

It is therefore a mistake to think of better quality public space as purely a visual concern, of interest only to a minority of aesthetes. Instead, these are fundamental issues that impact directly on the way all users perceive, function, and socialise in public space, and by implication on the viability of public space for different economic activities.

TANGIBLE QUALITIES

A wide range of publications focus on the design of urban space, setting out key aspirational principles for designing new and enhancing existing public spaces. Some of these are summarised in Table 1.1, which indicates that most converge on a set of widely accepted urban design principles. However, managing rather than designing public space is a broader concern that encompasses, but extends beyond, design objectives. It is also constrained by the fact that in most environments, the 'kit of parts' is already in place and unlikely to substantially change over the short or medium term.

Successive polls from MORI have focused on what residents perceive will most improve their areas, work which repeatedly throws up a consistent range of factors (MORI 2002), including:

- crime reduction
- activities for young people
- removal of rubbish/litter
- reduction in noise/disturbance
- better lighting
- reduced traffic
- better parks and open space
- less dog mess
- better street cleaning
- better maintenance i.e. of pavements.

The Association of Town Centre Managers have also attempted to gauge public perception of factors that make for a 'good' local environment through assessment of local authority enhancement initiatives. As well as basic 'Objectives of Urban Design', they cite cleanliness, a lack of graffiti, low transport emissions, safety and security, access for all, and quietness as preferred qualities, as well as a desire for basic amenities, including: good pedestrian routes and car parks, cycle routes, benches, places to meet and shelter, toilets, and clear signage. Indeed these represent reoccurring issues across a range of research projects (Williams and Green 2001: 4).

MORI (2000), for example, found that in the case of parks, people expect safety, cleanliness, tidiness, access for all, and provision for dogs; the University of Sheffield (1994) found that when looking specifically at children's requirements for good public space, they wanted clean streets,

less litter, graffiti and traffic, places to meet, better street furniture, and a reduction of anti-social behaviour, especially alcoholics in city centres. Pan-European research, discovered that factors that make public spaces popular include, places for sitting and relaxing, something to watch (preferably other people), sufficient pedestrian through-flow, and 'ambience', whilst low levels of vehicular traffic was not viewed as a problem (Hass-Klau *et al.* 1999).

Llewelyn Davies (2000: 99–105) confirms the importance of a good ambience, arguing that a comfortable and stimulating public realm requires activity, with uses related to public spaces in such a way that animation, diversity and versatility results. They call for public space that stimulates the senses, visually, but also by sound, touch and smell; places that are distinctive and interesting, building on local character; places free of clutter, but which nevertheless exploit the power of public art; and places with are legible through good lighting and signage.

The Audit Commission (2002a: 3–6) define this as the 'liveability agenda' which to them aims to strengthen local communities, to make streets safer, cleaner and better managed and to provide high quality public spaces. Their analysis shows that people want streets that are:

- pleasant
- attractive
- well designed
- free from danger pollution and noise
- functional
- litter free
- not repeatedly dug up
- diverse, to cater for all needs – peaceful and lively, business and play.

By contrast, the Project for Public Space (2000), based on their analysis of hundreds of public spaces around the world, conclude that four key qualities are required for a high-quality environment:

- access and linkage – convenient to use, visible, easy to get to and move within;
- uses and activities – providing a reason to be there, vital and unique;
- comfort and image – safe, clean, green, full of character and attractive;
- sociability – fostering neighbourliness, friendship, interaction, diversity, pride.