Cultural closure and social mobility: a critical examination of festival governance structures as exclusive social spaces

Jennie Jordan

Leicester Castle Business School, De Montfort University, UK

ORCHID: 0000-0002-3955-1913

Email: JJordan@dmu.ac.uk

DMU, The Gateway Leicester LE1 9BH

Word count: 9853
Abstract

Festival producers used their professional cultural expertise to navigate tensions between local and national policies in order to access resources from different funding sources. They did this according to tacit values which defined ‘excellence’ in their artistic fields rather than local communities’ cultural interests. In exploring festival production this paper contributes a critical understanding of how festivals’ governance institutions became exclusive social spaces that, through professional closure based on obscure ‘cultural value’ criteria, limited rather than facilitated social mobilities. In illuminating the role of art forms, funders and festival governance structures as exclusive in-groups, the study runs contrary to common academic and policy narratives which envision festivals as inherently open spaces. Consequently, the paper argues policy makers seeking to achieve socio-cultural outcomes through festivals carefully consider the festival’s cultural field and who is included or excluded from its governance.
Cultural closure and social mobility: a critical examination of festival governance structures as exclusive social spaces

Introduction

Festivals and events have a long history within public policy as tools for establishing national (Autissier, 2009) or civic identities, particularly in diverse places (Barker et al., 2019). Pernecky and Lück (2013) listed festival’s potential to promote inclusion, human rights and diversity, equalities and inclusion as common narratives in academic festival studies. They are therefore rich sites for addressing questions of events and social mobilities. This paper investigates the roles of cultural production structures in shaping who does or does not participate in festivals. It is informed by Weber’s (1920) concepts of social and market closure, the means by which groups act – consciously or not – to control access to resources. It is framed by Whitford et al.’s (2014) model which draws attention to the significance of governing bodies in shaping how open or closed events are.

Following Saha’s (2018) and Yeung and Thomas’ (2020) calls for more research into participation and representation in contemporary creative industries and event studies’ production institutions, this paper focuses on the relative transparency of decision-making processes regarding inclusion within festival governance structures. These cultural production approaches argue participation and inclusion are constrained by norms and values institutionalised in governance and management arrangements that define what is considered artistically excellent and, therefore, worthy of public support. Cultural norms are inculcated through formal institutions including educational systems such as art schools (Bull, 2019), cultural funding systems (Jancovich, 2017) and festivals’ own tacit and explicit choices regarding governance (Waterman, 1998). This study undertook a longitudinal exploration of two arts festivals in the English East Midlands to critically investigate how interrelations between shifting public policies, institutionalised in England’s arts production systems and artform aesthetics, and the festivals’ internal priorities have shaped their engagement with diverse communities. It enquires if tacit rules of association based in shared cultural values constrained attempts to be more socially inclusive and argues closure starts with the Arts Council’s narrow classifications of the art forms it funds. In studying two festivals launched 30 years apart from an institutional perspective it throws light on how the Arts Council’s shifting policies-in-action have limited aesthetic choices through its governance systems.

In the UK there are two main sources of public funding for festivals, the national Arts Councils which distribute monies for the national government and local authorities. Since the 1980s public funding been subject to neoliberal logics of marketisation, entrepreneurialism, deregulation and new public management-influenced quantitative auditing (Belfiore, 2004). Periods of austerity in the 1980s, 1990s and from 2010 reduced direct arts subsidy from the national Arts Councils and...
local authorities. As public authorities outsourced policy objectives to QUANGOs and the third sector, including art organisations, so intrinsic artistic judgements were replaced as rationales for subsidy by instrumental policy outcomes related to education, urban regeneration and wellbeing (Gray, 2004). Festival production has not been immune from these pressures. Whitford et al. (2014) argued the event policy environment has become primarily market-orientated, while Quinn et al. (2020) claimed festivals ‘have become synonymous with neo-liberal agendas and central to entrepreneurial cities efforts to generate commerce, regenerate place and stand out on the highly competitive global stage’ (p. 1). Although Finkel and Platt (2020) made the case that community engagement for social cohesion was equally important, civic boosterism has become the primary policy driver. This raises questions about how festival producers navigate the tensions between the policies’ intrinsic economic, social and cultural values.

In considering this question, Jancovich (2017) drew attention to how elites in the UK’s arts establishment had resisted policies aimed at widening participation in the arts beyond the white middle-classes, because ‘widening the range of voices involved in the arts was said to risk damaging quality’ (108). In contrast to local urban policies, this places concepts of artistic excellence as the central rationale for national-level public funding. Yet the term ‘quality’ is highly contentious as it is related to each cultural group’s conceptions of value. Martiniello (2015) pointed out ‘the arts can gather people but also divide people along socio-economic, political, ethnic and racial lines. In many cities, there is a tension between ethnic fragmentation and separation on the one hand and ethnic mixing and dialogue on the other. That tension also characterises the artistic scene’ (2015, p. 1229). When combined with limited evidence that widening participation amongst staff, governance and participants attempts have been successful (Jancovich, 2017; Patel and Naudin, 2018; ACE, 2020), there is an open question as to the extent to which festivals are achieving cultural inclusion outcomes and, if not, why not? Are their artistic choices creating implicit barriers to participation? This paper focuses on how policies are enabled or resisted at governance level, arguing powerful voices within cultural institutions act to maintain their influence by limiting access to board and management positions to those from professional arts fields they consider legitimate.

**Governance in the UK cultural sector**

Festival governance is a complex field. This paper follows Whitford et al (2014, pp. 387–403) who defined governance as

> the structures and processes through which policy actors interact with each other to pursue individual and mutual interests, and the level and type of
steering that governments undertake within those arrangements. The term “governance” captures the idea that governing is increasingly shaped by networks of public and private actors and that power and authority are shared (p. 388).

They identified five dimensions which governing bodies control and that affect the extent to which they include or exclude stakeholders; transparency, rules, structures, equitable involvement and responsiveness and accountability. In thinking about these dimensions as closure mechanisms, it is evident they exist on a spectrum, from opaque to fully transparent; from codified rules to tacit understanding; from rigid structures that encourage path dependency and can become an ‘iron cage’ (Powell and DiMaggio, 2012) to a disorganised system held together by shared norms; from full citizen control, to complete management control; and from clear democratic accountability to monopolistic power. The tacit and explicit mechanisms by which closure is achieved are discussed in relation to Weber’s concepts below.

Research into festivals and events governance has tended to be as part of event evaluations focused on whether that year’s targets have been met (Getz and Andersson, 2010) rather than exploring festivals as public policy instruments. This risks missing the long-run social impact effects intended by public policies such as those related to social mobility and inclusion. Non-participation is widely represented as being due to a deficit on the part of ‘hard to reach’ communities who did not understand it would be good for them (Miles 2015). Stevenson (2019) pointed to a lack of reflexivity and responsiveness among cultural professionals about how their programming and communications excluded the very communities they aimed to attract.

Since 2010, funding from local authorities has been much reduced due to austerity policies. This has made the Arts Councils’ contributions the paramount force in arts funding, able to shape the cultural landscapes in their respective nations. In effect, the Arts Councils have become the sole market for many not-for-profit arts organisations. The impact of resource dependency on festivals was shown by Mahon and Hyryläinen (2019), whose research found one festival’s focus on community participation meant it struggled to source funding, while a more entrepreneurial festival was financially resilient, but pressured to programme less community work. So this paper locates the priority-setting mechanisms in festivals’ governance structures and sets out to illuminate the processes which lead to them being open or closed to new participants. It focuses on how Arts Council England’s policies have shaped the case study festivals’ own governance choices, asking if, despite policy initiatives to democratise, the arts establishment has ‘retained decision-making where it had always been’ (Jancovich, 2017, p. 110)? Do festivals’ management and governance reflect the
closed picture found in other arts sectors or, because festivals have a reputation for catalysing change, are they the exception?

The cases examined were two arts festivals in the East Midlands of England, a region which has been consistently at the bottom end of cultural funding league tables (Stark et al. 2013, 2014, 2016), making its arts organisations particularly precarious and susceptible to changes in policy. Buxton International Festival is an opera festival that launched in 1979 and Derby Festé is an outdoor arts festival with a focus on circus arts and contemporary dance which launched in 2007. Both festivals are now funded by Arts Council England (ACE), the UK’s primary cultural policy agency.

The arms-length principle under which ACE operates means government ministers can set a policy agenda, but it is up to ACE to decide how to implement it. This draws attention to the Arts Council as a powerful gatekeeper in England, with the potential of it acting in its own self-interest to dominate the cultural policy landscape. In the context of this special issue, the paper argues that, while there have been clear governmental objectives to widen participation in publicly funded festivals, there is little evidence such programmes have been successful. In its own “Diversity Report” (ACE, 2020), the Arts Council acknowledged this and made a commitment to ‘diversify the cultural sector – the leadership, workforce and governance of organisations’ (p. 0), a tacit acknowledgement of on-going social and market closure within its governance structures. This paper goes further. It argues closure starts with the limitations on the cultural forms the Arts Council funds. It throws light on how the Arts Council’s shifting policies-in-action limited aesthetic choices through its governance systems. The paper contributes to understanding how this gatekeeping developed, and the consequences for festivals’ ability to attract communities not traditionally engaged with their art forms.

Social closure in the UK cultural sector

This study is framed by Weber’s (1920) concepts of social and market closure. Social closure concerns questions of status and is a concerted, although not necessarily conscious, process of exclusion by communal groups in order to maintain power. There are two types of social closure. Communal closure is based on affectual or cultural bonds related to identity, such as family ties or nationality. The rules for inclusion are unstated but totally understood by group members. Participants are likely to be invited informally by word of mouth, with outsiders simply not asked. This is considered pertinent in this paper as it demonstrates how unexamined and uncodified governance systems can perpetuate patterns of exclusion despite widening participation policies. By contrast, associative group membership is based on formalised rules. These could be knowledge of specific religious rites, age, or willingness to sign up to a code of practice, for example. In examining
the two cases, a central question is whether the rules of membership – in this case legitimisation by the main arts funding bodies - were clearly articulated or left (deliberately?) vague.

Social closure reinforces group members’ status by marking them out as having special knowledge or skills. Such ‘status differentiation goes together with monopolisation of cultural and material goods and opportunities’ (Weber, 2004, p. 190) through association with certain traditional rights and privileges. In management literatures the classic example is being given the key to the executive washroom. In the context of culture, social closure is expressed through tastes. Bourdieu (1985) called this cultural capital. He argued taste is socially constructed, an indicator of social affiliation and a source of power and domination. Group membership is signalled by tacit factors such as shared tastes in clothes, food, music and literature and disgust for tastes of other groups. Shared tastes are symbolic markers of belonging and allow powerful groups to implicitly exclude others, a form of communal closure. Without transparent and codified rules of engagement the group can avoid being held to account for outsiders’ apparent taste deficits. This becomes politically significant when public money is used to subsidise cultural events, and some forms of art are classified as high status, legitimated and publicly funded, while other forms are not. In the UK the ‘high arts’, including opera, classical music, ballet and contemporary dance, are funded through the Arts Councils. Forms such as comedy, folk and pop music rarely are (Arts Council England, 2017a). The status of legitimated artistic genres is underpinned by powerful formal structures that reinforce exclusion. Bull (2019), for example, showed how class distinctions were institutionalised through the international music exam syllabi which promoted European classical music as the highest form of musical excellence. In festivals, the programme is a signifier of ‘prestige and power’ (Waterman, 1998, p. 67) that can create a dilemma between ‘maintaining artistic purity and elite status and repositioning towards a wider audience’ (ibid, p. 68).

In the UK, these high art forms are the primary recipients of ACE core funding (Arts Council England, 2017). Organisations which receive 4-year core funding are part of the Arts Council’s National Portfolio and are known as NPOs. NPOs agree a contract to provide services that fulfil the funder’s goals as stated in its ten-year strategies (Arts Council England, 2010, 2013, 2021). The portfolio was launched in 2011. It was a response to an excoriating report into its botched 2007 review of grants (McIntosh, 2008). Despite an increase in its grant-in aid from the government, ACE cut funding for a number of well-established arts organisations. Its reasons for the decisions were obscure, leading to a vote of no confidence in it at a meeting at the Young Vic in January 2008 (Higgins, 2008). In contrast, the NPO system provided four-year funding through an open application round with transparent and semi-codified criteria related to its stated goals, making its decision-making more equitable and accountable.
In addition to the welcome subsidy, membership of the National Portfolio validates recipients’ claims to cultural expertise. So, the Arts Council’s own tastes are important in shaping which art forms are nationally valued, making a festival’s main art forms a political statement about its social status and potential policy effects. The wrong art form would mark it out as unsuitable for ACE-funding and its associated valorisation. As Williams (1979) argued, the Arts Council’s cultural tastes were set during its foundations. They were ‘the cultural interests of an older upper-middle and middle class’ (p. 163). These set firm boundaries around questions of quality, which became identified with the classical Western canon. These tastes became naturalised within ACE’s organisational structures through appointment and grant processes which relied on informal closures:

The British State has been able to delegate some of its official functions to a whole complex of semi-official or nominally independent bodies because it has been able to rely on an unusually compact and organic ruling class. Thus, it can give Lord X or Lady Y both public money and apparent freedom of decision in some confidence, subject to normal procedures of report and accounting, that they will act as if they were indeed State officials (ibid, p.165).

Members of this ruling class were directly appointed by government ministers to ACE’s governing council through consultation processes ‘shrouded in the usual mellow dusk. But it seems that there is consultation between Ministers and civil servants [...] and senior officers of the Council. Names then emerge, on no discernible representative bases’ (ibid. p60). These processes were replicated in the structures of the arts organisations it subsidised (Wilson, 2019). Belfiore (2019) revealed there has been little change in the decades since. Just as Saha (2018) showed in publishing, this institutionalised closure results in people of colour, working-class artists and non-elite cultural forms being excluded. Nwonka (2020) made a compelling case that ‘film diversity policy has possessed very paradoxical features. It represents aspirations for inclusion but also demonstrates a reluctance to take responsibility for the existing exclusion’ (p. 24). The Arts Council’s own diversity director pointed to his organisation’s continued failure to diversify its own management and governance as a reason for the disappointing outcomes of its repeated diversity initiatives (Hussain, 2019). Each of these researchers confirm the significance of decision-makers’ own cultural tastes during recruitment and grant-making processes in creating and maintaining tacit borders.

In relating these closure concepts to festivals, this paper defines communal festivals as events to which everyone in the participating community contributes (Lefebvre, 1991). The
boundaries here are drawn through a tacit understanding of who the members of a community are. Rules to participate in associative festivals appear at first sight to be more transparent and the boundaries, therefore, more porous. Anyone who purchases a ticket can, in theory, participate. However, it may be that there is an elision between the two forms which means, despite inclusive rules, the unspoken rules-in-action act against them, discouraging those without the necessary cultural capital from coming forward even if the formal rules allow them to. In the case of cultural festivals, as Wilks (2011) demonstrated, participants needed to have a knowledge of the art form, cultural capital, before they felt comfortable attending.

**Market closure and the festival marketplace**

Communal and associative social closure can also be mobilised to exclude ‘others’ from competitive markets and financial resources such as, in the cases in this paper, those controlled by ACE. Like social closure, market closure can be attributed to communal biases such as racism or sexism, derived from largely unconscious structural norming processes, including artistic taste.

It can also be achieved through professionalisation processes based on art form expertise such as those Wilson (2019) ascertained led the Arts Council to limit funds to an arbitrary list of art forms and arts organisations. Since it is difficult to judge which cultural products will be popular or prestigious, market values are negotiated through symbolic markers. These markers include the status of the intermediaries who identify, produce and market cultural products (e.g., Bourdieu, 1993; Matthews and Smith Maguire, 2014), in this case the Arts Council selects which festivals to fund and the festivals themselves select the artistic programme. Intermediaries can be individuals or organisations, such as festival producers. While there is no formal requirement to have graduated from particular art schools or conservatoires, it is clear having done so eases access to careers within cultural professions as a prestigious degree confers status on the holder. Buck’s (2004) “Market Matters: the dynamics of the contemporary art market” provided a clear exposition of how a cycle of valorisation operated to define quality and excellence and thereby closed the visual arts market to artists whose work did not appeal to the curators of key galleries. Professional arts workers in the UK, such as these curators, are overwhelmingly recruited from a narrow range of society. Analysis of creative and cultural sector employment patterns found, ‘[i]n every creative occupation we see those from managerial and professional origins dominate the occupations, as compared to those from working class origins’ (Brook et al., 2020, p. 63). This is important because, if festivals are reliant on funding bodies which are themselves run and governed by people from a limited range of backgrounds, as Hussain (2019) showed the Arts Council still was, that section of society’s tastes will dominate, a form of tacit closure.
In relation to not-for-profit cultural festivals in the UK, the most significant potential markets are ACE and local authorities. Each of these has distinct policy priorities. Ilczuk and Kulikowska (2007) found ACE ranked artistic excellence and international profile as the most important criteria for funding, while local authorities prioritised benefits to the local community. It is evident from ACE’s funding choices that its rules-in-action limit the conception of which art forms can be considered excellent. It is not the purpose of this paper to critique those choices, rather to show the connection between certain cultural tastes and access to funding from one principal provider, and how these rules effectively close the funding market to artists from other cultural forms, thereby limiting social mobilities. The exclusionary effects of social closure within cultural production discussed above are investigated as a possible explanation for the disconnection between public policy narratives about cultural festivals as a force for social inclusion and the lived reality.

Festivals are implicated in various aspects of the cultural marketplace. Their curation processes create exclusive groups based on the artistic director’s tastes and judgements of what their audiences will like (Waterman, 1998). These determine which taste groups attend, leading to the exclusionary boundaries to cultural spaces being reinforced as participants deepen their bonds through the shared experience (Wilks, 2011). Festivals are also reliant on a range of income sources including sponsorship and philanthropy, public subsidy and commercial sales (Quinn et al. 2020). Each of these markets depends on the expertise of festival producers to define what makes the festival valuable. If festivals exclude community members from their decision-making processes on the basis they would not understand ‘artistic excellence’, this is an example of a professionalisation process and, therefore, market closure at work (Toynbee, 2016). The two cases below, therefore, ask to what extent their governance structures were open to diverse voices, or whether the festivals closed their memberships to ensure they could comply with the funding system’s requirements, or to maintain their personal social or professional status.

Expanding Whitford et al.’s (2014) model, diagram 1 below illustrates the governance processes by which public funders are able to influence festivals’ aesthetic design and, accordingly, participation.
Closure is not a binary process. The degree of closure in both social and market groups exists on a continuum from open, so anyone can participate, to closed, where there are strict tacit or codified conditions limiting participation. In both market and social closure, in conditions of competition, groups act strategically to secure resources, which can lead to inequality between groups. This happens across the five governance dimensions, each of which can be more or less explicit and open and that change over time. Closure can take place through implementing formal rules of membership, but that structure may at the same time be very responsive to its communities. A local authority is a policy implementation structure which has strict democratic election rules, and at the same time is equitable as everyone over 18 is able to participate and there are clear lines of accountability. In contrast, prior to publication of is “Great Art for Everyone” strategy in 2010, ACE’s funding decisions were based on tacit understandings of what ‘great art’ was. The further to the left an organisation is, the more exclusive it is, as without codified rules for engaging, only those with prior knowledge of what is expected – in ACE’s case, professional expertise in one or more of its portfolio of art forms - are able to participate.

The effects of social and market closure are to create in and out groups (Weber, 1920), making it a useful concept for thinking about the logics which prevent social mobilities. In the context of festivals within urban policy, examining festival production and governance through these closure lenses enables an analysis of why festivals might fail to achieve social mobility aims.
Methodology

The methodology chosen for this study was case study analysis. By focusing on particular instances of a phenomenon, case studies provide in-depth accounts of processes, relations and events in order to uncover insights with wider implications. Bryman (2015) identified case study’s strength in situations where the object to be studied is complex and itself the focus of examination, not just a setting. In this study how the festival (the object of study) is produced is one element of the research focus, as this influenced each festivals’ design and, consequently, who attended. The two festivals, Buxton International Festival and Derby Festé, are also settings in which social relations can be observed, including understanding how festival producers relate to beneficiary communities and their professional networks.

The cases were selected as ideal types, which are a tool for illuminating and systematising features within complex social phenomena (Yin, 2009). In relation to festivals as settings for social mobility policies, ideal types were selected by identifying publicly funded arts festivals in the English East Midlands, chosen because of the comparatively low investment per head of population from ACE (2017b). Both festivals take place in the county of Derbyshire. Buxton is a small spa town in the north of the region, some 15 miles south of Manchester on the edge of the Peak District National Park. Its visitor economy had been neglected in favour of gravel extraction prior to the festival launching, so it was a declining town with a largely white working-class community with little interest in the arts. Derby is a small city in the south of the county. Its economy centres on three major engineering firms - Rolls Royce, Bombardier and Toyota – based on the outskirts. Prior to the recent boom in student accommodation its city centre had very little housing, making it a place to visit rather than to live. The region is home to some 4.6 million people, and sits to the east of Birmingham, south of Manchester and north of the London home counties. Some 88 per cent of the land, including two national parks and the National Forest, is classed as rural, with social life centred on towns as much as its four small cities (East Midlands Councils, 2015). Maughan and Bianchini’s (2004) research into the economic and social impacts of festivals in the region provided a baseline which demonstrated, 84 per cent of visitors to the eleven festivals studied were classed as local. Buxton Festival was the exception with 72 per cent of its audiences identified as visitors. This indicated the region’s festivals were not fulfilling the neo-liberal economic regeneration agenda Quinn et al. (2020) cited as the main rationale for urban event policies and implied the community cohesion agenda Finkel and Platt (2020) identified was likely to be more significant. The contrast in audiences between Buxton Festival’s tourists and Derby Festé’s local residents was useful in addressing questions of how social mobility changed as a result of artistic tastes.
A second reason for choosing these festivals was it was considered the cases needed to have been in existence for five or more years to ensure they had established governance systems and consistent funding streams as these were the focus of analysis. Thirdly, as ACE emerged as important in establishing cultural credibility, the cases were chosen because they received ACE funding. A final criterion was the festivals should exhibit evidence of a desire to facilitate cultural or social mobilities.

Derby Festé and Buxton Festival emerged as two viable cases. Both claimed to draw new audiences to regenerate their sites. Festé claimed it ‘generates £800,000 a year’ for the city’s economy and that is proved the city centre was a safe place to visit in the evenings (Festé, 2019). Buxton Festival highlighted its policy of staging rarely seen operas in ‘the heart of the beautiful Peak District’ (Buxton Festival Ltd., 2017) as central to its appeal to tourists. Both festivals promoted Western culture ‘high arts’: opera in Buxton’s case and contemporary dance in Festé’s, although the latter also included the more popular circus arts. Opera appeals to an educated, affluent and urban group which make up just 5 per cent of English households and is prepared to travel for cultural experiences (Bradley 2017; The Audience Agency 2019). Just under 5 per cent of the population attend contemporary dance (DCMS, 2018). When presented as an outdoor arts festival with the more popular circus arts added, outdoor arts’ profile becomes less socially exclusive, attracting local residents and families. Significantly this includes publics not usually engaged with cultural forms funded by ACE, and a higher proportion of BAME attenders (The Audience Agency 2018). In the context of urban cultural policies these figures point to festivals’ cultural forms as a significant factor in defining social boundaries.

Both of the cases chosen were staged arts festivals with claims to achieve local economic development objectives; Buxton Festival to attract tourists and Festé to encourage footfall to the city’s cultural quarter. Festé has a secondary purpose of widening the demographic profile of the cultural quarter by attracting audiences who rarely participate in arts such as contemporary dance. This elision of purposes is common in festival production and cultural policy discussions, so the cases allow for an examination of both policy narratives; that cultural festivals increase footfall through tourism or eventalisation (Smith, 2012), and that they enable social inclusion.

The festivals have contrasting governance models. Buxton is an independent charity, while Festé is run by a consortium of ACE-funded organisations. The comparisons illuminated how social and market closures might become tacitly or explicitly institutionalised in festival governance structures. In order to evaluate how institutional relations influenced festival production and, consequently, their ability to facilitate cultural and social mobilities, this study focused on the attitudes and values of their governance networks. Starting with each festival’s senior manager and
using a snowball technique, depth interviews were undertaken with sixteen Buxton Festival (in 2007-8 and 2013-14) and twelve Festé stakeholders (2016-17 and 2019) to ascertain what rules-in-action informed decisions about governance and artistic programming. Snowball sampling is particularly effective in researching networks (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). Although it can limit the perspectives studied, since one of the research questions this study sought to answer was who the ‘in group’ considered important to include in their festival production, snowball sampling was appropriate. The full list of interviewees by role can be seen in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buxton International Festival</th>
<th>Festival board/management</th>
<th>Influential stakeholders</th>
<th>Local interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews pre-2013</td>
<td>Festival General Managers x 5</td>
<td>Former Arts Council Finance Director</td>
<td>Buxton hotel owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-founder/Artistic Directors x 2</td>
<td>Former local councillors x 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opera North founder</td>
<td>Local musician</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former chairman x 2</td>
<td>Fringe venue manager</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Festival Friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism information officer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Buxton Opera House staff member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews post-2014</td>
<td>Festival administrator</td>
<td>Opera House board member</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former Festival General Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Board member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former chairman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literary Strand Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derby Festé</td>
<td>Derby QUAD CEO</td>
<td>Marketing company owner /sponsor in kind</td>
<td>Resident Derby suburbs x 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews pre-2017</td>
<td>Derby LIVE Manager</td>
<td>BID Manager</td>
<td>Pub manager, Derby Cultural Quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baby People founder/CEO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shop owner, Derby Cultural Quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artistic Lead/Dèda Artistic Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Derby Theatre Executive Director</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Festé Ambassador Co-ordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews 2019</td>
<td>Derby University researcher</td>
<td>Resident Derby suburbs x 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pub managers, Derby Cultural Quarter x 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shop owners, Derby Cultural Quarter x 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Derby LIVE staff x 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Interviewees by role, date and category
The research on each festival was undertaken in two fieldworks at each site. This enabled the researcher to visit two editions of each festival and to observe changes over time.

An interview guide was developed based on Critical Incident Technique (CIT) model. CIT is widely used in organisational development and psychological therapies (Butterfield et al. 2005). For its originators, CIT sought to describe an activity in order to determine its objectives or aims. What do festival producers believe they are trying to accomplish? When similar answers arose from different respondents, it was considered an indicator there were significant shared beliefs and values. Interviewees who were experts in an activity, or who undertook the work being analysed, were asked to describe specific events and phenomena they consider to be significant. Specifically, in this study, they were asked ‘what are you proud of?’ CIT was found to encourage people to discuss their personal feelings about the festival, rather than parroting an approved party line, so uncovering the tacit values underpinning actions. These responses were compared to the publicly stated aims of the festival as found in annual reports, marketing materials and market research, and the shared values identified as important within each festival’s governance system. As the interviews focused on the ‘in group’, these documents were a useful counterbalance. They provided evidence of what the festival considered important to stakeholders and included data on audience figures and demographics. Similarly, the interviews with local residents gave insights into how messages were received.

The cases were analysed thematically using Whitford et al.’s (2014) indicators for measuring event governance: transparency, rule of law, structures for implementing policy, responsiveness and equitable involvement, and accountability. The analysis asks what the causes were of any closures identified across these dimensions. First the two festivals will be introduced with a brief summary of their history and their espoused purposes.

Buxton Festival

Buxton Festival is an opera festival held over three weeks in July each year in the spa town’s historical 1,000 seat Opera House. It is a registered charity. It takes place during the summer, with ancillary events such as recitals or choral concerts in nearby venues. In 2000 the festival launched a series of literary talks which have become very popular with the opera audiences as something to do during the day and attract more local residents. In 2018 it turned over £1.3 million, employing seven staff. The majority of its income was from trading activity and philanthropy with 13.5 per cent from ACE and local authority grants (Buxton Arts Festival Ltd. 2018).

The festival was launched in the late 1970s by Malcolm Fraser and Anthony Hose, two opera producers who had met at Welsh National Opera. Fraser had recently moved to Manchester to work
at the Royal Northern School of Music. He came across Buxton’s then dilapidated theatre and Pavilion, originally built when the town was a rival visitor attraction to Bath, and immediately decided it was the perfect place to start an opera festival. This history gave the festival its vision. Fraser aimed to run an international arts festival which would attract tourists to the town to support its neglected visitor economy. There was “no expectation locals would come. The festival was for opera fans”. This vision was central and the interviewees all agreed, without prompting, that the festival’s purpose was to produce rarely seen operas which could only be seen at the festival in order to attract tourists to Buxton and to revitalise its visitor economy. Opera was considered ideal for this as aficionados were largely affluent and willing to travel to see unique productions. The aim was to produce excellent, high quality works which would appeal to the professional opera world and, through attracting tourists, appeal to local politicians interested in the town’s economic regeneration. Fraser explained:

I knew that if we could put a product in there of a high enough standard it would work. Because it’s such a unique environment. […] Buxton is fortunate it has this building, this Opera House. It’s the only place of its type outside an urban area. And that’s what the festival is for. It’s for fulfilling this place. […] So we wanted the best artists we could afford and found it was important to have international auditions (MF 30 June 2010).

For Fraser, the festival launch was “the opening of a major opera house” to set alongside Aldeburgh. Establishing artistic credibility was essential. To this end, the festival sought credibility by working with national and international figures from the opera world whose professional status positioned the festival as part of the mainstream. With support from the Duke of Devonshire, they recruited a board that included Lord Harewood, Managing Director of English National Opera 1972-1985 and founder of Leeds Triennial Musical Festival, alongside baritone Geraint Evans and John Tooley, General Director at Covent Garden from 1970-1988. There was an explicit agreement among the founders to exclude local residents who had lobbied the council to support the festival. Although there was internally settled, the decision was not advertised or codified in the festival’s governance regulations, so lacked transparency. This closure was aimed at establishing the festival’s artistic programme as on a par with Glyndebourne. The founders felt such prestige could only be achieved through association with high cultural capital, which they defined as having board members from the professional opera world.

Yet, despite this focus on producing quality in a high art form and governance links to the arts establishment and aristocracy, the festival did not achieve regular funding from the Arts Council.
until 20 years after it was established (Jordan, 2013). Even such a senior member of the establishment with many years’ experience of the Arts Council as Lord Harewood was surprised. I felt the Arts Council rather failed Buxton Festival. [...] It gave mixed messages. Buxton was encouraged to apply for three-year funding, a great deal of work went into it and then it was turned down (11 November 2010).

Harwood’s incomprehension was echoed by many interviewees. It is an indication the Arts Council’s funding rationale was opaque. In fact, there was a policy in place, as a former Arts Council Finance Director explained. Its policy was only to support ‘artistic creation’ not “to subsidise someone playing at being an impresario” and that there was a suspicion many festivals were “artificially brought together series of events” (AF 9 June 2011). There was also a policy of responsiveness, but this was to local authorities’ views not those of residents or other stakeholders. In Buxton’s case the County Council was unsupportive because the festival’s focus on opera was considered one that would not interest its residents. The individuals interviewed who were involved in the festival’s governance or management were not aware of these rules, meaning there was an accountability gap.

**Derby Festé**

Street performance festival Derby Festé started in 2007. It takes place annually on a Friday evening and Saturday at the end of September in the Cathedral Quarter (CQ) of Derby city centre. The CQ is an area comprising the Market Place, Derby Guildhall, the Silk Mill museum and key Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) QUAD digital media centre and Déda centre for contemporary dance, the two bodies which instigated and produce the festival.

Festé is primarily aimed at families who might not go into the CQ in the evenings and attracts 30-35,000 people over the course of the weekend, with 3,000 paying to go to the climatic Saturday night spectacular at the Bass Recreation Ground a short walk away near the river. The performances include contemporary circus and dance acts, stages for local artists and community performances and a parade, often featuring giant puppets imported from countries such as Spain or France, creating a sense of carnivalesque otherness marking the festive period as different from other weekends. Unlike Buxton Festival, the festival was programmed to have popular appeal, while staying true to Déda’s artistic mission:

> the quality of those contemporary dancers is something that you just wouldn’t hire on a shopping Saturday for people to see, so that’s what sets Derby Festé apart [...]. Festé stays true to pushing the boundaries with the art that happens.
There are a lot of high-risk bookings in there (SS-C 4 November 2016).

Just as in Buxton, the artistic team argued artistic excellence was central to the festival’s ability to transform the city’s imaginary.

Festé is a project managed by an executive committee of four of the city’s NPOs. Below this is a steering committee including staff from these four plus a marketing agency and a worker from an ACE-funded national body whose role was to diversify the festival’s audiences by attracting BAME and working-class audiences. Sub-committees were tasked with programming, marketing and event management. In 2015 an additional organisation joined ACE’s National Portfolio and was then invited to join the executive committee. Unlike the other NPOs, its work focused on using arts participation to support the needs of people from deprived communities rather than on presenting cultural work to the public. Its director noted that, despite having lobbied to be involved in the executive committee and programming group for some time, it was only when they became an NPO that this was agreed, making NPO status a tacit form of boundary maintenance similar to the professionalisation strategies Buxton used. Weber (1920) identified this as a market closure tactic. As in the Buxton case, the rules of participation in the governance structures were understood by the members, but were not transparent or codified into formal rules, making them difficult for outsiders to negotiate.

Festé’s foundation narrative prioritised economic development and footfall to the city’s cultural quarter by reimagining it as vibrant and welcoming in the face of competition from a new shopping mall that the founders feared would shift the retail focus to the other side of the city centre. A secondary purpose was to diversify audiences visiting the Cathedral Quarter, aiming for them to be more reflective of the city’s diverse demographics. Despite this, and the interviewees’ pride that Festé created a “general sense of togetherness” (AB 21 October 2016) where surprising new social conjunctions could be experienced, there was little evidence of these goals in its governance or management structures which excluded non-arts professionals.

In contrast to Buxton Festival, Festé’s audiences were local and accidental. According to research at its 2014 edition, only five per cent of respondents planned their trip specifically to go to the festival (The Audience Agency, November 2014). Festé was aware of its socially exclusive audiences and, with funding from a national NPO which had a widening participation remit, employed a part-time arts ambassador to broaden its appeal through work with residents in more deprived suburbs. Links were made to migrant communities from Eastern Europe, Roma and skateboarders who were asked to perform at community stages clearly differentiated from the spaces used by professional artists. Although described as important by the festival’s leaders, this work was narrated as ‘audience development’, community participation rather than a strand of the
professional arts programme, with only a small proportion of the festival’s budget (interview 2016) and no voice on the executive committee. While explicitly stated, it was evident this was work mandated from outside rather than integral to the festival’s purpose and that it had little impact on the festival’s tacit closures such as the choice of programming as a consequence.

Since the Arts Council is Festé’s primary funder these pressures can be associated with the changes in ACE’s own governance discussed above. In developing its ten-year strategy and five goals, ACE’s decision-making became more transparent, with clear rules and systems for allocating grants, and processes for evaluating its progress towards widening participation. This openness, however, had not been incorporated into Festé’s governance, which remained closed. Following Whitford et al.’s (2014) governance criteria, the rules of membership were limited to NPOs, a form of associational closure, but this was never formalised, so lacked transparency. And there was no formal role for CQ businesses, meaning the festival’s policy to revitalise the area had no structures for implementation. Despite its stated desire to diversify audiences and encourage marginalised communities to visit the cultural quarter, the executive excluded local artists, professional and amateur. That committee membership was limited to NPOs and reflected Eurocentric views of culture meant the festival’s responsiveness to and equitable involvement of minority communities was restricted. Consequently, the executive and programming teams had limited understanding of why many local communities rarely visited the city’s ACE-legitimised arts venues. One interviewee explained residents from deprived suburbs might visit the city centre, but even then “within the city centre there’s political or economic or social invisible boundaries or sections” (interview 2016). The Cathedral Quarter was one area they felt was ‘not for the likes of you’ (Morton-Smyth, 2004). As the NPOs were based in the CQ they had limited engagement with artists or audiences from disadvantaged areas, an omission exacerbated by the need to have enough cultural capital to feel comfortable with the festival’s European-tradition programming (Wilks, 2011).

Although the two festivals were managed differently, claimed to have dissimilar purposes, and operated in particular contexts, both had tacit rules of association which restricted their abilities to engage wider publics in their governance structures. Buxton Festival demanded either high status in the international opera world, or the ability to donate financially. Inclusion in Festé’s executive group was only open to organisations in receipt of ACE core funding. In analysing them as examples of social and market closure these distinctions provide a form of triangulation which helps to illuminate and add significance to similar boundary-monitoring behaviours.
Communal or associational closure?

Weber (1920) differentiated between communal social closure based on norms and associational closure based on rules. Elision of the two social closure types, and social and market closure effects can lead to incomplete and sometimes incorrect explanations for intergroup inequalities (Cardona, 2013). This elision is evident in relation to public festival policies and helps to explain why widening participation has been ineffective. Festivals are claimed to be sites for creative regeneration, community bonding, developing intercultural exchanges, for commissioning new artists and works, and for staging the canon. These purposes can be communal, associational or related to markets. And they can be either open or closed. A regeneration initiative might focus on one suburb, for example, with the aim of enhancing community cohesion through bonding activities for residents. Equally it might be a project aimed at bridging between diverse communities. Unless widening participation objectives are clearly identified and explicitly stated so there is accountability for outcomes from the outset, strategic or policy responses are likely to be confused leaving room for the ‘monopolisation of cultural and material goods and opportunities’ (Weber, 2004 p. 190). As festival organisations are more-or-less formally constituted, the rules of association were a good place to start to understand their rules-in-action.

Initially a core criterion for becoming a Buxton Festival trustee was membership of the global opera establishment. The festival’s founding artistic director explicitly excluded supportive local residents, however knowledgeable about opera, from board membership on the basis that “we are the artistic people, and we can’t have local amateurs, even very skilled amateurs, having too much influence on the artistic programme” (interview 2007), as this would detract from the festival’s attempts to establish itself as an international opera festival. Such prestige could only be achieved by recruiting trustees with high cultural capital, tacitly if not explicitly defined through professionalism.

The centrality of cultural capital was also evident in Festé’s programming structures. While the festival was nominally curated by a sub-committee, in reality the programme was selected by its chair, Dèda’s artistic director, and reflected his venue’s focus on contemporary dance and circus. The festival programme, comprised of professional artists in Western dance and circus traditions, was presented to the committee each year as a fait accompli. Despite its stated desire to diversify audiences and encourage marginalised communities to visit the CQ, the executive excluded local artists from its governance and programming, allocating only a fraction of its budget to community work. That Eurocentric curatorial norms and committee membership might explain the festival audiences’ homogeneity was only raised by one committee member interviewed. Rather, there was a belief that taking art onto the streets and making it free would encourage interest. However, as
Bourdieu (1984 [1979]) contended, culture is inherently exclusive, with rules that take a lifetime to understand. Taking the work onto the streets did increase the number of viewers, but with little evidence it had broken down any imperceptible participation barriers. Dèda’s artistic director himself commented, while watching a contemporary dance piece taking place on Cathedral Green during the eleventh edition: “you know there are 500, 600 people here. If I programmed this in Dèda there might be 40” (September 2017). Despite over a decade of evidence to indicate the festival did not widen participation beyond the weekend, there was no indication he or other committee members questioned why this was the case.

Neither did they ask whether it was the right approach for revitalising the CQ as a retail centre. Festé was founded to develop a new imaginary for the cultural quarter to drive footfall to independent shops and develop a distinctive retail brand in contrast to the new shopping mall. However, while the festival did attract audiences, the business community had not responded; shops did not open late, and restaurants did not display festival posters or offer special deals; nor was there a positive response to calls for festival sponsors. The festival organisers expressed disappointment and confusion about this reticence. There was, however, no discussion of undertaking research with businesses in the cultural quarter to understand how best the festival could support them, nor a plan to involve them in its governance structures. When asked, retail outlets felt that because the festival took place in the evening, and on the streets, it was actually detrimental as they would have to pay staff for extra hours, but the on-street nature of the activity meant few people visited the shops. The festival’s design was not suited to a direct economic effect of increasing their sales. The committee’s rules-in-action, that membership was determined by ACE funding was a form of associational closure. It meant there were no structures for implementing the economic development policy, and that local business’ voices were not heard, so their needs were not considered.

In both festivals the governance structures demonstrated clear evidence of social closure based on implicit associational factors related to professional expertise in the arts. These were presented as the ability to judge artistic quality, and attract international artists to the locality, a form of implicit communal closure through cultural capital more difficult to challenge than explicit rules. Local artists and cultural actors were excluded through both the formal and informal processes, limiting their potential to influence the festival’s artistic direction, or to widen the range of participants and audiences.

**Market closure through professional identity in the arts**

Market closure through professional identity is a concerted process if it is done to deliberately to
limit competition rather than a result of unconscious social biases. So, to what extent did the closures above lead to the festivals securing market opportunities? And, if they did, was this a strategic act?

In limiting membership of their governing bodies to established professionals from the cultural sector, both festivals can be seen to be attempting to establish themselves as high-quality institutions worthy of funding by ACE. From its foundation, ACE sought to create institutions to ‘elevate standards of performance in the arts’ (Wilson 2019 p. 141). It argued standards could only be maintained by professionals with time to focus exclusively on developing their practice. Including professional opera artists and artistic directors as trustees in the case of Buxton Festival, or by running Festé exclusively from ACE funded organisations, means both were acting strategically to convince the funder of their commitment to artistic quality and, therefore, their suitability for funding.

While Festé attracted ACE funding from its foundation, Buxton Festival was unsuccessful for the first twenty years of its existence and even in 2018 received only about ten per cent of its turnover from ACE. It is notable, in addition to professional expertise in the opera field, membership of its board was also open to donors or individuals able to attract other philanthropists. This meant a significant proportion of the trustees were affluent members of the UK’s elite. One was described by another trustee as, a “lovely man. An outgoing personality. Eton. The Guards … he introduced some very important people”. This man brokered relations between the founders and the region’s business elites who then financed the festival through philanthropy and sponsorship. Offering board membership on this basis can be seen as collective action to create a socially exclusive and therefore loyal group of funders limiting the opportunities for competitor organisations and less affluent board members.

In the case of Festé, the city’s NPOs effectively created a monopoly with two market consequences. Firstly, despite the festival’s claims it had been established to drive footfall to the cultural quarter, very few shops supported it. The organisers were unable to explain this, but had no structures for engaging business owners, pointing to alternative priorities as its real purpose. The rationale became clear when the local authority threatened to withdraw funding, and the festival successfully lobbied ACE to support it through a corresponding increase in Dèda’s NPO grant (Arts Council England, 2017a), showing its focus on artistic excellence rather than community benefits had been a good choice (Ilczuk and Kulikowska, 2007). This market closure had the effect of reinforcing the festival’s focus on norms associated with its art forms rather than the Council’s explicit priorities of economic development and social cohesion, thereby reinforcing cultural barriers to mobility.
Surprisingly, although Buxton Festival was successful in attracting tourists, a core part of the Council’s economic development policies, this did not lead to extra income from the local authority or sponsorship from businesses based in the town. This absence was attributable to a lack of identification with the festival, which was considered to be entirely for the benefit of ‘outsiders’ rather than residents, a direct result of its socially elite programming and governance structures.

Both festivals successfully closed elements of the market: Festé through a process of professionalisation which appealed to ACE, Buxton through a form of associational closure based on programming an art form that appealed to an affluent social elite with economic capital. The consequence of these resource driven priorities was to exclude other social groups. Buxton Festival was not interested in attracting local residents because its focus was on cosmopolitan opera fans. Festé’s stated concerns to drive footfall to the cultural quarter and attract audiences from lower socio-economic groups was marginalised because ACE funding prioritised cultural capital.

Conclusions
This paper asked to what extent festival governance constrained social mobility. It conceptualised festival production as forms of social and market closure within political economies in the UK regions which had been subject to declining funding for intrinsic cultural purposes. It identified Arts Council England’s funding policies as highly significant and found there was a lack of transparency about its artistic judgements. Even after the institution of formal goals in its 2020 “Great Art for Everyone” strategy, what qualified as artistic excellence remained obscure. This led the festivals studied to develop governance models which tacitly preferred professional arts managers over residents and community members. The funding system had become a closed shop, intelligible and accessible only to those with valorised cultural capital in the form of the right qualifications, work experience or networks.

And the festivals were right to take this approach. Their governing bodies demonstrated themselves to be adept at identifying public policy rhetorics they could attach themselves to. They pragmatically and successfully employed narratives that festivals catalyse change and mobilise communities to access support from economic development funds related to tourism or place marketing as well as arts-specific funding. Festé used festival’s image as places for social bonding to engage with urban policies to overcome social exclusion, while Buxton prioritised promoting the visitor economy.

There is a policy risk in this approach. If festivals are unable to achieve the results required, funding may be withdrawn. This study asked what the reason was for the gap between the policy rhetoric of festivals as inclusive spaces (Duffy and Mair, 2017) and the lived reality found in the
cases. Social closure at the governance level was found to be a useful frame for thinking about mobilities as it drew attention to vested interests within the festival cases’ production systems. These undermined inclusion by prioritising the in-group’s unquestioned notions of artistic excellence, pointing to the centrality of cultural form and equitable inclusion in decision-making if policy makers and festivals truly wish to widening participation. In both cases, festival producers used their professional expertise to dominate governance structures, restricting the range of actors with a voice in the festival’s curation and, consequently, the festival’s appeal to other socio-cultural groups. Opera is an elite art form in the UK and Buxton Festival’s board and audiences reflected that. The town’s demographics were middle and working class, and local residents formed a very small part of its audiences.

In the case of Festé, despite it taking place outdoors, there was limited engagement from BAME and working-class communities, albeit more than for shows in the partners’ venues. It was evident there was a limited understanding of marginalised communities’ views of the city centre. Rather than a neutral space, it was perceived by some as out-of-bounds, closed by the very ‘European-feel’ culture the committee felt was so welcoming because it reflected their own professional aesthetic. Audiences were demographically similar to those already visiting the cultural quarter, so while it might have grown audiences for the NPOs, the festival reinforced the quarter’s exclusive image.

For Cathedral Quarter businesses, while the festival appealed to affluent audiences likely to shop in independent local outlets, its timing as an evening event meant it was perceived as unlikely to increase short-term sales. The absence of dialogue between the festival’s producers, whose vision of the area it represented, and the businesses it believed would be direct beneficiaries of the rebranding was a direct consequence of its professionally closed governance structures which were not devised to implement the stated policy.

From the literature it is clear the distinction between social and market closure is often elided in cultural policy and cultural policy analysis. This was evident when Festé’s civic funding was replaced by Arts Council subsidy without the distinctions between local policy priorities and the ACE’s goals, or indeed those of the arts organisations themselves, being noticed or commented on. This raises questions of transparency and local accountability. ACE is an all-England body with no responsibility for Derby or Buxton’s regeneration or social cohesion. If festivals are not funded for local communities through local authorities, what are the processes for residents’ needs to be considered?

ACE’s historical focus on a limited palette of European art forms means, despite its stated aim of broadening audiences for the arts, it has struggled to engage communities from non-Western
cultures or working-class communities. In viewing this tension as the result of communal cultural closure, it becomes clear that membership of its governance structures, and those of the festivals’ studied, is drawn from a narrow section of society. As a consequence, European cultural tastes were institutionalised throughout the festivals’ designs. These cultural forms were crucial in determining participation. When applied to cultural production rather than consumption, the closure concept provides one explanation for the slow progress in diversifying arts audiences. It highlights the potential benefits of transparent, inclusive and accountable governance structures tied to explicit policy objectives.

By comparing two festivals started 30 years apart, the study also illuminated changes in ACE’s governance. The introduction of ten-year strategies meant it had become more transparent and accountable, leading to critical reflection (e.g., Hussain, 2019) and the creation of clear mechanisms for implementing diversity strategies, such as the funding of Festé’s ambassador post. It was also apparent that these changes had not resulted in the festival’s governance structures being opened up and, despite festivals’ reputation for disruption, governance closure had direct consequences on the cases’ achievement of policy goals related to social mobility. Buxton Festival attracted tourists because opera drew cosmopolitan audiences happy to travel to experience their favourite art form. Festé, by contrast, struggled to widen participation because contemporary dance, even when presented as spectacular street performance, did not resonate with communities from non-Western cultural traditions. Referring back to Whitford et al.’s (2014) dimensions of event governance, by relying on professionalisation processes to bolster their claims to funding, both festivals can be seen as unresponsive, inequitable and locally unaccountable, but equally highly successful. It was, after all, their professional cultural expertise which enabled them to navigate tensions between local and national policies in order to access resources from different funding sources. This required tacit knowledge of the norms and symbols associated with their specific cultural fields.

In exploring festival production this paper contributes a critical understanding of festival institutions as examples of exclusive social spaces. It found the festivals’ cultural forms were themselves used as rationales for cultural professional closure through rules based in tacit understandings of artistic excellence. This restricted transparency and accountability and led to the creation of festivals which were highly effective bonding sites for communities with relevant cultural capital but which did not effectively facilitate intercultural social mobilities. In illuminating the role of art forms in creating in-groups, the study runs contrary to common academic and policy narratives which envision festivals as inherently open spaces. Consequently, this analysis concludes policy makers seeking to achieve socio-cultural outcomes through festivals should first carefully
consider the unstated boundaries drawn by a festival’s cultural programming. They should then establish transparent, codified, responsive, equitable and accountable governance structures to achieve agreed policy outcomes rather than vague notions of ‘artistic excellence’.
Bibliography


