

A comfortable and stimulating public realm that encourages social interaction requires detailed attention to the structure of a space and the elements it contains. This involves the surfaces; what is hard, what is soft; what forms of planting are appropriate; and what surfaces are for vehicles as well as pedestrian use, for example. It also requires that the issues of security, public art, street furniture, lighting and signage and so on be looked at in tandem. The designer will need to move freely up and down the design scale of elements. We concentrate here on the fundamentals - more technical guidance is provided in other publications, notably the excellent Scottish Enterprise's "Streets Ahead" (1997).



Animating spaces with water



Market stalls inject colour and life, Guildford High Street



People are energy efficient and take the shortest, most direct route through a square. Only those pushing prams or cycles may detour

### 5.5.1 SOCIAL SPACES

#### Focus activity areas

The best public spaces often have nodes of activity (with pavement cafes or markets, for example), complemented by quiet zones for rest and people-watching. Deciding the relative positioning of activity areas requires attention to:

- visibility - enabling people to have views across spaces, while giving them a choice of areas to sit or linger in relation to activity 'hot spots';
- orientation - south-facing sunny and well sheltered spots with seating provide the most popular spaces for lingering;
- facilities for sitting and stopping in squares and parks at activity nodes and crossings;
- places for children to play, and not just in designated play areas. It is particularly important near housing to create spaces for children to play and for parents and carers to meet.

#### Uses in and around the space

There are many means of creating a 'stage set', for a lively and interesting environment. The most successful way of ensuring that an urban park or square is well used is to introduce an activity source alongside or in the interior of the space, such as a café or food stall. Remember that people attract people. Additionally, in central areas, spaces can be created to:

- encourage street performers;
- transform squares into evening film auditoria or theatres (such as Meeting House Square, in Dublin's Temple Bar - see 5.5.2);
- accommodate markets, carnivals or parades.

#### Build in versatility

People from different cultural or age groups, including children, the disabled and the elderly, will use spaces in different ways. Rather than segregating activity types and thus user groups, it is beneficial to look at ways of designing versatile spaces that enable different people to enjoy different activities *in the same space* as far as possible.

#### Routes through space: enable people to pass directly from A to B

The best-used paths will follow natural desire lines between destinations. This means aligning direct paths along popular routes and providing seating and lighting along the way. This can be done by observing movement patterns through a space and looking for tracks. For example, it is often possible to design diagonal pedestrian walkways through parking lots. This creates a more pedestrian-friendly approach and visually articulates the form and landscape of the car park.