

FESTIVALIZATION OF THE CITY

Contemporary examples

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Abstract: There is unprecedented interest in festivals as a cultural phenomenon that contributes to urban images, identities, and myths. The article addresses the role of festivals as image building-blocks and specifies a number of success factors for festivals aspiring to become the means of urban image creation. Festivals integrate people and establish inner-communities; they induce commonly shared experiences and encourage an atmosphere of fun, pleasure and excitement. In this way festivals facilitate the processes of transferring pleasant experiences onto other subjects, places or phenomena related to them (i.e. onto a city). Festivals act as an urban image device. The purpose of this paper is to present another dimension of festivals and describe how they can perpetuate false notions and fake images about the hosting city. The example of the city of Lodz is described, where the Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures creates an image of Lodz as a city of four cultures (which it was not) and a national and cultural melting pot (which it was not).

Keywords: *Festivalization of the city, urban image, urban identity*

The general idea of a festival is about organizing (mostly periodical) artistic events which last several successive days in a year. It is a retrospective of achievements in a given cultural domain, frequently combined in a convention of a contest. What festivals offer to their spectators is a variety of forms of celebration and possibilities to celebrate as well as to animate and dramatize the world around them (PRENTICE and ANDERSEN 2003; ROBERTSON and WARDROP 2004). They have become a means of creating urban images; they transformed cities into spectacles and they also dominate the vast majority of activities performed by urban communities. For this reason, more and more frequently those who do research on culture use the phrase “festivalization

of the city” or urban “festival marketplaces” (HARVEY 1991; HANNIGAN 1998b; LAOPODI 2002; RICHARDS and WILSON 2004; RICHARDS and WILSON 2006).

The article presents several examples of events which strongly influenced the process of festivalization of the urban space of Lodz (Łódź). The first part of the text describes the essence of these events as well as their distinctive features. For the events have a great potential to strengthen the sense of belonging to a wider social group; they also bring dynamic, vivid and engaging feelings and most of all they create a landscape for urban experiences. In this sense they become perfect building blocks for urban images and identity. In the second part of the article the case of Lodz is analyzed in order to estimate to what extent cultural events contribute to the image enhancement of Lodz.

1. Festivalization of the city

With the growing popularity of issues related to symbolic economy (ZUKIN, 1995) or experience economy (PINE II and GILMORE, 1999) an increasing importance of culture has been pointed out as a major growth factor for cities. In its variety of forms, aspects and expressions culture has become a crucial part of urban tourism and plays a crucial role in transforming cities into tourism destinations. Culture enables consumption of the cities, for it provides contemporary tourists – who are increasingly interested in finding new stimuli, attractions and consumption pleasures – with a variety of forms of urban experience. Generally speaking, culture has become the basis of urban attractiveness; it proves its uniqueness and gives potential for articulating identity and constructing images, myths and narratives about the cities.

Contemporary cities have turned into commodities, “festival marketplaces” offering a unique combination of vivid experiences, fun, feast and pleasure (HUGHES 2000; HANNIGAN 1998a; HANNIGAN 1998b; LAOPODI 2002; RICHARDS and WILSON 2004; RICHARDS and WILSON 2006). Qualitative and quantitative development of festivals and other types of cultural events has led to what is now called “festivalization.” It reflects contemporary mechanisms organizing and shaping urban social life and the type of entertainment for urban residents and tourists. In recent studies, it is either considered as a result of people’s search for pleasure deriving from urban consumption or as a consequence of local authorities’ intentions to develop the city by means of festivals and their potential to activate social and economic life. Festivalization leads primarily to

the predominance of festivals in a cultural urban landscape, and it reinvents urban identity on the basis of such forms of entertainment as festivals and other types of cultural events (LAOPODI, 2002; RICHARDS and WILSON 2004).

In the economic aspect festivals increase the inflow of tourists and other stakeholders into the cities. They support economic development in terms of job creation, improvements in infrastructure, lodging and restaurant facilities. They promote local cultural attractions (CROMPTON and MCKAY 1994), provide extensive media exposure, which directly attracts tourist attention (LAW 1996). From the social perspective, events activate local communities; they build a common sense of belonging and help celebrate and restore local customs and traditions (RITCHIE 1989; MASON and BEAUMONT-KERRIGE 2004). Festivals generate relatively high levels of commitment and emotional involvement among their “consumers” (predominantly – their regular spectators) as they proffer new reality with its own meanings, rules, and ambience. People participate in festivities in order to socialize and grasp creative and “authentic” experiences which extensively differ from their everyday routine. This has been thoroughly researched by urban anthropologists referring to the notion of carnival and play as a means of explaining human culture. Festivals provide sensory experience, *authenticity* and *uniqueness* and act as a point of identification (PRENTICE and ANDERSEN 2003). One may conclude that events affect the urban space in a multi-dimensional way and simultaneously they systematize and integrate urban images and become a common denominator for its identity.

Richard Prentice and Vivien Andersen conducted research on the image of Scotland and Edinburgh among tourists taking part in the most popular festivals in the region. They proved that the Edinburgh International Festival (a combination of separate art festivals presenting achievements of Scottish and international culture)¹ had been a factor in building the historical/cultural image of Edinburgh and helped in combining apparently opposing tradition with modernity. Due to the festival, fundamental perceptions about Edinburgh among the tourists referred to the city as a mix of modernity (in form of international art) and traditional “Scottishness” (represented by traditional Scottish art and culture and completed with typical Scottish landscape with its all spatial forms – e.g., monuments, relict buildings and streets, archaic squares – which evoke historical and contemporary events attached to these physical places). Prentice and Andersen also noted that regular participants of the Edinburgh

¹ www.eif.co.uk accessed 30 March 2004.

Festival (particularly foreigners) preserve a more sophisticated, coherent and meaningful image of the hosting city. Regular festival-goers share the meanings, motivations and particular value system as far as the festival and place imagery are considered. In the case of tourists less involved in the festival (incidental spectators), their images of the city were incongruent, simple and with more discrepancies (PRENTICE and ANDERSEN 2003). It could therefore be concluded that events enrich the cities and enhance their images; they provide a *decorum* for urban identity, often being its co-founders at the same time.

Festivals' impact on urban image can be influenced by a number of individual factors out of which the motivation of publics seems the most important one. In their essence, festivals serve as a means of collecting experiences and pleasures of one's spare time (HANNIGAN 1998a; HANNIGAN 1998b); however, on the basis of contemporary research results some additional motives could be distinguished:

- a) **SOCIALIZATION:** external group interaction and socialization, sense of belonging to the community, entertainment, relaxation, event excitement, unusual experience
- b) **EDUCATION:** cultural exploration, building up knowledge and professional skills, emotional development, curiosity, event novelty
- c) **FAMILY TOGETHERNESS:** family integration, known-group socialization, spending one's leisure time together with relatives (UYSAL, GAHAN, MARTIN 1993; MOHR, BACKMAN, GAHAN, BACKMAN 1993; BACKMAN, BACKMAN, UYSAL, SUNSHINE 1995; SCOTT 1996; FORMICA, UYSAL 1998; CROMPTON, MCKAY 1997; LEE 2000).

The classification presented above does not exclude further categorization, yet it provides cross-cutting information on people's motivation for taking part in festivals (whatever their profile may be). The above-mentioned groups of motives focus on interpersonal relations; they represent the meaning of links and interactions between spectators and show to what extent events affect social construction and relations. They clearly depict the potential of festivals to integrate people with different social and cultural backgrounds, to establish festival inner-communities, to induce commonly shared experiences, and to encourage an atmosphere of fun, pleasure and excitement. Such an atmosphere facilitates the processes of transferring pleasant experiences onto other subjects, places or phenomena related to the given events (i.e., onto a city). In this context festivals act as another urban image building and enhancement device.

2. Festivalization of multicultural Lodz

The Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures was first organized in Lodz in 2002. This cultural event developed dynamically throughout the following years, eventually gaining the status of a flagship event in Lodz and attracting attention of more and more tourists, as well as city-dwellers. Organizers of the festival intend to refer to the historic co-existence of four nations (Poles, Jews, Germans and Russians) within a single city at the turn of the 20th century and to re-establish dialogue between communities of different origins which used to live in Lodz. Witold Knychalski, the initiator and founder of the festival, said: *“The idea grew up to recollect the dialogue which had lasted incessantly in Lodz for several decades. People, taking from four so different cultures, connected in this dialogue, used to build factories, temples, theatres, cinemas and arenas together. (...) The dramatic history of the last century abruptly broke this dialogue. The Holocaust, the exodus of the Germans and the drastic change of historic conditions dramatically stigmatized the city of Lodz. The idea of the Festival refers to the beauty of tradition of Lodz, common to several nations. (...)”* (<http://www.4kultura.pl/history/pl/site/festiwal-2002.html> dated August 30th, 2008). The festival is therefore based on the idea of simultaneous confrontation and dialogue, diversity and interdisciplinarity reflected in the program of the event. The essentials of the festival are greatly diversified in terms of genres: it is an international review of achievements in several domains of art and culture, both high and popular. Theatrical and movie shows, fine arts displays, concerts, meetings with experts in politics and economy, exhibitions of photographs are all joined within a single event. Michał Mierczyński, the Artistic Director of the Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures stated in one of his interviews: *“I would call our festival a homogenized cottage cheese, in which a noble cream and a popular cheese are blended together to give a magnificent outcome.”* (*KULTURALNY MIKS. A DOBRE TO JEST?* 2005: 8)

The Festival was intended to teach – by means of the universal language of art – tolerance and to transfer knowledge about religions and cultures which used to constitute the city. The objective is to promote Lodz and its image as an internally coherent city without any sense of discrimination and hostility. Festival events tell a story of a city of four nations and refresh it year by year with every new edition. It presents Lodz as a multi-cultural and multi-national melting pot, in which traces of former interactions of **four** cultures – Polish,

German, Jewish and Russian – are still visible. The content of the festival, however, does not reflect the historic processes which really occurred in Lodz in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Festival creates an image of **a city of four cultures**. But the real past of industrial Lodz was slightly different...

Researchers in the history and culture of Lodz emphasize that this industrial city was built predominantly by **three** nations: Germans, Jews and Poles (MROCZKA 1987; *Dzieje Żydów w Łodzi* 1991; KOPCZYŃSKA-JAWORSKA 1999; *POD JEDNYM DACHEM* 2000). In the early 19th century first German-speaking textile craftsmen came to Lodz from Saxony, Bavaria, Prussia and Silesia. As time went by, their descendants became owners of textile factories and staffed their technical posts. Descendants of German settlers also often administrated textile factories in Lodz. Germans dominated the city until the World War I. The number of Jews in the city increased steadily. They worked in trade, cottage industry and banking. They also established factories. From the late 1860s until the beginning of World War I Jews and Germans possessed ca 94% of all textile factories in Lodz (PYTLAS 1994: 52). Poles rolled in from neighboring villages and towns to become workers (mostly unqualified) in textile factories. In the 1860s 44% of the inhabitants of Lodz were Germans; 35% were Poles, and Jews 21% (JANCZAK 1988: 218). The presence of Germans, Jews and Poles was clearly observable in the visual environment of the city. It manifested itself in activities of cultural and social institutions, city ceremonies and feasts, as well as in plain day-to-day activities. Next to magnificent residences and factories they built tenement houses and housing developments for workers. They founded schools, orphanages and shelters, temples, shops and hospitals. They erected an urban monolith strictly related to the textile industry which comprised three religions, nationalities and cultures. Finally, these three nations created the myth of industrial Lodz – a capitalistic metropolis second in the Kingdom of Poland only to Warsaw.

Notwithstanding what the Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures depicts, Russians were not a major part of the inhabitants of the city. In 1897 there were only 7,400 Russians in Lodz (at the same time there were 145,000 Poles, 92,400 Jews and 67,300 Germans). By 1913 the population of Russians decreased to 6,300 people (whereas the population of Poles grew to 251,700; that of Jews grew to 171,900 and that of Germans to 75,000). In 1921 there were only 700 Russians living within the city of Lodz, whereas in 1945 the Russian community comprised 1,718 people (with the total population of Lodz estimated at over 420,000) (GÓRECKI 1999: 18-20).

Russians lived their own lives in Lodz and established a rather closed community. They did not get involved in industry; they became neither factory workers nor factory owners (with the single exception of Vladimir Stolarov, a factory owner who eventually, after World War I, acquired Polish citizenship) (GÓRECKI 1999: 19). Their role in the city became more important after the failure of the January Uprising (1864), as a result of the Russification policy imposed by the authorities of the occupant. The Russians were representatives of the Tsar's administration and they established a state apparatus of coercion, which comprised the police and the army. Wojciech Górecki wrote: "*Inhabitants of Lodz of other nationalities often perceived the Russians as corrupted officials, a brutal constable (there was a gallows in the city) or a soldier. More aware Poles associated them with Russification and enslavement.*" (GÓRECKI 1999: 19). Therefore, the image of Russians in the history of Lodz is negative; they were perceived as an alien and oppressive occupant (POMIAN 2008).

Traces of Russian existence in Lodz can be found in architecture (two Orthodox churches and two cemeteries) and literature (in one of Julian Tuwim poems, *Polish Flowers*) It is the Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures that introduced and embedded in the collective memory the image of Lodz built by the Russians. The fact that one of the editions of the festival was devoted solely to Russian cultural heritage strengthened this false image of the great input of Russians in creating the culture of the city.

The Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures also creates **an image of Lodz as a national and cultural melting pot**, i.e., a city of co-operation, assimilation and harmony of four cultures. In its core it refers to assimilation processes which could be observed among the communities in Lodz. However, such terms as tolerance and openness of various nations living in Lodz towards "others" or "aliens" seem multidimensional and ambiguous.

Assimilation processes could have been observed among the Germans (particularly Roman Catholics), who were quickly attracted by Polish culture and tradition. Cultural researcher, Bronisława Kopczyńska-Jaworska, comments on this phenomenon: "(...) *as time went by, the privileged position of the Germans slowly faded away as a result both of spontaneous Polonization of the foreign settlers, mainly through marriages, and of regaining independence (after World War I – note: M.K.K.), by means of organized educational and administrative activities of Polish authorities (e.g., enabling access to vocational education for Polish workers, compulsory Polonization of administration of factories, etc.)*" (KOPCZYŃSKA-JAWORSKA 1999: 59). Such processes of

assimilation and emancipation were also observed (far less frequently though) among the Jews. They were a result of the spread of ideas of the *Haskalah* movement (the so-called *Jewish Enlightenment*, pressing for better integration into European society and increased education). In the case of the Jews, however, Germanization instead of Polonization was a more common phenomenon (ŁÓDŹ. PEJZAŻ ARCHITEKTONICZNY 1992). Effects of interactions between cultures, religions and traditions can be found today, for instance, in celebrating typical German customs (such as the city carnival ball, St. Nicholas Day or the Easter Bunny) (KOPCZYŃSKA-JAWORSKA 1999: 50).

It needs to be underlined that nationalities of Lodz never constituted an integrated local community. Divisions among the inhabitants of the city were preconditioned by linguistic and religious distinctiveness, which made trans-national contacts very difficult. Other reasons for these diversities were different financial positions, as well as social and economic aspirations. Discrepancies between salaries, social statuses, education and linguistic competences made integration virtually impossible. All the nationalities that lived in Lodz without any doubt were dependent on others, yet it is very difficult to support a thesis that they established a single and uniform community:

- a) At that time the Jews were the intellectual and economic elite; distinctions in language and culture made them an isolated community in Lodz;
- b) Germans constituted predominantly a highly-qualified workforce in the industry of Lodz. Until the beginning of World War I they were the most needed group of workers, due to their education and high qualification (the majority of them graduated from technical schools in Mulhouse and Mönchengladbach). Such factors as the unwillingness of the Germans to share vocational qualifications and experience, as well as their growing sense of civilizational superiority observed particularly in the 1930s (in the context of growing fascination of the Third Reich) did not support integration processes at all (KOPCZYŃSKA-JAWORSKA 1999; POMIAN 2008). Another important factor was a mere lack of will to belong to the same nation as less qualified factory workers (mainly Poles).

The examples given above show how an event may transform into a great means of creating and disseminating urban image. It is worth considering which distinctive features of the Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures were decisive in relation to its success as far as promotion of a multicultural atmosphere and tolerance is concerned. A few features have to be pointed out:

- a) contemporarily significant **ideas and contents of the event** (tolerance, acceptance of differences, social sensibility, openness towards other cultures: such ideas are always trendy, useful and needed; they perfectly integrate and activate people);
- b) **open formula** – allows the expressive presentation of the co-existence of four cultures in a single urban space. The Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures dominates the city landscape year by year with several exhibitions, displays, parades, concerts, shows staged in various spaces, not necessarily related strictly to institutions of culture. The festival is in the streets and in pubs, in a synagogue and in churches; its events take place in industrial workshops and in ballrooms of factory owners' palaces;
- c) **omnipresence** of festival activities and events gives an impression of co-operation, interdisciplinarity and harmony.

During the Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures the pulse of the whole city beats to the rhythm of Russian, Jewish, German and Polish songs. The city takes part in ceremonies of various religions; people watch shows in four languages. It makes the story of Lodz – the city of four cultures – more suggestive, as it reaches the mass of people who constitute the festival community and whose sense of belonging to this festival community is incredibly strong.

3. Supporting the image of the city – key features

It needs to be emphasized that creative functions of events depend greatly on several organizational factors related to logistics of the event and its promotion, as well as the public's profile. A unique organizational formula and proper executive management of a given event may support the process of re-defining the city (ROBERTSON and WARDROP 2004). It has to be strategically tied with identity of the place and needs to stay consistent in the long run (HALL, 1992). Academics and researchers have underlined the importance of a strong connection between identity and image, as authenticity and consistency of images make them a forceful motivation and communication device (BENNETT and KOUDELOVA, 2001, p. 207). It is therefore important to convey a credible message which develops into a point of identification for city-consumers (e.g. tourists, business investors, residents, workers, etc.) in a crowded marketplace.

The fundamental success factors for events aspiring to become the means of urban image creation are as follows:

- a) event size (including the number of dimensions, i.e., its scope, its length and the physical space occupied);
- b) event marketability, including
 - media exposure (promotional appearance and effective media coverage significantly impact on people's perceptions, thus the higher probability of visitors forming coherent and powerful imagery of the event);
 - event ability to generate additional symbolic and valuable actions, celebrations or behaviors on the spectators' part (e.g., world-famous celebrities visiting the festival and the city, unveiling ceremonies of new monuments or commemorative plaques, building the walk of fame, renovation of some important part of urban architecture, additional trade shows);
- c) event message, design and its context:
 - program content – its structure and attractiveness for the audience; professional status of lecturers, speakers and spectators;
 - costs of participation – as a function of time, effort and money spent at the event;
 - organizational values (meeting international standards in terms of the flow of coherent information, proper timing, professional event logistics, etc.);
 - community building power (development of the “festival society”; festival as a means of socialization; encouraging one's sense of belonging).

Additionally, consistency with expectations of the city inhabitants and with their sense of belonging to the city is another important aspect of every festival. Social acceptance and development of enthusiastic attitudes towards a given event effectively support the process of its inclusion into collective memory, as well as into public urban space.

All the factors mentioned above may influence the intensity of spectators' feelings and imagery, and eventually turn any festival into a mechanism that perpetuates urban image and reputation. The Festival of Dialogue of Four Cultures helped to create an image of Lodz as a multicultural city of tolerance. The advantages for the city are obvious: it began to be perceived (particularly by the “non-insiders,” visitors, and external tourists) as open, hospitable, creative and versatile. Lodz – the city of four cultures and tolerance – remains a myth, yet a very useful and modern one, as it opens the city to the world and refers to a way of thinking and ideas which are clearly understood and promoted in Western Europe.

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