Festivals, events and equality, diversity & inclusion outcomes: an evidence review

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1.0 Introduction

The intersection of festival and event occasions with equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)[1] aims is complex. Festivals and events can have market focused aspirations (e.g. Quinn et al., 2021; Finkel, 2010), though there is a growing body of work that recognises more layered and nuanced understandings of how they can be leveraged for other significant social and cultural benefits. Here, festivals and events are recognised for their potential to fulfil multiple functions, across the gamut of community celebration, place making and tourist attraction (Vorobjovas-Pinat & Fong Emmerson, 2022; also see: Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016) and, to operate in a variety of ways within those realms. As Stevenson has noted,

> *'there is a growing body of research around the potential of festivals and events to develop social capital and engender social inclusion' (Stevenson, 2016:99*

(also see: Vorobjovas-Pinat & Fong Emmerson, 2022; Hassanli et al., 2020, 2021; Devine & Quinn, 2019; Flinn & McPherson, 2008) and, to function as platforms for furthering the recognised benefits of arts and leisure for tackling social inclusion (Laing & Mair, 2015:254). The transition towards a broader conceptualisation of what a festival or event might help those involved in its production to achieve is important because, as Quinn et al, observe 'achieving social and cultural inclusion is now a key societal challenge for cities where ethnic and cultural diversity has become an indisputable reality' (Quinn et al., 2021:1876; also see Finkel & Platt, 2020; Saeys, 2021).[2] In this way, festivals and events have an important role to play as 'part of the toolkit of cultural forms being co-opted to achieve instrumental goals concerning place management, participation and community economic development' (Finkel & Platt, 2020:4 also see Stevenson, 2016. Also see Flinn & McPherson, 2008).

The ambition to foreground EDI considerations is relevant to both the debates and the practical activities undertaken in this field. The literature, however, shows that approaches to articulating these processes at the policy level and, capturing and analysing them at the practical level are many and various. Studies with a broad range of analytical framings have relevance for those seeking insight into the ways in which festivals and events might facilitate the achievement of EDI aims. For example, Stevenson (2016) presents her analysis through a social capital lens (also see: Finkel, 2010; Devine & Quinn, 2019), Laing and Mair (2015) utilise a social inclusion/ exclusion framing and, Hassanli et al. (2021) apply a social sustainability approach. Furthermore, Jamieson and Todd interpret their findings in terms of the 'social model and diversity model of disability' (Jamieson & Todd, 2022:6). Quinn et al. (2021) focus primarily on the analysis of the policy aspirations of five European cities included in their study, whereas Stevenson (2016, 2020), for example, concentrates on the experiences of event organisers and local community members.

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1 Equity, diversity and inclusion is sometimes preferred (see, for example: Wolbring & Lillywhite, 2021), particularly in North American discourse (for example: Worlbring & Lillywhite, 2021; Espinosa de los Monteros & Enimil, 2020). The term 'equity' is used to emphasise the necessity for tailored and individualised accommodations for those who need them. Equality, on the other hand, is argued to focus on the provision of uniform/ identical adjustments for those in need of additional support. See, for example: Minnow, 2021.

2 Also see: Vorobjovas Pinat & Fong Emmerson (2022:1803) & Finkel & Dashper (2020:6) re: events as agents of social change and Holloway et al.'s (2010) advocacy for increasing the use of ethnographic approaches for understanding participant experience of festivals and events. Elsewhere, Quinn notes that there are historical examples of 'rethinking the arts festival concept in an attempt to promote inclusiveness, accessibility and new forms of interaction between audience, artist and place' (Quinn, 2005:929-30).

This demonstrates the potential breadth and complexity of the field, showing the wide range of associated spaces in which processes and policies with significance for EDI are found. Indeed, events and festivals of every type and scale – community, cultural, sporting, music, etc. – comprise the subjects of analyses in the literature drawn upon here.

This evidence review seeks to provide an accessible overview of the discussions and debates ongoing in the festivals and events field pertaining to EDI. The review will also offer insights into the ways that festivals and events might contribute to attaining EDI objectives alongside evidence of challenges which may be encountered and should be considered when seeking to achieve these ambitions.

UCI Cycling World Championshiop opening ceremony. Source: David McGillivray
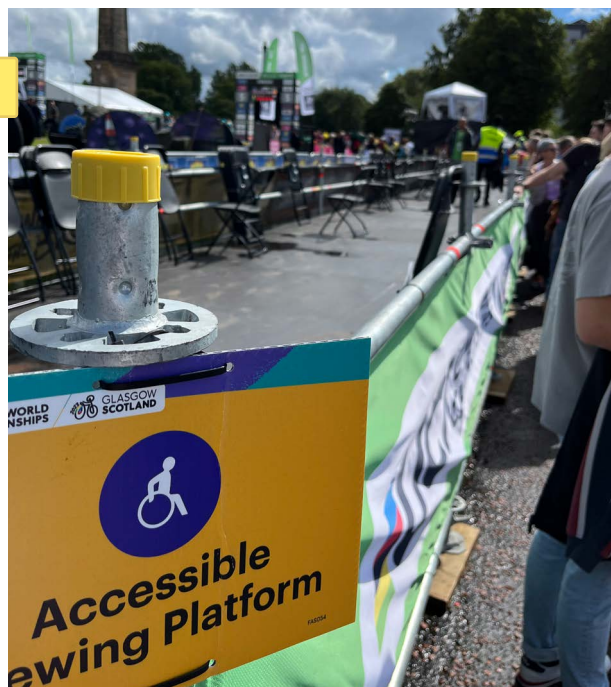
2.0 Methodology

This review draws on both academic and grey literatures to examine the ways in which festivals and events can function to achieve positive EDI outcomes. To this end, literature searches were conducted using a range of keywords and keyword combinations. Initially, the terms [festivals, events AND equality], [festivals, events AND diversity], [festivals, events AND inclusion], [festivals, events AND equality, diversity and inclusion] were used. It became clear that much literature of relevance to this study also used keywords tangentially related to EDI such as 'social inclusion,' 'social exclusion,' 'social sustainability,' and 'accessibility.' In combination, these terms were added to the search parameters.[3]

The literature returned covers a wide range of festival and event types from a variety of analytical standpoints. Findings reported discuss the experiences of event or festival attendees (e.g. Hassanli et al. 2020, 2021; Stevenson, 2016; Alvarado, 2022). Elsewhere, organisers' perspectives are the primary focus (e.g. Laing & Mair, 2015; Finkel, 2010) while others advance the argument that – for example – diversity must be considered both from the perspective of an event attendee and, that of participating artists (Finkel & Dashper, 2020). Policy approaches, including local governance (e.g. Quinn et al., 2021) and festival/event internal governance (Alvarado, 2022) comprise another dimension of the analyses presented. In their discussion of accessibility, Finkel and Dashper (2020, drawing on Waters 2018), suggest an approach to enhancing event accessibility comprising three parts; 'physical accessibility, financial accessibility, and cognitive accessibility' which – when adopted – 'facilitat[ed] diversity and foster[ed] an inclusive environment' to the benefit of all event attendees (Finkel & Dashper, 2020:4). This framework also provides quite useful vectors to be kept in mind while considering findings in this review. Even so, these areas should not be considered entirely discrete.

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3 It is interesting to note, Quinn et al. (2021) observe that while the cities under consideration in their study 'are deeply engaged in thinking about cultural inclusion' and the contribution that festivity can make to that agenda, 'they approach [this process] using terminology that differs in ways that are not immediately obvious' (Quinn et al., 2021:1889). This 'imprecision' or lack of agreement around terms is understandable when one considers the plethora of inputs that have the potential to inform EDI outputs/outcomes.

3.0 Access & Inclusivity

Access and inclusivity are closely allied, as Alvarado observes

'to ensure inclusivity, an event must be accessible to all who want to participate' (Alvarado, 2022:208;

also see Laing Mair, 2015; Finkel & Dashper, 2020). However, it is also the case that accessibility itself functions on several levels. According to Finkel and Dashper (2020), attempts to improve access to both 'high' and 'popular' forms of culture have been ramped up over the last few decades. The effort to increase interest in – and attendance at events using financial inducement (free, discounted or subsidised entry) has functioned alongside the growth in events taking place in public spaces which, Frey (2000) notes, may be more enticing as they take place beyond the intimidating walls of the opera or concert house, often still regarded as the preserve of the monied and cultured classes (Frey, 2000:4-5). The same authors, however, identify the sometime (unconscious) tendency for event producers to give precedence to the needs of attendees who are most like them in terms of values, beliefs and heritage (Finkel & Dashper, 2020). This finding is echoed in other studies where perceived barriers to access - for example, feeling intimidated or financial strain - are identified as crucial areas for redress if durable changes to issues surrounding accessibility are to be made (Laing & Mair, 2015).[4]

Accessibility is more commonly considered as a physical concern, which considers with the obstacles that those with a disability (PWD)[5] can face when it comes to accessing a festival or event. Where would-be festival or event attendees with physical disability may potentially face identifiable physical barriers to attendance, there is evidence that the support needs for those in this group are nevertheless poorly understood (Alvarado, 2022).[6] Accessibility for those with physical disability is not just a case of 'complex and expensive physical modifications' (Alvarado, 2022). Rather, there is also a range of other awareness and support needs that can be un- or under-addressed. In her study examining accessibility for those with disabilities at UK music festivals, Alvarado identifies a range of accessibility features that are present to a greater or lesser degree at several well-known music festivals (e.g. Glastonbury, Latitude and others.) alongside several ways that some of these events provide more specific support. For example, at Latitude, special features include a 'mobile app that allows attendees to access all the festival information [and], a dedicated tent for PWDs run by the expert team from AiE[7] and the "Drinks Concierge Services," offered at viewing platforms.' All these factors contribute to facilitation of participation by festival attendees with disabilities (Alvarado, 2022:210). Similarly, Finkel and Dashper refer to several ways in which the Edinburgh Festival Fringe seeks to support PWDs or additional support needs; these include the presence of 'specially dedicated staff for access enquiries and ticket bookings' at the box office.

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4 Although their research examines social inclusion in the context of cricket, Ratna et al.'s finding that 'recruitment of [minority group cricketers] may be enhanced if talented players felt that the social and cultural rituals associated with cricket were not conditional to their acceptance in teams' has relevance here (Ratna et al. 2016:13). Also see: Hunter (2023) re: increasing reports of discrimination across all levels of organised football.

5 VisitScotland (2019) note that PWD and their families are a significant market (worth £200bn in 2019).

6 It is also noteworthy that 70% of disabilities are hidden (VisitScotland, 2019).

7 Attitude is Everything is an industry specific group focussed on assisting industry professionals and organisations to better understand and improve access: https://attitudeiseverything.org.uk/ . However, the experiences of PWD who attended The Download Festival in 2023 demonstrate that gold award status from AiE, is no guarantee of accessibility. The Festivals: it was just a complete nightmare from start to finish episode of Access All heard testimony from a number of disabled festival goers who reported difficulties camping at, navigating through and accessing viewing platforms/toilet facilities at the event. Yet, 'this year's 20th anniversary festival was expected to be the biggest and best Download ever: 82% more accessible tickets were sold this year to mark the event' (Fox & Tracey, 2023: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0fvlhpr). In contrast, Festability is a 'fully inclusive festival for anyone who loves music' taking place annually in Kent (https://festability.co.uk/about) placing inclusivity/accessibility and support as the centre of its organisational approach.

Furthermore, 'many shows offer captioning, and audio description, signed and relaxed performances, which potential attendees may find by searching with these filters on [the] website' (Finkel & Dashper, 2020:3).

Despite evidence of positive measures in place at some festivals or events, Alvarado nonetheless found that booking for a group of festival attendees can be complicated as regular and additional support tickets cannot (in her study) be purchased together thus, for a group comprising differently abled people, more than one transaction is necessary (also see: McClaren, 2023). In addition, PWDs are only permitted to bring one other person with them to the accessible viewing areas thus, making it impossible for a differently abled group to experience the event together (Alvarado, 2022:211).

While Finkel and Dashper (2020) identify a range of ways in which the Edinburgh Fringe Festival seeks to ensure accessibility for all, other authors provide evidence that is illustrative of the complexity of the notion of accessibility. Thus, while on the one hand, booking may be accessible (Finkel & Dashper, 2020), in their work examining the experience of D/deaf[8] (would-be) festival goers, Jamieson and Todd (2022) observe that 'BSL provision is currently not satisfactory, and this was a significant barrier to the city's festivals.' Furthermore, in the panel-type discussion forum that served as the authors' foremost mode of data collection, participants agreed that there was 'need for guidelines about [the type of support that members of D/deaf communities would benefit from] for performing companies' (Jamieson & Todd, 2022:16).[9] For these reasons among others, these researchers suggest that, while there are both willing potential performers and audience members within D/deaf communities, 'festival-funding, venue-booking, council infrastructure and festival leadership networks are not seen to be accessible by deaf artists' (Jamieson & Todd, 2022:18).

Another vector which crosscuts the realm of accessibility (and inclusivity) is discussed by Martin who, writing in 2010, draws attention to the ways in which her experience of the Edinburgh Fringe was marred by encounters with disablism in comedy performances she attended. While acknowledging the limitations of her methodology,[10] Martin nevertheless identified numerous examples of 'unreconstructed disablism' which she described as 'widespread within the fringe [and] mainly manifesting itself via the idle use of othering language such as the word "spaz"' though Tourette's syndrome and cerebral palsy as 'comedy' also occurred regularly (Martin, 2010:539-40). Much of the disablism encountered was seen as having been incorporated into sets in 'apparently pointless and avoidable ways' and, discouragingly, while disabled comics were found to be less 'likely to invoke disablist tropes,' their involvement in performances did not guarantee that 'lazy stereotypes and othering' would not be relied upon for comic effect (Martin, 2010:543-4).

8 D/deaf denotes 'the separation between deaf as a condition of hearing loss and individuals [who] do not sign, and Deaf to refer to members of a signing community who share practices, histories and traditions' (Jamieson & Todd, 2022:7).

9 EMBOK (see: https://www.embok.org/) is a guide which provides 'insight into all the aspects to be taken into account for the appropriate organisation and development of an event' (Alvarado, 2022:209). While it is a positive step, Alvarado nevertheless finds that '[it] is too broad and does not consider the particular requirements PWDs may have' (Alvarado, 2022:214).

10 The author was sole researcher, seeing as many shows as her budget allowed.

Towards the end of her study, the author relates incidences of disablist behaviour exhibited by Fringe workers and discussed on the BBC's OUCH webpage[11] as well as noting broader issues such as accessible accommodation being booked up far in advance of the beginning of the Fringe (Martin, 2010:548) meaning that anyone with a physical disability who may wish to attend the event over a number of days has – potentially – to be far more organised than a differently abled counterpart to ensure that the possibility of so doing is available to them.[12]

Experiences of accessibility and inclusion are not uniformly dispiriting. There is a growing body of work highlighting how approaches to planning sport events while accounting for disability awareness and expertise can produce beneficial outcomes, for PWD. There are significant examples of increasing – and transformative – prominence being afforded to PWDs and their experiences. The 2012 London Olympics have been widely recognised for the ways in which those Games advanced a normalising agenda which foregrounded disability in sport but also, in wider media, social and environmental contexts (see: Jackson-Brown, 2020, Misener et al., 2018). TV shows such as Channel 4's The Last Leg[13] which aired nightly for the duration of the 2012 Paralympic Games, provided a significant platform for discussing disability both within and beyond a sporting context.[14] In spite of such progress, significant room for improvement in the realm of large sporting events, remains. For example, the 2023 UEFA Champions' League Final, played in Istanbul, made few adjustments or provisions for attendees using wheelchairs, leaving fans to struggle with uneven surfaces, poor facilities with little or no official assistance in place (See: Palmer, 2023, also: Taylor, 2023).

> *In their work comparing activity in Canada and Scotland, Misener, McPherson, McGillivray and Legg (2018) have shown that integrated sport events can be an effective means of generating greater awareness and understanding of PWD's needs;*

deriving from extensive media coverage, shared platforms and associated community programmes that accompany these events. These ideas are also reflected in findings associated with disability sport, with inclusion, attitudinal change and awareness reported by Misener at al. (2015) who note the importance of involving PWD's in processes of integrated and inclusive event planning (Misener at al. 2015:457).[16] These findings are echoed in Spirit of 2012's recently published 'Making Events Work for Everyone' report in which the need to embed inclusivity from the very first moment of event design and development is underscored (Iannetta et al, 2023).[17]

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11 See: https://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/about.shtml

12 Accommodation and venue prices have been subject to criticism with some Fringe performers noting that prices are becoming prohibitive; that they had been 'priced-out' and, voicing fears that for those at the start of their careers, the Fringe would be out of reach (see: Ward, 2024).

13 The Last Leg is hosted by Adam Hills, an amputee, alongside 2 panellists with visible physical differences.

14 Notably, The Last Leg continued to broadcast after the Games had ended, becoming a regular weekly fixture offering offbeat commentary on contemporary issues.

15 Events where para-athletes compete alongside their able-bodied counterparts, for example, the Commonwealth Games.

16 It is interesting to note these authors' observation that – for larger scale events of the type they consider (Glasgow Commonwealth Games), the learning and knowledge transfer gained from the hosting experience often passes between host city locations rather than defusing across the host city/area (Misener et al. 2015:461. Emphasis added).

17 The report outlines the breadth of areas in which the experience an insight of PWDs should be sought (e.g. leadership, governance, marketing, travel arrangements, follow-up consultation and reflection). These authors also note the significance of appropriate communication strategies alongside workforce and volunteer training. Disability awareness, etiquette, and assistance technique training are crucial for event delivery as is the commitment to funding to ensure inclusivity measures can be put in place and sustained (Iannetta et al. 2023).

Discussing the geographies of disability, McGillivray et al. (2018) demonstrate that, when hosting large sporting events, improvements to the built environment (including sport facilities) and transport infrastructure can enhance the accessibility of the host city overall. These authors, however, also emphasise that improvements should be permanent fixtures rather than temporary 'fixes' which apply only for the lifespan of the event. Ideally, the public value of such events should be seized upon as a progressive opportunity rather than for tokenistic social improvements or media spectacle (McPherson et al., 2017). For the 2014 Commonwealth Games, investment was made available to ensure volunteers with a disability were able to be supported to volunteer at the Games, thus gaining some of the social economy skills others benefit from through participation in such programmes. (Scottish Government, 2018).

Co-creation workshop insights. Source: David McGillivray
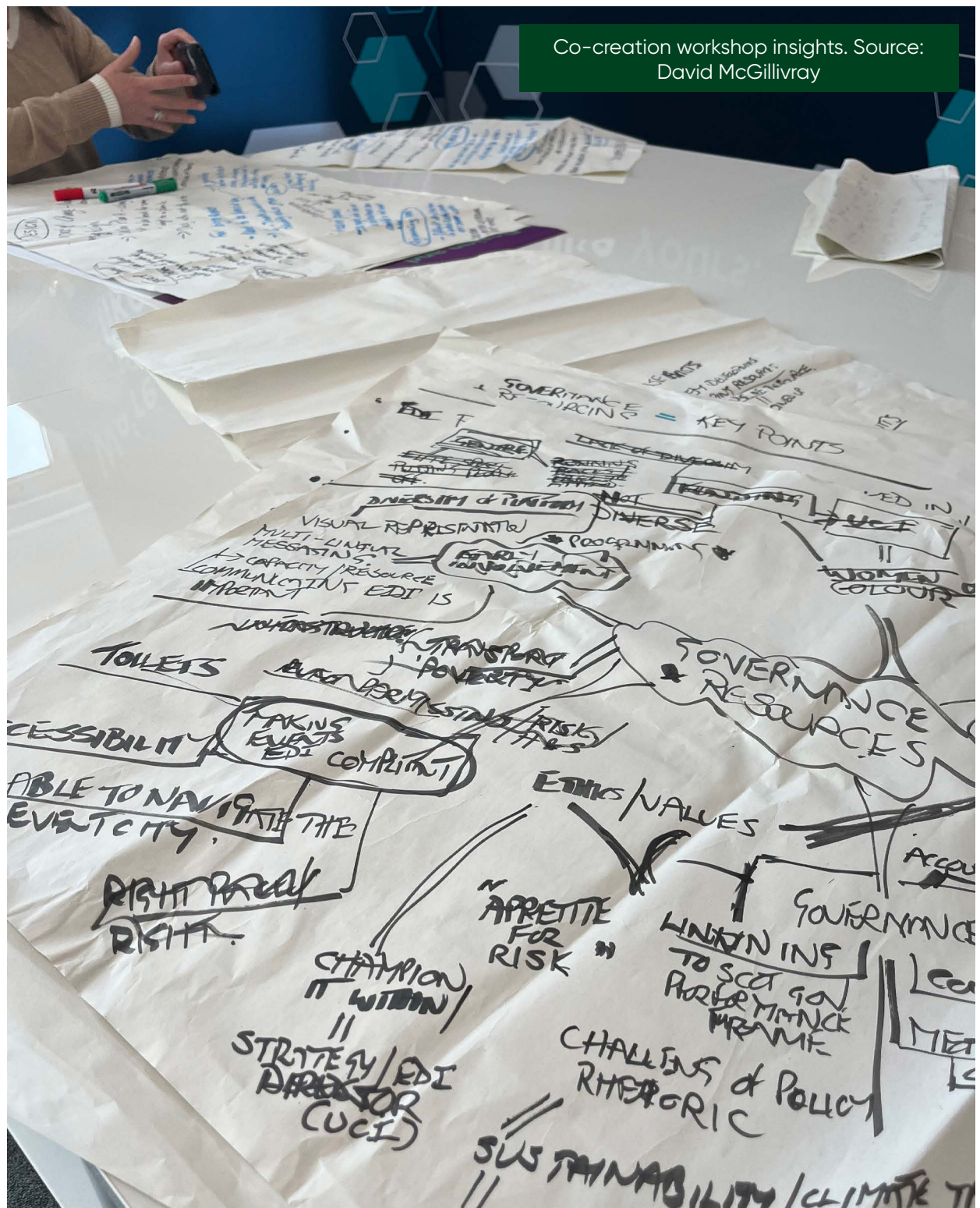
4.0 Communities, Events & Intercultural Encounters

As noted previously, the notions of fiscal, cognitive and physical accessibility underpin many debates pertinent for those wishing to consider how festivals and events might contribute to EDI outcomes. As evidenced in the following, many of the studies reporting findings of significance for these questions engage in narratives and analyses which coalesce around ideas of community and, the impact that an event or festival has within the local (or participating) community group.[18] There is strong evidence that festivals and events can function both to reinforce identity and belonging for participating groups and, to provide a platform for broader acceptance and mainstreaming of a minority group by providing exposure and facets of interaction for members to 'meet' and interact with members of mainstream society in the 'safe space' that the event provides.[19] Hassanli et al. (2021) relate the ways in which participants in the festival that is the focus of their study[20] demonstrate that 'speaking one's language and hearing one's (ethnic) music played loudly create[s] moments of freedom and power for attendees [...] whereby 'permission' is granted to engage in cultural practices that are meaningful'. Furthermore, in addition to the creation of a sense of internal, ethnically derived, 'groupness,' the festival in question presents an opportunity to represent their culture to members of the majority community group who visited the event. These authors argue that the festival experience has the potential to shape enduring feelings of community in the psychological sense at three levels. These levels comprise, participants' own ethnic community, migrant and mainstream community and social sustainability (equality for all) (Hassanli et al., 2021: 794-8; also see: Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016 and Citroni & Karrholm, 2019).[21] Vorobiovas-Pinat and Fong Emmerson (2022) reveal similar mechanisms at work in an LGBTQI+ context, whereby Pride events function as a platform for (temporarily) mainstreaming marginal identities and, providing a space in which members of a minority and mainstream community might encounter each other.

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18 As Laing and Mair (2015) point out, the community comprising the target group for a festival or event can be defined geographically – e.g. local community – or as a community brought together by their common interest in the theme of the festival or event, in which case geographical considerations are of lesser significance.

19 See: Devine & Quinn (2019) for a different perspective on the notion of 'safe space' where in the award of City of Culture 2013 to Derry/Londonderry helped to open up areas that had previously been 'no-go' to all members of the local community regardless of which religious community they identified with.

20 This festival involved refugees hosting a festival in their new country of residence.

21 Citroni & Karrholm explore the idea of visibilisation, whereby the visibility created by using civic space for a cultural event or moment can lead to sharing of unfamiliar elements of everyday life and, of space, which encourages usually separate community groups to interact. This notion is also evident in the work of Misener at al. (2015) and Paradis at al. (2017) where the successful hosting parasports events can bring about positive benefits in terms of social inclusion, accessibility and wider community awareness for PWDs.

In contrast, Saeys' discussion of two street festivals in Antwerp, Belgium, show that while 'interethnic encounters can be meaningful' such outcomes are not inevitable and, 'mere presence of others does not necessarily imply meaningful interethnic contact' (Saeys, 2021:637). Spijkers & Loopmans work examining the public pedagogy of contact – or, learning through encounter – suggests that meetings in public space can tend to be fleeting in nature thus making it difficult to determine if their impact is positive or negative (2020:1155-6). It is interesting to consider whether encounters taking place in festival or event spaces are viewed as less transient, or more positive. Devine and Quinn's examination of the effects the award of City of Culture 2013 to Derry/Londonderry using a social capital lens suggests some potential answers here. On one hand, these authors found examples of development of positive inter-community connections, however, most commonly these occurred between young attendees and event organisers rather than between peer-group members of separate community groups. Further, such connections were affected by generational considerations whereby older community members were far less likely than their younger counterparts to engage with events as an opportunity to extend their networks cross-culturally. Notably, in the absence of cohesive legacy planning enabling positive outcomes to be further leveraged, encounters were often passive and temporary; the opportunity to move towards more embedded and sustainable change was not fully realised (Devine & Quinn, 2019).

Studies have nevertheless established how festivals and events can function as safe spaces in which participating groups can come together to share an experience which may, in turn, help to break down both physical and perceptual barriers between groups (thus, leading to positive EDI outcomes). Nonetheless, there is also ample evidence to show that merely hosting an event in – for example – an under-represented area is not automatically analogous with the achievement of diversity and inclusion aims (e.g. Saeys, 2021). Examining the ways in which festival and event benefits are accrued and leveraged though the analytical lens of social capital, Stevenson (2016) observes that while the East London festivals included in her study offer 'the potential to engage and empower communities about change in their local area' (Stevenson, 2016:1002) in fact, any benefits which accumulate as a result of the event, are unevenly distributed. Instead of benefiting marginalised community members, gains are usually made by those in the community who already possess skills and knowledge which are useful in a festival and events context. For example, Stevenson notes, that 'volunteerism in HWFI reflects wider inequalities and is concentrated among those people who have the capability, time and wider remit to become involved.' Furthermore, participants' voluntary roles often reflect the skills and abilities that comprise part of their paid employment. In this way, disparities within communities are – potentially – amplified and reinforced rather than diminished by involvement with a festival (Stevenson, 2016:992, 1001-2. Also see: Stevenson, 2021:1780, 1783 & 2020).[24]

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22 As an interesting counterpoint, Finkel's (2010) examination of the social capital dynamics of Shetland's Up Helly Aa event found that the social and community norms and desires are based around strict gendered roles and some exclusionary practices through which the community foster their unique culture and identity. Up Helly Aa's financial autonomy has meant that it has been able 'to remain a community-led festival based on community values and [has] not been forced to adhere to top-down governmental edicts that have been argued to sanitise, homogenise and standardise local celebrations' (Finkel, 2010). Even so, see Carrell (2024) for signs that these traditional approaches are being reappraised and recast.

23 Hackney Wick and Fish Island Cultural Interest Group, an organisation promoting the interests of the local creative community and, associated with the Hackney Wicked festival which – alongside Wick Festival and The Hackney Experience – comprises the case study events in this research enquiry.

24 On the other hand, Nichols & Ralston (2011) study examining the 'experiences of volunteers in a programme established as a legacy of the 2002 Commonwealth Games' (2011:900) does give some examples of participating mega-event volunteers successfully moving into paid employment/ self-employment in a transition that they attribute to their volunteer experience (Nichols & Ralston, 2011: 906-7). Far from all of the respondents in the study were in pursuit of such a transition. Some were already employed but gaining reward from volunteering while others were intent on reducing their paid work commitments and increasing their voluntary roles or, volunteering only with no intention of moving into the paid workforce. The authors concluded that the study did show 'that volunteering can provide regular events for people to look forward to and plan their lives around. The regularly shared experiences develop and maintain social networks, some extending back eight years [at the time of writing] to the Commonwealth Games' (Nichols & Ralston, 2011:911).

Similarly, in their exploration of British music festivals from a space, place and representation perspective, Hayes and Mogilnicka found that those who are 'able to mobilise cultural capital and networks already occupy positions of relative power within the music and festival field' (Hayes & Mogilnicka, 2022:6). Additionally, while organisers may well be cognisant of lack of diversity and intent upon addressing it though measures such as venue and location selection; this in itself is not sufficient to effectively redress entrenched issues of under-representation of more marginalised groups who, may wish to attend a festival but who nevertheless experience exclusion from the festival space as it is composed and 'conceived through language, signs and other representations' (Hayes & Mogilnicka, 2022:12).[25]

Putting these obstacles to one side for a moment, there is also evidence of good practice and successful engagement of all parts of a (hard to reach) community in festival or event planning and execution. In their study, delving into the social inclusion and music festivals from the perspective of the event organisers, Laing and Mair relay the approach of one organiser who 'attended community meetings, to keep the community members up to date and to listen to (and address) any festival-related complaints.' The festival discussed here also maintained a community fund – where 'a dollar from every ticket sold goes into our fund, and then local community groups can submit a project for funding.' In this example, a determined effort is made to 'maintain a connection with [the] geographic local community and [to] develop the festival in line with community wishes' (Laing & Mair, 2015:263). Hassanli et al. (2020 & 2021) note that their festival case study provided opportunities for refugee and migrant participants to show their capabilities and to network within their communities and beyond (also see: Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016). Rich et al. (2015) discuss the role of a participatory sport event – Community Cup – in giving chances for newcomers to Canada 'to connect [...] in order to build capacity, connect communities, and facilitate further avenues of participation in community life' (Rich et al., 2015:129). It is notable that, in both cases, the authors are explicit in their acknowledgment of the importance of including the target beneficiary group in the planning and programming stages of the festival or event to ensure that the networking, social capital and associated advantages of participation are accessible to them (Hassanli at al., 2020, 2021; Rich et al., 2015).[26]

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25 As Smith et al. (2021a:228) observe 'even when admission is free, [events] can be exclusive as most city centre events tend to be staged to attract people willing and able to spend money.'

26 For example, Rich et al. record that '[a]n interesting characteristic of the Community Cup is that the organisation strives to achieve its goal of connecting newcomers not only though participation in sport, but through the organisation of the sporting event. The Community Cup is organised each year by over 20 planning teams, each of which is required to have at least one newcomer and one local volunteer, and ideally a post-secondary school student' (2015:134). Also see: Jamieson & Todd (2022) who identify the inclusion of PWD's in 'the event planning process rather than at the point of consumption' as a key recommendation. Saeys (2021) discusses an example of the consequences of failing to invite stakeholder groups into planning processes. Here, it is worth once again highlighting Devine and Quinn's findings regarding the durability of benefits and the necessity for legacy planning to ensure sustainable effects (Devine & Quinn, 2019).

Glasgow Mela. Source: David McGillivray

5.0 Festivals, Events & Space(s)

The notion that a festival or event creates a temporary space in which the norms of society are briefly suspended or, set aside in favour of a different order of things is well accepted. The significance of the concept of space is evident in the preceding Section, 4.0). A variety of evocations of space are apparent; further pertinent issues for this discussion are illuminated by considering them more closely. Writing of the Notting Hill Carnival, Quinn notes that the event 'still retains indigenous involvement and strong shades of their original purpose [...] [and] the substantial tourism and economic activity dimensions [relating to the contemporary festival] do not overshadow the profound social meanings of these festivities [...] [Thus,] the Carnival maintains its status as a hybrid site (Quinn, 2005:935). In this analysis, the festival in question functions successfully as a site for both the expression and sharing of a particular identity or set of identities.

Elsewhere, Hassanli et al. propose the concept of counterspace which, they describe as a setting 'where deficit notions of marginalised people can be challenged and where their experiences and identities can be affirmed and validated' (Hassanli et al., 2020:167). In their work, and that of others, space-focused ideas are explored and reflected upon. Hassanli et al. (2020) found that participants felt 'safe' in the festival setting and, that situating the event beyond the geographically defined 'cultural bubble' that the migrant and refugee attendee, organisers and/or beneficiary group usually inhabited enabled them to venture beyond the boundaries of their day-to-day lives in a way that felt secure but also ensured that their festival took place in a location that increased the likelihood of attendance by 'white Anglo-Saxon Australians [...] thus allowing for interactions [between the various groups] to happen' (Hassanli et al., 2020:176). In this regard, the cinema space in which the documentary films chronicling the lives of PWDs reported by Schwartz et al. (2010) denote an intersectional realm in which both PWDs and non-disabled people can come together to view the films and exchange insights and information in the space created.

In their work exploring 'the case for a D/deaf festival in Edinburgh,' Jamieson and Todd (2022) found that participants in their research did not support the idea of establishing a separate or specific venue for D/deaf performances which was associated with a risk of creating a "D/deaf ghetto,' known as 'the deaf place."[27] However, the 'need for D/deaf spaces at the festival – in particular a social space where participants could share information' – was defended (Jamieson & Todd, 2022:17). The delineation and purpose of space is examined in Higgins-Desbiolles study of the indigenous Australian cultural festival, the Spirit Festival, which problematises the conjunction of an event held to foreground an indigenous community and their culture and, 'commercial imperatives [that] have begun to dominate tourism in the neoliberal era' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016:1282-3).

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27 In the context of disability sport, Misener et al. (2015) provide good evidence of the ways in which 'integrated approaches to media representation, ticketing, venue accessibility and transport networks' are significant for both sustainable engagement and societal impact (Misener et al. 2015:463). Here (Misener, et al. 2015) and elsewhere (e.g. Paradis et al. 2017) the benefits of integrated approaches – and concomitantly, the avoidance of 'ghettoisation' – to event organisation accrued in terms of sustainable attitudinal change towards PWD's is also recognised.

In this study, the author found that the Spirit Festival functioned as a space in which aboriginal Australians could engage with their culture, socialise and network. The event afforded positive visibility,[28] while also offering some potential as a platform for reconciliation.[29] However, Higgins-Desbiolles observes that 'in creating an Indigenous Australian space in the heart of the city, there may be some tensions in fostering reconciliation by welcoming non-indigenous attendees.' Indeed, the researcher witnessed hesitation among some non-indigenous passers-by to enter the festival space, reporting that 'one attendee who [had] attended every Spirit Festival held since 2008 commented that she felt unwelcome at the 2012 event and wondered if the event was evolving to be only for Indigenous Australian people' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016:1291).

The question of who the festival is for was identified as a fundamental issue at play in this context where, 'it is apparent that there are contradictory aims being placed on [the] event, as the needs of Indigenous Australians, non-Indigenous Australians and tourists are all highlighted in [the organisers'] vision statement.' Furthermore, the necessity to secure funds from a Fringe association[30] meant that the festival organisers were required to consider a wider remit (including catering for tourists) to continue producing the event (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016:1294). By their very nature, these competing processes gave rise to questions 'about the impacts [they would] have on the meaning of the event for the indigenous community and the impacts that they may experience' (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016:1282). Quinn makes a similar point observing that, when utilised as city marketing tools, 'festivals may be compounding the social difficulties that necessitate renewal and regeneration programmes in the first place and, heightening tensions in already contested areas' (Quinn, 2005:934-5. Also see: McGillivray et al. 2020).

Predominantly, the above reflects on the notion of space from the perspective of event audience members and potential participants. There is, however, a significant literature in which the effect on those who are ordinarily resident in the temporary event space is considered (e.g. McGillivray et al. 2020 & 2021; Smith et al. 2021a; Gogishvilli, 2018). While the positive and productive outcomes of festivals and events are emphasised, there are also downsides to staging them which are often born by those resident in – or close to – the event space (e.g. Smith et al. 2021; McGillivray et al. 2020). As Smith et al. note, in addition to positive benefits 'festivals and events can also restrict, control and damage host spaces [thus] eroding their publicness' (Smith et al., 2021a:227). Currently, the same authors observe, there are 'some public spaces [that] are so heavily programmed that they have effectively become year-round venues' (Smith et al. 2021a:227).

28 See: Citroni & Karrholm, 2019 on visibilisation.

29 Reconciliation is described as 'about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, for the benefit of all Australians' (see: Reconciliation Australia: https://tinyurl.com/4sphhzbw).

30 Also see, for example, Finkel & Platt (2020:5) who note that 'the saturation of festivals has led to increasing competition for scarce resources. For example, Finkel (2009) found that cultural festivals are increasingly more standardised and homogenised throughout the United Kingdom.' Arguably, this state of affairs may affect issues pertaining to EDI disproportionately as the ambition to create events for particular groups (underrepresented) may be limited by the difficulty in attaining funds/making a sufficiently robust financial argument. In her examination of Shetland's Up Helly Ah festival, Finkel (2010) notes that, because the event is primarily funded through local sponsorship, EDI (particularly as gender inclusion) is not a key priority. Instead, traditional cultural hierarchies are reflected and maintained as an element of the purpose of the festival itself, as a reflection of place and identity (however, see: Carrell (2024) for evidence that these traditional approaches are nevertheless beginning to change).

Issues such as noise disturbance and increased traffic (e.g. Smith et al. 2021), temporarily restricted[31] access to local green, residential and commercial spaces (e.g. McGillivray et al. 2020 & 2022; Smith et al. 2021a) can create tensions and an environment in which locals come to view event organisers as "invaders' leading to adversarial relations and contested events' (Smith et al. 2021a:236). Further, while event-led investment can result in significant improvement in the public realm, such financial input – particularly where larger scale/ mega events are concerned – has the potential to further embed local area inequalities. For example, improving event sites and associated locations in (wealthier) areas, and upgrading the transport links between them in order to deliver the event can concomitantly exclude other – often less affluent – areas from the geography of the event, thereby, lessening (access/ eligibility to any) monetary support available to event hosts (e.g. McGillivray et al. 2020:288). Here, it is evident that, in some circumstances, hosting a festival or event can create a set of barriers whereby members of the host community can be among those for whom access to the event space is constricted, discouraged or overlooked.

31 Gogishvilli (2018) provides excellent insight into the ways in which supposedly temporary changes and restrictions can lead to more enduring change which excludes or restricts access to, and usage of, local spaces on a more permanent basis (also see: Smith et al. 2021a:230).

6.0 Insights for Practice

The preceding discussion gives insight into the complex and multi-level nature of EDI related discussions and debates, ongoing in the festivals and events literature. The evidence presented demonstrates both the variety of ways in which festivals and events can contribute to EDI outcomes and, the difficulties that can be encountered in attempting to leverage such happenings for EDI benefits. Festivals and events can be hosted for different purposes, they are sometimes hosted on a one-off basis or can be recurring. Different genres can be open to foregrounding EDI considerations, depending on their histories and traditions or the political environment within which they are taking place. Sport events backed by government funding can be expected to adhere to public duties around EDI (e.g. the UK Equality Act), while community festivals and events might have little resource or expertise to effectively embed these considerations in their planning and delivery.

The literature demonstrates that, for example, accessibility functions both physically and psychologically. Further, if the barriers that some people encounter are to be addressed effectively, then issues need to be tackled on several levels. As Quinn notes '[I]f [in this case] arts festivals are to achieve their undoubted potential in animating communities, celebrating diversity and improving quality of life, then they must be conceived of in a more holistic way by urban managers' (Quinn, 2005: 940, also see: Rich et al. 2015 and Ratna et al. 2016). Drawing from the findings of this evidence review, there are several insights that the festivals and events sector should take cognisance of when planning, designing and delivering:

- Festivals and events are complex and multi-faceted. While ideally EDI considerations should be 'baked' into conception, planning and delivery, there are factors related to the availability of expertise, experience and resourcing that currently make implementation inconsistent and variable.

- To avoid EDI considerations becoming tokenistic, or overly transactional, involving those participants or audiences expected to benefit from a festival or event in the inception and planning phases is imperative, not just at the point of delivery or consumption. Organisers need the right people 'in the room' from the outset.

- It should be recognised that, on occasions, festivals or events might be exclusive (or have elements of that are exclusive) to ensure the inclusion of specific groups, e.g. women only events. Organisers need to be mindful of this.

- Intentionality in siting or hosting an event in a particular community (neighbourhood, town, city or region) is insufficient to guarantee meaningful involvement or attendance from members of that community. Valuable EDI outcomes will only follow on from a carefully considered articulation of purpose, vision, organisation and reflection.

- Space matters. Festivals and events are contextual, taking place in locations and venues with their own unique political, economic, cultural and social histories. Organisers and their stakeholders need to recognise the unique features of a place when deciding where to host and the impact of those choices on targeted participants or audiences.

- Physical accessibility is – necessarily – a very broad spectrum. When considering how a festival or event can be made more accessible to those with additional support needs, it is necessary to consult with those with lived experience of disability and those representing their interests.

- For EDI considerations to be embedded effectively in the conception, planning or delivery of a festival or event, resources are required. Human capital provides access to expertise and experience, while financial capital is necessary to ensure organisers and their partners can adapt and invest in delivering inclusive and accessible experiences.

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