

civic and industrial might, business success and salesmanship, to 1950–1980 when the Square represented New York’s increasing disconnection from the country and its stigmatisation as a place of danger and decline, to the post-1980s, with the Square and New York finding a new role as the locus for globalised entertainment and real estate-led corporate power.

However, part of what gave Times Square its iconic appeal was also its long-standing status as a multicultural and socially diverse space of indulgence, containing a mix of the seedy and the flashy, together with the middle-class theatres, restaurants and hotels. The recent efforts at image management through the BID and its initiatives have tried to control this diversity while still maintaining the appeal it brings. Chesluk (2000) suggests this has been done primarily by ‘zoning-out’ through design and space management those uses and users perceived as more undesirable, thus creating a perceivably safe and sanitised but still exciting area for shoppers and office workers.

#### THE SECURITY AGENDA

As a result of the emphasis on cleaning up and sanitising the space, active space management and sophisticated surveillance systems have been a large part of the BIDs work. In November 1993, early on in the life of the BID, a \$1.4m sidewalk lighting project was completed as a way of addressing and countering the perception of Times Square as a crime-ridden area. By the end of its first five years of operation, the BID claimed significant improvements in safety indicators, such as a 58 per cent drop in crime, over 80 per cent drop in illegal peddling, and closure of over 40 per cent of pornography outlets (Times Square BID 1998: 20–1).

More recently various new management regimes relating to security have been introduced by the BID in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York in September 2001. The Times Square Security Council was created in 2005, and comprises the security directors from all the major financial, hotel, media and entertainment organisations in the district. Another security-related management regime is a twice-weekly canine patrol with an explosive-detecting dog throughout designated areas. Finally, BID staff are now routinely trained in ‘observation skills relating to suspicious behavior in today’s world climate’ (Times Square Alliance 2005).

This drive to tackle perceived and real safety problems has been accompanied by concerted action to create a visual image that reinforces the sense of a cared-for and thus safe place. The Times Square Alliance now employs around 70 ‘sanitation workers’ in red jumpsuits, to carry out jobs such as vacuuming and disinfecting the sidewalk, emptying litter baskets, removing graffiti, and painting street furniture. In addition the BID

employs an equal number of public-safety officers. Though unarmed, they are trained and patrol the district on foot and by car, and have a radio link to the armed NYPD. More recently, methods to alter the image of Times Square have been both explicit – changes in the design of the district, from the painting of street furniture, to the creation of new signage, and the removal of spaces for loitering such as seating and low walls – and the implicit – through the commissioning of public art and the removal of graffiti.

However, the re-imaging of Times Square has not been done exclusively by the BID. McNeill links it to more general efforts to transform many of New York’s more emblematic spaces, and with them, the image of the whole city (McNeill 2003). For example, the revamped image of Times Square owes something to urban design regulations brought in by the New York City Planning Commission in 1987 which tried to preserve the unique qualities of the place. These regulations stipulate minimum sizes of signage, brightness, position (generally going around the corners of the blocks and, exaggerating the triangular plots of the land as Broadway meets 7th Avenue – Figure 9.2), and the percentage of land use that must be dedicated to entertainment uses.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT

These efforts at rebranding have been largely successful in their own terms. Indeed, businesses and advertisers who have located in Times Square during and after redevelopment recognise it as what Sagalyn terms a ‘place brand’:

More than just an address in midtown Manhattan, Broadway between 52nd and 50th Streets was a marketable place. It was the new so-called 100-percent location, but for a different reason than what real estate professionals typically mean by that designation: the location could travel across space and culture to consumers worldwide, through communication broadcasts of every imaginable medium, for one simple reason – Times Square is an instantly recognisable ‘place brand’.

(Sagalyn 2001: 309)

Today the image of Times Square is of safe consumerism. As a place, it offers a combination of gentrified working and entertainment district and historic, civic and playground space. This has helped the BID to court large multinational developers, and large financial and entertainment tenants, in a process that further reinforces that image (Starr and Hayman 1998: 254).

This raises the question of how different users of this public space react to such a commercialised, surveilled and actively managed space. Research