Where The Great City Stands: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Thinking About Cities

by

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Class of 2017

A thesis (or essay) submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies

Middletown, Connecticut

April, 2017
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Acknowledgements

It has always been difficult for me to express my gratitude and I fear I will not do this section justice. Nonetheless, I must try. First I must express thanks to the Freeman family, for investing in so many students, including me, over the years and giving me this opportunity to enjoy an education in the liberal arts. I will forever be grateful.

This project would not have come to fruition had it not been for my thesis advisor, Professor Joyce Jacobsen. Thank you for taking time out of your (very) busy schedule to take me on as an advisee and push me to complete this project. Your quick wit and critical insight during our meetings always left me feeling energized and motivated.

To all my professors at Wes, thank you for pushing me and allowing me to grow as a person. Special mention to all my CSS professors. Professors Fay and Skillman—thank you giving me the courage to speak up in class and put my thoughts into words. This has meant more to me than you know. To all my sophomore year tutors: Professors Moon, Elphick, Adelstein, and Wiliarty, thank you for changing the way I think about the world. Thanks also to Professors Gandolfo and Rosenthal for taking time out to speak with me about my thesis. And to Professor Alice Hadler, for taking such great care of us Freeman scholars and international students. From agreeing to edit my thesis to hosting us at your house for dinners and picnics, thank you.

Thanks must also go to the seniors who took me under their wing these past few years. Winston, Jill, and Julian, thank you for providing me with a helping hand when needed. Chun Kit, thank you for stopping me from dropping CSS. To my CSS classmates, thank you for all the good memories in and out of class. The CSS lounge crew—thank you for making the lounge a second home for me.

Of course, I cannot forget my pesky 265 Pine crew, Daichi, Jason, and Josh. Thanks for the long chats into the night, the great Fifa matches, card games, and everything else we did together. Going to miss you guys next year. And everyone else who has been part of this process, including my writing mentor, Ella, who took time out to edit my thesis. Thank you!

To my family. Ameer—thank you for letting me bug you these past years. Although you do support the wrong football club, you still never fail to amaze me with your kindness and intelligence in all other matters. Mum and Dad—you two gave me your blessing to come study in this foreign land. Although I don’t show it, these four years away from home have been rather tough. There have been so many times when I wished I was back lying in the comfort of my (or your) bed. But this experience has been an opportunity of a lifetime for me and words will never be able to fully express my gratitude. I hope that one day, I will be half as good a person as the two of you.
Introduction

Why We Evaluate Cities

_Cities have always been the fireplaces of civilization, whence light and heat radiated out into the dark_ – Theodore Parker

_The chief function of the city is to convert power into form, energy into culture, dead matter into the living symbols of art, biological reproduction into social creativity_ – Lewis Mumford

What is the city and how did it come into existence? The origins of the city are difficult to trace. Cities have a complex history and have had various manifestations throughout time, from the ancient Greek and Mesopotamian cities, to the metropolitan cities of today such as New York, London, Paris, and Tokyo. Prior to the Industrial Revolution that started in Britain in the late eighteenth century, a relatively small proportion of the world’s population lived in large places that resemble the cities of today. As time progressed, the functions of cities started to change. Cities began to be associated with places where groups of people came together to live permanently for sustenance and support (Mumford 1961: 9) The advent of the Industrial Revolution and the new techniques of work brought along with it caused people to move closer to factories, and live in areas closer to their new workplaces. This clustering of people led to the formation of city living as we know it today. As technology continued to develop at an exponential rate, bringing with it new farming and manufacturing techniques, there was less need for manpower in rural areas. This was a reason for people to move to cities to find work. This historical phenomenon, which only started to take place on a large scale over the last 200 years, has led to city living becoming the new societal norm.
Times continue to change and cities change with them. There is a need for new forms of institutional arrangements that can cope with the new demands of the citizens of cities (Mumford 1961: 571). The mission of the first cities in the world, as an old Egyptian scribe tells us, was to “put the gods in their shrines” at the center of the city (Mumford 1961: 572). We see parallels to this today. The “gods” of today are our human needs, and the mission of a city is to put the most important of these needs at the forefront and center of all activities. As Lewis Mumford—an American sociologist and historian who wrote in the mid-1900s and was famous for his work on cities and urban architecture—puts it, the task of the city is:

> to unite the scattered fragments of the human personality, turning artificially dismembered men—bureaucrats, specialists, ‘experts,’ depersonalized agents—into complete human beings, repairing the damage that has been done by vocational separation, by social segregation, by the over-cultivation of a favored function, by tribalisms and nationalisms, by the absence of organic partnerships and ideal purposes (Mumford 1961: 573).

As we have seen, cities have undergone tremendous changes over history. And more changes are yet to come. While everyone is able to see the physical changes that take place in a city, it is also equally important to ensure social progress is made to allow for an increased quality of life for people living in the city. The city is a place where people are able to live and express themselves. To accomplish this, urban planners need to build cities that take into account the individuals living in the city, especially looking at the relationships individuals have with the built environment and with one another. One way planners can facilitate this process is by building spaces in cities that allow people to both relax, recharge and increase the number of meaningful interactions with other people. An example of this is public
parks with bench space. This allows people to have some quiet time for themselves to rest while surrounded by the trees in the park, or to engage in conversation with people who end up sitting next to them.

While we now see the growing need to support the citizens of a city, there is a lack of historical information about how to go about actually supporting them. There are descriptions of people’s lives and analyses of various cultures that form and shape the characteristics of a city, but there is little known about the relationship between the built environment and how it effects the people living in a city (Castells 1983: 3). Another important aspect to take into consideration when thinking about cities is the role that citizens play in changing the ways cities develop (Castells 1983: 3). Citizens themselves should be able to mold the cities they are living in. Their voices need to be heard and taken into consideration when thinking about how the built environment of a city should look. In addition, the flux of society today has resulted in different forms of complexities than in the past. Therefore, urban planners and policymakers have little historical context to go off of when thinking about how to plan cities today.

On another note, urban expansion has slowly started to displace the human goals it is supposed to serve, instead seeking to satisfy the needs of our capitalist market (Harvey 2012: 30). The built environment of a city plays an important role in helping people cope with the problems they face in society today (Mumford 1961: 571). Being able to evaluate the effects that this built environment of a city has on individuals in a city is important in helping us curb the problems that modern society brings with it.
As seen from the history of cities, no single definition is able to capture and describe the different functions that cities have fulfilled and the various transformations that cities have undergone throughout history (Mumford 1961: 3). Cities continue to change and develop, becoming increasingly more complex to manage. This has led to policymakers and urban planners around the world having to find new solutions to ensure proper management of cities. Planners and policymakers turn to the literature provided by urban theory to find these solutions. However, when thinking about possible solutions to problems that face cities, we need to draw from various disciplines, such as economics, psychology, sociology, and urban planning. Urban theory does not provide us with a clear framework to do this, as it does not fully synthesize theories from the different disciplines. For example, an economist will attempt to solve the problem of overcrowding differently compared to an urban planner. This thesis aims to address this lack of synthesis among different theories. It aims to elucidate these urban problems facing policymakers and urban planners who manage cities, and provide a framework to think about, analyze, and attempt to solve these problems.

In order to do this, this thesis will look at the factors that go into the makings of a great city. One way to do that is by looking at rankings of cities. Many organizations have created indexes that rank cities based off a list of factors they deem to be the most important to the development of a city. This thesis will elaborate on six indexes that are used to evaluate cities around the world. Before diving into the elaboration of these indexes in Chapter 1, I note that there are two flaws that come with these indexes. First, among the six indexes, there is no consistent framework
through which the cities are ranked. All six indexes have a list of factors they use to rank cities, and these factors all differ between indexes. There is no consistent means through which cities are evaluated. Second, these indexes place a greater emphasis on tangible aspects of city-building, and only peripherally take into account the factors that affect the people who live in a city.

Thereafter, Chapter 2 of this thesis will be divided into two parts that focus on improving these two shortcomings of the indexes. First, to not fall into the same trap as the indexes, this thesis pulls together conceptual frameworks from theorists in urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics. Drawing from these four disciplines will provide a holistic view when evaluating cities. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will then draw upon the ideas from these four disciplines to analyze specific problems that face cities today.

Second, this thesis aims to look at examples that place emphasis on the *individuals* who live in a city, and not just the built environment of a city in itself. Specifically, this thesis looks at both the relationship between individuals who live in a city, and between individuals and the physical environment of a city. This relationship between people and the built environment is termed the social organization of the city.

I break social organization down into three parts—an individual’s private and public spheres of life, and the intersection between these two spheres. Within these three parts, I will look at examples that are affecting most cities today. In the private sphere, I look at the examples of overcrowding and the home. For the public sphere, I look at the example of public space and how it affects community building in a city.
In the intersection sphere, I look at public transport and the voice of citizens in the city building process.

These are issues that plague many cities today. For all these examples, I use the case study of Singapore to better understand what the Singaporean government does to solve these problems. I use Singapore as a case study for three main reasons. First, the city ranks highly on three out of the five indexes this thesis looks at in Chapter 1 and thus, serves as a model for urban development and city planning for many developing nations around the globe. Second, most theory on urban development has focused on the western world and developed cities. Singapore provides a unique example of a non-western city that has done well in a very quick period of time. It would be interesting to gain insights and lessons from these factors.

Third, the heavy-handed government control in the city state of Singapore means that government policies directly affect urban and social planning in the city. Singapore, as a city-state, has a unique political structure where its national government runs matters at a city level. This is not the case in most other countries. For example, the federal government of the United States is not fully aligned with the government of New York City. This is an additional layer of bureaucracy that the Singaporean government does not have to go through in order to get things done. Coupled with this, Singapore—as a rich city-state—has an abundance of resources available to allow its government to make and implement decisions that can improve the urban development of the city. This strong government control also allows for an

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1 Five because one of the six indexes only looks at American cities
2 There are other cases, such as Vatican City and Hong Kong. They do not do as well as Singapore on the various indexes, as we shall see later.
efficient allocation of resources, as the national government knows the needs of the city and is able to effect the necessary change. To sum up these point, Singapore provides an example of a non-Western city that is highly-planned, understands most of the needs of its people, and is able to implement these needs. This provides insight into the characteristics that make for a great city and how a city can go about to become a great city.

This thesis will have five chapters. The first chapter will be broken up into two parts. The first part looks at characteristics of the city-state of Singapore and provides a brief overview of Singapore and its urban planning process. The second part of the first chapter will provide a description of the indexes that are used to rank cities. Chapter 1 thus provides a descriptive insight into what makes for a great city through looking at the factors that have led Singapore to become a model city for developing nations as well as factors that go into the indexes.

Chapter 2 will also be broken up into two sections and will provide an introduction to the two features that are missing from the indexes. The first section will delve into social organization in a city—the relationship between the built environment and how it affects the people living in a city. It will then go on to provide a brief overview of what the two parts of social organization—the private and public spheres—entail. The next part of this chapter will pull together theories from four different disciplines—urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics. This second chapter provides a new conceptual framework through which I elaborate and expand on the examples that will be postulated in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.
Chapter 3 of this thesis will look at the private sphere. First, I will provide a thorough definition of the private sphere and what it entails. Next, I will go into two examples to depict the relationship between the built environment of a city and its effects on the people living in a city. The first example looks at the effects of overcrowding in a city. The second example is that of the home—an integral part of an individual’s private sphere.

Chapter 4 will examine the public sphere, and how the built environment of public spaces affects people living in the city. Similar to Chapter 3, I will first provide an in-depth definition of what the public sphere entails. Next, I look at two examples: public spaces and community building. Specifically, I look at the role public spaces play in building community in a city.

In Chapter 5, I look at the intersection between the private and public spheres. One example I use is the public transport system. The second example I use is the role that grassroots organizations play in allowing for the citizen voice to be heard in a city.

Finally, in the conclusion, I propose possible changes that can be made and lessons that can be learned from the use of Singapore as a case study. This chapter encapsulates the argument of this thesis, which states that there is an important relationship between the built environment and a city, and that the social organization of a city needs to be taken into account to develop a holistic means of evaluating cities. Great cities, such as Singapore, can be built by fulfilling these two needs.

This introduction sets the framework for why we want to think about and evaluate cities: in order to make them great cities. Chapter 1 aims to define what
“great cities” mean. I will first look at the city state of Singapore. It is a relatively new city, having only gained independence from Britain about 50 years ago. Yet, in that short period of time, Singapore has grown from relative obscurity and mediocrity to become an urban model for most of the developing world. The rows of trees along the highway, the numerous public parks, and the tall skyscrapers that plaster the Singapore skyline is rivaled by few other cities. Additionally, the Singaporean government as also succeeded in promoting religious and racial harmony in a city that is fondly referred to as a rojak\(^3\) city, one with an eclectic mix of people all living together in one of the most densely populated cities in the world. Lessons from Singapore will help consolidate the theories postulated in this thesis, and allow us to better understand the changes that need to be made for cities in the developing world to improve.

\(^3\) Rojak means eclectic mix or mixture in colloquial Malay. Many people, especially from the older generations, including my grandparents and parents, refer to Singapore as a Rojak country.
Chapter 1: Characteristics of a City

*Nature prepares the sites, and man organizes it in such fashion that it meets his desires and wants* – Vidal de la Blache

Before we begin this chapter, I would like to borrow an analogy that Jane Jacobs used when she wrote for *The Village Voice* in 1957. She wrote about a story of a man who caught a bad cold in February, usually the coldest month in the northeast of the United States. This man went to his doctor and asked for help. The doctor replies, “We can’t do much for you, the cold will run its course and you will slowly recover. Get some rest and drink some chicken soup; that might do the trick.” However, the patient insisted that he wanted to be cured. “Ok,” said the doctor. “Go home, put up the window, lie down with your pajamas open, and let the wind run through.” The patient looked at the doctor in shock. “But doctor, this might give me pneumonia!” The doctor smiled and replied, “exactly,” while looking at the aureomycin in the medicine cabinet. “We know exactly how to cure pneumonia!” (Jacobs 2016: 81)

Sixty years on, the moral of this story still holds true. Many of the problems that face cities today are like the cold. And just like the cold, we need to understand that there is no perfect cure for these problems. We do not want to intentionally make the situation of our cities worse just so we can have a tangible solution that can cure the problem. While some of the solutions that urban planners, policymakers, and academics come up with might not cure the problems that face cities today, they

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4 *The Village Voice* edition published on 22 May 1957
5 Aureomycin is a drug used to treat and cure pneumonia
might be the rest and chicken soup that is required to get a city on the road to becoming a great one, and one where people are happy to live.

The previous chapter gave us insight into why the study of cities is important, and why we need to develop a framework to think about evaluating cities. Before moving on to develop this conceptual framework, this chapter aims to extract certain characteristics that make up a great city. The first section of this thesis looks at our case study: Singapore. I will delve into a brief history of Singapore and characteristics of Singapore that have allowed for its tremendous urban development over the past fifty years.

The second section of this chapter will look at what governments and organizations around the world have developed—what this thesis refers to as indexes—to evaluate cities. These indexes, although robust, mainly focus on the tangible aspects, things that can be measured through quantifiable data, such as infrastructure and business activity in a city. These types of factors overshadow those that place emphasis on what I believe is another facet of living in a city that is equally as important as its physical structure: the people living there. Most of these indexes do not fully elaborate on factors that directly affect the lives of individuals living in a city and the community aspect. Beautiful buildings in a city do not always equate to happy people. And both of these should be taken into account when evaluating a city. This thesis will address this issue of what is missing from the indexes in Chapter 2.
**Singapore: The City State**

Singapore only gained independence in 1965, after over 100 years of colonial rule by the British, and getting expelled from neighboring Malaysia, a much larger country that was politically stable and had an abundance of natural resources. Many thought that Singapore would not be able to survive, let alone thrive as an independent nation (Lau 1998: 37). She lacked natural resources and had a diverse and largely uneducated population—a recipe for social tension and slow economic growth. Nonetheless, Singapore’s government, led by then prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, lifted Singapore out of its state of poverty. Some fifty years after independence, Singapore has the third highest GDP per capita among all countries and is ranked first in the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report for its infrastructure (World Economic Forum 2016). It is a model for many developing nations, who attempt to mimic Singapore’s almost miraculous development and growth in a relatively short period of time (Menon 2015).

Academics, politicians, and researchers have all attempted to distill the key takeaways that led to the growth and success of Singapore as a city state. One important factor was leadership. Lee Kuan Yew played an important role in guiding and shaping Singapore’s trajectory. However, this came at a cost. To ensure such rapid growth, sacrifices were required. Singapore was governed with Lee’s “iron fist.” Central planning played an important role in shaping Singapore’s policies. Lee disliked democracy. Yet, Singapore was and still is a self-proclaimed democracy, one where the ruling political party, the People’s Action Party (PAP), has never lost an election in fifty years. Political power is also vested in a select few, who are chosen
after a careful process to ensure both aptitude and alignment with the party. They usually come from prestigious educational backgrounds and a higher socio-economic status (Lee 2000: 45). These select few are the ones who make the decisions, and owing to their privileged background, these decisions are not usually representative of the voice of all the people.

Two things come out of this. First, this allows heavy-handed rule allows for a full alignment of interest between the national and city-level government because there is no distinction between these two. Second, this allows for a large amount of social engineering in Singapore society. Everything is planned to the tiniest detail, with both short and long term implications considered.

Even with the heavy social engineering that takes place in Singapore, it seems that the people of Singapore are generally happy with the actions of the government, as such stringent planning has allowed for great economic success and an increase in overall wealth in Singapore (Lee 2000: 126). In addition, this has led to a city that looks beautiful from the outside. Singapore thus ticks all the right boxes in the various indexes that rank cities, leading to its high standing on many of these indexes. As mentioned earlier, I will describe and elaborate on these indexes in the second half of this chapter.

As well as Singapore does in all these tangible aspects of city development, Singapore’s top-down planning approach might not lead to the most organic form of society. A lack of vibrancy and a proper sense of community are issues that have plagued Singaporean society. The effect that the built environment of the city has had on Singaporeans has arguably been controversial, with strong voices on both sides
either stating that social development in Singapore has been done very well, or not done well at all (Lee 2000: 78). Social development here refers to the focus on individuals—looking at whether the government has done enough to ensure the welfare of the people. Therefore, this thesis aims to unpack the nuances of social development in Singapore, with a specific interest in the relationship between the physical environment and the impact that has on the people of Singapore and their wellbeing. I will then use the lessons learned from Singapore to inform our study of the effect that cities can have on individuals. The next subsection will provide some characteristics of Singapore as a city state and illustrate what the Singaporean government has done to combat the lack of vibrancy and community in the city. This will help further elucidate some elements of why Singapore was chosen as the case study for this thesis.

**Characteristics of Singapore**

Most developing countries did not pay special attention to planning spatial matters in the 1960s. Singapore was an exception (Lee 2000: 8). The government of Singapore had one goal—economic growth. Everything else would fall into place once people had jobs and were made to feel like their skills were being used to improve society. Hence with Singapore’s independence in 1965, the government immediately planned solely for economic growth and left everything else to be a by-product of this growth. Building up a city with robust infrastructure—good streets, public parks, tall buildings—was an important factor in Singapore’s aim for economic growth. This made Singapore an attractive city for multi-national corporations
(MNCs) to set up their Asian headquarters. Singapore has now joined the ranks of Hong Kong and is seen as a financial hub of Asia, as well as a city that boasts companies such as Boeing and Google with large offices and manufacturing plants (Saiidi 2016).

However, the government utilized a far-sighted and heavy-handed drive for economic growth that led to a monotonous development of the built environment in Singapore. As Aaron Betsky, a lead urban planner for Singapore in the 1990s and currently an architect, states, “[Singapore is] one of the most obsessively and thoughtfully controlled urban environments … Everything was being planned with such efficiency and with such an eye to the latest theories of what makes for a good urban environment that there was no opportunity for chance, ad hoc activities, or the joy of contrasts (Betsky 2016).”

Singapore places a lot of emphasis on top-down planning, with policy-makers taking into account long-term needs before making even minute decisions on land use. This approach has brought with it many benefits that have helped mold Singapore into the model city that it is today, as seen from its high rankings in the indexes (Betsky 2016). However, through this process, it might seem that the Singaporean government has oversimplified the complexity of human interaction and social community into formulas and forecasts to be applied to derive an ideal plan. It is possible that working from “formulas” about population density, land scarcity, green space, and transportation may produce efficient economic outcomes, but it is unlikely to result in a desirable place to live, because policymakers tend to oversimplify and misunderstand what makes a good urban environment. The Singaporean
government thus misses out on a very important aspect that makes for a good urban environment—the people themselves who live in the city. Furthermore, the government has made wrong predictions about the future, especially with their predictions on population. This can cause the final plan that is built on these predictions highly problematic (Tan 2008: 14). How did the Singaporean government overcome this problem?

One way in which the Singaporean government is trying to overcome this problem of top-down, rigid planning is by forming deeper partnerships with the public—getting the people’s input to see what they want and letting them be involved with the urban development process. This could potentially encourage a more organic form of growth especially as Singapore as a city starts to mature, and as the development of infrastructure starts to slow down. Community involvement can be important, as policy-makers might not fully understand the needs of the people living in certain areas. No expertise can fully substitute for local knowledge. I will further elaborate on the grassroots organization and the role they play in Singaporean society in Chapter 5.

Additionally, the Singaporean government has done a good job of planning the development of the city, and integrating policy measures to counter negative externalities and take advantage of positive externalities. The government placed a strong emphasis on education, and made primary education mandatory for all children once they reach six or seven years old (Singapore Ministry of Education 1969). Some positive spillover effects from this policy measure includes a lower crime rate, and a more highly-skilled labor force.
Another important method that the Singaporean government adopted is the highly planned public housing system. The Singapore government created an attractive public housing system, and today 80% of the population live in public housing. This public housing system is divided into different price and quality tiers to meet the needs of people from different income classes. Public housing in Singapore also has an enforced quota on race. This allows for communities with intermingling between ethnic groups to form. Additionally, there is a lot of empty spaces in the ground floors of the public housing estates that allow for interactions among people. These spaces are called void decks. This is an important method through which the Singapore government helped build community in a multi-racial society. This example of public housing and void decks in Singapore will be elaborated in Chapter 4.

In addition, there is world-class infrastructure, including both a robust public transport system and high quality roads. Singapore also has a beautiful landscape, with trees lining the highways, many public parks across the city, and tranquil lakes juxtaposed with open-park venues that host music concerts and other live events.

Singapore is also a small and highly densely populated country. Owing to its lack of natural resources, human capital was and still is Singapore’s main driver for economic growth. Therefore, the government aimed to increase the population through natural means as well as opening up its borders and allowing for easy migration of both skilled and unskilled workers into Singapore. However, as the needs and expectations of economic growth have changed, so have the population expectations. This change in population expectations has changed the way the
Singapore government has gone about planning the physical structures of the city. This has led to additional complications, one of which is overcrowding. We will look at the example of overcrowding and how Singapore addresses this problem in Chapter 3.

This section provides a brief outline of the characteristics of Singapore’s urban structure—a city with a well-maintained and robust infrastructure but with some underlying social issues. The examples in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will highlight the steps the Singaporean government has taken to solve these social problems. The next section will provide a broad generalization of characteristics that make for a great city by looking at six indexes developed by various organizations that rank cities around the world.

Indexes

Many organizations have gone about breaking down this idea of how we think about cities. They have created methodologies to rank them, and provide a tangible means to think about the factors that constitute elements of what makes for a great city. This is a challenging task, as it is difficult to capture so many different elements and weigh them in a fully objective way. For one, we do not know how people generally evaluate their ideal city, mainly because different people would evaluate it differently. Therein lies the essential question—what makes a city work? How do we define “good” when thinking about a successful city? For some, an ideal livable city is one where there is easy access to amenities such as parks, marketplaces, libraries, and offices. In this case, easy access would usually mean that public transport is
cheap, there is infrastructure that allows for people to walk between places with ease, or there are other means through which people can commute easily, such as the availability of bicycle lanes. Other people might place more value on affordable housing, while another group might place greater value on things such as the city having a vibrant nightlife, or high-end restaurants. Therefore, postulating ideas of an “ideal” city is a difficult question to answer because of the diversity of factors and different levels of importance that people place on these factors. These indexes that various organizations have developed aim to answer these questions.

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below depicts a summary of 6 reports published by different organizations. This summary provides the factors that these reports use to rank cities. The factors have been arranged by category types and the factors that match best with social organization have been bolded.

Table 1.1: Report Summaries for first three indexes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Global Cities Index</th>
<th>Global Cities Outlook</th>
<th>Economist Intelligence Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Activity</td>
<td>Business activity</td>
<td>Economics,</td>
<td>Education, Culture and environment,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Organization</td>
<td>Human capital, Cultural experience</td>
<td>Personal well-being</td>
<td>Education, Culture and environment,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Infrastructure</td>
<td>Information exchange</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Activity</td>
<td>Political engagement</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2: Report Summaries for next three indexes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Global Competitiveness Report</th>
<th>Livability Report</th>
<th>Mercer Quality of Living Rankings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Activity</td>
<td>Policies and regulation of the business environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Organization</td>
<td><strong>Soft connectivity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Opportunity, Engagement, Neighborhood, Environment, Health</strong></td>
<td>Schools and education, Socio-cultural environment, Recreation, Consumer goods, Natural Environment, Medical and health considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political Activity</td>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Political and social environments,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td><strong>Hard connectivity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transportation, Housing, Neighborhood</strong></td>
<td>Public services and transportation, Housing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will now look at the components that make up each factor. I do this to see how similar or different each index is, and to see if anything is missing from any of these factors. First, there is the AT Kearney Global Cities report, which analyzes “125 cities in terms of their ability to attract and retain global capital, people, and ideas, as well as their future prospects (Hales et al. 2015).” This report examines a city's current performance based on five criteria—business activity, human capital, information exchange, cultural experience, and political engagement, and creates an
index based on these five criteria. These five criteria can be further broken down. First, business activity is comprised of three factors, capital flow, market dynamics, and the number of major companies present in the city.\(^6\) Next, human capital is measured by looking at data for education levels. Third, information exchange refers to the amount of access citizens have to information through the internet and other media sources. Fourth, cultural experience refers to the access that people have to major sporting events, number of museums in the city, and other expositions that take place in a city. The fifth and last factor, political engagement, here refers to the number of political events that take place, think tank engagements, and embassies located in that city.\(^7\) As seen in Table 1.1, each one of the five factors has been given a weight, and the rank and score of cities are determined by taking the weighted scores of each factor. The data are obtained from publicly available city-level data. In this ranking, the top ten cities are New York, London, Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Chicago, Singapore, Beijing, and Washington, D.C, in that order. Figure 1.1 below gives us a visual breakdown of the five factors and how much they contribute to the rating for each of these ten cities. Seven are in bold, as they are the cities that appear in this index and the Global Cities Outlook Rankings, which I will describe next.

\(^6\) They do not define “major companies”
\(^7\) The report does not elaborate on how embassies tie in with political engagement.
Figure 1.1: Global Cities Rankings (2015)
Taken from: AT Kearney Global Cities Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Scoring breakdown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>London</td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Paris</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td><img src="chart.png" alt="Bar Chart" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further, this organization provides us with another report, the Global Cities Outlook, which looks at four factors—personal well-being, economics, innovation, and governance—to rate cities for the best future outlook (Hales et al. 2015). These four factors are once again broken down into smaller parts. First, personal well-being is comprised of the safety and healthcare for citizens, levels of income inequality, and the environmental performance of the city. Second, economics refers to long-term investments and projected GDP growth of a city. Third, innovation measures the entrepreneurial spirit in a city by obtaining data on the number of patents, private investments in companies, and start-up incubators there are there. Fourth, governance is a measurement of the long-term stability of a city through transparency of the government, quality of bureaucracy, and ease of doing business. The rank and score of a city for this index is measured by taking the change across each metric over the past five years and then projecting the scores out for the next 10 years. The scores are each weighted equally, and each counts for 25% of the total score. Once again, the data in this index are obtained through publicly available city-level data. The top ten ranked cities in this index are San Francisco, London, Boston, New York, Zurich,
Houston, Munich, Stockholm, Amsterdam, and Seoul. Singapore is ranked fourteenth on this index.

**Figure 1.2: Global Cities Outlook Rankings (2015)**
*Taken from AT Kearney Global Cities Outlook Rankings*

The cities that are bolded in both Figures 1.1 and 1.2 are the cities which feature in the top 25 cities for both indexes. Note that Asian cities such as Hong Kong and Beijing, which are in the top 10 ranking for current city performance, are not in the top 25 cities for future city outlook. On the other hand, Singapore is eighth in the rankings for current city performance and fourteenth in the ranking for future city performance (Hales et al. 2015). It is one of the few non-western cities—along with Seoul and Tokyo—that make it onto the top 25 cities of both indexes.

The third index we look at is the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) report, which ranks cities by assessing which provide the best (or worst) living conditions (EIU 2016). This is measured by looking at five factors—stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. First, stability here is further broken down into various parts. These parts are the prevalence of petty and violent crime in a city, and the threat of terror, military conflict or civil conflict occurring in that city. Second, healthcare is comprised of the availability of private and public healthcare, the quality of private and public healthcare, the availability of over-the-counter drugs,
and other general healthcare indicators that the World Bank most frequently uses in their assessments of cities. Third, culture and environment encompasses many factors, such as temperature and humidity, the discomfort of climate to travelers, the levels of corruption, social or religious restrictions imposed on people living in a city, the level of censorship in public media outlets, the availability of sporting activities and events, cultural availability, the quality of food and drink, and the quality and quantity of consumer goods and services. The fourth factor is education, and looks at the availability and quality of private education, and public education indicators that are adapted from the World Bank and used most frequently in their assessment of a city’s quality and quantity of education standards. The final factor that this index measures is infrastructure, broken down into the availability of good quality housing, the quality of the road networks, public transport system, international links (airports), energy and water provisions to citizens, and telecommunications. The data that this index uses to measure the cities were collected by a team from the Economist Intelligence Unit and are not publicly available.

In this report, the top ten cities are all different from the top ten cities in the Global Cities ranking and Global Cities Outlook ranking. The city of Melbourne, Australia, tops this list. The list is rounded off with Vienna, Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, Sydney, Helsinki, Perth, Adelaide, and Auckland.

It is interesting to note that even though these three indexes we have looked at so far attempt to measure and rank cities seem to aim for a similar goal—a city that is livable and is able to attract people to it—the cities that show up in these rankings are vastly different. The factors they use also quite similar. One possibility for these
differences are the different data sources they use. Another explanation could be subtle differences in how these organizations define a “livable” city. This is where the first shortfall of the index is seen, where the indexes use similar factors to rank cities, but have different means of evaluating them. This backs up the earlier claim that these indexes do not follow a consistent theoretical framework when making evaluations on cities. I will address this issue in Chapter 2, when I pull together theories from the four different disciplines. For now, I move on to the next three indexes.

The fourth index is published by the World Economic Forum. This index, called the Global Competitiveness Report, looks at the factors that drive the competitiveness of cities, looking at four factors in their rankings: a city’s institutions, the policy and regulation of the business environment, hard connectivity, which refers to the core physical infrastructure in a city, and last, soft connectivity, which is the city’s “social capital”—the “abilities” of the people in a city. The index first defines competitiveness as productivity, and a city’s ability to use “available inputs to drive sustainable economic growth and prosperity (Schwab 2016).” The first measure they use to evaluate these economic drivers—a city’s institutions—refers to the governance or decision-making framework that is used by city leaders. The factor is broken down into the following components: the political and legal systems of city government, the municipality’s relationship with the government at both the national and state levels, relations with business and other organizations in the city, the capacity for public-private collaboration, individuals and leadership, the role of ideas and the city brand, and last, the timing of major reforms, including taking advantage
of crises and critical turning points that occur. These are all rather vague criteria. However, the data that this index uses are not publicly available, so I was unable to delve deeper into what these criteria refer to and how the organization went about measuring them.

The second factor this index measures is policies and regulation of the business environment. This is measured through three components. The first is the macroeconomic policies that are tied to a city’s fiscal policies. The second is policies and regulations that affect the business environment, usually related to the market for goods, services, capital, and labor. The final component related to this factor is the economic activity of a city that is tied to global economic activity. This is a city’s foreign economic policies that are tied to international trade, foreign direct investment, foreign workers, and tourism. One might wonder how an organization can objectively place value on a city’s policies. A possibility is that this index measures absolute numbers (such as the percentage that the city contributes to the GDP of a country, or trade output by the city). But once again, that is not known, as the data are not publicly available.

The third factor in this index is hard connectivity, which refers to the core physical structure of a city. This is comprised of the transportation structures in a city, communication infrastructure, energy infrastructure, and logistics systems. For hard connectivity to be successful, a mix of planning and organic growth is required. The government should undertake some degree of planning in determining the required amount of infrastructure development. This needs to be combined with the government adjusting its plans according to the needs of the people. A city should
 thus be neither under nor over-planned. Another factor used to evaluate hard
connectivity is urban density. Urban density, which includes building tall buildings, is
preferred over urban sprawl as it allows for the city to benefit from the agglomeration
economies associated with it. I will elaborate on agglomeration economies in Chapter
2, in the section where I develop the theories derived from the four different
disciplines. Simply put though, tall buildings in city centers are good for business,
novation, and the environment.

The fourth and last factor used in this index is soft connectivity. This refers to
a city’s social capital—such as its quality of education and education levels,
improving livability by making quality of life for people a priority of the government,
and maintaining a robust digital infrastructure that can help improve people’s
personal productivity. Some elements of soft connectivity include levels of
technological innovation and diffusion, availability of education and training systems,
robust ecosystems that support small and medium enterprises, an entrepreneurial
culture, livability or quality of life factors to attract and retain people, relationships
between people and the government that promote trust and thus increase business
interactions, and lastly, an open culture. This idea of soft connectivity is possibly the
factor with the closest relationship to the social organization of a city. It focuses on
the people living there and the conditions that allow for people to benefit and enjoy
their lives while living there. I will further elaborate on this concept of social
organization in the next section of this chapter. This index does not publish the

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8 Note: These are the definitions and terms used by the index. The index does not elaborate on
these terms any more than I have.
ranking results at the city level. However, they do name the top three countries, and it is interesting to note that the report states that the three most competitive countries are Switzerland, Singapore, and the United States.\footnote{This index does not publicly publish the rankings at a city level. Only top three countries were stated.}

The fifth index is the AARP Livability Report, which ranks cities on seven factors—housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity (AARP 2016).\footnote{Note: this report only ranks cities in the United States.} The AARP report serves as an additional guide to look at how cities are ranked. It might not be as directly relevant compared to the other indexes as it is focused on how livable cities are for retired people in the United States. But it is included in this thesis to give us a greater understanding of the factors they use in their rankings and what they deem are good characteristics of cities. The AARP report provides various factors that tie in with the social aspects of living in a city for an individual, and provides us with a multi-faceted approach when we try to evaluate factors that focus on the social well-being of people living in a city.

This index uses seven factors to evaluate cities. The first factor is housing, which is in turn made up of five components: housing accessibility, housing options, housing costs per month, housing costs as a percentage of income, and availability of subsidized housing units. The second factor is neighborhood, including proximity to destinations such as grocery stores, parks, libraries, and one’s job by both public and personal transport. This factor also takes into account the activity density of neighborhoods, which is measured by the number of jobs and people per square mile. The last component in this factor is crime rates. The third factor is transportation, and
this is broken down into how convenient the transportation options are in a city (measured by the frequency of buses and trains per hour), transportation costs, the crash rate, and the accessibility of taxis, buses, and train stations. The fourth factor considered is the environment, which is made up of air and water quality, as well as energy efficiency. The fifth factor this index looks at is quality, accessibility, and prevention levels (health) in a city. To measure health, the index obtains data on these components: number of people who smoke regularly or are obese, the number who have access to exercise opportunities and health care, and the quality of health care.

The sixth factor is engagement, made up of internet access (broadband speed and cost), opportunity for civic engagement, and social engagement (by looking at the number of cultural, arts, and entertainment institutions per 10,000 people). The seventh and last factor is opportunity, broken up into four components, namely, income inequality, economic opportunity (number of jobs per person), education (measured by high school graduation rates), and multi-generational communities (measured through an index that looks at age diversity in communities in a city) (AARP 2016).

Even though the AARP Livability Report only ranks cities in the United States, this report is useful as it focuses less on the infrastructure and business activity in a city and places emphasis on the social and human aspects. This can serve as a guide when I think about the factors that are important in determining characteristics that make for a great city.

The sixth and final index is the Mercer Quality of Living Index. Mercer “evaluates living conditions in more than 450 cities surveyed worldwide,” analyzing
ten factors (Mercer 2017). The first is the political and social environment in a city, i.e. how politically stable a city is in terms of crime rate, and quality and quantity of law enforcement officials in a city. The second factor is economic environment, which is comprised of currency exchange regulations and banking services in a city. The third is the socio-cultural environment in a city, which looks at the limitations on personal freedom in a city, as well as media availability and censorship. The fourth factor is medical and health considerations, which takes into account medical supplies and services, prevalence of infectious diseases, sewage systems, waste disposal systems, and the amount of air pollution. Fifth, this index looks at schools and education, targeting standards and availability of schooling. Public services and transportation is the sixth factor, specifically looking at electricity, water, public transportation, and traffic congestion. The seventh factor is recreation option, such as the quality and number of restaurants, cinemas, parks, and sports and leisure opportunities, among others. Eighth is consumer goods, looking at the availability of food and daily consumption items, as well as luxury goods. The ninth factor is housing, comprised of price and availability of housing, household appliances, furniture, and maintenance services. The tenth and final factor in the Mercer index is the natural environment of a city, including climate and the record of natural disasters that occur there.

   Vienna tops the rankings in this Mercer index, and has been the top-ranked city for the past eight years. The rest of the top ten cities in this list are mainly European, excepting Auckland and Vancouver: Zurich, Auckland, Munich, Vancouver, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Geneva, Copenhagen, and Basel round up the top
The highest ranking city in Asia is Singapore, which is ranked twenty-fifth on this list. However, Singapore tops the Mercer list for infrastructure, which looks at a city’s supply of electricity, telephone and mail services, and public transportation as well as traffic congestion and the range of international flights available from the local airports. The data that Mercer has collected are not publicly available, so we cannot get a breakdown of the factors.

We see that these indexes focus on different factors and occasionally even leave out things that are on the other indexes. This shows us that none of these indexes is all-encompassing. Some of their terms—such as hard-connectivity and soft-connectivity—are vague and have intentionally left their definitions broad. The subjectivity of these indexes means that not everything is accounted for by any one of them.

Further, as seen from Tables 1.1 and 1.2, many of the factors within the social organization category do not look directly at how the physical environment and built structures in a city affect the people who live in a city. Some factors, such as soft connectivity, are vaguely defined. Granted, this is difficult to quantify, but important: including such things as the sense of community in a city and the ability to form organic relationships with others, thanks to the structure of the built environment. These indexes mainly look at the physical environment in isolation, in and of itself.

One possible reason why this is not included in these indexes is that they are indeed difficult to quantify. How would one be able to quantify the “feeling” of community that is established in a city? Can a survey of people’s happiness in a city be a good representation of that? These are not as easy to measure as hard numbers,
such as spending on infrastructure, economic activity like trade import and export data, or the number of train breakdowns that occur in a city. It is these tangible factors that populate the indexes, and therefore limit them. These indexes do not provide a holistic means to evaluate cities.

This chapter of the thesis examines the characteristics that make up a great city by looking at the example of Singapore and through the components of the six indexes. However, I note that there are limits to the indexes. In the introduction, I briefly introduced the idea of social organization in a city. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on this concept, and talk about why this idea is important to include when thinking about how the built environment of a city effects the people living in it. This impacts the quality of life for people living in a city. Chapter 2 will also pull and synthesize theories from four disciplines: urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics to allow us to have a conceptual framework when thinking about and evaluating cities.
Chapter 2: Overcoming the Shortfalls

Social Organization

Imagine yourself walking down a street after a long day at work. You are hungry and want to grab a bite for dinner before heading home. You see a line of signs and symbols on the street, inviting you into a restaurant or a cafe. What entices you to choose to enter that particular restaurant? After a hearty meal, you continue down the street and stare in awe at the aesthetically pleasing brick houses that are symmetrically lined up next to each other. Most of the curtains are drawn, preventing you from looking into the houses. You stare for a second and let your imagination run. “I wonder who lives in these houses and how the houses are decorated.” For a second, this thought passes through your mind, making you wonder what lies behind the drawn curtains in these houses. You are intrigued and naturally want to be let into the private sphere of another person’s house (Madanipour 2003: 1).

This scenario might be an over-generalization because not everyone cares how houses are decorated. But some people do, and this example goes to show that we, individuals, are—consciously or unconsciously—affected by our physical surroundings (Madanipour 2003: 1). This relationship between the physical environment and its impact on people is the social organization of a city.

As we go through life, we generally take for granted the effect the spaces around us have on how we feel and behave. In some circumstances, we feel and behave in a relaxed and calm way, in other circumstances, we might be anxious and careful. In the example above, where we are walking down the street, the physical environment has molded the way we think. It has influenced our decision on the
restaurant to go to for dinner, and also planted seeds of intrigue in our minds on what is inside another person’s private house.

To gain a better understanding of social organization, we can break it up into two parts—the private and public spheres. We see that the influence the environment has can occur in both private and public spheres of an individual’s life. In the public sphere, the derelict gates of a public park might dissuade us from entering as it might imply a park that is not well-maintained. This could lead to fewer people frequenting the park. This gives the park maintenance authorities less reason to upgrade and renovate the park. It might also lead people to think the park is unsafe, as a lack of people could be a rationale for criminals to rob or steal from the few with impunity, knowing they are unlikely to be interrupted or observed by eye witnesses.

In the private sphere, something as small as the yellow ceiling lights in our home might be a distraction from our casually reading a novel. The light might either be insufficient, or the fact that it is a yellow instead of a white light might be a distraction to some people. This leads to discomfort in a person’s life. The physical structures around us, both big and small, can play a direct or indirect role in determining how we behave and feel. Mumford talks about this idea in his seminal work *The City in History*, and in his research, has shown that this relationship existed even back in the Mesopotamian cities over four thousand years ago (Mumford 1961: 9). Even in those days, the physical structures of a city affected the way people live. If this has been happening for over 4000 years, then there is a rather strong implication suggesting that there is a link between the physical environment and its
effects on the individuals living within or moving about that physical space (Madanipour 2003: 2).

Now, we need to distinguish between the private and public spheres. A city is a conduit of both the private and public spheres, and both together form the social organization of a city. Social organization is an important aspect to think about in evaluating cities. Is the city built in a way that allows for community to be developed? Are people able to lead a happy personal life in the private spaces of the city? It is important to demarcate these two spheres to better analyze them (Madanipour 2003: 2).

Our built environment can affect our mental state and experience, and can influence our behavior. In the long run, the relationship between a city’s built environment and the impact it has on the people living there can superimpose a long-lasting structure onto how human society will be organized (Madanipour 2003: 1). In this thesis I aim to look at the social organization of cities and the specific ways in which it has an effect on the people living in the city. I would then like to develop a framework through which we can gain awareness and think about the effects that cities have on individuals, and incorporate this to build a more holistic means of ranking and evaluating cities than the current organizational indexes can do proper justice to. Before we begin on this endeavor, we first provide a brief overview of what constitute the two parts of social organization—the private and public spheres of individuals.

However, this endeavor should not be misconstrued as an attempt to construct a complete and formal theory on how to evaluate cities that is valid across all
societies and cities. That would be a futile endeavor. As seen, different people place different value judgements on what they value in a city. One cannot objectively say that one evaluation is better than another’s, especially when we try to evaluate a city based on the individual and their relationship with the built environment. It is not the rankings *per se* that are important, but coming up with useful ways to evaluate the more qualitative factors that should influence city planning.

It will be useful to think about the definition of the private and public sphere in this chapter before elaborating on them in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. This will allow us to better formulate an idea of social organization. There is a potentially diverse range of activities that can fall under either the private or public sphere. Stanley Benn and Gerald Gauss speak to this issue of ambiguity that can occur in the private-public dichotomy, and bring up the example of a public library, where a person should be in his or her personal space reading a book, while the books themselves are publicly available, and the space is publicly accessible as well (Benn and Gauss 1983: 36). The public library provides a public good, as well as meeting spaces, and publicly available internet connections, among other things.

Therefore, to clarify this potential area of imprecision in the terms private and public, Benn and Gauss came up with three dimensions through which we can think about social organization and how to distinguish between public-ness and private-ness. These three dimensions are (1) access, (2) agency, and (3) interest (Benn and Gauss 1983: 11). First, we look at access. Most definitions of public-ness emphasize who and how many people can access the place. This includes access to the place and access to the activities conducted there. Access can be further divided into four
different aspects: physical access (i.e. handicapped accessibility), access to activities held in the place, access to information, and access to resources. A public space is public for the very reason that anyone can have access to it. But a person might be able to have access to a place but not have access to an activity occurring in that place, such as having access to a group of friends who are gathering and talking on a bench in the park, because they are not part of the group. Access to information is another important factor that helps distinguish between private-ness and public-ness, as this involves the information we allow to remain private or public. How we manage our public appearances and view others is an important aspect of public-ness and thus, access to information allows us to distinguish between the private and public spheres of someone’s life. The last sub-division of access involves access to resources, where someone with access to greater resources will have greater influence over the public affairs of a city. A simple example might be one who is able to buy a car, which will usually give them greater and quicker access to different parts of a city (Madanipour 2003: 112).

Second, we look at agency. The idea of agency is important in distinguishing between the private and public spheres, as agency allows people to choose whether they want to act privately or not. The agency to be able to talk to people without fear of retribution might allow one to break the boundary of a group of friends and join their conversation. The third dimension is interest, and it is the idea of whether people want to take action in a particular space. The degree to which these three dimensions manifest themselves in a given situation determine if a space is in the private or public sphere for an individual. This thesis aims to build upon this idea, and draw on
analysis of social organization and relations between people who have emotional and social bonds that tie them to one another.

While Ben and Gauss came up with the conditions of access and agency as a test for private-ness and public-ness, Ali Madanipour postulates a simpler way for us to think about this distinction. The private sphere is the personal realm, usually the private space of a home. The public sphere is the realm of the impersonal, such as the busy and hectic streets of a city, where people go about their activities among a throng of people, but without having to pay any attention nor interact with these other people (Madanipour 2003: 1). Madanipour also introduces the intersection of these two spheres, the interpersonal spaces that take place in schools, workplaces, or in public transportation. The school and the workplace are spaces where people are in contact with others, but also where they are required to produce work individually. On the other hand, public transport is a public space people pass through to go to their individual activities. The interpersonal space is also a realm where meaningful interactions among people take place. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 will go further in-depth into examples of the two spheres, as well as the intersection between these two spheres. The next subsections will provide a brief introduction to the two spheres. In the second section of this chapter, I will bring up the tools we are going to use to furnish our analysis of social organization in a city. We will use theories from urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics to aid us in this endeavor.

**Brief Introduction to the Private Sphere**

First, the private sphere, in simple terms, can be thought of as “a part of life that is under the control of the individual in a personal capacity (Madanipour 2003:}
There is a lack of public restriction in the private sphere, and thus, there is and should be no interference from public officials or any other person for that matter. The private sphere can be thought of as the part of an individual’s life that is under control by the individual. This should be distinguished from private space, which is a space that is controlled by an individual and that the public does not have access to. Private space is part of an individual’s private sphere. Much of the private sphere occurs in private spaces, with one common example being one’s home. The private sphere of an individual also occurs in large parts of a person’s day—when an individual is in her or his own space, even when surrounded by people. Examples of this include commuting to work, or walking around a city (Madanipour 2003: 40).

Latching onto this idea that the private sphere can take place when an individual is doing things alone, some aspects of a person’s private sphere can be less obvious, and can unfold in public spaces, such as in a public library or public park, where people can go about their own issues, such as reading or lounging, without interference from others, even in a seemingly public place (Madanipour 2003: 40).

We go back to the three dimensions that Benn and Gauss posit to categorize the private-public dichotomy: access, agency, and interest. This gives us a framework to distinguish between the two spheres, or even categorize an event of location in that intersection space. One example could be public libraries. This might fall under the intersection of the private and public spheres. Understanding this falls under both spheres will allow us to better organize a library to best fit an individual’s needs.

Thinking about how public libraries are organized can give us a good sense of whether they facilitate and improve people’s lives in a city. For example, we can look
at whether there is easy access to public libraries in all neighborhoods across a city. We can also look at the built environment of a public library and whether it has enough tables and chairs, or even quiet rooms to allow for people to get their individual, uninterrupted spaces to read, learn, and work, or public computer terminals if this is a society where many cannot afford personal computers. I will further elaborate and look into the private sphere in Chapter 3, and will look at different ways to understand and evaluate these notions of the private sphere. I will also look at examples of events and spaces in the private sphere.

**Brief Introduction to the Public Sphere**

The second component constituting the social organization of a city is the public sphere. There are two major approaches through which we can think about the public sphere. The first approach is descriptive, where we simply look at people’s interactions with one another. In this approach, we think about the public sphere as places and activities where people are in the presence of others, and that this presence with others has on impact on people, whether through interpersonal relations, the interaction between people and society in general, or between people and the built environment (Madanipour 2003: 109).

The second approach takes a more normative stance, where we think about the public sphere and how the public sphere can be used to shape social interactions between people. In this second approach, we think about the power that the public sphere has over people in molding their thoughts and ideas (Madanipour 2003: 110). The public park with derelict gates and the restaurant signs are good examples of how
physical structures in the public sphere can have power over molding people’s thoughts.

Before I move on, it might be useful to distinguish between the public sphere and public space. Public space refers to the physical structures in a city. The public sphere is a much broader idea, and takes into account the physical structure of a city, as well as the people, places, and activities that make up the public dimension of human social life. Public space is a component of the public sphere. This thesis will look at all aspects of social organization, but will place emphasis on public spaces and the relationship between the physical environment and its impact on people.

Table 2.2 below summarizes the main types of public spaces that make up the public sphere, and their characteristics. The public sphere has many aspects and Table 2.2 is by no means exhaustive, although it is a good sample.

**Table 2.2: Type and Characteristics of Urban Public Spaces**
*Taken from: Carr, Francis, Rivlin, and Stone, 79-84*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Parks: Public/ central park</td>
<td>Publicly developed and managed open space as part of zoned open space system of city; open space of citywide importance; often located near center of city; often larger than neighborhood park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Parks: Neighborhood park</td>
<td>Open space developed in residential environments; publicly developed and managed as part of the zoned open space of cities, or as part of new private residential development; may include play-grounds, sports facilities, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squares and Plazas: Central Squares</td>
<td>Square or plaza; often part of historic development of city center; may be formally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Squares and Plazas: Corporate Plaza</strong></td>
<td>Plaza developed as part of new office or commercial building(s), often in downtown area but increasingly part of suburban office park development; built and managed by building owners or managers; some publicly developed examples but primarily privately developed and funded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Markets: Night market</strong></td>
<td>Open space or streets used for farmers’ markets or flea markets (called Pasar Malam or Night Market in Singapore); often temporary or occur only during certain times in existing space such as parks, downtown streets or parking lots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Streets: Pedestrian mall</strong></td>
<td>Street closed to auto traffic; pedestrian amenities provided such as benches, planting; often located along main street in downtown area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Playgrounds</strong></td>
<td>Play area located in neighborhood; frequently includes traditional play equipment such as slides and swings; sometimes include amenities for adults such as benches; can also include innovative designs such as Adventure playgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Open Spaces: Community garden</strong></td>
<td>Neighborhood spaces designed, developed, or managed by local residents on vacant land; may include viewing gardens, play areas, and community gardens; often developed on private land; not officially viewed as part of open space system of cities; often vulnerable to displacement by other uses such as housing and commercial development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Atrium</strong></td>
<td>Interior private space developed as indoor atrium space; an indoor, lockable plaza or pedestrian street; counted by many cities as part of open space system; privately developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I will elaborate on these two spheres in Chapter 3 and 4 respectively, and will provide a robust and exhaustive definition of these two terms. I will then go on to talk about the intersection between these two spheres in Chapter 5. In the next section of this chapter, I introduce theories from four disciplines: urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics that tie in with the issues of social organization in a city.

**Analyzing and Synthesizing Theories from Four Disciplines**

*Theory … does not flow above everyday life in a detached way: It comes from some place, and it is the responsibility of analysis to return it there*  
– Liggett and Perry

We have seen the indexes developed by various organizations and institutions in the previous chapter. Some of these indexes were built to be guides for multi-national companies (MNCs) to entice their employees to move to more attractive cities, or to determine a rate that employees should be compensated for sending employees to less desirable cities. Does undertaking this theoretical approach to look at cities add any value to these rankings? What practical benefits do we derive from this approach? This section will try to unpack the importance of using theories to better understand and evaluate cities.

The first people to critically analyze cities were not academics but social reformers. Thinkers such as Friedrich Engels wrote in the late nineteenth century about the negative effects of city life for the poor, and made these visible to the
people who were wealthier and whose decisions affected the lives of poor people living in cities (Parker 2004: 4). These people aimed to make changes in the social structure of the city by raising awareness of issues that were negatively affecting people who lived in the city. Similarly, engaging with theories allows us to first raise awareness of the issues that plague people living in cities today. Learning about how previous thinkers have thought about cities and the lessons we extract from them (and how these views have changed) is vital for the long-term future of cities (Parker 2004: 4).

Before I begin to look at theories postulated by various thinkers, it will be useful to clarify the key term used in this thesis—cities. Note that the terms “urban” and “city” will be used interchangeably. I want to focus on cities and the lessons we can learn about cities through elucidating the ideas of different theories. However, the term “urban theory” has been and still is being used in academic circles for a range of perspectives on the urban world that aim to provide us with a general understanding of city life (Parker 2004: 4). Most, if not all, of these theories place urban living and cities into the same category. Another point that is important to clarify is the distinction between urban theory and social theory. Urban theory can be considered a subset of social theory, but distinguished by the fact that social, cultural, political, and economic life are different in a city as compared to other types of societies, such as rural or suburban societies (Parker 2004: 4). I will discuss the issue of suburbs in the overcrowding section of Chapter 4.

In urban theory, there is usually no one standard framework through which we theorize about issues involving space and location. A geographer will look at things
from a certain angle, while a sociologist will look at the same issue and analyze it from a different angle. For urban theorists, this can be a strength, owing to the multi-disciplinary nature of urban issues. Understanding urban issues using the lens of only one theory or discipline—as a geographer or sociologist would—might not allow us to illustrate the multiple facets of these issues. However, this might also be a weakness for urban theorists, as they do not have a standardized framework through which to think about these issues. This section aims to use theories from four disciplines and provide a structure through which we can think about and evaluate urban issues, specifically with regard to cities (Smith 1980: 86).

Cities are concentrations of people. Therefore, most social scientific study on cities tends to use frameworks that study cities from a macro-perspective and not an individual perspective. Sociologists and urban planners use frameworks that study cities from a societal level. Social psychologists also use frameworks that look at how societal bonds are formed when many people are made to organically interact with one another in a city (Madanipour 2003: 64).

On the other hand, many activities in a city take place at an individual level. Individuals are constantly making decisions on the actions they want to pursue. Some of these decisions include: “Where should I buy a home? Should I buy a car or use public transportation instead?” Social scientists such as economists build frameworks to think about issues that are based on the actions of individuals living in a city and not based on collective action that takes place there (Smith 1980: 86).

This leads to a difference in the way theorists from different disciplines approach issues regarding cities. Theorists who focus on the collective tend to ignore
the individual and see the individual as a potential threat to the community. In contrast, theorists who place emphasis on the individual tend to look with suspicion at the intentions of the collective and may even see it as a potential hindrance to the individual (Madanipour 2003: 11). Yet, cities are usually a mix of these two realms and consist of both the individual and the collective realms. Spaces such as one’s home represent the individual sphere, while public spaces such as parks are representative of the public sphere. The next four sub-sections will elaborate on theories from urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics.

From the urban planning discipline, I will specifically use the contemporary theorist Ali Madanipour, who comes from the new urbanism strand of thought and draws from works by Jane Jacobs, a famous author known for her works on urban studies. For sociology, I will draw from contemporary scholars such as David Harvey and Saskia Sassen. In addition, I look at older works developed by Georg Simmel and Louis Wirth. Even though they formulated their theories in the early-to-mid 1900s, their writings still influence theories on cities and it is important to look at them when formulating a framework on how to think about cities. I also look at social psychologist Jeffrey Goldstein, whose work derives from seminal works by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess. Park and Burgess contributed works that helped form the Chicago School of urban theories, an important framework that allows us to better think about cities. Last, for economics, I draw upon theories postulated by urban economists in the mid to late 1900s, such as Vidal de la Blache and August Lösch, whose works on urban economics have influenced more contemporary urban economists such as Arthur O’Sullivan.
Urban Planning

Before we look at the two spheres—the public and private spheres—that encompass social organization in a city, it is important to think about how the physical environment of a city can play a role in influencing and affecting the individuals who live there. Urban planning has usually focused on the development of the physical environment, without taking into account the impact this has on the people living in the city (Sutcliffe 1981: 7). However, the advent of technology and changes in the political, economic, and cultural environments around the world have led to changes in the way planners think and go about planning urban development. Some policymakers and planners continue to argue that planning a city should primarily take a physical approach, where the main aspect of planning should focus on maximizing the use of space. Others argue that planning should also focus on the social impact of city planning. Instead of simply “maximizing” the use of space, planners should take into account the impact space has on people and developing the physical environment to ensure the well-being of the people living in that space. This should focus on both the individual and the community, facets that make up the private and public spheres of society (Franklin 2006: 1). This is important if one wants to build a city fit to satisfy the changing needs of people today.

However, there are tradeoffs if planners focus on the social impact of city planning without taking a holistic view of other factors that can be important. Something that we see occurring today is the building of rental bicycle stations in cities such as New York City and London.\textsuperscript{11} This is an example of a built physical

\textsuperscript{11} Citi Bikes in New York City and Santander Cycles in London
structure that takes into account the well-being of the people. It gives people easy access to bicycles that leads to reduced travel time, opportunity to get exercise while travelling, reduces road congestion, and reduces pollution. These are some of the main positives that come out of this initiative. Nonetheless, there are tradeoffs. First, the physical structure of the station takes up an awkward space that usually does not perfectly align with the road, or obstructs the walking pathway. Therefore, this is not an optimal use of space. Additionally, there is an opportunity cost of building the bicycle rental station. The bicycle rental station takes up space that could be used for other things, such as an extra lane that could also reduce vehicular traffic. Yet bicycle transport also reduces vehicular traffic, so numerous pluses and minuses have to be weighed. This is just one example to illustrate the factors that planners need to think about when deciding between placing emphasis on maximizing use of space or prioritizing the social impact of space and how that will impact the lives of people, and finding a balance.

Nonetheless, most planners are usually trained to develop the physical aspect of a city, only peripherally taking the social impact of their work into account. Owing to the intangible nature of social interactions, it is difficult to envision what the end product of a city or a building project will look like in terms of the social impact it will have. Therefore, it is easier for a planner to visualize the tangible, built environment. However, with the increasing complexity of the world, it is not only important to think about the physical manifestation of the city, but also how the physical manifestation can influence intangible aspects of city development, such as its social organization. The production of the built environment is a human and social
act, and is influenced by a variety of factors in a city including economic conditions, societal attitudes, historical traditions, technical knowledge, public perceptions, political interventions, and spatial context (Franklin 2006: 1). Therefore, while the built, physical environment is usually admired for its aesthetic beauty, it cannot be fully understood without first understanding or gaining knowledge about the society in which it has been built, and the users of the physical environment, who are the citizens of the city (Franklin 2006: 1).

However, most city governments do not have the resources to devote to both physical and social planning. They thus stick to the conventional planning that focuses on the physical environment. Most of this planning is centered on organization and building of a robust public transport system, building of highways, roads and sidewalks, zoning, housing, and the multitude of other aspects that encapsulate physical planning. Many would argue that planning the physical environment will implicitly lead to social forces coming into order. Planners and policymakers build beautiful parks that are centrally located because they assume that people will want to go to them (Sutcliffe 1981: 185-188).

But with the changing times, it might be important to think about where the park is built, as well as the amenities that go along with it. Is the park bicycle-friendly, and is it in close proximity to public transport, so people who cannot afford cars can still access these parks? One way to test if this actually leads to an increase in human traffic is through tracking the changes that happen in a physical location over time. To trace the changes in the physical landscape of a city we can analyze surveys, called land-use surveys, that many cities use to track modifications and
alterations made to structures over a period of time. As its name suggests, land-use surveys of cities can be made by dividing the map of the city into its major categories, such as residential, commercial, and industrial. Comparing various land-use surveys over different time periods can allow us to see how the physical landscape of a city changes over time. This can then be compared with the changes in activity levels of a city within that certain region, as well as the demographic changes of the city, and if the data are available, the demographic breakdown of people within a certain part of the city. This will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between the physical structure of a city and how people interact with the physical environment. A residential area with a younger demographic will mean different forms of activities, whereas a commercial district might have different needs. An analysis of the land-use survey of Singapore’s public train line will be conducted in Chapter 5. This will give us insight into the increased access across various parts of Singapore over the past 50 years.

Nonetheless, urban planners hypothesize that deliberate social planning is important and we cannot assume that planning the physical structures of a city without intentionally taking into account social impact will lead to the desired social consequences. Most of the time, organic growth of a city that only focuses on the physical environment does not capture all the various elements of social organization that are required to make citizens of a city happy and improve the quality of life for all. The built environment has an effect on the individuals in a population, and thus cities should take advantage of this awareness to maximize positive change. I now move on to look at theory from social psychology.
We first look at the realm of psychology, where theories postulated by social psychologists allow us to gain a better understanding of how our built environment can influence us and lead us to change our attitudes. Most social psychologists agree that the physical environment of a city can have a strong influence on people living in the city. Therefore, it would be important to think about the nature of this environment to better understand the effect it has on people (Goldstein 1980: 399). In this section, we delve into this relationship between the built environment and its influence on people. Importantly, understanding this will allow us to better plan our cities and incorporate a community-building aspect to city planning.

One thing social psychologists look at is how people both view and perceive the physical environment, and how this in turn has an effect on their feelings and actions. If an individual believes that a room is cramped and hot, they are inclined to be uncomfortable (or behave in a certain way), even if other people do not think that the room is cramped and hot (Goldstein 1980: 383). Social psychologists are interested in this subjective interpretation of the physical environment. Therefore, using theory from social psychology will add to our understanding of the relationship between the physical environment and its impact on social organization in a city.

In the early twentieth century, social psychologists from the University of Chicago were the first to look into the specific types of environments that influence people. Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess first conducted studies on the effects of the environment on the social organization in the city of Chicago (Park and Burgess 1925: 2). Other academics went on to conduct their own studies and formulate
theories—these theories came to be known as the Chicago School theories. The Chicago School theories are mainly interested in looking at a city’s physical structures and their effects on the individuals living there. This thesis follows the trends postulated by the Chicago School theories. Social psychologists such as Duncan and Reiss presented the idea that it is more important to understand a city by looking at the “patterns of social interaction and friendship” that occur there rather than in terms of “architecture and zones of residential and business dwellings” (Duncan and Reiss 1956: 5). Other social psychologists, such as Stanley Milgram, following his own set of studies, confirmed this idea (Duncan and Reiss 1956: 5). These seminal works from social psychologists remain important today and serve as a reminder to urban planners that the physical structures in a city should serve a dual purpose—of being both aesthetically pleasing, and encouraging the development of social organization.

One way we see this idea manifesting itself today is through people’s views of cities. When people are asked what they remember most of their travels in cities, most respond with a social encounter they have had—either with a great tour guide, a kind stranger, or an intimate experience with their travel partner(s) at a certain location. Even though physical structures help us orient ourselves in a city, it is usually our social interactions that are more important in creating a lasting impression of a place (Goldstein 1980: 399).

The scale of a city also plays an important role in determining how we react to its physical structures (Goldstein 1980: 404). A New Yorker would immediately “feel” the difference when they visit Paris. The buildings are not as tall and sidewalks
are wide, with benches and cafes lining them. In this case, when buildings line up horizontally instead of vertically, we see this has a different impact on people. Additionally, sidewalks and pavements that allow people to walk in the open have a different effect compared to walking paths that are indoors and air-conditioned. Individuals will have a different emotional response to these two variants of cities (Goldstein 1980: 404). Singapore is an example of a city that has many underground passages and covered walkways instead of open air walkways. This is done to negate the heat and humidity that pervades the city, and this leads to its people having a different form of relationship with the urban structure.

Therefore, by changing the nature of space, planners can influence the type of impact the physical structures of a city can have on people. Humphrey Osmond writes about two types of spaces—sociopetal spaces and sociofugal spaces (Seabury 1971: 45). Even though he wrote in 1957, these concepts remain relevant today. As he states, “sociopetal spaces encourage interaction between people, while sociofugal spaces discourage interaction (Seabury 1971: 45).” Places with immovable chairs that are far apart, such as waiting rooms in an airport, are sociofugal spaces as they do not facilitate easy conversation between people. Adjusting the physical environment can have a great impact on the social lives of people. The psychologist Oscar Newman empirically tested this hypothesis in the 1970s through the Clason Point Gardens development project (Newman 1996: 67).

The Clason Point Gardens development is a two-story housing development in the Bronx, New York City, part of the “defensible space” policy the New York City government had come up with. This policy tried to test the idea that if more residents
spent time in the common grounds of the project, this would lead to a reduction in crime rates in the project. To achieve this, the planners changed up the physical structure of Clason Point Gardens. The pedestrian paths were widened and were paved with decorative effects. The planners got benches to allow for public seating in the common ground of the project. Small playgrounds were built for children to play, with seating areas nearby to allow adults to supervise their children. Tenants got to select the colors and designs of these renovations. Additionally, the lighting in public areas was improved to increase the visibility of public spaces. These changes in the physical structure of Clason Point Gardens not only reduced crime but also increased the tenants’ feelings of satisfaction with the area (Newman 1996: 71). This example further illustrates the idea that physical structures in a city can have an effect on the people.

Another important factor that social psychologists study is the degree of anonymity that people city-dwellers face. Cities are larger and denser compared to rural areas. This would logically lead to a lack of privacy in cities. Yet this does not seem to be the case in the cities of today. It is the shared social norms and social institutions in place that establish the boundaries for privacy that exist in cities today. Privacy and anonymity occur in cities because it is too costly to deviate from the norms that have been set in society (Goldstein 1980: 400). For example, it would be too costly and time-consuming to express concern over everyone who begs for money on the street. Trying to help or even spending time on everyone who needs help on the streets of cities such as New York or Mumbai would take up every waking moment of a person’s time. Therefore, people living in cities have developed self-
established tools to allow them to carry on with their daily activities without being interrupted or affected by strangers around them (Goldstein 1980: 400).

We now try to answer the question of how physical environments have an effect on people. They can affect people through influencing them to change their behaviors and attitudes. Social psychologists have posited three main methods through which we can get people to change their attitudes. These three methods emphasize the way we can influence people, causing them to change their mindset. The first method is what social psychologists call the “rational-objective” influence (Smith 1980: 95). In this method, we get people to change their attitude when they accept a persuasive and rational argument that pushes them to accept a new viewpoint. In this way, people can either discard their old attitudes and adopt a new one, or assimilate parts of the new information and discard their current beliefs that are not consistent with these new ideas.

The second method through which we can get people to change their attitudes is through social influence. In this case, we can get people to alter their attitudes when they conform to the attitudes of people in their various social circles – their family, friends, colleagues, and peers. Social influence works because it is a human tendency to want to better integrate ourselves better into our social groups. This mentality ties in with the notion of “men as social animals” – a mentality that is prevalent throughout society (Goldstein 1980: 401). The physical structures of our environment can play a role in pushing this social influence to the forefront.

The third and final method to get people to change their attitudes is through emotional influence. Emotional experiences can lead to changes in people’s existing
attitudes. On one extreme, an example of an emotional experience that can lead to a change in attitude is trauma. Trauma is defined as “a compulsive reorganization of the mental field following an intense emotional experience (Beisecker and Parson 1972: 16).” On the other hand, an ecstatic experience can also lead to people changing their attitudes. These emotional experiences or often tied with the physical environment in which they happened. Visiting the city or area we grew up in can bring back a strong rush of emotions. Most of the time, these emotions remind us of past incidents and allow us to reflect on the impact these emotional influences have had on us and the attitudes we hold today.

These three methods of influencing people are important to take into account when planners think about how a city should be planned. Incorporating these three methods of influence within the physical structure of a city can provide opportunities for increased intentional human interactions, thus allowing for communities to grow in an organic way (Beisecker and Parson 1972: 16). Why build a park in the middle of a dense residential area if not to persuade more people to frequent the park. We can thus conclude that there is some connection between the use of these three influencing techniques and city planning. Therefore, intricate and detailed planning of a city can play an important role in influencing people to come together and create a sense of community and vibrancy (Sutcliffe 1981: 185-188).

**Sociology**

This section will now turn towards the discipline of sociology and will use theories from Louis Wirth and Georg Simmel to elucidate a conceptual framework. The arguments that these two theorists make are old. Yet, these arguments form the
basis through which much of urban theory today is based on. To show this, I will tie in their arguments with the arguments made by more contemporary sociologists such as David Harvey.

Louis Wirth published his work “Urbanism as a way of life” in 1938, a piece that is one of the “foundational statements of the Chicago School of urban sociology (Lin and Mele 2005: 33).” He was a professor at the University of Chicago in the 1930s and his work contributed to the emergence of sociology as a profession (Lin and Mele 2005: 33). He starts off his piece by stressing the importance of taking a sociological perspective when thinking about cities. He states:

Despite the preponderant significance of the city in our civilization, our knowledge of the nature of urbanism and the process of urbanization is meager, notwithstanding many attempts to isolate the distinguishing characteristics of urban life. Geographers, historians, economists, and political scientists have incorporated the points of view of their respective disciplines into diverse definitions of the city. While in no sense intended to supersede these, the formulation of a sociological approach to the city may incidentally serve to call attention to the interrelations between them by emphasizing the peculiar characteristics of the city as a particular form of human association (Wirth 1938: 3).

Wirth’s main point in his article states that city life exerts an influence on the people living in it. Wirth characterizes a city into three main features: large size, high density, and social heterogeneity (Smith 1980: 12). First, Wirth argues that interactions among people living in a city change as the population size of the city increases. This occurs because individuals in a city have to both compete and cooperate with one another. These conflicting interactions among individuals lead to what Wirth calls “increased differentiation” among people. Increased differentiation
refers to the variation in occupation, personality traits, and ideas of people living in a city (Wirth 1938: 4). Owing to this differentiation among individuals, there is a greater reliance on others for a person’s needs to be met. This, however, is not a deep reliance on others. Owing to this lack of depth in interaction, Wirth characterizes the relationship among people in cities as “impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental (Wirth 1938: 12).”

The second feature of a city that Wirth elucidates on is a city’s density. The idea of a densely populated city in 1938 is very different from that of today. Nonetheless, some of his arguments still hold true today. Wirth states that in a city “our physical contacts are close but our social contacts are distant.” People do not have any emotional connection to the many strangers who live in the same city. An increased density of people can lead to an increase in unwanted interactions among people with no ties to one another. This can lead to friction among people (Wirth 1938: 14).

Wirth’s third feature is social heterogeneity. He argues that the heterogeneous nature of individuals living in cities means that interactions among people “tends to break down the rigidity of caste lines (Wirth 1938: 16).” This leads to increased opportunities to interact with people who have different experiences. However, this also leads to decrease in depth of the conversation. Wirth uses the example of social groups that people form with one another. With this heterogeneity, there is no clear demarcation of groups and people thus do not have a clear allegiance to any one group. This can lead to a dearth in emotional connection among people living in a city.
While this is written in 1938, the notion of cities being spaces of impersonality has remained unchanged, or even been exacerbated. More recent scholarship from theorists such as David Harvey, who wrote his book Rebel Cities in 2012, agree with the descriptions of interpersonal relations among people living in a city that Wirth postulated almost eighty years ago. Harvey was influenced by Henri Lefebvre, a Marxist sociologist who was known for influencing modern thought on how space should be utilized in a city. Harvey furthers both Wirth’s and Lefebvre’s argument and reinforces this idea. In an article written by Harvey in 2008 called The Right to the City, he states that:

“The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city (Harvey 2008: 1)."

Sociologists also see the importance of the relationship between the built environment and how it effects the people living in the city.

Economics

“Man,” Adam Smith writes, “is the only animal that makes bargains. Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog.” In the market economy throughout the world today, individuals exchange their labor for wages. Economists look at cities as a place that provides a platform to facilitate trade among people, as well as a place where goods can be produced and consumed. This section will look at how these market transactions affect the development of cities.
As early as 1921, the French geographer, Vidal de la Blache, argued in his *Principes de Géographie humaine* that “all societies, rudimentary or developed, face the same dilemma: individuals must get together in order to benefit from advantages of the division of labor, but various difficulties restrict the gathering of many individuals (Huriot and Thisse 2000: 3).” This statement by Blache ties in with the idea that there are two types of opposing spatial forces that dictate our economic activities—agglomeration and dispersion. August Lösch, an economist known for his theories on urban economics, agreed with Blache and viewed the economic landscape as the outcome of “the interplay of purely economic forces, some working toward concentration and others toward dispersion (Huriot and Thisse, 2000: 4).”

Agglomeration brings about many benefits to people living in a city. This ties in with the idea of economies of scale, where the cost of production of goods will decrease if firms cluster together. This occurs because there are more competing suppliers, greater division of labor, and more specialization (Huriot and Thisse 2000: 4). Another benefit of agglomeration economies are network effects that take place when large groups of people gather (Huriot and Thisse 2000: 4). People will partially gain the benefits that come about from these agglomeration economies.

Agglomeration economies also lead to the formation of cities by allowing for a concentration of people and firms. From an economic point of view, most people live in cities for two reasons. First, it is where most of the jobs are located in today’s market. Second, cities are where people can find a variety of goods and services to satisfy their needs and wants. Living in cities generally allows people to gain a higher standard of living as compared to other forms of societies, such as rural areas. As
seen earlier, agglomeration economies bring about benefits to the people living in the city. However, too many people moving into a city can bring negative effects, such as congestion, crime, and pollution. Therefore, there is this tradeoff that people need to endure to reap the benefits of living in a city. They need to tolerate the congestion, crime, pollution, and other negative impacts of a city. These negative impacts affect both the physical environment and social organization of the city. In cities like Beijing and Hong Kong, which suffer from high levels of pollution, we see the smog that physically masks the city. In addition to the physical detriments this has, pollution also affects the quality of life for people living in the city—they now have to wear masks when they go out on the streets and they have to give up on outdoor activities owing to the bad effects this pollution can have on their health.

Economists look at the formation of cities based on individual decisions that affect market forces. They do not look at social reasons for the development of cities, such as companionship, politics, freedom of speech and artistic expression, religion, or any of these more intangible reasons that people use as rationales for moving to a city (Huriot and Thisse 2000: 43). Additionally, economists come up with different solutions to problems compared to urban planners or policy-makers. Economists understand that if a good, such as a public park, has a positive externality, it will be under-provided for in the market system. And the same for a good with a negative externality, which will be over-provided in the market. One way to correct these market failures is through government intervention. Governments can pass on the costs of actions, such as causing pollution or creating congestion, to the people who
caused these effects of their actions. This is a different approach when compared to theories from sociology and psychology.

Agglomeration economies has been and still remains an important idea that attracts people to a city. Maryann Feldman and Richard Florida wrote in a journal article titled *The Geographic Sources of Innovation*, where they observed that innovation clusters tend to occur in places where there are strong university or other infrastructures in place (Feldman and Florida 1994: 217). Silicon Valley and Boston are two cities where innovation clusters take place. These cities are thus able to attract top talent and this increases the cities capacity to innovate and continue to grow (Huriot and Thisse 2000: 4). Having a group of like-minded and ambitious people in a location can increase the amount of positive social interactions in that city, and decreases the likelihood of people wanting to move out.

We now look at a simple economic model of space that is used to better understand the economics of urban land use. Alonso, Mills, and Muth wrote in the 1960s on the static model of a monocentric city, whose assumptions are still used today in urban economics to think about cities. In this model, they talk about the idea that the “key insight in the monocentric model is that the price of housing varies with accessibility to the central business district (CBD) (Huriot and Thisse 2000: 263).” Simply put, people who live near the CBD area pay a premium for the space as they save on low commuting costs and especially, less time needed to travel to work. This price variation led to smaller houses near the CBD and larger homes in locations further away.
As cities continued to grow, governments started to focus on decentralizing metropolitan areas. In the United States, population decentralization is referred to as suburbanization (Mieszkowski and Mills 1993: 140). Urban economics deals with the formation of cities and tries to explain the size and location of cities. This concept of decentralization furnishes the theories that urban economics tries to explain (Huriot and Thissé 2000: 263). Decentralization is one means through which governments reduce the negative effects of overcrowding. I will elaborate on overcrowding in Chapter 3, using this theory of decentralization.

I have now briefly elaborated on theories from urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics. The next three chapters will draw upon the theories postulated here to better understand social organization of a city and evaluate the indexes that have been published by the various organizations. Chapter 3 starts by looking at the private sphere; Chapter 4 looks at the public sphere; and Chapter 5 delves into the intersection of the private and public spheres.
Chapter 3: Private Sphere

*He was free, infinitely free, so free that he was no longer conscious of pressing on the ground. He was free of that weight of human relationships which impedes movement, those tears, those farewells, those reproaches, those joys, all that a man caresses or tears every time he sketches out a gesture, those countless bonds which tie him to others and make him heavy.* – Saint-Exupéry

Human beings require time in private, by themselves. As seen from the quote by Saint-Exupéry, the weight of human relationships can impede a person’s movement, and the bonds that humans share with one another can also weigh them down. The previous chapter introduced us to various methods for evaluating cities. One method I looked at was the indexes published by various organizations that rank cities using different metrics. I then went on to claim that these indexes do not focus on the social aspects of a city, and miss out on the relationship between the physical environment of a city and its impact on people. I then went on to describe theories postulated by urban planners, social psychologists, sociologists, and economists that will allow us to better understand and analyze spaces and activities in urban areas that have an effect on people’s lives and sense of wellbeing.

This third chapter will use these theories to analyze the importance of the private sphere in an individual’s life. The first section will attempt to provide a robust definition of the private sphere, followed by two examples of factors that affect the private lives of city dwellers—overcrowding and its effect on the individual, and the significance of the home. The case study of Singapore will provide the examples—how they manifest in Singapore, and what the Singapore government does or does not do to prevent disruptions as a result of these factors from taking place. This will
provide us with a grounding on the private sphere and its impact on people living in cities, and will give us insight into what the organizational indexes can do better, taking these private sphere factors into account.

**Definition of the Private Sphere**

The root of the word “private” is the Latin word *privus*, which means “single, individual, private.” *Privare*, a derivation of the word *privus*, in Latin means “to bereave or deprive” while *privatus*, another derivation, means someone who is “withdrawn from public life, peculiar to oneself, a person in private life (Madanipour 2003: 47).”

The private sphere is usually denoted by its association with private property, which is part of private space. From a spatial point of view, this is the representation of an individual’s sphere of control. In this space, the physical environment creates boundaries that help regulate individuals’ private sphere and give them an environment where they can engage only with themselves without fear of intrusion from others. A home or even a piece of land has a physical boundary that separates the individual’s private and public spaces. This can be something as simple as a wall, a door, a gate, or a fence that demarcates the start and end of private space for a person.

However, private property has further nuances that need to be unpacked. Private property combines personal and interpersonal dimensions of dealing with space. For an individual who owns their own property, this space is an exertion of their power, and is something that gives them agency over the location. From a
psychological standpoint, this is a means through which people can express their personal identity and empower themselves (Madanipour 2003: 53). From this, we see that the private sphere can have a great impact on an individual’s psyche and ties back to the main idea of this thesis, which is looking at the relationship between the built environment and the impact it can have on people. There is a necessity for private spaces in people’s lives, as these spaces can have a positive impact on them.

Different people have varied opinions on the subjectivity of the private sphere. And not everyone has a positive view of it. Some scholars, notably Hannah Arendt, place a negative connotation on the term private sphere and see a person who lives a private life as one who “does not exist” and whose actions are without “significance or consequence to others (Arendt 1958: 58).” Arendt might have been referring to the historical meaning and connotation associated with the word “private life.” Historically, a person’s private life was mainly restricted to the household and the household was usually a women’s world. Arendt was critical of this notion. To Arendt, a life confined to the household was one not worth living. She states:

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an ‘objective’ relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through an intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself (Arendt 1958: 58).

There are other scholars, such as Krattenmaker, who emphasize private life, the universal right to privacy, as an essential part of human life. He states:

Privacy permits people to share intimacies and ideas on their own terms, and thus establish those mutual reciprocal relinquishments of the self that underlie the relations of love, friendship and trust…
The right to privacy is thus an inescapable aspect of our humanity (Madanipour 2003: 40).

Privacy and personal space are large parts of the private sphere. Arendt’s argument makes sense in that it focuses on the idea that living life entirely in private is bad. The right to privacy and personal space is an essential aspect of human life. Krattenmaker rightly states that people have a right to privacy and this right is “an inescapable part of our humanity.” The need to protect an individual’s privacy is often set against the fear of intrusion from an external source, such as the government, our bosses, extended family members, acquaintances, or even close friends and family members. Some of these people tend to have power and authority over us and can use this as a means to intrude into their private sphere. Others, such as friends and family, might unknowingly intrude into parts of our private lives that we do not want to give them access to.

In the next sections, I will look at specific examples that affect the private sphere of an individual in a city. The first example I will look at is the loss of the private sphere today through overcrowding and congestion in urban areas, and the effects these phenomena have on an individual. The second example I look at will be the private sphere of a person’s home.

**Loss of Private Sphere in Cities Today**

A city can be thought of as being a mold of two essential parts, its physical existence and its social existence. The main physical features of a city include housing, transport, permanent facilities for interchange and assembly (such as markets and malls), and other fixed sites. The essential features of the social existence...
of a city are the interactions between people, as well as cultural processes that add vibrancy to a city. When both these aspects of a city come together, a city becomes a buzz of social and economic activity. This leads to a built environment that facilitates unity among everyone living in the city (Mumford 1961: 480). A city, in its full form, is a place where people can come together to develop in both their professional and personal endeavors (Mumford 1961: 480).

Cities continue to work towards building an environment that facilitates the individual. Nonetheless, the changing times bring with it new problems. One change that is occurring in the world today is the unprecedented growth in the global population. In a span of only about 65 years, the global population has almost tripled—from approximately 2.5 billion people in 1950 to 7.4 billion people today (UN Population Division). And as the rapid pace of population growth continues, a greater percentage of people will end up living in cities. The World Bank estimates that the next fifteen years will see an addition of approximately 1.1 billion people into cities across the world (World Bank Development Report 2015). Graph 3.1 gives us an overview of the increase in population from 1990 to an estimate of the global population in 2030, and breaks it down into percentages of people who live in areas with specific numbers of people. We see that the percentage of people living in rural areas dips slightly from 1990 to 2030. The number of people living in areas of 1 to 5 million people, 5 to 10 million people, and more than 10 million people have slowly increased over the 40-year period. There can be various reasons for this, but one thing this implies is that cities that host these large numbers of people are going to grow. They will thus need to learn how to cope with this increase in people.
If managed properly, this addition of people to cities will bring with it tremendous opportunity for increased prosperity and livability for people all around the world. Increasing numbers of people moving to cities will bring with them the benefits of agglomeration. However, there are negative effects, such as overcrowding and social tensions, that can come about from this growth in cities. Governments need to take measures to slow down or even remove these negative effects.

Additionally, it is now easier for people to pack their bags and move to cities that have greater opportunities and higher standards of living. This can occur both within a country and between countries. Technological advancement in transport has led to increased convenience and reduced travel times for people who want to move. Migration policies have also generally eased and people now have greater access and ability to move to a city in a different country. \(^\text{12}\) Distance is now not as important a factor for people wanting to make a decision to move to another city.

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\(^{12}\) This might not be the case for refugees.
We now also see movement from rural to urban areas, as people look for the better quality of life that city living has to offer. All of this has led to the increasing importance of thinking about cities and how to best organize cities to meet the needs of the people. Policy-makers around the world strive to improve the quality of living in cities to attract more people. Governments, think tanks, and research organizations have spent countless amounts of time and money to understand the factors that help make a city successful, so that it grows economically and attracts more people. These various organizations have created indexes to evaluate cities.

Additionally, increasing numbers of people are moving into cities around the world and this adds to the complexity of a city’s social structure. The resulting increased diversity of thought, race, religion, and socio-economic background leads to different forms of human activity in urban areas. On one hand, this adds to the vibrancy and cultural capital of a city—a huge positive that can add great value to the public sphere of that city’s inhabitants. On the other hand, this increase in human density can change the way people relate to their physical environment on a personal level, in the private sphere. The sociologist, Georg Simmel, states that as more people move into the city, it can produce a “shift in the medium” through which we orient ourselves to the social environment (Smith 1980: 16). This shift in medium refers to the level of intimacy through which we start to get to know other people. With more people in a city, there is a decreased likelihood of gaining deeper connections with strangers who you bump into at a park. This will cause us to lose our sensitivity to the world, and decrease the power of human uniqueness and intimacy (Simon 1980: 16). As Simmel adds, this increase in human density leads to increased physical contact
but decreased amounts of close social intimacy, which accentuates the idea that people will change the way they orient themselves to their physical environment. This can give rise to loneliness, and create a sense of loss in one’s private sphere (Simmel 1971: 47).

Additionally, this frequent physical contact without emotional or sentimental ties leads to a spirit of “competitiveness, self-aggrandizement, and mutual exploitation” among people (Simmel 1971: 45). Increasing crowds and congestion in cities where people are socially distant and share no bond leads to an increased probability of irritation, annoyance, and friction among people (Simmel 1971: 47). Subways are a good example of this, where people lash out easily when annoyed by others who are usually in close physical proximity but who are not otherwise familiar. This is exacerbated by the rapid pace of urban life. Technology also plays a role in accentuating the negative effects of living in a dense urban environment. For example, smart phones create an increased social disconnect among people who are in close physical proximity to one another. While this allows people to be immersed in their private sphere, by either reading something on their phones or tablets, or messaging a family member or friend, this can also lead to increased tension and friction if they are disturbed by the people who are physically surrounding them (Smith 1980: 16). As seen when society evolves, there is a change in the way the private sphere is organized. This should inform our thinking when we contemplate ways to incorporate the private sphere into our assessment when evaluating cities.
The Effects of Overcrowding on the Individual

As seen from the section above, overcrowding is one mechanism which increases the likelihood of a person’s private sphere being invaded. This can happen in many ways. We will talk about two. First, in a more direct relationship, overcrowding infringes on an individual’s personal space, which is a sub-section of a person’s private sphere. The anthropologist Edward Hall borrowed this idea of personal space from Heidegger, who defines it as a “small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between itself and others (Hall 1992: 89).” This concept of a person’s personal space is usually subjective, as it is not something that can be seen. It is an invisible line that people usually create themselves, and they start to feel uncomfortable if this line is encroached. It is in this personal space where people tend to feel most in control of themselves. And this concept of an individual’s personal space has become a social norm in most parts of the world, although it also varies with cultures.

Individuals thus try to protect their personal space when others intentionally or accidentally infringe upon it. For example, getting too close to a complete stranger will cause the stranger to instinctively move back, as a means of protecting their personal space. Empirical studies have shown that continued intrusion into an individual’s personal space can lead to withdrawal behavior and a potentially high level of stress among people (Greenberg and Firestone 1977: 639). Therefore, a city that faces the problem of overcrowding will not be able to sufficiently meet the needs of an individual, as overcrowding affects the private sphere.
Second, studies have shown that there is an association between overcrowding and negative impact on city dwellers, one being increased crime rates (Glaeser and Sacerdote 1999: 230). Increased crime rates in a city infringe on the private sphere, causing people to be more guarded while they walk around the city alone, and resulting in a decreased quality of life. Overcrowding can occur through natural means, such as an increased birth rate in the city or country, or through more people migrating to that city. This is a paradox, as one goal of a city is to be able to attract more people, but attracting more people leads to overcrowding. Therefore, the answer to the problem of overcrowding is one that is complex and difficult to unpack, because there is no right answer on how to best balance the tradeoff between attracting more people and avoiding overcrowding.

In countries such as the United States and Britain, planners started the process of suburbanization to reduce overcrowding in cities (Mieszkowski and Mills 1993: 140). Suburbanization was a means through which people could be spread out within a city or even a country. And suburbanization allowed for people in middle class households to get larger personal spaces and intimate territories, by giving them the ability to buy bigger homes for the same cost as a smaller home in the city. Additionally, with the increasing mobility of the world and the ability to find work in other cities easily through online job portals, families are now able to leave cities that become too overcrowded.\(^\text{13}\) There has since been a decreasing tolerance for overcrowding as more and more people start to place value on their individual and

\(^\text{13}\) This only can happen if the member of the family who is working has access to a certain skillset that is in demand in the workforce and allows them to move easily
family privacy and move out of overcrowded cities. People do not want to live in neighborhoods in cities that have the negative effects of overcrowding (Madanipour 2003: 47). However, this method of dealing with overcrowding can lead to great segregation in society. One form of segregation that this can give rise to is the opportunity to live in neighborhoods with others who are of similar race and/or socio-economic background.

Empirical studies by urban economists Thomas Boehm and Keith Ihlanfeldt surveyed various household types on their view on neighborhood quality and whether they want to move out (Boehm and Ihlanfeldt 1986: 54). Table 3.1 below summarizes the survey results.

**Table 3.1: Opinion of Neighborhood by Race**  
*Taken from: Boehm and Ihlanfeldt*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Type</th>
<th>Neighborhood Quality if Poor (%)</th>
<th>Want to Move (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black, low, multi, city</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, high, multi, city</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, high, multi, suburbs</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, low, multi, suburbs</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, low, multi, city</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, high, multi, city</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, low, single, city</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, high, single, city</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, high, multi, suburbs</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, low, single, city</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race, Income, Housing Type</td>
<td>Rating</td>
<td>Probability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, high, single, city</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, high, single, city</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, low, multi, suburbs</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, low, single, suburbs</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, high, single, suburbs</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, low, single, suburbs</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:**
Black or White: Race of Families  
Low: income in the bottom third of income distribution  
High: income in top two-thirds of income distribution  
Multi or Single: live in multi/extended or single family housing  
City or Suburbs: Live in central city or live in suburban area

The results from Table 3.1 show that black, low-income families living in multifamily housing in cities are the ones who report the poorest neighborhood quality and are the ones who are most likely to want to move out of the neighborhood. Another interesting thing of note in this study is that the people living in suburbs are the ones who have the least probability of wanting to move out of their neighborhood (Boehm and Ihlanfeldt 1986: 55). It is also interesting to note that the people living in multifamily households are the one who want to move out of the neighborhood. This can be tied to the loss of the private sphere as well. Assuming the common rooms in the house are of a similar size, the more people living in a household, the less likely one is to get private time to themselves. There is increased likelihood of bumping into another person in the common spaces, or even having
people come over to your room to chat when you actually want personal time to yourself.

Additionally, one would assume that a household with a higher income would be less likely to want to move out. A larger income gives one the ability to buy a larger home. This might lead to a home having more rooms or more space in general and thus a lower likelihood of unwanted interaction with others. However, this is not reflected in the survey results shown in Table 3.1.

Another study conducted by another urban economist, George Galster, looks at the change in racial composition of a neighborhood when there is a transition from a segregated white neighborhood to a mixed-race neighborhood (Galster 1990: 349). Galster ran surveys that asked people how likely they would be to depart a neighborhood depending on the percentage breakdown of people by race in a neighborhood. The surveys showed that the percentage of whites who say they will leave a neighborhood is seven percent if the percentage of minorities in the neighborhood is seven percent. This number increases to twenty-four percent when the percentage of minorities in the neighborhood increases to twenty percent. The number of whites who would leave further increases to forty-one percent in a neighborhood with thirty-three percent minorities and then to sixty-four percent in a neighborhood with sixty percent minorities. There is an increased likelihood of white people leaving a neighborhood if the percentage of minorities in a neighborhood increases (Galster 1990: 349).

The indexes we looked at in Chapter 1 do not fully take into account the impact of overcrowding on society. While the indexes do capture the tangible aspects
of overcrowding through factors such as infrastructure and economic activity (which might actually lead to a positive view of overcrowding as more people in a city generally equates to more sales of goods and services), they do not capture the impact that overcrowding has on people’s changing preferences.

However, it is difficult to directly measure this negative impact of overcrowding. One possible metric that can be used to measure the impact is through looking at population density. However, it is difficult to extract the right data for population density across different cities and metropolises around the world. First, it is difficult because there is no one common definition of what exactly is a city, and what makes for the boundaries of a city. This has led to improper measurements of land areas that are reported by different cities.

One possible means of overcoming this problem is by looking at census data for cities. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau released a report on population density trends in 2012, looking at American downtown areas. However, the definition used by the Bureau was vague. It defined a downtown area as “everything within a two-mile radius of the local city hall (Badger 2013).” As seen from the maps of Baltimore (left) and Manhattan in New York City (right) in Map 1 below, there are patches of water that are included in the area calculated. There are also parts of New Jersey City that are included in the supposed calculation for population density in New York City.
Adding a spatial element adds a layer of complexity to calculations. Most governments do not take these factors into account when making population density calculations. Therefore, this might not be a good measure of overcrowding in a city.

And if governments and indexes do want to use this measure, they might have to take context into consideration, by taking into account water patches. This requires a lot of time and effort to conduct and may not be the best solution to the problem of measuring the amount of overcrowding that occurs in a city.

On another layer, the impact of overcrowding will be different depending on the physical layout and activity levels of a city. A highly dense city that is physically well-organized and with citizens who are considerate might be better off than a city that is less dense but less well-organized and with citizens who do not think about the welfare of others and go about utilizing facilities without a thought for other people. This can be tied in with the free-rider problem, an economic theory that states that people who are free-riders will take advantage of common resources, such as public
spaces, without paying their fair share of taxes, or by over-using these shared resources. A city with a greater number of free-riders will exacerbate the problems caused by overcrowding.

**Overcrowding in Singapore**

Singapore is an example of a city that is overcrowded. With a population of over 5.5 million people and a land space of approximately 275 square miles, Singapore is one of the most densely populated cities in the world (World Bank Statistics). Throughout Singapore’s urban planning process, it has changed its expectations for population growth tremendously. Table 3.2 depicts how only about 15 years ago, the Singapore government’s 2001 Concept Plan estimated a population of 5.5 million people by 2041-2051. According to the Singapore census data, the population in 2014 was already close to 5.5 million people, beating expectations by 26 years (Singapore Department of Statistics 2014). While this exponential increase in population growth can aid in increasing economic growth in Singapore, it can also cause large strains on resources and infrastructure. The Singapore government has adopted various policies to strike a balance between economic growth and a means to curb the problems that stem from this exponential increase in population size.

**Table 3.2: Population and Economic Growth Published Estimates for Singapore Concept Plan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Estimated Population</th>
<th>Economic Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1971 Concept Plan</td>
<td>3.4 million by Year 1992</td>
<td>GDP in 1992 assumed to be 6.4 times that of 1966 (~7.4% growth per annum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 Concept Plan</td>
<td>3.23 million residents by 2000,</td>
<td>Not indicated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taken from Tan Shin Bin, “Long-Term Land Use Planning in Singapore,” *Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy*, 4
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan Type</th>
<th>Estimated Population by Year</th>
<th>Growth Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 Concept Plan</td>
<td>5.5 million residents by 2041-2051</td>
<td>Not indicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term Concept Plan Review 2006</td>
<td>6.5 million residents by 2046-2056</td>
<td>Not indicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2013 Concept Plan/Land Use Plan</td>
<td>6.5-6.9 million total population by 2030</td>
<td>3-4% growth between now and 2020 2-3% growth between 2020 and 2030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On top of this population increase, Singapore has another important constraint to consider—land scarcity. The Singapore government has always understood the need to be prudent with its use of space, to avoid making short-sighted mistakes, such as prematurely developing and using up land that could have been reserved for potentially better, future uses (Tan 2008: 6). There is a need to chart out Singapore’s land use needs far ahead of time to overcome these problems. Because of the lack of space in Singapore, land costs are very high. Therefore, there is great incentive to build taller buildings to make better use of the space. This has benefits for both office and residential buildings, as now more tenants can utilize a single plot of land. Since more people occupy a smaller plot of land, there will be greater income for landowners generated per square unit of land. Moreover, high-rise buildings have the double effect of both increasing available floor space and increasing their potential value, as higher floors could be valued at a higher price owing to a better view, more natural sunlight, and an association with greater prestige (Polèse 2009: 50).

In the commercial area of the city, tall office buildings that line Singapore’s central business district (CBD) bring about agglomeration economies, as firms will
have easier access to complementary firms that could aid in their services. In one office building, there could potentially be a financial services firm, a law firm, and a retail firm, all with easy access to one another and with very low transport costs. The retail firm can easily reach out to the law firm to get help with its legal issues. This adds value to an economy and tall buildings can create a platform for this value-add to occur.

Looking at residential buildings, the taller a residential building, the more people living in it. This once again creates agglomeration economies, where the more people occupying a certain unit of land, the greater the potential for creating an area with a certain “buzz” or vibe, and increased interaction with other people.

Another method the Singapore government undertook to overcome this problem of overcrowding was through decentralization of the city, similar to the suburbanization process that took place in the U.S. and Britain. To reduce peak-hour congestion from traffic flowing in and out of the central business district (CBD) area, regional business hubs outside of the city center were introduced in the 1991 Concept Plan. This helped to bring jobs and other general amenities closer to residential areas and away from the CBD area (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2012: 4).

Tampines Regional Center, a largely residential area in Singapore located in the east of the city, and Novena Fringe Center, on the edge of the CBD area, have since become hubs, offering a mix of office spaces, malls, entertainment amenities, and sports facilities to meet the needs of the people who live in those areas. Over the next 15 years, the Singapore government has planned to add three new hubs to support further growth in the commercial, retail, and entertainment sectors (Urban
Redevelopment Authority 2012: 4). The largest of these to be developed is the Jurong Lake District in the Western residential area of the city, where there will be new public park spaces, office spaces, malls, and other amenities to meet the needs of the growing number of people moving into that area. Kallang Riverside at the edge of the city center and a residential area right outside the CBD, and Paya Lebar Central in the east are the other two areas designated to be developed. It is planned for each of these hubs to have a different economic focus and a unique identity, to complement the CBD area, which will continue to be the main hub of the business and financial district (Urban Redevelopment Authority 2012: 4).

![Layout of the Jurong Lake District, with a train station, housing buildings, high-rise offices (bottom left of picture), a school, a hotel, and various parks and malls](image)

One lesson we can extract from this Singapore example is the need to give these suburban locations all the major amenities required but also ensure they have a unique identity to them. This gives people a sense of pride in their area and lets it be a place that people want to stay in on weekends, rather than heading out of their area.
and into a place that is supposedly better. Part of the private sphere is having people feel comfortable in their own areas, and for them to be able to privately enjoy a stroll in the park, or going to a library to get some quiet time and read. Singapore has publicly accessible parks and libraries located in most neighborhoods across the city. And with this process of suburbanization, there will now be shopping malls as well as office spaces in these suburban locations.

Other than lack of space for living and office space, a lack of space could very easily cause traffic congestion as well. Traffic congestion causes inconvenience to the masses, and for firms, also means time lost and higher costs for fuel, drivers, and equipment. To overcome this problem, the Singapore government has put in place various tax measures to reduce car ownership, or dis-incentivize car owners from driving through certain crowded areas at certain times of the day. Technology plays an important role in helping ease congestion on the roads in Singapore. The Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) system is a barrier placed in strategic locations around the Central Business District (CBD) area and in popular residential and commercial areas. This is a form of tax revenue for the Singapore government as these barriers link to transponders in people’s cars and is based on a “pay-as-you-use” system, where drivers are charged a fee when they drive through high volume roads during busy periods. This has decreased congestion on roads, as people, especially younger working adults and low-income people, now choose to take public transportation instead of driving, or they do not drive through the roads where they have to pay this fee.
Another problem that arises from traffic congestion is air pollution. To reduce pollution, the Singapore government has put in place laws to control the emissions generated by motor vehicles. The Singapore National Environment Agency (NEA) regulates the type and quality of fuel that can be used in the city state, and also sets minimum exhaust emission standards for all vehicles. Drivers who do not abide by this rule will be fined 2,000 SGD\(^{14}\) for the first offense and 5,000 SGD for subsequent offenses (Singapore National Environment Agency 2016). This has become a norm in Singapore society and you cannot see exhaust smoke emitting from cars on the road. This has helped reduce pollution and has prevented air quality from deteriorating, which is a major boon for the standard of living in Singapore.

The Singapore government has made a thorough plan to overcome congestion. A city that balances between having a buzzing crowd and critical mass of people, while having generally clear roads and a consistent, working public transportation

\(^{14}\) 2,000 SGD is approximately equivalent to 1,400 USD as of 26 January 2017.
system contributes to an increased standard of living. The combination of tall buildings, technology, and decentralization has played a key role in making Singapore a city that works well.

Thinking about the impact of overcrowding and creative solutions to this problem should be incorporated in the indexes that rank cities. This can be done by looking at a number of amenities, such as libraries or park space per unit area, and also looking at the dispersion of these locations to ensure they are well spread out across the city and not concentrated in wealthier areas. The sign of a great city is when everyone has access to basic things such as libraries to read and learn new things, and park spaces to enjoy.

The Home

A person’s spatial dimensions, such as where they live, how they move about and travel around a city, and where they choose to go and spend their free time, are important aspects that help mold a person’s identity. Through an individual’s consumption of space, they can establish relationships with other people, or with a certain anchor. An anchor here refers to the literal meaning of an anchor, something that holds one in place. In this case, the anchor can refer to things such as a certain restaurant in a city, or museum, that attracts a person back to a certain place. People who live in prestigious and expensive neighborhoods could use that as a basis to mold their identity, and as a means to distinguish themselves from others (in this case, from the masses of people who do not live in exclusive neighborhoods). In this way, people are establishing their similarity with the people living in that neighborhood and
differences with the people living outside it. This is magnified over time. In this way, the physical space that a person consumes plays an important role in shaping their identity (Madanipour 2003: 159).

The home is an important example to consider when thinking about an individual’s consumption of space. An individual’s home is the spatial unit that puts together different facets of the private sphere. The home provides an individual with personal space, a roof to protect them from natural elements of the environment, a place where they can express themselves without scrutiny from others, and a place to rest and recuperate (Madanipour 2003: 161). On top of being a place for an individual, the home is a place for a social unit, usually a family. This allows a group of people who have intimate relationships with one another, usually a partner and children, to live under the same roof. In some cultures, the social unit branches out to include the extended family, which will then add one’s parents and relatives to the social unit (Madanipour 2003: 163). Having an extended family live in the same home might dilute the intimacy and privacy of the home, and we will talk about that when we elaborate on the Singapore example in the latter parts of this chapter.

The home is essential in providing people with a place that satisfies their desire for recognition and safety. Gaston Bachelard, in his book titled The Poetics of Space, argues that a person’s home is a place where “warm substance of intimacy resumes its form (Bachelard 1994: 40).” It helps satisfy people’s psychological needs. The home is the realm that epitomizes the idea of the private sphere. It creates and shapes memories and provides people with a sense of rootedness. It is the center of
intimacy and provides us with a space to let go of our inhibitions and expose our “true” selves to one another (Bachelard 1994: 40).

Urban theorists Peter Saunders also adds to the literature of the home and states that the home is a:

core institution in modern society. It shelters the smallest viable unit of social organization—the household—and basic patterns of social relations are forged, reproduced and changed within it. It is the place with which individuals can most readily identify and it easily lends itself to the symbolic expression of personal identity. It offers both physical and psychological shelter and comfort. It is the place where the self can be expressed outside of social roles, and where the individual can exert autonomy away from the coercive gaze of the employer and the state. It is the private realm in an increasingly public and intrusive world. For many of us, its integrity is of the utmost value in our lives (Saunders 1990: 311).

The home is thus an important aspect of the private sphere. Looking at the physical dimension of the home, using the three conditions that Benn and Gauss postulated in Chapter 2 to determine the degree of private-ness—access, agency, and interest—we see that rooms such as the living room and the kitchen are more accessible, run by, and in the interest of all members of the household. Therefore, these rooms are not fully private but exist in the semi-private sphere. This is in contrast to the individual rooms. These rooms are often controlled solely by the

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15 One aside I would like to make before continuing the discussion on the home is the idea of people who are homeless. How do people who are homeless gain a sense of the private sphere that they require to lead a fulfilled life? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations, states that the right to privacy is a human right. And people who are homeless lose access to this right. This is an important issue. Are social planners fully responsible for homeless people? Do people have a right to the private sphere, i.e. access to a home? Owing to the scope of this thesis, we will not be delving into this topic.
individual who lives in that room, and are thus the physical environment that denotes the private sphere for each resident.

This dual nature of the home—as a location that is both purely private and semi-private—serves to help build identity. Living in a home together with others provides a space to form intimate relationships with others while at the same time being able to retreat into their space of pure privacy whenever needed (Madanipour 2003: 77).

One issue that sometimes arises from this is the tension that is created between individualism and family. While the nuclear family was seen as a means to protect people from society, the tension between child and parent, or between spouses can lead to negative effects on the individual. Technological advancements have brought about an additional layer of complexity to this idea of individualism in the home. Laptops, tablets, and mobile phones have provided an avenue for communication with people outside the home while not leaving the comfort of one’s own bedroom. People can read newspaper articles and watch news clips on their phones, and video call their friend from across the globe on their laptops—all at no monetary cost (Madanipour 2003: 103). A person does not need to communicate with their family even when physically in the same home. These new forms of communication disrupt the private sphere and increase the feelings of isolation in society. The private sphere should be a space where people can reflect on their lives, a space for reinvigoration. Society today is moving away from this.

These advances in technology have increased the realm of individualism that people can pursue. The internet offers an increased level of privacy and allows us to
mask ourselves behind a keyboard when engaging in discussion with others. Therefore, even though individualism has deepened, people are also becoming more isolated. Thomas Nagel talks about this, and calls it a veil, which separates what people open up for public view and what they keep to themselves. He writes that this veil can “be partly lifted to admit certain others, without the inhibiting effect of general exposure (Nagel 1998: 20).” This refers to the interpersonal sphere of privacy, the realm that is semi-private, where people let others in according to what is comfortable to them. Social psychologists argue that this ability to control the semi-private sphere is essential for human emotional and biological development (Nagel 1998: 20). This interpersonal realm falls in the intersection between the private and public spheres and will be further elaborated in Chapter 5.

It is difficult to analyze the home in context with the private sphere specifically in Singapore without first elaborating on the social structure of Singapore. Singapore is a diverse city, with about seventy-five percent of the population being Chinese, twelve percent Malay, ten percent Indian, and three percent from other racial backgrounds (Singapore Population Statistics Page 2016). This leads to a variety of cultural norms that people adopt when organizing their lives in the private sphere. These three racial groups have very strong cultural norms, with little overlap between them. Understanding and evaluating the various aspects of the home in Singapore goes beyond the scope of this thesis as it delves into an analysis of religious and cultural practices in Singapore. It is therefore difficult to extract lessons and measures that can be translated to indexes when the private sphere of the home in Singapore is solely based on context.
However, one contextual point to note is the cultural tendency in Singapore towards having extended families live together. This has been equally true among all three of the major racial groups in Singapore. But as the citizens of Singapore start getting wealthier, Singaporean society has started becoming more individualistic owing to the rise of phone and tablet usage. Interactions among people have decreased. The newer generation of public home owners\textsuperscript{16} are thus moving away from living with the extended family and moving towards single family homes. This has resulted in a decay of relations among different generations in a family, i.e. between grandparents and grandchildren. This move has led to an increase in private space for people living in these single family homes. However, people now lose out on having a greater number of intimate familial relations with the extended family. Is this tradeoff worth it? Only time will tell if this new change in the societal structure of Singapore will be good or bad for an individual’s private sphere.

Last, having such major cleavages in race within such a densely populated city state such as Singapore needs to be carefully managed. The Singaporean government has addressed this issue by having racial quotas in the public housing estates. In the next chapter, I talk about the public sphere and how the Singaporean government has used the public housing system to manage the racial cleavages.

\textsuperscript{16} Note that in Singapore, people own or lease public housing. The ownership structure works such that the Singaporean government provides a 99 or 999–year lease to people living in the houses, thus making people have ownership over the house. They have to sell the house
Chapter 4: Public Sphere

“A hundred years after we are gone and forgotten, those who never heard of us will be living with the results of our actions” – Oliver Wendell Holmes

The previous chapter looked at the private sphere and the way in which it manifests itself in society. We looked at examples, and how the private sphere manifests itself in the city, including its effects on individuals. We now move to the public sphere. As the quote at the start of this chapter asserts, an individual’s actions in the public sphere can have long-lasting effects on how the physical environment of a city is shaped. Our usage of the physical environment should determine the decisions that urban planners and policymakers make to ensure the best use of the space in a city. However, the opposite can also be true—the physical environment can have an effect on individuals, as postulated in the studies conducted by social psychologists in the theory section of Chapter 2. In this chapter, we look at and elaborate on this relationship between the physical environment and its impact on the individual, specifically in the public sphere.

The first section of this chapter will provide an in-depth definition of the public sphere. The second section will look at the state of the public sphere today, and how it ties in with the current capitalist system that dominates cities around the world. In the third section, I delve into an important aspect of the public sphere that deals with social organization—the formation of community in a city. The fourth section ties the concept of community in with public space, specifically looking at examples of how public space can have an impact on community-building. This example will be analyzed with the four lenses provided by the theories of urban planning, social
psychology, sociology, and economics. We will then look at examples from Singapore to tie the theory to a practical example. Using Singapore will allow us to see whether a city that is highly ranked on the indexes actually does well in organically building community—an important measure generally absent from the indexes.

**Definition of the Public Sphere**

Public is derived from the Latin word *populous*, which means people. This is not very helpful when thinking of the definition, as it is rather broad and can have a wide range of meanings. In English, the Oxford Dictionary defines the adjective form of the word public as:

- of or pertaining to the people as a whole; belonging to, affecting, or concerning the community as a whole; authorized by or representing the community; open or available to, used by, or shared by, all members of a community; not restricted to private use; also (of a service, fund, amenity, etc…) provided by local or central government for the community and supported by rates or taxes; at the service of the public in a professional capacity; working in local or central government (Oxford Dictionary).

This rather long-winded definition provided by the Oxford Dictionary confirms the idea that the term public is rather vague and can have many connotations. However, they all generally refer to a large number of people associated with a group, usually in the form of a society or a state. This can refer to the entire global population, a city, or even just a local community. An important point to note is the continuous emphasis on the “public” as a “community.” I will delve into this idea of community in the third section of this chapter. Therefore, we can generalize a
definition of public as something that refers to a large group of people in relation to one another—almost in direct contrast to the private sphere (Madanipour 2003: 109).

Now we move on to clarify two elements—the public sphere and public space. I would like to reiterate the distinction between these two points. Public space refers to the physical environment, usually related to groups of people or communities. The public sphere is much broader and takes into account all the public aspects—such as what one says, and the activities one undertakes in public, as opposed to in private—of an individual’s life.

The Public Sphere Today

The public sphere is intrinsically tied to the way we interact with one another. The rise of industrial capitalism together with the growth of cities has led to a fundamental change in the way people interact with one another. Social relations have changed from the old idea of kinship and clans to one now based more on exchange and contracts between people (Hill and McCarthy 1999: 37). Eighteenth-century thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Hume saw this change as a development that was positive, as this new form of social relations based on exchange increases the possibility of new forms of friendships that are not restricted to one’s clan and family. As psychologists would argue, this ability to choose one’s friends can result in a more genuine form of friendship—one that is not forced on people (Hill and McCarthy 1999: 40).

This new commercial society that started to form in the eighteenth to nineteenth century focused on exchange as a structure through which society was
organized. This required a stronger cultural foundation where people generally had to be polite and well-mannered with others in order to succeed in trade. Hume and Smith argued that this would lead to more civil social interactions between people, and thus more civilized encounters among people (Hill and McCarthy 1999: 40). This resulted in a generally more tranquil, orderly, and just social life. However, not everyone bought in to this idea that this new societal structure of exchange was actually a positive change. Adam Ferguson, a Scottish philosopher and historian of the Scottish Enlightenment, argued that this rise of the exchange society would not lead to more genuine friendships but rather increased alienation in society. He argued that the bonds and ties formed in village life were stronger than the loose connections formed through this exchange society, and that the exchange society led to the hyper-individualism that persists till today (Hill and McCarthy 1999: 44).

Friedrich Engels was another thinker in the nineteenth century who argued against this new form of social relations and believed that it was a detriment to society. Engels stated that the crowds in the streets of London “had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another” other than the fact that “each keep to his own side of the pavement, so as not to delay the opposing streams of the crowd… without honoring the others with so much as a glance (Urry 2007: 75).” This impersonal quality developed with the new, commercially-oriented form of social relations among people. Many would argue that this impersonality in the urban public sphere still persists today. To Engels and Ferguson, this indifference among people was something that went against human nature—that humans are naturally social beings. They argue that people are not meant to go about living such robotic, ordered
lives. Organic social interactions are not usually developed in this way, and thus, this new form of impersonal social relations among people leads to increased isolation and alienation in society (Urry 2007: 76).

These eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers saw the first instances of this change in social relations and developed their arguments based on their observations at that time. Many of those thinkers were based in the western world and thus, we do not have the privilege of gaining an insight into how the public sphere was organized in cities in other parts of the world at the time.

In more recent times, thinkers started to interpret this new form of social organization as a form of order among people. Edward Alsworth Ross, an American sociologist eloquently wrote that:

A condition of order at the junction of a crowded city thoroughfares implies primarily an absence of collision between men or vehicles that interfere one with another. Order cannot be said to prevail among people going in the same direction at the same pace, because there is no interference. It does not exist when persons are constantly colliding one with another. But when all who meet or overtake one another in crowded ways take the time and pains needed to avoid collision, the throng is orderly. Now, at the bottom of the notion of social order lies the same idea. The members of an orderly community do not go out of their way to aggress upon one another. Moreover, whenever their pursuits interfere, they make the adjustments necessary to escape collision and make them according to some conventional rule (Goffman 1972: 6).

More recently, Jane Jacobs celebrated this idea of order and called it an “art form,” where everyone has a role to play in creating social connections among themselves (Jacobs 2016: 7). This order allows us to better integrate with one another.
As Jacobs goes on to state, it is in public spaces where this “art form” is facilitated. I elaborate on public space in the fourth section of this chapter.

**Building A Sense of Community**

One important aspect of the city is the sense of community that is fostered in the public sphere. Before moving on to discussion about community in the public sphere, we need to define community and what having a sense of community entails. There are many different definitions of community. Some social theorists, such as Louis Wirth, have defined this term in a way that stresses the organic nature of a community, where there is natural competition as well as a mutual interdependence from living together (Wirth 1938: 15). Other thinkers regard community as a “psychic phenomenon,” and stress the shared sentiments underlying social consensus and collective action (Smith 1980: 2). This thesis takes the view that the first definition provided by Wirth is a more nuanced understanding of community. Creating common experiences, goals, and understanding among people who are part of a community is one way through which a group of people develops a strong sense of social cohesion.

The question does still remain—do communities form organically or is there usually an authority figure or organization that helps build community by implementing various policies in a country, region, or city? Wirth argues that a community emerges and develops as “natural, symbiotic ties developed among people (Wirth 1938: 22).” People initially lived together because of their close spatial proximity to one another. This close proximity then led to a community being formed based on the common bonds that form through the hardships or happiness that people experience while
living together. Also, living in close proximity led people to be dependent on one another. This interdependence further cemented these bonds among the people (Smith 1980: 3).

Another theorist, Joseph Gusfield, helped distinguish between two major uses of the term community (Madanipour 2003: 60). First, he depicts community in its spatial sense—a territory or geographical location that brings people together. Examples of this include the neighborhood, town, or city. Second, he stresses the relational component that community brings with it. This component is concerned with the relationship between people, without reference to their location. A combination of these two ideas can help us build a holistic understanding of community. There is great overlap between the two, as both geographical proximity and social relations are important aspects of a community (Macmillan and Chavis 1986: 9).

Psychologists David Macmillan and David Chavis write about and try to define a sense of community in their paper published in 1986. In this paper, they propose four criteria that the definition and theory of a sense of community should achieve (Macmillan and Chavis 1986: 10). These four criteria are sound and I would like to build on them to develop a more nuanced understanding of community. First, the definition of community needs to be “explicit and clear.” Second, it should be “concrete, its parts identifiable.” Third, it needs to “represent the warmth and intimacy implicit in the term.” Last, it needs to provide a “dynamic description of the development and maintenance of the experience (Macmillan and Chavis 1986: 15).” I will now attempt to meet these four criteria as I define community.
We can divide the term community into four parts. The first part is membership. This is the feeling of belonging among people, or sharing a sense of personal and intimate relatedness. The second element is influence. This is the sense of recognition that people gain, a sense that they matter to others and that their presence can make a difference to others. The third part is reinforcement, which involves the idea of people integrating into a group and being able to fulfil their needs by being a part of this group. The final part and element that helps complete this definition of community is emotional connection. This refers to the belief that members of the group will have a shared history, or will share history, common places, time, and similar experiences together. Putting these four parts of community together, we define a sense of community as a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group as a whole, where their needs and desires can be met, and where people can have a sense of belonging and shared heritage (Macmillan and Chavis 1986: 15). This also ties in nicely with the four criteria that Macmillan and Chavis helped us establish earlier. In the next section, I first delve deeper into public spaces to better understand their function and effect on people. I will then combine these two ideas of community and public space and attempt to evaluate the role public space plays in building community in a city.

**Public Space**

Public spaces have been a staple in the urban fabric for a long time. The first instance of public spaces can be traced back 4000 years, to the Mesopotamian cities in 2000 B.C., where we find a form of public space in the central marketplace.
(Mumford 1961: 5). In Ancient Greece, the main temple was usually situated in the middle of the city and served as the nucleus of the Greek town, where a large volume of human traffic would flow through. Mumford states that the purpose of the marketplaces and temples of the past was to provide a figurative platform, a literal space—for people to get together on a daily basis to communicate—either formally, for transaction purposes, or informally (Mumford 1961: 7). The fundamental function of the public space has not changed to this day.

Before we delve further into the importance of public spaces in urban design, we first have to define public spaces. Ali Madanipour provides one definition, stating that the public spaces of cities can be described as places outside the boundaries of individual or small group control. Public spaces are “multi-purpose, accessible spaces distinguishable from, and mediating between demarcated exclusive territories of households and individuals (Madanipour 2003: 117).” These spaces are considered public if they have been both provided and managed by public authorities, include the population of the city as a whole, are open or available to everyone, and are being used or shared by all members of a community (Madanipour 2003: 117). Another definition, posited by Carr, et al., defines public spaces as an “open, publicly accessible place where people go for group or individual activities (Carr et al. 1992: 5).” From these two definitions, we see that public spaces are generally spaces accessible to all, where people can go to interact and enjoy activities. This definition has been left broad to allow it to be inclusive—public spaces can mean different things in different cultures, as will be elaborated on later in this section.
Therefore, as seen from the definition, public spaces can act as a catalyst for social interactions, providing people with greater access to interaction with other people. The streets, atriums, playgrounds, and parks in a city provide a platform for human exchange. Public spaces are a means through which people communicate, and provide an accessible space for people to relax and play after a day’s hard work. They provide a juxtaposition to the more defined roles that work, school, and home life give us. Therefore, public spaces satisfy certain basic human needs, help memorialize special cultural meaning, and provide people with a means to reminisce about the good times that they have had together in the space (Carr et al. 1992: 3).

As mentioned earlier, it is important to note that not all public spaces hold this same meaning. Different countries and cities can and will usually place different levels of importance on public spaces. The Latin cultures of Southern Europe used to adorn their public spaces with shows of wealth and power. We see that in their lavish and pristine palaces, churches, and town halls that line the streets, in view for all to see. In contrast, North African Muslim cultures had limited public spaces, and the few public spaces available were mainly simply-designed markets and shopping streets that catered to the everyday people and served a more functional need. North African Muslim cultures instead chose to express their riches and wealth in the more private domains of their homes, mosques, and madrassahs (Carr et al. 1992: 3). We see from these examples that public spaces hold different value in different cultures. However, planners have the ability to influence the degree of importance of public spaces through either making these spaces aesthetically pleasing, highly functional, or easy to access, and ideally, all three. It is thus still important to build and understand the
importance of public space in the building of a vibrant city, and the relationship between the physical environment and people living there (Carr 1992: 3).

Public spaces can be formed in two ways. First, as assumed in the earlier part of this section, public spaces nowadays are formed through a process of intentional planning by urban planners and policy-makers. However, some public spaces develop naturally. They do so usually through people using a certain location or place repeatedly in a particular way, or even a critical mass of people frequenting an area for a specific reason, such as to visit an attraction at that location. Over time, these unusual spots—be it the steps at the front of an office building, empty patches of grass, undeveloped land, or street corners—end up becoming spaces for people to meet and interact with one another (Carr 1992: 50).

However, these public spaces might not always be accessible to everyone. Their location might prevent people from having access. Therefore, the “decentralization” of public spaces—spreading out of public spaces throughout a city—can play an important role in solving this problem of access to public spaces. Here is where we see the formation of neighborhoods, especially in residential areas, playing an important role in forming their own hub of activity. Public spaces formed within these neighborhoods should facilitate interaction and integration and also provide a means to give the neighborhoods their own distinct flavor within the city. Neighborhoods can be used as a means to allow planners to break down the larger city and strategically place public spaces, and also allow planners to more easily manage large-scale city-planning projects (Tigran 2008: 118).
As seen above, public spaces vary in the way they are formed, and how accessible they are to people. They also vary in their types. The physical layout of a public space can determine and affect the type of activities people undertake in those areas. Some spaces, such as a small playground, can only accommodate one type of activity, while other spaces, such as large parks, can host a variety of different activities depending on the needs of the people and how they intend to use them.

Other than the physical space, the rules of the city can also play a role in determining the types of activities that can be undertaken in a certain space. A more autocratic country, like Singapore, has rules in place that limit activities in public spaces, such as rioting (Singapore Police Force). People need a special permit to protest, and this can only be done in one specific location in Singapore, called the speakers’ corner (Singapore Constitution).

Here is another example of the limited accessibility to public space in Singapore. Recently, a Singaporean high school student decided to use a public space as part of her final art project. She covered the steps on the twentieth floor of her public housing building in gold foil (Chew 2017).
Students final art project where she covered steps in gold foil. She was made to remove it by the Singaporean government.

Photos of her project were quick to circulate online and the town council for her area immediately released a statement saying that the “act was unauthorized under the town council’s by-laws (Chew 2017).” In Singapore, one needs a license before they can conduct any form of artistic endeavor in public spaces. The high school student then went on to state that "as an artist, I wonder why everything needs to be licensed. If I [had sought] permission, there wouldn't be a thrill in doing it; I need that adrenaline rush in my art-making process (Chew 2017)." She was made to remove her gold foil an obliged, although she did leave a small spot as an act of rebellion against this limited accessibility to engage with public spaces in Singapore.

This is an interesting example that highlights the limits to freedom of action in places like Singapore. Rules like these that limit or inhibit people from using public space create a sense of discomfort in people, and encourages them to move away
from these public spaces rather than use and engage with them. If a government wants its people to utilize public spaces, it needs to ensure that people feel at ease in them (Carr 1992: 154).

From this example, we see that one possible negative consequence of creating an overly-engineered space is that people in the more creative fields might feel that Singapore is not the right place to be, with all its restrictions hindering creative enterprise, as is the case right now with Singapore and its art scene (Chew 2017). As a result, people in these industries stop moving to Singapore or move away from Singapore. This causes Singapore to lose the innovative edge that allowed it to grow. The AT Kearney report illustrated in Chapter 1 has four components for computing future potential of cities—innovation, personal well-being, governance, and economics, with each of these four components given equal weight in the computation. It is interesting to note that even though Singapore does well in this ranking, Singapore falls very short on the innovation section, which could be an indication that illustrates how the overly-engineered process may harm its future potential, in terms of preventing people from coming up with new innovations and solutions to problems (AT Kearney 2016).

The Importance of Public Space in Building Community

Public spaces can have two main functions: First, to be aesthetically pleasing, and to have a monumental effect. “Iconic” spaces, like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, or Gardens by the Bay in Singapore, have this effect. The second function of public space is to facilitate social interactions and communication among people who
occupy that space. In this latter function, the space in itself can play an active part in facilitating the increased social relations among people (Madanipour 2003: 129). This can be achieved by several means, with one example being the availability of physical structures in these public spaces, such as benches for people to sit on. Benches can allow two strangers to sit together and have a conversation. Whether or not these two people have a conversation is not as important as the fact that the bench in itself is a means for facilitating and increasing the chance of such a conversation happening.

Public spaces are usually designed for a specific task or function in a city. However, they can transform into venues for many other, less pre-specified activities for the people living there. Social interactions among people need not be limited to formal settings, and do not need to be the main function of a public space. A marketplace, for example, can be used for a particular purpose in the afternoon, and then repurposed and used in a less restricted way at night, maybe for groups of people to gather, or even for festivities, such as those that take place in Singapore’s night markets (Madanipour 2003: 129). It is thus important to note that social encounters can take place anywhere, be it restaurants, bars, libraries, museums, beaches, theaters, etc. As long as the public space is a venue that facilitates interactions among people, there will be the possibility of increased social relations.

The growth of cities and increasing amounts of public spaces in a city brought with them increased opportunities for social relations to develop among people. While increased social relations are usually associated with positive feelings, they can also lead to an increase in both fear and anxiety. Increased social relations can be thought of as a double-edged sword for a city. On one side, it can lead to a greater
sense of isolation in people, but on the other, it can also generate a lot of energy and vibrancy within the city. These two contrasting feelings—anxiety and vibrancy—have been the hallmarks of the modern industrial city (Madanipour 2003: 155).

The physical landscape of a city plays an important role in determining its level of activity. Activity here refers to interactions between people living in the city. This is an important metric to think about when developing a model for a great city. Changes in the physical makeup of a city can thus lead to changes in the way activities are organized and arranged. An example I use to think about the relationship between the physical landscape and city activity is the amount of public space available. The intentional design and placement of public spaces allows for increased social interactions among a city’s inhabitants, from a simple greeting and smile to conversation about one’s life and family. A greater amount of public space available in a city can thus increase the likelihood of social interactions among people living there. We think about the amount of public space here as referring to both the number of discrete public spaces, the size of these public spaces, and their placement. Public spaces provide people with opportunities to disrupt the monotony of life. These are examples of the positive consequences that arise from public spaces. A small playground could as easily facilitate such dialogue—such as when two sets of parents engage in conversation while watching their children play—as would a large park or a shopping mall with a large central atrium.

Over time, public spaces have created a platform through which communities can support their needs, whether for any form of celebration, human interaction, or ritual, or a place to buy and sell food and other goods. A public space becomes the
symbol for the community and can acquire a special meaning through the functions it holds. The public spaces in a city thus become something that can hold deep meaning for people. An example is the marketplaces, that have long been a place where people engage in conversations and exchange information, especially in Asia. One example of this is the *Pasar Malam* or night market in Singapore. As people frequent the marketplace on a regular basis, they can interact with other people who also frequent the marketplace. This allows for a bond to form among the people living within a certain area. My mother has personally benefited from this arrangement of a marketplace close to our home. As she frequented the market, she got the opportunity to meet people—at first practically strangers—and formed bonds with them that have lasted until today. Some of these people remain my mother’s best friends.
Public places have enabled the social exchange of not only personal matters, but also political and communal issues as well. This allows for a better flow of information among people, and provides a means for people to have their voices heard. A critical mass of people voicing similar concerns can give these people a sense of validation. A public space provides the platform for people to gain this validation. This group solidarity might lead to people being less afraid to voice their concerns to the authorities in power. Even though there are vast differences in the forms communal lives take in different societies, public space can provide a means for an engaged public life, and plays an important part in the formation of the social groups that build a city (Carr 1992: 23).

With people moving around in massive numbers between different countries and cities, and from rural areas to metropolises, forming roots in an area will only continue to get tougher. The concept of a “home” will start to fade as people move to wherever the best opportunities are. Public spaces can allow people to develop this sense of rootedness, as an area that plays an important part in their lives. This can occur when the public space allows people the opportunity to take part in activities they like, and provides a space for people to engage, feel safe, and form deep connections with others. This sense of comfort can help develop a strong psychological connection between people and their environment. Public spaces can anchor people to a place in a number of ways, from growing up there, to having intimate experiences in the area, to special events that took place in that space. Continuous use of a space can also lead to a strong connection to it, and thus to that particular city or neighborhood. These connections to a space are also enhanced by
the presence of design features that once again provide anchors tying people to the place. For example, sacred or ceremominal places draw people together to fulfil and satisfy religious, cultural, or historical norms and can create symbolic connections to a site, and feelings of continuity, awe, and concern. Understanding how meanings are created can offer directions for design and management policies for public spaces (Carr 1992: 238).”

Forrest and Paxson state that public spaces play an important role in combining one’s public and private lives (Carr et al. 1992: 24). Studies have shown that, on average, even across cultures, a lack of public spaces in a city is correlated with increased degrees of isolation among residents. Lack of public spaces also reduces the likelihood of people helping and supporting one another (Carr et al. 1992: 24). Cities are starting to get more diverse with the increasing ease of migration, as more people are starting to move to cities for better opportunities, or be able to enjoy some of the amenities present in the city that meets their various demands. The importance of public spaces is only going to grow, as a platform for people from different backgrounds, cultures, and countries to meet and better understand one another. Ignorance breeds xenophobia, and public spaces can be a means to curb this. This facilitation begins to move into the interpersonal realm, which I will elaborate in Chapter 5.

I would like to end this section by summarizing the importance of public spaces and illustrating that public spaces form a large and critical part of a city—including things like sidewalks that urban planners and policy-makers do not really take into account. Urban planner Jan Gehl reiterates this importance of public spaces
and states that a great city is one where people want to go out of their homes (Gehl 2017). He goes on to explain the importance of public space, where all people have access to great libraries, parks, and other forms of spaces that make them want to get out and spend time in the city they are living in. Walking is the best means to get people outside. Being able to walk outside their houses or apartments to go to a nearby grocery store, or to take their children to a playground, is an important factor in determining a great city. Quality sidewalks in a city is an important way to encourage walking. As Gehl nicely sums it up, “just as a bird needs to fly, fish need to swim and deer need to run, we need to walk (Gehl 2017).” Even the sidewalks of a city form part of the public space. It is important that urban planners and policy-makers take note of even the smallest details when thinking about public spaces. Even these can have an effect on the people living in a city.

Public Space in Singapore: The Void Decks

The void deck is an open space that is typically found on the first floor of housing buildings in Singapore. The one usual staple at a void deck is the letter boxes, where residents can collect their mail. Additionally, there are some void decks with bakeries, doctors, or small grocery shops. Void decks also have seating and tables. Some of the tables have an built-in checkers or xiangqi\textsuperscript{17} boards on them for recreational use. The local Singaporean newspaper describes the void deck as “blank canvasses on which Singapore’s ethnic rainbow is painted, void decks host everything from weddings and funerals to romantic trysts and day-long checkers sessions that

\textsuperscript{17} Chinese chess
draw retirees from all ethnic groups (Rothman 2010).” It is useful to reiterate that all this happens in an empty space.

Open space at a void deck

Open space on the ground floor of a public housing estate
The void deck is no accident. It is an intentional policy enacted by the Singapore government as “part of Singapore's strictly enforced social policies aimed at ensuring harmony among the races in a region often torn by religious and ethnic strife (Rothman 2010).” This is a policy that Singaporean urban planners borrowed from Japanese architects, who called it the power of the architectural empty space (Schmidt 2008). This thesis will now elaborate on this peculiarly Singaporean concept of the void deck and the goals it aims to fulfil.

Before we begin, this thesis would like to provide a brief history and description of the unique public housing system in Singapore. In 1960, there was a housing crisis in Singapore. Only nine percent of Singaporeans lived in government flats, while many other people lived in unhygienic slums and crowded squatter settlements. After gaining independence in 1965, the Singapore government introduced the “Home Ownership for the People Scheme” to give Singaporeans a tangible asset to own, and improve the quality of public housing (Singapore HDB 2017).

Today, the public housing program in Singapore is managed by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), a government agency that is under the Ministry of National Development. Singaporeans have to buy these housing apartments from the government. However, the Singaporean government owns the land that these public housing buildings stand on. The land is leased to the people for either 99 or 999 years. After this time period, the government can reclaim the land, and thus by extension, the apartment. But before this lease is over, the individuals own the house. As Singapore has only been independent for 52 years, the government has not reclaimed
any of the public houses yet. It is to be seen as to whether the government will allow an extension of the lease or if they will reclaim the property (Singapore HDB 2017). I will allow time to answer this speculation.

These public houses, called HDB apartments—where a little over 80% of Singaporeans live—provide a platform for a shared living experience through the sharing of daily experiences in a common space, yet they are also diverse in many ways. The HDB has a housing quota that is broken up by race. To ensure that clusters of Chinese, Malay, or Indian people do not form, the HDB board has mandated that public housing estates have a certain percentage of Chinese, Malays, and Indians that mirrors the ethnic mix in Singapore. To further cement these percentage quotas, a Chinese family leasing a house under the Singapore rules can only sell or rent their house to another Chinese family (Singapore Ministry of National Development 2017).

Owing to the shared nature of living, with usually over 400 to 500 families living in an estate and where buildings can go up to 50-storeys high, HDB estates have events focused on community-building in these public housing spaces, to utilize and build on the bonds of living in close proximity to so many people. These events take place in the void decks. Some events—especially those organized by the town council of the estate—organize activities that focus on improving understanding between people of different backgrounds. This is important in Singapore, a city with a diverse and heterogeneous society. However, weddings and other events take place regularly at these void decks. It is a wonderful cultural experience to be able to attend Chinese, Malay, and Indian weddings over the span of a month without having to
travel away from the comforts of your neighborhood. Being able to attend these weddings in itself is a good way to learn about other cultures.

Creating shared living spaces with people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds has been crucial to promoting greater integration among different groups. Children living in the same area tend to go to the same neighborhood schools and thus form strong bonds from when they are young. They spend time learning together at school, and then return home to play soccer and “catch” on the void decks of their apartment blocks. These children will grow up with friends from different racial and religious backgrounds and this helps to erode racial and religious biases that may tend to arise if one lives in a more segregated society. Studies have shown that this kind of integrated reduces the amount of race and religious–hate crimes in a city (Bishop et al. 2004: 16). However, while these integrated societies are allowed to form organically, it is part of the Singapore governments efforts to enforce racial quotas in the public housing system, thus creating a scenario for inter-racial mingling to take place.

Nonetheless, it is important that these activities not solely focus on promoting inter-ethnic bonding. As Singapore’s permanent secretary of national development, Benny Lim, stated in an interview, when planning such activities, “we have to ask how we can get people to form real bonds of trust and friendship and cultivate reflexes for empathy and tolerance (Lim 2017).” Multi-ethnic participation should be one in a set of multiple desired outcomes.
Over the past 50 years since Singapore gained independence, its people have come to accept the ideal and value of ethnic harmony, as seen from census polls taken every year (Singapore Statistics Board). Lim goes on to say that:

However, I wonder if what undergirds this consensus is not radically different from why Singaporeans value the safe and secure low crime environment we have. Peace, safety, order and the danger of ethnic fault lines sparking tension and conflict are well appreciated by Singaporeans. If this is so, and our ethnic harmony rests mainly at this level of consensus alone, and is not both anchored by deep personal bonds of trust, mutual understanding and by a strong national identity, then we need perhaps to think about the strength and resilience of this ethnic harmony and reflect on its limits (Lim 2017).

With Singapore’s strong economic growth comes another problem—income inequality. Therefore, the challenges to social cohesion for Singapore will not only come from the cleavages in ethnicity, but also from class differences that have appeared over the years. Alleviating problems that emerge from class might be difficult to accomplish in these HDB estates, because the people from the upper-classes are the ones who do not live in these public houses.

Another fact that can become a problem is religious diversity in Singapore. Singapore has seen a rise in religiosity, including differentiation even within a religion, such as the division between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. This diversity of religious ideals has reduced the effectiveness of traditional religious leaders in acting as mediators in times of conflict. In Singapore, where the iron-fisted hand of the government still rules, the question remains as to whether government intervention is the best way to resolve community problems that arise from class or religious differences. On one hand, the state can play a role in addressing income inequality
and class cleavage through economic policy. Religious differences might require a different approach, and utilizing the estate space in HDB estates might be a good attempt to not only have cultural events but religious ones too. The challenge will not just be to manage competition between groups but more their demands against the state and society for concessions to their interests which they interpret as their fundamental rights (Lim 2017).

The question now remains—is such top-down enforcement good for a city? This has seemed to work well in the context of Singapore, where racial and religious riots were rampant in the 1960s and 1970s, but have all but disappeared since the 1990s (Bishop 2004: 25). However, can we transpose this same system to other countries and cities that have different forms of political structures? This is a difficult question to answer. Nonetheless, the lesson that we can learn from Singapore is that providing people with a platform for mingling and interactions among people, especially children, from different backgrounds is a good way to remove racial and religious biases before they start to take root.
Chapter 5: Intersection of the Private and Public Sphere

The previous two chapters went into detail describing and analyzing the two spheres of social organization—the private and public spheres. They then went on to provide specific examples that occur in these two spheres. The examples in the private sphere were overcrowding and the privacy of the home, while the examples in the public sphere talked about community building and public spaces in a city.

This chapter focuses on the intersection between these two spheres. First, it will elaborate on the boundaries that separate the two, and then delve into where the boundary lines start to blur, allowing for intersections between the two spheres. Next, it talks about the idea of the intersection between the two spheres as a form of interpersonal space—a realm where people can be personal in an impersonal space, or impersonal in a personal space (Madanipour 2003: 102). The examples of public transport and public libraries will be used to illustrate this idea. To end this chapter, this thesis brings up grassroots organizations in Singapore—called the residential committee centers. These are organizations formed by the government and located in every neighborhood district across Singapore. They provide the people with a platform to voice their opinions and try to affect changes in policies in Singapore. This is an interesting notion and this thesis argues that it breaks the boundaries between the private and public spheres, it is the interpersonal space that allows for meaningful conversation between people and the government.
Boundaries Between Spheres

An important notion that helps us think about the intersection between the private and public sphere is the boundaries, both physical and metaphorical, that lie between and separate these two spheres. These boundaries, which regulate the amount of exposure and concealment between spheres, play an important role in social relations in a city. According to the philosopher Thomas Nagel, “the boundary between what we reveal and what we do not, and some control over that boundary, are among the most important attributes of our humanity (Nagel 1998: 3).” While this might be seen as a broad statement, Nagel did pique my interest in boundaries and the role they play in social organization.

First, the boundary between the public and private sphere aims to fulfil two goals—first, it keeps disruptions out of the public sphere and, second, protects private life from the public gaze (Madanipour 2003: 60). Having a well-defined boundary between the public and private spheres give people a clear limit to what they can do. To give an exaggerated example to prove this point, a person would most likely not walk around in a public space with no clothes on, while one might do so in the space of their own room. This clear demarcation prevents disruptions from happening in the public sphere. It also gives people the freedom and safety to conduct such acts in the private sphere.

Next, we look at the construction of the boundary itself. The boundary can either be a physical or metaphorical element, and can signify different things. For example, a new housing estate that is developed on an open field establishes a series of physical boundaries through the walls and gates that enclose the housing estate. A
metaphorical boundary might be more difficult to conceptualize but is equally important in distinguishing between the two spheres. One idea that was mentioned in Chapter 3, the chapter on the private sphere, was the imaginary personal space bubble that encircles everyone. This is a metaphorical boundary that exists that demarcates between the private and public sphere for an individual (Madanipour 2003: 61).

When cities are built, urban planners and policy-makers essentially go through a boundary-setting exercise, where they implicitly set boundaries with different intentions and purposes. Boundaries are a means to divide space in a city and can also be used to reshape different parts of the city to fulfill different functions (Madanipour 2003: 61). These boundaries can change. Physical boundaries can be removed or added as and when necessary to fulfil the purpose that an urban planner or policy-maker intends for it. For example, the gate to a public park might be closed off if someone buys the land and decides to keep the land for their own use. The metaphorical boundary surrounding a person will adjust according to the situation they are in. In a crowded train, people might have to decrease their bubble in order to squeeze onto the train. Or while having an intimate conversation with someone, this bubble might decrease to allow the other person in, to better facilitate the conversation. Boundaries are an important aspect of our physical environment and provide individuals with a guide on how to act and behave, depending on the sphere they are in (Madanipour 2003: 68).

We start to see the intersection between the private and public spheres occurring when the lines of these boundaries start to blur. Once again, we go back to the dimensions of the private-public dichotomy postulated by Benn and Gauss to
better understand when the lines start to blur. As a reminder, the three dimensions are access, agency, and interest. When there is no clear notion of who has access, agency, or interest in a certain location, we see the lines between the two spheres start to blur. This ambiguity might cause unease in individuals in certain situations. There could be other situations where the broken boundaries might lead to meaningful conversations and newfound relationships. This is the interpersonal space that forms when boundaries start to blur. I will elaborate on this concept in the next section and use the example of public transport to illustrate my point.

**Interpersonal Space**

Madanipour brings up this idea of the interpersonal space where “meaningful (as well as instrumental) face-to-face social encounters” take place (Madanipour 2003: 110). He crafted this idea of the interpersonal space in response to the ambiguity in the very definition of both the private and public spheres. As seen in Chapters 3 and 4, the definitions of the private and public sphere cover large ground and this might be a cause for ambiguity. Context plays an important role in covering this ambiguity and determining the definition of the private and public spheres. The definition of the public sphere thus depends on how the private sphere is understood, and vice versa. Going back to the definitions proposed in the earlier part of this thesis, the private sphere can be understood as the personal realm, while the public sphere is the impersonal. However, Madanipour eloquently adds that:

Depending on the way the private realm is defined (mind, body, property, home), the public sphere finds a related but opposite meaning. If mind is the private realm, the outside world is the public. If the body is the private realm, the other bodies constitute the public. If private property is the private realm, what lies outside
private possession and control is the public. If the household is the private realm, the larger organizations and the rest of society is the public (Madanipour 2003: 113).

This adds a layer of complexity to our very definitions of the private and public spheres and allows us to broaden our understanding of social organization. Instead of the two spheres being a clear dichotomy, they can now be thought of as a spectrum.

I now look at how this interpersonal space manifests itself in society. One way is through communication between people. In the private sphere, communication between people takes place in a safe environment, one where people are able to voice their opinions without much fear of repercussion. However, in the private sphere, there is also a lack of opportunities to communicate with a large number of people. The set of people one has access to in one’s private sphere is small. It is usually limited to family and friends. On the other hand, the public sphere gives one access to a large group of people. This large group of people, however, are usually strangers, and there is no clear reason to engage in conversation with them. There is a lack of a safe space to engage in meaningful, deep, and insightful conversation between people. The interpersonal space allows us to fill this gap between the two spheres. It can provide society with a platform to engage in meaningful conversation with a larger pool of people.

The interpersonal space is also a realm for breaking metaphorical boundaries. The socio-economic class differences among people living in a city can be blurred through this interpersonal space. I depict this using the examples of public transport. Finally, this thesis will look at the use of interpersonal space as a platform for people to voice their opinions.
Public Transport

Transport is a means by which we can get around a city. Whether it be riding in a car, on a bicycle, taking a bus or the train, or even walking to one’s destination, the decision one makes on which mode of transport they choose is an intersection between the private and public sphere, to varying degrees. While driving a car seems like it belongs in the private sphere, there are instances where people interact with others, whether intentionally or not. For example, incidents that lead to road rage, which can affect a person’s quality of life, occur in the public sphere, as they involve interaction with other drivers on the road. Traveling on the public train system seems like a person straying solely into the public sphere. However, as we have seen from the definition of the private sphere, we do usually indeed remain in our personal space bubble while on a train, giving us the space to listen to music on headphones or read a book. Therefore, transport in general is an example that involves the interaction between the private and public spheres for an individual. However, in this section, I will focus on public transport, including walking, as the intersection between the private and public spheres. Public transport is a better representation of the blurring boundaries between both the two spheres and socio-economic class.

Before going on to elaborate on the example of public transport, it is important to think about the decisions urban planners and policy-makers make when developing transport infrastructure. Where a city chooses to invest in transportation infrastructure is also reflective of what it values. Does a city choose to invest in building safe bicycle routes to children’s schools, or more sprawling highways that can increase the rate of pollution but also reduce travel time between places? How an
urban environment is planned, designed and constructed greatly influences how we live, get around, behave and interact. Enrique Peñalosa explains that the infrastructure choices our society makes not only shape what we value, but how we function as people. He states

A city speaks, a city creates behavior. We want people to be able to leave their cars at home. In Holland a political decision was made to support bicycle infrastructure. It is done little by little. In Japan 30% of people who arrive at a train station arrive by bicycle. To have a safe bicycle route is a right; governments have to take a risk, show leadership and do the uncomfortable thing to invest in the necessary infrastructure (Peñalosa 2009).

In the future, bicycles will continue to become increasingly important. Bicycle use is a great symbol of equality. Someone on a $100 bike and in a $10,000 car are equal in the street in the sense that a cyclist has as much right to use the road space as a car does. This statement is a generalization but the number of cities that this statement applies to is only going to increase, as more cities start to see the benefits of bicycles on the road and thus start investing in the infrastructure to make it more convenient for cyclists. There is a three-fold benefit to substituting bicycles for cars. First, there is tremendous potential for monetary savings. Second, the use of bicycles can lead to a decrease in the amount of pollution in a city. Third, cycling doubles up as both a means of transport and also a form of exercise—it is a good use of time for people. Exercise increases the well-being of people in a city. Moving forward, cities should strongly think about encouraging cycling. Cities should be designed to accommodate people, and not just cars.

There are many cities that already encourage this. Copenhagen and Amsterdam are two that have recently been ranked as the top two most bicycle
friendly cities in the world, according to the Copenhagen Design Company Index (Copenhagenize 2017). Singapore is still catching up in this regard; therefore, I will not spend time focusing on Singapore and bicycles. However, the next section will look at public transport as a whole, specifically the train system, and use Singapore’s example to think about how a robust public transport network can benefit a city.

**Public Transport in Singapore**

Can people get around a city easily without owning a car? That is one key question that people and organizations ask when trying to answer the question of whether a city has a world-class public transportation system. Looking at the example of Singapore might provide some answers. Many would say that in Singapore, the answer to that question is yes—people can get around the city easily without owning a car. With the lack of space in Singapore, the government has to ensure that overcrowding on the roads does not occur. One easy fix for that is to have a world-class public transport system and to place extremely high taxes on cars (Lee 2000: 131). These two measures combined dis-incentivize people living in Singapore from buying cars. The Singaporean government has placed a strong emphasis on building infrastructure for public transport since the 1970s, and this has resulted in a robust network of train lines that span the city.

It is important that public transport in Singapore be constantly improved, as a high standard of transport enhances the quality of life, is good for economic growth and helps the city maintain a competitive edge over others (Singapore Land Transport Authority 1996: 14). Transport is not an end in itself but is a means to support the
many other aspects of economic and social life in a city. It is a link upon which the
efficiency and attractiveness of many of these activities depend. There is little point in
having wonderful amenities in the center of the city if the roads leading up to them
are heavily congested. Therefore, an important goal is to provide commuters with a
wide spectrum of transport choice, depending on what they value most (where they
usually have the choice between time and money). The range and quality of services
must be broad enough with sufficient differentiation to suit the individual’s
preferences.

In Singapore, the train system, called the mass rapid transit (MRT) system,
plays an important role in providing commuters with a quick and easily accessible
option to get into the city center and other major hubs around the city. The exhibits in
Exhibits 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 detail the growth of the MRT network in Singapore over the
past 12 years, and illustrates the plans for further expansion in the near future. As
seen in the exhibits, we note that the MRT system has grown to accommodate people
living on the edges of the city, while also concentrating on the city center. This is
important, as it is usually the railway system that can meet the increased demand that
comes with population growth while maintaining high travel speeds and the
predictability of consistent arrival and departure times (Singapore Mass Rapid Transit
2017). This is why cities are dependent on railway systems even though it is usually a
more expensive option than buses, owing to the need to build and maintain expensive
infrastructure. This rapid development shows a conscious effort to increase the
infrastructure of the public transport system and provides incentives for more people
to take the trains, as now people from further east or west have access to trains. The
trains also stop at almost every major hub in Singapore and have very short wait times—from as little as one minute during peak periods, to about seven minutes in non-peak periods. A world-class public transport system plays an important role in helping a city work well and provides people with a convenient way to get to work, the grocery store, or to the various amenities to enjoy their weekend.

Exhibit 1: Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Map: Singapore 2005

Exhibit 2: MRT Map: Singapore 2015
Owing to the high prices of cars, high road taxes, and the efficient MRT system, many people travel by the MRT. The MRT system in Singapore is a great societal leveler—people across all socio-economic classes travel on the MRT. This successfully breaks the boundaries that place people in most other cities in the private sphere of their cars.

There are approximately ten train stations (and growing) in Singapore that are hubs (Singapore Mass Rapid Transport 2017). These stations are large and are built into malls and open public spaces. They provide event spaces, with a large flow of human traffic through them. Some events that take place in these spaces range from open shop sales and high school dance competitions to social campaigns (such as the no-smoking campaign in Singapore). With these events, the supposed impersonal public spaces transform into spaces for interpersonal mingling. Some of these events create avenues for people to strike up conversations with others, through group activities and quizzes. These come with the chance of winning small prizes such as gift vouchers—a small cost that helps build rapport among people who would not otherwise have engaged in conversation. The MRT system in Singapore has provided
a platform to break the boundaries between the private and public spheres, and provides individuals with an avenue to engage in interpersonal dialogue with others. The spaces in the hub MRT stations allow for organic development of communication between people.

This is a unique model that works well in Singapore. Other cities might not be able to transpose this model wholesale to fit their needs. Nonetheless, it might be useful for governments and cities to invest in hub spaces in train stations because train stations provide a great source of human traffic. Through partnering with the correct organizations and with a little bit of work in event planning, cities can use this platform to allow citizens to engage with one another in an organic and meaningful way.

Capturing Both Private and Public Spheres: A Citizen-Driven Process

In this final section, I want to unpack the idea of how grassroots organizations can affect the citizens of a city. Toward the end of the twentieth century, governments around the world—in both developed and developing nations—tended toward building more inclusive cities. They started to take into account environmental and lifestyle concerns when thinking about urban design. This has led to an increase in the standard of living for people in the city. This activity falls under the intersection of the private and public sphere, because it takes into account both the private and the public spheres in the development of the city—the private spaces of a meaningful conversation between two people in the public domain.
In more developed countries, citizens play an important role in determining the urban design of their cities. Most democratically-led countries allow citizens to voice their concerns through voting for the leader who best fulfils their needs. This can be done on a more direct level—at the city or municipal level. As Henderson and Wang argue, increased democratization allows for election of regional representation at the national level (Henderson and Wang 2006: 284). This greater decentralization gives more autonomy to the cities, and provides locals with an opportunity to have their say in the way issues are dealt with in their city. This decentralization allows for national resources to be spread across cities in a country, rather than resources being concentrated in the capital or financial hubs (Henderson and Wang 2008: 284).

Citizens play an important role if this grassroots-led approach is to work effectively, specifically to have a positive impact on the urban design of a city. Citizens are the ones who interact the most with and frequent spaces and activities. Getting the citizens directly involved in the city building process allows for an increased awareness of the private and public spheres that urban planners and policymakers might miss.

Citizens are thus naturally the best people to advocate for change and help develop their city. Their insight has to be passed on to the city planners, architects, and policymakers to ensure the changes made to the city meet the ever-changing needs of the people. The foresight and clarity with which citizens portray their concerns to the people making the changes to the city are important in determining the problems and finding solutions to fix these problems.
The political institutions of a country play an important role in endorsing, prompting, and encouraging such thinking. As mentioned earlier, a democratically-led country can go about this process by looking at how people vote. More votes for a local candidate who focuses on transport policy against another candidate who places emphasis on housing will show where the people’s priorities lie. However, the problem with this is that the people themselves might not be politically mature enough or have enough information to make a holistic assessment of the city situation. This could have a negative impact on the long-term planning of the city.

On the other hand, a centrally planned government would not get as much input from its citizens. However, a centrally planned government that is well managed with strong leadership might be better placed to look at the long-term benefits of the city and plan accordingly. Many countries in Asia fall under this category, especially the Asian Tiger nations of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. These countries focused on the importance of economic growth, and planned their urban development in accordance with the growing demands of the economy.

However, overly-engineered spaces might not be very human friendly. The very thing that makes the city work well might make it a less attractive place to live. These spaces could decrease the vibrancy of the city—as the government tries to “force” culture, vibrancy, and community living on the people. The very criteria used to develop the model city that Singapore is could lead to the design of soul-less, sterile cities. Cities could get too large, too cramped, and too engineered. Therefore, it is important to take into account the voice of the people (Betsky 2016).
Residential Committee System in Singapore

The government of Singapore has attempted to take the voice of the people into account. Since Singapore’s independence in the 1960s, the government has instituted the residential committee (RC) system, which was established in all residential areas throughout the country. This system provided a platform for the people living in those areas to voice their concerns—both for the area and the country in general. This system is still in place today. Its critics have argued that this is just a means for the government to appease the people and give them the illusion of having a voice.

Lee Kuan Yew believed, in as early as the 1960’s, that to successfully build Singapore as a nation, everyone had to feel involved, and that everyone had a stake in nation-building (one can argue that he did this to create the feeling that one had a stake in nation-building, even if they did not actually have any real stake in making changes to affect the future of Singapore). Since then, grassroots organizations, or these residential committee systems, have fulfilled this role of giving everyone a stake and a voice in nation-building. The organizational networks in Singapore were created by the state to shape local community leadership as well as provide feedback to the government regarding the citizenry’s responses to policies that have generally been initiated in a highly centralized and top-down manner.

Residential committees are established in all neighborhoods across Singapore. There is a building or an office designated for RC activities, and they are given a fund to get people together through organizing events and activities. These events aim to
either build community within a neighborhood or provide people with a structured platform to voice their opinions on issues they face. The RCs are run by committees of members who are elected by the residents of that neighborhood. These members work together with the People’s Action Party (PAP), the political party in power right now in Singapore, and act as a liaison between the residents and the political party.

By organizing these events and activities, they are creating interpersonal spaces—spaces in the public realm that facilitate meaningful and insightful conversation between people. This is important for a place like Singapore, and is a lesson that can be transposed to other, larger developing countries. This decentralization of communication channels is a good way for the government to learn more about the issues that people face in a city.
Conclusion

In this thesis, I first look at why it is important to study cities. The population explosion that has taken place in the past fifty years has led to many people moving from rural areas and into cities. Technological advances in transport have also meant that people are now able to move within a country and between countries with greater ease. Governments and policy-makers thus have to contend with two opposing forces that come with these changes—trying to make the city more enticing and a better place to live, while at the same time trying to overcome problems such as overcrowding and pollution that might come with it.

I then go on to look at what others have done to think about these issues that cities face. Many international organizations have come up with annual indexes that rank cities based on a range of factors. They look at how livable a city is for people. However, an index cannot perfectly capture the infinite needs and preferences of individuals who live in a given urban area. I also noticed that these indexes very vaguely describe the relationship between the physical environment of a city and how that effects the people who live there—the social organization of the city—or in some cases, totally ignore this social element altogether. This thesis thus aims to develop tools to allow us to better understand this relationship between the physical environment and its impact on an individual, and find a means to evaluate it.

Thinking about cities involves putting together pieces from many different areas. Sociology, economics, psychology, geography, architecture, and many other disciplines all play a role in urban planning. However, there is usually no theoretical inter-mingling between these disciplines when a policy-maker tries to postulate new
ideas on urban planning issues. Therefore, this thesis has aimed to provide a multi-faceted theoretical approach and framework through which we can think about and evaluate cities. Specifically, I used theories from urban planning, social psychology, sociology, and economics to build this framework, as theories from these four disciplines allow us to best understand the social aspect of people living in a city.

As seen from this thesis, an individual’s social sphere can be broken up into three main elements—the private sphere, public sphere, and the intersection between the two. These three elements represent the personal, impersonal, and interpersonal facets of one’s life, respectively. The examples of overcrowding and the home were used to depict the private sphere. For the public sphere, the examples of public spaces and community-building were used. Last, for the intersection between these two spheres, this thesis looked at public transport and residential grassroots committees.

Overcrowding in a city can infringe on the private sphere of an individual’s life in many ways. Some of the important facets of this include decreased amounts of personal space in public parks and transport, increased rates of crime in a city, and possible segregation in communities. These are changes in the physical environment that affect the personal well-being of people living in a city. The home is an interesting and complex element of the private sphere. The physical structures of the home help demarcate between the private and semi-private aspects of the home. With the changes in social structures that are occurring across the globe, as more countries are started to liberalize their economies, an increase in people’s individualization is seen. The home is a space that epitomizes an individual’s private sphere, whose aim is to allow people to self-reflect and relax in the confines of a comfortable space.
However, with this increase in individualization, people are now starting to move away from communication via human interaction and rather toward technology such as phones and laptops. This has led to an increase in the quantity of communication but a lack of quality in the communications, which in turn has led the private sphere of one’s personal room to be transformed into a space where one engages, no longer in self-reflection and relaxation, but rather they now utilize that space for continued electronic communication and other activities. This leads to increased feelings of isolation among people, once again reducing the quality of life.

In the public sphere, public spaces and the effects they have on individuals living in a city are examined. This thesis also moved on to differentiate between the public sphere and public spaces. While the public sphere incorporates both the physical and metaphorical aspects of an individual’s public life, public space are just the physical manifestations of locations that are public in nature. This thesis then goes on to look at how public spaces—when intentionally planned—can build community. Building community in a city provides people with a sense of rootedness there. The building of park benches, public libraries, and other forms of spatial planning—while taking into account social aspects—can play an important role in increasing interactions among people.

Last, this thesis looked at public transport in a city and how that encompasses the intersection of the private and public spheres of an individual’s life. While commuting on a public platform, an individual is engaged in their own private activity. Tying these examples back to the indexes enables a better understanding of what is missing from them. This also provides a more holistic means of determining
how urban planners and policy-makers can think about social aspects when planning the physical structures of a city.

This thesis analyzed various aspects of the city. For future research, it will be useful to think about the factors that these indexes can measure to better account for the social aspects of a city. For the private sphere, we learn that personal well-being involves being able to manage the amount of overcrowding. This is important and affects multiple layers: First, it might be useful for cities to find a uniform and more accurate means to measure population density not just within a country, but across the globe. Undertaking this task will provide better data to analyze trends and correlations between population density and how well a city works. It allows for a more robust method in evaluating the two opposing forces that urban planners and policymakers have to struggle with when thinking about planning a city—making a city more attractive and preventing overcrowding.

Urban planners and policymakers might also want to include a means to measure well-being in terms of average commute time and possibly even space per person, and compare this across various cities. This will create a benchmark that cities can use to compete with one another. Too much overcrowding on roads or on public transport can increase frustration, hinder productivity, and in general decrease quality of life. A good example is Singapore’s Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) system that charges taxes to people who want to drive through certain busy streets during peak periods. In Singapore, this has decreased congestion on roads and allowed for quicker commute times. This works in Singapore owing to their strong public
transport system—and is a model for other developing nations if they have the infrastructure and resources to support it.

Attempting to implement factors that evaluate a person’s home can be difficult. One possible measure would be to look at the availability of homes. Having a home is a vital aspect of the private sphere. None of the indexes take homeless rates in a city into account, and this can be another measure to include, to add a social element to future indexes.

Many factors in the indexes focus on the public sphere. Spending on infrastructure, hard-connectivity, and other factors take into account the visible, tangible aspects of the public sphere. However, they do not take into much consideration the social aspects of the public sphere and how the physical environment can affect the lives of individuals living in a city. How can we create public spaces that allow for greater community? One thing that these indexes should seek to measure is the amount of park space there is, relative to the size (population) of a city. To take this measure even further, organizations could build a spatial index, to take into account both amount of park space, as well as concentration of park spaces in a city. A city with greater and less concentrated park space would score higher on the index. This spatial index can be created for any other form of public space that a city deems important, as a means to evaluate public space in the city and its impact on social activity.

Another possible factor that organizations can adopt to measure the social impact of public spaces is to collect data on the number of seat benches, seating opportunities, and other physical structures that facilitate conversations between
people. They can possibly collect this as a ratio of park benches to amount of free space in a city. In addition, organizations can also collect data on spaces that host activities, festivals, and events that encourage community-building in a city or neighborhood, and the number of times these occur in a year.

To evaluate the intersection between the two spheres, we can look at public transport infrastructure. One possible measure that indexes can take into account is the number of station hubs there are per square mile of a city. The indexes can also take into account the concentration of these hubs—are they spread around this city or concentrated in the center? Once again, creating a spatial index might be a good way of measuring the effectiveness of the public transport system and how it affects the social aspects of individuals living in a city. To evaluate citizen engagement and voice, we can look at the number of grassroots organizations there are in a city, how effective these grassroots organizations are, the number of events they put up, and the number of people involved with them. There are many other factors that we can look at to gain a more well-rounded index. However, the above-mentioned factors are a good start to the process of taking proper account of the social organization of a city, and how planning can directly affect the individuals living in it.

Using Singapore as a case study allowed us to tie in the theory with an example. While most of these theories were gathered from western influences, we see that policymakers and urban planners in Singapore take the lessons from these theories and fit them to meet its contextual needs. But the question still remains as to whether this can fit the needs of other developing countries that may not have the unique circumstances—such as the aligned government structure and wealth—
Singapore has, as well as other factors such as its small size and stroke of fortune (or misfortune) of a heavy-handed leader who meticulously went about planning the city and growing its economy. Singapore is also a good example because the government went to the extent of engineering social aspects of city-building into its plans. As seen from the void decks as community spaces, the abundance of public parks, and the robust public transport system, the government has done a good job of incorporating this social element into the planning of the city. However, we have started to notice the initial cracks that an overly-engineered environment can have on its people. The example of the art student being made to remove her art work from a public space shows that the government still has a heavy hand in controlling all aspects of social life. This infringes on both the private and public spheres. How can we think about improving this problem of an overly engaged government? And is it a bad thing that the individuals living in a city trade some civil liberties for stability and wealth? That is another potential topic for further research.

As societies around the world continue to change, the answer to the question, “what makes for a great city?” will change with it. However, Walt Whitman’s poem aptly entitled Great City might have in it some timeless vision as to the factors that make for a great city. He starts the poem with the following stanza that states:

*The place where a great city stands is not the place of stretch’d wharves, docks, manufactures, deposits of produce merely,*  
*Nor the place of ceaseless salutes of new-comers or the anchor-lifters of the departing,*  
*Nor the place of the tallest and costliest buildings or shops selling goods from the rest of the earth*  
*Nor the place of the best libraries and schools, nor the place where money is plenteest,*  
*Nor the place of the most numerous population.*
The great city is not one with the best production engines, or the largest buildings. As this thesis has illustrated, the great city is one that proves itself on a holistic scale, and takes into account both the tangible aspects, and also the intangible—the aspects of a city that cannot be literally seen. It is the pulse of a city, the effects of a city that take into account the social wellbeing of its people. Whitman appears to agree with this, and to conclude this thesis with lines from the last stanza of his poem seems only apt:

*Where the citizen is always the head and ideal, and President, Mayor, Governor and what not, are agents for pay, …*
*There the great city stands*

(Whitman 1861)

Indeed, there the great city stands.
Research Bibliography


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