

Staging city events in public spaces: an urban design perspective

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Published version

SMITH, Andrew, VODICKA, Goran, COLOMBO, Alba, LINDSTROM, Kristina N, MCGILLIVRAY, David and QUINN, Bernadette (2021). Staging city events in public spaces: an urban design perspective. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*.

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Journal:	<i>International Journal of Event and Festival Management</i>
Manuscript ID	IJEFM-10-2020-0063.R1
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	Animation, Activation, Programming, Parks, Streets, Squares

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Abstract

Purpose

There are two main aims of this conceptual paper. The first is to explore the issues associated with staging events in public spaces, and to produce a typology of different event spaces. The second is to explore if and how events should be designed into parks, streets and squares and whether this might reduce some of the negative impacts and associated user conflicts.

Approach

The paper analyses the history, drivers and effects of using public spaces as venues and examines the reciprocal relationships between events and the spaces that host them. To explain the range and dynamics of contemporary events, a typology of event spaces is developed. This typology highlights nine different types of event spaces which are differentiated by the level of public accessibility (free entry, sometimes free, paid entry), and the mobility of event audiences (static, limited mobility, mobile). Using this typology, the paper discusses ways that public spaces might be adapted to make them better suited to staging events. This discussion is illustrated by a range of examples.

Findings

The paper finds that it makes practical sense to adapt some urban public spaces to make them better equipped as venues, but designing in events presents new issues and does not necessarily resolve many of the problems associated with staging events. Disputes over events are inevitable and constituent features of public spaces.

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3 **Originality**
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7 This paper makes an original contribution by developing a new classification of event spaces
8 and by synthesising ideas from urban design with ideas from the events literature.
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15 **Keywords:** programming, animation, commercialisation, festivals, activation, cities, design,
16 space, festivalisation, parks, streets, squares
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Staging city events in public spaces: an urban design perspective

Introduction

There is a long history of staging events in urban public spaces. However, in the decade preceding the coronavirus pandemic, the number and range of events grew (Carmona et al., 2019). This trend corresponded with the rise of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and the prevalence of culture-led urban strategies (Gibson and Stevenson, 2004), but also a shift in urban design thinking. Many urban designers now focus on programming and activity as much as the design of physical space. This means reconsidering the role of the designer as someone who provides the platform(s) on which social activities occur (Southworth, 2014). The new emphasis on designing programmable space originates from the pioneering work of Jacobs, Gehl, Whyte and Kent who saw the need to make urban spaces lively and populated (Ivers, 2018a). More recently, the notion of the temporary city has also helped to enhance understanding of the relationship between temporary uses and more durable urbanism (Bishop and Williams, 2012). Nevertheless, programming temporary uses is a very contested practice, particularly when it involves commercial or ticketed events (Smith, 2016).

Programming public space involves installing various structures and activities, but this paper focuses on planned events. The discussion here addresses a range of these events; commercial events and those that are ticketed, but also civic events and those that are staged as community celebrations. There are two main aims of the work presented here. The first is to explore the issues associated with staging events in public spaces, and to produce a typology of different event spaces. The second is to explore if and how events should be designed into parks, streets and squares and whether this might reduce some of the negative impacts and associated user conflicts. **Public spaces can function perfectly well**

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2
3 without organised events, and so the paper does not seek to advocate using these spaces
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5 as venues. However, it acknowledges that festivals and events are being staged more
6
7 regularly in some spaces, and that there is a need to understand and optimise the outcomes
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9 of this trend. The paper also recognises the difficulties in defining public spaces, and the
10
11 heterogeneity of these spaces in the contemporary city (Carmona, 2010) but, for the sake of
12
13 clarity, it focuses on the most obvious examples of outdoor public spaces: parks, streets and
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15 squares. Most of these weren't designed with contemporary events in mind and damage to
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17 built and natural environments, plus negative social impacts, might be lessened if some
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19 spaces are (re)designed so they are more suited to staging events.
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24 This is a conceptual paper based on synthesising and reworking ideas from existing
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26 literature, rather than one grounded in empirical research. Relevant research written by
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28 event scholars is acknowledged, but ideas on programming public spaces from the urban
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30 design literature are also incorporated. In the past few years, there has been some very
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32 useful work on activating and animating public spaces which can be used to inform event
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34 studies. The paper begins with a review of the way that events were integrated into urban
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36 design in the past, drawing on some key texts published recently dealing with the
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38 relationship between architecture, festivals and the city. It subsequently addresses the
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40 reciprocal relationships between events and places: how events affect the spaces that are
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42 used to stage them, but also how host places affect events. Different types of contemporary
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44 event spaces are then categorised to better understand the ways that parks, streets and
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46 squares are currently used as venues. This analysis is used to contextualise a discussion of
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48 the different ways that events can be incorporated into public space design. Ultimately, the
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50 paper argues that, whilst it makes sense to adapt some spaces to make them better
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52 equipped as venues, designing in events does not resolve many of the issues associated
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54 with city events. Indeed, the paper concludes that event disputes are an inevitable and
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3 constituent feature of public spaces which are 'always contested, constituted in agonistic
4 relations' (Watson, 2006: 6).
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9 **A brief history of city events staged in European urban public spaces**

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13 The idea of using urban public spaces for events is nothing new (Gold and Gold, 2020).
14 Indeed, the recent rise of the 'eventful city' represents a revival of urban events, rather than
15 a new departure (Richards and Palmer, 2010). The European medieval city was notorious
16 for its events, many of which were curtailed during the 19th Century as industrialised labour
17 became more widespread. The Venice Carnival provides an illustrative example of the rise,
18 fall and restoration of events in the public realm. Like other carnivals, its origins can be
19 traced back to the formalisation of church rituals, with hedonistic events displaced from
20 places of worship onto the streets (Ehrenreich, 2007). The Venice Carnival grew into a large-
21 scale event during the middle ages, but was banned in the 19th Century, before being
22 revived in 1979 (Davis and Marvin, 2004). In the twentieth century, public events expanded
23 beyond religious celebrations and state occasions, to cultural festivals and sports events.
24 Pioneering arts festivals (e.g. Avignon) were taken out of cultural institutions and staged in
25 public spaces – to ensure audiences and artists interacted with host places (Quinn, 2005).
26 Other popular events such as film festivals were also deliberately planned to occupy urban
27 spaces rather than being confined to dedicated venues (Wong, 2011). The rising popularity
28 of street-based sport events like cycling and motor sport races meant that, by the mid
29 twentieth century, citizens were able to engage with a wide range of events staged in public
30 spaces (Smith, 2016).
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54 There is nothing new about staging events in public spaces and, similarly, there is nothing
55 new about designing these spaces to accommodate events. In Italian renaissance cities,
56 staircases, windows and other features were designed into structures with religious
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3 processions in mind (Mulryne, 2018). Alongside permanent features, events also involved
4
5 the construction of temporary architecture: ceremonial floats, temporary buildings and street
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7 dressings that were designed to complement and enhance more permanent structures
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9 (Frost, Lucas and Browne, 2019). Festivals give architecture a voice, and the meanings of
10
11 the host places 'exert an influence on, and introduce meanings to, the festivals performed
12
13 within them' (Mulryne, 2018: 9). In other words, buildings and spaces are not merely passive
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15 sites, but active constituents that shape events. Mulryne (2018) suggests that temporary
16
17 architecture allows the festival to answer back, highlighting the reciprocal way that planned
18
19 events and architecture interact – a theme that is covered later in this paper.
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24 At a broader scale, streets, squares and parks have been planned as event spaces.
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26 Ceremonial streets – for example The Mall in London and The Champs Elysees in Paris -
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28 were designed for parades and processions. Squares and plazas were designed as places
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30 that could accommodate markets, assemblies, executions and military manoeuvres
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32 (Giddings et al., 2011). Perhaps the most famous example is Siena's Piazza del Campo, a
33
34 space that hosts the famous horse race, Il Palio. Piazza San Pietro in the Vatican City is
35
36 another example: Bernini designed the Piazza in the late 17th Century with the Feast of
37
38 Corpus Christi in mind. Urban parks were also designed to accommodate events. In the late
39
40 19th Century, many were laid out to facilitate entertainment via the provision of bandstands
41
42 and sloping lawns. By drawing in the masses, events reaffirmed the publicness of these new
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44 amenities. For example, Hoskins (2003) notes that the evening concerts staged in Sydney's
45
46 Hyde Park in the late 19th Century were ways of claiming the space as public.
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51 **Contemporary events and the festivalisation of public spaces**

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56 Hosting planned events is an established function of urban public spaces but over the past
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58 thirty years a wider set of events have been staged. Alongside traditional occasions - such
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3 as parades, carnivals, fairgrounds, circuses and concerts - events previously confined to
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5 purpose-built venues have been brought into urban public spaces (Richards and Palmer,
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7 2010; Smith, 2016). Staging arts festivals in these spaces encourages artists to engage with
8
9 local contexts, reaching audiences who might not visit dedicated institutions, and producing
10
11 a 'new democratic space where the performance of culture requires the interaction of artists,
12
13 audience and locality' (Chalcraft and Magaudda, 2011: 175). This trend is not merely
14
15 restricted to arts and cultural events, it extends to sports events too. New franchises have
16
17 been established, e.g. The Global Champions Tour (equestrian events) and Formula E (a
18
19 new motor racing series), that deliberately use public spaces to attract new audiences and
20
21 connect with host cities. Screenings, fan zones and open-air cinema events are now
22
23 prevalent too, and the rise of experiential marketing means that it is common to see brand
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25 installations and product launches in squares and plazas. These new events, added to those
26
27 which already existed - plus the revival of many traditional events - mean that some public
28
29 spaces are so heavily programmed that they have effectively become year-round venues
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31 (Smith, 2016). This suggests there is a need to think more carefully about how events are
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33 incorporated into public space (re)design, particularly for prominent, central spaces that are
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35 attractive to event organisers.
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42 The effects of festivals and events on public spaces is sometimes referred to using the term
43
44 'festivalisation', particularly when commentators are noting increases in the volume and
45
46 regularity of events staged (Gold and Gold, 2020). Richards and Palmer (2010) use this term
47
48 to describe attempts to turn cities into a permanent festival, highlighting one key element of
49
50 festivalisation; the tendency for events to spill out of their temporal and spatial confines and
51
52 affect everyday time-spaces (Bennett et al., 2014). Academic accounts tend to adopt a
53
54 rather pessimistic tone, equating festivalisation with entrepreneurial urbanism and place
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56 marketing. But even if festivalisation is driven by a neoliberal agenda, that does not mean
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58 greater inequality and social fragmentation are the inevitable outcomes. Sassatelli (2011)
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3 argues that even if festivals are pursued for economic development, they can still act as
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5 forces for positive social and cultural change.
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11 Wynn (2015) provides a more upbeat account of festivalisation. He regards this as a process
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13 where cultural activity meets place making: 'an ongoing, organisational process wherein
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15 short term-events are used to develop, reinforce and exploit an array of communal goals'
16
17 (Wynn, 2015: 11-12). Wynn (2015) advocates festivalisation as a 'serious cultural strategy'
18
19 which, unlike 'concrete culture', can respond to the changing needs of the city, its residents
20
21 and the audience. Wynn's (2015) provides a fresh perspective on event-led urban
22
23 development, but his distinction between concrete culture and festival driven development is
24
25 over simplistic, especially as cities are now redesigning public spaces to allow them to
26
27 accommodate festivity. Wynn's (2015) account also downplays some of the problems noted
28
29 below regarding the commercialisation and privatisation of public space.
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36 **The effects of events on public spaces**

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42 The role and function of public spaces is a complex issue, and Amin (2008) thinks it is
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44 unrealistic to expect contemporary parks, streets and squares to fulfil their traditional roles
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46 as spaces of political participation. However, it is reasonable to suggest that urban public
47
48 spaces should be designed and managed to build sociability, tolerance of others, civic
49
50 engagement and common purpose. Staging events in parks, streets and squares can help
51
52 with this mission, by making public spaces more inviting, convivial and dynamic. But festivals
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54 and events can also restrict, control and damage host spaces - eroding their publicness.
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56 These effects are discussed in more detail below.
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3 Montgomery (1998) suggests that festivals and events not only add to the variety of activities
4 available in public spaces, they stretch their 'opening hours', and create meeting places and
5 spaces for people watching. Municipal authorities, designers, developers and various local
6 interests (including business associations) are keen to make public spaces more convivial
7 and events are obvious ways to achieve this aim (Gomes, 2019). Nowicka and Vertovec
8 (2014) argue that public spaces should function as convivial sites where encounters with
9 difference and intergroup mixing are fostered. Events may help to instigate encounters with
10 strangers and direct experiences of multi-culture, generating feelings of social and spatial
11 solidarity (Amin, 2008). Attending, or participating in, events (particularly multi-cultural
12 festivals) can lead to greater recognition of different social groups, but this conviviality does
13 not necessarily lead to communality (Fincher, 2003). Fuller and Ren (2019) see merit in
14 activities that encourage social proximity and fleeting encounters, such as those associated
15 with event settings. Where people gather to hear a favourite musician or watch their national
16 sports team, there exists potential for people to set aside cultural differences like age and
17 ethnicity and 'realise instead the significance of things like taste, lifestyles and leisure
18 preferences' (Gilroy, 2004: 39-40). Various spatial factors may affect whether these types of
19 effects are achieved. According to Fincher et al. (2014), transformative cross-cultural
20 encounters are more likely to be realised if festivals are staged beyond city centres in less
21 formal, less structured event spaces.
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45 Amin (2008) suggests that urban public spaces can be understood as involving the
46 circulation of humans and non-human matter, which host 'entanglements of bodies in
47 motion' and the 'swirl of the crowd' - something he describes as 'situated surplus'. Events
48 intensify movements and circulations, helping to activate public spaces. Indeed, Fisker et al.
49 (2021: 268) describe festivals as 'hybrid constellations produced in a context of
50 indeterminate fluidity'. This fluidity alters the spatial dynamics of public spaces, changing the
51 ways people move through them, what they do, who they encounter and how long they dwell
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3 there (Stevens and Shin, 2014). Giovanardi et al. (2014: 113), have written about mobilities
4
5 during festivals, describing how audiences create 'dynamic, ... varying and emerging
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7 relations to each other'. As such, event spaces are obvious examples of spaces that are
8
9 continuously in motion, and constantly re-made (Sheller and Urry, 2004; Hannam et al.,
10
11 2016). Thinking of events in terms of mobilities helps us appreciate their fluid and dynamic
12
13 nature; highlights their potential to unsettle the status quo; and points to their importance as
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15 ritualised, transgressive or transformative occasions that enable people to transition between
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17 key moments.
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22 Although events involve circulation and movement, they are also associated with symbolic,
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24 regulatory, financial and physical *barriers*, that restrict access to – and behaviour in - public
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26 spaces. Perhaps the most fluid, dynamic and mobile events staged in public spaces are
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28 unsanctioned events such as protests, demonstrations or flash mobs. However, these are
29
30 increasingly regulated and securitised too, as protests and demonstrations now invariably
31
32 require a permit or equivalent permission to take place. Events that spill out of their main
33
34 location are also increasingly policed, and managed, as evidenced by the zoning of events
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36 and the construction of dedicated paths to and from transit routes.
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41 Alongside altering spatial dynamics, events and event programmes can change the identities
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43 and images of urban public spaces. As Amin (2008) highlights, symbolic projections shape
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45 expectations of what and who public spaces are for, and events have become important
46
47 ways to disrupt established assumptions, particularly in instances where sites have
48
49 problematic meanings (Smith, 2016). Monumental squares, formal parks and ceremonial
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51 streets are not necessarily the most welcoming places as they tend to be associated with
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53 [state] power and control. Events can be used to supplant these associations. For example,
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55 Lehtovuori (2007) notes how Senate Square in Helsinki was reclaimed for its citizens
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57 through an events programme which made it seem less austere and state oriented. In other
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3 cases, events have been used to address a lack of meaning. The Committee responsible for
4
5 managing the Champs Elysees in Paris introduced new events to address the banalisation
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7 of the street: providing 'highly signified sense making against the unstructured flow of
8
9 nothing' (Deroy and Clegg, 2012: 370).
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13 Staging planned events in public spaces can assist with various public policy objectives, but
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15 programming involving events is criticised for various reasons. Formal occasions are often
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17 compared unfavourably with more spontaneous gatherings and are regarded as a rather
18
19 contrived form of animation (Degen, 2003). Rather than loosening the fixed meanings and
20
21 determined uses known to hinder some public spaces, they can also tighten them by
22
23 introducing physical, symbolic and financial restrictions (Smith, 2016). Commercial events
24
25 are associated with the commodification of public space when sites are hired out to event
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27 organisers, especially when they are fenced off for paid entry events (Smith, 2020). Even
28
29 when admission is free, they can be exclusive as most city centre events tend to be staged
30
31 to attract people willing and able to spend money (Van Deusen, 2002). Intensively
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33 programmed spaces are linked to the production of consumption-based environments
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35 (Schmidt and Nemeth, 2010) and it is important to acknowledge that these tend to be
36
37 exclusive. In a [social] media-driven age, events are also used by municipal authorities to
38
39 increase the visibility of their public spaces and thus attract new users / consumers. This
40
41 results in a problematic aestheticisation of spaces – 'the superficial embellishment of public
42
43 space into visually appealing lifestyle amenities' - which breeds exclusion (Glover, 2015:
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45 104). Following a similar line of argument, Wangro (2018: 58) reminds us 'curation is a form
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47 of control', and that 'programming has long been utilised as a tool for attracting desired
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49 demographic groups and for keeping less desirable groups away'. As the private sector is
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51 the obvious provider, commercial events can result in a form of privatisation as public space
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53 is handed over temporarily to profit oriented organisers (Gomes, 2019). The installation of
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55 sponsor logos, plus hospitality, retail and merchandising outlets also means that these
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3 events contribute to the commercialisation of public space (Smith, 2016). This is even more
4
5 obvious when public spaces are hired out for product launches and experiential marketing
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7 events. For example, the city of Leeds (UK) publishes an 'Events Spaces Guide,' a portfolio
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9 of streets and squares within the city centre that can be booked for promotional events
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11 (Leeds City Council, no date).
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16 Alongside some of the concerns about reduced publicness, events staged in public spaces
17
18 can denigrate the environmental quality of parks, streets and squares. When events are
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20 staged outdoors near residential districts, there are often issues with noise and
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22 inconvenience for neighbours. One obvious problem is the sound of amplified music, but
23
24 crowd noise, and disruption during the assembly / derig of temporary venues also generate
25
26 complaints. Some events involve drug and alcohol use, which can exacerbate conflicts with
27
28 local people - particularly when residents have fought hard to reduce drunken / drug fuelled
29
30 behaviour in public spaces (Smith, 2020). There are often problems during egress, when
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32 thousands of people simultaneously leave a venue not designed for that purpose. One issue
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34 that is particularly relevant to park events is damage to turf caused by large numbers of
35
36 people, installations and vehicle movements (Smith and Vodicka, 2020). The reparations
37
38 needed mean that park space can be inaccessible for several months after a large-scale
39
40 event. Superficial involvement by local people in decision making about events is also a
41
42 concern, with consultation often tokenistic. Events usually require licenses or planning
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44 permissions, but procedures are often ignored, bypassed or fast tracked to ensure proposals
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46 are sanctioned (Smith and McGillivray, 2020). For example, the organisers of recent
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48 Christmas events staged in Edinburgh city centre did not have planning permission
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51 (McGillivray et al., 2020).
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56 It is important to highlight that for many people, the negative effects outlined above are
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58 outweighed by the positive social experiences they gain by attending events. For some, the
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3 location of these events not only adds to the event experience, it increases their attachment
4 to the host space, and may even encourage them to visit more frequently in the future (Smith
5 et al., 2017). This highlights how and why events staged in public spaces are inherently
6 contested. Different publics have different ideas about what public spaces are for, and even
7 if agreement is reached that organised events are appropriate uses, there is unlikely to be
8 consensus about what types of events are staged and how regularly.
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18 **How urban public spaces shape events**

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22 Events affect host spaces physically and symbolically, but events are themselves affected by
23 the physical qualities and symbolic meanings of host places. The significance of place is
24 surprisingly neglected in events research (Smith et al., 2017). As Van Aalst and Van Melik
25 (2011: 196) point out, most researchers focus 'on what a festival can do for a place, few go
26 into what a place can do for a festival'. Many event organisers want to stage their events in
27 public spaces, rather than in purpose-built venues, because of the opportunity to transfer
28 place meanings. For some events - like fashion shows and other trade-oriented events - the
29 connotations associated with urban streets are valuable (Weller, 2013). This is where trends
30 emerge so, by visibly connecting wares to the street, companies and products gain more
31 authenticity. Commercial events are sometimes presented as street festivals, allowing them
32 to accrue some of the positive connotations attached to such occasions (Weller, 2013).
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45 Glasgow's Style Mile Carnival is a good example - this event seeks to drive 'footfall' to retail
46 and entertainment outlets. Similarly, the meanings associated with city parks are attractive to
47 organisers of music festivals, who want to recreate the image and feel of rural sites. Staging
48 an event in a park, rather than a purpose-built event arena, gives the impression that this is
49 a genuine festival where the audience can transgress, unwind and escape from urban life.
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56 City squares also attract event organisers for their symbolic qualities, especially when
57 centrally located and near to landmarks. These qualities help communicate that the event is
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3 being hosted by 'the city' rather than confined to a specific venue, and provide opportunities
4 to disseminate spectacular media imagery (Smith and McGillivray, 2020). For organisers and
5 promoters, this is preferential to staging events in anonymous arenas or showgrounds in the
6 urban periphery (Smith, 2016).
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13 Although some examples are less place oriented, with the wider significance of host sites
14 obscured by the creation of an enclosed eventscape, generally events draw a lot of meaning
15 from where they are staged. This helps to explain why prominent public spaces appeal to
16 event organisers. However, as public spaces become more heavily programmed, there is a
17 danger that these wider meanings are diluted. If events become an overly determined use,
18 there is less capacity to transfer meanings from location to festival. Put simply, in instances
19 where public spaces are turned into year-round venues there is a risk that, like anonymous
20 arenas, these will become less attractive to citizens and event organisers than multi-
21 functional public spaces. One of the most striking aspects of staging events in public spaces
22 is the transformation that occurs as familiar spaces are changed into eventscapes. If these
23 transformations themselves become familiar this effect is lessened and events become a
24 determined use, rather than a disruptive influence (Smith, 2016). For example, Meeting
25 House Square in Dublin hosts a market every Saturday but, rather than providing a way of
26 disrupting this space, this is now a fixed use which prevents the Square from being used for
27 other purposes, including other types of events.
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47 **A typology of event spaces**

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51 There have been multiple attempts to classify urban public spaces into different typologies
52 (e.g. Carmona, 2010). Here, rather than trying to differentiate between different types of
53 public spaces, different ways that events occupy them are identified. This helps to
54 summarise the range of events staged in urban public spaces, but it also indicates some of
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3 the spatial dynamics associated with hosting them. Every event and every space is different,
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5 but in Table 1 and Figure 1 a classification is provided that represents the typical ways that
6
7 contemporary events are staged in urban public spaces. This classification is based on two
8
9 key factors which determine the spatial dynamics of an event: the accessibility of the space
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11 and the mobility of the audience. Given the discussion above, and the importance of
12
13 accessibility in most definitions of public space, varying levels of accessibility is an obvious
14
15 way to differentiate between different event spaces. The second factor used to discriminate
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17 between event spaces is audience mobility. **As earlier analysis highlights, events can be**
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19 **understood as dynamic occasions involving various forms of mobility which (re)shape host**
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21 **spaces.** In instances where the audience is mobile, they tend to be more involved in an
22
23 event, blurring the boundaries between audiences and performers. The prevalence of
24
25 events staged in public spaces where citizens are more than merely passive spectators is a
26
27 key characteristic of the 'eventful city' (Richards and Palmer, 2010) and this factor also helps
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29 to differentiate between different types of events staged in urban public spaces.
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39 INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE
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41 42 43 *Summary of the nine types of event spaces* 44

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47 There is a long tradition of staging mobile events in cities where either the participants or the
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49 audience (or both) move through streets, squares and parks. These events fall into two main
50
51 categories: audiences watching performers from the fringes of spaces (e.g. parades,
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53 processions, cycle races - TYPE 1), and instances where the audience and participants
54
55 move through public spaces together (TYPE 2). The latter category includes street parties
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57 and **protest marches**, but also occasions where streets are closed to motorised traffic –
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3 allowing people to run, walk or cycle freely. For example, as part of its Obrim Carrers (Open
4 Streets) project, Barcelona now closes streets to traffic on the first weekend of every month.
5
6 Public spaces in cities are also used for a series of other events too. One common type
7
8 involves performances, projections or screenings that are staged at a fixed point at the edge
9
10 of those spaces (TYPE 3). This category includes concerts, open air cinema screenings and
11
12 light shows projected onto building facades. In other instances, a large open space is fenced
13
14 off and people pay to access a series of venues and installations (TYPE 4). We have termed
15
16 this type 'the pleasure garden' recognising the parallels with this historic attraction where the
17
18 public had to pay to enter. The most common examples are music festivals staged in city
19
20 parks that feature multiple stages and social spaces which audiences move between. Other
21
22 common forms of event spaces include various iterations of outdoor markets where the
23
24 public browse stalls, kiosks or rides (TYPE 5). This type is also characterised by movement
25
26 of people between temporary installations.
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33 In winter, or because an event requires an indoor or high spec space, public spaces are
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35 used as locations for large temporary arenas (TYPE 6). Most often these take the form of
36
37 large marquees or tents which are used to stage performances or exhibitions, but there are
38
39 also examples where more sophisticated structures are built, including temporary cinemas
40
41 and sports arenas. Within these, audiences tend to be static, other than when they
42
43 enter/leave. The central feature of other event spaces is not a temporary installation, but
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45 people. Citizens gather in their parks and squares to mark significant moments in time, to
46
47 protest or to watch events that are happening above them. In these examples, there are few
48
49 temporary structures; instead people are drawn by the presence of others and the
50
51 significance of the site or moment (TYPE 7). In the contemporary 'experience economy'
52
53 (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) there are also an increasing number of launches and experiential
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55 marketing installations brought to public spaces to catch people's attention (TYPE 8). These
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57 are often installed in vehicles, so they can be taken to different cities, and so we have called
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3 them roadshows. They also tend to be located in public spaces close to retail outlets.
4

5 Various street performers (including buskers, artists and preachers) also entertain passers-
6 by, creating a more informal type of event space (TYPE 9). This event type is perhaps the
7 most simple and common form of public space activation - with the Covent Garden Piazza in
8 London and Las Ramblas in Barcelona among Europe's most famous examples.
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16 These event space 'types' help us to understand the range of different events that are
17 staged in urban public spaces. They exhibit different assemblages of crowds and temporary
18 structures, and their spatial dynamics. There is some overlap, and some large events will
19 exhibit several event types combined, but these types represent a useful overview of
20 contemporary event spaces. There has been a lot of attention dedicated to city event
21 portfolios in recent years (Ziakas, 2014), but portfolio models tend to use standard ways of
22 categorising events - e.g. by size or genre. The typology developed here allows us to
23 understand city events according to their accessibility and mobility. The typology also helps
24 us to understand why there may be a case for making more permanent changes to public
25 spaces that would allow them to stage events more efficiently. Recognising the portfolio of
26 events that are staged in public spaces means that urban designers are better equipped to
27 consider the interventions needed to allow these spaces to function as venues.
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43 **Incorporating events into public space design**

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47 The purpose of this paper is to analyse the implications of city events for urban design,
48 rather than to advocate that public spaces should be used for events. However, in
49 recognising the potentially positive effects of some types of events for some types of spaces,
50 and the inevitability of event use, it is important to evaluate the value of design interventions
51 that may allow some sites to be better equipped as venues. There have always been
52 attempts to factor in events when designing public spaces, but it is useful to think about how
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3 this works in the contemporary era. At one end of the spectrum are comprehensive new
4 sites, where a significant investment is made to create spaces capable of staging TYPE 3, 4
5 and 6 events. Examples include the Parc del Forum in Barcelona, and the Queen Elizabeth
6 Olympic Park in London. Ideally, these venue spaces are created out of redundant spaces
7 (e.g. hidden spaces between / behind buildings), those that host unsustainable uses (e.g.
8 car parks) or ones that were previously inaccessible (e.g. redundant transport infrastructure).
9
10 This reduces the need to adapt an existing public space for that purpose. Creating hybrid
11 event/public spaces out of private or inaccessible urban spaces reduces the likelihood that
12 event use will be associated with the privatisation of existing public spaces. Millennium
13 Square in Leeds (Sandle, 2018) and La Place des Festivals in Montreal (Lestage, 2018) are
14 good examples of events-oriented public spaces created out of car parks or redundant urban
15 spaces.
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31 The issue of where to locate hybrid public space venues might also be addressed by
32 designating and redesigning a limited number of urban public spaces as event sites. For
33 example, in London, event producers advocate the creation of new dedicated park spaces
34 which are specifically designed to accommodate music festivals (TYPE 4) and concerts
35 (TYPE 3). This would shield other sites from some of the negative effects of staging these
36 large-scale events. However, creating dedicated venues limits the potential to transform the
37 wider public realm – something which appeals to event organisers (keen to make their
38 events distinctive), municipal authorities (keen to make spaces more visible and generate
39 income) and attendees (keen to experience the city in a new way).
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51 Public spaces can also be redesigned for events in more subtle, incremental ways. The most
52 obvious thing that can be done is to provide permanent features, so each event organiser
53 does not have to bring their own supply of water, power and lighting. This applies to street,
54 park and square settings. Koch and Latham (2011) discuss a street intersection in London
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3 which introduced new lighting, water and electricity points – making it possible to stage a
4
5 wide range of events. Dempsey (2018: 57) sees ‘not having its own electricity and water
6
7 supply’ as one of the key problems with South Street Park in Sheffield, and there are plans
8
9 to redesign Glasgow’s George Square because its capacity to stage events is limited by the
10
11 absence of basic infrastructure. An in-built power supply prevents organisers having to bring
12
13 in polluting generators (Smith and Vodicka, 2020). Other features can also be installed to
14
15 make spaces better equipped to stage events. Anchor points for barriers, tents or other
16
17 temporary structures (e.g. stalls for TYPE 5 events) can be provided without impinging on
18
19 aesthetic qualities (Ivers, 2018a). Clever design of the vertical dimension can also provide
20
21 structures or armatures on which to affix security, dressing, lighting and sound equipment
22
23 that are useful for TYPE 3 and 4 events (Lestage, 2018). The provision of storage is
24
25 important too, as facilities – including stages and kiosks - can be kept on site and retrieved
26
27 easily by event organisers (Sendra, 2015). These interventions are particularly relevant to
28
29 smaller-scale, more community-oriented events (e.g. TYPE 5 and TYPE 9).
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35 Revising the configuration and layout of public spaces may also allow them to host large-
36
37 scale events with greater efficacy. One option is to pedestrianise streets so road closures
38
39 are not required to stage events. The north side of Trafalgar Square in London was
40
41 pedestrianised in 2003 allowing it to be reconfigured as ‘a programmable space capable of
42
43 holding up to 15,000 people’ (Ivers, 2018b: 198); and there are currently plans to
44
45 pedestrianise Glasgow’s George Square as part of an events-oriented redesign (Glasgow
46
47 City Council, 2020). Installing amphitheatres as features within parks and squares, or
48
49 creating slopes or steps, creates audience spaces for TYPE 3 and TYPE 9 events. For
50
51 example, an amphitheatre forms a central feature of Chamberlain Square in Birmingham,
52
53 allowing it to stage a variety of public events (Giddings et al., 2011). There is a good
54
55 example next to City Hall in London - ‘The Scoop’ - which hosts various concerts, film
56
57 screenings and performances. The Event Arena in Castlefield, Manchester is another
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3 notable site which was designed to host events and as a place to sit (Degen, 2003).
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5 However, these amphitheatres have become rather ubiquitous features of our cities and
6 often struggle to attract people - both as venues and as everyday spaces to dwell. Ivers
7
8 (2018a) suggests that under-used amphitheatres illustrate the problems associated with
9
10 constructing fixed spaces for particular programmes.
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15 Morphology is important, but so are materials. Using resilient surfaces can ensure spaces
16 are able to host large numbers of people. New parks like Parc Diagonal Mar in Barcelona
17 (Sauri et al., 2009) and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London (Smith, 2014) have
18
19 been designed to accommodate TYPE 3 and 4 events, so have a high proportion of hard
20
21 surfacing. This prevents damage to turf, and allows for year round programming, but is
22
23 harder to justify in an era when green space, rather than merely open space, is valued
24
25 because of its contribution to ecological and human well-being. Other design features can
26
27 cause controversy too. For example, the deliberate provision of railings, walls, entry and exit
28
29 points and anti-terror infrastructure can reduce the need for temporary structures and event
30
31 fences when staging TYPE 3 and 4 events. But these features sit awkwardly with calls for
32
33 more open, accessible public spaces.
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41 Designers not only need to consider how audiences will enter and exit sites, but also how
42 event equipment will be brought in and out. Events which involve large temporary structures
43 (e.g. TYPE 3, 4, 6) are serviced by large lorries, and many parks and squares are not
44
45 designed to handle these vehicle movements. Some historic parks in London, including
46
47 Victoria Park, have been reconfigured to provide wider gates and access roads that can
48
49 accommodate HGVs. This can be a problem if public spaces are historic settings where
50
51 features and landscapes are protected. For spaces used to stage TYPE 3 events it might be
52
53 appropriate to install permanent features that would be useful to event organisers, but that
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55 also work as everyday features – for example permanent big screens in city squares which
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3 have been installed in Leeds and Manchester (Smith, 2016). Other cities, such as Toronto,
4
5 have built covered stages or pavilions in prominent public spaces (e.g. in Nathan Phillips
6
7 Square), providing contemporary versions of traditional bandstands. These are particularly
8
9 suited to TYPE 5, 8, 9 events and smaller scale occasions. Ideally, event pavilions should be
10
11 porous structures that don't disrupt the dynamics of everyday use when events are not being
12
13 staged (Lestage, 2018).
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18 One of the key challenges faced by designers tasked with providing spaces that can function
19
20 as venues and as everyday public spaces is how to create spaces that do not feel empty
21
22 when no events are taking place (Ivers, 2018a). There are no easy solutions, but one option
23
24 is to provide movable features – e.g. mobile planters and street furniture that make a space
25
26 more inviting in everyday mode, but that can be taken away during events (Lestage, 2018).
27
28 Breaking up the design of surfaces with patterns is also a way of addressing this problem.
29
30 Another option is to stage small scale events in-between larger ones. However, there is a
31
32 danger of over-programming; and designers need to recognise that users often appreciate
33
34 'the ordinary features of a space during tranquil times' (Pugalis, 2009: 223).
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39 Whilst it makes sense for some public spaces to be redesigned so they can better
40
41 accommodate events, it is important to recognise some associated problems. Designing in
42
43 events effectively sanctions the use of a space as a venue, something that might not please
44
45 regular users or those who live nearby. **In cities that have experienced festivalisation, public
46
47 space has often been exploited to prioritise economic development to the detriment of social
48
49 outcomes. Controversies over the use of public spaces to accommodate the growing festival
50
51 portfolio in Edinburgh provide recent examples of this (McGillivray et al., 2020).** Without
52
53 effective governance, there is a danger that spaces are programmed too intensively, or
54
55 overly used for commercial (TYPE 3, 4, 6) events, rather than more accessible occasions.
56
57 One of the most obvious examples of a UK public space that has been (re)designed as a
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venue space is Millennium Square in Leeds. Here, multiple event features have been built in, including underground logistics, a portable stage, sound and lighting systems, moveable trees, a big screen, sloping surface and fittings for barriers. When it opened, Sandle (2001: 201) recognised that: 'there is already argument and difference between those who want a space to relax in, to sit or promenade and who feel that ...the square is continually being disrupted by the putting up of fences, gates, tents, marquees and the stage itself, which it is argued, disrupt the peace and spatial continuity of the square'. This highlights that whilst designing in events might offer practical benefits, key problems associated with hybrid public/venue spaces remain unresolved.

Conclusions

Notwithstanding the effects of the Coronavirus crisis, the intensive use of public spaces for planned events is a key trend and one that can only be understood properly by taking urban design perspectives into consideration. It is important that event scholars are aware of some very useful work on event spaces that has been produced recently by urban design and architecture scholars. This paper examines the rise of eventful public spaces by bringing together insights from events scholarship with those from urban design. The paper explains why public spaces are being used more frequently for events, and what effects they have.

There is a dedicated attempt to understand the different events that occupy public spaces in the contemporary era and these are represented by the nine types of event spaces represented in the typology. The limits of this classification are acknowledged – not least the fact that it treats parks, streets and squares as generic open spaces, even though each has different specifications and requirements. Place managers and urban designers need to consider what might be the most appropriate programme of events for a specific space. This will depend on wider contextual factors, not just its material configuration. If the space is underused and in need of activation; an established public space but with an overly

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3 determined function; or a formal/monumental space with problematic meanings, then events
4
5 may be effective agents of change. However, there are issues with the frequency and
6
7 typology of events staged. The need to raise funds to help pay for the maintenance of public
8
9 spaces provides an incentive to host too many events, or events (e.g. TYPES 3, 4, 6 and 8)
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11 that are commercially oriented (Smith, 2018).
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16 As the latter part of this paper highlights, events are now being designed into public spaces.
17
18 This practice has the potential to resolve some of the practical problems associated with
19
20 staging events - by limiting some negative impacts and allowing some spaces to realise their
21
22 potential as **convivial, dynamic** and atmospheric sites. Installing power, lighting and sound
23
24 facilities to service events is expedient, but also more sustainable - reducing vehicle
25
26 movements and the need for polluting generators. Hard surfaces can reduce problems with
27
28 extended inaccessibility due to turf damage. However, these design features seem more
29
30 relevant to TYPE 3, 4 and 5 events in large parks or squares and there seem to be fewer
31
32 interventions applicable to street settings. As Stevens notes (2007: 206) the use of
33
34 prominent roads for parades and other events 'needs to be considered when making
35
36 functional modifications to those streets'. The paper has also highlighted potential problems
37
38 with designing in events, particularly the idea that providing events infrastructure effectively
39
40 determines that a space will be used for events. There is a danger that events will become
41
42 too dominant, overwhelming more mundane uses. This will affect the accessibility of the
43
44 space for everyday users, dilute its symbolic meanings, and - ultimately - make the space
45
46 less attractive to event organisers.
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52 Using public spaces as event venues is a complex and contested practice and designers,
53
54 event organisers, place managers and citizens should engage with it openly and critically.
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56 The objective should not be to convert public spaces into venues, but to consider where
57
58 hybrid public/event spaces might work, for what kinds of events and what kinds of
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3 audiences, with careful consideration of why a dedicated event function is needed. More
4
5 collaboration with local people about event programming is important, and ideally more
6
7 events should be co-produced by local community groups (Smith and Vodicka, 2018). As
8
9 Wangro (2018) notes, event organisers are often regarded as 'invaders', leading to
10
11 adversarial relations and contested events. To help address these problems, there needs to
12
13 be more participatory programming and more emphasis on inclusive events (e.g. TYPE 2, 7,
14
15 9). Work is also required to reduce the exclusionary impacts of TYPE 3, 4 and 6 events. This
16
17 might include ensuring some free to access events are staged in the facilities installed, or
18
19 allowing community groups to programme some of these events (Smith and Vodicka, 2020).
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23
24 Events are often resisted by some users/local interests, and some of the ideas above will
25
26 help to reduce some of the problems that lead to contested events, but it is perhaps a little
27
28 naïve to think that tensions associated with staging events should or could be resolved.
29
30 Critical accounts of public space acknowledge that 'public space is always, in some sense,
31
32 in a state of emergence, never complete and always contested, constituted in agonistic
33
34 relations' (Watson, 2006: 7). Event disputes are obvious examples of how public spaces are
35
36 inherently contested, with different interests and different publics competing to promote their
37
38 vision of who and what these spaces are for. Harvey (2012: 73) reminds us that it takes
39
40 political action by citizens to turn parks, streets and squares into public spaces and
41
42 campaigns to 'protect' public access from over-programming are constituent parts of the
43
44 ways public space is made and remade. There are legitimate concerns about the role some
45
46 events play in reducing the publicness of parks, streets and squares, but it is important to
47
48 remember that events - even if they are opposed by some interests - play a key role in
49
50 helping to turn open spaces into public spaces.
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1.	Parades and street races [audience watching at the sides of the space]
2.	Marches and street parties [audience moving through the space]
3.	Concerts and screenings [audience watching a fixed stage or screen]
4.	Pleasure gardens [multiple venues fenced off with paid entry]
5.	Markets and fairs [audience roaming around stalls, rides and kiosks]
6.	Large indoor arenas [hosting static audience inside large structure]
7.	Mass gatherings [static audience with minimal installations]
8.	Roadshows [people looking around promotional installations in vehicles]
9.	Micro-performances [small, static audience]

Table 1: A typology of contemporary event spaces

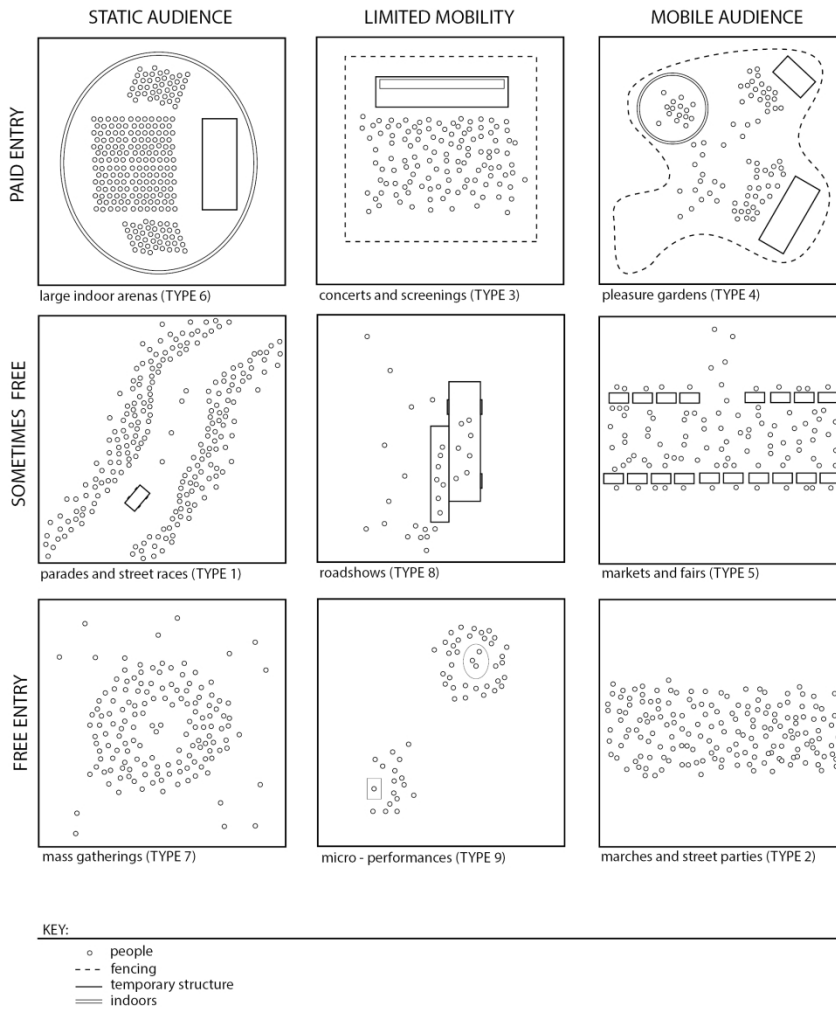


Figure 1: A typology of event spaces

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