



IMAGINING URBAN FUTURES WORKING PAPER 2

**Business Improvement Districts: policy origins,
mobile policies, and urban liveability**

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Abstract

This paper reviews the trans-nationalisation of Business Improvement Districts. It outlines the geographical and ideological origins of this much heralded approach to downtown governance, and the means through which it has found itself in such diverse settings as Cape Town in South Africa, Kruševac in Serbia and Liverpool in the UK. Analysing the emergence of Business Improvement Districts in terms of the external edges of the state and its internal architecture, on the one hand, and, on the other, in the context of discussions around urban liveability, this paper reviews work across geography, planning, political science and sociology. It concludes by arguing that Business Improvement Districts are both interesting in their own right, for what they reveal about contemporary trans-national trends in urban governance, and for what they have to say about wider processes of neo-liberal urbanization.

1. Introduction

Walk around the centres of cities and towns in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the US and it is likely that you will encounter individuals in brightly coloured uniforms with gleaming smiles. They may approach you and ask if you need help, handing you a brochure detailing the nearest shopping mall or pointing you in the direction of a close-at-hand coffee shop. This is all well and good if you look and act appropriately. However, if they feel your presence in the area threatens the veneer of civility that they are active in producing they may have a quiet word, perhaps suggesting you leave the vicinity. Clearly not public police officers, for the uniforms are too garish and the look too casual, these are the 'ambassadors' of the local Business Improvement District, combining public service and private management activities. As Hoyt (2006, 222) has put it, they 'function as the "eyes and ears" of the police', ensuring the 'securization of consumption ... [in order to produce] ... enclaves of contentment and encourage the pursuit of pleasure' (Rose 1999, 253; see also Christopherson 1994).

So what are Business Improvement Districts? Despite the voluminous academic and practitioner literature there is no single definition. However, it is possible to discern some generally agreed characteristics (Steel and Symes 2005; Symes and Steel 2003; Davies 1997; Hoyt 2003, 2004, 2006; Houstoun 2005; Mitchell 2001a, 2001b; Morçöl and Zimmerman 2006a, Ward 2006a). Business Improvement Districts are public-private partnerships, in which property and business owners in a defined geographic area elect to make a collective contribution to the maintenance, development and marketing/promotion of their commercial district. In the UK this contribution is

compulsory for all businesses within the area once the Business Improvement District is established, setting it apart from predecessors such as town management schemes. In the US it is compulsory for all property owners. In other countries, such as Australia, the contribution is not compulsory. Formation tends to involve a number of steps, involving the local canvassing opinions, and a vote on the establishment of a Business Improvement District. Who can vote, and the result that is required in order for a Business Improvement District to be established differs from one country to another. Assuming a 'yes' vote, a management structure is established, comprising representatives of businesses, the local authority and others with a stake in the economic fortunes of the area. This group then agrees a strategy, which is reviewed on a regular basis. In most countries Business Improvement Districts enter into a contract with the local authority to provide certain services and undertake particular activities. This is reviewed after either three or five years.

As the countries which have Business Improvement Districts has increased in number, so too has the variation on the model itself. According to some, we have even begun to witness some variation within countries (Morçöl and Zimmermann 2006; Ward 2006a). As Hochleitner (2003, 380) argues about the US, '[s]chemes of BID governance differ significantly from one locality to locality, as well as from BID to BID within localities.' This variety in the policy takes a number of forms, from simply different names for Business Improvement Districts, through to differences in who pays the contribution, and how this amount is calculated. There is no 'standard naming convention' (Hoyt 2003, 4), so where Business Improvement Districts might not exist in name, they do in practice, for example where there are 'Special improvement districts', 'public improvement districts', 'neighbourhood

improvement districts', 'municipal improvement districts', 'business improvement areas', 'downtown improvement districts', and 'city improvement districts'.

This paper reviews the evolution of the Business Improvement District model of downtown governance. It then organises its review according to three issues. First, this paper begins by drawing on the existing literature to set out the policy's origins, outlining the thinking behind the first few Business Improvement Districts. The second issue covered by this paper is that of the recent trans-nationalisation of Business Improvement Districts, as this model of downtown governance has found itself rendered mobile. It then turns as a third issue to the strategies pursued by Business Improvement Districts, as they strive to make city centres and downtowns places in which 'to live, to work and to play', to use the words they often use in their own promotional material. Finally, the paper argues that the growth in the number of Business Improvement Districts exemplifies the 'resurgence of market-based institutional shifts and policy realignments' (Brenner and Theodore 2005, 101).

Policy origins

Something extraordinary is happening in North American cities. Corporate leaders, property managers, and small retailers, business types usually hostile to taxes are choosing to pay extra mandatory assessments to support business improvement districts (BIDs) (Levy 2001, 124).

Business Improvement Districts have fairly humble origins, in a small west Toronto shopping area. In the 1960s local retailers realised that voluntary contributions were

not going to be enough for them to deliver their year-on-year revitalization strategies. After a series of meetings between local and provincial officials and local business representatives to discuss the establishment of a self-imposed tax, the Province of Ontario passed BID-enabling legislation at the end of December 1969 (<http://www.bloorwestvillage.ca/>; Hoyt 2006). Seven months later and the world's first Business Improvement District was created as the Bloor-Jane-Runnymede Improvement Area. Fast-forward to 2006 and the Bloor West Village BID is still going strong – and Toronto now has 54 Business Improvement Districts (<http://www.bloorwestvillage.ca/about.php>). And the city is not alone, as during the 1970s the BID model spread across Canada. Not just an example of the interventionist tendencies of local business elites, but rather an early indication of how states in a number of cities around the world would find themselves performing entrepreneurially in the forthcoming years (Hall and Hubbard 1996; Harvey 1989). The province of Ontario, for example, made infrastructure grants available for which only Business Improvement Districts could apply, encouraging their formation in the process (Hoyt 2006).

The first US Business Improvement District was established in New Orleans in 1975 (<http://www.neworleansdowntown.com/site119.php>). During the late 1970s and for most of the 1980s US downtowns were struggling economically and socially. Department stores were closing, while out-of-town malls were opening and expanding, leading to downtowns becoming 'redundant spaces', in the words of Andersen et al. (1983). The closure of J C Penney stores up and down the country during this period was symptomatic of a wider transformation of the spatial logic of capital accumulation (Harvey 1989). From when it opened its first store in 1902

through to the end of the 1970s, JC Penney stores were to be found in the downtown of most medium to large US cities. However, in 1982 the company issued a 'positioning statement' that confirmed what many in US cities already knew, that it was 'primarily ... a department store serving the merchandise needs of consumers who patronize shopping malls' (<http://www.jcpenney.net/company/history/milestn/milestn10.htm>). This 'repositioning' strategy, to use the words of J C Penney, continued during the 1980s, as downtown store after downtown store was closed, with not insignificant consequences for the areas around (Ward 2006a). In this context the 'local' conditions were created for Business Improvement Districts to spread across the US.

On the one hand it is likely that the emergence in US downtowns of Business Improvement Districts owed something to the Canadian experience. On the other hand, at that time the US had its own downtown policies. The special purpose district (SPD) and the special assessment district (SAD) were both created in the 1960s. The US BID programme has been, according to Hoyt (2003, 9), a 'hybrid of these two concepts.' Despite the creation of the first US BID in the mid 1970 it was another fifteen years before other US cities and towns began to establish their own Business Improvement Districts. Unlike in Canada, there was no state encouragement to create Business Improvement Districts, while the legal system meant that every time a place wanted to establish a BID it had to get state legislative approval. As a result only about one-third of the US's Business Improvement Districts were established before 1990 (Mitchell 1999; Hoyt 2006). Since then however, as more and more US states have introduced BID-enabling legislation, US downtowns have been making up for lost time. 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, 2001a, 2001b).

Of course it was not only US cities that were suffering. Cities across the industrialized world found their economic and social base undermined. From the 1980s onwards edge of town and out of town retail developments attracted consumers in their hundreds of thousands. Some stores relocated into these new shopping malls. Others simply went out of business. Those cities with a resident population began to see it drop in number. With a shrinking range of shops and a relocation of jobs to industrial parks at the edges of cities, so living in the centre became an increasingly unattractive proposition. In many cases only those too poor to leave stayed put. While these trends have been particularly pronounced in the US, evidence suggests that the phenomenon of retail and residential suburbanization is one that has been witnessed across most of the industrialized nations (Dawson 1974; Kellerman 1985; Walker 1981; Wrigley and Lowe 1996). In light of the apparently similar issues faced by their downtowns, it is perhaps not surprising that policy makers and practitioners in a number of countries looked to one another for solutions, particularly in light of the expansion at the same time in self-appointed 'experts' in the forms of analysts and consultants, whose work often created the conditions for the movement of a policy from one place to another. In the next section the paper turns to examine the trans-nationalisation of Business Improvement Districts through the activities of the new urban consultocracy.

Mobile policies

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).

This quote from the UK property writer David Lawson should look familiar to you. Why? Well, because it shares more than a passing resemblance to the quote with which I began the previous section. That was from Paul Levy, who is not only the President and CEO of Philadelphia's City Centre Business Improvement District, but he is also a past President of the International Downtown Association. This influential international agency, which describes itself as 'a world leader of and champion for vital and liveable urban centers' (www.ida.org) has facilitated the transnationalisation of Business Improvement Districts, through its maintenance of an information sharing infrastructure, in the form of organising conferences, seminars and workshops, and circulating printed documents and power-point presentations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in light of the IDA activities and his past role within it, Paul Levy (2001, 124) has recently claimed that, [t]he most important trend in business improvement districts over the next five years will be their substantial expansion outside North America'. And it is not just Business Improvement Districts. In areas such as education, health, welfare, and so on research has documented the ways in which policies have been transferred or moved from one place to another (Dolowitz 1997; Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2000; Stone 1999; Wolman 1992). While the bulk

of this has been produced by political scientists, there is a fledgling interests amongst geographers (Cook and Ward 2006; McCann 2006; Peck and Theodore 2001; Ward 2006b).

On the basis of research into the geographical expansion of Business Improvement Districts two points are worth making here. First, the countries in whose cities there are currently Business Improvement Districts – Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, UK and the US – are also those countries that share some similar political-economic characteristics (Peck 2001, 2003, 2004; Peck and Tickell 2002). While they are also marked by not inconsiderable economic and social differences, the six countries have been pursuing similar strategies for restructuring and re-scaling ‘state-market articulations’ (Peck 2004, 394), particularly in the area of economic development. Put directly, these countries have at the fore-front of introducing neo-liberal reforms in areas of policy as diverse as economic development, education, health, policing and welfare. As we shall see in the next section of this paper, the reconfiguration of state-market relations is used by some who argue that Business Improvement Districts constitute a ‘government for our time’ (Briffault 1999, 365).

It is possible to disaggregate the six countries where there are Business Improvement Districts into two groups. In one corner are Canada and the US, which in the case of Business Improvement Districts are at the centre of matters. However, while both countries can claim to have ‘invented’ Business Improvement Districts, only one appears as the reference point in press releases, policy statements, power-point presentations, and reports. As the Business Improvement Districts programme has been internationalized, so it is the US that has become represented and understood

as its place of origin. And, through this representational process, one 'local' example of downtown governance – the US's -- has become increasingly the 'global' model (Ward 2006b), an 'any time, any place, any where' way of revitalizing city centres. In the other corner are those countries that have looked to the US, and less so, to Canada, for models of downtown governance to import.

While it appears likely that the introduction of Business Improvements into New Zealand was mediated by Australia (Hoyt 2006), in the case of the other three countries evidence suggests it was a small number of US cities that were centres of diffusion. This initial phase is labelled as one of 'gestation, implementation and showcasing' by Wacquant 2001:405). The experiences of a handful of New York's and Philadelphia's Business Improvement Districts formed the empirical evidence on which the governments of South Africa and the UK were convinced of both the policy's 'local' successes and its ability to translate these into successes on the ground in the likes of Cape Town, Johannesburg, London, and Liverpool. It is to be believed that the UK government were also thinking of places like Bedford, Ipswich and Rugby when they introduced BID-enabling legislation. And not only government ministers but other members of what Peck (2004, 394) terms 'neo-liberal technocrats', or what we might think of as a trans-national 'consultocracy' (Saint-Martin 2000). For those of us who know these places – or place like them nearer to our homes – this takes some believing. Nevertheless, it was to the Bryant Park Restoration Company, the Grand Central BID, the Downtown Alliance, and the Time Square Alliance in New York and the City Center District BID in Philadelphia that policy tourists flocked to see the sights, including cleaned-up sidewalks, renovated shop fronts, and securitized public parks. As important was what they did

not see on these visits: beggars, prostitutes and other social groups that BID 'ambassadors' together with the Mayors of those cities and the local police force, had moved out of the downtowns. In addition to being shown around the Business Improvement District areas, the 'tourists' were treated to presentations involving benchmarks, charts, graphs, images, and league tables. All fairly mundane and routine methods of representing 'reality' but as McCann (2006, 27) makes clear, all 'tied closely to powerful definitions of truth about best cities and best practices that profoundly shape policy.'

In the case of South Africa, the first Business Improvement Districts were established in 1999 in Pretoria. However, they were not created in an institutional vacuum, not in Pretoria nor elsewhere, in other South African cities. The Central Johannesburg Partnership was formed in 1992 on the back of a meeting of urban elites (Bremner 1999; Tomlinson 1999). And, in 1995, after the end of the Apartheid system, the Johannesburg Inner City Development Forum (JICDF) was formed, followed by its representatives going on a policy holiday, taking in the First World Congress on Town and City Centre Management in Coventry, UK and performing 'on-site inspection[s] of best practices' (Hoyt 2006, 232) in the US cities of Atlanta, Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC. In the aftermath of these visits and armed with the 'evidence' garnered from the UK and the US, the JICDF worked with the provincial government to draft a Bill to allow the creation of Business Improvement District. Since the Pretoria BID was established in 1999 two other cities within the Gauteng province, Johannesburg and Midrand, have created Business Improvement Districts. Cape Town, South Peninsula and Tygerberg municipalities subsequently passed by-laws to allow for the creation of Business

Improvement Districts, influenced both by what was going on elsewhere in South African cities and elsewhere in the world, most notably those most-favoured US cities (Hoyt 2003, 2006).

The country in which Business Improvement Districts have the shortest history is the UK. The first BID, in Kingston upon Thames in London, was created on 16 November 2004. Perhaps not surprisingly for two countries that have a recent history of exchanging policies, it was to the US – and in particular to New York and Philadelphia – that UK ministers and policy makers looked (Davis and Dadush 2000; Dykstra 1995; Garodnick 2000; Hoyt 2005; Jenson 2005; Stokes 2006; Ryan 2000; Simone Gross 2005 Vindevogel 1999, 2003; Ward 2006b). When announcing in 2001 his decision ‘to introduce legislation to create Business Improvement Districts’, the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that ‘[t]hese will be similar to the successful US examples where local businesses help pay for projects that improve their local area’ (DLTR 2001, 1). And while he was the most senior, he was not the only member of the UK government that was at pains to point to out that it saw Business Improvement Districts as originating out the US. Small Business Minister Patricia Hewitt noted that ‘[t]his 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 2001: 2). Elsewhere the UK government was proclaiming Business Improvement Districts as ‘New York-style schemes’ (ODPM 2003, 1). At the local level – amongst many of the UK’s 30 Business Improvement Districts – the creation of these new downtown institutional arrangements stemmed from their relational geographies, connections forged within

the UK and outside it, with practitioners and policy makers in a number of US cities (Ward 2006c).

The second point that is worth drawing out of the multi-disciplinary work that is ongoing on Business Improvement Districts is how the 'reformist force' appears to be with Business Improvement Districts. As an institutional innovation they have appeared to be working with the restructuring and reformist grain. Even in countries where there is no history of town centre management arrangements, Business Improvement District legislation has begun to be introduced. Serbia is a case in point. As part of the country's 2002 local government reform programme, and financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Berman Group – a Czech based economic development consultancy – was hired to help Serbian cities form Business Improvement Districts. The policy was part of a wider suite of local government reforms aimed at 'improving the conditions for business development, reducing real estate vacancy rates, increasing property values, and creating jobs' (USAID 2005, 1). The ubiquitous policy holiday was organised for Serbian business leaders to New York. A competition was held to select cities for pilot status – a method used in other countries (Ward 2006c). Two cities – Valjevo and Zrenjanin – were chosen, and a change of events set in motion, culminating in the formation of Business Improvement Districts. With no past experience in downtown or town centre management, and thus no existing norms or practices, the Business Improvement Districts could be established relatively quickly. And in 2003 it was decided by a combination of national and local officials and local businesses that a third Serbian BID should be established in the city of Kruševac, with a fourth recently established in Nis. And while not all Business Improvement Districts the

world over perform the same strategies, it is possible to detect some commonalities around the notion of urban liveability.

Urban liveability

'We live in an increasingly competitive world, where people and capital are ever more mobile. Towns, cities, regions and countries that provide safe and attractive places to live and work will be the winners', so said the UK Prime Minister Tony Blair while announcing the UK legislation for Business Improvement Districts (DLTR 2001, 3). His choice of words was perhaps no accident. 'Clean and safe' and 'live, work and play' are the two phrases that are most invoked by Business Improvement Districts in their promotional brochures. As part of a global urban political economy in which more and more league tables are being produced against which to judge a city's 'quality of life' or 'liveability' (McCann 2004), the role of Business Improvement Districts has been to maintain the 'business climate' of downtowns (Wood and Ward 2007). So, Mallett (1994, 277) has argued that the US Business Improvement District 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.' That is, Business Improvement Districts 'understand that simple things – such as keeping sidewalks clean and safe – matter enormously to the urban quality of life' (MacDonald 1996, np). Whether in Coventry in England or Johannesburg in South Africa there is a not inconsequential overlap amongst the strategies developed by Business Improvement Districts. In his survey of US Business Improvement Districts, for example (Mitchell 2001, 119-120) found that the majority performed the same sets of services. Perhaps this is not a

surprise. On the one hand, there is a common policy gene, from which all national variations stem. And yet, we would also expect to see not inconsequential differences between Business Improvement Districts within as well as between countries.

In general terms Business Improvement Districts perform a range of services. Studies of US Business Improvement Districts reveal both the similarities and the differences between what they do and with what 'success', although it is possible to discern some very general *types* of strategies (Mitchell 1999, 2001a). These can be summarised as the following:

Physical infrastructure

Capital improvements (e.g. lighting, street furniture, shrubbery and so on)

Economic development (e.g. offering incentives to businesses)

Maintenance (e.g. collecting rubbish, removing litter and graffiti and so on)

Promotional infrastructure

Consumer marketing (e.g. organising and advertising events, producing and distributing maps and newsletters)

Policy advocacy (e.g. lobbying government and other stakeholders, liaising with other Business Improvement Districts and so on)

Surveillance infrastructure

Public space regulation (e.g. regulating traffic flow, discouraging on-sidewalks selling and so on)

Security (e.g. ambassadors, security guards, CCTV cameras)

These revitalization strategies all play their part in delivering 'urban liveability'. In the words of the Business Improvement Districts themselves, the emphasis is on making city centres and downtowns 'clean, safe and friendly', places in which to 'live, work and play'. And through pursuing these sorts of strategies Business Improvement Districts have become bound up in debates over the securitization and privatization of 'public' space, an example to point to in wider debates over the emergence of a punitive revanchist urbanism (Barr 2001; Duneier 2000; Low 2006; Mitchell and Staeheli 2006; Smith 1996; Zukin 1995).

Neo-liberal urbanization

Of course, focusing too narrowly on the specifics of what Business Improvement Districts do is wont to underestimate their wider consequences in the content of the emergence of neo-liberal urbanization (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Brenner and Theodore 2005; Brenner et al 2006; Ward 2003, 2006b; Wilson 2004). While there is much that divides work in this area, there are also points of connection. In particular, research has emphasised the ways in which the role of the state in urban governance has changed, as it has found itself involved in new types of market-oriented arrangements – alliance, coalitions, partnerships, regimes and so on – and its performances judged against a new set of criteria, as 'cities have been increasingly central to the reproduction, mutation and continual reconstitution of neo-liberalism' (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 28). On the one hand, While Business Improvement Districts are definitely not about less state -- they work with rather than replace local government in many cases. On the other, however, Business Improvement Districts

do constitute another redrawing of the state-market boundary. They are both state-like and market-like in interesting ways, examples of new forms of statecraft.

The emergence and trans-nationalization of Business Improvement Districts would appear to embody these changes and how they are evaluated. New public-private agencies to govern the downtown, whose performances are subject to evaluation by Key Performance Indicators that might make some senior CEOs blush, and who, through their activities, 'transform the very nature of what is *public*' (Mitchell and Staeheli 2006: 166, original emphasis). In crude terms, Business Improvement Districts seem to reflect 'the national trends of decentralization and localization' (Davies 1997, 187) often associated with neo-liberal reforms.

So, Business Improvement Districts are more than just a policy for governing the downtown or the city centre. Quite how much more depends on the country or city in question. The formation of Business Improvement Districts in the UK was part of the government's wider programme of enacting an 'urban renaissance'. In South Africa, Business Improvement Districts emerged as part of a post-Apartheid settlement (Bond 2005; Bremner 1999; Robinson 2005; Tomlinson 1999). In Serbia, on the other hand, the formation of Business Improvement Districts was part of a wider restructuring of local government. And when last year in the World Bank's *Doing Business* report Serbia was recognized as 2006's leading performer, it was the reforms – including the establishing of Business Improvement Districts – that were the cause (USAID 2005, 2).

So how might we understand Business Improvement Districts as an example of neo-liberal urbanization? A number of ways I want to suggest. First, Business

Improvement Districts are presented as solutions to the failures of the past policies and practices of the state:

[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)

In these accounts the crises faced by downtowns is attributed to the failure of government as opposed to the inherently uneven nature of capitalist accumulation, which has been argued to be an important factor behind the switching of capital investment from the centres of cities to their outskirts (Harvey 1982).

Second, the formation of Business Improvement Districts constitutes the dividing up of the city or the metropolis into discrete, governable spaces. 'Micro-spaces' in the words of one report into the activities of New York's Business Improvement Districts (New York City Council Staff Report 1995), which encourages inter-urban competition, as one BID competes with another to capture value, and a share in the spatial division of consumption (Harvey 1989). In contrast to the recent traditions of resource redistribution between places within cities, and between cities within regions, the BID model builds upon existing inequalities and emphasises breaking up the urban sphere into competing units.

Third, Business Improvement Districts are also presented as a flexible way of governing the downtown. So, according to (Mallett 1994, 282), this means that they 'can be more flexible and execute the design and implementation of programmes

more rapidly and more cheaply', while Hoyt (2003, 7) has argued that 'BIDs represent a cooperative, bottom-up, flexible mechanism for responding to local needs'. This flexibility is, so the accounts go, in direct contrast to the relatively bureaucratic and unwieldy nature government. So, some of the work on Business Improvement Districts presents the programme as both a means of critiquing past and proposing new models of downtown governance. Nowhere are these sentiments more clearly and forcefully articulated than in the publications of the *Manhattan Institute*. This US think tank, which prides itself on being able to 'turn intellect into influence' (Anderson 2004), has been at the forefront of promoting New York-style urban programmes around the world (Wacquant 1999, 2001; Ward 2006b). Heather MacDonald, one of its staff, has argued about what Business Improvement Districts are not – government-like – and what they are – market-like:

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 provide a vital and dynamic West Berlin to city government's sclerotic East Berlin (1996, np)

[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 (2000, 389)

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 programme. It is about critiquing a particular form of state intervention in cities (Magnet 2000), though not all forms of state involvement. As others have argued more generally about neo-liberal urbanization, it constitutes the redrawing of state-market relations not the diminution of state capacities. As the UK government put it about its involvement with Business Improvement Districts, it is about 'local government ... [acting] ... in different ways including commissioning, facilitating, influencing' (Raynsford 2005, 1).

Conclusion

According to its advocates, 'the BID movement is one of the most important developments in local governance in the last two decades' (MacDonald, 1996, np). It has changed 'the way America governs its shopping districts, commercial areas, and downtowns' (Hochleutner 2003, 374). Well, of course, they would say that wouldn't they? However, you don't have to be a fan of Business Improvement Districts to be able to recognise the potentially far-reaching implications they have for the ways in which city centres and downtowns around the world are governed. In concluding this *Compass* piece a number of points are reiterating. First, Business Improvement Districts constitute a new institutional arrangement for the governance of the centres of cities. They are public-private partnerships, with involvement from a range of private and public stakeholders. Second, although the world's first Business Improvement District was established in Canada, it has been the experiences of a small number of US Business Improvement Districts that have formed the 'case studies' upon which those doing the trans-nationalising have drawn. Third, research in the countries and cities in which Business Improvement Districts have been

established reveals a series of hybrid models, a mixture of Business Improvement Districts-in-general and Business Improvement Districts-in-particular. Fourth, much of what Business Improvement Districts deliver is, in their own words, about improving 'urban liveability'. This term covers a number of policies, all of which aim to revalorize city centres and downtowns, to improve the 'business climate'. Fifth, and finally, I want to argue that Business Improvement Districts are an example of neo-liberal urbanization. The BID programme reflects the growing interweaving of market-based and state-based regulatory arrangements, the combined effects of which have profound implication for notions of spatial and social justice. Something to think about, perhaps, as you wander around a city near you, and find yourself faced with an army of smiling 'ambassadors', armed with a handbook of promotional brochures!

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