

Eventful Cities: the relationship between city development and cultural events

In recent years slogans such as 'festival city' or 'city of festivals' have become common elements of the brand image of many cities. But why have events become so popular? What are the benefits of being 'eventful'? What is the relationship between city development and cultural events? How do cities create, shape, manage and market events, and how can those events in turn shape the city, its spaces and its image?

The creation and promotion of events such as festivals, shows, exhibitions, fairs and championships, have become a critical component of urban development strategy across the globe. No city believes it is too small or too complex to enter the market of planning and producing events, which have become central to processes of urban development and revitalisation, as cultural production becomes a major element of the urban economy.

By adding an intangible component to the physical culture of the city, events provide a scenario in which human contacts are possible, however superficial, and there is the promise of *communitas* through the shared experience of 'being there'. In this sense, events have taken on a new meaning in postmodern societies, where they become not only an essential experience in themselves, but also an important underpinning of individual and group identity.

Thanks to a progressive transformation of urban space from productive functions to consumption and performative uses, many cities around the world have taken this a step further, and now identify themselves as 'eventful cities' or 'festival cities'. In some cities the events have become so important that they begin to define the city itself. In this sense, events have become a major tool in the process of 'placemaking'.

Redefining the way in which we look at cities and their communities, events are a new source of identity and help build social cohesion. In this situation, cultural events are no longer just a cultural matter, and events policy become part of a wider urban task of revitalisation. By moving creativity to the centre of the urban agenda, a new role has been given to cultural events as the creators (rather than preservers) of meaning. This new vision also matches emerging models of the organisation of the postmodern or post-industrial city: the entrepreneurial city, the creative city and more recently, the intercultural city.

Cities are indeed the settings for a growing number of intercultural events, which deliberately set out to cross and blur cultural boundaries as a means of promoting communication between cultures and increased appreciation for what may be termed 'diversity advantage' in cities. The intercultural approach moves beyond equal opportunities and respect for existing cultural differences ('multiculturalism') to the use of dialogue and exchange between people of different cultural backgrounds to facilitate the transformation of public space, civic culture and institutions. In this context, all city policies, services and programmes need to be reviewed through the lens of interculturalism, which spans citizen participation in decision making, education and health care services, the management of public space and the practices of cultural institutions.

Within contemporary urban areas, cultural events have emerged as a means of improving the image of

cities, adding life to city streets and giving citizens renewed pride in their city. Cultural events such as fairs and festivals have been part of the urban scene as long as there have been cities. What has arguably changed in the modern city is the level of professionalisation of the event organisation process and the instrumental use of events to achieve wider policy ends.

As events have become increasingly integrated into the daily life of cities, so the planning of events and their integration with civic goals have become even closer. The contemporary city is likely to see eventfulness as one more source of creativity that can be developed to stimulate the creative industries, enhance the attractiveness of the city and promote social cohesion. The growing diversity of cities also provides new opportunities for cities to harness the creative power of their citizens to develop events and to benefit even more from their effects.

Note

This is a summary based on “Why Cities Need to be Eventful” by Greg Richards. The full text of the paper is available at

https://www.academia.edu/1295507/Eventful_Cities_Cultural_Management_and_Urban_Revitalisation

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