

The World turned Upside Down? Cities, Festivalization and Uncertainty

JOHN R. GOLD and MARGARET M. GOLD

Abstract

The rapid proliferation of festivals experienced by cities round the world over the last four decades was brought to a sudden halt in early 2020 by the coronavirus pandemic. Planned gatherings ranging from local arts festivals to global megaevents were summarily abandoned, postponed, or converted to digital alternatives. This paper opens with a contextual introduction. The ensuing section considers the reasons for the seemingly unfettered proliferation and festivalization that had occurred pre-COVID-19, but indicates that problems had already arisen over appropriation of public space, overtourism and security before the current crisis. The next part surveys the pandemic's impact on the urban festival sector to date. With reference to the megaevents planned for 2020 and a series of case studies of arts festivals, it notes responses ranging from whole or partial cancellations to implementation of wholly digital options. The conclusion argues that the continuing importance of physical congregation in designated places must be recognized, contending that this is enhanced rather than challenged by the rise of digital alternatives.

Keywords:

cities, festivals, festivalization, megaevents, protest, COVID-19, uncertainty, digital media, hybridity

The idea central to carnival, that most effervescent of festivals, is that of the world turned upside down. Under observances refined since early medieval times, the streets and squares of European towns and cities filled with revellers practising 'rituals of rebellion' that transgressed the norms of everyday life (Burke, 1978). Paupers or fools were crowned king, clergy wore their vestments back to front, men and women crossdressed, and rituals and processions blurred the distinctions between the social orders. Everyone knew, however, that the next day would see normality return and that the frivolity of carnival would be succeeded by the enforced penance of Lent.

In many respects, the analogy of carnival transgression provides an interesting insight into present-day challenges. The world has indeed been tipped upside down by COVID-19. The prime strategies employed in tackling the pandemic – lockdowns, the banning of social gatherings above minimal threshold sizes, the implementation of social distancing, and travel bans – are the direct antithesis of the temporary congregation, close physical gathering and thrill of the crowd that lies at the heart of festive activity. The big difference from historic precedent, however, is that normality has not returned in the morning. These emergency strategies led to the wholesale abandonment of planned festival programmes. Festivals ranging from megaevents down to small local festivals were swiftly postponed or cancelled outright. What were initially intended to be short-lived and decisive measures have continued into 2021 and probably will do so beyond given the virus's lethal tendency to mutate into ever more contagious variants. Indeed, for some commentators at least, these responses to epidemiological crisis are seen as placing a lasting and perhaps permanent stop on the wave of event proliferation that has transformed the festival calendar in the last four decades.

In this paper, we take stock of the current situation. The ensuing section recognizes the seemingly incontrovertible logic that only recently propelled festivalization to the fore of the urban agenda, but also acknowledges how certain problems had emerged before the outbreak of COVID-19, notable among which were growing local resistance to appropriation of public

space, overtourism and life-threatening security problems. The next part supplies an overview of the impact that the coronavirus pandemic has had on the urban festival sector to date. It draws on a survey of selected major festivals to chart responses in terms of whole or partial cancellations, precautionary measures required where some element of physical congregation was retained, and implementation of various digital options. It then reflects on the nature and credibility of existing strategies for reinstatement of city festivals in the short term and longer-term adjustments thought likely from convergence with digital media. The conclusion argues for recognizing the continuing importance of physical congregation in designated places, contending that this is enhanced rather than challenged by the rise of digital alternatives.

Festivalization

The rapid growth of scholarship on megaevents and city festivals over the last thirty years (e.g. see Getz, 1991; Gold and Gold, 2007, 2020; Lenskyj, 2008; Richards and Palmer, 2010; Boykoff, 2011; Johansson and Kociatkiewicz, 2011; Roche, 2011; Newbold *et al.*, 2015; Finkel and Platt, 2020) has been driven by two related considerations. One emphasizes the need to understand the complex set of cultural, economic and place-based factors that has propelled the previously unassuming festival sector to a position of far greater importance in the urban agenda (Gold and Gold, 2020, pp. 10–29). The other seeks critical appraisal of the consequences of that sector's growth for the places where they are held and for culture and society more generally (Smith, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017).

From whichever perspective, there is broad consensus about the advantages that city managers associate with staging festivals. For megaevents that move each time from one host city to another, such as the Summer Olympic Games or the World's Fairs (*Expositions Universelles*), staging the festival means making the most of an opportunity that will not recur within a generation. The perceived benefits here fall into three main categories. The first comprises enhancing a city's image by association with a prestige event, partly to burnish its claims for global status but also in the belief that international investors may be attracted by the dynamism and vitality that capturing such events suggests. The second consists of using the event as a catalyst, by which preparation of sites for hosting the megaevent can kickstart targeted regeneration and infrastructure projects. The third constitutes a loosely aggregated set of other benefits now commonly brought together under the banner of 'legacy'. Here long-term and sustainable advantage is sought by linking the holding of the event to achieving improvements that might relate, among other things, to sport, research and creativity, education, environmental initiatives, tourism, economic development, creation of cultural quarters, and inculcation of skills and knowledge.

For non-ambulatory and recurring festivals, the balance of advantage is somewhat different. Rather than seeking sustainable legacy from a one-off event, the usual policy is to encourage 'festivalization', defined as the process by which increasing the number and duration of festivals held in a particular place produces tangible and intangible changes in the economy, culture and environment of that place (Gold and Gold, 2020, p. 14). Ideally, if the proliferation of events is consolidated into an even spread throughout the year, it becomes possible to use cultural and hospitality infrastructure more efficiently and to boost the number of visitors and annual tourist spend without adding extra pressure during the traditional peak periods. Festivalization allows for the animation of the city for a more sustained periods and helps to promote its brand and identity, with all the marketing advantages that provides including, in some cases, putting cities on the international stage. Significantly, too, festivalization addresses the problems brought by deindustrialization and post-industrial change by stressing that festivals are now conceived as integral parts rather than marginal

appendages of the *real* urban economy. As such, formally-constituted and regularly-repeated festivals have become an important adjunct to the dynamic and still-evolving cultural and creative sector – the area of economic activity that lies at the crossroads of arts, culture, business and technology (O’Connor, 2010). *Inter alia*, they employ administrators and artists, commission new work, develop artists’ careers, and act as forums for new syntheses of performance and digital content.

Countervailing views had already emerged well before the advent of COVID-19 called the unalloyed positivity of much of this analysis into question. The Olympic Games and other ambulatory sports megaevents had long drawn criticism for exhibiting the key features of ‘megaprojects’ – large, complex and highly expensive ventures that impose long-lasting economic and political impacts upon the host city and its society (Müller, 2011; Flyvbjerg and Stewart, 2012; Butler and Aicher, 2015). Resistance to staging megaevents often focuses on the extent to which the city’s collaboration with international bodies such as the International Olympic Committee and the Bureau International des Expositions leads to the abrogation of normal planning and urban management procedures. This is evinced, for example, by protest movements and local plebiscites revealing opposition to bidding for megaevents (Lauermann, 2019), although most critics would reluctantly admit that there is still an adequate supply of cities willing to put themselves forward as hosts.

Similarly, the apparently unstoppable trend towards festivalization has encountered sustained critical analysis. Residents in various cities have protested about the way that municipal authorities have allowed festival organizers to fence off and appropriate public space for extended periods (Stevens and Shin, 2014; Smith, 2016, Quinn *et al.*, 2020). In many cases, the disruption to access can last for two to three months, especially when the same site is employed sequentially as the setting for several festivals (figure 1). Further discontent has stemmed from festivals helping to fuel overtourism, in which ‘the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks ... [has] caused permanent changes to their lifestyles, denied access to amenities and damaged their general well-being’ (Milano *et al.*, 2019, p. 354; also Adie *et al.*, 2020). For example, even before the outbreak of COVID-19 a groundswell of local opinion had already favoured a year’s moratorium on holding festivals in Edinburgh to provide an opportunity to evaluate and mitigate the impacts, positive and negative, on the city. In Venice, campaigners concerned with causes ranging from erosion of residents’ rights to opposition to mass tourism all recognized that the city’s extensive festival programme is an important element in the equation. Admittedly, however, the evidence is ambiguous. Although festivals contribute to overtourism, they can equally help to alleviate overload if timed to help spread the burden of numbers throughout the year or when employing festival sites far beyond the normal tourist hubs.

FIGURE 1 about here

More troubling problems perhaps stem from security. The problems that megaevents have faced from the 1972 Munich Olympics onwards have filtered down the scale over the last decade, notably with the obscene recasting of festival sites as ‘soft targets’ by individuals whose sole goal is to kill as many people as possible to advance political or other personal causes. Detonation of home-made pressure cooker bombs at the 2013 Boston Marathon, the slaying of eighty-seven people by a truck deliberately driven at high speed through crowds at the 2016 Bastille Day celebrations in Nice (figure 2) and the mass shooting at the 2017 Route 91 Harvest Festival in Las Vegas led to dramatic rethinking about festival security. Although these were isolated incidents, they added up to a perceived universal threat that could not be ignored. It has not only profoundly affected costs of securitization but has also brought about

extensive changes in organization and erosion of the carefree ambiance that lies at heart of the festival experience, especially when the private agencies typically brought in to handle security lack local knowledge and act in a heavy-handed manner (Aitken, 2021).

FIGURE 2 about here

Derailment and Reinvention

Sources of concern over security and overtourism and instances of public disquiet about the demands imposed by festivals were thus already apparent by the end of the last decade. Nothing that had previously occurred, however, would rival the impact that COVID-19 inflicted on the festival sector from February 2020 onwards. Understandably, early reactions were confused and occasionally contradictory. Evaluations of risk and uncertainty varied from country to country, with differing degrees of sensitivity about the extent that preventative measures would be seen as bolstering social control (Carrapico et al, 2020, p. 152; Scoones, 2019). However, the speed with which the emergency took hold required quick decisions to plot a route through the pandemic and beyond. In most cases, the immediate responses were cancellations and postponements.

There were no more high-profile casualties in this respect than the year's three megaevents, each of which was rescheduled by a calendar year after initial hesitancy as to what course of action to take. For football's multi-city Euro 2020 and Dubai's Expo 2020, the rescheduling required little soul-searching. The former simply made use of existing national stadia scattered across Europe; the latter would face a year's additional maintenance and security costs, but this never threatened the future of the event given the deep pockets of the ruling regime. The Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, however, proved more complicated. Suggestions at the start of March 2020 by the Games' organizers that the Summer Olympics in Tokyo might be postponed were immediately rebuffed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The ceremonial torch relay had already begun, with IOC President Thomas Bach insisting that athletes should continue their preparations 'with great confidence' (Nakrani, 2020). It was only after three weeks of statements and counterstatements that the IOC and the Olympic Organizing Committee bowed to the inevitable and jointly announced that the Games would be postponed until July 2021.

In part, this reaction was underpinned by the desire not to create an historic precedent for cancellation, but it also reflected the urban complexity of the Games. Contracts for legacy conversion of the Athletes' Village (figure 3), for example, proceeded on the assumption that the premises would be handed over to the private sector after the completion of the Paralympics in September 2020. The year's delay would trigger compensation for developers and potential residents of the new condominiums. Facilities such as Big Sight, Tokyo's massive convention centre, and the Nippon Budokan (to be used respectively as the Press Centre/International Broadcasting Centre and venue for karate) were leased and would need further contract arrangements. Games arenas and key infrastructure had to be maintained and secured for an extra year. In these circumstances, the final bill for the postponement was estimated at an additional \$1.9 billion (Gillen, 2020).

FIGURE 3 about here

Larger and better-funded gatherings like sporting and cultural megaevents, however, operate on a different plane from most city festivals. The complexity of everchanging lockdown arrangements, insurance concerns, the higher costs of staging festivals under coronavirus safety regimes, and the stresses of coping with degrees of risk and uncertainty

unprecedented in modern times all affected the decisions made by festival organizers. For most the response within the first few months was again straightforward cancellation (figure 4), but organizers gradually took stock of the new norm. With vaccine rollouts not starting until early 2021, the prevailing adjustments for 2020 relied on reducing interpersonal contact at events through mask-wearing, social distancing, ventilation, and increased sanitation. The unwanted but inevitable effects, of course, were diminished venue capacities and drastically reduced income from ticket sales. The degree to which festivals could be adapted also depended on their formats and venues, with those that could switch to open air performance, with its natural ventilation, often at a distinct advantage.

FIGURE 4 about here

Table 1 surveys the history of a selection of festivals scheduled for 2020, which collectively supply an impression of the challenges faced and the strategies adopted. The first indication of things to come was the curtailment of the Venice Carnival. This opened as planned on 8 February 2020 but was truncated two days earlier than intended once the true magnitude of the outbreak of coronavirus in northern Italy became apparent. The city's Architecture Biennale, then due to open on 23 May 2020, was first rescheduled for 29 August 2020 but finally opened on 22 May 2021, taking the slot that would otherwise have been occupied by the Art Biennale. Venice's other Biennales fared somewhat better, with the Theatre and Dance festivals simply moved back to September and October respectively and the Film and Music festivals taking place in September as scheduled. By way of expressing a measure of continuity in light of the absence of the Architecture Biennale, the artistic directors of the six Venice Biennales (art, architecture, theatre, dance, music, and film) curated an exhibition held in the Central Pavilion of the Giardini which opened on 29 August 2020 and ran until 4 November of that year. Entitled 'The Disquieted Muses: When La Biennale di Venezia Meets History', it reflectively reviewed the survival and adaptability of the festival over the 125 years since its creation, highlighting the interplay between the city, art, and international affairs.

TABLE 1 about here

Venice's experience revealed the flavour of the immediate reactions to the pandemic, as the carefully crafted annual festival programmes of many cities unravelled. Admittedly, in some instances there was a semblance of business as usual. In Salzburg, for example, cancellation of the Easter Music Festival (scheduled for April) and the Whitsun Festival (May) led to full refunds for ticket purchasers, but the Summer Festival managed to run at least some of its planned content. This was due partly to dogged determination that the spectacular programme planned for the event's centenary year would not be completely wasted. With infection levels in Austria sufficiently low by May for the authorities to relax restrictions, the festival went ahead on a more limited basis, albeit with commentators suggesting that the Salzburg Festival had used its considerable lobbying power to shape the government's new strategy (DW, 2020). In the event, the Salzburger Festspiele offered 110 events over 30 days in eight venues rather than the planned 200 events over 44 days in sixteen venues. The coronavirus regulations resulted in the sale of just 76,000 tickets compared to the usual 230,000, but government support and commercial sponsorship meant that the festival survived the year without a deficit.

Relatively few festivals, however, experienced that reassuring outcome. In most cases the impact on festivals and, in turn, upon on the cities, venues and artists with which they are associated has been profound, with recovery strategies mainly centred on emergency funding

and ingenuity in festival delivery. Regarding the former, for example, the Edinburgh Fringe had to change its funding model for 2020. Despite using crowdfunding to raise £360,000, of which £76,000 was raised by the Fringe Society for its artist and venue recovery programme, it was forced for the first time to rely on public funding. As such it received a substantial government loan and drew upon limited duration state schemes intended to support cultural organizations during the pandemic. In its evidence to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) consultation about the Impact of COVID-19 (EFFS, 2020), the Fringe Society argued for regular core state support if the government was to fulfil its goal of supporting the creative sector in Edinburgh, Scotland, and the rest of the United Kingdom, stating that:

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society delivers by far the greater economic impact and global reputation than any other festival in the UK. The provision of a UK core grant annually would provide an underlying stability to our charitable purposes and public good.

Not surprisingly given the scale of the crisis and the pace of change, emergency funding given for festivals and other cultural activities was patchy and reactive, with considerable variations internationally. Despite arguments that the state should act as insurer to reduce the risk involved (see Wynn-Moylan, 2017), in most cases organizers were thrown back on their own creativity to survive in the short-term, to continue to engage with their audiences, and to keep their festival in the public eye. What is readily apparent, as is made clear by table 1, is the extent to which organizers of what have always been predominantly place-based activities looked to engagement with digital and online content to safeguard their future. As 2020 wore on, it was clear that a watershed in festival organization had been reached with the rapid deployment of hybrid formats that utilize live streaming, catch-up viewing of recordings of live events, or performances designed specifically for the internet.

Clearly those festivals with the resources and access to expertise were able to adapt most effectively, especially those which had already developed effective digital platforms. The Avignon Festival, for example, had created its FXP Festival Expériences platform as long ago as 2014 as an ancillary medium designed to reach younger audiences and those unable to attend in person. Nevertheless, the ability to engage not only with traditional core audiences but also to extend the festival's reach to a global audience was novel for many festival managers. The feeling of having been on a steep learning curve was neatly summarized by Lyndsey Jackson of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society who mused how little they all knew back in April 2020 and how far they had come by the end of the festival:

We didn't know then that we'd accelerate key areas of work to make the Fringe more accessible, to reduce travel, to have more urgent and direct conversations with artists and makers, to keep alive key conversations to support artists to make a living. We didn't know then that the experiments, the failures, the stresses and the triumphs would be informing our strategies for recovery. We were all just trying to keep alive the thing we love. (Elsden *et al.*, 2021)

The Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake (Ontario, Canada) also engaged with hybrid formats for the first time. Unusual in that it had avoided losses by having performance interruption insurance (which it had taken out in 2015), the organizers had initially hoped to proceed as normal by pushing the opening date back from 1 April to July. This proved impossible, but rather than abandon the entire season, they staged sixty-five replacement concerts in later summer and early autumn, first in the open air and later in theatre accommodation. These proceeded with reduced audience numbers (2,460 in total) but with a new online presence gaining 76,671 viewers worldwide. Notably, addition of a digital component was not seen as just being necessitated by the prevailing circumstances but also as

something that could be enthusiastically endorsed as an important extra dimension for the festival. The event's Artistic Director Tim Carroll, for example, proclaimed that the online element had fostered a 'deeper connection' with the festival's audience (SF20, 2020, p. 9)

This finding had broader application. Annual reports from the festivals shown in table 1 repeatedly stressed that use of digital options offered an endless range of ways for keeping the festival experience alive, with particularly good results when coupled with the possibility of limited in-person attendance. Inevitably, however, experimentation ruled the day. For example, the Cheltenham Music Festival scheduled for July 2020 was cancelled and replaced online by a curated festival of recordings from previous years. By contrast its counterpart, the city's Literature Festival, went ahead in October as scheduled, but as a hybrid festival combining in-person events with live streaming. The result was a mixture of 7,088 in-person attendances and 200,000 online views, with over 120 events available on-demand (via subscription) until the end of December 2020. For its part, Avignon staged a daily programme *Un Rêve d'Avignon* (A Dream of Avignon) on television, radio and online throughout July to compensate for cancellation of its theatre festival. This was complemented by a short hybrid festival in October 2020 entitled '*Une semaine d'art en Avignon*', which combined online content with live performance in front of the small audiences permitted under coronavirus restrictions. Although the live festival was truncated when France entered its second lockdown at the end of October, the total live audience had generated 4,700 ticket sales, principally from France, whereas the online audience had amassed 800,000 views, with visitors from Europe, North and South America, Asia and Oceania (Festival d'Avignon, 2021, pp. 9, 13).

Finally, as indicated in table 1, Edinburgh also resorted to hybrid strategies after having cancelled the summer festivals in April 2020. The Edinburgh International Festival, for example, responded with displays of light installations positioned in thirteen of the city's major venues so that residents could still engage **with** something tangible in the landscape. These were linked to a virtual festival entitled 'My Light Shines On'. The latter consisted of past recordings, along with twenty-six new productions of dance, music and opera from Edinburgh Festival venues involving some 500 artists, musicians and technical staff. These were made available via the Festival's Facebook page and YouTube channels. The online reach of these activities was signified by more than one million viewings from fifty countries (Stephen, 2020). Although not a centrally curated festival, the Edinburgh Fringe also devised ways for artists to deliver material to audiences. These ranged from live streaming regular comedy shows throughout the festival to Fringe Pick 'n Mix, which allowed artists to load sixty-second films online with an interactive element for audiences to comment on performances and make donations.

Yet ironically, it was the most financially successful of the Edinburgh summer festivals – the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo – that presented the least flexibility for rethinking its format. Dating back to 1950, the Tattoo flourishes without recourse to public funding. In normal years, it sells around 220,000 tickets, with capacity audiences on most nights and a global television audience of more than 100 million. However, quite apart from any social distancing necessary for the usually packed temporary stands on the Castle Esplanade, three-quarters of ticket sales rely on substantial domestic and international tourism flows, with 46 per cent overall being overseas tourists. It was therefore cancelled not only in 2020 but, with the uncertainties over both pandemic responses and tourist arrivals, it was decided that the risk of sudden curtailment was too great to proceed with 2021 Tattoo. This was therefore also cancelled.

Back to the Future?

The start of vaccination programmes and expansion of rapid testing at the start of 2021 briefly hinted that the prevailing sense of negativity surrounding festivals might be dispelled. Yet, although the picture was far from uniform, the possibility of a rapid return to normality proved elusive as new and more contagious variants of the virus arose. Rather than opening up, many governments had reimposed restrictions or even lockdowns in the early months of 2021. International travel remained a minefield with a fluid regime of warnings, restrictions and quarantines. This affected not only potential festival visitors but also those selected to perform, whether in sports or the arts.

Nowhere was the cloud of uncertainty thicker than for Tokyo 2020. With low rates of vaccination and repeated spikes in virus transmission, considerable concern was expressed about the arrival in the host community of substantial numbers of visitors from overseas. These included the prospects of ‘large scale’ numbers of spectators given that nearly one million tickets had been sold outside Japan (Reuters, 2020), as well as more than 11,000 athletes and an estimated 79,000 Olympic officials, journalists and support staff. Public opposition grew steadily. Ten weeks before the opening, a reported 80 per cent of the Japanese public opposed staging the Games in July, with 43 per cent of the total favouring outright cancellation despite the venues having been prepared and waiting for nearly twelve months (AFP, 2021). In the final analysis, decisions to impose a state of emergency in the Tokyo region, to stage the Games in spectatorless stadia (figure 5), and to impose strict social distancing upon participants allowed the Olympics to start on time as a televisual event. Although this did permit world audiences to gain glimpses of the key sights of Tokyo, these decisions also effectively neutralized many of the benefits supposed to accrue from the event in terms of tourism and place promotion. Inevitably for the city of Tokyo, the greatest benefit to be obtained from the Games now defaults to their legacy provisions.

FIGURE 5 about here

For their part, city festivals faced continuing logistical and financial challenges into 2021, caused not least by the setting of frequently modified ‘road maps’ for the implementation and ending of coronavirus prevention measures. In the United Kingdom, for instance, plans for the complete lifting of COVID-19 restrictions by 21 June were delayed to 19 July and then went ahead despite soaring numbers of new infections suggesting that the opposite policy would have been more advisable. In other European countries national regulations were also changing over the summer, sometimes requiring action at short notice. For example, the Avignon Festival which was due to open on 5 July 2021 was placed in a position of needing rapidly rethinking when the French government suddenly lifted limits on venue capacity on 30 June, allowing the festival to release more tickets. This was then followed on 21 July by new instructions that required all theatregoers to show a European health passport or laboratory test results to access those seats. The festival was faced with having to police these arrangements.

Yet despite constantly needing contingency plans to cope with a volatile external environment, two related conclusions emerge that look with greater optimism beyond the problems of the current dispensation and reconfirm the power of place. The first is that it needs little emphasis to record that festivals have taken place at designated gathering places since time immemorial and have surmounted external environments featuring wars, prohibitions and epidemics in the past. Although some festivals will not survive the pandemic particularly due to losing their funding base, concerns are also voiced about government policies towards the cultural sector in general as the COVID-19 crisis has unfolded. Festivals do not exist in a vacuum and are sensitive to official priorities in treatment of the cultural and creative industries (Banks and O’Connor 2021, 6). Nevertheless, there is no reason why a

brief or even lengthy hiatus should change the fundamental reasons why people attend them in person or why cities are keen to attract both the events and their participants. Progress may be slow. The current situation suggests that getting tourism flows moving again is far from straightforward and building confidence among potential visitors to travel and congregate may take time. Until then, evidence suggests the increased importance of local and regional audiences and domestic tourists as staycationing replaces international travel for many, and the notion of being a tourist in one's hometown gains ground (Rentschler and Lee 2021, 44). It should be noted that Figure 1 also demonstrates the joyful return to the huddle at the local level as soon as conditions permitted.

The second conclusion concerns the convergence with digital formats that has transformed the city festival scene particularly over the last 18 months. Rapidly implemented as a lifeline in many cases, festival organizers quickly grasped that what was on offer was more than just a pale substitute for normality but something that could extend and enhance their offerings. As Fran Pearce, Director of Marketing for the Cheltenham Festivals, noted: 'When life and the festivals return to normal, our digital focus will remain as part of our ongoing commitment to bring the festivals to as wide an audience as possible' (Merrell, 2021). This could be seen as diversifying the social composition of audiences, but for many festival organizers what had clearly surprised them was the scale of the new global reach of their programmes. Hence, although on *a priori* grounds it might seem that the digital option would weaken the attractions of place, in practice the opposite seemed more accurate. Festivals now have a greater opportunity to celebrate and promote their connection with their home cities to this newfound global audience. Certainly, festivals that are place specific, intertwined with their locations, and central to their city's brand can become national or even international in their impact.

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Table 1. Event history for selected city festivals, arranged in chronological order of original dates of opening in 2020. (Source: Compiled by the authors)

<i>Festival</i>	<i>Original 2020 Dates</i>	<i>Cancellations and Revised Dates</i>	<i>2020 Festival Format</i>	<i>Planned Dates for 2021</i>
Venice Carnival	8–23 February	Closed early on 21 February	Usual pattern of processions and commemorative balls	6–16 Feb 2021 (cancelled)
Shaw Festival, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada	1 April–23 December	Delayed to July and then cancelled	Education and outreach activities online	1 April–23 December; start delayed to 7 July
Salzburg Easter Festival	2–13 April	Cancelled	–	29 October–1 November
Venice Architecture Biennale	23 May–29 November	Delayed to 29 August–29 November, then cancelled	Exhibition 29 Aug–4 November in Central Pavilion	22 May–21 November
Salzburg Whitsun Festival	29 May–1 June	Cancelled	–	21–24 May
Cheltenham Music Festival, England	3–12 July	Cancelled	Curated digital celebration 4 July onwards (free)	2–11 July
Avignon Festival, France (theatre)	3–23 July	July: A Dream of Avignon; 23–31 October Week of Art	October festival live events and digital content	5–25 July
Salzburg Festival	17 July–30 August	Shortened, 1–30 August	Live performances halved; live streaming and recorded concerts online	17 July–31 August
Edinburgh International Festival, Scotland	7–31 August	Cancelled	Replaced by online 7–31 August	7–29 August
Edinburgh Fringe	7–31 August	Cancelled	Online festival	6–30 August (hybrid)
Edinburgh Book Festival	15–31 August	Cancelled	Online festival. Over 140 events, 210,00 views	14–30 August (hybrid)
Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo	7–29 August	Cancelled	–	Cancelled
Cheltenham Literature Festival	2–11 October	Held 2–11 October	Hybrid festival; in-person events live-streaming on subscription	8–17 October

Figure 1. Walpole Park (Ealing, London). A large part of the central area is fenced off in mid-Summer to make way for a sequence of arts festivals (taken 9 July 2021). (*Photo: John and Margaret Gold*)

Figure 2. The memorial to the victims of the terrorist attack on Nice, 14 July 2016. (*Photo: John and Margaret Gold*)

Figure 3. The Athletes' Village in the Harumi waterfront district of Tokyo, shown under construction, June 2019. (*Photo: John and Margaret Gold*)

Figure 4. The poster on the right is for a film festival in Palmerston North, New Zealand that was cancelled in the wake of the pandemic. It appears alongside COVID-19 warning posters (taken 18 April 2020). (*Source: CC Mike Dickison*)

Figure 5. Passers-by pose for selfies with the Japan National Stadium, Tokyo in the background on 24 July 2021, the first day of the Summer Olympic Games. Designed to prevent public access to the stadium, the fence symbolizes the difficult decisions necessary to stage the Games (Photo: © Louise Claire Wagner).