thousand people and more in the case of the largest cities' (Jacobs, 1965). Furthermore, Jacobs identifies the causes of the failure of neighbourhood planning as ultimately failures of localized self-government. Lynch also recognizes the importance of a political function for the neighbourhood or district: his size for the political unit is considerably smaller than the hundred thousand suggested by Jacobs: 'It is in governmental units of 20 000 to 40 000 people that ordinary citizens can be active in politics if they wish, feel connected to an identifiable political community, and sense some control over public affairs . . .' (Lynch, 1981). In Chapter 4 it was suggested that the local government of the regions should be strengthened, but it is also necessary to strengthen small self-governing towns and districts within the urban region, so dissolving the scale of the big city into a finer political grain, and giving legitimacy to active public participation, in decisions about environmental quality.

The arguments about the size of the district, quarter, and neighbourhood like those about the region are inconclusive. We have seen, in Chapter 4, that Plato suggested a figure of 5040 householders or citizens as the population necessary for political decision-making (Plato, republished 1975). Aristotle was more circumspect. He was concerned that a political unit should be big enough for its citizens to be able to live a full life, but not so big that citizens lose personal touch with each other. For Aristotle, face-to-face contact was important so that questions of justice could be decided with the full knowledge of those involved, and so that offices could be distributed according to merit (Aristotle, republished 1981). The models for both Plato and Aristotle were Athens with

40 000 citizens, and the other Greek cities having 10 000 citizens or less. If figures of this magnitude are thought desirable for the lowest level of government and also for the size of the quarter or district, then the physical dimensions of the districts at Harlow designed by Gibberd, give an approximation of this component of the sustainable city of the future. The districts in Harlow comprise four neighbourhoods of between 4000 and 7000 people, so that the districts were approximately 18 000 to 22 000 people. There is probably no ideal size for the quarter or district, particularly in existing cities. It is important that the district or coalitions of districts can act as a check to the power of the city. The other chief function is the development of city structures which enable citizens to participate fully in both the administration of some city services and in decisions about the future of the city. As Alberti quite rightly stressed: '. . . the city itself ought to be laid out differently for a tyrant, from what they are for those who enjoy and protect government as if it were a magistery voluntarily put into their hands' (Alberti, republished 1955). If Alberti's statement is accepted, then it follows that the city structure for a more participatory democracy will probably be different from one structured for representative democracy which stresses centralized power in the state and in the city.

COMMUNITY

One of the formative ideas of the first new towns in Britain during the 1940s and early 1950s was the neighbourhood concept. Overlaying this concept was the notion of forming a 'community'. The cooperative

spirit which was prevalent after the end of the Second World War led to a belief that this community spirit could infuse the new planning system with life. The neighbourhoods in the, then, new towns and the local authority housing estates in the suburbs were to be modelled on the old inner city working-class communities of cooperation. Middle-class families, doctors, dentists and teachers, were to live as neighbours with the families of the labourer, mechanic and factory worker and to provide the community leadership. As Gosling points out, one group of planners was concerned that: 'The apparent impossibility of making any technical decision about the city without thereby implying a corresponding social structure has persuaded many designers of the primacy of the social programme. Urban design is seen essentially as the attempt to find the appropriate form to sustain this programme or perhaps more actively, to reinforce or even induce it' (Gosling and Maitland, 1984). To some extent the view of planning as social engineering prevailed, or was thought to prevail, into the 1950s. There was, however, another and more mainstream view of the neighbourhood which was held by planners. This idea of the neighbourhood is much more practical and is concerned primarily with the physical distribution of social facilities in relation to population thresholds: 'The neighbourhood is essentially a spontaneous grouping, and it cannot be created by the planner. All he can do is to make provision for the necessary physical needs, by designing an area which gives the inhabitants the sense of living in one place distinct from all other places, and in which social equipment, like schools and playing fields, are conveniently placed' (Gibberd, 1955). Gibberd in this passage stresses the spontaneous nature of community formation and suggests that the physical structure merely permits its development. It is not the pub, the corner shop or the chapel which created the British working-class community, but the strong family ties and the interdependence of the group in the face of financial crisis constantly present with the poor. It has long been recognized that 'community' is not necessarily a product of place. The 'community of interest' may draw members from the city, region or it may have a network of international contacts. The individual may, indeed, belong to several communities, including a local residents' group, a University fraternity and membership of an international professional association (Webber, 1964).

THE QUARTER AND PERCEPTION

The legible city – that is, the city easily visualized in the 'mind's eye' – has, according to Lynch, a clearly defined, easily recognized and distinctive perceptual structure. Lynch suggested that five components – the path, the node, the edge, the landmark and the district – were the key to urban legibility (Lynch, 1960). To some extent the perception and understanding of the urban environment is personal, but groups within a culture share sets of images. It is this shared image which is the concern of urban design. A clearly structured city in terms of Lynch's five components, it is argued, will strengthen the common features of the city image shared by its citizens. Such a city will possess the quality which Lynch described as 'imageability' or the ability to stimulate a strong visual image in the eye and mind of the viewer (Lynch, 1960).