



# **IMAGINING URBAN FUTURES**

## **WORKING PAPER 3**

### **‘Clean, safe and friendly’: Wisconsin’s Business Improvement Districts**

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*Abstract:* Using the example of Business Improvement Districts in Wisconsin, this paper argues for a greater appreciation of complexity, diversity and difference within this model of downtown governance that hitherto has been acknowledged. It contends that this is not just a case of knowing more about places beyond so-called 'paradigmatic cities'. It is also about thinking through what this knowledge might reveal about how we theorize the politics of urban development. Drawing on fieldwork in Wisconsin, it uses two examples, those of Appleton and Sheboygan, to examine the types of activities performed by Business Improvement Districts beyond the likes of New York, Philadelphia and Washington. The paper concludes by arguing that in the case of Business Improvement Districts there is a need to pay attention to the diversity *within* wealthier Western nations, as part of a more general cosmopolitanizing of urban theory.

## **Introduction**

The state of Wisconsin has 82 Business Improvement Districts. Only two US states – California and New York – have more (Mitchell 1999). And yet almost next to nothing is known about the state’s Business Improvement Districts. This is in sharp contrast to the paradigmatic example of Manhattan in New York City (Dykstra 1995; Garodnick 2000; Jensen 2005; MacDonald 1996; Simone Gross 2005). Together with one or two Philadelphia and Washington DC Business Improvement Districts, these have been studies by policy-makers from around the world (Hoyt 2005; Ryan 2000; Stokes 2006; Wolf 2006). That is not to say that we don’t know anything about other US Business Improvement Districts. We do (Clough and Vanderbeck 2006; Justice and Goldsmith 2006; Meek and Hubler 2006; Morçöl and Zimmerman 2006). However, it is New York, Philadelphia and Washington that have been visited by ‘idea brokers’, in the words of Smith (1991), from Australia, England, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Scotland, Serbia, South Africa. Impressed by evidence of revitalized downtowns, renovated waterfronts, and clean sidewalks, photographs of Bryant Park and Times Square (in New York), the Center City District (in Philadelphia) and Downtown DC (in Washington DC) have found themselves in the documents of a number of national governments and the power-points of international planning consultants. There is undoubtedly much to learn from the ways in which these cities have overseen a dramatic revalorization of their downtowns. However, there are also issues associated from over-emphasizing particular spaces in a small number of examples, and generalizing from them (Amin and Graham 1997; Lees 2003). This paper argues that there is much to be gleaned from the experiences of other ordinary, but no less global or ‘paradigmatic’, cities. Those that do not appear ‘on the radar screen of global cities researchers’, in the words of McCann (2004a: 2317). Drawing on the work of Amin and Graham (1997), McCann (2004a) and

Robinson (2006), amongst others, I use the example of Wisconsin, and in particular, from the cities of Appleton and Sheboygan, to make a case for an appreciation of the possibilities of a diversity of urban downtown experiences, even in practice, as this paper discovers, there is evidence of imitative urbanism.

To address these issues, I performed semi-structured interviews with the chairs and executive directors of Business Improvement Districts in Wisconsin between March and July 2005. These centred on four themes: the 'local' context for the formation of the Business Improvement District; the relationships between the Business Improvement District and government and non-government actors and institutions; the policies of the Business Improvement District and; the contradictions and tensions bound up in the activities of the Business Improvement District. I gathered together a range of secondary materials, from policy briefs through to state documents, from newspaper articles through to Business Improvement District annual reports, marketing merchandise and press releases. Using this combination of primary and second methods I melded together two representational techniques: discursive practices -- the context in which policy statements are made and their links to wider claims -- and social practices -- the more general ideological context in which the discourses have been used -- both centring on spoken and written words (Lees 2004).

The paper is four sections. The first reviews the literature on the entrepreneurial city. Arguing that most of this work has been generated from a very small number of studies (cities and sites within them) in North America and Western Europe, the paper argues for a greater appreciation of complexity, diversity and difference within its own empirical heartland. This is not just a case of knowing more about places beyond so-called 'paradigmatic cities'. It is also about thinking through what this knowledge might reveal about how we theorize the politics of urban development. The second section presents a short history of US Business Improvement Districts, documenting the spaces

involved in the rise of this means of downtown governance. The third section turns to the state of Wisconsin. It details the emergence of the state's downtown regulatory architecture and maps its current Business Improvement District geographies. The fourth section turns to two particular Wisconsin Business Improvement Districts: Appleton and Sheboygan. It examines the strategies of the two Business Improvement Districts as they attempt to revive their downtowns. In conclusion, the paper makes a general point about the limits to policy-making and theory-building from generalizing from one or two examples, particularly as we have witnessed in recent years the internationalization of the BID program (Hoyt 2006; Ward 2006, 2007a). More specifically it argues that in the case of Business Improvement Districts there is a need to pay attention to the diversity *within* wealthier Western nations, even if in some cases the findings suggest a degree of mimicry and imitation amongst cities.

### **The entrepreneurial city: insights, limits and ordinary places**

Over the last three decades a sizeable corpus of work has been developed on the changing ways in which some Western cities are governed. Using the concepts of the 'entrepreneurial city', 'urban entrepreneurialism' and 'entrepreneurial urbanism', research has generated a whole host of conceptual, empirical and methodological findings over the changing form, function and practices of urban governance (Boyle and Hughes 1994; Hall and Hubbard 1996; 1998; Jessop 1997, 1998; Jessop and Sum 2000; MacLeod 2002; McQuirk and MacLaren 2001; Ward 2003a, 2003b; Wood 1998). This work has been immensely useful at examining the changing governance of downtowns. Most noticeably these insights have centered on four issues. The first is that on the nature and extent of the changes in the institutional arrangements in place to govern cities (Goodwin and Painter 1996; Imrie and Raco 1999; Ward 2000). The second is the changing agenda,

interests and identities involved in place-based coalitions, partnerships and regimes, and the theoretical convergences and differences between these terms (Cox and Mair 1988; Imrie et al 1995; Jessop et al. 1999; Peck and Tickell 1995; Valler and Wood 2004). The third is the discourses and representations, and the politics over their mobilization and use, associated with contemporary modes of urban governance (McCann 2002; Ward 2003a; Wilson 1996, 1998). The fourth is the diversity of 'scales' represented and entangled in an 'urban' governing formation (Amin and Graham 1997; Brenner 1999). Fifth, and finally for the purposes of this paper, is the emphasis on the 'political economy of place rather than territory' (Harvey 1989: 7). In sum this 'sizeable literature that encompasses an increasing range of theoretical approaches' (Wood 2007: 1), has generated a rich set of empirical findings and conceptual insights.

Of course, and despite this sizeable contribution to how to best understand the contemporary nature of urban politics, the 'entrepreneurial city' approaches are not without their limits. Many of these stem from 'letting the part stand in for the whole' (Robinson 2006: 171); of the different ways in which the notion of 'synecdoche' appears in studies of cities (Amin and Graham 1997; Brenner 2003; McCann 2004a). Four in particular are worth further discussion here. First, within the entrepreneurial city literatures there is a tendency to generalize from one or two examples, even if studies are performed on an increasingly number of cities. Robinson's (2006: 169) call that the 'geographical referents for urban studies...[need] to be diversified' is one not limited to those who work on cities in the global south has far reaching consequences. Certain cities appear and reappear, cast as 'paradigmatic cities', explicitly or implicitly as reference points for other cities. They provide the empirical findings on which theories are built. While this is particularly pronounced for the analysis of 'poor cities' in the global south, it is also matters for studies of non-paradigmatic Western cities. It is against these

'paradigmatic cities' that others are evaluated and judged (McCann 2004a, 2004b), as cities are categorized and ranked, more or less entrepreneurial.

Second, the entrepreneurial city literatures have tended to generalize, from particular places within a city to the city as a whole. There has been a tendency to write about cities as a whole based on research performed in one or two places. Classically, in this work, these places tend to be city centers, downtowns or newly created sites of consumption or entertainment, such as malls, sport stadiums or tourist attractions. The centers of cities or the so-called 'mega projects' substitute for the city as a whole, presenting at best partial and lop-sided views of cities, and abstracting 'specific urban sites from their broader interrelationship[s] with larger metropolitan areas' (Amin and Graham 1997: 417). There is nothing wrong with these studies. Rather, it is the way their findings are generalized to represent the whole city. This characterizes much of the work on Business Improvement Districts (Ward 2006), where it is a small number of places in a small number of cities that offer 'apparent lessons for all other urban areas' (Amin and Graham 1997: 416). This is a not insignificant methodological and theoretical issue. Nowhere is this clearer than in the way the Manhattan version of the Business Improvement District has been internationalized (Ward 2006, 2007a).

Third, within the work on the entrepreneurial city there is a tendency to generalize from one or two functions. The term 'entrepreneurial' may be the most appropriate way of capturing the changing role of the state in urban development, as many have argued (Hall and Hubbard 1996; Harvey 1989; Leitner 1990; Roberts and Schein 1993; Jessop 1997, 1998; Jessop and Sum 2000; Ward 2003a). It may not, however, be the most apt way to capture how what government does or now doesn't do in areas of policy, such as in education, housing or mental health. Here the empirical findings are less clear cut. While there is evidence across the policy board that the role of

local governments has changed qualitatively in a number of different countries, this is not the same as saying that the term 'entrepreneurial' captures the *diversity* of these changes.

Fourth, the use of the term 'city' in the 'entrepreneurial city' literatures is potentially problematic in two ways. It invokes closure, delimiting, and boundaries. It objectifies the city, making 'it seem as if "cities" can be active agents when they are mere things' Harvey (1989: 5). Cities are either entrepreneurial or they are not. Moreover, the term 'entrepreneurial' is often used in these literatures not to refer to a 'space' – a whole city or a particularly part of it – but rather to the agencies and institutions who govern. It is not cities or parts of cities per se but it is, rather, local government that is understood to have performed an 'entrepreneurial turn', a qualitative transformation in its approach to the issue of 'development'. The work on state restructuring and the urban politics of development is revealing about how in particular countries the relationship between the state and the private sector in the urban development realm has been redrawn (Peck 1995; Peck and Tickell 1995; Valler and Wood 2004; Ward 2000, 2003a, 2003b).

In light of both the insights of the work on the 'entrepreneurial city' and its limits, this paper's parameters are as follows. It seeks to widen the geographical referents for studies of Business Improvement Districts, and of entrepreneurial modes of governance more generally. It brings into the literature places currently 'off the map', in the words of Robinson (2002). It argues that the cases of Appleton and Sheboygan are both revealing in their own right, and in terms of what they have to say about wider trends in the activities of Business Improvement Districts. They are no more or no less ordinary cities than are New York, Philadelphia and Washington. The paper shies away from generalizing from the experiences of the state's downtowns to its cities, acknowledging the accounts of the downtown as partial representations, understanding them with reference to the wider assemblages, circuits and networks of which they are constitutive.



## **US Business Improvement Districts**

Business Improvement Districts are public-private partnerships in which, in the US at least, 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. The US BID programme is, according to Hoyt (2004: 370), a 'hybrid' of the special purpose district (SPD), and the special assessment district (SAD), both of which were both created in the 1960s. Although the first US Business Improvement District was established in New Orleans in 1975 (<http://www.neworleansdowntown.com/site119.php>), it was another fifteen years before other US cities and towns began to establish their own Business Improvement Districts in any significant numbers. Only about one-third of the US's Business Improvement Districts were established before 1990 (Mitchell 1999; Hoyt 2006). Since then however, as more US states have introduced BID-enabling legislation, US downtowns have been making up for lost time. As Table 1 reveals, 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).

**Table 1: US Business Improvement Districts by State**

<b>US state</b>	<b>Number of Business Improvement Districts</b>
Alabama	1
Alaska	1
Arizona	3
Arkansas	2
California	73
Colorado	7
Connecticut	3
Delaware	1
Florida	12
Georgia	10
Idaho	2

Illinois	11
Indiana	2
Iowa	10
Kansas	2
Kentucky	1
Louisiana	3
Maine	1
Maryland	2
Massachusetts	1
Minnesota	3
Mississippi	1
Missouri	3
Nebraska	1
Nevada	1
New Hampshire	1
New Jersey	35
New York	63
North Carolina	32
Ohio	7
Oklahoma	1
Oregon	8
Pennsylvania	11
South Carolina	2
Tennessee	2
Texas	10
Utah	1
Vermont	1
Virginia	10
Washington	4
Wisconsin	54
Washington DC	3

**Source: Mitchell (1999)**

According to a number of US commentators, Business Improvement Districts have had a profound effect on the governance and the revitalization of downtowns. MacDonald (1996: np) argues that ‘the BID movement is one of the most important developments in local governance in the last two decades’, while Hochleutner (2003: 374) claims that Business Improvement Districts have changed ‘the way America governs its shopping districts, commercial areas, and downtowns. In terms of the governance of the downtown, the creation of Business Improvement Districts are presented as constituting both a rejection of state-centered practices and an embracing of a more flexible

approach. As Levy (2001: 129) has argued '[c]lose and accountable to the customer, BIDs can adapt quickly and creatively to new opportunities, take calculated risks, and try new approaches'. It is also apparent that there is a not insignificant variety *amongst* US Business Improvement Districts. As Hochleitner (2003: 380, emphasis added) 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.'

In terms of the revitalization of downtowns, generally, US Business Improvement Districts have been focused on a number of activities, such as festival and event organizing, marketing, security, and street cleaning (Houstoun 2005; Ward 2007b). While studies have noted more than a degree of overlap between the activities of Business Improvement Districts in different US towns and cities (Briffault 1999; Hoyt 2005; Hochleitner 2003; Houstoun 2005, Mitchell 1999, 2001a, 2001b) they do so based on a still relatively narrow empirical basis. In the next section the paper turns to Wisconsin's Business Improvement Districts, to examine the activities of Business Improvement Districts beyond the over-generalized, high-profile and 'paradigmatic' examples of New York, Philadelphia and Washington.

## **Wisconsin Business Improvement Districts**

### *'Local' context*

Commonly referred as the badger state, Wisconsin is also known as 'America's dairy land' or as 'the dairy state', as it accounts for over 40% of the nation's cheese, 20% of its butter and 15 percent of its milk, a situation that has prevailed since the turn of the twentieth century (Gara 1962; Nesbit 1973), despite its current farming workforce being just under seventy thousand. The dominant employment sectors in the state are

'manufacturing' which employs just over half a million, 'government' and 'education and health services' which each employ just over four hundred thousand, and 'retail trade' which employs three hundred and thirty thousand (<http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/oea/default.htm>). It is perhaps not surprising then that the five largest non-governmental employers in the state of Wisconsin are Wal Mart Associates Inc., Menard Inc., Kohl's department store Inc., Walgreen and the Kohler Company ([http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/oea/xls/top\\_100\\_private.xls](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/oea/xls/top_100_private.xls)), all large national and trans-national retailers, whose expansion has centered on developments on the edges and outskirts of towns as part of the emergence of entertainment and retail complexes.

Wisconsin is also a predominantly rural state. While 56% of its population live in its 'cities', of the state's 1851 municipalities only three have populations of over one hundred thousand – Green Bay, Madison and Milwaukee -- while ten have populations of over fifty thousand, and seventeen have populations of over twenty five thousand. Indeed, in Wisconsin 1570 of its municipalities have populations of less than three thousand, and 953 have populations of less than a thousand (Wisconsin Department of Administration 2006). It is then a state consisting primarily of small to medium sized cities, towns and villages; it is not a state comprised of the kinds of paradigmatic places that tend to dominate in the literature on US Business Improvement Districts, and that tend to frame the conditions under which the BID program has been internationalized (Ward 2007a). There is also a very pronounced geography to the distribution of this population, with 60% living in its South Eastern counties, mirroring the geographical unevenness of economic activity, and, as we shall see in the next section, the establishment of Business Improvement Districts.

*In the beginning*

'In 1982, a small group of business, professional, and community leaders formed the Wisconsin Downtown Action Council in order to more effectively address the serious problems plaguing downtowns all throughout the state'

(<http://www.wisconsinowntown.org/About.htm>). Around the state, towns and cities were struggling to retain their share of the spatial division of consumption, and retail suburbanization began to bite. As interviewees put it:

The Port Plaza Mall, which was put up during the mid 1970s was a million square foot, regional shopping center with three main anchors, J.C. Penney, Yonkers, and Boston Store. And it was a very vibrant place, and it was really a retail center. What took place, like in many other countries, was the suburbanization of retail (Interview #4, Green Bay, May 2005)

We've experienced the impact of, you know, the bigger retail stores coming to Baraboo, like, you know, the Wal-Mart's, and the Kmart's, and whatever that, because at one time in our downtown area, we had a, you probably heard this name but a J.C. Penney store ... and we had other stores that were kind of bigger, at that time, retail-type stores for different things. But then when the Wal-Mart's started coming, and Kmart's, and some of the other stores, it seems like some of those businesses were impacted more than others, so we ended up with some vacant buildings (Interview #6, Baraboo, May 2005)

Back in the late '60s, early '70s, there was not a storefront vacant. We had a huge men's clothing store, which is now the Perk Place Restaurant. We had two hardware stores, you know, downtown. We had two bakeries. So it just, it was really booming back then and then things started to kind of go downhill ... And at that time, there was no Kmart ... we had J.C. Penney's downtown, and then they closed up because there wasn't that traffic (Interview #8, Harford, May 2005)

Well, I think, like many central business districts, there was the era where 10, 15 years ago, there was so much urban flight. There was so much fleeing to the suburbs because of, whether it was crime or the perception of crime, people want to park outside the front door of their office building, CEOs want to have their offices within, you know, ten miles of where they live, people want to raise their families in the suburbs and get away from the social ills (Interview #12, Milwaukee, July 2005)

Faced with deteriorating downtowns – ‘commercial districts, once the hub of commerce, were becoming wastelands of vacant stores and shabby buildings’ (<http://www.wisconsin-downtown.org/About.htm>) – a small group of individuals organized a series of seminars and workshops. These assembled state and national experts, instigating a dialogue over how best Wisconsin’s downtown leaders and policy-makers could affect its revitalization. At the time, the challenges facing downtowns around the state were numerous, and local government was seen to be struggling to respond:

I think back to the 1980s, I think about at that ... time, the economy wasn’t terrific ... and I think local government just didn’t know what to do about it ... They were, local officials were there either to lead the community or manage the community, but filling a storefront in downtown was nothing that they could really even appreciate or understand (Interview #1, Madison, March 2005)

You know, it’s [downtown] small, it’s a blight, and don’t worry about it, we’re developing out here, this is new development. And the whole push towards redevelopment downtown is, you know, it has to start somewhere and be shown that it will work. And I think BID came into it from the standpoint of the local business owners and the property owners saying, we don’t want to give up on it (Interview #7, Monroe, May 2005)

Why our property owners petitioned the City to create a BID was because they felt that they needed to do something to become more competitive in the marketplace. Leases were coming up, they wanted to ensure that those leases were going to be renewed with, given the current fiscal constraints on local government, both city and county, more and more services were being cut. You know, you no longer had a police officer on every street corner. You no longer had your downtown street sweeper, you know. The frequency of garbage cans being emptied was being decreased because of budget cuts, because of fiscal constraints (Interview #12, Milwaukee, July 2005)

In some cases, the strategies pursued in the 1970s and 1980s to revitalize downtowns have become to be understood as part of the problem rather than the solution. For example, many cities built new downtown malls, seeking to play the out-of-town developments at their own game:

This building, absolutely, this building is currently on the tax rolls for \$4 million, and it's on about 7 or 8 acres of property. Fifteen years ago, this building was for sale for \$53 million. The building is the end-line space and the J.C. Penney building. That's the definition of the mall ... But in 1991, this building was on the market for \$53 million. It was owned by Metropolitan Life Insurance... They received an offer for \$42 million, and that offer was turned flat cold ... and this building was sold in 19, in 2001 for \$4 million ... And ... so there are questions about what is the best direction ... One consultant says that if you take these buildings down and you build what will work ... going back to what was here before, and it really is a mix of residential, and corporate, and a variety of uses, and entertainment. The consultant that we're talking to says that this same area, the same 7 or 8 acres, should generate between \$40 million and \$60 million worth of tax base (Interview #4, Green Bay, May 2005)

One ['solution'] was the mall, and this is something I'm sure other cities went on the mall bandwagon, which was ... close off the ends of the street, and you have a pedestrian mall ... And I'm sure that it works great in places that are always 72 degrees and 50% humidity. And so what you had was this closed-off area where people had to park far away, and then on December 23<sup>rd</sup> in 17-degree weather walk up and down exposed, going out of one store to another. And so it just, what happened was that the park benches housed vagrants, drug dealers, pimps, prostitutes. And what was left of retail Kenosha just withered and died, except for Walgreens because, you know (Interview #5, Kenosha, May 2005)

Working alongside others, such as the League of Wisconsin Municipalities and the city of Eau Claire, the Wisconsin Downtown Action Council led on the effort to create BID-enabling legislation at the state level. 1983 Assembly Bill 405 was passed on 1 April 1984, creating the legal framework to allow places in Wisconsin to form Business Improvement Districts. The Act stated that:

- (1) The continued vitality of the commercial business districts of this state, especially those in the downtown and central city areas, is necessary to retain existing businesses in and attract new businesses to this state.
- (2) Declining public revenues emphasize the importance of assembling viable public-private partnerships to undertake revitalization of these districts.
- (3) The establishment of a business improvement district system benefits the health, safety, welfare and prosperity of this state.
- (4) It is the purpose of this act to authorize cities, villages and towns to create one or more business improvement districts to allow businesses within those districts to develop, to manage and promote the districts and to establish an assessment method to fund these activities (1984: 2).

It was not Wisconsin's two largest cities, Madison and Milwaukee, that were first to establish Business Improvement Districts. Rather, it was the smaller cities that were first attracted to Business Improvement Districts:

It ... wasn't the Madison's and the Milwaukee's. It was in those communities that don't have the city municipal staff to support a downtown-type program. So I think more of the impetus came from some of the smaller communities around the state (Interview #1, Madison, March 2005)

Table 2 details the state's Business Improvement Districts. A couple of points of note: first, there is a diversity of levy rates, from \$0.8 dollar (Eagle River) to \$5.66 (Eau Claire West Grand Avenue) per \$1000, and second, there is a great amount of difference in the annual budgets of the Business Improvement Districts. While the data are not complete, from the available statistics and from information generated through the interviews Milwaukee #21, the city's downtown Business Improvement District, would appear to have the largest annual operating budget in the state at just over \$2 million.

**Table 2: Wisconsin Business Improvement Districts**

<b>BID (local population)</b>	<b>Year of formation</b>	<b>Levy rates (\$)</b>
Milwaukee #3 (650 000)	N/A	Formula based on 15 766 total
Shorewood (13 763)	N/A	N/A
Eau Claire Downtown (58 000)	1984	2.47/1000
Waukesha (58 113)	1985	2.95/1000
Monroe (10 241)	1986	0.45/1000
Brodhead (3 183)	1987	2.5/1000
Oshkosh (56 541)	1987	Proportionate value of 136 000 budget
Portage (8 880)	1987	1.77/1000
Berlin (5 500)	1988	2.95/1000
Chippewa Falls (12 727)	1988	1.57/1000
Eau Claire West Grand Avenue (58 000)	1988	5.66/1000
Grantsburg (1 150)	1988	N/A
Milwaukee #2 (650 000)	1988	Formula based on 200 000 total
Omro (2 863)	1988	2.94/1000
River Falls (10 600)	1988	0.23/1000
Shawano (7 596)	1988	2.25/1000



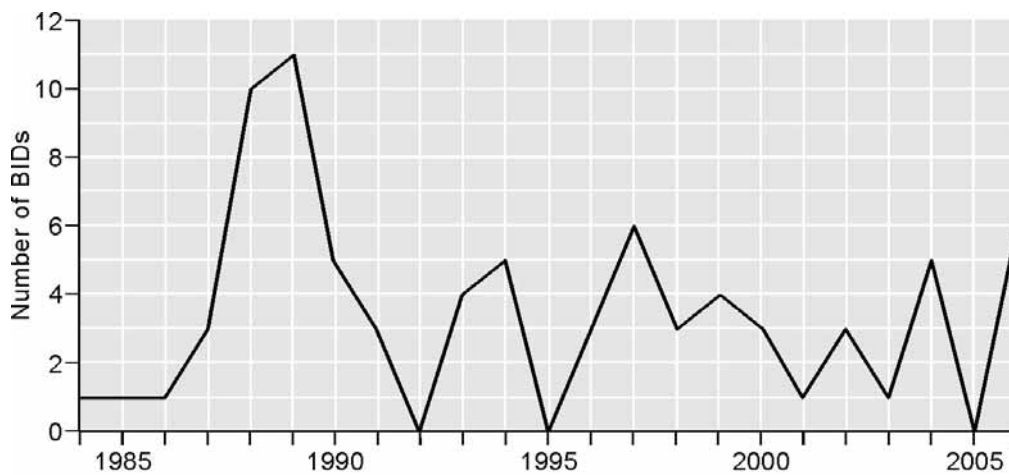
Sheboygan Falls (6 023)	1988	2/1000
Waupun (8 844)	1988	1.5/1000
Antigo (8 927) [not currently active]	1989	1.94/1000
Baraboo (9 625)	1989	1.85/1000
Beloit (35 500)	1989	3.25/1000
Deerfield (1 600)	1989	1.63/1000
Hartford (8 700)	1989	3/1000
Milwaukee #4 (650 000)	1989	4/1000 based on 84 386 total; Min. 400; Max. 2500
Milwaukee #5 (650 000)	1989	0.9/1000; Min. 210/parcel; Max. 12 600/parcel
Ripon (7 119)	1989	3.35/1000
Sun Prairie (17 000)	1989	1.39/1000
Superior (28 000)	1989	2/1000
West Allis (64 000)	1989	5.05/1000
Marshfield (19 700)	1990	1.35/1000
Menomonie (13 500)	1990	2.25/1000
Reedsburg (5 000)	1990	N/A
Rice Lake (7 900)	1990	2.75/1000
Sheboygan (50 000)	1990	2.3/1000
Arcadia (2 100) [not currently active]	1991	1/1000
Eau Claire Water Street (58 000)	1991	1.14/1000
Lake Geneva (6 000)	1991	N/A
Milwaukee #8 (650 000)	1993	4/1000 based on 102 921 total
Milwaukee #9 (650 000)	1993	Formula based on 32 905 total
Milwaukee #10 (650 000)	1993	3/1000 based on 100 116 total; Max 6000
Milwaukee #11 (650 000)	1993	5.15/1000 based on 77 698 total
Menomonee Falls (27 544)	1994	3.27/1000
Milwaukee #13 (650 000)	1994	Formula based on 43 500
Milwaukee #15 (650 000)	1994	Formula based on 10 000 total
Port Washington (10 000)	1994	2.11/1000; Max. 3200
Wauwatosa (48 000)	1994	2.9/1000
Milwaukee #16 (650 000)	1996	4.5/1000 based on 54 593 total
Milwaukee #17 (650 000)	1996	435/parcel based on 33 434 total; Max. 2000
Two Rivers (2 147)	1996	1.42/1000; Min. 100/parcel; Max. 2500/parcel
Black River Falls (3 600)	1997	Four zones; 3/2.75/2.5/0/1000
Green Bay Downtown (100 146)	1997	2.28/1000 for retail/hospitality; 0.76/1000 for others
Milwaukee #19 (650 000)	1997	Formula based on 74 100
Milwaukee #20 (650 000)	1997	Formula based on 120 391
Milwaukee #21 (650 000)	1997	Formula based on 2 186 533 total
Mosinee (3 986)	1997	10.52/1000
Green Bay Old Main Street (100 146)	1998	3/1000 for entertainment/hospitality; 1/1000 for warehouses; 2.50/1000 for

		others; Max. 3000
Milwaukee #22 (650 000)	1998	Formula based on 4 441 total
Wisconsin Dells (2 509)	1998	Five zones; 0.5/1/1.75/2/3/1000
Eagle River (1 374)	1999	0.8/1000
Fond du Lac (41 000)	1999	2.10/1000; Min. 150; Max. 1900
Milwaukee #25 (650 000)	1999	5/1000; Min. 1500 (industrial); Max. 3500 (if retail)
Milwaukee #26 (650 000)	1999	1.5/1000; Min. 350; Max. 2500
Appleton (70 167)	2000	2.50/1000; Min. 250; Max. 5000
Madison (190 766)	2000	N/A
West Bend (24 470)	2000	4/1000
Racine #1 (81 900)	2001	1.9/1000
Milwaukee #27 (650 000)	2002	3.9/1000
Milwaukee #29 (650 000)	2002	4/1000; Min. 125; Max. 1500
Neenah (24 507)	2002	2.95/1000; Min. 750; Max. 7000
Milwaukee #31 (650 000)	2003	1.2/1000 for retail; 1/1000 for industrial
Milwaukee #32 (650 000)	2004	N/A
Milwaukee #35 (650 000)	2004	N/A
Milwaukee #36 (650 000)	2004	N/A
Spooner (2 700)	2004	N/A
Wausau (38 246)	2004	Based on annual budget; Min. 250; Max. 2500
Milwaukee #37 (650 000)	2006	N/A
Milwaukee #38 (650 000)	2006	N/A
Milwaukee #39 (650 000)	2006	N/A
Milwaukee #40 (650 000)	2006	N/A
Racine #2 (81 900)	2006	2/1000
Rhineland (7 900)	2006	2.22/1000

Source: Law (2007) and Business Improvement District websites

Figure 1 charts the history of Business Improvement District within Wisconsin. Four points are worth making. First, that Business Improvement Districts were not established overnight. The Act was passed in 1984 but only three Business Improvement Districts were formed in the first three years, in Eau Claire, Monroe and Waukesha. Second, seven of the first ten Business Improvement Districts in Wisconsin were established in cities and towns with populations of ten thousand or less. Third, the period 1987-1990 saw 29 Business Improvement Districts established, as years of consultation and mobilization between public and private sectors in places around the state came to fruition. Fourth, since the early 1990s most years have seen the formation

of new Business Improvement Districts. In some years, such as 1997, the establishment rate has been as high as six, in other years, such as 2005, it has been zero. 2006 saw the creation of six new Business Improvement Districts, all in Milwaukee, as part of the city's renewed revitalization strategy. It alone now has 40 Business Improvement Districts, covering most of its downtown and neighboring areas (Ward 2007b).



**Figure 1: Mapping Wisconsin's Business Improvement Districts**

Figure 2 maps the geographical distribution of Wisconsin's Business Improvement Districts. A couple of points are worth noting. First, 35% of the state's Business Improvement Districts are in Milwaukee (Ward 2007a). Second, it is possible to draw a line between Green Bay and Reedsburg, below which lie 66 of the 82 Business Improvement Districts in the state, each located in its South Eastern corner. This grouping of Business Improvement Districts mirrors both the economic activity and the distribution of the population within Wisconsin.

*'Live, work and play: towards a remaking of the downtown?'*

\*According to one commentator, recent years have seen a slight reorientation in the activities of the state's Business Improvement Districts. As they put:



**Figure 2: The growth of Business Improvement Districts in Wisconsin**

20 years ago, it was driven by vacant storefronts. Today, it's driven by the, we've got the wrong mix of businesses. See the difference I'm trying to get at? We don't have the vacant storefronts, but we've got a collection of businesses that really don't work very well ... a little bit of the sort of maintenance of the downtown as kind of a cultural and residential hub of the community (Interview #1, Madison, March 2005)

This sentiment was confirmed by a number of representatives of Wisconsin Business Improvement Districts, where the emphasis was on a qualitative 'upgrading' of the retail and residential downtown mix. More than once, this was explained as being about

meeting the needs of as-yet-absence 'creative class', even in places where the local economic base did not suggest a dormant group waiting to move back downtown once the new bars, cafes, restaurants and condominiums were completed:

We want downtown Green Bay to be a cool place to work and live, and, basically, that's going after the creative class. So architects, and designers, and marketing people, and consultants, you know, this is the place that we want to attract those types of entities. We don't want to just have the lowest lease rates because we're depressed, we want to have affordable rates, unique opportunities that draw a mix of people that want to be here (Interview #4, Green Bay, May 2005)

And that's sort of how we, and then, you know, kind of a nightlife, people who live downtown are kind of hip, you know, and have hipster glasses, and accents, or what have you, are, will have a martini on a Friday or Saturday night, and maybe then go to that Performing Arts Center ... You know, they're not shot and a beer places, which is what Kenosha had, a shot and a beer during lunchtime to go back to the factory because you couldn't stand your job, and you had to it, no, that's what Kenosha was. And the largest per capita number of taverns of any city in Wisconsin. It was just a horrible alcoholic-drinking, hard-binge awful place (Interview #5, Kenosha, May 2005)

For instance, the presence of high-end restaurants in the area can have an impact upon frequents to the downtown and the desirability in the eyes of young professionals to make the area a residential place that is where they would live, instead of just be working here ... The atmosphere of festivals, occasional festivals, or weekend festivals (Interview #7, Monroe, May 2005)

And where does the creative class want to be? The creative class wants to be where there is the arts, where there is culture, where there is nightlife, where there is dining, where there is outdoor, urban kind of adventures to experience. So, you know, more and more businesses are tapping into the urban environment for their employee workforce, the creative class (Interview #12, Milwaukee, July 2005)

## **Two examples from Wisconsin**

*'Down town Appleton, downtown cool'*

2007 marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the incorporation of the city of Appleton, which lies on the Fox River in the north east region of the state. With a population of just over seventy thousand, it is one of the five largest settlements in Wisconsin. The city developed on the back of the paper industry, and in the Fox Cities area, which consists of sixteen communities located along the Fox River and Lake Winnebago (Appleton, Clayton, Combined Locks, Kaukauna, Kimberly, Little Chute, Menasha, Neenah, Buchanan, Freedom, Grand Chute, Greenville, Harrison, Town of Menasha, Town of Neenah and Vandebroek) there are 80 paper manufacturing and 90 publishing firms, enabling the city government to claim that the area has 'the highest concentration of paper-related industries in the world' (City of Appleton 2006: 6). Perhaps the most well-known of its 'local' paper manufacturers is the Kimberly-Clark Corporation, which currently employs almost sixty thousand staff globally, although of course with only a small proportion employed on its Appleton site. The company's original base was nearby Neenah, and it opened its Appleton site in 1889 a few miles outside of the city, on the Fox River. The company is one of the world's leading manufacturers of paper products such as facial tissues, paper towels, napkins and toilet paper.

The extent of the shadow cast by the paper industry over the city is perhaps best embodied in the Paper Industry International Hall of Fame. This was established in the early 1990s and given a home in 1999, when the Kimberly-Clark Corporation donated it its Atlas Mill, which had lay derelict for a number of years. The paper industry continues to be an important part of the city's economic and political life, with the Kimberly-Clark Corporation sponsoring a theater in the recently completed Fox Cities Performing Arts

Center in downtown Appleton, which formed an integral part of the Business Improvement District's revitalization strategies.

In terms of its recent history, Appleton's downtown suffered in the way that many in the state had:

Yeah, it's been through a lot of different phases, like I think most downtowns have, and it's kind of come full circle. You know, back in its heyday, it was the shopping destination, and families came down and they spent lots of time, and, hopefully, lots of money ... [Then] we lost our anchors [Yonkers and Marshall Fields], as far as department stores. And once the department stores moved out ... then you start to see other things kind of decline (Interview #3, Appleton, May 2005)

City government struggled to offer much of a response, hamstrung by the need to maintain service delivery levels across its territory, on the one hand, and refrain from raising taxes on the other:

If you're running for mayor and you're talking about increasing the tax rate, you know, well, you're not going to get in for sure. That's a huge deal, and don't cut services either, you know, and that, so we need to be creative about it. And I think the Business Improvement District was downtown's way of spreading the burden out among the many and still being able to add things, some beautification things, like the little twinkling tree lights, and do the marketing for the downtown (Interview #3, Appleton, May 2005)

The formation of Appleton Downtown Incorporated in the early 1990s, which subsequently led to the establishment of the Appleton Business Improvement District in 2000, constituted a response by local businesses to what they saw as an inability or unwillingness of city government to invest in the downtown.

Initially the main concern of the BID was to fill empty lots, although there were not many of these. Quite quickly its emphasis shifted. The 2002 opening of the two thousand seat Fox Cities Performing Arts Center in the downtown was both the result of, and the impetus behind, a reorientation of the Business Improvement District's

strategy for the downtown. The \$45 million facility, funded through the private contributions of over 2,700 local residents and businesses, formed the centerpiece of a still emerging and not complete 'entertainment district'. The development was part of an attempt to re-brand the downtown. This was about mobilizing material and emotional resources. It was about investing financially and changing the way the downtown looked. It was also about manipulating emotions, changing how residents and visitors felt about the downtown. Drawing on the imaginary place of Mayberry (from *The Andy Griffith Show*), the thinking was that using the term 'Metropolitan Mayberry' would signify to investors and consumers how the BID saw the future of the downtown. This would go hand in hand with a set of more material efforts to raise exchange values. It was all about making downtown Appleton 'cool', a place, in the words of the Business Improvement District 'to live, work and play' (<http://www.appletondowntown.org/>).

This has not though proved a smooth transition. The 'metropolitan Mayberry' downtown vision has co-existed with some of the older and more established drinking habits, associated both with the city's student and male working class populations:

We struggle with that because we still have some of [the 'bottomless glass'] here, and I think it's okay to maintain that, if it fits into the mix ... And the Police Department struggles with some of that ... [We have] people ... urinating in public, and throwing up on the sidewalk, and, yeah, some of that happens, you know, I mean, it's an Entertainment District (Interview #3, Appleton, May 2005)

Faced with an increase in the number of arrests downtown, and under pressure from the city government and the police department to reduce the number of liquor licenses, the BID has struggled to square its vision for the consumption habits and practices of residents with that of a sizeable proportion of the downtown users. This disjuncture between the imagined and the actual size of the 'Metropolitan Mayberry' class, which shares many characteristics with the more widely used 'creative classes' term was also



reflected in the relatively flat demand for new downtown residencies. As one developer noted:

They've sold 47 of the 147 units, and they're just struggling along to fill it. They're beautiful units, underground parking, a swimming pool, fitness, I mean, a very nice facility, but they're a little bit ahead of their time in our community. We'll get there, but it's taking some time (Interview #15, Appleton, May 2005)

Appleton's Business Improvement District has struggled with many of the issues also struggled with by the state's other Business Improvement Districts. It has run various branding and marketing schemes, to change the ways in which the downtown is thought and felt about. It has used the language of the 'creative class' and began to focus on residential and retail development as a means of re-imagining its downtown. Not all its efforts to revitalize the downtown in an image of its making have been successful. Hemmed-in by the current downtown development orthodoxy, in particular the emphasis on them as entertainment/consumption niches, the future of downtown Appleton, at least according to the Business Improvement District, would appear to rest on pursuing a relatively narrow suite of strategies that echo those already pursued elsewhere.

#### *'Downtown/riverfront Sheboygan'*

With a population of just over fifty thousand, Sheboygan is one of the top fifteen largest settlements in the state. The city was officially chartered in 1853, and its development owed much to its place on Lake Michigan. During the 1870s the harbor was dredged and developed and a number of docks built. Throughout much of the twentieth century shipping played an important role in the everyday life of Sheboygan, and it was one of a number of US Navy Reserve Centers established after the second World War, many of

which, like Sheboygan's, closed during the 1990s. Two other industries have shaped the development of the city and its downtown. The first has been that of the furniture industry. Described locally as 'the furniture capital of the world' (<http://www.sheboygan.lib.wi.us/pages/historyfurniture.html>), the Crocker Chair Company was the first factory established in Sheboygan for furniture manufacture, in the late 1860s. Many of the manufacturers went out of business or simply merged and disappeared during the 1950s and 1960s. The second has been that of the Kohler Company. Founded in 1873 in Sheboygan by John Michael Kohler this 'worldwide leader in plumbing products' (<http://www.kohler.com/corp/welcome.html>) is now present in twenty three countries, and has expanded into a number of new lines during its one hundred and thirty four year history, including destination resorts. The village of Kohler is three miles outside Sheboygan, and is home to just under two thousand residents, as well as a large US firm and a high-end tourist destination. It remains the largest employer in the wider Sheboygan County (Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development 2005).

The city of Sheboygan has taken its place in the voluminous number of league tables that are now produced. A decade ago *Readers Digest* ranked it the best place to 'bring up a family', while in 2002 *Golf Magazine* ranked it the 17<sup>th</sup> best US golf destination and *Money* magazine ranked it the 8<sup>th</sup> best place to retire (<http://www.sheboygan.org/community/Accolades.asp>). While of course not without their limits – in terms of what they reveal and the consequences they have for structuring local development (McCann 2004b) -- they put into sharp contrast the issues that had faced the city's downtown for a number of decades and to which those in charge were struggling to respond.

Faced with a new mall on the outskirts of Sheboygan, the downtown struggled to retain its 'anchor stores'. During the 1970s and 1980s the local retail centre of gravity was shifted out of the downtown:

We had a very strong Sears and Penney's [in the] downtown, along with what's Younkers today, what was Prange's ... Prange's was started here. And efforts were made to build downtown a new Sears and Penney's store, and it kept going back and forth ... And when they left downtown, that was really bad news ... If they had stayed downtown, we would still have a strong, vibrant downtown. We would have had Younkers ... Sears [and] Penney's (Interview #14, Sheboygan, July 2005)

The initial response by city government was to go like-for-like with the out of town malls, which was a not uncommon response in cities and towns around the state:

We had, the downtown was a pedestrian mall, which was a total disaster. And actually, when we [the BID] got started, part of the mall had been taken out, but a block or two from here was a dead-end cul-de-sac. It stopped traffic from flowing through (Interview #14, Sheboygan, July 2005).

By the late 1980s it was clear the downtown pedestrian mall had not worked. Lots remained empty. Worse still, there was clear division between the downtown businesses and those on the waterfront. Local capital was fractured. The formation of a Business Improvement District marked an acknowledgement that the future economic condition of one was dependent on the future economic condition of the other:

It was formed about 15 years ago, and our downtown was in a terrible state of disrepair ... we had approximately 26 vacancies in the downtown properties. And people downtown saw a need for something to happen ... at that time and our riverfront was quite prosperous. It was growing well. And, quite frankly, they were saying, well, what do we need a Business Improvement District? We're doing fine. You want us to bail you out. And when there were public hearings, the riverfront people sat in one part of the room and the downtown people sat in another part of the room. Today, we have a very good relationship between the downtown and riverfront. The Board of Directors is roughly half and half, and they work very well together. We alternate our chairmanship each one. One year

it's a downtown person, the next year it's the riverfront, so we keep going back and forth (Interview #14, Sheboygan, July 2005)

The centerpiece of the revitalization of the Sheboygan downtown has been the Harbor Center Master Plan. This was understood locally as a way of connecting the two areas. It was both a physical and a representational strategy. The first phase was completed in 1990, the second in 1995, and delivered the Weill Center for the Performing Arts, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, the Blue Harbor Resort and Conference Center and the Harbor Centre Marina.

These centered on linking 'the future with the rich heritage of the City of Sheboygan, stepped in entrepreneurial spirit, maritime industry and recreation' (City of Sheboygan 2006: 4). As a local developer put it:

That [South Pier] was originally a coal yard. The people that had that had the largest fleet of tankers on the Great Lakes. They had places in Duluth, Green Bay, Cleveland, Ohio, here. And it was big time. And later on, they got in the oil business, so it was a coal yard, oil yard. And the company was sold, it was owned by people in Sheboygan, and then it was sold to a company that's somewhere in Kansas ... and then the City bought the land from them. The cleanup was not as bad as you might have expected from a coal yard and oil thing. And, I mean, it's about 50 acres of land, jutting out on the lake, on the riverfront. I mean, it's an unbelievable place (Interview #16, Sheboygan, July 2005)

The third phase, which began during 2005 and is projected to run for 10-20 years, emphasizes the 'live, work, play' aspect of the redevelopment. It consists of six distinct 'high priority opportunity focus areas' (City of Sheboygan 2006: 14). The labels 'inner riverfront', 'upper downtown', 'lower downtown gateway', 'spaceport', 'south shore' and 'live/work neighborhood' refer to spaces and projects for the third phases of the harbor centre development. *The Harbor Centre Master Plan Phase Three* document also proposes a number of new developments, including establishing a Harbor Centre Marina, Triple Play Family Fun Zone, with 20 000 square foot sports and recreational complex and

redeveloping the Reiss Coal Company's brown-field site for use as a 183 room all-suite resort and its office building for condominiums on the Sheboygan river. Overall, this development has dramatically remade the downtown and waterfront of Sheboygan. While this mega-development promises much, it does so at a cost. Benchmarking themselves against other cities across the state and the US draws those in charge of the downtown towards a particular imitative form of urban revitalization. Sheboygan is not the first city, nor will it be the last, to use its relationship to the waterfront as a means of capturing capital investment and increasing exchange values. The Business Improvement District, along with the city government and the city development corporation, has sought to downplay its uniqueness. Instead, it has opted into a world in which difference and diversity gives way to sameness. Although making reference to Sheboygan's own unique history, the revitalization strategy closely resembles approaches taken elsewhere.

## **Conclusions**

In 2006 the Downtown Wisconsin Act was passed by the Senate Committee on Job Creation, Economic Development and Consumer Affairs and the Assembly Committee of Urban and Local Affairs. The two supporters of the Bill -- Representative Shilling (D-La Crosse) and Senator Lassa (D-Stevens Point) -- put it thus:

Downtowns are the heart and soul of our communities. As the economic hubs of our communities, their strength is vital to the overall health of the community ... If we do not make the growth of our central business districts a primary goal of our economic strategy we are severely limiting our potential throughout the state for economic growth and job creation (Shilling 2006: 1)

When downtowns weaken, the whole community suffers ... Business, tourism, and the community's very identity can all be affected by a downtown's livelihood (Lassa 2006: 1)

This Bill has reinforced the place of the state's downtowns in the geographical imagination of practitioners, politicians and policy-makers. Underpinning the Act was an understanding of the downtown very much in keeping with the new urban development orthodoxy (Amin and Graham 1997): downtowns as nodes in wider economic networks, downtowns as economic motors for state and federal growth, and downtowns as sources of, and sites for, entertainment and consumption niches. In light of this, the activities of the state's Business Improvement Districts are likely to continue to find support amongst city governments, property developers, retail trade bodies, think tanks and others with a stake in the economic fortunes of the downtowns, and of the wider city and counties of which they are part.

This paper takes its title from a plenary at the 12th Annual (Wisconsin) Governor's Conference on Downtown Revitalization, which took place in Madison in October 2003. It could just have easily been taken from all manner of BID 'collateral', as those in the industry like to refer to it: CDs, DVDs, marketing flyers, posters, press releases and so on. Or, it could have been taken from any of my interviews with Business Improvement Districts around the state of Wisconsin. It has sought to make a number of general points. Empirically, it has drawn attention to the Business Improvement Districts in Wisconsin, and in particular, the activities of two, in Appleton and Sheboygan. Both examples reveal the challenges facing those seeking to revitalize cities not categorized as 'paradigmatic'. Many of the activities being undertaken by the Business Improvement Districts were fairly mundane and routine. They were some way removed from the charismatic and dynamic representations that accompany much of the small geographical referents for BID studies. In both cases the BID was mobilizing 'city space as an arena for ... elite consumption practices' (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 21). This has meant attracting in particular bars, cafes, and other cultural facilities. It has also meant increasing the emphasis on residential development, on gentrification.

This leads us on to some broader theoretical points. The paper has strived to shift attention away from a number of sites within a small number of 'paradigmatic cities'. In the example of Business Improvement Districts these are New York, Philadelphia and Washington. It has sought to diversify the empirical basis, to highlight the experiences of Business Improvement Districts in two different types of cities. The paper's starting point was to be open to the possibility of a diversity of ways of revitalizing downtowns. In practice, the cases of Appleton and Sheboygan reveal how pervasiveness a particular downtown model of revitalization has become. This is not just about a model cascading down the urban hierarchy. It is also about the circuits in and through which 'models' are produced and disseminated. Those directing the Business Improvement Districts participate in conferences and workshops, read downtown trade magazines and use various web sites. This is how they find out about the strategies pursued by other cities, inside and outside of the state. They too were drawn to the paradigmatic BID examples of New York, Philadelphia and Washington. They were also drawn to other examples, in the case of Wisconsin, that of some of the Milwaukee Business Improvement Districts. While under no apprehension that the places they were seeking to revitalize differed in quite profound ways from these examples, nevertheless in both Appleton and Sheboygan local BID officials remained convinced that their way was the best way forward for these downtowns. And as Smith (2002: 96) reminds us, the building of 'whole new complexes of recreation, consumption, production, and pleasure, as well as residence ... [constitutes a] ... class infected urban remake.'

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