

13. MONITOR INVESTMENTS AND OUTCOMES

Monitoring activities ranged from regular assessments of management performance, to more fundamental systems designed to both record existing, and play a part in delivering new, quality. The benefits included both more efficient and effective maintenance processes and more outcome-focused management. The need to accurately record the state of public space, and thereafter to monitor the delivery of public space management goals should therefore not be underestimated as a means to ensure that other policy and management goals are being delivered. The most sophisticated systems might track depreciation of assets over time so that the condition of new investments can be monitored and lessons learnt, and so that costs can be factored into ongoing work programmes as part of a continuum of replacement and maintenance activities. In localities where these systems are largely absent, they can bring significant benefits in a context where continual improvement is dependent on adequate feedback to inform decision-making.

So to conclude

The five years during which the research in this book was conducted have represented a time of change during which public space policy has continued to develop. However, as argued above and in more detail in Chapter 6, this is still a new policy field (internationally), and its further development will be dependent on further research to understand the appropriate scope, nature and limitations of public space management.

To this process the research reported over the previous 10 chapters can contribute the following insights:

- The ‘rose-tinted’ view of the nature of public space through history, accompanied by the ‘doom-laden’ view of the nature of public space today are actually two sides of the same coin; neither are correct.
- Public space is in fact the site of massive economic and social potential; potential that can be either suppressed or released by management practice.
- Fears over exclusion and commodification are real and significant, but despite the impression given in the literature, privatised space remains only a tiny proportion of the total in most Western countries.
- For the majority of public space, the public sector will remain the dominant provider of public space management services.

- Nevertheless, there is a great opportunity to supplement public services by tapping into the real economic gains that the private sector derives from better quality public space.
- A system that involves all stakeholders in caring for the quality of public space should be the aspiration.
- This is particularly the case in a context where the public sector have often done such a poor job when left to their own devices, in particular on those issues that really matter to people – the provision of clean, safe and fulfilling streets (see postscript below).
- There is no moral or practical superiority of one model (state-, market- or community-centred) over another, each, and different combinations of them, can provide the right solutions in particular contexts.
- The key is to recognise the advantages and disadvantages of each and from there decide where and how they should be appropriately used.
- The aim should always be to deliver the ‘public good’, whilst avoiding any unintended consequences, perhaps through the safeguards offered by tight legal agreements, planning conditions, strong enforcement, coordinated partnerships, and the checks and balances provided by an overview role for the public sector for all public space.

All this suggests that it is time to stop being dogmatic about the management of public space, and instead to embrace pragmatic solutions, using whatever balance of approaches and responsibilities is appropriate locally, and that delivers the most effective public space management service. The empirical research explored in Part Two of the book illustrated a range of approaches to provision on a continuum from fully devolved to entirely public in provision, and each can be made to work given the right resources, commitment and vision. Management organisations and strategies should be put in place to achieve this. The thirteen lessons set out above give some indication of what will be required.

Postscript: but what do people really want?

Notwithstanding the conclusions above, in this final postscript to the book, the discussion finishes where it began, in the continuing search for an understanding of public space and in particular of what constitutes ‘high-quality’ public space. In this instance the analysis is based on user perceptions of public space and on what that means for attempts to