Festivals and the city: the festivalisation of public space

This session is sponsored by the Geographies of Leisure and Tourism Research Group (GLTRG).

Session conveners: Dr. Andrew Smith (University of Westminster)

This session aims to explore the significance of urban festivity, with a particular focus on how festivals affect the accessibility and inclusivity of public spaces. The contemporary festivalisation of cities is something that has been pursued enthusiastically by municipal authorities, but academics are more sceptical about this trend, linking it to the commodification, commercialisation and spectacularisation of urban space. Given the conference theme, this session will explore if festivals and festivity can help break down established borders and invisible boundaries that restrict who uses public spaces and what those spaces are used for. Festivals can encourage social mixing in urban spaces, bringing together people from different backgrounds. However, the rise of commercial festivals and ticketed events means that festivals are also responsible for building borders that restrict the availability of parks, streets and squares. Whilst festivity may be temporally constrained, the effects festivals have on the spaces and places that host them are not. So we are also interested in exploring the enduring legacies of urban festivity.

We invite contributors to submit abstracts on relevant themes, including, but not limited to:

- Festivals and social inclusion / exclusion
- Festivals and the demarcation / territorialisation of public space
- Festivals as border makers / border breakers
- Festivals and festivity as ways of fostering social encounters, interactions and exchanges
- Festivals and urban policy / management / governance.
- The role of festivals in the neoliberal city / cities of consumption
- The role of festivals in changing the identity and meaning of host spaces / places (and other long term effects)
- Festivals as ways to make difference visible in the contemporary city
- The role of social gatherings, demonstrations and assemblies

If you would like to participate, please send an abstract of between 250-300 words to Andrew Smith (a.smith@westminster.ac.uk) by 31st January 2020.

Participants will be invited to contribute to an edited book on this theme that will be produced following the conference.
More details are available here: https://www.rgs.org/research/annual-international-conference/