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# Tensions and disputes over public space in festival cities: insights from Barcelona and Edinburgh

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**ABSTRACT**

Festivals and events are important to cities, residents, cultural workers, and visitors, growing over time to have an inseparable relationship with the places that host them. In this article, we are concerned with the way outdoor urban public spaces in two self-identified Festival Cities are used to host festivals and events, including the tensions and disputes generated. Methodologically, we draw on in-depth case studies of the use of public space for festivals and events in Edinburgh (Scotland) and Barcelona (Spain). We found that both cities have experienced similar problems, with evidence of tensions and disputes over who can make use of public space to celebrate their festivities and with implications for access to those spaces for others. Open public space traditionally used for popular festivities is increasingly brought under the gaze of planning and management to maximise external reputational benefits over local citizen interests.

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## Introduction

Festivals and events are important to cities, residents, cultural workers and visitors (Guinard & Molina, 2018). They often grow over time to have an inseparable relationship with the cities that host them (e.g. Edinburgh, Salzburg, Venice and Cannes). The idea of Festival Cities has generated significant academic attention in recent years from scholars across anthropology, sociology, tourism studies, events studies and urban geography (Gold & Gold, 2020; Jamieson, 2004; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Ronström, 2016). Relatedly, many academics have sought to theorise and label the peculiarities of Festival Cities, coining various terms to explain the significance of festivals and related events to the urban setting (Hague, 2021a; Jamieson, 2004). One of the most popular monikers used to describe the tangible and intangible effects of festivals and events on the places that host them is festivalisation. Though there are different definitions of festivalisation, one of the most useful is Gold and Gold's (2020) who suggest that festivalisation represents a 'process by which increasing the number and

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duration of festivals held in a particular place produces tangible and intangible changes in the economy, culture and environment of that place' (p. 14). The trend has been towards cities having events coordinated across the year to give the impression of a planned programme, concealing the reality of urban life whereby long-standing or new events are brought together instrumentally and branded as an event portfolio to reinforce the notion of a 'Festival City'. As Gold and Gold (2020) suggest, festivalisation processes transform out of the ordinary, relatively ephemeral and even peripheral happenings into central features of the urban economy. For this article, we include events (i.e. one-off) other than festivals (extended duration and recurring) in our considerations. This is because, as Smith et al. (2021) suggest, the number and range of events staged in urban environments has grown, and the net effect of this growth is that some public spaces are heavily programmed, creating tensions and disputes.

While festivals and events have been shown to generate significant benefit to a place's sense of itself and its economic standing they have also been associated for centuries with disruption, economic loss and inequities in visitors and resident's experiences that still exist today (Gold & Gold, 2020). Renowned Festival Cities like Edinburgh and Barcelona have struggled for some time with the implications of programmed festivals and events on their urban environments, especially around their congested urban centres (Bennett et al., 2014). Narratives of over-tourism, linked to the influx of visitors to attend festivals and events year-round, have focused debate on the deleterious effects of intensive use of public space for urban dwellers. While public space is heterogeneous and heavily contested, in this article, we focus on three main outdoor public spaces: parks, streets and squares in the centre of two major European cities.

Our main research question is concerned with exploring 'how outdoor urban public spaces in two self-identified Festival Cities are used to host festivals and events, and the tensions and disputes generated as a result'. We focus on tensions and disputes around highly valued public spaces used to stage important festivals and events in both cities. In Edinburgh, the main public space site is Princes Street Gardens (East and West) and the main festivals and events are Summer Sessions and Edinburgh's Christmas, including the world-famous Hogmanay celebrations. In Barcelona, our focus is on festivals and events hosted in the public spaces of the city's central district, Ciutat Vella. This is the district with the highest concentration of population, social activity, commerce and cultural events. The majority of events taking place in this central district are traditional and popular celebrations (e.g. La Mercè) but it is also used as the site for many cultural industry events and festivals (Colombo et al., in press).

Structurally, we begin by discussing the Festival Cities context in both Barcelona and Edinburgh, highlighting their similarities and differences. We then set out, in turn, examples of tensions and disputes that have arisen over the use of public space for festivals and events in each city, focusing specifically on city centre public spaces. We then bring the article to a close with a discussion and conclusion that also considers the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the relationship between public space, festivals and events.

## Global pretensions and spatial tensions: the case of two festival cities

Barcelona has a high population density and limited space in which different interests collide. Decisions over the use of outdoor public spaces including streets, greenspaces

and plazas for festivals and events lie with the municipal administration, but pressure over the use of those spaces is, increasingly, evident. Barcelona is renowned for the peripatetic, or pulsar (Richards, 2015) mega cultural events it has staged in the last 30 years, but these have been accompanied by an extensive programme of recurring cultural festivals that have restored popular participatory expression to Barcelona's streets (Colombo, 2017). As Richards (2015) points out, Barcelona's event portfolio includes 'pulsar' events that generate global effects and 'iterative' events, built from within, that support more localised agendas including strengthening social cohesion and fostering cultural inclusion. For example, in recent years, Barcelona's social structure and population composition have changed radically with the influx of new migrants, including those searching for better economic conditions and quality of life. Festivals and events staged in outdoor public spaces like streets and plazas (Astor, 2019) have been viewed generally as tools for economic development opportunities, rather than as a means of encouraging social participation, encounters with difference and development of social capital (Brownett & Evans, 2020; Citroni & Karrholm, 2019; Quinn et al., 2020).

Currently, there are different tensions and disputes about the uses of public spaces in Barcelona's central district, for two main reasons. First, there is the problem of mass tourism, producing a lack of space for local activities. Second, the use of public space for commercial rather than social events creates tensions for city centre neighbourhoods. Like other cities in Europe (Smith et al., 2021), Barcelona now has a year-round calendar of cultural events (estimated 349), of which 66% are cultural industry events, 27% traditional and popular culture events and 6% cultural diversity events (Colombo et al., in press). Programming these events into city centre outdoor public space is challenging, leading to evidence of tensions and disputes related to the management of these spaces and the rights of the communities who make these festivities possible.

Like Barcelona, the city of Edinburgh has also become synonymous with festivals and other forms of events. While popular, traditional festivities exist in the city (e.g. Beltane Fire Festival), the foundations for Edinburgh's status as a Festival City date back to 1947 when Edinburgh International Festival was established post-World War II to create a flowering of the human spirit (Hague, 2021a). The now-famous Edinburgh Festival Fringe event first ran that same year. Since then, numerous other festivals have been established in the city, to the point where in 2021 Edinburgh had 11 official festivals. In recent years, the city also sought to bid for and host other one-off events including music, sport, and urban adventure. Edinburgh has successfully used its festivals and events as media for the transmission and reception of culture (Gold & Gold, 2020) contributing significantly to the city's place identity. Festivals and events are inseparable from the city's public life, with Jamieson (2004) arguing that for six weeks in August, 'thriving street life brings tourists, performers, and residents into proximity where difference in appearance, language, and behavior becomes the norm of city centre public life' (p. 64).

So important are festivals and events to Edinburgh's economy and cultural life that in 2007 the city created a new governance arrangement, *Festivals Edinburgh*, to coordinate its individual festivals into a brand that could be promoted domestically and internationally. Festivals Edinburgh has a 'mission to maintain and develop the value of the Festivals' and the Festival City's position locally and globally'. Though new festivals have been added to the city's roster in recent years, many of the events are longstanding, strongly

rooted in place. For that reason, Edinburgh Festivals are integral to the city, its architecture, and the use of public space. The urban environment and landscape are a crucial backdrop to many of the city's most iconic festival and event spectacles including the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, the Hogmanay Street Party, and, more recently, the Summer Nights music concerts (held in Princes Street Gardens). Edinburgh Festivals are also an intrinsic part of the urban economy – estimates suggest that they generate £160 m per annum for the city, much of that related to the additionalities associated with place promotion (Hague, 2021a). In August each year, the entire city centre is transformed into a stage, animating the historical streetscapes with performance and play. This, as Jamieson (2004) argues, is meticulously planned by the local municipality that controls how they want the city to look and feel via 'strategically planned festivalised spaces […] festivals generate regulated and liminal spaces in the city's cultural calendar' (p. 65).

Like Barcelona, in Edinburgh, the instrumentalist exploitation of festivals and events to develop positive urban imagery for circulation around the globe has generated tensions and disputes in the use of public space and in recent years this has been accentuated, for two main reasons. First, the 'official' Edinburgh Festivals have extended their temporal impact beyond the six weeks they used to operate in, mainly to attract new audiences and extend the festival season. Second, other festivals and events have been created or attracted that have added to the intensive use of the city's public spaces made popular by the Festival Fringe in the peak summer and Autumn periods. Hague (2021a) argues that these outcomes are an inevitable product of the growth coalition of public and private interests that has operated in Edinburgh since the 1990s, reflecting broader trends in entrepreneurial governance at the local state level. He suggests that 'festivalisation has normalised the flow of value from local public spaces to geographically dispersed asset owners' (p. 289). Private interests took on a greater role in staging festivals and events in the 2000s, as revenue generation became a priority for the local state, but this transfer of assets also created the conditions for several recent urban controversies over claims to precious urban public space (McGillivray et al., 2020). In entrepreneurial, growth-focused narratives, space and place are reimagined as assets to be exploited for financial gain (Gomes, 2020). The local state creates the conditions for private actors to operate to the extent that, in Edinburgh, 'the city council paid considerable sums of public money to a company that worked corporately with private and public sectors to market the capital as a place of festivals' (Hague, 2021a, p. 38).

However, objections have been raised by heritage groups, local residents and activist movements to the over-intensification of public space use for festivals and events in Edinburgh's greenspaces and streetscapes, in particular. As Hague (2021a) contends, 'The result has been the festivalisation of the city, through intensification and extension of the festivals and associated commercial cultural events, and the commodification of public spaces' (p. 31).

To summarise, in both cities, festivals and events (popular and cultural) have increased in prominence over the last 30 years, generating economic return, solidifying (new) place identities, or helping strengthen social ties locally. In both cases, city centre outdoor public spaces, including streets, squares (or plazas), parks and greenspaces have been used to host festivals and events, sometimes exacerbating concerns around the deleterious effects of over-tourism and the privatisation of space (Bodnar, 2015; Smith, 2016).

In the remainder of this article, we explore the tensions and disputes that the use of public space for festivals and events in the city centre generate between diverse interests and actors, including the local state, host communities and organisers.

## Research design and methods

In addressing the main research question, a qualitative case study methodology was developed which focused on two dimensions, (i) festivals and events and (ii) outdoor public spaces, in both cities. Spatially, in each case, we focused on city centre streets, squares (or plazas), parks and greenspaces used to host festivals and events. In Edinburgh, this included Princes Street Gardens, Princes Street, The Royal Mile and surrounding streets where the summer Edinburgh Festivals, Edinburgh Christmas and New Year (Hogmanay) celebrations were held. We also included the Summer Nights music concerts held in Princes Street Gardens as these generated specific tensions and disputes over the enclosure of public space (McGillivray et al., 2020). In Barcelona, the focus was on the central city district with the higher concentration of cultural events in the city Ciutat Vella, particularly the Barceloneta neighbourhood, where tensions and disputes around public spaces are strongly linked with over utilisation and gentrification. Spatially, we observed two examples of cultural events – the main festival in the city, 'la Mercè' and a community-linked neighbourhood event, 'Cors Muts'.

In each city, a combination of qualitative research methods was utilised to better understand potential tensions and disputes in the use of outdoor public space for festivals and events, including in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation. In both cities, interviews were conducted with representatives from the local state, festival and event organisers, heritage groups, event participants and community organisations. We observed festivals and events as they took place in our focus public spaces and documented our insights in the form of an observation template to ensure broad consistency in approach. Finally, we collected and collated documentation pertaining to festivals and events and public spaces in each city and read these documents to identify the stakeholders and interest groups influential in constructing policy discourses and to analyse identify references to festivals and events within these.

## Tensions and disputes around the use of public space (s)

Before developing the analysis, it is important to clarify our understanding of the terms tensions and disputes used throughout the article. In the field of physics, a tension is the force between two bodies that conversely generate a contra-attraction. This means that two poles exert outward force creating a tension in the same body that joins them, be it a rope, a pole or another object. Translated to our study context, tensions are found in public space when the event and other uses or users are working in opposite directions. Tensions always exist in public space, between different uses and users but the evidence suggests that these can be exacerbated when events are brought into the equation (McGillivray et al., 2020; Smith, 2018). Disputes are the outcome of tensions and competing interests when different actors claim the body (i.e. the space) creating conflict with those who wish to see it being used for a different purpose. We now highlight the tensions and disputes evident in our two case study cities.

## Barcelona: identity, tradition and contested space

Barcelona is home to many events that focus on identity and diversity, including festivals, popular celebrations and commemorations. However, these events have also been the site of contestation over the use of public space, especially focused on who has the right to access open city centre space.

Popular and traditional cultural events including Cors Muts, held in a city centre neighbourhood, reveal particular tensions over ownership of the event and the public spaces used as the venue for these celebrations (primarily streets). Traditionally, Barceloneta neighbours have promoted and exchanged their sea products during Cors Muts which used to have a commercial function alongside its cultural and symbolic purpose. Cors Muts is celebrated on Pentecost with great parades through neighbourhood streets, where participants dance to popular songs related to Clavé Choirs.[1] Each festivity centres on two main parades. The first parade takes place as participants leave their neighbourhood on Pentecost Saturday to spend the weekend outside of the city. The second takes place when they return to the neighbourhood on Whit Monday. For political reasons, during Franco's dictatorship, the singing processions were banned, and neighbours responded with the Cors Muts (Silent Choirs) as a social scourge to the situation. While singing was banned, the parades were permitted, so participants continued to organise these during Francoism, with changes to the sonic aspect with the introduction of the paradoxical silent choirs. With the arrival of democracy, the choirs were made audible again and the parades now consist of different groups moving through the streets performing their special songs and performances, inviting audiences and participants to celebrate together.

However, as this event has become more popular, tensions have arisen during the street dances between participants and audiences. On Whit Monday, a public holiday in Catalonia, participants arrive back in the city after a weekend away, ready to perform their unique dances to the neighbourhood only to find the streets full of people, most of them unaware of the existence of Cors Muts. Over the last decade, the city council has erected fences to protect street space for the dancers, retaining the authenticity of the event. However, the audience often enters the space reserved for the dances, disrupting the conventional performance of the festivity. To the participants of Cors Muts the streets where the parades take place are sacred during the liminal time of the festivity. However, the importance of these rituals is not well understood by tourists and locals from other neighbourhoods who are confused to find the streets fenced off, and often wish to join in, much to the annoyance of the participants. Dancers question the right of the audience to use 'their' space. Interactions between performers and audiences highlight the contestation over space that Cors Muts generates: 'You, get off here. This is not your festivity, this is our festivity, so get off […] Do you know I am paying for this? So get off because you are bothering me and this is my moment' (Dance participant, Interview, November 2021).

The tensions evident during the celebration of Cors Muts have been exacerbated by the effects of mass tourism on the Barceloneta area, one of the most popular and attractive neighbourhoods in Barcelona city centre. These tensions in Cors Muts exemplify a wider tension in Festival Cities over who owns public space when festivities take place and who has the power to decide what uses take precedence (Gomes, 2020; McGillivray et al., 2020).

A second example of an event that impacts on public space is the largest popular and traditional festivity of Barcelona, 'La Mercè'. This event is organised by the city council and activities take place across Barcelona, with many important events taking place in highly valued symbolic public spaces in the city centre (Pablo, 2000). 'La Mercè' first appeared in 1871 to celebrate the patronage of Barcelona (September 23rd). During the last few decades, it has gained more civic importance, relegating its religious roots to the margins. With the arrival of democratic councils from 1977 onwards, it has become an event where the population celebrates its sense of citizenship through expressions of social activity on streets, in parks and on plazas. However, the over-intensive use of the city centre has also affected this celebration, which in recent years has received fierce criticism from various actors over its role in creating overcrowded city centre spaces while at the same time detracting from the community essence of the celebration. Even participants recognise this tension, illustrated in the 2017 opening speech by the philosopher Marina Garcés: 'In big cities, festivities have been transformed into festivals, into mass events […] When you meet your friends, take for granted that you will lose them among the multitude. Consumption and cultural leisure dominate the festivity and dismantle the reunion' (Garcés, 2017).

Decentralisation and re-distribution have been proposed as a solution to address this criticism. Although there are many activities which still take place in the city centre district of Ciutat Vella, some decentralised programming now exists in the city's neighbourhoods. This decentralisation was accelerated by the shock of the coronavirus pandemic, to avoid cancelling the 2020 edition. Significant efforts were made to adapt the festivity to enable safe experiences. Measures included free pre-ticketing, small groups, social distancing, fenced perimeters, mandatory face masks, hand washing facilities and the distribution of events to many different locations across the city (Villanueva, 2021). The logic of Festival City narratives pre-pandemic tended to emphasise the concentration of festive activities in centrally located areas, to create the impression of the city-as-festival. However, the effects of the coronavirus pandemic have led to the development of iterative events hosted in several city districts. Ironically, this decentralisation and re-distribution might actually help address concerns over the overuse of public space for events in the city centre, encouraging greater local belonging and ownership alongside the strengthening of local social networks. We consider the future implications of these trends further in the concluding section.

### *Edinburgh: public spaces and the incursion of private interests*

In Edinburgh, in the last 30 years, the trend has been towards making greater use of the city's valued outdoor public spaces and iconic heritage assets as a backdrop for the global mediation of the city. For example, Edinburgh's Hogmanay celebrations were formalised in the mid-1990s, with the popular traditional festivities replaced with managed and ticketed events hosted in the city's Princes Street (and latterly its gardens). In subsequent years, the centrally located greenspace, Princes Street Gardens, has also been used extensively as part of a newly created Edinburgh Christmas winter festival, while George Street was used for the International Book Festival and new concerts and events were located at the foot of the famous Edinburgh Castle. In the mid-2000s, the value of festivals was reinforced, with local and national governments recognising the need to develop a

more cohesive festival offer, leading to the formation of a Festivals Forum in 2007 made up of public and private actors focused on maintaining Edinburgh's pre-eminent position in the global festival order. The implications of this commitment to festivals-as-growth narrative in Edinburgh are that commercial and leisure events have increased in number alongside the ever-present official recurring festivals that traditionally take place in August each year. Commercial event promoters want to use valued public space to host their events because of its iconic place-recognition value. However, as the local state facilitated access to these public assets like streets, parks and greenspaces, there is evidence that major festival-related developments have been permitted to 'proceed without the need for planning permission' (Hague, 2021a, p. 48) leading to the accusation that 'civic assets open to all, and managed by an elected authority are transferred, temporarily or permanently, to private entities, who can then exclude those unwilling or unable to pay to gain access' (Hague, 2021b, p. 297). This perspective was reinforced in our study with the former City Centre Programming Manager suggesting that the problem with the intensive staging of festivals and events in public space is fundamentally about:

> public access to civic space […] the creeping commercialisation of public space. In Edinburgh the feeling was that events get put on and so you are commercialising, you're barring entry – you're charging for entry to areas that might be common good land which might bring legality issues. But it's much more a point of principle, "why are we being denied access to this space when they're charging money?" (Interview, March 2020)

In Edinburgh, the effects on public space availability for use by residents has also been exacerbated when events effectively close access to greenspace (e.g. Princes Street Gardens) for extended periods of time, with the Summer Sessions music concerts alone taking around three weeks to set up, use and de-rig.

As discussed earlier, the urban architecture of Edinburgh has been shaped by, and shapes, the city's festivals. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe continues to inhabit the city's streetscapes in a way that strengthens public cultural life but it is the use of other public spaces as quasi-formal event venues that has generated tension and dispute in the city. As available greenspace is at a premium in the summer months, residents, heritage groups and activist movements have been increasingly vocal in their opposition to the closure of these spaces in order to host events that are sometimes viewed merely as place promotional vehicles. For example, Edinburgh Christmas, organised on behalf of the city by a commercial provider, Underbelly, occupies a large swathe of East Princes Street Gardens over the Christmas period, limiting access to the space for other activities for a number of weeks, contributing to 'a gradual move from "I really liked to go to Princes Street Gardens to see a concert" to now having something completely different (The Edinburgh Christmas markets) that requires a massive infrastructure and there's a lack of free access to civic space' (former City Programmes Manager, Interview, March 2020).

Though this six-week winter event is popular and generates revenue for the council, in 2019, pre-coronavirus, a major urban controversy was generated when it was found that the infrastructures associated with the Christmas Markets and related events had not received planning permission and, second, the ground damage caused by the celebrations was extensive. A prominent heritage organisation found that the right permissions had

not been granted after they sent an email to the council's Director of Planning asking 'number one, does this development need planning permission? Number two, if it does, has it got planning permission?' (Heritage organisation, Interview, March 2020). It transpired that the development should have had permission but had not sought it. The same heritage organisation drew attention to the damage caused to valuable green space, which precipitated a groundswell of public consternation initiated via social media channels, 'as the Christmas tree was sawn down, as the memorial benches were burnt, as the crib on the Royal Mile was removed, as the mud heaps appeared afterwards' (Heritage organisation, Interview, March 2020). This led to significant media coverage and a large public meeting where residents came together to challenge the effects of festivals and events held in public space on their experience of urban living in the city. In response to growing public pressure, the city council announced in early 2020 that it was looking to distribute its festivals and events more widely in the city centre and beyond to avoid the problems associated with the intensive use of a few valuable greenspaces and streetscapes.

What the Edinburgh case highlights are the absence of an agreed strategic framework to govern the use of public space in the city centre and how festivals and events fit into those discussions. In any city, the use and management of public space are contentious, but as more event promoters and festival organisers want to stage their events in Edinburgh's iconic streets, greenspaces and squares, there is a need for mechanisms to determine what good use of particular spaces would be. In Edinburgh, there is a 'lack of a central point that could be authoritative or could give guidance from a Council point of view[…]in decisions over use of public space' (former City Programmes Manager, Interview, March 2020). This lack of clarity means that individual event applications are approved without reference to a wider set of principles that govern decision-making, taking cognisance of economic, cultural, social and environmental considerations. While staging festivals and events in public spaces can produce significant benefits, there is also a danger of 'not encouraging the right things, in the right spaces, with the right quantity' (former City Programmes Manager, Interview, March 2020), risking overuse, mono-use and even underuse of some spaces.

## Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we set out to explore 'how outdoor urban public spaces in two self-identified Festival Cities are used to host festivals and events, and the tensions and disputes generated as a result'. Based on our findings in Barcelona and Edinburgh, there are evident tensions and disputes associated with festivals and events held in city centre public spaces, particularly pronounced in the pre-pandemic period. Both Festival Cities have invested heavily in year-round festival and event programmes which include traditional and popular festivals alongside more one-off contemporary (and commercial) events. In both cities, there is a rich history of recurring popular festivities making use of open public spaces like streets but in recent years these have been supplemented with the hosting of peripatetic cultural and sporting events that contribute to each city's portfolio (Gold & Gold, 2020). The effects of festivalisation on the use of public space in each city are also similar, albeit culturally the value accorded to city centre streetscapes is different. In Barcelona, popular festivities have had long-standing

historical importance, especially as an antidote to the experiences of dictatorship in the city but are acquiring new significance in contemporary times. Traditional festivities like 'La Mercè', with a history of more than 150 years, are inseparable from the streets, plazas and other outdoor spaces that host them. The occupation, or takeover, of streets represents a challenge to conventional authority structures and the focal point for collective expression. However, we have shown that there is a growing concern in Barcelona about the overuse of city centre urban space, exacerbated by the large number of events taking place in a concentrated area. Disputes in Barcelona also arise over ownership of popular and traditional festivities, including who has the right to access and use public space as either performer, participant or audience.

Edinburgh's history of recognised festivity using its outdoor urban landscape is more recent but as Jamieson (2004) has suggested, the Edinburgh Festivals are important elements of public life in the city, where different actors come together in proximity to each other. We have shown that in Edinburgh the tensions and disputes are related to the overuse of a limited number of city centre public spaces (e.g. Princes Street Gardens) which leads to the closure and commercialisation of civic space for extended periods of time. While festivals and events are highly valued by the local state and their partners, there is evidence of growing public discontent over the disruption created when events are prioritised over other uses of public space.

There are three principal analytical points we want to make in concluding this article. First, urban public space is under greater pressure to be used as venues or locations for festivals and events, both civic and commercial (Smith, 2018). As cities become more eventful (Richards & Palmer, 2010), commercial event promoters and local state marketers want to make use of premium city centre public spaces to stage their events. These new demands for access to public space create tensions and disputes with existing, traditional and popular celebrations as to what and who is prioritised. In effect, imperatives associated with place branding and promotion tend to prevail over alternative claims to space. The Festival Cities moniker is a powerful logic that drives policy and practice within cities, with precedence given to those uses of public space that contribute to wider urban strategies.

Second, those city centre public spaces that were traditionally the venues for popular festivities are increasingly governed by careful planning and management to exploit their value as assets (Gomes, 2020), as opposed to maintaining and protecting their historical and symbolic meaning. In Edinburgh, prime greenspace in the city centre is now conceived as an event venue, closed off for extended periods of time for wider public use and enjoyment. Events that made use of streetscapes and open public space in Barcelona are also now brought under the gaze of urban space managers. This also requires some other events to be relocated to bespoke venues in more peripheral parts of the city as space in the city centre is restricted. Only if the events have wider commercial, touristic or mass civic value are they permitted to take over or reclaim streetscapes (e.g. La Merce in Barcelona or Edinburgh Festival Fringe). Importantly, the local state increasingly facilitates the privatisation and entrepreneurial use of public space for certain types of events (Gomes, 2020; Smith, 2021) under the guise of economic austerity. As a result, who has access to public space, for what forms of festivity and when, is governed by a set of values that often prioritise the economic over the social and cultural.

Third, the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on all aspects of urban life cannot be underestimated. As demonstrated in both Barcelona and Edinburgh, festivals and events have been heavily impacted by the pandemic, as have city centres themselves. Pre-pandemic, in response to concerns about over-tourism and the intensive use of public space for festivals and events, there was growing pressure on the local state to decentralise and (re) distribute urban celebrations more effectively. This pressure came from residents, activists and at times businesses looking to minimise disruption to residents and damage to valuable greenspaces. As cities continue to experience the ongoing effects of the pandemic, attention is turning to the future of festivals and events (and the Festival City) and their relationship with public space. On one hand, environmental and social imperatives point towards changes in practice, with localism growing in appeal for city dwellers. This leads to calls for more neighbourhood events, a better distribution of benefits (economic and social) across the city and the use of more bespoke out-of-town venues that can be regulated and managed more safely. However, on the other hand, the negative economic outcomes of the pandemic on city centres may necessitate a return to an event-led model to drive people and investment back to the centre. While forecasting the future in these uncertain times is fraught with danger, it is evident that a greater spatial and economic distribution of festivals and events to some extent counters the concentrating logic of festivalisation processes. Decentralisation may actually help Festival Cities rediscover their relationship with neighbourhood, community and place, distributing the benefits of festivals and events more equitably while reducing pressure on important public space assets. Rather than prioritise capital accumulation, perhaps the Festival City of the future can operate with a form of urban governance that foregrounds rights and entitlements to the city and its public spaces, emphasising ideals beyond the market.

## Note

1. Clavé Choirs were the groups of choral singing founded by Anselm Clavé in the mid-1800s. They were constituted by popular sectors of industrialised Catalan cities in the like of Europe's contemporary choral movement of nineteenth century, with the aim of providing space for cultural activities through singing especially for the working class (Carbonell Guberna, 2000).

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