City and festival: spaces of “site” identity, territorial development and branding

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Abstract. The article considers the spaces of city festivals, their research as a special form of the “site” identity manifestation, a way to make the urban realm more comfortable and a component of territorial branding and development driver. Today a festival involvement into the system of territorial development and using it as the means of building a positive reputation for the site and increasing its investment attractiveness is relevant and explained, among other things, by common interest in the formation of the quality environment in Russian cities and the competition in the promotion of territorial vital priorities. The paper includes the analysis of traditional festivals as the basis of a modern urban life and culture, on the one hand; the actual trends of existing of the city festive culture as a component of urban daily living activities, development and branding space, on the other hand. It also stipulates for the identification of the image function of modern festivals for territories. It is important to address the festival as a form of the interpretation of traditions and immersion into the “site” culture, a means for improving the quality of life in the environment. The paper puts a special emphasis on the importance of the festive living space in a city as a space integrating traditions, popular trends and commercial interests (including touristic business interests).

1. Introduction

Research into the location competitiveness and attractiveness for investors shows the priority of quality and comfort of the environment, the importance of reputation and promoting the “interests” of the area. Branding is a crucial component of territorial development, image making, and promotion. Well-done place branding not only helps gain more resources and promote a location, but also improves the quality of the environment, preserves and/or revives the identity of this location, and gives rise to an authentic lifestyle. City festivals are part of the “real” branding and today’s urban life; it is their unique image that can be the vehicle of the city’s marketing strategy in its strive for investment.

2. Research Relevance and Objectives

Making festivals a part of city branding today is a relevant trend in the light of ever fiercer competition. Having transformed into a kind of system of mass consumption, festivals and their emotional potential are often used as means to “fine-tune” the collective emotion, to shape the basic values, to “conduct the feelings” and instill the “proper” ideas and branded images [1].

Festivals, traditions, entertainment industry, and landscaping have been researched by S.S. Averintsev, Ye.V. Anichkov, A.N. Afanasyev, M.M. Bakhtin, H. Cox, C. Lévi-Strauss, D.S. Likhachev,
Various aspects of “festive life” have been covered by Russian researchers [2–9]. Being originally a component of the society’s traditional authentic life style, city festivals are now becoming a core part of the what makes various locations distinctive and good-to-live in places they are. Accordingly, research into the empirical data and trends of using festivals and festive urban landscaping to create a one-of-a-kind positive image and brand for a location (a city) is relevant for professionals and is the goal hereof. The theory behind this research builds upon the analysis of authentic images and cultural archetypes of traditional festivals on the one hand, and today’s trends in festive culture and branding discourses on the other hand; all these aspects help define the specific image of modern festivals.

3. Theory

3.1. Space of authentic images and cultural archetypes of traditional festivals

Traditional festivals, their structure, and archetypes often have an internal connection and feature an immersion in the ritual space that covers nearly every aspect of human life and affects the cultural development and the shaping of authentic images alike.

- Sacredness and ritualism of festive culture
  A sacral and ritualized nature of the festive culture, being an intrinsic characteristics of traditional festivals as the spaces of contact and dialog between a sacral and worldly sides of the people’s lives (according to E.Durkheim, M. Eliade), forms its archetype structure to a large extent. Festive rituals, making up the fragments of an integral total, a uniform picture of the universe, not only translate traditional world representations as a systems connected with the human vital activity cycles in the Cosmic space, but also form its integral part. In fact, festivals do become a kind of cultural archetypes that indeed define the rules and forms of how a sacred event can take place, how the identity is visualized, what kind of festive attributes are there, and how festivities are made part of urban life.
  Most festivals come from, or are modifications of, religious rituals associated with the ancient cults (Earth cults, admiration of the Virgin, etc.) and life cycles of macrocosm and microcosm. They represent a special discrete-continual system of actions with a virtually invariant set of components whose “plot” develops from festival to festival. Then each new festival somewhat continues the preceding one while adding something new to stay relevant in the context of today. This makes the festive “references” highly adaptable and susceptible to change while also boosting the creativity of its actors.
  - mundane in human life; as such, it immanently features the sacredness and ritualism that to a great extent defines the archetypical structure of the festival. Festive rituals are fragments of a continuous whole and parts of the general worldview; they thus carry the traditional images of the world as a system bound
  - The authenticity and autochthony of traditional festivals, their embeddedness into a living space
    The uniqueness and autochthonicity of traditional festivals is what makes them a cultural identifier, an organic lifestyle component, and a factor of location’s image at the same time. This pertains to the inherent function of a festival as a vehicle that preserves and carries traditions and customs, values and codes of conduct from generation to generation [10].
    Holi, an ancient Hindu festival, is, among other Oriental counterparts, a classic example of an event that brings together ritualism and large-scale entertainment, universality and autochthonicity, diversity of communication and immersion in the life reality. The core idea behind this festival is the color transformations that symbolize the reincarnation and are dedicated to the cult of the place, to the Earth, Krishna and his beloved Radha; the streams of color wash away the caste discrepancy to make people equal in the face of Cosmos and Gods [11–12], transforming the area into an area of a grand celebration.
  - The modern trends of festive culture development, discourses of the city territorial development and branding
    The culture, upon which a city festival is built, as ancient as the city itself, often becomes the brand that enhances the competitiveness of the city’s identity while still preserving the specific format of
traditional festivals and entertainment but also expanding their scope and adding new spaces like bridges, stadium, department stores, etc. [13].

When discussing the general trends and uniqueness of today’s festive culture, one should focus on the place branding discourses to identify a few key features.

- A festival is a part of the city life, a form of “immersion” into cultural traditions and a communication space

A city’s self-sufficiency and competitiveness greatly depend on its uniqueness and the diversity of its urban identity, which is something an exclusive festival often carries. By embedding in the city’s life, its festivals create more jobs and forge an environment where people communicate and rally extensively, thus arranging new large-scale meet points while also serving as “communication of freedom”, [6] a form of ritualized and intentional breach of rules and stereotypes. The now-common democratic “local” festivals and grand urban marathons, street parades, flashmobs, fights, car and bike races, kiting, etc. “induce” a powerful energy charge in the “ritual” space of a festival [13].

Burning the Clocks, a street costume show in Brighton, is something virtually every locak takes part in. For many months before, the city dives deep into its local cultural traditions to prepare for the festival. It is a signature event that sees many tourists—and investment dollars. Nuit Blanche in Paris attracts tourists and professionals alike; the event is popular with the locals and is supported by the City Hall. The Strawberry Christmas (Rus: Клубничное Рождество) in Balakovo creates more jobs and brings more tourist and investment rubles in winter.

- A city festival event is an image-building event of the “site”, development resource and the territorial attractiveness increase

A unique location stands for a unique festival. And vice-a-versa, a one-of-a-kind festival gives its place a unique image, creates a unique vision of it, and defines the urban landscape. By making the location recognizable, the festival becomes part of the city’s brand, creates innovation and enhances the quality of life, all while filling the gap of lacking signature events; think of the Ginger Festival (Rus: Рыжий фестиваль) in Izhevsk, Tiger’s Day (Rus: День тигра) in Vladivostok, NYC’s Mermaid Parade, the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, etc.

A natural resource, such as gardening or horticulture in abundance, which is what some nature-themed festivals and/or carnivals are conceptualized upon (the Cucumber Festival in Suzdal, Syzran’s Tomato (Rus: Сызранский помидор), the Watermelon Festival in Kamyshin, the Herefordshire Big Apple, the Weimar Onion Market, the Grape Harvest Festival in Urgup, Bollenstreek, Brussels’ Iris Day, etc.), can also serve as a crucial component and a promoting factor behind a “special” festival. Even if a city has nothing but snow and ice, these wintertime attributes can become its symbols, see the Sapporo Snow Festival, the Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival, the Magic Ice of Siberia (Rus: Волшебный лед Сибири) in Krasnoyarsk, etc.

- A city festival is a modern form of the traditional interpretation and immersion into the history and the “site” specific character

Speaking of how the cultural and historical context affect the ideology and emergence of city festivals, one should take a look at the historical festivals as they represent a specific format of tradition interpretation and cultural immersion. Customs- and traditions-based national, ethnic, or urban festivals function as a “time machine”, see the Crimean Military and History Festival, Moscow’s Times and Ages (Rus: Времена и эпохи), etc. Historical reconstruction festivals based on real events are common nowadays, too; these recreate the material and spiritual reality of life, rites, and political life of different peoples and places, see Up HellyAa, the Romans and Carthaginians’ Cartagena, the Kaltenberg Knight’s Tournament, etc. Another way to immerse in tradition is to organize or take part in a theatrical ritual mystery similar to masquerades and fire shows like Walpurgis im Harz.

- A city festival as a part of touristic business, means of information and commercial territory promotion

Tourism is a strategic industry for cities today, including the so-called event tourism; it is a global trend in combination with local practices, a mental construct, a set of images and impressions, a social project and an anti-crisis instrument [14–18]. A festival that improves the social stability of a city can
help promote tourism as a tool for urban development, ultimately making the city attractive for tourists and businesses alike. Creating a festive air as part of the urban life is an inherent component of urban image making, which transforms the festivities into a way to gain tourists and take hold in the information space. The ad and marketing campaigns associated with a festival not only stir the public attention, but also make the event more profitable while enhancing the area’s business potential. Many festivals have so far become touristic Meccas, global brands known worldwide.

Statistics shows that Canada’s rising popularity is largely attributable to the Winterlude festivals famous around the globe. The Sharjah Light Festival makes its location the Capital of Arab Tourism. The Ice Music Festival in Geilo, the torchlight processions of Brighton, the Menton Lemon Festival, and many other events have long turned into image-defining features and brands that bring in millions of tourists, resulting in greater investment and subsequently in better urban life.

4. Results

Research into the images and archetypes of festivals and their current trends shows that the festive culture, especially in its current state of the art, focuses in this or that way on creating the image of its location, on materializing the branding discourses. The specifics of modern-day holidays as brand drivers, the current trends in festive urban landscaping boil down to a number of guidelines on making a positive image, promoting a location, and maintaining high living standards.

- City festival as location and culture identifier and manifestation of regional uniqueness

  The specific festive urban code based on the identifying features of the location is what makes the festive rituals intertwined with the urban space so unique; it is also what reflects the authenticity and autochthonicity of the place, becoming its signature and part of its brand. And it is the uniqueness of festivals that attracts tourists. St. Petersburg’s Scarlet Sails is a festival that is firmly associated with the city and its image and as such is a good example of a signature event.

- A city festival is a space of vital activity, a form of improving the life quality and the environment, and the place for communication

  The traditional embedment of festivities in urban life is changing now, which gives urban residents new ways to partake in festive mysteries while also enabling novel integration of festivals in urban life. The development of festival industries and the emergence of new professions, the function of festivals as emotional relaxation venues, and the accompanying design have an important role to play in making a better urban environment for a better life. The omnipresence of special local festivals coupled with branded events is becoming an integral part of today’s city image. This factor enables urban residents to put their ideas into practice, to make a difference in their cities. The information space creates opportunities in popularizing festivals as part of urban life, which expands the locals’ involvement in festive urban landscaping, in the positive “fine-tuning” of collective thought [1], which greatly advances the brand potential of festive culture for the citizens and for the city’s guests alike [19].

- City festival spaces as the integration of traditions, popular trends and commercial interests, a form of investment attraction and a branding means

  The concepts behind many festivals build upon the crossover of historical and cultural traditions of festivities and locations while blending them with the today’s life, technology, and trends. Professionals often research traditional festivals to find inspiration for new scenarios, styles, characters, and visuals [20–21]. The local culture can be shown and blended with the modern life by means of urban mythologemes and historical events whose unique identity makes the event truly stand out and renders the location more attractive for investors and businesses; consider, for instance, the famous Beltane Fire Festival that brings together many visitors every year and is part of Edinburgh’s branding. Of relevance is mixing ancient traditions and mass entertainment of today for promotion, identity development, and pitching the investors. Mardi Gras in New Orleans, a festival that mixes a pagan rite and American popular culture, has long become an urban brand that the locals and tourists love.

  Comprehensive consideration of the above has given rise to the concepts and designs of festive environments to give the Baikal Region and the City of Irkutsk a more attractive, touristic image. These include: Irkutsk, the Capital of Russian Design (Rus: Иркутск — столицароссийского дизайна), 355
Years of Irkutsk (Rus: Иркутску 355), Ice Percussion on Lake Baikal (Rus: ЛедоваяперкуссиянаБайкале), Siberian Endemics (Rus: Сибирскиеэндемики), Maslenitsa in Taltsy (Rus: Масленица в Тальцах), etc.

5. Conclusions
A festival today is essentially a chain series of joyful events that offer exclusive content; festivals are common and diverse, often being the local brand and transforming their cities into a single space that breathes festivity. Identity is the centerpiece of many festivals, as the very air of the event comes from the “spirit of the place”.

Being an important selling point that brings more investment by promoting local tourism among other things, festivals create new kinds of jobs for the locals, resulting in higher living standards and in a better environment. Mass media deliver the message to million-strong audiences, which helps promote such events. World-famous festivals and carnivals become true city brands that bring together the ethnic traditions of the location and the trends and technology of today, culminating in a combination of 3D shows, illumination, fire shows, and music concerts.

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