

‘Entrepreneurial urbanism and the management of the contemporary city: the example of Business Improvement Districts’

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine processes of state restructuring in exploring the ways in which Business Improvement Districts are being introduced into UK cities. In advancing the analysis the focus here is on the way in which one or two New York Business Improvement Districts were constructed as ‘models’ of urban management that could be taken out of their particular local and State contexts and introduced into a diverse set of local political economic contexts in UK cities and towns. Examining the way Business Improvement Districts have become a policy in motion, the paper sketches out the emergence of entrepreneurial urban governance arrangements in the UK as part of the state’s changing spatiality in the industrialized economies of Western Europe and North America. Seeking to move beyond the rather one-sided and shallow representations of policies that find themselves on the move, the paper draws on work in New York to unpack the nature of the political-economic relations that Business Improvement Districts were part of, before moving on to examine the process of policy-transfer and the early days of the introduction of the ‘model’ into UK cities.

Ten years ago a property tax to pay for street wardens or machines to lift gum off the pavements would have been greeted with near revolution among landlords. Today they are almost demanding it. Not surprisingly, that came as something of a shock to ... [UK]... Whitehall mandarins struggling to formulate yet another solution to declining town centres (Lawson, 2001: 1).

[B]usiness improvement districts are a response to the failure of local government to adequately maintain and manage spaces of the post-industrial city (Mallett, 1994: 284).

Neo-liberal arguments were ... one factor in an international trend which became known as the 'new public management'. In the new public management, the focus is on accountability, explicit standards and measures of performance, emphasis on outputs, not inputs, with rewards linked to performance, desegregation of functions into corporatized units operating with their own budgets and trading with one another, contracts and competition, and insistence on parsimony maintained by budget discipline. This required a shift from an ethic of public service to one of private management (Rose, 1999: 150).

Entrepreneurial urbanism and the management of the contemporary city

If you walk around the centre of a North American or European city there is a fair chance that before too long you will encounter individuals in brightly coloured uniforms. They may approach you and ask you if you need help; they may hand you a brochure detailing the nearest shopping mall, the closest 'cathedral of consumption' (Ritzer, 2004); they may engage with those whose presence they feel threatens the veneer of civility that they are active in producing. The identification of, and an attention to the needs of, potential 'customers' has to be balanced with expelling those who threaten the realisation of this potential. Clearly not public police officers, for the uniforms are too garish and the look too casual, nevertheless these predominantly young men and women are part of the ensemble of individuals and technologies involved in the regulation of contemporary urban space. As Rose (1999: 252) put it 'each employee of these enterprises has the maintenance of security as an objective, the other side, so it seems, of delivering quality service to the customer'.

Working with the public police and with private security operatives, those charging with 'meeting and greeting' us as we move around the centres of cities are visible signs of the wider restructuring that has occurred over the last three decades in the way urban centres are governed and managed (MacLeod et al., 2003). They are the bodies whose presence in public spaces constitutes one aspect of what, when writing about Los Angeles, Davis (1990) calls a 'project of control': that is the 'securization of consumption ... [in order to produce] ... enclaves of contentment and encourage the pursuit of pleasure' (Rose, 1999: 253). Part of this project has been the emergence of new modes and methods of urban governance and management that can be thought about along four axes. First, there has been the well-documented, although still contentious, shift from local government to local governance (Imrie and Raco, 1999; Ward, 2000), involving the re-inscription of the state's role vis-à-vis a range of other social actors, what Rose (1999) refers to as the

decline of the social state and the emergence of the enabling state. Second, there has been a broader entrepreneurial or neo-liberal restructuring and re-scaling of the nation state, with a series of profound implications for both local and regional scales of governance (Brenner, 1998, 1999; Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Jessop, 1997, 1998; Jones, 1999; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999; Swyngedouw, 1997, 2000). Third, there has been the putting in place of new governance arrangements, where the direct role of government in economic and social regulation and urban redevelopment is replaced by a range of partnership types between governmental, para-governmental, and non-governmental agencies (Goodwin and Painter, 1996; Jones, 1999; Ward, 2000). Fourth, the subjectivities and rationalities of public sector officials have been remade along neo-liberal lines. The 'governmentality of [public] professional activity' (Rose 1999: 153) has been transformed, with the emergence of what Power (1997) terms the audit society, as part of which those involved in the governance of cities are subject to visibilization in the form of being managed through contracts, performance measure and targets.

While these trends are not observable in all industrialised cities, there is enough empirical evidence to suggest that those that have been able to avoid being 'domesticated by cappuccino', to paraphrase Sharon Zukin (1995, 1998), are part of a shrinking minority. Studies of Eastern European, Far Eastern, Latin and South American, and South African cities also reveal that many of the characteristics of contemporary urban governance and management in North American and European cities are to be found elsewhere in the world (Brenner 2000; Cybriwsky, 1999; Tomlinson, 1999; Zhang, 2002). What appears to have emerged in recent years is an apparently international, if not global, way of 'doing' urban redevelopment (Ward, 2003). Urban governance and management in one place appears increasingly to resemble that in another, the consequence of which is that a global model has emerged, which has a disciplining effect on even those cities that choose to pursue an alternative developmental trajectory. In this political economic climate – with urban managers looking to each other for something that might give them an advantage -- programmes or policies are liable to be constructed, without often serious and sustained evaluation, as 'delivering'. This process of 'fast policy transfer' (Jessop and Peck, 1998) means that neo-liberalization is actively produced in different places at the same time through the existence of strong diffusion channels and distribution networks, that are themselves supported and legitimised through the serial exchange and circulation of expertise, ideas, and knowledge. To ensure policies 'work' – and can be seen and demonstrated to work -- those involved in the production and reproduction of neo-liberalization have worked to 'normalize' it as a means of auditing, evaluating and measuring success (Power, 1997).

In this article I explore one policy that appears both to reflect wider changes in urban governance and management and, is itself, a policy that in the last decade has been introduced in over 16 countries in four continents (Hoyt, 2003a). Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and BID-like organisations oversee a growing amount of public space in a growing number of cities. They oversee the growth in arts and entertainment-based redevelopment that has occurred in most cities, regulating what Pine and Gilmore (1999) name as the 'experience economy', being important actors in the revalorising of the built environment.

In exploring this example I have four objectives. First, I want to document the emergence of Business Improvement Districts and make the case that the programme is an example *par excellence* of the changes in how urban management is practiced in the most-industrialised economies of the world. By documenting the

evolution of the programme in Canada and the United States I hope to reveal the ways in which Business Improvement Districts constitute a significant innovation in urban governance, cementing the already well-documented shift to more entrepreneurial discourses, policies and practices (Hall and Hubbard, 1996; Jessop 1997, 1998; Ward 2000), while at the same time marking a significant redrawing of the boundary between public and private spheres.

Second, I want to reinforce the possible implications of the emergence of the BID programme in countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, South Africa, the UK and the US for users of public space. While some have claimed the privatisation of public space (Davis, 1990; Mitchell, 2003, 1997; Smith, 1996; Sorkin, 1992), others have been more ambivalent, seeing more room for manoeuvre and opportunities to resist and to create space for alternative, more just and inclusive visions or imaginations of urban futures (Bridge, 2004; Lees, 2003, Lees, 2004a). In this paper I want simply to suggest that the growing presence of Business Improvement Districts in cities and towns around the world would appear to be another example of the growing dominance of neo-liberal governance. As Brenner and Theodore (2002: 28) argue:

... it might be argued that a marked urbanization of neoliberalism has been occurring during [the last two decades], as cities have become strategic targets for an increasingly broad range of neoliberal policy experiment, institutional innovations, and politico-ideological projects.

However, I do not wish to suggest that neo-liberalism is an end-state, but rather to argue for an understanding of neo-liberalization as process, as contingent (Wilson, 2004), as 'never a *fait accompli* but ... always in need of accomplishment' (Kingfisher, 2002a: 14): in adopting this stance, thinking about 'strategy allows us to explore the gaps between ambition and achievement' (Clarke, 2004: 30).

Third, by drawing on empirical work in both the US and the UK I argue for the virtues of striving 'to come to grips with persistently diverse but increasingly inter-connected trajectories of socio-spatial change in different parts of the world' (Hart, 2004: 91) through multi-site fieldwork, as part of a methodology that allows an analysis of the different points in the policy network. As Peck (2003: 229) argues 'some of the crucial questions, therefore, relate not simply to the 'export performance' of the innovatory policy products, but also to the political conditions that shape their reception at the local level': in the case of this paper, how did the BID programme become a 'policy in motion'?

To address this question semi-structured interviews with elite actors in New York – the site from which the UK BID programme was imported -- are brought into dialogue with an analysis of the mechanisms through which the transfer was enacted, and a discursive deconstruction of relevant policy documents. Specifically, a dozen semi-structured interviews were undertaken between 1998 and 2004 with (i) senior management at some of Manhattan's Business Improvement Districts and (ii) senior officials at the New York City Council. Using this range of primary and second methods to examine the New York BID programme and the actors and agencies that have constructed it as a 'model' for urban management, constitutes an attempt to 'uncover certain hegemonic ways of thinking and talking about ... things'. As such my methods meld two representational practices: discursive practices -- the context in which policy statements are made and their links to wider claims -- and

social practices -- the more general ideological context in which the discourses have been used -- both centring on spoken and written words (Lees, 2004b: 102, 104).

Finally, this paper begins the process of unpacking what Business Improvement Districts might look like in the UK, as 'an internationally diffused approach to revitalization' (Hoyt, 2003a: 1), comes into contact with and reproduces or refashions existing urban redevelopment programmes, state spatial strategies, private sector participation rates, the subjectivities and rationalities of state officials and the politics that surrounds each of these aspects. In particular, I reveal how the example of the introduction of UK Business Improvement Districts differs from the ways in which the BID programme evolved in the US. Instead, an initial prognosis seems to suggest that Business Improvement Districts, UK-style are more likely to resemble their Canadian equivalents, the Business Improvement Areas (BIA), with a strong role for the national state. In this way the 'rolling-out' of the UK BID programme resembles earlier rounds of restructuring such as that which accompanied welfare reform. As Peck and Theodore (2001: 432-433) explain:

[T]he national level assumes responsibility for coordinating the activities of local partnerships and programme delivery systems and for establishing the 'rules of the game', while at the local level -- the scale of innovation and implementation -- plays a decisive role in translating national policies and local lessons into practice.

This article is organised in the following way. I first outline the origins of the BID programme, setting out its evolution in the US, the generic activities performed by Business Improvement Districts and their wider regulatory consequences. I then turn to the processes through which one or two Midtown Business Improvement Districts became constructed as constituting a 'model' of town centre management. I draw on New York fieldwork, to explore the 'local' export conditions, and an analysis of contemporary UK urban and regional political economy to establish the 'local' conditions that made the BID programme attractive to UK policy makers. Then, in the following section, I turn to situate the initial discursive reading performed by those involved in the policy-transfer process -- what Rose (1999) refers to as 'translation' -- before moving on to examine the beginnings of the UK BID pilot programme, emphasising its neo-liberal undertones. I conclude by considering the introduction of the BID programme in the wider context of on-going UK urban and regional state restructuring, and point to how it appears to be an example of growing dominance of neo-liberalism in the governance of cities.

The origins of Business Improvement Districts

According to US commentators, Business Improvement Districts have changed 'the way America governs its shopping districts, commercial areas, and downtowns' (Hochleutner 2003: 374). Despite these claims, and the international attention that has accompanied them, there is no agreement about the origins of the policy. As the BID programme has been introduced into a growing number of cities and towns around the world, so claims and counter-claims have been made over who and where came up with the concept. In part the confusion stems from the different acronyms that exist for 'self imposed financing mechanisms implemented by businesses and property owners for local improvements, specifically the enhancement of public services' (Hoyt, 2004: 367). In her international study of town management schemes, Hoyt (2003a) finds 'special improvement districts (SIDs), 'public improvement

districts (PIDs), 'neighborhood improvement districts (NIDs)', and municipal improvement districts' (MIDs), and 'business improvement districts (BIDs)' in the US alone. Elsewhere in the world she finds: in Canada 'business improvement areas (BIAs)', in Japan 'downtown improvement district [DIDs]', in New Zealand 'main street associations MSAs', and in South Africa 'city improvement districts (CIDs)'. And to this long list we are now able to add UK 'business improvement districts (BIDs)'. She distinguishes between Business Improvement Districts and 'BID-like' programmes, the difference between the two being in the case of the later an absence of a self-taxing mechanism.

The lack of a 'standard naming convention' (Hoyt, 2003a: 4) makes plotting the history of Business Improvement Districts less than straightforward. The origins of the BID programme would appear to be two separate developments, one in Canada and the other in the US. In Canada, which is often pointed to as the home of what are now known as Business Improvement Districts, the city of Toronto passed By-law no. 170-70, legally constituting the first BID in Bloor West Village (BWV). In the last four decades more than three hundred Canadian business improvement areas have been created. In the US, the BID programme emerged in the 1980s through combining elements of two policies established in the mid-1960s, the special purpose district (SPD) and the special assessment district (SAD). As such the US BID programme is a 'hybrid of these two concepts' (Hoyt, 2003c: 2). The process of US BID formation involves a two-step process:

The framework for BID formation is usually set out in a BID-enabling statute enacted by the state legislature. The majority of these statutes establish a two-step-process which a BID's proponents must show local support: (1) district property or business owners must vote for formation; and (2) local elected officials must enact an ordinance that formally creates the BID and determines its powers and boundaries (Hochleutner 2003: 378).

Despite the Canadian origins of the BID programme, it is the US model of city and town centre management that has caught the attention of UK policy-makers, and on which this article will focus.

Prior to 1981, commercial areas in US cities that wanted to levy additional taxes (or 'assessments') had to receive State legislative approval to form a SAD. In the 1980s there was legislation in a number of States that allowed cities within them to establish Business Improvement Districts. For example, in 1981, the New York State Legislature granted its cities the power to establish BIDs. The following year, New York City Council passed two Local Laws - No. 2 in January 1982 and No. 78 in November 1982 -- that meant new legislation was not needed each time a BID application was submitted by a commercial area in one of the five boroughs.

In the last fifteen years the number of Business Improvement Districts across the US has increased, as more and more states have introduced legislation to allow their creation. By the end of the twentieth century, just twenty years after they began to be created in US towns and cities, there were over 400 in forty-two of the states, with 64% in just five: California, New York, New Jersey, North Carolina and Wisconsin (Mitchell, 1999).

Writing ten years ago, Mallett (1994: 277) argued that the US BID programme was 'concerned with cleanliness and aesthetics of public space, security, achieving the best mix of activities, transportation access, and portraying an image of the whole to potential consumers.' Other studies of US Business Improvements,

and of other 'BID-like' programmes confirm this suite of policies (Briffault 1999; Hoyt 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004; Hochleutner 2003; Houston 1997, 2002; Mitchell 1999, 2001). In the US, then, Business Improvement Districts perform a number of regulatory functions, as part of what they do. In carrying out these activities the BID programme is both an example of the increasing political significance attached to the governance of sub-national economic spaces and to the ways in which the state is working with locally dependent capitals to oversee urban redevelopment. According to advocates, 'the BID movement is one of the most important developments in local governance in the last two decades' (MacDonald, 1996: np).

In terms of the regulatory functions performed by US Business Improvement Districts, there are many: first, city, state and Federal governments are lobbied to take a 'harder' line on issues that affect the interest of BID members. A good example of this is the role BIDs have played in arguing for a more aggressive line on homelessness and on informal economic activities and practices. Second, most Business Improvement Districts provide security guards in their areas to patrol the streets and public spaces, to enforce this 'harder line'. These two regulatory practices stem from an acceptance of the work of Wilson and Kelling (1982), who produced their 'Broken Windows' theory to argue that 'smaller' crimes lead to larger, more serious crimes, and as such, should be targeted as a means of improving the physical space. The brief of guards is to ensure that activities that might affect the business of local retailers are discouraged and reported, often working in tandem with the local public police. Third, the look and the feel of the local area are both regulated, as Business Improvement Districts get to decide the physical layout of benches, street lighting and shop facades, shaping the 'feel' of an area. In this sense the philosophy of the BID programme embodies the writings of Jane Jacobs (1961) and Oscar Newman (1972), who concurred that 'the supervision of public space deters criminal activity and the physical design of public space affects criminal activity' (Hoyt, 2004: 369). Fourth, the mix of retailing is also decided by Business Improvement Districts, as exchange values are manoeuvred upwards, and less high-end outlets are squeezed out by the rising rents that accompany any upturn in profits. What this all amounts to, according to Mallett (1994: 281), is that 'businesses have bought the right to say what should and what should not happen on public streets', this 'buying' coming in the form of the payment of a self-set assessment on district property.

In the US there is a relatively long history of areas within cities having tax-raising powers (Bollens, 1961), reflecting that some fractions of US capital has a tendency to be 'locally dependent' and thus more predisposed to involve itself in the politics over realising exchange values (Cox and Mair, 1991; Logan and Molotch, 1987). Despite the existence of this relatively supportive political economic context – as compared say to the UK, where, as we shall see later in this article, capital has been a little slower to involve itself in the BID programme -- which makes the formation of local coalitions of public and private more likely, Business Improvement Districts do nevertheless constitute something of a change from their institutional predecessors. First, Business Improvement Districts tend to be involved in service provision of one type or another and not in major redevelopment projects. Second, Business Improvement Districts manage city streets and not the lanes of the shopping mall. They deal with the existing built environment rather than being involved in its design. According to Mallett (1994: 282, original emphasis) this constitutes the creation of 'the downtown *as* a mall' (see also Christopherson, 1994; Zukin, 1995, 1998). Third, Business Improvement Districts are privately financed, through a 'public' assessment, which is collected by local government and then

remitted to the BID governing body, essentially meaning the Business Improvement Districts are privately run. This means that they ‘can be more flexible and execute the design and implementation of programmes more rapidly and more cheaply’ (Mallett, 1994: 282), or, as Hoyt (2003c: 7) has recently explained, ‘BIDs represent a cooperative, bottom-up, flexible mechanism for responding to local needs’. What comes across from the work on the US BID programme is how the act of creating a BID constitutes the rejection of existing ways of managing economic development and the introduction of a new way of doing things. As a champion of Business Improvement Districts argues:

[T]he great advantage of BIDs lies in their private characteristics. Unlike government, BIDs possess finite goals, which they can accomplish free of civil service rules and bureaucratic procedures. More important, they negotiate labor contracts from a clean slate: unbound by decades-old municipal labor deals, they can reward – and fire – employees according to their productivity, not their civil service status (MacDonald, 2000: 389).

Fourth, the formation, running and abolition of BIDs occurs on a property-based voting system, with non-commercial and tax-exempt properties (such as churches) not paying the tax. This is a break from past practice in the US.

Hence even in the US, where there is a history to business involving itself in the politics of state economic development, the BID programme constituted something new, perhaps in Jessop’s (1997) words, a de-statisation of the political system. While there might be much in the BID ‘model’ that might be generic to advance capitalist economies – and hence possible to uproot and relocate outside of the US – the way in which the model has been transferred and the terms on which it has been introduced into the UK, such as its place in the state’s wider scalar division of labour, are likely to shape local outcomes. This much is clear from the small amount of trans-national research that has been carried out on the dissemination of the BID programme (Hoyt, 2003a; Symes and Steel, 2003). It is also apparent from the work on the different types of Business Improvement Districts within the US (Houstoun, 1997; Mallett, 1994; Mitchell, 1999, 2001; Ward, 2001). As Hochleutner (2003: 380) argues about the US situation, ‘[s]chemes of BID governance differ significantly from one locality to locality, as well as from BID to BID within localities.’ In the rest of this paper I analyse the ways in which the organisational logics, practices and experiences of a small number of lower Midtown Business Improvement Districts have been elided, as a means of constituting and representing a town centre management ‘model’, an empirical example of how ‘place-specific neo-liberal governances involve different stocks of knowledge produced, capitals privileged, programs created, and effects’ (Wilson, 2004: 5).

From New York ... to London: or being specific about where this version of ‘the model’ originated

Around the globe, business owners, property owners, local merchant associations, elected officials, and municipal planners view the BID as a

useful mechanism for raising the requisite funds to improve the pedestrian experience and compete more effectively with suburban shopping malls (Hoyt, 2003b: 2).

The idea of UK Business Improvement Districts had been muted in some political and policy circles since the mid-1990s. In 1992 the Conservative government considered the introduction of something akin to Business Improvement Districts but in the end decided against it (Hoyt, 2003c). It was not though to Canada – the place of the first Business Improvement District – that UK Conservative government officials and Ministers turned when exploring the potential for policy-transfer: it was the US. This was perhaps not surprising, given the period was one characterised by a great deal of policy exchange between the two countries (Hambleton, 1995). While nationally the Conservative government decided against proceeding ahead with the introduction of Business Improvement Districts, there were those involved in UK urban management who looked positively on the programme. Most notably, The Corporation of London¹ commissioned a study of New York's Business Improvement Districts (Travers and Weimar 1996), the report drawing on interviews with their senior executive and with different branches of the local state. New York was chosen because:

London and New York are broadly the same in terms of their populations and economic structures and [because] both cities include a wide range of neighbourhoods and centres within a large urban area (op cit: 2).

It is also likely that New York was selected as a case study for a number of other reasons. During the 1990s the approach of those overseeing its redevelopment received substantial academic, media and political attention in the UK. It was a city that had appeared to reduce crime and to attract in new investment through the public and private sectors working in unison. More specifically, certain sites within the city had become key in the popular and political imagination on both sides of the Atlantic. As Sites (2003: 31, emphasis added) convincingly argues about the role ascribed to Times Square:

More than a success story, New York's famous crossroads of the world had become *a model of the new city*: safe clean, and prosperous, a place of opportunity where middle-class visitors could feel at home.

Successive UK governments adopted the mantra – if not the policies -- of 'zero tolerance' in their pronouncements on the necessity of having orderly cities, often drawing explicitly on the Broken Windows theory that informed New York's approach (MacLeod, 2002; Mitchell, 2003; Smith, 1996; Taylor 1998; Wilson and Kelling, 1982). In a sense then, drawing on a case study of New York generated findings from a *most-favoured city*, at least in policy terms, one that appeared as a policy 'hot spot' in the geographical imagination of UK urban policy-makers. 'Findings', in this wider political-economic context, would be more likely to travel, to find a receptive 'local' audience for the logic of a more 'flexible' mode of governance. For it wasn't just the policy that UK Ministers liked: it was also that it represented a

¹ The Corporation of London provides local government services for the financial and commercial heart of Britain, the City of London (see <http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk>)

change in – or to use current New Labour talk ‘modernisation’ – of the very *modus operandi* of urban management. As a proponent of the US-version of Business Improvement Districts makes clear, it is more than a programme: it is an ideological attack on government, as ‘the private sector not government or social service organisations ... [becomes] ... the focus of the new model’ (Porter, 1995: 65):

The BID model is popular largely because it works. More nimble than traditional city bureaucracies, BIDs have improved conditions within their borders, particularly in terms of increased business activity. According to their backers, BIDs are more effective and efficient than traditional models of local governance (Hochleitner, 2003: 376).

This sense of distance from past political practices, and of Business Improvement Districts embodying a new way of managing cities, speaks to the wider logic at play here: to create a Business Improvement Districts is not just to introduce a new policy, it is to critique the very ideology of government intervention in cities.² This neo-liberal sentiment is evident in the views of Heather MacDonald (1996: np) of the right-of-centre, Manhattan Institute, and in the thoughts of a leading figure at one of New York’s largest and most politically important Business Improvement Districts:

The key to BIDs’ accomplishments lies in their dissimilarity to big city government. They operate without civil service rules and red tape ... BIDs have returned to an earlier set of values regarding public space. They understand that simple things – such as keeping sidewalks clean and safe – matter enormously to the urban quality of life... They provide a vital and dynamic West Berlin to city government’s sclerotic East Berlin.

The thing is, it is meant to be an antidote to the idea of big Government, big City, big budget, big bureaucracy, in addition to it being, it should be compact enough that if any of us drop a wrench on our toe, everybody else in the building would hear us scream. It should have a direct personal meaning to the people in the building, business peers, that they can look up and if they don’t like what they did, then they will know the name of someone who to complain to. Or if they do, I hope that happens, if they do like something then they know who to call and praise! They have no meaning of this except that they are compact, and focused enough to be what people have come to feel they are missing in the large bureaucratic universe (Director, Manhattan Business Improvement District#1, March 1999).

This anti-government ideology was reaffirmed in a more recent interview, when it was argued ‘that [Business Improvement Districts] work because there is no bureaucracy ... city government wasn’t doing a damn thing for us so we decided to

² Ironically, Hoyt (2003a: 9) argues that the state played a strong role in the rapid growth of Business Improvement Districts in Canada in the 1970s. She argues ‘[o]ne explanation for why the model diffused in Canada more rapidly than in the United States is that Canadian governments encouraged the establishment of BIDs. For example, in the 1970s, the Province of Ontario made infrastructure grants available, but only BID organizations were eligible for funding ... In contrast the movement reached the United States in the 1970s, and only about one-third of the nation’s organizations were authorized before 1990.’

do it ourselves' (Director, Manhattan Business Improvement District#12, March 2004).

For New York local government the growing number of Business Improvement Districts in its boroughs – and especially in the economically and politically important Midtown Manhattan area -- meant it took on a new role. It had to regulate *differently* large parcels of urban space, entering into 'partnerships' with a range of 'local' Business Improvement Districts. As a senior figure at the New York City Council outlined:

We do it not with the hand of government saying 'we are the government and this is what we are giving you' but we do it through locally-based organisations who are of the community, represent the community, have the support of the community, speak the language of the community, both figuratively and literally (Senior Officer, Department of Business Services, New York City Council, March 2000).

Invoking un-problematically the notion of 'community' – referring not to it in the broadest sense but rather in a much-narrower manner, making reference to BID residents not city residents – officials in New York's city government saw their role as one of arms-length management. This did not necessarily constitute a reduction in its role: rather it meant it doing things differently. In the words of a senior government official, who described her organisation's role as, 'we are ... their [Business Improvement Districts] facilitators ... we can do this for you [the BIDs] and we can do that for you [the BIDs]' (Officer, Department of Business Services, New York City Council, March 1999).

This new role for local government was in part what attracted UK policy-makers to the US model of Business Improvement Districts and in particular the high-profile ones in New York City and Philadelphia. Although Travers and Weimar (1996) were commissioned to explore the basis of importing the BID model into London, on the back of case-study work in New York City, they were also clear that in part they were being asked to speak to the wider applicability of the model to be introduced in other UK cities and towns. They admit as much when they declare that '[while] the bulk of this report centres on the potential application of the BID model to London, there is little doubt that if BIDs ... could be made to work in London, they could also be made to do so in other cities and towns in Britain' (Travers and Weimar, 1996: 2).

The purpose of this New York City study was to find out more about the BID model: would it 'work' in the UK, in terms of increasing the involvement of local business in the management of the city and in terms of raising extra funds from the private sector to fund redevelopment schemes. At the time the London Corporation was also exploring the possibilities of introducing an infrastructure fund for London, as a means of local businesses paying for extra services that would enhance the context, or 'business climate', as one interviewer referred to it, in which they operated. The potential to introduce Business Improvement Districts into the UK was possible, according to Travers and Weimar (1996: 27), because

Things have changed radically in Britain in recent years. Local government has embraced the private sector and other local organisations rather more than in the past. The private sector has taken a far more active role in public

sector institutions ... BIDs ... are consistent with the spirit of the age in Britain.

Although not mentioned in the report, what Travers and Weimar were describing – ‘the spirit’ -- was neo-liberalization, and in particular, its urbanisation (Brenner and Theodore, 2002): ‘a new mode of governance rules, regulations, programs, and policies to resuscitate cities as sites for capital accumulation’ (Wilson, 2004: 1). In arguing that New York-style Business Improvement Districts should be introduced into the UK the report was recommending the importing of US neo-liberal urban policy. And as Sites (2003: 35) outlines:

[T]he ... [US Federal] ... politics of the mid-1990s set in motion a major retooling of American neoliberalism, with important consequences for New York and its lower-income residents. From free trade and financial-sector stimulus to new efforts to reform welfare and public housing ... [we saw] ... a new spatial environment [imposed] on the city.

With towns and cities up and down the UK forming town centre management partnerships (TCMP) between the private, private and the voluntary sectors, and with a trade organisation – the Association of Town Centre Management – that worked with its US equivalent – the International Downtown Association -- the political conditions did seem in place – or as Travers and Weimar (1996: 27) ‘the spirit’ was right -- to ensure that Business Improvement Districts received a favourable ‘local’ reaction if and when their UK introduction was proposed.

Of course, in their report Travers and Weimar (1996) did not deal with any of the concerns of local activists in New York: their focus was an internal evaluation, of the programme on its own terms. In part this was because they appear not to have spoken to anyone outside of the city’s Business Improvement Districts and supporting state infrastructure. In the conclusion they make reference to some of the concerns that others have raised, when they note that ‘despite a small number of high-profile stories about over-zealous treatment of the homeless in midtown Manhattan, BIDs have been judged to be highly effective with relatively limited resources’ (op cit: v). Of course, this is not a view that is shared by all. Many New York commentators echoed the concerns of those who have written more generally about the political economy of Business Improvement Districts (Briffault, 1999; Garodnick, 2000; Hochleitner, 2003; Hoyt, 2004; Loukaitou-Sideris et al., 2004).

Unhappy about the role of Business Improvement Districts in Mayor Giuliani’s Quality of Life programme, critical scholars writing on New York drew attention to the role Business Improvement Districts played in an increasingly authoritarian local political regime, in which ‘the public private nexus borders on the incestuous’ (McArdle, 2001: 8). This work drew attention to the ways in which BIDs had overseen the privatisation of previously ‘public’ spaces, redefined the ways in which urban areas were policed, involved itself in the transformation of New York’s midtown into one big theme park and removed those who activities/behaviour/look did not fit with the image-building exercises at work (McArdle and Erzen, 2000; Pack, 1992; Reichl, 1999; Sites, 2003; Smith, 1996; Zukin, 1995).

Perhaps not surprisingly for a document whose brief was to explore the possibilities for policy transfer, the majority of the fifteen conclusions were largely positive, referring to the BID model, its successes in New York City and its ability to be introduced into the UK. More specifically, the report concluded that:

- Despite cultural and governmental differences between New York and London/Britain and the US, there appeared to be no overriding reasons why BIDs could not be introduced – at least as an experiment – in this country
- Enabling legislation could allow BIDs to be created in London and other British cities, as and when the private sector wanted them. There [are] already imaginative town centre management initiatives, notably in Coventry, that could be enhanced by the financial security offered by the BID approach
- An experiment with BIDs would further enhance the improved relationship between local government and the private sector and would aid in strengthening of public private partnership

Of course since the report was commissioned and completed the UK's political economy has undergone a series of changes, most noticeably, of course, the election in 1997 of the Labour Party, led by Tony Blair, and its subsequent re-election in 2001. Despite this change in the party political situation, the eight years since the publication of the report has continued to be punctuated by examples both of 'deep' and 'shallow' policy transfer (and exchange) between the US and the UK, around issues such as economic development, urban regeneration and welfare reform (Peck and Theodore, 2001; Theodore and Peck, 2001; Wood, 1996). Here 'deep' refers to the sense that a complete or a part of a programme, and its policies are transferred from one country to another, while 'shallow' refers to the importing or exporting of the tone and emphasis of a programme, without the accompanying policies.

If, as appears to be the case, Travers and Weimar (1996) thought in 1996 that the UK local polity was receptive to the ideas of Business Improvement Districts, then two terms of office under New Labour are unlikely to have changed this: if anything the 'local' conditions that have been put in place since the report was completed make it more, not less likely that a national rolling-out of the BID model would chime with other ways in which the state has restructured its role in urban and regional politics (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Johnstone and Whitehead, 2004). As Table 1 outline both sets of 'local' conditions – in the exporting and importing places -- have been refashioned in the last three decades. This would seem to bring them closer into line, although 'inherited institutional structures, established political traditions and extant policy conventions and discourses' (Peck and Theodore, 2001: 430) points to differences in the way the model will be received and 'made-up' in localities around England and Wales. All of which suggests that UK Business Improvement Districts will differ – in detail rather than ideological blueprint -- from their US predecessors.³ A series of restructurings in urban and regional politics have created a host of new public-private institutions charged with overseeing a renaissance in the fortunes of sub-national territories, such as cities, city-regions, and regions (Imrie and Raco, 2003). In addition, and more specifically, there have been a number of joint seminars organized through the International Downtown Association, guest visits to the UK by leading lights from the US's Business and Improvement District

³ As Mitchell (1999) in his study of US Business Improvement Districts, and Hoyt (2003a) in her International Bid Project (IBP) make clear, no two Business Improvement Districts are exactly the same: each one's particular constitution and policies reflect the melding of generic features and local politics.

community and US trips by UK town centre managers, all to smooth the path for the introduction in the UK of BIDs: to ensure that differences are not insurmountable.

* Insert Table 1 about here*

It was then perhaps no surprise, given the ideological similarities between successive US Federal and UK central governments and the ways in which US and UK cities were presented as facing similar economic issues, that the Labour Government announced, three years into its first term of office, that legislation would be introduced to allow the creation of UK Business Improvement Districts (Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2001a). It is to this that the paper now turns.

New Labour, the management of cities and the early days of UK Business Improvement Districts

As part of the Green Paper, *Modernising Local Government Finance* (2000a), the UK government spoke with businesses and councils over the introduction of a supplementary business rate to fund town improvement schemes, in a manner similar to the way in which the Corporation of London consulted local businesses during the mid-1990s. In response to feedback on the Green Paper, and in line with Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force report (1999), whose suggestions drew on the US BID model, and those contained in the White Paper *Our Towns and Cities: the Future* (2000b), the British Prime Minister launched his government's Business Improvement District programme. Speaking in Croydon,⁴ in South East London, at a conference on the 'quality of life at the local level', Tony Blair, sounding remarkably similar to the former Mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani, boldly proclaimed:

When a neighbourhood declines, local business suffers too. Businesses, like individuals, have a major stake and role to play in improving local areas. I can tell you today that we have decided to introduce legislation to create Business Improvement Districts. These will be similar to the successful US examples where local businesses help pay for projects that improve their local area. This will enable local authorities and local businesses to enter into contracts to provide additional services or improvements, funded by an agreed business rate (DLTR 2001a: 1).

Small Business Minister Patricia Hewitt reinforced the model's US – rather than Canadian -- origins and the structural involvement of local businesses:

Business Improvement Districts give businesses and local authorities the means and incentives to invest in their area. This approach, building on the very successful business model in the USA, will allow business to see precisely what they are getting for their money and will help to harness local business leadership (DLTR 2001a: 2).

⁴ It is unlikely that Tony Blair knew it when he chose Croydon, England to launch the programme, but Croydon, Australia is home to five BID or 'BID-like' organisations (Hoyt, 2003a).

In the UK government's Local Government White Paper *Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services* (2001) the need to work 'with businesses to improve communities' was also emphasised. To quote:

The Government wants to see councils and businesses in their areas working together to improve local conditions. As part of this, we will legislate to allow Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to be established in any area where they are backed by the majority of businesses. The Government will introduce legislation dealing with such essential issues as the arrangements for the vote on whether to have a BID. Guidance will be provided on how BIDs should work, drawing on existing best practice in establishing and delivering BID-type schemes. We do not wish this to be prescriptive. The Government will encourage the local authority and business organisations to produce this guidance themselves (ODPM 2001: 14).

The Local Government Bill (2002), the penultimate piece in the legal jigsaw, received Royal Assent in the summer of 2003, clearing the way for the establishment of Business Improvement Districts in England and Wales from April 2004, subject to a successful local vote.⁵ As a precursor, the UK government established a series of pilot BIDs, the purpose of which was to prepare people, agencies, and institutions for the full programme. It is to these details that we turn in the next section.

From paper to people: UK 'pilot' Business Improvement Districts

After the establishment of a national BID framework the UK Government announced a competition in January 2003.⁶ Towns and cities in England and Wales were asked to apply to be included in the BID pilot scheme. Over hundred applications were received, of which 53 were short-listed before 22 areas were designated as 'pilot' Business Improvement Districts. The existing arrangement in these areas were to be re-named as BIDs, their activities to be subject to national scrutiny and learning prior to legislation coming into being.⁷ As if to confirm how

⁵ The legislation covers only England and Wales. In Scotland a parallel consultation occurred between July and the end of October 2003. The same sorts of agencies, trade bodies and government ministers that had supported the initiative in England and Wales spent the period drying to drum-up support amongst the Scottish business community. So, Minister for Finance and Public Services, Andy Kerr, argued that 'Business Improvement Districts are part of the Scottish Executive's commitment to promote conditions for long-term sustainable growth and to create a Smart Successful Scotland'. He also made reference to New York: 'Business Improvement Districts have already been successful elsewhere. You only have to look at Times Square in New York to see the massive improvement they can make to the look and feel of the area' (quoted in *The Guardian* 23 September 2003: np).

⁶ A national BID steering group was established to over-see the pilot project. This consists of the Association of Town Centre Management, Boots, British Council of Shopping Centres, British Retail Consortium, Capital Shopping Centres, Countryside Agency, EnCams, English Partnerships, Grosvenor, Groundwork, Hammerson, Land Securities, Local Government Association, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Prudential, and The Mall.

⁷ Business Improvement District formation is overseen by the Association for Town Centre Management (ATCM). Partnerships produce a four point business plan, and, as if to confirm the ways in which rationalities and subjectivities are remade through learning, 'participate in 'study tours in the UK and us, and a series of workshops, seminars and conferences. Lessons

important 'winning' BID pilot status was believed to be by those who entered the competition, a number of areas whose applications failed, such as Brighton, repositioned established town centre management partnerships as quasi-Business Improvement Districts.

Both the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) and the Local Government Association (LGA) organized national seminars and conferences, as part of the piloting exercise workshops. Over 100 interested local government officers and business representatives attended these events. Local events were also held in the 22 pilots, at which more detailed concerns over local specifics were discussed. At both types of meetings delegates learnt about Business Improvement Districts, often through listening about US case studies. The most popular sources of examples were, unsurprisingly, New York and Philadelphia (Hoyt, 2003c; Symes and Steel, 2003; Ward, 2001). In addition to learning from these examples, the US BID officers of these paradigmatic cases have visited the UK to speak to individual pilot Business Improvement Districts. Mike O'Connor, Senior Vice-President of Operations of the Alliance for Downtown in New York visited the Central London Partnership, the authority overseeing The Circle Initiative.⁸ He spoke about the relationship between the activities of the BID and the New York Police Department (NYPD). Specifically, he talked about how:

[o]ne of the key priorities of the Alliance has been enhancing the public realm by measures such as maintaining the area's open spaces, sprucing street furniture and improving sanitation while demonstrating 'zero tolerance' for quality of life crimes such as illegal street trading and graffiti writing. The contribution made by the Alliance rangers, working in partnership with the NYPD, towards regulating the quality of life on the streets has been crucial (Central London Partnership, 2002: 3)

Although O'Connor's visit was high profile, it was overshadowed when, at the end of 2003 Daniel Biederman, the *doyen* of Manhattan's Business Improvement Districts visited London. Credited with coming up with BID idea – although, of course, he didn't – and with creating some of the local conditions, into which, Rudy Giuliani could launch his Quality of Life reforms, Biederman's company ran the three largest Manhattan Business Improvement Districts during the 1990s, before very publicly falling out with the Mayor (Hochleutner 2003; Ward, 2001). Writing at the time, one local commentator made clear the link between Biederman (and by implication Business Improvement Districts) and New York's wider governing regime:

[T]his is one local political story you really ought to pay a little attention to, because its central figure is a man to whom all New Yorkers owe an

learnt from each of the Pilots will be circulated amongst the others and a central bank of knowledge and a best practice document will be produced' (Plymouth City Centre 2003).

⁸ At the time *The Guardian* (December 12 2000: np) ran an article entitled 'UK to take US-style to regeneration', where it was argued that Business Improvement Districts had 'radically transformed run-down areas in major cities across the US'. It also claimed that New York City had over '130 Bids', when in fact the true number was actually nearer 40, revealing one of the ways in which the importance of Business Improvement Districts is 'represented' as part of the policy transfer network, involving consultants, Ministers, media, policy-makers and so on.

extraordinary debt. His name is Daniel Biederman, and the government of the city of New York has basically declared war on him - even though Biederman's lonely efforts in the 1980s paved the way for Mayor Giuliani's remarkable success in re-establishing the foundations of civil society here in the 1990s (Podhoretz, 1998: 12).

In addition to 'experts' travelling back and forth across the Atlantic, as part of the learning process and the exchange of knowledge, more structural links were established between the UK and the US, between the US's International Downtown Association (IDA) and the UK's Association of Town Centre Management. Others, in 'flanking industries', have also organized means of disseminating 'good practice'. The Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV) and the Institute of Public Finance (IPF)⁹ have both run seminars and established networks to educate their members on the financial implications of Business Improvement Districts. In this way, local public sector officials in a range of UK towns and cities have begun the process of learning. Existing subjectivities and rationalities are remade in and through these events, and through the subject making exercises the state as a *peopled set of institutions* is restructured along neo-liberal lines: the events are elements in the construction of neo-liberalism's 'new regime of the self (Rose, 1996: 60), as the market ascends 'over the state and *inside* the state' (Brodie, 2002: 97. As part of the introduction of Business Improvement Districts there is a sense in which the 'self-governance' of public sector officials is opened-up for refashioning: state officials are now required to be autonomous enterprising, flexibility, self-sufficient, to become – through the types of educational and learning set out earlier in the paragraph – *neo-liberal selves* (Brodie, 2002; Cruikshank, 1996; Kingfisher, 2002; Rose 1996a, 1996b, 1999). All of this activity is, according to the Director of the Circle Initiative, Julie Grail, to 'assist people in becoming BID-ready' (quoted in *Regeneration and Renewal* June 13th, page 3).¹⁰

Business Improvement Districts and the wider UK political economic context

The UK government has proclaimed Business Improvement Districts as 'New York-style schemes' (ODPM 2003a: 1).¹¹ In that way not much has changed since Travers and Weimar (1996) wrote their report for The London Corporation. New York remains a dissemination centre, London, a sub-hegemonic 'centre of persuasion' in which US policies can be remade in a way that makes them more acceptable to continental Europe (Camack, 2003; Clarke, 2004; Peet, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peck, 2003; Wacquant, 1999). It is clear that BIDs are interesting in their own right. As this paper has documented, there is plenty to explore in terms of ways in which

⁹ The IPF is the commercial arm of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

¹⁰ While arranging an interview in March 2004, I was informed by the Executive Director of this particular New York Business Improvement District that it received a number of queries from UK local authorities or town centre management partnerships wanting to learn how about its work and programmes, pointing to the informal ways in which tacit knowledge is codified and exchanged.

¹¹ The two most cited examples by the UK government of successful US Business Improvement Districts are Bryant Park and the Downtown Alliance, both in midtown Manhattan.

the urban politics of redevelopment is done, as New Labour continues to restructure the ways in which the state regulates the city (and the wider 'city region' and 'region'), and what this means for the individuals involved in the day-to-day 'doing' of urban politics. Business Improvement Districts would appear to be neo-liberalism personified: embodying the ideal of state withdrawal while at the same time requiring a different form of state involvement: seeming to be organized to raise exchange values and to revalorize city centres, while at the same time requiring increase state-gathered taxes to do so: raising issues of accountability and democracy, as the governance of spaces at the centre of cities are handed-over to private management.

More than this though, the creation of UK Business Improvement Districts speaks to wider debates over the myriad of ways in which business continues to increase its role in the governance of a growing number of cities around the world, impelling rather than reducing state action (Wilson, 2004). It appears to mark the end of the state as we knew it (Gibson-Graham, 1996), and of meanings of 'public' and 'private'. For, as Clarke (2004: 31) explains, '[n]eo-liberalism has challenged conceptions of the public interest, striving to replace them by the rule of private interests, co-ordinated by markets' (see also Rose, 1999). The global emergence of Business Improvement Districts, or of management arrangements that mirror them, is no accident: it reflects the promotion over the last three decades of a strategic programme – and the creation of associated institutions and policies -- for the pursuit of neo-liberalism on a global scale by a small number of nation states and supra-national agencies (Cammack, 2003; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peet, 2002). The UK government is clear on this: Business Improvement Districts are situated, part of a wider restructuring agenda as Tony McNulty, the Minister for London, has explained:

Rejuvenating our towns and cities is a priority for this Government and everyone should play their part. Business Improvement Districts will see local authorities and local businesses working together for the benefit of the local community (Central London Partnership, 2002: 1).

This positioning of the fate of cities as linked to, among other things, the success of the Business Improvement Districts programme is a theme running through a number of the UK Government's documents:

BIDs are a vital part of our wider agenda encompassing urban and community regeneration issues including liveability, cleanliness, safety and attractiveness of street and public spaces (ODPM, 2003a: 1).

BIDs are ... part of the government's long-term strategy in encouraging partnership working between local authorities and local businesses to achieve improvements (ODPM, 2003b: 7).

There are a number of the Government's concerns that are bound-up in its creation of Business Improvement Districts. In particular, it is at pains to point to how the formation and organisation of a BID is to be left to local 'stakeholders':

Many of the details of the BID would be left to local agreement, including the area to be covered, the amount to be raised, what it would be spent on

and the local council/business partnership for implementing it (DLTR, 2001a: 1).

This devolutionary aspect is reaffirmed elsewhere, and mirrors the discursive claims made around other types of urban and regional state restructuring (Johnstone and Whitehead, 2004). In the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) of the BID element of the Local Government Bill the mantra of 'local flexibility' is repeated once more:

Much of the detail of individual BIDS will be left to be agreed between local councils and businesses. This will provide each local area with the flexibility to introduce improvements suited to their local needs (DLTR, 2001b: 6).

And yet it is clear that BIDS, UK-style will be different to their US predecessors: at an abstract level, the structural orientation of the two welfare states is very different. More concretely, the geographies of business involvement is likely to vary due to differences in the way capital is organised in each country (Valler et al. 2000). So, UK local businesses have not yet demonstrated the same level of commitment to Business Improvement Districts as has been witnessed in the US. It will not be 'from the bottom up' (Director, Manhattan Business Improvement District 12, March 2004), as the impetus behind the creation of US Business Improvement Districts was recently described to me: rather it is presently 'from the top down', in a manner not dissimilar to the way in which the original Business Improvement Districts – the Business Improvement Areas -- were introduced into Canada.¹² Whereas in the US the onus for the creation of BIDs came from the 'bottom', in the UK it is central government that is pushing the agenda along, albeit with increasing, if begrudging, support from some factions of the business community. Unlike the US, the UK state is still highly centralized: even apparently 'local' experiments such as Business Improvement Districts are heavily marshalled by centrally issued guidelines. It remains the case that what continues to be witnessed in the UK is something akin to the centrally prescribed localism that has characterized much of the denationalisation of the state since the 1990s (Peck, 1995; Peck and Jones 1995; Ward, 2000).

Nevertheless it would be misplaced to dismiss Business Improvement Districts as simply another example of the central state 'steering' the redevelopment politics of UK cities. The programme does mark a further bleeding of the public and private sectors: with the establishment of Business Improvement Districts property and business owners will now have a means of raising local taxes and deciding how the money is spent, something they have not had in the UK in recent centuries: they will have a say over what happens in the streets around their shops, in the spaces around the sides of their buildings, and they will undoubtedly have more 'local' political leverage, should they choose to exercise it. Under this regime more and more of the urban built environment, if the US is anything to go by, will be given over to activities whose prime purpose is to increase exchange values, to improve the conditions under which capital can be accumulated, with possible implications for use values, and the liveability of the city more generally.

¹² The Canadian State encouraged the establishment of Business Improvement Districts in a way that did not happen in the US, with the result that the model diffused much quicker. For example, 'in the 1970s the Province of Ontario made infrastructure grants available, but only BID organizations were eligible for funding' (Hoyt, 2003a: 9).

Conclusion

Writing about the US evolution of Business Improvement Districts, Mallett (1994: 284) argues that their creation reflects the failure of local government. BIDs, it is argued, are 'clearly part of the shift from managerial to entrepreneurial governance' (op cit. 285), components of some wider critique and rejection of Keynesian government. And he is not alone. Proponents of this model of urban management are clear that it represents a rejection of past, 'failed' management methods (Birch, 2002; Houstoun, 2002; Levy, 2001; MacDonald, 1996, 2000; Mallett, 1994; Mitchell, 1999; Symes and Steel, 2003). In the US Business Improvement Districts were established to manage those parts of the downtown that were decaying and where traditional redevelopment policies had been deemed not to have worked. More specifically, in the case of Manhattan, the rule regimes of its Business Improvement Districts melded with Rudy Giuliani's wider political response to what he diagnosed as 'state failure', as he oversaw a clear and systematic restructuring of spatial strategies, privileging some areas over others, some peoples over others, and some forms of intervention over others (Smith, 1996). With the production of more and more data, in the form of indicators and league tables, on the apparent success of the programme – as part of the more general emergence of what Power (1997) terms the 'audit society' – so the 'idea spread' (Symes and Steel, 2003: 302). London's policy-makers commissioned a report to explore the possibilities of importing Business Improvement Districts into England's capital city, arguing that it was facing problems not too dissimilar to those faced by New York in the 1980s. While nothing came of it at the time, in 1996, some eight years later and the UK now has 22 pilot Business Improvement Districts, the programme a cornerstone in New Labour's attempt to invoke an 'urban renaissance' (DETR, 2000).

Given the very recent introduction of Business Improvement Districts into the UK this paper has done no more than reflect on the process by which this came about: however, the mechanisms, the processes, the peoples, the policies through which this occurred is important. Policies do not appear from nowhere. They are introduced into real and lived places first, and then through a range of human and non-human actors are 'made' into a success. This process of 'making-up' policy is an acutely political one: there is nothing natural about which policies are constructed as succeeding and those that are regarding as having failed: that the model of urban management embodied in Business Improvement Districts has been adopted – in principle if not in name – in sixteen countries across four continents is not an accident, no chance occurrence. It reflects the strong diffusion channels and distribution networks that exist to facilitate the transfer of policies of a particular type from one place to another. The 'making-up' of policy is also then a profoundly geographical process, in and through which different places are constructed as facing similar problems in need of similar solutions. In the case of Business Improvement Districts, the twin argument of declining urban economies and of failing city government responses set the scene for the adoption of the model, which began its life in Toronto in 1971 as the Bloor West Village (BWV), in places as culturally, politically and socially diverse as Aso-gun in Japan, Brussels in Belgium, Cape Town in South Africa, Christchurch in New Zealand, Coventry in England, Melbourne in Australia, and Oslo in Norway (Hoyt, 2003a).

It is not only policy that is 'made-up' through the involvement of a network of actors: it is also the identities, rationalities and subjectivities of those that are doing

the making that is subject to change through the process of ‘inter-local policy transfer’ (Peck and Theodore, 2001). As part of the introduction of Business Improvement Districts in to the UK public sector officials and managers have attended conferences and seminars in which their own sense of self – their subjectivity -- is actively being remade: more enterprising, more entrepreneurial, more neo-liberal (Rose, 1999).

In transforming itself, not as something that is disembodied, as existing ‘out there’ but rather as an extremely embodied process, involving real people in the making of a ‘new planetary vulgate’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001) or a ‘global hegemonic project’ (Peet, 2002), neo-liberalization has gone from a political will into an economic inevitability, infusing the programmatic and technocratic procedures of policies, such as Business Improvement Districts, in such a way as to obfuscate from view the logic that underscores and reinforces it as very much an ideological project. And yet, and despite the recent expansion of work in the social sciences on the process of neo-liberalization, we actually still know very little about the details of how neo-liberalism is made in different places, and the mechanisms through which ‘local’ policies, practices and programmes are constructed as ‘models’. What this paper has hoped to achieve is to highlight the importance of turning to this task, and to use the example of Business Improvement Districts to point to the importance of research that connects together places in these networks as a means of exploring what Peck (2003) calls ‘policies in motion’.

For if the BID programme does constitute a further example of the urbanisation of neo-liberalism then it is the case that critical scholars have a social and ethical responsibility to open-up the ‘black-box’ of neo-liberalisation, to reveal what it means in different contexts, how it is experienced on a day-to-day basis, in part so that it is not portrayed all-encompassing. As Kingfisher (2002b: 165) reminds us – in a manner similar to the argument pursued by Gibson-Graham (1996) – ‘if we think of global capitalism/neoliberalism as already hegemonic, as an unstoppable all-penetrating force, we fail to see other realities, other possibilities.’ While we now know far more about the process of neo-liberalization (Clarke, 2004; Kingfisher, 2002a, 2002b; Larner 2003; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peck 2003; Tickell and Peck, 2003), and its on-going urbanisation, we still need to understand more about its different forms, how it interacts, frames, undermining or reproducing other ways of seeing and talking about the world. This would seem to demand that academics engage in a set of projects to reveal, to ‘unhide’ (Katz, 2001), or at least name neo-liberalization in all its forms, as just that, neo-liberalization, whatever theoretical position one writes out of (Larner, 2003). This will be no mean feat. More practically, the challenge would also seem to be to find its fault-lines, its cleavage points, those spaces in which alternative agendas, particularly in relation to the concerns of this paper, for cities might be realised (Lees, 2004a; Merrifield, 2000).

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Table 1: Getting 'BID-ready': 'trans-local' policy transfer in action

UK	UK 'local' political conditions		Intermediation		US 'local' political conditions
1970s	Local government oversees and delivers redevelopment programmes	↓		↓	The retail core of US cities and towns struggle to compete with suburban outlets and shopping malls.
1980s	Business becomes more involved in the design, the introduction and the evaluation of urban development, through both 'local' initiatives and as result of political space being created through centrally prescribed restructuring.	↓		↓	Economically US cities continue to struggle, causing financial problems for city governments, and for central areas to become physically run-down, as capital leaves the centre, and the state struggles to maintain the built environment. US cities suffer significant social issues with some commentators claiming government has failed.
Mid to late 1990s	A number of towns and cities form town centre management partnerships. These private agencies consist of a mix of public and private sector representatives and perform a number of functions including: overseeing the introduction of CCTV, promoting the city centre, and lobbying for better public services.	→ ←	The 40 plus Business Improvement Districts in the five boroughs of New York City are constructed as 'models' of urban management. Analysts, consultants, policymakers and trade body representatives working on the management and redevelopment of UK cities visit them to 'learn' about their successes. 'Results' find their way back into documents that circulate around UK cities. Retail lobbyists work with other 'local' stakeholders to push the idea, as the experiences of particular US cities become stripped of contextual 'noise' and constructed as 'model'.	→ ←	Somewhere between 400 and a 1000 Business Improvement Districts in US towns and cities, with a small number catching the attention of local economic policymakers from a number of countries, including the UK, particularly Philadelphia and New York.
2000s	UK government announces that it will introduce legislation to allow for the creation of Business Improvement Districts in the UK. 23 Pilot areas are designated, as existing town centre management partnerships begin the process of <i>becoming</i> a BID. The people and the places involved begin a process of learning, from experts, from each other, from existing BID managers in the US.	←	Senior officials in the International Downtown Alliance and at one or two high-profile New York Business Improvement Districts visit the UK to speak at seminars and conferences.	←	

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