

a reasonable mix of city land uses. It should comprise a mix of uses to include opportunities for work, education, leisure, shopping and governance in addition to residential areas. The quarter is a town within a town, and as such it should have a balance of land uses reflecting the balance in the city as a whole. It is the quarter and not the street block which is the main instrument for ensuring a balanced distribution of land uses throughout the city. The city street block, however, with great benefit for the environment, may house a mix of activities, including such uses as residential, shopping, office accommodation and a small nursery school. Many existing city centres would have remained safer and livelier places if the tradition of 'living over the shop' had survived. Some city councils in Britain are indeed pursuing a policy which aims to bring unused accommodation over shops back into use as flats, and also the conversion into apartments of former office blocks. It seems that in the sustainable city of the future there will be a range of city street blocks varying from single-use blocks to those of multi-use in varying proportions and with varying combinations of uses.

The size of an ideal urban street block cannot be established any more precisely than the size of a quarter or neighbourhood. As a rough guide, Krier suggests that urban blocks should be: '... as small in length and width as is typologically viable; they should form as many well defined streets and squares as possible in the form of a multi-directional horizontal pattern of urban spaces' (Krier, 1984). The smallest street blocks are generally found in the centre of traditional cities. They represent a form of development which creates the maximum number of streets and therefore street frontages on a relatively small area: such

a structure of street blocks maximizes commercial benefits. The high densities associated with this type of development stimulate intense cultural, social and economic activity – the lifeblood of city culture. The typical ground floor in this type of central city development has many doors and openings. The traditional European town centre has a quality of permeability: 'Only places which are accessible to people can offer them choice. The extent to which an environment allows people a choice of access through it, from place to place, is therefore a key measure of its responsiveness' (Bentley *et al.*, 1985). The street in the traditional centre facilitates distribution, in addition to its role in economic exchange and social intercourse. In contrast, large modern street blocks have a few guarded entrances, and most of the interchange takes place inside the building where internal corridors, private streets or splendid atria facilitate movement and distribution: the corridor replaces the street, which loses its primary function. The larger and more homogeneous the street block, the greater will be its power to destroy the social, economic and physical networks of the city. The large-scale, single-use, single-ownership street block is the instrument most influential in the decline of the city: its effect – together with that of its partner, the motor car – are among the real causes of the death of the great city.

It may be difficult to be precise about the size of the ideal urban street block, but it is possible to eliminate the block which is too large. Such blocks covering extensive areas are out of scale in a democracy, where power is vested in the people and not with the board of a conglomerate or council of a university. Street blocks in the early industrial cities increased in size towards the periphery of the urban area where land values were low and

where development could be expansive. As a city grew in both wealth and population, so too would its centre. The central city expanded and consequently land values increased at its former periphery, resulting in development pressures and large, over-developed street blocks surrounded by fewer but usually wider roads. Building programmes increased in size throughout the twentieth century, with single owners or developers building large sections of the city. The large development in single or corporate ownership, however, is not entirely recent as a phenomenon. The medieval castle or the cathedral and its ancillary buildings have, in the past, dominated the city. Where this has happened, such institutions have presented an alternative power structure independent of the city and its citizens. In this century these alternative sources of power have multiplied in the city. Large industrial complexes, hospitals, universities and extensive shopping malls are all common to most cities. These large-scale, single-ownership street blocks, or in some cases city districts, may be convenient for those who manage or own the establishment, but citizen rights are not paramount: this is private property, and those with legal possession have great autonomy within their ownership boundary. There seems, however, no reason why, for example, a city university cannot be designed to occupy small-scale city street blocks with buildings designed specifically for this purpose. A good example of such development is Oxford University with its rich mix of town and gown (Figures 9.5 and 9.6). The University of Liverpool, in contrast, followed a modernist approach to planning, destroying communities, the street pattern and also the rich grain of small-scale urban street blocks. In place of the rich nineteenth century urban structure there is a



**Figure 9.5** Oxford High Street.  
(Photograph by Bridie Neville)

large district of the city which dies when students leave at night for the halls of residence, and atrophies almost completely during vacation when they leave the campus for home (Figures 9.7 and 9.8).

The idea of the city as a ‘growing whole’ led Alexander to postulate a number of rules to achieve organic growth – the results of which he much admires – in traditional cities such as Venice (Figures 9.9 and 9.10). One of these rules of organic growth is that growth should be piecemeal: ‘... furthermore that the idea of piecemeal growth be specified exactly enough so that we can guarantee a mixed flow of small, medium, and large projects in about equal quantities’ (Figure 9.11). In detail, Alexander specifies that no single increment should be too large