

Social Inclusion Strategies at Music Festivals

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Thesis statement

By analyzing the roles taken by organizers of music festivals to promote social inclusion and how they implement particular strategies to encourage inclusivity, this analysis seeks to understand such multifaceted approaches as utilized in festival industries to cultivate welcoming and diverse spaces, leading to a better understanding of relationships and the intersection between social cohesion and cultural events.

Author Information

Jennifer Laing of Department of Management and Marketing La Trobe University, VIC, Australia. She is also involved in teaching and research at the University College London. Judith Mair is also a senior researcher at the School of Business University of Queensland St Lucia, QLD, Australia.

Summary

Mair and Laing's study researches how a music festival organizer uses such events to promote social inclusion and their strategies to encourage inclusive environments. Applying qualitative study methods, including observations and interviews, these authors look into festival organizers' perspectives, revealing diverse challenges and approaches organizers face when promoting inclusivity in festivals. The study noted that there are several social inclusivity strategies settings such as community engagements and infrastructure design policies. Mair and Laing analyzed themes like community partnerships, diversity programs, and accessibility of the social settings in place as integral strategies to foster inclusivity in music festivals.

Researchers trace social inclusion concepts to the 1980s European social policies that aimed to overcome social exclusion in societies. At the time, social exclusion was seen as a practice encouraged by people who encouraged deviations from social norms in societies (Laing & Mair, 2015, page 5). For instance, the study found that promoters of social exclusion argued that those excluded resulted from shrinking and laziness caused by inadequate social capital (Laing & Mair, 2015, page 5). The third discourse that encouraged social exclusion was mutual obligations, where beliefs indicated that capitalism is a just system and classes or individual problems are cultural misfits, and thus those who feel excluded should understand that the system aims at instilling responsibilities in their lives (page 6).

SPLC Center (2017) advises that one way of changing this is by speaking out and supporting the 'excluded' in our communities. Those findings are supported by Poortvliet (2021) on "Webinar recap: from intention to impact – steps for a diverse and inclusive festival culture" where participants and organizers are encouraged to take up active roles in promoting inclusivity, in festivals and other public places. Despite such apparent mistakes that encouraged social exclusion, early research focused on cultural diversity, social policies, and education. Still, later studies found that social inclusion involves action principles and personal experiences. As a result, modern studies indicate that social exclusion is the opposite of social inclusion (Laing & Mair, 2015, page 6). Thus, participation in social (like music festivals), political, economic, and cultural activities are all core to promoting social inclusion and understanding the intricate roles of strategies promoting such events.

Quotation Analysis

"Drawing on earlier work by Argyle (1996), O'Sullivan (2012) noted that festivals should be seen as a form of social integration, providing opportunities for social advantage, identity and improved self-esteem. A festival might also express acceptance of diversity or a focus on an otherwise marginalized group within a community (Gorman-Murray, 2009). Fnkel (2010, p. 277) pointed out that it is often these social inclusion goals or benefits 'that are a source of pride for organizers and for a reason they decide to become involved in the festival in the first place'... many local festivals are free or charge nominal entry, giving greater access to lower socio-economic groups to cultural activities" (Laing & Mair, 2015, page 9).

According to Mairs and Laing, festivals are an opportunity to promote social inclusion and cohesion, aligning with O'Sullivan and Argyle's perspectives. The study applied a qualitative approach where, through exploratory research, researchers conducted interviews. The study found that festivals offer platforms for enhanced personal identity, self-esteem, and social cohesion. Additionally, festivals must symbolize the empowerment of marginalized groups and community diversity, as Gorman-Murray indicated. For example, local festivals that are free or charge low fees are an opportunity for people from all backgrounds to come together and socialize as they learn from each other. Such considerations are encouraged at other major events to promote inclusivity.

According to Leone et al. (2022), "one area that still calls for extensive investigation is the potential impact that festivals can make on the image of a cultural industry. Such an impact represents potentially an interesting issue, as it contributes to a more fine-grained understanding of how festivals support cultural industries" (Leone & Montanari, 2022, paragraph 5).

Leone and Montanari (2022) discusses the case of Italian dance and how it has developed as a platform to unite people from different backgrounds. The authors indicate that an extensive study must be done on the image left behind by festivals in the cultural industry in terms of how such events encourage participation and inclusivity among people, especially in communities where exclusivity was common in the past.

Thus, the question of how festivals encourage inclusivity is well-researched and analyzed by Leone and Montanari which is consistent with Mairs and Laing previous study on strategies used by events promoters and organizers to foster inclusion in our communities. While exploring communities, Mairs and Laing found that definition of communities varies considerably depending on historical, geographic, social and cultural circumstances. Such findings explore what makes up a community in Australia or United Kingdom might be different to what a community is in Middle East, Africa, or even South America. Social theories as discussed by Simonson in 1996 attempts to differentiate those communities and significance differences they have in different societies. Those terms include *Gesellschaft* (communities made of trade or business relations); *Gemeinschaft* (habits or shared interests); or *Sittlichkeit* (localities where people work or live) (page 11). Therefore, if music organizers want to bring together *Sittlichkeit* or *Gesellschaft* community together then they must understand what shared interests in that particular group are and strategies to encourage those members join the events.

Portable communities' idea in modern *Sittlichkeit* helps in isolating and alienating some people for motivated and purposeful responses. The implications of that strategy are to ensure where people work or live does not imply, they cannot participate in events elsewhere. The idea introduces 'community of right-minded people' who are not constrained by geographical limitations. Leone and Montanari (2022) discussed this in terms of Italian dance. The dance attracts people from all walks of life depending on their interest on the subject making it easy for event organizers to narrow down to certain strategies to attract their target clientele. A report by the UNDP (2023) on "*Sustainable Events*" supports these findings on how, for instance, the *Gemeinschaft* (habits or shared interests) can come together in festivals, through the help of organizers and promote inclusivity for positive changes in the community. Such groups can be assembled under the flag of coming together in music festivals to support sustainability.

Overall Source Evaluation

Overall, Mairs and Laing's study provides vital insights into the practices and perspectives of festival organizers. The findings contribute to a better understanding of festival organizers' roles in promoting diversity and social cohesion. Specifically, the social inclusion concept is well extrapolated in this study. Expectations from event organizers with social inclusion and promotion in mind must understand their target community first before deciding on which strategies to apply in promoting social inclusivity. More importantly, the study highlighted complexities and challenges in balancing social inclusion objectives with commercial goals of the festivals. The study noted that as organizers promote inclusivity in music festivals, they are also compelled to incorporate the financial obligations of such events.

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