

## Chapter 11

# Theory, practice and real people

This final chapter brings together the various strands of research reported in the book as a means to draw out conclusions about the management of public space in the post-industrial world. In doing so, gaps are identified between the increasingly dominant and accepted theory of public space decline exacerbated by management processes, and the realities of actual management practice on the ground. From the research a set of 13 key lessons are offered for the development of public space management practice in the future. In a postscript to the book, and in order to focus attention where it is really needed, the results of a fourth and final empirical study are briefly presented that traces what people really want from public space, and what is important to them in making these judgments. The study reveals that academic preoccupations are not always directly reflected in the lived experience of public space. The chapter and the book therefore draws to a close by briefly considering whether practice as it is developing, is meeting the challenges being laid down by the people that really matter, the everyday users of public space – the public.

## The theory and practice of public space management

### A matrix of contributions

In Chapter 1, the case was made that public space represents a hugely complex stage – physically, functionally, socially – and, as a consequence, managerially. A failure to understand this complexity, and to appropriately value the benefits that flow from high-quality public space seem to be amongst the key reasons for a widespread deterioration in the quality of public space around the world.

The complexity of the management task can be characterised as a ‘matrix of contributions’ that input into the overall process of public space management, and that impact either positively or negatively on the greater whole. This matrix of contributions is shaped by the stakeholders’ combined objectives; operationalised through a wide range of discrete delivery processes; and is finally felt on the ground as collective outcomes that shape the character of public space. It encompasses:

- 1 Stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities: the sixteen key stakeholder groups identified in Table 1.3; each encompassing a complex range of stakeholders with different roles, interests and influences.
- 2 Public space aspirations: which should, but it seems too often do not, inform public space provision and management. Ten key qualities of public space were defined in Table 1.2 that can be recast as aspirations for better quality public space.
- 3 Public space character: which is determined by the inherent quality of the ‘kit of parts’ that constitute the space (i.e. the uses and physical components of public space) and the socio-economic and physical/spatial context in which public space sits (see Figures 1.6, 1.7 and 1.8). This character is also decisively influenced by how space is managed.
- 4 Delivery processes: organised into the four key means through which stakeholders contribute to the management of public space (see Figure 4.1):
  - coordinating the actions of themselves and others;
  - direct investment in the public realm (either themselves or by leveraging-in resources from others);
  - regulation utilising statutory powers;
  - the ongoing processes of public space maintenance.