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Entrepreneurial implications, prospects and dilemmas in rural festivals

Abstract: Rural festivals emerge in numbers, scale and variety. They contribute to the attractiveness and viability of rural places for residents as well as visitors. Typically, festivals are deeply embedded in local ecosystems of sports, cultural, business and other types of associations, while they deliver elements of coherence, commitment and meaning, and sometimes economic benefits as well. This study aims to showcase the business entrepreneurship aspect of festivals in Danish rural areas, and it is based on primary data from 315 festivals. The special emphasis is put on the nature, prevalence and importance of business activities at such festivals, and on the opportunities for entrepreneurs to utilize festivals as a means of business development in relation to sales, marketing, product testing, and customers' feedback. The results show that, on the one hand, only very few of the surveyed festivals are entirely commercial, and the commercial objectives are, due to ideological and relational reasons, generally low-ranked by organizers. On the other hand there is strong evidence that local businesses actually participate in rural festivals' ecosystem, and that there are numerous mutual interactions between local business, festivals and residents that altogether create an excellent means for entrepreneurial drive. It is delicate undertaking to strengthen partnerships with entrepreneurs without compromising the community ingredients. Several potential courses of action are proposed.

Keywords: Festivals, Business impact, Entrepreneurship, Denmark,

Highlights:

- Business ingredients are ubiquitous in rural festivals in Denmark, for example in relation to catering, sales, exhibitions, and sponsorship. For entrepreneurs, involvement in festivals may represent a way to get market access and users' feedback.
- Due to more imperative community objectives and commitments, prospects for (local) business remain unarticulated and possibly underexploited. The mutual prudery may lead to loss of rural business viability and innovativeness.
- Successful cases demonstrate that there are numerous opportunities to achieve entrepreneurial benefits from festivals without compromising the community fundamentals.

1. Introduction

Over the years, festivals have become vibrant ingredients of human and community life. Traditionally, they came about in order to cultivate local traditions and to celebrate momentous occasions such as the harvest or religious seasons. Intrinsically, origins may be strictly rural, no matter that many festivals have, over time, developed in scope, numbers and formats (Andersson, Getz, & Mykletun, 2013; Gibson, Connell, Waitt, & Walmsley, 2011; Jepson & Clarke, 2014).

There are many definitions of festivals. Inspired by Getz (2012) and Wilson, Arshed, Shaw, & Pret, 2016 this study defines festival by using five characteristics: (1) Festivals are limited in time with a clearly defined start and end; (2) Festivals are confined to a specific location; (3) Festivals are planned occasions with predefined objectives, themes and programs in recognizable structures, although they may contain some elements of spontaneity; (4) Festivals combine several activities into beneficial symbioses; and finally (5) Festivals are open and inviting, meaning that anyone can join.

Rural festivals are regarded as contributors to pleasurable hedonism, as well as to the social and cultural cohesion of the communities, while they bring citizens together as visitors and as organizers and the festivals are often appreciated for their playful integrative potentials (Derrett, 2011; Jamieson, 2014; Reid, 2011). However, as a consequence of stronger competition, many festivals seem to launch strategic planning and more rigid execution where commercial objectives and elements are more prevalent (Biaett,

2015; Getz & Page, 2015; Ziakas & Costa, 2011). The festivals landscape is becoming more pluralistic, allowing potentially for diversity in mutually beneficial setups, including business purposes.

The study examines the current supply of festivals in rural areas in Denmark, and it is based on a survey of 315 rural festivals in Denmark, whose respondents are persons with the main responsibility for the festival's organization. Questions raised in the study include what types of festivals take place in rural areas, and to what extent they are considered to benefit the local business environment. In addition, the research scrutinizes forms of business involvement in the festivals' setup and the intensive collaboration with festivals organizations.

This study attempts to identify essential entrepreneurial characteristics of festivals, to address development constraints and success criteria, and to provide examples of festivals which can serve as platforms for entrepreneurship without compromising the social and cultural objectives of the festivals. The priority given to business ingredients and prospects will be discussed in the context of rural development challenges. It examines to what extent rural festivals increase their significance and value for rural entrepreneurs who seek to boost business, widen market reach or test new products and services.

2. Literature review

Today, festivals contribute to the attractiveness and viability of rural places for residents as well as visitors. Typically, they are deeply embedded in local ecosystems of sports, cultural, business and other types of associations. All interest groups in such ecosystem contribute to and benefit from participation, as the amalgamation of elements provides the coherence, commitment and meaning, and sometimes economic benefits as well. For that reason, there is a growing interest in researching how festivals in rural areas are staged and how they contribute to wider revitalization of the host areas (Andersson, Getz, & Mykletun, 2013; Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Gibson et al., 2011; Wood & Thomas, 2008).

Predominantly, however, scholarly research focusses on social and cultural processes and significance (Jæger & Mykletun, 2013). There is a strong research emphasis on the inclusion of local residents in the festival organization as visitors and volunteers, leading to a better understanding of the cohesive forces and the social sustainability of festivals in rural settings (Janiskee & Drews, 1998; Moscardo, 2007; Ziakas & Boukas, 2015). This strand of research stresses the importance of collaborative structures, where boundaries between different interest groups and stakeholders are often blurred (Andersson & Getz, 2008; Karlsen & Stenbacka Nordström, 2009; Reid, 2011).

Attendees' experience and satisfaction constitute another major research area, as seen for example in studies conducted by Bruwer (2014), Jung, Ineson, Kim, and Yap (2015) or Wan and Chan (2013), to name but a few. Among others, this strand of research demonstrates that festivals are regarded as critical assets in the current experience landscape (Janiskee & Drews, 1998; Li, Huang, & Cai, 2009). Visitors appreciate both traditions and novelty. Festivals constitute touristic resources in rural areas, contributing to the attractiveness of the rural destinations and adding experience value and animation to specific local sights (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Lorentzen, 2012; Moscardo, 2007; Winkelhorn, 2015). Destination Management Offices eagerly promote festivals so as to create a number of reasons to visit an area across the seasons, and Kostopoulou, Vagionis, and Kourkouridis (2013) show that festivals may act as mechanisms to encourage regional economic development and touristic attractiveness, and for these reasons, festivals are increasingly being integrated in rural tourism planning (Kostopoulou, Kourkouridis, & Xanthopoulou-Tsitsoni, 2015).

The economic aspects of festivals constitute a topic that has generated a long and substantive research effort, but studies are predominantly focused on single-case economic impact analysis of (mega) sporting festivals (e.g. The Olympics, FIFA World Cup, Commonwealth Games) (Agha & Taks, 2015; Kwiatkowski, 2016b; Porter & Chin, 2012), rather than on smaller scale festivals. Impact studies of

various types of festivals (e.g., music, culture, sport) are not often seen (Getz & Page, 2015; Ziakas, 2013), including those omnipresent in rural areas. Impact analyses tend in fairly standardized ways to investigate visitors' spending patterns (Kwiatkowski & Oklevik, 2014; Thrane, 2002), and with use of economic modelling they determine the local effects for business turnover and derived employment (Diedering & Kwiatkowski, 2015). Such examinations include also in many variants multiplier effects, and they address difficulties and set-backs for local economies, for example the significance of economic leakages (Mair & Whitford, 2013) or crowding out effect (Litvin, 2007). Chhabra, Sills, and Cabbage (2003) show that festivals have a certain economic impact on the host regions, but it benefits mainly the accommodation and catering sectors, and that multiplications altogether are most often rather modest. The impact depends much on the size and structure of the local economy, the composition of festival attendees and how well-rooted the festival is in the local economy (Kwiatkowski, 2016a; Kwiatkowski & Oklevik, 2016; O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002).

Some studies dwell on incidences where festivals help to showcase sponsors and flash supplier products and services, but also that this requires a proactive festival management to balance the outcomes for festivals and corporate stakeholders (Reid, 2011). Studies of microeconomic aspects of festivals including the motivation of exhibitors, stallholders, suppliers and service providers are otherwise very infrequently seen in festival research (Mosely & Mowatt, 2011). The issue is largely under-researched in rural festivals, although drawing more interest in food related festivals and in other types of festivals, possibly as a consequence of food being rooted in rural origins (Jung et al., 2015; Wood & Thomas, 2008). Reid (2011) and Jæger (2012) suggest that the relationships between the stakeholders with business perspectives and other more community-related stakeholders may be somewhat contested, as goals and motivations are not always compatible.

Festivals may provide particular opportunities for business entrepreneurs, serving as occasions for product testing and exhibition and where they can create an initial market access. The entrepreneurial aspect is, however, treated to a very limited extent in research, and the main focus of the existing studies is on festivals as platforms for entrepreneurs in performing arts, exemplary music (George, Roberts, & Pacella, 2015). Entrepreneurial dimensions cover also innovation set-ups, as explained by Hjalager (2009) in the case of the Roskilde Festival, which provides space for creative entrepreneurs to work “in real time” on their entrepreneurial ideas with festival organizers and festival participants.

As the number of rural festivals is increasing, competition for audience attention may arise. However, the competitiveness of festivals is a topic only marginally investigated in the literature (Andersson et al., 2013). Nevertheless some festivals are developing positively over time, while others are forced to close again. There is limited insight into lifecycles of festivals and their driving forces, including economic driving forces (Getz & Page, 2015; Getz, 2002).

This literature review shows that the business and entrepreneurial aspects are included in studies of rural festivals, but to a rather limited extent. In particular, there seems to be significant research gaps when it comes to understanding the potential for stimulating positive entrepreneurial dynamics. There is a need to create a better understanding of how festivals can become better at contributing to rural revitalization and economic development through an integration of business agendas in ways that do not compromise with other essential values as expressed by organizers, residents and visitors.

3. Data collection and methodology

Most studies on rural festivals are case-based and provide evidence from one or a limited number of examples. While case studies present clear advantages for the purpose of generating a deep and multi-faceted insight, their weaknesses consist in a lack of comprehensiveness and overview over a more

complete festival landscape. This article is based on a survey among a larger number of rural festivals in Denmark, set into place with the main purpose of mapping the totality of the phenomenon and to ensure consistent inquiries into its characteristics, developments and geographical scope. This is the first study of this kind in Denmark, with comparable studies being also rare in other countries, while the identified ones include only surveys in Northern Norway (Jæger & Mykletun, 2009) and studies in rural areas over three Australian states (Gibson & Connell, 2011; Gibson & Stewart, 2009).

The definition of rural areas in this study complies with the official Danish governmental systematics. Denmark's space is divided in four groups: (1) Urban agglomerations, (2) Towns far away from agglomerations, (3) Rural areas in the vicinity of urban agglomerations, (4) Rural areas far away from urban agglomerations. This study focuses on festivals in categories 3 and 4, although festivals being staged in small villages in the second category are also included.

To collect data the following procedure was implemented. First, using Internet engines, a tailored keyword search was conducted to identify as many festivals as possible across the rural areas in Denmark. This effort was supported by screening webpages of local municipalities, as well as resources on specific festival and tourism association webpages. Telephone inquiries with festival related associations supplemented the list. A total number of 521 rural festivals were identified.

In April 2015 each festival organizer was contacted by telephone and asked to fill in an online questionnaire. A link to the survey was sent by an email. No incentives were provided for organizers (respondents) to complete the questionnaire. The survey was designed to be answered by the key persons of the festivals (e.g., leaders, organizers or funders). The study, therefore, takes essentially an organizer's point of view and treats only indirectly the views from visitors, exhibitors, artists, participants and the local population. The questionnaire was designed in Danish by a native speaker, and pretested before usage.

The survey collects data about (1) the festival's theme, history, occurrence and duration; (2) the objectives of the festival; (3) the festival's organizational and cooperative structure; and finally (4) the importance of the festival for the local community and various stakeholders. The questionnaire consisted of mainly close-ended questions with a single- or multiple choice answers. Responses were measured using the five-point Likert-type scale, where a lower score indicates a stronger agreement (i.e., 1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree). A space for comments was provided after most questions. In order to increase the response rate, two reminder emails were sent to festivals' organizers in May 2015. Finally 315 replied, giving a satisfactory response rate of 60.5% for this type of study. The data exploration was based on all usable observations available for a given question, ranging between 237 and 315 observations. The study included also 14 short case studies where researchers visited different festivals and undertook supplementary interviews with the organizers. This article utilizes mainly survey data.

4. The festivals landscape in rural Denmark

Based on 315 survey replies it is possible to obtain a reliable insight into festivals in rural Denmark: numbers, types, locations, time, durations and activities. Table 1 presents an overview of the thematic coverage of the identified festivals. Respondents are asked to indicate up to three main thematic focus points.

Music is prevalent in rural festivals, and sport is another important thematic focus. Table 1 shows that quite a few rural festivals are more "materialistic", with focus on food, arts and crafts, technology and hobby phenomena. It is likely that such themes invite commercial elements to a higher extent than both music and sports, but also when the main emphasis is for example on nature, politics, history, literature and so forth.

Table 1. Thematic scope of the examined festivals, number of times mentioned and percentage.

Theme	Number	Percentage
Music	133	42
Sport	64	20
Food and gastronomy	47	15
Arts and crafts	45	14
Fair (market)	44	14
Technology, vehicles	44	14
History	29	9
Hobby	26	8
Animals	18	6
Film and theater	16	5
Health	14	4
Literature	14	4
Nature and environment	12	4
Group of people (age, ethnic group or similar)	8	3
Politics, citizenship, democracy	6	2
Religion, philosophy, spirituality	5	2
Other	16	5
Total	541	-
Number of observations	315	-

An in-depth analysis of data, not reported in the table, reveals that in addition to the increasing number of festivals being hosted in Danish rural areas, there has been, over time, a shift in their thematic coverage from music and culture festivals being typical in the 1980's and 1990's to more highbrow art festivals (e.g., Art Festival Jelling) and niche food and gastronomy festivals (e.g., Wild Food Festival) coming to the fore in the new millennium. More recent festivals tend to have relatively more English names that might indicate a more international orientation. Likewise, there is a tendency to extend the thematic coverage of these more recent festivals to several topics, target groups and specializations, and there is also a modernization movement away from the close connection to the farming community's characteristics. Popular festivals in Danish rural areas include for example tractor pull shows and competitions, but also hobby related activities, for example thematically connected to gardening. Historical festivals are range from medieval or Viking animation festivals to celebrations of historical persons or landmarks. All these trends and new developments have also been viewed internationally (Higham & Ritchie, 2001; Wood & Thomas, 2008).

Table 2. Selected characteristics of the surveyed festivals.

History, year of establishment (N = 306)	
	Percentage
Before 1980	14.1
1980-1989	12.4
1990-1999	17.3
2000-2009	28.1
2010-2015	28.1

Audience size (N = 262)	
	Percentage
500 and less	22.1
501-2000	31.6
2001-10,000	27.5
10,001-40,000	14.1
40,001 and more	4.6

Participation fee (N = 310)	
	Percentage
Open access festivals	31.0
A mixture of ticketed and free festivals	23.9
Ticketed festivals	45.2

The results of the study show that the surveyed festivals are highly diverse in respect of size, age and access principles (Table 2). The smallest festival (Læsø Literature) has 35 participants, while the largest (Hjallerup Market) is estimated to attract 200,000 visitors. About a half of the surveyed festivals attract fewer than 2000 visitors. Another 27.5% attract between 2000 and 10,000, yet only less than one fifth festival have an audience size of 10,000 and more.

The majority of the surveyed festivals (56.2%) are fairly newly established, i.e. after 2000. Interestingly, among those about half of them were started within the past five years. By contrast, about 14% were launched before 1980. This suggests an upcoming and increasing interest in hosting festivals in rural areas in Denmark. It is also concurrent with evidence presented in other international studies (Andersson et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2011).

In addition, there is a significant and positive correlation between festivals' age and attendance figures, meaning that older festivals tend to have larger audiences. This is also in line with international

literature, which, however, also shows many exceptions (Andersson et al., 2013). This can be an indication that it takes time to build up and consolidate a festival. By contrast, there is no significant correlation between festivals' sizes and geographical locations. Thus, both small and large festivals can be successfully developed and held in rural areas close to- as well as far away from big cities. This result, however, stands in opposition to results presented by Gibson and Stewart (2009) for the festivals hosted in rural areas of three Australian states. Yet, when comparing both findings, one ought to be cautious and take account of the existing differences in what is understood by rural/peripheral in Denmark and in Australia.

Regarding the length of the surveyed festivals and their timing during the week and year (Figure 1), the majority consists of rather short-lived occasions during weekends of the summer months (i.e. June-August). It can be a challenge to host festivals offseason in a temperate climate.

Just under half of all festivals in the database are ticketed (45.2%). Another one-fourth features a mixture of ticketed and free festivals, while another third are totally free of charge (12%). The free festivals have to rely more than the others on income generation through sales of products and services, including also fees for commercial exhibitors and stallholders.

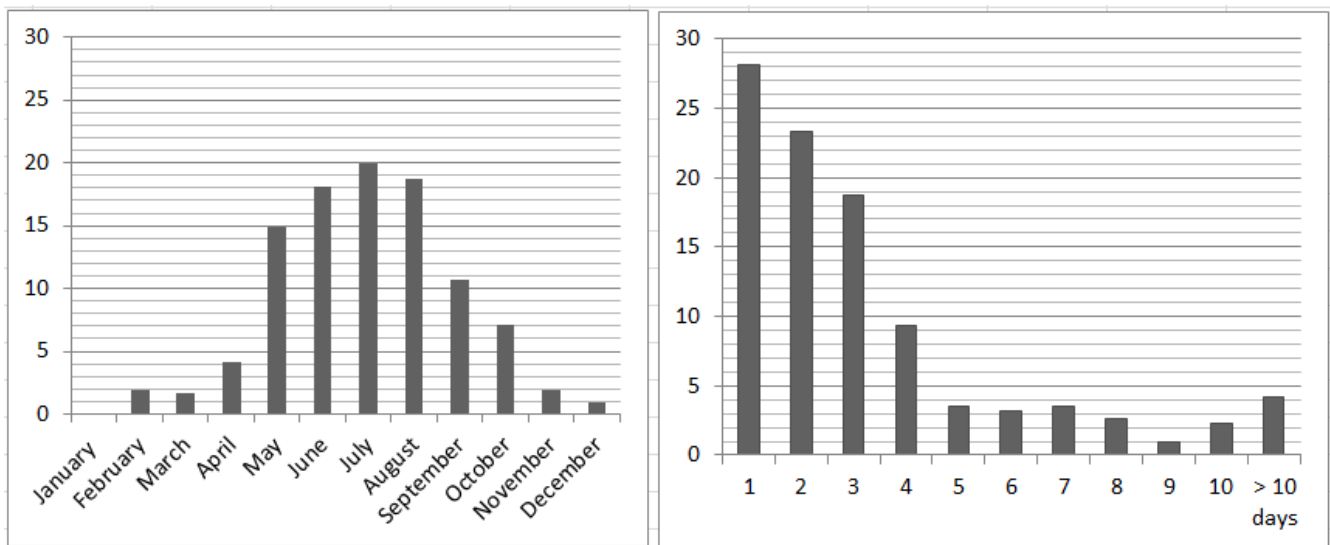


Figure 1. The length (right plot) and timing (left plot) of the surveyed festivals.

Note: N = 310; in %.

To increase the credibility of the aforementioned results, a test on whether the results change across Denmark was undertaken. As a reference for this analysis four types of rural areas as described in Section 3 were taken. The performed analysis, however, did not reveal any significant differences. This suggests that findings presented are, to a non-negligible extent, representative for the surveyed festivals, regardless of their geographical location.

This section shows the fact that the rural festivals are alive and kicking, as well as potential areas for entrepreneurial activity.

5. The entrepreneurial and business intentions in rural festivals

To what extent do the festivals officially and directly include aims with commercial connotations? What is the priority of such aims compared to other festival objectives? Assessing this can be undertaken through a question where the respondents are asked to indicate the main goals. Table 3 measures twelve items ranked on five-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree). Since a festival rarely serves a single purpose, multiply answers were possible.

Table 3. The importance of purposes of the festivals.

Item	Average assessment *
To promote interest in the activities and topics directly associated with the festival	1.4
To entertain	1.7
To promote and market the local area where the festival takes place	1.8
To create more social cohesion in the local area	1.9
To attract tourists to the area	1.9
To keep old traditions and culture alive	2.1
To enhance creativity and resourcefulness	2.2
To establish contacts between stockholders from and outside the local area	2.2
To strengthen member engagement in associations, organizations	2.2
To utilize and expose a specific local resource and specific characteristics	2.2

To create economic wealth for the festival organizers	2.8
To fundraise for associations and voluntary organizations	2.9
Number of observations	237-315

Note: Likert type scale, where 1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree.

Specifically, the results show that the most overriding goal stressed by festivals' organizers is *'to promote interest in the activities and topics directly associated with the festival'*, for example, sport/cycling during a cycling festival, or growing fuchsia for a gardening festival. The average assessment of this item is 1.4 and indicates that almost all respondents (i.e. festivals' organizers) highly prioritize this goal. In fact, only four respondents found this purpose irrelevant, including three market organizers. The second most ranked item was *'to entertain'*, with an average score of 1.7. This result seems to be straightforward as it is somewhat inherent for all leisure festivals to provide some degree of fun and enjoyment for the audience. An additional analysis of variance conducted for different types of festivals (e.g., music, sport, etc.) did not reveal any significant associations.

With an average score of 1.8 the next goal was *'to promote and market the local area where the festival takes place'*. This item also does not vary across different types of festivals, except for a few sporting festivals and tractor pulling shows, which do not stress this goal to a large extent. This is perhaps because such festivals are rather self-oriented, meaning that they are not directly built on- or related to the specific location. The item was followed by the goal related to creation of better community integration. Despite a few festivals with a purely commercial focus, for which the local area was only a platform for business activities, this item was ranked highly (on average 1.9). The goal of attracting tourists to the local area received the same score. Interestingly, although the last two items were ranked equally high, a different planning approach to place development is required (Boukas & Ziakas, 2016).

Middle-ranked priorities refer to a series of various objectives aiming at keeping old traditions alive, enhancing local creativity, increasing business collaboration and networking, increase local citizen commitment and better promotion of local assets.

Lowest ranked priority purposes cover the economic oriented goals, including creating revenue for owners, organizers and exhibitors or to fundraising for associations. The low rating of these two items emphasizes the fact that the organizers see festivals as a kind of ‘public’ good with a strongly and most explicitly expressed non-commercial and community focus.

As shown above, the surveyed festivals vary in terms of thematic coverage and purpose. Table 4 shows their range of activities, and it can be observed that on average there are more than four different activities integrated into a single festival.

Table 4. Main activities offered at festivals.

Activity	Number of hits	Percentage of festivals
Opportunity to purchase food and drink	236	76.3
Performance of professional practitioners directly related to the festival’s theme	216	70.5
Exhibitions of products and other things directly related to the festival’s theme	139	44.9
Opportunity to purchase products and services directly related to the festival’s theme	123	39.8
Competitions where visitors can participate as amateurs	87	28.2
Possibility of accommodation	83	26.9
Information and interpretation, for example on video screens	77	24.9
Involvement and activation of the visitors by debates, discussions and exchange of ideas	73	23.6
Teaching and learning activities	65	21.0
Promotion of sponsors	63	20.3
Production and sale of merchandise related to the festival’s theme	57	18.4
Competition between practitioners	49	15.9
Recruitment for charity members	39	12.6

VIP activities where visitors can meet performers	35	11.3
Total number of hits	1342	434
Number of observations		309

The commercial elements are revealed in various ways in Table 4. More specifically, the results show that at almost all surveyed festivals there is an opportunity to purchase food and beverages, although the way such service is organized and who is responsible for it differs across festivals. Additional data analysis, not reported in the table, shows that smaller or thematically defined festivals are mostly supplied by the restaurants and shops from the nearest neighborhood, whereas larger festivals mobilize the voluntary sector to organize necessary catering. For these reasons, the festival landscape is often characterized by temporary fast foods stands, coffee stalls and beer tents. On the other hand many festivals exhibit and sell a wider range of products, often with a greater emphasis on quality factors and regional characteristics. For example, food festivals frequently offer products that are not available in supermarkets, and perhaps in terms of taste these are special. These festivals also give visitors inspiration for spectacular gifts. Likewise, wool and knitting festivals are predominantly commercial and attractiveness for visitors and exhibitors can be found in the very large concentration and supply of yarns and accessories.

Importantly, many commercial activities at the festival venues are two-sided, meaning that the first business objective is to provide necessary services for attendees, whereas the second is to create a business platform for financing the festival. Taking into account specific types of festivals the results show that in many cases performance of professional practitioners relevant to the festival's theme is a core activity. To a large extent this is typical for music, sport and cultural festivals, but also at other festivals that invite "names" for entertainment. Famous artists are often an important reason why visitors choose to come. Food related events can create awareness of local culinary culture and typical products by getting celebrity chefs to cook, tell the local culinary tradition and handing out samples. Exhibits are also a

well-known ingredient. Cattle shows exhibit live animals. But festivals can also have on display machines and other products that can impress because of some special or unique qualities, especially if there is an opportunity to demonstrate. This review demonstrates that rural festivals offer many activities in a complex pattern. The choice of activities depends on core themes, and there are some basic ingredients that are relevant to the purpose.

6. Organizers’ perception of economic benefits

Merely 5% of the festivals’ organizers make any kinds of professional economic impact assessments. Such analyses are prioritized primarily by those festivals’ organizers who value highly economic aim. Moreover, it is mainly the larger ones that have developed assessment procedures. This underpins the conclusion that the business and entrepreneurship issues and prospects do not receive much attention in organizing bodies’ management practice.

Nevertheless, to get an insight into organizers’ perceptions of the impact of festivals on local business, festival organizers were asked to provide an assessment as they best can. The results presented in Table 5 clearly show the majority believes that the revenue effect on the local business outside the festival area is probably the most visible result of the festival (meals, accommodation and retail); yet considerably fewer believe that there is a large additional turnover for exhibitors and local service providers to the festival. These results correspond with the findings of other international studies (Chhabra et al., 2003).

Table 5. Organizers’ assessment of festivals impact on local business.

	Local exhibitors	Local service providers	Other local businesses (restaurants, accommodation, retail etc.)
Strongly agree	10.5	12.3	22.0
Agree	26.2	33.3	38.2

Neither agree nor disagree	46.4	40.3	28.0
Disagree	13.1	10,7	8.3
Strongly disagree	3.8	3.3	3.5
Number of observations	237	243	254

Note: Revenue increased by: (%)

Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between the festival’s size measured by the audience size and the organizers’ assessment of the revenue increase, and that accounts for all three categories. Thus, the larger the festival is the greater the propensity to induce economic impact on the surrounding business environment becomes, as far as the organizers can assess this.

7. Business partnerships in the organization of the festivals

Staging a festival is not a trivial task. It starts long before the festival actuality takes place, and requires an efficient organizational structure and normally also a collaborative operational mode. This section provides an insight into who stands behind the organization. The emphasis is on the extent and form in which commercial stakeholders are integrated into festival partnerships.

The results presented in Table 6 provide strong evidence that to a large extent the festivals examined citizens-based organizations and groupings in partnerships. This illustrates the fact that the rural festivals are considered to be joint ventures in the communities. It is normal to establish dedicated festival organization with the sole task of organizing the festival. However, such organizations typically recruit members from other organizations, mainly sports associations, together with particularly committed individuals.

Table 6. Main responsibility for organization of festivals

Item	Number	Percentage
Dedicated organization with the sole task of organizing the festival	119	40.2

Interest groups within a thematic scope of the festival	44	14.9
Commercial associations and tourist DMOs	38	12.8
Sports Associations	36	12.2
Museums and other cultural institutions	27	9.1
Private companies and foundations	12	4.1
Municipalities and other public authorities	7	2.4
Professional festival agencies	7	2.4
Other	6	2.0
Number of observations	296	100

Table 6 also shows that a smaller number of festivals are organized by commercial associations and tourist bodies. Even if such associations have a commercial weight, they usually put a wider emphasis on the idea that they work for the creation of vigor and activity in the local area. Such festivals include for example some of the markets, cattle shows, and festivals with a broader thematic festivity agenda, but also they are deeply embedded in the local networks and involve volunteers from sports and youth organizations, which receive a share of the surplus to boost their own activities.

The private companies and foundations mentioned in the list include for example some of the manor houses that have the capacity to organize among others food markets or historic shows, very often in close collaboration with other local stakeholders, both commercial and non-commercial.

In the sample there are a few professional festival managers who operate in several rural locations. Their business model consists of a structure for markets and festivals, for example based on food, and the festival bureau undertakes all organizing activities connected to the identification and preparation of the location, involvement of exhibitors, staging of entertainment, marketing and PR. They will generate a turnover through ticketing and stallholder fees, and they usually operate without volunteers.

There is strong evidence in the international literature that the functioning of any festival heavily depends on the number of volunteers participating (Allen & Bartle, 2014; Doherty, 2009; Monga, 2006). This is also true for this study, as 95% of the surveyed festivals profit from volunteers' work. Festivals

that do not have volunteers are more commercially oriented, and their organization comprises mainly paid staff. Table 7 shows that especially sports and music festivals draw intensively on voluntary labor. In contrast, markets and art festivals are least voluntary dependent. The difference might lie with how long the audience typically stays at festivals. Often, it is common in sports and music festivals that the audience is present throughout the entire festival, whereas for example market festivals tend to have more fluctuation in this regard.

Table 7. Number of festival participants per volunteer.

Type of festival	Number of festival participants per volunteer	Number of observations
Sport	35.2	78
Music	33.2	105
Arts and crafts	124.3	47
Market	137.7	36
Specialized topics	73.0	104
Total	43.0	245

But who are the volunteers in rural festivals? Table 8 provides evidence that they are mainly local people, both ‘ordinary’ and members of local associations, clubs, and the like. There are also quite a large number of festivals that get voluntaries through cooperation with local firms. This result once again clearly demonstrates that rural festivals are deeply embedded in local ecosystems, including the business sector. Table 8 also shows that many festivals recruit volunteers outside the local area, but business actors from outside seem, perhaps understandably, to be less willing to get involved. This highlights the symbiosis of the local entrepreneurship.

Table 8. Origin of volunteers at rural festivals

Item	Number of festivals	Percentage of festivals
‘Ordinary’ people from the local area	210	75.8
Members of the local clubs, associations and the like	196	70.8
Employees and owners of businesses in the local area	83	30.0

'Ordinary' people from outside the local area	109	39.4
Members of clubs and associations outside the local area	52	18.8
Employees and owners of businesses outside the local area	21	7.6
Number of observations		277

A substantial majority of the festivals are claimed to be mainly locally based, and this section confirms that the business related activities are also predominantly local. Local businesses participate in the rural festivals' ecosystem, and there are numerous mutual interactions between local business, festivals and residents. Overall, this strengthens vigor and business activities in rural areas, and contributes to the local wellbeing.

There are, however, "footloose" festivals, predominantly initiated by professional event businesses, which take advantage of rural amenity values and access to markets (e.g., in mature tourist destinations). They are less involved in local partnerships. However, although the share of such festivals is small, it increases tentatively in numbers.

8. The perception of competition

As indicated earlier, there has been a growing interest in hosting festivals in rural areas. However, to date the question of how festival organizers perceive the exposure to competition from other festivals on their business operation has not been addressed to a large extent. This study provides some evidence in this regard and, as indicated in Table 9, there is a strong agreement among festival organizers that running the festival is financially risky. This may translate into a risk for associated business operators, such as suppliers, sponsors and exhibitors. Examples from the case studies show that exhibitors consider carefully whether it is worthwhile to allocate time and money to participate in a festival. Their considerations include issues about attendance figures, as well as the competition from other festivals staged

approximately the same time in the local area. In that sense they address the competitiveness of festivals. Local business actors are less likely to withdraw their participation from the festival, arguing that they need to demonstrate their commitment to the local endeavor no matter what.

Gaining local council’s support (subsidies) and other sponsorship benefits is not easy task. In this regard conducted interviews with organizers suggest that it requires strong commitment to ensure proper sponsorships, while Table 9 also suggests an increased competition in this respect.

Attracting good performers, artists, or exhibitors to hosted festivals is essential for their attractiveness. Not all festivals attract the same segment of performers, artists, or exhibitors. Here, the results show that only 6.4% of the respondents strongly agree that the existing competition reduces their possibilities to attract good performers, artists, or exhibitors, while another 28.8% agree with this statement. Interestingly, over 40% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement, and another 8.2% do not know. Taking organizers’ perspective, this result allows concluding that there seems to be a fairly satisfactory supply of performers, artists and exhibitors to work with. Although not directly asked the share of responses may also suggest that there is a sufficient entrepreneurial and business development provision.

Table 9. Festival organizers’ assessment of exposure to competition.

	To run the festival is financially risky activity	The competition from other festivals reduces possibilities ...		
		(...) to gain local councils’ support and sponsorship benefits	(...) to increase the audience size	(...) to attract good performers, artists or exhibitors
Strongly agree	25.3*	20.1	12.0	6.4
Agree	30.9	28.1	30.3	28.8
Neither agree nor disagree	20.5	28.8	35.2	40.6
Disagree	15.6	15.6	15.1	11.7
Strongly disagree	6.6	4.5	4.6	4.3

Do not know	1.0	28	2.8	8.2
Number of observations	288	288	284	281

Note: in %.

These results do not systematically vary according to the festivals' size, duration and age. Both well-established festivals and new concepts can be said to have a strong competitive understanding and awareness of the existing competition. However, taking into account the thematic scope of festivals it can be concluded that more specialized festivals, such as within history, food or hobby oriented themes are less exposed to competition than other festival types. Of late there have been many new and specialized festivals, and this diversification may be the reason for the lower exposure to competition. It seems to correspond to the conclusions of international research, which also points to innovation as the role of business advantage (Larson, 2009). Further, the study found that art and craft oriented festivals find themselves more favored by municipalities and exhibitors. This result corresponds with other studies of artists and art economic potentials (Møller & Nielsen, 1999).

This section provides an indication that festivals constitute local platforms for entrepreneurs, and that there is a need for creative business behavior among festivals' organizers to become even more competitive on the crowded festival market. Furthermore, it shows that existing competition among different festivals may lead to innovative practices.

9. Sources of innovation, and business involvement in rural festivals

Festivals are changing and renewing continuously in time. It is a great challenge to ensure such a balance between valuable traditions and purposeful progressions, and it requires knowledge and ideas. In the following a closer look at the sources of innovativeness of rural festivals is provided.

Table 10 shows that, according to festivals organizers, the audience in particular come up with both praise and criticism, and it is the most valuable source of information and ideas for festivals' organizers.

Table 10. Source of information, inspiration and ideas for festival organizers.

Item	Average assessment
Feedback from the audience	1.72
Feedback from volunteers	1.74
Feedback from performers, artists and exhibitors	1.94
Feedback from people in the community in general	2.04
Visit at other festivals in Denmark	2.17
Cooperation with suppliers and professional partners	2.32
Media	2.61
Cooperation with authorities and organizations	2.78
Visit at other festivals abroad	2.84
Number of observations	270

Volunteers are also a very important source of information and knowledge. They might visit other festivals, and they might bring (new) ideas back. Furthermore, they are often part of a community on this very theme, which is another source of inspiration. Volunteers' knowledge also comes from other contexts, including work, study and leisure activities, which can be used at the festivals (Hjalager, 2009; Smith & Lockstone, 2009). Danish rural festivals have a very good understanding that volunteers are not just labor, but also key agents of change.

The third most important source of information and ideas comes from performers, artists and exhibitors. It is common that some of them have worked elsewhere, and they bring their knowledge and experience around. The carried out case studies demonstrate that organizers are keen on having dialogues with the performers, artists and exhibitors so as to be able, in a joint effort, to make the best usage of their capacities. This practice also holds true for suppliers and other professional partners and the media, but obviously to a quite less prominent extent.

These results indicate that festivals' organizers are rather open-minded individuals who are willing to listen to and learn from different groups for the benefits of festivals' development. However, the options

strategically to team up with business and entrepreneurs to increase the mutual innovativeness of the festivals and entrepreneurs are not evidently in focus.

On the other hand, it is also a question of whether the suppliers and exhibitors make the best of festival's involvement for their own innovative development. For food producers, for example, food festivals represent an opportunity not only to market new and existing products, but also to collect opinions and suggestions from consumers.

10. Discussion and conclusion

Festivals are common in rural areas in Denmark. They are of significant importance for the quality of life and for local identity, and they are growing in numbers. Music, sports, arts and crafts, food, markets and hobby related interests constitute the main themes of the festivals, but under the surface a very wide variation can be found in terms of styles, formats, target groups, content, and local underpinnings. The main objectives are to encourage an interest in the themes, to entertain, to promote the local area, and to support the community's identity and pride. However, the survey demonstrates that business goals and commercial elements are, in practice, given lower priority. Festivals' organizers show limited ambitions when it comes to fruitfully combining community and social objectives with the enhancement of effects on economy and employment.

Festival activity is a remarkable ingredient in rural life. In total in Denmark, rural festivals are estimated to attract between 3 and 4 million visitors annually. The audience consists of both locals and visitors from elsewhere, and rural festivals are assets in rural and coastal tourism. According to the respondents, contribution to coastal and rural touristic attractiveness and development is imperative. The festivals represent also a business turnover of quite some significance, in spite of the fact that much activity is free of charge or handled by volunteers.

There are several dilemmas in further growth of entrepreneurial and business potential in rural festivals. On the positive side, the functioning of festivals in the current numbers would hardly be possible without active and socially well-consolidated local networks of community groups. Almost all festivals in this inquiry are deeply embedded in the local ecosystems of sports, cultural, business and other types of associations. Such associations motivate dedicated organizers for various activities, and they ensure the mobilization of human resources, including committed business entrepreneurs, for numerous practical tasks. Community-based organizations benefit from the participation in such activities as they deliver elements of coherence, commitment and meaning, while sometimes they provide financial support for their core activities. Only very few festivals are entirely commercial; the large majority are “homegrown” and well integrated into community life, but pockets of innovative and successful business activity do thrive in most festivals, although with limited attention from organizers.

When analyzing the nature of festivals in rural Denmark it becomes clear that there is a need for better inclusion of business aspects into their functioning, albeit without compromising other main objectives. Many festivals lack a full range of quality products and services in their offerings that could better meet visitors’ needs and demands, as well as increase business impact of festivals on the host areas. But it is a challenge to introduce and work with business organizations whose main perspective is to create revenue (Gursoy, Kim & Uysal, 2004). It should be taken into account that most organizers as well as participants consider festivals as recreational pursuits, where economic alliances have to be on an “arms-length”. Stimulating the entrepreneurial potential cannot ignore this fact. Efforts to enhance rural festivalization must regard this as a condition for a success rather than an obstacle.

11. Business and entrepreneurial perspectives in rural festivals

The analysis reveals a considerable capacity and dynamics in the rural festival arena, and an impressive voluntary contribution from different groups. However, the survey also indicates that, so far, the potential in rural Denmark for further festivalization is hardly fully exploited. In a process of expanded festivalization there is opportunity for entrepreneurial endeavor. A number of areas can be pointed out for further development:

Building new portfolio of festivals and renewal of traditions: There is a devoted inclination to base new and existing festivals on well-founded and much-loved traditions, while at the same time to allowing some innovation and repositioning. However, the survey suggests that, over time, some festivals tend to stiffen. There is a need for festival organizers to seek inspiration from outside and to build strategic alliances, including business partnerships that can stimulate revitalization. Danish nature, culture, history, traditions and so forth encompass ingredients that, through creative processes, can instigate entirely new categories and formats in the festival landscape. The reinvention of existing festivals or the introduction of entirely new ones may address critical rural development issues such as considerable seasonal fluctuations. In this case, there might be potential for building new relationships with both local and external partners. Incremental changes and thematic alignments may ensure better profitability for exhibitors, artists and shopkeepers in the festival arena and the surrounding rural fabric.

Proactive dialogue with exhibitors, stall owners and so forth: In a more incremental style of change, organizers may initiate proactive actions with exhibitors, stall owners, suppliers, sponsors and so forth. This dialogue can include an exchange of ideas the range and quality of the products on offer, as well as on potential marketing endowers. It may be relevant that exhibitors and stalls are active, for example by demonstrating methods of production, and that any of the products or services on offer can be sampled. Successful festivals are characterized by the fact that ‘something happens’ and that offers are attractive

and dynamic. The contribution of commercial actors is particularly important. It is essential that they can see a business perspective, for example by direct sales or by subsequent increased activity in on-line sales.

Thematic coordination with local area businesses: The results showed that accommodation providers and retailers can experience a positive impact of festivals on their daily operation and profits. They can benefit from both personal sales and the festival's support for the theme. Thus, restaurants can have apple-based dishes during an apple festival, some stores can play chamber music during a chamber music festival, while others shops can offer particularly good deals on products that fit the festival's main topic.

Co-branding – symbiotic image promotion: This might include efforts to weave the host region's image into the festival theme. Co-branding between festivals and businesses in the local area can be strengthened by publishing (cook) books, travel films and much more, and in that context festivals can be start-ups for co-branding.

Merchandise: Bearing in mind that sales of goods and services at the vast majority of festivals rarely go beyond merchandising of inferior goods (e.g., hats, umbrellas, or simple souvenirs), there is a need, and potential, for the extension of merchandising offerings into a larger and more interesting portfolio of products and services that better fit to festivals' themes. In that sense merchandise must be seen both as a promotion tool via souvenirs and the source of revenues for festival organizers and exhibitors.

Innovation platforms: Some major festivals offer entrepreneurs the opportunity to test new business ideas and concepts (Hjalager, 2009), yet this practice should also be implemented at smaller festivals, and thus possibly contributing to rural business development (Freire-Gibb & Lorentzen, 2011).

Stronger touristic linking: There is a need for strengthening tourism operators' marketing of festivals in rural areas, including through festival calendars, available in shops, on ferries, etc. Festivals can be better represented on international platforms, exemplary TripAdvisor; this can possibly be achieved by

a closer cooperation with accommodation businesses, restaurants, hotel owners, ferry companies and so forth. Festivals can also collaborate with existing volunteers' associations or guide corps to appeal to special interest niches of attendees.

Strategic alliances with sponsors: Festivals often build upon sponsorship deals mainly with local companies and organizations. Alliances often mean money contributions, so that it can be done printing festival posters, programs, etc. in exchange that will bear the sponsor's name and logos. However, it is difficult to obtain good sponsorships as cash contributions. Alternatively it is possible to strengthen relationships with sponsors in other ways, for example by agreeing on non-monetary sponsorship, such as food and drinks for performers, prizes for competitions, "voluntary" help from employees of local companies, for example by supplying transportation, Internet access, office facilities and services. This can be supplemented by strategic media alliances in order to provide a strong basis for communication with potential and current festival visitors, while also reinforcing the argument of potential benefits for sponsors.

The study of rural festivals in Denmark indicates that festival organizers are not only committed, but they also have a considerable capacity for taking action individually and in partnerships. Initiatives such as these mentioned above are realistic in both small and larger festivals and in all thematic types. The study also ensures that even remotely located festivals are capable of developing their capacity and attractiveness, thus contributing to rural development processes. This challenges the general trend of depopulation and economic decline in rural areas, seen in Denmark as in most other European countries. Attaching a stronger entrepreneurial element and still complying with the intrinsic qualities of rural areas is the key challenge for the future.

Drawing on primary data from 315 festivals' organizers, this study contributes to the consolidation of the existing research about rural festivals. However, a limitation is that the study addresses the economic

perspectives from the organizers perspective, rather than from the business partners and entrepreneurs side. In future research, the mechanisms of business involvement in festivals, the implications of participation at different stages of festivals' planning and implementation, and the prospects for business and communities will need to be further examined. For this purpose there is a need to renew traditional, and somewhat stiffened, impact study methods.

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