

Abstract for the general public

The project aims to develop new knowledge on food festivals' role, impacts and extent in Polish rural areas, their communities and the business environment. The project focuses on rural development in Poland through food festivals. It is motivated by the fact that many rural communities in Poland are characterized by a significant interest in enhancing locally embedded and sustainable food production and sale, also because this can reduce outmigration and rural decline. Food festivals seem to be particularly useful in achieving these ambitious goals, as previous research suggested that they are regarded as possible contributors to rural development, preservers of tradition and bringers of renewal, and sometimes as providers of coherence, commitment and meaning for local community members and visitors alike. Furthermore, previous research has pointed out that food festivals can be signs of continuity to the past, but also sparks of culinary tradition renewal into new formats and meanings. Moreover, food festivals, might be a powerful means of self-identification, self-realization and self-examination for food producers, often becoming a stepping stone for local culinary products promotion and commercialization.

The project has been divided into three work packages, whereas each addresses two research questions: (WP1) spatial and temporal coverage of food festivals; (WP2) the impact of food festivals on development; (WP3) the impact of food festivals on business spinoffs. WP1 addresses the following research questions: What is the spatial distribution of food festivals in rural areas? And what is the composition of food festivals (origin, type, size, theme) in rural areas? WP2 addresses the following research questions: How do festivals provide constraints as well as opportunities for rural development? And how do perceived impacts of a festival on a rural place vary between the main stakeholder groups: locals, visitors, and organizers? Finally, WP3 addresses another two research questions: How do exhibitors at food festivals link up with the local area and what kinds of business spinoffs do food festivals create? And more generally, is there a case for "co-innovation" in a food festival setting, and what are the innovative characteristics?

The research concept for the current proposal has been derived from a series of research projects on rural and regional effects of events and festivals in which the Principal Investigator has been involved in Scandinavia and Germany since 2015. The project contains 3 phases. The first phase is design-centric and will embrace internal and external desk research aimed at reviewing and systematizing existing contributions, food industry reports, and governmental statistics about socio-economic effects of (food) festivals and their role in rural development. A special attention will be given to business aspects of rural (food) festivals, especially the issue of entrepreneurial implications and prospects for co-innovation at food festivals – an issue that has hitherto been sparsely addressed in academic research. Based on the acquired knowledge a consistent instrument for data collection among different groups of festivals stakeholders will be designed and tested. This phase will also aim to identify and localize in space and time as many as possible food festivals hosted in Polish rural areas. An integral part of this phase will be a research meeting and project's 'design-phase' consultation with Prof. A-M. Hjalager (University of Southern Denmark) and Prof. O. Oklevik (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences). The second phase is data-centric and embraces two core activities: (a) data collection and (b) data analysis. To collect data, two diagnostic survey techniques will be implemented: self-administered questionnaire interview and in-depth direct interview. The first self-administered questionnaire will be sent to organizers of all identified food festivals in Poland by an email, and – if not possible – by a surface mail. Afterwards, based on a number of criteria (e.g., location, time, schedule, size, theme) six food festivals (cases) will be selected for more detailed research. At each selected festival visitors and residents will be surveyed by means of PAPI method. The third phase is dissemination-centric and focuses on results' dissemination. This will be achieved by multi-channel strategy which will embrace 6 journal papers published in top journals of international scope and reach, related to either rural studies, place development and festival management. It is planned to publish projects' results exclusively in English, in reputable journals. Furthermore, it is planned to attend 6 international and 4 domestic conferences related to rural/local development and festival management.

The result of the project will be the acquisition and dissemination of new knowledge on the role, impact and extent of food festivals in rural areas in Poland. The results of the research will include: (a) comprehensive inventory, typology and spatial distribution of culinary festivals in Poland; (b) perceptions of business aspects stemming from food festivals from the perspective of exhibitors, residents and guests; (c) an explanation of the spatial and entrepreneurial aspects of food festivals.