

## **Staging city events in public spaces: an urban design perspective**

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## Staging city events in public spaces: an urban design perspective

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## Staging city events in public spaces: an urban design perspective

### 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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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  
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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  
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11 heterogeneity of these spaces in the contemporary city (Carmona, 2010) but, for the sake of  
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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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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  
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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  
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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  
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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 17<sup>th</sup> Century with the Feast of  
37  
38 Corpus Christi in mind. Urban parks were also designed to accommodate events. In the late  
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40 19<sup>th</sup> 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  
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46 Hyde Park in the late 19<sup>th</sup> 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  
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9 local contexts, reaching audiences who might not visit dedicated institutions, and producing  
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11 a 'new democratic space where the performance of culture requires the interaction of artists,  
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13 audience and locality' (Chalcraft and Magaudda, 2011: 175). This trend is not merely  
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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  
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19 new motor racing series), that deliberately use public spaces to attract new audiences and  
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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  
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27 which already existed - plus the revival of many traditional events - mean that some public  
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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  
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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'  
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17 (Wynn, 2015: 11-12). Wynn (2015) advocates festivalisation as a 'serious cultural strategy'  
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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  
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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  
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27 accommodate festivity. Wynn's (2015) account also downplays some of the problems noted  
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29 below regarding the commercialisation and privatisation of public space.  
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### 37 **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  
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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 during festivals, describing how audiences create 'dynamic, ... varying and emerging  
5 relations to each other'. As such, event spaces are obvious examples of spaces that are  
6 continuously in motion, and constantly re-made (Sheller and Urry, 2004; Hannam et al.,  
7 2016). Thinking of events in terms of mobilities helps us appreciate their fluid and dynamic  
8 nature; highlights their potential to unsettle the status quo; and points to their importance as  
9 ritualised, transgressive or transformative occasions that enable people to transition between  
10 key moments.  
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22 Although events involve circulation and movement, they are also associated with symbolic,  
23 regulatory, financial and physical *barriers*, that restrict access to – and behaviour in - public  
24 spaces. Perhaps the most fluid, dynamic and mobile events staged in public spaces are  
25 unsanctioned events such as protests, demonstrations or flash mobs. However, these are  
26 increasingly regulated and securitised too, as protests and demonstrations now invariably  
27 require a permit or equivalent permission to take place. Events that spill out of their main  
28 location are also increasingly policed, and managed, as evidenced by the zoning of events  
29 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  
42 and images of urban public spaces. As Amin (2008) highlights, symbolic projections shape  
43 expectations of what and who public spaces are for, and events have become important  
44 ways to disrupt established assumptions, particularly in instances where sites have  
45 problematic meanings (Smith, 2016). Monumental squares, formal parks and ceremonial  
46 streets are not necessarily the most welcoming places as they tend to be associated with  
47 [state] power and control. Events can be used to supplant these associations. For example,  
48 Lehtovuori (2007) notes how Senate Square in Helsinki was reclaimed for its citizens  
49 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  
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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  
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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  
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21 determined uses known to hinder some public spaces, they can also tighten them by  
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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  
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37 exclusive. In a [social] media-driven age, events are also used by municipal authorities to  
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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  
50  
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  
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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  
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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  
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24 crowd noise, and disruption during the assembly / derig of temporary venues also generate  
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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  
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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  
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36 people, installations and vehicle movements (Smith and Vodicka, 2020). The reparations  
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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  
45  
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  
10  
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  
16  
17 between event spaces is audience mobility. **As earlier analysis highlights, events can be**  
18  
19 **understood as dynamic occasions involving various forms of mobility which (re)shape host**  
20  
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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#### 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  
48  
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,  
52  
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.  
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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  
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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  
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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  
44  
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.  
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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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32 The issue of where to locate hybrid public space venues might also be addressed by  
33 designating and redesigning a limited number of urban public spaces as event sites. For  
34 example, in London, event producers advocate the creation of new dedicated park spaces  
35 which are specifically designed to accommodate music festivals (TYPE 4) and concerts  
36 (TYPE 3). This would shield other sites from some of the negative effects of staging these  
37 large-scale events. However, creating dedicated venues limits the potential to transform the  
38 wider public realm – something which appeals to event organisers (keen to make their  
39 events distinctive), municipal authorities (keen to make spaces more visible and generate  
40 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  
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5 wide range of events. Dempsey (2018: 57) sees ‘not having its own electricity and water  
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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  
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11 absence of basic infrastructure. An in-built power supply prevents organisers having to bring  
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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  
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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  
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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  
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55 example next to City Hall in London - ‘The Scoop’ - which hosts various concerts, film  
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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  
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7 often struggle to attract people - both as venues and as everyday spaces to dwell. Ivers  
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9 (2018a) suggests that under-used amphitheatres illustrate the problems associated with  
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11 constructing fixed spaces for particular programmes.  
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15 Morphology is important, but so are materials. Using resilient surfaces can ensure spaces  
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17 are able to host large numbers of people. New parks like Parc Diagonal Mar in Barcelona  
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19 (Sauri et al., 2009) and the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London (Smith, 2014) have  
20  
21 been designed to accommodate TYPE 3 and 4 events, so have a high proportion of hard  
22  
23 surfacing. This prevents damage to turf, and allows for year round programming, but is  
24  
25 harder to justify in an era when green space, rather than merely open space, is valued  
26  
27 because of its contribution to ecological and human well-being. Other design features can  
28  
29 cause controversy too. For example, the deliberate provision of railings, walls, entry and exit  
30  
31 points and anti-terror infrastructure can reduce the need for temporary structures and event  
32  
33 fences when staging TYPE 3 and 4 events. But these features sit awkwardly with calls for  
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35 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  
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43 event equipment will be brought in and out. Events which involve large temporary structures  
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45 (e.g. TYPE 3, 4, 6) are serviced by large lorries, and many parks and squares are not  
46  
47 designed to handle these vehicle movements. Some historic parks in London, including  
48  
49 Victoria Park, have been reconfigured to provide wider gates and access roads that can  
50  
51 accommodate HGVs. This can be a problem if public spaces are historic settings where  
52  
53 features and landscapes are protected. For spaces used to stage TYPE 3 events it might be  
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55 appropriate to install permanent features that would be useful to event organisers, but that  
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57 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  
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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  
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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  
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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  
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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  
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5 may be effective agents of change. However, there are issues with the frequency and  
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7 typology of events staged. The need to raise funds to help pay for the maintenance of public  
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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.  
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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  
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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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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  
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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  
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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  
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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

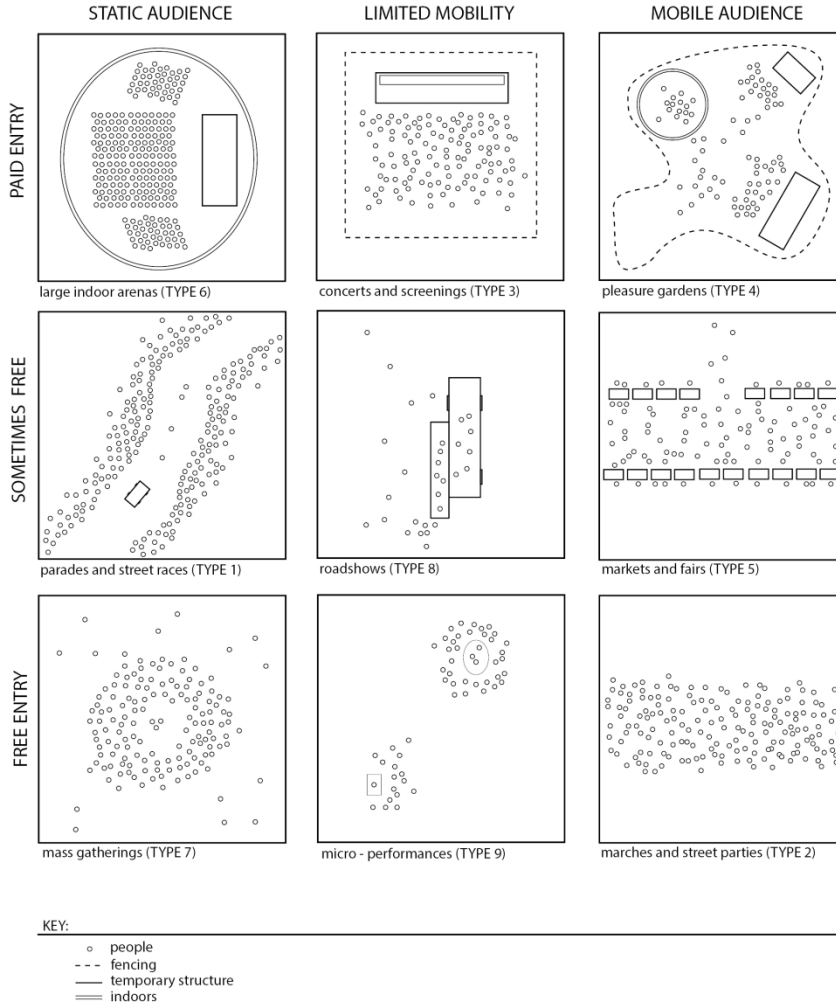


Figure 1: A typology of event spaces

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