Festivalisation and the privatisation of public spaces

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“City for Sale?” The Commodification of Edinburgh’s Public Spaces
URBANISATION OF FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

• Recent trend for urbanisation of festivals and events (Hagemann, 2010)
• Increased use of temporary venues constructed in civic squares, streets, public parks (McGillivray & Frew, 2008, Frew & McGillivray, 2014; Smith, 2018)
• Hospitality, sponsor, logistics installations
• ‘Short term’ exclusion of normal uses / users
• Longer term effects?

‘Events have the potential to transform, temporarily the spaces they occupy but there are also longer lasting spatial implications that emerge from the hosting of events’ (Foley, McGillivray and McPherson, 2012: 23)
FESTIVALISATION EFFECTS ON PUBLIC SPACE

• Festivals accentuate drama and spectacle
• Facilitate contemporary restructuring of urban public space – ‘commodified’, branded and enclosed as use value traded for exchange value (Osborn & Smith 2016;)
• Creation of ‘perceptual space’ (Lefebvre, 1991) – spaces which naturalise visibility, gating, branding...
• Shift from citizen to consumer as the focal point of policy – urban public spaces are symbolic spaces which are saleable as urban ‘assets’ (Duignan & McGillivray, 2019; McGillivray, 2019)
FESTIVALS AND EVENTS AS ‘TROJAN HORSES’

• New systems and practices for regulating and managing public spaces (Horne & Manzenreiter, 2016; Casaglia, 2018)
  • CCTV / policing
  • Advertising
  • Physical changes
  • Public space ownership / management models
TRANSFORMING PUBLIC SPACES INTO EVENT SITES: NORMALISATION

• Normalisation of idea that public spaces are appropriate venues for ticketed events (Smith, 2016, 2017)
• Precedent / mandate for future events:
  • Public
  • Event companies
  • City authorities
NEW ARTICULATIONS OF (EVENTFUL) PUBLIC SPACES

- Events and public space revitalisation (Smith, 2016)
- Exhibiting the ‘potentialities’ of public spaces
- Conviviality and festivity – loosening the stiffness of monumental civic squares (Hiller, 2012)
- Highlighting the potential for festive streets - free of motorised traffic
CONCLUSIONS

• Hosting festivals and events contribute to wider urban processes... including the privatisation, commercialisation, and securitisation of public spaces
• Part of the eventification of public space, and its visual and economic commodification
• Can also help to re-imagine public spaces in a positive way
SOME REFERENCES