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Curating the urban music festival: Festivalisation, the 'shuffle' logic, and digitally-shaped music consumption

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Abstract

In recent years, music festivals have grown in significance within local cultural policy, city branding and tourism agendas. Taking the Mexefest festival in Lisbon as a case in point, this article asks how, in the digital streaming era, music festivals in urban environments are framed, curated and experienced. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, our analysis examines how music festival programmers curate the urban festival experience, for both locals and tourists alike. First, we identify the emergence of urban music festivals in recent decades, and how modern festival programmes have adopted the cultural technique of the 'shuffle mode' as an influential principle. Second, we investigate the work of festival programmers through the lens of 'cultural intermediaries', and ask how their programming strategies, particularly through digital mobile media (such as music playlists), contribute to an aestheticised experience of the city during the festival. Third, we focus on how the Mexefest festival events are staged in tandem with brand activation by sponsors like mobile phone company Vodafone and their radio station Vodafone FM. In doing so, we highlight the participation of festival-goers through their embodied engagements with digital media, music listening and urban space, and evaluate the heuristic value of 'shuffle curation' as a tool for the understanding of music festivals as a distinctly global and networked form of leisure consumption in urban culture.

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> Less than a week from Vodafone Mexefest, it's
>
> now time to listen in loop your favourite songs and
>
> discover the ones that you do not know yet, in this
>
> beautiful playlist. (Mexefest, Facebook page, 2016)
>
> It's a kind of shuffle. We make a playlist of songs
>
> and bands that we think are relevant right now. (Mexefest, promotional video, 2016)

In recent years, researchers have been keen to note rapid developments in the recorded music industries, now dominated by streaming music services. In creating branded musical experiences in the era of ubiquitous music and listening (Kassabian, 2004, 2013) streaming services like Spotify, YouTube, MySpace and Pulselocker usually rely on recommendation systems to generate playlists, and tracking systems to monitor their users' consumption behaviours. In various debates, including in this journal, such developments have led to critical reassessments of conceptual tools related to cultural intermediaries, curators and taste making (Morris, 2015). We take up a related, yet different vantage point in this article. We ask how, in the digital streaming era, are contemporary music festivals in urban environments framed, curated and experienced? What are the main 'intermediaries', distributed across social and technological actors, which help to co-produce the festival as a spatially and temporally extended phenomenon? And in which ways are music festival curation strategies reflective of broader patterns of 'festivalisation' and branding in contemporary cities (Karpińska-Krakowiak, 2009)?

In addressing these questions, this article makes use of the prevalent notion of the 'shuffle mode', most strongly associated with the promotion and technical functions enabled by the Apple iPod mp3 device, launched in the early 2000s (Quiñones, 2007). As the opening quotes earlier indicate, a rather general notion of 'shuffle' is adopted in much festival promotion media. Yet, our analysis seeks to take up this concept to better understand the curation strategies and experience design of contemporary festivals, which extend beyond a bounded time frame and the locations of the festival event to the curation of playlists that present a selection of the (most popular) songs of the festival line-up, for instance, to be consumed in the lead-up to a festival, and potentially during and after its completion. Such developments invite further consideration of the interconnections between digital music streaming, mobile media, urban life, music-based urban branding, nightlife economies, tourist geographies, festival curation and experience design.

We cast our attention to the annual Mexefest festival, which takes place in the Portuguese capital city of Lisbon.[1] In recent years, Lisbon has grown in popularity as a destination for global tourism, with scholars identifying the emergence of a 'tourist tsunami' in the city, coming in the wake of austerity, neoliberal urban planning, securitisation, gentrification

and studentification (Tulumello, 2016). Cultural researchers have taken note of the significance of musical scenes in a broader process of the 'disneyfication' of Lisbon's urban identity and nightlife culture (de La Barre and Vanspauwen, 2013), and the gentrification of the city's central neighbourhoods. In a recent publication detailing a 'strategic reflection process' commissioned by local government to reassess Lisbon's cultural policy, sociologist Pedro Costa et al. (2017: 65) characterised the city's urban tourism explosion as the result of several influential factors, namely, the expansion of low-cost travel, success with direct online marketing and city promotion, and a contemporary desire for new urban experiences in global travel. Such developments have built on existing trends in event culture since the 1990s, spanning mega-events, such as the Expo 98 (Ferreira, 1998), through to night-time festival formats like Nuit Blanche (Birdsall, 2013), being hosted in Lisbon.

Many of these festival events, including Mexefest, have been organised with Lisbon's local government acting as a co-sponsor, along with other public organisations.[2] In the context of mounting criticism concerning the effects of global tourism, the head of the Portuguese Association of Festivals (APORFEST) responded that they remain keen to 'leverage our music, the economy, products/services and the best employees [. . .], realising that internationalization will bring more business and experience to the Portuguese market' (Bramão, 2017: 1). While there have been grassroots protests and other subversive practices in reaction to tourism and gentrification processes in Lisbon, during this fieldwork, cultural festivals did not specifically serve as a target for community criticism. Nonetheless, as the following study will show, various cultural intermediaries demonstrate a strong tendency to adhere to the mainstream scripting of Lisbon as a global tourist city and the internationalisation of cultural consumption more generally.

Our analysis centres on the planning and hosting of the sixth edition of the Vodafone Mexefest festival in Lisbon, on 25 and 26 November 2016. Inspired by urban sociology, popular music studies and digital sound studies, we chose a mixed method approach in which our ethnographic fieldwork was complemented by discourse analysis of official documentation, press releases and audio-visual promotional materials.[3] Our fieldwork was carried out on-site for a period of 6 months, comprising a situated engagement with the festival organisation and locations, in which we followed the main actors, performed direct observation and conducted (semi)formal interviews. The interviews were performed with full consent and have been anonymised; each interview had an average duration of 50 minutes, and all were recorded, transcribed and coded manually. Although we conducted interviews with 14 interviewees, in the present analysis and discussion of results, particular emphasis will be placed on five interviews with actors directly involved in the Mexefest festival, which is organised by the production company Música no Coração:[4]

- The producer working for Música no Coração and main manager of Mexefest;
- The general director of Música no Coração;
- An announcer for Radio Vodafone FM;
- The manager of events and sponsorship of Vodafone, the main sponsor of Mexefest;
- The creative director, Big Fish company;

- Additionally, a festival-goer, who self-identifies as a fan and frequent participant of Mexefest.

The interviewees who were involved in the festival production were chosen for closer attention as they provide keen insights into how, in addition to artistic curation and programming, the cultural work of the modern festival now extends to an expanded spatial presence of networked branding, one that actively appeals to festival-goers with a range of strategies that span from logo design and branding strategies in the city, through to promotional videos, festival playlists and live radio transmissions. The discursive repertoires identified in the interviews with festival organisers help to detail a professional ethos as cultural workers, their understanding of festival organisation and their efforts to engage festival-goers in the festival event and its networked festival experience.

In what follows, we will focus on the ways in which music festival programmers seek to 'curate' the urban festival experience, for both locals and visitors alike. Our analysis will consider key aspects to what we identify as the workings of a 'shuffle' logic used to frame contemporary festival organisation and experience design. First, we identify the emergence of urban music festivals in recent decades, and how modern festival programmes have adopted the cultural technique of the 'shuffle mode' as an influential principle. Second, we investigate the work of festival programmers through the lens of 'cultural intermediaries', and ask how their programming strategies, particularly through digital mobile media (such as playlists), contribute to an aestheticised experience of the city during the festival. Third, we focus on how the festival events operate in tandem with brand activation by sponsors like mobile phone company Vodafone and their radio station Vodafone FM. In doing so, we highlight the participation of festival-goers through their engagement with popular music listening, digital media and urban space, and evaluate the heuristic value of refining the concept of 'shuffle effect' to understand a distinctly global form of leisure consumption in urban culture.

The shuffle logic in digital music culture and festival curation

In recent decades, the specific format of the urban music festival – with concerts taking place at different venues across a given city, and within a limited time frame – has been adopted worldwide (McKay, 2015; Wynn, 2015). Such festivals can be extended over several months or can be as short as a single night or weekend, and often rely on programmes featuring early career bands (and artists), along with more well-known drawcards. During these festivals, there are often queues at the entrances to the various venues due to a limited capacity, which further stimulates hype around festival programming. While urban music festivals centre on the enjoyment of live music performance, they also represent a specific urban cultural consumption model predicated on the annual reiteration of the festival as a temporary or ephemeral place (Anderton, 2006: 40); the increased popularity of the music festivals in downtown urban areas, in turn, has become influential in the development of professional music festival organisation.

South by Southwest (SXSW) is an iconic example of the urban music festival format, which has been held each year in Austin, Texas, since 1987, with official showcases and

a host of side events. It has established a strong reputation for investing in new talent and thus facilitating music discovery for both industry members and audiences (Wynn, 2015: 149). The event takes place each year in May, and has, at its epicentre, a demarcated area with bars and venues, hotels and a convention centre. The creation of a distinct atmosphere unlike that normally found in the Texan capital is generally considered to be one of the unique aspects of the festival. The mix between medium and small stages, the informal trade of t-shirts, records and stickers, the closure of surrounding streets to car traffic, and the musical atmosphere generated by hundreds of street performers together contribute to a 'festivalised' experience of the everyday public spaces of Austin's city centre (Bennett et al., 2014). In his study of SXSW, Jonathan Wynn (2015) quotes a young Austin local who comments on the relaxed atmosphere, which induces the feeling that one can 'just pop in, check out a band for a while, drink some free beer, and go find something new' (p. 150).

The urban music festival format was first brought to Portugal by the production company Música no Coração in 2008, in the form of the Mexefest festival in Lisbon. Its programme is composed of an average of 50 concerts ranging across genres, such as pop, instrumental, hip hop and rock, with the word *mexe*, or 'mix', underscoring its combination of popular genres, rather than high or low culture boundary crossing. Focusing on artists at the beginning of their careers and names from the alternative music scene, the programme is based on what the programmers describe as New Music, invoked in promotional materials as the style of the 'artistic vanguard'. During the 2016 edition of Mexefest, the performances include R&B alternative music (e.g. Gallant, the United States), soul music (e.g. Elza Soares, Brazil), fado (e.g. Celina da Piedade, Portugal) and indie rock (e.g. Kevin Morby, the United States), among other genres. The festival's concerts are distributed across approximately 25 spaces situated around a major thoroughfare, Avenida da Liberdade, which is a broad boulevard located in the centre of Lisbon (see Figure 1). The location choices are often striking: similar to SXSW, Mexefest has opted for a large variety of sites – in terms of versatility, size and function – for its programming. This range extends from traditional cultural spaces (e.g. theatres and cinemas) to unconventional spaces (e.g. public transport stations, garages and churches). Mexefest has thus adopted the urban music festival format foreshadowed by SXSW, and adapted it to local particularities and preferences, but with a marked effort to achieve a sense of 'socio-spatial authenticity' for locals and visitors alike, through an integration of the festival with the physical environment of the city (Szmigin et al., 2017). Indeed, similar to the North American model, a key idea in Lisbon is that the audience can navigate events located on a circuit in the heart of the city, with the agency to make personal choices from the diverse programming offered by the festival organisers.

While urban music festivals generally appeal to notions of unpredictability and surprise, we seek to elucidate how the cultural technique of 'shuffle mode' serves as an influential principle for modern festival programmes, which seek to incorporate various musical acts, styles, stages and concert length times. The notion of 'shuffle' in relation to music listening entered vernacular discourse following the advent of portable MP3 players in the early 2000s, most noticeably as a result of the marketing of the Apple iPod, described as the first 'twenty-first century icon and acoustic metaphor' (Bull, 2007: 3). Technically, the 'shuffle' function refers to a playback sequence that is not linear, as in

Figure 1. Map of Vodafone Mexefest locations around Lisbon.
Source: Vodafone Mexefest (2016). Available at: www.vodafonemexefest.com. Used with permission of the Mexefest 2016 organisation team.

the album form, but instead jumps from one track to another. When the iPod was initially introduced, shuffle sat without fanfare in a subdirectory of the device's main menu. However, the function proved popular, and in 2005, Apple released a bespoke iPod

Shuffle model that was promoted with slogans such as 'Life is random', 'Give chance a chance' and 'Enjoy uncertainty' (Quiñones, 2007: 13). Such statements underlined the idea that 'shuffle' was necessarily a desirable mode of listening to personal music libraries on the MP3 device, based on a randomisation algorithm.

Cultural scholar Maria Quiñones has investigated the playful dimensions to shuffle listening, as associated with various modes of expectation and user engagement. Focusing on the embodied experience of individual listeners with headphones, Quiñones (2007) postulates that

> whereas Walkman users usually considered their portable stereos as a tool for inducing certain moods, shuffle listeners seem to use their digital players for discovering actual states of mind, challenging common notions of agency and of music consumption as a way of managing emotions. (p. 19)

In this assessment, the shuffle mode, therefore, may prompt a pleasurable process of moving between different styles, while shifting between musical identities. While the listener is generally encouraged to focus on the song they are consuming, Quiñones observes that the shuffle control still allows for an embodied connection to the everyday environment: individual listeners still tune in to their surroundings and comply with norms of appropriate behaviour, while sustaining the 'multi-located attention' typical of networked subjects accustomed to 'ubiquitous listening' (Kassabian, 2013). More than a decade later, the act of (silent) individual listening to digital music is co-extensive with other everyday interactions with networked mobile devices in public spaces (Quiñones et al., 2016). In this vein, Hesmondhalgh and Meier (2018: 1556) recently argued, there has been a shift from the 'mobile privatisation' characteristic of the mid-to-late 20th century to a 'networked mobile personalisation' of the contemporary era.

Media researcher Devon Powers has offered a critical assessment of the 'shuffle mode', embedding it instead in a longer history of notions of musical order versus randomness, spanning from early recorded music formats and playback technologies through to the present-day. As Powers (2014) argues, the notion of shuffle as articulated by Apple was not completely new:

> [S]huffle was an early player in acculturating music listeners to the norms of algorithmic curation . . . It is also a social concept that is structured by a range of epistemologies, some mathematical and some not. Shuffle may have employed mathematical functions to achieve (pseudo) randomness, but its output must interface with common sense understandings of what randomness is. [. . .] [C]olloquial comprehension of shuffle highlights the contest over ways of understanding the world as a binary opposition, 'human' versus 'computational', where computational technologies are imagined to be efficient, infallible, and nonhuman. (pp.257–259)

Power's analysis therefore reminds us that the shuffle reflects a hybrid formation that is articulated in the interplay between recorded music formats and playback technologies, listeners' uses of these and related discourses. Her analysis calls for more sensitivity to how musical recommendation and discovery in the present represent sociotechnical processes, which necessarily rely on human understanding and user participation, as well as computational logics (random playback, algorithmic recommendation) that underpin digital streaming services and apps.

If, at least in popular discourse, the shuffle mode has been largely used in reference to a user control function for headphone-based listening to personal music devices in the early 2000s, further reflection is necessary to understand the incorporation of this principle into the organisation and experience design of urban music festivals. The following will analyse how the Mexefest organisation deploys this principle, combining individualised playlists ('create your own mix') with the official festival curation.

'Curated shuffle': music festival programmers as cultural intermediaries in the digital streaming era

Recent debates have questioned the broader definition and validity of the 'cultural intermediaries' concept, especially in the music-streaming era, and against a broader field of amateur content production, 'tastemaking' and 'influencer' practices across digital culture. In coining the term, Bourdieu (1984: 325) identified cultural intermediaries in terms of those agents, working between producers and consumers, who performed a curatorial role that entailed the symbolic legitimation of cultural goods. In refining the term, Smith Maguire and Matthews (2012) delineate the work of cultural intermediaries in

> framing the interactions between cultural goods and those who encounter them, and they do so by virtue of the cultural legitimacy they accrue (i.e. a legitimacy which comes from a demonstrated ability to perform and be recognised as an intermediary in a given field) (p. 552)

thus pointing to the filtering and value-adding role of these agents.

Responding to this discussion, Morris (2015) has suggested that Bourdieu's term be reframed to consider music-streaming services as *infomediaries*, to address the technical and cultural work of recommendation services in shaping digital music consumption. The utility of this term is that it recognises how these services 'expand the capabilities of digital commodities by helping users discover new cultural goods or providing novel experiences of familiar cultural content, and they do so largely through persistent and pervasive data collection' (Morris, 2015: 453, see also Morris and Powers, 2015). Yet, algorithms and recommendation services are by no means entirely automated. Recent scholarship has pointed out that music curation through streaming services such as Spotify are sociotechnical algorithms (Webster et al., 2016), which do not possess the same sensitivity as humans and often remain insensitive to user preferences and feedback (Moschetta and Vieira, 2018; Snickars, 2017).

Current research on digital listening practices and streaming services has therefore emphasised both the central role of playlists – whether editorial or user-generated – in relation to processes of musical discovery, curation and identity patterns; and the fact that these practices are adaptations of user behaviours that predate the streaming era (Moschetta and Vieira, 2018). Significantly, recent studies have cross-referenced social media use and online music-streaming data to trace how live music performances at festivals serve as a 'trigger' for music consumption through streaming services and social interactions on Twitter (Danielsen and Kjus, 2017), thus raising questions about the 'modes of modulation' enacted in user-platform relations (Galloway, 2004; Hui, 2015; Nunes Junior, 2019). Maasø (2018) has further pointed to a so-called 'festival effect' that

feeds into a general event-based streaming patterns. He observed a process 'whereby outside events and happenings influence streaming patterns both on a micro level (the everyday choices individuals make when using music-streaming services) and on a macro level (event-related streams common to many users)' (Maasø, 2018: 165). Such research points to the role of editorially promoted content over an extended 'festival period'; with a noticeable tendency towards a predominant use of editorial lists prior to festival events, in contrast to post-event listening consumption arising from individually driven searches and choice-making.

Amid these discussions, researchers have been careful not to wholesale dismiss the role of curators as cultural intermediaries, with recent publications detailing how disc jockeys (DJs) for music discovery platforms like 22tracks (Barna, 2017), music journalists (Lange, 2016) and radio stations like National Public Radio (NPR; Cwynar, 2017) have adjusted their curation practices and audience engagement in what is now a 'crowded musical landscape' (Barna, 2017). We take these scholarly interventions as instructive for our present concern with how the ideal of 'curated shuffle' takes form in festival organisation and experience design of Mexefest in Lisbon. One of the striking aspects of urban music festival organisation in light of the above relates to logistics. Indeed, reduced concert length, continual stage changes and overlapping programming are among the developments that point to a shuffle-like logic adopted within the dominant model of contemporary festivals, evidenced by principles of random combination and simultaneity associated with mobile music media, and with performances of short 'showcases' of hit singles, rather than being reliant on the full-length album. Nonetheless, one of our interviewees noted certain limitations in their agency over programming choices, while another pointed to the necessity of shorter concerts lengths within a festival format:

> Often, a program per concert hall is also very dependent on the characteristics of the venues. (Producer, Música no Coração production company)

> At a festival it's normal to have 45 to 50 minutes for a concert, because there are so many [concerts]. Then there is the concentration of the hits, the most requested tracks basically. By contrast, during a normal concert you will accept the B sides, with songs that were not so expected [. . .] so you will come to hear a band and you would not mind as much listening to a three-hour concert (Director, Música no Coração production company)

Similarly, programmers try to reduce large concerts with similar styles occurring at the same time, due to possible negative effects caused by too much 'fear of missing out' (or 'FOMO') within the overall festival experience. More generally, a 'principle of choice' as a defining aspect within the festival's image plays a key role in the public's relationship with the way programming is organised.

Among the various strategies for 'optimising' the festival experience, we observed frequent references by interviewees to the perceived need for 'flow' and 'harmony' across the festival's duration and various locations, which often translated into programming choices based on genre and popularity. Linked with this, a notion of 'shuffle curation' can be found in the festival organisers' metaphorical use of the term 'tapas', as a practice of tasting several small portions of food:

That is a bit like tapas isn't it? You have to taste a little of everything. Be with the music, be with the space. There are many times that I have been at Mexefest and tended to run from here to there [. . .] You have to effectively be quick to move, and the name [Mexefest, meaning the 'mix' or 'shake' festival] also reinforces this idea. (Radio Announcer, Vodafone FM)

It is not uncommon for a tasting menu to have a half-dozen dishes: you can taste a little of everything, but each item is eaten in a smaller quantity than in a standard meal. The advantage is that you can enjoy a wide palette of flavours at one time and it is not uncommon to have pleasant surprises; the disadvantage is the variety confusing the palate. (Bonifácio, 2015)

In an interview with a frequent attendee of Mexefest, we could similarly observe how a fan of the festival acknowledged that benefit of the festival's programming strategy was attending a variety of performances, even if this meant that some of the programme's drawcards were missed:

It was a shame that I didn't get to see Malu Magalhães, Kevin Morby, Bruno Pernadas, Gallant, and so many others, and I didn't make it to the Capitolio [venue]; but I was very blessed to have seen Whitney, Baio and Elza . . . I left the festival with a full heart, even though I knew I missed a lot of good acts, but what I saw still made it worth it. (Festival-goer, who self-identifies as a fan and frequent participant of Mexefest)

A significant portion of the programming of the Mexefest comprises performers in an early stage of their career, who have been selected on the basis of their social network followers, number of views on web channels and potential for 'going viral' through mobile music devices. Other criteria referenced by festival organisers during interviews were aesthetic factors in the overall curatorial concept, along with pragmatic concerns such as availability and contractual negotiations, and a distribution of subcultural affiliations and the inclusion of both local and non-local acts.

In the broader context of the festivals' public discourse, music represents a vehicle for the crossing of cultures, tastes and habits of globalised consumption, most noticeable in how the festival produces a discourse about 'something for everyone' in its brand narrative. Indeed, both press releases and our interviewees' responses were replete with references to Mexefest as an opportunity to 'pick up' new music in Lisbon (Bonifácio, 2015), a discursive repertoire that can also be found in the promotional video quoted at the beginning of this article, and on the festival fan page, both of which encouraged festival-goers to prepare themselves ahead of the festival by streaming playlists. This encouragement to access playlists, as the interviewees revealed, also allowed the festival organisation to digitally track the popular interest in the programmed musical acts prior to the festival taking place. Music playlists therefore serve as a form of pre-event anticipation that extends the temporal duration of the festival experience. These findings are consistent with the observation made by Danielsen and Kjus (2017):

[A] live event now extends far beyond the here and now of the actual concert or festival venue. Music and media are deeply intermingled when the audience uses their mobile phones to prepare and process, document, and communicate the event on online platforms before, during and after it.

In their study, the authors observed peaks in the weekend following a festival (dubbed the 'weekend echo') as festival-goers continued to listen to newly discovered music, often in the context of private listening and group environments such as house parties. In turn, the festival programming and organisation take streaming as the 'normal' context for music listening for a large part of its audience. It follows a model of experience design in which enthusiasm for the event is seen as co-produced by festival-goers with the aid of technological devices (Leyshon et al., 2016; Prior, 2015).

Music discovery, as described here, occurs through acts of listening to curated music selections, and is intended to connect audiences to the festival experience. As such, the adoption of a 'curated shuffle' principle not only serves to bridge individual listening acts (e.g. to playlists) with the collective listening context of performance, but the 'shuffle' notion is emphasised in the shareable audio-visual content (both images and videos) circulated by festival organisers through social media. In such social media content, we find an analogue to the 'snapshot world' model (Aquino, 2016) enacted with contemporary digital photography practice: constant clicks to capture festival sites, which along with short concerts and quick changes between stages, artists and styles, aligns with the 'curated shuffle' notion. An illustrative example of how it is replicated in the festival's choice of visual design for its programmes, is seen in a map with street names and venues overlaid with an atmospheric image in the Instagram filter style (see Figure 1), which invites festival-goers to participate in the imagination of experiencing the festival and the city, but also shared memories on Instagram, both during and after the festival period (Maia and Nunes Junior, 2017).

The influence of a shuffle concept is also in evidence in a video posted on the official festival fan page on 21 November 2016. The video sets the tone for the experience created by the Mexefest festival, reaching already on its second day more than 100,000 views. With its synesthetic effect between sound and image, the content is presented with an overlapping of various places, dates and artist names. At the same time, it appropriates the image of Lisbon as an 'eventful' city (Richards and Palmer, 2009), a place with life on the street, in which a random cross-section combines urban places and diverse soundscapes. Intrinsic to the adoption of 'shuffle' here is the notion that it unfolds in real time at the 'heart of Lisbon', giving the strong impression that the Mexefest team has programmed several playlists as the basis for their creation of 'live', embodied experiences in concert halls and urban spaces. In doing so, the festival's curation strategy would seem to materially reproduce sensations at these sites that had been previously experienced by audience members through the consumption of the festival playlist and visual media strategies prior to the event.

While it is outside of the scope of this article to extensively account for how festival-goers' experience or evaluate a 'curated shuffle' approach to festival organisation, our interview data with audience members bear out an enthusiasm for the curatorial strategy to facilitate the discovery and experience of new music, along with selected urban locations around Lisbon. In a personal interview, a festival attendee, who lives in Lisbon, observed,

> I find [the festival] very interesting because of the diversity [of programming] and the chance that someone who is not enjoying one concert can go and try another one. It's fun to be able to

walk from venue to venue and discover new things. (Festival-goer, a fan and frequent participant of Mexefest)

In the following section, we would like to further expand these initial observations on how the work of event organisers and sponsors, as cultural intermediaries, both playing a role in curating and framing a dominant account of the festival as presented in a 'curated shuffle' mode, with infomediaries like Spotify supporting the circulation of festival playlists. We will now turn to the question of how the festival – sponsored by a telecommunications company and its radio station – engages in sonic brand activation in urban space. Here, too, we will consider the participation of festival-goers, not only in their engagements with popular music listening and digital media, as discussed here, but also as we turn to questions of festival atmosphere and placemaking in urban space.

Sonic brand activation and the festival's urban environment

Scholars now tend to refer to 'media industries' in the plural, due to the manifold subsidiary markets associated with the global recorded music industry, and patterns of integration across the media and cultural industries. Where the present-day digital music landscape is marked by the predominance of the information technology sector (Hesmondhalgh and Meier, 2018), the recorded music industry has also shared a close relationship to the commercial radio industry and telecommunication companies (Gopinath, 2013). In Portugal, too, the past three decades have been marked by a competitive and synergistic media landscape (Nunes, 2014), which was subject to a new media law in 2008 in the context of severe financial crisis, and marked by local radio ownership concentration, job cuts and foreign capital investment (Silva, 2014).

Against this background, we will now consider the manner by which the Mexefest festival, sponsored by the Vodafone mobile phone company and radio station, has been tied in to brand activation in the urban environment, and how this, in turn, relates to urban branding, festival placemaking and affective atmospheres (Sumartojo et al., 2017). In doing so, our treatment of festival curation and experience design in the previous section will be extended to the commercial 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and how a practice of 'curated shuffle' connects the broader context of musical culture in place selling or city branding, and the specific role of festivals and special events in this process. The most striking articulation of such ties is illustrated by official statements made in publicity for the Mexefest festival, as not only a showcase for new music, but for the discovery of the city of Lisbon, as illustrated in this excerpt from an interview given by the head of the Música no Coração production company:

Mexefest has this particular ability [to link festival and city], as well as making new music known. There are a lot of people who are from Lisbon who were not familiar with the Portuguese Society of Geography, and had never been there before. (Sapo 24, 2016)

Indeed, the festival may facilitate urban discovery for those not familiar with Lisbon and its urban locations, but this comment elides the neo-colonialist connotations of

'discovery' in the urban context, particularly given that a location like the Society of Geography is the former site of a major colonial institution. More generally, while music serves as protagonist for this cultural event, it also moves and often fulfils a supporting role; other reasons mentioned repeatedly by interviewees during the fieldwork included the possibility of seeing new places in the city, being with new people and having new urban experiences.

In our analysis of Mexefest's promotional videos, we identified how a notion of 'curated shuffle' was used to convey the promise of urban discovery and a festivalised atmosphere. Through different camera viewpoints, the videos blend concert images with the public in other urban scenes: streets, passageways, escalators, train stations, parks and public gardens in downtown Lisbon. In the communicational appeal of the material, the emphasis on the urban atmosphere is presented as almost more important than the festival programme itself. At times, these videos appeared closer to a city branding campaign, rather than festival promotion. Nonetheless, music remains a major aspect that is featured in the festival brand narrative, mainly invoked with shots of festival-goers dancing, large stages, vocal performances and close-ups of musical instruments. More than anything, though, music is presented as an important vehicle for the creation of ambience and the promotion of conviviality. In the foregrounding of bars, groups in conversation, chill-out zones, historical buildings, subway passages and many other places in Lisbon, the festival's on-stage performances appear more as backdrop to a strong impulse to discover new areas of the city, as can be elucidated in a scene of festival-goers (see Figure 2) observed during the fieldwork. The festival is, therefore, framed as facilitating urban discovery for visitors, but also for Lisbon dwellers, who are expected to have a new experience of 're-enchantment' with the city on the basis of the festival's unusual locations and atmospheres (Birdsall, 2013).

More generally, the patterns we have identified in our case of the Mexefest festival are consistent with recent scholarly work, which has observed how present-day music 'is being remodelled in the image of promotional media, as it is being used to push products, lend cool cachet to brands, and deliver persuasive messages' (Meier, 2019: 330, see also Meier, 2016). In the context of the festival, we observed the integration of Mexefest with commercial music, radio and mobile phone industries, in the form of Vodafone as the main sponsor, but also with other sponsors, whose brands gain visibility in public space during the festival. For instance, the sponsor Toyota had a car display positioned in front of Casa do Alentejo, which announced and promoted the free shuttle programme offered by Mexefest. At the Coliseu dos Recreios, there was also a Vodafone Cuckoo Stage installed on a balcony, which served as the compulsory means of entering this venue for the general public. Moving around the Avenida da Liberdade, the Vodafone Bus helped festival-goers to get more quickly to the venues and, at while, to promote the brand of the Mexefest main sponsor (see Figure 3). One of the Vodafone employees interviewed also reflected on the timing of the festival in the 'quieter' period of November as important for brand visibility:

> We worked a lot on digital, that is, we selected a group of what we call influencers, bloggers, public figures, jet sets, VIPs, gave them the freedom to live the festival their way and we had excellent results. (Manager of events and sponsorship, Vodafone)

Figure 2. Fieldwork photograph of a Vodafone Mexefest totem, 25 November 2016.
Photo credit: Paulo Nunes.

Figure 3. Fieldwork photograph of festival promotion on an inner city bus in
Lisbon, 20 November 2016.
Photo credit: Paulo Nunes.

Figure 4. Fieldwork photograph of a promotional installation for the Vodafone Mexefest festival, at the Restauradores Square in Lisbon, 25 November 2016. Photo credit: Paulo Nunes.

These comments are insightful about the coordinated strategy enacted by Vodafone; in particular, it points to the pre-selection of 'influencers' and other figures who, in return for free promotion of their festival experiences, were given free tickets to the festival as a way to encourage both brand visibility of sponsors and stimulate music discovery with the aid of social media posts and recommendations.

One of the significant brand activation campaigns was conducted by Big Fish, the company contracted to work with Música no Coração Productions in organising the event, who created a visual installation in the shape of a large gramophone horn (see Figure 4) located on Restauradores Square. These installations are built up annually as a means of announcing the upcoming festival event. The choice of scale and lighting was particularly striking in these installations:

> The visibility of the gramophone followed a particular marketing principle: it is important that the public understands that an event of an enormous size will be taking place. (Creative Director, Big Fish)

As such, the branded consumer experience with the giant gramophone relies on multiple sensory impressions, and refers directly to Vodafone, as the main sponsor of Mexefest.

The gramophone works to validate the festival's brand identity creation, and presents an attractive object for social media sharing. As a site of sonic brand activation, this gramophone structure serves as an oversized and aesthetically pleasing object, and connected to a nostalgia for analogue musical media, which is evocative in its creation of objects or sights that are 'Instagrammable' on social media (Boy and Uitermark, 2016). Such objects, therefore, not only offer 'experience trophies' (Aquino, 2016), but are also consistent with recent studies of music festival fans' uses of official merchandise as 'place souvenirs' (Barrière and Finkel, 2020). This example of the gramophone also reflects recent research findings about the necessity for 'vivid memory' within festival marketing and audience building (Manthiou et al., 2014).

Working in a similar vein, the festival organisation also arranged for totem poles to indicate the directions, with brightly illuminated signs and reflectors in shades of red that marked the main Mexefest routes in the Lisbon territory (see Figure 2). These visually striking features, dotted around the inner city, were consistent with Vodafone's publicity campaign using online media and graphic design (see also Figure 3). Together, the various promotional elements helped to transform Avenida da Liberdade into a large, music-themed amusement park in the city centre. The countless bars, cafes and other night-time attractions were thus folded into the festival programming, with interviewees frequently referring to the experience of 'going up and down' this avenue, spanning between Restauradores Square and São Jorge Cinema; a walk that festival-goers might perform several times during the night, usually facilitated by taking free rides in the Toyota publicity vehicles.

A case observed during the fieldwork is illustrative in this regard. During the opening afternoon of the sixth edition of Mexefest, on Friday, 25 November 2016, the production team at Avenida da Liberdade was preoccupied with putting the finishing touches on the various outdoor sites. In addition to new banners and totems, arrangements were being made to prepare the concert venues. In the midst of this activity, two glass containers that would later house the Radio Vodafone FM broadcast studio were delivered near São Jorge Cinema.

Late in the afternoon, journalists started interviews with artists and organisers and began to broadcast live concerts at the Vodafone FM booth. The glass containers have a strong visual appeal, as unusually shaped objects in the public space, and also in their function as a showcase by which passers-by could look into the 'live' radio studio, and for which broadcasters could comment on the night-time activities taking place on one of the most famous avenues in Lisbon. Nearby this location, the outer courtyard of Rossio Station became a festival stage named after Vodafone FM radio station. On this stage, music performances were programmed with a preference for artists already well-known to the station's listeners due to the high circulation of their main tracks in the weeks before the festival event:

> One thing we tried to do is to make sure that on the Vodafone FM stage at Rossio Station there is programming that fits in with what is happening on radio as well (Música no Coração producer).

According to a Vodafone FM Broadcaster, interviewed for the research, Mexefest gave a significant boost to the radio station's image (see Figure 5):

Figure 5. Transmission booth of Radio Vodafone FM.
Source: Vodafone Mexefest (2016). Used with permission of the Mexefest 2016 organisation team.

> We chose to be located between São Jorge Cinema and Tivoli Theatre with two containers for people to see us, for people to know that there is a radio station and that the radio is at their feet, it is on the street, it is with them. And that's super important to the brand, it's super important to the radio station, and it's super important to the audience. [. . .] this is the moment when you are face to face with people and people say 'ok, you [i.e. the radio announcers at Vodafone FM] are real'. [. . .] We also walked up and down the street with them, and invited their comments. We become tangible, in a way, and people associate us with Vodafone Mexefest. (Radio announcer, Vodafone FM)

Through such interventions, radio production is made visible and palpable, and serves to heighten a sense of liveness and eventness.

Vodafone FM radio acts as a site of yet another unfolding of 'curated shuffle' designed for the festival experience. The proximity of the Musica no Coração producer's relationship with the Vodafone radio group was emphasised by the company director: 'In addition to publicising the festival events, the radio station provides me with details for the artists that I must bring to my events. And it also brings me closer to the festival sponsors that are on the radio'. The director's statement clarifies the dual strategic function exercised by commercial radio and its efforts to cross its music market with the mobile communication market. In addition to being a source of research and testing of new musical trends, the director is able to distribute potential music hits among Portuguese listeners and prepare the ground for new audiences, who will, ideally, then complete the music consumption cycle by buying tickets to Mexefest or other festivals conveyed by the producer's

company. In this dynamic, the commercial radio station distributes new music and offers a space to promote festival events sponsored by Vodafone.

Recorded music and its performance are thus key structural elements for the festival, and the built environment also has a co-constructive role in shaping the festival performances. Recorded music and performance also inscribe distinct relations with urban space and inform the social dynamics underpinning the city festivalisation process:

> We took shuttles, we tuned in to radio, we were in the pool, we went to the market, to the theatre, to the cinema, to the garage, to the church, to the palace, to the station, to the coliseum, to the athenaeum, a common geographical space: Avenida da Liberdade. All this in the name of music. (Post on the Mexefest Fan page, 7 October 2015)

As such, we can critically observe a modulation (Hui, 2015) that takes shape in urban music festivals through an engagement of the 'shuffle' concept, practised not only by commercial radio stations but also by other intermediaries who made use of such narratives in their responses. Such rhetoric thus offers significant scope for thinking about how a shuffle principle is adopted by those tasked with organising cultural activities in the contemporary city.

In conclusion, this article has sought to outline the context in which urban music festivals operate today: namely, in a manner that continues to be inspired by a 'shuffle' logic that persists in digital music culture and festival curation. In the analysis, we have focused on the process by which a 'curated shuffle' can be read in the music festival's programming practices and digital engagements with its public, while critically reflecting on how various figures in the festival organisation, as cultural intermediaries, try to facilitate new music discovery in the digital streaming era. Indeed, as we have discussed, social networks, video dissemination platforms and other services for music consumption such as Spotify and many others are increasingly becoming mechanisms that co-constitute the organisation of our experience of and relation to music. In other words, our analysis has emphasised the ways in which different facets of the highly concentrated and networked conglomeration of the 'music industries' (Gopinath, 2013; Hesmondhalgh and Meier, 2018) coalesce around an event like the Vodafone Mexefest in Lisbon. As such, we posit that the shuffle concept offers a useful means for pinpointing the multi-layering of corporate engagement, mobile technologies and musicality into the urban spatial contests of the Mexefest festival in Lisbon; in this sense, 'curated shuffle' goes beyond the provision of official playlists to more systematic reimaginations of the urban environment occurring in the heart of downtown Lisbon.

While we appreciate how the organisation and distribution of digital music commodities by streaming services produce new and significant forms of curation and value production (Morris, 2015), we have also asserted the importance of understanding how urban music festival organisation 'intermediaries' are distributed across social and technological actors. As such, we foreground the ongoing importance of the category of cultural intermediaries for framing the work of festival organisers in curating in situ experiences for new music discovery. The fieldwork conducted here, based on interviews and observations, elicited new insights into the work of programmers involved in the festival organisation, as well as other actors, such as sponsors. Our analysis has also sought to remain

critical of the promotional discourses that those involved in the festival organisation reproduced, yet there may be further scope to query the 'rather singular narrative of self-interested cultural workers' (Perry et al., 2015: 725). For this, diary-keeping methods may be useful tools for eliciting more differentiated results (Perry et al., 2015: 736). A further area for potential future enquiry would be to expand on digital methods for audience research, to consider how festival-goers engage in everyday processes of urban placemaking and 'worldmaking' (Birdsall and Kalkman, 2018).

Our analysis has revealed how cultural intermediaries emphasise the significance of their work in facilitating a sense of 'discovery', both of new music and festival sites in the urban environment. The participation of interviewees in shaping the design and feel of the music festival experience, nonetheless, is inextricable from brand activation in public space and a broader context of urban revitalisation. For this reason, we investigated the main curatorial principles driving the organisation of the Vodafone Mexefest, which helped contribute to the creation of a festival atmosphere in downtown Lisbon during the 'quieter' period of November – this scheduling choice was perceived as allowing for a maximisation of brand activation in urban space and in the annual festival calendar, and is also considered to be a 'safer' time of year for the radio station to test out the popularity of new and less mainstream music with its audiences.

In maintaining an analytical attention to cultural intermediaries, in the form of music festival curators, we have sought to take a critical position towards the category of shuffle as being a form of modulation, rather than a 'neutral' or random logic. Attending to the work of these cultural intermediaries exposes the fundamental paradox of 'shuffle' in contemporary global capitalism, and cultural consumption, which enables its users to feel free and subject to unexpected new experiences when exploring the festival's varied programming and urban venues. This 'surfing' on the surface, when it comes to culture in a 'liquid' modern world (Bauman, 2000: 212; Bauman, 2000: 24), is predicated on continual change or reshuffle, but subject to the commercial imperatives of a festival sponsored by a major commercial music and radio player like Vodafone.

We further see potential for exploration of how the 'curated shuffle' principle of Mexefest's organisation dovetails with the mainstream urban narratives of tourist place selling, but also to attend to its frictions with other notions of lived space in Lisbon. While our fieldwork did not uncover protests or other subversive responses to the Mexefest festival from local inhabitants, the visible security presence in the festival's central area around Avenida da Liberdade clearly demonstrated the restrictions in place for the participation of 'marginal groups'. Similarly, concert halls were only accessible with the display (or purchase) of a festival wristband, and by going through a security control at the entrance.

While it was outside of the scope of this article to further pinpoint the festival's relationship to rapid gentrification processes in Lisbon's inner city and nightlife, it is fair to once again highlight the role of cultural intermediaries, since the festival's organisers play a crucial role in determining not only which aspects of music culture (particular artists or genres) are privileged, but also its choice of particular urban sites (scaled towards downtown and upmarket). These curatorial choices also exclude poorer areas of the city, and a larger palette of Lisbon music culture, including alternative or non-commercial music scenes. Moreover, the relation of the Mexefest festival to culture-led gentrification

in Lisbon (Zukin, 2010) is suggested by a full analysis of the festival's programming since 2008, which has revealed that following its first successful editions, many of the early venues could no longer used, as they were soon sold to real estate investors and have since been redeveloped as hotels and convention centre facilities (Nunes Junior, 2019).

Finally, we would like to close by reflecting on how our account of curated shuffle may be utilised for the study of other (music) festival categories, and the extent to which our results can be adopted for other contexts. We can certainly identify certain similarities with popular outdoor music festivals, such as the Glastonbury Festival, that are also multi-staged and have a certain range of concerts, each with a 40- to 45-minute limit, and for which festival goers move between programmes and stages, as well as visual installations, and shuffle through official apps while listening to the promotional playlists. As a result, it might be said that a 'shuffle mode' of curation in popular outdoor music festivals staged in non-urban locations is thus similar to what we see in the urban music festival, although we would still maintain that it is crucial to use this concept to consider how urban discovery is integrated as a key facilitating element within the festival design.

Indeed, in our analysis of Mexefest, we highlighted how it was modelled on the 'showcase' format of SXSW and, as a result, had as its original goal to foreground newer and upcoming acts. Yet, placed in the context of an urban musical festival, with a commercial radio sponsor, and responding to contemporary digital and smartphone music consumption culture, the impulse to discover and experience music is thoroughly intertwined with a discourse of exploring new or unusual locations in Lisbon. The location of urban music festivals in mid-size cities such as Austin (with a population of nearly 1 million inhabitants) and Lisbon (around half a million inhabitants) also raises questions about the visibility and density of such festivals in and around the city centre. Further research would be needed to examine whether the effects and dynamics described here apply only to medium-sized urban environments of equivalent scale to Mexefest, or if a similar 'curated shuffle' and brand activation plays out differently in festivals hosted by mega-cities or larger metropolitan conglomerations. This, in turn, raises new questions about how urban environments are, more broadly, being 'eventised' in line with a festivalised 'shuffle' logic, extending beyond any direct connection to contemporary digital music or urban music festivals.

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Notes

1. Due to sponsorship and marketing issues, from 2018, the event was renamed as Super Bock em Stock (see festival website at www.superbockemstock.pt/en/). Since the present empirical research focused mainly on the event in 2016, for the purposes of this article, it will be referred to as the Mexefest festival.
2. Other public entities that Mexefest include the Equipment Management and Cultural Animation Company (EGEAC), which since 1995 has been responsible for programming educational activities, managing cultural centres and organising public events, and means that some festival events are held in public venues, such as Cinema São Jorge.
3. The materials gathered were systematised into three main types, as relating to (1) formal practices of production publicly announced by the festival organisers, (2) pre-production meetings (media conference, activating brand marketing and all sorts of publicity) and (3) non-official practices and on-site interviews that were conducted during the empirical investigation.
4. Along with Everything is New and Ritmos, Música no Coração is one of the three largest music production companies in Portugal. The company occupies eight floors of the building located at Viriato Street 25, in the Picoas district of Lisbon. Of these eight floors, two are reserved for the communication, production, financial department and general board company offices. The other five host six different radio channels, all specialised in musical styles linked to the main festivals produced by the company, such as the Super Bock Super Rock, Caixa Alfama and Meo Sudoeste.

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