



About Non-democracy: Conversation and Understanding, (Dis)trust and Space.

In conversation with festivalmakers

Faculty of Arts Master's thesis Statement, University of Groningen

Name of student: Mette Li van Zoest

Student number: S4391977

Master's degree programme – specialization: Research Master Cultural Leadership, University of Groningen

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Thesis supervisor: dr. Johan A.C. Kolsteeg

Second reader: dr. Beate Peter

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Abstract

This thesis proposes three themes as entries to understand tensions between festivalmakers and other groups of actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies. These themes are 'Conversation and Understanding', '(Dis)trust' and 'Space'. Through conversations with festivalmakers from Iran, Syria, Serbia, Poland, Senegal and the USA, this thesis formulates possible understandings of tensions based on both new, current day challenges, threads and tendencies, and also historical approaches and long standing contexts of undemocracy. Through casual conversation, with the aim to take a more democratic approach to research itself, this research aims to formulate a set of terminology to understand the tensions between festival makers and other actors in the described contexts. This, by tackling both prominently established themes within related discourses on culture, festivals, politics and democracy, and new themes and questions which derived from the data. This thesis argues that the three themes can, to different extents, be linked to existing discourses. This can strengthen our understanding of the position and influence of festivalmakers and culture more broadly within contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies in related discourses.

Key words: democracy, non-democracy, festivalmakers, arts, culture and festivals

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Introduction

In conversations and in the media I observe calls for action from cultural organizations and festivals to counter undemocratic political behaviors and statements. It seems like culture and politics are finding themselves in a conflicting and strange relationship. During a conference, I spoke with some people from a Serbian festival which for years has been politicized and eventually got banned in 2025 for its efforts to facilitate conversations between Serbia and Kosovo. On social media I read posts about the Trump administration taking down funding schemes for projects and events focusing on diversity, inclusivity and minority communities. In other conversations I hear about censorship committees in Iran, a country often mentioned in the (Western) news for its narratives on migration and the suppressive regime that rules, and a country where people are actively involved in protests and activism demanding democratic rights. Somewhere else I read an article about the independent cultural sector in Thailand, which instead of actively fighting oppressive structures, now have developed underground strategies to create their own cultural spaces. These examples are just a handful of events and narratives. In the midst of new and already established tensions regarding democracy and politics, cultural organizations and festivals are using their voices to call out these events, choose to stay silent or start new conversations about the role of arts in society. It is in these tensions and intentions that I see both struggles and resistance. Democratic and undemocratic tendencies are happening all over the world. Within some contexts and regions, authoritarianism is already long established, other places are transitioning away from these types of political tendencies, and again other regions are currently struggling with the rise of un- and anti-democratic voices after a longer period of democracy. Within all these cases, there is the question if, and how, these tendencies are affecting festival making practices and the people involved in these processes. Can we find terms to understand these tensions in order to come to a better understanding of how undemocratic tendencies shape current, past and future events and as a next step, possibly find ways to act upon these?

Festivalmakers make up one group of the actors within an environment of festivals and the social political context they are situated in. This environment can be understood as a structure built on different types of relations, that deals with a variety of questions and tensions. These tensions include for example, suppression and resistance, but also deliberation and democracy. Festivalmakers and their festivals are in connection with other actors; policy makers, politicians, public funding, governmental entities, private actors, audiences and other actors operating in social and cultural spaces. These connections vary in type and intensity. Together they are constantly re-formulating a rather fragile structure. Actors are constantly voicing and constructing their position within this structure and the fields they operate in, influencing others and the environment around them. By looking into how festivalmakers are part of this network, and how they make and understand their own connections with other actors, we can start to understand how these structures are constantly re-formulated and how they can be challenged by both festivalmakers and other actors.

This thesis focuses on the question of democracy and un-democracy, as one of the discourses that plays a role in how festivalmakers are negotiating their positions, and tells us more about the tensions that are present as a result of actors making decisions and reformulating relations. These decisions create a specific context for festivalmakers, and influence their work. On their turn, they formulate organizational and curational strategies and tools in order to respond and loop back narratives.

Within the various contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies, festivalmakers develop organizational and curational strategies in order to keep their festivals running regardless of potential challenges and threats. Based on conversations with festivalmakers regarding these topics, this thesis looks at the following question: How can we interpret the qualities of tensions between the various actors dealing with un-democratic tendencies happening in various parts of the world (with cases from Poland, Serbia, Syria, Iran, Senegal and the USA) and organizational and curational practices of arts- and community festivalmakers related to these, through looking at how festivalmakers understand their own relations and actions contributing to the discourse on democracy, and their positions towards various other actors present in these environments? Looking specifically at how festivalmakers understand their own relations and see how they operate within these contexts, we can get an understanding of the construction of the environment itself and see how dynamics and fragility play out. This, by focusing on the qualities and contexts of tensions, rather than the concepts or events these tensions are based on. In order to formulate an answer to the main question, a set of three sub-questions is formulated:

- 1) How can we understand ideas around (non)democracy, in relation to culture and arts focusing on festivals and the role of festivalmakers, especially dealing with a large variety of (geographically) different cases in the data?
- 2) How can we understand different types of relations within this context from a theoretical point of view?
- 3) Through which terms can we understand contents and the qualities of the relations between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies?

Festivalmakers are the focus of this thesis due to two main reasons. First, I was able to approach this group as a result of my internship at The Festival Academy. Second, it seems that there are interesting phenomena happening in this sector with regards to social political events and un-democratic tendencies happening worldwide. Many (art-)festivals use their spaces and position to voice their position within their environment, and are actively engaging with topics touching upon political and democratic questions. This would showcase the active engagement of festivals and the people behind them within the discourse on democracy and un-democracy.

Even though festivals and festivalmakers are central in this thesis, they should not be considered as floating entities, but rather 'as social phenomena to be contextualized in the particular settings and contradictions of modern societies' (Delanty, Giorgi, and Sassatelli 2013, 7). This suggests that festivals have both characteristics of a closed off space, but are simultaneously also very much connected to- and in conversation with- other actors. This sets certain characteristics, which need to be taken into account throughout this thesis.

In order to get insight into the research question, this thesis is set out in three chapters each with a number of subsections. In the first chapter the theoretical framework is set out, which functions as the grounding work and in order to reflect back findings in the analysis. Chapter 1 will start with an introduction to a non-institutional approach of democracy (Sen [2009] 2010 and Young 2022). Following is an overview of various scholars who write about the relations between cultural professionals and un-democratic tendencies, and the actors that are connected to these. This includes research on for example censorship (Rohava 2020, Yakoub and Hammami 2020, Zamorano 2021, Bonet and Zamorano 2020), other political interventions such as illiberal cultural policies (Zamorano 2021) and participation and emancipation (Bird 2017, Vestheim 2012, Zamorano and Bonet 2020). Furthermore, festivals and national politics and identity (Rohava

2020, Posada 2012) and the presence of politics more broadly at festivals (Rogge 2018, Đurić et al. 2022) are also topics discussed here.

The second chapter of this thesis deals with the methodology and the underlying principles which have shaped method, data collection and working ethics. Within the research design, I focus on the potential to democratize research methods and argue for the use of casual conversation as a suitable approach to data collection in the context of this research. Additionally, this chapter covers notes on the selection process of research participants, the structuration of data and researcher's positionality and limitations.

The third chapter proposes the three themes of Conversation and Understanding, (Dis)trust and Space, as possible qualities of the tensions between festivalmakers and other actors in environments marked by undemocratic tendencies. I propose these three themes as possible lenses through which we can understand the contents and qualities of these tensions and relations. Within chapter 3 I mirror back to the theoretical framework, suggesting that the links between the first theme 'Conversation and understanding' are already quite well established both within academic resources and within the field of culture and festivals. The link with 'Space' can be found but to a lesser extent, and '(Dis)trust' is not as well connected to these discourses but both do have the potential to help us understand qualities of relations, tensions and phenomena happening within contexts with undemocratic tendencies.

1 - Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework sets the foundation for this thesis, providing insight into various concepts and ideas on (un)democracy and culture with a focus on festivals and festivalmakers. First, ideas about justice and democracy and how these relate to the position and influence of culture and festivalmakers are presented. An introduction to the topic of democracy and the initial understanding of this term will be followed by a more broader, non-institutional approach to democracy referring to Amartya Sen ([2009] 2010) and Iris Marion Young (2022). In addition, various complications of the term regarding potential normative and euro-centric stances are discussed. Second, an introduction to Actor Network Theory will be given in order to give insight into the ways we can understand various relations from a theoretical point of view. Third, I go over a number of theories and concepts present in discourses on (non)democracy and arts and culture, indicating which topics and themes are currently (2010's and 2020's) discussed within the academic context. In this section, a first set of themes needed to understand the behaviors and associations between festivalmakers and other actors is covered; including concepts such as healthy democracy, censorship and other political interventions, fragility and arts as alternative means for political engagement. These themes will help us to understand the interactions happening between festivalmakers and other actors who they interact with such as political actors, audiences, public- and private actors. These themes are also the basis of the codebook used during the coding phase as will be discussed in chapter 2.

Building further on chapter 1, chapter 3 introduces three new themes through which we can understand the qualities and contents of the tensions between festivalmakers and other actors in environments marked by un-democratic tendencies. These indicate overarching qualities found in the data and cover potential implications of themes related to both the practices of festivalmakers and the academic discourse on culture and (non)democracy.

1.1.1 - Democracy?

The question of democracy and non-democracy is a tricky one. From the start of this research, I have been struggling with the definition and application of this concept. Not knowing when- and if it is an appropriate word to use in so many different contexts and countries. Eventually, the words 'undemocratic tendencies' and 'undemocratic practices' have been chosen purposefully. This, to take a wide scope towards the topic of non-democracy and its implications. Not only including cases dealing with clear authoritarian regimes, but also more nuanced cases in contexts that on paper are still being considered democracies and ask for a more critical analysis. Instead of approaching democracy from an institutional or practical perspective suggesting merely the act of voting itself, this thesis takes up a non-institutional approach as proposed by Amartya Sen ([2009] 2010) and Iris Marion Young (2022), as discussed in the next sections.

1.1.2 - Justice and democracy

In order to get to an understanding of democracy that can be operationalized in the context of this research, it can be useful to take one step forward to the idea of justice, which is the main topic of Amartya Sen's book 'The idea of Justice'. This thesis is not directly dealing with the idea of justice, but rather that of democracy and non-democracy, however the idea of justice is important within this context. For Sen, democracy plays a special role within this understanding of justice, devoting the last chapter of the book to this topic. Democracy, according to Sen, should not merely be understood as political structure. He gives a constructive explanation of democracy and its supposed relationship with western or European understandings of the term. In addition, the work of Iris Marion Young is introduced, who gives a critical understanding of the idea of 'politics of difference'. Her argument is built around the idea of 'group differentiation' and 'social groups', in order to make more just decisions. These topics are discussed in order to get a better understanding of the overlapping elements in culture and politics related to the question of democracy and festivalmakers. After this, we dive deeper into the implications of democracy and how this relates to the focus of this thesis, namely that of festivalmakers and their relations.

In 'The idea of Justice', Amartya Sen approaches justice 'in terms of lives and freedoms of the people involved' (xii), rather than in terms of institutions or official structures ([2009] 2010). Meaning that justice should not merely be understood on levels of institutional structures and governments or 'just institutions' (xi), but is present in people's everyday lives and states of mind. Additionally, he makes a distinction between the idea of one 'ideal justice' versus the act of reducing injustice and enhancing justice where possible and needed (8). Taking as a starting point the capability of advancement, or withdrawal of justice, a comparative approach and focus on real life experiences and realizations within society is most effective (9). This is a 'realization-focused understanding of justice' (10) rather than an arrangement-focused one. The former approach is connected to people's actual behavior and lives, which brings us to a wider and more direct understanding of justice.

In the preface of his book, Sen writes that "democracy is assessed in terms of *public reasoning* [emphasis added], which leads to an understanding of democracy as 'government by discussion' ... But democracy must also be seen more generally in terms of the capacity to enrich reasoned argument through enhancing informal availability and the feasibility of interactive discussion. Democracy has to be judged not just by the institutions that formally exist but by the extent to

which different voices from diverse sections of people can actually be heard” (xii-xiii). This understanding of democracy is connected to the idea of ‘enriched reasoned argument’ (xiii) and the need to engage within reasoning, or ‘reasoned justification’ (x, 4). Instead of merely accepting that another’s viewpoint is different, he argues for the need of engaged discussion and the act of reasoning (x). This is something that can only take place within people’s lives, instead of in largely detached institutional structures. Following Sen, democracy, understood as the capacity to enrich reasoned argument through discussion and the presence of a large variety of voices, plays an important role in the enhancement of justice and just societies.

By looking at how democracy operates in society, people’s lives and behaviors, it can also be analyzed regardless of national borders, as the idea of democracy is not necessarily bound to political or institutional structures. This gives the possibility to analyze democratic and non-democratic behaviors and actions on individual-, local- and national-, but also on a global level.

Iris Marion Young argues for a critical understanding of the role of ‘difference’ in democracy (2022). She starts by proposing an alternative understanding of identity and social groups. Emphasising on group differentiation (162) and social groups (163), she argues that individuals are not necessarily the group they are socially assigned to. Individuals belong to a multitude of social groups rather than one (165). Paying attention to differentiation within social groups is ‘an important resource for democratic communication’ (Young 2022, 163). Young is critical about essentialism, showcasing how within certain social groups there are often conflicting interests and opinions found (170). In addition, it is a group's relation to another group that creates boundaries and distinguishes one social group with the other (166). Often it is the boundaries and borders that define our understanding of what is happening ‘inside’. This creates hierarchies and relations between various groups, regarding race, gender, social class, and more (166). This potentially creates tensions and streams of influence. Young continues by proposing ‘group difference as deliberative resource’ (172). She argues that in order to reach more just decision making, group difference is necessary. Taking an alternative definition of what politics as ‘public discussion’ means, namely in terms of the presence of certain social perspectives, she argues that differentiation of these social groups is a necessary democratic approach to establish more just decisions (173). Young adds on to the argument made by Glinton, that none of the perspectives included in a decision making process are objective, but that is also not necessarily the main purpose of a democratic process (174). According to Young, democracy is ‘a form of practical reasoning for conduct resolution and collective problem solving’ (174). Practical reasoning or collective problem solving requires first all social perspectives, and second the development of a more in-depth account of the social relations in which one is situated, including potential results of their influencing, bias, and relative position (2022). When all social perspectives are included within a public discussion, there is a larger likelihood to arrive at a more just decision (176).

1.1.3 - When democracy goes wrong, or was it never there in the first place?

As previously suggested, democracy could be understood in practical, or institutional, terms as merely being the structure surrounding public vote and political representation. This, however, brings along some difficulties. Voting can in the end run be quite ‘ineffective’ or even self-destructive, as is evident in the various examples of authoritarian rulers who gained their position through democratic voting structures (e.g. the case of North Korea, see Sen 2009, 327). It is not

only the political and corrective pressure put on voters during the voting process itself that could create a turn to authoritarian or- forms of non-democratic regimes and tendencies, but also phenomena happening outside of the voting as such. These phenomena include censorship, political suppression, the creation of fear within societies, exclusion of information, and I would add the creation of mis-information, lack of basic human- and political rights, and the suppression of political oppositions or independent media (327). All of these are not happening directly as part of the act of voting itself, but rather happen within daily life and through human behavior and thinking. Sen points out the great number of dictators who have won their position through elective structures, without even putting much effort in the voting process, but rather ‘through suppressing public discussion and freedom of information, and through generating a climate of apprehension and anxiety’ (327). This emphasizes the fragility of democracy and the need for constant input in order to maintain its functioning. Various actors play a role in this process, influencing the functioning- or non-functioning of democracy within a certain context. In order to understand these phenomena, one needs to adopt a non-institutional approach to democracy. This opens up the possibility to find democratic behavior and practices within un-democratic contexts, but also how un-democracy can be present in supposedly democratic contexts.

Democracy and non-democracy should not merely be seen as two separate categories. Bonet and Zamorano point out that many have described the path to authoritarianism in terms of weakening democratic systems, centralization and unlawful handling of power (2020). However, the more complex interplay of both institutional and bottom-up mechanisms that aim to resist this political control (Browenlee as cited by Bonet and Zamorano) point to a wider array of ‘hybrid and illiberal regimes’ (Zakaria as cited by Bonet and Zamorano 2020). There are various in-between categories, which all ask for a detailed, often historical, analysis in order to get an understanding of the current state of democracy within a certain context, country or place.

It is important to point out that not in every context democracy is the starting point of the discussion, which creates a different understanding of the concept itself. It creates different definitions of what democracy might be, not a political or institutional structure but rather acts happening within people’s behavior and daily activities.

1.1.4 - Democracy in question

Dealing with case studies and narratives from various parts of the world, it is good to take a look at the positionality of not only me as a researcher, as covered in chapter 2, but also that of the theories and concepts used. This, in order to analyze the narratives from the research participants and formulate conclusions in a more appropriate manner. Questions about the normative side of the terms ‘democracy’ and ‘un-democratic’ are important to raise.

Democracy is not an undisputed term. As pointed out by Sass and Dryzek, there are difficulties in defining who ‘the people’ are (2024). This influences our understanding of what it means to have a non-democratic context, or non-democratic tendencies. Within Democratic Theory, the definition of who ‘the people’ are, often has been established through rather undemocratic processes (886). ‘To be democratic’, has shaped itself through the setting of boundaries. This can be related to Young’s conceptualization of group differentiation (2022) as discussed in the previous section. Sass and Dryzek mention that ‘though the ‘we’ in the declaration (subsequently validated as ‘We the people’ in the preamble to the constitution [of the USA]) evokes a people that

does not yet exist but rather is created by the declaration itself' (Honig as cited by Sass and Dryzek 2024, 887). This is a performative act in itself (887). In addition, historically it was not always all people that have been included in these so-called democratic processes, which often excluded (minority) groups such as women, enslaved people or other marginalized people (887). There is an undemocratic side to democratic principles.

Sen has a clear stance on the idea that democracy is associated merely with Europe or the West (2009). He asks himself and his readers the question 'if public reason is so critically important for the practice of justice, can we even think about justice in the world at large when the art of public reasoning as a part of democracy seems to be, according to the common believe, so quintessentially Western and locationally confined?' (328). This idea of democracy, according to Sen, is 'ultimately a wrong and superficial diagnosis' (328). Following this statement, Sen sets out a historical account of the global origins of democracy, both in terms of institutional acts of voting and more broadly speaking in terms of public reasoning and discussion. Focusing mainly on Buddhist India (Buddhist councils), but also on Japan (constitution of Seventeen Articles) and examples from South Africa (Mandela's observations of local public discussions). There is an important lesson found in what Sen calls 'local democracy' or ways in which on a local level public debate and reasoning happens. Understanding democracy in a global manner, requires taking interest in how people have been participating in public reasoning in various parts of the world (322).

In conclusion, it is important to think about the potential understandings and critiques of the terminology used in this thesis and the research methods used, as different understandings and historical perspectives influence both me as a researcher and research participants their understanding of terms such as democracy. As this thesis deals with cases from various parts of the world, we need to be aware of the various ideas democracy as a term carries and the underlying structures, as theorized by Sass and Dryzek (2024) and Sen (2009). This is not only important for the input research participants bring in, but also potentially influences their understanding of the research and their position in it, in geo-political terms.

1.1.5 - Democracy and festivalmakers

By acknowledging the presence of the phenomena described above, and the acknowledgement of various people and entities who have an influence on (how) decisions being made and by whom, opens a large amount of doors connected to the processes of democracy. One of these 'new' sets of actors are those working in the field of culture. When looking at contexts where undemocratic tendencies or practices are taking the overhand, it is ever more important to look at actors and their relations and behaviors outside of institutional positions. In these contexts, those operating in institutional positions often are the ones avoiding the importance of reasoned justification and public forms of discussion and participation, while 'protestors' or actors who operate outside institutional functions are emphasizing its relevance (Sen [2009] 2010, 4). This means that analyzing those operating outside institutional functions, can bring us different, and perhaps under-highlighted, understandings about the functioning of democracy.

The field of culture, focusing on festivals, can play an important role in the process of democracy. Within his discussion on the idea of justice, Sen covers the role of media and press within the process and act of democracy. Although festivals and the arts are definitely not the same as media, they do share certain characteristics and positions with Sen's understanding of media.

Sen mentions five main connections between media and democracy. First, the freedom of media and press, or free speech more generally, is a direct contribution to our ability to communicate with each other, which contributes to the quality of people's lives (335-336). Second, it plays an important informative role (336). Third, it plays a crucial role in the protective function for minority, or neglected groups or people in general by giving voice (336). Fourth, it helps in the formulation of values which require open communication and reasoning (336). Last, the media plays a role in the facilitation of public reasoning more broadly (337). For this thesis I extend this argument into the field of arts and culture, with in particular festivals. I argue there are overlaps in the functioning and connections between these, and the field of media, in relation to questions of democracy and non-democracy. Relating this to Young, culture is an important influencer of social- and cultural groups and our understanding of those groups and their political participation.

This understanding of festivals in relation to democracy does, however, need to be critically understood and analyzed. There is a paradoxical side to this line of thought. Art has both the potential to be a pillar of 'healthy democracy' but at the same time, it also has the possibility to thrive under authoritarian pressures (Poprawski 2022b). The term 'healthy democracy' and its implications will be discussed further on in this thesis.

Culture and reason are not to be understood independently, but rather as co-evolving (Sass and Dryzek 2024). Sass and Dryzek point towards the performative nature of democratic reasoning, as understood from a cultural sociologist perspective (884), in which emotion and symbolism can be seen as powerful factors in deliberation and democratic processes for the inclusion of minority, or marginalized groups. It is both reason and emotion, especially empathy, that play part in conveying information in public discourse. During political and public discourses, reasoning and emotion widen deliberative perspectives (Neblo as cited by Sass and Dryzek 2024, 885). Culture and reason are not far opposites, but are rather interconnected and dependent on each other (Nussbaum 2003, Helm 2001; Jasper 2018; Neblo 2020 as cited by Sass and Dryzek 2024, 885). There is again a paradoxical element to this, as emotional influence can make people behave both emphatic or inconsiderate towards others (883). There is however a difference to be pointed out. Whereas non-democratic, or anti-deliberative emotional performativity used within political discourse merely directs receivers into a certain political or social direction, democratic or deliberative emotional performative moments advocate for reflection and establishment of empathy for potential other perspectives through 'inclusive deliberation'. The receiver becomes an active participant within democratic performative acts. By engaging audiences, political grounds are built through reasoned persuasions (888) in which emotions, such as empathy, are important elements. Emotion and reason should not be seen as two ends of a spectrum, but rather as spheres that can overlap within certain spaces. The role of culture and festivalmakers can be understood as taking place in these overlapping spaces, merging both reason and emotion as potential means to activate people in deliberation processes.

Conclusion chapter 2.1

In conclusion, these paragraphs have shown how starting from the rather complex terminology of 'democracy' and 'un-democracy', a non-institutional perspective can help to grasp how festivalmakers can play a role in facilitating and contributing to more inclusive deliberative processes through both reason and emotion. Democracy understood through Sen's approach of public reasoning, behaviors and lived experience (2009), and Young's understanding of group

differentiation and practical reasoning (2022) opens pathways to a more comprehensive and pragmatic understanding of the terms introduced. A large question lies in the potentially self-destructive nature of democracy itself and its relation to authoritarianism. This relation can be described as being rather straightforward and present in daily life, rather than merely being part of a hidden agenda from certain politicians. Democracy and non-democracy should not be seen as two ends of a spectrum, or one being the solution to the other, as pointed out by Bonet and Zamorano (2020). Both, and their interconnectedness, should be considered when analyzing a specific context. A major critique of the terms used lies in their normativity and seemingly Eurocentric origins. Democracy's normative or exclusionary elements are important (historical) critiques in this discourse. Sen is quick to dispute any Euro- or Western claims on the process we now call democracy (2009). Last, we can start to understand festivals as spaces with a potential to facilitate democratic and deliberative discourse, in which festivalmakers play a crucial role in shaping these spaces through the overlapping spaces of emotion and reason. Their position as creators of cultural, and artistic spaces contains overlapping possibilities with the characteristics of media as proposed by Sen (2009). Building on the work of Sass and Dryzek (2024), the aesthetic and emotional characteristics often assigned to festivals and the cultural sector more broadly, should not be separated from reason and its political associations. Building forward on these qualities, there lies the question if festivalmakers can extend their influence to reason and activate public discussion through facilitating the political emancipation of public- and practical reasoning, through overlapping the spheres of reason and emotion. This question can be seen as a path leading to the search of different relations between festivalmakers and other actors operating in the same environments. If festivalmakers can indeed extend their influence, how does this shape potential (new) connections, relations and tensions?

1.2 - Actor-Network Theory

In order to make a thorough analysis of the operations, connections and behaviors happening in the field of festivals in relation to (un-)democracy, I will make use of research practices and perspectives from Actor-Network Theory. A more detailed and critically formulated image of the understanding of relations between festivalmakers and other actors operating in contexts of un-democracy, will give insight into the research question. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) gives various approaches and perspectives to understand these types of relations. The next paragraphs start with an introduction to ANT, and the key elements related to the topics and questions of this thesis. After this, a section follows dealing with a number of themes related to the question of (un-)democracy and festival making and culture more broadly. These themes are the basis for the codebook, coding and following analysis, which will be covered in chapters 2 and 3.

The social, cultural and political space is a dynamic web in which various actors operate, communicate and create different types of associations with other actors (Michael 2017). Together they form a web in which each actor takes up certain roles. This approach of understanding social phenomena is also referred to as Actor-Network theory, an approach that aims to understand how actors, both human and non-human, handle influence and their positions within an environment and in relation to other actors. Through this handling of influence, patterns might occur, which built structures within society (Michael 2017).

By looking at how and why actors connect, we can get an understanding of the operations happening in a certain context. In his book "Reassembling the social: an introduction to Actor-Network-Theory" (2005), Bruno Latour sets the basis of this approach and proposes an

understanding of sociology, being the 'tracing of associations' rather than the 'science of the social' (12). Latour argues that the social space is a result of the associations instead of the starting point of actions and relations (246-247). This implies that societies are constantly in the process of re-formulating themselves, adjusting and upholding various connections between the various actors involved. By tracing associations, or connections between actors, we can start to gain an understanding of the underlying principles of so-called social spaces, rather than merely looking at the thing or actor itself. This can bring us new understandings of how and why actors are situated within their context.

Tracing and unveiling connections makes the social space more graspable (247). Latour describes the social as 'a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes' (73). This implies that the social space is not static or a given structure, but subject to change and interaction between actors. Actors are constantly shifting through moments of associations, constantly re-formulating shapes and contexts. This means that researchers cannot simply limit actors to ideal types, but rather should facilitate the space for actors to create their own worlds and (re-)define social spaces and analyze these formations and understanding processes critically.

Michael uses the term 'constructed knowledge' to talk about the process in which scientists have been creating knowledge in a constructive manner, including non-human actors, instead of a solid or objective manner (2017). Including the non-human as being a potential actor within a web of associations does not only allow for a multitude of perspectives and positions to be included in analysis, it also emphasizes the dynamic nature of webs and how influence and impact are able to shift around within a social space. This influences our understanding of 'social', expanding to non-human actors such as plants, other animals but also the environment and technologies. Being aware of the *how* of knowledge, helps us with the analysis of the social as such.

Actors all have their own relations and positions in a social web. These differ not only in type but also in extent. Michael mentions that there are differences in 'length of associations' between actors, and society emerges to be a rather 'flat network of associations' (2017). This also implies the possibility for actors to be involved in webs without actively wanting to or without full awareness of their impact and associations in certain discourses. This involves both actors who have already been participating in the web and those who happened to become part of it through relations and interactions (Latour 2005, 247).

In short, Actor Network Theory is used with this thesis as a tool to get a better understanding of how we can understand relations and associations within a certain environment. It also indicates how these webs or environments should be understood as moving and changing as a result of new actors entering the field, changing behavior, cutting ties and other ways of influencing other actors.

1.2.2 - A rather fragile web

Social webs are fragile. The fragility of the web in which festivalmakers operate is important to emphasize as there are two potential effects. On the one hand, it creates often forgotten or overlooked positions of impact and influence. Being aware of the impact of actors, which otherwise would be understood as less impactful or even passive, one can become more aware of the interconnectedness of actors and how different associations operate in a more layered

way. On the other hand, due to the potential of change, various actors have the space to take over parts of the web, to sabotage or disrupt connections, and re-frame positions by creating new types of associations or by intensifying their influence. This comes largely down to the idea of power, and the question whether power is merely handled by a small set of actors or by a larger group. ANT does not understand power to be possessed by actors, but is more interested in how the various actors exercise their influence, handle resources and how their connections look like (Micheal 2017). By tracing these, one can see if patterns and organized structures merge over time, and how easily connections and structures are broken down if actors start to behave in different ways.

As the nature of webs can be both dynamic and fragile, this can create paradoxical positions for festivalmakers. On the one hand, it is a recognition of the impact festivalmakers can make. It legitimizes the resilience of festivalmakers within challenging contexts that are marked by for example censorship and other political or social interventions. On the other hand, it also emphasizes that various actors have influence and are able to reconstruct (or de-construct) large parts of a web without conversation happening with (all of the) other actors in the same web. The environment in which festivalmakers operate is subject to rather intense, and potentially, seemingly sudden changes made by for example political actors. Societal change through influence is not only the result of actions by political actors but also festivalmakers, artists, audiences, private actors and others.

The understandings of democracy as proposed by Sen (2009) and Young, fit well in this way of understanding societies and the relations between actors that shape them. ANT focusses on the actual behaviors and decisions made by actors in a given context, rather than merely looking at institutional systems or structures. In a similar line, Sen proposes an understanding of democracy through looking outside institutional approaches and looking at the behaviours and positions people act out and take within societies. Young emphasizes the importance of the presence of the plural, differentiated groups being involved in the decision making process, and how these relate to, and are defined by each other.

Friction and (dis)agreement between festivalmakers and other actors are always present. Shifts in how influence is being handled can be especially noticeable when looking at the relations and decisions made in contexts that are marked by un-democratic tendencies and practices. However, not all of these tensions might be clear from the surface already. By looking at how these relations and tensions look in different contexts, be it strictly authoritarian or more nuanced cases, we expect to be able to develop an understanding of the various ways in which actors negotiate their position in order to eventually find thematics of the qualities of these tensions in order to describe these.

Conclusion chapter 1.2

In this section, a brief overview of the Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005, Michael 2017) has been provided. Through this approach, we can start to understand the role of festivalmakers as active actors within the field of culture and (un)democracy and better understand their possible ways of behaviour, connections and influence. These connections and positions are, even though active, to be understood as dynamic and fragile rather than a given.

1.3 - Culture, festivals and politics: Literature and practices from the field

A number of scholars have developed themes related to tensions between festivalmakers, and other workers in the cultural sector, in relation to un-democracy and democracy. Even though this thesis focuses on festivalmakers operating within un-democratic contexts, it is also important to take into account concepts regarding democracy, as the two are frequently found hand in hand within literature dealing with for example authoritarianism or other non-democratic structures. The following section covers a number of cases and themes dealing with the cultural sector, focusing on festivals, in relation to democracy and un-democracy covering a large variety of contexts. Themes are diverse and include for example questions about places where democracy is showing its signs of instability, as for instance is happening in some European countries (Bonet and Zamorano 2020), responses from the cultural sector as covered by Siriwanij who writes about the cultural sector in Thailand in terms of raising a 'non-army' and the importance of platforms (2023), Yakoub and Hammami who deal with the relations between European audiences and festivals and the political situation of Tunisia (2016), and Pahwa and Winegar who examine post-revolution Egypt (2022). All these different contexts showcase the diversity of how festivalmakers and other actors are associated with each other, and how influence is being handled in this sector on a local, national and global scale. The literature review below sets out a first set of themes that forms the foundation of the codebook and coding phase, and is used to mirror back to during the analysis of the data and discussion of the findings.

1.3.1 - Festivals as 'free spaces'

Before discussing the set of themes found in the literature dealing with festivalmakers and undemocratic tendencies, it is important to create an understanding of the position of festivals within the discourse on democracy and un-democracy; be it in promoting democratic values, strengthening anti-democratic agendas or operating in a space of in-between. The understanding of festivals as free- or democratic spaces should be considered and analyzed critically. Not only because internally organizational structures can be based on non-democratic principles, or when analyzing audiences and curation from an outside perspective, but the context itself impacts organizational decision making when it comes to for example audience and staff safety within authoritarian (leaning) contexts.

The idea of festivals being spaces of freedom is quite strongly established. In their chapter on 'Festivals: Between Sacred Ritual and the Consumerist Profane', Kuligowski and Poprawski take a look at how festivals have been conceptualized. They mention Caillois, who stated 'that during the festival "normal" rules are suspended'. Adding that 'freedom of manners is recommended and 'dietary and sexual sacrilege, forbidden and extravagant behavior' as well as 'contrary acts' are accepted' (Caillois as cited by Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023, 15). This suggests that festivals are spaces in which almost everything that is normally not allowed in the public space, is now allowed. This type of understanding is largely connected to the idea of work, as understood in terms of rules and structure, and leisure, as understood in terms of freedom and relaxation, as pointed out by Kuligowski and Poprawski (2023, 16). Even older approaches to festivals and the behaviour of people within these spaces as described by Fasassi in 1987 as a 'special reality', 'allowing for a 'celebration of life' or a 'time out of time' moment (as cited Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023, 18). The behavior of those entering such a space could, according to this line of thought, be described as behaving outside of the norms, extreme or against the set standards or

regulations that are present in 'normal' daily life, which is an understanding of festivals that needs to be critically analysed (Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023).

Even though one might find elements of the described characteristics above on (some) festivals, even within strong democratic contexts with large amounts of freedom and the acceptance of diversity in actions and opinions, this understanding of festivals is not very realistic. In contexts in which un-democratic tendencies take the overhand, I suggest that this is especially not an accurate understanding of festivals and their relation to freedom and democracy, nor how people behave in these spaces. Even though the authors mentioned above mainly focus on audience's their behaviors and interactions, this does also relate to the underlying norms influenced by festivalmakers and the organizational decisions they make. There are two important factors to consider in this process. First, when talking about audience behavior, festivalmakers too set certain norms within these spaces and not all social- and cultural norms from outside that space will simply disappear when entering into a festival space. The behavior of audiences is influenced by festivalmakers who set certain norms through festival's policies and set regulations within the festival space itself. These policies can reflect certain norms of the social environment in which a festival is located, but this is not necessarily the case. Norms are, however, not static. Various actors can influence norms and regulations through interacting with other actors (for example audiences and communities in which festivalmakers are embedded) and the environment they are located in. Second, when looking more closely at the process of decision making and the influence festivalmakers and other actors have, we need to keep in mind that especially in contexts with un-democratic tendencies and authoritarian practices, the physical and non-physical safety of audiences, festivalmakers and other potential stakeholders is one of the most important factors. It would be a misjudgment to understand festivals as spaces that are (merely) organized to enjoy total freedom. Due to these, and potentially a number of other reasons, we should not intrinsically consider festivals as spaces of freedom or democracy, but need to critically examine the influences coming from both the external and internal environment that influence a festival space.

It is not to say that festivals do not have the potential to incorporate democratic principles or have the urge to present themselves as promoting democratic ideas. This is happening in actuality. I observe a certain group of festivalmakers operating within un-democratic contexts that are very much aiming to advocate for these values. Various scholars have attempted to formulate a clear definition of festivals in relation to their outside environment, which often resulted in an oversimplification of festivals as 'free spaces'. Festivals, especially if located in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies, ask for a more nuanced understanding and an analysis of how and why festivalmakers operate in certain ways within these contexts.

1.3.2 - Healthy democracy, culture and society

Festivals, and culture more broadly, can play an important role in creating healthy and balanced democratic societies. In his article on cultural management and healthy democracy, Marcin Poprawski looks for the ways in which "arts and culture systems [are] used to disseminate and validate democratic principles and values" (2022b). He proposes a frame in which the arts, and festivals, function as one of the pillars of a 'healthy democracy'. Here, festivalmakers are part of constant conversations and have healthy associations with for example political actors, audiences, stakeholders and other actors. The main focus is on the role of cultural workers and artists to use their ability to imagine and facilitate artistic experiences as a means to operate in

authoritarian contexts, and uphold democratic values simultaneously (2022b). The arts can be a powerful tool for emancipation, community building and political expression (2022b). This approach suggests the potential of festivals, or more specifically festivalmakers, to take up a more active role if it comes to negotiating space within societies in relation to the democratic discourse. It legitimizes their role as active actors, rather than passively following political interventions and regulations that frame their space institutionally. In this way, we can understand the role of festivals within processes that contribute to the development or maintenance of a healthy democracy.

Management models can tell a lot about how festivalmakers operationalize their influence. By looking at which internal methods they make use of on an organizational level, we can get a better understanding of their influence and associations. There are various management models festivalmakers apply (ibid.). Within some of these models, un-democratic or sometimes even anti-democratic principles can be found. A critical perspective on the organizational side of festivals can help highlight these principles. This also shows the complexity of the question of democracy if it comes to festivals, not only as a context to operate in, but also as an element within the organizational structures within the sector itself. The context in which these actors are operating can be described as pressuring, and with relatively short time lines, which often asks for quick decision making, resulting in less democratic conversation or meaningful collaboration (ibid.). This is likely to loop back into how societies deal with democracy on a broader level. When there are 'organizations that are democratic, we are more likely to perform in democratic ways in society' (ibid.) and vice versa. This matter is not exclusive to festival management, but found in organizational matters in all kinds of fields. The organizational structures applied by festivalmakers is another way in which we can get a better understanding of how this group of actors understands questions of democracy within society and their work.

In short, festivalmakers, being part of the cultural field, have the potential to be active actors in the discourse on democracy and non-democracy. First of all, viewing festivalmakers as having an influence 'outwards' and creating impact in society. Through taking up an active role in these conversations in society, festivalmakers can contribute to developments of a healthy democracy. Second, by looking 'inwards' to organizational structures and models in which there (is a lack of) focus on democratic processes within the festival structure. Internal and external environments, which influence each other, can be understood as indicators of ideas such as contributing to a more healthy democracy, or strengthening undemocratic tendencies.

1.3.3 - Political actors and cultural policies

There is another entrance to the discussion on interconnectedness of festivals and the question of democracy and un-democracy, namely the instrumentalization of festivals, and thus festivalmakers, by political actors and their political objectives. Shortly mentioned by Kuligowski and Poprawski is the concept of the 'festivalization of politics', which was initially coined by Häussermann and Siebel in the 1990s (2023, 22). They point to the phenomenon in which political actors utilize festival characteristics such as community building and influence festivals can have on large audiences, for their own political ideology and agendas. In more recent research, nationalism, illiberalism and forms of censorship are prominent findings in European case studies (e.g. Bonet and Zamorano 2020). The observed trend of leaning to a more 'homogeneous and conservative understanding of culture' (Bonet and Zamorano 2020) is another prominent finding in this field of research. Bonet and Zamorano observe the development of illiberal policies

including 'delegated censorship' and xenophobia in their comparative study of Hungary and Poland (2020). Here, they examine the various cultural policies created by the two respective governments to enhance a more homogeneous understanding of societies (2020). These policies include a more noticeable censorship in the arts. They differentiate between 'direct censorship' found in cultural strategies as being part of totalitarian or anti-democratic practices (p563) and indirect- or 'delegated censorship' as a result of policies aiming to increase self-censorship (p563). In these contexts, illiberalism is fueled by policies that decrease diversity and break down more plural understandings of culture and arts. Political actors are influencing, and making use of festivalmakers in various ways in order to promote their own political agendas.

The organization of festivals and other (large scale) events is a popular tool for political actors, with possibly an un-democratic or even anti-democratic underlying reasonings and- or effects. National celebrations, as mentioned by Maryia Rohava, are often used as a strategic tool to glorify and strengthen certain political identities and narratives (2020). In her research, Rohava deals with citizens' understanding of celebrational events in Belarus, and how they relate themselves to these 'symbolic events'. This 'symbolic politics' which is happening through national celebrational events, is being used to 'reaffirm existing political hierarchies and provide visible affirmations of popular consent' (Rohava 2020, 884). One of the most prominent examples of the use of symbolic politics and mass movements or 'nationalization of the masses' in European history are the large-scale public- and cultural events which happened in Nazi Germany (a topic covered by Mosse, cited by Rohava 2020, 885). Cultural policies are often used by political actors as tools to strengthen their political ideology (Bonet and Zamorano 2020). It is important to point out that both in democratic and non-democratic contexts cultural policies (or the lack of them) are reflections of a certain type of political belief. Events and festivals can be utilized by political actors for various reasons, one of them being the reaffirmation of a certain nationalistic understanding of societies which can cause a more limited and homogeneous understanding of cultures and societies, and eventually limit participation in public debate and reasoning for either one selected group or on a larger societal scale.

The presence of policies aiming to suppress certain types of cultural expressions is not uncommon in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies. Instead of enhancing one type of cultural understanding, political actors are also influencing the cultural- and festival sector with political interventions (Poprawski 2022) such as budget cuts that target specific communities within a society, policies that aim to regulate programming or other actions that influence festivalmakers their influence, position and connections. This type of direct influence coming from political actors directed at festivalmakers is likely to be found in already stronger leaning authoritarian contexts, in which influence and decision-making is often largely centralized. However, this type of influence and behavior coming from political actors can be found in various contexts and in a large variety of manners. Suppressive policies targeting festivalmakers, and cultural workers who aim to work independently, is a common phenomenon in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies.

Concluding, research shows various ways in which political actors are pushing cultural policies that include forms of censorship, festivalization of politics, national celebrations and other political interventions in order to promote (illiberal or un-democratic) political agendas. Political actors seem well aware of the position of (large scale) cultural events such as festivals, and are both making use of the characteristics these events have, and have been suppressing festivalmakers and cultural workers in various ways, aiming to strengthen their own political agenda.

1.3.4 - Responses and relations in un-democratic contexts

Research also looks at how festivalmakers operate, connect and respond within contexts that are characterized by un-democratic tendencies and practices as described in the previous sections. Most research focuses on festivals that aim to counter a (undemocratic) government or ideology within the given context or country (e.g. Đurić et al. 2022, Girardot 2024, Siriwanij 2023). Second, research also covers a strand of festivals and cultural practices which aim to facilitate public reasoning outside traditional political structures (e.g. Bird 2017). Last, authors and cultural workers also ask themselves the question if, and how they can work either partially (e.g. Siriwanij 2023, Girardot 2024) or fully (e.g. Pahwa & Winegar 2022) independently from governmental institutions within oppressive contexts, and what actions are needed to achieve this position.

The relations to stakeholders and direct environment are important factors influencing the position of festivalmakers within a society, such as in developments around protest oriented-festivals. The term protestivals (St John, as cited by Đurić et al. 2022, 222) is used in the analysis of festivals and the understanding of behaviors and actions taken by festivalmakers in these contexts. Protestivals are festivals who are taking a clear, typically opposing, stance on the political events happening with their direct (or non-direct) environment. These festivals oftentimes originated out of protest events such as demonstrations (ibid.). In their article, Đurić et al. give an in-depth analysis of the changing position of EXIT festival in Serbia, by looking at how various stakeholders relate and understand the changing nature of the festival over time (2022). Being positioned in the discourse on event management, they propose a conceptual model covering the events' past, present and future. First that of organizational change and protest events, second that of a stakeholders perspective in relation to collective action, and third that of social and cultural change within the environment (226). Even though over time the festival has gradually changed its focus from campaigning and protest, which are still important elements, commercialization and profit have grown into the festival's organizational model (232). Đurić et al. notice that stakeholders are creating new types of understanding of the festival, now moving towards having shared characteristics with the political field they initially countered. In addition, they observe the understanding of stakeholders who see that the festival, instead of focusing on more local issues, now puts emphasis on international questions. They point out the potential contradictions this creates with the initial origins of the festival. This type of critical analysis showcases associations happening between stakeholders and festivalmakers on a temporal and political level. The conclusions made by Đurić et al. showcase how the understandings of stakeholders influence the functioning of festivals and the position festivalmakers have as actors in discourses on political and democratic issues.

Research is also looking into the potential of arts and festivals to facilitate public reasoning outside of institutional political structures. In her article 'Rethinking the Role of the Arts in politics: Lessons from the Négritude Movement', Gemma Bird argues that arts and culture can be understood as a powerful means for political engagement (2017). Bird highlights the importance of cultural communities and art as active actors within the political landscape, describing them as crucial responders on cultural policy making and political figures. Her focus is on the potential of culture and art as means to partake in political debate and discussion within societies of political dis-trust. Within these contexts, she understands the role of cultural communities as a means to engage politically in alternative ways, rather than through institutional means. This relates to an understanding of democracy happening not only within institutional voting structure, but within daily activity and through participating in public reasoning and conversation. Here,

connections can be made to the concept of healthy democracy, as discussed earlier in this thesis. There is however a difference as within these contexts, cultural actors are operating outside institutional structures, and rather aim to contribute to democratic forms of society in non-institutional forms and without necessarily connecting them to governmental structures. The potential of arts and culture to enhance political participation, democracy and potentially countering un-democratic practices and tendencies through facilitating alternative ways to partake in political debate, is another approach to the role and influence festivalmakers can have in the discourse on democracy and non-democracy.

Globally, festivalmakers are activating themselves in response to political interventions affecting their sector, aiming to strengthen their position and increase their influence. This happens both through the formation of for example unions (Girardot 2024) or by activating conversations about the influence and position festivalmakers and other cultural workers have (Siriwanij 2023). In her article, Siriwanij lays out the complexities of the cultural sector, mainly focusing on theatre workers in contemporary Thailand (2023). She describes Thailand being in an unstable political position, mainly centered around a military and the royal family's wellbeing instead of that of the people (ibid.). For the cultural sector in these types of regimes, this often implies that there is a low appreciation of the arts which take either a different, or critical focus on the established rule. Cultural workers and the arts that operate largely independent from institutional entities are therefore often simply neglected and kept seemingly unnoticed or ignored (Ibid.). Siriwanij describes that grants and subsidies are 'rare and arbitrary' (11) and governmental funding and recognition only comes once international recognition has been achieved (ibid.). The government's focus on the arts and creative workers is reserved for those who operate within the lines of the government's rather nationalistic and conservative regulations, a political focus Siriwanij refers to as being related to the concept of 'heimat' (10). As a response to these conditions, a sense of 'de-heimatization' can be found in new tendencies and actions from cultural workers in Thailand. However, as Siriwanij points out, this de-heimatization should not be understood in terms of battling against regime regulations but rather in terms of 'go[ing] around the lines and employ[ing] curves and de-tours' (13). She adds that 'if you smile everything away. If you reveal nothing in front of them but keep beefing up your work in places where their narrow vision cannot reach' (13), there is a potential to be effective and create a sense of independence or distance. This is what Siriwanij refers to as 'raising a non-army' (2023). Instead of confronting political actors, cultural workers are finding ways outside institutional practices. The organization and facilitation of spaces for reason and active conversation are important in these non-institutional ways of 'non-fighting'. Siriwanij emphasizes the importance of these spaces specifically for those working in less recognized positions in the cultural sector such as technicians, production members and other less visible workers (16). One can observe various ways in which cultural workers and festivalmakers are activating themselves in response to institutional and governmental interventions in the field, these activations can be both clearly visible, or deliberately 'hidden' and for the outside seemingly passive.

The question whether it is possible to maintain a functioning arts and festival sector without any state support and connection, remains a topic of conversation on both a local and international level. Within certain contexts, festivalmakers are working or aim to work completely independently from institutional and governmental structures as a result of not wanting to give in to strict censorship and political oppression. Focusing on the post-revolutionary Egypt, Pahwa and Winegar give insight into the overlapping fields of culture and politics and how the two are interconnected though, for example, centralized ministries of culture (2022). They cover the complexities of state support for the arts, mentioning that on the one hand state support can

create more freedom to the arts, creating independence from commercialization, and not having to deal with market pressure or audience demands (201). On the other hand, this does allow for political agendas to influence artists and cultural professionals instead (201). These structures are a relatively easy subject to corruption through the mis-use of public money and powerplay from political actors, regardless of theoretical solutions such as rotation in committees or other committee criteria. Often the role of the state within culture and arts as protectors or supporters for national heritage is put forward. However, Pahwa and Winegar observe a lack of productivity from the Egyptian cultural ministries on this matter, and call for more transparency from the ministry in general (201). Regardless of the various ways in which the Egyptian state is lacking to support the cultural sector, there is still much appeal to keep this structure in place as it does take away the market principles which, for example, heavily impact cultural workers in the USA (201). In the case of post-revolution Egypt, Pahwa and Winegar observe a growing amount of conversation happening both within institutional and non-institutional settings, discussing how to move forwards with a new cultural policy and structure (202). Here, themes such as public-private partnerships and changing relations between independent artists and state are the main topics discussed within a context still influenced by (past) authoritarian influences (202). Critical voices from the cultural sector emphasize that freedom of expression is not sufficient, (financial) support is needed to set up productions, and vice versa. During heavily restricted times, artists, cultural workers and festivalmakers have attempted to organize culture either by aiming to avoid political agendas while making use of funding, or without state support, if their goals do not align with that of the ministry of culture (203). When running a cultural organization without state support, active local communities are an important factor in sustaining grassroot, or independent organizations. Additionally, foreign funding and collaboration, which however comes with the risk of surveillance and state control, and private funders are often mentioned within these contexts (203). However, national funding is, at least for Egyptian artists, often still the manner through which support is found, due to the contextualization their work is often rooted in, which is difficult to translate to international audiences and supporters (203). The work of independent artists and cultural workers is very much intertwined with that of the state, through censorship, surveillance, funding and mutual status and support. This might suggest that independent artists are forced to agree with the 'devil's bargain' (207), but Pahwa and Winegar also observe a new generation of artists who start to question this approach, mentioning that 'full censorship not only makes no sense but is also impossible to truly execute.' (207). This fuels a new approach, that regardless of the presence of state influence on the independent sector, does open new pathways for independent festivals and arts. These observations highlight how discussions on the topic of independence and state support are an ongoing process, in which specific conditions are crucial factors within these conversations.

This section covered a number of questions regarding festivalmakers and creatives operating in more strictly un-democratic contexts. There is a strand of research dealing with festivals who take a clear and open stance against un-democratic or anti-democratic governmental agendas, through the concepts of protestivals (Đurić et al. 2022) and the formation of unions (Girardot 2024). But also through more hidden ways (Siriwanij 2023) and by finding alternative ways to facilitate public reasoning (Bird 2017). Going one step further, there is a strand of research focusing on possibilities to operate completely independent from any governmental or institutional relations and support (Pahwa & Winegar 2022).

1.3.5 - Not our problem, or is it?

One can observe a group of festivalmakers that is aiming to facilitate discussion about un-democratic tendencies happening outside their direct environment to their audiences and communities, through for example programming performances coming from autocratic contexts, or critical voices questioning undemocratic tendencies happening either within the context where the festival is taking place or elsewhere. This has certain consequences for the understanding created by audiences and other actors interacting with festivalmakers. Here, the concept of Fragile democracy, as mentioned by Yakoub and Hammami (2016), is a useful concept. Yakoub and Hammami give a reading of the performances- and possible understandings of the Moussem City @ Tunis Festival in Brussels, Belgium (2020). They highlight some of the connections between censorship, the transitioning of autocracy and the idea of a 'fragile democracy'. Within connecting these, they focus on how these connections influence various artists, guest-curators and the audiences, or interpreters, of the festival. Their reading of the festival takes a critical perspective, pointing to post-colonial histories and relations which influence the different interpretations of various actors and how this shapes the interplay between these actors. By taking this critical perspective on the Western understanding of Tunisia, they lay bare another type of associations happening between various actors, in this case the connections and influence happening between festivalmakers and interpreters of the festival. These interpreters are, due to curational decisions, now dealing with the topic of un-democracy originating outside of their direct environment (country, region etc.). Yakoub and Hammami fear for the potential that audiences interpret narratives fueling a 'democratic illusion' due to the post-colonial ideas about cannons and societies (2020). They advocate for 'a more subversive contribution to the construction of a new social consciousness on the ruins of the autocratic regime' which could create "renewed forms of contemporary collectivity and community". Fragile democracy highlights, similar to the idea of healthy democracy, the need to maintain democracy actively. But Yakoub and Hammami go one step further, including the relations and understanding made by audiences and other actors that are starting to get involved in certain matters of democracy as a result of, in this case, festivalmakers programming certain shows, or due to other curational choices. These cases deal with other people's democracy or non-democracy. Understanding democracy as fragile, or delegate, especially in cultural and artistic translations, means that narratives can be mis-understood or taken out of its actual contexts if not communicated properly. These international or global, cross-regional ties bring out a type of relation that is both socio-cultural and geopolitical. Yakoub and Hammami suggest methods such as delinking and de-centering to (re)construct these other types of relations and collectives (2022). These methods can be used by festivalmakers to bring in questions of democracy and un-democracy happening in other parts of the globe to their own context, taking into account the fragility of these questions and with performances that interact with these themes. The idea of fragile democracy can help us understand the processes happening as a result of curational choices from festivalmakers that bring in a ('new' or different) set of questions that deal with democracy and un-democracy happening outside ones' direct environment.

Conclusion chapter 1.3

This chapter covered various ways in which festivalmakers play a role and relate to other actors in the discourse surrounding democracy and un-democracy. Festivalmakers have entered the conversation about democracy in a number of ways; both in terms of developing or maintaining democracy further, and as a result of the lack of it in their direct (or not so direct) environment.

The idea of a festival as a 'free space' should be reconsidered critically (Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023), especially in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies. This does, however, not take away the potential of festivalmakers to contribute to the development or maintenance to democratic processes as discussed by looking at the concept of healthy democracy (Poprawski 2022a). One can observe phenomena such as a festivalization of politics (Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023), or other uses of instrumentalization of festival- and cultural characteristics by political actors (Rohava 2020), which frames festivalmakers into having certain supposed, positions, influences and connections (or lack of them) in a given context. As a response, festivalmakers have taken up various actions in order to counter (Đurić et al. 2022), find alternative means to facilitate public reasoning (Bird 2017), strengthen their positions (Girardot 2024) or find independent positions (Pahwa and Winegar 2022). Last, one can observe a tendency in which festivalmakers bring in the question of democracy or the lack of it, from another context into their own, which has effects on various actors in the direct environment of the festival. There is a fragile nature to this last tendency as discussed by Yakoub and Hammami (2016).

Implications following chapter 1

Continuing further based on the conclusions and observations described above, there is a need to broaden the way in which we understand festivalmakers and their involvement within the question of (non-)democracy by including both a local-global and local-national perspective. Festivals can take up questions of (non-)democracy happening both in the country or context they are directly located in, but also those frictions happening in other contexts by curating performances from other countries and places. With making the decision to involve oneself with events happening in other geographical places, in this case a choice made by festivalmakers, these two (or more) contexts are no longer separate. This has certain consequences for the other actors operating in the contexts the festival is located in, such as audiences but also political and public actors. With the appearance of these questions on festivals and their now active involvements within another's un-democratically marked contexts, we cannot only limit our analysis to associations happening within the context or space in question. Behaviors are (now also) happening on a local – global level, which on its own influences the national level through types of associations and influence through for example media, demonstrations or other. This does mean that in order to fully grasp the behaviors, associations and handling of influence of festivalmakers, the analysis made in this thesis needs to include these types of actions and thus the inclusion of both a local-global and local-national lens.

2 - Methodology and data

The second chapter of this thesis covers the research methodology and collection of data. First, an overview will be given of the selected research participants and the process behind the selection. Second, an introduction to the research ethics and methodology will follow. Here, I focus on the potential of democratic research methodologies and approaches, and doing research 'with' instead of 'about' people by referring to Hall, Godrie, and Heck (2022) and their discussion on Knowledge democracy, and Beuving and de Vries entry into Naturalistic inquiry (2015a) and casual conversation (2015b). Third, a discussion about the method used will be presented, introducing casual conversation as a possible method to engage more democratically

with research participants within research that deals with potentially sensitive data. Fourth, more information about the structuration of the data and analysis will be provided. The last two sections present researcher positionality and more general limitations of the research.

2.1 - Selection of festivalmakers

All research participants are currently actively working as festivalmakers and live or have lived in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies. Within the selection process, the focus was on selecting people from various geographical places worldwide. Festivalmakers originally coming from 6 different countries have accepted my invitation, namely from Iran, Syria, Serbia, the USA, Senegal and Poland. Two people are originally from Iran. Those coming from Iran and Syria no longer live in these countries, but have actively worked in the cultural sector and festivalmaking before they moved abroad. In addition, the research participant from Poland has also lived and worked in the cultural sector in the USA. I have reached out to a small number of other people, but for various reasons they could not partake in this research.

Most of the research participants were selected in collaboration with The Festival Academy (TFA), an non-profit organization based in Brussels, Belgium. They have facilitated contact details and have introduced me to a number of research participants for the research. The other research participants have been selected based on recommendation of personal contacts and through meetings on conferences and other events. Even though a number of research participants have been selected in collaboration with TFA, their participation in the research should not have any negative influence on their relations to TFA or the research. The research has been designed and carried out independent from TFA. This, and their other rights as a research participant have been stated clearly in the information brochure they received at the start of the research. Selection criteria are deliberately broad, in order to investigate a wide variety of contexts that showcase undemocratic tendencies and interactions between the actors in the environment.

Out of safety considerations, no festivalmakers who are currently living in regions governed by strict authoritarian regimes have been asked to participate in this research. More information on the research ethics and data security can be found below.

Most research participants wished for their full name to be mentioned within the research. Two research participants only wished for their first name and the initials of their family name to be mentioned. Aiming to respect accreditation of knowledge, I followed these wishes. Within the included cases and form of presentation, I did not see any high risks as a result of including their names. Furthermore, I choose not to mention any of the festivals they work for in connection to the quotes used, as I do not see how this information contributes to the research question.

2.2 - Introduction to Research ethics and methodology: casual conversation

In an attempt to uphold democratic values, take into consideration research ethics, safety regulations for research participants, and to gain insights into the tensions happening between festivalmakers and other actors, I have opted for casual conversation as a means for data collection. Below, I set out a short introduction on knowledge democracy and casual conversation, and elaborate on the underlying principles the research approach is built on.

Research ethics and safety regulations have been kept in mind when designing the research methodology. This already started before reaching out to potential research participants due to potential personal and political impacts when partaking in this research. The Data Research Management Plan (DRMP) and research ethics were finalized with assistance and recommendations of the UG Ethics Committee (CETO). The DRMP is not included in this thesis, but can be requested.

In their article, Hall, Godrie, and Heck discuss the idea of ‘knowledge democracy’ for participatory research (2020). Putting into conversation their interpretations on knowledge equality, epistemic inequalities and participatory research practices, they ask if instead of speaking about or on behalf of someone, we can speak *with* someone. The framework they propose centers around five key concepts namely; looking into ethics and values, understanding of power relations in collaborations, making use of various modes of research, establishing a balance between theory and practice, and understanding the role of the researcher to be that of a facilitator (2020, 39). The research design aims to keep these concepts in mind. Although aiming for a more democratic mode of knowledge creation, it was not feasible to activate all of these concepts within this research, or only to a certain extent due to time limitation and practical considerations. This thesis focuses on ethics and values, power relations and understanding the role of the researcher, by actively engaging and opening discussions with research participants and for example informing myself on the geo-political and historical contexts of the cases discussed.

Second, Hall, Godrie, and Heck refer to Knowledge Democracy as one’s ability to “produce, share and consume information and understanding acquired by education or experience”, in both an academic and social-political context (2020, 35). This implies a plurality of knowledge both in how knowledge is created and its representation. Last, Hall, Godrie, and Heck point towards the importance of openness and the protection of ownership rights (2020). These topics and potential implications of knowledge creation, documentation and credit through the awareness of plurality and a sense of intimacy of knowledge have shaped the research design in a number of ways. There is a large variety of geographical and thematic focusses within the group of selected festivalmakers. Due to this diversity in different voices and perspectives, there is also a need to highlight accreditation and the position of these different research participants, while keeping in mind safety and data security. From the beginning, research accreditation and data security have been clearly identified and communicated with research participants by giving them the choice how they want to fill in this question.

In ‘On Naturalistic inquiry: Key Issues and Practices’, Beuving and de Vries cover the practices and key concepts of interpretivist, or naturalist inquiry, in social research. Instead of expecting law-like principles as assumed by a positivist way of thinking, naturalist inquiry “adopts the view that social order follows from how humans understand their situation and act upon that” (Athens as cited by Beuving and de Vries 2015a, 28). It aims to study social life as it happens, rather than controlling it (Beuving and de Vries 2015a). The selection of research participants follows as a result of looking into a topic and matching participants accordingly (*idem.*). Beuving and de Vries point out the importance of awareness of language and the recognition that language is not neutral. As they argue, language stems from people’s everyday lives, meaning it is not freed from any related issues. In relation to research, they advocate for the differences in use of terminology as a place of entry rather than a trigger for terminological struggle. Regarding research methods that align the naturalist line of thought, Beuving and de Vries conclude by asking themselves if “not every day casual conversation [is] the most naturalistic way of interviewing, or rather of not

interviewing, but talking about society?” (2015b, 110). Instead of hoping to find a specific answer through systematic methods, they propose ‘casual conversation’ as a means to formulate knowledge through being open to new avenues and let conversations develop themselves. Within the context of this research, aiming to find ways to understand the qualities of tensions, rather than the themes these tensions are based on, casual conversation as a means of naturalistic inquiry also helps to focus less on festivalmakers and their characteristics, but rather their understanding of situations and relations. Situations and one’s (understanding of a) position, as mentioned by Beuving and de Vries (2015a) within a certain context suggest different relations and influences happening, which can potentially tell us more about the qualities of these tensions.

There are overlaps to be found in the ideas on Knowledge democracy, as covered by Hall, Godrie, and Heck (2022), and the naturalistic approach of casual conversation as introduced by Beuving and de Vries (2015a, 2015b). Both reflect on the idea that knowledge can be created and found in the interaction of people within everyday settings. In both means of creating or documenting knowledge, there is a call for personal connection and the awareness of how a relation between researcher and research participant is set up, its potential power dynamics and the setting in which the data collection takes place.

The ideas and concepts mentioned above, explain the underlying principles used in setting up this research, aiming for a naturalistic approach that upholds democratic values in itself as far as this is possible within the context of this thesis. In addition, considering research participant safety and research ethics, and the question of credit and knowledge democracy. The ideas discussed in this section have actively shaped the research approach during the meetings with festivalmakers. Therefore these meetings have been approached as conversations rather than formal interviews. Together with research participants, I have actively reflected on terminology and language both during and after the meeting. As this research aims to understand how we can understand tensions happening in the field of festivals, there are no strict topics or concepts central, but rather I aim to focus on how these tensions are formulated and understood.

Within the context of this research, casual conversation as a means for data collection offers suitable characteristics. First, there is the potential presence of sensitive data and its political and social consequences, meaning it is important to create a research context in which not only research participants feel a sense of safety within the interaction with the researcher, but also limit the amount of people with whom their data is shared. Hence, this research opted for one on one sessions instead of for example focus groups. Second, this method is helpful as the research is focussed on creating understandings of tensions, rather than merely understanding the topics and events on which tensions can be based. This is in contrast to, for example, structured interviews which have more specific focus points set from the beginning of a session. Semi structured interviews could have also enabled insights into the research question, however the natural flow of casual conversation was envisioned to provide more input from participants on thematics and underlying structures. Therefore, causal conversions with keeping in mind ideas on knowledge democracy, open up to finding insights into tensions of both pre-established and new topics and experiences while keeping an eye on data sensitivity.

2.3 - Casual conversation and data collection

The data collection is based on casual conversations with seven festivalmakers, aiming to identify tensions and connections within context marked by undemocratic tendencies. Casual conversation, as introduced and argued for in the previous section, is chosen as a means to collect data, additionally making use of topic lists and reflection sessions. In the following sections, the role of the topic list, possible limitations and implications of casual conversations, and the possible effects of reflection sessions and the importance of reflectivity are discussed.

Topic lists

In preparation for the data collection, both a topic list and case study based research has been prepared for each of the conversations. The topic list does fulfill a similar role to that of for example an interview guide. However, the topic lists were envisioned as a set of themes to fall back on during the conversation and for research participants to get familiar with the research topic beforehand, by formulating a list of rather broad topics and themes (e.g. the cultural sector, cultural policies, centralization, political interventions etc.) In addition, research participants were given the possibility to alter this list, or steer away from this list if during the conversation these turned out irrelevant. The formulations of the topic lists was also a moment within the research which aimed to involve research participants actively. The invitation for the research participants to participate in the creation of the topic lists served on the one hand as a means to increase safety and comfort during the conversations themselves. On the other hand it involved them during the research process, with the aim to increase knowledge democracy. The topic lists differ per conversation in order to adapt to the specific context a festivalmaker was/is located in. The topic lists roughly follow 5 different sections; Social/political context, festivals/cultural sector, threats and challenges, tools/strategies/positions, and organization/curation. This, in order to create a better understanding of the various complications that might be present within the specific contexts. Research participants were able to adjust the topic list freely, and skip certain topics before and/or during the conversations for the sake of safety and/or comfort.

Conversations

Due to the different geographical places research participants were located in, six out of seven conversations took place online. One conversation took place in person. Sessions took between approximately one and one and a half hours and have been recorded using a personal device of the researcher. After the conversations, all recordings have been stored on a secured drive of the University of Groningen. The conversations took place between February and May 2025.

Regardless of the efforts to keep an open approach within the conversations there is always the possibility of bias. On the one hand, the topic lists and preparatory research created the possibility to dive deeper during the conversion by already establishing a certain set of knowledge before the sessions. On the other hand, this could have also created certain understandings and pre-set thematics for each of the cases due to the likely presence of bias within sources and my understanding of these in the context of this research. By actively reflecting on this, and on the previously mentioned issues of research ethics, power relations and the relation between researcher and participant, I have aimed to minimize this bias.

Reflection sessions

Reflection sessions were offered in order to continue the conversation with research participants and give them the possibility to nuance or edit their input, while additionally receiving feedback on the first interpretations of data they brought into the research. This step has two functions. First, involving the research participants further in the research with the aim to create a more shared approach to knowledge and building upon the relation between researcher and research participant. Second, it strengthens the data set by feeding back understandings and analysis of the data with the initial research participants. Research participants mainly reflected back on the data by checking the data and analysis in their own time, and sending feedback e.g. via email, but active sessions focusing on the collected data via video call have also taken place. Some information has been withdrawn or corrected by research participants after the initial conversion (e.g. year-numbering, correcting/taking out names and sections in order to secure safety for colleagues). The inclusion of reflection sessions aims to create a more nuanced data set and create a safer research environment for the participants.

Reflectivity

Reflectivity is also related to research positionality and the reflection on the potentially different meanings and positions of terminology (both in terms of theory and language) within different (geographical) contexts. Reflectivity has been an active mind set in the data collection by reflecting on terminology and definitions with research participants during and after the conversations in order to foster a better understanding of their positions, relations and the tensions between different actors. The term 'democracy' and its relation to the arts, is the most disputed term within this research, as also reflected in the theoretical framework resulting from discussions with participants. In addition to the topic of language and definitions, the data set also asked for a more individual understanding of language with regards to the fact that not all research participants, nor the researcher's native language was English. This means that there might be different definitions and ways of interpreting terminology both during the conversation, the coding process and during the analysis. By reflecting on language differences and placing these within the context of the respective speaker, the research aims to bring a better representation of the data set in the descriptions and analysis. Reflecting on research positionality and the creation of relations as a result of being in conversation is further covered in the section on researcher perspective and positionality. Reflectivity does not mean always completely agreeing and copying research participants' use and way of understanding certain terminology, but rather incorporating their reflections and input on terminology and definitions within the research. Reflectivity in these various forms is an important part of the research process and the formulation of conclusions as it can strengthen both the attempt to democratize the research process, and the data set and analysis itself.

2.4 - Coding and structuration of data

The following section covers the coding phase, including comments on the codebook, codes and code groups, and structuration of data. This section is focused on clarifying relation between the various elements of data collection phase in relation to the coding, in order to lay a foundation for the analysis and findings as presented in chapter 3.

The dataset consists of seven transcripts from recorded conversations with seven festivalmakers coming from six different countries, namely Syria, Iran, Serbia, USA, Senegal and Poland. In order to create insights and formulate an understanding of tensions happening between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies, the transcripts have been coded and structured making use of Atlas.ti. This is a commonly used tool to code and create data overviews in qualitative research as it allows the creation of co-occurrences and demonstrates relations between various codes and/or code groups. The coding phase showed which, and how tensions are described, and how festivalmakers relate themselves to other actors within the environments they operate in. A codebook has been formulated based on the literature, with additional new codes which have been added based on themes and concepts identified during the first round of coding. Within the codebook, as presented in appendix 2, this has been indicated as either coming from 'literature' or as a 'new code' coming from the data. This means there have been two rounds of coding, one with the initial set of codes from the literature, and a second round including new codes. The research profits from the presence of codes from both literature and new, or emerging codes as there is a large variety of different contexts included in the data set. This can ask for a variety of concepts and codes to understand the different, and potentially newly shaped contexts out of which the data originates which might not yet be covered in the literature. The code book serves as a tool to first collect and highlight different occurrences within the data, and then cluster different types of codes indicating tensions, behaviors and influences. The code groups reflect the following sub questions, as presented below, but do not completely mirror these as the research questions and different contexts present within the data ask for a more overlapping approach between these three code groups. The three code groups can be found in table 1.

Sub questions:

1. How can we understand ideas around (non)democracy, in relation to culture and arts focusing on festivals and the role of festivalmakers, especially dealing with a large variety of (geographically) different cases in the data set?
2. How can we understand different types of relations from a theoretical point of view?
3. Through which terms can we understand contents and the qualities of the relations between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies?

The output of Atlas.ti consists of a structured overview of labeled quotes from the conversations, grouped in their respective code groups and codes. These overviews merge the seven different conversations in order to create an overview of tensions rather than applying a comparative approach between the different cases. This creates an overview of how we can understand the role of festivalmakers and the positions of their work within contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies, indicating which topics, concepts, influences and actors are present within the relevant contexts. Additionally, this creates an overview of the different relations and influences happening between the various actors as presented in the data. Based on these overviews, an analysis has been made in order to formulate possible understandings of tensions present between festivalmakers and other actors. The analysis focused on pinpointing the understandings of tensions and relations of festivalmakers within their respective context, while also looking at the use of language and finding overarching thematics describing these tensions.

The three overarching themes which have been identified will be presented in the following chapter.

An overview of the relations between various elements in the data- and research structure can be found in appendix 3, clarifying their input, result, relations to other elements and relation to the research question. In figure 1, the various relations in the data structure are visualized.

Code group 1: Actors	Code group 2: Social and political occurrences	Code group 3: organizational and curational occurrences
How festival makers describe their own position and their relation to other actors in the environment they are located in.	Mentions of themes, events, experiences and topics that relate to social and or political tendencies and influences in relation to the festivalmaker's behaviour, actions and decision making.	Mentions of themes, events, experiences and topics that relate organizational and curational decisions, tendencies and influences in relation to the festivalmaker's behaviour, actions and decision making.
Understand various relations, connections and influences between various groups of actors, focussing on festivalmakers and their understanding of these relations, connections and influences.	Understand what type of themes, influences and tensions take place and which actors and tendencies take place in relevant contexts.	Understanding how festivalmakers position their influence, the types of decisions they make internally and how they understand their influence and role within the context they operate.

Table 1. Overview of the codegroups, description and relation to the subquestions.

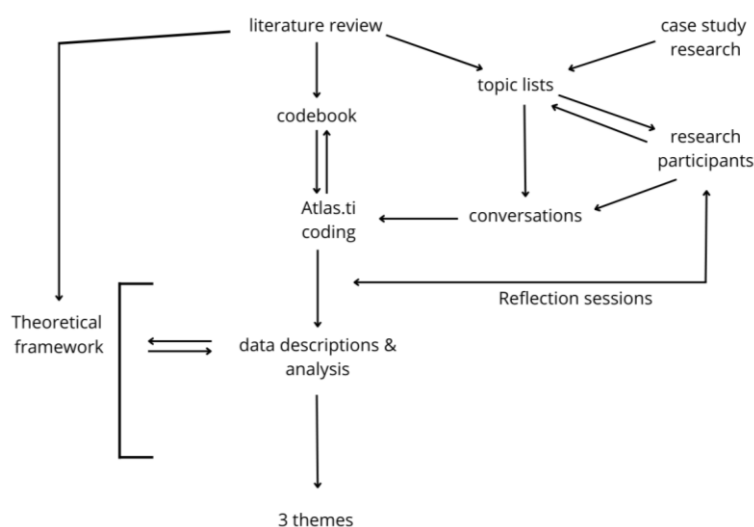


Figure 1. Visualization of data structure and research process.

2.5 - Researcher's perspective and position

As this research looks at a number of different case studies coming from different regions worldwide, it is important to look critically at the position and background of the researcher. First, I am a white female from West-Europe, who grew up in a country with a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. Regardless of aiming to have a neutral approach towards questions of democracy and un-democracy, this brings along certain biases and what for me are norms and normative approaches towards political systems and cultural practices. I have been brought up with a certain set of values we could call 'democratic values', which influences my approach and understanding of other types of political systems, their values and the understanding of democracy itself. In addition, this background also can influence my understanding regarding for example colonialist relations between countries and other geopolitical relations, which should also be taken into account. Second, I have reached out to all research participants within the role of a research intern at The Festival Academy (TFA). Even though the research has been done independently from TFA, research participants could still have this association in mind when agreeing and participating in the research.

2.6 - Limitations

This research comes with a couple of limitations. These limitations are likely to be present in the data and a result of the selection of research participants. The potential of self-censorship is the biggest limitation in this research. Research participants might have kept information behind for safety reasons, either for themselves, their colleagues, friends or family. Another limitation comes from the selection of research participants. Out of safety considerations no research participants are currently based in countries governed by strict authoritarian regimes, meaning that this perspective is not fully represented in the research. Besides that, none of the case studies cover a festival or festivalmaker that is fully neutral towards- or actively supports governmental bodies who are carrying out un- or antidemocratic policies. This means that this perspective and/of these types of actors are not included in the research. Last, the network from The Festival Academy is likely to contain a certain type of bias too. It consists of a certain type of festivalmakers, mainly those working for arts- and community festivals, who are focused on creating international connections and oftentimes do not shy away from taking a more critical position to social or political matters.

3 - Data analysis: Three themes

So far, chapter 1 has set the theoretical framework of this thesis covering a range of literature from both political perspectives on democracy and justice, and cultural theories focusing on festivals, cultural workers and the cultural sector more broadly. Chapter 2 has given an overview of the data collection and methodology with its perspectives and limitations. The following chapter will cover the analysis and propose a new set of three themes which have been formulated based on the analysis of the data, and will help us to understand tensions happening between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies. This set of themes gives insight into the qualities of the tensions happening as a result of behaviors,

phenomena and relations between actors, rather than aiming to pinpoint which thematics or events these tensions are based on. By these three proposed themes, we can formulate possible understandings of tensions happening between the actors in the field and look at how organizational and curatorial practices of arts festivalmakers relate to these.

There are various tensions happening in the different contexts analyzed. Even though these different contexts ask for an embedded analysis in order to understand these different cases individually (Delanty, Giorgi, and Sassatelli 2013, 7), as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I aim to find overarching themes that cluster individual tensions. This, while keeping an eye on for example geo-political, or historical differences between the various cases in the data set. The overviews which have been created based on the coded data as described in chapter 2, serve as the basis of the data analysis. The analysis consists of identifying overlapping themes that cluster the different types of tensions into groups based on the characteristics and qualities of the tensions themselves, rather than the events or concepts these tensions are based on. In the next sections I focus on three, interconnected themes; namely 'Conversation and Understanding', '(Dis)trust' and 'Space'. These three themes should be understood as possible qualities of tensions happening in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies.

In the following sections I describe these three themes on the basis of the data analysis. The aim is here to formulate a set of terminology that can be used to describe the qualities and contents of tensions. I argue that the first theme, 'Conversation and Understanding', can be linked with and is already quite established within the academic discourses on culture, festivals and (un)democracy. The theme 'Space' has been lightly suggested in some literature, but this link has not yet been fully explored within the presented literature. The theme of (Dis)trust is less linked and not yet as embedded in these conversations, but I do identify a link with Bird's argumentation of art and culture as an alternative means for political engagement (2017). I propose these as promising and valuable entry points to the discussions on tensions related to culture, (un)democracy and the position of festivalmakers, which can strengthen the discourse on culture, arts and (un)democracy with a focus on festivals.

The numbers in brackets used below indicate which one of the 7 conversations is referred to, with the second number indicating the quote as coded in Atlas.ti. An example would be (1:2) which would mean 'conversation 1', (Agata Grenda, 2025. Personal communication) 'quote 2' as coded in Atlas.ti. The list of conversations with the corresponding numbers can be found in the Bibliography under Personal communications.

3.1 Conversation and understanding

As a first quality of the tensions and relations between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies, I propose the theme of 'Conversation and Understanding', through the lens of education and knowledge. Conversation, or the lack of it, is a quality marker in these relations and tensions. Pointing out one's knowledge about- and willingness to engage with other actors' standpoints and perspectives is a strong marker of the tensions found. This theme relates strongly to the understanding of democracy as proposed by Sen (2009) and Young (2022) and the conversational or awareness spreading qualities assigned to festivals, culture and creatives working in the artistic sector such as suggested by under more Poprawski (2022), Bird (2017) and Yakoub and Hammami (2016) as discussed in chapter 1, as both are located in

everyday activities and behaviors. Festivalmakers approach this theme in various ways, overarching is the sense of urgency to facilitate and organize dialogue and in-depth conversation.

Festivalmakers are calling out the importance of awareness of other perspectives and knowledge of (other) cultures, oftentimes taking an educational angle. Ndèye Mané Toure mentions specifically that she aims for her festival to be a 'democratic school' (Personal communication 2025, 7:27), where people can learn about, for example, science, and collaborate with each other. Agata Grenda also points out the importance of education and the need within society to be more interested in others' perspectives. Talking about the relationship with politicians, she asks herself how best to educate, or inform politicians about the work festivalmakers and other cultural workers are doing, without provoking them (Personal communication 2025, 1:66). Both Grenda and Toure mention the lack of engagement from political actors to engage with the work of cultural workers, which leads to weak relations and a lack of understanding of each other's work (1:45, 7:36). Toure mentions how she herself also has little interest in building up a substantive relationship with political actors (7:32). Grenda advocates for more nuanced, and thorough approaches to bring politicians and festivalmakers closer, with an educational angle, instead of only provoking them with statement pieces (1:66). Grenda is also critical about festivalmakers and creatives' self-understanding, arguing that the majority is not educated properly about their own profession, and the role they have within society (1:70). The connection with educational actors such as universities, schools and knowledge events like panels and conferences (Personal communication 2025, Gwillem, Sepehr S., Nima D., Toure) is reoccurring within multiple cases from the dataset, this indicates a seemingly important role for education and knowledge within these contexts.

Education and facilitating conversation

Next to this, festivalmakers are reflecting on their own role as educators or facilitators of awareness and knowledge within societies. Rami Magharbeh described how the cultural projects they organize are always aiming to contribute to a better understanding, and (re)formulation of the knowledge that is embedded within cultural practices of Syrian people (Personal communication 2025, 2:37, 2:39). This, in order to formulate an alternative understanding to the dominant, and homogeneous cultural identity that has been formulated by the (former) regime. Toure and Gwillem both point out the importance of combining culture and education through the collaboration with educational actors (7:40, 6:22). The educational role of festivals, through the presence of educational elements within the festival program, and through collaborations with educational actors seems to be an important element within the included festivals. Festivalmakers are aware of their position and possible influences and impact on audiences and society when it comes to education.

Conclusion 3.1

This first theme, with which we can understand tensions between festivalmakers and other actors in context with un-democratic tendencies, highlights the importance of knowledge, education and information through active dialogue. This circles back to ideas about democracy such as practical reasoning, lived experiences and deliberative processes as covered in chapter 1 of this thesis. First of all, many festivals within contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies, or not, have an educational, or conversational element within their programming. This means

festivalmakers see value in these types of activities. Second, there is a discourse developing among festivalmakers to better understand the role of festivals and the impact they have in society and within un-democratic contexts. Some festivalmakers also point out the need to better understand their own role and relation to other actors. In addition, some festival makers advocate for the need to establish dialogue and understanding of other actors', especially political and financial ones, perspectives and vice versa. Third, is the tendency to understand 'culture as knowledge' and role of festivalmakers as facilitators to highlight the knowledge that is embedded within cultural practices. Together with the other two themes which will be discussed below, this section aims to answer the sub question that deals with qualities of relations and tensions between festivalmakers and other actors.

3.2 (Dis)trust

The second theme proposed is that of (a lack of) trust. Characterized on the one hand by a weak relation, be it deliberately or not, as a result of distrust, while on the other hand other connections are strengthened, and trust is prominently present. So far in this thesis, the relation between festivalmakers and political actors is much discussed. However, other relations are also important to consider such as developments of (dis)trust happening between festivalmakers and other cultural workers, audiences, communities, public- and private actors and more. I suggest this theme to be a crucial, new quality to understand tensions between these actors, as it influences the capacity of deliberative processes within societies and the relations between various groups of actors including those of festivalmakers. A link can however be made with the theoretical framework here. Bird's understanding of arts and culture as a powerful means to create an alternative entry into political engagement is grounded in the narrative of people's distrust in political and institutional structures within contexts marked by un-democracy tendencies. Based on the analysis and descriptions presented below, I argue that this is a valuable entry into understanding tensions which can strengthen discourse on culture and (un)democracy.

(Dis)trust is understood as a quality of tensions between festivalmakers and other actors they share certain environments with, meaning a quality of the 'intensity' of a certain association. Distrust is understood as not, or no longer, relying on the other to collaboratively operate within the same environment. Distrust can be the result of not feeling (physically, emotionally or morally) safe or comfortable within the other's company. (Dis)trust should not be seen in binary terms, but as a spectrum which can fluctuate as a result of various behaviors and actions that are changing over time and between different spaces.

Understanding relations with political actors

Some festivalmakers are aiming to organize outside the reach of the political eye and influence through hidden, or double agenda's, creating a sense of (mutually) false trust. Political actors can have various ways of controlling the cultural sector, by for example restricting financial structures, legal frameworks and censorship. These structures of control showcase a certain type of distrust or 'inherent need for controlling'. Political actors' understanding of festivalmakers and their audiences as 'cultural spies' as described by Nima D. (5:39), emphasizes this. Certain political actors understand or know festivalmakers to have this double agenda or disagree with their approaches, and limit their capacity to organize through for example cultural bans (Tijana

Duknic, personal communication 2025) or limiting their work through other means. Grenda describes her and other's behavior as 'playing a game' or 'playing with the government' (1:59). Grenda takes a more historical perspective, specifically referring back to the period in which the communist party was dominant in Poland (till the late 1980's). By not showing all aspects of one's work, but by being selective in one's communication with political actors, festivalmakers are operating on two different levels. One which serves or at least stays within political boundaries, while simultaneously organizing events that would not have been granted permission within these contexts. Sepehr S. shares how he balanced both institutionally related or 'official' work with independent curating in Iran (3:20). This, in order to both establish a trustworthy relationship with officials, while also being able to contribute to independent festivals. He mentions:

"So I said, whenever you want curation, help or networking or connection to anybody, let me know, I will do it on myself, but not the agency" (Sepehr S. 3:20).

By choosing to operate either as an independent actor or via an institutionally recognized organization, one's 'institutional status' and official relations with other actors shift. Balancing these different expectations and roles can create a tricky position for festivalmakers. Within social political contexts covered in this thesis, the position of independent festivals and cultural workers is oftentimes heavily supervised and contained. Collaboration with parties that are tied to political structures or actors, are described by research participants as preferably minimal, short and concise but very much thought through. By applying tricks and positioning one self strategically, a (mutually) false trust can be built through which cultural organizing can continue to take place up to a certain amount.

Some actors are basing official relations on '(mutual) distrust', as they do seem to still be crucial to be maintained. Naturally, associations between various actors are always existing, as they share a certain environment together they will interact and influence each other. For various contexts, such as the Polish one, festivalmakers are (still) very much dependent on political actors for financial reasons without necessarily liking the other, as pointed out by Grenda. Sepehr S. describes how official relations with the institutional side of the cultural field are important to have, as it gains them the official permission from political actors, regardless of their disagreement on policies and ideological matters (3:20). On the other hand, Sepehr S. also points out that officials are often very much aware of the presence of independent and often underground scenes (3:95). These are oftentimes unofficially accepted by political actors up to a certain point. He describes how the Iranian regime dismantled an underground dance festival in the 2020's, resulting in a large number of arrests, confiscation of passports, and as a response a large wave of dancers migrating from Iran (3:96).

Although not the case for all contexts, the frequent shifts of political actors due to unstable governments also contribute to the difficulty to build a trustworthy relationship with political actors (Toure personal communication 2025). This can result in the rather low effort- approach from festivalmakers to build up trusted relations. Toure describes this relationship with governmental entities in rather transactional or in administrative terms;

"The reason for me, it's just for information. ...I just read nothing from them, really nothing from them. I just do what I want to do and that's it. For me it's like I spend my time for nothing. Each time I send this letter [its] because for me it's an infomercial. [So] they just cannot say; 'sorry no, you didn't send anything. We don't know.' I know Senegalese mindset, government mindset. They can say no [even] if we know we can. But now I know they know, because sometimes I get answers; sometimes they say yes, it is nice." (Toure 7:37, 7:39).

This antidote highlights how, in some cases, festivalmakers are understanding their relationship with governmental officials in rather latent terms. Due to the high amount of shifts in governmental actors this can result in a lack of true interest from both sides to build up this relationship.

Understanding financial streams and (dis)trust

Funding and the access to other resources are important in understanding the efforts of festivalmakers that aim to build trust-full relationships with funders, political actors and other actors. It seems that festivalmakers are quite well aware how funding streams, and actors from financial fields influence their work. Chris Gwillim mentions:

“Like, how are you going to do anti-capitalist fundraising? And I thought that was such a brilliant question because it's like impossible. But it's also like it makes my job really easy because I know that our ethics are so strong that I can say no to like any source of funding that might exploit us or hurt us or like be harmful for our artist...” (Gwillim 6:83).

The possible influences and consequences resulting from connecting with certain financial actors is for some festivalmakers an important element in deciding whom to build relations with. These (ideological) choices can result in the creation of connections with funders who share, in this case, political or ethical stances, or at least do not counter one's stances completely. This can result in connections with funding actors which are built with more trust due to having a shared vision or approach. Additionally, these connections are not necessarily only between two parties (festival maker and funding actor) but are embedded in a larger environment. It seems that the creation, or active participation and presence, within such an environment can also contribute to more trust and understanding one's position in relation to other cultural- and funding organizations or entities. This is for example evident in the description by Magharbeh, who explains how they operate as a Syrian organization located in Türkiye. He mentions that

“It was difficult to build this relation with Turkish authorities, and Turkish [cultural] organizations. Of course, some of them were or are really open to having this relation. But also some of them were trying to control the fund. Because they are, you know, they have a relation with the authorities and they have the power. Let's say, control and to manage all this work, not us as refugees. But we also have a great relation with some of them. Sometimes the Turkish or the Turkish programs, funding programs, were aware about this point and they provide Syrian artists or organizations with the fund...” (Magharbeh 2:44).

Following and understanding financial streams and the trust created between these various actors can give insight into how these actors interact and build connections.

At the same time, some festivalmakers are also critical of themselves and their colleagues and advocate for more awareness among themselves regarding finances, their own worth and are thinking about alternatives to build more independent sustainability. Grenda describes how in the Polish case, there is a high dependency on funding from public funds in order to sustain the cultural sector. She mentions that ‘they're [cultural workers] helpless without public money’ (1:47) and that “culture without government dies, like we don't know how to do it without” (1:1). Funding has political or ideological ties, and by accepting funding these become one of the influential factors in the organization of a festival. Grenda adds that sometimes there is simply no other choice but to receive funding from public entities, as (only) alternative to ‘commercial

money'. This 'choosing between two evils' is a returning narrative. Gwillim gives the example of on the one hand political actors trying to control financial streams through under more the Anti-DEI regulations of the Trump administration in the USA which directly influences, for example, queer-focussed festivals. On the other hand asks herself questions on the ethics of 'old money' or commercially oriented funders. A certain group of festivalmakers is critically analyzing the relations they have with financial resources and if they can (keep) relying on these.

Society and building trust

Festivalmakers also build relationships with, for example, other festivalmakers, creatives, audiences, communities and other actors coming from a social or public background. These relations are for a large part described by the research participants in terms of high levels of trust, and often take place either on a local, or international level rather than a national one. Through collaborations and networks, festivalmakers and other cultural workers are connecting with each other in order to share experiences and challenges. Through sharing and connection over what Nima D. calls 'mutual pain' (5:2), these connections become more strengthened. Nima D. coined this term mainly as reference to the shared struggles during covid, but also related this to the shared struggles of authoritarian rule in various places worldwide as a means to connect over. Foreign funding is also a returning aspect, including collaborating with embassies, international organizations, private donors and foreign municipalities or funds. Highlighted by Gwillim is the shift in focus for future financial collaborations with private donors and public-private partnerships specifically, as these collaborations ask for a more detailed understanding of each other's goals and orientations. Next to this, various research participants express the importance of audiences and communities they work with (Gwillim, Toure, Magharbeh) and describe these relations in terms of high level of trust. Gwillim describes how closely connected the festival staff is with the community they are organizing for, with the community being highly responsive and invested in organizational decision making of the festival. She describes that both sides, organization and community, are responsive and attentive to the other's input and efforts (6:59, 6:92). A similar narrative can be found in the descriptions of Toure who mentions:

“I only have this little budget and they [the people from the village] open their houses. ... They give what they have. ..., they give for the festival. Until now they are really keen and open their houses... And for me this thing is most important, to have any budget. Because this is the way and they accept and they believe.” (Toure 7:34)

There is a sense of trust in the relation between the groups of actors described here, which can make collaboration and organization more approachable and effective. Relations between festivalmakers and social actors or communities are not always based on trust. Duknic describes how there are high levels of distrust within Serbian society towards Kosovan citizens. This creates challenges for her and her colleagues in practical terms, such as renting spaces or collaborating with local companies (4:73). The quality of trust is a returning theme in the relations between festivalmakers and actors such as community members, social actors and more. Through connecting over shared experiences or challenges, these relations are built within both local and international spaces.

Conclusion 3.1

In conclusion, the theme of (dis)trust highlights a number of qualities that are found in the tensions and relations between festivalmakers and other actors operating in the same environment. This section has offered another entry into understanding the qualities and contents of relations and tensions between festivalmakers and other actors as introduced in subquestion 3 and the research question. A first narrative found here is the creation and upholding of 'fake-trust', be it mutually or not. This type of tension often takes place between festivalmakers and political or social actors. Upholding these seemingly fake, low effort or untruthful relations happening from both sides, strengthens distrust and uncertainty within an environment. It showcases the presence of conversation between various actors to happen either unofficially, merely on the surface, or not at all. This (mutual) distrust in relations is not only the effect of un-democracy, but also seems to strengthen it. Second, festivalmakers question how their relation looks like with financial and resourced actors. Their awareness of potential consequences of engaging with financial streams highlights how these relations can be strengthened by building trust through for example shared ethics. This also comes down to the mere question of safety and knowing certain collaborations will not hurt the festival in one way or the other. Third is the creation of more trustful relations by connecting over either 'mutual pain', shared ethics or goals, and the knowledge of one's added value to the environment, or visa-versa. This third narrative seems to be especially important when discussing relations with communities, audiences and other (non-political) actors, and are oftentimes located either on a more local, or international level. This relates to the question of space as discussed below.

3.2 Space

The third theme I propose is that of 'space' as the last quality described in this thesis, in order to give insight into the qualities and contents of the relations and tensions between festivalmakers and other actors. Here, space is understood both in terms of physical space and conceptual, or perceived space. On a physical level, instances of space include the organization of festival spaces, the breaking down of space, and physical interruption of spaces by police, protestors and other actors. On the level of non-physical space, festivalmakers describe their perceived space through for example mindsets, awareness of surveillance, social anxiety and self-censorship. Using the theme of 'space' we can create a new understanding of the various ways in which actors influence others and how associations or tensions between them are perceived. The theme of space shares some overlaps with the theme of (dis)trust as discussed above, where (dis)trust creates a certain distance or closeness between various actors.

Looking at the creation and negotiation of space between various actors indicates influences and characteristics of their relations. Some of the literature discussed in chapter 1 makes suggestions to the theme of space. As an example, Yakoub and Hammami are critical of the shifts in narrative and perception of theatre performances within different geographical locations (2016). But these are not directly applying an understanding of space to be an active factor within their argument, as they rather treat this as a condition in which phenomena are taking place. A direct link is made between festivals and space more generally by for example the discussion on the understanding of festivals as 'free spaces' and its critiques are presented as discussed by Kuligowski and Poprawski (2023). However, as previously argued, a more nuanced understanding is necessary here, especially in relation to (un-)democracy. These two links made with the

theoretical framework already indicate how the theme of space can be understood from various angles.

Space is not only created by those inside a certain space, but moreover by those who are not inside a space and the boundaries around a certain space. This can result in both literal and metaphorical disconnections between those inside and outside. In the case of festivals, these boundaries can be physically created by for example fences, walls or other types of physical enclosure of spaces. But also through mental barriers resulting in inclusion or exclusion of certain groups and actors. Here, an important link between the theme of space and the cultural discourse on (un)democracy as mentioned in the theoretical framework, is the idea of group differentiation and social groups (Yough 2022). Young emphasizes how groups, similar to spaces, are oftentimes defined by the understanding we have of what or who is 'inside' in relation to what or who is 'outside', creating hierarchies and tensions with other groups (2022) and spaces. This can be a deliberate choice, out of safety considerations of audiences and communities. The creation of spaces directly and indirectly creates an us-them division. This brings forward a paradox of democracy; in order to ensure audience safety and potentially even safeguard democratic principles one is sometimes forced to apply undemocratic principles of inclusion and exclusion. This, through for example the creation of these semi-closed spaces like festivals. Festivals are never fully closed off spaces, there are various connections between the 'inside and outside' of festivals through influences and interactions with other actors and spaces as previously mentioned in this thesis.

Possibilities and movement in the physical space

As a result of various political interventions and restrictions, cultural spaces in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies can be categorized as institutional-, independent- and underground spaces. In reality, festivalmakers often move around in more than one of these three types of spaces. Institutional spaces should be understood as venues, locations, governmental offices such as censorship committee bureau's, and other types of spaces in which political actors are controlling or supervising the space in more or less terms.

There are large differences between the functioning and characteristics of institutional and non-institutional spaces. Both Sepehr S. and Nima D. point out that both underground- and independent spaces in Iran are in large discrepancy with institutional spaces. Examples of underground spaces include parking garages and bunkers (3:97). Independent spaces are not necessarily underground, but both share a distance from institutional entities and actors. This, through for example not being based in governmentally funded venues, or not being financed through governmental funding. Nima D. points out the importance of site-specificity and the different possibilities different types of spaces bring (5:24). The festival he co-founded is based in the digital space, which for him should not be a replacement for the physical but rather serves as an alternative or additional space. The digital space brings possibilities such as anonymizing presence, and the inclusion of those who might not be able to travel to a physical venue. The presence of independent- and underground spaces indicates the need or wish from festivalmakers to deliberately distance themselves from political actors. Whereas the presence of festivalmakers in more institutionalized spaces suggests a closer relationship with political actors, regardless of agendas and political (dis)agreements.

The distinction between institutional or non-institutional does not mean that festivalmakers only operate in one of the two. Some festivalmakers move between these different spaces in order to

both have governmentally granted permission to organize events on an institutional level, and organize independent festivals on an individual level (3:20). As most independent festivalmakers do not wish to collaborate with institutional spaces, they often collaborate with private or other independent actors, such as for example foreign theatres (3:75), independent cultural venues, people's homes, community spaces or schools (Toure). The presence of these different types of spaces indicates types of relations between festivalmakers and political- and other actors, either distancing one from the other, or moving closer for example in order to gain certain positions and possibilities.

Interruption of spaces

In more explicit cases, spaces created by festivalmakers are interrupted through physical means or restrictions, indicating the aims of political, social and other actors to demonstrate their influence and positions towards festivalmakers and their colleagues. Duknic describes how the Serbian government had banned the 2025 edition of the festival she works for, with hooligans blocking the festival sites, and participants from Kosovo being refused to enter the city of Belgrade (4:73, 4:55). This also ties into mobility restrictions as a means to limit access to spaces and movement between different spaces (as mentioned by Sepehr S., Nima D. and Magharbeh). A second example is the dismantling of underground festivals by governmental actors, such as the previously mentioned dismantling of a dance festival in Iran (3:96). The issue of space as an indicator of the quality of relations between political actors and festivalmakers is specifically pointed out by Toure, mentioning:

“But this space was also for the government. One day they arrived, they needed the space. And they broke everything. Everything was broken. And yes, in just a few minutes they are destroying everything. It was heartbroken. And I said, okay, now I think I need to have my own space to start again and to try to find the space” (Toure 7:2).

Physical behaviors and actions from actors influencing the work of festivalmakers in which the understanding of space, such as the interrupting of- and not granting access to space, gives us a lens on the quality of the relations and tensions between these various actors.

Structures of space

Certain legal restraints and policies influence the spatial conditions of festivalmakers and their connections with audiences, political actors and others. First, within the analyzed contexts, (cultural) policies are oftentimes pushing centralization of both political influence and cultural activity. Authoritarian (leaning) governments often aim to establish a more homogeneous idea of a national identity, as described by Magharbeh (2:38). This, oftentimes resulting in cultural activity being centralized in capital cities (2:41). The centralization of legal and physical political influence creates a lack of local institutions, making it difficult for festivalmakers to organize events within regional areas outside of capital cities. Additionally, as a result of centralization of cultural ideas through the presence of censorship committees (as mentioned by Sepehr S. and Nima D.) in contexts such as those in Iran, we can understand cultural production as being centralized in terms of content. Second, as an effect of authoritarian rule, both migration, and reduced mobility are not uncommon phenomena (Sepehr S., Nima D. and Magharbeh) This results in communities being physically fragmented and located in different locations. Both diasporas and the

fragmentation of communities are audiences these festivalmakers aim to connect and build relations with. These are important spatial elements to consider in the understanding of tensions happening between festivalmakers, political actors and communities.

Perceived space

In the above sections, interactions and influences dealt with the physical presence and spaces in which actors are situated. In addition, we can also view space as non-physical, meaning a perceived or conceptual space in which actors understand their presence and ability to, for example, voice their position symbolically or non-physically.

The influence of political actors through controlling policies and structures of surveillance creates a culture of pressure and anxiety, which festivalmakers respond- and behave to in different manners. Whereas some cultural workers stay 'within' these sensed restrictions of censorship, others aim to criticize and challenge them. Nima D. describes how he senses that the new generation of artists and festivalmakers in Iran are no longer wanting to accept censorship regulations set by the ruling government. He mentions that

“They are much braver now, the new generation, they take the risk. My generation was not brave enough. But now they are doing a lot of performances without hijab, without the mandatory costume codes, whatever, which is a brave, brave, brave move. Brave wave, I would say. And there is always a risk. I mean still a lot of them getting arrested and they have problems, but how many people can they [the police] arrest? That's the point” (Nima D. 5:72).

Whereas certain festivalmakers aim to either stay within the perceived space of cultural control or find ways to hide their independent and underground work, others openly challenge these boundaries through criticizing censorship and cultural codes.

Social censorship and self-censorship influence the perception of space of festivalmakers in terms of what they 'can or cannot do' within the eye of the public and political actors. An example is mentioned by Grenda, describing how Catholic norms and values in Poland influences the work of herself and her colleagues. She mentions a peer- theatre director who canceled a theatre show in response to Catholic communities protesting against the programming of a queer performance, arguing she herself would have never given in to these types of critiques (1:63). Here, social actors aim to influence the space in which festivalmakers are operating with the use of social and cultural arguments grounded in, for example, religion.

As a result of political or social threads, festivalmakers notice that collaborators can become hesitant with sharing spaces with festivalmakers in terms of collaborating. Out of fear of putting the other at risk, festivalmakers are carefully considering who and how to associate potential partners with their festival. Gwillem indicates that she and her colleagues are taking into account potential (political), be it physical or otherwise, consequences before reaching out to potential partners, which would bring them inside their political or social space. Additionally, when talking about their collaboration with the university, she mentioned that “...none of the university departments put their name on the festival this year because they were afraid of retaliation” (6:81). This indicates a type of psychological distancing of collaborative actors towards (politically explicit) festivals.

Festivalmakers are analyzing their own behaviors and relations in terms of the space they create and situate themselves in. Grenda critically notes that 'we are in the bubble, seriously like our

festival and our region' (1:52). Whereas Grenda points out how this creates a dependency of Polish cultural workers on governmental funding and support systems, Toure highlights the opposite side of this narrative. She describes a small, but dynamic and independent cultural scene in Dakar, Senegal, which one could describe as happening inside a relatively small scene, or bubble, operating without structural governmental support (7:53, 7:55). There are various approaches through which festivalmakers understand the space in which they operate, and how through this they relate to other actors.

Political actors are also claiming perceived space through the instrumentalization of festivals for their own political agendas, having no legal structures set in place to register cultural organizations, or through surveillance of financial streams. Duknic describes how various politicians have made use of their festival either speaking in favor or against the festival's goals whenever fitting for their campaigns or public statements (4:50, 4:60, 4:62). Through these actions of speaking in favor or against, political actors take up spaces and positions in which they relate themselves to the festival. Sepher S. and Nima D. describe how political actors are influencing perceived space of festivalmakers through financial and legal restrictions. Through the surveillance of financial streams, political actors are influencing festivalmakers' spaces, such as their abilities to collaborate and possibilities to receive (foreign) funding. Nima D. mentioned that:

“There were some threats by the government or the Internet police in Iran. They approached those artists or speakers. [Asking] why are you participating in this event? Who are you getting money from? That's why we try not to get any funding from anyone. And it's very difficult to launch such a huge project without a penny of grants from any, any institution” (Nima D. 5:74).

On top of this, international sanctions also create difficulty to receive foreign funding. This directly relates to the lack of legal structures (such as associations, foundations ect.), which forces festivalmakers to think about alternative ways to structure their organizations. Nima D. adds that the festival

‘was artist-run, so we didn't have any connection to any organization or funding or grants or anything. And yeah, it started as an artist-run project from myself, and then the group joined, and then we started doing some collaborations with schools through an internship program. For example, the first year everyone was a volunteer. The second year we had an internship program at University of Maryland’ (5:5).

These structures are oftentimes based on unofficial agreements such as volunteering, but also artist-run festivals or finding ways to enroll an organization legally in another country to be able set up legal and financial structures are methods mentioned in these contexts. Political actors have various methods through which they influence cultural spaces, on which festival makers are responding by finding alternative methods related to organizational structures, safety and the position of the festival as perceived and instrumentalized in the public.

Conclusion 3.3

The theme of space as a lens to understand the tensions between festivalmakers and other actors brings a number of implications and potential applications forward. Space should be considered both in physical- and non-physical terms. First, by looking at how the physical space is being negotiated between various actors, we can start to understand how this influences their actions

and behaviors. The presence of institutional, independent and underground spaces already indicates certain types of relationships. These are nuanced by the movement of festivalmakers through these different types of spaces. Regardless of festivalmakers' movement between the various types of spaces, they describe large differences in possibilities and motivations. The idea of site-specificness brings forward the various possibilities and challenges different types of spaces create. On top of that, interruptions of spaces are clear examples of how various actors are influencing others' capacities and the relations they shape with these actions. Structures of physical space are also being influenced by various (legal) restrictions or the lack of these. Here, centralization, migration and restricted mobility are key in understanding how space is being structured by political actors and understood by festivalmakers. Second, perceived space brings forward another set of implications and tensions. Through structures of surveillance and control, anxiety and a culture of social- and self-censorship are created. This results in at least three models of responses from festivalmakers. First, staying within the set boundaries. Second, finding strategies to hide activities. And third, openly challenging norms and censorship. Festivalmakers are critically reflecting their position, and the potential implications of types of perceived spaces. They reflect on how involving others within their perceived space can influence both themselves and the others involved. Additionally, political actors are also claiming perceived (cultural) space through instrumentalizing festivals and surveillance. As a response, festivalmakers aim to find alternatives to organizational structures, safety and are finding ways to deal with instrumentalization by calling out politicians.

Implications and conclusion chapter 3

In this chapter, I proposed three themes in order to formulate possible understandings of the qualities and contents of the tensions between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies. These themes are 'Conversation and Understanding', '(Dis)trust' and 'Space'. The order of the themes discussed is purposefully not based on the strength of the link established with the literature in related discourses. Instead, the themes reinforce, build upon and overlap with each other. In addition, these themes should not be understood as linear or binary. By actors moving in different locations and over time, the context and their behaviors shift the qualities of relations and tensions. The first theme discussed was 'Understanding and conversation'. Here I argued that this theme already has a strong link to various topics and understandings in the discourse on festivalmakers, culture and un-democratic tendencies. This theme highlights the importance of knowledge, education and (cultural) understanding through active dialogue as mentioned by research participants, with the concepts such as practical reasoning, lived experiences and deliberative processes as discussed in the theoretical framework. The second theme is that of '(Dis)trust'. A link can be made with the theoretical framework by connecting back to Bird's understanding of arts and culture as alternative means of political engagement as an effect of societies distrust towards political actors and entities (2017). This theme highlights the ways in which festivalmakers and other actors are aware of their own and other's agenda's and the different types of collaborations that are shaped as a result of this. The first narrative found is that of upholding (mutually) fake-trust between different actors in order to gain something out of that relationship. Upholding fake, low effort and untruthful relations happening from both sides, can again strengthen a sense of distrust and uncertainty within an environment. The second narrative found here, is that of financial ties and potential consequences of collaboration, which involves a type of trust that is based on shared values and goals. The third narrative is that of building trust over shared

experiences such as ‘mutual pain’, which mainly relates to communities and audiences. The third theme proposed is that of ‘Space’. Two main levels can be indicated here; physical space and perceived space. Not only the differentiation of institutional and independent spaces indicate tensions between actors, so do for example the interruption of spaces, site-specificness, the presence and restriction of movement and centralization. Instances of surveillance and control, anxiety and a culture of social- and self-censorship indicate types of perceived space as a quality of the tensions between different actors. Through the interconnected themes of ‘Understanding and Conversation’, ‘(Dis)trust’ and ‘Space’, I have proposed a set of terms that can help us formulate possible understandings of tensions happening between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies.

Conclusion

Undemocratic tendencies mark various countries and places worldwide. Governmental policies, the lack of them and other implications and tendencies related to undemocratic practices and values create sometimes challenging contexts for festivalmakers. Especially those who, for example, voice a more critical perspective towards governments, aim to facilitate spaces for minority communities or merely due to the lack of support structures for the cultural sector in general. At the same time, it seems that within these contexts, a certain set of festivalmakers aim to take up a more active approach to create a (more) democratic impact on society. This thesis looked into the various tensions between festivalmakers and other actors within these types of contexts, focusing on how we can formulate an understanding of the qualities and contents of these tensions. By proposing the three themes of ‘Understanding and Conversation’, ‘(Dis)trust’ and ‘Space’ as a set of terms to describe tensions and linking these back to the theoretical framework, I aimed to strengthen discourses on culture, festivals and (un)democracy.

Looking back, this thesis has given insight into various themes and concepts related to (un)democracy and the relation to festivalmakers, their practices and behaviors. This, in order to formulate an understanding of the qualities and contents of the tensions present in the relations, behavior and communications (or the lack of these) within the described contexts. Central were the 7 conversations with festivalmakers from Iran, Syria, Senegal, Serbia, Poland and the USA. This thesis focused especially on the organizational and curatorial practices from people working in the field of arts- and community festivals. It became evident, however, that curatorial and organizational practices are oftentimes very much intertwined with social and political influences and events happening within the environment in which these festivalmakers are embedded. This suggests an active approach from festivalmakers to engage with their local and/or (inter)national environment, and the presence of external influences from social and/or political events and actors on the internal organization and curation of festivals. This can create a dynamic, but also fragile environment in which festivalmakers are forced to find a (strategic) position. This description of ‘fragileness’ can be understood in both approaches as mentioned within this thesis. First, it has been used to describe the (social political) environment of actors as discussed in chapter 2, referring to the implications of fragility in Actor Network Theory (Micheal 2017) and democracy as understood by Sen ([2009] 2010) and Young (2022), which created a paradoxical position for festivalmakers and the influence they have. Second, fragility highlights the potentially changing nature of the understanding of narratives and meaning if art is being moved from one space to another, as a result of festival programming, both physically and culturally (Yakoub and Hammami 2016). It is these two different understandings of the environment, the embedded

position of festivalmakers and the role of arts and culture within different types of environments that shapes the context of the cases and themes discussed.

There was the question of how democracy can be understood, especially within relation to the role of festivalmakers and creatives, and in the discourse on non-democracy. Here, I referred to Sen ([2009] 2010) and Young (2022) their ideas and approaches on democracy as theorized in relation to justice and just decision making. Both take a non-institutional perspective focusing on democracy as being related to every-day life instead of the act of voting as such. Sen proposes the idea of democracy as public reason ([2009] 2010) and Young argues for the understanding of democracy referring to public discussion with a focus on the politics of difference (Young 2022) in order to come to more just decision making processes. These approaches open up more types of political engagement, and legitimize the influence of different types of actors within the political discourse on democracy. Here, 'healthy democracy' as theorized by Poprawski (2022a), is a helpful concept to understand the role of the arts within this discourse. Additionally, Sass and Dryzek (2024) discussion on reason and emotion is a useful entry way into understanding the role of culture more broadly in relation to political discourses. With these concepts and ideas, we can formulate an understanding of the role of festivals and festivalmakers in relation to (un-)democracy, strengthening connections and streams of influence between different groups of actors such as audiences, cultural actors, political actors and more.

Second, there was the question of how we can understand the various relations and tensions between the different groups of actors, present in the described contexts, from a theoretical point of view. These groups include festivalmakers, audiences, politicians and other political actors, public actors, private entities, media and more. Actor Network Theory, as conceptualized by Latour (2005) and Michael (2017), is a useful addition to get a better understanding of how associations are created and are changing over time and throughout different spaces. Various scholars have covered topics that highlight the different implications of (un)democratic political behaviors and responses and actions in the cultural field. Most of the research covered in the theoretical framework focused on the relations between cultural workers, such as festivalmakers and political actors (e.g. Bonet and Zamorano 2020, Rohava 2020, Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023), but also in relation to audiences and society understood in a broader sense (e.g. Rohava 2020, Yakoub and Hammami 2016), and relations among cultural workers themselves (e.g. Siritwanij 2023). There was a lesser focus, for example, on private actors or public entities. Some scholars did also touch upon religion and religious actors, covering for example the influence of Islam on policies and the cultural field (Pahwa and Winegar 2022). Various concepts presented in the theoretical framework help us to understand which, and how un-democratic tendencies are affecting festivalmakers. These include the instrumentalization of festivals and the festivalization of politics (Kuligowski and Poprawski 2023), direct interventions such as the enhancement of censorship and carrying out illiberal cultural policies (Bonet and Zamorano 2020), the creation of societies of fear, anxiety and self-censorship, protestivals (Đurić et al. 2022), the establishment of 'non-armies' (Siritwanij 2023) and (in)dependence on state support (Pahwa and Winegar 2022). Additionally, there are also effects on society and audiences as a result of festivalmakers taking up an active position in the discourse on un-democracy. These are discussed by Yakoub and Hammami (2016) and their use of 'fragility' and the potential of culture and art as an alternative form of political engagement and facilitation of public reasoning (Bird 2017). Based on the current academic discourse on culture and (un)democracy, this thesis presented a first set of concepts and themes. These concepts and themes highlight what relations are centered around, and do not necessarily tell us more about how we can understand

the contents of these relations as such. They did, however, point towards crucial intersections where these tensions, relations and connections take place.

Building on top of this first set of concepts and themes as discussed in the theoretical framework, I proposed three new themes that help us formulate understandings of the qualities of tensions between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies. These are based on the analysis of a data set consisting of seven conversations with festivalmakers originating and/or working in Iran, Syria, Serbia, Poland, Senegal and the USA. The three proposed themes of 'Conversation and Understanding', '(Dis)trust' and 'Space', are a set of terms that aim to describe the qualities and contents of tensions, rather than topics on which relations and tensions are based. Even though these themes are not yet directly mentioned and conceptualized within literature discussed in the theoretical framework, I argued that there are links to be made and overlaps to be found which could strengthen discourses on culture, festivals and (un)democracy. The theme of 'Conversation and Understanding' is reflected the current academic discourse through looking at the overlaps it shares with concepts such as public reason (Sen [2009] 2010) and public discussion (Young 2022), but also ideas around the potential of festivals and arts to facilitate alternative forms of (political) participation (Bird 2017) and healthy democracy (Poprawski 2022a). Links between the literature and the theme of space mainly cover the topic of democracy and festivals as such, rather than in contexts where these topics overlap. Presented links include ideas around the different understandings of festival spaces as such, and the creation of spaces for democracy. However, I argued that the theme of space can be understood as a quality related internally to tensions taking place in contexts marked by un-democratic tendencies. I argued that the theme of space is an important marker of qualities as the negotiation of space, in its many forms, is a crucial key that indicates relational qualities and tensions within these contexts. Last, the theme of (dis)trust can be related to Bird's idea on alternative forms of political engagement (2017). Within the theme of (dis)trust I indicated three narratives. First the creation of narratives based on (mutual) fake-trust. Second, narratives related to the potential consequences of (financial) collaboration. Third, the narrative of building trust over shared experiences such as 'mutual pain'. Even though (dis)trust as a theme is not yet as strongly linked within the relevant discourses, the data does show how this theme can be relevant to understand tensions in different contexts. I have argued here that the theme of (dis)trust is a crucial theme within understanding tensions as it influences the capacity of- and interaction between actors in deliberative processes, and contexts with undemocratic tendencies.

Taking a more broader perspective, there are various overlaps and interconnections to be found both within the data and these three themes, meaning that these should not be seen as three separate categories. In this thesis, I proposed these three themes as possible terms to formulate an understanding of tensions between festivalmakers and other actors in contexts marked by undemocratic tendencies. When aiming to understand tensions and related contexts, I propose a frame that overlaps these three themes, with the potential to zoom in and out, potentially adding new concepts and themes that describe a specific context more accurately.

To end on a positive note, regardless of the challenges festivalmakers are dealing with related to distrust, non-understanding and the difficulty to create spaces for their communities, there is also a positive narrative to be told. Within all the conversations I had, I do also hear a strong willingness to create and facilitate conversation to develop mutual understanding, create trustful connections and collaborations, and spaces for exchange and cultural experiences. I think these

narratives should definitely also be highlighted within the context of this thesis and within society at large.

Future research

The three themes indicate various possible implications on broader understandings of phenomena happening in the world and ways in which festivalmakers are operating nowadays. There are many noteworthy observations to be made based on the descriptions included above and as found more generally within the data. I want to highlight two of these. Both as possible future entries for research, but also as reflection points for festivalmakers and other cultural professionals. First, the tendency to differentiate work as institutional and/or independent, and the type of relations these choices create with political, financial and other actors, as this decision brings forward the question of where festivalmakers aim to create impact or where they think their impact can become most fruitful. Second, I want to highlight the (new) networks and connections created both locally, but also certainly globally as a result of tensions happening on national and international scales. How can we understand these global networks in relation to communities, and their position in festivalmaking? These are both questions of conversation and understanding, space and (dis)trust.

Reflections on research process

The additional aim of this thesis was also to investigate the potential of democratic research methods and research approaches. This thesis aimed at a more democratic approach based on casual conversation with an active aim to include a wide variety of voices and strong position for research participants. Looking back, I think this was particularly successful. On the one hand, I sensed that research participants were open and happy to provide ideas and experiences and were glad to share them within the context of the research. Most of them deliberately choose for their name to be added in the documents, which could indicate their willingness to be an active part of this conversation. In addition, casual conversation seemed to help to be less fixated on one certain set of ideas that could connect to democracy and un-democracy. On the other hand, I also saw how within other interactions with research participants they also simply do not have the time or space to become more actively involved within following up in the research outside the more practical and 'formal' parts of being a research participant. For the conversations, I aimed for a shared creation of a topic list. In reality, for the research participants the topic lists mainly functioned as an introduction to the various themes, and for myself as a guide in case a conversation didn't flow directly into conversation. I think this also relates to how research is understood more broadly and the relatively short time period available. Building up relations with research participants over a longer period of time and revisiting conversations more frequently could have resulted in a more democratic and insightful research. This would, however, also ask more time and energy investment from research participants which is another question to keep in mind as this group of people often have busy schedules already. In addition, I think an valuable contribution of creating a more democratic approach to research also lies in the ability to share found knowledge in approachable manners after the research has been finalized.

Besides the research method and approach to research ethics, I think this thesis could have been made stronger by including some sections on conversation, trust and space in the theoretical framework. This could be another future direction to develop further on the topics discussed in this thesis.

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Personal Communications

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S., Sepehr. to Mette van Zoest. 2025. Conversation Festivals and Undemocratic Tendencies Interview by Mette van Zoest. Video Call. Conversation 3.

Toure, Ndèye Mané. to Mette van Zoest. 2025. Conversation Festivals and Undemocratic Tendencies Interview by Mette van Zoest. Video Call. Conversation 7.

Appendix 1. Overview of codes and themes

Actors	Social / political	Curational and organizational
Festivalmakers / How festivalmakers understand themselves	Populism and communication	Ethical management
Politics and governmental entities/ How festivalmakers understand political and governmental actors	(the rise of) Illiberal cultural policies	Private/public funding, stakeholders, partners and relations/network
Funding / financial actors /How festivalmakers understand funding and financial actors	Nationalism, identity politics as treat for cultural organizing/ production	Role of cultural professionals
Audiences and people in society / How festivalmakers understand audiences and other people in society	(the rise of) Illiberal populism, authoritarianism, illiberal democracies	Smallness
Private actors / How festivalmakers understand private actors	Non-democratic political structures: autocracy, dictatorship,	Use of the digital as curational (and organizational) choice
Public / social actors / How festivalmakers understand public and social actors	National / local government	Democratic affordances
Volunteers and community / How festivalmakers understand volunteers and community	Community / collectivity - related to identity	Curation
Other actors / How festivalmakers understand other actors that do not fit in the codes mentioned above in this group.	Revolution, protest and activism	Financial (in)dependency
	Social un-democracy	Humans/the individual and the collective/community
	Healthy democracy	Location registration of organization
	Ideology	Organizational models
	Generational formations	Space

	Corruption	Volunteering/volunteers
	Diaspora/migration	Tools and strategies related to curation and organization
	Lack of connection / mobility	
	Distrust	
	International sanctions/embargoes	
	National/regional level government	
	Conservatism	

Appendix 2: Code book

code group	code	Description	Literature / new code
Actors	1. festivalmakers / cultural professionals	Mentioning festivalmakers, their behaviour, responses and positions. Including actions of interviewees themselves, talking about their own experiences and actions/	New code
	5. Audiences and society	Mentions about how audiences and society in a broader sense are related to, influence(d) or are connected with festivalmakers and their work.	New code
	3. Funders	Mentions regarding funders, funding entities etc.	New code
	2. Political actors	Mentions of political actors, their influence and positions in relation to those of festivalmakers, individuals or entities.	New code
	Private actors	Mentions regarding private entities and individuals within the field.	New code
	Public/social actors	Mentions regarding public and or social actors, individuals or entities in the field; often with governmental or political connections.	New code
	Volunteers	Mentions of volunteers and their position in relation to cultural work.	New code

	4. Other actors	Other actors mentioned which are also relevant.	New code
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Code group	code	description	Literature / new code
Social and political occurrences	Populism and communication	Zamorano (2021) states that “far right populism is using culture to enforce illiberal policies” Which is against a healthy democracy (EU context) Bonet and Zamorano (2020) describe illiberal cultural policies by making connections to populism, national identity building and identity politics in Poland and Hungary. They understand populism and mass communication as two of the big influences in cultural policies being instrumentalized for ideological hegemony.	Zamorano 2021, Bonet and Zamorano 2020,
	(the rise of) Illiberal cultural policies	They describe the illiberal cultural policies in Poland and Hungary, characterizing them as “mechanisms to foster a homogenizing and conservative understanding of culture”. They understand illiberal democracies as ‘any authoritarian political projects that share a common rejection for a fully democratic pluralism and for minority rights, being part of regimes where free and fair elections are combined with a relative denial of such constitutional rights’ (Zakaria 1997; Bogaards 2009, as cited by Bonet and Zamorano 2020. page 560)	Zamorano 2021, Bonet and Zamorano 2020
	Nationalism, identity politics as treat for cultural organizing/ production	Bonet and Zamorano 2020 describe the influence of nationalism within cultural policies as a threat to the organization of culture.	Zamorano 2021, Bonet and Zamorano 2020

(the rise of) Illiberal populism, authoritarianism, illiberal democracies	Youngs 2015, Bonet and Zamorano 2020, Poprawski 2022a observe a rise in un-democratic tendencies and systems.	Youngs 2015, Bonet and Zamorano 2020, Poprawski 2022a
Non-democratic political structures: autocracy, dictatorship,		Siaroff 2022a, 2022b
National / local government	Related to (de)centralization	New code
Community / collectivity - related to identity	Issues related to questions about community, identity and collectivity in terms of collaboration, audiences or society.	New code
Revolution, protest and activism	Examples and mentions of the influence and presence of revolutions, protests and activism either directly related to festivals and the cultural sector, or more generally within society.	Đurić et al. 2022
Social un-democracy	Issues within a society that can be seen as having an un-democratic nature such as social pressure, self-censorship and cancel-culture. Related to cultural norms and values.	New code
Healthy democracy	Healthy democracy as understood by Poprawski (2022), suggests the role of culture as one of the pillars in a dynamic, healthy democracy that requires a back and forth of various sectors in a society.	Poprawski 2022
Ideology	Ideology as an underlying structure for political agendas and understandings of culture and belonging.	Rohava 2020
Generational formations	Related to the shaping of cultural identities, suppression, formation, belonging, cultural understanding of one's identity. Etc.	New code

	Corruption	Corruption as mentioned in political and social contexts.	New code
	Diaspora/migration	Diaspora and migration used to explain the movement and displacement of people to different regions in the world; either out of personal reasons or due to political and social issues such as war or unsafely.	New code
	Lack of connection / mobility	Issues regarding lack of physical mobility due to political regulations and/or lack of physical or non-physical connections; e.g. network of colleagues.	New code
	Distrust	Related to social distrust or societies with high degrees of distrust either between citizens and between citizens and authorities.	New code
	International sanctions/embargoes	Issues regarding international sanctions and embargoes on a political level.	New code
	National/regional level government	Issues related to national and regional level governments and governmental institutions.	New code
	Conservatism	Issues related to a more conservative society as struggle for festivals.	New code
Organizational and curation occurrences	Ethical management	Robertson et. al. introduce this concept in order to investigate how festivals can be managed in ethical and responsible ways both internally and in how they interact with broader social phenomena.	Robertson et.al. as cited by Đurić et al. 2022
	Private/public funding, stakeholders, partners and relations/network	Funding and the relation between cultural institutions and funders (be it private or public/governmental) is discussed in various contexts. Feder and Katz-Gerro (2015) look into cultural hierarchies as an effect of governmental funding in the performance art, point towards	Feder 2021 (cosm talks), Zamorano 2020 (cosm talks) , Feder and

		ethical and geographical distinctions in the case of Israel. Zamorano (2020) points to the formation of private-public alliances in contexts of illiberal cultural policies.	Katz-Gerro 2015
	Role of cultural professionals	Poprawski (2022) proposes art to be a pillar for a healthy democracy, positioning cultural professionals as facilitators for dialogue and citizen participation.	Poprawski 2022
	Smallness	Topics related to the scale of the festival, smallness	New code
	Use of the digital as curational (and organizational) choice	Strategies and issues related to the use of the digital space and other technological means.	New code
	Democratic affordances?	Participation	New code
		Support and solidarity	New code
		Education	New code
		Facilitating alternative forms of political engagement	New code
		Conversation / democracy	New code
	Tools and strategies related to curation and organization	<i>Tools and strategies related to curation and organization, as suggested and/or used by festivalmakers.</i>	
		Shared resources / alternative resources	New code
		Adapting to un-democratic structures	New code
		International communities	New code
		Anonymity, hidden events, use of metaphor	New code
		Archiving	New code
		Art as means for emancipation	
		Artistic boycott	New code
		Artivism	

	Collaboration	New code
	(lack of) language skills and resources more generally.	New code
	Safely measures (audiences, cultural workers and artists)	New code
	Underground organizing	New code
Curation	Mentions regarding the curational side of festival making and its (non)importance.	New code
Financial (in)dependency	Issues regarding financial (in)dependency and the structures around this.	New code
Humans/the individual and the collective/community	Concepts and examples related to a more prominent role of one individual or a small group of individuals in relation to a community; those who act in behalf/for the collective.	New code
Location registration of organization	Issues related to the location where an organization is registered.	New code
Organizational models	Examples and issues related to different organizational models.	New code
Space	Efforts to facilitate and organize spaces for culture, dialogue and experimentation. Related to the importance of (festival/cultural) spaces	New code
Volunteering/volunteers	Issues related to volunteering and volunteers.	New code

Appendix 3 Relations in data structure

Relations between various elements in the data- and research structure.

What	Input	Result	Relation to	Relation to research question
<u>Literature review</u>	Academic publications related to festivals, politics, (un)democracy, culture etc.	Overview of literature from relevant discourses	Theoretical framework Input topiclists Input codebook	Theoretical framework, grounding conversations and input for codebook.
<u>Topiclists</u>	Literature review Case based research	Guidelines and background knowledge for the conversations	Conversations Research participants	Background research and underlying foundation for conversations
<u>Transcribed conversations</u>	Recorded conversations with festivalmakers	Input for Atlas.ti	Atlas.ti, codebook and input new codes.	Establishing a set of material for Atlas.ti and data overviews.
<u>Codebook</u>	Literature review New codes from the first round of coding.	Concepts and topics from literature and new codes	Overview topics and concepts already established in related academic discourses + new concepts derived from new codes.	Set of concepts relevant within the context of the research. Overview of relevant topics and themes Working list of topics for research on festivals/culture and (un)democracy
<u>Overview of tensions, relations and influences.</u>	Coding / overview of quotes with codes from Atlas.ti and final version codebook and	Overview of themes and coding.	Overview of data findings/quotes matching with themes from the literature review (lack of) links with theoretical framework	Identifying themes that describe the qualities of relations and tensions