

in community facilities, shopping malls, cafes and car boot sales are all arenas where people meet and create places of exchange' (Worpole and Knox 2007: 4).

Reflecting on the new forms of space, Light and Smith (1998: 4) suggest that the average American does not want to spend time with strangers, and cite a range of authors to support this view, including Robert Venturi, who described the plaza as 'un-American'; J.B.Jackson, who observed that American public space is designed for 'the public as an aggregate of individuals'; and Roberta Smith who describes Americans as consuming public spaces like french fries, 'thoughtlessly and without ceremony'. They observe that the American public prefers spaces that are entertaining and not collective, educative, or political; and cite the revulsion of the middle class from the dangerous urban public space of the Modernists, and the increasing competition of other forms of entertainment such as cinema, television, and the worldwide web. Instead they note that large corporations increasingly compete for consumers through 'sensation, sentiment and nostalgia' in urban public space, and quote Venturi's description of Disneyland as 'nearer to what people really want than anything architects have ever given them' (Light and Smith 1998: 5).

Banerjee (2001: 14–5) continues the argument claiming that an important function of public space is enjoyment: 'The sense of loss associated with the perceived decline of public space assumes that effective public life is linked to a viable public realm ... where the affairs of the public are discussed and debated in public places ... But there is another concept of public that is derived from our desire for relaxation, social contact, entertainment, leisure, and simply having a good time'. For him, 'Reinvented streets and places' seek 'to create a public life of *flânerie* (the activity of strolling and looking) and consumption'; and 'whether it actually takes place in a public or private space does not seem to matter'.

Lees (1994: 448–9) concedes that contemporary public spaces still contain important aspects of urban life, and although many of these primarily commercial public spaces lack wider civic functions, we should remember that commercial space has always been built into public space and vice versa. 'The core of city life – exchanges of goods, information, and ideas – still has a strong grounding in space ... the design, accessibility, and the quality of such urban space can and ought to be criticised, but its existence must be recognised'. For others, such commercialised public spaces are at least 'profoundly ambivalent'. Goss (1996: 221), for example, examines the waterfront festival marketplaces which have been developed in several American cities since the 1970s, and acknowledges that simulation and nostalgia, as described by Boyer (1993), are used for mass consumption. Yet Goss asserts that there is no longer a general public in such a divided society:



3.20 Reconquered cities: Copenhagen

Critics must, of course, consider whether private ownership and the pursuit of profit compromises the claim of festival marketplaces to provide a new model of public space ... however, they are wont to sound churlish ... to blame festival marketplaces for failing to provide equal access to all members of a mythical 'general public' – which does not and cannot exist in an ethnically and class-divided society – and for failing to provide the context for authentic public interaction and transactions – which does not exist in a mass-mediated society – is to repeat precisely the impossible bourgeois desire for a genuine public sphere that the festival market articulates.

(Goss 1996: 231)

Others, have anyway noted an improvement and reinvestment or return to the traditional forms of space, with a consequential improvement in the quality of public space and a resurgence in public life. Gehl and Gemzøe (2000: 20), for example, examine 39 public space exemplar projects from across the world, and conclude that:

In a society in which increasingly more of daily life takes place in the private sphere – private homes, at private computers, in private cars, at private workplaces and in strictly controlled and privatised shopping centres – there are clear signs that the city and city spaces have been given a new and influential role as public space and forum.

They argue that examples of such reconquered cities can be found across the world, particularly across northern Europe (Germany, Netherlands and Scandinavia see Figure 3.20), and – standing out as notable exemplars in the Americas – Portland in the US (Figure 3.21) and Curitiba in Brazil. Carr *et al.* (1992: 343) suggest that new forms of public space are only to be expected as cultures and societies develop and new uses need to be housed. For them, this is a sign of life, rather than death.