

cities for investment. This process is led by corporate interests in alliance with city governments, with an overarching concern for managing public spaces and their image so that they are perceived as conducive to the types of activities and users that can reinforce and increase their value. In the effort to create 'safe' public spaces, the multicultural and pluralistic nature of public space with its perceived risk has had to be controlled, managed and policed. This has often meant banning unconventional behaviour and those who do not fit the purposes of this new space.

There are many elements in this interpretation of what is happening to contemporary public spaces that are less than consensual. However, it is generally agreed that whatever the real meaning of ongoing changes to the nature of public space, management and management regimes play a fundamental part in them, and none more so than the takeover of the management of many important public spaces, particularly in the US – and now of British cities – by corporate organisations and property owners through business improvement districts (BIDs).

However, the economic and social dynamics of public spaces is far too complex to fit neatly into the simplified view sketched above. In order to explore what actually happens to public spaces exposed to a globalised and consumerist society, and managed to some degree by corporate interests, three internationally iconic civic spaces whose histories were briefly examined in Chapter 2 – Times Square in New York and Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus in London – are returned to here.

## Research methodology

Times Square and Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus have a great deal in common. They are iconic public spaces, at the core of global metropolises, subject to all the pressures described above. They are also high-profile tourist attractions associated with commercial entertainment and leisure, rather than any significant civil functions. They originate mainly from localised private development, and their fortunes have had historical links with theatre, and by the 1930s, cinema, and hence have attracted both the respectable and the 'dissolute'. They suffered decline in the 1960s and 1970s and have undergone repeated attempts at regeneration. Most recently their central location and iconic status has created the conditions for the adoption of new management regimes, most recently BIDs. This chapter focuses on Times Square, while Chapter 11 deals with Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus.

Fieldwork tested on the ground how far each of the case studies incorporated some or all of the characteristics expected of contemporary spaces, especially issues of exclusion–inclusion, commercialisation,

surveillance and control. A wide range of fieldwork techniques were used as a means to deconstruct the cases into a semiotic environment that could be analysed in terms of its symbolism and meaning.

The approach focused on the experience of place, their legibility, land uses, signage and advertising, as the system of codes that structure the visual and sensorial experience of those places. This was followed by a micro-analysis of each space and their compartments, describing what they contain and which uses and activities they foster. Issues of control and surveillance were also examined, and an analysis of the observed behaviour of users of the public spaces and how this relates to physical and management constraints was undertaken. The observation of users was partly done with a camera, using methods borrowed from Zeisel (1984) and Whyte (1988). The period of observation was one week (for each) in the Spring of 2002, including a Friday and Saturday night.

## The production and management of public space in Times Square

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, New York City government experienced persistent financial difficulties which in their worst moments brought the city to the brink of bankruptcy. Some of the reasons for this were local, whereas others were part of a more general reduction in state and city funds which came as a consequence of a wider programme of financial cuts by the federal government. Metropolitan areas suffered further loss of finances by being forced into tax cuts by law and the need to stop the flight of residents and businesses to the suburbs outside the city limits. This process reached its climax in the 1980s with the Reagan administration and its strong commitment to 'neoconservatism', a political ideology that saw government intervention as a hindrance to economic efficiency and individual liberty (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998).

As a result, city funding for all public services, including the provision and management of public spaces, was drastically reduced. In the context of a strong neoconservative approach, the alternative to public provision meant privatisation, or 'the introduction and extension of market principles into public service production and provision...[and] the disengagement of the public sector from specific responsibilities under the assumption that the private sector would take care of them' (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998: 76).