

of cities before modern economic and political trends destroy their essence through commodification and standardization.

The changing character of the city

Cities and society have developed and flourished in an almost symbiotic manner. The latin word for city is *civitas*, from which the words *civilization* and *citizenship* are derived. Take, for example, British cities prior to the Industrial Revolution. Despite being home to the minority of the population, these cities often physically dominated their surroundings and exerted immense influence over all spheres of human endeavour. From their beginnings, cities were places of manufacture and commerce, often developing in locations suited to a particular economic activity such as on trade routes or near useful resources such as coal. There was a tension in the division of wealth and power between the country landowners, and the city-based merchants and rulers, but over time the latter prevailed, as cities grew physically larger and, thanks to additions to the workforce, also economically more powerful. The British Census of 1851 showed that, for the first time, more people were living in urban areas than rural, at 54% of the population (Best, 1979).

Today, globally about 2.6 billion people live in cities of up to 5 million inhabitants with an additional 400 million living in some 40 large urban areas, often called mega-cities, of over 5 million inhabitants (Angotti, 1993; Sassen, 2000). Two-thirds of the population of Europe lives in cities and urban areas that occupy about 1% of the land area (Stanners and Bordeau, 1995). With their concentrated population, diversity of skills and growing demands, cities stimulated economic growth. Often this was led by the consumption patterns of a privileged stratum, made up of the few new rich, who often lived in close proximity to the many in abject poverty (Best, 1979). Some would argue that this wide gulf between the rich and the poor has never disappeared.

The social role of the city

As well as being the seats of power, wealth and knowledge, cities have also been catalysts for social change and revolution. They have been the source of most of the enduring changes that underpin human freedoms including the development of politics

(from the Greek word *polis* meaning city), the centre of revolutions that have helped to shape the modern world and the struggles for human rights. Arguably cities are the birthplace of democracy which, we would argue, is a vital feature of sustainability.

The essence of cities is that they have always contained a myriad of diverse and intense connections and activities; where people live, work, shop and play, meeting the needs of economic production and social reproduction (Smith, 2002). They bring together people from many different backgrounds and cultures. This can be purely in terms of physical proximity but also in the creation of space for fusing ideas, styles and activities. They are centres for many cultural forms. Without romanticizing their history, which has its grim share of oppression, hunger, crime and pollution, cities have been the driving force for innovation, social improvement, cultural activity and diversity (Figure 1.1).

Urban space has always been a place for the community rather than the individual, and public buildings, such as those for government, education, culture and commerce, play an important role in providing a focus for citizens and communities. They provide emotional attraction for both citizens and visitors, embodying political and cultural activities, giving significance and providing landmarks in time and space. They link the past, present and future, become reassuringly familiar to local people and stimulating for visitors. Lozano (1990) argues that the city is a realm with a high level of culture linked with the most civilized expression of social behaviour. Mumford (1970) described the city as the most advanced work of art of human civilization.

The changing form of the city

Historically, cities have had complex spatial layouts reflecting the multiplicity of human exchanges. They have been alive with the richness of patterns and symbols that fulfil many psychological and spiritual needs. For example, the sense of enclosure and spatial definition provided by medieval walls satisfied more than just a need for defensive protection; they also provided psychological stimulation and physical comfort (Lozano, 1990). The need to pattern human surroundings is as valid today as it was in medieval times, and this is particularly recognized by Alexander and Lynch (Lynch, 1960; Alexander *et al.*, 1977; Alexander, 1987). Their ideas about legibility are based on a vivid and integrated physical setting that can provide the raw