

**Beyond the pale: the legacies of austerity for London's municipal parks [Abstract only]**

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This document is the Accepted Version [AM]

**Citation:**

SMITH, Andrew and VODICKA, Goran (2021). Beyond the pale: the legacies of austerity for London's municipal parks [Abstract only]. In: Royal Geographical Society Annual International Conference 2021, London, 31 Aug 2021 - 3 Sep 2021. (Unpublished) [Conference or Workshop Item]

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# RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2021

## Beyond the pale: the legacies of austerity for London's municipal parks

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### Abstract

Fifteen years ago, in their book *The Invention of the Park*, Jones and Wills suggested that 'the municipal park, at least in its urban form, may yet become a victim of a broader war between public and private use, class and moneyed interests'. Following the period of austerity 2010-2019 this is now not merely a possibility, but the reality for many UK parks. Cuts to local government budgets significantly reduced the funds available for maintenance. New governance models and measures to increase income from commercial activities were introduced to address shortfalls and this funding crisis has been exacerbated by COVID-19. This paper assesses the legacies of austerity for public parks by analysing several London cases. Some of London's municipal parks have been managed by local authorities as revenue generating assets, rather than as public amenities, furthering processes of commercialisation and commodification. This paper examines this trend via a series of photographs taken by the authors as part of their fieldwork. The images illustrate the ways that fenced off event spaces in Finsbury Park, Gunnersbury Park, Brockwell Park and Victoria Park now restrict access to municipal parks. These photos are accompanied by a commentary that contextualises the images within wider debates about the future of municipal parks in an era of neoliberal austerity. The paper was conceived in the pre-pandemic period, but has been updated to illustrate how, during the coronavirus crisis, festival fences were replaced by other barriers and restrictions which also affected the accessibility of London's parks.