

## Chapter 10

# Two linked iconic civic spaces

## Managing Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, London

This chapter takes a detailed look at two neighbouring iconic civic spaces in London, Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus. As in Chapter 9, the objective is to explore how the introduction of a new public space management regime based on greater private-sector involvement has shaped users' experience of these spaces. A first part describes recent management initiatives for Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, how they coalesced into a business improvement district (BID), and what this has meant for the way private and public interests interact. The second part comprises a micro-analysis of the public spaces and their components, as well as the uses and activities they foster. The main purpose of this section is to understand how management and control affects how visitors' experience the spaces and the way they use it. The discussion links the particular arrangement of public and private actors found in Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus, with a prominent role for the local council, to the kind of transformation that the spaces are undergoing. This greater partnership of interests means that the transformation is less dramatic and less univocal than that experienced in Times Square and similar places elsewhere.

### The move to BIDs

This chapter continues the detailed analysis of public space carried out in Chapter 9, but the focus now is on Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus (Figures 10.1 and 10.2), neighbouring iconic civic spaces in London. As with Times Square, Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus have come to exemplify the commodified, privatised and homogenised character of much contemporary public space. They have become areas of hedonism and consumption, and it is the consequence of this that management processes are now attempting to control.

However, the programmed interventions in Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus do not encompass the vast regeneration programme and change in uses that have occurred in Times Square. No major changes in land use have been proposed, nor has there been an overt campaign to increase the number of visitors and the appeal of the space to corporate users and investors. Instead, the issue has been about how to regulate and control the use of the public space and its intensity. As a result, the management approaches adopted in Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus have been less intrusive than in Times Square.

### BIDs in England

The UK, like the US, witnessed dramatic falls in public-sector funding for public space throughout the 1980s and 1990s (see Chapter 5). As a consequence, 'new additions to urban space are often developed and managed by private investors, as the public authorities find themselves unable or unwilling to bear the costs of developing and maintaining public places' (Madanipour 1999: 888).

In this context, BIDs along the lines of their North-American counterparts (see pp. 160–1) were suggested in the mid-1990s as a way of drawing private resources into public space management in a more consistent and formalised way than through voluntary arrangements such as the ubiquitous town centre management schemes. In April 2001, the Prime Minister announced that BIDs in England would be funded by an additional levy on the business rate – the local tax paid by occupiers of commercial property – if agreed by local business and councils. This extra funding would help to pay for new projects, including initiatives designed to make streets and other public open spaces safer and cleaner. Regulations allowing the formation of BIDs were enacted on 17 September 2004: