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**Exploring the Legacies  
of Small and Medium-  
Sized Cultural  
Festivals: Evidence  
from a Qualitative  
Study**

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# Exploring the Legacies of Small and Medium-Sized Cultural Festivals: Evidence from a Qualitative Study

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## Abstract

*This study applies a hybrid thematic analysis to examine the long-term consequences of small and medium-sized cultural festivals on host territories. It adopts a qualitative exploratory design based on semi-structured interviews with festival organizers and stakeholders. Drawing on the framework developed by Preuss (2019), the findings identify five interconnected domains of structural change; human, social, intellectual, institutional, and environmental; which give rise to differentiated forms of legacy, predominantly cultural, social, and economic. The evidence highlights the central role of festivals in fostering skills development, cultural participation, and network formation, while long-term consequences in urban, environmental, and institutional domains emerge more limited.*

*This research advances event legacy literature by building on Preuss (2019) distinction between structural changes and legacy within the context of cultural festivals, explicitly linking the two dimensions through an empirical analysis. In doing so, it proposes a more systematic framework for investigating long-term effects of events in non-mega-event settings. The study further expands the empirical scope of legacy research by focusing on underexplored provincial contexts, showing how festivals contribute to human capital formation, cultural diffusion, community building, and pathways to employability. The findings also provide practical insights for organizers, emphasizing the role of data collection, youth engagement, continuous educational initiatives, and multi-level collaboration in enhancing the enduring value of cultural festivals.*

**Keywords:** Festivals, Legacy, Cultural events, Long-term impacts, Local development

## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, Europe has witnessed a marked expansion in the number and diversity of cultural festivals, to the point that they are now widely recognized as a central component of contemporary cultural production (Quinn, 2006). In Italy alone, more than 3,000 cultural festivals of different genres and scales were organized in 2025 (IsiCult, 2025).

Situated at the intersection of artistic expression, cultural production and entertainment festivals fulfil multiple functions (Van Aalst, Van Melik, 2012). Beyond their educational role, they respond to economic and recreational demands, often acting as key entry points to cultural participation for broader audiences. They attract substantial public and private investment and are strategically deployed by cities to enhance urban attractiveness, stimulate local demand, strengthen place identity and foster social cohesion. (Waterman, 1998).

Despite this growing relevance, research has largely concentrated on short-term impacts, particularly economic outcomes (Zourgani et al., 2023), while the long-term consequences of events, referred to as *event legacy*, remain under-examined (Langen and Garcia, 2009; Mair and Whitford, 2013). Existing studies focus predominantly on mega sporting events (Leopkey, Parent, 2012; Thomson et al., 2013), and the limited work on cultural festivals is mostly confined to major international cases, often treated as stand-alone case studies (Lemmi et al., 2018; Wulandari, 2021). In the cultural field, there is still no shared framework for identifying and assessing long-term territorial outcomes, nor systematic investigations of the legacies associated with small- and medium-sized festivals.

This article addresses these gaps by applying a unified analytical model to examine the long-term consequences generated by cultural festivals and by advancing understanding of cultural festival legacies. It focuses specifically on small- and medium-scale festivals held in provincial urban contexts, which are particularly relevant as they account for approximately four-fifths of all festivals organised in Italy (IsiCult, 2025).

Analyzing their outcomes from a long-term perspective, rather than solely during the current edition, is crucial for fully grasping their role and for substantiating public support in terms of resources and cultural policies. The study is guided by the following overarching research question: what types of long-term legacies do small-and medium-sized cultural festivals generate in their host territories?

To address this question, the article adopts a qualitative methodological approach based on semi-structured interviews and a hybrid thematic analysis, using an established event legacy framework (Preuss, 2019) as the main reference for the classification of legacies. Empirically, the study draws on the case of Treviso, a medium-sized Italian city characterized by a strong presence of small and medium enterprises and a rich cultural heritage, which hosts numerous festivals and an innovative local festival network.

Overall, the research offers an integrated view of the long-term consequences generated by small- and medium-sized cultural festivals and contributes to both theoretical debates on the lasting effects of events and the development of practical tools for organizers seeking to enhance the positive impacts of their festivals on the hosting territories.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Event Legacy and Event Legacy Framework

The notion of *event legacy* designates the sum of long-term transformations that events produce in host communities. From the 1990s onwards, *event legacy* emerged in the literature as a key argumentative device to legitimate the large public expenditures associated with mega events, especially when short-term outcomes systematically failed to match political and economic expectations (Chappelet, 2012).

Although still relatively limited, the literature on *event legacy* has gradually complemented a body of work traditionally focused on short-term, predominantly economic impacts (Crompton, 1995). This scholarship has developed primarily in relation to sport mega-events, where the magnitude of investments, the scale of urban transformation and the high political visibility have rendered the notion of legacy particularly salient. In the Olympic context, in particular, legacy has progressively acquired institutional relevance, becoming a core component of the discourse of bidding and organizing committees (Preuss, 2019).

Despite its growing prominence, *event legacy* remains a concept that is not fully consolidated within the literature. As noted by Kassens-Noor et al. (2015), its interpretation varies considerably across scholars, resulting in persistent conceptual ambiguity. This fragmentation concerns issues such as its temporal scope, with some authors referring to event legacy as only post-event (Chalip, 2003; McCloy, 2003), while others also include pre-event effects (Getz, 2005; Hiller, 2000); its evaluative nature, with some authors considering it to encompass only positive effects (Hiller, 2000; McCloy, 2003) and others including negative effects as well (Chappelet, 2003; Getz, 1991); and its spatial scale, with some focusing exclusively on local effects (Getz, 1991; McCloy, 2003) and others adopting a more global interpretation (Moragas et al., 2003).

This fragmentation also concerns the classification of legacy dimensions. Existing studies propose a wide range of categorizations based on the sectors in which long-term effects materialize. Among the most cited, Cashman and Horne (2013) identifies economic, physical infrastructure, education, public life, politics and culture, sport, and symbolic dimensions such as memory and history. Similarly, Chappelet et al. (2006) distinguish among sporting, urban, infrastructural, economic, and social legacies, a classification later expanded by Cornelissen et al. (2011) to include environmental, political, and image-related dimensions.

While these approaches underscore the inherently multidimensional nature of legacy, they also highlight the absence of a unified analytical framework capable of systematically guiding its identification and evaluation.

Against this background, Preuss (2019) proposes a definition that underpins an operational framework for identifying and assessing event-generated legacies, the *event legacy framework*. He defines legacies as “any outcomes that affect people and/or space caused by structural changes that stem from the Olympic Games” (Preuss 2019, p. 106), thereby introducing an important distinction in the literature between *structural changes* and *legacy*. Structural changes refer to the modifications directly induced by an event within the host territory during its preparation or implementation that persist over time (Preuss, 2019). Legacy, by contrast, denotes the longer-term consequences that these structural changes generate across different spheres of society.

In the context of sport events, Preuss (2019) identifies six main types of structural change:

- urban development, such as infrastructural interventions or the construction and renovation of facilities;
- environmental improvement, through the adoption of sustainable practices or technologies;
- policy and governance adjustments, including new regulations or organizational arrangements introduced in connection with the event;
- human development, reflected in changes in skills, knowledge and relational networks;
- intellectual property, in the form of new cultural, scientific or creative outputs;
- social development, encompassing shifts in values, perceptions and collective practices.

These structural changes can, in turn, give rise to different kinds of legacies, depending on the dimension under consideration, for instance economic, social, cultural, environmental or political (Preuss 2019; Preuss 2024).

Following the *event legacy framework*, analysis should therefore proceed in two steps: first, by identifying the structural changes generated by the event; and second, by examining the longer-term consequences that these changes produce across the various sectors of society, that is, the legacies.

This distinction is particularly useful, as it enables a more systematic identification of the full range of long-term consequences generated by an event, differentiating between those directly attributable to the event and easily recognizable and those more indirectly associated with it. In this way, Preuss (2019) offers a more comprehensive perspective than earlier contributions, which tended to group all consequences under a single label without explicitly considering their causal linkages, thereby risking an incomplete understanding of the long-term effects produced by events.

Although this framework does not fully resolve issues related to temporal boundaries or the measurement of legacy, it provides a more robust analytical structure by explicitly linking event-induced transformations to their downstream effects. This is particularly valuable for empirical research, as it enables a more systematic examination of how event-related processes translate into enduring outcomes. For this reason, the present study adopts the framework proposed by Preuss (2019) as its analytical foundation and uses it to operationalize the distinction between structural changes and legacy in the analysis of cultural festivals in small- and medium-sized contexts.

## 2.2 Event legacy in cultural festivals

Festivals can be defined as “periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds and sharing a worldview” (Falassi, 1987, p. 2). In contemporary societies, festivals are not only educational spaces but also fulfil important economic and recreational functions, operating at the intersection of artistic expression, cultural production and entertainment (Finkel, Platt, 2020; Van Aalst, Van Melik, 2012)

Festivals have been examined from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including anthropology, sociology, geography, and economics, but are now predominantly analysed in the field of event studies and related research on urban cultural economies and tourism (Cudny, 2014; Finkel, Platt, 2020; Getz, 2005). Within this field, the literature is particularly extensive with regard to short-term impacts on host territories, with a strong emphasis on economic effects such as visitor expenditure, local business revenues, and employment. (Rivera et al., 2008, Tohmo, 2005)

By contrast, research on the long-term consequences of cultural festivals remains comparatively limited. Existing contributions are largely case-based, often focusing on large or emblematic events and typically addressing a single, predefined dimension of legacy, such as cultural capital formation or place image (Duignan et al., 2018; Eshuis et al., 2014; Koenig Lewis et al., 2021;). Exploratory, multi-case studies that consider small- and medium-sized festivals and aim to capture the full range of long-term outcomes for host communities remain scarce.

In this context, the *event legacy framework* developed by Preuss (2019) for sport mega-events provides a useful lens. By distinguishing between structural changes directly induced by an event—such as urban development, environmental practices, human development, intellectual property, and social development—and the legacies generated by these changes over time across different societal domains, the framework enables a more systematic organization of existing findings on festival-related transformations and their enduring effects. Applied to cultural festivals, this distinction helps disentangle changes directly generated by events from longer-term economic, urban, social, and, crucially, cultural legacies created by those changes

In line with Preuss (2019) *event legacy framework*, the literature on cultural festivals documents several types of structural changes and their associated long-term consequences.

With regard to urban development, the literature highlights a range of transformations associated with major festivals, including the regeneration of underutilized urban areas, the enhancement of tourist facilities, the construction of permanent cultural venues, the upgrading of technical infrastructure, and the restoration of existing cultural sites. (Casanova, Hernandez, 2011; Quinn, 2006; Ranisio, 2020; Wulandari, 2021). Although generally smaller in scale than those associated with sport mega-events, these interventions nonetheless reshape the urban fabric. Urban regeneration can expand the availability of spaces dedicated to cultural activities, thereby increasing both the volume and diversity of cultural initiatives and enhancing local cultural capital (Finkel and Platt, 2020). From an economic perspective, regenerated areas may continue to attract visitors beyond the festival period, sustaining demand for local goods and services. Studies also report improvements in perceived safety, increases in property values, and upgrades in tourism infrastructure, all of which contribute to the growth of tourist flows, thus creating an economic legacy (Gibson, Stewart, 2009). Moreover, similarly to sport mega-events—where new facilities encourage participation in sports—the creation or restoration of artistic infrastructure can stimulate both the supply of cultural initiatives and cultural consumption among residents, thereby consolidating cultural legacies. (De Valck, 2007) Conversely, the loss of cultural venues may lead to a contraction of artistic activities and negative effects on the local cultural ecosystem. (Cudny, 2016)

In the domain of environmental improvement, the literature reports relatively few structural ecological interventions. Most studies instead emphasize initiatives aimed at raising environmental awareness among audiences or the adoption of eco-sustainable practices in festival organization, with the objective of diffusing “green” behaviors among participants and event organizers (Wulandari, 2021; Zifkos, 2015). Only in isolated cases Finkel e Platt (2020) are physical alterations of the territory reported. Evidence suggests that both thematic programming and sustainable management practices can increase environmental awareness among audiences and organizers, encouraging the adoption of environmentally responsible behaviors in everyday life and in future event planning (Wulandari, 2021).

Regarding human development, the literature provides limited systematic evidence on skill acquisition among festival workers or volunteers, although this represents a promising area for integration with broader research on event volunteering (Katz, Rosemberg, 2005; Prouteau, Wolff, 2006). Nonetheless, scholars highlight the role of festivals as temporary clusters where artists meet, exchange ideas, and establish long-term professional relationships (Comunian, 2017). Gibson and Stewart (2009) show that skills and networks developed through festival participation can facilitate integration into professional circuits within the cultural and event sectors, thereby generating local economic benefits. At the same time, the lack of empirical studies linking volunteering to transferable skills or improved employment prospects limits the robustness of conclusions in this area. Relationships formed during festivals may also evolve into enduring collaborations, leading to new artistic productions that enrich the local cultural repertoire and can themselves be considered cultural legacies (Quinn, 2006).

With respect to intellectual property, existing contributions mainly highlight the production of new artistic and cultural outputs generated within the festival context. Unlike sport mega-events, where attention often focuses on technological innovation, festival-related outputs typically consist of artistic works building upon existing cultural forms, such as theatre productions, visual arts, and literary works. (Quinn, 2006)

Finally, in the domain of social development, the literature consistently emphasizes the capacity of festivals to valorize cultural traditions and enhance the visibility of host territories. (Karabağ, 2011; Mair, Duffy, 2019). Similar to sport mega-events, which tend to increase public interest in sport, cultural festivals promote cultural knowledge and appreciation among audiences and may introduce new artistic genres to broader publics. (Dowell et al., 2019; Kruger, Saayman, 2017; Quinn, 2006) A particularly significant dimension concerns place image. Media coverage associated with festivals can increase the visibility of a locality, reshape perceptions by portraying it as culturally vibrant, and position it within international cultural circuits. (Eshuis et al., 2020; Ingham, 2023; Ranisio, 2020; Sahoo, Mukunda, 2020). As in the case of sport mega-events, the literature reports increase in tourist flows linked to enhanced visibility (Eshuis et al., 2020; Lemmi et al., 2018). These changes may involve not only a quantitative rise in visitors but also the attraction of new segments of demand. Festivals can contribute to associating a territory with specific cultural productions, attracting artists and creative professionals. (Quinn, 2006; Wulandari, 2021).

Festivals are widely recognized as key sites of social interaction, facilitating connections, including informal and spontaneous ties (De Luca, Donelli and Panozzo, 2026), both among geographically dispersed individuals who share common interests and among local residents. The literature strongly emphasizes their role as spaces of social aggregation, where opportunities for encounter and exchange enable the formation of new social ties while also reinforcing existing ones within the host community (Mair, Duffy, 2019; Ranisio, 2020). In this sense, festivals simultaneously foster external linkages, by attracting participants from diverse contexts, and strengthen internal cohesion by bringing together local populations in shared cultural experiences. As noted by Mair and Duffy (2019), such dynamics contribute to the consolidation of collective identity and to the development of a sense of pride and belonging within host communities.

The literature shows that cultural festivals generate a range of structural changes and legacy across urban, social, cultural, environmental, and economic domains, including urban regeneration, cultural production, social cohesion, place branding, and the diffusion of sustainable practices. However, these findings remain fragmented, often derived from single case studies and predominantly focused on large-scale events, with limited attention to small- and medium-sized festivals. As a result, the long-term legacy of cultural festivals is still only partially understood, highlighting the need for more systematic, comparative, and multi-dimensional research in this field.

### **3. Objectives and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Scope**

This research project aims to analyze the long-term effects generated by small- and medium-sized cultural festivals on their hosting territories. Adopting an exploratory approach, this working paper lays the groundwork for identifying the key variables through which such effects can be assessed.

In a prospective view, the study seeks to foreshadow the identification of the most relevant dimensions and indicators associated with festival legacy, contributing to the development of a structured analytical

framework. Particular attention is devoted to festivals operating in small-scale and non-metropolitan contexts, which remain largely underexplored in the existing literature.

While cultural festivals are increasingly recognized as drivers of local development, prior research has predominantly focused on large-scale events, often overlooking smaller initiatives and their long-term implications. This gap limits the understanding of how such events contribute to place-based development processes over time.

Against this background, the main objective of this working paper is to identify and systematize the key variables characterizing the long-term impact of cultural festivals, providing a conceptual basis for future comparative analyses. Ultimately, this research aims to support the development of a predictive model linking festival characteristics to their potential long-term outcomes on the hosting territory.

### 3.2 Data

This study draws on 19 semi-structured interviews conducted between April 2024 and July 2025 with members of the organizing teams of cultural festivals held in Treviso (Veneto, Italy). The demographics of the analyzed festivals are presented in Table 1. The city was selected as a representative case of a medium-sized provincial context characterized by a rich cultural environment and a dense calendar of small- and medium-scale festivals distributed throughout the year. Collectively accounting for approximately 200 events annually, these festivals vary widely in thematic focus while remaining comparable in scale and organizational structure.

The sample was designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of the local festival landscape, as 20 festivals were active in the reference year. Festivals were identified through publicly available sources and personal networks, and participation was based on respondents' availability. Within this context, members of the organizing teams were selected as key informants due to their direct involvement in festival planning and implementation, which enables them to provide informed and reflective insights into potential long-term effects on the hosting territory.

Interviews were conducted either online or in person, lasted on average 75 minutes, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent before being transcribed using an intelligent verbatim approach aimed at enhancing clarity while preserving meaning.

The interviews were guided by a flexible protocol informed by the literature on event legacy, gradually moving from general to more specific questions. This approach ensured consistency across interviews while allowing respondents to elaborate freely and enabling the emergence of unanticipated insights.

The resulting transcripts were analyzed through a structured coding process combining inductive and deductive logics, allowing empirical insights to emerge while progressively connecting them to established theoretical frameworks. The detailed coding procedure and the development of higher-order themes are presented in the following section.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the analyzed festivals

<b>Festival name</b>	<b>Main theme</b>	<b>Year of foundation</b>	<b>Year of termination</b>
4passi	Solidarity and sustainable economy	2004	Still going
Avanscena	Stage design	2013	Still going
Carta Carbone Festival	Literary	2013	Still going
Edera Film Festival	Film	2018	Still going
Festival Anthropica	Street art	2015	2021
Young Thinkers Festival	Philosophy	2017	Still going
L'Arsenale	Contemporary music	2009	Still going
Mythos	Classical theatre	2022	Still going
Nipponbashi Matsuri	Japanese culture	2010	2019
Q.Pido Festival	LGBTQ+ rights and inclusivity	2018	Still going
Robe da Mati	Mental health	2017	Still going
Sole Luna Doc Film Festival	Documentary	2006 (a Palermo) 2014 (a Treviso)	2022
StatisticAll	Statistics	2015	Still going

Subculture Festival	Arts	2004	Still going
Treviso Comic Book Festival	Comics		Still going
Treviso Creativity Week	Entrepreneurship	2017	Still going
Treviso Giallo	Literary	2017	Still going
Treviso Suona Jazz Festival	Jazz music		Still going
VivaVoce International A Cappella Festival	Cappella singing	2005	Still going

### 3.3 Data analysis

The data analysis process followed a three-stage approach.

The first stage consisted of a familiarization process, during which all interviews were read twice in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the collected material. During this phase, preliminary notes and analytical reflections were recorded to capture emerging insights and recurrent patterns.

In the second stage, an initial coding process was undertaken. Although the interview protocol had been informed by themes identified in the literature, these were not imposed during the early stages of analysis in order to preserve an open, data-driven approach. Codes were instead generated inductively by identifying recurring meanings and patterns within the interviews and assigning labels to relevant text segments. These ranged from single sentences to longer passages, depending on their analytical significance, and in some cases were associated with multiple codes. Following this initial phase, the interviews were re-examined and the coding scheme was iteratively refined until a stable set of codes was achieved. In total, 49 codes were generated.

The final stage involved the aggregation of codes into higher-order themes by drawing on established theoretical frameworks. In particular, codes were mapped onto the categories of structural change proposed by Preuss (2019)—namely human development, social development, intellectual property, environmental enhancement, urban change and governance—as well as onto the main types of legacy identified in the literature. While all categories of structural change were represented in the data, only a subset of legacy types emerged as empirically relevant, specifically those related to social, economic, urban, and cultural dimensions. Additionally, several codes pointed to economic impact dynamics, which were retained in the analysis despite the study's primary focus on long-term effects.

The table with the codes associated with each theme follows below (table 2).

Table 2: Summary of codes belonging to each theme

Theme	Codes
Human development	activities for young people outside of schools, collaboration with other festivals, collaboration with universities, involvement of schools, guest details, audience details, connections between guests, presence of activities throughout the year, volunteers
Social development	activities for young people outside of schools, collaboration with other festivals, collaboration with foundations, collaboration with the productive sector, involvement of schools, event details, guest details, brand locations, presence of activities throughout the year, discovery of new talents, tradition/innovation, use of municipal venues, use of cultural venues, use of private venues
Intellectual property	activities for young people outside of schools, collaboration with other festivals, creation of works during the festival, involvement of schools

Environmental enhancement	collaboration with foundations, involvement of schools, environmental sustainability
Urban change	creation of works during the festival
Governance	involvement of young people in the organizing team, festival network
Social legacy	festive/playful elements, connections between guests, perception of citizenship
Cultural legacy	activities for young people outside of schools, considerations about Treviso, involvement of schools, audience details, connections between guests, creation of associations related to the theme, creation of similar events, creation of schools related to the theme, discovery of new talents, legitimization of the art form, use of cultural venues
Economic legacy	activities for young people outside of schools, involvement of schools, changes in the sale/use of hospitality and catering venues, emergence of new commercial activities, creation of schools related to the theme, return of guests to Treviso, discovery of new talents, use of municipal venues, changes in real estate value, volunteers
Urban legacy	considerations about Treviso, construction of venues, use of municipal venues

#### 4. Findings

The interview analysis indicates that cultural festivals in Treviso generate transformations that map onto all the categories of structural change identified by Holger Preuss (2019), namely human development, social development, intellectual property, environmental enhancement, urban change, and governance. These transformations, in turn, give rise to different forms of event legacy; primarily cultural, social, economic, and urban; with varying intensity across the cases.

##### *1. Human development and cultural legacy*

The findings show that a substantial number of festivals contribute to skill development and the strengthening of relational capacities, particularly among younger participants and volunteers.

Educational initiatives are widespread: 10 out of 19 festivals incorporate workshops, seminars, and training activities into their official programmes, while 13 report structured collaborations with schools, often extending beyond the duration of the event. These initiatives take multiple forms, including competitions (2 festivals), workshops and seminars (11 festivals), and, in 5 cases, activities organized throughout the year.

While these initiatives clearly support the acquisition of competences in specific cultural domains, their long-term impact in terms of employability or autonomous cultural production is only partially observable. Stronger evidence emerges regarding their capacity to stimulate cultural engagement. Among the 13 festivals targeting younger audiences, 5 organize year-round activities and 2 report concrete outcomes. In the case of Mythos, participation in free theatre workshops led some students to enroll in paid courses offered under the same brand and also fostered intergenerational participation, with students bringing their parents to performances. A similar dynamic is reported by StatisticAll, where students involved in training activities subsequently engaged their families during the festival. These cases suggest that structured educational initiatives can expand cultural participation beyond the temporal boundaries of the event, thereby generating cultural legacies.

Volunteering constitutes an additional mechanism of human development. Fifteen festivals engage volunteers, primarily high school and university students, in organizational and operational roles. In 7 cases, interviewees report concrete outcomes in which former volunteers have leveraged their experience to access employment opportunities. More specifically, 3 festivals report cases of employment in external organizations, 2 indicate hiring by festival partners, and 3 describe transitions from volunteer roles to positions within the festival organization itself. Although such evidence is not systematically available across

all festivals, it illustrates how skills acquisition and relational networks developed within the festival context may translate into professional opportunities, contributing both to human capital formation and to elements of economic legacy.

Networking processes further strengthen this dimension. Fifteen festivals explicitly report the creation or consolidation of relational networks, and 9 provide concrete examples of collaborations among artists arising from festival interactions, particularly during informal and convivial moments embedded in the programme. Although not all festivals are able to document specific outcomes, these interactions have, in several cases, led to new cultural outputs, contributing to both social and cultural legacies.

## *II. Social development and social and cultural legacy*

The data indicate that festivals operate as spaces of social interaction, facilitating encounters among individuals belonging to different social groups. All 19 festivals analyzed incorporate convivial and informal moments into their programmes, which are described as key mechanisms for fostering exchange and relationship-building.

A strong local anchoring emerges: 16 out of 19 festivals report that their audience is predominantly drawn from the province of Treviso. Although only 3 festivals systematically collect detailed audience data, all confirm a prevailing presence of local residents. In some cases, festivals explicitly integrate community-oriented practices—such as food-related events linked to local traditions—aimed at reinforcing social cohesion and a sense of belonging. While only 2 festivals explicitly report this outcome, the recurrence of such practices suggests a broader role in strengthening local social ties.

At the same time, 10 festivals report the participation of artists from outside the province, including international contributors, thereby introducing elements of cultural exchange and exposure to diverse perspectives. In addition, two festivals—Anthropica and the Treviso Comic Book Festival—stand out for having contributed to the legitimization of specific cultural forms within the local context, such as urban art and comics, thus fostering the emergence of local creative communities.

More broadly, 5 out of 11 festivals operating in artistic domains report concrete evidence of new initiatives or activities inspired by their programming. These include the establishment of schools, associations, and parallel events, as well as increased participation in related training programmes. For instance, the Treviso Comic Book Festival reports the emergence of comic schools and associations, alongside rising enrollment in courses, while other festivals highlight similar dynamics in their respective fields. These patterns point to the existence of cultural legacies in terms of the diffusion and institutionalization of specific cultural practices.

In terms of participation, all festivals report an increase in audience size over time, in some cases accompanied by a rejuvenation of the public. Although systematic data on audience composition are limited, this trend suggests a gradual broadening of cultural engagement.

With regard to territorial visibility, only one festival explicitly reports contributing to the international positioning of Treviso, while others provide more indirect indications of change. Interviewees notably emphasize a broader shift in the perceived image of the city; from a “closed” to a more culturally vibrant and “open” environment; indicating the emergence of a symbolic and reputational legacy.

Collaborations with private companies (17 festivals), foundations (6), and business associations (8) further reinforce the social dimension by linking festivals to the local productive system. Although their specific outcomes are not always explicitly articulated, these collaborations contribute to consolidating inter-organizational networks and embedding festivals within the local socio-economic fabric.

## *III. Urban change and urban legacy*

No festivals report permanent infrastructural transformations or major modifications to the built environment. Instead, urban change is primarily manifested through artistic interventions embedded in the urban landscape.

Anthropica has contributed to the creation of the Restera Art District through the production of murals across successive editions, supporting the requalification of the area and, according to interviewees, increasing visitor flows and local economic activity. Similarly, the Treviso Comic Book Festival has promoted site-

specific interventions, including murals and the Progetto Vettrine, involving over 35 illustrators and more than 250 shop windows across the city.

Although limited in number, these initiatives contribute to the aesthetic enhancement and symbolic re-signification of urban spaces.

#### *IV. Intellectual property and cultural production legacy*

The data indicate that 6 out of 19 festivals contribute to the production of original cultural outputs. In 3 cases, these outputs result from structured educational or participatory initiatives targeting young participants; in others, they are embedded in the core format of the festival, such as competitions or curated productions.

These outputs include texts, performances, audiovisual productions, and publications. While only one case reports commercial distribution, several channels of dissemination operate within cultural and educational circuits. For example, catalogues are distributed through local libraries, and student-produced works are made accessible via institutional platforms. These processes support the accumulation and circulation of locally generated cultural production, creating cultural and educational legacies even in the absence of direct economic returns.

#### *V. Policy, governance, and institutional legacy*

The findings underscore the importance of coordination mechanisms among festivals. The existence of a local network facilitates the alignment of schedules, the sharing of resources, and the organization of joint initiatives, with all participating festivals reporting at least one instance of collaboration.

The network also acts as a collective interface with local public authorities, enabling the articulation of shared needs. However, its impact on structural conditions appears limited. In particular, despite recurring demands, no evidence emerges of investments in new cultural infrastructures or the renovation of existing spaces. This points to an institutional legacy that is primarily expressed in terms of coordination and collective capacity, rather than substantive structural policy change.

#### *VI. Environmental enhancement and environmental legacy*

The empirical evidence does not reveal structural interventions explicitly oriented toward improving environmental sustainability. Rather, environmental concerns are predominantly addressed at the level of programming content. Nine out of 19 festivals report initiatives focused on environmental themes, including seminars, talks, and exhibitions.

In several cases these activities are accompanied by specific practices, such as the use of recycled materials for communication tools. Taken together, these initiatives primarily contribute to raising participants' awareness, indicating the presence of a discursive environmental legacy centred on the dissemination of sustainability-related values.

### *Synthesis*

The findings show that small- and medium-sized cultural festivals generate structural changes across all dimensions identified by Preuss (2019), producing diverse forms of legacy, primarily cultural, social, and economic. Evidence highlights a strong contribution to human and relational capital, with widespread educational initiatives and school collaborations, as well as extensive volunteer involvement. Festivals also foster social interaction and local cohesion, while supporting cultural diffusion, audience development, and the emergence of creative communities.

By contrast, impacts in urban, environmental, and institutional domains appear more limited and predominantly intangible, with few infrastructural transformations and mainly awareness-raising initiatives. Overall, the results suggest that such festivals act primarily as generators of cultural participation and social networks, while their capacity to produce structural, long-term transformations remains more constrained.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Theoretical implications**

The first theoretical contribution of this study lies in applying Preuss (2019) framework on structural changes and legacy to the context of cultural festivals. This approach allows the analysis to clearly distinguish between changes directly generated by events and the longer-term effects that emerge from them, while also highlighting the relationship between the two. Although these concepts are present in the literature, they are often treated in an implicit or overlapping way. By making this distinction more explicit and empirically grounded, the study helps clarify how event-related transformations translate into legacy outcomes and supports the development of more systematic approaches to analyzing event legacy, particularly in non-mega-event contexts.

A further contribution concerns the empirical investigation of festival legacies in under-researched settings. As outlined in the preceding paragraph, prior work has largely concentrated on large-scale or hallmark events, whereas research on small- and medium-sized festivals, especially in provincial areas, remains limited. Through a systematic mapping of the range of effects generated in such a context, this study broadens the empirical scope of legacy research and brings to light dynamics that tend to be overlooked in the literature on large events.

The findings also yield new insights into the relationship between festival-based educational initiatives, skills development, and longer-term cultural engagement. While the role of festival-driven training activities in shaping participants' trajectories has not been systematically examined, the evidence suggests that such initiatives may foster not only competence-building but also sustained cultural participation and, in some cases, the activation of broader social networks.

In a similar vein, the study contributes to research on volunteering, which has predominantly focused either on motivations or on general skill acquisition and employability in event settings (Katz, Rosemberg, 2005; Prouteau, Wolff, 2006), paying limited attention to cultural festivals as environments for professionalization. The results indicate that volunteering within festivals may support both skills development and access to employment opportunities, thereby positioning festivals as potential entry points into the labor market.

An additional contribution concerns networking processes. While previous studies have predominantly conceptualized festivals as temporary clusters that facilitate interaction among artists (Comunian, 2017), the present analysis shows that networking also involves participants in educational activities and younger audiences, thus extending the scope of relational dynamics beyond professional artistic communities. More broadly, the study refines and extends existing knowledge on the social and cultural role of festivals (Kruiger and Saayman 2017; Quinn, 2006).

Consistent with prior research (Mair, Duffy, 2019), festivals emerge as spaces of social interaction, particularly for individuals who share specific cultural interests; however, the findings demonstrate that these dynamics are not confined to large-scale events, but are equally salient in smaller, locally embedded festivals with predominantly community-based participation.

The results further indicate that the capacity of festivals to legitimize and disseminate specific cultural forms is not restricted to large or internationally renowned events (Ingham, 2023), but can also be observed in smaller initiatives. Similarly, the emergence of local artistic communities following the introduction of new artistic forms previously documented in larger contexts (Quinn 2006) appears to occur, albeit at a reduced scale, in provincial settings (es. street art)

At the same time, the analysis selectively confirms several patterns identified in the existing literature. The limited structural environmental impact of festivals aligns with studies on event sustainability, which suggest that, unlike mega-events, smaller initiatives tend to address environmental issues primarily through programming rather than through infrastructural transformation (Wulandari, 2021; Zifkos, 2015). Likewise, the absence of strong, measurable effects on tourism flows and long-term destination attractiveness is consistent with earlier research indicating that only large-scale events typically generate sustained destination legacies (Eshuis et al., 2020; Lemmi et al., 2018).

The study also identifies some points of divergence and underexplored dimensions. In contrast to major festivals (Casanova, Hernandez, 2011; Quinn, 2006; Ranisio, 2020; Wulandari, 2021), there is no evidence of urban transformations in the form of new infrastructure or large-scale redevelopment; rather, urban change is expressed through artistic interventions, implying a more symbolic and incremental form of impact. Additionally, although the evidence is limited, the identification of cases in which festivals contribute to the creation or consolidation of local business (e.g., the emergence of comics schools encouraged by TCBF or

the commercial activities developed within the Restera Art District) activities points to a potentially significant, yet under-investigated, dimension of festival legacy and indicates a promising direction for future research.

## **5.2 Managerial implications**

This study offers a set of practical recommendations for cultural festival organizers seeking to strengthen the long-term impacts of their events on the host territory.

A first critical issue emerging from the Treviso case is the limited availability of systematic audience data. Only a minority of festivals collect structured information on participants (e.g., attendance, demographics, origin, level of engagement), while most rely on internal perceptions. More robust data collection, through on-site surveys, digital ticketing, QR codes, or web and social media analytics, would support evidence-based management and enhance festivals' ability to demonstrate their value to external stakeholders, thereby facilitating access to funding, sponsorship, and public support. Furthermore, objective evidence of participation could help organizers secure additional partnerships and funding, as well as strengthen their advocacy efforts with municipal authorities.

A second implication concerns the strategic engagement of young people. Festivals that actively involve younger generations, via volunteering, internships, or collaborations with educational institutions, report benefits in terms of audience renewal. Young participants introduce new perspectives and help align festival offerings with contemporary cultural consumption patterns, while also enhancing inclusiveness and contributing to local human capital development.

Closely related is the role of educational activities, particularly when implemented on a continuous basis throughout the year. Evidence from Treviso suggests that sustained educational initiatives, especially those targeting young audiences, can foster interest in specific cultural expressions and encourage ongoing cultural participation. Yet such activities remain unevenly distributed across festivals. Stronger collaborations with schools and universities could support their expansion, although budgetary constraints and the need to align with academic calendars must be considered. Inter-festival cooperation may offer a viable strategy, enabling cost-sharing and the provision of complementary learning opportunities.

The findings also underline the importance of reinforcing local partnerships. While most festivals collaborate with private firms, mainly through sponsorship, fewer engage in co-created initiatives with local associations, educational institutions, or cultural organizations. Expanding these collaborations could increase visibility, strengthen community ties, and support the diffusion of cultural practices. Similarly, greater engagement with social and environmental organizations could augment both reputational and societal impacts: although environmental themes are frequently included in programming, partnerships with specialized organizations remain limited, constraining the potential for more substantive behavioral change among participants.

Another implication concerns the valorization and dissemination of cultural outputs generated within festivals. Many creative products arising from educational or participatory activities remain confined to restricted channels (e.g., festival websites, local libraries). Shared digital archives or platforms could increase their visibility, preserve locally generated cultural production, and extend its impact over time.

More broadly, the analysis highlights collaboration as a key driver of long-term impact. Stable relationships with schools, universities, businesses, associations, and other festivals can enhance both the cultural and economic sustainability of events, while contributing to community building and local identity formation. In this respect, the Treviso case illustrates the underexploited potential of festival networks. The existing network of 16 festivals already supports coordination, knowledge sharing, and resource exchange, but its role as a collective promotional and strategic actor remains limited. Strengthening its communication function, through a shared digital platform, integrated calendars, and coordinated social media, could position Treviso more effectively as a "city of festivals." Despite persistent challenges related to divergent identities, scarce resources, and coordination costs, even incremental measures such as cross-promotion or joint audience packages could generate meaningful benefits.

Finally, enhanced collaboration with public institutions could enable more structured and durable urban interventions. Although some festivals have contributed artistic elements to public space, these remain isolated initiatives. A more strategic alignment between festivals and local authorities could support multi-year cultural projects, improving urban quality and strengthening the city's cultural profile.

Overall, the Treviso experience indicates that, even in resource-constrained settings, cultural festivals can increase their long-term impact through data-driven management, youth engagement, continuous education, and, above all, multi-level collaboration. These elements constitute key levers for transforming festivals from temporary events into enduring drivers of cultural and social development.

## 6. Limitations and future research trajectories

This research presents some limitations that open up avenues for further development.

The analysis relies exclusively on data derived from interviews which, although rich and in-depth, reflect the subjective perspectives of the respondents. In particular, the predominance of festival organizers has facilitated the emergence of positive outcomes, while potentially negative effects and viewpoints from other stakeholders have not been explored. Moreover, the lack of systematic information on audiences and local actors makes it difficult to empirically verify some of the hypothesized consequences and to attribute observed changes specifically to festivals, especially in the absence of structured indicators and a comparative framework.

These limitations point to several directions for future research. First, the development of specific indicators would be crucial not only to identify festival legacies but also to measure and evaluate them more rigorously. Such an approach would allow the analysis to evolve from a primarily descriptive perspective towards a more structured and comparable assessment, ultimately contributing to the creation of a comprehensive procedural framework tailored to the cultural events sector. In addition, comparative studies across similar small- and medium-sized festival contexts, as well as longitudinal analyses of individual events, would help test the generalizability of the findings and reveal further long-term effects.

Future research could also deepen the understanding of less explored legacies by involving audiences and local stakeholders more systematically, for instance through surveys and mixed-method approaches. This would make it possible to assess aspects such as cultural engagement, participation patterns, community cohesion, and changes in social or environmental behaviors linked to festivals. At the same time, further investigation into the long-term effects on partners and organizations involved, as well as on the perception and use of cultural venues, would provide a more balanced and measurable picture of festival legacies.

Finally, additional attention could be devoted to the role of volunteering and educational initiatives connected to festivals. Examining their contribution to skills development, network formation and future opportunities, alongside the long-term consequences of year-round educational programmes on cultural participation, would further strengthen the understanding of how festival-related activities generate lasting value.

Overall, these lines of inquiry would support the construction of a more robust, measurable and context-sensitive framework for analyzing the legacies of cultural festivals.

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