Public space is essential to urban life. As contemporary architects, developers, and planners pursue innovative ways to design, ‘activate,’ ‘program,’ and govern public spaces, their strategies raise questions about encroaching privatization, global homogenization, and ongoing exclusion. Public space is, after all, an increasingly important resource and refuge for homeless and marginally housed people, and for those with limited access to formal political settings in cities where the presence and extent of public space seems to be in decline. Gaps remain, therefore, in our understanding of the practices, frames, networks, institutions, and struggles through which the future of public space is being shaped. Addressing what has been referred to as a contemporary ‘resurgence’ in academic debates over public space, this presentation will explore some hypotheses on the relationship between a) how and for whom contemporary public space is designed, governed, and used and b) the spatial and temporal ‘inter-referencing’ involved in the politics and production of public space. It will draw on examples from Vancouver, BC, where alleys, beaches, community centres, parks, and streets have all been recent objects of attention from institutions looking to redesign and valorize them. Yet, these spaces are also valued in their present form by low-income and politically marginalized communities, while allied political activists propose alternative improvements to them and seek to protect them as sites from which to question hegemonic visions of the city. The presentation will consider the tensions between these agendas, and its focus on ‘referencescapes’ (representations of specific public spaces that refer to their pasts, potential futures, and to models from cities elsewhere of how to design, govern, and use them) will add a global-relational analysis to the study of spaces that are often seen as intensely local.