Regenerating and marketing cities and their 'public' spaces: A British way

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Public spaces, which have been one of the crucial parts of cities for centuries, have become subject to broad concern for more than two decades. Particularly under the shadow of globalisation and privatisation, attractive and alluring public spaces have been placed at the centre of the major 'world cities', and the 'old-industrial cities' competing to find new niches in the urban markets. Starting from the late-1970s, the significance of public spaces has also been increasingly recognised in Britain, particularly through a number of flagship projects pioneered by the Conservative Governments in order to revitalise and regenerate the derelict lands of industrial estates, declining waterfronts and city centres. In the 1990s, the Labour Governments have also increasingly promoted the importance of 'well-designed' and 'well-maintained' public spaces, as well as the improvement of declining and decaying public realms in cities, by publishing new policy documents, generating new funds and launching new public space schemes. As well as the central government, a number of local authorities have shown their concern about public spaces by preparing plans with emphasis on imaginative investment in the public realm through the provision of art, landscaping and public facilities, the creation and maintenance of the vitality of city streets and the enhancement of public streets. This recent rising interest is a promising sign for the British cities and their public spaces, which had suffered from decline and decay for a while. Nevertheless, it raises remarkable questions about the 'publicness' of the new-generation public spaces. Following these questions, this paper investigates the problem of the 'publicness' of the public spaces in Britain in the 1990s with a special reference to Newcastle upon Tyne.

This paper puts forth a model which enables us to measure different extents of the 'publicness' of public spaces through the three criteria; i.e., 'access', 'actor' and 'interest'. Using this model and based on a case-study method, this paper examines the Grey's Monument Area, one of the busiest and most lively public spaces of the city centre of Newcastle. The Grey's Monument Area has been redeveloped in the 1990s within the Grainger Town Project which aims at regenerating the nineteenth-century historical core of the city centre. The scheme which has remarkably changed Grey Street and its surroundings represents one of the prominent public space improvement schemes in the city centre. As a public space, it also provides a fine example which is promoted as cultural and historical legacy of the city in order to construct new images of Newcastle as the 'capital of the North-East of England', 'service city', 'working city' and 'city of culture'. The investigation of the 'publicness' of the Grey's Monument Area starts with the description of the 'publicness' of the public space before the recent development scheme took place. Then, it summarises the development story of the public space, while the third part focuses on the end-product of the recent public realm improvement scheme and investigates the 'publicness' of the newly developed public space through the three criteria mentioned above. The investigation seeks to show that, the new GMA has become a remarkably good-looking and well-maintained, but less 'public' space. More specifically, this paper tries to point out the decrease in the variety and diversity of user groups after the recent development scheme; and it underlines the reduction in the physical accessibility of the public space. Additionally, it seeks to show that the new public space has become an environment which favours the public interest less than it used to do, while serving the private interest more than it used to do. Finally, this paper outlines the major lessons which should be taken through the conclusions of this case study.