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## **Cultural pluralism, tolerance, and public space**

Ali Madanipour

According to the UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance in 1995, 'Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference' (UNESCO,1996:71). The keyword in this definition is diversity, and tolerance is the positive attitude that is advocated towards this diversity. It shows the close connections between tolerance, diversity, and freedom; by showing tolerance, diversity is free to be expressed and survive, rather than being suppressed and eliminated. Later on in 2001, in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO (2002) re-emphasizes the significance of diversity.

What is the role of public space in encouraging a diverse and tolerant public culture? To find an answer, I will initially set aside the complexities of defining space and adopt a broad definition of space as a combination of places and processes, so that I can investigate what a pluralist and tolerant public culture might mean. I will start by analysing the various meanings of 'culture', and try to find out its public dimension and its relations with public space.

The dictionary definitions of culture refer to three meanings: products of human endeavour, process of improvement, and the totality of a way of life. The phrasing of the Oxford English Dictionary for these three meanings is: 'the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively' and 'a refined understanding of this'; 'improvement by mental or physical training'; and 'the customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people' (Thompson,1996). Each definition needs a closer look.

### **Products of human endeavour**

The word culture has a troubled presence in the English language discourse. If we look at the websites of some of the major English speaking newspapers and television companies, we see how they divide the world into categories. On the BBC website, which shows several ways of categorizing its subject matter, the word culture does not appear. Instead, its subjects include entertainment, lifestyle, knowledge, news and sport. On the BBC website, the only mention of 'culture' in its A-Z list of subjects is a reference to 'The Culture Show', where amidst a swarm of words and images the viewers are invited to share their definition of culture, which implies how difficult it is to pin it down. The weblog of the programme, nevertheless, refers to itself as 'The best of the week's arts and culture news, covering books, art, film, architecture and more' (BBC,2012).

The same absence of the word is seen in the headlines of the newspaper *The Times*, which subdivides the world into news, opinion, business, money, sport, life, arts, puzzles, and papers. *The New York Times* does the same, splitting all of its subjects into a list which does not include culture. A newspaper that does use the word culture in its broad categories, *The Guardian*, covers art and design, books, film, music, classical, stage, kids' books, TV & radio, games, blogs, videos, and arts network. Another newspaper that also uses the word, *The Telegraph*, splits it into a similar list of ingredients: film, music, art, books, TV and radio, theatre, Hay Festival, dance, opera, photography, comedy, pictures, and video. The UK government department that deals with culture lists it alongside media and sport, referring to arts, museums, libraries, tourism and heritage, and their relations with society and economy.

In the instances where the word culture has been used, it lists these forms of public representation, which refers to what the Oxford English Dictionary lists as its first meaning: 'the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively' and 'a refined understanding of this'. This is indeed the dominant use of the term culture. A thriving public culture would therefore mean a proliferation of these cultural products in all their various forms, made available to a wide range of audiences. A tolerant society would allow the freedom of expression that is needed to produce and share these representations. Diversity is reflected in the variety and range of these expressions, and tolerance is shown towards this diversity in the name of individual freedom of expression. In this case, tolerance, as UNESCO (1996:71) has recommended, would mean 'respect, acceptance and appreciation' of 'our forms of expression'. The role of the public space would be the provision of the institutional infrastructure for facilitating the presentation of, and access to, these cultural products. Such a public space can take various forms, from libraries, theatres, galleries and museum to websites and open spaces of urban streets and other public and semi-public places (Madanipour,2003). We are, however, confronted by at least three problems: commercialization of cultural products, transience of their meaning, and access to public space.

The commercialization of cultural products is a major concern. As Adorno (1991) had suggested, the culture industry produces cultural products as commodities, without due consideration for their cultural value. In our time, the proliferation of cultural products goes hand in hand with the development of a consumption-based economy. In the promotion of creative or knowledge-based economies, the economic value of cultural activities is the primary consideration in their evaluation (Madanipour,2011a). The economic and environmental perils of consumerism are by now well-known, and so this poses major questions as to whether there is a genuine need for many of the existing cultural products or that any such need is induced through advertising. Commercialization of cultural products is particularly visible in the urban space, where the boundaries between advertising and cultural expression are blurred, using size, colour and technology to dominate the space, and turning some public spaces into a mere background for conveying commercial messages. As the British city centres show, the entire city centre can become an open air shopping mall, with most forms of historic heritage and cultural expression integrated into the consumption of a spectacle.

The second problem, which overlaps with the other two, is the role of these cultural products in society. When such representations were scarcer, their role and impact were much more significant, so for example a single work of art could have a major social impact. In the context of the proliferation of the cultural products, however, their consumers treat them as disposable items like any other. Public and private spheres are filled with images, the consumption of which may become a replacement for corporeal experience, an experience that is short-lived and skin-deep (Debord,1994). The visual culture can produce a transient experience of the world, all from a safe distance, which can fill the place of physical exchange, and can change as quickly and frequently as the images can be produced. The multiplicity and transience of representations would reduce their value as human endeavours and transform them into symbolic currency in social relations. In other words, it is their exchange and consumption rather than meaning that matters. As Bourdieu (1984) had argued, the consumption of cultural products would be taken to be a mark of social status. Longstanding disputes have been going on what constitutes art and what sorts of intellectual achievements can be considered sufficiently significant to be called culture. The debates about high culture and popular culture appear to have been sidelined by the new media, although they still persist, for example, in controversies about the distinctions between the critical and commercial success of a work of art.

The proliferation of cultural products would mean that they compete for visibility and attention, and so the problem becomes how to regulate and manage access to the places and processes that their producers aspire to. While it is expected that public spaces are open and accessible to all, the problem is that too many cultural products compete for too few places in the prime locations within public space. A television company like the BBC, for example, offers such visibility to a cultural product that a

presence there is considered to be a mark of success, envied by those who are not given a place. How is the editorial and critical process dealing with these cultural products? What is the basis for their selection? How can they maintain the claim to neutrality? This poses major questions about the aesthetic choices of the gatekeepers, the subjects that are considered to be of public interest, and the commercial implications of being given a presence in a public forum. In urban space, this tension is partly seen in the expression of commercial interests. The UK cities have a highly developed system of signage, controlling shopfronts and billboards as well as street artists, markets and festivals. However, when the public local authorities are, by choice or force, following the market logic in deciding what happens in the city's public spaces, the result may become different. Street art, for example, may then be seen as a support for retailers, rather than having a non-commercial cultural value, influencing the type of activity that may be permitted. Public space would then provide the backdrop and the stage for the spectacle as an aid to commercial gains.

While the proliferation of cultural products is a sign of rich cultural activities, therefore, their relations with commercial interests, their inability to penetrate the depths of society, and their competition for presence in public space renders the relationship between public space and public culture problematic. The limited capacity of the public sphere, in its institutional and spatial forms, means that for finding a place, cultural products have to go through many levels of assessment, where commercial considerations and competition for social status can frame the process. The capacity of the public sphere has now been massively extended through the Internet. The freedom of expression for cultural diversity, which UNESCO has recommended, may be better served in this way. However, access to this sphere is still unequal, and the cacophony of its voices reduces the significance and durability of any impact they may have. Furthermore, physical public spaces are still the scenes in which tolerant co-existence or violent conflict can take place, which is why it is significant that access to these spaces be facilitated and managed through open and democratic means.

### **Process of improvement**

Defining culture as a process of improvement refers to its ancient meaning, rooted in the Latin origins of the word. As it was possible to cultivate plants in agriculture, it was thought to be also possible to cultivate people in an urban society, which formed the basis for education in science, arts and sport. Public culture, therefore, would mean the different ways that such cultivation is made possible, and the role of public space is to provide the support infrastructure for this process of development.

According to the UNESCO (1996:74), 'Tolerance is facilitated through direct contacts, communication and education', which can only exist in an open and inclusive public sphere. Although the UNESCO does not mention public space and public sphere, its declaration relies on the existence of the open platforms on which tolerance can be promoted, i.e., an open public sphere. It is only here that 'fear and rejection of the unknown' can be replaced by 'mutual understanding', made possible 'through active interest in the traditions and beliefs of others and the sharing of common ideas' (ibid). Physical public spaces play an immediate and significant role in facilitating such direct contacts and communication.

This education about the others is an integral part of the public sphere. Education is not limited to what is taught at school; it includes the entire range of information and knowledge that is available in a society. The character of this public sphere is a major reflection of the degree of tolerance in a society. Many doubts can be raised about the role of formal education and public culture in what they aim to achieve, what forms of order they want to instil in the population and how they want to establish different types of discipline. But when it comes to comparing the tolerant and intolerant systems of public sphere, where one allows the freedom of thought and expression to a much larger extent than the other, it is clear which ones are more or less progressive, enabling or suppressing the individual and group talents, expectations and needs. A number of problems, however, emerge: the efficiency of any such cultivation vis-à-vis nature, its recipe for the socialization of individuals, the challenge of social diversity.

One question is whether and how far such cultivation is possible. Since the ancient times, the systems of education are all based on the belief in the possibility of improvement. The idea is deeply ingrained in all major religions that aim at linking particular forms of behaviour to particular rewards. A new version of this way of thinking was reflected in the socialist attempt at the creation of a new type of human being who could give up greed and only work for the good of society. Is it nature or culture that determines our main characteristics? This is a question that has been raging for centuries, and now revived through advances in genetic research, which looks for relevant genes in all sorts of human behaviour; or various schools of psychotherapy that look to change behaviour through some form of education. As Bourdieu (2000) argues, however, it is not clear how far the characters that are inscribed on human bodies can be changed through these devices.

The second question is about the content of this cultivation, which is a form of socialization into particular ways of belief and action. Public culture depends on what a society cultivates in its members through education and entertainment. So there are always major controversies about children's education, as it would influence the future of a society. This is a social process, advocating a particular social order, as Raymond Williams (1981) reminds us. As we continue to hear, the purpose of education is sometimes defined in very narrow functional terms, training the workforce for the needs of the employers in the economy. The counter-argument interprets it in a broad sense of developing the various capacities of the young to move in many possible different directions. This possibility, therefore, raises the question of what to improve and towards what end.

The move towards specialization of professions and disciplines, and the debate about what matters most, have led to a dispute between physical and social improvement. Should improvement mean the improvement of the built environment or the social institutions and processes, both inherent parts of the culture? This was partly in response to a physical determinism that looked for social change via physical transformation.

As a pathway to improvement, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used architecture, as part of a wider material culture, to embellish the European towns and cities and inject a sense of confidence in their inhabitants. The contribution of public space, as a collection of buildings and urban spaces, to the sense of improvement and culture-building in this period was considerable. This is a trend that can be seen in later periods as well, for example in the modernist movement and its beliefs in the possibility of avoiding revolutions through spatial change. The problem, however, was that this confidence in the role of spatial change could be misplaced, and many optimistic developments of the modernists failed to improve the urban conditions. Indeed, many buildings of high cultural value were removed to be replaced by functionalist machines.

In the functionalist mindset of the modernists, and in the Marxian analysis of the nineteenth and twentieth century socialists, what mattered most for improvement were the political and economic problems. Culture was a superstructure that followed the underlying logic of the economic production. If any improvement was to be made it was in the social and economic conditions of life, which needed urgent attention. Critics of this analysis argued for the relative autonomy of culture, and how it mattered under all circumstances. The argument continues in the form of disputes between redistribution or recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

In our time, the belief in the necessity of improvement in public space has gained ground. Many municipalities now invest in their public spaces, as part of their investment in the quality of life and in the competitiveness of their city. In doing so, they hope to raise the profile of their city in the real or imagined global competition in which they engage, and invite visitors and investors. A problem with this approach, however, has been a heavy emphasis on central areas and noticeable places at the expense of the rest of the city. In the UK, the campaign for 'urban renaissance' (UTF, 1999), which was initiated and supported by the government, advocated the rebirth of British cities, bringing people and activities

back to the declining and abandoned urban areas. This campaign was part of a longer process of urban regeneration and revival, as part of addressing deindustrialization and investing in cities as the nodes of the new knowledge society within the global economy (Madanipou,2011a). The urban renaissance and regeneration fuelled major property investment in British city centres, which favoured speculative upmarket residential development as well as retail and entertainment spaces. The development of new public spaces, therefore, occurred in this context of attempts for attracting an elite clientele (Punter,2010). The attention to city centres was successful in some cities in increasing the population and economic vitality, but also it was charged with gentrification and displacement, undermining the existing culture of some areas (Lees & Ley,2008; Madanipour,2011b). Meanwhile, the economic crash of 2008 ended this boom, leaving thousands of empty shops and flats in city centres. As the process was driven by private developers, no similar interest was expressed in the marginal areas and deprived neighbourhoods. Is public culture only reflected in the display windows of the central public spaces? Are the marginal public spaces also count as the places of public culture, or are they places to be ashamed of, to be hidden from the view or to be neglected as unimportant (Madanipour,2010)? Can marginal public spaces be placed at the forefront of public culture, in the way that happened in previous generations?

This leads us to a third question on the interface between improvement and the vast range of diversity that exists in any society. What are the beliefs that are allowed to be held, what sorts of behaviour are praised and what forms of action are frowned upon and excluded from public discourse? As Foucault (2002) argues, this is a form of power that is institutionalized in everyday normalcy, hiding a tough process of ordering that lies behind. After the decline of belief in universal values, can there be an agreed destination for improvement or is it as diverse as the mosaic of different subcultures that make up the urban society? A current debate in the UK is about the role of the faith schools, whereby different religious groups are able to develop a curriculum on the basis of their own beliefs, and controversies about the possible fragmentary impact that this may have on the society as a whole.

Through education, the UNESCO argues, understanding, solidarity and tolerance can be promoted among individuals as well as among ethnic, social, cultural, religious and linguistic groups and nations. 'Education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance. The first step in tolerance education is to teach people what their shared rights and freedoms are, so that they may be respected, and to promote the will to protect those of others' (UNESCO,1996:72). This belief in the power of education may seem to be too optimistic, especially when stronger forces pull these individuals, groups and nations apart or bring them into conflict with one another. In the politics of identity and tribal battles, individuals take refuge in their culture and kin as a safe haven that would protect them from a harsh world. Rather than tolerance towards others, intolerance and hatred thrives in these circumstances. When peace in a society breaks down, people who had learnt to live together for centuries suddenly turn on one another, changing their peaceful coexistence into conflict and intolerance, at worst turning into even killing fields. The public spaces of a city such as Sarajevo or Nicosia, which accommodated the co-presence of a diverse population, could suddenly become the place of tribal conflict, split along the cultural lines, which education has difficulty to cross. For education to work, in other words, a range of other measures is needed to prepare the ground for peaceful coexistence. But belief in education is belief in hope for the future.

The growth of intolerance can be found everywhere around Europe. In France, the far right Front National, which campaigned against immigration and advocated reinstating death penalty, improved its popularity from 17 per cent of the votes in presidential elections in 2002 to 18 per cent in 2012 (Wilsher,2012). The French revolution was based on the idea of liberty, equality and fraternity. According to the representatives of the people who had gathered in the National Assembly, 'the only causes of public misfortunes and the corruption of Governments' were 'ignorance, forgetfulness or contempt of the rights of man' (ibid). However, if declaration of principles and supporting it by education were enough to abolish ignorance, and if two-hundred-year old, mature institutions and a vibrant public

sphere were enough to prevent forgetfulness and contempt for human rights, would nearly one in five voters prefer an intolerant party? While the significance of the public sphere, and the importance of fighting against ignorance, forgetfulness or contempt for human rights cannot be denied, the causes of intolerance also lie in the changing material conditions in society. These material conditions may be tackled with a politics of redistribution alongside a politics of recognition.

In previous generations, the development of urban space was considered to be a way of responding to social problems. Le Corbusier and Ebenezer Howard, whose ideas of towers in the parks and garden cities shaped the cities of the twentieth century, thought that their spatial ideas offered social solutions (Le Corbusier, 1987; Howard, 1960). Public housing, public services and public parks were all parts of the response. With deindustrialization and the decline of public housing across Europe, and the current austerity measures, however, the prospects of investment in public space and public services are far more limited than before.

Public space, therefore, provides the means with which to socialize the members of a society into a particular set of beliefs and actions, but it faces questions about its efficiency, legitimacy and inclusivity. It can provide the basis for social and spatial improvement, but may have limited impact on the deep-seated natural and social differences. The political and cultural public space needs support from a range of other social and economic measures to make peace among warring factions.

### **A way of life**

The third definition of culture by the Oxford English Dictionary refers to 'the customs, civilization, and achievements of a particular time or people'. This is the anthropological definition that appeared in the nineteenth century in response to several historic trends that transformed the fabric of modern societies. It is here that the modern idea of the public can be found as a theme that binds many of these trends together, expressed in the narratives of a way of life.

The word public gets repeated in both terms 'public space' and 'public culture'. Inherent in the modern meanings of the term are the ideas of universality and equality: that it is a domain that is equally available to everyone. However, these are not actual conditions of any society, which are made of diverse people and groups with different levels of resources and status. Instead, it is a normative social construct, which shapes behaviour and demands to be observed. The public is an amalgamation of a wide range differences in people, places, and processes, trying to shape these differences into a single universal mould. The differences in publicness of places, social position of people, and unevenness of processes show the limitations of making a public out of a multitude. The key challenge for the concept of the public is the actual diversity of society. Public culture is hardly a monolithic construct; by its nature it is a collection of countless pieces and processes, while a myriad of attempts are continually made to link these pieces together in practice or at least in rhetoric.

The idea of the public is closely related to the subject of identity, in particular narrative identity, whereby we discover and determine our identities through the stories that we tell about ourselves (Ricoeur, 1992). Public culture becomes the framework for a public identity, the collection of narratives that describe and develop a common way of life. However, it faces challenges in at least three levels: individual, group, and national. Tolerance, pluralism and diversity may be analysed, and according to the UNESCO be promoted, at three distinctive but overlapping levels of individuals, groups and states. What should be the character of the public culture? Different political theories seem to advocate different solutions.

Under the conditions of increased diversity that characterized the rise of modern urban societies, there seems to be always a need for such binding devices: the development of the nation state that aimed at constructing single political entities out of a multitude of provinces; the emergence of manufacturing industries that brought large numbers of people from various provinces into growing and stratified cities; the growth of individualism in which the first person consciousness became the basis for the new ways

of living; the romantic movement that looked for holistic expressive concepts; and the pressures for democratization that entailed the development of a concept of a collective that could be managed together. The nationalist theory advocates a single national culture which dominates a society, but it undermines its social diversity. The excesses of nationalism showed how this public culture could be held hostage to a narrow view of a way of life. Internationalist discourses, from imperial to solidarity, have tried to overcome this narrow view. In our time, European integration has been a peaceful process of supra-national collaboration, in need of an identity that binds cultural differences. This is why Umberto Eco argues that in Europe, 'culture is our sole identity' (Riotta,2012), as a binding process that relies on shared history and geography, and the stories told about these shared experiences. However, a European public space that can facilitate this common awareness does not yet exist.

At the individual level, diversity would mean individual diversity, and tolerance the attitude of accepting others as unique individuals. The states, groups and individuals are expected to treat human beings, as Kant had advocated, as an end in themselves, in their uniqueness. This is the traditional principle of liberty, which has been articulated in various ways. In the Declaration of Human and Civic Rights, which was issued on 26 august 1789 by the French National Assembly, 'Men are born and remain free and equal in rights' (Constitutional Council,2012). Two centuries later, the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights reiterated this principle: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood' (UN,2012).

The only limit on their liberty was harm to others. According to the French revolutionaries, 'Liberty consists in being able to do anything that does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of every man has no bounds other than those that ensure to the other members of society the enjoyment of these same rights' (Constitutional Council,2012). The principle, however, goes beyond mutual respect among human beings; it is a framework for limiting the power of the state over the lives of individuals. As reiterated by John Stuart Mill (1985:59), civil or social liberty addressed the nature and limits of power that society legitimately exerted over its members, even when the state is accountable to the community. The tyranny of the majority was not acceptable and it was only 'to prevent harm to others', that power could be 'rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will' (Mill,1985:68).

The principle of individual liberty is now widely incorporated in the modern politics and culture. There are, however, continuous controversies between different forms of liberty, which may draw the lines between different ideologies and political tendencies within democratic societies. Social, political and economic freedoms lead to different forms of ideas and practices, with different ideologies and implications for the rights of individuals. Tolerance for economic freedom is the hallmark of libertarians and right-wing politicians, who argue against any limits to personal accumulation of wealth. Their left-wing opponents, however, wish to limit those economic liberties, arguing for a better distribution of resources. Tolerance for social differences, meanwhile, is shared by liberals, who may have right- or left-wing ideologies, but opposed by social conservatives, who emphasize the importance of traditional values, wishing to limit social freedoms that they see as excessive. All shades of opinion, at least in democracies, have agreed on political freedoms, such as the freedom of expression, right to peaceful protest and universal suffrage. Therefore, tolerance towards different forms of freedoms, and the shapes of diversity that it creates, is not equally embraced by various shades of opinion and interest.

Controversies are heightened when the debate is about cultural liberties and group rights. The idea of pluralism among individuals has been broadly accepted; but extending this notion to groups has been more difficult. The first article of the UNESCO's declaration on cultural diversity asserts cultural diversity to be 'embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind'; it is 'the common heritage of humanity' and 'as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature' (UNESCO, 2002:62). While acknowledging cultural diversity at the state and international

level is not controversial, accepting it within the boundaries of nation states is not easily settled. Therefore, it is not at the individual or state level that controversy and concern is at its highest, but at the level of cultural groups that exist as distinctive minorities within urban and national societies. Individual cases that signify these groups may come to the fore, but implicitly as a representative of a larger group with distinctive characteristics and needs.

The main problem, as formulated by John Rawls (2005:xxxvii), is the possible existence of 'a just and stable society of free and equal individuals who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines'. His response is a political liberalism that largely revolves around tolerance practised by adherents of different 'reasonable' creeds. 'Political liberalism assumes that, for political purposes, a plurality of reasonable yet incompatible comprehensive doctrines is the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime' (Rawls,2005:xvi).

For some, advocating tolerance towards groups and their identities and rights is at odds with egalitarian liberal thought, which has historically been based on the concept of equal individuals forming a democratic and homogenous state. According to Barry, following Mill (Barry, 2001:ix), a politics of difference undermines the egalitarian principles of the Enlightenment, as well as undermining 'the politics of redistribution' (Barry,2001:8). As he puts it, 'As far as most culturally distinctive groups are concerned, a framework of egalitarian liberal laws leaves them free to pursue their ends either individually or in association with one another' (Barry,2001:317).

Communitarian thinkers have tried to reconcile the individual and group rights by envisaging the society as a collection of communities (Etzioni, 1995; Taylor,1995). But others have argued that closed systems need to be opened up to scrutiny, without which they cannot be democratic (Habermas,1989). The problem is not easily solved, as cultures are sometimes seen as closed systems, reproducing ideas and beliefs that may be at odds with the principles of tolerance. When groups start to come into conflict with one another and disregard each other's right to be different, then tension between individual and group rights become more pronounced. Mutual recognition (Honneth,1995; Riceour,2005) may apply to the individual level, but when it comes to the group level, it may be more challenging, as politics of identity are more difficult to regulate (Rawls,2005; Barry,2000).

### **Tolerance as an active attitude**

In its common usage, the word itself has some negative connotations: when you tolerate something or someone, you just put up with them, rather than respect them. You may accept their presence somewhere in society, but you do not welcome them with open arms, or at least you are not expected to have anything to do with them. Tolerance, however, the UNESO (1996:74) argues, 'is neither indifference nor concession nor condescension; it is openness, respect, solidarity and acceptance of our diversity as human beings'. Rather than a passive stance, it is 'an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others' (UNESCO,1996:71). It is a form of responsibility: 'the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law' (ibid). It is a responsibility for individuals, groups and states to promote tolerance, which would mean rejecting dogmatism and absolutism, and affirming the values and standards set out by the international human rights instruments.

In most of these debates, tolerance is the attitude expected to be shown by the majority, and its political manifestation the state, towards a minority. The debate revolves the conditions under which tolerance is or should be shown towards different forms of behaviour by people who are considered to be outside the mainstream, or weak in some form or other. The implicit assumption is that those who are thought to be strong or mainstream do not need to be shown tolerance, unless they deviate or weakened. It is indeed an age-old ethical principle, according to which the strong are encouraged to show tolerance

towards the weak. It is a principle embedded in many religions and social codes of behaviour, a standard against which the powerful are judged.

The evaluation of the relationship between the weak and the strong in favour of the weak, however, is brought under scrutiny by Nietzsche, who questions the foundation of religious morality, calling for the 'revaluation of all values' (Nietzsche, 2007:88). He interpreted this morality as the resentment and revenge of the weak against the strong, trying to celebrate weaknesses rather than strengths, preferring a slave morality to an aristocratic one. This, however, would be a basis for intolerance: 'While all noble morality grows from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says no to an 'outside', to an 'other', to a 'non-self' (Nietzsche,1996:22). In other words, intolerance grows out of weakness, rather than strength.

Developing the possibility of peaceful co-existence for diverse and transient populations with multiple identities in modern cities is a major challenge in need of complex physical and institutional arrangements. Such arrangements may lead to a disengaged co-presence based on the functional division of labour and consumption of goods and services, which could be fragmentary, alienating, unjust, and, if combined with a high level of social inequality, potentially explosive. They may alternatively prepare the ground for social engagement on a democratic basis, in which tolerance finds a positive character through mutual respect, and may nurture the possibility of adaptive transformation for all parties. This would partly have to rely on the development of an active public sphere, as the open material and institutional infrastructure through which narrative identities are explored, social recognition facilitated, and active encounter encouraged. Such an infrastructure may help the development of a civil society that is more than the sum of its parts, where economic innovation, political participation, and shared cultural narratives become possible.

Public space can make considerable contributions to tolerance and pluralism, by allowing different individuals and groups to become aware of themselves and others, and be together in the same place, rather than be separated and alienated from one another. The spatial organization of modern cities has been based on fragmentation and dispersion along social and economic lines. Before suburbanization by motor cars and railways, co-presence in public spaces in compact pedestrian cities was an integral part of life. As cities have grown and diversity and inequality intensified (OECD,2008), a fragmented social geography has emerged in which the desire for and the possibility of co-presence by different groups has receded. Public space, as a place and a process of bringing strangers together, offers the chance of recreating co-presence and facilitating active engagement. Spatial arrangements cannot weave back the society together, and spatial determinism of the sort that the modernists believed in is simplistic, as the history of the twentieth century testifies. Nevertheless, physical co-presence of strangers is an essential part of living in the same society (Wirth,1964), facilitating the chance for people to experience the world with others (Arendt,1998). The history of public space shows it to be an integral part of collective processes. Familiarity with others through the medium of information and communication technology can be a positive step, but these inherently libertarian technologies cannot replace the experience of being physically close to strangers, which is primarily possible in public spaces, and engagement in collective processes, which is best possible through spatial co-presence.

However, two important limitations need to be recognized: First, intolerance can have reasons in the material conditions in society, which need to be addressed. No amount of contact, information and debate can address real grievances that may have been caused by injustice. Second, public space is a part of public sphere, so the impact of spatial arrangements would be limited to a range of possibilities. No amount of passive co-presence on its own can be sufficient for addressing deep-seated disagreements and conflicts. Rather than an end in itself, co-presence is a first step towards promoting peaceful co-existence, which needs an active process of engagement on many levels and at many fronts.

Nowhere is more culturally diverse and in need of tolerance than the poor neighbourhoods of large cities. In these areas, either as a result of market forces or through public policy, vulnerable groups and disadvantaged people from different parts of the world have come together, creating a highly diverse place. When the size of a particular group or type of activity grows, a process of clustering occurs, so, for example, there will be a Chinatown or a commercial district. But many smaller groups and activities are clustered together in particular parts of the city, as they do not have the critical mass to form a distinctive cluster on their own. The public spaces of these neighbourhoods are places of conflict between incompatible lives, as well places of forging new alliances and identities.

But is tolerance a way of accepting unjust differences? There are advantages that some groups keep in society, and tolerating them may mean letting them go unchallenged, accepting an unfair settlement in the name of keeping social peace. Peace is kept, but the cost has been the continued subservience of the disadvantaged. The critical approach, however, challenges this acceptance. If the critical attitude was revealing the shortcomings of science and philosophy (Descartes, 1968), turning the age old beliefs upside down, its application to social conditions meant a demand for a new social contract, in which the old privileges were revisited in the light of new circumstances. But challenge can be peaceful and persuasive, rather than violent and explosive, achieving tolerance alongside necessary change.

In all this, an Enlightenment idea of critique, in which the customs of the past are and should be open to criticism, comes into conflict with adherence to cultural affiliations. The modern science and philosophy were based on the idea of questioning the past, which was based on the authority of customs and examples, rather than rational thinking. Descartes 'was convinced that our beliefs are based much more on custom and example than on any certain knowledge' (Descartes, 1968:39). However, he argued, 'the assent of many voices is not a valid proof for truths which are rather difficult to discover, because they are much more likely to be found by one single man than by a whole people' (ibid). We have inherited the beliefs and practices of the past, which make up the various cultures, but they are not enough to provide us with certainty about the world.

Truths found by individuals, however, needed to be confirmed by others. It is not even possible, as Wittgenstein argued, to arrive at any such truths without the aid of a public discourse. In his famous manifesto, Kant (1995:1) defines the Enlightenment as 'man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another'. What was needed for this Enlightenment, he argued, was nothing but freedom: 'It is the freedom to make public use of one's reason at every point' (Kant, 1995:2). Such freedoms turn communities into societies (Tönnies, 1957). As culture becomes the basis for social analysis (Bourdieu, 2000), the old divides between classes are replaced by divisions between group identities (Mouffe, 2005). As corporatism comes under criticism for being too cosy with capitalism, agonism questions the possibility and the desirability of tolerance.

Individual diversity was recognized early on and reflected in liberal arguments for liberty, as best exemplified by John Stuart Mill (1985). The big debate now, however, is about the recognition of cultural groups and their role in politics and public culture, as exemplified in the debate between Will Kymlicka (1995) and Brian Barry (2000). The liberal theory advocates a public culture of individuals, where they are free to develop and express individual identities. But here the context in which the individuals are located seems to be ignored, as individual choices are always informed by the social framework in which they take shape. The communitarian theory advocates a public culture made of the multitude of communities that made up society (Taylor, 1995). But here the problem is the fragmentation of society along cultural lines.

Some argue that the new tribes can help regenerate society after the follies of universalism (Maffesoli, 1996), but questions have arisen when this tribalism is seen to challenge the nationally sanctioned narratives of identity. Can religious minorities claim to be subject to separate rules and

rights? The politics of identity is based on cultural differences, but they can exaggerate and essentialize these differences, creating rigid frameworks from which their members cannot escape. A parallel debate at the other end of the spectrum is about the role of organized economic actors such as business corporations: can the presence of players so powerful and multinational that they are larger than many nation states and can easily move around the world be subject to democratic controls and public cultures? In a public space, where large players can easily dwarf smaller ones, how can we think about the diversity of actors and the possibility of expressive freedom and mutual recognition? In a competition between these actors for the prime locations in the public sphere, what considerations should be taken into account? How should the tension be managed between instrumental use of public space to promote the commercial value of cultural products and the efforts of individuals and groups for the freedom to express themselves and the possibility of being heard and recognized for who they are?

A narrow interpretation of culture as a way of life may lead to the development of elite enclaves disconnected from the rest of society, legitimating gentrification and elitism. Privatized public spaces and gated neighbourhoods are the spatial manifestations of this supposed defence of a way of life. Heavy reliance on culture as products, meanwhile, fuels consumerism and superficial deployment of diversity, ending in a society of spectacle in which public space is merely a backdrop. A wider and more inclusive interpretation of culture as a way of life, however, would recognize diversity as an inherent feature of urban society and look for the ways in which these diverse ways can be present and have positive mutual effects. In spatial and institutional terms, this would lead to the development and expansion of the public realm, the places and processes where different ideas, practices and groups can meet. Rather than elite or functionalist enclaves, the energized and empowered public realm would be inclusive for a wider range of ideas and practices, and allow for the development of local distinctiveness as the outcome of interaction among culturally diverse populations within and between localities. Pressure for homogenization, which is a consequence of globalization, would be offset in this way by local democratic compositions with their unique social and economic features. In response to the 19<sup>th</sup> century economic laissez-faire and social diversity, which accompanied the phenomenal growth of cities in Europe, many public institutions were developed, while a long line of thinkers from Hegel onwards have emphasized the significance of recognition as a social force (Ricoeur,2005; Honneth,1995; Taylor,1994), made possible through public institutions that offered opportunities for new ideas and practices, a lesson that we may need to relearn today.

## **Conclusion**

A short answer to the question about the role of public space in a tolerant and pluralist public life would be: Public space is a constituent part of public culture, its social and spatial infrastructure for facilitating the construction and display of meaning in the public domain. Public space provides the range of places and processes that partly constitute and support public culture. Public space can support all three dimensions of public culture: it can facilitate the presentation and reception of cultural products, support the cultivation and improvement of society, and enrich a way of life. Public space can contribute to pluralism and tolerance by facilitating what the UNESCO considers the pathway to tolerance: direct contact, communication and education. It offers the possibility of co-presence in a context marked by centrifugal forces, helping the development of institutional and cultural infrastructures of sociability and co-existence. As we have seen, however, there are many challenges to this apparently simple formulation. Depending on how we define culture, our answers and our problems will be different, even though they are ultimately related to one another, all facing the challenge of social diversity and instrumental use of space, which need to be answered by a wider rather than narrower interpretation of culture. It is a significant place, not as a display window for consumer products, but as a forum for self-expression and discovery, as well as mutual recognition. As mediating infrastructure in large, impersonal social encounters, public space can help develop a public culture that supports social relations, not through creating an exclusive and elitist place that shuts out diversity and alterity, but through an open forum for a pluralist public culture. For a pluralist public space to exist, tolerance as an

active attitude is needed, but so is the awareness of the limitations of the public sphere in social processes.

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