

It is difficult to conceive of 'space' as being without social content and, equally, to conceive of society without a spatial milieu. The relationship is, therefore, best conceived as a continuous two-way process in which people create and modify spaces while at the same time being influenced in various ways by those spaces. By shaping the built environment, urban designers influence – inhibit, facilitate, precipitate and modify, but do not determine – patterns of human activity and, therefore, of social life.

This section presents a set of five chapters exploring the social dimension of urban design – that is, the relationship between space and social/urban experience. The first is from **Jan Gehl's** 1971 book *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space* (Arkitektens Forlag, Skive). Gehl's work is based on extensive observational analysis over many years, much of it in Copenhagen (Denmark). Through his work, Gehl has been able to directly influence the design and management of public space in the city. As a result, and despite its climate, Copenhagen is an extremely 'livable' place, with high quality public spaces. Gehl has now applied his ideas to a large number of European cities, including London. Presented in a very accessible form, Gehl illustrates how the environmental quality of public spaces affects the intensity of their use. Arguing that outdoor activities in public spaces can be divided into three categories – 'necessary' activities; 'optional' activities and 'social' activities – he contends that, through design and within certain limits – regional, climatic, societal – it is possible to influence *how many* people use public spaces, *how long* individual activities last, and *which* activity types can develop. The crux of Gehl's argument is that when public spaces are of poor quality, only strictly necessary activities occur. When public spaces are of higher quality, necessary activities take place with approximately the same frequency – although people choose to spend longer doing them – but, more importantly, a wide range of optional (social) activities also tends to occur.

Chapter 16 is **Jane Jacobs'** 'The uses of sidewalks: safety', originally published in her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (Penguin, Harmondsworth). Jacobs was an early critic of functional zoning arguing that the vitality of city neighbourhoods depended on the overlapping and interweaving of activities and that understanding cities required dealing with combinations or mixtures of uses as the 'essential phenomena'. Like Gehl, much of Jane Jacobs' analysis was based on observational research: in Jacobs' case through personal observation of the neighbourhoods in which she

lived – Greenwich Village, New York and Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia. The influence of this inevitably subjective and impressionistic approach to investigating urban design has nevertheless been profound, providing an early and devastating critique of Modernist urban space design. Part of the classic urban design canon, the essence of Jacob's book, and arguably her major contribution to urban design, is her emphasis on vitality. Focusing on the cardinal importance of a mix of land uses and activities to create lively, vital public places and outlining four conditions she considered indispensable to the generation of 'exuberant diversity' in a city's streets and districts, this selection encapsulates that contribution.

Chapter 17 is **Tridib Banerjee's** 'The future of public space: beyond invented streets and reinvented places', originally published in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* in 2001. This short article offers a straightforward argument in the form of a series of useful points and succinct observations. Banerjee argues that the boundary between public space and quasi-public space is often difficult to define precisely as a result of privatisation, globalisation and the communications revolution. As well as issues of space, issues of access and accessibility must be considered together with whether or not the setting constitutes 'neutral' ground (and in what sense). Given the somewhat slippery nature of definitions of 'public' space, Banerjee recommends urban designers focus on the broader concept of 'public life' (i.e. the socio-cultural public realm of people and activities), rather than the narrower one of 'public spaces' (i.e. the physical public realm of buildings and spaces). Banerjee's concern, therefore, is with 'social space' (i.e. spaces that support social interaction and public life) regardless of whether it is genuinely 'public' space or private space that is publicly accessible. He argues that while planners have traditionally associated public life with public spaces, public life increasingly flourishes in private places, such as coffee shops and bookstores – that is, in Oldenburg's 'third places' (see below).

Chapter 18 is **Ray Oldenburg's** 'The character of third places', drawn from his 1989 book *The Great Good Place: Cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons and the other great hangouts at the heart of a community* (Marlowe & Company, New York – second edition published 1999). As highlighted in the previous selection, Oldenburg's concept of the third place provides a useful way of enhancing the understanding of informal public life and its relation to the public realm. Oldenburg argues that, while seemingly 'amorphous and scattered', informal public