

But the lights quickly became an essential part of the circus's ambience and perhaps its most publicised aspect through picture postcards featuring night time views (Oxford 1995: 56). The lights were even used to display election results on an electrical zipper in the 1920s (Ditchfield 1925: 102). In this setting, crowds gathered and on occasions of celebration or major events filled the entire space (Figure 2.14).

In contrast to Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus organically became an important space for civility and community, for celebrations and for democratic exchange, with the steps of the Eros fountain becoming a major meeting and hanging out space for Londoners and visitors. The steps of Eros, and the space as a whole contain the same mixture of the respectable, in the form of the shopper or tourist, and dissolute, in the form of the drinkers and loiterers for whom the space has long been a magnet. In contrast also, the space demonstrates, like no other in London, the dominance of commercial interests, encouraging users to consume, and the results of fragmented management responsibilities resulting in a light touch management framework. Piccadilly Circus is now, however, part of the same 'business improvement district' as Leicester Square which is marketing the space for the large private-sector landlords who own the advertising space and buildings around Eros (see Chapter 10).

## Into the modern era 2: space types in New York

Continuing the historical evolution of public space, three further studies on the other side of the Atlantic are explored in central New York. Like the London studies, these were chosen for their historical importance and for the contemporary trends they help to illuminate.

### Town squares and parks: the Americanisation of European culture

Early settlers in North America from Spain, France and England each brought with them their own traditions of public space. The spaces created in the New World by each group of settlers had their provenance in parts of Europe, but soon evolved into a new and distinct typology.

The Spanish influence is to be found in the southwest of the United States, particularly in California. Public space in Spain is typically organised around a central plaza, usually in the form of a paved square. Early plazas in America hosted a marketplace in the centre, often containing a corral for animals, while also being used for formal public events such

as celebrations and bullfights. The French influence can be found in the southern states, principally in Louisiana. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1998: 37–9) note that the main public space for the French settlers was the *place d'armes*, a more formal space than the plaza, that was initially intended for military parades and training, but came to host civic events and public celebrations.

The English influence was most obvious through the Puritan communities of New England, and brought from home the tradition of common land that was originally used for the communal grazing of cattle and horses, and for the training and parading of local militias. Building plots around the common became built up in time, first with meeting houses, then courthouses, churches, shops, and schools (Webb 1990: 116–118). The common developed into the village green in the early nineteenth century after Puritan religious dominance was broken and the militias disbanded. Boston Common in Massachusetts is an example and is today the oldest public park in the United States, dating from 1634.

The plans for settlements were often laid down by respective colonial governments, such as through the Spanish colonial Laws of the Indies. 'Colonial towns represented integrated wholes; their public was more or less a homogeneous, uniform entity. The town centre, represented by the square, was conceived as a setting for collective action. People went there to participate in public activities that were often political and carried communal meanings' (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998: 37–8). Urban public space was therefore developed to serve social and democratic needs. But the square was often viewed as a central modular part of an otherwise organic settlement.

Some colonial public squares still exist in central locations, but many were lost as American cities expanded massively in the nineteenth century. Rapid immigration and urbanisation meant that despite the abundance of land elsewhere, urban space was in short supply. Moreover gridiron plans lent themselves to quick and easy speculative development.

### PARKS IN NEW YORK

In New York, as in the United Kingdom, a park movement was formed to lobby for citizens to have greater access to open space. Heckscher (1977: 161–70) suggests this was to 'moralise' New York's citizens, particularly immigrants, a comparable movement to the attempts to moralise the 'working classes' in nineteenth-century Britain. Yet it was also touted as a method to increase real estate values. Central Park, the first landscaped park in the US, was made possible by demolishing many central Manhattan blocks – between 59th and 110th Street, and 5th Avenue and 8th Avenue – creating over 800 acres of space in the late 1850s. Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux created a park in the English romantic