experience of public space. Therefore, concentrating on some qualities to the detriment of others may simply undermine attempts to improve the overall quality of space.

The context for action

The final conceptualised dimension of public space character adds yet further complexity to the management of public space by introducing the notion of a range of physical/spatial 'contexts for action' to which public space management processes need to respond. The contexts are initially generated by the patterning together of the different elements from the 'kit of parts' to create the networks, densities, mixes, urban typologies (urban, suburban, rural) and urban forms that constitute particular places.

For example, perceptions will vary considerably depending on whether the area being described is rural or urban. Rural areas are – perhaps unsurprisingly – considered to be more friendly, safer and greener by their residents (by a factor of two, three and three respectively). They are also much less likely to be characterised as shabby, dangerous or run down (MORI 2005: 23). Perceptions that higher density or mixed-use environments offer lower environmental quality are also well established in the literature (Carmona 2001a: 201–5).

The socio-economic context also dictates a separate set of factors that are likely to impact on local environmental quality. Such factors include:

- choice and opportunity open to residents
- levels of owner occupation
- child density levels
- levels of economic activity and employment
- levels of community engagement.

A range of research provides powerful evidence to back up these relationships. For example, evidence gathered together to test the concept of environmental exclusion (Brook Lyndhurst 2004b) indicated a particularly strong relationship between levels of deprivation in an area and the quality of the immediate local environment. Drawing on the English Housing Condition Survey, the report suggested that twice as many dwellings in areas characterised by multiple deprivation are effected by worse air quality than other districts; with litter, rubbish, graffiti and dumping experienced fourfold in deprived areas. A sister report (Brook Lyndhurst 2004a) suggested that two fundamental factors underpin perceptions of local environmental quality in deprived areas: public safety and public health. Parks and play areas, for example were only seen as

benefits if residents could also be confident that such spaces were secure from crime (the overriding concern), clean (from litter, dog fouling, broken glass, and drug needles), and safe from road traffic.

Other research has demonstrated how the socio-economic context can impact on the ability to deliver neighbourhood environmental services. Hastings *et al.* (2005), for example, have found that there is a gap between the environmental amenity of deprived and non-deprived neighbourhoods. They show that poor neighbourhoods have more environmental problems than affluent neighbourhoods, and that these include a greater range of problems, and problems that are more severe, particularly graffiti, litter, fly-tipping, and generally the poor maintenance of public and open spaces. They identify a complex range of reasons (Hastings *et al.* 2005: viii):

- greater use of the neighbourhood environment with associated rubbish and wear and tear, due to higher rates of economic inactivity and higher population densities, particularly child densities;
- built forms that are more difficult to manage, including large open spaces, undefined front gardens and high housing densities and a predominance of flats;
- the presence of a higher proportion of vulnerable households, less able to manage their neighbourhood environment;
- diminishing social responsibility within the community, and less motivation amongst residents to tackle the up-keep of their neighbourhood, leading to less effort amongst residents to control their local environment;
- reduced concern amongst frontline workers for deprived neighbourhoods because of the scale of problems and the difficulties in working in some places – fear, threats, violence, etc.

By contrast, the research recoded the increased motivation amongst operatives when working in affluent areas, driven as much by the fear of complaints following shoddy work as by the knowledge that they could work effectively in such areas (Hastings *et al.* 2005: ix). The result was further polarisation between poor and wealthy neighbourhoods.

MORI's work on physical capital (2005: 23) supports these findings. Their polling reveals residents of deprived areas are three times more likely to consider their area noisy and four times more likely to describe their area as shabby, whilst residents of affluent areas are significantly more likely to describe their areas as friendly, safe and green.

Other contextual factors are also important. The argument has already been made that policy approaches that are both effective and efficient in one circumstance may have unintended consequences in others, and therefore that sensitivity to context is required. Streets in predominantly