

# **Organizing Swiss Music Festivals:**

*Balancing Creativity and Financial Viability from Niche Events to Large-Scale Festivals*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Music festivals operate in an increasingly challenging landscape shaped by rising artist fees, growing competition, limited public funding, and changing audience expectations. In this context, festival organizers must balance maintaining and innovating their creative identity to attract audiences while also ensuring long-term financial viability. This case study explores how festival managers in Switzerland navigate this tension through strategic decision-making, thereby addressing a gap in the academic literature, particularly as the Swiss music festival context remains largely unexplored. Drawing on ten semi-structured interviews with organizers from diverse festivals, the research identifies five key strategic areas: financial risk mitigation, cost control, creative innovation, internal organizational expertise, and external collaboration. To mitigate financial risk, festivals emphasized the importance of building reserve funds, securing long-term sponsorships, and using community-based crowdfunding. Cost management strategies included limiting artist fees, minimizing fixed costs, and maximizing the use of volunteer labour. Creative innovation was driven by audience-oriented programming and immersive design. Commercial festivals often used lifestyle trends to enhance their appeal, while non-profit festivals focused on community-centred programming. Having long-term team members and post-event evaluations were key for continuity, learning, and future planning. Lastly, external collaboration proved particularly valuable for non-profit festivals. Coordinating event dates, sharing resources, and engaging in joint advocacy helped reduce operational challenges and enhanced their collective influence in cultural policy discussions. Notably, this finding challenges earlier assumptions that such collaborations are only initiated in times of crisis or under external pressure, showing instead that they can emerge as a deliberate and strategic choice. Overall, organizers do not see creative identity and financial viability as opposing goals but as mutually reinforcing, with financial stability enabling creative risks and unique programming and experiences helping to attract audiences and sponsors. This study contributes to the festival management literature by offering empirical insights into how festivals navigate the complex relationship between creativity and financial sustainability within the underexplored Swiss context. Furthermore, it extends existing theory by illustrating that collaboration between music festivals can be a proactive strategy. It also offers practical guidance for organizers seeking to balance innovation with long-term viability.

**KEYWORDS:** *Festival Organization, Cultural Identity, Financial Viability, Festival Innovation, Strategic Planning*

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# 1. Introduction

Across Europe, the rapid growth and popularity of music festivals have created a highly competitive landscape, making it increasingly challenging for festivals to remain viable, establish a distinct identity, and build a loyal audience amid numerous alternative options (Anderton, 2018, p. 37; De Maule, 2013, p. 250; Leenders et al., 2015, p. 764; Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 435; Meyer, 2024). As a result, festival organizers must continuously make strategic decisions to attract audiences and ensure financial sustainability. This demands ongoing innovation in programming, marketing, and the overall festival experience (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 120). To stand out, a festival must offer something unique, as audiences are more likely to be drawn to events that feel different or creatively distinct (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 446). However, coming up with something new and appealing each year is challenging. Since festivals are experiential products, it's difficult to pinpoint what exactly makes them attractive to different audiences (Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149). The experience of atmosphere or excitement varies greatly from person to person, which makes it hard for organizers to predict how a new idea will be received (Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149). However, despite these uncertainties, being creative and innovative remains essential for attracting audiences and standing out in a competitive festival landscape (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 120; Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149). At the same time, festivals must commit to significant upfront costs without knowing exactly how many attendees will show up, making financial planning inherently uncertain (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 682). Thus, festival organizers are constantly navigating a delicate balance between the need for creative innovation and the uncertainty of financial return (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 120). These challenges are not unique to a single national context. Saturated festival markets in countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, Norway, or Switzerland present similar concerns about long-term survival (Anderton, 2018, p. 37; De Maule, 2013, p. 250; Leenders et al., 2015, p. 764; Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 445). This study contributes to this broader discussion by focusing on one national context in depth. In recent years, Swiss music festivals have experienced significant growth, with both the number of events and overall revenue reaching record levels (Meyer, 2024). Major festivals such as the Montreux Jazz Festival, Paléo Festival, and Openair Frauenfeld, Europe's largest hip-hop festival, draw international audiences and play a vital role in shaping Switzerland's cultural landscape and tourism industry (EDA, n.d.). Given the competitive landscape and popularity of its festival scene, Switzerland offers a relevant case for exploring how organizers manage the tension between creative ambition and financial viability. Therefore, this study focuses on how Swiss festival organizers respond to these challenges by strategic decision making (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 120; Getz et al., 2006, pp. 103–104; Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 679).

Both creative decision-making and financial viability have been key areas of academic research on music festival organization (Laing & Mair, 2015; Lopez & Leenders, 2018; Knardal & Pettersen, 2015;

Shen et al., 2025; Simon et al., 2017). Lopez and Leenders (2018, p. 436) examined how festival organizers have significant control over a festival's creative identity and overall experience, with their strategic decisions directly impacting visitor success. In this context, the music festivals' creative identity refers to the outcome of all creative decisions made by festival organizers, such as lineup selection, marketing strategies, festival design, e-commerce, digital presence, or branding (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 714; Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 446; Fernandes & Krolikowska, 2023, p. 27). These elements are crucial in shaping a festival's brand, positioning, and overall success (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 436). Their findings show, for example, that festivals featuring well-known national artists tend to attract larger audiences and have a higher likelihood of selling out (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, pp. 443–445). While creative identity shapes a festival's brand and audience appeal, its long-term success also depends on financial viability. Getz & Andersson (2010, p. 551) show that financial viability is a key determinant of a festival's sustainability and long-term success, requiring the organizers to navigate complex stakeholder networks and balance competing interests that influence festival operations. Financial viability refers to the festival's ability to sustain operations over time by ensuring adequate revenue streams, cost control, and long-term economic sustainability (Getz & Andersson, 2008, p. 4; Mair, 2019, p. 13). According to Andersson and Getz (2008, p. 207), festivals achieve this through a combination of income sources, namely ticket sales, sponsorships, local government grants, concession fees, merchandise sales, and state or national funding.

Despite the importance of both financial sustainability and creative identity decisions in shaping a music festival's success, academic research has mostly focused on audience experiences and the cultural impact of large-scale events rather than the organizational side (Ballantyne et al., 2014; Brown & Sharpley, 2019; Moss et al., 2019; Getz, 2010, pp. 4-5). Furthermore, there are limited studies connecting the concepts of creative identity and financial viability, and little research exploring this dynamic in the context of Swiss music festivals. Additionally, niche festivals are often overlooked in favour of mainstream events (Kement, 2024, p. 449). Thus, this paper focuses on how music festival organizers in Switzerland navigate the challenge of fostering creativity and innovation to deliver unique and engaging experiences while maintaining financial viability. Therefore, the central research question guiding this study is:

***How do music festival organizers in Switzerland manage the challenges of maintaining and innovating their creative identity while ensuring financial viability in their events?***

To answer the research question, this study employs a qualitative approach based on ten in-depth interviews with festival organizers in Switzerland, aiming to gain detailed insights into how they perceive and navigate the tension between creative goals and financial realities in their everyday practices and strategic planning. The findings reveal five key strategies used by organizers: mitigating

financial risks, controlling costs, fostering creative innovation, building internal expertise, and engaging in external collaboration. Together, these approaches help balance long-term financial sustainability with maintaining and innovating their creative identity.

## 1.1 Academic and Social Relevance

This study holds scientific relevance by addressing a notable gap in the festival research literature, specifically how organizers manage the complex relationship between maintaining and innovating their creative identity while ensuring financial viability. By examining this dynamic within the Swiss festival landscape and including often-overlooked niche festivals, an underrepresented area in existing research, this study adds to the academic discourse on sustainable festival management by highlighting how both small-scale and commercial festivals develop context-specific strategies to balance creative identity and financial viability. At the same time, its societal relevance lies in offering a practical, managerial perspective on how festivals can remain both financially viable and creatively innovative in an increasingly uncertain economic landscape, marked by rising costs, changing audience expectations, and growing regulatory demands.

## 1.2 Chapter outline

This paper is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework introduces the key challenges in festival organization, with a focus on the tension between maintaining creative identity and ensuring financial viability. It also reviews existing academic literature on strategies used by organizers to manage this balance and provides a brief overview of the festival landscape in Switzerland. The methodology section then outlines the research design, detailing the sampling process, data collection through ten in-depth interviews with festival organizers, and the approach to thematic analysis. The results section presents the main findings, organized around emerging themes, and connects them to relevant literature to contextualize the insights. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key contributions of the study, acknowledges its limitations, and offers suggestions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces the key theoretical concepts relevant to this study. It outlines the general challenges of festival management, with a focus on creative identity and financial viability. In addition, it presents existing literature on strategies that festivals use to balance these two aspects. Finally, the chapter gives a short overview of the Swiss festival landscape to better understand the specific environment in which the research takes place.

### 2.1 The Unique Challenges of Music Festival Organization

Organizing music festivals presents a range of unique challenges, such as extended planning timelines, dependence on volunteer labour, financial pressures, the demand for memorable audience experiences, and complex stakeholder coordination. These aspects are examined in detail in the following section.

Music festival management is distinct from other planned events due to its short yet intense performance period, contrasted with a long planning phase that can extend over a year (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 679; Meyer, 2024). Despite the complexity of this planning process, most festivals are organized by small administrative teams and rely heavily on volunteer labour to keep costs manageable and operations feasible (Getz et al., 2010, p. 40; Frost & Laing, 2015, pp. 1305-1307). Especially in not-for-profit contexts, volunteers are not only engaged during the event itself but often take on year-round responsibilities and even serve on organizing boards (Getz et al., 2010, p. 40). However, despite their central role, many not-for-profit festivals face difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers, and shortages remain a common issue (Carlsen & Andersson, 2011, p. 91; Frost & Laing, 2015, pp. 1309-1311; Mair et al., 2024, pp. 178-179). Moreover, Getz (2002, p. 212) highlights that poor leadership and a poor organizational culture can negatively affect organizational performance and increase the risk of event failure.

While relying on small teams and volunteers helps reduce costs, it does not shield festivals from broader financial risks. Financial uncertainty remains a central challenge for festivals of all sizes, as they must often commit to high upfront costs without knowing if revenues will cover them (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 682). In many cases, artist fees must be confirmed and acts booked months or even years in advance, placing significant financial pressure on already limited organizational resources (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 679; Meyer, 2024). Moreover, long-term financial security remains precarious due to fluctuating income streams, limited and unstable public funding, and rising costs for both performers and operational logistics (Getz et al., 2010, p. 31). These financial pressures are increased by external risks, with bad weather consistently cited as one of the most significant threats to festival success, alongside growing infrastructure demands and the dependence on single funding sources (Swartjes et al., 2023, p. 106; Getz et al., 2010, p. 47; Carlsen & Andersson, 2011, p. 91).

Furthermore, unexpected global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic presented a major challenge, particularly for festivals that take place only once a year and in some cases were cancelled for multiple seasons, leading to increased financial uncertainty (Ali & Balme, 2022, pp. 338–340; (Swartjes et al., 2023, p. 106).

At the same time, festivals operate in an increasingly saturated and competitive cultural landscape (Meyer, 2024; Lopez & Leenders, 2019, p.435; Simon et al., 2017, p.155). Artist popularity fluctuates quickly, new acts emerge constantly, and audience tastes shift in unpredictable ways, making programming decisions highly complex (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 682). Given their imitable nature, festivals are also vulnerable to substitution by other events or leisure offerings, which increases pressure to deliver a compelling and distinctive experience (Carlsen & Andersson, 2011, p. 85). The experiential nature of festivals adds another layer of complexity to this challenge (Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149). Rather than offering functional utility, festivals are considered hedonic products, valued for the emotional, social, and sensory experiences they provide, such as atmosphere, immersion, and proximity to artists (Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149). However, these types of experiences are highly personal and can differ a lot from one person to another. What one attendee finds exciting or memorable might not appeal to someone else, which makes it difficult for organizers to predict whether their creative choices will lead to audience satisfaction or strong ticket sales (Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149).

Furthermore, festival managers must navigate complex stakeholder networks, balancing the often-competing interests of governments, sponsors, artists, and local communities (Getz & Andersson, 2010, p. 551). This complexity stems not only from the diversity of these actors but also from the fact that many of them are involved throughout the entire planning and execution process (Larson, 2009, pp. 298-299). Coordinating these parties, who are frequently based in different locations and represent different institutional or commercial priorities, adds another layer of organizational difficulty (Larson, 2009, p. 299). These competing demands contribute to festivals' unique position within the events sector (Getz et al., 2010, p. 31).

## 2.2 Creative Identity of Festivals

To remain competitive in a saturated market, festivals need a distinct creative identity that allows them to differentiate themselves and stay attractive to visitors (Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149). Creativity in festivals is defined as both a symbolic and strategic process that generates new cultural forms and enhances competitiveness (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 122). In this context, festivals function as brands, with organizers shaping their identity through programming, marketing, and audience engagement (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 436). Key elements such as lineup, ticket pricing, and artistic diversity contribute to brand identity (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 437). Thus, festival organisers play a crucial role in shaping the festival's brand identity and experience, with their decisions directly influencing attendee experience and satisfaction (Fernandes & Krolikowska, 2023, p. 27; Lopez &

Leenders, 2018, p. 436). Based on these definitions, this paper understands creative identity as the outcome of all creative decisions made by festival organizers.

### 2.2.1 Key Components of a Festival's Creative Identity

Empirical research has identified key elements of a festival's creative identity, including its programming (lineup), additional entertainment and activities such as workshops, festival design, e-commerce, digital presence, and branding (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 714; Fernandes & Krolikowska, 2023, p. 27; Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 446; Morgan, 2008, p. 85). Lopez & Leenders (2018, p. 446) found that the programming (lineup) of a festival is a key factor in shaping its creative identity, as it reflects the aesthetic and artistic vision of its organizers. Festival lineups are curated based on criteria such as innovativeness, uniqueness, and expert recognition, while also balancing the need to appeal to a broad audience (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 446). While some festivals cater to niche markets with highly specialized programming, others prioritize broad accessibility by diversifying their lineup to attract a wider audience (Leenders et al., 2005, p. 149). This underlines how programming decisions are not only creatively significant but also strategically crucial for attracting and retaining audiences (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, pp. 445-446).

In addition to the lineup, a festival's brand identity is shaped by pricing strategies, e-commerce, and interactive audience engagement efforts, all of which contribute to its long-term relevance (Leenders, 2010, p. 300). Moreover, supplementary entertainment offerings and added value enhance the overall festival experience, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive and cohesive creative identity (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 714). These include elements such as atmosphere, the variety and quality of non-musical activities, and opportunities for socializing, all of which contribute significantly to how audiences evaluate and remember their experience (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 711). As Ballantyne et al. (2014, pp. 66–67) emphasize, while the music lineup remains important, these surrounding elements, such as the freedom to explore, connect, and discover, are equally valued by festivalgoers. Morgan (2008, p. 82) similarly highlights that event design plays a key role in creating memorable impressions, particularly through features like theme, content, and spatial environment. Non-musical activities, such as local food stands or creative workshops, give attendees opportunities to explore and help create a festival atmosphere that offers a clear break from everyday life (Morgan, 2008, pp. 89–91). These experiential elements are designed to enhance the attendee's overall experience, making the event feel memorable and distinct, while also reflecting the festival's broader creative goals (Morgan, 2008, p. 82).

Furthermore, creative identity is not limited to the physical festival space but also extends into the digital environment, where design elements play a crucial role in engaging audiences (Fernandes & Krolikowska, 2023, p. 27). This includes digital tools such as mobile apps and social media platforms, which enable interaction and content personalisation across all stages of the festival journey, before, during, and after the event (Fernandes & Krolikowska, 2023, p. 30). When designed with a customer

focus, such tools can enhance the overall experience by offering features like scheduling, navigation, and real-time engagement, thus deepening the audience's emotional connection to the festival (Fernandes & Krolikowska, 2023, p. 31).

## 2.3 Financial Viability of Festivals

For many festivals, securing resources and maintaining financial viability remain an ongoing challenge (Andersson & Getz, 2008, p. 208; Getz et al., 2006, pp. 103-104). In very simple terms, financial viability refers to the ability to generate enough money to sustain operations and remain functional over time (Mair, 2019, p. 13). Similarly, Getz and Andersson (2008, p. 4) define the economic dimension of sustainability in festivals as focusing on the ability to sustain adequate revenues, control costs, and ensure long-term financial viability. This involves determining whether the festival can consistently generate enough income to cover its expenses and whether financial management strategies enable cost control. Additionally, financial viability is linked to the festival's capacity to continue operating and producing events in a competitive environment while adapting to market changes and potential financial risks (Getz & Andersson, 2008, p. 4).

### 2.3.1 Revenue Structures Across Festival Types

Festivals primarily generate revenue through ticket sales, which constitute their largest income source (Andersson & Getz, 2008, p. 207). Additional funding can come from local government grants, concession fees, and corporate sponsorship, while merchandise sales, other minor income streams, and national government grants contribute only a small share (Andersson & Getz, 2008, p. 207). Naturally, the balance between these income sources varies across different festival types. Private festivals are more reliant on ticket sales and therefore more vulnerable to market fluctuations, often operating with a short-term, profit-oriented focus (Carlsen & Andersson, 2011, p. 91). Public festivals, typically owned or operated by governmental bodies, tend to depend heavily on a single funding source, usually public subsidies, though they may still aim for financial surplus when resources are limited (Carlsen & Andersson, 2011, p. 91). Not-for-profit festivals, in contrast, are generally driven by a community service orientation and rely on a broader mix of income sources such as sponsorships, fundraising, and voluntary support. However, this financial diversity does not necessarily guarantee stability, making long-term planning particularly complex (Carlsen & Andersson, 2011, pp. 90–91).

### 2.3.2 The Role of Stakeholder Management in Ensuring Financial Viability

Identifying and managing stakeholders is an essential part of festival management, especially regarding powerful stakeholders that can determine success or failure or contribute to the long-term sustainability of the organization (Getz & Andersson, 2010, p. 551; Van Niekerk, 2016, p. 177; Van Niekerk & Getz, 2016, p. 429). In this context, financial viability depends on festival managers' ability

to navigate complex stakeholder networks and balance the interests of those who influence festival operations (Getz & Andersson, 2010, p. 551). Getz et al. (2006, p. 106) identified key festival stakeholders, including festival organizers, the music industry, local trade and industry, sponsors, public authorities, associations and clubs, and the media industry. Building on this, Van Niekerk and Getz (2016, pp. 427–429) provide a more detailed framework that differentiates between internal and external stakeholders and identifies eight universal stakeholder categories found across all festivals: employees, owners or shareholders, senior management, customers, government, suppliers, special interest groups, and competitors. These categories are further broken down into unique subgroups whose relevance depends on the festival's type, ownership model, location, and resource dependence. Recognizing and adapting to these differences is essential for effective and context-sensitive stakeholder management (Van Niekerk & Getz, 2016, pp. 427–429). Effectively managing these relationships is especially important given that festivals often depend on stakeholders for critical resources (Getz et al., 2006, p. 105). Dependence arises when an organization must rely on external actors who control key resources, whether these are tangible, like funding or infrastructure, or intangible, such as expertise or legitimacy (Getz et al., 2006, p. 105). In response, festival managers are placing greater emphasis on building strong networks and managing stakeholder relationships strategically. By doing so, they aim to secure necessary support and position their events as valuable, long-term contributors to the community (Getz et al., 2006, p. 104). Successfully navigating these dependencies is essential for ensuring both the delivery of events and the future sustainability of the organization (Getz et al., 2006, p. 104). Long-term cooperation often leads to stronger relationships, built on trust and shared positive experiences (Getz et al., 2006, pp. 105–106). Getz and Andersson (2010, pp. 547–551) identify four main stakeholder relationship patterns in festival management. Some festivals depend primarily on venues, often leading to close ties with local authorities (Getz & Andersson, 2010, p. 549). Others follow a government-first model, relying on public funding and aligning with civic goals. In a customer-first approach, audience satisfaction drives decision-making, while sponsor-first festivals focus on partnerships with private companies, which may risk compromising cultural aims (Getz & Andersson, 2010, pp. 550–551). Across all these models, the authors emphasize the importance of securing long-term support from key stakeholders, particularly regulators and resource providers, as this is essential for ensuring the festival's continuity and success (Getz & Andersson, 2010, p. 552).

To manage these different types of dependencies, festivals use various strategies to build and maintain strong relationships with their key stakeholders. Andersson and Getz (2008, pp. 209–218) and Getz and Andersson (2010, pp. 9–15) discuss several such approaches. Getz and Andersson (2010, p. 9) outline several stakeholder management strategies in their comparative case studies, including internalizing powerful regulators by involving local authority councillors on the board, turning suppliers into sponsors, developing long-term sponsorships, and collaborating with independent organizations as co-producers. These approaches are supported by findings from a broader survey conducted by

Andersson and Getz (2008, p. 209), which highlights commonly used strategies such as developing core values to guide branding, using marketing to strengthen brand identity, and converting suppliers into sponsors to reduce costs. Convincing the media to become official sponsors also emerged as a particularly successful strategy. Other noteworthy approaches included lobbying the government for financial support, initiating outreach programs, and forming marketing partnerships with other organizations (Andersson & Getz, 2008, p. 209). Such strategies are particularly important given the risks associated with overreliance on a single or limited number of resource suppliers (Getz, 2002, p. 213). High levels of dependency can make festivals vulnerable, as the withdrawal of support may force them to adapt to the demands of their benefactors or risk collapse, a factor that has been linked to festival failure (Getz, 2002, p. 213).

## 2.4. Strategies to Navigate Balance between Creative Identity and Financial Viability

This section begins by discussing the one study that explicitly examines the relationship between budgeting and the balance between creative identity and financial viability. It then integrates additional literature that addresses either creative or financial strategies independently.

### 2.4.1 Budgeting as a Balancing Mechanism

An academic paper that combines the concepts of creativity and financial control in the context of festival management is Knardal and Pettersen (2015, pp. 692–693). Their case study of a large Norwegian festival illustrates how budgeting was used as a management control tool to balance artistic goals with financial constraints. Drawing on Simons' (1995) framework, the authors distinguish between diagnostic and interactive uses of budgets. While the diagnostic use focuses on tracking performance against predefined objectives and correcting deviations, the interactive use emphasizes continuous dialogue, interpretation, and discussion of uncertainties through direct engagement with staff (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 683). By combining diagnostic and interactive approaches during the planning period, the festival's managers encouraged staff to take ownership of the budget and engage actively in financial decision-making (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 692). This combination also fostered organizational learning, helping the team cope with the unpredictability inherent in festival production (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 692). Furthermore, the flexible use of the budget enabled the inclusion of unplanned creative elements shortly before the event. It functioned as a dynamic tool throughout the planning phase, supporting project-specific adjustments and allowing producers and coordinators to pursue creative ideas within clear financial boundaries (p. 693). Thus, working with a flexible and participatory budget system can be understood as a strategic approach to manage the balance between creative ambitions and financial demands.

## 2.4.2 Strategies to Enhance Creative Identity

A second strand of literature examines how festivals strengthen their creative identity to enhance audience appeal and thereby indirectly support financial viability. For example, López and Leenders (2018, pp. 435–447) examine how programming choices, particularly artist selection and lineup composition, serve as central elements in shaping a festival's creative identity and its audience appeal. The authors emphasize that festival organizers must strategically decide between taking creative risks through innovative programming or opting for more familiar, proven artists (Lopez and Leenders, 2018, p. 436). Their empirical findings show that featuring nationally popular acts increases audience size and the likelihood of selling out, as these artists signal quality and reduce perceived risk for attendees (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, pp. 443–445). Furthermore, the study finds that both very narrow (genre-specific) and very broad (multi-genre) programming scopes have a positive effect on ticket sales, whereas moderate diversity is associated with lower success, lacking both niche appeal and broad market attractiveness (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, pp. 445–446). Selling out more consistently contributes directly to financial viability and strengthens the festival's ability to operate successfully over time. These results suggest that carefully positioning the lineup, either through specialization or broad appeal, can serve as a strategic tool to achieve financial stability while shaping the festival's brand identity.

Another strategy is described by Simon et al. (2017, pp. 161–162), who emphasize the importance of curating a lineup that reflects audience preferences as a key driver of success. Their findings show that festivals which align their musical programming with current trends and the tastes of their target demographic are more likely to attract larger audiences.

## 2.4.3 Strategies to Enhance Financial Viability

One strategy that emerged in two academic papers to enhance financial viability is the conversion of suppliers and venues into sponsors. Rather than treating them solely as cost factors, festivals built cooperative relationships that included discounted services, flexible arrangements, or in-kind contributions. This approach not only helped reduce operational expenses but also strengthened stakeholder support and long-term financial stability (Getz et al., 2006, p. 117; Andersson & Getz, 2008, pp. 205, 213).

Another strategy to enhance financial viability is securing committed and long-term sponsorships. Carlsen and Andersson (2011, p. 92), as well as Andersson & Getz (2008, p. 215), highlight that having major sponsors who are fully dedicated to the festival can provide a stable foundation for financial planning and reduce the overall risk burden on organizers.

A third strategy to enhance financial viability is building financial reserves to buffer difficult years. Andersson and Getz (2008, p. 213) describe this as a desirable approach that many event

managers aim to implement, as it allows festivals to prepare for unexpected shortfalls or external disruptions. However, they also note that limited surplus revenue often makes it difficult to follow through on this strategy consistently.

## 2.5 The Festival Landscape in Switzerland

Switzerland hosts over 150 music festivals annually, spanning a broad range of musical genres, from electronic and hip-hop to classical, rock, and folk, as well as diverse formats, including large-scale commercial events and non-profit grassroots festivals (Festivals in der Schweiz, 2025; Wirth & Böhler, 2025). These festivals are deeply embedded in the country's cultural life and reflect its regional diversity (EDA, 2024). Many festivals are organized by locals and play an important role in the cultural life of both cities and rural areas (Wirth & Böhler, 2025).

In recent years, however, festival organizers have faced growing structural and financial challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the sharp rise in artist fees. As reported by Meyer (2024), these increased costs have significantly driven up ticket prices, putting pressure on both organizers and audiences. For many festivals, especially those that are independent or receive little public support, it is difficult to stay financially stable while keeping ticket prices affordable. The rising costs are not limited to headliners; even mid-level acts now demand higher fees due to inflation, increased touring expenses, and the overall professionalization of live music logistics (Meyer, 2024).

This trend is directly impacting programming decisions across the country. Fischer (2025) observes that fewer international superstars are performing at Swiss festivals, not only because of budget constraints but also due to strategic decisions by artists and booking agencies. Many acts now prioritize larger, more lucrative festivals in neighbouring countries or choose to concentrate on their own headline tours rather than playing mid-sized European festivals. As a result, Swiss events are finding it increasingly difficult to attract high-profile international names without compromising their financial sustainability. Organizers often must choose between reducing the size of their line-ups, raising ticket prices even further, or shifting their focus toward local and regional talent (Fischer, 2025). This dynamic is further intensified by structural shifts in the festival industry. As Wenger (2019) explains, international corporations such as Live Nation and CTS Eventim are increasingly acquiring Swiss festivals and agencies. These conglomerates often have exclusive relationships with global artists, limiting access for independent festivals and reinforcing a market structure in which major acts primarily perform at corporate-run events (Wenger, 2019). At the same time, changing audience expectations are reshaping the very character of festivals. Demand for comfort, hygiene, and luxury experiences has risen sharply. These developments reflect a broader shift from music-centred gatherings to lifestyle-driven, commercialized experiences, adding another layer of pressure for smaller festivals.

seeking to remain culturally relevant and financially stable in a rapidly changing environment (Wenger, 2019).

Furthermore, public funding for non-commercial music festivals remains highly limited and tied to restrictive conditions in Switzerland (Wirth, 2023). According to Wirth (2023), current cultural funding policies often require a minimum ticket price to qualify for public subsidies. As a result, festivals that are free to attend are systematically excluded from support, even though they actively contribute to the local cultural landscape. Organizers stress that introducing entry fees would significantly alter the composition of their audiences and limit access for young people and residents with low incomes (Wirth, 2023). These festivals instead depend on income from food and drink sales, sponsorships, and donations to pay artist fees. However, this funding model is unstable and particularly vulnerable to external factors such as poor weather. Menzi (2024) reports that some festivals have come close to financial collapse under these conditions and have been forced to turn to emergency crowdfunding measures to fill budget gaps. In earlier years, similar cases have even relied on small-scale fundraising events to recover from weather-related losses (Wirth, 2023).

Ultimately, these challenges require constant strategic decisions from organizers to balance their creative ambitions with economic sustainability.

## 3. Methods

The following section outlines the methodological approach employed to investigate how music festival organizers in Switzerland navigate the balance between creative identity and financial sustainability. The chapter includes the research design, sampling strategy, operationalization, data collection, data analysis, as well as considerations of credibility, reliability, and research ethics.

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, using semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore how festival managers navigate the challenges of balancing the creative identity and financial viability of music festivals in Switzerland. In-depth interviews are particularly suitable for this study because they allow researchers to gather in-depth information and knowledge, especially regarding lived experiences, values, and occupational ideologies (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 4; Knott et al., 2022, p. 1). Given that festival management and organization involve complex decision-making processes, an in-depth approach ensures a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing managerial strategies. Due to their flexibility and spontaneity, semi-structured interviews not only allow researchers to confirm or question their existing understanding of the topic but also uncover entirely new information, introduce unexpected topics, or reveal new perspectives on established knowledge (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 101). This makes them a suitable method for this research, particularly given the limited existing literature on balancing creative identity and financial viability (Karatsareas, 2022, p. 101). This approach allows for flexibility in questioning, ensuring that key themes are explored while enabling participants to share insights specific to their experiences (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, pp. 4-5).

### 3.2 Sampling Strategy

For this study, purposive sampling was used as a non-random technique in qualitative research to deliberately select participants based on their knowledge and expertise on the topic (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2). This method helps identify information-rich cases for optimal use of resources without requiring a specific sample size or underlying theory. Additionally, participant availability, willingness to engage, and ability to articulate experiences were key considerations (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2). A total of 53 Swiss festivals of varying sizes and organizational models, ranging from large-scale commercial events to small non-profit festivals, were contacted. By incorporating festivals of varying sizes, genres, and linguistic regions in Switzerland, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different strategies used by festival organizers to balance creative identity with financial sustainability. All major festivals in Switzerland (>20,000 daily visitors) were contacted, such as Openair Frauenfeld, Paléo Festival, Openair Gampel, Openair St. Gallen, Greenfield Festival,

Gurtenfestival, Montreux Jazz Festival, and Zürich Openair (Suhr, 2019). In addition, based on self-knowledge of the local festival scene, a selection of medium-sized festivals (10,000–20,000 daily visitors) and smaller, independent festivals (<10,000) from the German-speaking part of Switzerland were also included to capture a broader range of perspectives (Suhr, 2019). Organizers were approached through LinkedIn, email, or contact forms on the festivals' official websites. The outreach focused on board members and key decision-makers, including Executive Managers, Artist and Booking Managers, Finance Managers, and Communication and Sponsoring Managers, as these individuals were considered valuable to provide insights into both the creative and financial aspects of festival organization. In the end, 10 festivals responded to the outreach. This resulted in 8 in-depth verbal interviews and 2 written responses, the latter due to time constraints on the part of the participants. All participating festivals were located in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. After ten interviews, theoretical saturation was reached, as recurring themes appeared consistently across the data; therefore, no further interviews were conducted (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1895). This decision was also influenced by the defined scope of the thesis and a lack of additional responses from contacted participants. Table 1 provides a list of all participants involved in this study. The sample includes ten organizers holding key positions in areas such as executive management, finance, communication, and artistic programming. It reflects a broad spectrum of festival types and sizes, encompassing both free and ticketed events, as well as a range of legal structures, from non-profit associations to corporate and hybrid models.

|           | Gender | Years of Festival Organization Experience | Contract  | Position                                       | Festival Type | Festival Reach (Total Visitors) | Legal Status of Festival |
|-----------|--------|---|-----------|--|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>P1</b> | Female | 3 years                                   | Voluntary | Executive Management, Awareness, Food, Booking | Free Entry    | ~5000                           | Non-Profit Association   |
| <b>P2</b> | Male   | 23 years                                  | Voluntary | Communication, Graphics                        | Ticketed      | ~800-1000                       | Non-Profit Association   |
| <b>P3</b> | Male   | 10 years                                  | Voluntary | Executive Management,                          | Ticketed      | ~7500                           | Non-Profit Association   |

|            |          |          |               |  |            |            |   |
|------------|----------|----------|---------------|--|------------|------------|---|
| <b>P4</b>  | Male     | 10 years | Voluntary     | Finances, Office                                     | Free Entry | ~2000      | Non-Profit Association                    |
| <b>P5</b>  | Male     | 4 years  | Voluntary     | Executive Management, Finances, Sponsoring           | Free Entry | ~2000-3000 | Non-Profit Association                    |
| <b>P6</b>  | Male     | 9 years  | Voluntary     | Executive Management, Sponsoring                     | Free Entry | ~5000      | Non-Profit Association                    |
| <b>P7</b>  | unknow n | unknown  | Voluntary     | unknown  | Ticketed   | ~18'500    | Corporation                               |
| <b>P8</b>  | Female   | 20 years | Voluntary     | Communication  | Ticketed   | ~10000     | Non-Profit Association                    |
| <b>P9</b>  | Male     | 15 years | Paid position | Executive Management, Marketing, Sponsoring, Booking | Ticketed   | ~35000     | Dual Structure: Association & Corporation |
| <b>P10</b> | Male     | 3 years  | Paid position | CFO  | Ticketed   | ~20000     | LLC                                       |

Table 1: List of Participants

### 3.3 Data Collection

Data collection took place in Switzerland between April 3 and May 19, 2025, and involved a total of ten in-depth interviews with organizers of Swiss music festivals. Of these, 2 were conducted in person, 4 by phone call, 2 via Zoom, and 2 through written responses due to scheduling constraints on the part of the participants. At the beginning of each interview, participants were presented with a consent statement outlining the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any point, and the recording procedure. To establish rapport, each conversation began with two to three introductory questions that helped ease participants into the discussion (Morris, 2015, pp. 79-80). To create a comfortable atmosphere for participants, all interviews were conducted in Swiss German, the interviewees' native language. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing for both guided questioning and flexibility (Morris, 2015, p. 40). The interview guide was developed to ensure

that all key themes relevant to the research questions were addressed, while still allowing participants the freedom to guide the conversation flexibility (Morris, 2015, p. 41). The structure and content of the guide were based on existing research about how festivals are managed, their creative identity, and how they stay financially sustainable (e.g., Brown & Sharpley, 2019; Carlsen et al., 2010; Getz, 2002; Getz & Andersson, 2008; Knardal & Pettersen, 2015; López & Leenders, 2018; Perron-Brault et al., 2020). In line with Morris (2015, p. 41), the selected topics were intended to generate responses that both resonate with existing research and provide data necessary to answer the research questions. The guide was structured around six main themes: (1) festival profile and ownership structure, (2) festival management and organizational structure, (3) creative identity and artistic vision, (4) finances, (5) the relationship between creative freedom and financial reality, and (6) innovation and future developments. Each theme was represented by open-ended questions designed to encourage in-depth reflection and concrete examples from the participants' experiences. The full topic list is included in Appendix A.

The interviews varied in length, ranging from approximately 20 to 45 minutes. The shorter interviews still provided sufficient responses to address the main research themes. With participants' informed consent, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. As Swiss German is not a standardized written language, the transcriptions were translated into High German for the analysis. Special care was taken to preserve meaning in cases where dialect-specific expressions could not be translated directly. As such, minor deviations from standard German were retained to reflect the original phrasing as closely as possible. Finally, all interviews were anonymized by removing participants' names, festival names, locations, lineups, and any other details that could reveal the identity of the festival or interviewee. The interview data served as the basis for the analysis, which is explained in more detail later in this chapter.

### 3.4 Operationalization

This section draws on existing literature to define and operationalize the key analytical concepts used in this study. The format and scope of a festival were operationalized based on the dimensions outlined by Paleo & Wijnberg (2006, p. 58). This includes character (competitive vs. non-competitive), purpose (for-profit vs. not-for-profit), range (wide vs. focused), and format (one-track vs. multivenue, non-ranking vs. ranking). As discussed in the theoretical framework, this study understands creative identity as the outcome of all creative decisions made by festival organizers. Based on this definition, creative identity was assessed through the following dimensions: Lineup decisions, including the selection of artists, the overall curation of the program, and the broadness of a music festival's lineup in terms of the number of musical genres present (Lopez & Leenders, 2018, p. 440). Event design, encompassing stage and venue aesthetics, thematic elements, and spatial arrangements that contribute to the festival's atmosphere (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 711). Online content and digital presence, such as social media engagement, and exclusive digital experiences that extend the festival beyond the

physical event (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 711; Fernandes & Krolikowska, 2023, pp. 29-30). Branding and visual identity, including marketing materials, logo design, merchandise, and promotional strategies that shape audience perception (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 711; Leenders, 2010, pp. 152-153). Other entertainment factors, such as workshops, interactive experiences, and additional activities beyond the music lineup that enhance audience engagement (Brown & Sharpley, 2019, p. 711).

Financial viability was operationalized using the concept of economic sustainability in festivals as defined by Getz & Andersson (2008, pp. 3-4). This includes assessing whether adequate revenues can be sustained, whether costs can be effectively controlled, and whether the organization remains financially viable, meaning it has the capacity to continue producing the event over time.

Although not explicitly part of the research question, organizational structure was assessed because it can be a relevant factor in explaining the success or failure of festivals (Getz, 2002, p. 212). As many different types of festivals were involved, it was also included as a control variable to enrich the information gathered. Organizational culture was assessed through organizational structure, leadership, and internal decision-making processes (Getz, 2002, p. 212). This includes the flexibility or rigidity of the organizational structure, the presence or absence of strong leadership, and the degree of alignment or division in internal decision-making regarding goals, programming, and strategy (Getz, 2002, p. 212). This served as the basis for both the development of the interview topic guide and the creation of the initial coding frame, which was later refined during the analysis process, as outlined in the following section.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The data was analysed using thematic analysis, an approach that identifies recurrent features or patterns across the data set (Clarke & Braun, 2016, pp. 297-298). A hybrid thematic analysis approach, combining deductive and inductive elements, was applied to guide the analysis while remaining open to new insights (Fereday & Muir-Cochran, 2006, pp. 81-83; Proudfoot, 2022, p. 309). This method ensures a structured yet flexible approach, allowing predefined theoretical concepts to frame the analysis while also enabling new themes to emerge from the data (Proudfoot, 2022, p. 309). It enhances methodological rigor by preventing excessive theoretical imposition while ensuring that findings remain grounded in empirical data (Fereday & Muir-Cochran, 2006, pp. 81-83; Proudfoot, 2022, pp. 309-310). Additionally, this approach is particularly suited for exploring complex and layered research problems, making it well-suited for studying how festival organizers balance creative identity and financial viability (Proudfoot, 2022, p. 309).

In this study, template analysis was used as a method of thematic analysis to structure and analyze qualitative data (Brooks et al., 2015; King, 2004; Symon et al., 2012). This approach emphasizes hierarchical coding while allowing flexibility in refining themes to suit the research needs (Brooks et al., 2015, pp. 203-204; King, 2004, p. 256). To ensure a systematic and structured analysis, qualitative data were coded and organized using Atlas.ti. The analytical process followed several key

steps as outlined by Brooks et al. (2015, pp. 203–204). First, the transcripts were reviewed to gain familiarity with the content. Subsequently, preliminary coding was conducted to identify relevant segments in the data, incorporating *a priori* themes derived from existing academic literature, as explained in the operationalization chapter (Brooks et al., 2015, pp. 203-204). Emerging themes were then grouped into meaningful clusters, establishing hierarchical relationships where appropriate. For example, *Financial Strategies* were identified as a subset of broader *Strategies to Balance Creativity and Financial Viability*, encompassing aspects such as budget planning and cost-cutting measures like the use of volunteer work. Similarly, *Creative Strategies* formed another subcategory, including themes such as *Creating Value Through Atmosphere and Experience*, or using *Personal Networks in Booking*. An initial coding template was developed using a subset of the data and iteratively refined as additional interviews were coded. However, since each festival employed its own distinct strategies, a considerable number of new codes emerged during the coding process. After the initial round of coding, a total of 112 codes had been generated. These were subsequently reviewed, refined, and merged where overlaps occurred. For example, in the initial coding phase, statements about the need to stick to a budget, the importance of having a realistic budget, and the practice of developing budget plans based on previous years were coded separately. However, as all these points related to a common theme of structured and experience-based budget planning, they were later merged into the category *Strict (Experience-Based) Budget Planning*. Furthermore, during the initial coding phase, some content was coded that, while interesting, was ultimately deemed irrelevant to the research question, for instance, reflections on the impact of COVID-19 on festival operations. Such codes were either removed from the final analysis or, when found to be indirectly relevant, integrated into broader categories where appropriate. Once the template was refined, it was applied to the full dataset as part of the second coding process to ensure a comprehensive and structured analysis (Brooks et al., 2015, pp. 203–204). The final coding template comprised 80 codes. Of these, 43 represented concrete strategies identified by participants to navigate the balance between creative identity and financial viability. These strategies were then thematically organized, with guidance from relevant academic literature to support the analysis. The remaining codes focused on assessing the festivals' creative identity, financial viability, including revenue sources and financial challenges, as well as their ownership structures. This comprehensive coding approach provided a structured basis for comparing the cases, allowing for the identification of both shared patterns and distinctive features across the different festivals. The full coding frame, including all categories, subcategories, and illustrative quotes, can be found in Appendix B.

### 3.6 Reliability and Credibility

To ensure the credibility and reliability of this study, multiple strategies were employed in line with established qualitative research standards. Central to this approach and to establishing the credibility of the research is the concept of rich rigor, which Tracy (2010, p. 841) defines as the use of sufficient, contextually relevant data and appropriately complex methods to reflect the intricacy of the

phenomenon under investigation. In this study, interviews were conducted with festival managers from a range of organizational contexts, including festivals of different sizes, ownership structures, and professional roles within the organization. This purposeful sampling strategy helps capture the diversity and complexity of the live music festival sector, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were employed to ensure that all key themes were explored consistently across participants (Morris, 2015, p. 40). In addition, the thematic analysis was guided by relevant academic literature and carried out in multiple steps, allowing for both inductive and deductive insights to emerge and ensuring a thorough and transparent coding process. Furthermore, to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, all quotes were translated into English by two independent researchers, a fellow student and the author, and then compared and revised collaboratively to prevent any loss of meaning in translation.

As Silverman (2011, p. 360) emphasizes, transparency is key in qualitative research, particularly in clearly documenting the methods used. Accordingly, all interviews were audio-recorded and carefully transcribed by the researcher to preserve accuracy and context, as recommended by Silverman (2011, p. 365). Both Silverman (2011) and Tracy (2010, p. 840) underscore the importance of transparency in reporting the research strategy and analytical procedures. All steps, from data collection to thematic analysis, are therefore described in detail to support transparency and interpretive trustworthiness. This thorough documentation also contributes to the study's reliability by enabling the research process to be replicated (Silverman, 2011, p. 360).

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

All ethical considerations in this research were guided by the EUR ethics policy (EUR, 2018). In line with these guidelines, participants were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the interview, any potential risks involved, and their right to participate voluntarily. Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained, and participants were explicitly reminded that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any point without consequence (EUR, 2018, p. 7). To accommodate the busy schedules of festival managers, written responses were also accepted as an alternative format, ensuring flexibility and respecting participants' time constraints. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers and that the goal was to understand their experiences and perspectives. To ensure participants felt comfortable and could express themselves fully, interviews were conducted in their native language. This helped create a sense of trust and encouraged open, honest responses. To ensure confidentiality and protect participant identities, all personal and organizational identifiers, such as names of individuals and festivals, were anonymized during transcription. Interview recordings were used solely for the purpose of transcription and were securely deleted immediately afterward. Transcripts and related data were securely stored in the EUR Cloud to prevent unauthorized access and to ensure the integrity of the data throughout the

research process (Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity, 2018, p. 20). Furthermore, all interview transcriptions were carried out manually by the researcher rather than using AI tools or automated transcription software, ensuring data confidentiality.

## 4. Results

To explore how music festival organizers in Switzerland navigate the balance between creative identity and financial sustainability, this study applied a thematic analysis to ten semi-structured interviews with key decision-makers involved in various aspects of festival planning and management. The coding process revealed that the central tension identified in the research question, namely the struggle to maintain creative direction while ensuring financial viability, is deeply embedded in the everyday realities of festival organizers. At the same time, the analysis identified several recurring strategies that organizers use to cope with this tension. These include building financial buffers and mitigating risk, managing costs creatively using creative solutions to make the festival more appealing to people, relying on local networks and resources, and drawing on post-festival learning to strengthen internal expertise.

In the following sections, each of these themes will be examined in detail, illustrating how festival organizers actively negotiate the complex relationship between creativity and financial sustainability.

### 4.1 The Tension Between Creativity and Financial Viability

A key finding across the interviews was that creativity and innovation are closely tied to available financial resources, confirming and adding to existing literature on the tensions between artistic ambition and financial constraints in the festival sector (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 123; De Maule, 2013, p. 261; Getz, 2007, p. 210; Knardal & Burns, 2020, p. 112; Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, pp. 682–683, 692–693; Oddane, 2015, p. 33). Nine out of ten participants explicitly stated that their creative decisions are significantly constrained by budget limitations. This restriction primarily affects core creative elements such as the lineup, overall festival design atmosphere, infrastructure, and side programming. In contrast, areas such as merchandising and communication were generally seen as less impacted by financial constraints, as they are not considered a priority when additional funds become available. However, this outcome may also be influenced by the fact that most interviewees were not directly involved in areas such as design or communication but rather worked in roles related to booking or held executive positions overseeing general operations. For many, the lineup was clearly regarded as the most significant creative decision within the festival. In response to the question “*How do finances restrict your creativity?*”, one participant summarized this relationship by explaining:

*“Yes, certainly the number of bands we can book, and also which bands. That depends on the money. So, the more money we have, the more we can be creative. I think, in general, you can just do more if you have the budget. But it's also an art to do things with a smaller budget. You have to get creative and find creative solutions to do something cool.” (P4)*

This reflects what Knardal and Burns (2020, p. 112) describe as the central dilemma for festival organizers, the ongoing challenge of balancing creative ambitions with uncertain financial resources. In this context, creativity becomes not only a means of artistic expression but also a strategic response to financial uncertainty (Knardal and Burns, 2020, p. 112).

A key challenge for many organizers lies in striking a delicate balance between what is financially feasible and what is likely to attract audiences. As one participant explained,

*“This year we've also reduced our lineup budget a bit and booked a few less well-known bands, so we're trying to find our balance. I think that's a constant issue, how we should manage it, and also, it's different every year. So, what kind of lineup do you need, what are the prices of the acts, how many people come to the festival at all. Yes, you have to find a good balance somehow.” (P2)*

Several participants emphasized that maintaining the right balance between financial constraints and creative goals is not a fixed process but must be reassessed each year, as factors such as artist fees, audience expectations, and available resources vary over time. This observation aligns with existing literature that highlights the seasonal and unstable nature of the festival sector (De Maule, 2013, p. 261). Because festival planning depends on limited timeframes, varying audience demand, and fluctuating funding, long-term stability is difficult to achieve. As De Maule (2013, p. 261) explains, these conditions require organizers to react quickly and use their creativity to adapt to changing circumstances and remain competitive in an uncertain environment.

The analysis shows that this need for balance is closely tied to the reality that innovation is often only possible when additional resources are available. While small adjustments are feasible, more transformative creative changes are generally avoided unless supported by external funding or new opportunities. As the same participant noted,

*“Yes, these are small adjustments, because we also realize that we can't turn everything upside down, given the resources we can invest.” (P2)*

This highlights how innovation is not purely driven by vision or ambition, but is deeply resource-dependent, emerging only when conditions permit. These findings are consistent with the work of Knardal and Pettersen (2015), who emphasize that budgeting in festival settings can contribute to organizational rigidity and slow, risk-averse planning processes (pp. 682-683). According to their analysis, the structured nature of budgets often limits the flexibility needed for creative experimentation, leading to incremental rather than transformative thinking (Knardal and Pettersen, 2015, 682). Moreover, several studies underscore the importance of innovation for long-term economic growth in a rapidly changing global environment, marked by evolving technologies, shifting market conditions, and changing audience preferences (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 123; Getz & Andersson, 2010, p. 552;

Oddane, 2015, p. 33). In this context, festivals must innovate not only to maintain cultural relevance but also to remain financially viable, thus creating an ongoing tension between these two constructs, a tension that festival organizers must continually manage.

## 4.2 Strategies to Navigate the Balance between Creativity and Financial Viability

While the specific challenges faced by each festival vary, the interviews revealed a number of recurring strategies that organizers use to navigate the tension between creative ambition and financial constraint. Despite the diversity of contexts, similar patterns emerged in how festival managers adapt, prioritize, and innovate within their resource limitations. These strategies will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

### 4.2.1 Financial Buffering and Risk Mitigation

A key strategy identified across interviews for managing financial uncertainty and ensuring long-term viability was the use of financial buffering and risk mitigation, which includes building monetary reserves, engaging in crowdfunding, and securing long-term sponsorship agreements. While crowdfunding was often described as a short-term solution to cover immediate costs, securing long-term sponsorships was seen as a more sustainable strategy for financial stability. By maintaining financial reserves, organizers also aim to prepare for worst-case scenarios, such as external disruptions like bad weather, which can significantly affect ticket sales and overall revenue, ultimately influencing the available budget for creative decisions.

#### 4.2.1.1 Building Reserves

One of the main themes that emerged from the analysis is the importance of building financial reserves as a strategy to remain viable in the long term. For many festival organizers, the ability to survive a difficult year, whether due to bad weather, low ticket sales, or other unpredictable factors, is seen as essential to being able to host the festival again the following year. This financial buffering is closely tied to the structural challenges of festival organization, where high upfront costs and limited control over income can create significant financial risk (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 682). Many participants emphasized the importance of setting money aside during successful years in order to build a financial cushion. As one organizer explained,

*"Yes, we're making sure that we can put money aside so that we can get through a few bad years. (...) We have a five-year plan where we say one bad year and then four good ones, and then compensate in this way. And that has actually worked relatively well so far. But you always*

*watch out a little bit and don't spend extra money, because then it won't work in the long term."*  
(P5)

This strategy was mentioned across different types of festivals, though the ability to build reserves varied. Non-profit festivals, in particular, reported greater difficulty in establishing financial buffers due to their lack of admission fees and more limited revenue streams. This makes sense, as these festivals often operate without ticket sales, which leaves them with far smaller budgets and therefore less surplus to put aside. This is consistent with findings by Andersson and Getz (2008, p. 213), who note that while building a reserve fund is widely regarded as a desirable strategy among event managers, it is often difficult to implement due to limited surplus revenue. Nevertheless, the theme of financial resilience also surfaced among commercial festivals, where even those with more stable income emphasized the value of reserve-building. As one participant described,

*"So even if the weather were bad, we now have a bit of a buffer. So, it looks pretty relaxed, and ticket sales work every year. No, that doesn't make me so nervous anymore."* (P8)

In this way, relying on built-up reserves not only helps manage risk but also reduces pressure and uncertainty during the planning and execution phases. Thus, financial buffering emerges as a crucial first layer in navigating the broader tension between creative ambition and financial sustainability. This is further supported by findings from Carlsen and Andersson (2011, p. 93), who identify the establishment of reserve funds as a common response to external influences such as bad weather. Their results show that both non-profit and, to a lesser extent, commercial festivals report setting up financial buffers, highlighting its perceived importance across different types of ownership. In doing so, they increase their ability to continue running the festival annually, regardless of external influences, which in turn creates the financial stability needed to act more creatively and take calculated risks (Carlsen & Andersson, 2011, p. 89; Andersson & Getz, 2008, p. 213).

#### 4.2.1.2 *Crowdfunding*

Another strategy used to mitigate financial risk, particularly among non-profit festivals, is crowdfunding. This approach is generally viewed as a short-term solution to address immediate funding gaps. Several organizers reported turning to their communities for financial support during years of unexpected shortfalls or when reserves were insufficient. One participant explained,

*"There were slightly fewer people than expected. So, we couldn't put enough money aside. And then last year we didn't have enough reserves, so we had to do a crowdfunding campaign to cover the expenses from last year."* (P2)

Weather-related issues were also mentioned as a common cause for such financial gaps. As another organizer noted,

*“Last year, for example, many festivals launched crowdfunding campaigns because the weather wasn’t very good.” (P4)*

This aligns with recent developments in cultural and creative industries, where crowdfunding has become an increasingly popular funding tool. As Cicchiello et al. (2022, p. 35) observe, the use of crowdfunding in Europe’s cultural and creative sectors has grown significantly in recent years, providing an alternative funding channel particularly relevant for smaller, independent initiatives.

While crowdfunding is generally seen as a realistic and community-oriented solution, it is not without limitations. Its success depends heavily on the strength of local support and the willingness of the public to contribute. One participant reflected,

*“It actually worked quite well. I think the local community really values us.” (P2),*

highlighting how existing community ties can make or break such efforts.

At the same time, participants acknowledged that crowdfunding requires significant additional effort and comes with uncertainty, since it is impossible to know in advance whether people will be willing to contribute or how much support the campaign will generate. These observations reflect concerns in the literature about the risks of relying too heavily on a single funding source. Carlsen and Andersson (2011, p. 90) emphasize that such financial dependence increases a festival’s vulnerability, especially when the continuation of the festival depends on it, which can pose significant risks, particularly for non-profit festivals. Similarly, Getz (2002, p. 212) identifies dependence on a single revenue stream as a key factor contributing to festival failure. In summary, while crowdfunding can offer short-term relief during financially difficult years, it is not a consistent or sustainable funding model. Its success depends heavily on external conditions like community engagement and public willingness to contribute. Therefore, it should be seen not as a primary solution, but as one component of a broader, diversified financial strategy essential for long-term resilience (Carlsen and Andersson, 2011, p. 90; Getz, 2002, p. 212).

#### *4.2.1.3 Importance of (long-term) Sponsorship Deals*

Sponsorships emerged as a crucial financial pillar across nearly all cases, with 9 out of 10 festivals, both non-profit and commercial, indicating a heavy reliance on sponsor partnerships to sustain operations. Several participants described sponsorships as existentially important for their financial viability. This finding is in line with the literature highlighting the importance of sponsorships for a festival’s financial viability (Getz, 2008, p. 9; Getz & Andersson, 2010, p. 542; Larson, 2009, p. 297; Rowley & Williams, 2008, p. 781). Because of this strong dependency, long-term sponsorship deals were frequently cited as a core strategy to reduce financial uncertainty. In contrast to crowdfunding, which is generally seen as a short-term response to financial gaps, long-term sponsorships are perceived

as a more stable and sustainable solution. They not only help secure ongoing funding but also provide festivals with greater planning security and a higher budget for creative efforts. One participant explained,

*"Yes, we've had the same sponsors for years. That makes things a lot easier and also gives us a bit of security, because we know that part of our budget is already covered. We can count on it and know the exact amounts." (P1)*

However, not all festivals enjoy this level of stability. Several participants highlighted the difficulty of securing new sponsors, with one noting that replacing a major sponsor can take years, further reinforcing the value of durable partnerships. This concern is echoed by Getz (2002, p. 213), who warns that dependence on one or a few resource suppliers poses a significant risk. If such sponsors or suppliers withdraw their support, the festival may be left financially vulnerable (Getz, 2002, p. 213). This underscores the importance of securing long-term sponsorship deals to ensure financial stability and reduce vulnerability to sudden changes in support.

Furthermore, a common strategy among festivals was to turn suppliers into sponsors, fostering long-term cooperative relationships that offered mutual benefits. These partnerships often involved in-kind contributions such as discounts, logistical support, or flexible purchasing agreements, helping festivals reduce operational costs.

*"We have different contracts with beverage sponsors. (...) We can purchase stuff cheaper and return what we don't use." (P6)*

This approach reflects a broader trend in the festival industry, where traditional cost factors such as suppliers and service providers are increasingly being integrated into sponsorship strategies (Getz et al., 2006, p. 117; Andersson and Getz, 2008, p.205). Getz et al. (2006, p. 117) observe that suppliers and venues, typically considered expense items, can become sponsors themselves, often through a blend of free or discounted services and paid arrangements. Similarly, Andersson and Getz (2008) identify this as a successful stakeholder management strategy, highlighting that converting suppliers into sponsors is a promising way to reduce costs while simultaneously building long-term support (pp. 205, 213).

As a contrasting example, one festival reported a notably different approach. Unlike the majority of cases, it had no sponsors and relied primarily on ticket sales. According to the organizer, sponsorship was not essential because the event consistently sells out, even in poor weather, due to strong local support. This can be attributed to the festival's niche musical focus and its deep roots in both the local community and the broader fan base of that specific genre, which aligns with De Maule's (2013, p. 249) observation that some festivals succeed in selling a large number of advance tickets because they have a loyal audience and a unique identity that goes beyond simply offering popular acts.

Similarly, Carlsen and Andersson (2011, pp. 214–215) emphasize that such festivals often attain the status of “institutions,” playing a valued role within their communities, a status that helps explain the consistent support they receive from local audiences year after year.

## 4.2.2 Cost Management

In response to limited and often unpredictable financial resources, festival organizers implement various strategies to manage costs effectively. This section explores how festivals operate within their financial constraints by focusing on efficiency, prioritization, and strategic spending. Two key approaches emerged from the analysis: maximizing cost efficiency through resourceful operational practices and strict, experience-based budget planning to ensure financial discipline across all areas of festival organization.

### 4.2.2.1 Maximising Cost Efficiency: Balancing Savings with Values

Within the broader cost management strategy, many festivals, particularly non-profit ones, pursue cost-saving measures across several operational areas to maintain financial viability. These strategies include limiting artist fees, reducing advertising costs, and relying heavily on volunteer labour. Across the board, the goal is to maximize cost efficiency without undermining the core experience of the festival. One key area where savings occur is in artist remuneration. Especially in non-profit contexts, artists are often paid modest fees, which allows organizers to allocate limited budgets elsewhere. As one participant explained,

*“No, we don’t pay very little, but also not very much. If we had more money, the first thing we would do is pay more generous artist fees.” (P4)*

Another participant echoed this sentiment, expressing a desire to compensate artists more fairly, acknowledging that many musicians rely on performance fees for their livelihood. This reflects a common tension between financial limitations and fair compensation. As Hiller (2016, p. 332) points out, festivals often try to reduce headliner costs while booking lesser-known artists who are high-quality but more affordable. These acts can still enhance the audience experience and reputation of the festival, offering value without high fees (2016, p. 332).

In terms of promotion, non-profit festivals often spend very little on advertising, relying primarily on their own communication channels or informal promotion by sponsors. Many organizers felt that heavy advertising wasn’t necessary, as their audiences are often loyal to local communities. This can help reduce costs and allocate them somewhere else.

Another major area of cost reduction is through volunteer labour, which plays a central role in both planning and executing festivals. As shown in Table 1, 8 out of 10 festivals in this study relied primarily on volunteers within their organizing committees. Furthermore, during the festivals

themselves, volunteer shifts are a standard model for every festival. In exchange for their time, volunteers at commercial festivals are typically offered a ticket, a T-shirt, and meals, while non-profit festivals usually provide a shirt and meals. Paid positions are generally limited to security personnel and technical staff, keeping wage expenses low. These findings align with broader industry patterns described by Getz et al. (2010, p. 40), who note that few festivals employ year-round staff, and that non-profit festivals, in particular, rely heavily on volunteers as a core part of their business model. In many cases, volunteer involvement extends beyond the event itself, with a significant proportion of not-for-profit festivals having volunteers on their boards or involved in year-round operations (Getz et al., 2010, p. 40).

#### *4.2.2.2 Strict, Experience-Based Budget Planning*

As expected from the academic literature, all participating festivals, regardless of their organizational model, whether commercial or non-profit, emphasized the central role of strict, experience-based budget planning as part of their broader cost management strategy (Knardal & Burns, 2020, p. 126; Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, pp. 692–693). Every festival reported having a clearly defined budget plan prior to the start of festival planning. This plan is typically based on revenues from previous years, the amount of sponsorship income, and the level of public funding available. Once the total budget is determined, it is divided among different departments, each of which is expected to operate within its allocated financial frame. Within these predefined limits, departments are encouraged to work creatively, but the importance of adhering to the assigned budget was universally stressed. As one participant noted,

*“Yes, exactly, everyone receives a budget, and that has to be adhered to.” (P9)*

While budget plans are clearly defined in advance, several participants acknowledged that minor deviations are possible when strategically justified. One interviewee noted that their festival includes a “miscellaneous” budget category to accommodate unforeseen needs if a department exceeds its allocation. Another participant explained that in certain cases, they deliberately choose to exceed the planned budget, particularly when booking artists who are expected to boost ticket sales:

*“If we find a really good artist, we sometimes go beyond the budget for that. We always have to figure out what’s worth it. (...) It’s difficult to predict which artist will actually convince people to buy a ticket. It’s an investment, and you always hope it pays off.” (P3)*

Overall, these insights broadly support Knardal and Pettersen’s (2015) research, which highlights the budget as a key management control tool in the festival context (pp. 692-693). Their study underlines how budget systems, when based on historical data and strategically adjusted, help balance the need for financial discipline with the flexibility required for creative programming (p. 681). Particularly in environments marked by uncertainty, such as fluctuating audience turnout, variable artist fees, or

weather-related disruptions, a well-planned, experience-based budget enables stability and informed decision-making (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 682).

### 4.2.3 Creative Strategies

After outlining how financial constraints are managed, this section shifts focus to how creativity is still actively pursued, particularly in the areas of lineup curation and festival atmosphere. While many organizers, especially from non-profit festivals, reported feeling most creatively restricted in aspects such as lineup selection and overall ambiance, several themes emerged from the analysis that illustrate how festivals actively pursue creativity despite these limitations. These efforts are often driven by the hope of attracting a larger audience, which in turn can lead to increased revenue and greater financial flexibility in future editions.

#### 4.2.3.1 Booking Strategy

Creativity in festival programming often emerges through efforts to balance artistic vision with financial realities. This includes strategic decisions about which artists to book in line with the festival's identity, how to schedule performances within the lineup, and how to offer something new and exciting each year. Several themes emerged from the analysis that show how organizers, both from commercial and non-profit festivals, apply different strategies to curate compelling lineups that aim to increase audience attendance and contribute to the overall success of the festival.

Across all festivals, regardless of size or structure, staying in tune with musical trends emerged as a central element of the booking strategy. Every festival reported having a dedicated booking team responsible for brainstorming, listening to a wide range of artists, and identifying acts that align with the festival's identity and target audience. This aligns with findings by Simon et al. (2017, pp. 161–163), who emphasize the importance of curating a lineup that reflects audience preferences as a key driver of success. One participant explained,

*“We do invest some time in researching what’s currently popular. We collect our ideas in a table, then create a shared Spotify playlist that everyone listens to. Afterwards, we hold meetings to make decisions together.” (P2)*

Another interviewee noted that their booking team consists of people who are very engaged in the music scene and, therefore, naturally aware of current trends. In contrast, commercial festivals tend to rely more on booking agencies, but they also seek ways to discover emerging talent. One organizer mentioned attending showcase festivals specifically to scout new artists. Despite different methods, both types of festivals emphasized the importance of staying musically relevant, whether by following trends or discovering emerging artists. These examples show that programming can be a creative process, where organizers use their musical knowledge to find new and relevant acts that fit the festival's

identity. This reflects the point made by López and Leenders (2018, p. 436) that festival organizers are required to strategically make creative decisions, such as selecting headliners, supporting artists, and young talents, as well as deciding between taking creative risks through innovative programming or choosing more familiar acts. To maintain audience appeal, they are expected to be both innovative and offer something unique each year, and it takes creativity to do this consistently, confirming that booking is not only a logistical task but also a creative strategy to attract audiences. However, this need to attract a wider audience often brings financial considerations into play, which can influence or limit these creative intentions. For example, many participants highlighted the importance of including at least one headliner per festival day, an artist with enough name recognition to draw in a broader audience. One organizer noted,

*“Yes, we try to have a band every night that works as a headliner, or one that we know that if you tell your friends, they’ll know who they are. So, a band that attracts people.” (P1)*

Especially for commercial festivals, booking globally recognized acts was seen as essential for generating reach and demand:

*“Big headliners with global recognition definitely increase demand.” (P10)*

These high-profile acts serve as strategic anchors in the lineup, often justifying a higher budget due to their potential to boost ticket sales and media attention. These strategies support what Knardal and Pettersen (2015, p. 688) describe as the economic reason for booking well-known artists, they help attract more visitors and increase ticket sales. Similarly, López and Leenders (2018, pp. 443–445) argue that featuring popular national acts can increase audience turnout and can signal quality by reducing perceived risk for potential attendees.

At the same time, regional and emerging artists also play a significant role in lineups, particularly for non-profit festivals. All of them reported intentionally booking local acts, not only as a cost-effective solution but also as a way to support emerging artists. One organizer commented,

*“I think we, as free open-air festivals, have a bit of a regional focus,” (P5),*

while another added,

*“We provide a stage for Swiss artists and new talent.” (P3)*

Even commercial festivals acknowledged the value of balancing international headliners with promising local talent. This approach allows them to offer a diverse lineup and gives attendees the opportunity to discover new music. These booking strategies reflect a broader understanding of how audiences engage with music festivals. As Perron-Brault et al. (2020) argue, musical motivation is not singular but multidimensional, encompassing a range of desires, from seeing personal favourite artists,

to being drawn in by well-known performers, to experiencing the discovery of unfamiliar or local acts (p. 8). This understanding is clearly reflected in the strategies employed by festival organizers in this study.

#### *4.2.3.2 Creating Value through Atmosphere and Experience*

In addition to curating a musically compelling lineup, many festival organizers highlighted the importance of creating a unique festival atmosphere that extends beyond the performances themselves. Around half of the festivals in this study emphasized that audiences today increasingly seek distinctive and immersive experiences. As one participant explained,

*“And then I think the general trend is a bit more individuality, which a lot of people want. So, everyone is looking for special experiences, away from the masses and towards smaller, special formats. And these should also be more charged in terms of content and theme, i.e., more than just standing in a field, watching a concert, and drinking a beer.” (P9)*

This reflects a growing shift toward experience-driven programming, where festivals aim to differentiate themselves not only through their music but also through atmosphere, aesthetics, and added value (Neuhofer et al., 2020, pp. 2895-2896). This is consistent with Ballantyne et al. (2014, p. 66), who found that festivalgoers value not only the musical content but also the social and atmospheric aspects of the event. Similarly, Leenders et al. (2005, pp. 149, 153–154) argue that festival organizers must continuously explore new and creative ways to remain attractive to audiences.

Among commercial festivals, this shift is already taking shape in more structured ways. Two participants described their events as “experience festivals”, drawing inspiration from large-scale international events like Coachella. A key part of this strategy involves engaging with current lifestyle trends, particularly around health and wellbeing. One organizer noted that today’s festivalgoers increasingly value how they feel after the event, highlighting a transition from a party-centred culture to one that prioritizes mental and physical well-being. Referencing Coachella as a model, the participant described how brands and festivals now collaborate on wellness themes, shifting the focus toward positive recovery, self-care, and overall health-consciousness. Thus offering the attendees a distinct experience that goes beyond music alone. Such events exemplify the use of theming and storytelling as strategic tools to craft a lifestyle-oriented identity that emotionally resonates with audiences and encourages communal engagement (Neuhofer et al., 2020, p. 2896; Pine & Gilmore, 2016, p. 7). This further aligns with Leenders et al. (2005, p. 149), who argue that festivals function as hedonic products valued for emotional, social, and sensory experiences they create.

For non-profit festivals, this emphasis on experience is expressed differently but no less creatively. Here, the focus often lies in offering a rich supporting program that reflects the festival’s values and engages a diverse audience. Examples include interactive spaces like bazaars, children’s

programs, and creative or physical activities such as screen printing, circus tents, or casual food events. One participant described their approach as follows:

*“We call it the ‘experience area’, so far, we’ve had things like a tooth gem stand, screen printing, or portrait drawing.” (P1)*

These efforts are typically closely aligned with the festival’s creative identity and are designed to enhance visitor experience in accessible and community-focused ways. This aligns with broader research suggesting that non-profit festivals tend to be more community-oriented in their goals and operations compared to commercial festivals (Getz et al., 2010, p. 44).

It is important to note, of course, that each festival has its own unique creative identity, and the types of experiences offered are closely tied to that identity, as well as to the expectations of their specific audience (Simon et al., 2017, pp. 161–163). However, structurally similar festivals, whether in terms of size, funding model, or target demographic, often showed notable similarities in how they conceptualized and implemented experiential elements. This suggests that while experiential design is highly individualized, it could also reflect broader trends and shared strategic responses within the festival landscape. At the same time, these approaches are likely shaped by the available budget, which influences the scale and type of experiences that festivals are able to create.

#### 4.2.4 Networks and Local Resources

In addition to internal strategies, the analysis revealed how festivals draw on external support and collaboration, particularly through local networks and partnerships with other festivals. These connections help them access essential infrastructure, reduce operational costs, and secure long-term support, ultimately contributing to their financial viability and creating budget flexibility for creative initiatives.

##### 4.2.4.1 Using Local Support and Network

An emerging theme across several interviews was the significance of local embeddedness as a strategic resource in festival organization. Many festivals, particularly those with a long-standing presence, benefit from strong connections with their surrounding communities, including municipal authorities, local businesses, and residents. These local networks not only contribute to the festivals’ cultural legitimacy but also offer practical support and cost-saving opportunities. Participants shared that, over the years, their festivals have become well-established and deeply rooted in the local community, often seen as tradition and consistently supported by both residents and local authorities. One organizer reflected:

*“Now it’s really cool, we have a great relationship with the municipality, we’re seen as a traditional event and fully supported.” (P8)*

This participant highlighted how this local support has contributed to the festival's financial security and long-term stability:

*Presales start from day one, and we no longer worry financially. In the past, without presales, we were always anxious about whether people would come or whether it would rain. Now we're sold out in advance, and that's such a relief. Even if it rains, we've already secured the ticket revenue. Over 20 years, it's developed incredibly well." (P8)*

Some saw this embeddedness in local social and institutional structures as one of their greatest opportunities, particularly in terms of ensuring long-term financial viability. One participant noted,

*"I'm very grateful for the support we've received over the years, from our attendees, but also from the municipality. I think they'll continue to support us. That's definitely a big opportunity for us." (P3)*

In practical terms, these relationships often translate into material support or preferential conditions. Several organizers described receiving discounted rates from local suppliers, as well as free access to some infrastructural elements:

*"It's a huge opportunity for us to work with (festival location), because we get infrastructure and resources for free, like electricity, water, tape, a dishwasher, or storage space." (P4)*

Having strong ties with the local community brings a range of benefits, not just in terms of financial or material support, but also in helping to prevent conflicts. As one organizer shared,

*"We also have a good relationship with our neighbours, no conflicts or noise complaints. We're a neighbourhood festival and attract people across generations." (P4)*

These findings align with Getz et al.'s (2006) concept of institutionalization, which describes how festivals, as they mature, can become deeply embedded in their communities (pp. 104-105). This goes beyond simply reducing resource dependency; it involves developing strong, lasting networks of support that view the festival as an essential part of local life (Getz et al., 2006, pp. 104-105). In some cases, this support can be so strong that the community itself takes ownership of the festival, ensuring its continuation even in times of financial difficulty. Such institutional status enhances financial resilience, reduces operational risk, and contributes to long-term sustainability (Getz et al., 2006, pp. 120-121).

#### *4.2.4.2 Inter-Festival Collaboration and Shared Resources*

An emerging theme that stood out among some non-profit festivals, particularly those located within the same geographic region, was a strong commitment to collaboration and mutual support. Organizers described this not just as a practical arrangement but as a major opportunity to strengthen

their festivals collectively and address shared challenges more effectively. Several participants emphasized that collaboration has become increasingly structured in recent years. Several festivals have established a regional umbrella association, where representatives meet annually and stay in contact via a group chat to exchange advice, ask logistical questions, and share updates. As one participant explained,

*“We really want to strengthen our collaboration, visiting each other’s festivals, helping out, and standing together a bit more.” (P5)*

One area of cooperation is date coordination, aimed at avoiding overlaps that could divide local audiences and reduce visitor numbers. As one participant noted,

*“We’ve always made sure not to schedule our festival on the same weekend as the others.” (P4),*

while another added,

*“We had to make sure to avoid clashing with others. It would be a shame to split the audience, because in the end, both festivals suffer.” (P1)*

Another area where collaboration takes shape is in lineup planning. While occasional overlap in booked acts may occur, participants noted a general courtesy-based understanding to respect one another’s programming choices. As one organizer explained,

*“In terms of lineups, there’s an unwritten courtesy rule not to copy from each other. We try not to steal each other’s ideas.” (P6)*

Another significant aspect of collaboration involves the sharing of materials and resources. This can include items such as silent disco headphones, benches, walkie-talkies, and even volunteer staff. Festivals also exchange knowledge, for example, on logistics, insurance, or pricing. One participant shared,

*“Sometimes it’s just nice to share your worries. For example, we weren’t sure how to handle our insurance, and we asked in the chat and found a solution. We even compare beer prices sometimes.” (P4)*

Importantly, collaboration also extends to joint representation in dealing with regulatory authorities, especially in response to growing pressure from environmental and safety regulations. Several organizers described an increase in regulatory demands, such as stricter decibel limits or requirements, growing environmental pressure related to grass and soil preservation, which are difficult for small

festivals to meet on their own. One participant emphasized the financial burden of complying with these requirements:

*“The issue is the cost factor. It’s just not worth it for us alone to buy these things, and renting is incredibly expensive. Unless the city provides extra funding, we need to find other solutions, perhaps through the umbrella organization.” (P6)*

Furthermore, festival organizers mentioned that working together also strengthens their collective political voice. Rather than acting in isolation, festivals use their collective presence to negotiate with local authorities and resist unrealistic demands.

*“We want to maintain political pressure at the city level. It makes a difference when not just one festival, but several say something.” (P6)*

This finding appears to contrast with earlier literature by Andersson and Getz (2008, p. 213), who note that while sharing tangible resources among festivals may seem theoretically sound, it often faces practical or political barriers and is typically a crisis-driven or externally imposed strategy. However, the collaborative practices described in this study suggest a shift toward more proactive, voluntary cooperation. Rather than being driven by crisis or compulsion, these efforts are increasingly structured and embedded in long-term planning through regional umbrella associations. This contrast may be partly explained by changing conditions in the festival sector, including growing regulatory demands and limited public funding, which make collaboration increasingly useful and necessary (Wirth, 2023). In Switzerland, such cooperation is especially relevant given the current structure of cultural funding. As Wirth (2023) notes, public subsidies often require a minimum ticket price, which means that free, smaller, and community-focused festivals are frequently excluded from support. In this context, working together is not only a good strategy but could be essential for survival, as it allows festivals to share resources, exchange knowledge, and advocate jointly for more inclusive cultural policies. In doing so, these festivals demonstrate how regional cooperation can enhance resilience and contribute to long-term sustainability in a challenging cultural environment. This approach resembles what Winborg and Landström (2001, p. 248) describe as “relationship-oriented bootstrapping” in their study on small-scale businesses, where personal networks are used to access and share needed resources. Such socially oriented solutions are seen as a natural and complementary alternative to market-based strategies, particularly in rural or resource-limited contexts (Winborg & Landström, 2001, pp. 248–249). Comparable forms of collaboration have been documented in the film festival sector, where local and international festivals engage in shared resource use, joint programming, and strategic alliances aimed at cost reduction and innovation (Krainhöfer, 2018, pp. 10, 23–25, 32). Examples include shared venues, personnel, and co-funded travel costs, as well as joint platforms and marketing initiatives to expand audience reach and increase market power (Krainhöfer, 2018, pp. 10, 41). These collaborative practices offer a new perspective for music festival research. While such structured and proactive forms

of inter-festival cooperation have been documented in the film festival sector, they have not yet been widely observed or theorized in the existing academic literature on music festivals, even though such practices could be common in both local contexts and commercial festival settings.

#### 4.2.5 Post-Festival Learning and Internal Expertise

This final theme highlights how organizational culture and internal expertise contribute to a festival's long-term success. Many organizers described structured post-event reflections and a strong internal knowledge base as key to improving both creative and financial strategies over time. This aligns with Getz's (2002, p. 212) argument that the quality of internal organization is a key determinant of event outcomes, suggesting that intentional team processes and a culture of learning are not just beneficial but foundational for both creative outcomes and financial sustainability, as these internal teams are ultimately responsible for all strategic decisions.

##### 4.2.5.1 Yearly Post-Event Strategy Discussions

A majority of participants described holding structured discussions after the festival to evaluate what went well and what could be improved. These sessions were not limited to operational feedback but often extended to strategic topics such as creative direction, financial decision-making, and innovation planning. One organizer shared:

*“We always do an evaluation at the end of the year and decide what we want to keep the same, what we want to change, and then it’s clear which departments are responsible for what. We look at how the lineup was received by the audience and whether everything went smoothly with the infrastructure, food stands, bars, etc. And yes, there are always bigger and smaller adjustments.” (P2)*

This emphasis on internal reflection and structured feedback aligns with existing literature, which highlights how post-event learning is a key driver of innovation in festival settings. According to Carlsen et al. (2010), innovation often emerges from new insights gained during previous festival experiences and is closely linked to the creativity and vision of core team members such as artistic directors and festival managers. These individuals play a central role in translating experience into actionable change, particularly when it comes to programming and strategic development (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 123). Similarly, Larson (2009) notes that innovation in festivals often takes the form of rejuvenation within an existing framework, emphasizing adaptation and refinement rather than large-scale transformation (p. 295). This aligns with the analysis, where one participant described the goal of post-event discussions as refining existing formats, such as making the festival more family-friendly, rather than implementing major changes. This supports Larson's (2009) further observation that creative renewal can be driven by smaller initiatives aimed at staying “ahead of the market” and maintaining competitiveness (p. 302). Another example of such a small adjustment by responding to

evolving audience needs is the introduction of more alcohol-free beverages and vegan food options. Several participants mentioned noticing a trend toward declining alcohol consumption and a growing interest in healthier, more sustainable lifestyles, which influenced these changes. In contrast, some festivals are already engaging in longer-term strategic planning. One participant shared that their team recently attended a workshop focused on the year 2027, where they identified long-term goals and discussed how to gradually integrate them into upcoming editions:

*“We were just in a workshop for 2027 where we asked: What are the topics we need to address to continue evolving? Where do our challenges lie, and what can we already apply to 2026? Honestly, even if you plan for five years, in the end you’re really only operating within a two-year window.” (P9)*

This tension between ambition and uncertainty is also reflected in Larson’s (2009) findings, which highlight the challenges of initiating long-term innovation projects in festivals due to unpredictable budgets and the uncertainty of external influences (p. 303). However, attracting and retaining audiences requires ongoing innovation and the ability to offer a unique and engaging festival experience (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 120). This underscores the importance of post-event evaluations for shaping both creative direction and financial planning.

#### *4.2.5.2 Professional Expertise and Long-Term Involvement*

Another important aspect highlighted by participants was the role of organizational culture, particularly in relation to team expertise and continuity. This was seen as especially crucial for non-profit festivals, where limited resources make internal knowledge and experience even more valuable. Several organizers emphasized that having team members with relevant professional skills, whether in communication, design, or technical planning, greatly supports the smooth execution of the event, as it saves both time and resources.

Furthermore, festivals that retain a stable core team over several years seem to benefit from greater efficiency and increased creative capacity. One organizer explained:

*“We don’t have to reinvent everything. The festival runs, and the concept works. We just need to do it for a few years, and then you start to have the breathing room to refine and improve things, make it nicer, experiment.” (P8)*

This supports Larson’s (2009, p. 298) view that when festival teams work together over many years, they develop more efficient workflows and routines based on shared experience. As familiar challenges are handled more smoothly, organizers gain the flexibility to focus on creative improvements and fine-tune the festival concept over time. Another participant emphasized how important it is to encourage long-term commitment:

*“We actually have a solid core of people who’ve been involved for a longer time. We try to make sure people stay on board, so we don’t have to train new ones every time.” (P5)*

Participants explain that keeping experienced team members helps avoid the time-consuming process of onboarding and ensures a smoother run when everyone already knows their role. However, several participants also mentioned the growing challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers, both for the core organizational team and for event-time operations. Many noted that it is increasingly difficult to find people who are willing to work on a voluntary basis, especially over a longer period. As team members leave after only a short time, transferring responsibilities and knowledge becomes a recurring obstacle. One participant reflected on this issue, emphasizing the need for succession planning:

*“So yes, these organizational committee handovers and know-how are difficult, you have to plan ahead. In other words, you have to do some kind of junior staff planning. (...) But I think that’s the case with every association. So it’s nice to have people with some experience. The whole festival depends on the team, so it’s very important.” (P3)*

This aligns with Frost and Laing’s (2015, p. 1311) observation that succession planning is a major concern for smaller festivals, with many struggling to maintain continuity from year to year. This highlights the value of long-term involvement and organizational stability, as having experienced team members in place ensures smoother internal processes, reduces the need for constant retraining, and allows the festival to operate more efficiently.

## 5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the research question: How do music festival organizers manage the challenges of maintaining and innovating their creative identity while ensuring financial viability in their events? Drawing on ten in-depth interviews with festival organizers across Switzerland, representing a range of festival sizes, ownership models, and roles within their organizations, the research employed a thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in how these actors navigate the tension between creative vision and financial sustainability. The findings confirm that the tension between creativity and financial viability is not just theoretical, but a persistent challenge embedded in everyday decision-making. Organizers consistently described having to strike a careful balance between maintaining their creative identity and adapting to financial realities. The results indicate that this balance is achieved not through one-size-fits-all solutions, but through a flexible mix of strategies that reflect both the constraints and opportunities unique to each festival.

Furthermore, a central insight emerging from this study is that festival organizers perceive the relationship between creative identity and financial viability as two things that positively influence and depend on each other. On the one hand, stronger financial viability, through mechanisms such as reserve-building or reliable sponsorship, offers organizers the freedom to take creative risks, experiment with programming, and improve the overall festival experience (Knardal & Burns, 2020; Carlsen & Andersson, 2011; Andersson & Getz, 2008). On the other hand, offering an innovative and compelling festival experience is itself a driver of financial success, as it attracts audiences, increases ticket sales, and strengthens sponsor appeal (Carlsen et al., 2010; Leenders et al., 2005; López & Leenders, 2018). As a result, organizers adopt strategies not only to manage budgets and stabilize income but also to creatively differentiate their festivals in ways that contribute to long-term sustainability.

To understand how this complex balance is achieved, the study explored both financial and creative strategies, alongside the internal and external networks that shape festival operations.

### 5.1 Key Findings

This study identified five interconnected strategies that music festival organizers in Switzerland employ to navigate the tension between financial sustainability and creative identity.

First, regarding financial strategies, organizers emphasized the importance of risk mitigation and building resilience. Financial buffers such as reserve funds, long-term sponsorships, and in some cases, community-based crowdfunding, were seen as essential for handling unpredictable conditions (Andersson & Getz, 2008; Getz, 2002; Carlsen & Andersson, 2011). These measures offer crucial planning security and help offset financial risks, creating room for more ambitious programming.

Notably, crowdfunding was viewed as a short-term solution, whereas long-term sponsorships were considered more reliable and sustainable for securing ongoing financial stability.

Second, cost management emerged as another recurring theme. Festivals reduced expenses through modest artist fees, minimal advertising, and heavy reliance on volunteer labour, especially in non-profit contexts (Getz et al., 2010, p. 40). In this way, organizers tried to make the most of their budgets while still staying true to the festival's core identity. In addition, a strict, experience-based budgeting process was used to ensure that departments stayed within their limits. This aligns with research highlighting the role of budgeting as a key management control tool in uncertain environments (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, pp. 681–693).

Third, to stay creatively competitive, festivals implemented a range of strategies to build a strong identity and attract audiences. They curated lineups that matched their concept and audience preferences, using internal booking teams or agencies to follow current trends (Simon et al., 2017, pp. 161-163). Well-known acts were booked to drive ticket sales, while local and emerging artists helped keep the lineup fresh and diverse (Knardal & Pettersen, 2015, p. 688). Organizers also focused on the overall atmosphere, commercial festivals often integrated wellness and lifestyle elements, while non-profits created inclusive spaces with workshops, kids' areas, or creative activities (Ballantyne et al., 2014; Leenders et al., 2005). These efforts helped boost audience engagement and set each festival apart.

Fourth, networks and collaboration, both local and inter-festival, were highlighted as important elements for success. Locally, festivals benefited from deep ties with municipalities, businesses, and communities, which provided both legitimacy and material support (Getz et al., 2006, pp. 104-105). Regionally, non-profit festivals reported increasingly structured collaboration through umbrella organizations, facilitating knowledge exchange, shared logistics, and joint advocacy, especially in response to mounting regulatory pressures. Contrary to earlier literature suggesting that inter-festival collaboration is rare or crisis-driven (Andersson & Getz, 2008, p.213), this study shows that festivals in Switzerland are actively and voluntarily fostering regional alliances as part of long-term resilience planning.

Finally, internal organizational culture and expertise proved to be essential to both creative and financial success. Festivals with a stable core team benefited from routinized processes, increased efficiency, and more capacity for creative risk-taking (Larson, 2009, p. 298). Post-festival evaluations were widely practiced and extended beyond logistics to include strategic discussions around future creative directions and financial planning (Carlsen et al., 2010, p. 123). This culture of reflective learning and continuity was especially crucial for non-profit festivals with fewer resources. At the same time, organizers raised concerns about volunteer shortage and recruitment, echoing concerns in the literature about succession planning and knowledge transfer (Frost & Laing, 2015, p. 1311).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that festival organizers do not address creativity and finances in isolation. Instead, they pursue a combination of strategies that intertwine creative vision, economic constraints, organizational learning, and both internal and external partnerships.

## 5.2 Practical and Theoretical Implications

The findings reinforce and extend prior research on the persistent tension between creativity and financial constraints in the music festival sector, showing that while different solutions are applied in different contexts, the underlying struggle remains the same (Carlsen et al., 2010; Knardal & Burns, 2020; Knardal & Pettersen, 2015). The importance of this balance was evident across all festivals in the study, regardless of whether they were privately run or non-profit, large or small, ticketed or free entry, as each operates within a constantly changing and uncertain environment. Most strategies used to balance creativity and financial viability generally aligned with previous research, apart from the increasing collaboration between non-profit festivals. Notably, most existing research on strategies to balance creative ambitions and financial sustainability dates back more than a decade. Yet, this study suggests that many of these strategies, such as adjusting programming to audience preferences, careful budgeting, risk management, drawing on internal knowledge, and relying on personal or organizational networks, still appear equally important as they were 15 years ago. Notably, even despite the significant disruptions caused by COVID-19 in the live event sector, all strategies identified in this study remain similar to those documented in earlier research (Ali & Balme, 2022, pp. 339–340). At the same time, this study highlights a noteworthy shift in inter-festival collaboration compared to earlier literature. In contrast to earlier literature suggesting limited collaboration between festivals (Andersson & Getz, 2008), this study reveals a shift toward proactive, voluntary partnerships among Swiss non-profit festivals. These findings suggest that cooperation, especially in the face of funding limitations, can act as a long-term strategic asset rather than a short-term fix, and may also reflect a broader trend emerging in other national contexts.

These insights can be useful for festival organizers as they navigate the ongoing challenge of balancing creative goals with financial realities, helping them make more informed decisions that support both artistic vision and long-term sustainability. Furthermore, for local policymakers, the finding that collaboration between festivals can strengthen resilience may offer a valuable takeaway. In other regional contexts where such collaboration is not yet common, policymakers could play a key role by facilitating platforms or communication channels that enable smaller or local festivals to connect, share resources, and cooperate. This could serve as a meaningful form of support that strengthens the cultural sector without requiring major financial interventions.

## 5.3 Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers valuable insights into how festival organizers navigate the tension between creative identity and financial sustainability, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample is limited in both size and geographic scope, focusing solely on ten festivals in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. This means that a significant portion of the Swiss festival landscape, particularly those in the French- and Italian-speaking regions, remains unexplored. Additionally, several festivals in the study were located in the same region, which may have introduced shared contextual influences and limited the diversity of perspectives.

Second, the professional roles of the interviewees may have influenced the findings. Most participants were executive managers or booking directors, which means that the perspectives of individuals in other key areas, such as communications, graphic design, or digital infrastructure, were not fully represented. According to the literature, these areas also contribute to shaping a festival's creative identity, as they play a central role in how the event is visually and conceptually framed for audiences. The absence of these perspectives may have limited a more complete understanding of how creative identity is shaped and maintained across various aspects of the festival. Including a broader range of roles could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of how creativity and finances intersect across departments.

Third, while thematic analysis is well-suited to identifying patterns in qualitative data, it also involves a level of subjectivity. As Tracy (2010, p. 842) points out, the method relies heavily on the researcher's interpretation, which can affect the reliability of the findings. In this study, no second researcher was involved in the coding process, which means that there was no opportunity to cross-check interpretations or compare coding decisions, potentially limiting the consistency of the analysis.

Finally, the timing of the interviews posed a practical limitation. Because the research was conducted during the spring, which is the busiest planning period for summer festivals, several participants noted time constraints. As a result, interviews may have been shorter than ideal, limiting the depth with which some topics could be explored.

For future research, one particularly promising area would be a focused investigation of inter-festival collaboration. The findings suggest that regional cooperation among festivals, such as sharing resources, coordinating calendars, and developing a joint voice in regulatory matters, is both a growing trend and a potentially powerful strategy for long-term sustainability. A study examining the structures, challenges, and benefits of such collaborations could provide valuable insights into how festivals collectively respond to increasing economic and regulatory pressures. Additionally, comparing different national contexts could offer further depth, as the specific challenges festivals face may strongly depend on cultural policies, funding structures, and the level of support provided by local or

national governments. Thus, future research could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how national contexts influence strategies for balancing creative ambitions with financial viability.

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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix A: Topic List for the Interviews

#### **Consent and Ethics:**

Before each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and how their data would be used anonymously. Verbal consent was obtained to record the interview.

#### **Personal Information & Role in Festival Team**

- What is your name?
- Can you tell me about your background and how you got into festival management?
- How many years of experience do you have working in the music festival industry?
- Could you describe exactly what your current role and main responsibilities are within the festival?
- Do you work alone or as part of a team?
- Do you work full-time for the festival?

#### **Festival Profile / Ownership Structure (Getz & Andersson, 2008; Getz et al., 2010)**

- How large is the festival (total number of visitors)?
- What is the ownership structure of the festival?
- What makes your festival unique?
  - Are there certain values or a creative identity that define it?

#### **Festival Management & Organizational Structure (Getz, 2002)**

- How is the festival team organized?
- How many people are involved in planning the festival?
- How are tasks divided among different teams or departments?
- What does collaboration and communication between the different festival teams look like?
- What does the planning process for the festival look like?
- When do you start preparing for the next edition?
- What are the biggest challenges you face when planning the festival?
- Have you experienced any difficulties or challenges within the organization team?

**Creative Identity & Artistic Vision** (*Brown & Sharpley, 2019; Lopez & Leenders, 2018; Perron-Brault et al., 2020*)

- What defines your festival's creative identity?
  - What are most important creative choices?

**Line-up:**

- How do you put together the line-up, and who makes these decisions?
- Do you focus on a specific style or music genre for the festival?
- What factors influence your booking decisions?
- Do you prioritize booking major headliners?
- Do you deliberately give a platform to smaller or lesser-known artists, or aim for a conscious mix?

**Side Programming**

- What kind of side programming do you offer in addition to the music performances on stage?

**Audience:**

- Who is your target audience?
- Have audience expectations influenced the festival's identity over the years?

**Competition / Market**

- What sets the festival apart from others?
- How do you deal with competition in the festival scene?
  - Do you consciously try to differentiate yourselves, and if so, how?

**Finances** (*Getz & Andersson, 2008*)

- What are your main sources of income?
  - How are they distributed proportionally?
- What role do partnerships/sponsors play in financial stability?
  - Do you work with the same sponsors every year, or are you regularly looking for new partners?

- What are the biggest financial challenges in organizing the festival?
- Have you noticed any changes in your funding in recent years?
- How do you deal with rising production costs?
- What do you think is the key to sustainable festival financing?

### **Creative Freedom vs. Financial Reality (*Knardal & Petersen, 2015*)**

- Are you able to realize your creative vision for the festival as you would like, or is money often a limiting factor?
- If finances play a role:
  - In what ways do financial constraints limit your creative decisions?
  - How do you manage limited resources or work within a tight budget?
  - Do you have a budget system?
- Have there been changes over the years?

### **Innovation & Future (*Carlsen et al., 2010*)**

- Do you have a strategy for innovation?
  - If so, what does it involve?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges/ opportunities for the festival in the coming years?

### **Closing Question:**

At the end of each interview, participants were asked whether they would like to add anything further to the discussion.

## Appendix B: Coding Frame

| Theoretical Concept | First Order Code | Second Order Code | Illustrative Quote   |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| Creative Identity   | Festival Program | Concerts          | “We actually have 4 concerts, relatively standard, usually 1 main act, two before, one after.”   |
|                     |                  | DJ                | “Then we set up a circus tent, where DJs play alternately with the acts on the main stage”   |
|                     |                  | Side Program      | “Yes, we call it the Experience area, so far we've had a Toothgem stand there, or we do screen printing ourselves (..)”  |
|                     |                  | Food & Beverages  | “And then we have various food stands. And various bars, of course.”   |
|                     |                  | Market            | “The market, and all the nonfood stands and food stands as well are all outside the area, so you can go there even if you don't have a ticket. You can actually just go to the market and eat something and listen to music and you're just like not inside, you can't |

|  |                 |                            |  |
|--|-----------------|----------------------------|--|
|  |                 |                            | see the stage, but you're right next to it.”   |
|  | Festival Appeal | Affordable Ticket Prices   | “And otherwise we also have reasonable prices. We charged ad 43-45 francs for the bigger acts, or even a bit cheaper. So if you want to see these acts, that's a very good price, yes.”  |
|  |                 | Backstage Care for Artists | “I think what makes us special is that we take great care to ensure that our bands and artists are well looked after. So backstage we have a photo booth where they can take pictures, and we also cook a whole catering for them as a team and so on. So that they have the feeling afterwards that they had a good time at the festival. And that they'll be happy to come back or recommend us to other bands.” |
|  |                 | Intimate Atmosphere        | “And then I think, especially last year, you got the chance to see the acts, especially the main act, in an intimate atmosphere.   |

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|  |                            | Location                             | “The festival is in the middle of the city. That's very special.”  |
|  |                            | No Entry Fee                         | “Our audience is actually everyone from young to old, and that is also one of the reasons why we make the festival free, quite deliberately, so that access to art and culture should not depend on money, so to speak.” |
|  | Restrictions in Creativity | Line-up and Booking                  | “Yes, certainly the number of bands we can book and also which bands. That depends on the money.”  |
|  |                            | Overall Festival Design & Atmosphere | “You could work a lot on the decoration and atmosphere. That would definitely be a point of innovation for us.”  |
|  |                            | Infrastructure                       | “So basically everything. Also infrastructure, but I don't know if that's also a creative decision.”   |
|  |                            | Side Programming                     | “So the line-up anyway, but also what we can do in this experience area, the supporting program”   |

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| Financial Viability | Revenue Sources      | Ticket Sales                      | “Ticketing for sure, yes, that's the biggest chunk.”   |
|                     |                      | Sponsoring                        | “One-sixth of our income comes from sponsoring”  |
|                     |                      | Public and Institutional Funding  | “There were a few small donations from the village and a small contribution from the municipality”                     |
|                     |                      | Stall Rentals                     | “We've got two external food stands that pay the stand rent”   |
|                     |                      | Merchandise                       | “We've got a merch stand”  |
|                     |                      | (Food)-Market                     | “Yes, jewelry and sunglasses etc. and all the food stands. And these are the ones who pay our stall rent”              |
|                     |                      | Food and Beverage                 | “And we got the most income from the bar and then food”  |
|                     | Financial Challenges | Expensive Artist Fees             | “Yes, but that's not easy either, because the prices of these bands are now also rising very quickly and very steeply” |
|                     |                      | Increasing Event Production Costs | “And there are also rising costs for   |

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|  |  |                                    | <p>infrastructure and personnel.</p> <p>“</p>   |
|  |  | Upfront Costs                      | <p>“In our case, we got told that if we had to cancel everything on Friday morning, we'd still have to pay half the expenses.”</p>  |
|  |  | Fair Compensation for Artists      | <p>“We also try to pay all acts fairly and not just our headliners”</p>   |
|  |  | Selling All Tickets                | <p>“Ticket sales situation”</p>   |
|  |  | Decline in Sponsoring              | <p>“So sponsors in particular are tending to decline.”</p>  |
|  |  | Decline in Public Cultural Funding | <p>“And cultural funding is unfortunately decreasing.”</p>  |
|  |  | Competition with Other Events      | <p>“That's right. The European Championships and World Cup were, no, are, great competition for us. We got a big public viewing boom and we had to see how we could deal with that. Those are a few things. There's just always something going on. We have to share people's</p> |

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|                                    |                      |   | attention with a lot of other people.”   |
|                                    |                      | Impact of Weather on Revenue                | “Last year we got the problem that the ticket sales were missing when it rained”   |
|                                    |                      | Rising Expectations for Technical Standards | “Professionalism is expected more and more from technology and so on.”   |
|                                    |                      | Decline in (Alcoholic) Beverage Consumption | “Overall, people are also consuming a little less, especially alcohol and so on, and we also notice that in our bar revenues.” |
| Ownership                          | Ownership Structure  | Association                                 | “We are an association that organizes the festival”  |
|                                    |                      | Corporation                                 | “we've also got a stock corporation where we're employed.”   |
|                                    |                      | LLC   | “Public limited company”   |
| Strategies to Navigate the Balance | Financial Strategies | Set Money Aside / Build Up Reserves         | “Yes, always make sure that we can put money aside so that we can survive a few bad years”                                     |
|                                    |                      | Crowdfunding                                | “And then last year we didn't get enough   |

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|  |  |   | reserves and so we had to do crowdfunding.”   |
|  |  | Importance of Long-Term Sponsorship Deals | “No, fortunately they are long-standing sponsors and partners. That's very relaxed.”  |
|  |  | Low-Cost Lineup                           | “And I think we probably don't pay the artists a lot”   |
|  |  | Volunteer Work                            | “And of course another huge advantage is that we don't have to pay people.”   |
|  |  | Low-Cost Advertisement                    | “We do a lot on social media, it doesn't cost a lot.”   |
|  |  | Cost-Conscious Booking                    | “We've also got our lineup budget down a bit this year and booked a few less well-known bands, so we're trying to find our balance.”                        |
|  |  | Strict (Experience-Based) Budget Planning | “We already have a budget plan and so on, we'll have a budget meeting for that, I'll draw up a plan for that alone first, based on last year's expenditure” |
|  |  | Maximising Cost Saving Opportunities      | “Always exploit savings potential”  |

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|  | Creative Strategies | Creating Value Through Atmosphere and Experience | “And then I think the general trend is a bit more individuality, which a lot of people want. So, everyone is looking for special experiences, away from the masses and towards smaller, special formats. And these should also be more charged in terms of content and theme, i.e. more than just standing in a field, watching a concert and drinking a beer” |
|  |                     | Audience Appeal in Booking                       | “We always look at what is current, what attracts people”  |
|  |                     | Booking Swiss Acts                               | “Actually, we always book Swiss acts that are currently being talked about a bit or that are sometimes played on the radio.”   |
|  |                     | Famous Main Act                                  | “Yes, we try to have a band every night that works as a headliner. Or one that we know that if you tell your friends, they'll know who they are. So, a band that attracts people.”   |

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|  |  | Diverse Mix of Genres and Acts | <p>“So the aim is to have an identity for every day. So on Friday we've got rock. Then on Saturday it's more pop and hip hop. And on Sunday it's family day with us, so there's a children's band and a programme that's attractive for the whole family. So yes, we've either got a theme like family day, or a music genre like pop or rock”</p> |
|  |  | Personal Networks in Booking   | <p>“Now, for example, [artist] is coming, and we were able to push the price down quite well because he comes directly from [festival location].”</p>  |
|  |  | Gender Balance in Line-Up      | <p>“What is very important to us is that we alternate between women and men on stage. We even got a women-only day once.”</p>  |
|  |  | Going to Showcase Festivals    | <p>“We are also part of a European festival association and regularly go to the showcase festivals that take place, in January in Groningen, in May in Brighton and in September in</p>  |

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|  |  |  | Hamburg. The agencies present their new acts there and we try to book as many exciting acts as possible directly from there. We try to present a 'best of European talent'."                   |
|  |  | Working with Agencies                            | "Both. We've now got a few agencies that we can work with very well and they make suggestions for us."   |
|  |  | Support for Local/Young/Emerging Artists         | "The focus there is also unknown artists, and local and regional artists."   |
|  |  | Know Current Trends / Trend Research for Booking | "Yes, well, the people who do the booking for us are, first of all, really into reggae, they absolutely love the music themselves, and they always know what's coming up and what's trending." |
|  |  | Fine-Tuning Established Concepts                 | "We don't have to reinvent everything, the festival works, the concept works, we just need to keep doing it for a few years, and then you get the breathing room to fine-tune it,"             |

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|  |                            |   | make it nicer, try things out, and optimize stuff.”  |
|  | Expertise & Team Knowledge | Organizational Experience / Long Term Involvement | "But because we know each other, we're pretty in sync. People know what needs to be done."   |
|  |                            | Professional Expertise in the Team                | “I do communication and graphics, that's also my professional background. “  |
|  |                            | Well-Established Team                             | “A lot of them have been with us for several years, which is really nice because then you've got that experience and the closeness.”   |
|  |                            | Cohesive Communication Channel                    | “And we've got a Slack channel for communication. This allows all departments to work together. And we've also got Dropbox for files.” |
|  |                            | Continuous Meetings Throughout the Year           | “Yes exactly, we usually meet about once a month. We discuss where we stand and if something isn't clear, we discuss it.”              |
|  |                            | Task Distribution Through Specialized Teams       | “Exactly, we have so-called departments, and they have their own specific tasks. So an   |

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|  |  |  | example would be booking or finance, or social media and advertising.”  |
|  |  | Yearly Post Event Strategy Discussion (for Optimizing) | “New strategies and innovations are discussed in the team after each festival has taken place.”   |
|  |  | Succession Planning                                    | “So yes, these organizational committee handovers and know-how is difficult, you have to plan ahead. In other words, you have to do some kind of junior staff planning” |
|  | Cooperation & Collaboration Between (Free) Festivals | Collaborative Date Planning                            | “So we had to make sure to plan around each other a little. It would be a shame to take each other’s audience, so both festivals would end up suffering.”               |
|  |  | Different Line Up                                      | “When it comes to the line-up, there’s an unwritten rule, a courtesy rule, that you don’t copy from other festivals. So, we make sure not to steal each other’s ideas.” |

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|  |  | <p>Exchange of Resources<br/>(Ideas, Knowledge, Material, Volunteers)</p> | <p>“And we also sometimes exchange equipment, like those silent disco headphones.”</p> <p>“We’re trying to strengthen the cooperation between us, so we can lend each other volunteers and equipment.”</p>   |
|  |  | <p>Joint Representation<br/>Towards Authorities</p>                       | <p>“At the same time, we’re able to maintain political pressure on the city level, so it’s not just one festival speaking up, but seven festivals at once saying things like: replacing the grass every year is completely unrealistic. So, in that sense, we don’t really see each other as competitors.”</p> |
|  |  | <p>Advocating for Public Support (Free Festivals)</p>                     | <p>“For example, we don’t really get support from the city. They generally don’t support free festivals. That’s definitely something that would help if they were more accommodating.”</p>   |

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|  | Using Local Support & Network | Personal Network in Booking     | “In 2019, we were able to book <i>[famous swiss band]</i> for an extremely good price, and many people bought tickets to see them. We had a few good connections, and they wanted to play at a smaller festival for a change.” |
|  |                               | Support from local community    | “And we also have a good relationship with our neighbours, no conflicts or noise complaints. We’re a neighbourhood festival, and people from all generations attend.”  |
|  |                               | Support from local municipality | “And now it’s really great, we have a very good relationship with the municipality, we’re seen as a traditional event, and we’re fully supported.”   |

# 8. Declaration Page: Use of Generative AI Tools in Thesis

## Student Information

Name: Lili Balai

Student ID: 672327

Course Name: Master Thesis CM5000

Supervisor Name: Dr. Roderick Udo

Date: 26.06.2025

Declaration:

## Acknowledgment of Generative AI Tools

I acknowledge that I am aware of the existence and functionality of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, which are capable of producing content such as text, images, and other creative works autonomously.

GenAI use would include, but not limited to:

- Generated content (e.g., ChatGPT, Quillbot) limited strictly to content that is not assessed (e.g., thesis title).
- ~~Writing improvements, including~~ grammar and spelling corrections (e.g., Grammarly)
- Language translation (e.g., DeepL), without generative AI alterations/improvements.
- Research task assistance (e.g., finding survey scales, qualitative coding verification, debugging code)
- Using GenAI as a search engine tool to find academic articles or books (e.g.,

I declare that I have used generative AI tools,  I declare that I have NOT used any generative specifically DeepL, Grammarly, ChatGPT in the AI tools and that the assignment concerned is my process of creating parts or components of my thesis. original work.

The purpose of using these tools was to aid in generating content or assisting with specific aspects of thesis work.

Signature: [digital signature]

Date of Signature: [Date of Submission]

## Extent of AI Usage

I confirm that while I utilized generative AI tools to aid in content creation, the majority of the intellectual effort, creative input, and decision-making involved in completing the thesis were undertaken by me. I have enclosed the prompts/logging of the GenAI tool use in an appendix.

### **Ethical and Academic Integrity**

I understand the ethical implications and academic integrity concerns related to the use of AI tools in coursework. I assure that the AI-generated content was used responsibly, and any content derived from these tools has been appropriately cited and attributed according to the guidelines provided by the instructor and the course. I have taken necessary steps to distinguish between my original work and the AI-generated contributions. Any direct quotations, paraphrased content, or other forms of AI-generated material have been properly referenced in accordance with academic conventions.

By signing this declaration, I affirm that this declaration is accurate and truthful. I take full responsibility for the integrity of my assignment and am prepared to discuss and explain the role of generative AI tools in my creative process if required by the instructor or the Examination Board. I further affirm that I have used generative AI tools in accordance with ethical standards and academic integrity expectations.

Signature: 

Date of Signature: 25.06.2025

## **Appendix: Declaration of AI Tools**

- Grammarly was used for writing improvements, including grammar and spelling checks.
- ChatGPT was used as a search engine to find relevant articles during the reading process
- ChatGPT was used during the reading process to identify relevant articles (prompt: summarize article); however, all literature cited in the final thesis was read by the researcher.
- ChatGPT was used to suggest synonyms (prompt: suggest a synonym for [X]).
- DeepL was used to verify the correct translation of all quotes.