

instance, in the existence of parks departments within local authority structures, which mirrored the independent, comprehensive management structures of historic parks. Even as late as 2004, a survey conducted for the research reported in Chapter 5 showed that the vast majority of English local authorities did not have an operational definition of public spaces that went beyond parks and a few iconic squares.

Therefore, as analysis in Chapter 5 confirms was still true at the time of the research, by and large, care for the majority of public spaces in England over the last half century has been dealt with as an implicit part of the general environmental management responsibility of local authorities. The professionalisation and compartmentalisation of public service delivery structures and the lack of a specific focus on public space – with the exception of park management – meant that public space management was carried out by a fragmented collection of agencies, very often located in functionally different departments and with a focus on narrowly defined services that happen to take place within public space.

This approach to managing public space, prioritising the delivery of discrete tasks without an overall strategy encompassing all forms of public space, lasted relatively unquestioned until very recently. Its utilitarian rationale suited policy priorities in the expanding urban economy of the 1950s and 1960s, with its large share of centralised state control, and it was not until problems of urban decline and economic and state restructuring in industrialised economies were acknowledged towards the end of that period that the need for a more strategic view of public space and its management started (very slowly) to emerge.

That approach is now being challenged by alternative models that imply a shift in public space management away from local government structures, and towards an increased involvement of other stakeholders (other public sector agencies, the private sector, community organisations, interest groups, etc.). This sits together with an increased awareness of public space management as a public service in its own right. If the key dimensions of coordination of interventions, regulation of uses, definition of maintenance regimes and investment and resourcing were subsumed into the management priorities of services that were peripherally concerned with public space, they are now slowly coming to the fore.

### **The drivers behind current changes in public space management**

So what are the reasons for the current changes and key elements shaping them? Today the concern with the vitality and viability of town and city centres – and the public spaces within them – is now well consolidated in British and European urban regeneration (see for instance Urban Task Force 1999; DETR 2000). Similarly, the roles of parks and green spaces

in the quality of urban life, and in the urban economy are now widely recognised. Therefore, part of the reasons underpinning changes in public space management are linked to an evolution in the thinking about urban regeneration and its aim of bringing sustainable vitality and viability to urban areas, and to the role of public space quality in this process.

In a related but separate process, the evolving understanding of the role of public space in social and economic life has directed attention to the ability of local service delivery agencies to meet more ambitious challenges. In the UK, for example, from the early 1980s, with the curbing of powers and spending of local authorities by an incoming Conservative government, there was a steady decline in funding for public space maintenance, a trend reversed only very recently (DTLR 2002a; Audit Commission 2002a). Emblematic of this process was the decline of park management systems and the disappearance of the park keeper. Park keepers were responsible for the care and management of individual parks and represented the continuity of localised and dedicated care mechanisms dating from Victorian times, but fell victim to rationalisation and cuts in public services as park maintenance was ‘rationalised’ and incorporated into spatially undifferentiated maintenance routines. As awareness of the importance of public space quality grew, so did the concern with the ability of a poorly funded and neglected system to meet the new demands on public space (DTLR 2002a).

### **GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE**

These factors – recognition of the key role of public space in urban policy and the need to raise levels of funding to public space services back to what they had been – although important, are not in themselves enough to fully explain the more recent re-thinking of public space management and its emergence as a policy concern in its own right, both in the UK, and elsewhere. For that, it is important to understand the general context in which the changes are situated.

First, as a public service, public space management has not been immune to considerable changes affecting state and public services in general over the last 15 to 20 years. Drawing on the policy theory and public policy literatures, recent trends can be situated within the political, cultural and institutional context of contemporary urban governance (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Kooiman 1993; 2003; Andersen and van Kempen 2001). Changes in the relationship between central and local government, society and government, the economy and government triggered by deeper transformations in the economy and society (globalisation, the move to a service-based economy, affluence, fragmentation of social life and changing lifestyles, etc.) have challenged hierarchical, ‘command and control’ forms of government. In turn this has led to the rethinking of