

Conclusions

The Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus area partially conforms to the characteristics attributed to contemporary public space in the literature. Homogenisation of the experience of the place under the pressure from a globalised economy and culture is manifest in the nature of the shops, restaurants and bars that dominate its space. In that regard, the London study area is not and does not feel dissimilar to the centre of many world cities.

Even though dominated by commercial uses, the area does not feel as commodified as might be expected for such a prominent public space. The existence of abundant space for sitting and loitering and the ease with which this exists under the management regime certainly contributes to that. Equally, the lack of any intense effort to market the place (such as that mounted by the Times Square BID) might also have contributed to a weak association between the public space of Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus and consumption of that space as a brand. This might change as the Heart of London BID gets more established.

The indications of a monitored and controlled space were as strong here as they were in Times Square, albeit in different ways. Whereas a highly visible presence of management figures characterised control and monitoring of public space in Times Square, here it was the ubiquitousness of electronic surveillance through CCTV cameras. So far, the increasing control and monitoring through CCTV and through a growing presence of wardens and other authority figures has not led to exclusion of the 'other' from the public space. The Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus area still retains

a degree of spontaneity and social mix which is stressed by the continuing presence of street performers, vendors and musicians and space users from a broad social background. In this sense, the London study area still retains a strong sense of vibrancy, civility and community (broadly defined), and the feeling of a sanitised space is not as strong as in Times Square.

As a consequence, in spite of similar management regimes, the public space of the Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus area appeared more socially inclusive than that of Times Square, as the contrasting sample activity/behaviour tables illustrate (Tables 9.4 and 10.1). Whether this is related to different degrees of corporate control in both cases, or to different levels of tolerance for 'otherness' in the two societies, or to differing histories of spatial segregation by race and class, it is difficult to say.

However, it is also the case that direct private involvement in public space management in the Leicester Square/Piccadilly Circus area is still in its infancy and so far the trends are less stark than in Times Square. Indeed, one characteristic has been a more explicit partnership between public and private interests, with Westminster City Council taking a particularly prominent role in both the day to day management of the area, and in planning for the new management regime envisaged in the future. The area might never achieve the same degree of power and independence from elected local government that has been obtained in New York, but it will certainly evolve and consolidate. As it does, tensions between inclusion and exclusion, spontaneity/vibrancy and control/safety, private and community interests, are likely to grow and lead to the reshaping of management priorities and methods, and consequently to changes in the character of the public space.