

Article

Not peer-reviewed version

The Dynamic Mutuality of Public Space and Civic Culture: In Case of Casa Del Prado in Balboa Park

[Hong Zheng](#) *

Posted Date: 28 November 2024

doi: 10.20944/preprints202411.2180.v1

Keywords: Public Space; Civic Culture; Casa del Prado; Space Ballet; Place Attachment



Preprints.org is a free multidisciplinary platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This open access article is published under a Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license, which permit the free download, distribution, and reuse, provided that the author and preprint are cited in any reuse.

Article

The Dynamic Mutuality of Public Space and Civic Culture: In Case of Casa Del Prado in Balboa Park

Zheng Hong

Department of Political Science, China University of Political Science and Law, 2, No. 25, Xitucheng Road, Haidian District, Beijing, China, 100088. E-mail: zhh77_6@hotmail.com

Abstract: This study investigates the dynamic relationship between public space and civic culture, using Casa Del Prado in San Diego's Balboa Park as a case study to illustrate how public spaces shape—and are shaped by—civic values, identity, and practices. By framing public spaces as active contributors to sustainable urban life, the research demonstrates how Casa Del Prado, through its architecture, multifunctional design, and inclusive management, embodies San Diego's cultural heritage while fostering civic values of social responsibility, community engagement, and equity. The study explores the reciprocal influence between civic culture and the sustainable development and management of public spaces, highlighting three main aspects: the connection between historical heritage and contemporary identity, the role of public spaces in promoting civic values sustainably, and the management complexities of multifunctional spaces that balance community access with economic sustainability. Grounded in concepts from environmental psychology and political science, the study further analyzes the mechanisms supporting this dynamic relationship, using the concept of "place ballet" to illustrate how routine activities foster place attachment and strengthen civic engagement. Findings indicate that public space management can reinforce a resilient civic culture, providing a model for future urban development initiatives that aim to align community well-being with sustainable practices.

Keywords: Public Space; Civic Culture; Casa del Prado; Space Ballet; Place Attachment

1. Introduction

This article centers on the reciprocal relationship between public space and civic culture, with Casa Del Prado serving as a detailed case study. The research posits that these relationships are inherently dynamic, supported by three core findings identified within Casa Del Prado's context: the bridging of historical and contemporary elements, the cultivation of youth culture and civic values, and the representation of public management's complexities within a democratic framework. Additionally, through the lenses of environmental psychology and political science, the study examines the mechanisms underlying this dynamic interaction. These dynamic mechanisms fundamentally reveals the sustainability of urban public space development.

The original contributions of this study include grounding civic culture within physical public spaces, demonstrating how civic values influence space management, and showing how thoughtful design can enhance social interactions. The study holds both theoretical significance—advancing civic culture and spatial justice theories by examining their manifestation in real-world settings, and practical significance by offering insights for policymakers on managing public spaces as inclusive, vibrant sites that nurture a resilient civic environment.

2. Literature Review

The exploration of public space and civic culture spans a wide range of academic disciplines, including political theory, sociology, and urban planning. While existing literature provides significant insights into the nature and function of public spaces, the study of Casa Del Prado offers a unique perspective by bridging historical symbolism, practical functionality, and the challenges of

public management and then puts forward the dynamic mutuality between the public space and civic culture. This comprehensive approach and the findings about the dynamic mechanism distinguish it from prior studies.

The general view that space is not merely a container is common among scholars. Space plays an important role in social life. But how exactly does space function? Many academic contributions have explored this concept. Here, the literature view is organized by the themes related with this study.

First. Conceptualizing Public Space. Public space is viewed in academic discourse as more than a physical location; it is socially constructed and embedded with cultural and political meanings. Jürgen Habermas, in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), and Hannah Arendt, in *The Human Condition* (1958), emphasize the symbolic and political nature of public spaces as arenas for collective discourse and democratic engagement. Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space* (1974), extends this idea from a Marxist perspective, arguing that public spaces are produced and reproduced through complex social, political, and economic forces, forming spaces where power are enacted.

Urban planners, such as Jane Jacobs in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Jan Gehl in *Life Between Buildings* (1971), focus on the functional aspects, arguing that well-designed public spaces facilitate social interactions and promote community cohesion. Jacobs' notion of "eyes on the street" underlines the role of public presence in sustaining civic vitality. These functional views are critical but often do not integrate symbolic and historical considerations. While previous works either emphasize the metaphysical functions in political philosophy or the practical utility of public spaces, this study aims to merge these aspects. This dual focus on both symbolic and practical dimensions adds depth to the understanding of how public spaces function in real-world contexts.

Second. Illustrating the concept of civic culture. As introduced by Gabriel Almond in *The Civic Culture* (1963), 'civic culture' highlights the importance of balanced participation, trust in institutions, and civic engagement for democratic stability. Robert Putnam extends this through his studies in *Making Democracy Work* (1994) and *Bowling Alone* (2001), connecting civic culture with social capital and showing that communal activities strengthen democratic governance by building trust and social bonds. This study aligns with these foundational ideas but contributes uniquely by illustrating how public space acts as a tangible platform where civic culture is both expressed and reinforced. Unlike prior works that focus abstractly on civic values and participation, this study analyzes how the smart space designs increase the social interactions and grounds the concept in a physical location where civic interactions are nurtured through youth programs and community activities.

Third. Multifunctionality and challenges. The multifunctional nature of public spaces is a common theme in the literature. Jane Jacobs advocates for diverse uses of public spaces to create vibrant communities. Meanwhile, scholars like Setha Low, in *On the Plaza* (2000), and Don Mitchell, in *The Right to the City* (2003), highlight the exclusionary risks inherent in public space management, where power dynamics may lead to unequal access. This study differs from traditional critiques by showcasing a practical example of how multifunctional space is managed to balance inclusivity and economic sustainability. The paper's discussion of Casa Del Prado's tiered fee structure exemplifies how policies can be designed to prioritize public and non-profit use while maintaining financial viability. This approach adds to the literature by providing a tangible model of spatial justice applied in urban management. Additionally, this study from the perspective of political science puts forward that the problems evoked by the multiple uses is normal and regular in democratic society.

The literature on public space and civic culture highlights three key areas: the conceptualization of public space, civic culture, and the challenges of multifunctional use. Casa Del Prado's study bridges symbolic and practical perspectives, showing how public spaces embody both historical identity and community interaction. It uniquely grounds civic culture in physical settings, illustrating how design enhances social engagement. Additionally, it offers a practical model of spatial justice by balancing inclusivity and economic viability, presenting conflicts from multiple uses as inherent to

democratic societies. This comprehensive approach distinguishes Casa Del Prado's study within the broader discourse.

3. Methodology and Research Design

The study uses the Casa Del Prado in San Diego's Balboa Park as its case due to its historical significance and multifunctional use as a public space. Data collection was multifaceted, including archival research at the San Diego History Center and participate observations of public use, complemented by in person visits and informal chats.

This study adopts a dual-structured research design to ensure a thorough exploration of the relationship between public space and civic culture. The design is characterized by two interwoven lines of inquiry. First, progressive analysis from exterior to interior. It begins with an architectural analysis, examining the Baroque façade and symbolic elements that embody the city's cultural identity and historical heritage. The focus then shifts to the interior spatial features, where spaces such as the enclosed courtyard and loggia are explored to understand how they are designed to promote social interaction and foster community engagement. Finally, the analysis delves into human activities and management, assessing how the building is used and managed by various groups, including youth programs and community stakeholders, to reveal its multifunctional role and practical significance. Second, ongoing discussion of the public space-civic culture relationship. Embedded within each analytical phase, the research consistently addresses the dynamic relationship between public space and civic culture. This involves assessing how the building's design and use influence civic identity, participation, and values, as well as how community practices shape the space in return.

These two intertwined lines of inquiry ensure the study's cohesiveness and depth. This approach adds a unique structural rigor to the research, showcasing the multifaceted interactions between space design, management, and civic engagement.

4. Findings

The study finds that public space and civic culture dynamically reinforce each other in the case of Casa Del Prado through an ongoing, reciprocal relationship. The building's Baroque design and historical symbolism embody San Diego's cultural identity, establishing a foundation for civic pride based on self-recognition. This symbolic role is actively sustained by the civic activities it hosts—such as youth programs that foster cooperation, responsibility, and social engagement—illustrating how the space itself nurtures civic values. Casa Del Prado's design elements, like the courtyard and loggia, enhance these interactions by providing spaces that naturally encourage social gathering and dialogue. Furthermore, the tiered fee structure prioritizes community use, embodying principles of spatial justice that align with civic values of inclusivity and access. This dynamic exchange is evident in the way the building's multifunctional uses, including as a nighttime shelter, engage diverse groups while challenging the space's adaptability. Ultimately, Casa Del Prado exemplifies how public space and civic culture co-evolve, with each continually shaping and enriching the other to foster a resilient and engaged civic environment.

4.1. Symbolism: Historical Narrative As The Expression Of Civic Culture

Balboa Park, celebrated for its 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition, serves as the cultural heart of downtown San Diego, designed in a blend of Spanish-Colonial and Mexican styles. If Balboa Park can be envisioned as an elegant lady with a rich historical taste, Casa del Prado at the entrance of Balboa Park, would be her intricately adorned head.

Architecturally, Casa del Prado stands as a masterpiece of Baroque style. Its elaborate façade encapsulates the history of San Diego. At the corner of El Prado and Village Place, the eastern façade presents a hierarchical sculptural group. At the base, a Spanish conquistador wearing a plumed caballero's hat is depicted. Above, five figures are arranged in three niches adorned with floral bases and a shell tympanum. The central niche holds a buxom female figure with two children—one

appearing to be Indigenous and the other Anglo-Saxon—symbolizing the contributions of both races to California's history. Together, they hold bunches of fruits, representing abundance. To the south stands a figure clad in a cuirass and shield, representing Spain, while the northern figure, holding a globe and cross, symbolizes Anglo-Saxon influence. Crowning this ensemble is a female figure, symbolizing religion. (Smith Julia, 1963, in-house materials of library of San Diego History Center). This façade reflects California's historical demographics—a population of Hispanic, Native American, and Anglo-Saxon heritage coexisting under the unifying influence of a common religious tradition. This symbolism suggests an early ideal of inclusiveness. [photo 1: The façade including the portraits of all the figures. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023. photo 2: The portraits in the middle of the façade. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023.]



Photo 1. The façade including the portraits of all the figures. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023.



Photo 2. The portraits in the middle of the façade. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023.

Across the building, the Baroque aesthetic continues, with pillars entwined in grapevines adorning the auditorium façade and entrance pavilions. The twin entrance pavilions, highly

ornamented, feature cherubs, crowns, urns, shields, olive leaves, grapes, and other fruits, motifs reflective of the agricultural significance of these crops, brought by the Spanish and rooted in local history. The loggia between the pavilions evokes the classic Mexican patio, on the lintel depicting six discs holding bound wheat, grapevines, and gourds, further anchoring the building in the region's agricultural past.

Both the fictional figures and tangible crops depicted in the architectural details narrate the city's history. Deyan Sudjic (2001) ever comments congress building as a physical manifestation of a society's traditions and aspirations, reflecting not only how a city remembers its past but also how it chooses to define itself for the future and express itself to the others. So does the Casa del Prado. It conveys a narrative of cultural hybridity and local heritage, embedding San Diego's identity in its historical and agricultural roots. This architectural self-awareness forms a crucial part of the city's civic culture, symbolizing how a community envisions its collective identity and legacy.

4.2. Smart Spatial Designs To Enhance Interaction

Casa del Prado offers a public space with high aesthetic appeal, incorporating smart design elements to accommodate and encourage a variety of activities. One of the standout features is the enclosed courtyard, located in the southern wing of the building. This hollow rectangular space, measuring 136 by 84 feet, includes a landscaped open courtyard, with first-floor rooms opening directly onto it and second-story rooms connecting to wrought-iron decorated balconies.

Added during the 1970s rebuild, this courtyard serves as a versatile venue for wedding ceremonies and Junior Theater shows. Its open design allows for multiple uses, providing a space that encourages both activity and interaction. Additionally, it offers excellent visibility, enabling guests to "see and be seen." Unlike traditional indoor theaters, the outdoor balcony offers a more relaxed atmosphere, with different perspectives that enhance the viewing experience, allowing for free body movement and relaxed socializing. [photo 3: The enclosed courtyard. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023.]



Photo 3. The enclosed courtyard. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023.

Another clever design is the long and arched loggia. This shaded walkway is perfectly suited to California's sunny climate, offering comfort for outdoor activities year-round. The loggia's design thoughtfully adapts to the local environment, creating a cool, comfortable space that acts as a 'transitional zone' between the indoor and outdoor areas, fostering a high potential for interactions. Japanese architect Tadao Ando(2012) believes that such transitional spaces promote what he refers to as 'spatial flow' — a fluid interaction between spaces that encourages movement and social activity. [photo 4: The arched loggia. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023.]



Photo 4. The arched loggia. Photographed by the author in Jan, 2023.

The third smart design element is the use of corridor corners to showcase historical relics, such as the apes not rebuilt in the 1970s, alongside walls displaying old photos that narrate the history of Casa del Prado. This transforms the public space into an informal history museum, offering both visual and educational engagement. Visitors are encouraged to stop, reflect, and absorb the historical significance, making their experience more enriching.

These intelligent design choices demonstrate how public spaces can be both functional and aesthetically pleasing. By incorporating features that encourage watching, learning, and interacting, Casa del Prado exemplifies how thoughtful design can enhance the visitor experience in a comfortable and engaging way.

4.3. The Spatial Justice: Historical Legitimacy and Balanced Renting Principle

Casa del Prado is a popular sightseeing destination as well as a daily recreational space for local residents. The current Casa del Prado was originally the Foreign and Domestic Products Building, a temporary structure from the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition. It later became the Food and Beverage Building in the 1960s. The rebuilding process was complex and non-linear. However, thanks to the dedication of teenagers, their parents, and especially the efforts of the Committee of 100, along with support from ordinary citizens who voted in favor of the reconstruction, the project succeeded. Through donations and bond issuance, the decision-making process became a testament to civic mobilization, commitment, and collective achievement. (Hong Zheng, 2017) So the civic culture gave the birth of Casa del Prado.

Casa del Prado is the public building in the term of ownership, which means theoretically everyone can use it. However, due to the limited availability of spaces such as rooms and the auditorium, the question arises: who gets priority access, and why? This introduces the issue of exclusivity within public ownership, as some groups are granted priority over others. These groups were defined as 'designated organizations', including San Diego Botanical Gardens Foundation, San Diego Floral Association, Junior Theater, Youth Ballet, Youth Choral, and Youth Symphony. These groups have historically been the primary users of the building, which was designed as a garden-youth center, giving their priority access some historical legitimacy.

Besides the historical legitimacy another aspect of spatial justice is embodied in the balanced renting principle. The auditorium, the largest space in the building, could be rented under three categories of use (free/no admission, charity/non-profit, and commercial admission) with varying

rates. These higher rates for commercial activities reflect an effort to prevent the privatization of public space by profit-seeking entities. By keeping the fees lower for non-commercial and public-interest activities, the policy supports the sustainability of the building while prioritizing access for non-profit and public-benefit groups. The fee structure today continues to reflect this balance, as outlined in 'PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT FEE AND DEPOSIT SCHEDULE'.

The concept of spatial justice lies at the heart of civic culture. It addresses a fundamental question in political science: "Who gets what and why?" In the case of Casa del Prado, the spatial allocation favors public welfare while keeps economical sustainability. This balanced principle echoes Almond's classic definition of civic culture, asserting that a successful democracy requires a balance of three cultures. Ultimately, this discussion touches on the timeless topic of political theory: as Aristotle said, politics is about finding the "mean" or balance.

4.4. *Vibrant Civic Space: Cultivating the Youth and Sheltering The Homeless*

Casa del Prado serves not only as a memorial to its historical legacy but also as a vibrant civic space, crucial in fostering the development of youth and promoting social inclusion by sheltering the homeless. The building's design and regulations offer tremendous opportunities to various youth groups—such as Junior Theater, Youth Ballet, Youth Choral, and Youth Symphony—by providing them with the space to practice, rehearse, and perform in the auditorium and the south patio.

Performing arts education at Casa del Prado plays a vital role in cultivating the civic spirit in the following ways.

First, it provides a space free from ideological influence. Unlike formal school environments, which may carry political or ideological biases, Casa del Prado offers an independent, open space where youth can engage with classic repertoires. These repertoires convey timeless truths and values such as love, courage, integrity, and responsibility. Such exposure helps youth develop an open, inclusive mindset that fosters critical thinking and a deeper understanding of life. These eternal lessons, sometimes in contrast with school teachings, help nurture well-rounded individuals.

Second, the affordability of the art education makes it inclusive. With low rental costs, the space remains accessible to youth from low-income families, ensuring that performing arts education is not limited to those with financial means. This inclusiveness reflects the building's role as a true public space that offers opportunities to all, regardless of socioeconomic background.

Third, participation in the performing arts cultivates essential qualities such as cooperation and responsibility. Working in the performing arts requires teamwork, both during practice and live performances. In Junior Theater, for example, youth not only perform on stage but also take on various behind-the-scenes roles, including stagehands, set designers, technicians, and costume designers. As highlighted on its website, 'Once a production opens, its success is entirely dependent on young people'. Additionally, learning performing arts demands persistence and expressiveness. These qualities—cooperation, responsibility, persistence, and expressivity—are vital for shaping future civic leaders, equipping them with the skills and mindset necessary for public service and leadership.

Casa del Prado is the public space for the youth to enjoy the life, while it also the shelter for the homeless. When the night comes the homeless usually sleep along the loggia and the courtyard corner. For them this public space is a necessity. The shelter provides a sanctuary in the urban landscape, symbolizing the role that public institutions can play in ensuring that even the most vulnerable members of society are not left behind. The prestigious political theorist John Rawls (1997), in his *A Theory of Justice*, argues that justice involves giving greater consideration to the disadvantaged. According to his 'Difference Principle', social and economic inequalities are justified only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society. Henri Lefebvre's *The Right to the City* (1996) also talks about the citizens' equal right to use the public space. These classic theories underscore the importance of public spaces being accessible and functioning as essential lifelines for marginalized groups, ultimately fostering a more humane and inclusive civic culture. Casa del Prado serves as a prime example of this principle in action.

In fact, the ungated Balboa Park is not a favor or privilege to the homeless. They just take the equal right to access the public space at night. But they are regarded as the potential criminal and the public space at night is dangerous. It is the case sometimes. Depriving their access to public spaces only leads to further segregation and animosity. In contrast, the silent permission that allows them to use public spaces like Balboa Park is a benefit not just for the homeless, but for the entire city. This quiet tolerance reflects a broader commitment to social justice, inclusivity, and the equal right to public space. By allowing the homeless to exercise their right to the city, as advocated by John Rawls and Henri Lefebvre, the city fosters a more humane and cohesive civic culture, one that embraces rather than marginalizes its most vulnerable members.

5. Discussion

This section is not mandatory but can be added to the manuscript if the discussion is unusually long or complex.

Casa del Prado, a historic building in San Diego's Balboa Park, serves not just as a monument to the city's past but also as an active space where civic culture is practiced, experienced, and transformed. In case of Casa del Prado, mutuality of public spaces and civic culture can be summarized as follows.

First, public space reflects civic culture. Public space like Casa del Prado serves as physical manifestations of a community's values and cultural identity. The building's architecture and design, with its historical and symbolic features, reflect the shared heritage and civic pride of San Diego. Through its Baroque façade and agricultural motifs, Casa del Prado embodies the city's multicultural history, expressing how civic culture is embedded in physical spaces. Historical symbolism of public spaces reinforces civic identity.

Second, civic culture gives the birth of the public spaces and shapes the use of it. Without the civic commitment in 1970s there would be no Casa del Prado. The principle of prioritizing public use with commercial activities as a secondary function ensures that the public space remains self-sustaining. What's more, in Casa del Prado's case, its role as a hub for youth programs during the day and a shelter for the homeless at night reflects the civic values of inclusivity, social justice, and community engagement. Inclusivity in public space reflects civic values. Civic culture, with its emphasis on providing equal opportunities and supporting vulnerable populations, guides how the space is allocated and who benefits from it.

Third, public spaces play a crucial role in fostering interactions and civic engagement. Thoughtful and smart design elements encourage people to linger, which naturally increases opportunities for social interactions. By providing comfortable, inviting environments, well-designed public spaces create settings where people feel inclined to stay longer, leading to more spontaneous exchanges and community-building moments. Additionally, Casa del Prado by hosting youth programs like Junior Theater and Youth Ballet, offers a space where young people actively engage in learning and practicing civic virtues such as cooperation, responsibility, and persistency. These programs allow participants to collaborate, perform, and interact within the context of shared goals, fostering a strong sense of civic involvement. This nurturing of civic virtues is a direct outcome of how the space is designed and used, demonstrating the powerful role public spaces can play in cultivating civic culture through education and community activities. Casa del Prado's specific function as a youth center is one of its unique attributes, distinguishing it from other public spaces. While not all public spaces are dedicated to youth activities, the principles it embodies hold true for any well-utilized public area. When a public space is thoughtfully designed and purposefully used for civic activities—whether through education, recreation, or cultural programs—it inevitably enhances civic engagement. The more fully a public space is integrated into the social fabric of the community, the more it contributes to fostering civic participation, community connections, and a vibrant civic culture.

The influences of public space and civic culture are mutual as well as dynamic. The mechanism in the dynamic force can be analyzed in two perspectives. One is universal, while the other is located in democratic society.

First from the view of environmental psychology, David Seamon's concept of "space ballet" offers a compelling framework for understanding the dynamic mutuality between public space and civic culture. In his theory, "space ballet" describes the regular, rhythmic actions of a group of people who share similar values, worldviews, and life perspectives. These individuals frequent a particular place to perform familiar tasks, developing a sense of security and attachment to that space through repeated interactions. Over time, this regularity becomes almost unconscious, leading to what Seamon calls "place attachment," where individuals form a deep, emotional connection to the space. This attachment cultivates a stable environment where social and cultural values are nurtured and reinforced. (David Seamon, 1980, pp.162-163).

When applied to Casa del Prado, this theory illustrates how the mutual relationship between public space and civic culture is dynamic and continuously evolving. Casa del Prado serves as a space where "space ballet" is performed by different groups—youth participants in theater and ballet programs, homeless individuals seeking refuge, and local residents engaging in community activities. These regular, repeated interactions in the space create a sense of familiarity and security, fostering a strong connection between the community and Casa del Prado. The "place attachment" that emerges from this engagement reflects a shared sense of belonging and civic pride, which in turn reinforces the values of civic culture.

Moreover, Seamon's idea that "space ballet" refers to a process of acquiring political cognition and accumulating political sentiment aligns with how Casa del Prado functions as a space for civic learning and engagement. Through their participation in the space, individuals—especially the youth—learn cooperation, responsibility, and social participation, forming the core of civic values. These activities, performed repeatedly within the public space, help internalize civic culture in an unconscious way, creating a mature, shared political understanding within the community.

Seamon's "space ballet" can be used to explain that this dynamic mutuality is not static or fixed; it evolves through regular interactions that shape both the physical space and the civic culture it sustains. Casa del Prado, through its diverse uses and flexible design, exemplifies how public spaces can nurture a deep sense of civic attachment, continuously reinforcing and adapting to the needs and values of the community. This dynamic interaction ensures that public spaces remain vital arenas for the development and expression of civic culture, illustrating that the relationship between space and culture is one of constant, rhythmic growth.

Second from the view of public administration, the critical question lies in how multiple, and sometimes conflicting, uses of a space are managed. Casa del Prado serves as a prime example of this complexity, functioning simultaneously as a tourist destination, a hub for youth cultural programs, and a nighttime refuge for the homeless. These diverse uses, while essential to the space's public purpose, can sometimes come into conflict. For instance, the presence of the homeless at night may create a sense of insecurity, potentially affecting both the tourist experience and the space's influence on young people. Such inherent tensions present significant challenges for urban management, which must balance these competing needs while maintaining the space's public function.

This balancing act is a dynamic process that tests the city's management capabilities. The way these conflicts are addressed reflects the effectiveness of urban governance, where policies must navigate and mediate between various stakeholders. Urban management is not a static task; it operates continuously, like a machine running day and night. Decisions about how to allocate public space, who gets to use it, and under what conditions, are all part of a dynamic political process. Public space, as a shared resource, inherently requires political negotiation, making its management a reflection of broader societal debates about equity, access, and the public good.

In a democratic society, managing such conflicts relies on a flexible civic culture that provides space for dialogue and negotiation among different groups. As Gabriel Almond discussed in *The Civic Culture Revisited*, civic culture must adapt to the pressures and conflicts that naturally arise in pluralistic societies. The struggle over public space allocation is not about simple binaries of right and wrong but involves a complex balancing of competing interests and values. This ongoing adjustment process highlights the dynamic nature of civic culture, which evolves as it navigates challenges and tensions.

Thus, the relationship between public space and civic culture is not solely about the optimistic cultivation of civic virtues but also about pragmatically addressing conflicts and finding solutions. In the case of Casa del Prado, these solutions require an ongoing, dynamic engagement with the realities of urban life—recognizing that public spaces are arenas where problems emerge, get addressed, and, through this process, civic culture is continuously interpreted and enriched. The challenges of balancing diverse uses in a public space like Casa del Prado underscore the fact that civic culture is not static but is constantly reshaped by the need to respond to practical issues in urban governance.

6. Conclusion

The study of Casa Del Prado reveals the dynamic mutual relationship between public space and civic culture, showing that public spaces actively shape and reflect a community's identity, values and civic practices. Casa Del Prado, as a historic and architectural symbol, embodies San Diego's cultural heritage and fosters civic pride. Through its role as a venue for youth programs and community gatherings, it nurtures essential civic values like cooperation and responsibility. Thoughtful design elements, such as the courtyard and loggia, encourage social interaction and cohesion, while the building's tiered fee structure reflects principles of spatial justice, balancing community access with economic sustainability and prioritizing public benefit over private gain.

This dynamic relationship is reflected in three key findings: Casa Del Prado connects history with the present, nurtures youth culture and civic values, and embodies the complexities of public management within a democratic framework. Moreover, through the lenses of environmental psychology and political science, the study explores the mechanisms underlying this dynamic. Seamon's concept of "space ballet" illustrates how regular, repeated activities within Casa Del Prado foster a deep sense of attachment, creating a stable environment where civic values are internalized. This dynamic interaction, with its blend of historical symbolism, civic engagement, and adaptive public management, underscores the essential role that public spaces play in nurturing a resilient and inclusive civic culture within democratic societies.

The significance of this study on Casa Del Prado lies in both its theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the dynamic relationship between public space and civic culture. Theoretically, the research advances existing civic culture and public space literature by illustrating how civic values are embedded and actively reinforced within physical spaces. By integrating perspectives from environmental psychology and political science, the study provides a unique framework that captures the reciprocal nature of public spaces, showing how they shape and are shaped by civic identity, community values, and collective practices. This approach enriches theories on spatial justice, civic engagement, and community resilience by demonstrating that public spaces like Casa Del Prado are dynamic entities, contributing to the co-evolution of space and culture in real-world contexts. Practically, the study offers actionable insights for urban planners, public administrators, and policymakers on managing multifunctional public spaces in a way that fosters inclusivity, social cohesion, and civic pride. Casa Del Prado's design and tiered fee structure present a model of spatial justice, demonstrating how public spaces can balance community accessibility with economic sustainability, ensuring that diverse community needs are met without compromising financial viability. By showcasing how public spaces can support diverse roles—from youth engagement to providing shelter—the study highlights how thoughtful design and inclusive policies create resilient, vibrant civic spaces that embody and nurture democratic values.

While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between public space and civic culture, certain limitations suggest directions for future research. The primary focus on a single case, Casa Del Prado, means that findings may not fully capture the diversity of public spaces across different cultural, economic, and political contexts. Additionally, the study relies heavily on qualitative data, such as observations and informal chats, which, while rich in detail, could be complemented by quantitative analyses to provide a broader understanding of public space usage patterns and impacts. Future research could explore comparative case studies across varied urban environments to examine how different public spaces contribute to civic culture under unique historical or social conditions.

The relationship between public space and civic culture reveals that shared spaces encompass more than mere architectural form; they serve as stages where collective identity, values, and aspirations are expressed and reinforced. Each interaction within these spaces, whether brief or lasting, contributes to the evolving narrative of civic life. As communities and cities continue to grow and diversify, the task of nurturing public spaces becomes increasingly vital—not only to mirror existing identities but to inspire visions of a more inclusive and resilient society. These spaces foster a dynamic and ongoing dialogue, shaping both place and people in the continuous pursuit of a vibrant civic culture.

Author Contributions: For research articles with several authors, a short paragraph specifying their individual contributions must be provided. The following statements should be used “Conceptualization, X.X. and Y.Y.; methodology, X.X.; software, X.X.; validation, X.X., Y.Y. and Z.Z.; formal analysis, X.X.; investigation, X.X.; resources, X.X.; data curation, X.X.; writing—original draft preparation, X.X.; writing—review and editing, X.X.; visualization, X.X.; supervision, X.X.; project administration, X.X.; funding acquisition, Y.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.” Please turn to the [CRediT taxonomy](#) for the term explanation. Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

Funding: Please add: “This research received no external funding” or “This research was funded by NAME OF FUNDER, grant number XXX” and “The APC was funded by XXX”. Check carefully that the details given are accurate and use the standard spelling of funding agency names at <https://search.crossref.org/funding>. Any errors may affect your future funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: In this section, you should add the Institutional Review Board Statement and approval number, if relevant to your study. You might choose to exclude this statement if the study did not require ethical approval. Please note that the Editorial Office might ask you for further information. Please add “The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of NAME OF INSTITUTE (protocol code XXX and date of approval).” for studies involving humans. OR “The animal study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of NAME OF INSTITUTE (protocol code XXX and date of approval).” for studies involving animals. OR “Ethical review and approval were waived for this study due to REASON (please provide a detailed justification).” OR “Not applicable” for studies not involving humans or animals.

Informed Consent Statement: Any research article describing a study involving humans should contain this statement. Please add “Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.” OR “Patient consent was waived due to REASON (please provide a detailed justification).” OR “Not applicable.” for studies not involving humans. You might also choose to exclude this statement if the study did not involve humans. Written informed consent for publication must be obtained from participating patients who can be identified (including by the patients themselves). Please state “Written informed consent has been obtained from the patient(s) to publish this paper” if applicable.

Data Availability Statement: We encourage all authors of articles published in MDPI journals to share their research data. In this section, please provide details regarding where data supporting reported results can be found, including links to publicly archived datasets analyzed or generated during the study. Where no new data were created, or where data is unavailable due to privacy or ethical restrictions, a statement is still required. Suggested Data Availability Statements are available in section “MDPI Research Data Policies” at <https://www.mdpi.com/ethics>.

Acknowledgments: In this section, you can acknowledge any support given which is not covered by the author contribution or funding sections. This may include administrative and technical support, or donations in kind (e.g., materials used for experiments).

Conflicts of Interest: Declare conflicts of interest or state “The authors declare no conflict of interest.” Authors must identify and declare any personal circumstances or interest that may be perceived as inappropriately influencing the representation or interpretation of reported research results. Any role of the funders in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results must be declared in this section. If there is no role, please state “The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results”.

Appendix A

The appendix is an optional section that can contain details and data supplemental to the main text—for example, explanations of experimental details that would disrupt the flow of the main text but nonetheless remain crucial to understanding and reproducing the research shown; figures of

replicates for experiments of which representative data is shown in the main text can be added here if brief, or as Supplementary data. Mathematical proofs of results not central to the paper can be added as an appendix.

Appendix B

All appendix sections must be cited in the main text. In the appendices, Figures, Tables, etc. should be labeled starting with “A”—e.g., Figure A1, Figure A2, etc.

References

- Almond, Gabriel, and Sidney Verba. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton University Press, 1963.
 - Almond, Gabriel A., and Sidney Verba, eds. *The Civic Culture Revisited*. Sage Publications, 1980.
 - Ando, Tadao. *Conversations with Students*. Phaidon Press, 2012.
 - Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press, 1958.
 - Gehl, Jan. *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*. Island Press, 1971.
 - Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. MIT Press, 1962.
 - Jacobs, Jane. *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Random House, 1961.
 - Julia, Smith. *The History of Bolboa Park*. Library of San Diego History Center (in-house materials), 1963.
 - Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell, 1974.
 - Lefebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*. Translated and edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, Blackwell, 1996.
 - Low, Setha. *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. University of Texas Press, 2000.
 - Mitchell, Don. *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. Guilford Press, 2003.
 - Putnam, Robert D. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press, 1994.
 - Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster, 2001.
 - Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
 - Seamon, David. "Body-Subject, Time-Space Routines, and Place-Ballets." In *The Human Experience of Space and Place*, edited by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon, pp. 162-163. Croom Helm, 1980.
 - Sudjic, Deyan, and Helen Jones. *Architecture and Democracy*. Te Neues Pub Group, 2001.
 - Zheng, Hong. "Civic Accomplishment and Liberal Civic Cultivation: The Construction of Casa del Prado from 1968 to 1971." *Social Sciences*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2017, pp. 19-27.
- San Diego government official file, 'PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT FEE AND DEPOSIT SCHEDULE', <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/prfeeschedule.pdf>
- The mission of Junior Theater. <https://juniortheatre.com/about/mission/>

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.