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public spaces**

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## **The long-term implications of mega-event projects for urban public spaces**

### **Abstract**

An emerging theme within the mega-events literature is the ways they affect the provision, regulation and design of urban public spaces. Host cities seem keen to bring events out of traditional arenas into public spaces. Urban parks, streets and squares are also used for supplementary occasions and facilities associated with hosting mega-events. Using the examples of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, this paper examines the long-term significance of mega-events for urban public spaces. The paper contends that these events can be used as 'Trojan Horses' which allow new systems to be introduced under the cover of an event. It also emphasizes how temporary mega-events transform public spaces into venues for subsequent commercial events. Finally, the paper acknowledges more positive legacies, showing how mega-events can change how public space is imagined by users and by those responsible for managing it. The Glasgow and London cases both highlight the ways events can highlight the potential of spaces, influencing the ways spaces are used, designed and managed.

### **Keywords:**

Olympic Games; London; Glasgow; public realm; eventalisation; Commonwealth Games

# **The long-term implications of mega-event projects for urban public spaces**

## **Introduction**

The relationship between mega-events and public spaces is often represented as one involving the creation of new spaces (Roche 2017; Smith 2014a), or the animation (Hiller 2012) of existing ones. This paper encourages a deeper and more critical understanding by focusing on the longer-term implications of hosting mega sports events for urban public spaces. Over the past two decades, one key hosting trend has been the way that urban parks, streets and squares have been more extensively utilized to host events in temporary venues (Lee Ludvigsen 2019; McGillivray and Frew 2015; Smith 2016). Public spaces do not just host venues, they are also used for the various sponsor, hospitality, retail and logistics installations that accompany contemporary mega-events such as the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, Commonwealth Games and European Football Championships. Hagemann (2010) calls this the urbanisation of events, a term which highlights the ways that mega-events have spilled out of traditional venues into the urban public realm. This trend has helped host cities to avoid accusations of wasteful expenditure on permanent facilities and it has helped to ensure that host cities (and their populations) are more visibly connected to the events that they host. Accordingly, much of the existing research asks what public spaces can do for events. For example, discussing the Vancouver Winter Olympics, Hiller (2012, p. 70) notes that it was the animation of city streets that played a “huge role in heightening people’s emotional connection with the 2010 Games.” However, there is less work that addresses what these events can do (and do do) for the public spaces that are used to host them.

In this paper we are particularly concerned with long-term effects: what happens in these spaces once the mega-event circus has left town? What are the enduring legacies of these events for the parks, streets and squares that are increasingly incorporated into hosting strategies? To provide focus, and because there are significant differences in the issues faced by mega-event hosts in the Global South, this paper concentrates on developed world cities in the Global North. In particular, we draw on experiences from two UK cities that have become regular bidders and hosts for mega-events: London and Glasgow. Glasgow staged the Commonwealth Games in 2014 and London hosted the Olympic Games in 2012, making 2020 an appropriate time to assess longer term effects. These cases are typical of the recent generation of mega-events staged in democratic states where public spaces have been used extensively (across several sites) and intensively (multiple activities over an extended period) to host mega-events. In this paper we synthesize studies carried out by the authors across the last 10 years. This body of work involved extensive participant observation, interviews with strategic actors and analysis of documents produced by host cities and their partners. In this paper, we not only bring this research work together, we extend it: by developing some of the core ideas; and by adopting a longer term perspective using contemporary observations and more recent documentary evidence.

Johnson and Glover (2013, p. 191) have called for more public space research by leisure researchers, and despite recent efforts to address this deficiency (e.g. by Glover 2019; Navarro et al. 2018), their call remains valid. In this paper, urban public spaces are the main focus of analysis, and the key objective is to examine the ways that mega-events have affected urban parks, streets and squares. This includes physical changes, but also changes to the ways spaces are managed, regulated and used. The paper begins with a review of research that addresses the relationship between mega-events and urban public space. In the sections that follow, we argue that the long-term effects of mega-events happen through three main processes: where mega-events are used by urban regimes as Trojan Horses to implement

controversial changes to public spaces; where mega-events normalize the idea that public spaces are appropriate venues for commercial events; and, finally, where mega-events help to re-imagine public spaces by highlighting their potentialities as places where people can meet and dwell. The longer term effects of temporary installations are often overlooked, and even when they are acknowledged, the possibility of progressive change tends to be discounted. By addressing these research gaps, we offer new perspectives on the relationship between mega-events<sup>1</sup> and urban public spaces.

### **Mega-events and public space**

Before focusing on the three main processes that influence the long-term effects of mega-events on public space it is important to consider how these issues have been discussed in existing literature. Rather than merely using permanent arenas, which are often located in peripheral urban locations, mega-event organizers are making more use of temporary venues located in city centres to attract different audiences and spread the benefits more widely. There is a long history of using public spaces during mega-events, with Olympic Torch relays (Macaloon 2013), street races (Polley 2009) and park based events (Gold and Gold 2018) good examples, but urban public spaces have been incorporated into sports mega-events more extensively in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. During the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, the organizers placed the city at the heart of the Games experience by providing co-ordinated crowd entertainment outside official venues (Garcia, 2012). In the wake of these so-called 'Live

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<sup>1</sup> While recognising debates in the literature about what constitutes a mega-event in terms of size, scale and impact (Müller 2015), we address the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup (which are clearly mega-events by any definition) alongside second-tier events including the Commonwealth Games and European football championships. However, for clarity and brevity, we use the term mega-event throughout.

Sites', the 2004 European Football Championships in Portugal piloted the Fan Park concept and hosted Fan Embassies to welcome visiting soccer fans. Two years later, the FIFA World Cup in Germany attracted 13 million visitors across 10 Fan Parks from Berlin to Munich – this was viewed as a success story for the host nation and for FIFA (Frew and McGillivray 2008). The success of Fan Parks and their Olympic Games equivalents, Live Sites, means hosts are now contractually obliged to provide them. This applies to mega-events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games and to other sporting events, including the Youth Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, and other major Championships.

It is easy to dismiss these ancillary events (Chalip 2006) as merely examples of the ways mega-events are growing in scale and scope, but the extension of mega-events into the public realm of cities is highly significant. Lowes (2002, p.8), focusing on the location of the famous Indycar Circuit in Vancouver, Canada, suggests that 'urban public culture is defined and shaped by competition over the right to conceptualize, control, and experience public spaces'. How space is used and framed communicates a wider vision and set of values. In the era of late capitalism, developers and pro-growth coalitions have successfully (re)framed the use of public space for private gain, with mega-events playing a key role in this process. Indeed, 'the organization of spectacular consumption-biased spaces' (Lowes 2002, p. 22) is often part of wider attempts to attract the right sort of investment and people to cities. Exploiting the city's most iconic public spaces is crucial to the success of this approach, and mediatisation plays an important role especially in the context of place marketing. Ancillary, or visitor-focused, spaces at mega-events are carefully planned in order to be reported or disseminated easily with the focus on 'securing dramatic moments that capture action shots of noisy, waving audiences' (Boorstin 1961, p. 260). Moreover, these new temporary spaces often have a commercial focus – to animate urban public spaces and deliver marketing value for event hosts and sponsors. This line of argument aligns with those writing about the commercialisation and privatisation of public space, processes that are accelerated by the

hosting of mega sport events (Smith 2016). Using this logic, public spaces like parks, streets and squares are reimagined as assets or products to be exploited for commercial gain. The city, its buildings and public spaces become brandscapes (Osborn and Smith 2016) promoting the sponsors and companies featured, but also promoting the space itself as somewhere to visit / consume. Crucially, the local state facilitates the use of publicly-owned spaces for event organizers to activate their brand assets, ceding sovereignty to external actors by passing exceptional legislation that protects the rights of these actors whilst neglecting the rights of citizens (Gogishvili 2018).

The increasing commodification of public spaces through mega-events, producing branded, enclosed and exclusive spaces, has been discussed in recent literature (Gogishvili 2018; McGillivray 2019; Smith 2016). By creating enclosed public spaces accessible only through fences, walls, and security barriers, a 'disciplined set of spatial practices' (Frew and McGillivray 2008, p.181) are enacted. In these disciplined, carceral spaces (Coaffee 2015), the audience is objectified and spatially confined, whilst subjected to invasive gating and branding. More open festivals and events can allow a diverse group of people to come together in public space (Quinn 2010), but when mega-events are staged, spaces tend to become more controlled and more exclusive (Smith 2016). This trend is driven by two interrelated factors; the need to protect the interests of corporate sponsors that make mega-events financially viable, and the need to protect events from various security threats.

The disciplining spatial practices produced by mega-events go beyond the temporary handing over of public space to external bodies. Once the logic of consumption is normalized and urban public space is reconfigured as consumption-biased (Lowes 2002), external corporate imperatives can influence and determine policy processes. In times of fiscal austerity, the allure of commercial income accruable to municipal authorities from the exploitation of public

assets is powerful (Smith 2018). Public land is hired out or exploited as a commercial asset, and this detracts from its established role as a public amenity or civic good (Smith 2016). Schimmel (1995) argues that the acceptance of mega spectacles as a route to solving urban problems is dependent on 'symbolically constructing consensus' (p.131). These strategies are mutually reinforcing and self-perpetuating in an era of relentless promotion and image-making driven by inter urban competition. Municipal authorities create the policy conditions to enable development to take place, providing incentives which 'ease the financial risk to private capital. By absolving some of the costs of investment, the local state either increases private capital accumulation (profit) or reduces private capital loss' (Schimmel 1995, p.132). Research has demonstrated how cities adapt their regulatory mechanisms to facilitate access to public spaces for mega-events (Osborn and Smith 2016). Amended planning and licensing arrangements are introduced by local, regional or national governments which enable, rather than restrict, opportunities for event owners to host their events. Even in liberal democracies, multi-agency units are assembled to fast-track applications, ensuring that the event owners and local organizers are shielded from exposure to regulations and scrutiny.

Though mega sport events can produce damaging effects that challenge the democratic use and management of public spaces, they can also generate new potentialities. Some events are responsible for closing down public spaces, but others can open up them up, attracting new populations to spaces which were previously deemed unattractive or less visible. As this process is one involving the *event-led revitalisation* of space, Smith (2016) refers to it as *eventalisation*. Festivals and events can be useful vehicles for attracting audiences that might not traditionally access public spaces, creating contact zones and opportunities for increasingly diverse populations to encounter one another. Festivals and events, as celebrations of sociality, can produce interaction and exchanges between strangers, including families, visitors, local residents and new populations to share space, generating 'communitas' and other positive effects (Chalip 2006). In the public space literature there is a recognition



that fleeting encounters (produced by coming together for festivals or events) can produce positive benefits as they ‘challenge the fear of the other embedded in relations with strangers; they disrupt stereotypical categories and open up space for reflection and change’ (Ye 2019, p. 484). We return to the potential of mega-events to create these sorts of effects in the latter part of this paper, but in the next two sections we present evidence of the other two processes influencing the long-term effects: events as ways of rolling out new ways of configuring and organising public spaces, and as agents that normalise their transformation into commercial event spaces.

### **Mega-events as Trojan horses**

Mega-events can act as ‘Trojan horses’ which allow new systems and practices for the management of public space to be implemented under the convenient cover of the event. Several authors have used this analogy, including Horne and Manzenreiter (2016) and Casaglia (2018), the latter of which argues that recent mega-events in Italy (including the 2006 Torino Winter Olympic Games) have been used to roll out new ways of configuring and organising urban public space. Casaglia (2018) argues that these events have created new institutions, militarised sites and changed legislation that govern people’s access rights. When mega-events are staged, physical installations, regulations, and technologies are introduced to urban public spaces which may be conveniently retained post-event. In normal circumstances these changes might be regarded as inappropriate or unacceptable, but the prestige, festivity and deadlines associated with staging a mega-event facilitate their introduction. The perceived significance of mega-events means people are perhaps more willing to accept changes if they are deemed necessary sacrifices which allow a prestigious event to be staged (Smith et al. 2019). The tight and immovable deadlines associated with staging mega-events also help new regulations, designs and management approaches to be

rolled out, with time constraints conveniently used as an excuse to override robust scrutiny and consultation procedures (Smith 2012).

In the mega-events literature, the Trojan Horse scenario is often associated with the FIFA World Cup. For example, Eick (2010) highlights how the 2006 edition was used as a convenient excuse to install hundreds of CCTV cameras in various German cities, with many host cities retaining these post-event (accompanied by legal changes that provided the police with new powers). Eick (2010) suggests that the event cast 'shadows of surveillance', which remained after the event. Similar outcomes have been witnessed in other parts of the Global North. Wood and Abe (2011) highlight the ways policing and surveillance policies tend to be tightened up in Japan in advance of mega-events; including the introduction of new surveillance technologies, but also revanchist actions to 'clean up' cities by removing homeless people from the streets. In this way mega-events are used to impose a public space aesthetic deemed more acceptable to event interests and elite groups. There is a long term implication here as actions adopted for events help to justify similar actions in the future. Security legacies are also discussed in detail by Boykoff and Fussey (2014) who argue that various measures, processes and knowledge associated with mega-events endure once events have gone - including legislative provisions that turn social incivilities into criminal offences.

As Boykoff and Fussey (2014) suggest, mega-events are often accompanied by regulatory changes that govern what is permissible in public spaces. This includes individuals' behaviour (e.g. drinking, protesting, prostitution) but also the presence of commercial advertising. Hagemann (2010) notes how staging the 2008 European Football Championships made commercial advertising in Swiss cities more prevalent; for example, in Zurich, a city that had previously adopted a conservative approach to outdoor advertising in public spaces. Mega-

events are also associated with greater controls over who can advertise where, with large exclusion zones imposed around venues to protect the interests of official sponsors. This was a key feature of the regulatory system introduced for the London 2012 Olympic Games (Osborn and Smith 2016). In Glasgow, hosting the 2014 Commonwealth Games led to investment in the cleansing and 'beautification' of priority touristic routes in the city centre alongside the introduction of new licensing and rights protection legislation to enable the area to be re-imagined as a 'Live City' (McGillivray 2019). Several streets, squares and parks were closed off to create a festival-like atmosphere in the city and this provided a template for how public spaces were used in subsequent years for other large events. The UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill was passed in early 2020 to enable the creation of exclusion zones in Glasgow city centre in advance of hosting fan zones for the European football championships.

New installations added to public spaces via major and mega-events include (permanent) big screens. For example, a screen was installed in Woolwich's General Gordon Square as a direct result of work undertaken in advance of the London 2012 Olympic Games and this screen is now a permanent fixture (Smith 2016). A previous event - the 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester - spawned a series of permanent public screens in various UK cities as part of the Public Space Broadcasting project (McQuire 2010). These screens can help to encourage people to dwell in public spaces, making them feel safer, but they often show advertising and facilitate commercial events which means that they are also contributors to commercialisation. The screens are also a source of noise and light pollution, illustrating some of the negative effects associated with animating public spaces (Glover 2019).

The tangible legacies of staging the 2012 Olympic Games for London's public spaces also include outdoor gyms that were installed in several London parks. These were vaunted as

great ways for local communities to benefit directly from the Games, allowing organizers to legitimize a key legacy ambition - to inspire young people to become more active (Weber Newth 2014). In reality, these were sponsor installations funded by Adidas as part of their tier 1 sponsorship deal with the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG). Adizones are dominated by brand logos and include 'walls of fame' that feature only Adidas endorsed athletes and singers (Duman 2012). Like fanzones and Fan Parks (McGillivray and Frew 2015), these installations allow sponsorship to extend beyond official venues into everyday public spaces (Hagemann 2010). Unlike fanzones, these are permanent features, meaning they constitute a significant way that the 2012 Games has affected the long-term provision of public space. For Duman (2012) they are symptomatic of the corporatisation of contemporary cultural life. The Adizone in Charlton Park is a rather anomalous example of corporate sponsorship in a suburban park, but observations at this site eight years after it was installed suggest that the facility is well used by local people.

Perhaps the most significant way that mega-events act as Trojan Horses is the way they help to facilitate the introduction of new ways of governing public spaces. The 2012 Olympic Games helped to introduce and promote a new type of public space governance in the host city (Shenker 2017). Open spaces within a large part of East London are now controlled by the London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC) that was established to manage the areas in and around the Olympic Park post 2012. This Corporation has its own planning powers, which further dilutes the influence of elected local authorities in managing this territory. Ferreri and Trogal (2018) highlight the heavy surveillance and micro-management that typify the way London's Olympic Park is regulated, with everyday activities like picnics and organised sports prohibited. The authors recount an incident when a security guard told some school children that it is forbidden to fly kites because this is 'a public-private park' (Ferreri and Trogal 2018, p. 518). However, as the space is open 24 hours a day, it is arguably more accessible than many other large London parks.

Whilst the Olympic Park might be regarded as a public-private, rather than private space, some of the other newly developed areas on its fringes provide more obvious examples of privately-owned public space. The provision of new housing and associated facilities in East Village (where the athletes' accommodation was located during the Olympic Games), has been accompanied by the development of privately owned and privately managed streets, squares and gardens (Shenker 2017). As Burrows (2017: no pages) points out, 'because the area is privately owned, you can't sleep rough on any of the streets, or set up a camera on a tripod without permission. Security guards patrol the area'. Access is only permissible at the discretion of the landowners who determine what is acceptable behaviour on their sites (Burrows 2017). Now East Village's apartment blocks are occupied, and as new cafes and services have opened, the area feels pleasant and welcoming. Users struggle to tell the difference between this set of parks, streets and squares and the public realm in other parts of London. Nevertheless, there are concerns about undermining freedoms and democracy, particularly as privately owned public spaces tend to prohibit political protests (Shenker 2017). We cannot solely blame the rise of privately-owned public spaces in London on the 2012 Olympic Games, but its projects have contributed to the expansion of these spaces in the UK capital. Like the other examples cited above, the Games provided a convenient vehicle with which to roll out controversial changes. The changes have been opposed by social justice campaigners, including those who organised a mass trespass of privatised spaces in 2016 (Townsend 2016). However, as Shenker's (2017) research suggests, their concerns are not necessarily shared by the wider public.

### **Transforming public spaces into event sites: normalisation**

One of the key findings from our research over the last decade is that mega-events help to normalize the idea that public spaces are appropriate venues for commercial events. As the preceding discussion has illustrated, public spaces have been reimagined as places that serve private interests, where the space's exchange value is prioritized over its use value. Mega-events have provided the foundations for host cities to programme public spaces as commercial venues in the legacy phase, overshadowing less lucrative uses. Some parks and squares are now hired out to event organizers for significant parts of the year, making them less accessible to regular users. London provides a clear illustration of this trend. During the 2012 Games, several parks were used to host venues and live sites, including Blackheath (Smith 2016), Greenwich Park (Smith 2014b), Hyde Park (McGillivray and Frew 2015; Osborn and Smith 2016), Kensington Gardens (Smith 2016), Woolwich Common (Smith 2014b) and Victoria Park (Smith 2019a). These spaces have been used more intensively as venues post 2012, for sports events (e.g. the World Triathlon Grand Final in Hyde Park in 2013), new music festivals (e.g. All Points East in Victoria Park and OnBlackheath) and football fan zones (e.g. Hyde Park during the 2018 FIFA World Cup). The perceived success of park-based Olympic events seems to have provided the mandate and precedent to reimagine these parks as major event venues. This controversial legacy has not just affected the parks used during the 2012 Games, there has also been a more general effect on parks across London. Despite legal challenges and public opposition (Smith 2019a), since 2012, music festivals have been introduced into many London parks (such as Finsbury Park, Brockwell Park, and Gunnersbury Park). Other parks have been used to stage contested events such as Battersea Park - which was used for Formula E motor races in 2015 and 2016 (Smith 2018; 2019b). The links between these events and the Olympics Games in 2012 are indirect, but as Smith (2016) has shown, organisers have cited the Olympic events staged in London parks as precedents in event applications – to justify their proposals.

The increased use of London's parks as venue for large-scale, ticketed events is highly contested with opposition led by Friends of Parks Groups, local action groups and national campaign groups such as the Open Spaces Society (Smith 2019a). The main objections are the restricted access to fenced off areas, the damage caused to grassed sites which can take months to recover, and the noise and anti-social behaviour which disrupts the lives of residents who live nearby (Smith and Vodicka 2020). Even though event installations are temporary, the heavy programming of some parks, and the time required to assemble and derig venues, means that they can interrupt access for long periods at times of the year (late Spring, early summer) when demand for everyday park use is high (Smith 2016) .

The Royal Parks in London were particularly prominent during the 2012 Games and in the post-event era the agency responsible for managing these eight prestigious parks has been inundated with applications to stage events. In 2015, The Royal Parks reported that they were receiving 5,000 enquiries from event organizers every year (The Royal Parks 2015). As a result, they introduced a new Major Events Policy which aimed to provide a clearer framework to guide decisions about which applications to accept. This framework highlighted a new openness to staging major events (for 5000+ people) not just in Hyde Park - which has traditionally been used as a venue for major events - but in some other Royal Parks too. For example, the new policy indicates the willingness to stage three major events per year in Greenwich Park and four per year in Kensington Gardens (The Royal Parks 2015). The new Major Events Policy and the precedent of the Olympic Games have been used to justify a series of new events, including a month long fanzone in Greenwich Park for the UEFA European Football Championships. London 2012 inspired this new events orientation as the Games showcased London park's potential as venue spaces and provided park authorities with useful experiences and expertise they can now draw on (Smith 2014b). This trend is also driven by the effects of government austerity (Smith 2020). The national government grant for The Royal Parks has been cut, forcing this organisation to become more entrepreneurial. The

latest accounts for The Royal Parks suggest levels of commercial income (c.£30million per annum, of which £13million is from events) are close to matching the funds provided by government (£36million per annum) (The Royal Parks 2019). In this context, hiring parks out to global entertainment companies like IMG, Live Nation and AEG Live helps the Parks to remain financially sustainable. Ironically, London now finds it difficult to accommodate mega-event installations (e.g. for Euro2020) in its parks and open spaces, because so many parks are now already committed to long term contracts with event promoters. In this sense, with so many competing events, the city has ambushed itself.

In Glasgow, the 2014 Commonwealth Games was also influential in encouraging greater use of urban public spaces as event venues (McGillivray 2019). The Commonwealth Games Act demanded the creation of event zones to protect the interests of sponsors and this required the city to amend its licensing arrangements to align with the interests of major events. In the subsequent period, a multi-agency team was formed to make it easier for event organizers to process their applications to host events in the city. Rather than apply to a myriad of bodies for permissions, the city streamlined its systems by bringing planners, economic development agencies, tourism authorities and land service functions together. The Strategic Major Events Forum (SMEF) had been operational in the city for some time and in 2018 an Event Board was created by city leaders to make decisions on external events applying to come to the city. That Event Board now brings all of the key stakeholders together to agree on strategic priorities and, crucially, commit to the city supporting the delivery of external events held in public spaces. As a result, Glasgow's main civic public spaces have been opened up for event incursions, open for hire by external event organizers. Though accelerated in the aftermath of the 2014 Commonwealth Games, this development dates back to 1990 when the city was European Capital of Culture. This event provided the catalyst for hosting major sport and cultural events in the city's public spaces.



In 2002, Glasgow hosted city centre fanzones in its main civic square, George Square, for the first time when hosting the Champions League Cup Final. In 2007, the city built on the success of the 2002 fanzones when the UEFA Cup Final was hosted in the city. George Square was again transformed into a fanzone for visiting football fans, along with the streets of the Merchant City, one of Glasgow's premier visitor destinations. Entry and exit points were erected to create a temporary venue with restrictions placed on the activities of local traders in favour of exclusive access to official sponsors (e.g. sale of only one brand of alcohol). Access to the square for sitting and walking through were restricted for several days. In subsequent years, George Square has been utilized for many festivals and events, including the 2014 Commonwealth Games, the 2014 Radio One Big Weekend, the 2018 European Championships and the UEFA European Football Championships 2020. When hosting the inaugural European Championships in 2018, George Square was transformed into a broadcast centre for the BBC for two weeks, with live coverage of sport events and a range of cultural activities. As an event space, Glasgow sought to create a unique, place-specific backdrop for watching millions around Europe that showcased the attributes of the city and its people. The strategy to use the square to mediate the event was successful from a place marketing perspective, but it was rendered inaccessible for everyday use as a civic public space for more than a month. The pervading influence of the major events staged in 2014 and 2018, is illustrated in the marketing literature for proposed hosting of the European Football Championships:

just like during the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games and the European Championships in 2018, George Square will once again become a hive of free, family friendly activity next summer, when the UEFA EURO 2020 Football Village opens...

(Glasgow Life 2019).

Free access to the square during these events contributes to the potentialities we discuss in the next section, but the square has been less accessible and open to everyday use, including for public protest, because of its use as an event venue. In late 2019, the future of George Square was discussed in a city-wide 'conversation', the findings of which suggested that residents wanted the space to be open for all, with less commercial events held there.

Glasgow's Merchant City area, the home to a festival created to service the city's tourism ambitions in 2008, has also been transformed into a regular event site in the last decade, partly to support the planning and delivery of the Commonwealth Games. First, the Merchant City Festival was moved from September to July to help facilitate the hosting of Festival 2014, the Commonwealth Games cultural festival. New licensing and trading regulations were passed at national (via the Commonwealth Games Act) and city level to enable this area, close to George Square, to become a free-flowing festival site. Since 2014, other cultural festivals have been hosted in the Merchant City including the European Championships in 2018 and this was planned for the 2020 European Football Championships which were eventually postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. In Glasgow, there is also evidence that public spaces are being redesigned so they can host more events in the future. For example, in 2019 the aforementioned Glasgow 'conversation' on the future of George Square gave significant consideration to its role as an event venue. There is pressure on city leaders to invest in the square to avoid the need for expensive and unsustainable temporary infrastructures to be brought in to host large events. As one Glasgow event organizer suggested:

...it's a roundabout ultimately just now. So you're doing an event in a roundabout with no power, with no tech, on a slope, with lots of statues in very bizarre places...I think in terms of future proofing both in terms of how we make it more efficient and more effective, I think we need to redesign our public domain for that.

(Personal interview, Glasgow Life 2019).

In announcing the design contract process for the square, the city council recognised the importance of large scale events when confirming that construction work would not commence until the city had fulfilled its contractual obligations to host the UEFA European Championships, COP 26 and the UCI Cycling World Championships.

Glasgow has also exploited its public parks and normalized the use of events in the greenspace closest to the city centre, Glasgow Green. This park is often utilized, along with George Square and the Merchant City, as a triumvirate of venues when large events are hosted. Up to 30 public and private events per annum are hosted in Glasgow Green, including ticketed events like the World Pipe Band Championships, the TRNSMT music festival and Proms in the Park. Post-2014 Commonwealth Games, the TRNSMT music festival took over residency in Glasgow Green and has subsequently generated significant concern from resident associations and 'Friends of' groups for the disruption caused to the park and the surrounding area in the build-up and during the three-day event itself. This public park has reached saturation point for hosting events, and the recent response of the city authorities has been to open up other public spaces as potential event venues. City parks including Bellahouston Park, Kelvingrove Park, and Victoria Park have been used for events in recent years and there are strategic plans for Pollok Park and others to be reimagined as venues in the future. Ultimately, driven largely by economic imperatives, the city now regards its public parks as commercial event spaces.

### **Exhibiting potentialities: new articulations of eventful public spaces**

The discussion above has emphasized the potentially problematic long-term effects that mega-events have on the provision of urban public spaces. However, it is important to note

that there are, and could be, more positive effects, based on the potential of these events to reimagine the ways public spaces are designed, used and managed. Lehtovuori (2010) helps explain how events can help to 'open up' public spaces, by challenging conventional identities and by encouraging people to relate to them in different ways. Drawing on work by Pløger (2010), Smith (2016) uses the term eventalisation to describe the ways that parks, streets and squares can be revitalized through events that disrupt established identities or functions and encourage a more diverse range of uses and users. These effects are not necessarily limited to the duration of the event. Mega-events can provide excellent ways of highlighting the potentialities of public spaces – allowing people a chance to experience what public spaces could be like. And these experiences may influence the ways public spaces are designed, managed and used in the future. For example, events can demonstrate the ways that streets dominated by traffic can be transformed into sociable meeting places (Deroy and Clegg 2012) or the ways that stiff, monumental squares can be loosened and humanized (Lehtovuori 2010).

In the wake of the London 2012 Olympic Games, there are also examples of the ways public spaces in London have been 'eventalised'. As the discussion above highlights, a key legacy of this mega-event is a more commercial orientation for many of London's parks and squares, but the effects on the city's streets seem more positive. In the aftermath of London 2012, for the first time, Westminster City Council permitted the closure to traffic of Regent Street (between Piccadilly Circus and Oxford Circus) for four consecutive Sundays in July. 'Summer Streets' has now been staged every year since 2013. These events can be linked indirectly to the Olympic Games. In the justifications provided for Summer Streets, the case of the 2012 Games is cited as a key inspiration, influence and precedent (City of Westminster 2014). The aim of Westminster City Council was to 'build on' the success of London 2012, 'by promoting this famous street, and indeed London, as a people focused place and challenge the perception of the city always being dominated by traffic' (City of Westminster 2014, p.4). The Council's rationale for staging the event also included the idea that the 2012 Olympic Games

showed 'what can be achieved to improve the look and feel of the streets' (City of Westminster 2014, p.10). So, the event not only provided inspiration for a more people-oriented space, but also an example of how its appearance and design could be improved. The Summer Streets event has been a great success in attracting more people to use Regent Street, with the Council reporting a 57% increase in footfall during the inaugural edition (City of Westminster 2014) and, by 2018, the event was attracting 1.2 million people over four days (New West End Company, 2018). The Council hope that there will be more permanent effects too: their explicit aim is to use the event to promote walking, cycling, dwelling and socialising so that people 'adjust their habits and it becomes the norm' (City of Westminster 2014, p. 4). The introduction of complementary projects such as Healthy Streets, city wide car free days and various measures to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic mean this ambitious aim is slowly being realised.

Other new events that have eventalized London's streets can also be linked back to the 2012 Games and initiatives implemented to lever a positive legacy. For example, in 2013 the Mayor of London (in conjunction with Transport for London and London & Partners), launched a new cycling festival - Ride London - that aimed to secure a positive physical activity legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games. Thanks to the success of Team GB, cycling had been a very high-profile sport at the 2012 Games. The Mayor of London at the time, Boris Johnson, was keen to capitalize on this momentum and secure an urban cycling legacy. Rather than merely staging another elite race (the city had staged the Tour de France Grand Depart in 2007), a new event was created. This event was designed to encompass public participation via a mass cyclothon (when members of the public could ride an elite race route) and a Free Ride (a day when anyone could cycle on closed streets). This annual event has been extremely successful and has contributed to the growing reputation of London as a city that promotes active travel in and through its public spaces. The 2015 edition involved 96,600 participants and attracted

286,650 spectators, with 50% of participants and 25% of spectators suggesting they would cycle more because of their experiences at the event (TfL 2015).

The increasing prevalence of road closures to stage free events in the city centre represents a positive legacy from London 2012 – one which helps to reimagine the city’s streets as active, festive, sociable and accessible spaces, rather than as urban roads dominated by motorised traffic. And the success of these events has encouraged wider debates in London about redesigning and pedestrianizing key thoroughfares, including Oxford Street.

In Glasgow, there are similar examples of eventalisation in the way that parks, streets and squares have been revitalized through events, to achieve more progressive social objectives. Recent discussion about the future of George Square has focused on a desire to ensure the square is not simply given over to commercial interests, and to focus more on what sort of events *should* take place in the city’s principal civic space. In 2019 the Deputy Leader of the Council suggested that:

‘George Square in particular should only be for civic and free events, events that bring added amenity to the civic life of the city...I think it has to be the right type of event...it’s about people led spaces and people centred spaces, and then being able to let people use those spaces if they want’

(Personal interview, Glasgow City Council 2019)

This commitment has been translated into new event selection criteria, governed by the Event Board that seeks to inform decision-making on what events to give the go-ahead to. While this political commitment can be compromised by instances when the city is legally required to offer premier public spaces to organisers (e.g. see previous examples of the 2020 European

Football Championships, COP 26 and UCI Cycling World Championships), there is evidence that the city is committed to removing barriers, physical and psychological, so that people can access the square during large events.

Glasgow's 2014 Commonwealth Games - an integrated able-bodied and parasport event - also produced some positive public space legacies for people with a disability (McGillivray et al. 2018). There was evidence that the Games provided a stimulus and a deadline to progress an accessibility agenda. Sport venues and the surrounding public realm were improved to increase accessibility (signage, surfaces, transport hubs) and improvements to train stations and public space surfaces also provide a longer-term legacy for people with a disability. However, like many mega-event investments, some of the improvements were temporary and focused only on priority routes, and were removed after the Games.

The city has also committed to George Square as a space for protest and to host civic events that have wider social value. For example, in 2016 Glasgow hosted the Homeless World Cup in George Square and linked this commitment to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, especially Goal 3 (to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages). Glasgow invested in event legacy by recruiting homeless people as volunteers, working closely with 29 homeless organisations in the city and building in education programmes and complimentary passes to the city's sport venues for homeless people. When hosting the European Championships in 2018, Glasgow used Glasgow Green as a 'Go Live' site, promoting healthy and active lives through blending sport, physical activity, culture, arts and health. This initiative, utilising the focus of the sport event, sought to address inequality of access and participation to sport and physical activity by programming taster sessions from sport clubs and organisations and translating community sport development activity in some of the city's more deprived communities into realistic active pathways. Observations

conducted at the Go Live site confirmed the success of this initiative to use public space for progressive social agendas. Children and families from the city's diverse population were present in the park, producing valuable social interactions.

Ever since the hosting of 2014 Commonwealth Games, city leaders have sought to recreate the sociable atmosphere of the Live City (McGillivray 2019). Strategically, this has influenced the city's City Centre Strategy which has led to the redesign of many city centre streetscapes, focused on making the city centre a more attractive place to live, work and enjoy leisure time. Recognition of the need for more public space in the city centre, the Avenues project is foregrounding accessibility, green and sustainable streetscapes and the promotion of people-led spaces and festivities. Rather than impose an external event on public space in the interests of sponsors or awarding bodies, the city has realized that it needs to root its events more effectively in a locale, building an appreciation of routine, everyday events and special occasions into the planning and design of public spaces. Glasgow has used large sport events to test new design approaches that can then be included in the transformation of some public spaces. For example, hosting fanzones in George Square during Euro 2020 is being used as way to test the feasibility of pedestrianizing part of the square and making the area more people-friendly.

Crucial to the realisation of potentialities and new articulations of public space, pre and post mega-event, is a meaningful engagement with more participatory, and inclusive, urban planning and design processes. To avoid reproducing the same uses and users of public space, it is imperative that the needs of diverse populations are designed into urban plans. Balazs and Zein (2019) suggest that participatory planning can sometimes fail to find common ground between differences and that can actually accentuate or reproduce existing divisions and weaken social cohesion: 'in practice, a poorly designed, participatory project only



preserves the status quo - that is, a low level of social cohesion - or even worsens the situation' (Balazs and Zein 2019, p. 93). Though convivial new events and spaces are a possible outcome of mega-event hosting, they are unlikely to contribute to greater social interactions with different populations unless they involve 'socially sensitive' design practices. The Glasgow conversation around the re-design of George Square is a positive sign of citizen interests being foregrounded. However, delays to redesign caused by contractual obligations to major event organisers illustrates the economic imperatives that cities are bound by.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has added to our understanding of sports mega-events by highlighting the ways that they affect urban public spaces in the long term. The paper highlights the potential for positive and negative, tangible and intangible legacies, with events like the 2012 Olympic Games and the 2014 Commonwealth Games changing the ways public spaces are used and regulated, and reshaping physical environments via the introduction of big screens, outdoor gyms and security apparatus. Appropriating these spaces for mega-events is often justified as merely a temporary interruption to the status quo, but the work presented here shows that these events change urban public spaces in enduring ways.

In a text about FIFA World Cups, Eick (2010, p. 294) notes that that mega-events 'normalize the perception of the populace that private, commercial and non-profit stakeholders define and control...public space'. In this paper we have illustrated how sports mega-events, particularly those staged recently in the UK, operate as Trojan Horses, allowing new systems, practices and features to be implemented under the convenient cover of a mega-event. Many of these changes can be linked to the greater securitisation, commercialisation and privatisation of

urban public spaces, generating questions about who and what these spaces are for. We have also shown how mega-events can reconfigure the physical configuration of public spaces, although this was more apparent in London than in Glasgow - suggesting that the most significant impacts result from the world's most significant event (the summer Olympic Games). The paper also highlights that mega-events create the precedent and mandate for public spaces to be transformed into sites for commercial events. Even though mega-events are often as justified as exceptional occurrences or once in a lifetime occasions, they provide the foundation for a series of more regular events, with prominent parks and squares repurposed as venue spaces in the post-event era. Whether this trend should be regarded positively or negatively depends on what types of legacy events are staged. Unfortunately, in an era when cities are keen to realize the exchange value of public spaces, and one where there is an imperative to promote public spaces to increase footfall for businesses, commercially oriented events dominate. The influence of urban entrepreneurialism is significant here. Entrepreneurial discourses legitimize exclusionary uses and associated control measures that are introduced by local governments and their commercial partners. 'Consultation' with citizens is often about rubber stamping the appropriation of public spaces in the name of local economic development. Some actors have more power and influence than others to shape or determine the acceptable uses of public space(s) and those with an inclusive, accessible and consultative vision for public spaces are often overwhelmed by the spectacular, consumption-oriented city.

And yet in this paper we have also illustrated how mega-events can encourage social interactions and exchanges in public space and provide the inspiration for better public space provision and management. Hiller (2012, p. 79) notes that during the Vancouver Winter Olympic Games in 2010, 'the concreteness of urban space was given new flexibility', with the animated streets encouraging a new energy and pro-social behaviour in previously dead spaces - creating the sort of intersubjectivity that turns open spaces into public spaces (Kohn

2004). The examples we have discussed here show that these effects are not necessarily confined to the period of mega-event. Somewhat paradoxically given the discussion above, these effects are also due to events that have been staged to extend mega-event legacies. Accessible events can be utilized to enhance civic engagement, social justice and healthier living. Rather than occupying or appropriating public spaces, these events can actually make spaces more public: they produce public spaces by carving out spaces for social interactions from sites traditionally dominated by motorised traffic. This can demonstrate to citizens and authorities what their public spaces could be like. However, for these ambitions to be realized, planning and design processes need to more effectively accommodate the voices of neighbourhoods and communities so that they can influence public space provision. This requires municipal authorities to facilitate people-centred participatory design processes. Festivals and events can play an important role because they can bring people together, enable interactions between strangers or those with weak ties, and contribute towards greater social cohesion. With greater levels of public involvement, political will, creative thinking and professional commitment, mega-events might help to produce more accessible public spaces.

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