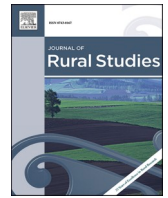


Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

Understanding the cultural potential of rural festivals: A conceptual framework of cultural capital development

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Audience
Cultural capital
Cultural heritage
Embodiment
Festivals
Rural

ABSTRACT

This study examines the under-investigated cultural outcomes of small-scale festivals. Specifically, it uses Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to explore the cultural outcomes of festival participation in rural locations, investigating if and how small-scale festivals are arenas for displaying, reinforcing, and acquiring culture. The aims were to investigate whether attendees enhance their cultural capital by participating in literary festivals and to identify the elements that play a role in this process. Interviews and observations were undertaken at two small-scale literary festivals: Listowel Writers' Week located in a rural village in the west of Ireland, and Pordenonelegge located in a small town in the north of Italy. Findings reveal that cultural capital can be reinforced, stimulated, and acquired in a process that is shaped by both internal and external elements. A new conceptual model capturing this process is presented. The model characterises the internal elements as: demographic features, behavioural dimension, enjoyment, involvement, and pre-existing capitals; and the external elements as: festival features, social context, spatial and temporal dimensions. The empirical findings show how rural literary festivals can be rewarding and fulfilling experiences that lead to individual cultural capital development. Further research is needed to examine whether the model portraying the development of cultural capital associated with literary festival participation can be applied to other types of festivals.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, arts festivals have spread worldwide (Quinn, 2010). They play several important social, cultural, economic, and political functions, and are now 'one of the main players on the stage of modern cultural consumption' (McGillivray and Frew, 2015, p. 2650). Much of the literature on festivals has focused on measuring the economic impact of festivals. However, recent research has started to explore how festival participation can be beneficial for participants on a personal level. For instance, scholars have investigated the socio-cultural impacts of festivals and events on participants (Sharpley and Stone, 2012). Scholars have also started to explore 'the social sustainability of festivals in rural settings' (Hjalager and Kwiatkowski, 2018, p. 218) and the role they play in generating local identity (Lin and Bestor, 2020), social capital, and a range of benefits at the personal level. Yet there is still much truth in the assertion that 'little attention has been devoted solely to the value gained from attending festivals from a visitor's perspective' (Lee et al., 2012, p. 335).

In recent decades, 'festivals have become frequent in small cities'

(Lorentzen, 2013, p. 53) and the growth of festivals has been interpreted by many to represent a trend of festivalisation (Jordan, 2016). This means that the term festival is now a 'generic label' for all types of celebrations and gatherings (Ronström, 2016, p. 67), and that with the rise of festivalisation, many different kinds of cultural productions are being 'in a festival-like way' (Ronström, 2016, p. 67). We are, therefore, experiencing an increasing expansion of festival products in space, time, and content. This development poses new challenges and is criticised by some scholars who argue that it is linked to the commercialisation of aesthetic culture (Négrier, 2015). Their contention is that festivalisation 'is driven by market factors rather than aesthetics' (Jordan, 2016, p. 51) and they argue that festivals are turning into commercial products. However, others disagree, arguing that the growth and spread of festivals represents a democratisation of culture. For example, 'rural festivals are regarded as contributors to pleasurable hedonism, as well as to the social and cultural cohesion of communities' (Hjalager and Kwiatkowski, 2018, p. 217). Similarly, Wynn (2015), while exploring American music festivals, argued that they are moments of networking and local cultural growth. All this suggests that there is a need to explore more

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.05.009>

Received 5 November 2020; Received in revised form 17 April 2021; Accepted 26 May 2021

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fully both the cultural benefits gained through event participation (Getz and Page, 2016) and the extent to which rural festivals generate individual cultural outcomes.

Such a research agenda could be advanced in a number of ways, but this paper proposes using Bourdieu's ideas about cultural capital as a theoretical framework. Generally speaking, cultural capital is infrequently studied in festival contexts, and even less so in respect of specific types of festivals like literary festivals (Weber, 2018). Wilks and Quinn (2016, p. 35) noted a scarcity of research on how festivals generate cultural capital for participants, stating that 'to date, the role that festivals play in forming, maintaining and shaping cultural capital is under-researched'. Robertson and Yeoman (2014) and Sapiro et al. (2015) also noted the lack of research on literary festivals as arenas where participants can acquire cultural capital. Thus, there have been several calls for more research on the process of cultural capital development (Kisida et al., 2014).

Responding to this shortcoming in the literature, and using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, this paper aims to understand if and how rural festivals contribute to participants' cultural capital development. Empirically, it focuses on literary festivals and reports case study findings from two small-scale literary festivals, one in Italy and one in Ireland. In addition to exploring whether people enhance their cultural capital by participating in literary festivals, it also seeks to identify the key elements involved in the process of personal self-improvement and cultural fulfilment. The paper's main contribution is to introduce a new conceptual model portraying the development of cultural capital associated with literary festival participation. Study findings are intended to make a significant contribution to rural and festival studies by furthering understanding of the cultural value of festivals and the factors that can influence participants' cultural capital.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Cultural capital theory

A person's cultural capital refers to the individual level of education, knowledge, skills, and cultural goods that (s)he possesses. All of these influence a person's tastes and behaviours in respect of certain forms of culture. According to Bourdieu (1984 [1979]), cultural capital comprises three states. The embodied state is made up of 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body' (Bourdieu, 2002 [1986], p. 84). It is a personal assimilation of knowledge, abilities, tastes, and values that becomes an integral part of the person, in the form of *habitus*. This assimilation is also called self-improvement and presupposes 'a personal cost', 'an effort' (Bourdieu, 2002 [1986], p. 85). The objectified state refers to all cultural goods possessed, such as books, pictures, and dictionaries, while the institutionalised state includes all the academic qualifications that a person has obtained.

Bourdieu theorised the concept of cultural capital to explain differential educational attainment and scholarly success of children from the highest social classes. According to Bourdieu (1984 [1979]), cultural capital is first inculcated via the family and then acquired at school, nevertheless, Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) stressed that these dispositions are developed as an on-going process throughout people's lives.

Thus, according to Bourdieu, cultural participation depends on social origin, which depends in turn on individual cultural resources. This theory of homology claims that people from different social classes or social groups participate in different cultural activities because they possess different levels of cultural capital and tastes. Some scholars support this view. For example, Holt (1998, p. 17) claimed that high cultural capital participants can achieve personal enrichment and self-actualization in leisure activities, while people with low cultural capital can only experience 'autotelic sociality'. This means that the individual pre-existing level of cultural capital determines how people attend cultural activities and what they gain from them. Nevertheless, a large body of research has questioned Bourdieu's ideas of cultural

capital. For example, Peterson and Kern's (1996) omnivorous theory argues that people can be open to appreciating and participating in different cultural activities, from highbrow to popular, independently from her/his social class.

Other researchers have pointed to the ambiguity of the concept and call for more research in contexts beyond the French cultural consumption setting which Bourdieu analysed (Priour and Savage, 2013). Moreover, while Bourdieu argued that cultural capital acquisition is an on-going and systematic process, he neglected to deeply explore whether and how cultural capital can be developed beyond family and schooling into adulthood. He only explored its development in the occupational field (Bourdieu, 1987). Thus, scholars claim that more work is needed on how cultural capital is acquired in adulthood outside the formal educational field (Kisida et al., 2014). In using cultural capital ideas to investigate cultural consumption in literary festival settings, the study reported here provides new insights into cultural capital acquisition in an under-explored arena.

2.2. Literary festivals and cultural capital development

Literary festivals are cultural festivals dedicated to literature, books, and writers, and forms of literary tourism (Mintel, 2011). They celebrate literary culture through readings, discussions, and debates, so they are 'cultural events with value and meaning' (Driscoll, 2014, p. 192). Their goals are promoting books, fostering reading, and creating a sense of community (Rossetti and Quinn, 2019). They are typically delivered over a few days, from one weekend to two weeks. The oldest still-surviving literary festival in Europe is The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival in England, founded in 1949 (Weber, 2018). Now over 450 literary festivals are held annually across English-speaking countries (Weber, 2018). In 2017, there were 59 such festivals in Ireland and 94 in Italy. During the twenty-first century, they have also spread throughout the developing world. Giorgi (2011) argued that literary festivals can be classified as either international or peripheral. International festivals take place in big cities, feature literary celebrities, and are commercial in nature. In contrast, peripheral festivals are located in small villages and include local writers and regional topics in their programme. In this context, this study is preoccupied with peripheral festivals.

Literary festivals can be seen to have expanded their programmes in recent years, with for example, music, theatre, and school-based events (Ommundsen, 2009). This has led to the tourismification of literary festivals which are growing as tourist attractions (Mintel, 2011). With this tourismification, literary festivals are experiencing a broadening of audience characteristics, less dominated by passionate readers and more generic in composition. However, the features of literary festival participants are unclear and under-researched (Mintel, 2011), with extant scholarly discussions tending to adopt two differing perspectives. Some researchers argue that the literary festival participant is mainly female, middle aged, local or regional in origin, high-brow in tastes and middle class, with high pre-existing cultural resources (Sapiro et al., 2015). Others argue that nowadays, participants are neither passionate lovers of literature nor do they only represent the middle classes (Giorgi, 2011). Indeed, some argue that because of the complexity of motivations for attending and the variety of levels of involvement with the literary world, there is no such thing as a typical literary festival participant (Weber, 2018).

When trying to determine whether people enhance their cultural capital by participating in festivals, the nature of that participation is very important. Ommundsen (2009, p. 21) argues that the consumption of literary festivals is an 'active involvement - physical, emotional, intellectual and social'. Similarly, Driscoll (2014, p. 165) identifies three key elements of the literary festival experience: the value of serious discussions, 'a bookish community' seen as 'the warmth of the festival atmosphere', and the 'intimacy with star authors', those considered to be high-profile guests with whom audiences create emotional

connections. Likewise, [Weber \(2015\)](#) argues that it is composed of four dimensions: social, aesthetics, affective and intellectual.

In respect of festivals more generally, scholars argue that festival participation and personal outcomes are shaped by several factors including: participants' personal features like demographics ([Axelsen and Swan, 2010](#)) and motivations ([Geus et al., 2016](#)); the event experience, which includes timing ([Axelsen and Swan, 2010](#)), the levels of engagement/involvement ([Geus et al., 2016](#)) and entertainment ([Semrad and Rivera, 2018](#)); and the event environment, which includes physical factors like spaces and event locations, festival attributes like programme contents, amenities, tickets ([Cole and Chancellor, 2009](#)), and the social dimension ([Geus et al., 2016](#)).

Moreover, rural festivals have been described as heterotopic spaces that temporally change social order and create 'transformation of multiple discrete spaces' ([Quinn and Wilks, 2017](#), p. 35). Also, scholars argue that they are participative and immersive ([O'Grady, 2015](#)) and multi-sensorial in nature ([Jordan, 2016](#)), where the dynamic entanglement between the environment and participants' bodies can shape their cultural embodiment ([Herborn, 2017](#)). When it comes to rural festivals, researchers are clear that their value lies in 'engaging with local development activities and shaping local development agendas' ([Mahon and Hyryläinen, 2019](#), p. 1). Their contribution goes beyond the economic outcome ([Moscardo, 2007](#); [Mair and Duffy, 2018](#)) and includes, for instance, promoting cultural resources. Similarly to [Gibson and Gordon \(2018, p.259\)](#), who argued that rural music festivals 'sustain cultural vitality', this paper explores the cultural significance of literary festivals.

[Yun and Park \(2015\)](#) observed that spatial and temporal movements of rural events visitors can be used to understand how they experience rural events. Yet, understandings of experiential consumption and corporeality in festivals settings are under-developed ([Lea, 2006](#)). So too are understandings of how knowledge is embodied through festival participation ([Karlsen, 2009](#)). Scholars have started to conceptualise and measure festival participation and event experience ([Richards et al., 2020](#)), but much work needs to be done to fully understand 'the linkages between different elements of the event experience, the co-creation of value through event experiences' ([Richards, 2019](#), p. 1).

Only a few studies have explored if and how audience's individual cultural capital is shaped by festival participation, and they adopt two main perspectives. Some scholars argue that festival participation, including literary festival participation ([Johanson and Freeman, 2012](#); [Kruger, 2019](#); [Robertson and Yeoman, 2014](#); [Sapiro et al. 2015](#); [Weber, 2018](#)), may lead to participants' cultural capital accumulation. According to them, a literary festival provides intellectual stimulation for participants, with serious discussions ([Driscoll, 2014](#)) and 'a distinctive experience that confers cultural capital on attendees' ([Johanson and Freeman, 2012](#), p. 312). For example, participants can buy cultural goods ([Begg, 2011](#)), develop their skills ([Driscoll, 2014](#)), learn about local heritage ([Merfeld-Langston, 2010](#)), or develop their literary capital ([Kruger, 2019](#)). In contrast, others argue that participants cannot acquire cultural capital through festivals because mere participation is not enough to significantly shape people's cultural resources ([Fumaroli, 1991](#)). Moreover, some scholars claim that people now attend festivals merely for fun and enjoyment ([Négrier, 2015](#)), or because they desire physical engagement and intimate communication with writers rather than to develop their cultural capital ([Meehan, 2005](#)).

To sum up, there is an ongoing debate about how cultural capital is acquired in contemporary literary festivals settings. [Kisida et al. \(2014, p. 293\)](#) claim that 'participation in cultural activities may spark a genuine interest in learning and thinking more deeply about the world', what [Wilks \(2009\)](#) defined as the cyclical process of cultural capital development in festivals. However, others are not so sure, and so there is a need to further investigate whether cultural interests (and the entire pre-existing cultural capital) follow, and not just precede, cultural participation.

3. Research methods

Answering the call for more qualitative analysis of socio-cultural impacts of festivals that highlights the importance of meaning and not measurement ([Quinn, 2010](#)), the study reported here was intersubjective, prioritising respondents' perspectives, and involved a non-probability sample ([Silverman, 2013](#)) to understand how festival participation can shape individual cultural capital. Data were collected at two peripheral literary festivals in Ireland and Italy with short semi-structured on-site interviews (n = 92) and in-depth follow-up semi-structured interviews (n = 35) with participants. Information gathered related to festival participation and cultural capital development associated with festival participation. Participant observations were also undertaken. The on-site interviewees were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling ([Denscombe, 2014](#)). The sample for the follow-up interviews was purposive because it started from the on-site sample and depended on those who expressed their consent to participate in a follow-up in-depth interview and who were actually available to be interviewed two-four weeks after the end of the festivals.

The interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions that allowed interviewees to respond to the questions in their own terms without influence from the researcher ([Veal, 2011](#)). To strengthen credibility, the study emphasised validity and reliability. Internal validity was constructed with triangulation, which included the use of multiple sources of evidence, extensive quotations, and reviews of transcripts to verify data accuracy ([Yin, 2016](#)). While 'case studies can never form a sample from which you can generalise' ([Thomas, 2016, p. 173](#)), this research can be partially replicated and can shape the design of future studies ([Yin, 2016](#)). All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and the thematic analysis technique was employed to identify key themes and core conceptual issues ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#)).

3.1. The case studies

This research included two case-studies: Listowel Writers' Week and Pordenonelegge. The Writers' Week in Listowel is an annual literary festival held over five days in June in a small village in South West Ireland. Listowel is famous for its literary culture and tradition, since is the birthplace of many famous Irish writers, like John B. Keane, Bryan MacMahon, Brendan Kennelly, and George Fitzmaurice. As such, it is known as the Literary Capital of Ireland. The festival was founded in 1970 by four authors to promote local writers and the storytelling tradition. It is a rural festival that had 15,575 participants in 2017 and features different types of events, from book discussions to writing workshops, writing awards, and theatre shows.

Similarly, Pordenonelegge is an annual literary festival held for five days every September in Pordenone, a small town in North-Eastern Italy. Pordenone is called the 'painted city' for the frescoes on the historical buildings. It is also known for its literary production that includes 4 public libraries, 15 bookshops, and the literary festival. Pordenonelegge was founded in 2000 as part of a local Chamber of Commerce project intended to increase tourism. In Italian terms, PL is a small festival, with 120,000 participants in 2017. Like the Writers' Week, Pordenonelegge also features different types of events, from poetry to book discussions, theatre shows and writing competitions. Both of the festivals include book stalls where participants can buy books. Findings related to the development of cultural capital and to the key elements influencing the process of cultural capital acquisition are discussed below.

4. The development of cultural capital

Results revealed that participants' cultural capital, in all its three states (institutionalised, objectified, and embodied), was enhanced by being reinforced, stimulated, or acquired. The acquisition of the embodied state was by far the most prevalent and also the most complex

process. Most of the respondents argued that the festival had contributed to their education because 'you have never finished learning' (April). Attending the festivals led to knowledge creation as 'cultural baggage because you see something you don't know about' (Leonardo).

The findings also showed that respondents improved their literary capital, for example, 'the difference between fiction and memoir' (George), as well as learned about general cultural topics, such as 'philosophy' (Alessandra), 'politics' (Maria), 'religion' (Pietro). Moreover, respondents acquired different abilities, such as 'how to write a song' (Rita), 'interact with people' (Rosa), or 'travelling alone' (Ashlyn). Respondents also acquired new tastes and interests, such as in reading more: 'I'm more interested to look at books than I have been' (Cassie). Some of them increased their cultural participation by visiting local cultural heritage during the festivals, such as 'the lodge of the town hall that was open to the public' (Mario), or the 'church' (Michele). This happened also for locals. For example, as Dennis, explained, Listowel Writers' Week gave him the occasion to visit the local literary museum since 'having a timetable and saying: yes this [event] is happening at 11 was one of the reasons I decided to go'.

Moreover, examples of how the objectified state was acquired by purchasing cultural physical goods (Begg, 2011) were plentiful. For example, 54% of on-site respondents bought at least one book and some also bought paintings. In contrast, the institutionalised state was acquired only by some. For instance, Missy said that winning the writing competition was a 'great achievement' that conferred 'a sense of pride'. She perceived the prize as a formal education qualification and an enhancement of her institutionalised cultural capital. In contrast, for others like Michele, the win was interpreted as merely as an informal recognition.

Sometimes, cultural capital acquisition did not occur during the actual festivals. Instead, it seemed that the festivals sparked interests and stimuli that enhanced cultural capital development afterwards. Quite when this stimulus took effect varied. For Teresa, the festival was self-rewarding 'because we discussed our interpretations at home, with whoever was with me. It seems to me that something has remained with me'. Similarly, Orlaith was inspired to consider starting to write. Respondents also increased their participation in other 'cultural events' (Nicola). For example, Missy started to attend a painting course after the festival because her 'brain was working better'.

In contrast, for others, the experience of being at the festival was much more about reinforcing pre-existing cultural capital, a process of 'confirming your thinking, it's assuring' (Nicole). The festival 'opens you up to ideas, but it also reinforces your existing ones', explained April.

5. Elements shaping cultural capital

The analysis of the findings revealed the process of cultural capital development associated with festival participation to be extremely complex. A number of aspects of the experience identified as influencing participants' cultural capital were clustered into internal and external elements. The internal elements were classed as: participants' demographic features, the behavioural dimension, the enjoyment factor, the involvement factor, and the pre-existing levels of cultural and economic capital. The external elements were classed as: the festival features, the social context, the spatial and the temporal dimensions.

5.1. Participants' demographic features

Findings showed that the gender composition of the audience varied by event and that women experienced the festivals differently to men. As such, it is argued that the opportunities to acquire cultural capital were gendered. For instance, the observations revealed that in Ireland, female participants were more likely to attend day-time events, while male participants predominated in evening-time events held in pubs. Moreover, for some, age seemed to shape their festival experiences and cultural capital acquisition. For example, Peter said 'I'm too old to learn

new things'.

Furthermore, the on-site interviews revealed that in both festivals tourists predominated, both international, domestic, and regional (89% in Ireland, 60% in Italy). The data showed that festival participants learned about local culture and traditions during the festivals. For instance, Missy discovered that pudding is square shaped and not round in Listowel: 'I had never seen squared black and white pudding before ... [but] it can [be] in Listowel' (Missy). Surprisingly, locals and new residents also learned new information about their towns, although what they learned differed from what tourists learned. For example, Cassie, who has been living in Listowel for 10 years, took notes during the 'very educational' bus tour because she 'didn't grow up in Listowel [and she] wouldn't have a clue of the local history'. Local residents felt 'like a tourist in my city, something that ... a tourist, and [not like someone] who lives in the city out of necessity' (Melissa). All the above data suggest that demographic features like gender, origin, and age can impact on participants' cultural capital development.

5.2. The behavioural dimension

Observational data showed that during the festivals, the role of the body and the five senses, especially sight and hearing, played key roles in the festival experience and in how respondents acquired cultural capital. Participants were sitting down, in front of a stage, looking at and listening to some speakers, asking questions, laughing, clapping, reading the programme, talking to each other, eating, drinking, or taking notes. Findings observed that listening was a key activity in festival participation: 'when I listen to the authors I always get to know things that maybe I didn't know' (Susanna).

Findings revealed that the times in between festival events were also important for acquiring cultural capital. Some participants spent time walking around the venues in the towns to experience the local heritage. For instance, Katia said 'I always learn a lot of things from what I see'. For Laura, walking in the streets of Listowel was a way of discovering her personal roots by walking in the footsteps of her mother and 'looking [at] things with her eyes'. Festivals were therefore moments for the festival visitors to engage with the local environment.

5.3. The enjoyment factor

When asked to choose, 50% of on-site respondents chose the statement 'while I'm here I'm discovering new things, expanding my knowledge and exploring new ideas', while only 9% chose the statement 'while I'm here I'm having great fun'. So, the festivals were learning experiences that resulted in people acquiring cultural capital. However, further analysis revealed that 41% of the interviewees described their festival experience as 'enjoyable'. Thus, entertainment was an important dimension of the experience since participants were discovering new things while enjoying the festivals. For most people enjoyment and cultural capital acquisition were closely connected. Some said 'I'm learning because I'm enjoying' (Fiona). Equally, for others 'I'm discovering [new things] so I'm having fun' (Melissa). Acquiring cultural capital and enjoyment were, therefore, 'two wheels of the same bicycle' (Shane).

5.4. The involvement factor

Findings revealed that cultural capital acquisition differed in ways that relate to participants' levels of involvement. For instance, incidental and casual participants mainly enjoyed the social atmosphere and acquired less cultural capital than those who were more involved in the festivals. In contrast, writers involved in the programme and passionate readers developed more cultural capital and described the festival as 'fulfilling', 'satisfying' or 'gratifying'. Thus, differing levels of involvement in the festivals played a role in participants' cultural capital development, although it was not always the case that higher levels of

involvements led to higher levels of cultural capital development.

5.5. Pre-existing levels of capitals

Levels of economic capital and occupations were heterogeneous. The two festivals differed in how participants' pre-existing economic capital shaped participation and, in turn, the opportunity to develop cultural capital. In Ireland, participants' economic capital was a prerequisite for accessing the festival since they had to pay for most of the events. This was not the case in Italy.

Furthermore, levels of engagement with the literary world were diverse. Both reading and writing habits varied. For example, 54% of the on-site interviewees claimed to possess hundreds of books, but 61% were not involved in writing. The in-depth analysis revealed that most of them (28%) usually read up to five books per year, or between 11 and 20 books (28%). Thus they consumed the festivals differently by attending different events because of some previous taste or interest. However, irrespective of the nature of their pre-existing stocks, respondents either developed their cultural capital even further during the festivals, or were stimulated to acquire it after the festivals. As such, there were several examples of participants with low pre-existing cultural capital acquiring more new cultural capital than those who had higher pre-existing levels.

5.6. The social context

Even though 45% of the on-site interviewees were attending the festival alone, the presence of others influenced how they developed their cultural capital. Observational data revealed that the festivals were occasions for socialisation, and irrespective of whether participants were alone or with others, networking led to cultural capital development. Molly observed that 'we are always learning, until we go to the grave, we are educated by people we meet, people we talk to'.

Apart from interactions among festival participants, cultural capital acquisition was shaped by listening to the authors, who were considered to be 'experts who know better' (Mario) and from whom one can learn. At the same time, for writers, the festivals were occasions to 'talk to peers, [get] some advice [and feel] of being part of a community' (Evan).

Finally, festival participants also had social interactions with local inhabitants and this fostered occasions for cultural capital development. For instance, Darrel observed that 'I spent half an hour in a shop talking to a guy who is the owner of the shop about the town and I learnt a lot about the town'. Thus, festivals were occasions for tourists to engage with the rural community. This also means that social interactions were not only limited to formal festival venues: the entire, very complex and dynamic festival setting created opportunities for respondents to shape their cultural capital.

5.7. The festival features

Some festival features shaped the ways respondents developed their cultural capital, like the number and type of events on offer. For example, during the formal talks respondents learned about 'the subject of his last book' (Beatrice) and cultural topics like 'politics' (Maria) or 'anxiety' (Cassie). They had occasions to acquire notions, exchange opinions, take notes, and buy books. During the walking tours, you can learn about 'the buildings' (Theresa), 'the context of the local stories' (Jimmy).

The ticket types and costs were other festival features that influenced how respondents participated and, in turn, how and what kind of cultural capital they acquired. In Pordenone most of the events were free of charge and festival participants had to spend several hours queueing, which sometimes was an occasion to listen, chat, and exchange opinions. The festival enriches you 'on a cultural level because you come into contact with people [the authors] who are usually difficult to meet, and on a personal level, because it's still nice to listen to others chatting

while queueing', said Francesca.

5.8. The spatial dimension

Observational data revealed that the physical characteristics of the towns and venues, the atmosphere, and the mix of sounds, colours, and smells prevailing influenced participants' cultural capital. Teresa said that she enjoyed the events because they 'were liveable ... in an environment where you can listen to the person, where you can understand [the performer] and not be oppressed by the crowd'. The small Irish town of Listowel is very connected to literature, being the birthplace of many writers. Thus, in the village there are several cultural attractions connected to literature, such as a writers' museum. This context encouraged festival participants to acquire knowledge and interest about local literature. Similarly, in the Italian small town of Pordenone, festival participants had opportunities to learn about and visit some cultural and artistic attractions, such as the 'exhibition of mosaics' (Alice). Thus, while participants went to the two small towns primarily, or only, for the festivals, they actually ended up acquiring cultural capital not only at the festival venues, but also in other spaces in town, such as 'the local church' (Michele) or the historical building of 'the council hall' (Melissa).

5.9. The temporal dimension

The on-site interviews revealed that most respondents were repeat visitors (71%) while only a few were first-time visitors (29%). This notwithstanding, even those who were attending for the first time acquired cultural capital. This suggests that the element of time and perseverance might not always be necessary to acquire cultural capital, at least in these festivals.

6. The model of cultural capital development associated with festival participation

The main contribution of this paper is to propose a new conceptual model of cultural capital development associated with festival participation (Fig. 1). This model includes all the elements that can shape individual cultural capital in peripheral literary festival settings as well as the three possible outcomes that emerge from this highly complicated process.

As the model shows, individual cultural capital can be reinforced, stimulated, and acquired because of festival participation. Data clearly show the festivals to be rewarding and fulfilling experiences for participants and suggest that cultural capital can be acquired through festival participation in adulthood and not simply through childhood socialisation with family and school, as Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) argued. Indeed, participants here were found to have developed their institutionalised, objectified, and embodied cultural capital.

Findings suggest that festival participants can develop their literary capital by purchasing books, winning a writing award, learning about a new genre or improving their writing skills (Driscoll, 2014; Robertson and Yeoman, 2014; Sapiro et al., 2015). Thus, peripheral literary festivals emerge as arenas where participants can gain an introduction to literature and develop their literary capital (Merfeld-Langston, 2010). As such, the data support Kruger's (2019, p. 189) analysis of literary festivals as significant occasions that encourage and increase 'purchasing behaviours [of literary works], which is vital to the viability and continuation of the arts industry'.

However, empirical evidence show that participants also developed their cultural capital beyond the literary world, by, for instance, visiting the local church, buying paintings, acquiring social skills and general cultural values. This means that peripheral festivals are occasions to engage and learn about local culture, for both tourists and locals. As Gibson and Davidson (2004, p. 401) point out, a festival can be celebration of 'national identity' and 'rural values'. Data support the view

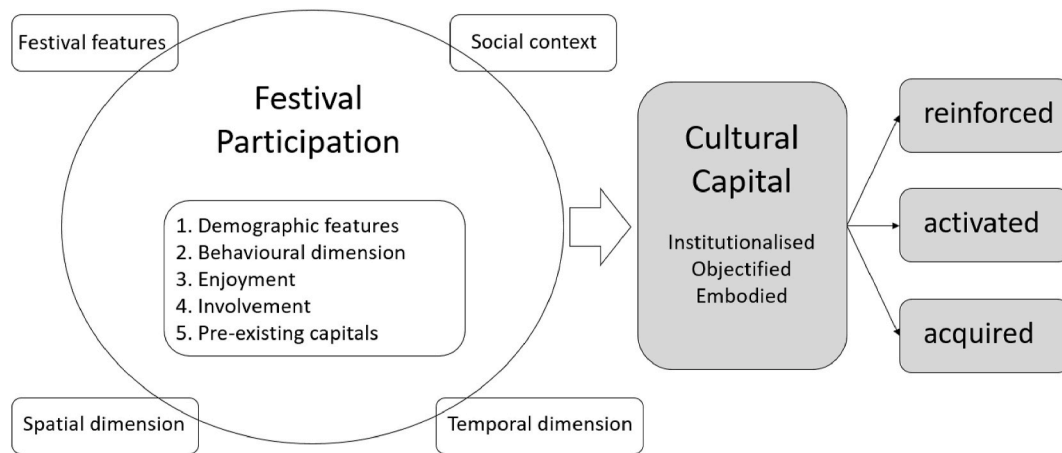


Fig. 1. Model of cultural capital development associated with festival participation.

that rural festivals can shape local development (Mahon and Hyryläinen, 2019; Mair and Duffy, 2018), by promoting cultural ‘vitality’ (Gibson and Gordon, 2018, p.259). This suggests that it is overly simplistic to argue that literary festivals only promote literature. The reality is that the cultural value of rural festivals goes far beyond literature, being associated with increasing and encouraging cultural participation, interest, skill development, and knowledge acquisition of both the literary arts as well as cultural arts in general.

Sometimes, the festivals sparked interests and stimuli that enhanced participants’ cultural capital development after the event. Thus, it seems that festival participation can generate new cultural stimuli and interests beyond the time spent at the festival. This is consistent with Kisida et al.’s (2014, p. 281) view that ‘exposure to a cultural institution has the effect of creating “cultural consumers” motivated to acquire new cultural capital’.

Furthermore, the model also shows that several elements shape the cultural outcomes of festival participation. The potential for a literary festival to act as a cultural consumption setting where cultural capital is influenced, formed and developed stems from the coming together of a series of what can be termed internal and external elements. Equally, the kinds of cultural capital that individual participants can activate, acquire and/or reinforce are linked to the interplay of all of these internal and external elements.

The model identifies five internal elements that can shape whether and how festival participants develop their cultural capital. The first one is demographic features. For instance, gender and age played a role in how people participated in the festivals. Occupation, and by extension social origin and pre-existing economic capital, seemed less important to how interviewees acquired cultural capital. This questions Bourdieu’s view [1984 (1979)] that cultural capital is shaped mainly by the agent’s class and is a marker of social distinction. Indeed, social class and pre-existing tastes shaped participation, like the selection of which events to attend, but empirical evidence suggest that social origin might not be the primary factor that shapes cultural capital development in festivals.

Furthermore, the model suggests that for the participants, the interactions between their bodies and the physical environment played a crucial role in cultural capital development. This supports previous research arguing that festivals are multi-sensory experiences (Jordan, 2016) and that bodily experiences allow cultural capital to be embodied (Lea, 2006). Moreover, for festivals that take place in small towns like those under study, venues tend to be all located in close proximity. This means that small-scale festivals might have more potential to expose participants to local cultural heritage (Giorgi, 2011). For instance, results show that participants were discovering local attractions like museums or churches. As such, this paper agrees with Yun and Park’s

(2015, p. 1262) view that it is important to understand how participants move in festival venues because ‘movement patterns have a great effect on the scope and content of their experience, consumption, and the communications with rural residents’.

Moreover, this new conceptual model shows that the enjoyment factor is another element that shapes individual cultural capital. The data question the view that contemporary audiences attend festivals for hedonistic purposes and not for willingness to learn and acquire cultural resources (Meehan, 2005; Négrier, 2015). Instead, it suggests that the cultural capital development is linked to the enjoyment of the experience (Semrad and Rivera, 2018); that festival participation can be simultaneously both serious and recreational and creating a dichotomy between these two dimensions is overly simplistic. The model is therefore useful to better understand where the festival culture fits within the two binaries of cultural value/‘hard thinking’ and entertainment (Ommundsen, 2009, p. 32).

A further internal element is the degree of involvement that participants have in the festival, and this is a crucial element of the festival experience (Geus et al., 2016). Similarly to Weber (2018), who refuted the concept of a typical literary festival audience member, this study argues that festivals can have a mix of participants with different degrees of involvement that shape both the opportunities they have to develop their cultural resources and how they participate.

The last internal element is the level of pre-existing capitals. Results support the argument that literary festival participants include not only passionate lovers of literature but also a more general audience (Giorgi, 2011). This suggests that high cultural capital is not a prerequisite for accessing literary festivals. Literary festivals do not represent only upper social classes anymore, instead, empirical evidence reveals that audience members are omnivorous (Peterson and Kern, 1996). Findings also show that high cultural capital is not a necessary precondition for cultural capital development since respondents with both low and high cultural capital could be seen to have developed it. This questions Holt’s (1998) view that high cultural capital is a precondition to gain self-actualization and personal enrichment in leisure activities.

Similarly, findings show that pre-existing economic capital shape participation although there was no correlation between higher economic capital and higher cultural capital development. So, this paper questions Bourdieu’s (2002 [1986]) view that more economic capital lead to more cultural capital accumulation.

The model also includes four external elements that can modify participants’ cultural capital. Just as festival participants’ experiences are shaped by the social environment (Axelsen and Swan, 2010; Geus et al., 2016), one of the external elements is the social context. Observational data showed that these small-scale festivals were occasions for socialisation (Getz and Page, 2016; Quinn and Wilks, 2013). Results also

show how rural festivals connect people, including locals (Quinn and Wilks, 2013). This supports the view that rural festivals enhance networking and foster local cultural growth (Moscardo, 2007; Mair and Duffy, 2018; Wynn, 2015). It also highlights the importance of peripheral festivals as arenas for tourists to interact with locals and learn about local intangible cultural heritage.

Another external element is the role of festival features. Findings are a confirmation that festival features, such as programme and tickets, can shape participants' experiences and outcomes (Cole and Chancellor, 2009; Geus et al., 2016). Findings reveal that the festivals encouraged participants to acquire cultural capital by, for example, engaging them in intellectual discussions and selling books. So, part of their agenda is to transfer cultural capital to participants (Robertson and Yeoman, 2014). This is in line with those scholars who argue that literary festivals are serious moments of intellectual discussions (Sapiro et al., 2015), irrespective of their peripheral or international nature. In contrast, it counters the view that 'literary festivals place emphasis on entertainment' (Giorgi, 2011, p. 37) and do not satisfy audience's willingness to be intellectually stimulated (Ommundsen, 2009).

Another external element that influenced participants' cultural capital is the spatial dimension. The findings show that the role of the physical environment is crucial in the process of cultural embodiment in festival settings, since the human body and its environment are inseparable, and participants can become immersed in the festival environment (Herborn, 2017). Observational data also showed that the towns became the festivals and the festivals became the towns (Quinn and Wilks, 2017). Also findings support the view that 'the experience of the arts in the rural is strongly interconnected in each place to the local history and heritage' (Mahon and Hyyryläinen, 2019, p. 22). The festivals transformed the towns with their festival signage and decorations, literary activities, bustle of festival crowds and volunteers in festival t-shirts. They encourage tourists as well as locals to visit cultural exhibitions and attractions in town. By enhancing cultural participation, rural festivals serve as a vehicle for people to acquire knowledge about local tangible heritage that is unconnected with the festivals (Merfeld-Langstron, 2010). This means that rural festivals are occasions where the locality and local heritage is display, shared, and learned. They are moments of local cultural growth (Wynn, 2015).

Finally, Axelsen and Swan (2010) underscored the importance of time in festival experiences and this study concurs, including the temporal dimension as the last external element that can shape participants' cultural capital development. Very importantly, this paper calls into questions Bourdieu's (2002 [1986]) view that it takes time to acquire cultural capital. Findings show that people can accumulate formal recognitions, buy books, visit local heritage, and develop skills and knowledge without repeat participation. This means that people can acquire cultural capital in short-term pleasurable activities like festivals.

7. Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper was to further understanding of the cultural value of rural literary festivals and the factors that can influence participants' cultural capital. Festivals are important to rural societies and it is crucial to appreciate more fully the complex roles that they play. This research provides insight into the under-explored relationship between festival participation and cultural capital development. A new theoretical model of cultural capital development associated with festival participation is presented, based on the analysis of empirical data gathered at two literary festivals in Ireland and Italy. The new conceptual model comprises three possible individual cultural outcomes for participants, where cultural capital is reinforced, activated, and/or acquired. It also includes all the elements that play a role in the cultural capital development process, both internal (demographic features, behavioural dimension, enjoyment, involvement, pre-existing levels of capitals) and external elements (festival features, social context, spatial and temporal dimensions).

In general, this paper answers the call for more work on cultural capital acquisition (Kisida et al., 2014) and cultural impacts of event participation (Getz and Page, 2016). While some scholars (Meehan, 2005; Négrier, 2015) imply that people cannot acquire cultural capital attending festivals, this study's findings contend otherwise. It found festivals to be meaningful experiences that can be perceived as rewarding, fulfilling, and valuable leisure activities that lead to personal development in terms of cultural capital acquisition (Kisida et al., 2014; Kruger, 2019; Sapiro et al., 2015). This suggests that cultural capital can be further developed after socialisation through family, school, and work (Bourdieu, 2002 [1986]). It also suggests that, even though some scholars (Jordan, 2016; Négrier, 2015) express concern about the commercialisation of aesthetic culture in the context of festivalisation, empirical evidence shows that this is not always the case. Literary festivals still play an important role in the current scenario of cultural consumption, especially now that they are including an omnivorous audience (Peterson and Kern, 1996). For instance, they promote local cultural resources in a variety of ways (Gibson and Gordon, 2018).

Findings reveal how in attending literary festivals participants can develop their cultural capital: acquiring cultural goods, winning a writing award, embodying knowledge, skills, and new interests, modifying their cultural values and increasing their cultural participation by visiting local heritage sites. The rise of individual cultural capital levels increases, in turn, 'cultural vitality' more broadly within society (Gibson and Gordon, 2018, p.259). This means that peripheral festivals are arenas for individual cultural capital acquisition and cultural development of rural places more generally. This paper highlights the vital role that festivals play in rural places to enhance cultural sustainability. These festivals allow local values and cultural heritage to be displayed, accessed, and shared both among local residents and visitors to the area. Rural festivals allow tourists to engage with the rural communities and local heritage. Festivals are sources of inspiration, knowledge sharing, enjoyment, and social networking that feed cultural imaginations and enrich lifestyles in rural places. The paper supports therefore the view that festivals in small settlements enhance local cultural growth (Wynn, 2015). It is also consistent with previous research on how rural festivals foster social sustainability (Lin and Bestor, 2020) and they are crucial to social actors in rural settlements (Quinn and Wilks, 2017).

Clearly, the study reported here has been an exploratory study that relies on only two cases. As such, more research is needed on the cultural and educational outcomes of festivals. Moreover, this paper calls for more research on the nature and meanings of small-scale literary festivals and it is hoped that the model of cultural capital development associated with festival participation introduced here might serve as a guide for further research. Future studies might seek to investigate literary festivals in other countries and to investigate whether the arguments made here relate to festivals other than literary ones. Scholars can also use the model to explore the various dimensions of festival participation (Richards et al., 2020; Semrad and Rivera, 2018; Weber, 2018) and thus enhance the conceptualisation of festival experience (Geus et al., 2016). Further research using the model could investigate how people consume festivals, by exploring festival bodies and the corporeality of festivals (Herborn, 2017; Lea, 2006). Finally, while this paper focused on peripheral festivals (Giorgi, 2011), more research needs to be done beyond the rural on international literary festivals in urban areas.

Author statement

This paper draws on Dr Rossetti's PhD thesis (2020), which was funded by the Technological University Dublin's Fiosraigh PhD Scholarship. Dr Quinn was the PhD supervisor. The authors would like to thank the Technological University Dublin for funding the research, and the editor and the reviewers for their comments.

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