

9. EMPHASISE EFFICIENCY (BY DEVOLVING RESPONSIBILITY)

A considerable emphasis is placed on efficient management by the most successful cities. The reduced cost that flowed from such approaches seems to require, first, an investment in modern management methods, learning where appropriate from private-sector practices, second, the introduction of clear and direct decision-making structures, and third, investment in a skilled and specialised workforce. On the issue of localised versus centralised management and operations, benefits were apparent in both models, and the balance needs to be struck in the light of local circumstances. The key aim should be to establish the optimum cost/quality ratio by distinguishing those elements of the service that are best devolved to the neighbourhood level, from those that require a more strategic organisation. This can be achieved through a clear typologically-driven view of public space, with management strategies for particular types of space defined by their function, ownership, and perception (see Table 3.1) and by local and national aspirations.

10. INVOLVE OTHERS

Different cases reported success with both heavily privatised, and largely public models, and all combinations in between. Most cities saw this relationship as a partnership that needed nurturing and careful management over the long-term. Thus the aim should be good collaborative relationships that aim to increase expertise and responsibility for quality on the part of contractors and the creation of a transparent but competitive environment for the authority. Dogmatic approaches to service delivery should be rejected in favour of carefully considering which aspects of public space management can be more efficiently and effectively delivered by the private sector, and which are best left to the public sector. The former are likely to be the more routine and easily specified maintenance tasks, whilst tasks requiring a greater degree of creative interpretation and adaptability in the field might be retained in-house. Other key stakeholders may also beneficially have a direct role in the management of public space. Examples in the case studies included voluntary and community groups, users in all their guises, educators, health professionals, private-sector operators, and other relevant local government departments.

11. INTEGRATE RESPONSIBILITIES (BY COORDINATING ACTIONS)

The imperative to coordinate local government public space responsibilities with the public space activities of other organisations was clear. This can be achieved by devolving responsibilities to a lower level to better integrate

service delivery at the coalface. Equally, integration at a more strategic level is valuable to secure broader buy-in to public space management objectives. In both models, the benefits of having one strong central organisation with responsibility for all or the majority of public space management functions was evident. The proviso remains, however, that it is more important that aspirations and actions are coordinated, than that ownership and responsibilities for public space reside in one place. This requires a simple commitment to work in an integrated manner within and between all organisations and stakeholders. Fully integrating responsibilities for public space management in one organisation nevertheless remains a laudable aspiration. A step on the road may be the more frequent dissociation between the ownership of public space and its management.

A related issue concerns enforcement powers, which need to be taken more seriously, properly resourced, and coordinated with other public space management activities. The need for proper feedback loops between enforcement work and policy, design and maintenance activities was a key finding from the UK and international case studies. Without joining up these roles to other public space management activities, the quality of public space can be quickly undermined.

12. CONSIDER A DEDICATED MANAGEMENT MODEL

Dedicated and semi-independent agencies seem to have been particularly effective at achieving their ends, in part because of the absence of competing calls on expenditure. Unfortunately, the conditions that have made such models successful are not always easy to replicate as the political and financial independence required and the narrow focus on public spaces stands outside of normal local government structures. As a consequence, it is highly unlikely that local governments today would relinquish tax-raising powers and political accountability to, for example, an independent parks agency, except in exceptional cases. The latter might include relatively rare but nevertheless important circumstances where new settlements or other major developments are being planned, and where it is important to capture the rising land value to pay for long-term management needs. In such circumstances, a hypothecated funding model might offer the appropriate tool. More common, however, will be the establishment of dedicated agencies within the purview of local government of along the lines of the BIDs model. For both, care should be taken to ensure that clear public interest goals are reflected from the start in their management practices and priorities.