

The festivalisation of London's Parks: the friends' perspective

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CHAPTER 2

The Festivalisation of London's Parks: The Friends' Perspective

Andrew Smith, Guy Osborn and Goran Vodicka

Introduction

Public parks are deemed to be pivotal spaces in the drive to make our cities more liveable, more equitable and, ultimately, more sustainable. This ambitious agenda highlights one of the biggest challenges facing those tasked with managing parks: they are now asked to serve an increasing number of functions: as places to escape, socialise, play and relax, but also as 'green infrastructure' or 'ecological services' that absorb CO₂, cool our cities and provide habitats for wildlife. Parks are also viewed as assets that can be hired out, add value to real estate, or attract tourists. These varied functions are not always compatible, creating tensions and conflicts over what and who city parks are for.

Contested uses and debates over whether parks should be more focused on environments or entertainments are perhaps most obviously illustrated in disputes over park festivals and events (Smith 2018). In recent years, reflecting wider processes witnessed in other types of urban space, there has been a 'festivalisation' of some city parks, with festivals and events used to populate, animate, promote and subsidise green spaces (Smith 2016). Parks have long

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been ‘eventful’ (Richards and Palmer 2010), but there are signs that the number and range of events staged has grown (London Assembly 2017), partly due to the increased demand for experiences, but also because events have become key tools to help achieve various public policies. As Wynn (2015: 12) notes in his definition of festivalisation, festivals and events are now used to ‘develop, reinforce, and exploit an array of communal goals’.

This chapter examines park festivalisation with particular reference to one particular city, London, and one set of stakeholders, Friends of Parks groups (hereafter Friends groups). London is well known for its green spaces and, during the Victorian era, the city played an influential role in the development of public parks (Elborough 2015). In 2019 London became the world’s first National Park City, a title partly justified by the large proportion of the city designated as green space. London has approximately 3,000 parks and, over the past 35 years, Friends groups have formed to help protect and maintain them. There are now estimated to be over 600 groups representing parks and green spaces in London (LFGN 2021). Many of these were established to respond to various threats facing public parks, particularly reductions in local authority budgets. Alternative funding sources – such as grants awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund – encouraged groups to be established as community involvement was a condition of grant aid (Speller and Ravenscroft 2005). Friends of Parks in the UK are notably different from Friends of Parks in other countries. In the US they tend to represent a new approach to management and funding which relies on private donations. For example, in New York, the Friends of the High Line not only programme, maintain and operate this new park, they raise nearly 100% of the High Line’s annual budget (thehighline.org). In the UK, Friends groups are essentially user groups, and involve volunteers who campaign to maintain and improve parks. As Whitten (2019) highlights, UK Friends groups aim to complement, rather than replace, local authority management and maintenance. However, there is considerable variation in the roles and responsibilities that these groups adopt, with some functioning as heritage appreciation societies, whilst others are more focused on campaigning, or contributing volunteer labour.

In this chapter we focus on the Friends’ perspective for four reasons. First, because Friends groups have become key stakeholders in the management of parks – groups across London now help to protect, maintain and improve many of the capital’s green spaces. Second, whilst they are not necessarily representative of all park users, Friends groups represent people who use parks on a regular basis. Third, because funding and organising festivals and events are activities that Friends are directly involved in. Fourth and finally, we focus on Friends groups because some of these groups have led high profile campaigns against festivals and events staged in parks (Smith 2019). As such, Friends groups offer informed and involved perspectives on festivals and events staged in London’s parks – and one that has been hitherto ignored in published research.

The overriding aims of this chapter are to explore how London's parks are programmed as venues, and to establish what Friends groups think about the festivals and events that are staged in their parks. We begin with a short review of relevant literature and a synopsis of the methods used to collect data on park events in London. We then outline the range of festivals and events that were staged in London's parks in 2019 and summarise the impacts these have, according to Friends groups. The chapter also discusses how Friends groups are themselves involved in events, and how these groups are incorporated into decision making. The chapter also addresses the extent to which park events represent the communities that live nearby. We conclude that it is relevant to apply the notion of festivalisation to explain processes affecting London parks in the years preceding the Covid-19 pandemic. The outcomes of festivals and events vary and depend on the types of events and types of spaces under consideration: events are seen as good ways to attract and diversify users, but they are also associated with exclusion and environmental damage. To help address the negative impacts identified and to ensure events are more inclusive, a series of recommendations are provided to help guide future practice.

The Festivalisation of Parks

Festivalisation is a term that describes the increases in the number and size of festivals in recent years, but also the ways that culture and space is organised and presented in a festival-like way (Rönstrom 2016). The notion of festivalisation is often applied to urban public spaces, but research on urban streets and squares tends to dominate this body of work. Texts that explicitly address the festivalisation of urban green spaces are rare, even though this process seems to be equally relevant to city parks. Park settings have long been used for festivals and events but in recent years there seems to have been a marked increase in the number and range of events staged (London Assembly 2017). There are multiple, overlapping reasons for this trend: the mission to encourage more people and different types of users to parks; the aim to make parks more visible; the push to modernise outdated parks; the need to generate commercial income to offset cuts to grant funding; and increased demand for events generally. In cities like London, where there seems to be a shortage of large outdoor spaces, parks are regularly utilised as event venues, particularly in the summer months (Smith 2019).

One of the main benefits of park events at various scales is that they can attract new users and encourage social interactions between them. This allows open spaces to be reconstituted as sociable, *public* spaces that are more welcoming to a wider set of users (Barker et al. 2019). In Neal et al.'s (2015) research, organised parks events and celebratory occasions were identified as moments of diversity and amicable interaction by participants. Their findings suggest park events are effective ways of encouraging people from different ethnic groups to

come to parks: indeed, interviewees talked positively about the ‘ethnic diversity of park events’ such as Fun Days. In Neal et al.’s research, feelings of connectivity to culturally different others were also noted as positive impacts of staging organised events. Similarly, Gobster (2002, 157) suggests that park events are effective vehicles for nurturing multiculturalism: ‘the park serves as a logical centre of activity for festivals or a cultural centre that celebrates the multicultural population of park users’. There is also evidence that festivals and events can connect people with park spaces, building greater affinity, attachment and involvement. Perry, Ager and Sitas (2020, 613) note that: ‘linking a cultural event with natural and/or built heritage can build people’s sense of belonging and pride, especially if focused at a local or regional audience’.

The literature on parks also highlights that events and other forms of entertainment have allowed parks to transcend their origins and become more than just sites of passive leisure (Elborough 2015). This has led to more ‘active’ parks, with organised fun and social mixing usurping parks’ traditional functions as spaces for quiet contemplation and encounters with nature (Jones and Wills 2005). An event function is now designed into many parks. Obvious examples include bandstands, event pavilions and outdoor theatres, but other design features such as sloping lawns and hard standing areas also make green spaces more suitable for large-scale events. Designing contemporary parks as eventful spaces is something indelibly associated with Tschumi’s design for Parc de Villette in Paris, which was intended to be a model for the urban park of the twenty-first century (Hardingham and Rattenbury 2011). Tschumi designed an urban and dynamic park – a park of culture, not nature – which essentially provided a setting for events.

Nam and Dempsey’s (2020) recent research found that residents of Sheffield, UK, were generally positive about events staged in their parks. Of the 500+ people they questioned, 79% were positive about fun days and fairs, although there was less support for music festivals (60% positive) and circuses (34% positive). Their research concluded that there is broad acceptance of events in parks amongst park professionals and community groups, a finding which is ‘at odds with dominant discourses in academic literature that parks should be protected from commodification and commercialisation’ (Nam and Dempsey 2020, 8). Academic texts tend to emphasise that parks are increasingly hired out for commercial events, something which provides an important income stream for sites suffering from government cutbacks and under-investment (Smith 2020). Accordingly, events have become indelibly associated with the notion of self-funded, ‘entrepreneurial’ parks with users increasingly regarded as consumers, rather than citizens (Loughran 2014; Madden 2010). In American examples such as Union Square and Bryant Park in New York, rental of parkland for special events is now ingrained in the governance, management and funding models, transforming them into places of leisured consumption (Zukin 2010). Lang and Rothenburg (2016, 5) discuss this trend and

its consequences: 'amenity-laden parks are always facing pressure to pay for maintenance which in many cases leads to the further privatisation and commercialisation of public space'.

Although many of these ideas emanate from US research, similar approaches are increasingly prevalent in the UK, and there are now examples of parks in London that are entirely funded by the commercial income generated by events (Smith 2020). The increased use of London's parks for commercial festivals means that, whilst events are seen by some as ways of making parks more welcoming, they can also exclude people physically, symbolically and financially (Smith 2016). Large-scale festivals disrupt access to park space during events but also during the time it takes to assemble and derig temporary venues (Smith 2019). If events damage park environments, then access can be disrupted for an even longer period. Local residents in London have objected because events restrict their access, and because of the noise, anti-social behaviour and crowding linked to some events, especially music festivals (Smith 2019). Opponents tend to be dismissed as selfish, conservative NIMBYs who have an old-fashioned idea of what a park is for, but objections to events can be aligned to wider concerns about the right to the city (Harvey 2013). Intensive programming is regarded by some commentators as the antithesis of free space (Mitchell 2017) and various researchers now acknowledge that animating public parks can exclude, as well as include, even when it aims to achieve the latter effect (Glover 2019).

Research Method

The research presented here is based on the results of an online, qualitative survey which was distributed to Friends groups representing parks and green spaces across London in 2020. The survey involved a series of open-ended questions about events staged in parks which key representatives of Friends groups were encouraged to answer. To provide focus, comparability and validity, questions were asked specifically about events that were staged during one calendar year (2019). This means that the effects of the Coronavirus crisis are not addressed in the research presented here. Online surveys usually capture quantitative data but we wanted to develop a qualitative instrument that could record a) what was happening in London's parks and b) what representatives of Friends groups thought about it. We developed a qualitative survey that aimed to gather in-depth insights from informed participants on a focused topic, rather than a broader, more basic overview from the wider public. According to Braun et al. (2020), online qualitative surveys are a novel, and often invisible or sidelined method, and our survey matches many of the recommendations developed by these authors. Questions were generally open and expressed as succinctly and as unambiguously as possible. Braun et al. (2020) suggest studies

include nine or ten questions, including some questions where participants are asked to explain an answer, and a final open question inviting further comments. These principles guided the design of our research instrument which included questions on the range of events staged and their impacts, plus questions about Friends' involvement both in events and in decisions about whether to stage them, and questions about how well the events staged represent local communities.

Our online qualitative survey was distributed in several different ways. The lead author attended a meeting of the London Friends of Green Spaces Network (LFGN) in March 2020 to introduce the research and to encourage participation. A link to the survey was then distributed via an email newsletter distributed regularly by the LFGN. If email addresses for Friends groups were available publicly online, emails and reminders were sent directly. This generated a good response: we received completed surveys from representatives of groups from 43 different parks and green spaces across London. This sample included a relatively even distribution of sites across different parts of London, and a mix of centrally located and more peripheral spaces (see Figure 2.1). There is an over-representation of cases in inner London Boroughs and a corresponding absence of ones located in outer London, but otherwise submissions were obtained from a good range of locations and a wide range of boroughs (17 out of 32). A range of governance modes are represented too, with local authority managed parks complemented by those run by charitable trusts, social enterprises and the Corporation of London. The sample was also varied in terms of the types of spaces represented, with responses from eight main types of urban green spaces: local parks (15); large 'destination' parks (8); small urban parks and garden squares (6); heaths and commons (6); linear parks (2); peripheral country parks (2); publicly accessible playing fields (2); plus orchards and woods (2). This produced good variety in terms of the scale of parks included, but also in terms of different types of publicly accessible urban green space.

There are inevitably some limitations with the sample. We acknowledge that Friends groups most affected by events were more likely to respond to the survey. Therefore it is not possible to claim that the sample of parks and green spaces is representative of London parks generally. This issue may have resulted in the overemphasis on inner London boroughs noted above. The high number of large municipal parks in the sample perhaps reflects the fact that events are a particular issue for more central spaces that can host large-scale festivals. Nevertheless, there were many responses from groups representing parks that staged no commercial events at all, and several responses from parks that staged very few events of any kind, which suggests that the sample of parks and green spaces obtained is varied enough to draw conclusions about the general state of park events in London.

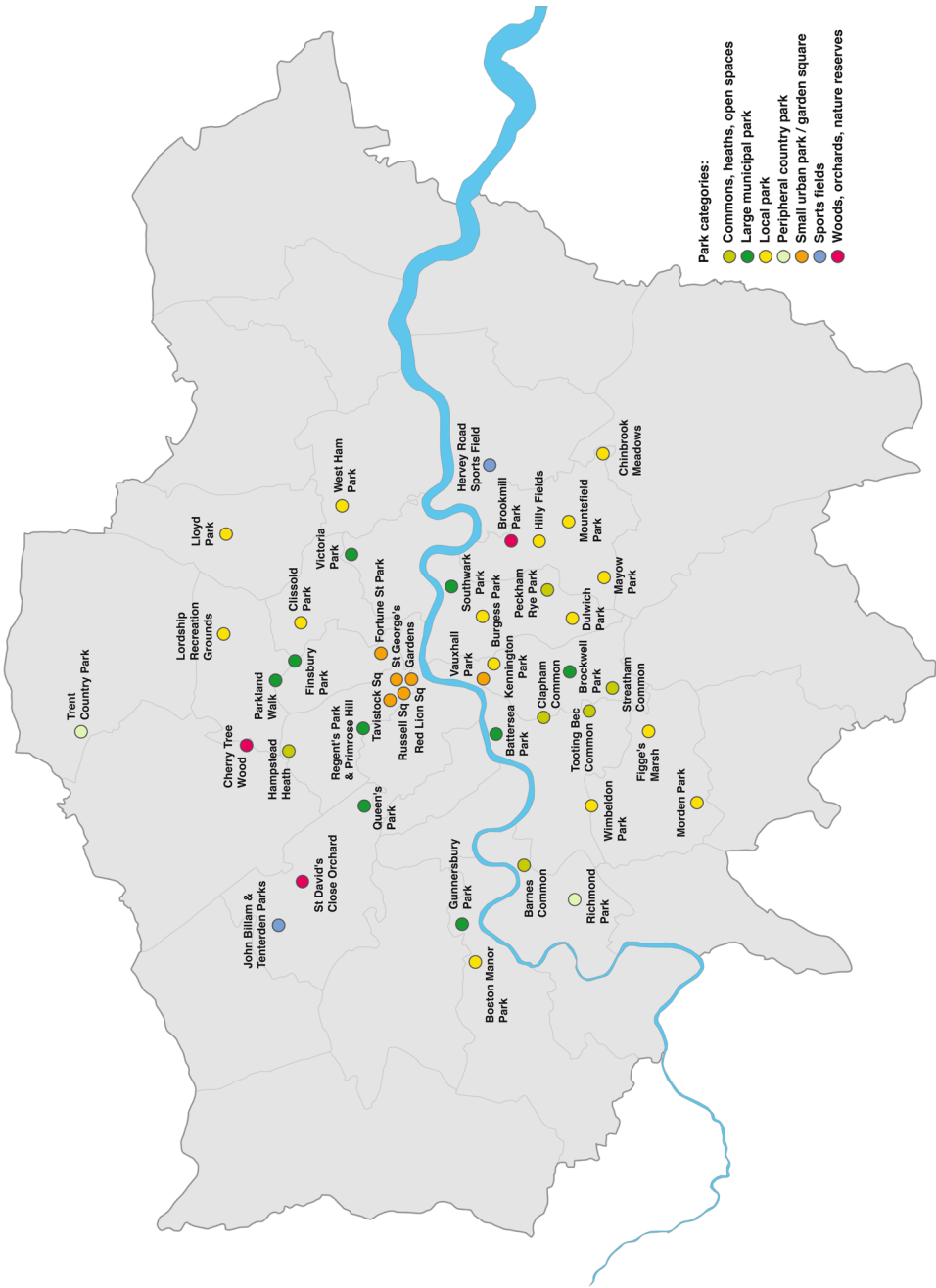


Figure 2.1: The types and locations of the parks that responded to the survey. Map by Goran Vodicka.

The Range of Events Staged in London's Parks

Festivals and events come in all shapes, sizes and guises, a heterogeneity that is exacerbated by the blurring of the boundaries between everyday leisure and special events. London parks host a varied selection of events, and existing policy guidance can be used to build sustainable and varied programmes whilst minimising and mitigating negative impacts (Parks for London 2019). The events staged in London's parks can be split into three categories: free to access events; events organised by Friends groups; and paid entry events. Whilst events in the latter category tend to be the most contentious, it is useful to get a flavour of the broad spectrum of events that take place across one calendar year.

Free to access events are prevalent within London parks and green spaces, with large sites such as Hampstead Heath reporting around 100 annually, but even smaller spaces such as Cherry Tree Wood host lots of free events. These are generally received favourably. The most commonly cited free events were gardening and planting events, highlighting the important role of urban green spaces as productive, horticultural places, rather than merely sites of passive recreation. The prominence of these 'events' in responses also highlights the fine line between small scale events and scheduled activities more generally. Following Citroni and Karrholm (2017), the events staged in London's parks are not easily separated from everyday life and draw attention to ordinary activities such as sport and horticulture.

Free music events were also staged in London's parks. Five parks reported free music festivals, including Lloyd Park in Walthamstow which attracted 35,000 people over two days in 2019 (see Figure 2.2). A further five parks reported programmes of free music events staged on bandstands. Alongside the widespread provision of fairs, dog shows, running events and other sports activities, free to access parks events also included walks and talks, plus several art events. Free festivals and events dedicated to celebrating specific cultural or religious groups were common. Some parks even hosted events outside daylight hours, including light shows and stargazing gatherings highlighting the eclectic and creative ways that London's parks are programmed.

Some of the free festivals and events staged in London's parks in 2019 were events organised by Friends groups and the rationale for staging these was highlighted by this response:

[...] the aim is to have something each month that will appeal to a wide range of the local community – volunteer gardening, history walks, bird walks, park spring clean.

Community development and social cohesion appeared to be key reasons for staging these events, with responses often mentioning the aim to 'engage', 'involve' and 'bring together' local people. Several Friends groups told us via the



Figure 2.2: The 2019 edition of the Walthamstow Garden Party in Lloyd Park, London E17. Photograph: Andrew Smith.

survey that they want to stage more events but are prevented from doing so by limited organisational capacity, low demand and unhelpful procedures. Only three Friends groups that responded to the survey did not organise any events in 2019. One group said this was because they were anticipating the start of the major redevelopment project and another stated that due to the way their park is governed, all events are organised by the city. Perhaps reflecting the different roles and functions that Friends groups may adopt, one group acted more as a campaign group that actively campaigns against inappropriate events. This opposition is useful to bear in mind as we consider commercial events.

Commercial events are undoubtedly the most contentious events staged in London's parks with music festivals and funfairs the events provoking the most negative comments from Friends groups. Some groups pinpointed specific events that caused problems, but the effects of staging multiple commercial events were also deemed to be an issue:

Leading up to Wireless there were a number of other events – this meant that for most of the summer our park was mostly out of bounds. The fabric of the park suffered and the noise/disruption to the local community was unacceptable. (Friends of Finsbury Park)

Music festivals were cited by eleven groups as examples of paid for events staged in 2019, but other types of ticketed events were also staged in London's parks, with open air cinema or theatre events prevalent. Interestingly, these events were regarded more favourably by respondents. For example, The Friends of Dulwich Park reported that their Luna Cinema screenings were '*popular and had little impact on the park*'.

Whilst ticketed, paid for, events generate a lot of publicity and complaints, our survey found that around a quarter of the Friends groups that responded to our survey reported no paid entry events at all and, in most parks, only a few commercial events are staged. However, in some of London's largest parks a large number of paid entry events were held in 2019. Remarkably, The Friends of Richmond Park reported: 'Typically 170 or so events per month' – mainly running, cycling and other fitness events that required some form of entry fee. These events encourage exercise but they are disruptive to other users especially when they involve several thousand participants. Constructing large temporary arenas in parks to stage arts exhibitions, corporate events and various other commercial events was also something reported by Friends groups. These events do not relate to (or enhance) parks' status as green spaces but instead treat parks as open spaces available to hire (Smith 2019).

The Impacts of Park Events

There is considerable body of work on event impacts, which now includes considerable attention to socio-cultural impacts, alongside an established focus on economic and environmental impacts. Our survey included questions about the positive and negative impacts of events staged in London parks during 2019. The answers provide insights into how Friends groups view the events organised in their park. Seven groups were adamant that all events had positive impacts – these were mainly groups representing small urban parks or woodland spaces. A further five stated that all community/free events had positive impacts. Countering this positivity were three groups that reported that 'all' events caused negative impacts. Apart from these polarised views most answers were more nuanced, as discussed below.

Which Events are Associated with Positive Impacts and Why?

The most commonly cited events regarded as making a positive contribution were various fun days, fairs and carnivals. Friends groups also mentioned fun-fairs, circuses, concerts, gardening events and nature walks as events that had the most positive impact on their park. Different reasons were given to explain

why certain events were regarded positively. Six groups said that events were regarded as a good way of getting more people to use the park. The Friends of Regents Park and Primrose Hill reported that:

The bandstand concerts were very popular – over 15,000 people came and sat on the deckchairs or the grass-brought picnics, kids etc. Klezmer on the Bandstand is a huge one-day Jewish music event that is free and very popular. It attracts around 5,000 people (many non-Jewish) during the one day.

Attracting more users, even in large numbers, was generally seen as a positive thing. The Friends of St George's Gardens explained why: '*we want the gardens to be used*'. Other groups also saw events as good ways of promoting their parks and prompting future visits. For example, two separate parks in the Borough of Lewisham reported positive impacts from a series of talks which '*drew in a large audience and were informative and raised the profile of the park*'.

To explain positive outcomes, a number of Friends groups mentioned community cohesion and the role of events as occasions that bring people together. A related explanation for positive impacts was the contribution certain events made to inclusivity, with free events regarded as good ways of bringing '*a wider group of people into the park*'. A good example was the response from Queen's Park:

The most positive [event] is Queen's Park Day bringing in 17,000 [people] through [the] doors, supporting many organisations, through a range of events bringing the community together in many different ways.

One of the most interesting positive impacts cited was the way events helped to get users more involved in their parks. The Friends of Cherry Tree Wood told us that their events programme '*engaged with the local community and involved them directly in planning a range of activities*'. At Lordship Rec, a renowned example of community-led management, the Friends group felt that their events empower communities and '*help them see that it's our park and we are the local community taking responsibility for it*'.

Nature walks were deemed to be good ways of encouraging participation, but also promoting environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviours. One group felt these events: '*Encourage people to value biodiversity in the park, so the community is more likely to want to be involved with protecting and enhancing our biodiversity assets*'. Seven user groups cited the income generated by events as a key positive impact. Friends groups representing Gunnersbury Park, Victoria Park and Boston Manor highlighted that large music festivals generated significant sums of money for management authorities. And groups representing Victoria Park, Lloyd Park, Richmond Park and Russell Square

reported that income earned had been used to upgrade park facilities, maintain environments or fund other free to access events.

Which Events are Associated with Negative Impacts and Why?

Where examples of problematic park events were reported by Friends groups, music festivals were the most commonly mentioned type. The groups most worried about these tended to be those representing some of London's largest parks such as Gunnersbury Park, Finsbury Park, Streatham Common, Peckham Rye Park, Morden Park and Brockwell Park. Other events that were also regarded as problematic by some groups included funfairs, winter festivals, religious festivals and even exercise 'bootcamps' and park runs. These caused issues in very large country parks (e.g. Richmond Park), but also in smaller parks.

The reasons events were cited as having negative impacts were varied, but three core problems were mentioned by multiple groups: excessive noise; damage to grassed areas; and restricted park access. The most frequently mentioned problem was noise, although this was usually mentioned in conjunction with other issues rather than being a standalone problem. For example, one group reported that: *'We are aware of complaints from residents relating to parking, litter and noise related to large commercial events arranged through the Council'*. Several groups highlighted that noise from events not only affected people inside the park, it impacted those living nearby, particularly when there was *'varying levels of intense bass noise'*.

The two other most commonly cited negative impacts – restricted access and environmental damage – are linked because damage (e.g. to grassed areas) means that people cannot access areas whilst repairs are made. Groups stressed that parts of their park were inaccessible or unusable for as long as six and even seven months after events because of the damage they caused. Damage to turf is caused by event attendees, installations which deprive grass of sunlight/water, and by lorries/vehicles used for events. It was noted that restrictions on park access happen both during events and during their assembly/derig. The time it takes to set up and take down events means that a weekend-long event equals *'restricted use one week before and two weeks after'*. Groups complained about the amount of space and time events take up, particularly when multiple ticketed events were staged in key spaces: *'The number of ticketed summer events restricts access to the most desirable parts of the park'*. Restricted access was noted as a particular problem in areas where few local people had private gardens: *'many people in our area live in flats and don't have private access to outdoor space, so when a fun fair or circus comes for 10 days and takes up a large portion of the park then it restricts access to outdoor space'*.

Problems with the aesthetics of 'ugly' fences were also mentioned by several groups and three groups reported problems with litter and various forms of

neighbourhood disruption linked to congestion, traffic and parking. Reassuringly, crime and antisocial behaviour were only mentioned sparingly, although one group did note that a music festival staged in their park was accompanied by '4 non-fatal stabbings'. Another felt that music festivals were justified by the council as cultural provision, but the reality was different: *'The business of drink with loud music "festivals" has been misrepresented as a cultural expression for which space must be found'*. One other interesting issue highlighted was low level commercialisation; with one group suggesting that events mean parents are pressured to spend money when they visit the park. This suggests that the transformation of parks into sites of consumption is something not merely associated with large-scale, ticketed festivals, but smaller, free to access events too.

Concerns about the negative impacts highlighted above meant that nearly half of groups reported they had formally objected to event proposals in 2019: seventeen before, and one after specific events. One group contextualised their objections as follows:

Our objections are legion, extensively documented, campaigned at all levels without result. The council asserts it makes money from mega commercial events, but we have demonstrated this is false. Its insistence appears to be solely politically motivated to satisfy its supporter constituency in the east of the Borough.

A similar number (eighteen) said they had not objected to any proposals to stage events in their park in 2019. One of these groups explained that timely consultation meant they didn't need to object: *'No. We are involved at a much earlier stage so events we are likely to object to don't happen!'* When asked about the ways they have been involved in the wider decision-making process about events staged in their park in 2019, six groups said they hadn't been involved at all and five responded 'not much'. Where groups were involved this tended to be relatively superficial involvement: eight groups told us that they were only involved in decision making related to one or a few specific events and a further ten described their involvement in the decision-making process as taking part in regular council-led park management groups or public consultation meetings. These were often criticised:

Invited to public consultation evenings – painful droning from dull businessmen explaining how things were going to be so much better than the previous year. Subtext – how little do we have to spend to keep you lot quiet?

The striking number of objections raised, and the rather limited involvement of Friends in decision making, highlight an interesting contradiction: whilst these groups are increasingly relied on to provide voluntary services for parks and green spaces – including small scale event organisation – they tend to be

ignored when their views on park events do not concur with the priorities of park authorities.

Festivity and Inclusivity

Parks should be designed and managed 'for the purpose of facilitating comingling and co-presence among loosely connected strangers from diverse parts of society' (Barker et al. 2019: 496). As discussed earlier, one key justification for programming events in parks is the potential to nurture these interactions between people from different social groups. Whilst our survey established that events can act as useful vehicles to reach out to people who might not otherwise use parks, the inclusivity of event programmes is not always so clear. We asked Friends groups how well the events staged in their parks matched the social profiles of neighbouring communities. Whilst fifteen groups felt that the events matched the social demographics reasonably well, two felt they did not and a further ten were unsure how to answer this question.

A key issue identified was the price of tickets, something several groups mentioned as presenting a barrier to inclusivity. Even free events were seen as problematic by some groups due to a perception that they tend to be focused on certain socio-economic and ethnic groups. For example, there was a critical self-awareness that events organised by Friends groups, *'tended to attract a greater proportion of white young families than is a true reflection of the socio-economic composition of the area'*.

The issue as to whether events attracted people who did not usually visit the park elicited a generally positive response. However, our research participants' interpretation of this question was insightful: it was usually taken to mean people travelling from further afield, rather than people from underrepresented ethnic and socio-economic groups. This suggests that the issue of underrepresentation (of non-white and poorer users) might be underestimated by Friends groups. Responses to our survey suggested that park events *do* aim to achieve community cohesion and *could* have the effect of bringing people together, but there was acknowledgment that more could be done to address diversity and inclusion agendas.

The events have definitely introduced a greater variety of people to the park but there may be other events that would draw a more diverse group to better match the socio-demographics of the area.

One way of doing this would be to involve a wider range of groups and communities in organising and promoting events. Indeed, whilst this research asked Friends groups about inclusivity, it is important to acknowledge that these groups have themselves been criticised for their lack of diversity as their

members tend to be older and whiter than the park users they purport to represent (Whitten 2019).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter has reaffirmed that London's parks are used for a wide range and large number of festivals and events. The observations made here, alongside the finding that these events are used to achieve a range of strategic objectives, support the notion that there has been a festivalisation of parks in the period leading up to 2019. According to Rönstrom (2016), festivalisation involves an unprecedented increase in the number and size of festivals staged and our survey provides evidence of such increases, with 2019 perhaps representing 'peak event' for London's parks. The other facets of festivalisation identified by Rönstrom are also evident. Following his ideas about the semantic dimension of festivalisation, what might have once been considered park activities are now regarded or rebranded as events. For example, sports activities, gardening and nature walks were regarded as events in responses to our survey. Rönstrom (2016) also considers festivalisation as something that describes the ways culture and space are now produced and organised in a festival-like way, and the research presented here suggests this also applies to London's parks and green spaces which are increasingly managed, represented and experienced as venues.

Many of the events deemed to have positive impacts (e.g. horticultural events, nature walks, fun days/runs) were those that emphasised the notion of parks as active, green, community spaces. Our research also revealed that a series of innovative events were staged: with festivals dedicated to specific communities, art exhibitions and night events all notable examples. These events disrupt traditional notions of who and what parks are for, and when they can be accessed. The significant role that Friends groups play in organising many smaller events was reaffirmed by the responses to our survey. Events, particularly those that are free to access, have a series of very positive impacts on London's parks according to Friends groups. They bring people in, diversify users, boost awareness and generate income that can be used to help maintain parks. The prevalence of nature-oriented events also highlights the role of events in promoting pro-environmental behaviours. Our findings support Nam and Dempsey's (2020) research which also revealed generally positive attitudes towards park events. The most positive outcomes seem to stem from instances where Friends and other local groups were involved in organising events.

Friends groups also feel that some events cause negative impacts with restricted accessibility, damage to park environments and disruption of surrounding neighbourhoods the key complaints. These effects are associated with large-scale festivals and, to a lesser extent, funfairs and circuses. Over a quarter of the parks that responded to the survey hosted major music festivals in 2019 and, although Friends groups were generous enough to acknowledge

these mean ‘*three nights of 40,000 people having a good time*’ (Friends of Gunnersbury Park and Museum), they do cause negative effects. For example, some groups reported access restrictions for 6–7 months post-event while park surfaces were restored. This problem and other issues meant that around half of Friends groups that responded to our survey objected to event proposals in 2019. Worryingly, many Friends groups reported that their involvement in decisions to stage park events was limited or nonexistent. There has been much written about the potential for Friends groups to play a more active role in park maintenance and fundraising, but such involvement must also be accompanied by incorporation into decision making and park governance (Speller and Ravenscroft 2005). The combination of negative effects and the perceived imposition of commercial events meant several Friends groups were very strongly opposed to the ways their parks were being exploited as commercial venues. Reflecting observations made by Smith (2019), these groups tend to be those representing large municipal parks and urban commons which have recently introduced large-scale music festivals.

Finally, our findings suggest that events have an important role to play in making parks more inclusive. Festivals and events, particularly free to access events, can attract a wider set of users in terms of their socio-economic and ethnic profiles, and they produce places where people from different backgrounds encounter one another (Barker et al. 2019; Neal et al. 2015). When they are dedicated to particular cultural or religious identities, events can help to build more cohesive and tolerant communities by ensuring marginalised people are visibly represented in prominent public spaces (Low, Taplin and Scheld 2005). However, more needs to be done to ensure event programmes represent the interests and profiles of surrounding neighbourhoods (Citroni and Karrholm 2017). It is imperative that Friends and other community groups are meaningfully involved in event planning and management decisions, that social inclusion outcomes are used in criteria to evaluate proposals for events, and that community groups organise their own events. More research is also required to understand if and how events include and exclude different groups, but also the cumulative and longer term effects that programmes of events have on the inclusivity of park spaces.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed towards the authorities responsible for managing parks. Some of these were suggested specifically by Friends groups in the responses they submitted. The remainder were conceived by the authors based on responses to the survey. These recommendations can be viewed in full in an online document we produced to report our findings to participants and key stakeholders (Smith and Vodicka 2020), but we have provided a short summary here.

Many of our recommendations refer to the ways events are planned and regulated. Friends groups and other user groups should be involved in event planning and management decisions. Consultations about new events or major changes to existing events need to be timely and meaningful. Decisions whether or not to stage events should be guided by an up to date events policy that is co-produced with Friends and other user groups. User friendly procedures and training in event marketing and management could encourage community groups to organise more free-to-access events.

We have also developed a series of recommendations that aim to minimise negative impacts. Parks' suitability and resilience as venues could be enhanced by providing specialised features and design adaptations. For example, simple additions such as a permanent power supply would help to reduce the need for polluting generators. In instances where park settings are irrelevant to the aims and user experience of events, alternative outdoor venues should be considered – including brownfield sites awaiting development. The relocation of the Field Day music festival from Victoria Park to an industrial site in Enfield in 2019 provides a useful example to follow. Our survey highlighted that lengthy winter events on grass surfaces (e.g. winter wonderland type events) were deemed particularly problematic so these should be avoided or relocated.

Finally, there are ways that festivals and events staged in parks could be better aligned to inclusivity objectives. Social inclusion outcomes should be included in criteria used to adjudge the merits of event proposals and, given the important roles that park settings and cultural events play in social inclusion (Neal et al. 2015), park events could be better integrated into wider social policy. The only reliable way to ensure that event programmes represent the interests and profiles of surrounding neighbourhoods is by involving local stakeholders in planning events and event programmes. We think it would be helpful to (re)consider events as powerful processes, not merely opportunistic occasions, and more could be achieved by leveraging event planning/organisation to advance social inclusion. A good way to do this would be to provide dedicated funding and support for events organised jointly between different community groups. This would encourage inter-group collaborations pre-event and address the need to engage community groups beyond Friends groups.

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