**Collaboration and action – exploring solutions for inclusivity to UK music festivals for people living in poverty**

The paper presents phase two of an ongoing project that explores issues of inclusivity at music festivals in the UK for people living in poverty. The investigation serves to tackle some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the field of music festivals, namely Number 3 – good health and wellbeing and Number 10 - reduced inequalities (United Nations, 2023).

Phase one of the project analysed the websites of 30 paying festivals and conducted interviews with 6 music festival organisers to examine the issue of inclusivity to UK music festivals for those living in poverty. In phase two, subsequent interviews took place with representatives from a UK festival association and a charitable organisation that works in the area of poverty. These preliminary interviews, along with the results from phase one informed the design of a collaborative online workshop with 9 festival organisers that were members of the festival organisation.

The results of the first phase highlighted the rising costs of attending music festivals in the UK from website analysis and this issue was confirmed as one that led to the exclusion, albeit not purposefully, of people in poverty by festival organisers. In order to address this problem, for emancipatory outcomes (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011), it was felt that a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach should be taken, in line with Laing’s (2018) recent observations regarding future research in festivals and tourism. Therefore, external organisations with specific expertise were recruited to explore the issue further. A consultant that specialises in poverty was contracted to inform the research design and provide headline information on the issue of poverty within the UK at that time (2021) for use in the workshops. The views of a charitable organisation that works in the realm of poverty and tourism were also sought via an in-depth interview process, based on the notion that festivals can be considered as a form of holiday and therefore a form of ‘social tourism’ as discussed by Hazel (2005), McCabe, Joldersma and Li (2010) and Diekmann and McCabe (2020); . A similar in-depth interview was then carried out with the CEO of one of the festival associations in the UK to gain their views. The latter participant acted as a gatekeeper for the recruitment of 9 festival organisers that were members of their festival association to take part in what were to be 2 collaborative workshops to explore the issue further.

The results from the in-depth interviews informed an initial workshop design, which was then further formatted with the help of the consultant and additional discussions with the charity representative and festival association representative. In an ideal world, the workshops would have taken place face-to-face, using the ‘Ketso’ method of collaborative investigation, as pioneered in tourism research by Wengel, McIntosh and Cockburn-Wootten (2019). However, due to Covid restrictions and difficulties with travel and timescales, just the one workshop took place in an online environment. The Ketso method was still used as a basis for exploration and break rooms were used to initiate deeper discussion on specific topics.

The aims of the in-depth interviews and collaborative workshops were to gain an understanding from festival organisers of their views on the topic and to explore possibilities for initiatives that they could employ within their management processes to deal with the issue. This approach fits with the processes of action research as described by McNiff and Whitehead (2011) whereby such a project initially intakes stock of what is happening, then identifies a concern and subsequently a possible way forward.

During the interview process, it was noted by the festival association that it would be ideal to produce a set of guidelines as to how to tackle this issue, in a similar way to how the organisation ‘Attitude is Everything’ does with disability accessibility issues. However, further investigation during the workshops revealed that what might work for one would not be appropriate for another due to the varying nature of the industry in terms of ethos, business structures etc. Several initiatives were mentioned by festival organisers, but issues with these approaches were also brought to light. Limitations to the research approach were that only festivals from one association membership could take part in the research, and therefore additional collaborative workshops with similar festival associations acting as gatekeepers for recruitment are planned. This will enable discussion of the issue with a wider audience and the collection of opinions from a larger sample of festival organisers, building on ideas for how to tackle the challenges.

It was agreed during the collaborative process that further action research with individual festivals would be beneficial in understanding further the barriers that people that live in poverty face if wishing to attend a music festival. Therefore, the next phase is to work with festivals and organisations to recruit individuals and families that are living in poverty to attend, by offering free tickets and helping with other costs. Ethnographic research using visual methodologies and interviews will look to explore experiences of the attendees related to positive outcomes and potential barriers or issues.

**Keywords: Festivals; poverty; collaboration; action research**

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