



**Not (just) for the money:**

**Motivations behind the start-up of music festivals and the management challenge of balancing the needs of art and profit in cultural industries.**

A qualitative study of small-sized *niche* festivals in Kristiansand. The organizers` point of view.

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## ABSTRACT

The background for this study is the acknowledgment, by academics, researchers and policy makers, of the relevance of Cultural Industries and cultural content created and distributed by them. Cultural products are indeed “complex, ambivalent and contested”, as Hesmondhalgh affirmed: big cultural corporations tend to be motivated by profit maximization, but simultaneously there are many cultural artefacts and organizations that are not moved by capitalistic interests (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.5). However, the relation between the artistic and idealistic and the commercial remains cause of tensions in the field of cultural industries and many economists, sociologists and theorists have long disputed about the state of artistic authenticity and autonomy in cultural production in the capitalistic era.

Did cultural production lost integrity and idealism with capitalism? Or do creative autonomy and authentic art still exist? Why do individuals get involved in cultural activities? What role does profit have in a creative venture? These are just some of the questions that spun around my mind when starting this research. The study was then narrowed down to the live music industry and the focus finally moved to the exploration of how the apparent tension “art vs commerce” is perceived and faced in small music festivals.

The present study therefore aims at investigating (1) The nature and challenges of *niche* music festivals, considering latest trends and developments in the live music sector, (2) The reasons behind the start-up of such festivals and the role that profit play in these events (3) The relation between art and profit, with reference to the management of small music festivals, from the organizers` point of view.

In the approach of these questions, a qualitative methodology is used. The collection of data is done through the conduction of in-depth interviews with informants from the music industry, namely the creators and/or organizers behind three small-sized *niche* music festivals in the city of Kristiansand.

Based on the results from the interviews, it was possible to conclude that *niche* festivals present the same features as other cultural industries; they have a risky and unpredictable nature and call for high costs. However, they cannot apply the same approaches used by the big cultural firms to try solving the problems deriving from their nature, as they are not as financially strong. Besides, *niche* festivals have also been impacted by new trends in the live sector, as the surge in artist fees, consequent higher ticket prices and incremented audience expectations. Moreover, what emerged clearly from this study is that such festivals are started out by individuals with strong motivation and idealistic driving force, and profit is not the goal of these events. Nonetheless, the festivals acknowledge the tension between art and profit and are aware of the need of integrating the two elements into the management of the event.

The paper concluded that no festival can be based exclusively on “love and dreams”, although most festivals are started out of an idealistic component, the rules of economy, must be considered. However, it is true that *niche* festivals are not ready to compromise for a handful of more tickets, keeping their idealistic and artistic integrity intact.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 About the Topic and the Relevance of the Study

Attention around the Cultural Industries (or Creative Industries<sup>1</sup>) has increased in the last decades, both in the academic field, but also in public policy sectors, showing that their relevance in our society has been fully acknowledged, as beneficial from both an economic, cultural and social perspective. Hesmondhalgh considers cultural texts<sup>2</sup> important because of their influence on how we understand, experience and know the world. They can give a contribution to who we are, and not only offer a way of spending time (2013, pp. 4-5). We do use a lot of our time by consuming or experiencing them, this factor alone, can explain the relevance of Culture Industries in our time.

The music business, intended as an industry consisting of diversified and integrated activities (Wikström, 2009) and as a core sector of the Cultural Industries (Throsby, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2013), has gone through some dramatic changes in the last two decades, mainly due to the digitalization of music. As stated by *The Economist* (2010, p.2): “The Music Business didn’t die, it changed deeply.” We have witnessed a major decline in pre-recorded music sales (Krueger, 2005), and the live sector has boomed, against all predictions of economists and sociologists of music. They had envisioned that mediated music products and experiences would have led to a decrease in live attendance, or even to a fatal damage to the live sector (see Frith, 1987; Sanjek and Sanjek, 1991). The decline of live music described a more complicated situation, but evidence showed that this prediction has been reversed (Frith, 2007). Live music business turned out to be more alive than ever. The so-called Bowie Theory<sup>3</sup> got confirmed eventually, and artists, primarily because of the loss in record sales, found themselves in having to focus on

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<sup>1</sup> These two terms are used almost interchangeably in economy and policy making, while in humanities, the choice of terms is considered important (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Cultural texts are described by Hesmondhalgh as content, cultural work of all types produced by cultural industries (2013, pag.3).

<sup>3</sup> The “Bowie Theory” is the prediction made by the famous artist David Bowie who foresaw that music would become like “running water or electricity”. He reflected about the consequences of internet and digitalization of music and envisioned the increasing relevance of touring already in 2002 (Pareles, 2002).

touring. Ticket prices, partially because of this, have surged enormously and faster than inflation (Krueger, 2005), and new kind of live music formats have arisen, to maximize profit from live performance. Festivals, being one of these, have boomed all over and the importance of live music has been confirmed (e.g., Frith, 2007; Holt, 2010; Yeoman, 2004; Reksten, 2007; Getz, 1991; Falassi, 1987; Karlsen & Nordstrøm, 2011). Festivals can be big commercial machinery, pressured by the rise in artist fees, they also got more expensive and are now aiming at maximizing profit. However, festivals, independently of their size or goal, are also displaying cultural artefacts that matters to the people attending. The cultural texts are indeed “complex, ambivalent and contested”, to use Hesmondhalgh’s phrasing (2013, p.5). Big cultural industries tend to support conditions in which they can make more money, nonetheless, there are many cultural texts that do not support those conditions, and the principles upon which they are created, do not coincide with capitalistic interests (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.5).

Indeed, there is a tension between the art motive and the commerce one in the field of cultural production. With my knowledge progressing on this field, by acknowledging what had been studied before and what had not, I decided to direct the focus of my study on small-sized music festivals and to explore: (1) The nature and challenges presented by *niche*<sup>4</sup> music festivals, in light of the latest trends and developments in the live music industry, (2) The reasons for starting and being involved in such festivals and the role that profit plays in their start-up and management, (3) The organizers’ perspective about the relation between art and profit, with reference to the management of music festivals.

This work is motivated by a lack of research regarding the issue of the relation between the artistic and idealistic *motif* and the economic and commercial one, specifically applied to *niche* music festivals. This apparent dichotomy “art vs commerce”, in literature is applied generally to cultural industries and popular music studies, but not much is to be found on the challenges that it can bring in event management, especially on small-sized festivals who are built on a fragile balance made of enthusiastic engaged individuals with (often) limited financial possibilities. While, extensive literature exists on the motivation

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<sup>4</sup> Niche: “adjective denoting or relating to products, services, or interests that appeal to a small, specialized section of the population”.

Retrieved at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/niched>

of festival goers to participate in cultural events and on the positive impacts that festivals have on society, not much is available on the motivations of festival organizers to get involved in this risky and unpredictable business.

This will not be a new work intended to find universal answers to the above-mentioned questions and objectives. It rather attempts to carry out an in-depth analysis of some small-sized festivals, and hopefully give insight into their nature and their view on the tension between art and profit. By comparing these findings to the existing theory, I hope they will contribute to better understand the complex relation of art and commerce in cultural events.

## **1.2 Motivation**

I decided to dedicate my time for research and academic writing to the live sector of the music industry. It came as a natural choice as live performance has always been what has drawn me to music in the first place. I remember watching the live streaming of the MTV Awards in an age of nine or ten years old, my English was still very rudimentary, but the power of live concerts talked a universal language to me. Later, I travelled countries and visited big and small festivals on my own, for the love of live music. Professionally, I have also had experiences both in big-sized and small music festivals in Norway and that gave me an insight into this unique universe. Before starting this research project, I had the feeling, by being involved in the live music business myself, that the motivations for starting a festival go much deeper than just wanting to start a business and try to make profit out of it. I am interested in finding out more about the struggles that emerge when one decides to involve oneself, heart and soul, into the management of a music festival, particularly a small-sized one, which is usually known to possess a rather limited commercial potential. Therefore, with this thesis, I wanted to explore more in depth the motivations that move those individuals that one day wake up and decide to start up a music festival, as I assumed that profit was not their first objective. I find interesting to explore the efforts and motivations that usually lies behind a festival. Many festivals would not be where they are, without the fundamental contribution of passionate people both in leading positions but also volunteering in humble but at the same time necessary tasks.

### **1.3 Limitations**

This study is limited to a small-scale qualitative research, involving only three *niche* music festivals, in the city of Kristiansand. A qualitative study was carried out, to go in-depth of the topic and research questions, rather than employing statistics and large numbers. The research was limited only to this geographical area because of matters of time and distance, but also because I have extensive knowledge of the festival landscape of this city. Moreover, the focus was placed on the study on *niche* festivals, instead of comparing them to big-scale and more commercial oriented festivals, as I was interested in finding out the similarities that these events share, but also to see if there were any differences in the motivations, vision and core values and in their relation to profit. All the festivals interviewed are aiming at a small audience and the contraposition “art vs commerce” might emerge more clearly, due to their non-profit nature. It is hard to come by extensive data about the topic of organizers and promoters` motivation and perspective in cultural events and on the management issue of the relation between art and commerce in festivals. More literature is to be found about the creative autonomy for texts creators. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the question of how the *niche* festivals interviewed perceive the tension between the artistic and idealistic purpose behind the event and the economic forces and rules they must get along with, to put up and run a festival.

### **1.4 Structure of the Study**

The present paper has four main subject areas. Those are: Methodology (cf. 2.), Theoretical Background and Framework (cf. 3.), Interview and Findings (cf. 4.), Discussion (cf. 5). In the second chapter, the methodology and research methods of this paper are illustrated and explained. I argument for my decision to use qualitative methodology for the collection and analysis of my data, instead of quantitative. Then I explained my reasons for the methods employed for data collection, namely literature review and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Afterwards, I focused on the latter research tool, displaying the interview questions and presenting the interview partners. I also illustrated relative strengths, challenges and ethical concerns encountered in the use of this method, and finally I discussed the analysis process employed.

In chapter three, focused on theory, I started by discussing the different definitions of the cultural industries, high-lightening their complexity and difficulties in defining them and their boundaries, illustrating also the features and challenges posed by their nature. Then I focused on the music industry; its definitions, its plurality and the development occurred in the live sector the last twenty years, with focus on the festival boom. Finally, I summarized the theories around the topic of the apparent conflict between art and profit, and I discussed creativity and commerce in the cultural industries and popular music, regarding creative autonomy, diversity and cultural production in the era of capitalism. In chapter four, I transcribed parts of the interviews conducted with the organizers of the music festivals, to display the findings. In chapter five, I then discussed those, considering the existing theory and my research questions, to see if I fulfilled all my objectives and if the literature used could be transposed to the case of *niche* music festivals.

## 2. Methodology

To better follow the methodology chosen for this thesis, the research objectives will be hereunder repeated. The research project is aimed at exploring (1) The nature and challenges presented by *niche* festivals, in light of latest trends and developments in the live music industry, (2) The reasons for starting and being involved in such festivals and the role that profit plays in their start-up and management, (3) The organizers` perspective about the relation between art and profit, with reference to the management of music festivals.

The field of music management research can be located within the study of cultural industries and it embraces different academic disciplines as cultural studies, media and economics, management studies, political science and sociology. The music business field is still relatively new seen from an academic perspective, and there is not extensive research on the music industry`s development and challenges to date. Two experts of the field that have set the business in a more academic perspective are Patrick Wikström and David Hesmondhalgh. Wikström with his *The Music Industry: Music in the Cloud* from 2009 is one of the first and still very relevant academic contributors illustrating the changes the industry has undergone in the new digital millennium. His book tried to foresee how the music business will be likely to change in the near future. Hesmondhalgh`s *The Cultural Industries* from 2002 is another influential book and now represents a classic in the field. It analyzes the transformation undergone by the cultural industries by employing a holistic approach taking account of the cultural, political and economic contexts.

However, in recent years more and more articles, studies, statistics and dissertations have appeared on the topic of the creative and on that of the music industries. More and more higher education institutions all over the world are now offering education programs both on graduate and undergraduate levels on the field of music and cultural management. This shows an increase in interest for the field, the need for educating professionals to work in a rapidly evolving sector and confirm the high demand for further research on the area.

Although this study should be read by taking account of its delimitations, as the results cannot be generalized to all kind of music festivals, I hope that it can contribute to the academic discourse on live cultural events, and give an in-depth insight, into the unique genre of *niche* music festivals, straddling between creativity and economic viability.

According to Denscombe (2007, p. 5), the researcher should choose a suitable, feasible and ethical method for conducting the research. Usually, it is the research question(s) that dictates the method, but also the time and resources available should be considered realistically, and lastly, the method selected should comply with ethical concerns, such as privacy. For this research project, two methods were used: literature research and semi-structured in-depth interviewing. Before explaining the reasons of my choice, I illustrated why I chose qualitative methodology, I then focused on the method of semi-structured in-depth interviewing, on its process and evaluation.

## **2.1 Quantitative or Qualitative approach?**

In an academic research project, the basic generic premise is that the research problem dictates which methodology the researcher employs to study the topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 34).

One of the main distinction between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies includes the presence of quantification and measurement in the latter mentioned, and a focus on words in the former (Bryman, 2008, p. 22). As also Denscombe stated, the difference is not technically to be found in the use of different methods, but rather in the different way of treating the collected data (Denscombe, 2007, p. 247). According to him, quantitative research is associated with "numbers as the unit of analysis"; the analysis of large-scale studies with a relevant researcher detachment (Denscombe, 2007, pp. 248-250). Qualitative research is instead associated with "words or images as the unit of analysis" and the descriptive use of data collected in small-scale studies, with a certain degree of researcher involvement (Denscombe, 2007, pp. 248-250). Hence, quantitative research is emphasizing quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, p. 138). Some of the methods used in quantitative research are structured interviews,



structured observations and content analysis, all designed to analyze in a rigorous and systematic way an extensive amount of data (Bryman, 2008, p. 138).

On the opposite, qualitative research is concerned with the understanding of phenomena from the viewpoint of an informant. In this kind of methodology, the skills and experience of the researcher matter in the data analysis process, not just numbers. Qualitative research is usually applied in the understanding of phenomena that have been little studied before and it is meant to help building new hypothesis and explanations. It is common to use this strategy to understand social and behavior science (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, pp. 105-106). Qualitative methods are well suitable and sensitive to human situations, expect an empathic dialogue with the participants (Kvale, 1996, p. 70), and have the potential of giving insight into human behavior, which quantitative research can hardly manage to do (Kvale, 1996, pp. 3-4). Main research methods are observations, qualitative interviewing, focus groups, discourse and conversation analysis, but also collection and qualitative analysis of texts and documents (Bryman, 2008, p. 369).

The table hereunder also illustrate the main differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, according to Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1990).

	Qualitative	Quantitative
Conceptual	Concerned with understanding human behaviour from the informant's perspective  Assumes a dynamic and negotiated reality	Concerned with discovering facts about social phenomena  Assumes a fixed and measurable reality
Methodological	Data are collected through participant observation and interviews  Data are analysed by themes from descriptions by informants  Data are reported in the language of the informant	Data are collected through measuring things  Data are analysed through numerical comparisons and statistical inferences  Data are reported through statistical analyses

**Fig. 1 Qualitative vs Quantitative Methodologies (Minichiello et al., 1990)**

## **2.2 Methodology and research methods used in this thesis**

For this thesis, methods from the qualitative research model such as literature research and semi-structured in-depth interviewing were employed.

There is too little quantified and quantifiable data on the motivations behind the start-up of music festivals and on the role that the artistic and ideal vision has, in comparison with the role of commerce. Therefore, I chose to pursue a qualitative approach for my research. My main research questions – Why do people start a *niche* music festival and how do they perceive the relation between art and profit in the management of their own festivals– led me to explore the whys and how’s of the problem, questions that are best to be answered through qualitative methods such as in-depth semi-structured interviews. Besides, my choice of qualitative over quantitative method had a mere realistic reason which is that I did not have enough knowledge and time to collect and analyze large quantitative data in a satisfying academic way. I therefore realized that quantitative methods were not suitable in this research.

Qualitative research is the most suitable for social sciences and for in depth analysis. As stated earlier (cf. 2.1), this kind of research approach is a rather dynamic and interpretative and has the potential to give insight into human behavior (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 3-4), on the contrary of quantitative research, which is rather rigorous, with high focus on numbers and measurement. I have decided not to focus on big numbers, while concentrating on a few cases, trying to aim at the heart of the topic.

### **2.2.1 Literature Research**

The literature review qualifies as a research method (Jesson et al., 2011, p. 9) and has been used in this dissertation. The literature review should be present at the beginning of every research process. It is employed with the purpose of presenting what has already been written in research regarding a topic and to suggest further topics (Jesson et al., 2011, p. 83). Jankowitz emphasized the process of building on pre-existing work, but

with a focus on bringing the work together in a critical way and not just by listing (Jankowitz, 2005, p. 161). The aim of the literature research and review should therefore be to provide the context within which the study is situated in the academic field and show how the work done can address a gap in knowledge (Hart, 2005, p. 155). It is important to gain awareness of current work and perspectives on the chosen topic so that you can “position your own research clearly on the academic map of knowledge creation” (Ridley, 2008, p.1). Without referencing to other research, the study cannot be a valuable and scientific one.

In this research I mainly used published, external sources as academic books, articles and periodicals, I consulted masters` and doctoral dissertations, but also image-based documentation, as pictures and a documentary. The literature research for this thesis started in the digital library database of the university libraries in Norway, called *Oria*. I began with searching some open keywords, and gradually they became more specific and detailed along with my study progression. I used also academic journal archives, *Google Scholar*, and literature that other researchers employed in their studies.

The literature research process has been an interactive one, and involved both broadening and narrowing of the search, as my understanding and cognition of the research topic progressed. For example, considering the lack of academic work on *niche* festival industry, I found out that I had to include cultural industries in general, or as the thesis took form, I realized how some topics became peripheral and could be excluded from the final thesis.

### **2.2.1 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviewing**

As I am interested in the why and how`s in my study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as one of the main research methods. The entirely unstructured interview, together with the semi-structured type are particularly suitable if the researcher intends to collect data based on "opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences", "sensitive issues" and "privileged information" (Denscombe, 2007, p. 175).

Interviews are one of the most used methods in research with a qualitative approach (Bryman, 2008, p. 436). Interviews focus on gaining insight into the experiences and

opinions on some specific events and are especially suitable in situations where the researcher wants to create a comfortable atmosphere for the interview subject to feel at ease in information sharing (Mack, Woodson, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, pp. 29-32). The qualitative research interview tries to understand the subjects' point of views and it stimulates "an inter change of views": "If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives why not talk with them?", said Kvale. (all quotes by Kvale, 1996, pp. 1-2). In conducting semi-structured interviews, the topics to discuss will be chosen before beginning the research and the same topics will be covered in each interview and after covering the questions on the list, participants should feel free to add what can be relevant for them. The researcher should also feel free to ask additional questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 39).

I decided not to employ the structured interview because although it could have provided an easier data analysis process, its rigid nature was unsuitable for my research, as it is more appropriate for quantitative data (Denscombe, 2007, p.175). I decided to interview four informants, therefore findings resulted in a manageable data volume. My priority was not to expedite the analysis process, but to employ a data collection tool that allowed the interviewees to develop ideas and speak more freely, ensuring more flexibility.

The other research method considered was the focus group, where a small group of people are brought together by the researcher, who act as a moderator, to discuss about a topic (Denscombe, 2007 p.178). I have dismissed this kind of data collection tool, as the group of informants was composed only by four individuals and it resulted more practical to meet them individually, so to be more flexible according to their commitments. Besides, the possible sensitivity of data weighed on the decision to dismiss the focus group as a method for collecting data, as I preferred to meet the informants individually, so they could feel freer to express their views.

In the following paragraphs, I discussed the strengths and challenges of semi-structured interviewing, and ethical concerns encountered. I then illustrated the interview guide used for doing the interviews, I introduced the interview partners and their festivals and finally, I described the analysis process.

For carrying out the interviews and analyze the data obtained, I employed the "seven stages of an interview investigation" that Kvale (1996, p. 88) proposed:

1. Thematizing - clarifying the "why and what of the investigation"
2. Designing the study
3. Interviewing
4. Transcribing the interviews
5. Analyzing the interview material
6. Verifying - checking the findings for reliability and validity
7. Reporting those findings

### **2.2.3 Strengths**

This kind of interview, the semi-structured one, allows to maintain some consistency over the concepts covered (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 39). Besides, it is possible to adjust the questions, during data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 39), and the participants can have a sense of control in addressing the answers, it is therefore more flexible. There is more emphasis on the interviewees, which are freer to stress their point of interest (Denscombe, 2007, p. 176), and this was one of the priorities when collecting data. I aimed at avoiding yes or no answers, while I wanted the interview partners to deepen the topic, if they felt for it. With the semi-structured it was easier to discover, rather than just check (Denscombe, 2007, p. 176). Moreover, the face to face individual interview was easy to make it happen, as it was the commitments and agenda of only two individuals that had to coincide. (Denscombe, 2007, p.177). The fact that we all live in the same county made things even easier. Interviewing face to face gave the chance to avoid or correct misunderstandings, thanks to body language. Besides, the transcription process was easier and faster, with only one informant talking. However, I also decided to interview two informants together, since they belonged to the same festival. There, more coordination and attention were needed, both in doing the interview and analyzing it afterwards. My prior acquaintance with the two of them, established immediate trust and a relaxed setting.

#### **2.2.4 Challenges**

The challenges in this kind of method can be that it is more difficult to ensure that all the issues that are important to the informant are covered (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 39). However, I took awareness that the interviewees preferred to direct the conversation onto some other aspects, I considered that, but also asked the same question again whenever I meant it was fundamental to the study.

Another challenge was that using semi-structured interviews took more time in conducting it and processing the data, as also Denscombe remarks (2008, p.203), than if I had chosen a structured, rigid questionnaire, since the answers were not standard but rather in open format. Moreover, as mentioned just above, one interview was conducted with two partners at the same time, making the interview conduction and analysis slightly more complex, than with the individual ones.

Adopting interviews as a data-collection method is also dependent on the skills of the interviewer. It was the first time for me, and that made me slightly insecure, I first struggled with formulating my questions in a more open way, and during the interviews I was not entirely sure about how much I should contribute to the conversation, fearing to influence the interviewees, but I decided to comment when I felt appropriate hoping not to interfere, and let the interview partners free to express their ideas undisturbed.

#### **2.2.5 Ethical Concerns**

As Kvale (1996, p. 109) stated, “An interview inquiry is a moral enterprise”. It gives the possibility of entering the world of participants, but this poses ethical challenges as the interviewer and the participants are in close contact (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 15).

Ethical decisions must be made throughout the whole research process. There is a moral implication in every interview process, as for example the issue of confidentiality and anonymity. Especially if data is of personal or confidential nature, but this was not the case in my thesis. Therefore, all the interviewees chose to forego anonymity. Before conducting the interviews, they read and signed a consent form where I stated the background and aim of the research project, what the participation would imply and what would happen with the information on them, reminding them also that the participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the project whenever they wanted. For

more details, the informed consent form is to be found in the appendix at the end of this thesis. One ethical concern I encountered was originated from the fact that I personally knew two of the informants, but I tried to maintain a professional distance and not influence the conversation with any bias.

## 2.3 The Interview Guide

An interview guide for semi-structured interviewing contains the topics to be covered, with suggested questions (Kvale, 1996, p.129). In the interview guide I formulated some issues that I wanted to address with my interview partners and it gave me the possibility to leave space for some stories to unfold and facilitate them with individual and more spontaneous questions. Based on the findings of the theoretical framework, the interview guide consisted of 16 questions, divided into five sections (see the full guide here below). In the attempt to formulate open-ended questions, I mainly asked about how or why they perceived something, or what they meant on a subject.

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **1. Introductory Question**

1.1 What is your name and position in the festival?

#### **2. Working in *Niche* Music Festivals: Distinctiveness and Challenges**

2.1 What would you say are the most characteristic features of *niche* music festivals?

2.2 What are the challenges you encountered in the start-up and management?

#### **3. Motivation and Vision Behind the Festivals**

3.1 Why and how did you get involved in the music business?

3.2 What is your experience with working for free in the music business?

3.3 Tell about your festival.

3.4 Why did you decide to start a festival?

3.5 What are your dreams/vision/core values/ambitions behind it?

3.6 How do you try to keep loyal to the original vision?

3.7 What would you say are the elements that makes your/a festival “successful”?

#### **4. The Role of Profit and the Relation Between Art and Commerce**

4.1 How many people are working at the festival? Are there any paid positions?

4.2 What role does profit have in your festival?

4.3 What kind of relation do you think art and commerce have in the management of your/a *niche* festival?

4.4 What has been done to help the festival growing and/or deal with economic sustainability?

4.5 Did you have to compromise the artistic side of the event to keep the festival economically viable or profitable? If not, would you be willing to do that?

#### **5. Free Part**

5.1 Is there something you would like to add?

**Fig. 2 Interview Guide**

## **2.4 The Choice of Interview Subjects**

My selection of interview subjects was reflected. I decided to focus on the festival market in Southern Norway, more specifically in the city of Kristiansand, because that is where I live and study, and it is where I got engaged in festival work and I have knowledge of the existing *niche* events. Moreover, my choice of delimitating the interviews to festivals in this geographic area is also a matter of time and methodology choices, considering that I wanted to implement a qualitative research and as named earlier, I am interested in going in the depth of the motivations behind a festival. I am not interested in big numbers and statistics but rather in specific cases. I focused my research in one/two persons per festival. I have conducted three interviews, one of them with two informants at the same time. For this research, I have decided to interview three small-sized *niche* music festivals



in the city of Kristiansand. The following criteria were used for finding suitable interview partners:

1. The interview partners should have been engaged, either as funders or leaders, in a *niche* festival in Kristiansand.
2. The interview partners are known to be outspoken, honest and are respected for their work, both in their professionalism and engagement in the cultural life of the city.

The interview partners were Timo Helmers and Idunn Sem for Vivid. A Post-Rock Festival, Jan Bang for Punkt Festival and Tanja Søyland for Southern Discomfort Metal Festival. Hereunder follows a brief presentation of the festivals and of the roles the interview partners play in the events.

### **Southern Discomfort Metal Festival**

Southern Discomfort is a small heavy metal festival arranged for the first time in 2002 hosting both Norwegian and international bands (Wikipedia, 2018). Tanja Søyland is the administrative leader of the festival and board leader of the Metal Forum of Southern Norway<sup>5</sup>, which is the organization behind Southern Discomfort. She has also recently started to manage some metal bands. Tanja has been part of the festival since 2012 and in 2013 she was voted board leader. The festival is volunteer based and organized as an association. The board running it is composed of four people and the festival has about 30 to 40 volunteers. The only people involved receiving a salary are artists and technicians (Interview with Tanja Søyland).

### **Vivid. A Post\_Rock Festival**

A vivid crossroad of music and visuals, artists and audience.

VIVID. a post\_rock festival is an annual Post-Rock/ Post-Metal festival held on the south coast of Norway. The first edition was held in 2015, aiming to establish itself as a unique music festival emphasising audio-visual expressions, inclusion and hospitality. Vivid, "evocative, lifelike" describes not only our understanding of the post-rock genre - throughout the two days

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<sup>5</sup> Norwegian Original: Sørnorsk Metallforum

of the festival we want to expose post-rock to a new group of people, and to become a vivid cross-road for both artists and audience, musicians and visual artists. As part of the overall concept we will experiment with new ways of involving audience and audio-visual expressions. The event takes place in the old cinema in town, Aladdin, with its massive backdrop for visuals. (Vivid Festival Official Website, 2018)

Timo Helmers and Idunn Sem are the minds behind the festival. Timo works fulltime at Kilden, the theatre and concert house in Kristiansand as scenography carpenter. Idunn works at The University of Agder as media expert and is also freelance exhibition designer. Timo has responsibility for artist booking, and Idunn for the visual part of the festival. The festival is volunteer-based, organized as an association and has about 45 volunteers. Only sound technicians and artists receive salary and/or are refunded for expenses (Interview with Timo Helmers and Idunn Sem).

## **Punkt Festival**

This concept is an extension of how the curators of the festival, Jan Bang and Erik Honoré, have worked with a range of Nordic and international musicians; with live sampling and live electronics, and as record producers and remixers. Many prominent musicians and guest curators have contributed to the Punkt project, including Brian Eno, David Sylvian, Laurie Anderson and John Paul Jones. In addition to the mothership festival in Kristiansand, Punkt events have been arranged in the following cities, and more offspring events are planned: London, Paris, Montreal, San Sebastian, Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, Moers, Tallinn, Frankfurt, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Milan, Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Mumbai, Prague, Brno, Garana, Wroclaw, Rzesow, Gdansk and Warsaw. [...] All concerts at Punkt are remixed live, and the audience may listen to the remixes immediately after each concert. In many cases, the remixers also invite musicians to interact with the remixes, making them a platform for innovation and improvisation. (Punkt Festival Official Website, 2018)

Punkt Festival is a contemporary jazz and electronic music festival centred around the concept of “Live Remix”. The festival is volunteer-based and organized as a foundation. The board comprehends five members. Jan Bang, together with Eric Honoré, is a board member and one of the directors of the festival. Jan is dedicating most of his professional life to music, as he is a musician and professor at the University of Agder, teaching

electronic music at the conservatory. During the festival there are about 70 to 90 volunteers (Interview with Jan Bang).

## **2.5 Data Analysis and Processing**

All the interviews were recorded with a Dictaphone and subsequently subscribed by the author herself. As Kvale (1996, p. 170) states, there is no standardized way of transcribing (Kvale, 1996). Lewis and Ritchie (2003) noted that this is an essential part in the analytical process and encourage to synthesize data into a higher quality for presentation. I tried to keep as close to the exact wording used by the interview partners, but I omitted passages that were irrelevant or unessential for the aim of the research.

The criteria used for the analysis is based on Denscombe's four guiding principles (Denscombe, 2007, pp. 287-288): (1) "The analysis of the data and the conclusions drawn from the research should be firmly rooted in the data.", (2) "The researcher's explanation of the data should emerge from a careful and meticulous reading of the data.", (3) The researcher should avoid introducing unwarranted preconceptions into the data analysis.", (4) "The analysis of data should involve an iterative process", this means that the researcher "moves back and forth comparing the empirical data with the codes, categories and concepts that are being used" (all quotes: Denscombe, 2007, pp. 287-288). I indeed kept the theoretical framework and my research questions always in mind and refined those as the coding of the data progressed.

### 3. Theoretical Background and Framework

To better follow the theoretical background that will be hereunder illustrated and discussed, the research objectives will be repeated. This study is aimed at exploring (1) The nature and challenges presented by *niche* festivals, considering latest trends and development in the live music industry, (2) The reasons for starting and being involved in such festivals and the role that profit plays in the start-up and management (3) The organizers' perspective about the relation between art and profit, with reference to the management of music festivals.

As stated in the methodology chapter (cf. 2.2.1), the literature research and review should provide the context within which the study is situated in the academic field and show how the research done can address a gap in knowledge (see Hart, 2005). It was important to create a framework for placing my research. Firstly, to be able to make sense of the nature and challenges of *niche* festivals, the cultural industries have been described in their heterogeneous nature and their relevance. Thereupon, Hesmondhalg's contribution to the field of cultural industries, with his "The Cultural Industries" (first published in 2002), has been precious and used as a cornerstone in this thesis. He portrayed this field as a very complex one and hard to define and circumscribe, drawing also on the work of Williams (1981), he stressed the importance of focusing on the communicative or symbolic nature of culture, to determine if a product/experience is cultural or not. Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse's dystopian pessimism is also inevitable in this thesis, as they were the first ones to use the term "Culture Industry", to talk about production of culture in the capitalistic age, which according to them got irremediably corrupt and commodified.

When it comes to define the "Music Industry" in its complexity and heterogeneity, the recent work of Nordgård (2016), drawing on Wikström (2009) and Negus (1996;1999), has been relevant to stress the diversity of the field, better represented in its plural acceptance, the "Music Industries". Furthermore, to understand some of the challenges faced by *niche* festivals, the latest trends and developments in the live music industry had to be displayed. The music business got shaped by media innovation throughout history,

it went through dramatic changes, but it did not die, as also stated in an article by The Economist (2010). Holt (2010), Montoro and Garcia (2010), Krueger (2005), Connolly and Krueger (2006) and Frith (2007) all studied and confirmed the increasing relevance of the live sector, after the disruption brought along by digitalization. They also acknowledged and researched the phenomenon of the surge in ticket prices. The growing audience expectations is also recognized as a new trend by Nordgård (2013) and Yeoman et al. (2004). Moreover, about festivals features and management challenges, the work of Nordic researchers such as Tjora (2013), Sekse (2013), Nordgård (2013) and Mykletun (2009; 2011) were key. Besides, one documentary commissioned by the Norwegian National TV Channel (NRK) about the Øya Festival in Oslo, has provided valuable insight into the world of festivals, the motivational and idealism aspects of it, but also the internal conflicts that may originate from a change of visions among the organizers or by the loss of that initial spark. Finally, to put in perspective the organizers' view of the relation between art and profit in their *niche* music festivals, a more general framework on the topic was provided. Creativity autonomy in cultural work has been discussed by Hesmondhalgh (2013), Banks (2010), Ryan (1992) who firmly argued that creativity cannot be eliminated in cultural work, as it is an essential part of it. On the same topic the Frankfurt School believed instead in a gradual elimination of the autonomy of authors (Adorno, 1991). Also, on the discussion on the relation between Art and Commerce, Frankfurt School's exponents had a very pessimistic perspective. On the other hand, a much more positive perspective on the coexistence of both art and profit motives were provided by Frith (e.g., 1981; 1983; 1987), Hesmondhalgh (2013), Nordgård (2013) and Negus (1996).

The theoretical framework is composed of three subchapters: (3.1) The Cultural Industries: complexity, ambiguity and challenges, (3.2) Developments and trends in the live sector: the last two decades, (3.3) When art meets commerce.

### **3.1 The Cultural Industries: Complexity, Ambiguity and Challenges**

In this subchapter, I will give an insight into the discussion relative to the definition of the Cultural Industries and of their boundaries, showing their complexity and distinctiveness. I will then summarize the most noteworthy common features of the cultural industries and the management challenges they come with, so to get an insight into the nature of cultural organizations and products. Then, the focus will move onto one of the core sectors inside the cultural industries, mainly the music industries. I will discuss the different approaches in the attempt to define the music industry and its boundaries, and I will show why the plural version of term – the music industries- is preferred by some academics, to explain the plurality and complexity of these industries. The following subchapter will focus on the changes occurred in the live music business.

#### **3.1.1 Defining the Cultural Industries and Their Boundaries**

During the last decades, the relevance of cultural industries has become more acknowledged, and research interest for them has grown in several academic disciplines. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of a comprehensive view on this topic. Although an extensive body of work, it is to date a controversial matter to resolutely determine what characteristics make industries cultural and which industries and activities belong the cultural field (Peltoniemi, 2005, pp. 1 - 3) Many experts have tried, but also showed a high level of confusion in the attempt of defining the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.16). A good starting point for finding appropriate definitions, is to take the concept of culture seriously, as Hesmondhalgh (2013, p.16) suggested. However, there is a degree of difficulty in the task of defining “culture” in the first place. This is a widely used concept in cultural industries, and as it happens with other notions as well, is not univocal and there is not just one universal and absolute definition for it (Hartley et al., 2013). This thesis will concentrate on a rather narrow definition of culture, starting from which different definitions of cultural industries have been coined. Williams (1981, p.13) referred to culture as “the signifying system through which necessarily a social order is communicated, reproduced, experience and explored”. In a simpler paraphrasis, cultural

industries are directly involved in producing social meaning, communicating with an audience, and creating cultural artefacts, also called texts. Nonetheless, the term cultural industries remain controversial and difficult to define, and as Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 22) stated, the difficulties come from the challenge of defining culture, not to mention industry. At last, he defined the Cultural Industries as “Industries based upon the industrial production and circulation of texts, and which are centrally reliant on the work of symbol creators<sup>6</sup>” (Hesmondhalgh, 2013 p.14). The just-mentioned definition refers only to texts that have a mainly communicative or symbolic nature. In his book *The Cultural Industries* (2013, p. 23), he also presented other suitable definitions used when referring to the cultural industries:

<b>Media industries</b>	Used interchangeably with Cultural Industries
<b>Information industries</b>	Including also telecommunications, internet and information and communication technology sectors
<b>Leisure industries</b>	Comprehending also sport and tourism
<b>Creative industries</b>	The most preferred alternative to Cultural Industries
<b>Entertainment industries</b>	Preferred usually by business analysts

**Fig. 3 Alternative terms used to Cultural Industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2013)**

In the humanities and cultural studies, the choice of terms is considered rather important. Hesmondhalgh (2013) preferred to use the term “Cultural Industries” because it grasped better the dynamics of the “core” sectors as film, broadcasting, music and digital content industries. Other critics preferred the term cultural industries for political reasons, stating that “shifting from cultural to creative industries would imply to move away from the commitment to the public good and instead replacing it by believing more in the social use of a market outcome” (Turner, 2011, p. 693).

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<sup>6</sup> Symbol creators are defined by Hesmondhalgh as those who “make up, interpret or rework stories, songs, images and so on”. He believes the term is more inclusive than the word “artist”. (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.6)

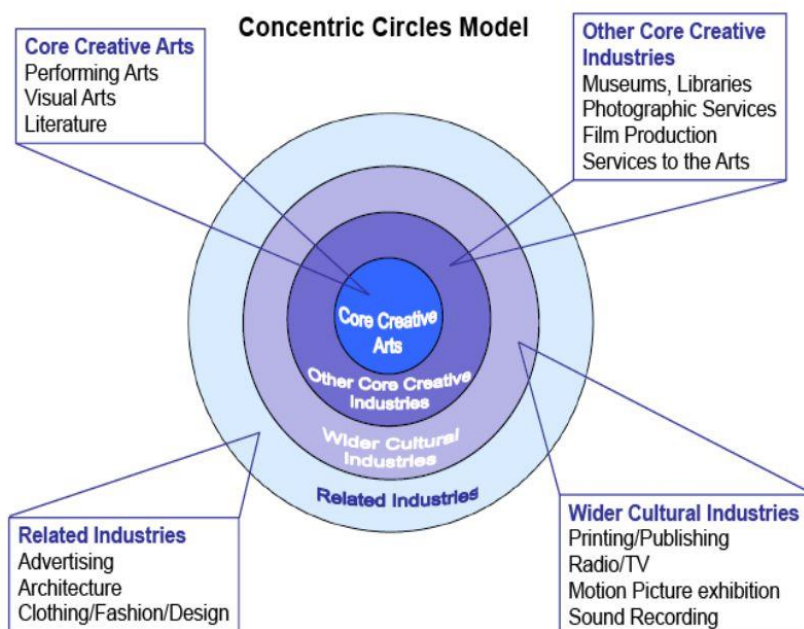
Moreover, the concept of cultural industries has been referred to, both in the singular form of the term (culture industry) and the plural one (cultural industries). The plural form tends to be preferred when talking about cultural policy documents and it is preferred especially by political economists as Hesmondhalgh (2013) and Miège (1989, 2011). On the other end, the singular version is preferred in cultural theory, where the term is associated with the neo-Marxist philosophy, that is highly critique to the art and culture under industrial capitalism.

Two German Jewish philosophers, Adorno and Horkheimer, from the so-called Frankfurt School are the ones who have developed the term “Culture industry” in 1947 (Adorno & Horkheimer 1979, pp. 349-83) while in exile from Nazi-Germany. For them, the term culture in its ideal state had to do “with art, and exceptional forms of human creativity”, but according to them, culture had lost its potential to create and offer a better life, because it had been commodified. Culture and industry were supposed to be opposite, but now in the modern capitalist democracy, they had collapsed together, they advocated (Hesmondalgh, 2013, p. 24). Adorno and Horkheimer defined culture in capitalist societies as “the overall standardized character of cultural production, and the way in which the culture industry seeks to incorporate producer and consumer, artist and audience, into this process” (Quoted in Negus 2006, pp. 198-9). The culture industry concept was later developed by Herbert Marcuse (1964), also belonging to the Frankfurt School, and he stated that the capitalistic society was promoting false needs, trying to create a “one-dimensional” and homologized way of thinking and behaving (Hartley et al., 2013, p. 78). The term “Cultural Industries” became more popular from the 1970s, in connection with new political interest in cultural policymaking (Hartley et al., 2013, p.80), and was preferred by French sociologists (Huet, Ion, Lefebvre & Miège, 1978; Miege, 1979; Morin, 1962) and policymakers. They preferred it to the singular, because the term “culture industry” suggested a unified field, where all the different cultural productions were considered to follow the same logic. The French Sociologists instead, wanted to show how complex these industries were (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.24) and they were also skeptical the attachment of the Frankfurt School to the preindustrial mode of cultural production, as they meant that industrialization and technology had also brought innovation, not only corruption and standardization as Adorno claimed (cf. Adorno, 1991). Garnham (1990) believed that cultural researchers should not only focus on the



ideological critique which takes for granted that culture is inevitably aesthetically corrupted by industrialization, and that capitalism transformed societies into internally more complex and heterogeneous systems. He also believed that cultural creators that pursuit a profit, have also an interest in producing varied culture for more different cultural markets (Hartley et al., 2013, p.80).

Defining the boundaries of the cultural industries is also challenging. There have been several attempts to refine and improve the understanding of what the cultural industries are and include (Garnham, 2005). Leading cultural economist David Throsby (2008, p.5). developed the concentric circles model illustrated hereunder (Fig.4).



**Fig. 4 Throsby`s Concentric Model of the Cultural Industries (2008)**

Hesmondhalgh (2013) instead, included the following industries into the core:

- Broadcasting
- Film industries
- Music industries: including recording, publishing and live performance
- Print and electronic publishing
- Video and computer games
- Advertising, marketing and public relations
- Web-design

Hesmondhalgh disagreed with Throsby when it comes to defining the core activities. Throsby believed that creativity could only spring from outside commercial industries, and this, according to Hesmondhalgh (2013, pp. 21-22) was certainly an overly polarized representation of creativity and commerce. Both Negus (Negus, 2006, pp. 201-202) and Hesmondhalgh (2013) believed that the cultural industries are not the only place where creativity can happen, but at the same time, it is also true that to understand cultural production it is important to reach for the specificity of these industries. By doing so, one will notice the difference between businesses that are centrally involved in producing texts and other kinds of social activity where the creation of symbolic texts is not the priority, Hesmondhalgh pointed out (2013, p. 20).

### **3.1.2 Some Distinctive Features and Challenges**

It is not an easy task to identify what makes cultural an industry, but there are at least two main features that are specific to cultural industries (Peltoniemi, 2015). First, there is a constant oversupply of creative labour, independent of economic cycles (e.g., Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Throsby, 2001). Also, there is a high uncertainty in foreseeing the products' success (e.g., De Vany, 2004; Pratt, 2008), as the artefacts of the cultural industries are experiential goods and therefore, prior to consumption, consumers do not possess enough information to evaluate them (e.g., Towse, 2003b).

Moreover, all these industries interact with each other, considering that they compete for the same resources, the most relevant of which are: limited consumers income and time, limited advertising revenue and skilled creative and technical labor (Garnham, 1990, p.158). According to Hesmondhalgh (2013, p.17), the competition for these resources and the fact they share some common characteristics, make it possible to call the cultural industries as a sector. Considering the French sociologists' work (see Huet, Ion, Lefebvre & Miège, 1978; Miego, 1979; Morin, 1962) but also Garnham's, it is possible to highlight some distinctive features the cultural industries present and that makes them challenging, but also some possible responses applicable to these hurdles.

These are the main distinctive features: (1) Cultural industries imply a tension between creativity and commerce, (2) They are risky businesses, (3) They produce semi-public goods that have high production costs and low reproduction costs.

They are risky because of the very volatile and unpredictable nature of cultural goods (Garnham, 1990 p. 161). Furthermore, the dialectic between creativity and commerce is important to understand when talking about the distinctiveness of the cultural industries, as it helps creating the relative autonomy that many symbol creators achieve (This topic will be further discussed later, cf. 3.3). Also, cultural goods have high production costs and low reproduction costs, as once the “first copy” is made the rest is relatively cheap to reproduce, even more nowadays with digitalization. Finally, cultural industries produce semi-public goods, which means that the act of consumption does not reduce the possibility of being consumed by others (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.26-29).

These challenges can vary from a sector to another and can be more evident in some than in others (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.26). However, cultural industries in general respond to the challenges posed by their features and that diminish their possibilities for profit making by: (1) Building a repertoire that can offset misses against hits, leading to overproduction (2) Trying to ensure audience maximization through concentration and integration strategies, (3) Trying to create artificial scarcity through advertising, copyrights and limiting access to reproduction, (4) Formatting the cultural products, by creating stars, genres and serials, to minimize the risk of losses (Ryan, 1992) and finally (5) Applying a looser control on symbol creators to give them more freedom, but strengthening the control on distribution and marketing, usually through vertical integration (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.30-32).

However, these approaches seem to work better for bigger companies. Concentration strategies leads to bigger and powerful companies, while the failure rate for small companies increases as they are unable to spread risk across a large repertoire. However, Hesmondhalgh, being aware of that, and of the fact that these features and responses are not shared in equal ways by all kinds of cultural industries, wanted to stress that “it is the collective nature of these characteristics that matter” and that “cultural industry companies respond in particular (though variable) ways to perceived difficulties of making profits” (all quotes by Hesmondghalgh, 2013, p.33).

### 3.1.3 Defining the Music Industries and Their Boundaries

Music is undoubtedly one of the creative activity at the core of the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Cowen, 2000; Hirsch, 1972; Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000; Throsby, 1994, 2008). A common suggestion would be to name publishing, recording and the live music industry as integrated sectors inside the music industries (Towse, 1997, p. 147; Wikström, 2009, pp. 49-60; Hesmondhalg 2002).

Most of the current debate around the definition of the music business rotates around the use of the singular term “*the music industry*” *contra* the plural one “the music industries”. The use of the term in singular diminishes the complexity and plurality of the field and it results rather limiting when trying to analyse the changes occurred in this sector. As Nordgård (2016, p.14) argued in his doctoral thesis, “It is fundamental to acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of the music industries”. There are of course challenges in defining the music industries so to make justice to their diversity, and at the same time, determine some boundaries. For instance, considering the music industries only as any intermediary between the artist and the fan, as Hirsh did, could fail to acknowledge the distinctive functions that each stakeholder performs in these organizations (Elberse, 2013, pp.192-94). Keith Negus (1992; 1996; 1999) and Simon Frith (2001; 2007) instead, stressed “the complex and irrational nature of then music industries”, and the need to abdicate depthless explanations and focus instead on the complex human relations and dynamics that form the music industries (Nordgård, 2016, pp. 34-35). Negus stated in fact that “the recording industry has been misleadingly characterized as mechanical and factory-like in the first place” (Negus 1999), and that when trying to understand the music industry, one should not simply see culture as a product, while it should be considered more thoroughly, as the context “within and out of which the sounds, words and images of popular music are made and given meaning” (Negus, 1996, p. 62). By way of concluding, as Nordgård (2016, p. 9) stated, to better understand the structures and dynamics of the music industries, one should take cognition of that fact “that it is a composition of different industries, and therefore it should be written in the plural”. Referring to the music industries as *the music industry* gives an inaccurate and narrow picture of a singular and uniform industry. The music industries are more than just the record companies, but where does this field end? As Wikström wrote in his book *The Music Industry* (2009), there are several propositions on how to best classify the sectors

part of the industry. Most of them evolve around a concept of core and related activities and or industries, indicating different activities and levels of involvement in the music industries. This way of classifying the different industries within the industry starting from a core and then spreading out to the “periphery”, is also evident in Hesmondhalgh’s (2013) description of the cultural industries (Nordgård, 2016, p.7-8).

## **3.2 Developments and Trends in the Live Sector: The Last Two Decades**

After having introduced the discussion relative to what the cultural industries and music industries are, what they include and what makes them distinctive, I will now illustrate the developments and changes occurred in the live music business the last two decades. The live sector got stronger than ever after artists lost revenues from pre-recorded sales, but this contributed to a surge in artist fees and an increase in ticket prices, and audience expectations have also become more complex and sophisticated. The music business had to invest in other more lucrative formats, as the festival one, which has specific features and management challenges.

### **3.2.1 The Growing Importance of the Live Sector**

Live popular music culture has extremely changed after the advent of digitalization in the late 90s. The two main elements of this shift are the new economic relevance of live music and the rise in ticket pricing (Holt, 2010, p. 246). Fabian Holt, among many other experts, confirmed that live music has gained greater importance in contemporary culture and that it has become a steadily increasing share of the music industry (Holt, 2010; Montoro & Garcia, 2010; Krueger, 2005; Connolly & Krueger 2006; Frith, 2007). What has happened is that there has been a significant decline of the market share of recorded music (Krueger, 2005, p.21) and the economy of popular music has turned dramatically from recordings to live sector in less than ten years (Holt, 2010, p. 257). Internet has surely influenced negatively the consumption of recorded music, but it did not affect live attendance (Krueger, 2005, p.41). Mortimer, Nosko and Sorenson (2010) claimed in an article that

live and recorded are complimentary: the more people listen to recorded music, the more they see live music. Their contribution even showed that there has been a correlation between illegal file sharing, and demand for live music, and that the former positively influenced the latter. The decline of prerecorded music has gone hand in hand with the increase of the live market as a revenue for artists. Until two decades ago, concerts were promoting record sales but then, first with illegal file sharing and then with more legitimate digital distribution, we have witnessed a reduction in incomes from physical sales. This trend has brought artists to do more touring and the concert prices has raised enormously (Montoro & Garcia 2010, p. 20). This was anticipated by the so-called Bowie Theory<sup>7</sup>, and as the famous artist said: "You'd better be prepared for doing a lot of touring because that's really the only unique situation that's going to be left." (Pareles, 2002). This theory explained the decline in complementarities between the pre-recorded and the live sector. In the past, as just mentioned above, records were subsidizing the live sector, while now it has become the other way around (Krueger, 2005, p.46).

The other element of the new live music economy is the surge in concert prices. From 1996 to 2003 in US, the average ticket price increased by 82%, while the CPI (Consumer Price Index) increased by 17% (Krueger, 2005). The average price for a concert of a superstar has more than doubled since 1996, and in 2010 the price equated that of five to ten albums (Holt, 2010, p. 250). Explanations for price growth include: (1) The possible defeat of the secondary ticket market, (2) The rising Superstar Effect, that sees only a small percentage of artists earning most of the money, (3) Baumol and Bowen's disease<sup>8</sup>, (4) Increased concentration of promoters and finally, (5) The erosion of complementarities between concerts and album sales because of file sharing. Krueger concluded that the decline in complementarities, as predicted by David Bowie, is the main cause of the recent rise in concert prices (Krueger, 2005, p. 24-26).

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<sup>7</sup> Bowie Theory: see footnote no.3, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Baumol and Bowen's Disease is a phenomenon observed in certain industries where there is little or no gain in productivity over time, resulting in rising production costs (Towse, 2003c, p.91). Krueger said that this may account for the price growth in live events in the pre-1996 period. The live sector does indeed suffer from Baumol and Bowen's disease, as there are still limits on the size of the audience one can physically reach and the costs of live music continues to rise faster than general inflation. Notwithstanding that, the disease has not been fatal, he concluded (Krueger, 2005, p.26).

A commonplace among economists and sociologists has been that the rise of mediated musical goods and experiences would have led to the decline of live music. In the last decade, though, live music in the UK results to be one of the most resilient parts of their music economy. According to Frith, the reasons why people pay money for music remains centered in the live experience and the prediction of the decline of live music sector has been eventually reversed (Frith, 2008, p.2).

This growth includes also other forms for live music, as festivals, but also theatre-style performances and big DJ-sets. (Holt, 2010, p. 248). Promoters have widened “the scope of the tour”, as Frith said, and has focused on festivals, for dealing with the high costs and maximize the audience capacity (Frith, 2007, p. 4). Furthermore, economies of scale can go into effect, as many artists can be covered by the same staging, ticketing and marketing costs. Another solution used by promoters to limit the damage of the cost disease, has been to expand the potential revenues of a live performance, with for example merchandising (Frith, 2007, pp. 4-5). In conclusion, despite strong predictions from both economists and sociologists, “The live music sector continues to flourish” (Frith, 2007, p. 9).

### **3.2.2 Distinctiveness, Trends and Challenges in Festivals**

The industry of festivals and events has also evolved from early 90s. On a global basis there is an exceptional interest in festivals and a new industry has developed and grown around this format. Moreover, the festival business has been proved to be relevant for both the economy and culture of the hosting destinations and community (Yeoman, 2004, p. 6; Allen, O`Toole, Mc Donnel, & Harris, 2002; Mossberg, 2000). It is possible to state that the last decades have been characterized by a so-called “Festivalization<sup>9</sup>” (Négrier, 2015; Reksten, 2007; Getz, 1991; Falassi; 1987). Furthermore, the phenomenon of summer music festivals has experienced a notable growth (Montoro & Garcia, 2010, p.20) and nowadays, most cities or regions have some type of music festival. Although

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<sup>9</sup> Festivalisation of culture has been defined by Négrier as “the process by which cultural activity, previously presented in a regular, on-going pattern or season, is reconfigured to form a ‘new’ event, e.g. a regular series of jazz concerts is reconfigured as a jazz festival” (Négrier, 2015, p. 18).

festivals are not a new phenomenon, it is the astonishing increase of their number which is impressive (Frey, 1994, p.29).

What is interesting in the case of these events is that the decision to start up a festival, comes usually “from an interest group that wish to either educate a wider audience or showcase some cultural practise” (Yeoman, 2004, p.35). The festival business has always been made of enthusiastic people and music lovers, and most festivals are started for idealistic reasons, and enthusiasm and voluntary work are important elements in festivals. (Tjora, 2013, p.16). A documentary shown on the Norwegian National TV channel (NRK, 2016) about the Øya Festival<sup>10</sup> in Oslo is very explicatory about the whys and how’s of a festival start-up. Today, Øya Festival is a well-established and profitable event, but it all started with four friends from Oslo’s nightlife that had little knowledge of festival economy, organization and management. Their initial vision was to make Norwegian bands play for a wider audience, the same bands that had played in their clubs. As one of the founders claimed in the documentary: “You have to have genuine interest, if you don’t have that, it will shine through”<sup>11</sup>, and he added: “The most important was to create something we liked, something we believed in [...] there was a basic interest in spreading the music we liked”<sup>12</sup>. Festivals are often linked to a strong motivation and idealism. However, those factors alone do not make a festival. As also the documentary above-cited showed, you need festival skills and a good overview over the economy of the event, but the balance between the cultural and the commercial is not an easy one. As stated in the precious book “Festival. Between Disorder, Culture and Business”<sup>13</sup>: “The relation between the economic and the non-economic, or between the business-oriented motivations and the more enthusiastic cultural idealism, are much more fluent and dynamic than what is possible to measure with simplified indicative research”<sup>14</sup> (Tjora, 2013, p.23).

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<sup>10</sup> Øya Festival is a large outdoor music festival in the heart of Oslo active from 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Norwegian Original: «Du må ha genuin interesse. Det skinner gjennom hvis du ikke har det». Translation mine.

<sup>12</sup> Norwegian Original: «Det viktigste var å gjøre ting vi hadde tro på, ting som vi likte. [...] Det var en grunnleggende interesse for å spre musikk som man likte selv». Translation mine.

<sup>13</sup> Norwegian Original: Festival. Mellom Rølp, Kultur og Næring.

<sup>14</sup> Norwegian Original: “Forholdet mellom det økonomiske og “ikke-økonomiske»- eller mellom den næringsrettede motivasjonen og en mer entusiastisk kulturelle idealisme – er langt mer flytende og dynamisk enn det man er i stand til å avdekke med forenklet «indikatorforskning». Translation mine.



In festival management it is rather important to have a set of festival skills in different sectors, like administration, economy, marketing, logistics, and in the creative field the event focuses on. “The fundamentals of a festival, such as creativity, volunteer work, enthusiastic people involved with passion and engagement, create an unsystematic landscape where knowledge and experience are mostly linked to specific individuals and personalities”<sup>15</sup>(Quoted in Tjora, 2013, p.17). It is fundamental to recruit creative individuals, but it is also important to develop an environment where creative skills can grow, and therefore some professionals could be also employed, to avoid overwork on the volunteers and to allow the creative minds to focus solely on their work (Sekse, 2013, p.83). The leader of VossaJazz, a festival in the Western coast of Norway, believed that it could be positive to have some professional people to develop festivals (Sekse, 2013, p.83). On the other hand, the manager of Festival Voss declared in an interview that there is a thin balance between reaching the professionalization of a festival and still managing to take care of the unique and artistic: “If you try to do everything so professional, you sort of kill the artistic soul of the event”<sup>16</sup>, he believed. In his opinion, the creative and experienced enthusiasts are vital and necessary for a festival (Sekse, 2013, p. 82).

Undoubtedly, the management of festivals can be challenging as the characteristics of these events are unique and therefore it is not possible to use a standard management model. Their distinctiveness lies among other factors, in their intangibility, as production takes place simultaneously as consumption. Although there are many kinds and form for festivals, the management issues are often similar and derive from the fact that festivals are operating in a very competitive environment, have decreasing resources available, they should satisfy more and more discerning and sophisticated consumers (Yeoman, 2004), and as Garnham (1990) and Hesmondhalgh (2013) noted, cultural industries imply a tension between art and commerce. The variables accounting in the destiny of a festival are many, but what should a festival generally try to aim at? What makes a festival successful? The answer can be rather subjective and varies according to the organizer`s value and aims, but if we followed the rules of neoclassical economic theory, then every

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<sup>15</sup> Norwegian Original: «Grunnlaget for festivalene – som kreativitet, dugnadsarbeid, ildsjeler, lidenskap og engasjement – danner et usystematisk landskap der kunnskap og erfaring i stor grad er knyttet til enkeltpersoner og personlighet». Translation mine.

<sup>16</sup> Norwegian Original: “Viss ein skal prøve å gjere alt så profesjonelt, så trur eg at ein drep litt av den andre delen då». Translation mine.

firm's aim should be profit. Nonetheless, as it will be discussed later (cf. 3.3.1), in cultural industries many entrepreneurs are motivated by something else than money (Brolin & Nilsson, 1997).

Mykletun defined success as “the ability of a festival to attract an increasing number of participants, balance its economy, be appreciated by local people and develop as a hallmark event for the region” (Mykletun, 2011, p.127).

When discussing challenges in the management of festivals, Nordgård confirmed in his essays about the changes in the festival sector in Norway, that the rise in artist fees has represented a new trend and a new challenge, on top of the rest, making artist booking in festivals more complex, difficult and expensive than ever. Like Claes Olson from Øya Festival argued in an interview, the latest years the artist fees have increased, many agents try to sell artists at a flat fee all over Europe, while earlier they were more attentive to the different size of the festivals (Nordgård, 2013, p.61). Nordgård also confirmed the increase in number of festivals and therefore in competition. Prices for artists go up as, their income have been subjected to a loss in music sales, and as there are more festivals competing and requesting to book them, they become more expensive. Besides, there are also many smaller artists available which involve a higher risk when booked. These are not in power to ask for high fees, however some of them do anyway to try to be exclusive, and all these factors contribute making small festivals even more vulnerable (Nordgård, 2013, p.61).

Another feature becoming more and more common in the festival landscape is that the festival formula attracts people that wants to participate to the event for the whole experience, and not only for a name on the festival poster (Nordgård, 2013, p. 64). Big festivals that sell out before the line-up is even announced, offer the possibilities to present new artists because people are looking for the whole festival experience, and by attending the event, they might discover artists they never heard of. However, the festivals that Nordgård interviewed did not hide that that this aspect, comes with the challenge to balance artistic integrity, the need to present new artists and the audience expectations to see the big superstars (Nordgård, 2013, p.64). The expectations of the festival and those of the audience and the rest of the music industry do not necessarily coincide, explained

Nordgård (2013, p. 58). People want the big names on the programme, while festivals still want to uplift upcoming unknown bands. Luckily it looks like festival bookers are still aware of their responsibility in presenting new things and building up the audience (Nordgård, 2013, p.67). However, they encounter the challenge to top up the previous editions, when it comes to artistic programming. Audience “get spoiled” and expect more famous artists year after year (Nordgård, 2013, p.64). The audience has become more demanding, making things even more difficult for festivals, especially the smaller ones (Nordgård, 2013, p.53). Nonetheless, festivals can try to communicate with the audience about what they can and should expect from the festival. It is true that the business and the artists let themselves be influenced by expectations, but at the same time the audience can also be influenced by musicians and the music industry. Therefore, the communication between industry, artists and audience as defined by Wicke (1990) and Negus (1999) is a process with several actors and with mutual influence (Quoted in Nordgård 2013, p. 68).

### **3.3 When Art Meets Commerce**

After illustrating and discussing the changes that took place in the live music industry after the advent of digitalization and that posed new challenges in the management of events, like festivals, the study will now focus on the discussion concerning the relation between art and profit, the apparent tension between the artistic, creative and idealistic side of the cultural industries and products, and the more economical and commercial one. Starting from discussing the difficult balance between artistic vision and commercial goals in the cultural industries, I will move to the discourses relating creativity autonomy in our age, to finally discuss the art and commerce relation in popular music and festivals, illustrating the more pessimistic view on creative freedom and authenticity in the capitalistic era, first claimed and defended by the Frankfurt School, and the more positive ones, promoted by Frith and Negus.

### **3.3.1 Artistic Vision and Commercial Rules in Cultural Work**

A tension between artistic vision and financial profit is often present in the cultural industries (Peltoniemi, 2015, p.48), and as Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 81) noted, this is an interesting and fundamental feature of all copyright industries. Creative individuals need to conform to both artistic and financial goals in cultural production (Durand & Jourdan, 2012). The relation between the symbol creators and the cultural industry organization is an important one, but it is undeniable that there is often tension between them. However, Hesmondhalgh believed in the fact that there is a confusing and bewildering over-polarization between creativity and commerce. The belief that “real” great artists can only create when they are as far as possible from commercial dictates is exaggerated. Nonetheless, it is true that the relations between creativity and profit making is a matter of “negotiation, conflict and struggle”, as Hesmondhalgh pointed out (2013, p.82). This polarization though, can also have positive consequences, continues Hesmondhalgh as the fact that some creators are pleading for more autonomy eventually helps producing richer and more varied communication (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.81).

The majority of the “texts” we consume are circulated by big businesses, and like all businesses they are interested in profit. An important issue that has been discussed is if the cultural industries have profit as the goal. There is no simplistic answer, as very often what cultural organizations and firms do is trying to lead the audience to alternative way of thinking, that are not necessarily capitalistic. The cultural industries are indeed industries, but they manage creativity and knowledge, they “are concerned, fundamentally, with the management and selling of a particular kind of work” (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.6). Sociologists and Marxists have claimed though that artistic work is not that far from other types of labor, both producing objects or experiences. But it is true that artistic work has some distinctive features that make it unique: it involves creativity - art and symbolic creativity, as Hesmondhalgh preferred to call it - which can make peoples life more meaningful, but sometimes it is also true that these texts can be just mediocre (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.7).

According to neoclassical economic theory, the purpose of every firm, by acquisition of resources to create and then sell products or services, should be profit maximization (see e.g., Hoskins & McFadyen, 2004, p.141; Picard 2002, p.3). Nevertheless, in cultural

industries many entrepreneurs are motivated by something else rather than money (Brulin & Nilsson, 1997). At the same time, although profit is not the goal, or one of the core values, there are very few authors which can disregard completely the rules of economy: every business has bills to pay to avoid bankruptcy (Wikström, 2009, p.25). Most cultural entrepreneurs agree that starting a company is a tool to structure their activity and deal with other economic ventures. Perhaps, although profit maximization is not the goal, it should at least allow the creators to continue in their job (Wikström, 2009, pp. 26-27).

Cultural industries face the challenge of negotiation between commercial rules and creative goals. Many agrees on this (e.g., Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011; Lampel, Shamsie and Lant, 2006; Ryan, 1992). At the heart of cultural production there is the matter of the relationship between creativity and commerce; “between the drive to make profits, and those other values which also motivate production: the quest to make interesting, intriguing, pleasurable, beautiful, informative, enlightening products” (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.229).

### **3.3.2 Creative Autonomy in Cultural Production in the Era of Capitalism**

Hesmondhalgh (2013) stated that symbol creators are granted considerable autonomy because of the need for originality and innovation. Instead, some critiques suggested that autonomy in cultural work has been dramatically decreased or compromised (see Adorno, 1991). Against this view, Mark Banks discussed how autonomous cultural work is impossible to destroy, as it represents a prerequisite for value-production in cultural and creative industries (Banks, 2010, p.260). In *Making Capital from Culture*, Ryan (1992) focused on with what he defined a “specific contradiction” at the heart of the culture industry — namely, that although “cultural production is consistently more organised to satisfy capitalist demands, it is still not reducible to merely those demands because, by necessity, it must comprise other antithetical forms of value, originated from the practices and procedures of art” (Ryan, 1992, p. 5). Creation still requires the labour of artists, “individuals with unalienable and irreplaceable talents and skills”, and therefore, it can never easily be debased to a set of rules (Ryan, 1992, p. 121). However, some theorists are very sceptical to the idea that cultural workers still possess creative autonomy and artistic independence. The “Culture Industry” critique, first presented by Adorno and Horkheimer, exponents of the Frankfurt School (1992) in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,

recognized the industrialisation of art and culture in modern societies and the commodity standardisation (Adorno, 1991, p. 99). As stated by Adorno, the autonomy of authors, as well as the freedom of consumers, is going to be “tendentially eliminated by the culture industry”, and there will eventually be a standardization and uniformity of culture and art (Adorno, 1991, p. 99). Adorno and Horkheimer believed that independent culture had become integrated in capitalist dynamics in the form of the “Culture Industry”.

However, the idea that cultural commodities in a capitalistic society only produce and promote dominant ideologies has been challenged, for example by Garnham (2001) who argued that in a capitalistic system, there can co-exist a big variety of cultural forms and ideas and that the market will lead to an expanding diversity of cultural products.

Notwithstanding that Adorno has long been under attack for his cultural pessimism, he still retains a notable influence on contemporary critique. For example, McGuigan (2004) suggested that cultural production is now more strongly defined by the logic of economics and that autonomous critical judgment and creativity have been disintegrated by neo-liberalism. McRobbie (2002) argued that since the mid-1990s, cultural industries have become gradually ruled by more aggressive marketing, which diminished genuine creativity and autonomous cultural production.

By way of conclusion, Banks suggested that “The cultural industries are not only inducing alienation, individualism, or status-seeking and instrumentality, instead, they contain a much more open and ambiguous sense of autonomous subjectivity cultural industries should not be understood as sites of a standardised and general exploitation, but as loci for a contestable and transformable political economy of work” (Banks, 2010, pp. 266-267).

### **3.3.3 The Art and Commerce Relation in Popular Music**

“Popular music and the music industry are closely linked together. The coexistence of the creative and economic powers is so coinciding that it is difficult to say where one ends and where the other starts”<sup>17</sup> (Nordgård, 2013, p.56). For instance, it is a myth the one

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<sup>17</sup> Norwegian Original: “Populærmusikk og musikkindustri er tett knyttet sammen. Sameksistensen mellom kreative og økonomiske krefter er så sammenfallende at det er vanskelig å definere hvor det ene slutter, og hvor det andre begynner». Translation mine.

that tells that Rock is born spontaneously in the moment when artists and public meet; it is rather a product of the expectations that the artists and the music industry have, towards the audience's desires. (Wicke, 1990, quoted in Nordgård, 2013, p. 56). The music industry consists of a constant dialogue among all the involved stakeholders (Nordgård, 2013, p. 56).

As Negus stated, the music industries' economical logics function in interaction with the artistic and creative expression (Negus, 1999). In opposition to classical music or art music where perhaps, the demarcation between industry and art is bigger, popular music and the music industry operate instead in a mutual interdependency. When talking about festivals, for instance, most of these events are started on an idealistic basis, but at the same time, they also have the potential to grow and be professionalized, both from the organizational point of view and the artistic one (Nordgård, 2013, p.57).

Nonetheless, for many academics, journalists, fans or musicians, the music industry has often been portrayed as a corporate machine trying to control creativity, compromising high artistic aspirations and threatening heterogeneity (Negus, 1996, p.36). However, the music business should be considered both as driven by profit-making, and as a place for creative activity. "The problem lies in attempting to bring the two of them together", Negus pointed out (1996, p.36).

Several attempts to reconcile creative and financial goals have been tried in popular music history. The 60s and 70s saw an explicit marriage of commerce and creativity, when for example recording companies let high level of autonomy to creators because of the high demand of "originality and meaningfulness", in the attempt to conquer new young consumers. The demand for autonomy did not only concern Rock, but also Afro-American, Asian, Latin-American, Caribbean and African music. Often, the critiques raised about commerce in popular music, were naïve and self-contradictory, argued Hesmondhalgh, but by 2000s some of the hardline opposition to commerce in Rock had loosen up. The business had started to embrace commerce. For instance, in the 80s, big rock bands were not denying anymore the help they had received from the commercial system to become popular. But of course, cases of resistance to commerce continued in 2000s (Hesmondhalgh, p. 249): famous is the case of Prince who performed many times with the word "slave" written on his forehead (Wikström, 2009, p. 29). Nonetheless,

believing that the music industry is only about art is a misconception. Consider for example the following quotations from two famous Pauls (quoted in Eliot, 1993): “Somebody said to me ‘but the Beatles were anti-materialistic.’ That’s a huge myth. John and I literally used to sit down and say, ‘Now, let’s write a swimming pool’.” said Paul McCartney. And then this: “Popular music is one of the industries of the country. It’s all completely tied up with capitalism. It’s stupid to separate it”, stated Paul Simon from Simon and Garfunkel. Of course, Rock is much more than just an industry. For example, Bruce Springsteen, once marked: “I help people hold on to their own humanity, if I’m doing my job right” (Azerrad, 2002, p. 13). And undoubtedly, he is right, music can produce positive externalities, many artists and agents have greater and more noble objectives than mere income maximization (Krueger, 2005, p.2).

Frith rejected the “art and commerce” conflict as a “cliched opposition” (Frith, 1991, p. 106) and he believed that they were not opposite but interwoven instead, and that they had an integrated relationship, not antagonistic (Frith, 1983, p. 83). For Frith, British pop culture, for example, was a place where “creativity, commentary and commerce have become indistinguishable” (Frith, 1987, p. 69). Furthermore, Frith believed that the separation between music as a commodity and music as human expression was misleading (Frith, 1988). According to him, no popular music activity is made outside of the industrialized record production (Negus, 1996, p. 54). However, Negus did not entirely agree with Frith on that, as he believed in the possibilities of music production outside the commodified business, and he also considered Frith’s assumption disempowering towards the attempts of all the artists that are at least trying to take distance from the commercial show-business (Negus, 1996 p 54). On the other hand, Adorno strongly believed in the corporate control argument, according to which, popular music is produced by a “Culture Industry” and therefore subjugated to the commerce rules, produced and distributed industrially and with the purpose of profit maximization. “Commercial gain and social manipulation” are terms used by Adorno when talking about the process behind writing a song. The Frankfurt School theorists believed also that the recent concentration of ownership led to a “colonization of leisure” and that any attempt of creative possibility was lost, absorbed by the commercial system (Negus, 1996, pp.36-40). Even free jazz in Adorno’s eyes, was referred as a “pseudo-individuality”, art form that claimed originality, but that in reality was “carefully planned out in advance with



machinelike precision” (Adorno, 1976, p.123). Despite this, he did not deny that there could be occasional moment for real improvisation but like other genre, jazz as well, had been subject to the culture industry and therefore lost its authenticity. Chapple and Garofalo (1977) were also worried about how capitalism turned popular music into a commodity, but they were far from as pessimistic as Adorno, and saw some potential in modern popular music (Negus, 1996, p.29).

## 4. Interviews and findings

To better follow the findings emerged from the interviews, the research objectives will be hereunder repeated. This research project is aimed at exploring (1) The nature and challenges presented by *niche* festivals, in light of latest trends and developments in the live music industry, (2) The reasons for starting and being involved in such festivals and the role that profit plays in their start-up and management, (3) The organizers' perspective about the relation between art and profit, with reference to the management of music festivals.

The aim of the interviews was to explore in depth the just above-mentioned research objectives by collecting empirical data and comparing them to the theoretical framework. The intention behind the research was not to generalize to all possible music festivals, but to give an insight into the world of small *niche* festivals in the city of Kristiansand: to explore the interviewees' "lived world and their relation to it" (Kvale, 1996, p. 29). In this chapter, I will transcribe part of the interviews and illustrate the findings, dividing them into three main themes. I will leave the discussion of the findings, compared to the theory and research questions for chapter 5. Since most of the literature that provided a frame for this thesis, is mainly focused on cultural industries in general, not on the festival industry particularly, the interviews were an important tool to support the transfer of frameworks and findings to the festival industry, or more specifically, to that of *niche* festivals.

I will divide the findings into the following three main topics: (1) Working with *niche* music festivals: distinctiveness and challenges, (2) Motivation as a driving force, (3) Commerce as "evil" necessity. In the findings hereunder, the interview partners will be often cited only by their first name and it will happen that the festival names will be in some cases shorten like this: Punkt for Punkt Festival, Southern Discomfort for Southern Discomfort Metal Festival and Vivid Festival for Vivid. A Post-Rock Festival.

## **4.1 Working in *Niche* Music Festivals: Distinctiveness and Challenges**

### **4.1.1 Risky and Expensive Business, Increase in Artist Fees and Audience Expectations**

Tanja Søyland from Southern Discomfort confirmed the unpredictability of live events as festivals. She said: “The thing with music festivals is often that it is very, very hard to foresee how they are gonna go, especially here in Kristiansand where people are not big on buying tickets ahead. We actually found ourselves the first day of the festival with like 20 tickets sold”. Festivals are risky businesses, “you cannot foresee their success. I guess you see, most of the festivals around here sometimes go bankrupt. Southern is actually one of the oldest festivals in town now”, Tanja added. The same happened at the first concert of Punkt Festival, where very few people attended, Jan Bang confessed.

Moreover, the production costs of a live event are always rather high so, to keep the costs down Tanja from Southern Discomfort explained that through festival networking she got in contact with different suppliers and managed to set up barter agreements. “We have most of the food sponsored, we actually serve gourmet food for both crew and artists and that’s one of the things we’re really well known for”, Tanja explained. The other festivals as well are familiar with the high costs implied with a festival, and they do try to adapt and shape the event considering the resources available, but this is not always easy. Punkt Festival have been had red numbers for years and book according to funds available. Vivid Festival is a much younger festival, if compared to Southern Discomfort, first started in 2002 and to Punkt Festival, started in 2005. This implies a series of challenges that the two other festivals do not face, or at least not at the same degree, or not anymore. Vivid struggles in getting more established and receive the funds necessary for the growth of the festival. The festival has come to a stage where the organizers feel like they would like to be able to fairly pay all the artists for their concerts and maybe manage to book slightly bigger names, but they do not receive yet enough public financial support to do that.

More and more artists are expecting to be better paid for their job. Timo explained:

Most of the bands except the headliners, play for just transport and accommodation. [...] So yeah, they do it for a different reason than “fame”. However, things are never that easy, and with the festival approaching its fourth edition, more and more artists are expecting to get paid for their work [...]

The agents who are sitting between him and the bands are making unrealistic offers, with very high artist fees. Idunn Sem pointed out also that with the financial crisis not that many European countries can afford high fees for bands, but that Oslo still can and therefore some European bookers think that Norway has the money. Moreover, Timo experienced that if the agents hear the word festival, they think immediately big and that there will be many people at one place, but that does not necessarily apply for *niche* festivals. Idunn and Timo acknowledged therefore an increase in artist fees, even for some of the small bands. Tanja from Southern Discomfort has also experienced that prices for bands have become higher.

Idunn also underlined the problem that once you had a bigger name in the program, audience and bookers will assume that you are going to book even bigger next year, and it becomes difficult to fulfil these expectations.

#### **4.1.2 Need for Festival Skills: Professionals or DIY-volunteers?**

Tanja believes that even if Southern Discomfort is volunteer-driven, it got more and more professionalized through time. Some of their volunteers have got paid positions in other festivals, and that shows that they grew in what they were doing. When asked about her thoughts around the use of professional staff to replace some volunteer-positions, she claimed: “We'll keep things as is, with the technicians and artists being paid. Us who sit in the board have about 100 years of experience all together, and with great volunteers, everything runs smoothly”.

Jan Bang from Punkt Festival admitted that it might be easier to demand an effort if you are paying for a service, but not necessarily in all parts of the organization:

It would certainly contribute to a higher part of commitment in certain specific roles, especially involving the finances, paying the bills, making

annual reports, applying for funding etc. Still, most of our work is being done brilliantly strictly by volunteering work, or by a small symbolic compensation.

Timo from Vivid Festival thinks that it is important to have someone committed as he cannot manage and run a festival on his own: “I think the festival would miss a lot of creativity and excitement without different impulses” and Idunn added: “Also, the purpose of the festival would be lost. It’s a shared effort”. Idunn believes that when a festival is made of passionate volunteers, you can feel that it is the result of a group achievement, but it makes it also fragile: “You are dependent on volunteers being so enthusiastic year after year”. Idunn then concluded: “One thing is that you have the enthusiasm and authenticity yourself, but the more established you become, the more you risk of not needing these extra hours by the volunteers, and then you see the festival up and running....and maybe you miss some of the idealism behind it”. Idunn also took cognizance of the necessity for more dedicated work and efforts into some positions, but it is hard to get this done by volunteers. Perhaps some paid staff would help, but the festival does not have the economic capacity for that. Idunn acknowledged the need for a group of people with different and complementary skills as a challenge. She admitted: “You need a whole range of qualities to make it more professional” and it can be hard to find them in people working for free.

#### **4.1.3 Holding Motivation and Engagement Alive**

All festivals agree that motivation and enthusiasm are key. A challenge in volunteer-based festivals like these *niche* events appears to be to manage to keep the spirit alive among the co-workers and volunteers in the long run, but it is mentioned only by Vivid Festival. The other two festivals stressed the importance of motivation but did not name a struggle in keeping people motivated. However, Tanja from Southern Discomfort do acknowledge that internal conflicts might emerge. Timo from Vivid acknowledged this aspect as problematic: “We’re so small and the balance is fragile. I don’t know if the initial energy is lost but it is a natural circle. [...] Yeah but I’m not getting tired of it, but of course I need some players to play with me”.

Timo asked me during the interview: “Have you seen the documentary about the Øya Festival in Oslo? They started out as a party and later there were some internal conflicts among the organizers. I guess it's the same pattern that applies to most festivals [...] some people want to go on professionalizing the festival, others want to keep it low key”. Timo sees the potential risk of internal struggles and changes of chemistry and balance within the core people involved in an event. Idunn underlined that the first year of the festival, they had music management students that were the key leaders, but many of them left and then, they had to find some new engaged leaders. Timo confirmed that there will always be some new people involved and that it can be exciting as they could bring some new energy and ideas. Timo and Idunn try every year to keep up the enthusiasm among the volunteers. They try to listen to their needs, they organize a party for them and recently arranged a concert where they could join for free. “I want the volunteers to have a good time and come back”, stressed Timo. Idunn also emphasized the importance of avoiding that the volunteers feel “exploited” or like a small part of a big machinery.

Tanja from Southern Discomfort also acknowledged that if the motivation decreases, the whole festival atmosphere will be influenced negatively. If someone is tired of their role, she suggested decreasing the engagement or step out. However, she takes care of the volunteers, so after the festival they gather the whole crew for a volunteer party. “We try to lift them up. That's important to the people working. There wouldn't be a festival without them”, she concluded.

Jan from Punkt Festival also agrees that when somebody is tired of a role inside of the festival, they will move that task to another person within the organization.

#### **4.1.4 Marketing the Event and Finding your “Crowd”**

Vivid Festival finds it hard to communicate their profile and find the right market segment to direct their attention to. Even though they focus on a very specific genre, post-rock, maybe the market for that is too small and they do not manage to market themselves as a festival that can offer something valuable also for other people, like metal and rock lovers, the art community or film lovers. This, in opposition to the metal genre that communicates itself or for example to Punkt Festival, that managed to create a strong concept of

remixing throughout the years and managed to communicate sufficiently, said Idunn and she continued:

[...] We haven't managed to communicate the event as something that could be interesting for you that like guitar-based music or metal. We should have been better at trying to hook onto existing community. [...] It does maybe seem like that in our attempt to mix the two things, the visual and audio, we fall between too many chairs [...] but I do think people have a nice experience being there.

Timo believes that it is important and more efficient to think small:

Two weeks ago, I just went to Oslo to a concert at Rockefeller. I took with me flyers and just handed out personally to everybody who was in the line. I didn't have enough, but it went well, because some people had heard about it and some people had been there. And I think that's how to spread this kind of things. Otherwise I can't see a really good solution on that. I think this is the best thing to talk personally to them and to explain what it is. This will take time. I don't know. I don't know if we have enough time to survive.

Jan tells that Punkt has been to twenty-five cities around the world:

You know, taking the festival idea into other festivals, this is also a way of natural marketing tool. We are invited by other festivals. [...] And that opens for a new type of audience, and it opens for bringing the local artists also abroad. [...] It's interesting that what we're seeing now the “word of mouth” as opposed to the, you know, the traditional marketing, in a way. And the word of mouth is kind of the underground way of marketing. It works on a parallel level. It's always been like that. It also comes back to the truth. This kind of a search for it, not necessarily finding it, but the search for it.

## **4.2 Motivation as a Driving Force**

### **4.2.1 Getting involved**

Tanja from Southern Discomfort explained that she “just got dragged into it” in 2005, when talking about her engagement in the music industry:

I got involved with the Lost Souls Festival and then with the Quart Festival in 2009. After that I moved on to Odderøya Live, where I worked in the accreditation and administration for some years. And now it's mostly Southern I work with, and I also manage some bands.

Timo from Vivid Festival said that he started to drift away from pop music in an age of fifteen and started instead to be dragged into hard core, old school and new school punk. He went to a lot of concerts and festivals and when he came to Kristiansand he wanted to create his own. "Maybe it's just me, but I think... who is not dreaming of having that, starting your own festival? And if there's a person in your life that support that, then why not?". Idunn explained that she is not necessarily into the music *per se*, but she sees a festival as a platform:

[...] A sandbox for making stuff, a way to create and hanging out with nice people. Working with such small festivals gives me the opportunity to get to know people in different new ways, mainly thought the fact that you are dependent on each other in different ways, not only as friends but as a team. This way you can appreciate people's unique qualities.

For Timo, the *charme* with niche events is that they attract people who come for enjoy the music and want to meet new people and he added:

People drink beers, talk, the atmosphere is relaxed and maybe it can contribute to bring people together and allows new ideas to be created. [...] The first year we almost got high from seeing that we had managed to attract people we didn't know, people come to you or either sit down and enjoy themselves. You look at people's faces and they are smiling, having a good time. Some come to you and tell you: "hey, this is a nice thing, I like to be here". All these kind of things makes all the hard work worth it.

Jan from Punkt Festival said about his involvement in the music business:

Well I grew up in Kristiansand during the 80s. I started working together with Eric, which is Eric Honore, my co-artistic director in Punkt and we started working together as a duo. We were part of a bigger kind of a community of different underground type of alternative scene that was increasing. It was the so-called T23 that consisted of different type of bands and we formed a label and released own material, recorded and produced it from a DIY perspective. Then I moved to Oslo and worked as a record producer, throughout the 90s. The first thing that I was involved in was probably the Quart Festival for about a year or so and then I did also a festival together with the Centre



Culture Française in Oslo. [...] Then I moved back to Kristiansand and we started something called the Panavision Series that was a series of concerts that were kind of “beat-less”, because I'd been working so much with beat-less based music. [...] So, Panavision kind of morphed into Punkt. And I remember the starting point was, together with Eric who I also did the Panavision Series with, that we had an idea of something that could start from a zero point it could be a point anywhere in the world. And the signals from every concert we could have access to that in a kind of alpha room, so that we could have concerts in the Dome and in Agder Theatre, in you know, in different clubs and different things and all these lines would go into a kind of hub where we would have access to this like a spider's net and then to sample out of the different performances and then to perform a new type of concerts in that hub. [...] So, this is where we based the concert and the live remix, which is you know the idea of Punkt.

#### **4.2.2 Vision and Ambitions for the Festival**

For Tanja, the motivation for being so involved with Southern Discomfort is to bring good metal to the city. She explained: “You know, very often we are frowned upon, we're in the Bible Belt<sup>18</sup>, but we love what we do, bring good music to people”. The reason why the festival got started was to have a metal festival in Kristiansand, because there was nothing similar like that at the time. Tanja further explained that there were only some rock clubs and so the festival was started in 2002. They wanted to bring the music they liked to others. “There`s always been sort of a big metal community in Kristiansand a lot of musicians and bands from here”, Tanja added. For Southern Discomfort the most important thing is always to keep the music quality high, “to make a good festival with good music and the music that we like. Our mission is not to grow big or anything like that. If it's anything, it's just getting better”.

Timo confessed that “it was kind of been the dream of myself to make a festival, to do things we cannot basically do, it started kind of in this way”. Timo was also wishing to do something to make this genre, post-rock, more known, while Idunn, was more interested in the experimental part. Timo told about the moment the two of them decided to start the festival adventure together:

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<sup>18</sup> Southern Norway is also known as Bible Belt because of the high number of churches and a large religious community.

We went to Denmark on a tour and we ended up in Aarhus. There was a kind of post-rock festival “Post Fest” with a good line-up, but there were few people around and everything was too big for the genre. [...] During the concerts I usually like to dream myself away and close my eyes, that happened sometimes before, just because I like the music. Sometimes I get like a film running in front of me and that's a really nice thing with Vivid [the festival has visuals behind the stage while bands are playing<sup>19</sup>]. We took the chance to talk to one of the bands, they were positive and ended up as the headliners the first year [...] They said that Vivid was the kind of small festival that they're really into. They wanted to come and play in small events, because it keeps the genre alive and they love to be together with other bands and promoters and audience all on the same level.

Timo explained that his aim is to have a festival with a good line-up, where both bands, promoters and audience can gather and talk to each other, so that the *genre* can get a little more popular. Idunn as mentioned, is more interested in making the festival like a “sandbox” for experimentation, she explained:

That's why we also invited people that haven't done visuals before, that are artists in other fields. We wanted to mix established artists with non-established artists, as you [Timo<sup>20</sup>] do on the audio side. That's an ambition, to mix newcomers with more established artists so that the audience can get their hands up for new stuff.

Another ambition they have for the festival is to obtain an inclusive atmosphere: “That's why we made the backstage area little exciting. We want fans and artists to hang out. It's nice, the headliners come to the afterparty too!” said Idunn enthusiastic. Furthermore, she concluded that for her, the festival is also a channel for experimenting, giving the chance for others to do the same, to experiment. Timo said about his goals for the near future:

I'd love to have more visit ... if we can get to sell 300 tickets it would be great. I have no ambition of making it much bigger than that... Last year we sold tickets sold 155 tickets. Maybe we can learn how to sell like 200 plus. There's just so many things to who are playing a role and it is hard to say if we'll get there once.

Another ambition is “to keep the price down” for the tickets. They would like to do that as they are expecting international audience. People travelling to Norway know that it is

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<sup>19</sup> Author's note.

<sup>20</sup> Author's note.

an expensive country. However, they hope to find 300 people that can and are willing to pay for the festival.

Jan from Punkt Festival said that the idea behind the festival was based on the concept of life sampling, which he developed in 1996:

I found a system where I could bring my studio into a live situation and sample out you know, different musicians. This was a big revelation for me and I thought this was a new way of making music. So, I just followed that path. And I worked live for many, many years and travelled around the world doing this, and then I've returned to my old companion Eric, my friend and steady collaborator, and we thought of an idea where we could use that technique, but we could develop it and make it bigger. So, instead of just sampling single musicians on stage, it was about sampling entire concerts. We used two different rooms, one for the concert and the second room at the theatre for the remix. The people could listen to the concert and afterwards walk down through the alpha room and listen to the deconstruction and reconstruction of what they had just experienced. [...] We wanted to call it live remix because of the street name for deconstruction and reconstruction. And when we experienced that and when that was done we just knew that... my God... this is a new path that could lead us to places we have not been before.

Jan also confessed that the fear for the concept to become a gimmick was there, but their artistic focus was so important, that they decided to try anyway: “You have to follow something that is the truth. You don't have to find it, but you need to follow something that you believe is the truth. It has to be that”. When asked if he wanted to follow what was authentic for him, Jan found himself in agreement and he added that the reason for their extreme concern for the artistic part is probably due to their background as musicians. One of his ambitions was also bringing that music to people in Kristiansand:

There was no culture for it here. So, I was moving back to Kristiansand and I wanted to bring some of my culture back to the community where I grew up and yes, now there's a cultural side of this here. It's also a way of educating the audience because what we have done is it's kind of like a youth education you know within a certain type of style or something. And now I think that the sound, if there is some kind of a sound, at least the live remix concept, you think of it as something that comes from the city. But I think that you're right, there is another aspect of it, there's kind of a social responsibility within the community and to think globally and act locally. That type of thought is noble in itself. But I think it's in the essence of it. It is the music and the artistic expression which counts. I have to say this, yeah...

### 4.2.3 Using Own Time (and Sometimes Money)

All these festivals are volunteer-based and even the leaders and producers do not receive a salary. The production of these events requires innumerable working hours that will never be remunerated. Some of the leaders, like Timo from Vivid, even contributed to the event with his own money and this explains already abundantly the strong motivation that moves these individuals. Tanja from Southern acknowledged that working for free for the festival is a time-consuming activity and sometimes she found herself thinking: “Why do I bother? But then, always on the first day of festival, I remember. Yeah, it is always worth it when you get to that point”. She also revealed that there can be tensions and struggles among friends working together when they have known each other for too long and worked very tight. Tanja understands that many people don't get the point of working for free and wonder why she would volunteer all this time “for nothing”, but she argued that it is not for nothing, it is quite the opposite. The hard work is worthy. She also added that:

There must be a strong motivation and if this starts to lack then you should just remove yourself from the job, because that is when things will start to go downhill otherwise. So, if one day I will find myself sick and tired with Southern, then I will just remove myself and my position will be taken from with someone else.

Tanja also pointed out that “If there is no drive then working in the festival becomes really demotivating. It really affects everything. So yeah, I think that's sort of important, to remember to step out in time”.

Punkt Festival is also based on volunteer work. Jan explained that the event is based on passion, there is no administration and that it is a DIY project, meaning that he is involved in all aspects the festival. He underlined that even though the amount of work easily becomes too much, it is worth it as the experience gives you a feeling of a community, which is what makes the festival.

#### 4.2.4 The “Family” Feeling

As just mentioned, Punkt Festival, in the words of Jan, is a DIY project, meaning that it can lead to a work overload, but it also provides a feeling of a community for everyone involved. Jan explained that they want to implement the organizational concept of Norwegian flat based structure. Even when it comes to presenting the shows to the audience, the audience is very close to the artist. “There is no special lounge or something like that. We want everybody to feel on the same level”. And that is the reason why Jan thinks that people are talking about the “Punkt Family”. “Every voice count: It is the community feeling that is actually the festival”.

Tanja explained that Southern Discomfort has got a very good reputation with the artists throughout the years:

We get bands we cannot actually afford, because there's so much more, to play with us. They've heard so much about us, and that is a lot about the community feeling. We have a great crew. Many of them have been there for many, many years. There is like a family feel to it and that sort of spreads to the audience and to the artists, like a happy family.

Tanja pointed out that in big festivals, volunteers get their little task and then “disappear”. While in Southern Discomfort organizers are interested in getting them more involved. “We take care of the volunteers. We try to lift them up. And that's important to the people working”. Moreover, she observed that the festival has a flat organizational structure, they defined themselves as non-hierarchical company. Tanja remarked also that to a degree it regards also the audience, Tanja said on this regard: “We listen to the audience. Like last year, there were several people asking throughout the festival for another band. It looks like they will be signing soon. Yeah so that's important to listen to the audience”.

Timo and Idunn highly care about creating an inclusive and intimate atmosphere, they wish for the audience and artists to be at the same level. Besides, from the organization point of view they also feel they maintain a flat structure. There is a community feeling also among many post-rock bands that are glad to come play in such festivals for the treatment they get there and for the good environment. When it comes to the audience Timo is positive about the fact that Vivid built up an inclusive meeting place where people like to come back:

The festival managed to create something good: people can come back in a way, because it's so small and intimate. I think they see that it's made of passion for the genre. I think I got responses from people is that they really had a good time and they want to come back. The same guy was twice the first one to buy the festival ticket!! Every sale is a victory for us, so we monitor this ticket programme a lot.

#### 4.2.5 A “Successful” Festival

When asked about what makes the festival “successful”, this is what the informants answered.

Tanja, Southern Discomfort:

We have a great crew. [...] and that's what contribute to make a good festival. It's important that it runs smoothly. But now we've done it for so many times, we have so many great technicians that work for us, so yeah things sort of just roll on their own pretty much, because everybody knows what their job is. If there is a problem, it's like, no worries, we fix it!

Jan, Punkt Festival:

I think it comes down to the music in the essence, but also the social aspect. The artistic side of it was maybe 70 or 80 or 90 percent the first year, and then it slowly went to like a 50-50 maybe, or 70-30 or something. But of course, the artistic expression under the concerts and the live remixes are important. But I guess for me more and more it comes down to processes, not necessarily results. I'm not necessarily as result oriented now as I was previously. I try to learn from the process and maybe that would help me to gain a better result. But I care less and less for the result in the end. We've seen that when we do big projects, like Brian Eno, you know, we've done it with some other artists as well. Use a lot of money because we want to create something as powerful as possible, to really make something interesting. We see that we spend a lot of money on that and we have to work a few years afterwards in order to, you know, to get financial viable again. And the question is, is that worth it or not? If you look at it from an artistic perspective it is worth it, when it comes from the economical side, my accountant would probably say no, you're stupid or what. You know that type of thing. But I think you have to see in long terms and in order to gain something, if you have an idea, you just go for it.

Vivid Festival:

Idunn: A memorable experience shared with friends. That's a big factor for me. The festival should offer something new maybe, to make it more memorable. And if you sense that there is a joint effort, that it's not a commercial machine, that creates a good atmosphere for you.

What impresses me is also when a festival manages to have homogeneous aesthetic and not only the visual part, maybe all the way from posters to the way you write your Facebook posts. And we haven't managed necessarily to do that homogeneous. [...] You need time for that to happen and you need these volunteers to dedicate a lot of time in that, or simply paid people. [...] A big festival has the capacity to focus on a homogenic and branded design to give a homogeneous design to the event...we do this part time...

Timo: I think the experience has a lot to say. What the offer is. Many are just basic, just offer music other offer more stuff, collaborations. Meeting new people is also important, having a good time, listening to people, talk about your interests. [...] That's what makes it interesting for me. I wouldn't go to Palmesus<sup>21</sup>. I would have nothing to talk about with the people there.

As an organizer I think it's important to reach the audience on a more personal level. The bigger festivals just run the festival, in the small ones you can feel part of it. I think that if an organizer manages to make people come and feel that they are not just numbers in the system, that they get heard and they feel kind of home, then you accomplish something. Small details of things are also important for me. Also, I want that both bands and audience to feel on the same level. [...] We're just people, there are no superstars. I think that's kind of important that you don't feel like you're less worth than the artists.

### 4.3 Commerce as “Evil” Necessity

Tanja from Southern Discomfort said that the festival has had green numbers for the past five years and this is how she explained what role does profit have in their festival:

We need to stay alive and of course artists get more expensive, so the profit helps us. But nobody is taking out salary so we're not like that financially driven. We only want the best for the festival, so that it can survive. Money is not the ultimate goal, but it's the necessary evil you need to keep doing

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<sup>21</sup> Palmesus is a big beach summer festival in Kristiansand with focus on EDM music.

what you do. Yeah and that's why we're clever about it. We always managed to cut costs with barter deals. For example, we struggle getting sponsors for like cars, so we borrow them from people and that cut the costs. Sometimes I have people come in to volunteer for job that they would normally pay someone for.

Tanja meant that the artistic vision and the commercial side of the festival are integrated, but that “It has also a lot to do with how you work to bring them together. I think that's possible, like us being a small niche festival. I think in the big festivals the commercial part would be overpowering”.

To face the challenge of following their vision and being economically sustainable at the same time, Tanja explained that the festival receives full financial support from Kristiansand Municipality, Vest-Agder County and the State Art Council. Then she added: “When it comes to the bands, I would love to book bands just for me but of course, It would not be right for other people. We try to book really diverse bands. So, we can sort of reach out to everybody. The most important thing is always the quality of the music program”. When asked if they would book some more famous artists to push tickets, Tanja answered firmly: “We only book bands we are completely comfortable with and few of them are totally hits or miss”.

Jan from Punkt Festival explained that they are organized as a foundation, and he thinks that is a good juridical asset because if the festival goes well, the money earned goes into the festival. However, if it goes bad, they are responsible. Moreover, if you are in debt you are kind of forced to just move on and to continue working because if you stop you would have to pay:

We would have stopped years ago if we didn't have that, you know, that financial draw. I think we have something like 5-700.000 NOK that we keep in-debt from earlier years. It used to be a couple of millions. So, it's really going down...well it does in a way. It also encourages us to keep on working because if you stop, then you have to pay that back! In a way that's a structural thing. [...] What it does is, that it affects the way we program the festival. So, if the red numbers are really high, we say ok, we don't have that much money. It's like, if you don't have any money to spend then you don't spend so much money! But if you have money to spend, we say... let's do something great now! So, like this year we won't probably use that much money on artists, but for next year which is 15th anniversary, we are going to focus on that, do



something nice and hopefully we'll be back at Agder Theatre or something like that. So, then we are kind of home.

When asked about if the festival ever had to compromise or if it managed to keep loyal and authentic to the vision, Jan answered that:

It was a dilemma for us for us because the first year in 2005, there were about 20 people at the first concert. Any normal person would have reconsidered and said: next year we need to sell some more tickets here and maybe also change the direction. Is it right to do the live sampling? We knew that we had found the artistic quality we wanted in that concept and that we just had to do it again and again and again. One of the central things that we did already from the first year, since I was myself traveling around the world, was to collect journalists` names and agents and so on. When the time came to do the festival, I called these people up and said OK now we're doing a festival. Would you like to come? We applied for funding from the municipal city council and we got some money to invite these people to write about the festival. Meaning that after the first year, even though it was only a few people that attended, there were so many people writing about this, BBC called it "the Festival of the year". So, the next year there were a lot of people there. [...] After the first year, we could easily have done some kind of compromise you know, but since we had the idea of live sampling, Erik and myself, and we were also in very much control together with the board, we could just continue doing it. You know the director of Twin Peaks, David Lynch. He said that the only film that he was dissatisfied with was the one where he listened to the producers instead of keeping loyal to the mission. He basically says: keep your vision and everything will be solved if you have a vision. And that is both a business formula and an artistic formula that show that a business and aesthetics could go in parallel lines.

Idunn, from Vivid, when asked about the role of art and commerce in the management of their festival said:

Starting up a festival, commercial interests and motives among bands, tech/service providers and supporters (print/public funding) are a definite opposite of the ability to make art. However, to be able to grow, and to present bands and visual artists that are regarded as higher quality, we have to go along with commercial interest as these artists work professionally, and we cannot expect them to work for free. As a non-profit festival we urge them to ask for less fee, but this is difficult as the bookers literally comes in our way. So, I guess you could say that at some point we have grown to a state where art and commerce are complimentary/integrated. As long as we get in balance due to higher ticket sales and still get funding, this is ok for us, since we still offer a stage/sandbox for the unestablished artists. Mixing up a line up with

some payed and others not payed artist, do cause some unwanted difference between artists, and also hampers the early years volunteer attitude among bands and visual artists that we could ask for the first years, though. At the same time, it benefits unestablished artists too to be presented alongside established once.

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of the findings resulted from the interviews presented in the previous chapter (cf. 4) was to find answers to the research questions that aimed at exploring (1) The nature and challenges presented by *niche* events, in light of latest trends and developments in the live music industry, (2) The reasons for starting such festivals and the role that profit play in their start-up and management (3), The organizers` perspective about the relation between art and profit, with reference to the management of music festivals. Drawing on the interviews with Tanja, Jan, Timo and Idunn, I will discuss and compare the findings, in relation to the relevant theory and research questions. The discussion will be divided according to three areas of focus: (5.1) The nature, features and challenges of *niche* festivals, (5.2) The role of profit and motivation in *niche* festivals, (5.3) The relation between art and commerce in *niche* festivals.

### 5.1 The Nature, Features and Challenges of *Niche* Festivals

The unique nature of cultural industries, presented in the theory was more tailored to the cultural goods produced by them, but it found a correspondence and transposition in the answers of the interview partners about *niche* festivals, confirming that they also are risky, unpredictable and costly businesses. The risks come from the fact that the audience use cultural products and experiences in a volatile and unpredictable way (see e.g., Garnham, 1990; Wikström, 2009). Tanja from Southern Discomfort confirmed this aspect and explained that the audience from Kristiansand is not that used to buy tickets ahead and one of the festival`s edition, they found themselves with only twenty tickets sold ahead of the event. Punkt Festival as well took off with the first concert in 2005 and very few people were attending. Besides, festivals are also unaccountable as there is high uncertainty in foreseeing the product`s success, before consumption (see De Vany, 2004; Pratt, 2008), or in the case of festivals, before experiencing it. In other words, cultural commodities, and festivals as well, are experiential goods (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Another predominant characteristic of the cultural industries is the alleged tormented relationship between creativity and commerce, advocated primarily by Adorno and the other theorists from the Frankfurt School, which developed a very pessimistic view and predictions about the eroded creative autonomy in the capitalistic era. Other academics and economists (e.g., Frith 1981;1991) were more positive to the idea that it is possible to create authentic art, even though co-opted by capitalistic production systems, or to the idea that not all culture is produced inside the commercial system (Negus, 1996). The findings did acknowledge a tension between the pursuit of creativity and artistic vision and the rules of economic sustainability, but also an admission of the need of integrating the two. This distinctive tension in cultural industries will be thoroughly discussed later (cf. 5.3).

Moreover, Garnham described the cultural goods as semi-public, meaning that, the act of consumption by one does not reduce the possibility of being consumed by others (see Garnham, 1990), and therefore it is important to create artificial scarcity to minimize losses. The festivals interviewed have entrance fees, and if one is interested in seeing an artist perform live there is nothing else one can do, other than pay the ticket. Therefore, this issue is not so problematic for the festivals, as the access is already limited by the festival tickets.

Garnham (1990) proposed some solutions applicable to attempt solving the just-mentioned problematic aspects in the cultural industries that might lead to a loss in profit. However, these are not so transposable in *niche* festivals, as profit maximization is not the first concern, as shown by the interviews, but also for the fact that they are small businesses and generally do not have the financial capacity to actualize those strategies, although they might encounter some of the same problems and challenges as bigger festivals. For instance, the solution of building a repertoire that can offset misses against hits and ensuring audience maximization through concentration and integration are not possible responses applicable by small companies; they cannot afford to do like big festival companies could do by investing in different festivals at the same time. So, this might lead to a high failure rate for small companies, unable to spread risk across a large repertoire. Ryan (1992) named the formatting of cultural products, for instance by creating genres and serials, as a tool to minimize the risk of losses. The use of the festival

format could help in that, due to the diverse artistic offer spread on more than one act. Jan, from Punkt Festival, acknowledged the opportunities that the festival formula can bring for a *niche* genre:

The festival form is something that allows more focus and it gives an opportunity to do something that is more like a *niche* thing. It will gain more audience because you collect a lot of different events in a period of three days or three weeks or whatever you say that this is. [...] And the other thing is the economic side of it. By doing a festival you could apply for funding from the Norwegian Art Council, from the EU. And it's also a way of educating the audience. [...]

Since some of the above-mentioned solutions are little appealing for *niche* festivals, what the three festivals mainly do, some in bigger other in a smaller degree, to contain costs and save money is to have volunteers working, instead of paid professional, with exception of technicians and artists, moreover they exchange favors in the local or national music community, set up barter deal, for example, for artist catering, like Southern Discomfort does. To try to cover the high production costs, all the festivals are focusing on public funding from the municipality and or county and or state. Vivid Festival, being the youngest, experiences more problems in coming out of the “limbo”, how Timo and Idunn defined the state they are in, with a foot still into a newly established DIY event and the other into a professionalized non-profit festival, struggling to get enough funds to fairly remunerate artists, so to allow the growth and professionalization of the event.

However, as Hesmondhalgh stated, although the fact that these features and responses are not equally shared by all kinds of cultural industries is true, he stressed that “it is the collective nature of these characteristics that matters” and that “cultural industry companies respond in particular (though variable) ways to perceived difficulties of making profits” (all quotes by Hesmondghalgh, 2013, p.33).

Moreover, all the festivals taken in analysis are volunteer-based and cannot afford paid staff in all positions. Notwithstanding that, Southern Discomfort and Punkt Festival found themselves satisfied with volunteers executing most of the tasks, while Vivid Festival admitted that professional paid workers could do the job more efficiently and dedicate

more time to the tasks, but that could risk reducing the spirit and idealism behind the event. In festival management it is vital to have festival skills in the different event phases and sections. As brought up by Sekse (2013), creativity, volunteer engagement and enthusiasm “create an unsystematic landscape where knowledge and experience are mostly linked to specific individuals and personalities” (Sekse, 2013, p.17). Therefore, it is important to have creative personalities on board, but it should be considered to hire some professionals, to avoid a work-overload on the volunteers and to allow the creative minds to work undisturbed.

Furthermore, the growth in audience expectation represents a new trend that see consumers being more sophisticated and demanding, making things even more difficult for festivals, especially the smaller ones (Nordgård, 2013 p.53; Yeoman, 2004). As Nordgård claimed (2013, p. 58), the objectives and expectations of a festival do not necessarily coincide with those of the audience and the rest of the music industry. This aspect comes forward from the interviews. When it comes to audience expectations, one of the festivals, namely Southern Discomfort, tried to listen to its audience and pleased it when possible, but never compromising their artistic objectives. Tanja from the festival said: “Last year there were several people asking throughout the festival for another band. It looks like they will be playing this year. We are working since then to book them and it looks like they will be signing soon”. All three festivals are concerned with providing a line-up they are artistically satisfied with and they would not compromise by booking artists that would push ticket sales. People want to see big names, while festivals still want to present new names and build up the audience (Nordgård, 2013, p.67). The interest for showcasing and uplifting upcoming artists is indeed present in all festivals and emerge in and between the lines, and in the festivals` artistic programmes, year after year. Idunn from Vivid explained their vision of putting together more establish artists, both musician and visual artists, with less experienced ones “so that the audience can get their hands up for new stuff”. However, it is true that the audience get spoiled and year after year, expect more famous artists (Nordgård, 2013, p.64). In *niche* festivals, people do not expect necessarily big stars, but it is true that they might expect something better in the next editions. Vivid Festival for example, did feel the pressure to book bigger, to top up last years` headliner, but they fear not being able to afford that.

Furthermore, a challenge only mentioned by Vivid was to find a slightly wider crowd for their festival. A *niche* event is of course aimed at a small audience, but maybe the *niche* for Post-rock music in Kristiansand is too small, so Idunn and Timo would like to communicate that Vivid could offer something interesting for other people as well, not only post-rock lovers. Idunn remarked that subcultures need to be bigger, to be able to create activity and that if there is no audience for it, then it is hard to create a subculture. She also thinks that the taste in music is shifting away from rock towards electronic, and this makes it difficult for festivals that do not have a mix between rock and other genres. It emerged that perhaps it is a disadvantage to be so focused on one small *genre*, as *niche* tends to attract mostly people passionate about that specific niche. Idunn and Timo admitted that maybe they have not managed to communicate efficiently what the festival is about.

A common feature in both Vivid and Punkt that emerged from the interviews, when discussing special features is the use of “Underground marketing” techniques. The festivals deal with limited budgets and they decided to use more suitable and innovative ways to promote the ideas behind the festivals. Timo for example, personally hands out flyers outside festivals and concerts with related music genre to Vivid`s one, and Jan from Punkt, did networking with journalists and people from the industry on an international level. For both, this solution seemed to have worked well.

Regarding new trends in the industry, live popular music culture has extremely changed after the advent of digitalization. The two main elements of this transformation are the new economic relevance of live music and the rise in ticket pricing (Holt, 2010 p. 246). Live music has gained great importance in contemporary culture and it has become a consistently increasing share of the music business (Holt 2010; Montoro Garcia, 2010; Krueger; Larkin, 2006; Connolly & Krueger 2005; Frith 2007). There has been a significant decline of the market share of pre-recorded music (Krueger, 2005, p.21) and the economy of popular music has shifted from recordings to live sector in a very short time span (Holt, 2010). As a result, concerts are becoming much more expensive. (Krueger, 2005; 2006). As Nordgård argued the surge in artist fees has represented a change and a new challenge, making artist booking in festivals more complex and

expensive (2013, p.61). Vivid Festival is confirming and experiencing the same trend. Timo found himself dealing with unrealistic offers and explained:

First, you know, they (the agents<sup>22</sup>) get some information from me about the festival and I am saying that Kristiansand is a small-medium city, it's not Oslo or Copenhagen. They should know about that too. [...] Sometimes I just get offer from bands that are like crazy. I'm just wondering myself how can that go, they know the festival has a 300 people capacity. They want to get paid for a headline which is not the biggest headline and they want me to pay me 10000 euros plus food and hotel, transport and drinks and all the stuff, and it is just not realistic.

Tanja from Southern Discomfort noticed also the increase in artist fees: "We need to stay alive and of course, artists get more expensive", she mentions while talking about the role of profit in the festival.

Nordgård also confirmed the increase in number of festivals and therefore in competition to get the same artists, when it comes to bigger festivals. Prices for artists go consequently up, even for smaller acts. Although the latter ones are not in power to ask for high fees, some of them do it anyway, contributing to make small festivals even more vulnerable (Nordgård, 2013, p.61). Vivid confirmed this trend as well, as Timo stated, some smaller artists, are requesting higher fees:

[...] Even small bands, they ask for a lot of money... one asked for 25.000 NOK! You'll never get this money back, and again, it just doesn't work because you need to sell a ticket for 300-400 NOK and nobody is paying that, because almost nobody knows them! Yeah, I think something is just wrong, maybe the agents might think in Oslo prices... that makes it expensive to have festivals and concerts here.

On the other end, in the *niche* markets there are still bands that are playing for the joy of it and are satisfied with minimum wage, or for expenses refund, Timo pointed out. However, Timo would rather not increase the ticket prices of too much.

In conclusion, the discussion about the nature of these events shows the many-faceted human dynamics behind the business and confirms the complexity and plurality of the music industry, as advocated by Negus (1996;1999) and Nordgård (2013). As Nordgård

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<sup>22</sup> Author's note.



claimed it is important to stress “the complex and irrational nature of then music industries”, and the need to abdicate depthless explanations and focus instead on the complex human relations and dynamics that make up the music industries” (Nordgård, 2016, pp. 34-35).

## **5.2 The Role of Profit and Motivation in *Niche* Festivals**

Artistic work is producing objects and experiences, and therefore not that different from other types of labor, but it is also true that it possesses a unique feature: it involves creativity, symbolic creativity as Hesmondhalgh (2013) called it.

According to neoclassical economic theory, the purpose of every firm should be profit maximization. However, in cultural industries many entrepreneurs are motivated by something else, although when it comes to symbol creators, very few can disregard completely the rules of economy (see Brulin & Nilsson, 1997, quoted in Wikström, 2009, p.25). Perhaps, despite profit maximization is not the goal, it should allow the creators to continue their job, argued Wikström (2009, pp. 26-27). This aspect emerged clearly in the findings, the festivals are not motivated by profit in their start-up and management but cannot ignore the economic side of running a business. The profit is seen by all interviewed festivals as an “evil” necessity, to use the words of Tanja from Southern Discomfort. The three festivals are not aiming at profit maximization, while they are mainly interested in offering the audience and the community the kind of artistic programme they have always dreamt about. Jan from Punkt Festival explained the role that money has in the management of his event and how it affects the festival:

The red numbers.....what they do is that they affect the way we program the festival. So, if the red numbers are high, we say ok, we don't have that much money. It's like, if you don't have any money to spend then you don't spend so much money! But if you have money to spend, we say... let's do something great now! So, like this year we won't probably use that much money on artists, but for next year which is 15th anniversary, we are going to focus on that, do something nice [...]

Idunn from Vivid Festival confirmed the role of money as a tool to keep the festival alive as she stated that “[...] as long as we get in balance due to higher ticket sales and still get funding, this is ok for us”.

Tanja from Southern Discomfort reiterated that the festival is not financially driven, and even if they had green numbers, nobody is receiving a salary. “Money is not the ultimate goal, but it’s the necessary evil you need, to keep doing what you do”. The priority is the quality of the music program, and although they can book diverse bands in the metal genre, and listen to the audience requests, they only book bands they are completely comfortable with.

The theory that sees the festival business made of enthusiasts and people passionate for music (see Tjora, 2013, p.16) is confirmed. The motivation factor is a very strong driving force in the people interviewed and who have decided to get involved, body and soul, in the music industry, and more particularly in the start-up and management of *niche* festivals. Their involvement and attraction to the music business have also deep roots into strong passion and love for the music both as fans, like in the case of Timo from Vivid and Tanja from Southern Discomfort, or as an artist, in the case of Jan, director of Punkt Festival and traveling musician. Idunn got involved with Vivid because of her interest in artistic experimentation, she saw the festival as a platform, “a sandbox for making stuff, a way to create and hanging out with nice people” (Idunn Sem, personal interview). None of them has started working with music and festivals with the idea of making a profit out of it. Other factors made them engaged in this business. It is a genuine interest to bring the music they like and believe in, to the community, that made them start or work in their festivals. Tanja from Southern Discomfort said *à propos* that: “We want to bring good metal to the city. [...] We love what we do, bring good music to people”. Timo and Idunn from Vivid were also spontaneously curious about starting something new, something they had never done before. Timo pointed out that: “it was kind of been the dream of myself to make a festival, to do things we cannot basically do, it started kind of in this way”. Timo’s passion for the *niche* genre of post-rock naturally directed the venture into focusing on this kind of music. Timo explained that he wished for the genre to get slightly more popular, although he is aware of the non-commercial *niche* nature of it. Jan from Punkt started the festival with the idea of showcasing the electronic music

concept he had developed, the “Live Remix”, and his words about it illustrate well the enthusiasm behind it: “[...] When we experienced that [the Live-Remix<sup>23</sup>], we just knew that... my God... this is a new path that could lead us to places we have not been before”. He also wanted to bring this new concept to the audience in Kristiansand, where there had never been something similar before.

The profit motive does not result as one of the objectives of these festivals. Money is neither mentioned or emerging between the lines, as one of the drive for putting up and managing these events, for none of the interviewees. All the interview subjects are willing to go the extra mile, when it comes to make the festival they have envisioned up and running. They admitted working uncountable hours, not receiving any salary. Timo from Vivid Festival has even been using personal savings to supply for the non-sufficient amount of public funding. Both him and Tanja from Southern Discomfort, has exchanged favours in the music community, through helping other festivals or promoters, or working on a volunteer-base for the Municipality, in exchange of a monetary reward to invest in the festival, like Timo and his crew did to support Vivid.

The motivation is fundamental, the interviewed festival admitted that if they, as leaders, or if any other volunteers involved should begin to lose the spark then, it is advisable to leave the festival, otherwise the lack of enthusiasm will shine through and affect negatively the entire event. Holding the enthusiasm high, is not easy even though the festival leaders try their best to lift and reward their helpers, trying to make them feel part of a family and not only of a machinery. That “family feeling” is usually spread not only to the crew, but also to the audience and the artists, as all the festivals are concerned with creating an inclusive environment, where there are no superstars. Finally, when asked about ambitions and vision, none of them showed commercial aspirations, but all expressed the will to continue doing what they are doing.

Although there is a debate on what the factors that makes a festival survive are (cf. Getz 2001; Robertson, Chambers & Frew, 2007), Mykletun (2011, p.127) defined success as “the ability of a festival to attract an increasing number of participants, balance its

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<sup>23</sup> Author’s note.

economy, be appreciated by local people and develop as a hallmark event for the region”. This definition partially resonates in the answers given by the festivals when asked about what makes the festival successful. None of the interview partners mentioned the economic side of the business but in between the lines, it emerged that what they care about is balancing the economy, not aiming at profit maximization, offering something special and new to the community and focusing on their artistic vision.

### **5.3 The Relation Between Art and Commerce in *Niche* Festivals**

Creative individuals need to comply to both artistic and financial goals in cultural production, claimed Durand and Jourdan (2012). However, Hesmondhalgh (2002) stated that symbol creators are granted considerable autonomy because they are expected to create original and innovative content. Banks (2010) and Ryan (1992) also agreed with Hesmondhalgh and have discussed how autonomous cultural work cannot be destroyed, as it is what produces value in creative industries. On the other hand, Adorno (1991, p.99), when discussing about the autonomy of authors argued that this would be “tendentiously eliminated by the culture industry”, and there would eventually be a standardization and uniformization of culture and art. Some contemporary social science scholars such as McGuigan (2004) and McRobbie (2002) are also supporting his thesis, even though are not that pessimistic, suggesting that autonomy in cultural work has been dramatically decreased or compromised.

For what concerns the creative autonomy of the artists, it emerged a high degree of freedom for *niche* text authors involved in the festivals, which hold artistic quality as the first motivating driving force for their creative work. There are still texts creators that pursue the kind of art they want, as showed by Jan Bang from Punkt, who himself persevered in developing and showcasing his concept of “Live Remix”, although the visitors attending the first concert in Kristiansand were few. As Jan said, the festivals` accountant might have called him stupid after the first edition`s extremely low attendance, however he believed in the authenticity of his work and continued without compromises. To use his own words, Jan believed that they, him and Eric Honorè, “had struck a core here, like a golden core that was not evident in audience numbers”, and instead of

compromising they just continued doing what they had started. Besides, if we also think about those Post-rock musicians still willing to tour to display their music, although aware of the low commercial power in it, it becomes clear that not all autonomy and creativity is lost or co-opted by the commercial “evil machine” of the culture industry, as foreseen by the Frankfurt School, and also that not all artists are a part of the business, of if they are, they are on a smaller scale that allows them to be freer (even though less popular).

However, if we follow Frith`s claim, all popular music is part of the industrialized record production (see Negus, 1996). Frith is therefore significantly positive to the complementarity of creativity and commerce, but his ideas could oversee the struggle of some artists that are at the margin of the music business, as *niche* artists. As Negus also pointed out, and as shown by the findings, there are possibilities of creation outside the commodified music production and therefore, Frith`s assumption disempowers the attempts of those artists who want to distance themselves from the commercial music business (see Negus, 1996).

Nonetheless, many academics and theorists have agreed on the fact that the management of cultural industries poses the challenge of negotiation between commercial rules and creative goals (see Banks, 2007; Hesmondhalgh & Baker 2011; Lampel, Shamsie & Lant, 2006; Ryan, 1992). The relation between creativity and profit-making is often a matter of “negotiation, conflict and struggle”, as Hesmondhalg (2013, p.229) stated and there is a tension “between the drive to make profits, and those other values which also motivate production: the quest to make interesting, intriguing, pleasurable, beautiful, informative, enlightening products” (see Hesmondhalgh, 2002, p.229). Nonetheless, Hesmondhalgh believed that the over-polarization between creativity and commerce is exaggerated. On the other hand, Adorno and Horkheimer were extremely pessimistic and had a dystopian view about the autonomy and authenticity of culture production in the capitalist era. Herbert Marcuse (1964), also belonging to the Frankfurt School, stated that the capitalistic society promoted false needs and attempted to create homogenized behaviors and thinking (Hartley, 2013). The Frankfurt School was convinced that commercial markets necessarily produced corrupted culture. When it regards popular music, Adorno strongly believed that this was produced by a “culture industry”, and therefore subjugated to the commerce rules, produced and distributed industrially and with the purpose of

profit maximization (see Negus, 1996). Other academics disagree with the extreme pessimism of the Frankfurt School and do not see the art *motif* and the profit one as diametrically opposite, as Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse thought they should be. For example, Frith, when discussing about popular music, rejected the art and profit conflict as a “clichéd opposition” (see Frith, 1991), he defined them instead as interwoven and integrated.

The fact that the *niche* festivals object of this research project, exist and continue in their activity, in the case of Punkt Festival and Southern Discomfort for many years now, shows that there is space for diverse types of music, and that the cultural and creative autonomy is not necessarily threatened and doomed to be dissolved in favor of mainstream commercial events and corrupted artistic artefacts. These festivals do struggle to make economic ends meet, but still hold on to their vision and aspirations. The tension between artistic and idealistic aims and economic ones is therefore confirmed, and from the findings resulted a constant negotiation between creative ambitions and economic rules. Nonetheless, this tension concerns more the quest to be loyal to the artistic vision and the quest to be economically viable, not that to make profit, as Hesmondhalgh claimed (2013, p.229). Making profit is not among the objectives of any of the interview partners. Although the festivals interviewed confirmed the tension between the pursuit of their artistic vision and the economic side of driving the event, they do not think that the two are complete opposites. Tanja from Southern Discomfort meant that the artistic vision and the commercial side of the festival are integrated, but that “it also has a lot to do with how you work to bring them together”. She believes that it is possible for them to coexist, especially for them being a small *niche* festival, but she is aware that in bigger festivals the commercial focus would be overwhelming. Jan from Punkt Festival, when asked if he believed art and commerce were opposite poles, answered briefly but sharp: “Well, I think that the whole sort of pop culture tells you something different, doesn't it?”, he also acknowledged the integrated nature of them, willing or not. Idunn commented on this topic by stating that the festival, Vivid, has grown to a point where art and commerce have to be complimentary, as they have to go along with commercial interests, not expecting artists to work for free and join blindly the “non-profit festival army” and to use her own words: "Commercial interests and motives among bands, tech/service providers and supporters (print/public funding) are a definite opposite of the ability to

make art”. In spite of that, the festivals keep loyal to their vision and none of them would compromise their artistic ambitions for the event, in exchange of higher attendance. Their highest goal is to continue the festival, showcasing artistic forms they can stand for and be proud of. Very little is done to maximize profit. For instance, Punkt Festival does not even have its own merchandise, which is nowadays seen as a source of income and a memento for the audience (see Frith, 2007). That is not among the festival’s priorities. The other two festivals have decided instead to sell festival merchandise, as Idunn mentioned, it helps to build loyalty, but otherwise none of the festival is focusing on accessory activities and services aimed at maximizing profit.

In this research, small *niche* festivals have been seen closely, through the words of the organizers and leaders, and they have showed that they are not in any way subjugated to commercial rules, they are not promoting corrupted and mainstream commercial art, and profit maximization is far from being one of the main objectives. Nonetheless, they do have to follow some economic rules to keep their activities viable, and this can come in the way sometimes, as in the case of Vivid Festival, who struggles to get more established and raise the amount of public funding to support the growth and professionalization of the festival. But these realities, like the three festivals interviewed, show that cultural production in 2018 is far from homogenic and exclusively subjugated to the rule of profit as the Frankfurt School believed would have happened. Negus explained how, many, among academics, journalists, audience or musicians, have been depicting the music business as a corporate machine trying to control creativity, compromising artistic quality and threatening diversity, however he argued that the music business should be considered both as commercial and as a place for creativity: “The problem lies in attempting to bring the two of them together”, he added (see Negus, 1996, p.36). Nordgård (2013) also concluded that popular music is closely entangled with the music industry and supported Negus` idea that the music industries` economical logics interact with the artistic and creative expression (see Negus, 1999). The findings emerging from data collected confirmed this. The three *niche* festivals in Kristiansand cannot disregard completely the economic side of the business, as being non-profit and with limited financial resources, but they are doing all in their power to guarantee the audience the level of quality and the core values they had envisioned for their events. As mentioned earlier (cf. 5.2) these efforts go from using personal money for some and (a lot of) time

for all the interview partners, to exchange favours in the local music community, programme the festival keeping in mind of red numbers, set up barter deal, organize a loyal group of engaged volunteers. None of the festivals have talked about a change in the vision or of the core values.



## 7. Conclusion

This paper attempted to establish a close understanding of: (1) The nature and challenges presented by *niche* music festivals, in light of latest trends and developments in the live music industry, (2) The reasons for starting a festival and the role that profit play in the start-up and management of such events, (3) The organizers` perspective about the relation between art and profit, with reference to the management of small music festivals.

The above-listed research objectives were fulfilled by conducting a qualitative study, using the existing literature around the topics, and semi-structured interviews with three *niche* music festivals in the city of Kristiansand. Divided into two main areas, I hereunder present the conclusions drawn, based on the findings` collection and analysis, and considering the theory used:

### (1) Working with *niche* music festivals: distinctiveness and challenges

The *niche* festivals interviewed have some common features and challenges to face that associate them to the other cultural industries, as they are risky, unpredictable and costly. However, the challenges they encounter are more evident and of note in such small-sized businesses but cannot be solved with the same approaches applicable by big cultural companies, which can for example, to minimize risks, invest in audience maximization, expand their repertoire and format the cultural products or experiences. Small companies, like *niche* festivals, do not have the financial capacity for that. All they can do is minimize costs where possible, be aware of what they can afford, and remember to “not bite more than they can chew”. Moreover, other challenges in light of new trends and developments of the live music industry, emerged from the research. Artists are touring more than ever, their fees and consequently, concert ticket prices have increased enormously since 1996. Non-profit *niche* festivals are undoubtedly impacted and damaged by these trends, as their financial power is much weaker than that of commercial festivals and cannot afford the sometimes “unrealistic” prices agents want to sell artists for. Audience expectations have also grown, and fans have become more demanding. The festivals confirmed also this

trend and perceived the pressure to satisfy the audience needs, but firmly keep loyal to the artistic vision. Besides, with the festival boom, competition has surely increased, contributing to the artist fees surge, and to the decrease of resources available due to a rise in events competing for the same funds and artists.

## (2) Motivation as a driving force and commerce as “evil” necessity

The three *niche* festivals proved to be driven by strongly motivated individuals and are all volunteer-based and non-profit. These structural aspects benefit to the spirit of community and “family feeling” of the event, but also entail in some cases a struggle in keeping the enthusiasm high, and in requiring volunteers to perform a task as professionals. Southern Discomfort and Punkt Festival are satisfied with the jobs being performed by volunteers, while Vivid Festival thinks that it could be beneficial to hire paid staff, as it is important to have certain professional festival skills, but that would perhaps weaken the idealistic motive behind the event, as confirmed also by the theory. In conclusion, the start-up of these festivals is linked to strong idealism, and profit is not the goal, it rather represents a tool to keep on following the vision. The example of “Øya Festival” in Oslo, also confirmed that festivals, even those who grew big, have once been started out by enthusiasts and music lovers. The strong idealism behind these events can help understand the complex human relations and dynamics that make up the music industries, as Nordgård and Negus believed, supporting the thesis that the music industry is much more than a mechanical and factory-like business. It is made of people. It is possible to conclude that the artistic and idealistic motif should be integrated with the commercial one, but that, does not imply that the creative autonomy and artistic quality is necessarily undermined and corrupt by the rules of economy, as the critical theorists from the Frankfurt School firmly claimed. The reality of these festivals shows more resonance to the theories of Negus and Frith, claiming that art and commerce are complementary and not antagonists, at the same time it shows also the complexity of this industry and of the art of balancing art and profit. The effort these organizers, and volunteers, put in these events proves the relevance that culture and creativity still have for people. As Hesmondhalgh said (2013, p.5), cultural texts influence how we understand, experience and know the world. They can give a contribution to who we are and are not only a way of spending time. Not every cultural organization has a capitalist

interest. The dystopian prediction of Adorno and Horkheimer have been proved wrong. Diversity is not priceless to achieve, and might not result in commercial success, but it is still possible to create.

Hopefully this research can contribute explaining the complexity of both the music industries and the cultural industries and the relation between art and commerce in the cultural field, and more in depth, in the reality of small *niche* festivals. Despite huge music conglomerations and big festival corporations, small non-profit and idealistic driven events still exist. The tension between creative freedom, the pursuit of one`s artistic vision has long crashed with commercial imperatives, it is a well-known conflict both from artists, and organization. However, the festivals interviewed showed comprehension to the fact that those two elements coexist and need to be integrated. No festival can be sustainable if only based on “love and dreams”.

Of course, this thesis has its limitations. For what regard the theoretical framework, for example, the scarcity of theory on the organizers and promoters` perspective and on non-profit events was initially problematic. But then, it provided the possibility to try to feel a gap in knowledge. As named already in the introduction (cf. 1), this was a small-scale qualitative research, involving only three *niche* music festivals. I carried out a qualitative study, to go in-depth of the topic and research questions. The study cannot therefore be significant for all kinds of festivals, and not even for all *niche* festivals, but hopefully it can be significant and consistent in displaying some patterns and perceptions, typical of *niche* festivals, and inspire for further research on the field of *niche* event management, perhaps researching best practises and possible solutions to support these fragile entities. A Norwegian festival called “Norwegian Wood” has just started a crowdfunding campaign...might this be the future for sustaining passionate events about to disappear?

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# Appendix

## 1. Interview participant consent form

### Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

**“Not (just) for the money: Motivations behind the start-up of music festivals and the management challenge of balancing the needs of art and profit in cultural industries.**

**A qualitative study of small-sized *niche* festivals in Kristiansand.  
The organizers` point of view.”**

#### **Bakgrunn og formål**

Formålet med studiet er å undersøke motivasjonene bak *niche* musikkfestivaler. Problemstillingen som skal analyseres ser nærmere på hvorfor man starter en festival, om man gjør det for profitt eller for idealismen og personlige motivasjoner. Denne masteroppgaven finner sted ved Universitet i Agder sitt fakultet for kunstfag, ved studieretningen Music Management, og gjennomføres ikke for eksterne oppdragsgivere, og ikke i samarbeid mellom flere institusjoner.

Personen er forespurt deltakelse fordi vedkommende befinner seg innenfor en målgruppe som passer godt med forskernes forutsatte avgrensing.

#### **Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?**

Datainnsamlingen vil foregå i intervjuer som tar sikte på å ikke vare lengre enn 1 klokke. Opplysningen som innhentes gjennom disse intervjuene vil i størst grad være deltakerens oppfatninger, meninger og perspektiver. Denne dataen vil registreres med lydopptaker men vil behandles særdeles forsiktig som anvist i neste punkt.

#### **Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?**

Alle opplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og dataene vil kun være tilgjengelig for de involverte i prosjektet, som i denne forstand er det meg selv i samarbeid med veilederen, samt at alle opptak blir lagret og beskyttet på min personlige datamaskin som er låst med brukernavn og passord.

Deltakerne vil kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjon gjennom navn og ytringer.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes **21.05.2018**. Etter prosjektslutt, skal opptaket bli slettet.

#### **Frivillig deltakelse**

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Dersom du har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med **Giulia Avella, tlf. 93659028**,  
(veileder: Daniel Nordgård, daniel.nordgard@uia.no).  
Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for  
forskningsdata AS.

## **Samtykke til deltakelse i studien**

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)