



10.5 Heart of London Business Improvement District jurisdiction

However, the main emphasis of the BID has been on the delivery of enhanced services to the Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus area and its businesses. This reflects the nature of the BID mechanism in the UK, with its focus on additional levels of ‘public’ services and its levy base of business occupiers rather than property owners. Effectively it denies the power and resources for the more ambitious infrastructure and re-design initiatives that have characterised some of the larger US BIDs. When, therefore, the Heart of London BID became involved in a £1m pedestrian improvement scheme on Coventry Street, it did so as a minor player, with Westminster City Council in the driving seat; as they were in the much larger refurbishment of Leicester Square.

Recent developments in the latter case include a £15m scheme that includes new lighting and signage, new street furniture, a new theatre ticket booth, a new performance area and the replacement of the existing fence around the central gardens with a retractable fence (City of Westminster 2006). So far there has been no financial involvement of the BID in the project and private sector involvement has happened through sponsorship arrangements coordinated directly by Westminster City Council.

#### JUDGING THE BID’S EFFECTIVENESS

As, at the time of writing, the BID had only been in place for two years, it was not yet clear how successful it had been in changing the profile of the area. The available evidence from the BID’s own system of targets and indicators suggests it is succeeding in making the area feel safer and cleaner (Heart of London 2006). Whether this will eventually change the nature of what goes on in Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, and how these spaces are used, it is too early to say.

The emphasis on fighting anti-social behaviour in particular has the potential to function as a mechanism to exclude from the public space sections of the community whose norms of behaviour diverge from

accepted standards; changing in the process the mix of uses and users that give these public spaces their vibrancy. Similarly, the emphasis on the commercial success of public spaces reinforces a consumerist view of what these spaces are for, with equally exclusionary consequences. As argued in the previous chapter, these issues can only be investigated through a detailed analysis of the space and the way it has been used. This is the purpose of the next section.

## The spaces and their components

As in the previous chapter, the in-depth reading of Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus begins with a look at the area as a whole. Analysis then turns to the scale of the individual user and examines how the area and its elements relate to user behaviour.

#### Experience of place

As in the previous chapter, Hiss’ (1991) concept of ‘experience of place’ was used to capture the sensory perception that users will have of the spaces. Visual and non-visual impressions make up the ambience of the space which users experience. In the case of Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus, the public space is made up of sections of quite different character, each providing a different experience.

The ambience of Leicester Square is very different to that of Times Square, mainly because of its central green garden space and absence of vehicular traffic. This creates a space that is tranquil until the afternoon, when, like Times Square, visitors slowly increase in numbers. Local office workers create a rush through the square at 9.00am and 5.00pm, and are also prominent in and around the gardens at lunchtime. Users in the area are socially, culturally and racially very diverse.