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**On the contested nature of place: ‘Figuera’s Well’, ‘The  
Hole of Shame’ and the ideological struggle over public  
space in Barcelona**

Andrés Di Masso\*

Department of Social Psychology, University of Barcelona.

Address: Pg. Vall d’Hebron, 171, 08035 Barcelona, Spain

John Dixon

Department of Psychology, Lancaster University.

Address: Fylde College, Lancaster LA1 4YF, United Kingdom

and

Enric Pol

Department of Social Psychology, University of Barcelona

Address: Pg. Vall d’Hebron, 171, 08035 Barcelona, Spain

\*Address correspondence to: Andrés Di Masso, Psico-SAO, Research Group in Social, Environmental and Organizational Psychology, Department of Social Psychology – University of Barcelona, Pg. Vall d’Hebron, 171, 08035 Barcelona, Spain; E-mail: [adimasso@ub.edu](mailto:adimasso@ub.edu); Phone number: +34 93 312 51 80; Fax number: +34 93 402 13 66

## **Abstract**

This paper explores some of the discursive practices through which the place meanings are formulated, warranted and, above all, contested. Drawing particularly on the work of the social psychologist Michael Billig, we present a rhetorical analysis of newspaper reports and interview accounts about the ‘development’ of a contested public space in Barcelona, known locally both as Figuera’s Well and the Hole of Shame. This analysis explores a number of rhetorically opposed constructions of the nature, purpose and appropriate beneficiaries of this place, whose implications are discussed both within the context of local power struggles and within the context of wider ideological struggles over the nature of public spaces in Barcelona. We argue that a rhetorical perspective reveals how practices of attributing meaning and value to places is often more conflict-ridden, action-oriented, and politically-charged than is implied by much research in environmental psychology. Relatedly, we argue that environmental psychologists need to complement a ‘weak’ conception of the role of conflict in the formation of public space (focused on subjective differences in environmental tastes, preferences and values) with a ‘strong’ conception of the role of conflict (focused on ideological struggles over access, equality and inclusion).

**Key words:** public space, place meanings, contestation, rhetoric, ideology

## **1. Introduction**

To the east of Barcelona's historic centre lies a narrow strip of public land (see Figure 1, p. 9) that falls within the city's Casc Antic district. In its recent history, this land has been named in two quite different ways, a tension that expresses an ongoing controversy. For some it is known as Figuera's Well, a title borrowed from an adjacent street and used to designate a space selected for a government-approved programme of semi-private 'regeneration'. For others it is known as the 'Hole of Shame', a title used mainly by those seeking not only to highlight the illegitimacy of this regeneration program, but also to indict a longer history of government neglect of the local environment. As will become apparent during the course of this paper, the name one applies to this space is not arbitrary. In everyday discourse in Barcelona's Casc Antic, using the wrong name to the wrong audience may prompt a surprisingly heated round of challenges, corrections and repairs. The very act of naming, it seems, betrays one's political orientation towards the site's nature, meaning and future development. Whether advertently or inadvertently, it implies a position within a wider struggle to define and control public space.

Using this struggle as a case study, we have three objectives in the present paper. First, we argue that environmental psychological research might benefit from a greater recognition of the role of processes of social conflict and contestation in shaping place meanings. Second and related, we argue that concepts and methodological tools drawn from rhetorical social psychology may facilitate work on contested meanings of place. Thus, extending the recent 'discursive turn' in environmental psychology (e.g. Aiello & Bonaiuto, 2003; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000), we conduct a rhetorical analysis of discourse about Figuera's Well/The hole of Shame, building particularly on the work of Michael Billig (Billig, 1987, 1991). Finally, on a more general level, we show how our case study provides insights into the geopolitical forces that are currently reshaping the urban fabric of Barcelona, forces that refract wider struggles over public spaces in cities elsewhere in the world.

## **2. Beyond placid geographies: Conflict, place and environmental psychology**

In 1979 the International Architectural Psychology Conference gathered together professionals working in a number of disciplines to discuss a core topic: *conflicting experiences of space*. Among other themes, the conference was designed to explore tensions between lay and professional definitions of space use; disputes between

different social groups about the proper uses of spaces; disparities between planned and actual spatial usages; and conflicting interpretations of the meaning of public and private spaces. The meeting's goals were practical and ethical as well as academic; that is, in generating knowledge about the nature and causes of spatial conflict, contributors sought to devise concrete strategies for fostering peaceful coexistence in everyday spaces. At the same time, contributors also presupposed that "conflicts and tensions between groups are just part of life" (Woitrin, 1979, p.20), and thus constitute a fundamental concern for researchers interested in the relationship between people and their environments.

This meeting testifies that, in its formative years, practitioners working within the fledgling discipline of Environmental Psychology recognised the fundamental significance of conflict for understanding human-environmental relations. In subsequent decades, however, surprisingly few environmental psychologists have developed this early interest in a systematic or concerted way. To be sure, from time to time, researchers have highlighted that individuals or social groups may attribute antithetical meanings to particular places (e.g. Contreras, 2006; Devine-Wright & Lyons, 1997; Hubbard, 1996) and may accordingly hold discrepant views about the kinds of people or activities such places should accommodate (e.g. Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Dixon, Levine & McCauley, 2006; Pol, Di Masso, Castrechini, Bonet & Vidal, 2006). Similarly, the role of intergroup power struggles in shaping human environments has been occasionally discussed (e.g. Mazumdar, 2004; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1997). In the vast majority of research, however, the social struggles that routinely mark the creation, transformation and lived experience of our environments have tended to be submerged. Thus, in their influential discussion of "substantial paradigms" in environmental psychology, Saegert and Winkel (1990) observed that "...efforts to shape and control the environment by different groups also lead to the possibility of intergroup conflict, a neglected issue in much of the work reviewed here" (p.466). Likewise, in the conclusion of his article on conflicts between lay and professional interpretations of architecture, Hubbard (1996) noted that "environmental meanings, and hence preferences, are clearly tied into processes of cultural contestation. It is therefore suggested that the recovery of such meanings, and their contestation between different groups, could, and indeed should, be an important research foci for environmental psychology" (p.91). The present paper is an attempt to capitalise on the recommendations of Saegert and Winkel (1990) and

Hubbard (1990) by treating conflict as a central and abiding concern for environmental psychology.

What do we mean by conflict in this context? Clearly, the term may be defined in many different ways with varying realizations within the human geography of everyday life. We have found it heuristically useful to distinguish between *weak* and *strong* definitions of conflict. A weak definition of conflict is built around the recognition that the meanings attributed to spaces and places are often socially diverse and relative to the beliefs, values, motivations and cultural backgrounds of particular users. This diversity and relativity may provoke disagreements about the ‘proper’ design of particular environments or about the rules that (should) govern our behaviour there, a possibility that several environmental psychologists have discussed (e.g. see Carr, Francis, Rivlin & Stone, 1992; Rapoport, 1979). The strong definition of conflict adopted in the present paper, by contrast, treats conflict as a chronic, organic and inevitable product of wider political struggles that are both expressed within, and reproduced through, our human geography. It is perhaps not surprising that researchers working in contexts with a stark and visible history of intergroup division and inequality have favoured this strong definition, which treats conflict less as a reflection of cultural differences in place ‘preferences’ or aesthetic ‘tastes’ and more as a symptom of underlying relations of domination, subordination and resistance (e.g. Possick, 2004; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1997). Such relations, of course, are manifest not only in the concrete organisation of our material environments, but also in ideological struggles to define their meaning and value.

### **3. Place meanings: from subjective representation to rhetorical and ideological construction**

The trend in environmental psychology has been to treat the attribution of place meanings primarily as an individual and cognitive phenomenon – a trend captured, for example, by the majority of studies of environmental preference (e.g. Herzog, 1992; Herzog, Kaplan & Kaplan, 1976, 1982; Herzog, Herbert, Kaplan & Crooks, 2000) and cognitive mapping (e.g. Lynch, 1960; Downs & Stea, 1973). The rise of the so-called ‘socio-cultural paradigm’ in environmental psychology, however, has rendered the *social* production of place meanings increasingly central to the discipline (Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995; Canter, 1996; Saegert & Winkel, 1990). Indeed, the project of

understanding how community members jointly invest particular places with subjective meanings now lies at the heart of many of the core theoretical and empirical projects of the discipline. On a general level, concepts such as ‘social imageability’ (Stokols, 1981) and ‘social representations’ (Castro, 2006) have underlined the significance of investigating collective definitions of place. On a more specific level, concepts such as ‘place dependence’, ‘place identity’ and place ‘traditions’ have reframed person-place bonds in terms of the creation of particular sets of shared meanings through which, for example, environments become arenas of social belonging, group-expression, and historical connection to collective values (e.g. see Bonaiuto, Breakwell & Cano, 1996; Devine Wright & Lyons, 1997; Loukaki, 1997; Stokols & Schumaker, 1981).

The social construction of place meanings is also a central concern of an emerging tradition of discursive research on space and place (see Aiello & Bonaiuto, 2003; Auburn & Barnes, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, chapter 6; Bonaiuto & Bonnes, 2000; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Taylor, 2010), which capitalises on the earlier ‘turn to discourse’ in social psychology (Harre & Gillet, 1994; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1997; Potter, 1996). Work in this tradition re-specifies the focus of environmental research in a number of ways. Rather than treating place meanings as an ‘internal representation of place’ (Genereux, Ward and Russell, 1983) existing inside the minds of individuals, for example, discursive psychologists focus attention on the public, interactional practices through which place meanings are actively created, reproduced and transformed. Moreover, they investigate not only how such practices underpin individuals’ ‘sense of place’, but also how they are designed to perform a range of other social and political actions within a given context. Constructions of place or of the nature of person-place bonds, for instance, may be designed to warrant resistance to the process of racial desegregation (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004), condemn others’ behaviour as a ‘breach’ of legitimate boundaries between neighbours (Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003), or manage external threats to place identity (Hugh-Jones & Madill, 2009).

More directly relevant to the present research, the discursive tradition also provides concepts and methodological tools that can elucidate the *contested nature of place meanings*, a contribution evidenced most clearly by the work of Billig and his colleagues (Billig, 1987, 1991, 1997; Billig et al., 1988). This work holds that individuals’ accounts about the nature of social reality – including human-

environment relations – must inevitably orient to alternative versions of that reality. That is to say, when we express our opinions, beliefs and attitudes in everyday situations we must simultaneously warrant our positions (*offensive rhetoric*) and defend them against plausible counter-positions (*defensive rhetoric*) (see Potter, 1996). Indeed, for Billig and other rhetorical social psychologists, human thought is itself structured in the form of argumentation: an idea that applies as much to private moments of inner reflection as it applies to the cut and thrust of public debate.

Of course, as particular instantiations of broader patterns of historical and political commonsense, individuals' arguments also echo the shared meanings, images and themes of the 'thinking society' (Moscovici, 1984). These *ideological traditions* (Billig, 1991) tend to (re)produce particular arrangements of power and social order. Yet they are themselves marked by internal contradictions and opposing meanings, giving rise to so-called *ideological dilemmas* (Billig et al., 1988) – dilemmas of common sense that must be negotiated as individuals grapple with, deploy, and reflect upon the ideological inheritance of the societies in which they are rooted.

#### **4. Relations in public and the contested meanings of public space**

Whether they are conceived as the "places where the drama of communal life unfolds" (Carr et al., 1992), the "life between buildings" (Gehl, 2001), the "locus of a world of strangers" (Lofland, 1973) or the "natural" arena where "the right to the city" is achieved (Mitchell, 2003), public spaces are instructive sites in which to study the role of conflict in shaping human-environment relations. Based on his analysis of Mumbai's *maidans* (open spaces), Burte (2003) has proposed a useful typology that addresses this issue. He suggests that public spaces are at once:

1. *The setting of conflicts*, whether depicted as legitimate manifestations of collective dissent or as illegitimate appropriations of the public domain.
2. *The precipitate of conflicts*, such as those embodied in the Mumbai's maidans, which were originally installed as part of a military strategy to defend the colonial city from native rebels, but now serve as playgrounds used for the practice of cricket.
3. *The object of social conflicts*, involving competing claims over proper usage, control, rights of occupation, and so on.



As will become apparent, the present case study illustrates all three forms of conflict, but the emphasis of our empirical analysis is on the third. Indeed, as a locus of struggles over freedom and control, order and disorder, we believe that public spaces are particularly revealing contexts in which to explore the contested meanings of place. On the one hand, public space, by definition, designates a realm that is freely accessible to all citizens and defined by a visible diversity of people, activities, functions and uses. To apply Walzer's (1986) evocative phrase, public spaces are typically conceived as 'open minded' spaces. Historically, public spaces have also served as the arena in which social protests are staged and, taking this idea to its extreme, Mitchell (1995) has argued that the public domain should not merely serve as a space *of*, but also as a space *for*, such collective action. On the other hand, public spaces have also always acted as environments where dominant social and political values are visibly established and where social order is maintained via the exclusion of 'inappropriate' people, activities and behaviours. Indeed, some commentators have argued that this impulse towards social control has led to a progressively sanitized, privatized and security-conscious public domain in some societies (e.g. Crawford, 1992; Davis, 1992), an argument that is sometimes labelled, rather gloomily, the 'end of public space' thesis. (Others have pointed out, however, that nostalgically hankering after a democratic public life that has been lost is to romanticize the past; Brill, 1989). In short, public space is characterised by a chronic tension between the expression and the regulation of human freedom – a tension expressed both within everyday understandings of our lived environments and within the 'official' discourse of those who plan and build our cities.

Expressed in Billig et al.'s (1988) terms, one could say that the meanings attributed to public spaces implicate an ideological dilemma, which is centred on the reconciliation of competing values of freedom and control, social diversity and social exclusion. This dilemma that must be worked through, for example, when we attempt to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable uses of public space or when we seek to justify removing certain types of people from public space. The term 'ideological' is important here, for it brings into view the *political* dimension of struggles to define and control public space and, by implication, casts such struggles as an example of what we have previously called a strong definition of spatial conflict. This definition resonates with wider strands of research in human and cultural geography, much of which has focused on the transformation of the public domain in the United States

(e.g. see Fraser, 1990; Mitchell, 1992, 1995, 2003) and has framed this process in relation to broader issues of racial, gender and class justice. Extending this tradition of research, the present study examines a “locational conflict” (Mitchell, 2003) over the development of a public space in the Old Town of Barcelona (Catalunya).

## **5. Research context**

Our case study focuses on a recent conflict over a site in the neighbourhood of Santa Caterina located in the Casc Antic area within the Ciutat Vella district of Barcelona (see Figure 1). Part of the old city, Casc Antic has been historically affected by military aggression, urban redevelopment, and demographic movement, leading to a progressive decline in residents’ living standards. In the early 1900s, the construction of a four-track street separated Casc Antic from the rest of Ciutat Vella, destroying more than 2000 buildings and 82 streets (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1989). The civil war (1936-1939) and the rise of Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975) brought poverty and political repression to the area. When the dictatorship ended, the living conditions were extremely harsh, particularly in Ciutat Vella: the population was old, poor and declining; rates of unemployment were high; housing was dilapidated; and urban facilities were limited (Gomà & Rosetti, 1998).

[Insert figure 1 here]

The transition to democracy promised to bring urban regeneration to the most deprived neighbourhoods in Ciutat Vella. The *Plans Especials de Reforma Interior* (Interior Reform Special Plans; hereafter, PERIs) were the official mechanism through which this process was meant to occur. The PERIs outlined a scheme to expropriate land and buildings in the old town for demolition in order to replace obsolete urban structures with open squares and to create new public housing and infrastructure. However, although the PERI affecting Santa Caterina was approved in 1985, as late as 1997 urban intervention in the area had not commenced. This delay triggered social unrest in the neighbourhood, whose residents were living under conditions of growing poverty. When intervention finally started in this area, it did so amidst an atmosphere of considerable local mistrust and resentment. In particular, the local administration’s attempt to expropriate dwellings around ‘Pou de la Figuera’ Street (Figuera’s Well) were denounced, being interpreted as part of a secret plan to gentrify the area. Some neighbours argued that the City Council had deliberately

allowed the area to degenerate in order both to force residents to leave and to justify this process of gentrification.

[Insert figure 2 here]

Around the end of 1999, the local administration demolished a number of decaying and informal dwellings in the centre of Santa Caterina, creating a 6.500m<sup>2</sup> 'empty space' crossed by Figuera's Well Street (see Figure 2). The space was then cleared, paved and occupied by some neighbours, who refused to accept the official urban development plan. On December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2000 these neighbours planted a Christmas tree in the space, proclaiming it as the 'green zone' that was originally planned in the PERI. The space was labelled 'Hole of Shame' in order to signify the administration's history of neglect both of the local environment and of its residents. Within weeks, the tree had become a meeting place for theatrical performances and music concerts. Several empty buildings around the Hole of Shame were occupied by 'squatters' involved in Barcelona's social movements, who played a central role in the struggle for the space. Trees were planted in other parts of the site, creating the 'Park of the Hole of Shame' and symbolising local resistance to forms of development other than the creation of a public green space for the neighbours.

[Insert figure 3 here]

The rest of the history of the 'Hole of Shame' is a history of confrontation and struggle between various interest groups, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the park and the establishment of an 'official' development called Figuera's Well. In 2003, after a violent protest (see figure 3) that left several neighbours injured and several others arrested, the authorities built a concrete wall around the Hole of Shame, designed to prevent any further occupation. This wall was promptly demolished by neighbours and activists, and the second 'Self-arranged Park of the Hole of Shame' was founded (see figure 4). In the ensuing months, it was furnished by its occupants with flower-beds, a football pitch, a basketball court, stone benches, litter bins, a stage for performances, and a playground. By this time, territorial struggle for the control of the space was complicated and involved at least three main interest groups (perhaps better described as loose coalitions): a) the occupants (groups of neighbours, social organisations, and members of the squatting movement), who sought the direct appropriation and self-management of the space; b) the City Council and Focivesa (urban development company with mixed capital, private and public), charged with managing the development of the area; and c) a platform of forty civic associations

(the PICA) who rallied against both the occupants and the City Council, but argued for an official development of the space as a “decent” public space.

[Insert figure 4 here]

The City Council agreed to elaborate a new ‘participatory plan’ for the development of the Park by the end of 2005. The participatory process was officially presented as a tool for building consensus amongst the various protagonists involved in the spatial conflict. Nevertheless, the occupants continued to see it as a strategy transparently designed to impose the council’s hidden agenda; that is, to encourage real estate speculation and private investment, attracting middle-high residents and tourists to the area whilst further marginalising the traditional population in Santa Caterina. Despite their sustained opposition, in March 2007 the second Park of the Hole of Shame was demolished and removed and a new public space called Figuera’s Well was developed. The only element left intact was a fountain made by the neighbours, still bearing the inscription “Self-managed Park of The Hole of Shame”. On November 27, 2007, squatters living in buildings neighbouring the Hole of Shame were evicted by the police, and several of them detained, removing the last vestiges of collective resistance to official plans for developing the site.

## **6. Method**

### *6.1 Data collection*

The data comprised 186 media reports gathered between 1999 and 2008 and a set of 16 interviews. The media reports were drawn from the two most widely read Spanish (El País) and Catalan (La Vanguardia) newspapers, as well as from the ‘alternative’ press (e.g. pamphlets, leaflets) produced by social movements sympathetic to the occupants of the ‘Hole of Shame’.

The interviews were conducted with representatives of all the parties involved in the conflict. They included representatives of members of five organisations defending the occupation, four neighbourhood associations of the PICA (against the occupation), the mediator in the participatory process for the development of the space, the public relations spokesman of Focivesa (urban development company involved in the Hole of Shame case), three district councillors responsible for the area, and two urban planners. Interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and consisted of a series of open-ended questions. Each interview started with a general

question about the Hole of Shame's current state (e.g. 'How do you explain the existence of a space like 'Hole of Shame' in this neighbourhood?' 'What kind of space is it?'), followed by more specific questions about its users, its uses, its management and its future (e.g. 'Who uses the space?' 'How do you think that the space should be developed?'). We also asked questions about specific events (e.g. 'Can you tell me about the wall that was built around the space?').

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, using conventions appropriate to level of analysis conducted (see Willig, 2001), which aimed to identify and explore broad strategies of argumentation rather than to undertake finer grained linguistic processes. Thus, we included basic information that might bear upon the interpretation of content such as indicating: laughter ((Laughs)), inaudible speech ((inaudible)), word emphasis (*'blame'*), short untimed pauses ((.)) and longer timed pauses ((4 secs)), but did not, for example, employ the full set of Jeffersonian transcription conventions.

## 6.2 Analytic procedure

As discussed above, our analysis was informed by Michael Billig's rhetorical approach (Billig, 1987, 1991) and also, in a broader sense, by work in the field of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Rhetorical analysis entails investigating both the arguments that individuals and communities employ within everyday discourse and the techniques of persuasion through which such arguments are warranted. It also entails investigating the situated consequences of arguments in particular contexts. Methodologically, this involves more than simply showing, for example, that members of different political interest groups espouse different opinions about the meaning and value of a historic site (e.g. Devine Wright & Lyons, 1997). It also involves showing how, when, and to what effect, such views are expressly designed to undermine plausible alternatives. As Billig (1991, p.19 & p.31) emphasizes, "...what is being argued against must be understood in order to understand what is being argued for, because "...meaning is related to argumentative context".

In practice, analysis involved the following steps. First, all media reports and interviews were read and recurring patterns of argumentation were identified, focusing particularly on arguments that mobilised place meanings. Second, the rhetorical organisation of such accounts was explored, that is, we considered how

they were designed to combat potential counter-arguments and to engage with broader ideological controversies surrounding the development of public space in Barcelona. Finally, we explored how accounts functioned either to support or undermine particular forms of political action within the ‘Hole of Shame’ controversy. As this process unfolded, our analysis came to focus on three types of arguments: (1) arguments about the identity of the Hole of Shame as a place; (2) arguments about the categories of people (‘publics’) who use this place; and (3) arguments grappling with the dilemmatic meanings of public space, notably with the opposing values of freedom and control. Data analysis was conducted on media and interview discourse in Spanish and Catalan; however, the illustrative extracts presented below have been translated into English by the first author.

## **7. Analysis and Discussion**

### *7.1 Rhetorical constructions of place*

Places derive their meanings from attempts to define what they are or are expected to be. From the perspective of rhetorical psychology, such definitions are typically designed to undermine alternatives and to accomplish social actions within a given context (Billig, 1987; Macnaghten et al, 1993; Reicher et al., 1993). Two rhetorically opposed place-constructions recurred in discourse about the Hole of Shame: the ‘green zone’ versus ‘empty plot’ construction and the ‘city open space’ versus ‘plaza mayor construction.

#### *7.1.1 ‘Green zone’ versus ‘empty plot’*

##### **Extract 1**

In the first hour in the morning, Barcelona’s local police imposed by the force the entrance of diggers. The green zone of the ‘Hole of Shame’, fostered by the neighbours, is at this moment being replaced by a layer of concrete. ‘Through force, as in a rape’, said a neighbour caught by the local police in a corner of one of the nearby streets (Public manifesto from social movements, November 19, 2002).

##### **Extract 2**

*Neighbours’ protest and police intervention in the ‘Hole of Shame’.*

The entrance of municipal workers to start developing the plot known as ‘Hole of Shame’, in Barcelona’s historic centre, ended yesterday morning with a strong charge by the Guardia Urbana against a group of neighbours and squatters who were arguing for the zone to become a green zone (‘El País’, November 19, 2002).

On November 18, 2002, in preparation for the council’s redevelopment program, local police evicted occupants of the Hole of Shame. Extracts 1 and 2 present competing accounts of this episode. Extract 1 presents an occupant’s version of the event, which was published in a social movements’ media report. Extract 2 was written by a local journalist and appeared on the front page of the Catalunya section of *El País*, one of Spain’s highest circulation newspaper. The accounts elaborate the identity of the Hole in rhetorically contrasting ways.

The occupant’s account defines the space as a ‘green zone fostered by the neighbours’ that is about to ‘replaced by a layer of concrete’. This characterisation was strategic in two ways. First, by appealing to environmental rhetoric (see Macnaghten et al., 1992; Dixon et al., 1994), it presents the Hole as a space of nature threatened by (unnatural) human intervention. Second, it establishes the Hole as a space ‘fostered by the neighbours’, attributing it with territorial and proprietary meanings. Such meanings are also conveyed by the simile on which the extract ends, which likens the ‘entrance of the diggers’ to a rape. The overall rhetorical function of the account is to criticise police intervention and, by implication, the broader process of redevelopment it supports.

By contrast, the ‘El País’ report defines the Hole of Shame simply as ‘the plot’. In the original Spanish the word ‘solar’ was employed, which means a patch of urban ground that awaits development. Moreover, and revealingly, the report refers to the Hole as a space that neighbours and squatters wanted *to become* a green zone, implying that it has not yet acquired this status. In other words, extract 2 is rhetorically designed to undermine the claim that police action has somehow violated a valuable natural space and to promote the claim that this is instead a legitimately developable ‘plot’. Note also that in this account neighbours are not given any special proprietary claim to the Hole and thus there is no sense territorial violation conveyed. In this way, the removal of the occupied space is normalised and the urban development program supported.

Just as place definitions help to define the moral status of spatial behaviours, so too the definition of such behaviours are part of the rhetorical construction of

place. Thus, in extract 1, the language of force and coercion instructs the reader that the invasion of a territory has occurred (Gifford, 1987). Conversely, the 'El Pais' account depicts policemen as agents reacting legitimately to protesting groups in order to let 'municipal workers' do their jobs. Place-behaviour is portrayed as routine and acceptable, being framed within a canonical narrative (Bruner, 1991) of urban development. The Hole is thus shorn of any territorial meanings. We can see, then, that the kinds of spatial behaviours that environmental psychologists have treated as relevant to the formation of place meanings (e.g. see Canter, 1988; Carr, 1978; Genereux, Ward & Russell, 1983), can also work as rhetorical warrants in the frame of a socio-spatial dispute.

### 7.1.2 'City-open space' versus 'Neighbourhood Plaza Mayor'

#### **Extract 3**

F: The original idea, let's say, was to transform what was a busy road such as Via Laietana into a space for the people that live there (...) at the same time, a space that can generate movement from the city to Ciutat Vella, I mean, that facilitates the access of the rest of the city to all the good things that one can find in that part of Ciutat Vella: palaces, easy access from the city to La Ribera, with the Picasso museums and all the stories that one can find there, as an area that leads towards Barceloneta, an open space, a space (.) open, where the first to enjoy it are the neighbours, but that the city can enjoy it globally, and that stops being a problematic space, where social or human problems are concentrated, let it be a space more for the city, no? (Interview with the representative of FOCIVESA's urban developers, January 2006).

#### **Extract 4**

M: We saw that the Ayuntamiento was implementing the same city model here, as in Born and La Ribera, then the struggle became concentrated in the Hole of Shame because it was the only remaining place where, where the neighbours identified there could be a square (.) what we call the 'plaza mayor' of the neighbourhood, yes?, The plaza mayor, a space for co-habitation where neighbours could really (.) where the philosophy of space was a philosophy of interaction among the neighbours, where people could be at leisure, where the elders would have a nursing home, it could be an intergenerational space amongst young people, the children, elders, people from different communities, you know? Then the struggle concentrated on that. Then (.) by means of a lot of popular pressure, three years ago already, well it was achieved. (Interview with the representative of the occupants of the Hole of Shame, January 2006).



Rhetorical constructions of the identity of the place are again central in these extracts, with representatives of the developers (extract 3) and of the occupants (extract 4) formulating contrasting plans for transforming the Hole of Shame into a public space.

Extract 3 constructs the Hole as a space that should be defined by its connectedness to the city as a whole, invoking spatial ideals of inclusiveness and accessibility (e.g. 'let it be a space more for the city'). The speaker reinforces this argument by portraying the 'closeness' of the Hole of Shame as a source of environmental problems that could be resolved if it became a public space in the fullest sense. In the context of debates over the development of the Hole, these place constructions were rhetorically strategic: after all, who would wish to impede access of 'the city globally' to 'all the good things' of the area in order to maintain a space 'where social or human problems are concentrated'? Who would wish to create an insular public space to be enjoyed only by a limited cross-section of people?

Extract 2, by contrast, describes the Hole of Shame as the upshot of a 'struggle' against such official plans to create precisely this kind of 'open' space of the city. According to this account, the most desirable space is the 'already achieved' neighbourhood square. This is likened to a '*plaza mayor*' - the central square in towns, villages and old cities - a phrase that is employed here to signify the site of a bustling local community, comprising multiple groups of people ('elders', 'children', 'young people', 'different communities'). In emphasizing the local character the Hole and its status as an interactional context for neighbours, the speaker is, of course, also criticising the council's attempts to impose the global model of city space that the developer in extract 3 extols. Here, the project of connecting the Hole to the city is framed not as a positive transformation but as scheme for destroying the authentic, participatory, public space of the neighbourhood.

The contrast between a city-open space and a neighbourhood '*plaza mayor*' recurred in arguments about the Hole's development, emerging as a paradigmatic opposition within the discourse of both occupants and developers (Shields, 1993). Consider, as another example, the account offered in extract 5 in which occupancy of the Hole is condemned as an 'abnormal impasse'. Once more, this argument exploits deep-seated assumptions about the ideal qualities of a truly 'public' space, notably social inclusiveness, openness and lack of territorial personalisation (e.g. '*public*

*space is for everyone, and nobody can close it and make it his own*'). Moreover, rather than privileging the entitlements of neighbours, or people who regularly interact in the Hole, this account appeals to the abstract category of 'the citizen': the universal subject who can legitimately lay claim to the freedoms and privileges of the city but must not cause undue impediments to others. From a rhetorical perspective, such 'category constructions' (see Edwards, 1991) are often strategic and action-oriented rather merely descriptive, a point whose implications for the Hole of Shame case study we develop in the next section.

### **Extract 5**

Now [the space] it's in a situation of impasse, an abnormal impasse, from the point of view of the citizen. And the thing is that (.) for any reason that one may or may not have, there is not a single citizen allowed to appropriate a space, make it their own, to grow his own orchard there, or whatever he wants. It's evident that the public space is for everyone, and nobody can close it and make it his own" (Interview with the representative of FOCIVESA's urban developers, January 2006).

## *7.2 Rhetorical constructions of place-relevant social categories*

Environmental psychologists recognise that place meanings often encompass notions of who belongs where (Canter, 1988; Russell & Ward, 1980), signalling, for example, who is and is not entitled to lay claim to a given space (Lynch, 1981; Francis, 1989). In the Hole of Shame case study, as in similar disputes, such meanings were conveyed through mobilization of *place-relevant social categories*, which performed a variety of discursive and rhetorical work.

### **Extract 6**

C: The one who has created this mess is the local government, because it should have listened to the neighbours from the neighbourhood...

I: So the neighbours haven't been heard...

C: No, no, no (.) and I, of course, a little time ago I told to the [politician of the district], 'you have made the mistake of not listening to the neighbours from the neighbourhood. Please, if you make a survey and those ones have to give their opinion, they should do it if they are registered in the neighbourhood and live in the neighbourhood. The one who has to enjoy the neighbourhood is the resident, not those coming from, from elsewhere...' (Interview with a PICA neighbourhood leader,

favouring the official development of the Hole of Shame, December 2005).

In this extract, a dissident neighbour who opposes the occupation of the Hole criticizes the City Council for being swayed by the wrong opinions. In her view, the only people whose opinions should count in the development process should be 'neighbours from the neighbourhood'. The category of 'neighbour' here clearly works as a warranting device in several senses, drawing on a common-sense ideology (Billig, 1991) of rootedness that allocates certain entitlements on the basis of *belonging* to a place. To begin with, it warrants the speaker's own entitlement to voice her discontent about the existence of the Hole of Shame and about the fairness of the consultation process. That is, she clearly speaks *as* a neighbour as well as *for* other neighbours and proclaims, on that basis, the council's actions as invalid. In addition, the category construction 'neighbour' discounts the opinions and actions of others (those 'from elsewhere') by virtue of the fact that they do not belong *here*. The elaboration of category inclusion criteria is revealing. We are told that it is not only a matter of residing in and around the Hole, which would qualify all of the occupants of the Hole of Shame, but also a matter of being officially 'registered in the neighbourhood', which narrows category membership considerably.

Awareness of the rhetorical work performed by place-relevant social categories allows us to reconsider several of the extracts discussed earlier. In extract 4, for example, the occupants' representative argues that the Hole has become a space for '*the* neighbours'. He also formulates an illustrative list of users who have specifically benefitted, including 'young people', 'children', 'elders' and 'elders' who require access to a 'nursing home'. What rhetorical functions might these category constructions serve within the account? We would argue that they are designed both to manage both 'dilemmas of stake' and to warrant the occupancy as valid and legitimate (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). As extract 6 illustrates, occupants were sometimes accused of being 'squatters' who did not represent the wider views of the neighbourhood and had simply appropriated land for themselves. By referring to the beneficiaries of the Hole using generic, inclusive categories such as 'the neighbours' or 'the people', then, the speaker in extract 4 is deflecting the accusation that the occupants are motivated by narrow self-interest (managing a dilemma of stake), an effect that is underlined by his suggestion that the Hole was established as the result of 'popular pressure'. At the same time, by listing beneficiaries from

categories of people that society typically considers vulnerable (e.g. ‘children’, ‘elderls’), the occupant’s account clearly implies that lifting the ‘plaza mayor’ would involve an ethical transgression by stopping these prototypically vulnerable groups from enjoying their space.

The occupant in extract 4 faces a second, perhaps less obvious, dilemma – he must promote a local square for the ‘neighbours’ whilst defending against the counter-argument that this square excludes the rest of Barcelona. Put simply, how can one defend a neighbourhood public space and at the same time not appear to exclude the wider citizenship from using it? Wallwork and Dixon (2004) call this a dilemma of inclusion. The discursive solution provided by the occupant’s representative is to portray the Hole as a place that accommodates a rich variety of public life, i.e. it is a space for ‘interaction among neighbours’, ‘where people could be at leisure’, ‘an intergenerational space’, a place for the ‘elders’, ‘young people’ and ‘different communities’. These formulations foster the impression of a universality and diversity of publics (Thompson, 1990). Indeed, it becomes somewhat unclear whether it is the general or the local population who will benefit from the ‘plaza mayor’. A similar dilemma of inclusion is navigated in the developer’s accounts in extract 3, albeit lodged within an opposing line of argument. How can one argue for city-open space without generating the counterargument that this space neglects the needs of its immediate neighbours? The developer negotiates this dilemma by constructing a hierarchy of spatial entitlements, prefacing his argument for the creation of a public space for ‘everyone’ with a concessionary recognition of ‘neighbours’ entitlements. By acknowledging that *the first to enjoy [the space] are the neighbours*, he is better able to argue that the ‘city can enjoy it globally’.

Our main point made in this subsection, then, is that place-related social categorisations did not work primarily as descriptions of the various actors involved in the Hole of Shame dispute. To the contrary, they were used to intervene in the conflict as accounting practices (Auburn & Barnes, 2006), being designed to warrant and defend competing spatial claims.

### *7.3 Ideology and public space*

We have suggested constructions of the meaning of the Hole of Shame and of categories of person involved in the conflict were often designed to warrant competing visions of how the space should be developed. However, it is a mistake to imagine that such arguments typically took the form of simple, coherent and antithetical positions that mapped straightforwardly onto the goals of particular interest groups. As they publicized their plans for the Hole's development, the various agents involved in the conflict produced accounts marked by complexity and contradiction, expressing the wider ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988) that lie at the heart of commonsense understandings of public space. Analysis of such dilemmas encourage us to recognise how our shared, historical understandings of public space are linked to broader power struggles, which are expressed in recursive attempts to reconcile the competing values of spatial freedom and control, inclusion and exclusion (Dixon et al., 2006). In this final section of the analysis, we outline three such dilemmas, which were central in accounts produced by the local administrators and developers. We show, too, how in orienting to such dilemmas developers attempted to justify an ideological vision that was ultimately implemented with full force.

#### *7.3.1. Legitimate and illegitimate publics*

It is a truism to say that everybody has 'the right' to public space; however, the Hole of Shame conflict revealed that territorial entitlements in the city are also understood as being unevenly distributed. The universal citizenship rights that underpin the common sense ideal of public life (Carr et al., 1992; Lynch, 1981; Rivlin, 1994) are in practice countered by other, equally deep-seated, assumptions about the kinds of people who are most (and least) entitled to the public spaces of the city (e.g. see extract 7) and about who should exercise ultimate control over their design and norms of usage (e.g. see extract 8). Such contradictions highlight the ideological limits of publicness itself. How open are the "public" spaces of the city to everybody? What kinds of spatial uses and functions are deemed appropriate and why? How, why and by whom, in short, are the boundaries of public space to be drawn?

These kinds of tensions pervade the account presented in extract 7, where a technical councillor elaborates his version of the Hole of Shame conflict, and, more

specifically, discusses why it does not (yet) qualify as a fully public space. We offer this account as an example of the complexity of arguments over public space, which emerges as speakers explore the ideological tensions and contradictions of the concept itself. Yet, perhaps even more important, it is also an example of *ideological closure* in the sense it ultimately produces meanings that sustain a specific set of power relations and associated normative assumptions.

### **Extract 7**

Let's see (laughs), in theory (.) *in theory* it is a public space, a different thing is that (.) there are some neighbours, and I wouldn't talk about (.) not lots of them but not a few either, this is always very dangerous to say, there are some neighbours that have made that space their own, because they've felt closer to it, because they have defended it more, etcetera and they are currently (.) I don't like the word 'managing', but well, they are a little more concerned with how the space works. Well this, without being absolutely wrong, it's not (.) optimal either, because we think that there are people that don't feel themselves reflected in it, with this way of working, so, eh (.) our (.) job is, having in mind that it is and it must be a public space, to transform it into a truly public space where everybody feels comfortable. In this moment, I wouldn't say that it isn't an absolutely public space, because it is, but it's true (.) that there are sensibilities that don't see themselves (.) much reflected in how that space is functioning, considering moreover the added issue of the (.) *Penya Cultural Barcelonesa* being squatted, that we have then (.) there is another building at the *Metges Street* which is also squatted, etcetera. And this distorts a little bit (.) a little bit the reality of the neighbours (Interview with the technical councillor of the district 2003-2007; December 2005).

This extract shows precisely what spatial *argumentation* is all about. The account produced is marked by a host of rhetorical shifts, qualifications, equivocations and concessions. Indeed, one has to expend considerable effort to grasp what overall position the councillor is trying to develop. To begin with, he describes the Hole of Shame as a public space 'in theory', thus implying it is not a public space in practice. The neighbours' appropriation of the space is then presented as understandable, given that they have 'felt closer to it' and 'defended [it] more', and the space created is granted some degree of publicness ('I wouldn't say that it isn't an absolutely public space, because it is...'). In the final analysis, however, the public

status of the Hole is again constructed as problematic on two main grounds, both of which concern the nature of the categories of people for whom it caters. On the one hand, we have illegitimate category of ‘squatters’ whose presence ‘distorts’ the reality of neighbours and compromises the space’s ‘functioning’. On the other hand, we have an unnamed category of people whose ‘sensibilities’ are not ‘much reflected’ in the current space and whose discomfort becomes a primary concern for future planning. By implication, then, truly public spaces are spaces without the disruptive presence of people like squatters.

In terms of its rhetorical functions, one could argue that the complexity of this argument allows the technical councillor to confirm a democratic and responsive concern with the perspective of the neighbours, recognising the rights of local people to actively create authentic public spaces, whilst justifying the removal squatters and the necessity of the further development. In valuing freedom and grassroots’ participatory action, he is better able to reassert a socio-spatial order in which normal public spaces are purged of these illegitimate publics.

### 7.3.2. *Institutional versus “popular” sovereignty over public space*

#### **Extract 8**

Well, let’s see, we (.) can understand all kinds of protests, what we can’t understand or, let’s say, that it isn’t (.) it isn’t very logical to seize oneself with a thing that (.) that is absolutely impossible, and even more when it’s not 100%, nor 90% or 80% of the neighbourhood who is asking us for it, but a part of it like there are many others, there are lots of people that give their opinions and everybody must cease, starting by the administration itself, thus, I couldn’t understand that someone locked himself in a position (.) I couldn’t understand. Everybody is free to do what he wants (laughs), but we think that we have given enough opportunities and that we’ve been open enough to facilitate receiving everyone’s ideas. If despite of this there is still people who don’t conform to it (.) well (.) I’ll feel sorry but (.) what is important is to finish this once and forever, eh (.) start to work and (.) finish it as soon as possible (Interview with the technical councillor of the district 2003-2007; December 2005).

In this extract, the technical councillor of the district justifies the plans of the local administration at the outcome of the consultation process. The bare facts are straightforward. He insists that the council (‘Ayuntamiento’) must develop the space immediately because everyone has been fairly consulted. What is more interesting is that the technical councillor seems to be grappling with a dilemma. On the one hand,

he projects a democratic profile: a political style defined by listening to all interested parties, understanding everyone's opinions, and respecting people's freedom of choice. Specifically, he understands 'all kinds of protests' and appreciates that 'everyone is free to do what he wants'. On the other hand, he cannot 'understand that someone locked himself in a position' and although 'everybody is free to do what he wants', he 'will be sorry' if someone 'doesn't conform' to the institutional plans, because 'it is important to finish it as soon as possible'. In other words, the technical councillor oscillates between the values of democratic responsiveness and institutional authority. Institutional authority, however, clearly prevails.

The latter ideological closure reminds us of the tension between a positive and a negative concept of liberty (Berlin, 1969). However much it is valued, freedom in the public realm always eventually encounters the boundary of formal political powers. What was ultimately not open for discussion in the discourse of planners, developers and councillors was the assumption that formal political institutions have sovereignty over the public spaces of the city. Thus, no matter how sensitive and responsive council representatives sought to appear, as glimpsed in extracts 7 and 8, the final decision was to be taken in the Ayuntamiento's offices. As the official in extract 8 affirms, 'If despite all this there are still people who don't conform to it (.) well (.) I'll feel sorry but eh what is important is to finish this once and forever'.

### *7.3.3. Public space as a commodity or as public good*

Regardless of who debated the Hole of Shame, one thing was clear: the dispute resonated with a wider controversy surrounding the management of contemporary city-space in post-Fordist societies (Quintana, 2004). The ideological core of the conflict revolved around the alleged consequences of a specific strategy of urban regeneration; that is, a strategy favouring a city space that attracts tourists, property developers, the relatively wealthy, and investors at the expense of those forced to leave their neighbourhoods. As illustrated already (e.g. extract 4), the occupants of the Hole made the latter consequence their primary concern, but it was also a concern for politicians and developers. It was an accusation they had to manage when accounting for their decision to remove by force a public place that was arguably used as productively as other spaces in the city.



### **Extract 9**

Compared to all the other spaces, it's (Figuera's Well) the centre of the city, the administrative centre, the historical centre, the leisure centre, the cultural centre (.) it's a place of a huge urban potential. Of course, if all this is in a terrible state, all (.) all the virtues are mitigated, at least, if not eliminated. But in the moment when you start to improve the quality of life, and you start to improve streets, spaces, squares, facilities, then (.) they are putting you in the eye of the hurricane, it's evident that (.) that if it improves it'll be an objective sought by real-estate business (.) is this good or bad? Well, if it isn't there, it's wrong, because it means that it's a (.) it's a dead world. If there is too much of it it's wrong, because one enters in processes that are complicated. There are people who have their dwellings and property and sell them because it's a business good. There are lots of people that are living there and feel the pressure to abandon their dwellings (Interview with the representative of FOCIVESA's urban developers, January 2006).

In this extract, the representative of Focivesa warrants the development of the Hole of Shame on the basis of its centrality to the symbolic geography of the city ('the centre of the city', 'the administrative centre', 'the historical centre', 'the cultural centre', 'a place of huge urban potential'). His argument draws on the common sense assumption that city-centre areas (at least in old medieval European cities) have a higher value and must be preserved. In doing so, the 'identity of place' (Lalli, 1992) is used to justify a controversial development program. The consequences of work of improvement are "naturalised" (Thompson, 1990) by the interviewee: when an area is uplifted, he argues, its economic attractiveness increases and we find real-estate business emerging organically. The rest of his argument unfolds as a dilemma formulated in moral terms. If there is no real-estate, it is 'wrong' and the place is 'dead', but if there is 'too much', then bad situations surface, so that people feel 'pressured to abandon their dwellings'. Of course, this dilemma neatly sidesteps the deeper debate, which was not so much about the 'optimal' presence of real-estate and private business in the Hole as about the occupants' refusal to accept its presence. By formulating the dilemma in an opposition between 'no real-estate business' and 'too much', the representative of the developers anticipates a happy medium that accepts 'some' presence of real estate business (which is supposedly being unreasonably refused by occupants of the Hole of Shame).

This tension between the production of commodified "public" spaces and spaces governed by spontaneous and market-free social relations is by no means

unique to the Hole of Shame case study. Urban theorists working in other societies have discussed the growing privatization of public spaces in cities, often warning that this process results in environments that support a narrow set of economic values and tend to subtly – and sometimes not so subtly - curtail rights of access, expression and disposal in order to satisfy entrepreneurial or capitalist interests (see e.g. Kohn, 2004). Highlighting the dangers of the proliferation of such ‘single-minded’ spaces (Walzer, 1986), they have encouraged planners to create ‘nodes of social integration’ (Madanipour, 1999) as a means of protecting diverse, socially-meaningful and tolerant public environments.

In Barcelona, this process has assumed a particular historical expression. Indeed, occupants’ suspicions that the city council’s ‘participatory plan’ belied its hidden agenda of gentrification and gradual displacement of local residents were based on their shared understanding of wider geopolitical forces affecting the entire city. The Hole of Shame conflict unfolded during the second phase of implementation of the so-called ‘Barcelona Model’ (Borja, 2005): an ambitious government plan to transform the landscape of the city, converting Barcelona into a platform for the optimal articulation of private capital investment, global tourism and urban regeneration (see Borja & Castells, 1997; Degen, 2008; Sassen, 2006 for detailed discussion). The occupants argued that this “model” underpinned the council’s plans to ‘develop’ their neighbourhood and that this development would ultimately disregard residents’ needs. Accordingly, many of them explicitly conceived their struggle as reflecting class divisions and not simply disagreements about good urban design. This ideological and historical sensibility was often reflected quite explicitly, as our final extract below illustrates. Clearly, in this extract, a narrative of urban and social decline is used to challenge the legitimacy of the ‘city model’ the council wanted to impose. However, the account also reveals the occupants’ sophisticated grasp of the broader geopolitical and historical contexts within which their struggle was being waged.

### **Extract 10**

The city model that the Ayuntamiento has (.) and (.) above all (.) the city generally (.) of Barcelona since the Olympics, but that has been implemented in a very (.) very (.) aggressive way in Ciutat Vella, ok? Then we would say that it has transformed (.) the northern part of Raval, all the Gothic and all Ribera and Born, we could say that it has

been transformed into a (.) a district of services and (.) well (.) oriented to the tourist, and focused to a very specific kind of activity, that has caused that the neighbours (.) well which has resulted in a huge urban transformation taking place. The neighbours had had to leave, directly because they have been offered money or because they have been mobbed or because when the neighbourhood changed they weren't able to maintain the life standards (.) I mean, in Born there are no elders anymore, because at last the people who resisted the most (.) a moment arrives when they don't have a place to take the kids to, they don't have an elders' residence, they don't have a bar for drinking their beer, they don't have a place to (.) to drink (.) to buy milk, do you understand me? This is what we call indirect mobbing. We depart from this context... (Interview with the representative of the occupants, January 2006).

## 8. Conclusion

Manzo (2003) has recently criticised environmental psychologists' tendency to focus mainly on positive bonds between persons and places, as captured by the image of the 'home as haven'. One consequence of this focus, she argues, is that the political dimension of person-place relations has often been submerged in environmental psychological research. This is a problem not only because environments are often experienced by users as restrictive and alienating, but also because users' sense of place is inevitably structured by wider relations of inequality and oppression.

Manzo's recognition of the role of power relations implies a related limitation of much environmental psychological work. That is, just such work has perpetuated an 'idyllic' conception of person-place relations, so too it has perpetuated a 'placid' conception of the processes through which places, and our lived experience of places, are created, maintained and transformed. Part of the rationale for the present paper has been to highlight the central significance of social and political conflict in structuring place meanings and values (see also Hubbard, 1996; Saegert & Winkel, 1990).

We have suggested that the rhetorical perspective developed by Billig and colleagues provides a useful framework for bringing conflict into focus (Billig, 1987, 1991; Billig et al., 1988). The idea that constructions of place are *rhetorically designed* - e.g. designed to promote and normalise some versions of person-place relationships, whilst undermining other versions - puts practices of discursive contestation at the foreground of environmental research. Relatedly, concepts such as 'ideological tradition' and 'ideological dilemma' sensitise us to the broader political and historical dimension of discursive conflicts over the meaning of space and place.

They remind us that individuals' accounts of place inevitably echo and rework the collective commonsense of the 'thinking society'.

Drawing on this perspective, we have presented a rhetorical analysis of interview and media accounts of the development of a public space in Barcelona, called the 'Hole of Shame' by some and 'Figuera's Well' by others. Between 1995 and 2007, this served as a 'conflictual' space in all three of the senses proposed by Burte (2003). It was the *setting* for an ongoing series of violent struggles between occupants and the police; it was an environment whose physical and design features were constantly shaped and reshaped by such struggles; above all, it was an object of rhetorical struggle as competing interest groups sought to define the space and its users in ways that justified particular visions for its 'development', whilst discrediting others.

It is important to situate such struggles within their broader political contexts. On the one hand, as discussed in the closing section of our analysis, social actors who wanted to justify specific plans for the development of the Hole of Shame also had to negotiate a series of ideological dilemmas. For example, the developers' arguments that the occupants should leave the site so that it could attract private investment and encourage urban regeneration was typically framed so as to acknowledge, too, that public space is not merely a commodity, that it should remain accessible to all users, and that fair consultation with local residents should be undertaken. Such dilemmas, of course, are by no means unique to this particular case study. They are echoed and reworked in struggles over public space in many other contexts (e.g. Dixon et al., 2006; Mitchell, 1995, 2003). On the other hand, it is also important to recognise the specificity of the Barcelona context and of the historical and political processes that gave rise to the events that unfolded in the Hole of Shame. In this sense, we have contextualised some occupants' resistance to the 'development' of the Hole as a rejection of specific form of privatization that has characterised the so-called 'Barcelona Model' (Borja, 2005) of urban regeneration, a model that has transformed the areas surrounding Santa Caterina into gentrified enclaves for tourists, shoppers and private entrepreneurs.

To put this point another way, the Hole of Shame case study does not merely instantiate conflict in the 'weak' sense that tends to feature in some Environmental Psychological research, which treats it as a process that involves disagreements over place preferences (e.g. aesthetics, design features, amenities, and so on) and that

arises organically as a result of social diversity. The case study also instantiates conflict in the ‘strong’ sense. That is, it suggests that conflict reflects underlying dynamics of political inequality, which are expressed, for example, through struggles to impose and resist normative definitions of who belongs in a given place and what activities are deemed appropriate and acceptable there. Indeed, from this perspective, environmental ‘tastes’ and ‘preferences’ are themselves reconceived as “...embedded in structures of power and dominance that exist in capitalist society.” (Hubbard, 1996, p.77). In this ‘strong’ conception of conflict, too, it is not incidental that public spaces such as the Hole of Shame are often the *locations for* conflict, serving as the arenas in which protests are physically staged (see also Mitchell, 1992, 1995). Historically, it is precisely through occupation of such spaces that disadvantaged groups have been able to air grievances and undertake collective action.

Of course, one must also acknowledge that the present research constitutes a single case study, with all of the limitations that this implies. Thus, one should be cautious about generalising on the basis of our analysis of the Hole of Shame to conflicts unfolding in other spatial contexts. Two specific reservations are worth flagging here. First, one might argue that the Hole of Shame case study gives undue prominence to the role of conflict in creating, reproducing and transforming place meanings, masking, for instance, the equally important role of collaboration and consensus in the formation of place meanings. Second, and ironically, we one could also argue that the dramatic nature of the Hole of Shame case study may distract researchers’ attention from more mundane environmental struggles. For example, in many everyday public spaces, processes of social exclusion and resistance unfold quietly in ways that go unnoticed by the majority of everyday users. One thinks, for example, of how heterosexist norms proscribe the free expression of certain forms of human relationships and how, consequently, such norms are strategically flouted and resisted by marginalised groups (e.g. see Hubbard, 2001). One thinks, too, of the quiet struggles that mark relations within ‘mundane’ public sites such as sidewalks (e.g. see Loukaitou-Sideris & Ehrenfeucht, 2009). In other words, spatial conflicts do not necessarily involve noisy confrontations between protestors and police lines: they may assume an array of subtler, but equally important, forms.

### *Post-script*

In November 2008, as part of a feature in its travel section, The Guardian newspaper in the United Kingdom related the following history of the ‘Forat de la Vergonya’ (‘The Hole of Shame’):

The strange, semi-official name for this new green square of self-governed park came about after a protracted war between residents and developers a couple of years ago. The developers knocked down a swathe of old buildings – to citywide outrage – but before they had the chance to start building, the neighbours reclaimed the entire area as their own, planting flowerbeds and a community-tended allotment. The council eventually responded, taking the side of the residents and going on to provide children’s playgrounds, wooden fencing for the allotment and a small civic centre with language classes, theatre groups and a samba school. It was a triumph of people power. The dynamism of the project has been a driving force behind the regeneration of what had become a rundown – and occasionally feared – barrio. Over the past two years there has been a spectacular transmogrification to equal that of the Born, Sant Pere’s chichi neighbour”.

The article went on to describe how the area has now become a mecca for tourists and upmarket shoppers, with ‘kicky boutiques’, ‘DJ Bars’, an Asian Tapas bar with a ‘urban Japanese aesthetic’, and ‘St Peter’s wardrobe’ – “an elegant pocket of couture, bringing together clothes from up and coming, mostly local, designers at surprisingly affordable prices.” Of course, the author concedes, ‘decades of neglect’ have inevitably taken their toll on the area. However, even this is framed as part of the area’s charm for the would-be tourist or shopper. “There’s plenty here”, she enthuses, that is “keeping it real”.

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