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Music festival employees' ableism as experienced by participants with disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Being disabled or having a health problem is the third most common reason for not participating in arts events. Ableist attitudes are common but have hardly been studied in the festival context. We focus on this research gap, concentrating on festival employees' ableism. The introductory quantitative analysis demonstrates that persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses, altogether 157 in our survey, experienced more inappropriate behaviour from security staff, customer service personnel, and other festival employees, than other attendees. The in-depth interviews revealed various types of misconduct that persons with disabilities saw as ableism, and that festival employees had difficulty facing disability. Three universal themes were identified: lack of understanding, distrust, and hostility. Additionally, organizers' actions were mostly addressing mobility impairments only. The results indicate that it is crucial to provide training to festival organizers and employees on disability issues. Furthermore, it is essential to have persons with disabilities among festival employees.

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Introduction

Approximately 16% of the world's population has a significant disability (WHO 2023). Persons with disabilities are the biggest minority in the world, and their number is increasing as people live longer, so there will be more older people. Leisure time is essential for well-being and for being an equal member of society. There are indications how participation in disability-specific events facilitates empowerment. These events include the Paralympics (Darcy, Dickson, and Benson 2014), Special Olympics (Webb and Richelieu 2022) and other parasport events (Nordhagen, Kvammen, and Moen 2024), as well as disability festivals (Walters 2023). There are also studies on accessibility in leisure to enhance equal opportunities for participation (Alvarado 2022; Kang et al. 2020; Takata, Yamakita, and Aoyama 2024).

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However, disabilities or health problems are the third most common reason for not participating in arts events (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sports 2020), reducing participation in society and increasing exclusion of persons with disabilities (see also Darcy and Taylor 2009; Leahy and Ferri 2024). Various barriers make leisure participation challenging for persons with disabilities. These include (Devine and Kastenholz 2018) structural (time, money, accessibility, information availability), interpersonal (lack of a companion, lack of encouragement by friends and family, negative attitudes of service providers and other people) and intrapersonal (abilities, age, skills, lack of self-confidence) factors. For instance, negative attitudes of tourism service providers towards persons with disabilities might lead to those people avoiding specific destinations or travel in general (Kang et al. 2020). The attitudes play a crucial role since 'a key element in triggering feelings of exclusion is the social environment' (Tchetchik, Eichhorn, and Biran 2018, 207). Shi, Cole, and Chancellor (2012, 230) even argue that 'service providers' attitudes towards persons with disabilities could be more important than the physical accessibility'.

Ableism – favouring abled people in building environments and services – generates discrimination towards people who do not fulfil expected able-bodied norms (Duignan et al. 2023; Sue 2010; Wolbring 2008). Ableism has also been defined as 'stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities' (Bogart and Dunn 2019, 651). Through ableism, disability is perceived as 'a negative concept, state, and experience' (Sue 2010, 242). Nario-Redmond, Kemerling, and Silverman (2019, 739) called it 'disability prejudice', defined as 'the disrespectful treatment of disabled people simply based on their disability status'. Ableism is manifested on the structural level as barriers to access, and on the interpersonal level as prejudiced attitudes and even 'awkward' interactions (Wang et al. 2019, 905). Disableism, on the other hand, is a form of oppression where persons with disabilities are excluded and their possibilities to participate are restricted (Thomas 2007, 73).

Even though an increasing number of festivals aim for inclusivity, the research on festival experiences of participants with disabilities has mainly focused on physical accessibility (Walters 2023), leading to a situation where 'physical barriers have been discussed more than attitudinal barriers' (Duignan et al. 2023, 4). Ableist attitudes are common, but they have hardly been studied. Overall, disability is a neglected research theme in critical event studies, taken that during the ten years of 2011–2021, only nine articles on disability in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion were published in the core event management journals (Calver et al. 2023).

We aim to shed light on this research gap, concentrating on festival employees' ableism as experienced by Finnish music festival participants with disabilities. This is an essential issue for festivals aiming for inclusion. If festival staff demonstrate ableism, they most likely approve of such attitudes and consequent inappropriate behaviour from audience members, which would increase non-inclusivity at the festival. Furthermore, the staff's ableist attitudes and behaviour will inevitably influence the festival's reputation since the festival's aims for inclusivity should be demonstrated in practice by the staff's actions.

Our research questions are:

- To what extent do persons with disabilities face ableism from festival employees?
- How is this ableism expressed, and how do participants with disabilities perceive it?

In this paper, we adhere to the concept of ableism and not disableism, since we believe that festival organizers do not willingly build disableist festivalscapes. Instead, the problem is an environment and practices that are aimed at non-disabled people. We use 'person-first language' throughout the paper, emphasizing the person before their disability (Bogart and Dunn 2019, 653); thus, the terms 'persons with disabilities' and 'participants with disabilities'.

The introductory part of the study is quantitative, giving a general view of the phenomenon. The focus is on the qualitative part, which follows principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014, 8). We wanted to know how persons with disabilities talk about the ableism they have faced, attempting to understand what constitutes ableism from their perspective.

Literature

The initial phase of recognizing and studying disabilities was based on a so-called medical model where disability was seen as a misfortune that should be treated more than any other way in medical terms, aiming for 'cure' and 'normalisation' (Bogart and Dunn 2019; Yoon 2022). Disability was considered a 'personal tragedy' (Yoon 2022, 188) or 'abnormality' (Bogart and Dunn 2019), implying that non-disabled persons were normal, happier and more fortunate. Persons with disabilities were targets for charity work, institutionalization and segregation (Daruwalla and Darcy 2005, 551). Disability was understood 'as a physical, moral, emotional, mental and spiritual deficit' (Loja et al. 2013, 198).

In the 1980s, the social model of disability turned the mindset towards human rights (Walters 2023), seeing disabilities as created by constraints in society: the environment, the place, and people with their negative attitudes created disabilities (Duignan et al. 2023; McKercher and Darcy 2018; Shaw, Chan, and McMahon 2012). This viewpoint means that the impairment per se does not generate the barrier, rather it is the disabling environment and attitudes (Daruwalla and Darcy 2005, 553). Consequently, the focus should be on fixing these constraints instead of assuming that persons with disabilities adjust and remain socially excluded from society.

In the latest affirmative model, disability is seen as a source of its own culture and identity, constructing a positive identity (Yoon 2022, 189). This can be seen, for instance, in the culture of Deaf people, where sign language interpreters are transformed into sign language performers; that is, artists of their own. Here, we use the initial capitalized form Deaf to emphasize that Deaf people do not necessarily see themselves as disabled but as a linguistic minority (Bogart and Dunn 2019, 654).

Our research is based on the social model of disability as we scrutinize the ableist attitudes that make persons with disabilities feel ignored, insulted and of unequal worth compared with non-disabled people. Persons with disabilities are a vulnerable minority that faces violence and harassment. Amborski et al. (2022) reported that persons with disabilities are at a bigger risk of facing sexual violence than non-disabled, and Malihi et al. (2021) that both male and female individuals with disabilities experience more non-partner physical and sexual violence than persons without disabilities. According to Malihi et al. (2021), the main perpetrators of non-partner violence against females with disabilities were parents and relatives, whereas, against males, the dominant perpetrators were strangers.

Forms of ableism

The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission report (EHRC 2011) on harassment faced by persons with disabilities lists various reasons for harassment: ignorance and lack of knowledge; lack of empathy; fear of disabilities; discomfort about how to interact; being an easy target, and envy and jealousy of 'special treatment'. The incidents are rarely reported, which leads to the situation where most of the harassment towards individuals with disabilities remains 'hidden in plain sight' (61).

A 2019 Special Issue of the journal *Social Issues* concentrated on ableism. In this issue, Olkin et al. (2019) investigated microaggressions – 'covert expressions of discrimination' (Sue 2010, 243) – against women with disabilities. They concluded that 'microaggressions are daily reminders of the stigmatized condition of disability' (781). The most common forms of microaggression were downplaying the effects of disability in one's life, assuming that persons with disabilities need help (even when not requesting it), being praised for doing almost anything (patronization), and denying the right to equality. Out of these forms, the most troubling were denying the right to equality and downplaying the effects of disability in one's life. The right to equality was troubling since it defined women with disabilities as second-class citizens: they could not enter spaces they wanted, they were denied public transport, they were ignored, and jokes were made about them. People were not talking to women with disabilities directly, but rather to other people with them. Downplaying the disability experience included attitudes like 'assuming that they are taking advantage of 'the system' by exaggerating or faking their disabilities' (Olkin et al. 2019, 771).

Nario-Redmond, Kemerling, and Silverman (2019) studied hostile, benevolent and ambivalent ableism from the perspective of persons with disabilities. Their theoretical framework was the Stereotype Content Model (SCM), which can classify disabilities by warmth and competence (Canton, Hedley, and Spoor 2022). Typically, persons with physical disabilities are defined as high in warmth and low in competence, often resulting in paternalistic prejudice like pity (benevolent ableism). In contrast, persons with psychological disorders are perceived as low on both warmth and competence. Nario-Redmond, Kemerling, and Silverman (2019) identified six forms of ableism: paternalistic or condescending; benevolent or admiring; hostile or angry; envious or jealous; dehumanizing or objectifying; and disability fear-based ableism. The most common was paternalistic ableism, followed by admiring ableism in the form of 'being described as "inspirational" for doing everyday activities' (742).

Wang et al. (2019) concentrated on unsolicited help and the consequences on perceptions about individuals with disabilities when they confronted this help. Since 'warmth penalties' occurred after refusing help, authors interpreted that non-disabled people did not perceive offering patronizing help as inappropriate or prejudiced. Harder, Keller, and Chopik (2019), on the other hand, found out that women in general and people who had contact with individuals with disabilities were less prejudiced.

A more recent study by Timmons, McGinnity, and Carroll (2024) found that ableist attitudes differ by disability type, gender and social context. Negative stereotypes were more common towards disabilities that are generally seen as 'less warm' (as defined in the SCM) like autism or mental health issues. Based on the results, they questioned the assumption that ableism would be a general attitude, but 'ableism manifests differently depending on

the individual's disability, their gender and the social context' (655). This implies that more research on ableism is needed to explain its various forms and motivations in different contexts.

Ableism in leisure

Ableism has been hardly studied in a leisure context; Daruwalla and Darcy's (2005) research is one of the exceptions. They studied tourism staff attitudes towards persons with disabilities before and after a disability awareness programme, concluding that personal attitudes changed through training; even more so, if training was given or assisted by a person with disabilities. However, it was necessary to refresh the learnt issues regularly.

In sports, the Paralympics have gained extensive media coverage, and the megaevent is essential in facilitating accessibility in general and offering opportunities for athletes with disabilities to participate in sports on an international level. However, it has also been noticed that the media often treat participants with ableist attitudes, introducing them with patronizing emphasis as 'superheroes' (Daruwalla and Darcy 2005, 552). In contrast, they should be treated like any international-level athlete.

Randle and Dolnicar (2019) analyzed online posts of Airbnb guests with disabilities and hosts who offered them accommodation. Based on the social model of disability, they presented attitudinal, physical and informational barriers that make people disabled. Regarding attitudinal barriers, they say that 'often, negative attitudes are associated with ignorance about people with impairments, what they are capable of, and the extent to which they have a right to be fully included in society' (279). Physical and built environments introduce physical barriers, and incorrect and misleading information causes severe problems for persons with disabilities.

McKercher and Darcy (2018) defined a four-tiered framework that describes the different barrier levels to travel faced by persons with disabilities (Figure 1). The lowest level barriers are common to all people, containing structural (like time and cost), interpersonal (for example, lack of a travel partner), intrapersonal (psychological factors),

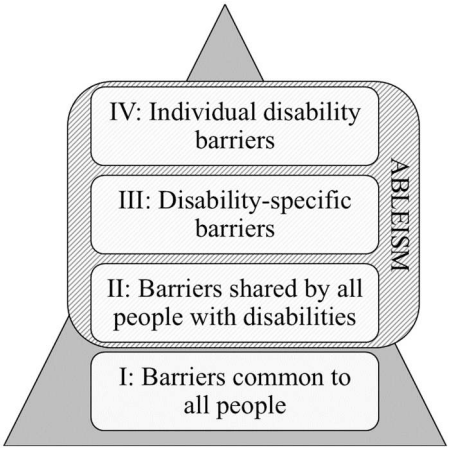

Figure 1. Barriers to travel for persons with disabilities (adapted from McKercher and Darcy 2018).

and interest (that is, lack of interest that Deville and Kastenholz (2018) defined as part of the intrapersonal sphere) factors. The next level of barriers is shared by all persons with disabilities. These barriers include ignorance, negative attitudes, the trustworthiness of available information, and industry ignorance that focuses on the fast 'process' of high volumes of clients. On the third level, some barriers are specific to a certain type of disability like mobility, vision or hearing. Only on the fourth level are the individual obstacles that depend on the personal differences regarding the impairment(s). McKercher and Darcy's three highest levels of barriers can be interpreted as ableism. These barriers are obstacles that non-disabled people do not face since society is built for and serves them.

Disability studies in event management

As mentioned in the Introduction, Calver et al. (2023) reviewed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) articles in four major event management journals from 2011–2021 and found only nine handling disabilities. We continued their systematic review for the years 2022–2024, reviewing the same journals (*Event Management, International Journal of Event and Festival Management, Journal of Convention & Event Tourism, Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*). We used the same search words ('disability' OR 'ableism' OR 'disabled') in the title, keywords or abstract of the articles retrieved from the EBSCO Hospitality and Tourism Complete database and included only articles handling events. Our result was nine articles, meaning that between 2011–2024, only 18 articles on disabilities were published in these four core event management journals.

The summary of articles is represented in Table 1. There were five articles on mega events (Olympics, Paralympics, EXPO), five on festivals, three on sports events (other than mega events), two handling meetings, conventions and conferences, one general article, one about Pride events and one about queer leisure spaces (including social events). None of them handled ableism explicitly, strengthening the current study's need.

Participants with disabilities at festivals

Participants with disabilities have been studied in the festival context, particularly regarding physical accessibility (Alvarado 2022; Bossey 2020; Castle, Burland, and Greasley 2022). The focus has been on McKercher and Darcy's (2018) tier model's third level, which includes barriers specific to certain disabilities. The studies demonstrate that the emphasis has been on mobility disabilities, paying attention to accessible routes for wheelchairs, viewing platforms for wheelchair users and accessible toilets (Alvarado 2022). Vision impairments have got some attention, indicating the importance of accessible information both at festival sites (Castle, Burland, and Greasley 2022), and on the internet (Dinis, Eusébio, and Breda 2020).

Some festivals are organized particularly for (and by) persons with disabilities. For instance, Walters (2023) studied the InterACT Disability Arts Festival in New Zealand and the rights of individuals with disabilities to create the festival content. The festival demonstrated the importance of empowering people by giving them opportunities to showcase their skills and abilities. In this way, the artists with disabilities offered role models to attendees (Bossey 2020), giving them new ideas, inspiration and self-confidence.

Table 1. Results of the systematic review of articles on disability 2012–2024.

Article	Event category	Theme
Irish (2020)	MICE	Universal design in conferences
Boo and Kim (2020)	MICE	Accommodating disability in the meetings and events industry
Kang et al. (2020)	Mega events	EXPO service quality for travellers with mobility impairments
Darcy, Dickson, and Benson (2014) Dickson, Darcy, and Benson (2017)	Mega events	Volunteers with disabilities in Olympic and Paralympic Games
Webb and Richelieu (2022)	Mega events	Special Olympics for participants with intellectual disabilities
Takata, Yamakita, and Aoyama (2024)	Mega events	Accessible tourism development through Paralympic Games
McPherson et al. (2017) Nordhagen, Kvammen, and Moen (2024) Yamashita and Muneda (2023)	Sports events	Parasport events
Darcy (2012)	General	Call for inclusive event research
Alvarado (2022) Bossey (2020)	Festivals	Accessibility in music festivals
Dinis, Eusébio, and Breda (2020)	Festivals	Social media accessibility in music festivals
Walters (2023)	Festivals	Disability festival
Kinnunen and Honkanen (2024)	Festivals	Inappropriate behaviour towards minorities at music festivals
Lewis and Hermann (2023)	Queer events	Queer people with disabilities in Pride events
Vo (2023)	Including online/virtual and social events among leisure spaces	Queer people with disabilities in leisure spaces

One of the very few studies on increasing the inclusion of participants with disabilities in other than specific disability festivals is Brazil's Street Carnival of Rio de Janeiro, from the perspective of one of the organizing bands which wanted to increase inclusion (Snyder 2022). The study was not from 'The' Rio carnival of samba schools but from a grass-root level block carnival. The aim was to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities, both in musical acts as performers and as members of the audience. One of the new practices was an 'accessibility section', an area near the musicians, reserved for persons with disabilities. This allowed participants 'to dance, participate, and move around' (Snyder 2022, 103), which was not possible on viewing platforms that are typically very restricted in space and far away from the stage. However, it has to be noted that some persons with disabilities might not want to draw attention to themselves through designated areas (Castle, Burland, and Greasley 2022).

The studies on festival participants with disabilities have hardly touched on the issue of ableism and ableist attitudes except in terms of accessibility. Kinnunen and Honkanen (2024) reported ableist attitudes of non-disabled festival and gig goers, manifested by harassment, threats of violence – and even violence. However, the ableist attitudes of festival employees have not been studied previously, which is the knowledge gap on which we concentrated.

Materials and methods

Our study is based on 16,681 responses to a web survey and seven in-depth interviews of persons with disabilities and their Personal Assistants (PA). The survey data were analyzed

using statistical methods and interviews with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The quantitative part should be considered as an introduction to the theme, whereas the qualitative section goes deeper into the forms of ableism as perceived by music festival participants with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses.

Throughout our study, we use the terms 'inappropriate behaviour' and 'ableism'. Inappropriate behaviour is defined here as 'any kind of harassment or derogatory, insulting, humiliating, violent or other inappropriate behaviour', including physical, verbal and non-verbal harassment. For ableism, we use Bogart and Dunn's (2019, 651) definition of 'stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities' since it emphasizes negative attitudes that lead to inappropriate behaviour.

Research data

Quantitative data were collected through the Finnish Festival Barometer, an online audience survey conducted every second year and administered by LiveFIN, the network and interest group of Finnish live music events. The data are from the Barometer survey in 2022 conducted in October–November that year by 24 LiveFIN member festivals, and they distributed the survey link on social media. Tickets to the following year's festivals were offered as prizes, and two prizes were drawn for respondents for each of the 24 festivals. The questionnaire contained various questions on festival attendance, such as visit frequency, musical preferences, important experience elements, and so on. In 2022 there was a special section on inappropriate behaviour at music festivals within the previous five years. We received 16,681 responses, of which 31% had experienced inappropriate behaviour. To analyze inappropriate behaviour in more detail, there were questions on minority membership. 1,324 (8%) respondents identified themselves as minority members, and out of them, 157 had a disability, a chronic illness, or both.

It was also asked whether the respondent wanted to participate in further research, and if so, they were asked to provide their email address. Twelve respondents with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses were contacted, and five volunteered for face-to-face interviews between March and April 2023. The participants were offered a free festival ticket, but this opportunity was revealed only after the interview time was agreed. The audio of the interviews (5 hours and 17 minutes) was recorded and transcribed. The interviewees (Table 2) included two persons with reduced mobility, one blind person, and two non-neurotypicals with ADHD, of which one also had autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Two Personal Assistants participated as well; consequently, seven persons were interviewed. Out of them, three belonged to a gender minority and three to a sexual minority, meaning that there were intersecting minority identities. However, we did not concentrate on intersectionality as it did not appear to have influenced festival employees' attitudes in our case. Our interviewees had both visible (Sarah, Red Devil, Hannah) and hidden disabilities (Maija, Snowflake).

Analysis methods

In the statistical analysis, persons with disabilities and/or a chronic illness were compared with other (that is, non-disabled) festival attendees to find out the differences in

Table 2. Interviewees (n = 7).

Pseudonym, Age Interview length	Gender Gender pronoun	Minority identities	Characterisation of disability in their own words
Sarah, 19 (1:08)	Non-binary They/them	Gender minority Disabled because of an illness	'I can't go alone [to festivals], from time to time it's real hard for me to move around, like I need the wheelchair or crutches'.
Red Devil, 39 (1:15)	Female She/her	Person with reduced mobility Chronically ill	'I every now and then get up [from the wheelchair], cause I'm able to stand and walk [a bit]. And if I sit for a very long time, I start hurting more'.
Helmi, 22 (Red Devil's PA)	Female She/her	None	
Maija, 28 (1:25)	Gender non-conforming She/her or they/them	Gender minority Sexual minority (lesbian) Non-neurotypical (ADHD)	'No matter how lovely and energizing [the festival is], I know that because of my own neurotype I will end up being totally beat anyway'.
Hannah, 38 (1:23)	Female She/her	Blind	'I can't respond to eye contact because I can't see, so then someone, like someone serving customers, talks to my assistant and not to me'.
Person, 37 (Hannah's PA)	Person They/them	Gender minority (gender fluid) Sexual minority	
Snowflake, 27 (1:06)	Female She/her	Sexual minority (pansexual, sapiosexual) Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) Non-neurotypical (ADHD)	'I have Asperger's, which has a real strong effect on how my senses work. Like, for me, music is colours, which is so lovely when you go to festivals. […] You need to think it through yourself, do you want to tell you are an autist and face all that prejudice about autism, or do you rather not tell and then meet the thoughts and reactions towards your own behaviour, maybe peculiar behaviour or behaviour deviating from social norms'.

inappropriate behaviour conducted by festival employees. Chi-square tests and Fisher's exact tests were used for this comparison.

Interview data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Moss, Whalley, and Elsmore 2020; Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014; Smith 2019). IPA is developed from thematic analysis but goes deeper into participants' experiences. The researcher aims to make sense of participants' experiences, perceptions and feelings – even trying to put themselves in the participants' positions. This requires rich descriptions of incidents, and the sample sizes in IPA research are small. The aim is to produce 'an in-depth examination of certain phenomena, and not generating a theory to be generalized over the whole population' (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014, 9), and 'the primary concern of IPA researchers is to elicit rich, detailed, and first-person accounts of experiences and phenomena under investigation' (10).

Research ethics

According to the instructions of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (Kohonen, Kuula-Luumi, and Spoof 2019, 20), an ethical review for the study was not required, which was confirmed by the Research Integrity Adviser of the first author's university. This was because all the participants were at least 15 years old; they were informed about the research, its purpose and voluntary participation;

there was no safety risk, mental harm exceeding normal everyday life or exceptionally strong stimuli, and their physical integrity was not interfered with. Contact information of a mental health organization's helpline was included in the questionnaire.

The purpose of the study and participant's rights were summarized at the beginning of each interview session. All the interviewees gave their informed consent and agreed to the audio recording of the interview. Additionally, the draft of this article was sent to them, allowing them to correct possible misinterpretations.

Findings

The purpose of quantitative analysis was to serve as an introduction to the theme. With the help of survey responses, we wanted to summarize the characteristics of survey participants with disabilities and to determine if they faced more inappropriate behaviour from festival personnel than non-disabled participants. After that, the qualitative part aimed to scrutinize in more detail the types of ableist attitudes interviewees had experienced by festival staff.

Introductory quantitative analysis

157 survey respondents had a disability, a chronic illness, or both. Over half of them (57%) had experienced inappropriate behaviour at Finnish music festivals during the previous five years. The corresponding figure for non-disabled persons was 31%. The types of inappropriate behaviour from which participants were asked to choose all options that applied were: harassment because of gender; harassment because of sexual orientation; harassment because of ethnicity; harassment because of disability, functional or mental capability; harassment because of age; harassment because of language; harassment because of clothing or appearance; sexual harassment; physically threatening situations, and physical violence.

Table 3 summarizes the perpetrators of persons with disabilities and/or a chronic illness and of non-disabled participants. Persons with disabilities and/or a chronic illness were more often mistreated by festival security staff (25.6%, others 4.1%), customer service personnel (12.2%, others 1.9%), and other festival employees (3.3%, others 0.4%). Thus, they were more often subjected to inappropriate behaviour by festival employees compared to others. Additionally, a familiar member of the audience was more likely to treat them inappropriately (10.0%, others 4.3%). In contrast, an unfamiliar member of the audience was less likely to do so (86.7%, others 94.1%), even though

Table 3. Who was conducting the inappropriate behaviour?

Perpetrator	Disabled and/or chronically ill (n = 90)	Others (n = 5,118)	Chi-square or Fisher's exact test
Unknown member of the audience	86.7%	94.1%	χ^2=8.55 p = 003
Familiar member of the audience	10.0%	4.3%	p = .016
Festival security staff	25.6%	4.1%	p < .001
Customer service personnel	12.2%	1.9%	p < .001
Other festival employee	3.3%	0.4%	p = .010

an unfamiliar member was most likely to engage in inappropriate behaviour towards both groups.

The results indicate that participants with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses face considerably more harassment by festival employees. Notably, the prevalence of inappropriate behaviour by security staff – up to 26% of the incidents – is alarming, as the main task of security personnel is to ensure that participants are protected from different kinds of threats. The fact that 12% of individuals with disabilities and/or chronic illness experience inappropriate behaviour by customer service personnel is not encouraging either. It is noted that the survey responses reflect the respondents' perspectives and their interpretations of what happened.

Qualitative analysis

Interviews were conducted to find out what kind of inappropriate behaviour persons with disabilities face at music festivals and how they interpret such behaviour. Many interviewees used humour and sarcasm when describing their experiences and festival personnel's reactions, similar to Sue's (2010) findings. Sue argued that this is done to reduce the negative impacts. We tend to agree, assuming the interviewees did not want these incidents to change their positive attitude towards life (see also Devile and Kastenholz 2018).

Conducting the interviews was the central part of the study. It was essential to use open-ended questions, let the interviewees talk freely and gain their trust. Their experiences were not questioned or belittled since the essence of the study was their individual interpretations of the incidents. The interview data were transcribed and read through various times. First, the excerpts with narratives describing incidents with staff members were identified. Then, single cases were explored to get each participant's individual perspectives (idiography) (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014). Only after that point were the emergent themes defined and generalized to upper-level, clustering themes (Figure 2). The aim was to make sense of the incidents experienced and their influence on individuals: how did it feel, and what made it ableism from their perspective?

The most frequent incidents were related to a lack of understanding, followed by distrust and hostility. The citations in the following sections are quite long to facilitate making sense of participants' experiences and to retain their voices.

Lack of understanding

Lack of understanding included customer service personnel not noticing (or outright ignoring) persons with disabilities and not speaking directly to them, but to their Personal Assistants. Hannah, who is blind, laughs when describing an incident where it was difficult to get any attention from a bar worker,

> A bar worker, whaddaya call it, they didn't talk to us at all, just tried really hard to look at my assistant. I mean they didn't say a single word to either of us. […] They just made gestures [as told to her by her PA]. That was quite weird. That night I didn't order any more (laughter) drinks cause I didn't want (laughter) that any more. I think it's good manners to just say 'hello' and all that, but they didn't say A SINGLE WORD. This is quite weird sometimes (laughter).

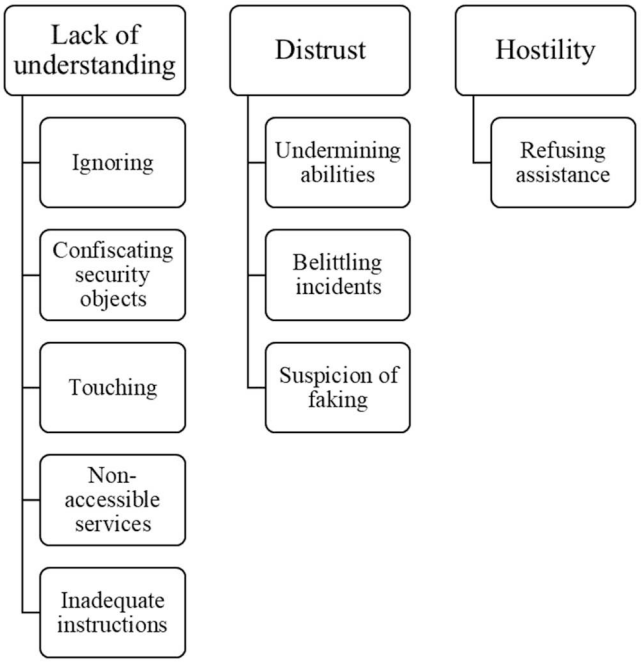

Figure 2. Emergent and clustered themes.

When Red Devil is in a wheelchair, it is often difficult to get service since customer service personnel do not see her, or just ignore her if her PA is not present,

> There was this high counter at the cafe. And I couldn't reach up on my own […] So once when I went to get the coffee on my own, the people working there started yelling about a miraculous healing [because I stood up from my wheelchair]. So I just told them I had no choice but to miraculously heal cause I can't reach the counter any other way and my assistant has gone off somewhere. I don't remember where Helmi was at that moment, but they were so embarrassed. I had to stand up cause they didn't notice me when I was sitting down there.

Having ASD, Snowflake needs her own water bottle, plate, knife, and fork to eat and drink. This situation is something that festival rules do not consider. Consequently, security staff confiscated her safe objects, which influenced crucially her festival experience. Snowflake describes:

> It's real important for me to have my own dishes. I always have my water bottle with me and if I buy a drink … I usually buy like a soda or water, and I want to pour it in my own bottle, so people are always … well not always, but people are asking, why do you need to do that since you did buy a bottle. And I have a terrible problem, I come with my own utensils, because I'd like to have my own utensils so I could eat something out there. Cause they don't allow your own snacks. I've tried to bring a fork and a knife and a plate of my own (chuckles). It's not allowed, well that I can understand as such. But for me, those days usually go so that I'm not able to eat anything because I can't take my so called safe objects with me.

Touching is also an issue for Snowflake and security checks are challenging for her. If the security person were female, it would be a bit easier, but festivals generally

do not offer the possibility of choosing who does the security check. Snowflake illustrates,

> For me, all touching is unacceptable behaviour and crossing my boundaries. For example, going through a security check is an ordeal for me, having the bracelet attached, and well, generally walking in a crowd. I'm aware that it's sort of just me and as an individual I can't bend the rules, the security check and having the bracelet attached, but for me they are something that violate my boundaries anyway. […] I'd rather let a female guard do the security check.

The festival servicescape might be designed for non-disabled attendees only, with no understanding of different needs that might exist. Hannah says she attended a festival with only a touchscreen payment terminal available for purchases. The customer service person did not apologize or give other payment options. Finally, Hannah gave her PIN code to her PA, who typed it in. She, quite rightfully, asks 'How many non-disabled people would be ready to reveal their credit card PIN to someone? Even if it was someone real close'.

Another common shortcoming is that festival instructions for participants with disabilities consider only persons with mobility disabilities, ignoring other types of impairments. For example, information about PA tickets might refer only to wheelchair users. Hannah has to make an extra effort to ensure her options,

> It usually says that if you're on a wheelchair, your assistant gets in free and you can buy tickets here and here. But it usually doesn't say that, like, an assistant for a visually impaired person also gets in free, that is something you always need to ask separately. And then sometimes when you browse the contact information of some organization, you're wondering, which of these ten different addresses should I […] (sigh) You sometimes feel that it's a lot of work to just get to some festival. Like making sure that yes, we too can attend (laughter).

The examples above demonstrated ableism due to a lack of understanding or knowledge, which would be easily changed through adequate training on different kinds of disabilities.

Distrust

A volunteer supervisor did not trust Red Devil's ability to work as a festival volunteer. In this case, the supervisor saw only the disability and the wheelchair, ignoring that Red Devil is an adult and an experienced festival volunteer, with valuable skills and the ability to judge what kinds of tasks she can do.

Red Devil:	When you are volunteering at the festival, you get this, 'hey, you can't do that cause you're disabled or cause you're in a wheelchair or cause you're this and that'. Like you are just not able to do the volunteer work. That's something I've heard a lot.
Researcher:	So you get that from the organizers?
Red Devil:	From the organizer, yea, but even more from the co-volunteers. More from them than anybody else, and from the one who's your closest supervisor, they may also comment like they just can't believe it, 'oh, you're in a wheelchair'.
Helmi:	And even we've always told them in advance. So they should already know that.
Red Devil:	Yea, I always tell them in advance.

Sarah tells how a security person showed distrust by belittling inappropriate behaviour reported by them. After this encounter, they never reported any incidents since they did not trust that their experiences would be handled appropriately.

> I remember when I went [to the security guard] and told them about a group of guys jeering at us, so their comments were like 'well, that's how the young boys are, they've had a drink or two' and something like that, kind of downplaying it. Like 'sure, we'll keep an eye on them' kind of thing. Like not actually doing anything about it.

On the other hand, security staff might have wanted to see the disability card when a person using a wheelchair stood up (most wheelchair users are not paralyzed). Audience members might have reported that there was a 'fake' disabled person 'fooling' the organizers. Red Devil illustrates,

> [Someone from the audience] once went to tell a guard that I'm faking, that I'm not really disabled cause I'm standing […] That's when I had to prove it, show my disability card.

Distrust is a stronger demonstration of ableism than actions due to a lack of knowledge. One way to tackle distrust could be having colleagues with disabilities at the festival site. Having contact with a minority member could reduce prejudices.

Hostility

Hostility was rare and manifested in one incident only as reluctance to assist. This kind of ableism was included in a story where a security person refused to help persons in wheelchairs reach a platform where the ramp was slippery and too steep:

> Red Devil: I think it was [a security guard], like 'you really need to be able to get up the stage on your own'. It was something like that. And oh well, that [ramp to a raised wheelchair platform] was real slippery.
> Helmi: And it was quite steep too, like it wasn't a long and gently sloping ramp, but …
> Red Devil: I almost couldn't get up that ramp.
> Helmi: No, I was pushing you. And I really had to push like for real. And then coming down again, that was also …
> Red Devil: It was dreadful!

In this case, the ableist attitude might be so strong that it is not easily changed, and these individuals are the biggest threat to the reputation of a festival. Organizers might have to move these persons out of direct customer contact.

Discussion

The introductory statistical findings revealed the concerning fact that participants with disabilities face more inappropriate behaviour from festival employees than non-disabled attendees. To find solutions for this issue, more information was needed on the types of ableism experienced. For this reason, in-depth interviews were conducted.

The interviews revealed ableism on three levels in McKercher and Darcy's (2018) model: barriers common to all disabilities, barriers specific for a certain disability type, and barriers due to individual differences in a particular disability type (Figure 1). For instance, Snowflake's sensitivity to touch is specific to her ASD experience. However, many of the incidents with festival employees demonstrated attitudinal barriers that were

common for all disabilities. These included not talking directly to customers with disabilities or even ignoring them. Collins et al. (2022, 318) define this action as treating them as second-class citizens and passively avoiding speaking directly to them.

Confiscating Snowflake's safe objects was an example of a disability-specific barrier since certain objects might be crucially important for persons with ASD. Another disability-specific barrier was the touchscreen payment terminal, which is not suitable for persons with visual impairment, and it violates their equal right to services. This kind of ignorance reflects quite well the fact that disabilities are often seen solely through mobility issues. The instructions about PA tickets are addressed to wheelchair users, and even the universal disability sign is a wheelchair. This leads to an assumption that, for example, accessible toilets are only for wheelchair users. Snowflake would also like to use more spacious and peaceful toilets since she has a disability card due to her ASD, and a phobia of public toilets.

Hannah sees safer space policies as a manifestation of minority hierarchy since they so strongly stress the rights of gender and sexual minorities. She says sarcastically,

> This is something I always keep wondering, like for who those [principles of safer space] are safe and what that means for me. For me, it would be just helpful if someone said 'I'm putting your drink here in front of you' and 'there's the payment terminal', but they can't say that, can they, cause you need to have these (laughter) principles of safer space [and you shouldn't make any assumptions about people].

Distrust reflected downplaying the disability experience (Olkin et al. 2019) in the form of watching out that persons with disabilities were not 'faking' and misusing free PA tickets. Nario-Redmond, Kemerling, and Silverman (2019) defined this as envious or jealous ableism. Fundamentally, the other members of the audience demonstrated ableism, but the security personnel went along with them by requiring proof of disability if a person in a wheelchair stood up. Both Sarah and Red Devil reported these incidents. Even though these issues were related to the use of a wheelchair (mobility disability), the attitudes revealed disability-independent ableism, something that might happen regardless of the type of disability.

Red Devil's experiences with voluntary supervisors were further manifestations of distrust common to all disability types. In this case, a person with disabilities was only seen through their disability, ignoring all the other aspects of them like skills and expertise, so denying their other than disability identity (Sue 2010, 250–251).

Finally, the reluctance to help participants with disabilities was not necessarily impairment-specific, even though it was manifested towards persons with mobility issues. This hostile ableism (Nario-Redmond, Kemerling, and Silverman 2019) showed negative and prejudiced attitudes that could be directed against any person with any impairment.

Different types of ableism require different corrective actions. Lack of knowledge could be changed with more information and training, whereas distrust towards persons with disabilities might require a direct relationship with individuals with disabilities (Harder, Keller, and Chopik 2019).

Theoretical implications

Timmons, McGinnity, and Carroll (2024) emphasized that it is essential to study ableism related to different types of disabilities in different contexts. Concentrating on music

festivals, we shed light on festival employees' ableism. The prevalence of ableist attitudes among both security and customer service personnel is a new and essential finding.

The interviews revealed various types of ableism. Previous research had similar findings, but here we contextualized the ableist practices and attitudes in the music festival setting. The findings indicated that different types of ableism require different actions. This new knowledge improves the possibilities for festivals to solve the problem. Most ableist practices are due to a lack of understanding and knowledge.

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) has been used in previous studies to define different disability types using a scale of warmth and competence. Our findings indicate that there might be a hierarchy regarding minorities where festival organizers' actions are concerned. For instance, safer space policies often focus on gender and sexual minorities, whereas accessibility and PA ticketing are directed at persons with mobility issues. Visual impairment, non-neurotypical or autism spectrum disorder are not considered as much as mobility impairments.

Practical implications

McKercher and Darcy (2018, 64) stress that 'industry must stop believing that people with disabilities are a homogeneous group defined largely by mobility disabilities, and as such, must move away from the one size fits all approach still adopted commonly by many sectors'. Our results indicate that it is crucial to educate festival organizers and employees on disability issues to increase inclusivity at festivals, since most problems stem from ignorance and lack of knowledge. As earlier research demonstrates, people who have personal contact with individuals with disabilities hold more positive attitudes towards them (Harder, Keller, and Chopik 2019). This is an important reason to hire persons with disabilities for festivals. Through personal interaction, non-disabled festival personnel would gain insights into living with disabilities. However, in some cases, transferring an employee with a strong ableist attitude to back-office duties might be necessary.

Festival organizers have to decide how equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training is given to people who are not directly hired by them. Security personnel are often subcontracted. Similarly, customer service personnel might include employees of entrepreneurs who have hired a stall from the festival, selling their own products like drinks or food. Consequently, it might be necessary to include the requirement of training employees on EDI issues in the subcontracting agreement. There are some EDI certificates available, but they are not yet as mainstream as green certificates, and they might include only training of HR and management to enhance EDI in their own organization. Instead, festival subcontractors need certificates that include EDI training of all their personnel to meet the needs of different minorities as both customers and colleagues. Once these kinds of certificates are more common, festival organizers should acquire one and require that their subcontractors have one as well.

Limitations

We scrutinized only the perceptions of persons with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. We did not gather the perspectives of the festival staff and, thus, we do not know their

reasons for this kind of behaviour. Our aim was to concentrate solely on the perspectives of the vulnerable minority and their interpretations of the incidents.

Most of our survey respondents were female, and we were not able to reach male interviewees. Thus, the results demonstrate mainly perceptions of females with disabilities, which means that their gender might have influenced their experiences (Timmons, McGinnity, and Carroll 2024).

Future research

The research participants were active festival goers. It would also be important to gain knowledge from persons with disabilities who do not attend festivals even though they would like to. It would be essential to know why they do not participate for the benefit of festivals in their development to be more inclusive and welcoming of diverse people.

There is also a need to investigate further if the practices of festivals create hierarchies of minorities. Do certain minorities receive more attention while others might be forgotten, regardless of the prevalence of each minority within the festival audience?

Furthermore, the attitudes of festival organizers and employees should be studied to find out how common ableist attitudes are and why people behave as they do towards persons with disabilities. At the same time, the effect of disability awareness training should be measured before and after the training, as Daruwalla and Darcy (2005) did for tourism employees.

Conclusion

The quantitative data demonstrate that participants with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses, altogether 157 in our survey, experienced more inappropriate behaviour than other attendees from security staff, customer service personnel and other festival employees. Most concerning is the fact that every fourth participant with disabilities faced inappropriate behaviour from festival security staff.

In the qualitative data, we focused on festival employees' ableist attitudes, which could be found in the interviewees' stories. The interviews revealed various types of misconduct that participants with disabilities perceived as ableism, and that festival employees had difficulty facing disability. Three universal themes were identified: lack of understanding, distrust, and hostility. These themes reflected barriers independent of the disability type, disability-specific barriers and individual barriers of a particular disability (McKercher and Darcy 2018). Furthermore, it was evident that mobility disability dominated the attention given to festival organizers' actions. This reflects the possibility that they perceive disabilities in a hierarchy where the mobility impairment is highest and deserves most attention – maybe because certain accessibility actions are required by law.

Finkel and Dashper (2020) argue that event spaces (their accessibility and comfort), staff attitudes and event representation (diversity in workers and performers) influence people's participation intentions. This is particularly true for marginalized groups like persons with disabilities. Studying festival employees' ableist attitudes and defining measures to change them is thus essential for developing inclusive festivals.

It should also be emphasized that festival companions of participants with disabilities do take note of any ableism experienced. As they talk about their experiences to their

friends, word-of-mouth about the non-inclusivity of the festival spreads, causing further damage to the festival's reputation.

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