PRIVATISATION AND DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF PUBLIC SPACE

PRIVATISATION AND DEMOCRACY: THE CASE OF PUBLIC SPACE

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LAY ABSTRACT

Viewed through the lens of democratic philosophy, this thesis explores the complex relationship between the privatization of space and its impact on the democratic function of public spaces.

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This thesis explores the complex relationship between the privatization of public space and its consequences for democracy. The thesis contradicts popular narratives, which frequently oversimplify the effects of privatisation by concentrating only on problems related to ownership and access. This work attempts to provide a more nuanced view of privatisation and its possible consequences on democratic values through a philosophical lens. This thesis establishes criteria for ideal public spaces by drawing on Kohn's tripartite structure of public space, Hegel's theory of recognition and Christiano's democratic theory, which emphasize the importance of diversity, disagreement, and cognitive biases in a democratic society as well as the role of public space in promoting democracy and liberal rights. It then explores the relationship between privatisation and democracy using this theoretical framework, highlighting potential counter-democratic effects. I argue that decisions affecting civil society shouldn't be left to the exclusive control of private businesses. However, I also recognise the democratic advantages of private endeavors and propose that private organizations may legitimately be given decision-making authority. I conclude by examining how social shame shapes business and individual behaviour in the contemporary world. I draw attention to the influence that social rejection and exclusion have on behaviour and emphasize how relevant this is in the context of democracy and privatisation.

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This dissertation marks the culmination of a long and transformative journey—one shaped by persistent questions, unforeseen challenges, unexpected discoveries, and moments of profound solitude and connection. Though the act of writing often feels solitary, this work could never have come into being without the presence and support of those who stood beside me along the way.

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Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to all those who continue to reflect on the meaning and value of public life in a democratic society. In an era increasingly defined by privatization, fragmentation, and withdrawal from shared space, I hope this work offers a modest contribution to the enduring conversation about freedom, responsibility, and the public realm that binds us.

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1. Privatisation and Democracy and The Case of Public Space

Privatisation is the transfer of ownership and management of a company, agency, corporation or public service from the public sector (government) to the private sector (individuals or businesses). This process can include contracting public services to private businesses, selling state-owned assets to investors, or permitting companies to compete in formerly state-run industries. The debate over the privatisation of public space has gone on for years. Many commentators argue that the public sector is shrinking the services it provides to citizens, while the private sector is increasing its own sphere of action.

There is evidence everywhere of the increasing privatisation of public spaces, including the dominance of advertisements and malls in urban city centres. For example, the United States now has more than twice as much square footage of retail space per citizen as any other country (Hayden et al., 2009) and there is increasing private management of city parks, public transportation, parking, sanitation, and public resources while private security services are also increasingly used to police public spaces (MacLeod, 2002; Savas, 1991).

This process of privatising public space has engendered criticism and is currently one of the main concerns in the urban literature. It is argued that privatisation poses a major challenge to the practice of democracy due to the fact that private owners can deny people rights such as freedom of speech and political activity. This restriction of such activities is problematic since privately-owned spaces are significant gathering places for members of the public. For example, some large public spaces in the United States are veritable small towns unto themselves and may in fact be integral to the functioning of municipalities, such as the local government services located in the

Shop of Knoxville Center in Tennessee. Citizens are encouraged to visit the mall in order to pay their property taxes, renew their driver's licences, mail letters, and apply for marriage licences.

How should we classify such a commercial centre? Is it public or private? We often assume that the owners of private spaces don't have the same responsibilities toward the public as the government does in managing public spaces. However, this assumption becomes questionable when a private space effectively functions as a town center, an argument which was first introduced to American courts in 1946 in the case of *Marsh v. Alabama* (Kohn, 2004, p. 9). Building on this, one concern is that as a result of the process of constant privatisation, there may be far fewer places for citizens to raise and hear political issues in the near future. This potentially resulting demise of old public spaces requires us to reconsider the way we classify and govern contemporary meeting places such as malls. Furthermore, these types of privatised commercial spaces are becoming more and more important to community life since, in addition to their commercial function, they offer places for social and civic interaction. In the modern world, where the distinctions between public and private spheres are blurring, a re-evaluation of the meaning of privatised spaces is essential. To guarantee that such venues support democracy, we must take concrete steps in the real world to modify our legal and social structures. Should we fail to acknowledge and adjust to this new trend of privatisation, we run the risk of weakening the fundamental principles of democratic governance (Kohn, 2004, p. 44).

Christopher Essert supports this claim by arguing that public spaces are essential democratic infrastructures that facilitate interactions based on equality and mutual respect (2022). He contends that, to maintain their fundamentally democratic nature, these spaces must be regulated to guard against private appropriation and ensure fair access and use (Essert, 2022, p. 67). Discussing pandemic-related adjustments, Essert emphasizes how these areas were crucial during the crisis,

demonstrating their capacity to uphold democratic values even under challenging conditions (Essert, 2022, p. 92). For instance, due to indoor restrictions and health concerns, restaurants expanded their outdoor dining onto sidewalks and streets. Originally intended as temporary, these expansions became significantly popular and, in many cases, evolved into semi-permanent fixtures, indicating potential long-term transformations. This example underscores the importance of vigilance and proactive regulatory frameworks to maintain dynamic, inclusive democratic societies by illustrating how pandemic-induced changes might reshape public perceptions, regulatory approaches toward public spaces, and redefine the relationship between public and private spheres (Essert, 2022, p. 92).

With this in mind, I intend to critically evaluate the impact of privatisation of public spaces on democracy. To this end, I aim to answer the following questions: What is a public space? What value does a public space offer to the practice of democracy? Is being a private space incompatible with also being a public space? Is the privatisation of public space a threat to the public practice of democracy? If so, what are the dangers? The overarching rationale of this project is to improve the abilities of theorists and practitioners to assess and improve upon current laws and policies that regulate the divide between public and private space in contemporary democracies.

Answering these questions requires that I first clarify exactly what is meant by the concepts of privatisation and public spaces, better establish a clear distinction between the public and private domains and delineate what they mean in relation to each other. The next step will involve clarifying and defending specific concepts and arguments essential for democratic governance while highlighting the major debates surrounding the key politico-moral values that privatisation risks undermining. I will then proceed by providing my own responses to these debates and situating my project within the broader literature.

1.1 The Nature of Public Space

What is public space? To understand the meaning of this term, it is better to understand the difference between the public realm and the private realm. Jeff Weintraub (1997, p. 7) has distinguished four main contexts that may help to distinguish between the public and private sectors. In the first context, the terms "public" and "private" are used to distinguish between the state and the family, respectively. In the second context, "public" is synonymous with the state, which represents the public sector, and "private" refers to the market economy, which represents the private sector. In the third context, theorists influenced by Hannah Arendt use "public" to describe a political community separate from the economy, the household, and the administrative apparatus of the state. In the fourth and final context, researchers define the "public realm" as a space for socializing and appearing before others. In light of these varied conceptions of the public and private realms, it would be a mistake to think that there is a single privileged substantive public-private distinction. As Raymond Geuss (2003, p. 106) explains, when one begins to carefully examine this idea, any purported distinction dissolves into a number of relatively unrelated issues. It is therefore unlikely that one could conceive of an interesting, general, substantive theory distinguishing the public and private.

The difficulty of distinguishing between the public and private demonstrates why it is so difficult to define the term *public space*. We intuitively consider public to be a place that is publicly-owned and accessible to everyone, but in reality, many privatised spaces are much more accessible than many public buildings, which are not actually accessible to all people (Kohn, 2004, p 8). For example, bureaucratic headquarters or military bases are owned by the government but are not accessible to most citizens. We also have places which we describe as "public houses," such as restaurants, and while they may not be controlled by the government, a large number of

people have access to them. Shopping malls are another excellent example of how public and private spaces can be mixed. These places are privately owned but their architecture and design suggest a function akin to old-fashioned town centres.

With this in mind, we may argue in favour of describing public space as a cluster concept, meaning that it has multiple and contradictory dimensions and should be treated accordingly. Such a characterisation of the idea of public can only be properly approached by considering a range of potential meanings and criteria by which to define it. However, these meanings and criteria need to be applied in a flexible fashion, since the absence of a single criterion should not necessarily lead to a space being automatically categorized as private. A more dynamic and inclusive approach to defining public space is thus made possible by this sophisticated view, which takes into consideration its varied and complex nature.

However, while we might theoretically find satisfaction on some level by using the cluster method of defining public space, this is not the best answer from a political perspective. As Geuss (2001) argues:

> [I]t is not the case that we must or should adopt a two-step procedure, first getting clear about the public/private distinction, assuming all the while that there is a single distinction to be made, and then, having discovered where the line falls between public and private, going on to ask what we can do with that distinction, what attitude we should adopt toward it, what implications making the distinction correctly might have for politics. Rather, first we must ask what this purported distinction is for, that is, why we want to make it at all. To answer this question will bring us back to some relatively concrete context of human action, probably human political action, and it is only in the context of connecting the issue of the public and private to that antecedent potential context of political action that the

distinction will make any sense (p. 106-7).

Geuss skillfully illustrates how it is challenging to make a clear distinction between "public" and "private," which leads to disputes, as these distinctions are contingent upon an individual's objectives and values. Geuss's recommendation is to tailor the concepts of public and private to the demands of particular contexts of inquiry. The quotation also emphasizes how important it is for political initiatives to clearly define public and private areas. Thus, when taking a political stance, it is imperative to establish a precise understanding of public space. Margaret Kohn (2004) expands on this framework by providing a definition of public space commonly used in planning literature, which I will examine in more detail in the following section.

1.2. Kohn's Vision of Public Space

According to Kohn, it is essential for successful political demonstrations to occur in physical public spaces since political speech often needs to be directed towards citizens who are unlikely to attend political events happening in specifically political places (2004, p. 38). People who are already aware of a given political issue have many ways of connecting with people who share their interests or in getting information from political organizations, such as using phone trees, reading information published on the internet, receiving direct mail, or meeting people at lectures and other events. However, the political importance of public spaces is that they create the possibility for such encounters and information sharing to happen in the course of everyday life for people who are not otherwise actively interested or engaged in societal issues. Such spaces are geared to the politics of the ordinary since a political encounter happening in the street with some degree of surprise has the distinctive potential to disrupt an individual's insularity and raise questions over their routines. For this to happen, public space should be as accessible as possible since segregation and exclusion make it difficult for people to do things like accessing privatised public spaces or

freely raising their voices. This is both a moral and political issue.

Morally speaking, segregation is inappropriate since it preserves societal norms which privilege some groups over others, such as the rich over the poor. It undermines the moral ideal of social justice by denying these groups equal access to opportunities for interaction, mutual understanding, and shared experiences. This type of exclusion normalizes contempt for the struggles of others, which not only exacerbates inequality but also erodes a community's moral foundation. On the other hand, from a political perspective, the main problem is that this practice prevents members of privileged groups from being exposed to the injustices around them. Segregation limits the exposure of privileged individuals to direct, in-person encounters with images of deprivation, particularly when they are in an environment removed from what would typically be considered dangerous areas. Others rapidly lose the ability to identify with and sympathize with people from different classes and cultures—even when they live nearby and share the same world—if they are completely isolated from such realities. According to Kohn, this contributes to the standardization of how people use public space, which eventually leads to its physical deterioration and fuels growing trends of commercialization and privatization. These developments, Kohn argues, pose real challenges to democracy, as segregation erodes the diversity and inclusivity essential for a healthy democratic society (Kohn, 2004, pp. 2, 6, 156, 162). Segregation hampers meaningful connections that foster understanding across cultural and social divides, undermining the democratic potential of chance encounters and preventing privileged groups from witnessing the realities of injustice and inequality. Politics, according to Kohn, is not a staged protest but rather depends on impromptu encounters and unplanned conversations that dispel stereotypes and encourage discussion. These options are curtailed by segregation. Furthermore, segregation-driven privatisation and commercialisation of public areas

undermine democracy's participatory framework by lowering chances for group decision-making and shared participation in public life. According to Kohn, these factors jeopardise attempts to alleviate societal injustices and the democratic ideal of equal participation.

1.2.1. Key Components of Public Space: Ownership, Accessibility, and Intersubjectivity

With this democratic concern in mind, Kohn proposes three components to consider when determining whether or not a space is public: ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity (2004, p. 9). I will now introduce these three key components. First, a key criterion for her is the concept of ownership of public space. The normal conception of a public space defines it as government-owned and accessible to everyone. It is suggested that government-owned property better supports democracy by providing a space where citizens can freely enter and utilize it to publicly advocate for their causes. However, Kohn envisions the ideal public space not as one controlled by the government, but as a shared common, an idea she discusses in her 2016 book, *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth.*

In her book, Kohn argues that public spaces should be viewed as commons rather than as commodities controlled by either the state or private entities (2016, p. 2). She outlines two main models of public space ownership: the Sovereigntist model and the Populist model (2016, p. 140). The Sovereigntist model, grounded in Hobbesian theory, treats public spaces as state-controlled zones, regulated to maintain order. In this model, public spaces are extensions of state authority, with their use defined by government rules, highlighting a strict separation between the state and its citizens. In contrast, the Populist model portrays public spaces as grassroots political arenas that operate independently of state control. This model emphasizes direct citizen participation, collective decision-making, and the expression of popular sovereignty. Kohn favors the Populist

model. For her, public spaces are dynamic platforms for dissent and mobilization, challenging state power and empowering the people (2016, pp. 146, 154). Thus, she advocates for a commons-based approach to public space, free from excessive regulation by either the state or corporate interests.

With this framework in mind, Kohn challenges the traditional state-centric perspective by redefining public spaces as open, participatory commons where diverse voices can converge and shape the public space. She advocates for the concept of accessible public spaces, where citizens can enter freely without facing unreasonable financial or logistical obstacles. Her emphasis on accessible public spaces highlights a core principle of democratic inclusivity: that such areas should be open and available to all individuals, regardless of socio-economic status, location, or mobility. She contends that genuinely public spaces are those that do not impose financial or logistical obstacles on those wishing to use them. For her, full and unrestricted accessibility is crucial, as public spaces are intended to be venues for interaction, allowing people from diverse backgrounds to engage in spontaneous and meaningful encounters that shape public opinion and cultivate a sense of community. As Kohn argues, "[p]ublic spaces are critical to democracy because they enable citizens to see and be seen, to speak and to listen" (2004, p. 13). When access to these spaces is restricted, they are unable to fulfill this essential democratic function.

Kohn critiques the design and placement of certain public spaces that, although theoretically open to all, are practically accessible only to a select group of individuals. She notes that "when public spaces are tucked away in suburban locations or exclusive areas that are not well served by public transportation, they effectively exclude those without private vehicles or the financial means to travel" (Kohn, 2004, p.14). This exclusion represents more than a mere logistical issue; it fundamentally challenges the democratic ideal of equality in the public sphere by restricting who can engage in civic life.

In keeping with her argument, Kohn emphasizes that accessible public spaces are vital for fostering democratic public spheres where a wide range of voices and perspectives can be represented, defining a second key criterion as the degree of accessibility of public space. She contends that spaces situated in the suburbs or in wealthy neighborhoods disproportionately benefit those who already possess social and economic advantages, while marginalising those who are economically disadvantaged. As she points out, "[t]he best public spaces are those that are centrally located, well-connected by public transit, and welcoming to all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status" (Kohn, 2004, p.15). This accessibility is crucial for ensuring that public spaces function as genuine democratic fora, where individuals can participate in discussions, protests, and other forms of civic expression necessary for a thriving democratic society.

Kohn's emphasis on accessibility also underscores its broader implications for civic engagement and political participation. When public spaces are not easily accessible, it limits opportunities for citizens to connect with their community, express dissent, or engage in collective action. This exclusion can create a ripple effect, reducing the overall quality of democratic participation and hindering the public's ability to influence policy and drive social change. Kohn succinctly addresses this concern, stating that "[a]ccessibility is not just a matter of convenience; it is a democratic imperative that ensures all citizens can participate in the life of the city and the nation" (Kohn, 2004, p.16). For Kohn, accessible public spaces represent more than mere physical locations; they are essential infrastructures of democracy that facilitate ongoing public discourse, social interaction, and civic engagement.

However, simply knowing the owners and the level of accessibility of a place is insufficient to help us define an ideal democratic public space. Besides ownership and accessibility, she introduced the concept of intersubjectivity as the final component of a public space. For her, some

spaces create interaction between people and bring them closer, while some spaces separate and isolate people. For example, stadiums and theaters often turn people into passive spectators rather than engaging them in active democratic participation. This is when the term "intersubjectivity" and its democratic values become significant.

For Kohn, movie theatres and sports stadiums do not feel like public spaces because they do not foster interactions between people but instead isolate them and turn them into spectators who only observe (2004, p.10). Truly being together and being sensitive to the democratic demands of others only occurs through critical interaction between people and is therefore an important element of public spaces. To explain this, Kohn references Guy Debord's concept of the "spectacle" to argue that venues like stadiums and theatres fail to foster the intersubjectivity necessary for a vibrant democratic public life (2004, p. 10). According to Kohn, drawing from Debord (2021), the spectacle describes a social condition in which relationships amongst people are mediated by images, representations, and a focus on consumption, rather than through direct and meaningful interactions. In this framework, individuals can be understood as passive spectators who observe rather than actively participate, undermining the potential for authentic intersubjective connections. Essentially, while stadiums can gather large crowds physically, they do so in a manner that reinforces separation instead of encouraging genuine interaction. In these settings, attention is directed toward a central object - such as a sports event or performance - where the audience primarily engages with the spectacle rather than with one another. This creates a scenario in which individuals are connected solely by their shared focus, rather than through direct engagement.

One might argue that stadiums can indeed facilitate intersubjective bonds, particularly through shared emotional experiences and collective actions, such as cheering, chanting, or even storming

the field. However, from Kohn's viewpoint, these interactions are still constrained by the dynamics of the spectacle. While emotional responses and a sense of collective identity can arise in a stadium setting, they are largely arranged and formed by the spectacle itself. Activities like chanting are directed outward toward players or the opposing team, rather than fostering interaction amongst spectators. This environment is not designed to promote dialogue or exchange between fans with diverse opinions; instead, it maintains a collective focus on the spectacle. Moreover, stadium activities often reinforce a sense of group identity - such as supporting the same team - rather than encouraging an appreciation for different perspectives. This kind of groupthink can at times result in divisive behaviour, such as booing or hostility toward fans of opposing teams, rather than the act of feeling with someone by entering into their emotional world, which is essential for genuine democratic engagement. Ultimately, the emotional bonds formed in such settings tend to be fleeting and do not evolve into the sustained, critical, or dialogical engagement needed for a thriving democratic public life.

A clear example of intersubjectivity enhancing democratic awareness is the 2003 incident with Stephen Downs at Crossgate Mall in Guilderland, New York. Because he was wearing a T-shirt with the slogan *Give Peace a Chance*, Downs was arrested, drawing attention to the restrictions on political expression in privately owned spaces open to the public. The mall's management, comparing it to "a private house," imposed a ban on political speech on its property. In contrast, activities in a stadium typically do not challenge prevailing norms or power structures. These activities are part of the expected conduct in such settings and are carefully regulated to prevent disruptions. Unlike the Stephen Downs incident, where a peaceful political expression sparked a debate on free speech and the privatisation of public spaces, stadium events are tightly controlled and rarely provoke broader societal reflection or change.

In this context, although stadiums and similar venues can evoke strong emotional experiences, they do not challenge the "spectacular" nature of modern society, which often reduces citizens to passive observers. Instead, genuinely democratic public spaces should foster opportunities for spontaneous interactions, critical discussions, and direct interaction, where people are not merely spectators but active participants in shaping a collective political and social world. Kohn argues that public spaces should go beyond arranged displays of emotional unity and promote true democratic participation. In shaping her democratic theories, Kohn also draws significantly on the ideas of Adam Smith.

1.2.2. Adam Smith and Kohn: Political Engagement and the Role of Public Spaces

Kohn asserts that public spaces should encourage political engagement, basing her argument largely on Adam Smith's theory of sympathy (2004). She emphasizes that the presence of marginalised groups in public spaces, such as the homeless, is essential for reminding society of privileges often taken for granted. As Kohn explains, "[d]rawing on Adam Smith's idea that sympathy is cultivated through the observation of those less fortunate than ourselves, I argue that the presence of homeless people in public space serves to remind the more fortunate members of society of the fragility of their own privileges" (Kohn, 2004, p.153).

This argument situates public spaces as essential for expanding one's sense of community and responsibility, rather than simply as functional areas. Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, uses the term "sympathy"[1] to describe the capacity to understand and resonate with others by imaginatively placing oneself in their circumstances (2002, p. 11). Building on this idea,

[1] Though he calls it sympathy, Smith's concept is closer to what we today refer to as empathy—the ability to "fellow-feel" by entering into another's emotional world. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I use sympathy in line with Smith's notion of sympathy.

Kohn argues that public spaces facilitate such encounters by exposing individuals to the diverse lived experiences of others, thereby nurturing the moral imagination necessary for democratic life. She implies that these kinds of encounters broaden mutual recognition beyond the direct social group of an individual, encouraging a more inclusive sense of community and shared responsibility. As she explains, "[p]ublic space facilitates the mutual recognition of strangers [and] provides a context in which such people can become familiar, not intimate, with one another" (Kohn, p.157).

Kohn also invokes Smith's concept of the "impartial spectator," an internalized moral perspective. She argues that public spaces enable individuals to be evaluated by a broader public, outside their direct social group, encouraging them to reflect on their actions from a more objective viewpoint. As Kohn writes, "[in] public we witness the happiness (or suffering) of others and, to some small degree, share it […] It is the basis of a modest degree of solidarity and reciprocity, which are two of the basic components of citizenship" (Kohn, p.157).

Kohn jumps off from Smith to focus on the democratic nature of public spaces. According to Kohn, public space invites the interaction of diverse people, which in turn promotes sympathy. For her, these spaces give an essential voice to marginalised and dissenting viewpoints. As she observes, "[public] space strengthens a democratic polity by providing a forum for dissenting views" (Kohn, p.155).

In the end, Kohn's interpretation of Smith emphasizes the power of public spaces to cultivate an engaged citizenry. She envisions these spaces as arenas for ethical reflection and social connection - places that foster diverse perspectives and facilitate meaningful, albeit sometimes challenging, interactions. However, as I will explain later, it is my contention that Smith's theory does not fully support her arguments.

Kohn's approach to evaluating public spaces - focused on ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity - offers a robust framework for understanding their role in supporting democracy. By questioning traditional distinctions between public and private spheres, she highlights the importance of inclusive and interactive environments that foster democratic engagement and address social inequalities. Her perspective emphasizes the need for spaces that facilitate active participation, meaningful dialogue, and collective interaction, irrespective of ownership. Additionally, her interpretation of Adam Smith highlights the transformative role of public spaces in fostering an engaged and active citizenry. This framework paves the way for a more detailed exploration of her ideas and their broader implications, which I will summarize in the next subsection.

1.3. Overview of Kohn's Perspectives on Public Spaces

As I have argued above, Kohn avoids providing a strict definition of public space and instead emphasizes three key dimensions: public ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity. Public ownership encourages democratic participation through the creation of areas for congregation and open discussion. Accessibility makes these areas open to all, removing physical and logistical barriers to participation. Intersubjectivity supports the need for environments that promote critical human contact rather than passive observation. Together, these characteristics support a diverse spectrum of public life, enabling a variety of public areas, some of which are more in line with the democratic ideal than others. This range captures Kohn's nuanced viewpoint, acknowledging that public areas can differ greatly in their capacity to foster civic engagement and public life. As Kohn herself acknowledges, different venues serve distinct democratic functions, and not every venue fully embodies all three dimensions (2004, pp. 8, 10). For example, a public park may excel in accessibility and intersubjectivity by offering an open, inclusive space where people can interact

and engage with one another. However, it may lack true public ownership if it is managed by private entities or subject to restrictive regulations. Similarly, spaces like libraries might be publicly owned and foster accessibility, but may not fully promote intersubjectivity, as their primary function often emphasizes quiet individual activity rather than interpersonal engagement.

With this in mind, Kohn argues that public property and private property are not always synonymous with public space or private space, respectively. A space's publicness depends on how it is used, who can access it, and the nature of interactions that occur there. Privately owned spaces, such as malls and cafés, can serve as public spaces if they are available to the public and encourage public activity. Conversely, government-controlled areas might not be legitimate public places if they are closed off to the public or have restrictive policies regarding their use.

Building on Kohn's nuanced perspective, we can propose terms that extend beyond the conventional legal distinctions of public and private spaces based solely on ownership, with Kohn's insights allowing for a more accurate differentiation of spaces based on their function and accessibility. The following is an effort to create specific terms that reflect these nuances:

1. Ownership-Based Terms:

    - Publicly-Owned Spaces (POS): Spaces legally owned by government entities or public institutions. These spaces are typically regarded as public because they are funded and maintained through public resources. Examples include public parks, streets, and government buildings.

    - Privately-Owned Spaces (PrOS): Spaces owned by private individuals, corporations, or organizations. These areas are generally considered private due to

their ownership and controlled access. Examples include private estates, corporate offices, and shopping malls.

2. Accessibility and Use-Based Terms:

   - Open Public Spaces (OPS): Publicly accessible spaces that promote public activities, regardless of public or private ownership. They encourage spontaneous social interactions, community engagement, and democratic participation. These include public parks, libraries, plazas, and even some privately-owned spaces such as shopping malls or cafés that are open to the public without serious limitations.

   - Restricted Public Spaces (RPS): Limited access spaces that do not fully function as public spaces despite their ownership. For example, government buildings or areas with restrictive entry policies like, military bases.

Employing this terminology, we can distinguish between legal ownership (publicly-owned vs. privately-owned) and functional accessibility (open public vs. restricted public). This framework lines up with Kohn's nuanced definition of a space as truly public or private. It is less concerned with ownership than with how it is used, who can access it, and the nature of interactions that take place within it.

This viewpoint prompts us to reconsider traditional classifications of space and to acknowledge that the publicness of a space depends more on its function and accessibility, rather than merely its legal status. In fact, Kohn's flexible approach suggests that a space's true publicness is determined by its functional characteristics, challenging the conventional dichotomy of public versus private (2004, p. 9). For Kohn, the fundamental quality of a public place is its ability to

uphold democratic ideals through being welcoming, accessible, and encouraging social interaction. To promote these ideals, public spaces should encourage social interaction, active involvement, and the free exchange of ideas. Regardless of whether these spaces are owned by the government or the private sector, the focus should be on creating environments for congregation, communication, and participation in democratic activities.

Finally, Kohn draws on Smith's concepts to emphasize the democratic role of public spaces. By encouraging interactions among diverse individuals, these spaces foster sympathy, which, for Kohn, is essential to democratic participation. She asserts that marginalised voices should be acknowledged and heard in these environments, and that dissenting views should be voiced, making public spaces crucial for the health of a democratic society. As she states, "[public] space strengthens a democratic polity by providing a forum for dissenting views" (Kohn, 2004, p. 155).

As we conclude this chapter, it is important to acknowledge Kohn's significant contributions to the study of public spaces. Her work provides a critical analysis of how the privatisation and commercialisation of public spaces can hinder democratic engagement by limiting access and designing spaces that prioritise profit over the public good. Kohn's focus on accessibility, intersubjectivity, and the danger associated with private control offers valuable insight into the challenges faced by contemporary public spaces. Her arguments demonstrate the necessity of creating inclusive spaces where citizens can freely participate, express views, and engage in meaningful conversations. In the end, she makes a compelling case for prioritising public spaces and democratic political values over other public goods, utilizing Smith's theory to strengthen her argument.

In the next chapter, I will critically assess Kohn's perspective and investigate how her theory might be expanded. The goal is to introduce a more nuanced understanding of public space by

engaging with democratic theories, such as those proposed by Thomas Christiano (2008). This approach will highlight the importance of considering issues of ownership and governance, acknowledging that not all types of control are inherently problematic. Instead, it is the nature of that control -whether it promotes or inhibits democratic engagement - that ultimately shapes the value of public spaces. Additionally, I will explore some limitations of Smith's theory of sympathy and discuss how these shortcomings can be addressed within a more robust framework. Through this perspective, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at work in public spaces and develop a wider framework to confirm their democratic potential.

2. Critique of Kohn's Theory: Unpacking the Limitations and Gaps

As I have argued above, Kohn avoids providing a strict definition of public space and instead emphasizes three key dimensions: public ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity. In this regard, Kohn's view of public space as common space offers a valuable framework for understanding the function of public space in democratic societies. Her conception emphasizes inclusivity, accessibility, and the presence of diverse voices, positioning public spaces as essential to civic engagement and democratic participation. By defining public spaces as common spaces, Kohn underscores their potential to serve as sites of mutual recognition, ethical reflection, and political expression.

While Kohn's model of public space as common space is insightful, its limitations become apparent when examined from a democratic perspective—especially given that, for Kohn, the primary function of public space is the realization of democracy itself, and she wrote her seminal book to demonstrate how the disappearance of public space undermines democratic politics (2004, p. 2). From the perspective of democratic theory, several limitations can be identified in her work. First of all, the concept of common space often fails to address the complexities behind who controls, maintains, and determines the use of these spaces. Additionally, it fails to fully confront the power dynamics and conflicts that may arise regarding how public spaces are used, by whom, and for what purposes. Even spaces that are theoretically open to everyone may still be subject to exclusionary practices, restrictive regulations, or privatisation efforts, all of which can erode their democratic function. Moreover, Kohn relies significantly on Smith's theory of moral action to highlight the crucial role public spaces play in forming the moral and social dynamics of a society. Her reliance on Smith's concept of sympathy presents limitations, as it can encourage shallow emotional responses rather than the sustained moral engagement necessary for the realization of

democracy. This framework also makes public spaces excessively confrontational, rendering them less effective in addressing the full complexity of democratic governance. Thus, while Kohn's model offers a vital foundation for rethinking public spaces, it requires further analysis and critique to fully address issues of ownership, access, and equitable participation in public life, requiring a stronger philosophical theory to support its claims. I will now expand on these points, beginning with a review of the challenges associated with each dimension of her theory: public ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity.

2.1.1. Ownership Challenges of Kohn

Kohn weaves the concept of the commons into her account of public space, arguing that these spaces should function as vital arenas for popular sovereignty and community power. For her, public spaces are venues for political expression and social interaction, free from excessive state or corporate regulation. She defines two main models of public space ownership: the Sovereigntist model and the Populist model. The Sovereigntist model, grounded in Hobbesian theory, views public spaces as state-controlled areas governed to maintain order. In this framework, public spaces are extensions of state authority, with usage tightly regulated by state laws and rules, emphasizing a clear separation between the state and the public. In contrast, the Populist model sees public spaces as grassroots political fora that operate outside state control. This model emphasizes direct citizen engagement, collective decision-making, and the expression of popular sovereignty. From this perspective, public spaces are vibrant sites for dissent and mobilization, directly challenging state authority and celebrating the power of the people (2016).

The Populist model more closely aligns with Kohn's image of public space as a commons, where spaces serve as platforms for collective action, citizen engagement, and popular sovereignty. By envisioning public spaces as dynamic environments formed by the direct actions and decisions

of the people, Kohn defends a commons-based approach that prioritises inclusivity and community management. This perspective challenges the traditional, state-centered view, reimagining public spaces as open, participatory commons where various voices can gather to influence the public sphere. Essentially, Kohn's concept of public space as commons links the two models, supporting the populist ethos of citizen-driven spaces over state-dominated ones (2016).

This reimagining of public spaces aligns with broader movements that oppose the privatisation and over-regulation of urban environments, advocating instead for a model that envisions active public participation in the management and functioning of these spaces. In this context, Kohn's perspective offers a visionary framework that connects public spaces to the historical ethos of the commons. However, when analysed through a democratic framework, two types of challenges to her model can be identified regarding ownership: the governance challenge and the challenges of power dynamics and inequality. Considering that Kohn's ultimate goal is to create a more democratic society, making the use of a democratic framework to analyse her theorisation is particularly relevant. Thus, in the next section, I will apply Thomas Christiano's democratic theory framework to critically assess Kohn's model of public spaces and address these two critical limitations. I will begin my analysis by addressing the governance challenge.

2.1.1.1. Governance Challenge

The governance of public spaces as commons poses a considerable challenge to Kohn's theory of ownership. Kohn's perspective suggests that community participation and collective decision-making alone can effectively oversee these areas. However, this model frequently neglects the complexities of democratic governance, especially in urban environments where interests may be varied and at times conflicting. Christiano, a prominent scholar in democratic theory, offers important insights that can enhance our understanding of this matter.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to briefly outline the main argument behind Christiano's theory. According to Christiano (2008, p. 253), disobeying the choices of a democratic assembly is equivalent to treating fellow citizens as less than human. Why is this the case? At the heart of Christiano's theory of democracy is the idea that all humans share an equal moral status due to their capacity to be authorities in the realm of value, which demands that they be treated equally. Because everyone has the ability to engage with and contribute to the creation of intrinsic goods, each person deserves an equal opportunity to promote their interests. As a result, Christiano argues that justice requires a societal structure that promotes the well-being of all individuals equally, in recognition of their dignity (Christiano, 2008, p. 17).

Christiano's theory of democracy is also grounded in the recognition of four fundamental human interests and the argument that democratic governance is justified by the practical challenges posed by diversity, disagreement, human fallibility, and cognitive biases. He explains how the challenge of diversity arises from individuals being raised in different societal contexts and within distinct social groups, each of which cultivates its own unique culture and worldview (2008, p. 57). This diversity leads to the varied ways people create, recognise, and assign value to different states of being, making disagreement inevitable. Furthermore, Christiano highlights the complexity of human judgments, which are often subject to error and bias, making it difficult to establish universal principles that can reconcile disparate interests (2008, p. 59). Christiano notes the disagreements over different interpretations of the meaning of equality, including equality of welfare, resources, and opportunity (2008, p. 58). On the other hand, cognitive biases heighten these disagreements, as individuals often interpret others' interests based on their own experiences (2008, pp. 59-60). When people prioritise their own understanding of equality and personal interests over those of others, conflicts can occur. In response, Christiano identifies four

fundamental interests of the individual: the desire to correct cognitive biases, the need to feel at home in the world, the right to know the truth about public issues, and the need to have their equal status recognised by their fellow citizens (2008, pp. 60, 94). These fundamental interests, according to Christiano, are the foundation of justice and serve as necessary conditions for pursuing any other goals. He asserts that "a person's fundamental interests are those that serve as the cornerstone or prerequisite for pursuing any other interests they may have" (Christiano, 2008, p. 60). Lacking these fundamental interests in their lives makes individuals unable to effectively work toward their personal objectives and overall well-being.

Christiano argues that democracy is the most effective way to address and advance these four fundamental interests equally for each member of the community (2008, p. 252). Why is democracy the best way to equally advance these four fundamental interests? First, democracy helps correct cognitive biases in individual and collective judgments by enabling equal participation and group discussion, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered and reducing biased decision-making. Second, democracy fosters a sense of belonging, as people feel "at home" in the world when they can influence the institutions and laws that shape their lives. Accordingly, public spaces and societal institutions must allow individuals to express themselves, pursue their goals, and engage with others in ways that affirm their dignity and worth. Third, democracy guarantees access to truth by protecting the right to know the facts about public matters through open debate, disagreement, and criticism, enabling individuals to refine their views, participate in meaningful discourse, and make informed decisions. Lastly, democracy upholds the recognition of equal status by granting everyone an equal voice in shaping public policy, ensuring that all individuals are treated as valued and respected members of society. In sum, democracy achieves a

form of public equality in the face of these fundamental interests by granting every person an equal voice in choosing which laws or policies will be implemented.

Here, I rely on Christiano's concept of public equality. That is, I accept Christiano's thesis that democratic governance is the necessary means to equally advancing these four fundamental interests for all, and that human dignity demands that we equally advance these interests. That is, democratic government is necessary to provide each member of the community with roughly equal protection against the cognitive biases of others, to instill within each a feeling of community, to give each an equal opportunity to find out the truth about public concerns, and affirm the equal moral status of each. By ensuring that everyone has an equal voice and the chance to take part in decision-making processes, it achieves these objectives..

Christiano's framework draws attention to a significant flaw in Kohn's methodology: her model of public places fails to include formal procedures of democratic governance, which could allow powerful groups to gain control and marginalise or exclude others. Christiano's theory illuminates the need for established frameworks that prevent domination and promote inclusivity by highlighting the necessity of democratic processes to combat cognitive biases, maintain equal status, and resolve conflicts emerging from diversity and human fallibility. His observations imply that in the absence of such frameworks, Kohn's view of the democratic potential of public places is susceptible to exclusion and inequality.

Christiano's emphasis on public equality and the democratic treatment of each individual emphasises the need for clear rules and deliberative processes within public spaces to ensure that, despite inherent diversity, cognitive biases, disagreements, and human fallibility, all citizens feel their voices are heard, respected, and represented. Kohn's ideal model, on the other hand, is a populist framework entirely devoid of governmental interventions. Her omission of any detailed

discussion about its formal structure suggests that she intends to leave this responsibility to citizens to decide. Consequently, her ideal model aligns with a participatory style of democracy rooted in a form of anarchism, and her theory of the state is missing many crucial elements. In this regard, Kohn's failure to incorporate structured conflict resolution mechanisms risks perpetuating societal inequalities rather than promoting genuine democratic engagement. In the absence of clear management structures or conflict resolution procedures, disputes between residents, business owners, activists, and government agencies could hamper the equitable use of public spaces. Addressing this issue, Christiano highlights a major governance challenge in the absence of clear state failure: the coordination problem. In Kohn's vision of public spaces as commons, management is entrusted to the community, assuming that individuals will collectively decide on the use and upkeep of the space. Christiano emphasizes that coordinating individual actions without a central authority can be quite challenging. Christiano points out that without a central authority to guide and synchronize actions, it becomes especially difficult for individuals to coordinate effectively toward a shared objective (2008). This indicates that democratic government is crucial for promoting the four core interests that Christiano defined because it provides the social conditions and institutional framework required to properly address them. By guaranteeing equal involvement in decision-making and enabling a range of perspectives to confront limited or biased opinions, it helps correct cognitive biases and produces more equal and balanced results. By giving people the ability to change the laws and institutions that affect their lives, and by establishing channels for meaningful engagement and self-expression, democratic governance promotes a sense of belonging. Through free discussion, scrutiny, and exchange of thoughts, it also ensures that people have access to the truth, empowering them to make informed choices while promoting accountability and openness. Additionally, by giving everyone an equal

say in determining public policy, democratic government upholds the recognition of equal status while promoting both individual dignity and a spirit of respect and inclusivity among everyone. Democratic government is essential for equality, justice, and fairness because without it, these core objectives are more likely to be disregarded, compromised, or controlled by influential parties. This highlights a critical tension between Kohn's vision of community-managed public spaces and Christiano's concern about the practical challenges of coordination, suggesting that without a central authority, the effectiveness and sustainability of such spaces may be undermined.

The above coordination problem is easily observed in real-world scenarios such as community-managed urban gardens and cooperatively run public parks. For example, participants often struggle with organizing essential tasks like planting, watering, and maintaining the garden in community gardens. Without centralized leadership, disagreements can emerge regarding responsibilities for upkeep, crop selection, and the sharing of resources such as water and tools. This disorganization may result in neglected plots, resource depletion, or conflicts caused by management choices. Co-managed public parks frequently encounter challenges related to competing uses of space, like the designation of space for playgrounds, sports, or community gatherings. With no well-defined decision-making process or authority to resolve these disputes, such spaces can become divided. For instance, while one group of local residents may seek a quiet space for relaxation, another group may advocate for more areas dedicated to organized sports, causing arguments that compromise the park's functionality and inclusivity. These examples support Christiano's argument that without centralized supervision or clear governance structures, collective management can devolve into disagreement and inefficiency, neglecting the four fundamental interests of individuals in a democracy. This reinforces the importance of organized, democratic processes to ensure that public spaces equitably address the needs of all users.

Christiano's theory also highlights the conflicts of interest that frequently arise among parties involved in managing shared resources (2008). While Kohn's model assumes that community-driven management will allow diverse groups to express their needs and collaborate as equals, in reality, conflicts frequently arise due to opposing views and interests regarding the use of public spaces. As he argues (2008), the fact that people grow up in families who reside in widely disparate societal spheres ensures diversity in any reasonably complex society. The division of work in society ensures that everyone has contact with different kinds of people and learns from them. Different social groups often form their own cultures and even worldviews, which affect how well they function. This variety of circumstances suggests that people's ability to create objectively valued states is relatively diverse, and their capacity to recognise and enjoy these states-is probably diverse as well. Furthermore, moral judgments and individuals' perceptions of others' interests are susceptible to fallibility and arbitrary effects, including epistemic errors, social and cultural biases, unequal political influence, misrecognition of interests, and structural inequalities. It would be challenging to identify and evaluate a set of guiding concepts that could unite all these disparate, intricate, and esoteric interests. The amount and significance of voluntariness in the creation of people's interests, the significance of an individual's judgment in defining the interests and the shares of each person, and the degree to which some amount of freedom is required for the characterisation of equality are all topics of debate among theorists. Because of this, serious disagreement is likely to result from varying notions of equality and how they should be applied. This means that in practice, the interests of protesters, local businesses, residents, and law enforcement officials often collide in shared public spaces. According to this analysis, strong governance structures that can resolve these disputes and guarantee that public areas continue to

be inclusive and equitable for everyone are necessary for the effective management of public space**.**

This conclusion is evident in Kohn's discussion of the Occupy Wall Street movement (2016), which faced both legal disputes and state intervention. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) started in 2011 as a protest against economic disparity, corporate dominance, and financial greed. Centred in Zuccotti Park in New York City, the movement sought to reclaim public spaces for protest and communal living, representing the marginalised 99% of the population overshadowed by the wealthiest 1%. Demonstrators set up tents in the park, forming a temporary community to express their demands for economic justice. Critics contended that the encampments, by taking over significant areas of parks, restricted access for other users and disrupted traditional activities like recreation and leisure. During a similar movement, the Occupy Toronto protests, local businesses reported a decline in customers, while residents had concerns over noise and safety. The subsequent legal battles, including Batty v. Toronto, highlighted the conflict between the protesters' right to free speech and the public's right of access to these shared spaces. Courts ultimately ruled against the occupiers, framing their actions as an unauthorized privatisation of public property rather than a legitimate usage of public space for protest (Kohn, 2016, p. 146). This situation illustrates the practical challenges of managing shared public resources within a commons model, where the lack of a clear authority to regulate usage can result in exclusionary practices and conflicting interests, as noted by Christiano. These disputes show that, in the absence of organized governance, public spaces can devolve into arenas of competing demands instead of remaining inclusive, democratic environments.

Another significant concern raised by Christiano's democratic theory is the substantial transition costs and uncertainties associated with shifting from a state-regulated model to one

managed by the community. Kohn's transformative vision for public spaces necessitates a comprehensive revision of current legal and social frameworks, a process that is complex and carries inherent risks. Christiano notes, "There are enormous costs of transition in attempting widespread social change or averting widespread social change. These kinds of movements take long periods of time and exact a heavy toll on most of those who participate. Often, those who participate do not live to see the day when their efforts have succeeded. And these changes are often more stretched out in time and more costly the farther away one's situation is from the ideal one is aiming at" (1994, p.33). Adopting a commons-based approach entails not just legal hurdles but also a shift in public attitudes and behaviours regarding shared spaces. The ambiguity surrounding how such a model would operate in practice may discourage community members from fully participating, thereby undermining the very foundation of the type of collective management that Kohn advocates for.

In conclusion, Christiano's democratic theory draws attention to important governance issues in Kohn's commons model, highlighting the need for formal frameworks to settle disputes, bring disparate interests together, and guarantee inclusivity in public areas. Public spaces run the risk of becoming arenas of conflicting demands and exclusionary practices in the absence of clear governance structures, diminishing their democratic potential. These drawbacks highlight yet another crucial problem in Kohn's ownership theory: the impact of inequality and power relations, which I will discuss in more detail in the following section.

2.1.1.2. Power Dynamics and Inequality Challenges

Kohn's conception of the commons presupposes that all community members have equal influence; however, power dynamics, in reality, frequently distort levels of participation. More organized or powerful groups can have a disproportionate impact on the management and

utilization of public spaces, often marginalising less represented communities. Although Kohn's intention is to empower these marginalised groups, realizing true inclusivity in practice poses a considerable challenge. There is a persistent risk that public spaces may still be dominated by those with greater resources, thereby reinforcing the inequalities that the commons model aims to eliminate.

Kohn's belief in community members having equal influence fails to acknowledge the actual power imbalances that exist in the governance of public spaces. Christiano's democratic theory, in contrast, underscores how disparities in power dynamics can marginalise disadvantaged groups, thereby undermining the democratic purpose of these spaces. He contends that in models without formal structures, the parties which are most assertive and that possess the strongest networks often dominate decision-making, while quieter or more marginalised voices tend to be overlooked. Christiano asserts, "To the extent that the interest group associations of disadvantaged citizens are likely to have far less resources than those concerned with the interests of more advantaged citizens, the views of the disadvantaged are likely to receive much less of a hearing in the democratic forum" (2008, p. 199). . This viewpoint directly challenges Kohn's framework, showing that without structured and equitable mechanisms to ensure that a variety of voices are engaged with, public spaces can devolve into sites of exclusion rather than acting as true commons.

Christiano argues that deliberative structures and formal mechanisms are crucial to balancing power dynamics and guaranteeing equal participation among all members of a community. Without these structures, as seen in Kohn's model, the view of dominant groups may prevail unchecked. Christiano asserts that " In the light of this fact and interests, the principle of public equality requires that the process of public deliberation be structured in an egalitarian way. Individuals must have the resources so that they can make themselves heard in a democratic society

and so that they can contribute to ongoing debates in the public forum" (2008, p.202). Achieving equality in Christiano's democratic proposal requires a democratic process which prevents personal prejudices from negatively influencing outcomes, ensures that individual interests are respected, and that justice and inclusivity are maintained.

Given the above arguments, while Kohn's vision of public spaces managed as commons presents an inspiring alternative emphasising collective management and inclusivity, it comes with notable limitations when examined through the lens of Christiano's theory. Ambiguities in governance, legal obstacles, and entrenched power dynamics create major obstacles to effectively implementing her model. Kohn herself acknowledges the complexity of public spaces as political arenas, stating that "the terms 'public' and 'private' are difficult to define not only because they are contested but also because they describe a series of related but inconsistent distinctions" (p. 95).

The South-Central Farm in Los Angeles exemplifies how power dynamics and the absence of formal governance structures can jeopardise community-led public spaces. This 14-acre urban farm, situated in a predominantly low-income Latino neighborhood, not only provided fresh food but also served as a crucial community center. It offered a place for residents to grow food, participate in cultural activities, and foster a sense of community for more than a decade. However, in 2006, despite extensive community efforts to preserve it as a public space, the land was sold to a private developer. The farm shutting down highlighted the vulnerability of marginalised communities in the governance of public space when they find themselves in opposition to stronger economic forces.

The absence of formal legal protections or mechanisms to guarantee community control over the land was the major contributor to the farm's downfall. Despite community efforts - including

protests, legal actions, and fundraising campaigns supported by celebrities - they were unable to secure ownership or formal recognition of their rights to the space. In the end, they were powerless against the economic strength of private developers. As Matsuoka and Sorenson (2014) note, "[the] case of South-Central Farm demonstrates how public spaces can be privatised and commodified, even when they fulfill essential social and ecological roles, because decisions about their future are often controlled by those with the most economic power" (p.57).

This case study underlines Christiano's argument that without structured governance and protections, informal commons models are vulnerable to imbalanced power dynamics. The South-Central Farm case illustrates how external forces wielding greater economic and political powers can undermine the community-driven spaces, even when supported by local residents. It shows the limitations of community management without formal supervision and raises critical questions about how to safeguard public spaces from privatisation and exploitation. What happened with the farm serves as a powerful reminder of Christiano's point that structured oversight is necessary to mitigate the informal hierarchies that naturally develop in community-managed spaces, ensuring that all participants have an equal opportunity to influence outcomes. For Kohn's vision to flourish, it is crucial to address these issues with a clearer negotiation structure, legal reforms, and sustainable governance structures that account for the demands of all users. Only by addressing these issues can public spaces truly function as dynamic, inclusive commons working for the good of the entire community.

In summary, Christiano's democratic theory critiques Kohn's conceptualization of ownership for public spaces by emphasizing the importance of structured governance, the recognition of diverse interests, and the correction of cognitive biases in managing those spaces. By incorporating these insights, Kohn's vision can be refined to ensure that public spaces are truly inclusive and

democratic. This requires a more conscientious and regulated approach to managing public spaces, one that aligns with the principles of public equality and democratic participation, as defined by Christiano. Now, let us examine the second criterion of Kohn's model through a democratic lens: accessibility.

2.1.2. Accessibility Challenges of Kohn's Theory

Kohn envisions a public space that is fully accessible to all citizens, this is her ideal**.** By removing physical and logistical barriers to participation, accessibility makes these areas open to all. However, another major flaw in Kohn's framework is its lack of clarity regarding the extent and quality of access required in public spaces. Kohn fails to adequately address how access should be managed, particularly when different groups have conflicting needs or desires for the same space. Let me begin by explaining why accessibility is essential for democracy from a democratic theory perspective.

Public spaces should be designed with accessibility in mind to advance the equitable realization of our four fundamental core objectives. When implemented effectively, accessibility can support the realization of those objectives, which is the key insight we can draw from Christiano's democratic theory. Firstly, accessibility can help address cognitive bias by allowing people the opportunity to encounter other viewpoints and confront their own prejudices in inclusive public areas that encourage discussion and debate. Public forums that allow people from different backgrounds to discuss policy issues, for instance, guarantee that decisions made represent society's common wisdom. These areas are crucial for reducing the dangers of biased or constrained decision-making. Secondly, it fosters a sense of belonging and helps individuals feel at home in the world. Accessible public areas provide people with a feeling of community by enabling them to achieve their objectives and participate in meaningful interactions. For example,

parks, community centres, and public squares that support a range of cultural expressions and activities allow people to feel appreciated and connected to their communities. Additionally, these areas guarantee that people's views and interests are represented in the public sphere, strengthening their sense of pride and inclusion. Thirdly, accessibility enhances access to truth by fostering public spaces that encourage open communication and the exchange of ideas. For example, town halls and online public forums give people a place to exchange information, discuss public concerns, and gain knowledge from one another. This guarantees that people may participate actively in democratic processes and make well-informed judgments. Finally, it will promote the recognition of equal status. Visibly inclusive public areas affirm that all people are created equal. A strong message of equality and respect is conveyed when marginalised groups are openly visible and actively involved in public life. A dedication to treating everyone as moral and social equals is demonstrated by accessible areas where everyone may express their thoughts and have an impact on decision-making. However, while Kohn's theory emphasizes the value of public spaces as shared resources, it lacks the specificity required to address the complex realities of modern democratic life, particularly in the face of accessibility challenges.

As previously mentioned, one significant flaw of Kohn's theory is its failure to define the degree and type of access required in public spaces to truly serve democratic ideals. Unlike Christiano's democratic theory, which identifies four fundamental interests essential to justice and societal welfare - addressing cognitive bias, fostering a sense of belonging, ensuring access to truth, and recognizing equal status - Kohn's framework offers a generalized and idealised vision of public commons without clear mechanisms for achieving these goals. Furthermore, Kohn's romanticized view of unregulated public spaces overlooks the challenges posed by real-world dynamics. For instance, her emphasis on the necessity of political activities within public spaces

does not adequately consider the practical issues of balancing competing demands among diverse user groups. Kohn's principle that public spaces should be fully accessible is easy to declare in theory, but in practice, it raises challenging questions about what activities should be allowed and how conflicts between user groups should be managed. For example, urban skateboarding is often celebrated as reclaiming public space from private corporations, but it also presents challenges (see Borden, 2001; Stevens & Dovey, 2004; Young, 2002), as unregulated access can lead to the exclusion of certain groups of citizens, such as elderly individuals or people with children, who may not feel safe or comfortable in such environments. The democratic ideal of promoting a sense of belonging, which Christiano highlights as being necessary for people to feel "at home" in the world, is compromised by this exclusion. Public areas run the risk of alienating particular groups when they are unable to meet the varied demands of all users, jeopardising equity and inclusivity.

Given the above argument, upholding public equality and creating environments where everyone feels safe and welcome depends on establishing regulations that balance diverse uses and user groups. Washington Square Park, for example, frequently faces conflicts between diverse groups, including musicians, chess players, families, students, and activists, leading to noise complaints, overcrowding, and disputes over what activities should be permitted. City management has had to intervene with regulations on noise, designating specific areas for performances, and restricting some group activities to maintain a balance that serves all visitors (Stevens & Dovey, 2004). This illustrates the need for effective oversight to prevent the monopolisation of public space by specific groups and to preserve inclusivity. Regardless of how fit and healthy an 80-year-old may be, a collision with a skateboarder is likely to cause serious injury or even result in death for the older individual. Structured management should protect all users from such eventualities.

Indeed, people frequently put their own demands ahead of the welfare of the group when areas are open and accessible without proper regulations or oversight. This can lead to issues like neglect, graffiti, and littering, which over time deteriorate an area's quality and usage. In addition to reducing the aesthetic and practical worth of public spaces, these types of issues impede the achievement of the four fundamental interests that Christiano deems necessary for democratic existence: correcting cognitive bias, promoting a sense of community, guaranteeing access to the truth, and confirming equal status. To be sure, public spaces cannot offer the inclusive environments required for meaningful democratic conversation, community development, and equal involvement when they are dominated by individualistic practices. Unsafe or dirty environments, for instance, deter different groups from participating, especially those who are already marginalised. The idea of public equality, the democratic realization of our fundamental interests, and the benefits that well-managed public spaces are supposed to offer are all compromised by this phenomenon. Christiano's focus on the necessity of regulation emphasizes how crucial it is to manage public spaces in a way that strikes a balance between individual liberties and group obligations, ensuring that they continue to be open, friendly, and supportive of the realization of democratic ideals.

These concerns highlight the inflexibility of Kohn’s approach in addressing conflicts or promoting inclusivity. According to my interpretation of Christiano's framework, his writings offer certain guidelines that can overcome the drawbacks of Kohn's model in order to address these issues. Without proper oversight, democratic governance in these spaces is vulnerable to the *tragedy of the commons*, where the absence of regulation can lead to unsafe or exclusionary environments. Kohn acknowledges this tension, but does not go as far as to offer applicable solutions for managing conflicting uses of these spaces, leaving the question of how to balance the

rights and needs of various users unanswered. For public spaces to truly function as commons, there must be specific guidelines on how different groups can coexist without compromising safety or accessibility. In this context, Christiano's model proves to be more effective.

According to my own reading of Christiano's arguments, the goal should be to enhance the functionality and inclusivity of public spaces, ensuring they effectively meet the needs of all users. This involves not only guaranteeing equal access but also actively managing spaces to accommodate diverse needs and ensure that no group feels unsafe or marginalised. Christiano's theory implies that without effective mechanisms to reconcile competing interests - such as those of young skateboarders and elderly citizens - the democratic potential of public spaces is undermined. In the context of public spaces, this means that simply providing equal access is insufficient if that fails to meet the diverse needs of different groups. For example, a park that is technically accessible to all but dominated by one group, such as skateboarders, might offer equal access but not equal use, in the end excluding others like the elderly or families with small children. With this democratic framework in mind, Kohn's vision requires more structured guidance to achieve true public equality.

In sum, Christiano's democratic paradigm offers a more robust definition of democracy and its essential components. It also provides a framework to ensure equitable negotiation between various groups, enabling public spaces to fulfill their democratic potential. His conception avoids the safety hazards and exclusionary practices that are inherent to Kohn's approach by suggesting the use of organized regulation to balance conflicting interests.

Building on this framework, in the next section, I will investigate the last element of Kohn's theory, intersubjectivity. This section will examine the similarities and differences between Christiano's democratic theory and Kohn's focus on intersubjectivity work in public spaces. I will

investigate whether Kohn's concept of intersubjectivity effectively captures the complexity of contemporary public spaces, or if it requires further development to better align with democratic principles.

2.1.3. Intersubjectivity Challenges

Let us now focus on the intersubjective dimension of Kohn's theory and evaluate its role within a democratic framework. Kohn highlights the intersubjective nature of public spaces, particularly emphasizing their political impact. She contends that physical public spaces - such as streets, parks, and squares - function as the most dynamic and influential venues for political engagement, enabling individuals to gather, share ideas, and participate in democratic processes. In this way, they become essential platforms for collective action and political expression. Kohn asserts that these locations might facilitate unexpected encounters among people from diverse backgrounds, ideologies, and social standings, and that this unpredictability creates opportunities for the confrontation vital to a thriving democratic society. For Kohn (2004, p. 8), chance meetings in public spaces compel individuals to confront varied perspectives and reevaluate their preconceived beliefs. In contrast to the curated interactions typical of privatised public spaces, physical public spaces confront people with difference and dissent in a more direct and unavoidable way.

For example, a public demonstration in a park or a protest on a city street unites individuals who might otherwise never have reason to engage with one another. While unplanned exposure to opposing views first leads to conflict, for Kohn it can also promote dialogue, understanding, and lead to democratic transformation. Kohn posits that public spaces are not simply milieus for passive enjoyment or quiet contemplation; they are arenas where diverse voices confront, debate, and negotiate the terms of coexistence (2004, p. 95). A confrontational coexistence is essential for

the health of a democratic society, as it enables individuals to express dissent, challenge established norms, and have meaningful engagement. By not shying away from conflict and disagreement, by in fact welcoming it, public spaces fulfill their functions as sites of civic engagement and active participation, nurturing a culture where differences are accepted and even viewed as fundamental to the democratic process.

Although Kohn's focus on conflict and confrontation highlights a crucial component of democratic participation, her limited interpretation of politics as originating only from conflict ignores other, more common ways that people interact with policies. This oversight runs the risk of undervaluing more subdued but no less important types of involvement that are essential to building a fully democratic society. By focusing so heavily on the political function of these spaces, she risks overlooking other vital roles they serve - roles not necessarily linked to conflict but equally essential for cultivating a democratic ethos. The major drawback of Kohn's democratic perspective is its narrow focus on public spaces as arenas for political struggle, overlooking the broader reality that democracy thrives not only through direct/confrontational political activities but also within the quieter realms of cultural and everyday life that shape how individuals understand themselves, interact with others, and collaborate toward a shared political future. I am here echoing Alexis de Tocqueville (2011).

De Tocqueville makes the case in his landmark book *Democracy in America* that democracy shapes the very fabric of society, embedding equality, civic engagement, and moral responsibility into daily life. For De Tocqueville, democracy is a way of life—one that shapes not only how individuals vote and govern, but also how they think, appreciate art and culture, interact with others, raise families, and organize society (2011, p. 84). He refers to this broader dimension as 'mores': the habits, beliefs, traditions, and everyday practices that shape individual character and

sustain democratic culture (2011, p. 322). Mores are essential because they uphold democratic life even more firmly than political demonstrations, laws or institutions; they foster the qualities required for self-governance, such as civic duty, mutual respect, and a sense of community. Mores provide the cultural and educational soil in which democratic behavior grows. According to De Tocqueville (2011, p. 474), mores even create a unique culture—such as democratic literature—and an educational stysyem that is fundamentally different from that of aristocratic civilizations. In this sense, a country's system of governance actively shapes its cultural and educational life.

Such a culture must be embodied in daily life to remain meaningful. According to De Tocqueville (2011, pp. 518, 520), democracy flourishes when people take an active part in public life. By allowing people to participate in group decision-making, institutions like town meetings, neighborhood associations, and non-profit organizations foster a culture of cooperation and shared accountability. So, the strength of a democratic society depends on how actively and responsibly its citizens participate in civic life. By doing this, De Tocqueville emphasizes how active participation upholds the democratic ideal and a sense of duty among citizens. From this perspective, public spaces like town squares, parks, libraries, and other communal gathering places are essential for fostering and expressing democratic mores. They are dynamic arenas where people can experience democratic culture, engage in social learning, develop moral awareness, and form civic ties—not merely neutral settings for political activity. They allow individuals to interact with others, observe cultural and aesthetic norms, practice coexistence in a pluralistic society, and be exposed to diversity. By fostering unity, tolerance, and a shared commitment to the principles of democratic life, these everyday encounters help sustain democratic mores.

In sum, De Tocqueville's concept of democracy as a lifestyle is comprehensive. It encompasses more than just direct, visible and overt political activities; from this perspective,

politics can be subtle, functioning as a moral and cultural framework that shapes how people perceive themselves, interact with others, and work toward a shared destiny. In this way, democracy becomes more than just a political system—it evolves into a shared way of life that unites citizens in the pursuit of the common good. Beyond political activism, it also relies on art, culture, and education to be sustained.

With this theoretical framework in mind, I see serious flaws in Kohn's theory of intersubjectivity. Indeed, there is a risk of rendering public spaces one-dimensional, stripped of cultural and aesthetic value, and even discriminatory, when they are viewed primarily as arenas for overt political discourse and confrontation. By focusing primarily on visible confrontation, Kohn's perspective overlooks the importance of cultivating democratic spaces where individuals can experience democracy as a way of life and develop the mores essential to its sustainability. Portland's demonstrations against racial injustice and police brutality offer a compelling example. Due to the intensity of the protests, public squares and parks were transformed into arenas for nightly confrontations between demonstrators and the police. Despite being essential for political activism, these places became highly tense due to the ongoing conflict. It disrupted daily routines and made many companies and residents feel insecure. This change brings up an important point: public areas should continue to be open to everyone and fulfill a variety of functions. The overt and visible political events in Portland essentially closed off public venues to individuals who were not engaged in the protests but wanted to enjoy democracy as a way of life. To achieve true democracy, public spaces must strike a balance—safeguarding both the inclusive, everyday enjoyment of democratic life and the opportunity for vigorous political activism.

Furthermore, Kohn's conceptualization of public space endangers liberal rights, which are essential in a democratic society. Christiano's democratic theory provides further rationale for

being critical of this. However, before using this rationale as an evaluative tool, I must first provide a brief explanation of his theories on liberal rights.

As Christiano notes (2008), given the realities of diversity, disagreement, fallibility, and cognitive biases, it is crucial to ensure that every individual in society is treated equally. Achieving this requires upholding the liberal rights Christiano views as essential foundations for democracy. The four fundamental rights for Christiano are: freedom of conscience, freedom of pursuits, freedom of association, and freedom of expression.

Firstly, freedom of conscience safeguards individuals' right to hold and change their beliefs without external coercion, allowing them to reflect on their values and engage with diverse perspectives. Christiano asserts, "people's beliefs about the world enable them to be at home in the world they live in, when one group imposes its beliefs on the other, the group on whom the beliefs are imposed is likely to experience a sense of alienation" (2008, p. 142). Secondly, freedom of pursuits grants individuals the autonomy to set their own goals and follow personal interests, such as choosing a career, practicing a religion, or managing private property, without unjust interference. Christiano maintains that this freedom "involves the right not to be forced or coerced into living in ways that others demand" (Christiano, 2008, p. 145). Thirdly, freedom of association allows individuals to form and be in the groups that align with their values and interests, facilitating social connections and fostering a sense of belonging. Christiano explains that "one important way in which a person shapes the world he lives in is by organizing his relationships with others so as to form associations of various sorts" (2008, p. 147). Last but not least, Christiano contends that the ability to freely express oneself is essential for facilitating candid discourse and debate, forming the cornerstones of democratic life. Public equality is undermined when people are unable to fully engage in the political process and when different viewpoints are suppressed due to a lack of

freedom of expression (Christiano, 2008, p. 151).

To uphold these liberal rights, which are essential for democracy, public spaces must be diverse and inclusive, providing opportunities for various forms of expression, interaction, and personal pursuits. A public space that prioritises confrontation as the sole form of political activity fails to fully uphold all aspects of liberal rights. Christiano's focus on democratic institutions that promote equitable negotiation and group decision-making emphasizes the necessity of moving beyond a public space culture that only involves confrontation. By emphasizing respect and collaboration in his democratic theory, Christiano demonstrates how we can create environments where diverse viewpoints are not only accepted but actively incorporated, fostering a sense of solidarity that strengthens the very foundations of democracy. A culture that embraces solidarity and common humanity as fundamental elements of democratic life guarantees that political participation transcends conflict. All of this means that we need to build solidaristic, loving connections that foster successful political reform, rather than merely dividing people. This solidaristic, loving culture enables individuals not only to visibly engage in politics, but also to express their beliefs, explore artistic, cultural and social interests, and build associations in line with their identities.

With all this in mind, Kohn’s view of public space as a commons does offer a valuable structure for understanding how these spaces can promote democratic engagement and collective action. However, her emphasis on inclusivity, accessibility, and intersubjectivity has some significant drawbacks. Kohn’s model frequently neglects the intricate dynamics of ownership, governance, and power imbalances that can affect the accessibility and democratic functionality of public spaces. While her focus on the confrontational aspects of public spaces is important, it does not adequately capture the full gamut of activities and interactions that lead to an energetic

democratic life. Part of the problem lies in the theoretical framework she uses to support her claim, specifically her use of Smith's theory of moral sentiments.

2.1.4. Kohn's Application of Adam Smith's Theory of Sympathy in Public Spaces

Kohn bases her confrontational theory of public space on Smith's notion of sympathy, which holds that exposure to societal injustices directly fosters moral consciousness of others (2004, pp. 155- 156). She views the presence of underprivileged groups in public spaces as a confrontational act that forces the affluent to face their own culpability in systemic injustices, in addition to serving as a reminder of societal inequity. The presence of marginalised people facilitates this confrontation, which upends the luxury of privilege and compels an admission of societal inequalities (2004, pp. 12, 123, 124).

Kohn contends that in order to promote moral contemplation and democratic engagement, public spaces should deliberately cultivate the conditions necessary for these kinds of interactions. By using Smith's notion of sympathy, she presents public areas as places where people are forced to feel for others, dismantling barriers of indifference and fostering a community that is more involved and just. According to Kohn, this adversarial dynamic is a vital tool for bringing about social and political change by causing the more privileged people of society to become more morally aware (2004, pp. 12, 148, 155, 156). However, there are notable limitations to be found in Smith's theory as well.

Smith's notion of sympathy is flawed in its vagueness and potential superficiality. When Smith discusses sympathy, he implies an ability to "feel with" another person. However, this often results in a shallow emotional reaction: feeling pity for someone without truly grasping their lived experience. Such compassion requires a shared emotion with others, be it sorrowful or joyful. It is the necessary transfer of emotions that introduces ambiguity to the situation (Solomon, 2004, pp.

50, 51, 52, 53, 69). For example, if one person suffers a broken leg, another person might sympathize with them, but they do not actually experience the pain associated with that injury. Similarly, if one person loses their job, sympathtizing with their situation does not make one feel the personal loss of employment. This brings up an important question: what does it genuinely mean to sympathize with another person's experience? Christiano's position suggests that this perspective is inherently limited because it depends too much on moral sentiments and assumes that merely witnessing suffering will naturally motivate meaningful action.

Christiano emphasizes that in complex and competitive societies, individuals typically act in accordance with their immediate self-interests rather than lofty moral principles. He observes, "[a] rational self-interested individual will improve his or her welfare by pursuing policies which make changes only at the margins of society" (Christiano, 2004, p. 13), indicating that people tend to prioritise actions that yield immediate benefits over addressing larger social problems through moral or empathetic responses. Furthermore, Christiano contends that there is a considerable gap between theoretical moral agreements and actual behaviours, as what may seem rational in hypothetical scenarios often significantly deviates from real-life actions. He points out, "[what] action is rational for a person in hypothetical circumstances will often be quite different from what is rational in actual circumstances" (Christiano, 2004, p.13). There is an assumption in Kohn's theory that simply witnessing suffering in public spaces will lead to authentic moral engagement or societal transformation. Instead, Christiano suggests that public spaces need to integrate structured mechanisms that actively promote dialogue, critical reflection, and collaborative efforts that go beyond passive observation. The above insights challenge Kohn's reliance on the visibility of marginalised groups as a trigger for ethical engagement, indicating that sympathy alone may not be sufficient to effect meaningful changes in behaviour or policy. Kohn's argument

presupposes that encountering homeless individuals in public spaces will inevitably lead the observer to move from mere sympathy to deeper reflection and action. Critics of Smith's theory argue that this form of sympathy often amounts to emotional contagion, where people may experience a brief feeling of sorrow without truly understanding or committing to tackle systemic issues that lead to homelessness and marginalization (Solomon, 2004, pp. 53, 54, 70).

Furthermore, imagination is crucial to Smith's theory of sympathy, especially when we consider individuals who are vastly different from ourselves, such as Joan of Arc. "What would it be like to have this happen to me?" Answering this question requires both imagination and intellectual effort. This brings us back to the point that while we may feel sympathy for someone in distress, we may not fully comprehend their specific needs. When we see someone living in poverty, merely handing them money may not fulfill what they truly want or need. To provide meaningful assistance, we must fully grasp the other person's situation. It is common to project our own feelings onto a situation, putting ourselves in someone else's shoes, but this does not usually achieve genuine sympathy. This limitation indicates that, although public exposure to marginalised individuals may elicit an immediate emotional reaction, it does not guarantee the sustained sympathy and moral reasoning needed for true social change. People may continue to feel pity for the homeless without taking actions that genuinely promote their integration and well-being. Consequently, Kohn's dependence on Smith's theory does not fully appreciate the tendency toward shallow sympathy lacking in meaningful moral engagement.

Another significant concern is that Smith's theory of sympathy, as seen in Kohn's argument, does not sufficiently address the structural and systemic factors that lead to marginalisation in the first place. Smith's framework assumes that sympathy is inherent to human interaction and morality, yet it fails to consider the complexities involved in understanding the wider social,

economic, and political contexts that create and sustain homelessness and inequality. Kohn suggests that exposure to homeless individuals will foster an understanding among the privileged, leading to a moral obligation to act. However, without prolonged thinking on the problem that critically examines the structural causes of homelessness - the lack of affordable housing, mental health challenges, and systemic inequalities to name but a few - there is a danger of reducing the issue to just an emotional response. True understanding and moral action demand more than just encountering suffering (Solomon, 2004, p. 30). A deeper critical awareness and engagement with the origins behind suffering is needed.

Additionally, there is a risk that Kohn's approach, which is rooted in Smith's theory of sympathy, could unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and stigmatization. By portraying homeless individuals primarily as symbols or reminders of privilege, there is a risk of reducing their complex identities to mere objects for the moral education of the privileged. This dynamic could create a paternalistic relationship, in which homeless people are seen not as active participants in public life but as passive instruments for imparting moral lessons. Given this risk, Kohn's approach is in danger of oversimplifying the paths to democratic engagement and neglecting the structural obstacles that hinder meaningful change. Her approach neglects the fact that public spaces are more than just venues portraying suffering; they should create frameworks that promote authentic, informed, solidaristic interactions capable of driving systemic transformation.

In sum, Kohn's approach faces significant challenges regarding governance, accessibility, and the ownership of public spaces. While she advocates for inclusivity and commons, her framework does not fully tackle the real-life difficulties of managing these spaces. Power imbalances, competing interests, and the absence of formal governance mechanisms can all weaken the democratic potential of public spaces. Without clear structures to handle these issues, Kohn's

model risks perpetuating exclusion and inequality rather than promoting collective action and participation.

Furthermore, Kohn's reliance on conflict as the driving force of politics, evident in her emphasis on the third component of public space – intersubjectivity - overlooks the broader cultural ethos that public spaces have the potential to cultivate. Democracy involves more than just using conflict to solve the problem of inequality; it also involves fostering conditions in which people view democracy as a way of life, as De Tocqueville argued. Public spaces must foster everyday creative and cultural exchanges that influence how people interact with one another, view themselves, and work together to achieve common objectives. This holistic perspective acknowledges that places like parks, libraries, and cultural institutions that are intended for everyday interaction can foster a sense of mutual respect and shared identity.

In the end, although Kohn's emphasis on confrontation draws attention to a significant feature of public space, her theory's excessive concentration on conflict and its dependence on Smith's theory of sympathy ignore the larger structural and cultural requirements of democracy. By incorporating Christiano's ideas, we may imagine more vibrant and inclusive public areas - areas that not only confront injustices but also foster the solidarity required to maintain democracy as a way of life, as per De Tocqueville. Furthermore, by advocating for democratic governance that ensures the protection of public spaces, Christiano's democratic theory offers a robust foundation to justify their necessity.

Given these arguments, although I do not completely reject Kohn's conception of public space, I believe it has to be reinforced by a stronger democratic framework. Based on the grounds mentioned above, I suggest Christiano's theory in this regard. Christiano's theory supports Kohn's argument by reaffirming that space is necessary for democracy, in addition to offering a more

thorough and tangible approach to addressing the difficulties of achieving democracy in public spaces. In the next section, I will provide a more detailed analysis of how Christiano's theory can help establish an improved rationale for building and creating public spaces.

2.2. The Visibility of Justice: Public Spaces as Crucial Arenas for Realizing Social Equality

Christiano argues that democratic decision-making is appropriate for shaping the common social world—a world largely constituted by rules governing property, contracts, public infrastructure, security, criminal law, and more. For him, it is crucial that our interests are similarly and deeply impacted by the structure of this shared world. Given the background conditions of disagreement and cognitive biases, he contends that democracy is necessary for determining its shape. Since this world profoundly and roughly equally affects each of us, ensuring that everyone has a say in shaping it is essential for advancing the four fundamental interests equally. Given this, one potential objection to the relevance of his theory to public space is that Christiano's argument does not explicitly extend to public spaces, as his primary concern is with the broader common social world rather than physical spaces of interaction. However, for Christiano, equality is not merely a theoretical concept; it must be tangible and evident in daily life. He argued that people should be able to witness justice in action (2008, p. 46). This underscores, in my view, the central role that space plays in his theory of democracy. In this section, I first examine Christiano's emphasis on the visibility of justice and its significance in shaping public spaces as essential arenas for democratic and social equality. Secondly, I will also elaborate on my argument that public spaces can serve as vital tools for cultivating democracy as a way of life when Christiano's theory is effectively applied.

Let us begin with the first argument. As mentioned, for Christiano, equality is not merely theoretical. It must be concrete and real in our day-to-day lives. He views the justice of institutions and interpersonal relationships as social justice and believes that realizing equality on a public scale is essential to social justice. According to Christiano (2008, pp. 46, 49, 56, 63), not only must justice be served, but it also needs to be seen as such. In actuality, the mere existence of just institutions and processes cannot guarantee respect for the equal treatment of people. For this process to be authentic and long-lasting, its tenets need to be evident and observable in the daily lives of citizens. People must see firsthand that their rights are upheld, their opinions are acknowledged, and their involvement is important. This means that all people must realize and *see* that justice is not simply a concept, but that it also is upheld. This implies that public space becomes essential in this context. The principles of equality and justice, which are abstract concepts, become concrete experiences for residents in public areas. People see and take part in the development of equality in public spaces, both through institutional justice and in their everyday encounters and engagements.

What underlying assumptions do we adopt when making this argument through a reading of Christiano's framework? One might argue that public demonstrations of justice are essential for maintaining confidence in democratic institutions. In a democracy, where power is shared among citizens, the perception and conviction that justice is applied fairly and impartially strengthens the fundamental ideals of the democratic system. Based on Christiano's democratic theory, the challenge of convincing everyone that laws are impartial stems from the basic human elements of disagreement, fallibility, and cognitive bias. As previously mentioned, individuals naturally possess diverse perspectives shaped by their unique experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personal interests. In any pluralistic society, these differing viewpoints can of course lead to

conflicting conceptions of justice and equality. Moreover, cognitive biases can distort how individuals interpret laws and social standards, leading them to perceive the system itself as unjust, particularly when filtered through a lens of self-interest. Knowing this, publicly demonstrating justice becomes crucial in reducing these doubts and building trust in the legal system. When justice is transparent and public, it helps to clarify the ambiguity created by these biases and disagreements. It creates a common standard or reference point that all citizens can rely on, reassuring them that the system is fair in spite of the existence of contradictory viewpoints. So, the necessity of public space is justifiable based on fundamental aspects of human nature highlighted by Christiano.

On the other hand, when viewed through the lens of Christiano's four fundamental interests, the transparency and accountability of law enforcement - argued here as necessitating public space - become equally justifiable. First, transparency helps counteract cognitive biases by making it clear that the law is impartial and does not favor specific groups. Second, it supports the need to feel "at home" in society by offering individuals the trust that they live in a fair and just society. Third, transparency ensures that people have access to the truth about public issues by allowing legal processes to be observed and scrutinized. Lastly, showing that everyone is treated equally by the law, even those from different backgrounds, reinforces the equality of all citizens. Given these considerations, transparency and accountability in the enforcement of laws act as a protective measure to ensure the legal system functions according to Christiano's democratic principles of equality, fairness, and justice. These qualities in turn give citizens the means to assess their own treatment and the system as a whole, empowering them to challenge injustices and strengthening the moral and legal foundations of society.

Thus, my argument is that when justice is made visible in public fora, this visibility becomes a direct embodiment of the democratic principles that Christiano emphasizes. The visibility and consistency of justice are vital tools in addressing the uncertainties caused by disagreement, fallibility, and cognitive bias. By ensuring that justice is transparent and applied equally to all, society fosters a more impartial legal system that enhances public trust and upholds the democratic values of fairness and equality. It is imperative, in this regard, that society creates places that are open to all individuals so that they can observe the consistent and equitable application of justice. This reasoning demonstrates why, for Christiano, a pluralistic society needs public space for its very survival. Not only for the realization of democracy, but also for the pursuit of individual fundamental liberal rights, the realization of justice, and the equal advancement of interests.

Secondly, public spaces can play a crucial role in fostering democratic liberal rights. On the one hand, spaces that encourage artistic, professional, or recreational activities are vital in safeguarding the freedom of pursuit. These areas give people the chance to showcase their own personalities and skills, encouraging individuality and opening doors for community involvement. For example, an open park that hosts a career fair, a local art exhibition, or a recreational sporting event promotes civic engagement while enabling participants to pursue their passions. By combining individualism and group activities, social ties are strengthened and communities become more robust and cohesive.

On the other hand, these areas foster freedom of association by giving people the means to congregate, connect, and organize into groups based on common interests or objectives. Diverse populations can live and work together in a public square that accommodates discussions, concerts, or cultural festivals. Even within groups with different priorities or values, these gatherings promote communication and understanding between them. By fostering mutual respect and

coexistence against the backdrop of division, this inclusivity aids in the dismantling of societal barriers.

Most importantly, by providing fora for candid discussion, creative production, and cross-cultural interaction, these areas support freedom of expression. A theatrical production in a park, a public speaker's corner, or a colourful street mural are a few instances of how these settings enable people to express their opinions, question conventions, and start conversations. A society's intellectual and cultural development depends on this open flow of ideas, which guarantees that creativity and critical thinking are consistently fostered. Taken together, these points justify the essential role of space in sustaining democracy, according to Christiano's perspective. In the next chapter. That said, Christiano's theory is not without its limitations. In the next chapter, I will analyze some of the shortcomings in his model.

3. Evaluation of Christiano's Theories of Public Spaces

Christiano presents a robust normative theory advocating for public spaces, emphasizing their critical role in fostering democratic governance and social justice. Rooted in the values of justice and equality, he asserts that public goods are indispensable for establishing a fair society where even the most disadvantaged enjoy equal access to resources that ensure their well-being and participation in community life.

An important component of Christiano's theory is his focus on the visibility of justice. In his view, justice must not only be carried out but must also be visibly enacted, highlighting the importance of public spaces where citizens can bear witness to equal treatment under the law. For him, public spaces can also play a crucial role in fostering democratic liberal rights. By emphasizing that justice must be available for the public to see, and offering a foundation for understanding the importance of public space in realizing liberal rights, Christiano's theory provides ample material to help us prioritise public spaces as essential environments for the principles of justice, equality, and inclusion to be tangibly experienced as more than just theoretical concepts.

Christiano's normative theory is more robust when compared to other theories, such as Rawls' theory, especially his *justice as fairness* model (2001). Rawls' approach focuses on designing principles of justice that individuals would select from an impartial standpoint - what he calls the "veil of ignorance" - where they are unaware of their personal characteristics, social status and talents (2001, p. 15). This ensures fairness in creating social institutions, with Rawls emphasizing key principles such as the equal distribution of basic rights and the "difference principle," which allows inequalities only if they benefit the least privileged. While Rawls concentrates on just institutions and correcting social and economic inequalities, Christiano stresses the value of public

equality and the need for justice to be visible through democratic processes. Christiano asserts that the democratic process itself is non-instrumentally valuable. It allows individuals to recognise that they are treated as equals, regardless of differing views on justice. So, political authority's legitimacy stems not only from outcomes, such as fair resource distribution but also from processes wherein everyone has an equal voice in shaping the rules and decisions that govern collective social life (Chrisitano, 2008).

Christiano's perspective focuses on how justice is perceived and experienced in everyday life. He contends that people need to witness justice being enacted, as this visibility helps build trust and assures individuals of their equal treatment. While Rawls emphasizes abstract principles of justice, Christiano concentrates on the practical, participatory, everyday elements of democracy, arguing that justice must be realized in public and through active democratic involvement, rather than solely through theoretical institutional frameworks. In essence, while Rawls offers a theoretical model for distributing resources fairly within society, Christiano stresses the role of democratic processes in ensuring that justice is not only fair but also visible and inclusive through public participation. In this way, his theory aligns more closely with De Tocqueville's view of democracy as a way of life.

But what are the limitations of Christiano's theory? Kohn's critique of Rawls's normative theory concerning public spaces points out several significant limitations that, she argues, weaken its ability to address the challenges proposed by the privatisation and commercialisation of such spaces. Based on my reading of Kohn, she implicitly identifies five central limitations in normative theories like Rawls' that challenge their applicability to public spaces (2004, pp. 152-155). These include an overemphasis on redistribution, which overlooks the broader social and political functions of public spaces; reliance on abstract principles of justice, which fail to address diverse

perspectives; lack of motivation to encourage support for public goods; failure to prioritise public goods over other social needs; and insufficient responses to the privatisation of public spaces. I will now explain each limitation that Kohn discussed and evaluate whether they apply to Christiano's model as well.

3.1.1. Overemphasis on Redistribution Challenge

Normative theories often focus too heavily on the redistribution of public goods, viewing them primarily as resources that must be fairly allocated. This approach overlooks the wider social and political roles that public spaces serve, which extend far beyond equitable access. Kohn believes that merely ensuring the fair distribution of public spaces in a city is inadequate if those spaces do not fulfill the vital role with which they serve the public. The vital role of public space goes beyond just accessibility. It is about creating environments that build the key elements that define an ideal public space, such as social interaction, political engagement and community-building. Let us imagine a city where public parks are evenly distributed throughout all of its neighbourhoods. From a redistributive justice viewpoint, this may appear successful: all residents, regardless of location, have access to green spaces. However, Kohn would argue that the true worth of these spaces is not in their availability alone. Are the parks designed to promote public gatherings, community events, or political discussions? Do they contain seating, open areas for unplanned interactions, or spaces for children and families to spend time? Without these features, the parks may sit unused or unable to attract diverse groups of people, ultimately failing in their broader democratic and social functions.

How does this critique apply to Christiano? Christiano's theorization of public spaces goes beyond seeing them as resources to be equitably distributed. His theory emphasizes that these spaces are essential environments where people can exercise fundamental rights, such as freedom

of expression, association, and assembly, making them vital venues for democratic participation. This approach recontextualizes public spaces as more than just assets to be fairly allocated. It views them as vibrant and diverse settings where social and political interactions occur, promoting belonging and community cohesion. With that same mentality, he challenges the notion that human dignity is solely derived from individual autonomy and moral self-determination. While he acknowledges the importance of autonomy, he argues that dignity also arises from our ability to engage with values that extend beyond personal autonomy, such as justice, creativity, and community involvement (2008). This wider understanding of human dignity and worth shows we recognise human dignity in various ways, rather than being limited to the autonomous action of humans. Here, Christiano's conception of dignity expands beyond political participation or decision-making, incorporating engagement with intrinsic values like beauty, social connection, and creativity. This inclusive framework for moral obligations emphasizes the significance of all forms of human interaction in upholding human dignity. Consequently, public spaces, which should embody the realization of this dignity, become essential venues where individuals can find comfort, foster community connections, and engage in activities that enhance their lives (Christiano, 2008). Thus, Christiano's theory effectively addresses Kohn's critique of normative theories in this regard.

3.1.2. Conceptual Challenges in Applying Theories of Justice

Kohn critiques normative theories like Rawls', implying that they rely heavily on abstract principles, such as the "veil of ignorance" and "difference principle," to justify the distribution of public goods (2004, pp. 152-153). As always, these theoretical models are difficult to apply in real-life situations because people's understanding of fairness and justice are influenced by their personal biases as well as their cultural and social environments. Kohn's overall concern with

philosophical concepts like Rawls' is that, although intellectually sound, they struggle to address people's diverse perspectives on justice and fairness when applied in practice.

As Kohn puts it, people's understanding of justice is shaped by their personal biases, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts, making it challenging to apply these abstract principles in a consistent fashion across different populations. For example, Rawls' difference principle holds that inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the least advantaged. However, determining how this principle should be implemented in the distribution of public spaces can lead to many issues. Where one might see a new urban park as an appropriate redistribution of space, another may find it inadequate in addressing deeper structural inequalities. This variance in perspectives complicates the process of translating philosophical ideals into real policies that effectively address the social and political complexities surrounding public goods.

In contrast, Christiano's theory does not rely solely on abstract principles to assess the inherent value of justice. Instead, his approach is rooted in the recognition of each individual's intrinsic worth as a creator of value. Christiano argues that justice is not grounded in universally accepted rational principles, which are difficult to achieve given the diversity of human experiences, biases, and disagreements. Rather, his theory is based on the idea that each individual is worthy of respect and recognition for their unique capacity to generate and hold value. Christiano acknowledges that people's self-interest and disparate perspectives are an inevitable part of any discussion on justice. Rather than attempting to neutralize these differences through abstract reasoning, he highlights the importance of appreciating and recognizing each individual's unique ability to create and hold value. This recognition fosters a more inclusive and grounded approach to justice, one that does

not depend on universal agreement on abstract principles but instead encourages mutual respect for each person's contributions to society.

In this way, Christiano's approach effectively counters Kohn's critique by accepting the fact that perceptions of just distribution vary based on individual biases and social contexts. Instead of disregarding these differences, his structure incorporates them, making it more practical and applicable to the complexities involved in public goods distribution and the function of public spaces. By acknowledging and respecting diverse perspectives, Christiano's theory provides a more malleable, human-focussed approach to justice, one that is better suited to address the variability Kohn identifies as a limitation in normative theories like Rawls' (2004). Christiano's theory successfully responds to Kohn's critique of normative theories on this point.

3.1.3. Lack of Motivation to Support Public Goods

Kohn highlights the fact that normative theories fall short in addressing the issue of motivation. Namely, why should individuals feel compelled to contribute to public goods? She argues that offering theoretical justifications alone does not cultivate the civic spirit or sense of responsibility required for citizens to act in the public interest. While normative theories are useful in explaining why public goods should be upheld from a justice perspective, they often fail to provide the tools needed to encourage people to place collective interests above their personal ones.

Kohn argues that without cultivating this sense of civic duty or public-spiritedness, normative theories overlook a crucial practical issue mentioned above: motivation. She highlights that abstract principles of justice prescribe certain behaviours but fail to offer the necessary social or ethical guidance to encourage individuals to act accordingly. In one example, progressive reformers in the early 20th century advocated for public spaces like parks and playgrounds not just

for altruistic reasons but also because these spaces helped reduce social disorder and foster civic identity, especially among new immigrants. In turn, this pragmatism inspired individuals to support public goods by seeing their role in producing tangible social benefits. Kohn concludes that such a clear motivational factor is absent from normative theories.

Kohn further observes that the current reduction of public support for recreational programs exemplifies the challenge of sustaining motivation for public goods. When ideological frameworks such as "positive environmentalism" lose popularity or are perceived as paternalistic, the drive to prioritise public goods diminishes, making it harder to maintain collective support (2004, p. 155).

How does Christiano's theory respond? This represents an Achilles' heel in Christiano's framework. Christiano's theory's lack of a well-developed motivational component - specifically, an explanation of why people should actively support public goods - makes it vulnerable to Kohn's criticism. While Christiano emphasizes public equality and the visibility of justice, he does not sufficiently address what motivates individuals to embrace a commitment to these principles.

This shortcoming stems in part from the absence of a robust foundation in his theory for recognition: the sense of shared responsibility and mutual support that encourages individuals to act in the collective interest, even when they may not benefit personally. Kohn's critique that normative theories often fail to inspire civic duty or public spirit is particularly relevant here. Without a strong theory of recognition, Christiano's framework lacks an account of the social and ethical motivation that binds individuals together in the shared effort to uphold public goods. I will elaborate further on this criticism in the proceeding pages.

3.1.4. Failure to Prioritize Public Goods

Reading Kohn (2004), one can argue that the normative approach does not offer a clear justification for giving precedence to public goods, such as parks and public spaces, over more

urgent social needs like healthcare and education. Specifically, the normative approach fails to clarify why public goods, such as parks and public spaces, should be prioritized over other necessities like healthcare and education.

This lack of prioritisation can result in insufficient investment in public spaces, which are often viewed as less essential than these other services. Kohn's reading of normative theories implies that, although these theories emphasize fairness and justice in the allocation of public goods, they fail to provide clear criteria for evaluating the relative importance of different types of public goods. As a result, public spaces are often underfunded because they are considered less vital than services like healthcare, education, or housing.

This lack of vision to prioritise public places is concerning because it fosters the perception that shared public venues are merely "nice to have" rather than crucial to the health of a society. While healthcare and education fulfill fundamental needs such as physical health and intellectual growth, the wider societal contributions of public spaces are often neglected. Parks, plazas, and similar areas are essential for promoting social unity, facilitating political expression, and generally improving the quality of life in urban settings. Because their benefits are not as readily apparent as those of healthcare or education, they are frequently deprioritised in public policy decisions.

During economic downturns or periods of austerity, governments may sacrifice public space funding to prioritise spending on healthcare and education. But this strategy fails to acknowledge the indirect benefits that well-kept public spaces can offer to society. Public spaces provide citizens with opportunities for social interaction and civic participation. This is a boon to society, yet their importance is often overlooked when compared to other services that address more urgent needs.

The lack of investment in public spaces reflects this normative error, wherein their role in the wider social ecosystem is not fully recognised.

Christiano's theory of public equity presents a strong case for why public spaces deserve priority. As I have previously noted, Christiano asserts that justice should not only be a theoretical concept but must be displayed in everyday life. Christiano's argument doesn't obviously extend to public spaces given his particular concerns with the common social world. However, as I have argued, public spaces are crucial for making justice visible, acting as venues where fairness, accountability, and equal treatment are portrayed. Furthermore, public spaces are microcosms where the four interests can be advanced equally in a public way. This microcosm of public equality will foster the democratic ethos and the sense of recognition that is necessary for a functioning democracy. This potential effect of public spaces is very important for each of us, and roughly equally so.

Given this, public spaces play an essential role in building trust in democratic institutions by enabling citizens to feel justice in action, whether through political protests or community involvement. This has a twofold positive effect as justice is not only enforced but also perceived to be applied equitably. Without public spaces, the concept of justice risks becoming abstract and detached from daily life. Furthermore, Christiano's interpretation makes clear that adequately funded and accessible public space is not a luxury but a pre-condition for the equal exercise of fundamental liberal rights. In his view, prioritising public spaces is indispensable to ensuring that every citizen can observe, question, and influence collective decision-making, thereby safeguarding the equal-treatment requirements of his theory, as well as the transparency and accessibility of justice for all. In this way, Christiano contends that prioritising public spaces is essential for securing the transparency and accessibility of justice for all.

According to my application of Christiano, public spaces are not merely recreational facilities but essential platforms for demonstrating fairness and upholding democratic ideals. Investing in public spaces enhances the visibility of justice and reinforces the social layer of a fair and equitable society. From this perspective, Christiano's framework provides a persuasive argument for the necessity of investing in public spaces as a cornerstone of a just and equitable community. Instead of being considered less important than other services, public spaces should be regarded as fundamental to the operation of a just and democratic society.

3.1.5. Inadequate Response to Privatisation

Reading Kohn (2004), one can criticize normative theories for not adequately addressing the increasing privatization of public spaces. These theories fail to effectively challenge the issues created by private entities managing public spaces, which can restrict opportunities for diverse social interactions and often result in limited access and socioeconomic exclusion.

The shift toward privatisation transforms traditionally open and accessible areas into spaces dominated by private interests that prioritise commercial goals, effectively blocking certain groups from participating in public life. This change fundamentally threatens the intended purpose of public spaces as venues for democratic engagement.

Normative theorists, like Rawls, emphasize the equitable distribution of public goods and the theoretical significance of equality and justice. However, they frequently neglect the practical implications of privatisation, where public spaces increasingly prioritise economic exclusivity over democratic inclusivity. In these privatised environments - like shopping malls, gated communities, or corporate-owned parks - access is controlled, either overtly through physical

barriers or subtly through pricing and design features that discourage low-income citizens and marginalised groups from entering.

The emergence of "public" spaces in commercial developments, such as malls or privately owned plazas, creates an illusion of inclusivity while easily excluding individuals who do not match the image of the ideal consumer. These places often restrict activities like protests, loitering, or any behaviour that does not align with their commercial objectives, thereby restricting the political and social uses that genuine public spaces are designed to fulfill. Private owners frequently justify this exclusion as essential for maintaining order or maximizing profit, even though such goals directly undermine the democratic role of public spaces. Kohn implies that normative theories fail to adequately address the reverberations of privatisation. By emphasizing theoretical fairness, they overlook the practical realities in which private ownership reduces opportunities for interaction across class barriers, thereby reinforcing social exclusion. The question of who controls the space—whether it is a private or public actor—is a crucial additional consideration, given the dissertation's focus. The advancement of the four basic interests and the development of a democratic culture can be directly impacted by the choices made by those in authority. The public sector is perhaps in a better position to serve these interests equally. On the other hand, these interests are less likely to be equally supported, and the democratic ethos may be undermined when a space is governed by a private actor with ultimate authority. While I believe that Kohn brings up a legitimate concern regarding the limitations of some normative theories in dealing with the privatisation of public spaces, I do not believe this critique applies entirely to Christiano's framework. As I will elaborate in a separate section, I contend that there is substantial evidence in Christiano's writings that effectively counters Kohn's argument. Thus, I will set aside the discussion of this aspect of Christiano's theory for now.

3.2. Reimagining Justice: Public Spaces and the Limits of Normative Theories

Given this context elaborated in the previous section, Christiano's theory of public spaces provides a strong framework that emphasizes their vital function in democratic governance and social justice. In contrast to reductionist perspectives such as Rawls', Christiano emphasises the broader significance of public spaces as environments that promote civic engagement, social relations, and political participation. His focus on the visibility of justice and the public awareness of equality sets his approach apart from others, including Rawls. While Kohn critiques normative theories for overlooking the importance of prioritising public goods and for failing to foster civic responsibility, Christiano's framework presents a compelling counterargument. He emphasizes the moral obligation to ensure accessible public spaces and the necessity of justice to be seen by the people, in turn vitally strengthening public investment in these areas.

However, Kohn's emphasis on motivation is one important element missing from Christiano's theory. Christiano provides a helpful framework for understanding the structural significance of public spaces, but he falls short in explaining how people come to feel obligated to preserve and engage with these spaces as democratic goods. In other words, he does not address how individuals develop the drive necessary to sustain a democratic society. De Tocqueville becomes particularly relevant in this context As I have argued, De Tocqueville asserts that democratic people have a tendency to retreat into their own lives, concentrating on their personal, professional, and family issues. According to De Tocqueville, when people become overly preoccupied with their personal lives and material possessions, they begin to feel self-sufficient and disengaged from societal issues (Cook, 2004, pp. 69-70). This rise in individualism weakens civic involvement, making it possible for even small or underrepresented political groups to gain influence. As citizens withdraw from public life, the state steps in to fill the void, leading to increased centralization and

a greater risk of authoritarianism. De Tocqueville cautions that democratic disintegration results from this retreat (2011, pp. 510, 517). The checks and balances on which democracy depends begin to erode in the absence of active citizen participation. Furthermore, De Tocqueville argues that a democratic community becomes less cohesive when mutual recognition and shared responsibility are weakened, leading to mistrust, alienation, and ultimately apathy. The preservation of liberty in a democracy, he suggests, depends on active participation in civic life (Cook, 2004, p. 6). The absence of these fundamental elements poses a threat to the model of democracy proposed by Christiano. His democratic ideals such as accountability, deliberation, and equality become hollow and unsustainable in such an environment.

Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* was one book that focused on this idea (2000). Putnam shows that, since the mid-1960s, involvement in both civic and political associations has decreased by 35 percent (2000, p. 46). Christiano's democratic paradigm, which depends on active civic engagement and broad participation in deliberative processes, is seriously threatened by this decline. According to Putnam, the fundamental tenets of Christiano's democratic ideal—equal participation and the communal exercise of reason—are in jeopardy if citizens become less involved in public and social life (2000, pp. 66, 78). These changes point to a serious flaw in Christiano's framework: it may overestimate people's willingness or capacity to remain politically active in atomized or individualistic societies while underestimating the structural and cultural factors that contribute to civic disengagement. In the next chapter, I will delve deeper into how we can enhance Christiano's framework, proposing a more comprehensive approach that incorporates the essential motivational dimensions needed to sustain commitment to public spaces and shared democratic values.

4. Beyond Alignment: The Limits of Christiano's Theory in Cultivating Recognition and Belonging

As I have argued, Kohn highlights that normative theories do not adequately address the problem of motivation, namely why people ought to feel obliged to contribute to public goods. She argues that the civic spirit or sense of duty required for citizens to participate in the public interest cannot be fostered by academic explanations alone. Although normative theories do a decent job of explaining why, from a justice perspective, public goods should be promoted, they frequently fail to provide the useful resources required to motivate people to put the interests of the group ahead of their own. De Tocqueville also cautioned that democracy's focus on equality encourages an individualistic society in which people retreat into private social circles of close friends and family (2011). Unlike selfishness, which is an innate tendency, individualism is a deliberate retreat from collective matters, weakening social ties. While democracy depends on active participation**,** individualism isolates individuals, fostering a passive society that allows for the concentration of power and even the rise of authoritarianism (Cook, 2004, p. 70). As De Tocqueville points out (2011), when people focus solely on their own concerns, public virtues deteriorate, and democracy itself is undermined. The best defence against this democratic threat is the development of solidarity**,** which requires a philosophical framework emphasizing mutual dependence and recognition. These shortcomings are also evident in Christiano's theory.

Christiano's theory of public equality, while comprehensive in its discussion of how individuals should be treated as equals in democratic societies, does not adequately explore or justify how this sense of justice emerges or develops within citizens. Christiano's theory of democracy is based on the essential premise that there is a common ethos of recognition, which holds that people act in solidarity and naturally care about the interests of others. His idea of public equality is based on this ethos, which is also necessary for democratic engagement to function. It

makes the assumption that democratic procedures depend on people listening to one another, respecting one another's rights, and accepting group decisions - even when they do not align with their own preferences. However, Christiano's framework does not offer a convincing explanation for why this ethos exists or endures, nor does it offer workable strategies for promoting it. Christiano's idea of democratic government is impossible to achieve without citizens adopting a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity. Without this common solidaristic ethos, factionalism, mistrust, and self-serving behaviour would threaten Christiano's idea of public equality, which holds that each person's opinion should be given equal weight.

In light of this, and despite the fact that according to this theorization, Christiano assumes that people will acknowledge and promote each other's interests in the name of public equality, his theory fails to clarify how such a shared commitment to justice is cultured and supported among diverse populations—especially given that, in practice, this sense of collective responsibility and acceptance of public equality is not universally evident. For example, this negative outcome can be quite pronounced in countries with authoritarian regimes, like North Korea or Saudi Arabia, which have strict hierarchical systems that ignore public equality as a core value. These regimes operate on the belief that certain individuals or groups possess greater inherent value or authority than others, often justifying this inequality through religious, cultural, or political doctrines. Convincing citizens in such contexts to accept Christiano's assertion that everyone should treat each other equally would necessitate a fundamental transformation in their worldview, challenging deeply established hierarchies and power dynamics.

The principle of equality can also be contested within groups existing in democratic societies. Far-right movements in the United States and parts of Europe often do not accept the notion that all individuals are entitled to equal treatment, especially immigrants or ethnic minorities. By

favoring the rights of certain citizens over others, they are weakening the democratic ideal of public equality. Furthermore, it can be challenging to defend the idea of public equality, especially among people generally valorizing their own self-interest in democracies. Self-preservation and putting the interests of the individual ahead of the welfare of the group are common motivations for human conduct. Fostering a feeling of shared commitment to justice that goes beyond the individual is difficult considering this reality. For example, people's unwillingness to give up their own resources or privileges, even when such actions are required for the greater good, frequently leads to opposition to redistributive laws designed to reduce inequality. This self-serving resistance highlights a major weakness in Christiano's theory: even in communities that are purportedly dedicated to democratic ideals, there is no strong system in place to foster a feeling of justice and mutual respect. The goal of public equality runs the risk of being aspirational rather than achievable if these psychological and practical obstacles are not addressed.

In such scenarios, Christiano's assumption that citizens will instinctively prioritise the equal progress of all interested parties ignores the real-world inclination toward self-interest or holding exclusionary ideologies. Investigating methods for influencing people and organizations to accept the idea that everyone deserves equal treatment is crucial to developing Christiano's thesis. For democratic processes to function effectively, trust and good faith among citizens are essential. People must believe that others will act with integrity and prioritise the common good over personal gain. This trust fosters a sense of loyalty to the system, even when individual outcomes may be unfavorable. In turn, mutual trust enables collective action and cooperation, allowing diverse groups to work together to address shared challenges and resolve conflicts constructively. Equally important are the principles of respect and equality. A shared ethos ensures that all individuals are regarded as moral equals, whose interests are acknowledged and treated with

dignity. This recognition reinforces the legitimacy of collective decisions and upholds the democratic ideal of public equality, creating a foundation for a just and inclusive society. Together, these elements - trust, cooperation, and respect - form the backbone of a functioning democracy.

However, as I have shown, Christiano's theory is missing an important component: a basis of mutual trust or an accurate explanation of how to build such trust. Hegel's philosophy provides the needed resources.

4.1. Hegel and the cultivation of democratic ethos

We require a theory that explains how democratic values become engrained into people's daily lives, encouraging a feeling of accountability, community, and active engagement that goes beyond short-term political or social gain. Hegel's philosophy does this by discerning democratic principles in the customs, institutions, and common practices that mould people over time, thus establishing a democratic culture rather than merely a utlitarian method to justify it. To explain this point, it is necessary to first delve into Hegel's critique of Kant.

Hegel's critique of Kant's moral theory focuses on the limitations baked into Kant's abstract concepts of justice (1991, p. 162). Hegel contends that while Kant's approach mandates that individuals act according to moral imperatives, it fails to provide the necessary motivation or ethical training for people to carry out this moral behaviour. In Kant's system, the idea of a reconciled community is implicit, in that rational individuals are assumed to live in harmony by following universal laws and respecting each other's rights (Hegel, 1991). However, Hegel critiques Kant for failing to show how this reconciliation of individual wills is achieved in practice (1991, p . 186). According to Robert Sten (2012, p. 79), Hegel argues that Kant does not do enough to explain how individuals move from their own particular wills (focused on personal interests) to the universal will (focused on the common good and mutual respect). Without addressing this, it

becomes difficult to adequately explain how a community of free and equal individuals comes into being and how their wills are harmonized.

Hegel's philosophy explains how the reconciliation of individual wills is achieved. It is not through adherence to a universal moral law alone, as Kant suggests, but through the social practice of mutual recognition. Individuals must recognise each other as free, autonomous agents, and in doing so, they will legitimize each other's rights (Stern, 2012, p. 80). This mutual recognition is what allows individuals to reconcile their particular interests with the universal will, creating a harmonious community. In Hegel's view, rights are not simply derived from abstract moral principles but constituted and maintained through mutual recognition between free agents (Stern, 2012).

Hegel introduces the idea of ethical life (Sittlichkeit) as a remedy, referring to the social institutions, customs, and practices that form individuals' values and dispositions (1991, p. 195). This ethical life motivates individuals to act justly through mutual acceptance of each other's dignity and roles within the community. According to Hegel, justice cannot be maintained solely through abstract rules; it must be grounded in the ethical life of the community, where individuals are socialized into a sense of justice, duty, and mutual acknowledgment of each other's roles and rights within the social order (1991). This reflects a distinctly Tocquevillian understanding of democracy, which emphasizes the importance of social institutions—such as civic associations, family, and religion—in cultivating public virtue and restraining individual self-interest. In both thinkers, the idea is that democratic life is sustained not merely through laws or procedures but through the moral habits and shared values embedded in the everyday practices of citizens. Hegel argues that, in the absence of these social structures and mutual recognition, individuals have no compelling incentive to rise above their self-interest in the name of justice (1991, p. 271).

This critique of Kant is pertinent to discussions of Christiano. Similar to Kant's moral theory, Christiano's approach outlines why citizens should endorse democratic principles but neglects to address the practical motivations for doing so. For Hegel, promoting a sense of ethical life within society and cultivating mutual acceptance among individuals is necessary to support public goods. In fact, without an agreement amongst all peoples to promote justice and mutual recognition, democratic processes can devolve into self-serving or factional behaviours, in turn attenuating the principles of public equality. Citizens in liberal democracies come from different backgrounds and often possess competing interests. There's no guarantee all citizens will instinctively prioritise the equal advancement of others' interests over their own. Arguments about the concept of fairness are likely to arise due to cognitive biases, social backgrounds, and personal experiences. Consequently, Christiano's theory assumes a level of moral commitment and civic responsibility that may not consistently manifest in practice.

Research in political philosophy has consistently emphasized the necessity of motivational frameworks to complement normative theories. For example, Jon Elster (1989, p. 100) argues that although normative principles can define what is just, they often neglect the motivational factors that drive individuals to act in accordance with these principles. In societies that reject equality, or for those groups that benefit from unequal systems, there is often not much incentive to embrace a more egalitarian perspective. To persuade citizens in hierarchical or exclusionary societies to accept Christiano's concept of public equality, it is essential to address these motivational shortcomings. A more powerful framework should investigate how to promote a feeling of shared responsibility and sympathy among citizens, even when individuals may not stand to gain directly from promoting equality.

From here it is clear to see that for Christiano's theory to be successful in practice, there must be a concerted effort to nurture and reinforce this commitment to justice. This poses the critical question: how can we ensure that citizens develop this necessary sensibility? This challenge requires a more persuasive theory that explains why individuals should care about one another's interests. We need to cultivate such a culture from childhood, as focusing solely on self-interest is insufficient to achieve meaningful results. I believe that Hegel's ideas on recognition can provide valuable perspectives in this context.

Furthermore, Hegel's philosophy offers insightful contributions that can enhance the discourse surrounding public spaces, especially through his aesthetic theory, which presents a comprehensive understanding of the role of aesthetics in public life. As I have covered in previous chapters, democratic theories frequently highlight how democracy is ingrained in citizens' daily interactions and habits. The habits, relationships, and interactions of its citizens are what give democracy its strength. Because they are places where people come into contact with one another and form a feeling of community, public spaces are essential to fostering democratic values. Hegel's philosophy can offer valuable support in understanding how other aspects of public spaces, such as their architecture, can further contribute to fostering a democratic ethos.

Based on these considerations, I still find it relevant to use Hegel's work to support my arguments. Hegelian philosophy is undoubtedly extensive, but my primary focus will be on Hegel's concept of recognition. Recognition is vital for Hegel because it serves as the foundation for individual identity and social responsibility. As Axel Honneth argues (1996, p . 92), Hegel's notion of recognition extends beyond mere acceptance of others; it constitutes a dynamic, reciprocal process that creates both individual autonomy and social cohesion. In this view of

things, recognition acts as the mechanism through which individuals perceive themselves as integral parts of a larger community and begin to form a sense of responsibility to one another.

Hegel's concept of ethical life (Sittlichkeit) is closely tied to recognition. For him, ethical life goes beyond simply adhering to abstract rules. It also involves participating in the institutions, customs, and practices that form society. As Allen Wood (1990, p. 199) discusses in *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, Hegel contended that only through ethical life can individuals foster a genuine sense of justice and responsibility; and, the ethical order itself is the final end. Recognition within these social frameworks enables individuals to transcend self-interest and cultivate a true commitment to promoting the common good.

Politically, Hegel views recognition as essential for building ethical life and freedom within social institutions like the family, civil society, and the state. It is through mutual recognition that individuals participate in and uphold these institutions, achieving collective freedom. Ontologically, Hegel understands recognition as fundamental to self-consciousness. Hegel argues that individuals only become fully aware of their existence and freedom through a reciprocal, social process of recognition (Wood, 1990, p. 85). This makes recognition a core aspect of both individual identity and the structure of reality itself.

Hegel's philosophy, especially as understood by academics such as Honneth (1996) and Wood (1990), provides important insights into how recognition addresses and overcomes alienation by fostering a feeling of shared responsibility and social unity in the context of public space and justice. From a different angle, Christiano's framework itself reveals certain limitations that call for a deeper philosophical response. Although his approach centers on procedural justice—ensuring equal standing in democratic decision-making—it tends to overlook deeper forms of social alienation and the human need for recognition that drive public engagement. The flaws in

Christiano's theory about the formation of justice and accountability among citizens are remedied by Hegel's concept of recognition, which embeds people within an ethical existence and offers a framework to foster civic involvement and mutual care. In addition to highlighting the social component of justice, this paradigm also underlines how important recognition is to maintaining society's democratic foundation.

4.2. Hegel, Recognition and the Interdependence of Humanity

Hegel's philosophy of recognition highlights the natural interdependence between individuals. He believes our self-awareness is closely tied to our relationships with others. In a manner akin to a mirror, the people around us reflect back aspects of ourselves, helping us to understand and shape our own identities. For Hegel, true self-realization can only be achieved through the acknowledgment and recognition of others. Hegel states that ″[self-consciousness] exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged″ (2018, p.111).

Recognition is a crucial element in Hegel's ethical, social, and philosophical framework, especially when considering the evolution of self-consciousness, freedom, and overcoming feelings of alienation. For Hegel, recognition is not simply a superficial acknowledgment of another person's existence, it is a fundamental process that enables individuals to attain self-awareness, ethical agency, and a sense of community belonging. The three aspects of recognition that Hegel describes are particularly significant for my analysis: Recognition as the Foundation of Self-Consciousness, Recognition as an Ethical Principle, and Recognition as a Solution to Alienation.

4.2.1.1. Recognition as the Foundation of Self-Consciousness

Hegel's notion of recognition is central to the development of self-consciousness, emphasizing the importance of relationality in human psychology. For him, self-consciousness does not develop in isolation but fundamentally relies on the presence and acknowledgment of others. The understanding of one's identity and autonomy are all deeply rooted in recognition from others.

Hegel argues that self-consciousness requires an encounter with another self-conscious being to gain an authentic sense of itself. This encounter is necessary because, without recognition, the self remains abstract and unable to fully comprehend its own freedom. In Hegel's view, individuals affirm their existence and freedom only when they are acknowledged by others. Recognition is, therefore, more than simply being seen; it is an essential affirmation where one's sense of self is validated and mirrored back, creating a more integrated and grounded self-awareness (Hegel, 2018; Williams, 2000).

Williams (2000) expounds on this concept, explaining that recognition involves an "intersubjective doubling of self-consciousness" (p. 61). This means self-consciousness is not a solitary process but one realized through the presence of others. When the self encounters another, it becomes aware that it is not only the subject of its own experiences but also an object within another's perception. This dual perspective demonstrates that the self's identity and understanding are not solely products of its internal perception; they are shaped and confirmed externally through recognition.

An essential aspect of this process is the individual's motivation to recognise others. According to Hegel, self-consciousness and the realization of autonomy are inherently social processes. For an individual to achieve full self-awareness and a stable sense of identity, they must

engage in reciprocal recognition. Recognizing others becomes a necessity because it is through this act that the individual validates their own status as self-conscious beings.

Hegel insists that self-consciousness attains its full form only through this dynamic of mutual recognition. The self becomes aware of its existence and freedom not as isolated but as affirmed by another conscious being, allowing the individual to develop a coherent and stable sense of self, anchored in external affirmation (Hegel, 2018). This recognition process provides a mirror through which the self becomes aware of its identity in a concrete, psychologically integrated manner.

Williams (2000) points out that for Hegel, self-consciousness is a process involving both "self-repulsion" and "self-discovery" in the face of the other (p.59). Hegel conceives the self not as a static identity but as something restless, requiring an encounter with another to find stability and understanding. The process of recognizing and being recognised deepens the self's awareness, pushing it beyond a purely internal, abstract perception. As Hegel notes, self-consciousness is "for itself" only by being "for another"; it is the other that brings the self to full awareness of its identity and freedom (2018, p.112).

The individual's interest in recognizing others is rooted in the desire for self-affirmation and the development of a true and stable identity. By acknowledging another's autonomy, an individual creates the conditions necessary for their own recognition, leading to a more profound understanding of their own freedom. This mutual engagement is what allows individuals to see themselves as part of a relational structure where their existence is not isolated but supported and validated through the presence of others. Through this reciprocal dynamic, individuals achieve a fuller, richer sense of self, affirming their identity, their autonomy, and their freedom.

Recognition thus has a transformative effect on the individual's self-awareness. By engaging with others and receiving acknowledgment, the self deepens its understanding of itself. This

process validates autonomy and provides a clearer, more secure foundation for the self to comprehend its freedom and identity. Through recognition, of others and of themselves, individuals form a complete sense of self, understanding their place and existence in relation to others. This relational dynamic is crucial for psychological development, as it transforms the self from an isolated state into a fully realized, autonomous being—a process essential for the implementation of democratic ethos. The second aspect of recognition is its role as the foundation of ethical/political life, which I will now analyse.

4.2.1. 2. Recognition as the Foundation of Ethical/Political Life

Hegel's ethical theory is composed of three interrelated stages: Abstract Right (Recht), Morality (Moralität), and Ethical Life (Sittlichkeit). Abstract Right addresses external legal entitlements and the importance of respecting individual freedoms within formal relationships, with a particular focus on property rights and legal acknowledgment. Morality explores the internal motivations that drive actions, emphasizing personal ethical reasoning and accountability. However, the pinnacle of Hegel's ethical framework is Sittlichkeit, whereby individual freedom is fully realized through engagement in social institutions such as the family, civil society, and the state. In this stage, freedom transcends mere individualism and subjectivity, becoming deeply rooted in communal relationships and institutional structures, with mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities serving as the foundation for a fair and coherent society. This is how Hegel connects recognition to the concept of freedom.

In Hegel's philosophy, recognition is not only crucial for self-consciousness but also plays a vital role in shaping ethical life (Sittlichkeit) and achieving freedom. This concept of ethical life embodies a structured communal existence in which individuals are in interaction with various institutions that facilitate the realization of their freedom. As Williams (2000) notes, for Hegel,

"the genesis of the consciousness of freedom in mutual recognition establishes the importance of recognition for ethics" (p. 68). This suggests that the awareness of one's own freedom and moral agency emerges from mutual recognition, which serves as the cornerstone of ethical life. In sum, recognition and freedom are closely interconnected.

The master-slave dialectic presented in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* serves as one of the most notable and deep examples of the theory of recognition and its connection with freedom. It begins with two self-conscious individuals who, driven by their desire for recognition, engage in a struggle for dominance. According to Robert Stern (2002, p. 76), scholars have categorized interpretations of this struggle for dominance into three primary accounts: (A) domination and desire, (B) one-sided recognition, and (C) recognition through risking life. Account A sees the life-and-death struggle as an extension of self-consciousness' domination of objects to satisfy desire. However, mere objects—things without consciousness—cannot respond or reciprocate; they cannot recognize self-consciousness as a subject or confer acknowledgment. Because recognition requires mutual acknowledgment between subjects, self-consciousness turns its attention to other self-conscious beings. This shift introduces conflict, as each self-consciousness attempts to impose its will on the other in order to assert itself, ultimately resulting in the life-and-death struggle. In Account B, the emphasis shifts from desire to recognition as the driving force behind the struggle. Here, conflict arises because one self-consciousness demands recognition from the other**,** yet refuses to offer recognition in return, perceiving such acknowledgment as a threat to its own autonomy and independence. This results in a one-sided relationship, where recognition is sought but not reciprocated. Since genuine recognition requires mutual acknowledgment between equals, the refusal to recognize the other leads to a deadlock, escalating into conflict as neither party is willing to concede their claim to independence. In contrast, account C integrates recognition with

the existential act of risking life. Self-consciousness seeks recognition by demonstrating independence from mere biological existence, requiring a voluntary risk of life. This risk is essential to developing subjectivity and is reciprocated in a mutual struggle, as both self-conscious entities test each other's worthiness for recognition. Of the three interpretations, account C offers the most comprehensive understanding of Hegel's dialectic by emphasizing the ontological and existential depth of the struggle. By emphasizing the existential necessity of risking life, account C aligns closely with Hegel's writings and broader philosophical themes. Supported by thinkers such as Kojève (1969), and Bernstein (1984), this interpretation portrays the life-and-death struggle not as a mere contest of wills but as an existential test through which self-consciousness asserts its subjectivity and freedom. In this scenario, one individual (the master) subjugates the other (the slave), operating under the belief that such domination will ensure recognition of their supremacy. Here, the struggle to the death between two individuals becomes the only way for each to assert their worth. However, as Hegel illustrates, this effort at domination ultimately fails to yield authentic recognition, since the master's acknowledgment from the slave is not granted freely but rather by pressure.

Hegel discusses the master–slave dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (2018, pp. 104–110). Hegel articulates the conflict inherent in the master-slave relationship by asserting that "each aims for the death of the other" (2018, p.106). We see here the destructive aspect of the master's attempt to dominate the slave, as the master aims to suppress the other's independence. However, through this struggle, the master eventually realizes that genuine self-consciousness and freedom cannot be attained through the oppression of another person. The master comes to recognise their own reliance on the slave's acknowledgment. This results in a paradox: the master, who seeks recognition through domination, finds themself trapped and incomplete, while the slave, by

engaging in labour and self-activity, achieves self-consciousness and a more profound understanding of freedom (Hegel, 2018). Despite being in a subordinate position at first, the slave acquires self-consciousness through their work. By interacting with the material world and changing it via labour, the slave becomes aware of their own abilities and independence. In contrast, the master, who depends on recognition from someone beneath them, remains unfulfilled, as the recognition they receive lacks authenticity and mutuality.

This dialectical relationship highlights the inherent limitations of recognition through dominance. As Williams points out (2000), true recognition must be reciprocal rather than unilateral. He points out that the master-slave dialectic "underscores the importance of reciprocal recognition for the realization of freedom and self-consciousness" (Williams, 2000, p.88). For Hegel, freedom can only be perceived through mutual recognition, where both individuals acknowledge one another's autonomy and subjectivity. We can see that the master-slave dialectic demonstrates that domination is ultimately counterproductive. True recognition, which is crucial for true self-consciousness and ethical agency, requires mutual acknowledgment rather than subjugation. It is only through shared recognition that individuals can escape the alienation and constraints that arise from power-based relationships.

Based on this, for Hegel, ethical life and freedom are not merely the result of individuals acting independently; they constitute a collective existence where freedom is realized as a social reality. This understanding of freedom extends beyond personal autonomy. It is deeply woven into the relationships and institutions that make up society. As several scholars have shown, Hegel broadens the notion of recognition to encompass institutions such as the family, civil society, and the state (Honneth, 1996; Williams, 2000). These institutions provide the frameworks within

which recognition is shaped and maintained, enabling individuals to develop a deeper sense of freedom and ethical agency.

In the family setting, for example, recognition is expressed through love and care, where individuals acknowledge one another as inherently good and foster mutual respect. Hegel considers the family to be the fundamental ethical institution, where people first learn the principles of recognition and interdependence (1991, p. 203). Within civil society, recognition manifests through contracts and laws that govern interactions among individuals, ensuring that each person's rights and responsibilities are both acknowledged and honored (1991, p. 103). Civil society in turn makes recognition into an institution through economic and legal systems that create a framework for social collaboration and individual liberty. At the state level, recognition is raised to the highest form of ethical life, becoming institutionalized through legal and political systems that safeguard the rights of all citizens. Hegel regards the state as the ultimate embodiment of ethical life, because it establishes a universal structure in which individual freedoms can be practiced in alignment with the common good (1991, p. 275). Thus, recognition transforms into a formal principle that ensures the legal and political equality of citizens, establishing their status as autonomous individuals deserving of respect.

Nonetheless, Hegel's vision of the state has faced substantial criticism, particularly regarding its perceived anti-democratic characteristics. Hegel's support for a constitutional monarchy and bureaucracy, as detailed in his *Philosophy of Right*, conflicts with the principles of democratic equality (1991, p. 308). In his treatment of the subject, Shlomo Avineri (1972, p. vii) points out several criticisms of Hegel. One major criticism is that Hegel's vision of the state promotes a hierarchical structure that limits individual participation in decision-making processes, implying that power or might equates to right.

Based on my readings of Hegel, Hegel did not endorse a rigid, authoritarian state; instead, he advocated for a rational state that realizes freedom by recognizing individual rights within an organized framework. His reference to the term monarchy is not intended to undermine democratic principles but rather to embody the unity and sovereignty of the state. As Hegel states, "and in [state] freedom enters into its highest right," suggesting that individuals achieve their freedom by engaging in the ethical life of the community (1991, p. 275). Furthermore, Williams (2000) argues that Hegel's state aims to reconcile individual freedoms with the collective good through institutional recognition (p. 121). Also, Hegel's focus on the ethical role of the state emphasizes its responsibility as a protector of public welfare and equality before the law. In sum, his conception of the state as an ethical institution is grounded in mutual recognition, ensuring that the rights of citizens are accepted and safeguarded by the legal and political frameworks of the state. Thus, far from being anti-democratic, Hegel's vision of the state serves to balance individual freedoms with the obligations of citizenship, ensuring that personal rights are respected while maintaining the common good.

This is how Hegel's concept can contribute to the cultivation of a democratic ethos. Hegel's concept of Sittlichkeit is grounded in the principle of mutual recognition, which integrates individuals into a collective ethical framework while remaining deeply aligned with democratic ideals. If the concept of self-interest in Christiano's theory raises questions, this principle suggests that individuals are not motivated solely by self-interest; rather, they are intricately linked through the recognition of one another's rights and freedoms. Such recognition affirms individual autonomy while connecting them to the broader social and ethical layer of a democratic community. Here, recognition transcends personal interactions, serving as a principle that underpins the ethical structure of society. Through mutual recognition, individuals engage in a

democratic community where their rights and freedoms are both acknowledged and upheld by institutional frameworks that reflect this recognition. By engaging with these institutions, individuals grow a dedication to the common good, which is vital for a healthy democracy. Hegel's framework reveals that recognition within ethical life propels individuals to perceive justice as an experiential reality rather than just an abstract idea. Through mutual recognition, individuals are inspired to participate in democratic processes, support public goods, and uphold the principle of public equality that Christiano advocates. However, this is not the full story of recognition; its ultimate purpose lies in addressing and overcoming alienation.

4.2.1.3. Recognition as a Solution to Alienation

Beyond its role in self-consciousness and ethical/political life, recognition plays a crucial psychological role in addressing alienation. Alienation, as defined by Hegel, refers to the sense of estrangement that individuals experience when they are disconnected from the ethical community or Sittlichkeit. This feeling of alienation is particularly pronounced in modern economic contexts, where individuals frequently find themselves detached from their social and ethical obligations.

In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel notes that modern economic life, characterised by self-interest and private property, drives individuals away from the communal ties that define ethical life. He states that an individual finds himself in a world that is foreign to him, where he must assert his independence (Hegel, 1991, p. 263). This disconnect from community life creates a profound sense of alienation, causing people to feel estranged from their social roles and relationships.

Here, the concept of recognition becomes essential as a remedy for alienation. Hegel's theory suggests that individuals can defeat alienation only by being recognised within a larger community. Recognition offers the sense of belonging and validation that is often absent when people are severed from their social roles and relationships. By promoting mutual recognition,

societies can cultivate environments in which individuals are appreciated not just for their autonomy but also for their contributions to the collective. As Williams argues (2000), Hegel's notion of recognition offers a way to overcome alienation by re-establishing connections between individuals and the ethical community. Recognition affirms individuals as integral members of society, where their rights and responsibilities are acknowledged, and their contributions appreciated. This mutual recognition enables individuals to transcend the isolation and fragmentation prevalent in modern life.

Thus, recognition is a foundational element of Hegel's philosophy, shaping his insights into self-consciousness, ethical life, and the resolution of alienation. Williams (2000) argues that recognition gives freedom its existential-phenomenological form and supplies the fundamental intersubjective framework of Hegel's idea of spirit (p.10). It is through recognition that individuals achieve self-consciousness and become ethical agents capable of participating in a community. By reconnecting individuals to the ethical ties of society, recognition helps them navigate isolation.

In summary of the three functions of recognition, we can see that recognition operates as both a personal and political principle to form the ethical backbone of society. Through mutual recognition, individuals develop self-consciousness, participate in ethical life, and confront the alienation inherent in modern economic and social contexts. Recognition here offers a different motivational framework for individuals to truly participate in the collective good. It gives both personal and political reasons to respect others. By recognizing others as moral agents with their own rights and duties, understanding that self-consciousness is achieved through mutual collaboration, and acknowledging the vital existential role of recognition, individuals are motivated to fulfill their obligations within the community. This mutual recognition fosters a stronger commitment to justice, encouraging individuals to transcend self-interest and actively

contribute to society. It is through this dynamic that citizens are inspired to engage in democratic processes, support public goods, and uphold the principles of public equality. I will elaborate on my arguments in greater detail in the next section.

4.3. Bridging Democratic Gaps: The Role of Hegelian Recognition in Strengthening Christiano's Theory

In order to deal with the limitations of Christiano's theory through Hegel's concept of recognition, we can explore how each of Hegel's three functions of recognition responds to the specific motivational gaps in Christiano's framework. While Christiano focuses on public equality and democratic participation, he does not sufficiently account for what motivates people to engage with democracy. Hegel's theory of recognition offers an ethical and psychological basis for why individuals should be concerned with the collective good and the well-being of others. The following outlines how each function of recognition contributes to strengthening Christiano's theory. Let us begin with recognition as the foundation of self-consciousness.

4.3.1.1. Recognition as the Foundation of Self-Consciousness

Hegel's concept of self-consciousness as articulated in *Phenomenology of Spirit* (2018) posits that individuals become aware of themselves through the recognition of others. This concept provides a motivational foundation for democratic engagement by fostering an understanding of mutual dependence and social interconnectedness. When individuals realize that their autonomy and self-realization rely on being acknowledged by others, they are more likely to respect others' rights and take part in civic duties. This dynamic underscores the importance of collective participation in democratic societies, where recognizing others' rights and ensuring equal participation becomes a way of achieving one's own self-consciousness.

The above insight from Hegel directly addresses the motivational gap in Christiano's theory, which lacks a compelling explanation for why individuals are motivated to support democratic norms. Hegel's notion of self-consciousness, rooted in mutual recognition, offers a strong ethical incentive for individuals to engage in democratic processes - not just for abstract principles, but as a means of realizing their own identity. This strengthens the view that individuals are socially embedded beings whose sense of self is formed through interactions with others. As a result, democratic participation is necessary not only for the state's functioning but also for individual self-realization within a social community. For example, self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985, p. vii), emphasizes that relatedness - feeling connected to others - is a fundamental psychological need that drives motivation. SDT does not explicitly mention democracy or political participation linked directly to social connectedness within Self-Determination Theory (SDT). However, the broader theoretical framework from Deci and Ryan strongly supports the notion that interpersonal relatedness (social connectedness) is crucial for intrinsic motivation and self-determined behavior. This aligns conceptually with democratic participation and resonates with Hegel's argument that self-consciousness is fundamentally rooted in mutual recognition. Let us now examine the second function of recognition: its role as the foundation of ethical life.

4.3.1.2. Recognition as the Foundation of Ethical Life

Hegel's conception of Sittlichkeit suggests that genuine freedom is realized only when individuals actively engage in society with mutual recognition. For Christiano, achieving concrete freedom in public spaces and democratic governance requires individuals to contribute to the common good. Hegel's ethical theory, with its focus on the communal realization of freedom, offers a framework for understanding why individuals should feel morally responsible to

promoting democracy and equality. It strengthens Christiano's vision by demonstrating that ethical participation in public life is crucial for realizing both personal and collective freedom. Given this, true freedom is realized not in isolated subjects acting autonomously but through dialogue and democratic interaction with others.

One example: imagine a Muslim parent who registered their children in a school where the majority of students are Jewish. The parent would like their child to master computer skills, but this school does not provide computer courses. The parent suggests to the school board that such courses would be beneficial. They advise speaking with other parents to find consensus and raise the money required for the project. The parent then attempts to connect with other parents and to convince them of the advantages of computer courses for their children.

In the beginning, this might prove difficult. Due to the different religious backgrounds and historical violence between the two groups, those parents might not be willing to work on this project. But as time goes by, and the two disparate groups spend more time with each other, coming to understand one another, more and more parents are drawn to the concept. Online forums and organizations, which serve as public spaces, were developped to discuss and further the project.

With patience and time, the two groups set aside personal and religious interests and biases. This might, at first, jeopardise other parents' plans and interests. Some parents might think that other kinds of courses are more relevant for their children. So, they push back against the decision to allocate all the school's resources to computer courses. In the long term, however, when prejudice and misconceptions are set aside, the benefits of a computer program become clear to everyone. In fact, by coming together with this common goal, and by taking part in discussions in a public space that elide their differences, it becomes possible for everyone to achieve their individual interests while working toward a shared objective.

This serves as an example of both the shortcomings of Christiano's framework and the advantages of Hegel's notion of recognition. Christiano's theory presupposes that public equality will be guided by an inherent sense of justice and equal concern for all. Hegel's view strengthens Christiano's vision by demonstrating that ethical participation in public life is crucial for realizing both personal and collective freedom. True freedom and moral obligation emerge within social institutions where individuals accept each other's autonomy and rights. By recognizing one another and contributing to a collective goal, the parents exemplify how ethical participation in public life (such as organizing computer courses) leads to the realization of both personal and collective freedom. This supports Hegel's argument that mutual recognition and ethical participation are vital for maintaining democratic structures and ensuring public equality. It also deals with some gaps in Christiano's theory. This analysis can be extended to other areas, including the market. Heisenberg (2018, p. 1289) argues that the market teaches individuals to recognise the existence of desires and needs beyond their own, fostering an appreciation for the diversity of human interests.

This aligns with Hegel's broader vision of recognition, where individuals come to understand their individuality in relation to the universality of others. The market, by exposing people to the needs and goals of others, encourages a perspective that moves beyond mere self-interest to a recognition of connection. This is essential for cultivating a democratic spirit of inclusion and mutual recognition. The market's role in civil society helps individuals realize their freedom through structured interactions that involve both self-interest and the recognition of others. Key to democratic life, this realization reinforces the understanding that individual freedom is intertwined with the freedom and recognition of others. While the market may seem driven merely by competition, Hegel's philosophy, as interpreted by Heisenberg (2018), explains that it also plays

an essential role in promoting mutual recognition and respect. Now, we are ready to explore the third function of recognition: recognition as a solution to alienation, and to examine its impact on democratic theory.

4.3.1.3. Recognition as a Solution to Alienation

A central challenge to Christiano's theory is determining how to motivate individuals who feel alienated from democratic systems to participate in democratic processes. In this context, the term "alienation" describes those who feel that their government does not always align with their personal goals and ambitions. Reduced civic engagement and a decline in faith in political institutions might result from this feeling of alienation. In addition to structural changes, addressing this issue calls for promoting a feeling of acceptance and acknowledgment within democratic procedures. This means that, even beyond fixing the structural problems of democratic systems (like reforming institutions or voting laws), there needs to be a psychological and epistemic component to political inclusion. In other words, people who feel alienated must not only be invited to participate but also come to understand why their voices matter and how they contribute meaningfully to the democratic process. This *feeling of acceptance and acknowledgment* is essential for restoring trust and encouraging engagement. It echoes philosophical themes about the need for recognition—something Hegel emphasize: political legitimacy isn't just procedural, it's relational**.**

Hegel addresses this issue by showing how alienation can be lessened through mutual recognition within an ethical community. In modern life, individuals often experience alienation due to the fragmentation of social life and the dominance of capitalism. Hegel did not witness the rise of capitalism, but he was concerned about the alienation people feel when detached from the larger social framework. In the context of this project, which focuses on democracy and public

space, this suggests that people may feel less motivated to support a democratic structure if they lack a sense of connection and recognition within the community. However, mutual recognition helps individuals overcome this disconnection, fostering a sense of connection to the democratic process, and encouraging active engagement with public institutions and democratic ideals.

Christiano's discussion of the concept of *feeling at home* elucidates his view of alienation. Christiano highlights the basic human need to feel "at home" in the world. He argues that this desire stems from our need to align the world with our sense of self, either by shaping our environment to suit our needs or by attempting to make sense of it (2008). For him, individuals require the freedom to form their own beliefs and viewpoints to feel at ease within their surroundings. When external forces, such as government institutions, impose beliefs on individuals, it creates alienation by undermining their ability to interpret and navigate the world autonomously. This imposition leads to a sense of estrangement, as Christiano observes, "people's beliefs about the world enable them to be at home in the world they live in" (2008, p.142). He argues that when one group's beliefs are forced onto another, alienation and a loss of connection to their environment will result as well.

In addition to offering a more thorough framework than Christiano's, Hegel's approach to alienation also provides an ontological basis that inspires people to participate in communal life and value one another. Christiano stresses that people must *feel at home* by upholding their own particular convictions, but he does not go far enough in exploring the idea or defining what *feeling at home* actually means. This lack of detail emphasizes the necessity of a more thorough examination, which Hegel's philosophy suitably offers.

Hegel contends that genuine belonging is attained by actively engaging in an ethical life, in contrast to Christiano, who contends that belonging can be attained simply by observing how one's

ideas impact democratic decisions. Mutual recognition is the foundation of this moral existence, wherein people relate to the organizations that influence their identities and liberties as well as to one another. According to Hegel (1991), alienation is a profound separation from the institutional and social frameworks that shape one's sense of self and autonomy, rather than just a cognitive or emotional state. Wood states that for Hegel genuine freedom requires social self-transparency (Wood, 1991, p. xxix).

Hegel's philosophy fills in important holes in Christiano's thesis by providing a thorough framework for comprehending this interaction between people and their social spaces. It offers a more comprehensive and nuanced explanation of how people might get over feelings of alienation and create a true sense of community, which will ultimately strengthen the democratic ethos. Hegel's concept of recognition goes beyond simply tolerating others' beliefs - it is about individuals seeing themselves as integral parts of a broader social community, where their autonomy and worth are affirmed through mutual recognition. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argues that individuals realize their freedom through relationships with others (2018, p. 104). Alienation is overcome when individuals perceive their roles in society as meaningful and fulfilling.

Hegel's concept of Sittlichkeit, or ethical life, is particularly relevant in this context. When individuals participate in community, they transcend isolation and develop a sense of purpose within that very community. This connection to the communal spirit goes beyond the existential, it is a drive that helps us overcome alienation. Being part of a larger ethical community provides individuals with a reason to value the rights and freedoms of others. In *The Philosophy of Right*, he describes how love and community (such as marriage and family) provide a context where

individuals experience unity with others, which enables a deeper sense of self and purpose (Hegel, 1991).

This unity counters feelings of isolation and gives life meaning by embedding individuals in a network of reciprocal relations. As Honneth (1996, p. 92) points out, recognition offers the psychological security and social validation necessary for maintaining personal autonomy and freedom. The reciprocal act of recognition creates the mutual interdependence crucial for democratic participation and social cohesion. Williams elaborates that this existential structure underpins Hegel's philosophy, showing that recognition is integral to the human experience (2000, p. 10). It goes beyond simply understanding oneself; it provides the ontological ground for one's sense of purpose and place in the world.

Given this, Hegel sees recognition as essential for overcoming the alienation that individuals might otherwise experience. This collective engagement with a sense of meaning fills a gap in Christiano's framework, which lacks a deeply motivational element encouraging individuals to look beyond self-interest and meaningfully participate in the democratic process. Thus, Hegel's theory of recognition offers a more comprehensive solution to the issues of alienation and motivation in democratic participation than Christiano's framework. Christiano highlights the request of individuals to feel "at home" in the world by preserving their personal beliefs, and Hegel provides a more profound existential foundation grounded in mutual respect, recognition and communal involvement. For Hegel, true freedom is achieved through active participation in society's ethical life, where individuals find meaning by recognizing and being recognised by others. This process defeats alienation, motivating individuals to engage with democratic institutions and support public equality. Given the close relationship between recognition and

communal activity, public spaces become vital for cultivating a democratic ethos. In the next section, I will delve deeper into this thesis.

4.4. Public Space and Its Necessity from a Hegelian Perspective

Hegel's philosophy of recognition provides a compelling framework for understanding the significance of public spaces in society. As I have argued, self-consciousness and identity are not achieved in isolation; they are fundamentally relational, requiring encounters with others to be fully realized. Employing this Hegelian viewpoint, public spaces provide essential physical and social contexts for these interactions. Without spaces to engage with one another, the possibility of recognition - and thus the development of self-consciousness - remains limited. This is the first reason to recognise the contribution of his theory of recognition to the concept of public space.

On the other hand, modernity's emphasis on individualism and privatisation often leads to alienation and fragmentation. As people retreat into increasingly isolated spheres, meaningful encounters risk diminishing—driven by factors such as overreliance on technology, suburbanization, and the privatization of formerly public resources. This separation creates a context in which individuals struggle to connect with the larger social framework. In this regard, public spaces serve as a counter to this modern alienation. In public spaces, individuals are not isolated subjects but are instead part of a shared community experience. The presence of others invites individuals to engage, recognise, and affirm each other's existence, which is fundamental for overcoming alienation. Public spaces, by enabling people to see and affirm each other, fulfill this existential need.

Finally, public spaces embody the idea that freedom is not an isolated state but a collective experience. In these shared spaces, individuals can move beyond their private identities,

participating in the collective life of the community and, in turn, experience their freedom in a fuller, more integrated way. Ethically, public spaces encourage individuals to move beyond self-interest, engaging in interactions that promote mutual respect and understanding. While physical public spaces can deepen mutual understanding, they also expose individuals to conflict and disagreement—essential elements of democratic life. According to Kohn (2004), disagreement is not a threat to democracy but a vital part of it. As Kohn puts it (2004), this friction is essential because it challenges assumptions, fosters critical thinking, and supports a pluralistic society. In this way, disagreement becomes a driving force for democratic engagement and growth. This dynamic reinforces the idea that true freedom is achieved not in isolation but through our participation in a community where we recognise and support one another.

Given these three contributions, Hegel's philosophy of recognition clearly demonstrates the vital role of public spaces in cultivating self-awareness and freedom. Public spaces provide the necessary environments for individuals to meet, countering the alienation often perpetuated by the modern emphasis on individualism and privatisation. Public spaces fulfill an existential need for belonging and meaning. In this way, public spaces become essential to realizing Hegel's concept of recognition.

Hegel's concepts of recognition and ethical life (Sittlichkeit) offer a strong framework for viewing public spaces as arenas for mutual recognition and communal interaction. These insights can enhance our understanding of the motivations behind acting with a democratic ethos toward others, contributing to intersubjective theories as developed by Kohn.

My discussion of Hegel comes to an end here. In order to build a theory of public space, I believe I have adequately described the theories and examined the possibilities and constraints of these three philosophers. My plan is to apply these theories in a dialectical manner, looking at each

one in light of the others. I believe that each of these three philosophers - Christiano, Kohn, and Hegel - make significant and perceptive contributions to our knowledge of and development of public places. Kohn in particular offers a solid framework for determining the fundamental characteristics of a public area, and my analysis will be greatly influenced by her three main ideas. Her focus on emphasizing use over ownership in public space is also quite persuasive and crucial to my paradigm. Of the three concepts Kohn introduces - ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity-, Christiano's theory is particularly effective for understanding accessibility. As I will discuss in a separate chapter later, his theory is also highly effective in addressing the issue of ownership. Regarding intersubjectivity, Hegel's theory of recognition provides a more sophisticated framework, despite falling short in addressing the complexities of privatisation, particularly concerning issues of ownership and accessibility, which are critical challenges for contemporary public spaces. The privatisation of public spaces - where once communal areas are now controlled by private entities - poses challenges that Hegel's theory does not adequately address. Modern public spaces often involve complex layers of ownership, regulation, and restricted access, transforming them from sites of open engagement into regulated environments. While Hegel's emphasis on mutual recognition and ethical participation helps explain the importance of public spaces as communal venues, his framework lacks the tools to deal with contemporary issues related to ownership and accessibility, as well as the market-driven forces that now shape these spaces.

Additionally, Hegel's theory does not fully grapple with the complexities of accessibility in modern public spaces. In this regard, Christiano's focus on public equality and democratic participation is more applicable, especially when dealing with questions of ownership and access. Christiano's emphasis on fairness and equality directly addresses concerns about who can use

public spaces and how they are governed. His approach, with its focus on democratic governance and the distribution of public goods, is better suited to addressing contemporary concerns about equal access.

Having introduced the relevant theories, I am now prepared to develop my own ideas about an ideal public space. In the following chapter, I will explore the ideal qualities of public spaces by analyzing the contributions of these three thinkers.

5. The Anatomy of Excellence: Traits of a Good Public Space

By analyzing the shortcomings and developments of each theoretical viewpoint - including those of Hegel, Christiano, and Kohn - I will investigate the ideal characteristics of public space in this chapter. Kohn lays out the essential elements of the perfect public space, such as accessibility, ownership, and intersubjectivity, and offers a solid basis for understanding public space and its importance for democracy. Her study highlights that how the space is used, rather than ownership, is the primary factor in determining the democratic value of public space. This realization is especially important when discussing the dangers of privatisation for democracy.

Although Kohn's three evaluation criteria are clearly crucial for establishing the perfect public space, I have pointed out certain shortcomings in her explanation of these factors. In addition to highlighting the notion that democracy is a way of life, as per De Tocqueville, Christiano's democratic theory provides an insightful analysis of ownership and accessibility criteria. Christiano's writings emphasize the necessity of adding further democratic aspects to the concept of ideal public spaces, going beyond what Kohn has suggested. However, as I mentioned, Christiano's theory has several drawbacks, particularly in relation to Kohn's criticism of the motivational component. Finally, Hegel's theory of recognition provides a sophisticated foundation to address these concerns. His writings offer a useful framework for understanding how public space relates to other facets of human existence, such as the necessity of recognition to overcome alienation and create a democratic ethos.

This clearer understanding of public spaces and their necessity, as explored through the perspectives of these three scholars, will enable us to define the parameters of public spaces that effectively promote these democratic values. Values such as inclusiveness, accessibility, face-to-face interaction, mixed-use diversity, safety, space and boundaries, history, and distinctiveness.

As we embrace our shared dreams of an ideal future, let us try to define the qualities of the perfect public space.

5.1. Inclusiveness: A Space for Everyone

Inclusivity in public spaces is essential for a healthy democracy. When individuals are excluded based on race, class, or other social reasons, it weakens democratic ideals by denying equal access to public life. Christiano insists upon the inherent worth of every individual and the importance of inclusivity to public equality. He argues that human beings are in themselves valuable because they possess the capacity to recognise and create value (Christiano, 2008, p. 15). Exclusion from public spaces undermines public equality by marginalising certain groups and denying them full participation in the democratic process. As Christiano states, "[the] exclusion of individuals from public space threatens the realization of public equality, as it denies their status as equal participants in the democratic process" (Christiano, 2008, p.45). A functioning democracy relies on respecting all individuals and perspectives, ensuring fair representation

Kohn supports this argument by emphasizing the role of public spaces as democratic commons where inclusivity is fundamental. She asserts that "[public] space should be understood as a common where inclusivity is essential for the functioning of democracy" (Kohn, 2016, p.78). Exclusion not only diminishes participation but also weakens social cohesion by preventing diverse groups from interacting in a meaningful way. According to Kohn, inclusive public spaces are critical for civic engagement and upholding democratic values.

The central argument here is that inclusive public spaces foster mutual understanding and shared experiences, both of which are essential components of a democratic culture. People from diverse backgrounds build trust, sympathy, and a sense of community when they come into contact with one another in settings that encourage open communication and equal status. Based on my

readings of Hegel, these encounters foster the motivations required for democratic engagement and counteract the individualism De Tocqueville warned against. By promoting public equality and enabling individuals to see themselves as co-authors of the social environment they inhabit, inclusive spaces serve as more than just neutral backdrops for democracy; they are catalysts for democratic life.

Urban planning literature also supports the idea that inclusiveness in public spaces is crucial for promoting democracy, social interaction, and community resilience. Jane Jacobs famously argued that vibrant and inclusive public spaces are vital for the health of urban communities. She observed, "[cities] have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (1961, p.238). Jacobs' work demonstrates that inclusive spaces encourage spontaneous social interactions, build social capital, and offer opportunities for civic involvement.

Urban designer William H. Whyte also saw the importance of inclusivity in the design of public space (1980). His observational studies of public plazas showed that the most successful and well-used spaces are those that are accessible to all, welcoming people from various backgrounds. Whyte concluded that "the best-used plazas are those that are accessible and inviting to all segments of the population, where people feel they belong regardless of their background" (1980, p.33). His research underscores the importance of creating democratic public spaces that actively invite participation from all members of society without excluding anyone.

Henri Lefebvre further explores the transformative potential of inclusive public spaces (1991). He aimed to rally all forms of diversity—political systems, nations, places, ethnicities, natural endowments, and other distinctions—into one unified movement instead of treating each difference separately, as ecological discourse often does (1991, p. 64). This conceives of space as

a dynamic arena where social relations are continually negotiated and reshaped, giving marginalised communities the opportunity to articulate their needs and challenges. Lefebvre emphasizes that inclusive public spaces empower these groups by giving them a platform for engagement. For him, space is a tool of thought and action, the locus of possibility (Lefebvre, 1991, p.192). Inclusive public spaces, therefore, serve as critical sites where all individuals can participate in shaping their collective futures.

Given the above arguments, exclusion has a nefarious political impact on the egalitarian/democratic treatment of everyone's interests. The ideal public space must facilitate the participation of diverse individuals representing different races, classes, and backgrounds. This means that the space should be inclusive to the extent that anyone who so desires can participate.

Practically speaking, advancing gender equality and inclusivity requires ensuring women's safety in public spaces. To achieve genuine inclusion, it is also essential to address broader structural barriers such as unequal access to childcare, economic inequality, and societal norms that restrict women's full participation in public life. These factors significantly limit many women's ability to access and engage in public spaces on equal terms. However, any realistic account of democratic inclusion must also recognize and address the challenges of ensuring safety for women in public spaces not as an isolated issue, but as a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful civic engagement, autonomy, and the exercise of equal rights in a democratic society. In this context, the unique issues women face in public environments become central to the broader concept of inclusivity.

Similarly, physical access for all, including those with disabilities, is necessary for the planning of an ideal public space. Such inclusive design removes obstacles to democratic participation. Providing methods of sharing information is also part of this inclusivity. Public

displays of information are crucial for the making of well-informed decisions, allowing everyone to participate in civic life. Accessible information kiosks, notice boards, and interactive displays provide citizens with pertinent information and promote the making of well-informed decisions.

In contemporary urban design, there is a strong focus on creating inclusive spaces that address the socioeconomic divides prevalent in cities. Examples such as New York's High Line and Copenhagen's Superkilen are designed to foster diversity and inclusivity, providing environments that invite interaction across different social groups. These spaces are more than just recreational areas; they serve as social hubs that mirror the diversity of their communities, encouraging dialogue and enhancing social cohesion.

Commerce Square in Lisbon, Portugal, stands as a historical example of a resilient, inclusive, and democratically engaging public space. After being rebuilt following the 1755 earthquake, the square evolved into a central location for social, cultural, and political activities in the city. Its open, barrier-free design ensures that it is welcoming to both locals and tourists, offering amenities like shops, restaurants, and seating that appeal to a broad spectrum of people. The square's significance as a democratic space is highlighted by its role in political events, such as the "Que se lixe a Troika!" protests against austerity measures. This function underscores the importance of inclusive public spaces in facilitating civic engagement and promoting democratic participation. Commerce Square exemplifies the power of inclusive public spaces to support democratic participation and social cohesion.

5.2. Accessibility: Breaking Down Barriers

As Williams observed (2000), recognition is the foundational Hegelian principle upon which ethical life is built, connecting individuals within the larger social framework. As I have argued, for Hegel, the state and its institutions—including public spaces—should foster environments in

which individuals can fully realize their interconnectedness. Furthermore, as Williams observes, “the threshold of the ethical for Hegel is attained when the other ceases to be regarded as a nullity or a mere 'thing,' and comes to count as a self-determining end in itself" (2000, p.16). Taken together, this insight underscores the importance of accessible public spaces that eliminate obstacles, allowing individuals to participate fully in a shared ethical and social life. In Hegel’s framework, mutual recognition goes beyond mere acknowledgment, involving the creation of a social fabric where individuals can engage freely and ethically with each other (1991). By removing barriers to access, public spaces fulfill their role as platforms for ethical life, allowing people to realize their full democratic potential through shared engagement and participation.

Accessible spaces allow meaningful dialogue to occur. Such venues facilitate collective decision-making among individuals with diverse origins, abilities, and perspectives by guaranteeing physical and communicative accessibility. As has been suggested, for Hegel (1991), true moral advancement arises from the clash of opposing ideas and the mutual recognition of each other's humanity. Accessible public areas also provide forums for civic engagement and ethical instruction. People can learn about democratic values, social duties, and ethical principles through public forums, workshops, and cultural events. You know what Hegel says when people actively engage in community affairs and work toward achieving the common good, ethical life grows.

On the other hand, as Christiano explains (2008), individuals in a democratic society possess an innate drive to confront and rectify cognitive biases held against them by others, given the background conditions of disagreement and cognitive biases. In addition, people in democratic societies work to develop a feeling of agency and belonging in their environment. To achieve these two goals - correcting cognitive biases and promoting a sense of belonging - accessibility to public spaces is essential. Public spaces become dynamic fora for social interaction and democratic

involvement only when they are open to all members of society, regardless of physical ability, financial standing, or cultural identity.

Having said all of this, accessibility is a problem in many social places, including shopping malls. For many underprivileged groups in society, using a car to access a huge mall may not be an option. Public transit often does not extend to certain locations and parking may be expensive, which restricts access for a sizeable percentage of the population. Consider the following thought experiment: imagine a world in which all land is evenly distributed yet fully privatized. At first, citizens may permit one another to cross their privatised land to get to other places, but eventually, one of them refuses this privilege to others, sparking actual conflict. For individuals to experience democracy and freedom, the state must protect a certain proportion of land for public use, even where equal distribution of property exists.

Other scholars in urban studies refer to hidden architectural methods that owners use to create sanitized public spaces. As scholars of gated communities observe, many upscale neighborhoods worldwide lack public transportation, limiting opportunities for broader civic engagement (Kohn, 2004). The perspectives of urban planners who have examined the complexity of public places in terms of design and management are required if we are to advance the prospect of a democratic society. Equitable and comparable access to these venues must be guaranteed for all members of the public. In addition, it is critical to consider the accessibility requirements of all people, in the conception and building of public spaces. Public areas must provide a warm atmosphere where people need not worry about facing prejudice or physical obstacles.

Trafalgar Square in London exemplifies a high quality of accessibility in public spaces. Located at a central transportation junction, it is easily reachable by subway, bus, and pedestrian pathways. Its open design welcomes individuals to enter, gather, and voice their opinions, making

it a true representation of democratic values. The square encourages interaction among people from various backgrounds, allowing them to engage in protests or simply enjoy the surroundings. This dynamic reinforces Hegel's concepts of mutual recognition and intersubjectivity in public life. (see Figure I).

Figure i: Accessibility and Trafalgar Square

5.3. Face-to-Face Interaction: Connecting Communities

Public spaces must foster open dialogue. These spaces should promote reciprocal and interactive connections. This underlines the value of communication in various social settings and reinforces the idea of democratic intersubjectivity. Face-to-face encounters should be encouraged in the design of an ideal public area. Let us summarize some of the key reasons behind this conclusion.

As previously stated, according to Hegel (1991), the ethical state offers a bridge between particularity and universality and assists people in moving from their particularity to their universality. As I have argued, I view civil society as central to this process, with public space being an integral part of civil society. Civil society is the domain of interaction among private

individuals and is essential for creating a democratic ethos. It is here that people are in interaction with each other, and through this mode of communication, they will develop a better form of civic/democratic responsibility. Here, the encounters with others in public spaces make it possible for people to see themselves from another perspective. And this is essential for fostering a democratic ethos. The inherent diversity and heterogeneity of the public realm might prompt the question: *Who is the man within?*

Allow me to illustrate with a personal story. I remember a professor telling me about a racist German student who used derogatory language to characterise people of color. It became clear from the conversation between the professor—whose Black racial identity gave her a deeper understanding of the issue—and the student that the student had grown up in an area that was once mostly German but had gradually become predominantly Black. The Black children in the area had been harassing and abusing the students. Tears filled the eyes of both the student and the teacher as the student shared his story. This moment of mutual vulnerability—enabled not merely by face-to-face presence, but by storytelling and open symapthetic listening—led to a deeper recognition between them and a shift away from their preconceptions. The capacity to cultivate recognition through such interactions is an essential feature of democratic discourse. Recognition fosters civic trust, strengthens social bonds, and enables more effective conflict resolution within democratic life.

This example illustrates why in-person communication remains vital to democracy. Community meetings and public gatherings facilitate this process, enabling us to better understand each other's viewpoints and develop mutual recognition. Examples of these interactions include community meetings, public gatherings, and meaningful conversations among citizens. People are more likely to sympathize with someone they have met and dealt with directly in a physical setting.

Studies in social psychology show that people are more likely to sympathize with those they've met in person due to nonverbal cues, emotional expression, and mirroring (Decety & Lamm, 2006, p. 1149).

To build such places, consider the following design guidelines. First, set up the chairs so that people can interact with one another. Second, design a layout that is adaptable and open to movement. Accessibility concerns are to be kept in mind for people with different mobility requirements. Third, unofficial gathering places (e.g. picnic tables) encourage people to hang out and mingle. Fourth, tiered seating is great for improved visibility and interactivity during speeches and performances. Fifth, interactive exhibits can stimulate visitor participation and induce conversations. Sixth, offering electronic device charging stations and Wi-Fi connectivity promotes gathering, productivity, and teamwork. Finally, incorporate spaces for live performances, such as platforms or stages, where people can gather to enjoy speeches, music, or performances.

Urban design literature emphasizes the importance of thoughtfully designed public spaces in facilitating face-to-face interactions, which are vital for fostering community and encouraging civic participation. Jan Gehl (2010, pp. 15, 17, 169) argues that these spaces should promote "life between buildings," where personal interactions enhance individuals' sense of belonging and mutual understanding. He asserts that the characteristics of public spaces play a crucial role in how people connect with each other. Spaces designed for human-scale interactions, where individuals can easily be in close contact, are fundamental for nurturing spontaneous and meaningful conversations. When public spaces are vibrant and utilized by a variety of people, they facilitate encounters across different social groups, helping to dismantle barriers and stereotypes. Dynamic, mixed-use public areas serve as gathering places where individuals can forge bonds and weave the social fabric that holds communities together.

Trafalgar Square in London is a prime example of the importance of face-to-face interaction. Its open design, accessibility, and central location allow the square to be a lively hub. Plenty of seating and spacious areas encourage direct engagement among individuals, promoting intersubjective communication vital for democratic discourse. The presence of art and historical monuments, combined with unrestricted access, fosters spontaneous interactions, making it a space that embodies Hegel's vision of public areas that encourage reciprocal and interactive connections (Figure II).

Figure ii: Trafalgar Square

5.4. Mixed-Use Diversity: Spaces That Evolve

Democracy should enable us all to reach our full potential. As I mentioned with reference to De Tocqueville, this should extend well beyond political discourse. For democracy to reach its full potential, it must influence the creation and preservation of public spaces that celebrate the diversity of human experience. This is a key takeaway from Christiano's philosophy as well.

Similarly, as I have argued, Hegel (1991) conceives of civil society as the sphere in which individuals pursue business and advance their own interests within the framework of the market economy. In my reading, this suggests that rather than condemning such private interests, Hegel's philosophy acknowledges and values the diverse activities and projects that free citizens undertake within civil society. From this perspective, the pursuit of a variety of hobbies and careers by free people enhances society as a whole. In my reading of Hegel (1991), rather than imposing a single set of principles or pursuits, his philosophy holds that genuine mutual understanding, collaboration, and solidarity emerge from the interactions of free citizens within civil society. People learn to accept and appreciate one another as equals through these validating exchanges. This acceptance of difference as a source of vigour and power within society is crucial; it helps build the motivational ethos of democracy, as Hegel's concept of civil society emphasizes.

In light of this, public spaces ought to provide options for a range of user needs. Let us summarize various aspects of life that might be addressed in a public space. First, an ideal public place can enable people to learn new things, investigate concepts, and broaden their perspectives. De Tocqueville highlighted how free association in public settings fosters intellectual and moral development, making such environments vital for the exchange of ideas, the members form, first, an intellectual bond (Cook, 2004. p. 49). Second, to find peace in the chaos of daily life, humans need spaces of calm and serenity. No one can make effective decisions in a democracy without moments of leisure. Urban parks and gardens create this kind of sanctuary. Third, social interaction is ingrained in human nature. Places for social events, cultural gatherings, and community activities help people bond and create lasting relationships, which are central to a democratic culture. Access to sports facilities and fitness centers in public spaces promotes individual well-being and enhances opportunities for people to develop a democratic ethos.

In sum, an ideal public space should be flexible and multifunctional, accommodating a wide range of physical and social activities. The Greek Agora is the perfect example of such an ideal public space. It was a bustling marketplace and social centre, hosting a variety of events that extended beyond mere political discourse, here the body of citizens—the *demos*—asserts its own complete sovereignty (Cornelius, 1991, p. 106). Cornelius Castoriadis argues that the Greek agora was the crucible of radical democracy: in the people's own discourse, the law took shape and the principle of autonomy—self-legislation and self-organization of the polis—was actively practiced (1991, p. 113). More than just a marketplace, the Agora was a venue where citizens participated directly in creating the laws and decisions that governed their lives. This concept of autonomy is fundamental to Castoriadis' interpretation of the Greek polis, representing a community perpetually engaged in questioning and redefining its own norms and values.

For Castoriadis (1991, pp. 106-107), the Agora served as a tangible representation of the polis' dedication to isonomy (equality under the law) and isegoria (equality of speech). In this space, every citizen, regardless of their social status, had the right to speak and participate in public discourse, representing the democratic ideal of active participation. The trial of Socrates, which took place in the Agora, exemplifies this commitment to open dialogue. Despite his controversial reputation and being accused of undermining the city's moral values, Socrates was permitted to defend himself in a public setting, highlighting the Agora's function as a venue for critical engagement and the clash of ideas.

For Castoriadis (1991, p. 112), the Greek Agora was vital for establishing a true public sphere - an arena where private citizens could gather to debate community issues. Unlike today, the Greek polis recognised the private and public as intertwined. As a public space, the Agora facilitated the transition of citizens from their private lives to their active participation in the community.

According to Castoriadis (1991, p. 112), the presence of a public sphere within the Agora was crucial to the Greek concept of paideia (education and formation), where involvement in public affairs both shaped and informed citizens. This civic education involved active engagement with fellow citizens in the Agora, where ethical, political, and social norms were continuously negotiated and reviewed. From this perspective, the Agora was more than just a site for transactions or festivals, it was a space for ongoing learning, where democratic values were both observed in practice and formed internal beliefs.

Castoriadis goes on to observe that the Greek Agora facilitated both conflict and agreement, reflecting the dynamic and often challenging nature of democracy. As he puts it, democracy is a system built openly on *doxa*—that is, individual viewpoints—the confrontation of differing opinions, and the collective formation of a shared public perspective (1991, p. 7). In contrast to the liberal view of public space that prioritises harmony and order, the Greek Agora accepted conflict as an essential aspect of democratic life. Public discussions, legal proceedings, and philosophical debates were not only permitted but actively encouraged, as they were considered crucial for the health of the polis. In this regard, the Agora was the site of intense political, social and military debates. This public space allowed for the clash of diverse voices and viewpoints. This readiness to engage in conflict and dissent was a defining characteristic of the Agora, enabling the polis to address its internal contradictions and evolve from them. This process was at the heart of the Greek democracy - an ongoing endeavor of questioning and self-institution in which nothing is taken for granted.

For Castoriadis (1991, p. 235), public rituals, theatrical performances, and festivals—often held in and around the Agora—were integral to the life of the polis. These events went beyond mere religious or cultural celebrations. They were political acts that strengthened the community

and built solidarity. These activities allowed citizens to reaffirm their dedication to the collective values of the polis, thus reinforcing the social fabric.

This is how the Agora connected the sacred and the secular, the personal and the political. It was a place where citizens could engage in divine rituals and discuss public affairs. Castoriadis points out that these events were not only moments of celebration but also occasions for reflection, allowing the community to unite in expressing its identity and prepare for challenges to come (1991). Ancient Greek public spaces are still models for today. Modern spaces should strive to host a wide array of interests, just like the Agora. They should foster an inclusive space of mutual respect and recognition. Public life is multi-faceted and public spaces should embrace this fact to promote social interaction and exchange.

Current research shows the vital importance of mixed-use development in promoting social inclusion and economic sustainability within urban areas. Talen (2022) asserts that diversity in public spaces bolsters social cohesion, as it facilitates the daily interaction of people from different backgrounds, which enhances civic participation. Supporting these insights, Gehl (2010) emphasizes that varied, mixed-use public spaces enhance a sense of place, invigorating cities by accommodating multiple activities throughout the day, ultimately helping to alleviate urban isolation. In his view, a truly vibrant city is one where interior spaces are complemented by well-designed outdoor areas, allowing public spaces to function more effectively and support urban life (2010, p. 31). Together, these studies advocate for the development of mixed-use and diverse public spaces as a means to cultivate more inclusive, interconnected, and vibrant urban environments—conditions that, in my reading, are deeply conducive to the flourishing of democracy.

5.5. Safety: Ensuring Comfort and Security

There is no flourishing of democracy without safety in public spaces. The lack of guaranteed safety stops citizens from exercising their democratic rights. In Hegel's philosophy, there exists an important place for the state in providing personal security and safety as fundamental aspects of ethical life. For Hegel (1991), the state transcends a mere political entity, it serves as a crucial representation of ethical order that balances individual freedoms with collective responsibilities. In his writing, the state must establish a secure environment where citizens can engage in an ethical manner free from fear, and nurture mutual recognition and social cohesion (1991, p. 260).

Public safety encompasses more than just physical protection; it creates an environment where individuals can acknowledge and respect one another's rights, thereby cultivating trust and stability within the community. Hegel articulates this by asserting, "But the right which is actually present in particularity means not only that contingencies which interfere with this or that end should be cancelled and that the undisturbed security of persons and property should be guaranteed, but also that the livelihood and welfare of individuals should be secured - i.e. that particular welfare should be treated as a right and duly actualized.." (1991, p.258). In the context of Hegelian recognition theory, safety within public spaces is fundamental to the ethical life of society, ensuring that individuals can act freely and be responsible, interactive members of their communities.

On the other hand, the freedom to engage in private pursuits is a fundamental right for citizens. According to Christiano (2008, p. 145), this includes the right to religion, the right to choose one's own profession, the right to pursue one's own aesthetic interests, the right to form and join any group one chooses, and the right to acquire and dispose of private property in any way one sees fit. Without safety, it is impossible to fulfill these needs. Safety is also essential for ensuring

freedom of expression. A public area should provide a setting in which everyone is at ease sharing their opinions and engaging in candid conversations. Without psychological safety, people self-censor, which hinders free speech, an essential component of democracy. Ensuring that differing opinions are valued and shielded from harassment requires public spaces that prompt feelings of safety and security.

Both structural and cultural components are necessary to provide this type of psychological safety: spaces must be easily accessible and openly monitored to deter intimidation, but they must also promote societal values of tolerance, respect, and open communication. Clear norms of conduct, diverse representation, and designated discussion areas can all contribute to the development of environments where people feel free to express themselves. In this light, protecting democratic rights requires placing a high priority on safety—both physical safety and the cultivation of mutual respect.

Urban scholars also support this conclusion. Scholars who specialize in feminist theory have investigated the idea of social geography and the ways in which it affects how women interact with public areas. For example, Pereira and Rebelo (2024) examine how urban public spaces influence women's experiences, emphasizing that urban design elements can either facilitate or hinder women's sense of safety and comfort. They highlight that features such as lighting, visibility, and accessibility are crucial in shaping how women perceive and use public spaces, significantly affecting their ability to move through cities freely and securely. A number of elements, including dim illumination, unclear signs, and a lack of public facilities, might make women feel vulnerable and isolated. Furthermore, the literature indicates that safe and comfortable public spaces foster democratic engagement. Sufficient seating, pleasing design elements, and well-kept facilities will attract people to stay and use the space. The importance of comfortable

seating is highlighted by William H. Whyte in his book *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980, pp. 28, 32). According to his studies, when people are comfortable around each other, they are more likely to interact. Finally, a sense of belonging is enhanced by comfort, which is fostered by the presence of inclusive amenities, accessible routes, and areas that can accommodate a range of demands. Richard Sennett (2020, p. 36) emphasizes the value of areas that accommodate a range of users and purposes to foster a participatory atmosphere.

In sum, safe public places drive democratic participation. Town halls for instance allow us to safely get together and discuss things in a comfortable environment. Good lighting and plentiful seating create a safe place for dialogue. Parks and plazas with good energy are the perfect place for nonviolent protests, cultural events, and political gatherings. Furthermore, comfort and safety also reduce barriers to participating in democracy for marginalised people. The traditionally underrepresented gain a voice when inclusivity is a priority.

A fantastic example of a safe public space is Wenceslas Square in Prague. This historic square has played a vital role in political, social, and cultural activities, and has been the site of many historical events including the 1989 Velvet Revolution. The square has excellent lighting, even after dark, along with a noticeable presence of both uniformed and undercover police officers, which creates a sense of security for both residents and tourists (Figure III). This safety is conducive to public gatherings, protests, and everyday social interactions, aligning with the perspectives of Hegel and Christiano that public spaces should facilitate free and secure engagement among citizens. The focus on safety ensures that Wenceslas Square remains a democratic arena where individuals can express their views without fear, embodying Hegel's assertion that the state must safeguard its citizens' security to maintain ethical life.

Figure iii: Wenceslas Square at night

To summarize, safety is an essential element of a healthy democracy. The places that put safety and comfort first serve as the birthplace of debate and sharing of opinion. They are more than just physical places, but practical tools of a vibrant democracy.

5.6. Space and Boundary: Creating Balance

The effective structuring of public space relies on the establishment of boundaries - walls, fences, sidewalks, and other demarcations that define and organize the space. These boundaries not only shape the physical environment but also reflect a deeper philosophical principle tied to Hegel's concept of recognition. For effective Hegelian recognition to occur, there must first exist two distinct entities, each separated and defined in relation to the other. As Hegel argued, Determinate Being (Dasein) represents the initial concrete phase of existence. In contrast to pure Being, which is completely abstract and lacks specific content, Determinate Being is characterised by its specific attributes and the negation of what it is not. Hegel argues that the limit serves as the

midpoint where two opposing elements cease to be what they are. Each extends beyond the other—beyond the boundary that defines them. This limit, as the negation of each, becomes the otherness of both (2010, p. 148). This indicates that every determinate entity has unique qualities that distinguish it from others, allowing it to exist as a particular entity rather than as an indistinct whole.

In Hegel's view, every determinate thing exists through its identity and its differentiation from other entities. For example, we can define a tree as a tree because it is not a rock, a house, or a cloud. Its specific existence is determined by the boundaries that distinguish it from all other things. This principle is universally applicable: every finite being is characterised by its distinctions and limitations, by what it is not.

Charles Taylor (1975) reinforces this notion by highlighting that Hegel's understanding of Being is fundamentally relational. He explains that "for Hegel, every object, everything, is what it is only through its relations with other things, and this is crucial in his understanding of reality" (1975, p. 294). This relational aspect of Being emphasizes that boundaries and negations are not mere restrictions. Instead, they are fundamental conditions that shape the identity and existence of specific entities and consequently play a pivotal role in Hegel's theory of recognition.

Christiano's discussion of freedom of association implies that boundaries are essential for democracy (2008), as they help determine who is or is not part of a given organization. These boundaries allow for clearer membership criteria and enable groups to form around shared values and commitments. They create membership requirements, including common values, passions, or connections that define who can join. They allow us to distinguish members and non-members of a group, allowing for the creation of a collective identity. They are markers of collective goals and clarify objectives. By respecting the structure and procedures put in place by these boundaries, the

group's autonomy and guidelines are safeguarded. They encourage interaction among organization members by establishing a common area for participation and cooperation. Finally, by setting rules for conduct and settling disputes, boundaries aid in the protection of the rights and interests of association members, guaranteeing equal treatment for all.

Finally, the concept of boundaries has often been used in political democratic literature. Building on this idea, the founders of the United States integrated this perspective into their vision of governance. James Madison, in the 10th Federalist Paper, famously argued that the expansion of the republic's borders would help mitigate the dangers posed by various factions (2009, p. 19). By increasing the geographical area of the republic, Madison believed it would encompass a greater diversity of interests and opinions, making it less likely for any single faction to dominate the political process. This innovative argument demonstrated that boundaries are not merely physical demarcations but play a profound role in shaping the dynamics of political power and democratic participation.

Research in urban planning and design consistently highlights the significance of boundaries in shaping and improving public spaces. In *The Image of the City* (1960, 62), Kevin Lynch identifies elements like streets, walls, and waterfronts as "edges" that provide essential structure and coherence, enhancing the sense of place, and making public spaces more memorable and navigable. As I will explain in the next section, they all help incorporate elements of historicity into the design of public spaces, which is crucial for democracy. Gehl, in *Cities for People* (2010, pp. 74, 232, 239), emphasizes that well-designed boundaries create a room-like environment, which increases comfort, safety, and social interaction by offering a sense of enclosure through building facades, trees, and seating arrangements. Oscar Newman's *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention through Urban Design* (1973, p. 325) reinforces this idea by demonstrating that clear

distinctions between public and private areas enhance safety, foster a sense of ownership, and contribute to the overall success and security of public spaces. Collectively, these perspectives argue that boundaries are not simply limitations; they are crucial components that define, organize, and energize public spaces, enhancing their functionality, safety, and social significance. All of these components contribute in different ways to the practice of democracy as a way of life.

The following points clarify the significance of boundaries. Defined perimeters, first and foremost, promote social interaction and tighter gatherings. People connect more easily and conversation arises more naturally when we are near each other. Second, limitations to a space encourage harmony between individual and group life. They permit people to interact with one another while maintaining a certain level of personal space. Third, enclosed areas can be used for a variety of purposes, such as town hall meetings, vigorous discussions, artistic performances, or simply quiet time for introspection. Such activities strengthen communities and contribute to the creation of a democratic ethos. Fourth, contained-style public areas become iconic, capturing the spirit and identity of a neighborhood. Boundaries shape a feeling of place and loyalty. They create safety by clearly indicating points of entry, all of which are very important for fostering a democratic ethos.

An exemplary public space with effective boundaries is Shah Square (Naqsh-e Jahan Square) in Isfahan, Iran. This square is renowned for its clear and well-defined boundaries, which create a sense of containment and order without feeling confining. The architecture of the square, the Shah Mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Ali Qapu Palace, as well as its arcades and bazaars, beautifully enclose the area, establishing a unique sense of place and identity. Its design emphasizes a human-centered approach that promotes a feeling of connection between the public and their environment,

showcasing how well-defined limits can improve the functionality and democratic potential of public spaces (Figure IV).

Figure iv: Shah Square, courtesy of Ali Khodaei

5.7. Distinctiveness and History

Hegel highlights the importance of distinctiveness and self-development in his philosophy of recognition (2018, p. 111). Hegel also delves deeply into the concept of actuality, where he emphasizes that every historical event possesses a unique actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)—a rational unfolding of freedom within time and context (1991, p. 20). Given this, for Hegel, originality and self-determination do not stem from a private essence but emerge through the dynamic interplay of one's inner nature, the rational structure of history, and social forms. Using this viewpoint, Hegel would likely favour public spaces that emphasize their own uniqueness and intrinsic historical qualities. He tends to favor art projects where individuals appear as active agents, shaping their lives in response to historical forces, rather than as passive victims or indifferent observers of history.

This view of actuality is particularly relevant to our debate. One of the key challenges facing public spaces in modern democratic societies is the widespread standardization that diminishes their uniqueness and erodes their heritage value. However, From a Hegelian perspective, the uniqueness of public spaces - especially when rooted in historical and social values - is essential for shaping their character and ensuring they reflect the distinctiveness and diversity that democracy seeks to uphold. Additionally, people are more inclined to be proud of their surroundings when they come across areas that are unique, infused with cultural significance, and represent the uniqueness of their town. This pride can be transformed into vivacious energy that encourages individuals to actively participate in democratic processes and builds a stronger bond with their community. In a similar vein, Christopher Alexander highlights in *A Pattern Language* (1977, p. 45) that areas created with consideration for human scale and local identity promote a feeling of community and active engagement, according to him, people who live in large-scale communities tend to lack distinct character or identity. These viewpoints are consistent with the democratic ideal that public areas should celebrate uniqueness while encouraging people to consider themselves as part of a greater whole. All things considered, unique public areas serve as tangible representations of democratic ideals by offering a venue for celebrating variety and preserving collective memory. Such areas strengthen people's sense of agency by affirming the individuality of people and groups while defying the monotony of conventional designs. Consequently, this fosters a more active and involved populace, illustrating how the distinctiveness of form can directly support democracy's vitality,

We can find several passages in Hegel's philosophy that support the above arguments. Hegel emphasizes that individuals derive their identities from their distinctive historical contexts (1956, p. 68). This suggests that a distinct public forum not only provides a platform for individuals to

express their opinions but also deepens their sense of belonging to a broader, historically rooted community. For genuine democratic recognition to emerge, the element of distinctness must be preserved and valued.

Building on this insight, we can argue that democratic public space must do more than merely accommodate activity—it must reflect and reinforce the historical and distinctive dimensions of communal identity. A truly democratic public space should incorporate symbolic elements that connect the physical environment to shared ideals, transcending mere utilitarian or aesthetic functions. To fulfill its deeper purpose, such a space must foster not only practical engagement but also opportunities for historical awareness, identity reflection, and communal meaning-making. In contrast, democratic discourse becomes shallow in homogenized settings that lack the richness and depth such elements provide.

Hegel's stress on uniqueness, historical continuity, and the encouragement of self-development in public settings is best illustrated at Terreiro de Jesus in Salvador, Brazil. Terreiro de Jesus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the historic Pelourinho neighborhood, serves as a vibrant hub for socializing, political protests, religious and secular gatherings, and cultural festivals. Its architecture is reminiscent of Portuguese colonial urban planning, fusing historical relevance with a contemporary air to create a vibrant area for intercultural dialogue and community involvement.

Hegel's concept of public spaces as fora where individuals can engage with their community while taking into account their historical and cultural background is embodied in this square. Venues for shared activities, such as art galleries, cafes, and places of worship, foster contemporary social and cultural exchanges while maintaining a strong connection to the past. By combining historical and modern components, Terreiro de Jesus is positioned as a living example of Hegelian

principles, where people actively shape their environment by participating in democratic and communal life rather than just being passive consumers of history (Figure V).

Figure v: Terreiro de Jesus, courtesy of Max Haack/Secom

In conclusion, there should exist a range of purposes for public spaces. To foster a sense of recognition and promote meaningful democratic exchange, they should have clearly defined boundaries. Their design should prioritise accessibility and inclusivity to ensure that everyone feels safe, accepted, and at ease engaging in democratic exchanges. Additionally, public areas should promote in-person democratic communication by offering places for community development and socialization. In order to accommodate the community's diverse democratic needs, they ought to encourage mixed-use diversity by including areas for leisure, education, and cross-cultural interaction. Prioritising safety means establishing spaces where individuals may relax, connect, and speak without fear. Last but not least, promoting pride and democratic identity requires the incorporation of history and uniqueness. In order to foster a stronger bond between people and their common legacy, these areas should represent the community's distinctive cultural and

historical values. By combining these characteristics, public areas can act as fora for democratic participation, encouraging both uniqueness and a sense of community.

All of this means that a genuinely public space amounts to more than just an architectural construct. A true public space is a vibrant and open area that facilitates a range of human activities and interactions. Again, I refer to De Tocqueville, who argued that democracy is a way of life, not merely a set of obvious political activities. Public spaces embody the lived experience of democracy by fostering inclusiveness, shared engagement, and mutual recognition among citizens.

Following this exploration of the characteristics of an ideal public space, the next chapter will focus on how privatisation influences democracy in these public spaces. By examining the effects of privatisation on accessibility, inclusivity, and the democratic use of public spaces, we can gain insight into the pros and cons that arise when private interests intermingle with public needs. As I mentioned above, Kohn offers a framework for comprehending how privatisation affects democracy. Her opinions on several aspects of this project have already been discussed, so I will refrain from reiterating them here. Furthermore, Hegel's time did not permit an in-depth understanding of how privatisation affects democracy. Given this, I will concentrate more on Christiano to examine how his democratic framework can assist us in examining the effects of privatisation on democracy.

6. On Privatisation and Democracy

The process of transferring ownership, management, or operation of public assets or services from the public sector or government to the private sector is known as privatisation. This can involve giving concessions for the management of public utilities and infrastructure, selling state-owned businesses, or contracting out services to private businesses. Increasing competition, the push towards decreasing government intervention, raising efficiency, and making money are all common justifications for privatisation.

The way cities are constructed and experienced has changed significantly as a result of the notable increase in privatisation that has occurred in recent years throughout global urban landscapes. The prevalence of privatised spaces in new construction developments is an example of this tendency, which reflects broader changes in urban planning dynamics and priorities. One notable example of this trend can be observed in the proliferation of privately owned shopping malls and commercial complexes in urban centres. These developments, often constructed by private developers, offer a range of amenities and services, including retail stores, restaurants, entertainment venues, and recreational facilities. Today, a large portion of the population uses these private spaces. The Journal of Shopping Center Research has published evidence indicating that 75% of all Americans visit a shopping mall at least once per month (The Mall Phenomenon, 2018). As the International Council of Shopping Centers demonstrates, the number of American shopping malls quadrupled between 1970 and 2017. This indicates that, contrary to the news regarding the death of the shopping mall, this kind of facility is still a very popular place in the USA. So even after a decade, Kohn's observation remains valid: malls continue to serve as central hubs of social interaction, largely because they combine the enjoyable aspects of public life with the comfort and security typically associated with private spaces (2004, p. 64).

What effects will these recent developments have on urban planning? Here, we draw attention to two major issues with this privatisation practice: the increase of exclusionary spaces and the decrease of political life. These issues have serious implications for democratic participation, as they challenge the accessibility and inclusivity necessary for a vibrant civic culture. In what follows, I will first review key debates in the urban planning literature and then examine them through the philosophical lenses of Christiano and Hegel, in order to assess the soundness of these arguments and evaluate the extent to which they affect the practice of democracy.

6.1. The Increase of Exclusionary Spaces

The first effect of privatising public spaces is a rise in places that are exclusive and the exclusion of individuals based on class and race. According to urban design literature, this exclusionary process happens through several design strategies: the closing, redesign, and policing of public parks and plazas; the development of business improvement districts that monitor and control local streets and parks; and the transfer of public air rights for the buildings of corporate plazas (Carmona 2010a; 2010b). Mike Davis and Morrow have discussed several examples of these kinds of urban design initiatives (1990). At the level of the built environment, Davis and Morrow (1990) claim that we may observe a new class war in Los Angeles, where the majority of buildings are completely controlled by security equipment. According to them, this trend destroys public space by excluding people on the basis of their ethnicity and race. The Goldwyn Regional Branch Library is one instance that Davis and Morrow (1990) describe. According to the authors, it is:

> Undoubtedly the most menacing library ever built, with fifteen-foot security walls . . ., anti-graffiti barricades . . ., a sunken entrance protected by ten-foot steel stacks, and its stylized sentry boxes perched precariously on each side. ….It relentlessly interpolates a demonic

> other (arsonist, graffitist, invader) whom it reflects back on surrounding streets and street people (1990, p.239-240).

Libraries are not the only places with this type of restrictive construction. Another example is the widespread use of *defensive architecture* in metropolitan areas, such as spikes placed on flat surfaces near buildings to discourage loitering or benches with metal segments to prevent homeless people from lying down. Such design choices reinforce the notion that public spaces are not intended for everyone, systematically excluding vulnerable communities (see, for example, Petty, 2016; Minton, 2009). These examples demonstrate that the widespread use of exclusionary urban planning in commercialised areas aggravates social inequality by pushing out existing marginalised communities. These design techniques maintain social exclusion by reinforcing pre-existing power relations and restricting access to public areas based on race and class.

Not all urban design scholars, however, share this concern. According to the Broken Windows Theory, obvious signs of chaos and neglect in urban settings, such as broken windows or graffiti, can, if ignored, foster an atmosphere that invites more crime and degradation (see, for example, Ren et al., 2019). As such, it is imperative to create secure spaces by eliminating everything that could exacerbate feelings of insecurity, As I have argued previously, this hypothesis is reinforced by Newman (1973), who emphasizes the importance of timely maintenance and community vigilance in preventing urban decline. He argues that if signs of neglect are not promptly addressed, it signals a broader absence of communal care, which can accelerate the deterioration of the area.

Newman's *defensible space* concept is the notion that communities with well-defined boundaries are more inclined to attract people to take care of them. Hence, urban planners and politicians should aim to create a sense of communal responsibility for the maintenance and safety of private areas by cultivating a proprietary mentality within communities. This idea implies that

people are more likely to devote time and resources to maintaining a space over which they feel a sense of ownership. Given Newman's theoretical framework, it is possible to understand the rise in privatisation and security control measures as efforts to define and protect private areas in urban settings. Following this line of thinking, policies that impose exclusionary measures, such as gated communities or increased surveillance within neighbourhoods, are intended to foster a sense of security and ownership among inhabitants.

6.2. Decrease of Political and Public Life

The second effect of privatising public spaces is a decline in political and public life. Owners and developers of privatised public spaces desire for their areas to be *apolitical* (Leclercq & Pojani, 2023, p. 1). As a result, they keep consumers away from unnecessary social or political distractions and aim to put users in a mood that is consistent with their purpose: to consume (see, for example, Carmona 2010a; Low et al, 2006). Because of this, operators of shopping malls will do all in their power to keep customers focused on their main perceived responsibility, which is to shop.

It is said that, as a result, the political life of public space is dwindling in the face of market-oriented growth. This has led to a broad consensus that public life is in decline (see, for example, Sennett, 2002; Mitchell 1995; Harvey, 2000; 2005). Sennett's main argument in the book is that we are no longer politically active in public spaces due to the growing emphasis on private relationships with family and close friends—a shift driven by the rise of secularism and capitalism (Sennett, 1977). He suggests that public life is increasingly seen as rigid and devoid of vitality, while the inward focus on private life has turned into a kind of trap—capturing individuals' attention without providing genuine distraction or meaningful engagement.

Another well-known member of this school of thought is Henri Lefebvre (1991). He is an outspoken opponent of modern public places, contending that they serve more as representations

than as real, experienced environments (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 230). He contends that rather than being molded by real human interactions, these spaces are imagined by planners and bureaucrats (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 45). According to this perspective, public spaces serve primarily to allow the state's power to be exercised and to guarantee the free movement of money. Lefebvre asserts that enforcing order in public areas through the application of plans, codes, and designs is a top priority for urban designers. He describes these tightly regulated environments as spaces where the state does not tolerate resistance or deviation from established norms (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 381). Consequently, these spaces become devoid of political significance, characterised by homogeneity, instrumentalism, and a lack of historical context. Such policy spaces aim to create an appearance of perfection in which disagreements are forgotten and criticism is silenced. These areas seek to provide a sanitized picture of society, stripped of the intricacies and inconsistencies inherent in human experience, by encouraging a sense of uniformity and conformity.

Lefebvre's critique underscores the need to challenge the hegemony of state and capital in shaping public spaces, advocating for spaces that prioritise genuine human interaction, diversity, and democratic participation. According to him, societies may create conditions that promote real community involvement and group empowerment by reclaiming public spaces as venues of contestation and plurality as opposed to tools of control and conformity (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 381). Lefebvre made an attempt to offer a strategy for establishing the actual public space through the right to the city. In this case, habitation - rather than private property - is the basis for city membership rights (Purcel, 2014, p. 146). The people who live in the city are entitled to the city. Since the right to the city is based on everyone's life, everyone who uses space in their daily existence has a right to it. Therefore, no citizen should be kept apart from city areas or in segregated residential neighborhoods in accordance with this right. Furthermore, the right to the city implies

that each and every person has a say in all matters pertaining to the creation of urban space. Therefore, every citizen in this country has the right to participate in decision-making at all levels, which shapes how social space is organized and controlled.

As has already been discussed, Kohn (2004) emphasizes how important public spaces are for encouraging democratic participation and engagement. These spaces are more than just physical places; they are essential fora for discussion, debate, and group action among various groups - all of which are essential components of a robust democracy. Kohn also stresses how public space is confrontational and how it may be used to question established norms and hierarchies of power (2004). According to Kohn's theory (2004), it is crucial that marginalised people be included in these environments. The affluent are strongly reminded of the presence of marginalised groups by the impact of their own choices and behaviours. This process is not always peaceful and can be tense and ridden with conflict. However, by stifling public and political activity, privatisation seriously threatens these democratic impacts and eventually erodes the democratic capacity of public spaces.

Building on Kohn's thesis, the privatisation of public spaces represents a disturbing phenomenon in urban planning, where the inclusive and participatory character of these areas is being overshadowed by commercial and security interests. For her, the dominance of commercial and governmental forces in the planning and administration of public spaces must be challenged if they are to reach their total democratic potential (Kohn, 2004).

Reclaiming public places necessitates not just guaranteeing physical access but also encouraging sincere human connection and active involvement in forming urban life, as Kohn's work serves to remind us. Without such initiatives, the current trend of privatisation runs the risk

of escalating inequality and depriving communities of their influence, which would ultimately jeopardise our cities' democratic nature.

These are some of the impacts of privatisation on democracy. However, not all scholars in the urban design field agree with this characterisation of debate. Generally, two arguments have been proposed in urban design literature: *it is people's demands*", and *society is changing*.

First of all, according to some academics, the reason space became apolitical was because the average citizen wanted to have "interesting" experiences (Carmona 2010a, p. 137). This line of reasoning holds that people choose to travel to destinations in order to simply have fun for a brief amount of time. Given this, the contention that public spaces are increasingly perceived as apolitical stems from the fact that people, especially in metropolitan settings, use these areas more for leisure than for political activity. Furthermore, in contrast to the idealised view of public spaces as intrinsically political fora, these areas have historically fulfilled a variety of functions outside of politics. According to Carmona (2010a, p. 144), in the past, public areas have served as locations for social meetings, cultural events, and recreational pursuits in addition to political protests or rallies. Public spaces have supported a wide range of human activities, reflecting the many interests and requirements of society, from ancient marketplaces to contemporary parks and plazas. Moreover, public areas have always been crucial platforms for artistic and cultural expression. Public exhibitions, art installations, and street performances all add to the energy and cultural diversity of these areas by enticing people to interact with a variety of artistic and expressive media. Public areas can therefore act as fora for promoting intercultural understanding and communication, bridging political divides, and advancing a feeling of humanity.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that society is dynamic, and new forms of public life require new types of venues (see, for example, Carr et al., 2007). There is also an argument that

new virtual lives could open up new possibilities for public life (Carmona, 2010a, p. 133). For example, Andreas Broeckmann (2004, p. 281) contends that a diverse range of artistic interventions are currently appearing at the intersections of ICTs and urban public spaces. These artistic virtual creations challenge the prevailing logic of privatisation, surveillance, and fragmentation in such an environment. In order to create a visual mix of interface, public space, and urban design, it is important to connect numerous levels, scales, and publics (Broeckmann 2004, p. 282). He says the digital revolution generates strong pressure for change and opens up new options for urban design and organization (Broeckmann 2004, p. 282). He proposes that established ideas and techniques for urban research and design might not be enough anymore and that established solutions to urban issues might also no longer be effective. Another example of this perspective in urban design literature is the concept of "third places. Ray Oldenburg was the first to propose this idea (Carmona, 2010a, p. 132). He made the case that in order to lead fulfilling lives, people need to interact with other social worlds because modern domestic life frequently consists of secluded nuclear families and work due to the proliferation of new technologies. For him, a variety of third-place venues such as pubs, cafes, stores, bookstores, hair salons, and other modest private hangouts are fundamental to this *informal* public life. The following traits apply to these planned or routine meetings: people are free to come and go, they will mostly take place in settings that are extremely welcoming, they are easily accessible, and they do not have formal membership requirements (Carmona, 2010a, p. 132). Their use can also take place both during and after business hours, they have a lighthearted atmosphere; and, lastly, they are fora for discussion, which naturally leads to political discourse.

So, what can we conclude from these debates? The debate between these opposing perspectives reflects broader tensions within the theory and practice of urban design. While

opponents of privatisation advocate for greater diversity and autonomy in public spaces, its proponents frequently place a higher priority on effective upkeep and repair. Both points of view bring up important issues regarding how public space affects city life and how to reconcile spontaneity and control. However, as I have maintained, public areas are crucial to a democratic society. They enable us to use our liberal rights and witness democracy in action. They are also essential for fostering a democratic culture. Therefore, the ability of public space to promote inclusive and democratic interaction is the ultimate indicator of its effectiveness. Public areas run the risk of losing their democratic potential and turning into instruments of exclusion rather than gathering places for people to share humanity if use is prioritised over ownership.

Since democracy itself is the fundamental issue underlying the privatization of public spaces, a deeper examination of this problem from the perspective of democratic theory is necessary to address the concerns raised in this discussion. In the following section, I will draw on Christiano's work to explore the tensions in greater detail.

6.3. Democratic Theories and Privatisation

Christiano (2006, p. 119) asserts that the private sector possesses substantial power and resources, enabling it to affect both the political and economic domains of society. In this sense, choices made by private organizations have the power to directly impact democratic processes, possibly producing results that put corporate profit ahead of the well-being of society. As he puts it, picture a situation in which members of civil society decide to push for better working conditions or higher minimum pay. Christiano (2006) contends that although this decision might represent the democratic will of the people, it may conflict with the societal ambitions of certain economic elites, such as business owners. These elites might oppose such changes in a prosperous society where commercial interests predominate because they worry that increased labour

expenses will reduce their profits. Modern economies are global in character, which exacerbates the conflict between commercial interests and democratic values (Christiano, 2006, p. 136)**.** As Christiano argues:

> The increasing ability to move capital across borders enables owners of capital to elude the kinds of regulation and taxes that the government imposes and seems to give them increasing abilities to defeat aims that are chosen democratically and pursued by governments. In the international arena, these kinds of cases suggest a kind of conflict between two principal aims of contemporary international institutions: the development of international trade, and the spread of democracy (2010, p.197).

Here, Christiano draws attention to the fundamental conflict between democratic principles and global economic interests, highlighting how capital mobility threatens democratic governance and regulation. Because of this, company owners frequently have the choice to move operations to nations with cheaper labour costs or more lax regulations (Christiano, 2006). This could then lead to situations where the government abstains from making a decision because a company's threatened disinvestment could impede economic growth and hurt the government's chances of winning re-election. Another example is when the government decides against raising the minimum wage out of concern that employers might retaliate by firing employees, which would raise the unemployment rate. In summary, Christiano's research highlights how the worldwide flow of wealth severely limits democratic decision-making, frequently compelling governments to put economic stability ahead of social justice initiatives. In addition to undermining governments' capacity to implement laws that benefit their constituents, this dynamic draws attention to the larger tension between market-driven interests and the democratic ideal of group decision-making.

These examples highlight the serious challenges democracy faces due to the privatization of public spaces, as the influence of private companies can conflict with democratic decision-making and their financial interests. In these examples, private companies can bring about results that are contrary to democratic decisions. In such cases, political equality is violated when private companies choose not to honor a democratic decision, potentially jeopardizing the community's democratic demands.

For instance, in the context of privatized services or spaces, companies may respond to stricter pollution regulations by disinvesting, or to minimum wage increases by laying off employees, as explained by Christiano (2006, p. 119). This undermines the assumption that private entities will act in alignment with democratic principles. In these cases, capitalists are not necessarily controlling the electoral process disproportionately; instead, they are influencing the circumstances under which objectives can be pursued, which in turn affects how many of these objectives are achieved. As a result, the achievement of these democratically endorsed goals is constrained not by formal political opposition but by the strategic use of ordinary liberal property rights within privatized structures.

In this way, private interests may be able to influence or sabotage democratic decision-making, creating an environment in which the interests of a wealthy few eclipse the voices of the majority. This example makes it clear that creating a truly democratic space necessitates striking a careful balance between democratic government and economic freedom. As Christiano states (2010, p. 203), unrestrained privatisation can erode democratic principles by consolidating power in the hands of a small number of people.

As I have argued, for Christiano (2008), democratic governance is justified both by the intrinsic value of each individual as an authority in the realm of value and by the practical

challenges posed by diversity, cognitive biases, disagreement, and human fallibility. In light of this, Christiano's viewpoint casts doubt on the idea that unbridled self-interest is invariably consistent with the benefit of society. Applying the same logic, one could argue that a common justification used by the private sector to expand its business activities in public space is the claim that such behavior reflects a natural aspect of human nature. However, as Christiano explains (2010, p. 209), it is commonly acknowledged that members of society must follow moral and legal democratic rules. In fact, respect for moral and legal democratic norms is necessary for a stable and just society, implying that political arrangements cannot be based only on self-interest. In light of this, Christiano warns against ignoring potential conflicts between private and collective interests. According to him, the right to capital is not a fundamental one (Christiano, 2010). In his words:

> On the first kind of undue burden, the idea is that the authority of a democratic legislature runs out when it attempts to act in violation of one of the basic limits on democratic authority. Serious abridgments of the freedom of expression or the freedom of association qualify as actions that are beyond the authority of democracy. And it seems to me that abridgments of basic rights of personal private property are beyond that authority. It is not clear to me, however, that the right to own capital qualifies as a fundamental right. It does not seem to be as central to the fundamental interests of the great majority of persons as the freedom of association or the freedom associated with personal private property. It is the centrality of these rights to the promotion of the fundamental interests of persons that qualifies them as grounds of fundamental rights that not even a democratic assembly may abridge. By contrast, the rights over capital, since they do not have this centrality to fundamental interests, are not basic limits to democratic authority. Hence, I do not think

> that requiring capitalists to cooperate with the pursuit of democratically chosen aims is an undue burden imposed on capitalists, at least in this respect (2010, p.213)

Elsewhere he argues that:

> Property rights themselves are the subject of serious disagreement. In light of such disagreement, a political decision-making process ought to have a role in defining the system of legal property (2006, p.136).

This viewpoint emphasizes that property rights are neither fixed nor immutable. Because these rights are controversial, a strong oversight framework is necessary to guarantee their equitable implementation and prevent exploitation. Christiano emphasizes the usefulness of regulatory systems in such circumstances as a way to protect democratic values and balance conflicting interests (2010, p. 207). In light of this, Christiano emphasizes the necessity of regulatory monitoring to prevent abuses of power and guarantee fair results. In addition, he notes that market equilibrium has consistently been associated with government involvement (Christiano, 2010, p. 214). The US government's intervention during the Great Depression averted catastrophe. The recent response to the COVID is another example. These examples underscore the vital connection between market forces and government regulation. Because of the market's historical ties to the government, the latter is frequently necessary for its success. As a result, even in cases where their own interests conflict with democratic decisions, private persons have a moral duty to accept them. Therefore, Christiano contends that we should take a nuanced stance that strikes a balance between individual freedoms and collective well-being. As he states:

> To the extent that this tension holds, I will argue that commitment to democratic norms implies that private capitalist firms must cooperate with a democratic assembly and

> government in the pursuit of the aims of a democratic assembly even when this implies some diminution of the profits of the firms. (2010, p. 196)

Christiano's argument implies the importance of democratic processes in regulating and forming private companies in private spaces, emphasizing the need to put democratic standards ahead of unbridled capitalist objectives. We can gain a deeper understanding of the complex connections between privatisation, democracy, and social progress by analyzing these theories in conjunction with historical examples. Therefore, democratic values may occasionally be challenged by actions made by the corporate sector. In these situations, given the practical challenges posed by diversity, cognitive biases, disagreement, and human fallibility, the private sector ought to take the initiative and try to control its operations and internal processes in a way that supports democratic principles rather than undercuts them.

Thus far, I have argued that the private sector should operate in ways that support democratic infrastructure. However, it is not sufficient to simply establish a set of rules and laws governing private spaces. Why not? Christiano highlights how capital mobility allows private actors to undermine democratic decisions by avoiding regulations or threatening disinvestment (2010, p. 197). However, he also warns against heavy-handed regulation, noting the unpredictability of markets and the importance of individual freedoms, including the freedom of association (Christiano, 2010, p. 213). Furthermore, while privatization can challenge democratic authority, it also has the potential to support democratic life when properly managed. Private spaces—like salons, cafes, or even embassies—can foster dialogue and freedom, especially in restrictive political environments. Ultimately, privatization is not inherently anti-democratic. Its impact depends on how well democratic societies regulate private power while preserving its potential to foster innovation, participation, and recognition. A healthy democracy must balance economic

freedom with collective responsibility. In the next section, I will discuss this serious issue. Let's begin with the argument that we cannot simply impose a set of rules and laws on the private sphere.

6.3.1. The Importance of Handling Privatised Interests with Caution

Christiano argues that we cannot simply rely on a set of rules and laws to regulate the private sector (2010). As he puts it, since people's unpredictable actions and decisions impact economies and private spaces, we cannot guarantee that government actions will result in specific economic results. One clear example of the unpredictable nature of private areas is the financial market. A wide range of factors, such as macroeconomic statistics, investor sentiment, and geopolitical developments, influence daily fluctuations in stock prices. Even with the best of intentions, economists and decision-makers are not always able to predict market movements due to unforeseen occurrences like natural disasters or abrupt changes in governmental regulations. The subprime mortgage crisis in 2008 shows the real-life consequences of this argument. Unfortunately, the value of regulatory measures is often difficult to predict with theory.

Given this reality, we should be cautious about imposing top-down rules over the privatised sectors. Increased regulation of capitalist behavior is frequently advocated by social justice campaigners as a means of ensuring the preservation of democratically determined goals. These rules could include things like more stringent laws governing employee layoffs or additional fees levied on businesses that move their money abroad. In addition, there can even be demands for nationalising businesses in order to stop capitalists from influencing democratic choices. But in a globalized world, capitalists with the ability to swiftly relocate their capital strongly oppose the imposition of such laws. In capitalist societies, where profit is the primary objective, they are often drawn to regions with more lenient regulatory frameworks. Thus, efforts to control capital are met with strong resistance and devious means.

Even in a nation with a solid democracy, capital regulation presents complex difficulties. The competitive and profit-focused nature of capitalism creates barriers to efficient regulation. Capitalists have the means to organize against regulatory actions that jeopardise their interests and wield a great deal of economic power. The process of establishing and implementing regulations has significant challenges. It is impossible to ignore the realities of navigating the complexities of a capitalist society, even when there is support for imposing more regulations on businesses and privatized spaces. Social justice advocates face challenges from the entrenched power structures and vested interests that come with capitalism, even as they work to protect democratic values and guarantee fairness.

Furthermore, attempts to regulate market and private sector activities in public spaces, for example, risk undermining the potential benefits of a free market. It is worth mentioning that one of the main motivations for people to work in the private sector is the freedom they feel there, which encourages experimentation, creativity, and personal development. The private sector creates great places for people to freely express themselves, experiment with new ideas, and push boundaries. This is in contrast to the limitations frequently imposed by governmental or societal organizations. This freedom is one of the key features that attract people to the private sector, and it aligns with one of the forms of freedom that Christiano advocates for: the freedom of association. In private, people are free to take chances, follow their passions, and forge their own routes to success without being constrained by entrenched hierarchies and bureaucracy. This independence encourages people to think creatively and entrepreneurially, challenging preconceived notions. This could help to explain the state's historical caution when it comes to policing privatised areas.

In light of this, there are burdens that democratic assemblies are generally not entitled to impose on the private sector, often delineated by fundamental constitutional rights in liberal

democracies (Christiano, 2010, p. 213). Normally, democratic assemblies are not allowed to violate fundamental rights such as the freedom of association, speech, or some parts of private property rights.

Furthermore, there are also situations in which the expectation that small companies bear a large percentage of the expenditures associated with minimum public space rules could cause these enterprises to go bankrupt, making this imposition and expectation an unnecessary burden. For example, minimum public space restrictions essentially shift the costs of promoting public welfare onto a smaller population, even though their stated goal is to improve welfare for society as a whole. This smaller population could see this as an unfair responsibility thrust upon them. For example, in the context of this project on public space, there may be a valid case for requiring a minimum amount of space for public use within privately owned areas. However, no company should be forced into bankruptcy in order to comply with such official requirements, as this would ultimately undermine the very purpose of the statute. Thus, it is also critical to remember that a company's decision to deviate from these standards cannot be seen as a rejection of democratic decision-making or as a breach of political equality. They have their *raison d'être*, and a democratic constitution cannot impose its will upon them.

This might explain why the Court has become very cautious about intervening in this matter, despite having taken an interventionist approach in the past. As Kohn (2004, pp. 55-57) argues, courts have never treated private property as a sacred text. According to her research, prior to 1980, U.S. courts were more actively engaged in the debate on privatization and democracy. However, there has been a discernible change in the last several years, with judges showing a greater unwillingness to become involved directly with the private sector (2004, p. 105).

Let us briefly review this history. As Kohn argues (2004), in American courts, debates over the extent and limits of citizens' rights to free speech in commercialised public areas have long been important. With the landmark decision in Hague v. CIO (1939), constitutional theory addressed the political significance of this question eighty-five years ago. In that case, the mayor of New Jersey invoked a city rule to prevent labour organizations from disseminating literature pertinent to protestors' political concerns in public spaces (Kohn, 2004, p. 37). The courts debated the legitimacy of a Jersey City rule that forbade citizens from holding labour meetings in public spaces, at the request of some labour organizations. Justice Roberts, who authored the majority opinion, contended that although streets and parks may be owned by governments, they have historically been entrusted to the people and have been used for gatherings, exchanging ideas amongst citizens, and debating public issues. From ancient times, residents have had certain advantages, immunities, rights, and liberties that include the use of the streets and public spaces. Thus, the courts urge the government to uphold the rights of its citizens to free expression in public areas by citing the *historical* significance of public space. The "traditional public forum doctrine" is the name given to this approach to public space, which uses historical precedent to define what public space is and is not. Judges have relied heavily on this theory when determining what constitutes public space (Kohn, 2004, p. 37).

The legal rulings made in the context of *privatised* public space were among the court interventions aimed at safeguarding citizens' access to "public" spaces. In a number of instances, the US federal and state Supreme Courts discussed the negative effects of private ownership of privatised public spaces on the practice of freedom of expression. Since the owners' decisions may have a significant impact on society, it is clear that they are not free to act solely in their own private interests as these courts work to protect this fundamental right. The right of ownership has

never been viewed as an impassable barrier for the same reason (Kohn, 2004, p. 55). The expansion of the public's right to freedom of expression in commercialised public spaces has been significantly facilitated by the courts. This supports the claim that the courts are a key component of representative democracy and a significant driver of social advancement. However, there are obstacles to this process, which have led the courts to become more conservative in recent years. The conflict between individual property rights and collective freedoms is one of the main challenges. As privatised public areas are increasingly seen to serve commercial interests, property owners frequently invoke their rights to restrict the use of their property, banning activities they consider disruptive - such as rallies or demonstrations. The task of striking a balance between these conflicting interests falls to the courts. The difficulty of this task leads to a cautious and limited approach from the courts, and there has been little progress made on this issue in the last few years (Kohn, 2004). Reflecting on Hegelian philosophy, which asserts that what is actual is rational and what is rational is actual, and considering the challenges enumerated by Christiano (2010), it seems the wisest course of action is to avoid adopting an overly idealistic stance. We cannot believe that regulations alone are sufficient to impose democratic principles on the private sector. That said, I believe the primary means by which a democratic policy achieves its objectives is not through government control, but through the promotion of free will, public deliberation, and ethical convictions. This perspective allows for a more nuanced view of privatization—not merely as a threat to democracy, but also as a context in which democratic principles can be preserved and even reinforced through both individual and collective engagement. I will explore this idea further in the next section by examining how privatized spaces can foster democratic collaboration and public discourse when shaped by moral action and mutual understanding.

6.3.2. Navigating Privatisation: Democratic Solutions for Upholding Democracy

As Christiano briefly argues:

> Ample empirical evidence exists that individuals do not act merely in terms of their self-interest and that they are motivated by considerations of justice (2006, p.155).

This idea casts doubt on the notion that human behaviour is primarily motivated by self-interest by indicating that people frequently take justice and morality into account when making judgements. Hegel's definition of love, as expressed in his *Early Theological Writings*, provides intellectual justification for this remark. According to Hegel, love is a powerful unifying force that eliminates individual differences and establishes a state of harmony where the ego finds pleasure in the acceptance and welfare of others (1971, p. 305). For him, love dissolves the rigidity of selfhood, allowing true unity to emerge. In love, the other's consciousness is no longer in opposition to mine—instead, I discover myself within the other. (Hegel, 1971, pp. 302–308).This concept emphasizes how people can rise above self-interest and discover freedom and purpose in mutual respect and harmony with one another. Thus, Hegel's wisdom supports Christiano's assertion by highlighting the fact that human action is frequently guided by justice and fairness rather than merely self-interest. When taken as a whole, these viewpoints demonstrate the deeper moral and relational capacities that can support democratic collaboration and group action.

These are reasonable claims. In fact, a number of studies have shown that people commonly prefer justice and fairness to their own self-interest, defying the self-interest axiom. People have a strong tendency toward fairness, reciprocity, and cooperation in a variety of social circumstances, according to experimental research in behavioural economics, psychology, and sociology (See, for example, Fehr & Schmidt, 1999; Bolton & Ockenfels, 2000).

Research on how people make economic decisions in experimental settings, for example, has shown that people frequently turn down offers they feel are unjust, even if doing so would benefit them personally (Fehr et al., 2008). The assumptions of conventional economic models, which hold that people always behave egotistically to the benefit of their own material interests, are in conflict with this conduct. Furthermore, studies on prosocial conduct and altruism have brought attention to people's innate desire to act in ways that help others, even at their own expense (Batson et al., 1981, p. 290). People regularly participate in actions that promote the common good, showing a sincere concern for the welfare of others beyond their immediate self-interest. These behaviours range from volunteering and charity giving to acts of kindness and cooperation.

Additionally, research spanning cultural and socioeconomic contexts has demonstrated the profound integration of concepts of justice and fairness throughout human civilization (Henrich et al., 2005, p. 797). Our cross-cultural interest in justice suggests all people value it. Indeed, it is clear from this empirical data that the self-interest axiom falls short in explaining the complexity of human behaviour. While self-interest does play a role in decision-making, it is far from the sole or primary motivator. Moral values, a sense of justice, and concerns about fairness significantly shape human behavior and social interactions.

Furthermore, there are strong democracy-related examples that support the idea that citizens' privatized demands can, in fact, enhance democratic life. A notable case comes from the late eighteenth century, when private associations established exclusive forums to discuss issues of social justice and democracy (Habermas, 1989). Before the eighteenth century, public opinion was largely controlled by a feudal system, where authority rested with the king and a small circle of elites (Habermas, 1989). However, with the rise of commerce, the press, and rational discourse in the early eighteenth century, a brief but significant period emerged in which the bourgeois public

sphere began to take form. As a result, private individuals and organizations gathered in bars, salons, or coffee shops to discuss topics of common interest and voice their opinions regarding societal demands. The bourgeois public sphere in this case was not a forum for discussing economic issues, but rather, it served as a generally open forum where private citizens could freely express and publicize their opinions while engaging in critical discourse about societal concerns and state policies. The new bourgeoisie started to exert pressure on the elites for political changes that would permit a larger share of wealth and power following these debates. As a result, they were able to alter society's basic structure and open up new social frontiers. These secluded areas foster deep discussion on how to advance society. Thinkers of all stripes were able to debate issues important to the public and lay a foundation of democratic principles.

These are a few instances that demonstrate how privatisation has improved democracy. They seem to me to be a kind of proof that validates Hegel's philosophical observations on the important role that private citizens and civil society play in democracy and recognition. Hegel argues that the exercise of individual liberties within the collaborative frameworks of civil society can act as a spark for social change and political dialogue (1991, p. 224). These collaborative projects not only help people feel like they belong, but they also provide them the ability to actively influence the socio-political environment. Ultimately, nurturing democracy is based on mutual recognition and intellectual debate within the private domains of civil society. We are empowered to address global challenges through these candid conversations in privatized settings. The private sector's capacity to host such interactions challenges the notion that privatization inherently undermines democratic norms. Therefore, even as we acknowledge the drawbacks of privatization, it remains essential to strike a balance between promoting economic freedom and safeguarding society's democratic values.

However, recognizing that privatized spaces can foster democratic participation does not eliminate valid concerns about their potential risks. As privatization expands, questions persist about how to ensure that democratic principles are genuinely upheld, particularly when corporate behavior remains largely voluntary. Informal mechanisms—such as public shaming—play a crucial role at this intersection, where optimism about privatization meets its democratic vulnerabilities. In the following sections, I examine how recognition-based processes—especially the threat of reputational harm—can serve as effective tools for holding private actors accountable and reasserting democratic pressure within the privatized public sphere.

6.3.3. Recognition in the Age of Surveillance: Public Shaming as a Democratic Tool

There may be legitimate concerns about my optimism regarding privatization and its impact on democracy, particularly given the voluntary nature of privatized actions. These concerns underscore the need for mechanisms—whether direct or indirect—to regulate the private sector in order to safeguard democratic values in public spaces. In the face of this objection, I would contend that some informal contemporary procedures currently exist that could assist the corporate sector to align with democratic norms in public spaces. Today, an important and dominant mechanism is the process of shaming which can lead to substantial reputational costs in public spaces. The significance of this process is further elaborated in Christiano's theory (2009).

My argument is that in contemporary globalized societies—where public recognition and trust are essential for upholding democratic norms and guiding behavior—backlash and reputational consequences hold particular significance. By focusing on this motivating factor, I aim to provide a more thorough understanding of how recognition functions as a catalyst for fostering stability and democratic participation in public spaces.

Avoiding negative backlash or shame has become a powerful factor in influencing the conduct of individuals and corporations in the modern world. At its essence, shame revolves around the fear of social disapproval and ostracism. People and businesses alike are well aware of the negative effects of tarnished reputations and damaged public perceptions. Fear of humiliation is particularly real in the age of social media, where every action is subject to close examination and can be shared widely in a matter of seconds. As a result, corporations are now more aware of the impacts of their actions on their image.

The omnipresence of social media makes corporate activity more visible. Accountability and transparency are more important than ever. With scrutiny over every decision, businesses must promote democratic values and moral choices in public spaces. Public backlash and reputational risk are powerful forces that drive corporations to place social responsibility and ethics at the forefront of their priorities. The culture of shaming also encourages shared accountability for all. People are empowered to speak out against misconduct. This coupling of pressure from both inner and outer sources leads to better corporate governance and leadership.

The phenomenon of shaming also encompasses larger social issues and causes. Businesses are becoming more and more aware of the reputational hazards connected to supporting or sponsoring divisive political objectives, social injustices, or environmental devastation. Corporations are forced to match their behaviour with democratic values and socially responsible practices out of fear of public censure and boycotts in public spaces. This helps to advance ethical and democratic norms in society.

The public's reaction to unsafe working conditions exemplifies this. One such instance is the criticism directed towards specific fast-fashion retailers due to their employment of sweatshop labour in the production of clothing. These businesses have come under fire in public spaces for

allegedly exposing their employees - many of whom are from underdeveloped nations - to hazardous working conditions, long hours, little pay, wage fraud, child labour, and workplace injuries. Companies are forced to address these concerns and enhance their labour standards in response to public pressure in public spaces as well as media exposés. Some, such as Walmart, have announced efforts to enhance working conditions and plant safety in Bangladesh in 2013, following criticism of its labour policies.

The outcry against businesses that fail to provide adequate working conditions highlights how important social justice and human rights are becoming to public attitudes and consumer behaviour. This means that social justice and human rights are becoming ever more important as guides to the consumer. Increased corporate accountability goes hand in hand with this. This shows how public pressure in public spaces may spur constructive change and force businesses to put their employees' well-being first.

Businesses that adhere to ethical standards gain public esteem. The emergence of social media platforms such as YouTube has given previously voiceless people a way to demand equality and representation. Businesses that ignore diversity and inclusivity concerns run the danger of losing customers and drawing the public's ire. The impact of social media campaigns on public perception and business practices is immense and cannot be overstated. Social media has the power to mobilize large groups, as seen in movements like #MeToo or public advocacy around environmental issues in shared public spaces. Through demonstrations in public spaces, activists and concerned citizens have used hashtags, viral videos, and online petitions to pressure businesses into adopting more ethical and socially responsible practices.

Furthermore, due to the modern world's interconnectedness, harm to a company's reputation in one region of the world can have a significant impact on other regions as well. A bad tweet or

widely shared video may quickly damage a company's reputation and undermine customer confidence, underscoring the significance of matching business practices to societal norms. Corporations cannot just vanish to another location anymore when facing criticism.

In conclusion, private actors are now more in charge of governing common areas as a result of the privatization of public space. However, this transfer of power does not give corporations unfettered authority. Traditional hierarchies of power have been disrupted by the widespread influence of social media and the rising prominence of individual voices. Private corporations can no longer control public areas as they see fit, free from democratic oversight. Instead, a watchful public actively monitors, criticizes, and responds to corporate actions, holding them accountable.

Because of this, businesses are now required to integrate democratic principles into their operations, recognizing that public areas—even when managed by private organizations—remain spaces of shared importance. Failing to meet these standards not only poses a reputational risk but also reflects a broader cultural shift toward greater transparency, inclusivity, and moral responsibility. In this era of digital surveillance and collective scrutiny, the need for corporate accountability has never been greater. Thanks to the re-democratization of the public sphere brought about by social media, recognition-based processes such as backlash and public shaming can now effectively counteract the commercialization of democratic life.

Given this, shame can be a useful tool for encouraging morally democratic behaviour in privatised spaces. This is in line with the Hegelian framework of this paper. For Hegel, as a legitimate child of the German romantic, emotion plays a significant role in his philosophy, as I have previously noted, in the master-slave dialectic, the transformation of the slave is catalyzed by the profound emotional experience of confronting death. Hegel does not downplay the relevance of emotional reactions to other people, even as he stresses the need for intellectual recognition.

Crucially, Hegel's theory of recognition also considers how human emotions, such as guilt and sympathy, shape interpersonal relationships and influence the dynamics of recognition. In fact, as stated, feelings such as shame can be quite important for promoting moral behaviour and a sense of recognition in society. Jean-Paul Sartre, heavily influenced by Hegel, extensively explored the concept of shame and its connection to our relationships with others (2021, p. 259). The quote from Sartre, "Hell is other people," captures the nuanced interaction between people and society and emphasizes how acceptance from others can simultaneously offer happiness and suffering (1989, p. 45). Similarly, the idea of shame functions within this duality by acting as a cause of harm as well as a tool for accountability.

According to Sartre, while shame can promote accountability, and similarly to how recognition from others can result in feelings of security and power, the potential downsides include the social exclusion and psychological trauma that come from being publicly shamed and shunned (Solomon, 2000, Lecture 22). A basic feature of human nature is demonstrated by Sartre's "voyeur" case: the propensity to objectify others while remaining entirely oblivious to one's own subjectivity. Imagine a voyeur watching someone via a keyhole, only to suddenly realise that someone else has entered the room and caught him in the act. At first, the voyeur is not thinking about or reflecting on his act; instead, he is fully engrossed in the objectification process. The voyeur's experience is drastically changed, though, when he suddenly realizes he is being watched and hence being judged. This shows the influence outside judgment has on our sense of self and feelings of potential shame (Solomon, 2000, Lecture 22).

Further examination uncovers the parallel between the voyeur's experience and the predicament of private companies on social media. Online audiences continuously examine and assess private businesses that operate in the digital privatized space. Social media platforms

function as virtual "keyholes" through which people may peer and evaluate the performance, policies, and activities of businesses. Even just feeling like you're being seen and evaluated can cause tension and guilt as businesses try to meet the standards and expectations set by their online audience. Intensifying this, the internet's anonymity frequently encourages outspoken criticism and condemnation, which spreads a culture of observation and judgment.

Sartre here clarifies the power dynamics present in online encounters by introducing the idea of the Other as a factor in self-awareness. The Other, symbolized by the unseen observer in the "voyeur" case, possesses the authority to shape the subject's perception of themselves. Similarly, online audiences, as embodiments of the Other, have a big say over private businesses and can force them to follow the expectations and societal standards that are already in place. Companies carefully regulate their online presence and behaviour out of fear of being condemned and shunned by the virtual collective. Failure to do so risks facing the wrath of the virtual mob.

Furthermore, Sartre's differentiation between human and non-human observers highlights the specific characteristics of judgment dished out by social media. In contrast to an animal observer, whose gaze would probably arouse curiosity or disinterest, online viewers' gazes have social and moral ramifications for businesses. Companies under public inspection experience increased sentiments of shame and guilt due to the perceived moral authority of the digital community. Here, as Sartre explains in his dictum that hell is other people, I had the impression that if we view interpersonal relationships in this way - that is, as connections with others that can have benefits and harms - we can hope that if capitalist society is examined through the gaze of Other, then those who have erred will be obliged to make more democratic and wise choices.

To continue from Sartre, I can see the possible benefits of public shaming to address the behaviour of private businesspeople in public spaces. The public is able in this way to pressure them to behave

responsibly. Subsequently, it is harder for them to resist democratic demands. Elon Musk, for example, has deleted posts in response to public criticism. Using this framework, derived from Hegel's philosophy, we can envision a civil society that balances the relationships between the state, the market, and democracy. Such a society strives to establish systems that prevent injustices from occurring, rather than merely addressing individual wrongs. By ensuring that our systems align with the values of justice, respect for human dignity, and reciprocal recognition, we can move closer to a more inclusive and equal democracy. Striking a balance between the complexity of modern life and the timeless principles that define us as a just and democratic society is both the challenge and the promise of our time.

7. Conclusion

The main goal of my research project was to analyze the impact of privatization on public space and democracy. The central questions guiding this research were: What is a public space? What value does public space offer to the practice of democracy? Is being a private space incompatible with also being a public space? Is the privatization of public space a threat to the public practice of democracy? If so, what are the dangers? The overarching rationale of this project is to enhance the ability of both theorists and practitioners to assess and improve current laws and policies that govern the divide between public and private space in contemporary democracies.

In response to the first and second of these questions, I began by exploring the concept of public space—its meaning and its role in sustaining democratic life. As I have demonstrated, Kohn provides a solid framework for understanding public space and its significance for democracy by emphasizing essential elements of the ideal public space, such as intersubjectivity, ownership, and accessibility. Furthermore, for her public spaces serve as essential fora for discussion, debate, and collective action among various groups - all of which are vital components of a healthy democracy. Moreover, Kohn argues that it is crucial that marginalised groups be included in these environments. The presence of marginalised groups powerfully reminds the affluent of the broader societal repercussions of their unjust choices and behaviours. Given this, she saw privatization as a danger to the practice of democracy in public space, as it limits the access of marginalized groups and restricts political and subversive activities within these spaces. Lastly, Kohn's research emphasizes that the primary factor in determining the democratic value of public space is not who owns it but rather how it is used. This perspective is particularly useful in addressing the challenges that privatisation poses to democratic values.

However, my findings reveal certain limitations in her approach. Given that my second research question was whether the privatization of public space is a threat to the public practice of democracy, I used Christiano's framework to analyze Kohn's approach. As I have argued, Kohn's notion of common space does not adequately engage with the complex questions of who holds power over these spaces—who governs, maintains, and decides their use. It also overlooks the inherent power struggles and potential conflicts over access and use that often arise in public spaces. Furthermore, Kohn draws heavily on Smith's theory of moral action to emphasize the significance of public space in shaping a society's moral and social fabric. However, as I have argued, democracy is a way of life—one that shapes not only how individuals vote and govern, but also how they think, appreciate art and culture, interact with others, raise families, and organize society. Indeed, there is a risk of rendering public spaces one-dimensional, stripped of cultural and aesthetic value, and even discriminatory, when they are viewed primarily as arenas for overt political discourse and confrontation. By focusing primarily on visible confrontation, Kohn's perspective overlooks the importance of cultivating democratic spaces where individuals can experience democracy as a way of life and develop the mores essential to its sustainability. To enhance its democratic value, the ideal model of public space should be anchored in a more robust philosophical framework rooted in democratic theory.

This paves the way for using Christiano's model to analyze public space and its role in supporting democracy. With this in mind, Christiano's democratic theory challenges Kohn's conception of ownership in public spaces by highlighting the need for structured governance, the acknowledgment of diverse interests, and the mitigation of cognitive biases in their management. As I have argued, by incorporating Christiano's insights, Kohn's vision can be refined to ensure that public spaces are truly inclusive and democratic. This requires a more conscientious and

regulated approach to managing public spaces, one that aligns with the principles of public equality and democratic participation, as defined by Christiano. Furthermore, Christiano's understanding of democracy opens the way to view democracy as a way of life and to argue for the diversity needed in the practice of activities in public spaces. There is also the possibility of using his theory to understand public space, given that, for Christiano, democracy must be visible—an idea that opens the door to applying his theory in areas he may not have originally envisioned. However, my research shows that this is not as straightforward as it seems. As I have argued, Christiano's idea of democratic government is impossible without citizens adopting a spirit of mutual respect and recognition. In fact, Christiano's theory of democracy is predicated on the idea that there is a pervasive ethos of recognition or the conviction that people act in solidarity and genuinely care about the interests of others. His idea of public equality is based on this attitude, which is essential to democratic participation. It makes the assumption that people respect one another's rights, listen to different points of view, and accept group decisions - even if they do not align with their own. However, Christiano's paradigm does not offer a convincing explanation for why this ethos exists or endures, nor does it offer workable strategies for promoting it. Without this common ethos, factionalism, mistrust, and self-serving behaviour would threaten Christiano's idea of public equality, which holds that each person's opinion should be given equal weight. With this limitation in mind, I have proposed that the Hegelian ethos of recognition plays a vital role in sustaining democratic processes.

Recognition is vital for Hegel because it serves as the foundation for individual identity and social responsibility. It constitutes a dynamic, reciprocal process that creates both individual autonomy and social cohesion. In this view, recognition functions as the mechanism through which individuals come to see themselves as integral members of a larger community and begin to

develop a sense of mutual responsibility. It can also help a democratic society confront the challenges of individualism that De Tocqueville identified and opens the door to addressing some of the existential problems individuals face in life. For Hegel, recognition within social frameworks enables individuals to transcend the self-interest valorized by individualism and to cultivate a genuine commitment to the common good. And here, public places are crucial for promoting the democratic ethos. People engage with others, experience new points of view, and grow to appreciate ideas that differ from their own when they leave their homes and participate in public spaces. These public areas are essential for fostering a sense of shared identity and uncovering our shared humanity.

Using this theoretical framework, I have argued that Kohn, Christiano, and Hegel each offer unique yet complementary perspectives on the concept of public space. Together, their insights can contribute to the development of a more comprehensive theory of public space and its role in supporting democracy. By combining Hegel's philosophy of recognition, Christiano's focus on public equality, and Kohn's definition of public space along with her critique of privatisation, I have developed a comprehensive framework for understanding the fundamental qualities of public spaces in a democratic society. Together, these perspectives have enabled me to articulate the ideal characteristics that public spaces should embody and to effectively address key aspects of my research questions. So, as I have argued, public spaces should fulfill a variety of functions and cater to the needs and preferences of a democratic community. To foster intimacy, togetherness, and meaningful connections—all essential to democracy—public spaces should have clearly defined boundaries. Their design should prioritise accessibility and inclusivity to ensure that everyone feels safe, accepted, and comfortable interacting with one another in a democratic society. Additionally, democratically oriented public spaces should encourage in-person

interactions by creating environments that foster sociability and community building. To address the diverse needs of the community, they should promote mixed-use diversity by incorporating areas for leisure, education, and cross-cultural interaction. Safety is essential, ensuring that people can relax and engage in democratic discourse without fear. Incorporating history and distinctiveness is equally important for building democratic identity and community pride. These spaces should reflect the community's unique cultural and historical values, fostering a deeper connection between individuals and their shared heritage—an essential element in supporting democratic life. By exhibiting these qualities, public spaces can serve as venues for democratic participation. By synthesizing the theories of Kohn, Christiano, and Hegel, a comprehensive understanding of public spaces as vital democratic foundations emerges, linking theory and practice to promote a vibrant, inclusive democratic society.

After outlining the essential qualities of public space, Chapter Six addresses the final set of questions in the dissertation: whether the privatization of public space poses a practical threat to democracy. Given the direct and detrimental impact of privatization on democratic practice, I argue that the privatization of public space must not proceed without appropriate checks and balances. Rather, we need to take into account certain limitations associated with it and recognise that privatisation may run counter to democracy in certain situations. As history shows, governments have had a significant impact on the direction and growth of economies in the past, justifying the fact that regulatory supervision to protect the public interest and preserve harmony between democratic accountability and economic efficiency can be used to address the challenges of privatisation when it is counter to democratic ethos.

Given this, the government should actively oppose any societal norms or conditions that undermine the foundational principles of democracy, particularly within public spaces. In practice,

decisions regarding public space must not conflict with or cast doubt upon the core tenets of democratic life. According to Christiano, no democratic entity has any authority to revoke the most fundamental rights of any members of the democratic assembly (unless possibly as punishment for offences). Therefore, no individual's right to freedom of expression, association, personal pursuits, or conscience should be infringed upon fully by private entities within public spaces. From this perspective, we must remain aware of the challenges and risks posed by privatization, particularly when it conflicts with the democratic values that public spaces are meant to uphold.

At the same time, I argue that private ventures can offer numerous democratic benefits that are not always immediately apparent. In fact, private enterprises have played a significant role in shaping many aspects of modern society, and in some cases, their actions have strongly supported democratic culture. Furthermore, there is a high degree of uncertainty surrounding the decisions of the private sector in the global context, especially when faced with strict regulations, which can undermine top-down approaches. Therefore, I contend that decision-making regarding public spaces can, to a considerable extent, be entrusted to private entities—provided they act as responsible stewards and uphold democratic principles in the process. This perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of privatization—viewing it not solely as a threat to democracy, but also as a potential arena where democratic values can be preserved and even strengthened through active individual and collective participation.

Nonetheless, this research also acknowledges the growing need to scrutinize how democratic standards can be upheld, especially in contexts where corporate behavior remains largely self-regulated. In such cases, informal mechanisms like public shaming become essential. Operating at the intersection of democratic potential and privatized vulnerability, these recognition-based tools—such as reputational accountability—help exert civic pressure on private actors,

encouraging them to align with democratic norms and reinforcing public oversight in privatized domains.

All things considered, this study has shown that comprehending public space within a democratic framework necessitates a multi-layered theoretical approach—one that critically addresses issues of ownership, use, governance, and the development of democratic values. I have argued for a more comprehensive framework that views public space as a basis for democratic life itself, rather than just a place for political expression, by combining the ideas of Kohn, Christiano, and Hegel. This research has also demonstrated that, although privatization presents real threats to democratic principles, it can also improve public life in specific circumstances and with the right protections. In the end, public space needs to be seen as an essential setting for achieving democracy as a way of life—one that necessitates a multifaceted and morally grounded perspective. After outlining how my research weaves together and answers the central research questions, the following section discusses its unique contributions and how it crosses existing theoretical and disciplinary boundaries.

7.1.Rearch Originality

These formed the central arguments of my dissertation, and I believe they offered a significant and original contribution to the field. The uniqueness of my study lay in its response to a persistent gap: while urban planners have long relied on Marxist critical theory to conceptualize and critique urban processes—particularly in areas such as gentrification, spatial justice, and the political economy of space—there has been a notable lack of systematic and theoretically grounded application of liberal democratic theory within the field and the broader urban planning discourse. By engaging with liberal democratic philosophy, particularly the work of Christiano, and

reinterpreting its core concepts, my research addressed this gap and introduced a new conceptual framework for evaluating and planning public space.

What I refer to as an interpretative and disciplinary leap is at the heart of this creativity. Instead of sticking to the traditional canon of urban studies literature, I looked to democratic theory—an area that urban planners rarely consult—because of its normative richness and capacity to influence urban practices in ways that are both politically and ethically sound. By demonstrating how democratic ideals can be translated into concrete standards for assessing the quality of public space, I hoped to close the theoretical divide between political philosophy and urban planning. This lends my dissertation a conceptually innovative character. One of the most innovative aspects of my work was developing a fresh and critical perspective on the theory of public space. While Kohn's work remains important in current debates, I offered a new interpretation—drawing on liberal democratic theory—that challenges some of her core assumptions and broadens the discussion through the introduction of alternative normative insights. This approach helped reposition Kohn's contributions within a broader democratic framework, highlighting elements often overlooked in existing research.

In addition, much of urban planning research still relies heavily on case studies and empirical analysis, often at the expense of deep theoretical/philosophical reflection. A review of recent articles in the field of urban design reveals growing concerns about its current state. Cuthbert (2007) contends that even after five decades since the establishment of urban studies, the field has produced few robust theories. Instead, it is characterized by a generalized anarchy of creative ideas that lack internal consistency or collective coherence. According to his assessment, substantial theoretical contributions remain scarce, with academic journals largely dominated by case studies

and design regulations. My research addressed this gap by providing a strong philosophical foundation for public space theory. In doing so, it introduced essential yet underappreciated concepts to the spatial disciplines. At the same time, even though the main focus of this work is theoretical, I have made a conscious effort to bolster my claims with references to data, real-world examples, and discernible patterns. This was a deliberate decision influenced by my experience in urban planning, which forced me to create a project that engages with the concrete realities of space in addition to theorizing about it. I sought to create a framework that speaks to both philosophy researchers and urban design practitioners—a unique contribution that connects critical theory and lived urban experience, rather than providing a simply abstract or speculative description. Based on my professional experience, I think this research's unique contribution is the way it integrates theory and practice.

Furthermore, my concentrated and ongoing engagement with the writings of Cristiano—a philosopher whose contributions to political philosophy and urban studies remain largely underappreciated—added a layer of originality to my work. First, I have made Cristiano's theory more accessible to academics and professionals outside the field of political philosophy. His theory has limited analysis in detail, and there is still a lack of secondary literature on his work. Second, I expanded Christiano's concepts into a domain he did not explicitly address, and in doing so, my work aligns with a broader scholarly tradition that reinterprets and mobilizes influential philosophers across disciplinary boundaries. Although Christiano's work has not yet been thoroughly examined or integrated into the fields of urban planning and public space theory, my dissertation introduced his ideas into this context, using them to critique Kohn's framework while also critically engaging with the limitations of Christiano's own project. To do so, I brought Hegel's theory of recognition into the discussion, highlighting how Christiano's framework, while

normatively rich, may underemphasize the emotional and relational dimensions of recognition that are central to democratic life. By placing Christiano in dialogue with Hegel, my study aimed to deepen the conceptual foundations of democratic theory in urban discourse and propose a more holistic understanding of how public space can support both rational deliberation and intersubjective recognition. As a result, my study provides both philosophers and urban planners with a collection of creative, philosophically grounded tools for evaluating the democratic quality of public space. At the same time, it contributes to political philosophy by demonstrating the broader applicability and relevance of democratic theory, particularly for fields concerned with the spatial organization of democratic life.

Finally, my democratic theory framework enabled me to develop a set of parameters essential for constructing a democratic public space—one that reflects a more comprehensive understanding of democracy than is typically found in the field, inspired by the Tocquevillian notion that democracy is not merely a system of governance but a way of life. Building on this original perspective, I proposed a framework for understanding how both the ordinary and political functions of public space can contribute meaningfully to the practice of democracy. To my knowledge, such a comprehensive and democratically oriented method for evaluating public space has been largely absent from the field. Much of the existing literature tends to prioritize empirical case studies or adopt narrow theoretical frameworks, often overlooking the potential of liberal democratic theory to offer normative insights into the design and use of shared urban environments. My dissertation aimed to fill this gap by proposing a broader evaluative framework that accounts for both the political and social dimensions of public space within a democratic context.

Moreover, through the application of liberal democratic theories, I deliberately challenged the dominant narrative in urban studies, which often portrays privatization in an entirely negative light—highlighting its threats to access, equity, and democratic participation. The sustained and in-depth use of liberal democratic theory remains rare in this debate, making my contribution both timely and distinctive. While concerns about the impact of privatization on democracy are valid and important, I sought to complicate this view by recognizing that privatized spaces can also create opportunities for democratic engagement—provided certain conditions are in place. To address the persistent tension between privatization and democratic values, I introduced new conceptual tools suited to the realities of the digital age—most notably, the notion of public shame as a mechanism of recognition and accountability. Drawing on the philosophical insights of thinkers such as Hegel, Sartre, and Christiano, I explored how shame, when channelled appropriately, can act as a form of soft regulation, encouraging corporations and private actors to align their behavior with democratic norms and values in both physical and digital public spheres. By bringing these ideas together, my work not only advances the theoretical discourse on public space in a novel way but also addresses the practical and ethical challenges posed by privatisation and public life.

7.2. Research Limitation

In order to create a normative framework for comprehending public space, I have based this study on Christiano's philosophy of democracy. However, it is crucial to recognize that Christiano's approach was not initially developed with public space in mind. Political legitimacy, public equality, and the procedural prerequisites for democratic decision-making within institutional frameworks are the main topics of his theory. Therefore, I had to exercise some interpretive flexibility to apply these ideas to the geographical realm of public life. This

methodological decision adds a degree of subjectivity because it reframes and adapts theoretical concepts from one field to another.

Similarly, the main topic of this research is public space and how it operates in liberal democratic settings. The use or conceptualization of public space under authoritarian regimes, hybrid governments, or in cultural contexts where the ideals of deliberation, recognition, and public equality may be configured differently or absent entirely are not covered by my liberal democratic theory-based analysis. Even though my research adds to a deeper understanding of public space in democratic theory, it also leaves open the possibility that future studies will examine how public spaces are created, managed, or contested in non-democratic societies—or how they might represent values that differ from those extolled in liberal democratic discourse.

Additionally, the approach I have suggested is rooted in the tradition of normative political theory, which means it reflects certain views on the goals of public space in democracies. It places a strong emphasis on values like mutual respect, transparency, accessibility, and inclusivity. Other theoretical traditions, however—such as critical geography, anarchist philosophy, phenomenology, or even aesthetic theory—may propose alternative uses or ideals for public space. This allows for other conceptualizations that are not limited to the framework that I have used.

Lastly, my approach to this subject has unavoidably been influenced by my disciplinary background in urban planning and design. A combination of practical considerations, professional experiences, and architectural principles that prioritize urban aesthetics, functionality, and spatial order have shaped my concept of public space. By firmly grounding philosophical analysis in the practical challenges of urban governance and spatial planning, this background has aided me in bridging theory and practice. However, it also implies that my viewpoint is inevitably limited. Other researchers may emphasize aspects of public space that I have not prioritized due to their varied academic or cultural backgrounds. I am well aware that there is still debate and uncertainty around the definition of the ideal public space, and I hope that this work is only one of many that

will contribute to a deeper, more multidisciplinary understanding of public space in democratic life.

7.3.Final Note

As this dissertation has demonstrated, protecting public space necessitates a fundamental rethinking of how we interact with one another in communal settings, in addition to opposing privatization. By combining the perspectives of Hegel's ethical recognition, Christiano's procedural equality, and Kohn's spatial justice, we may imagine public space as a living institution that reflects democratic values in its everyday operations as well as in its architecture and governance.

Given the historical era we live in, which is characterized by the global return of authoritarianism, nationalist fervor, and division, this study is extremely relevant. The principles of liberal democracy and global solidarity appear to be seriously threatened for the first time since World War II. An equally potent ethical reaction is required to counter the increase of hatred, which manifests itself in xenophobia, exclusionary politics, and the marketing of fear. In light of this, I have argued for a reimagining of space that is based on the generative power of love rather than hatred or domination.

In this sense, love is a public ethic—a fundamental stance toward compassion, recognition, and acknowledging others as deserving of respect and inclusion. To reimagine space in the name of love, we must plan, manage, and occupy public areas in ways that support vulnerability, affirm life, and defy the divisive logic of exclusion and privatization. If hatred shatters the social fabric, love serves as the glue that keeps democracy intact.

For this reason, I advocate democracy as a way of life—a living practice based on how we interact with one another, share space, and create a shared environment—rather than just a political framework. According to this perspective, public spaces serve as sites where democratic values

are subtly practiced via routine acts of compassion, consideration, and unity, rather than merely serving as forums for discussion or protest. They must be created and nurtured in a way that promotes belonging, empathy, and trust.

Reclaiming public space becomes an act of democratic love and imagination in the face of privatization and the commercialization of communal life. We practice democracy in these public spaces—open squares, parks, libraries, streets, and marketplaces—not as a theoretical idea but as a shared, lived reality. Democracy must be rooted in the places where people congregate, care for one another, create, and rediscover their common humanity if it is to survive in this era of global unpredictability and fragmentation. Only then can we create a future driven by love, acceptance, and the everlasting promise of democratic life, rather than by fear and exclusion.

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