

6 Roskilde Festival and transgressive behaviour: An emerging safety concern for event organisers

Jannick Friis Christensen and
Morten Thanning Vendelø

Abstract

Based on a study of Denmark's Roskilde Festival, this case is designed to enable students to become aware of and critically reflect upon the phenomenon of transgressive behaviour as an emerging safety problem that event organisers must address. Transgressive behaviour can be viewed as a wicked problem for which there is no absolute solution. Therefore, the aim is not to solve the problem, but to unfold its complexities through analysis of (gendered) power dynamics and to stimulate students to design interventions and undertake studies of their own.

Subjects: event governance; event safety management; contemporary issues and trends (#MeToo); social sustainability and responsibility; research ethics; equality; diversity and inclusion

Introduction: The orange feeling¹

Roskilde Festival, a music and arts event held every summer in Denmark, is by many of its participants associated with the colour orange, found on the canvas of the main stage, aptly named Orange Stage. For festival participants, however, orange is not just a colour; it also describes a feeling. If asked directly what that orange feeling is like, most would reply that it is something that must be experienced directly, making the feeling unique to each individual. More generally,

1. The authors adopt the wording used by festival participants throughout the case narrative. For that reason, readers are warned that this article contains explicit language.

the feeling can be said to encompass a sense of freedom that may not be experienced in everyday life. That is, Roskilde Festival is a 'free space' where individuals may discover different and, perhaps, less restricted versions of themselves. As the festival space turns social norms on their head, thereby offering an alternative to society in general, part of the informal agreement made by participants at Roskilde Festival is that they explore and test boundaries (Christensen, 2021). In that regard, Roskilde Festival offers freedom in both the negative and positive sense of the word. When participating in the festival, attendees are free from many of what some feel are the constraining norms and expectations of daily (work) life, such as dress codes. Yet, individuals will also experience freedom to do things they normally cannot or would not do, such as participating in a naked run.



Figure 6.1: Naked run in the Dream City camping area (image: Robert Hendel)

The naked run (see Ullman, 2020, p. 186), a tradition organised by the festival's participants, is an excellent illustration of how norms for what individuals can and cannot do change in the context of the Roskilde Festival and similar events. From the festival's point of view, everyone should be able to push their own boundaries if they want to. Indeed, that is what happens at the naked run: people sign up voluntarily and since the run is confined to a limited area, the individuals for whom public nudity crosses a personal boundary can simply stay away. The problem that Roskilde Festival faces is that some participants perceive the festival space as 'boundaryless', meaning they believe they can get away not only with transgressing their own boundaries but the boundaries of other participants. In other words, the free space that Roskilde Festival wants to offer its participants is (mis)used as an excuse for enacting transgressive behaviour. An alternative view is that the experimental, liberated, and 'loose' festival culture is conducive to transgressive behaviour, in that the culture renders it possible and even legitimises that people sometimes go too far (Holse et al., 2019).