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Privately owned public spaces (POPS) are intended for public use but are owned and maintained by building owners. POPS have gained popularity as a means to expand public areas, especially in densely populated cities. However, many POPS worldwide fail to offer a welcoming environment due to inadequate maintenance and illegal private use. Certain managers of POPS have gone so far as to add hostile architecture, like spikes on ledges, impeding citizens' access. In cities like Seoul and New York, these POPS issues have not been adequately addressed due to the government's passive and insufficient oversight. Much of the research on POPS has dichotomized stakeholders into developers (or property owners) and local authorities. However, in this study, we explored whether citizen participation can effectively enhance the management of POPS and reinforce the general public's determination to reform public spaces. We involved nonprofessional citizens and local architects in simulated inspections and qualitative assessments of Seoul's POPS. The citizens were able to effectively identify violations in POPS and provide more rigorous qualitative evaluations from a user perspective than experts. Following the inspection, the citizens developed a new sense of responsibility as stakeholders in urban public spaces. These findings reveal that citizen participation could make POPS more public and empower citizens to become active agents in improving public spaces.