

Civic Spaces in a Global Age: An Agenda for Pacific Asia Cities

Mike Douglass*

IPS-Nus Forum on Civic Spaces in the Cities of the Asia-Pacific
The Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore, 4 – 5 March 2002

Abstract. The rise of civil society in Asia has an equivalent in the built environment: the construction of civic spaces that are vital for voluntary societal associations to bridge divides through shared experiences, and for people to engage in resolving social, political and economic issues in common. Eight typical types of civic spaces are identified as a way into assessing trends in the vitality of civil society. Evidence from the U.S. and Europe shows that each type is facing new constraints as well as new sources of support. Many have all but disappeared while some, such as the internet, appear to be potentially expanding rapidly. In Pacific Asia, with its traditions of strong “developmental” states, the emergence of civic spaces has largely been through resistance and insurgence. However, on-going political reforms lead to new possibilities for the routine provision of civic spaces open to all and are protected by the rule of law against state abuse. At the same time new questions arise concerning the impacts of globalization on civic spaces as cities shift attention to competition for international investment and as urban spaces become fragmented through global linkages and privatization for commercial interests. An agenda for policy on civic space thus needs to pay attention not only to progressive reforms in state-civil society relations, but also to ways in which relations between localities and globalization are transforming the content and uses of urban spaces.

1. Urbanization and Civil Society

Derived from the word “civitas,” the idea of the city is closely associated with the vision of the active involvement of civil society in public life. The urban transition now underway in Pacific Asia is likewise associated with the rise of civil society, including the formation of non-government organizations and political communities outside of state orchestration. Soon for the first time in history more than half of the population of this region will be residing in cities and towns. Over the past decade, urban centers in this regions have witnessed a flowering of civil society organizations seeking to work either with or against the state to address myriad issues associated with governance, social justice, environmental management and many other issues that had been neglected or exacerbated by strong arm “developmental” states pursuing accelerated economic growth through globalization. In response of the rise of civil society attending urbanization, governments have declared themselves in recent years to be committed to enlarging the participation of civil society in the public domain.

Civil society is defined by and manifested in the myriad of voluntary associations outside of direct control of either the state or the private economy. These associations, emerging from households, neighborhood associations, religious organizations, clubs, labor unions, and other socio-cultural identities, are often referred to as the “third” sector

* Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Hawai’i.

that co-exists with government and markets to form the public domain or sphere (Friedmann 1987; Habermas 1989). In providing vital linkages between people and the state, civil society organizations are essential to the functioning of democratic societies and serve as a principle institutions directing the self interest of individuals toward defining the public interest and the common good (de Tocqueville 1969). These organizations serve as the institutional means for citizens to monitor, restrict and direct the uses of state and corporate power.

More recently, the propensity to form associations in civil society is viewed as being the fountain of social capital formation that is a crucial source of economic sustainability (Putnam 1993). Through routines of collaborative engagement in civil society, localities build capacities for problem solving and innovation. Multiple forms of association with a high degree of autonomy from state and private business are viewed as being essential to local economic resilience in the new global economy of informational networks and rapid innovation in knowledge industries (Thurow 1999, PPI 2000).

These positive attributes notwithstanding, there are no guarantees that civil society – in all its contradictions and conflicts – will achieve collaborative outcomes for the public or common good. Social stratification written in space has, for example, given rise to not-in-my-backyard contests among communities, with richer communities winning over poorer ones. Cities are being fragmented into gated communities that work against creating shared visions of common futures. Some forms of organization also center on repressive and discriminatory ideologies with violent programs of action. These are the “communes of resistance” that seek to capture the state for their exclusive control or engage in internecine violence against other elements of civil society (Castells 1998).

The future of cities in Pacific Asia will depend upon capacities to create new forms of collaborative governance that express the vitality of civil society while transcending entrenched communes of resistance. In this context, the provision of civic spaces is seen as being vital to longer term capacities to bridge social divides, to have shared experiences, and be engaged in solving common social, political and economic issues within civil society as well as between it, government and the corporate economy. How such spaces appear and what are the trends in their provision, purposes and uses are the central issues in the building of cities and emergence of urban societies in Pacific Asia.

2. Civic Spaces

The major theme of the research being proposed here is that for the social, political and economic promises of the rise of civil society to be realized, their must be civic spaces available for its daily practices and collaborative engagement among its various organizations. Civic spaces are defined as those spaces in which people of different origins and walks of life can co-mingle without overt control by government, commercial or other private interests, or *de facto* dominance by one group over another. Echoing Lefebvre’s (1991:59) observation that all social change requires appropriate spaces for their fruition, providing and giving sustenance to civic spaces is a basic requirement for the promises of better governance and resilient economies.

The use of the term “civic space” here is not intended to be equivalent to either “civil society space” or “public space.” The former, which includes the household as well as exclusive social clubs or even fanatical communes, is much broader in scope. Similarly, the term “public space” normally implies public ownership or direct management by the state; yet many forms of civic space can be found in private or nominally private spaces such as coffee shops, pubs or even the country store. Here the interest is in spaces that are inclusive, that is, open to a broad spectrum of civil society and its organizations, whether public or private. In this sense, civic spaces are perhaps most closely equivalent to what Evans and Boyte (1986, 1992) call “free spaces” or “community free spaces” (King and Hustedde 1993:2):

A free space occurs in a setting in which people can meet for public talk and actively contribute to solving public problems. It is characterized by several major components: a sense of shared bonds, a comfortable physical, social, and cultural setting, a social network, engaging debate and dialogue, a participatory environment, and a potential for forming larger public networks and vision. If a free space exists, citizens can learn group identity, self-respect, public skills, and the value of cooperation.

This romantic definition can be seen as adding a spatial dimension of a long lineage of thought about the nature of civil society from Aristotle to the Enlightenment and on to present day discourses about the public sphere.¹ It misses, however, the insurgent spaces that are wrought from struggles among factions of civil society, the state and private (corporate) interests. More than a sense of shared bonds, the idea of civic space here is that of autonomy from the state, inclusiveness, and potential for asserting voice of civil society into public affairs.

Finally, using the terms “free space” and “autonomy” does not mean that civic spaces are unregulated or without any constraints on access or use. Whether in the form of private property, common property or state property, civic spaces require rules of access and use if they are to function in an inclusive, fundamentally non-violent and civil manner. Although regulation of civic spaces can take place under common property regimes outside of the state, in the contemporary world most common property regimes rely on larger protection by governments to keep commercial and other encroachments at bay. The need for regulation makes the provision of civic spaces all the more complex than such terms as public space imply. In some instances, for example, civic spaces are created through the regulation of private property, as in the case of laws in several U.S.

¹ As summarized by Korten (2001):

Historically the term civil society traces back to ancient Greece and Aristotle's concept of a *politike koinonia* or political community, later translated into Latin as *societas civilis*, or a civil society. Aristotle described the civil society as an ethical-political community of free and equal citizens of good and responsible character who by mutual consent agree to live under a system of law that expresses the norms and values they share. As the law is a codification of the shared cultural values by which the members of society have chosen to live, it becomes largely self-enforcing—maximizing the freedom of the individual and minimizing the need for coercive state intervention. It is an ideal consistent both with our current understanding of the organizing principles of healthy living systems and with freeing the creative potentials of humanity.

states requiring privately owned shopping malls to allow freedom of speech on their premises.

These observations lead back to the long-standing thesis that civil society exists in relation to the state in which the roles of law making and police powers reside and are called upon to insuring the “civil” or non-violent uses of civic spaces. As such, civic spaces do not exist under absolute control by either state, civil society or private ownership, but rather as a physical (or cyber) spaces that become civic spaces through the interactions of the three. This further suggests that civic spaces are often contested and subject to shifts in power relations.

Eight types of civic spaces can be identified as a means to initiate broader discussions on the origins, roles and prospects in the future.. A significant body of research related to civic spaces suggests that most are under great stress and might even been declining in many instances. At the same time, new efforts to create civic spaces have also been launched. Together the giving recognition to the widespread concern that cities requires such spaces for their social, political and economic life to flourish.

2.1 Public parks/plaza

Public squares, parks and plaza are basic forms of civic spaces in towns and cities in many world regions. In Italy, the piazza has been a vital civic space since Roman times:

The grid of archetypical Roman urban design inevitably included a square near the city heart called a forum. In this public space vendors might assemble, festivities take place, friends or enemies gather, opinionated individuals mount a speaker's podium. In a literal sense, civil society was coterminous with the sum of public opinion heard in the forum, theater and other places of gathering in the city. Without the infrastructure and the institutions of the city, its strangers and its tapestry of personal connections, there could be no Public Benefit, Common Good, or indeed Civil Society (Witteveen 1996:78).

Political mobilization, public rallies and forms of unorganized political exchanges continue to take place in the plaza on a daily basis in Italy and elsewhere. In the U.S., the public park takes on some of these civic roles, though in a much less routinely organized manner. In Tokyo, Hibiya Park next to the Imperial Palace has been the site for popular protest movements since its inception after the Meiji Restoration (Machimura 1997).

Much of contemporary research on cities in the West reveal that the plaza and the park are under increasing stress and are sites of intensive social conflict. Homelessness, gentrification, increasing social stratification and inequalities between haves and have-nots are manifested in struggles over such spaces, with the tendency to abandon the notion of the park as an inclusive civic space by either letting it become a residential zone for the homeless or excluding “undesirable” people from them through regulations, removing benches or engineering physical designs such as uncomfortably rounded bench seats to discourage sleeping or long term habitation (Harvey 1992). Homelessness

targeting parks and open urban spaces is also now appearing on a significant scale in cities in Pacific Asia, notably Japan.

In response to the potential loss of this vital form of civic space, governments and community organizations have launched public square renaissance and “save the park” campaigns. In Waterloo, Canada, a combined agora and forum in a Civic Square with a public amphitheater have recently been created by the municipal government to bring civic with commercial space together in the city center. Dublin, Ireland, has attempted to revitalize the historic area of Smithfield by opening a new Civic Plaza the size of two football fields in 1999. With a capacity to hold 8,000 people, it is expected to be the site for all major civic events. Among the annual events scheduled is a Freedom of the City Ceremony, with Aung San Suu Kyi being the first to be honored.

Concerning public parks, Barcelona used the 1992 Olympics to fund the restoration of its main park. In Paris the Parc Andre Citroen was developed on the site of a defunct car assembly plant (*The Economist* 1996). In Germany’s Saarbrucken a park has been built on an old coal depot. In the mid-1990s St. Louis adopted a plan to spend \$300 million over the following decade to restore its century old Forest Park. Elsewhere, old docklands are being turned into waterfront parks. In addition to providing much needed open space, the provision of public parks is found to bring people of many different backgrounds into contact with each other, thus promoting a basic sense of civility that counters a common urban trend of spatial segregation by class, gender, ethnicity, age and other differences.

Restoring parks and making them welcome to the public at large are separate matters. For the latter, local citizens need to be engaged in the process of mutual accommodation. Grass-roots citizen organizations to make parks, streets and neighborhoods more convivial and inclusive are be found in many cities. In San Francisco, for example, the Community Design Consulting Program of Urban Ecology was formed in 1994 to bring architects, planners, and landscape architects to provide professional design support in collaboration with community groups in low-income, often ethnically diverse neighborhoods. One of its major activities is to design and plan a community garden and park on a former railroad right of way in downtown Richmond. Its Blueprint for a Sustainable Bay Area has as its goals a broad-based process of citizen participation to “confront the challenges that threaten our quality of life; in our homes, neighborhoods, small towns, suburbs and major cities.” In Kobe, a forum to discuss the rebuilding of the city after its devastating earthquake calls upon homeowners planning to rebuild to give 10 percent of their land for parks and wider roads (Sakamaki 1995).

2.2 Public sidewalks and “main street”

Public sidewalks, particularly those in downtown commercial and residential areas, have traditionally provided civic spaces for people to mingle as they walk to work, shop or just go for a stroll. Juxtaposed to commercial establishments, they allow for the exercise of civic rights that are normally curtailed in private retail establishments that they front. Jane Jacobs, in her landmark treatise, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), observed that the mix of civic with commercial as well as residential

functions at a neighborhood and community scale was one of the most important enhancements to urban life. Public sidewalks in community shopping areas have been a key element of the mix of civic with other urban functions in the past.

As documented by Kunstler (1994) and others (Sorkin 1992), the decline of “main street” throughout urban United States and other countries as the shopping mall supplants older downtown shopping streets has been a direct assault on the civic dimension of urban space. Once the symbol of the intimate city where neighbors met neighbors while shopping and engaging in civic life, main street has systematically declined with the appearance of huge discount stores and privately owned malls located in suburb and exurban areas. In the U.S. more than half of all residents are now located in suburbs where the primary spaces of human congregation are shopping malls. Exclusively commercial, malls are designed to promote consumption as citizenship. Seemingly public, they are increasingly being patrolled to enforce private property rights, including denial of rights of assembly and free speech and such activities as labor strikes and pickets in front of its shops.

The most radical absence of public streets are found in the privately owned exurban urban nodes that are “economically powerful but politically invisible” private developments composed of “office parks, business campuses, privately-planned residential communities and commercial centers...containing impressive concentrations of office jobs and hotel space account for extremely high volumes of retail sales,” but are devoid of public functions and civic spaces (Knox 1993:2). Such “stealth cities” are not confined to the U.S. or high income countries. Jakarta’s Lippo Kowaraci is a privately owned new town designed for a population of 100,000 “middle and upper class” residents. In Bangkok, the major benefit advertised for a new town called Muang Tong Thani that began construction in the early 1990s to accommodate 400,000 to 700,000 people was that it is privately owned and has no municipal government. With the 1997 economic crisis, it became a ghost town of scores high rise commercial buildings and condominiums before it could be occupied.

Downtown and main street revitalization programs have been launched in many cities in the U.S. Where they succeed, they tend toward gentrification and displacement of the poor as residential areas without significant improvements in public or commercial space. Others, such as Flint Michigan’s attempt to create a new economy by revitalizing main street after the wholesale abandonment of the area by General Motors in the 1980s, have been characterized as painting lipstick on a gorilla and have been notably unsuccessful. With suburbanization leaving central city governments with declining financial resources and rising homeless populations, and with the mall established as the place to shop, innercities face tremendous difficulties in reconstructing their once vital civic and commercial areas.

Recognizing the reality of suburbanization and the emergence of the mall as the center of public interaction, movements have emerged to legally compel malls to create civic spaces. As previously mentioned, several U.S. states have passed laws mandating malls to allow free speech. The juxtaposition of civic with private spaces is finding new configurations in some countries. In Japan, the City of Nagoya has developed a private-

public partnership to build a combined shopping-community center in the form of a high rise building with public events held in the open courtyard on the ground floor and commercial shops and community activities such as public art shows together occupying each of the higher floors.

An ambitious program directed toward transforming commercial and suburban malls into public and civic spaces was launched in the 1990s by the Walt Whitman Center at Rutgers University. Understanding that the mall has become every city's "social space in the default mode," the vision the Center's Malltown Square project is expansive (WWC 1996:1):

Imagine a mall that included a community theater, a childcare center, a public health station, a "Hyde Park" corner for political debate and pamphleteering, a community art gallery, an interior court with music performances, a public library/communications center with access to the internet, a kid's playground, and a storefront "city hall" where local representatives could face their public. Imagine an architecture that integrated and interspersed these kinds of civil society facilities with shops and stores, and that reclaimed public space from what have become homogeneous commercial arenas.

On a larger spatial scale, the neo-traditional town planning that has emerged in many countries promises a return to the multi-functional community and its civic spaces (Kunstler 1994). So far, the actual developments, such as Seaside, Florida, Laguna West, California, and Disney's Celebration in Orlando, Florida, have been oriented toward affluent households and communities. In a related development, advocates of "smart cities" propose that telecommunications and tele-commuting will also allow people to recreate smaller, intimate communities replete with public and civic spaces (Shaw and Utt 2000).

2.3 Community/civic centers and public buildings

Government, non-profit and for-profit community centers have provided civic spaces covering a wide variety of activities, ranging from hobby clubs and the arts to community political organizations and action groups. As noted above, a number of governments have been actively trying to create civic centers to revitalize declining downtown areas as well as civic life.

These same spaces, especially public buildings housing government functions, have become the sites of insurgent citizenship (Friedmann 1998) with claims of rights to the city and, as many cities have experienced since the WTO conference in Seattle in 1999, demands for a more accountable global corporate economy. After the September 11, 2002 terrorist attack on New York city, public buildings and such spaces as public sports and entertainment sites have been systematically placed under increasing police, military and intelligence agency surveillance, with their civic aspects being sharply curtailed.

In some instances of political reform in Pacific Asia, government centers have been opened to include civic spaces. Such was the case of Taipei City Hall, which opened its

front courtyard to popular access after reforms allowed a new party to the mayoral election in the mid-1990s.

2.4 Commercial establishments with traditions as civic spaces

Some types of commercial establishments are given commercially viability because they are frequented for the civic spaces they provide. Many are long-established social institutions that have continued to thrive in contemporary times. Among the most well known commercial activities creating civic spaces in North America and Europe are the coffee shop and the pub where people are generally free to spend hours of time and engage in conversations with strangers as well as friends at modest costs and limited commercial impositions. In Japan and Korea, the privately owned public bath traditionally took on the role as a civic space where all people in a community would gather not only to bathe but to engage in conversations with neighbors. In the case of Japan, it is revealing to note that in the bubble economy of the late 1980s public baths were targeted as a “block busting” technique by land developers who would buy and demolish them to break down community solidarity against the loss of housing to commercial buildings. The result was a precipitous decline of public baths to a mere handful in central Tokyo by the early 1990s (Douglass 1993).

The spread of global fast food restaurants explicitly designed to promote fast eating and quick departure have undermined the civic nature of such establishments. Also chain stores such as Starbucks might offer opportunity for civic encounters, the gourmet prices of its coffee put it out of range of significant shares of the population. Everywhere the local diner and coffee shop are yielding to fast food chains, which have enhanced the commercial at the expense of the civic experience of eating out.

Some institutions carry on, however. The pubs of the U.K. continue to thrive because they offer civic spaces for local communities. Despite the spread of global fast food chains to Pacific Asia, cities are still replete with local restaurants that provide for social as well as eating occasions.

2.5 Private establishments regulated by the state to include civic spaces

The quality of civic life in all civic spaces greatly depends on the ways in which they are regulated by the state, private or common property owners, stewards and users. In some instances, governments have moved to create civic spaces in privately owned locations that have serve the public at large. As an illustration of the use of legal or regularity means to create civic spaces where they have been excluded, the state of Florida requires airports to provide free speech areas to allow for the expression of the civic freedoms to their users. As noted above, several states in the U.S. also require malls to allow for free speech. Most states have not, however, adopted such legislation.

A major thrust of the Malltown Square project discussed above is also to have governments put laws into effect to compel malls to vastly expand their civic spaces and civic functions. There are, however, countervailing tendencies by civil society organizations mobilized to advance absolute rights of private land owners against all

forms of state and social control, including environmental regulation of land use. At stake is not simply the rights of land owners, but also the exercise of civic rights and engagement in civic life.

2.6 Cyber civic spaces

The emergence of the internet over the past decade has held the promise of new forms of civic spaces without geographical propinquity (Lim forthcoming). These promises of telematics range from empowering citizens to form “virtual communities” (Graham 1997) to the re-emergence of (neo-) traditional communities on a human scale in “smart cities” (Shaw and Utt 2000). “Blade Runner” dystopian futures with telematics used to give totalizing control to behemoth corporate governments have also been conjured about the future of wired cities, and there is increasing concern about “digital divides” and privileged spaces in the informational networks that now characterize the contemporary city (Castells 1989; Knox 1994; Graham 2000).

The image of the Panopticon notwithstanding, revolutions in telecommunications are nevertheless creating new forms of civic spaces. To some observers, the use of the internet by increasing numbers of people represents an important means for civil society to organize beyond national boundaries to confront the forms of world governance that have already appeared at that scale in the form of transnational corporate networks and such intergovernmental bodies as the World Trade Organization. Although characterized in the popular press as being “anti-globalization,” the protest against these emergence forms of governance more accurately reflect the dissatisfaction about the non-democratic nature of these institutions rather than being against global trade as such. Protestors joining together in Seattle to protest the 1999 WTO meeting reportedly organized before the event through electronic mail on the internet.

Internet cafes with low-cost access to computers abound in many Pacific Asia cities, especially in Southeast Asia where ability to buy computers is still restricted to a small percentage of the population. In addition to person-to-person communications, internet services provide open chat rooms, bulletin boards and web pages for social and political causes. In the U.S. the public library has begun to take on this role to create virtual communities in the digital age (Molz and Dain 1999).

A key issue in this regard is the shift from public to privately-owned and operated communications systems that incorporate international flows of money and capital, allowing “corporate capital to escape the regulatory powers of nation-states” (Graham 1994:418). The increasing concentration of ownership of all forms of media into huge transnational corporations stands in sharp contrast to the promises of the civic space expansion through the spread of easy access internet use within civil society. At the moment much of the tension in the use of the internet in Pacific Asia is about government controls and civil society-state relations. As political reforms proceed toward more democratic forms of government and economies are increasingly open to transnational corporate linkages, the key issues about the internet as civic space will shift to civil society-corporate economy relations as access to news, information, and knowledge is filtered through corporate networks.

2.7 *Marginal, illegal/covert, and disguised civic spaces*

In contrast to the open piazza and other civic spaces conferred with legal protection of civic rights to assembly and freedom to speak, many other forms of everyday resistance and expressions of civic life are muted and occur in marginal or disguised spaces. In situations of severe social and political repression of civil society, civic spaces can still exist and be sustained because their particular characteristics or locations are difficult to assail or control by government authorities even though the activities are declared to be illegal or offensive to dominant social groups. Hegemony is never totalizing; resistance is rarely absolutely subdued, human agency can be expressed even by the most marginalized people.

Such civic spaces might be harbored, for example, in temples, religious schools or other sites for religious practices that governments dare not directly enter. They are common in large ethnic communities where the very numbers of people and ‘foreign’ languages shield them from intensive state control. As Korea showed throughout the long struggles toward democratic government covering several decades, universities can become sites where proscribed resistance is shielded by even public institutions. Civic spaces can appear at moments when the policeman is not nearby.

The internet is among the more interesting of these spaces in some countries where civil society has been heavily suppressed. As explained by Lim (forthcoming), during the Suharto “New Order” years of repression, the emergence of the *warnet* – internet café – in Indonesia created cyberspace avenues for information and political discussions that were prohibited in all forms of media but could not be effectively controlled when sent via satellite through telephone lines. Similar contests between government control and civil society associations over the internet are occurring in such countries as Vietnam and China where access is limited by government regulation, and messages are constantly under possible state surveillance.

2.8 *Insurgent spaces*

The appropriation of urban spaces for political insurgence occurs at particular historical moments and sites as forces within civil society rise up to confront the state or other powerful entities such as emerging non-democratic forms of global government. Almost every city has sites that are imbued with deep cultural and political meanings that, while perhaps invisible on a daily basis, become the spaces for protests and challenges to the dominating interests. Successful occupation of such sites can become a source of political validation and empowerment. As the Tiananmen Square episode of 1989 clearly revealed, capturing – or failing to capture – some sites can put political institutions of an entire nation at stake. Democracy Monument in Bangkok, EDSA boulevard in Manila, Hibiya Park in Tokyo, the Parliament building in Jakarta, are among the sites that insurgents know will carry high levels of symbolic importance when successfully occupied. Yet on any given day, these sites are just as likely to be little more than business thoroughfares or places of leisure or even tourism.

As noted above, with nation-states becoming more permeable to transnational corporate interests, insurgent spaces are also shifting from direct civil society-state confrontations to civil society-corporate economy relations. In focusing on the world corporate economy, civilian protests have reverberated throughout the region following the economic collapse of several Pacific Asian countries. Anti-IMF marches in Seoul and other cities show this shift in attention toward global power structures. In response, with every world meeting or corporate-state interests, the intrusions into civic spaces by militarized police forces mobilized to defend these events have intensified.

Insurgent civic spaces reached a global scale in 1999 as thousands of demonstrators representing manifold civil society organizations gathered in Seattle to protest the policies and lack of accountability of the newly formed World Trade Organization (WTO), which has taken on attributes of world governance in the guise of trade negotiations. The importance of this event has not been lost on either civil society organizations or governments. Subsequent events – World Bank – IMF annual meeting in Washington, D.C., WTO meeting in Bangkok, Asia Development Bank meeting in Honolulu – now have governments sending police teams to previous event sites to learn how to control these spaces, how to divide protestors into smaller groups and how to enlarge the “no-go” spaces around what are, in principle, public events (Boski 2002). At the recent World Economic Forum (WEF) held in New York in January 2002, the approximately 3,000 participants in the meeting were protected by a 10,000 member police force. If all such international gathering were to have such ratios of more than 3 militarized policemen and women per every delegate, the costs borne by taxpayers would be enormous.²

As vital as insurgent citizenship might be to the political life of cities and nations, some observers believe that their moments of accomplishment are extremely difficult to sustain or translate into long-term gains (Friedmann 1998). Governments respond with more effective means of control, coalitions among voluntary organizations are fleeting, and reactive politics do not readily translate into proactive solutions. Yet cities everywhere will continue to have sites of insurgency, and it can be hypothesized that the more repressive government is, the more likely that civic spaces will be roughly hewn from the urban landscape through insurgent action.

The types and examples of civic spaces summarized above serve to illustrate that their provision and characteristics are being challenged and transformed in the contemporary cities of the world (Westwood and Williams 1997; Soja 1997). Stress on civic spaces is coming from many sources. Increasing fortification of urban space and surveillance of public spaces are subjecting them to closer state scrutiny and presence, reducing the autonomy of those spaces from the state (Davis 1990). At the same time the commodification of public events and places continues, with once public events now carrying corporate logos and entire cities having official corporate sponsors for public events, as in Coca Cola’s exclusive rights to advertise and sell beverages in at all

² The 2 day Asia Development Bank Meeting in Honolulu in 2001 reportedly cost the local government \$3.5 million for police protection, with more than \$500,000 spent on new riot gear, barricades and other special equipment and training (Brannon 2001).

municipal events in such cities as Newport Beach, California and Honolulu, Hawaii. Roads and sidewalks are inside of gated communities are private. Strengthened private property rights are turning large office buildings from places of public access to fortresses that admit only those with official approval and after the scrutiny of private guards and police forces. With increasing surveillance of public spaces and privatization of what use to be considered public spaces – large buildings and streets – the city is being remade with diminished civic spaces.

Added to these trends is the increasing numbers of transnational migrant communities and multicultural composition of urban populations. While the city has always been thought of as a center of diversity, in the current era this has become exceptionally complex as cities are more stratified by income, ethnic and racial divisions. Even large cities in Japan, Korea and Taiwan are becoming the homes of hundreds of thousands of long-term foreign workers (Douglass 1999). Immigration is mixing with pre-existing and new social cleavages to create multi-ethnic divisions along with those of class, status and other affinities such as community and turf identities. Exploitation of insecure immigrant labor adds layers of extreme vulnerability to the homeless, an underclass of chronically unemployed, and new forms of poverty among working households in a service-industry, part-time employment dominated economy that has moved beyond the hollowing out of the middle class and that contrast with rising affluence of a small share of the population. The resulting “heteropolis” is a city fragmented into a myriad of “lifestyle clusters” (Jencks 1996) or, perhaps more accurately, life chances. Civic spaces in these contexts tend to also fragment along rather than bridge social divides.

Yet in many cities, civil society organizations and governments have moved to renew existing civic spaces and to create new ones. Park and civic center restoration, new towns and smart cities, fostering civic spaces in privately owned public places such as suburban malls, and using public libraries for access to the internet for all community residents regardless of income are some of the many initiatives in this direction. While many, increasingly globalized, forces are at play that seem to jeopardize civic spaces, these local efforts show that opportunities to create and sustain such inclusive spaces do exist and are being pursued.

3. Civic Space, Urbanization and Globalization in Pacific Asia

Many of the transformations of civic spaces in North America and Europe are also occurring in Pacific Asia countries. Gated communities, for example, have been the major form of suburban housing development in most countries in the region. Shopping malls that privatize what was once considered to be public space are also readily seen in almost all large cities in the region. Internet use and its forms of civic space through chat rooms, mailing lists and email are proceeding at exceptionally high rates as well.

Other features of civic spaces are, however, of a different order. The urban transition is still underway in many Pacific Asia countries, what can be called a significant urban middle class is also recent in most countries, and the successful rise of civil society in the form legitimate large-scale political communities independent of state-

run parties is still somewhat exceptional. For these and other historical reasons, civic spaces have tended to be found in marginal or clandestine sites with important moments of insurgency that have in led toward more democratic forms of governance in several countries.

In 1950 less than one quarter of the population in Pacific Asia lived in cities. Although urbanization began to accelerate in the 1960s and 1970s, in most cases political reforms only began to lead to more accountable governments in the 1980s and 1990s. Strong arm and authoritarian states – collectively termed “developmental states” – were the hallmark of the newly industrialized economies of the region. Under rapid rates of urbanization and non-democratic forms of government, cities grew around business and regime maintenance interests, with commercial and industrial property development occasionally yielding to the construction of state buildings and public spaces created for pageantry rather than for the expression of voluntary forms of civic association. Parks and other forms of civic space appeared as well, but at modest levels and often with controls against group assembly or political activity. Civil society throughout the region was severely muted both institutionally and in urban space.

Over the past decade these characteristics of Pacific Asia cities and state-civil society relations have profoundly changed. Understanding that civil society stands in relation to the state and, in the contemporary world, the global as well as local corporate economy (Friedmann, 1988, 1998), these changes are manifested in at least two ways. First, the rise of civil society has been pervasive, resulting in political reforms toward democratic governance, including locally elected and accountable governments in several countries. Throughout the region, non-profit organizations have blossomed in number and variety over the past decade (Douglass *et al.* 2001).

Second, at the same time that popular demands for accountable governments have led to political reform, national economies are being deregulated and radically opened to global competition. Particularly in the aftermath of the Pacific Asia economic crisis beginning in the late 1990s, new forms of state-civil society relations are emerging at the urban and metropolitan level. These new relations are contextuated by the impacts of economic reform and deregulation of border controls over the flows of finance, commodities, and the location of production. The result has been a sudden heightening of levels of competition among cities for global investment.

These two trends – new local state-civil society relations and intensifying intercity economic competition – are the principal sources of the contested spaces of cities in Pacific Asia today. While residents demand more livable cities, global competition is pressuring governments to cater to perceived global demands for mega-infrastructure projects such as world hub airports, heavily subsidized industrial parks and export processing zones, convention centers, and Manhattan skylines. Privatization of urban functions, including public universities, and cost-recovery programs to make public goods pay for themselves that are being required by the IMF as part of structural adjustment loans following the 1997 economic crisis have raised further questions about the capacities of national and local governments to provide for the common good through investments in non income generating sites such as civic spaces.

As contests over changes in the built environment have sharpened government-society relations, global economic forces are putting pressures on cities to privatize and commodify urban spaces and to replace political citizenship with consumer citizenship. The city is thus being transformed in a site composed of individuals 'voting' with money for material possessions rather than a place in which social or political communities are concerned with civic life. The fragmentation of the city into enclosures protecting residents from interaction with people from different walks of life accentuates this change. In this context of local-global interaction, a policy research agenda is put forth below to clarify the importance of providing for a vibrant civil society through the creation and sustenance of civic spaces.

4. Research Agenda and Program

Based on the foregoing discussion, pursuing research on civic spaces in Pacific Asia cities can accomplish five major purposes: (1) to understand civic space in the context of the idea and existence of civil society historically through culture, philosophy and politics in countries in the region; (2) to analyze and explain tendencies and issues related to specific types of civic spaces in a given city; (3) to compare and synthesize studies from several cities; and (4) to look toward the future of cities in Pacific Asia by addressing the question of how and through what means civic spaces can or will be expanded.

4.1 The idea of civil society and civic spaces in Pacific Asia societies

Much of the literature on civil society states that it is a Western idea and that Asian countries have no history of the existence of civil society. This is a complex issue, however, and summary pronouncements about it are not easily made. Much, of course, depends on the definition of civil society. While there are many definitions, most agree on a central feature, namely, that it consists of voluntary associations that have a significant degree of autonomy from the state. Thus if Asian 'despotic' or authoritarian governments gave no autonomy to people to organize outside of the state, it would seem to follow that no civil society could have existed in the past. Further, with the rise of civil society in the stylized West said to be the historical outcome of the Enlightenment that asserted the power of individuals to reason, the "civil" elements are presumed to have prevented from emerging in other parts of the world by the persistence of "traditional" religious beliefs or other dogma.

Such a judgment is not easily sustained. It assumes that the state could be all powerful and hegemonic and that no social philosophy other than a "Western" one could embrace the idea of society having an existence separate from whatever form of government or state that is in place. It would not reveal, for example, that the roots of independence movements in Asia were found in the rise of civil society against oppressive states, or that democracy movements were being promoted by mainstream intellectuals in China before the Opium War of 1839.³ Similarly, while Germany and

³ Metzger (1998:1) distinguishes the meaning of civil society in modern Chinese thought from the Western concept. In the West, civil society is un-utopian with morally and intellectually fallible citizens organized against an incorrigible state. In China it is seen as a utopian idea "free of 'selfishness,' pervaded with

Italy were sliding into fascism in the 1930s, a political transformation was taking place in Thailand that turned the kingdom into a constitutional monarchy (1932) and proposed democratic ideals. Rather than being intrinsic to their cultures, the failure of civil society to flower in Pacific Asia as a political force cannot be separated from colonial histories. Nor, on the other hand, can “Asian values” be substituted for long, rich histories of people struggling for democracy in this and other parts of the world:

Asia needs democracy as much as any other region in the world. To resist this by invoking “Asian values” or “Western arrogance” only confounds that basic understanding. The arrogance of the West consists not so much in “pushing” their own brand of political liberalism -- or of science or technology -- on the rest of the world, but in appropriating a world heritage of ideas as their own by labeling them ‘Western’ (Sen 2000:3).

Rather than continue to essentialize an Occidental versus Oriental history of civil society, a more fruitful – and historically richer – approach would be to explore the social and cultural foundations of the contemporary rise of civil society in Pacific Asia. Although much of current literature on civil society continues to dwell on East-West differences as either a “clash of civilizations” or the triumph of Western values, variations are great within each geographical category. Even so-called Confucianist societies vary in important ways among East and Southeast Asia societies, not to mention the variety of other cultural and religious bases across the region. A contemplative exploration of local roots of civil society in Pacific Asia would greatly add to the debates and understandings of the socio-cultural and philosophical origins of contemporary social movements in the region that are everywhere being summarized as “the rise of civil society.” Among the key questions to be asked are:

- How have socio-cultural and political philosophies and structures affected the existence and role of civil society in a given society?
- What types of civic spaces have been created through time and what are their origins in society and politics?
- What social, political or economic roles have civic spaces played?
- What are the current issues with regard to civic space?

4.2 Case studies of specific sites and episodes of civic spaces

In addition to revealing historical contexts, case studies are needed in cities at specific types of sites to reveal contemporary trends and issues. These might follow variations of the listing of types above or could add to the list. Among the questions to be explored are:

- How were the specific sites created or how did they emerge?

‘sincerity,’ lacking all ‘constraints limiting properly free individual desires’ (*shu-fu*), free of ‘exploitation,’ without any “‘conflicts or feelings of alienation coming between people’ (*ko-ho*).”

- What social, political or economic roles have they played?
- What limitations, if any, have been placed on the use of these spaces and how have they affected the types of activities that have taken place in them?
- What changes in civic space have occurred in recent years with regard to:
 - changing government policies and/or political reform
 - globalization (e.g., deregulation and intercity competition)
 - changes in social relations (social cleavages, migration of different ethnic groups) that are affecting civic spaces.
- Understanding the forces now at play, what is the future of these spaces?

4.3 Comparative analysis and synthesis of experiences

The case studies are important in their own right, but much can also be learned by comparative analysis and synthesis of findings from many cases. This analysis would add a potentially important dimension to current debates on the rise of civil society, political reform and globalization in the region and beyond. Among the questions are:

- Are there common experiences in the appearance and types of civic spaces? Which are expanding or diminishing? Why? What is happening in the balance to civic spaces among countries in the region?
- How have recent political reforms (e.g., democratic, neoliberal) affected civic spaces?
- Are governments actively expanding the realms of civic space? If so, how are they doing this; if not, why not?
- What are the impacts of globalization on civic spaces? Are they, as Castells suggests, fragmenting into spaces for rivalry among “communes” of resistance and anti-systemic forces, or, as others suggest (Friedmann 1998), are they fulfilling the promises of an active society engaged in the formation of political communities that are open and inclusive?
- How vital are civic spaces to such issues as good governance and sustainable development?
- What are the key relations between civil society and civic space?

4.4 Providing civic spaces

As discussed, much of the writing and evidence on civic spaces suggest that in Pacific Asia until recently they have taken the form of either marginal/covert spaces or insurgent spaces. Many observers also suggest that countervailing powers of the state

and corporate economy are likely to continue to marginalize and even further diminish these spaces. Others argue that even if such spaces are appropriated by elements of civil society, they are now dissolving along with the nation-state into radical (often utopian) communes of violence and intolerance of differences (Castells 1998), which is the antithesis of the ideal of civic space.

As political reforms proceed and governance becomes more inclusive of civil society, a central question concerning civic spaces is whether or not they will be created, provided or otherwise 'liberated' from existing urban spaces. The proposition put forth in this paper is that unless such spaces and their institutional underpinnings are routinely provided along with the rise of civil society, the capacities to overcome either the excessive privatization of urban space or the dissolution of civil society into fragmented 'cantons' of class, ethnicity and other secular and religious affinities will seriously hinder the broad social project of establishing and sustaining inclusive democracies.

To put the issue another way, if civic spaces are created solely through insurgency or resistance at the margins of dominant forces, the prospects for collaborative governance that can resolve differences within society in a civil manner are limited. As the record of insurgent occupation of spaces around global events shows, the power imbalances favoring government-corporate linkages combined with defensive reactions to what is now perceived to be global terrorism will create spirals of diminishing civic space and, with it, civic life. Even significant shares of civil society now seem to have become willing to give up rights to civic space and civic life under the banner of anti-terrorism. Governments are assisting this process by intensifying surveillance and controls over public spaces, diminishing civic freedoms in the process. Likewise, businesses are fortifying the private property of buildings, commercial shops, shopping malls and other corporate property that make up increasing shares of urban space.

The onus of routinely providing civic spaces in cities through public policy ultimately falls onto the state, both in a physical and institutional sense. The push for such space is, however, most likely to come from civil society rather than the state or corporate interests. As such there is a certain mutual causality in society and space relationships: for civil society to push its claims there must be real (or virtual) civic spaces where people can gather, organize and give voice to not one or a few but many people; yet civil society must organize in political communities to put sufficient pressure on government and other actors, including international lending and development agencies, to create such spaces. In the short-term dynamics of space-society interplay, the form of civic spaces might therefore appear as it has in Pacific Asia, namely, through resistance and insurgence. In the longer term, however, renegotiations of urban space between state and civil society could result in a routine provisioning of civic spaces, which is the ideal.

In Pacific Asia the need to physically create more civic spaces that are open to people of all walks of life in cities is evident. The need to institutionally expand the civic aspects of public and private spaces through laws protecting rights of non-violent assembly and freedom to speak is also readily apparent. As the example of efforts to create civic spaces in shopping malls in the U.S. shows, such efforts need not be limited

to public land, but can also include privately owned sites that have displaced civic spaces and have become major centers of city life. Among the research questions concerning the intentional provision of civic spaces are:

- What are the major factors inhibiting the provision of (various types of) civic spaces?
- What types of initiatives or interventions to expand civic spaces are most needed and most promising?
- How can the provision of civic spaces best meet the needs of increasingly multicultural societies for associational life and shared civic culture?

The resolution of the myriad conflicts between civic life, communal strife, state power and the global economic system will, in part, depend on the degree to which civil society interests can be routinely inserted into the public agenda. This, in turn, suggests the need for civic spaces in which urban residents can engage in exchanges of ideas, form voluntary associations, and move toward engaging state and corporate interests in collaborative deliberation and decisionmaking about the future of cities.

There is no single model of the urban future; elements of many possible urban futures can be found in all cities. Yet there is theory and evidence suggesting that a city that provides spaces for civic life will also be a city that is better able to create its own capacities for innovation and economic sustainability. Research on civic spaces is proposed with this possibility in mind.

References

- Boonchuen, Pornpan (2001), "Urban Design Strategies for Creating Civic Space for Livable Cities: The Case Of Bangkok's Transition in the Global Age" (Honolulu: Department of Urban and Regional Planning, MA paper).
- Boski, Joe (2002), "Insurgent Civic Spaces in a Global Age: From Seattle to Genoa and Beyond," Ips-Nus Forum on Civic Spaces in the Cities of the Asia-Pacific, The Institute Of Policy Studies, Singapore, 4 – 5 March.
- Brannon, Johnny (2001), "Police Spent \$3.5 Million on ADB Security," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 4 July.
- Castells, Manuel (1989), *The Informational City* (Basil Blackwell)
- Castells, Manuel (1998), "Communal Heavens: Identity and Meaning in the Network Society," *The Power of Identity* (Blackwell), 3-32.
- Davis, Mike (1990), *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (London: Verso).
- de Tocqueville, Alexis (1796), *Democracy in America* (New York: Harper and Row).
- Douglass, Mike (1993), "The 'New' Tokyo Story: Restructuring Space and the Struggle for Place in a World City," in Kuniko Fujita and Richard Child Hill, eds., *Japanese Cities in the Global Economy: Global Restructuring and Urban-Industrial Change* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press), 83-119.
- Douglass, Mike (1999), "Unbundling National Identity -- Global Migration and the Advent of Multicultural Societies in East Asia," *Asian Perspectives*, 23:3, 79-128.
- Douglass, Mike, Orathai Ard-Am and Ik Ki Kim (2001) "Urban Poverty and the Environment -- Social Capital and State-Community Synergy in Seoul and Bangkok," in Peter Evans, ed., *Livable Cities? The Politics of Urban Livelihood and Sustainability* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).
- Economist* (1996), "To Be Loved and Give Delight: City Parks," Feb 24, 338:7954, 9-10.
- Evans, Sara and Harry Boyte (1986), *Free Spaces* (New York: Harper and Row).
- Evans, Sara and Harry Boyte (1992), *Free Spaces: The Sources of Democratic Change in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Friedmann, John (1987) *Planning in the Public Domain: from Knowledge to Action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Friedmann, John (1988), *Life Space and Economic Space* (New York: Transaction Books).
- Friedmann, John (1998), "The New Political Economy of Planning: the rise of Civil Society," in M. Douglass and John Friedmann, eds., *Cities for Citizens: Planning and the Rise of Civil Society in a Global Age*. (London: John Wiley), 19-38.
- Graham, Stephen (1994), "Networking Cities: Telematics in Urban Policy -- A Critical Review," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 18:3, 416-432.
- Graham, Stephen (1997), "Imagining the Real-Time City; Telecommunications, Urban Paradigms and the Future of Cities," in S. Westwood and J. Williams, eds., *Imaging Cities; Scripts, Signs, Memory* (London: Routledge), 31-49
- Graham, Steven (2000), "Constructing Premium Network Spaces: Reflections on Infrastructure Networks and Contemporary Urban Development," *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 24:1, 183-200.
- Habermas, Jurgen (1989) *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press).

- Harvey, David (1992), "Social Justice, Postmodernism and the City," *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, 16:4, 587-601.
- Jane Jacobs (1961), *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Doubleday).
- Jencks, Charles (1996), "The City That Never Sleeps," *New Statesman*, 125:4290, 26-28.
- King, Betty and Ronald Hustedde (1993), "Community Free Spaces," *Journal of Extension*, Winter, 31:4.
- Knox, Paul (1993), *The Restless Urban Landscape* (Prentice Hall).
- Knox, Paul (1994), *Introduction to Urban Geography* (Prentice-Hall).
- Korten, David (2001), "The Civil Society: an Unfolding Cultural Struggle." <http://cyber-journal.org/cj/authors/korten/CivilizingSociety.shtml>
- Kunstler, James H. (1994), *The Geography of Nowhere* (New York: Touchstone).
- Lefebvre, Henri (1991), *The Production of Space* (Blackwell).
- Lim, Merlyna (forthcoming), "From Real to Virtual (and back again): Civil Society, Public Sphere, and the Internet in Indonesia," in K. C. Ho, R. Kluver, and K. Yang. (eds.), *The Internet and Development in Asia* (London: Routledge).
- Machimura, Takashi (1997), "Building a Capital for Emperor and Enterprise: the Changing Urban Meaning of Central Tokyo," in Won Bae Kim, Mike Douglass, and Sung-Chuel Choe, eds., (1997), *Culture and the City in East Asia* (Oxford University Press), 151-166.
- Metzger, Thomas (1998) "The Western Concept of the Civil Society in the Context of Chinese History" (Stanford: The Hoover Institutions, Stanford University, Hoover Essay).
- Molz, Redmond Kathleen and Phyllis Dain (1999), *Civic Space/Cyberspace: The American Public Library in the Information Age* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press).
- PPI (Progressive Policy Institute) (2000), "The New Economy Index," http://www.neweconomyindex.org/section1_page02.html.
- Putnam, Robert (1993), *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Shaw, Jane and Ronald Utt, eds. (2000), *A Guide to Smart Growth: Shattering Myths, Providing Solutions* (Heritage Foundation).
- Soja, Edward (1997), "Six Discourses on the Postmetropolis," in S. Westwood and J. Williams, eds., *Imaging Cities; Scripts, Signs, Memory* (London: Routledge), 19-30.
- Sorkin, M. ed. (1992), *Variations on a Theme Park; the New American City and the End of Public Space* (NY: Noonday Press).
- Thurow, Lester (1999), "Building Wealth; the New Rules for Individuals, Companies and Nations," *Atlantic Monthly*, June, 57-69.
- Westwood, Sallie and John Williams (1997), eds., *Imaging Cities; Scripts, Signs, Memory* (London: Routledge).
- Witteveen, Peter (1996), "Understanding Civil Society, Its Ramifications, Its Roots," *Human Mosaic*, 30:1, 72-84.
- WWC (Walt Whitman Center) (1996), "Malltown Square: A Legislating Civil Society Project" (New Brunswick: Dept Political Science, Rutgers University. <http://www.cpn.org/sections/affiliates/whitman/lcs-malls.html>).