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Post-Urbanism and Beyond: The Unclaimed Paradigm, from Deconstructivism to the Planetary

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Abstract: Objectives: This paper re-examines Post-Urbanism as an unstable yet persistent paradigm in contemporary urban-design discourse and clarifies its relationship to deconstructivism, starchitecture, transurbanism, and place branding. **Methods:** A critical conceptual synthesis is undertaken across primary theoretical texts, comparative classifications of urbanisms, scholarship on iconic and star architecture, and literature on architectural globalization and city branding. Two analytical devices are used: the foreground/background distinction and a typology of public, private, common, and club goods. Four cases are used purposively as heuristic exemplars; counter-cases, selection, and an operationalization protocol appear in appendices. **Results:** Post-Urbanism emerges as an unusually unclaimed paradigm: repeatedly attributed to architects, projects, and development practices but rarely adopted as a self-description. Three conditions distinguish it from a retrospective analytical category. Five frequently conflated concepts operate at distinct ontological levels: formal language, design paradigm, production regime, diagnosis of the urban condition, and policy instrument. Post-Urbanism is reconstructed as a cumulative scalar trajectory from object → district → city → territory, across which its relationship to context changes from inherited → manufactured → absent → inapplicable. **Conclusion:** Post-Urbanism and starchitecture are not equivalent. The former describes a design logic; the latter one regime of its production and legitimation. At the territorial scale, the logic can persist even when the singular star architect disappears. The publicness argument is advanced as a conditional proposition for empirical testing: excludability expands with scale where enlargement coincides with concentrated governance authority, and need not where authority remains plural and publicly accountable.

Keywords: starchitecture; iconic architecture; city branding; publicness; club goods; urban design theory

1. Introduction: An Unstable Category

Post-Urbanism occupies an unusual position in contemporary urban design discourse. Kelbaugh named and repeatedly elaborated it as one of three competing urbanisms in several statements between 2000 and 2008 [1,2,47,48], yet acknowledged that the term was not widely used and that no practitioners formally identified themselves as Post-Urbanists [2]. Carmona nevertheless retains the category, giving Post-Urbanism its own section in the standard survey of the field and tracing its origins to a radical New Modernist approach closely related to Deconstructivism, in the projects of an avant-garde comprising Koolhaas, Eisenman, Hadid, Libeskind, Tschumi, and Gehry [3]. The category is also mapped onto Schwarzer's Conceptual Urbanism, paired there with New Urbanism as one of two contrasting propositions about what should inform urban form [3,21], and it is retained among the five dominant ideals identified by Haas and Olsson [15].

The manner of that retention is itself instructive. Carmona introduces the term by reproducing its disclaimer, acknowledging that Post-Urbanism is not widely used and that no one formally labels themselves a Post-Urbanist before quoting Kelbaugh's definition of it as the avant-garde paradigm grown out of the post-structuralist or critical architectural project [3]. The field's principal textbook thus transmits the category and its refusal in the same sentence. The concept persists despite unusually weak institutional and professional self-identification.

Terminological note: for consistency, this paper uses Post-Urbanism (capitalized and hyphenated) for Kelbaugh's category. The lowercase, unhyphenated posturbanism is retained only for Mulder's distinct usage, as discussed in Section 4.

This instability has led to several adjacent concepts merging into one another. Post-Urbanism is retrospectively associated with the architects assembled in MoMA's 1988 Deconstructivist Architecture exhibition [4]; it overlaps with the fragmentary and disjunctive spatial thinking discussed by Tschumi [5]; it shares a word, though not a meaning, with the posturbanism Mulder rejects in proposing TransUrbanism [6]; and it later intersects with scholarship on star architecture, iconic architecture and urban branding [7–11]. These connections are historically important, but they do not describe the same phenomenon. The five concepts operate at distinct ontological levels, set out systematically in Table 3. Treating them as synonyms obscures the ways in which distinct aesthetic, urbanistic, institutional, and promotional histories became entangled.

The distinction from style is especially important. The 1988 exhibition assembled many architects later associated with Post-Urbanism, while its curators resisted presenting them as a coherent movement [4]; Tschumi's own position emphasizes program, action, and event rather than autonomous form [5]. The formal ancestry of Post-Urbanism was heterogeneous from the outset; a point developed in Section 4.

A second transformation converted an architectural exception into an urban-development instrument. Across the 1990s, culture-led regeneration, an expanding international market for celebrated architects, and increasingly deliberate strategies of city branding converged on the proposition that architectural distinction could itself become an urban resource. Bilbao rendered the convergence globally visible, and agency within it was always wider than the named architect, extending to clients, firms, governments, developers, cultural institutions, and media systems [7,8,10,11,12,14]. Section 5 reconstructs this history and distinguishes the concepts it entangles.

That convergence raises a publicness problem. Sklair connects iconic architecture and consumer-oriented environments to "privileged publics," in which access to benefits may be mediated

by purchasing power [11]. Public claims attached to iconic buildings cannot, therefore, be inferred from appearance or ownership alone.

The final problem is scalar. Much of the established debate concentrates on the exceptional building, yet the spatial field of exception has expanded from individual icons to cultural and regeneration districts, from districts to competitive skylines and urban-development fields, and increasingly from bounded cities to infrastructural and territorial propositions. This paper, therefore, reconstructs Post-Urbanism as a cumulative scalar logic rather than as either an architectural style or a synonym for starchitecture:

object → district → city → territory

Across these registers, the relationship between exceptional intervention and its urban background changes:

inherited → manufactured → absent → inapplicable.

The argument proceeds in four steps: situating Post-Urbanism within the wider proliferation of "urbanisms"; examining the history of refusal surrounding the category; distinguishing the five concepts and tracing their convergence around Bilbao; and examining the paradigm's scalar expansion and its consequences for publicness.

For this final step, the paper draws on Haas and Olsson's distinction between public, private, common, and club goods [15]. The question is not whether every Post-Urbanist project is exclusionary, but whether enlargement of the spatial field of intervention can also enlarge the field across which access, consumption, ownership, and control condition participation.

The purpose is not to invent another urbanism, but to explain why a term that has remained institutionally weak nevertheless continues to describe a recognizable spatial logic. Post-Urbanism names that logic; starchitecture names one regime through which it has been produced. As the scale of intervention increases, the logic may outlive the star.

1.1. Method, Case Selection, and the Status of the Argument

This is a conceptual paper, and its method is accordingly interpretive rather than measurement-based. Three procedures were combined.

The first was a close reading of the primary texts in which the relevant categories were named, refused, or redefined: Kelbaugh's successive formulations of the three urbanisms [1,2,47,48]; the 1988 MoMA catalogue [4]; Tschumi [5]; Mulder's TransUrbanism and the contributions collected with it [6]; Koolhaas [29]; and the three volumes of the Michigan Debates on Urbanism [30–32]. These texts were read for what they claim and for what they decline to claim, since the pattern of refusal is itself this paper's object.

The second was a survey of comparative classifications of contemporary urbanism published between 2000 and 2025, assembled in Table 1. The criterion for inclusion was that a source explicitly maps the field of contemporary urbanisms, paradigms, cultures, or force fields rather than advocating one of them. The survey was undertaken to establish whether Post-Urbanism's instability is particular to it or general to a field inclined to proliferate categories, and it yielded the negative finding reported in Section 3.

The third was a reading of scholarship on iconic and star architecture, architectural globalization, and city branding [7–14,33–42], together with the public-space and publicness literature [15,54–57], from which the two analytical instruments used in Sections 6 and 7 were drawn.

The scalar registers were not specified in advance and then illustrated. They emerged abductively, through movement between the literature and the cases. The literature is itself organized around different spatial units: Kelbaugh and the deconstructivist genealogy address the architectural object; Evans, Ponzini, and Ponzini and Nastasi address districts and regeneration programs; Kaika and Sklair address serial and city-scale production; Brenner and Schmid address a field that exceeds the bounded city. An initial four-part ordering was formulated from that distribution, tested against the cases, and then revised. The fourth register in particular was reformulated from an earlier "network" category once it became apparent that what distinguishes it is not connectivity, which is present at every scale, but the inapplicability of external context. Cases were selected afterward to occupy the registers, against the four criteria set out in Section 6, and are used as heuristic exemplars rather than as a sample. Appendix B records the protocol and the selection decisions in full.

The status of the two principal claims should therefore be stated plainly at the outset. The reconstruction of Post-Urbanism as an unclaimed paradigm is an evidential claim, resting on documented refusals and on the comparative pattern set out in Table 2. The scalar argument concerning publicness is a conceptual proposition, advanced for subsequent empirical testing and not measured here. No causal relationship is asserted at any point. The paper claims that enlargement of the coordinated spatial field enlarges the field across which excludability can potentially be organized, under a condition specified in Section 7.4; it does not claim that enlargement causes exclusion, and no part of the argument depends on such a claim. Appendix A specifies how the proposition could be tested, Appendix B records how the cases and counter-cases were selected, and Section 8.1 states what the paper does not establish.

2. Why Paradigms Matter

It is tempting, faced with the proliferating vocabulary of contemporary urbanism, to treat classification as academic bookkeeping. It is not. Urban-design paradigms carry assumptions about what constitutes a good city, which problems deserve attention, which interventions are legitimate, and whose interests the resulting environments serve. Carmona and colleagues accordingly frame urban design as an ethical activity concerned with values, social justice, and equity [3]. A paradigm is therefore not merely a label attached retrospectively to similar-looking projects; it is one vehicle through which particular values become spatially operative.

The modern disciplinary use of the term "paradigm" derives principally from Kuhn [16]. In his account, a paradigm is not simply an idea but a constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, exemplars, and standards shared by a disciplinary community. Two characteristics are particularly important here. First, a paradigm possesses a community that recognizes legitimate problems and acceptable solutions. Second, it contains a mechanism of self-correction, because anomalies become visible from within the community that reproduces the framework [16].

Urban design is not a natural science, and the Kuhnian analogy cannot be transferred intact. Garde provides a useful adaptation [17], distinguishing integrative paradigms—the Garden City, Neighborhood Unit, and New Urbanism—which assemble reformist ideas, social values, and design techniques in response to perceived problems, from degenerative variations, which emerge through cumulative transformations of urban types and can intensify segregation, commodification, and inequalities of access. Paradigms in urban design are therefore simultaneously conceptual, normative, and material: they organize ways of understanding the city while shaping what is built.

Garde adds an important qualification: implementation can compromise the reformist values on which a paradigm was founded [17]. A design paradigm can therefore remain rhetorically intact while its realized forms diverge from its declared social intentions — a gap that becomes significant later in evaluating Post-Urbanism.

Lakatos adds a limited but useful caution: frameworks can

persist despite anomalies and criticism, so persistence alone does not demonstrate explanatory or normative success [18].

Kuhn and Lakatos nevertheless share an assumption that becomes decisive here: both presuppose an identifiable inside, a community capable of reproducing, defending, modifying, and questioning a framework. This is precisely where Post-Urbanism becomes unusual.

Abusaada and Elshater reinforce the need for caution [19], distinguishing genuine epistemic shifts from methodological, tactical, normative, or historical changes too readily described as such. This paper, therefore, does not claim that Post-Urbanism constituted a Kuhnian revolution or displaced an earlier paradigm.

Instead, paradigm is used here in a more restricted urban-design sense: a recurring constellation of assumptions, exemplars, values, and spatial practices sufficiently coherent to organize a recognizable approach to the city. Crucially, this definition does not require formal membership in a movement. To impose such a requirement would exclude the very phenomenon under investigation.

This permits a distinction central to the paper:

A claimed paradigm possesses an identifiable inside; an unclaimed paradigm is constituted predominantly through external attribution.

To make this distinction operational, the degree to which an urbanism is claimed is assessed here across six qualitative indicators: (1) explicit self-identification by practitioners; (2) codified principles, charters, or manifestos; (3) organizations, membership structures, or recurring institutional forums; (4) identifiable proponents who publicly defend the label; (5) sustained practitioner use of the term; and (6) mechanisms of internal debate, revision, or boundary-setting. These indicators are not combined into a numerical index, but they permit systematic comparison across urbanisms.

Two questions follow immediately, and the distinction proposed here is of little use until they are answered. What minimum conditions must a constellation satisfy to count as a paradigm at all, when most of the claiming indicators are absent? And how does an unclaimed paradigm differ from an analytical category that scholars construct retrospectively and impose upon a body of work?

Three conditions are proposed as jointly necessary. The first is *recurrence*: an identifiable and repeated set of exemplars, recognizable to observers who did not coin the term. The second is *reconstructible commitments*: shared assumptions about context, order, typology, and exception that can be stated as propositions rather than registered merely as family resemblance. The third is *operative continuity*: the constellation continues to inform the commissioning, design, and promotion of new projects, rather than describing only a closed historical set. Post-Urbanism satisfies all three. The six claiming indicators are additional to these conditions and independent of them; their presence yields a claimed paradigm and their absence an unclaimed one, but neither determines whether a paradigm is present.

The distinction from retrospective classification turns on the second and third conditions, together with one further asymmetry. The International Style and Brutalism are retrospective classifications: coined by observers, applied to a closed corpus, and carrying no continuing instruction for practice. They require no internal mechanism of correction, because nothing further is produced under them and nothing turns on their boundaries. Post-Urbanism differs in three respects. It remains operative, which is why its consequences continue to accrue. Its supposed exemplars are not absent or indifferent but active and explicitly refusing, and refusal is itself evidence of salience, since a designation that no one applies requires no rejection. And it carries normative and distributive consequence, in the form of claims about publicness, access, and urban benefit, which is precisely why the absence of an accountable inside is consequential rather than merely curious. A retrospective classification has no one to answer for it because no one needs to. An unclaimed paradigm has no one to answer for it although someone should.

The resulting conjunction is the phenomenon this paper names. Across the six indicators, New Urbanism registers positively on all six and Post-Urbanism on none, while both satisfy the three paradigm conditions. The finding is categorical rather than graded, which is why it is reported as a comparison and not as a score: no weighting of the six indicators could alter a result of six against zero.

An unclaimed paradigm is therefore not simply contested, diffuse, or informal. A contested paradigm has recognized adherents who disagree over its meaning; an informal paradigm may lack formal organization but still be self-identified; and a diffuse paradigm may have porous boundaries while remaining recognizable to participants. “Unclaimed” denotes a stronger asymmetry: the category is reproduced primarily through external attribution while its supposed exemplars rarely adopt the designation themselves. Table 2 applies this distinction comparatively.

New Urbanism provides the clearest control case. Whatever its internal disagreements, it possesses an organization, a Charter, named proponents, declared principles, and practitioners capable of debating what belongs to the movement [3]. Post-Urbanism possesses almost none of these institutional attributes. Its supposed exemplars are recognizable, and its spatial tendencies recur, but the category itself is routinely refused.

That difference is more than semantic. A paradigm with an inside can debate its failures and revise its principles. An unclaimed paradigm has no equivalent mechanism of collective accountability.

The paradox at the center of this paper can therefore be stated more precisely:

Post-Urbanism appears coherent enough to be recognized from outside, but insufficiently claimed to be corrected from within.

The next section asks whether this peculiarity is exceptional or simply another consequence of a field unusually inclined to manufacture new “urbanisms.”

3. Mapping the Urbanisms: Paradigms, Cultures, Force Fields, and a Census

Post-Urbanism did not emerge in a field lacking classification. Since the turn of the millennium, planning and urban-design scholarship has repeatedly organized contemporary practice into paradigms, movements, cultures, force fields, and competing “urbanisms.” These do not describe identical objects: some map planning theory, others design ideologies, professional practices, or spatial tendencies. Their cumulative significance is that the field suffered not from a shortage of classifications but from their proliferation.

Fainstein’s mapping of planning theory distinguished the communicative model, New Urbanism, and the Just City, exposing tensions between process and substantive outcomes [20]. Schwarzer, in the same year, described four movements, Traditional, Conceptual, Marketplace, and Social, preferring a plural account of urban development to a single theory [21]. Carmona subsequently incorporated both into his synthesis of contemporary urbanisms [3].

Kelbaugh’s triptych thus formed part of a broader classificatory moment rather than an isolated exercise [1,2]. What made it unusual was the placement of an attributed avant-garde position alongside approaches with far clearer professional constituencies.

Subsequent mappings enlarged the field. Talen reconstructed American city-making through four overlapping cultures: incrementalism, plan-making, planned communities, and regionalism

[22]. Fraker, responding directly to Kelbaugh, rejected three discrete schools in favor of six more fluid "force fields" [23]. Important here is his attention not only to assumptions and roots but to constituents—the actors capable of sustaining an urbanism. His Generic Urbanism/Hyper-Modernity approaches the territory Kelbaugh called Post-Urbanism while directing attention toward the institutional and economic forces behind its production.

Garde reframed the debate by distinguishing between integrative paradigms and degenerative variations [17]. His contribution is less another taxonomy than a demonstration that classifications can be normative and cumulative: some innovations assemble reformist values, while others progressively intensify segregation, commodification, and inequalities of access. Busquets identified ten contemporary approaches to the "urbanistic project," reflecting the diversity of strategies through which urban transformation was conceived [24].

By 2011, Barnett could catalog 60 of the "newest urbanisms" across environmental, social, political, community, and design concerns [25]. His census makes the larger point visible: once urbanism becomes a productive suffix capable of naming a condition, aspiration, technique, ideology, or theory, terminological proliferation becomes a disciplinary phenomenon in its own right.

It also yields an unexpected negative finding. Post-Urbanism is not among the sixty. Neither is starchitecture nor transurbanism. The most inclusive inventory of urbanisms yet compiled, one that finds room for Holy Urbanism, Stereoscopic Urbanism, and Second-Rate Urbanism, omits the paradigm entirely. Its content, however, is present: among the sociopolitical urbanisms Barnett lists, Irresponsible Urbanism, glossing it as "what the other guys are doing," while noting that Koolhaas elevated it to a principle in "Whatever Happened to Urbanism?" [25,29]. The position is cataloged. The category is not. It circulates as an accusation rather than as a name anyone holds.

Later classifications did not resolve the proliferation. Haas and Olsson identified five dominant ideals—New, Post, Green, Re- and Everyday Urbanism—while noting that no stable categorization had been achieved [15]. Roggema, whose title echoes Kelbaugh's triptych while addressing an unrelated problem, organized urbanism according to temporal rates of change—Fast Urbanism, Slow Urbanism, and Suddenism [26]. Shahsavar more recently mapped a shift from form-centered paradigms toward landscape urbanism, green infrastructure, and ecological design [27], while Abusaada, Elshater, and El-Husseiny emphasize that urban design paradigms must be understood within their historical, political, cultural, and spatial contexts [28].

Table 1. Selected comparative mappings of contemporary planning and urban-design paradigms, 2000–2025

Source	Object being mapped	Principal categories or organizing logic
Fainstein, 2000 [20]	Planning theory	Communicative model; New Urbanism; Just City
Schwarzer, 2000 [21]	Contemporary urbanisms	Traditional; Conceptual; Marketplace; Social
Kelbaugh, 2000/2007 [1,2]	Self-conscious urbanisms	New Urbanism; Everyday Urbanism; Post-Urbanism
Talen, 2005 [22]	American urbanist cultures	Incrementalism; plan-making; planned communities; regionalism
Fraker, 2007 [23]	Urban-design force fields	Everyday; Generic/Hyper-Modernity; Hybrid; New; Transformative Urban Morphology; Urban Ecological Reconstruction
Garde, 2008 [17]	Urban-design innovation	Degenerative variations; integrative paradigms
Busquets, 2009 [24]	Contemporary urbanistic projects	Ten approaches to contemporary urban transformation
Carmona et al., 2010 [3]	Contemporary urbanisms	Synthetic mapping drawing, particularly on Schwarzer and Kelbaugh
Barnett, 2011 [25]	Proliferating urbanisms	Census of 60 named urbanisms
Haas and Olsson, 2014 [15]	Dominant planning/design ideals	New; Post; Green; Re-; Everyday Urbanism
Roggema, 2015 [26]	Paces of urban change	Fast Urbanism; Slow Urbanism; Suddenism
Shahsavar, 2025 [27]	Urban-design frameworks	Form-oriented paradigms → landscape and ecological approaches
Abusaada et al., 2025 [28]	Context of urban-design paradigms	Context-sensitive framework linking paradigms to historical and societal conditions

Source: Author's own synthesis.

The table is selected, not exhaustive, and its categories operate at different levels of abstraction: Fainstein maps planning theories; Talen maps historical cultures; Fraker maps force fields; Busquets maps modes of intervention; Barnett maps terminological proliferation. Their heterogeneity is part of the evidence rather than a flaw in the comparison.

Contemporary planning and urban design display a persistent desire to classify themselves, yet classifications stabilize unevenly. New Urbanism recurs across otherwise different mappings and possesses recognizable institutions, texts, proponents, and principles. Other categories remain diagnostic or descriptive.

Post-Urbanism sits uneasily between these conditions. It was named by Kelbaugh, repeated in his later work, incorporated into

Carmona's synthesis, retained by Haas and Olsson, and approximated through categories such as Fraker's Generic Urbanism/Hyper-Modernity [1–3,15,23]. Yet it never acquired institutional consolidation commensurate with its persistence in discourse.

Sorkin, surveying the same landscape, dismissed both poles at once. His essay on the ends of urban design describes New and Post-Urbanism as twin dead ends—a Hobson's choice that leaves the discipline trapped between The Truman Show and Blade Runner, and the urban imaginary divided into the faux and the fab [46]. The critique is worth registering because it comes from outside both camps and grants neither the standing of a working paradigm.

This is the central implication of the classificatory history:

The problem is not a lack of classification. It is the inability of this particular paradigm to stabilize within a field unusually committed to classification.

Why it failed to stabilize is the subject of the next section.

4. The Unclaimed Paradigm

The classificatory instability identified above becomes more significant when one asks who actually claims Post-Urbanism. The answer is remarkably difficult to establish.

Kelbaugh acknowledged the problem himself, stating that no one formally labels themselves a Post-Urbanist and that the term is not widely used [2], while retaining the category on the grounds that a sufficiently coherent avant-garde paradigm can be identified across poststructuralist thought, global flows, and particular architects and projects. Carmona reproduces the same qualification [3].

This is not a terminological accident. Refusal is embedded in the genealogy from which Post-Urbanism is constructed. Johnson and Wigley's 1988 Deconstructivist Architecture exhibition assembled a canonical group while resisting the idea that it constituted a coherent movement or style [4]. Tschumi's own theoretical position further complicates the notion of retrospective stylistic unity by insisting on program, event, and disjunction rather than on autonomous architectural form [5]. The supposed formal ancestry of Post-Urbanism was therefore unstable even before the term itself was coined.

Johnson's own framing is more emphatic than any paraphrase. Opening the 1988 catalog by recalling the exhibition he had mounted with Hitchcock and Barr fifty-six years earlier, he writes that there are now no such aims: deconstructivist architecture is not a new style, represents no movement, is not a creed, has no "three rules" of compliance, and is not even "seven architects" [4]. Wigley is equally direct, describing not a movement or an -ism but a curious point of intersection among practitioners moving in different directions—at best an uneasy alliance, and an episode he expected to be short-lived [4]. The exhibition that fixed the roster devoted its opening pages to denying that it had done so.

Koolhaas presents a similar difficulty. Kelbaugh positions his work close to the paradigm's intellectual center [1,2], yet Koolhaas never adopts the term. In "Whatever Happened to Urbanism?" he attacks the ambition to control the city through the "twin fantasies of order and omnipotence," emphasizing uncertainty, fields, and potential instead [29]. Analytical proximity is not membership.

The distinction is clearest in the Michigan Debates on Urbanism, staged in 2004 and explicitly organized around Kelbaugh's taxonomy: Everyday Urbanism in Volume I, New Urbanism in Volume II, and Post-Urbanism and Re-Urbanism in Volume III [30–32]. Together, they provide an unusually useful comparison of how far different urbanisms possess an institutional and intellectual "inside."

Everyday Urbanism occupies an intermediate position: Crawford presents it as partial, situational, and accretional, favoring small interventions within existing conditions rather than comprehensive replacement [30], yet there remains an identifiable literature, vocabulary, method, and set of proponents willing to say what it means.

New Urbanism is considerably more institutionalized: it possesses the Congress for the New Urbanism, a Charter, founders, conferences, declared principles, and a professional constituency [3], and Kelbaugh notes its unusual organizational strength [2]. Institutionalization does not imply consensus; Calthorpe resists reducing New Urbanism to a neo-traditional style and emphasizes its regional and social ambitions [31], yet the disagreement occurs within a recognized movement. The capacity to dispute what New Urbanism should become is itself evidence of a collectively acknowledged object of disagreement.

Post-Urbanism is different.

Volume III is revealing precisely because the debate constructed around the category cannot find an uncontested representative of it. Littenberg and Peterson advocate ReUrbanism rather than positioning themselves within Post-Urbanism, while Eisenman—effectively assigned to the Post-Urbanist position—questions whether he is an urbanist at all [32]. Kelbaugh's own framing acknowledges that neither side identifies with the term.

The asymmetry can therefore be stated sharply:

New Urbanism demonstrates what an urban-design paradigm with an inside looks like: an organization, charter, founders, adherents, declared principles, and mechanisms of internal debate. Post-Urbanism possesses almost none of these institutional attributes.

This does not make Post-Urbanism fictitious. Analytical categories can identify regularities practitioners do not name, and refusal does not invalidate a concept. What matters is the persistence with which Post-Urbanism is constituted through external attribution.

External evidence supports the same conclusion from a different direction. Alaily-Mattar, Hall and Thierstein's systematic review of 365 articles published between 1997 and 2019 found that although the architecture field accounts for a substantial share of this literature, only 5 percent of its contributions are critical, against 22 percent across all other fields; only 7 percent are theoretical; 28 percent employ research methods that cannot be identified from the article, against 3 percent elsewhere; and more than half are never cited [9]. The discipline that enables these projects discusses them extensively but subjects them to comparatively little critical and theoretical scrutiny.

Table 2. Operational indicators of claiming and degrees of self-identification across selected urbanisms

Urbanism	Evidence of an "inside" / claiming indicators	Mode of self-definition	Character of disagreement
New Urbanism	CNU; Charter; founders; conferences; professional constituency	Explicit movement with declared principles	Internal disagreement over style, scale, regionalism, and evolution [3,31]
Everyday Urbanism	Identifiable authors, texts, methods, and proponents	Self-articulated but deliberately partial approach	Debate over efficacy and capacity for larger-scale intervention [30]

Post-Urbanism	No organization, charter, membership, or agreed manifesto	Predominantly attributed by critics/theorists	Supposed exemplars frequently do not identify with the category [1–3,32]
ReUrbanism	Identifiable proponents but limited institutionalization	Proposed alternative emphasizing repair and redevelopment	Defined partly against the attributed Post-Urbanist position [32]

Source: Author's own synthesis based on Kelbaugh [1,2], Carmona et al. [3], and the Michigan Debates on Urbanism I-III [30–32].

Mulder's formulation appears to reinforce the pattern, and does so, though not in the way it is usually read. TransUrbanism is proposed explicitly against posturbanism [6]. The posturbanism Mulder rejects, however, is not the one Kelbaugh named. Mulder defines it as urbanism minus the present: a design strategy characterized by the fragmentation of familiar material, by collage, montage, and quotation [6]. That describes postmodern historicism, nearer to Rowe or Graves than to Koolhaas. Kelbaugh's Post-Urbanism, by contrast, is what he calls Koolhaas Urbanism: heterotopian, sensational, and poststructuralist [1].

Two scholars, two years and two continents apart, therefore used the same word for incompatible objects, without explicitly engaging one another's usage. Koolhaas, who is Kelbaugh's central exemplar, appears in Mulder's own volume as a contributor to transurbanism. And within that volume, Soja rejects both terms, remarking that he is not particularly happy with transurbanism and would not like posturbanism either, since we remain in urban industrial capitalism, whatever the label [6]. The instability of the category is therefore not the product of subsequent drift. It was present at the moment of naming.

The result is what this paper defines as an unclaimed paradigm:

a sufficiently recurrent constellation of assumptions, forms, practices, and exemplars to be recognized externally as a paradigm, but without a corresponding community that consistently accepts the designation, defines its boundaries, or assumes responsibility for its consequences.

The distinction matters because it returns us to the problem identified in Section 2. A claimed paradigm can register anomalies internally: adherents can debate, reinterpret, or revise it. An unclaimed paradigm has no equivalent mechanism. Criticism reaches individual architects, projects, or institutions, but not a collective body capable of recognizing criticism as a problem for the paradigm itself.

This may explain one of Post-Urbanism's central peculiarities: its vocabulary remains unstable while its spatial logic persists.

The relevant question is therefore no longer whether Post-Urbanism exists as an organized movement. It plainly does not. The more productive question is how a paradigm without an institutional inside nevertheless acquired a recognizable material history.

Bilbao is where that history changes.

5. The Bilbao Convergence: From Urban Transformation to Traveling Formula

The preceding sections establish that Post-Urbanism was neither an organized movement nor an isolated classificatory invention, and that the architects associated with it never constituted themselves as Post-Urbanists. What transformed this weakly claimed paradigm into a consequential urban phenomenon was not disciplinary consolidation but convergence.

By the late 1990s, several previously distinct developments had begun to intersect: the formal experimentation associated with deconstructivism; Kelbaugh's diagnosis of an avant-garde Post-Urbanism; the expanding international market for celebrated architects; culture-led urban regeneration; and increasingly sophisticated strategies of city marketing and place branding [1,4,7,8,10]. Bilbao became the point at which these trajectories appeared to demonstrate their mutual usefulness.

5.1. Five Concepts, Five Registers

Deconstructivism, Post-Urbanism, starchitecture, transurbanism, and place branding overlap historically, but they are not competing names for the same phenomenon. Deconstructivism identifies a formal and theoretical architectural constellation, canonized primarily, however reluctantly, through the 1988 MoMA exhibition [4]. Post-Urbanism is an urban-design paradigm attributed most systematically by Kelbaugh to a set of attitudes, works, and practitioners [1,2]. Starchitecture is better understood as a regime of production, commissioning, and legitimation in which architectural reputation becomes an operative project resource [8–11]. Transurbanism is a diagnosis of contemporary urban conditions, explicitly proposed in opposition to posturbanism [6]. Place branding and city marketing constitute a policy apparatus for managing and communicating the symbolic value of places [7,12].

Table 3. The five terms discriminated

	Deconstructivism	**Post-Urbanism**	**Starchitecture**	**Transurbanism**	**Place branding / city marketing**
Assembled and named	MoMA, 1988 [4]	Kelbaugh, 2000 [1]	Media discourse c. 2000; scholarly elaboration through Evans, McNeill, Ponzini and others [7,8,10]	Mulder, 2002 [6]	Marketing, tourism and urban policy literatures
Ontological level	Formal language	Design paradigm	Regime of production	Diagnosis of urban condition	Policy instrument
Core proposition	Instability and displacement expressed	Fragmentation, exceptionalism	An exceptional reputation adds symbolic, political,	Contemporary urbanity exceeds conventional	Urban image and reputation can be

	through architectural form	tionalism, heterogeneity, and rejection of conventional urban order	and market value to projects	bounded and stable conceptions of the city	strategically managed
Attributed / principal actors	Gehry, Eisenman, Koolhaas, Libeskind, Hadid, Tschumi, Coop Himmelb(l)au	Koolhaas, above all, overlapping the 1988 constellation	Gehry, Hadid, Foster, Nouvel, Libeskind, and international firms	Mulder and contributors to TransUrbanism	Municipalities, development agencies, tourism organizations, consultants
Key texts	Johnson & Wigley [4]; Tschumi [5]	Kelbaugh [1,2]; Michigan Debates III [32]	Ponzini & Nastasi [8]; McNeill [10]; Sklair [11]; About Star Architecture [33]	Mulder [6]	Evans [7]; Dinnie [12]; Klingmann [14]
Typical spatial expression	Exceptional architectural object	Exceptional object or urban intervention	Branded cultural building, tower, megaproject, or development	Networked/fluid urban condition	Cultural quarter, waterfront, flagship development, city image
Principal overlap	Personnel and formal vocabulary with Post-Urbanism	Form with deconstructivism; production with starchitecture; image with branding	Output with Post-Urbanism; instrumentality with branding	Some diagnoses of fragmentation and flows	Uses iconicity and starchitecture as possible instruments
Principal difference	Does not constitute an urban-development regime	Does not identify the production system by which projects are commissioned	Describes process and actors rather than a coherent aesthetic	Was proposed against posturbanism	Concerns strategic representation, not a particular built form
Pattern of refusal/contestation	Curators denied a coherent movement [4]	Supposed practitioners rarely claim the term [2,32]	Architects may resist the “starchitect” label	Mulder rejects posturbanism [6]	Not generally refused; causal claims remain contested

Source: Author’s own synthesis.

The first conclusion is ontological: formal language, design paradigm, production regime, diagnosis, and policy instrument should not be collapsed into one another. A building can simultaneously employ a formal vocabulary associated with deconstructivism, embody a Post-Urbanist relation to context, be delivered through a starchitecture regime, and serve a city-branding strategy. None of these statements makes the concepts synonymous.

The second conclusion is historical. Their crossover is real but asymmetric. Post-Urbanism borrowed personnel and formal tendencies from the architectural avant-garde; starchitecture supplied institutional and reputational mechanisms capable of delivering exceptional projects; and place branding supplied political reasons for commissioning them. Transurbanism remained more diagnostically adjacent than causally integrated.

5.2. Bilbao as Convergence

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao opened in 1997 at precisely this intersection. But the first correction is essential: Bilbao was not regenerated by one building.

Ponzini and Nastasi show that the museum formed part of a much broader transformation involving infrastructure, environmental remediation, transport investment, redevelopment, economic restructuring, and public-space intervention [8]. The Guggenheim became the globally transmissible symbol of that transformation, which is not equivalent to having independently caused it.

What traveled internationally was therefore not Bilbao in its institutional and infrastructural complexity. What traveled was Bilbao compressed into a formula:

declining city + cultural icon + famous architect → visibility + tourism + regeneration.

This compression transformed a contingent urban history into a reproducible policy narrative. Decision-makers elsewhere pursued spectacular cultural facilities and celebrated designers in the expectation that analogous effects could be replicated [8]. Evans's analysis of the "hard-branding" of the cultural city identifies the policy context into which that formula traveled: cultural facilities became instruments not only of cultural provision but of distinction, visitor expenditure, and external recognition [7]. The emerging vocabulary of "star architecture" entered scholarship through this culture-and-branding discourse, including the Tate

Modern discussion around the turn of the millennium [7,34].

The traveling-formula claim can also be documented directly. González's study of "urban policy tourism" shows that policy-makers made organized visits to Bilbao and Barcelona specifically to learn from their regeneration experiences, locating the Bilbao effect within wider circuits of urban policy transfer. Her analysis also shows that the model mutated as it traveled: what circulated internationally was a selective and simplified lesson rather than the full institutional history of Bilbao [58].

Jencks subsequently captured the competitive logic of the "Bilbao effect": internationally recognized architects and memorable buildings appeared capable of differentiating cities in interurban competition [35]. Yet the traveling model routinely omitted the conditions that had made Bilbao's transformation possible.

Jencks's own reticence is instructive. Asked at the outset of *The Iconic Building* how this state of affairs arose, he answers that the question would lead away from architecture into the orbits of political power, the world art market, the celebrity system and branding, and that since those realms already receive the lion's share of attention, he prefers to consider the story from within architecture's point of view [35]. Among the most frequently cited architecture-field authors on the subject [9], he thus declines the analytical register in a single sentence, a qualitative counterpart to the pattern measured in Section 4.

Here lies the central paradox. City-branding scholarship notes that places learning from the same successful models can become "equally special" [12]. Ponzini and Nastasi identify a parallel tendency in starchitecture: cities seeking uniqueness through a limited repertoire of celebrated architects, project types, and representational strategies may instead produce greater similarity [8]. Sorkin had anticipated the spatial endpoint earlier in his description of globally repetitive environments encountered from city to city [36].

The paradox can therefore be stated simply:

The pursuit of differentiation through globally repeatable instruments can produce convergence.

Starchitecture supplies an important production mechanism for that convergence. McNeill embeds the global architect within international firms, commissions, clients, competitions, and media networks [10]. Sklair shifts attention from individual genius toward the social production and marketing of architectural iconicity [11]. Ponzini and Nastasi show how architectural reputation can influence project selection, political consensus, media exposure, and exceptional treatment even though implementation depends on networks of other actors [8]. Later star-architecture research accordingly treats star architecture as a process extending from project initiation through commissioning, design, implementation, and urban reception [33].

Post-Urbanism describes the design logic of the spatial outcome; starchitecture describes an important regime through which such outcomes are produced and legitimized. Bilbao matters because the two converged so visibly.

Table 4. Historical crossover among architecture, urbanism, and urban-development policy

Period	Architecture	Urbanism/theory	Policy, production, and branding
1985–1988	Derrida–Tschumi and Derrida–Eisenman exchanges; MoMA Deconstructivist Architecture [4,5]	Poststructuralist architectural debate	Culture-led regeneration emerges in European urban policy; flagship cultural projects enter city strategies
1988–1995	Expansion of commissions associated with the 1988 constellation; Koolhaas, S, M, L, XL [29]	Critiques of fragmentation, simulation, and contemporary urban condition [36]	Culture-led regeneration and flagship strategies expand
1997–2000	Guggenheim Bilbao opens	Kelbaugh names Post-Urbanism [1]	"Bilbao effect" becomes a traveling regeneration narrative; cultural branding expands [7,8]
2002–2003	Saadiyat and Gulf cultural-district commissions initiated [8,39]; parametric techniques enter avant-garde practice [3,45]	Mulder proposes transurbanism against posturbanism [6]	Evans connects cultural hard-branding with the emerging discourse of star architecture [7]
2004–2008	CCTV and expanding international star commissions	Michigan Debates III; Kelbaugh's later formulations [2,32]	Jencks records interurban competition for icons [35]
2011–2016	Proliferation of iconic cultural buildings, towers, and megaprojects	Barnett's census; Haas and Olsson retain Post-Urbanism [15,25]	Starchitecture is increasingly theorized as an urban-development and governance process [8]
2020–present	Architectural authorship increasingly embedded in large multidisciplinary systems	Planetary urbanization provides an earlier theoretical frame for thinking beyond the bounded city [37]	Star-architecture scholarship consolidates [33]; city branding increasingly intersects with sovereign and territorial image-making [38]

Source: Author's own synthesis.

The chronological crossover should not be read as a causal

sequence in which one concept produces the next. Deconstructivism did not become Post-Urbanism; Post-Urbanism did not become starchitecture; and city branding did not originate in architecture. Rather, historically separate trajectories became mutually reinforcing.

Bilbao represents the moment when that convergence became globally legible. It also initiates the scalar argument that follows: once the exceptional object becomes a development strategy, the surrounding urban field can itself be reorganized to sustain and extend exception.

The paradigm is about to change scale.

6. From Object to Territory: The Scalar Escalation of Post-Urbanism

If Bilbao marks the convergence of Post-Urbanism, starchitecture, and place branding, its more important consequence is scalar. The exceptional building demonstrated that architectural distinction could be mobilized as an urban-development resource. Once that proposition entered development and policy practice, there was no reason for the exception to remain confined to the building.

This paper, therefore, proposes that Post-Urbanism can be read across four cumulative spatial registers:

object → district → city → territory

These are not successive historical stages. Exceptional objects continue to be commissioned; districts do not supersede buildings, and cities do not supersede districts. Each register enlarges the spatial field within which exception can be produced and coordinated.

What changes across them is the relationship between foreground and background. At the object scale, an exceptional building is foregrounded against an inherited urban context. At the district scale, the surrounding context can itself be produced to support a constellation of exceptional objects. At the city scale, repeated exceptionalism can become sufficiently pervasive that a stable contextual background no longer organizes the composition. At the territorial scale, the distinction between object and background becomes increasingly inadequate because infrastructure, landscape, settlement, mobility, and development are conceived as components of an integrated spatial system.

The corresponding movement is therefore:

inherited → manufactured → absent → inapplicable

From the standpoint of exception, the same sequence reads:

exception within context → production of context → replacement of context → transcendence of context.

The four cases used below are selected purposively as heuristic exemplars, not as a representative sample and not as evidence of a linear historical sequence. Selection followed four criteria: a clear fit with one scalar register; a documented linkage between architectural exception and wider urban-development or representational strategies; sufficient published evidence to identify principal actors and governance arrangements; and analytical usefulness for comparing changes in the foreground/background relation. The cases are used to illustrate and compare the internal coherence of the scalar model, while Table 6 later makes their evidentiary status and publicness limitations explicit.

Counter-cases are possible by design and are examined in Section 7.4: object-scale projects may be highly exclusionary, while territorial systems may contain extensively accessible infrastructures. Scale is therefore not used as a proxy for publicness.

6.1. Object: Exception within an Inherited Context

The object is the register closest to Kelbaugh's original formulation: formally assertive, frequently sculptural, resistant to conventional typologies, and often intentionally dissonant with its surroundings [1–3]. Carmona's illustration of the type is Gehry, whose work he describes as acontextual and discordant yet visually rich, with considerable landmark potential [3].

The genealogy connecting the 1988 constellation to later Post-Urbanism is most visible at this scale [4,5]. Yet significance does not lie in form alone: once celebrated authorship enters the commissioning logic, the building accumulates reputational and symbolic value. McNeill's global architect and Sklair's social production of iconicity show the exceptional building to be simultaneously architectural, media, and economic-symbolic object [10,11].

The relation remains figure against ground: the inherited city provides the background against which the object appears exceptional. Gehry's Guggenheim is intelligible partly because Bilbao existed before it (Figure 1). At this register, context is inherited, and an exception occurs within it.



Figure 1. The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, within the Abandoibarra riverfront, with the Iberdrola Tower (2011) behind. The exceptional object remains legible against an inherited background; the tower marks the subsequent shift toward serial exceptionalism at the city scale. Photograph by Naotake Murayama, Nov. 2016, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

6.2. District: The Production of Context

At the district scale, the relationship changes. The object no longer merely encounters a context; a context can be manufactured around it.

Bilbao already suggests this shift, as the Guggenheim was part of the larger redevelopment of Abandoibarra [8]. Saadiyat Cultural District makes the logic more explicit. Rather than inserting one exceptional cultural object into the established urban fabric, Abu Dhabi assembled a planned district around internationally recognized institutions and architects. Tourism policy, government development vehicles, real estate development, cultural institutions, and spectacular architecture were deliberately connected to the ambition to position Abu Dhabi as a global destination [8].

Ponzini's later analysis of transnational architecture develops this point further: the Guggenheim is only one component of a broader cultural-development environment involving the Louvre Abu Dhabi and other internationally branded commissions [39]. Representation itself could precede material completion, as renderings, institutional brands, and spectacular architectural imagery circulated globally even as substantial elements were still under development (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Saadiyat Cultural District, masterplan visualization. The image presents the district as complete; several of the institutions shown remain unbuilt. Source: Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi.

Figure 2 is an instance of that condition rather than a record of it. This is qualitatively different from the isolated icon. The frame becomes part of the project.

The paradigm also generated its own answer to the problem of scaling up. Carmona pairs Post-Urbanism with Parametric Urbanism, noting that few Post-Urbanist projects had extended beyond individual architectural pieces until parametric techniques provided a means to do so [3]. Schumacher's claim for parametricism is explicitly urbanistic and explicitly systemic: a new style whose superior capacity to articulate programmatic complexity becomes more pronounced the larger the project, generating façades, built forms, blocks, and streets through a single algorithm to produce what he calls a deep relationality [45]. That the resulting masterplans have proved less flexible in execution than in representation, One-north in Singapore being the standard illustration [3], matters less here than the ambition. Parametricism can be read as a design-theoretical attempt to move from object to field without surrendering authorship.

Manufactured context does not, however, mean the disappearance of locality: transnational projects are negotiated and reinterpreted when they "land" [39], and Ait Oukhzame describes Gulf urbanism through the simultaneous globalizing of the local and localizing of the global, in which imported institutions and globally recognizable forms produce new local identities [40]. The claim is not that district-scale Post-Urbanism produces no context, but that context itself becomes an object of production.

At this register, the background is manufactured.

6.3. City: The Replacement of Context

A further transformation occurs when exceptional architecture is no longer episodic but serial.

Kaika's analysis of the City of London is important because it moves beyond the assumption that iconic buildings merely signify economic prosperity. She connects the transformed skyline to institutional restructuring, architectural patronage, and the rebranding of the Corporation of London [13]. The icon becomes part of a larger reconstruction of institutional and urban identity. Her subsequent concept of the "serial object" sharpens this argument [41]. Once an exception is reproduced repeatedly, the exceptional building no longer necessarily disrupts a stable urban field; it can become the normal mechanism through which that field is produced (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The City of London cluster (London skyline), December 2013. Repeated architectural distinction ceases to interrupt an inherited field and becomes the mechanism through which the field is produced; a second cluster at Canary Wharf is visible on the horizon. Photograph by kloniwotski, Dec. 2013, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

The type that makes serial exceptionalism possible is the tall building. An icon is by definition singular, whereas a skyline is repetition, and the tower reconciles the two: legible at distance, competitive by height, and available in effectively unlimited quantity. Skyline competition among London, Dubai, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and the Gulf capitals is therefore not an incidental feature of Post-Urbanism but its characteristic instrument. The point holds for the skyline as a whole and not only for individual commissions [13,41].

Authorship also begins to thin at this register, well before the territorial scale. The supertall towers that produce these skylines are largely the work of large corporate practices rather than of the named architects around whom the paradigm's reputation was built. The recognizable signature survives in particular commissions, but the skyline as a whole is not composed of them. The withdrawal of the star, examined in Section 6.4 as a condition of territorial urbanism, is therefore better understood as a gradient beginning here. Dubai provides a particularly visible example of this condition. Sklair situates its skyscrapers, artificial islands, malls, and other iconic megaprojects within the competitive production of spectacular, consumer-oriented urbanism [11]. The same mechanism underlies the paradox identified by Ponzini and

the branding literature: cities seeking uniqueness through similar global repertoires can converge formally and representationally [8,12].

This is why "absent" requires precision. It does not mean that cities lack history, culture, or existing fabric. Rather, it describes an analytical condition in which a stable inherited background no longer governs the composition of the exceptional foreground. When repeated icons, megaprojects, and branded districts become central to the production of the city's image, exception itself becomes background.

Hence the paradox:

The multiplication of differences can produce sameness.

At the city scale, context becomes progressively absent as an organizing principle.

6.4. Territory: The Transcendence of Context

The final register moves beyond the conventional bounded city.

This shift has a theoretical precedent in work on planetary and extended urbanization. Brenner and Schmid argue that contemporary urbanization cannot be adequately understood through a fixed, bounded settlement ontology: urban processes extend across infrastructures, logistics, resource landscapes, and territories, while the inherited city/non-city distinction becomes increasingly unstable [37,51,52]. Their framework is not itself Post-Urbanism, and the present argument does not subsume planetary urbanization into an architectural paradigm.

Its relevance is more specific. Planetary urbanization supplies an ontology for understanding why the bounded city may cease to be the terminal scale of analysis, whereas Post-Urbanism, as defined here, concerns the spatial logic through which exception, contextual displacement, representation, and development coordination operate within that enlarged field. The planetary register therefore does not describe a new style or a fifth stage. It identifies the point at which an external urban background becomes analytically insufficient.

Brenner and Katsikis's concept of "operational landscapes" sharpens this territorial condition by foregrounding the hinterlands, infrastructures, logistical systems, resource zones, and other non-city landscapes through which urbanization is materially sustained [53]. This helps explain why the territorial register must include landscape, mobility, resource, and technical systems rather than built form alone.

The territorial register must also be distinguished from several adjacent large-scale practices with which it is easily confused, since scale alone does not identify it. Megaproject development, as the literature on large infrastructure defines it, is characterized by cost, duration, organizational complexity, and risk [59]; a hospital network or a rail tunnel qualifies without proposing any departure from existing urban order. Infrastructural urbanism, in the sense established by Allen, treats infrastructure as the primary medium of urban form and is justified instrumentally, through capacity, sequence, and the provision of a framework for a subsequent development that it does not itself specify [60]. Large-scale masterplanning works with a site: tenure, hydrology, adjacency, and existing settlement are constraints to be managed, and the plan remains answerable to them. Planetary urbanization is of a different order again, being an analytical ontology concerning how urbanization actually operates rather than a mode of intervening in it [37,51–53].

Three conditions distinguish territorial Post-Urbanism from all four, and they must hold jointly. The first is *exceptionality as organizing principle* rather than as a consequence of size: the project is justified by its departure from existing urban order, not by demand, capacity, or sequence. The second is *representational primacy*: the proposition circulates as image and claim in advance of, and partly independently of, material realization, so that the project exists publicly before it exists spatially. The third is *context treated as inapplicable rather than as constraint*: there is no external host field against which the intervention is read, because the intervention proposes the field.

A territorial project may therefore be very large without being Post-Urbanist, and a Post-Urbanist proposition may be territorial in conception while remaining almost entirely unbuilt. The second possibility is not incidental to the definition. On these criteria representational primacy is a defining condition rather than a contingent feature, which is why the territorial register is the one at which the paradigm's claims are most likely to outrun its construction.

Architectural iconicity has followed part of this expansion. Sklair's celebrity infrastructure extends the icon into transport networks, intermodal hubs, and "aerocities," where architecture, mobility, retail, and connectivity merge [11]. At this scale, no single architect necessarily organizes the project: engineering firms, sovereign development agencies, consultants, technology providers, and financial actors become increasingly consequential.

Representational scale expands in parallel. If Klingmann's brandscape connects architecture and experience to branding [14], Molotch and Ponzini's nationscape describes a broader symbolic field in which showcase cities and infrastructure contribute to the production of national identity [38,42]. The built environment becomes an instrument of country-making rather than city marketing.

The representational progression can therefore be read as:

icon → brandscape → nationscape → territorial system

alongside the morphological progression:

object → district → city → territory.

These sequences should not be collapsed: brandscape and nationscape describe representational environments, while the scalar model concerns spatial relations between exception and context.

Contemporary projects such as THE LINE within NEOM make the analytical problem especially visible. The project is presented not as an exceptional object inserted into an existing city but as an integrated urban system extending across a territorial corridor and combining settlement, infrastructure, mobility, technology, and landscape [43]. That description derives from material published by the developer, which is cited here as a primary document recording what is claimed, in the manner in which a manifesto is cited, and not as evidence of a realized condition.

Independent scholarship now permits the claim to be assessed rather than merely reported. Cugurullo examines NEOM and THE LINE as a site at which new-city development and urban artificial intelligence converge, situating the project within the politics of technologically mediated urban governance [61]. Vijay analyzes the project's circulating imagery as an affective infrastructure through which a particular aesthetics of global modernity is produced, treating the promotional apparatus as an object of analysis rather than as a description of a place [62]. Batty's modeling of linear-city equilibrium shows that the geometry on which the proposal rests is unstable under ordinary assumptions about accessibility-seeking behavior, the idealized form dissolving as populations reorganize [63]. Rivas and Navarro-Cerrillo raise the ecological consequences of a continuous linear barrier across a migratory corridor [64]. The project can therefore be discussed on the basis of peer-reviewed analysis, while its own documentation is treated strictly as evidence of intent.

The trajectory is also not irreversible, and the territorial register provides the clearest demonstration of this. A paradigm that depends on representational primacy is exposed to the conditions that finance representation. Reporting since 2024 indicates that the first phase of THE LINE was reduced from the announced

length of approximately 170 kilometers to approximately 2.4 kilometers, that the 2030 population target fell from 1.5 million to below 300,000, and that construction was subsequently halted until at least 2030 pending redesign, with sovereign investment reallocated toward ports, data centers, and other infrastructure [65,66]. These are journalistic rather than scholarly sources and are reported as such; the figures should be treated as indicative. Their analytical significance does not depend on their precision. The territorial register is the one at which the paradigm is most capital-intensive, most dependent on sustained sovereign commitment, and least able to be delivered incrementally, and it is therefore the register at which the scalar progression is most readily arrested or reversed. The sequence proposed in this paper describes an enlargement of ambition and of the field of coordination. It does not describe an enlargement that necessarily completes.

At this scale, the classic foreground/background distinction becomes inadequate. There is no independent host city against which the intervention is read. The intervention proposes the urban field itself.

Context has therefore not simply disappeared.

It has become inapplicable as an external category.

Table 5. The scalar registers of Post-Urbanism: spatial unit, status of background, reach of regulation, logic, agents, and critical condition

Register	Spatial unit / background	Reach / dominant logic	Principal agents	Critical condition
Object	Building / Inherited	Threshold / Formal exception or icon	Institutions, patrons, named architects	Object consumes or contests context without producing it
District	Cultural or regeneration district / Manufactured	Managed environment / Regeneration, spectacle, place branding	Municipalities, foundations, developers, star architects	The frame itself becomes part of the spectacle
City	Skyline or urban field; tall building as serial type / Absent as organizing principle	Urban system / Competitiveness, global visibility, serial exceptionalism	States, municipalities, global developers, investors, architectural firms	Exception becomes normalized; differentiation can produce convergence
Network / Territory	Infrastructure, corridor, territorial system / Inapplicable	Integrated territorial system / Connectivity, optimization, systemic transformation, national positioning	Sovereign actors, consultants, engineering and technology systems, finance	A bounded city and a named architect cease to organize the paradigm

Source: Author's own synthesis.

This reconstruction resolves an apparent contradiction. If the paradigm were defined by the celebrity architect, it would weaken as authorship becomes distributed across larger, more technically complex systems. Understood instead as a spatial logic of exceptionalism and contextual displacement, the opposite becomes possible.

The architect can become less important as the paradigm grows.

The mechanism by which the logic can outlive the star must therefore be specified. What persists is not a fixed formal vocabulary, nor necessarily the celebrity-branding apparatus, but a design-development logic in which exceptional spatial production is coordinated across increasingly large fields. Starchitecture may supply reputational capital and place branding may supply representational value, but at larger scales these can be absorbed into development agencies, regulatory frameworks, infrastructure programs, consultancy networks, technical systems, and finance. Authorship shifts from a recognizable individual toward a distributed institutional apparatus; the spatial logic can persist even when singular authorship recedes.

The trajectory from object to territory is therefore not simply an enlargement of architectural scale. It is an enlargement of the field of control.

That observation leads directly to the question of publicness.

7. Publicness and the Potential Reach of Excludability

The scalar model describes how the spatial reach of Post-Urbanism can expand; it does not determine whether that expansion is socially beneficial or exclusionary. Scale is not a proxy for publicness. An object-scale project may be highly exclusionary, while a territorial system may contain extensively accessible infrastructures. A spectacular building may be broadly accessible; a conventional square may be heavily regulated; privately owned space may sustain diverse public life; and users may be excluded from formally public space through pricing, surveillance, or rules of conduct.

Publicness therefore requires a separate analytical framework. Haas and Olsson distinguish public, private, common, and club goods through the properties of rivalry and excludability: public goods are non-rival and non-excludable, private goods are rival and excludable, common goods are rival but non-excludable, and club goods are non-rival up to a point but excludable [15]. Complementary public-space scholarship reinforces the multidimensional character of publicness. Varna and Tiesdell's Star Model conceptualizes it through ownership, control, civility, physical configuration, and animation [54]; Németh and Schmidt

model publicness through the interaction of ownership, management, and uses/users [55]; and Carmona's critique and classification of contemporary public space shows why management regimes and degrees of control complicate any simple public/private binary [56,57]. Taken together, these approaches support a common point: formal ownership or designation does not establish effective publicness.

A distinction within this literature must be made explicit, because the present argument depends on one side of it. Publicness can be assessed as an institutional and configurational condition — who owns a space, who manages it, what rules govern conduct within it, how it is physically connected and entered, and on what terms access may be withheld — or as an experienced condition, constituted through how different users actually perceive, enter, appropriate, avoid, and make use of it. The two do not coincide. A space may be formally open and experienced as forbidding; a privately governed space may be experienced as generously available. Kohn's criteria of ownership, accessibility, and intersubjectivity [67] and Langstraat and van Melik's comparative assessment through ownership, management, accessibility, and inclusiveness [68] operate principally in the first register, while Zeng and colleagues' structural model of users' experience of publicness in Hong Kong open spaces illustrates the second and the survey instruments it requires [69].

The analysis in this paper addresses the first register only. It concerns the institutional and spatial conditions under which excludability can be organized, and the enlargement of the field across which those conditions operate. It makes no claim about experienced publicness in any of the four cases, and the enlargement of a field of potential control is not evidence that those within it experience exclusion. Establishing that would require user-level research of a kind not undertaken here. The proposition advanced below would in part be tested by whether such research finds the correspondence this framework predicts.

The analysis that follows is therefore conceptual rather than an empirical measurement of the publicness of the four cases. It identifies mechanisms and dimensions—ownership, management, access, control, use, pricing, mobility, and excludability—that could be operationalized in subsequent comparative fieldwork. The cases are used to formulate a testable proposition, not to assign definitive publicness scores.

The question for Post-Urbanism is therefore not simply whether a space is public or private. It is:

As the spatial field of intervention expands, how far can the capacity to exclude expand with it?

7.1. From Architectural Exception to Expanded Excludability

At the object scale, exclusion is comparatively bounded. Museums, theaters, or cultural institutions may be publicly financed and symbolically public while regulating entry through opening hours, security, ticket prices, or programmed use. The Guggenheim Bilbao illustrates this distinction. The museum itself does not constitute a pure public good, but many benefits associated with the wider transformation, public-space improvements, infrastructure, and urban visibility extend beyond admission to the building [8]. One object can therefore combine public, private, and club-like characteristics without determining the publicness of the surrounding city.

At the district scale, the potential field of regulation expands. Saadiyat Cultural District combines cultural institutions with tourism, real estate, infrastructure, and branded development [8,39]. Participation is not reducible to one ticketed threshold: access may be conditioned by admission, consumption, property, mobility, and management. At the city scale, the issue becomes more systemic. Sklair identifies, within globalizing consumerist urbanism, a tendency toward the virtual privatization of public space and the production of "privileged publics," whose effective access is closely tied to purchasing power [11]. Shopping environments, entertainment districts, mixed-use megaprojects, and spectacular transport hubs may be widely accessible yet governed by specific norms of acceptable conduct and consumption.

Jian and colleagues provide empirical support for this mechanism at the district register level. Classifying public open spaces within private developments in Hong Kong into five types, they find that accessibility within such spaces disproportionately favors privileged groups [74].

Sorkin diagnosed an earlier version of this condition, connecting simulated and controlled environments to the erosion of conventional public space [36]; Garde includes invented public places, malls, gated communities, and Edge Cities among degenerative variations whose cumulative effects intensify segregation, commodification, and inequalities of access [17]. Kaika provides a particularly important empirical bridge: her London case shows that developments, promoted in part by the provision of public space, can produce environments that are privatized, surveilled, and heavily regulated [13].

At the territorial register, the potential reach of control becomes greater still. If settlement, infrastructure, mobility, services, landscape, and digital systems are conceived within a coordinated spatial apparatus, exclusion can theoretically operate not merely at the entrance to a building or development but through the systems that structure participation in the territory itself.

This does not imply that territorial-scale development is necessarily exclusionary, nor does it support a completed judgment about projects whose governance remains uncertain. For THE LINE in particular, the discussion concerns a prospective analytical condition rather than an observed publicness outcome. The point is analytical:

As the field of control expands, so does the potential reach of excludability.

In terms of regulatory reach, the same sequence reads: threshold → managed environment → urban system → integrated territorial system.

7.2. A Tendency, not a Determinism

The argument is not that Post-Urbanism automatically converts public goods into club goods. Morphology does not determine publicness. Spectacular architecture can provide broadly distributed cultural and symbolic benefits; privately operated districts may support substantial public life; publicly owned spaces can be excluded through policing, surveillance, pricing, or social codes. Nor are club goods inherently undesirable. The normative issue arises when benefits presented as broadly public become conditional upon membership that is unevenly distributed.

Garde's concept of degenerative variation is useful precisely because it focuses on cumulative consequence rather than intrinsic pathology [17]. A single Guggenheim does not produce territorial exclusion; a cultural district does not automatically privatize a city; a skyline of icons does not by itself destroy public life. The issue is whether repeated spatial, institutional, and governance arrangements accumulate in a particular direction.

Silber's critique of "genius" architecture adds an accountability dimension [44]: when exceptional architecture is attributed to singular authorship, while responsibility for its consequences is distributed among clients, developers, institutions, and authorities, accountability becomes difficult to locate.

Scalar expansion compounds that difficulty. At the object scale, one can still ask whether a building serves its users. At the territorial scale, the relevant questions concern governance, infrastructure, ownership, access, mobility, economic participation, and the capacity to alter the system over time.

The issue is no longer simply whether architecture serves its users.

The question is who has the capacity to shape the environment through which users must live.

Table 6. Comparative case matrix: scale, governance, publicness/access, evidence base, and qualification

Register	Illustrative case	Principal actors/governance	**Publicness: ownership/management/uses–users**	Evidence base	Qualification
Object	Guggenheim Bilbao	Basque public authorities; Guggenheim Foundation; cultural institution; architect and associated project actors	Ownership: building and site owned by a company held by the Basque Government, the Provincial Council of Biscay, and the City of Bilbao; the collection owned by a company held by the Basque Government and the Provincial Council. Management: the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Foundation, a private foundation whose founding trustees are the two Basque administrations and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, its board chaired by the President of the Basque Government [72]. Uses–users: ticketed admission within opening hours and institutional rules; riverfront, infrastructure, and symbolic benefits of the wider transformation extend beyond admission	[8,10,11]	Bounded threshold at the object scale; not evidence that the wider Bilbao transformation is exclusionary.
District	Saadiyat Cultural District	Abu Dhabi government development vehicles, cultural institutions, developers, and international architects	Ownership: government development vehicles and developers; institutional parcels held by cultural bodies. Management: district-level managed environment with controlled perimeter and ticketed institutions. Uses–users: public cultural functions coexist with access conditioned by admission, consumption, property, and mobility	[8,39]	Mixed degrees of publicness; the district is not a single club good.
City	Dubai	State and municipal actors; global developers and investors; corporate architectural firms; operators of privately governed environments	Ownership: mixed state, municipal, and private holdings; large privately held development parcels. Management: substantial areas under private management with proprietary conduct codes and surveillance. Uses–users: widely accessible urban environments coexist with spaces whose benefits are conditioned by purchasing power, property, and management	[11,38]	Illustrative of city-scale mechanisms only; does not characterize Dubai as a whole.
Network / Territory	THE LINE / NEOM	Sovereign development agency; consultants; engineering and technology systems; finance	Ownership: sovereign development agency. Management: prospective, with platform, service, and mobility systems conceived as integrated. Uses–users: prospective only; residency, mobility, service access, and ownership could become system-level conditions	[43]	Statement of intent, not an observed outcome; used only to illustrate territorial conception.

Source: Author's own synthesis using case literature [8,10,11,38,39,43,61,62, 72] and publicness dimensions from [15,54–57,67,68]. The publicness column follows Németh and Schmidt's ownership/management/uses–users axes [55]. The table distinguishes evidence from prospective analytical propositions and does not assign publicness scores.

Table 6, therefore, does not classify these cases as club goods. It identifies the governance and access mechanisms through which the scalar enlargement described in Section 6 could enlarge the field across which excludability is organized, while making explicit where the evidence is empirical and where it remains prospective.

The critical variable is not architectural spectacle itself.

It is the relationship between spectacle, scale, control, and access.

7.3. Toward a Corrected Definition

The analysis now permits a more precise definition. Post-Urbanism should not be defined by a list of famous architects, formal resemblance to deconstructivism, or the mere existence of iconic buildings, nor should it absorb adjacent concepts.

Its defining features concern the relationship among exception, context, scale, agency, and public consequence.

Table 7. A corrected definition of Post-Urbanism

Dimension	Post-Urbanism reconsidered
Origin	Named principally by Kelbaugh from 2000 onward and genealogically associated with poststructuralist and deconstructivist architectural discourse [1–5]
Character	An unclaimed design paradigm, recognizable largely through external attribution rather than organized self-identification
Formal tendency	Heterogeneity, disjunction, exceptional form, and resistance to conventional typological and contextual continuity
Scale	Cumulative progression from object → district → city → territory
Relationship to context	Inherited → manufactured → absent as organizing background → inapplicable as external category
Agency	Expands from named architect and patron toward municipalities, developers, cultural institutions, global firms, sovereign actors, consultants, finance, and technological systems
Production	Overlaps historically with starchitecture but is not synonymous with it; starchitecture describes a production and legitimation regime [8–11,33]
Political/economic purpose	Exceptional visibility, symbolic distinction, regeneration, competitive positioning, and, at larger scales, systemic or territorial transformation
Public effect	Not inherently exclusionary; enlargement of the controlled spatial field can increase the potential reach of excludability and club-like conditions [11,15,17,41]
Present form	Can persist without singular architectural authorship: the spatial logic may outlive the star

Source: Author's own synthesis.

The corrected definition clarifies the inversion at the paper's center. At its earliest scale, Post-Urbanism could be read as an architectural attitude associated with particular designers. At district, city, and territorial scales, it becomes increasingly entangled with branding, development, governance, and large institutional systems.

Post-Urbanism begins with the apparent autonomy of the architectural object. It ends with the system's increasing autonomy in producing the urban field.

This is why accountability becomes more, rather than less, important as the paradigm expands in scale.

7.4. Counter-Cases and the Scope of the Proposition

A proposition that admitted no counter-cases would not be a proposition. Three cases falling outside the pattern indicate where its limits lie, and together they specify the condition on which it depends.

Parque Biblioteca España in Medellín was commissioned as a formally exceptional building by a celebrated architect, sited in one of the city's poorest comunas, connected to it by cable car, and justified explicitly as an instrument of access rather than of distinction. It employs the object-scale repertoire of Post-Urbanism toward the opposite end of the distributive spectrum. Deluchi's reading is critical, arguing that the building's symbolic work for the city's international image can be separated from its effect on residents' everyday conditions. Tiles began falling from its façade in 2013; by 2015, its water-damaged volumes were cloaked in black fabric; and in 2017, a decade after opening, it was closed indefinitely for repair, locally labeled Medellín's "white elephant" [70]. The case is instructive for precisely that reason. Exceptional form and exclusionary consequence are independent variables, and the relation between them is contingent upon commissioning intent and governance rather than given by morphology.

IBA Emscher Park is the territorial counter-case. Across roughly eight hundred square kilometers of the Ruhr, it coordinated some one hundred and twenty projects over a decade around an eighty-kilometer landscape park, including architecturally exceptional conversions of industrial structures, while organizing the program around distributed public access, environmental remediation, and regional repair [71]. It satisfies the territorial scale condition and fails the excludability expectation. It is therefore the clearest available demonstration that enlargement of the coordinated spatial field does not by itself enlarge the field of exclusion.

The converse case requires no single example. Gated residential enclaves and privately governed compounds operate at the object and district scales, exhibit minimal architectural exceptionality, and achieve near-complete exclusion. Exclusion requires neither scale nor iconicity.

What these cases establish is that the proposition advanced in this section is conditional, and that the condition can be specified. Enlargement of the spatial field enlarges the potential reach of excludability where, and only where, enlargement is accompanied by the concentration of governance authority over the enlarged field. In the Gulf and Saudi cases, scalar enlargement and the concentration of development, regulatory, and proprietary authority in a small number of sovereign and quasi-sovereign actors occur together, and the two have accordingly been treated as a single phenomenon. They are separable. IBA Emscher Park enlarged

the field while distributing authority across a state program, municipalities, landowners, and publicly accountable agencies, and the predicted consequence did not follow.

The proposition is therefore restated:

Where the enlargement of the coordinated spatial field coincides with the concentration of governance authority over that field, the potential reach of excludability expands with scale. Where authority remains plural and publicly accountable, it need not.

This formulation is narrower than the one with which the section began and more useful because it identifies the variable on which the outcome depends and specifies what comparative empirical work would need to measure.

8. Conclusion: The Unclaimed Paradigm Reconsidered

Post-Urbanism has occupied an awkward position in urban design discourse for more than two decades. Kelbaugh named it clearly enough for the category to enter subsequent classifications [1–3], yet it never consolidated as an organized movement or self-declared school. The absence of such institutionalization does not render the category meaningless; it changes the kind of paradigm it is.

Post-Urbanism is better understood as an unclaimed paradigm: a recurrent constellation of spatial assumptions, exemplary projects, representational practices, and design attitudes recognized largely through external attribution rather than collective self-identification. This distinguishes it from New Urbanism, whose organization, Charter, proponents, and internal debates constitute an identifiable disciplinary "inside" [2,3,31]. Post-Urbanism possesses no comparable constituency through which its boundaries, failures, or transformations can be collectively negotiated.

The argument also requires conceptual separation. Deconstructivism provides a formal and theoretical genealogy [4,5]; Post-Urbanism names an attributed design paradigm [1,2]; starchitecture a regime through which reputation becomes operative in commissioning and legitimation [8–11,33]; transurbanism a diagnosis proposed against a different posturbanism [6]; and place branding the policy instruments through which architecture is mobilized for competitive positioning [7,12,14]. Their significance lies in historical convergence without conceptual equivalence.

Bilbao made that convergence globally legible. The Guggenheim Museum did not independently regenerate the city but became the internationally transmissible symbol of a far wider program of restructuring [8]. What traveled was not Bilbao's institutional complexity but a compressed proposition: that a spectacular cultural object by a celebrated architect could generate visibility and regeneration.

Once this proposition traveled, the exceptional object could no longer be treated as the sole unit of analysis. The central theoretical contribution of this paper has therefore been to reconstruct Post-Urbanism as a cumulative scalar logic:

object → district → city → territory

Across these registers, its relationship to context changes:

inherited → manufactured → absent as organizing background → inapplicable as external category.

At the object scale, exception derives meaning from contrast with the inherited context. At the district scale, context can itself be manufactured around coordinated exceptional interventions. At the city scale, serial exceptionalism can become sufficiently pervasive that exception begins to constitute the background. At the territorial scale, settlement, infrastructure, landscape, mobility, resources, and technology may be conceived as components of one system, rendering the conventional distinction between intervention and external context increasingly inadequate. In this limited sense, planetary and extended urbanization provide the theoretical bridge beyond the bounded city without becoming synonymous with Post-Urbanism [37,51–53].

These are not evolutionary stages that every project must pass through. They are coexisting scalar capacities. Their importance lies in showing that the logic of Post-Urbanism can expand beyond the architectural object.

Scalar expansion also changes the question of agency. Internationally prominent architecture has never been produced by the architect alone; it depends on networks of firms, clients, governments, developers, institutions, finance, and media [8–11,33,39]. As scale enlarges, sovereign agencies, consultants, engineering, and technology may become more structurally important than the recognizable author.

The paradox follows:

The paradigm can become less dependent on the star precisely as its spatial logic expands.

The publicness analysis adds a necessary qualification. Post-Urbanism is not inherently exclusionary. Publicness is multidimensional, involving ownership, management, control, use, access, and excludability [15,54–57]. The claim advanced here is not an empirical finding that movement from object to territory transforms public goods into club goods. It is a conceptual proposition: as the spatial field of coordinated intervention expands, the field across which excludability can potentially be organized may also expand. This proposition requires comparative empirical testing.

This is why the unclaimed paradigm ultimately matters. If Post-Urbanism were merely a formal style, criticism could remain architectural. Understood as a spatial logic operating through development, branding, governance, and increasingly systemic urbanization, responsibility becomes harder to locate. This concern also echoes an earlier critique by Mehaffy and Haas, who linked poststructuralist architectural culture to fragmented urbanism, market pressures, and a weakening of collective professional responsibility [49].

The framework remains conceptual rather than deterministic. Its scalar registers and publicness propositions require empirical testing through comparative work on governance, accessibility, ownership, management, and the distribution of benefits. But the reconstruction allows Post-Urbanism to be understood neither as a synonym for spectacular architecture nor as a discarded label for architects who never claimed it. This distinction is reinforced by Hoteit's analysis of deconstructivism, which shows that the translation of deconstructivist philosophy into architecture was neither direct nor uniform: different architects selectively appropriated specific concepts. They transformed them into distinct architectural positions rather than constituting a single coherent doctrine [50]. It describes a spatial logic whose field has progressively enlarged. The problem is not that Post-Urbanism has gone unnamed. Kelbaugh named it. The problem is that no one has ever had to answer for it.

8.1. Limitations

Four limitations should be stated directly.

The cases are purposive, not representative. They were selected to occupy the four registers and to make the comparison legible, but they cannot establish the prevalence of the pattern they illustrate. A representative or randomized sample of cities would answer a different question — how common territorial Post-Urbanism is, and under what conditions — which this paper does not address and which would require a research design of another kind.

The evidence base is uneven across the registers, and necessarily so. Bilbao can be assessed against three decades of realized outcomes; THE LINE cannot be assessed in those terms at all, since it remains substantially unbuilt. The two have therefore been

treated asymmetrically by design, with the territorial material labeled as intent, qualified in Table 6, and supplemented by independent scholarship wherever analysis rather than announcement is required. The asymmetry nonetheless limits what the territorial register can be said to demonstrate, and it should not be read as evidence of realized performance.

The publicness argument is not measured. It identifies mechanisms and, in Appendix A, specifies how they could be operationalized; it assigns no scores and tests no causal relationship. Nothing in Section 7 should be read as a finding about the realized publicness of any of the four cases.

Finally, the trajectory is reconstructed as a cumulative logic rather than modeled over time. It does not incorporate the macroeconomic, financial, and geopolitical conditions that determine whether territorial propositions proceed, stall, or are abandoned, beyond the observation in Section 6.4 that they frequently do stall. A temporal account of those conditions, and of the reversals they produce, would be a substantial and worthwhile extension of the framework.

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On 18 November 2008, during a visit to Stockholm and KTH Royal Institute of Technology by Douglas Kelbaugh, former Dean of the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan, and Professor Harrison Fraker, former Dean of the College of Environmental Design at the University of California, Berkeley, I made a promise to continue developing and extending the frameworks they had helped to establish. In particular, this concerned Kelbaugh's formulation of the Three Urbanisms, especially Post-Urbanism and ReUrbanism, and Fraker's work on urban-design "force fields," as well as the broader challenge of classifying and theorizing contemporary paradigms of urbanism.

It has taken many years for that promise to mature into the present work. This article represents one fulfillment of that promise and one stage in a broader effort to revisit, refine, and extend these frameworks for contemporary urban conditions. That larger project will continue in the forthcoming book *City Futures in Flux: Reimagining Contemporary Urbanism Paradigms*, co-authored with Ryan Locke (Routledge, London, 2027).

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Generative AI Use Statement

During the preparation and revision of this manuscript, the author used generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Claude (Anthropic), as editorial and scholarly-support tools for language refinement, structural review, discussion of arguments, and consideration of alternative formulations. The paper's central concepts, theoretical framework, interpretations, selection and evaluation of sources, and scholarly judgments remain the author's. All AI-assisted suggestions were critically assessed, revised where necessary, and accepted or rejected by the author. References and factual claims were independently checked, and no AI-generated citation was relied upon without verification. The author determined the final wording and argumentation and assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and conclusions of the manuscript.

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Appendix A: Operationalizing the Publicness Proposition for Subsequent Empirical Testing

The proposition advanced in Section 7 is conceptual. The protocol below specifies how it could be tested, which dimensions would be measured, through which existing instruments, and against which data. It is offered so that the claim is falsifiable rather than merely plausible. No values are assigned here because assigning them would require fieldwork not undertaken for this paper.

Two further bodies of work bear on this protocol. District-scale liveability and accessibility indicator sets, covering walkability, transport access, environmental quality, the provision and distribution of facilities, and satisfaction with open space, supply candidate indicators for the physical-access and amenity-distribution rows below, and the criteria behind such indicator sets are directly relevant to how access to urban amenity is assessed at district and city scales [73]. They measure the quality and spatial distribution of amenity rather than the terms on which access may be withheld, and are therefore adjacent to publicness rather than measures of it; the distinction matters for the protocol, since an environment may score well on amenity distribution while remaining highly conditional in its terms of access. Jian and colleagues' study of public open spaces in private developments in Hong Kong aligns more closely with the present argument: it classifies such spaces into five empirical types and finds that accessibility within them disproportionately favors privileged groups [74]. That finding is an instance of the mechanism described in Section 7.1 at the district register, established through precisely the kind of comparative empirical work this appendix is intended to enable.

Table A1. Operationalization protocol for the publicness proposition

Register	Dimension to be measured	Candidate indicator	Instrument	Data source
Object	Ownership and management	Legal owner; operating body; public subsidy as a share of operating cost	Németh and Schmidt [55]; Varna and Tiesdell [54]	Institutional accounts; founding instruments
Object	Threshold access	Admission price relative to median local income;	Varna and Tiesdell [54]	Published tariffs; institutional reporting

		free-entry hours as a share of opening hours		
District	Perimeter and connectivity	Public entry points per kilometer of perimeter; continuity of public rights of way across the district	Carmona [56,57]; Varna and Tiesdell [54]	Cadastral and planning records; site survey
District	Tenure composition	Share of district floorspace in private, club-governed, and publicly accessible tenure	Haas and Olsson [15]; Langstraat and van Melik [68]	Development agreements; land registry
District	Conduct regulation	Presence, scope, and enforcement of private conduct codes; surveillance density	Németh and Schmidt [55]	Management agreements; observation
City	Distribution of club-governed space	Share of centrally located accessible space under private management, measured across time	Carmona [56,57]	Planning permissions; longitudinal mapping
City	Price-conditioned access	Spatial correlation between accessible amenity and residential or consumption cost	Sklair [11]; Haas and Olsson [15]	Property and transaction data
Territory	Residency and mobility conditionality	Terms of residency, employment tie, and the right to enter or remain	Haas and Olsson [15]	Regulatory instruments; governing statutes
Territory	Concentration of governance authority	Number of independent bodies holding development, regulatory, and proprietary authority; presence of external appeal or review	Section 7.4 of this paper	Statutes; corporate structures
Territory	Platform and service governance	Conditions attached to access to essential digital, mobility, and service systems	Cugurullo [61]	Published terms; regulatory filings
All	Experienced publicness (not addressed here)	User perception of welcome, belonging, and freedom of use, by social group	Zeng et al. [69]	Structured user survey

Source: Author's own synthesis. The final row marks the dimension this paper does not address, and is included to delimit the present claim rather than to extend it. The governance-concentration indicator operationalizes the scope condition stated in Section 7.4; a test of the proposition would consist of determining whether excludability tracks that variable rather than scale alone.

Appendix B: Case Selection Protocol

Cases were selected after the scalar registers had been provisionally formulated from the literature, and were chosen to occupy the registers rather than to sample a population. Four criteria

were applied.

First, unambiguous occupation of a single register. Cases operating across two registers were set aside because the purpose of the comparison is to hold one register constant.

Second, a documented linkage between the architectural exception and wider urban development or representational strategy, established in peer-reviewed scholarship rather than in promotional material.

Third, sufficient published evidence to identify principal actors, governance arrangements, and the terms on which access is organized.

Fourth, analytical usefulness for comparing the foreground/background relation across registers.

Candidates considered and set aside included Abandoibarra treated separately from the Guggenheim, which duplicates the Bilbao case across two registers; the West Kowloon Cultural District and Hudson Yards, both of which satisfy the district criteria but add no mechanism not already visible at Saadiyat; Shenzhen and Shanghai, which satisfy the city criteria and were set aside in favor of Dubai because the latter's development and promotional record is more fully documented in the star-architecture literature already under discussion [8,11,38]; and Masdar City and Songdo, which occupy a position between the district and territorial registers and would have obscured the distinction the fourth register is intended to draw.

Counter-cases were selected on the opposite principle, and because the rationale differs from that governing the four main cases, it is set out here in full.

The purpose of a counter-case is not illustration but falsification. The proposition advanced in Section 7 generates, for each register, a specific expectation: that enlargement of the coordinated spatial field enlarges the potential reach of excludability. A case that merely conforms to that expectation adds nothing the conforming cases have not already supplied. What tests the proposition is a case that satisfies a register's scale condition while failing the expectation the proposition generates for it. The selection procedure therefore had three steps: state what the proposition predicts at a given register; search the literature for a documented case that occupies that register and contradicts the prediction; and, where such a case exists, identify what distinguishes it and narrow the proposition accordingly.

Three counter-cases were retained, each testing a different direction of possible failure.

Parque Biblioteca España tests whether exceptional architectural form entails exclusionary distributive consequence at the object register. It was selected because it deploys the same instrument as the conforming object case, a formally exceptional building by a celebrated architect, internationally circulated as an image, toward the opposite distributive end, which isolates commissioning intent and governance from morphology. Candidates considered and set aside included the High Line, where the publicness question concerns displacement in the surrounding district rather than access to the work itself, and the Seattle Central Library, which is broadly accessible but sits within an inherited civic context that supplies no distributive contrast.

IBA Emscher Park tests the proposition's central claim at the register where that claim is strongest. It was selected because it satisfies the territorial scale condition, a coordinated spatial field of roughly eight hundred square kilometers, including architecturally exceptional interventions, while distributing governance authority across plural and publicly accountable bodies. Candidates considered and set aside included Room for the River and the Grand Paris Express, both territorial in extent and publicly accountable but justified instrumentally through capacity, risk, and sequence, so that they fail the first of the three conditions set out in Section 6.4 and do not constitute territorial Post-Urbanism at all; and Medellín's integrated transport and cable-car network, which is infrastructural rather than exceptional in the sense this paper requires.

Gated residential enclaves and privately governed compounds test the converse proposition: whether exclusion requires either scale or iconicity. No single example was necessary, as the type was sufficiently documented and uniform.

The outcome of this procedure is recorded in Section 7.4 and is worth stating explicitly because it bears on the status of the argument. The first and third counter-cases qualified the proposition without contradicting it. The second contradicted the proposition as originally formulated, and the proposition was narrowed in consequence: from an unconditional relation between scale and excludability to a conditional one in which the operative variable is the concentration of governance authority. The restatement at the end of Section 7.4 is therefore the result of the counter-case procedure rather than a qualification appended to a conclusion already reached.

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