

Urban Design in Autocratic and Democratic Societies

The major difference between urban designing in autocratic states and in democratic is that centralized powers of decision-making in autocratic societies are not subject to any control from the citizenry or their representatives. As a result they tend to be large scale and located where the whim of the dictator decrees. In urban renewal, projects are ruthlessly driven through existing built-up areas (e.g. the redevelopment of Bucharest under Ceausescu; see Chapter 7). Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in the Paris of Napoleon III set the example for modern times in 1853. In the first half of the twentieth century Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini all had grandiose projects on the drawing board. The latter two dictators saw parts of their urban design ambitions in place. Mussolini's Via della Conciliazione, lined with new buildings and 28 obelisks, gives a commanding view of St Peter's (see Figure 2.1). Such projects have been difficult to put in place in democratic countries because of the amount of demolition of the existing city required to build them. The City Beautiful scheme for Philadelphia saw only one component, the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, built. It had to be cut through a number of neighbourhoods (Brownlee, 1989).

During the middle third of the twentieth century in both totalitarian and democratic countries many urban design schemes were housing estates (e.g. the public housing schemes in the United Kingdom, the United States and continental Europe and, more spectacularly, the mass developments across the former Soviet Union, and in many Asian countries). Their sizes have varied enormously. Few new towns, other than company towns, in democratic countries have turned out



Figure 2.1 The Via della Conciliazione, Rome in 1961.