



THE HALF-CENTURY HISTORY OF FESTIVALS IN KOSOVO: THEIR TYPES, DISTRIBUTION AND TOURIST IMPACT

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Abstract: Festivals are occasions when people come together, usually with positive intentions. Conceived in a specific area and experiencing a global trend, they are increasingly being studied in various fields, among which also in the tourism geography. A general study on this topic was missing in Kosovo. Even more so, research in the field of tourism geography was entirely lacking; For this reason, this study, along with an analysis of the tourist impact of these festivals, constitutes the purpose of this paper. The study adopted a mixed methodology, using both primary and secondary sources. The main findings were derived through semi-structured interviews and ethnographic methods. Based on this approach, the results showed that festivals in Kosovo began in the middle of the 20th century. Their development followed an oscillating pattern, a trend common to festival evolution worldwide, yet distinct in the Kosovan context. With 26 out of 146 recognized festivals which are now defunct, the paper illustrates an unstable trajectory. Their high number, unfortunately, emphasized quantity over quality. Only a relatively small percentage demonstrated consistency in programming and sustained efforts, despite both past and ongoing challenges. The most critical early challenges occurred during the 1990s, when Serbian repression in Kosovo peaked. Organizing festivals during that time required significant courage to defy Serbian police and military forces. Contemporary challenges, no less important, revolve around limited budgets, weak programming, poor quality control, and the lack of institutional oversight. Music festivals emerged as the most dominant, followed by visual arts, and the third constituting theatre ones, while the highest concentration is found in Pristina, Prizren, and Ferizaj. Their social, cultural, and economic impacts on both the local and national communities have been assessed as partially positive. To improve sustainability, the paper recommends: (the first) greater institutional support, and (the second) the revitalization of both the creative and financial capacities of festival managers.

Keywords: tourism, festival, event, Kosovo, impact of festivals, interview, culture, heritage

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is generally defined as the movement of people for the purposes of recreation, leisure, healing, and expansion of cultural knowledge. Tourism now plays a significant and essential role in social, economic, and physical development (Govind, 2016). As a service industry, tourism encompasses hospitality, transportation, and hospitality (Govind, 2016). The extent of its overall impact varies greatly, just as the types of its impact which are also variable. Panfiluk estimates that in the case of Poland's Podlaskie region, tourism was a complementing economic sector on a regional level. In certain local destinations, tourism has a significant impact on employment and population income (2015). Festivals are activities that occur in different periods of time. They showcase history, folklore, heritage, innovation and creation, depending on their type and purpose. Therefore, they play a major role in the development of tourism because, they attract visitors and tourists to the locations where they are organized. Meanwhile, we emphasize here that a geographical and geographical-tourism study of them is deemed deficient in general (Cudny, 2013), and completely lacking in the Republic of Kosovo, with the exception of Ukshini's master's thesis (2021) and Humolli's solid contributions to conferences (2024a) and (2024b). Quinn, however, asserts that research on festivals and events is currently a significant and fruitful field in the study of tourism (2009). He claims that even the most superficial research indicates a noticeable rise in the research presence on festivals, at the academic levels of tourism studies. Nowadays, festivals are considered to contribute significantly to the cultural and economic development of a community or even have an impact at the state level. Festivals aid the tourism industry in three ways: first, they draw tourists; second, they enhance and promote the country's image; and third, they help the local community.

Tourists and visitors increase the rate of consumption, contributing directly to tourism businesses and indirectly to other businesses. According to Panfiluk (2015), previous studies on the analysis of festivals impact show that they have a favorable impact on the local economy, society and sustainable development. The economic effects of events include increased employment (but not always) (Crompton et al., 2001) and increased local taxes (Thrane, 2002). In the social field, festivals contribute to raising awareness and social activity, at least this is how it has been assessed in the case of Seoul (Kim & Petrick, 2005), as well as strengthening local ties and strong social cohesion according to examples brought from Indian villages (Rao, 2001). According to some authors, including Prentice & Andersen (2003), Walker et al. (2013);

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McKercher et al. (2006), festivals help preserve local resources of intangible and distinctive ethno-cultural heritage and have an impact on the application of sustainable development. Rein, Kotler & Haider claim that successful festivals can help recreate the image of a country or contribute to the exposure of a location, thus trying to place it on the tourist map (1993). Likewise, this was also emphasized by authors Luong & Nguyen (2025).

In this case they tend to increase the attractiveness of the destination and in most cases, they do. There is a wide range of types of festivals, including: food, theater, dance, music or a combination of art forms. In Kosovo, little was known about the absolute and relative sizes of these types until recently! They can range in size from small (community) to large music festivals with over 100,000 participants (Davies, 2020). Mintel (2019) offers an example that helps illustrate the significance and rise of festivals, particularly in the period after COVID-19 pandemic. He claims that music events generate £17.6 billion for the UK economy, and that attendance at music festivals has grown by about 22% in recent years, with 57% of participants choosing to join these tourist activities over European annual holidays. What is the history of festivals in Kosovo, and how long have they existed? Were festivals in Kosovo serving to enhance and recreate the country's image when they were being held, as it was the case with the study of Rein et al. (1993)?! As previously said, the motivational effect of festivals in drawing tourists and visitors varies, as does their overall socioeconomic influence. Since the study field has yet to provide clarification on this, we decided to establish a distinct objective for this study. Addressing the geographical question is another goal: Which regions in the area had the most notable festivals taken place? The purpose of this article is to inform the reader about the missing impact of the contribution that festivals have played over the decades.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a wide debate about the definition of festivals. Despite the differences, something seems to unite them. According to Négrier et al. (2013), festivals are defined as events limited in time and space which develop a specific artistic project and take place at regular intervals of time. In recent years, local festivals have become an increasingly popular tool for developing tourism around the world (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). Over the years studies show that festivals and events have long served as tourist attractions and influenced the development of places as travel destinations (Quinn, 2009). Festivals and events have a long historical trajectory and embody the traditions of different areas. They have flourished again in the contemporary society, after a decline from the mid-20th century onwards (Boissevain, 1992). Festival writers have given different opinions on their strengthened repositioning. For example, Prentice & Andersen (2003) argue that a lot of demand factors, like the need for socialization and leisure time, help festivals grow, whereas Getz (2008) thinks that the move toward experiencing consumption is what drives the growth of festivals.

According to Smith & Jenner (1998), the main reasons for the popularity of the local festivals (as a means for promoting tourism) are that festivals boost the demand for local tourism, which is in line with Rein et al. (1993) cited in the introduction. The evidence presented by Potecnik Topler, in her study, *Svenica* near Maribor, as well as other cases like the *Grossmann* case in Ljutomer and the *Solzic* festival in the village of Kotlje, is also very explicit (2021). Small events like the festivals mentioned above, as well as other instances, she claimed, demonstrated the influence on the rise in tourist flows, which had a major economic impact. A similar pattern is evident in the list of tourist motivations for a Middle Eastern country, as illustrated in the case of Jordan presented by Allan (2025).

Festivals are being examined in many different sciences since they are a rapidly evolving phenomenon. Given their significant contribution to the growth of tourism, a thorough examination of festivals within the context of tourism geography is crucial. Traveling to various destinations to visit a festival can be treated as a special type of tourism called festival tourism and as such has a substantial impact within the tourism space (Cudny, 2013). He asserts that travelers want to experience unique events, connect with like-minded individuals, and broaden their knowledge of the world. On the other hand, Quinn (2009) asserts that festival attendees are more drawn to the exotic culture showcased during the events than to other elements. In a geographical article by Cudny (2011), festival tourism is treated not only as cultural tourism, but also as urban and rural tourism, while tourists who travel to attend festivals should be called festival tourists (Cudny et al., 2012). The authors referred to the process and its impact as festivalism. When one looks at the evolution of festivals over the years and decades, it is easy to see how the suffix “-ism” (festival-ism) conveys the sense of the process. As we discussed in the literature, its dynamics were inconsistent but tended to increase in recent decades.

Without a doubt, festivals provide both material and spiritual benefits. These are settings that offer chances and opportunities for performances of many genres. Festivals frequently open doors that would otherwise be inaccessible, particularly when it comes to intangible advantages. On the evening of August 9, 2024, in the northern city of Kosovo, I was standing in Martyrs' Square (Sheshi i Dëshmorëve) in Podujeva, where a folklore group from distant Mexico gave their first performance in our city (among the nine participating countries). The third edition of the Newborn Kosova Festival (NKF) (Podujeva, 2024) brought these groups together, enabling this intercultural affirmation that is hard to achieve in other ways. Of course, Mexico and its culture are far from the typical perception of the many residents of this small town. The literature presented here and in the Introduction section makes it clear that festivals are multiplicative in all respects, including their type, influence, and historical origin. Festival tourism modifies the physical, social, and economic features of a place, which is why festivals are a subject of study in the geography of tourism (Cudny, 2013) which is precisely we have undertaken this study. He claims that festivals are currently growing dramatically and that festival tourism is becoming more and more important in Central and Eastern Europe. Our study has the potential to demonstrate this, and the findings should support this. However, this issue has not received any special attention from researchers, not even those that represent the geography of tourism (Cudny, 2013). An effort is being made to contribute to this path with our research [this paper (I) and the section on the characteristics of tourists at Kosovo festivals (forthcoming paper II)], as well as other

studies from countries in the region like Hungary, Vojvodina, and Slovenia (Pavluković et al., 2019); (Potecnik Topler, 2021). The most varied forms of tourism are those that have drawn the greatest attention in postmodern society, including cosmetic tourism (Corbisiero & Monaco, 2017). Although it appears to be a new phenomenon in the study region, festival tourism has already proven to be sustainable in countries with more tradition in this regard.

Schuster (2001) has emphasized that festivals arranged as urban ephemera boost the economy by bringing attention to locations, their institutions, and their products while drawing in flows of tourists, money, and domestic investment. For many Western cities, a key motivation in developing festivals and event strategies was recovering from long-term economic downturns. But this is not easily achieved. For this reason, according to Cole & Chancellor (2008) cited by Jeon (2020), festival organizers face a challenge to design unforgettable experiences to attract visitors who return year after year. This study will shed light into one of the challenges faced by festival makers in Kosovo.

METHODOLOGY

Due to its complexity, tourism frequently necessitates the application of multiple scientific research methodologies. This is consistent with Lindsay's (1997) recommendations that the methodological requirements for scientific study in human geography—more specifically, the geography of tourism—should be addressed. The institutions of the Republic of Kosovo have failed to produce statistics for certain and specific segments of cultural, social and economic life in the country; therefore, the need for primary data became a requirement for our research. The study of festivals was completely lacking, thus the selection of methodology was based on the experiences of international studies (Pavluković et al., 2019; (Potecnik Topler, 2021) and partially on local studies (Humolli et al., 2023). Each research method has its advantages and disadvantages (Overall, 2019). By choosing a qualitative method, we would not only fill statistical gaps in the country but also deepen our knowledge about festivals, their connection to tourism, and their impact on the local community and beyond. The primary methodology used in this study was semi-structured face-to-face interviews. They were carried out with individuals deemed capable, sometimes the most capable, of the festivals we spoke with. Before we even started the research, our expectations regarding the number of festivals were hypothetical but never accurate and reliable. From reviewing the literature and especially the media coverage of festivals whenever they were held, we came to the conclusion that there were more than 100 festivals in Kosovo. Due to the widespread use of social and public communication techniques, it is now simpler to obtain information and use it to produce a list of festivals that will be the focus of interviews.

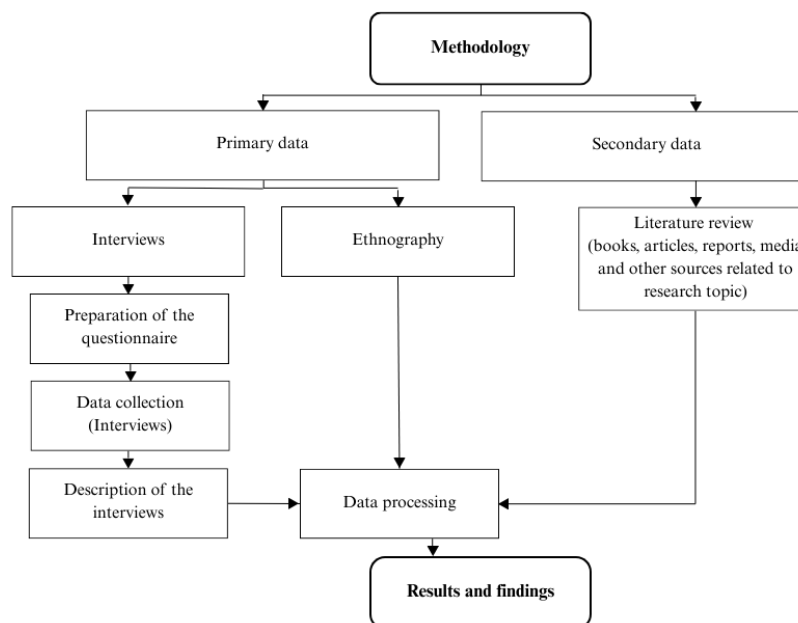


Figure 1. Research Methodology Flow Chart

In light of these findings, we carried out eighteen interviews. The sample covered the entire study area geographically.

They were carried out throughout two time periods (2021–24), with some of them (interviews) taking place in both. Representatives from both the most well-known festivals as well as other less known festivals were deliberately chosen for the interviews. The selection also applied thematic criteria, including most types of festivals in the interviews. The interviews were conducted with key personnel responsible for the festivals. The interviewees were audio-recorded with their consent, and the interviews lasted approximately an hour. The interviewees agreed to be publicly identified, so with their permission we have shown their authenticity. All interviews have been transcribed, and their results are reflected in this paper. Close familiarity with festivals, sometimes as a direct panelist, such as at two of the most well-known in Kosovo, *Hardh Fest* (Humolli, 2018) and *Emo Fest* (Humolli, 2021), doctoral studies (Humolli, 2015), and other study visits, such as at *NBK* and *Doku Fest*, also made it possible to implement the ethnographic method. Overall (2019) states on page 66 that this also made it possible to observe the behaviors of the participants in the research area. The review of international and local literature accompanied the study, confronted experiences, and brought out convergences and divergences in this study. Other data from

alternative sources, even quantitative, fulfilled the purpose of the study and assisted the main method. Professional GIS (ArcGIS Pro 3.4) and statistical (SPSS and Excel) software were used for the presentation, processing and display of data.

RESULTS

1. The number of festivals - active and passive festivals, their distribution and their types in Kosovo

1.1 Active and passive festivals

Festival numbers show two situations: **a)** *the first ones (passive festivals)*, while **b)** *the second ones (active festivals)*.

Together, they **(a+b)** symbolize all of the festivals that have ever taken place in Kosovo.

For a variety of reasons, festivals that have not taken place in the past three years—2021–2022, 2023—are considered passive or perhaps defunct. Examples include *Skena UP*; Festival *Akordet e Kosovës*; *Prishtina Jazz Festival*; *PoliFest*; *VideoFest*; *KosovaInFest*; *Prishtina Kids Fest*; *Festivali i Letërsisë dhe Ditët e Diasporës*; *Festivali i Bukës*; etc. The main reasons for their extinction were the lack of sufficient funding for their organization, socio-political changes (the transition from a centralized to an open system), the historical impacts of Serbian pressure in the period 1990-1999, etc. [(All interview); (RTK, 2024); (Humolli, 2024a); (Humolli, 2024b)]. Out of a total of 146 festivals that were identified, 26 of them were passive festivals (i.e. about 18% of all festivals ever organized in Kosovo). For many, as for us, defining festivals that were not held for a period of time is a challenge. We classified them as passive festivals because we were unsure that some of them will reappear in the future (like the Prishtina Jazz Festival.)

Active festivals are those that have been held for years, in a continuous-traditional manner (annual or periodic) by securing self-financing funds from various donors (both foreign and local). Based on data from a variety of sources, including interviews conducted between 2021 and 2024, MCYS (2024), MUP (2025), Kult Plus, 05.01.2018 (2018); Eurovoix (2024), Kosovafacts (Dema, 2024), and others, the study determined that there were 120 active festivals overall.

Only a few are being mentioned because of the nature of the work: *Doku Fest*, *Etno Fest*, *Hardh Fest*, festivali *Anibar*, *Green Fest*, *40 Bunar Fest*, *Ngom Fest*, festivali *Flaka e Janarit*, festivali *Rising Stars*, festivali *Thes Ari*, festivali *Anadrintia Jehon*, festivali *Hasi Jehon*, *PriFilmFest*, *Festivali i Arkitekturës*, *Festivali Mbarëkombëtar i Teatrit*, *Cicërrimat buzë Ibrit*, Festivali *Sunny Hill* etc. A specific group of active festivals were also *periodic festivals* which are held every 2, 3 or more years. One such case was the *Bienalja* festival in Prizren which is held every two years.

1.2 The extent of festivals and their number by municipality

Based on information gathered from a variety of sources (as in the aforementioned paragraph), it is estimated that the capital city of Pristina hosted almost half of the festivals that took place in Kosovo (61 of the 146 festivals, or 42% of them). Prizren has the second-largest number of festivals after Prishtina, followed by Ferizaj, and so on (Figure 2). In both states, these cities continue to hold the primacy for both active (current) festivals and the list of all festivals (passive + active).

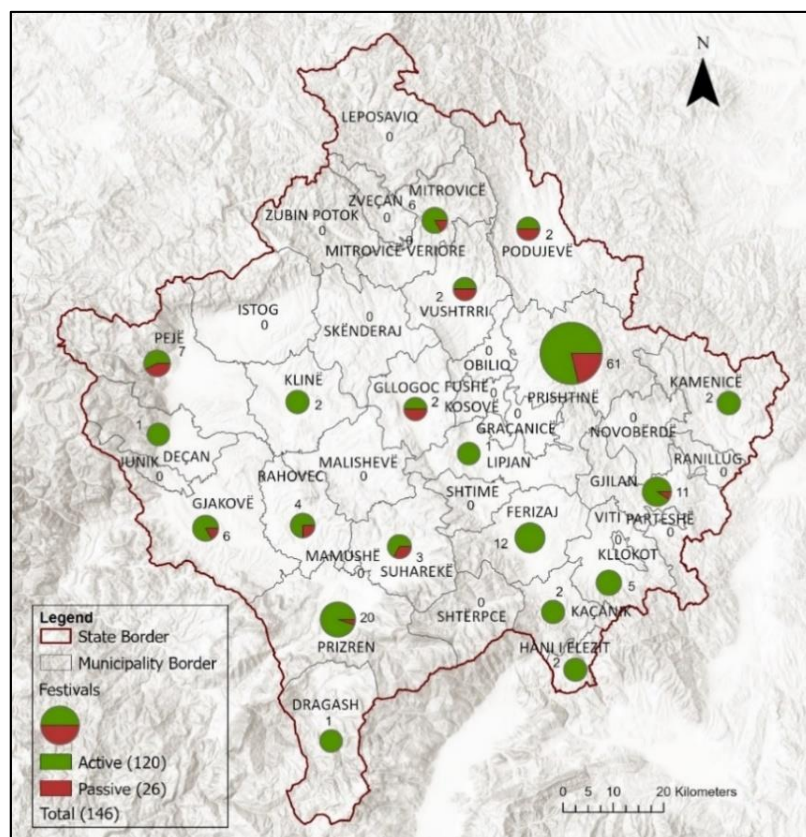


Figure 2. Number of festivals (active and passive), by municipalities in Kosovo (Source: Interviews (2021-2024); MKRS (2024); MIA (2025); Kult Plus (2018); Eurovoix (2024); Kosovafacts (Dema, 2024) and the authorial data collected over the study period of 2021-2024)

1.3 Types of festivals

The findings confirmed that Kosovo hosts a variety of festivals. Several literary works, including (Davies, 2020), differentiate them as follows: literature, music, theater, film, and cuisine. This model was used (Figure 3).

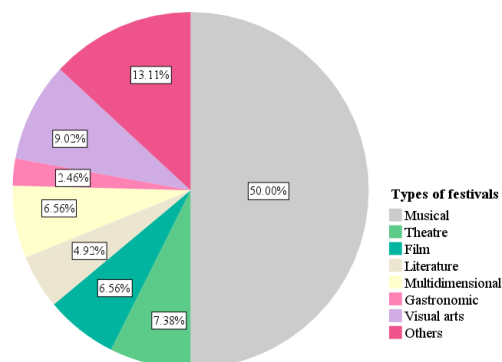


Figure 3. Types of festivals and participation by type of active festivals in Kosovo

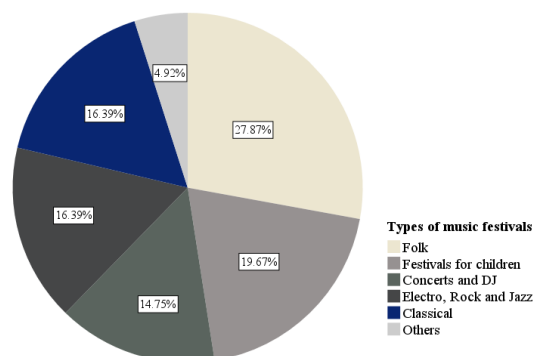


Figure 4. Types of music festivals in Kosovo

The data indicates that music festivals (50%) make half of all festivals held in Kosovo. Visual arts festivals are in the second place with 9%, followed by theater festivals in third place, 7.4%. Additionally, there are a variety of music festivals (Figure 4). Each of these categories has a distinct audience, function, and significance. In addition to being the biggest event category in Kosovo, this festival category is also a major draw for tourists and visitors (based on interviews). From year to year, they have seen an increase in both domestic and foreign visitors. The most popular music festivals are those for adults that feature live performances by artists and primarily focus on folklore (17 festivals). Our research revealed that 12 children's festivals (19.67%) come after them, with the municipality of Gjilan hosting the most of these.

2. The impact of festivals on attracting tourists to Kosovo

Kosovo offers a wide range of opportunities for both domestic and international travelers interested in nature-based and cultural tourism (Gashi, 1977; Humolli, 2015; Humolli et al., 2023). This study also looked into particular aspects of the potential for tourism attractions, such as festivals, in order to deepen the research. We brought up the topic of why visitors travel to Kosovo in our questionnaire and addressed it directly. We also wanted to know if visitors are: **a)** there just for the event itself, or **b)** they have other plans and the festival becomes an additional motive?! Our respondents acknowledged that the two categories of tourism resources—natural and cultural—were the base for the motives why people came to Kosovo.

They listed mountain tourism as one of the natural motives, stating that *hiking* and mountain tours, particularly in the *Albanian Alps* and *Sharr Mountains*, have attracted the most attention to date. Since Kosovo mountains are beautiful in all seasons, the tours were conducted all year round. However, during the summer months, when the majority of the festivals in Kosovo take place festivals serve as an additional motive for tourists to visit the country (Interviews and other alternative sources). The summer season is also the period when expatriates come on vacation, more than at any other time of the year. As the results demonstrate, Albanian expatriates had a strong interest in festivals and appeared to be a very loyal audience for them. As an example, the first interviewee highlights that *Kosovo is a new country that has not been visited before and that travelers are ready to see new areas every time* (Interview I, 2021) as the reason why tourists travel to and choose Kosovo as a destination. According to the same respondent and every other one, *Kosovo is another opportunity for tourists, a different culture, and it has other traditions compared to other countries*. Additionally, there are several natural beauties that attract tourists to visit Kosovo (All Interviews 2021/24). Only Prizren demonstrated differences in this aspect, as the primary motives were nearly exclusively cultural. *The city has a historical area, it has a fortress, and also a considerable number of festivals that take place throughout the year, and it also has proximity to Prevala as a destination with natural motives and to the other mountainous area of the Sharr Mountain and Park*, according to the majority of respondents, who list the motivating-attractive reasons why Prizren presents this difference.

With respect to the degree of motivation and influence of festivals, the interviews enabled us to differentiate between those that have a *higher* potential for directly attracting tourists and those that have a *lower* potential.

Everyone agreed that a large number of tourists come exclusively for these festivals: **a)** Doku Fest Documentary and Short Film Festival, **b)** Anibar Animated Film Festival, **c)** Sunny Hill Music Festival, **d)** Hardh Fest Agro Festival, etc. Prior to the organization of the *Etno Fest* festival, Kukaj was an abandoned village with just three houses and was unknown to most people in Kosovo. According to Interview VII (the festival director) and Interview XVIII (community members), *tourists have visited and will continue to visit this village because of the values it provides to the public and media, while also taking in the natural beauty of this tourist and cultural oasis* (2021).

3. Stages of festival development and their features

Three questions have been put forth in line with the goals stated at the beginning of this research. **First**, “How do you see the past development of festivals in Kosovo from your experience and memory?” In this study, we aimed to learn more about the historical development paths and the time of oscillations that accompanied festivals in Kosovo. In an effort to find as much data as possible and to find an acceptable line for periodic division of festivals, public sources from television media, radio, newspapers, etc., were also examined. But we also brought up this matter for treatment in all of our interviews (all interviews), and as a result, a conclusion has been made that festivals should be divided into three time periods:

I. the years 1970–1990, when they first started and when they underwent a highly favorable development;

II. the years 1990–1999, a period of regression caused by the police and military pressure of the former Yugoslavia, namely Serbia, at that time, which led to the war (1997–99);

III. the years 1999–2024 (present), the period of resumption (recovery). A higher number of festivals were associated with the emergence of democracy, the removal of political and security pressure on a national basis, the opening up of new and some of these festivals, as previously noted, proved successful. According to numerous sources, Kosovo had a number of traditional festivals during the first period (1970–1990), including: *Akordet e Kosovës*, *Kosovarja këndon*, *Zambaku i Prizrenit*, festivali i folklorit *Gllgovci*, *Festivali i Teatrove Amatore* në Ferizaj etc., funded mainly by *Sekretariati Krahinor për Arsim Shkencë dhe Kulturë* (the Provincial Secretariat for Education, Science and Culture), (Interviews and Others) and they continued to operate in this manner until 1988/89. This was the stage at which the interviewees pointed out a noteworthy accomplishment in the festivals' development. They highlighted the various factors that contributed to the success of the festivals, such as: **a)** *the lack of access to other creative organizations at that time, which rendered them uncompetitive; b)* *there were only a few festivals, each of them had a sizeable audience; c)* *there were few televisions (two - three channels) and the entire public was mainly entertained by them, by what the state broadcasted; d)* *there were not many private initiatives at that time etc.* In contrast, a lot of festivals were established during the third phase (1999–2024). Some of them soon ceased to exist in the lack of serious artistic and managerial platforms (programs), according to the interviews (Interviews VII, VIII and IX, 2021). In contrast, some serious festivals, like *Doku Fest*, *Etno Fest*, *Piano Fest*, *Hardh Fest*, etc., have managed to survive and grow significantly, enhancing the country's cultural landscape and fostering the development of tourism (Interviews VII, VIII dhe IX, 2021). But there were also festivals that maintained their artistic value, such as the "*Zambaku i Prizrenit*" festival, but which was never strengthened as it was before. This passed into the administration of the Municipality of Prizren, and it seems that the lack of dignified organization of the festival has caused its prominence and reputation to fade so much that it went from being one of the top festivals in the country in the 70s and 80s, to falling into a completely provincial festival with no current social impact (Interviews VII, VIII and IX, 2021).

Second "What elements contributed to some phases having a bigger or smaller audience, and why? What qualities help you identify those phases?" Most of the interviewees responded that the last five years have seen a larger audience. According to some, this is related to budgetary support from donors. The study results in a conclusion that the main donors to festivals in Kosovo are the local and central governments. They claim that *having a higher budget allows for a wider range of festival activities; you can invite more well-known artists; and the like, and all of which, according to them, have an effect on the growth of the audience*, part of which is expected to be tourists. The interviewees also noted a simpler division of festival-making into **pre-war** and **post-war** (before and after 1999). However, some respondents consider the post-war phase as an additional opportunity compared to the past. They claim that *as a result of the increased number of festivals, there are now more chances to attend one or perhaps join the professional team. Before the war, you had to be brave to attend a festival before the war, particularly during the Serbian regime (mostly 1989–1999), and more importantly to be a member of the professional organizing team* (Interview III and VI, 2021). According to those surveyed, while the emergence of democracy had brought about greater freedom of opportunity, it also resulted in less funding options, which was a challenge for all festivals (All interviews). There were festivals that took their approach and program more seriously. *It became necessary to invest in bringing in international music names, and as a result, the festival started to grow after 2015. It also made its way into the international media, with numerous media in France, Italy, and other countries that writing about the festival. As a result, this festival has advanced to a higher level* (Interview V, 2021).

a) Regarding the increase or decrease in the number of tourists at specific stages of the festival development, which was considered in the first question, the answers are summarized. All respondents claimed that they have had an increase in audience from year to year, excluding the years of the pandemic 2020–21. According to FEMART, the connections that are made with artists worldwide are expanding and networking (Interview IX, 2021) which then "translates" into increased public interest in festivals. In justifying the success and explaining the cancellation of some festivals, Mr. Hysa states: *the audience of a festival is created by the concept, quality, professionalism and consistency* (Interview VII, 2021 and 2024). *With them, festivals move forward, otherwise, they leg behind.*

b) "Do you believe that more could have been done for festivals in general by local and central institutions in the past? This was the second question we posed to the interviewees. On this point, the interviewees were almost unanimous. They say that institutions can help through financial and physical capital, logistics, media, professional support (with cooperation and strengthening of ideas), etc. In general, most of the interviewees responded that they *are not satisfied so far with the support provided by local and central institutions*. The financial support they received was in the form of subsidies, which is far from sufficient for the organization of festivals and especially for their sustainability.

The representative of *Anibar* during the interview emphasizes that *the municipality of Peja has provided more than financial support*. He notes that *Anibar* has a 15-year agreement with the City Cinema to host their animations festival and this saves funds for renting or building the cinema, which they use for other artistic and creative purposes of the festival (Interview II, 2021). While the same people emphasize that more financial support translated into more opportunities for human resource development and similar. The *Hardh Fest* interviewee holds a distinct perspective (Interview V, 2021). He maintains that festivals should not be reliant just on institutional factors but should find different ways of generating their own income, regardless of the support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, and Rural Development (MAFRED) and Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (MCYS) (Interview V, 2021). In this regard, Gondos emphasizes that through the revenue generated, in the form of various taxes, festivals can stimulate the growth of the country's economy (2014). The *Etno Fest* interviewee claimed that the institutions like MCYS, MAFRD, and the Ministry of Diaspora could have done

more, particularly for certain proven festivals that would have a direct or indirect impact on the development of cultural tourism in certain communities (Interview VII, 2021). According to the interviewee from the Ferizaj *Theatre Festival*, most festivals in Kosovo regrettably suffer with financial concerns. He further states: *there are no long-term policies, i.e. there are no long-term agreements between festivals and institutions that would have ensured funding for at least 3 to 5 years, so that the festival would no longer have doubts about funding* (Interview XVI, 2024).

Third, why did some festivals end, and do you believe they should be revived? The study enabled the identification of many defunct festivals (also mentioned above). Some of the interviewees felt that discussing other people's festivals was inappropriate, as in interviews XII-XVII (2024). Some of them think that there is no need to revive festivals that have not been held for several years. According to them, it is better to support currently active festivals in order to keep them from deteriorating further. For them, Mr. Salihu emphasizes, *'festivals that have had a long break, it is better not to return. They should remain as an originality that has ended and as a healthy memory of ours'* (Interview XII, 2024). Most of them agree that various reasons contributed to their extinction. Initially, the old festivals were part of state institutions of the socialist state, but as politics changed some of them fell, never to rise again. However, after 1999, some of them disappeared after only a few years of operation. As stated by those interviewed, the reasons include: *lack of organization, a non-serious program, lack of consistency, institutional ambiguity expressed in a lack of visionary strategies and concepts ect.* (Interview VII and XII, 2024). The first festival in Kosovo "Akordet e Kosovës" founded in 1969 never returned since 1995 (Kultplus, 05.01.2018). Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK) established the "RTK Song Festival" in 2023 (RTK, 2024) through which it aims to participate in the 2025 Eurovision Song Contest. But RTK and Kosovo in general failed to restore "Akordet e Kosovës", an iconic name with a sensational history that was owned by Radio Television of Pristina, the public predecessor of RTK. We brought up this festival as a historical fact to attest to the agonizing experience of the first festival in Kosovo and to highlight the fact that all six of our interviews, without exception (Interviews XII-XVII, 2024) spoke of the festival's tragic ending. In contrast, it seems that the Ferizaj festival fared than this one. One such instance is *Kosovarja këndon* (1972), a festival dedicated to the emancipation of Albanian women and the preservation of folk songs. The interviewee from the *Fer Film* film festival told how, with the great efforts of art lovers, this festival, together with the *Recitators festival*, was included in the national list of protection as spiritual heritage by the MCYS (Interview XIV, 2024).

4. The current state of festivals, problems and prospects

Regarding the third objective, the interviews were mainly focused around two main questions.

I. "How do you assess the state of festivals in Kosovo today and are there enough festivals in Kosovo?"

There are more significant differences amongst the interviewees in this case than in others, and several of them showed dualism in their responses. In comparison to the past and the circumstances that surround or make up the creative environment, it is generally believed that the state of festivals today is good. Based on these factors, the interviewers (II - VI, 2021 and XVII, 2024) believe that the situation with festivals in Kosovo is good. Unlike them, other interviewees believe that while Kosovo has certain nice festivals, their general state is not good. Given that they are sponsored by institutions, primarily cultural ones, their performance is questionable, they should be of higher quality (Interview IX, 2021 X and XII, 2024, etc. More evaluation criteria are needed for institutional supervision and subsidization (Interviews XI, 2021 and XII, 2024). Some respondents in its continuation made it apparent that they were concerned about something that we, the authors, have also observed through ethnographic evaluations based on our attendance at a number of festivals in Prishtina, Podujeva, Prizren, and Ferizaj. Two issues are brought to light by the concern: a) it appears that festivals are copying each other's programming, and b) a significant number of festivals fail to justify their purpose; thus, this number illustrates the problem of program copying, possibly even without intent but due to a lack of originality.

As we noted above from the interviews, this is also a result of inadequate institutional controls of central and municipal bodies (XI, 2021 and XII, 2024). However, the NKF founder asserts that this also calls for increased administrative and professional-creative responsibility as well as self-criticism. According to him, the *NKF completed its third edition, but it took them ten years to convince themselves that this initiative was necessary, appropriate, and beneficial to Kosovo society* (Interview X, 2024). Furthermore, the interviewee (XIV, 2024) believes that festivals should have a specific mission. Thus a festival should be thoroughly examined before being established; otherwise, it is quite painful for a festival to disappear after one or two editions, as has happened in certain cases. The interviewee (XVI, 2024) raises the dilemma that some events do not deserve to be called festivals. He claims that this term is misused and that more professional evaluations are required for their purpose and continued existence. We raised the issue of whether Kosovo has enough festivals, and the interviews expressed similar concerns. Their initial concern was the large number of festivals (Interview VII, XI and XII, 2024). Due to its small size and population (about 1.6 million people as of 2024) (Bajrami & Semini, 2024; KAS, 2024) it is not estimated that many festivals are necessary, and during the season, there can be over five of them in a single week (Interview XI, 2024).

This amount harms the state budget and other festivals that may benefit less as a result of the allocation of budgets dedicated to them. This means that festivals with non-serious programs and a lack of sustainability get their share, which could be used for real festivals in other situations (Interview XVI, 2024). Concern about the large number of festivals and the suspicion that this number has increased especially in the last 4 or 5 years are also expressed in interviews (XI and XII, 2024) and partly in interviews (VIII, 2024; IX, 2021 and XIV, 2024). They justify the existence of some festivals with the financial benefits they receive from the ministry or even the municipalities. The values, mission and method of implementation, according to them, are questionable. According to the Femart festival interviewees, there should be high-quality festivals among the many that are present, even though they believe the number is adequate. The interviewees highlight that, in terms of quality, roughly 8–10 festivals have succeeded in making a name for themselves in the creative

scene and benefit from their social impact, which in this case is most noticeable in terms of tourist flows but also has an impact on the local economy, society, and culture (Interview VIII and XVI, 2024).

II. “What are the current problems without which the festival would run better overall?”

Interestingly, at this point more than 88% of those interviewed prioritized *the need for additional funding*.

Others (less than 2%) think that the lack of ideas is essential (Interview XVI, 2024), while for the *Hithi* festival, the main problem was the space (venue facilities) that they were currently improving (Interview XIII, 2024). Other problems that festivals faced were the lack of presence from public figures such as ministers and the like, especially before 2020. Through them, direct lobbying is done for other citizens on the importance and interest in the festival (Interview IX, 2021). Next, the lack of promotion from televisions —particularly on public television—was emphasized (Interview VI and IX, 2021). For Mr. Salihu, *the law on cultural sponsorship needs to be better understood*. He claims that it currently represents an opportunity that could have, in another way, made it easier for festivals to operate more effectively and ensured more stable funding (Interview XII, 2024). Until early 2024, the visa regime *has prevented free movement*, especially for festival organizers, from being more current and more collaborative with their European hosts and not only (Interview II, 2021).

5. The economic, social and cultural impact of festivals on the community and beyond

The study looked into cases and came up with some interesting results. They are, in our opinion, significant markers that demonstrate the potential benefits of festivals. Naturally, the reader can see that there can be significant differences across festivals. However, the examples of some festivals that have achieved success—particularly in terms of sustainability and duration—were good models for understanding the broader economic, social, and cultural significance that festivals have contributed. *Etno Fest* was a small, straightforward, and an easily understood case. Based on the narrative from Interview VII (2024), Kukaj had just three houses in 2010—the year before the first event. About thirty houses used to be in that community, but they had been abandoned over time (Interview XVIII, 2024).

The director claims that the slowing of the emigration trend was the first beneficial outcome following the first edition in 2011. *Actors, doctors, authors, and artists began purchasing land and building houses as early as the first year. He claims that the cost of land and properties has risen tenfold since then, and that the number of purchase requests has also increased* (Interview VII, 2024). When asked about the motivations behind these real estate purchases, the village resident and owner of the restaurant “Oda e Dautit” stressed that they chose to purchase houses and land after visiting the town for the festival and noticing its peace and quietness (Interview XVIII, 2024). The second effects encouraged the activation of primary activities. The remaining residents in the village began to get involved in the work of organizing the festival, edition after edition. They began to cultivate more land and increase the number of livestock for the needs of the festival staff and visitors (Interview VII, 2024), especially since the festival includes within its program the part of ethno, agro-traditional activities. In addition to the restaurants like “Oda e Dautit”, some created guesthouses, paid parking during the festival.

In the study on festivals, we interviewed the representative of *Etno Fest* twice (2021, 2024), in two periods of time. According to him, the number of visitors reached up to 1,000 per day. With the festival lasting ten days, the number of visitors (some of whom were tourists) reached 10,000. This number has also contributed to the creation of diffuse effects (third effects) of the social and economic category. *The growth of the festival from year to year also affected the surrounding villages, which are present with their agricultural, craft and similar products and services, in the preparatory work of the festival and further, in meeting the demands during the festival days, said Mr. Hysaj* (Interview VII, 2024). He also underlined that more and more commercial partners—known in the neighborhood—want to advertise their services on the festival grounds as suppliers, cafés, street vendors, etc. Additionally, these diffusion effects led to social improvements in the number of volunteers, which Mr. Hysaj estimates to be between 15 and 20 (Interview VII, 2024).

The effects of the festivals were, for the most part, more subtle and varied greatly in other situations. Although the NKF festival appears to be highly promising, the director found it difficult to perceive any measurable impact coming from his festival (Interview X, 2024). The *Ulpiana Fest* festival had an even less obvious effect. Ms. Gjonbalaj (Interview XI, 2024) underlined *that aside from a rise in circulation, no significant social or economic effects were seen*. This is particularly true given that the festival was held at Ulpiana, an ancient site that is entirely remote from other settlements and commercial centres. The festivals like the *Hardh Fest* in Rahovec and the *Doku Fest* in Prizren also have a big social and economic impact. They already have a strong reputation on the festival scene, both nationally and internationally. The cultural factor is among the most basic elements that gave rise to the concept of organizing festivals. According to *Etno Fest* representatives, this impact on their festival is measured through several indicators that have emerged for them, such as:

- the increase in the number of visitors/tourists is not accidental but is directly related to the popularity of the ethno program, which the festival has provided over the years;
- increased interest and presence of public and private media, television and print;
- increased coverage and sharing of festival activities on social networks;
- increasing the number of activities, quality and diversity of the program (*theater, concerts and ethno performances, archaic rites and modern performances, exhibitions, debates and book promotions, traditional cuisine, museum activities, exploratory activities, creative workshops, ethno-news, relaxing-recreational activities...*);
- Increasing age diversity with a growing trend towards the younger age group.

The cultural influence that the *Doku Fest* festival has had over the years is evident. In the summer of 2013, the festival allowed for a return to tradition by bringing back cinema, which had been out of business for over 30 years (*Doku Kino*) (Interview VIII, 2021). Other cinemas had also opened, and she claims that Prizren has more cinemas per person in Kosovo than any other city. The *Doku Fest* festival had a significant worldwide influence on the short documentary film industry. From the interviewee, we learned that *Doku Fest* has gained international recognition and certification by BAFTA (British

Academy of Film and Television Arts) (Interview VIII, 2021). With this growth, it has become artistically pleasing, thus attracting foreign tourists as well as local visitors. Mr. Grajčevci from *NKF* explains that the cultural impact of this festival can be explained in several ways. According to his testimonies and other publicly available information regarding the festival in question, this is understood [(Interview X, 2024; (FIDAF, 2024); (Festival, 2023)]. *First*, it's one of the few festivals that features national ethno-cultural folk performances from not just Europe but beyond it. *Second*, the festival is part of FIDAF-Kosova, a significant global organization for dance and culture in general. *With Kosovo's membership in it, it became possible for our festival to be more attractive to different artists and other groups. This is due to the desire for international representation and recognition within the FIDAF Kosovo community* (Interview X, 2024).

Meanwhile, for Ms. Gjonbalaj (Interview XI, 2024), the organization of the *Ulpiana Fest* festival *has contributed to the cultural life in the country because it has given people an idea of how cultural heritage assets can be utilized. Our festival is intentionally held in the archaeological park, not because it is the best location because it lacks basic infrastructure, but rather to give another message of attracting people to sites of national and international importance, such as Ulpiana.*

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study supports the already well-refined theory, also presented by Boissevain (1992), emphasizing that festivals re-emerged in the first decades after World War II. The study shows a delayed temporal correlation as it was proven that in Kosovo there were festival performances rather than re-performances as it was the case in other European countries and beyond. Furthermore, the results showed that for the same period, about half a century from now, there were different oscillations in the development of festivals. The study showed a correlation between the rise/fall of festivals and political and socio-economic developments in Kosovo. Although these political developments in the Western Balkans were ... even bloody (we recall here the events of 1989-91 and 1997-99), they consequently caused significant disruptions to festival activity. This was supported by empirical results (All Interviews) and other sources such as (RTK, 2024). Later (after 2000) a revival began, expressed less in old festivals and more in new festivals, and as the research study showed, their number increased to 146 (2024). The findings showed that certain festivals, such as *Hardh Fest*, *Etno Fest*, *Doku Fest*, etc., raised the demand for local tourism, which is consistent with the theoretical explanations examined here, such as Smith & Jenner (1998) on the factors contributing to popularity of festivals. Based on Interview VII (2021/2024) and Interviews V and VIII (2021), the rises were consistent and favorable year after year. In recent years, festivals have become a global phenomenon and a tool for the development of tourism (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). Our study is in line with Cudny's (2013) state, who claims that festivals are growing significantly in Central and Eastern European countries and that festival tourism is becoming increasingly important. The same has happened to countries in Southeast Europe, such as the Republic of Kosovo. The findings of this study helped to understand that indeed positive developments with festivals have followed (in the case of Kosovo), mainly after 2000. Our research on these trends indicates that there are more festivals and that some of them are of higher quality. They do not support the idea that the collapse of the preceding political and economic system (communist/socialist) is a necessary condition for the success of festivals, nor did the study purport to do so.

More information about the writers' stances and contributions that highlight the significance of festival studies is provided in the Literature Review and the Introduction. Cudny (2013) demonstrated the deficiency of geographical-tourism studies, as our study asserts, and so emphasized the significance of achieving outcomes in this area of research.

Therefore, *maximizing positive effects on the local environment, culture, and history while minimizing negative ones is the aim of cultural heritage tourism*, as Potecnik Topler (2021) states in his declaration. Reflections on the possible advantages of hosting festivals have prompted authors to offer well-informed views on what constitutes a benefit. According to these beliefs, this study found that festivals have a positive impact on the tourism in the following ways: attracting tourists, enhancing and marketing the country's image, and helping the local community. The results of these influences are listed as separate points in the above section. The findings based on existing evidence, adopted in the methodology of this study, contributed to the creation of convergences as well as divergences, within the theory of this field. They present an important, completely new and unfortunately unaddressed insight into festivals in Kosovo. The study has helped form the argument that the destination image improves and reaches an incomparably better level, but by no means in all cases. The findings were based on: **a)** interviews (Interviews VII and X, 2024; Interview V, and VIII, 2021) etc., **b)** methodological-ethnographic stances (twice in the summer of 2024 at *Etno Fest*, at *NKF* also in 2024, **c)** as well as participation in thematic presentations as professional staff, at *Etno Fest* (Humolli, 2021) and at *Hardh Fest* (Humolli, 2018). They demonstrated how festivals can help create or improve a country's image (e.g., *Hardh Fest*, *Doku Fest*, *Sany Hill*, etc.) and create an image (e.g., *Etno Fest*). This is similar to the views of Kotler, Haider, and Rein, who have shown that successful festivals can help re-create a country's image or help put a place on the map of tourists (1993).

Our study took a long time and the authors were involved in it. From this we learned, interviewed, saw and heard a lot about them (festivals). As the results show, their number went to 146 (120 active). Is this number a sign of achievement or is it just a numerical display that does not present enough? It is not a comprehensive study. The current study will be followed by the second half of the results, which is mentioned in the section on literature review. But our studies, despite their limitations, have managed to provide evidence that a number of festivals are indeed organizations that represent little of what is expected, representing numbers rather than value. Remembering Bonet et al., 2013 festivals are characterized as time- and space-limited events that develop a particular artistic project and occur on a regular basis. Not completely, but in part, our findings run counter to this definition. Our research revealed 20 festivals that are no longer in operation, as mentioned above. Given these issues and the results of interviews like Interview XVI (2024), it was concluded that several of them were started just as a fad to embezzle public funds, which in these situations are readily justified.

On the other hand, this basic contradiction with the theoretical calls for the noble purposes of festivals reveals the lack of criteria for evaluation, when selecting recipients of subsidies, on the one hand, and of supervision for the implementation of the program and contractual agreements, on the other. Thus, the results—particularly the statement from Interview XVI—raise the question of whether certain manifestations are worthy of being referred to as festivals. As the findings indicate, this word is misused, and far more expert evaluations of their purpose and presence are required.

This call is completely consistent with the theory that we introduced in our study using Cole & Chancellor (2008) cited by Jeon (2020). They emphasized that festival organizers face a challenge to design memorable experiences to attract visitors who return repeatedly every year. Mika's (2007: 216-217) very positive statement, which (Cudny, 2013) cites, is related to and serves the purpose of all of this. Festival tourism is the term he coined to describe the phenomena of individuals moving for reasons where their primary motivation is to attend cultural events like movies, plays, concerts, street festivals, or other activities centered around fun, entertainment, and sports. In our case, this has only occurred with a few selected festivals that we have made sure to include in the results section as having a big influence, particularly when we have discussed their contributions to tourism, socioeconomic impacts, and cultural benefits.

By examining and choosing the findings for discussion, the scope of this study's implementation is revealed in hindsight. Results from this study, including the number of festivals, their geographical location, their types, passive and active festivals, their general and particular impact, etc., were not previously available. The large number of festivals and the fact that this number was outside our initial expectations presents the limitation of our study. After the first phase of studies, from the end of 2021 until now we increased the number of interviews from 9 to 18 because the research brought us more and more festivals (from 80 in 2021 to 146 in 2024). In summarizing the problem, we would like to emphasize that we required everyone's participation, and the study demonstrated that our limitations for in-depth analysis in specific circumstances, particularly in certain festivals (*Doku Fest*, *Hardh Fest*, *Etno Fest*), lay the groundwork for future research. We believe that the gaps in our current study should be filled by some aspects of social and community impacts as well as significant aspects of geographical transformations brought about by festival activities.

The outcomes of our questionnaire have been examined, however not all of them have been written. The other sections will be written in a later publication, as planned by the authors. The origin of tourists and visitors—some of whom, as we identified, were Albanian immigrants from European countries and beyond—was not covered in the current study. We recognize that they have sufficient potential for roots tourism, echoing the statements of Tullio et al. (2023), Humolli (2024b), and other sources. According to the results, the same people proved to be very loyal participants in festivals. In light of these sources, we recommend that future studies, ours and others, delve deeper into what Humolli had titled “Festivals: one path towards roots of tourism” (2024b). Tourist characteristics and the role festivals play in creating destinations are important areas of research and investment. The first step in doing this is figuring out how the quality of the event affects attendance and willingness to pay more (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Therefore, precisely for this reason, the study strongly recommends that steps be taken to improve the quality of festivals by each party. The relevant institutions at the central/local levels should be more accurate in their assessments and take public money into consideration, giving value a chance over anti-value. However, investigations should go deeper into evaluations by using specific situations to support the idea. In order to properly manage events in general and festivals in particular, it is necessary to systematically monitor the festival's demands as well as the needs of tourists. Their loyalty and contentment are crucial to the sustainability of the festivals.

CONCLUSIONS

Although festivals have a longer history around the world, Kosovo's more than half-century history of festivals should not be ignored. While it has been 56 years since the establishment of the first festival until now, they have evolved (risen and fallen) at a pace completely influenced by political developments, first and then by social circumstances, not at all suitable for their normal course. Although the importance of festivals and their significant positive impact on local communities and society at large have been well recognized, including by the literature examined in this research, the study supplied hitherto unrepresented evidence regarding their relevance in Kosovar society.

The study in its format managed to quantify them, brought their location for the entire Republic of Kosovo, their types, participation by type and country, their impact on attracting tourists, as well as their impact on the socio-economic and cultural sphere. These are precisely what made the study important and necessary on the one hand and equally overdue on the other. While these results have now appeared, the joy for them should not lose the concern for the delay of their absence until now. A first step was necessary but delayed. The results of the study showed partial correlation with theoretical references, while their impact compared to the number of 120 festivals was weak. The personal commitment of festival managers, then of all influential stakeholders, such as the government, the municipality and the local, professional and scientific community, must come together to give more chances to festivals. They should not be seen as ephemeral activities but as a beneficial multiplicative mechanism. Their inability to become part of the tourist packages of local attractions is evidence against which future engagement, even research, is needed. This plays an important role in placing the region on the map, compared to other regions. If the study provided evidence of improvements in the image of locations by festivals, this is not an example of complacency but a call for even more careful repositioning. In addition, the generosity of public funds should continue but with much grater caution. The large number of festivals did not justify their positive impact; therefore, attention to their better qualification as well as the increase in the number of studies in support of the results of their multiplicative role, are limits that Kosovan society must meet in the future.

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