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Public Spaces: Places of Protest, Expression and Social Engagement



Written by **Christele Harrouk**

22 days ago

"Public space" is a legal terminology that tackles the notion of land ownership, suggesting that

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early 2000s to recent Black Lives Matter movements, are altering the world. In times like these, while people still need to "*take their issues to the streets*" to be heard and seen, public spaces have resurfaced as a topic of discussion.

Not limited to its definition, public spaces have always been considered as a place of exchange since the Greek Agoras and the Roman Forums, where men came together and discussed matters of the state. In fact, the concept comes from our need to be connected to others. It's a place of encounters, translating how we practice space in relation to others. It ignites the idea that we are part of a collective effort, that we belong to this world... that we exist.



A public space is a form of democracy. It is a space of freedom of movement, expression, and most importantly, it is our first contact with a city. A mere reflection of the urban fabric, it reveals cultural, economic, and political influences. Diverse, by definition, public space gives us the chance to be different types of people, especially in urban areas.

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informal sidewalk settings, interstitial spaces and an overflow of private spaces onto the public domain.



A physical illustration of the individual and the collective vision, these areas have symbolic values. Scale, location, borders, angles, views, proportions, and artifacts play a role in determining the final outcome of these areas. They could stop time, overwhelm and oppress passersby, intimidate people, and translate power and tyranny. They could also generate a sense of belonging within the citizens of the same territory, cultivate pride, and encourage hangouts.

Along with all these variables, one constant remains unchallenged. Public spaces are places of expression. Some more than others -due to a series of proper factors put together- but all public spaces ins

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Read on to discover public spaces of expression around the world.



The Arab Spring Takes Back the Public Space

“Like the agora, the mosque provided the space in the city where the male, adult population exercised its political rights”, explains Nasser Rabbat in his study entitled [“The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space”](#). Actually, plazas and squares were only introduced in the late 19th century in Arab cities through mandates and colonial authorities. Spatially controlled and planned for military movement, these spaces had no civic meanings until they became the grounds of [revolution](#) and blood. *“In fact, squares such as Tahrir Square in Cairo, Taghyir (Change) Square in Sana'a, and Sahat al-Sa'a (Square of the Clock, renamed Freedom Square) in Homs have come to frame the Arab revolutions and to represent their exuberance and anguish at the same time”,* stated Rabbat.

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As governments around the world understand the threat that the public space itself generates, they often exercise pressure, barricade, and control these areas, in order to silence these movements. In Egypt, Tahrir Square was a constant reminder of the powerful control the regime had over public spaces; and [Tunisia's](#) Habib Bourguiba Avenue, the main stage of the 2011 Tunisian Revolution, was a space that “*reflects the power, control, and prohibition of protests during 23 years of dictatorship*”, according to Josh Sanburn in [Time](#). On another hand, Pearl Roundabout in [Bahrain](#) and Green Square in [Tripoli](#) have benefited from a lack of state surveillance, to gather numbers of protestors.

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Beirut Reclaims its Streets

With a lack of public spaces in [Lebanon](#), making up only 0.5% of [Beirut](#) according to the UN-Habitat, the Lebanese people took back the remaining few public areas and [reclaimed their streets](#) with the start of the October 17 [revolution](#). People invaded highways, [Beirut's](#) Martyrs' and Riad Solh squares, as well as adjacent parking lots, to create their own space of resilience, bringing people back to a once privatized city.

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Public and Semipublic Spaces for Black Lives Matter Movement

During Black Lives Matter protests, [New York City's Central Park](#), Times Square, the [National Mall](#) in Washington D.C., Union Park in [Chicago](#), downtown [Philadelphia](#), [Minneapolis](#), [San Francisco](#), [Seattle](#), and [Los Angeles](#) are some of the public spaces engaged. In addition to the public domain, an [initiative](#) is soliciting art lobbies around the country to open up and become “public spaces”, asking museums, theaters, and other art centers to be spaces for rest for protesters.

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European Squares of Resistance

The [Red Square](#) in [Moscow](#) was the scene of the 1968 demonstration against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In 2011, Puerta del Sol in Madrid held the 15-M Movement, and in 2014, Maidan Nezalezhnosti in [Kyiv](#) was at the center of the Ukrainian Euromaidan Revolution. Other European spaces of protests include Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz and Alexanderplatz in [Berlin](#), Piazza Duomo in [Milan](#), Academician Sakharov Avenue, and Pushkin Square in [Moscow](#), Heroes square in [Budapest](#), and Place de la Republique and Place de la Bastille in [Paris](#), both heavily animated during the “Gilets Jaunes” protests.

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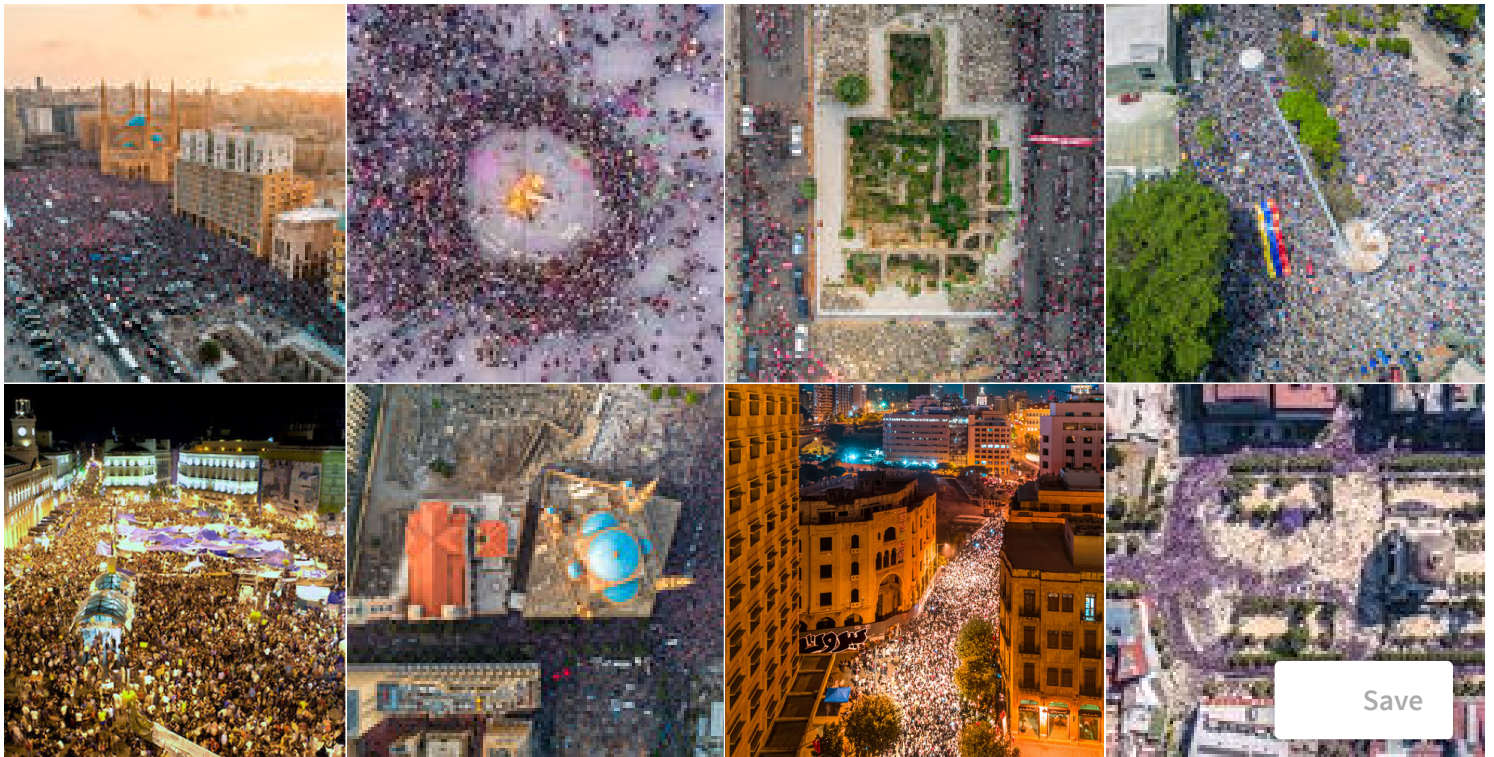
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Protest

- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Cinelandia
- Brasilia, Brazil: Eixo Monumental, Praça dos Três Poderes, both designed for protests
- Buenos Aires, Argentina: Plaza del Congreso
- Caracas, Venezuela: Plaza Venezuela
- Mexico City, Mexico: Zócalo, [Paseo de la Reforma](#), [Plaza de la Republica](#)
- Kenya: Uhuru Park, Nairobi
- Ethiopia: Meskel Square, Addis Ababa
- Gambia: Westfield intersection, traffic light intersection.
- New Delhi, India: [National War memorial](#) next to India gate
- Tehran, Iran: Azadi Square
- Istanbul, Turkey: Taksim Square
- Toronto, Canada: City hall

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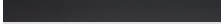
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Jerome Morley Larson Sr. • 21 days ago

Captions on the pictures would really be helpful; look up old 1950 issues of LIFE magazine to see how to communicate; this was awful!

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Livon Diramerian • 21 days ago

Public spaces better be healthy, safe, comfortable, friendly, natural, humane, and created by the participation of the people to reflect their needs.

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oaqui1957 • 21 days ago

Congresos

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Very smart to reflect on the subject. Due to the massiveness one believes that that of his city, of his country is where it is produced the most but the truth is that they are produced in all places. Especially from the use of social networks, WhatsApp to convene them and Tweeter to organize them. Not all of them mean the same thing, while in Puerta del Sol they protested against a right-wing government, in Buenos Aires we did so against socialism. In addition to the Plaza de los Congregos, we usually use 9 de Julio Avenue and of course the Plaza de Mayo, the square that Perón and Eva Duarte began to use for this.

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