



Eventful policies, public spaces and neoliberal citizenship: Lessons from Glasgow

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ABSTRACT

Over the last three decades, festivals and events staged in public spaces have been an important element in the neoliberal regeneration of cities. However, so-called festivalisation strategies have been subject to criticism for their focus on economic imperatives to the detriment of the lives of urban residents. In many cities of the Global North, in particular, these debates have been accompanied by increasing calls for forms of urban governance that give more weight to local democratic processes and practices. This paper analyses these debates, focusing on the Scottish city of Glasgow, where the staging of festivals and events has long been a key factor in the city's rebranding. In recent years, city leaders have created processes designed to ensure that the voices of local people are heard. We analyse to what extent this turn towards more inclusive rhetoric is translated into practice when policy and planning processes are still governed by economic growth logics. We show how citizen participation and engagement processes to consult residents about the use of public spaces for festivals and events reinforce narratives of neoliberal citizenship, primarily acting to assimilate and neutralize opposition, rather than sharing power and decision-making with local citizens. The implementation of these policies in Glasgow represents an emblematic illustration of the neoliberal governance logics which prevent the local state from granting an increased role to citizens and local organizations, particularly in cities of the Global North. However, we conclude by highlighting some potentially fruitful new avenues to support greater transparency and accountability in public space governance.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, festivals and events have been a central feature of neoliberal urban strategies in both Global North and Global South contexts. In the Global North, festivalisation strategies (Gold & Gold, 2020; Ronström, 2016) have been particularly crucial to the regeneration of cities experiencing postindustrial decline in the context of growing interurban competition (Richards & Palmer, 2010; Whitford et al., 2014). While the size of events, their embeddedness in urban spaces, and the stakeholders involved in their organization and promotion vary in different countries, festivalization strategies have been central in the trajectories of many cities in North America (Jakob, 2013; Wynn, 2015), Western Europe (Quinn et al., 2020) and Australia (Mercer & Mayfield, 2015), including Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Barcelona, Austin or Melbourne. Yet, across all settings, these strategies have generated growing criticism for being overly concerned with economic imperatives to the detriment of wider social, cultural and environmental considerations. In particular, the intense staging of festivals

and events in public spaces (including parks, streets and squares) has produced disquiet about the impact on the everyday lives of residents and other users (Johnson et al., 2020; McGillivray et al., 2020; Smith, 2020).

The importance of these issues is also evident in the Global South. From Brazil to China, mega sport events, in particular, have been used to catalyse and accelerate urban changes, attracting global attention and economic capital (Gogishvili, 2018), and helping (re)build the image of cities entering a new "post third-world" era (Richmond & Garmany, 2016). While scholars recognize the positive role that event hosting can have on the development of local transportation systems (Pereira, 2018) and built environments (Wu et al., 2016), event-led strategies have also been viewed as "socially unjust policies" (Richmond & Garmany, 2016), reinforcing the exclusion of marginalized segments of the local population and their access to urban spaces in the city (Shin & Li, 2013). In the case of Brazil, for example, Vainer (2015) demonstrates that, like cities in the Global North, the strategy of bidding and delivering mega sport events including the 2014 FIFA World Cup or the 2016 Rio

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Olympic and Paralympic Games, aligned perfectly with neoliberal policies followed by the Brazilian state since the 1990s. The urban catalyst effect of event-led developments ‘fit into the city’s long-term plan by boosting its transformation through the creation of a new urban structure’ (Schausteck de Almeida et al., 2014: 277). Yet, research highlights how the transformation of urban space often focuses on selected urban initiatives in priority development areas (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2015), whereby partnerships with global event franchises enable a ‘local-unselected elite to realize fantasies of (global) capital accumulation through state-sanctioned commodification of urban land’ (De Liso et al., 2018). Ultimately, these event-led developments undermine the rights to the city that Rio citizens had been used to (Broudehoux and Sanchez, 2015).

Related to festivalization and mega-event strategies, there are growing concerns over the impact of sporting and cultural events on the rights of local residents in both Global North and Global South contexts – especially on their ability to access and use public spaces often used to host these events. This has led to discussions about how the planning and design of festivals and events might more effectively address the needs of local populations living in and around the civic public spaces (Quinn et al., 2020) often used for these spectacles. In most existing studies, this debate has been framed as “for or against” events (Clark et al., 2016). On one hand, festivals and events are criticized for contributing to the privatization, commodification and securitization of urban public spaces, a situation that has been analysed in cities including Lisbon, Edinburgh, Berlin, Toronto, London or Glasgow (Gomes, 2020; Hague, 2021; Jakob, 2013; Lowes, 2002; McGillivray, 2019; McGillivray et al., 2020; Smith, 2016; Smith & McGillivray, 2020). In this narrative, festivals and events are associated with the imperatives of the entrepreneurial city (Harvey, 1989), generating positive place impressions and attracting external visitors to garner economic benefits. On the other hand, a body of research praises festivals and events for potentially contributing to more inclusive and sustainable urban environments. Here, festivals and events are viewed as a means to encourage greater equality, diversity and inclusion (Pernecky & Lück, 2012) by fostering pro-social values, including tolerance for others and the acceptance of difference (Barker et al., 2019). These studies also emphasize how festivals and events staged in public spaces like streets and parks can improve the lives of citizens, facilitating pleasurable encounters, strengthening social capital, and generating greater social cohesion (Stevenson, 2020; Watson & Ratna, 2011). Aligned with this work is the notion that negative effects could be countered by a greater “inclusion” of citizens in the conception, planning and promotion of festivals and events, and their relationship with valued public space.

In a few cities of the Global North, these debates have moved from academia to the public policy level. Indeed, while in more authoritarian regimes, event-led strategies have been implemented without relying on a public consultation or legal decree, and generated little reaction from local residents (Gogishvili, 2018), the criticisms expressed in democratic settings have led to new statements from policy makers regarding the need to include local residents by making them more active contributors to the events. This is all the more significant when the staging of events in streets, squares and parks has generated growing protests from citizens who complain about the disruptions they cause to their daily lives (Johnson et al., 2020; McGillivray et al., 2020; Mercer & Mayfield, 2015; Smith, 2020).

In this paper, we explore to what extent, and with what effects, urban residents can effectively be involved in planning and decision-making about festivals and events hosted in their civic public spaces. We explore to what extent meaningful citizen participation can be accommodated within policy and planning processes for festivals and events when these policies are still ruled predominantly by narratives of neoliberal urbanism. We explore how, when not accompanied with reflection on the distribution of power in planning and decision-making, festivals and events run the risk of reinforcing existing tendencies in neoliberal urban policies, such as a promotion of neoliberal citizenship

(Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019).

We seek to provide rich empirical evidence of what Renedo and Marston (2015) call contested ‘participatory spaces’ where the possibility of citizen influence and participation exists. To that end, we focus on the emblematic eventful city: Glasgow, UK. The UK is one of the early adopters of a model of cultural and event-driven regeneration that was subsequently mirrored on almost every continent ((Finkel & Platt, 2020). In the UK, Glasgow has long been seen as a pioneer for these developments. Since the late 1980s, the local economic and political elite in Glasgow has sought to use festivals and events (cultural and sporting) to initiate a transformation of the city from a declining industrial area into a so-called vibrant and creative place (García, 2005; McGillivray, 2019). Following an event-led regeneration strategy (Gray & Porter, 2015) the city has grown the scope and scale of its festival and event programme with the aim of generating economic benefit through encouraging increased tourism visitation and related investments. The emphasis on culture and events reflected a commitment to urban entrepreneurialism that saw the city bid for, and win, numerous peripatetic sporting events (e.g. 2002 Champions League Cup Final, 2014 Commonwealth Games, 2018 European Championships), alongside many recurring gatherings making use of the city’s outdoor urban landscape as their stage or backdrop, including the main civic square (George Square) and its main public parks (Glasgow Green and Kelvingrove Park). This strategy has had significant impacts on Glasgow’s economy and image over the past few decades, making it a city that now often sits high in national and transnational rankings for the vibrancy of its event and cultural industry.¹

Many academic studies and policy reports have praised this strategy, heralding Glasgow as an archetypal example of a city that has successfully undertaken a regeneration process, by using cultural and sporting festivals and events as drivers for change (García, 2005; Gómez, 1998). The 1990 European City of Culture title was the most high profile early success for the city but, right from the start, this renewal strategy drew criticism from the Worker City movement who opposed the commodification-of-culture discourse that culture-led regeneration involved (Mooney, 2004). Other analyses have criticized the effects of these event-led policies, by highlighting how Glasgow’s cultural, sporting and retail-based renaissance has failed to address the city’s stark economic and social inequalities (Gray & Porter, 2015; McGillivray, 2019; Mooney, 2004; Paton et al., 2012). This generated increased scrutiny on the use of the city’s prime public space assets like public parks to host major festivals and events, and their role in creating disruption, compromising access for residents and contributing to spatial privatization.

In this paper, the case of Glasgow serves as a basis for a discussion that aims to address two research questions:

RQ1. How can staging festival and events in public spaces balance competing economic and social objectives?

RQ2. How effective can planning and decision-making processes be in enabling citizens to influence how public spaces are used for festivals and events?

We address these questions by subjecting local government policy to scrutiny through interviews with policy actors responsible for setting objectives and with local groups and organizations affected by festival

¹ In 2019, for example, Glasgow was crowned UK’s top cultural and creative city, ahead of London, in the Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor report released by the European Commission, who also defined it as “a creative and cultural centre of European importance”. (Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-50316325>). In the 2019 British Meetings & Events Industry Survey, it also reaches the 5th position of the most used UK cities for events by both corporate and not-profit sectors, making it the top Scottish city ahead of Edinburgh (Source: <https://www.meetpie.com/images/BMEIS-2019-RHS0353HGTFPS.pdf>)

and event hosting in public space. The literature review underpinning the first half of the paper focuses on the relationship between festival and event policies, neoliberal urbanism and discourses of neoliberal citizenship. Following a discussion of methodology, in the second half of the paper we explore the practical effects of neoliberal urban discourses with a specific focus on debates linked to one of Glasgow's major public parks, Glasgow Green, where these issues have become particularly pronounced over the past few years. Finally, we explore how the implementation of event policies in Glasgow represents an emblematic illustration of the neoliberal logics which prevent the local state from granting an increased role to citizens and local organizations, particularly in cities of the Global North.

2. Literature review

2.1. Festivalisation, neoliberal urbanism and public space

While festivals and events have long occupied an important role in the public life of cities (Smith, 2016), concerns over the deleterious effects of so-called festivalisation has brought renewed attention to the use of these activities in urban (economic) development strategies. Over the past two decades, significant literature in tourism management, economics and urban studies has shown how, along with arts and culture (Guinard & Molina, 2018), festivals and events have been exploited for economic development and the symbolic promotion of cities in a neoliberal urban context. With the increasing importance of the symbolic economy in urban development (Zukin, 1995), and shifts in urban governance linked to a growing interurban competition (Harvey, 1989), festivals and events have been viewed as ways of enriching the host city's destination offer, attracting mobile capital and contributing to the perception of a place as attractive, vibrant and sought after for tourism, work or study (Richards & Palmer, 2010). As Gold and Gold (2020) suggest, in this conceptualisation 'festivals therefore shed their aura of being ephemeral appendages to the real urban economy. Instead, they are recognized to have contributed substantively to the post-industrial economic restructuring of towns and cities by linking cultural creativity to economic competitiveness' (p14). The use of festivals has become increasingly intertwined with commercial strategies, illustrated by a growing use of the term to reflect manifestations that aim to foster consumption in urban public spaces, with examples found from Melbourne (Weller, 2013) to Dubai (Smith et al., 2021).

Festivalisation processes are inseparable from models of urban growth that foreground marketisation and capital accumulation. In the context of how these relate to the use of public spaces, Peck et al. (2013) argue that place and territory are subordinated to 'speculative strategies of profit-making at the expense of use values, social needs and public goods' (p 1092). Referring to the tensions over neoliberalised festivalisation processes in the city of Edinburgh, Hague (2021a) argues that concerns about over-tourism, reduced access to greenspace and enclosure of parkland for festivals and events is the inevitable outcome of entrepreneurial governance arrangements that have 'normalised the flow of value from local public spaces to geographically dispersed asset owners' (p289), referring to private event organizers. Others suggest that festivalisation processes bring about the reimagination of space and place as assets to be exploited for financial gain (Gomes, 2020), with these assets transferred (temporarily, in theory) to external actors. As Hague (2021b) suggests, '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' (p297). Moreover, in the context of financial austerity, post-2008, festivals and events hosted in public parks were viewed as an even more important means of generating revenue to address budget cuts in public funding (Smith, 2020).

In both Global North and Global South contexts, critics of festivalisation processes have highlighted how these strategies have often benefitted the interests of capital over marginalized populations

(Pereira, 2018; Richmond & Garmany, 2016). From this perspective, staging festivals and events in places deemed in need has fueled the gentrification of neighbourhoods and the (re)production of urban inequalities (McLean, 2014). While helping to counter territorial stigma associated with some urban destinations (Eizenberg & Cohen, 2015), researchers have also shown how the staging of events produces a controlled image of the city which stays within specific social and spatial boundaries, contributing to selective city branding campaigns aimed at external visitors (Guinard & Margier, 2018). These processes have often reinforced divisions between the promotion of the city for external visitors and the experience of local residents (Vanolo, 2015). There is also literature suggesting that festivalisation policies contribute to making public spaces less accessible to residents and marginalized populations, as they tend to encourage the privatization, commercialization, and securitization of these areas (Smith, 2018). Finally, there is also evidence that staging large-scale events is used as a "Trojan Horse" to test new uses and management of urban public spaces, paving the way for their adoption afterwards in a more permanent way (Smith & McGillivray, 2020).

2.2. Urban governance, public space and citizen participation

The use of festivals and events as a feature of neoliberal urbanism (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019) connects with broader debates regarding the role that citizens have in the governance and management of urban public spaces. Over the past few decades, public spaces have been observed as crucial sites for enabling or preventing the inclusion of diverse populations in contemporary cities (Fleury, 2010; Lofland, 1985). For that reason, they represent an emblematic example of the evolution of power relations that shape the governance and management of cities. Many urban studies researchers have argued that public spaces have been increasingly influenced by neoliberalised forms of governance and management, and Certomà et al. (2020) emphasize that this has led to a 'progressive commodification of public space and privatisation of the city' (p3). Public parks are a good illustration of this process, being understood historically as spaces for protest or public gatherings and as the first public sites where a diversity of classes gathered to participate in democratic practices (Arora, 2015; Smith, 2020). In recent times, critics claim that these spaces have become increasingly controlled and restricted, switching 'from relatively unregulated public space to currently corporatized, commercialized, and semiprivatised space' (Arora, 2015: 63). Many public parks have become a symbol of the shift towards increasing selectivity, control and even militarisation of public spaces (Harvey, 1992; Low et al., 2009; Mitchell, 1995).

While reframing the purposes of public spaces in cities across the world, neoliberal urbanism has also transformed 'the political and social aspects of citizenship.[...], with citizens framed increasingly as consumers' (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019, p817). Komporozos-Athanasiou et al. (2019) suggest that citizenship represents a site of 'struggle with institutional power holders and official bodies to determine how rights, relationships, and identities are realised in practice' (p371). Under the logics of neoliberal urban governance, they argue that instead of affording spaces of possibility for the co-production of knowledge and collective action that addresses power differentials, 'participation' often becomes a way of governing and disciplining citizens. These trends are evident in the Global South context too with Coelho et al. (2016) arguing that in India, the progressive notion of citizen participation has been glossed as public consultation. While policy makers insist on the inclusion of stakeholder participation and consultation mechanisms, they suggest that discourses of participation in urban India have often disenfranchised the already-marginalized, manufacturing consent for policies already designed elsewhere. Participation is more akin to cooptation rather than informed deliberation, empowerment or democratisation.

The governance and management of public spaces represents an

interesting contested participatory space (Renedo & Marston, 2015) which has been the site of significant rhetoric around citizen participation, said to provide greater opportunities for citizens to influence planning and decision making processes. However, these participatory discourses have largely been framed within the logic of capital accumulation, foregrounding the interests of business, with the local state often acting as an enabling partner in that process. In this context, attempts to give more voice to citizens can easily turn into an extension of neoliberal forms of governance, in a context where, as March and Ribera-Fumaz (2016) suggest, private capital is ‘silently but relentlessly permeating into the different layers’ (p824) of the city. Several analyses of citizen participation in the urban planning literature illustrate this process. For example, addressing (a lack of) citizen participation in Smart City initiatives in Barcelona and beyond, March and Ribera-Fumaz (2016) argue that rhetoric around inclusiveness and citizen empowerment fails to address how ‘the interests of citizens are to be made compatible with the interests of private capital and of the urban political elites’ (p825). Discussing citizen participation in planning, Maier (2001) draws on Arnstein (1969) depiction of different levels of participation as rungs of a ladder, where non-participation (manipulation and therapy) gives over to tokenism (informing and consultation), placation, partnership, delegated power and, finally, citizen control. Maier argues that only on the top of the ladder do ‘citizens have a major role in decision-making processes’ (p709). In their work on Smart City initiatives across Europe, Cardullo and Kitchin (2019) found evidence of citizens occupying ‘a largely passive role, with companies and city administrations performing forms of civic paternalism (deciding what’s best for citizens) and stewardship (delivering on behalf of citizens)’. This is very relevant to the context of planning and managing public spaces like parks, where there is a tendency for city administrations to retain control over decision-making processes, while engaging with citizens through informing and consultation (Smith, 2020).

There is broad agreement in the urban planning literature that without changes to the power relations associated with neoliberal urbanism, the rhetoric of citizen involvement and inclusivity becomes merely ‘an empty, hollow signifier [...] built in the image of capital and of the political elites’ (March & Ribera-Fumaz, 2016, p826). Reinforcing the need for a change in the power dynamics of urban planning, Cardullo and Kitchin (2019) suggest that non-participation or tokenistic forms of citizen engagement is a consequence of the focus, objectives and solutions being set ‘before problems and suggestions from citizens could be taken into account’ (p819). They suggest that there is a need for new forms of urban governance that enable an ‘effective shift of power[...] rooted in the right to the city, entitlements, community, participation, commons, and ideals beyond the market’ (p.813). They call for the development of different techniques and approaches that meaningfully foreground the interests of citizens, including more ‘inclusive and deliberative framing of citizen participation’, ‘more extensive public consultation, collaboration and co-production’, and the idea that public assets should ‘form commons to be protected and leveraged for the common good’ (p825). In each case, they appeal for an emphasis on normative concerns including ‘fairness, equity, democracy and social justice’ (p825).

There is some evidence of resistance to the exploitation and marketisation of public parks despite the pressures on these spaces to switch from non-commercial environments to spaces of capitalist regimes of accumulation (Smith, 2020). Smith has shown how commercialisation processes are now being resisted thanks to complaints and collective action from residents. Similarly, McGillivray et al. (2020) have shown how Edinburgh’s citizens drew attention to the negative outcomes of festivalisation on the city’s green spaces by making use of online platforms and in-person public meetings to force public authorities to modify their plans for the use of those public spaces for events in the future. These examples come in addition to protests that have also emerged in other cities of the world against mega-events, like the street demonstrations against the Rio Olympics (Richmond & Garmany, 2016),

or sporting events, like the long-term opposition to the Formula One motor race in Albert Park Melbourne (Mercer & Mayfield, 2015). These examples indicate that the effect of neoliberal urbanist narratives may not be one-directional and instead can be open to protest, dissent and opposition. However, the literature suggests that for these oppositional practices to be sustainable they also need to be accompanied by a change in power relations that recognizes that public space should be rooted in the assets and needs of local communities (Peinhardt & Storrington, 2019). Implicit in these policies is a more active role for citizens and communities informing decision-making about the places they live in. However, questions remain as to how citizens can effectively participate in planning and decision-making in the context of a broader economic context still driven by neoliberal imperatives. The marketization agenda at the heart of a neoliberal urbanism model conceives of place and territory (including public parks) as environments that can generate exchange value, downgrading the importance of use value and social needs (Peck et al., 2013). As a result, the associated ‘rights’ of citizenship (rights to access public space for example) are based on individual autonomy and consumer choice rather than collective rights and a common good. In this regard, citizens remain subservient to the interests of state and market – generating revenue from parks, for example, is privileged over citizen’s rights to occupy, use, and shape those spaces, and participating collectively in decision-making about it.

3. Material and methods

In exploring our two research questions, we undertook in-depth investigations on the case of Glasgow, Scotland. First, we aimed to provide an overview of the policies developed at a city-wide level in relation to festivals and events and their use of public spaces, with a specific focus on the period between 2014 and 2020. Indeed, while recent policies follow in the footsteps of the city’s so-called culture and event-led renaissance in the late 1980s, 2014 onwards reflects the period when Glasgow placed more emphasis on the role of local citizens in its deliberations. This follows the introduction in 2013 of the new motto, ‘People Make Glasgow’. The debates and tensions agitating various public spaces of the city of Glasgow cannot be understood without taking in account the city-wide strategies which are driving them. Second, we also explored in greater detail the debates surrounding the use of one public space: Glasgow Green. As one of Glasgow’s major public parks and most historic public spaces, Glasgow Green provides an emblematic case of the tensions that have emerged around the role of citizens in the management of the city’s public spaces. While this park has been utilized as a venue for festivals and events for many decades, it has gradually become one of the prime locations for staging sporting and cultural events in Glasgow. The Green has been the host to events of varying size and scale, including the World Pipe Band Championships (circa 15,000 attendees), the BBC Proms in the Park (1000 attendees) and since 2017, TRNSMT, Scotland’s largest music festival (100,000 attendees over three days). Moreover, since 2014, the use of Glasgow Green has been linked to several controversies which illustrate the continuing influence of neoliberal urbanism and its neoliberal citizenship equivalent.

We utilized three forms of data collection. First, we analysed local government strategies, by scrutinizing the main city-wide policy documents published by Glasgow City Council between 2014 and 2020 (see Table 1). When analysing these documents, data collection focused on identifying the nature of the policy discourse conveyed on events, festivals and the use of public spaces. We also observed to what extent these policies were associated with specific goals, in terms of economic and social benefits, and the role granted to different categories of citizens in these initiatives.

Second, we conducted semi-structured interviews with actors responsible for strategy, policy or planning of Glasgow’s festivals and events in the city’s outdoor public spaces ($n = 7$). These informants included the main representatives in charge of the culture and event

Table 1

Policy documents reviewed for the study of Glasgow's policies relating to festivals and events.^a

Year of publication	Document name
2020	Open space strategy
2019	Draft Culture Plan
2017	City Council Strategic Plan 2017 to 2022
2017	Tourism and Visitor Plan to 2023
2017	City Development Plan
2016	Glasgow economic strategy
2014	City Centre Strategy and Action Plan 2014–19

^a All documents are available online on the websites of the Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Life.

strategy at the local authority (Glasgow City Council), and others working with the city's arms-length organization (ALEO) responsible for the delivery of culture, sport and events (Glasgow Life). Members of the ALEO were chosen for their strategic role within the organization, including its main executives, or because they had specific tasks linked to the implementation of events and community engagement. In both cases, the conversations were guided by an interview schedule structured around the following themes: the role of festivals and events in Glasgow's political agenda and development strategies, how festivals and events interact with the city's public spaces, the opportunities and challenges presented by organising festivals and events in these areas, the strategies deployed to take account of the voices of diverse citizens in the events' design and implementation.

Finally, we engaged with representatives from organizations interested in the protection, preservation and promotion of Glasgow Green. We conducted five semi-structured interviews with representatives of organizations linked to the park, and one focus group with the official Friends group responsible for advocating for the park. We also observed Facebook group discussions for both the Friends group and a residents group set up to discuss the impact of events on the park, and participated in meetings attended in person by both. In these observations, we focused on exploring each organizations' views about hosting festivals and events in Glasgow Green, the strategies and actions they used to influence debates and their relations with other organizations pursuing similar goals.

4. Results

4.1. Glasgow's event policies: (economic) growth with an inclusive veneer

Our analysis of policy documents and interviews with strategic actors confirmed that Glasgow has used the staging of festivals and events as an important element of an urban (re)development based primarily on discourses of economic growth. Glasgow's strategy for festivals and events has been remarkably consistent over the last two decades, reflective of a normalization of a neoliberal urbanist logic in the rationale behind event-led policies. In 2007 responsibility for culture, sport and events was outsourced to the arms-length organization, Glasgow Life, which further detached decision making processes from direct local government accountability. However, a change of local government administration in 2017 appeared to signal a shift in thinking and practice with the establishment of an Event Board designed to bring more direct political influence to bear on decisions about which festivals and events to bid for and where in the city to host them. The Event Board seeks to ensure that the events which are attracted to or hosted by Glasgow serve the city's strategic policy orientations with an emphasis on inclusivity, sustainability and social value alongside the economic imperative. The Event Board was accompanied by several city-wide strategic developments that talk to similar progressive agendas. For example, the city's *Strategic Plan 2017 to 2022*, defines Glasgow as 'a world class city with a thriving and inclusive economy where everyone can flourish and benefit from the city's success' (p. 5). The idea of

inclusivity is reasserted throughout the plan, with an emphasis on addressing systemic social issues, 'to tackle poverty, tackle poor health in the city and improve our neighbourhoods' (p. 5).

We found consistent messages across strategic documentation emphasising that cultural and event-focused policies should have a positive impact on local populations. This was confirmed by a Senior Project Officer for the Council, who suggested that:

Everything that we're doing needs to be able to feel like it's something that's for the people. We keep talking about this, sort of, 'People Make Glasgow', but it is actually such a great thing. If we can't do something that people in Glasgow can respond to and see themselves reflected in, then really should we be doing it?

Our interviews reaffirmed the expected contribution of festivals and events to the social and cultural fabric of the city, with a Senior Executive of the ALEO responsible for culture, sport and events in the city stating that: 'an event can no longer, and it will no longer be appropriate to us if it's not hitting social, cultural and economic outcomes'.² Across strategic plans and interviews, there was rhetorical commitment to the importance of local communities with the voices of citizens being foregrounded. This was accompanied by an expressed commitment to foster greater inclusivity in the spatial distribution of festivals and events in the city, recognising the potentially deleterious impacts on access to the city's principal public spaces under previous approaches to the hosting of festivals and events. The Deputy Leader of the Council explained the thinking when referring to the city's main civic square:

we made the commitment in our manifesto to look at the challenges that the city was facing around the commodification of public space in the city, and in particular whether certain events fitted into a civic space like George Square [...], something like the Christmas markets, for example. In George Square, the square used to be fully fenced off, it acted as a physical but also a psychological barrier for people.

Beyond the inclusivity policy rhetoric, the city is also extending its commitment to consult with affected communities when planning for and delivering larger, externally-oriented city festivals and events. In many cities of the world, community engagement processes have now become a common tool used by the local state in order to solve the problems raised by urban redevelopment projects and give more space to the needs of local residents (Maier, 2001; Stapper & Duyvendak, 2020). In Glasgow, they are now regularly integrated in the planning and delivery of events in the public spaces of the city: communities likely to be affected by the hosting these manifestations are asked to contribute their views to ensure negative impacts are minimized, and positive ones maximized.³

However, despite the emphasis on inclusivity and citizen participation in policy documents, our findings suggest that these words remain largely symbolic, representing attempts to manufacture consent for already-agreed policies, coopting support rather than establishing meaningful mechanisms for informed deliberation, empowerment or democratisation (Coelho et al., 2016). Our interviews highlighted the existence of tensions between messages promoting the role of events in strengthening communities and their external, economic function to put the city on the map, reinforcing positive place impressions. This tension is evident in the thinking behind a proposed new Event Strategy for the

² All the interview extracts in this paper are from personal interviews.

³ For example, for the 2020 edition of the TRNSMT festival, held in Glasgow Green, three drop-in sessions were planned to be held by the local authorities and the festival organizers ahead of the event. These sessions followed a debrief meeting that was organised at the Glasgow City Chambers after the 2019 edition, in order to collect and exchange with residents, local organizations, representatives of community council, members of Police Scotland, and the event promoter.

city. On one hand, its authors recognized the growing importance of accountability to citizens and communities, by asserting the need to invest in ‘community events, events that are owned by the local, that are designed and owned by local people.’ (Senior Executive, ALEO). On the other hand, it restates the city’s ‘ambition to host mega events [...] so it’s important that no-one gets the idea that [...] Glasgow is withdrawing from that market’ (Senior Executive, ALEO). Using the language of the market illustrates the continuing influence of neoliberal urban discourses on festival and event policies in the city, informed by, and implemented within, the context of inter-urban competition in which the city strives to retain its position at the forefront of world cities.

The pressure exerted by external event promoters influences the extent to which citizens have a meaningful say in planning and decision-making processes. While community engagement is required as part of event planning and licensing consents, these exercises are largely concerned with providing information to those affected rather than presenting any form of power sharing as proposed by [Cardullo and Kitchin \(2019\)](#). As the local authority official responsible for community engagement processes explains:

What we are not in a position to do is hand over the decision to have an event to our community [...] whatever challenges we face in terms of engagement with the residents, we also have this challenge to keep the city’s status what it is.

This example highlights the marketisation agenda conceiving of place and territory as a means of generating exchange value with the views of residents being subservient to the interests of the market – supported by the state. Consultation is framed as an opportunity to limit negative impacts and facilitating economic return rather than a meaningful means by which residents can participate as partners in the production of the places they inhabit. We found that opportunities for citizens to influence planning and decision-making, individually or as part of representative groups were, in practice, very limited. Those in planning and licensing roles, where the public engagement remit sat, articulated the existence of competing priorities between supporting the pro-growth adherent’s ‘vision for the city in terms of seeking events’ (ALEO Senior Officer) and the need for proper resident engagement under the regulations. Bidding for, and signing agreements, to host major festivals and events takes precedence over consideration of resident views, with the latter being framed as an inconvenience or problem. This is evident in the words of an official responsible for the community engagement processes:

There’s no escaping the fact that, that the bulk of people who come to these meetings, [...] a certain number of people come along that just don’t want events in parks and actually there’s nothing I can do about that [...]. The decision has been made, I am here to make this as painless a process as I possibly can [...]. The purpose of the engagement is to get everyone’s concerns and say to [the promoter], ‘can you actually look at this differently because it is actually causing too much of an impact. Go away and look at that road closure.’.

So, despite the political rhetoric suggesting that inclusivity, greater accountability, and involvement of citizens in decision-making is important, this has yet to materialize in practice, mainly because of the influence of continuing economic imperatives on decisions to host festivals and events in public spaces like Glasgow Green. In cities like London, Edinburgh or Melbourne, favouring economic imperatives to the detriment of residents have led to increasing opposition from residents and local organizations against events hosted in greenspace, parks and streets ([Hague, 2021](#); [McGillivray et al., 2020](#); [Mercer & Mayfield, 2015](#); [Smith, 2016, 2018, 2020](#)). In these cities, opposition acquired significant visibility through complaints on social networks or on-site campaigns, where events were criticized as a symbol of the commodification, privatization of public space, reinforcing control over these spaces by a few private actors, and limiting its access to local residents.

However, despite the existence of concerns in Glasgow about the intensive use of public parks like Glasgow Green for festivals and events, the absence of effective opposition is largely due to planning and decision-making processes operating to neutralize local voices, encouraging forms of neoliberal citizenship that work against meaningful collective organization and mobilization.

4.2. Events, public parks and citizen participation: neutralizing opposition

Our detailed study on Glasgow Green provided little evidence of meaningful collaboration to ensure public space is ‘a manifestation of a civic politics in which the boundaries of private interest and public good can be negotiated as a practical matter’ ([Brain, 2019](#): 177). Instead, our investigations found evidence of increasing concern from residents and local representative organizations (e.g. Friends of groups and community councils) about the effects of staging festivals and events in public parks and a lack of confidence in the engagement processes utilized to consult with citizens.

The intensive use of Glasgow Green for events has led to many complaints over recent years,⁴ about lack of access to the park for extended periods of time when events are being staged, anti-social behaviour, noise pollution, and environmental damage caused by the infrastructure brought in to stage events. These complaints have been accompanied by concerns that the community engagement processes put in place by the local authority leaves very little room for affected citizens to influence the overall direction of policy and planning. To illustrate, a residents Facebook group, formed specifically to address concerns about the TRNSMT music festival staged in Glasgow Green, decried the absence of meaningful consultation before decisions have been made by the Council:

There was a meeting [...] but it wasn’t really a consultation meeting, it was more of a panel information meeting, saying ‘this event will go ahead on such a date, and the park will close several weeks beforehand’. [...] At first they were called community consultations. But I challenged that to Council to say: ‘you know, there is no consultation’ (resident group contributor, interview).

Similarly, other residents living around Glasgow Green explained how concerns were often treated as individual complaints rather than reflective of more general problems associated with the effectiveness of citizen participation and decision-making processes. Referring to the process of resident engagement in advance of the TRNSMT festival, the Council appeared to operate a divide and rule strategy:

What we noticed is that they [event organizers] constantly refused to meet with any groups. They would meet with individual residents. [...] I originally had an agreement for a group meeting, and the day before it was due to happen, [the event organizer] cancelled it, and said: ‘but we could meet with you individually’. So I didn’t meet with them individually. [...] But some people did. And the people who did seemed less critical after[wards] (resident group contributor, interview).

This example further illustrates some of the main tenets of neoliberal citizenship, whereby individual autonomy and consumer choice discourses prevail over collective social needs, with a preference for private

⁴ In the case of Glasgow Green, the collective initiatives taken over the past years by residents have included: the writing of a petition sent to the Calton Community Council in 2018, which asks for further consultation and meaningful engagement with local residents and groups when significant events are held in the park (signed by 33 people); the creation of a Glasgow Green Residents Facebook group in 2019 (circa 250 members in 2020) which aims to coordinate the action from residents about TRNSMT; a report sent to the City Council, and written by members of this Facebook group, which listed a series of issues encountered by residents during last edition of the festival.

sector and market-oriented solutions, defined and ideologically reinforced in the contemporary political economy of place (Brain, 2019). We found that the commercial event promoter took the lead to account for the effects of the event on Glasgow Green rather than the democratically-elected municipality. To ameliorate concerns from concerned residents, complimentary tickets were offered, alongside the promise of a post-event debrief to ensure problems were not experienced in subsequent years. A neutralization of opposition was also facilitated by accentuating the existence of divisions among local groups and organizations as to who was best placed to legitimately represent residents' interests and liaise formally with the municipality.

As in several other public spaces where major festivals and events have been staged in Glasgow, the representation of local communities has been fragmented, diluting their power and influence. The official park Friends group operates alongside the Glasgow Green Residents Group, and five Community Councils covering the wards surrounding the Green. The Community Council for the area closest to the Green has been suspended since 2018 following a breakdown in relationships between members. Local democratic structures are strained, leaving fewer representative agencies to fill the void, but the internal divisions experienced by these organizations has also lessened their effectiveness in holding the local authority to account. For example, within the Friends group there have been fissures over the focus of collective action, and the *modus operandi* of the group to effect change. The existing committee was comprised mainly of Glasgow Green residents without prior campaigning experience, and they were concerned at the effects of staging festivals and events on their daily access to the park. In contrast, the new committee included people with a long history of collective action, campaigning through unions or other Friends groups. This committee focused on emphasising continuities with previous collective movements, especially the ones arguing against the silencing of Glasgow's working-class heritage in the rebranding of the city from the late 1980s onwards. They were more interested in campaigning using traditional approaches associated with collective action, including leafleting, face-to-face protests and demonstrations designed to pressure the Council into change.

However, while the residents group, Friends group and community councils each felt strongly about an over-use of Glasgow Green for festivals and events, they have been largely unsuccessful at changing policy or practice. Partly these failures relate to the lack of visibility garnered by various groups and their lack of collaboration and coordination.

Yet, while there were some disagreements between the groups on their strategy, they shared a concern over the lack of meaningful coordination with the Council and private event organizers when planning events on the Green. Moreover, they all expressed a desire for new forms of urban governance and citizen participation involving inclusive and deliberative planning and decision-making processes that genuinely encourage citizen participation. These should be focused on ensuring that their parks should be viewed as a 'commons to be protected and leveraged for the common good' (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019, p825).

5. Discussion

Drawing on policy documentation and interviews with key informants, we have shown that, in a context where festivals and events remain tied to economic growth objectives and narratives of neoliberal citizenship, new rhetoric towards inclusion and citizen involvement does not necessarily translate into practice. In his book about festivals and place-making in US cities, (Wynn, 2015) argues that festival-led strategies could 'more fluidly respond to the changing needs of the city, its residents and the audience' (p.228). Yet, our study demonstrates that the neoliberal logics that govern the planning and delivery of these strategies, contribute to the marginalization of residents' voices. While we found evidence of several engagement and consultation mechanisms to encourage citizen participation, these were largely superficial, providing a gloss of involvement that concealed marginalization in

practice. Inclusive and participatory logics represent a veneer for policies which still operate on economic and market-led logics.

Beyond the sole issue of festivals and events, the Glasgow case represents an emblematic illustration of the local state's inability to grant an increased role to citizens and local organizations in the planning and management of urban public spaces which mirrors the experience in many cities of the world, particularly in the Global North. In recent years, the rhetoric of inclusivity and citizen participation has penetrated many layers of the urban policy domain, especially when it comes the production and management of urban public spaces (Brain, 2019; Certomà et al., 2020). This has led to greater emphasis on the importance of local democratic processes and entities, and to a commitment to collaborative, inclusive and consultative modes of engagement with residents and their representatives (Certomà et al., 2020). However, as the case study of Glasgow Green illustrates, these wishes are countered by the fact that, in practice, the local state and its partners continue to follow a model of urban governance that privileges the economic exploitation of prime public space over other potential uses. Where symbolic commitments to local consultation and involvement are evident, we have shown that this represents a largely tokenistic (Maier, 2001) form of participation in planning and decision making processes. The local state and its arms-length organizations (themselves an expression of neoliberal urban governance) continue to manage their public parks (and other public spaces) by relying on forms of stewardship and civic paternalism (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019) that undermine their rhetoric of citizen participation and inclusion. On this level, the case of Glasgow helps extend theoretical criticism on the limitations of inclusion policies (Cardullo & Kitchin, 2019; Stapper & Duyvendak, 2020), by highlighting the subtle inflexions which lead rhetorical commitments to participation into tokenistic practices: forms of participation are largely reactive, responding to focus, objectives and solutions decided before citizens are asked for their views. Decisions about events are announced before community groups and associations are made aware of plans. 'Information' sessions are arranged where local residents and interested parties can attend, at a time and place deemed convenient for the organizers, to hear of the operational plans for the events. In these sessions, there is evidence of placation and cooptation (Coelho et al., 2016) but no real sign of partnership, delegated power or citizen control - the forms of participation that entail a major role in decision making processes (Maier, 2001). Therefore, while citizens are visible in urban governance processes, this rhetoric actually represents an extension of neoliberal logics, where citizens (similarly to public spaces) are perceived as assets rather than actors who have an important voice in the production and management of the city.

Our findings cast new light on "the multitude of forms that coercion now assumes in the governance of the neoliberal city" (Mercer & Mayfield, 2015). In previous work, researchers have demonstrated the existence of contradictory interventions by the local state towards its citizens for the uses of urban public spaces. In the case of Melbourne, for example, Mercer and Mayfield (2015) highlighted how the local state encouraged citizens to "connect" with their public spaces during carefully curated events, while labelling as "inappropriate" any forms of grassroots manifestation, like protests, that compromised the image of a creative, and pacified city. The local state promoted a 'passive engagement with public spaces', based on the idea that the participation of citizens should be encouraged only when it contributed to the promotion of a vibrant city attractive to visitors. The role of citizens in Glasgow shows a similar process. Urban authorities, trapped by economic models that depend on the marketization of public assets, seek to exploit festivals and events as "spaces of exception" that allow authorities to test new uses and regulations of public spaces that are then adopted more permanently on a city-wide level. These experiences have been mirrored from Baku to London (Gogishvili, 2018; Smith & McGillivray, 2020).

Our study demonstrates that the apparently noble intentions of policy-makers towards more effective inclusion of citizens are

insufficient to subvert the neoliberal logics that govern the production and management of the city. In practice, these policy directions fall short because they fail to address issues related to the distribution of power in the planning and decision-making process. The case of Glasgow illustrates how, despite the promotion of inclusive discourses, those people who live near, use and care about public spaces like parks, still have little influence on decisions about what their public spaces are used for, and how intensively. Furthermore, the engagement processes designed to consult residents about the use of public spaces for festivals and events primarily act to assimilate or neutralize opposition, focusing on co-optation rather than sharing power and decision-making with local citizens. Overall, these tactics reflect the influence of forms of urban governance that foreground the interests of neoliberal actors who retain power in planning and decision-making processes, which can be observed from Rome to Barcelona (Certomà et al., 2020; March & Ribera-Fumaz, 2016).

The absence of collective citizen activism or opposition to the hosting of festivals and events in Glasgow's parks should not be read as a lack of interest or concern. Rather, staging festivals and events in public spaces is now so normalized that attempts to initiate or sustain forms of collective social action have proved largely ineffective (Smith, 2020; Smith & McGillivray, 2020). Those drawing attention to negative effects are often dismissed as naysayers (Smith, 2020) and the mechanisms through which citizens can express opposition are also limited. Moreover, as Stapper and Duyvendak (2020) have demonstrated in the case of Amsterdam, new conflicts can be created between those seeking to be true representative of communities or neighbourhoods, especially when urban policies pit them against each other. This mirrors our findings from Glasgow where community engagement processes fueled internal divisions between local organizations.

However, despite evidence of opposition being largely assimilated or neutralized, our analysis provides some hints on new emerging modes of opposition that could counter forms of neoliberal urban governance. Mould (2015) has argued that the notion of the Creative City stimulates creativity only in opposition to it. Similarly, our analysis shows that, if the community engagement process in Glasgow acted to neutralize oppositions to the intensive use of parks for festivals and events, it led local citizens to become more vocal and mobilize against what they perceived as mechanisms designed to placate rather than involve them. We found evidence of new groups and organizations forming, often mediated through digital and social media platforms, to generate awareness, organize and mobilize. While these new entities are currently disparate, operating largely independently of each other and utilizing different modes of operation, their very existence represents an opportunity for future coordinated action, following examples already observed in other cities (McGillivray et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion

Eventful strategies developed in many cities of the Global North and Global South have long been criticized for favouring economic over social benefits. Drawing on the case of festivals and events held in public parks, this study has demonstrated that, despite greater policy level insistence on the inclusion of stakeholder participation and consultation, this does not translate into major shifts in the pre-existing, neoliberal logics that frame planning and decision making about public space. While this study drew on a case from the Global North, we have also shown that contestation over access to and use of public space is mirrored in Global South contexts including Brazil and India. Common to each context is the way that citizen participation is recalibrated as an individualised act that helps authorities govern effectively rather than enabling the co-production of knowledge and collective action that addresses power differentials. Under neoliberal urbanism logics, citizen participation is tokenistic, reactive, limited by available mechanisms and used to coopt, assimilate and neutralize opposition rather than to enable greater deliberation, empowerment or democratisation.

And yet, we want to conclude by outlining some ways in which local groups and organizations could be more effectively involved as co-creators in deliberative processes from the start of the planning and decision making process. In particular, there exists an opportunity for the local state, residents and representative groups to develop, collaboratively, a strategic framework for decisions to be made on what appropriate uses of public space for festivals and events would be. This framework would contain a set of principles to govern decision-making, accruing its authority from a membership that represents the diverse interests of those concerned with public space use and management. This requires moving the focus from external, private event promoters to local residents, by engaging with local organizations and residents as early as possible in the event design, and making sure that the exchanges held before, during and after the events are representative of a wider set of voices locally, in order not to play residents off against each other. In essence, festivals and events need to be recast as an opportunity to rekindle enthusiasm for a place that residents use regularly and less of an external imposition that disturbs normal activities.

If designed this way, festivals and events could be a valuable tool for finding new ways of governing and managing urban public spaces, providing an “urban laboratory” (Eizenberg & Cohen, 2015) for experimenting with new types of conversations that can have positive consequences for the city as a whole. Instead of extending the neoliberal modes of production of the city, festivals and events can then help to replace tokenistic forms of citizen engagement with more deliberative approaches that foreground the interests of citizens with common good at its core, and make meaningful involvement an essential component of planning and decision-making processes.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Séverin Guillard: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **David McGillivray:** Funding acquisition, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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