

7 The social value of festivals: a theoretical framework

Learning objectives

- **Understand the concept of social value in festivals**, analysing how cultural events generate social, cultural, economic and ethical outcomes for host communities beyond purely economic impacts.
- **Critically assess the positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of festivals**, including community cohesion, cultural preservation, innovation, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and potential risks such as commodification and social exclusion.
- **Apply social capital theory to festival contexts**, distinguishing between bonding, bridging and linking social capital, and evaluating how festivals foster networks, trust, reciprocity and community capacity.
- **Explain residents' attitudes toward festivals through Social Exchange Theory**, analysing how perceived costs and benefits influence community support, opposition, and long-term legitimacy of events.
- **Analyse the role of communication and media through Social Representation Theory**, understanding how festivals are socially constructed, and contested within public discourse and collective imaginations.
- **Evaluate the shift from impact assessment to a social leverage approach**, understanding how strategic planning, stakeholder engagement and design can transform festivals into long-term agents of change.

Definition

Festivals, through new forms of participation (live and remote), are some of the most popular leisure activities and act as important agents of socialisation, becoming moments for sharing experiences, values and lifestyles. This leads us to reflect on their educational, socialising and entertainment functions and on the new ethical potential that, today more than ever, they can develop. Leisure time in postmodern society, no longer peripheral to working time, takes on a central role for contemporary individuals (who are more educated, more aware and more globalised) in the construction of social identity, the search