

## The evolution of BIDs in New York and Times Square

As briefly discussed in Chapter 2, private-sector involvement in the provision and management of public space in New York has taken different forms. In commercial areas, especially those with a high profile, the most widespread mechanisms replacing publicly-funded public space services have been private partnerships in the form of BIDs. This mechanism, created in Canada and successfully embraced by US cities, allows for a partnership of local business and property owners to impose a levy on all property and businesses in an area, on top of normal local taxes. These funds are then used to pay for a range of public services within the boundaries of the BID. To establish a BID, a majority of property owners in a designated area must vote in favour of the scheme. Once a BID is formed, all property owners must pay the agreed levy. The compulsory character of the scheme, once it is approved, required specific legislation, which, in the case of New York City was passed by the state legislature in 1983. In the US, services funded by BIDs typically range from street cleaning, to private security, public works, place marketing and the provision and management of public space.

In New York alone there are now over 130 BIDs, covering most commercial districts, with more than 1,500 in the whole of the US (Lloyd and Auld 2003). This enthusiasm for BIDs has created a form of fragmented municipal government where funds for different districts vary vastly depending on district borders and the nature of business within them. Nearly every shopping street in New York City now has a BID in some form, varying from the Grand Central Partnership, a Manhattan BID that contains 53 affluent blocks commanding high property prices and including many multinational corporations, to much smaller local high street BIDs in less affluent residential neighbourhoods. The former can issue its own bonds to pay for ambitious large-scale infrastructure and service improvement programmes; the latter might raise just enough funds to pay for street cleaning services. This disparity raises questions about the control of urban space, and has led to concerns about the corporate takeover of public space by the larger BIDs (Zukin 1995).

It is in this context of neoconservative policies and private provision of urban services that the redevelopment of Times Square has taken place. The emergence of the Times Square BID, for example, was the result of pressures by the business elite with vested interests in the area to improve its image and thus reverse its economic fortunes. In particular, this has meant finding ways to fight high levels of street crime and the dominance of the area's retail sector by the sex industry (Sagalyn 2001). The perception of the consequences of that dominance for the economic fortunes of the area is illustrated by reports on the concentration of adult entertainment establishments in and around Times Square produced by the BID early in its life. These reports explicitly link the agglomeration of pornography

outlets to high crime rates, a fall in property values and to negative impacts on other businesses. Together with other similar studies produced at the time, it helped to create favourable conditions for zoning changes banning sex-related business from many of their traditional locations in New York, including Times Square (Papayanis 2000).

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared by the New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) in the late 1970s (quoted in Reichl 1999: 61), described those who hung around the area where 42nd Street meets Times Square as 'hustlers and loiterers', who had stopped 'office workers and other positive users having a territorial stake' there. The document goes on to say that 'in a real sense, 42nd Street is their territory [the hustlers and loiterers], and others venturing through it perceive they do so at their own risk'. Racial tensions in American society also played a part in shaping the dominant views of what was going on in Times Square. As Sagalyn (2001: 20) puts it, for the white middle class, 'the loiterers on the street seemed alien, unrestrained by conventional social codes'. The process reinforced racial stereotypes 'as innocent Blacks and Hispanics on 42nd Street were given a wide berth by wary whites'.

## Times Square under BID management

Whether or not the reality of Times Square did actually match this picture is a different matter. A contemporary study by the City University of New York (CUNY), also quoted in Reichl (1999), suggested that most of the population in the area were merely 'hanging out' rather than hustling. The study also found that the area featured 'one of the most racially integrated streets [42nd Street] in the city', and that Whites were the dominant racial group at most times of day and night.

That the dominant perception of Times Square amongst suburbanites and planners stigmatised the area as a 'ghetto street' has been explained as the product of anxieties about a minority takeover, deeply rooted in a society that continues to be characterised by racial segregation and inequality (Reichl 1999: 62). This is not to say that Times Square was not dangerous in the 1970s and 1980s, but so was the rest of New York. It was the perception of 'the otherness' of the space and its users that became more important than the reality (Goldstein and Elliot 1994).

Underpinning the case for cleaning up the Times Square district and 42nd Street was the need for a westward spread of office space in midtown Manhattan (see Reichl 1999). In the context of a city trying to retain its status as a global financial capital, Times Square was almost a default location for office space for large multinational headquarters and financial institutions given the lack of other alternatives within Manhattan and the area's excellent transport links. Initiatives to redefine Times Square's character as a 'cleaner' entertainment and tourism destination have also