



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI TRENTO

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Arts festivals and the vitality of communities: strategic control, accessibility and generativity

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Abstract:

This study examines the potential of cultural social economy organizations to foster the vitality of communities by addressing the three fundamental questions: “*who controls culture?*”, “*who is culture for?*”, and “*to what effects?*”. The first question - “who controls culture?” - addresses the problem of identifying the aims and objectives of cultural activities. The second question - “who is culture for?” - points at who the direct beneficiaries of culture are, and the answer is hypothesised to follow from the institutional settings and processes identified with the first question. The third question – “to what effects” - considers the generative capacity of activities in terms of the public benefits created at the broader community level. The idea is that cultural activities are aimed at producing value for the entire community. We address these questions in the context of the Trentino province, characterised by a diversified rural and urban territory. Rural territories, in particular, often possess rich cultural and environmental resources that can spur socio-economic dynamism. However, many of them also face challenges of economic decline, cultural heritage depletion, and exclusion from development planning due to top-down approaches with predetermined aims. Against this backdrop, this research explores how these organisations can counteract these challenges by fostering inclusivity and participation, producing permanent spaces for enquiry and discovery of what has reason to be valued by the community, and supporting community-driven aims. The paper presents a picture of arts festivals in the province drawing from an original organisational survey conducted in 2024-25, addressing the nature of festival organisations and a series of indicators that address the three questions highlighted above.

Keywords: Cultural organisations, Social and solidarity economy, Festivals, Community, Local development, Vitality, Capabilities.

Acknowledgments

This research has been funded by the *Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Trento e Rovereto*.

Contents reflect findings and reflections developed during the project. More details on the data and methodologies can be found in the project reports. In particular:

Rapporto di ricerca (Survey sottoposta a 67 organizzazioni mappate sul territorio, campione=37)

Sacchetti, S.; Mustaffi, V. (2026) I Festival in Trentino. Organizzazioni ed offerta culturale dei festival di matrice artistica in Trentino: governance, proposta culturale ed esiti collettivi., rapporto di ricerca No. 3. Progetto “Organizzare e innovare nel settore culturale”. Unità di ricerca su istituzioni economiche e bene comune (Cives), Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale. Università di Trento.

Some of these contents were presented as academic conferences or workshop papers, in particular:

[Vitality in remote areas. Cultural social economy organisations and public policies for culturally sustainable local development.](#) By Silvia Sacchetti, Andrea Salustri and Roger Sugden [Italy]. In: Local SSE Policies enabling the Socio-Ecological Transition - an International Collection of 17 working papers - a cura di Timothée Duverger (Sciences Po Bordeaux) and Marguerite Mendell (Karl Polanyi Institute. Published by the GSEF in October 2025

[Art festivals from communities and for communities as a means to foster the vitality of territories. Evidence from the Trentino province.](#) By Silvia Sacchetti and Andrea Salustri. Sisec, Firenze 2026. Società Italiana di Sociologia Economica, Sessione su: Turismo, innovazione di prossimità e patrimoni della produzione: pratiche locali di cooperazione e micro-rigenerazione territoriale.

[Economia Sociale, Cultura e Sviluppo di Comunità. I festival e il volontariato culturale](#) – Atti della tavola rotonda del 24 ottobre 2024, a cura di Sacchetti, S; Gaudiello, M; Di Stasio, M. Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale, Quaderno nr. 10.

Thanks to Valentina Mustaffi, Marco Di Stasio, Alicia Chiodi, Andrea Salustri, Enzo Loner for support on the mapping of organisations, data collection, management, and computation. Thanks to participants in the Sisec conference 2026, Florence and Olga Tzadzadaki for organising the session on sustainability and tourism, as well as to Andrea Ronzani for suggestions and comments. AI (Gemini 3.0) was utilised for summary tables and always checked, adapted and verified by the researcher. Usual disclaimers apply.

Project: “Organizzare e innovare nel settore culturale”. Unità di ricerca su istituzioni economiche e bene comune (Cives), Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale. Università di Trento.

Arts festivals and the vitality of communities: strategic control, accessibility and generativity

1. The vitality of communities, festivals, and the governance of cultural production

The pursuit of territorial vitality in peripheral regions necessitates a fundamental departure from growth-oriented models of cultural development. In this traditional paradigm, arts and events are frequently framed as instruments for urban branding and global competitiveness, prioritising prestigious projects to stimulate local economies. Within industrial organisation studies, this approach is criticised for its reliance on exclusive control on production decisions and resource allocation (Cowling and Sugden, 1998), or exclusive governance (Sacchetti, 2015). The same criticism can be useful to apprise or shape cultural and tourism policy, where the focus on market exchange and visitor volume often leads to the commodification of cultural commons, such as local heritage, as well as of community identity and the decoupling of a community from its own developmental aims (Sacchetti and Sugden, 2024). While communities undoubtedly benefit from the economic influx of visitors and tourists, processes that ensure the participation of community are required to ensure that such presence does not erode the community's capability for self-determination (see Andriotis, 2018 for analysis and discussion of conceptual issues).

As a response to these failures, this research defines a method to assess whether art festivals can be framed as deliberative and creative spaces that facilitate the construction of community capabilities to discover and identify valued aims. Central to this shift is the concept of vitality, defined as the capability of a community to identify or discover their valued aims - specifically, which functionings people should choose among those available to them (Sen, 1992) - and to coordinate resources to move towards those emergent aims, aware of what personal fulfilment and the common good entail (Sacchetti and Sugden, 2025; Sacchetti, 2025).

This perspective finds deep resonance in the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey. For Dewey (1927), the "public" is not a passive audience but a collective formed through the shared recognition of common problems and the communicative act of aesthetic experience. Within local development, Deweyan thought suggests that community life is a process of social inquiry. In this light, the discovery function of a festival serves as an act of both personal and collective intelligence and imagination; if managed solely as a service to be produced and consumed, or to the benefit of restricted categories (for example, for visitors mainly), it bypasses this level of inquiry, treating the territory as a backdrop providing inputs into a profitable production process. Rather, vitality acts as a criterion and as a benchmark, to appreciate and distinguish the extent to which Cultural Social Economy Organizations (CSEOs) act to enable communities to discover and identify valued aims, by offering spaces in which they can articulate their preferences regarding the forms of (cultural) development they envision for their territory

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To assess whether festivals foster vitality, our research addresses three fundamental questions regarding the organization of cultural production: who controls culture? who is culture for? to what effects?

The first question acknowledges that vitality is defined by the right to identify valued aims. Control is assessed through governance indicators, specifically the legal form, distinguishing between market-oriented and mission-oriented entities, and the degree of stakeholder inclusion and strategic influence. In a Deweyan sense, this measures who participates in imagining or in the inquiry of the festival's purpose.

The second question addresses the direct beneficiaries and the accessibility (geographic, social, cultural, and economic) of the cultural services produced. We use target indicators to identify whether beneficiaries are located in poles or peripheral areas, if they are local residents or tourists, the artistic language utilised (referring to Bourdieu's distinction between high-brow and popular culture; Bourdieu, 1984), and the pricing strategies of events. We posit that the nature of beneficiaries is a direct consequence of governance; if strategic control is exclusive, benefits will likely fall upon exclusive publics. On the other hand, there is a risk that communities become self-referential, hence we emphasise the importance of networks.

The third question, finally, evaluates the generativity of the festival, or its capacity to generate a creative space where community and participants can exert their imagination and deliberative capacity, the identification of innovative approaches for the community, and the activation of new activities. We utilize also relational indicators, such as local and extra-local collaborations, the activation of local supply chains, the intensity of volunteer engagement, and the creation of relational goods and community identity. In so doing, our research provides a method to explore if and how cultural social economy organisations can promote the vitality of people and communities.

Method

To address the research questions regarding the vitality of cultural events, this study adopted a multi-stage quantitative approach focused on festival organizations within the Trentino province. The methodology was designed to evaluate how these organizations function as discovery platforms for community-valued aims. The first phase of the research involved a comprehensive mapping of the festival population within the study area. We identified 67 festivals characterized by explicit artistic and cultural content. This mapping exercise served to define the boundaries of the local artistic festivals, and ensured that the subsequent survey targeted active entities.

In the second phase, between 2024 and 2025, a structured questionnaire was administered to the main contact person of identified festival organizations through the platform LimeSurvey. The questionnaire was structured into 5 key thematic sections, containing 55 questions: 1) the first addressed the features of the organisation behind the

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festival events. This section establishes the baseline characteristics of the festival organisation, including its legal form, which allows for the distinction between market-oriented and mission-oriented entities, its size, its longevity. 2) The second section addressed the geographical location and users: This block focuses on the spatial footprint of the festival and the demographics of its audience, identifying also the balance between local residents and tourists. 3) The third section, on the features of the production of cultural services assessed the nature of the cultural supply, including the specific artistic languages used, the timing and location of events, the pricing strategies employed for events and the intensity of volunteer engagement. The fourth section focused on the organisational governance, investigating the "control" dimension by measuring the degree of stakeholder inclusion and the strategic influence held by different groups within the organization. Finally, the survey addressed the organisational innovation and project capacity, the organisational competences, and the network ties of festival organisations.

Items from these five sections were selected and rearranged to capture the three analytical dimensions previously established: control, accessibility, and generativity. The study of control uses a series of governance indicators extracted from questions about the legal form of the association, the diversity of stakeholder inclusion in decision-making, and the mechanisms of strategic influence. Accessibility is addressed using indicators about beneficiaries, their origins, the geographic and socio-economic reach of the events, the cultural level of events and pricing structures. Finally, generativity is assessed using indicators that capture the capacity to activate creativity, innovation, and new initiatives for the community, as well as the activation of relational goods, local and extra territorial network ties.

Out of the 67 organizations identified in the population mapping, 36 questionnaires were returned. Following a data cleaning process to ensure the robustness of the analysis, 31 fully filled-in questionnaires were retained for the final dataset. This sample represents a significant portion of the active cultural producers in the region, providing a reliable basis for assessing the discovery function and the generative capacity of these organizations in line with the vitality framework.

Results

The features of festival organisations

Festivals as multidisciplinary artistic spaces

Given the initial selection of festivals through the mapping exercise, which focused on artistic festivals with performing elements, the artistic identity of the respondent organisations features a significant lean toward live performance, though many maintain a cross-disciplinary approach. The analysis of the thematic focal points reveals that music is the dominant activity of the sector, representing 35.48% of the organizations. This is

followed closely by performing arts (encompassing theatre, dance, cabaret, and circus) at 25.81%, underscoring a robust collective interest in live artistic experiences.

Other creative domains occupy more specialised niches within the sample. Audiovisual and radio (including film, television, and multimedia) and miscellaneous categories ("Other") each account for 9.68%. Literary arts and public speeches both stand at 6.45%. Themes related to identity/folklore and tangible/intangible cultural heritage are the least represented, each appearing in only 3.23% of the festivals. A defining characteristic of these organizations is their thematic fluidity. Rather than strictly adhering to a single discipline, the vast majority—77.42%—opt for a multidisciplinary offering, addressing various thematic areas within a single festival edition. Conversely, only 22.58% of the respondents maintain a monothematic focus, concentrating their programming exclusively on a single artistic field. This high level of diversification suggests that these festivals serve as cultural nuclei where different artistic languages intersect, likely to appeal to broader audiences and potentially foster collaborative innovation across artistic sectors.

A hierarchy of cultural enterprise activities

Beyond the thematic orientation of these events, an analysis of the specific functions performed by festival organizations provides insight into their operational priorities and value proposition. On a 5-point Likert scale to measure activity engagement, these entities primarily define themselves through the management and curation of cultural experiences (4.35), a finding reinforced by the fact that 87% of respondents rated this function with a high-intensity score of 4 or 5. This administrative and organizational focus is closely supported by the creative phases of production, specifically the conception of content (4.10) and its subsequent realization (3.94).

While these organizations are involved in the direct execution of performances (3.71) and the provision of ancillary services related to cultural heritage (3.74), they appear to dedicate comparatively fewer resources to long-term developmental roles. Lower mean scores are observed for research and experimentation regarding new content or products (3.48) and the delivery of artistic-cultural training (3.39). This hierarchy of activities suggests that while the sector is highly proficient in the live and operational phases of cultural production, there remains significant room for growth in fostering formalised educational programs and R&D within the festival environment.

Organisations of the social economy

The empirical analysis of the legal nature of festival organisations reveals a sector deeply rooted in the social economy. The sector is predominantly composed of associations (61.11%), followed by foundations and other third-sector entities (11.11% each). Only 16.67% of the organizations are formally configured as social enterprises, while the vast majority (83.33%) are not. While some festivals in the sample have been active since the 1970s, the sector experienced a major growth surge after 2000, with a significant peak in

2019, representing 20% of the sample. The financial behaviour of these organisations reinforces their non-extractive nature, prioritising operational continuity and community service over rent and capital accumulation. Reflecting their mission-oriented focus, the primary financial priorities, when it comes to expenditures, are salaries (50%) and the procurement of goods and services (42%). Conversely, profit distribution is the lowest priority for 89% of respondents, confirming the non-profit nature of these organisations. On the other hand, funding sources rely mostly on public grants, which constitute the backbone of the sector, utilised by 70% of organisations. This is supplemented by private contributions (the second priority for 63% of festival organisations) and commercial revenue from the sales of goods and services (a tertiary support stream for 78% of organisations).

Table 1 below summarises the main organisational features of festival organisations and ties them with corresponding operational priorities, highlighting potential implications for social value added.

Table 1. Mapping organisational features to artistic output

Economic features	Corresponding operational priority	Implications for social value added production
Non-extractive nature (89% deprioritise profit)	High score on “Management of cultural or creative activities” (4.35)”	Funds are cycled directly back into cultural delivery and operational continuity rather than capital accumulation.
Grant dependency (70% rely on public funds)	Multidisciplinarity (77.42%)	Festivals diversify their artistic scope presumably to attract a diversified public and broad community mandates.
Contracted/consultant labor (94% usage)	High score on “content conception” (4.10)	Organisations remain creative, using external expertise to refresh artistic vision without high fixed costs.
Limited permanent staff (only 42% have staff)	Lower score on R&D Research and Discovery*/training” (3.39)	A delivery-of-events focus may leave little bandwidth for long-term research or formalised education programs.

* we use research and discovery rather than research and development in accordance with our definition of vitality.

The nature of labour

The cultural production of these festivals is heavily dependent on contracted labor of consultancy type, volunteering, and collaborative partnerships. The sector relies heavily on contracted collaborations (for 94% of organisations) and volunteering (86%). Permanent employment remains limited, with only 42% of organisations having at least one permanent staff member. Volunteer intensity varies, with 39% of festivals engaging between 1 and 10 volunteers, while 8% engage more than 50. Collaborative capacity is high, with 74% of festivals operating in partnership. The latter, however, tend to be focused networks; while 17% of festival organisations maintain four partners, extensive collaborations exceeding 10 partners are rare. Furthermore, most organisations (69.44%) operate independently of second-level associations, though approximately 31% belong to specific provincial or sector-specific networks.

Who controls culture? The governance question

To understand the governance of these festivals is to examine their steering mechanism, which contributes to understand the vitality of communities through festivals. In this research, again following Sacchetti and Sugden (2025), *vitality is defined as the capability of a community to identify and discover valued aims, grounded in an awareness of what constitutes both the personal and common good*. The results indicate that this is not a top-down administrative process, but a *guided vitality* model. The results indicate that strategic direction, or the identification of valued aims and ways to pursue them in festivals, is primarily a leadership-driven discovery process that remains deeply porous to community stakes and internal human resources. The influence of different actors was measured on a scale of 1 to 10. As detailed in Table 2, reveals how these valued aims are identified. Internal leadership acts as the primary catalyst for this discovery, holding a mean influence of 8.32, with 78% of respondents placing leadership in the 7–9 range. However, their role is not to dictate, but to mediate the search for value, ensuring that the festival's direction remains a guided but common effort. This leadership is anchored by community stakes (7.39). With 61% of respondents scoring community influence at 6 or higher—and nearly one-fifth (19%) being entirely community-led—the governance model reflects a high level of community awareness. This suggests that the valued aims being pursued are not insular; they are co-discovered. The staff and volunteers (6.58), being themselves part of the community, further reinforce this.

A critical finding for the study of vitality is the relatively low influence of funding bodies (4.35) and market demands (4.10). Despite a 70% reliance on public grants, 46% of organizations report minimal strategic influence from funders (scores 1–3). This arm's length relationship is essential for vitality; it allows the community to discover its own aims based on intrinsic and emergent values rather than having them externally defined or be subject to market-driven requirements. The resistance to market pressures (where 42% report low influence) is probably made possible by the public sources of funding, and

underscores a commitment to the prioritisation of cultural aims, even when they lack immediate commercial viability.

Table 2: The actors and forces shaping the strategic direction of festivals

Stakeholder influence	Mean scale (1-10)	Response rates
Internal leadership	8.32	Strategic direction is largely a leadership issue. Highest concentration in the 7–9 range (78% total). Leading figures are the primary strategic drivers, though none reach the absolute 10.
Community stakes	7.39	Diversified engagement. 61% of respondents score ≥ 6 . Specifically, 35% give a score between 8 and 10, 19% of festivals are fully community-led (score=10). 28% of festivals give a score 1 to 5, indicating a relatively high orientation toward local community needs.
Staff and volunteers	6.58	Significant involvement of HR. 68% score between 7 and 9. They have relative high influence, though slightly lower than top-level leadership.
Funding bodies	4.35	Funders provide support but rarely dictate strategy. 46% place influence in the low range (1–3). Only 23% feel a moderate influence (score 5/7).
Partners	4.19	Partners have a moderate influence. Most frequent score is 7 (19%). General perception of a contained but present collaborative influence.
Market demands	4.10	Dual distribution: 42% report low influence (1–2), but 26% report a high influence (score of 8). The market direction is polarised across the sample.

The vitality enabled by these organisations is further evidenced (discussed later in Table 6) by the correlation between leadership and community (0.376). This indicates that as leadership becomes more defined, it tends to align more closely with community interests, suggesting that the identification and discovery of aims is cooperative and mutual rather than conflictual. Furthermore, the correlation between human resources and community (0.236) suggests that volunteers and staff facilitate a constant feedback loop regarding what the community finds valuable.

Finally, this vitality is characterized by intergenerationality. The *pursuit* of valued aims involves a broad demographic spectrum: while the 30–49 age bracket leads the

organizational effort (66.67%), there is significant participation from young adults (20–29) and children (below 10). This demographic diversity ensures that the common good being pursued incorporates the motivation of different life stages, possibly supporting the relevance of cultural activity for both the current and future community.

Strategic influences and organisational competences

The strategic influences previously described is mirrored by the distribution of operational competencies (Table 3). We measured the sources of expertise on a 5-point Likert scale, the highest mean value (4.61) is recorded for competencies found among the members or partners of the festival organisation. This finding represents a near-unanimous frequency of 97% for high-intensity scores (4 and 5), indicating that the core knowledge required to identify and discover valued aims is generated from within the organization itself.

Table 3: Sources of organisational competences

Source of competence	Mean score (1-5)	Significance for vitality and professionalisation
Internal members and partners	4.61	It indicates that the primary intelligence and know-how reside within the organizing entity. This internal mastery is the foundation of the guided vitality model.
Service providers	3.71	It highlights a high reliance on technical expertise (production, catering, audiovisual) to execute high-quality cultural experiences.
Artists and companies	3.68	It suggests a significant integration of external creative knowledge as a key input for content realisation.
Banking foundations, and associations	3.03	It suggests a secondary role for institutional expertise compared to the internal and technical tiers.
Public entities and local communities	2.97	It indicates that while these actors are strategic stakeholders, their direct contribution to the <i>technical</i> organization of the festival is limited.
Local schools and volunteers	2.42 - 2.90	It reveals that despite strong community orientation, educational and grassroots entities provide lower levels of specific organisational competencies.

This internal mastery is supported by a tier of technical and artistic expertise, in particular by a) service providers (competencies from technical services, audiovisual production, and catering provide significant support with a mean of 3.71); b) artists (individual artists or companies contribute essential creative knowledge at a mean of 3.68).

In contrast, external institutional and community-based knowledge sources indicate a lower impact on the organizational process. Lower mean scores are observed for expertise originating from banking foundations or associations (3.03) and public entities (2.97). Also, the competencies provided directly by local volunteers (2.90), volunteer associations (2.97), or available at local schools (2.42) are perceived as less critical than the internal expertise of the organisers.

This reinforces the previously discussed hierarchy of cultural enterprise activities: while the festival is a community-oriented space, the operational intelligence- the specific knowledge needed to transform an imagined aim into a realised event resides primarily in the lead figures and internal members. This concentration of expertise explains the high management of cultural activity score (4.35) mentioned earlier regarding the activities of these organisations, as it indicates that these organisations function as professionalised nuclei that curate and coordinate external artistic and technical inputs to produce their festival events.

Who is culture for? The accessibility question

To address the second sub-question, we examine the accessibility of festivals through target indicators, which determine whether these events serve as inclusive community platforms or as exclusive tools for restricted or external visitors' consumption. Within the framework of vitality, accessibility is not just a logistical metric; it is a condition that enables a community to be part of a space where valued aims are identified and discovered. If a community is physically or socially locked out from the processes and events that festivals provide, the discovery of valued aims may remain uneven.

Spatial distribution and the poles-peripheries balance

The data indicates a strong concentration of festival headquarters in urban centers, likely due to existing infrastructure and population density. These poles often coincide with municipalities showing the highest tourism density—defined by Istat as the ratio between the number of overnight stays and the surface area of the municipality (Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: Festival organisations location and municipalities population

Festival e popolazione nei comuni del Trentino

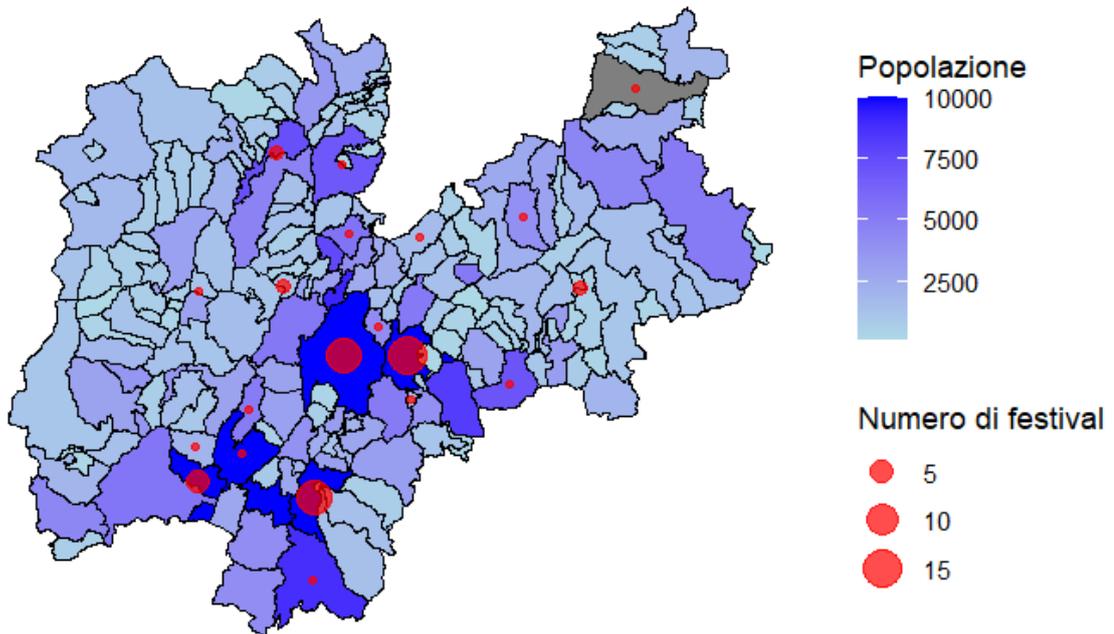
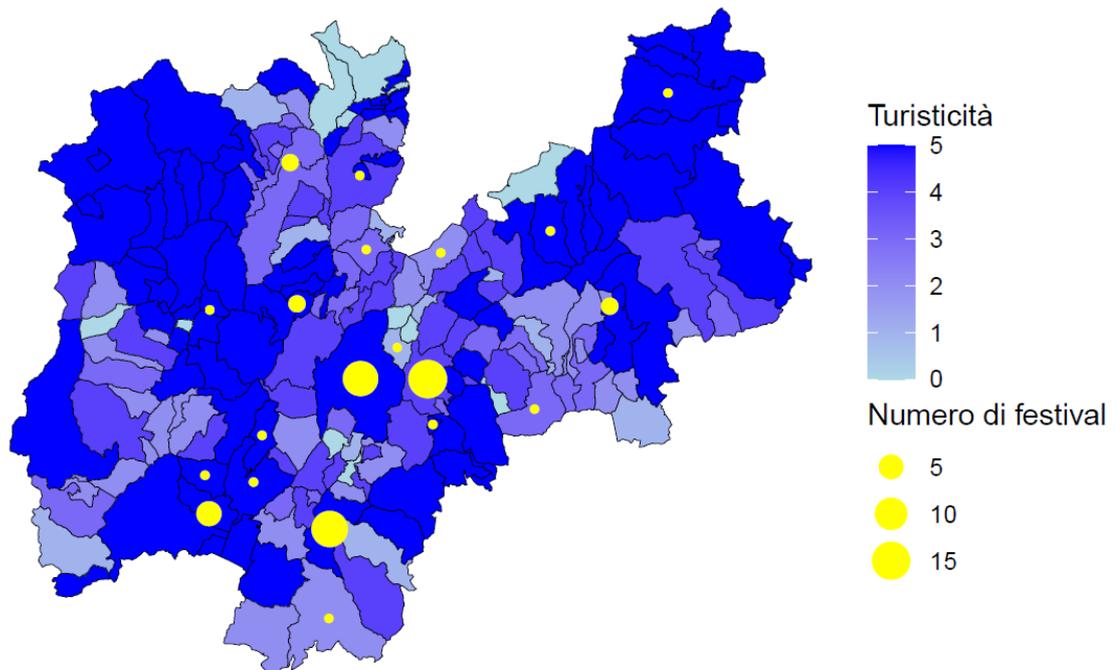


Figure 2: Festival organisations location and touristic presence density across municipalities

Festival e sviluppo turistico nei comuni del Trentino



However, the actual territorial reach of these events indicates a significant effort toward decentralization and peripheral outreach (Table 4). While 41.18% of festivals are concentrated in main centers (e.g., Trento, Rovereto), a nearly equal share (38.24%) focuses on the Trentino Valleys, with 20.59% adopting an inter-territorial approach across multiple municipalities. This spatial distribution indicates that, by extending beyond the urban core, these organisations seem to extend the capability to identify and discover valued aims, from poles to less central areas. While a vast majority of events (76.47%) occur in predominantly urban spaces like theaters and squares, the 20.59% utilising hybrid urban/rural sites and the 46% occurring in suburbs or hamlets indicate a commitment to neighborhood inclusivity.

Table 4: The territorial reach of festival events

Category	Item / response option	Frequency (%)	Notes on dimension
Geographical area	Main Centers (TN, RO, Alto Garda)	41.18%	Urban concentration
	Trentino Valleys	38.24%	Peripheral outreach
	Both (inter-territorial)	20.59%	Center-valley integration
Municipal extension	Single municipality	55.88%	Local dimension
	Multiple municipalities	44.12%	Network dimension
Space typology	Predominantly urban	76.47%	Centrality of services
	Hybrid (urban and rural)	20.59%	Spatial experimentation
	Predominantly rural	2.94%	Territorial niche
Neighborhoods	Historical center + suburbs/hamlets	46.00%	Neighborhood inclusivity
	Historic center only	42.00%	Traditional/Institutional
	Suburbs/hamlets only	13.00%	Cultural decentralization
Timeframe	Multiple dates within one week	41.18%	Classic festival format
	Distributed over 1-2 months	35.29%	Seasonal presence

	Distributed over 3-12 months	17.64%	Continuous presence
	Single date	5.88%	One-off / spot event
Growth	Expanded	85.29%	Dynamism
	Stable	11.76%	Stable interest
	Reduced	2.94%	Declining interest from either organisers and/or community

Social accessibility

The accessibility of festivals is further defined by the nature of their content. The findings indicate that festivals act as bridges between diverse publics rather than catering to a narrow elite. In terms of programming, only 32.26% of festivals adhere solely to "high culture," while the vast majority (64.52%) offer a combination of "high" and "popular" culture. Overall, festivals create access opportunities for different social groups to encounter one another. This intersectional programming increases social blending, allowing the valued aims to be defined through the participation of a wide variety of publics.

Consistent with an emerging guided vitality approach, where leadership aligns with community stakes, the data indicates that these festivals remain deeply rooted in their local territories. On a scale of 1–5, the highest scores for audience origin are attributed to the local territory (4.26) and provincial/regional areas (4.06), while international presence remains a secondary factor (1.87). The primary audience segments are young adults (20–29) and adults (30–49), who together represent over 61% of the primary audience rankings. This demographic alignment with the organizational labour force - where the 30–49 age range is also prominent - indicates a high degree of internal-external symbiosis.

The events benefit from significant dynamism, with 85.3% of festivals reporting an expanding audience. This growth suggests that these organizations are not repeating legacy programs but are successfully identifying and meeting emergent community interests.

To what effects? Assessing perceived generativity and relational implications

The final dimension of our analysis addresses the generative capacity of festivals, or their ability to enable broad collective benefits and community value. Vitality implies a generative process, which can be conceived as the capability of a community to mobilize resources toward identified and discovered aims. We also study relational implications

Organisations report that their impact extends beyond simple entertainment. On a scale of 1 to 5, respondents perceive significant generative effects in several key areas. Active community participation with an average score of 4.44 is the highest-rated benefit, suggesting festivals act as primary vehicles for engaging citizens in collective life. Skill development and training (4.38) indicate that festivals serve as informal educational platforms, fostering new competencies within the territory. The average score for social inclusion (4.00) indicates the perceived ability of festivals and their organisations to reduce individual isolation. Festivals are also consistent with identity and tradition (3.71) but are less focused on commercial activities (3.29) or direct job creation (2.18).

The perceived effects of these organisations are further observed in Table 5 through their generative capability, defined by three core indicators of novelty: the ability to generate innovative approaches to territorial needs (innovation), to provide a context for participant creativity, and to activate other entities to introduce new cultural or educational activities. We also consider two items for network activation effects, emphasising local and extra-territorial dimension of ties.

Table 5: Generativity and network activation indicators

Indicators	Mean (scale 1-5)	Std. dev.	Mode	Median
Innovation: Generating innovative approaches to territorial needs	4.21	1.27	3.00	4.00
Activation: Stimulating other people or entities to introduce new cultural or educational activities	4.00	1.18	5.00	4.00
Creativity: Offering a context where participants utilise their own creativity	3.32	1.28	4.00	3.00
Local networks: Creating collaborative networks within the local community and Trentino	4.32	1.23	5.00	4.00
Extra-territorial networks: Creating collaborative networks outside the provincial territory	4.24	1.19	5.00	4.00

Generativity and network ties: correlation analysis

The correlation matrix (Table 6) indicates that the various facets of generativity are highly interconnected. Specifically, innovation (generating new approaches to territorial needs, mean=4.21) and activation (stimulating others to introduce new activities, mean=4.00) indicate strong synergy. The matrix reveals an extremely strong correlation between

innovation and creativity (0.48, $p=0.0066$), as well as between innovation and activation (0.55, $p=0.0014$).

Furthermore, the ability to create local networks (mean score 4.32) and extra-territorial networks (4.24) indicates a positive relationship with innovation and activation. Notably, both the presence of local and extra-territorial ties correlates with activation (0.51, $p=0.0035$) (0.50, $p=0.0043$). This suggests that a festival's generative power is intrinsically linked to its relational reach; and vitality is amplified when the identification and discovery of aims is shared across networked actors.

The relationship between control and generativity

The correlation analysis provides a nuanced answer to how governance affects the community's capability to identify valued aims. Vitality thrives when control is rooted in the community and local leadership, but it indicates a diminished capacity when stifled by purely external pressures.

Community influence correlates significantly with the creation of local networks (0.52, $p=0.003$). This supports our guided vitality model, where leadership aligns with the community to activate local business and service provision. Internal HR (staff and volunteers) indicates a significant positive correlation with activation (0.44, $p=0.013$). This reinforces the idea that the people within the organization are the primary actors for imagining new possibilities for the territory.

In contrast, when control is shifted toward external actors, generative capacity often fluctuates or diminishes. Influence from Funders indicates negative correlations with innovation (-0.2) and creativity (-0.26). Similarly, Partners indicate a negative correlation with Activation (-0.18). Market demands indicate virtually no positive relationship with innovation (0.09) or activation (0.33, $p=0.073$), suggesting that market-oriented governance does not effectively support the community's discovery function.

Limitations in organisational competences

The data highlights a significant competence gap that may prevent festival organisations from fully realizing their role as spaces for community vitality. These limitations are primarily observed in two areas.

The first refers to professionalisation and the employment structure. The reliance on a volatile workforce presents a structural challenge to long-term capability building. Permanent staff is limited and the observed high reliance on volunteers is a resource but also a limitation.

Second, vitality requires the capability to identify and discover valued aims, yet the survey reveals that organisations feel least competent in the very areas required for this function.

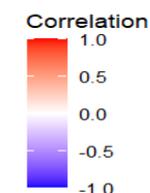
Project: "Organizzare e innovare nel settore culturale". Unità di ricerca su istituzioni economiche e bene comune (Cives), Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale. Università di Trento.

On a scale of 1–5, the lowest competence scores are often found in strategic planning and the ability to conduct systematic social inquiry. Also, although leadership is highly influential, this influence could be absorbed by daily operational survival rather than the long-term strategic discovery of emergent community aims.

Finally, the ability to exercise self-determination can be further constrained by the financial structure. With 70% of festival organisations relying on public grants as their pillar for financial sustainability, the strategic direction could be nudged toward the administrative requirements of funders. Smaller organizations also often lack the specific administrative and legal competences required to navigate complex public funding frameworks, which can distract from their primary cultural and social mission.

Table 6: Who controls and to what effects? Correlation coefficients between control items and perceived effects items (generativity indicators and network activation indicators)

Netw_inter	0.1 (p = 0.61)	0.23 (p = 0.22)	-0.08 (p = 0.66)	0.21 (p = 0.25)	-0.04 (p = 0.82)	0.07 (p = 0.69)	0.55 (p = 0.0014)	0.59 (p = 0.00052)	0.5 (p = 0.0043)	0.46 (p = 0.0093)	1 (p = 0)
Netw_local	0.52 (p = 0.003)	0.12 (p = 0.52)	0.05 (p = 0.8)	0.12 (p = 0.51)	0.06 (p = 0.74)	0.14 (p = 0.44)	0.27 (p = 0.14)	0.34 (p = 0.063)	0.51 (p = 0.0035)	1 (p = 0)	0.46 (p = 0.0093)
Activation	0.22 (p = 0.23)	0.33 (p = 0.073)	0.08 (p = 0.69)	0.44 (p = 0.013)	-0.24 (p = 0.2)	-0.18 (p = 0.34)	0.55 (p = 0.0014)	0.35 (p = 0.051)	1 (p = 0)	0.51 (p = 0.0035)	0.5 (p = 0.0043)
Creativity	0.23 (p = 0.21)	0.25 (p = 0.17)	0.14 (p = 0.46)	-0.05 (p = 0.78)	-0.26 (p = 0.15)	-0.05 (p = 0.81)	0.48 (p = 0.0066)	1 (p = 1.6e-228)	0.35 (p = 0.051)	0.34 (p = 0.063)	0.59 (p = 0.00052)
Innov.	0.1 (p = 0.59)	0.09 (p = 0.62)	-0.1 (p = 0.58)	0.12 (p = 0.52)	-0.2 (p = 0.28)	-0.01 (p = 0.94)	1 (p = 1.6e-228)	0.48 (p = 0.0066)	0.55 (p = 0.0014)	0.27 (p = 0.14)	0.55 (p = 0.0014)
Partners	0.27 (p = 0.14)	0.04 (p = 0.85)	0.04 (p = 0.83)	0.2 (p = 0.27)	0.43 (p = 0.016)	1 (p = 0)	-0.01 (p = 0.94)	-0.05 (p = 0.81)	-0.18 (p = 0.34)	0.14 (p = 0.44)	0.07 (p = 0.69)
Funder	0.11 (p = 0.54)	0.11 (p = 0.57)	-0.03 (p = 0.88)	0.17 (p = 0.37)	1 (p = 0)	0.43 (p = 0.016)	-0.2 (p = 0.28)	-0.26 (p = 0.15)	-0.24 (p = 0.2)	0.06 (p = 0.74)	-0.04 (p = 0.82)
HR	0.24 (p = 0.2)	0.16 (p = 0.38)	0.16 (p = 0.38)	1 (p = 0)	0.17 (p = 0.37)	0.2 (p = 0.27)	0.12 (p = 0.52)	-0.05 (p = 0.78)	0.44 (p = 0.013)	0.12 (p = 0.51)	0.21 (p = 0.25)
Leaders	0.38 (p = 0.037)	0.13 (p = 0.5)	1 (p = 3.6e-224)	0.16 (p = 0.38)	-0.03 (p = 0.88)	0.04 (p = 0.83)	-0.1 (p = 0.58)	0.14 (p = 0.46)	0.08 (p = 0.69)	0.05 (p = 0.8)	-0.08 (p = 0.66)
Market	0.13 (p = 0.47)	1 (p = 0)	0.13 (p = 0.5)	0.16 (p = 0.38)	0.11 (p = 0.57)	0.04 (p = 0.85)	0.09 (p = 0.62)	0.25 (p = 0.17)	0.33 (p = 0.073)	0.12 (p = 0.52)	0.23 (p = 0.22)
Community	1 (p = 0)	0.13 (p = 0.47)	0.38 (p = 0.037)	0.24 (p = 0.2)	0.11 (p = 0.54)	0.27 (p = 0.14)	0.1 (p = 0.59)	0.23 (p = 0.21)	0.22 (p = 0.23)	0.52 (p = 0.003)	0.1 (p = 0.61)
	Community	Market	Leaders	HR	Funder	Partners	Innov.	Creativity	Activation	Netw_local	Netw_inter



Discussion and summary

This research has sought to redefine the role of art festivals, moving beyond the extractive models of tourism-driven growth toward a framework centered on territorial vitality. By applying the discovery function lens proposed by Sacchetti and Sugden (2025), we have assessed whether these events and the governance behind serve as effective platforms for community self-determination and the identification of valued aims. We now bring together our analysis about the governance of the sector (who controls), its territorial and social accessibility (for whom), and its generative outcomes (to what effects), to sketch a vitality profile of the artistic festivals of Trentino.

Table 7: Are art festivals vital? Summary of findings

Research question	Research dimension	Empirical findings	Implications for vitality and social value creation
Cultural organisation profile	Governance	Predominantly non-profit associations (61.11%) prioritising salaries (50%) and community service over profit (89%).	Indicates a non-extractive impact, where resources are reinvested into the community's cultural foundation rather than capital accumulation.
Who controls culture?	Governance and competences	Strategic direction relies on leadership (8.32) but responsive to community (7.39). Internal members provide the primary expertise (4.61).	Vitality is a guided process: It relies on a professionalised internal nucleus that curates community needs into valued aims.
For whom?	Accessibility and territoriality	Relevance of the Trentino Valleys (38.24%) and neighborhood inclusivity (46%). Audience is primarily local (4.26) and the nature of events is multidisciplinary (64.52%).	The identification and discovery of valued aims is a shared territorial capability, reducing social isolation and bridging high and popular culture.
To what effects?	Generativity and networks	Highest perceived effects in active community participation (4.44) and skill development (4.38). Strong local (4.32) and extra-territorial (4.24) network ties. Positive correlation between local networks and	Festivals act as public generative spaces that catalyse local resources and stimulate new cultural activities through network ties.

Control relates to effects	activation of new cultural activities (0.51).	When reliance is on endogenous drivers; social value is most effectively produced when the community maintains autonomy over its valued aims identification and discovery.
	Community influence correlates with local networking (0.52), while external funder control indicates lower innovation (-0.2).	

The empirical results indicate that the surveyed festival organisations are not merely event producers but are essential instruments of community vitality. In accordance with our definition—vitality as the community’s capability to identify and discover valued aims—the data reveals a sector that is rooted and generative.

- A guided vitality model. The governance analysis indicates that control is neither purely top-down nor horizontal. Instead, a guided vitality model emerges, where staff provide the professional knowledge required for complex cultural production while remaining open to community stakes. The findings suggest that the most generative festivals are those that maintain this internal-external balance, as evidenced by the significant correlation between community influence and the creation of local networks (0.52).
- Accessibility as a condition for valued aims discovery. The spatial and cultural accessibility of these festivals suggest their role for vitality. By decentralising events into peripheral municipalities and urban suburbs, and by blending high and popular cultural genres, these organisations can lower the barriers to participation. The involvement of diverse demographics - including a significant intergenerational presence – also support that through festivals culture can be for a broad spectrum of the community rather than a restricted elite.
- Generativity and self-determination. Finally, the assessment of effects indicates that festivals are primary vehicles for the activation of activities and innovative suggestions, supporting movement towards desired aims. The high scores in community participation and skill development suggest that these events generate a capital of new competencies and socioeconomic ties. However, the correlation matrix warns that this generative capacity is sensitive to the nature of control. While community and internal human resources drive innovation and activation, purely external or market-oriented pressures indicate a stifling effect on creativity.

Despite their generative potential, however, the vitality of these organisations can be tempered by structural limitations. We have emphasised the high reliance on a volatile, volunteer-based workforce and a lack of permanent professional staff, which may create a competence gap in long-term strategic planning and research and discovery of valued aims and activities. This suggests that

while the *will* to discover community-valued aims is present, the *capability* to do so systematically may be constrained by the administrative and operational burdens of the current governance of the cultural sector.

Regional economic and cultural policies promoting culture may consider shifting from quantitative metrics (visitor volume, tourist nights) toward qualitative indicators of community engagement and organisational resilience and resist the concentration of cultural events in large poles to maximise the number of visitors, while providing support for events that target not only target event production but also the discovery function through the arts. Also, the professionalization of social economy organisations may stabilise human resources, rewarding work and rooting institutional memory and the development of specialised relational competences. Finally, policy makers can look at festivals as deliberative partners. Governance structures that allow local communities to maintain strategic control, as seen in our correlation analysis, are more likely to generate long-term public value and prevent social decoupling.

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