

COORDINATION, THE OVERARCHING FACTOR

Collectively, the three key challenges presented significant but not insurmountable problems to the chosen authorities, and each was related and dependent on the others, for example better regulation depended on adequate resources for enforcement and went hand in hand with every-day maintenance tasks. An overarching solution was frequently found in the better coordination of efforts within the constraints established by local spending priorities. This encompassed the better coordination of investment – funding and human resources – the better coordination of regulatory powers and activities, and the better coordination of maintenance roles and responsibilities.

Conclusions

The case studies established that although authorities had not clearly defined public space, most favoured a broad, inclusive definition, not least because the key problems facing public space managers were re-occurring across space types and contexts. Most fundamental seemed to be the general lack of resources for public space management, and perennial difficulties with coordinating activities.

The interviews confirmed the four key sets of barriers to delivering better managed public space. First, barriers to the better coordination of policies, programmes and actions:

- lack of funding;
- lack of linkage between policy formulation and implementation;
- vaguely formulated policies;
- fragmentation of initiatives;
- the persistence of local authority ‘departmentalism’.

Second, barriers to the better regulation of public space:

- lack of coordination between regulatory regimes;
- lack of resources especially for enforcement;
- the patchwork nature of laws and byelaws;
- insufficient powers to prosecute;
- insufficient enforcement powers.

Third, the major investment and resource barriers:

- fragmentation of public funding streams with different requirements;

- the cost and time involved in getting and managing these funds;
- the fact that funds do not cover all aspects of public spaces;
- many authorities do not have a cohesive strategy to frame investment and an ad-hoc approach dominates;
- capital investment funding tends not to cover on-going revenue requirements;
- de-regulation and decreased subsidy to some services makes environmental quality objectives more difficult to achieve.

Finally, barriers impacting on maintenance routines:

- an insufficient level of investment in maintenance;
- problematic relationships between client and contractor functions, reinforced by the impact of now abandoned CCT practices;
- a lack of coordination of maintenance routines and standards between agencies (internal and external to the local authority);
- a mismatch between community expectations in terms of standards and what can be accommodated within the local authority’s budget;
- design conflicts and lack of concern with maintenance during design;
- intensive use of some spaces leading to conflict between maintenance routines and some users/uses.

Some authorities argued that there was scope to operate more efficiently within existing resource levels, but most argued they were short of manpower and expertise across management services. In addition, more effective enforcement powers were generally seen as a pre-requisite to the better management of public space.

In this regard, the community was sometimes seen as part of the problem, particularly in hard-to-manage contexts, such as heavily used city centre locations. Nevertheless, engaging the community in public space management was seen as important by most local authorities, for example through basic consultation exercises, friends and community groups for particular open spaces or areas, community planning events and meetings, education initiatives, and formal community councils (area forums).

The role of the private sector in better managing public spaces was also seen as very important and preferably part of a positive two-way relationship, for example through their role as landowners and investors in the public realm; via direct sponsorship schemes; as a result of direct contractual arrangements, bringing specialised knowledge to tasks; as members of partnerships paying for wardens, town centre managers, CCTV systems, and so forth; as contributors of Section 106 planning gain funds; and, in time, through formal town centre management and BIDs schemes.