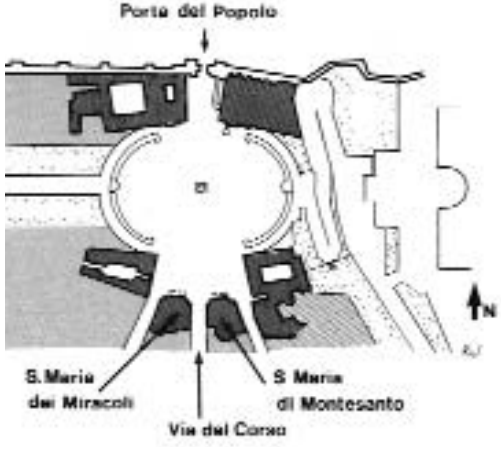
5.20

Figure 5.20 The Campidoglio, Rome
Figure 5.21 Plan of Piazza del Popolo, Rome



5.21

Special arrangements for negotiating changes in level must be made for the handicapped.

Where steps are necessary for changing level, they should be accompanied by a ramp for those in wheelchairs or parents with buggies and prams. Steps are not always the most convenient method of accommodating a change in ground level. Ramps are necessary not only for the handicapped and those pushing prams but also for cyclists and where the pavement is shared by pedestrian and wheeled traffic. Where, however, the ramp is to be used by pedestrians, it should approximate to a 1 m rise in 20 m: this is the most comfortable slope for walking up and down (Halprin, 1972). The ramp, in addition to its utility, has great potential as an ornamental feature of the city. It establishes a quite different aesthetic experience from the stair: it gives a more insistent quality to continuous vertical movement. Unlike a staircase, the ramp does not offer the same opportunity to stand, rest and look about on platforms between flights of steps. The fluidity of the movement is beautifully expressed in the long curving ramps of the exedra connecting the Pincio gardens with the Piazza del Popolo, Rome (Figures 5.21 and 5.22).

SOFT LANDSCAPED AREAS

All paved surfaces have to be drained. Large surfaces such as Piazza Campo in Siena and Piazza Obliqua, St Peter's, Rome are dished, falling dramatically to the rainwater outlet points. Even small surfaces have their drainage channels and grids, which can be highly decorative features of the urban environment. However, dealing with the surface run-off of rainwater in a city is a major undertaking. It is also expensive, often involving engineering works. In addition, the universal canalization or culverting of streams and rivers represents a lost opportunity of living with nature and ornamenting the city with decorative river walks. Natural areas have an important role in the hydrological cycle of cities as well

Figure 5.22 Piazza del Popolo, Rome

as serving the needs of wildlife. Naturalistic open space, being permeable, slows the speed of rainwater run-off, so benefiting hydrology. Increasing the area of permeable land reduces the need to culvert water courses, a necessity only because of the large areas of impermeable city land and the consequent difficulty in controlling fluctuations in the water table (Elkin and McLaren, 1991). The use of load bearing but permeable materials for hard surfaces is useful in the attempt to modify run-off. Such materials are particularly recommended for car parks.

The present dominance of the hard impervious pavement in towns and cities is in part responsible for increased urban temperatures and lowered humidity. These micro-climatic changes in turn increase the demand for artificially controlled internal environments dependent on air conditioning. Landscape wedges linking periphery to city centre, together with local green spaces in squares, on roofs and in private courtyards, can counter adverse local climatic conditions. The green lungs of the city trap particulates, increase humidity and limit the extremes of temperature to which buildings are exposed. Much of the landscaped open space in urban Britain is dominated by mown, chemically retarded grass, and a few scattered ageing trees. The degraded landscape is often the product of imposed financial constraints or popular dislike of unkempt, 'weedy' and natural environments. There is little money available for the maintenance and rehabilitation of many British parks – an important part of the country's heritage. The heritage of municipal parks was donated by city fathers of previous generations. It was a useful contribution to the ornamentation of towns and cities in this country. Sir Titus Salt, for example, when he built the small town of Saltaire, which at the time was completely