

# Frequent music festival attendance: festival fandom and career development

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of the study is to compare features of career development and fandom in frequent festival attendance in the context of Finnish music festivals.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study uses a mixed methods research approach and employs two theoretical frameworks: theories of career development and fandom.

**Findings** – In frequent festival attendance, both festival career development and festival fandom are most clearly present in motivation development and social dimensions.

**Practical implications** – Strategically, frequent festivalgoers should be considered as crucial stakeholders, who might mobilize the co-creation of a sense of community or festival brand.

**Originality/value** – Music-related fandom has been previously investigated in relation to artists and specific musical genres, but not so much in relation to music festivals in general. Career studies, on the other hand, concentrate heavily on sports events. There is a scarcity of research scrutinizing both career development and fandom in the festival context within the same study, and festival attendance as part of music tourism is an under-researched area.

**Keywords** Music festivals, Mixed methods research, Fandom, Festival career, Audience

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Music festivals are important platforms for live music consumption offering shared musical enjoyment, social interactions, and the sense of community (Kelly *et al.*, 2014) that produce socially extended emotions (Wood and Kinnunen, 2020) and long-lasting memories (Manthiou *et al.*, 2014). Larsen *et al.* (2009) stated that consuming music has a significant role in the individual's representation of self in social interactions, and that music depicts music consumers' desired self-image. The consumption of live music has increased both in Finland (OSF, 2018; Teosto, 2018) and internationally (Pitts and Burland, 2013). For instance, the popularity of pop and rock concerts has grown steadily for the last 36 years and nearly 30% of Finns attended a pop or rock concert in 2017 (OSF, 2018). Along with the growth of live music consumption, the number of music festivals has also multiplied for several decades (Webster and McKay, 2016), and the attendance figures are remarkable (Finland Festivals, 2020).

Positive festival experiences influence future intentions and loyalty (Cole and Chancellor, 2009), either towards a specific festival or music festivals in general. Motives for participation



might change through time, starting maybe from curiosity, friends' initiative or interesting programs and ending in the need for positive and emotional experiences that increase well-being and help in coping with everyday life (Getz, 2008). The motivational change might act as a trigger for *frequent festival attendance*, or for a desire to participate in festivals more often. Furthermore, the practices related to frequent festival attendance might change over time. For instance, one might start attending festivals in different locations or countries, or attending festivals alone might become a new practice. Frequent festival attendance is a leisure career (contrary to a work career) that can be developed, consciously or unconsciously. Studies on career development show that devotion to a specific leisure activity involving frequent event attendance modifies future behavior in motives, preferences and patterns, intending to fulfil needs that have been changed through accumulated experience (Getz, 2007, 2008).

Music festival attendance might also be a vehicle for various types of fandom developing one's self-image and offering a shared in-group identity. First, a music festival attendee might be a fan of an artist. Some fans travel long distances to see their idol in concerts and festivals (Henry and Caldwell, 2007), and many music festival front row attendees are fans of the performing artist. Second, the fandom might be directed at a certain musical genre. For instance, the fans of heavy metal music tend to be very loyal metal festival attendees due to the music and like-minded participants (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2019a), nurturing genre-based music tourism (Lashua *et al.*, 2014). Third, the participation motive might be the fan interest towards music festivals in general, to experience "festival communitas whose members are more open to participate in collective actions and shared enjoyment than in normal circumstances" (Kinnunen, 2018, p. 106), thus fulfilling social and hedonistic needs and aims. Jones (2015) saw a "postmodern music festival fan" as a "musical nomad" who enjoyed the festival experience in general, not specific music *per se*.

Career development and fandom are related concepts. They both contain the aspect of communality: a strong sense of being a member in a like-minded community. Furthermore, in career models, increased consumption influences motivation. Fandom, on the other hand, might be developed through increased consumption or vice versa; increased consumption and career development might emerge because of fandom (Lexhagen *et al.*, 2019; Mackellar, 2009). Juxtaposing these concepts in the context of frequent music festival attendance helps understanding an important festival audience segment that is valuable for the festival atmosphere (Kim, 2004; Prentice and Andersen, 2003), and music tourism in general (Bolderman and Reijnders, 2017; Lashua *et al.*, 2014).

Music-related fandom has been previously investigated in relation to artists (Cavicchi, 1998; Henry and Caldwell, 2007; Vroomen, 2002) and specific musical genres (Hill, 2016; Sinclair and Dolan, 2015), but not so much in relation to music festivals in general (exceptions include Jones, 2015). Leisure career studies, on the other hand, concentrate heavily on sports events (Buning and Gibson, 2015; Getz and Patterson, 2013) as if career development in a hobby would require a measurable activity. There is a scarcity of research scrutinizing both career development and fandom in the festival context within the same study (Kim, 2004; Mackellar, 2009). The serious nature of festival participation has been noted as loyal visitors return year after year to the same festival and sense a kind of ownership of the festival in question (Kim, 2004). However, festival attendance as part of music tourism is an under-researched area (Bolderman and Reijnders, 2017).

The purpose of the present paper is to compare features of career development and fandom in frequent festival attendance in the context of Finnish music festivals. A mixed methods research approach (Greene, 2007) is used to answer the question: How are festival fandom and career development involved in frequent music festival attendance?

### Theoretical foundation

In the literature review, first the history of travel and event career developments is introduced, followed by the conceptualization of musical fandom. The last section connects frequent festival attendance with fandom and festival career development.

#### *Travel and event careers*

Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) introduced the concept of the *motivational career in travel*, later *Travel Career Ladder* (Pearce, 1988), where a traveler's motivational factors or needs change through time. The idea was based on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs, stating that as travel experience accumulates, the higher order needs become involved. Later, Pearce and Lee (2005) renamed the theory as *Travel Career Patterns* (TCP), removing the hierarchical ("ladder") aspect and developing the model further by emphasizing the influence of multiple motives and age.

Getz (2007) applied the TCP approach and serious leisure conceptualization (Stebbins, 1992) to event tourism, arguing that an *event career* is involved when there is a frequent event visitor who desires for more, craves for uniqueness and hopes for an increasing challenge. Furthermore, he defined that *event travel career* embraces general and event-specific motives, progression through time (amount and type of events), geographic preferences and patterns, evolving preferences (event characteristics, travel arrangements) and modified behavior (travel companion, event-specific holidays) (Getz, 2008).

Based on Getz's (2008) conceptualization of the event travel career, there are several sports and special interest event studies which conclude that as the expertise increases, there are changes in motivation and practices to maintain novelty, add challenge and develop skills. Additionally, socialities influence travel careers as the same interests create friendships among enthusiasts (Getz and Patterson, 2013). Getz and Andersson (2010, 2020), as well as Getz and McConnell (2011), tested the event travel career model among participants of different sports events and concluded that it contained the following dimensions: motivations, travel styles, temporal and spatial dimensions, and event and destination choices. Getz and Andersson (2010, 2020) argued that progress in an event career is first and foremost dependent on the level of involvement. Lamont *et al.* (2012) concentrated on the competing priorities causing challenges in the pursuit of an event travel career, while Buning and Gibson (2015), Patterson *et al.* (2016) and Getz and Andersson (2020) defined career progression stages from introduction to mature career or lifestyle.

Research on the event travel career is dominated by sports studies. It is important to note that these studies are related to being an active sports participant (not a spectator); that is, a runner, cyclist and so on. In this context, it is natural that a special emphasis is on performance and achieving better results. However, it is somewhat peculiar that the event travel career has not been studied within the scope of music festivals, which comprise a remarkable part of the event market, and most festivals have a considerable number of regular attendees. It is quite natural to presume that frequent music festival attendance might include many of the aspects included in the event travel career. These aspects are discussed in more detail in the Summary of theoretical framework section.

#### *Fandom*

Fandom entails an emotional relationship towards the object of fandom that will be called *fan interest* from now on. Funk and James (2001) developed a Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) to describe the depth of individuals' psychological connection to a sport or team. In PCM, the level of interest is divided into awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance. Awareness and attraction describe a casual spectator whereas attachment and allegiance are more related to fandom. Attachment includes a stronger, deeper and stable relationship with

the fan interest, and allegiance demonstrates commitment and loyalty. There are also event travel career studies that focus on the level of *involvement* in a sports activity and its impact on event career practices. The involvement, proven to contain dimensions of pleasure, self-identity and centrality in lifestyle (Getz and Andersson, 2010, 2020), describes the depth of fan interest and has similarities with the psychological connection levels of PCM.

Fandom is both personal and collective (Duffett, 2014). At the personal level, emotions and identity building are the most important aspects (Hill, 2016), whereas the collective level embodies social (shared) identity, demonstrated in a sense of unity and belonging with other fans (Cavicchi, 1998; Reysen *et al.*, 2017). Identification with other fans leads to social connections with them (Duffett, 2013), which in turn is related to well-being (Reysen *et al.*, 2017; see also Packer and Ballantyne, 2011).

Fan practices include the production of fan culture, like writing fan fiction and communicating on the Internet about the fan interest, as well as consumption practices like collecting items related to fandom or attending events, and travelling because of it (Bolderman and Reijnders, 2017; Duffett, 2013, 2014). Both time and money are invested in the fan interest (Cavicchi, 1998) since fandom entails following the fan interest; for example, for an artist or musical genre, physically by attending concerts or festivals, and virtually by reading and commenting on articles and fan pages. In fan culture, there might be a certain code of conduct to be followed. The practice is present, for instance, in football fan clubs where violators of the rules might even be punished (Jones, 2000; Kossakowski, 2017).

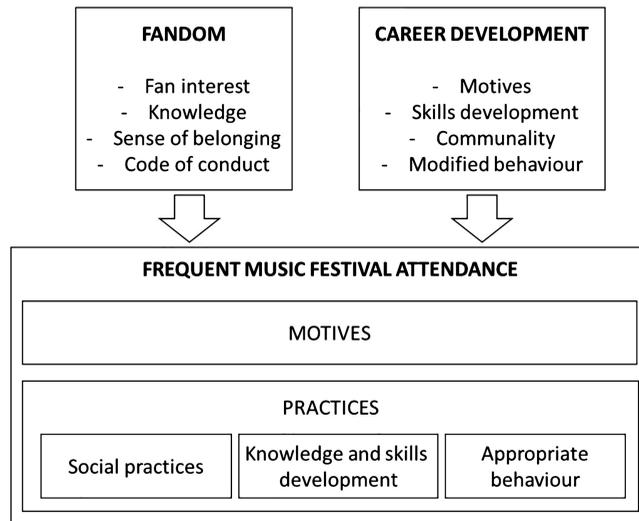
When considering festival fandom, the importance and meaning of the fan interest – music, festivals and festival experiences – is vital. A frequent festivalgoer is a committed and loyal festival attendee who often shares the values that a festival represents. Particularly, fans of festivals of a certain musical genre share feelings of belonging (Rihova *et al.*, 2015) that extend to strangers who have mutual musical interests. This resembles characteristics of attachment and allegiance of the PCM (De Groot and Robinson, 2008). Frequent music festival attendance is a demonstration of festival fandom including fandom-related practices, part of which are present also in the event travel career model as discussed next.

#### *Summary of theoretical framework*

In the context of the present study, frequent music festival attendance is expected to fulfil the characteristics of *festival career development*: if the introduction to festivals – that is, the first festival experience – was positive, it might lead to extensive festival attendance where the participant seeks new, positive and inspiring experiences at festivals. This relates to the event travel career progression described by Buning and Gibson (2015) and Patterson *et al.* (2016).

We aim to compare features of career development and fandom in frequent music festival attendance since the concepts are clearly intertwined (Figure 1) in motives and practices. In career development, the most important aspects are changed behavior and motivation, sense of community with others and skills development (see Getz, 2008; Getz and McConnell, 2011; Mackellar, 2009). Fandom, on the other hand, includes a personal relationship with the fan interest, a collective identity with other fans (see Cavicchi, 1998; Duffett, 2013; Hill, 2016), acquisition of knowledge about the fan interest, as well as a specific code of conduct within the fan community (Jones, 2000).

The principal part of both fandom and event career is *motivation*. Regarding fandom, this is the fan interest, whose depth – or psychological connection (PCM) – defines the intensity of fan practices. In the case of frequent music festival attendance, the fan interest is the music festival experience in its entirety: live music, festival community, communal and relaxed atmosphere, as well as the liminality of the festival experience, when one's economic and social status, and everyday worries are left at the festival gate. Communitarity – the positive, open and egalitarian connection with other members of the audience – is at the heart of a memorable festival experience (Kinnunen, 2018). As the participation frequency in music



**Figure 1.**  
Frequent music  
festival attendance

festivals increases, the importance of the festival program often lessens, at least in festivals with which the attendee is familiar; in this case, a frequent festivalgoer expects to meet familiar faces, have social interactions and experience a communal and relaxed atmosphere, all of which makes the visit pleasurable, fulfils the needs of identity building and helps in coping with everyday life. This leads to changes in motivations for participation, like in the event travel career, most probably towards social benefits and well-being.

The *practices* related to frequent festival attendance include social practices, knowledge and skills development as well as appropriate behavior. *Social practices* include bonding, bridging, the sense of community and belonging (cf. [Kinnunen et al., 2020](#)). Festivals are a suitable environment for bonding and spending quality time with friends and family, as everyday routines are left behind. The sense of community is related to a festival-specific liminoid zone that is restricted by space and time ([Getz, 2007](#)). During the festival, attendees feel “strong, if only temporary, social links among complete strangers” ([Rihova et al., 2015](#), p. 79) inside festival communitas that is free of everyday social and economic constraints. This makes it easy to find new friends – or bridge in Quinn and Wilks’ conceptualization ([2016](#)) – as social interaction with strangers is more acceptable than in the surrounding society. The collective identity with other fans (see [Cavicchi, 1998](#); [Duffett, 2013](#); [Hill, 2016](#)), on the other hand, facilitates social interactions with strangers who have similar values and interests and with whom the sense of belonging is felt ([Rihova et al., 2015](#)). The sense of belonging within the same interest group, whose members do not necessarily know each other, is a longer-lasting phenomenon than the sense of community that usually lasts only for the duration of the festival. Social practices in festivals include not only social interactions but also collective actions like dancing and singing along.

*Knowledge* acquisition and accumulation are typical for fandom as often the strength of fandom is tested by the level of knowledge about the fan interest ([Sinclair and Dolan, 2015](#)). *Skills* development in turn is a fundamental part of an event travel career. Performance is important in sports hobbies because of measurement and the desire to improve the results. This is not essential in music festival attendance. Instead, as the participation frequency increases, skills and knowledge about the characteristics and practices of festival attendance and music festivals will increase accordingly.

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The final part of practices is *appropriate behavior* at festivals. “Festivarian code” (Gardner, 2004), a positive state of mind and respect for other participants, facilitates communality and everyone’s enjoyment at the event. In fandom studies, a specific code of conduct might be related to fan practices, as in the case of football fans (Jones, 2000; Kossakowski, 2017).

## Methodology

### *Research context*

Finland is one of the leading countries in Europe in relation to the number of arts festivals and cultural events (Amberla, 2013). In the country of 5.5 million citizens, the number of festivals per capita is noteworthy, Finns participate actively, and the contents of festivals represent various artistic genres (for example, music, theatre, film, dance, literature and fine arts). Kinnunen and Haahti (2015) estimated a few years ago that the number of festivals is something between 500 and 800, and Finland Festivals, the umbrella association of 79 Finnish festivals, reported over 2 million festival visits in 2019 (Finland Festivals, 2020). Regarding the artistic offer, the festival field in Finland can be seen as a thriving context, when hundreds of not-for-profit and for-profit organizations produce artistic content throughout the country (Amberla, 2013).

Talking about the evolution of the festival field, Kinnunen and others (2019a) argue that Nordic festivals have moved from many kinds of voluntary-based productions to more professional, business-oriented productions (see also Amberla, 2013). This is apparent particularly in the context of large rhythm music festivals (Nordvall and Heldt, 2017; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2019a). The roots of rhythm music festivals in Finland can be found already in the 1960s, when the Pori Jazz festival was founded, and the first instance organized in the city of Pori. Besides Pori Jazz, many of the iconic rhythm music festivals were established in a five-year period in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the middle of festival fever in Northern Europe (Klaic, 2014), such as Ruisrock (founded in 1970) in the city of Turku and Ilosaarirock (founded in 1971) in the city of Joensuu (Luonila and Kinnunen, 2019).

Today, rhythm music festivals encourage cultural consumption to flourish especially in summertime, when hundreds of pop, rock and jazz festivals are produced both in cities and peripheral regions. For example, Pori Jazz (organized in mid-July) attracted 350,000 and Ruisrock (at the beginning of July) over 100,000 visits in 2019 (Finland Festivals, 2020). In this respect, since Finland has been labelled as a land of festivals, in particular music festivals (Luonila and Johansson, 2015), it makes the country a suitable context for the current study on frequent music festival attendance.

### *Methods of data collection and analysis*

The quantitative data included results of the Finnish Festival Barometer web survey from the year 2016, altogether 3,322 responses. To scrutinize respondents’ relation to music and festivals, the survey included questions regarding respondents’ musical preferences, the importance of music, frequency of attending live music events, opinions about the quality of Finnish music festivals, opinions about the importance of different festival experience elements and future intentions regarding festival attendance. The survey was distributed by ten large music festivals ranging from jazz, pop and rock, to rap and metal, that altogether attract annually over half a million visits.

Table 1 summarizes the survey respondents. They were predominantly female (71%), the average age was 30 years and median 27 years (SD 10.44). Most of them had a vocational or upper secondary school education and they were mainly students or blue-collar workers earning less than 30,000 € per year. The average number of festivals they attended in a year was 2. The profile characteristics are in line with previous research conducted at Finnish

**Table 1.**  
Background  
information of web  
survey  
respondents  
(*N* = 3,322)

Variable	Classification	<i>N</i>	%
Sex	Female	2,363	71
	Male	926	28
	Other	9	0
	Do not want to answer	24	1
Age	Mean: 30		
	Median: 27		
Highest finished education	Comprehensive school	338	10
	Vocational school or upper secondary school	1,704	51
	Tertiary education	1,280	39
Socioeconomic group	Managerial position, entrepreneur / self-employed	186	6
	White-collar worker	640	19
	Blue-collar worker	1,133	34
	Student	1,062	32
	Unemployed	211	6
	Other (pensioner, housewife / husband, and so on.)	90	3
Annual income	Less than 10,000 €	1,122	34
	10,000–19,999 €	534	16
	20,000–29,999 €	608	18
	30,000–39,999 €	572	17
	40,000–49,999 €	276	8
	50,000 € or more	210	6

music festivals (Kinnunen, 2018; Kinnunen *et al.*, 2019a). Furthermore, Finns' attitudes, tastes and perceptions of festivals have not changed much along the years (see the report on the longitudinal Finnish Festival Barometer research in 2014–2018, Kinnunen *et al.*, 2019b), except 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of summer festivals. As a consequence, festival fans have grown to appreciate live music and festivals more than ever (LiveFIN, 2020; Live Nation and TicketMaster, 2020).

To scrutinize frequent festivalgoers' motivations and practices in more detail, interviews of eight frequent music festivalgoers were conducted in October 2017. Interviewees were selected from those respondents of the Festival Barometer 2016 who had attended at least nine festivals a year and who had left their contact information for a possible interview. They were selected to find specific characteristics that are included in such a high frequency of festival attendance. Even though the number of interviewees was not high, the saturation point was reached, since the same practices were identified throughout the interviews. The interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 10 minutes (on average 51 minutes), and the total length of all the interviews was 6 hours 48 minutes. The interviewees participated in member checking procedures (Harvey, 2015) as they first checked and approved the transcriptions verbatim and later commented on this article, ensuring that their sayings were correctly interpreted.

Interviewees' background data is summarized in Table 2.

Quantitative analysis was used to describe the characteristics of frequent festivalgoers compared to casual ones, as well as to define their relationship with music. Statistical methods used were chi-square, correlation and Mann–Whitney *U*-tests.

The features and practices of festival fandom and career development were studied using a qualitative approach with interview data. Qualitative analysis was executed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) for the interviews transcribed, since it was suited for analyzing those themes in more detail that were derived from literature of fandom and career development: motives and practices (social practices, skills and knowledge development, and appropriate behavior).

Pseudonym and background	Favourite music	Hobbies besides festivals	Motives for attending	Characterisation
Tiina female, 27 years, boyfriend (not living together) Sofia female, 24, single	Folk, alternative, indie, ambient Heavy metal, rock	Live music, making music, amateur theatre, nature activities, event surfing Live music, regular at a local bar, (theatre)	Program, friends, atmosphere Performers, friends	Analytical, independent festival visitor and active volunteer worker in festivals <i>I see festivals as the gems of the Finnish summer</i> Adventurous, social festivalgoer, lots of extempore participation, wants to visit at least one new festival a year <i>People chill out at the camping site because you can pop into anyone's camp, talk to anyone about just anything and your background does not matter at all. Everybody is everybody's pals</i> Changed friends to younger ones as the older friends did not attend festivals anymore; regularly visits festivals abroad <i>I like that way of life, the kind of illusion of freedom that predominates at festivals</i> Works in the music industry; started his career as a festival volunteer; visits festivals abroad as part of his work <i>If you think about the gateway [of becoming a festival addict], I'd say that in my case it was listening to W.A.S.P. and reading Suosikki [a youth magazine]: You wanted to be one of them</i> Writes articles on festivals and other live music gigs for a fanzine; gets accreditation in 75% of the attended festivals; attends several festivals abroad each year and has acquaintances around Europe whom she meets only at festivals <i>In festivals it's also really easy to talk with new people. At least I do not have any problems to start a chat with someone</i>
Pauli male, 47, polyamorous relationship	Rock, heavy metal, punk	Live music, (earlier sailing)	At the beginning: curiosity	
Seppo male, 41, wife and a 16-year-old son	Heavy metal	If any free time left: live music, theatre, museum, city holidays	Work	
Anna female, 45, single	Heavy metal	Live music, exercise, (food and beer festivals, theatre, films, classical music)	New festivals: bands Familiar festivals: entirety	

(continued)

Table 2. Interviewees (N = 8)

Table 2.

Pseudonym and background	Favourite music	Hobbies besides festivals	Motives for attending	Characterisation
Pekka male, 31, single	Rock, punk	Live music, bars, floorball, food and drink festivals	To see friends	Enjoys camping at festivals; divides festivals into home and travel festivals; attends festivals abroad every second year <i>You schedule nearly all the summer in such a way that "this weekend is reserved for festivals". It kind of defines the course of the summer</i>
Maria female, 29, single	Finnish pop, rock	Live music, reading, exercise, book and music fairs	Performers	Follows her favourite artists; front row fan who dances a lot <i>Ruisrock [festival] is a perfect three days. The sun always shines. You can just be three days holding your hands up high, listening to good music and dancing among people</i>
Nina female, 35, in a relationship (spouse does not attend festivals)	Finnish pop, rap	Live music, exercise, spending time with friends, (theatre, films)	When younger: friends Now: performers	Attends festivals where favourite artists perform; stays in the front row taking photos <i>Festival participation is a situation where you can spend relaxed time with your friends, without any everyday worries. You do not have to talk about work or anything dull</i>

Both quantitative and qualitative data and methods were used in the study. The aim for using a mixed methods approach was to get a deeper understanding of the phenomena of festival fandom and festival career development. This rationale is called complementarity (Sandelowski *et al.*, 2006), completeness (Bryman, 2006), knowledge-based (Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela, 2006) or production of a more complete picture (Denscombe, 2008). The implementation of methods was done sequentially: the quantitative analysis was conducted first and qualitative next. The major weight was on the qualitative data and methods.

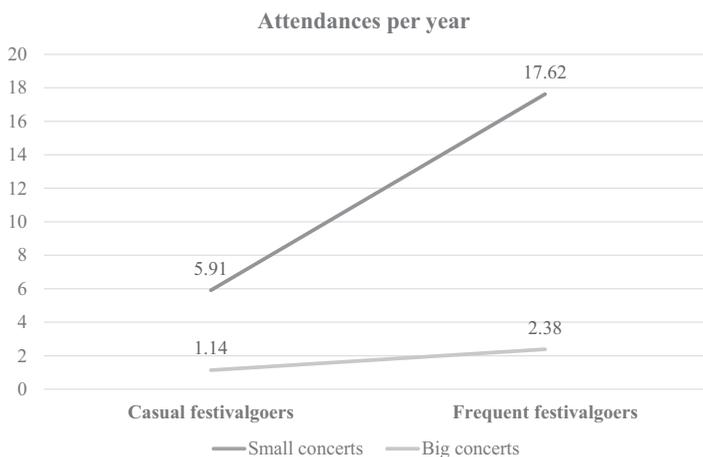
## Findings and discussion

### Motives

*Fan interest.* For analysis purposes, the survey respondents were divided into two groups based on the number of festival attendances during the previous year: *Casual festivalgoers* ( $N = 2,908$ ) were respondents who attended one to four festivals within the previous 12 months, and *frequent festivalgoers* ( $N = 199$ ) five or more (cf. “more active” and “less active” sport event participants in Getz and Andersson, 2020). 215 respondents had no festival attendances during the previous year and were omitted from the analysis. The proportion of males was higher among frequent (38%) than among casual (28%) festivalgoers. The difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 8.77$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). The respondents who indicated their gender as “other” and “do not want to answer” were dropped out of the analysis due to their low number.

Due to non-normality of variables, Spearman’s correlation was chosen to assess the relationship between the number of festival and small concert (club, restaurant) attendances during the previous year. There was a statistically significant, strong positive correlation between them ( $r_s = 0.380$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Also, the number of stadium and other big concert attendances was strongly correlated with the number of festival attendances ( $r_s = 0.233$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). See Figure 2 for concert attendances per attendee type.

Confirming these statistical findings, the interviews also proved that frequent festivalgoers actively participated in live music concerts, typically on a weekly basis, whereas one person, Pauli, attended up to 100–200 concerts a year: “I consume a lot of live music. I never bothered to count but I attend several hundred gigs a year”. This means that



**Figure 2.**  
Mean number of  
attendances in big and  
small concerts per year  
per festival visitor type

live music is an essential part of a frequent festivalgoer’s life, like for Tiina who summarizes that “I see the Finnish musical scene (laugh) so that the summer is predominantly the festival season and the winter is the time for club gigs and concerts”.

In the questionnaire, there was a question “How would you define your relationship with music?” using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree – 7 = totally agree) for the statements represented. A Mann–Whitney *U*-test showed that there were statistically significant differences ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) in all statements’ scores between the attendance frequency groups, except in the item “Music often creates strong emotions in me” (Table 3). The relationship with music was stronger for frequent than casual festivalgoers in the following items: “Music is one of the most important things in my life,” “I actively search for new music that interests me,” “I actively recommend artists, pieces and albums to my friends,” “I usually listen to music concentrating and burying myself in it,,” “Making and playing music is one of the most important things in my life” and “I usually listen to music with friends, acquaintances and like-minded people.”

There were three female interviewees (Sofia, Nina, Maria) who were fans of a certain artist or a band, and followed them at festivals – but typically only inside Finland:

Next Friday we’ll attend – I think it’s the 90th gig of Stam1na [. . .] The aim is that next year I’ll reach 100 gigs because it will be ten years since I saw them for the first time. (Sofia)

The artist fandom was demonstrated by being in the front row and taking photos of their idols. However, these fans did not try to meet their idols in person. Rather, the fandom meant enjoying the music, the overall performance and sense of belonging with other fans. For example, Nina who has been following festival performances of the pop artist Antti Tuisku for 1½ years, explained that “I like to attend his gigs but I do not have a need to meet him or discuss with him”. Hence, the idol was not the object for fanaticism or social contact, but it created the circumstances and atmosphere that facilitated the sense of belonging between the members of the audience.

In summary, music meant more to frequent festivalgoers and they also consumed more live music in general than casual festivalgoers, which can be interpreted as fandom for artists, musical genres, or both. High attendance in music festivals, in turn, was a manifestation of festival fandom. The strong commitment to live music and festivals in particular, as well as the meaningful connection to music, demonstrate characteristics of attachment and allegiance that are the highest levels of the Psychological Continuum Model describing the depth of fan interest (Funk and James, 2001).

	Mean (casual festivalgoers)	Mean (frequent festivalgoers)	z-score	p-value
Music is one of the most important things in my life	5.82	6.20	4.30	0.000
I actively search for new music that interests me	5.04	5.67	5.36	0.000
I actively recommend artists, songs, and albums to my friends	4.69	5.42	6.00	0.000
I usually listen to music, concentrating and burying myself in it	5.05	5.39	3.34	0.001
Making and playing music is one of the most important things in my life	2.63	3.18	4.03	0.000
Music often creates strong emotions in me	5.64	5.83	1.75	0.081
I usually listen to music with friends, acquaintances and like-minded people	5.02	5.36	2.82	0.005

**Table 3.**  
Relationship with music:  
Mann–Whitney *U*-test

*Modified motives.* Festival fans interviewed used a considerable amount of money and leisure time for festivals, especially during summer. They were ready and willing to invest in festivals as an essential part of their lifestyle.

There were some changes in motivations found in the participation data collected; mostly this was related to motives like the search for novelty. Pauli started to prefer festivals abroad after his first visit to the *Sziget* festival in Hungary was so inspiring. Sofia, on the other hand, set targets for her festival attendance. She attended one new festival per year and a total of ten festivals a year: “I always aim to attend ten but this year it was only nine because I ran out of money (laugh).” Festival attendance also increased fans’ well-being (cf. Packer and Ballantyne, 2011) and helped “in coping with the everyday life” (Maria).

Some changes in motives were due to getting older and not because of long-term festival attendance, as Pearce and Lee (2005) demonstrated in TCP: for instance, Nina stated that earlier friends’ company was the most important participation motive, whereas nowadays the line-up dictates the festival choices.

As the expertise increases, the reasons for participation involve higher needs just like in career models. Benefits like enjoyment and pleasure were gained from attendance, also well-being and getting energy for everyday challenges through social festival experiences (see also Meretse *et al.*, 2016). Motivation changed with expertise: for instance, festival fans wanted to maintain the aspect of novelty (Getz, 2007; Getz and Andersson, 2020) by visiting new festivals in different locations.

### *Practices*

*Social practices.* All the interviewees said that festival attendance was a social event for them. Sofia and Pekka were fans of camping festivals since a camping site forms a space for a particularly strong sense of community (Nordvall *et al.*, 2014). Some campers made a special effort to organize their site for a successful experience and to build their festival image (Gardner, 2004; Tjora, 2016). Sofia and her friends occupied the same spot every midsummer at the camping site of *Nummirock* metal festival, and their camp was well-equipped, even though the neighbors went even further:

Generally it lasts from Tuesday or Wednesday to Sunday [. . .] In our crowd, one couple brings the pavillion, another one brings in the fire wood [. . .] One guy always brings a sofa [. . .] But you know, we have NOTHING compared with others: they have portable generators and stuff to get electricity. One guy has a freezer. He makes ice.

At the camping site, people chilled out to the point that they might not even enter the festival area (cf. Gardner, 2004). Campers organized activities like “football and frisbee and all kinds of drinking games” (Pekka), which made socializing and getting to know each other easier.

Frequent festivalgoers socialised at festivals, but not only with friends since they also made new friends at festivals, as Pekka illustrated:

We got acquainted in Denmark [Roskilde Festival] with four Finnish girls: It was awfully crowded there and they didn’t find any place to camp. Then they heard us speaking [Finnish] and we got acquainted since we let them into our camp. Now we see them each summer at events in Finland.

Interviewees pointed out that they might attend a festival alone since they knew that there were friends and acquaintances they met only at the festival in question: “There are acquaintances all around Europe. You know that if you attend an event alone you’ll surely see at least one familiar face there.” (Anna)

Communitality and the sense of belonging built by festival attendees was a major building block for both fandom and career development; it was related to participation motives where the social atmosphere of festivals played an important role. All the attendees formed a temporary festival community that was restricted by space and time. However, the fans of

festivals, certain musical genre or certain artist formed a more permanent community with a specific sense of belonging that was described in fan theory as well as in career development models (see also [Rihova et al., 2015](#)). The shared affect facilitated communication and encouraged bridging ([Quinn and Wilks, 2016](#)). Festival attendance was an important element of frequent festivalgoers' social life. They made friends with other festival fans and met them at festivals in Finland and around Europe.

*Skills and knowledge development.* Frequent festivalgoers' knowledge and skills development comprised planning, self-control and using accumulated knowledge about festivals. Planning of festival attendance was two-fold and tourism-oriented. Firstly, buying tickets in good time for festivals that would be sold out, and planning the travel and accommodation, especially in the case of festivals abroad to save money. Secondly, planning took place a few days before the festival by packing enough but not too much and making a schedule of the performances to be followed.

Self-control included knowing when to drink and eat to avoid the need to go to the toilet in the middle of the best performance. Furthermore, being able to control one's own alcohol consumption meant that the festivalgoer was able to see the performances, and not to miss them as Pekka illustrated:

Sometimes it happened that an evening was kind of totally blacked out since you had drunk so much that you didn't remember anything of the evening's program, but nowadays it is fortunately really rare.

Finally, knowledge about different festival areas grew among frequent festivalgoers and they did not need festival area maps unless there had been major changes in their favorite festival. Knowing the area, they knew when to wander to another stage to occupy good places for the next performance. Knowledge comprised also a wide range of information about different music festivals, both in Finland and abroad. For instance, Pauli was familiar with various cashless payment methods used in festivals around Europe. All in all, the increase in skills and knowledge made the festival attendance easier and more enjoyable, reducing attendance-related stress.

Skills and knowledge development led to certain routines, which in turn influenced the participation motives so that frequent festivalgoers experienced a need for novelty. Knowledge, on the other hand, was an essential part of music fandom but it was not present in music festival fandom in the same way as in artist or genre fandom, where knowledge was tested and sometimes even a prerequisite for respect and approval from other fans ([Sinclair and Dolan, 2015](#)). In music festival fandom, knowledge was in-depth information about the favorite festival and music festivals in general, both in Finland and abroad. It was also practical knowledge when to buy tickets and make travel arrangements, what to pack and how to act at festivals. Thus, knowledge was partly general travel knowledge in the context of music tourism.

*Appropriate behavior.* Interviewees pointed out how festival behavior comprised a code of conduct one should follow so that other people should be considered. Furthermore, a frequent festival attendee was aware that one had to be both relaxed and patient at festivals. The relaxed attitude was necessary to enjoy the festival and to keep oneself and others in a good mood. Patience, on the other hand, was needed since festival attendance involved lots of queuing and waiting.

Sofia, a metal fan, emphasized how metal festivals had peaceful participants who behaved themselves:

In rap festivals there are like fifty reports to police per evening and in metal festivals there are none during the whole weekend. [...] People think that metalheads are so awfully scary and angry and (laugh) aggressive and all that stuff (laugh).

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Interviewees were aware that their own behavior influenced others since the positive state of mind spread around the attendees. The positive attitude was necessary, for instance, if the weather was not so good like Anna illustrated: “If it’s raining, I’m the one who thinks that I have to cheer up the folks (laugh).”

The most important behavioral aspect was the essence of socializing. Frequent festivalgoers were open for social interaction to nurture the sense of community and belonging (see Social practices). They offered and enjoyed inclusivity of the festival: they could attend alone and yet not feel lonely; they talked to strangers and became friends with them; they smiled and were positive towards fellow attendees. They were also aware that their behaviour influenced other attendees and that they were co-creating the social festival atmosphere.

The increased and internalized knowledge was implemented in the code of conduct. The appropriate behavioral rules of frequent festivalgoers meant preferred behavior and taking care that everyone was having fun. Thus, fans’ “performance” (Duffett, 2013, p. 28) was part of the festival product, their behavior improved the product and consciously co-created the positive festival atmosphere.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to find out how festival fandom and career development were involved in frequent music festival attendance. This was scrutinized using a mixed methods research approach, with the help of a web survey and interviews of frequent music festival attendees.

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis attested that frequent festivalgoers were heavy users of live music. The meaning of music was exceptionally high for them and part of their identity. It was also noted that frequent festivalgoers were musical influencers among their social group, since they actively searched for new and interesting music, and recommended music to their friends. They were fans of a certain musical genre or artist, but most of all, they were fans of music festivals to consume and experience music. Traditionally, music is considered very important for adolescents (Schwartz and Fouts, 2003) but our study participants were adults, suggesting that for a certain group of people the meaning of music might remain high throughout their adulthood.

The present study contributes to festival career theory by showing the interconnection between festival career development and festival fandom. The aspect of combining fandom and career development has been studied in the framework of serious leisure in football fandom (Jones, 2000) and rock ‘n’ roll fanatics’ festival participation (Mackellar, 2009), but – according to our knowledge – not in the context of music festivals in general. Loyalty has been a popular research subject in festival studies, and it has been mainly handled as a result of positive experience or satisfaction (Manthiou *et al.*, 2014), not because of festival career development. Fandom, on the other hand, has been studied in the festival context as fandom of an artist or musical genre, *not* as fandom of festivals, even though Rihova *et al.* (2015) suggest that “event attendees experience a sense of kinship and belonging that goes well beyond the scope of the event, and can propel them on an ‘event career’” (p. 79).

Not all the festivalgoers become frequent attendees. Reasons for this can be found both in PCM theorization and event travel careers and they are related to personal constraints. For instance, competing priorities defined by Lamont *et al.* (2012) regarding event travel career influence behavior. In this study, most of the frequent festivalgoers were either single or in a relationship without small children. Thus, familial responsibilities were minimal for them. In addition, Pauli is a good example of other competing priorities. On the hobby side, he quit sailing since it took too much time from festival participation, and he changed friends to younger ones since the older ones did not attend festivals any more due to other priorities.

Additionally, frequent festivalgoers' personal and psychological connection to music and festivals was on the level of attachment or allegiance (Funk and James, 2001), urging them in particular to commit to live music events and festivals.

Our findings show that frequent music festival attendance is festival fandom and career development that are heavily intertwined in motives and practices, as summarized in Figure 1. There is an interesting implication chain: skills and knowledge development → appropriate behavior → social practices → modified motives → frequent festival attendance. As skills and knowledge accumulate, the awareness of appropriate behavior increases. This means that frequent attendees understand how important it is for the overall festival experience that they contribute to the festival atmosphere. This is done mainly by social practices that are related to bonding, bridging, sense of community and sense of belonging. These are, on the other hand, core constituents of social sustainability as defined by Quinn and Wilks (2016) and Rihova *et al.* (2015) (see also Kinnunen *et al.*, 2020). The social sustainability aspect is further attested by modified motives that are directed towards personal well-being. Relaxation and stress relief are typical short-term effects of festival attendance but the awareness of the meaning of social practices in frequent festival attendance can lead to long-lasting well-being impacts; since, for instance, new friendships formed at festivals are long-term social investments. As the motives for attendance are changing, the commitment and loyalty towards festivals increase, leading to frequent festival attendance.

The most important theoretical contribution is that according to our findings in frequent festival attendance, both festival career development and festival fandom are most clearly present in motivation development and social dimensions. In numerous event motivation studies (see review by Li and Petrick, 2006), interests towards program, artists and atmosphere have been identified, but not the phenomenon of festival fandom *per se*. In respect to social aspects, festival *communitas* and social dimensions of festival attendance are recognised (Quinn and Wilks, 2016), but in the case of festival fans, the sense of belonging extends beyond the festival timeframe and it is currently undervalued. Furthermore, it was proven that the PCM introduced by Funk and James (2001) does not necessarily apply only to sports fandom, but it has useful conceptualizations for festival fandom as well.

From the praxis point of view, the study indicates that frequent festivalgoers as loyal festival fans have the potential to contribute to various phases of festival production since they are considered as professionals in festival attendance. Using several examples, our study demonstrates the importance of social dimensions in music festival attendance, revealing the role of the frequent festivalgoers as important and potential actors in the production processes of festivals and the development activities in the networked production contexts.

The findings indicate frequent festivalgoers' internal and external role in festival productions. Firstly, in line with the main theoretical contribution of the study, by being sociable, friendly and skilled attendees, frequent festivalgoers might be positioned as members of the festival *communitas* who create a festival experience and atmosphere by participating in collective actions and shared enjoyment. Secondly, before and after the festival, frequent festivalgoers as festival fans could be engaged in the production as messengers who can take a role as influencers by sharing the festival's message and vision of consuming "the festival experience" for a wider audience and newcomers (Luonila *et al.*, 2016, p. 477; see also Suomi *et al.*, 2020).

Strategically, through the social practices mentioned during, before, and after the festival, frequent festivalgoers have the potential to be actors in the production networks who mobilise the co-creation of a sense of community (Rihova *et al.*, 2018) or festival brand (Suomi *et al.*, 2020). According to our findings, frequent festivalgoers are aware of the importance of their practices for festivals. Since they are aware of their role in the co-creation of the festival

atmosphere during the event and beyond, they should be considered as crucial stakeholders in the production networks of festivals and posited as co-producers in these networks. This consideration implies that organisers could benefit from frequent festivalgoers' expertise and willingness to participate in the festival's development practices both in marketing and management. This action might justify the festival's existence by empowered legitimacy through frequent festivalgoers' subjective contribution to the production (see Luonila *et al.*, 2019), and foster attendance motivation among new festival audiences.

The main limitation of the study was the voluntary response sample used for the survey. Bias was caused by the distribution of the web survey via social media. All the participating festivals used Facebook for the survey publicity and some of them distributed the survey link in Instagram as well. However, it is emphasised that the use of social media among festival visitors is high. There were around 462,000 followers of the participating festivals in Facebook, whereas the total number of visits to these festivals was 564,000 [1] in 2018. The other survey sample bias was towards female respondents since women tend to answer more eagerly research surveys (Smith, 2008).

The number of interviews was quite low. However, interviewees represented different types of frequent festival visitors: there was a volunteer worker (Tiina), music industry worker (Seppo), fans of artists (Sofia, Nina, Maria) and of a certain musical genre (Anna, Sofia), camping enthusiasts (Sofia, Pekka) and participants who set and measured their targets (Pauli, Sofia).

Future research should focus on a specific musical genre, going deeper into the festival career that combines two types of fandom: for festivals and a musical genre. A suitable candidate for this is metal music, since it is exceptionally popular in Finland, metal fans are very loyal festival attendees (Kinnunen *et al.*, 2019a), and there are several festivals that concentrate on metal music.

## Note

1. The number of visits is not equivalent to the number of visitors. For instance, the three-day Ruisrock festival had 105,000 visits in 2018. However, there were approximately 50,000 individuals participating in the festival since the same people attended the festival for several days.

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