

governance and management consolidated in the middle years of the twentieth century in most Western countries is still the most appropriate way to realise all the roles ascribed to those spaces. This clearly means a critical appraisal of the traditional forms of management of public spaces, and an understanding of the meaning and implications of emerging management forms.

As Chapter 3 indicates, there is a considerable literature on what has been happening to public space over the last quarter of a century, much of which centred on the implications of a key element in the recent changes: the retreat of the state and the privatisation of public space provision and governance. As with other public sector activities, this process is linked to broader changes in the nature of contemporary governance of cities, in the relationship between civic society and the state, and in the economic and social context in which governance takes place.

What those changes come to is an on-going re-arrangement of urban governance mechanisms which is leading to important and sometimes painful changes in the organisational structures and practices through which traditional state functions are delivered, including the provision and management of public space. The evidence in this book suggests that new organisational forms have emerged, and that responsibilities, power and resources have been redistributed within and beyond government structures.

Whether or not this redefinition of rights and responsibilities in the management of public spaces is socially desirable is an open and contested issue. However, any critical analysis of what is going on with public spaces requires a historically well-grounded perspective of what public space management has come to mean as a public service, and how patterns of provision and management gradually built over a long period are coping with current demands. This chapter discusses these new forms of public space management that have emerged recently, using England as its focus, and dwells on their significance for the debate on the future of such spaces and their governance. This theme will be re-examined in later chapters through a more detailed examination of current practice in England and elsewhere around the world.

What is public space management?

All public spaces, no matter how inclusive, democratic and open require some form of management so that they can fulfil their roles effectively. Chapter 1 introduced the broad range of functions that public spaces of all sorts have to accommodate. Linked to these various roles are a wide array of stakeholders who are concerned that public spaces meet their own requirements as, for example, providers of infrastructure, motorists, pedestrians, retail operators, park users, etc. The potential for conflicts of

interests in the daily usage of public space is therefore quite significant, and, in a sense, inextricably linked to the very 'publicness' of such spaces. Public space management is therefore:

The set of processes and practices that attempt to ensure that public space can fulfil all its legitimate roles, whilst managing the interactions between, and impacts of, those multiple functions in a way that is acceptable to its users.

This is a very broad definition, and there are clear issues here concerning who legitimises the different roles of public space, what is acceptable and what is not, and who decides; as well as with who are the users – the owners, defined groups, or wider society. This reflects some of the discussions in Chapter 3, and will be returned to in connection with the case studies in Part Two of the book.

Public space management is anyway the governance sphere where stakeholder demands on, and aspirations for public space are articulated into sets of processes and practices. Given the multifunctionality of public space, the variety of stakeholders whose actions contribute to shape its overall quality and the plurality of elements that constitute it – the 'kit of parts' discussed in Chapter 1 – it is clear that the management of public space is a complex set of activities, that often goes well beyond the remit of those organisations, public or private, formally in charge of delivering it.

For the purposes of this book, the management of public space is conceptualised into four key interlinked delivery processes:

- 1 The regulation of uses and conflicts between uses: the use of public spaces and the conflicts between uses have always been regulated, either formally through byelaws, and other prescriptive instruments, or informally through socially sanctioned practices and attitudes (see Ben-Joseph and Szold 2005 and Madanipour 2003). Regulation sets out how public spaces should be used, sets a framework for solving conflicts between uses, determines rules of access and established acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. How regulation is conceived, adhered to, and how it adapts to changing societal needs is a vital dimension of public space management.
- 2 The maintenance routines: these ensure the 'fitness for purpose' of the physical components of public space. Public spaces and the infrastructure, equipment and facilities vested in them need to be maintained in order to perform the functions that justify their existence. This concerns anything from ensuring that public spaces are usable, uncluttered, clean and safe, maintaining the surfaces of roads, street furniture, lighting, vegetation and facilities of all sorts;