

Chapter 4

Models of public space management

The first part of this chapter discusses the concept of public space management and its evolution in a context of wider changes to urban governance. Public space management is taken as a sphere of urban governance in which conflicting societal demands on, and aspirations for, public space are interpreted through a set of processes and practices. Four interlinked dimensions for public space management are proposed: the coordination of interventions; the regulation of uses and conflicts between uses; the definition and deployment of maintenance routines; and investment in public spaces and their services. Within this conceptual framework, the chapter looks at recent changes in public space management and in a second part suggests the emergence of alternative models of management. These are based on the roles ascribed to the state, to private agents and to community organisations, and on different approaches to dealing with the four management dimensions. Although the discussion shows that these models are more than just abstract formulations, and have been used to deal with a variety of public space problems, an important purpose for the chapter is to provide an analytical framework through which to examine emergent practices in the management of public space and their potential consequences.

The nature and evolution of public space management

The recent urban policy focus on issues of sustainability, social exclusion, economic competitiveness, place image, culture, gender and ethnicity, reveals an increasing awareness of the multidimensional nature of the challenges facing cities, their managers and inhabitants. This has also

permeated our understanding of the roles of the built environment in general, and public spaces in particular, partly explaining the renewed global policy interest in the quality of public spaces. From civic, leisure or simply functional spaces with an important but to some extent discrete part to play in cities and urban life, public spaces have become urban policy tools of a much wider and pervasive significance.

Within this context, the broadening concern with public space and its quality, from the iconic parks and gardens to the ordinary streets and squares, reflects a more complex view of the relationship between the local physical environment and the social and economic well-being of its inhabitants (see Gospodini 2004). This goes well beyond the more mechanistic formulation of that relationship which characterised modernist planning and design. As a result, urban policy instruments have emphasised the potential roles of public spaces, variously as weapons in the arsenal of global and local inter-city competition, as catalysts for urban renewal, as potential arenas for community revitalisation and participatory local democracy, as well as fulfilling their more traditional functions as a source of amenities and connecting tissue between the private spaces of the city (Hall 2000, Fainstein and Gladstone 1997, Smyth 1994, Low and Smith 2006).

This wider understanding of public space and its urban policy role has also led to a closer attention to the processes through which its qualities and its ability to fulfil all those functions are created and maintained, and through which rights and obligations are established. Therefore, the concerns with design issues that have informed the planning literature, or those with ownership and rights that have dominated much of the geography debate on public spaces, are gradually incorporating a more explicit critical attention to the management regimes shaping public spaces and their uses. The key issue is whether the regime for public space