

City rhythms and events

As a space of interaction and lived experience, a city is always an object in motion (Lefebvre, 2004). It is a space of “becoming through circulation, combination and recombination of people and things” (Crang, 2001, p. 190). Space is both a context and medium for an array of communicative practices (Netto, 2017). Time, space and actions lead to the creation of an urban place where “multiple temporalities collide” (Crang, 2001, p. 189) and new meanings are created. Every urban temporality can be presented as an “envelope of time-space” (Crang, 2001, p. 192) through which actors must pass to accomplish their daily activities. A routine, repetitive tempo of urban life with its 9 to 5 commuting-lunch-shop-home sequence can be, however, challenged and changed by the emergence of new rhythmic groupings (Crang, 2001) or projects (de Certeau, 1984), which offer an alternative to an everyday urban pace.

One such rhythmic grouping is planned events. Events open up opportunities for a new reading of public spaces, actualising new meanings and breaking the everyday rhythms of a city. ‘Rhythm’ is a key word. Lefebvre (2004) explains that a rhythm manifests itself in an interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy. The analysis of rhythms emphasises such categories as change and repetition, identity and difference, contrast and continuity. Being inspired by Lefebvre’s (1991, 2004) rhythmsanalysis, this note calls for strengthening research focus and exploring events not only as place-making practices, which is a research trend nowadays, but as significant creators and manipulators of city rhythms.

Within tourism, urban and event studies, events have been increasingly explored as place makers (e.g., Richards, 2017; A. Russo & Richards, 2016; Smith, 2016). Sack (2004) metaphorically describes place-making as loom weaving, where the loom is the structure and dynamics of a place, the threads are the elements of reality and the weavers are the creative place-makers. Thus, events are capable of re-designing urban spaces into event places with new structural conditions and dynamic changes. Lehtovuori (2010) compares urban events with a labyrinth, where the physical structure made for events, including selling booths, stalls, stages, temporary toilets and fences reduces the scale of the public space and changes its structure and rhythms. A new space of exploration immerses passers-by into a maze of new experience, opportunities and adventures.

However, an urban space itself is “an eventful and unique happening” (Crang, 2001, p. 194). It is always about ‘presencing’ and opening possibilities rather than being present and static (Crang, 2001). Events, those Habermas’s organised modalities of the public sphere (Netto, 2017), produce new rules and flows of interaction within these ever changing urban entities; they affect vitality, publicness and sharedness of urban spaces. As Montgomery (1995, p. 102) mentions, “[C]ities need an element of chaos, or more precisely, an active street life.” The emerging time-space envelopes, produced by events with their frontiers, interactions and improvisation, change the city rhythms, “the coordinates through which inhabitants and visitors frame and order the urban experience” (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p. 17). A rhythmical flexibility of events generates a “buzz-effect” that intensifies or lessens the speed of people and transport flows and affects frequency and consistency of communication on the streets (Stevens & Shin, 2014).

There is a considerable demand for the application of rhythmanalysis to explore the relationship between planned events and urban spatiality, which consists of a physical space of architectural formation and a semanticised space of contextualised communication (Netto, 2017). By changing the urban rhythmicity, events deform the existing space-time mode and create

opportunities for new conditions and flows of communication. Moreover, a repetitive or one-off rhythmical activity of events in a city forms an attractive aura of eventfulness, where a symbiosis of events, cityscapes, images and attached meanings generates unique experiences (Bevolo, 2014). Richards (2015) touches upon rhythmical impacts of events, distinguishing pulsar and iterative events. Pulsar events deliver dynamic changes in a city; they develop new structures and networks. Iterative events accomplish a maintenance function, strengthening the existing relationships and relations.

Lefebvre (2004) argues that the study of rhythms is always comparative and should be focused on identifying certain contrasts between cities. However, he does not offer clear guidance on how exactly to study rhythms. What we know is that a rhythm analyst should be “more sensitive to times than to space, to moods than to images, to the atmosphere than to particular events” (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 87). The role of the physical and lived body in experiencing a complexity of urban rhythms is critical. To grasp a rhythm, our body should have been grasped by it (Lefebvre, 2004). A rhythm is not an object, it is an interaction, experienced subjectively (Lefebvre, 1991). What sort of methods are appropriate? One might think of applying ethnography. Indeed, extensive observations coupled with photo and video data might become a starting point in uncovering the ‘eventful music’ of the city. A phenomenological approach could be also considered, as the experience of city rhythms is twofold. The rhythms of representation are more formalised and turned outward, toward the public. This is what the city offers to the audience. The rhythms of the self are more intimate and are about individual consciousness and the experience of urban space (Lefebvre, 2004).

Wearing and Foley (2017) argue that city experience is constructed around the processes of interaction with urban spaces and places. This note suggests that diverse amplitudes and frequencies of city rhythms should be considered as key components of ‘experiencing’. It might be argued that we experience not a space itself, but our time being within this space. Thus, we experience its rhythms. The mediation of rhythms, motifs and tonality of event-related changes gives birth to a unique dynamism of urban interactions and communication. A rhythmic interference of events introduces new senses and meanings of the city, defines its melodic uniqueness and suggests alternatives to the everydayness. Rhythm analysis in events and tourism studies could initiate an interesting turn from place-making to rhythm-making and from urban spaces to urban paces, where the amplitude, frequency, intensity and tension between diverse event-generated forces would be scrutinised to uncover new dimensions of a lived experience in a city.

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