

For Shonfield (n.d.) the solution can be found in a radical and somewhat utopian extension of the public realm to all spaces and buildings that can not specifically be identified as either home or work; for example to the places used for travel, caring activities, ‘mind–soul servicing’, ‘body servicing’, or in democratic pursuits. Built on a right to roam and a right of access, this would go hand-in-hand with a reclaiming of streets from the car. She argues it could deliver ‘A city were each and every activity outside the home and work, promises the experience of democracy, the experience of freedom and the experience of security’ (Shonfield n.d.: 13).

### Exclusionary space

Rather than extending public space into realms where it has never existed, most commentators focus on preserving the quality and rights to public space that already exists. A number of the most influential figures in urban design, including Jane Jacobs (1961); Jan Gehl (1996), and William Whyte (1980; 1988), have argued that the use public space receives is directly related to the quality of that space. Therefore, if space is poorly managed and declines either physically, or in the opportunities and activities (social, cultural, political, economic) it offers, then a vicious cycle of decline may all too easily set in:

If people use space less, then there is less incentive to provide new spaces and maintain existing ones. With a decline in their maintenance and quality, public spaces are less likely to be used, thereby exacerbating the vicious spiral of decline.

(Carmona *et al.* 2003: 111)

Although the physical quality of public space will be important to all who choose to use it, for some it will be more important than for others. For some, particularly the disabled, those with young children in pushchairs, or the elderly, simple physical barriers can present major obstacles to their use of public space, often completely excluding them from certain areas as a result (Figure 3.5). Hall and Imrie (1999: 409) argue, for example, that the disabled tend to experience the built environment as a series of obstacle courses. For them, most built environment professionals have little awareness of the needs of those with disabilities, and the public space that results is itself disabling when it need not be (Imrie and Hall 2001: 10). Moreover, because disability is associated with wheelchair use when in fact only a very small percentage of the population with disabilities are wheelchair users (four per cent in the UK), the manifold ways in which the environment can be disabling is rarely appreciated (Imrie and Hall 2001: 43).

For Carmona *et al.* (2003: 43), addressing environmental disability involves:

- understanding social disability and the ways in which the environment is disabling;
- designing for inclusion rather than for exclusion or segregation;
- ensuring proactive and integrated consideration, rather than reactive ‘tacked-on’ provision.

In other words, because what is good for those with disabilities is generally good for all (making the environment more accessible and easier to use for everyone), the needs of less physically able users of the built environment should be considered as an integral part of processes that shape and manage the built environment. Likewise, the psychological barriers to accessibility may need to be tackled. These include fear of crime (see below), or simply a concern that the streets are unsafe for certain users (particularly children) because of their domination by fast moving traffic.

### SPACE AND AGE

For Loukaitou-Sideris (1996: 100):

the fragmentation of the public realm has been accompanied by fear, suspicion, tension and conflict between different social groups. This fear results in the spatial segregation of activities in terms of class, ethnicity, race, age, type of occupation and the designation of certain locales that are only appropriate for certain persons and uses.

Lofland (1998) describes such spaces as ‘parochial’ because they are appropriated by particular groups, so whoever wanders in feels either like a stranger or a guest, depending on how they fit in. Loukaitou-Sideris (1996: 100) describes users of contemporary public space as having suspicion of the stranger but, as opposed to the single undifferentiated spatial type of the modernist public space, there is now segregation into distinct spatial types and users.

The combined result of physical barriers, and concerns for the safety and well-being, in particular of the old and the young, means that life-cycle stage is amongst the most significant determinants of environmental accessibility and equity (Lang 1994:269). The reluctance of parents, for example, to let their children play in the street or walk to school has been widely reported, and linked to associated health and obesity problems amongst children unable to get enough exercise, as well as to a decline