

**Mobilising urban policies: The policy transfer of US Business  
Improvement Districts to England and Wales**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the ways in which policies are transferred between places: how they are disembedded from, and re-embedded into, new political, economic and social contexts. To do this, the paper will draw upon a case study of the transfer of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) from the US to England and Wales. Within this, the paper demonstrates how they were a response to fiscal problems facing city centre management in England and Wales; how US BIDs were socially constructed as ‘successful’ and ‘transferable’; and how the BID ‘model’ was reshaped prior to and following its rolling-out in England and Wales. The paper concludes by stressing six wider conceptual points about the nature of urban policy transfer.

## **1. Travelling Tales of Success: Business Improvement Districts in the US and Beyond**

For Paul Levy (2001, p. 130), the President of the Center City District in Philadelphia, “one thing is certain ... America’s downtowns are back”. Looking out from his office in downtown Philadelphia, this is plain to see: “rising occupancy rates, new housing, thriving parks and new outdoor cafes, they’re alive day and night with a positively European flair ... For the first time in a long time, there is optimism in the air” (Levy, 2001, p. 130). The changing fortunes of downtown Philadelphia and other American cities, he argues, are no coincidence. Instead, they are the result of the rapid proliferation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across the US during the 1990s onwards.

By 2004, over 429 BIDs had emerged in a variety of downtown, inner-city, suburban

and rural business districts in the US (Hoyt, 2004). From Levy's Center City District to the downtown BID in Madison, Wisconsin, BIDs across the US share a common essence. That is, they are publicly sanctioned yet privately directed organisations that supplement public and private services to improve geographically defined, outdoor public spaces and business services (Hoyt, 2004). Most importantly, they are all funded primarily through a multi-year, compulsory business taxation mechanism. This taxation is not aimed at all businesses, however, but for the overwhelming majority of US BIDs, it is property owners within the district that are charged a small annual fee. The services they provide vary from BID to BID. Nonetheless, public space cleaning and maintenance, securing of public spaces and businesses, and marketing of the BID area are the most common services domains (see Briffault, 1999; Hoyt, 2004; Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2006).

As Levy and others will tell you, BIDs and their services have been remarkably successful. If you walk across the street from a BID area to a non-BID area, you are likely to notice a disparity in the cleanliness of the sidewalks and the numbers of trash cans being emptied. The BID in Times Square, for instance, collected 1235 tons of refuse, removed 4505 stickers and cleaned 740 incidents of *graffiti* during 2005 (Times Square Alliance, 2005). Not only has the BID made the area cleaner, some onlookers argue that it has also made the area safer and less threatening, thanks largely to the BID's patrolling Public Safety Officers (McDonald, 2001).

By rectifying the small signs of disorder in public space, MacDonald (2000) reasons that BIDs have encouraged once-hesitant consumers and investors back to these districts. When viewed in this way, it is easy to link the economic and social revival of, for instance, the area around 42nd Street in New York City in the past 15 years with the introduction and

operations of three BIDs in the area. Indeed, the Times Square Alliance, Grand Central Partnership and Bryant Park Corporation have been widely praised for their role in lowering crime rates and vacancy rates, and increasing visitor numbers, rental values and property values in their districts (New York City Department of Small Business Services, 2004; Sagalyn, 2001; Thompson, 1997). What is more, after years of public-sector funding cuts and retrenched and overworked public services, BIDs appear to offer a private-sector-led solution to reviving business districts and declining public services.

What MacDonald, Levy and others might not tell you, however, is that BIDs have some worrying facets and associations and do not have unanimous support. To be sure, BID officials and advocates are still unable to demonstrate clearly the causality, rather than correlation, between their BID's introduction and operations and the social and economic transformations taking place in their area. This is, for instance, demonstrated by the hesitancy of academics firmly to attribute crime reduction in Philadelphia BID areas (Hoyt, 2005) and increases in property prices in New York City BID areas (Ellen *et al.*, 2006) to their respective BIDs. What is more, businesses frequently perceive the BID levy as unnecessary additional business taxation. In contrast, some left-leaning academics have argued that, amongst other things, BIDs are unaccountable and undemocratic (Hochleitner, 2003); represent the privatisation of public space regulation (Mitchell and Stacheli, 2006); and impinge on citizens' political freedoms and the civil liberties of targeted, disadvantaged groups such as the homeless and unlicensed street traders (Clough and Vanderbeck, 2006; Katz, 1998).

In spite of these problems and fuzzy linkages, BIDs and their associated success stories have become very attractive to many US businesses and policy-makers in search of a

policy prescription for their business districts. What is more, these success stories have captured the attention of policy-makers and businesses in Europe (Houstoun, 2005). Indeed, since 2002, Germany, Ireland, Serbia, Albania, England and Wales have all introduced BIDs. Whilst BIDs were evident in Canada, New Zealand, Jamaica and South Africa prior to their introduction in Europe (Hoyt, 2004, 2006), it is the US that has provided the inspiration for their European introduction. In England and Wales, where BIDs legislation was passed in 2003, national and local policy-makers and advocates continue to speak of the US origins of BIDs and their successes in the US (Ward, 2006). Stories of the BID operations and downtown transformations in New York City, Philadelphia and Washington, DC, in particular, continue to be cited in a variety of political, business and media arenas.

Rather than detail the successes of BIDs in England and Wales—where the juries are still out—this paper will explore how and why US BIDs and their associated stories of success have had a profound influence on BIDs policy and practice in England and Wales. The paper, henceforth, is split into three parts. The first outlines the role of policy transfer within urban governance and develops a process-based framework for understanding urban policy transfer. The second draws upon this framework to explore the processes through which the BID ‘model’ has been disembedded, mobilised and re-embedded into new political, economic and social contexts. In doing this, it critically examines the framing of BIDs as ‘successful’ and as an ‘appropriate’ policy prescription to the fiscal problems facing city centre management. The paper concludes by pinpointing six conceptual issues that can inform future studies of urban policy transfer.

This paper draws on an on-going research project investigating the importation and (re)embedding of BIDs in England and Wales and locally into the urban arenas of Coventry,

Plymouth and Reading (September 2004— onwards). Methodologically, the research primarily involved semi-structured interviews with over 60 public and private élites in the US and UK. The interviewees were selected due to their role in transferring BID policy and practice from the US and/or developing and rolling-out BID policy and practice nationally as well as locally in Coventry, Plymouth and Reading. Elite interviewing was supported by a critical discourse analysis of selected core policy documents, websites, policy speeches and media documents. This critical discourse analysis focused upon identifying the linguistic strategies and techniques used by the writers and speakers to convince their audience of their policies' legitimacy, necessity and future (or existing) successes. Used together, these methods helped to reveal the experiences, rationales and legitimisation strategies behind the mobilisation of BIDs in(to) England and Wales.

## **2. Conceptualising Urban Policy Transfer**

US BIDs are not the first 'actually existing' urban policies to have attracted attention from, and been emulated by, curious policy-makers, practitioners and advocates elsewhere. Indeed, a handful of urban policies have become internationally renowned 'policy meccas' that policy-makers and practitioners continue to read about, hear about, discuss, perhaps visit, and consider whether to emulate. Over the past 30 years, perhaps the best-known of these are Baltimore (for its Harborplace re-development), Bilbao (for the Guggenheim Museum redevelopment), New York City (for its 'zero tolerance' policing strategies) and Barcelona (for its public spaces, urban design and management of the 1992 Olympic Games) (see Dixon and Maher, 2005; Jones and Newburn, 2007; Monclús, 2003; S. Ward, 2006). From featuring in good-practice regeneration guides to being the subject of study tours and

international conference presentations, these places, policies and their apparent successes have been translated into a wide variety of ‘off-the-peg’ policy remedies (Peck and Theodore, 2001, p. 433).

As studies of policy transfer have demonstrated, UK policy-makers have frequently turned to the US for inspiration, notably in the fields of urban policy and welfare reform, in the past 30 years. Alongside BIDs, the most notable policies with US origins are the Urban Development Grant (Wolman, 1992), the Child Support Agency (Dolowitz, 2001), Working Families’ Tax Credits and the New Deal ‘welfare-to-work’ programme (Peck and Theodore, 2001). For Dolowitz *et al.* (1999), these trans-Atlantic policy transfers are facilitated by the common language, shared ideology and strong personal political relations. Peck and Theodore (2001) further reason that New Labour has engaged in ‘fast policy transfer’ as it is perceived to deliver ‘quick fixes’ to domestic economic and social problems. By emulating seemingly successful policy solutions that address seemingly similar problems, policy prescriptions are available without time-consuming, costly policy formation and the rolling-out of ‘untested’ policies. More widely, McCann (2004, 2007) and Wolman and Page (2000, 2002) argue that the studying of policies elsewhere has been facilitated by the widespread availability of good-practice guides, reports, benchmarking studies and websites offering digestible descriptions of policy programmes and their successes.

Academic accounts frequently, and quite correctly, highlight the rationales, mechanisms, actors and institutions behind the mobilisation of policies (see, for example, Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; Evans, 2004; Evans and Davies, 1999; Jones and Newburn, 2007; Stone, 2004). These accounts, however, do have a tendency to underplay the *processes* through which policies are disembedded from, and re-embedded into, new political, economic and

social contexts and relations (Peck and Theodore, 2001). What is more, there has been little consideration of the multifaceted ways in which policies are interpreted and (re)presented as both ‘successful’ and ‘appropriate’. Policies, after all, are rarely transferred if they are considered inappropriate or (actually and potentially) unsuccessful. It is clear, therefore, that in order to understand fully the policy transfer of BIDs, a conceptual framework which emphasises the processual nature of policy transfer and the social construction of ‘success’ and ‘appropriateness’ is required. In this light, a framework will now be outlined.

Fundamentally, this conceptual framework is based on the ontological understanding that policy transfer involves the processual and contingent disembedding, mobilisation and re-embedding of policies. Furthermore, it is argued that policy transfer is borne out of dissatisfaction with existing domestic policies and is achieved through negotiation, persuasion and augmentation. Elaborating on these ideas, the framework emphasises six core yet overlapping aspects that need empirical and conceptual attention. These are:

1. *The identification and construction of domestic policy problems.* As policy transfer is often instigated by discontent with existing policies, attention needs to be paid to the processes and mechanisms through which domestic policy problems are identified, constructed, articulated and fed into the policy process.

2. *How policies are strategically selected and interpreted as being successful and appropriate.* Within this, four elements need attention. First, the methods and criteria through which actually existing policies and places are strategically selected (over others). Secondly, the disembedding of a policy—in other words, the material and discursive ways in which a policy is stripped of its territorial political, economic and social contexts and relations into its “administrative or methodological essence” or a ‘portable model’ (Peck and Theodore, 2001, p. 435). Thirdly,



how the model is conceived and presented as both already successful in the donor's locality and, in turn, soon-to-be-successful in the recipient's destination. Fourthly, how the model is conceived and presented as an appropriate means to 'fix' the domestic policy problem and appropriate to the recipient's social, economic and cultural context.

3. *How models are re-embedded into, and reshaped in, the new context.* Chronologically following on from this, three elements need to be addressed here. First, how the model, together with its previous and inherent successes, is conceived and presented as being transferable—that is, able to work successfully in the recipient's political, economic and social context. Secondly, how the model has deliberately been readjusted to fix the perceived policy problems, meet societal needs and work within existing governance strategies and institutions in the recipient's locality. Thirdly, how the model has been reshaped and reconstituted through its new contextual political, economic and social relations following its rolling-out and how the rolled-out policy, in turn, reconstitutes its political, economic and social context.

4. *How and why actually existing policies are discursively used as a legitimisation tool.* Attention needs to be paid to the ways in which policy-makers discursively utilise policies and places elsewhere, and their successes, in order to legitimise and gain support for these policy prescriptions and as part of *post hoc* policy justification. Within this, attention to the sources of the narratives and statistics as well as the dissemination strategies, consumption and recycling of these associative discourses is required.

5. *The actors and institutions involved in the policy transfer process and their roles within this.* The core state and non-state actors and institutions involved in the transfer at a variety of scales and places need to be pinpointed (such as elected officials, civil servants, consultants, think-tanks, media officials). Furthermore, the contingent power relations between the actors and

institutions, places and scales involved at the different stages also need to be teased out.

6. *The exclusions and silences within the policy transfer process.* Just as certain places, actually existing policies and practices, actors and institutions, and evaluation and re-embedding methods are strategically *involved* in policy transfer, others are *excluded* from the process. Therefore, attention needs to be paid to the silences and exclusions from the process. In other words, which places, actually existing policies and practices, actors and institutions, and evaluation and re-embedding methods have been overlooked, excluded or silenced and why?

This framework will now be utilised to conceptualise the recent transfer of BIDs into England and Wales. In order to understand this policy transfer, however, we must first turn to the 1990s when a policy problem within the management of town and city centres was surfacing and being articulated (and to which BIDs would soon after be proposed as a remedy).

### **3. Business Improvement Districts in(to) England and Wales**

#### *3.1 Identifying Policy Problems and Prescriptions in England and Wales*

The 1990s witnessed the widespread introduction of formal and informal local public-private partnerships (PPPs) responsible for the management of town and city centres in England and Wales. Popularly known as town centre management (TCM) schemes, their operations involve a mixture of 'janitorial' public space maintenance and more strategic planning and promotion of their centres (see Reeve, 2004; Warnaby *et al.*, 1998). Funded in large part by voluntary private-sector contributions, their goals were simple: to make their

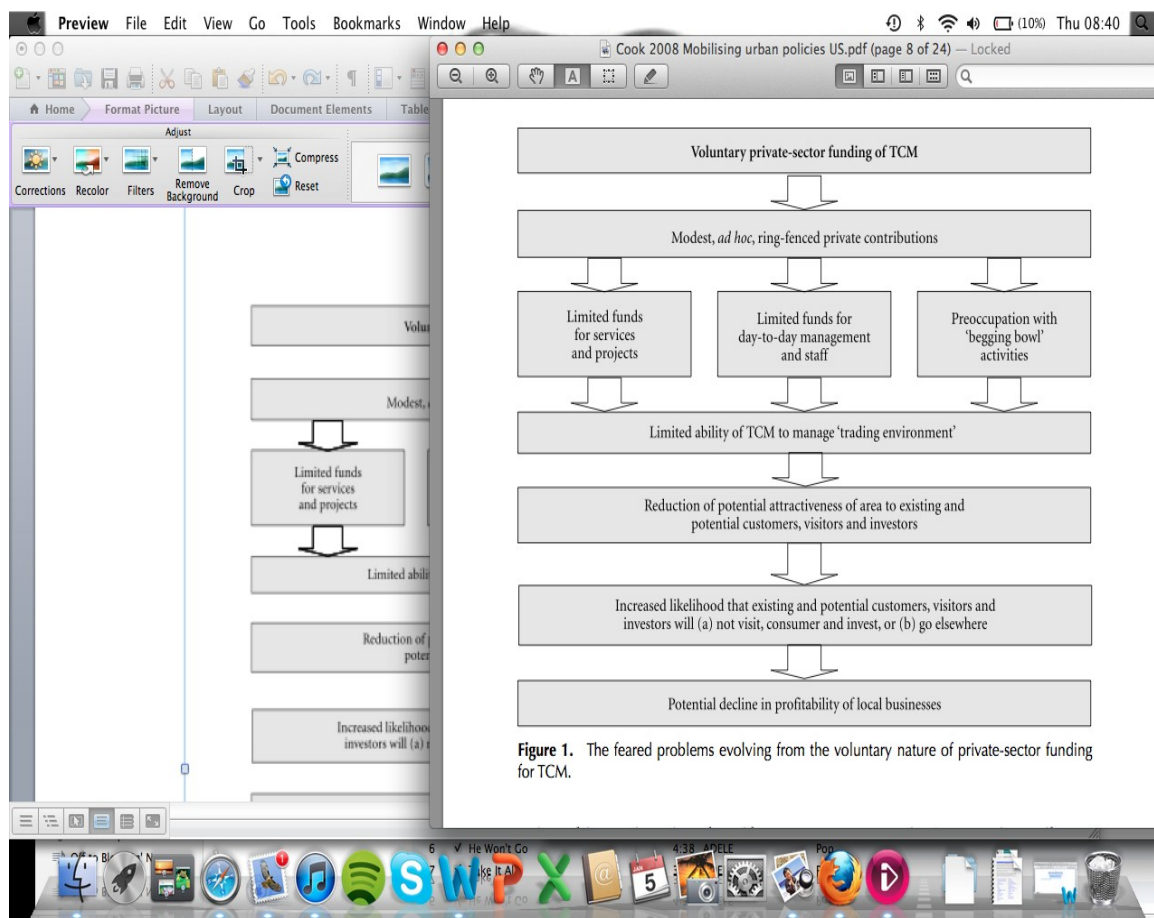
centres more economically competitive and attract higher footfall, spending and investment. Their introduction reflected the wider pluralisation and neo-liberalisation of the local state by the Conservative government. TCMs, in this sense, were one of many local PPPs—from Urban Development Corporations to Single Regeneration Budget boards—set up to stimulate economic growth through the ‘licensing out’ of state power to the private sector (Peck, 1995; Flinders, 2006). Their creation, importantly, was a response to a number of perceived problems on the high street. Most prominently, these were low consumer spending; the increased competition from neighbouring centres and the rising numbers of off-centre and out-of-town retailers; and a frustration with local council services by local businesses. Placing the private sector at the core of these partnerships, it was hoped, would unleash an efficient, innovative and market-sensitive approach to the governance of city centres. Capturing additional private-sector funding, it was further anticipated, would pay for this approach.

By the late 1990s, TCM schemes had, for some, played a role in strengthening the competitiveness of town and city centres and in places like Manchester and Leeds helped to revive consumer spending, investment and footfall (Department of the Environment, 1996; Revell, 1998). Nonetheless, discontent with TCM’s financing mechanisms grew amongst TCM officials and their professional organisation, the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM), in particular. Whilst most TCM schemes received substantial funding from their relevant local authority, the voluntary nature of private donations was considered problematic. For them, voluntary financing encouraged ‘free-riding’ from businesses who chose not to contribute financially to TCM but still enjoyed the ‘benefits for all’ as paid for by some of their neighbours.

Research by Medway *et al.* (1999, 2000) highlighted the reluctance of multiple retail chains and independent retailers to contribute financially to TCM schemes in the late 1990s. Not only were a very small minority of independent and multiple retailers contributing, their donations were modest, *ad hoc* and often ring-fenced for specific projects (such as CCTV installation, Christmas illuminations). This reluctance, therefore, led to limited funding for services, projects and the day-to-day running of TCM.

This critical lack of funding was deemed detrimental to the quality of the TCM services and projects. This, it was feared, would damage the ability of town and city centres to attract spending and investment and ‘fight off’ intraurban and interurban competition. In turn, this would harm the long-term profit margins of businesses in their locality (see Figure 1). The following quote from an interview with an official from the Plymouth City Centre Company (October 2006) is emblematic of the widespread frustration with TCM’s voluntary funding and the feared ramifications of it:

“The private sector provided limited amounts and a lot of free-riding was going on ... So it was a constant struggle to pull together something that was properly funded and would benefit everyone ... The partnership was not adequately funded. Not to deliver the service that we wanted. If you are talking about transforming the fortunes of the city centre, putting it on the map in terms of the region, and providing an environment that shoppers are attracted to ... then you have to have very significant resources.”



**Figure 1.** The feared problems evolving from the voluntary nature of private-sector funding for TCM.

For the ATCM, an alternative TCM funding mechanism was necessary and a policy prescription needed to provide sizeable, sustainable and long-term funding for TCM. This broad prescription was heavily influenced by the emerging trans-Atlantic relations and reciprocal interactions since the mid 1990s between the ATCM and the International Downtown Association (IDA)—a professional organisation for downtown management whose membership and reach is overwhelmingly North American based and focused. Through these strengthening ties, the ATCM became increasingly aware of BIDs in the US:

an actually existing and seemingly successful example of sizeable, sustainable and long-term funding for downtown management. A pivotal moment in the search for a policy alternative was the joint organisation, together with the International Urban Development Association (INTA, based in The Hague), of the first World Congress of City Centre and Downtown Management in Coventry in April 1996 (see Grigsby, 1996). Attended by ATCM, IDA and INTA members and other key UK policy-makers, the conference facilitated interaction between officials and members from the different organisations. Arguably the conference allowed many ATCM officials and other public and private officials to hear about and discuss the experiences and ‘successes’ of US BIDs in depth for the first time. As one organiser of the conference commented:

“We had speakers from all over Europe and from BIDs in the US. Talking about case studies, what they are doing, the good things, the bad things. People from all over, 800 or 900 people there in Coventry which was amazing ... [R]eally that was the first main exposure that we had as a country to Business Improvement Districts. And it was sponsored by government as well so we had the government ministers and senior civil servants there ... So there were all these connections going on, the Americans played a massive part ... A lot of people got a buzz out of it” (former senior official, Coventry City Council: interview, September 2006).

This conference, in sum, helped to confirm to ATCM officials the need for a similar system of sustainable, sizeable and long-term funding in England and Wales. However, when a more detailed policy prescription was developed by the ATCM and its consultants at URBED and Leeds Metropolitan University (Shutt *et al.*, 1999; URBED, 1997), BIDs were not the initial choice. Instead, ‘town improvement zones’ (TIZs) were proposed. At their

core, TIZs were a TCM funding mechanism that involved ‘matching’ of substantial public and private money over a fixed long-term period (rather than a BID mandatory levy on businesses or property owners and optional for other public and private organisations). The ATCM’s TIZs recommendations were further supported by the government-commissioned Urban Task Force (UTF) report advocating TIZs as one of 105 “practical solutions to bring people back into our cities, towns and urban neighbourhoods” (UTF, 1999, p. 1).

Whilst the New Labour government readily accepted the need for a system of sizeable, sustainable and long-term funding of TCM, they considered TIZs inappropriate. In short, the financial commitment required of local authorities and the still voluntary nature of private-sector funding in the policy prescription were unpopular (interview, New Labour MP, February 2006). Instead, a mandatory financial commitment from the private sector which could be ‘topped up’ voluntarily by financially constrained local authorities was deemed more appropriate. In the eyes of government, BIDs rather than TIZs offered this. Somewhat paradoxically, the ATCM’s constant use of US BIDs as examples of sizeable, sustainable and long-term TCM funding in their lobbying for TIZs, actually further encouraged governmental officials to introduce BIDs rather than TIZs.

The decision to formulate BIDs legislation in England and Wales was publicly confirmed by Tony Blair in April 2001 (see Blair, 2001). This was followed by the construction of legislation and regulations in England and Wales over the next few years. Passed in 2003 and 2004, the legislation and regulations focused exclusively on the creation, collection and administration of levies, voting mechanisms and appeals against the formation of BIDs. They did not cover the projects and services that BIDs could deliver<sup>1</sup> with these decisions devolved to local BIDs’ boards. Furthermore, BIDs were neither

compulsory urban governance schemes nor mandatory replacements of TCM schemes. TCM could either ‘evolve’ into a BID, the BID could become the service-focused subsidiary of the more strategically minded TCM scheme, the BID and the TCM could co-exist as separate institutions, or a BID could emerge where no TCM scheme had previously existed. This organisational decision was also a ‘local decision’. With the legislation and regulations in place, the first local BID in England and Wales went ‘live’ in Kingston upon Thames on New Year’s Day 2005.

### *3.2 Utilising the US East Coast Model*

At this point, it is important to focus on two interrelated issues: first, the processes through which US BIDs were considered successful and appropriate; and, secondly, the exact ways in which US BID policies and practices have been drawn upon in the development of BIDs in England and Wales. In relation to the first issue, there was no apparent *detailed* commissioned or governmental research into the experience of BIDs abroad and their potential appropriateness prior to the decision to construct BIDs legislation. Instead, the government itself engaged in limited, *ad hoc* and arguably somewhat uncritical research into the success of US BIDs and their suitability to England and Wales. This included occasional informal meetings with US BID and IDA officials, the digestion of the examples of US BID ‘success stories’ as told by the ATCM and a brief study tour of a BID in Bryant Park in June 1997 by a group of senior MPs (including John Prescott and Richard Caborn) and senior officials from the then Department of the Environment (Harding, 1999; interview, senior official, Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, July 2005). These methods were considered sufficient to establish two key criteria: first, that BIDs were successful in the US; and, secondly, that,



with slight alterations, they would ‘work’ in England and Wales.

This interest in, and utilisation of, US BIDs by English and Welsh policy-makers did not stop following Blair’s announcement to introduce BIDs. Instead, during the development of the subsequent legislation, regulations, BID pilot schemes and governmental BIDs ‘good-practice’ guidance, the glances towards the US—and selected US BIDs in particular—became more formalised, frequent and influential (interview, New Labour MP, February 2006). This was largely due to two factors: first, the perceived belief that the formulation of *detailed* BIDs policy and practice required much more thorough understandings of ‘what works’ (and what does not) than the previous *ad hoc* glances abroad; and, secondly, the institutionalisation of the ATCM (in the construction of BIDs regulations and the governance of the BIDs pilot scheme) brought a simultaneous institutionalisation of the ATCM’s belief that successful policies of US BIDs and the expertise of US officials must constantly be drawn upon.

The national US BIDs experience, when disembedded and stripped down to its “administrative and methodological essence” (Peck and Theodore, 2001, p. 435), provided a portable and abstract *definition* of a BID—that is, a publicly sanctioned yet privately directed organisation that supplements public and private services to improve shared, geographically defined, outdoor public spaces and business services through a multiyear, compulsory property owner taxation mechanism (Hoyt, 2004). Clearly though, this was too abstract to be a fully-fledged policy prescription ready to be inserted into England and Wales. More detailed legislative and regulatory policy prescriptions and ‘good-practice’ guidance were therefore largely developed from readings of selected local US BIDs. This focus on *local* BIDs can be partly explained by the fragmented legislative system in the US where BIDs are

enabled by state laws and officially established by local ordinances; this leads to a wide variety of BID governance mechanisms, legislations and services (Briffault, 1999; Houstoun, 2003; Morçöl and Zimmerman, 2006). This made detailed, coherent and nation-wide lessons difficult to find, construct and, in turn, utilise.

The BID cities that dominated the mind-sets of English and Welsh policy-makers and advocates were the large east-coast cities of New York, Philadelphia and Washington. Within these cities, the downtown BIDs in Philadelphia (the Center City District) and Washington (Downtown DC BID) and New York's three Midtown 42nd Street BIDs (Times Square Alliance, Bryant Park Corporation and Grand Central Partnership) preoccupied the English and Welsh élites' attention.

Of course, we need further to ask *why* these particular east coast downtown BIDs (here-after ECDBIDs) and BID cities were selected? In the numerous trans-Atlantic interviews conducted, a variety of reasons were cited. These include the impressive variety of services offered by these BIDs; the number and variety of BIDs within each city; the hospitable and charismatic nature of the BIDs officials; and their relative accessibility to organisers and participants of English and Welsh study tours. Arguably though, the prime reason for their selection was the BIDs' association with, and perceived centrality to, the very visible and much publicised regeneration and 'upgrading' of their districts and their wider downtowns (Ward, 2006). Many of these overlapping factors were highlighted by one of the senior IDA officials interviewed (August 2005):

“BIDs on the East Coast, in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, attract a lot of the attention because they have got everything, you know, the budgets, the programmes, the personas ... and the BIDs with the glossy presentations ... and [the

officials in] New York and Philadelphia say some interesting stories about how the area has changed ... become better.”

The English and Welsh policy-makers and advocates, therefore, were subtly influenced by the wider media and policy discourses around urban regeneration, revived economies, reduced levels of crime and revived public spaces within these downtowns and cities and in the US more generally. Through highly simplified casual linkages between the BIDs’ operations and the transformations in the area, the ECDBIDs were promoted and interpreted (somewhat uncritically) as ‘successful’ and, therefore, worthy of emulation. To establish their successes, already-existing statistics and narratives were drawn upon largely from the BIDs’ documents and websites. The statistics and narratives contained within these documents, of course, were somewhat self-congratulatory with the BID operations heralded as central to the dramatic transformations in their districts. Visitor numbers, occupancy rates, rental values and crime statistics dominated the carefully selected statistics within these texts (see Caruso and Weber, 2006). Together with the glossy photographs of the area (frequently binary ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures), they offered a very attractive and deceptively simple policy success story. Furthermore, from the interviews conducted, many policymakers and advocates were rarely critical of these statistics, narratives and casual linkages being promoted. For some, arguably, simply being told that the policy was ‘successful’ was enough to convince them of its success and applicability.

Echoing the decision-making process prior to Blair’s announcement, there was a continued reliance on *ad hoc* evaluation methodologies during the development of governmental legislation, regulations and good-practice guidance. For instance, the methods continued to include the reading of websites and official BID publications and listening to

US BID officials at conferences. However, unlike before, the emphasis was now on what *precise* practices and ways of governing were successful and transferable, rather than on trying to establish whether BIDs, in general, were successful and transferable.

One particularly prominent and more formalised methodology, however, was developed and utilised during the development of regulations and good-practice guidance: study tours. The various high-profile study tours were organised by the ATCM as well as the London-based Circle Initiative and the British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA). They allowed national, regional and local policy-makers, pilot BID officials, business association officials and potential local BID governors to visit schemes in the US. The east-coast downtowns dominated the various study tours. However, selected smaller BIDs within Washington and Philadelphia were occasionally visited (and their senior officials introduced) and Baltimore's Downtown Partnership was visited on several occasions. Furthermore, one ATCM study tour also visited BIDs in Tampa, Florida and Richmond, Virginia (interview, senior official no. 1, ATCM, February 2006). These destinations were selected, on the whole, by the organisers themselves. The interviews conducted with the various host officials, study tour organisers and participants revealed a common itinerary involving meeting with host senior officials, watching presentations overviewing the development and governance of the BID and its 'impact' on its neighbourhood and viewing their on-the-ground operations (such as watching the street-cleaning operations).

Behind the various study tours was an implicit epistemological and methodological belief that by 'seeing' and 'experiencing' first-hand, the operations and 'successes' of the BIDs would be better visualised and understood. In turn, it was assumed that better-quality transferable lessons would be formulated from these more accurate first-hand

understandings. As one ATCM senior official (no. 2, interview, February 2006) explained:

“You can read about [BIDs], you can then try and explain [what you have read] to a certain extent to people but actually going there, seeing it on the ground, meeting the individuals who are actually running it as opposed to just hearing them present at a conference, having a chance to ask the naïve questions, and that was the thing that made the real difference. ATCM ran a study tour that I went on ... [with] 45 of us, I think, went out from all of the pilots ... and we all came back as total enthusiasts for it but also [had] the answers and the ability then to present it in our own locations, to say, here’s what they do, and have the detailed answers ... You needed somebody to be on the ground who has experienced it and can understand it, and it changed from being an abstract concept of ‘oh, it is better-funded town centre management’ to being much more detailed, real thing that you could sell.”

Of course, this quotation points to another important rationale behind the study tours: they were promotional exercises. That is, they were used to sell the concept of BIDs to policymakers, ATCM members, local businesses and business associations (although it is highly unlikely that hardened critics of BIDs went on the study tours). The content of the study tours, however, was not always deemed appropriate and the ‘time away’ was considered too long by some potential participants:

“To be honest, study tours sound like a great idea but the problem was that early on my role was very broad and to rule out three, four or five days to go off and look at American BIDs ... was not something I could easily do ... Also I was not particularly interested in some of the things on it such as seeing how the warden schemes are working in America” (senior national official, Boots: interview, December 2006).

What is more, accepting a place on the study tours led in several cases to accusations of wasting public or private monies on ‘jollies’ (for example, see Rankin, 2003) or, as one unnamed US-based interviewee labelled it, “blatant policy tourism”. It is clear, therefore, that the ways in which policies elsewhere are ‘experienced’ and assessed are by no means universally utilised or welcomed.

### *3.3 The ECDBIDs as an Associative Legitimation Tool*

The ECDBIDs have been, and continue to be, heavily used as discursive tools both to gain support for their policy prescriptions and to justify the rolling-out of policies and practices. This appropriation of US BID ‘examples’ remains common-place throughout the speeches, policy documents, formal documents, meetings and conversations by English and Welsh policy-makers and advocates. Importantly, the construction, dissemination and consumption of these associative discourses and narratives are contingent and have been frequently circulated, recycled and reshaped for different groups for varying purposes. However, there are commonalities in the associative techniques and narratives used and the reasons behind this.

The reasoning behind these associative techniques is quite apparent. From attempts to encourage MPs to vote for BID legislation to promotional efforts to encourage local businesses that a BID in their area is a ‘best investment decision’ (Raynsford, 2005a, p. 1), numerous public and private actors and institutions had to be convinced of the validity of the policy alternative. In order to achieve this, its advocates argued how and why these policies and practices will be successful once implemented. By associating the proposed

policy with actually existing examples of similar and successful policies, it was assumed that further legitimacy would be brought to their policy prescriptions. This tapped into, and attempted to reshape, two underlying widespread ‘common-sense’ understandings of the audiences: first, that BIDs were successful financing mechanisms for TCM and urban regeneration in general (particularly in the US east coast)<sup>2</sup>; and, secondly, what was successful elsewhere would be successful in their locality, albeit with slight adjustments (see Peck and Theodore, 2001).

Impressive, overwhelmingly positive, audience-tailored and (most importantly) digestible narratives, statistics and examples of successful policies and practices elsewhere were central to these associative discourses. What is more, the desire to impress was reflected in the strategic choice of, and repetitive use of, the “big Rolls-Royce models of the east coast of the States” (interview, senior official, London BIDs, February 2006) and the Times Square Alliance in particular. The associative use of the ECDBIDs and their perceived successes was deemed to add kudos and respectability to their arguments. These discourses furthermore deliberately tapped into, and attempted to reshape, the audience’s existing ‘geographical imaginations’ and cognitive understandings of these places, particularly Times Square and New York City. These were conditioned in part by the wider and very positive media discourses of regeneration and by the economic, political and crime-control successes ‘against the odds’ in these areas mentioned earlier. In turn, associative discourses sought to flatter the audience with suggestions that their area could be as economically and socially successful as Times Square providing they followed the suggested ‘parallel’ policy prescription.

Two particular common-place associative discursive techniques were commonly

drawn upon, and continue to be drawn upon, particularly by local officials trying to encourage support and positive votes for their proposed local BID scheme. The first is the use of brief and anecdotal examples and case studies of the operations and successes of selected US BIDs—especially the ECDBIDs—within domestic policy documents, conversations and speeches (for an example, see Figure 2). Secondly, the repetitive use of phrases such as the precursor ‘US-style’ or the use of ‘as was successful in’ instantly highlights the similarities between the two policies and places. Both techniques, however, were frequently used explicitly to connect, or transfer, the kudos and successes of the ECDBIDs with the future or existing developments of the author’s or speaker’s BID project.

At the time of writing, however, BID practitioners and supporters are increasingly using the associative discourses of ECDBID successes in conjunction with discourses of the successes of the various BID pilots and the initial ‘live’ BIDs in England and Wales. The underlying theme behind the discursive use of *both* US and domestic examples is that BIDs are not only successful in the US but also ‘here’ in England and Wales. The experiences of pilot schemes, therefore, are increasingly being constructed and utilised as both an associative legitimisation tool and, as I will now demonstrate, as a policy and practice ‘re-embedding’ mechanism.



## We know it **works!**

Research shows that customers, residents and businesses using Kingston want a cleaner and safer town centre which is well maintained and better promoted. The American experience shows that **BIDs** can and do deliver this. There are hundreds of **BIDs** in North America of varying sizes and with vastly different budgets which demonstrate remarkable results for their local areas.

### Cleaner environment

Times Square, New York **BID** has a 50 person crew, working in two 8 hour shifts between 6.00am and 10.00pm, 7 days a week.

Sidewalk cleanliness ratings now regularly exceed 90%, compared to 54% when the **BID** began.

Source: *British Retail Consortium*

Street cleansing in Times Square, New York



"The BRC recognises that, if properly implemented, Business Improvement Districts could provide retailers with an important tool to co-ordinate collective investment to improve their trading environment. BID services however must be genuinely additional to statutory and accustomed local authority provision and deliver tangible benefits to the retail community."

British Retail Consortium

### Safer streets

Metrotech New York **BID** employs 28 security officers providing a 24/7 walking and scooter patrol. The **BID** also provides 23 CCTV cameras (monitored 24 hours a day) connected to the police department radio link.

There has been a 78% reduction in crime since the formation of the **BID**.

Source: *British Retail Consortium*

'Meeting and Greeting' in New York



### Better transport

In 2002 the Baltimore Downtown Partnership secured a \$5 million grant for a commuter park and ride scheme.

Additionally, tireless effort and advocacy by the Partnership has resulted in an extra 3,300 new parking spaces.

Transport success in Baltimore



### More customers

The Downtown Washington **BID** attracted an additional 500,000 people to cultural and entertainment activities in 2002, including an audience of 10,000 to a **BID** annual concert on a summer Saturday evening.

10,000 people at a **BID** concert in Washington



w w w . k i n g s t o n f i r s t . c o . u k

Figure 2. Associative legitimisation of BIDs through the successes of the ECDBIDs

Source: Kingston First (2004, p. 5).

### *3.4 Re-embedding and Reshaping English and Welsh BIDs*

Whilst there was a widespread and a somewhat uncritical belief that successful ECDBIDs would be successful in England and Wales, this was tempered by a widespread understanding that these models could not simply be ‘dropped’ unproblematically onto towns and cities throughout England and Wales. In addition to elements of ECDBIDs’ policy and practice being omitted and overlooked by English and Welsh policy-makers, the aspects that were transferred were often reshaped to fit perceived national and local contexts and requirements. Within this, numerous re-embedding strategies and mechanisms were developed and two particular nationally orchestrated examples will now be highlighted.

The most disputed aspect in the translation of US BIDs into English and Welsh legislation was the alteration of the roles of property owners and business tenants in the financing and voting of local BIDs. The system of levying (that is, taxing) property owners in US BID areas was seen by government officials as incommensurable with the existing system of collecting local business taxation through business occupier rates in England and Wales (interview, senior New Labour MP, February 2006). Ministers argued that the taxing of property owners would require the creation of a register of property owners and the introduction of “a new tax” leading to unnecessary “administrative burdens” on local billing authorities (Raynsford, 2003, p. 1). A much simpler system was proposed whereby business occupiers were levied through an extension to the already-existing ‘business rates’ taxation mechanism. In turn, as business occupiers were the only group to pay the levy, they were also the only group eligible to vote to establish (or re-establish) a BID in their area. Property owners and residents, therefore, could not vote in local BID elections although both could

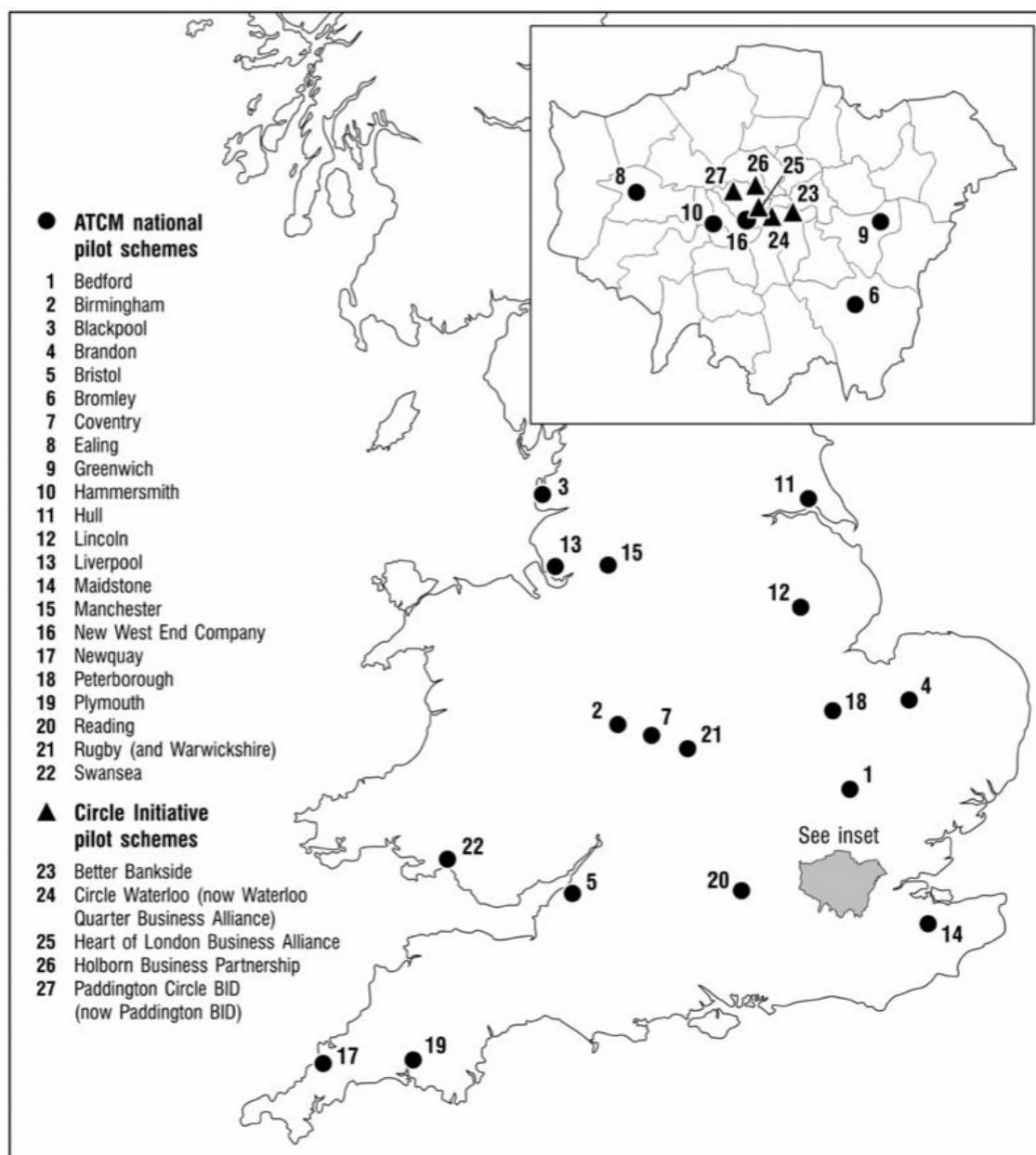
make voluntary contributions and have seats on the boards if approached.

This re-embedding strategy by the government, however, was poorly received by several business groups. Indeed, the ATCM, the Circle Initiative and several business associations including the British Retail Consortium and the British Property Federation lobbied the government to amend the legislative Bill (Ashworth, 2003; Hirst, 2003; Mackenzie, 2003). Although these organisations were, and continue to be, largely in support of BIDs, their arguments were twofold. First, with no voting power, property owners would have little influence in the creation and operations of local BIDs. Secondly, tenants would be more reluctant to vote for local BIDs as they would fear that it could lead to increased rents and property owners ‘freeloading’ on tenants’ levy contributions (Ashworth, 2003). These criticisms, however, were rejected by the government, although they did agree to conduct a long-term review of the role of property owners in BIDs legislation (see York Consulting, 2006).

Another key re-embedding mechanism took place after the passing of the legislation. This was the piloting of BIDs in selected towns and cities in England and Wales and the construction of ‘official’ good-practice guidance from the local pilots. Two pilot governing schemes materialised in England and Wales: a central London ‘Circle Initiative’ pilot scheme with five local pilots and an ODPM-commissioned, ATCM co-ordinated ‘national’ pilot scheme with 21 local pilots in England and one in Wales (see Figure 3). Whilst the Circle Initiative pilot schemes showcased on-the-ground services and local governance structures from January 2001 to March 2006 (interview, senior official, London BIDs, February 2006), it was not as influential as the ‘official’ ATCM pilot scheme in the development of BIDs policy and practice within England and Wales. For this reason, I shall concentrate on

detailing the ATCM pilot scheme.

The ATCM pilot scheme ran from January 2003 to June 2005 and was one of the many New-Labour-commissioned urban policy pilot schemes (see Jowell, 2003). The ATCM pilots, however, were not ‘traditional’ pilot schemes as they were neither a precursor to the governmental decision to legislate BIDs nor did they seek to ‘demonstrate’ the effectiveness of on-the-ground BID services and projects as the name ‘pilot’ suggests. Instead, the ATCM pilots were more public-private ‘talking-shops’ responsible for formulating individual business plans for, and gaining business support for, post-pilot ballots. In other words, they were responsible for making the pilot schemes ‘ballot-ready’ (interview, senior official no. 1, ATCM, February 2006). However, the ATCM pilots played a wider and perhaps more crucial role in the re-embedding of BIDs in two ways. First, the local pilot officials assisted the ODPM in the construction and wording of BID regulations in England. Secondly, selected ‘good practices’ from the pilots’ development were extracted, generalised and formed key elements of the ATCM’s, the ODPM’s and the National Assembly for Wales’ ‘official’ good-practice (written and verbal) guidance (see for example, Reilly and Szabo, 2005).



**Figure 3.** The location of BID pilot schemes in England and Wales

It was felt by ATCM and ODPM officials that the good-practice guidance developed from the ATCM pilot schemes would be appropriate for all practitioners and places in England and Wales due to the large number of local pilots and the variety of local contexts

in which these pilots were inserted and developed. Indeed, a range of ‘geographical locations’ was an explicit goal in the pilot selection process (Reilly and Szabo, 2005). As Jacque Reilly (2003, p. 8) of the ATCM argued, the selection process “wasn’t about saying ‘These are the ten strongest candidates for a BID’ but ‘How can we research how it works in different places’”. However, on closer inspection, the ‘nation-wide’ tag and the implied ‘geographical variety’ of pilots are debatable with, for instance, only one pilot scheme within Wales (Swansea) and no pilot schemes in industrial estates (where several live BIDs have subsequently emerged). Furthermore, the explicitly geographical aspect of the selection process was based upon naïve understandings of local contextual difference, with locations selected primarily for their different economic fortunes, business residents and, perhaps most crudely, population sizes. This, in turn, means that the already-problematic labeling of the good practice developed as ‘generic’ and ‘nationally applicable’ is somewhat inappropriate and, even, misleading.

These re-embedding mechanisms and strategies, therefore, demonstrate yet again that a straightforward importation of BIDs from the ECDBIDs did not take place. Instead, the reality reflects Reilly’s (2003, p. 8) assertion that “the USA may have been the inspiration for BIDs in the UK, but the UK system is not a straightforward clone”. What is more, the various local English and Welsh BID schemes are embedded into, and emerging from, a contextually specific and often highly path-dependent set of social, economic and political relations and networks (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). The BIDs’ internal structures, goals and services have, therefore, been shaped, constrained and facilitated by their local and extra-local *context* and the relationship between them. Most importantly, they are constituted by the (interpretation of) localised customs, mechanisms and goals of politically organising businesses, delivering public and business services and partnership-working. Relatedly, local

BIDs are also shaped by their interactive, and often reciprocal, *relations* with other actors and institutions (for instance, through consultation, joint working and, of course, conflict).

Within this, BIDs are also shaped internally by the insights, decisions and debates of local economic and political representatives on their boards and committees. However, not only are BIDs constituted by the contextual relations and connections that they are embedded in and actively construct, they also actively reshape these contextual relations and connections. Indeed, the rolling-out of BIDs reconstitutes wider mechanisms and practices of politically organising businesses and delivering public and business services in which they are situated.

In sum, then, through deliberate re-embedding mechanisms and the BIDs' national and local contextual relations, BIDs—from Coventry's city centre to Bolton's industrial estates—are significantly different from their 'origins' in the US east coast.

### *3.5 (Legitimising) Exclusions and Silences*

The BIDs policy transfer process involved strategic exclusions and silencing which now need to be highlighted and examined. Perhaps the most telling absence from the policy transfer and rolling-out of BIDs was the lack of involvement by employees, residents and the wider public. These groups were rarely involved in constructing national and local BIDs policies and practices on both sides of the Atlantic. From New York City to Bristol, they continue to be unable to vote in local BID elections and are largely absent from local partnership boards<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, the desire to meet the perceived and actual *direct* needs and desires of employees, residents and citizens was absent and silenced. Instead, the direct needs and desires of employers, businesses and, to a lesser extent, consumers prevailed. The

construction of a funding alternative for TCM and the development of Business Improvement Districts, as the name suggests, was conceived and legitimised as a *business* policy (interview, senior official, National Assembly for Wales, March 2006). Therefore, New Labour created new institutional spaces (Jones, 1999) at national and local scales for businesses and employers rather than residents, employees and the wider public.

In many ways, this institutionalisation of business leaders and the prioritisation of ‘business needs’ was legitimised through discourses emphasising the benefits of BIDs to businesses, local government and consumers alike. Nick Raynsford, the ex-Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions, for instance, argued that the benefits of BIDs “will not be felt by businesses alone: people from local areas and beyond will enjoy a cleaner, safer, more pleasant environment in which to shop, work and socialise. Bids are therefore a real win:win” (Raynsford, 2005b, p. 1). This echoes MacDonald’s (2000, p. 401) argument that benefits produced by BIDs are “available to all city residents, not just BID members. We are all free riders on BIDs expenditure”.

The BIDs’ focus on the needs of businesses was justified through the rhetoric of ‘trickle-down’. These discourses revolved around the assumption that the BIDs policies for, and by, businesses would indirectly but eventually benefit the wider *consuming* public, primarily through a more competitive local economy and an improved ‘trading environment’ and ‘shopping experience’. BIDs were also promoted as being beneficial to local governments through bringing additional and supplementary public and business services without public costs (although local governments can make voluntary donations).

In many senses, the framing of BIDs as a ‘business policy’ guided what was searched for, and noted by, the English and Welsh policy-makers in their observations of ECDBIDs.



Relatedly, this also guided what was promoted by the US BIDs and IDA officials (who also viewed BIDs as a business policy) when faced with interested observers from England, Wales and elsewhere. Combined, it is unsurprising that positive business narratives of revived economies and trading environments, incorporating statistics of increased visitor numbers and occupancy rates, dominated English and Welsh policy-makers' discourses and mindsets. Other aspects which were not directly linked to profitability were considered unimportant and not promoted, heard about, observed or emulated. For instance, the US BIDs' ability (or inability) to improve either employees' work conditions and pay or the public space and 'shopping experience' for those with low or no consumer power were rarely, if ever, of interest to on-looker policy-makers and advocates. What is more, these issues were rarely espoused when legitimising national legislation and regulations or local proposals in England and Wales. After all, locally it was only businesses—in the form of occupiers—who were able to vote to establish BIDs and not residents, employees or the public in general. These issues, therefore, were dismissed as either irrelevant or uncompetitive.

In addition, nationally and locally, there was a widespread reluctance to emulate the frequently used US discourses promoting the BIDs' purported ability to increase rental values of local properties (see Ellen *et al.*, 2006). This reluctance is not because of a belief that the linkages between BIDs and increased property values are tenuous. Instead, it reflects the contentious decision by Whitehall, highlighted earlier, to levy business occupiers rather than property owners. Should occupiers hear such discourses, they might be less likely to vote for a BID scheme, fearing that its success may make occupiers vulnerable to increased rents.

When English and Welsh local and national policy-makers studied and talked about the ECDBIDs, they were selective in what they studied, remembered, adapted and used to legitimise their schemes. This, however, was fundamentally conditioned by the initial selectivity of the host US BIDs and IDA senior officials. It is these officials who, for instance, showcased their BIDs on the study tours and conferences and compiled their annual reports and websites that the English and Welsh policy-makers and advocates drew upon. It is unsurprising, therefore, that neither the hosts' reports, presentations and agendas nor the on-lookers' notes rarely featured the BIDs' shortfalls and failures. It is, therefore, quite possible that English and Welsh policy-makers and advocates may have been, or continue to be, unaware of many of the existing problems, shortfalls and negative consequences of US BIDs' policies and practices such as those outlined earlier on in the introduction.

More widely, it is useful to examine why certain places, which have their own BID schemes, were ignored or sidelined by English and Welsh policy-makers and explain why this is important. Perhaps the most evident absence is the experiences of BIDs *outside* the US, especially that of Canada—where they first emerged and spread under the guise of Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). No research was conducted into the success and appropriateness of BIDs in Canada or elsewhere outside the US. Arguably, though, the US BID system was selected over Canadian (or South African or other) systems for four largely anecdotal reasons: first, its perception as hosting more 'innovative' and, with the exception of Canada, older and more developed BIDs than elsewhere; secondly, selected US BIDs and their areas' regeneration 'success stories' were already much better known in English and Welsh policy-making circles; thirdly, US BIDs were seen as developing in supposedly more similar political-economic contexts; and, fourthly, through the emerging relationship between

the ATCM and IDA, the US had far stronger personal and professional ties with the advocates and policy-makers in England and Wales.

Within the US, BIDs in towns and cities that had not visibly undergone an aesthetic transformation or, on paper, reversed downtown decline were seldom, if ever, drawn upon. Unsurprisingly then, the BIDs in Detroit or Camden, New Jersey, for instance, were rarely heard of or spoken about in England and Wales. Furthermore, suburban and rural BIDs did not attract much interest. Arguably, though, a more explicit focus on these by England and Welsh policy-makers and advocates may have informed the policy process in three useful ways: first, by dampening the often overenthusiastic, grandiose claims of BIDs advocates; secondly, by providing examples of what policies and practices were *not* successful; and, thirdly, by revealing how they work outside large downtown districts.

Relatedly, the exclusive focus on the ECDBIDs left English and Welsh policy-makers with an unenviable dilemma. Whilst the budgets of the ECDBIDs were impressive, they were far larger budgets per square footage of public space than any BID could hope to achieve across the Atlantic. This was due to the vast size and value of the commercial properties in the ECDBIDs' boundaries (especially those in Midtown Manhattan). Therefore, they could provide particular services and a particular level of service that places elsewhere are simply unable to afford. It is also almost impossible to replicate these finances without huge public subsidies or large business taxations. This, in turn, left local BID policy-makers in England and Wales with the almost-impossible situation of wishing to replicate the ECDBIDs without having the funds to do so. Attempting to emulate such cities clearly had its drawbacks.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the processes and conduits through which Business Improvement Districts have travelled from the US to England and Wales. In doing this, it has shown how and why a new and important form of urban governance has been adopted, rolled out and discursively legitimised. More specifically, the paper has explored how BIDs were promoted (albeit inadvertently) as providing a sizeable, sustainable and long-term financing mechanism for fiscally struggling town centre management schemes. It has also demonstrated that lessons were not simply drawn from ‘nation-wide’ US experiences and policies, but from particular east coast downtown BIDs. These caught the attention of English and Welsh élites because of their associations with the much-heralded regeneration and economic revival in their business districts. Quite simply, they were seen as being highly successful and, therefore, worthy of emulation. What is more, narratives of these ECDBIDs were consistently drawn upon by national and local policy-makers in England and Wales to legitimise their policy decisions and ‘demonstrate’ the success and, in turn, the potential of BIDs. The paper, furthermore, has reflected on the ways in which the BID ‘model’ was reshaped for, and within, the English and Welsh context. From the various pilot schemes to the decision to make occupiers rather than owners pay the BID levy, the BID model has been deliberately reshaped to ‘fit’ its new economic, social and cultural contexts.

Whilst the paper focuses empirically on BIDs, it also speaks to the wider literature on, and conceptualisations of, urban policy transfer. The process-based framework together with the empirical study have underlined six fundamental aspects about the nature of policy transfer that require academic attention. First, policy transfer involves, directly and indirectly, a wide variety of actors and institutions within and beyond formal state institutions, situated

in complex power-relations, at and across various places and scales. Secondly, policy transfer is largely born out of dissatisfaction with existing policies, whereby these policies are considered to be (now) inappropriate, unsuccessful and in need of alteration. Thirdly, similar to the previous point, policies elsewhere are evaluated largely on their existing and ‘forthcoming’ success and appropriateness. The methods and criteria used to judge these policies are often qualitative, informal and *ad hoc* whilst the criteria used are frequently narrowly economic. Fourthly, policy transfer involves complex processes whereby policies are disembedded from, and re-embedded into, new political, economic and social contexts and relations. Upon re-embedding, policies are both deliberately and inadvertently reshaped into new forms. Fifthly, policy transfer is inherently discursive as it involves argumentation, negotiation and legitimisation. Policies elsewhere and their successes, furthermore, are frequently drawn upon in order to justify future or previous policies or practices. Sixthly and finally, policy transfer is inherently selective with certain policies, practices, discourses, actors, institutions and methods being used whilst others are sidelined or silenced.

These six points, when used in conjunction, offer a nuanced way in which conceptually to frame further work into what McCann (2007) calls “urban policy mobilities”. To be sure, more research into BIDs and urban policy transfer is required. For instance, in numerous post-communist central European states, interest in BIDs is growing with BIDs already established in Serbia and Albania and being discussed and formulated in several others (Hoyt, 2006). This is fascinating, on-going and arguably part of the wider Westernisation and neo-liberalisation of these states. Yet, it has received little of the academic attention that it so clearly deserves. More research into BIDs within England and Wales is also necessary. At the time of writing, it is too early to provide a thorough analysis of the actual successes and long-term trajectories of BIDs in England and Wales. Future

research is, therefore, necessary to capture their on-going national and local evolution, development and mobilisation. Although high-profile and important elements of the contemporary urban governance landscape, BIDs, however, are merely the tip of the ‘urban policy mobilities’ iceberg. Further empirical and conceptual research is required to understand fully the intricacies, processes, mechanisms and geographies of urban policy transfer and the framework offered in this paper can be utilised to research this.

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1

"Reflecting the limited devolution process in Wales under New Labour, the National Assembly for Wales (NAW) was granted powers to construct regulations for BIDs in Wales, although the ODPM was responsible for constructing the initial and wider BID legislation for England and Wales (as well as regulations for England). In contrast, Scottish BIDs legislation and regulations were passed by the Scottish Executive in 2006 and 2007 respectively, with local BIDs set to roll out from 2008 onwards (Scottish Executive, 2007). This paper, however, will not comment further on the development of BIDs in Scotland.

2

This common-sense understanding is reflected in the ATCM's Jacquie Reilly's (2004, p. 21) assertion that BIDs' "potential for improving the public realm cannot be disputed".

3

The latter is in contrast to Blair's wider partnership agenda which has, to a limited extent and in particular policy areas, sought to involve selected 'community' and 'voluntary' actors on local partnership boards (Raco and Flint, 2001).