



Figure 1.3
The square as a place for
chance meetings, a focal point
in the city, a recognizable
landmark and a junction of
various routes: Verona, 1999.
(Source: Bob Giddings.)

social interchange and disconnecting travellers from their surroundings (Appleyard, 1981). Sprawl, car traffic, zoning and major redevelopments have destroyed the fabric of streets, buildings and spaces, often replacing diversity with large single-use structures which can have a hostile or imposing presence. In the process of modernization, urban communities have lost the richness of patterns and symbols that made each city distinct. Lozano's concept of cities (1990), as the setting of culture and civilized behaviour, is becoming increasingly fragile.

Suburban sprawl has meant that the edge of cities is often blurred with miles of semi-suburban semi-rural hinterland of shopping malls, office parks and housing developments that constitutes neither city nor countryside. In many cases huge conurbations have obliterated any notion of the city (Bookchin, 1995). People often live miles from where they work, shop or go for leisure activities. The traditional connection of the exchange of goods between cities and their neighbouring countryside is also lost with resources being shipped from all parts of the world to service the undifferentiated urbanized communities.

Commodifying cities

Today's modern landmarks reflect the values of commercialism, where offices and retail units have replaced the library and the town hall, often in physical stature as well as importance to the city (nowadays expressed in terms of financial returns). These bland new buildings neither connect with the city's public, social or physical fabric nor reflect its identity or individuality. Bookchin (1995) has argued that when there is a physical loss of 'city-ness' in favour of huge, bland conurbations there is a parallel loss of citizenship. Active citizenship is discouraged and replaced by the role of consumer or, at best, passive voter. Power is concentrated in the hands of large companies, and government largely acts in their favour.

Recent trends in global economics and telecommunications have led to the assertion that place no longer matters. With no apparent need for a physical focal point for activities, it would seem that cities could suffer dramatically. The possibilities of teleworking and Internet-based consuming would appear to make it possible to return to a more rural lifestyle. However, this runs counter to the international trend of increased urban living. Urban areas continue to grow and there is strong evidence that at least some cities are still as important as ever because they provide rich social connections, high densities of people and skills, as well as being centres of power, decisions and infrastructure. Gillen, for example, discusses the significance of city as a necessary *physical hub* for people whose work patterns are becoming increasingly more oriented around technology-based networks.¹

The last few years have seen a growing emphasis on the importance of cities with policies, for example in the UK, to