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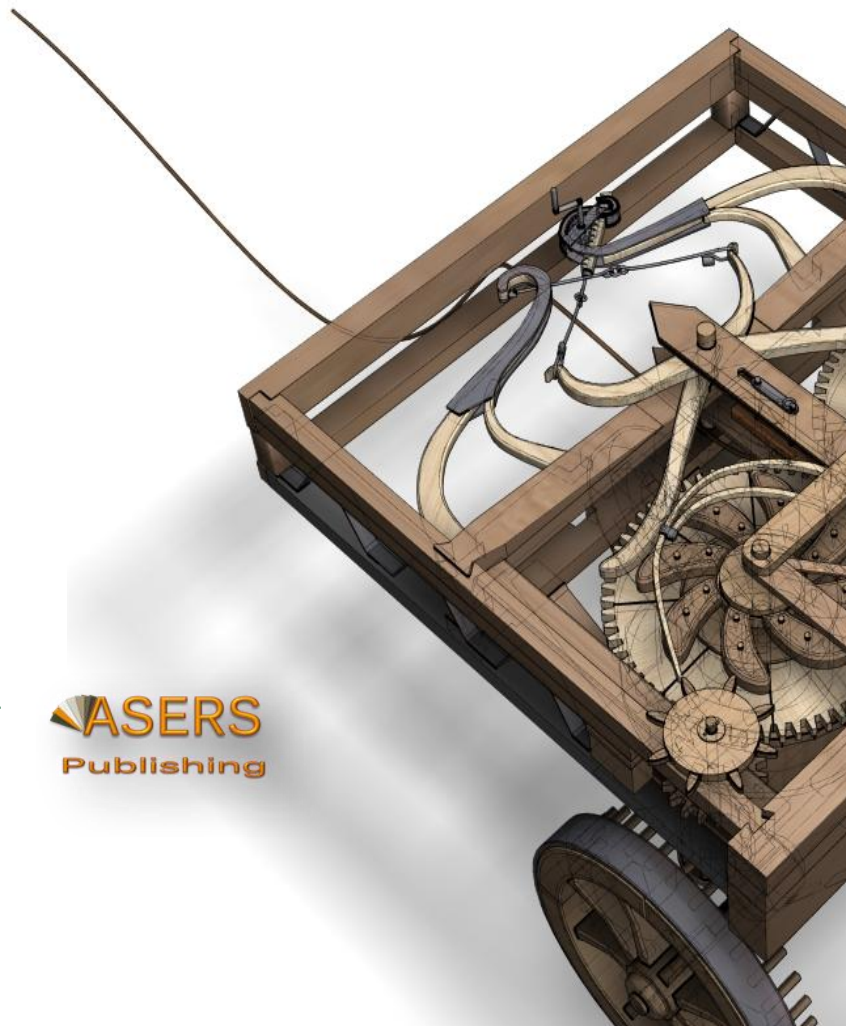
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Reframing Festivals: From Celebration and Tourism to Cornerstones of the Creative Industries

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Abstract: Festivals have emerged as multifaceted phenomena that not only drive cultural consumption and stimulate tourism but also function as creative hubs integral to the growth of the creative industries. This conceptual study synthesizes existing literature and real-world examples to examine the interconnections between festivals, tourism, and the creative industries, positioning festivals as essential contributors to the creative economy. Rooted in the cultural and creative sectors, festivals attract travelers and serve as platforms for artistic innovation, knowledge exchange, and the formation of temporary creative clusters. They contribute to socio-economic development, urban transformation, and place branding, while strengthening the activities and networks of the creative class. The article highlights the dual role of festivals in both cultural consumption - through performative culture and tourism - and creative production, emphasizing their capacity to foster education and innovation. It further proposes a conceptual framework that captures the dynamic interplay between festivals and the creative industries, addressing existing gaps in institutional recognition and academic discourse.

Keywords: festivals; tourism; creative industries; urban and regional development; festivals as creative hubs.

JEL Classification: R11; L83; Z10.

Introduction

Festivals are growing rapidly in both number and variety, offering people a break from daily routines and an opportunity to enjoy cultural, entertainment, and social experiences (Davies 2015; Finkel and Platt 2020). Beyond entertainment, they also play a vital role in economic development - particularly through tourism and investment - aligning with the principles of the experience economy (Cudny 2016) and contributing to culture-driven territorial branding (Bianchini 1993; Quinn 2005; Degen and Garcia 2012; Zherdev 2014; Díez-Pisonero, 2025).

One of the most frequently discussed features of festivals in academic literature is their ability to attract tourists. Visitors are drawn to destinations hosting such events by the promise of fun and extraordinary experiences (Laing 2018). The most common motivations for attending festivals include the desire to experience culture, spend leisure time in an engaging way, enjoy the distinctive festival atmosphere, spend time with friends and family, and meet new people. People traveling to festivals participate in festival tourism being a part of cultural tourism (Ratkowska 2010; Cudny and Ogórek 2014; Rossetti, 2024). Festivals are often organized in tourist destinations during peak seasons as additional attractions complementing leisure or sightseeing. In this sense, they function as tourist attractions - elements that enhance the tourism product of various destinations - and, without a doubt, represent a form of cultural consumption based on extraordinary experiences (Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011; Cudny 2016).

Recent academic research increasingly highlights strong links between festivals and the creative industries (Alvarez 2010; Rofe and Woosnam 2016; Richards 2016; Johansson and Toraldo 2017; Black *et al.* 2024; Islam and Sadhukhan, 2025). Rooted in the cultural sector, creative industries encompass a wide range of activities, from the arts and performance to IT, media, video games, architecture, and design. These industries are recognized as engines of social and economic development, with their growth closely tied to the rise of the so-called creative class (Stryjakiewicz *et al.* 2010, 2014). Festivals are often created and led by members of this

class - artists, local creatives, and game developers among them (Visser 2005; Brennan-Horley *et al.* 2007; Cudny and Rouba 2012; Kang *et al.* 2014).

Traditionally, scholars have examined festivals and creative industries through the lens of cultural consumption and urban development. They are seen as key components of the creative economy, driving tourism and enhancing the attractiveness of specific places (Cudny 2016). However, festivals are more than just consumer experiences - they also serve as platforms and nodes for creative thinking, education, and artistic production. Many functions as incubators for new ideas, performances, and trends (Prentice and Andersen 2003).

The connections between festivals and the creative industries are therefore multifaceted. They extend beyond economic impact to include creative production, temporary creative clusters, network-building, business development, and educational innovation - all of which contribute to the vitality of the broader creative class. Despite this, festivals are still commonly perceived primarily as consumption-driven events or tools for place branding. There has been relatively little institutional effort to formally integrate festivals into the framework of the creative industries, and comprehensive studies explicitly positioning festivals within this context remain limited.

This article seeks to address that gap. It consolidates existing knowledge on festivals and their relationship with creative industries, highlighting how deeply interconnected these spheres are. The first research goal is to present classical perspectives on festivals as drivers of tourism and local growth. The second is to position the festival sector as a legitimate and essential component of the creative industries. The article also aims to identify key areas where these connections are most visible - drawing on both institutional and traditional perspectives - while emphasizing the potential of festivals to function as creative hubs for cultural production, education, and innovation - presenting a deeper approach to festivals and creative industries.

The scientific novelty and importance of this study lie in its integrative approach to understanding festivals not merely as cultural consumption events or instruments of place branding, but as dynamic components of the creative industries. While existing research has primarily focused on their touristic and economic dimensions, this study advances the discussion by positioning festivals as active nodes within creative ecosystems - spaces of artistic production, innovation, and knowledge exchange. By bridging the conceptual gap between festival studies and creative industry frameworks, it highlights how festivals contribute to creative cluster formation, business development, and education, reinforcing their role as incubators of creativity and local development.

1. Methods

This article is a conceptual paper. The main goal of a conceptual article is to propose new frameworks, models, or concepts that advance understanding within a specific field. Conceptual papers also develop models and theoretical propositions that can be tested through future empirical research. These models are constructed through the summarization and synthesis of existing knowledge drawn from secondary materials, such as academic publications, reports, and credible online sources. Conceptual articles therefore integrate previous findings and offer new ways of thinking about a problem, phenomenon, or theory. In scientific research, conceptual articles play an essential role in theory building and intellectual development. They help identify gaps in existing literature; challenge established assumptions and provide fresh perspectives that can guide future empirical studies. Such papers often serve as a foundation for generating hypotheses, designing research methodologies, or redefining key constructs within a discipline (Jaakkola 2020; Reese 2023).

The goal of this conceptual article is to identify and analyze scholarly literature that connects festivals with the creative industries, aiming to uncover how festivals reflect various forms of creativity and contribute to their development. The analysis adopts a dual perspective: on one hand, it explores established themes rooted in institutional and traditional socio-economic views of festivals - as tourist attractions, events for cultural consumption, and vehicles for place promotion and development. On the other hand, it examines newer and more nuanced perspectives that offer alternative understandings of how festivals intersect with creativity, creative industries and the broader creative economy.

The literature review began with keyword searches in the Scopus database, using terms such as *festival*, *creative industries*, *creative cities*, *creative class*, and *events*. These keywords were chosen because they represent the core of current discussions on how cultural events relate to urban and economic transformation. Initial filtering focused on whether these terms appeared in titles, abstracts, or keywords.

Subsequently, abstracts were reviewed to assess their relevance, with particular attention to works offering conceptual or empirical insight into the relationship between festivals and creativity - especially through the lens of the creative industries or the creative class. Selected texts were read in full to extract key themes, theoretical approaches, and empirical findings. Additional relevant works were identified through reference lists, ensuring a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the topic.

To enrich the analysis and ground it in real-world practice, the literature review was complemented with examples from online sources - including festival websites, digital media, and publicly available reports. Additionally, elements of autoethnography were incorporated, drawing on personal experiences and observations from attending creative festivals and cultural events (see: Butz and Besio 2009; Ellis *et al.* 2011).

This combined methodology - integrating academic sources, digital content, and lived experience - seeks to present an interconnected, and multidimensional view of how festivals foster creativity and contribute to the evolving dynamics of the creative industries and economy.

2. Theoretical Background: Defining Festivals, Festival Tourism and Creative Industries

2.1. Festivals

Italian sociologist Falassi (1987, p. 2) stated that "Festival commonly means a periodically recurrent social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees all members of the whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview." Davies (2015, p. 535) wrote that, "Festivals are distinctive because they take people outside their normal behaviours in time and space. They provide unusual activities and evoke feelings and emotions that are very different to the regular and material routines of the workday. Traditionally most took place in spaces that are either normally used for other activities such as roads or empty spaces but later become the exclusive sites for the period of the event - sites usually temporarily transformed by decorations and events."

Gibson *et al.* (2011) described festivals as unique occasions filled with ceremonial entertainment, spectacles, and acts of remembrance. They unite people, with participants seeking extraordinary experiences and the pleasure of coming together. According to Quinn (2005) festivals are exceptional, creative events that transcend the ordinary and must cultivate a unique atmosphere rooted not only in artistic excellence but also in the locale's traditions and heritage. Gibson and Stewart (2009, p. 6) stated that "To qualify for inclusion as a festival, an event had to meet at least one (and preferably more than one) of the following criteria: use of the word 'festival' in the event name; it being an irregular, one-off, annual, or biennial event; emphasis on celebrating, promoting, or exploring some aspect of local culture; or being an unusual point of convergence for people with a given cultural activity or specific subcultural identification."

Festivals are organized events embodying various expressions of human culture, allowing people to gather during leisure time. They contribute to the production and consumption of culture and are inherently creative, showcasing human ingenuity across multiple domains. Since human culture encompasses both tangible and intangible elements, there exists a vast array of festival types (Waterman, 1998). These include arts festivals like Glastonbury, Cannes Film Festival, Edinburgh Fringe, and Frankfurt Book Fair; festivals celebrating customs like the Rio Carnival; religious festivals; science events like the World Science Festival; food and wine festivals like Oktoberfest; fashion weeks; multicultural events; LGBTQ+ festivals like San Francisco Pride; and many others. This diversity highlights the wide range of themes around which festivals are organized (Cudny, 2016). They are brought to life by creative individuals such as artists and scientists. Festivals often serve as platforms for emerging talent, providing opportunities for new creators to showcase their work to wider audiences (Larson, 2009, 2011).

Festivals fulfil numerous functions: they entertain, provide access to culture, and help build cultural (Getz, 2010; Rossetti and Quinn, 2021) and social capital (Cudny and Ogórek, 2014). They strengthen community identity and pride, fostering a sense of belonging among participants and residents. As social gatherings, they facilitate human interaction and contribute to economic growth through revenue from festival tourism. The construction of the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès in Cannes, driven by the Cannes Film Festival, illustrates how festivals can lead to significant infrastructure development. Additionally, festivals are prominent media events featured in both traditional and social media, becoming tourist attractions and branding opportunities (De Valck, 2007; Cudny, 2022).

The rise of festivals gained momentum after the Second World War when average incomes increased, people sought new and extraordinary experiences, and there was more leisure time (Cudny 2016). In many developed societies, a growing desire emerged to participate in unique experiences - a phenomenon known as the experience society (Schulze, 2008) and economy (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Naturally, festivals, being extraordinary and unique events, became the ideal medium to provide such experiences (Waterman, 1998).

2.2. Festival Tourism

Festival tourism is a form of cultural tourism in which people travel to a destination primarily to attend, experience, or participate in festivals or special cultural events (Cudny 2013). In cultural tourism, travelers are interested in exploring attractions connected with human culture, understood as the collective achievements of human civilization. Within cultural tourism, several forms can be distinguished, such as sightseeing, museum tourism, heritage tourism, and festival tourism, among others (Kowalczyk 2008; Du Cros and McKercher 2020; Richards and Leal Londoño, 2022).

Festival tourism involves visiting destinations to enjoy music, art, food, religious, historical, or seasonal celebrations that provide insight into the art, traditions, lifestyles, and identities of local communities. Travelers seek extraordinary experiences associated with the festival atmosphere - such as performances, social interactions, and connections with others, including friends, family, or new acquaintances met during the event (Cudny 2014, 2016; Kinnunen *et al.* 2025).

Visiting festivals as part of cultural celebrations encourages cultural exchange between locals and visitors. Festivals function both as tourist attractions and as tourism products that generate tangible and intangible effects: they often boost the local economy and stimulate the tourism industry (Quinn 2006, 2019; Richards and Leal Londoño 2022). Moreover, festivals are an essential part of cultural consumption within tourism destinations. They provide a platform where visitors engage with local creativity through art, design, performance, and gastronomy. Such experiences transform tourists from passive spectators into active participants in cultural production (Wang and Kao, 2023). Festivals also serve as spaces for showcasing local talent and innovation, strengthening the destination's creative identity. Through this process, cultural and creative consumption fosters a deeper emotional connection between tourists and the host community, enhancing the overall cultural value of the destination (Cudny 2016; Thomasson, 2022).

2.3. Creative Industries

At the beginning of the twentieth century, culture became commodified on a mass scale, leading to its commercialization and the rise of mass culture. Due to the development of mass media - radio, television, and later the internet; increased societal wealth; and more leisure time, cultural products - both material and immaterial - became significant in social life. Subsequent decades saw culture's growing economic significance, influenced by the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 2011) and the shift into a post-industrial phase (Rifkin 2000). Deindustrialization began in the 1950s, affecting many regions and cities. This process was accelerated by globalization, which shifted industrial production to Asia, replacing industrial activities with the growth of the service sector in Western countries (Wróbel 2017). Therefore, cultural services became a factor in urban and regional revitalization on different scales, partly replacing declining traditional industries (Bianchini 1993; García 2004; Jayne *et al.* 2010). This led to concepts like the cultural economy (Gibson and Kong 2005) and culture-led regeneration (Cudny 2016). Culture positively impacted spaces by generating employment, creating profits from cultural production, and promoting cultural and event tourism (Wang and Kao, 2023). Spatial revitalization was achieved through building cultural venues (*e.g.*, Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao), promoting localities based on cultural heritage, cultural production, and event sector.

The United Kingdom pioneered cultural industries which began playing a key role in development and revitalization policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was a response to economic changes impacting traditional industries, leading to urban decline and unemployment (see Bennett *et al.* 2000). The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), established in 1997, played a crucial role in developing cultural industries. DCMS actively supported this sector through legislation, funding, and policy strategies. British authorities recognized the cultural and creative sector's potential as a catalyst for economic and social renewal, promoting a service- and culture-based economy (Lupu *et al.* 2025). Notable examples include the revitalization of London's East End. Similar initiatives occurred in Manchester, which, after the textile industry's collapse, focused on developing cultural industries (O'Connor 2007).

Later the concept of cultural industries evolved into creative industries due to the growing importance of technological innovations, and the knowledge-based economy. Initially focused on culture-related sectors to aid urban revitalization and counter deindustrialization, the concept expanded to include creative sectors. Therefore, the ideas of the creative economy and creative clusters, regions, and cities emerged (Środa-Murawska and Szymańska 2013; Lupu *et al.* 2025). In regions and cities, the creative economy leads to new jobs, attracts talent and investments, and fosters the revitalization of neglected areas (Graham 2005; Evans 2009; Landry 2012; Kalfas *et al.* 2024).

Creative industries were defined in the 1998 DCMS Mapping Document as industries that "have their origin in individual creativity, skill, and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property," encompassing sectors like advertising, architecture, arts and crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television, and radio (Potts *et al.* 2012, p. 59). According to Turok (2003, p. 552), creative industries are "the area of overlap between cultural and commercial activities. They involve the supply of goods and services that contain a substantial element of artistic, imaginative, or intellectual effort, or that are associated with and play a vital role in sustaining cultural activities. The boundary is a matter of debate; for example, what forms of entertainment are included. They typically include film, television, video, music, the visual and performing arts, advertising, publishing, design activity, software and new digital media."

Richard Florida's creative class theory (2002) emphasizes the importance of creative professionals in driving the growth and innovation in creative industries and creative economy. According to Florida, cities and regions that attract and support the creative class foster socio-economic development. The creative class, consisting of scientists, engineers, and artists, is a key factor in global competitiveness. Although often criticized (see: Peck 2005; Cudny *et al.* 2020) Florida's concept further influenced urban development strategies, encouraging environments conducive to creativity, such as cultural zones, investments in education and research, and high-tech industries. Many urban regions began to emphasize technology, talent and tolerance (3Ts) as elements which attract the creative class and stimulate economic growth (Florida 2003). The emergence of innovation centres and first technology parks in cities like London, New York, and San Francisco became symbols of this change, attracting skilled workers and investors, fuelling dynamic economic and social development (Hospers 2003).

3. Festivals and Creative Industries: An Institutional Perspective

Attempts by institutions to define and recognize festivals within the creative industries are limited. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report (2008), festivals are classified as traditional cultural expressions (Table 1). However, this perspective offers a narrow view of festivals' value and their breadth within creative industries.

Festivals can be associated with other UNCTAD sub-groups of creative industries. For instance, in visual arts, festivals like the Mural Festival in Montreal, Canada, and the Berlin Mural Fest in Germany are examples. Photography festivals such as the FORMAT International Photography Festival in Derby, UK, and the Lagos Photo Festival in Nigeria exemplify this diversity. Festivals play a significant role in performing arts (live music, theatre, dance, etc.). Events like the Glastonbury Festival in Somerset, England, and Tomorrowland in Boom, Belgium, showcase the integration of festivals into this sector. Theatre festivals such as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland or the Avignon Festival in France are illustrations. Cinema festivals like the Cannes Film Festival in France and the Berlin International Film Festival in Germany can be categorized within the audiovisual sector. Events like the Łódź Design Festival and Fashion Weeks represent the design sector, while the Festival of Comic Books and Games in Łódź represents new media.

To conclude, festivals span many creative sectors distinguished by UNCTAD, proving they are an integral part of the creative industries. Therefore, recognizing festivals solely within the traditional cultural expressions category is insufficient.

Table 1. UNCTAD's classification of creative industries

Creative industries	Sub-groups of creative industries according to UNCTAD	
	Traditional cultural expressions: arts and crafts, festivals and celebrations.	
	Performing arts: live music, theatre, dance, opera, circus, etc.	
	Audiovisuals: film, television, radio, and other broadcasting.	
	New media: software, video games, digital creative content.	
	Creative services: architecture, advertising, creative R&D, etc.	
	Design: interior, graphic, fashion, jewellery, and toys.	
	Publishing and printed media: books, press, and other publications.	
	Visual arts: paintings, sculptures, photography, and antiques.	
	Cultural sites: archaeological sites, museums, libraries, exhibitions, etc.	

Source: Own elaboration based on http://unctad.org/es/Docs/ditc20082cer_en.pdf

The European Union document Unlocking the Potential of Cultural and Creative Industries (p. 14) highlights festivals' role in enhancing career opportunities and mobility for cultural workers who belong to the creative class, stating: "opening up new market opportunities and enhancing their career possibilities in particular through their participation in residencies, festivals, live touring performances, international exhibitions or literary events" (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/>).

4. The Role of Festivals in Urban-Regional Growth within the Creative Industries: A Traditional Perspective

Several authors have acknowledged festivals as integral parts of the creative industries (Alvarez 2010; Rofo and Woosnam 2016; Cudny 2016; Richards 2016; Johansson and Toraldo 2017; Black *et al.* 2024; Islam and Sadhukhan 2025). Traditionally festivals are mostly recognized as platforms for presenting diverse art forms, including music (Matykowski and Zmudzińska 2022), film, theatre, visual arts such as graphics, paintings, and sculpture (Visser 2005), folklore (Bird 1983), heritage (Brennan-Horley *et al.* 2007; Kang *et al.* 2014; Cudny *et al.* 2022), fashion and design (Cudny and Rouba 2012), and new media like video games (Cudny 2016). By bringing these cultural products to audiences, festivals represent the creative industries and play a vital role in promoting cultural consumption (Snowball *et al.* 2010).

However, there is still limited focus on festivals as hubs of creative ideas and production. The participation of festival-goers is primarily seen as an opportunity to consume artistic creations and performances (Burgess 1992; Waterman 1998). As a result, cultural consumption becomes a pivotal element of cultural policies in cities hosting festivals. These policies develop urban economies through festival tourism and foster attractive place brands rooted in culture (Bianchini 1993; Richards and Wilson 2004; Quinn 2005; Degen and Garcia 2012; Zherdev 2014). Festival tourism is a clear example of cultural consumption, as it involves experiencing and engaging with the cultural expressions of a destination (Rivetti *et al.* 2024). Tourists participate in festivals to enjoy music, art, cuisine, and performances that reflect the traditions and creativity of local communities. Through these activities, visitors consume cultural products and experiences that hold symbolic, emotional, and aesthetic value. This process transforms culture into a form of economic and social exchange, where creativity and heritage become part of the tourism product. In this sense, festival tourism illustrates how culture is both produced and consumed within the broader context of the creative and experience economy (Wyatt and Rossetti, 2024).

Existing research also emphasizes the socio-cultural impacts of festivals, including fostering social capital, facilitating social interactions, and promoting cultural heritage (Small *et al.* 2005; Arcodia and Whitford 2007; Sharpley and Stone 2020). Moreover, participation in festivals represents a clear example of encounters between cultures - because festivals bring together people from diverse cultural, social, and geographical backgrounds. They create opportunities for the exchange of traditions, values, and artistic expressions through shared experiences such as music, performances, cuisine, and rituals (Hassanli *et al.* 2021). In this sense, festivals act as intercultural contact zones, where dialogue and understanding between different cultural groups can naturally emerge. These interactions often lead to cultural exchange and hybridization, inspiring new creative expressions and shared forms of identity. Thus, attending festivals extends beyond entertainment, serving as a significant form of intercultural communication and cultural co-creation (Cudny 2016).

Moreover, festivals are seen as vital in bolstering local and regional economies through tourism (Cudny 2013; Matykowski and Zmudzińska 2022; Akhundova, 2024), as attendees spend on accommodations, dining, and souvenirs, thereby stimulating local businesses. Festivals create jobs within the event, hospitality, and retail sectors. They also generate revenue from ticket sales, sponsorships, and vendor fees (Tohmo 2005; Saayman and Rossouw 2011; Hjalager and Kwiatkowski 2018; Ray, 2022; Kwiatkowski *et al.* 2024).

Furthermore, festivals as the whole creative industries sector are utilized in cultural-led development and regeneration strategies to rejuvenate cities experiencing stagnation (Cudny 2016; Finkel and Platt 2020). Festivals also enhance a destination's reputation, attracting investment in infrastructure and additional cultural events, thereby ensuring lasting benefits through cultural labeling (Johnson 2016; Cohendet *et al.* 2010; Landry 2012; Cudny *et al.* 2020).

For example, Edinburgh, has developed its economy and brand through festivals like the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, attracting millions of visitors annually and significantly boosting its tourism industry and economy. The festivals held in Edinburgh are a tourism asset of global significance, attracting visitors from all over the world and shaping the city's international image (Thomasson, 2022). Events such as the Edinburgh International Festival and the Fringe have made the city one of the leading cultural capitals of Europe. On this basis, the city has developed long-term urban and regional development strategies that integrate culture and tourism as key

drivers of growth. Festival tourism has become central to the city's economic and branding policies, supporting local businesses, creative industries, and year-round visitor engagement. As a result, Edinburgh's festivals not only enhance its global visibility but also serve as a model for sustainable cultural and tourism-based development (see: <https://www.visitscotland.com/things-to-do/events/edinburgh-festivals>).

In 2008, Liverpool and Stavanger were named European Capitals of Culture. Liverpool, once a major industrial hub, leveraged this designation to revitalize its image and boost its economy through a year-long series of celebratory events (West 2022). Similarly, Wrocław, as the European Capital of Culture in 2016, organized numerous cultural events that fostered the city's development by improving infrastructure, increasing tourism, enhancing its international profile, and stimulating economic growth.

In conclusion, in a classic academic view festivals are recognized as integral components of the creative industries; however, they are predominantly perceived as events focused on the consumption of creative goods. They are also viewed as tools for economic growth and urban development through consumption. This perspective is an instrumental approach, treating festivals as tools to stimulate growth and brand creation. Insufficient attention is given to considering festivals as hubs of creativity, nurturing the creative class and fostering creative ideas.

5. A Deeper Understanding of the Connection Between Festivals and the Creative Industries

5.1. Festivals as Creative Productions

Festivals are cultural creations, even when they feature pre-existing artistic works. They present performing arts through live performances, using mediums such as drama, dance, and music to convey creativity and engage audiences. Organizing a festival involves numerous creative decisions, including curating unique programs, selecting artists, and staging music or theatre performances. Some festivals also incorporate real-time art creation, such as the International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival in Harbin, China. As a result, the festival process itself represents a distinctive form of cultural creation (Turok 2003; Larson 2009, 2011; Wang and Kao, 2023).

Waterman (1998) emphasized that festivals serve not only as venues for cultural consumption but also as sites of cultural production. This dual role is crucial, especially since creative production is often regarded as more significant than consumption in the development of creative cities (Comunian 2011). As such, staging a festival can be considered a form of creative production, built on extraordinary experiences and integrally linked to creative city policies. Festivals, as innovative cultural products, frequently operate within local and international networks of creative individuals and entrepreneurs. They generate creative outputs based on diverse domains, including knowledge (e.g., scientific festivals), culture (e.g., film or music festivals), new media, and entertainment (e.g., gaming festivals). To attract repeat visitors, festivals must continually innovate, offering fresh experiences with each iteration. Thus, creativity is an indispensable element of festival execution (Larson 2009; Ossowska *et al.* 2024).

Moreover, festivals embody a dynamic creative chain, integrating the expertise of professionals such as artists, managers, and technicians in a collaborative process. Artists deliver emotive performances, managers curate holistic experiences, and technicians apply their specialized skills. This synergy shapes the unique identity of each festival, advances innovation, fosters community engagement, and enriches the broader discourse on creative industries and cultural production (de Valck 2007; Jordan, 2016).

5.2. Festivals as Part of Creative Networks

Festivals contribute to the development of creative social networks (Larson 2009; Gibson *et al.* 2010). Social networks were first discussed by John Arundel Barnes. The concept gained popularity in the late 20th century among anthropologists and sociologists, later extending to political science, economics, and computer science. It is linked to Talcott Parsons' theory of social systems, which views a social system as a network of interactions among actors at various levels (family, friends, work). Social networks encompass interactions from local to global scales (Mitchell 1974).

Social network theory includes concepts focusing on individuals, teams, organizations, and their interpersonal relationships that constrain and enable human actions. Social network analysis examines the participants, their relationships, and how these relationships form a framework (Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1994). A network consists of nodes and ties. In social networks, nodes can represent actors like government agencies or non-actor entities such as collaboration venues and events. Ties represent relationships like information exchange, trading, disagreements, or joint participation (Bodin *et al.* 2020).

In the creative arts, networks play a pivotal role in connecting artists, agents, and audiences. Events like festivals are crucial for fostering these social networks by bringing together various stakeholders (Jarman *et al.* 2014; Jordan, 2016, Braden and Teekens 2019; Grau Pérez, 2025). According to Comunian (2017a), networks are vital in creative fields such as the film industry. De Valck (2007) identifies "obligatory points of passage" as key nodes within these networks, with festivals exemplifying such points.

Film festivals for example enable industry members to meet, exchange ideas, and collaborate on projects. They provide filmmakers with opportunities to present their work to audiences and connect with professionals such as actors, producers, directors, and screenwriters, facilitating partnerships. As network nodes, film festivals support the development, showcasing, distribution, and innovation within the film industry. Consequently, as part of the creative industries (Cunningham 2002; Turok 2003; Comunian 2017a), film festivals are indispensable nodes within creative industry networks (de Valck 2007; Cudny and Ogórek 2014).

Furthermore, festivals are vital in forming creative social networks across geographical scales. Locally, they serve as hubs where artists, producers, and audiences converge, facilitating idea exchange, collaborations, and showcasing talent. This strengthens community ties, fosters a supportive creative environment, and offers local artists opportunities to develop the cultural scene. Globally, festivals connect artists and producers from different regions, promoting cultural exchange and mobility. By attracting international participants and audiences, festivals expand local artists' reach, highlight global trends, and enable cross-border collaborations (Cudny *et al.* 2020; Quinn, 2025).

For instance, the Camerimage Film Festival, currently held annually in Toruń, Poland, is a premier event dedicated to cinematography and serves as a node in creative film network (Cudny and Ogórek 2014). During this event, attendees make valuable industry contacts, participate in workshops, and collaborate on future projects - often developing cooperation plans - thereby strengthening the global creative network of filmmakers (<https://camerimage.pl/en/energacamerimage>).

5.3. Festivals as Temporary Creative Clusters

The next concept explaining the role of festivals in the creative industries is cluster theory. Clusters in regional development are geographic concentrations of interconnected businesses, suppliers, and associated institutions in a specific field. These clusters often include collaborating and competing firms, specialized suppliers, service providers, and institutions such as universities and trade associations (see: Roberts and Lowe, 2024). According to Porter (1990), clusters can impact competition in three ways: by increasing company productivity, driving innovation, and stimulating new businesses in the field.

The role of creative clusters in urban and regional development has been widely studied (Bagwell 2008; Evans 2009; Chapain and Sagot-Duvaurox 2020; Gutierrez-Posada *et al.* 2023). Clusters serve as nodes for the spatial concentration of innovation, business creativity, and modern technologies through cooperation and experience exchange. Related to events is the concept of temporary clusters, which refer to gatherings such as conferences, congresses, trade fairs and festivals (Maskell *et al.* 2006).

Festivals function as temporary clusters of creativity, transforming their host destinations into vibrant hubs for knowledge exchange, networking, culture and idea generation. They act as focal points for showcasing talent and fostering connections, creating dynamic spaces where all aspects of the festival's creative content converge. Despite their temporary nature, festivals often have a year-round impact, with venues housing organizers who curate programs and recruit participants well in advance, sustaining creative activity beyond the event itself (Cudny 2016).

Many festivals also maintain functional and spatial ties with contractors and event-related institutions such as art foundations, incubators, universities, film schools, or recording studios. These relationships form broader creative clusters that integrate festival venues, events, and associated organizations, fostering innovation and collaboration. For example, the International Festival of Music Producers and Sound Designers Soundedit in Łódź connects creative music producers, offering opportunities for cooperation, education, and workshops. Hosted at TOYA Studios, a music and dubbing production firm, the festival exemplifies how partnerships enhance both event execution and the creative ecosystem (<https://soundedit.pl/en/>).

Festivals vary in geographic scale, operating within global networks while embedding themselves in local connections among creative institutions, practitioners, and infrastructure (Gibson *et al.* 2010; Comunian 2011). Comunian (2017b) highlights that many festivals function as temporary creative clusters, profoundly influencing regional and local economies. The participation of the local creative class and entrepreneurs is critical, as they co-organize events, collaborate on projects, and drive the development of the creative economy (Cohendet *et al.*

2010). Festivals provide access to global knowledge, enabling local creatives to understand trends and harness their potential to produce and commercialize experience-based products (see Kwiatkowski *et al.* 2024).

In Łódź, Poland, the local creative class plays a pivotal role in festivals such as the Łódź Design Festival and Fotofestival. Supported by the Łódź Art Incubator – Creative Industries Incubator, they curate exhibitions, organize workshops, and host lectures that showcase both emerging and established talent in design and photography. This active participation enriches the festivals' quality and diversity, fosters artistic growth, and facilitates networking and cultural exchange. Strengthened by the support of the Łódź Art Incubator, these festivals position Łódź as a vibrant cultural hub, attracting visitors and participants from around the world (see Cudny 2016; Cudny *et al.* 2020).

5.4. Festivals as Creative Business Developments

Festivals play a pivotal role in fostering creative entrepreneurial collaboration, acting as hubs for business connections within the creative sector. These connections inspire new solutions, facilitate the introduction of innovative products to the market, secure funding, and link creative entrepreneurs with both business clients and individual customers. By showcasing creative products and entrepreneurship, festivals enable individual buyers or wholesalers to discover and purchase items at events (Gibson *et al.* 2010; Qu and Zollet, 2023).

Festivals strengthen Business-to-Customer (B2C) relationships by offering opportunities for direct sales and engagement with buyers (see: Fernandes and Krolikowska 2023). For instance, fashion or design festivals showcasing everyday products like furniture, as well as art festivals featuring music, graphics, or sculpture, allow artists and designers to display, brand and sell their creations during or after the event. This exposure not only promotes creative firms but also helps them attract new customers.

In addition to fostering B2C connections, festivals also facilitate Business-to-Business (B2B) interactions by bringing together entrepreneurs, including startups. Events such as film, design, fashion, and computer game festivals provide opportunities for partnerships with firms, sponsors, agents, and retailers. For instance, Fashion Weeks serve as vital platforms for business development, enabling designers to connect with buyers and industry professionals while gaining media exposure that extends their reach to global retailers (Cudny and Rouba 2012; Duignan *et al.* 2018).

As discussed, festivals play a crucial role in creative industries by supporting the development of creative enterprises and fostering the growth of the creative class through their facilitation of B2B and B2C interactions. These events not only drive economic growth but also strengthen the creative sector's influence on urban and regional economies.

5.5. Festivals as Hubs for Education, Social Justice, and Creative Atmosphere

Festivals play a pivotal role in education, serving as vital components of the modern learning paradigm that fosters innovation in society. High-level education is essential for nurturing creativity, especially among youth. Enhancing educational opportunities boosts creativity, which in turn improves problem-solving abilities, fosters ingenuity, social equality and justice, elevates quality of life, and stimulates productivity and economic growth (Shaheen, 2010; Sendra, 2024).

As powerful educational tools, festivals immerse attendees in diverse cultural, scientific, and artistic experiences (Kridel, 1980; Childs, 2017). Cultural festivals like the Edinburgh Festival Fringe showcase a wide range of artistic expressions, allowing attendees to explore various cultural narratives and traditions, thereby enriching their cultural capital. Similarly, the Venice Biennale, one of the most prestigious cultural festivals held in Italy, educates the public about contemporary art by introducing new artistic movements and ideas.

Science festivals offer interactive workshops, lectures, and demonstrations that make complex scientific concepts accessible to the public (Park *et al.* 2019). Events such as the World Science Festival in New York City and the Cambridge Science Festival bring together leading scientists, artists, and thinkers to discuss and display scientific advancements, promoting lifelong learning and curiosity.

Music festivals and events, including those featuring popular music, often incorporate educational workshops on music history, instrument making, and songwriting, providing attendees with a deeper understanding of music and its cultural significance (Snell, 2005). Additionally, festivals like the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., focus on cultural heritage, featuring live demonstrations and performances that educate visitors about diverse cultures, traditional crafts, music, and customs from around the world. Film festivals, such as the Sundance Film Festival and Camerimage, not only screen films but also host panels and discussions with filmmakers, offering insights into the filmmaking process (Cudny and Ogórek, 2014).

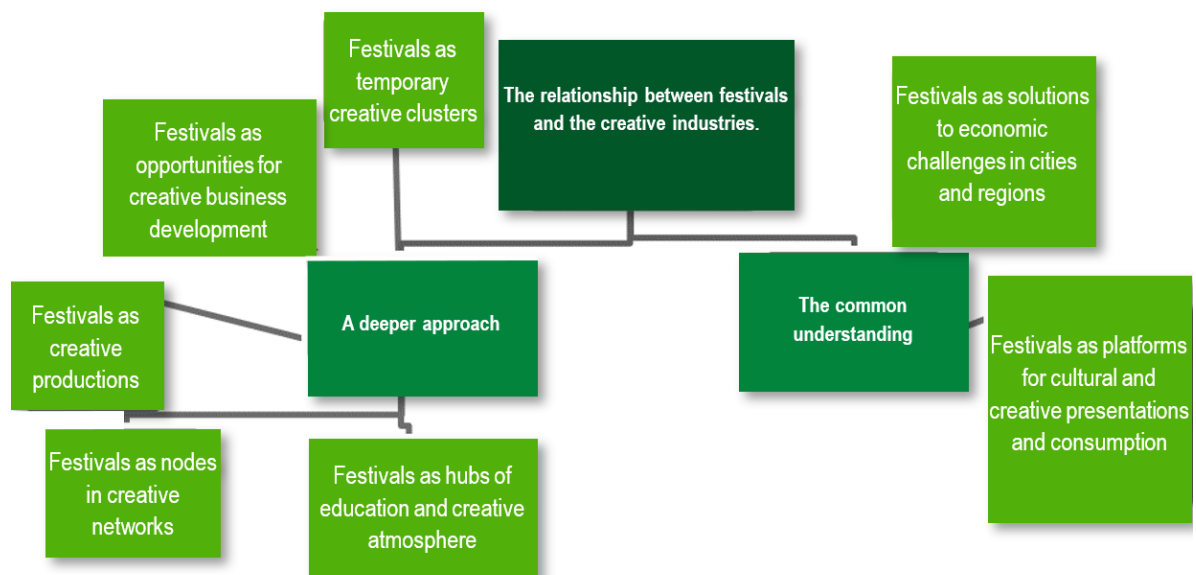
The concentration of the creative class in specific locations is facilitated by Richard Florida's "3T" factors: Technology, Talent, and Tolerance (Snowball *et al.* 2010). Festivals help fight social prejudices and create a tolerant, open, and multicultural atmosphere (Walters *et al.* 2021). Events such as LGBTQ+ gatherings, like San Francisco Pride or Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras create spaces for free sexual expression (Waitt 2008), while multicultural festivals showcase diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, fostering a tolerant environment (Johnston and Waitt, 2015; Duffy, 2005; Buch *et al.* 2011; Lee *et al.* 2012; Hassanli *et al.* 2021; Son and Krolkowski 2025). Organizing these festivals requires creativity in developing diverse programs, selecting a range of artists, and designing unique events that celebrate cultural expression. For instance, The Pasifika Festival in Auckland unites multiethnic societies, reduces cultural tensions, and builds social capital in diverse communities. It facilitates interaction and integration between dominant ethnic groups and recent immigrant minorities, combating intolerance, racism, and prejudices (Cudny and Maiava, 2016).

According to Waitt (2008), festivals are often established in cities aiming to reinvent themselves as vibrant, dynamic, and cosmopolitan. Florida (2005) notes that the creative class gravitates towards places with dense labor markets, openness, tolerance, justice and a high quality of life. Tolerance regarding sexual orientation, ethnicity, and race is particularly important in attracting creative individuals who value freedom and diverse lifestyles, including skilled immigrants (Florida *et al.* 2008). These individuals, often referred to as bohemians, embrace unconventional lifestyles and seek engaging leisure opportunities (Comunian *et al.* 2010). Festivals and events fulfil multiple roles by creating vibrant atmospheres akin to bohemian culture and showcasing various cultural expressions. They provide stimulating leisure activities that attract culturally inclined individuals, offering dynamic and exciting environments for leisure time (Cudny, 2016; Van der Hoeven and Hitters 2023).

Conclusion and Further Research

This article bridges a research gap by synthesizing traditional perspectives on festivals and their intrinsic ties to the creative industries, positioning the festival sector as a cornerstone of this ecosystem. The concept of the relationship between festivals and creative industries presented in the article may serve as a basis for future case study research and broader analyses of the interconnections between festivals and creative industries. The presented analysis establishes a framework for understanding the dependencies between these elements in terms of a common understanding of these relationships and a deeper comprehension of them (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The relationship between festivals and creative industries - a framework



Source: Author's elaboration.

By examining key intersections, the study highlights festivals as platforms for cultural and creative consumption, showcasing diverse art forms (Visser, 2005), folklore (Bird, 1983), heritage (Brennan-Horley *et al.* 2007; Kang *et al.* 2014), fashion, design (Cudny and Rouba, 2012), and new media (Cudny, 2016). In classic view these events facilitate the consumption of cultural and creative products, encapsulating the essence of the creative industries. The traditional roles of festivals are very often realized within festival tourism, which is a branch of cultural tourism. In this context, festivals serve as both tourist attractions and tourism products that

enrich the cultural offer of destinations (Matykowski and Zmudzińska 2022; Thomasson, 2022; Akhundova, 2024). They provide visitors with opportunities to engage in cultural consumption, experiencing local creativity, heritage, and traditions in diverse and dynamic ways. In doing so, festivals expand the scope of cultural experiences available to tourists and enhance the overall attractiveness of a destination (Ray, 2022; Kwiatkowski *et al.* 2024) (Figure 1).

Festivals play a crucial role in shaping socio-cultural and economic dynamics within the creative economy. They nurture social capital, foster creative interactions, and preserve cultural heritage (Small *et al.* 2005; Arcodia and Whitford, 2007; Sharpley and Stone, 2020). Economically, festivals stimulate tourism, boost local employment, and contribute to regional development and place branding (Tohmo, 2005; Saayman and Rossouw, 2011; Cudny 2022), aligning with the broader goals of the creative industries (Figure 1).

A deeper analysis reveals festivals as drivers of creative production, networking, innovation, and education (Figure 1). Festivals transcend passive consumption by actively producing cultural content, such as live art and performances, fostering unique interactions between attendees and creators (Wang and Kao, 2023). These experiences often reflect the host locale's creative identity (Turok, 2003; Larson, 2009, 2011).

Festivals are pivotal for building creative social networks (Larson, 2009; Gibson *et al.* 2010; Jarman *et al.* 2014; Jordan, 2016; Braden and Teekens 2019; Grau Pérez, 2025), acting as hubs for interaction among artists, institutions, and venues. These networks enhance collaboration and innovation, strengthening the creative industries ecosystem (Bodin *et al.* 2020) (Figure 1). For example, film festivals serve as "obligatory points of passage," facilitating professional connections and partnerships (de Valck, 2007; Cudny and Ogórek, 2014).

As temporary creative clusters, festivals resemble regional economic clusters by bringing together businesses, suppliers, and institutions to foster cultural vibrancy and growth (Porter, 1990; Comunian, 2017b). Their regional influence often includes collaborations with firms, artistic studios, universities, and other locally based organizations (Figure 1).

Festivals also catalyze entrepreneurship, offering creators market exposure, fostering innovation, enabling product launches, and securing funding (Fernandes and Krolikowska 2023; Qu and Zollet, 2023). Design, fashion, and film festivals connect creators with industry professionals and consumers, underscoring their importance in the creative industries (Gibson *et al.* 2010; Duignan *et al.* 2018) (Figure 1).

Educationally, festivals provide immersive learning experiences that enhance cultural, artistic, and scientific knowledge (Kridel, 1980; Childs, 2017). Interactive workshops and showcases offer accessible opportunities for public engagement (Park *et al.* 2019; Cudny and Ogórek, 2014). Additionally, they educate on social justice and combat stereotypes, supporting underrepresented groups (Walters *et al.* 2021).

Festivals also attract and support the creative class, driven by Richard Florida's "3T" factors - Technology, Talent, and Tolerance (Snowball *et al.* 2010). Events like LGBTQ+ festivals advocate for equality, while multicultural festivals celebrate diversity, fostering inclusive, dynamic communities (Waitt, 2008; Hassanli *et al.* 2021; Son and Krolikowski 2025). These contributions enhance cities' appeal and cultural vibrancy (Figure 1).

While this study offers meaningful insights into how festivals connect with the creative industries, there are some important limitations to consider. The conceptual research is primarily based on a review of existing literature, online sources and personal reflections through autoethnography. These methods help build a broad and conceptually rich picture, but they lack direct, real-world testing. To better understand how these ideas play out in practice, future research should include detailed case studies or fieldwork involving actual festivals, along with their organizers, participants, and local communities.

The autoethnographic elements - commonly used in qualitative research - are drawn from the author's own experiences and observations at festivals. These reflections provide valuable, first-hand insights, but they are inherently subjective and may not fully represent the diversity of festival experiences across different cultural or geographic contexts.

Future studies would benefit from combining the conceptual approach with more empirical research to build a more comprehensive and grounded understanding of the role festivals play in the creative industries.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Waldemar Cudny: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Project administration, Writing –review and editing, Visualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

The author declares that AI-assisted technologies were used during the writing process prior to submission. These tools were employed to enhance the clarity, language, and readability of the manuscript, and their use has been fully disclosed in accordance with publication guidelines.

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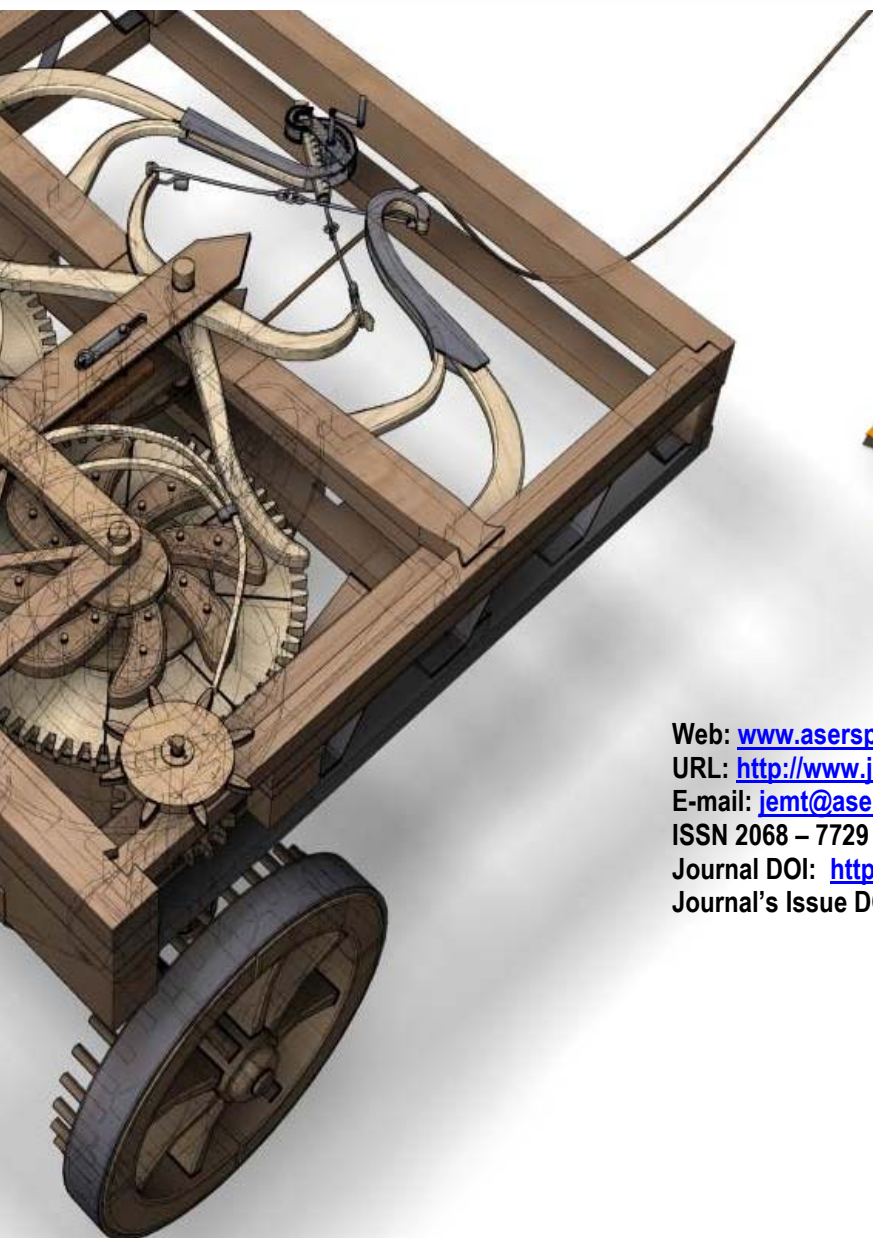
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