Managing networks of meaning in arts festival productions

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Introduction

Festivals and events form a substantial part of contemporary culture (Jordan 2016; Richards 2015; Yeoman, Robertson, McMahon-Beattie, Backer & Smith 2015). In light of the temporary and fleeting nature of consumption culture, festivals are a means of producing spectacular and immersive art (Jordan 2016) and of reframing consumption as a social activity (Négrier 2015). Festivals have become a popular means for individuals to consume and to experience culture, wherein the emphasis is placed on holistic experiences and the surrounding community and lifestyle (Bennett, Taylor & Woodward 2014; Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Pine & Gilmore 1999). As a result of this rapidly growing ‘festivalisation’ of culture, festivals currently serve to produce culture and function as platforms of cultural production, distribution and consumption to a greater extent than ever before (Bennett et al. 2014; Négrier 2015; Richards 2015). In this discourse, festivals are not merely traditional practices but also extend to those sponsored by arts and cultural institutions. This occurs, for example, when arts organisations package and publicise their programmes in the form of festivals as an example of ‘festival fever’ (Négrier, Bonet & Guérin 2013); having said that, festivals have both directly and indirectly come to play a multifaceted role in contemporary society through their social, cultural and economic contributions (Getz 2012a; Luonila 2016a; Richards 2015).

In discussing the concept of ‘festival management’, the core questions are related to how audiences and other stakeholders experience and participate in these artistic endeavours (Jordan 2016; Négrier 2015) and how the prevalent development of festivals is reflected in managerial practices within this manifold branch of the arts. The literature on festival management has provided evidence of the networked structures for producing festivals and has placed emphasis on a variety of social elements of festivals, such as the resulting relationships and interactions (e.g. Getz, Andersson & Larson 2007).

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and to conceptualise the management of arts festivals. Following previous literature on the networked production of festival structures (e.g. Andersson & Getz 2008; Getz et al. 2007; Izzo, Bonetti & Masiello 2012), the discussion of the present chapter focusses on the networked production of arts festivals. Drawing from Getz (2012a), festivals create and are attached to varied dimensions of meanings (DOMs) related to their fundamental activities. The aims of this chapter are to capture these DOMs and to analyse
how varied DOMs are reflected in managerial practices and decision-making (see Luonila 2016a). This approach can enable greater understanding of the networked production structures of festivals and serve as a basis for comprehending the role and the effectiveness of festival stakeholders in festival production as well as the changing relationships in production networks.

This chapter first discusses the festival as a product and briefly exemplifies a framework for evaluating its produced networks. Second, the network of festivals and the network of DOMs are defined. Third, the discussion turns towards managerial aspects by emphasising the essential characteristics of network management in festival context. Finally, the chapter concludes by providing a conceptual basis for analysing the management of festival networks and DOMs.

**Conceptual approach: festivals as a product**

In this study, festivals are considered to be a short-term, recurring and project-based way to organise a variety of artistic contents for manifold audiences (Luonila 2016a). Accordingly, arts festivals are organisations which produce a setting that enables cultural and holistic arts (festival) experiences, hence promoting a sense of community and celebration outside of ordinary life (Jordan 2016; Morgan 2008; see also Chong 2010). This is the basis for the creation of the festival-specific product, which can be comprehended as artistic content, as well as essential services designed according to a festival’s mission at the festivalscape (Gratton, Arcodia, Raciti & Stokes 2011). The artistic content produced in events series (Orosa Paleo & Wijnberg 2006) is positioned as the core of the product (Luonila 2016a). Hence, festivals can be considered to be product-driven productions whose contents are associated as the result of creative act (see Colbert 2007). In line with the literature on the performing arts (e.g. Kotler & Scheff 1997), in this chapter, festivals are acknowledged as products to be consumed in an act of interpretation at a particular time and place as long as the ‘performance’ takes place (see Figure 13.1; Lampel, Lant & Shamsie 2000; Orosa Paleo & Wijnberg 2006).

Figure 13.1 illustrates festival product and outlines the conceptual approach of this chapter (see also Luonila 2017).

![Figure 13.1 The concept and aims of festival as a product](image)

*Source: Luonila 2016a, 82.*
Networks of festivals

The ephemeral nature of festivals influences their economy and resourcing (e.g. Frey & Vautraves-Busenhart 2003), which are also notably reflective of their organisation and management (Johansson 2008). Based on a general understanding of the project organisation (Larson & Wikström 2007), the year-round activities of festivals are managed by scarce organisational arrangements, whereas the number of actors involved and intertwined in the production of festivalscape and contents escalates significantly near the execution of the festival (see Hanlon & Jago 2014). This cyclical process might be seen as a result of the resources required by a festival form in terms of arts contents as well as economic and knowledge capital (e.g. Andersson & Getz 2007; 2008; Getz & Andersson 2010; Johansson 2008). This requirement represents a challenge for festival management, as the management must combine the essential capital and networks that would enable festival production and provide the aspired festival experience. The needs for material and immaterial resources and the temporal nature of the festival influence the production environments of festivals, which are presented in the literature as networked entities consisting of various stakeholder groups and co-producers (e.g. Getz et al. 2007; Johansson 2008; Larson 2002). The stakeholders of festivals, such as the festival organisers, the media industry, local trade and industry, sponsors, public authorities and involved associations and clubs (Getz et al. 2007), create a platform for production (Luonila 2016b; Luonila & Johansson 2016). In this platform stakeholders take on multiple, multifaceted roles as regulators, facilitators, co-producers, suppliers, collaborators and audience members, thus forming the salient basis for festival production (Getz et al. 2007; Larson 2002; see also Robertson, Rogers & Leask 2009).

Therefore, the production structure of festivals might also be seen as a kind of ecosystem that combines public and private sectors as well as market and policy logics (Jordan 2016; Moeran & Strangard Pedersen 2011). A variety of goals and aims are clearly held by each stakeholder, yet these may also overlap and blur in the face of the demand to provide certain desired outcomes (Getz 2012b). In this sense, the networked production environment is in charge of conducting the fundamental functions of festivals, which are reflective of a complex assembly of actors and interests; such intertwined interests can present challenges for the management of festival productions (e.g. Andersson & Getz 2008; Getz 2015; Getz, Andersson & Carlsen 2010; Getz et al. 2007; Larson 2002; 2009).

The network of meanings

Getz (2015, 20) states that festivals ‘facilitate social and economic exchanges, promise highly desired experiences, embody cultural differences, communicate symbolic meanings and nourish both individual and group identity’. In the context of this argument and the previous discussion, the festival product is a concrete tool in the meaning-based negotiations (Luonila 2016a) that involve economic, social and symbolic exchanges between festival and network actors (Getz 2015). At a concrete level, these meanings may be those associated with the specific target markets of business partners, for instance, who use festivals as valuable leveraging tools for attaining certain ends, or host destinations, which seek to use festivals to develop image and attractiveness or an opportunity to enhance one’s cultural capital through artistic experience. From a consumptive point of view, this is a recent evolution that can be explained by changes in the relationship between culture and society as a consequence of changing trends of social relations in the network society (Richards 2015; Yeoman et al. 2015). In that context, festivals have come to serve a variety of interests and aims while simultaneously producing spectacular and immersive arts contents (Jordan 2016) and experiences for a wide range of audiences.
In cultural policy discourse, festivals can also be defined as ‘Swiss army knives’ that are expected to be in agile, flexible and cost-effective form yet also fulfil manifold cultural, social and economic objectives at once (Négrier et al. 2013). This approach appears to also be true in taking a closer look at the recent evolution of ‘festivalisation’: festivals have become an alternative to the building-based arts productions with permanent staff (Jordan 2016) and therefore are an economically attractive way of producing arts (Luonila 2016a). Meanwhile, in the sponsorship discourse, festivals are often framed as an attractive accompaniment to marketing activities or as valuable cooperating platforms that can serve as outlets for business partners and others to obtain greater economic success; thus, festivals are now framed as leveraging tools for enhancing business opportunities and effectiveness (see Luonila 2016b).

In the aforementioned examples, festivals are framed as the vehicles of stakeholder objectives and are therefore instrumentalised for the purposes of stakeholders in their own networks. However, taking into account the closer look of the relationship between host destinations and festivals, collaboration can be framed more in terms of their social ramifications. The meanings of festivals are shared between a festival’s organisation and host destination. Festivals produce value for host cities via intangible influences (e.g. create brand value and attractiveness) and have concrete economic dimensions (e.g. create cash flows or job opportunities). Thus, as mentioned, festivals are flexible and cost-effective ways of producing arts for citizens. In this context, public authorities are seen as the most influential stakeholder and enabler of festival productions (e.g. Luonila & Johansson 2015). However, as a result of this exchange, festivals are imbedded in and based on the locality where they take place: the role of volunteers or the ease of access to events represents multilevel influences that impact the social and cultural values of host destinations (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards 2007). As Elbe and others (2006) have noticed, festivals may benefit from stakeholder support but also contribute to such networks, strengthening public authority, for example. This process might be exemplified by the fundamental activities of festival production and consumption, which are, in many ways, valuable for host regions, as festival organisations often partner with local actors in the public, private and third-party sectors. Hence, festival-producing actions at the operational level can enhance the vitality of a city or host destination and can comprehensively affect the direction of regional development (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards 2007; Luonila & Johansson 2015).

From these perspectives, festivals are clearly vehicles that reflect identities and lifestyles and that promote valuable collaboration across communities and businesses (e.g. Bennett et al. 2014). This discussion has highlighted the varied DOMs that are attached to festivals and some of their cultural, social and economic properties (Getz 2012a), which ultimately influence meaning-based negotiations (Luonila 2016a; 2017). In production networks, the purposes of festivals and stakeholders are twofold: festivals are a way of creating added value for stakeholders, and stakeholders are enablers of festivals, producing festivals that respond to their own strategic goals. In this context, festivals contribute towards the value-creation networks of stakeholders, wherein festivals are positioned as one means of value creation (Luonila 2017). The basis for this lies in the network architecture designed and generated by festivals according to their mission; the aim of the festival-driven ‘node’ is thus to seek opportunities for value co-creation (see also Thorelli 1986).

However, as Johansson (2008) and Elbe, Axelsson and Hallén (2006) discuss, either the individual or the organisational levels can become the focus of festivals and separately considered because of the nature of social relationships in networked production structures. The mobilisation of resources is one indication of a festival’s legitimacy and is linked with the values of respective stakeholders (Elbe et al. 2006; Larson, Getz & Pastras 2015).
meaning-based negotiations, festivals represent opportunities for stakeholders to carry out their strategic goals but also must answer to the desired means of arts consumptions; the framing of this consumptive strategy is imperative in gaining the acceptance and the trust of stakeholders (Larson et al. 2015). The mission of a festival and the nature of a festival as a product influence the overall structure and form of collaboration with stakeholders. Hence, the legitimacy of the festival might be seen as a consequence of DOMs at both individual and organisational levels, considering that festivals are active and agile and renew society according to stakeholder interests (see also Larson et al. 2015).

Figure 13.2 shows the framework for the network of meanings imbued in festivals.

**Managing the network of festivals**

In the business management literature, networks and the creation of inter-organisational relationships have been examined in recent decades as a way of enhancing the efficiency of businesses and enabling value co-creation (Håkansson & Snehota 1995). According to Halinen and Törnroos (2005, 1286), ‘networks are often viewed as embedded in different spatial, social, political, technological and market structures’ that result from ‘a game with the partner-specific communication’ (Grandori & Soda 1995, p. 195) in which the game pieces are material and immaterial resources (e.g. Håkansson & Snehota 1995). In these
context-dependent constructions, informal social and cultural factors, in addition to the autonomy and the decision-making capabilities of each party and hierarchical structures (e.g. Möller, Rajala & Svahn 2005), are found to influence the roles, tasks, functions and causal power of management (Tsoukas 1994; see also Carlsen, Andersson, Ali-Knight, Jaeger & Taylor 2010; Lampel et al. 2000; Luonila & Johansson 2016). These can represent challenges to practical management tasks (i.e. controlling, implementing and developing activities towards a common goal) (e.g. Campbell & Craig 2005). An emphasis on the autonomy and the vastness of hierarchies might lead networks to be seen as unmanageable. However, Järvensivu and Möller (2009) disagree: ‘management tasks, derived from general management functions and contingent upon networks, differ according to network type’ (p. 654). Accordingly, in these constructions, the roles that different actors can adopt ‘depend on their resources and capabilities’ (Järvensivu & Möller 2009, 654; see also Becker 1974; 1982).

In connecting this network approach to the festival context, the related arguments found might be similar. The relationships and cooperation between the festival organisation and the stakeholders, as well as opportunities for interaction among stakeholders, are crucial elements for guaranteeing festival production and for obtaining resources; also, such collaborations are required to maintain the vitality and the innovativeness of festivals (see, e.g., Carlsen et al. 2010; Getz & Andersson 2010; Larson 2009; Luonila 2016b). The economic and knowledge resources essential for festival-specific production define the unique networks of each festival (Luonila 2016b). As Larson (e.g. 2009) exemplifies, the interaction between the parties involved in networked productions is key for developing events and innovations. According to Johansson (2008), the resources are in relation to each other, and thus, they are constituted by organising. As framed by this author, ‘one element creates another’ (p. 140). In this sense, the interactions within these social constructions define the uniqueness of the created networks (see Halinen & Törnroos 2005) and of the processes and dynamics that operate within their range of interests (Larson 2002), thereby characterising the network-specific managerial attributes (Luonila & Johansson 2016; Luonila, Suomi & Johansson 2016).

An understanding of the means of co-producing and co-creating festivals, both in terms of designing festivalscape and experiences, requires an understanding of the relationships and interactions that occur in the context of festivals (Larson 2002; 2009). From a strategic management perspective, as Robertson et al. (2009) explain, the presence of a complex set of actors results in contested meanings besides the pursued outcomes of cultural festivals. Larson (2002) exemplifies this by stating that in networked festival production, varied interests, conflicts and power relations define the management of the festival context. The festival embodies the goals of both involved and detached stakeholders as well as other multifaceted objectives, wherein the connections between values, procedural dynamics and outcomes are not linear but dynamically relate to one another over time via intertwined factors (Larson 2002). To manage such relationships, it is necessary to comprehend the interactions with and between parties. This places the manager at the core of such interaction: the manager holds the key role of managing and maintaining activities that are beneficial for the goals of actors who subsequently interact on the networked production platform (Luonila & Johansson 2016).

Managing the network of meanings

Festivals can be defined in terms of their production of a network of meanings; the resulting networked structures for producing meaning stem from meaning-based negotiations and form the resources of festival production (see Johansson 2008; Luonila 2016a; 2017). In this
sense, co-production and co-creation of meaning interact in order to generate the festival products (Larson 2009). As stated by Johansson (2008), the key is to get the resources ‘to talk’, meaning that the resources ‘become a resource by being part of network of relations’ (Johansson 2008, 136).

In the festival context, notions of network management are related to a manager’s ability to frame, activate, mobilise and synthesise the activities of a festival, imperative for the successful production of the festival (Järvensivu & Möller 2009; Luonila 2016b; see also Ritter, Wilkinson & Johnston 2004). Such orchestration is dependent on the ability to assert influence over stakeholders and to promote valuable collaborations (Luonila 2017). In the case of arts festivals, the core component of such festivals rests in their symbolic and cultural meanings, and the production itself widely reflects on social and economic meanings. According to Robertson et al. (2009) and Hede (2007), the identification of the meanings created by and attached to festivals should be a major focus, as should discerning how the festival as an artistic product might serve the varied interests of stakeholders.

In this respect, effective interaction with the audience and other stakeholders is emphasised during festival production, as this enhances the manager’s ability to assess both the manageable and unmanageable factors in production processes (Luonila et al. 2016). At a practical level, stakeholder interests in collaborating across a variety of production levels, as well as during various production phases, might be concreted as instrumental (activity), idealistic (commitment) or affective (emotional) interests (Elbe et al. 2006). These interests define the positions of stakeholders in the festivals’ networks and characterise the network interfaces in the stakeholders’ networks that enable value-creating collaborations.

In this sense, the role of active interactions within the stakeholder network cannot be underestimated. Strategically, the interaction enables the identification of possible forms of collaboration with the aim of creating ‘nodes’ of value (Luonila 2016a). Accordingly,

![Figure 13.3](Image)

**Figure 13.3** Management of the network of meanings

*Source: Luonila 2016a, 111.*
interactions may be seen as a crucial tool in engendering innovation or in implementing existent production forms. This analysis contributes towards a greater understanding of the unmanageable aspects of festivals: the festival experience and the motivations and interests of stakeholders elucidate the vulnerability of festivals in light of antagonistic influences stemming from the economic climate, cultural trends and audience demands (Newbold, Jordan, Bianchini & Maughan 2015), a fragile, project-based method of producing art for audiences (Figure 13.3).

Conclusions

The conceptual basis of this chapter is that festivals can be defined as a multifaceted platform for value co-creation that enables the exchange of the varied cultural, social and economic meanings attached to them as a reflection of their legitimacy (e.g. Getz 2012a; Larson et al. 2015; Luonila 2017). Bearing this in mind, it is argued herein that these DOMs create a basis for the formation of networked structures for producing festivals. These structures can be seen as the result of meaning-based negotiations conducted by the festival that occur on the festival production platform, wherein collaborations aim to produce value and to generate practices with shared meanings and relations (see also Luonila & Johansson 2016; Orosa Paleo & Wijnberg 2006). Festival management in this sense involves the management of the network of meanings and of the resources that enable the legitimacy of a festival. Thus, the active interaction with production networks is an essential component of the management of festivals. These interactions must be understood in order to critically enhance our comprehension of stakeholders and how they ‘may place a different value on a particular impact than another’ (Robertson et al. 2009, 161). While this chapter has focused on networks and network management, the cultural, artistic and symbolic dimensions of values represent a critical framework for understanding the management of arts festivals. Therefore, the unique festival product is a strategic tool in meaning-based negotiations (Luonila 2016a), and the management of arts festivals must presume leadership that comprehends diverse topics, such as the nature of art in addition to having sound managerial capabilities (Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993; DiMaggio & Hirsch 1976) and understanding the logic of art’s economy (Caves 2000; Ginsburgh & Thorsby 2006). Leadership can then foster building networks through managing relationships and interactions with and between the involved parties in order to promote valuable collaboration opportunities. To enable the festival-led orchestration of such processes, the clear mission and the ability of management to create a culture of ‘collective things’ and to enhance a festival’s legitimacy thereby enables the formation of a valuable network of nodes across a production platform that allows for successful resourcing (see Luonila 2016a).

More in-depth research at the individual and organisational levels is needed in regard to the meaning of artistic content for stakeholders. In addition, other aspects of festivals for further study are the meanings given to relationships and the opportunities for collaboration at the production platform. Further analysis should also be based on the consumption approach to shed greater light on wider changes in the field of ‘festivalised culture’.

References


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