

**Places/Spaces of Celebration and Protest:
Citizenship, Civic Conversations and the Promotion
of Rights and Obligations**

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Résumé

Les lieux bâtis/espaces ont été depuis longtemps des lieux réservés aux conversations civiques ainsi qu' l'engagement des citoyens à exercer leurs droits à célébrer, protester ainsi qu'à témoigner. Deux propositions fondamentales concernant les conversations civiques, intérêts collectifs ainsi que les droits et obligations des citoyens sont offertes. Les urbanistes sont encouragés à créer des lieux et espaces reliés à des conversations civiques, éléments importants pour favoriser des sociétés décentes. Les conversations civiques font partie d'un milieu élargi dans lequel les citoyens mènent leur vie, et les commentaires de Taylor sur le "Malaise du Modernisme" est suggéré comme un défi contemporain pour les urbanistes qui recherchent à construire des lieux/espaces afin que les citoyens puissent exprimer leurs opinions sur le monde. Nous présentons aussi des brefs commentaires sur la citoyenneté qui fournissent des éléments pour une meilleure compréhension de la planification des lieux/espaces. On suggère aux urbanistes de trouver des méthodes créatives afin de fournir l'accès aux lieux virtuels/espaces plutôt qu'aux traditionnels lieux/espaces, ceci afin que la récente tendance en technologie reliée à Internet puisse complimenter les lieux publics traditionnels où les citoyens se réunissent.

Des publications reliées à "*spaces of technological citizenship*" comme lieux virtuels/espaces pour des conversations civiques sont identifiés. Est ce que ces initiatives peuvent engendrer des conversations civiques actives ainsi que des nou-

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veaux rôles pour les citoyens afin d'influencer les résultats sur leur qualité de vie? Finalement nous explorons les difficultés de réconciliation impérative concernant les droits et obligations de régler et planifier lieux/espaces de telle manière que tous les citoyens soient encouragés à s'engager dans des conversations civiques pour aborder les besoins et désirs collectifs et individuels.

Mots clés: onversations civiques, lieux bâtis/espaces, lieux virtuels, Internet, citoyenneté

Abstract

Built places/spaces have long been sites for civic conversations and the engagement of citizens to exercise their rights to celebrate, protest and bear witness. Two basic propositions concerning civic conversations, collective interests, as well as rights and obligations of citizens are offered. Planners are encouraged to promote places/spaces for civic conversations as important elements to promote decent societies. Civic conversations are part of the broader milieu in which citizens conduct their lives, and the comments by Taylor on the malaise of modernity is suggested as a challenging contemporary context for planners as they seek to provide places/spaces for citizens to express opinions about the world. We also offer brief comments about citizenship, which provide further contextual material for an understanding of the planning of places/spaces. It is suggested that planners need to find creative ways to provide access to virtual places/spaces from physical places/spaces so that recent trends in technology using the Internet can complement the traditional public sites where citizens congregate.

Issues relating to *spaces of technological citizenship* as virtual places/spaces for civic conversations are identified. Can such initiatives engender active civic conversations, and new roles for citizens to influence outcomes on the quality of life? Finally, we explore the difficulties of reconciling imperatives regarding rights and obligations, and to regulating and planning places/spaces, so that all citizens will be encouraged to engage in civic conversations to tackle collective and individual needs and wants.

Key words: Civic conversations, built spaces/places, virtual spaces, Internet, citizenship

Introduction

Built places/spaces have long been sites for civic conversations and the engagement of citizens to exercise their rights to celebrate, protest or bear witness. In

this paper we argue that such places/spaces deserve to be promoted by planners among others to encourage civic conversations about the state of the world, and to provide citizens, agencies of the state and the media with the opportunity to hear the views of others. At the outset we suggest that built places/spaces are part of land use planning, and among the consequences of such planning efforts are the opportunities for such physical sites to be appropriate ones for citizens to actively participate in expressing opinions about the society in which they live. In this paper we also refer to virtual places/spaces as sites of growing importance for civic conversations and discussions. Places/spaces *per se* are insufficient to ensure active civic conversations, hence we mention some contextual material which planners should be aware of as they plan places/spaces with a view to encouraging civic conversations. We suggest that physical sites should complement virtual sites of civic engagement.

Hedges (2008, 175) passionately presents a view of places and citizenship that planners cannot ignore, and which we suggest deserves close attention:

We have been robbed of the physical spaces where we could once carry out meaningful discourse and debate, where we could participate in our society as citizens. Community centers, village squares and town meetings, the public spaces that made democratic participation possible, have been replaced by privatized spaces, by shopping malls, where we are permitted to enter as consumers and forbidden to enter as citizens. The privatization of public space has pushed us into the lonely virtual worlds of television and the Internet. It has cut us off from others. These isolated, deadening virtual worlds are curious hybrids. They give us the illusion of being part of a powerful (although anonymous) community. Sentimental drama and tawdry spectacle, from 'reality' television shows to huge sporting events and saccharine musicals, fill the empty caverns of our inner life. These spectacles have become a common cultural experience and provide the common vocabulary for communication. We sit for hours alone in front of screens. We are enraptured by bread and circuses. And while we sit mesmerized, corporations steadily dismantle the democratic state. We are kept ignorant and entertained.

The notion that citizens could and should be part of planning is a recent one in the history of urban development. Hall (1998) in his magnum opus on *Cities and Civilization* makes it abundantly clear that many times throughout history, innovations and creative ideas that had enormous repercussions on the lives of citizens were the results of authoritative actions by so-called enlightened imaginative individuals. Would Venice or Florence, for example, have been planned as

successfully if citizen participation been part of the process? In this paper we will not debate the general role of citizen involvement in the creative processes of innovation in cities, but accept the view that citizens in the contemporary world typically feel entitled to comment on actions by their governments. This view harks back in England "... on rights supposedly secured by the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 which allows for the people to question those who govern, no matter how uncomfortable this might be for the State" (Tate Museum 2008). States have a variety of means, ranging from the introduction of fairly benign measures, to the use of force and military might, to curtail such efforts by citizens to express critical opinions about actions of the state. On occasions the media are prevented from viewing places/spaces where citizens are protesting or bearing witness. The legitimacy of such actions is much debated, and a lively discussion is currently underway in many countries about the conflicts between the rights of the state to set limits on actions by citizens, and the rights of citizens to criticize the state.¹

Two basic normative propositions are offered in this paper as our starting point in the discussion.

First, the protection and improvement of rights (economic, social, cultural, environmental, human) for citizens requires *inter alia* the promotion of civic conversations among citizens as a requisite obligation of citizenship.

Second, that places/spaces can contribute to opportunities for civic conversations regarding attitudes and policies that relate to rights and outcomes that influence quality of life (QOL).

For the purposes of this paper the concept of *civic conversation* embraces two basic elements:

- The conversations are among all citizens, not just those in cities, and typically include matters that concern the individual in the context of the state, and other citizens, whether family, friends, colleagues, neighbours or strangers. The conversations may be face-to-face or via electronic means and the Internet, for example.
- Non-coercion and the right of non-violent expression and assembly characterize the setting for the conversations which can take the form of demonstrations of celebration or protest, and as such typically involve a crowd of citizens and the state. However, civic conversations can also be defined as between the citizens and the state via demonstrations of individual citizens.

As the lives of citizens become more complex, civic conversations are no longer confined to official or designated public spaces, therefore, it is important

to update our understanding of where citizens can interact with planners and others. The following list, for example, provides a clear taxonomy of five distinct layers of civic life in a community in which civic conversations may occur (Pew Centre 2008).²

1. Official

The layer of official politics and institutions in a community. People in the community engage this layer through such places as city council meetings and public hearings.

2. Quasi-Official

The layer made up of organizations and people who are involved with citizen associations, local municipal leagues, advocacy groups and other groups.

3. Third Places

The layer of civic conversations and spaces where people gather to talk and do things together. Third places include churches and synagogues, community socials, barber shops, diners, child care centres.

4. Incidental

The layer of civic life where people interact informally on sidewalks, at the market, in backyards. Here people bump into one another.

5. Private

The layer that occurs in the privacy of people's homes.

An elaboration of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) in the modern age is provided in the Proceedings of the First International Conference of CIDESC (International Centre on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 2008) held in Lisbon in 2005 (Harland 2006). As the evidence suggests ESCR activities link to the broader and more significant set of human rights as elaborated in many documents and initiatives stemming from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights signed on December 10th 1948: details are provided on (United Nations 2008). A brilliant overview of *human rights as practice* is offered by Kurasawa (2007). He elaborates five fundamental topics (bearing witness, forgiveness, foresight, aid and solidarity) that contrast sharply with the traditional view that rights are determined by judicial process. We suggest that places/spaces have significant roles to play in the implementation of most of the topics. Clearly civic conversations are critical to support the bottom-up approach to rights argued for so cogently by Kurasawa (2007). Physical places/spaces do indeed provide sites for bearing witness and for manifestations by citizens about the state of the world, and virtual places/spaces are increasingly important tools for organising such demonstration of celebration, protest and solidarity.

Following this brief introduction we will offer comments on selected physical and built places/spaces which are primarily public in nature, and have been sites for civic conversations and the engagement of citizens to exercise their rights to assembly and the free expression of views. We provide brief comments on the work of the organization *Project for Public Spaces*, and suggest reasons why such physical sites have declined in popularity for the promotion of civic conversations in many societies with the rise of consumerism and what has been called the *individualization of society*. Comments on the *malaise of modernity* as defined by the celebrated Canadian philosopher Taylor will be presented in the next section. The planning of places/spaces must take cognition of the new milieu in which citizens live their lives. No longer is the world as in earlier times when gatherings of citizens occurred in places/spaces of markets, boulevards, and arcades for example, and politics and news were topics of conversation, and the physical places/spaces were the sites for exchanging information about the world. Hence we encourage planners to take changes due to modernity into account when developing policies. Following that, an overview of views about citizenship as an emerging concept of identity and rights as well as responsibilities will be presented. We will offer comments on the concept of citizenship that embraces rights and obligations, and impinges on the encouragement of individuals to devote time and effort to exchange thoughts with others about the world, to influence collective choices and to provide checks and balances on the actions of those agencies that are the foci of power and influence in the modern age. Access to places/spaces by citizens is an important element for promoting full citizenship.

In the subsequent section recent initiatives to engage citizens using virtual places/spaces which do not involve face-to-face interactions in the traditional sense are described. Such sites allow strangers and friends to exchange words and images about collective interests and engage in conversations about individual needs and wants. The concepts relating to *spaces of technological citizenship*, as developed by Frankenfeld (1992), will be explored. More specifically, we address the question of whether or not such initiatives can engender active civic conversations, and new roles for citizens to influence outcomes, and promote improved levels of accountability of the players and organizations whose acts may have very significant effects on collective interests, and the quality of life of individuals, and more generally, pervasive consequences on the planet and our species.

Finally we will identify a small set of imperatives regarding rights and obligations which are challenging for citizens and states to reconcile, and which demand *inter alia* civic conversations in physical and virtual places/spaces so that citizens in Canada and other countries will be more actively engaged in asserting and satisfying their economic, social and cultural rights as important elements of their human rights, and take individual and collective responsibility for the future.

Built Public Places/Spaces

As planners it is important to examine the relationship between individuals, groups and places/spaces, to investigate, for example, the ways in which the interactions among individuals can be influenced by places/spaces, and how in turn individuals and groups interact with the places/spaces themselves. After all, every form of civic conversation or act of protest or celebration is contained within a specific place or space whether it is a public park or online forum. Throughout this section, examples will be given that illustrate the different connotations places/spaces hold for individuals and how the state, through policies, controls and regulates public places/spaces.³

Typically, in public places/spaces life may appear to be on public display, yet often many of the feelings and conversations of individuals may well be hidden from view, and the contents of conversations unknown, uncensored and private. Ideally one might hope that the conversations are on occasion about matters of collective interest, rather than narrow personal ones. However, given the rising emphasis on individualism that has been recognized by many including Taylor (1991), and the trends we will discuss in the following section regarding contemporary society, it is lamented that insufficient effort is made by significant numbers of citizens to be concerned about collective interests and the lives of strangers. The challenge for planners and concerned citizens is to promote and increase access and use of places/spaces to promote civic conversations that reverse this trend.⁴

Heneff and Strong (2001, 1) provide a careful and incisive overview and analysis, using literature from the classical period as well as the contemporary scene, to examine "...the nature of the space in which human beings encounter each other with the intention of determining how their lives in common shall be lived." They remind us that this topic is perhaps "...the oldest of political questions" and in western thought dates back to the second book in Homer's *Odyssey*. Their overview chapter on 'The conditions of public spaces: vision, speech, and theatricality' that introduces a series of essays by respected authors uses Cicero's quotation *Res publica est res populi* to head the chapter: a quotation that has been examined many times by philosophers and legal scholars as to its relevance and place in understanding human behaviour and collective action, and legitimate authority. Heneff and Strong (2001, 2) assert that apart from being *public*, space may be *private*, *sacred*, or *common*, and they offer a simple taxonomy of such spaces with the two basic dimensions on axes that describe ownership: OPEN or OWNED and HUMAN or DIVINE aspects of place. They argue that public space is

a human construct, for example, "...Saint Mark's Place Venice is a public space; the alleys and canals are not" (2001, 5). Further, they examine the effects of modern technology such as film, television and communications on the qualities and possibilities for civic conversations in public space. The boundaries and nature of public space are becoming *virtual* in some respects: strangers are connected in communities that never have face-to-face contacts. Perhaps planners can envisage access points to virtual places/spaces in the physical setting of physical places/spaces. This requires Internet connections and the suitable location of tables and shelter, for example. Thus physical places/spaces can be associated with virtual places/spaces as a result of careful and imaginative planning. The organization *Project for Public Spaces* (PPS) offers a detailed web site with information on the attributes of successful public spaces, the reasons why some fail or succeed, and examples from around the world. It asserts, after Winston Churchill, that: "First we shape our buildings [places/spaces]: thereafter they shape us" (PPS 2008). Planners should consider this claim as they design places/spaces.

However, PPS fails to reflect key changes and debates currently facing planners. There is no mention, for example, of the feasibility of integrating physical and virtual places/spaces. We will return to this deficiency in the final section where we suggest that planners have the responsibility and potential to modernize their approaches to place/space planning with regard to providing successful public places/spaces that provide opportunities for civic engagement and conversations. Moreover, although the focus of the PPS project is on the western city, Lefebvre (1991, 286) reminds us that in all societies "Space is permeated with social relations: it is not only supported by social relations but it is also producing and produced by social relations."⁵

The following three sections present some of the debates and challenges planners are currently facing, in different contexts and at different scales, while also serving as a reminder that planners have always been forced to adapt to the changing world around them. It has been long recognized by planners, architects and citizens that public spaces, squares and plazas (i.e. civic spaces) are important elements in the life of all communities. From his classic book on 'great good places' Oldenburg's (1999, xxvii) opening sentence is worth quoting: "Great civilizations, like great cities, share a common feature. Evolving within them and crucial to their growth and refinement are distinctive informal gathering places." Similarly, Oldenburg (2001) argues that a healthy vibrant society needs 'third places' to complement the 'first places' of home, and the 'second places' of work where people can congregate. The 'third place' such as the square, park, piazza or the plaza is

the less formal setting for social intercourse, as civic conversations, that is so necessary for civil society and social life to achieve a balance in an age of work and consumption. However, Banerjee (2001) asserts that public space is shrinking, and the future of such spaces that are necessary for civility to flourish must confront three major trends of privatization, globalization and the communications revolution.

Although the outcomes of social interaction in public spaces are not always intended, the planning of public spaces, whether for civic or recreational purposes, dates back to the founding of early cities and empires. Planned squares, which are clearly recognized as such, appeared in ancient Greece from the fifth century BC, for example. Furthermore, the diffusion among civilizations over space and time of the idea of incorporating civic spaces into a city plan is elaborated in Zucker (1966), and other writers such as Cleary (1999) have focused either on specific squares (Places Royales in France) in particular countries and cities, or on the effects of open spaces on the quality of life of citizens. Perhaps the most well known writer in this latter regard is Olmsted who is credited by Fabos et al. (1968) as the founder of landscape architecture in America and as a remarkable planner of urban parks and open spaces.⁶

In the Canadian context, the *Globe and Mail* critic Rochon (2003) offers a critical appraisal of the architectural planning of selected spaces/places that could potentially contribute to increased social interactions and civic conversations. The title of her three-part series is “Place and Placelessness”, and the articles overtly identify the fact that without careful planning some public spaces fail as places where people congregate and feel a sense of belonging as well as safe, secure and at ease. She makes no mention of ways to connect physical places/spaces with virtual ones in ways we mention earlier.⁷ Clearly planners have a responsibility to promote public spaces/places as sites for celebration, protest and for bearing witness, as well as for sharing social interactions and recreation.

Recognizing that public spaces are planned it is important to consider the ways in which the activities and the behaviour of groups and individuals within places/spaces can be monitored and controlled. Although it has traditionally been the individual who seemingly wanders aimlessly around the square, the tramp, the drifter, the ‘misfit’ may be watched and scrutinized closely as a potential risk or threat to others. Public spaces have always been exclusionary and the degree of state surveillance and control has increased in recent years. In 1906, for example, the Open Spaces Act in the UK offered a set of bylaws under section 15 that clearly defined acceptable public behaviour in the parks and public squares in London.

Almost 100 years later, in 2005, the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act (SOCPA) was passed by the Parliament in London. To illustrate the spatial nature of this instrument of state control, we present the case of Maya Evans, who was the first person to be charged under section 132 of the SOCPA, which requires protestors to obtain police permission before demonstrating within one kilometre of the House of Commons/Parliament (Tate Museum 2008). When Maya Evans exercised her right to free speech by reading out the names of the 97 British soldiers who had died in Iraq outside the zone, nothing happened. When she took one step forward and entered the one kilometre boundary around the House of Commons/Parliament and read out the same 97 names, however, she was arrested. This one example can be seen in similar forms in cities all over the world, and is indicative of the increasing tensions between individuals and the state over rights and behaviours in a public place/space.⁸

It is evident that the role of public places/spaces for civic conversations has changed very significantly in recent years due in no small measure to the evolving characteristics of contemporary societies. Planners need to be creative and find ways to combine traditional ways of designing public places/spaces with the new technologies that provide citizens with access to virtual places/spaces. Before we explore some of the concepts regarding virtual places/spaces in a later section we will devote the next two brief sections to matters concerning the contexts for planning places/spaces. Specifically we will elaborate some concepts concerning the modern age and behaviour of individuals, and then provide remarks about the emerging notions of citizenship. Planners need to be aware of these matters as they seek creative ways to plan places/spaces.

Modernity: Opportunities Create Tensions

The civic conversations in the places/spaces we are concerned with occur within the contemporary setting of the world, and in this section we offer some comments on the topic of this setting. We begin with brief remarks from the work of the celebrated Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2008) and his writings on *The Malaise of Modernity*. Basically, he asserts that three interwoven features affect the contemporary world. Each illustrates the so-called advances that are occurring in human society while recognizing the downside of each, and the consequences on individual behaviour, political involvement by citizens and the potential for conversations about matters of collective interest, and individual wants and needs.

1. *Individualism*: this is a fine achievement of modern civilization but it can yield a loss of heroic dimension to life and a higher purpose; centring on self flattens and narrows life and there can be less concern for others.

2. *Instrumental reason*: this is a kind of rationality to achieve measurable outcomes with the dominance of technology but a loss of resonance, depth, or richness in human surroundings can occur, making the market and the state increasingly powerful.

3. *Political consequences*: de Tocqueville noted that individuals are often ‘enclosed in their own hearts’—they enjoy private life as long as governments produce the means of satisfaction and there is low participation in politics by citizens.

It is important for planners to understand each of these features of modernity, as they generate new challenges for those who try to promote civic conversations in specific places/spaces.

Recent important work by Putnam (2007), using detailed empirical data for the USA relating to communities, co-operation and trust argues that as a society becomes more ethnically diverse, as is certainly the case in Canadian cities, in the short run this is leading to reduced social capital: trust is lowered, communication and co-operation are rarer and friends are fewer. Planners need to be aware of these trends as they plan new and improved places/spaces, where it is hoped that some of the energy of citizens will be devoted to addressing issues of collective interest via civic conversations, in a milieu of security and acceptance of ethnic differences among citizens. The consequences of a reduction of social capital are perhaps that collective interests are not a focus of attention as group and individual interests prevail. The promotion of civic conversations in places/spaces within and between ethnic groups is to be encouraged to build trust among and within ethnic communities. Recently Barber (2007) has supported the need for increasing awareness of changes in social capital and the need for creative careful planning in Toronto to tackle some of these consequences of ethnic diversity.

One of the defining characteristics of the modern age involves considerable efforts by individuals and governments to delineate the concepts of belonging and citizenship in a global and ever changing world. In the following section we will address selected points regarding citizenship. Planners need to be responsive to the ways in which citizens define their sense of belonging, so that when places/spaces are designed with the intent to promote civic conversations, matters of identity, security and acceptance of others are taken into account. These are complex matters and no easy solutions exist but we suggest planners pay attention to the emerging literature in these fields.

Some Views on Citizenship

The word citizenship invokes an enormous variety of responses from laypersons, academics and politicians among others. The word *citizenship* is part and parcel of the contemporary world of identity politics and planning, where rights are as-

serted especially by some interest groups, and supported by laws and sanctions, yet obligations are less easy to identify and enforce. Both rights and obligations are critical to a healthy state in which civic conversations occur. Planners can help in this project through efforts to design places/spaces for such conversations.

Traditional definitions of citizenship imply membership within a political community (originally a city or town but now usually a state). Moreover the term *active citizenship* implies working toward the betterment of one's community through economic participation, public service, volunteer work and other such efforts to improve life for all citizens. In recent years, however, and especially within the context of Canada's multicultural framework, individuals do not automatically associate their citizenship with a nation but rather smaller fragmented communities based on cultural, professional, recreational and spatial identities. Places/spaces can play significant roles as locations for citizens to gather and feel secure and able to share views about the world, and their wants and needs. Can planners design such places/spaces so that citizens from different ethnic backgrounds feel equally secure to mix and mingle in a shared place/space?

Putnam (1995) asserts that the rise of individualism is creating more and more isolation in society, and a lessening of responsibilities and engagements with problems that confront others and the collectivity. He notes that citizenship in a civic community is marked by active participation in public affairs, interest in public issues and devotion to public causes. All are key signs of civic virtue. Citizens in a civic community, on most accounts, are more than merely active, public-spirited, and equal. Virtuous citizens are helpful, respectful, and trustful toward one another, even when they differ on matters.

While Canada's diversity can be seen as a strength, with the celebration of diversity and tolerance of differences, it can also be considered a challenge for planners to contribute to nation building and collective will because of the lack of a single culturally-defined identity that binds.

This brings us to the questions of what makes a good citizen and what actions can be taken by planners to promote citizenship.⁹ As mentioned earlier, citizenship is often associated with rights and entitlements for individuals, but what about the corresponding duties and obligations individuals should ideally perform to be considered as a good citizen? Furthermore, how can rights be enforced and responsibilities encouraged, and what role is played by face-to-face and virtual civic conversations as part of being a good citizen? Such conversations take place at school, work, cultural events, 'third spaces' or increasingly via virtual forums such as *chat rooms* and *blogs*. The contents of exchanges are a matter of debate and concern as censorship and freedom of expression are subject to controls, and issues of accountability are currently being considered. How much regulation lies within the purview of the state, and how much responsibility resides with the authors of commentaries that are available on the Internet?

Spaces of Technological Citizenship

In the 21st century a discussion of places/spaces would not be complete without mention of virtual spaces where individuals can meet and interact without actually being together. The spaces of the web and Internet provide opportunities and challenges for strangers to be connected. This new phenomenon of connecting strangers and friends using computers is a new and emerging feature of contemporary society.

The role of the Internet to empower citizens and cause governments and agencies of the state to be more responsive is the general topic explored by Fountain (2001). She argues that citizens must be informed of all aspects of the Internet to ensure they do not lose control over the institutions that employ such technology. Will citizens be willing and able to undertake this daunting task and act in common to protect their rights as individuals and as a collective? Perhaps the gathering of citizens in informal settings such as cyber cafes, third spaces of the Oldenburg (1999, 2001) kind, will contribute positively to link virtual public spaces and strangers with real places.

Earlier we have suggested that planners need to be creative to help provide access to virtual places/spaces from physical places/spaces. We suggest that while virtual places/spaces must be incorporated into modern planning policies, planners must also mediate the potential loss of traditional public spaces caused by new technologies. Besser (2008) argues that large scale economic forces contribute to the elimination of public spaces that allow culture and politics to flourish and such forces "...have launched a full-scale attack on public information spaces, many of which exist on the Internet" His article "...uses the disappearance of public spaces in cities as a metaphor for the disappearance of public spaces in cyberspace." Besser asserts that the consequences are a direct assault on "...free speech, artistic endeavour, and entire way of life" as copyright law assaults the public domain to turn all information into commodities. In a related intellectual vein the urban critic and social thinker Jacobs (2004) in her recent book encourages all citizens to remember the past, and fight against collective forgetting of the consequences on the human condition of events not talked about when people congregate. The absence of opportunities to congregate assists in collective forgetting. Public spaces are places for citizens to congregate and bear witness to past events of both a positive and negative nature.

Just as the importance of sense of place has survived the 'death of distance' or 'placelessness' assault brought about by information and communication technologies, the claim that virtual public spaces will destroy the spirit of the street is not entirely true. While Andrews (2006) acknowledges that citizenship is played out in civic spaces, and that the use of physical places and face-to-face interactions are declining, he argues that digital spaces on the web are emerging to fill the void. In

fact, here is evidence that online forums and blogs are actually helping to build trust and civic engagement in communities. In artistic and activist communities, for example, online forums are spatially rooted in specific neighbourhoods and serve to enable conversations between individuals engaged in common projects or struggles. Participants, who because of hectic schedules, may not be available to meet in person. Virtual spaces can be seen as a modern tool to solve some of the problems of modernity, in that they have the potential to reconnect individuals to various communities of citizens.

It is important to recognize that the notion of 'technological citizenship', which was initially introduced by Frankenfeld (1992), and the use of virtual spaces described by Andrews (2006) bring with them a new set of potential problems and questions regarding the relationship between individuals and the state. Andrews (2006) argues that a major challenge to the use of the Internet as a format for civic conversation lies with matters of the tyranny of censorship. Who controls the content of civic conversations among strangers? What kinds of regulations are feasible to ensure reasonable levels of accountability regarding the content of information exchanged? Questions regarding censorship, accountability and availability of information via the Internet abound.

Frankenfeld argues there are distinct elements associated with technological citizenship and civic conversations using the Internet, for example: he identifies a set of rights and duties of citizens to ensure that civic conversations in virtual space are beneficial to society. Specifically he asserts four rights:

- Citizens should have access to information
- Citizens should participate in public decisions
- Citizens should give informed consent
- Citizens should accept a reasonable level of risk involved.

The following three duties of a citizen are that each person should:

- Achieve technological literacy
- Engage with problems of the day
- Protect the public good.

Barney (2007) has elaborated a number of highly significant aspects of technological citizenship which must engage the attention of planners and others in the modern world. He invites us to: "... consider many important issues: how are we used by technology (rather than how we use technology)? How does it affect the practice of political judgment by citizens in a democracy? How engaged are we as citizens in determining the direction in which technology goes? What do we think about its unintended consequences and social implications?" According to Hancock's introductory remarks to the public lecture by Barney (2007) on the topic:

One Nation Under Google: Citizenship in the Technological Republic, “He [Barney] helps us to create stronger, more nuanced notions of citizenship and the readiness not only to participate in the democratic life of our country but also to shape it.”

The Internet and virtual places/spaces are potentially highly significant and influential components in the modern world regarding public discourse. Their importance as a means of personal and mass communications cannot be understated or ignored. Planners are challenged to find appropriate ways to encourage the use of the Internet to promote active debate about public matters. We believe that this is a worthy topic for deliberation at professional meetings of planners and within the curriculum of planning education. Further, we suggest that planners seek to encourage governments to provide Internet access as a public good. At this stage of development of this new means of communication it is yet to be made clear how the potential of the Internet can in fact enhance significantly, and in meaningful ways, public debate, and contribute to celebrations, demonstrations and bearing witness that improve rights and QOL for all.

Reconciling Imperatives: Can Civic Conversations Help?

In this concluding section we assert that the basic imperatives of citizenship involve rights and obligations, and that civic conversations among citizens are necessary to tackle questions regarding the reconciliation of imperatives of living in the modern world.

Planners and others have responsibility to help design places/spaces to promote opportunities for civic conversations as part of the general project to enhance QOL for all in both the short and long run. While governments and agents of the state act on behalf of the citizenry, it is appropriate that as many citizens as possible make their views known to those who make decisions that affect the collective. With this in mind we identify below a set of five elements or imperatives of the contemporary civic state, each paired with somewhat contradictory tendencies. Comments on the civic state are given in Massam (2000).

1. Citizens assert rights – citizens have obligations
2. Citizens seek security – citizens seek liberty and freedom
3. Citizens assert individual rights – citizens contemplate collective rights
4. Citizens are concerned about the present – citizens contemplate the future
5. Citizens are concerned about us and we – citizens contemplate the situations of strangers and unknown others.

There are tensions within each pair of the five imperatives, and we argue that civic conversations can contribute positively toward the search for a degree of reconciliation among the imperatives for a society. Planners may be able to assist this initiative in some measure by designing appropriate places/spaces.

To return to the PPS project, we argue that its values and applications are out-dated, and do not reflect the current milieu of civic engagement. Furthermore, as we have already suggested, the project offers comments about how citizens connect and interact without mentioning the rapidly expanding role of communications technologies and the impact of virtual places/spaces. While traditional elements of planning, which focus on the physical aspects of the built world through land use efforts and initiatives remain important, the time is ripe for planners to seek new and imaginative ways to construct places/spaces which accommodate access to virtual places/spaces with physical ones. A specific suggestion in this regard is to ensure the access to the Internet in public places/spaces via wireless connections. Already in some places/spaces such as coffee shops, Internet cafés, plazas, malls, parks and commons wireless connections are available. We now observe individuals sitting in such locations, sometimes engaging in conversations with their neighbours, and using their computers to receive and send information from elsewhere.

Finally we assert that: “The pursuit of civil society as the key to building effective civic states and a global civic order to promote justice and sustainable human existence seems to me to be perhaps the single most challenging task facing humanity” (Massam 1996, under “Preface”). Planners have an obligation to share responsibility with other professions and organizations, as well as with citizens, to contribute to this debate through their efforts to design places/spaces that serve the noble end of developing meaningful civil societies.

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Notes

¹ In Toronto the poet laureate di Cicco (2008) has argued, and tried to persuade citizens in his poems and speeches, that *civic discussions* should be part of the planning process in the city to engage citizens and politicians in the project to improve the QOL for all.

² Some further information about the notions of civic conversation, public space and civic obligations are provided in the recent article by Stein (2007).

³ The January/February 2008 publication of the Canadian magazine *The Walrus* features a series of short reviews of some important places/spaces, which have been sites of highly significant celebrations and protests, including Place de la Concorde (Paris), Plaza de Mayo (Buenos Aires) and Tiananmen Square (Beijing).

⁴ An elaboration of the history and planning of public places/spaces is given in Massam and Everitt 2004 and Everitt et al. 2004.

⁵ Any general introduction to the topic of space must include a reference to the classic work of Lefebvre 1974 and his book *The Production of Space*. A short summary does not do justice to his elaborate treatment of this complex topic but perhaps it is sufficient to say at this point that great emphasis is placed on the notion that space is a social construct: Lefebvre (1991, 83) claims "...any space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships-and this despite the fact that a space is not a thing but rather a set of relationships between things (objects and products)."

⁶ Sutton 1971 provides an overview of the contributions of Olmsted in the project of 'civilizing American cities' through the use of open space plans.

⁷ An elaboration of the form and design of squares is given in Moughtin 1999 and comments on the social advantages of civic spaces are given in Whyte 1989, Spreiregen 1965 and Hume 2003.

⁸ While much emphasis has been placed by academics and planners on public spaces in western societies it is also clear that in countries in Asia the public space is an important phenomenon of social interaction and production of social relations. For articles on public spaces in Asia see Kong and Law 2002, Chua and Edwards 1992 and Pu 2001.

⁹ For papers regarding the topic of the 'good citizen' see Westheimer and Kahne 2008, and Bryant 2006.

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