Sustainability Everywhere: Problematising the "Sustainable Festival" Phenomenon

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ABSTRACT   This conceptual paper focuses on the recent introduction of the idea of "sustainability" in a specific segment of enquiry within the tourism and events research, namely the festival sector. It considers "sustainable" music festivals as conceptually different—although quite akin—to "green" cultural events, because sustainability should mean much more than merely embedding "green" or "eco-friendly" practices into the festival management. The paper provides an initial attempt to: (i) review literature on sustainable festival practice; (ii) locate sustainable performing arts festivals around the world; (iii) elicit the way in which sustainability is interpreted in that context, and;(iv) establish an ideological critique of the "sustainable" festival phenomenon. Selected interpretations of sustainability in this context are quoted, and pathways for future research are recommended.

Introduction: Festivals, Tourism, and the Introduction of Sustainability

Festivals are encountered as a vibrant part of cultures everywhere. Built into and co-evolved with wider sociocultural systems, throughout human history the festival has served at a particular space and time for communities to celebrate publicly communal values, identity, history, status and cultural continuity, as well as their physical survival (Turner, 1982). For centuries the festival has represented "not only joy, communion, participation in Dionysiac life, but also a cooperation with the natural order" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 203). Hence "sustainability"—in a broader, ecological context—has always been an organic, however latent, quality of the festival. Modern festivals constitute a kaleidoscopically diverse range of themed, public cultural celebrations which reflect the vast economic and sociocultural changes in the context of globalisation, including changing patterns of socialisation, consumption, as well as the commodification and the instrumental use of cultural forms (Crespi-Vallbona & Richards, 2007). They are one of the fastest growing, most important, and vibrant forms within the cultural economy, especially with respect to the world tourism, leisure, culture, and arts industries (Gration, Arcodia, Raciti, & Stokes, 2011). There is plenty of evidence that supports the idea that festivals and tourism are highly associated. It has been a long tradition for communities to use such public celebrations as opportunities for exhibiting their distinctive identity and achievements to passing-by travellers, visitors, and observers (Arnold, 2000). Nevertheless, only recently have festivals been transformed into "products" that tourists desire and, thus, occupied a niche within organised mass tourism, to the degree that we can now observe and conceptualise the phenomenon of "festival tourism" (Picard & Robinson, 2006). Saarinen (2006) suggests that sustainability needs to be linked to all forms of tourism and, moreover, holds that the idea and definition of sustainability, itself, embraces major challenges for tourism research and the industry. As indicated by Arcodia, Cohen, and Dickson (2012), sustainability in the event industry has not been well discussed, although events are increasingly facing similar, serious challenges. Considering, therefore, that festival studies constitute a particular research area within tourism and events studies, the above conceptual and practical challenges are automatically relevant to sustainable festival enquiry as well.

The majority of modern festivals are planned special events, which are deliberately staged to achieve particular benefits including community cohesion, place branding, or pure financial profit. Nevertheless, the festival's potential for unintentionally generating negative impacts on the surrounding environment—from an economic, a sociocultural, as well as an environmental perspective—is substantial, especially with respect to the con-

temporary music mega-festivals (Mair & Laing, 2012). Consequently, studies of negative impacts of festivals and festival tourism constitute a recent line of relevant research (Getz, 2010). In the field of event practice, an increasing number of music festival organisers, worldwide, are currently claiming that they can recognise and, essentially, address the potential negative externalities of their events by embedding the notion of "sustainability" into the management of such festivals. By calling attention to their "sustainability" credentials, they either label their festivals as "sustainable" or emphatically promote the events' contribution to "sustainability" (Ensor, Robertson, & Ali-Knight, 2011; Quinn, 2006; Raj & Vingali, 2010). Sustainability, however, is a discursive notion, which lacks a single, universal definition. The backdrop of this on-going research is thus the emergent phenomenon of the "sustainable" festival, which may be either responsive to the growing popularity of the idea of "sustainability" or to the increasing awareness of humankind's current "unsustainable" way of living. Since the question of sustainability is rarely discussed within the festival literature, this paper aims to invite creative thinking on the nature of sustainability—when the latter is applied to a socially and culturally complex entity such as the festival.

The paper will set the context of the study through a brief overview of the sustainability discourse. The next section provides a comprehensive literature review on "sustainable" festival practice and identifies three main research traditions. The paper then analyses the results of a desk research carried out to locate "sustainable" music festivals around the world, as well as to elicit the way sustainability is interpreted in that context. Next, the term "sustainable festival" will be problematised, since research results imply a myopic interpretation of the idea of sustainability. The paper concludes with framing some suggestions for possible future research involving the "sustainable" festival.

Sustainability

The term "sustainability" is supposed to have been coined about 300 years ago by von Carlowitz, a mining and forest engineer, who highlighted the challenges of extracting resources from a stock in a pace that natural reproduction could not replenish during the same period (Spangenberg, 2010). The more recent western expression of the idea of sustainability, however, first came to light when economists, social scientists, and ecologists acknowledged that there might be physical and social limits to economic growth (Ekins, 1993; Hirsch, 2005). In particular, the origins of the modern debate over sustainability can be traced back to at least the 1960s, when scholars first realised that our economic-activity impact on the biosphere, a pure consequence of our present way of living, is not

"sustainable". In other words, it was first realised that there will be a crisis somewhere in the future in which humanity will face serious and coinciding problems, making the whole structure abruptly collapse. The concept of sustainability is usually defined on the basis of the much-quoted World Commission on Economic Development "Our Common Future" report, as " … development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987, p. 24). This landmark United Nations report, also known as the Brundtland Report, suggested three main dimensions to the idea of sustainability, namely the environmental, the economic, and the social. The very term describes generally "man's ability to create a world for humans and non-humans" (Blackburn, 2007, p. xiii) through behaviour that ensures and improves the long-term well-being of humanity's surrounding, multi-dimensional environment. Environmentalist Orr (2002) defines sustainability as "the arts of longevity" (p. 11) and recommends that whatever the name, its philosophy "must connect us to life, to each other, and to generations to come" (p. 4). Such definitions of sustainability can therefore be considered as important moral exhortations, reminding us of our duty to deliver to future generations as many opportunities as we inherited and, moreover, of our continuous responsibility to seek the means that will foster and enrich both nature and humanity. From a corporate perspective, the meaning of sustainability is twofold: first, it stands as an ethical sensibility and guiding principle that refers to an organisation's obligation to contribute to the long-term well-being of its environment—often termed as "Corporate Social Responsibility" or, recently, "Corporate Sustainability" (Dahlsrud, 2008)—and second, it implies a focus on the survivability of the organisation itself.

As stated in the full version of the WCED's (1987) definition, sustainability is whatever contributes to the balanced endurance of a set of three relationships: (i) between humankind and the environment, (ii) between the present generation and future generations, and (iii) among present generations. Quite often, the Brundtland Commission's definition is misinterpreted, since scholars or practitioners employ only the first set of those relationships. Concerns such as resource depletion, water and air pollution, global warming, and endangered species are gaining global momentum. Traditionally, therefore, sustainability has been viewed principally through the lens of natural ecosystems' preservation. The idea of preserving the natural environment, and maintaining a healthy relationship between the latter and humans, is indeed fundamental to sustainability. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that sustainability is not simply about protecting natural landscapes, natural resources, and the biosphere; it is about all things that constitute our present quality of life, in its broadest sense, as well as about the general welfare of future generations. Even if we are speaking of the overexploitation and destruction of the natural environment we are not really denoting destruction of nature per se, but rather a real-world process of jeopardising the comfortable conditions that the latter provides for humankind, as well as for the human civilisation to develop. Revisiting relevant literature allows us to find one of the few careful studies of the notion of sustainability. In particular, Pearce et al. (1990, cited in Lawn, 2001) point out that the sustainability concept takes into account quality of life concerns including access to basic freedoms, nutritional status, educational attainment, and spiritual welfare. Sustainability, thus, is about whatever contributes to the actual qualitative, as well psychic, improvement of life—or unfoldment of its potentiality—over time. In other words, sustainability is the same as the constant betterment of quality of life, which refers to the well-being of both individuals and societies at large, both now and in the future. Deep questions that are relevant within the sustainability debate—including definitions of "needs", "wants", desired "well-being" or "welfare",

and "genuine" development—have been largely discussed in literature, but even a brief overview would exceed the scope of this paper.

The openness of the above questions suggests that although sustainability seems to be a widely accepted, straightforward concept, it is definitely a very complex subject, devoid of a coherent theoretical core. It is currently a discursive, social construct, which depends on subjective value judgements and, consequently, it is open to contention (Pol, 2002; Webster, 1999). There is no one fully accepted definition of the concept and, moreover, it is constantly changing as a function of changes in society. Sikor and Norgaard (1999) portrayed sustainability as a dynamic, "on-going outcome of appropriate social processes" (p. 53), and as a concept, which depends deeply on subjective value judgements. Mawhinney (2002) argues that sustainability

> appears to be an over-used, misunderstood phrase … often presented as a mission statement … at a time when there is general recognition of mission statement fatigue, and there are different interpretations from a variety of business, policy makers, the health sector and academics. (p. 5)

While sustainability might sound like a global "ideal that has evolved to become the buzzword for a new era" (Roosa, 2010, p. 1), it is rather formulated and effectively performed at the local scale, within particular contexts and drawing upon those contextual values. The present on-going study aims to advance our understanding, as well as expand and redefine the concept of "sustainability" in the particular context of the contemporary performing arts festival, and eventually to elaborate a proper conceptual framework for the "sustainable" festival.

Sustainability and the Festival

There is currently a gap in the research relating to the study of the emerging "sustainable festival" phenomenon. At the same time, there is a small number of texts that deal with aspects of "sustainability" or make use of the terms "sustainable festival" or "sustainable festival practice" without, however, making any particular effort to address thoroughly and conceptually the idea of "sustainability" within this framework. Literature on event management and tourism is slightly more developed regarding the contribution of sustainability discussions. However, the festival is a far too complex an entity—in sociocultural terms—to be explored within the same lens.

What becomes fairly easily obvious during any literature review on the festival research that entails the term "sustainability" is that the concept is approached from a rather eco-centric perspective. This research focus can be justified either on the grounds of the very first discussions about sustainability—which emphasised the notion of continuous development without any detrimental effects on the natural environment—or by the growing number of eco-concerned festival-goers and the implications for festival marketing research and practice (A Greener Festival, 2006). Ben Challis, co-founder of the "Greener Festival", states that an ever-growing number of festivals around the world have been at the forefront of promoting sustainability "whether by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimising waste, reducing their event's environmental impact or championing positive behaviour such as recycling" (A Greener Festival, 2012, p. 2). Drawing on examples from the broader events management literature, Mair and Laing (2012) make an attempt to explore sustainability by addressing the drivers of, and constraints to, achieving "green" festival performance. They hold that the "sustainable" festival is an event with ethical considerations which are manifested practically through the adoption of pro-environmental management practices including encouraging access by public transport, waste management, and the minimisation of energy use. For Kennell and Sitz (2010) the "sustainable"

Bonnaroo festival educates its participants on "sustainable behaviour", embeds green issues into its core values, and markets "itself with messages of environmental responsibility and sustainability" (p. 1). Similarly, Laing and Frost (2010, p. 262) look into issues related to staging a "sustainable" event and define the latter as "an event that has a sustainability policy or incorporates sustainable practices into its management and operations". In order to do that, they refer to the Glastonbury Festival, the Peats Ridge Festival, the Burning Man Festival, and the All Points West Music and Arts Festival, considering them as events that are committed to improving and developing their sustainability initiatives (Laing & Frost, 2010)—equating, however, the term "sustainable" to "environmentally friendly". Last, there is a wealth of evidence from the press that interprets festival sustainability as a matter of cleaning up after the event is over or doing less harm to the natural environment (Todd, 2010).

A second emerging focus in festival-related literature that entails the use of the term "sustainability", has been on the festival's ability to be "sustained"—meaning to survive or endure as an organisation. This interpretation is rooted to the Latin meaning of the word sustinere (sus: up; tenere: hold, keep), which literally means the capacity to "maintain", "endure", "hold up", or "support" (Thiele, 2013). Kruger and Saayman (2012) hold that a "sustainable" festival is a festival that can remain competitive and successful over the long term. Employing a repertory grid method, Ensor et al. (2011) conducted in-depth interviews with elite festival directors in order to capture their perceptions of festival sustainability. In their exploratory and explanatory study they found that the majority of festival leaders interpreted sustainability as a matter of a festival's ability to survive, rather than any environmental concern. Similarly, the majority of the contributors to the "What makes festivals sustainable?" workshop in France, organised by the European Festivals Research Project (EFA, 2006), approached festival sustainability as a matter of continuity of the event itself. Marschall (2006) makes use of the term sustainability to refer to a festival's ability to secure its survival by continuously pooling resources—principally financial funds. Palmer and Thelwall (2013) define the sustainability of small arts festivals as the ability to survive, which is manifested practically as the ability to manage sponsor relationships and bring in donations. Lee and Groves (2013) discuss the sustainability of a Canadian American festival by exploring the factors that help create positive long-term relationships between tourists and the event, which, in turn, can potentially contribute to the viability of the festival over time. Last, in a similar vein, an expert Q&A panel hosted by the De Montfort University (2012) in March 2012 interpreted festival sustainability as a matter of long-term survival of the festival sector as a whole.

A third line of relevant research evaluates the management performance of the festival in wider sustainability terms, utilising Elkington's (1999) "triple bottom line" (TBL) model. Getz and Andersson (2008 p. 1) adopt such an approach and address the term "festival sustainability" from the perspective of the event organisation, namely by exploring how festival organisations can achieve long-term viability—how they can become "hallmarks"—within their community. Although they narrow down and adopt a managerial approach, they seem to understand explicitly that "festival sustainability" can be defined in a range of ways, from "greening" the events, to ensuring long-lasting popularity of their programmes as a structure of artistic or social expression. With reference to the TBL analysis, in another paper, Getz (2009, p. 70) talks of festivals as being in need of a new sustainable and responsible paradigm, and states that "sustainable" festivals

> … are not just those that can endure indefinitely, they are also events that fulfil important social, cultural, economic and environmental roles that people value. In this way, they can become institutions that are permanently supported in a community or nation. Green events are part of this movement … .

Gration et al. (2011) also interpret sustainability utilising the TBL framework and eventually make a step towards the development of a planning and evaluation model in that context. Employing two case studies of Australian non-urban festivals, they argue that all three TBL dimensions—people, natural landscape, and profit—are intrinsic to the sustainability of these events. Findings elicited from interviews revealed that festival directors were quite familiar with the TBL-relevant concept of sustainability, and hence its practice, although the respondents did not use the term "sustainability" in expressing their ideas and thoughts (Gration et al., 2011). A TBL approach is also employed by Stettler (2011) in order to recommend strategies aimed to help music festival organisers adopt and improve sustainable event management of their events.

Methodology

Relevant music festivals were mainly located using public domain search engines such as Yahoo, Google, and Google Scholar, and running the following search queries: (i) "sustainable festival" AND music; and (ii) sustainability AND festival AND music. References on "sustainable festivals" were also sourced from published articles in online newspapers as well as in academic journals on a range of subjects, including events and festival management; tourism and hospitality management; and sustainability in tourism and events. It should be noted that, as the employed search query implies, the located festival websites and online newspaper articles were in English. However, future research will include queries in German (Nachhaltige Festival), Italian (Il Festival Sostenibile), Spanish (Festival Sostenible), and French (Le Festival Durable). Therefore, as data collection is still ongoing, the results presented in this paper are preliminary.

Results

This desk research identified a total of 71 music festivals which are subject to one or more of the following criteria: (i) are self-proclaimed as "sustainable"; (ii) have a dedicated section to "sustainability" on their website; (iii) explicitly express a commitment to "sustainability"; or (iv) are considered as "sustainable" by someone else. Due to the language limitations of the initial stage of the research, the identified music festivals were located in North America (22), Europe (32), Australia (14), Asia (1), and Africa (2). The majority of these festivals (45% or 64%) had a section dedicated to sustainability on their website. It is important to note that any results relating to "sustainability festivals"—meaning festivals that are sustainability-themed (i.e. festivals about "sustainable living")—were excluded from this research since our focus is the "sustainable" performing arts festival.

As one might expect, all identified festivals demonstrated a rhetorical emphasis on environmental consciousness. Nevertheless, an important feature that emerged is that the majority (64.7%) of these identified "sustainable festivals" interpreted sustainability as a concern solely related to the natural environment. Bumbershoot (2013), for example, aims to become "one of the most sustainable festivals around … [and] a sustainability trailblazer within the festival industry", by adopting eco-friendly practices. In a similar vein, Splendour in the Grass is considered to have been adopting "Sustainable Event Management practises before the name SEM came into existence" (Howell, 2012), drawing on its leave-no-trace environmental ethos. The dominant actors in those festivals' sustainability statements referred to on-site waste management practices (i.e. recycling, composting, and reusing); carbon offsetting schemes; introduction of off-grid energy or contracting with renewable energy providers; encouraging audiences to travel by public transport; and raising awareness initiatives for climate change.

This finding indicates that using the prefix "sustainable" for such events is myopic and rather problematic, because "sustainability" is much more than a mere environmental concern. Festivals have, indeed, been associated with risks, and have had a tangible impact on the natural environment, a simple result of both the hordes of visitors travelling to "consume" the festival within a particular time and space, and the large amount of resources that festivals require in order to be staged. Festivals bring visitors, cars, require energy, and generate waste. Yet, intentions and operational strategies aiming to minimise or eliminate such negative impacts fall in the wider focal area of "green" or "environmentally friendly" business practice, and, therefore, this paper will not delve any further into the analysis of the "green" rhetoric of such festivals. Ironically, the study even located "sustainable" festivals that actually contradict the principles of "environmental sustainability". The Bonnaroo festival (2013), for example, gives early registrants a chance to win an all-new—petrol engine—Ford Fiesta, although it communicates a strong commitment to sustainability by employing a year-round "Sustainability Coordinator". Similarly, the line-up of the—self-proclaimed as "sustainable"—V Festival (Virgin, 2010) includes artists who travel around the globe in their private jets such as Sir Elton John.

Another interesting finding of the study that would attract more scholarly attention in the future is the different interpretational approaches to sustainability between "sustainable" festivals in North America and Australia, on one hand, and festivals in Europe, on the other. In particular, the vast majority of "sustainable" festivals in N. America (77.3%) and Australia (92.9%) expressed sustainability as simply as a "leave-no-trace on the natural environment" philosophy, whereas the number of festivals in the European context that interpreted sustainability in such a limiting way was quite a bit lower (15 festivals or 46.8% of the total on the continent).

Contrary to the 46 "leave-no-trace" festivals, which simply regarded sustainability as a synonym of natural environment protection, the rest of the identified sustainable festivals (25) approached the notion rather more holistically. On that account, they did want to "leave their trace", to preserve things "that matter", to give something back and, eventually, "change" their broader surrounding environment—and not only the "natural" dimensions of it. Their statements and actions quite often have a strong rhetoric of activism or even, I would argue, anarchistic culture—in terms of exhibiting radical openness, promoting an autonomous culture and developing their own, loyal communities. The Rothbury Festival (2009) aims to have minimal impact on the natural environment, while, however, causing "a major impact on its people". Hence it explicitly recognises that "sustainability" requires giving back to its local context, be that the local economy, the local community, its surrounding nature or—essentially—the local culture. In terms of the latter, since "music is the core of Rothbury" (Rothbury Festival, 2009), the festival makes particular efforts to help keep music in the curriculum in local Michigan schools by donating money and instruments, as well as by offering performance opportunities and hands-on experience to music students. Similarly, the tourist-orientated Taragalte world music festival (http://www.taragalte.org) in Morocco addresses sustainability through promoting local cultural heritage, creating spaces for intercultural exchange, as well as by highlighting its manifestation of respect for cultural diversity. They also seem to recognise that sustainability should better be approached by working together with all people involved, thus offering a voice to anyone affected by the festival. Inspired by the nomad culture of Sahara, they highlight in their sustainability manifesto that the concept of preserving their ancestral heritage, and learning from it, is a critical segment of their mission. The Big Green Sustainable Music Festival (http://thebiggreenfest.com) interprets sustainability as an on-going effort to integrate into its practice the objectives of a high quality of life, prosperity, social justice, as well as respect for the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity. The

festival managers state that their vision of a sustainable future includes: (i) creating resilient and self-reliant local economies, (ii) offering opportunities for all people to thrive in their community, and (iii) contributing to a healthy natural environment (http://thebiggreenfest.com). The Sunrise Arts and Music festival (http://www.sunrisefestivals.co.uk/) attaches the dimension of "Ethics" to its sustainability mission, struggles to inspire a shift in consciousness and bring about positive "'change' among festival-participants—the first step that will 'enable a more sustainable world to be created'" (Positive News, 2012). Interestingly, the Sunrise festival of "Organic Arts"—as it is proclaimed—aims to be the first "Transition Festival" by building a strong, resilient festival community grounded in the local area. Another "exemplar" festival, in terms of its approach to sustainability is Shambala (http://www.shambalafestival.org). Its managers believe that festivals indeed play a key role in normalising new ideas and sustainable practices in society in order to help meet the challenges of a sustainable, positive future. They thus regard festivals as opinion forming, providing opportunities for debate, innovation, inspiration, and learning. Among their values, they highlight in particular the idea of creating communities—contrary to the notion of attracting audiences—and that is enabled by including a substantial number of participatory activities: "We are a 'community' not a 'product', and participation is central to the event" (http://www.shambalafestival.org). The managers at the UK-based Seventeen Events criticise the so-called green events and state: "At Seventeen, sustainability is about more than just obvious green touches like recycling or organic tea and coffee" (Seventeen Events, 2013). Last, the Building Man Festival—inspired by the well-established Burning Man Festival—proudly stands critical of popular "Green Festivals" and proclaims that the concept of "participation", as well as the development of a permanent site infrastructure and community art hubs, is critically important to the idea of a sustainable festival organisation (The Poosh, 2013).

Discussion

Are these Festivals "Sustainable"?

The results indicated that the majority of contemporary "sustainable" festivals leave significant dimensions of sustainability—those that reside in the spheres of ethics, culture and society—rather untouched. Although festival "sustainability" efforts are observably increasing, this might be merely the result of the growing importance of major environmental challenges, as well as the realisation that any festival, no matter how large or small, does contribute—in its own way—to the degradation of the natural environment. The fact that festival organisers put into practice the widespread acknowledgment that global environmental deterioration is anthropogenic in nature is a welcome development. However, this is precisely the opposite pole of "sustainability". In other words, we contend that a great number of contemporary "sustainable" events should rather be given the label "unsustainability-aware" festivals. Their practices actually bring to public attention attempts to measure the distance from their ideal of sustainability, inverting in that sense the core ideological problem. This confirms, again, the deep conceptual problem regarding the notion of sustainability; that it is mainly talked about and applied in practice as related to the natural environment. Indeed, the most serious among the current global challenges is the environmental crisis, because of its increasing irreversibility: natural resources are being depleted, waste is accumulated, and the natural environment is being degraded at the altar of encouraging an increase in human wants along with changing patterns of consumption. Furthermore, such short-sighted interpretations of "sustainable festival practice" are portrayed as technological solutions to a technological problem, embedded

in a rhetoric of natural engineering. For the vast majority of the organisers of the so-called Sustainable Festivals, nature is principally regarded as a collection of natural resources. Their "sustainability" commitments, therefore, aim at mitigating the moral sense, in conformity to an ethics of minimising negative effects to the natural environment—not an ethics of producing greater good, as the principles of sustainability would suggest. However, sustainability is much more than a concern for obvious cleaning up efforts, serving fair-trade food, and offsetting carbon emissions. As Ferraro, White, Cox, Bebbington, and Wilson (2011) rightfully put it, sustainability enquiry "pushes the boundaries of our thinking and action towards a paradigmatic shift in the way we look at the world, at nature and at humankind, raising awareness that the physical, social and intellectual worlds are interconnected and interdependent" (p. 6). Therefore, a more holistic approach to the notion of sustainability is much needed in order to move from the notion of the "parasite" festival to a truly "sustainable" one.

The findings also imply that scholarly approaches to existing "sustainable" festivals should be sceptical. Such a label might not be indicative of a new form of "responsible" festival practice and genuine "sustainability qualities, but rather simply constitute another marketing attempt employed by festival managers, who are trying to differentiate their events from existing "green festivals", as well as put them on the global "festival map" and attract "sustainability-concerned" visitors or tourists. Keiner (2006) noted that currently many enterprises struggle to occupy the term "sustainability" because of its mainstream attractiveness, "posing an opportunity that shouldn't be missed" (p. 3). More specifically, a number of scholars have been emphasising the festival industry's need to differentiate and renew themselves constantly in order to ensure media attention and the return of visitors (Pegg & Patterson, 2010; Van Zyl, 2012; Yoshimoto & Kataoka, 2007). We should consequently problematise whether the notion of the "sustainable" festival has emerged within the broader need for an alternative, genuine paradigm of sustainable cultural institutions that bear the potential of thriving symbiotically with their sustainable contexts. Otherwise, one could argue that the emerging "sustainable" festival is simply the introduction of "camouflage" marketing practices - such as "greenwashing" - into the festival sector.

What is more, as Uwasu (2011) says, current social and economic systems are characterised by mass production, mass consumption, and mass disposal, which are indeed major challenges to global sustainability. Tinnish and Mangal (2012) argue that since marketing in the context of contemporary events is serving to encourage consumption, it is not surprising that the majority of modern festivals can be considered as less than "sustainable". On that account, the current notion of the "sustainable" festival might even form—at a glance—an oxymoron; a number of such events are capitalising on their efforts towards "cleaning up after themselves" while they are actually driving people towards great amounts of "consumption"—be that, for example, cultural experience and entertainment, food, drink, plastic tents, and the need to travel—and therefore toward "unsustainability". It is thus contended that considerable attention should be paid to whether or not such events are "seemingly sustainable", exploiting in that sense the place, the natural resources, the local community, and their audience, in order to increase their profits and survive within a highly competitive market.

Towards "Holistic" Festival Sustainability

Anthropologist Lieber (1999) argues that "Sustainable X" is currently a very appealing term; "like other fortuitous concepts, its core meaning initially serves to connote more than to denote" (p. 14). Yet, what sustainability connotes is an arena of inquiry; and this

paper aims to invite interdisciplinary contributions to such an arena. A proper "Sustainable" festival inquiry should first reflect a continuous, holistic exploration of the benefits and values that the festival contributes to its broader natural or human-constructed environment. Second, it should be addressed to the fundamental question of what are the attributes of sustaining an organic, symbiotic relationship with all the intertwined dimensions of the festival environment over the long term. Third, it should take a closer look into the festival processes that suggest a sustainable path by emulating natural ecological metabolic actions. Interestingly, a number of events that were identified in the frameworks of the present study expressed the idea that being "sustainable" requires giving something back to the broader festival context, preserving and enriching a wide spectrum of resources, encouraging participation, and, moreover, serving as an "incubator" of change. Such an organic worldview that the above "sustainable" festivals maintain might be a critical reflection on replacing quantitative, one-dimensional "unsustainability-aware" rhetoric by a qualitative mission aiming at the development of well-being—which is the essence of sustainability.

Among such festivals, the concept of "giving back" to the local environment is interpreted in a rather broad way, and not only through references to financial contributions to the local economy. Promises of leaving permanent infrastructure (i.e. venues and energy producing equipment), or establishing or enhancing local educational facilities and hubs, demonstrate an alternative approach to what "sustainable" festival organisers feel indebted to, regarding the wider host environment.

Furthermore, the notion of "resources" acquires a broader interpretation. Contrary to the majority of "sustainable" festivals, which essentially hold nature as the "ultimate" resource, a number of such events acknowledge the existence and the importance, in sustainability terms, of intangible resources such as "art" and "human relationships". This can be inferred from sustainability statements that highlight a general obligation to preserve particular artistic genres and cultural diversity, or to encourage artistic, group creativity, within the context of the festival. Preservation of intangible, past local artistic and cultural heritage, for example, is an actual guiding principle for such festivals not for any narrow utilitarian economic or tourism reasons, but for the "resources" themselves. The latter constitutes a fundamentally self-fulfilling conceptualisation of artistic and cultural resources and, thus, an alternative "sustainable" sense of purpose. In a similar vein, it is noted that being a "sustainable" festival involves working with the aim of enhancing human-to-human relationships and, eventually, of contributing to the establishment of growing communities. Interestingly, quite often in sustainability commitments such as the above, it is implied that the well-being of such intangible resources—to which the festival can potentially contribute—correlates directly, and has a critical impact on an enhanced quality of life, over time. At this point we should note that both the concept of "giving back" and the protection and enhancement of "resources", as the above statements suggest, adhere to the sustainability principle of intergenerational equity; we, as the current generation, have as a moral duty to bequeath to future generations the stocks of recourses that will ensure general human prosperity in the future.

Encouraging active participation is another important value expressed in a number of "sustainable" music festivals. Participation is put into practice through active, radical festival-goers' contribution to the planning and implementation of such events. The central place of participation within the rhetoric of such festivals brings to the discussion the idea that participatory life experiences can have a positive impact on human well-being, be that enhancement of education, intellectual development, or advancement of active citizenship. Indeed, under a sustainability discussion, commitment to participation reproduces within the festival microcosm fundamental democratic qualities, and, moreover, enriches

the stock of social connections. Such a guiding principle has the potential of transforming "audiences" to "participants" and "communities", offering to festival attendees a range of unprecedented opportunities that exceed the frameworks of "immersive festival experience", and, thus, the events themselves: participation might also underlie opportunities for the self-realisation and moral fellowship of festival-goers within broader societal structures.

Last, "positive change" is indeed a critical quality from a "sustainability" perspective, because it is strongly aligned to the ideas of sociocultural evolution and progress towards a better world. Daly (2000) proposed a vision of sustainable development as a creative, qualitative change. It is our belief that the concept of a "Sustainable" festival should "vibrate" with creativity and, moreover, "shine" with hopeful promise. The paper argued earlier that sustainability is fundamentally, and inherently, about better scenarios in our future. Boulding (1956) warned us that when societies lose their positive image of the future, they lose their capacity to find solutions for their current problems as well, and eventually might abruptly disintegrate. Heraclitus famously said, "τὰ πάντα ῥεῖ"—"all things change (flow)". He used this metaphor in order to express the belief that humans are always in danger of applying anachronistic ideas to new circumstances. As Capra (2002) suggests, sustainability is a dynamic process of co-evolution—addressed by a continual interaction of both human and non-human living systems—rather than a static state. Fortunately, there is evidence that a number of "sustainable" festivals do recognise positive change as their guiding principle. Most principally, however, they highlight the festival's potential to educate participants about and to accelerate transition to higher standards of human living, anchored in anthropocentric and higher-order moral principles. Considering the dynamic character of the broader festival environment, i.e. the rapid transformations that social and cultural systems are currently undergoing, another implication of the notion of "change" becomes obvious. Thiele (2011), employing an ecological approach, defined sustainability as the on-going quest for ever-greater resilience—"the capacity of a system to adapt to a world in flux without falling apart" (p. 6)—in an interdependent world. A system such as the "sustainable" festival should therefore continuously seek ways to adapt to changing circumstances in order to secure its "survival", and this adaptive organic, co-evolutionary practice must be embedded in any "sustainability" mission statement and managerial strategy.

Concluding Remarks

Questioning the current "sustainable" festival, described as a one-dimensional, short-sighted "sustainable" event, expressing only a natural environment-oriented rhetoric, is of great importance. Thus, the present paper, part of an on-going study, has been motivated by the limitations of the current interpretation of "sustainability" within the festival sector. Our call for adopting an ecological perspective to the above enquiry is a hopeful, even a utopian, discourse. This initial desk research recommends that empirical work is needed in order to deepen our understanding of the emerging "sustainable" festival phenomenon, especially with respect to festivals that approach sustainability as more than just a natural environment-related notion. It is important to note that there might be a large number of festivals worldwide that are engaged in holistic "sustainable" practice without, however, issuing any manifesto that directly links to the concept of sustainability. Yet, since sustainability was defined as a social construct that is formulated within given temporal and geographical conditions, these findings provide a strong basis for employing qualitative methods as appropriate research traditions for exploring and evaluating sustainability in this particular domain.

Last, this study posits that understanding what the concept really means within the frameworks of festival practice, and with reference to particular context-specific criteria, is critically important and has a wide range of policy implications for the whole structure of sustainability. This paper conceptualised sustainability in the belief that social, economic, environmental, and symbolic systems are not discrete entities but rather intertwined parts of the same social system (Gutenschwager, 2004, 2013). As a consequence, sustainability should be associated with the prosperity of that multi-dimensional system, as a whole, rather than with those separate spheres. Understanding—under the broad policy lens of sustainability—the dynamic relationship between the different social, cultural, environmental, institutional, and economic processes that take place within that complex system can provide a valuable framework for identifying the imperatives of its well-being over the long term. In other words, adopting an ecological point of view, or approaching sustainability in the sense of "quantum theory"—by exploring the "sub-atomic structure" of sustainability—we may master the whole structure of it. And this study is concerned with a particular "sub-atomic" area of human culture; the festival phenomenon.

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