



Inclusive Urban Design



Public Toilets

Clara Greed



Inclusive Urban Design: Public Toilets

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Foreword

In recent years, thanks to various global meetings such as the World Toilet Summits and Asia Pacific Toilet Symposiums, the issue of Public Toilets has evolved from being an embarrassing subject to one that is gaining widespread awareness and generating lively discussions.

Toilet is culture; we visit the toilet several times a day. To enjoy our lives, we need to develop good toilet culture. This culture is made up of many diverse and inter-related issues including Provision, Planning and Design, Cultural Attitude, Behaviour, Public Health, Social Graciousness, Safety, Cleaning Skills and Methods, Building Maintenance, Disabled Accessibility, Setting Norms and Standards, Policy and Legislation, Management, Research and Development, Technologies, Public Education and Environmental issues such as water and sewage treatment and recycling.

These issues are also different in each kind of building. A factory's toilet serves different visitors from that of a shopping centre, or a school, a hospital, an office, a coffee shop, a swimming club or a hotel, and these issues differ again in varying urban, suburban and rural locations. The degree of development or affluence in each location also plays an important role in determining needs and priorities.

The needs of the toilet user are also varied. Demands and provision must be different for a man, a woman, a child, an elderly person, an infant and different kinds of physically disadvantaged people like those with visual impairments, incontinence sufferers and the wheelchair bound. Furthermore, cultural differences need to be taken into account, especially in view of rapid globalisation.

Clara's book is an important document that comes at an important time. Due to the long neglect of this subject, the global community, including the commercial sector, governments and non-government organizations are now realising there is an urgent need to address toilet issues and search for new answers and solutions. This book nourishes their searching minds.

Many have discovered that good toilet facilities are not only an essential service but can in fact offer healthy returns on investment. Toilets are disease prevention tools. They help reduce the cost of public health provision, and improve people's quality of life, productivity and morale. As evident by the 'Loo of the Year Award' in Britain, shopping centres and hotels alike are finding that providing good toilets earns them good dividends in the form of increased shopper traffic and occupancy rates. Enterprises, like the Great World City shopping precinct and the Singapore Zoo, feature their toilets as an important attraction to

visitors. Beijing, through the Beijing Tourism Bureau, is a fine example of how a city can increase tourism income by improving its image with better public toilet facilities.

Clara has taken great effort in meticulously capturing the plight of toilet goers. Reading this book, I felt the title could alternatively be called *All you wanted to know about public toilets but dare not ask*.

The book provides a deep understanding of toilet issues and many useful suggestions. It is an eye-opener for all those concerned with the current toilet situation. Architects, industrial designers, building owners, facility managers and government officials everywhere will do well to study it.

This book marks another milestone to the continuous global awareness of public toilets. I am certain it will be a strong catalyst in breaking the 'taboo' on this subject.

Jack Sim
World Toilet Organisation (WTO)
Singapore
November 2002

Preface

In previous research I have investigated the planning of cities (Greed, 2000a), urban design (Greed and Roberts, 1999), urban governance issues (Greed, 1999a); gender issues (Greed, 1991, 1994a) and cultural factors (Greed, 2000b). My observations of dissatisfaction with the urban situation among the general public, and puzzlement at the apparent lack of awareness in the built environment professions of the urban spatial deficiencies highlighted by the women and planning movement, and by other minority and community groups, initially led me to investigate 'why' this was so and to undertake detailed research on the needs of women in cities in particular (Greed, 1991, 1994a). In spite of all the verbal diarrhoea advocating equal opportunities, women's rights, better health and environmental sustainability, the lack of public toilets, and the contempt in which the subject is held, may be seen as the true indicator of the lack of progress that has been achieved, especially in respect of women's position in society.

In this book my emphasis is upon a key 'micro' level, detailed component of the built environment – namely toilets – whereas my previous work has been on wider 'macro' level policy issues. I chose this topic for further research for two main reasons. Firstly, in the course of undertaking research on 'women and planning', many respondents declared, *'it all comes down to toilets in the final analysis'*. Women, especially those with small children, and the elderly, explained how their use of the city was limited by the availability, or not, of public conveniences. The situation has become unsatisfactory for everyone, both men and women, of all ages because of accelerated closure rates, an ageing population and a lack of investment in public facilities.

Secondly, I chose this topic because, in my extensive travels by train for my research work, I often could not find a toilet when I myself needed one, and when I did I encountered queues, filthy conditions, plugs which did not pull, and dangerous steep steps; but, occasionally, a cheerful lavatory attendant, innovative designs, and a freshly picked sprig of plastic flowers by the washbasin. My concern with public toilets came to a head in 1994 when I found that a turnstile had been installed at the entrance to the Ladies at Paddington railway station. The toilets had been closed for several months because of refurbishment, but were now reopened. To my horror I found that, in spite of spending millions of pounds, the toilets were still down some awkward stairs when they could have easily have been put at platform level, so much easier for people with luggage. Worst of all, now one had to pay 20p to go through the turnstile, which is 15½ inches (40 cm) across, hardly enough room for luggage, and the average pushchair is at least

18" (46 cm) across. As the Consumers Association commented (*Which* magazine, January 1991: 52–3), British Rail seemed to assume that the average passenger is carrying nothing more than a rolled-up newspaper (and little has changed, see *Which*, 2001). Mothers with pushchairs at railway stations may be told they are not allowed to use the disabled toilets which may constitute the only passenger-accessible toilets with an adequate width entrance now that turnstiles have been installed. Most mainline London terminus railway stations have toilet turnstiles including Paddington, Euston and King's Cross, and most are located downstairs. On phoning the Station Manager at Paddington about the problem, I met with an amused and disrespectful response. He told me, 'you could always go behind a hedge' (in Central London?). It was then that I decided it was time to become passionate about public toilets and gradually over the years I have picked up speed on this topic, so that now it has quite taken over my life.

My initial concern with the lack of public toilets in our urban and rural areas inevitably led into looking at ways and means of ameliorating the situation, and into campaigning for policy and legislative change. In this process I came across a whole world of researchers, campaigners, toileteers and interest groups, who were championing different aspects of 'toilets', such as the campaign group as will be explained in subsequent chapters. Much of my inspiration came from All Mod Cons (AMC), the pressure group set up by Susan Cunningham in Cardiff for better public toilets in the 1980s, whose voice continues to be heard within the context of its successor the British Toilet Association (BTA), of which I am an honorary member and avid devotee. So I cannot claim personal neutrality but have nevertheless sought to maintain a more neutral perspective in undertaking academic research on toilets (Greed and Daniels, 2002). I argue with passion that public toilets are essential for creating accessible, sustainable and equal cities, and that they are a vital factor in getting people out of their cars and back to walking, cycling and using public transport. I also argue that the reinstatement of public toilets is a key component in mainstreaming gender into planning policies. Toilet rearmament cannot be done lightly; it involves fundamental cultural change, considerable financial investment, legislative change and a whole set of different priorities which will result in better lives for everyone. We need a restroom revolution, a toilet transformation – indeed, our lives depend on it.

Clara Greed
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March 2003

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part one

The Problem of Public Toilets



SECTION ONE:
THE BACKGROUND: PUBLIC LOSE OUT

chapter one

Introduction: background and context

The problem of public toilets and its relevance to architects

This book investigates the problem of inadequate public toilet provision and discusses the role of urban design in contributing towards a solution. Public toilet provision has become increasingly unsatisfactory, because of closure of existing facilities and a general neglect and marginalisation of toilet issues by urban policy-makers.¹ Why are public toilets of relevance to architects, or to the creation of Great Architecture? Architects are increasingly taking on the roles of urban designer, regenerator and policy leader, as legitimated by the Urban Taskforce agenda (Rogers, 2000). New Urbanism and urban renewal policies demand that architects contribute to meeting social needs through enlightened design. Public toilets are a necessary component for users of the built environment in enabling user-friendly, sustainable, safe, equitable and accessible cities. While writing predominantly for a built environment specialist audience, the areas of health, sustainability and equality also feature strongly in this study as key considerations in achieving better toilet provision.

Government policy is putting greater emphasis upon the need to create sustainable cities, by means of reducing the use of the private car and encouraging people to walk, cycle and use public transport. Such a shift creates a need for a concomitant increase in public toilet provision, as mobility patterns change. Likewise, the expansion of the evening economy and 24-hour city puts pressure on toilet facilities and, in particular, the growth of street urination in town centres has brought the issue to media attention. The renaissance in urban design, whose agenda nowadays includes attention to user needs as well as aesthetic considerations, demands a more holistic 'joined-up-thinking' approach to meeting public need. Public toilets should be included in the new vision of the city, as valued components of modern townscape, rather than being hidden behind some bushes where they are likely to be vandalised.

This book is written from the premise that public toilets should be seen as an integral and important component of modern urban design and town planning policy, at city-wide, local area and individual site level. Designing toilets has been seen by some architects as the equivalent of doing latrine duty in the Army. The provision of public toilets should not be seen as an unpleasant low status function, typically in with local authority cemeteries, allotments and waste disposal departments and carried out, albeit with good intentions, by the public works and plumbing fraternity alone. There is no shortage of existing toilet manuals which provide the details and dimensions of internal layout, plumbing fixtures and fittings. Such precepts appear detached from the wider world of urban design and policy. They deal with internal specifications for individual toilet blocks in isolation from the surrounding environmental situation, locational context and modern user needs.

In spite of all this technical guidance, there is considerable dissatisfaction with the end product in terms of building design, levels of provision, location, crime and safety factors, hygiene, layout, disabled toilet² requirements and accessibility, and so the time is right for a rethink of the existing government standards. Many have argued (BTA, 2001) that the emphasis upon meeting the minimal requirements of British Standards and Building Regulations encourages little consideration of how the location, level of provision and external appearance

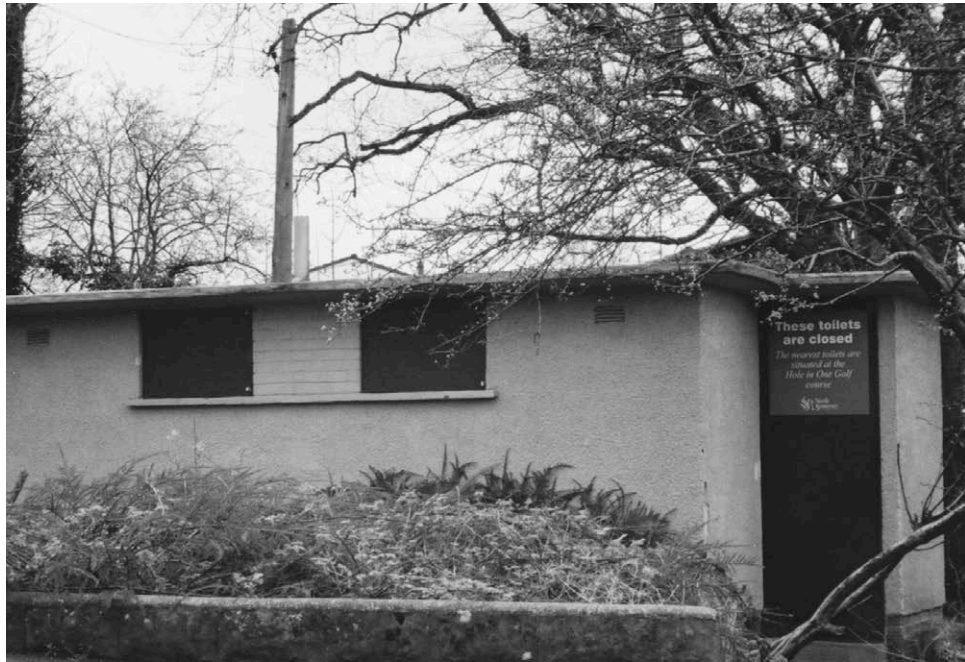


Figure 1.1 Closed toilet in Portishead at terminus of bus route out from Bristol. This closed toilet is at a bus terminus. Well located (and open) toilets are necessary to meet the needs of would-be public transport users in outer Bristol. Subsequently demolished in late 2002.

exacerbate the problems associated with toilets, such as crime, lack of access, urban incivility and depressing, threatening environs. On the other hand, there is nothing worse than disembodied policies and abstract sociological discussion and analysis 'floating in a spaceless vacuum' (Harvey, 1975:24).

Form follows bodily function

This book is not another technical manual – although, of course, 'plumbing' is always an important determinant in toilet detail; rather, this book is concerned with the way in which toilet planning can meet users' needs, within the wider context of urban design. This book is written from the perspective of seeing public toilet provision as part of the solution to urban problems, as an integral component of strategic policy, town centre management, and the urban design agendas. It does not present one ideal architectural blueprint for a universalist, totally inclusive toilet as there are so many local situational variables involved which make it impossible to prescribe 'one size fits all' design solutions. The study seeks to present principles, guidelines and ideals to inform the design process in all situations. Throughout, greater emphasis is put upon 'public' on-street conveniences as an essential component of creating sustainable cities, rather than majoring on 'off-street' privately provided public toilets. While the latter may have a complementary role, they are not necessarily open to everyone and therefore truly 'public'. Nowadays, toilets in shops or fast food outlets are often cited as a viable alternative, or excuse for municipal under-provision, when in reality access may be quite restrictive in terms of physical barriers, times, and 'glares'.

This book combines social aspects and physical design considerations in developing public toilet guidance. We live in a material and visual world in which toilets are an important concrete physical element meeting vital user needs. Good toilet design is sensitive to the architectural axiom that 'form follows function', to quote a truism, and in this case 'bodily function informs form', in the guise and design in which public toilets manifest themselves within the built environment.

One such social issue is 'gender' in respect of the differential levels of provision for men and women. The book incorporates a universalist approach to providing public toilets for everyone (Goldsmith, 2000), but it gives greater emphasis to the challenges created by the under-provision and poor design of women's toilets. The toilet issue affects all 'users', but particularly women, who comprise 52% of the population (ONS, 2002). Men on average have twice as much provision as women, as they have urinals as well as closets and a greater number of Gents toilet blocks overall. Anyone out and about in the streets in the daytime doing the shopping, or undertaking other essential caring tasks, may find themselves without the benefit of a convenient office or hotel to nip back into should they need 'to go' while away from home (BTA, 2001). Women are

likely to need public toilets more often, and for a greater range of reasons, because of biological differences. While the majority of user groups are female, the majority of providers and policy-making groups are male, and according to women toilet campaigners 'it simply does not occur to them, it's not important to them, they don't find it a problem'. Women have seldom been consulted about toilet design (Cavanagh and Ware, 1991). It is only in recent years with the increase in the numbers of women in architecture and urban design that women have begun to participate in the design process on a professional basis.

When the fact that women have fewer public toilets than men is raised, someone is always likely to say, 'well they could always use a pub'. For a range of cultural, practical, legal and safety reasons, women are less likely than men to go into a 'strange' pub to use the toilet, and they are legally forbidden to do so if accompanied by babies or small children. Many ethnic minority and religious women would not enter a premises serving alcohol or fastfood chains selling non-halal (non-kosher) food. Even with liberalisation of opening hours, pubs are unlikely to be open before 11.00 am, thus limiting availability. As public provision is reduced to the minimum, and pubs sport notices stating 'Toilets strictly for the use of patrons only', more men as well as women are beginning to notice there is a problem. In other words, most of the population is affected by this issue (Greed, 1996a). The needs of children, the elderly, tourists, public transport users and drivers, postal workers, van drivers and disabled people are not adequately met either by the present situation (Shaw, 2001).

The focus of this book is British toilets. Some of the problems are shared internationally but some are peculiar to the British situation, while others are common to the Anglo-Saxon and North European cultural contexts. It used to be said, 'Britain has the best toilets in the world', but nowadays many other countries have much better levels of provision. In seeking inspiration and solutions international comparisons and examples will be included, not least from the Far East which is currently in the throes of a toilet revolution. Japan is generally acknowledged to be the 'toilet leader' of the world. Other societies' ideal toilet designs may not be our preferred solution – e.g. the international toilet world is divided over the 'sit or squat' debate, the former being a particularly western solution to toilet design. Material from recent World Toilet Conferences in Japan (JTA, 1996a), Singapore (WTO, 2001) and Korea (WTO, 2002) is drawn upon to provide a wider perspective on 'British' public lavatory problems.

Not only is there a lack of facilities, those that are provided are often sub-standard. The toilet problem is heightened because of bad design, poor maintenance and management of existing facilities, and lack of toilet attendants. These factors result in insanitary facilities, anti-social behaviour, and an unsuccessful battle against the problems of crime and vandalism that so beset public toilets. Limited opening hours, unequal distribution and inappropriate location of facilities result in ordinary people declaring 'there's never a public toilet when you want one'. Unlike buses, three do not come along at once if



Figure 1.2 People queuing at the London Eye. Millions of tourists visit this attraction and all of these people, from all age groups, able and disabled, male and female, might need a toilet. The nearest toilets are down steps, thus immediately excluding many of those in this queue.

you wait long enough! Unlike mobile phones, you can't buy one and take it with you.

Not only are facilities poor within toilets, but getting into the toilet in the first place remains a major issue, as highlighted by a wide range of user groups. Small, narrow cubicles with inward opening doors, leaving only a small gap between the toilet bowl and the door, make public toilet use almost impossible for many. The introduction of environmental requirements for disposal containers for sanpro³ to be placed in every cubicle in the Ladies has further reduced space and created an unhygienic situation with the container rubbing right up against the toilet pan and inevitably the user's leg. Other factors that reduce accessibility for both the disabled and the abled include steep slippery steps down to underground toilets, installation of 'pay to pee' turnstiles, and the expansion of the dreaded APC (Automatic Public Convenience) which is not popular with the public.

Yet, some North American cities are very proud of their APCs and see them as a major tourist plus point. In San Francisco a tourist promotion film put them in the same 'fabulous' category alongside their historic tramcars! They are larger models, with disabled access, and the toilet bowls have automatically cleaned

seats which make them a bit more bearable for women. Public toilets are being closed down in many American states, not least California, because of a crack-down on drugs and cottaging (male homosexual activity in toilets, sometimes known as cruising). In contrast with Britain, there are still likely to be more available to the public in North American department stores, banks and food outlets. In Britain the municipal public toilet is likely to be the only option available in many areas and when that goes there are few 'private' off-street public toilet alternatives compared with those found in mainland Europe within cafés and restaurants.

In contrast, in late Victorian times and the Edwardian era public toilet provision had a much higher status which was reflected in the quality of provision. Right up to the 1950s, public toilet provision continued albeit often in the shape of basic provision. Provision was mainly for 'Gentlemen', and 'Ladies' toilets were the minority. This unequal situation was enshrined in legislation that required men to be given approximately twice as much provision as women, and the difference has not yet been made up. This book recommends that women should be provided with not just 'equal' provision but ideally twice as many facilities, because women use on-street public toilets more frequently because of a range of biological and sociological reasons. Men take an average of 35 seconds to go and women take 91 seconds because of anatomical differences and different clothing (Kira, 1976; Asano, 2002); therefore, in the US there has been a move towards 'potty parity' between women and men (Soifer, 2001). Unequal provision is untenable in the light of modern advances in the fields of equality, under both Equal Opportunities (EO) and European Union (EU) law.

The scope of the book

'Toilets' is a topic linking to a range of issues, including (in no particular order) crime and vandalism; sexuality (of all types); the environment, water conservation and global sustainability; health, hygiene and medicine; women's issues, child-care, breastfeeding and sanpro disposal³; public transport and private travel; leisure, tourism and sport; continence, disability and ageing; architecture, engineering and design; sewerage, drainage and plumbing; religion, culture and taboo. In fact, 'all human life is there'⁴, and it was a major task to disentangle the various strands as all the issues are interconnected and overlap. All these topics will be found, *inter alia*, in this book.

Doing research involves investigating the cultural, statutory and attitudinal factors that result in this lack of acknowledgment of such a basic human need among those who design and manage our lives and environment⁵. While much of my work has gravitated towards the realms of social town planning, urban design and women's issues, it must be stated that the only subject I came top in at university was 'sewerage and drainage systems'. Yet it has always puzzled me

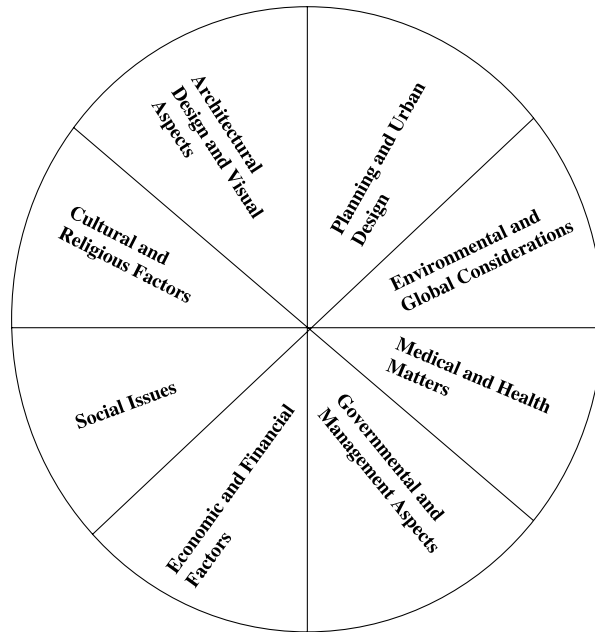


Figure 1.3 Realms concerned with toilets.

when standing in the queue for the Ladies loo, why other women in the queue do not protest about the situation, especially in these days of so-called sexual equality and girl power. In spite of all the verbal diarrhoea of equal opportunities policy, little seems to have been achieved at the most basic level of toilet provision. Clearly it is time for a toilet revolution.

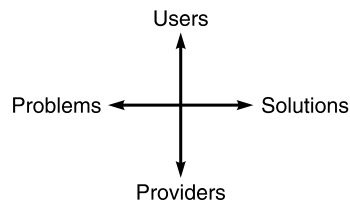
As a result of lack of provision, a range of medical, environmental, social equity and access issues are aggravated and intensified. In spite of the current government's protestations as to its commitment to social inclusion, equality, health and environmental sustainability, nothing has changed. It has always seemed so 'obvious' (to me at least but apparently not to others) that public toilets are a basic necessity, and therefore it is time to write down the reasons and arguments for better toilet provision. After all, 'everyone has got to go sometime...'. Someone arriving from Mars would not get this impression, for one can search in vain for any mention of public toilets on street maps and tourist guides; in official documents on urban issues; and within 'serious' academic and professional work one would find a glaring lacuna (gap) and deafening silence. A woman who came to Britain from mainland China told me when she first arrived in London she was desperate to find a toilet, and seeing piles of dog dirt on the pavement concluded that perhaps these were human faeces and this was the local custom. Fortunately she was directed to a toilet before deciding to follow

suit and squat on the pavement. So the book relates to the needs of a wide range of types of people who compose society.

The style of the book

The purpose of this book is to investigate the factors which have shaped and determined the 'problem' of the nature and currently poor level of public toilet provision in Britain and, second, to identify those factors, change agents and processes which might ameliorate the situation, increase provision and provide a 'solution', and to suggest improved design standards and means of providing better toilets. Arguably one cannot effectively design public toilets unless one understands the reasons and background to the problems to be addressed. Otherwise one ends up with a mechanistic application of set rules and generalised standards, often with disastrously inappropriate results. Relatively speaking, in the first part of the book 'the problem' – that is, the reasons and issues resulting in poor provision – are investigated, while in the second part of the book emphasis is put upon identifying design solutions and policy guidelines. The situation and solutions are looked at from both user and provider perspectives throughout.

So, in summary, the contents of the book may be seen as running along two main continua:



Contents

Part I, 'The problem', comprises Sections I and II, sets out the cultural and attitudinal factors that contribute to the problem, and gives reasons why it is vital that the situation should be improved, because one cannot design something unless one understands the needs and issues involved first. Part II, 'The solution', comprises Sections III and IV, gives policy and design guidance that might improve the situation, and means of achieving change, respectively. Albeit Part II inevitably has to refer (back) to the problems identified in Part I, as the debate is always a tense dualism revolving around the key questions of 'what is the problem?' and 'what can be done about it?'. The book seeks to give both ideal (maximum) and pragmatic (minimum) solutions in view of the hostile state of toilet funding. Since building toilets is only half the battle, attention is given to man-

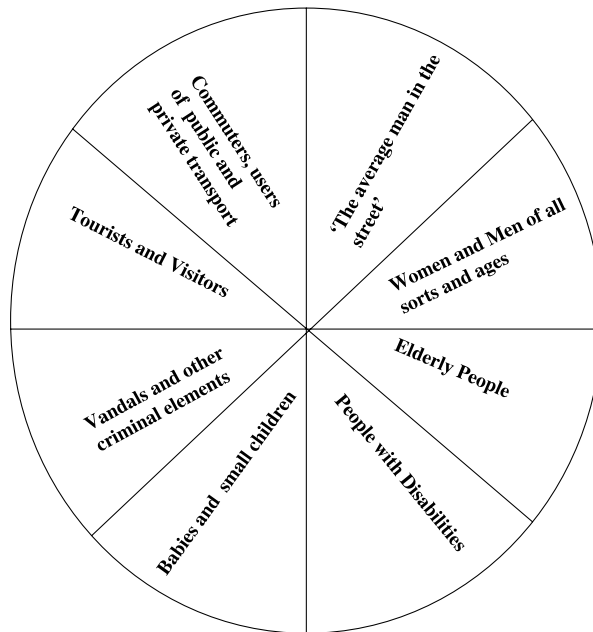


Figure 1.4 The range of public toilet user groups.

agement, maintenance, financial and organisational issues too. These are all components of the modern urban agenda of maintaining the regenerated city in a sustainable state. Ideal solutions to solving the problem would involve major investment, cultural and political change, and a whole new way of looking at the toilet situation. Therefore, where possible, the book provides both ‘best solutions’ and more pragmatic interim solutions and designs that take into account the realities of the present funding climate.

Section I comprises Chapters 1–4 and provides the conceptual, historical and legal context to the ‘problem’ of public toilets. Following the introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provides the conceptual perspective to the study, in order to place ‘toilet provision’ as a valid subject within academic study and professional activity (skip this chapter if you are not academically inclined). Chapter 3 looks at the historical development of public lavatory provision as a means of understanding how we got to where we are now, and in order to learn from the past examples of provision. Toilets from the past comprise a substantial component of the modern built environment and are part of the living fabric of the modern city.

Chapter 4 continues the story with particular emphasis upon the legislative context that has shaped the unequal and inadequate levels of provision across the twentieth century. A major problem is that the laws governing local authority provision of public toilets are ‘permissive’ rather than ‘mandatory’ – that

is, local authorities 'may' provide toilets if they so wish, but there is no requirement that they 'must'. Legislative change is essential in order to enable the provision of better designed, more equal and accessible toilet provision.

Section II comprises Chapters 5–7 and considers three of the most dominant perspectives, or sets of worldviews on the toilet problem, which strongly influence the chances, or not, of achieving better provision, and the type of design solutions likely to be adopted. While this book will cover many of the details and practicalities of public toilet facilities and design, it has to be concerned with deeper causal and cultural factors which shape the level of provision and the wider nature of our towns and cities and likely levels of comfort within the built environment. There is no point in providing new and better toilets if they are soon vandalised and closed because underlying social attitudes remain unchanged and unregenerated within society.

Chapter 5 considers the cultural aspects of toilet provision, looking at societal attitudes towards bodily functions, human waste, sex and 'dirt'. To investigate these vexed issues one has to draw upon a diversity of academic and professional realms, including anthropology, history, sociology, religion and feminism, but also plumbing, sewerage, public health, town planning, architecture, sanitary engineering, environmentalism and urban governance, in order to make sense of it all.

In Chapter 6 the medical dimensions of public toilet provision are considered within the context of an increasingly ageing population who generally 'need to go more often', and women's so-called 'special needs' owing to our 'different' biological functions. It addresses both clinical and public health reasons – that is, at both the curative and preventative arguments, for increased toilet provision.

Toilet provision and related sewerage and disposal systems have become the subject of considerable debate within the world of environmentalism, sustainability, public health and the new healthy cities agenda. Chapter 7 provides an opportunity to discuss the global context and to make international comparisons with particular reference to other advanced developed nations and in respect of developing Third World nations. Many developing countries do not have water-based sewage systems, and many would argue that it is inappropriate to promote the Western 'flush and forget' approach to waste disposal. Instead, a 'recycle and remember' approach is more sustainable. Thus by the end of Parts I and II the reader will be aware of the global spectrum of toilet issues likely to impinge upon the design agenda.

The second part of the book, comprising Sections III and IV, is concerned with solutions, with presenting urban policies and design guidance in respect of achieving better public toilet provision; and with the means of achieving change respectively. In Section III, Chapters 8, 9 and 10 are concerned with the design aspects of public toilets, working down through the city-wide level issues to local urban design aspects including the siting and configuration of toilet blocks, and thus down to the layout of facilities and design of cubicles and everything there-

in. Thus the debate ranges from high level urban spatial strategy to the question of where to put the toilet roll.

Although Section III is more prescriptive in style, unlike 'toilet manuals' it retains a more discursive policy guideline approach which seeks to explain and give reasons for the principles presented. Chapter 8 gives a city-wide 'macro' perspective on the question of 'where will they go?' – that is, on people's needs for decent toilets within urban space. People of all sorts need to go to the toilet 'away from home' (BTA, 2001), not 'just' disabled people. As people travel further and spend more time away from home as a result of modern decentralised, car dependent, segregated land uses, a range of improved back-up services is needed. Alternative perspectives and solutions will be discussed which have put an emphasis on 'planning for the city of everyday life' (Eurofem, 1996). Emphasis is put upon seeing the public toilet as a strategic component of spatial planning, not a marginalised townscape feature.

Chapter 9 looks in more detail at the problem of toilets within the context of the factors that limit people's access to the city, especially people with disabilities. It is acknowledged fully that dedicated disabled facilities are needed, and far more than at present, but the ways in which this is approached, not least the question of the segregation between abled/disabled facilities and the need for a more inclusive agenda, are also explored.

Chapter 10 moves on to looking at toilet provision at the 'meso' level in terms of the location, siting and distribution of public toilets at the local, district and neighbourhood level, and highlights the urban design considerations involved. Chapter 11 centres on the detailed 'micro' aspects of internal toilet design, of the toilet block, the cubicle and all the components that go to make up the public toilet, and thus comprises the longest and most design orientated chapter. Because of the plethora of information involved, additional checklists of key points and priorities are provided at the end of the chapter in an aide-mémoire box. Diagrams are provided to illustrate key design considerations and principles rather than as prescriptive exact architectural drawings.

Having set out what needs to be done, the last two chapters look at the means of achieving change. Chapter 12 discusses management, maintenance and finance issues. It is one thing to build toilets, it is quite another to keep them in good working order, open and not vandalised. There are many related issues as to who pays, who maintains them and how their management is incorporated, or not, into the running of public toilets. There is no doubt that sanitary ware manufacturers want more public toilets as it increases their sales, but local authorities are more cautious because of the huge ongoing costs of maintaining toilet provision.

In the course of my toilet research I have often come across hard pressed, but well intentioned, local authority toilet supervisors who want to provide better toilets but do not have the power, the policy brief, or the money to generate change. Thus they get all the blame while valiantly trying to fight off vandalism



Figure 1.5 Typical public toilet in a seaside resort, at Watchet, Somerset. This toilet is in a centrally located car park – ideal for visitors wanting an easy-to-find public loo at journey's end.

and building deterioration in order to continue to provide a service to the public. Significantly, most departments responsible for running toilets are completely separate from the strategic planning departments in their local authorities, which means that they have neither the resources nor the means of mainstreaming toilet provision into strategic policy-making. Clearly the problem has to be addressed and dealt with at a much higher level, as an integral component of national governmental policy, as left to themselves the typical 'parks, allotments and public conveniences' department of the local municipality can never be expected to solve such huge problems on its own. To achieve this, major change is required.

Therefore Chapter 13 identifies likely change agents, and outlines the agendas of both key provider groups (including enlightened public sector and private commercial providers) and key user groups including community, pressure and special interest groups who are all campaigning for better toilets from a range of perspectives, including concerns with access, childcare, equality, health, elderly people, women's issues, and the environment.

The final chapter (Chapter 14) identifies promising means of bringing about such change and comprises a drawing together of the whole study. It is one thing to say what should be done, how better facilities might be provided and that 'the government should do something'. It is quite another matter to implement policy and create actual change. It is argued that in order to effect concrete policy change it is vital to create a cultural change within the hearts and minds of toilet



Figure 1.6 Men have more places to pee, as they have the urinals as well as the cubicles, although many facilities are very basic. (Photograph courtesy of Ray Fowler).

providers. Potentially useful areas of government policy and changing legislation will be identified, ranging from Millennium funding, European spatial planning to local government finance reforms.

A range of other legislative and governmental means will be discussed in this last chapter. The wider context in respect of Britain's place within Europe and the likely effects of European harmonisation and subsidiarity upon urban form, legislation and fundamental ways of life will be discussed. Changing demographics and the development of a more culturally and ethnically diverse population create needs for a more varied and flexible approach to toilet provision. Many of the problems seem to recur in society – there is nothing new and it all seems so obvious – but people have to be reminded again and again. So this book will bear testimony to what needs to be done. 'Plus ça change, plus c'est le même chose'.

Notes

1. The word toilet is used as it is widely understood internationally. In Britain the term public lavatory is more common, and public conveniences (uses of words will be discussed later). Lavatory originally related to the washbasin

rather than the toilet itself. Lavatory is still used in Britain as a less affected, 'non-U' or 'naff' term than 'toilet'. Personally I prefer the term 'lav'.

2. 'Disabled toilets' is used for 'toilets for people with disabilities' and does not imply there is something faulty or disabled with the toilet plumbing!
3. Sanpro is short for sanitary protection products (including sanitary towels, tampons, napkins etc.) (Tallantire and Carroll, 1996).
4. The phrase 'all human life is there' used to be a slogan used by the *Sunday People*, a British tabloid newspaper.
5. We found this when we undertook Nuffield-funded research on 'User and provider perspectives in public toilet provision' based on a small case study of a sector stretching out from the centre of Bristol across North Somerset to Weston Super Mare (Greed and Daniels, 2002).

The research continues. Under the EPSRC SUE Consortium, Vivacity 2020: 'Urban Sustainability for the 24 hour city', Dr Julienne Hanson (UCL) invited Dr Clara Greed (UWE) to act as expert advisor in the team for Work Package 9, 'A sustainable strategy for the provision of public conveniences in city centres' based on a national study of a range of city centre locations (EPSRC, 2003).

Principles for integration into urban design agenda

- ➔ Joined up thinking
- ➔ Holistic approach
- ➔ From the strategic to the detailed
- ➔ From the uttermost to the guttermost
- ➔ Equality and demographics
- ➔ A global perspective
- ➔ Access and environment

chapter two

Conceptualising the problem of public toilets

Placing the study

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conceptual background to the study. The chapter seeks to place 'toilets' in a research and policy context. Those who are not academically inclined please skip this chapter. It considers theories and taboos that might help explain 'why' the public toilet situation is in such a sorry state, and 'why' the policy-makers and government bodies who are meant to be responsible for provision are not particularly concerned – when 'everyone' is demanding better toilets. Unless the underlying 'social' attitudes are identified and dealt with, it will be impossible to achieve long-term, sustainable change in the physical reality of public toilet design. One reason is that it is still 'not done' to talk about toilets and the functions that take place in them. While there has been a sexual revolution, there has not been a commensurate 'defecation revolution' (Aglionby, 2001).

It is important to look at the aspatial (social) factors that shape and determine spatial (architectural and urban design) realities (Foley, 1964:37) in investigating the toilet problem and its likely solutions. Thus this study is interested in the 'reproduction over space of social relations over space' (Massey, 1984: 16), in this case the imprint of cultural taboos and especially gender relations upon the built environment (Greed, 1991: 5) in relation to the chances of public toilet provision in our towns and cities. One of the objectives of the study is to make a small contribution to answering another part of the classic urban question of 'who gets what, where, and why?' (Pinch, 1985) (not a lot), and consequently to make recommendations for changing the situation. I include material in the second part of this chapter on the processes of governance, policy-making and potential change. There is no point in coming up with new designs for better toilets without also looking at the chances of implementation and installation of improved provision, as so strong are the taboos that some sorts of solutions are culturally unacceptable. At the close of the chapter a brief summary of method-

ology used is included and, finally, a set of key dualisms (opposites) is presented around which the toilet debate revolves.

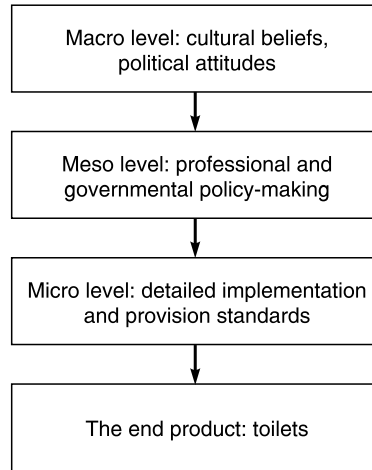
Levels of engagement

It was helpful to divide up the key toilet issues and causal factors into different categories, at the macro, meso and micro levels, which for the purposes of this study are defined as follows. 'Macro' refers to the big issues, to the overall situation, and to national and large-scale factors affecting toilet decision-making as a whole. Likewise, discussions of the built environment, the city-wide perspective, urban master planning, urban society itself and the power of the built environment professions as a whole are all macro issues. This high policy level is extremely important to this research as it fundamentally shapes the chances of toilet issues being taken seriously and included in discussions of funding, resource allocation and urban regeneration priority formulation.

In contrast, 'micro' refers to personal and detailed issues and, for example, includes the experience of a particular minority individual, the problems of a specific building, maintenance problems, incidences of vandalism, 'where to put the toilet roll' and the individual prejudices of the 'jobsworth' toilet official. Yet quite small changes at the micro level of daily life (such as increasing the clearance between the toilet bowl and the inward opening door within the toilet cubicle by a few centimetres) require monumental and concerted effort at the highest ministerial level, at the macro level of governmental policy-making. One soon finds that 'everything is linked to everything else' and one has to embark on a long and complex quest to get to the root of the problem (Greed, 1994a, 1999a, 2000a and b).

There are some 'macro' level issues which overarch and influence everything at all other levels, and these are so important in shaping toilet policy that the next chapter is devoted to underlying cultural issues. These include deep-seated attitudes held within society towards excretion, the body and sexuality, which are generally negative and which contribute to the low status and taboo mentality which is often associated with toilet issues. There is already a considerable range of literature on cultural taboos and the obsession for separating out clean/dirty components. A list of key dualisms mentioned in the book as a whole is included at the end of this chapter.

'Meso' is more difficult to explain, as it contains the idea of movement and transmission between macro and micro levels. In urban terms the 'meso' (middle) level is the in-between level, and comprises the local district and neighbourhood level between the whole city and the individual site or toilet location. Organisationally the meso level contains the individual professions, institutions and people that transmit macro level societal attitudes and cultural hang-ups 'down' into the micro level of actual policy and design standards. This relationship and process may be represented in a simple one-line flow diagram as follows:



A universalist approach

'Macro' and 'micro' are sometimes used with the disability agenda to mean something different. For example, according to Goldsmith (2000), a macroist viewpoint 'means' that disabled people should be treated the same as everyone else – they are mainstream customers and a 'universalist' approach should therefore be adopted. In contrast, according to Goldsmith's definition, a microist approach is based on the view that disabled people are special and should be treated differently and as welfare recipients. In comparison in North America, a macroist approach 'sees' disabled people as citizens and equal consumers with constitutional rights. Goldsmith certainly favours the macroist approach, arguing that all facilities should be improved so that everyone benefits. Advocates of the needs of women, children, babies, the elderly and tourists inter alia, argue the same, as so many people find the 'normal' toilet cubicle too small to get into if accompanied by pushchairs, luggage, shopping etc. as they jealously eye the disabled toilet provision. So overall my approach is macroist too in this sense, as well as inclusive and universalist, with the proviso that while all facilities should be accessible to everyone, especially women, in some cases additional 'special' provision is needed too – e.g. for the users of wider powered wheelchairs, or for those adults who require changing tables because of advanced incontinence and mobility problems.

Social exclusion

One of the problems limiting change is the fact that provider groups, especially local and central government bodies, seldom seem to hear let alone see the needs of user groups. It is as if we are invisible. When it comes to public toilets,

the professionals and providers and the users and pressure groups seem to be 'talking past each other', manifesting complete mutual incomprehension and lack of awareness of each other's perceptions of reality (Hillier, 1999).

To understand why this is so, it is helpful to see the world of 'toilets' as possessing its own professional subculture. 'Subculture' is taken to mean the cultural traits, beliefs and lifestyle peculiar to 'the plumbing fraternity'. One of the most important factors appears to be the need for a person to 'fit in' to the subculture. I have argued in previous research that the values and attitudes of the subculture, as held by its members, have a major influence on their professional decision-making. These ultimately influence the level and nature of provision – that is, 'what is built' (or, more likely in the case of toilets, what is left unbuilt and considered unimportant). Thus professional socialisation may be seen as a major factor affecting both men and women, resulting in pressure to conform and 'not to rock the boat' if they want to progress up the jobs ladder. Anyone talking toilets in the wrong circles may find this is a bad career move leading to humiliation, sexism and potentially social exclusion from the professional group. Indeed such are the powers of professional socialisation that women architects, planners and designers may not necessarily hold different views from men on gendered issues such as toilet design (Greed, 1994b).

Gender is a major consideration in understanding 'who' receives what sort of treatment; so are class and ethnicity. For clarification, 'gender' is normally taken to mean the social role of women in different cultures. This is in contrast to 'sex' which is taken to mean the biological characteristics of women. For example, in all societies only women give birth to children, but the gender role of caring for them may differ somewhat between societies and social classes. In the case of public toilets both gender and sex are key factors in understanding the very 'different' needs that women have in respect of the design and provision of public toilets.

My previous research on the built environment professions, including the world of surveyors, engineers and other construction practitioners, has shown that quantitatively less than 5% of construction professionals and clients are women (Greed, 1999b, 2000c). It is argued that, although their professional decisions are meant to be impartial, neutral and purely informed by technical and policy factors, the individual life experience, age and health characteristics of the decision-makers are major constraints on their worldview and thus on the professional decision they make.

Of course there are many other 'actors', apart from those on the standard setting committees involved in the wider urban development process (Kirk, 1980: 38–41; Ambrose, 1986: 68–69), including architects, town planners, local councillors and central government level politicians, all of whom have an impact on 'what is built' and how budgets are set. Financial institutions and private property developers have a major impact too, not only on private sector schemes, but also on public sector development, particularly if the provision of public conven-

iences is part of so-called 'community benefit' or 'planning gain' within the negotiations for a new shopping development. The power of different actors in the process varies according to the particular situation. Although all these actors in the development process might not be on the 'same side', nevertheless they are mainly likely to be male and not particularly concerned with the question of either public lavatories or, for that matter, childcare provision, crèches or disabled access, unless statutory requirements exist as an issue. Instead, [male] toilet agenda issues predominate, such as crime, cottaging, and [male] street urination and cost cutting.

It is not contested there are other overarching 'macro level' economic, social and political factors which shape urban space too. Design and development decisions cannot always be accounted for by purely financial, political, practical or technological constraints. Matters related to the gender, race, disability and cultural perspective of the professional decision-makers undoubtedly influence the end product, and the way it is produced. While everyone pleads the importance of the 'cost factor' and 'time constraints', it may be argued that in fact the subcultural peculiarities of the 'plumbing fraternity' actually create additional expense and difficulties. As will be illustrated in later chapters, in some instances less profitable and less practical solutions are made because of ignorance of the needs, potential contribution and the economic significance of minority groups. Stories of committees spending hours discussing the dimensions of a new cistern while remaining completely blind to the impractically small size of the toilet compartment and the general under-provision for women are legendary in toilet campaign circles.

Women who try to get involved in the development process and to influence events may feel isolated. The need for identification with the values of the subculture would seem to block out the entrance of both people and alternative ideas that are seen as 'different'. The concept of 'closure', and the social exclusion that results, as discussed by Parkin (1979: 89–90) and first developed by Weber (1964: 141–52, 236) in relation to the power of various sub-groups protecting their status, is a key theme. This is worked out on a day-to-day basis at the interpersonal level, with some people being made to feel awkward, unwelcome and 'wrong', and others being welcomed into the subculture, made to feel comfortable and encouraged to progress to the decision-making levels within it.

While policy-makers are predominantly male, middle class and apparently unlikely to be using public transport or having childcare responsibilities, those who are the subject of toilet policy – that is, those who need them most – are likely to be so-called minorities, namely women, especially women with children and elderly women, disabled people and those who use public transport and are dependent on local facilities. Significantly tourists also need public toilets; and they may, in their own countries, be of 'higher' social significance but as short-term 'foreigners' in Britain they too are unlikely to receive much attention to their needs. Not only are public toilets seen as a low status area of policy concern but

the users too are not seen to be of any importance. In reality virtually everyone nowadays pays rates and taxes, and so-called minorities constitute, together, the majority of the population whom the professionals and policy-makers are meant to be serving. Clearly it is all a matter of perceptions and 'how' they see the world. It is argued that to change policy one must change the policy-makers, and there are no quick answers.

The urban problem

The 'problem' for women in particular is that although they are significant users of the built environment, e.g. as workers and public transport passengers, and they comprise 52% of the population, the majority of the elderly population and 60% of all potential voters, the built environment is mainly designed by men, who comprise over 95% of built environment professionals and still the majority of politicians and decision-makers at central and local government levels.

Women utilise the built environment differently from men because, even today, they are the main carers, often combining childcare and homemaking with work outside the home. This may result in quite different travel patterns and land-use requirements. For example, for many women the 'journey to work' is not a mono-destination trip but may consist of 'trip-chaining' as they travel from home, to the childminder, to the school gates, to the office, to the shops and back again. All this will often involve a lot of hanging about at cold bus stops if the woman does not have the use of a car. For many women the ideal design would be the city of short distances, of mixed land uses with increased proximity between home and work locations, and a high level of dispersal of local facilities, amenities, shops, and schools. This ideal city form, pioneered by leading European town planners, is called 'the city of everyday life' which, incidentally, would also be a highly environmentally sustainable city (Eurofem, 1996). Thus women and those they are caring for require a different pattern of toilets, including a greater number at different locations (Greed, 1999a; WGSG, 1997a,b; Booth et al, 1996; Little, 1994; Darke et al, 2000). Likewise buildings, and the components within, are designed around standards based on the height of the average man (De Graft-Johnson, 1999). In the case of toilet design it would seem that the starting point has been to design around male requirements and then adapt the standards to female needs rather than acknowledging that both biologically and socially women's use of toilets is likely to be so different from those of men that this requires a totally different approach to design.

Not only are women's needs unrecognised but disabled people (who constitute around 5 million people, the size of the population of Norway) and ethnic minority groups (constituting majority populations in several inner city locations within London and the Midlands) have not had sufficient voice in the toilet debate. Women, disabled, elderly, and ethnic minorities are not mutually exclu-

sive groups and in some circumstances – e.g. in rural villages in the South West – the most ‘typical’ citizen may be female and elderly, and not the young male worker whose image is so often used to represent ‘everyone’. Likewise, in many inner city areas the average citizen, statistically, is the middle-aged woman of Afro-Caribbean descent working part-time in the care industry. Women’s ‘different’ needs in respect of toilets in the city of men are discussed later in the context of city planning assumptions.

Urban governance perspectives

While my own research has been particularly concerned with the role of the professional bodies, especially those within the built environment and engineering professions in shaping policy, as stated earlier there are other important actors in the process, not least governmental agencies, civil servants and politicians at central and local government levels. Julia Edwards has undertaken parallel studies of the toilet situation in relation to the role of these groups, drawing on her own background in public policy, management, health service and local government research, adopting both a feminist, health and disability related perspective (Edwards and McKie, 1996a). Since her work is of such great value in understanding ‘why’ public toilet provision remains a neglected area some of her key concepts are presented below.

Edwards argues that much local government policy-making, that is meant to be serving the needs of the citizen, is in fact misdirected and unsatisfactory. She describes policy-making, in respect of public toilet provision, as ‘organised irresponsibility’ (Edwards, 1998a). She cites Beck (1992) who coined this concept and originally applied it to the ineffectiveness of governmental policy-making in respect of controlling global risks such as oil pollution and drug trafficking, but subsequently the concept has been applied to a wide range of macro level policy-making situations. She also discusses Ham and Hill’s work (1993) on the concept of responsible policy-making within the US. Ham and Hill argue that bad publicity and negative public feedback along the ‘links’ within the governmental policy-making machinery will act as a check and balance to right bad policy-making. She argues that in the British situation policy-making is fragmented and there is no mutual accountability between government departments, so that no such links exist and nothing will change. Edwards applies these conceptual insights to the problem of public toilets for women. She argues that the powers that be can always make much of the deficiencies in women themselves, such as the loss of muscle tone and the effects of age on contributing to incontinence, rather than ‘making’ local authorities culpable for contributing to the problem by closing public toilets.

It would seem that loss of public conveniences means that women develop strained bladders. Meanwhile local authorities apparently remain ignorant of