

The impact of private-led densification on public space Exclusion through governance?

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Planners worldwide are faced with the challenge to densify the existing built environment, while maintaining livability and environmental quality. The provision of high-quality, open, and accessible outdoor spaces is a crucial aspect for solving this puzzle, acknowledged as such by public policy and planning regulations. However, in the context of neoliberal planning and New Public Management, the provision of public goods is increasingly transferred towards the private sector (Gerber, 2016; van den Hurk & Tasan-Kok, 2020). In the case of inner-city developments, the task to provide outdoor spaces, including public and green spaces, is often left to the private developer. However, in the urban context the private provision of local public goods tends to result in clubification (Webster & Lai, 2003), by which these goods are developed for those able or willing to pay a fee for its management and maintenance, such as through rents or condominium fees. Being so, the provision of outdoor spaces by private actors within inner-city developments leads to growing exclusion and privatization in cities, as these spaces are developed for a limited group of users rather than the public collective. Nonetheless, based on a neo-institutionalist approach (Gerber, Knoepfel, Nahrath, & Varone, 2009) we argue that local planning authorities have various instruments at hand to prevent clubification in privately-developed projects. Based on empirical data collected through case-studies in Biel (Switzerland) and Utrecht (the Netherlands), we analyze to what extent the conditions of governance contribute or not to the development of publicly-accessible and high-quality outdoor spaces in densification contexts. While clubification is an attractive solution for private developers to ensure quality - and therefore profitability - of the development, the active and strategic role of planning authorities throughout the planning and negotiation process is crucial to ensure that densification leads to more livable and inclusive urban spaces.

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