

Table 1.2 Universal positive qualities for public space

Clean and tidy	Well cared for	Clear of litter, fly tipping, fly posting, abandoned cars, bad smells, detritus and grime; adequate waste-collection facilities; provision for dogs
Accessible	Easy to get to and move around	Ease of movement, walkability; barrier-free pavements; accessible by foot, bike, and public transport at all times; good quality parking; continuity of space; lack of congestion
Attractive	Visually pleasing	Aesthetic quality; visually stimulating; uncluttered; well-maintained paving, street furniture, landscaping, grass/verges, front gardens; clear of vandalism and graffiti; use of public art; coordinated street furniture
Comfortable	Comfortable to spend time in	Free of heavy traffic, rail/aircraft noise, intrusive industry; provision of street furniture, incidental sitting surfaces, public toilets, shelter; legible; clear signage; space enclosure
Inclusive	Welcoming to all, free, open and tolerant	Access and equity for all by gender, age, race, disability; encouraging engagement in public life; activities for young people; unrestricted
Vital and viable	Well-used and thriving	Absence of vacant/derelict sites, vacant/boarded-up buildings; encouraging a diversity of uses, meeting places, animation; availability of play facilities; fostering interaction with space
Functional	Functions without conflict	Houses compatible uses, activities, vehicle/pedestrian relationships; provides ease of maintenance, servicing; absence of street parking nuisance
Distinctive	A positive, identifiable character	Sense of place and character; positive ambience; stimulating sound, touch and smell; reinforcing existing character/history; authentic; individual
Safe and secure	Feels and is safe and secure	Reduced vehicle speeds, pedestrian, cyclist safety; low street crime, anti-social behaviour; well lit and good surveillance, availability of authority figures; perception of security
Robust	Stands up to the pressures of everyday use	High-quality public realm, not repeatedly dug up; resilient street furniture, paving materials, boundaries, soft landscaping, street furniture; well-maintained buildings; adaptable, versatile space
Green and unpolluted	Healthy and natural	Better parks and open space; greening buildings and spaces; biodiversity; unpolluted water, air and soil; access to nature; absence of vehicle emissions
Fulfilling	A sense of ownership and belonging	Giving people a stake (individually or collectively); fostering pride, citizenship and neighbourliness; allowing personal freedom; opportunities for self-sufficiency

behaviour. It must illuminate the lived experience of individuals and groups in relation to public leisure spaces' (Lloyd and Auld 2003: 354).

The trends raised by Lloyd and Auld (2003) also reflect the dangers of the social exclusion of key groups (i.e. the young or economically inactive) from some types of contemporary public space such as shopping centres, reinforcing for the researchers the key principles of equity, citizenship and access as qualities to be nurtured in the local environment. Related research examining the use of public space in the East End of London confirmed the importance of these social roles (Dines and Cattell 2006: xii). The study concluded that 'people need a variety of public open spaces within a local area to meet a range of everyday needs: spaces to linger as well as spaces of transit; spaces that bring people together as well as spaces of retreat'. Queens Market, for example, a long-established street market has evolved to reflect the different needs of the populations arriving in the area. As such it has provided (Dines and Cattell 2006: 32–3):

- a strong and enduring element in the area's identity and peoples' attachment to it;
- an important local social arena and venue for unexpected encounters;
- a local place where people felt comfortable, safe and able to linger;
- a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual place of interaction between different communities;
- a familiar and uplifting place that contributed directly to a sense of well-being in users.

Although these perceptions were not shared equally by all groups in the area (younger people and children were far more negative about the market as a social space), they nevertheless demonstrate the importance of seeing public spaces as social venues and as an important resource for individuals and communities; not just as physical containers. These qualities were considered fragile, raising concerns that they could easily be damaged by otherwise well-meaning processes of 'regeneration' or management that are often unaware and unconcerned about this important social role (Dines and Cattell 2006: 17–18).

DESIRABLE QUALITIES

The discussion above presents just the tip of the iceberg of literature dealing with the desirable qualities of public space. Combined with the range of urban design objectives drawn from various sources (see Table 1.1), it is possible to identify a set of – arguably – 'universal positive qualities' for public space that reflect the complex and overlapping social, economic, and environmental characteristics of local places (see Table 1.2).

Inevitably, as writers such as Kevin Lynch and many others have long since argued, relative judgements about the importance of various qualities are matters of individual perception, and different users will value different qualities more or less highly. Consequently, the emphasis placed on different qualities by local public space services will be matters for local judgement. But, just as Lynch (1960: 48–9) argued that the component images of place pattern together to create one overall image of place in users minds, so will the qualities pattern together to form an overall