

# Kerb Your Enthusiasm

Why shared space doesn't always  
mean shared surface, and other stories

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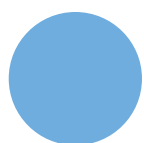
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- i Over the course of the last ten years, shared space has increasingly been discussed in and beyond transport and design circles. Research conducted for this report found large divergence of opinion about the implications of the term. Based on an initial interview process, shared space has therefore been defined as 'a multi-understood and somewhat controversial term which exists across a number of fields including urban design, engineering and traffic management and which implies new direction in thinking about the public realm.'
- ii The divergence of understanding has been linked to a lack of substantial research and/or definitive guidance as well as relatively low numbers of practical examples.
- iii Quite logically, observers have relied upon the most tangible elements of the concept, and tended to define shared space based on some of the design techniques used in public realm schemes to which it has been applied.
- iv The term has recently become synonymous with the conflict and controversy associated with some of these design techniques such as the removal of kerbs, signage and crossing points. However, research undertaken for this report has identified the more progressive and philosophical beginnings of shared space which could make a particularly useful contribution to the improvement of our public realm.
- v This report aims to move the debate on from the design elements it currently centres on, which will be shown as locally rather than nationally relevant issues, towards a focus on community-led maximisation of the role which the public realm can play.
- vi Rather than attempting to redefine the term 'shared space', this report has focused on the potential which a shift in thinking about public realm could have. PACTS has identified the role which the public realm could play in the achievement of a wide range of community needs, desires and objectives, but has also outlined a number of the evident hurdles which limit application.
- vii The following three questions have been central to the research process throughout:
  - What is the policy context within which shared space exists?
  - Why is the term so multi-understood and what are we really dealing with?
  - How can we move the debate forward and which areas should be focussed on?

### PUBLIC POLICY AND THE PUBLIC REALM

- viii Though in appearance a simple term to define, the 'public realm' proves to be complex in its character. Without wanting to limit this complexity, our focus has fallen solely on those public space areas which exist on the street network. Combining the CABE definition of streetscape<sup>3</sup> with the ODPM (now DCLG) definition of public space<sup>4</sup>, this report defines the 'public realm' as:

**Those parts of the highway to which the public have shared access and on which the spectrum of public life is carried out. This can include, among others, high streets, rural village streets, market squares and shopping streets but would not include roads of obvious and limited purpose such as motorways and dual carriageways.**

3 <http://www.cabe.org.uk/files/paving-the-way.pdf>

4 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/131006.pdf> schemesr

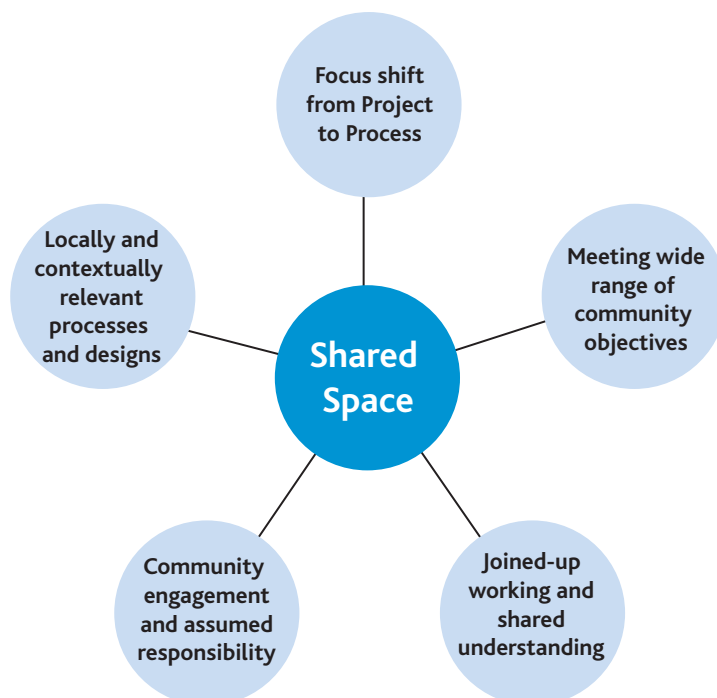
- ix This research has focused solely on those areas included within the above definition. Good public realm planning is shown to act as a catalyst in the achievement of a community's needs, desires and objectives, whilst poor public realm planning is shown to act as a hurdle. Certain policy objectives, such as modal shift, increased social integration and improved safety and security for users, are more likely to be affected by the quality of public realm planning.
- x Some of our public realm is fundamentally and unintentionally underperforming. This public space which should be providing a backbone of integration to society is frequently unsafe, unclean, inefficient and underwhelming.
- xi By outlining the government's development objectives, this report shows how 'smarter governance' can be applied to the public realm as much as it can to other policy tools.
- xii The public realm is seen as a key player in the balancing of the mobility objectives (economic growth, improved local economies, reduced congestion and so on) and civility objectives (healthier communities, cleaner air, safer roads and so on) of a community and of society at large.

### BALANCING MOBILITY AND CIVILITY: PAST AND PRESENT

- xiii The balancing of mobility and civility objectives has been consistently attempted by planners over the years. In the second chapter, PACTS looks at a number of attempts from the last century, providing a rationale for some of the approaches which are less well perceived today and outlining the reality of 'unknown unknown' outcomes from well intentioned plans.
- xiv Moving closer to today, it is seen that the evolving and increasingly complex policy context has generated a shift change in public realm priorities. Initiatives such as Pedestrianisation, Home Zones and Mixed Priority Routes have tended to accentuate the 'civility' objectives for communities.
- xv New initiatives are assessed based on research available, experience is summarised and lessons are identified. There has been a fundamental lack of awareness in public realm planning over the last 20 years about the experiences and lessons learnt from that which has gone before. For example, extensive consultation was identified during at least three major projects as a crucial element for success in innovative public realm schemes and yet new approaches still fail to attempt extended consultation processes.
- xvi Shared space is viewed as a recent attempt to balance the mobility and civility objectives placed on the public realm. In practice, this balancing act attempts to redefine the public realm to ensure that, where appropriate, the car is the guest and does not own a space. As motorised transport has become increasingly important, areas designed for public life have become dominated by the prioritisation of cars, vans and other forms of motorised transport. Recent approaches try to redress the status quo.

## SHARED SPACE: MOVING THE DEBATE FORWARD

- xvii Shared space schemes in England have often been the subject of media, public and industry interest. Proponents and opponents are split over the potential benefits or disbenefits of a number of design approaches associated with shared space.
- xviii This report looks at the experiences, at the local level, of planners and stakeholders of so called 'shared space schemes' to highlight the kinds of issues being raised.
- xix In the absence of substantial evidence, research, guidance or practical examples, observers of shared space have tended to latch-on to the more tangible elements of schemes and national debate has centred on specific design techniques.
- xx However, a closer look at the origins of shared space and the theories developed during the European Shared Space Project show that this design-centred focus risks clouding a much wider contribution.
- xxi PACTS has identified the potential which shared space has to offer. The central theory, built on a series of key elements (disaggregation of the road network, speed and tolerance, behavioural understanding and so on) is developed into five 'lessons' shown in the model below.
- xxii This report calls for a shift in thinking which moves from shared space being an objective towards shared space being a process. PACTS has developed a model which builds a theoretical process which could help to maximise the contribution made by the public realm towards societal objectives.



**MOVING THE DEBATE FORWARD: THE CHALLENGES**

- xxiii A shift in thinking and a shift in process of this kind are not expected to be automatic. In fact this is unlikely. PACTS has identified a number of hurdles which will need to be considered if public realm approaches are going to be pushed forward. The final chapter looks at issues such as engaging with communities, risk and liability, the weakness of private/public sector links and so on.
  
- xxiv It is hoped that the stakeholders, policy makers and planners will act on the recommendations made in this report. Smarter governance, joined-up working and shared understanding could make our public realm work harder and should make an important contribution to improving the quality of public life.

**This report identifies a number of recommendations which can be found below and at the end of each chapter. Five key recommendations which encapsulate the larger list are central to the research conclusions:**

- 1 Stakeholders, policy makers and planners should more effectively conceive and design the public realm as part of a joined-up working approach, to ensure its contribution towards the achievement of governmental, economic, societal and community objectives.
- 2 Evaluation and research should be better disseminated to stakeholders, policy makers and planners and applied to future design and planning guidance and approaches. Appropriate channels of communication should be explored and applied.
- 3 Stakeholders, policy makers and planners should see shared space as a process rather than a design technique and should use it to enable smarter planning and to encourage innovative and feasible public realm solutions. The user should provide a central focus to public realm design and planning.
- 4 Processes should engage with the community throughout and encourage cross-departmental participation at all levels.
- 5 National government should fund a demonstration project to generate greater understanding of the potential gains for society of using joined-up working processes and applying a wider set of objectives to public realm planning. Such a project should include an action learning element that would enable greater communication between participants. Good practice models for this include Neighbourhood Road Safety Initiative (NRSI) and the European Shared Space Project.

#### **PUBLIC POLICY AND THE PUBLIC REALM**

- Policy makers and planners should be aware that public realm conception and design will impact on the wider needs, desires and objectives of a community and should prepare accordingly.
- Those involved in public realm conception and design should be aware of the full breadth of societal and community objectives.
- Transport goals concerning the economy, the environment, accessibility, health, safety and security provide a useful national base on which to add locally-specific knowledge to generate a nationally and locally relevant contextual setting.

#### **BALANCING CIVILITY AND MOBILITY: PAST AND PRESENT**

- Public realm planners and stakeholders should be aware of research and experience in the field before embarking on a scheme.
- The government should provide a central database of research and good practice which allows those working on or involved in public realm schemes to gather a wider sense of research and experience in the field.
- Local Authorities should be aware of the potential for unexpected outcomes of certain approaches.

- Stakeholders, policy makers and planners should ensure that planning, design and implementation all take account of location and context specifics when working on public realm schemes.
- Local Authorities should improve and widen consultation on public realm schemes.
- Local Authorities should collect before and after data based on the objectives of any public realm scheme and budget for substantial evaluation both of processes used and the schemes themselves.

### SHARED SPACE: MOVING THE DEBATE FORWARD

- The shared space debate needs to be moved away from micro-level discussion about design techniques and used to develop the role of the public realm as a facilitator which can contribute towards the wide needs, desires and objectives of communities. Shared space should be synonymous, in public realm terms, with joined-up thinking and shared understanding.
- The DfT should adapt LTN 1/08 to include the development processes which should precede and support the design stages of public realm schemes.
- Research should be conducted to further establish the nature of the direct or indirect link between public realm interventions and social outcomes. This should then feed into CLG guidance documents on Community Cohesion.<sup>5</sup>
- As the objectives of public realm schemes widen, so should the processes which are used to evaluate, audit, monitor and maintain those schemes. Future design guidance should address this.
- Consultation on public realm schemes must be extended to consider consultees as partners and generate a much wider sense of a community and its objectives.
- Central government should work to ensure that Local Government structures and processes allow for cross-departmental communication, understanding and cooperation.
- Guidance on community-based approaches to public realm should be directed at the wide range of planners and stakeholders and include information on how/where to identify wider community objectives and those partners who can communicate them.
- Vulnerable road users of all kinds should always be fully integrated into public realm processes.
- The self-explaining road concept should be developed and applied to all roads with particular focus placed on improving the implications of the concept at the public realm level.

5 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/151411.pdf>

## MOVING THE DEBATE FORWARD: THE CHALLENGES

- National government should encourage the development of a clear 'whole area approach' which identifies key goals and is accessible to all stakeholders. Part of this should encourage planners and stakeholders to identify the potential which the public realm holds in terms of influencing policy areas such as health, the environment, social inclusion and so on.
- National government should develop cross-departmental trials to evaluate the potential of using the public realm to achieve community goals using community-centred processes as outlined in this report.
- National government should lead by examples, encouraging Local Authorities to use the recession to an advantage. Looking at the bigger picture and the longer term will be key in identifying the cost efficiencies available.
- National government should set up a web-based tool allowing for dissemination of research and experience sharing between local stakeholders at all levels.
- Future design guidance should provide material on the auditing and evaluation of public realm schemes with increasingly complex objectives.
- The DfT should commission research looking into regulatory frameworks relating to public realm areas in the rest of Europe. This research should aim to establish any links between regulatory frameworks and user behaviour, user safety and wider social outcomes.
- National government should fund 'action-learning' trials which aim to move public realm developments from project to process in the manner outlined in this report. The trials should attempt to create more effective public realm using joined-up approaches and shared understanding and should feed back into guidance for practitioners. Knowledge sharing models such as NRSI and the European Shared Space Project should be considered as good practice examples.



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