

Evaluating the eventization of public space in the perspective of publicness: a case study of Northern Longfu Cultural Park in Beijing

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Research Paper

# Evaluating the eventization of public space in the perspective of publicness

## A case study of Northern Longfu Cultural Park in Beijing

Cao GAN, School of Architecture in Tsinghua University, China

Lanchun BIAN, School of Architecture in Tsinghua University, China

### Abstract

*In the post-industrial society, increasing number of events are staging in public spaces and public spaces around the globe are much more frequently occupied by planned city events rather than unplanned city life. The expansion of public space eventization has drawn great scholarly attention. However, in the exiting literature, there still lacks a complete and quantitative assessment on how events affect public spaces. Besides, empirical studies on public space eventization in China and its consequences can hardly be found. Therefore, the paper, through using the methodology of “publicness” and conducting fieldwork in Northern Longfu Cultural Park in Beijing, evaluates to what degrees that events staged in public spaces in China affect the public life and analyses how public space eventization impact the publicness of Chinese urban space. The findings indicate that, though the overall publicness score did not variate significantly when staging event, the event, through multiple component processes such as disintegrating with the city, creating filtered space, providing cultural consumption amenities and introducing communities of strangers, affected the public space on specific dimensions or aspects. Public eventization process cannot be reduced into a unidirectional process through which public spaces are simply animated or altered detrimentally by events.*

### Keywords

*Eventization, Public Space, Publicness, Northern Longfu Cultural Park*

## 1. Introduction

In the post-industrial society, we have witnessed the rise of experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and the prevalence of cultural-led urban strategy (Grobach and Silver, 2013) in the context of globalization and consumerism. Many cities are experiencing the gradual development of industrial society’s essential city life to the elective city life of a leisure and consumer society (Gehl, *et al.*, 2006). Within this macro-trend, increasing number of events are staging in public spaces and public spaces are much more frequently occupied by planned city events rather than unplanned city life, which is favoured by event organizers for more memorable and spectacular events and by city authorities who want to animate urban public spaces (Smith, 2016).

Public space eventization and its social implications have drawn great scholarly attention in correspondence with the tendency of urban festivalization and the shift in urban design thinking which now focuses on programming public life as much as the design of physical space (Ivers, 2018, Smith, *et al.*, 2021). Some scholars declare that events in public spaces will add to the variety of public activities and create meeting places and spaces for people visiting public spaces (Montgomery, 1998). On the contrary,

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some scholars associate the trend of public space eventization with the increasing hegemony of neoliberal economic models and they state that it will lead to the commercialization, scrutinization and privatization of public spaces (Ivers, 2018, McGillivray, *et al.*, 2020). In this on-going debate, there are still some unresolved questions: (1) what are the relative degrees that events staging in public spaces affect the public life in them? (2) what account for the social effect of public space eventization? Among the existing researches there still lacks a complete and quantitative evaluation on how events affect public space and public life.

It is noticeable that rather than advocating staging city events in public spaces, the paper acknowledges the tendency of public space eventization and intends to understand the trend and its social consequences. There are mainly 2 aims in the research. The first is to explore the issues associated with public space eventization and construct a complete and quantitative evaluation model in the perspective of publicness. The second is to conduct fieldwork in selected case and provide empirical assessment on publicness variation in the process of staging events in public spaces.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Eventization of public spaces and its effects

Smith Andrew (2016) proposes the concept “eventization” to study how individual events affect specific public spaces and gain valid and concrete empirical evidences on outcomes of urban festivalization. The existing researches on public space eventization are mainly conducted in the following dimensions: spatial environment, manipulation, and activity.

In the spatial environment dimension, scholars state that the spatial environment impacts of public space eventization mainly reflect on the following elements, including scale (Frenchman, 2004), accessibility (Belghazi, 2006), mobility (Stevens and Shin, 2014), triangulation (Frenchman, 2004), amenity (Pratiwi, *et al.*, 2015), sensibility (Sabate, *et al.*, 2004), legibility (Davis, 2016) and etc. In the manipulation dimension, public space eventization is often criticised for various reasons including, introducing more strict restrictions and controls into the public spaces (Belghazi, 2006, Weller, 2013), encouraging the commodification of public spaces (Smith, 2018) and denigrating the quality of public space maintenance (McGillivray, *et al.*, 2020). In the activity dimension, some scholars state that events staging in public spaces will add to both the vitality and the variety of activities through amenities, spaces and places for new engagement (Harcup, 2000, Giovanardi, *et al.*, 2014). However, some scholars also criticize that the planned events may introduce a rather contrived form of animation and on the other hand may bring restrictions or even damages to everyday life in public space (Van Deusen, 2002, Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011, Weller, 2013).

In summary, the public space eventization is a multi-dimensional and complex process which involves different sub-processes and outcomes. Smith (2016) identifies and uses the subsidiary terms eventalization (the process through which public space is animated via the staging of events) and eventification (the process through which urban space is altered detrimentally by events) to analyse the related effects of public space eventization. The two processes are not separate and most of the public space eventization processes involve both of them (Smith, 2016). However, most of the existing researches only focus on certain dimensions, sub-processes or outcomes and lack complete and quantitative measurement on to what degrees events affect the public spaces. Therefore, the paper introduces the methodology of the “publicness” of public spaces to explore how to evaluate the affects of public space eventization in a complete and quantitative way.

## 2.2. Publicness of public spaces

The relationship between public and private has been one of the key concerns of social philosophy (Madanipour, 2014). Many scholars in social philosophy, including Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Richard Sennett and etc. have introduced terms including “public sphere”, and “public man” to the debate and construct areas of knowledge on the public-private distinction (Arendt, 1958, Habermas, 1991, Sennett, 1978). In the research field of urban design, the concept of “publicness” of public spaces is defined as the ontological attributes of public spaces, which outlines what is needed to classify a space as a true public space by identifying the essential features and qualities that give a public space its specificity (De Magalhães, 2010). Varna and Tiesdell (2010) state that the publicness of a place can be researched in two ways – through deductive (interpretivist) approaches which view “publicness” as in the eye of the beholder and through inductive (critical realist) approaches which see publicness as something external to people. This research paper takes the inductive (critical realist) approaches to conceptualize and analyse the publicness of public spaces.

The earliest frameworks for the interpretation of publicness developed by urban design scholars theorize publicness to be based on the following dimensions: ownership, access/accessibility, agency, interest and intersubjectivity (Benn and Gaus, 1983, Kohn, 2004). Németh and Schmidt (2007) create a three-axial model to outline an evaluative definition of publicness, which includes 3 dimensions: ownership, management and uses/users. Varna and Tiesdell (2010) use five distinctive dimensions – ownership, control, civility, animation and physical configuration, add aspects such as physical connection with the surrounding environment and opportunities for passive or active engagement and create a more complete evaluation methodology, treating publicness as a complex entity. On the basis of the frameworks and evaluation models, many urban design scholars also explore and develop some new publicness evaluation models, including OMAI model (Langstraat and Van Melik, 2013), multi-process publicness evaluation model (Wang and Chen, 2018), Publicness Evaluation Model (PEM) (Lopes, *et al.*, 2019), and etc.

Scholarly interpretation and attention on the publicness are gradually widening, from a simple focus on the aspects such as ownership, access and management to a wider concern on human connection and active/passive engagement. Besides, there is also an evolution from the theoretical, static approaches to detailed, practical and dynamic approaches. The overlap of these approaches has currently formed a mature methodology to analyse publicness, the essential and fundamental feature of public spaces, and is the foundation for further assessment on how events staging in public spaces can affect them.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Creation of an evaluation model on publicness of public space eventization (PoPSE)

Through the review and analysis of literatures on public space eventization and publicness of public spaces, the paper constructs the evaluation model on publicness of public space eventization (PoPSE) in four dimensions: spatial environment accessibility, spatial environment inclusiveness, manipulation balance and activity diversity. The evaluation aspects and indicators can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Aspects and indicators for the evaluation model on publicness of public space eventization**

Dimensions	Aspects	Indicators
Spatial environment accessibility	Location centrality	Betweenness of roads (SA01), Public transportation accessibility (SA02)
	Physical accessibility	Thresholds and gateways (SA03), Fences and gateways (SA04), Barrier-free access (SA05), Availability of facilities (seating place, restroom and

		microclimate) (SA06)
	Visual accessibility	Threshold permeability (SA07), Visual connection (SA08)
	Information accessibility	Information accessibility (SA09)
Spatial environment Inclusiveness	Urban Environment	Blank frontage (SI01), Landuse mix (SI02)
	Pedestrian Environment	Traffic isolation (SI03), User mobility (SI04), Hard surface adequacy (SI05)
	Amenity Availability	Variety of sub-spaces (SI06), Variety of activity facilities (SI07), Seating opportunities (SI08), Variety of microclimates (SI09)
	Art, cultural or sensual enhancement	Density of elements providing sensory complexity (SI10), Variety of elements providing sensory complexity (SI11), Density of interactive elements (SI12), Variety of interactive elements (SI13)
	Functional flexibility	Small-scale Vendors (SI14)
	Restrictive design	Restrictive furniture or elements (SI15)
Manipulation balance	Agency	Ownership (M01), Arrangement and enforcement agency (M02), Articulation with surrounding spaces (M03)
	Control	Time restriction (M04), Traffic control in surrounding spaces (M05), CCTV (M06), Security guards (M07), Behavioural restriction (M08), Financial restriction (M09), Presence of sponsor or advertisement (M10)
	Maintenance	Cleanliness of site (M11), Dustbin Maintenance (M12), Paving Maintenance (M13), Night Lighting (M14), Greening Maintenance (M15)
Activity diversity	Activity quantity and density	Activity quantity (A01), Spatial distribution (A02)
	Activity quality and diversity	Use variety (A03), Social engagement (A04), Stay duration (A05)
	User diversity	Presence of people of diverse ages (A06), Presence of people of diverse genders (A07), Presence of people of diverse races (A08), Presence of people with diverse physical abilities (A09)

### 3.2. Operationalization of the PoPSE evaluation model

The operationalization of the PoPSE evaluation model is structured in 3 steps: (1) the case selection; (2) the data collection; and (3) the publicness evaluation of public space eventization (Lopes, *et al.*, 2019).

In the selection of case studies, the fieldwork was conducted in Northern Longfu Cultural Park in Beijing. Beijing, the capital of China, has a long tradition of staging festivals and events (like temple fairs and the Lantern Festival Parades) in significant public spaces (Naquin, 2001). Nowadays, the number and range of events staging in public spaces in Beijing are continuously increasing since Beijing is taking a number of cultural strategic measures to construct the cultural centre of China. Northern Longfu Cultural Park, located in Dongcheng District and in the vicinity of National Art Museum of China, aims to become a “world-class cultural and art consumption destination”, in which various kinds of cultural and fashionable events are taking place (Zhou and Chai, 2020) (Fig. 1). The study selects Northern Longfu Cultural Park as the case. Dawa Market, which provided an explicit cultural theme and multiple activity opportunities, can

be representative of other events staging in Northern Longfu Cultural Park and be selected as the case event (Fig. 2).

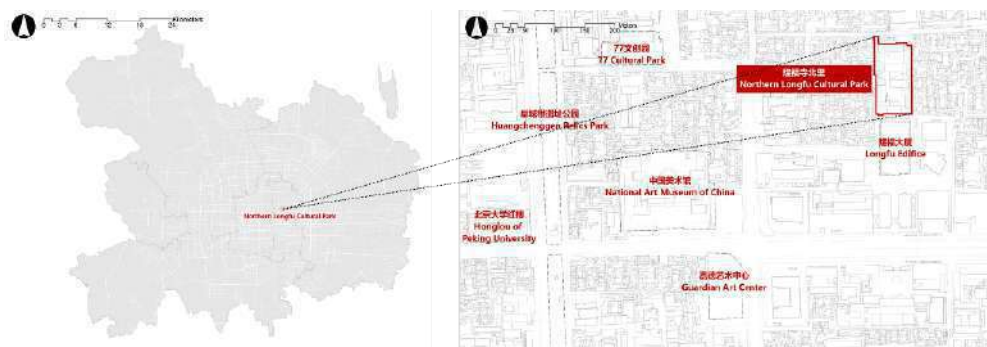


Figure 1. Location of Northern Longfu Cultural Park. Source: Authors.



Figure 2. Map of Northern Longfu Cultural Park in normal status and event status. Source: Authors.

The second step is the data collection process. Primary data on spatial environment and manipulation were collected through fieldwork visual assessment at a specific moment. Besides, the review of documents, interviews with relevant agents, and spatial analysis methods like space syntax, are also involved. The need for dynamic observation in the assessment of on activity relies on SOPARC observation, “a systematic observation through scheduled scans of all the target areas of the specific public space” (Mckenzie, *et al.*, 2006). Multiple visits to the site were conducted on weekdays and weekend days in April 2022. Every visit lasted from 9:00 to 20:00, when the highest usage generally occurs.

The result of the data collection process, moving into the final stage, is the evaluation of publicness score. On the basis of the dimensions and the indicators that the paper identifies, a grading system from 1 (most private) to 5 (most public) is given. The overall score represents its degree of publicness. The highest possible overall score for a given space is 240 (very high degree of publicness); the lowest score is 48 (very low degree of publicness). The research paper evaluates and compares the publicness scores both in the normal status and in the event status. In the end, the application of the PoPSE model is reflected with a graphical representation of publicness, displaying the combined performance of all indicators (Fig. 3).

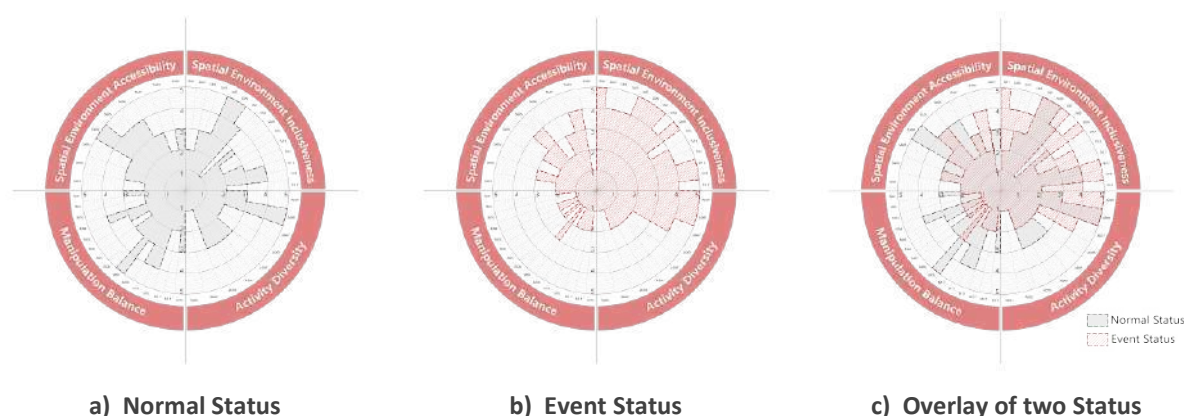


Figure 3. Hypothetical graphical representation of PoPSE model evaluation. Source: Authors.

### 4. Results

The evaluation results of Northern Longfu Cultural Park in normal status and event status are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Index scoring for Northern Longfu Cultural Park in both normal status and event status

Dimensions	Aspects	Indicators	NLCP Normal Status	NLCP Event Status
Spatial Environment Accessibility (SA)	Location	Betweenness of roads (SA01)	3	3
		Centrality	Public transportation accessibility (SA02)	3
	Physical Accessibility	Thresholds and gateways (SA03)	1	1
		Fences and gateways (SA04)	3	3
		Barrier-free access (SA05)	2	2
		Availability of facilities (SA06)	3	2
		Visual Accessibility	Threshold permeability (SA07)	5
	Information Accessibility	Visual connection (SA08)	3	1
		Information accessibility (SA09)	5	5
Spatial Environment Inclusiveness (SI)	Urban Environment	Blank frontage (SI01)	3	3
		Landuse mix (SI02)	4	4
	Pedestrian Environment	Traffic isolation (SI03)	5	5
		User mobility (SI04)	5	3
		Hard surface adequacy (SI05)	5	3
	Amenity Availability	Variety of sub-spaces (SI06)	4	5
		Variety of activity facilities (SI07)	2	4
		Seating opportunities (SI08)	5	5
		Variety of microclimates (SI09)	3	3
	Art, Cultural, or Sensual	Density of elements providing sensory complexity (SI10)	3	3

Manipulation Balance (M)	Enhancement	Variety of elements providing sensory complexity (SI11)	2	4	
		Density of interactive elements (SI12)	3	5	
		Variety of interactive elements (SI13)	2	5	
	Functional Flexibility	Small-scale vendors (SI14)	1	5	
		Restrictive Design	Restrictive furniture or elements (SI15)	5	5
	Agency	Ownership (M01)	3	3	
		Arrangement and enforcement agency (M02)	3	3	
		Articulation with surrounding spaces (M03)	3	5	
		Control	Time restriction (M04)	5	5
			Traffic control in surrounding spaces (M05)	5	4
			CCTV (M06)	1	1
			Security guards (M07)	3	1
		Behavioural restriction (M08)	1	1	
		Financial restriction (M09)	5	3	
		Presence of sponsor or advertisement (M10)	5	3	
Maintenance	Cleanliness of site (M11)	5	3		
	Dustbin maintenance (M12)	3	2		
	Paving maintenance (M13)	5	5		
	Night lighting (M14)	3	5		
	Greening maintenance	1	1		
Activity Diversity (A)	Activity Quantity and Density	Activity quantity (A01)	3	5	
		Spatial distribution (A02)	5	5	
	Activity Quality and Diversity	Use variety (A03)	3	4	
		Stay duration (A04)	4	4	
		Social engagement (A05)	2	1	
	User Diversity	Presence of people of diverse ages (A06)	2	1	
		Presence of people of diverse genders (A07)	2	2	
		Presence of people of diverse races (A08)	2	1	
		Presence of people with diverse physical abilities (A09)	1	1	
Overall score			155	155	

#### NLCP Northern Longfu Cultural Park

Firstly, as revealed by the overall scores, there is no significant difference in the levels of publicness in normal status and in event status. Both statuses received relative positive score, 155 out of 240, which means that Northern Longfu Cultural Park is quite 'public' in the 2 statuses. Second part of the analysis

marks out in what dimensions the event impacts the publicness performance of the public space. The distributions of each status’s publicness score for each of the indicators are mapped out (Fig. 4).

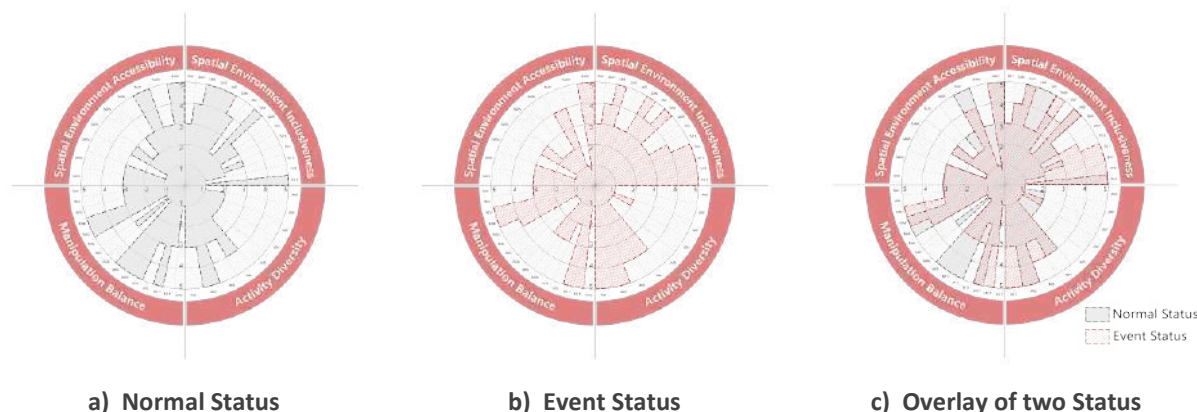


Figure 4. Score distribution of Northern Longfu Cultural Park in normal status and event status. Source: Authors.

According to the findings above, the research identifies 4 major component processes that represent a typology of key aspects in which the event affects the publicness performance of the public space, including disintegrating with the city, creating filtered space, providing cultural consumption amenities and introducing communities of strangers.

**Disintegrating with the city:** The component includes indicators such as threshold permeability (SA07), visual connection (SA08), articulation with surrounding spaces (M03) and traffic control in surrounding spaces (M05). In comparison to the normal status, Northern Longfu Cultural Park in event status is less connected with the surrounding. When staging Dawa Market, the traffic of the roads around was partially controlled for the safety concern of people queuing to enter the event zone (see Fig. 5a). Besides, Northern Longfu Cultural Park in event status is not as visible from surrounding environment as in the normal status because large parts of it is enclosed by black opaque fences (see Fig. 5b).



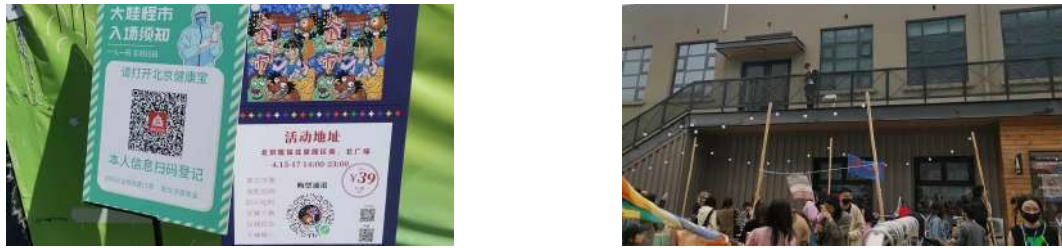
a) Queue and traffic control on streets



b) Black opaque fences enclosing the event zone

Figure 5. Disintegrating with the city in event status. Source: Fieldwork, April 2022.

**Creating filtered space:** This component assesses the availability of facilities (SA06), user mobility (SI04), hard surface adequacy (SI05), financial restriction (M09) and security guards (M07). The term “filtered space” implies that certain techniques are taken in the public space to effectively filter or sort users to ensure an appropriate clientele (Németh, 2009). When Dawa Market took place in Northern Longfu Cultural Park, the event organizers and the public space managers took multiple techniques to demarcate a filtered space intended for targeted consumers, including limiting the mobility of consumers (Fig. 2), dividing centralized paving surface with fences (Fig. 5b), charging entrance fee (Fig. 6a), and increasing the number of security personnel (Fig. 6b). Through staging Dawa market, the public space intended to attract target consumers that are trendy, urban, well-educated and most importantly, willing to pay, into the enclosed event zone and separate them with other users in the public space.



a) Entrance requirements to the event zone      b) Presence of security personnel on the site

Figure 6. Creating filtered space in event status. Source: Fieldwork, April 2022.

**Providing cultural consumption amenities:** The component consists of the following indicators: variety of sub-spaces (SI06), variety of activity facilities (SI07), variety of elements providing sensory complexity (SI11), density (SI12) and variety (SI13) of interactive elements, small-scale vendors (SI14) and night lighting (M14). The event organizers and public space managers provided diverse types of amenities that intend to facilitate both passive engagement and active engagement, including new types of night lighting (Fig. 7a) and commercial cultural or interactive elements such as hip-hop stage (Fig. 7b) and small vendors (Fig. 7c).



a) Night lighting      b) Hip-hop stage      c) Small vendors

Figure 7. Providing cultural consumption amenities in event status. Source: Authors.

**Introducing communities of strangers:** The component evaluates activity quantity (A01), use variety (A03) social engagement (A05), presence of people of diverse ages (A06) and presence of people of diverse races (A08). The term “a community of strangers” is described as ‘dystemic space’ in which people are connected through impersonal and abstract relationships and most of the activities are necessary activities or passive social activities (Wang and Chen, 2018). The paper categorizes stationary activities into 4 types: necessary activities, passive social activities, active social activities and discovery and display (Gehl, 2016, Varna and Tiesdell, 2010). The research discovers that, when staging Dawa Market, though the quantity and density of activity experienced a significant increase, the proportion of active social activities and discovery and display in the site declined (Fig. 8). Besides, the diversity of user’s ages and races also declined. In the event status, a huge number of visitors came to use the space, most of whom did not come regularly and most of whose activities were passive social activities such as parallel activities (eating, drinking and etc.), watching cultural activities, co-working and commercial activities.



a) Normal Status      b) Event Status

Figure 8. Numbers of persons doing “passing activities”, “necessary activities”, “passive social activities”, “active social activities” and “discovery and display” in normal status (a) and event status (b) during a weekend day. Source: based on data collected through SOPARC observation during the fieldwork.

In the normal status, Northern Longfu Cultural Park is mainly used by residents who live or work around and visit the public space regularly. They will frequently conduct active social activities, including childing playing, active recreation (playing sports like frisbees and skateboards) and strolling with acquaintances (Figure. 9). However, the event drove the residents' activity out temporarily, disrupted the day-to-day routines of inhabitants around and altering the complexion of the public space. The public space was hence to a considerable degree transformed into "a community of strangers", strengthening the inherent commercial nature of the event.



a) Children playing with their parents talking



b) Playing frisbees and strolling with acquaintances

Figure 9. Active social activities in Northern Longfu Park in normal status. Source: Fieldwork, April 2022.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussions

The paper intends to answer the following question: (1) to what relative degrees events staged in public spaces in China affect the public life? (2) what accounts for the social implications of public space eventization in China? In response to the questions, the paper (1) constructs a complete and quantitative evaluation model on how events affect public spaces in the perspective of publicness and (2) assesses the publicness variation in the process of staging events in the selected case.

The paper shows that the public eventization process cannot be reduced into a unidirectional process (eventification or eventalization) through which public spaces will be simply animated or altered detrimentally by events. As is indicated in the paper, though the overall levels of publicness of Northern Longfu Cultural Park did not variate significantly when staging event, the event still affected the publicness performance in specific dimensions including spatial environment accessibility, spatial environment inclusiveness, manipulation balance and activity diversity. Through multiple component processes including disintegrating with the city, creating filtered space, providing cultural consumption amenities and introducing communities of strangers, Dawa Market facilitated more diversified activities and attracted many more visitors into the public space. However, on the other hand, the enclosed, ticketed and managed nature of the event also limited the event's extension towards urban environment and the interaction between event visitors and residents living or working in the surroundings.

As there is currently a characteristic transformation in the urban socio-physical features of public spaces in China, public space eventization in China has been increasingly common and influenced profoundly on the performance and nature of public spaces. The ideas that the public space eventization should be seen dialectically and be evaluated in a complete, detailed and objective way will make contributions to the policy-making processes to balance strategic growth and social justice in the design and management of public spaces.

It is noticeable that in the research paper, the empirical assessments were limited to one specific case. To make the assess more generalizable, the PoPSE evaluation model needs to be applied to more kinds of public spaces and urban events to draw a more complete picture of public space eventization in China. Besides, the research paper only evaluates publicness through inductive (critical realist) approaches. However, it is also helpful to explore how events affect the users' images and perceptions towards the

publicness of public spaces. Therefore, empirical analyses such as user-group questionnaire surveys which study and compare the diverse opinions of different user-groups can also be a fruitful area for future studies on the publicness variation caused by public space eventization.

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