemplified by this project), publication (exemplified by this paper) and presentation (exemplified by our use of exhibitions as a research method). Combining such different perspectives and stepping out of the comfort zones of our research production, presentation, and publication can make it challenging to find common ground. In this relational perspective, materiality matters: things and non-human entities are not the passive background of public encounters; they actively influence processes of gathering with their vibrancy and unexpected affordances. The agency of things – as active partners of humans in how they perform actions throughout a sociospatial network – is broadly recognised in this concept of publicness. The very possibility for people to get together and undertake matters of concern creates new sociospatial conditions. Feeling safe, recognised, and respected is also made possible by material objects

available for creative reuse and recombination. In the PuSH research project, we *push* for experimentation and *push* for a framework for the public-spirited exchange of knowledge. Through this process, and from the integration of different scientific perspectives, significant insights about spaces and cultures of publicness on European social housing estates are beginning to form. One insight is that the normativities associated with the large-scale forms of mid-twentieth-century architectural modernism and planning are but one aspect of what makes up public life and sustains cultural encounters across social and material domains on these estates. Another insight is that, to understand the architectural contribution of these estates, we need to see them within a framework of more complex temporalities (which we call living heritage), scrutinise the regulatory frameworks (which we call policies and practices), and investigate how they help to build or break down larger social bodies (which we call democracy); we need to consider all the other relationships of power and togetherness that morph through informal channels (which we call informality), and take seriously the question of representation and form (which we do when we include exhibitions as a research method). Making the exhibitions has brought together these various perspectives and generated productive dialogue toward developing a new understanding of public space in social housing through the different aspects of publicness. Exhibitions have also been a means of engaging and giving voice to local community actors and immersing students in education-based research. While the immediate impact is limited to the people present, the exhibition format enables publicness to take place by providing a space for researchers, associated partners and external actors to share, communicate and critically discuss insights regarding public space in European social housing. Only by taking this multifarious approach can we begin to see the real power of these estates, their publicness as a contextual and situated quality, and their capacities to spark a public into being.

Notes

1. Ellen Braae, 'Welfare Landscapes and Communities', in *Forming Welfare*, ed. by Katrine Lotz and others (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2017), pp. 34–49.
2. Henriette Steiner and Kristin Veel, *Touch in Times of Corona: Essays on Love, Care, and Vulnerability in the Pandemic* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).
3. Ash Amin, 'Collective Culture and Urban Public Space', *City*, 12:1 (2008), 5–24.
4. Ali Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces of the City* (London: Psychology Press, 2003).
5. Alba Yaneva, 'Making the Social Hold', *Design and Culture*, 1:3 (2009), 273–88 (p. 277).
6. Noortje Marres, 'Issues Spark a Public into Being: A Key but Often Forgotten Point of the Lippmann-Dewey Debate', in *Making Things Public*, ed. by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 208–17.
7. Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander, *Community and Privacy: Towards a New Architecture of Humanism* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1963).
8. Kenny Cupers, *The Social Project: Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
9. *Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity, and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Tom Avermaete and others (Amsterdam: SUN Publishers, 2009).
10. Gordon Cullen, *Townscape* (London: Architectural Press, 1961); Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, NY: Random House, 1961); Jan Gehl, *Livet mellem husene: Udeaktiviteter og udemiljøer* [*Life between the Houses: Outdoor Activities and Outdoor Environments*] (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 1971); Brent C.

Brolin, *The Failure of Modern Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1976); Mikkel Høghøj, 'Mass Housing and the Emergence of the "Concrete Slum" in Denmark in the 1970s & 1980s', in *Mass Housing of the Scandinavian Welfare States*, ed. by Svava Riesto and Miles Glendinning (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2020), pp. 8–18.

11. Svava Riesto and Rikke Stenbro, 'Beyond the Scope of Preservation: On the Life and Potential National Heritage Protection of Early Danish and Norwegian Mass Housing', *Nordic Journal of Cultural Policy*, 17:2 (2014), 210–35; Svava Riesto and Rikke Stenbro, 'Mesterværkerne, Eliten og dem, der var flest af. Værdiopfattelser og blinde vinkler i fredningen af velfærdssamfundets boliger [The masterpieces, the elite and those who were the most: Value perceptions and blind spots in the preservation of welfare society housing]', *Factory and Dwelling*, 1 (2019), 32–48; Rebekka Ferguson, Rodney Harrison, Daniel Weinbren, 'Heritage and the Recent and Contemporary Past', in *Understanding Heritage and Memory*, ed. by Tim Benton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 277–315 (p. 286).

12. See, for example: Svava Riesto and Anne Tietjen, 'Doing Heritage Together: New Heritage Frontiers in Collaborative Planning', in *Heritage, Democracy and the Public: Nordic Approaches*, ed. by Torgrim Sneve Guttormsen and Grete Swensen (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), pp. 159–74; John Pendlebury, Tim Townshend, Rose Gilroy, 'Social Housing as Heritage: The Case of Byker, Newcastle upon Tyne', in *Valuing Historic Environments*, ed. by Lisanne Gibson and John Pendlebury (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 179–201; Hilde Nymoen Rørtveit and Gunhild Setten, 'Modernity, Heritage and Landscape: The Housing Estate as Heritage', *Landscape Research*, 40:8 (2015), 955–70.

13. Ibid.

14. Martina Löw, *The Sociology of Space: Materiality, Social Structures, and Action* (London: Palgrave McMillan 2016; Deutsch, 2004); Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, vol. 30 (1974; repr. Oxford: Blackwell Oxford, 1991).

15. Marie Glaser, 'Durability in Housing: Aesthetic of the Ordinary', in *Aesthetics of Sustainable Architecture*, ed. by Sang Lee (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers 2011), pp. 198–213; Eveline Althaus, *Sozialraum Hochhaus: Nachbarschaft und Wohnalltag in Schweizer Grossbauten* [*Neighborhood and Everyday Living in Large Swiss Residential Buildings*] (Bielefeld: transcript verlag, 2018).

16. Davide Però, 'Migrants' Practices of Citizenship and Policy Change', in *Policy Worlds: Anthropology and the Analysis of Contemporary Power*, ed. by Cris Shore, Susan Wright, David Però (New York, NY: Berghahn Books 2011), pp. 244–63; Jane Jacobs, Stephen Cairns, Ignaz Strebel, 'Doing Building Work: Methods at the Interface of Geography and Architecture', *Geographical Research*, 5:2 (2012), 126–40.

17. Elizabeth Bäschlin Althaus, *Wohnort Grossüberbauung: Das Tscharnergut in Bern* (Bern: Benteli 2004).

18. Lyn H. Lofland, *The Public Realm: Exploring the City's Quintessential Social Territory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998).

19. Ibid., p. 10.

20. Ibid., p. 11.

21. *Policy Worlds*, ed. by Shore, Wright, Però, p. 1f.

22. Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (New York, NY: Russell Sage, 1979).

23. *Policy Worlds*, ed. by Shore, Wright, Però, p. 8.

24. *Policy Worlds*, ed. by Shore, Wright, Però, p. 245.

25. Löw, *The Sociology of Space*.

26. Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, Frank Lennox, 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)', *New German Critique*, 3 (1974), 49–55 (p. 50).

27. Amin, 'Collective Culture and Urban Public Space'.

28. John Parkinson, *Democracy and Public Space: The Physical Sites of Democratic Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

29. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

30. Bonnie Honig, *Public Things: Democracy in Disrepair* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017).

31. David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

32. Lillin Knudtzon, 'Democratic Theories and Potential for Influence for Civil Society in Spatial Planning Processes', in *Defining Landscape Democracy: A Path to Spatial Justice*, ed. by Shelley Egoz, Karsten Jørgensen, Deny Ruggeri (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2018), pp. 3–15.

33. Melissa Anna Murphy, 'Dwelling Together: Observable Traces and Controls in Residential Urban Spaces', *Space and Culture*, 20:1 (2017), 4–23.

34. Amin, 'Collective Culture and Urban Public Space'.

35. Parkinson, *Democracy and Public Space*.

36. Laura Lieto, 'Things, Rules and Politics: Blurring the Boundaries Between Formality and Informality', in *Planning for a Material World*, ed. By Laura Lieto and Robert Beauregard (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 26–41.

37. Jan Gehl and Lars Gemzoe, *New City Spaces* (Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2001).

38. William H. Whyte, *Project for Public Spaces: How to Turn a Place Around: A Handbook for Creating Successful Public Spaces* (New York, NY: Project for Public Spaces, 2000); Miguel Lopes, Sara Cruz, Pedro Pinho, 'The Changing Publicness of Urban Spaces', unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'EURAU '12', Porto, September 2012, pp. 1–10.

39. Ken Worpole and Catharina Knox, *The Social Value of Public Spaces* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2007).

40. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1927).

41. Marres, 'Issues Spark a Public into Being'.

42. Chiara Tornaghi, 'The Relational Ontology of Public Space and Action-Oriented Pedagogy in Action', in *Public Space and Relational Perspectives*, ed. By Chiara Tornaghi and Sabine Knierbein (London: Routledge, 2015).

43. Marres, 'Issues Spark a Public into Being'.

44. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

45. Colin McFarlane, 'Rethinking Informality: Politics, Crisis, and the City', *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13:1 (2012), 89–108.

46. Oren Yiftachel, 'Critical Theory and "Gray Space": Mobilization of the Colonized', *City*, 13:2–3 (2009), 240–56.

47. N. John Habraken, *The Structure of the Ordinary* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

48. Richard Bower, *Architecture and Space Re-imagined: Learning from Difference, Multiplicity, and Otherness of Development Practice* (New York,

NY: Routledge, 2017).

49. Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente* [*The Absent Structure*] (Milan: Bompiani, 1968).

50. George Varna and Steve Tiesdell, 'Assessing the Publicness of Public Space: The Star Model of Publicness', *Journal of Urban Design*, 15:4 (2010), 575–98.

51. Alejandro Aravena, *Reporting from the Front: Biennale Architettura 2016* (Venice: Marsilio, 2016); Andres Lepik, *Small Scale, Big Change: New Architectures of Social Engagement* (New York, NY: MoMA, 2010); Andres Lepik, *Afritecture: Building Social Change* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013).

52. *GAM 14: Exhibiting Matters*, ed. by Milica Tomić and others (Berlin: Jovis, 2018).

53. Marres, 'Issues Spark a Public into Being'.

54. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik: How to Make Things Public', in *Making Things Public – Atmospheres of Democracy Catalogue of the Show at ZKM*, ed. by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 14–41.

55. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik', p. 16.

Illustration credits

arq gratefully acknowledges:
Eveline Althaus, 3a
Cæcilie Andrea Bue, 6
Liv Christensen, 3b
COWI, 1b
ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Bildarchiv-Stiftung Luftbild Schweiz, Friedli, Werner, Christina Ferraiuolo, 1e, 5
Tom Fricker, 1a
Bettina Lamm, 2
LBS_H1-028525, 1d
Lillin Cathrine Knudtzon, 1c, 4

Competing interests

The authors declare none.

Authors' biographies and affiliations

Ellen Braae, architect PhD and Professor in Landscape Architecture at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Project leader of the HERA JPI Public Space in European Social Housing (PuSH).

Henriette Steiner, cultural historian PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and part of the Danish PuSH team.

Svava Riesto, art historian PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, PuSH WP-leader on 'Heritage' and part of the Danish PuSH team.

Marie Glaser, cultural anthropologist PhD, Associate Professor at ETH, Switzerland, leader of the ETH Wohnforum, PuSH WP-leader on 'Policies and practices' for the Swiss team.

Eveline Althaus, social anthropologist PhD, senior researcher at the ETH Wohnforum, Switzerland and part of the Swiss PuSH team.

Liv Christensen, cultural ethnographer, researcher at the ETH Wohnforum, Switzerland and part of the Swiss PuSH team.

Lillin Knudtzon, sociologist PhD, senior researcher at the NMBU, Norway and part of the Norwegian PuSH team.

Melissa Anne Murphy, architect PhD, Associate Professor at the NMBU, Norway, PuSH WP-leader on 'Democracy' for the Norwegian PuSH team.

Inger-Lise Saglie, spatial planner PhD, Professor at the NMBU, Norway and part of the Norwegian PuSH team.

Beata Sirowy, architect PhD, senior researcher at the NMBU, Norway and part of the Norwegian PuSH team.

Bettina Lamm, architect PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark and part of the Danish PuSH team.

Gilda Berruti, urbanist PhD, Associate Professor at the Federico II University, Naples, Italy, and part of the Italian PuSH team.

Maria Cerreta, architect PhD, Associate Professor at the Federico II University, Naples, Italy, and part of the Italian PuSH team.

Laura Lieto, urban planner PhD, Professor at the Federico II University, Naples, Italy, PuSH WP-leader on 'Informalities' for the Italian PuSH team.

Paola Scala, architect PhD, Associate Professor at the Federico II University, Naples, Italy, and part of the Italian PuSH team.

Maria Federica Palestino, urbanist PhD, Professor at the Federico II University, Naples, Italy, and part of the Italian PuSH team.

Marilena Prisco, architect PhD, post doc at the Federico II University, Naples, Italy, and part of the Italian PuSH team.

Anne Tietjen, architect and urban designer PhD, Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, PuSH WP-leader on' Exhibitions as tools' and part of the Danish PuSH team.

Authors' addresses

Ellen Braae, *embra@ign.ku.dk*
Henriette Steiner, *hst@ign.ku.dk*
Svava Riesto, *svri@ign.ku.dk*
Marie Glaser, *glaser@arch.ethz.ch*
Eveline Althaus, *althaus@arch.ethz.ch*
Liv Christensen, *christensen@arch.ethz.ch*
Lillin Knudtzon, *likn@numbu.no*
Melissa Anne Murphy, *melissa.murphy@nmbu.no*
Inger-Lise Saglie, *inger-lise.saglie@nmbu.no*
Beata Sirowy, *beata.sirowy@nmbu.no*
Bettina Lamm, *bela@ign.ku.dk*
Gilda Berruti, *gberruti@unina.it*
Maria Cerreta, *cerreta@unina.it*
Laura Lieto, *lieto@unina.it*
Paola Scala, *paola.scala@unina.it*
Maria Federica Palestino, *palestin@unina.it*
Marilena Prisco, *marilenaprisco@ymail.com*
Anne Tietjen, *atie@ign.ku.dk*