

5. In/exclusion in the Festival City

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Format: traditional (call for abstracts and individual presentations of around 15 minutes)

Urban centres have been sites for celebration and festivity throughout time, linking communities with place. Historically, festivals were temporary escapes from the mundanity of everyday routines, which brought people out of the ordinariness of their lives to celebrate shared heritage and values (Featherstone, 1992). Along with this escapist function, special events and festivals also are considered social, economic, and political entities, constructed by societal influences of a specific place and culture. As Finkel, Sharp & Sweeney (2018, 1) state, “Special events are microcosms of society. Because they are temporary and usually bound by geographic space, they can be considered reflections of or responses to societal norms at the time they take place.” Recent urban festivals now exhibit complex tensions between the socio-economic strategies of neoliberal urban policies on the one hand, and the cultural needs of diverse communities on the other. As a strategic device of the urban cultural economy toolkit, festivals have been utilized more and more by cities around the world to leverage marketing, tourism, and other socio-economic benefits. Indeed, scholars have reflected on the city as ‘theme park’ (Sorkin, 1992) as part of discourses surrounding the Disneyization of society (Zukin, 1993) driven by cultural consumption and the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), of which festivals tend to be the commodified vehicle of choice (Waite, 2008). As argued by Finkel & Platt (2020), “Festivals and cities have an ongoing relationship, which is now mainly commercialized and politicized, and this has diverse impacts on communities, urban spaces, and cultural identities.” This can often create an unequal city, where urban celebrations have become exclusionary to those who do not fit in to the ‘city brand’. For example, there is criticism that tourists are often prioritized over residents in such situations, with many controversies around housing, transportation, and crowding hitting media headlines in recent years. As more and more cities around the world adopt festivalization strategies, this session seeks to explore in/exclusionary policies and practices. Thus, it is expected that session papers would include interdisciplinary and international approaches to the inequalities and accessibility issues surrounding the increasing festivalization of cities. Innovative praxis at the intersection of urban, cultural, and event studies are welcome. This could include, but is not limited to, ideas involving:

- The impacts of urban festivals on local and marginalized communities.
- The festivalized city and disability rights.

- Symbolic and physical barriers to urban celebrations and experiences.
- Diversity in urban celebrations and experiences.
- Safety issues, especially related to gender, in the festival city.
- Tourism, over-tourism, and local experiences.
- Urban festival spaces as sites of disruption, subversion, protest, education, and platforms for change.
- Urban policies involving festivals and impacts on communities.
- In/exclusionary practices in the festival city.

Empirical research is preferred, but conceptual and creative approaches will be considered, especially those theorizing the topic with regard to identity, symbolic meaning, and affective geographies.

References

- Featherstone, M. (1992). Postmodernism and the aestheticization of everyday life. In Lash, S., Friedman, J. (eds.) *Modernity and identity*, 265-290. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Finkel, R., Sharp, B., Sweeney, M. (eds.) (2018). *Accessibility, inclusion, and diversity in critical events studies*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Finkel, R. & Platt, L. (2020). Cultural festivals and the city. *Geography Compass*.
- Pine, J. & Gilmore, J. (2011). *The experience economy*. Cambridge MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Sorkin, M. (1992). *Variations on a theme park*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Waite, G. (2008). Urban festivals: Geographies of hype, helplessness and hope. *Geography Compass*, 2(2), 513-537.
- Zukin, S. (1993). *Landscapes of power: From Detroit to Disney World*. Oxford: Blackwell.