ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to examine the notion of what constitutes public space in the light of increasing private provision of public spaces by shopping malls in HDB town centres. A significant portion of our lives is spent in these hermetically sealed containers which are public spaces in some sense. The issue addressed here is the changing nature of public space in our urbanistic and consumerist society with particular attention to the dynamic shift in the public and private realm. Perhaps a rethink of the notion of our public environment needs to be done to include and recognize the full range of places related to public life.

The scope of study includes an introduction to the background of public space and the dichotomy between the public and private realm. Transformations in public spaces due to effects of urbanism with particular focus on privatised public spaces will be addressed. Controversial issues relating to the mall assuming social centrality, becoming a form of control and placeless environment will be discussed. Decentralisation of retail functions to the HDB estates in relation to government policies and the social significance of town centres are highlighted.

Focusing on the aspect of adaptation, various criteria important for the effectiveness of this new form of public space are identified and assessed through comparison studies. The purpose is to identify new trends so as to assess the change in morphology of public spaces in HDB town centres. The findings indicate that in spite of the most authoritarian control and the lack of active appropriation, the latent social function of the mall still exists and holds much potential for development. The conclusion includes the consolidation of recommendations to improve adaptation of this new form of privatised public space and possibilities of integrating it into the larger network of the HDB fabric.

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