

Figure 8.5 Street scene,
Mykonos

Figure 8.6 Street scene,
Germany



8.5



8.6

result was a series of largely unoccupied, cold and wind swept public areas. Another example of post-war Modernist urban design that Postmodernists criticize is the Paternoster Square development in London by Holford. The spaces originally planned as an informal Sittesque landscape around St Paul's Cathedral suffer from the same defects as the town centre at Harlow. In this case, the result was compounded by the Church Commissioners who wanted to maximize floor space and therefore profit (Figure 8.4).

These stark environments were not only without decoration and ornament but also failed to achieve the simple elegance of spaces found in Greece, Italy and other parts of the Mediterranean. In the traditional towns of Southern Europe small scale spaces are enlivened with a few well placed hanging baskets, doors and windows that decorate street and square, signs, fountains and sculpture that enrich the urban scene (Figure 8.5). Northern Europe too is not without its tradition of delightfully decorative public squares and streets (Figure 8.6).

The loss of this great tradition cannot, however, be laid entirely at the feet of Modernist architects and planners. This would be to invest the respective professions with too much power. Other more powerful forces were at work denuding the city of its traditional character (Figure 8.7). Post-modern urbanists must understand the social, political and economic forces which are at work in the city if they are to propose the creation of a more decorated city. There can be no going back to some ideal time in the past except for inspiration. Mere copying would be pastiche (Figure 8.8). It is also to the future city and its role and function that the urbanist must look for the rational basis of a decorative public realm of human scale, even if the forms and concepts used for the decoration derive from past traditions.

An exhaustive analysis of the forces acting upon the city and conditioning its development, has been presented elsewhere for example, (Mumford, 1938; 1944; 1946; 1961; Ravetz, 1980 and Ambrose,

1979). It would not be appropriate in a book on ornament and decoration to repeat that analysis. However, it is necessary to outline, briefly, those factors which may have a bearing upon the creation of a decorated city.

In North America and western Europe the twin values of democracy and the free market predominate. The ensuing importance given to individualism, competition and the profit motive has an inexorable effect upon city form. Planners, architects and urban designers can work with these main currents, controlling and possibly mitigating some of their worst effects or stand like an impotent Canute bidding the tide to retreat.

One result of western cultural patterns is cities where the land market conditions the height of buildings and the location of activities. Where land values are high, usually at important centres or communication nodes, densities are high. Single uses tend to dominate in these areas because of economies of scale and the locational advantage of proximity to allied or associated business. In contrast the periphery of many cities is expanding outwards with low density suburbs. For example, in Britain and other property owning democracies the ideal of owning a house with a garden dominates the ambition of most families. This demand is met by the development of low density single use housing suburbs. Industrial, business, shopping and leisure parks follow the population to suburban locations. In Britain the trend is facilitated by road dominated transport policies supported by a largely compliant electorate.

The building industry is an important part of the commercial democracy and follows the same imperatives. Buildings are constructed for profit. Traditional materials such as stone, brick and slate are expensive. The craftsmanship to mould such materials into decorative patterns is also expensive as is on site construction. Buildings, if they are to be reduced in cost and therefore maximize profits, tend to be constructed of standard prefabricated, factory-made components requiring little fixing on



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Figure 8.7 Market Square, Nottingham



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Figure 8.8 Richmond Riverside, London