The assemblers of rural festivals: organizers, visitors and locals

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The study aims to show how festivals might impact rural areas and how perceptions of festival impacts on rural areas differ among key groups of festival assemblers (i.e., organizers, visitors, locals). By mobilizing the notion of placemaking, the study identifies six dominant rural festival spinoffs (i.e., attraction, consolidation, promotion, transformation, reinvention, revitalization), thereby increasing the conceptual understanding of the role and value of festivals in the rural context. By applying a combination of three samples, the study provides new evidence concerning the perception of different festival effects on host places depending on the evaluation group. The results show that festivals are meaningful events that might be strategically used to sustain, create and reinvent rural assets. Furthermore, the study offers evidence that perceptions of festival spinoffs vary among groups of assemblers, whereas a direct association with festivals either by organization or participation strengthens a positive view of festival spinoffs. The results also demonstrate that festivals might be utilized by policy makers to empower local inhabitants, to promote rural assets and to perpetuate or reinvent somewhat forgotten rural traditions, habits and myths. The increased liveability of rural areas should in turn be used to counter rural decline and the outmigration of young people.

Keywords: festivals; rural impacts; co-creative placemaking; assembling; Denmark; Norway
Introduction

Festivals are part of culture, tradition and identity. For centuries, festivals have produced a sense of belonging and exposed a society’s fundamental needs and values. In many ways, festivals may connect people, places and ideas, as well as the entire world, with local structures. They can also be strategically used to contribute to the social fabric and the economic viability of the host area (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Gibson, Connel, Waitt, & Walmsley, 2011; Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018; Richards, 2015).

Although the idea of placemaking is not new, it has only recently been acknowledged in the event and festival literature (Richards & De Brito, 2017; Smith, 2016). Place, despite its constitutive role in providing ‘locales’ for festivals, also has social attributes that are both shaped by festivals and shape festivals (Jepson & Clarke, 2015; Richards, 2015). This study focuses on the interplay between the festivalization of rural space and placemaking processes and thus offers new insights into the role of festivals in sustaining, creating, and changing rural places and communities. The interplay of festivalization, rurality and placemaking has not previously been widely examined, and therefore this article clearly adds to the literature on placemaking through events and festivals, which hitherto has been contextualized mostly in urban settings (Belghazi, 2006; Cudny, 2016; Johansson & Kociatkiewicz, 2011; Sánchez & Broudehoux, 2013).

Festivals are meeting places for different categories of participants, of which the main groups are visitors, organizers and local citizens, and merely putting on a festival constitutes an ‘assemblage’ of contributions from all these groups (Bærenholdt, 2015). Increasingly, places and festivals, in order to be considered meaningful and worthwhile, are being creatively assembled using cultural artefacts transformed in a peer-to-peer environment (Lorentzen, Larsen, & Schrøder, 2015; Russo & Richards, 2016). This study
addresses the degree to which assemblers share their opinions about the implications of festivals.

In this context, it is important to understand that urban and rural areas provide different conditions for festivalization (Cudny, 2016). In urban centres, festivals are more frequently hosted ‘onto places’, and thus, they have weaker ties with local structures. The commercial and/or designed place marketing/branding focus, somewhat detached in character, is often central to the existence of festivals in urban areas. Rural festivals, in contrast, often ‘derive from places’, and thus, their grassroots nature predominates. Furthermore, ‘rural festivals are supposedly older, agrarian, centered on fertility rites and cosmogony myths, while the more recent, urban festivals celebrate prosperity in less archaic forms and may be tied to foundation legends and historical events and feats’ (Falassi, 1987, p. 3). Thus, the contextual configurations of a specific locality (urban vs. rural) affect the development of festivals and their respective impacts on the host area. The transparency of factors affecting implications differs for the assemblers, which is an issue of some importance here.

While the use of events and festivals in placemaking has been extensively studied in an urban context (Lazzeretti & Capone, 2013; Scott & Kühn, 2012), less attention has been paid to events and festivals in rural contexts. However, there are some exceptions. Blichfeldt and Halkier (2014) examined how a rural mussel festival in Denmark aggravates the tension between different stakeholder groups. Through a case study, Blichfeldt and Halkier (2014) describe the festival as a signature event for place branding a host area. However, to our knowledge, there is no attempt in the literature, from a broader perspective, to delve deeper into how perceptions of different groups of festival assemblers might vary regarding a festival’s effects. The present study aims to bridge this research gap by studying organizers’, visitors’ (participants’), and locals’ perceptions of
a festival’s effects on a rural development. This thematic focus is a consequence of contemporary debates on the empowerment and revitalization of rural communities and places (McHenry, 2012) and the transformation and co-creation of touristic space (Liburd, Nielsen, & Heape, 2017). The empirical basis for the study comprises a combination of three samples. The first sample offers insights into organizers’ perceptions of festival spinoffs, the second offers insights from festival visitors’ viewpoints, and the third offers insights from local community members’ standpoints. Thus, this is the first examination of its kind that, in a single elaboration, brings together perceptions of different assemblers: organizers, visitors, and locals.

As such, the paper contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it offers a conceptual model focusing on the expected effects of events and festivals on rural areas. Second, through samples of three different respondent groups in Denmark and Norway, the study empirically demonstrates the consequences of the conceptual model and identifies the most important general perceptions of the effects of events and festivals for rural placemaking from different standpoints. Finally, the study shows how perceptions of festival effects on rural placemaking differ among the three assembler groups.

In what follows, the paper begins by discussing the relationship between festivalization and rural placemaking processes and elaborates on the literature, which links festivals/events with placemaking. Next, a conceptual model that features the impact of rural festivals on rural places is described, and then the data used for empirical probing are outlined. The results are provided and discussed, after which conclusions are formulated regarding the role of festivals in current rural placemaking processes.
Tying events and places together – the impact perspective

Progress-oriented festivalization, that is, an instrumental usage of leisure events to support image building and to catalyse local development, has been fuelling public and academic debate over the impact of events on host regions, tourism destinations and/or countries (Cudny, 2016; Getz, 2009; Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013; Richards & De Brito, 2017; Richards & Palmer, 2012). Events and festivals have increased in importance in recent decades and no longer occur only to provide a host area with tourists to stimulate new spending, combat seasonality or spread tourism spatially (Dragin-Jensen & Kwiatkowski, 2019). Moreover, they are no longer seen only as economic vehicles for the host to create (alleged) employment and tax revenue effects (Kwiatkowski, 2016). In contrast, events and festivals have assumed a key role as regional development strategies (Moscardo, 2008), and a consideration of their single, short-term impacts has been replaced by a consideration of their long-term, cumulative (economic, societal, spatial, etc.) effects that form the basis for local growth and change (Ziakas, 2013). In this context, it is particularly important to further an understanding of the role of festivals in placemaking processes and to explain whether and how festivals sustain, create, and/or change rural places. Liu (2014) argues that cultural events can provide national and international exposure, which in turn might lead to changing and creating the host area as a tourist destination. However, the focus of research contributions on festival placemaking processes has been cities and urban areas, not rural areas. Thus, our findings deepen our understanding of rural settings.

The majority of event impact assessments have found that short-term festivals and events have not necessarily provided the positive (mostly economic) outcomes that were originally anticipated by their organizers and/or proponents (Kwiatkowski & Oklevik, 2017). This pattern is predominantly evident among smaller grassroots events whose
audiences comprise mostly local and domestic visitors who provide a substitutable form of demand stimulated by events (Getz & Page, 2016). Subsequently, recent studies have begun to consider how the effects of events operate beyond their economic aspects, venue boundaries and short-lived nature (Cremona, 2007; Duffy & Mair, 2018; Richards & De Brito, 2017). The inherently social and grassroots character of many events, particularly festivals, has linked these considerations to the notion of placemaking. Place provides ‘space’ and ‘context’ (i.e., culture, tradition, heritage) amidst which festivals are staged (Richards, 2015). The importance of place in the development of rural festivals has been well documented by Gibson et al. (2011). Conversely, festivals play a significant role in local placemaking, which is—as defined by Coghlan, Sparks, Liu, and Winlaw (2017, p. 67) —‘a process designed to create benefits for its local community, both economically and in terms of liveability, well-being and aesthetics, drawing on community aspirations and values to develop a shared sense of place’.

According to Biaett (2015, p. 19), 'the classic rhetoric of festivals and events emanating from dictionaries as well as festival and event management texts define the term event simply as an occurrence; the term special event expands this meaning to include temporary and infrequent unique experiences; the definition of the term festival further adds ideas of community and celebration’. Taking into account the above as well as the aim of this study, in the following, all examined occurrences are called ‘festivals’ and defined by five characteristics: (1) a limited timespan within a clearly defined period; (2) confinement to a given location; (3) planned occasions set within recognizable structures as manifested through predefined objectives, themes, and programmes, with some leeway for spontaneity; (4) a combination of different activities in beneficial symbiosis; and (5) an open and inviting atmosphere for the general public (Getz, 2010; Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018; Wilson et al., 2016).
The intersection of place and festivals/events has been demonstrated in a number of contexts with reference to several conceptual frameworks. For example, Derrett (2003, p. 57) showed how a sense of community and place are linked to community-based festivals. She found that festivals play three complementary roles: they ‘celebrate a sense of place’, ‘provide a vehicle for communities to host visitors’ and ‘are the outward manifestation of the identity of the community and provide a distinctive identifier of place and people’. Van Aalst and Van Melik (2012, p. 197) also indicated the functions of a trio of festivals in place development, where festivals served as ‘a showcase’, ‘a creative destination’ and ‘an attraction for visitors’. Similarly, Moscardo (2008) argued that the effectiveness of festivals in supporting regional development can be organized according to their connections to three constructs: ‘building social capital’, ‘enhancing community capacity’, and ‘supporting non-tourism-related products and services’.

The academic literature suggests, in addition, that festivals can be seen as placemakers and bridge-builders, preservers of tradition and bringers of renewal, and sometimes as providers of coherence, commitment and meaning for local community members and visitors alike (Fisker, Kwiatkowski, & Hjalager, 2019; Richards, 2015). Undoubtedly, when properly linked to a certain location, festivals strengthen local identity and continuity by referring to ‘shared histories, shared cultural practices and ideals’ (Quinn, 2005, p. 928). This happens, according to Karlsen (2007, p. 186), ‘through storytelling, explaining who we are through the concerts and other events, and through the media, which retells those stories to others’. Indeed, previous research has found that festivals can be signs of continuity to the past (McCabe, 2006) and can spark culture renewal into new formats and meanings (Gibson & Connell, 2012). Furthermore, they are a means of self-identification, self-realization and self-examination for the community
Festival spinoffs (effects) may also be divided into those that are place-bound (intrinsic) and those with more externally oriented effects (Fisker et al., 2019). This division, in turn, seems to pave the way for the conceptualization of the role(s) of festivals in placemaking offered by Richards (2015), who convincingly argues that events/festivals might both sustain and transform places. Based on the role of festivals in placemaking processes, Richards (2015) distinguishes between ‘pulsar’ and ‘iterative’ events. Pulsar events generally result in durable transformations of structures, whereas iterative events sustain structures. Pulsar events are usually linked to the global level and have the power to create ‘new structures, links and opportunities’ (Richards, 2015, p. 7). As indicated by (Sewell, 1996, p. 271), (pulsar) events ‘transform structures largely by constituting and empowering new groups of actors or by re-empowering existing groups in new ways’.

Iterative events, in contrast, are more closely tied to the local and serve a maintenance function by ‘bringing people together on a regular basis to cement strong social ties and generating bonding social capital’ (Richards, 2015, p. 7).

Despite these insightful contributions, research on small-scale festivals hosted in rural areas has yet to fulfil its potential for systemizing our understanding of their roles in development processes (Biaett, 2015). Rural areas and small communities face particular challenges related to industrial transformation and outmigration. In such challenging contexts, festivalization does not seem to be the most obvious development measure. However, local stakeholders maintain the belief that festivals are impactful. It is important to ensure a deeper understanding of the mechanism of festivalization and its wider impacts on small places and of the coinciding or diverging perceptions of the
implications among the actors who contribute to the assembly. In this context, key questions to be addressed are the following:

**RQ1:**  How do festivals contribute to rural development?

**RQ2:**  How do the expected impacts of a festival on a rural place vary between assembler groups: locals, visitors, and organizers?

### Impacts of festivals on rural places – a conceptual model

This study focuses on the expected effects of festivals’ hosting on rural areas, and in that context, it contributes to the international literature that attempts to understand the reasons why rural communities engage in hosting festivals, and it identifies the respective spinoffs of such festivals. The term festival spinoff can be used to illustrate the externalities that result from festivals for the host areas and their communities. Drawing on an emerging strand of research on this issue (e.g., Gibson et al., 2011; Moscardo, 2008; Quinn, 2005, to name but a few), six dominant effects can be identified that, taken together, impact rural viability and community wellbeing (Fig. 1). This method represents an alternative approach to standard economic inquires where direct, indirect and induced effects of events are measured (Kwiatkowski, 2016).

[Figure 1 here]

- The *conservation* spinoff refers to the power of festivals to keep old rural traditions, myths, habits and culture alive. In many cases, rural festivals are designed to encourage the practice, preservation and maintenance of traditional dance, song, and art. In this sense, festivals are commonly acknowledged as a significant source of rural identity and an asset for cultural conservation.

- The *consolidation* spinoff refers to the cohesive power of rural festivals that integrate and bring local community members together around a certain idea. The
rural festival is often a meeting place for a large number of community members, an occasion for them to interact and integrate.

- The *transformation* spinoff pertains to the power of festivals to work against a backdrop of rural decline by ‘transplanting’ a number of urban values, practices and formats to rural areas. Festivals may diversify and create new local culture and identities, as well as revolutionize local businesses. In a broader sense, rural festivals can be sources of creative empowerment.

- The *reinvention* spinoff relates to the ability of festivals to convert ancestral traditions, symbols and habits into new formats to make them suitable for the present day. Therefore, festivals can serve as an important means of idealization of rural life.

- The *manifestation* spinoff concerns the promotional role of festivals both among local inhabitants and external visitors. Festivals create awareness of local assets and become attractions *per se* for visitors and a leisure opportunity for locals.

- The *attraction* of spinoff events and festivals often functions as a reason to visit rural locations as a kind of spark for further development.

As indicated above, these six dominant roles of festivals are rather complementary in nature and together contribute to local placemaking. However, previous studies provide strong arguments that perception of leisure events’ impacts tend to differ among different groups of stakeholders. For example, Crompton (2006) argues that local authorities can intentionally overestimate events/festivals’ benefits in order to justify public subsidies, and, thus legitimize their political position. Consequently, it can be expected that local authorities will tend to highlight alleged economic effects, community integration, and marketing benefits. On the other hand, for visitors and tourists the higher values can be assigned to entertainment values and extraordinary attraction that they can experience and
see. Finally, for locals, a mix of values related to entertainment and local wellbeing can be expected. This has been, among others, well-documented in studies of Crespi-Vallbona and Richards (2007), who, drawing insight from cultural festivals, pointed out that stakeholders tend to differ more in the meanings attached to concepts such as identity, with policy makers exhibiting a greater emphasis on economic and political issues, whereas cultural producers are more concerned with social aspects of identity.

**Data and methods**

The empirical basis for the study comprises a combination of three samples collected in two Scandinavian countries (i.e., Denmark, Norway) that together are aimed to provide insight into the opinions of organizers, visitors and locals about the effects of festivals on rural locations.

To collect the data, a consistent survey instrument was developed based on the literature review and previous empirical studies. The questionnaire embraced the same set of 5-point Likert-type questions that were closely linked to the six dimensions of the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

The first sample, which included organizers of festivals staged in the Danish countryside, provides insight into festival organizers’ opinions about the effects of festivals on rural locations. The data were collected in Denmark in 2015 from 315 rural festival organizers. The examined festivals represent all genres, scales and themes of rural festivals occurring in rural Denmark and is therefore representative of the Danish countryside festival landscape. A detailed overview of the sample selection as well as the different characteristics of examined cases can be found in (temporarily removed for the review process).

The next two samples extend the first sample by providing supplementary data on festival visitors’ and local area residents’ opinions of the effects of festivals on the host
places. The data were collected in Norway in 2017 from (a) 306 visitors to the Jordeplerock festival, which occurred in the Sogn and Fjordane region, and (b) 205 residents of that region who did not participate in the festival. Data were collected via email from a sample of attendees and by means of a self-administered questionnaire among local inhabitants. A cluster sampling procedure was used to provide the highest standard of sample representatives (Lohr, 2011). The Jordeplerock festival is a two-day, place-bound music festival that has been organized on an annual basis in Sogn and Fjordane, with the first event in 2013. Table 1 provides the characteristics of the visitor and local samples.

[Table 1 here]

The chosen approach allowed us, for the first time, to contrast views of three main festival assembler groups in relation to the expected spinoffs of the festivals. Furthermore, it allowed us to test the results against a series of contextual variables, for example, for the organizer sample, in relation to the festival type, festival location, and festival duration, festival size, and for the other two samples, in relation to the respondents’ socio-demographic profiles. As such, the chosen approach enriches discussion on the regional effects of events and festivals by arguing that the evaluation of festivals effects should take into account different assembler groups, as they have different needs and expectations. Indeed, different stakeholder (assembler) groups may value festival spinoffs differently and, in some cases, contrarily. Therefore, decision makers should take into account that hosting festivals is an endeavour targeted to satisfy not only tourists’ expectations but also residents’ and local entrepreneurs’ needs.
**Results**

The results section has been divided into two parts, each of which relates to the research questions formulated at the end of Section 3. The first part of the section discusses how festivals can contribute to rural development, while the second part explains how the expected impacts of a festival on rural places may vary between groups of assemblers.

*How do festivals contribute to rural development?*

This study contributes to understanding the rural development role of festivals by using a conceptual model that features the expected effects a festival might have on rural areas. In addition, the study identifies the most important general perceptions of the outcomes of festivals in rural placemaking based on the literature review. Thus, the current section demonstrates, through three samples of different festival assembler groups, the impact of the conceptual model for the totality of stakeholders (cf. Figure 1).

To demonstrate an empirical interpretation of the conceptual model, six general questions were developed, i.e., one for each of the dimensions in the conceptual model. Since the main purpose of the study is to answer and discuss the two research questions through a new theoretical conceptual model, the empirical datasets are used only as an illustration. Single items were used to measure particular dimensions, thus following a suggestion offered by Loo and Kelts (1998) that short scales may reach quite acceptable levels of reliability if they assess homogeneous, theoretically deduced, and clearly defined concepts. Indeed, when constructs have a reasonable degree of homogeneity, longer scales may even have lower construct validity (Burisch, 1997). Clearly then, if the construct in question lends itself to uncomplicated operationalization, short scales may be preferred on conceptual, not merely of pragmatic grounds (Postmes & Haslam 2013). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that other standpoints might exists in this regard,
exemplary calling for an application of at least three items per one dimension. This approach should be definitely used in future studies.

This section also provides empirical evidence on how the organizers’ perceptions varied in the Danish sample for the six dimensions between peripheral vs. urban and music vs. non-music festivals as well as the correlations between them and other relevant contextual variables.

The research questions in the study are descriptive in nature, since they clearly focus on how festivals contribute to rural development and how perceptions of rural impact of festivals might vary among stakeholder groups. Thus, the research design has been descriptive, and only variables that contributes to outline the phenomena studied here were included (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Consequently, the research questions build the selected research design, which cannot thus be considered as casual.

As described in Table 2, the assemblers have the highest perceptions of manifestation spinoff, followed by consolidation, reinvention, attraction, transformation and conservation spinoffs. The table also reports the t-values related to the test of the mean scores between the considered questions.

[Table 2 here]

However, in-depth exploration of the organizer sample provides some additional insights. The examination of the festival location, which was divided according to the official Danish governmental definition of (a) centrally located festivals (i.e., located closer large urban centres) and (b) peripherally located festivals (i.e., far away from urban centres) revealed that three (i.e. manifestation, transformation, and attraction) out of the six considered dimensions had significantly higher mean scores among the peripheral festivals than among the central festivals. This result might indicate potentially higher perceptions and clear-cut needs of all of the assembler groups for the promotion of more
peripherally located areas, in particular the promotion of their traditions, habits and customs in more centrally located markets. In that sense, festivals can serve as ‘pulsar events’ that can transform existing structures by constituting and empowering new groups of actors or by re-empowering existing groups in new ways. For the three remaining dimensions, no significant differences in means were found between peripherical and central festivals.

Furthermore, the overall sample was divided according to five dominant types of festival: music, sport, art, market and special festivals. Testing the mean scores between music and non-music festivals revealed that three dimensions (i.e., manifestation, consolidation, and reinvention) were significantly more important among the music festivals than among the non-music festivals. For the three remaining dimensions, no significant differences between means in the two groups were found. This result might suggest that music festivals are an ideal cradle to evince local culture, particularly music. They are also particularly suitable to serve as the means for strengthening social cohesion and civic pride. In some cases, they can also keep old traditions (songs, folklore) alive.

The next step of analysis was to divide the sample by sport (n=62) and non-sport festivals (n=228). Testing the means between the two groups revealed that three (i.e., manifestation, reinvention, and attraction) out of the six dimensions had significantly lower mean scores among the sports festivals than among the non-sport festivals. These results might be caused by the fact that sport festivals are more generic in nature, meaning that sport per se does not convey particular values related to local areas but rather universal values related to a culture of physical activity.

Furthermore, the sample was also divided by food (n=44) and non-food festivals (n= 251). Testing the means between the two groups revealed that three (i.e., manifestation, transformation, and attraction) out of the six dimensions had significantly
higher mean scores among the food festivals than among the non-food festivals. The results again confirm the manifestation power of festivals, especially in relation to the promotion of local culinary traditions, customs and regional products. Furthermore, to some extent, food festivals can also transform local areas, food traditions and customs by adjusting them to the current times and consequently making them local tourist attractions.

A series of correlation analyses were also conducted to obtain deeper knowledge about other contextual variables that could potentially impact the final results. First, correlation analyses between the festival age and the six dimensions were calculated. The analyses showed mixed results. The correlations between age and transformation were negative and significant (r=-0.13, p<0.05). This result implies that older festivals are not as important for transformation as their younger counterparts. The correlation between age and conservation was, on the other hand, positive and significant (r=0.19, p<0.01). This result indicates that as the age of festivals increases, so does the perceived conservation role. The correlations between the four remaining dimensions and the festival age were non-significant.

The survey among festival organizers also included a question about how many local organizations and non-local organizations were included in the organization of the festival. The number of local organizations and non-local organizations varied between 0 and 6. Correlation analyses between the number of local organizations and the six impact dimensions in the study revealed significant effects in five out of the six correlations. The correlation of the number of local organizations involved with manifestation was negative and significant (r=-0.20, p<0.01), with consolidation was negative and significant (r=-0.26, p<0.01), with attraction was negative and significant (r=-0.16, p<0.01), with conservation was negative and significant (r=-0.15, p<0.05), and with reinvention was
negative and significant \( (r=-0.17, \ p<0.01) \). However, the correlation between transformation and the number of local organizations involved was not significant. Furthermore, the correlations between the six impact dimensions and the number of non-local organizations involved in the festival organization were also tested, but this examination revealed only non-significant correlations. The results might indicate that local organizations more eagerly advance ideas about placemaking and rural development for the festivals than their non-local counterparts, who probably do not have these goals. For them, the theme of the festival is the main goal and likely their only interest. In contrast, local organizations could have multiple goals, such as the festival theme and rural/place development.

**How do the expected impacts of festivals on rural places vary among assembler groups, i.e., locals, visitors, and organizers?**

A further purpose of the study is to show how perceptions of festival effects in rural placemaking vary among three different assembling stakeholder groups. Consequently, this section will offer insight into how the expected effects described in the previous section might vary among the three stakeholder groups. This section will also answer the second research question. As described in the sample description section, the sample characteristics might vary significantly among different stakeholder groups. Stakeholder groups also differ significantly in their motivations for being involved in the event or festival and therefore also have different perceptions as to the effects of events and festivals on rural placemaking. Table 3 shows how the mean scores on the six questions varied among the three stakeholder groups. In addition, the table contains a test to determine whether these mean scores are significantly different from each other.

[Table 3 near here]
One main finding is that the attitude towards the particular effects of the festival on rural placemaking strongly depends on the group that evaluates them. Another main finding is that locals have lower perceptions than the other two groups, indicating that practical participation and being present clearly influences the impact assessment in a positive direction. These findings will be further explained below.

Generally, and across the categories of questions, locals are far less positive in terms of effects than are participants. This finding is interesting, but not surprising, as it may signify an engagement in or general positive appraisal of festivals by participants. What makes this finding especially crucial is the fact that the participant group is rather young (mean age = 25.4 years, median = 21 years). It is reasonable to expect that young participants have more or less the same perceptions regarding the impacts of festivals as older participants because the impacts suggested by our conceptual model are generic. To test this assumption, a median split of the participant sample (median = 21 years) was undertaken. In testing between the groups, a significant difference emerged only between the low- and high-age participant groups on the attraction dimension (mean[low] =4.52, mean[high]=4.72, p<0.05). For the five other impact dimensions in the questionnaire, the differences between the age groups were non-significant. Since the perceptions of the impact of the festival are stable across age groups for 5 out of 6 dimensions tested, it can be concluded that the impact of the proposed model is not age-sensitive. However, since the perceptions of the attraction impact effect vary between age groups, this result requires some attention. Going into further detail, the results show that older participants are more likely than their younger counterparts to believe that a festival will motivate people to attend. The explanation might be that young participants (as opposed to older ones) have travelled less, have less experience of destinations, and know less about them.
A closer look at the mean scores show significant differences between the three groups at the 1% level for all six items, with the exception of the item ‘to attract tourists to the area’; this result illustrates that for the attraction dimension in the conceptual model, the mean scores between the organizer group and the participant group are not significantly different. Accordingly, there is a recognition that festivals are not only about experiences and that tourists have a potential positive impact.

However, all three groups share views of the deeper purpose and impact of a festival, and they mostly acknowledge the manifestation effect, as illustrated through the item related to the broader promotion and marketing of the local area where the festival occurs. This finding means that the exposure of local assets and their promotion and marketing represent the most important functions of rural festivals regardless of the evaluation group. However, while the local inhabitants do agree on this point, the scores assigned to it differed significantly among the groups. The strongest agreement with this item was expressed by participants (an average assessment of 4.61), then organizers (4.21), and then local inhabitants (3.98).

The second most important function of festivals relates to consolidation, illustrated by the item ‘creating and strengthening social cohesion in the local area’. As in the case of manifestation, this function was mostly prioritized by the festival participant group (4.51), followed by the organizers group (4.11) and, rather surprisingly, the local group (3.78).

Reinvention, illustrated by the item ‘to enhance creativity and resourcefulness’, represents another important function of rural festivals, one that was mostly acknowledged by the participant group (4.35) and significantly less so by the other two groups (average assessment at 3.84 among participants and 3.64 among locals).
The item ‘utilize and expose local resources and specific characteristics’ illustrates the *transformation* function of festivals in rural placemaking, with the highest assessment provided by the participant group (4.17), organizer group (3.78), and local group (3.42), with all of the mean scores significantly different from each other (p<0.01). The *attraction* function, illustrated by the item ‘to attract tourists to the area’, constitutes the fifth function described in the conceptual model. The function was equally acknowledged by the organizer group and the participant group (both 4.10) and significantly less acknowledged by the local group (3.62). The last function, *conservation*, illustrated by the item ‘to keep old traditions and culture alive’, is the most important for organizers (mean score 3.88), participants (mean=3.49), and locals (mean=3.43). Thus, *conservation* stands out from the five other functions in that it is the least important function and is significantly more important for organizers than for participants and locals.

Altogether, this section demonstrates a systematic difference between the assembler groups regarding what they expect in terms of the impact of festivals on rural placemaking. For five out of the six functions described in the conceptual model, the perception is strongest among participants and then among organizers and are weakest among locals. One exception exists: perception of the *conservation* function are highest among organizers, then among participants, and finally, among locals.

**Discussion**

This study investigated the interplay between rural festivals and the placemaking process occurring in rural areas. Particular attention was paid to the identification of the dominant effects of festivals on host places and, second, to the evaluation of these effects by three stakeholder groups, i.e., locals who do not attend the festival, event visitors, and event organizers. All of these groups have a stake in the assembly of a festival. By combining
these samples of these three groups, the study provides new evidence concerning the perception of different festival effects on the host places depending on the evaluation group.

Conceptually, the study identified six different effects, i.e., *conservation*, *consolidation*, *transformation*, *reinvention*, *manifestation*, and *attraction*, that festivals have on rural areas. Furthermore, to demonstrate and illustrate this conceptual model empirically, six general questions were developed and tested on an aggregated sample of 816 respondents (locals and visitors) and 315 festival organizers.

The results show that the assemblers have the strongest perceptions of the *manifestation* effect of hosting rural festivals. The fact that the *manifestation* spinoff concerns the promotional role of festivals both among local inhabitants and external visitors confirms the findings of Derrett (2003) and Moscardo (2008). Furthermore, the study provided evidence that the second most important effect of hosting events and festivals, in the eyes of stakeholders, is *consolidation*: integrating and involving local community members around an event idea. The rural festival is often a meeting point and functions as a social engine (Lazeretti & Capone, 2013).

The third and fourth most important expected effect in rural placemaking of hosting festivals, in the eyes of stakeholders, are *reinvention* and *attraction*. These two effects are equally valued from the stakeholders’ points of view. This finding is in line with recently discussed trends in the literature: the growing number of cultural events (Liu, 2014). The fifth and sixth most important expected effects of events and festivals in rural placemaking are *transformation* and *conservation*. Transformation refers to working against a backdrop of rural decline. This concept has been described in urban settings in the literature (Scott & Kühn, 2012). Scott and Kühn (2012) discuss the occurrence of place regeneration in the context of post-socialist urban governance. Conservation
involves keeping old rural traditions, habits and culture alive. The results from our study show that this is the least important impact of events and festivals in rural placemaking. In this section, we have illustrated the aggregated expected effects of events and festivals in rural placemaking among three groups of stakeholders (organizers, locals, and participants) and their relative importance.

Regarding the second research question, we highlighted how the expected impacts of festivals on rural places may vary between stakeholder groups, particularly locals, visitors, and organizers. The results indicate that the expected impacts of festivals on rural placemaking strongly depend on the groups that evaluate them. Furthermore, the results show that a direct association with a festival, either by organizing it or participating in it, has a positive influence on attitudes towards festival impacts on rural placemaking. For five out of the six expected impacts (conservation, consolidation, transformation, reinvention, and manifestation), we find the same pattern. The expectations are strongest among participants, followed by organizers and then locals. The mean scores are significantly different among all of the groups. For the sixth expected impact in our conceptual model (attraction), the mean scores between participants and organizers are not significantly different from each other. However, both groups have significantly stronger perceptions of the attraction impact on rural placemaking than do the local group.

In this study, we demonstrate how perceptions of the impacts of events and festivals in rural placemaking vary among the three different stakeholder groups. The results show that participants tend to perceive festival spinoffs much more strongly than local inhabitants, regardless of their nature (cost/benefits). The pattern holds for all four of the main categories of items in the scale. The pattern described in our conceptual model, which we illustrated through six targeting questions in our survey among the three
stakeholder groups, is thus validated for two of the stakeholder groups (locals and participants).

Conclusion

Festivals are assemblages of contributions from all stakeholders, and they have impacts in terms of experiences, happiness, excitement, etc., but also have wider positive implications for, in this case, their rural settings. Such spinoff effects are recognized by the participants, organizers and locals, although with some differences in focus, as examined above. A question to be raised when addressing the conclusions of this study is whether the participants in and organizers of rural festivals suffer from entirely unrealistic illusions about their positive impact on the rural location. Having a nice, happy time during a festival and experiencing a smooth flow will naturally positively affect one’s perceptions. For the locals, the experience may be slightly more ambiguous, and there may be reservations in terms of the effects of noise, traffic, littering and other inconveniences. In this respect, this study supports other research findings, where people close to a festival (organizers, shopkeepers, restaurant owners, etc.) have a higher appreciation of the event than locals, who remain passive (Liu, 2014).

Local communities can learn from this study. It is particularly essential to understand that alliances between assembler groups must be nurtured. This study supports research that increasingly points to the transformative capacities of festivals and to events as scenes for co-creation (Russo & Richards, 2016). Many festival organizers are keen to enhance the composite effects in cooperation with participants, leaving them to play roles of both enjoying and co-producing events. Furthermore, a festival attempts to retain the attention of visitors, not only during the festival itself but year-round on social media or in voluntary associations that support the festival (Ziakas, 2013).
Motivating stakeholders to contribute to the benefits of festivals and reap the rewards in the dimensions addressed in this study will demand increased alliance building. Seeing festivals as ‘assemblages’ emphasized their fluidity, exchangeability and multiple purposes, all of which are applicable in connection with the proposed impact categories described in this article. Along the following lines, further considerations could be of relevance for organizers as well as for locals and participants:

**Conservation** – New and existing rural festivals are often based on local traditions, customs and myths, and in many places, the approach has much more to offer. Rural festivals are dichotomized between their abilities for conservation of rural assets and for reinvention. This tension requires a prudent dialogue with locals, business partners, sponsors, restorers, historians, and destination management organizations (DMOs) from festival organizers. The notion of conservation can be further explored in co-creative ways, where conservation becomes a prime driving purpose of a festival, as observed, for example, in events where organizers, locals and participants jointly plant trees or work in other ways to improve a heritage landscape.

**Consolidation** – Rural festivals strengthen local social ties and community cohesion, and thus, alliances with local action groups are of key importance for their proper functioning. There is also a need to include locals and visitors in festival creation to strengthen their experience and satisfaction. This cooperation could be done with the development of volunteer organizations that transcend the local network and organizations and draw on experience from other festivals.

**Transformations** – In many ways, festivals may renew somewhat stagnant communities, and thus, alliances with external partners are needed to provide a continuous source of innovation and ideas. Developing the most transformative forces may require the initiation of formal co-creative processes and bringing in assistive
counselling to obtain views from potential future participants. Judging from this study, external actors are willing to contribute to creative processes.

**Reinvention** – Festivals can be used to convert outdated traditions and customs into new formats that are more accessible to different audiences, including people coming from urban areas. To do so, one must build a bridge between representatives of traditions and fresh ideas from the outside. The rural festival arena can offer numerous examples of reassembling people and ideas, for example, food festivals where local food ingredients and cooking methods are integrated into entirely new ceremonial and experimental structures. Often, the locals are not happy at first but eventually might not only accept the new structures but also become critical contributors. Rural races using old agricultural machinery are a good example of new formats of assemblage.

**Manifestation** – Local destination management organizations (DMOs) are usually considered important for the promotion of festivals and events and thus are key actors in the coordinated storyline of specific rural areas. However, the commitment of visitors as well as locals may be a signal that the role of DMOs in the manifestation dimension is diminishing. An honest discussion of local qualities can sometimes be better accomplished by the participants in their own networks. Many festivals have extensive social media strategies, and this study supports that rationale.

**Attraction** – Festival goers may become tourists and vice versa. Competency and capacity building in the tourism field are crucial for small rural communities, not only for the benefit of the festival period but also for more general benefits. Such competency and capacity building requires the mobilization of resources, an entrepreneurial spinning-off and a diversification of enterprises operating in other sectors. Well-functioning local festivals can become platforms for community entrepreneurship in new formats, for
example, by in-migrating former festival participants who see business opportunities. This study suggests that festival goers at least are open to these business prospects.

Policy makers in local areas, jointly with local organizations, enterprises, etc., have already been observed to be eager to use festivals to create vibrant places in which to live. Further activities may be to ensure that festivals in local places are linked thematically or in other ways to reach the best synergy effect through, among other means, tying festivals into portfolios. The critical dimension is that the heterogeneity of the festivals is in perpetual focus.

Rural festivals may become a stronger means of motivating the retention of a young generation in rural areas and of motivating in-migration, thus working against rural decline and population shrinkage. The remembrance of good times during festivals is a decisive factor, and continued communication and dialogue with former participants form part of an implementation strategy. Some festivals included in the Danish survey attempt to engage young people as volunteers, which means that they will build a denser network in the local area. Another measure is to make creative alliances with relevant educational institutions and invite students to undertake study work, which has also been seen in Danish rural areas. The fact that jobs and education are mainly located in urban areas is a barrier to intensive and durable impacts of this sort. The examination of a young generation of festival goers in this study was purposeful, as the members of this group are at a critical stage of life, and their perceptions and opinions can be important for policy makers in terms of how to create a vibrant place to live.

The limitations of this study include the non-representativeness of the collected samples for the rural festivals landscape, and thus, further research of a similar scope, but with a broader focus, is needed. Further studies may more comprehensively link the views and perceptions of participants, locals and organizers and, in particular, undertake a
longitudinal analysis that could demonstrate the persistence and development of the engagements and the relationship-building in festival assemblages. Moreover, to test the proposed model a set of six items was employed, where each item correspond with one dominant effect. However, to increase further studies’ robustness it is called to employ more nuanced approach with at least three items pertaining to single impact.

References


## Tables

Table 1. Sample demographics of visitors and locals, Jordeplerock Festival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Locals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>60.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>39.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>27.2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
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<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/college ≤3 years</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University/college &gt;3 years</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of observations</strong></td>
<td>306</td>
<td>205</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. An overview of organizers’, visitors’ and locals’ attitudes towards the effects of festivals on a host region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected impacts of events and festivals</th>
<th>General question</th>
<th>Gross sample (organizers, participants and locals merged together) N=816</th>
<th>Range of t-values</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Stdv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifestation</td>
<td>To promote and market the local area where the festival occurs</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>Consolidation</td>
<td>To create more social cohesion in the local area</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attraction</td>
<td>To attract tourists to the area</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>To keep old traditions and culture alive</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinvention</td>
<td>To enhance creativity and resourcefulness</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>To utilize and expose a specific local resource and specific characteristics</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.13</td>
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</table>
Table 3. Means and standard deviations of the six items in the Danish study among participants and locals at the Jordeplerock festival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected impacts of events and festivals</th>
<th>General question</th>
<th>Organizers (n=316)</th>
<th>Participants (N=306)</th>
<th>Locals (N=217)</th>
<th>Test</th>
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<tr>
<td>Manifestation</td>
<td>To promote and market the local area where the festival occurs</td>
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<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<td>0.92</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.84</td>
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<td>To attract tourists to the area</td>
<td>4.10a</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>4.10a</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>To keep old traditions and culture alive</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinvention</td>
<td>To enhance creativity and resourcefulness</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>To utilize and expose a specific local resource and specific characteristics</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure captions

Figure 1. Impacts of festivals on rural places – a conceptual model.