

consideration. For example, a 'radial' is essentially defined in relation to a set of routes converging to a centre, and is in principle independent of road form or patterns of use. A radial could be a quiet lane or a bustling boulevard.

Relation must therefore be seen as a category separate from form or use, since either form or use could change while the structural relation remained the same (or vice versa). For example, a 'radial route' could acquire a row of shops and double its traffic volume, but still be a radial route; conversely, it would no longer be a 'radial' if the other spokes in the network were removed – even if the physical form and use of the street itself remained unchanged.

The final category – *Designation* – refers to classification themes determined purely by allocation or assignation: it relates to properties that could be applied abstractly to a map of a road network. A typical example would be administrative status (e.g. ownership) or recommended traffic route (e.g. tourist route). Such properties might relate to form, use or relation, but in principle need not be fixed to these. Changes to these types of designation can take place without any change on the ground, and vice versa. (An observer from space could not directly detect a change in designation.)

The kind of theme(s) chosen to classify streets will depend on the purpose to which the classification is to be put. The question arises: why are some themes chosen rather than others? In particular, why are conventional road classifications arranged the way they are?

### *The meaning of function*

Conventional hierarchical road classifications of the type shown in Table 3.1 are classically regarded as being 'functional' classifications, meaning roads are classified according to their function, rather than their form, use or ownership. The importance of function was recognised by Alker Tripp, and has been promoted, among others, by the Institution of Civil Engineers in the UK and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials in the USA.<sup>14</sup>

But what exactly is 'function'? At first sight, function might be regarded as coming somewhere between Designation and Use – function reflects actual use to some extent, but is also directed towards future needs and uses, and therefore need not reflect present conditions (a route could be designated 'tourist route' even if little tourist traffic materialised).

Strictly speaking, however, we really have to consider this kind of 'functional classification' as a classification by designation. A route whose so-called function is to carry, say, 'long-distance traffic' is really simply a