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## Bridging and bonding: social capital at music festivals

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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Bridging and bonding:**

**social capital in the music festival experience**

**Dr. Linda Wilks**

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Abstract:

This paper uses the theoretical concept of social capital as its framework to examine festivals in the context of social and cultural policy. Government policies have cited the arts as a tool for combating social exclusion, overcoming barriers between people and fostering community cohesion. Social capital theorist Robert Putnam specifically suggests that cultural events can bring together diverse social groups. To investigate these claims in practice, this study collected empirical data at three festivals: a pop festival, an opera festival and a folk festival. The empirical data, comprising observations, screening questionnaires and in-depth interviews, was analysed using critical discourse analysis to bring out styles and discourses relating to social interactions. It was found that the reinforcement of existing relationships, termed bonding social capital by Putnam, was an important part of the festival experience. The formation of bridging social capital: that is, new and enduring social connections with previously

*L. Wilks*

unconnected attendees was not, however, found to be a feature of festivals, despite a sense of general friendliness and trust identified by some. Furthermore, drawing on Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital, festival attendees were found to be remarkably similar in their demographic make-up, also throwing doubt on policy-related suggestions that festivals could be sites of inter-connections between people from diverse backgrounds. This study therefore suggests that music festivals are not valuable sites for social and cultural policy aims of combating social exclusion, bridging barriers between groups and fostering wider community cohesion.

**Keywords:** Putnam; Bourdieu; social policy; community cohesion; social exclusion; critical discourse analysis; music festivals; cultural policy.

## **Introduction**

Government policies in the United Kingdom suggest that the arts can bring people together and strengthen relationships, while ‘welcoming differences’ and ‘removing social barriers’, beliefs highlighted by the Department for Culture Media and Sport on their ‘arts and communities’ webpage (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2010c). This statement by the incoming UK government in 2010 echoes the former left-of-centre government’s linking of culture with community and inclusion, illustrated by the statement in the PAT 10 report that ‘participation in the arts and sport could help to renew blighted and excluded communities’ (Bennett & Silva, 2006; Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2001; HM Treasury, 2007; Labour Party, 2006). Similarly, at European policy-making level, mention has been made by Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, of the role of the creative and cultural industries in encouraging cultural diversity (European Commission, 2010). Also at European level, the 2008 ‘European Year of Cultural Dialogue, the ‘magical power’ of the arts ‘to connect value systems and open new spaces for encounter’ was highlighted during the Brussels debate (European Commission, 2008b), with arts festivals in particular being emphasised as being ‘vital for promoting intercultural dialogue ...offering a concentrated possibility of exchange and enrichment’ (European Commission, 2008a).

Continuing to echo the theme of inclusion and its link to the arts in the UK, the right-of-centre Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Jeremy Hunt, asserted in his first keynote speech, in May 2010, that: ‘culture and the arts are for everyone, not just the lucky few’ (Department for

Culture Media and Sport, 2010a). Also associated with the ideals of building strong community is the UK government's concept of the 'Big Society', involving the creation of 'a climate that empowers local people and communities', which Prime Minister David Cameron launched in 2010, aligning it to social capital theory (Prime Minister's Office, 2010). Showing synergy with the volunteering ethos implicit in Big Society, and providing a further link to social capital theory, is an assertion by Hunt of the government's aim to encourage a 'deeper commitment to cultural philanthropy' by members of the public (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2010a).

Other policy documents which help to frame this study include the McMaster Review of the arts, commissioned by the former Secretary of State for Culture in 2007, which, whilst focusing on excellence, also provides key evidence and recommendations relating to encouraging wider and deeper engagement by audiences (McMaster, 2008).

Taking these policy issues as its lead, this paper uses festival settings to examine how far these arts events do facilitate the building of socially inclusive community. To give added focus, the theoretical concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 2002; Putnam, 2000) is utilised to provide a lens through which the audiences of three music festivals can be examined. Participants were recruited at three UK festivals, through a two-stage process, with the outputs of interviews with a selection of the recruits being presented in this paper. Observations and participant screening data also contribute empirical findings to the study.

### **Focus on festivals**

Music festivals were chosen as the setting for this study for several reasons. Festivals are an expanding sector of the cultural industry across the world (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007), with spending on festivals in the United Kingdom up by 18% in 2009 compared to the previous year, a sharper rise than any other area of live music, according to the Performing Right Society (PRS) (BBC, 2010). Concert promoter, Live Nation, also reports that festivals had been for them the most important development of the first decade of the twenty-first century (Keynote, 2010).

By their very nature, music festivals collect people together in order for them to experience a range of cultural events. Festivals' generally extended and geographically constrained nature therefore gives the potential for the close examination of extended social interactions within a cultural context, a feature mentioned by Larsen and O'Reilly (2005). The former government's highlighting of a belief that the sharing of musical experiences can enable people from different cultural backgrounds to build mutual understanding also encourages this study's focus on music festivals (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2008).

There have been several studies and reports which have been useful in building knowledge of social and cultural issues in relation to festivals featuring music. Some studies focus on economic impact, whilst touching to a greater or lesser extent on social issues, and are often commissioned by festival organisers or sponsors with the aim of demonstrating benefit (AEA Consulting, 2006; Long & Owen, 2006; Maughan & Bianchini, 2004; Sussex Arts Marketing, 2008; The Association of Festival Organisers, 2004). A review of the literature relating to

the economic and social benefits of events and festivals by Wood, Robinson and Thomas (2006) concludes that social benefits are usually seen by organisers to be of secondary importance, however, despite some studies claiming that the social benefits often outweigh the economic benefits.

Social impact, rather than economic impact, as in the above studies, is the focus of a study of a Gaelic Festival by Matarasso (1996). Although this is worth noting as one of the first to attempt to assess the social impacts of festivals, it has since been heavily criticised for its poor research design (Merli, 2002; Selwood, 2002). Criticism includes that the questionnaire wording is vague, the conclusions, as well as the statements about society in general, are so bold as to be meaningless, and any potential negative effects of the festival are downplayed or discounted. Belfiore (2002) goes even further by criticising any attempt to identify benefits beyond an 'art for arts' sake' perspective, whilst Gibson (2008) demonstrates an opposing philosophy by arguing that it is still important to consider instrumentality in relation to the arts in order to ensure that the publicly funded arts are democratic and accountable.

Literature focusing on the social and cultural characteristics and behaviours of music festival audiences is particularly relevant to this study's aims of studying social capital in the context of music festivals. Quinn (2000; 2003) highlights the role of the Wexford Opera Festival as a site where people make statements, through a display of values, about who they are and how they live, promoting particular sets of values. Her finding that divisions were evident between local residents who tended to favour the fringe festival and visitors who attended the main festival is particularly interesting. In his studies of festival audiences, Waterman (1998; 1998) suggests that arts festivals (including music)

are a chance for a group celebration of shared values. They may be a mechanism for the symbolic emphasis of social division, according to Waterman: they become places to be seen. Similarly, Jamieson's (2004) study confirms this view in terms of Edinburgh's festivals, which she found to exclude those living in the housing estates on the outskirts of the city in favour of the cultural tourists. Sharpe (2008) also found audience homogeneity at an alternative festival in Canada, where the attempts to draw in a mainstream crowd of attendees who were likely to be transformed by the politics of the festival were unsuccessful, as the festival tended to appeal to individuals who were already aligned to the festival's alternative values.

Commenting on festivals' potential for emphasising exclusivity and superiority, as demonstrated above, Long, Robinson and Picard (2004) also suggest that festivals may provide opportunities for cross-cultural understanding, however. Hints at diversity were reported by Gardner (2004), for example, who claims that people from a wide variety of educational, occupational and religious backgrounds mingle at bluegrass festivals and Willems-Braun's (1994) study of Canada's fringe festivals warns that the attendees cannot be un-problematically categorised into social groups due to the possibilities of multiplicities within individuals and within the festival space. Curtis (2010) also suggests that new social connections are made between jazz festival performers, leading to new musical collaborations.

Although the studies reported above have been useful in building knowledge of social and cultural issues in relation to festivals, there is a general lack of recent empirical research in this area. Calls have been made, for example, for further research to discover the connection between social capital and



festivals in particular (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007) and for further insights which might contribute to the development of cultural policy (Selwood, 2006).

There is a general lack of recent empirical research focusing on social issues relating to festivals which could be used to explore social and cultural policy in the UK. Calls have been made for further research to discover the connection between social capital and festivals in particular (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007), as this has not been attempted previously, and for further insights which might contribute to the development of cultural policy (Selwood, 2006).

### **Social capital in theory**

The theoretical concept of social capital is useful when examining issues relating to community cohesion, social inclusion and broadening participation in the arts. Social capital theorist, Putnam (2000), whose views have attracted the attention of American and British politicians (Bunting, 2007), specifically suggests that the arts can bring together diverse groups and thus promote well-being by allowing the production of mutually beneficial norms of reciprocity, generalised trust and co-operation. Putnam suggests that the extent of volunteering and philanthropy is a central measure of social capital in a community, although he explains that the social connections gained from ‘doing with’ are more important to social capital building than the cheque in an envelope approach of ‘doing for’ (Putnam, 2000, p. 116). Putnam also claims that arts events could be used to transcend social barriers: people may make new connections with others whom they perceive to have a different, though equally rigid set of values. Providing further links from social capital to the arts, social

and cultural theorist Bourdieu (1984, p. 18), also highlighted the potentially divisive role of music: ‘...nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music’.

Social capital is a broad term, with theorists interpreting and developing the concept in various ways. These approaches vary from a macro-scale view which highlights the operation of social networks and their potential for indirect public good; and a micro-level focus on the individual, highlighting personal actions and potential benefits, although some coalescence between the two perspectives is apparent. Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo-Cal and Wright (2009) combine the two perspectives neatly by indicating that their reading of the literature concludes that friendship and social contact networks are the essence of social capital.

Putnam emphasises the macro approach to social capital in this definition, regarding it as being related to:

‘...features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit’  
(Putnam, 1995, p. 67)

He sees social organisations as encouraging the growth of civic virtue, tolerance, reciprocity and trustworthiness, as well as lessening shirking and cheating and improving health. Putnam’s conceptualisation of social capital has, however, attracted criticism, including for its overemphasis on supposed positive outcomes (Mouritsen, 2003); for the lack of emphasis on context which its macro scale encourages (Edwards & Foley, 2001; Koniordos, 2008; Wallis, Killerby, & Dollery, 2004); and for its measurement flaws (Healey, 2004). The term ‘capital’, with its connotations of productivity and competitiveness, has also been

criticised for its inappropriateness within a social inclusion context (Thompson, 2009).

However, as the research settings of this study provided bounded contexts, the study did not follow Putnam's methodology, and a critical perspective is employed, it was concluded that Putnam's more specific concepts of bridging social capital and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000) are useful conceptual tools. Putnam explains that bonding social capital is inward looking, reinforcing exclusive identities and promoting homogeneity; whereas bridging social capital is outward looking, promoting links between diverse individuals. Putnam suggests that many groups simultaneously bond across some social dimensions and bridge across others. He sees bonding social capital as increasing solidarity with people who are already similar, bolstering the narrower self and creating strong in-group loyalty. Bridging social capital, however, links people to others who move in different circles. Although attracting criticism for over-simplification (Blackshaw and Long, 2005), these theories do provide a helpful framework for the consideration of issues of community cohesion and bridging boundaries between groups of people.

In contrast to Putnam's macro perspective, Bourdieu places the individual at the core of the concept of social capital, stressing their place within a network:

'The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize.'

(Bourdieu, 2002, p. 86)

Bourdieu's focus on the role of social capital in controlling group membership, with mutually recognisable signs, or family, school or class characteristics facilitating access, thus provides a useful complementary

Comment [L1]: Ref needed from endnote

perspective. His highlighting of the potential for issues of power or elitism to arise is also useful for its relevance to issues of social inclusion and broadening participation.

The theoretical concept of social capital therefore directed the study towards examination of the social networks in operation at the festivals, as well as the ways in which the individuals operated within these networks.

### **Collecting the empirical data**

In order to discover the role of social capital in the music festival experience, and thus throw light onto social and cultural policy, this study used an ethnographic approach which enabled a multi-layered study of the research area. The methods included screening questionnaires, systematic observations and document examination, as well as in-depth interviews of festival attendees after the festivals.

Three UK festivals were used as the case settings. These festivals were carefully selected to be aligned in terms of features such as scale and the presence of a public funding stream, either from Arts Council England and/or via their local authority, but varied in terms of musical content. In order to provide the potential to draw on the experiences of people with differing music tastes, as well as to allow for different modes of festival operation, the festivals chosen were of three types: an opera festival (OperaFest), a folk festival (FolkFest) and a festival concentrating on indie-pop music (PopFest).

A data collection screening stage using a structured sampling approach collected basic demographic, attendance and music taste information from 219 festival attendees at the events. The screening and observational data indicated

that the attendees of all the festivals were remarkably similar to each other in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. They tended to be from the middle classes and to possess higher levels of academic qualifications. Festival attendee ages at each festival and at the events within each festival were concentrated in relatively narrow ranges. Observable ethnicity at all three festivals was overwhelmingly White British, despite one of the festivals being located in a city with a high proportion of British Asian residents.

From the screened responses, eleven interviewees from each festival, a total of thirty-three, were selected for the hour-long follow-up in-depth interviews. The selection of the interviewees was purposively designed to echo the range of socio-demographic characteristics of the screened respondents from each festival.

### **Exploring the social landscape of the festival through a critical discourse analysis of the data**

Following thematic analysis of the interviews, the interview texts and observations were further analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003) in order to identify orders of discourse and the accomplishment of 'style':

An 'order of discourse' represents the discursive facet of a particular set of social practices within a particular social order, whilst style explores the accomplishment of individual identities through talk. When broken down into their constituent parts, 'orders of discourse' comprise competing and complementary 'discourses'. According to Fairclough, discourses are specific ways of representing aspects of the material, mental and social world. The

analytical strength of a focus on discourses is that patterns, similarities and differences in their use, between participants and between festivals, can reveal much about the role of social capital in the festival experience. For individual speakers, the deployment of different discourses enables them to achieve different social and personal 'styles' as well as to illustrate their social relationships with other people. This enacted style can effectively position the social actor in relation to social capital. A CDA approach, with its emphasis on discourses and styles, as well as its critical standpoint, therefore offers rich possibilities for the analysis of data relating to social capital within the setting of festivals and allows conclusions to be reached relating to social and cultural policies.

A connection/detachment order of discourse was identified within the texts of the research data. This order of discourse surfaces the ways in which the research participants did or did not relate to others during their festival experience, focusing particularly on talk relating to social networks and personal image. Three competing discourses comprise this order of discourse:

- the 'persistent connection' discourse relates to individuals' talk about attending the event within a close-knit group of friends, meeting up with other previously well-known contacts at the event, forging enduring connections as a result of festival meetings, as well as telling known people with common interests about the festival after the event;
- the 'temporary connection' discourse includes comments about casual conversations with strangers;
- the 'detachment' discourse includes talk on avoiding contact with other

festival attendees and feeling apart from the festival community.

Examples of the three competing discourses within this order of discourse and discovered within interviewees' talk will be presented here.

***The 'persistent connection' discourse***

The persistent connection discourse includes reference to close-knit social relationships which were already in existence before the festival, as well as enduring beyond the event, thus being a feature of the festival experience. Some of the relationship groups existed outside the festival context as well as within it; whilst others were focused on the festival, to be resurrected each year or at a range of similar festivals. Within the persistent connection discourse there was an emphasis on presenting as friendly, sociable, popular and as an insider, as the following quote from Matt at Folkfest illustrates:

Matt: You have your pocket group of friends who you get up, suffer your hangover with, have your breakfast and your coffee and then you just kinda split during the day, disappear off to do your own things. Then lunch-time, there'll be a couple of phone calls, oh you know, where are you at, ah in this pub, whatever. Go and have a beer in your lunch. Uhm and then you split again for the afternoon and you'll see them wandering around, or working, or doing something. And then you meet up in the evening and um, more beer! So, yeah, there is that, that little circle of friends and I think the majority of people work like that.

Matt from FolkFest's network tended to be focused on festivals and he characterised it as having two levels of closeness. Illustrating the way his group worked at the festival, with the connections remaining persistent throughout the weekend, he used a metaphor of being in a pocket to emphasise his close-knit

inner set. The sense of a friendship group connecting and interconnecting as well as dividing and then re-joining also evokes the imagery of knitting, culminating in a complete ensemble and enabled Matt to establish his style as popular within his vast network of friends. Beer, phone calls, pubs and lunchtime are all non-discursive elements referred to by Matt, which help to texture this discourse and provide insight into the way these persistent connections work. As well as his close group of friends, Matt made reference to a wider set of persistent connections made through folk festivals, again displaying a sociable style:

Matt: It's one massive circle of friends. I mean, everybody basically knows everybody through somebody.

Geoff from OperaFest, when talking about the friends he met up with at the festival described a similar *modus operandi*. Geoff, like Matt, described the group coming together then dividing up again, then reconnecting within the festival as well as being brought together year after year to attend, positioning himself as a social lynch-pin:

Researcher: Do you meet anyone else when you're there at all?

Geoff: For the last oohh ten to fifteen years, yes we have. We've got other friends who come up from London and one who comes up from just outside Oxford and we all get together. We all get our seats in the same place usually so that we can sit together. We tend to go out to lunch. Everybody does their own thing [before and after the opera].

Unless we have an evening free and then we'd all get together.

There were also examples of talk about close-knit groups, which also existed outside the festival from PopFest interviewees, which can be categorised as persistent connections discourse. Alan from PopFest made use of the term



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'friends' as well as establishing a style as a family man, to describe his group of fifteen or so fellow PopFest attendees, with his reference to the number of years he had known them giving credence to the closeness of their connections.

Alan: These are mainly friends that we've got to know in the local villages over the last ten or twelve years. There was probably a link through our son, I think. Yeh, most of them I think from memory have got sons or daughters of around my son's age. We do see that sort of group of people quite you know every couple of weeks. It's if you bump into people, or I play tennis with some of them. My wife knows them well and plays tennis with some of them.

OperaFest had also brought together Jill's friendship group of six people. Although they were now spread around the country, most of the group members were persistently connected through university attendance and still met up regularly, including annually at OperaFest. Sixty-year-old Jill stressed their musical links as well as their academic alignment, using a styling as a maths graduate to affirm her own musical credentials too:

Jill: Well, put it this way, friends of my husband were commiserating with him because he was going to be the only member of the group who wasn't an Oxford mathematician. So we're all keen on music.

Persistent connections made as a result of becoming closer with people from their outer network at festivals were also mentioned by some of the PopFest participants. Lucy and Madeline, styling themselves as friendly, for example, spoke of maintaining the new connections they had made from within an existing wider friendship network.

Madeline: I met a few new people who were perhaps friends of friends.

Researcher: Was there anyone you've kind of kept in touch with?

Madeline: Yeah there are actually yeah. Two girls that I've kept in contact with since. They'll perhaps come out with us now.

Lucy: I actually met someone that I've seen him around but I've never really been introduced to him properly who I've become really friends with since.

The persistent connection discourse therefore features within the discourse from all three festivals, encompassing friendship groups which are already in existence. This discourse was particularly prevalent amongst the FolkFest participants. Closeness within a group of previously more distantly connected friends was engendered by attendance at the festival in some cases. What was not in evidence in the dataset was evidence of new persistent connections formed between people who were completely unconnected before the festival, however.

### ***The 'temporary connection' discourse***

Examples of temporary connection discourse were again identifiable in participants from across the three festivals and related to talk of fleeting, non-persistent, connections made by chance rather than design. Temporary connections were usually made through chatting to adjacent audience members, during refreshment breaks, or to festival neighbours. Within the temporary connection discourse styling was of restraint and friendliness when necessary.

The impression of chance encounters was gained from the use of phrases such as 'happen to' or 'find yourself', as illustrated by Christine, Barry and Janice of OperaFest:

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Christine: If we're at things we'll talk to people but there's no, we don't meet friends up there. It's just the people that we happen to be at the same thing with, effectively people we're sat next to.

...

Barry: There was a couple, I don't know quite where they came from, but they were staying where I was and we had to come out the doors together. So we had a conversation.

...

Researcher: Do you find yourself talking to people that sit next to you?

Janice: I think you, maybe in your B&B, sometimes you do have a little bit of a chat about things

There was no talk of keeping in touch with these temporary acquaintances, however, rather a styling of being friendly and open where necessary, but within limits, separating this discourse from that of persistent connection. PopFest interviewees, such as Mike and Alan, also spoke of chance encounters, demonstrating a style of restraint, again using the phrase 'happened to' and emphasising forced proximity, as the key to connection:

Mike: There was just the occasional people that you happened to be sitting at the same table, sort of chat about things. But nothing more than that.

...

Alan: We spoke to a few people on the campsite that were next door to us

OperaFest interviewees, such as Lydia, for example, also referred to personal image as a vehicle of temporary connection:

Lydia: It's quite nice to look the part. I think there's an atmosphere that does encourage you to dress up.

Evidence of the temporary connection discourse was not particularly common throughout the dataset, but most prevalent amongst OperaFest interviewees, indicating a willingness to acknowledge a connection to other festival attendees but a reluctance to take the connection further.

A general trust in fellow festival goers and a feeling of safety at the event was also highlighted by some as an enabling factor in feeling able to make casual conversation with others:

Callum from FolkFest confirmed that 'you can walk up to anyone' at the folk festival. He also remarked on the feeling of trust and safety at the festival:

Callum: You're in a private area where you've had to have a ticket to get in so everyone's like-minded. There's no-one malicious there, no-one's going to come up to you to distract you while your wallet's being pinched. Walk around drunk all day and not feel unsafe - it's great!

Several of the PopFest interviewees also mentioned the feeling of security, with Stephen and Daniel commenting on this:

Stephen: It's not overly rowdy, not a lot of misbehaving.

Daniel: I feel safe in the crowd.

### ***The 'detached' discourse***

Within the connected/detached order of discourse, the detached discourse includes talk about attending the festival alone, as well as talk of being different

or separate from the other festival attendees in various ways. Styles within the detached discourse tended to be of a focused and intended separateness.

There were numerous examples of detached discourse amongst OperaFest attendees, indicating a styling of focused separateness. Both Barry and Keith, for example, mentioned attending ‘alone’, and Clive emphasised his detachment:

C: I think I’m a fairly solitary person. I don’t really think it’s a social experience. I don’t feel I’m mixing with like-minded people who I could talk to opera about.

Similarly, Roy, Sylvia and Maureen also stressed that they tended to purposely stay detached from others at the festival, but by using the pronoun ‘we’, styling themselves as within a private, self-sufficient married unit:

Roy: We don’t talk to a lot of other people. It’s a going out together thing.

Sylvia: It’s a private holiday for us. We might occasionally chat to somebody but we’re not looking to be particularly sociable when we’re there.

Maureen: We don’t go to make lots of new friends and exchange addresses

Detached discourse was not common amongst PopFest interviewees. Daniel, despite attending with a group of three friends, however, hinted at feeling detached from others and purposely distancing himself when commenting on his perception of the outlooks of the festival crowd. This comment implies a self-styling as adventurous in contrast with the other festival attendees:

D: I think other people are quite conservative.

Of the FolkFest participants, only Kath hinted at ‘detachment’ when reporting staying in the pub whilst the friends, with whom she was spending the weekend, attended events, styling herself as uninterested in festival events and purposively dressing in a different way:

Kath: The couple that we stay with go to a lot of events. They go to as many as they can but they’ll leave us in the pub and they’ll go and see someone.

Kath: ...not dressing to look like a folkie because actually that’s the last thing I’d want to look like...I’ve never felt an affinity with anybody there.

The detached discourse was therefore, like the persistent connection and temporary connection discourse, in evidence in the talk of interviewees from each of the festivals, although it appeared most common amongst the talk of OperaFest attendees.

### **Focus on the role of social capital in the festival experience**

As shown above, examples of the connection/detachment order of discourse were identifiable within participants’ talk from across all three festivals. The use of this discourse within the talk of the interviewees tended to vary between festivals, with OperaFest talk tending to feature detached or temporary connection discourse, although persistent connection discourse was not completely absent; whilst the FolkFest and PopFest interviewees tended to display more examples of the persistent connection discourse and less temporary connection or detached discourse.

Observations of social interactions, as well as noting festival attendees' self-presentation, provided insights into the operation of social inter-relationships at the festivals. The interviewees' discourse, as demonstrated above, also contributed to the gaining of an understanding of the role of social capital in the festival experience.

In terms of social networking with others at the festivals, social capital notions of connection and detachment come to the fore. Reflecting Putnam's (2000) bonding and bridging interpretation of the theory of social capital, highlighted earlier, interviewees reported that different forms of social connection emerged during the festivals. This reflects the idea that social capital takes different forms which can facilitate different types of social connection.

Many of the pop and folk festival attendees established a 'socially connected' style, demonstrated through their persistent connection discourse, which was an important part of their festival experience. In doing so, they referred to the large friendship groups at the festival of which they were part. These groups had either specifically arranged to attend the festival together or had anticipated, based on previous experience, that known contacts would be there. By choosing to attend the festival, the opportunity was created, and taken, to build bonding social capital with existing acquaintances (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital, where new social relationships are formed, was only rarely reported by any of the interviewees. The temporary and detached discourses examples shown above demonstrate the resistance to forming this type of social capital, despite evidence of a feeling of trust and safety. It can thus be concluded that bonding social capital played a role in the pop and folk festival experience, whereas bridging social capital did not. However, this study's

findings also suggest that Putnam's concept of bonding social capital should be modified in connection with festivals. Putnam's theory is that bonding social capital brings together people who already share social and cultural similarities. At the festival, attendees were observed to be relatively homogeneous in their socio-demographic characteristics. The findings of this study suggest therefore that bonding at festivals is only between people already known or socially connected to each other, not merely between people who share social and cultural similarities.

Attendance within large friendship groups was not reported as the norm at the opera festival. Interviewees reported a greater tendency for social detachment, punctuated by brief serendipitous social interactions. As such, it can be concluded that neither bonding nor bridging social capital played a major role in the opera festival experience.

### **Implications for cultural policy**

This study has shown that festivals are a useful setting for the study of key social and cultural issues and several implications for cultural policy can be identified. The former government's policies saw culture and the arts as tools to combat social exclusion, bridge barriers between groups and foster community cohesion (Labour Party, 2006), as mentioned earlier. Similarly, the current centre-right government sees the arts as playing a role in bringing people together to bridge social barriers (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2010c). Also highlighted earlier, European policy makers have cited the role of the arts in promoting intercultural dialogue (European Commission, 2008a) and connecting value systems (European Commission, 2008b).



This study concludes that music festivals do not, however, appear to perform these functions. It was found that bridging-type social interactions between people who were previously unknown to each other were not common, particularly at OperaFest. The policy-related term community cohesion is also problematic. It could be interpreted as denoting cohesion within groups, rather than the across-group cohesion which is usually understood to be the aim. This study has shown that cohesion, or bonding, within groups of people who are already known to each other is promoted by festival attendance, but bridging between those who were previously unknown to each other was not generally a feature. There were, however, hints that the closed nature of festivals promoted a sense of trust in fellow festival goers, largely due to an assumption that they were likely to hold similar values.

Furthermore, the screened festival attendees were found to be similar in demographic characteristics, such as being in the upper levels of socio-economic categories and educational qualification levels, and homogenous in ethnicity, suggesting that social exclusion, rather than social inclusion, was a feature of these events.

The findings of this study suggest that further study of arts audiences is essential if planning for the arts is to remain democratic and accountable, as Gibson (2008) suggests. It should also be ensured that an increase in private funding through the government's encouragement of cultural philanthropy does not result in a further intensification of the exclusivity characteristic of bonding social capital. Thus, key policy-related outputs such as the ongoing Taking Part survey commissioned by the DCMS along with the Arts Council England and other public partner bodies to improve knowledge of audiences (Department for

Culture Media and Sport, 2010b) and the pilot version of CultureMap London (Audiences London, 2010), which aims to bring together information about cultural provision and audiences in London, continue to be supported. The Arts Council England's 'Great Art For Everyone' initiative (Arts Council England, 2010), launched in 2006 with a publication in 2008 (Arts Council England, 2008) also has the potential to include a consideration of barriers to participation. Further theoretically-grounded academic research should also be encouraged.

### **A policy for festivals?**

Cultural policy at various levels has incorporated reference to festivals, including by the 'arms-length' Arts Council England (Arts Council England, 2005, 2006), as well as by local councils, including the Greater London Council (Nadkarni & Homfray, 2009), and the Milton Keynes Council (Milton Keynes Council, 2008), for example. Arts Council England has commissioned investigations specifically relating to festivals (Long & Owen, 2006) and continues to feature festivals on its website.

However, there is no published national or European-level strategy relating to festivals and the UK's National Carnival Arts Strategy 2005-2007 (Nindi. P., 2005), which did mention festivals is now outdated. A specific festivals strategy could therefore be considered, having identified their increase in importance within the cultural sphere. Meanwhile, it is vital that festivals are included in over-arching strategic arts planning processes.

Finally, it should also be noted that the festival directors themselves have the opportunity to shape the social as well as the cultural policy for the festival

they are organising. This opportunity could be further encouraged by support from the continued inclusion of festivals in national strategy.

### **Limitations and suggestions for further research**

Although this study used a rigorous qualitative methodology and a recognised theoretical framework to use the investigation of festival settings as a lens for the examination of cultural policy in the UK and beyond, it should be noted that the findings were based on data collection at only three small-scale music festivals located in England. The qualitative methods used were strong in their close focus on individuals, but did not allow the analysis of large numbers of individuals or the statistical analysis of the demographics attendees. Further research, using qualitative or quantitative approaches, set in festivals of other types, including community-based festivals, music festivals of other genres, festivals with a commercial, non-public funded position, and non-arts festivals, as well as research situated on festivals beyond the UK, is recommended in order to throw light on the under-researched topic of social capital at festivals.

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