



# In the public realm of POSSIBILITIES...

*London's streets and spaces should not be neglected in the drive to upgrade the capital*

Londoners only sometimes like to think of themselves and their city as either homogenous, or of the scale implied by the world city status. Normally they are more comfortable identifying with a local town centre name, like Bromley or Fulham, mostly reflecting some sense of continuity and heritage from an ancient village, now much expanded and often forming an indistinguishable urban mass. It is human nature to make such mental mapping adjustments to cope with such wide variations in the scale of geographic information, and this is true also of the increasing interest and use of the phrase: London's public realm.

At a recent day long professional conference, speakers from a range of organisations from central

government, to think tanks and consultants, mentioned the 'public realm design' so many times that it seems that a universal appreciation, if not a definition, has been achieved. This would possibly replace civic or urban design in the lexicon of professional jargon. The disappointing truth is that no budget headings entitled public realm have been created as part of this new awareness, in most public or private sector capital or revenue budgets. This means that overlaps and gaps between conventional or new initiatives, tend still to generate barriers between single issue agendas of some familiar topics like accident prevention or walking. Similarly, the much trumpeted joined up thinking of sustainable community investment can still fall foul of many new professional

disciplines, with budget scopes so broad that the simple old divides of being under a transport or a planning policy heading seem more relevant to the public realm of streets, public buildings and open spaces.

Examining and discussing the recent technical successes and innovations in the design and management of London's public realm can be complex and is reminiscent of Lenin's comment on politics: "... everything is connected to everything else..."

This is of course part of the reason people like urban living. They want to see the best qualities of the public realm, maintained, enhanced and equipped for the needs of the 21st century.

## **STREET CLUTTER AND STREETScape**

Many of these public realm improvement challenges, like the de cluttering of streets have remained constant since the mid 20th century, but have also been constantly under funded, like

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