Landscapes and Cyberscapes of the Commons: Scottish Festivals in the Pandemic and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how Scottish festivals chose to implement commoning practices in both digital and hybrid spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilising a deductive thematic analysis approach, the authors draw out emergent themes from a series of interviews with festivals conducted between October 2020 and September 2021 to develop a set of aspects or commonalities between commoning practices for digital and hybrid festivals. The authors examine how some of these commoning practices are directly linked to traditional understandings of the cultural commons, such as the sharing of physical and knowledge resources with other organizations or shared forms of governance. While describing festivals as "commons" in themselves would be reductive and conceptually contentious, this paper argues not only that festivals can include commoning practices, but that these are inherently relevant to their identity and audiences that, even in times of extreme operational restrictions, these remain central to their activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Festivals, throughout history, have served as vital milestones marking the passage of time for different peoples and cultures. The significance of festivals within societies has become an important area for research across many different disciplines, from philosophy to the social sciences. According to Mair (2018), festivals are difficult to define due to their variety of characteristics; as she notes, the study of festivals is a rich research area that encompasses a wide range of disciplinary approaches. In particular, festival research has in the last couple of decades begun to focus on the complex and often conflicting interrelationship between people, place and culture (Sassatelli 2011; Finkel and Platt 2020; Chiya, 2024a; Chiya, 2024b).

This complexity is also apparent in the multitude of definitions, typologies and value systems that have emerged through festival research (Cudny, 2014). Indeed, the term is highly 'slippery' and can be used to describe very different and context-dependent events from carnivals to village fetes. However, there are dominant discursive trends within festival research which reveal the tensions between economic and socio-cultural value(s). On the one hand, there is a tendency to situate festivals within a globalized tourist and experience economy, and on the other, researchers are increasingly focusing on belonging and identity in relation to the communities that hold festivals (Naupa, 2025). The globalisation of festivals has been made more evident by the rise of digital festivals, which will be the focus of our article. The digitisation of festivals has been characterised by concerns about "the potential for over-commercialisation and the technical limitations of digital experiences" and the need to "to combat digital exclusion and foster stronger community engagement" (Chen and Yu, 2025, p.12).

These key debates have engaged with notions of commodification of festivals and the dislocation of seasonally bound iterations of festivals within neoliberal capitalist structures (Taylor and Bennett 2014). Davies argues that festivals are "part of the fabric of global society", but also "the epitome of a capitalist society" (2021, p.185). On the one hand, they have a great cultural and social significance all over the world; on the other hand, they are a massive industry where bigger players have a disproportionate advantage over grassroots and small companies, which are much more precarious (Davies, idem). Most of the festivals chosen as case studies for this article fall into the latter category; the following section will introduce the changes that were caused in their activities by the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

This article was conceived as a response to a UK-wide research initiative led by the Centre for Cultural Value (CCV), which examined the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic for the cultural sector (Walmsley et al., 2022). A dedicated strand of this project investigated the ways in which Scottish festivals adapted to restrictions on mobility and social distancing. The empirical component comprised semi-structured interviews with directors and managers from thirteen festivals. While these interviews surfaced themes pertaining to practices of commoning, such issues extended beyond the original remit of the study.

To ensure transparency, we articulate our positionality and the trajectory of this research. Both authors have maintained a close association with CCV since its inception. The first author served as lead researcher for the Scottish festival strand and undertook all interviews. Subsequently, the first author collaborated with the second author, whose expertise in commons theory informed the deductive thematic analysis from the dataset.

The emergence of data on commoning experiences in these festivals provided an opportunity to explore how digital platforms allowed for the creation and reproduction of relational practices of cultural co-production and social engagement during a time in which people could not interact with one another in physical proximity. Furthermore, it gave us the opportunity to discuss the experience of festivals beyond consumerism and commodification, and to draw theoretical links between commons and festivals.

The literature on festivals and their interrelationship with the commons remains in its infancy. This literature tends to focus on specific festivals and their contexts, such as a study of Burning Man in Nevada by John F. Sherry et al. (2007), or in the case of large-scale architectural biennials in China (Robinson, 2023). Other notable contributions include the analysis of the co-production of rural festivals (Dalla Torre et al., 2015) and the role of festivals as both resistance to and force of privatisation (Dahlin and Fredriksson, 2017; Zorzin, 2019). Although these studies pose questions of sustainability or reproducibility of the commons, they focus on the coproduction and temporality of participatory space, which are more akin to the commons as a spectacle that are constantly at risk of being re-appropriated over time into capitalist modes of production. However, an in-depth ethnographic study into festive gatherings in Scotland carried out by Sophia Woodman and Andreas Zaunseder (2022) began to question how different forms, practices and structures of festivals encouraged different commoning practices. Our article moves beyond this assessment by exploring liminality within the broader commons discourse and its interrelationship with digital and hybrid practices.

In this article, we address these shifts and particularly how the adoption of digital and hybrid technology and spaces interrelate with emerging commoning practices, highlighting the organisations' ability to adapt to

unprecedented times. This article, therefore, examines the following research questions: how did the COVID-19 pandemic shape opportunities for commoning in Scottish festivals? How did digital festival spaces enable the reproduction of forms of commoning?

The article is structured as follows: first, it will introduce the context of festivals during the COVID-19 lockdown. It will then move onto a discussion of the theoretical links between commoning, festivals, and their temporal and liminoid dimension. We subsequently introduce the methodology employed in this research, and a series of aspects and commonalities related to commoning practices in digital and hybrid festivals. These aspects serve as a structure for the presentation of our findings, which illustrate how Scottish festivals were able to provide opportunities for commoning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, our conclusions offer some reflections on the role of digital platforms for festival organisations.

FESTIVALS IN LOCKDOWN

The unprecedented conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic led the festivals that we analyse in this paper to think about their relationship with their communities in a new way, and to develop alternative ways to foster a sense of sociality in a time of social distancing. As reported by the CCV (2022), at the beginning of the pandemic, they were in a state of deep crisis, as their limited size and resources enhanced the sense of insecurity related to the lockdown. However, many of them were able to quickly adapt and implement online solutions, as many other festivals around the world (Shipman and Vogel, 2024). While digital tools had long been a way to enhance festival experience before the pandemic (Morey et al., 2016), this was a steep learning curve.

Our analysis of commoning practices in online and hybrid festivals can be situated within the realm of the digital commons (Pélissier, 2021). Digital commons provide opportunities to share information in a collaborative way, creating knowledge commons that are fostered and maintained by online communities (Dulong de Rosnay and Stalder, 2020). However, as exemplified by the Creative Commons licence, they also provide a framework for online collaboration and creative engagement (Lessig, 2004). The restraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led to a wide range of experimentations in online arts offerings (Bradbury et al., 2021); this included the use of digital platforms to offer opportunities for cultural participation and creative commoning (Cirillo and Locorotondo, 2021; Palmieri et al., 2021). More specifically, this article analyses how the shift to a digital delivery enabled either the preservation of existing or the creation of new "opportunities for commoning",

moments of relational practices that involved exchanging, sharing and co-creating different elements of festivals. This serves a twofold purpose: first, it allows us to analyse how organisations were able to adapt and change in a time of crisis to deliver important social and cultural values. Furthermore, from a theoretical standpoint, this provides an opportunity to contextualise festivals in the study of the commons, providing avenues for future research.

FESTIVALS, THE COMMONS AND TIME

In this section we analyse how festivals are related to different theoretical perspectives on commons and commoning, especially for what concerns their temporal dimension. First, we analyse the relationship between commoning and festivals in the context of the contemporary festival industry. We then turn to the notion of "temporal commons" (Bluedorn and Waller, 2006) to explore the liminoid (Turner, 1974) nature of festivals. Lastly, we analyse commoning practices in the context of liminality (Stavrides, 2016), focussing on their temporal dimension.

In this paper, we argue that describing festivals indiscriminately as "commons" in themselves would be reductive and conceptually contentious. Literature on the origins of festivals emphasises that, as celebrations of a community, they are rooted in practices of sharing of resources and collaboration (Cudny, 2014; Bowdin et al., 2023), which makes them a form of "liminal" commons (Varvarousis, 2022), as will be further analysed below. Moreover, recent co-production initiatives related to the organisation of festivals have adopted a commons-oriented approach (Dalla Torre et al., 2025). However, as stated earlier in this introduction, festivals have been deeply shaped by capitalist and neoliberal processes that have fundamentally affected their organizational structure and the experience they provide.

Harvey (1989, in Waitt, 2008) argues that festivals can serve as a tool to oppress the disadvantaged population, providing a distraction from urban problems and serving as a mechanism to reassert the authority of those in power. Furthermore, the growth of the festival industry has increasingly placed an emphasis on the marketisation of festivals. Flinn and Frew, in their analysis of Glastonbury Festival, describe how festivals can be both "cathedrals of consumption" and a "managerial machine of systematic control and compartmentalisation" (2013, p.247): rather than facilitating communality and festivity, they segregate attendees through pricing mechanisms, creating a divide between those who can afford a luxury festival experience and those who cannot. Therefore, rather than a community effort and celebration, the organisation of festivals can

often be a professional endeavour that can be mobilised both by the state and by the market to serve agendas that run counter to the relationality of the commons.

In this context, when analysing the relationship between the commons and festivals, Robinson argues: "Answering cynically, it might have to be confessed that festivals probably offer little more than a spectacle of the commons, a transient if not fraudulent experience of collective urbanity, and certainly nothing very durable." (Robinson 2023, p.94). Indeed, if analysed following Ostrom's theoretical framework (1990), most festivals cannot be categorised as a commons. Ostrom (1990) analyses the management of common-pool resources by groups of "appropriators" who both benefit and contribute to the maintenance of these resources; this is done through the design and implementation of a shared set of self-imposed rules.

The management of the commons is based on collective action and collaboration, as opposed to market dynamics and state laws. Some festivals are indeed managed as a commons, with whole communities coming together to co-create an experience that is not regulated by economic rationales, nor by state laws. However, in the context of the festival industry, festivals, instead, rely on a hierarchical organisational structure that marks a clear divide between those who take part in the governance of the festival and those who instead only experience the festivals as attendees. The "rules" of festivals (programme, pricing, code of conduct, etc.) are designed and enforced by organisers, while attendees, for the most part, experience the festival as consumers, rather than co-producers or commoners.

However, despite the limitations imposed by the predominance of market-oriented and capitalist rationales in the festival industry, the liminoid dimension of festivals, which will be analysed below, makes them ideal grounds for modes of social interaction that can engender processes of collective co-creation. These processes run counter to individualistic and consumeristic understandings of the festival experience and have the potential to disrupt these narratives by offering sites to imagine alternative realities. Therefore, in this paper, we explore how festivals provide opportunities for what Linebaugh has defined as "commoning", that is, the relational process of construction of the commons (Linebaugh, 2009). This term has also been described as the process "of joint action, of creating things together, of cooperating to meet shared goals" (Bollier and Helfrich, 2015, n.p.), thus providing a comprehensive approach to the analysis of relational, co-creational processes, including those that happen outside of institutions that can be categorised as commons according to traditional Ostromian (1990) frameworks. We believe that this approach provides a useful methodological

lens for the analysis of festivals: while, from an institutional standpoint, the festivals we analyse in our paper cannot be categorised as commons from an institutional perspective, relational processes of joint action are essential to the creation of the festival experience, as it will be analysed further below.

To get a deeper understanding of festivals, their social role and commoning, in this section, we also analyse their role as an essential part of the temporal commons (Bluedorn and Waller, 2006). Allen C. Bluedorn and Mary J. Wallers state that: "(t)he shared conceptualization of time and the set of resultant values, beliefs, and behaviours regarding time, as created and applied by members of a culture-carrying collectivity, constitute a temporal common" (Bluedorn and Waller 2006, p.357). Following this definition, to talk about the temporal commons means to discuss the relationship between culture and time, from the development of different calendars in various parts of the world to the use of time in different cultures (Bluedorn and Waller 2006). The relevance of festivals and events for the conceptualization of time in the cultural context has been highlighted by Bowdin et al., who describe them as "the benchmarks of our lives" (Bowdin et al. 2011, p. 4), marking the passing of seasons and special occasions during the year. For this reason, we can see them as an essential part of the temporal commons and of the way in which we understand, give meaning to and celebrate time.

Another way to conceptualize the relationship between festivals, time and communities is connected to their liminoid nature. Liminal and liminoid are two terms coined by Victor Turner (1974) to identify experiences that mark change, or a temporary suspension of one's own condition or status. Turner uses the term "liminal" to describe those experiences that mark a passage from one social status to another in the context of communities; an example of this is the rites of passage, which are collectively celebrated and mark a specific time in the life of a community member. These ritual phenomena are considered essential to the reproduction of society in its status quo. The term "liminoid", instead, refers to phenomena that exist outside of the realms of economics and politics: they instead belong to the dimension of leisure, and are characterised by their temporary nature. According to Turner (1974), the liminoid refers to "play", or those activities that are not related to either economic production or the reproduction of the social order.

Festivals, therefore, can be categorised as liminoid phenomena; their existence outside of the productive rationale of everyday life allows people to experience freedom from their usual constraints, "freedom to play – with ideas, with fantasies, with words [...], and with social

relationships" (Turner, 1974, p.68). Peter Berger (1969, in Bluedorn, 2002) states that the aim of play is a kind of joy that takes place during play, not at the end (Bluedorn, 2002). Thus, we can see the liminoid as a dimension that allows people to experience positive feelings that are not connected to a reward or to instrumental goals, nor to immediate consumption, but rather to the temporary enjoyment of an activity. The dimension of play, according to Turner, allows for imagination, creativity and, potentially, change; indeed, while liminal phenomena are mostly in service of the reproduction of the socioeconomic structure of society, the liminoid holds the power for critique and subversion. This position is reinforced by Caudwell and Rinehart:

> The liminoidal is not always ritualistic, like the liminal, but offers opportunities for critical engagement, subversion of normative ways of being, and the trying out of non-dominant values and systems within public, albeit less rigid and proscriptive, spaces (Caudwell and Rinehart 2014, p. 1, in Pielichaty 2015, p.236).

The liminoid nature of festivals has extensively been discussed in academic literature (Pielichaty, 2015; Luckman, 2016), although very often using the terms "liminal" and "liminoid" interchangeably; this is because, as expressed by Luckman (2016), some authors find the connection between the first and tribal/rural society, and between the latter and industrial ones (Turner, 1974) obsolete. However, for the purpose of this paper, we employ the original terminology used by Turner (1974), as we believe it provides a clearer and more nuanced theoretical context for our analysis. The liminoidal nature of festivals has also been referred to as "authorized transgression", a context in which "particular activities or forms of behaviour that challenge social hegemony are indulged in" (Sharpley and Stone 2014, p.356). While this function can be seen as a temporary relief from oppressive social structures that serve the function of reinforcing the status quo, it also represents a space to imagine new social imaginaries, as discussed in Sharpley and Stone's analysis of Pride festivals (2014).

The liminoid in festivals is reinforced by a clear spatial dimension that often requires travel (Luckman, 2016) and allows for the creation of spontaneous and non-hierarchical forms of socialization (Currie, 2018) and "creative resistance" to hegemonic modes of production and consumption across physical and digital spaces (Duignan et al., 2021). Stavros Stavrides' analysis of common space identifies liminality as one of its key characteristics. He defines common spaces as thresholds that hold the potential "for a possible solidarity between different people allowed to regain control over their lives" (Stavrides, 2016, p.240). Furthermore, he argues that:

> It seems that common space may be captured in representations of a society beyond capitalism and domination that stem from a threshold-like imagination. In between the present and the future, in between absolute outside and a recognizable inside, representations of common space are representations of liminal experiences and liminal practices (idem, p.241).

Following Stavrides' argument, we argue that the commons are a liminoidal space that inherently offers a critique of the capitalist status quo; they exist at the threshold of current societal practices, offering a space for new social, political and economic imaginations and prefigurative politics. Due to their liminoid nature, their longevity is not necessarily a marker of their success, as stated by Varvarousis (2022); instead, in some instances, their temporary nature is what allows for a sense of freedom to experiment and play, unbound by expectations of sustainability. However, while Stavrides' (2016) work focuses on the spatial analysis of the commons, this paper will instead explore their temporal dimension, with a focus on temporary practices of commoning that appear in festivals. Some of these moments of commoning that are co-created in festivals have managed to survive the move to the digital dimension imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In summary, this article argues that festivals are part of the "temporal commons" (Bluedorn and Waller, 2006) of a community; more specifically, they are a liminoid space (Turner, 1974), a space for temporary subversion of the existing status quo and for the prefiguration of new social and economic imaginaries. This is liminoid nature is reinforced by how festivals are able to provide opportunities for commoning, which is a relational process of co-creation (Linebaugh, 2009; Bollier and Helfrich, 2015). Stavrides (2016), in his analysis of commons in the urban environment, states that they constitute a space where people can engage in liminal activities; our analysis moves beyond the spatial element, arguing that the liminoid power of commoning is to be found in its temporal dimension. We explore this theory in our analysis of digital festivals, which, unlike their in-person counterparts, do not offer participants a shared physical space. However, they still provide a time for commoning, for social interaction and collective co-creation and sharing of the festival experience.

METHODOLOGY

In this article, we draw upon six semi-structured interviews with representatives from five festivals in Scotland during the pandemic. These interviews were carried out between

October 2020 and September 2021, during which time different restrictions on movement were in place and, as a result, were undertaken virtually. The interviewees will not be named for ethical reasons, but they have given their consent for their respective festivals to be named, as this is pertinent to the analysis. In this article, we also draw upon secondary data to support our findings. Each of the six interviewees was either a programme director, lead producer or key organisers and as such, our findings are based on their perspectives with a focus on what the festivals were aiming to achieve rather than from the perspectives of different stakeholders within each festival.

The interviews were carried out as part of a UKRI-funded national research project that focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the cultural sector in the UK (Walmsley et al. 2022). The interviewees were chosen primarily for their extensive experience in festival management and situated knowledge within each festival context. In many cases, they also represented the only permanent members of staff associated with each festival. This was due to factors such as the size of core teams, a culture of freelance working, and the effects of COVID-19-related employment schemes. During the project, commoning practices emerged as a latent research theme but remained largely out of scope of the original project. This was due to the original project's focus on networks, economic impact, labour force and potential policy recommendations. This article was conceived as a method of addressing this issue and moving towards a further understanding of commoning practices within festival research.

The following deductive thematic analysis was utilised to develop a set of key aspects and commonalities for digital and hybrid festivals that we developed by synthesising existing commons literature with sub-themes that emerged from the interview data. The initial themes, coded from the literature, included: funding, participation, festivalisation, urban regeneration, benefits of festivals and place-branding. Sub-themes were then extrapolated from the interview data and synthesised with the broader commons literature as follows: culture as commons, dimensions of care, 'comedy of the commons', co-production of space through participation, relationships with place, management and activities, governance and resources.

These sub-themes then formed the overall set of aspects and commonalities. This process was iterative and involved a cycle of coding, analysing and construction until we had saturated theoretical judgments from the interview data. This approach to deductive thematic analysis follows processes that are established in the wider social sciences as outlined by Braun and Clark (2013). We then began to group these themes further to develop a theoretical set of commoning aspects for festivals. The development of these commonalities was vital as there remains a significant lacuna in the understanding of different forms of commoning practices that emerge within digital and hybrid festivals. The following section outlines the key aspects and commonalities and offers a contextualisation of the commons literature that has informed our theoretical approach.

It is important to foreground the festivals in this study before we begin the theoretical and analytical sections of this paper. The festivals we selected are Africa in Motion (AiM), Big Burns Supper, Bute Festival, Paisley Book Festival and Orkney Folk Festival. This sample was selected from the overall study because these festivals presented differing commoning practices which provide an opportunity for study. The following table describes each festival and provides its location.

NAME	DESCRIPTION	LOCATION
Africa in Motion (AiM)	Is an annual film festival based in Edinburgh but has also held events in Bristol, Glasgow and Cardiff amongst other cities. The main aim of AiM is to provide a platform for audiences to experience African productions and films.	Edinburgh
Big Burns Supper	Is one the largest community-led platforms in the south of Scotland. They programme throughout the year which is different to many other festivals in the sense that they have a cooperative organisation which is less time-bound.	Dumfries and Galloway
Bute Festival	Is a family and community centred festival held annually on the Isle of Bute during July. Bute is a music festival which brings together local and international artists.	Isle of Bute (Firth of Clyde)
Paisley Book Festival	The festival was inspired by the Paisley Radicals, part of a movement that was a reaction to war in France in 1820. This radicalism is intertwined with Paisley's identity and is a thread taken on by the book festival. Due to COVID-19 the second iteration of the festival was entirely delivered online.	Paisley, Renfrewshire
Orkney Folk Festival	Orkney Folk Music festival brings together performers, folk musicians and artists to the town of Stromness. Although there are several other festivals that run across the summer months, the main folk festival is held in May.	Orkney Islands

Festival Description Table.

ASPECTS AND COMMONALITIES: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COMMONING FOR DIGITAL AND HYBRID FESTIVALS

Following a deductive thematic analysis, the data collected in interviews with organisers and directors of Scottish Festivals were first analysed thematically: this first round of analysis brought to light a consistent theme of commoning, that is, sharing, doing things together and relationality that led the researchers to further investigate this aspect of the work of festivals during the pandemic. This deductive thematic analysis was further refined into a series of sub-themes that were then analysed with the support of an interdisciplinary range of academic literature on the commons and commoning. Some of these are related to the cultural practices embedded in festival-going, some others are instead related to organizational structures and activities, thus revealing a constellation of commoning opportunities.

The first commoning dimension that was identified was that the festivals' temporal dimension was perceived as an important aspect of the interviewees' experience, thus highlighting their relationship with the **temporal commons** (Bluedorn and Waller, 2006). Next, we found that the shared management of resources, in the common's literature, normally focuses on physical assets (Ostrom, 1990) and knowledge (Hess and Ostrom, 2007). However, rather than focusing on the mechanisms related to these processes, we instead explore the **commoning processes related to the shared management of resources**, to be understood as the relational practices that lead not only to sharing resources, but also care, relationships and communities; this took the form of exchange between different festivals and organizations, and crowdfunding.

Time emerged again in how, in accordance with the discussion on the concept of "liminoid" presented in the previous section, festivals were seen as an opportunity to see the success of the **'comedy of the commons'** (Sherry and Kozinets, 2007), to be understood as the reappropriation of human aspects that are unproductive and, as such, condemned by capitalism, such as play and imagination. In this context, an important aspect of the value of festivals comes from the **co-production of the experience through participation,** pushing the limits of spectatorship (Sherry and Kozinets, 2007). The active role of participants in shaping cultural experiences has been analysed as a form of commoning, both in terms of aesthetics (Ranciere, 2014) and space (Sabatini, 2022). Volunteer work was another form of shared management of festivals: indeed, the **volunteer dimension of the commons** is what, as analysed by Ruiz Cayuela (2021),

positions the commons outside of dominating systems of production and reproduction and, thus, holds potential to offer social imaginaries beyond capitalism. It must be noted, however, that understanding commoning only as volunteer work can reproduce the same inequalities (Bianchi, 2018) and exploitative labour practices that exist in capitalist modes of cultural production. Lastly, the theme of community also emerged in discussions of how, during the COVID-19 pandemic, festivals were an important dimension of **care, relationality and reciprocity**, which are characteristics that are essential to the process of commoning (Berlant, 2016; Lijster and De Tullio, 2021). In the context of the pandemic, festivals provided a space to process events and even grieve global tragedies. We note that shared governance, one of the most important aspects of commoning, is not featured here; this is because only one of the case studies engages with this kind of practice. Further research with a wider range of case studies is required to investigate this issue.

These emerging themes have allowed us to identify a range of commoning opportunities and their value in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section provides an analysis of these opportunities, with a focus on their liminoidal characteristics, and on the challenges related to re-imagining festival experiences and commoning practices in the digital dimension.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following thematic analysis draws on each of the subthemes highlighted above.

TEMPORAL COMMONS

The conceptualisation of commoning practices as temporal within festival discourse has led to a questioning of how and why festivals approached the challenges they faced during the pandemic. A significant finding within our study is that the temporal commons feed into each of the other sub-themes, thus providing a node or pivot point that will be addressed in each of the sub-theme sections. For example, we found that shared management of resources was contingent on the temporal development of relationships that formed between different festivals during the pandemic. Similarly, in the 'comedy of the commons', the pandemic offered an opportunity for some festivals to dedicate time and human resources to 'unproductive' play and experimentation that was previously ill-afforded in pre-pandemic conditions due to the temporal nature of funding and delivery demands.

This temporality of commoning became particularly apparent in relation to the co-production of the experience through participation in those festivals which broadcasted or streamed their events live. For example, in Orkney, an interviewee noted that: "We heard stories of people getting dressed up at home and watching it […] texting their friends and family". Here, the act of 'dressing up' and communicating with other festivalgoers temporarily suspends the social order within these specific home contexts. Instead, a shared communal experiential moment emerged that was more than an act of cultural consumption and production because the viewers were not passive but became active participants with others. Of course, some theorists argue this form of experience is now appropriated into the economy and is itself a form of commodified consumption (Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013). Although this argument is valid in terms of a generalised position, within this specific context, the purpose behind the decision to 'dress up' was about a spontaneous communicative social act rather than a pre-determined function of the festival's design. This relative spontaneity is indicative of improvisation, which, according to Currie, foregrounds a fundamental characteristic of all festivals: the creative remembering, recreation, and realization of traditions to meet the present challenges of future contingencies (Currie 2018, p. 310).

It is this interplay between the creative remembering and recreation of past Orkney festivals that played out in this spontaneous action by local and regional festivalgoers, which temporarily enters a liminoidal space of commoning between those involved. This action also suggests that the predication of being present in the same physical space may not be as important as has been stated in festival discourse. Indeed, there is an argument here which suggests live broadcast events can create a different form of spatial-temporal dimension that remains relational but does not require close physical proximity, as discussed in the studies conducted by Zhou (2023) and Velt et al. (2015). In essence, this opened a temporal threshold to imagine new ways of being with each other in an alternative festival context. This seems to further contextualize festivals in the domain of the "temporal commons" (Bluedorn and Waller, 2006), where people create meaning regarding time – even when individual experiences take place in different spaces.

Big Burns Supper developed a live broadcast on Burns Night to mark their annual gathering, which would usually take place in Dumfries over several days. However, the festival was suspended due to COVID-19, and instead they re-focused on activities throughout the year, which became less time-bound to a specific season. Unlike many other festivals, Big Burns Supper had already begun to develop events throughout the year (including utilising digital technologies) prior to 2020, and thus the social cooperative that runs the festival had fostered both capacity building and infrastructural changes that could be adaptable to social distancing measures. However, similarly to the Orkney folk festival, Big Burns Supper decided to mark the significance of their winter festival through an online broadcast event; this was both a socio-cultural and symbolic decision.

The event was not simply a 'placeholder' but became symbolic in its social re-imagining of what Burns night could be for all those celebrating it. This was articulated by one of the interviewees as:

> our sense of place has really been strong throughout
> […] I suppose in our digital stuff we entered that
> with a view to show the world what our place was
> and who we are […] it has to be more than the visitor
> economy. It must be about social value.

The interviewee went on to suggest that the online broadcast had reached people around the world with more than 300,000 viewers. The festival would typically see 3000 festivalgoers, partly because people were in lockdown, but also because it was a chance to share in a live experience with a distinct socio-cultural identity, which is an important factor in how places are understood and experienced. The festival achieved this thanks to a carefully curated programme which featured a combination of local, national, and international artists, footage of the locality and a comedic host; this evoked a sense that all those participating were together in one place.

What is also in play here is a history of Burns Night as an important national celebration within the collective consciousness of Scottish people. By engaging with this history, Big Burns Supper was able to activate a temporal threshold between the past, present and future. This is described by Stavrides as "thresholds create the conditions of entrance and exit, prolong, manipulate and give meaning to an act of passage" (Stavrides 2016, p.5). In effect, the festival was engaging in a dialogue with a complex knot of historical, social, and cultural relationships that conceptually extends far beyond a physical locality, and yet, remains tangible in the time-bound broadcast.

These differences in duration and participation challenged the notion that physical localities and seasonal patterns must remain fixed for festivals to happen. This is indicative of a re-thinking in organisational structure and purpose with festivals that are moving towards a programme of work. However, we do not imply here that in all cases elements such as season or physical localities are not important, yet this research is indicative of the potentiality of temporal commoning practices by utilising

different methods and methodological approaches to festival management and design.

COMMONING AND RESOURCES

One of the dimensions of the commons that we identified in the interviews relates to the sharing and collaboration of resources, knowledges, and practices in the commons' literature. This was exemplified across the interviews as a "Scotland system" of collaboration and networking in festival contexts. Interviewees suggested that this 'system' evolved significantly due to the pandemic, but it had its roots in informal networks that are embedded within the communities which constitute the festivals that have developed over decades. An interviewee from the Paisley Book festival described this system as "there has been a book festival network developed in Scotland [...] we are sort of willing to help and support each other". This was echoed by another interviewee from Big Burns Supper who stated that they were working with many different arts organisations and fellow festivals to investigate and a re-alignment both politically, economically, and socio-culturally by "aggregated supply of resource [...] reordering the south of Scotland [...] let's look at where we can share resource like insurance policies across small third sector organisations". What has emerged is a specific socio-cultural and geographical dimension to these festival networks within Scotland. This is because they are not completely specific to an art form, but also, they are not always regionally fixed and instead appear to have developed around resources and skills sharing.

Sharing resources, in the field of the study of the commons, has mainly been analysed following Ostrom's theory of common pool resources, which explains how "self-organised and de-centralised collective action" can developed around the sharing of resources, support and knowledge (Ostrom 1990). While this partly aligns with our findings, in the context of this paper we do not focus on the specific resources being shared and the mechanisms used for this purpose. Instead, our research highlights the temporality of this process, illustrating how the pandemic accelerated and expanded the formation of networks beyond institutional ones. The process of commoning, therefore, encompassed relationships and connections, not only information and knowledge resources. Importantly, these self-organised collaborative actions were not predicated entirely on economic gain but on a broad spectrum of values and shared problem-solving. This was articulated by an interviewee in terms of the rapid development of digital technologies for streaming and broadcasts, which festivals engaged with:

Celtic Connections were very generous with sharing things [...] they shared what we they had done and then we did the same [...] the rate of digital technology is so rapid, some of it didn't exist a year ago.

The same interviewee mentioned that there were various "loose networks" which had formed during the pandemic across Scotland, but also more broadly in the UK context. Indeed, this was a key finding in the Centre for Cultural Value's research on the impacts of the pandemic on the cultural sector (Gilmore, O'Brien and Walmsley, 2024). However, what is notable is that many of the festivals stated that they learned from each other and interrelated adjacent supply sector organisations during the pandemic. This occurred through knowledge exchange and the development of peer-led collaboration, which can be understood as forms of commoning. Notably, these networks and relationships accelerated during the pandemic, but as several interviewees pointed out, they were not all formed because of it: several groups have developed over much longer time periods, highlighting the importance of considering the temporal commons.

The emergence of this often-informal sharing of knowledge and resources correlates with our argument that commoning practices developed in non-institutional spaces, in this case, through relationships between festivals. This key finding further addresses our research question, suggesting that the sharing of knowledge, skills and understandings of digital technologies between festivals aided the rapid adaptation to digital design and delivery of festival offers.

'COMEDY OF THE COMMONS'

An important aspect of commoning practices identified by the interviewees was aspects of play and transgression that resonate with what Sherry and Kozinets (2007) have defined as the "comedy of the commons", a liminoidal, collective subversion of capitalist norms that celebrates relational aspects of the human experience that can be considered "unproductive". During the COVID-19 pandemic, the general well-being of the UK population was affected negatively (Kwong et al., 2020). The situation of forced isolation faced by many meant that opportunities for spontaneous social engagement were fewer; furthermore, opportunities for "transgressing" social boundaries and norms not only diminished but were associated with practical, physical risks for oneself and others. Lastly, many people were temporarily forced out of the workplace during the pandemic (Allas et al., 2020), forcing them to be

in a state of "unproductivity". It is in this context that it is necessary to analyse the value of festivals as safe spaces for play, transgression and time that is not devoted to productivity (Turner, 1974), and how these aspects were adapted to fit the needs of pandemic audiences.

The theme of play and transgression was also central to the Drag School organised by Big Burns Supper. This initiative, aimed at young people, was an in-person series of training sessions held in Dumfries in the summer of 2021, when restrictions around in-person gatherings started being lifted. Campana et al. (2022) state that drag, as an art form, is often perceived as an act of transgression of gender boundaries they further argue that drag queen culture includes other acts of transgression, namely "realness", to be understood as the "transgression of social categories through the creation of a parallel social world where stigmatized individuals can experience a different life" (idem, p.1964) and defiant comedy. In the context of a summer school aimed at young people, these transgressions are explored in a safe context, where we can still see it as a form of "authorized transgression", a temporary subversion of the status quo. Furthermore, exploring one's gender expression and performance abilities through the creation of a drag persona can be seen as an act of play – an idle and joyful experimentation with notions of identity and self-presentation.

The theme of transgression assumed a very important role in the work of AiM in relation to global audiences. The festival, which was normally attended by Scottish audiences, thanks to its online delivery, became open to people all over the world; this meant that, for the first time, the organizers had to concern themselves with matters of international distribution and censorship. As stated by the organizers, "the minute we move online, suddenly we have all these problems", because "the people who have worldwide rights might not have UK rights". Showing certain films could have been considered a crime in another country: "a film we showed a few years ago, Rafiki, is now banned in Kenya [...] and you become embroiled in these debates". AiM, therefore, became a place for potential subversion of censorship and norms for a global audience, enhancing potential risks for participants and organizers, but also its power as an agent of temporary transgression.

As analysed here, the "comedy of the commons" was not a process imposed by festival organizers, but a fundamental aspect of digital festivals that was co-produced with and by participants, recreating the fun and the enjoyment of the in-person experience. This reinforces the fundamental role of festivals as part of the temporal commons (Bluedorn and Waller, 2006), marking a period of time that is collectively understood as a temporary

subversion of rules; despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, festival organisers and their participants were able to co-create modes of safe temporary transgression, retaining the festivals' liminoid nature.

CO-PRODUCTION OF THE EXPERIENCE THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Sabatini (2022) analyses how audiences and performance co-create theatrical experiences in her analysis of Opera Camion, a site-specific performance tour by Teatro dell'Opera di Roma. Sabatini notes that this process of "commoning" happens both in the way audiences interact with space and in the way they participate in the performance, creating an experience that is not exactly replicable. A poignant version of this "commoning" of the artistic experience can be found in Kozinets and Sherry's analysis of Burning Man Festival (2007), where the blurring of the boundaries between performers and participants results in a unique co-created experience. Following Rancière's concept of "emancipated spectator" (2014), we argue that this aspect of coproduction is a form of commoning that is allowed by the sense of agency and freedom that people perceive in the context of festivals.

This form of commoning practice was prevalent in the interviews. Akin to the previous theme, this co-production was particularly pronounced in the digital and hybrid spaces and the activity which fostered these different forms of relationships. Several interviewees described a shift in working with festivalgoers and members more closely to curate and design ideas for festivals. Others noted that they developed online portals and platforms for people to 'gather' and simply 'hang out' online. Indeed, there is a sense of a shift in the importance of the co-production of informal communal online spaces in response to the crisis. This was achieved through both synchronous platforms (e.g. live streaming) and asynchronous ones (e.g. video recordings).

Paisley Book Festival re-created the feeling of attending the festival in person by sending their online attendees a Paisley "participant pack that would involve one of these lovely backgrounds, but they could opt to use it or decide not to use it" while watching the festival, as described by an interviewee. Furthermore, Paisley Book Festival recruited volunteers to blog about the programme, to recreate post-festival conversations that would normally happen in pubs or restaurants among participants. The decision of some participants of the Orkney Folk Festival to "dress up" to watch the online events signals how special attire is a celebrated aspect of festival-going (Lough 2023; Chaney

and Goulding 2016), and it was important for some people to recreate this experience at home. The use of props and digital tools provided not only a place for people to be creative but also engage in a form of play – almost a sort of "make-believe" – aimed at recreating the atmosphere of a live event, transforming digital consumers into co-creators of their own festival experience.

VOLUNTEER DIMENSION OF THE COMMONS

Voluntary work within the festivals was a recurrent theme throughout the interviews. The role of volunteering in the Bute festival was particularly pronounced and was characterised by an interviewee as "I've dragged most of my friends in one way or another... it's all that pulling together... we then go up on stage so everyone can see it's real people that put it on...". The interviewee then went on to state that "so it's for the benefit of the island, not for financial gain or anything like that". This is indicative of the forms of commoning practice described by Ruiz Cayuela (2021) as "by rejecting gatekeeping practices traditionally enforced by charitable organisations" volunteers are able "to be an active part of the organisation" (Ibid, p.1555). Ruiz Cayuela (2021) argues that this form of commoning goes beyond traditional passive forms of voluntary work that can reinforce capitalist subjugator systems and instead opens a more active participatory inclusion where different forms of exchange can occur, and new futures can be glimpsed. This movement towards participatory action can be seen in how those who voluntarily help the Bute festival are valued. They are made visible, whether it is on the stage or in their community, through participation in the festival itself.

It is important to note that our findings are indicative, and that further research is needed to carry out a deeper analysis of the extent to which these networks and voluntary actions have continued, and their respective relationships developed or if they have fallen away. In this sense, an assessment of whether these were "temporal" networks, or they were the start of something more long-lived is required. Indeed, if we take volunteering as an example, it must be noted that not all festivals have the same interconnections between community, volunteering and participation. However, what has emerged in the interviews is a broad spectrum of causation and application of these collaborations and networks. For example, the networks forming in the south of Scotland within the third sector are more specifically about resource sharing and partnership building. However, other networks have emerged which are more akin to support groups. This is not to say that these

two forms are mutually exclusive from each other, but that a difference in the usage, management and intent is evident.

CARE, RELATIONALITY AND RECIPROCITY

In the context of this paper, we refer to care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, p. 40, in Dombroski et al., 2019, p.99). The notion of care is a highly contested one, due to how it has historically been used to oppress women and diminish the value of their labour, as it often involves caring for people and spaces (Finch and Groves, 2022). This is no exception in the context of the study of the commons, as existing power relations can indeed shape expectations about who should perform care duties in a commons arrangement; for example, in their exploration of co-housing arrangements, Tummers and MacGregor (2019) found that, in most of them, women carried out most care activities. In this sense, care can be a "one-way street", where a group of people is tasked to care for another.

However, the pandemic pushed festivals to implement new practices of care based on relationality and reciprocity, where participants were able to care for each other and for their communities in a specific moment in time, despite spatial distances. Practices of care emerged in the online delivery of AiM; the festival was delivered at a time of an increased sense of global precarity due to the pandemic and to the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd on May 25th, 2020. AiM provided a space for an international community to mourn and reflect during difficult times, where participants could foster a sense of solidarity. Care, therefore, seems to be a recurring theme in the way in which festivals were able to re-establish a 'sense of place' through the online dimension. Lijster and De Tullio, in their analysis of the commoning of care practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, note that "commoning is per se a collectivisation of care, whose practices aim to transform the organisation of care and rethink caring institutions" (2021, p.16). The pandemic provided an opportunity to bring to light the invisible practices of collective care provided by festivals in Scotland, and to devise ways to maintain them in precarious times.

Unlike the other festivals we interviewed Bute, which is entirely run by volunteers, after volunteers did not hold a festival digitally or otherwise during the period of this study, partly down to infrastructure, cost and capacity, but also because they felt it would not serve the community of the

festival. This presents a challenge to the notion that digital adoption was the only modus operandi. However, they did hold online gigs to help raise money for the foodbanks on the island. These gigs were described by the interviewees as "Bute's sense of people caring" and were held in isolation, where the festival goers could click on a link and donate money to foodbank itself whilst the gigs were streamed through Facebook Live, with each performer streaming from their own homes.

CONCLUSION: TEMPORAL COMMONING IN FESTIVALS

This paper identifies several ways in which digital and hybrid festivals were able to provide opportunities for commoning during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, they were able to make people feel part of the same "temporal commons" (Bluedorn and Waller, 2006); they offered opportunities to engage in exchange of knowledge and resources; festivalgoers were able to co-produce festivals by volunteering in their organisations, or by participating in them and contributing to their 'buzz' and atmosphere; digital festivals offered spaces for the subversion and the playful disruption of the status quo in a process of "comedy of commons" (Sherry and Kozinets, 2007); lastly, they offered a site for mutual care and support to people who were far from each other either because of the COVID-19 lockdown, or because of geographical borders. In some instances, digital festivals allowed for the replication of in-person forms of commoning, as it is exemplified by the case of the co-production of the festival atmosphere. However, in other instances, they were able to offer new opportunities for commoning that would have not been otherwise possible, as in the case of the international space for care provided by AiM.

Furthermore, this paper provides a contextualization of festivals within the study of the commons; following Bluedorn (2002), we provide a novel approach to the analysis of the function that festivals have in marking the passage of time from a cultural perspective, thus being a part of the 'temporal commons' of a community. In our analysis, the temporal dimension emerges as one of the fundamental aspects of how people experience festivals, building a 'sense of place' even when people cannot be together in the same place. In turn, this enables practices of care, especially in precarious situations. This feature of the festival is directly linked to their liminoidal nature, that is, as spaces for temporary transgression, play and critique of the status quo. Following Stavrides' (2016) theory on the commons and liminality, we argue that the liminoidal dimension of festivals characterises them as opportunities

for temporary commoning, creating ephemeral, but no less valuable, moments of relational co-creation and sharing of the festival experience.

Secondly, based on an analysis of academic literature on the festivals, the commons and commoning, we propose a set of aspects and commonalities aimed at identifying opportunities for commoning within the context of digital festivals, with potential applications to in-person festivals too. While this paper is limited by a narrow selection of case studies, it demonstrates that further exploration on festivals as opportunities for commoning is needed to better analyse how festival communities are defined and redefined across different circumstances and temporal dimensions. Most notably, our analysis does not include a fundamental aspect of commoning, that is, systems of shared governance: further enquiry with many case studies is required to explore this important dimension of practice. A further methodological limitation of this article is related to our participants sample (representatives from five different Scottish festivals); the inclusion of festivalgoers, funders, members of the local communities and other relevant stakeholders would have resulted in a richer, more nuanced set of data. Similarly, complementing interviews with other methods, such as participant observation or focus groups, would have strengthened the validity of our findings. For this reason, we argue that further studies on commoning and festivals require more complex methodologies that can capture a plurality of voices. In turn, a richer set of data could provide the opportunity to test the validity of the aspects of commoning identified in this paper and, potentially, use them as a starting point to create a more robust theoretical and analytical framework.

Our analysis clearly shows how, during the pandemic, festivals were able to have access to digital infrastructure that they used for knowledge-sharing, staying connected to participants, providing spaces for spontaneous interaction, and branching out to international audiences. What is less clear is if and how this digital infrastructure is being used now, and why. Online knowledge-sharing platforms ensured agile communication and networking opportunities, which resulted in collaborations that were instrumental in ensuring the festivals' survival during very uncertain times. Similarly, connecting online allowed participants to recreate the spontaneous social interactions that are typical of festivals, offering relief from the forced isolation brought about by the pandemic. Moreover, moving online challenged the organizers' notions of "community" embedded within the standard target of the festivals analysed in this paper, thus becoming more inclusive and reaching global audiences who, despite not being local, felt a strong connection towards the festivals. At the time of writing this paper, most of the festivals analysed here, except AiM and, to an

extent, Big Burns Supper, have moved back to in-person delivery. While this can be seen as a natural consequence of the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, it is necessary to ask whether abandoning all forms of online knowledge-sharing and community-building platforms is a missed opportunity for the retention of the agility and accessibility that festivals were able to achieve during the pandemic.

Lastly, this article provides evidence of the fact that, once the physical spatial dimension of festivals is removed, so are many instrumental arguments for their value, such as the concepts of place branding, experience economy and regeneration: what is left is culture, people and a sense of connectedness. To achieve this, further consideration needs to be given to the resources, time and effort required from festival organizations to build relationships with their communities; we also suggest that giving a new life to the digital platforms and tools that were fundamental to the survival of festivals during the pandemic would enable organizations to both expand their audiences and exchange knowledge with their peers in an agile and effective way.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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