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Festival connections: how consistent and innovative connections enable small-scale rural festivals to contribute to socially sustainable communities.

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Festival Connections: how consistent and innovative connections enable small-scale rural festivals to contribute to socially sustainable communities

Abstract
This paper examines the contribution of small-scale, rural festivals to the social sustainability of their host communities. Small-scale, community originated festivals proliferate the rural landscape throughout the UK and yet despite this, festival research has focused predominantly on large, urban events and on their economic impact (Wood and Thomas 2009, Gibson and Connell 2011). This paper seeks to address the perceived research gap by examining these events through a lens of social sustainability.

The research uses a case study approach focused on four festivals in Northumberland, UK. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with festival organisers, key figures and visitors. Following a Constructivist Grounded Theory method four principle indicators were identified to determine festival contribution to community social sustainability. These indicators are: contribution to community pride and localness, enhancement of knowledge and understanding, contribution to the continuity of local culture, and enablement of networks of connectivity.

The findings demonstrate the networks of connections which festivals enable between the culture, heritage and people (individuals and groups) of a place. By focusing on four indicators the paper shows the social impact of connections through the festival processes and content. The paper argues that small-scale festivals in rural locations can contribute to social sustainability if they demonstrate a balance of both consistency and innovation and accessibility and openness within the locale.

This paper addresses the gap in social impact research into rural festivals and presents an original approach to identify festival impact on community social sustainability.

Key to Abbreviations
Case study festivals: MG (Morpeth Gathering), OGF (Ovingham Goose Fair), HC (Haltwhistle Carnival), GF (Glendale Festival)
Interviewee categories: Orgs (Organisers), KFs (Key Figures), FG1 (Focus Group1), FG2 (Focus Group2), Visitors
Research Context

The research uses a case study approach focused on four festivals in Northumberland, the most sparsely populated county of England (Vall 2011). The case study festivals are the Morpeth Gathering (MG), the Ovingham Goose Fair (OGF), the Haltwhistle Carnival (HC) and the Glendale Festival (GF), each occurring annually and defined as small-scale, having less than 10,000 visitors and income of less than £30K (BAFA 2008:8, Finkel 2009:6).

Introduction: contextualising the social within a sustainable community

Social sustainability refers to the connective qualities within a community, including the responsibilities as well as the personal advantages to well-being that connectivity entails. A socially sustainable community may be summarised as one in which the majority of its members experience a sense of well-being, a positive cognitive evaluation and assessment of life (Deiner 2009, Phipps and Slater 2010). Taken within Max-Neef’s (1991:18) concept of sustainable development it is an important component of a community in which, by and large, the ‘universal human needs’ of its members are satisfied.

The role of connectivity within sustainable communities explored by, amongst others, Healy and Cote (2001), Putnam and Fieldstein (2003), Macnab, Thomas et al. (2010) reveals the need for a range of connections (i.e. bonds and bridges, formal and informal) and the potential for these connections to contribute to greater levels of well-being within that community (Maslow 1943, Max-Neef 1991, Scheff 2004). As Putnam (2003) has emphasised, there is a need for both internal and external connections to avoid a community becoming over ‘exclusive’ with too great a reliance on ‘strong, internal bonds at the expense of inclusivity’ (Macnab, Thomas et al. 2010:2). Festivals can stimulate both bridged and bonded connections with place and can ‘help people identify more strongly with a sense of place but also break down boundaries’ (Rose 2002:100). Connections are made or reinforced through the holding of festivals between people, their culture and cultural heritage and with place. These connections may in turn, contribute to satisfying human needs, as for example Max-Neef’s (1991) exploration of needs for identity, understanding and participation.

However, despite recognition within the literature of ‘the importance of acknowledging [festival] impacts’ (Robertson et al. 2009:157) and of identifying links between community and festival social impact (Woosnam and Van Winkle 2013), many authors highlight a paucity of research into the social impact of festivals (Faulkner and Fredline 2000; Moscardo 2008; Reid 2008; Rogers and Anastasiadou 2011). Olsen (2012:1) refers to a continuing
‘disregard [for] the festivals’ social and cultural potential’ within the ‘well-established literature’ on festivals and their values. Woosnam et al. (2013:257) suggest ‘the social-cultural impacts of festivals can oftentimes be secondary to [...] economic impact’. This paper seeks to move towards addressing this disregard, in particular through examining festival contribution to social sustainability.

Social sustainability requires both a degree of consistency and the ability to adapt or innovate, allowing for a stable framework within which to allow change and adapt to address human needs (Max-Neef 1991, Sachs 1999). As Ahman (2013:1162) states, ‘it is in the dynamic and ever changing process of negotiation between changing society and maintaining it as-is, that society can be truly sustainable’. Consideration of social sustainability within a community context raises questions of place-identity, entangled in notions of the past and ideas for the future. Massey (1994:8) identifies this convergence, stating ‘the debate [concerning place-identity] should focus on the terms and nature of both conservation and innovation’ The purpose of this study was firstly to develop a specific model to identify the aspects of a festival which contribute to community social sustainability. Woosnam et al. (2013:258) highlight the ‘need to further validate’ existing models for measuring social impact ‘in other community types and with differing types of festivals’, referring specifically to the Festival Social Impact Attitude Scale (FSIAS) (Delamere 2001) as used in this research methodology. The second purpose of the research was to determine, through this model, how a balance between consistency and innovation within festivals impacts on social sustainability.

Festivals may contribute to consistency within their community through providing temporal and spatial connections, recalling Massey’s (1994:3) reflection on ‘space-time as a configuration of social relations’. Festivals provide opportunities for both reflections on the past and anticipation of the future and to connect with place and the people associated with the place. The continuation of local culture infers a community’s heritage. Festivals consist of many displays and performances, some of which carry heritage value, ‘the living expressions and traditions inherited by communities and transmitted to their descendants’ (UNESCO 2003). In contributing to social sustainability festivals act as a platform for cultural survival through providing a consistent opportunity for this cultural display, participation and engagement. Culture has been employed [in both an economic and social sense] to instigate a form of ‘nurturing’ – bringing social cohesion to a fragmented and disenfranchised social sence’ (Highmore, 2015). In considering culture in the context of social sustainability the
subjectivity of place and culture are better understood by positioning within a context of time’. The interactive, “living” demonstration of local culture is important to emphasise with the capacity for adaptation and innovation within the more constant framework. Through providing a consistent link with the past, the purpose, as Hobsbawm (1983:12) states, is to ‘legitimate action and cement group cohesion’. This supports Derrett’s (2005) findings that the temporary and annual frequency of this type of event contributes to community relevance and contemporary responsiveness. However, over consistency is seen as detrimental to a sustainable community which, it is argued needs to be innovative, adaptable (Max-Neef 1991) and dynamic (Ahman 2013). Innovative elements of festivals (organisational processes, display and content) can contribute to social and cultural capital within a community in the form of new, outward reaching forms of relationships or bridges (Putnam 2000), and through representations of change in balance with respect for tradition (Sachs 1999).

Identifying Festival Social Impact

Within the literature, prominent examples for identifying festival social impact were noted. Gursoy et al. (2004:n.p.) refer to ‘community pride and image’, ‘enhancers of understanding’ and ‘preservation of local culture’. Robertson et al. (2009:156,163), highlight the importance of ‘social networks’, ‘pride and participation’ and ‘community involvement with regional place’. The potential range of voices on display contributes to what Lavenda (1992:100) has called ‘the public culture […] a field of both political and cultural forces, constituted by events satisfying different tastes and subject to the play of varying interests’. An understanding of culture is complex and nuanced. However, as Highmore (2016:13) notes, the term culture has been employed in both ‘an economic and social sense’ and, of particular relevance within the context of social sustainability, may be instrumental in ‘bring[ing] social cohesion to a fragmented and disenfranchised social scene’. A broad mix of content may provide opportunity for multi-level knowledge exchange (Bowen 2013) which arguably occurs at both a bonded, more localised level and at a bridged level to extend connections beyond the limitations of the immediate locale. As Putnam (2000) has argued, a socially sustainable community needs both bonds and bridges and the exchange of knowledge through both these avenues is an important contributor to this end. Fabiani (2011) and Delanty (2011) also draw attention to the potentially inclusive and cosmopolitan nature of festive events regarding opportunities for knowledge exchange. Through their varied forms and content festivals may contribute to a ‘more democratic, locally representative understanding of
community’ (Dicks 2000:96). Derrett (2005) refers to the ability of festivals to more readily transfer and share power amongst stakeholders through a broader range of culture on display. Building on these examples, and within the theoretical frameworks for social sustainability, a specific model was developed to identify festival contribution to community social sustainability. The data supports these theoretical frameworks through findings that a combination of consistent opportunities to connect must be in balance with innovative and culturally adaptable ways of making connections.

Methodology
A Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (Charmaz 2006) allowed for a relational and ethnographic, mixed method approach using archival research, qualitative semi-structured interviews and field observation within four case study festivals within Northumberland. The purpose of the research was to make visible the threads of a social web spun amongst and beyond each individual case study festival and their host communities. Initial purposive sampling of strategic decision makers (n = 2) and festival organisers (n = 4) led to further snowball sampling of key community figures (n = 16) and focus groups (n = 5 with total n = 37 participants) with additional random sampling of festival visitors (n = 163). Data gathering took place over 18 months during 2012/13.

Existing methods for measuring festival social impact were analysed to identify key indicators ((Delamere, Wankel et al. 2001, Fredline, Jago et al. 2003, Small, Edwards et al. 2005). Evidence from these existing models was subsequently embedded in the paradigm of social sustainability to identify themes of connectivity (temporal, spatial and social connections) and of consistency and innovation. This grounding method led to the creation of a model for identifying festival contribution to community social sustainability through four principle indicators. In order to demonstrate contribution to social sustainability, a festival must:

a. contribute to community localness and pride
b. enhance knowledge and understanding
c. contribute to the continuity of local culture
d. enable networks of connectivity

The seeming simplicity of the four indicators belies the complexity of each individual festival situation. Each community of place and of interest is unique, bringing with it multiple variations within the members of each community and within the responses both from and to
the festival. Yet despite their variations, festivals share common traits as participatory and celebratory events within their communities. They may thus contribute to the satisfying of ‘fundamental human needs [which] are finite, few and classifiable […], the same in all cultures and all historical periods’ (Max-Neef 1991:18).

This paper is subdivided by these four indicators. The evidence presented from the case studies seeks to contribute to greater understanding of the many and varied ways by which small-scale, rural festivals contribute to the social sustainability of their communities.

**Contributions to Community Localness and Pride**

The first principle indicator by which a festival contributes to the sustainability of its host community is through contributing to a sense of localness and pride associated with belonging. For a community to have a sense of localness the individuals which make up that community must share a sense of affinity in recognising what is local culture, where it is sourced and share a sense of its accessibility. The local culture of a festival hosting town/village predominantly includes the products and processes associated with a community of place, directly linked to the individuals and groups who reside, work or participate in that place. There may be cultural links beyond the geographical boundary of the place through the wider community of interest which a festival creates. Whilst there is evidence that festivals make cultural connections both within and beyond a geographical place boundary, as Duffy and Waitt (2011) have explored, the evidence found within this research data suggested that a sense of localness is primarily based within a boundary of proximity to place.

**Contributing to a Sense of Localness**

The data reveals that geographical localness is important, not only for the opportunity to engage with the locale and connect to activities and groups being held locally, but that the identity of the festival is strengthened by its display of place-based culture. Derrett (2005) suggests that support and contributions from local stakeholders may help sustain the festivals themselves. Rose (2002) considers the impact festivals make towards people’s sense of place through displaying geographically local culture. Including local resources and reflecting local identities and culture can contribute to the social stability of a place (Edwards 2011, Quinn and Wilks 2013). The inclusion of local content in a festival was repeatedly emphasised by
respondents as being instrumental in keeping local culture alive and contributing to the
appeal of the festival to local visitors.

There was a strong desire amongst interviewees for the festival to demonstrate a sense of
place, a “snap-shot” of the town/village with displays of local products and organisations.
Whilst apparent amongst all interviewees, the perceptions of how successfully festivals
displayed a sense of localness varied between the groups. There was particular evidence of
discrepancies in the level of localness between the organisers (who were predominantly
responsible for selecting the content) and the non-organising interviewees (key figures,
visitors and focus groups). These conflicting perceptions were influenced by existing
knowledge of the festival and, in particular, the individual standpoint regarding what
constitutes localness. Recognition of a group or participant in the festival enhanced the
positive response to a sense of festival localness. Perceptions of localness were also
influenced by the perceived openness and accessibility of the organisational committee,
including whether its members were considered insiders (locals) or outsiders (non-locals).
The opportunities to participate (in the organising or display of the event) also influenced
how respondents considered the localness of the festival.

Consistent elements of the festivals, annual repetition of date, place and elements of the
format, contribute to the sense of localness through earning the festival a place in the local
community. The repetition of set patterns and practices within the festival implies continuity
with the past whether as invented traditions or customary practices. Festivals were described
as being part of the fabric of the place (KF MG, 2013), reflecting changes in the local
cultural dynamic and contributing to a positive, sometimes tacit, image of the place. They
were seen as being part of the local identity through their consistent recurrence and yet
respondents were keen to emphasis the dangers of an event becoming too consistent.
References were made to the time gap between events as being long enough to work on new
ideas (renew energy to participate) and yet not long enough to repeat things and become
complacent. Without elements of innovation in the form of new content and some changes to
the format, there was evidence that festivals would lose their audiences. However,
respondents stated that it was important that the origins of the innovation emanated from
within the locale and that the scale of change was not too great, as this could lead to
disengagement and feelings of detachment from the locale. Innovation within the local
cultural content had the potential to challenge perceptions of insularity and stereotypes associated with small, rural towns.

**Contributing to Community Pride**

The festivals contributed to the social sustainability of their communities through enhancing shared pride in the locale. The recognition of localness in the festivals was associated with an increased sense of belonging and place attachment. Respondents referred to this as contributing to a sense of pride, predominantly expressed in place-based terms. The festivals were described as showing-off the town/village, being beneficial and necessary for the place and in marking the unique or special qualities of the locale.

Increased pride, associated through the festival with place, strengthened bonds between locals and could enhance territorial attitudes within a community. There was evidence that, in the words of one focus group member, *you support your own* (FG1 OGF, 2013). There were some negative perceptions of festivals as being territorial, or exclusively for locals, primarily amongst focus group respondents who had never or infrequently visited the festivals. The respondents who visited the festivals showed in contrast, less perception of territoriality. Pride in place and community through the festival was more commonly emphasised through expressions of desiring to “show the festival” to visitors, particularly the younger generation.

The pride created through a feeling of ownership or enhanced belonging was translated into opportunity to share the positive sense of place created through the event. Community pride, although associated with a territory or bounded place in a geographical or administrative sense (the village/town boundary), crosses beyond the fluid boundaries of the festival (Delanty 2011, Fabiani 2011) and is a positive contributor to sustainability.

**Enhancing Knowledge and Understanding**

Festivals contribute to the social sustainability of their host communities through the enhancement of knowledge and understanding of the culture associated with the place where they are held. As the MG organiser stated, *the event can overcome ignorance of the culture* (Org MG, 2012). The evidence within the interview data predominantly corroborated Dicks’ (2000) notion of ‘democratic cultural display’. The transfer and enhancement of knowledge, through both formal and informal means and between a wide range of groups and individuals, occurred at festivals on a variety of levels, contributing to a ‘socially shared understanding which provides a framework to enable the functioning of groups in an environment’ (Fiske
and Fiske 2007:284). These included opportunities to enhance understanding in the build-up, during and after the event.

An internal, bonded sense of understanding and knowledge exchange occurred through predominantly informal means whilst outsiders found bridges to understand and relate to the host community through the inclusion of more formal means of purveying knowledge. The opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding was enhanced through the consistent process of holding the festival, the repetition of the date and place and of some elements of the format. Introduction of more innovative means of displaying culture was an essential element in maintaining vitality and interest amongst visitors and participants, and a means through which relevant frameworks for encountering change in place were created.

**Formal Knowledge Exchange**

Festival content which was intended to be educational or informative was predominantly linked to place, and/or place-based heritage. Examples of this included demonstrations of craft or workshops to teach cultural skills which were particularly in evidence at MG, reflecting its heritage theme and aim to transmit, promote and preserve cultural practices.

Further evidence of intentional passing on of information or knowledge was found at all the case studies in the form of displays informing visitors of the activities of groups participating in the event, often with the intention of recruiting support and new members. The knowledge passed on to visitors by these groups formed part of the “shop window” on the locale, demonstrating what Picard and Robinson (2006:12) have referred to as the ‘meaningful frameworks’ underlying the community. The display of local organisations and groups undoubtedly provided knowledge on what was available locally for the community or place-based community information. Alongside these local groups, all case study festivals had participating groups from beyond the immediate town/village geographical boundary, participating through connections of interest which allowed for fluidity within the festival community boundary.

Some discrepancy was observed between the perceptions of the organisers and non-organisers (key figures, visitors and focus groups) regarding the role of the festival to promote local knowledge and educational opportunities about the place-based traditional and contemporary culture. Whilst organisers believed they provided some educational opportunities (including skills inheritance and development) through their respective
festivals, visitors, key figures and focus groups were less convinced of these opportunities. Visitors in particular implied that the festivals were missing an opportunity to promote knowledge about their local area, particularly with regard to heritage. Dominant perceptions of heritage, equated with an often finite past and predominantly with tangible content over intangible processes, appear to interfere with festival goers’ ability to recognise the link to local culture on display. Although the organisers were aware of the link when selecting the cultural content, there appeared gaps in conveying that link to the audience, in particular the local visitor.

**Informal Knowledge Exchange**

A significant proportion of the knowledge exchanged and opportunities for enhanced understanding of the community took place informally. Festivals are sites where stories are swapped and memories transferred and where much of the content is motivated with the intent of entertaining the audience and of a celebratory nature. The contribution of these performances, displays and social exchanges to cultural and place knowledge was often implied as a secondary or subconscious addition rather than the raison d’être. The interviewees widely acknowledged the importance of these informal means of gaining information and understanding although the responses varied as to the impact upon the recipients of the knowledge.

Organisers at each festival stated that they believed the festivals contributed primarily to understanding of the locale through community consolidation and integration rather than through formal, educational displays of culture. All visitors felt that the festivals passed on knowledge about the locale, although the majority of visitors believed they personally learnt little about the place through the festival, particularly if they resided within ten miles proximity of the event. Visitors interviewed suggested that information was passed primarily to outside visitors and through the transfer of cultural information to a younger generation. The intergenerational sharing of knowledge and cultural links were frequently mentioned by interviewees when referring to increased understanding which the festival contributed to. The events were described as *reference points for a community* (KF GF, 2013) which could help explain the vagaries of local living and, as Gibson and Stewart (2009) found, enhance place understanding to outsiders, incomers and young members of the community whilst maintaining levels of interest amongst local residents.
Referring again to the temporal and annual nature of each case study festival, respondents from each event described the importance of the yearly and short-term nature of the event with regard to enhancing knowledge and understanding. The annual recurrence provided a level of stability, a consistent occasion to share memories and stories amongst participants and visitors alike. Organisers referred to the annual repetition of certain skills and demonstrations as being important in reinforcing local knowledge, particularly of heritage culture. The temporary nature of the event in turn provided opportunities for reinterpretations of the local culture and allowed for adaptation to cultural change, described by Larson (2009:289) as a form of innovation. This reinforces the need for both consistent connections, with place and the place culture, and opportunities to adapt and innovate, within a socially sustainable community.

Continuity of Local Culture

Duvignaud (1976) refers to the part festivals play in providing cultural and historical continuity, a community’s heritage. The data showed that perceptions of heritage amongst respondents were problematic and appeared at odds with the UNESCO (2003) notion of heritage as providing continuity. A narrative emerged in the interview findings which equated heritage with what Duarte (2010:856-8) calls a ‘dominant preservationist norm’ associated with things finite and historic. Whilst this interesting observation is beyond the scope of this particular paper, it must be noted that perceptions of what constituted heritage content influenced participants’ ability to identify heritage content and associated connections. Despite a general consensus amongst interviewees that heritage helped to keep culture alive, many of the interviewees failed to identify heritage content within their respective festivals. Visitor and focus group participants in particular, where they identified festival heritage content, referred to predominantly historical elements. Festival heritage was also equated with tradition, a view which the majority of organisers adhered to. This was seen as a positive attribute, driven within the community by the desire for the festivals to recover a “traditional”, arguably idealised, form of community which had been “lost”.

The balance of consistency and innovation in the process of hosting a festival is a critical component of continuing local culture. Over consistency was seen by some respondents as a negative […] the same each year (KF MG, 2013). There appeared a demand for certain new or creative elements for, as Finkel (2006) and Larson (2009) observed, a lack of innovation could be stultifying and lead to a declining audience. Interviewees from all categories
suggested that innovative processes needed to be relevant and not arbitrary; too many changes or inconsistencies with previous events could lead to feelings of disconnection between the festival and the community. Innovative elements and changes were more likely to be accepted if they were perceived to be authentic or connected in some way to the festival, whether that was linking to place, people or heritage rather than capricious inclusion. Respondents referred to the ability of festivals to adapt to the changing nature of the community, what Derrett (2005:13) describes as ‘responding to the needs of the times’, stating this adaptability as being important for a continuation of the local culture.

**Processes of Continuing the Local Culture within the Festivals**

Many interviewees commented that heritage was important for the continuity of their community and felt that the festivals could do more to transmit local cultural heritage, particularly emphasising a return to a more traditional format and through display of more historical links. It may be argued that, where a festival has a consistent existence within the community, the process of staging it is, in itself, part of the local tradition and community heritage. The festival processes are the means through which aspects of local culture are inherited from year to year. There is potential for these processes to go unacknowledged as part of the community heritage and in turn, a failure to consider them as important contributions to the continuity of local culture. Respondents, whether as an organiser, performer or visitor, emphasised the social elements of participation in the event as critical elements of cultural continuity. To cite from the interviews, the festivals were described as being *part of the town*, as *markers in the local calendar*, as *part of what you do here*, forming a *common foundation* through the event (various interviewees, all festivals). In particular, the timing and location of the festival and key aspects of the process of the event were perceived as significant and *set in stone* (FG1 OGF, 2013). Visiting the festival was seen in itself as part of the local culture.

All the case study festivals displayed a percentage of local organisations and groups offering potential social interaction with the host town/village. Festivals have been described as ‘cosmopolitan’ (Delanty 2011:196) and ‘non-elitist’ (Rose, 2002:99), implying accessibility to a broad range of the community. Cross generational connections, the passing on of local knowledge and sharing of memories, experiences and skills were all cited as contributing to cultural continuity. Evidence within the data predominantly supported this, though difficulties were expressed in attracting the teenage/young adult sector of the community.
**Authenticity of Local Culture**

Interviewees stressed the importance of the localness of festival culture and considered this instrumental for its continuation. Where cultural content was perceived to be non-local or inauthentic within the festivals, comments from respondents indicated a negative impact upon connections and discontinuity of the local culture. Too little continuity or over emphasis on bringing innovation to the festival could be detrimental to its survival and acceptance within the community.

Although many aspects of the festivals were inherited processes which had become part of the anticipated format of the festival, adaptations over time in their content (for example, the evolution of the dance into a disco at HC) meant that the majority of respondents did not value these elements of the festival as heritage (therefore, not part of the continuity of the local culture). Where respondents identified festival heritage content, it was considered to have a value in contributing to the continuity of local culture, only where it was recognised as being “of the locale”. In contrast, if heritage content was perceived as inauthentic or non-local, connection with place was lost.

Some interviewees identified that rather than contributing to the continuity of culture, inauthentic or too broadly place-specific content may cause confusion and have a negative impact on local culture. A recognisable connection to the locale is a critical aspect of the content, whether this was seen as heritage or as an innovative take on the local culture.

Respondents recognised the need to appeal to both locals and non-locals through the content and form of the festival, but emphasised that the balance should not tip too strongly in either favour. This reinforced findings within the literature which suggested that over emphasis on connecting with locals (bonds), or with non-locals (bridges), may have a negative impact (Putnam 2000, Curtis 2011, Duffy and Waitt 2011, Edwards 2011).

**Enable Networks of Connectivity**

Festivals have been described as both facilitating and depending on networks of connectivity (Derrett 2003, Gibson and Stewart 2009, Phipps and Slater 2010). Evidence within the data was rich with reference to social connectivity describing the events as reference points for socialising, as hubs for connections, at individual, group and intergroup level (various interviewees, all festivals). Respondents overwhelming saw the events as social occasions which potentially enabled both old (or established) connections to be renewed and new ones.
to be created, although the majority believed that the renewal of existing connections predominated.

**Aspects of a Festival which Enable Networks of Connectivity**

The spatial and temporal consistency of a festival enables networks to develop through providing a place and time where the community could anticipate meeting up with friends, neighbours and new acquaintances. Festivals are sites of display, whether those be of ‘unique, important high-end art work [or] being of and for the community’ (Bowen 2013:n.p.). Place based consistency, provided through the annual recurrence of the event in time and in physical location, may encourage a form of ‘public or private ritual […] the creation of meaningful frameworks of their being together’ (Picard and Robinson 2006:12). Festivals enable connections with place at many levels. They contribute to immediate engagement with physical spaces in which the festivities take place and also through secondary connections with those who inhabit, work in or otherwise occupy the places which host the festival. By enabling opportunities for festival goers to share memories and stories from previous festival experiences with contemporary encounters with place, the events may contribute to belonging and connectedness within a host area.

The ability of a festival to enable connective networks was influenced by both the longevity of the event and the presence of any events perceived as serving a similar or potentially rival role in the community. Rather than enabling the intertwining of networks within a community, multiple events may cause tension or exclusion within the community particularly if the events were perceived as being motivated and aimed at separate networks of people. Some evidence of this was found within two of the case studies, MG and GF. The town of Morpeth has two annual events, the MG and the town fair. Although recognised as distinct in their own right, nevertheless underlying tensions existed between the two events.

In Wooler, the town played host to the carnival in addition to the GF. Respondents at GF referred to these two events as being very separate from each other, having quite separate networks through which the events were organised and participated in. The origin and the perception of the organising committee at the GF, influenced respondents’ interpretations of these events. The carnival was referred to as having a bonded, insider network of local inhabitants, whereas the GF was perceived as being organised by incomers and reaching out to a wider network. Perceptions as to whether the GF enabled social connections were more polarised, suggestive of a separation of networks within the community.
The brief, temporality of the festival within a collective environment can provide a focal point for the promotion of participating groups or organisations (Goldblatt 1997). All respondents noted that opportunities to join groups, both in the locale and beyond, were available through the festivals. However, despite the importance placed on the opportunities which the festivals provided to join groups there was only a relatively small number of respondents who reported becoming a member following the event. Passive knowledge took precedent over active engagement; the knowledge gained of what was available and the potential to join contributed to a feeling of well-being without the need to actively join a group.

Festivals have been described, for example by Frazer (1976) and Ehrenreich (2007), as points of celebration in the face of adversity, occasions where subversive or irregular behavior, which may not be tolerated in everyday circumstance, is permitted. There was evidence that all the case study events subverted physical places from their normal use (whether as a road, building or open space). Respondents referred to the positive benefits of being able to inhabit familiar spaces in unfamiliar ways and how this contributed to social interaction. Festivals can provide the consistency and security of a familiar setting (the high street or park, for example) in which to experience innovative or alternative cultural displays, stimulating conversation and social exchange.

Bonding and Bridging Networks

Festivals can provide close, bonded networks, characterised by relations between existing friends and/or family members often within a bounded place (the town/village). They can simultaneously provide links to wider, bridged networks making connections beyond geographical or socially familiar boundaries. As Macnab et al. (2010) emphasise, a sustainable community requires a balance of both internal and external connections to avoid becoming too exclusive or inward looking. Amongst the case study festivals evidence existed of connections of both bonded and bridged types although to varying degrees. It appeared that content type, perceptions of the organisation and aims of the festival (including to whom it was perceived to be aimed and how local the content was perceived to be) are important factors which contributed to the type of relationships and networks formed through the festival.
Multi levels of network were referred to by respondents at all festivals regarding more formal networks instigated through the involvement of community groups or organisations and informal personal networks through individual involvement. The intentions and the ability of the festival organisers to instigate and develop networks contributed to a festival’s level of connectivity. Intentions alone were insufficient however, for if the organisers’ aims at connectivity were not apparent, and respondents perceived low levels of local content and opportunities, then a festival was seen as less able to connect and contribute to a network of belonging.

The findings show that purposely included heritage content was considered to primarily enable connections with place and community for outside visitors (tourists) and incomers to an area, over and above any connections for locals or insiders. Many local visitors stated they learnt little about the local culture from the festival. Respondents emphasised the educational purposes of including heritage as more important for potentially breaking down stereotypes and aiding integration for outsiders. Although deliberately included heritage may enhance a bridged network of connections to a wider community of interest for incomers and outsiders, heritage content had less impact on local community connectivity. It may even exclude sectors of the local community through perceptions of inauthenticity or non-localness.

**The Functioning of Networks through a Festival**
Festivals contribute to networks through, in particular, their ability to adapt to the needs of that community and to offer opportunities to engage at a number of levels in the working of the community. Respondents referred to the ability of festivals to encompass societal changes including demographic change in terms of employment and migration. All festivals were perceived as offering opportunities for incomers to integrate into a town/village, a positive example of a bridging network. However if too great an emphasis was perceived as being placed on the needs of outsiders (whether participants or audience), this could lead to feelings of exclusion within a community. Evidence suggested that a balance was the desirable state, with sufficient allowance for local needs to allow bonds to grow, whilst ensuring the festival did not encourage overtly bonded networks making it inaccessible to outsiders. This reflects what Curtis (2011:290) was describing in the ability of festivals to make connections with ‘the here and now and with other places and times’.
Festivals offer opportunities to engage with cultural forms at a variety of levels for a variety of stakeholders and are participatory activities. The value of the participatory nature of festivals is arguably a collective social value. Performances, artworks, carnival floats and parades are produced collectively for the festivals by groups of people. Individual craftspeople and artists also produce art work which contributes to the festival but many will also encourage visitor participation at a stall or exhibition, whether that is passive observation or actively joining a creative activity.

Participation in cultural activity at a festival contributed to the creation and maintenance of networks which, by definition, are reliant on participants to function. In turn this contributed to the survival of networks within communities. The data revealed that participation was motivated predominantly by social rather than creative reasons. The opportunity to interact with other members of the festival community was stated as most important, with creative benefits coming as a secondary bonus, and that joining in was much more important than having artistic skill. Respondents referred to the contribution to cultural continuity which participation between the generations made as this was seen to strengthen networks between young and old. This intergenerational participation was also seen as being necessary for the survival and continuity of the festival, continuing the cultural practice and providing the next generation of organisers and volunteers.

Conclusion
This paper argues that small-scale cultural festivals can satisfy the four indicators identified in the introduction to this paper, and contribute to the social sustainability of their host communities. The importance of connectivity and participation within communities (Partridge 2005) has been demonstrated, reflecting what Becker et al. (1999:6) call the ‘basically social’ core of sustainability. Festivals contribute to the social sustainability of their host communities through a balance of consistent and innovative connections with the culture, heritage and people of a place.

A balance was required between consistent processes in the organising and running of a festival, and opportunities for innovative approaches and adaptability. Festivals could provide frameworks of meaning through providing the time and space for networks both within and without the community to intermingle. Their potential to enable both bonded and bridged forms of connectivity were shown through the combination of formal and informal means of
knowledge exchange which occurred at the festivals. The bonded forms were more likely to
occur in informal settings and through the variety of participatory processes made possible
through the festival. Bridged connections were enabled through formal connections, through
the representation of organisations and groups and through organised activities. These formal
connections also played an important role in enabling or strengthening bonded connections
within a community by offering a “shop window” on the locale and the opportunity to
engage, even if this was not actively entered into.

The content of the festival must have balance between consistency with the heritage of the
place culture, and ability to bring in innovative and adaptable approaches to this content. This
reinforces the findings of Rose (2002), who suggested that a festival can reflect the nature of
a place whilst, as Duffy and Waitt (2011) proposed, simultaneously revealing the nature of
wider society. The display of locally originated and authentic culture is important for social
sustainability through enabling a sense of belonging and identity making. Recognition of
local heritage can contribute to a sustainable community and yet the inherited processes of
the festivals are largely unrecognised and heritage content perceived as being aimed
predominantly at outsiders. Where there is a perception of the organising committee as
accessible and inclusive (in terms of organisation and content), the consistent process of
staging a festival may subconsciously reinforce an understanding of the locale whilst offering
an opportunity for contestation and adaptation.

A small-scale, rural festival can potentially connect both traditional and contemporary aspects
of place, providing ‘a link between global space of flows and local space of place’ (Richards
and de Brito 2013:223). Festivals contribute to the duality of social sustainability, the need
for development and maintenance, through their ability to combine internal and external
connections and their propensity for consistency alongside innovation. A festival in itself
may have a duality of being locally rooted and yet able to branch out beyond the spatial
boundaries of place. Through a core local identity the community has a sense of ownership
and belonging, in combination with a more fluid dynamic allowing for new interactions,
ideas and inspiration from beyond the locale, enabling connections at many levels.

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