Public space: The contribution of the Covid-19 pandemic to the privatisation of public life.

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Abstract

In light of a longstanding inseparable relationship between urban planning and public health, this paper explores the contribution of coronavirus (Covid-19) in the privatisation of public life in public spaces, today and in future. Public life is the primary ingredient of public space through which it attracts and retains people. However, public life continues to be privatised due internal forces such as the state, content and location of the public spaces themselves and external factors such as the modernist movement and the virtual space. While responsible authorities are grappling unsuccessfully to deal with privatisation, a new threat known as coronavirus (COVID-19) has emerged with even worse effects on public life. This is a result of its strict requirements for physical distancing and lockdowns where people are expected to stay at home in order to flatten the curve for new infections. The research is undertaken through a critical literature review. The paper is anticipated to contribute towards new ways of understanding the public space-public health interface and subsequently set a springboard towards rethinking the social public space. In light of infectious diseases and in particular Covid-19, the paper will conclude by interlacing together the drivers of public space privatisation into a comprehensive model that will stand as a basis to the understanding and improvement of urban public life.

Key words: *Urban planning, Public space, Corona virus, Privatisation, Public life.*

1   Introduction

In light of the new and persistent COVID-19 pandemic, Odediran (2020) realised the 'need to strengthen the physical planning systems to prevent the spread of infectious diseases'. A critical question is how do planners plan and manage physical planning activities so as to 'minimise the risk of COVID-19 and ensure equitable access to health care?' (Odediran, 2020). Planners are therefore expected to play a role in the functioning of public space, which is the chief medium for the spread of the disease.

'Public space' refers to the external or outdoor component of any built environment that is accessible and usable by the public and any land lying between private landholdings (Harvey, 2009; Carmona, Tiesdel & Heath 2010; Tonn et al., 2010; UN-Habitat, 2016). It refers "not only to the spaces between buildings but also the objects and artifacts therein, and the building edges that help define the physical boundaries of the spaces" (Mehta, 2014). Carmona et al., (2010) classifies 'public space' into three categories namely 'external public space', 'internal public space' and 'quasi-public space'. External public space is the real public space that is accessible and available to all for example squares, streets, public parks, parking lots, forests and water courses. The internal public space includes public institutions (libraries, museums, town halls) and transport facilities (train stations, bus stations, airports).The quasi-public space includes university campuses, sports grounds, restaurants, cinemas, theatres, nightclubs and shopping malls. This category is not purely public but more of private since access is regulated (Carmona et al., 2010). The three categories expose different levels of 'publicness' through a public-private space continuum. Public life is practiced and enjoyed in such public spaces throughout the continuum.

Public life in public spaces has always been faced with different threats leading to privatisation. Such internal forces such as the state, content and configuration of the public spaces themselves and external factors such as the modernist movement and the virtual space. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a new and persistent threat to public life in public spaces. COVID-19 is caused by a novel corona virus which originated in the City of Wuhan, Hubei province China, home to over 60 million people (Fang, Nie & Penny, 2020). The outbreak was declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a pandemic on the 31st of January 2020 (Zhang, Jiang, Yuan & Tao, 2020; WHO, 2020). It is thought to have been transmitted to humans from an as-yet-unidentified animal source, the new virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets, such as those generated when an infected person coughs or sneezes (Chen, 2020; WHO, 2020). Mild cases of COVID-19 have symptoms which look like the common cold, which have some respiratory symptoms, sore throat, runny nose, fever, all the way through pneumonia. There can be varying levels of severity of pneumonia which can lead to multi-organ failure and death (WHO, 2020). Research published in

the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) has shown that 82 percent of the cases are mild, 15 percent are severe, and 3 percent are classified as critical. According to UN-Habitat (2020), COVID-19 has significantly changed people's relationships with the public space due to physical distancing that has 'reduced intimate personal connections' and 'exacerbated social isolation'. The paper is structured into the research purpose and objectives, literature review of the study and materials and methods, and the results. The discussion and the conclusion constitute the last part of the paper.

1.1 Research purpose and objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic has descended heavily upon public space, which according to Carmona et al., (2010), is 'the lifeblood of the city'. People need to go outside for shopping, work, play, leisure socialization and for health reasons. The poor, in particularly were the most affected since they directly depend on the public space for a living (UN-Habitat, 2020). Therefore, there is urgent need to help cities and in particular the public space to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. Jasinski (2020) proposed alternative mode of

actions: one where no action is taken and one where planners, architects, and regular citizens can...do anything to make life in our cities better and improve the quality of the public space'. This study is in line with the second action mode and thus seeks to set a background for action.

Various urban planning studies on COVID-19 have addressed the public health and public space interface (Odediran, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2020; Jasinski, 2020). However, these studies paid little attention to the contribution of the COVID-19 pandemic towards the privatisation of public life and in particular, the relationship with the traditional drivers of privatisation namely the internal state of the public parks, the modernist approach and the cyberspace. The modernist approach and the virtual space are known as drivers of privatisation and have been discussed extensively in literature (Koray, 1999; Bentley et al., 1985; UN-Habitat, 2009; Koray,1999; Sennet, 2010; Walters & Brown, 2004). Their link with COVID-19 as driver of privatisation is a gap in literature. This study therefore intends to understand COVID-19, a new change agent in light of public space usage against the backdrop of the traditional drivers. This means that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation in the cities and

public space in particular was not optimal. In concurrence, Odediran (2020) pointed out that COVID-19 'presents a unique and necessary opportunity to reshape a future that was already in jeopardy, with looming disasters such as growing social disintegration'. While taking the past, the present and the future into consideration, this study to set a springboard towards evoking urban planners and public health practitioners in finding out how such a holistic understanding can be incorporated in health sensitive public space design and management. The 'spectacular speed and scale' (Odediran, 2020), the global reach and the significant footprint of COVID-19 in public life compared to other infectious diseases warrants investigation especially in the public space sphere where public life resides. In the context of public space, the aim of the study is to explore the contribution of coronavirus (Covid-19) in the privatisation of public life. The specific objectives of this study are twofold:

1. To raise a torch on the interface between COVID-19 and public space design and management.

2. Interlace together the drivers of public space privatisation into a comprehensive public life privatization framework that will stand as a basis to the understanding

and improvement of urban public life.

Through the two objectives, this study is expected to stimulate a debate and rethinking of the human responsive public space in light of COVID-19. In light of the foregoing objectives, this study is conscious of the UN-Habitat's 'vision' of what settlements should be like:

> *"Our cities must be places where human beings lead fulfilling lives in dignity, good health, safety, happiness and hope"*

Human dignity, health, safety and hope are threatened by COVID-19. Their usage of the public space, an important asset for public life is quickly getting limited. Privatisation of public life is taking its toll. Therefore, efforts have to be devoted towards a better understanding of the situation and at least find means to bring back 'publicness'' in public spaces. While taking a look at the old evils and the new evil, the justification of this study is premised on this argument.

2   Literature Review

This section is begins by explicating the role of public space and then turn to the drivers of the privation of public space. The

contribution of COVID-19 as a new driver to privatisation constitute the last part of this section. A public space is supposed to promote social life. In this way and according to UN News (2015), it allows users to 'participate in public life'. The UN-Habitat (2010) proclaimed that;

> *"the more degraded the public space, the more degraded the citizen because the public space is not only about the quality of life but also its expression of its citizenship".*

Rio (2004) concurred that the quality of public space is a major contributor to citizenship. It is generally agreed that the quality of public space positively contributes to the people's quality of life (Dilorenzo, 2011; Gillespies, 2007; Urban October Background Paper, 2015; Wojnarowska, 2016). The Urban October Background Paper (2015) proclaimed the theme of the 2015 United Nations Habitat Day as 'Public Spaces for All'. This contemporary theme resulted from a realisation that the public space often has been undervalued, while, in actual fact, it is the backbone of cities and is central to the creation of an inclusive city as required by Sustainable Development Goal 11 that seeks to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" (ICSU/ISSC 2015). The UN-

Habitat (2016) highlighted that the specific target 11.7 is evidence of the importance of public space to humanity. Target 11.7 reads:

> *"By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities".*

According to Koray (1999), public spaces are related to social behaviour, transactions, culture, safety, commercial success. The same view is echoed by Trip (2007) who highlights that a high-quality public space promotes urban competitiveness. It plays a pivotal role in urban structure and attractiveness of the townscape (Wojnarowska, 2016) and thus allows cities to compete for a better image nationally and abroad (Rio, 2004). A public space has the potential to reposition, reimage and market a city; and improve the city's tourism potential (Harvey, 2009). In the view of Carmona et al., (2010), a high-quality public space is "incredibly important and it is the lifeblood of the city". It is the most important aspect of the built environment that gives a city its image and sense of place (Dilorenzo, 2011; Gillespies, 2007; Harvey

2009). The New Master Planning Limited (2008) is in unison with this statement:

"Often the public realm is the first and lasting impression a town centre makes on a visitor. From the point of arrival to the experience as a pedestrian exploring the town, the public realm (space) plays a significant role in the statement a town makes and its profile as a destination".

In the same vein, the Project for Public Spaces (2012) remarked that public space defines the character of a city. On the other hand, the Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE ,2011) proclaimed that the outside spaces are important for the health of local people since it encourages sports and a healthy lifestyle. Public spaces are important for the betterment of human health and well-being (Harvey, 2009). One of the environmental benefits of a high-quality public space is its ability to contain and regulate the negative adverse effects of climate change. For example, a well-vegetated public park may regulate the 'urban heat island' (Maulan, 2015). In light of the Urban October Background Paper's (2015) description of the public space as the "poor man's living room", public spaces have the potential to

promote social inclusive cities. Related to social inclusivity, Rio (2004) confirmed that high-quality public spaces reduce the rich–poor divide. Furthermore, the public space offers to the public opportunities for learning, communication, refreshing and political activities (Lofland, 2009).

Figure 1 shows some of the benefits of a high-quality public space as illustrated by the New Zealand Ministry of Environment (2005). It is apparent from Figure 1 that a high-quality public space has multiple benefits such as stronger communities, greater social and economic engagement, enhanced economic performance and improved health.

Figure 1: Benefits of a high-quality public realm
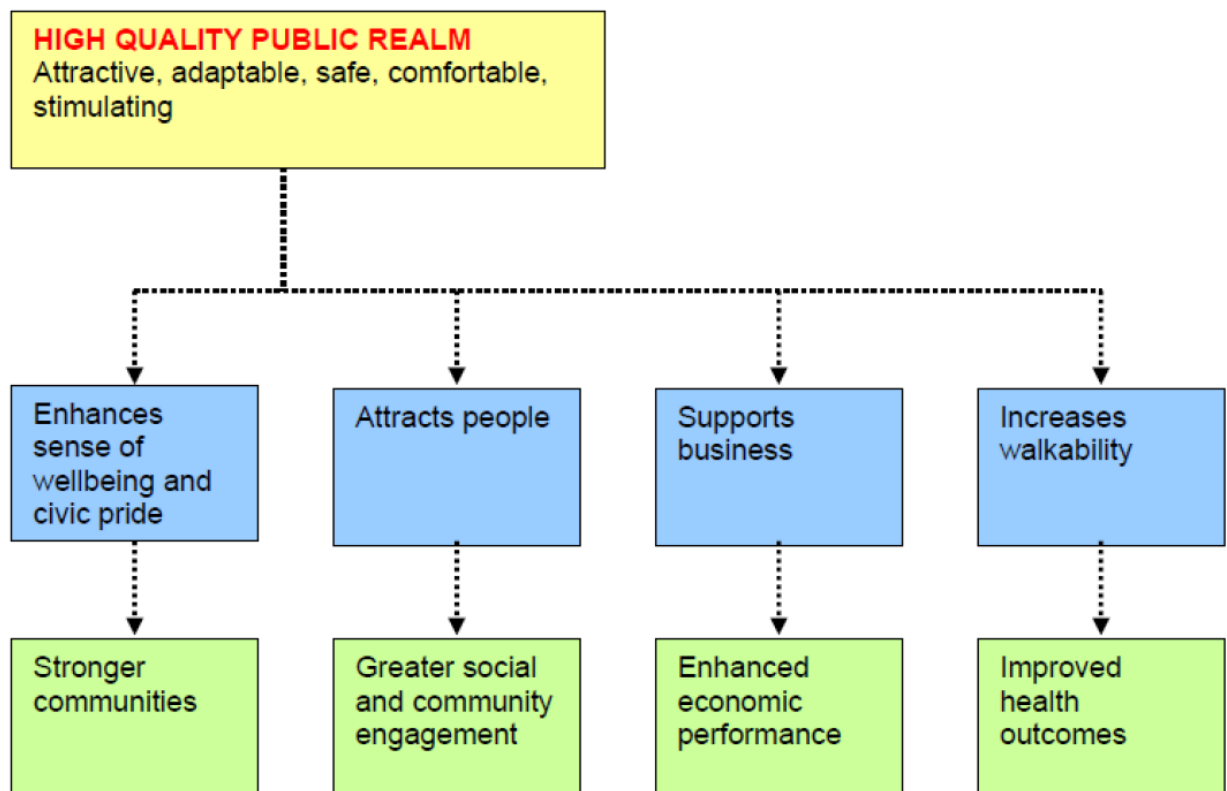
Source: New Zealand Ministry of Environment (2005)

In summary, a high-quality public is the driver for economic performance, human participation, movement and interactions, as well as recreation (New Zealand Ministry of Environment, 2005; UN-Habitat 2015). In this way, "liveability and prosperity of cities and human settlements" are improved. In addition, the Urban October Background Paper (2015) concurred:

> *"Good public spaces play a role in attracting investment, uses and activities, thus enhancing safety; increasing property values, generating municipal revenue; providing opportunities for economic interaction and enhancing livelihood opportunities".*

The forgoing value of public space can be better exposed by paying attention to the two major components of external public space namely streets and public parks.

In contemporary times, the street is viewed as a social arena that offers opportunities for people to meet and socialise, where they can rest, sit, eat and relax (CABE, 2011 & Fredrickson, 1999). In a similar vein, the Project for Public Spaces (2012) reported that streets are pivotal because they promote both social and economic interaction. The Project for Public Spaces

(2008) indicated that when a street is characterised by minimal human presence, it is not a place at all; it is "nothing more than a conduit for motor vehicles" but a "case of a disappearing place". Jacobs (1961) emphasised the importance of streets and sidewalk in a city:

> *"Streets and their sidewalks, the main public spaces, are its most vital organs. Think of a city and what comes to mind? Its streets. If the city's streets look interesting, the city looks interesting, if they look dull, the city looks dull".*

The Dutch 'woonerf' concept is a good example of a scenario whereby the street is used more as a social space than a traffic channel. This is a residentially shared street concept that gives people supremacy to the social use of the street over that of cars.

Great public spaces such as parks, on the other hand are important places that contribute largely to the shaping of great cities such as Bryant Park in New York, as depicted in Figure 2. Striking is the relaxing mood and the big number of movable seats. The Great urban parks are a "safety valve for the city" (Project for Public Spaces, 2012) and they come in various forms such as places to eat and places where one can have something to drink, as well as public

markets (including vending) and spaces around cultural centres and districts (Project for Public Spaces 2008). Such spaces encourage shows, celebrations and gatherings. Public parks in particular are categorised by Willemse (2015) into urban parks, community parks, play or pocket parks, and parkways.

Shaftoe (2008) reported that the conviviality of public parks may be improved through availability of eating and drinking opportunities, and public performance. He further suggested the inclusion of movable seating, comfort breaks such as public toilets, and public art. The importance of a parks has been summarised by Willemse (2015) as functional, aesthetic and ecological in orientation. According to Remigios and Lloyd (2012), the public park improves residents' experience through beauty and intercourse with nature; people enjoy a microclimate, air and water purification, recreational, therapeutic and psychological advantages, as well as ecological and aesthetic advantages. McCormack, Rock, Toohey and Hignell (2010) underscored that by encouraging physical activity, public parks provide physical and mental health benefits.

Figure 2.   A lively park in New York

Source: Project for Public Spaces (2008)

The foregoing discussion and in particular a discussion on the streets and public parks, demonstrates that besides the physical shaping of cities, public space can potentially improve the quality of people's lives by providing social, economic, environmental, health and psychological benefits. Social inclusivity is the main ingredient of a good public space. The success of a public space is determined through its ability to attract and retain people from all walks of life largely for socialisation. This in line with Mehta's (2011) assertion that 'sociability'- is the primary role of public space. Therefore, the central goal for public space planning,

design and management is to attract people and promote sociability. However, public life in public spaces has been and continues to be threatened towards privatisation by both internal and external factors.

Drivers for the privatisation of public life
The drivers are both internal and external. These are factors that repel the usage of public space.

Internal drivers
The internal drivers are repelling factors engrained within the public space itself and have to do with the state, characteristics and/or content of the public space. These have to do with the quality of the public space and include safety, availability of facilities, and maintenance levels (Willemse, 2015). Facilities include play spaces, tot lots, play equipment, informal sports facilities, signage, secure and adequate parking, landscaping (lawns and trees), trash bins, lighting and paved walkways (Willemse, 2015), seats, food and drinks (Willemse 2015; Shaftoe, 2008), public toilets, public art (Shaftoe, 2008) and public markets (Project for Public Spaces, 2008). The presence of water features, pleasant scenery, fenced with controlled free access, spacious for communal use, green, multipurpose use and minimal gangsters attract uses to the public spaces.

Activities in a park, both active and passive, include braaing (barbeque), picnicking, talking, socialising, playing, sightseeing, engaging in festivals and partying (Willemse 2015) are also important attracting features. Aesthetics is one other important feature which can come through landscaping, natural settings, distinctive smells, fresh air of fumes, sounds of nature, or quietness (McCormack et al., 2010).

Failure to meet most of the foregoing quality issues will lead to abandonment of the public spaces. They can only be used for 'necessary activities' and not 'optional activities' In this way the public space repel users giving them no option but to stay in their private space leading to privatisation of public life.

External drivers
The modernist movement and the digital space are two prominent external factors that have contributed to privatisation in the history of public space. The declining quality and quantity of public space may be largely associated with historic and current forms of urban planning. The modernist approach to planning has and is still negatively affecting the built environment. The UN-Habitat (2009) highlighted that the approach, which is a brainchild of Le-Corbusier and other modernists, has lived

since the 1850s and persists today as a form of urban planning. The UN-Habitat (2009) described modernist urban planning as follows:

> *"It generally involves a particular process of producing plans (which was 'top down' and expert led, and regarded as solely a function of government); a particular form of plan (generally known as a master plan, underpinned by a land-use regulatory system); and the promotion of a particular urban form (urban modernism, characterized by mono-functional use areas, low-built densities, movement systems based on the private car, tower blocks and quantities of green open space)."*

The undesirable results of the mechanistic modernism approach, which is expert-driven, have attracted the need for a humanistic approach that places people at the centre stage. Humanism is a branch of psychology that focuses on the personal growth and potential of humans to choose their own patterns of life (Pastorino & Doyle-Portillo, 2011). According to Bland and DeRobert (2017), the humanistic approach creates a window towards the understanding of "the lived experiences of

individuals as active participants in their life world". This is an important approach propounded by humanists such as Maslow and Rodgers around the 1950s and 1960s (Jingna, 2012) at a time when there was an outcry on the declining quality of public space (Koray, 1999). Unlike the modernist approach, the humanist approach links people to basic needs (Jingna, 2012). Clearly, it is based on the experiences and aspirations of the users and not that of the experts.

The modernist movement has essentialist characteristics and according to Røe (2014), knowledge is mainly expert-based, data is about physical conditions and places are understood as material spaces and people, who happen to be the public space users are given minimal consideration (Røe, 2014). Even the liveliness and vitality of places are associated with the appearance of buildings and their formal and spatial composition without recognising people's behaviour and activities that bring an environment to life (Mehta, 2014). However, "local people have the best understanding of the assets and challenges of a particular place" (Project for Public Spaces 2012:12) and their values and views are therefore important (Jiven & Larkham, 2003). Therefore, the modernist approach led to inhumane and repressive spaces

(Bentley et al., 1985).The resulting public spaces are not appealing to the users and thus leading to privatisation. The second external driver is the emergency and growth of the digital space. Communications technology, and the cyberspace or virtual space in particular, is a competitor to, and is suspected to be gradually replacing and threatening the physical public space or real space (Koray, 1999; Sennet, 2010; Walters & Brown, 2004). This is so because people may spend their social time indoors using their phones and computers without having to visit the physical public space. According to Jasinski (2020);

> *"The observed tendency of individuals to seek isolation in a crowd also leads to certain problems: Mobile phones used by public transport passengers, cyclists, and pedestrians allow them to sink into the music and alienate themselves from reality, where they are present only in body"*

The quote points at a scenario where people will be physically in the physical public space but paying attention to private life. Such a scenario together with 'machine learning and artificial intelligence' is break physical contact between people and has led to the emergency of 'cybergeoisie' and

'protosurps' (Jasinski, 2020). While safety is necessary in the public space, 'ubiquitous electronic surveillance' has 'limitations on personal freedoms of citizens' (Jasinski, 2020). On the other hand, technology has facilitated copy and paste of public space designs (Fainstein 2005; Watson, 2015). This has led to standardised public spaces characterised by loss of individuality and inability to support public life (Healey, 2010); loss of innovation and imitation has become the order of the day and public spaces that do not respect the local context (Fainstein (2005). The driving force is that cities are competing for global status and the subsequent global–local tension that normally results in the erosion of authentic space and loss of local character (Butterworth, 2000; Koray, 1999). However, Coca-Stefaniak (2013) warned that "place uniqueness is considered an element of sustainable advantage for town centres as a strategic response to the standardising effects of globalisation trends". In support of this trajectory, Polat (2009) concurred that public space design must respect and respond to the local context.

The physical public space remains necessary even in the face of the threat from the virtual space. The digital space does not afford direct social contact among people

and their environments (Gehl, 2007:3) and cannot totally replace face-to-face human interactions (Friedman, 2014). While the digital space may not be a perfect substitute for the real space, a lot of effort has to be devoted towards the improvement of the real space in line with the following argument by Gillespies (2007);

> *"In a society becoming steadily more privatised with private homes, cars, computers, offices and shopping centres, the public component of our life is disappearing. It is important to make the cities inviting, so we can meet our fellow citizens face to face and experience directly through our senses. Public life in good quality public spaces is an important part of a democratic life and a full life".*

It is apparent that interactions in the cyberspace is very artificial, but people will fully resort to it if the physical public space is not attractive. A more natural, direct and physical interaction through senses would yield a more enriching experience – this comes through the real and physical public space.

While the modernist movement is pushing people out of the public space through the unpleasant environments it creates, the

virtual space is pulling people into the attractive private spaces, and thus both forces complement each other in the privatisation of public space. The gross result is the failure to create active public spaces characterised by human presence. While grappling unsuccessfully to address the two threats with the intention to attract and retain people to the public spaces (publicness); another change agent, COVID-19 has just emerged and like the other two threats, but more than the two combined, seems to reverse the efforts being made, by forcing people away from public space into private places (privatisation) as discussed in the results section.

3   Materials and methods

The study methodology follows a critical literature review of the public space, COVID-19 and their interface in light of privatisation of public life.

4   Findings and Discussion

The aim of this study is to explore the contribution of COVID-19 in the privatisation of public life. In light of the two objectives of the study, the results are discussed under the following headings: COVID-19 and public space design and management and a subsequent presentation

of a comprehensive public space privatisation model.

COVID-19 and public space design and management

As previously enunciated, COVID-19 has changed the relationship between people and public spaces (UN-Habitat, 2020). Design and management of public spaces should therefore change in order to suit the new order. The changes can either targeted at reducing the spread of COVID-19 in public spaces or using public spaces to deal with the problem. Odediran (2020) stressed the need for innovation and adaptation. Failure to innovate in public space design and management means that the usage of the spaces will continue to be avoided where possible leading to privatisation of private life. This section will identify changes brought by the pandemic followed by the implications for design and management of public space.

COVID-19 has brought changes in travel patterns. According to Jasinski (2020) people 'walk rather than take a tram, ride a bike instead of going by bus, chose a private car over a train'. Travel is privatized as much as possible. Regulatory limits on the number of people per vehicle for example in Zimbabwe also promotes privatized travel. In light of the physical distancing

requirement, the UN-Habitat (2020) the expansion of the amount of allocated to public space, that is, streets, pavements, foot paths, parks. This is against the background of UN-Habitat's (2016) lamentation that land devoted to streets is small (less than 20%) in Africa. The approach can encourage walking, play and biking while observing physical distancing. In the same way of thinking, having multiple transit points can help decongest especially the main bus termini in cities.

Density have made cities vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic and other hazards (Odediran 2020). Therefore, the physical setting within the public spaces should be spacious and afford the users an opportunity to observe physical distancing. Arguing that the shape and functioning of the space must respond to COVID-19, Jasinski (2020) pointed out that;

> *"The COVID-19 pandemic will change the patterns of behaviour in public space and the rules of spatial planning. Chairs will be further apart in street cafes, park benches will be marked with tapes to ensure the desired personal distance and some streets may be closed and converted to pedestrian zones. More*

people will probably walk and cycle".

In addition to spacious public space levels of hygiene must be maintained. Adequate bathroom facilities and water points in the public space must be provided. The materials used for the facilities in the public spaces must be easy to clean (UN-Habitat, 2020). For starters, an almost COVID-19 free public space environment may achieve this through a careful use of materials (seats, benches, play equipment, pillars, and bollards among other physical elements) that do not promote the long life of the virus. The UN-Habitat (2020) further suggests the need for equitably distributed public spaces across all scales and the planning of self-sufficient neighbourhoods-with neighbourhood parks and other public spaces. This will not only create walkable distances but will also avoid a scenario where people from different neighbourhoods are forced to mingle all the time. The overall effect is the reduction of overcrowding in the great urban parks and main streets. In this way, public space itself is also believed to be a solution to the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the pandemic, Odediran (2020) highlighted that;

"a new approach to city planning should bring open spaces, watersheds, forests and parks, into the heart of how we think about and plan our cities".

Meanwhile, the poorest sections of society are the most affected by the pandemic since they earn a living directly from the public space and spend most of their time in the public spaces. They spend their time in the public spaces either for relief from the crowded high-density areas or because they are homeless and therefore stay permanently in the public spaces (street kids for example). The public space is 'the living room' of the poor (Urban October Background Paper, 2015).The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the poor rich divide while prices private spaces are increasing (Jasinski, 2020). During lockdown where everyone is expected to stay at home, except those offering essential survives the tendency has always that the poor were swept away from the public spaces. In some instances, it was observed that the vending structures were demolished by the local authorities. The UN-Habitat (2020) guides that the informal traders must be allowed to operate in the public space in well-organized vending space at physical distancing while wearing protective gear.

While equitably distributing public spaces (especially public parks) across all scales special attention should be given to high density areas where there is minimal private space.

The foregoing discussion has shown that the COVID-19 pandemic has rendered the public space unattractive thus complementing the internal drivers for privatisation. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has fuelled the significance of the cyberspace. In their private homes during lockdowns or restricted movements, the digital source has become 'a platform for sharing information and enabling contact and interaction'. Cyberspace taking over the physical space (Jasinski, 2020). In this way the COVID-19 pandemic is a double-edged sword. It suppresses the functioning of the physical public space by pushing people to their private premises and on the other hand promote the use of cyberspace in private spaces. As a way of emphasising how the COVID-19 has privatised public spaces and subsequently destroyed the main attraction of city life. Jasinski (2020) lamented;

> *"Wearing masks, sunglasses, hats and headphones, they cross over to another dimension of virtual space, one that is cut off from the surrounding world".*

The combination of COVID-19 and the cyberspace are challenging physical public space to the extent that the multisensory contact between people and the public space has becomes totally lost. This situation can possibly create a wrong impression that the physical public space is no longer necessary thus perpetuating the privatisation of public life.
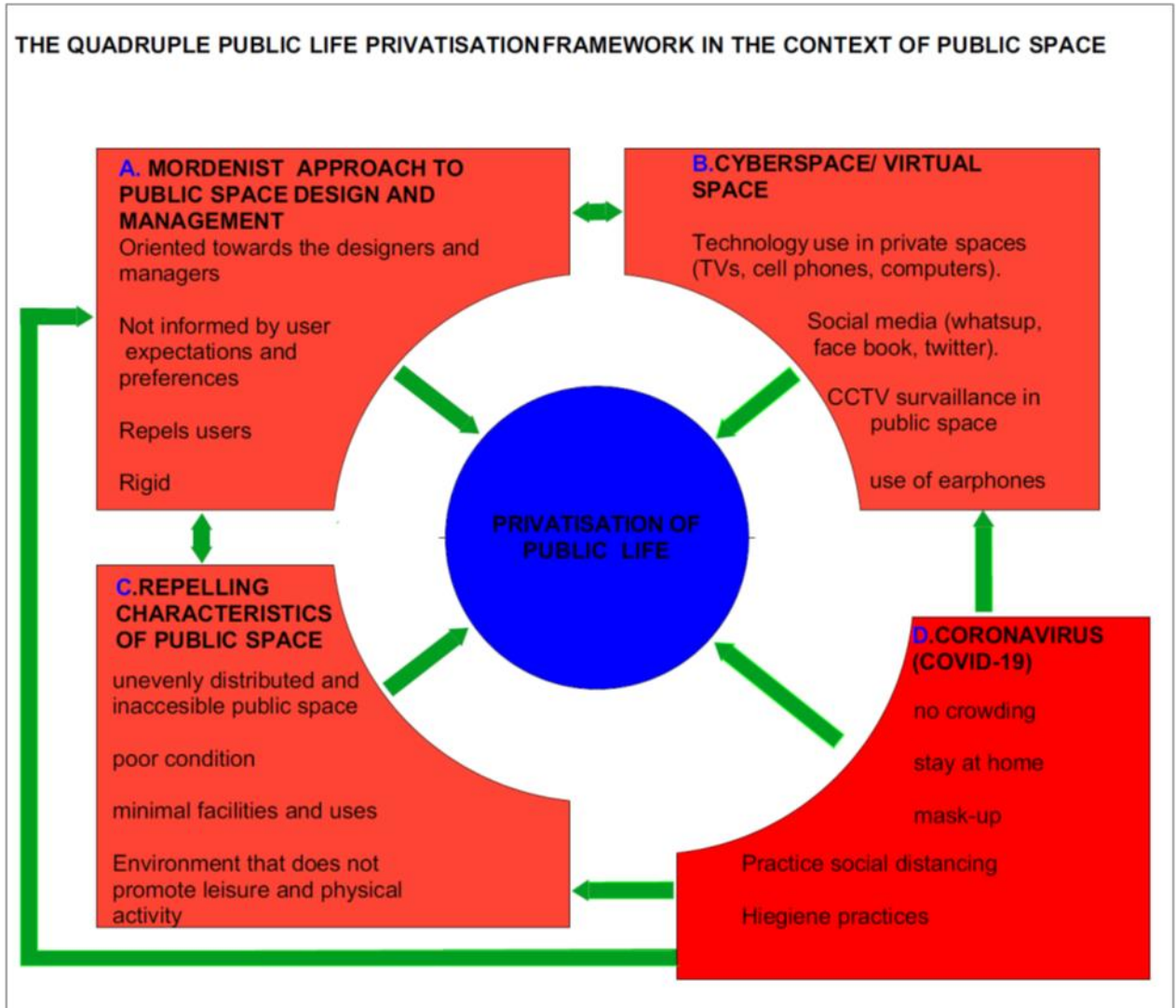
Comprehensive public space privatisation framework.

The implication of the 'COVID-19 and cyberspace coup of the physical public space' on design and management of the physical space is not straight forward. The cyberspace has always been competing with the physical space. COVID-19 has emerged to suppress the physical space while supporting the cyberspace. Now people's focus is on COVID-19 and cyberspace and no longer on improving 'the seemingly useless physical public space'. The physical public space has for long been neglected due to internal quality factors and the modernist approach that created unattractive public space environments. The COVID-19 pandemic and cyberspace are out of control from the perspective of

the built-environment professions and physical public space is the only controllable factor. The dilemma is clarified through a quadruple public life privatization framework in the context of public space as reflected in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The quadruple   public   life privatisation

THE QUADRUPLE PUBLIC LIFE PRIVATISATION FRAMEWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC SPACE

A. MORDENIST APPROACH TO PUBLIC SPACE DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT
Oriented towards the designers and managers

Not informed by user expectations and preferences

Repels users

Rigid

B. CYBERSPACE/ VIRTUAL SPACE

Technology use in private spaces (TVs, cell phones, computers).

Social media (whatsup, face book, twitter).

CCTV survaillance in public space

use of earphones

PRIVATISATION OF PUBLIC LIFE

C. REPELLING CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC SPACE

unevenly distributed and inaccesible public space

poor condition

minimal facilities and uses

Environment that does not promote leisure and physical activity

D. CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

no crowding

stay at home

mask-up

Practice social distancing

Hiegiene practices

Therefore, for built-environment professionals, the way forward hinges upon improving the quality of the physical public space, making it usable even during the pandemics like COVID-19 and making it usable together with cyberspace. The physical space has to be improved in such a way that it is humanistic and COVI9-19 compliant. The physical public space enjoys the fact that it is natural, promotes face to face social interaction, and promotes an active rather than a sedentary lifestyle.

The human need to interact with public space is long rooted in the history of mankind. However, forces that discourage the interaction have always been present and these continue to increase and come in new dimensions. The COVID-19 pandemic is a many-sided polygon which no one profession can tackle. Every profession is therefore called upon to participate since the pandemic affects every aspect of life. While the built environment professionals cannot deal with the pandemic as medical scientists should, they must aim at creating a better and attractive environment that are usable even in the face of pandemics. If that is not done the four privatisation namely modernism movement, state of public spaces, cyberspace and pandemics, will totally and permanently take over the role

of the physical public space. A holistic approach to the privation drivers and any other necessary factors may give good results since the public space is also multifaceted. While not everything is wrong about the said evils, the loss of public life and loss of an active lifestyle is a big loss to human health and life.

Some observational studies have shown that indoor environments are contributing to the increased spread of the virus. The PHE (2020) have reported that aerosols easily build up in enclosed spaces particularly where there are poor air exchanges. However, airborne risk of COVID19 transmission is much lower outdoors while on the contrary the risk of spread via droplets remain high if people engage in prolonged face to face close contact (SAGE, 2020). In public spaces there are shared objects such as playground facilities, gate handles which therefore need regular hand washing, maintaining a distance of 2m, disinfection among other strategies (SAGE, 2021).

The European Centres for Disease Prevention and Control (2021) stated that vaccines should be made readily available if the goal of reopening the society is to be realised. Europe has successfully rolled out their vaccine strategies to achieve herd

immunity against the transmission of the SARS-COV-2 and have started to realise the benefits. In the summer, public space was reopened, and people were readmitted, albeit with proper precautionary measures being followed and in lesser volumes in the stadia for the Euro 2020 tournament. Therefore, there the light of the future depends on the thinkers of today.

5   Conclusions

This study has managed to weave together the drivers of public space privatisation into a comprehensive public life privatization framework that will stand as a basis to the understanding and improvement of urban public life. The framework stands as a springboard that provokes new thinking by built environment and public health professionals. One of the weaknesses of this study was that it was purely depended on secondary data due to COVID-19 restriction that limited empirical data collection. Future researches can, therefore, be done empirically to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. A study that will seek to influence planning law and public health law in relation to pandemics can enlighten society on the planning, design, management of public space.

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