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Music Festivals as Social Venues: Method Triangulation for Approaching the Impact of Self-Organised Rural Cultural Events

Milena Kriegsmann-Rabe *, Cathleen Müller and Ellen Junger

Centre for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and SMEs, Bonn-Rhine-Sieg University, 53359 Rheinbach, Germany; cathleen.mueller@h-brs.de (C.M.); s34ejung@uni-bonn.de (E.J.)
* Correspondence: milena.kriegsmann-rabe@h-brs.de

Abstract

The SIKUL research project examines the case of a self-organised music festival, which is understood as a social innovation in the field of arts and culture, in order to answer the following question: What effects do social innovations in arts and culture have on the members of the public involved in rural areas? How do they impact the region? To this end, a triangulation of methods has been used in conjunction with seven expert interviews that were analysed using focused interview analysis as well as a multimodal image analysis of the festival's social media presence supplemented by a descriptive study of the festival's cooperation, pictured on social media. The festival is a free space for the organisers. It promotes self-expression and learning. For decades and across several generations, a community of care has existed that extends beyond the festival experience into everyday life. Thus, the festival is a self-organised social space. Involvement in the festival allows participants to express and mutually reinforce their connection to the region. The festival primarily cooperates with regional stakeholders within a 10-km radius and is thus a creative driver in the region. Social innovations in arts and culture play a significant role in local cohesion and identity-building in rural regions.

Keywords: social innovation in arts and culture; method triangulation; effect measurement; social place; impact of art

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1. Introduction

> *"Arts and cultural activities have payoffs beyond the strictly economic as well—in civic participation, aesthetic and entertainment pleasure, and solving community problems."* (Markusen 2007)

Novel cultural institutions and projects such as culture buses, culture cafés, village operas and touring exhibitions breathe life into rural areas of Germany. The SIKUL* research project (Social innovations in arts and culture as a factor for resilience and cultural participation in structurally weak rural areas: a case study approach to researching mechanisms of impact) understands these as social innovations and investigates why these emerge, what obstacles interfere with their implementation and what factors lead to their success. In doing so, the objective of the project is to produce recommended courses of action for (local) cultural policy and rural cultural stakeholders.

This article reproduces the findings of a case study from rural western Germany. The Field Festival (real name redacted) has been taking place since the mid-1970s in a very rural and socioeconomically deprived region (Thünen Institute 2025) and is organised on a voluntary basis. It is a rock/blues/alternative music festival that is celebrated by just under

300 association members and currently around 2000 attendees on one weekend per year. As well as music, the festival also features political discussion groups, theatre workshops and free entry on Sunday for residents of the village. The Field Festival can be understood as part of the post-war culture of protest, in which jazz, pop and rock festivals enjoyed a boom in popularity (Teissl 2013). Inspired by the film "Woodstock" (Woodstock 1970), young people from the village near the venue organised the first event; as such, they can also be understood as part of the hippie movement, which used festivals as large-scale presentation forums (Willnauer 2013).

As the festival has been in existence for so long and has therefore stood the test of time as a social innovation, it presents an opportunity to serve as a case study to investigate social innovations in the field of arts and culture in more detail in order to apprehend the following research questions:

What effects do social innovations in arts and culture have in rural areas?

- What influence do they have on the members of the public involved?
- How do they impact the region?

This article uses a triangulation of methods (Flick 2011) to build on research into the effects of social innovations in the field of arts and culture and to test novel approaches.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. Social Innovations in Arts and Culture

In this paper, the Field Festival is understood as a social innovation. The concept of social innovation has grown in importance in recent decades (Godin 2012; Meichenitsch et al. 2016; Journal of Rural Studies 2023). The German federal government appointed a Commissioner for Social Innovation in 2022 and published the "National Strategy for Social Innovations and Social Enterprises" (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy 2023). In this strategy, social innovations are considered key to tackling today's major social challenges, whether with regard to social, technological, geopolitical or environmental changes (ibid). Generally speaking, the term includes a wide range of innovative activities and approaches with the objective of solving social problems (European Commission 2017). Depending on the research institution, enterprise, political strategy or funding programme, the term is used in a variety of different ways.

Little research has been conducted into the extent to which artistic and cultural offerings can be understood as socially innovative. Literature mostly refers to the economic potential of innovations in cultural fields like the creative industry, but little attention is given to the general, societal development innovations in culture can advance (see Jelinčić 2017 for a detailed theoretical debate). In this article, the authors refer back to their project work and publications in which social innovations in the field of arts and culture are defined as follows:

> "Initiatives perceived as new to the local area and different by the stakeholders involved (founders, participants and supporters) and which focus on a specific social problem and are thus designed to add value to society beyond commercial and individual interests and uses: the stakeholders could be members of the public or officials. Social innovations in the field of arts and culture make use of funding for arts and culture a) to facilitate broad social participation by harnessing the integrative function of the arts and culture and b) in pursuit of the inherent value of the arts and culture. Social innovations in the arts and culture cannot be planned in their entirety as chance plays a role in bringing them about. However, structures that can be influenced by policy, such as spaces that can be used free of charge to hold events or actively involved cultural commissioners, make it more likely that social innovations will come about" (Kriegsmann-Rabe and Müller 2025).

The Field Festival was perceived as a revolutionary innovation by the residents of the rural region in the 1970s, in contrast to traditional wine festivals, consciously positioning itself in opposition to conservative local attitudes. It offered and continues to offer an initial point of exposure to alternative music for young people and is designed to draw participation from the widest possible cross-section of society in terms of its structure and programme.

2.2. State of Research Regarding Analysis of the Effect of Social Innovations

Analysing the effects of social innovations presents a challenge. Despite the increasing amount of academic attention being dedicated to the topic in recent years, analysis of the actual effects of social innovations frequently receives nebulous and unsatisfactory treatment. One cause of this is inconsistent definition of the term, to say nothing of the great diversity within the field of social innovations. Even with a consistent definition, measuring the effects proves difficult (Weber et al. 2024). The relevant contexts in which social innovations emerge are complex; only by drawing on a wide-ranging spectrum of methods and by taking measurements before and after the introduction of a social innovation can the intended changes and the unintended side-effects be adequately determined.

The "Impact of Social Innovations (ISI)" project (2022–2024) funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research addressed these challenges. As well as continuing work to differentiate between definitions of social innovations, the project also aimed to develop a tool for systematic impact analysis. Terminological and conceptual distinctions regarding social innovations, as opposed to other forms of innovation, also present a core challenge on this front (Zielinski et al. 2023).

Ammaturo and Schmidt (2024) situate a social innovation's so-called moment of valuation prior to a measure's practical implementation. The authors argue that consciously working with ideas—for example, through critical self-reflection on the part of the originators of an idea regarding the envisioned product—already contributes towards value creation. This process may in turn spur on potential effects on regional development processes, especially in rural areas (Ammaturo and Schmidt 2024).

2.3. State of Research Regarding the Effects of Music Festivals

The state of research regarding impact analyses of music festivals reveals a range of different focuses:

Research papers relating to the economics of music festivals

Lorenz Grünewald-Schukalla et al. (2019) examine the significance of new network media as factors in the success of pop festivals. They argue that new opportunities to co-create festival values presented by digital media are decisive for a festival's success in the context of the overabundance of festivals. The analysis is based on four expert interviews with the organisers of various music festivals in Germany.

Research papers relating to the impact of music festivals on the relevant region and the perceptions of local residents

There are numerous research papers that investigate the perception of festivals by the local population. For example:

Ros Derrett (2007), who examines the significance of community cultural festivals in fostering regional resilience.

Ásvanyi and Jászberényi (2017), who examine the socio-cultural influence of festivals not otherwise specified on regional development by means of a qualitative content analysis.

Pavluković et al. (2020), who used quantitative questionnaires in connection with two festivals in Hungary and Serbia to measure the local residents' perceptions of the social effects.

Chiciudean et al. (2021) take a similar approach and use a questionnaire to investigate the socio-cultural dimensions of an international music festival with a focus on the local population.

Research papers focusing on the group of attendees

Based on the findings of social capital theorist Robert Putnam (2000), Linda Wilks (2011) examines the social encounters at three different pop and folk festivals using a set of qualitative and quantitative methods. She investigates whether the power of cultural events to bring different people together postulated by Putnam also applies to festivals.

In her 2011 paper, Babette Kirchner analyses the Fusion Festival and its attendees. Her contribution to event research emphasises the festival communities brought together by the break from everyday life presented by the occasion.

In her 2022 publication, Ina Kahle sheds light on the potential of music festivals to drive social and environmental transformation. To achieve this, she adopts a qualitative and quantitative research approach to trace a habitual basic mode among festivalgoers which is drastically different from daily life, and asks to what extent this may extend beyond the festival and have a positive influence on environmental sustainability.

In conclusion, aside from observations on regional economies, the research landscape on the effects of music festivals focuses in particular on the social effects of the festival on tourists and attendees, and also factors in local residents' perspectives on the festival. In this paper, the organisers who have local roots in the festival region are taken into consideration and the question is posed as to what effects the social innovation of a music festival organised by civil society might have on the members of the public involved and how these might spread throughout the region. After all, aside from the appreciation in economic value that arts and culture bring,

> "the effects of this experience, which is hedonistic more than anything, on the development of people's personalities as individuals and on the development of a collective consciousness—more so aesthetic than social in nature—[. . .] should not be underestimated, but should be made the subject of research in the field of cultural studies" (Bürkert 2022, p. 121).

As demonstrated above, little research has been conducted into the effects of social innovations. This paper expands the range of research into music festivals in Germany and the literature on the effects of social innovations by taking a multi-method approach in a careful attempt to trace the changes that the Field Festival brings about for the organisers and the wider region.

3. Materials and Methods: Triangulation of Methods

In light of the known challenges and methodological limits of impact measurement, this analysis employs a qualitative triangulation of methods. Triangulation as part of the research process means "the factoring in of various different perspectives on a subject under investigation or, more generally, when answering research questions" (Flick 2011, p. 12). Thus, as Flick would have it, the aim is to facilitate an improvement in the knowledge gained, producing further-reaching findings than would otherwise have been possible with one single approach (ibid). As such, a focused interview analysis (Kuckartz and Rädiker 2020) and a multimodal image analysis (Rost and Fischer 2024) have been conducted on a range of different text types (interview transcripts and images from social media) and the findings are supplemented with a descriptive study of the festival's cooperation with (non-)cultural stakeholders in the region (own approach) (Figure 1).

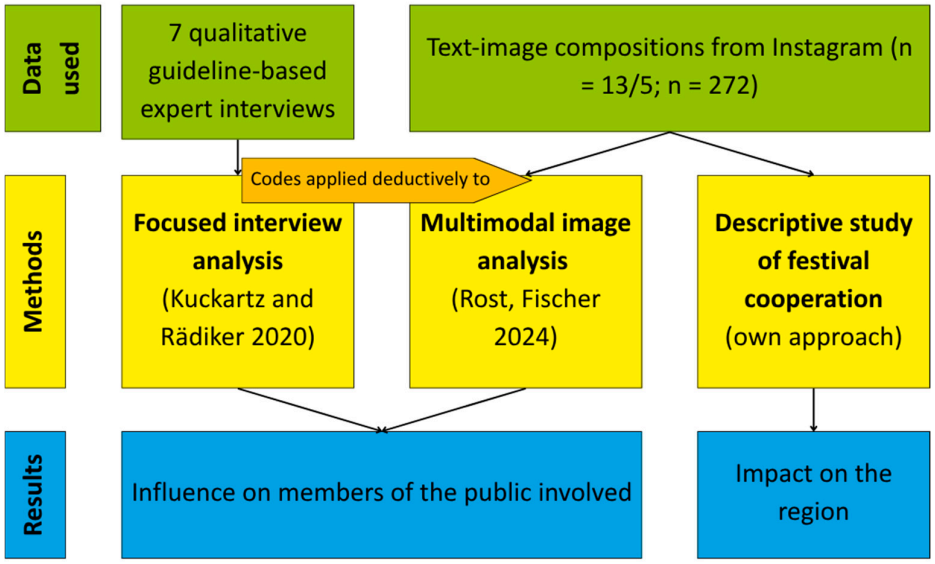

Figure 1. Methodological approach—research process. Referring to Kuckartz and Rädiker (2020) and Rost and Fischer (2024).

Two areas of impact are of interest in this process. In the first, the analysis considers the effects of social innovation on the stakeholders, meaning the initiators and supporters. What individual meaning(s) is/are ascribed to the social innovation and what value is attributable to the event for the region? To answer this question, seven expert interviews were conducted with key stakeholders/drivers of the SI (see sample: qualitative guideline-based interviews) and the texts analysed by means of focused interview analysis (Kuckartz and Rädiker 2020). All interviewees can be described as key figures in the implementation and existence of the Field Festival and who, furthermore, represent the three main groups the festivals association consists of: The first, founding generation, the young generation as well as external local supporters. Three people between the ages of 50 and 75 (Raul, Carola, Tim; interviewed in form of a focus group interview) are part of the first generation of the festival, the founders and first association members. Two people around the age of 30 are part of the Field Festival's second generation and have been members since childhood (Anna, Martin). Also included are two interviews with one person who has been attending and supporting the festival for many years (Mirko) and one creative professional who has been a passive member and attendee for decades (Lukas). The interviews were conducted between summer 2023 and summer 2024.

In the second step, the social media presence of the festival, more specifically, systematically selected images, was subjected to a multimodal image analysis (Rost and Fischer 2024). What (self-)image of the Field Festival is conveyed and projected to the public by these images? What effects can the festival activities be inferred to have had on the association members? In a deductive-inductive approach, the codes previously identified in the interviews are applied analytically to the image descriptions. The range of different methodological approaches enables a variety of different perspectives to be traced, more specifically knowledge in the form of interview statements and actions, in other words the image projected externally by the interviewees (Flick 2011, p. 49).

The second area of impact this research works on is the effect the social innovation has at the regional level. Therefore, the authors invented a new methodological approach, a descriptive study of the festivals cooperations, analysing social media data. This means, this study aspect focuses on the extent to which the Field Festival as a cultural stakeholder comes into dialogue with other local cultural stakeholders and how far this network reaches. To achieve this, the Field Festival's Instagram presence was once again studied and all

the cooperations with various (non-)cultural stakeholders described there during the time period subject to research were identified (see Section 4.3 for details).

Coding was performed using the MAXQDA software version Analytics Pro 2022 (Verbi Software 2022). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Medical Faculty of the University of Bonn (No. 277/23-EP).

4. Results

4.1. Cross-Case Summary of Interview Themes

4.1.1. Community and Solidarity

The association members report finding community in the volunteer-organised Field Festival. The community celebrates its coming together once a year by means of the festival. However, it continues to exist for members throughout the year too in the form of virtual and real-life meetings, planning groups and the personal network. The value of solidarity, which is held in high regard, is particularly characteristic of this community. Solidarity takes prime importance among members of the association, but it is also a founding principle of the Field Festival to allow as many people as possible to attend, regardless of personal finances or age, to experience music in the rural region, which is seen as an alternative to other traditional cultural offerings such as wine festivals and fairs. Solidarity is also expressed in the commitment to donate any surpluses to promote young, local bands throughout the year or to support social projects. Carola describes this in detail:

> "So for me [the Field Festival] is a big group of people, including with a wide range of different attitudes [. . .]. And (..) the sense of community lasts all year. [. . .] If I ever have a problem, a question about something, I know that somebody from the [Field Festival] will give me an answer (smiling). Just because the people are such a mixed bunch and at times the support is so enthusiastic too" (Carola, 144 et seq.).

The same also applies outside of festival season, but it is especially palpable during the event itself, when mutual support can be built upon. This is seen as something special and valuable. "For me, the [Field Festival] means something because this big group of people who all live locally carry on meeting up throughout the year and sort of come together as a gigantic community that's never organised, it's just there" (Raul, 155–158).

Anna, who now works in the events industry due to her experiences of the festival, also describes the festival community as special:

> "I spend the majority of the time backstage, [where] there are lots of sofas too and where the [Field Festival] members sit. I sat there watching the music. I almost never went and stood in front of the stage, which is stupid because I basically didn't get to see bands that I'm a big fan of and who were at [the Field Festival] (laughing)" (Anna, 375 et seq.).

Finding a way into the Field Festival community can be difficult. Anna, whose father was a founding member but has since left the region, confirms how difficult it was for her to work her way into the inner circle over the course of many years:

> "I had the sense that you very much had to be sworn into the group. And this was in spite of the fact that I was always there [. . .] Lots of people knew and trusted me, but lots had to be reminded of that every year. Who am I actually? Even though people had heard of my dad, who [is known] for being one of the co-founders and who everyone knows" (Anna, 84–90).

It was only via a friend who is also on the management committee and after proving her organisational abilities that she was accepted into a work group with greater organisational responsibility.

4.1.2. Like a Family: Welcoming Meeting Place and Multi-Generational Project

The unchanging date of the Field Festival, which is always held on one of the first weekends in summer, is described by the interviewees as a point of reference in the year, and by many of the attendees too. The association members plan their year around this date, which takes on the significance of a regular, welcoming family celebration, as Carola describes: "I have three children who all sort of grew up with [the series of events]. And whenever you asked them [. . .] the answer was always Christmas, birthday, [Field Festival]. It was one of the main events of the year. And it still is now for all of us" (Carola, 193 et seq.). Accordingly, the interviewee also calls the association members the "festival family" (Carola, 234).

The community of participants as well as the Field Festival attendees span multiple generations: the youngest association members collect bottles for the German recycling scheme known as *Pfand* and help out in other ways; small children are present on the festival grounds, as well as adolescents, who are often experiencing a festival of this kind for the first time, and elderly people too. The Field Festival is described by the interviewees as an open space in which participation of all generations plays a big role. Mirko reports: "If you rock up with a Zimmer frame, [. . .] it's nothing out of the ordinary, no one bats an eyelid. Yep, it's totally normal (smiling)" (Mirko, 317 et seq.).

The continuity of the festival and the encounters and friendships it entails are such that the association members ascribe great biographical significance to it. "That's how I see it, as a totally decisive factor that's had a real impact, including on my life. In other words, when it comes to the association, it's like a child that you've been raising" (Raul, 825 et seq.).

4.1.3. The Music Festival as a Subjective and Political Space of Freedom

- *Space for individual development*

The Field Festival, which is both a one-off event during the year as well as a permanent community independent of the place and event, is viewed by the interviewees as a space of freedom separate from daily life. In this space, a range of different people can contribute what they like and there are no "directives" reports 29-year-old Martin: "So for one thing, it's because I see it as a very open space. It's volunteering, after all. And anybody can give as much or as little as they want. [. . .] But if I [. . .] only really go to help set up and pack things away again, then there's no one to say, 'You have to work three hours or eight hours every day'. If you want, you can hammer one nail and say, 'Great, time to call it a day'. [. . .] And that's because there's no one watching over or monitoring you; instead it's from each according to their ability, which I rather like" (Martin, 98 et seq.).

- *Experience in self-efficacy and learning new skills*

Within this space of freedom, it is possible for the participants to test themselves, try different tasks and surpass themselves: "For us, [. . .] it's a place [. . .] where we can realise our potential and get involved" (Martin, 248 et seq.). Carola relates an experience of surpassing herself in detail. Despite her fear of heights, she had to climb up onto the rigging and help with setting up as no one else had time: "Then I just spent two hours sitting right up on top of the stage helping to get this crossbeam into place [. . .] I put my fear of heights behind me (laughing). In other words, this wasn't a challenge [. . .] that I would've just set for myself. But in that moment it was absolutely necessary" (Carola, 570 et seq.).

- *Space of freedom to experience and embody an alternative antifascist utopia that is critical of capitalism*

The Field Festival has been a political space right from its inception. In the 1970s, it was possible to smoke cannabis here and many of the older participants report listening to notorious jazz and blues music. Tim reports: "Prior to 1933, the area where [the Field Festival] comes from [. . .] was a Nazi Party stronghold, in other words [. . .] it already had extremely high levels of Nazi values in its voting habits prior to '33 and [. . .] I think the desire to be different and to distance themselves from their parents could have been a distinguishing factor from other regions" (Tim, 12 et seq.).

Nowadays, the festival is a testing ground for an anti-capitalist utopia. The entry fee covers the costs but does not generate a profit. The association makes a commitment to donate its surpluses throughout the year wherever possible: "And I just want a project of this kind to give something back too and I perhaps also hope that the countryside's present mentality doesn't give way to total commercialisation [. . .] that there [is] some sort of antithesis to all this ugliness in the world, capitalism, the excess of territorial conflicts, wars and so on" (Raul, 804 et seq.).

4.1.4. The Festival's Connection to the Region and the Region's Connection to the Festival

The regional connection, the enmeshing of the Field Festival in its local region as reported by the interviewees, is intimately bound up with the community aspect. This is a source of motivation to use the festival to do something for the region and the people who live in it, to whom they feel connected. Martin describes his motivations for being part of the Field Festival as such and has the "feeling [. . .] that it doesn't just do something for me as an individual, but also for the general public in a way [. . .]. It's not just a case of meeting my friends in the woods, making a campfire and having a good time. It's also a matter of providing something for the local people and for culture lovers" (Martin, 139 et seq.). For example, the Field Festival also makes a conscious effort to support local businesses such as the drinks seller: "We've reached a size where we could also purchase directly from the breweries, but the drinks seller also offers a bite to eat" (ibid, 252 et seq.). Cultural offerings are understood as a factor in local quality of life and as an opportunity to come into contact with other people, explains Mirko, who is not a member of the association but who has been attending the festival for decades and, as the owner of a major local business, supports it financially. "I personally had a break of ten years or so at some point, because I was away from [name of region], but [Field Festival] actually remained a point of contact the entire time. If [Field Festival] was on and you happened to be in [name of region], then you were there and you met your people" (Mirko, 32 et seq.).

It follows that many attendees no longer live in the region, but visit once a year to attend the Field Festival on the strength of old ties and to catch up with old contacts. Furthermore, as it is perceived as peaceful and non-threatening, it is often the first opportunity for young people from the region to attend a music festival. The Field Festival is described as the gateway to a range of other small festivals that have emerged in the region since the 1970s (field notes, informal discussions). In turn, the view is held that the festival has also existed for so long because it originates from and is rooted in the region. The Field Festival commands widespread support among the local population, as was recently in stark evidence during a critical situation. Until recently, there was no pre-sale of tickets, which resulted in a disaster for the association a few years ago when heavy rain resulted in a lack of attendees at the Field Festival and the event organisers being unable to cover their costs. A fundraising drive led to an outpouring of support from private individuals, as well as suppliers who waived all or part of their charges, and a pub that organised concerts and passed on the proceeds. "So we raised a handsome, five-figure sum as part of the drive

and, of course, it goes to show the region's depth of support [. . .]. I reckon a lot of people donated [. . .] because they were [here] when they were young and it feels good that's still going, even if I might no longer go myself" (Tim, 470 et seq.).

4.2. Findings of the Multimodal Image Analysis as per Rost and Fischer (2024)

4.2.1. Sample: The Field Festival's Instagram Presence

In addition to their website, the members of the festival association also use social media (Instagram and Facebook) for their online presence. The images and text contained there are understood in this article as self-representative expressions and a practice of identity construction by the members. The content posted on Facebook and Instagram overlaps. For reasons of practicality in conducting the research, the multimodal image analysis was carried out using the Instagram presence, which has existed since mid-June 2018. This profile is used to make regular posts every couple of days, has 3379 followers and has made 272 posts as of 14 November 2024. The images are a combination of reels and photo posts, including some that have been made as part of cooperations. The images frequently depict the festivalgoers as a large crowd of people and close-ups of particular scenes characteristic of the festival such as tickets, drummers or festival decorations such as streamers that are found on the site. There is also practical information for the near-term about the Field Festival, such as a screenshot of a weather report for the event location or about ticket sales. The images posted on the profile are not uniform in appearance, as is apparent from the differences between the tiles; this can be ascribed in part to the fact that contributions are made by different photographers who use different filters.

Analysis questions:

- What (self-)image on the part of the festival association is conveyed and projected to the public by these images?
- What effects can the festival activities be inferred to have had on the association members?

4.2.2. Systematic Selection of Images

From mid-June 2018 until mid-November 2024, 272 posts were made on the festival's Instagram profile. The posts are shown by year, including the number and type of content, in Table 1 and the percentage weighting by types of content over the entire observation period is shown in Table 2. The compositions of text and images cover a variety of different topics: the festival programme category features bands who are playing and other events on the programme such as readings, workshops, and an overview of the programme. Pictures relating to the festival itself include practical information for attendees, such as about the weather or networking services for car sharing. Information about events other than the festival itself includes concerts organised or co-organised by the association during the year or concerts and festivals by other organisers. Some posts are dedicated solely to ticket sales, and just five to miscellaneous content.

Table 1. Distribution of Instagram posts by the festival association each year by topic and percentage.

Year	Number of Posts	Proportions of Types of Content, Chronologically by Posts per Year
2018	2	2 posts about the festival
2019	4	4 posts about the festival
2020	6	2 posts about the festival 3 posts about events other than the festival itself 1 miscellaneous post

Table 1. *Cont.*

Year	Number of Posts	Proportions of Types of Content, Chronologically by Posts per Year
2021	9	4 posts about the festival 1 post about events other than the festival itself 4 miscellaneous posts
2022	46	Announcements about the programme (32/46 = approx. 69.6%): 27 posts about bands 3 posts relating to other events on the programme 2 programme overview posts 10 posts about the festival (10/46 = approx. 21.7%) 4 posts about events other than the festival itself (4/46 = approx. 8.7%)
2023	92	Announcements about the programme (34/92 = approx. 37%): 30 posts about bands 4 posts relating to other events on the programme 29 posts about the festival (29/92 = approx. 31.5%) 23 posts about events other than the festival itself (23/92 = 25%) 6 posts about ticket sales (6/92 = approx. 6.5%)
2024	113	Announcements about the programme (47/113 = approx. 41.6%): 30 posts about bands 6 posts relating to other events on the programme 11 programme overview posts 48 posts about the festival (48/113 = approx. 42.5%) 5 posts about events other than the festival itself (5/113 = approx. 4.4%) 13 posts about ticket sales (13/113 = approx. 11.5%)
Total	**272**	**272**

Table 2. Topic and absolute number of posts and distribution as a percentage across all years.

Topic of Post	Absolute Number	Proportion Across All Years as a Percentage
Programme	113 (87 images of bands; 13 programme overviews; 13 posts with information about other events on the programme such as readings)	42 per cent
Posts about the festival (weather, practical information)	99	36 per cent
Events other than the festival itself	36	13 per cent
Ticket sales	19	7 per cent
Miscellaneous	5	2 per cent

13 of the 272 images were selected to ensure a suitable distribution of all topics over the years. When deciding which images to choose, aspects including the representative nature of the image for the given topic and the distribution within a year and across all years were taken into account. This produced the following outcome:

- 4 posts about bands
- 1 post about other events on the programme
- 1 programme overview post
- 4 posts about the festival itself

- 2 posts about events other than the festival itself
- 1 post about ticket sales

4.2.3. Multimodal Image Analysis in Three Steps

To begin with, these 13 photograph posts (each post consists of one photograph) were subjected to an image description. The knowledge previously gathered by the researchers did not play a role in this process. Everything that could be seen in the photographs was described in neutral terms.

In the second step of the image analysis, a second image description was carried out. This time, knowledge gathered through previous project work, field research and interviews was referred back to, as well as information contained in the accompanying post text. At this point, the selection of images was further reduced and focused on just five posts directly about the festival and festival organisation, as these appeared to be the most logical choices in terms of responding to the research questions.

In the third step, the codes identified inductively from the interviews were now applied deductively to the images. Now the question was to find out whether the photographs also represent the themes that were conveyed linguistically.

4.2.4. Summary of Themes Identified in the Image Analysis

The images studied depict a variety of different subjects from the Field Festival. They include: a purely graphical representation, a photograph of an empty field, a well-attended concert, a sign image and a screenshot of the Instagram page itself. All of these images, as in the analysis of the impact interviews, convey a community of festivalgoers that continues to exist beyond the actual event which takes place once per year. This community presents a community of care in which people look out for one another. This is not limited to within the festival association, but also extends to stakeholders providing assistance: thus, the community is more than just a group of mere acquaintances, but is characterised by deep connections and care like an idealised conception of a family. For example, this can be inferred from the postscript "don't drink and drive", which features as the caption for Image 4 like a word of parental advice, expressing the care of the organisers for the attendees. In terms of content, it is a call to provide opportunities for car-sharing, reflecting the communal spirit of looking out for one another, mutual support and solidarity. Respectful treatment of the farmers is also called for, as in Image 2, which asks people not to enter the Field Festival meadows, as the festival cannot take place due to the coronavirus pandemic: "Our concern is that the entire [Field Festival] grounds are privately owned and used by the farmers as pasture, fields and meadows". This shows the farmers are understood as part of a diverse group of participants, which is not only made up of the association members but also all of the "hardworking helpers, stallholders and the people working quietly behind the scenes". Furthermore, "the farmers" are referred to using the definite article, rather than merely as "farmers", contributing to the sense of community. This implies that they are known to the association members as well as the attendees. The way it is formulated also assumes existing background knowledge on the part of the target audience: the reader knows or would have to know that the meadow belongs to one or more farmers. This background knowledge of the Field Festival, which is required to understand the images or captions in many posts, creates a sense of familiarity and equality among the followers and within the festival community, but it is also exclusive. Not everyone, it seems, is automatically part of the community—only involvement and, above all, long-term participation can facilitate broad knowledge of the festival and thus inclusion.

The importance of a space of freedom, which was also a prominent theme in the interviews and which the Field Festival is designed to provide, warrants particular emphasis.

The expansive depiction of the sky and the wide-open fields give a sense of boundlessness, freedom and expansiveness: accordingly, Image 4 shows people seeming to roam freely across the grounds who might also set up little picnics like the group of people in the right of the image. This creates the impression of a relaxed atmosphere. The utopia of a free space where the individual is self-determined and leads a creative life, all in amiable co-existence with their neighbours, seems possible. In keeping with the mood, a person can be seen walking around shirtless and barefoot in a cowboy hat, demonstrating the break from everyday life presented by the event and the informal atmosphere. In addition, specific characteristics of the space of freedom are expressed pictorially and through textual elements: the fact that all of the people in Image 1 are sitting on the ground beneath an open sky has a certain democratic quality, as there is nothing to indicate that a particular ticket is required to reserve a specific exclusive space. This creates the sense of greater interconnection among the people than can be found at concerts with different ticket categories. It is entirely up to the individual person where in the meadow they would like to sit and this is not reflective of their class or financial situation—the utopia of a not-for-profit event where equality and solidarity take centre stage appears possible.

Lastly, the manner in which the images match the code of regional connection bears mentioning. Three of the photographs selected show a beautiful landscape, seemingly pristine meadows and an expansive, clear sky or spectacular clouds in the sunset, conveying the account owners' emotional connection to the rural region.

Unlike the interviews, the images do not convey the theme that self-efficacy and self-experience, achieved through trying new things, play a major role in the individual space of freedom which the Field Festival provides its members. This can be explained by the fact that Instagram as a medium is aimed at a wider audience, including people who are not association members and who thus have little to do with the activities just before and after the event and throughout the year.

As it was only mentioned as an aside in the interviews, it is surprising that a professionalisation of the organisation comparable to for-profit festivals also plays a role in the Instagram profile. Hence the festival's "Marketing Team" introduces itself in Image 5 by way of a screenshot. This does not mean, as one might expect, the public relations or communications team; instead, the term is used in the sense of advertising, indicating that the Field Festival is still subject to certain forms of market logic, such as targeted advertising, in spite of the impression of economic otherness conveyed.

4.3. Descriptive Study of the Festival's Cooperations Within the Region

In a third perspective, the underlying data from the text and image compositions from Instagram was then used to understand how the festival cooperated with other regional stakeholders during the research period, what effect this has and how far-reaching the effects of this are within the region. In this article, the term "cooperation" is used to mean multiple cooperation partners voluntarily acting in coordination with one another in pursuit of a shared objective (Koch 2019).

To get an overview of how far the Field Festival reaches through cooperations beyond its local borders outside of its annual cycle during the rest of the year, all texts from the 272 Instagram posts published between 27 June 2018 and 14 November 2024 (most recent post at the start of the analysis) were studied. Figure 2 shows the distances and cooperations.

In this process, 23 cooperation partners mentioned were identified. These connected the Field Festival to 13 different locations over the observation period. The average distance of the cooperation locations mentioned in the text from the festival location is 21.05 km as the crow flies, with the exception of a cooperation with Namibia and two without a specified location. Half of the cooperations are concerts by the festival community that are

held locally, mostly in direct proximity (within 10 km) of the festival location and organised by the festival association. Of these, two events involving the "circus tent" stakeholder took place in the same year; four events involving "catering service—restaurant/café 1" took place over the course of two years; and four events involving the "community centre/youth club" took place over the course of four years. The other cooperations during the observation period are one-off cooperations. In Table 3, the frequency of the cooperations in the individual locations with their distance from the festival location is laid out in more detail, as well as the number of cooperations. This makes it apparent that around half of the cooperation partners (11 out of 23) are located in direct proximity (up to 10 km) of the festival, although the festival is also active in the wider region, up to a radius of 88 km (with Namibia as an outlier).

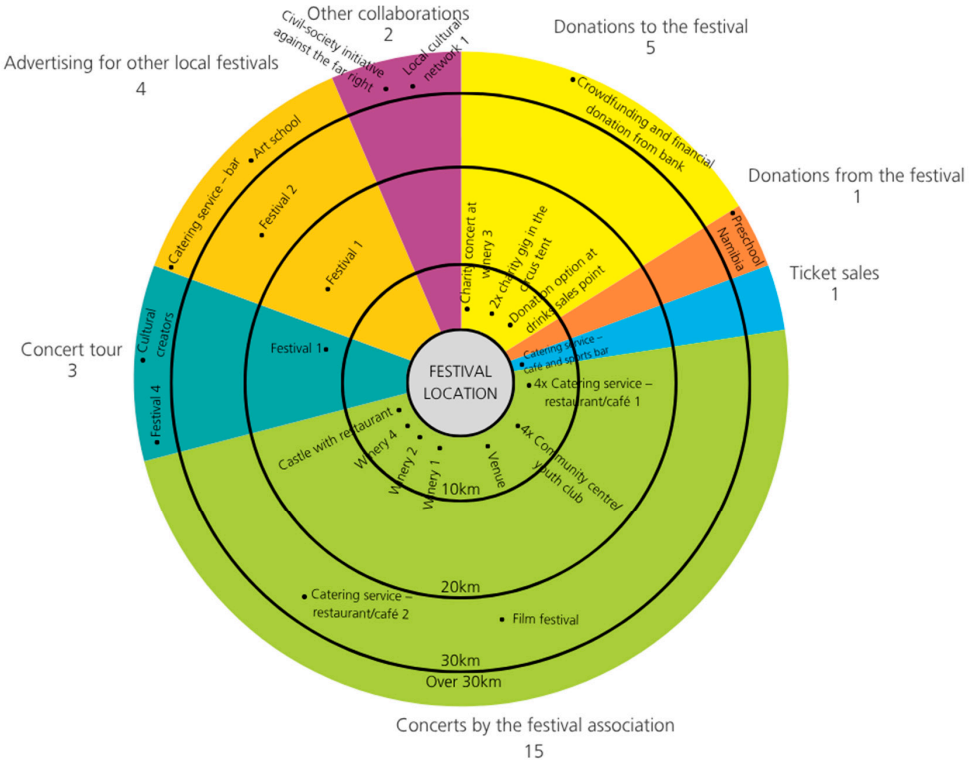

Figure 2. Distance to locations of cooperation partners and nature of cooperations.

Table 3. Number of cooperations and partners and distance from festival location for each location.

Location	Number of Cooperation Partners	Number of Cooperations	Distance from Festival Location as the Crow Flies (km)
Festival location (Location 1)	1	4	0
Location 2	6	9	9
Location 3	2	3	9
Location 4	2	2	10
Location 5	2	1	12
Location 6	1	1	14
Location 7	1	1	22
Location 8	1	1	27
Location 9	1	1	29
Location 10	3	2	48
Location 11	1	1	50
Location 12	1	1	88
Namibia (Location 13)	1	1	7647
2 unknown locations	2	2	-

This analysis only presents a small sample of the association's cooperation activities over the course of around seven years. It is possible and likely that other cooperations took place during the observation period without being mentioned on the social media platform. See Table 4 for the distribution of cooperations over the years.

Table 4. Number of cooperations per year and in total.

Year	Number of Cooperations
2018	0
2019	1
2020	4
2021	2
2022	4
2023	14
2024	6
Total	**31**

Five cooperations take place per year on average. While no cooperations were cited in the first year of the Instagram presence and just one in the second year, there were as many as 14 cooperations in 2023. It is interesting to note that around half of the 31 activities that the festival association describes beyond the festival event itself, are other concerts by the festival community within the region (n = 15). There are three additional concert events (concert tour) held in cooperation with other cultural stakeholders on top of this.

In keeping with statements made in interviews, Figure 2 also contains five examples demonstrating that the festival received donations from within the region. Two are from concerts held at the premises of a circus tent operating company, one from a winery, one from a drinks market and one from a local bank.

It also bears mentioning that the festival has apparently acted in turn as a multiplier for four other cultural stakeholders and disseminated advertising for four festivals by different stakeholders.

However, these can only be described as moving in the direction of cooperations proper, as activity on the social media page has increased significantly since its launch in 2018, the coronavirus pandemic placed severe restrictions on the culture industry during the research period, and only the second half of 2018 and the portion of 2024 up to November have been taken into consideration.

5. Aggregation of the Three Analytical Approaches and Discussion of Findings

If the three analytical approaches, and the findings of the focused interview analysis, the multimodal image analysis and the network map are aggregated, the following findings are produced with regard to the guiding research questions:

What effects do social innovations in arts and culture have in rural areas?

- What influence do they have on the members of the public involved?
- How Do They Impact the Region?

5.1. Influence on the Members of the Public Involved

From this data, it can be inferred that the social innovation in the field of arts and culture studied in this article—a music festival in a field organised by civil society—constitutes in particular a meeting place for people who know each other and operate on the as-

sumption that they will meet acquaintances and friends. Pre-existing acquaintances and social ties are refreshed and strengthened at the festival every year. Along similar lines, Linda Wilks (2011) observes

> "that cohesion, or bonding, within groups of people who are already known to each other is promoted by festival attendance, but bridging between those who were previously unknown to each other was not generally a feature" (Linda Wilks 2011, p. 24).

Wilks thus refutes the argument of the oft-cited social capital theorist Robert Putnam ("Bowling Alone", 2000) that cultural events have the capacity to bring diverse groups of people together and overcome social barriers. No conclusions can be drawn from the data available in the case study as to which forms of new contact are established at the festival. Investigating this topic would require a different research question and set of methods. However, passages from the interviews and text and image communications on Instagram both indicate that criteria for inclusion and exclusion such as knowledge of the rules that apply on the grounds or previous experiences give rise to a community of long-term festival organisers and attendees. Much like Fusion Festival, the Field Festival can thus be described as a festive occasion "where the community is the dominant aspect" (Kirchner 2011, p. 157). This is the case for two levels or qualities of communities: in particular, the festival association members on the one hand and the contact of association members with attendees who return every year on the other. However, as the group of attendees in this study was not the subject of the research question, making statements about the potential effects of this exclusivity and its potential negative consequences for members or attendees who are not included is neither the intention nor an option. By contrast, members of the public involved who participate in the planning, communications and execution of the Field Festival as festival association members find a community of care in this diverse group of people, which is often linked to individual family relationships (parents and children or siblings who participate), but also goes beyond these. In this way, being a member of the festival association and working on the event throughout the year—organising musical acts, security and awareness plans, and marketing—become part of the individuals' identities. They are part of the "festival family" (Carola, 234). The festival organisers can thus be understood as "post-traditional communit[ies] in traditional garb" (Liebl and Nicolai 2009, p. 263). Despite the fact that the Field Festival is defined by voluntary involvement, a conscious decision to commit and an emotional connection on the part of the stakeholders, it employs the "traditional and institutionalised framework of associations and clubs" (ibid). It might be surmised that this is unlike other post-traditional communities and serves the purpose of fostering stronger connections and thus greater meaning in the lives of the individuals involved. Whether the formalisation of social innovations in rural areas in the form of associations is a specifically rural phenomenon or whether it also occurs in urban areas is outside of the scope of this article.

Lorenz Grünewald-Schukalla et al. (2019) have studied multiple pop festivals that demonstrate functional similarities between Fusion Festival and the Field Festival:

> "These worlds that revolve around the staging of particular locations, often loaded with histories, are about certain spaces of freedom, experiences and encounters; these extend beyond the acts and music and constitute the values of pop festivals, which are growing ever more important: they facilitate a certain individual and social form of belonging. To achieve this, the pop festivals studied create multifaceted events that create an escape from everyday life and provide the attendees with more than 'just' a series of music concerts. They are about short holidays, opportunities to participate in organising the festival, and political

> and/or subculture-specific programmes (Fusion") (Lorenz Grünewald-Schukalla et al. 2019, p. 187).

Much like Fusion Festival, the social experience takes precedence over the musical experience for the stakeholders involved in the Field Festival. The music creates the occasion to get together; getting together on the festival weekend, as well as virtually and in person throughout the year in the organising group, is the defining experience of the event, as is apparent from statements made in the interviews and pictures posted on Instagram.

In addition to the sense of community that the Field Festival imparts to the stakeholders, the event is a playground, a world of possibility and a space of freedom for the individuals involved, where they experience, try and learn new things. Ina Kahle's (2022) research paper on the sustainability of festival-like patterns of behaviour among attendees and their significance on the context of social and environmental transformation focuses, as is made clear, on the attendees. However, her findings can also be applied effectively to the group of organisers examined here, who are also attendees. Accordingly, Kahle writes that escapist episodes such as music festivals "may lead to personal growth and self-realisation, among other things. By extension, escapists open themselves up to new ideas and models of living in a novel and creative way, and actively and playfully participate in deploying these in practice" (Ina Kahle 2022, p. 210). Similarly, the interviewees describe surpassing themselves by taking on tasks that are initially unpleasant, trying out a variety of different tasks and, in the example of Anna, the experiences she gained in the course of membership of the association and the manner in which her annual attendance of the festival intertwined with her life story even evolved into a career. The escapist episode which the festival constitutes thus ceases to be a state of exception and becomes the daily life of the stakeholders involved.

The community of festival organisers is closely bound up with a sense of belonging to the region. The Instagram images convey a sense of pride and joy in the rural region where the festival takes place; the interviewees describe their close connection to the local population who, in critical situations such as those in recent years, support the festival financially and ideologically; furthermore, the interviewees express the desire to use the festival to make a difference in the region. The festival, organised by civil society, has grown to become a fixed meeting place over its decades of development and is characterised by aspects of a social space (Kersten et al. 2022).

> "Social spaces are [also] public spaces of encounters and communication, of togetherness, of contacts that have been maintained, where communal activities take place and people reinforce their sense of what they stand for. However, social spaces extend far beyond mere meetings and encounters. They are spaces of inclusive participation, cooperation and even of conflict and refuge. Fulfilment of these roles does not necessarily mean that it is possible to set foot in the spaces physically: regional networks and local initiatives where people from civil society, local government and industry come together, get involved and network also constitute social spaces." (Kersten et al. 2022, p. 77)

Accordingly, the Field Festival, with its cheap and concessionary (i.e., reduced) ticket costs for people of limited financial means, offers a low-threshold point of entry for many people. It conceives of itself as a dedicated political space geared towards opposing right-wing attitudes. But, in particular, it is a meeting place for the association members and regularly returning attendees. In the festival, the organisers have found a space where amicable and friendly relationships emerge, where encounters are confirmed and consolidated once per year. But these also go on to shape relationships and personal

identities throughout the year and beyond the scope of the individual's participation, which often persists for many years.

5.2. Impact in the Region

Explanations of the meaning of the festival as a meeting place are also relevant in terms of answering the second research question. In this sense, the Field Festival can be understood as a cultural marker of regional identity as per Knaps and Herrmann (2018). Referring back to Jürgen Pohl (2001), the authors understand regional identity "as personal and collective positive feelings towards a region, ranging from a vague sense of belonging to close attachments and deliberate confession" (Knaps and Herrmann 2018, p. 1). The development of a regional identity can, the authors argue, work in favour of regional development strategies. Cultural markers, whether historical/traditional or modern in nature, such as specific recollections, places of significance or events, are understood as reference points for regional identity. The Field Festival, having emerged after the Second World War, constitutes a "modern cultural marker [. . .] of collective significance" (ibid, p. 7) in contradistinction to traditional markers. After all, not only have the organisers understood the festival as a constant point of contact and physical location for decades, they also see it as part of the region's story and individual identity. The interviewees describe a strong connection to this festival which is also rooted in the geographical locality of their region of origin and residence. In their paper, Le et al. (2022) investigate to what extent a "sense of place" influences cooperations in the area of cultural education in rural regions and, by extension, the building of social networks. Referring back to Hashemnezhad et al. (2013) and Kianicka et al. (2006), the authors understand "sense of place" to be the relationship between people and places, and conclude in their analysis:

> "that local actors develop ties with specific places and, because of these existing connections, tend to participate in region-specific, cultural programmes. Through cultural participation, cultural actors establish new social contacts. In this way, new cooperation can potentially emerge, and thus social networks can be expanded" (Le et al. 2022, p. 291).

Accordingly, in the case of the Field Festival it can be observed that the people involved express their close connection to the region through the festival and the desire to contribute something to the region through their involvement. Conversely, this involvement in turn reinforces the sense of belonging to the region. Le et al. arrive at a similar conclusion:

> "While participating in cultural and arts education, participants find themselves in a space to work on regionally specific issues, which can reinforce a sense of place. Consequently, an iterative process commences, which is why we consider sense of place an important resource for promoting social networks, cooperation, and cultural participation" (Le et al. 2022, ibid).

Furthermore, it can be inferred from the stories told by the interviewees and the network analysis data on donations from the general public that the Field Festival is a cultural marker for portions of the general public as well as for the association members, organisers and regular attendees. It has achieved this by remaining in existence for such a long period of time and thus becoming a collective point of reference for the region. The Field Festival is well known there.

Additionally, the findings of the descriptive network analysis demonstrate that the festival also continues to play a role in the cultural life of the region throughout the year beyond the main event and that cooperations between various cultural stakeholders emerge out of the relevant relationships to the region. In particular, the association comes into contact with other cultural stakeholders within a 10-km radius of the festival location. These

include wineries and other catering establishments that offer organised concerts either together with or separately from the festival. They also include other cultural stakeholders, such as a cultural network and a youth club run by the local authority where the festival takes place. Half of all cooperations—donations by and to the festival, advertising for other festivals and cultural offerings, pre-sale points, miscellaneous cooperations and standalone concerts—fall under the category of self-organised concerts separate from the festival itself.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the Field Festival, over the years of its inception and ever since, has worked as an enduring independent cultural stakeholder within the region and, more specifically, among its inner circle. Furthermore, it can be concluded that it has taken on the role of an important multiplier in the area of regional cultural offerings by holding concerts throughout the year and collaborating with other cultural stakeholders.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Practical Implications

Social innovations in the field of arts and culture, such as the case study presented in this article, can become social spaces (Kersten et al. 2022); the Field Festival is a real and non-material meeting place for the organisers, which facilitates the formation of identity and communitarisation. Volunteer-organised rural cultural offerings can serve as a fixed point of reference for people who have moved away, providing an occasion to return to the region on a regular basis and catch up with old acquaintances. In addition, they present an opportunity to become a cultural incubator for the region, as cooperations with a diverse range of stakeholders are established. This enables social innovations in the field of arts and culture to grow into cultural markers of regional identity. Identities of this kind are often difficult to achieve through top-down processes, but must instead emerge organically through the involvement of civil society. Furthermore, this does not only apply to active users, but also to residents for whom the cultural event "is simply a part of the region".

Using a triangulation of methods, as considered by Flick (2011), is a fruitful opportunity to enrich data and findings on the scarcely researched field of impact measurement of social innovations, especially for short-time research projects and staff boundaries, using different data, like interviews and public accessible social-media-data and the combination of different methodological ways can be a senseful way to profound research results.

6.1. Limitations

Still, the underlying data for this paper are limited. The images were selected in a systematic fashion. Nonetheless, bias may be present as a result of reducing the number of representative images. The festival association's cooperations were identified solely based on its Instagram page, meaning that other cooperations have not been taken into account. To enrich data and perspectives, future research similar to this project, should not only use or focus on social media content, but also analyse traditional local media content like TV or press. The cooperations portrayed on the network map are purely descriptive and the quality of the relationship remains unclear. Lastly it bears mentioning that there has been no external validator. These limitations are primarily due to limited resources, time and staff in the course of the research project and could be mitigated by designing the project to take place over a longer time period.

6.2. Implications: What Do the Findings Mean in Practice?

6.2.1. Implications for Rural Cultural Development Plans and Policy

- Volunteer-organised, civil society-led culture can have a long-term positive influence on the sense of regional belonging of cultural stakeholders
- A long-standing cultural offering can be emotionally significant for the residents of a region—even if they do not attend themselves

- Cultural offerings can act as regional markers for a region, with potential positive effects on the attractiveness of a region for the residents
- Volunteer-organised cultural offerings have the potential to exert a positive influence on a region's cultural landscape, including beyond just the events themselves: by establishing networks with other offerings from the creative and cultural economy and seeking out cooperations with local businesses

6.2.2. Implications for Rural Cultural Stakeholders

- Rural cultural stakeholders who run volunteer-organised cultural offerings should examine their external communications strategy to determine whether it has an exclusive effect or whether it also addresses new attendees—insofar as this is desired
- Cultural stakeholders whose offering has already been in place for a long time should be aware internally of mechanisms that may exclude new/younger members and choose organisational forms that facilitate the inclusion of a greater number of people.

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