

## From Digital Subcultures to Destination Tourism: Profiling Attendees at Multi Genre Festivals

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### Abstract

*The rise and connectivity of digital subcultures are increasingly influencing destination tourism. This study provides an understanding of a multi genre festival within the wider context of popular 'geek' culture and its increasing role in events and destination tourism. Through profiling the characteristics and experiences of visitors attending Nordsken, an annual festival in Northern Sweden, we profile segments and provide insights on attendees. Based on a survey of festival visitors, this study revealed five distinct clusters (Digital Gamer, Enthusiastic Nerd, Analogue Fan, Spectator & Follower and Creative Player) based on interests and activities. Experiences of the event were relatively similar for all clusters indicating that multi genre festivals can create memorable experiences for a broad audience with a variety of interests rooted in digital cultures. Through understanding and developing target audiences, regions can leverage multi genre festivals as platforms to enhance regional digitalization.*

**Keywords:** destination tourism, events, geek culture, video games, festivals

### 1. Introduction

Events and festivals are an increasingly relevant topic in the area of tourism management as the hosting of events and festivals are emerging as a significant topic in city development and planning (Kim & Kaewnuch, 2018). In developed nations, new technology in conjunction with an increase in more discretionary income and leisure time has resulted in a large increase in the number and variety of events globally at all levels – local, regional and national (Backman, 2018). This includes geek popular culture, which can be viewed as communities and practices around specific media such as games, comics or movies (Woo, 2018). The sheer multitude of fandoms and varied intersections of

popular culture interests has led to the emergence of 'multi genre festivals' that cater to a broad range of 'geeky' attendees. Such festivals have a large impact both in terms of economic benefits and socio-cultural influence (Woosnam et al., 2016) and are important for building local community, attracting tourism and regional development (Mair & Duffy, 2018). The creation of festivals around popular culture has become a growing phenomenon with gaps in the current academic literature on the topic (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019). Also driving research gaps is the debate whether different types of events are in fact associated with and or linked with tourism (Laing, 2018).

However, as the importance of festival studies are increasing within the event management field (Getz, 2010), it becomes imperative to move beyond literature focusing on economic issues to an understanding on how a festival's meanings and inherent value (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019) aligns to participant's experiences and motives for attending or to their satisfaction of events (Backman, 2018). In particular, we need insights in understanding how festival participation events bring together fans of 'subcultures' (Laing, 2018), influence repeat attendance (Folgado-Fernández et al., 2017) and create memorable experiences (Geus et al., 2016). As themed celebrations of various values, ideologies, identity, continuity of a community (Wilson et al., 2017) and related lifestyle narratives (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019), festivals provide a suitable context to investigate psychological perspectives which have been understudied (Kim & Kaewnuch, 2018) within event management.

Event managers need to deliver a memorable experience for visitors through making their events stand out (Oklevik et al., 2022) as event quality is key for marketing and consumer retention (Jeong & Kim, 2019). Attendees are at the core of event research as consumers in a variety of roles (Armbrecht et al., 2021) and there is a need to develop our understanding about individual interests that drive the consumer experience (Armbrecht

et al., 2021) including the common drivers of event participation (Armbrecht et al., 2021), for instance through profiling or understanding segments. Knowledge regarding the audiences of festivals in terms of segmentation is of value in terms of developing marketing strategies but also for refining the event experience itself (Kinnunen et al., 2019). At complex cultural events the consumption experience is co-created between attendees and organizers although value to consumers in terms of distinct market segments remains under researched (Dowell et al., 2019).

Festivals may serve a variety of purposes for urban regeneration including: empowering local communities, building local identities and supporting creative industries dynamics (Rutten, 2006). From niche voluntary-based events conducted by content-oriented enthusiasts, the Nordic festival scene has continued to grow, moving to more professional and business-oriented events (Kinnunen et al., 2019). One such example in the Nordic region is Nordsken, a multi genre festival located in Skellefteå in Northern Sweden that in 2019, attracted 9,600 unique visitors (Nordsken, 2022).

Tourism in northern Sweden has largely developed due to the concepts of the great outdoors and the natural characteristics of the arctic region (Schilar & Keskitalo, 2018). Culture based festivals in the region tend to be embedded through a multitude of stakeholder relationships that creates glocal networks of actors who are both locally and internationally bound (Karlsen & Stenbacka Nordström, 2009). Regional festivals must negotiate the balance between strengthening entrepreneurship while also achieving community driven goals (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018). Nordsken started in 2012 as a celebration of creative culture with a focus on geek and popular culture. It has since become integrated within an EU funded regional project to grow the video game industry around the cities of Skellefteå, Boden, Piteå, Umeå and Luleå in the 'Arctic' region of Northern Sweden. This can be seen as in line with the strategy behind Umeå as the 2014 Cultural Capital of Europe, which was to attract capital and people through events that enhanced the culture of the region (Åkerlund & Müller, 2012). The video game industry represents an opportunity to develop further creative and technology-based industries around it that can attract more highly skilled residents and prevent rural decline. Nordsken is now a central component as part of the Arctic Game Week, a "week filled with business conferences, networking, entertainment and the public event Nordsken where games, culture and creativity meet" (ArcticGameWeek, 2022). Nordsken and the conference attract international talent within games and creative industries to showcase the region. While Nordsken identifies as 'Northern Scandinavia's largest game event' it also is 'a tribute to people's imagination and

ingenuity with a focus on games, culture and creativity (Nordsken, 2022), retaining its roots in creative cultures.

The festival is held in the local Kraft Hockey Arena and consists of 5 main halls; the expo, creative hall, digital hall, adventure hall and the arcade. Digital games are a key focus in terms of the expo, game pitches, esports, LAN parties and game industry networking meetings held on the fourth floor throughout the event. While this particular digital (sub)culture is in focus, festival attendees can also engage in a wide range of activities beyond games, across many aspects of creative geek culture including; science fiction, fantasy, comics, art, cosplay, larping, tabletop gaming, pinball and film. Such interests and fandoms have been brought together as communities through digital mediums which are influenced by the context in which they occur (Peeples et al., 2018). Of further relevance it is through these same digital networks of relationships that travel decisions are increasingly made (Campione, 2021). The purpose of this research is to profile attendees of multi genre festivals within the wider context of popular 'geek' culture and examine how experiences may differ by segment. The specific research questions guiding this research are as follows:

RQ1: What segments of audiences can be identified within a multi genre festival?

RQ2: How do experiential factors influence the identified segments attending Nordsken?

## 2. Theoretical discussion

### 2.1. Multi Genre Festivals and Games, Geeks, Nerds & Fandoms

With an explosion of interest around geek culture in recent years, the resurgence of 'geek culture' has become increasingly mainstream and is showing enormous presence and growth in geek festivals and conventions (McCain et al., 2015). Terms such as nerd or geek are often used interchangeably but in terms of media consumption what is common is a shared 'community of practices' around a certain media that can also be termed fandom (Woo, 2018). Fandom in relation to tourism is an under researched area but its increasing pervasiveness has its root in the internet providing a platform for identity and belonging in relation to various media (Linden & Linden, 2016) as people connected through specific niche interests and formed communities around them (Peeples et al., 2018). Social researchers often examine fandoms as discrete phenomena yet Woo (2018) argues that geek culture can be seen as an intersection of various fandoms, where various interests overlap. Geek culture can be seen as a shared collection

of fandom or practices towards specific interests (Woo, 2012) and many interests can fall under the umbrella term of geek culture including video games, comics, science fiction among others (Peeples et al., 2018). Although previously popularly associated with adolescent pursuits, geek culture has becoming increasingly more adult as geeks push their preferred media to grow up with them (Woo, 2015).

Geek conventions such as Comic-con and Dragon-Con increasingly attract audiences who travel large distances to attend (McCain et al., 2015). Travel driven by popular culture where events attract audiences who share media interests can be seen as a form of 'contents tourism' (Graburn & Yamamura, 2020). There is no current fixed definition of events like these based on 'fantasy culture' (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019) but for the purpose of this paper we will adapt the term multi genre convention (Peeples et al., 2018) as multi genre festival. Events such as these display characteristics of public goods that embody a diverse mixture of social, cultural and economic agendas (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019). These events reflect geek culture yet are not limited to geek participation with innovations and increased mainstream visibility leading to more casual participation in the culture (Woo, 2012). Geek pursuits and interests at multi genre festivals can include but are not limited to; comics, video games, sci-fi, tabletop games, horror, fantasy, table-top games, and cosplay (Peeples et al., 2018). Events are complex social settings in which different stakeholders come together usually around a common interest or purpose (Helgadóttir & Dashper, 2016). Multi genre festivals, however, are potentially more complex and can act as a meeting point for a diverse range of communities and a wide variety of audiences and stakeholders (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019). The consumption of material goods in the form of gadgets and collectibles are prerequisites for participation in most fan or geek practices (Woo, 2012) and multi genre festivals must carefully balance the commercial side with the cultural aspects in order to be sustainable (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019). Participation in geek culture generally requires interaction with both texts and with people, and engagement with culture involves the accumulation of commitments to various stakeholders within it (Woo, 2015). As a result, multi genre festivals must strive to integrate the commercial and cultural aspects successfully to maintain success. Given that festivals or special events can have a host of direct and indirect benefits to the hosting community (Kim et al., 2016), festivals embedded in geek culture represent some of the most successful globally (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019).

## **2.2. Experiences and motivations in multi genre event festivals**

Some theories that discuss similar matters, such as the push and pull framework assess internal, intangible factors that 'push' attendees towards specific experiences and external, tangible factors that pull them towards specific destinations. This framework has been used to examine what motivates people to visit a variety of destinations such as; art festivals (Viviers et al., 2013), green events (Chen & Mo, 2014), esports events (Qian et al., 2020) but also physical and digital events (Zhang & Byon, 2017). To understand how consumers perceive experiences and value at this specific festival the factors of education, escapism, and novelty, sense of community, value, and memorable experiences were identified as relevant.

### **2.2.1. Education**

While there is plenty of literature that discusses the linkage between knowledge and behaviour, cultural space for geeks are often associated with participants acquire new knowledge and skills (Woo, 2012) and multi genre events can be seen as opportunities for enthusiasts to gain new knowledge (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019). In line with this, Zhang and Byon (2017) highlight, "online consumers are attracted to a game event to identify with the achievement of others, share success, gain knowledge, maintain and boost their self-esteem, and experience stressful, arousing, stimulating, pleasing, and happy sensations" (p.61). Education is thus a crucial component for sharing knowledge, satisfying the needs of consumers and motivating consumers to visit.

### **2.2.2. Escapism.**

Escapism has been profoundly inquired in leisure, literature, games, tourism research and much more. It describes different variations of how one may avoid the real, but as Calleja (2010) mentions it is more 'thorny' and may sometimes even differ depending if playing out in physical or virtual settings. Escapism may generate visits to events for generic benefits of entertainment and diversion, learning, doing something new and socializing, even getting away (Getz & Page, 2016). Luxurious experiences have also been discussed so that it may be enabled by focusing on hedonic escapism (Holmqvist et al., 2020). For bigger events, positive escapism has shown to mediate the relationship between fan passion and procrastination, while negative oriented escapism is a mediator between obsessive sport fans passions and procrastination (Astakhova et al., 2022).

### 2.2.3. Novelty

Novelty in terms of events is characterised as the festival being distinctive and attendees experiencing the unfamiliar and perceiving uniqueness (Geus et al., 2016). While Novelty is one of the more common ways of characterising any memorable and or leisure experiences (Tinsley & Eldredge, 1995) for attendees of festivals it is an essential aspect of the experience (Geus et al., 2016). In particular geek enthusiasts are open to new experiences and value creativity (Peeples et al., 2018).

### 2.2.4. Sense of Community/ Belonging

Geek culture is based on a connection based on shared interests (Peeples et al., 2018) and the digital capabilities that enabled the growth of culture were successful in that they connected real people (Woo, 2015). Multi genre conventions represent an important social occasion for attendees (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019) and cultural spaces by these are often enacted by actors, motivated by intrinsic reward, seeking to provide a forum for members of the culture to experience, interact and share their interests (Woo, 2012). The motive to belong can be seen to drive people in their engagement with geek activities and identification with geek culture (McCain et al., 2015). The socialscape of a festival describes the social interaction aspects of the of the environment as perceived by the festivalgoer (Gration & Raciti, 2014) and for attendees of multi genre festivals, the atmosphere and community engagement can be one of the more motivating factors to attend (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019).

### 2.2.5. Value

Value, initially a broad concept, such as the trade-off between quality and price (Mathwick et al., 2001), the experiential perspective highlights value deriving from experiences, regardless of it being a product, service and events (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). While value may be a multidimensional construct, value is also linked to economic perceived value (Song et al., 2015). Experiences are discussed as economic offerings in various different contexts (Luo et al., 2018; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). Mathwick et al. (2001) discuss its theoretical development, typologies, intrinsic and extrinsic values. The authors develop a scale which may be useful in predicting shopping preferences and patronage intentions in retail contexts. Furthermore, mere experiential marketing may induce customer satisfaction through functional and emotional value (Yuan & Wu, 2008). Value is interlinked with experiential settings and that understanding value may be a feasible way of predicting experiences in various contexts, notably in large events.

The value perceived by attendees is an important part of the overall experience and can lead to revisits and positive word of mouth communications (Semrad & Rivera, 2018).

### 2.2.6. Memorable Experience

It is a general knowledge that experiences create new memories. While memorable experiences may be argued to be influenced by the concepts above (Semrad & Rivera, 2018), it is also shown that experiences are sought for and valued (Mathisen, 2012). In regards to experiences and memory, experiences create memories and that the general notion of overall experiences are positively related to memorable experiences (Rivera et al., 2015). Experiences have been previously studied a lot from the perspective of economic impact and visitor motivation (Geus et al., 2016). In gaming and tourism contexts, Wong and Lai (2021) show that when consumers visit a gaming tourist destination memorable tourism experiences are created, but that gaming oriented memorable tourism experiences may have impact on destination location image and revisit intention. Memorable experiences have been shown to have a positive impact on behavioural intentions to revisit the destination and encourage others to visit through digital platforms (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021)

## 3. Method and research design

The aim of this study is to explore the profiles and motivations of participants of a multi genre festival, rooted in fandoms and geek culture. Nordsken represents a typical case of multi genre geek festivals, albeit with a role within regional strategy on game development. To get a deeper insight into the motivations and profiles of organizers and visitors, the data was collected in three steps. Before the festival, informal discussions with the festival organizers were conducted. Those provided the researchers with a better understanding of the different elements of the festival and development in the last years. During the 2019 festival, the authors made observations of the venue, the different visitor groups, and activities. Those provided a detailed understanding of the festival, which was used for refining the quantitative survey. The survey was designed in consultation with members of the Nordsken committee and was distributed after the festival through the Nordsken email list and Facebook pages both in Swedish and English. During the 2022 post pandemic relaunch of the event one of the research team attended the event and Arctic game week.

The design of the quantitative instrument is based on existing literature and the insights gained through observations and discussions with organizers. The survey

was divided into three sections. The first section contained demographic information, in the second section the participants were asked which activities and halls of the festival they enjoyed most. To measure the preference of activities the survey participants identified the activities they were interested in through selecting all

that applied of; video games, esports, board and card games, science fiction, fantasy, comics, cosplay, art, role play, live-action role play (larping) or pinball. In the third section, some of the discussed constructs were measured. Table 1 shows the origin of their scales as well as their operationalization.

**Table 1: Operationalization of the used constructs**

Construct	Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cr. Alpha
Education (Semrad & Rivera 2018)	My experience stimulated my curiosity.	5,23	1,505	.824
	It allowed me to learn a lot.	5,16	1,497	
	It made me more knowledgeable about creative culture.	4,67	1,680	
Escapism (Semrad & Rivera 2018)	Attending made me feel like I am in another world.	4,80	1,788	.825
	Visiting Nordsken gets me away from it all.	4,61	1,952	
	I was so involved in my experience I forgot everything else.	4,21	1,971	
Novelty (De Geus et al. 2016)	The event was unique.	5,51	1,683	.793
	I experienced new things.	5,15	1,610	
Sense of Community/ Belonging (Gratton & Raciti 2014)	Nordsken is different to other event experiences I've had in the past.	5,39	1,595	.832
	I enjoyed being with people who enjoy the same things I do.	5,42	1,632	
	I enjoyed being with people who have similar values.	5,18	1,544	
Value (Semrad & Rivera 2018)	I enjoyed talking to new and varied people.	4,78	1,847	.891
	Overall, I am happy with the prices I paid	5,39	1,738	
Memorable Experience (Semrad & Rivera 2018)	Attending the event was worth the time and money	5,77	1,734	.883
	I won't forget my experience at Nordsken	4,90	1,840	
	I will remember many positive things about this festival	5,35	1,673	
	I will have wonderful memories about Nordsken	4,98	1,751	

N = 211, items measured from 1 (strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree), all scales not improving through item elimination

**Table 2. Sociodemographic profile of respondents (N= 211)**

Respondent profile	Frequency (%)	Respondent profile	Frequency (%)
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Repeat visit</i>	
Male	113 (53.6%)	Yes	145 (68.7%)
Female	94 (44.5%)	No	64 (30.3%)
Other	4 (1.8%)		
<i>Age quartils</i>		<i>Party composition</i>	
10-27	57 (27.3%)	Alone	16 (7.6%)
28-36	59 (28.2%)	With friends	67 (31.8%)
37-42	50 (23.9%)	With family	83 (39.3%)
43-69	43 (20.5%)	With family & friends	42(19.9)
Age mean	33.88		
<i>Nationality</i>		<i>Region of origin</i>	
Swedish	207 (98.1%)	Surround city	105 (49.8%)
Other	4 (1.9%)	Closer <sup>a</sup>	69 (32.7%)
		Furtherer <sup>b</sup>	31 (14.7%)
		Lives outside Sweden	4 (19%)

Note: a=Lives<200km fr city, b=Lives> 200km fr city

### 3.1. Sample

The survey was completed by 211 attendees of Nordsken post the event. The socio-demographic profile of the sample is presented in Table 2. The majority of the respondents were Swedish, mostly coming from the surrounding of Skellefteå, and nearly equally male and female. The average age of respondents was around 34 years old, while the youngest surveyed visitor was 10 years old, the oldest 69. More than two thirds of the respondents visited Nordsken already for at least the second time. Most of the festival attendees come together with their friends (31.8%), their family (39.3%) or both (19.9%).

### 4. Analysis

To answer the first question and aiming to understand the activities and interests of different visitor groups, we performed a hierarchical cluster analysis using 12 items that measure the preference of activities at

the festival. Two cases had to be removed from the sample due to missing values in those items. Using the average linking method and squared Euclidian distance for binary variables, multiple cluster solutions were investigated. Finally, the solution with five clusters was chosen, as this solution shows not only a reasonable amount of variance explained with cluster sizes that are suitable for further statistical analysis, but also allows the most meaningful interpretations. In table 3, the five-cluster

solution is presented. Dissimilarities between clusters were examined by using Pearson Chi-Square test. After, paired Chi-Square tests with Bonferroni-corrected p-values were used post-hoc tests to examine the significant differences between the clusters. We identified five groups, that we call Digital Gamers, Enthusiastic Geeks, Analogue Fans, Spectators and Followers, and Creative Players.

**Table 3: Cluster building from preferred festival activities**

Variable	Mean	C 1 Digital Gamers n=34	C 2 Enthusiastic Geeks n=44	C 3 Analogue Fans n=42	C 4 Spectators and Followers n=58	C 5 Creative Players n=31	Significance
Video Games	70%	88%	100% <sup>a</sup>	55% <sup>b</sup>	57% <sup>b</sup>	52% <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2=38,511$ ; $p<.000$
E-Sports	28%	85% <sup>a</sup>	48% <sup>b</sup>	10% <sup>c</sup>	05% <sup>c</sup>	03% <sup>c</sup>	$\chi^2=95,914$ ; $p<.000$
Board & C G	56%	18% <sup>a</sup>	91% <sup>b</sup>	43% <sup>a</sup>	43% <sup>a</sup>	90% <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2=63,733$ ; $p<.000$
SciFi	55%	38% <sup>a</sup>	93% <sup>b</sup>	81% <sup>b</sup>	43% <sup>c</sup>	90% <sup>a,b,d</sup>	$\chi^2=105,696$ ; $p<.000$
Fantasy	65%	29% <sup>a</sup>	98% <sup>b</sup>	81% <sup>b</sup>	31% <sup>a</sup>	100% <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2=90,531$ ; $p<.000$
Comics	32%	00% <sup>a</sup>	75% <sup>b</sup>	43% <sup>b</sup>	02% <sup>a</sup>	45% <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2=38,132$ ; $p<.000$
Cosplay	33%	38%	43%	17% <sup>a</sup>	17% <sup>a</sup>	65% <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2=27,987$ ; $p<.000$
Film	65%	59% <sup>a</sup>	93% <sup>b</sup>	81% <sup>b</sup>	31% <sup>a</sup>	74%	$\chi^2=51,241$ ; $p<.000$
Art	39%	09% <sup>a</sup>	59% <sup>b</sup>	67% <sup>b</sup>	22% <sup>a</sup>	39%	$\chi^2=40,609$ ; $p<.000$
Role P	32%	09% <sup>a</sup>	66% <sup>b</sup>	07% <sup>a</sup>	09% <sup>a</sup>	87% <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2=101,289$ ; $p<.000$
Live A RP	19%	12% <sup>a</sup>	14% <sup>a</sup>	05% <sup>a</sup>	10% <sup>a</sup>	71% <sup>b</sup>	$\chi^2=64,72$ ; $p<.000$
Pinball	28%	21% <sup>a</sup>	66% <sup>b</sup>	17% <sup>a</sup>	26% <sup>a</sup>	03% <sup>a</sup>	$\chi^2=44,311$ ; $p<.000$

N=209, Superscripts a, b, c, d indicate statistically significant differences exist between the groups

Next the demographic and event-related characteristics were compared between the five cluster solutions. Those cluster describing variables give additional information for interpreting and understanding the chosen cluster solution. Depending on the type of variable an ANOVA with Bonferroni post-hoc test, or Pearson Chi-Square test and paired Chi-Square tests with Bonferroni-corrected p-values as post-hoc tests were used to examine significant differences between the different groups of festival visitors.

In the next step we compared the different factors for the different visitor groups to answer the second research question, do experiential factors influence the identified segments? The values for the clusters were compared with an ANOVA with Bonferroni post-hoc test. Significant differences were found to only exist between the 4th and the 5th cluster, reflecting differences between the least engaged group of *Spectators & Followers* and the cluster that is most active in the event, *Creative Players*. Despite some differences among some clusters, the factors are relatively similar for all groups. The *Creative Players* group perceived the experience as best value, most memorable, novel and enjoyed the greatest sense of community.

## 5. Results

In answer to what segments of audiences can be identified within a multi genre festival, five clusters were identified among the event participants; *Digital Gamers*, *Enthusiastic Geeks*, *Analogue Fans*, *Spectators & Followers* and *Creative Players*. In terms of how experiential factors influence the identified segments, the experience of the events have only differed slightly among the clusters. The findings imply that visiting a multi genre festival such as Nordsken includes experiential factors, seen beyond what was examined here.

*Digital Gamers* like video games and have by far the highest interest in esports. The *Digital Gamers* are mainly focused on their specific interest and show little interest in other areas of the festival: In particular their interest in the more classical and potentially analogue topics of board and card games, science fiction, fantasy, comics and art is significantly lower than other groups (except for the group of the *Spectators & Followers*, that are generally less interested in the festival topics). However, they also like Cosplay and have a moderate interest in films. Festival visitors from this group are significantly younger and more likely to be male than the average festival attendee.

The *Digital Gamers* are mainly visitors from the local area and prefer to attend with their friends.

The second group, *Enthusiastic Geeks*, is characterized by a very high and at the same time broad interest in the different interest areas. The *Enthusiastic Geeks* score highest in video games, comics, films and pinball, but also show a significantly high interest in role play, art and board and card games as well as a fair interest in esports. It seems like this group is overall enthusiastic about the different areas of the festival. Another, rather methodological, explanation of the overall high scores might be that the visitors in this group were overall satisfied with the festival experiences and might have even discovered their interest in different topics during the festival. *Enthusiastic Geeks* are typically male and come both from the local community of Skellefteå as well as the region around and visit the festival in a group which can be both their friends and/ or their families.

The third group is characterized as *Analogue Fans* who like science fiction and fantasy. They show the highest level of appreciation for art compared to all other festival visitors, and they are strongly interested in comics and films. The interest pattern of the *Analogue Fans* shows that they prefer to passively consume media related to their interests. At the same time, their interest score is relatively low in areas that require an active participation like video games, board and card games, role play and live action role play. Another interpretation is that the members of this cluster are less interested in playing and gaming. *Analogue Fans* form the oldest interest group of all, with equal balance of male and female festival visitors. Visitors from this group are typically visiting the festival with their family and mostly come from the local areas around Skellefteå.

*Spectators and Followers* are characterized by the fact that their interest in the different topics is below average, neither they have a specific area or topic that they are particularly interested in. They are moderately interested in video games, science fiction and board and card games, but they don't seem to be very attracted by the different areas of geek culture. This pattern can be explained by looking at the cluster describing variables: Visitors from this group are nearly always visiting the festival together with others, both with their families and friends. Also, the cluster consists of nearly 70% women, that are both from Skellefteå as well as from the surrounding within 200km. This largest group of festival visitors reflect what Dubois and Gibbs (2018) term as 'collateral game tourists' at gaming events and a segment at cultural events named 'Have Been Dragged Along' (Dowell et al., 2019). We label them as *Spectators and Followers* given that many may have visited out of curiosity,

even when activities do not relate to their personal interests.

Finally, the smallest cluster, the *Creative Players*, consists of persons who have a special interest in cosplay, role play and live action role play. As all these activities involve a high level of creativity and engagement, like costumes, stories and identities, we gave the attribute creative to the group. In particular the interest for live action role play is significantly higher than in any other group. Besides their importance for the different forms of role playing, the *Creative Players* like board and card games, science fiction, fantasy and movies. A typical *Creative Player* is female and visits the festival with a group of friends or family. In addition, the visitors from this cluster have on average the longest journey to the festival. We interpret the acceptance of a longer journey as a sign of their perceived importance of the festival for their specific interest in (live action) roleplay and cosplay.

## 6. Discussion

Nordsken is embedded within gaming culture as part of the region's development strategy yet also illustrates how gaming is part of a wider milieu of creative and geek culture. In terms of festival attendees our findings illustrate that clusters around specific interests are identifiable yet that the wider experience of the event is similar for all. This is line with the interpretation of geek culture as an intersection of various fandoms, where various interests overlap (Woo, 2018) given that the identified clusters reported similar experiential outcomes. The interests of attendees can range and intersect, with some such as gaming inherently digital yet others such as board games rooted in analogue practices. What is central is how digital spaces can connect those with similar interests regardless of geography or fandom size. The bi-annual DreamHack event in Jönköping Sweden is billed as the world's biggest digital festival and attracts gamers from all over the world. It acts as a connection point for a variety of subcultures and communities within gaming and esports to bring their digital world into the real one. It brings identity and tourists to the 'City of DreamHack' but also stimulates an active regional market of both commercial and non-commercial actors (McCauley et al., 2020). Festivals such as Nordsken and DreamHack illustrate that multi genre festivals can add value to regions beyond just attracting tourism through stimulating entrepreneurship in the region, particularly in terms of digitality.

The relatively minor differences between clusters in terms of the experiential factors highlight the *Creative Players* as most engaged and deriving the most

overall value from the experience. This is similar to research on music and sport event attendees (Oklevik et al., 2022) as this cluster is potentially rooted more in self-identity, and lifestyle narratives (Tonga Uriarte et al., 2019). While observing at the event itself, it was noted that those who engage in cosplay and larping represent some of the most striking attendees/participants, enhancing the overall novelty of the arena. *Spectators and Followers* was the cluster that had generally lower scores on experiential factors yet were not significantly different than three other clusters. What could be inferred is that these two clusters create experiential value for each other. *Creative Players* may as a novel encounter that makes the experience more memorable for the *Spectators and Followers* who in turn act as an appreciative audience that rarely encounters such geeky activities.

## 7. Limitations & Future research

This sample size for this survey is limited and can be expanded for more detail. As the study is bound to the specific festival, generalization is rather limited, and further studies are recommended to be conducted in other multi genre festivals, both on a national level, but also internationally. It would particularly be interesting to examine the geek culture and how well it overlaps or diverges when it comes on a global level, especially when many elements within the culture is indeed global. As the factors among the clusters differed only slightly, it would be of interest to include other variables such as motivations to attend when examining attendees at Nordsken. What was not examined in this study is the value to the region and games industry in terms of industry participants (approximately 600) who attend both the conference and Nordsken in a professional capacity. Due to the pandemic the 2020 edition cancelled having been scheduled to expand offerings and activities. The 2022 version was somewhat scaled down on the 2019 event, for example not hosting the LAN event. As such plans to conduct a follow up survey were postponed. The 2023 event will provide an opportunity to expand this research through developing a more comprehensive refined survey with incentives to take part. Qualitative interviews will be held on site with both attendees, volunteers and industry participants providing a mixed methods approach to identify more intangible and essential characteristics of festivals such as locals' identity, attitudes, attachment and volunteerism (Armbrecht et al., 2021). This will provide further insights on the impact on the local communities identities and how it supports the emerging game development industry dynamics (Rutten, 2006). The segments

identified in this study represent a starting point for future research to develop more avenues of inquiry within multi genre festivals and destination tourism. How different segments or fandoms engage with events in digital spaces pre, during and post events can provide rich insights on the role of real-life events within subcultures existing mostly online.

## 8. Managerial Implications

Organizers of multi genre festivals should ensure that a diverse range of interests are catered for and kept current through identifying and emerging subcultures, fandoms and practices. This can enhance attendance through attracting a wider range of potential attendees. Further, organizers should actively target encourage segments of the audience that will potentially be more engaged with activities, for example cosplayers, and as a result potentially enhance the festival experience for others. *Spectators and Followers* as the cluster with lowest scores on experiences and value, are a segment that is curious about the event or come along together with other visitors. We speculate that despite not being the promoter for others to visit the event but are instead being 'dragged' over by friends or family. Potentially this is a great opportunity to deliver engaging experiences not necessarily linked to specific geek culture, that can create memorable experiences, hence increase the motivations to revisit or spread positive word of mouth. As visitors have different preferences of activities during the event, it becomes important for the organiser to understand the difference between the primary interest(s) as to why people visit the event and what they prefer to 'do' during the event, as these two does not necessarily always align given that geek interests often overlap. In terms of attracting more attendees, organizers should engage more in relevant digital spaces as platforms for targeted engagement and positive word of mouth. Further the perceived economic value should be kept in mind, particularly when launching a new event where potential attendees will hesitate to risk capital on an unknown festival. New festivals should seek regional support in initial financing to lower prices, ensuring that potential attendees experience lower perceived risk. Through delivering memorable experiences for visitors, resulting positive word of mouth can allow for subsequent higher prices.

## 9. Conclusions

Events and festivals are a universal human experience with multi genre events representing how digi-



tality has allowed subcultures to intersect as one overarching geek/popular culture. While many events may appeal to a specific audience with shared interests (e.g. music or wine), multi genre festivals can be seen to cater to a broader audience that are driven by similar perceived experiences despite having different preferred activities and interests. Attendees will attend due to the attraction towards their specific subcultural or geek interests yet can enjoy a relatively similar experience overall. Understanding the variety of cultures around geek pursuits, whether rooted in analogue or digital behaviours, can create opportunities for creating memorable experiences through festivals and events. In turn this can allow potential for new models of digitalization and economic activity within regions, through demonstrating value to industry or activating local actors.

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