

MECHANISMS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OUTCOMES AT THE  
INTERSECTIONS OF PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY AND  
IDENTITY-BASED FESTIVALS

by

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This thesis aims to determine potential public policy mechanisms in identity-based festivals that may lead to social justice outcomes. The purpose of identity-based festivals (with particular focus on film festivals) and public policy advocacy is explored. By synthesizing literature surrounding (film) festivals, social movements, and social justice outcomes, this qualitative study reviews relevant existing literature and analyzes an in-depth case study of an existing identity-based festival. A conceptual framework of the relationship between both film festivals and social movements with identity at their focal point is articulated. The central findings of this study are threefold, framed by a focus on purpose, mechanism, and opportunity. 1.) Identity-based film festivals are a reaction to and a symptom of the current discourse and socio-political climate with the purpose of acknowledgement and amplification. 2.) Public policy advocacy supporting the progress of social movement can look different depending on the mission and scope of the activists. 3.) An opportunity exists for identity-based (film) festivals to impact public policy advocacy in support of social movements. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to open greater avenues for research regarding how the arts' modes of exhibition may be theoretically situated in the public policy process toward social justice outcomes.

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## Introduction

Film is an art mode with which I have been fascinated from a very young age. I resonate with the breadth and depth with which film can articulate human experience. My course work as a double major in Planning, Public Policy, and Management and Spanish with a certificate in Cinema Studies has deeply informed my interests and heavily influenced this research. I am fascinated by the ways in which creative modes, like film, influence sociocultural and organizational development. I imagine my career being centered somewhere at this intersection between creativity and organizational management. Currently, I am finding myself drawn to the intersectionality of work like project management or consulting in creative industries (i.e. the arts), which draws me to this study.

Moreover, I am interested in creative work and policy that impacts those who may otherwise be silenced or overlooked. In taking numerous courses toward my cinema studies certificate including – IBFM6 – International Baccalaureate Film, J 201: Media and Society, CINE 260M: Media Aesthetics, CINE 266: History of Motion Picture II, CINE 267: History of Motion Picture III, HC 221H: Music & Emotion, CINE 381M Film, Media, & Culture, ODUB 388: Filmmaking Ireland, ODUB 388: Ireland Onscreen, HC 421: Short Film Form, and CINE 440: Contemporary Global Art (Film Festivals) – I have studied film history (production, distribution, and exhibition) and content, analyzed their form, and created short films of my own. I have learned that film festivals and mainstream films have, historically, been deeply and systematically exclusive. For this very reason, film is an exciting and pertinent space with which to affect change – to subvert expectations and amplify humanizing narratives.

Other courses which have prepared me for this research include: PPPM 201: Introduction to Public Policy, PPPM 360: International Public Policy, PPPM 465: Program Evaluation, PPPM



470: The Arts in Society, SPAN 348: US Latino Literature & Culture, and SPAN 490: Transborder Modern.

Naturally, my thesis has been inspired by these interests; I am focusing on a bridge between (film) festivals and public policy advocacy. My stake in this research, beyond its relative association with my potential career paths, is my passion for the possibility of the arts, specifically film, and their exhibitions playing a role in positive social outcomes, whether direct or not. The questions framing my research have stemmed from concern whether film festivals are having any consequential effect on social movements. I am curious, for instance, about whether these events are contributing to tangible policy change by way of advocacy that stems from the conversations and emotional experiences evoked and mediated by the arts. And, furthermore, I am concerned with what point(s) within the grander “logic model” of the public policy process and social movements that festivals may fit into. While it may be clear that many of these events provide a platform for minority voices, I wonder about their impact.

This qualitative, exploratory study has included extensive literature reviews, a case study of an exemplary identity-based festival, and analysis on how this example, and others like it, may be intersecting with, a symptom of, or perhaps may be impacting social justice outcomes.

*The Central Question:*

Can identity-based (film) festivals impact public policy advocacy to lead to social justice outcomes?

*My Supporting Questions are:*

What is the purpose of identity-based film festivals?

What kinds of public policy advocacy supports progress of identity-focused social movements?

## **Research Design**

By synthesizing literature surrounding film festivals, social movements, and social justice outcomes, this qualitative study has reviewed relevant existing literature. The review includes website and organizational document analysis. The study also includes an in-depth case study of Raizado Festival, an existing identity-based festival featuring a film portion/program. A key informant semi-structured interview with a director of Raizado Festival informs the discussion.

The purpose of identity-based film festivals and the extent of their role in public policy advocacy has been explored. Furthermore, a conceptual framework of the relationship between both film festivals and social movements, with identity at their focal point, is articulated. The objective of this study is to create a conceptual model or framework of the relationship between film festivals and social movements with identity at their focal point. I intend for the result of this study to open more extensive avenues for future research in the interest of how the arts and its modes of exhibition may be employed to contribute to the public policy process toward social justice outcomes.

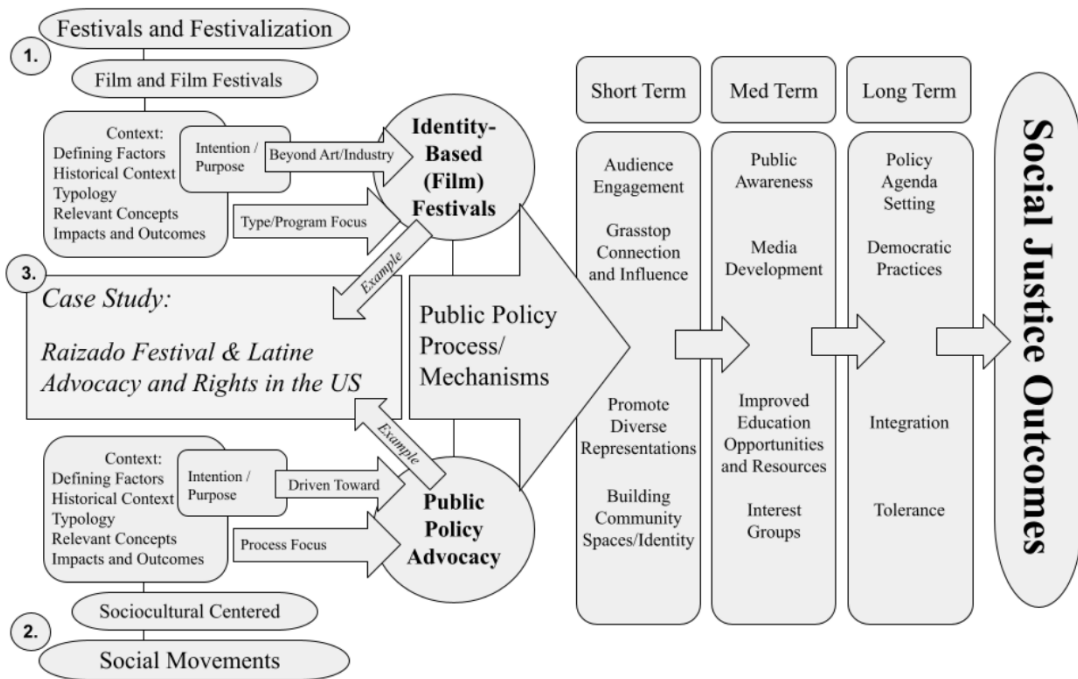


Figure 1: Thesis Concept Map/Conceptual Framework (Revised March 2025)

The above featured figure (Figure 1) provides a concept map of the scope and body of my research. This map outlines the literature review sections under the umbrella of two categories: (film) festivals and (sociocultural centered) social movements, as pictured on the top and bottom left. The first section in the literature review contextualizes the defining factors, historical context, typology, relevant concepts, and impacts and outcomes (including economic and cultural value) of film festivals. The intention and purpose being, namely, to promote the art and industry of cinema. The final part of section one of literature review covers identity-based film festivals. As this is the particular focus festival type in this study, a background on this typology is provided.

Section two of the literature review mirrors the first in terms of organization. This section focuses on social movements and social justice outcomes of movements centered on sociocultural issues. Defining factors, historical context, typology, relevant concepts, and

impacts and outcomes are, likewise, explored in this section. The culmination of this contextualization focuses on outlining a critical driving force of social movements: public policy advocacy. This section will end with an overview of social justice outcomes. As visualized in the logic model (Fig. 1), these outcomes can be categorized into short-, medium-, and long-term impacts. The short-term encompass specific actions and knowledge; medium-term impacts are indicated by changes in behaviors; and long-term outputs are marked by larger social shifts in society, especially those related to policy, with the goal in this model being long-term shifts in attitude, behavior, and institutions.

The primary intention of the literature review is to situate my exploration of film festivals through the lens of the arts – its production and exposition – motivating public policy advocacy toward social justice outcomes.

The two literature review sections are followed by a case study, through which I offer an example of an identity-based festival, Raizado. The festival was founded in honor of Latine contributions to society, featuring Latine leaders across the industries and art across mediums – film being a major component. This case study includes qualitative and exploratory analysis as well as an in-depth key informant interview. Raizado Festival was selected as the single in-depth case study because it offers a unique and deeply informative opportunity to explore relationships between identity-based (film) festivals and the public policy process targeted and social change. My case study offers rich and thick description of this complex social phenomenon. It offers descriptive analysis of the festival, its activities, outputs, and impacts.

The case will inform my discussion section and findings section. Of course, Raizado Festival offers only one example as to the impact and effectiveness of festivals in correlation with public policy advocacy toward social justice outcomes. In other words, there is certainly no

direct link between the findings in this case study and any correlation or causality related to public policy implementation. Moreover, given that this study is supplemented with one in depth-case study there is no generalizability across the field as this study not necessary representative of other similar cases. However, the case study builds upon the existing literature and my literature review to guide my discussion and recommendations regarding where and how identity-based film festivals may be situated in the grander scheme of the public policy process, social movements, and social justice outcomes.

## **Methods**

The methods of data collection include a key informant interview and document analysis. Documents were found online and provided by the organizations and are included in the case study analysis.

### *Key Informant Interviews*

The interview is semi-structured with one key-informant of Raizado Festival. The professional participant, Dalissa Vargas, recruited as an interviewee, is the Interim Chief Development Officer for Justice for Migrant Women, the organizing, incubator organization of Raizado.

Dalissa Vargas, a leader involved in the Raizado Festival was purposely identified for inclusion in the study: selected by her professional status, title, experience in the nonprofit sector, and her work in the space of public policy advocacy. A potential informant was originally identified through publicly available staff listings located on the organization's page on LinkedIn. I contacted this individual, who agreed to recruit an applicable and consenting informant to the case study (i.e., a snowball sampling of a targeted key informant).

Once a key informant interviewee was identified, the targeted research participant (Dalissa Vargas) received a copy of the recruitment letter (see Appendix A), which describes the purpose, potential benefits, and potential risks to participating in the study, via email. Vargas was asked to provide copies of relevant documents, participate in a one-hour, video-recorded Zoom interview, and be available for follow-up questioning via phone or email. The interviewee was asked to consent to the use of her name, job title, and quotations in publications derived from the interview and documents produced by the organization. Only individuals who provided consent to be identified as informants could be interviewed. Consent for the above was obtained orally at the beginning of the virtual interview. Permission was not granted for the interview audio or video to be virtually recorded. The interview was instead documented solely via typed notes.

The interviews took place in March 2025. The case study section was shared with Vargas in April 2025 (see Appendix D). Consent to use her comments in this section was received via email in April 2025.

The only data collection instrument formally used in this investigation was a semi-structured interview protocol form (see Appendix C). The primary methods of data recording employed in this investigation include field notes and typed notes of interviews. Interviews were summarized (with some selective transcription) in typed documents. Notes were coded and summarized by using key themes and keywords.

### *Document Analysis*

Again, methods of data collection were twofold: key informant interviews and document analysis (of documents published by the organizations). These data collection methods are also supplemented by data acquired through observation of the case study and an ongoing review of existing scholarship.

The entire study was completed by June 2025.

## **Section 1: (Film) Festivals**

### **Film**

Why are movies important? And what is their function? To explain the purpose of identity-based film festivals one must first be aware of the value of films and their modes of exhibition. Whether as a means of escapism, of self-development, or purely for their entertainment value, film is a critical mode of contemporary expression. Film affirms, contests, and mediates what people believe and value (Tesser, 1988, p. 441-449). Yet, how and where we get to see films – and even which ones we see – are equally important considerations; “a film that is not screened is dead” (de Valck, 2012, p. 25). This is to say, only films that are viewed as valuable to some degree – in their respective cultural context – are screened and, in the same rite, a film can (generally) only retain continuous cultural significance if it can be viewed. The mode in which a film can be viewed is called exhibition.

### **(Film) Festivals: Defining Factors**

One prominent actor in exhibition is film festivals. To understand film festivals, it is important to first frame the concepts of (film/arts and culture) festivals and festivalization in urban settings on a broader scale.

There has been a rising global interest in cultural events over the last few centuries. And with it comes a rise of “festivalization” in urban spaces (Cundy, 2016, p. 11). Festivalization “encompasses a temporary transformation of the city into a particular, symbolic space, where the use of the public sphere is affected by a specific model of taking advantage of culture” (Richards & Palmer, 2010, p. 28). In other words, festivalization can be “understood as a development of



festivals and their influence on people and the surrounding space” (Cundy, 2016, p. 11). Given the novelty and celebratory nature of these events, their demand does not come as a surprise.

What may be surprising, however, is that festivals can be somewhat complicated to define. The novelty of festival spaces is captured by researcher Wayne Davies, who notes that “festivals are distinctive because they take people outside their normal behaviours in time and space. They provide unusual activities and evoke feelings and emotions that are very different to the regular and material routines” (Davies, 2015, p. 535). Historically, festivals could be commonly defined as “a periodically recurrent social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees all members of the whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview” (Falassi, 1987, p. 2). However, others argue that this definition does not capture the demand for consumption of (new) experience – regardless of cultural connection – nor the economic impact events like this may have (Cundy, 2016, p. 16). Festivals may also be more explicitly defined from the perspective of belonging and social cohesion. In his work *Media Discourses: analyzing media texts*, Donald Matheson positions festivals as “encapsulat[ing] identity, in terms of the nation state, a sense of place, and the personal and heterogeneous identities of a people” (Matheson, 2005, p. 224). Festivals at their core are organized celebrations which recognize and center a particular cultural production. And the sense of place and local or personal identity is often what makes one festival distinct from another.

In “Carnivals for elites? The cultural politics of arts festivals,” Stanley Waterman (1998) offers a particularly nuanced definition which I find is most in alignment with my own study:

*“(...) festivals transform landscape and place from being everyday settings into temporary environments—albeit with permanent identities—created by and for specific groups of people, (...) art festivals contribute to both the production and consumption of culture (...), provide a means whereby groups may attempt to maintain themselves culturally, while presenting opportunities to others to join that group. Festival is also an occasion for outsiders (sponsors, subsidizers) to endeavour to force or to lead the group towards an acceptable course for the continuity of its culture. This is no esoteric aesthetic topic; arts festivals have become events of sociological and geographical concern” (Waterman, 1998, p. 55)*

Simply, festivals can be defined for the purposes of this study as cultural celebrations of various forms of expression. In this case, culture is viewed as “the whole material and spiritual achievement of humanity, as well as all values, rules and norms of coexistence adopted by given communities; all that is created thanks to people’s work, that is the creation of their thoughts and activities” (Cundy, 2016, p. 12). Thus, cultural production can be seen as the process of creating, distributing, and consuming cultural goods, practices, and meanings within a community or society. Festivals make-up and emanate parts of “non-material culture,” presenting art, customs and cultural symbolism as cultural products (p. 13-14).

It is valuable then to frame the typologies of culture, which include, “idealistic and materialistic, high and low, regional, local and global culture” (Cundy, 2016, p. 12). But it is also critical to note that festivals are used in politics as well and perform valuable social and economic functions (p. 13-14).

Festivals serve a role as cultural and social events that help in the development of community cohesion and expression of shared values, ideology, and identities. Their impact can be both local and global as festivals are examined as a site of cultural connection on both scales/in both contexts. Furthermore, they are viewed as, “a point of convergence” (Gibson & Christopher, 2009. p. 6) for a culture, offering a space of meeting and contact among people interested in a certain form of culture and art, as well as people working in the fields related to this kind of activity (Cundy, 2016, p. 20). Arts and culture festivals can include a diverse array of activities such as music, dance, theater, visual arts, film, and culinary arts, that may reflect the identity and heritage of a specific community or region. Although community belonging is often at the core of these events, they act as disruptors and transgressors as well: as platforms for critique of normative discourse (Cundy, 2016, p. 47). Overall, festivals are significant in contemporary societies, acting as sites of cohesion and of cultural celebration and critique.

A film festival is defined as a gathering (typically annual) held to evaluate new films and reconsider old ones. Film festivals provide an opportunity for creators, distributors, critics, press, and cinephiles (lovers of cinema) to attend screenings, network, discuss current developments (aesthetic, technological, genre/thematic, etc.), or to otherwise celebrate achievements in film. Distributors, responsible for marketing and disseminating, are also a defining contributor because they purchase films that they believe may be successful for their own organizations or in their own countries at festivals and their corresponding film markets. Sponsored either by national or local governments, service organizations, experimental film groups, interested industries, or individual promoters, film festivals are not only valuable to the film industry and local economies, but to the sociocultural relevance of those groups, communities, and/or locations who sponsor them. In this section I offer an overview of the history, typology, and

relevant concepts related to film festivals, and investigate the general economic benefits of these events on the industry, the economies and the communities in which they take place. In addition, I examine their sociocultural implications locally and for audiences and cinemas world-wide to help determine the value of festivals as a mode of film/arts exhibition.

## **Historical Context**

The concept of festivals dates to early stages of humanity and were often held in connection with agricultural, seasonal occasions such as harvest or sowing seasons. In ancient Greece, for example, “more advanced” forms of festivals were held to honor gods and goddesses and included religious rituals and practices. The Renaissance marked the festivalization of Europe, and, in the centuries following, culture- and art-centered events began to arise. The industrial age, convenience and access to transportation and increased average incomes, also brought the development of festivals as their influence on people and the economy grew. Thanks to globalization, humanity became more mobile in the latter half of the last century. The 20th century also saw a significant increase in the number and variety of festivals, driven by factors such as global tourism, increased leisure time, higher disposable incomes, and the rise of experience societies that value unique and immersive cultural experience (p. 22-31).

This period also witnessed the "festival boom," where festivals became a prominent feature of urban and cultural life. Festivals became then an element of building the post-industrial economy; a valuable product of the cultural economy (Cundy, 2016, p. 29). Culture and festivalization are perhaps of greater import than ever in the contemporary 20th century, which has resulted in the deindustrialization of “developed countries and societies whose economies were based on services, including those related to culture and entertainment” (Cundy, 2016, p. 13). The role of culture and experiences as product has come to play an important role

in local, regional, and global economies which accounts for their more recent proliferation (p. 13).

Film festivals were created with similar focus on the cultural economy. Their central purpose was finding audiences for films and, in turn, boosting film economies. In their contemporary form, while they may be either for-profit or nonprofit, they have evolved beyond simply economic goals to become consistent contributors to cinematic cultural diversity (de Valck, 2012, p. 25-40). Dating back to the Second World War, film festivals are “key players,” in film history, having significantly promoted the development of the film industry internationally (Vallejo, 2020, p. 155-169). These secondary spaces for film screenings sprang up to stimulate the industry, largely to “compensate for the poor system of film distribution in Europe” (Iordanova, 2009, p. 34). The first festival was held in Venice in 1932. Yet, since the late 1960s, festivals have become increasingly common globally. These events have also become more specialized, with some, for example, focusing on creators who identify with particular communities, while others screen only films on highly niche topics or themes, etc. As argued in Aida Vallejos article, “Rethinking the cannon,” film festivals have, primarily, had influence in three major ways: “(1) (re)defining film genres – such as documentary–, (2) bolstering film movements and (3) discovering cinemas and filmmakers from peripheral regions” (Vallejo, 2020, p. 155). Advertised as prestigious celebrations of cinema from nations around the world, film festivals have created a space for the industry and its consumers alike to recognize cinema as both an industry and art form – and commemorate its shifts over time (Vallejo, 2020, p. 155-169) Bearing in mind these major impacts, Vallejo posits that the “agency” of festivals “in the articulation of world cinema canons shouldn’t be underestimated” (Vallejo, 2020 p. 155). Being spaces in which the effect and achievement of film is evaluated, debated and internalized, where

film is perhaps its most meta, festivals have unique influence on the art, particularly in terms of form and merit. Since their establishment, film festivals have been, and remain, vital players in the creation, consideration, and mediation of works and global cinemas.

## **Typology**

There are numerous kinds of events categorized as festivals. Their typology according to Cundy is mostly based on the following:

1. Attitude to religion
  2. Festival venues
  3. Social class structure, division of power and social roles
  4. Important moments in personal life
  5. Season
  6. Scale and importance
  7. Repeatability
  8. Form of organizing and financing the event
  9. Structure of the festival guests and visitors
  10. Theme
  11. The historical situation and the geographic situation of special events
- (Cundy, 2016, p. 32-33).

According to Getz, festivals can be practically included in every type of event. There are small, local festivals (neighborhood festivals), regional festivals and large-scale events (hallmark or mega events), attracting audiences from the whole country or even abroad (e.g. the Cannes Film Festival and Woodstock) (Cundy, 2016, p. 15).

The main components of a festival can be outlined as the following:

Elements Related to Organization	Elements Related to Impacts on Culture and Community
Takes place at a specially designated place and time (occupies this space for a specified period of time), outside everyday duties	Develops social identity and social capital (e.g. celebrating values for given community) Can offer opportunity for individuals to acquire skills
Often combined with a competition for the “best” creation (e.g. a film) Or is organized as an overview of an artist’s works	Develops interpersonal relations (can make and reinforce contacts) May celebrate groups of friends, family, colleagues etc.
A public event, containing an “element of fun”	Social event based on extraordinary experiences Generated by social needs Participants are community (local, regional) members Numerous social impacts
An organized event with a leading theme	Culture-related event Shapes and presents culture A place and time of celebrating, consuming, and considering culture
A one-off Or regular event	Part of broadly understood human cultural heritage

Figure 2: Adapted from Table 2.1 The main components of a festival (Cundy 2016, p. 20)

Furthermore, the elements of a festival environment as articulated in *Festivalisation of Urban Spaces*, include event organizers; artists participating in the event; media; local and supralocal politicians; festival audiences; local and regional culture; geographical environment of

the event; local economy; infrastructure used for festival purposes; and sponsors (Cundy, 2016, p. 21).

The main types of festivals can be loosely categorized as:

- Religious festivals: Typically tied to significant religious holiday or events in a faith's history, with rituals and practices that are specific to the religion (e.g. Diwali, Ramadan, Christmas, Eid al-Fitr).
- Cultural festivals: Which celebrate the heritage and diversity of a community or ethnic group. These will generally including traditional music, dance, and food (e.g. Mardi Gras, Cambodian New Year).
- Seasonal festivals: This kind of festival marks the changing of seasons with activities related to harvest, spring equinox, or winter solstice. (e.g. Harvest festivals, Spring celebrations).
- Arts festivals: Showcasing various forms of artistic expression like fine arts or performance arts (e.g. Edinburgh Festival).
- Food festivals: Focusing on cuisine, these events often have locally based food stalls and cooking demonstrations (e.g. A local farmers market festival).
- Music festivals: Featuring live music performances from various artists within or across genres (e.g. Coachella).
- Film festivals: Screen a selection of films within particular focus, theme, and/or parameters (e.g. Cannes Film Festival).

Of course, it is important to note that this typology is an over-simplified one, as many festivals encompass and combine numerous of these categories.



Typologies of film festivals appear less explicitly outlined in the literature. Nonetheless, there are film festivals for long or short films, features, documentaries, animation, experimental films. Additionally, some film festivals select films not only according to their length, format or style, but their theme or context (Buccheri, 2020, p. 26). Marikke de Valvk categorized these kinds of film festivals as specialized film festivals which could be divided into four different categories. These include genre-based festivals, national or regional festivals, online festivals, and identity-based festivals (to which the most studies are dedicated). Other film festival categories are dedicated to genre or social concern such as disability, environmental/green, globalization, or human rights film festivals (Buccheri, 2020, p. 26-27).

While there is not an explicit defined typology of film festivals adopted across the literature, there are a few categories which are generally described:

- **International Film Festivals:** Festivals which showcase a wide range of films from around the world and often attract a global audience. They feature prestigious films across multiple genres and are known for high-profile premieres and competitive awards (e.g. Cannes Film Festival (France)).
- **Regional and National Festivals:** These festivals celebrate films from a specific country or region, promoting local talent and culture while sometimes showcasing work from other parts of the world (e.g. Galway Film Fleadh (Ireland)).
- **Genre-Specific Festivals:** Festivals focused on a particular film genre such as horror, science fiction, documentary, or animation. They will draw more niche audiences and enthusiasts who appreciate specific storytelling (e.g. Beyond Fest (USA), the highest-attended genre film festival in the U.S).

- **Short Film Festivals:** These festivals highlight short-form storytelling, typically featuring films under 40 minutes in length. They may provide a platform for emerging filmmakers to showcase their creativity (e.g. Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival (France)).
- **Student Film Festivals:** Providing a platform for student filmmakers to showcase their work and gain recognition. Often featuring films from film schools and universities (e.g. National Film Festival for Talented Youth (USA)).
- **Children's and Family Festivals:** These feature films suitable for children and families, often including both educational and entertaining content (e.g. New York International Children's Film Festival (USA)).
- **Online and Virtual Festivals:** As the category suggest, these are hosted online, allowing filmmakers to reach a global audience without the need for physical attendance. They became particularly popular during COVID-19 as a means of making festivals possible and continue in some settings as a hybrid option to make festivals more accessible (e.g. We Are One: A Global Film Festival).
- **Cinematography and Film Craft Festivals:** These festivals celebrate the technical aspects of filmmaking, such as the cinematography, editing, and sound design (e.g. Camerimage (Poland)).
- **Experimental and Avant-Garde Festivals:** Festivals in this category showcase innovative and unconventional films that push the boundaries of traditional filmmaking (e.g. Ann Arbor Film Festival (USA)).

- **Environmental Issue Festivals:** These festivals focus on films that address environmental issues, raising awareness and promoting change (e.g. Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital (USA)).
- **Social Issue and Identity-Based festivals:** Festivals of this nature focus on films that address social issues to raising awareness and promote policy change. They may also celebrate cultural practices and people of identities (e.g. Outfest Los Angeles (USA), LGBTQIA+ storytelling).

As noted under the festival typology, this list is not all-encompassing and does not make the claim that these categories are at all mutually exclusive. For this study, I have centered my focus on social issue and identity-based film festivals at the regional and national level.

## **Relevant Concepts**

### *Distribution*

Films have three major stages, the first being production, next distribution, and the last being exhibition. Exhibition is defined as a public display of works of art. In the context of film festivals, exhibition also encompasses the curation, selection, and programming of a festival. In terms of the industry, it involves various settings which can include theaters, television, streaming platforms, and DVDs. Exhibitors own the platforms where films are shown. Meanwhile, distributors play the role of getting films from the end of the productions stage to these different exhibition settings. Without distribution, a film cannot begin to recover their expenses, much less net a profit.

Distribution may take different forms, but most films follow a general process. If a distributor thinks the film will work well for their organization, an acquisition contract is signed, and the distributor will work to maximize the profits by licensing the movie in as many

territories/countries as possible for as long as possible. Thus, distribution includes the initial theatrical release and ancillary marketing, where films can continue to draw in profit years after the release (e.g. on streaming platforms).

Major film companies often make deals with major distributors or are vertically integrated (owning both production and distribution companies as well as the theaters). Vertical integration in the Hollywood industry refers to consolidation of all three processes of film – its production, distribution, and exhibition – under a single company's control. This can be seen, for instance, in the cases of Walt Disney Motion Pictures, Sony Pictures, Paramount Pictures, 20th Century Studios, Amazon MGM Studio, etc.<sup>1</sup>

The practice of vertical integration leads to the homogenization of the industry in several ways. For one, it leads to a standardization of content. Given that fewer companies have control of a major share of the market, a tendency to produce content that appeals to the broadest audience possible arises (Hanssen, 2010, p. 519-543). This has resulted in a focus on blockbuster films and franchises, which can be referred to as part of the “cycle of concentration”. Cycles of concentration alludes to the idea that culture industries alternate between periods of high market concentration leading to low cultural content diversity (Sargut, 2005, p. 1-169). Additionally, although vertical integration can lead to cost savings and efficiencies, it can result in a focus on profitability over artistic innovation. Studios may prioritize projects that are formulaic, repeatable and safe, rather than taking risks on unique or experimental films.

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the Paramount Decision of 1948 stipulated that studios could not be fully vertically integrated (owning the means of production, distribution, and exhibition) as there were a few major companies which monopolized the entire industry, from the production studios to the theaters themselves. (Jacobs, 1983, p. 44-49) In 2020, however, that decision expired, which has some studios involved in the interest of vertical integration once again (Netflix, Disney+, & a Decision of Paramount Importance, 2020, p. 485-491).

In terms of how this specifically impacts parts of the industry related film festival and other creative forms of exhibition, vertical integration allows major studios to control the supply chain in a way that can stifle competition. This can make it difficult for independent filmmakers to get their movies distributed and shown to audiences (Hanssen, 2010, p. 519-543). For films produced independently, outside of the major studios, distribution is not a given. Independent (indie) studios need to shop their film around to different firms. They have multiple options to do so, including acquiring a sales agent, self-distribution, festivals, or film markets.<sup>2</sup> Independent studios typically need to employ some combination of these methods.

Festivals may be the first site of exhibition – the première – for many independent films with the hope of garnering enough attention to be picked up by a distributor (or a sales agent who will help them later find a distributor). However, most distributors are only present at highly prestigious festivals such as the big five: Venice, Canne, Berlin, Toronto, and Sundance (See Figure 3). This reality makes the success of independent film in finding distributors all the more challenging and selective.

The biggest and most prestigious festivals in the world are as outlined below:

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<sup>2</sup> Film markets are often adjacent to a film festival itself, like the Canne Film Festival and it's Marché du Film. Some markets do occur on their own. The primary purpose of these markets is to sell films to distributors, so they can be a good route for films that do not make it into highly selective film festivals like the big five.

Festival	Establishment	Overview
Venice Film Festival	1932	<p>The oldest film festival in the world.</p> <p>Held on the Lido island in Venice, Italy, this festival showcases a variety of films from across the globe.</p>
Cannes Film Festival	1946	<p>An invitation-only festival known for its red carpet and the Palme d'Or award.</p> <p>A showcase for new films.</p> <p>Held annually in May at the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès in Cannes, France.</p>
Berlin International Film Festival	1951	<p>Also known as the Berlinale, this festival is known for its independent and art-house films.</p> <p>The most political of the major film festivals.</p> <p>Held in February, this festival is one of the largest film festivals globally.</p>
Toronto International Film Festival	1976	<p>North America's biggest film festival, a major platform for launching award-winning films.</p> <p>One of the biggest publicly attended film festivals in the world.</p> <p>Held in September, this festival is a major platform for launching award-winning films.</p>
Sundance Film Festival	1985	<p>Largest independent film festival for independent and documentary films in the United States.</p> <p>Held in January, this festival is a launchpad for emerging filmmakers.</p>

Figure 3: The Big Five

## *Festival Programming and Curating*

In the context of film festivals, before the actual exhibition, or screenings of films, the selections and careful curation of films, followed by determining the order in which films are to be screened must be decided. This process is referred to as festival programming, which results in the careful selection of a screening block (a group of films, usually short films, that are shown in succession) or a festival program.

This role is carried out by programmers and/or curators. The programmer's job is to watch films, make selections, and decide how/when films will be screen. Films may be selected in several ways, for instance by submissions, or by making selections from a broader pool based on criteria outlined by the festival. Not only do potential films need to be selected, a role fulfilled by a programmer, but they may be curated by a curator to best fulfil the specific theme or aesthetic of the festival. In smaller festivals, a single person might take on the role of both curator and programmer, managing the entire film selection process. In other contexts, these two titles may even be used interchangeably (which I will do in this study from here on out).

As mentioned, the order/timeslots in films are screened throughout a festival must then be decided. This process is a critical part of the process referred to as festival programming and is often highly intentional and strategic. The order may be focused on eliciting a particular emotional response, or telling a larger, thematic story for example. It is deeply important that individuals in this role understand the business and practice of exhibition. Those in this role must intricately understand the mission of the festival for which they are curating and must create a program that caters to the vision of the festival director(s) and to the interest of the audience. They may, for instance, predict trends and the trajectories of potential rising stars and select films featuring said actors. Overall, the curator's job is to create a program that tells a story

(namely to the press), communicates a particular mission (to the public/audience), offers the intended environment for exhibition, and seems to identify new talent or fruitful space for new connections in the industry.

## **Outcomes and Impacts**

### *Economic Value – Within the Industry*

The economic profitability of film festivals is debated within the literature. Some scholarship postulates that festivals pose “frail economic logic” (Iordanova, 2009, p. 34). This is because, unlike the hegemonic examples in US cinema –Hollywood – the lack of central coordination among film festivals, by comparison, does not produce the same tightly-coordinated distribution powerhouses of the mainstream. Film festivals tend to exist in silos; while this may, in some ways act as a strength, film festivals are not typically networked to provide continuous or lucrative distribution of their selected films after they have been screened in a program (Iordanova, 2009, p. 25). Despite numerous circuits that string festivals together by strategic timing throughout the year, there remains a lack of overall coordination between festivals nationally and internationally as compared to mainstream distributors (Iordanova, 2009, p. 24-25). Why does this matter and how might it impact the economic “logic,” of conducting a film festival?

To make a profit, films need to get in front of audiences, the exhibition stage. Getting a film in front of an audience first requires distribution. And the more opportunity a film has to be screened, the more likely it is to draw the attention of distributors and, eventually, make a profit. Without coordination between these siloed festival circuits (particularly those which are lesser known), a film has less opportunity to find its audience.



On the same coin, there is much literature which argues their lack of parity with other distribution vehicles is precisely why film festivals work. While festivals may not be able to compete with the superpowers of the industry, perhaps they do not intend to compete are all. Their economic value can, if nothing else, be understood in a local, independent, and even subversive sense. Dina Iordanova's book chapter, "The Film Festival Circuit," urges that "there seems to be a growing consensus on festivals as an 'alternative distribution network' for world cinema beyond Hollywood" (Iordanova, 2009, p. 22). Like many other film scholars, Iordanova clarifies that film festivals are not merely an alternative to the distribution network, as they are, in fact, vital to global film industries. Given the growing numbers of streaming platforms flooded with films, alongside the ever-narrowing range of films selected for theater exhibition, festivals may be the singular place where the works of promising independent directors can be viewed by enough people to enable them to gather enough funds for their next film (Iordanova, 2009, p. 22). Among the economic benefits of film festivals, promotion of the careers of little-known creatives is extremely important to the transmission of this mode to new generations of artists. Not to mention the annually sustained income generated for local economies where popular film festivals take place. Regardless of debates surrounding the economic instability or, perhaps, vulnerability of film festivals, these events fill a gap in the industry, generating income for local regions and promoting and distributing unconventional, independent, and lesser-known works that may not otherwise find an audience.

### *Economic Value – In Local Communities*

Not unlike other events which attract cultural tourism, film festivals can have positive impacts on local communities, attracting an influx of visitors. Annual international film festivals being a very European conception, Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam, Locarno, Karlovy, Vary,

Oberhausen, and San Sebastian are some of the most recognizable names in film festival circuits to this day. Why do these sites maintain such robust film festivals? Interestingly, some of these known venues are sites/cities that compete with one another for cultural tourism and across seasonal events (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 82-107). *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*, posits that “festivals boost cultural tourism, invite business, and improve quality of life for urbane populations” (Wong, 2011, p. 13). By increasing interest in a community and attracting tourism, overall quality of life for local populations is cultivated. Film festivals celebrate the place – city and/or nation – that hosts them and bolster the “regional industries that often underpin them” (Wong, 2011, p. 2).

As another example, there are many European film festivals located in former industrial cities who have been attempting to reinvent themselves as cultural centers. This is all part of a greater trend toward the effort of “renewing” cities and “infus[ing] new life” into urban spaces (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 85). “Festivalisation” is often used to develop cities, improve their image, gaining income and revitalize or restructure urban centers (Cundy, 2016, p. 79-80). In this way, film festivals can become strategically important for “city-branding,” given the influx of consumer interest in cultural tourism since the 1990s (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 85). Social capital is produced in these settings, “constituted by interpersonal linkages, norms and social relationships” (Cundy, 2016, p. 83-84). Festivals “reinforce” social capital by creating potential for relationship building across all those involved in the event: organizers, inhabitants, local entrepreneurs, politicians, volunteers, festival staff, etc. (Cundy, 2016, p. 83-84). Cultural events of this nature result in social and cultural gain for the regions and their industries. Film festivals draw industry professionals and cinephiles alike, cultivating and sustaining the economic and sociocultural capital of hosting regions.

To address their limitations, in some cases, festivals can burden cities in which they are hosted. This can happen when they are “too costly, do not attract tourists, do not perform any other functions or cause problems” (Cundy, 2016, p. 2). In these kinds of situations, “a festival that typically has a positive influence on an urban space might, alternatively, hamper its development” (Cundy, 2016, p. 2).

### *Cultural Impact*

Moreover, beyond the economic pull of these festivals for creators and stakeholders, the benefit of festivals from a cultural lens also lies in audience exposure. The role of festivals can be described as intending “to complement and answer what is lacking in the current cultural scene in films” (Iordanova, 2009, p. 22). By showing varieties of films to audiences, even if only at film festival screenings, cinema as a mode of art is further recognized as nuanced and heterogeneous – as opposed to the typically flattened narrative cast by mainstream media distributors. This is why intentional curation is a job in and of itself. While the thoughtful and strategic selection of films that do not always appeal to the masses can feel counterintuitive, consciousness in this decision is part of what makes film festivals culturally significant. The diversity of genre, form, content, and geographic origin (/language) of films platformed by festivals creates opportunity for those whose perspectives are not represented in the mainstream to see themselves reflected in the art they consume.

It is critical to also consider, however, the significant limitations of cultural value and impact of film festivals, for one, due to monetary barriers. Some people may not have access to festivals due to the high prices of tickets or “closed distributions” (Cundy, 2016, p. 90). It is not uncommon for only a small portion of tickets to be sold on the market while the majority are distributed, for instance, by organizers at their own discretion. Furthermore, critics may find

festivals to be “socially burdensome” (Cundy, 2016, p. 84-85). In other words, they be characterized with creating a sense of social helplessness which occurs when a part of the inhabitants is excluded from participation in festivals (Cundy, 2016, p. 84-90).

Regardless, film festivals still fill a gap in the industry. The multifaceted nature of these events can operate in a kind of symbiotic relationship to “serve up an overarching snapshot” of the international film scene (or particular facets of cinema) and create ties between “creative output and industry” (The Festival Today). Film festivals can be characterized as events through which filmmakers, artists, actors, and all others involved in the industry can experience “the entirety of the film world: film school students, art house cinema, veteran filmmakers, and industry powerhouses” (The Festival Today). With the intention of celebrating and representing “a microcosm” of cinema as it develops and changes internationally over time, festivals can promote distribution within the industry and across national and global contexts, while simultaneously drawing critical attention and, oftentimes, prestige to cinema of all kinds. Film festivals benefit industry, local communities, and (inter)national culture by providing a space where cinema is exhibited and mediated. It operates as an extension of the economic industry and as a setting for critical analysis and celebration of the art form.

They can act as “an arena for expressing and consolidating opinions and values common for the urban communities” (Cundy, 2016, p. 83-84). Yet, even more pressingly, film festivals often showcase complex content, thematically intended to push audiences to confront major contemporary issues. They tend to challenge the conventions of Western hegemony established by Hollywood’s mass, formulaic cultural production and vertical integration in both filmmaking and social conventions, resulting in a wider and counter gaze and a valuation of cinema on a cultural level (Grunwell, 2008, p. 201-210). Overall, film festivals have a notable social impact

in supporting cultural expression, with consideration for minority stories and perspectives (Grunwell, 2008, p. 201-210). They can have transformative influence not only on conventions and criteria surrounding global film form, but film content as well.

Film festivals can serve to “take the pulse of world cinema once a year. To gather the movers and shakers of the profession in one place so they can exchange ideas, show each other their movies, and do business” (Wong, 2011, p. 1). They reflect, subvert, and deeply influence the hierarchy of films, their content, and language, as well as that of national cinemas (Wong, 2011, p 1-228). Showcasing works on the periphery (of the dominant/mainstream), they influence the boundaries of popular art and culture. Film festivals, therefore, may call for shifts in tolerance within popular culture through the works they elect to highlight. This is especially relevant in reference to identity-based film festivals.

### **Identity-Based (Film) Festivals**

Beyond their economic and industry impact, arts festivals have cultural impact, and those with arguably the most influence in this area are identity-based festivals. These events reach further than promotion of an industry and a celebration of an art. They aim to make a broader social statement, comment on an issue, mediate the discourse, question and solidify identities, and more. These kinds of events can have impacts that last far longer than the fleeting stage they offer for some form of cultural production. I argue, therefore, that identity-based festivals can be understood as part of a larger context of social change and social movements.

In the case of identity-based film festivals, these are distinctive in contrast to the dominant structures of relatively mainstream film festivals which have, historically, been geared toward entertainment, cinematic celebration, film circulation, and industry support. I employ the work of Andy Bennett and Ian Woodward in *The Festivalization of Culture* to frame my

exploration of identity-based film festivals and their connection to social movements. Their work illustrates that “traditional fairs and festivals were a form of escapism,” and a “gigantic exercise in making money” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1964). And, while this “remains largely true today, many festivals nowadays also contain some radical and/or political element” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1964). Conversely, they argue that, in some cases, film festivals have been exploitative of counterculture ideas and lifestyles, so it is critical not to overestimate or romanticize the disruptive or counter-cultural function of festivals. This is not to say that there are no festivals that offer oppositional or radical experiences, but rather to note that many do not. The authors argue that analysis should then consider how resistance, protest, and political action in festival-like forms “might play out in a context that is now so dominated by the cultural industries and processes of commercialization and consumerism” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1968).

As I will outline in Section 2, social movements are complex. They are often a compilation of “a plurality of meanings and orientations,” with a heavy focus being placed on conflict resolution toward the establishment of collective identities (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, 1970). Therefore, identity-based (film) festivals can be spaces involved in the formation of collective identity as “cultural laboratories” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1992). In this way, festivals can be understood as being politically and socially “expressive rather than instrumental” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1969).

It is valuable to then consider how programming for identity-based film festivals must make special considerations of the way in which it mediates and contributes to a discourse through its messaging. For instance, these events must remain conscious of the active roles they can play in shaping film histories, contributing to various genres and cinema movements. They

may serve to challenge the dominant meanings and conventions in films – and beyond the screen – in these public settings by encouraging and adding to the discourse and creation of meanings. In these ways, film festivals with the added intention of expressing social critique or acting as a call to action have a particular ethical responsibility toward the audience.

The question remains, what precisely is the impact that film festivals, particularly identity-based festivals, can have beyond the industry and local economy. Are they a reflection of our social condition, a symptom, an output, or a driving mechanism of social change?

## Section 2: Social Movements and Social Justice Outcomes

### Social Movements: Defining Factors

Social movements can be a broad and challenging concept to define. Scholarship remains divided on how they are best theorized and explained. However, to next answer the question of what kinds of public policy advocacy supports progress of identity-focused social movements, we must first explore how social movements and public policy processes can be defined. Depending on the time and place in history through which they are studied, their driving forces, intentions, and functions may be understood very differently. What is certain is that social movements are critical vehicles for social and political change. Throughout history, participants have organized to protect the environment, protest war, advocate for minority rights, and so on. (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 2). Most scholarship agrees that social movements are “collective efforts, of some duration and organization, using noninstitutionalized methods to bring about social change” (Flacks, 2005, p. 5). Movements may use institutionalized methods/activities, including lobbying (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 6). Generally, something only qualifies as a social movement within the literature when it includes some noninstitutionalized methods/activities (e.g. demonstrations) (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 6). Some scholarship presents a political framing of social movements as a form of contentious politics (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 6). This is to say, social movements typically involve “collective making of claims that, if realized, would conflict with someone else’s interests” (Tilly & Wood, 2013, p. 3-4).

Social movements are, therefore, driven by existing social conflict. Social conflicts may be viewed as being driven by disrupted forces meant to establish social integration, or perhaps as countercultural, intended to spark alternative ways of knowing and being in sociocultural life, and so on (Touraine, 1985, p. 749-787). Furthermore, they “act as ‘symbolic challenges’ to the



homogenizing logic of the system,” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1970). And individual actors challenge these “dominant cultural codes,” simply by living alternative lifestyles which ask us to recognize and accept their right to live outside of these established norms (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1970). Bennett and Woodward (2014) also argue that, where power is typically masked by “operational codes, formal rules and bureaucratic/technocratic procedures, contemporary movements act as ‘revealers’ by exposing that which is hidden or excluded by the decision-making processes” (p. 1970). Lilian Mathieu (2021) defines the “space of social movements,” as the “relatively autonomous microcosm of practice and meaning,” which are connected by drivers – inspiration, alliance, competition, and conflict – toward “contentious mobilizations” (p.193).

When understood as contentious politics, social movements can be viewed as “collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities” (Tarrow, 2011, p. 4). The distinction between social movements and other social phenomena like political parties or interest groups is not always entirely clear. However, scholars have noted that to be regarded as a movement, activities must challenge or fall outside of the established power structures. There is potential for movements to become professionalized, in that they may encompass stable organizations, often headed by major financial contributors, rather than simply made up of activists (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 7). This distinction between social movements and organizations is made in definitions by some theorists as “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1217-1218). This definition differs from others in literature, so it recognizes preferences from change as separate from organized collective action, allowing for the acknowledgement of social

movements that never fully mobilize (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, 1973). Another defining factor of social movements is their actors. Actors in social movements aim to represent themselves as unified, numerous, and committed (Tilly & Wood, 2013, p. 5). It is valuable to acknowledge that although participants are motivated to engage in social movements due to grievances or goals linked to the movement, “most people who believe in causes are not active supporters of the movements fighting for those causes” (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 3).

### **Historical Context**

Social movements, as they developed into the recognizable shape they sustain today, were first established in the West after 1750 (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 6). They came to consist of campaigns that made claims aimed at authority, often organizing into associations of coalitions engaging in demonstrations, petitions, public statements and meetings, or other forms of “contentious performances” (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 6).

Historically, there is evidence of social movements taking the form of peasant uprisings and journeyman protests that can be traced back to medieval Europe and in ancient Greece and Rome, marking early examples of collective action against social injustice. Another major social movement surge was marked by the Revolutions of 1848 (also known as the Spring of Nations, a series of social and political uprisings across Europe), the industrial revolution, and the 19th century labor movements. In the late 1960s, the world underwent numerous socio-political transformations. Some of these include American civil rights and antiwar movements, the Mai 1968 revolt in France, students’ protests in Germany, Britain, and Mexico, the worker–student coalitions of the 1969 “Hot Autumn” in Italy, pro-democracy mobilizations in Madrid and Prague, early stages of women’s movements and environmental movements that would shape the new politics of the 1970s, and so on. “Accordingly, the study of social movements developed at

an unprecedented pace into a major area of research” (Della Porta, 2006, p. 1). In the late 1940s, critics objected to the “crudely descriptive level of understanding and a relative lack of theory” (Strauss, 1947, p. 352), and in the 1960s there continued to be criticism that “in the study of social changes, social movements have received relatively little emphasis” (Killian, 1964, p. 426). However, by the mid-1970s, research into collective action became considered one of the most robust areas of sociology (Della Porta, 2006, p. 1). By the late 1980s there had been “an explosion, in the last ten years of theoretical and empirical writings on social movements and collective action (Morris & Herring, 1987, p. 138). It is vital to note that social movements are a subset of collective action. Which is to say, all social movements rely on temporal continuity of collective action, but not all collective action is a social movement (Snow et al., 2018; Heydari Fard, 2024, p. 1-11).

Even theory surrounding social movements as they relate to history and society have been deeply contentious, as, over the past few generations, it has been continuously challenged and redefined. There are numerous theorists who have, since the mid-sixties, established and interacted under the umbrella of four main approaches to social movement theory.

<b>Four Approaches</b>			
Implied primary image of human action			
		<i>Materialist</i>	<i>Culturalist</i>
Scope	<i>Macrosocial</i>	Mobilization or process	Programmed society or new social movement theory
	<i>Microsocial</i>	Rational-choice or game theory	Pragmatism, cultural-historical activity theory, framing theory, feminist, queer theory, cultural-strategic or emotional approaches

Figure 4: Adapted from Table 1. Four approaches, 1965–2010 (Jasper, 2010, p. 969)

The paradigms, pictured in Figure 4, are not comprehensive by any means, since theories continue to develop and become more nuanced. Those listed include mobilization or political process theory, programmed society theory, rational-choice theory, pragmatism, feminist queer theory, cultural-historical activity theory, cultural-strategic approaches, and emotional approaches.

These theories and approaches are briefly described here:

- **Rational Choice Theory:** Systematically applied to social movements starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the groundwork was laid by Mancur Olson in "The Logic of Collective Action" in 1965. This approach applies principles from microeconomics and game theory to understand how participants in social movements make rational choices

based on costs and benefits. It addresses how movements overcome collective action problems and focuses on strategic interactions among individuals (Olson, 1965, 1-198).

- Resource Mobilization Theory: Proposed by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald in the 1970s, is a framework which puts emphasis on the importance of resources (e.g. money, labor, and organizational skills) in the development and success of a social movement. It illuminates the role of external support and strategic action in mobilizing these resources (McCarthy and Zald, 1977, p. 1212–1241).
- Political Process Theory: Developed by Douglas McAdam in the early 1980s, particularly through his book *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* published in 1982, this approach focuses on the role of political opportunities and constraints in the emergence of successful social movements. It suggests that movements are more likely to arise and succeed when there are favorable political conditions, for instance, increased political access and divided elites (McAdam, 1982, p. 1-346).
- Framing Theory: Introduced by David Snow and Robert Benford in the mid-1980s, with significant contributions in their 1986 paper "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," this theory examines how social movements construct and communicate their messages to mobilize supporters. It draws attention to the importance of framing issues in a way that resonates with participants and the broader public (Snow, et al., 1986, p. 464–481).
- New Social Movement Theory: Emerging in the late 20th century, particularly in the 1980s. This theory focuses on the cultural and identity aspects of social movements. In particular, it highlights those that emerged in the late 20th century. The framework

argues that these movements are driven by issues related to identity, lifestyle, quality of life, and cultural change (Buechler, 2013, p. 1-7).

- Programmed Society Theory: Rooted in the work of Alain Touraine, this theory gained prominence in the late 20th century. The theory suggests that social movements in postindustrial societies are driven by conflicts related to technological and bureaucratic control. It emphasizes the cultural and identity issues that arise from these societal changes (Fuchs, 2006, p 101-137).
- Pragmatism: Emphasized in social movement studies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, focusing on practical action and problem-solving. This approach centers on flexible, trial-and-error methods to address issues. It prioritizes what works in practice over rigid ideological commitments (Joas, 1993, p. 1-272).
- Cultural-Strategic Approach: Developed in the late 20th century, this approach highlights the importance of culture and strategic thinking in social movements. Highlighting the importance of culture and strategic thinking in social movements, the perspective examines how movements use cultural symbols, narratives, and identities to frame their causes and mobilize support. It considers the strategic planning of actions to achieve goals within cultural contexts (Jasper, 2007, p. 59-109).
- Emotional Approaches: Gained attention in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, focusing on the role of emotions in social movements. This approach explores how feelings such as anger, fear, hope, and solidarity drive individuals to participate in collective action. It examines how movements generate and manage emotions to sustain engagement and motivate participants (Jasper, 2007, p. 59-109).

- Feminist and Queer Theory: Emerged in the late 20th century, combining insights from feminist and queer theory to analyze social movements. This approach focuses on how gender and sexuality intersect with other social categories like race, class, and ability. It examines how movements challenge normative structures and advocate for inclusivity and intersectionality (Kahl and Paige, 2024, p. 84-96).
- Cultural-Historical Activity Theory: Integrated into social movement studies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, emphasizing cultural and historical contexts. This theory integrates cultural psychology and historical sociology to analyze social movements, emphasizing the importance of cultural and historical contexts. It examines how movements are shaped by the activities and interactions of individuals within specific cultural and historical settings (Sannino and Engeström, 2018, p. 43-56).

Although many of these theories were formally articulated later, their foundational ideas and influences often trace back to the 1960s. However, the grand theories of social movements have been all but dismantled since the sixties and seventies. Approaches have since been emerging that, instead, offer cultural and emotional theories of action. These perspectives allow analysts to understand movements from a micro-level to a macro-level in a more empirical way. Social movements are made up of individual actors and their interactions. Newer theories like rational-choice approaches acknowledges that; however, it is too abstract at the micro-level. Pragmatism, feminism, and queer theory call for a rethinking of collective action and fill critical gaps in the literature (Jasper, 2010, p. 965-974).

Today, like many other theoretical landscapes, social movement theorists consider the valuable underpinning of these older schools of thought while adding nuance that was previously

overlooked. As pictured in Figure 4, the four main approaches of paradigms for articulating and conceptualizing social movements have been developed by identifying the theorist's scope (micro- or macro-social) and the implied image of human action (materialist or culturalist). The trend in the literature is, thus, the classification/categorization of big theories into paradigms with greater attention on microfoundations (how individual actions and interactions lead to macro-level outcomes) of social and political action (Jasper, 2010, p. 965-974).

Social movements as we conceptualize them today are a relatively recent means of organizing for the purpose of impacting social change (Staggenborg, 2016, p. 4). Andy Bennett and Ian Woodward (2014, p. 11-26) in their chapter, "Festival Spaces, Identity, Experience, and Belonging," assert that, today, society is increasingly complex, where our fixation on material production is beginning to be replaced by the production of meaning: information, signs, symbols and social relations. Certainly, society's focus has shifted from material production to the creation of meaning, where the production of meaning refers to the process by which individuals and groups create, interpret, and make sense of the world around them. This involves generating and sharing cultural narratives, values, and social norms that shape our understanding of reality and define our place within it. In contemporary society, this process is increasingly important as we navigate increasingly complex social and cultural landscapes. This complexity arises as meaning is constructed through greater access to media, and through cross-cultural communication and social interactions.

Why or how has contemporary society and our productions of meaning become increasingly complex and fragile? There are several variables involved. For one, globalization, including the interconnectedness of our economies, cultures, and global political systems has exponentially increased. This has also led to rapid exchange of ideas, goods, and services,



presenting both opportunities and challenges, such as exacerbated inequalities and new vulnerabilities economic and political. Urbanization – the migration of populations to urban areas – has led to the growth of multicultural urban centers. The concentration of diverse cultures promotes both innovation and strains infrastructure and social services. Another reason for our increasing social complexity at a global scale has to do with cultural hybridization. Given the increased access to cultural exchange and interaction, the blending of traditional norms with modern influences occurs more and more regularly. These dynamic social transformations inspire creativity but also present challenges in maintaining cultural identities. Lastly, technological advancements have deeply impacted society globally. The digital revolution has transformed the way we communicate, our systems of commerce, and even our social interactions, which can, for instance, quickly destabilize traditional structures and create disparities in access. Naturally, social movements of our contemporary era are “correspondingly heterogeneous, fragile and complex” (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1970). The shift from focus in material to cultural production is reflected in contemporary social movements. They have diversified, become multifaceted, and, perhaps as a result, are often fragile, as they navigate the intricate landscape of cultural and symbolic production to mobilize support and create a sense of belonging.

The study of social movements itself is also much more solidly established now. Social movements, protest actions, and political organizations have become a norm, a permanent aspect of Western democracies. Naturally, there has been fluctuation in the intensity and degree of radicalism of collective action over time, and its capacity for influence on political processes. Yet, not only do social movement continue to emerge, but, possibly for the first time since 1960s, mobilizations seem to have the potential for a global, generalized themes. At the same

time, movements against and within neoliberal, globalized contexts are highly heterogeneous, and not necessarily interconnected. They address numerous of issues in many different and overlapping ways. This is where their categorizations come into play (Della Porta, 2006, p. 1).

## **Typology**

Social movements may be categorized as being motivated by various types of social conflicts, including the pursuit of collective interest, a reconstruction of identity (whether political, social, or cultural), the mobilization of a political force, the defense of a status or privilege, the control of dominant cultural norms/patterns, the creation of a new order, and, at the highest level, a national conflict (Touraine, 1985, p. 749-787).

American Anthropologist David F. Aberle (1966) sorted social movement into four main categories: revolutionary, reformative, redemptive, and alternative. These categories are dependent on the movement's mission – who they are trying to change, and how much change they are advocating for. Revolutionary movement is a type of movement that is aimed at carrying out revolutionary reforms and gaining some control (of the state). To be considered revolutionary, they must be aiming for an exclusive control. Reformative social movements advocates for minor changes instead of radical ones. For instance, revolutionary movements may scale down their demands, agreeing to share powers and influence with others, to become a coalition/political party. Redemptive social movements are radical in scope, but they focus on the individual. An alternative social movement is one seeking to create limited change in beliefs and behavior, mainly focusing on individuals within a specific group of people, rather than societal transformation at the larger scale.

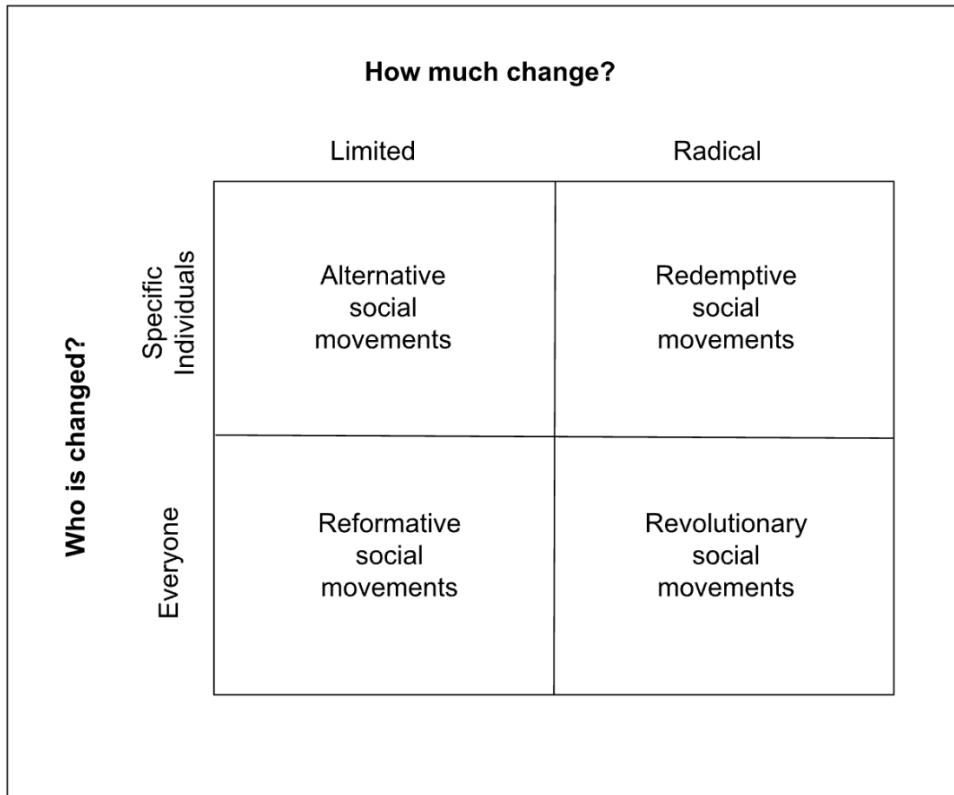


Figure 5: Adapted from Four typologies of social movements based on Aberle (1966)

Overall, while Aberle's typology and the theoretical approaches I have presented provide a useful starting point for understanding social movements, the importance of acknowledging their limitations cannot be overstated. It is necessary to consider the dynamic nature of movements when applying these frameworks. Aberle's social movement typology is criticized in the literature for being overly simplistic and rigid, failing to capture the nuances (i.e. power structures/dynamics) and evolving nature of social movement. It fails to recognize the often-multidimensional degree and target of desired change within a single movement depending on context and strategy.

Beyond the four typologies presented under Aberle's framework, we may, more generally, take into consideration measures the scope/targets (who is changed), type of change

(how much change), scale, methods, and themes or topic areas of a social movement to best categorize them. For instance, the kind of change a movement aims to make can be anything on the spectrum from limited to radical (see figure 4). Targets or scope represents the focus movement, whether it is for the whole of a group, or those within a particular identity. What seems to be missing from Aberle's framework, however, is scale – whether the movement is conducted at global, national, regional, or community/local level. This is a valuable measure because it helps to determine tactics/strategies. Methods are important to consider, given that some movements are entirely “peaceful,” utilizing nonviolent resistance while other movements may resort to violence to influence change. Furthermore, methods may also concern tactic of a movement, such as protests and demonstrations, civil disobedience, boycotts, strikes, media communications, or legal action.

With consideration for the content or topic of a social movement, they may focus on themes such as civil rights, gender equality, environmental protection, economic justice, labor rights, racial equality, LGBTQ+ rights, indigenous land, anti-war activism, access to healthcare, reproductive agency, animal welfare, and social justice issues more broadly. Even though movements are often inherently intersectional, key focus areas/types of social movements can be divided into political issues, economic issues, social issues, environmental issues, and cultural issues. Examples of various topics include:

- Civil rights movements: American Civil Rights Movement, Anti-Apartheid Movement
- Women's rights movements: Suffragette movement, Feminist movement
- Indigenous rights movements: Land rights movements, Cultural preservation efforts
- LGBTQ+ rights movements: Gay rights movement, Trans rights movement
- Labor movements: workers' rights movements, Unionization efforts

- Environmental movements: Green Peace, Climate change activism
- Peace movements: Anti-war movements, Nuclear disarmament campaigns

It is vital to note that while most social movements, if not all, are highly intersectional, the focus of this research is on social and identity-based equity (e.g. racial equality and broader social justice issues).

## **Relevant Concepts**

### *Grassroots and “Grasstops”*

Advocacy is the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something such as a cause or policy (Hart, 2005, p. 120). The main goal of advocacy is to result in positive change. Positive change may look like influencing government legislation or policy changes or securing some kind of funding. The two traditional approaches to advocacy are grassroots and grass-tops (Hart, 2005, p. 120). For the purposes of my work, grassroots advocacy can be defined as “organized efforts by an organization to inform, recruit, and deploy political power from constituents” (Handbook of Public Affairs, 2005, p. 84). Grassroots constituents, those who can be recruited for grassroots participation, include employees, retirees, customers, allied interest groups, communities (in which the economy, policy, etc. may be affected), suppliers, shareholders, general public, community advisory panels, etc. (Handbook of Public Affairs, 2005, p. 84). The most common grassroots activities may be writing an email, calling, or meeting with a legislator, writing to a newspaper, attending a protest or demonstration (Handbook of Public Affairs, 2005, p. 84). Grassroots advocacy is reliant on everyday community members who are passionate or otherwise invested in a cause. The success of grassroots approaches is the strength in number.

“Grasstops”, on the other hand, refers to a type of advocacy that involves engaging in one-on-one dialog with key government or corporate actors through representatives or

professional lobbyists (Hart, 2005, p. 120). More generally, it involves accessing the elites or individuals who have greater influence at the campaign level. These individuals can mobilize support and have a relationship with politicians or other individuals of influence. With grass-tops advocacy, the central focus is leveraging high-profile individuals to take supportive action. This approach to advocacy engages personal and political connections to leaders, celebrities, popular activists, and other individuals with high social capital.

### *Stages of a Social Movement*

As has been established, social movements can be thought of as “organized yet informal social entities . . . engaged in extra-institutional conflict . . . oriented towards a goal” (Christiansen, 2011, p. 15). Said goals can be aimed at a specific, narrow policy or, conversely, be broadly aimed at cultural change. It is important, then, to conceptualize how social movements orient and mobilize themselves toward their goal (Christiansen, 2011, p. 15). The “lifecycle” was first defined by Herbert Blumer, an early social movement scholar, who identified four stages of social movements. These were “social ferment,” “popular excitement,” “formalization,” and “institutionalization” (De la Porta and Diani, 2006, p. 150). Today these are known as emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline (see figure 6). Emergence is the process of people becoming aware of an issue while leaders emerge. Coalescence is when people begin to join together, get organized, and take action. Bureaucratization or institutionalization is the stage where the movement is formalized. In other words, this is where the movement becomes established as an/with organization(s). The relevance of a movement declines over time. The term decline marks the ending stage of a social movement life cycle. The

decline may occur for several reasons, including success organizational failure, co-optation, repression, or establishment within the mainstream (Christiansen, 2011, p. 16).

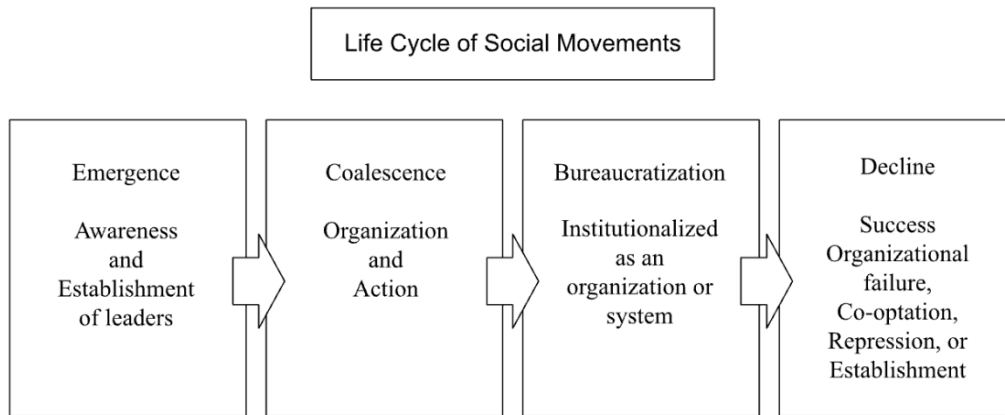


Figure 6: Life Cycle of a Social Movement as articulated in *Theories of Social Movements* (Christiansen, 2011 14-25)

### *Logic Models*

Logic models are a tool which is foundational to the theory and underpinnings of this research. They allow for the visualization of such concepts as the life cycle of a social movement (see figure 6) as well as more complex frameworks. This tool has, for example, helped me to visualize the intersectionality of this research to formulate a roadmap for my study: how the inputs, outputs and outcomes of two different umbrellas of activities (identity-based festivals and social movements) may overlap (see Figure 1). According to the *Logic Model Development Guide*, a logic model is a systematic and visual way to present an understanding of the relationships between resources a program has to invest, the activities they plan, and the changes or results the program aims to achieve (Kellog, 2004, p. 1). An earlier publication by W.K. Kellogg Foundation defines a programs logic model as an illustration of how a program operates, the theories and assumptions which underpin the organization (Kellog, 1998, p. 35). They offer a

“road map” of a program and the order of activities, highlighting how it works, in theory, and how the desired outcomes are achieved (Kellog, 1998, p. 35).

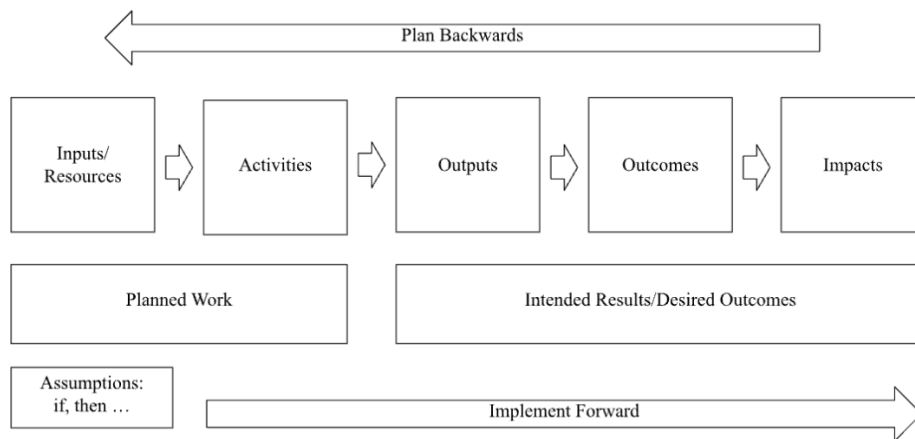


Figure 7: Adapted from Figure 1. The Basic Logic Model (Kellog, 2004, p. 1).

A logic model (otherwise referenced as a program logic model) is described simply as “a flowchart that summarizes key elements of a program” (Wholey, 2010, p. 28). A program is “a set of resources and activities directed toward one or more common goals” (Wholey, 2010, p. 29). Key elements include inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Inputs include the materials, resources, and contributions available to invest in a program. The activities are the specific processes, actions, events, or interventions that programs engage in to produce outputs toward desired outcomes. Outputs are the direct results, products, and services that are delivered. And finally, the outcomes are “the changes in clients or communities associated with program activities and outputs” (Wholey, 2010, p. 28). These changes, or outcomes, associated with the program may be categorized as short-term, medium-term, or long-term results (Wholey, 2010, p. 28). These outcomes ultimately become impacts, or the long-term changes or consequences that



result from program activities. In a positive, desirable case, these represent a broader societal, economic, or environmental improvement achieved as a result of to the program's intervention. Logic models may also identify or acknowledge key factors outside the control of a program but are likely to impact the achievability of the desired outcomes. A logic model illustrates “assumed cause-and-effect linkages” between the given elements, and in some cases may show assumed linkages between external factors and program outcomes (Wholey, 2010, p. 28).

### *Public Policy*

Public policy involves the influence of decision-makers to change laws or regulations. Public policy is a complex result of numerous decisions made by numerous individuals and organizations alike. A complex phenomenon, it is often influenced by other earlier policies and by popular public opinion, and it is frequently tied to other seemingly unrelated decisions. Public policy can be defined as the positions adopted and actions taken (and abstained) by governments as they address the needs of society. In other words, public policy is a set of laws, regulations, and funding guidelines for a specific topic that are established by the government at the local, state, and federal levels, yet can be influenced by external participants.

Researchers analyze public policies through various approaches, one of which emphasizes understanding public policy as the outcome of political decision-making within specific institutional configurations. This approach highlights the nature of the political regime, loosely defined as the organization of the political system. The political regime refers to the formal and informal rules, norms, and procedures governing and influencing political behavior and the decision-making process. This includes the distribution of power among different branches of government, the influence of political parties, the role of interest groups, and interactions between both governmental and non-governmental actors. By considering

institutional configurations, researchers can better understand how policies are formulated, adopted, and implemented. Recognizing that public policy is not created in a vacuum, reveals the underlying power dynamics, the role of political actors, and the impact of institutional constraints on policy outcomes. Instead, policy is shaped by the political environment and the institutional arrangements in place. This approach also highlights the importance of historical context, as past policies and decisions can shape current policy debates and influence future directions.

Public policy spans various domains, including economic, social, health, education, environmental, defense, and transportation policies for example. And, the unit of analysis can range from countries, groups of countries, states or provinces, local governments, supranational governments, political parties, interest groups, government agencies, to different types of regimes. To achieve policy objectives, governments use policy instruments or tools, which include economic incentives (carrots), regulations (sticks), and information (sermons). These instruments represent different types of control, such as coercion, economic assets, and normative values.

#### *Public Policy Process (Stages)*

The public policy process or the policy cycle consists of five stages: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation (see Figure 8). The process begins with problem identification and agenda-setting, where an issue is clearly defined and analyzed to determine its significance and the resources required to address it. This stage often involves input from various stakeholders, including public interest groups, public servants, and constituencies (McCormick, et al., 2022).

Once the problem is identified, the next step is policy formulation, which involves developing potential solutions. This stage can include multiple competing proposals from different stakeholders, each with their own agendas and perspectives. The formulation process may involve considering alternative courses of action, forecasting future impacts, and conducting detailed analyses to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of proposed solutions. After formulating potential solutions, the process moves to decision-making, where the most viable proposal is selected and officially adopted. This stage often involves legislative action, regulatory decisions, or executive orders, depending on the level of government involved. Following decision-making, the focus shifts to policy implementation, where the adopted policy is put into action. This stage typically involves various government agencies and entities responsible for carrying out the policy's provisions. Effective implementation requires coordination, resource allocation, and ongoing management to ensure that the policy achieves its intended goals. Finally, the policy formation process includes policy evaluation, where the outcomes of the implemented policy are assessed. This stage involves monitoring and analyzing the results to determine whether the policy is effective and whether any adjustments are needed. Evaluation helps policymakers understand the impact of their decisions and make informed choices about future policies. Overall, public policy formation is a dynamic and iterative process that is essential for addressing complex societal issues and ensuring that government actions are effective and responsive to public needs (McCormick, et al., 2022, p. 309-315).

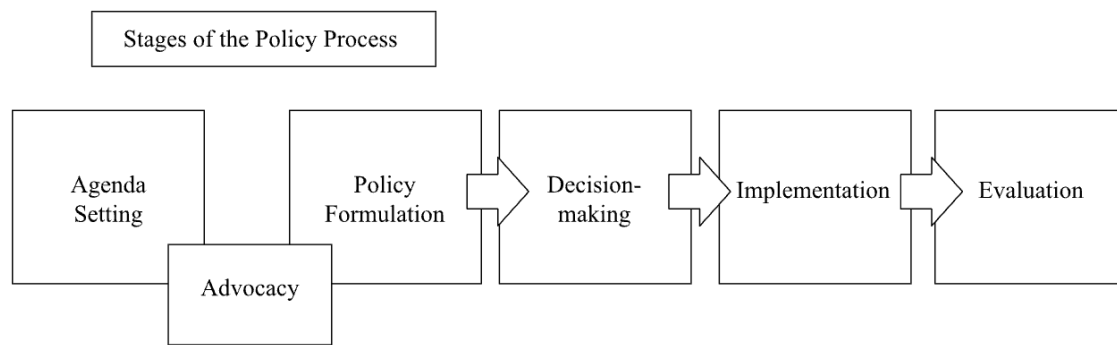


Figure 8: Adapted from Figure 17.1: Stages of the Public Policy Process (McCormick, et al., 2022, p. 309).

These stages correspond to phases of applied problem-solving, from problem recognition to monitoring results. Outputs are the efforts expended by the government, such as laws and regulations, while outcomes are the substantive results of policy implementation, which can be intended or unintended, positive or negative. The policy domain is influenced by political culture, legal environment, and how people understand the nature of the problem and potential solutions (McCormick, et al., 2022, p. 309-315).

Public policy is driven by ideas and interests, with specific groups of actors forming connections, alliances, and coalitions to influence policy design. The process of policymaking can be understood as a competition between coalitions of causes, each constituted of actors from various institutions, interest groups, administrative agencies, legislators, researchers, and journalists, sharing a system of beliefs linked to public action (McCormick, et al., 2022, p. 89-315). Kingdon’s Three Streams Metaphor explains these competing actors and interests (see Figure 9). The metaphor describes how policy change occurs when the “problem” stream, “policy” stream, and “politics” stream converge, creating a window of opportunity for new or changed policies. This convergence is often triggered by changes in problem understanding,

political shifts, or focusing events that draw attention to specific issues (Kingdon, 2011, p. 1-280).

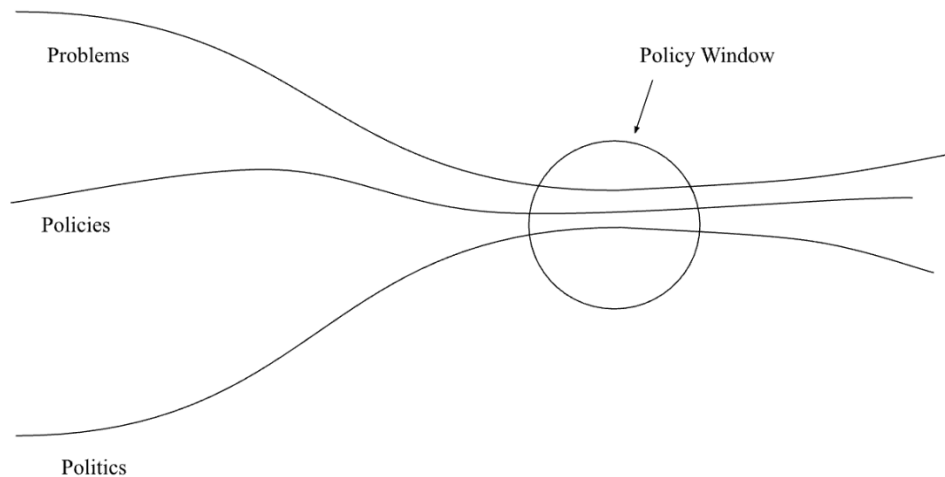


Figure 9: Visualization of Kingdon's Three Streams Metaphor (Kingdon, 2011, p. 1-280).

### *Public Policy Mechanisms*

Ideas represent a shared “system of thought consisting of a series of interconnected claims and assumptions about how something functions” (Hart, 2005, p. 381). Ideas are sets of meaning telling actors how ‘to do’ social life (Swinkels, 2020, p. 287). According to Swinkels, “these sets of meaning are open to contestation, but in public policy, the range of potential interpretations is not infinite. Instead, contestation is shaped by path dependency mechanisms (Pierson, 2000) and hegemonic discourses (Blyth, 2013)” (Swinkels, 2020, p. 287). Path dependency mechanisms are the driving force behind why a product, practice, or institution may persist, even if there is a known better alternative. This may be the result of historical preference, financial implications, or risk-aversion.

Public policy mechanisms, on the other hand, are how ideas and opinions influence policy change. These mechanisms are framework that describe the process for how policy actors interpret new ideas and make policy decisions (Blatter, 2021; Swinkels, et al., 2020). These mechanisms can be used to explain how policy changes and, eventually, policy outcomes come about.

Types of public policy mechanisms include but are not limited to:

- Ideational change mechanisms: Which describe how policy actors adapt to new ideas. These reactions can be endogenous, having an internal cause or origin (such as socialization), or exogenous, relating to or developing from external factors (such as coercion).
- Policy diffusion mechanisms: This describes how policymaking processes and outcomes in one polity influence others (i.e. learning, competition, emulation, and coercion).
- Transmission mechanisms: Describe how policy tools influence changes on policy targets.

Factors that influence public policy include, but, likewise, are not limited to:

- Education: Which may raise awareness in the public of current issues and increase civic participation/engagement.
- Research and development: Research from universities and other institutions may produce evidence in support of policy proposals.
- Cultural diversity: Policymakers can better craft inclusive policies, providing insights into different cultures and viewpoints through cultural education and greater diversity within relevant policy actors.

In summary, public policy mechanisms allow shared systems of thought or meaning to be leveraged through the public policy process toward policy change. These mechanisms highlight how meanings and ideas are contested and then activated and mobilized into action. Employing this research as an example, I would like to propose that identity-based (film) festivals can be situated or contextualized into the discourse of the public policy process as a space for the mediation of ideas, values, preferences, and norms to take place. They may be a space for discourse around contentious issues in society and/or as a place of belonging. Festivals may offer awareness of an issue, thereby changing individuals' perspectives. Ideas, once exhibited and mediated in community settings in such a way, may offer the structure for collective action to occur, in turn influencing agenda setting and policy formulation in the policy process. This, ultimately, has the possibility of affecting change. But how does idea formulation and mediation become collective action that can influence agenda setting within the public policy process? This is the mechanism defined as public policy advocacy.

*Advocacy (Social Movements and Collective Action)*

Unlike the study of public opinion, advocacy is a mechanism affecting public policy which is not supported by a huge field of study. Advocacy is also rarely formally defined in the literature. However, researchers agree that (public policy) advocacy is the process of influencing decision-makers to impact public policy. Public policy advocacy activities include lobbying, litigation, public education, and building relationships at any level of government, research for interpreting problems and suggesting preferred solutions, constituent action and public mobilizations, agenda setting and policy design, policy implementation, monitoring, and feedback, and election-related activity. It can be conducted by individuals, private or nonprofit organizations, associations, or coalitions. Advocacy may be conducted, as mentioned before,

from grassroots or a grass-tops approach. And, it may be active, covert, or inadvertent. Active advocacy is support for a policy or a cause that is done intentionally, while covert is done in secret, and inadvertent is done accidentally or unintentionally. It may, for example, look like a structured plan to influence decision-makers, or be a symptom of other political action, and so on. Overall, advocacy is the act of supporting, defending, opposing, or arguing for a policy, aiming to bring about significant societal change by influencing the public policy process, educating the public and influencing public interests and opinions (Burstein, 2014, p. 6-7; Reid, 2000, p. 1-7).

### **Outcomes and Impacts**

The result of the public policy mechanisms that can arise from advocacy are referred to as public policy outcomes. These outcomes are deeply influenced by a government's ultimate actions and decisions, and how well they achieve their goals. They are shaped by numerous factors, including public opinion, the legislative process, and implementation of laws. One measure of public policy outcomes, particularly in reference to social movements is social justice.

#### *Social Justice*

Social justice is intertwined with social movements and is equally challenging to define. The modern conception of social justice emerged from the early industrialization in France and Britain in the 1840s. In practice, this meant challenges could be “mounted to the power of the owners of capital, and to the dominance of the entire market system within which capitalism was embedded” (Barry, 2005, p. 5). However, social justice, in essence, is about the “treatment” of inequities of all kinds (Barry, 2005, p. 10). Social movements are often motivated by a social conflict hinging on some inequity of power structures that is met with a call for social justice.



While social movements themselves do not always include tangible systematic changes, their outcomes often do. The eventual outcomes of movements toward these changes are social justice outcomes. These outcomes can be organized on a spectrum somewhere between short term and long-term impacts. In the short-term, outcomes may include audience/public engagement, grassroots mobilization or grass-top connections and influence, promotion of diverse representations, and the building of community spaces or identify. In the medium term, social movements and public policy mechanisms may lead to public awareness of an issue, media development, improved education opportunities and resources around an issue, and more formalized interest groups. Finally, in the long-term, social movements may impact policy agenda-setting, democratic practices in the form of institutionalized processes and law, integration into social norm and general tolerance in society (specifically in reference to the norms of a particular identity group). The long-term outcomes of social movements and the public policy processes, if successful, should lead to some combination of these impacts on society, which I refer to broadly as social justice outcomes. Thus, for this work's purposes, reference to social moments broadly refers to the mobilization of political, social, and cultural mechanisms to the end of social justice outcomes.

### **Section 3: Case Study - Raizado Festival**

#### **Raizado Festival**

Raizado Festival was selected as a single in-depth case study because of its extremely unique programming. This festival offers a deeply informative opportunity to explore the relationships between the previously outlined concepts and frameworks seen in Sections 1 and 2 of this thesis. As a case study, Raizado offers rich and thick description of the complex social phenomena depicted in Figure 1. The paragraphs that follow offer descriptive analysis of the festival, its activities, outputs, and impacts. Created to honor and acknowledge Latine contributions to society, Raizado Festival features Latine leaders across the entertainment industry, culinary, non-profit, government, and media and business landscape. In addition to film screenings and movie talk backs, activities include masterclasses, panels and fireside chats, food and beverage, music performances, book readings and discussions, and fashion panels. Raizado was founded by Mónica Ramírez and officially launched in 2022 by The Latinx House, a project of Justice for Migrant Women. The Latinx House began at Sundance in 2020. It was created by Ramírez, producer and entrepreneur, Olga Segura, and producer and activist, Alexandra Martinez Kondracke. Today, the festival continues to be incubated by Justice for Migrant Women (Raizado Website).

Justice for Migrant Women (J4MW) is a national advocacy and technical assistance project founded in 2014. Founder Mónica Ramírez, a daughter of migrant farmworkers, is dedicated to defending the rights of migrant and rural women, “to live and work with dignity, free from fear of sexual violence.” The organization was, therefore, born out of a need for a

“new, bolder vision” for cultivating migrant women's rights “across borders, industries and issues” (J4MA).

The mission of Raizado Festival is, similarly, to “unite the Latine community and our allies by providing the space for artists, content creators, grassroots organizers, thought leaders, and other supporters to address issues that impact the Latine community and creative narratives that will shift culture” (Raizado Website).

### **Key Informant**

Dalissa Vargas, my key informant interviewee, has a rich background in the public and nonprofit sector. With over 25 years of service in fundraising and communications in various capacities across diverse organizations – from needs including early childhood education to, housing and home ownership and equity, etc. – she has spent her career in service of communities.

Dalissa Vargas met the founder of Justice for Migrant Women, Mónica Ramírez, as a board member of another nonprofit, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice. Vargas worked as a consultant and senior advisor for The Latinx House for nearly three years, developing strategic partnerships and sponsorships, and leading project management and content creation for “high-profile events” including Sundance Film Festival and an Oscars Brunch. Now, as the Interim Chief Development Officer, Vargas works as the facilitator of all fundraising efforts for Justice for Migrant Women, including the creation of a long-term strategy to grow the fundraising portfolio. This has led to her development of organizational management systems such as team training sessions. And, most importantly in the context of this study, Vargas implements sponsorship strategies for Raizado Festival (Ramirez).

The interview with Dalissa Vargas – hereafter referenced as (Vargas) – took place March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025, virtually and was recorded via typed notes.

### **Founding of Raizado**

Established by activist Mónica Ramírez in 2020, Raizado, as Dalissa Vargas noted, “was a response to COVID” (Vargas). Beginning to understand the pandemic and the impact it was having on migrant workers was alarming; thousands of migrant farm workers in California died, according to a report published in fall of 2020 (Raizado Website). This rate was several times higher than the national average. “Something like that doesn’t happen unless there is a systemic failure,” Vargas chillingly pointed out, “and systemic failures like that don’t happen unless people are unseen” (Vargas). To that end, she shared that, unfortunately, the idea was “born out of pain” (Vargas).

Vargas recalled that Mónica Ramírez referred to this festival as a “record-scratch moment,” a moment of resounding nature that forces people to stop and consider what we are doing (Vargas). Ramírez was motivated to change the way that Latine people are viewed and treated to prevent tragedies like those reflected in the 2020 Covid mortality report (Raizado Website).

The idea was to take community-based organizing and “turn it on its head” (Vargas). The question was, in essence, “What would it look like if we went to one of the most affluent places in the world and we centered our community,” a community which helped build and maintain Aspen to this day. Ramirez knew it required bold creativity to shift the narrative such that Latine people would not be so undervalued and unrepresented to be left unprotected in a crisis, again. Additionally, she knew it was necessary to combat false narrative that Latine people take opportunities and resources away from others to illustrate the reality that Latine people,

including thousands of farmworkers across the nation, in fact *create* resources, jobs, culture, opportunities and more (Raizado Website). The core message being, “We are here, there are needs, we are valuable, and we are contributors”. By working backwards, Ramirez decided, the goals of this work would be to make these people seen by fight against the stereotypes and flattening narratives that dehumanize Latine communities and cultivate hatred. The festival intends to dismantle the ideas that migrant workers are takers. Vargas remarked, “We are makers not takers” (Vargas).

Raizado Festival became Mónica Ramírez’s answer: the word in Portuguese meaning *deeply rooted*. Thus, Mónica Ramírez made a ten-year commitment to organize this festival because, as Vargas shared, research has shown (with this kind of event) it takes 10 years to make resonate cultural change. The commitment is for ten years. But, Vargas clarified, the hope is that the festival will continue beyond, that ten years will be enough time to solidify the festival as a wanted part of the “fabric” of how we celebrate as a community (Vargas).

In its fourth annual celebration of culture, Raizado Festival is hosted in Aspen each summer. “Why Aspen?” I pressed. Not only did Ramirez recognize that to create what she calls a “record-scratching moment”, that could capture widespread attention and achieve the necessary culture shift, the festival must be a long-standing commitment, but it must also be hosted in a place of significance and prestige. Aspen allows the festival to reach the grass-tops, the leaders, celebrities, popular activists, and others with high social capital. In other words, it had to be established in a location that would capture powerful public attention (Vargas).

### **Festival Pillars: Truth, Power, Culture**

Raizado Festival “brings together changemakers, innovators, and leaders from the United States and beyond” (Raizado Website). Aiming to be a social and political driver, the festival

highlights powerful contributions of Latine people across industries/sectors. Furthermore, the festival creates space to unite the Latine community and allies, artists, content creators, grassroots organizers, thought leaders, and supporters, “to address issues that impact the Latinx community and creative narratives that will shift culture” (Raizado Website). The guiding pillars of the festival include power, culture, and truth. These pillars are defined respectively as; Celebrating the cultural, political, and economic power of the Latine community; Celebrating the rich and diverse Latine culture, including food, music, literature, and art, as well as Culture Makers; And celebrating Truth Tellers, sharing accurate stories and experiences that represent Latine people in the US (Raizado Website).

The first pillar, power, attempts to influence and advocate for social mobilization. For example, the choice of location is heavily influenced by this pillar, as, “Ramirez selected Aspen because it is a place where thought leaders, changemakers, entrepreneurs, and political leaders convene to participate in many of Aspen’s esteemed programs” (Raizado Website). Furthermore, Ramirez points out that “Latine, Indigenous, and immigrant community members from countries around the world are the overwhelming majority of the people who sustain Aspen through their labor and make the city the vibrant location that it is today” (Raizado Website). Although the founder of the program noticed Latine communities economic/industry contributions in Aspen, she also noted the reality that their services are often invisible. Thus, the location can have powerful impacts on bringing visibility to this community. Aspen being an economically thriving city, the festival is in an apt location to leverage the power of grass-top interests and investments. With experiences such as masterclasses and networking opportunities available to patrons, the event creates space for the sharing and generation of ideas, connections, knowledge, wealth, etc.

This in mind, the program positions itself as a space for powerful cultivation of Latine contributions in Colorado and across the country.

The pillar of culture is met by the array of industries and experiences featured in Raizado Festival's programming. For instance, the program includes Latine leaders across culinary, non-profit, government, media and business landscapes, featuring music/performances, film, screenings, book readings and discussions, masterclasses, fireside chats and panels, outdoor fitness activities, a food and beverage experience, and networking opportunities (Raizado Website). When asked how Raizado Festival celebrates and promotes Latine culture, Dalissa Vargas said "it is everywhere, in every way." Particularly, she sees culture in the aesthetic and artistry which the festival brings in. The food and beverage are one of the signatures of the festival. The menu is curated from recipes from family and ancestors. For anyone who has had the privilege of attending the festival, Vargas digressed, the food is the thing that traveled the fastest; it is often one of the first things attendees mention. Remaining true to its vision, the organizers have woven traditions, symbols, food, beverage, and details down to the furniture attendees sit on, that is all reflective of the community to create an atmosphere reflective of the vibrancy of the culture. Evidently, Raizado festival combines an array of activities and opportunities to celebrate and recognize the breadth and depth of work and contributions of Latine people across sectors. (Vargas)

Truth, the last of the three pillars, highlights Raizado Festival's dedication to accurate narratives. While this pillar can be seen throughout, film is a particular special medium through which accurate narratives can be shared, with representative cast and crew as well as plot, music, setting, etc., all true to Latine experiences. The festival, Vargas informed me, is programmed with attention to a number of key selection factors:

- Atmospheric awareness of relevance and popularity of the moment
- Broader annual themes (selected by the organizing staff)
- The three operating pillars
- Availability

Anchored in the pillars of power, culture and truth, the organizers keep a running depository throughout the year where organizers collect their ideas. This list includes popular media, implementation of new or relevant policy, locally (in Colorado), or nationally, discourse that may be important to address, and other reactions to what is happening in Latine communities in the United States and around the world. There is an advisory committee which informs those topics and gives the organizers a thorough line to relevant policy and community needs in Colorado. Programming goals are then decided at the beginning of each new year followed by outreach to leaders, activists, artists, and presenters related to these programming goals/themes. By programming stories (whether in film, books, or other media/art forms), panel discussions, authentic gastronomic experiences, etc., Raizado creates space for Latine people to diversify and clarify the narratives and, in effect, decrease the flattening of their stories into stereotypes.

(Vargas)

The other layer to its pillar of truth which Raizado stands by, is the authenticity with which participants and attendees get to show up with when in spaces of community. The difference with Raizado, as opposed to other festivals of a similar nature, is that the festival is entirely invitation based, meaning that presenters, leaders, and creatives are intentionally in community with people who look like them. Vargas explained that “being in front of an audience of their people,” means “being able to put down the masks.” At the same time, the festival “defines leaders in the broadest sense,” from c-suite executives down to grassroots union leaders.



Bringing in leaders from a highly curated list across multitudes, Raizado puts people in an intimate space, who would never be in a room together otherwise. As a result, Raizado creates an environment where there is common understanding, “even if we don’t have shared experience”. And with this common understanding, “we get to show up authentically.” To be in spaces like Hollywood or corporate America, for example, “we check certain things at a door.” Vargas shared there are “masks we wear” to be in those spaces. At Raizado, “we get to put those down and be more vulnerable, more candid, because you are not doing the same calculation of repercussions.” Beyond diversifying narratives and promoting Latine representations, Raizado is a space to be in community and have authentic conversations without the filters applied in industrial spaces, and without fear of misunderstanding (Vargas).

### **Unique Contribution**

What makes Raizado different from other identity-based (Latine) festivals of this nature? What kind of gap it is filling in the industry? And how does Raizado Festival address challenges faced by the Latine community? Vargas called Raizado, “a party with a purpose,” because, to its organizers and the community, it is as much about the celebration as it is about innovation and amplification of the community. These three – amplification, celebration, and incubation and innovation – Vargas dubbed the three-legged stool. Raizado creates the space to have the conversations no one else is having, yet they always “center joy.” This celebration alongside purposeful amplification, Vargas said, is “the special sauce of the festival.”

When it comes to their programming, Raizado thinks deeply about inclusion and having socio-cultural conversations in unique ways to ensure that no one is left behind. Raizado looks for new approaches to the conversation of healthcare, for example, having previously hosted panels or art exhibitions themed around oral health, mental health, and abortion access in Latine

communities. Other examples of unique panel topics include the importance of entrepreneurship and its incorporation of AI, erasure of queer, Latino and Indigenous folks in Hollywood, as well as the importance of equitable broadband access (access to high-speed internet) in rural spaces. Furthermore, Raizado recognizes both urban and rural communities in their pursuit of inclusion. Vargas argued that solutions are not going to be found in the urban centers. So, one of their major underpinning goals is not leaving rural communities behind. Vargas explained, “compromise, in its nature, leaves people behind.” Legislation, she said, often makes a lot of compromises. Using Roe v Wade as an example, she asserts even generally well received legislation often excludes vulnerable populations. Therefore, Raizado explicitly places value on centering their conversations on the ones most impacted to ensure no one is left behind. The questions the organizers ask themselves: “What are the conversations we have to have?”, “How do we have them in ways that are different?”, and “How do we bring a different perspective?” (Vargas).

There are a lot of celebrations that are targeted at Latinidad, Vargas explained, but these events are usually siloed. They may be specific to film or some other medium, or perhaps specific to one nationality/group within the Latine community. What makes Raizado different is that it broadly embraces all Latinidad, the cultural richness in all of its multitudes. Vargas explained, “we are bringing in indigenous culture,” and “not stopping short of the Panama Canal.” Each year they ask themselves, are we representing everyone and a variety of intersections. The intention is that the artistry and film they program represents multiple legacies not a singular one. “That is how we are different,” Vargas assured me, “and how we have been successful” (Vargas).

## Short- and Long-Term Impacts

The impact of Raizado Festival is slow but purposeful, as Vargas put it. Intentionality is a part of all the programming. Raizado, meaning deeply rooted, aims to do what its name suggests: plant seeds and grow roots. While the festival may not “blossom immediately,” the goal is for it to take root over time. The amplification of the festival is apparent, however, in the partnerships that have been formed out of the festival. For instance, a partnership with a beverage brand that had networked at the festival led to sponsorship and features of the brand at a much bigger festival. The impact is seen in these kinds of “incremental wins,” said Vargas, as well as the broader stroked ones. Another example of the amplification which the festival can provide is especially evident in the film programming/screenings. When the film *Los Frikis* (2024), with its cast entirely made up of native Puerto Ricans and Cubans, went on circuit Raizado was one of the first to screen it. This expanded some of the markets for *Los Frikis* and amplifications that led to a network of other festivals (Vargas).

In terms of any quantifiable data, the festival surveys both attendees and participants separately. Speakers and participants give feedback in real time as well, some of which has led to expansion directly resulting from that feedback. Vargas said the organizers, including herself, know “it is a festival in its infancy,” but coming out of year four the organizers will finally have the data to see and interpret trends. Additionally, Vargas believes the measurable impacts are in the community itself. For instance, one thousand people showed up at the first community day. In another example Vargas offered, the rapid transit provides rides for attendees on community day, reporting more people using this service each year on this particular day. Moreover, staff, who are invited to participate in the events when they are off duty, offer positive feedback about the opportunity of getting to see the main streets in Aspen filled with Latinos. Historically, the

wealthy and majority white community it is, it would have been unheard of to see as much diversity and Latine folks as present ins Aspen throughout the festival (Vargas).

### **Looking Toward the Future**

Looking toward the future, there is a tension between place and accessibility/any ability for the festival to grow. The size, its intimacy, Vargas argued, is part of what makes Raizado special. But on the same coin, the problem of scalability is also its size. While there is only so much you can do in Aspen, Raizado's organizers do not want to lose the intimacy. Trying to reach the best of both worlds in a real time way has led them to consider live streaming or recording portions of the festival. This could create a hybrid space that could supplement that limited scalability (Vargas).

My interview with Vargas seemed as though it could not have come at a more critical and monumental time in the movement toward social justice for Latine communities, in the US. How might the festival shift its focus, activities, or needs moving forward in consideration or, perhaps, despite shifts under the new administration, I wondered. Raizado, Vargas said, is not just about Hollywood or industry, "it's about narrative," it's a "cornucopia" of culture. Now more than ever, this kind of representation, beyond the singular stories and mistruths about Latine communities, is vital (Vargas).

Another consideration of Raizado is their audience. I asked Vargas where organizers may see the festival expanding its reach to audiences beyond the Latine community. Vargas's eloquent response was that "We want to be careful . . . We don't want to justify our existence." She said that while they extend their reach via communications on their social medias, "non-Latine audiences are not our audience," because Raizado is, at its core, "about validating our contributions." The festival is a reminder for the community that, "the world is lying" and it is

“trying to criminalize us.” Raizado aims to combat and speak out against dangerous and discouraging stereotyping. Many of the participants and audience members may be singular in their position within their field, which can lead to a sense of imposter-syndrome. To know that there are others just like them and to be “re-grounded” in this truth is powerful. This, Vargas said, allows them to carry back/hold onto that truth in the spaces where they are singular. Ultimately, she concluded, Raizado is about “celebrating the legacies left to us” and exploring what legacies “we seek to leave behind” (Vargas).

## **Analysis**

### *An Identity-Based Film Festival*

While Raizado and the findings of this case study may not directly answer my research questions, this study reveals interesting context as well as a series of relevant lessons. For one, the case study maps onto my model outline throughout Sections 1 and 2, primarily because it is an effective example of what Cindy Hing-Yuk Wong, in *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*, describes as a film festivals’ ability to “take the pulse,” not only of cinema once a year, but of national leadership and community contributions. Raizado proves to “gather the movers and shakers of the profession in one place so they can exchange ideas, show each other their movies, and do business.” They reflect, subvert, and deeply influence the hierarchy of films, their content, and language, as well as that of national cinemas (Wong, 2011, p. 1). Although Raizado is a more general festival, the same kind of subversion of norms and hierarchy can be applied to the themes and discourse opened by the panels and arts programmed for Raizado, including, in particular, by its film screenings. More than just “doing business,” grass-top leaders can exchange ideas and develop actionable steps toward collective action when in community at Raizado. Thus, there is tremendous opportunity for the arts, particularly film, to

be studied as a vehicle for cultural expressions, community cohesion, and public policy advocacy (Bennett & Woodward, 2014, p. 1960-1991; Cundy, 2016, p. 15; Gibson & Christopher, 2009, p. 6; Grunwell, 2008, p. 201-210; Tesser, 1988, p. 441-449; Wong, 2011, p. 1-228). As explored in Section 1 of this thesis, film mediates what people believe and value while festivals have the capacity to help develop community cohesion and expression of shared values, ideology, and identities (Gibson & Christopher, 2009, p. 6; Tesser, 1988, p. 441-449). Showcasing works *and ideas* on the periphery (of the dominant/mainstream), this case is an example of how the boundaries of popular art and culture can be influenced by each other. Raizado exemplifies an effective identity-based festival (as I outline them Section 1), indeed calling out normative discourse and elevating voices working toward shifts in tolerance within popular culture through the works the festival elects to highlight.

#### *Within the Latine Social Movement(s)*

It must be noted that the bigger picture of Latine social movements and history, particularly in the United States, goes beyond the scope of this study. And the exact stage in the life cycle (see Figure 6) in which various Latine movements may be classified is also beyond the scope of this research. However, the social conflicts within the greater Latine justice movement which Raizado explores fall into several typologies. They seem to follow the models of similar civil, indigenous, and worker rights movements. And resistance and resolutions to these conflicts are in pursuit of a collective interest, a reconstruction of a socio-political identity, and the protection and security of rights for Latine communities. These qualities, as detailed in Section 2, are all characteristic of social movements. Although the Latine social movements and history fall outside of the lens of this study, as I argue in this study, collective action toward Latine social justice can be seen as a component of a broader social movement.

The reactive, timely nature of Raizado is another feature making it an apt case study for this research. Many of the issues emerging in the media over the course of the year make it into the festival's programming and discourse. The model for the lifecycle of a social movement (see Figure 6) can be used in this case to view emerging issues and the community's response. Thus, the timeliness of the festival in covering emergent issues can be mapped onto some stage between the emergence and coalescence of a social movement.

### *Advocacy at Raizado*

Raizado Festival centers joy and celebrations of culture; however, the underpinning advocacy of the festival is, nonetheless, evident. Raizado's advocacy can be categorized as active because it is deeply intentional. Figure 8, Adapted from Figure 17.1: Stages of the Public Policy Process (McCormick, et al., 2022, p. 309), illustrates that public policy advocacy falls between agenda setting and policy formulation. Most festivals of this nature, as I argue in Section 2, can be accurately mapped onto the public policy process as a kind of public policy advocacy.

Raizado is an interesting case. Instead of fitting somewhere between agenda setting and policy formulation, I find it falls into some earlier stage of community development *before* the public policy process is set into motion. Unlike other identity-based festivals, aiming to educate others and move agendas into action in the form of policy-writing, Raizado is focused inward. The festival is a reaction to divisive media, a counter-mainstream working to connect and build community across grassroots to grass-tops. Raizado creates a space for some of the work of problem identification and agenda defining to be done within the community.

The work of Raizado is to validate people in their experience, empower Latine leaders in their individual spaces, and unite communities through shared identity and culture. Leveraging high-profile individuals to take supportive action, Raizado's grass-tops approach to advocacy

engages personal and political connections to individuals with high social capital while also engaging local Latine community members (Hart, 2005, p. 120). That is precisely what makes Raizado so unique. The organizers are not interested in directly targeting/reaching others. To my surprise, the permeation of humanizing narratives through the direct education of their audiences is not the goal. For Raizado festival, the Latine community is their audience, and the festival is a celebration of culture, amplifying the work and contributions of participants and attendees. Festivals like this one are opportunities to share and connect over artistic narrative and storytelling and cultural expression. Film is an especially influential medium in revealing each of these things (Bennett & Woodward, 2014 p. 11-26; Cundy, 2016, p. 15; Gibson & Christopher, 2009, p. 6; Grunwell, 2008, p. 201-210; Tesser, 1988, p. 441-449; Wong, 2011, p. 1-228). By affirming them in their work, Raizado can (re)ignite leaders in the Latine community. Movements must have a strengthened, relatively unified community in place to advocate and take steps toward policy. Raizado reveals how imperative it is for a marginalized group, even without shared experiences, to become a cohesive voice with shared identify and shared agenda.

#### *Outcomes (Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term)*

My hypothesis when beginning this study included predicted short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes of identity-based film festivals as they contribute to social justice (see Figure 1). In the short-term, these include audience engagement, grass-top connections, promotion of diverse representations, and building community spaces and identity. In the medium-term, public awareness, media development, improved education opportunities and resources, and interest groups. And in the long-term, I hypothesized policy agenda-setting, democratic practices, integration, and tolerance all being outcomes of activities occurring within and inspired by identity-based film festivals.



In the case of Raizado, my projected short-term impacts are consistent with the qualitative responses I received from Vargas in our interview (albeit the extent to which this can be argued is limited). The medium- and long-term impacts are more difficult to analyze because the festival is still in its infancy. However, since the festival is inwardly-/community-focused, some of the outward focused outcomes/impacts I projected may not be consistent with the actual future outcomes of Raizado. Additionally, it is important note that these findings are based on reported outcomes from a singular source on a singular festival, so findings from this study may not be generalizable to other similar festivals.

### *The Mission and Vision*

Raizado Festival’s mission is to “unite the Latine community and our allies by providing the space for artists, content creators, grassroots organizers, thought leaders, and other supporters to address issues that impact the Latine community and creative narratives that will shift culture.” Providing opportunity to showcase their work and connect over current issues, Raizado allows the Latine community to recognize mainstream discourse and counter it. Not only is it an amplification and celebration of Latine culture, political and economic power, and their work and contributions, but a space for “incubation and innovation” (Vargas). By sharing and incubating truths with each other, Raizado accurately represents Latine people in the US. This innovative celebration of culture and power in community is recharging and empowering participants and attendees to continue in their work as changemakers in their fields and spaces. Therefore, the cultural shift that Raizado envisions, is not one of blooming community uprising or coordinated protest/demonstration. Rather, Raizado is working within the Latine community to celebrate and empower each other in their contributions.

## **Section 4: Summary of the Study**

In the preceding sections of this thesis, I proposed a framework which suggests how identity-based film festivals may be mapped onto the public policy process and can, therefore, be a component of the mechanisms which result in social justice outcomes. My methods took a two-fold approach: a literature review and case study including an in-depth key-informant interview. The defining factors, historical context, typology, relevant concepts, and impacts and outcomes of identity-based festivals (with particular focus on film) and social movements and public policy advocacy made up Sections 1 and 2 of the study respectively. Beyond synthesizing the literature, this qualitative study analyzed Raizado Festival as a case study, exemplifying a unique identity-based festival. A conceptual framework of the relationship between both film festivals and social movements with identity at their focal point was articulated.

The central question of this study was: Can identity-based (film) festivals impact public policy advocacy to lead to social justice outcomes? My supporting questions were: What is the purpose of identity-based film festivals? And what kinds of public policy advocacy supports progress of identity-focused social movements?

### **Findings and Recommendations**

The central findings of this study are threefold, and are framed by a focus on purpose, mechanism, and opportunity.

#### *1. Purpose*

Identity-based film festivals are a reaction to and a symptom of the current discourse and socio-political climate with the purpose of acknowledgement and amplification.

In contrast to other festivals, geared toward entertainment, celebration, film/arts circulation, and industry support, identity-based festivals move beyond celebration; they are critical. Identity-based film festivals are expressive of our social condition; they are an output of current events and discourse. Meanwhile, they can make a social statement, mediate the discourse, question and solidify identities, and more. Beyond cultural production and celebration, identity-based (film) festivals are intended to recognize and discuss social conflict, while creating collective space to imagine solutions.

Research may want to further develop my hypothesis that festivals are a reaction to and a symptom of the socio-political climate by expanding the scope beyond review of existing literature and an individual case study. Avenues for future research may specifically include mapping the history of the Latine social justice movement(s) onto models such as the life cycle of social movements and analysis of this movement within the theoretical frameworks which I define and offer background for in Section 2 of my literature review. From a professional practice perspective, festival programmers will want to consider current events and public discourse to best situate their festival and the selected works/various screenings with acknowledgement and amplification at the forefront.

## *2. Mechanism*

Public policy advocacy supporting the progress of social movement can look differently dependent on the mission and scope of the activists.

Policy is driven by ideas, so the process of policymaking can be understood as a competition between ideas. Kingdon's Three Streams Metaphor is used in this study to define window of opportunity for new policy, as the "problem" stream, "policy" stream, and "politics" stream converge (see Figure 9). This convergence may be triggered by changes in problem

understanding, political shifts, or focusing events that draw attention to specific issues.

Advocacy, which can be active, covert, or inadvertent, is the process of influencing the public and decision-makers to impact the public policy process. In other words, it is the act of supporting, defending, opposing, or arguing for a policy. Advocacy can be understood to be situated between agenda-setting and policy formulation (see Figure 8). With the Three Streams in mind, depending on the needs of the problem and the political climate, advocacy can be intended to spur societal change by educating the public, shifting public interests and opinion, and/or influencing public-makers. Public policy advocacy supports social movements and intended social justice outcomes by bridging a gap between movement goals and policy change. Public policy advocacy not only provides a means of translating goals into concrete, actionable changes through legislation and policy reform but raises awareness, mobilizes supporters, and engages decision-makers as well. By shaping public policy to reflect contemporary socio-cultural values, social movements can begin to address larger social issues.

In the case of Raizado, instead of fitting somewhere between agenda setting and policy formulation as I hypothesized, I find the festival falls into an earlier stage of community development *before* the public policy process is set into motion. Unlike other identity-based festivals which aim to educate others (perhaps as a kind of intervention or transmission mechanism) to move agendas into action in the form of policy-writing, Raizado is focused inward. Where other festivals may fit into the stage of advocacy (see Figure 8), Raizado festival is perhaps an outlier, creating a space for problem identification and agenda-defining within the community to result in ideational change mechanisms going forward.

There remain many avenues for research surrounding my hypothesis and findings, which should be further explored through more expansive research in the field, moving beyond singular

case studies. More specifically, these findings provide fruitful space for additional investigation into other identity-based festivals within different stages of the public policy process and within identifiable and varied stages of the life cycle of a given social movement. Researchers will want to think about avenues for future research which include more quantitative methods. From a practice perspective, leaders, community organizers, and programmers will want to take this research into consideration and perhaps concretely understand where their work, event, targets, and mission can be contextualized within the public policy process and the life cycle of the given social movement they operate within. This may be something programmers/event directors may strategically aim to make clear to their stakeholders and attendees for the purposes of buy-in and continued success.

### *3. Opportunity*

An opportunity exists for identity-based (film) festivals to impact public policy advocacy to support social movements.

In this study, I proposed a framework which suggests identity-based (film) festivals can be situated under the umbrella of social movements within the public policy process either for public-facing advocacy to the end of agenda-setting (what I expected to find in my case study) or as a mechanism for community and identity building (in the case of Raizado). Festivals can be a space for works to be celebrated, discourse around social conflict to be mediated, and connections to be made. This study finds that identity-based (film) festivals have the potential to cultivate audience engagement and grass-top connections, promote diverse representations, and build community spaces and group identity. In other words, as a component of either community building and problem identification, or as a form of public policy advocacy following agenda-

setting, identity-based (film) festivals can be dedicated space for cultural shift in the early stages of the public policy process.

This study opens greater avenues for research regarding how cultural arts and their modes of exhibition (e.g. festivals) may be theoretically situated in the public policy process toward social justice outcomes. Identity-based (film) festivals may want to consider their intended outcomes and indirect impacts on social movements they address. Organizers and programmers of these events may also ponder how this research may have implications in the context of opportunity for more direct and intentional impacts (e.g. through community partnerships and development, think tanks and panels which discuss the underlying themes of the exhibited works, etc.).

## **Conclusion**

Finally, this thesis aimed to examine the possibility of the arts, specifically film, and their exhibitions playing a role in positive social outcomes. The questions my research stemmed from concerned whether film festivals are having consequential effect on social movements, a topic on which it seems little research had been done. I was motivated by my curiosity around if and how these events could be contributing to tangible policy change by way of advocacy. Moreover, I was concerned with what point(s) within the public policy process and social movement life cycle that festivals may fit into. Ultimately, I wondered about their impact.

In the preceding sections of this thesis, I proposed a framework which suggests how identity-based film festivals may be mapped onto the public policy process and can be a component of the mechanisms resulting in social justice outcomes. My central question surrounded whether identity-based (film) festivals impact public policy advocacy can lead to social justice outcomes. This, I hypothesized would be possible, although indirectly. My hypothesis holds true, with some stipulations. My findings were framed by purpose, mechanism,

and opportunity. They clearly addressed the main research question. I found that identity-based (film) festivals can be a dedicated space for cultural shift in the early stages of the public policy process. They can be such, I argued, either as a form of public policy advocacy after agenda-setting, or as a component of community building and problem identification – an additional, unexpected model. I argued that impacts on the early stages of the public policy process can translate social movements' goals into actionable changes that can have long term social justice outcomes.

### **Significance**

Amid loss of support for and even the aggressive dissolution of organized efforts related to DEI at a national level, the continuous marginalization of, and the implementation of harmful policy aimed at Latine populations in the US, this kind of research is becoming more valuable every day. Even more important than continued research is *interpretation* of our research and, most of all, turning our findings into action. Action at the community, grassroots level while also leveraging grass-top interest and investment is invaluable in the contemporary hegemony and the socio-politically polarizing discourse which the US has witnessed become ever-more prevalent over the last few months.

Looking at identity-based festivals can be a meaningful facet of a greater body of intersectional research on social justice outcomes. This kind of research can contribute to an intervention toolkit for people in public policy and planning spheres to better understand public discourse in this forum. Furthermore, this research can be used within festival circuits to better understand the larger dynamics and processes in which festivals can be understood or situated.

Ultimately, this work could be expanded upon and used as a tool to support the work of people across industries and sectors who care deeply about social justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion of those who may otherwise be left behind.



## Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

### Recruitment Letter

Date

Name

Address

City/State/Zip

Dear <POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEE>

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Mechanisms for Social Justice Outcomes at the Intersections of Public Policy Advocacy and Identity-based Festivals*, conducted by Sophia Sienkiewicz from the University of Oregon's Clark Honors College Undergraduate Thesis Program. The purpose of this study is to determine potential public policy mechanisms intersecting with identity-based (film) festivals that may lead to social justice outcomes.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your leadership position with Raizado and your experiences with and expertise pertinent to social and cultural advocacy for Latine populations. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in a remote interview, lasting approximately one hour, in winter of 2025. If you wish, interview questions will be provided beforehand for your consideration. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use a Zoom recording for transcription

and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone call or email.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 971-225-8255 or [ssienkie@uoregon.edu](mailto:ssienkie@uoregon.edu).

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I will follow up with you soon by email to answer any questions you might have and to hopefully schedule a time to meet for an interview.

Sincerely,

Sophia Sienkiewicz  
Undergraduate Student  
Clark Honors College, University of Oregon

## **Appendix B: Consent Form**

### **Consent Form**

Research Protocol Number: STUDY00001608

### **Mechanisms for Social Justice Outcomes at the Intersections of Public Policy Advocacy and Identity-based Festivals**

Sophia Sienkiewicz, Principal Investigator  
Clark Honors College Thesis  
School of Planning, Public Policy and Management  
University of Oregon

You are invited to participate in a research project titled *Mechanisms for Social Justice Outcomes at the Intersections of Public Policy Advocacy and Identity-based Festivals*, conducted by Sophia Sienkiewicz from the University of Oregon's School of Planning, Public Policy and Management. The purpose of this study is to determine potential public policy mechanisms intersecting with identity-based festivals that may lead to social justice outcomes.

In this phenomenological study the purpose of identity-based (film) festivals and public policy advocacy will be explored. By synthesizing literature surrounding film festivals, social movements, and social justice outcomes, this qualitative study will review the existing literature and analyze an in-depth case study of an existing film festival. A conceptual framework of the relationship between both (film) festivals and social movements with identity at their focal point will be articulated. Ultimately, I intend for the result of this study to open greater avenues for research regarding how the arts and its modes of exhibition may be employed toward social justice outcomes.

You were selected to participate in this study because of your position with Raizado Festival, and your experiences with social and cultural advocacy for Latine populations. If you decide to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in a remote interview, lasting approximately one hour, in winter 2024/25. In addition to taking handwritten notes, with your permission, I will use a Zoom video recording for transcription and validation purposes. You may also be asked to provide follow-up information through phone call or email.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will be carefully and securely maintained. All research records will be stored on a password-protected computer. The Zoom video recording will be downloaded to a password-protected file. Research records will be retained through completion of this research project for validation purposes and shortly past publication of the thesis research project; research records will be destroyed shortly after completion of the study. Only the principal investigator and the faculty research adviser will have access to these records.

There are minimal risks (loss of privacy and/or breach of confidentiality) associated with participating in this study. To maintain credibility of the research, I intend to identify participants and use quotes from participants in the final publication. Your consent to participate in this interview, as indicated below, demonstrates your willingness to have your name and title used in any resulting documents and publications and to relinquish confidentiality. You will have the opportunity, if you wish, to review and quotes and paraphrasing of your statements prior to publication. It may be advisable to obtain permission to participate in this interview to avoid potential social or economic risks related to speaking as a representative of your place of work.

Your participation is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

I anticipate that the results of this research project will be of value to the cultural sector and invite further avenues for research on the social impacts and implications of identity-based festivals. However, I cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 971-225-8255 or [ssienkie@uoregon.edu](mailto:ssienkie@uoregon.edu), or Professor Patricia Lambert at [pdewey@uoregon.edu](mailto:pdewey@uoregon.edu). Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Office for Research Compliance Services, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403, (541) 346-2510.

Please read and initial the following statements to indicate your consent. Since interviewees differ in their wishes for information to be collected during the interview and in reviewing the information before publication, please specify your understandings and preferences in the list below:

\_\_\_\_\_ I understand that I will be identified as a participant in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of note taking during my interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of Zoom video recording during my interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the potential use of quotations from the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the use of information I provide regarding the organization with which I am associated.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to have the opportunity to review and possibly revise my comments and the information that I provide prior to these data appearing in the final version of any publications that may result from this study. I understand that the principal investigator will send me by email a copy of all of the quotes and paraphrases that are directly attributable to me, and that I will have the opportunity to approve and/or revise these statements by a clearly defined deadline.

Your oral consent indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. You have been given a copy of this letter to keep.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agree: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your interest and participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Sophia Sienkiewicz  
Undergraduate Student

School of Planning, Public Policy and Management

Clark Honors College, University of Oregon

971-225-8255

[ssienkie@uoregon.edu](mailto:ssienkie@uoregon.edu)

## Appendix C: Research Design and Instruments

### Research Design and Instruments

Interview Protocol

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Case Study:

Data ID:

Key Descriptor:

Date:

Interview Location:

Interviewee Details:

Consent:  Oral  Video Recording  OK to Quote

Notes on Interview Context:

Key Points:

CODING

INFORMATION

NOTES

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*Semi-Structured Interview Questions:*

*Programming*

How does Raizado Festival celebrate and promote Latine culture within its programs?

How does Raizado Festival address challenges faced by the Latine community?

What are the processes involved in curating and programming for Raizado Festival? Logistically, how do you program, create your lists and make your selections?

*Social Movement Influence*

How does Raizado Festival influence movement toward justice for Latine peoples?

How would you describe the gap you see Raizado Festival, and the Raizado Festival filling?

*Feedback*

How does Raizado Festival gather feedback from its participants and community members?

*Impact*

What do you believe are the measurable impacts of Raizado Festival?

Why is it important to get these films, creators, and activists in front of audiences?

*Future*

What are some areas where you believe Raizado Festival can expand its reach?

What do you see for the future of Raizado Festival and Justice for Migrant Women?

How do you see Raizado Festival (and the national identity-based festival landscape in general) evolving in the future?

Data Collection Sheet for Document Analysis

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Case Study:

Data ID:

Key Descriptor:

Date:

Document Location:

Document Type:  Report, Article, Book etc.  Government Document,

Public Policy  Arts Management Instructional Materials  Cultural Statistic

Arts Organizations' Written Materials  Job Descriptions  Online

Information  Notes  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*Reference Citation:*

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CODING

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## **Appendix D: Key-Informant Interview Follow-up**

Hello Dalissa,

Thank you again for such an informative interview. It was such a delight to learn from you and hear about your experiences.

Attached are the direct quotes and paraphrase attributed to you in my thesis. Please be so kind as to let me know if you would like to have any changes made to these by Wednesday April 30th.

If I do not hear from you by then, I will understand this to mean you approve of all these statements as they are written in this documented.

Thank you so much for your input.

Warmly,

Sophia

Sophia Sienkiewicz

Undergraduate Student

Clark Honors College, University of Oregon

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