

space is of this type, as it exhibits the characteristics of what economists call 'public goods' (see Cornes and Sandler 1996). Just like clean air, defence or policing, public spaces are goods that, once produced, can be enjoyed by more than one consumer simultaneously without affecting the utility derived by any of them. It is difficult and/or onerous to exclude from consumption anyone who wishes to benefit from those goods and, therefore, it is equally difficult to charge at the point of consumption.

This possibility of free consumption makes market provision of such goods unlikely as there is no incentive for it, even if demand is high. As with other public goods, public spaces have been historically provided and managed by philanthropy or collective organisations – as opposed to private, profit-seeking ones – and more recently the state through general taxation. This public-goods character of public space underpins much of the history of state involvement in its provision and management in modern societies.

In most Western countries, the progressive codification of the roles of the state during the twentieth century, and its takeover of the roles of previous collective and philanthropic organisations, led to the provision and management of public spaces becoming a public service, along with health, education, social housing and welfare. Vital functions performed by public spaces (linkage between places, traffic corridors, leisure, meeting and ceremonial spaces, health enhancing, etc.) became accepted as key to the well-being of modern societies and thus part of the array of goods and services whose adequate provision should be secured by the state. In most countries, the essentially local character of most public spaces and the functions they perform have resulted in their management becoming the responsibility of local government.

#### THE UK: THE RECENT HISTORY

In the UK, the development of local government as provider of public services resulted from the consolidation of multi-purpose, elected local authorities, a process that started in the early nineteenth century, gained impetus in the early twentieth century and reached its apex in the post-war years. During the Victorian period, the growing demand for infrastructure, health, education, poverty alleviation, and so forth, produced by rapid industrialisation was generally met through the piecemeal increase of state intervention, replacing or, more often than not, functioning side-by-side with a plethora of voluntary bodies, private companies, charitable organisations or private philanthropy that had traditionally provided for those needs (Leach and Percy-Smith 2001: 48). This was also the case with public parks provision and maintenance, and services related to road and waterway infrastructure, from street lighting to maintenance, waterworks, drainage, etc. (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 1997). Simultaneously, local

government became gradually more democratic, moving away from the business-dominated municipal corporations and coming to embody a wider array of local interests (Leach and Percy-Smith 2001: 51).

Multi-purpose, elected local authorities, as the principal provider of a series of public services in UK were a product of reforms in local governance structures from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s. This established the two-tier system that still characterises local government structures in parts of the UK, as well as the central government/local government dualism that has dominated local politics, given the absence until recently of a regional sphere with any practical meaning for the delivery of public services. Thus, for most of the twentieth century, the local single-purpose private, voluntary or charitable bodies that were so prevalent in the Victorian period, almost disappeared as public service delivery organisations. For more than half a century, local governance appeared synonymous with local government (Leach and Percy-Smith 2001: 50). In this context, public space management has been provided through local government's hierarchy of operational structures, and has been responsive to users' needs through the same means that render all local government's actions accountable to citizens, the ballot box.

#### PROFESSIONALISM OR SILO MENTALITY?

From the middle of the twentieth century, the growth in importance of local government as part of the welfare state machinery contributed to the transformation of local authorities into large multi-purpose organisations, with a high degree of internal specialisation and professionalism (Goldsmith 1992; Leach and Percy-Smith 2001). This meant the formation of large, self-contained service delivery units organised around specific areas of welfare policy (e.g. housing, education) or particular services (e.g. traffic and highways management, street cleansing, parks maintenance). This is at the heart of what is now decried as the 'silo mentality' that came to dominate the strategic thinking and the delivery of public services, characterised by an exclusive focus on one particular service and an inability to understand the connections and linkages across services and policy areas (Richards *et al.* 1999).

In the case of public space management, although the activities that make it up were for the most part located within local authority service delivery structures, it was not in itself the focus of public services, simply the context in which the service happened. Moreover, given their utilitarian origins, ordinary streets and squares were not viewed primarily as public space until very recently, and their management was focused on the functions and activities that used those spaces, not, in a holistic sense, on the spaces themselves. Public space as a concept tended to be limited to parks and iconic civic spaces, and this was expressed, for