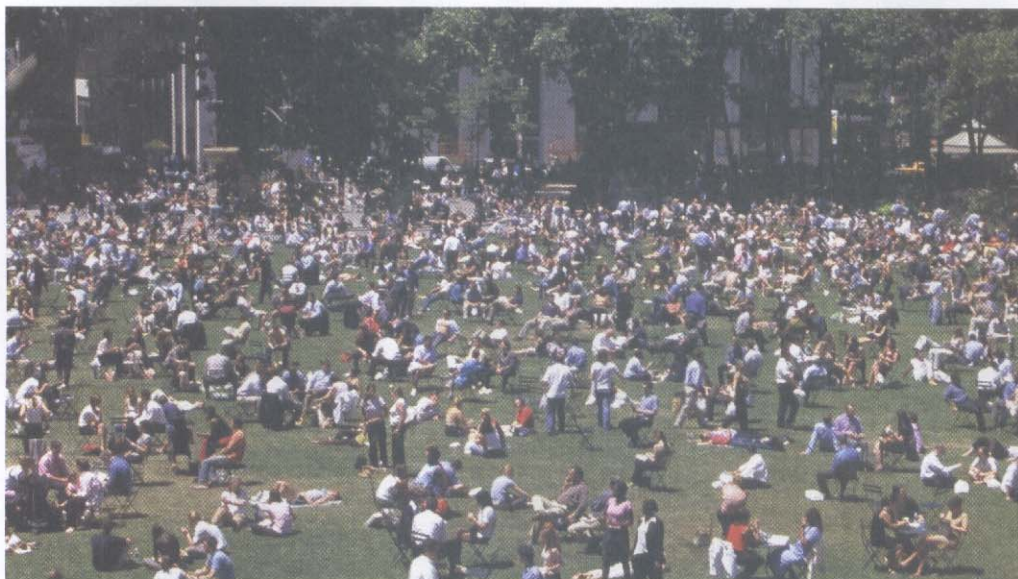


Bryant brilliance



Bryant Park: New York City's most densely occupied public space.

Bryant Park is a pristine oasis in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, located behind the New York Public Library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. Sitting today amongst its horticultural displays, towering London plane trees, and immaculate lawn, it is hard to believe the park was, until relatively recently, a dangerous drug-ridden place.

It took an intervention by the private sector, under the watchful eye of Daniel A. Biederman, to initiate change. And, the dramatic turnaround of Bryant Park is still managed and funded today by entirely private means. Today, Bryant Park is New York's premier park, and is the world's most densely occupied public space.

Bryant Park was originally laid out over 150 years ago, and received a major redesign in 1934. Over the years, the park gradually fell into disrepair. By the 1970s, there were over 500 crimes per year in the park,

about 150 of which were robberies, an exceptionally high number for such a small space. There were occasional murders, drug markets organised at every entrance, graffiti everywhere, a persistent smell of urine, and a rapidly deteriorating capital plant. The City of New York had no idea what to do with the space to make it work, and was unhappy with the bad publicity the frequent crimes occasioned.

Because it was the only park in the Midtown business district, and because it was situated immediately adjacent to the main branch of the New York Public Library, the Rockefeller Brothers took it upon themselves to find a solution. In 1980, the Rockefellers and the New York Public Library hired Biederman, and together they capitalized on private techniques to develop a workable strategy by establishing the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation.

Biederman developed a

sophisticated form of user analysis and created a ten-point checklist of park requirements. He believes that every public space and street that works well - and there are precious few of them - has certain services, improvements, and offerings that are totally absent in the world's dangerous and neglected spaces:

A user-friendly design, which pays homage to place-making principles like honouring pedestrian "desire lines", avoiding blank walls and dead ends, avoiding needless grade changes, and providing sufficient complexity (but not through fussy and expensive architectural details).

Seating. In parks, movable chairs are far superior to any other forms of seating. No other technique so quickly restores life to an underused space or street. Movable chairs can be easily relocated to meet the number and type of visitors, weather conditions, and conversational groupings. In

UNTIL RECENTLY, MANHATTAN'S BRYANT PARK WAS A DANGEROUS, DRUG-RIDDLED PARK WITH LITTLE TO OFFER THE PEOPLE OF NEW YORK CITY. ENTER DANIEL BIEDERMAN AND THE PARK'S TRANSFORMATION INTO THE CITY'S PREMIER PUBLIC SPACE. HOW DID THEY DO THAT? HOWARD KOZLOFF REVEALS ALL.

Bryant Park, there are over 3,000 movable chairs, and hundreds of movable tables. These are carried throughout the park by visitors, who position them relative to their tastes - sun v. shade, alone v. in a group, solitude v. people-watching.

First-class concessions, which can enliven public space with added visitors at expanded hours, and help remedy any design flaws that are too expensive to correct with full brick and mortar redesign work. Eating facilities are a particular draw: the urban space expert William H. Whyte, Jr., Biederman's mentor, used to say that "food is an urban winner". Bryant Park's restaurant has among the best views in New York, and an adjacent café becomes a singles bar at 5 pm, thereby welcoming a set of park users that otherwise would not have entered.

Bryant brilliance

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Stunning flowers, trees, and lawns are all too often forgotten as landscape architects lean toward expensive hardscape, fountains, and public art that fail to draw dedicated visitors. Elaborate horticultural displays add visual excitement to the park, as well as attract garden enthusiasts.

A well-designed white lighting scheme, using metal halide bulbs, provides a warmer, healthy light. This is a vast improvement over the yellow light found in most cities, which casts a sickly glow across their neighborhoods. Active night-time use requires such lighting. Lampposts should be architecturally interesting, adding a bit of interest and detail to the street. The lighting standard, rather than the customary “footcandle” readings used by technicians, should be based on a more common-sense evaluation, like the brightness necessary to make an elderly woman feel totally comfortable at night. And, most notably, a moon glow is cast over all of Bryant Park at night, from an adjacent skyscraper. This lighting is not so bright so as to overwhelm night-time park users, but it is sufficient to create a sense of security.

Restrooms, for there is no quicker turnoff to a potential user than the smell of urine, which you can count on if you don't provide an alternative for visitors. Further, visitors who are drawn to a space by new food concessions will demand these facilities. Bryant Park's restrooms are in a small landmarked building and are meticulously managed, with cleanings every five minutes.

Cultural programs, which can

be a very important tool (when not relied upon to solve bad problems of underuse all by themselves) to introduce new users to a newly improved facility or street. A choice of dance, music, and spoken word presentations can draw different audiences who might never otherwise discover the space. Major outside funding can sometimes be arranged, avoiding stress on the park or management entity's operating budget. In Bryant Park, sponsors pay a sizable fee for the use of the space and pay the full cost of the talent and set-up to boot. As a media capital, London should be getting the same.

Maintenance

A first-rate sanitation and maintenance program, eliminating eyesores like litter, graffiti, stickers and placards and attending promptly to necessary minor repairs. Litter is picked-up and trash cans emptied constantly throughout the day.

A strong sense of security, characterized by the constant presence of devoted users of the space, and enforced by well-trained private or public security officers. Unarmed security personnel roam the park enforcing against minor transgressions such as spitting, playing of loud radio music, or cursing.

These points are universal – they worked in New York and can be successfully applied to parks and public spaces in London and many other cities.

Today Biederman continues to oversee all operations, maintenance, and management of Bryant Park. The result is a one hundred percent reduction in crime. There is, at worst, maybe one felony every two years, which is usually something along the lines of a fight on surrounding streets



that drifts into the park, but has nothing to do with the park itself.

As a result of the lack of crime in Bryant Park, and the dozens of amenities it boasts, there has been a massive change in peak use. Whereas Bryant Park once struggled to attract upwards of 700 people to events in the park, today over 5,300 people can be found in the park on non-event days. Park events that have gained huge renown throughout the world – Fashion Week, an HBO outdoor film series, Good Morning America concerts, and other such events – now attract over 10,000 people to the park.

The City of New York ran Bryant Park on a \$200,000 budget. Today, that budget is \$4 million, and is completely privately funded through a variety of innovative methods. These include lease revenues from the restaurant and several kiosks located within the park; fees paid by corporate users of the park for events such as Fashion Week or corporate product introductions; advertising; and an assessment paid by surrounding property owners (this assessment has been reduced over the years as outside sources have paid more for the right to use the park).

There has also been a tremendous amount of

Biederman has helped to create a hugely popular park in the heart of Manhattan.

economic development as a result of Bryant Park's success, including the creation of approximately 1,000 jobs directly related to the park. Surrounding office buildings went from 80 percent occupancy levels to 100 percent in a five-year period, and rents in those buildings doubled or tripled from 1991 to 1998, a time when rents in Manhattan were as flat as can be. All of this positive activity has brought Bryant Park much prominence and praise. Today, an internet search of Bryant Park will turn up 100,000 favorable mentions, whereas a similar search in 1979 would have resulted in only negative reviews.

The most significant contribution of Bryant Park's methods is its applicability throughout the world. Biederman, through the BRV Corp., his private firm, is applying his knowledge to such spaces throughout the United States and overseas with much success. There are many thousands of spaces around the world – in the United Kingdom and elsewhere – that would benefit from Bryant Park's formula. **LEI**



Manhattan mission
The restoration of NYC's Bryant Park. *Page 22*



Local Government News



Reviving Bradford
Let the regeneration begin. *Page 32*

Councils accused of wasting £5bn a year

BY TOM IDLE

Local authorities are wasting more than £5 billion a year as a result of not being able to collect their debts efficiently, according to new research.

Annual reports of the UK councils researched have a combined revenue expenditure of over £50 billion per year. However, figures reveal uncollected debts totalling over £5 billion - almost £250 for every household, which finance

departments have failed to collect. In London, uncollected debt equates to over £1 billion - more than £450 a household.

And nearly a quarter of this amount has been identified as unpaid council tax. Finance experts predict that if councils were to manage their debt in the same fashion as many private sector organisations, the savings would be dramatic.

Alexander Bielenberg, Consultant Director at REL, the organisation that carried

out the research believes the solution is simple. "The answer is not rocket science," he said. "Many councils are wary of alienating their voters by chasing debt too forcibly. The solution does not lie in being aggressive with residents - it should be quite a straightforward business process.

"It can sometimes be as simple as getting the right invoice to the right person at the right time."

Meanwhile, on a more happy note...

BY LAURA SHARMAN

Local authorities are setting the standards when it comes to improving public services across the country, according to the Local Government Association.

In the second round of the Audit Commission's 'league tables', more 'good' and 'excellent' and fewer 'poor' and 'weak' local authorities were realised.

But despite how good the results read, the LGA believes that the true extent to which improvements have been made in our town halls nationwide, is underestimated. According to the Association, many individual council's 'direction of travel statements' point upwards, but not quite far enough to make the jump from 'good' to 'excellent'.

LGA Chair, Sir Jeremy Beecham said: "With 82 councils now 'good' or 'excellent' (55 percent), well up on last year, and improvement across all categories, local government has a lot to be proud of.

"These results show that councils are helping each other on a path of continuous



Elegance for Notts centre

The City of Nottingham has new elegant piece of public art - a new sculpture for Bolero Square, outside the National Ice Centre. The striking 19 metre high landmark in stainless steel is lit from below and slowly rotates.

Nottingham City Council commissioned the sculpture with £80,000 funding from the Arts Council England regional arts lottery programme.

Cllr Malcolm Wood said: "The sculpture will provide a landmark piece of public art for Nottingham and one that is very much a local enterprise."

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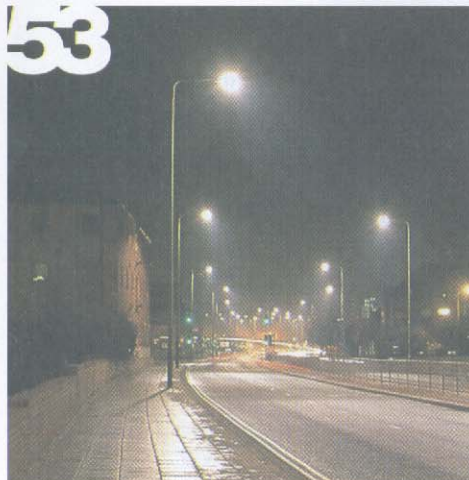
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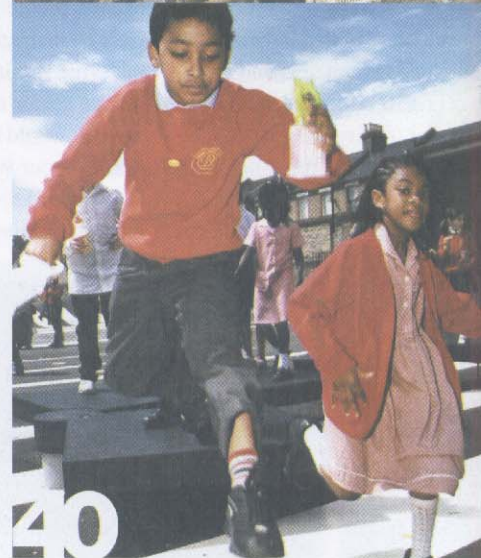


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