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Festivalization and historic building adaptation in the Merchant City, Glasgow

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ABSTRACT

Holding festivals to attract investment, tourism, and attention has become a typical strategy used by city authorities for marketing and rebranding the urban image in recent decades. This strategy has contributed to the development of concepts such as 'festivalization' and 'the eventful city.' Glasgow's regeneration in the 1980s is renowned for hosting significant events, serving as a notable example that inspired other cities, such as Stockholm in 1998, to adopt similar strategies. Glasgow became a benchmark for illustrating how culture and events can provide economic benefits. While existing studies primarily examine this urban strategy through economic, human behavior, and geopolitical lenses, comparatively little attention has been given to the impact of place-making projects, particularly in the historic city center, where the efforts in historic environmental renovation and the adaptation of built heritage are essential to the success of festivalization. An analysis of conservation planning in the Merchant City provides insights into the relationship between festivalization and the adaptation of urban-built heritage. The exploration of several place-making projects from the 1980s illustrates that the festivalization strategy is embedded in conservation-related planning. In other words, the intervention methods applied to historic buildings in Merchant City both spatially and strategically underpin festivalization.

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Introduction & festivalization

The notion of urban festivalization emerged alongside the rise of the global economy, coinciding with a dramatic increase in the number of festivals over recent decades. This trend has been shaped by neoliberal urbanism and entrepreneurial-led urban management. It is noteworthy that festivals have long been a cultural tradition, but in an increasingly globalized world, the concept of festivalization has become more prevalent. According to Manuel Castells, cities are evolving into a new kind of network society that connects people and activities through a larger spatial context.¹ The neoliberal economy

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has accelerated interurban competition by limiting global capital flows. The rise of the creative class and the expansion of 'creative economics' has driven various urban development strategies in modern society.² One of the most effective tactics for stimulating area development is hosting festivals. The theoretical advantages of this approach, as explained by Gordon Waitt, include the symbolic realignment of cities, particularly those that have been negatively affected by deindustrialization, the acquisition of funding for urban redevelopment through public-private partnerships, and the promotion of local identity in the face of globalization.³

Urban festivalization, defined as the increasing prominence of festivals in shaping urban spaces, has become a key strategy for cities seeking to revitalize and redefine their cultural and economic landscapes. This approach harnesses the cultural economy to stimulate development, providing an alternative to traditional, manufacturing-based economic models. City authorities, facing periodic financial crises, have increasingly turned to cultural events as a means of regeneration. The United Kingdom was an early adopter of this approach, and it is widely recognized as one of the principal strategies for cultural urban regeneration.⁴ A growing number of cities are bidding for festivals due to the better returns on investment. This situation has been proven in many cases, such as the UK City of Culture.⁵

Exploring the process of festivalization critically examines the dynamic relationship between festivals and urban planning. This research substantiates the investigation into how festivals influence urban spaces and architectural heritage, encompassing both their tangible and intangible impacts.⁶ Analogous to the concept of the 'eventful city,' which strategically employs a schedule of events and festivals for urban renewal,⁷ this paper proposes urban festivalization as a long-term planning strategy for managing festivals and events.⁸

Hypothesis & perspective

The central hypothesis is that the festivalization of the Merchant City is embedded in the area's renovation history and built heritage conservation since 1980. The study is driven by two primary objectives. First, it seeks to explore how the urban festivalization strategy aligns with conservation-related planning in the Merchant City. Second, it aims to examine how the process of adapting historical buildings intersects with this strategy from a place-making perspective. To address these objectives, the research draws on archival records, existing literature, and site investigations. Additionally, the author's personal experiences attending several festivals in the area have provided valuable insights to inform the research.⁹

In sequence, illustrating the adaptation projects in the Merchant City supports the point raised in the discussion. Projects such as Princes Square, Virginia Court, Merchant Square, and the Italian Center demonstrate a pattern of adaptive reuse that aligns closely with the concept of urban festivalization. These block-level projects are not only interconnected functionally but also spatially within the broader context of the Merchant City. The transformation of these projects coincided with the area's physical regeneration that started in the 1980s, which set the tone and basis for the area's festivalization. Among these, the analysis of Merchant Square offers an insight into how the adaptation of historic buildings directly impacts the development of urban festivals. This case study adopts a spatially oriented framework, drawing on Tschumi's theory to explore the relationship

between the programmatic shifts in these buildings and the festivalization of the spaces they occupy. The objective of this analysis is to draw comparisons between the transformation of these structures and the evolving role of space in facilitating urban festivals.

As Van Aalst and Van Melik have pointed out, 'Yet, although most publications on the subject focus on what a festival can do for a place, few go into what a place can do for a festival.'¹⁰ The current scholarly discourse reveals a need to explore the interconnection between urban festivalization and the conservation or redevelopment of historic environments. Addressing this gap, this paper seeks to broaden the scope of both urban festival studies and adaptation theory.

Glasgow experience: a festival-cascading approach

In scholarly research on festivalization, Glasgow is frequently cited as a model city, particularly for its effective organization of major events and the transformative processes that follow. Initially, Glasgow's festival culture was shaped and inspired by several key cities and their internationally renowned festivals, particularly those designated as European Cities of Culture before Glasgow received the title in 1990, including Athens, Florence, Amsterdam. However, the most direct influence came from Edinburgh, whose Edinburgh International Festival and the Fringe Festival, both established in 1947, set a precedent for Scotland's cultural economy. The Edinburgh International Festival founded by cultural pioneer Rudolf Bing, was conceived as a means of rejuvenating post-war spirits through the arts. Its success elevated Edinburgh's status as a global cultural hub and demonstrated how large-scale arts festivals could contribute to urban regeneration and economic revitalization.¹¹

Based on these experiences and in response to the challenges posed by deindustrialization, Glasgow adopted a festival-cascading strategy. This approach began with the Garden Festival in 1988 and continued with notable milestones such as Glasgow's designation as the 1990 European City of Culture, the world's largest architecture and design festival in 1999, the 2002 UEFA Champions League Final, the 2018 European Championships, and others. These initiatives have been widely recognized as successful in enhancing the city's social, cultural, and economic fabric. As a result, the impact of this strategy has been profound, shifting Glasgow's post-war industrial identity towards one that is increasingly defined by culture and creativity¹² (Table 1).

Guillard & McGillivray examined the benefits and drawbacks of staging festivals in Glasgow based on the neoliberal city's governance and policy-making decisions. They made the point that the demands for inclusivity and public involvement in decision-making processes might be compromised for the economic objectives of the festival strategy.¹³ Apart from the downsides associated with consumer culture or social fragmentation, many scholars see the festivalization strategy as beneficial due to the factors of refreshing city images,¹⁴ the impetus to the urban economy, and the promotion of tourism,¹⁵ contributing to an inclusive urban environment.¹⁶

Merchant city festival

In fact, Glasgow's festival strategy is inextricably linked to the redevelopment of the Merchant City. The area has long served as a popular venue for festivals, with the Merchant

Table 1. Major festivals in Glasgow and their contribution to urban development.

Event/Festival	Year Introduced	Introduction	Contribution to City Development (general)
Glasgow's Miles Better Campaign	1983	Launched to change Glasgow's industrial image, using Mr. Happy to represent the city's friendly and vibrant culture.	Significantly improved Glasgow's image, boosted tourism, and instilled local pride, setting the stage for further cultural investments and urban development.
The Burrell Collection Opening	1983	This event marked the opening of a museum housing the eclectic art collection of shipping magnate Sir William Burrell.	The museum has since become a key cultural destination, enhancing Glasgow's profile as a city of culture and art.
European City of Culture	Announced 1986 (Effective 1990)	Designated to highlight Glasgow's cultural heritage and contemporary arts scene.	Spurred a decade of cultural activity and infrastructure improvements, revitalizing community spaces and boosting tourism. Marked a significant shift in Glasgow's approach to urban renewal, positioning culture at the forefront of its regeneration strategy.
Glasgow International Jazz Festival	1987	Initiated to celebrate jazz music, featuring international and local artists, enhancing the city's cultural diversity.	Enriched Glasgow's cultural scene, attracted international visitors, and has been pivotal in developing a vibrant music scene that supports the local economy and nightlife.
Glasgow Garden Festival	1988	Part of the UK's National Garden Festivals to regenerate derelict land, located on the south bank of the River Clyde.	Attracted 4.3 million visitors, improved local landscapes, and catalyzed development in the Pacific Quay area, enhancing media and technology hubs.
UK City of Architecture and Design	1999	Celebrated Glasgow's architectural heritage and contemporary designs through various public engagements.	Increased awareness and appreciation of Glasgow's architectural heritage and modern design, encouraging preservation and thoughtful urban development.
Merchant City Festival	2002	Began as a series of events to rejuvenate the historic Merchant City area.	Helped transform Merchant City into one of Glasgow's most vibrant cultural quarters, stimulating economic and social regeneration in the area.
Glasgow International (GI)	2005 (Biennial)	This contemporary art festival showcases work by local and international artists in various venues across Glasgow.	The festival has been instrumental in fostering a vibrant arts scene in Glasgow, enhancing the city's cultural profile and attracting cultural tourism.
UNESCO City of Music	2008	This title is part of UNESCO's Creative Cities Network, which recognizes cities around the world for their cultural contributions in various domains such as literature, film, music, crafts and folk art, design, media arts, and gastronomy.	This title helped promote Glasgow as a global music destination, encouraging cultural tourism and supporting the local music industry, including live events, festivals, and community music projects.
Commonwealth Games	2014	As the third time Scotland hosted the Games, following Edinburgh in 1970 and 1986, the Glasgow Commonwealth Games aimed to showcase the city's revitalization and its rich cultural heritage while promoting sport across the Commonwealth nations.	The Games spurred infrastructural developments, including the construction of the Athletes' Village and upgrades to sporting facilities and public transportation. This event significantly boosted tourism and economic activity in the city.
COP26	2021		

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Event/Festival	Year Introduced	Introduction	Contribution to City Development (general)
		The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) was held in Glasgow, bringing together participants from around the world to discuss climate action.	Hosting COP26 placed Glasgow at the forefront of global environmental discussions, showcasing its sustainability initiatives and encouraging further investments in green technologies and industries in the region.

City Festival being a signature event (Figure 1). The idea of a dedicated festival emerged from the concerted regeneration initiatives undertaken in the area during the 1990s. It is important to emphasize that the Merchant City Festival was a vehicle to continue Glasgow’s transformative successes of 1988 and 1990 at a local scale.

The festival was officially established in 2002, initially produced by independent arts group UZ Arts before the council’s culture body, Glasgow Life, assumed management. City officials like the Merchant City Steering Group and the Merchant City Traders Association were involved in guiding the festival’s development. Glasgow City Council

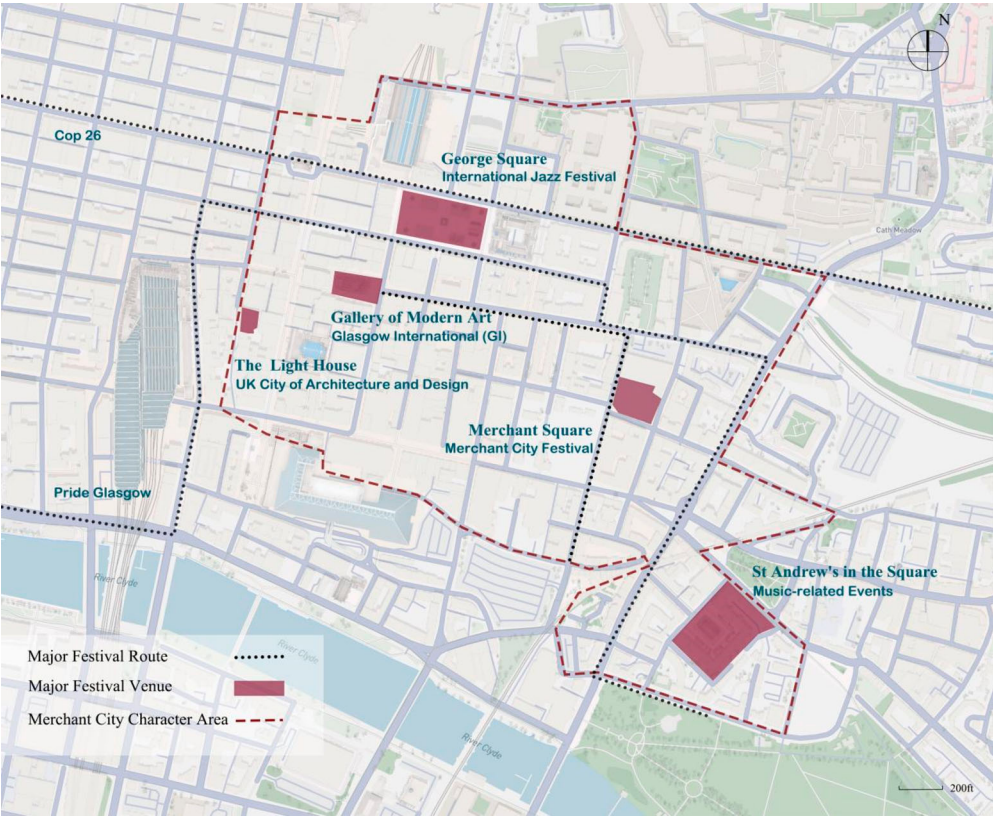


Figure 1. Map of key festival venues and pedestrian routes within the Merchant City character area, Glasgow. The map highlights the spatial distribution of major performance spaces, event locations, and circulation patterns during festivals.

has been a primary funder, integrating the festival into its city events program and multi-year Merchant City Action Plans. This public support was supplemented by funding from Creative Scotland, Heritage and Lottery Grants, and European funding sources.¹⁷ While the Scottish Government doesn't typically fund the festival directly on an annual basis, it has injected significant support during major event years. For example, during the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, the Merchant City Festival was integrated into the official cultural program. The Scottish Government, in partnership with Glasgow City Council, funded that Games cultural program with a budget of £13.2 million, into which the pre-existing Merchant City Festival was folded.¹⁸ Later, the private sector sponsorship has played an increasingly important role in sustaining the festival. In recent editions, key venues and businesses in the Merchant City have provided sponsorship in exchange for brand visibility and on-site presence. As exemplified by Merchant Square, which is often transformed into a lively cultural venue during the festival, hosting food markets, performances, and exhibitions.

Merchant City Festival's funding has largely been tied to urban regeneration initiatives and special projects. Glasgow's Merchant City was the focus of a Heritage Lottery-backed Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) from 2000 to 2006, and the funding package included £100,000 from the European Regional Development Fund.¹⁹ In essence, EU development funds indirectly support the festival, enabling the Merchant City to become a cultural hub. Similarly, Heritage and Lottery Grants, along with heritage-focused funding, have enabled special projects within the festival while contributing to the conservation of the Merchant City's character. There has never been a singular 'Heritage Lottery grant for the festival' line in its budget, but rather heritage grants have augmented specific content. One such program was the Townscape Heritage 'Arts-led' Program, integrated building restoration with cultural activation, including public art commissions and street markets that influenced early festival editions. Thus, in its early years, the festival was largely a publicly funded initiative, riding the momentum of Glasgow's urban regeneration and culture strategy.

Festival in placemaking policies and urban planning history

The renovation of Merchant City has yielded a unique venue essential for attracting festivals and facilitating a range of spatial experiences for their staging. The process of festivalization within Merchant City represents a strategic urban policy approach, initially rooted in the municipal authorities' re-evaluation of the area's cultural heritage. The narrative of city development since the 1980s substantiates this assertion, when the city passed the comprehensive redevelopment era and entered an assembly conservation-oriented planning period. The revitalization of the historic quarter, along with the revaluation and adaptation of the former industrial buildings, became a priority in the urban redevelopment agenda during this period. Of particular note, besides the geographical factors, the Merchant City is viewed as the city's signature due to the significance of the historic environment. There are substantial listed buildings, some of which are influential in local history and architectural narrative, such as the Scottish Baronial architecture.

According to the Scottish Development Agency (SDA) and the McInsey report (1985), rejuvenating the dilapidated appearance of the city, alongside the functional reorganization of the city center, is essential for city marketing and regeneration. Pedestrianization

of central streets, such as Buchanan Street, is emphasized in urban planning.²⁰ With the implementation of pedestrianizing major streets, the City Council (District Council) restructured the area's functionality by incorporating mixed-use developments into the existing properties, achieving this through housing projects and service programs.²¹

From then on, festival- or event-related policies were generally rooted in the macro view of placemaking in the city center. Evidence of this approach is found within planning strategies and policies, including the City Development Plan (2016) and the Open Space Strategy (2020).²² Additionally, the city public realm design proposals prioritize event and festival guidelines, emphasizing the following features: attractive, safe, flexible, sustainable, inclusive, and attractive.²³ The discourse surrounding festivalization in these urban strategies is inherently spatial, with city authorities placing significant value on staging festivals as a means of promoting economic growth and revitalizing the image of previously industrialized areas. Thus, from the perspective of Glasgow's urban planning history, the renovation of Merchant City demonstrates that events and festivals are integral to placemaking principles.

Maintain identity and physical attributes

Accordingly, the transformation of cultural identity in Merchant City occurred before the process of festivalization, marking an essential sequence in the city's regeneration. This progression is critical for understanding festivalization, as it shifts festival-related strategies from being seen solely as commercial ventures imposed upon the urban landscape to a more deliberate urban planning approach that incorporates spatial authenticity. In this context, festivals and the festivalization process contribute to the development of new identities and a more dynamic sense of place, ultimately enhancing the cultural attributes of the area.

Various festivals demand different venues; in certain cases, the audience may not seem to care as much about the location. However, research on how festivalization strategies affect space has shown that, even if a festival becomes more footloose and less place-dependent, the hosting area and city remain significant to the event. A comparative study conducted in 2012 by Van Aalst and Van Melik on the North Sea Jazz Festival (NSJF) in Rotterdam and The Hague provided empirical support for this theory. Staging festivals reveals the area's characteristics, and the urban festivalization strategy physically shapes the design of places and districts.²⁴

Moreover, the strategies have educational implications for the historic architectural environment and local cultural practices. Maintaining the urban identity during the process of festivalization is vital for both the festivals and the city.²⁵ The reciprocal relationship between space and festivals is the foundation of the festivalization strategy. According to this viewpoint, the Merchant City's festivalization hinges on properly restoring its features through redevelopment, as it promotes the place dependency that festivals demand.

Staging festivals in public spaces

Staging festivals in the Merchant City area, including parades and outdoor performances, primarily involves public displays or ephemeral events. Many festivals, including the

Garden Festival and Merchant Festival, adopt or partially incorporate parade formats. This choice is often guided by factors such as population density, the potential impact of the festival, and the opportunity to showcase city culture. In the transformation of urban spaces during these festivals, the interventions comprising installations, slogans, lighting, and other elements are subtly integrated into the streetscape. These features primarily serve symbolic purposes rather than effectuating substantial physical modifications to the street fabric. Such interventions are regulated by urban authorities to ensure they align with the heritage environment.

The staging of festivals in the area is further supported by pedestrian-friendly urban planning in Scotland, which prioritizes pedestrians over cyclists and public transportation.²⁶ According to Dicks' notion of 'visitability,' festivals enhance the space by showcasing the built heritage, rendering it more visible and worthy of attention.²⁷ Holding events in public spaces can, in a sense, repurpose the townscape, transforming the figure-ground relationship of the urban environment. The façades of buildings serve as both the exterior and the decorative backdrop for the festival venue. In this context, the architectural frontages engage interactively with the festival narrative, consistently conveying the historical significance of the urban space, rather than simply promoting marketing messages.

The 1997 redevelopment of Buchanan Street in the Merchant City area by the Gillespies exemplifies the principles previously discussed, demonstrating how a historic street can be adapted to host festivals.²⁸ The design incorporated installations and lighting decorations that created a festival atmosphere, redirected attention toward the built environment. These festival-oriented interventions not only blended contemporary celebrations with historical contexts but also reconceptualized urban spaces, fostering a deeper public engagement with the city's architectural heritage.

Nature enclosures and spatial nodes

Therefore, speaking of architectural conservation, the most influential factor in the festivalization of public space is the conservation of façades, and vice versa. Evidence of this can be found in the conservation and cultural policies associated with these events. A more obvious example is, during the Garden festival, the City Council (District Council) repaired the building's exterior (Kingston Hall) because it's on the tourist route to the festival.²⁹ The impetus for this intervention stems from the city council's desire to present visitors with a revitalized urban fabric. This initiative is driven by the overarching objective to transition the city center from an industrial image to that of a vibrant, artistic service hub. Consequently, to support this transformation, preventing urban decay and obsolescence, along with the conservation of façades, becomes crucial for accommodating processional festivals and events in streets and squares at that moment.

An assemblage method has been employed to preserve the façades of historic buildings in the Merchant City, with particular emphasis on the street architecture. The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) 1997 along with the Civic Amenities Act 1967, underscored the necessity of obtaining permission for any exterior alterations. The establishment of conservation areas enhanced the historical continuity by contributing to preserving peripheral space with appropriate controls over advertising

and development.³⁰ The facades are strictly regulated with a focus on the visual perspective, including the graphic style of the signs, etc.³¹ Since much of the Victorian-era architecture was facing decay and obsolescence around the 1980s, the city council carried out stone cleaning and floodlit many buildings in Merchant City. This approach has since been criticized by scholars regarding the assessment of the stone and the methodologies used. However, as previously mentioned, in a pre-industrial city center that required urgent updating, this approach effectively revitalized the street's image.

The conservation of the façade contributes to the historical continuity of the Merchant City area from a street-level perspective, helping to define its urban character and creating natural enclosures that facilitate the staging of festivals. Quentin and Haeran highlighted the four spatial conditions that contribute to staging festivals: enclosure, centrality, axial connection, and permeability.³² These characteristics are compatible with various festivals and support the intensification of urban social life. Some of these attributes are dependent on topographical features, while others are shaped by the specific festival. Conservation planning in the Merchant City possesses a similar motivation in improving these features.

Moreover, the refurbishment initiative successfully conserved the spatial attributes while undertaking the restoration of significant landmarks within Merchant City, including, but not limited to St. George's Tron, Tolbooth Steeple, and St. Andrew's Cathedral. These landmarks stretched the parameters of location, connectivity, and signaling, thereby promoting the organization of festivals within the area. Furthermore, the urban development sector, recognizing the functional potential of these sites, strategically employed these monuments as nodes within tourist routes.³³ Based on the spatial nodes, the festivalization of Merchant City also benefits from the generation of smaller urban spaces and the initiation of transformations that cascade from these locations.³⁴ As a result, historic environmental renovation not only enhances the festival experience, underpinned by structured themes, but also facilitates a deeper engagement with the local typo-morphological transformation.

Eventful architecture

Despite the area revitalization policies and strategies mentioned before, another prominent approach for advancing the festivalization of Merchant City is the individual adaptation projects. As Tschumi stated, 'To use a Palladian arch for an athletic club alters both Palladio and the nature of the athletic event.' The transformation of the site, whether through architectural interventions related to the festivalization of the area or through historic building adaptations, embodies a comparable process. Both strategies manifest the concept of 'alienation' as discussed in Tschumi's theory, involving a departure from the site's original spatial configuration and utility. It should be emphasized that the phenomena of physical displacement, dislocation, and separation affect the architectural types and functions defined by Tschumi as the 'event.' As a result, 'architecture ceases to be a backdrop for actions, becoming the action itself.'³⁵ The spatial meaning and attached values are restructured through the intervention of both methods, which influence the signifier and signified of the site. Festivalization shifts the spatial components to festival facilities, and simultaneously, the form and planning challenge spatial compatibility. This transformative process is generally programmatic-oriented,

drawing upon principles of urban semiology to interpret and reimplement the signs and symbols embedded within the urban landscape. The festivalization process codes and decodes the space through an assemblage approach to devise spatial modes, notate activities, and map the audience's movement, among other aspects. Within this framework, both the festivalization of an urban area and the reuse of a commemorative space fundamentally reconfigure the spatial sequences and the programmatic context of a building. Built heritage adaptation reconceptualizes the space with the new program, which sets out as intrinsic to extending the building's life through the 'event' movement and bringing mutual tension to the existing host building through new design language, thereby altering its *genius loci*. Moving beyond functionalist considerations, both tactics not only provide various spatial experiences but also empower the space's memory, identities, and narratives.

Furthermore, studies show that festivals seem to draw more attention from audiences, thereby increasing the density of the space. Richards highlighted that the role of attention in city development can be viewed as an essential asset, beneficial for hosting an event and attracting short-term interest.³⁶ As mentioned before, converting short-term festival effects into long-term is defined as festivalization. From a long-term perspective, this process aligns with the renovation of areas and the adaptation of historic buildings. When such projects have become influential and have drawn increased attention to the area, becoming emblematic of it, the adaptive reuse of built heritage can also be characterized as festivalization. Drawing upon Tschumi's concept of intertwining space and program via a strategic schedule of events, the case study further demonstrates how built heritage adaptation is intertwined with festivalization in Merchant City.

Case study: square-based adaptation

Several historic site adaptations in Merchant City exemplify the discourse on reinterpreting space to transcend mere utility, embracing broader dimensions of cultural significance and communal engagement, which are aligned with the festivalization of the area.

For instance, the Italian Center, situated between Ingram and Cochrane Streets, underwent reprogramming that transitioned the area from former warehouses into a hallmark shopping destination in the 1990s. The group buildings were constructed between 1823 and 1840; the host structure initially served as warehouses, commercial, and residential buildings, featuring 4 stories with polished ashlar façades in a classic style detailed with motifs like pilastered cornices and pediments. Prior to the renovation, the properties were owned by the Glasgow District Council, and their redevelopment mirrored the collaborative model of private-public partnership. Led by Classical House and supported financially by the Scottish Development Agency, with Page & Park as the architects, the project focused on the redesign of the courtyard.³⁷ This adaptation involved the subtraction of parts of the existing structure to make way for a new courtyard incorporating a half-octagon sunroom, angular circulation paths, a cantilevered metal balcony adorned with textile-inspired installations, sculptural elements, and a fountain designed to promote interaction and movement within the space. Also, this renovation stripped away some original textural details to create a cleaner, unified façade while integrating these with preserved elements like staircases and cross walls. The entire roof was reconstructed, with one side reformed to provide additional space

and another built up with a new story to maintain architectural balance. This integration, although innovative, introduces challenges in distinguishing between the old and new elements. The Italian Center is designed to create an ‘Italian village’ in the former warehouse district, where the physical intervention embodies traditional Palazzo-style architecture. The objective of this project is to establish a peaceful enclave within the busy city center³⁸ (Figure 2).

Princes Square, located on Buchanan Street, represents another instance within this category. Constructed in 1854 by John Baird, Princes Square on Buchanan Street has transitioned from a retail and warehouse hub owned by clothier Sir James Campbell, into a prominent shopping district. Recognized for its architectural and historic value, the building was designated a B-list property in 1970. In 1987, the site underwent significant adaptive reuse by Hugh Martin & Partners, transforming it into a retail complex with 70 specialist units across five levels centered around a restored courtyard. This redevelopment involved conserving the building’s detailed facades and historic sandstone courtyard walls, while integrating modern architectural elements. The redesign also introduced a double helix staircase, glass feature lifts, and utilized materials that align with the building’s Art Nouveau style. A new high-tech shell structure now covers the building and courtyard, with a glass roof supported by columns featuring ‘Tree of Life’ motifs from Celtic and Nordic culture.³⁹ Princes Square epitomizes the iconic imagery of the city center’s primary pedestrian thoroughfare, Buchanan Street. Its innovative transformation into a botanic garden-like space echoes the Art Nouveau style, and the façade decoration stands for the new urban shopping culture (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Italian Centre. Sculptures integrated with the courtyard staircase and aligned with the entrance gate. Installations designed to interact with the original warehouse architecture through material, form, and spatial alignment. Photograph by Author.

Virginia Court is another notable example, integrating historic buildings from the city's prosperous eighteenth-century tobacco trade era. Shaped by the tobacco merchants, key streets and buildings, such as the Tobacco Merchant's House on Miller Street, built in 1775, have been preserved and repurposed. The project involved converting a mix of historic structures, including the former Stirling's Library and a Renaissance-style warehouse built in 1877, into retail spaces and luxury apartments. Completed in 2008, the redevelopment maintains the medieval character of the old town and transforms the space into a vibrant area for exhibitions and festivals. The Virginia Court project invokes the area's merchant history and revives memories by spatially redefining the traditional courtyard. It emphasizes the preservation of existing materials and reinterprets the spatial ambience, thereby retaining the historical essence while introducing contemporary functionality (Figure 4).

All these projects underwent transformations in both their function and spatial arrangement. Correspondingly, the interventions involved a design process based on algorithms of subdivision, integration, and reorganization, thereby redefining the spatial dynamics between interior and exterior realms of the city block.

What is more, these adaptive reuse projects embody the procedures of reconceptualizing place as outlined by Rebecca Madgin, which involve recognizing space, managing change, promoting place, and re-creating a sense of place.⁴⁰ Likewise, festivals serve to unleash the area of the city from its functional use to the symbolic realm, ascribing new meanings, and providing the audience with a novel spatial experience.⁴¹ The

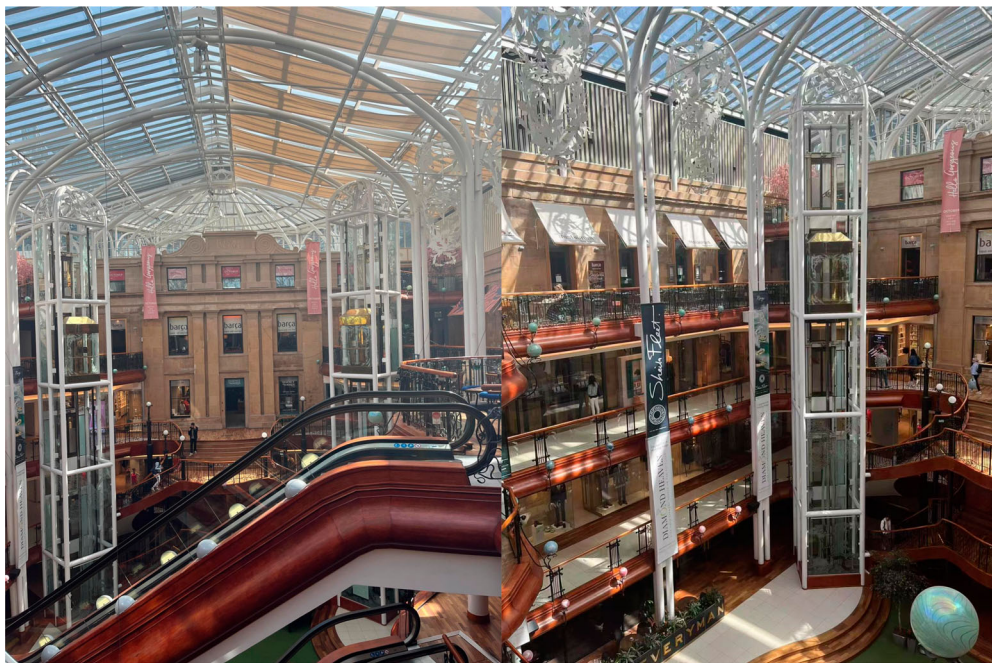


Figure 3. Princes Square. Art Nouveau-inspired high-tech structure enclosing the historic building and courtyard. Glass roof supported by slender columns integrates new architectural elements with the existing fabric. Photograph by Author.

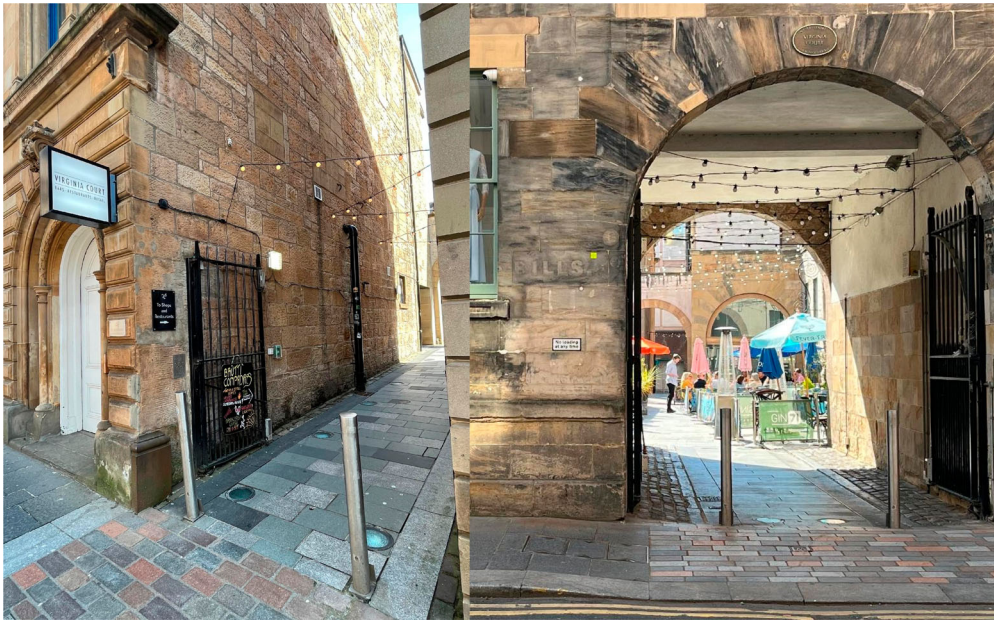


Figure 4. Virginia Court. Two gate views showing preserved wall textures and lighting design. Photograph by Author.

renovation processes parallel festivalization, generating new interpretations of the area while fostering a dynamic dialogue between past and present that reinforces cultural identity.

In light of the above, the festivalization of Merchant City can be attributed to the intricate weaving of festivals with both space and history, achieved through renovations of the area's historic environment and the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. Merchant City has become synonymous with cultural festivals that are indelibly tied to these signature projects. The adaptation of these projects encapsulates a microcosm of the area's regeneration, illustrating the transformation and revitalization that have occurred through the integration of historic value and local narratives with architectural and urban renewal. Moreover, these courtyard-based projects improved the area's public space through geospatial integration, which enhances accessibility and connectedness and making the area more conducive to hosting festivals.

Merchant Square

In the narrative of the festivalization of Merchant City, Merchant Square merits detailed examination as an exemplary case that demonstrates how a historic site can be transformed into a festival venue. Its adaptive reuse also epitomizes the broader festivalization trend within Merchant City.

As previously mentioned, the site is a well-known historic venue that hosts some of the city's most prominent events, including the Merchant City Festival. It was formerly used as a cheese and fruit market, connected to the City Hall. Two significant A-listed buildings compose the square. The Curving façade building (60-82 Candleriggs and 3-9 Bell



Figure 5. Merchant Square. Exterior views showing the well-preserved historic façade. Photograph by Author.

Street) was built by John Carrick in 1885. It was a two-story façade with 25 bays, painted polished ashlar, and round-arched windows on the first floor. The most attractive component is the entrance, where paired doric columns with pilasters on the first floor highlight this wider bay and the scrolled pediment with a fruit basket sculpture above⁴² (Figure 5).

The second part of the square at the corner of Albion and Bell Street (13-31 Bell Street and 69-97 Albion Street) was built in 1817. It was a single-story and open-air market at the time. JAT Houston rebuilt the walls and completed the space with cast-iron trussed roofs in 1907. The façade is generally in Italianate style with decorative motifs. A segmental pediment, cartouche, foliate moldings, and shallow arch emphasized the central bay in Bell Street.

The two sites were integrated to create a large courtyard, featuring skylights built into the trussed roof, a design element commonly seen in Victorian train stations. While the alignment of the cast iron columns became slightly irregular due to the merging of the spaces, the open-plan layout of the courtyard remained intact. This newly created space has a capacity of approximately 1,600 people. Although the façade differs significantly in style, tone, and material from the interior, the overall layout ensures functional coherence, preserving the space's integrity and usability.

Adaptation

The intervention in the space was minimal, yet it resulted in significant enhancements to both the scenography and functional qualities of the area. Entering through the historic gate into the expansive open square leaves a strong impression. The preservation of the existing slabs and bricks upholds the site's historical integrity, while functional zones are effectively defined through variations in ground texture. The adaptation of the space reinforces a sense of focus by organizing the front-facing shops in a layout that aligns with the enclosed spatial characteristics. The host structure was refurbished and received new layers of paint, while the facilities were upgraded to incorporate modern management systems for event-related equipment, such as the installation of the city's largest indoor TV screen⁴³ (Figure 7).

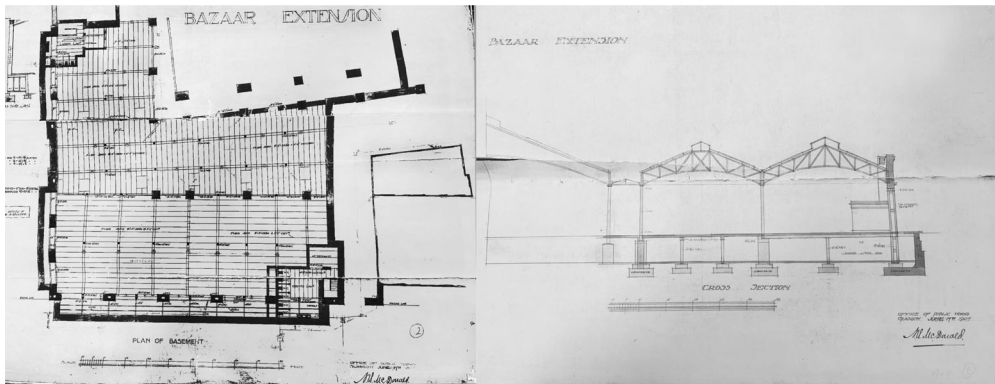


Figure 6.

The visual branding and placemaking of Merchant Square were managed by Graven and commissioned by Merchant City Properties.⁴⁴ The core intervention focused on the graphic design, lighting, and spatial orientation, integrating the brand narrative into the site's spatial context. Rather than introducing a new design language, the adaptive reuse project emphasizes the enhancement of the interior atmosphere. The primary objective was to improve spatial compatibility and to create an environment conducive to hosting a wide range of events and festivals.

The design of this project is inherently four-dimensional, with its adaptation evolving dynamically through the influence of the users and events that occupy the space. As these events unfold, the spatial narrative will persist, embodying the ongoing process of festivalization. This process not only incorporates the dimension of time but also utilizes cultural tools to shape temporal experiences.⁴⁵ Originally a site for markets and warehouses, the space has been reprogrammed to function as a venue for events and bars, continuing to serve as a focal point for gathering people. In typical architectural heritage practices, there is often an inverse relationship between space compatibility and spatial features.



Figure 7. Interior view of Merchant Square. Showing spatial arrangements and the use of nature lighting. Photograph by Author.

However, this project successfully preserved the typology of the original structure while reactivating the space as an event-driven square through placemaking. The strategic balance between conserving historical elements and restructuring the space aligns with the city council's broader vision for regeneration and rebranding.

Conclusion

The festivalization of Merchant City can be attributed to an approach intricately linked to urban regeneration initiatives started in the 1980s. Theoretically, a constant process of place remaking and rebranding supported the adaptation of former industrial-built heritage during that period. This process has concurrently laid the foundation for festivalization, illustrating how cultural and social revitalization strategies are woven into the fabric of urban redevelopment. It is important to note that while festivals contribute to placemaking, cultural vitality, and urban regeneration, they also present challenges for the urban environment. Their temporary nature places pressure on city authorities, particularly in relation to annual maintenance cycles, public service provision, and logistical coordination. The influx of visitors can strain infrastructure, requiring additional waste management, crowd control, and transportation planning. Temporary installations may disrupt routine city operations, while residents often face increased noise, congestion, and interruptions to daily life. Although local businesses may benefit from elevated foot traffic and sales, some also encounter issues such as overcrowding and intensified competition. These complexities highlight the need for integrated urban planning strategies that balance the cultural and economic advantages of festivals with their operational and social impacts.

The cases in the Merchant City support the hypothesis that festivalization is embedded in area regeneration and conservation-oriented planning. Unlike generic festival halls or one-size-fits-all stadiums, event venues in the Merchant City are interwoven into the historical urban fabric. The festivalization of the area emerges as a direct result of renovating the historic environment, thereby circumventing the issue of festival homogenization. The model of the Merchant City festivalization is analogous to the Merchant Square adaptation; both rely on the host space and programmatic transformation. The historic building adaptation methods fit into the urban strategy of attracting and holding festivals from an architectural perspective. This process is not confined to the festival period but extends over a relatively long term. The assemblage conservation planning promotes the area as an eventful place.

Otherwise, the festivalization of public space in the Merchant City involves a delicate balance between commodifying built heritage and respecting its subjective value. The subjective value of these sites encompasses the personal and collective memories, meanings, and identities that they hold for local communities. Staging festivals in the Merchant City is considered a contemporary value of the historic environment. Built heritage conservation aims to maintain the historical value while adapting the site for new use. These two approaches complement each other and are mutually beneficial. The case of Merchant Square illustrates how the combination of these two types of interventions within a practical situation, not only in a physical aspect but also in the accumulation of spatial experience, which is compressed in the urban memory and mingling with time.

The paper sees festivals and their relationship to the city in a new way, considering festivalization in conjunction with the processes of built heritage adaptation and conservation planning. It aims to bridge the thinking barriers between these two disciplines. The festivalization of urban space may have detrimental effects on the conservation of built heritage, which stems from the negative aspect of neoliberal city policies. For example, it may exacerbate the issue of facadism, in which the disparaging notion of preserving only the façade of historic buildings could hinder the broader redevelopment of the area or result in a lack of authenticity within conservation practices. Future research agendas focusing on minimizing the intervention of festivals toward historical value could aid in the better management of events and urban development by architects, urban planners, and city authorities. The cross-fertilization of adaptation theory and festivalization studies advances both disciplines and may yield novel insights to expand upon them. Consequently, this approach offers residents and visitors new spatial experiences and improved urban lives.

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