

## **Social capital in the music festival experience**

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### **Abstract**

This paper uses the theoretical concept of social capital as its framework to examine festivals in the context of social and cultural policy. Government policies have cited culture and the arts as social tools which can help combat social exclusion, bridge barriers between groups and foster community cohesion. Leading social capital theorist Robert Putnam specifically suggests that cultural events can bring together diverse social groups. To investigate these claims in practice, this study collected empirical data designed to provide insight into the operation of social inter-relationships at three festivals: a pop festival, an opera festival and a folk festival. The empirical data, comprising observations, screening questionnaires and in-depth interviews, was analysed using critical discourse analysis to bring out styles and discourses relating to social interactions. It was found that the reinforcement of existing relationships, termed bonding social capital by Putnam, was an important part of the festival experience. The formation of new and enduring social connections with previously unconnected attendees - Putnam's bridging social capital - was not, however, found to be a feature of festivals, despite a sense of general friendliness and trust identified by some. Furthermore, drawing on Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital, festival attendees were found to be remarkably similar in their demographic make-up, also throwing doubt on policy-related suggestions that festivals could be sites of inter-connections between people from diverse backgrounds. This study therefore suggests that music festivals are not valuable sites for social and cultural policy aims of combating social exclusion, bridging barriers between groups and fostering wider community cohesion.

### **Keywords**

Social capital; Putnam; Bourdieu; social policy; community cohesion; social exclusion; critical discourse analysis; music festivals; diversity.

## **Introduction**

Social and cultural government policies in the United Kingdom (UK) are currently in a state of flux due to the recent change of government. Early signs are that the new government might emphasise the economic aspects of the role of culture, as well as initially focus on the Olympics within that portfolio, although there are also indications that community cohesion may feature. This paper uses the setting of music festivals to examine issues of social and cultural policy. To give added focus, the theoretical tool of social capital provides a lens through which to conduct the study.

## **Focus on festivals**

Music festivals were chosen as the setting for this study for several reasons. Festivals are an expanding sector of the cultural industry, with spending on festivals up by 18% in 2009 compared to the previous year, a sharper rise than any other area of live music (BBC, 2010). At the time of the study, attendance at live music performances and events, including classical, jazz and opera, already formed the biggest type of arts event attended by adults in England (Aust & Vine, 2007). By their very nature, music festivals collect people together in order for them to experience a range of cultural events. Festivals' generally extended and geographically constrained nature therefore gives the potential for the close examination of extended social interactions within a cultural context, a feature mentioned by Larsen and O'Reilly (2005).

There have been several studies and reports which have been useful in building knowledge of social and cultural issues in relation to festivals featuring music. Some studies focus on economic impact, whilst touching to a greater or lesser extent on social issues, and are often commissioned by festival organisers or sponsors with the aim of demonstrating benefit (AEA Consulting, 2006; Long & Owen, 2006; Maughan & Bianchini, 2004; Sussex Arts Marketing, 2008; The Association of Festival Organisers, 2004). A review of the literature relating to the economic and social benefits of events and festivals by Wood, Robinson and Thomas (2006) concludes that social benefits are usually seen by organisers to be of secondary importance, however, despite some studies claiming that the social benefits often outweigh the economic benefits.

Social impact, rather than economic impact, as in the above studies, is the focus of a study of a Gaelic Festival by Matarasso (1996). Although this is worth noting as one

of the first to attempt to assess the social impacts of festivals, it has since been heavily criticised for its poor research design (Merli, 2002; Selwood, 2002).

Literature reporting academic research on the social and cultural characteristics and behaviours of music festival audiences is particularly relevant to this study's aims of studying social capital in the context of music festivals. Waterman (1998; 1998), Quinn (2000; 2003), Jamieson (2004), Long, Robinson and Picard (2004) and Sharpe (2008) have all published studies which explore the roles of shared values and social division in the context of festivals which include music.

However, hints that social diversity may be identified at some festivals were reported by Gardner (2004), for example, who claims that people from a wide variety of educational, occupational and religious backgrounds mingle at bluegrass festivals. Willems-Braun's (1994) study of Canada's fringe festivals also warns that the attendees cannot be un-problematically categorised into social groups due to the possibilities of multiplicities within individuals and within the festival space. Focusing on performers, rather than audience members, Curtis (2010) suggests that new social connections are made between jazz festival musicians, leading to new musical collaborations.

There is a general lack of recent empirical research focusing on social issues relating to festivals which could be used to explore social and cultural policy in the UK. Calls have been made for further research to discover the connection between social capital and festivals in particular (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007), as this has not been attempted previously, and for further insights which might contribute to the development of cultural policy (Selwood, 2006).

### **The cultural policy context**

The use of the arts as a social tool to combat exclusion, promote community cohesion and bridge barriers between groups was a key aim of the previous government (Bennett & Silva, 2006; Labour Party, 2006). The Labour government's Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) set out, in its PAT 10 Progress Report, strategies for widening participation in the arts by sectors of the community identified as having low levels of engagement (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2001). 'Cultural Partnerships' aimed to offer young people from deprived areas new opportunities to engage with the arts, for example. This PAT 10 document also set out

## *Social capital in the music festival experience*

commitments to encourage people from all ethnic backgrounds to engage fully with the arts by removing any barriers to participation.

More specific arts-related claims by the former government that the sharing of musical experiences can enable people from different cultural backgrounds to build mutual understanding are of particular relevance to this study (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2008). The Public Service Agreement (PSA) 21, released by HM Treasury in 2007, for example, linked social issues to involvement in the arts, citing studies which demonstrated that people taking part in cultural activities were more likely to know many people in their neighbourhood and more likely to trust others (HM Treasury, 2007).

Many of the documents mentioned above are now either archived or inaccessible online, with the majority of the content of the DCMS and the Communities and Local Government websites under review by the incoming Conservative/Liberal coalition government. Interestingly, the first (informal) statement from the new Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Jeremy Hunt, focused on the potential of culture and the creative industries' role in the UK's economic recovery (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2010b), rather than choosing to highlight culture's social value, for example. However his first official speech, on May 19<sup>th</sup> 2010, also included a statement that 'culture and arts are for everyone, not just the lucky few', whilst hinting at the need to bring in private investment by emphasising the need to improve philanthropy in the cultural sector (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2010a). The new Ministerial title's inclusion of 'Olympics' alongside the original three areas also indicates a focus on funding this event within the initial phase, although the DCMS retains its original title.

Hints that community and social capital are likely to be of importance to the new government have already been made. Prime Minister, David Cameron, made specific mention of social capital in his launch of the 'Big Society' concept, for example, whilst Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, also stressed the importance of 'community' at the same event (Prime Minister's Office, 2010).

Although, as highlighted above, government cultural policy is currently in a state of flux, policy-related documents prepared in partnership with or by other bodies, such as the arms-length Arts Council England or consultancies such as Audiences London,

are still available and worth noting. Key outputs include the ongoing Taking Part survey commissioned by the DCMS along with the Arts Council England and other public partner bodies to improve knowledge of audiences (Department for Culture Media and Sport, 2010c) and the pilot version of CultureMap London (Audiences London, 2010), which aims to bring together information about cultural provision and audiences in London. The Arts Council England is also in the process of analysing the results of a recent consultation on how to achieve their 'Great Art For Everyone' initiative (Arts Council England, 2010), launched in 2006 with a publication in 2008 (Arts Council England, 2008). This initiative aims to include a consideration of barriers to participation, as well as identifying opportunities and challenges for the future. Although now also moved to the web-based National Archives, the McMaster Review of the arts, commissioned by the Secretary of State for Culture in 2007, provides key evidence and recommendations relating to encouraging wider and deeper engagement by audiences (McMaster, 2008).

Of relevance on the wider policy-making stage, Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, highlighted the role of the creative and cultural industries in encouraging cultural diversity (European Commission, 2010).

### **Review of the theoretical literature**

The theoretical concept of social capital is useful when examining issues relating to community cohesion, social inclusion and broadening participation in the arts. Social capital theorist, Putnam (2000), whose views have attracted the attention of American and British politicians (Bunting, 2007), specifically suggests that the arts can bring together diverse groups and thus promote well-being by allowing the production of mutually beneficial norms of reciprocity, generalised trust and co-operation. Putnam (2000) also claims that arts events could be used to transcend social barriers: people may make new connections with others whom they perceive to have a different, though equally rigid set of values. Providing further links from social capital to the arts, social and cultural theorist Bourdieu (1984 [1979], p. 18), also highlighted the potentially divisive role of music: '*...nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music*'.

Social capital is a broad term, with theorists interpreting and developing the concept in various ways. These approaches vary from a macro-scale view which highlights the operation of social networks and their potential for indirect public good; and a micro-level focus on the individual, highlighting personal actions and potential benefits, although some coalescence between the two perspectives is apparent. Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo-Cal and Wright (2009) combine the two perspectives neatly by indicating that their reading of the literature concludes that friendship and social contact networks are useful considerations for social capital measurement.

Putnam emphasises the macro approach to social capital in this definition, regarding it as being related to:

*'...features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'* (Putnam, 1995, p. 67)

He sees social organisations as encouraging the growth of civic virtue, tolerance, reciprocity and trustworthiness, as well as lessening shirking and cheating and improving health. Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital has, however, attracted criticism, including for its overemphasis on supposed positive outcomes (Mouritsen, 2003); for the lack of emphasis on context which its macro scale encourages (Edwards & Foley, 2001; Koniordos, 2008; Wallis, Killerby, & Dollery, 2004); and for its measurement flaws (Healey, 2004). The term 'capital', with its connotations of productivity and competitiveness, has also been criticised for its inappropriateness within a social inclusion context (Thompson, 2009).

However, as the research settings of this study provided bounded contexts, the study did not follow Putnam's methodology, and a critical perspective is employed, it was concluded that Putnam's more specific concepts of bridging social capital and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000) are useful conceptual tools. Putnam explains that bonding social capital is inward looking, reinforcing exclusive identities and promoting homogeneity; whereas bridging social capital is outward looking, promoting links between diverse individuals. Putnam suggests that many groups simultaneously bond across some social dimensions and bridge across others. He sees bonding social capital as increasing solidarity with people who are already similar, bolstering the narrower self and creating strong in-group loyalty. Bridging social capital, however, links people to others who move in different circles. These theories

help when considering issues of community cohesion and bridging boundaries between groups of people.

In contrast to Putnam's macro perspective, Bourdieu places the individual at the core of the concept of social capital, stressing their place within a network:

*'The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize.'*

(Bourdieu, 2002 [1986], p. 86)

Bourdieu's focus on the role of social capital in controlling group membership, with mutually recognisable signs, or family, school or class characteristics facilitating access, thus provides a useful complementary perspective. His highlighting of the potential for issues of power or elitism to arise is also useful for its relevance to issues of social inclusion and broadening participation.

The theoretical concept of social capital therefore directed the study towards examination of the social networks in operation at the festivals, as well as the ways in which the individuals operated within these networks.

## **Methodology**

In order to discover the role of social capital in the music festival experience, and thus throw light onto social and cultural policy, this study used an ethnographic approach which enabled a multi-layered study of the research area. The methods included screening questionnaires, systematic observations and document examination, as well as in-depth interviews of festival attendees after the festivals.

Three UK festivals were used as the case settings. These festivals were carefully selected to be aligned in terms of features such as scale and the presence of a public funding stream, but varied in terms of musical content. In order to provide the potential to draw on the experiences of people with differing music tastes, as well as to allow for different modes of festival operation, the festivals chosen were of three types: an opera festival (OperaFest), a folk festival (FolkFest) and a festival concentrating on indie-pop music (PopFest). A data collection screening stage using purposive sampling collected basic demographic, attendance and music taste information from 219 festival attendees at the events. From the screened responses,

eleven interviewees from each festival, a total of thirty-three, were selected for the hour-long follow-up in-depth interviews.

### ***Critical discourse analysis***

Following thematic analysis of the interviews, the interview texts and observations were further analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003). CDA acknowledges as significant non-discursive, material elements which exist beyond the text but which also feature within it, such as styles of dress and the possession of culturally-related artefacts. In addition, the focus of CDA on the accomplishment of 'style': that is the accomplishment of individual identities through talk, was also deemed useful when attempting to discover issues relating to social disposition.

This study uses three inter-linked CDA concepts to analyse the data: orders of discourse, discourses and styles. CDA uses the identification of the 'orders of discourse' which feature within a text as its crux. An 'order of discourse' represents the discursive facet of a particular set of social practices within a particular social order. When broken down into their constituent parts, 'orders of discourse' comprise competing and complementary 'discourses'. According to Fairclough, discourses are specific ways of representing aspects of the material, mental and social world. The analytical strength of a focus on discourses is that patterns, similarities and differences in their use, between participants and between festivals, can reveal much about the role of social capital in the festival experience. For individual speakers, the deployment of different discourses enables them to achieve different social and personal 'styles' as well as to illustrate their social relationships with other people. This enacted style can effectively position the social actor in relation to social capital. A CDA approach, with its emphasis on discourses, genres and styles, as well as its critical standpoint, therefore offers rich possibilities for the analysis of data relating to social capital within the setting of festivals and will allow conclusions to be reached relating to the context of social and cultural policies.

## **Exploring the social landscape of the festival**

### ***Overview of the screening and observational data***

The screening and observational data indicated that the attendees of all the festivals were remarkably similar to each other in terms of socio-demographic characteristics.

### *Social capital in the music festival experience*

They tended to be from the middle classes and to possess higher levels of academic qualifications. Age ranges varied across the three festivals: those at OperaFest were mostly over 50, whilst the PopFest attendees were mostly under 50. FolkFest attracted a wider age range, although different types of FolkFest events attracted participants who were generally concentrated within smaller age ranges. Similarly, OperaFest did feature activities by local schools which attracted a different audience demographic. Observable ethnicity at all three festivals was overwhelmingly White British, despite one of the festivals being located in a city with a high proportion of British Asian residents.

#### ***Overview of the connection/detachment order of discourse***

A connection/detachment order of discourse was identified within the texts of this research data and may be used to examine issues of social capital in the festival experience. This order of discourse surfaces the ways in which the research participants did or did not relate to others during their festival experience, focusing particularly on talk relating to social networks and personal image. Three competing discourses comprise this order of discourse:

- the ‘persistent connection’ discourse relates to individuals’ talk about attending the event within a close-knit group of friends, meeting up with other previously well-known contacts at the event, forging enduring connections as a result of festival meetings, as well as telling known people with common interests about the festival after the event;
- the ‘temporary connection’ discourse includes comments about casual conversations with strangers;
- the ‘detachment’ discourse includes talk on avoiding contact with other festival attendees and feeling apart from the festival community.

Examples of the three competing discourses within this order of discourse will be presented here. Interviewees’ talk will be drawn on, as will the researcher’s observations of social practices at the festival sites.

***The 'persistent connection' discourse***

The persistent connection discourse included reference to close-knit social relationships which were already in existence before the festival, as well as enduring beyond the event, thus being a feature of the festival experience. Some of the relationship groups existed outside the festival context as well as within it; whilst others were focused on the festival, to be resurrected each year or at a range of similar festivals. Within the persistent connection discourse there was an emphasis on presenting as friendly, sociable, popular and as an insider.

Matt from FolkFest's network tended to be focused on festivals and he characterized it as having two levels of closeness. Illustrating the way his group worked at the festival, with the connections remaining persistent throughout the weekend, he used a metaphor of being in a pocket to emphasize his close-knit inner set. The sense of a friendship group connecting and interconnecting as well as dividing and then re-joining also evokes the imagery of knitting, culminating in a complete ensemble and enabled Matt to establish his style as popular within his vast network of friends.

Matt: You have your pocket group of friends who you get up, suffer your hangover with, have your breakfast and your coffee and then you just kinda split during the day, disappear off to do your own things. Then lunch-time, there'll be a couple of phone calls, oh you know, where are you at, ah in this pub, whatever. Go and have a beer in your lunch. Uhm and then you split again for the afternoon and you'll see them wandering around, or working, or doing something. And then you meet up in the evening and um, more beer! So, yeah, there is that, that little circle of friends and I think the majority of people work like that.

Beer, phone calls, pubs and lunchtime are all non-discursive elements referred to by Matt, which help to texture this discourse and provide insight into the way these persistent connections work. As well as his close group of friends, Matt made reference to a wider set of persistent connections made through folk festivals, again displaying a sociable style:

Matt: It's one massive circle of friends. I mean, everybody basically knows everybody through somebody.

## *Social capital in the music festival experience*

Geoff from OperaFest, when talking about the friends he met up with at the festival described a similar *modus operandi*. Geoff, like Matt, described the group coming together then dividing up again, then reconnecting within the festival as well as being brought together year after year to attend, positioning himself as a social lynch-pin:

Researcher: Do you meet anyone else when you're there at all?

Geoff: For the last ooohh ten to fifteen years, yes we have. We've got other friends who come up from London and one who comes up from just outside Oxford and we all get together. We all get our seats in the same place usually so that we can sit together. We tend to go out to lunch. Everybody does their own thing [before and after the opera].

Unless we have an evening free and then we'd all get together.

There were also examples of talk about close-knit groups, which also existed outside the festival, from PopFest interviewees which can be categorized as persistent connections discourse. Alan from PopFest made use of the term 'friends' as well as establishing a style as a family man, to describe his group of fifteen or so fellow PopFest attendees, with his reference to the number of years he had known them giving credence to the closeness of their connections.

Alan: These are mainly friends that we've got to know in the local villages over the last ten or twelve years. There was probably a link through our son, I think. Yeh, most of them I think from memory have got sons or daughters of around my son's age. We do see that sort of group of people quite you know every couple of weeks. It's if you bump into people, or I play tennis with some of them. My wife knows them well and plays tennis with some of them.

OperaFest had also brought together Jill's friendship group of six people. Although they were now spread around the country, most of the group members were persistently connected through university attendance and still met up regularly, including annually at OperaFest. Sixty-year-old Jill stressed their musical links as well as their academic alignment, using a styling as a maths graduate to affirm her own musical credentials too:

Jill: Well, put it this way, friends of my husband were commiserating with him because he was going to be the only member of the group who wasn't an Oxford mathematician. [laughs]. So we're all keen on music.

### *Social capital in the music festival experience*

Persistent connections made as a result of becoming closer with people from their outer network at festivals were also mentioned by some of the PopFest participants. Lucy and Madeline, styling themselves as friendly, for example, spoke of maintaining the new connections they had made from within an existing wider friendship network.

Madeline: I met a few new people who were perhaps friends of friends.

Researcher: Was there anyone you've kind of kept in touch with?

Madeline: Yeah there are actually yeah. Two girls that I've kept in contact with since.

They'll perhaps come out with us now.

...

Lucy: I actually met someone that I've seen him around but I've never really been introduced to him properly who I've become really friends with since.

Personal image could be considered as a non-discursive indicator of persistent connection at festivals, with common styles of dress being observed by the researcher. One perhaps more enduring image feature which was commented on by David from FolkFest was the prevalence of full beards amongst the men at FolkFest, a factor also noted by the researcher, perhaps being categorisable as an indicator of a persistent connection to the folk scene:

David: I think the beards and the folk activities and the Morris dancing converge. I can't think of anyone who grew a beard because he'd become a Morris dancer, but you get quite a few people with beards who turn up and express an interest in dancing.

However, bearded Callum, in his late twenties, from FolkFest highlighted age divisions, pointing out that there was also a style gap between himself and the younger generation of folk fans:

Researcher: And you've got quite long hair as well [as a beard]. Is that a folk thing, or is that something else?

Callum: Kinda. It's more of a statement. It probably doesn't fit so much now. I've got people telling me I should cut my hair and I should stop wearing the funky trousers because the youngsters that are coming through into the same scene aren't dressing like that so I'm almost aging myself.

## *Social capital in the music festival experience*

The persistent connection discourse therefore features within the discourse from all three festivals, encompassing friendship groups which are already in existence. This discourse was particularly prevalent amongst the FolkFest participants. Closeness within a group of previously more distantly connected friends was engendered by attendance at the festival in some cases. What was not in evidence in the dataset was evidence of new persistent connections formed between people who were completely unconnected before the festival, however.

### *The 'temporary connection' discourse*

Examples of temporary connection discourse were again identifiable in participants from across the three festivals and related to talk of fleeting, non-persistent, connections made by chance rather than design. Temporary connections were usually made through chatting to adjacent audience members, during refreshment breaks, or to festival neighbours. Within the temporary connection discourse styling was of restraint and friendliness when necessary.

The impression of chance encounters was gained from the use of phrases such as 'happen to' or 'find yourself', as illustrated by Christine, Barry and Janice of OperaFest:

Christine: If we're at things we'll talk to people but there's no, we don't meet friends up there. It's just the people that we happen to be at the same thing with, effectively people we're sat next to.

...

Barry: There was a couple, I don't know quite where they came from, but they were staying where I was and we had to come out the doors together. So we had a conversation.

...

Researcher: Do you find yourself talking to people that sit next to you?

Janice: I think you, maybe in your B&B, sometimes you do have a little bit of a chat about things

There was no talk of keeping in touch with these temporary acquaintances, however, rather a styling of being friendly and open where necessary, but within limits, separating this discourse from that of persistent connection. PopFest interviewees,

## *Social capital in the music festival experience*

such as Mike and Alan, also spoke of chance encounters, demonstrating a style of restraint, again using the phrase ‘happened to’ and emphasising forced proximity, as the key to connection:

Mike: There was just the occasional people that you happened to be sitting at the same table, sort of chat about things. But nothing more than that.

...

Alan: We spoke to a few people on the campsite that were next door to us

OperaFest interviewees, such as Lydia, for example, also referred to personal image as a vehicle of temporary connection:

Lydia: It’s quite nice to look the part. I think there’s an atmosphere that does encourage you to dress up.

Evidence of the temporary connection discourse was not particularly common throughout the dataset, but most prevalent amongst OperaFest interviewees, indicating a willingness to acknowledge a connection to other festival attendees but a reluctance to take the connection further.

A general trust in fellow festival goers and a feeling of safety at the event was also highlighted by some as an enabling factor in feeling able to make casual conversation with others:

Callum from FolkFest confirmed that ‘you can walk up to anyone’ at the folk festival.

He also remarked on the feeling of trust and safety at the festival:

C: You’re in a private area where you’ve had to have a ticket to get in so everyone’s like-minded. There’s no-one malicious there, no-one’s going to come up to you to distract you while your wallet’s being pinched. Walk around drunk all day and not feel unsafe - it’s great!

Several of the PopFest interviewees also mentioned the feeling of security, with Stephen and Daniel commenting on this:

S: It’s not overly rowdy, not a lot of misbehaving.

...

D: I feel safe in the crowd.

***The 'detached' discourse***

Within the connected/detached order of discourse, the detached discourse includes talk about attending the festival alone, as well as talk of being different or separate from the other festival attendees in various ways. Styles within the detached discourse tended to be of a focused and intended separateness.

There were numerous examples of detached discourse amongst OperaFest attendees, indicating a styling of focused separateness. Both Barry and Keith, for example, mentioned attending 'alone', and Clive emphasised his detachment:

C: I think I'm a fairly solitary person. I don't really think it's a social experience. I don't feel I'm mixing with like-minded people who I could talk to opera about.

Similarly, Roy, Sylvia and Maureen also stressed that they tended to purposely stay detached from others at the festival, but by using the pronoun 'we', styling themselves as within a private, self-sufficient married unit:

R: We don't talk to a lot of other people. It's a going out together thing.

as did Sylvia:

S: It's a private holiday for us. We might occasionally chat to somebody but we're not looking to be particularly sociable when we're there.

and Maureen:

M: We don't go to make lots of new friends and exchange addresses

Detached discourse was not common amongst PopFest interviewees. Daniel, despite attending with a group of three friends, however, hinted at feeling detached from others and purposely distancing himself when commenting on his perception of the outlooks of the festival crowd. This comment implies a self-styling as adventurous in contrast with the other festival attendees:

D: I think other people are quite conservative.

Of the FolkFest participants, only Kath hinted at 'detachment' when reporting staying in the pub whilst the friends, with whom she was spending the weekend, attended events, styling herself as uninterested in festival events:

K: The couple that we stay with go to a lot of events. They go to as many as they can

but they'll leave us in the pub and they'll go and see someone.

The detached discourse was therefore, like the persistent connection and temporary connection discourse, in evidence in the talk of interviewees from each of the festivals, although it appeared most common amongst the talk of OperaFest attendees.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Focus on the role of social capital in the festival experience***

As shown above, examples of the connection/detachment order of discourse were identifiable within participants' talk from across all three festivals, as well as within the non-discursive discourse in evidence. The use of this discourse within the talk of the interviewees tended to vary between festivals, with OperaFest talk tending to feature detached or temporary connection discourse, although persistent connection discourse was not completely absent; whilst the FolkFest and PopFest interviewees tended to display more examples of the persistent connection discourse and less temporary connection or detached discourse.

Observations of social interactions, as well as noting festival attendees' self-presentation, provided insights into the operation of social inter-relationships at the festivals. The interviewees' discourse, as demonstrated above, also contributed to the gaining of an understanding of the role of social capital in the festival experience.

In terms of social networking with others at the festivals, social capital notions of connection and detachment come to the fore. Reflecting Putnam's (2000) bonding and bridging interpretation of the theory of social capital, highlighted earlier, interviewees reported that different forms of social connection emerged during the festivals. This reflects the idea that social capital takes different forms which can facilitate different types of social connection.

Many of the pop and folk festival attendees established a 'socially connected' style, demonstrated through their persistent connection discourse, which was an important part of their festival experience. In doing so, they referred to the large friendship groups at the festival of which they were part. These groups had either specifically arranged to attend the festival together or had anticipated, based on previous experience, that known contacts would be there. By choosing to attend the festival, the opportunity was created, and taken, to build social capital with existing

acquaintances: that is, ‘bonding social capital’ (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital, where new social relationships are formed, was only rarely reported by any of the interviewees. The temporary and detached discourses examples shown above demonstrate the resistance to forming this type of social capital, despite evidence of a feeling of trust and safety. It can thus be concluded that bonding social capital played a role in the pop and folk festival experience, whereas bridging social capital did not. However, this study’s findings also suggest that Putnam’s concept of bonding social capital should be modified in connection with festivals. Putnam’s theory is that bonding social capital brings together people who already share social and cultural similarities. As the festival attendees were observed to be relatively homogeneous in their socio-demographic characteristics, the findings of this study suggest that bonding at festivals is only between people already known or socially connected to each other, not merely between people who share social and cultural similarities.

Attendance within large friendship groups was not reported as the norm at the opera festival. Interviewees reported a greater tendency for social detachment, punctuated by brief serendipitous social interactions. As such, it can be concluded that neither bonding nor bridging social capital played a major role in the opera festival experience.

### **Implications for cultural policy**

#### ***Relevance to cultural and social issues***

This study has shown that festivals are a useful setting for the study of key social and cultural issues and several implications for cultural policy can be identified. The former government’s policies saw culture and the arts as tools to combat social exclusion, bridge barriers between groups and foster community cohesion (Labour Party, 2006), as mentioned earlier. This study concludes that music festivals do not appear to perform this function.

This study found that bridging-type social interactions between people who were previously unknown to each other were not common, particularly at OperaFest. The policy-related term community cohesion is also problematic. It could be interpreted as denoting cohesion within groups, rather than the across-group cohesion which is usually understood to be the aim. This study has shown that cohesion, or bonding, within groups of people who are already known to each other is promoted by festival

attendance, but bridging between those who were previously unknown to each other was not generally a feature. Furthermore, the screened festival attendees were found to be similar in demographic characteristics, such as being in the upper levels of socio-economic categories and educational qualification levels, and homogenous in ethnicity, suggesting that social exclusion was a feature of these events. Observations confirmed this finding.

### ***Festivals policy***

Cultural policy at various levels has incorporated reference to festivals, including by Arts Council England (Arts Council England, 2005, 2006), the Greater London Council (Nadkarni & Homfray, 2009), and the Milton Keynes Council (Milton Keynes Council, 2008), for example. The National Carnival Arts Strategy (Nindi, 2005) also mentions festivals briefly and Arts Council England has commissioned investigations specifically relating to festivals (Long & Owen, 2006). However, there is no published national strategy relating to festivals and this could be considered, having identified their increase in importance within the cultural sphere. Meanwhile, it is vital that reference to festivals is incorporated into new strategy documents as they are devised.

Finally, the festival directors themselves have the opportunity to shape the social as well as the cultural policy for the festival they are organising. This opportunity could be further enabled by support from the continued inclusion of festivals in national strategy. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide impetus for action.

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*Social capital in the music festival experience*

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