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Facilitating the process towards social sustainability: A culture-based method for mapping the publicness of historic public places; applied using the example of Tabriz Bazaar, Iran

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Introduction

As the current literature on public space shows, the significant role of public space in enhancing social sustainability is justified – at least theoretically (Yadollahi, 2015).¹ Nevertheless, in empirical research and practice a more comprehensive methodological framework is required which takes into account the complexities of local understandings of public space and social sustainability. This paper is a contribution to the development of such a framework.

The following discussion is based on a number of concepts that need to be clarified. Concepts used in this paper such as social sustainability, publicness and culture (including how they are related to each other in the context of this discussion) are defined below.

Social sustainability

Conceptually speaking, international documents such as the Brundtland Report (1987) define social sustainability as the ability of the human community (locally and globally) to administer environmental and economic resources in accordance with social justice, social cohesion, equality, and the right of future generations to benefit from these resources.

Based on a literature review of different approaches to social sustainability, Vallance et al. (2011, 342) suggest that it is a “concept in chaos”. They argue that current scholarship uses and discusses the concept of social sustainability as a tool to achieve biophysical, environmental and economic goals of sustainable development by changing certain social behaviours or preserving certain traditional socio-cultural practices (ibid. 342). In particular, they point out that different fields approach social

¹ A literature review of methodological approaches to assessing and implementing social sustainability in historical public spaces was published in the latest issue of the Heritage Studies series. Therefore, the discussion about physical public space and its relationship with social sustainability will not be repeated here.

sustainability in different, partly contradictory ways and call for an underlying understanding of these contradictions and conflicts.

Since social sustainability can have different meanings and functions in different contexts, a single, generalized view of social sustainability cannot lead to feasible solutions. Dealing with social sustainability in connection with real problems prompts important questions: What social behaviours can be considered sustainable? Should all social behaviours that have been traditionally developed and established be sustained? And in the event of contradictory, conflicting views, what interpretation of social sustainability is acceptable?

We pose these questions in relation to historic public spaces – a type of urban heritage, which is a common asset of society as national or world heritage, and a common place for social interaction. This paper follows a holistic approach towards understanding urban heritage and urban heritage management (Labadi and Logan, 2016) and (Bandarin and Oers, 2016). This approach considers urban heritage an integrated part of the city, which is a dynamic whole with tangible and intangible dimensions. In this context, we approach social sustainability by discussing publicness in historical public places (as a category of urban heritage).

Publicness

A physical public space is a place for human face-to-face communication and where members of a society share physical space as well as the functions associated with it. Its form and use are in constant correlation with the boundaries of private space, which is “*a part of space that individuals enclose to control for their exclusive use*” (Madanipour, 2003). In principle, public space is a place of tolerance for diverse people and ideas. Generally speaking, scholarship (in disciplines such as urban planning, political sciences and sociology) on public space suggests the key concepts of “commonness, openness and accessibility” to be the basic constructors of the significance of public space (Yadollahi, 2015, 164).

Obviously, the ability of a place to offer these qualities is limited by its political, economic and cultural context. The capability of a given place to meet the above-mentioned principal qualities of public space is considered its level of *publicness*. *Publicness* here means the ability of a place to host public life such that the rights of users to express themselves and take decisions about their common space are equally respected.

In other words, the level of publicness of a public place hinges on how the above-mentioned fundamental values are actually practiced. Just like social sustainability, publicness is a concept that should not be viewed from a single angle. Since it can be used for completely contradictory purposes, the contradictions in its definition in local contexts need to be understood and highlighted. Therefore, the first step to understand the level of publicness and social sustainability in a public place is to highlight local conflicts in the interpretations of these concepts. This is where understanding local culture(s) in public places plays a significant role.

Culture

In this paper, the term culture is employed from an anthropological point of view. According to Malinowski,² “Culture is a well organized unity divided into two fundamental aspects—a body of artefacts and a system of customs.”³ (Prinz, 2013) Here, the term *culture* in relation to a public space refers to the patterns of use of spaces that have been developed and learned by a community through history. More precisely, *culture* is understood as the repeated and established patterns of relationships between people and places that can be studied through ethnographic research. Before entering a more detailed discussion in this regard, the approach of this paper towards the concept of *culture* should be clarified.

Pointing out that the three pillars of sustainability (environmental, economic and social) do not sufficiently reflect the complexity of societies, Agenda 21 for culture introduced culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability in 2004 (United Cities and Local Governments, Committee on culture, 2004).⁴ It was the first time that the development of cities was linked to cultural development. *The Concept study on the role of Cultural Heritage as the fourth pillar of Sustainable Development* by the South East Europe Transitional Cooperation Program goes beyond Agenda 21 for culture. It differentiates the narrow understanding of culture as a sector that includes arts and cultural industries from the broader anthropological understanding of culture that views culture as sets of values that form and guide choices and behaviours of communities in governing the process of development (South East Europe Transitional Cooperation Program, 2012). Based on this anthropological understanding, this document argues that culture is not only a fourth pillar, but the origin and a “fundamental element of sustainable development” (ibid, p.43). This understanding of culture in relation to social sustainability is applicable to many cases in which the relationship with a current culture and social sustainability is not the subject of conflict. However, this harmony does not always exist.

A mindful focus on the relationship between culture and social sustainability is particularly important in studying traditional urban spaces where the everyday use of spaces is strongly influenced by the local culture. When dealing with historic public places located in traditional neighbourhoods (in cases where the traditional ways of life are still practiced), we need to have a multi-angled view of concepts of culture, publicness and social sustainability. Here again, we turn to the questions regarding the sustainability of cultures as established behaviours. Should all behavioural patterns that are traditionally developed and established be sustained in a historic public place? Does the current culture in a community promote justice and equality in their public space? Finally, how can urban researchers contribute to addressing these questions?

A method for studying publicness in a historic public place

From an urban planning viewpoint, social dynamics are always understood in connection with particular locations. Therefore, providing a location-based understanding of the social, legal and economic status

²Polish anthropologist and ethnographer (1884–1942)

³Available from: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/culture-cogsci/>. [Accessed: 9.3. 2015]

⁴ It was approved by the 4th Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion in Barcelona.

of an urban area (i.e. mapping them) forms the basis for understanding its publicness. Depending on the desired outcome and the scope of research, this mapping system can zoom in or out to cover different scales of the city.

Because of the differences between the paces and patterns of development in historic centres and the modern parts of the surrounding city (e.g. in Iranian cities), their integrity with the city as a whole should be studied as the first step of exploring the publicness and social sustainability of a city centre.

Urban researchers such as Gehl (2013) and Whyte (1980) offer tools and indicators to study social life in urban public spaces. Some of them can be used to assess the connectedness of the historic centre (as a public place) to the rest of the city. For example, when evaluating historic commercial complexes, indicators could include the historic centre's current share in the commercial activities of the city, its pedestrian flow and activity level, the diversity of the services offered there, a breakdown of users' age and gender (including compared to other public spaces and the city as a whole), the level of public infrastructure and safety, the availability and quality of public transportation, the permeability of the area, road traffic and air pollution statistics, the quality of the built environment in surrounding neighbourhoods, and any physical or visual barriers blocking access to it.

Explaining these assessment methods calls for an extended discussion on an urban scale. However, the discussion in this paper is focused on an urban district scale. With the above-mentioned brief introduction in mind, we concentrate on explaining methods for mapping the multi-layered structure of a public place inside the historic centre.

Understanding the publicness of a public place always involves the problem of the ambiguity of public-private boundaries within it. Due to the complex, overlapping forces that influence urban space use, physical boundaries cannot be drawn between public and private spaces. Therefore, in reality, the publicity and privacy of urban spaces are experienced as a continuum in which many "semi-public or semi-private spaces can be identified" (Madanipour, 2003, p. 210). To map the continuum or spectrum of the publicity-privacy of a space, we have to convert the publicness qualities into factors that can be defined and assigned to individual places.

Ideas presented by scholars such as Canter and Habraken about the organization of the built environment takes us one step further. Approaching the phenomenon of place from an architectural-psychological point of view, Canter (1977) explains it as a product of *conceptions*, *actions* and *physical environment*. Similarly, Habraken (1998) argues that the built environment is organized by three types of orders: *physical structure*, *control and territory*, and *common understanding*. In order to be able to map the structure of a public place, these dimensions were elaborated into measurable factors.

The soft (social) and hard (physical) structures that make up a public place are constructed by physical accessibility, legal control (enforced by ownership), the local culture of territory-defining, and the current use of spaces. In other words, influences enforced by these four factors jointly define the levels of public and private control in a public space. These four factors help to compare publicness qualities (openness, accessibility and commonness) of different spaces and to map the differences. We can use them to define the position of each space in the spectrum of publicness-privacy in a public place (Fig. 1).

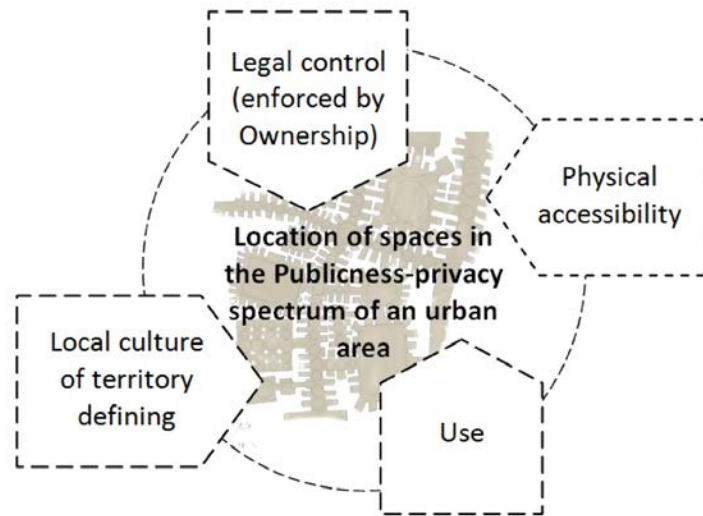


Fig. 1: Four factors defining the publicity or privacy of a space

Naturally, the types of use in spaces can attract different numbers and types of people. The structure of the physical space also influences the publicness–privacy situation by facilitating the control of access to the space by different groups at different times of the day. In addition, to assess the commonness of spaces and the participation of actors in their use and control, their ownership status must be taken into account. Considering the factor of ownership ensures that the rights of private owners are respected when the publicness spectrum is mapped.

The cultural norms forming the patterns and use of territorial definition also shape the character of a public place. What is referred to in this paper as the *culture of territory-defining* is identified and explained by observing repeated and culturally established human behaviours such as sitting, resting, chatting, drinking tea and standing in the spaces studied. All activities indicating that a certain group considers a space safe and culturally appropriate to slow down from necessary activities such as passing by or shopping, for having the above-mentioned optional activities help to identify the territory definers and those who merely act based on the defined territories. The map showing the culture of territory-defining aims to categorize zones in a public space according to their regular dominant users.

The patterns of territorial definition need not necessarily follow patterns of ownership or physical form. As discussed below, these traditional territories may be defended, questioned or challenged by different user groups. Fig. 2 shows the recommended data collection techniques for mapping the aforementioned four factors in an urban setting.

<u>Factors for mapping Publicity-privacy Spectrum of a public place</u>	
<p><u>Physical accessibility</u></p> <p>Categorizing the architectural typology of spaces based on the level of private control they facilitate</p> <p><u>Techniques of data collection:</u></p> <p>Photography, field sketches</p>	<p><u>Current use</u></p> <p>Categorizing the functional status of buildings and spaces based on the users they attract</p> <p><u>Techniques of data collection:</u></p> <p>Field observation</p>
<p><u>Legal status of land ownership and control</u></p> <p>Categorizing the legal status of lots</p> <p><u>Techniques of data collection:</u></p> <p>Questioners or using existing legal documents</p>	<p><u>Territory-defining culture</u></p> <p>Categorizing spaces based on regular, dominant users</p> <p><u>Techniques of data collection:</u></p> <p>Semi-structure Interviews, behavioral observation (filming or serial and single photographing, recording traces of human activities, tracing the users), and counting the users</p>

Fig. 2: Techniques of data collection for studying and mapping the publicity–privacy spectrum of a historic public place

As explained below, inserting these four factors into a matrix helps relate them to each other (Fig. 3 shows this matrix using the example of Tabriz Bazaar). The matrix has one row for each factor. The columns indicate the degrees of publicity–privacy that can be identified in an area. The number of columns depends on the precision of the study as well as the numbers of identifiable categories in architectural typologies affecting accessibility, use diversity, ownership types, and the diversity of user groups.

Application of the method using the example of Tabriz Bazaar, Iran

Tabriz Bazaar is a marketplace located in the Eastern Azerbaijan province in north-west Iran. It has an area of about 29 hectares according to its World Heritage nomination dossier.⁵ The method discussed was adapted to local conditions influencing publicness at the Tabriz Bazaar World Heritage site.

Fig. 3 shows the matrix designed to achieve a qualitative understanding of the current *publicity–privacy spectrum* in Tabriz Bazaar. The interpretation of this matrix is based on the identification and behavioural studies of the groups involved in public life in the bazaar: the bazaar community (men, women and children) and the regular publics (men, traditional women, non-traditional women and children).

The numbers in the matrix are indicators to compare spaces in terms of the levels of public or private control in them. These indicators do not represent quantitative values. 1 indicates the highest degree of private control of a space assessed within the ownership, cultural, use or physical conditions of a particular space or zone; 5 represents the highest level of public control of spaces. The final row showing the degrees of publicity–privacy results from adding the indicators for each factor in the first column.

⁵ Available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1346> (accessed 3.12.2015)

Scores of 17–20 represent zone 5 spaces, which are the most legally, culturally, physically and functionally open and accessible zones to everyone. Obviously, zone 5 does not mean absolute openness and accessibility. Instead, it indicates the highest degree of publicness within Tabriz Bazaar considering the physical, legal, functional and cultural conditions. Similarly, spaces with an indicator score of 4–7 indicate the most private zone (zone 1) of the bazaar.

This matrix is a tool to understand the current levels of responsibility and rights of public and private actors in particular zones in the bazaar. It is not meant to show the desired state of publicity–privacy; it only reflects the current structure of the public space in this regard.

Level of public control Factors defining openness and accessibility	5 (public) ←	4	3	2	1 (private) →
Physical accessibility	Rastehs (covered pathways)	Central spaces in Saras, ⁶ Carvansaras, Timchehs, ⁷ Dalans, ⁸ mosques with two or more controllable openings	Central spaces in Saras, Carvansaras, Timchehs, Dalans and mosques with one controllable opening	Hojrehs (small rooms used for various purposes) in open Rastehs	Hojrehs in privately controlled buildings
Current use	Retail with weekly and daily shopping potential and mosques	Retail with yearly and monthly shopping potential	Gold and carpet workshops, storage spaces and offices mixed with retail	Non-commercial institutions (accepting individuals based on payment or membership)	Workshops and storage spaces (noisy, requiring plenty of space)
Ownership	Public – state ownership	-	-	-	Private and Vaqf ⁹ ownership
Culture of territorial definition	Relatively even mix of people from different age and gender groups	10–35% of regular users are women and children	Less than 10% of regular users are women and children (these are normally spaces for storing goods and places where porters rest)	Seminary schools and other institutes (used mainly by certain users)	Used mainly by staff (work places and workshops)

⁶ Saras are similar to Carvansaras in terms of architectural design, but are not built for serving caravans. They include merchant offices and wholesale shops.

⁷ Timchehs are arcades and covered buildings that provide space for offices and wholesale shops, usually for goods like textiles, carpets and jewellery.

⁸ Dalans are corridors in which specialized functions such as wholesale spaces, workshops, commercial offices and storehouses are located.

⁹ Vaqf (endowment) properties are inconsumable properties like buildings. Vaq properties cannot be sold, and are not considered as private or public properties because they are supervised by the Owqaf and Endowment Affairs Organization (www.awqaf.ir/pages/showpage-397.aspx [Accessed: 26.7.2015]). The director of the Owqaf organization is elected by the supreme leader (www.awqaf.ir/pages/showpage-384.aspx [Accessed: 26.7.2015]). At least in Iran, regular public members have no legal right to manage these properties. Although they don't have a private owner, the OEAO acts very similar to a private owner. Therefore, in this matrix, Vaqf is considered close to private ownership.

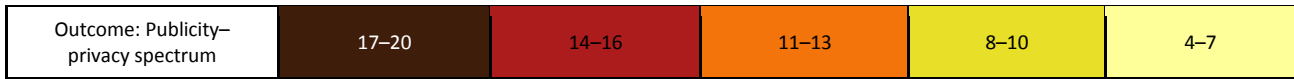


Fig. 3. The publicity–privacy spectrum matrix for Tabriz Bazaar

Using the results obtained from this matrix, four maps were prepared to show how the state of physical form, use, ownership and culture of territory-defining in each space in Tabriz Bazaar allow higher or lower levels of publicity and privacy. These four maps were juxtaposed to produce the map of the publicity–privacy spectrum of Tabriz Bazaar (Fig. 4).

As can be seen in the matrix (Fig. 3) and the map (Fig. 4), areas in zones 1 and 2 are Hojrehes (used as shops, workshops and offices) inside privately owned and controlled buildings or along pathways. The main groups involved in these zones are the bazaar community members and institutions. As we approach zones 2, 3, and 4, public involvement rises.

Zone 3 areas are mostly privately owned central spaces that are physically open to the public and are suitable for slowing down and taking part in social interaction. These zones are currently the middle zones. Public and private actors are involved in shaping the activities in these zones. As a bazaar is a mostly privately owned public place, the higher the number of orange central spaces, the more public the bazaar, because the darkest (the most public) parts are actually the pathways, which mainly function as connectors.

In the map of the culture of territory-defining, a nearby shopping street was included in the studies to show that in Tabriz Bazaar there is no zone 5 in this factor. In other words, no space with equal influence and power share by different users was found in the bazaar. The highest rate recorded for women and children involved in optional activities in spaces was 35% of all regular users.¹⁰ This map indicates the limited ability of Tabriz Bazaar as an urban public place to foster social diversity in terms of gender and age.¹¹

In the current socio-physical structure of public life in the bazaar, enhancing the involvement of women and children appears easier in zone 3 areas because they are usually safe, neither overcrowded nor empty, their function is public-friendly, and the architecture allows public access. Accordingly, these spaces should be the first to be facilitated for public use. If they start to attract a wider diversity of people, they will influence other adjacent open spaces that today are classified as zone 2. This will generate growth in the orange (3) and red (4) zones in the bazaar. Of course, the quality of this growth should be discussed with private owners. If the policy of enhancing the current orange zones is successful and leads to the emergence of new orange and red zones, the next step for planners would be to equip them with public infrastructure.

¹⁰ These findings were obtained by regular quantitative and qualitative ethnographic studies in Tabriz Bazaar between March 2013 and September 2015 (Yadollahi, unpublished PhD dissertation).

¹¹ The study conducted to assess the connectedness of Tabriz Bazaar to the surrounding city on an urban scale reveals the limited diversity of social classes using Tabriz Bazaar as a public place (Yadollahi, unpublished PhD dissertation).

Note that the darkest areas (zones 5 and 4) form a spine which keeps elements of the whole structure together. Without these connectors, the bazaar would be a miscellany of adjacent private and semi-private spaces without constituting a meaningful whole. This underlines the vital role played by the presence of diverse social groups in the bazaar in preserving its integrity as a marketplace and a public place.

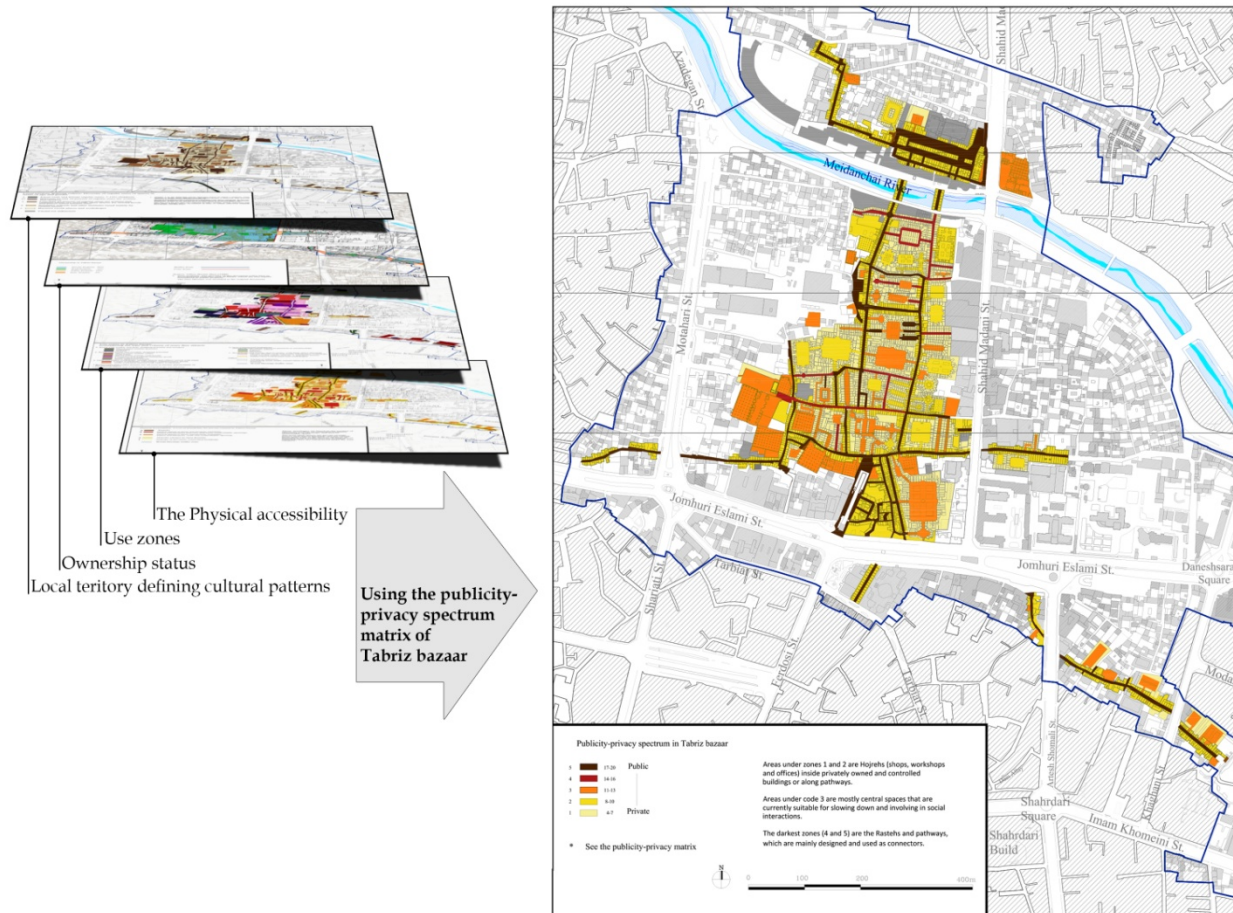


Fig 4. Publicity–privacy spectrum map of the Tabriz Bazaar

The contribution of publicness assessment mapping to social sustainability

As explained in the introduction, the main aim of this paper is to discuss how urban research can contribute to solving questions regarding conflicts in interpreting social sustainability in relation to culture (in the context of urban planning). The method presented here based on publicness indicators and the four factors of *use*, *physical accessibility*, *ownership* and *local culture of territory-defining* is a step towards this goal. The present paper is a contribution, which goes beyond *methodological approaches of assessing and implementing social sustainability in historical public spaces* (this issue is discussed in a paper written by Yadollahi (2015) in a recent Heritage Studies Series volume, *Perceptions of Sustainable Development of Sustainability in Heritage Studies*).

As urban researchers, we do not argue for or against any traditional social order of public place use. Our aim is to understand the cultural patterns of the distribution of influence and power in a place from the perspectives of different user groups. In the process of achieving social sustainability, sooner or later a community has to reach a point at which it can discuss and decide whether it wants to sustain or transform certain cultural behaviours. It is this community who should openly discuss and come to a final conclusion about whether or not existing cultural norms enhance values such as social justice and inclusive use in their common urban spaces. The role of urban research is to scientifically explain the current multi-layered structure of the public place and facilitate a knowledge-based public discussion.

More precisely, the territory defining map and its relationship with the publicity–privacy map highlights the diversity of the presence of social groups with respect to the dominant culture in the space. This is particularly sensitive in historic neighbourhoods in which traditional norms control the social hierarchy of public places. By highlighting the current power relations in the use of a historic public place, this mapping system enables the territory definers and those who follow the defined territories to develop a more conscious and responsible understanding of their public life rather than overlooking or ignoring the conflicts and regarding the present situation as unquestionable and unchangeable.

Practically and professionally speaking, this place-based understanding of the current effectiveness of the actors involved helps urban planners identify and prioritize the negotiation strategies for each zone. It is a tool to understand the current levels of responsibilities, rights and vulnerabilities of public and private actors in different zones. This mapping system is not designed to show the desired state of publicity and privacy in a public place. Of course, using this method, the desired publicity–privacy map can be prepared based on the goals of an urban conservation plan. The mapping method can highlight the differences between the desired and existing power balance patterns in each studied zone. It also helps the planner to identify the interrelationship between functional, legal (ownership-related), physical and cultural causes of attractiveness or unattractiveness of a place for certain users. This knowledge provides the basis for planning and navigating the path from the current publicity–privacy situation to the desired level Figure 2.

The main questions regarding the understanding of the power balance in a historic urban area		The contribution of the mapping tool in addressing these questions
Current situation	Who is involved, to what extent, where? Who are the main negotiation partners in each zone?	Showing the existing publicity–privacy patterns in each zone
Desired situation	Who should be involved, in which zone, and to what extent?	Illustrating the desired patterns of publicity–privacy in each zone (<i>after these patterns are decided by the community and planners</i>)
Finding solutions	How to attract and involve people who are excluded or needed for the liveliness of a place?	Providing the basic knowledge on the interrelation of the functional, legal, physical and cultural causes of the current pattern of power balance in a place. This knowledge is needed for a fair decision-making

Figure 5. The publicity–privacy spectrum mapping tool can offer an important contribution to urban governance process, when the issue of power balance is important or problematic

In a nutshell, the method presented suggests that the urban governance system needs to be flexible regarding the publicity–privacy spectrum of the place indicating the current power relations of different actors in each zone. It provides a place-based and a culture-based model of the public place. The outcome of this method (the final publicity–privacy map) is easily understandable for the actors involved. Therefore, it can facilitate a more knowledge-based negotiation process, which is the basis for social sustainability. That is how the presented method goes beyond the traditional engineering approaches of urban heritage management in relation with social sustainability.

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