

Cornwall's Festivals: A Space for Festivity, Subversion and Empowerment

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Abstract

Cornwall, in the United Kingdom, is a place where the performance of heritage in public is intrinsically woven into the community calendar. Three hundred and sixty-eight festivals take place each year in its villages and towns (Kent 2018), of which this paper will explore three: St Germans May Tree Fair (a revived, community-led festival), Trevithick Day and Golroos (both reinvented, community-led festivals). This formed part of research into how heritage is defined and valorised in Cornwall, conducted between 2017 and 2019. These case studies focus on valorising of heritage through living performances, as a reflexive cultural process where values and symbolic meanings are seen in action. When viewed as an active process, 'heritage' is seen as an empowering, performative space for negotiation and recognition of a plurality of values. Integral to this empowering process is a specific mode of behaviour, termed the festive form, of convergence, revelry and subversion. Subversion is explored as

Image

St Germans May Tree Fair
(author's collection)

Keywords

*Festivals, Subversion,
Empowerment and Intangible
Cultural Heritage*

¹ *Reinvented tradition is a newly formed contemporary festival that enacts the festive form of convergence, revelry and subversion.*

both a temporary subversion from everyday life, but can be mobilised strategically to increase visibility and longer-term change. Subversion is first explored in the context of personal agency and empowerment. The next section explores festivals and empowerment as longer-term subversion of wider societal concerns, including recognition of alternative heritages and democratisation. The final section shows that although increasing recognition and support for festivals and other forms of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)² from official bodies is welcome, in some cases this can lead to disempowerment. Tensions can emerge as powerful stakeholders become involved in decision-making. These longstanding issues continue to create a delicate balance in the empowerment potential of festivals. Throughout the paper, Cornwall's festivals are described as an unofficial process and 'grassroots'. These were adopted to explore collective cultural heritage processes by 'ordinary' people, as distinct from that mobilised by professionals or official leadership (governments or heritage bodies).

The conceptual and methodological approaches I chose for my study involved a critical heritage approach within a cultural studies framework, both of which used a mixed methods participatory methodological approach that centres primary experience and the concept of giving voice. The study used a qualitative approach to explore how groups of people interact and construct their world, and collected ethnographic and phenomenological qualitative sources of data, supplemented with a questionnaire and document searches. In addition interviews, observation and focus groups provided greater depth, explaining more fully the complexity, dynamism and negotiation of behaviour, cultural production and power/knowledge relations. The methodological approach chosen not only connects to a broader notion of cultural politics and democracy (Giroux 2000), it 'enacts an ethics of respect' (Denzin 2003:237). In addition adopting a collaborative approach, conducting research 'with' not 'for' communities, is key to critical ethnography (Manning 2017). Approaches to data collection were deployed that reflected this critical methodological stance and looked at dynamics, positionality and aimed to empower participants, using data techniques that collected the expression of 'heritage' as they emerged through public performance of heritage.

1. Festivals and Empowerment

Several scholars explore social heritage practices (festivals, carnivals, rituals) as an empowering process that can create space for subversion and negotiation. The spatial and temporary interruption of social order created by them reflect Foucault's concept of heterotopia³, where value lies in creating multiple transformational spaces (Quinn and Wilks 2017). Turner (1982), in looking at the liminality⁴ of ritual practice, describes such sites as alternative, more liberated and inclusive ways to be socially as humans. Both concepts of liminality and counter-sites help us understand how festive events can create space for subversion and negotiation. These hetero spaces reflect Bakhtin's (1968, 1984) 'carnival sense of the world', that pushes aside seriousness (inversion) and makes

² Intangible heritage is a concept that describes the everyday emotions, expression and performance of heritage. UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) also adopts the term ICH, describing performative acts (storytelling music, dance), social practices (festivals, rituals), traditional crafts and knowledge. Their Convention on Safeguarding ICH (2003) aims to provide a framework for governments to support community's express, (re) create and pass down their idea of heritage.

³ Foucault (1986) refers to heterotopic sites within cultures as 'counter-sites' that offer simultaneously space for contestation and representation.

⁴ Turner writes how the liminality in cultural performance becomes a space for subversion, 'an embodiment of mutational forces' (2016) p. 12. The inherent instability and in-betweenness of this liminality allows social norms to be suspended or challenged. In the case of many festivals this is a temporary disruption of norms for example road closure for processions.

room for a multiplicity of voices and meanings. Oldenburg uses Bakhtin's concept of 'third space' to describe informal public socialising as timeout away from everyday routine, 'life duties and drudgeries' (1989:21). Kent (2018) also details the break from conventional order of living and inversion of norms that operate in the texts and performances of Cornwall's many festivals. He writes of the plethora of processions in the Cornish calendar ritual as reflective of 'a mysterious past, embodied in strange and mystifying festive practice' (2018:418), describing an ancient mode of behaviour of convergence, revelry and temporary subversion. Kent further explains these public events are still valued today as important for the greater good of the community, offering a sense of belonging for social, religious or geographical groups and in the 'long term contribute to group cohesiveness' (2018:15). Intrinsically, this idea of 'heritage' is passed on because individuals or groups choose to do so, and the replication of this heritage, as a sense of inheritance, imbues its social value (Robertson 2012).

1.1 Empowerment and Ownership

St Germans May Tree Fair is one of Cornwall's calendar festivals, where the local community of St Germans and neighbouring villages come together in a celebration dating back to 1284 (Orme 2000). It is an example of a revived tradition, in that the community at different times did not perform it (Manley, interview 2018; 2019). The community revived the May Tree Fair in 2012, which coincided with the loss of the annual community carnival at the adjacent Port Eliot Estate. Helen Manley involved in organising this event said:

"I think I benefited greatly from various events about Cornwall as a teenager, but as I've become older yet still perceived as a younger person within the circles of people who tend get involved in community committees/groups, it's a case of realising if you want something to happen, it's down to us that make it happen and create that opportunity for others." Interview 2018

From the beginning, an important aspect of this community-led event was ownership. The May Tree fair committee explicitly wanted it to be their event, and that it would take place central to the village, in contrast to the St Germans Carnival that had been held on the adjacent Port Eliot Estate. Placing the event in a community space, away from this powerful stakeholder, offered an alternative community gathering to the carnival and to Port Eliot Festival (which also took place on the Estate). The St Germans May Tree organising committee were predominately village residents, in professional or skilled employment, often-creative practitioners (OCSI report 2009), and members were also involved in other village social networks. For example, the researcher noted from attendance at meetings that members organised children's social groups like the St German's Youth Club, Rainbows (social club for young girls), or tended to work in the village (SGMF meetings 2012-2018). One anonymous interviewee commented that it was all 'very hippy', which suggests that some of the stakeholders appeared from a distinct group

(interview, 2019). The committee welcomed new members to contribute, but there was a lack of representation from black or ethnic minorities, which reflected the wider low representation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) in Cornwall's official culture (DCMS 2018) and Cornwall ethnicity of 98.2% white in the UK Census (2011). The May Tree Fair was also community-driven and encouraged co-production. For example, local school children were involved in the event, and the 'May Tree Tune' was circulated on social media to encourage the community to play along (observation 2012-2019). The May Tree Tune was also part of the village's heritage, as it was adapted from a 10th century Medieval Latin mass dedicated to St. Germanus. The event was therefore driven by local stakeholders, with the wider community being invited to take part. Co-production was integral to this way of doing heritage, all of which created a sense of ownership. Grassroots festivals are a living practice of heritage, and intrinsically place people as consumers and producers of the past, not passive or marginalised. Viewing festival as an active practice, foregrounds what people experience. Termed the felt expression (after Thrift 2008), 'heritage' becomes seen as a living, embodied performance of meaning-making.

1.2 Empowerment and Sense of Self

The ability for grassroots festivals to be dynamic and driven by the local community was critical, as motivations to perform heritage varies according to the perceived need of individuals or groups. Individuals and communities decided to continue, increase the frequency or even discontinue performances, however they defined it and, importantly, official safeguarding and protection did not determine this process. St Germans resident Will Halwyn was key in the revival of the event, motivated by the idea of revelry and bringing people together:

"It was a description of the St Germans mock mayor and May celebrations in the book 'Popular Romances of the West of England' that made Will want to do something, simply as he'd found the entry funny and the fact it happened in the village we grew up in motivated him to look up further. Initially Will envisioned something smaller and more like a group of friends /garden party-type celebration, but after holding an open meeting and finding support from others, there was the real possibility of making it a larger community event." Manley, interview 2018

The community who perceived a need to have the village of St Germans coming together again, annually, supported the revival of this tradition as they had in the past. Interviews with residents reflected positive emotional impacts:

"What's great about it is it's almost like the beginning of summer...it gets everyone together and is a wonderful feeling of relaxation and everybody processing and ending up at the pub and hanging out together." Video, May 2014

This desire reflects Turner's concept of 'spontaneous communitas', in which he describes how 'all cultures recognise the need to set aside certain times and spaces for community creativity and celebration' (1982:11).



Image

St Germans May Tree Fair
(author's collection)

⁵ According to legend, St Piran, the Patron Saint of Cornwall was washed up on the sandy shores of Cornwall at Perranporth beach. 'Under the order of the Irish King (who was suspicious of Piran's powers) Piran was cast to sea off the Irish Coast tied to a millstone. Piran decided to build an oratory here in Perranporth to promote Christianity and the story goes that his first disciples were a badger, a fox and a bear' (Perranporth leaflet, 2018).

Cornwall's festivals were an example of a practice that brought the community together for socio-cultural benefits. The research affirmed how these festive spaces enhance bonding of social actors, providing a sense of community, be it a local connection, or a 'felt connection to the cultural tradition' (Quinn and Wilks 2013:28), reinforcing identity (Ashley 2020) and contributing to wellbeing (Jepson and Walters 2021). Such festivals celebrate community values, ideologies, identity and continuity (Getz, 2010). They only take place because the communities come together to make this happen and value it enough to continue this form of heritage each year. Continuance of Cornwall's grassroots festivals was therefore a driving force for why they continued to be performed. This was rooted in a motivation to help people connect with their past and engender a sense of belonging.

"It's part of our heritage. It's passed on from generation to generation and it's nice to keep it alive. A lot of them like Padstow Obby Oss and Helston Flora day are peculiar to that area. To give a reason why...I don't know...it's just a good thing to do." Oldham, FG 2018

Fundamentally, these are socially interactive processes and embodied enactments. This was also communicated in the repetition of performances of heritage at Golroos Festival, which takes place at Perranporth at the end of June. Perranporth⁵ is significant in Cornish culture, as the beach is where St Piran was first washed onto these shores.

Golroos Festival is a gathering of Cornish musicians and dancing led by the collective Nos Lowen, which includes a community procession on

the beach. Cathy Bennet, violinist/fiddle player in the Cornish folk band 'Black Eyed Nancy', who played at Golroos in 2018, agreed that she has made close friends through the folk scene, Josh Simmonds added:



Image

Golroos (author's collection)

"Yeah it's like a close knit community. Something is always going on and that is part of why everyone gets on so well and are close." FG 2, 2018

Positive impacts were linked to actively taking part and accounted for a high rate of volunteering at Cornish events and festivals (observation 2017-2019). The positive impact of taking part can be described as an example of *communitas*. The audience celebrated together, and interactions created chatting, smiling and applauding. Focus group participants also commented on a spontaneous communal social interaction and how this created value for them:

"It was great to see people there that you knew as well as a get together bonding thing." Charlotte, FG 2018

This is a social relationship theorised by Turner (1969) that generates (somewhat fleetingly) something communal and shared, richly charged with effects that can be transformative. Cathy Bennet explained the importance of social interaction:

"My mum is very involved in the Cornish folk scene. Therefore, I have been involved for like my whole life. So, like that Cornish music going on at this folk festival is like normal – It's just what happens all the time. Loads of my friends and people I know are part of this folk music scene. It's like a big family." FG2, June 2018

The research demonstrates how bonding of social actors is important. This social capital is further explored by Walters and Jepson, who highlight the role of families and collective memory for quality of life at events, identifying three indicators: 'physical well-being, psychological/emotional well-being and relationships with family' (2019:34). These interactions, described by participants in all case studies, are why groups value a social bond – a shared experience and behaviour that is

rooted in the past. It appeared that the impact of this social interaction and how it was valued was situational and was affected by being embedded (or not) in the community. The researcher, taking part in these Cornish festivals during the study, observed this. Events appeared to have different affective dimensions and impacts, from feelings of belonging (as a resident in St Germans) or alienation (as a tourist at Trevithick Day). This created diverse forms of valuing produced by these different experiences with layers of meaning, values and symbolic meanings.

2. Empowerment and Temporary Subversion

In Cornwall, the value behind performance of heritage in public was not only about coming together and revelry, but also about enacting at some level, subversion. Festivals have the ability to temporarily invert social order and this was observed at the St Germans May Tree Fair. This played out through the tradition of an election of a 'Mock Mayor', which satirised civic procedures. The community chose the Mock Mayor on the Saturday night in the Eliot Arms pub, before the procession on Sunday. Subversion of the everyday was not only integral to this contemporary heritage process, but it was also described in the records of this tradition (Manley 2019). Subversion was also performed during the May Tree procession, which went through the centre of the village, enacting the communities' ownership of space. The crossing from the adjacent Port Eliot Estate, owned by the Earl of St Germans, is distinct, as the area is poignantly within earshot of the village procession.



Image
The Mock Mayor
(author's collection)

This subversion enacted in the St Germans fair created an inverted image of the normal world, pushed aside hierarchies (Bakhtin 1968, 1984) and created a third space of informal public socialising (Oldenburg 1989). Bakhtin outlines how calendar carnivals have a long provenance dating back to the medieval period, where they have been seen in parish and manorial feast days, adding that festive forms are not just fleeting or



Image
May Tree Procession
(author's collection)

⁶ The writings by Stuart Hall (1999) are central to challenging or unsettling 'the' official heritage, and he refers to British heritage, as that deemed valuable in relation to an authored, national story. In particular he addresses the state of heritage and museums in a British postcolonial context and argues for a more inclusive representation of the 'forgotten other' of British history and nationhood (1999) p. 225.

meaningless: they shift the way history is told. This subversion within festivals was only a temporary release from the everyday, and organisers needed to be complicit with authority (Quinn and Wilks 2017). The May Tree Fair required a road closure and a Temporary Events Notice, authorised by Cornwall Council, but the subversion or temporary deviation from social norms that was enacted was desired by the village to connect with the past (ancient practices), and to perform an important social role. This practice from the past shows that heritage is still valued, and demonstrates a need for freedom from structural spaces. The questionnaire (2018) results showed that coming together socially as part of the community in these festive events was a core motivation: 20% attended because it provided family togetherness and 71.4% said they attended because it was a community event. The motivation to bring a community together and celebrate was therefore an important factor that drove these festive practices in Cornwall. This was enacted in an ancient festive form of convergence and revelry, a connection with the past that was still needed in contemporary communities. Bringing a community together to celebrate cultural heritage and identity through festivals had much more than an economic value – it put on display the values of that group. Quinn argues that 'festivals are more than an industry and are a socially sustaining device extending beyond tourism' (2006:288); a way that a community actively reproduces shared values and beliefs systems, and that cultural meanings are intentionally produced to be read by the outside world. This form of heritage, viewed as a cultural process, then becomes a creative dialogue, more than the end value of a practice or static thing. In doing so, subverting a Western centric idea of heritage, towards alternative or private spaces.

3. Empowerment and Social Action

As outlined previously, festivals can provide a temporary subversion from everyday life, but can also be mobilised strategically to increase visibility and enact change. This includes unsettling 'the heritage' (Hall

1999).⁶ The dominance of valuing built heritage, by UK experts, has been long-standing, which has not only hampered progress in democratising how heritage is valued, but has also overlooked diverse cultural forms, the complex ways that cultural heritage is experienced and how people engage with it (Waterton 2010). More recently in the UK, there has been a shift in cultural policy, which calls to attention the way heritage is used and celebrated in informal processes and practices (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016; Cornwall Council, 2022). These debates have occurred in cultural studies circles for years, especially around popular culture. James Clifford suggests that local structures produce histories, rather than yielding to history. These provide new dimensions of authenticity (cultural, personal and artistic), 'reconceived as hybrid, creative activity in a local present-becoming-future' (1989:126). His work is supported by other research in Latin America, where expressive forms—particularly festivals—rather than being eliminated, have reformulated and thrived (Guss 2001). Researchers describe performing culture in public, as a social drama (Brady and Walsh 2009; Conquergood 2016), while Guss (2001) suggests the performance of culture in public is a battleground and a site for social action. It acts as an important form of historical remembering, particularly in helping to reconstitute the community in a time of crisis. Dynamically shifting constantly between elite and popular meaning, filled with ambiguity and contradiction, it provides a space to produce new meanings. Guss maintains that cultural performances are 'recognised as sites of social action where identities and relations are continually reconfigured' (2001:12). He refers to a 'folklorization process' (2001:20) that is multivocal and multilocal, expressive form, suspended between the worlds of ritual obligation and a national spectacle, with competing interests between government, media, tourists and the locals. Kent makes reference to Guss' work and asserts that Cornwall's folk dramas (festivals) are inherently performative⁷ in this way – at some level involving subversion and social action. He argues that Cornwall's festivals are a drive to devolve power and leave behind its peripheral status, and 'provide an alternative way to assert difference and identity' (2018:365). He adds that the large numbers of festivals in Cornwall are symbolic of disempowerment and tensions, acting as a safety valve.

3.1 Empowerment and Recognition

The final case study, Trevithick Day, illustrates how grassroots festivals play an important role in increasing visibility, including the distinctiveness of Cornwall's cultural identity. Trevithick Day takes place on the last Saturday in April, with interviews (see Table 1 for detail on data collection) revealing that people travel long distances to attend this social event each year.

Trevithick Day celebrates and puts on show Cornwall's mining heritage and takes place in Camborne—an ex-mining town, and part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site (WHS)—and is an example of a reinvented tradition. The heritage event is organised and funded by the Camborne community, and celebrates the ingenuity of Richard Trevithick – a well-known Cornish mining engineer and steam-engine inventor. From

⁷ Ervin Goffman describes 'frames,' (1974) to discriminate areas of sociocultural practices from general community life. 'Frame breaking' is to section off community social practices, images and symbols to be scrutinised, relived or re-valued. Some social dramas, like festivals, are multiple frames in a hierarchal arrangement, and allow for this deep reflexion and examination. Butler's (1993) concept of performativity engages with Goffman's frame analysis where breaking the frame allows room for slippage and potential change.

⁸ Cornwall and West Devon's mining cultural landscape was recognised and designated a WHS by UNESCO in 2006.

observation in 2018, the event attracted large crowds of all ages, having a carnivalesque atmosphere with bands playing, trader stalls and fairground music. The shops and cafés were brimming. The event included dancing by local children as Bal Maidens, and later in the day adults showed their traditional Cornish Scoot dancing, accompanied by the Camborne brass band and a variety of steam engines, which were driven along the main road through the town centre.



Image

Trevithick Day © Colin Higgs

⁹ *Gorsedh Kernow is a grassroots group that exists to 'maintain the national Celtic spirit of Cornwall. The tradition of preserving Celtic history and culture through poetry, song, dance, music, art and spoken word stretches back to the storytellers – the Bards of ancient Celtic countries' (Gorsedh, 2019).*

Interestingly, at the end of the festival route in 2018, there was expression of a hybrid nature of Cornish identity as an industrial Celt, for example The Ad Nos' stage performed Cornish Celtic folk music and dancing. Alongside this social event, there seemed to be a shift towards longer-term subversion or social/political recognition, including representations by Cornwall's heritage interest groups as trader stalls turned into information stalls and the presence of the 'Cornish Embassy Bus'. The latter was literally a vehicle to explore the concept of Cornishness and was funded by a Cultural Fund from the Government in 2017. Trevithick Day was a celebration, a temporary change from everyday life, but also included a push for social action. The performative nature of this festival created a space for subversion, but also calling for social action and increased awareness of Cornish culture that might be seen as a 'heritage movement'. Cornwall has been seen by some academics as geographically and politically peripheral in UK decision-making, creating tensions from changes to Cornwall's culture largely by 'outsiders' through tourism, regeneration and gentrification in cultural policies (Deacon and Perry 1988; Deacon 2017). Despite the Localism Act (2011) and some devolved decision-making (Devolution Deal 2015), this has resulted in a grassroots movement from within Cornwall that called for social action. This subtly subversive process by grassroots groups like Gorsedh Kernow⁹ drew unofficial Cornish heritage into the mainstream. These groups appeared motivated to increase the visibility of Cornish cultural heritage and recognition of cultural diversity. Importantly this heritage movement by grassroots groups interacted with state and quasi-state groups. They sought to counterbalance central or state



Images

Trevithick Day © Colin Higgs

¹⁰ *The recognition of the Cornish as a national minority through the Council of Europe (1995), provides legal protection as a racial group under case law.*

government-led processes as simultaneously the insider and the outsider.

The publicness of all these festivals was an important aspect of this subversion. An increased expression of ICH in public spaces, including Cornish scoot dancing and speaking/singing Cornish, was observed. The performance of culture in public symbolised (re)claiming space (Ashley and Frank 2016). Performing Cornish culture is connected to increasing the status and legitimacy of minorities in the eyes of statutory bodies and decision-makers, ensuring empowerment and fairness (Saltern 2011). This is, importantly, a transnational process that includes the Cornish diaspora, and in this sense reflects a wider sense of community, echoed in the inclusive concept Cornishness – a term embracing those who were born, live or love Cornwall.

The festivals in this paper were, therefore, a temporary change from everyday life, but also included a push for social action driven by grassroots interest groups. These events created a cultural battleground for recognition of Cornish culture (recognised as a National Minority¹⁰ in 2014) and an emerging confidence. It is important to note that 'heritage' (in this case festivals), when linked to a need for increased visibility and recognition, results in a shift towards negotiation and respect of all cultures and plurality of voices. Although recognition of a plurality of heritages is a welcome shift from homogenic and essentialising debates (Tilley, 2006), diversity and perception of difference, it needs to be managed carefully. Heritage, difference and cultural diversity then become a series of qualities, which must be 'constantly chosen, recreated and renegotiated in the present' (Harrison 2013:165).

4. Negative Impacts and Disempowerment

Like other forms of heritage, however, festivals can create negative impacts and disempowerment. The research demonstrated that

unofficial heritage tended to be driven by the local community and was valued as intrinsically socially interactive. There were also some additional undesirable impacts to members of the community who were not taking part in festive events. During the St Germans May Tree Fair, road closure, noise and disruption were issues, particularly in the first few years of the revival, when some of the community were upset that the road through the village was temporarily shut for the Sunday procession. The impact was negated in subsequent years by improved communication to the residents of the village, informing them that this was going to take place each year and its duration. In addition, music and large crowds engender noise. This supports research into rural community festive events by Quinn and Wilks (2017) who outlines similar negative impacts caused by disruption.

Negative effects from disempowerment can also occur when powerful stakeholders become involved in community festivals. Cohen (1993) highlights complexities of ownership within Notting Hill Carnival (UK), describing a shift from grassroots black community-led, to containment by councils, police and funders. From the study, funding heritage related festivals remains complex and tensions emerge with (over) commodification. Kockel et al (2019) consider heritage festivals as tourism events and consider their economic role. Arguably from this research, festivals can contribute to the local economy, but participants expressed concerns over ownership when grassroots festivals became linked to official motivations including economic benefits creating tensions over ownership and accountability (Manley, interview 2018, 2019). Official processes could change the feel of an event from a community base to a commercial festival framework. For example, Penzance's Golowan Festival was revived in 1991, and was sponsored by Arts Council England and the National Lottery Community Fund. This formal funding had implications on how this Cornish festival was evaluated (Anonymous, interview, 2018) and shaped the event to reflect current cultural policy objectives. Traders also contributed to the funding of the festival, and paid for an area within the site. For them, the success of this event and how it was valued relied on organisers attracting audiences to provide them an economic benefit. The research demonstrates how some festivals act as a governmental tool, mobilised for a strategic good (tourism, regeneration, social cohesion and inclusion), but also social control. Termed the institutionalisation of marginality (Walters and Jepson 2019:23), mainstream, institutionally generated programmes when critically analysed control cultural production and the marginalised.

In contrast, the St Germans May Tree Fair committee, decided from the beginning that they would be the 'drivers of the cultural agenda' (Ashley 2020:14) and did not want to rely on external funding, as this could create tensions between artists. Therefore, all of those involved would be unpaid volunteers, and today the festival relies on personal funding and on volunteers' goodwill and social networks to organise events. There were elements of event infrastructure, however, that needed resources, including road closures, event licences, and insurance. St Germans May Tree Fair found support for these elements from various sources such as

pub quizzes. More recently, funding for the creative elements has been gained by the award of a 'Festival Enhancement' grant of up to £1,000 by FEAST (ACE funded) and the Cornwall Community Foundation Partnership.

Support from public funding can be welcome, however a critical approach is needed to prevent disempowerment, posing a question of who 'the community' is, and how transparent are their motivations within cultural power. There are an increasing number of calls for sustained support for ICH from the UK Government (Nic Craith et al, 2019), including ratification of UNESCO's Convention (2003)¹¹ but it is critical to adopt holistic models (Stefano 2022) that effectively ensure local benefits and centralise community in decision-making. For example, China has ratified the 2003 Convention, however state policies have disrupted Uyghur community expression of Meshrep, replacing and promoting a national community version (Harris 2020).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explored Cornwall's community-led festivals as a performance of heritage in public, which enact empowerment. They take place irrespective of professionals, policy or legislation and place people as active agents. Importantly, this process was therefore an embodied enactment of 'heritage' constituted from the community who lived in it. These festivals were transmitted through socially interactive, affective modes and an active process of 'doing' heritage, which shaped how this 'heritage' was perceived, valued, and by whom. This research argues that recognition of alternative heritages, including festivals, is centred around empowerment. The research highlighted the complexities of heritage and explored alternative ways of 'doing' heritage to official processes. Festival performance could be seen as a conscious lens, mapping connections between embodiment festive form and social action, creating a crucible for recognition and cultural diversity. The performative nature within these festivals (subversion) provided an unstructured heritage-making process and created space for multivocality and a plurality of values. It provides a platform to view multivocality in valorisation, promoting democratisation of heritage as active production and recognition of diverse voices that may have been omitted or marginalised. There were, however, some tensions over ownership and potential for (over) commodification, emerging from levels of disempowerment as community festivals are linked to official processes. Providing public funding and recognition of community festivals, although welcome, has the potential to change the feel of an event, but a critical approach can help negate appropriation, loss of local ownership and embrace socio-cultural and socio-economic values when evaluating public benefits. Festivals remain an important piece of human activity and experience, a cultural process of empowerment that has transformative potential.

¹¹ *The UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) aims to ensure long-term viability of intangible heritage within communities and groups. For the purpose of the Convention, ICH means the practices, expressions, representations, knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. ICH manifests in the following areas: Oral expression, traditions and language as a vehicle of ICH; Performing arts; Social practices, rituals and festive events; Knowledge and practises concerning nature and the universe; Traditional craftsmanship.*

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APPENDIX

Document Search

Documents ranged from media coverage, UK and international policy, reports at Cornwall Council and festival programmes.

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St Germans May Fair archive Cornwall Council

Trevithick Day Programme 2018

Observation

Observation of community-led festivals, were key to a performance-centered approach and helped capture affective moments and dynamic creative forms of valuing. This included the use of mixed visual data from filming that provided verbal and non-verbal data. Film data produced at same time as the researcher's own was included to aid reflexivity and representation. This aided co-production, and representation, following the action of participants, their stories and emotions. In this way the researcher did not control the visual process. This participatory approach where mixed visual data co-produced are strikingly different to purely observational research approaches (Pink 2013).

St Germans May Tree Fair: Ethnographic observation of social groups involved in organising and attending the St Germans May Tree Fair between 2012-2019. This included follow-up analysis of audio-visual footage captured by participants at the festival.

Observation of events (Port Eliot Festival, 2017-2019). Live and recorded audio-visual data.

Black Friday, (2017-2019) observation of the band playing at St Germans May Tree Fair and the Rod' n Line pub in East Cornwall.

May Tree committee (2012-2018): Observation of meetings for the St Germans May Tree organising committee, Eliot Arms, St Germans.

Video (2014): Observation of film footage of St Germans May Tree Fair in the 'Voices of St Germans,' 25th May 2014, produced by Diana Laugharne and Paul Joyce (permission given for use).

Trevithick Day and Golroos Festival: Data included live observation of the event and follow up analysis of audio-visual footage by other participants.

Additional observation data from performance of Cornwall's heritage in public.

Edfss (2018): English Folk Dance and Song Society, conference 21st June 2018, Liskeard Public Hall.

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Gwenno (2018): Observation of Gwenno Saunders performing music in Cornish, 28th July 2018, Port Eliot Festival, Cornwall.

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Music sessions (2018): Observation of Celtic music sessions at 'The Dolphin', Plymouth second Sunday of the month and the 'Barley Sheaf', Liskeard.

Observation OCS (2018): Observation of the Liskeard Old Cornwall Society, August 2018 at Stuart House, Liskeard.

Observation (2018): Observation of St Piran's Day Perranporth,

Tom O'Reilly and the Swaggers (2016) Performance of band at the Pan Celtic Festival, 3rd April 2016, Carlow, Ireland.

Interviews

Four Interviews:

Jack Morrison (FEAST). Cultural brokers that are Arts Council England funded.

Helen Manley in connection to St Germans May Tree Fair.

Anonymous interviewee x 2 in connection with festive events in St Germans and Penzance.

Focus Groups:

Focus groups were conducted to provide group interviews that gather qualitative data from individuals who have experienced a particular situation, which serves as a focus of the interview. Focus groups are seen as a form of oral history, a history making process, as tools to recover hidden pasts or those that do not run in state archives, often increasing the visibility of marginalised communities. To challenge the power relations, the researcher took part in the groups and shared personal stories.

FG June (2018): Focus group with 'Black Eyed Nancy' band during Golroos Festival, 30th June, 2018 at Seiners Arms, Perranporth, Cornwall.

FG August (2018): Focus group with Liskeard Old Cornwall Society 1st August 2018, Stuart House Liskeard, Cornwall. This group included Brian Oldham, Paula Arthur and Jackie Jenkins.

Questionnaire (2018) On-line survey with structured and unstructured questions, distributed to festival organisers, funders, cultural heritage sector and participants in Cornwall (n=89).

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