

Research Aim and Objectives

A variety of political, economic, social and built environment issues resulted in the 20th century seeing a significant dilapidation in the quality of urban public space. Although not a new phenomenon, the private creation and control of public space became a proposed solution for this problem. As larger social, political and economic changes occurred, the model of urban private-public space spread across cities in the western world. Whilst creating pleasant spaces, notable criticisms have been made by people in academia, government and the media. Although much is known about the creation of these spaces, little is understood about how they are used by public. Investigating how the public use urban-private public spaces became the aim of this research.

The objectives of the research were:

To examine how the public, and myself as a researcher, interact with these urban private-public spaces

To explore the influence of social media on how urban private-public spaces are represented and used



Figure 1. Paternoster Square



Figure 2. Granary Square

Methodology

The literature identified that people's use of urban public space and the influence of private forces are often linked to larger social, political and economic issues. This identification meant that it was important to use the spatial political-economic theoretical framework in this research, whilst also incorporating a constructivist grounded theory approach. The qualitative methods involved used a detached observation, a subjective-narrative observation and a social media image analysis of Instagram, the latter two being new and underused methods in built environment research. Three urban private-public spaces were selected for analysis (Bermondsey, Granary and Paternoster Square) and a fourth urban public space enabled comparison (Trafalgar Square).



Figure 3. Bermondsey Square

Findings

The results identified various uses of urban private-public spaces, different atmospheres within these spaces and range of activities occurring within these spaces. Furthermore, each space had a particular mode of representation on Instagram. When analysed, these results indicated a, previously unidentified, sense of 'local' within the spaces. This was created through both the people and the activities carried out in the spaces.



Figure 4. Trafalgar Square

Conclusions

Further to the findings, this research allowed a platform for future built environment investigations to incorporate narrative and social-media analysis methods, as well as evidencing the importance of the spatial political-economy theoretical framework. Using a constructivist grounded theoretical approach enabled the addition of new theory in the area of urban private-public space, that of a sense of 'local'. With the concerns about the decline in community in urban areas and the increasing nature of private lifestyles, it appears that urban private-public spaces could provide an opportunity to rekindle the important elements of public life and local connections.