



3.23 Space types: Erith

Conclusions

Richard Sennett (1977: 21–2) has argued that the public space of the modern city has always represented a hybrid of political and commercial forces. At the root of many critiques, however, is a perceived increasing severance between the two.

Whether these critiques are any more or less pertinent today than during any period in the past are open questions. As discussion in Chapter 2 demonstrated, there has always been a strong historical link between commerce and urban public space, and strong exclusionary tendencies amongst those with management and ownership responsibilities. Nevertheless, the concerns of those who criticise trends in contemporary public space design and management are powerful and all too relevant to the way public space is used and perceived today. On the other hand, one might argue that it is hardly surprising that corporate interests are determined to take responsibility for their own public spaces, or for spaces that directly impact on their businesses, when the public sector has so often done such a poor job in managing the spaces for which they are responsible; spaces that still make up the large majority of the public realm, and that have long been perceived as in decline.

As the typology of public space demonstrates, the management context, reflecting the patchwork of public space types, is perhaps more complex now than ever before. Although some of the literature takes a relatively sanguine view about the nature and quality of contemporary public space, the majority offers a more pessimistic view, arguing that how

urban areas are managed today is increasingly undermining the ‘public’ in the concept of public space. In the future, if the critiques themselves are to be consigned to history, then public space management strategies will need to be sensitive to the full range of space types, and not just the selected few – the historic, affluent or private.

Note

- 1 Smith’s (1996) notion of revenge against minorities and the affirmative action directed at them, including, for example, asylum seekers, beggars, and young people.