

Sweet Dreams are made of These:

Exploring the Role of Festival Campsites in shaping the Festival Experience

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This research investigates how festival campsite facilities create the complete festival experience for visitors who attend multiple-day music events. Academic studies about festivals primarily focus on performances and economic aspects and audience behaviours yet the campsite remains a poorly studied area. The research uses thematic analysis of ten Dutch festivalgoers' semi-structured interviews to reveal how the campsite serves as an essential social and affective space which defines the festival experience beyond mere sleeping accommodations.

The research employs theoretical frameworks from Turner (liminality) and Foucault (heterotopia) and Turner (communitas) and Durkheim (collective effervescence) and Anderson and Böhme (atmosphere) and Bourdieu (distinction) to demonstrate how the campsite enables festivalgoers to break free from their daily routines while building deep social connections and participating in communal rituals of short-term communal living. The experience achieves its authentic quality through the reinterpretation of both uncomfortable conditions and practical difficulties which festival participants call "suffering." The festival campsite presents an enigmatic environment which unites brief periods of liberty and unity with refined social arrangements and organizational systems.

The research adds new knowledge to festival and cultural studies through its analysis of the campsite as a place where experiences and identities and meanings emerge. The research demonstrates how short-lived disordered settings create deep communal bonds among people. The research findings provide useful information to event planners and spatial designers and scholars who study leisure activities and rituals and social patterns of modern cultural events.

Keywords: Festival experience, festival campsite, liminality, communitas, collective effervescence, cultural capital, collective suffering

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Introduction

“The Island of Freedom”, “I’ll Be Your Mirror” and “A Campingflight to Lowlands Paradise”, a selection of slogans from some of the most iconic multiple-day music festivals of Europe (Sziget, n.d.; Primavera Sound, 2023; Lowlands, n.d.). These slogans do not immediately suggest that they are promoting a music festival. Instead, they suggest something more immersing; they promise an experience. Weekender music festivals are not only presenting themselves as places for music but also as temporary worlds in which you can escape and feel free. Worlds created for only one week were briefly constructed on vast, non-permanent grounds.

These are weekends in which people can enjoy the freedom to dance to music from both major and emerging artists, enjoy other types of art, eat tasty things, drink too expensive beers, make new friendships, make love and so on. In order to sustain this mood beyond the festival grounds and into the night, organisers have introduced on-site campsites. Here, visitors sleep in tents they pitch themselves, allowing them to wake up surrounded by the same energy they fell asleep to and start a brand-new day filled with all the previously mentioned experiences and maybe even more. ("Kamperen", 2025)

The addition of campsites to festivals has seriously developed over time, shifting from an informal place to sleep close to the festival to one of the essential elements of a multiple-day music festival. Take the longest still-running music festival, *Pinkpop*, as an example; in 1976 they introduced their first official campsite, which was six years after their first edition. This was because of the growing interest; nowadays they have three campsites with room for over 40,000 visitors (Eurofietstas, n.d.).

While camping is a beloved leisure time activity for some, it is seldom the primary reason that people attend a music festival. For some, the prospect of camping is a barrier to visiting rather than an attraction. Some people love festivals without liking to camp; some cannot stand it. One festivalgoer posted on a Reddit forum: "I love festivals, but camping is always rough for me [...] I couldn't sleep at all. Music plays all night and morning; it was so hot [...] I tapped out; on day 3 I went to a hotel by myself to get sleep and came back the next day" (Mammoth_Werewolfff, 2023).

And while both people sleep in tents, the festival campsite is completely different than the “normal” campsite. Rather than a quiet retreat into nature, the festival campsite is way more chaotic. As Dutch news outlet RTL Nieuws (2020) described it: "Empty beer cans, stray sleeping bags — with or without someone in them — and the smell of wet grass and fried eggs." This imagery captures how festival campsites are lived in environments shaped by

chaos.

Festival campsites are not random open fields but intentionally organised spaces for attendees where the vibe, closeness, and shared interpretations are carefully cultivated. The sea of tents, food trucks, sanitary facilities and decoration help to create an idea of a distinct social and emotional setting from the outside world.

In this thesis the topic of camping at festivals will be explored and evaluated. The research question that will be explored in this thesis is: “How does the festival campsite contribute to the festival experience of visitors of multiple-day music festivals?” To answer this question, a range of theoretical concepts will be used, for example, liminality (Turner, 1979), heterotopia (Foucault, 1986), *communitas* (Turner, 1982), collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995), atmosphere (Anderson, 2009; Böhme, 1993), and cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), to understand the campsite not merely as a logistical space but as a key site of meaning-making, identity formation, and shared experience.

Qualitative research has been conducted to make sense of these concepts in relation to the research question. Semi-structured interviews about people’s festival experiences, especially those on the campsite, will be evaluated and also compared to other touristic preferences to see how the experience is shaped by the act of spending multiple nights on a grass field filled with pop-up tents.

Despite that the campsite plays an important role in shaping the festival experience, has academic research not really touched upon it yet? The academic work surrounding festivals is focusing on performances, audience behaviours and economical aspects of festivals. The academic relevance is that with this thesis a subject that is often overlooked gets more attention. Studying festival campsites contributes to a broader knowledge of cultural festivals and their role in social cohesion and cultural understanding.

The social relevance can be found in the insights about how atmosphere, rhythm, and affective experiences shape the social space of the festival campsite. Festival organisers, spatial designers and policymakers can find value in this. Because it can help in the understanding of the modern ritual space, this thesis will show how temporary spatial practices can lead to social impact. Next to that, it can create awareness about social inequality in leisure spaces by showcasing how economic privilege can shape an experience even in festivals where everybody seems equal.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework aims to help with finding results for the research question that has been set. Theories will be set out to get an idea of what is known about festivals and their visitors and how a campsite can play a role in the visit of festivalgoers. The research question is looking for the effect that staying on a festival campsite has on the general music festival experience. The term “experience” can be interpreted in many ways. In this thesis, experience will relate to the way human beings feel in temporary spaces. Festival spaces are designed by the organisers to make the experience as good as possible for their visitors, but in contrast to buildings, these spaces are only there for a maximum of a week.

Liminal spaces and personal experience

For visitors the festival can work as a tool to escape from day-to-day life through an extraordinary experience (Morgan, 2007, p. 3). Ivány and Bíró-Szigeti (2020, p. 450) found that a form of escapism can be reached through entertainment and aesthetics. Turner’s (1979, p. 465) concept of liminality fits in the frame a festival ground can strive to achieve. Liminality is the transitional state a human being can be in in which they are not involved in the structure of their quotidian life but also not yet integrated into a new set of manners.

Festival organisers should aim to set a liminal frame for their visitors to create a space where they can let go of the projection of their everyday lives and be fully temporarily involved in another culture. Festivals can be understood as a specific form of tourism, and within tourism studies, liminality has been used often to understand why what people experience feels transformative. Liminality in tourism can help people experiment with different versions of the self that they would feel less connected to in their day-to-day life (Huang et al., 2018, p. 13; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006, p. 770; Pritchard, 2007, p. 18).

On the other hand, can the liminal characters of a festival also be a way for a person to be true to their authentic self, as found by Kim and Jamal (2007, p. 184) in research on tourists looking for the search for authenticity in tourism? The placelessness of festivals allows visitors to set a new framework and thus experience liminality. Festivals can set a commoditised setting to help people experience this liminal space, but it is the people that will co-create this using the space designed for them and thus have an authentic experience (Szmigin et al., 2017, p. 10). Morgan (2008, p. 82) argues that the design of the festival terrain should create a unique and memorable experience for the visitor; this is also helping to pull the mindscape away from the ordinary and creating this liminality (Turner, 1979, p. 465).

Not only festivals but also campsites can also allow participants to have a liminal experience. Camping is a way of vacationing and that often results in people looking for a different way of spending their time than their daily routine (Currie, 1997, p. 895). When people go camping in their leisure time, they are likely to improve the image they have of themselves and gain happiness (Kim et al., 2019, p. 6). The happiness people experience from camping is also continuing to have an influence on their diurnal activities; campers appreciate that they can be in a space that is different than what they are used to and that they can experience extraordinary things (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 217).

Cohen (1988, p. 43) found that tourists experience liminality because they left the place they consider as their home. So, it can be said that campsites at festivals allow people to stay away from home and not even leave the area, which can have an influence on the experience through an extra sense of liminality that is added onto the festival terrain. The temporary aspect of a festival terrain allows the organisers to set the liminal frame in detail; they do not have to think about durability or convenience as much as normally is expected in places designed to be there for years (Getz, 2008, p. 404).

Communitas

The concept of liminality is not only influencing the individual experience but does also influence the social aspect of a space. According to Turner (1969, p. 360), within liminality there are ways of how people are living together; he calls these 'communitas'. This is the social bond that is emerging when people experience the same transformative state. He also introduced three forms of communitas: spontaneous, ideological and normative. The form that occurs the fastest is the spontaneous communitas; this is when people in the same liminal space forget about the hierarchy and feel like one (Turner, 1982, p. 48). With ideological communitas, Turner (1982, p. 49) talks about how a social scene is in the ideal form of a community, where people are equal and act in solidarity. Almost like a utopian idea of how society should live together. Finally, there is the normative communitas in which the way people are associated with each other is in a more permanent way of communitas; it can be seen as more institutionalised, with clearer rules and roles that people follow (Turner, 1982, p. 49).

Wu et al. (2020, pp. 11-12) took Turner's idea of the three communitas and compared how it translated into the festival. They found that the festivals consist of characteristics of all three communitas set up by Turner (1982, pp. 48-49) and that the festival should facilitate attributes to form encounters. This is because the communitas itself is a way to attract people

to the festival since they like the collective experience.

According to Ayazlar & Ayazlar (2024, pp. 215-216), campsites fit right into the idea of a spontaneous *communitas*. Campers intensely experience a community without any hierarchy. This made it easier to have social interactions and even form friendships. There is a new type of community that has their own set of rules and behaviours that can be learnt and developed during the activity.

One thing they found is that some campers felt the *communitas* spirit less because of differences in camping gear; there was some sort of differentiation between the people through the amount of money they could spend because of their economic welfare.

Distinction

So the liminal space of a camping can for some people be weakened by economical differentiation (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216). The fact that people feel differentiated by the behaviour and customs of other individuals is not new. Bourdieu (1984) came up with the distinction theory; through this, he argues that people have a certain taste in what they consume and what they participate in based on their social class and cultural capital. Branded camping gear or luxury clothes can be seen as markers of “class” (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 1-6).

Cultural capital can be translated into the skills and knowledge a person has in a certain social situation, which can act as a marker in social disposition (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 17-22). Visiting festivals as a leisure activity can be seen as embodying cultural capital. What a way to improve their knowledge of culture, and through this, they are also able to shape this cultural phenomenon. It is a way to both symbolise and expand their knowledge (Rossetti & Quinn, 2022, p. 540). Still, Bourdieu is arguing that cultural capital is knowledge of highbrow arts and culture that is gained through highbrow forms of culture like classical symphonies or opera, while Western weekender music festivals rarely have this type of music as their main genre but programme more of the genres that Bourdieu would consider popular (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 87-89; Vinnicombe & Sue, 2017, p. 283).

At festivals cultural capital does not particularly stem from the genre of music that is listened to, except for being at the ‘right’ stage at the ‘right’ time, but it can still lead to distinction. The earlier mentioned embodied cultural capital is gained through subtle behaviours and knowledge. In leisure time this embodiment can be gained through experience; the more experienced a person is, the more aware they are about what to do (Stebbins, 2014, p. 35). First-time participants at a festival might not know how to act immediately, but it also does not take a lot of time to develop this knowledge (Rossetti &

Quinn, 2022, p. 539).

The previously mentioned distinction on campsites is based on economical differentiation, which can be linked to Bourdieu's idea of capital but not cultural capital (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216). Another marker for social class is economic capital; this entails how wealthy a person is based on things like property and income, and that can lead to them having more means to distinguish themselves (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 114-116). Festivals introduced on-site campsites to extend the holistic experience. Camping is one of the things that can enhance your festival experience but is not the main attraction. It can be seen as commercialising camping and letting people spend more money on the event (Anderton, 2008, p. 40).

Festivals play into the idea of people from different classes with different preferences, so they started to offer more luxury offerings in the trade for more money. Take the "glamping" as an example; it stands for glamorous camping and is a form in which there are more facilities to make spending the night on the festival terrain feel luxurious with private and grand supplements (Hitchings et al., 2018, p. 499). That there is a market for it could be seen at *Fyre Festival*, which was marketed as a festival for ordinary people to have access to a luxurious experience at a festival. The festival was sold out, which can be seen as an indication of people's wishes to have a luxury experience. (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2019, p. 138).

Since the "glamping" is often on another terrain and is not really on the campsite, it could be argued that that does not belong to the general festival experience, but it showcases how people with economic capital are willing to pay for luxury. This can also be translated on the "real" festival campsite, since people still can turn up with new luxurious equipment from expensive brands, which is creating a distinction between the people who are willing to spend more money and people that will not (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216). This can also be seen as a combination of how cultural capital and economic capital come together in the practice of camping at a festival. The knowledge of what good camping gear is for at a festival camping can be something that can be gained through experience and so on; it can develop throughout the years. But especially for people going there for the first time, it already is a big investment, so economic capital can be beneficial because they have the means to buy "better" camping gear. (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216; Rossetti & Quinn, 2018, pp. 539-540; Stebbins, 2014, p. 35)

Heterotopia

Using Turner's (1979, p. 465; 1984, p. 48) ideas of liminality and *communitas* can be a bit contradictory, looking at how Bourdieu's (1984, pp. 17-24) distinction can lead to differences in hierarchy through symbolic and cultural capital when looking at the temporal communities like festivals. So, it could be argued that considering a festival as a place where everything is equal is too romantic, too utopian. French philosopher Foucault (1986, p. 24) came up with the term 'heterotopia', which is a placeless place within a culture and has some shared characteristics with a utopia but is not completely the same. While utopias are imaginary places that cannot exist in reality, heterotopias are real places where existing social relations can get restructured.

Quinn and Wilks (2017, p. 39) wrote about festivals as heterotopias; they argue that festivals can transform a space temporarily into sites of intense social interaction, but that it leaves traces of past editions which shape participants' experience of a certain festival, which gives them the ability to meet certain cultural gestures better. In other words, it helps increase the participants' cultural capital in festival knowledge. (Wilks & Quinn, 2016, pp. 28-30). The temporality of festivals plays an important role in making it the sacred space; structural forces and spatial design are made so that social and cultural capital can be gained through experiences.

Similarly, it can also be considered a heterotopia; they are staged environments created as a space of temporary escape from modern life and have the ability to change the everyday roles of campers (Gosseye & Heynen, 2013, p. 72). But still the social roles are not equal; some sleep in a tent on the camping ground while others have booked a bungalow in the same space. (Gosseye & Heynen, 2013, p. 57).

Collective Effervescence

The previous chapter shows that its social and spatial dynamics can be structured. This does not have to mean that intense emotional experiences are not present in heterotopias. In fact, being in a heterotopia can lead to affective moments, which can produce emotional synchrony. The concept of collective effervescence by Émile Durkheim (1995) can be used to explain that. In this concept he describes how people can feel heightened when they take part in a certain activity in a group, often in the form of a ritual or celebration. Participants of these activities will, according to Durkheim, feel like they are part of something that is outside of what they are able to comprehend, what the sociologist calls a state of unity that can be seen

as sacred (pp. 217-218). What is noticeable is that social differences are not eliminated during this, but the group cohesion and belonging will be enriched by the, temporary, sense of connection that is formed during these practices (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 211-218).

Durkheim (1995, p. 218) is giving the example of an Australian tribe that reaches an extraordinary height of exaltation through emotions that get expressed through religious ceremonies; these emotions turn into a rhythm, and that leads to a song and dance. Rhythms, songs and dancing are also things that can be found back in music festivals; academics also picked that up and started applying the concept of collective effervescence to festivals and live music events (Hopkins et al., 2016, p. 20; Liebst, 2019, p. 27; Koepler et al., 2024, p. 2). Hopkins et al. (2016, pp. 21-22) emphasise that the collective effervescence arises at festivals through not only being in a crowd but also by sharing intimate experiences, group norms and social identities; this is considered collective self-realisation. Being in together in an intimate setting, like in a festival crowd or camping on a field, can cause people to start helping each other and seeing each other as connected; this is called relationality. presence. Berkers and Michael (2017, pp. 103-105) frame festivals as present-day rituals in which the attendees are part of the “festival tribe” in which the bodily presence and symbolic immersion occur. They argue that even though music is the main attraction of a music festival, in the end, the performing artists do not really impact the success of the festival. Just like how Durkheim (1995, p. 340) argues that in religion it is people who do not purely worship God, but the collective sentiments that are experienced as collective effervescence.

Liebst (2019, pp. 34-35) studied collective effervescence at music festivals, and he suggests that through composition-focused interactions can have a positive influence on collective emotions. He studied what aspects could influence the notion of collective effervescence and found that party preference was the only thing that significantly increased how much collective effervescence was experienced. Gender did not have any influence, and age and previous visits only had a small amount, so the festival should be composed in favour of party behaviour.

In an observational study of rock music festivals, Tjora (2016, pp. 72-77) found that the festivalgoers created a sort of social rhythm that fits the festival; the life at the festival is formed by phases, and some of them take place on the campsite. These phases are early calm, brunch, pre-concert, concert and *nachspiel*, visitors negotiate these phases through collective actions like opening the first beer in the morning. These stages of a festival day, formed around ritual-like activities, create the perfect ground to synchronise with each other,

have intense emotional connections with each other and form new sorts of social bonds. argues that such social rhythms and rituals take place between the tents on the campsite more often than during being in the crowd at a festival. Making the campground sort of the sacred place of the festival where collective effervescence is embedded in the way people live there for the weekend.

Leaving the campsite

Festivals are one of the few examples in tourism in which the choice of accommodation is so limited, since it is often in a deserted place; the festival campsite becomes the primary and often only way to remain present in the liminal space or heterotopia that a festival is (Foucault, 1986, p. 24; Turner, 1979, p. 465). For people who have never camped as a leisure activity, noncampers, this can be difficult. Ram & Hall (2022, pp. 929-932) researched people with different levels of camping experience to identify preferences and barriers of noncampers, one-time campers, occasional campers and frequent campers. The first thing they found was the previous mention of lack of knowledge and gear that can be linked to distinction (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 1-6). This is a structural-practical barrier; organisers of festivals could tackle this by informing the festivalgoers or even making equipment accessible. Another big barrier that noncampers and one-time campers shared was that they feel discomfort with the idea that they must sleep on an impermanent construction. Next to that, something that all campers seem to experience as a barrier is overcrowded campsites. These two barriers, which are intrapersonal barriers, are much harder to solve by organisers because these are factors that come with the creation of a campsite from scratch that will be used for the time span of a maximum of one week.

While organisers have a hard time countering the intrapersonal barriers that visitors of festivals that must sleep on the campground have, other things must make up for it. The atmosphere can be an important factor in this; it is about how the campsite is felt by the visitors. Ben Anderson (2009, p. 78) introduces affective atmospheres: what is the influence that an atmosphere has on people present? It is the shared mood in-between the personal experience and the spatial environment. It is possible that the atmosphere will not actually be registered by the individuals, but they will dispose of perception and behaviour. Böhme (1993, p. 114) describes atmosphere somewhat similarly; he argues that atmosphere is not just how a space looks but everything in that space working together to make you feel a certain way. Every space has its aesthetic, and every aesthetic creates a mood or atmosphere.

Visitors of outdoor recreation sites used feelings such as safety and connection to evaluate the atmosphere of a camping space; fixed attributes were barely used to define atmosphere (Vining & Fishwick, 1991, pp. 121-122). In her studies of British rock festivals, Brown (2021, pp. 305-310) introduced the term "festival atmosphere" since visitors claimed that the atmosphere was the most important factor for a music festival. According to her, the festival atmosphere consists of three interrelated dimensions. The first one is the musiccape: what are the aspects of a festival related to music? The second one is 'socialscape', the part of the music festival which is led by social interactions and gatherings. And lastly enjoyment; this is mainly about emotional responses to being present at the festival. The festival campsite could be argued to have the least done with the musiccape since it is separating the festival terrain, yet it plays a central role in the social and emotional experience.

However, not all festivalgoers experience the same atmosphere, especially in how they experience the festival as a safe environment. Fileborn et al. (2019, pp. 15-16, 28) emphasise that many female and non-binary visitors adapt their behaviour to feel safe. Things they do to feel safe in moshpits or the campsite are, for example, avoiding certain zones and most of the time moving in groups. Festivals have the image of being carefree, but these modifications show how atmosphere is not always equally distributed and how gendered vulnerability shapes the mood that is felt on festival campsites.

Daily rhythms form the atmosphere of the campsite. There are different ways of social interaction during the day, which causes the mood at the festival camp to range from peaceful moments in the morning to afternoons filled with energy and communal experiences late at night. Atmosphere emerges through collective routines in a temporal structure (Tjora, 2016, pp. 72-75). So, social rhythm is causing affective atmospheres to be reproduced, showing how deeply embodied and socially fixed festival experiences are.

One interesting insight about atmosphere is that it is not only set by sensory experience but also through forms of privilege and choice, which becomes painfully clear when festival campsites are compared to refugee reception centres. Rozbicka et al. (2020, pp. 23-24) made this comparison because of the similar aspects in infrastructure, like tents, queues for sanitation, and mud, but still have a big contrast in meaning. As Rozbicka et al. (2020) note, "Life at a music festival is, and always will be, a luxurious experience. Life in an RIC is the complete opposite" (p. 24). What becomes clear is that discomfort on the festival campsite can be aestheticised, also because it is temporary and voluntarily chosen by the visitors. This contrast makes clear that atmosphere is not just affective and embodied.

So, according to these perspectives, atmosphere is co-produced through bodies,

material and time and shaped by all different kinds of aspects that belong to music festivals and camping. The campsite is not just the place where people take their rest to enjoy the festival, but it is where the festival is lived, felt and remembered.

Motivations to Participate

The previous sections have explored different themes; to conclude the theoretical framework, these will be connected to motivations people have to go to festivals and to go camping. When buying tickets for a weekender music festival, people are not purchasing the physical ticket; they are putting money into the fact that they want to have a memorable experience (Pine & Gillmore, 2013, p. 26). So, the motivations are not only personal but also culturally and economically built up, especially in the experience economy where experiences became a form of consumption.

Lee et al. (2004, p. 66) studied a big group of festivalgoers from all over the world to identify the motivations of the participants. Six core factors that clarify why people are going to festivals were found: cultural exploration, family togetherness, novelty, escape, event attractions and socialisation. The experiential concepts theoretical framework of this thesis fits right into these motivations.

Cultural exploration and event attraction argue the fact that visitors are looking for meaningful experiences. The concept of heterotopias provides a useful point of view in understanding how festivals are functioning as spaces where cultural meanings and social roles are reconstructed (1986, p. 24). The distinction theory and especially cultural capital fit well with these motivations since this is about individuals seeking out experiences with cultural value to express taste, gain knowledge and mark their social class (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 17-22).

The liminal function of festivals can be found in escape and novelty; participants go to festivals to escape from their everyday lives and enter a transformational space (Turner, 1979, p. 465). It is not only the escape from the continuous habits, but also time that gets forgotten through the atmosphere created by the social rhythm on the festival campsite (Tjora, 2016, pp. 72-75).

Socialisation and family togetherness show that shared emotional experiences and forming bonds are motivating forces. This fits both the *communitas* (Turner, 1982, pp. 48-49) and collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 217-218). This is since festivals form the ideal space for bonding through shared rituals and the removal of a formal structure. The

motivation lies in that people want to experience the sense of belonging, which sometimes is hard to find in day-to-day life.

The act of camping is often part of a multiple-day festival, sometimes required because there are no better options, and it can boost these motivations. Escape is extended, socialisation is intensified in the form of a shared living space, and event novelty transforms into a continuous experience.

So, it does not come as a surprise that the motivations of festivalgoers overlap with those that go camping in their leisure time, as found by Hollender (1977, pp. 139-140). Both highlight the desire to escape routine, seek entertainment, enjoy aesthetic experiences, and engage in social bonding. Lee et al. (2004, p. 66) emphasise event attractions and cultural exploration; Hollender is noting that elements like primitive lifestyle and escape from urban stress are important. These shared motivations reflect how, in both, leisure activities serve as temporary breaks from the ordinary, offering a space for both relaxation and transformation.

The overlapping of motivations in these two frameworks suggests that the festival camping acts as a hybrid motivational space; it combines the intense social interactions and rituals of the festival and the identity-forming, leisure-orientated appeal of camping. In both cases the main reason is that the participants are looking for a way to temporarily step out of everyday life into a liminal, affective, and socially meaningful experience.

Furthermore, Lee et al. (2004, p. 69) found that people who are motivated by all six dimensions they put out are the most satisfied festivalgoers; they call them the 'multi-purpose seekers'. This group are probably also drawn to the festival campsite since it intensifies the experience, which makes it so they really live the event instead of just attending it.

Yet, as previously mentioned with distinction, not all participants approach camping with the same motivations or resources. For some, camping is part of their authenticity or a challenge worth embracing, while others can see it as a barrier due to lack of experience, gear or financial means (Ram & Hall, 2022, pp. 929-932). The motivations of people are deeply shaped by economic and cultural capital and thus structure the conditions under which festival attendees engage and interpret their experience (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 114-116).

To summarise, the motivations to go camping at a festival are intertwined with social, spatial, and emotional concepts. People are not just drawn to festivals for music but for the whole experience of transforming, connecting with others, escaping and memory making, and the campsite can play a central role in elevating the festival experience.

Methodology

In this thesis the research question is, ‘How does the festival campsite contribute to the festival experience of visitors of multiple-day music festivals?’ . In the previous part, the theoretical framework and concepts that can influence the experience, and, in this chapter, the methodological design and approach will be further elaborated. A qualitative research approach was selected since that allows in-depth exploration of participants’ lived experiences and how they give meaning to it (deMarrais, 2004, p. 52). Thematic analysis through Atlas.ti was used to allow the voices of the participants to shape the findings in a flexible but also conscientious way (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77).

Research Design

This thesis uses an inductive qualitative approach informed by descriptive phenomenology to explore how living on a campsite during a weekender festival can contribute to the festival experience. So, instead of testing predefined hypotheses, the goal is that the narratives of the participants create insights in their experience. This approach fits the goal of capturing the personal nature that festival life has, especially in social contexts like the campsite (deMarrais, 2004, pp. 52-53). The inductive process enables one to get a bottom-up understanding of how festival campers make sense of this environment in which experiences are shaped through interactions. This suits the research best since it has an exploratory nature; the goal is not to have a generalised overview of a big amount of festival visitors but depth and contextual understanding.

Through semi-structured interviews, the approach of descriptive phenomenology is used to gain insights into the experiences of the participants. This approach aims for people to describe experiences as if they were lived, focusing on the “what” and the “how” of their experience. This is to uncover essential structures of the experience by seeing how people perceive and make sense of things happening in their lifeworld, in this case the festival terrain. This moves the research more to the participant’s perspective since the assumptions of the researcher will be put in the background to use it when necessary; this technique is called 'bracketing'. The goal is to see the concepts from the theoretical framework being embedded in the narratives of the participants. (Sundler et al., 2019, pp. 735-736)

Sampling

The goal of the sample was to have it reflecting a broad spectrum of festivalgoers; this was to capture the diversity of experience at the festival campsite. The ten participants in this research ranged in age from their 20s to their 50s and included men and women with different levels of camping experience, from individuals who were seasoned leisure campers to people who had never set foot on a campsite before attending festivals. The group also reflected diverse socioeconomic and professional backgrounds. The sample is so diverse to explore how people with different backgrounds and experience levels engage and interpret the festival campsite.

The primary sampling method used was purposive sampling; this is when the selection is done carefully to get participants with certain characteristics (deMarrais, 2004, p. 60). The purposive sampling has been done in two separate ways; the first one is by contacting people via online forums and group chats which have festivals as a topic. The goal was to find people with a lot of experience in visiting different sorts of festivals and who have stayed on multiple festival campsites for multiple years; the idea behind this was that people who are spending time to interact with strangers about this topic online must be very passionate about visiting festivals. This method of sampling was useful and gained some response, but the people were not very diverse, with almost all of them being men around fifty years old.

So, to gain more diversity, the second form of purposive sampling was introduced, and with this manner, the diversity was better regulated. The participants were met at a festival or event with live music. After a short talk about festivals and an introduction to the topic of this thesis, they were asked if they wanted to participate in an interview. Through this, the sample got more diverse.

Because purposive sampling alone did not yield enough participants with limited or negative camping experiences, snowball sampling was used in the later stages, and previous participants were asked if they knew people who they know that are not very experienced in sleeping in tents on the festival terrain or chose to go glamping after previous experiences on the normal campsite. In the end, the sample came together through a mix of purposive sampling and these snowball connections. (deMarrais, 2004, 60-61)

Data Collection

Now the sample was selected, it was time for the data collection. The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. This approach is providing a good balance between comparability across interviews and flexibility to dive deeper into the unique stories or perspectives of the interviewees (deMarrais, 2004, p. 53). The aim of the interviews was not to just see what the participants did on the festival campsite but how they experienced it and made sense of it. The choice of semi-structured interviews fit well with the inductive and phenomenological nature of the study since meaning-making through the lived experience was simple (Sundler et al., 2019, p. 736).

The interview guide can be found in Appendix A. The aim of the interview was to first set out the “actual” festival experience, this to see how concepts like collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995) and liminality (Turner, 1979) are

The duration of the interviews was between 45 and 75 minutes, with 60 minutes as the average. The location of the interview was either online or face-to-face at a location chosen by the participants; this was to make them feel as comfortable as possible. It is important that the participant feels comfortable in the hope that they will feel at ease and be willing to talk openly and freely about their experiences. (deMarrais, 2004, pp. 53-59) Ten interviews were conducted, resulting in approximately ten hours of interview material., either through the program that was used for the online meeting or by using a phone to record the audio during in-person interviews.

The participants were all aware that the interview was recorded and gave permission to do so; this has been done through an informed consent form. The purpose of this form was to make the participation in the interview as transparent as possible and to make the participants aware of their rights and how the data will be used and stored.

The participants have all been anonymized, this has been done through giving them pseudonyms. The names that are visible in this thesis, as well in the transcripts are all made up names. This to make sure that the interview does not lead to unpleasant consequences for the participants. Talking about festivals may include topics that the participants rather not have public, the reason for this can differ.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews, in Dutch, were turned into transcripts to make the process of analysing the data more efficient. The data was analysed through thematic analysis using the

six-step framework introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87). This method helps identify patterns across participants' observations. The aim of the analysis was to stay close to what the participants actually said while also catching up on broader themes. Although the transcripts were in Dutch, the coding as been done in English, this to link the codes and code groups to the theory with more ease.

Before the analysing process started, the transcripts were read to become familiar with the interview and what was told in the interview. During the first reading quick notes were made, but nothing was coded yet. But the early impressions helped with the initial coding process. The process of initial coding was conducted in the coding program Atlas.ti; this works very well for giving tags to certain parts of the data and comparing these tags and later codes. For this thematic analysis the initial coding was done in the form of open coding; this entails that the codes emerged from the data itself and were not pre-defined. During the process the codes got refined because of growing insights.

The codes then got examined to see if there are concepts that are similar, and these were then grouped in a preliminary theme. For example, codes such as “feeling free” and “letting go” were grouped under the emerging theme of liminality and escaping. Then when all the themes were done, they got reviewed, both within and across cases. This is to make sure that they all were coherent and making sense while not overlapping. Some themes were merged because they seemed very similar. Each theme was defined to capture the essence of one of the key aspects that make the festival campsite experience. Care was taken to ensure that themes were descriptive and analytically useful.

Now the themes are settled, they will be handled in the findings part of this thesis. Each theme will be explored and handled in detail to show how the themes relate to the theoretical framework and contribute to answering the research question. To support this, illustrative quotes from the interviews will be used, and those will be analytically interpreted.

Results

In this chapter the findings on how the festival campsite influences the general music festival experience will be presented. These findings are obtained through thematic analysing ten interviews with Dutch festival goers about their experiences on camping during multiple-day music festivals. The interviews were coded using open codes and these codes have been categorized into broader themes that are relevant in answering the research question. The results will be presented in the following themes: *Atmosphere of Detachment*, *Campground Connections*, *Campsite Realities*, and *Doing it right*.

Atmosphere of Detachment

When talking about festivals, all the participants used vivid metaphors to describe how they experience the atmosphere of the festivals and particularly the campsite. Several referred to it as a “bubble” (Sander, Brit, Lotte), highlighting the characteristic of being a self-contained and sealed-off nature. Danny called the festival and its campsite “an Island” to illustrate how the festival is deserted from real life. And Roxanne her comparison, “It feels like some sort of Alice in Wonderland”, showcases the magical atmosphere all the interviewees seem to experience when wandering around the festival grounds.

These metaphors suggest more than just fun, they point to the terrain as a distinct spatial and emotional reality, making a difference in structures found in the everyday life (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216). Foucault’s (1986, p.24) concept of heterotopia aligns with the notion the festivalgoers make about how they experience the festival and its camping grounds; it is an existing space in the normal world but outside of the normative orderings, alternate forms of experience and social. The campsite is not just a place to sleep, but a world in which time, space and behaviour shift. This theme will explain how the participants experienced a sense of immersion through this atmosphere of detachment that is experienced.

Liminality at festivals

According to the participants visiting a festival can act as the perfect way to escape the quotidian life for a short amount of time (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216). Like Lize describes when reflecting on her yearly visit to the Dutch festival Lowlands:

When I think about Lowlands, it really feels like you’re stepping out of your own world for a while, because it becomes its own kind of community where everything seems self-sufficient. Of course, that’s not really true, you’re paying for everything

and it's not self-sufficient at all, but it still feels like there are different rules there, and like you can just step out of a certain routine. (Lize)

The sense of temporary stepping into a different world is resonating with Turner's (1979, p. 465) concept of liminality. The change in routine and social expectations over several days allows visitors to lose themselves in the moment and to leave behind the structures of everyday life and engage with alternative ways of being. They are not fully transitioning into a new state, but they remain within the liminal phase itself, existing outside conventional roles without transitioning into a newly formed identity.

The festivalgoers are immersed into the liminal frame created by the characteristics of the festival and do not think about what is happening behind the gates of the festival. One of the participants reflected on how external events simply ceased to matter during the festival

You really don't know what's happening [...] Sure, maybe you get a *NOS* (Dutch news broadcaster) notification, but otherwise you're not at all concerned with what's going on outside those gates. Like, 'Donald Trump did this' and I just think, honestly, I really don't care right now. (Sharon)

This illustrates how the immersive nature of the festival not only suspends social expectations and routines, but also temporarily detaches the visitor from the outside world. It establishes a mental boundary that enhances a separation between everyday concerns and the festival life, this psychological threshold is a core aspect of the liminal experience (Turner, 1979, p. 465).

Temporal Suspension

The festival campsite plays a crucial role in maintaining this liminal frame created by the organizers (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216). The people stay within the physical boundaries in which the event takes place, this so they do not have to fall back in the routine of the day-to-day life. It allows the visitors to completely delve into the temporal space in which people come together to enjoy an event that has music as a focus. This temporal suspension can of being away for multiple days causes that people enjoy the experience to its fullest, without thinking about upcoming tasks or how to get back home. Lotte said about experiencing a sense of freedom when visiting a festival that took one day, "I experience this feeling way less when I go to a day-festival, [...] at a certain moment I am thinking about

things like ‘oh yeah, I have to go home at that time’.” Participants also experience this with going to concerts.

My life is great, do not get me wrong, but sometimes it is great to escape everything for a little while, and on festivals I can do that. Because I am really gone for three days, with a concert that is of course not the case. Then you probably have to go back to work the next day, you see your family again, and the dogs need to be walked. I do not have any of that there. (Peter)

This quote shows what most participants mentioned when visiting other music-oriented events, like concerts and day festivals, it does not allow the same sense of detachment from everyday obligations as it multiple-day music festivals with campsite do. The multiple-day nature of the festival combined with sleeping on site was described as essential for experiencing this temporary escape. Half of the participants have visited multiple-day music festivals without camping, Sander visited the festival *Primavera Sound* in Barcelona what did not have a campsite and said, “there you do not have a campsite, so I had to sleep in a hostel, well I think camping is more fun because you stay in the bubble”. Sander later added onto that:

Primavera Sound was in the middle of the city. So, I hired a bike [...] then you have to ride your bicycle five kilometres through the city to get to the festival. In Spain that was not big of a deal because the festival only started in the evening, what caused that I had to bridge a gap. So, I went to the beach to cycle there. That makes it different. (Sander)

Festival Tourism

“It is a bit like stepping into an airplane to a certain country or city” is how Sharon describes going to music festivals. Some of the participants have travelled or are making plans to travel outside of their home country to visit a festival. In the academic literature festivals are often describes as sites of touristic liminality, as seen in the theoretical framework (Getz, 2008, p. 410; Pritchard, 2007, p. 18), but the interview data suggests that the liminal experience and expectation is different when visiting a festival abroad instead of in their home country. Joost put it like this when talking about going to a festival abroad: “I would like to make a festival trip [...] and then building a holiday around it. I have done it once with Sziget,

that makes it different, both are intertwined”.

Roxanne and a friend with who she always goes on holiday planning to visit Sziget this year, but she also sees the festival as part of the holiday, she tells: “we are not going to camp on the festival, we stay in an Air bnb in Budapest. What also is a wonderful city” and that “I see it more as a holiday, I want to explore Budapest. I think that I will find the city beautiful”. She hints on that going to a foreign city already is creating enough to detach.

Being abroad is already allowing people to immerse in a different culture, it could be argued that this cultural shift of being in a new country overshadows the immersing into a culture created on a festival (Cohen, 1988, p. 43; Currie, 1997, p. 895). Sharon also went to primavera and mentions “eating tapas” in Spain as something she enjoys a lot when going on holiday, a typical thing for the Spanish culture (Joselito Lab, n.d.), earlier in the interview she described the experience of going to the music festival Primavera Sound in Barcelona: “You had to go back to the hotel, all of a sudden you were back in the city eating tapas. Later, you went to the festival again, but you really had to get in the mood again”.

Most participants described a holiday in which relaxing, enjoying culture and doing some activities was what they preferred as a vacation trip. As a result, when attending a festival abroad, the liminal focus often shifts to the broader touristic experience of visiting a new place, with the festival as just one element.

So, going on holiday and going to a multiple-day festival both can be seen as a touristic activity leading to a sense of liminality, but the kind of liminality differs, even when during travelling festivals are visited. The interviews suggest that sleeping on a festival campsite provides the ultimate liminoid space (Turner, 1979, p. 465), being away from the daily routine is not enough to be fully immersed in the festival, but staying on the same grounds will create this “bubble” the participants are talking about. As Lize puts it: “Different rules and laws apply there (the festival with campsite), that allows you to step out of the daily grind. A holiday allows that as well, but there are real rules and laws.”

Rhythmic Shifts

Festivals with a campsite can be seen as temporary worlds, most participants talk about that they have the idea that there are different laws and rules. As Paul puts it, “except for at the gates I have never seen security [...] I do not experience the sense of control, legislation, rules. I do not experience it there. It is some sort of different world in which everything feels free”. This impression of different rules can lead to extraordinary behaviour

It does not matter if you go to bed on at four in the night, eight in the morning or ten in the evening. Do whatever you want to do! And if you want to eat a frikandel speciaal in the morning, just do it! Whereas, if I were to do that at work, or here at home, then that would be looked at differently. Waking up and opening a beer, yeah, that is not what I do every day before I go to work. (Paul)

Tjora (2016, pp. 72-75) explains that multiple-day festivals foster their own social rhythm, a collectively improvised tempo that is standing in contrast with the structured schedules and expectations of everyday life. While Tjora distinguishes several phases within this rhythm, early calm, brunch, pre-concert, concert and *nachspiel*, the ten participants in this research experienced these moments as well, though not as fixed or clearly as Tjora suggests. Lotte describes “all the things that I normally do in one hour when I am at home are done in four hours when I am on a festival, I find that relaxed” and in one of Joost’s answers the lack of time awareness becomes clear, “and then at one o’clock I will grab my first pint. Or at twelve o’clock, or eleven o’clock. Who knows”.

This blurring of time and routines reflects not only on Tjora’s theory on the social rhythm of a festival, but also echoes Turner’s (1979, p. 465) and Foucault’s (1986, p. 24). As Paul put in: “Time becomes fluid. Everything is just: we’ll see [...] You get in a car, and you know one thing, you’ll come back wrecked, and that’s it. And everything in between just happens.”

Exploring Identity

In the theoretical framework liminality at sites as festivals is set as a way in which people could be their true authentic selves (Kim & Jamal, 2007, p. 184). The data gathered does tell that the atmosphere is judgement free because like-minded people are all in the same spot, what gives them the idea that they can do what they want. But most participants did not report to express a hidden aspect of their identity at the campsite. Instead, practical limitations such limited capacity of what people could bring with them to the festival campsite, as well as the shared character of the campsite seemed to discourage elaborate forms of self-presentation (Szmigin et al., 2017, p. 10).

What stood out was that the participants were less paying attention to being their true self and were way more interested to adopt a different lifestyle for a few days, what meant embracing spontaneity, eating and sleeping at unusual times, letting go of responsibilities and schedules. Some participants made while they were home schedules for acts they wanted to

visit, but even these were let go “you make your own timetable beforehand. But ofcourse that goes overboard on day one” (Paul). This alternative way of life was experienced as the core of the festival’s appeal.

Campground Connections

The previous theme explored the atmosphere of detachment, focussing on how individual festivalgoers experience the temporal and spatial frame created by the festival. In this theme the attention will shift towards how the temporal “world” is shared, shaped and inhabited collectively. It explores how visitors connect with each other on the festival campsite and how these interactions contribute to the overall experience of the music festival.

The participants of this study frequently noted how on the actual festival grounds, they were drawn into this wonderful world largely shaped by the organizers, through performances, stage designs and decoration. It is a space of curated immersion where the atmosphere is constructed so it facilitates to have social interactions and to have a sense of connection. Previous research, mentioned in the theoretical framework, has shown that such environments are especially good for what Durkheim (1995, pp. 211-218) called collective effervescence, the spontaneous, shared energy and emotion that arise when people gather for a common purpose (Hopkins et al., 2016, p. 20; Liebst, 2019, p. 27; Koeffler et al., 2024, p. 2).

Many examples of collective effervescence on the actual festival ground can be found in the data. As Brit, who mainly visits hardstyle, rawstyle and techno festivals, describes: “There is constant interaction with each other. And at a good drop, you just look at each other with a bass face, you know?” and she continues, “And that high five you give after dancing together for a while, that kind of vibe is really important to me, and also a lot of fun. It really adds something to the festival.”. Sander talks about how on more alternative and indie focused music festivals “spontaneous moshpits” and “flashmobs” creates a “sense of unity” what improves his festival experience.

Building a Temporal Community

While shared excitement and connection are found on the festival grounds, it is the campsite that brings a unique form of community. Interviewees described how, when walking between the stages, they were struck by the terrain design and decorations—Paul noted the “Las Vegas appeal” of some festivals, while Peter said, “At Wildeburg the terrain is an attraction itself, that’s so cool. The whole weekend long you will get lost.”

These carefully curated spaces set the stage for collective experience, but as participants often noted, it was on the campsite, away from the spectacle, where deeper, more spontaneous

forms of connection emerged.

The festival campsite fosters an idea of togetherness that is built from the ground up. This begins as soon as people arrive on the campgrounds of the festival terrain. Sharon describes, “sometimes you arrive and set up your tent and then look around and think ‘alright this will be our neighbours for a couple of days’, it really feels like that” and on festival campsites there often is no choice to not interact with the neighbours, as Brit explains: “At such a regular campsite I have the feeling that because you are literally all crammed together, you automatically become friends with your neighbours because you practically sit on each other's laps and I think that is quite nice”. The festival goes from temporary communities, not through programmed activities, but through simply living side by side sharing almost the same conditions.

This form of community closely aligns with what Turner (1969, p. 360; 1982, pp. 48-49) described as *communitas*: a spontaneous bond that arises among individuals in a liminal setting. On the campsite everyday roles and hierarchies are suspended, making room for genuine connection. This sense of togetherness was something the participants experienced through different things. For example, neighbours in borrowing and lending things to each other.

Every year I forget my flipflops, while I do really need them, that seems to be a structural thing. [...] But then there are other people from who you can borrow them. I always bring an air pump, and that is something the whole campsite seems to forget. So, my pump gets passed on over the whole campground.

The spontaneous nature of *communitas* on the campsite is not only practical, but also social. Roxanne recalled getting lost and being immediately welcomed by a group of strangers:

I remember once walking back to my tent in the morning and getting lost again. I saw a group of people smoking a joint, and they just called out to me, ‘Hey, come join us.’ So I sat down, didn’t smoke myself, but just had a really nice chat. They were all very high. It was just such a funny, I thought, this just happens here, but never really in normal life.

These small and spontaneous exchanges like highlight how the festival campsite becomes as site of genuine *communitas*. This atmosphere created on the festival campsite and

spread across the whole terrain is also something that draws most of the participants of this study back to festivals, as Sander brings it: “yeah, I think that the festival is the ultimate festival experience”.

Deepening Bonds

Another popular reason the participants tend to go to certain multiple-day music festivals is because friends are going there. So, the festival visitor is entering, but also shaping, this *communitas* with their friends. It turned out that the power of the *communitas* on the campsite was not limited to encounters with strangers, but it also strengthened existing friendships. Sharon tells about conversations she has with friends during festivals:

You can have conversations about things that someone might have put off talking about for a long time, because in everyday life there’s never really room for it. But here, there is space. [...] You just feel that it’s very pleasant and safe with each other, and you’re up for anything, and you also have the peace and space to really listen to someone—because there’s nothing else you have to do. (Sharon)

The liminal setting, both temporary and egalitarian, allows for friends to see different sides of each other while also setting expectations through shared traditions. For example, everyday roles and social status often fade into the background, making space for new forms of connection and enjoyment.

I have a friend who really earns good money and loves way too expensive food and wine. But in two weeks, we’ll be back in Landgraaf on Thursday, standing around a disposable barbecue, grilling half-frozen hamburgers and sausages from the Jumbo. And if the sun is out, honestly, you couldn’t make us happier. (Paul)

These usages on festivals by friends do somewhat shape the social rhythm of the festival as described by Tjora (2016, pp. 72-75), the participants mention certain reoccurring happenings at the campsite that can be linked to some of the five phases linked to that theory. In the I “hearing the stories about the past night of friends you lost during the evening” (Sharon) or when returning on the campsite drinking a last beer and talking about the highlights in the *nachspiel*. Some participants forgot about the actual festival program because of the good company of friends on the campsite, For example Peter: “I always go with at least

six people, sometimes up to fifteen. [...] Yeah, I'm fine with that. We've even skipped the afternoon program before and just sat at the campsite until five o'clock. Which was ridiculously fun."

Some participants and their friends even had some kind of rituals that they always did on a certain festival. Like "organizing lowlympics" (Joost) a game tournament on the music festival Lowlands, and "sleeping in the 'bosjes'" (Peter) what entailed returning to the same camping spot every year, even though most people argued that that was the worst spot. The friend group of Sander even has special apparel and a festival anthem: "When hear *Zon op m'n Piemel* (Dutch song) and see orange safety glasses, what will be our key sign to recognise each other, you know that we are that". In these cases, it becomes clear how repeated rituals and group traditions function as a form of secular ceremony, strengthening group identity and belonging across festivals and years. As Durkheim (1995, pp. 211-218) and Turner (1969, p. 360; 1982, pp. 48-49) argue, such shared experiences actively create a sense of community within the temporal world of the festival campsite. Collective effervescence can be experienced when the shared energy and excitement of a friend group or a big audience reaches a peak.

Yes, I am susceptible to a kind of mass feeling or something. The energy and emotion of a larger group. [...] And it can be really energy from the party atmosphere, but it can also just be deep emotions of a beautiful moment. And experiencing that with like-minded people, I can't explain it any other way than that. And that doesn't even come close. That is something big, something wonderful. (Paul)

Spontaneous Gatherings

While many participants talk about the traditions of their groups and how it creates memorable experiences, just as often, the most memorable moments arise unexpectedly. Spontaneous gatherings of strangers that start engaging in different happenings like, "singing *Witte Was* by *Goldband* collectively in the campground bathhouse" (Lize), "beach parties with boomboxes" (Sander), "party tent parades including 'partytent' chants" (Peter), "a protest parade with people holding signs against 'everything'" (Lize) and even a nephew who became a leader of an alternative sect and was walking with a costume surrounded by worshippers.

These happenings, all taking place on the camping grounds of different music festivals, showcases how the festival campsite becomes a place for collective creativity. This

can be seen as part of the “festival tribe” emerging (Berkers & Michael, 2017, pp. 103-105). Boundaries between strangers disappear and everyone is welcome to join in. Participating in, or even just seeing, these social gatherings can also bring the sense of collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 211-218). For many participants, these spontaneous moments stood out as the heart of the festival experience and were the most memorable moments across all the festival memories they have gathered over the years.

Weathering the Storm Together

Bad weather is often seen as a downside of festival camping, as Brit tells: “At some point it just kept raining and stayed cold. You couldn’t get your clothes dry anymore. Eventually, you ran out of dry clothes and just couldn’t get warm. ... that can kill the vibe”. But remarkably, a fair share of the participants did say that bad weather on the campsite gave a special kind of festival atmosphere in a positive way. It intensified the sense of unity and shared purpose. Several interviewees mentioned how sudden rainstorms, mud, or broken tents led to spontaneous acts of help and support among strangers. Spontaneous interactions, in times where weather conditions were not normal, created a special feeling of unity.

It started to rain really hard that Thursday evening. [...] We had one of those party tents that was already falling apart, and we were all huddled underneath. [...] I was sharing one of those cheap ponchos with one of the guys, just draped over both of us. Yeah, I can honestly say I immediately felt a nice connection with him. I thought, ‘Well, this is off to a good start.’ So these spontaneous things just happen that you could never have planned. (Sharon)

I found out during the thunderstorm that my tent was leaking. [...] So I had to go around the campsite and ask people, ‘I know this is a weird question, but do you maybe have a spot where I could sleep tonight?’ And then there were three guys with a huge army tent who let me join them, and that’s where I slept that night. (Sander)

These stories illustrate how moments of adversity on the campsite often resulted in collective effervescence and *communitas* (Durkheim, 1955, pp. 211-218; Turner, 1969, p. 360; 1982, pp. 48-49). Such shared experiences of discomfort and mutual support became part of the festival’s social fabric. At the same time, these moments also highlighted the physical

realities and what opportunities or limits this brings to the life on the campsite, which will be explored in the next theme.

Campsite Realities

The previous themes explored how the festival campsite can foster detachment from the day-to-day life and is allowing for the visitors to create social bonds, but the reality of staying on the campsite is not always idyllic. Alongside the escaping and connecting, participants are confronted with discomforts, challenges and sometimes the primitive conditions that come with sleeping outdoors. Multiple participants called living on the festival “surviving” (Danny, Lize) and “suffering” (Sander, Roxanne, Danny, Joost), but they keep coming back to the festival campsite instead of looking for different accommodation. These hardships are simply “part of the deal” (Brit, Danny, Joost, Peter, Lotte, Roxanne), the participants embrace them as an essential aspect of the festival experience.

This theme explores how festivalgoers navigate, endure, and at times even celebrate the less glamorous side of camping, and how these physical realities both shape and complicate the unique atmosphere of the festival campsite, and what visitors want from the organizers to make their experience optimal.

Camping, Festival Style

According to Hollender’s campsite motivations (1977, pp. 139-140) many of the motivations for camping at festivals mirror the general desire for escape, novelty, and a break from routine, as described in the first theme *atmosphere of detachment*. Eight out of ten participants live in the *Randstad*, a highly urbanized region in The Netherlands, and describe the appeal of encountering natural phenomena while camping, “Waking up a bit hungover he sun on your face [...] wet and moist evenings. A bit too warm during the day, that is nice” (Brit) and Sharon describes a morning in which “it is completely quiet, and that there is dew on the grass and then you walk to the toilet and your feet and flipflops get wet”.

However, unlike recreational camping, festival camping is rarely about peace and tranquillity. The experience is marked by constant activity of night owls and early birds alternating each other, muffled music coming from several different boomboxes, noise by people who are having fun, and so on. This leaves little space to find relaxation in a quiet peaceful way. People are not going to the festival to camp, they are camping to be in the festival environment. What causes that the priorities are shifted, as Sander states: “Yeah, you're kind of floating, you know. You're living on your minimum needs. Three hours of sleep a night, lots of alcohol, tiredness.”

Moreover, with often limited space and practicalities of carrying to the campsite in combination with restrictions from the organization what you can bring, most visitors end up bringing less than they would for a traditional camping trip, resulting in a perhaps even more primitive experience than they would have had when camping as a leisure activity (Hollender, 1977, pp. 139-140; Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216).

It already starts at home, walking to the station. [...] You always think, 'I didn't bring that much,' but I can't pack a bag well, I always bring too much, too many clothes. [...] So, I always end up carrying a Big Shopper. That bag really cuts into your hands, the worst feeling is that walk to the station. [...] Then you're standing in that long line to get in, moving step by step, and that bag just keeps digging into your legs. [...] In that moment, you really think, 'Why am I doing this?' But once you've put up your tent, you remember why. (Sharon)

The data shows that festival camping is more than just sleeping outside but making do with less and embracing discomfort, it is almost like on to enjoy the event you must go back to basic on the campground.

Collective Suffering

Only two participants mentioned that camping is their favourite way to spend their holiday, others do not really mind or even hate it. Still, they overcame the barriers of discomfort, sleeping on impermanent constructions in overcrowded places, what at festival campsites can be argued to be even worse, that some noncampers and first-time campers experienced (Ram & Hall, 2022, pp. 929-932). This can be attributed to a lack of awareness of what camping at a festival truly entails.

I was really the least prepared festivalgoer. I did not even have my own tent. I didn't know what you were supposed to bring or what to leave at home. I really had no idea, so I just went there totally clueless. (Roxanne)

The primitive way of staying at a festival is something what is seen as ritualistic, Joost calls it "collective suffering". All participants talk about how shared hardship, far from being merely negative, actually binds people together. "Ideally, we all suffer. Because then you have the same experience and understand each other, and I think people also become nicer to

each other” (Sander). It creates a strong sense of solidarity, unity and, as Durkheim (1955, pp. 211-218) would argue, moments of collective effervescence.

All participants agree that in most cases the true festival experience is not complete without suffering. As Danny, who does not like camping at all, puts it “at a festival you must survive, that belongs to it”. Paul who “hates” camping agrees, one time he tried sleeping in a hotel, he found it was not worth repeating. This since it broke the liminal state he was in and he missed the shared state of being, even thought that was a rougher experience (Turner,

You go out of the bubble. [...] We ended up in a clinical hotel bar with eight of us. The beer was fine, and you can sleep well and shower in the morning, but it’s not the same as waking up and immediately being back in it. [...] In the hotel, you’re just not with like-minded people. You’re a bit of an outcast there. At the campsite, you look around and everyone’s in the same state as you—muddy, tired, but part of it together. (Paul)

The data shows that the collective effervescence and liminality gained from the collective suffering is more memorable than the actual suffering. “Some things are not nice like carrying all your stuff, but you forget these things during the weekend and especially when looking back.” (Lotte)

Organised Comfort

Not many participants have voluntarily stayed the night somewhere else than the festival campsite during a multiple-day music festival. When asked about it Sharon tells she slept on the glamping, an exclusive part on the festival terrain for visitors that do not want to conquer the barriers of real camping (Ram & Hall, 2022, pp. 929-932). Sharon did not like this experience at all and will never do that again.

I felt like I was in some sort of prison camp. Just rows and rows of tiny tents. At night you’d come back drunk or stoned, and half the time we’d end up at the wrong tent. I remember thinking, is this really the glamorous campsite? (Sharon)

None of the other participants have slept on the festival glamping, and all of them except for Lotte, who thinks that a bit of extra comfort can be nice, say that they will never sleep there. or most, the idea of glamping seems to contradict the authentic festival spirit; as

several explained, “roughing it” is simply part of the fun and experience. The data hints that that has to do with detachment, sleeping on a cheap air mattress in an impractical tent is different than what is experienced in the day-to-day life (Turner, 1979, p. 465; Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216; Böhme, 1993, p. 119).

However, this does not mean festivalgoers reject all forms of comfort or convenience offered by the organizers. On the contrary, a few essential facilities are described as both highly valued and necessary to make the primitive lifestyle bearable, and the festival experience a success. The most frequently mentioned basic needs are sanitary facilities. Yet, even these amenities are rarely luxurious, “but the camping shower is also a bit of a struggle. It is always just a weak little stream. You have to wait in line, and you have to pay” (Sander).

The biggest improvement that can be made on the festival campsite, according to the participants, would be more toilets. Multiple interviewees stressed that the availability of toilets is having an impact on the festival experience.

The toilets really are a hassle, especially for women. When I go with my girlfriend, I see how long she has to wait in line. Sometimes it’s just not doable. ... On some festivals it’s better arranged than others, but it’s something that could really be improved. (Joost)

Joost added to that, while waiting for a shower is not a problem since that can be done whenever you want, the facilities must be “in proportion to the number of people. That’s what matters the most”.

Food is another crucial aspect: while some enjoy cooking their own instant noodles at the tent, most participants expressed a preference for a central place to get food and drinks, such as a small bar or a food truck with a simple menu. Having a spot to gather, eat, and recover is seen as vital for the social rhythm of the campsite (Tjora, 2016, pp. 72-75), .

The emergence of the “camping supermarket” was named by several respondents as the best recent innovation. Having a shop on-site, where you can buy everything from bread and snacks to toiletries, was seen as making festival camping dramatically easier and more enjoyable. Peter states: “The supermarket is just brilliant. [...] You don’t have to bring so much stuff with you, and if you’ve forgotten something, you just get it there. [...] It’s so much more efficient and makes everything easier”. While Roxanne has mixed feelings about the supermarket, on the one hand she uses it because it is easy, but on the other hand she likes the

raw camping vibe more and gets too confronted with the normal everyday life (Böhme, 1993, p. 119; Anderson, 2009, p. 80).

I actually think those facilities take something away from it, because it makes it feel more like normal life. [...] I did use the supermarket, but I thought it was kind of lame. I already knew, this is going to be convenient and I'm going to buy things, but I also just think it's stupid. (Roxanne)

Doing it Right

Much has already been revealed about the ways in which the festival campsite shapes the visitor's experience. However, for many festivalgoers, it takes time to discover how to participate in a way that feels truly "right" to them. The campsite is an isolated phenomenon, with its own unique codes, routines, and expectations, often very different from everyday life. This section explores how participants come to understand, value, and embody these unwritten rules, and what it means to "do it right" at a music festival.

Going to a multiple-day festival for the first time was for most participants very impressive and intense, most of them did have an idea of what to expect but still were blown away with what they experienced.

I was very overwhelmed. About... Yeah, that I thought wow, I didn't expect it to be this much fun. I really thought it was all about the music. And about the concerts. But apparently, It was also much more than that. With a lot of togetherness and doing fun things. (Roxanne)

The First Time

For many participants, the first time at a festival was a confusing experience, full of mistakes and forgotten gear. Some were not aware of certain house rules of the festival.

we didn't realize you could actually bring your own food and drinks onto the festival site. So we just bought everything at the festival all week. [...] Then we saw people coming in with carts full of food. We really didn't know what the house rules were. [...] You just feel like such a rookie. I was only 17, and I remember it all felt pretty overwhelming. (Lotte)

And others were confronted with the unwritten rules on how to act on the campsite after the main program on the actual festival terrain is done.

The funny thing is, I remember my very first festival so well [...] Everybody went after the regular program to the afterparty on the campsite. Everybody was sitting by their tents and everywhere was music, and I thought ‘what is this?’. I did not get it [...] Only later did I realize that hanging out together at the campsite is actually a huge part of the experience. (Sharon)

Mistakes on what to bring were also common for first time festival campers, some carried way too many belongings with them. For two participants this was including a borrowed leaking tent. And Roxanne was not even aware that she had to bring something, she tells: “I was the worst prepared festivalgoer ever. I did not even bring my own tent, I had no clue what to bring and what not to bring”. Even Sander who prefers outdoor holidays was caught by unexpected circumstances.

Not knowing the festival’s “house rules”, and the social conduct is what sets the newcomer apart from experienced festivalgoers, those who have what Bourdieu (1984, pp. 1-6) calls cultural capital. For seasoned visitors, knowing what to bring, what is allowed, and how to navigate the unwritten codes is a way to point out group belonging.

Becoming an Insider

Gaining knowledge on the festival norms is not just about acquiring practical tips; it is a social process, in which mistakes and understandings become the rites of passage (Lee et al., 2004, pp. 66-69). Participations in group rituals and sharing insider knowledge are essential for feeling fully included in the festival community (Szmigin et al., 2017, p. 10). Lotte’s memory of feeling like a “rookie” underscores how these experiences mark the beginning of becoming an insider, someone who not only knows the formal rules, but know how to act according to the unwritten rules and expectations that define the authentic festival experience.

In the Interview participants frequently mentioned that a noisy and festive atmosphere belongs to the festival campsite—it is never truly quiet—but there are still limits. One widely shared unwritten rule is to respect others’ rest at certain times.

“There was this group with a full DJ set, four speakers, and a party tent. During the day, they played music incredibly loud at the campsite—it was fun. But, of course, you have to check in with your neighbors. We don’t sleep before four or five anyway, but on day one, the guy started setting up at 7:30 in the morning...” (Paul)

This example shows, on the one hand how the boundary between fun and disturbance is negotiated on the campsite. As soon as someone crosses that line, like playing music too early in the morning, it becomes clear that being an insider is not just about joining the party, but about understanding and respecting the collective norms that make the festival community work (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 1-6; Szmigin et al., 2017, p. 10). And on the other hand it shows how the participant gained knowledge through living the festival campsite (Bourdieu, 1984, 1-6).

Participants’ gear also becomes more practical over the years; big backpacks are purchased, yoga mats are substituted for proper air mattresses, and tents that stay cool and dark are chosen—material signs of becoming “experienced” (Lee et al., 2004, pp. 66-69; Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170).

First I camped with a thin mat, an inflatable pillow, and a sleeping bag, the year following up the pillows from the bed at home were brought. Now we have a thick air mattress, so it seems like every year we gain a luxurious item. (Sander)

But buying more practical stuff does not necessarily make you a more skilled camper, as Sharon humorously notes after all her years of experience: “Other people look at me and I completely block, I feel like a loser that I can’t set up a pop-up tent.” The learning process continues, and mastery remains partly elusive—a reminder that festival camping is as much about shared imperfection as about expertise.

Drawing the line

On the festival campsite, “everybody is equal” (Sander), as shared discomfort and collective effervescence outweigh most status differences (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024, p. 216; Bourdieu, 1984, 1-6; Durkheim, 1995, pp. 211-218). Still, participants consistently set themselves apart from “glampers”—those who pay for luxury tents, private facilities, and extra comfort. As Sander put it, “You can always spot them. They look too fresh, all dressed up.” While this might suggest a display of economic difference, participants clarified that

even those who could afford it chose the “real” campsite instead, and those who could not still would not pick glamping if it were almost as cheap as the normal campsite; it’s about authenticity, not money (Ayazlar & Ayazlar, 2024; Hollender, 1977, pp. 139-140).

That’s still the polarizing aspect. I actually like that we’re all together in the same situation—everyone’s one in the moment. But the glamping creates a divide, like, ‘oh, they have more, they earn more.’ Maybe I shouldn’t feel that way, but it just happens. I don’t feel looked down on by them, but I do look down a little on people on the glamping. (Roxanne)

The participants are actively choosing for discomfort, they aestheticize it, since this is what they consider the ultimate festival experience. The ability to choose for this is a luxury itself (Rozbicka et al., 2020, pp. 23-24). For most, “doing it right” means embracing the discomfort, looking rough, and being part of the crowd—not standing out as a “glamper” or someone who goes home to sleep. Distinction here is not about what you can afford, but about choosing to belong to the festival tribe (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 1-6; Turner, 1969, p. 360).

Conclusion

This thesis explores the role of the festival campsite in shaping the overall festival experience of multiple-day music festivals. To do so data collected through semi-structured interviews has been thematic analysed, what led to themes that demonstrated that the festival campsite is not only functioning as a place to sleep close to the event, but it is a deeply meaningful social space that shapes how the festival is lived, remembered, and valued. Through theories about liminality (Turner, 1979, p. 465), *communitas* (Turner, 1982, pp. 48-49), heterotopia (Foucault, 1986, p.24), collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995, pp. 211-218), distinction (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 1-6), and atmosphere (Anderson, 2009, p. 80; Böhme, 1993, p.119), it has become clear that the campground is a common thread in the stories people tell about their experience of multiple-day music festivals. The campsite allows visitors to fully immerse themselves into a temporary world that is shaped by the festival, here everyday roles, expectations, and rhythms are suspended.

Liminality turned out to be essential in understanding how the campsite contributes to the festival experience. Participants consistently described the festival as a “bubble” or “magical place”, reflecting Turner’s (1979) idea of a place creating a transformational mindscape that helps detaching from the everyday life. Sleeping on the campsite, rather than going to a hotel or home, helps extending and empowering the liminal state over several days. Visitors step into an alternate world where they experience time differently, where responsibilities fade, and where they are free to adopt new daily rhythms. This research shows that temporal suspension is not just created by entertainment on the actual festival terrain but is actively created and intensified through life on the campsite.

The campsite is simply a backdrop to the “real” festival experience; it is the place where the liminal becomes embodied. Here, people live together in an alternative way than contradictive norms. Whether people liked camping as a leisure activity or not, on the festival campsite people came together through sharing discomforts, this is playing part in making the general festival experience memorable. The fact that people are surrounded by strangers experiencing the same struggles can be seen as a ritual that belongs to camping. Collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995), the heightened energy people sensation when sharing an experience, was manifested in the “collective suffering”.

Collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1995), is not only found in the suffering but also in how people lived together under shared circumstances in which social roles, expectations, and rhythm is not present. Participants described experiencing this *communitas* through

spontaneous interactions like, sharing stories and supplies, but sometimes also almost ritualistic gatherings, in which people do things that they would probably not do in their day-to-day lives since there are no liminal contexts that cause a temporary suspension of hierarchies.

This *communitas* also plays a role in strengthening existing friendships. The campers see their friends in a different social context that gave room for meaningful conversations and reconnection. The campsite combines the fun aspect of the entertainment that attracts people to the festival, and the intimate atmosphere created by the primitive aspect of camping. This also brings an emotional depth to the general festival experience. Both planned and spontaneous moments like these align with Durkheim's (1995) notion of collective effervescence.

The aestheticization of suffering (Rozbicka et al., 2020, pp. 23-24), was mentioned more than expected. The participants found some sort of shared identity in the act of "surviving" and "suffering." The participants chose discomfort as a marker of authenticity. The festival visitors not sleeping on the campsite were not just seen as outsiders, but also as people who do not experience the festival to its fullest.

This distinction between campers and glampers reflects Bourdieu's (1984) ideas of cultural and economic capital. Cultural and economic capital does have an influence on who can enjoy a multiple-day music festival and with what kind of means they go camping, within the campsite, these hierarchies are blurred. The distinction made on the festival grounds is not based on living the "true" experience or not, so if you are experiencing shared discomfort or luxurious comfort.

Limitations and Future Research

The research contained multiple constraints that affected its development. The research sample consisted of ten participants who were all Dutch citizens, most of them were living in the Randstad region which restricts the study's generalizability to other Western or European festival environments. The study included participants from diverse age groups and genders and with different camping backgrounds, yet the participants mostly came from an urban educated population.

The research depended on interview-based self-reported information for its data collection. The research method enabled deep reflection, but the collected data became influenced by participants' memories and their ability to tell stories and create meanings after the events. The study could have gained additional valuable information about campsite rhythms and interactions through observational research methods and extended observation

periods.

The theoretical framework provided depth to the research but possibly restricted some of the analysis. The concepts liminality and *communitas* provide strong analytical power yet they create an overly positive view which might ignore conflicts and hidden social structures that continue to exist in supposedly equal environments.

Future research should increase the geographical and cultural range of this study. Research that compares campsite experiences between different countries and cultural backgrounds would reveal worldwide patterns in how space and community and ritual practices differ. Research on how different music genres affect campsite culture would deliver a more detailed understanding of how subcultures modify space.

The study of exclusion and safety presents a promising research direction for future investigation. A thorough feminist or intersectional analysis should investigate how different social categories such as gender and race and sexuality and ability affect individual experiences.

The growth of commercial camping options including glamping zones creates an interesting opportunity to study how marketization transforms concepts of genuine experiences and communal bonds and sacred rituals. The introduction of new social structures appears to be forming within what used to be considered an equal environment. These changes in the experience economy demonstrate what broader societal developments look like.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide – Master’s Thesis

Bas van de Mortel

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. To begin, could you please tell me a bit about yourself?

- Who are you, how old are you, where are you from, and what do you do in daily life?

Music Festivals

- Do you enjoy attending music festivals? How long have you been doing this?
- Approximately how many festivals do you attend per year?
- Which festivals have you attended so far?
- What attracts you to visiting music festivals?
 - (If they focus on artists/line-up: What if we set the lineup aside, are there other aspects that are important for you?)
- Are there festivals you think really did a good job at creating a great experience? What stood out?
 - When you walk around a festival site, what goes through your mind, how do you feel?
- Are there examples of festivals where you felt things could have been improved?
- When you reflect on a festival experience, what are the first things that come to mind?

Holidays

- Since festivals often take place in the summer, do they replace traditional holidays for you?
- How often do you go on holiday per year?
- What do your typical holidays look like?
 - In what type of accommodation do you prefer to stay?

- What do you seek in a holiday, and how does this differ from what you seek at festivals?
 - Have your holiday habits changed over the years?
 - Have you ever gone camping as part of a holiday? How was that experience?
 - (if “no” or “barely”, mention that festival on the campsite was a complete new experience to create a bridge)
-

Festival Campsites

- When did you first experience camping at a festival?
 - (when camped before) How does it differ from spending your vacation on a campsite?
 - How did you experience that?
 - How did your festival camping habits change over the years?
 - Have you ever considered alternative accommodation during a festival? If so, what kind?
 - What would your ideal festival campsite look like?
 - Would you like to do activities on the campsite beyond just sleeping?
 - In your view, how should the facilities on the campsite relate to those on the main festival grounds?
 - Can you describe some of your previous experiences with festival campsites?
 - Both positive and negative experiences are welcome. As long as it is memorable for you.
 - If you could design a festival campsite yourself, what would it look like?
 - What would be essential?
 - What would you add, and what would you leave out?
-

Closing

- This brings us to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss that we have not yet covered?

Appendix B

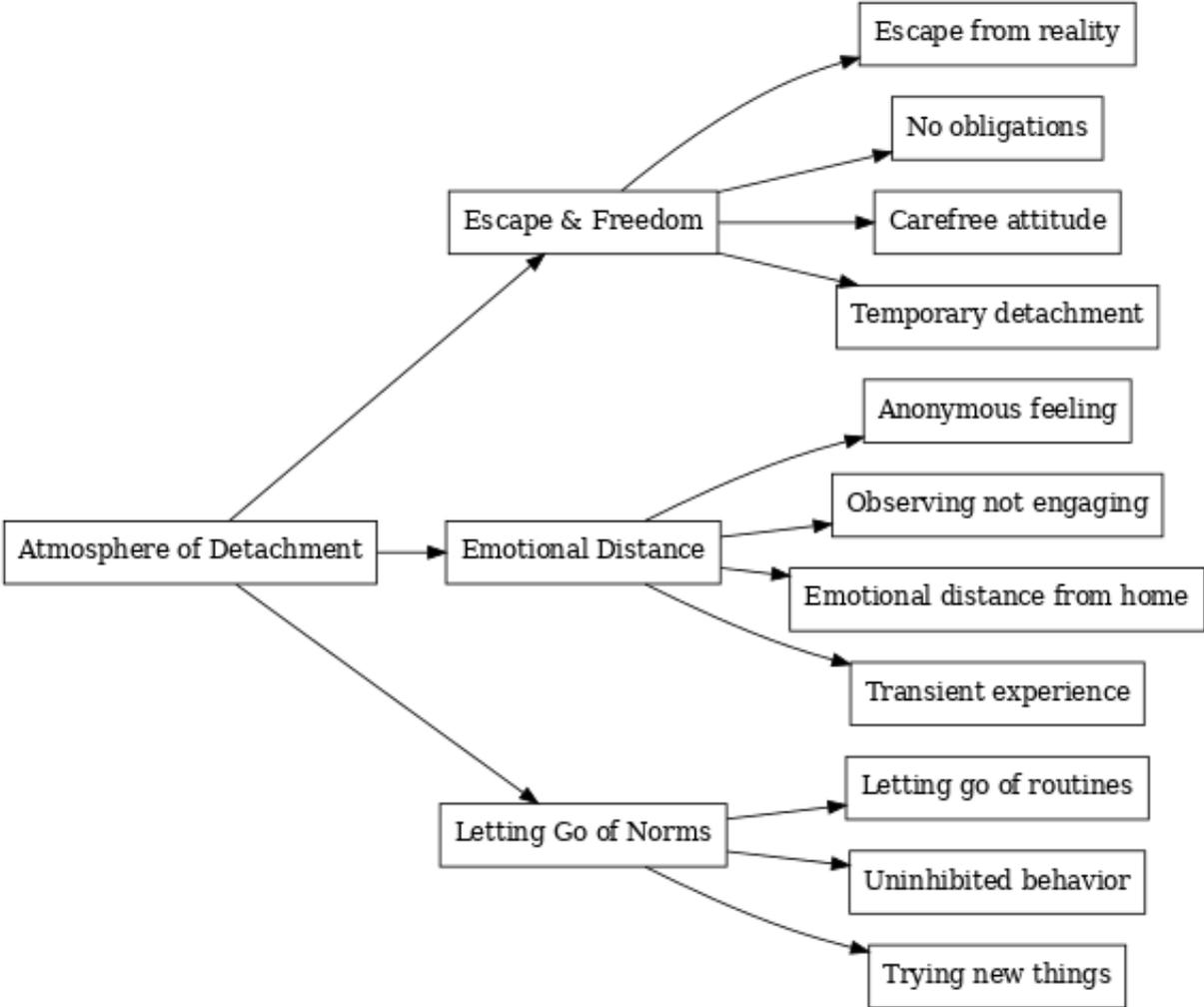
Participant overview

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Region	Occupation	Festival Camping Experience	Leisure Camping Experience
Lize	23	Female	Randstad	Student	Yes, 4 times	Only in childhood
Joost	29	Male	Randstad	Cultural researcher	Yes, 5+ times	Preferred holiday
Peter	56	Male	North NL	IT specialist	Yes, 5+ times	Only in childhood
Brit	23	Female	Randstad	Marketeer	Yes, 5+ times	Couple of times, not preferred
Sander	31	Male	Randstad	In-between jobs (worked in journalism)	Yes, 5+ times	Preferred holiday
Danny	49	Male	Randstad	Publisher	Yes, 5+ times	When younger
Roxanne	28	Female	Randstad	Journalist (intern)	Yes, 5 times	Only in childhood
Paul	42	Male	Randstad	Disability care worker	Yes, 5+ times	No, hates it
Sharon	28	Female	Randstad	Project officer media	Yes, 5+ times	Couple of times, not preferred
Lotte	28	Female	South NL	communications advisor	Yes, 5+ times	Only in childhood

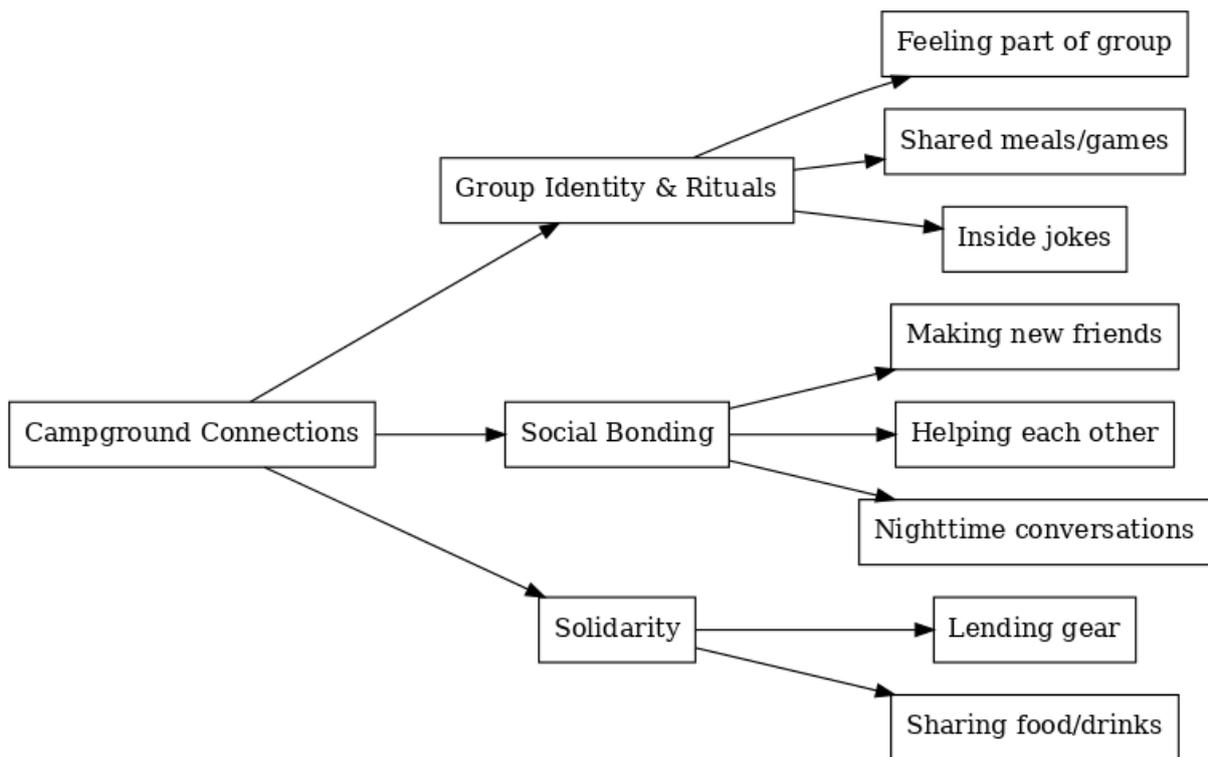
Appendix C

Coding Trees

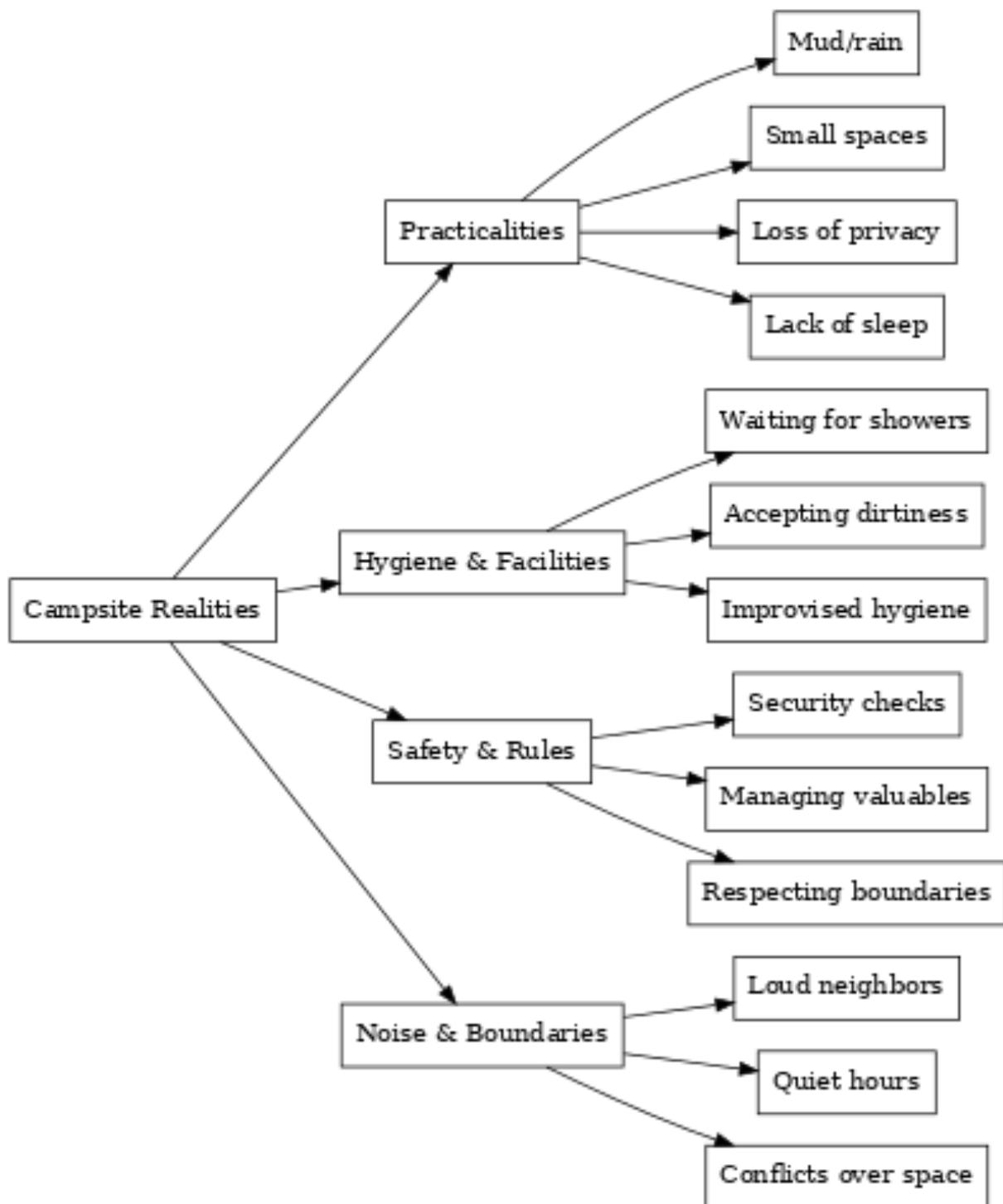
Theme 1: Atmosphere of Detachment



Theme 2: Campground Connections



Theme 3: Campsite Realities



Theme 4: Doing It Right



