

# Event Culture and Urban Development

The City of Zurich as an  
Example of Differentiation  
and Exclusion

Events and eventisation pervade everyday life — in the shape of childrens' birthday parties, cultural and marketing events, community festivals, sports events, etc. — and thereby reflect fundamental social processes of differentiation and exclusion. Against this background, "Event Culture and Urban Development," a project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, explores the city of Zurich as an example of the manifold interconnections between the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of differentiation and exclusion.

## Project Background – Social Context:

"Nightlife should be a bonus, not a problem" (20Minuten, 4 Sept 2014), "More Space for the Opera House at Bellevue Square" (Tages Anzeiger, 28 Sept 2014), "Public Space: Between Attraction and Exclusion" (Neue

Zürcher Zeitung, 4 Nov 2013) or "Club Jil: Albanians and Kosovarians Denied Admission" (20Minuten, 10 Sept 2013). Headlines like these plainly illustrate that the increasing density of events features high on the agenda of city politics. Zurich's cultural and entertainment offerings have undergone a dynamic development since 1980. In the early 1980s, increasing economic internationalisation and the stagnation of established culture in Zurich brought forth an urban social movement that demanded the promotion of culture beyond existing (mainstream) cultural institutions. New clubs, theatres, and festivals emerged and now shape Zurich's image as a thriving city of culture and trends. Whereas a constantly differentiated range of events promises out-of-the-ordinary experiences and social distinction, criticism of the 24-7 society has firmly established itself on the political



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agenda: people feel disturbed by noise and littering, and free spaces have become a rare commodity. There is clear evidence for increasing differentiation and exclusion: the economic importance of the event sector is not only substantial but it is also heightened by the growing significance of event marketing. International competition between cities, the struggle for highly qualified labour, investment and tourists, the redefinition of public spaces through increased use, and selective admission to events all lead to comprehensive revaluation processes on different levels.

### Project Aims

Based on a case study of Zurich, the project analyses the effects of extensive eventisation through a multiple-perspective approach on four levels: a) processes of socio-economic differentiation; b) hierarchisation of spaces; c) event cultures and strategies of experience production; d) reception and participation: negotiation processes and dimensions of experience. Starting from the indeterminacy of the notion of event, the project on the one hand repositions this key concept within current scientific debates. Given the current overabundance of events, the project on the other hand develops future strategies and potentials for everyday practice in association with urban development specialists and the Zurich Police Department. Project findings will form the basis of a normative discussion about requirements and permission criteria with a view to initiating socially and culturally sustainable urban development.

### Event Cultures and Exclusion – An Interdisciplinary Question

Spanning theoretical (conceptual) definition, economic utilisation, as well as popular prac-

tices and perceptual patterns, the force field explored in the project contributes to the indeterminacy of the notion of event. Our research thus makes a significant contribution to a present-oriented conceptual critique: the overriding claim that increasing eventisation within the context of urban development leads to specific processes of differentiation and exclusion addresses an important gap in event research within the social sciences and cultural studies. The institutions and disciplines brought together in this project – popular cultures, art theory, event practice, event dramaturgy, online ethnography, social work, and urban research – enable an innovative way of providing new perspectives to the current debates on the concepts of event, event cultures, and eventisation.

### Project Organisation and Staff

#### Project director – main applicant

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