

re-emergence of this form of provision and management of public space has a number of key drivers:

- There has been a sustained effort to modernise the state, and local government in particular, to establish the ‘enabling state’. This will include the search for more effective, responsive and cost-effective ways of delivering public services, but also the formulation of a new contract between citizens and the state by re-distributing responsibilities (DTLR 2001, DCLG 2006).
- At a more practical level, there have been attempts by government to reach sections of society normally at the margins of social programmes, such as some difficult-to-reach ethnic groups, teenagers in social housing estates and so forth through fostering their involvement in the provision of public services relevant to them (DTLR 2001).
- Specifically in the case of public spaces, there is plenty of evidence of problems of under-use and exclusion by particular groups within a community, which could be better addressed through the involvement of the relevant groups in design and delivery of solutions (DTLR 2002a, Audit Commission 2002a).

If contractual relationships defined the nature of devolved service provision to private-sector agents, given the variety of contexts in which public space management by communities has evolved, it is difficult to define a single set of characteristics for the relationship between the state and voluntary agents. In the UK, devolved service provision through community and voluntary sector organisations has also tended to take a contracts-dominated form, with the state acting as the principal, and the voluntary organisations as the agents. However, this has proved to be fraught with tensions because of the threat to the independence of those organisations created by their progressive transformation into public-sector contractors (Deakin 2001). As a result, there are moves now to replace conventional principal-agent, or client-contractor arrangements with more complex ‘compacts’ involving mutually agreed principles, practices and distribution of responsibilities.

Well-defined public space management contracts with voluntary organisations exist side-by-side with much less formal agreements with ad-hoc residents’ groups centred on the management of particular spaces whose existence and survival depend both on government funding and on the capacity of the community in question for sustained collective action. An example of the former is the transfer of the management of social housing estates and its recreational and green spaces to housing associations, or the management of parks or open spaces by long-standing ‘friends’ associations. An example of the latter are the neighbourhood

management schemes, funded by government neighbourhood renewal initiatives, in which communities in deprived areas are encouraged to manage their own public spaces (DCLG 2007). More recently, there have been a few examples of role changes in contractual relationships, in which organised communities have been able to produce public space management strategies for their areas and have them recognised by their local authority, effectively becoming the clients for public and private contractors (see Chapter 7).

COORDINATION

Like the state-centred model, the interventions of community-centred agents on public space also require better vertical and horizontal connections within public sector organisations. Given the contractual nature of many public space management agreements between the public sector and voluntary organisations, contract specifications are also important in establishing that what is being delivered by the contractor is what is required, and that it reflects broader public space policies. However, enforcement and sanctions that went hand-in-hand with specifications as means of coordinating contractual relationships between the public-sector and private agents are less effective here as not all forms of voluntary and community organisations will be affected by contract sanctions in the same way.

As the separation between the providers and users of public space services is even narrower than in the other models, partnership mechanisms are essential tools of coordination. Adequate partnership structures, with clear consultation, participation and decision making mechanisms can lead to the formulation of clear agreements about what outcomes should be expected, what is required from each partner, why they should comply with broader policy strategies, and how sustained engagement between partners will be maintained. The ability to negotiate with and engage partners is the key skill.

Coordinating the inputs from public space users into management is not an issue in itself in this model, as it is already implied in the involvement of users in management tasks. However, this involvement is mediated by the way in which voluntary and community organisations work, and it depends on how representative they are of their own constituencies, and how well they absorb and deal with the demands and aspirations of their members.