Changing patterns of urban public space: observations and assessments from the Tokyo and New York metropolitan areas.

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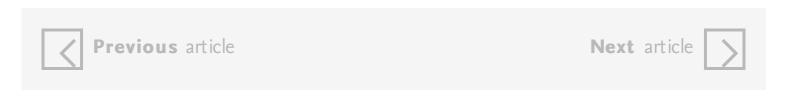
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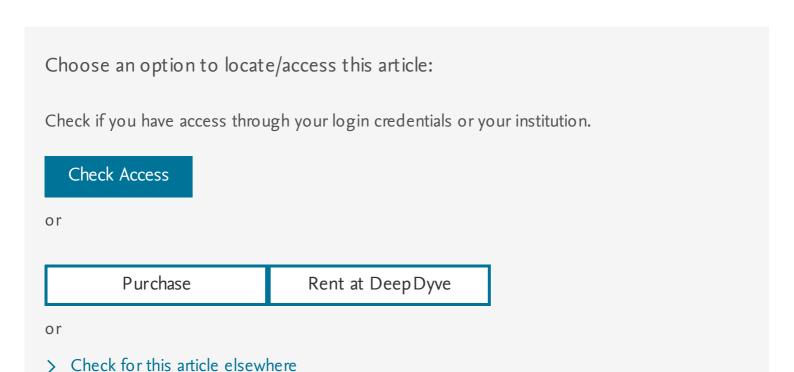Get rights and content

Abstract

This paper looks at new, high-profile redevelopment projects in Tokyo and New York City and their surroundings for examples of trends in the design of urban public spaces and changing patterns in how they are used. This includes new parks and other open spaces, landscaped plazas or public squares associated with new office towers, shopping centers and other large-scale commercial developments, and various popular â€œfestival sitesâ€ such as those along recreation waterfronts. A comparison indicates that both cities have quite a few new public spaces that enhance the quality of urban life and add aesthetic appeal, but that also reflect certain social problems and divisions. We see the following common trends: (1) increasing privatization of spaces that were once more clearly in the public domain; (2) increasing surveillance of public spaces and control of access to them in order to improve security; and (3) increasing use of design themes

that employ â€œtheme parkâ€ simulations and break connections with local history and geography. In the Tokyo area there is also a curious trend to create large, landscaped open areas near new development projects that few people use. They can be called â€œplanned wastelandsâ€ or â€œnew urban desertsâ€. New York City, on the other hand, has succeeded in having more people come together for enjoyment in parts of the city that were once all but abandoned. The paper is illustrated with photographs, and draws on the examples of Times Square, South Street Seaport and Battery Park City in New York, and Yebisu Garden Place, Teleportâ€"Daiba, Makuhari New Town and Minato Mirai 21 in the Tokyoâ€"Yokohama area.

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Keywords

public space; Tokyo; New York

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