

Article

The Impact of Local Food Festivals on Rural Areas' Development

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Abstract: The importance of food festivals in the functioning of local rural areas is manifested in the construction of a sense of community and place. However, each stakeholder group perceives the impact of such festivals differently. The literature lacks a comprehensive approach to this issue. The main aim of this research is, thus, to identify how particular groups of stakeholders perceive the impact of a local food festival on the development of a rural area. The research was conducted at a small local food festival in Poland in July 2020. Individual groups of stakeholders (organizers, vendors and visitors) were asked to assess the impact of the festival on the development of the rural area. This research was conducted in three main stages using various research tools. In the first stage, an in-depth interview was conducted with the festival's organizers. In the second stage, a survey, via a questionnaire, was conducted with visitors. In the third stage, semi-structured interviews were held with vendors. Surveys and interviews were carried out using the paper-and-pencil interview (PAPI) method. Our results indicate that interest in the impact of festivals on rural development decreases with distance. That is, the sooner such effects are visible, the more positive they are perceived. Moreover, visitors (on vacation) perceive a festival's impact more positively than vendors (at work).

Keywords: food festival; rural area development; festival impact; sustainability



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1. Introduction

Food is increasingly becoming an essential component of culinary tourism, mainly due to its significant potential to increase tourism sustainability, enhance the authenticity of a place, strengthen a local economy and provide environmentally friendly infrastructure [1]. Thus, food is a “cultural benchmark” that contains unique information about the products and culture in the geographic destination where it originates [2]. Along with the growing popularity of culinary tourism, there has been an increase in the number of food festivals [3].

Lewis [4] defines food festivals as popular, food-centered events—a social phenomenon found in nearly all human cultures. Food festivals affect local development in a broad sense, contributing to the sustainability of this development, as well as to increasing food security [5,6]. In terms of sustainable development, food festivals support all three pillars: they are a place to promote green practices [7], support local entrepreneurship and economy [8], as well as social sustainability [9,10]. Festivals play an important role in the life of a community by building social capital through a sense of community and place [11–14]. Food festivals provide an opportunity to promote high-quality local food products that are sourced or produced near the festivals' location [15]. They also show the cultural importance of belonging to their nearest town or larger region [16]. These festivals can benefit both tourists and local people, who often live in rural areas [15]. According to Albala [16], the main goal of most food festivals is to provide communities with opportunities to meet and interact, creating a bond between participants. Zhang [17], and Mohi and Wong [18] emphasize that food festivals are always an opportunity for visitors to enjoy local cuisine and experience local culture at the same time. Moreover, as Hall and Sharples [19] emphasize, participation in food festivals represents the desire to experience a certain type of food

or product in a certain region. Due to the direct relationship with food, the unique role of festivals contributes to increasing broadly understood food security [20]. This is possible in various ways. First, vendors and food producers often base their production on their own or local raw materials, ensuring high quality [15,21]. Additionally, the offered products are usually manufactured based on traditional, proven recipes [22]. This makes the food they offer safer and healthier than that of supermarkets. In addition, shortening the food supply chain contributes to improving food security [23,24].

Festivals can provide many benefits, not only to participants, but also to the places where they are organized, especially rural areas [14,25]. Several groups of stakeholders take part in food festivals, mainly organizers, vendors and visitors [14,26–28]. In the context of food festivals, visitors are the most frequently studied group [15,29–35]. Organizers [8,29,36] and vendors appear in research much less frequently [2,11,37]—often only in the background, not as research subjects. There is no common approach to covering the various groups of stakeholders at food festivals. Kwiatkowski et al. [14] indicate the need for research combining the perception of the impact of festivals by participants, residents and organizers more comprehensively.

According to Derrett [13], sense of place may differ depending on the person and time. In addition, food festivals indisputably influence the development opportunities of rural areas. This impact is assessed positively and is often referred to as the main driving force, especially in peripheral areas [8,14,15,38]. Folgado-Fernández et al. [15] emphasize that there is still a lack of studies in the literature on the effects of small festivals, which play an important role at the local level. Hjalager and Kwiatkowski [8] emphasize that an important direction of research to be undertaken in this area is to examine the mechanisms of involvement, perception, as well as the prospects for business and community, whereas Kwiatkowski et al. [14] raise the question for future researchers of whether the participants in and organizers of rural festivals suffer from entirely unrealistic illusions about their positive impact on the rural location. In particular, as emphasized by Hjalager and Kwiatkowski [8], this impact is perceived differently by stakeholders—usually, groups closely related to the festival have a higher rating than people not directly related to the festival. Hence, there is still a need for further comprehensive research on the perception of the impact of food festivals on the development of rural areas. As Park and Widyanta [39] point out, research into the food landscape should also benefit practitioners.

Therefore, this study is an attempt to fill this research gap with a comprehensive approach to a food festival's impact on local development in relation to all stakeholder groups. That is, this study is an attempt to answer the following research questions:

Q1. How do individual groups of stakeholders (organizers, vendors, visitors) perceive the impact of festivals on the development of rural areas?

Q2. What factors drive the convergence or divergence of different perceptions on the impact of festivals?

The main research goal is, thus, to identify how particular groups of stakeholders perceive the impact of a local food festival on the development of their rural area.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 contains a literature review. Section 3 presents the research methods and study context. Section 4 describes the characteristics of the research groups (organizers, vendors and visitors). Section 5 presents the research results. Section 6 includes a discussion of the results. Finally, Section 7 elaborates the study's conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Festivals Impact

Regardless of the type of event or festival, its organization is usually associated with benefits for the place, e.g., by positively influencing its image [40,41]. There are many examples of research in the literature related to the impact of festivals on host areas, including rural development. These studies concern both the economic and social spheres

of development, including economy and entrepreneurship, as well as local community. Increasingly, these results relate to sustainable development.

Undoubtedly, a local festival provides an opportunity to promote and develop entrepreneurship in rural areas. Festivals are an opportunity for business entrepreneurs to test and exhibit products and are a platform to gain initial access to the market [8]. In terms of food festivals, Einarsen and Mykletun [42] indicate that their success depends on embedding in a network of institutions and organizations that produces food and meals based on local traditions and local products. From this perspective, local food is a factor that can increase local tourism [43] because, as emphasized by Özdemir and Seyitoglu [44], food is considered an important tourist resource. A common purpose of tourists traveling to a given place is to learn about the real life of the minority population and to experience the authentic culture of the destination, an important part of which is tasting local dishes [45]. Egresi and Kara [46] note that tourists participating in small, local festivals spend money that affects local economies. While such an impact is limited, small festivals matter, for example, as tourist attractions. This is important because positive emotions at a food festival may affect visitors' later purchasing decisions, which is socially and economically beneficial [47]. Additionally, Folgado-Fernández et al. [15] emphasize that the impact of small festivals is important for local economies, not only for the tourism sector, but also for the consumption of local products. In addition, as small food festivals are important for the sustainable positioning of destinations, it is worth including them in the communication campaigns of these places. Thus, festivals can be strategically used to maintain, create and rediscover rural resources; empower local people; promote rural values; and perpetuate or rediscover somewhat forgotten rural traditions and customs [14]. The use of local food as a means of profiling rural areas is becoming commonplace. From this perspective, local food festivals help to market local resources [29].

It is also worth emphasizing the social impact of food festivals. According to de Jong and Varley [9], a local food festival can be a way to increase social sustainability, as these events are conducive to building social bonds between festival participants and the local community [48]. Research by Janiszewska et al. [11] also confirms that food festivals are relational platforms in which numerous relationships are built. However, there is great heterogeneity in the disclosed compounds, which vary in motivation, sequence, intensity and duration. Baptista Alves et al. [49] emphasize that while small food festivals have both positive economic and social effects, the latter extend beyond the economic benefits. In terms of the broadly understood social effects of local festivals, it is worth mentioning that they strengthen sustainable social development, due to the relationships that are built between various social groups living in the same area [9]. The importance of tradition and culture is also emphasized—not only locally, but also nationally [50]. The sociocultural needs that encourage rural communities to organize culinary festivals have also been investigated [51]. These various aspects of a festival's impact on rural areas result from the fact that each festival is at once a kind of ecosystem, environment, connecting business, society and culture that also comprises many other elements [8].

2.2. Classification of Festivals Impact and Functions

Arcodia and Whitford [12] indicate the functions of festivals by emphasizing that they are economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental. This approach refers to the concept of sustainable development. The economic function covers generating income and new jobs, as well as promoting places. This function combines economic impact with marketing impact. The political function means conducting political actions at festivals, and this function can be combined with the promotion of the place. The socio-cultural function is related to consolidation within the local community and promotion culture. This is a particularly important function in relation to the local community. Moreover, it should be emphasized that increasing attention is being paid to the environmental function, which covers ecological campaigns at festivals.

Moscardo [25] refers to the broadly understood positive festivals impact in regional location, distinguishing several categories: economic impact, tourism impact, physical impact, sociocultural impact, psychological impact and role in regional community development. The economic impact generally covers additional influences and employment opportunities. Festivals can contribute to the development of entrepreneurship and improvement of the income situation in the local context. The tourist impact alludes to improving the image of the place and extending the tourist season. Festivals can enrich the tourist attractions of the area where they are organized. The physical impact comes with new facilities and infrastructure, as well as the regeneration of rundown areas; this type of impact is particularly important for less developed areas. The sociocultural impact covers social opportunities for residents and the improvement of social networks; this enables the involvement of the local community. The psychological impact relates to strengthening the sense of community, pride and excitement on the spot. Together with the sociocultural impact, it enables building human and social capital. The role in regional community development means increasing the skills of volunteers and participants, and developing partnerships and alliances, which also positively affects social capital.

Kwiatkowski et al. [14] identified several dimensions of a festival's impact on rural areas: conservation, consolidation, transformation, reinvention, manifestation and attraction. Conservation refers to keeping old rural traditions and culture and is one of the more important roles of food festivals, especially in rural areas. Consolidation covers the integration of local community members. This helps to achieve common goals and build social capital. Transformation refers to 'transplanting' a number of urban values and helps to modernize rural areas as a place to live. Reinvention covers converting traditions, symbols and habits into new formats; thanks to this, traditions, symbols and habits move closer to festival stakeholders, including the residents of rural areas. Manifestation covers the promotional role of festivals, which is an informative role. Finally, attraction means that food festivals are a reason to visit rural locations; therefore, festivals can be a pull factor.

2.3. Stakeholders Perception of Festivals Impact

It is worth emphasizing that each group of festival stakeholders perceives the impact of a festival and its local development opportunities differently. According to Cudny et al. [52], local residents consider local festivals important, as they have a positive impact on the image of their locale. Residents often participate in festivals, considering them an interesting way to spend their free time. Moreover, the participation of residents in local festivals may affect their well-being and quality of life; therefore, they pay attention to the benefits of festivals [53].

In the context of a festival's impact on the behavior of its participants, Mason and Paggiaro [30] indicate three fundamental dimensions of festival in culinary tourism: food, fun and comfort. That is, visitors, especially tourists, treat a festival as an attraction and may not focus on the benefits of the venue [21]. However, it should be emphasized that the success of a festival is mainly measured by the number of tourists it attracts [18]. Furthermore, many research results indicate that satisfaction with a festival and its quality often results in loyalty to the festival [31,42,54–58]. The loyalty of the participants is crucial, as it causes the participants to make repeat visits to the festival. Such participants are an asset because they more often express themselves positively about the festival than occasional participants and are a positive reference group [58–61].

According to Blichfeldt and Halkier [29], festival organizers are aware of the positive impact of their food festival on development opportunities in rural areas. In the organizers' view, they are a way to attract tourists and (potentially) residents, as well as to improve the brand of the place. Alves et al. [36] also indicate a positive perception among festival organizers on increasing employment and improving the image of both their festival and its region. Gursoy et al. [62] emphasize that, in addition to the socio-economic benefits of a festival, its organizers are aware of its costs—not only economic, but also social.

A specific group of stakeholders at any food festival comprises vendors, craftsmen and food producers. For this group, festivals are primarily places to sell their products and share their passions [39,63,64]. Therefore, they are less sensitive to the development of the host area unless they represent a local business—then, such benefits apply to them directly [18].

3. Materials and Methods

This research entailed a case study approach. The implementation of the research assumptions required an in-depth exploration of stakeholders' perspectives on the impact of a local food festival. Based on a detailed description of the selected festival, a detailed analysis was carried out, taking into account all stakeholder groups. Our case study considers both quantitative and qualitative data [65,66].

The data were collected at the 5th edition of the Edible Flowers Festival in Dobrzyca (11 and 12 July 2020), which was organized by the company "Hortulus". The village of Dobrzyca is in Western Pomerania, 12 km (7 miles) south of the Baltic Sea coast. The region of Western Pomerania is characterized by a relatively low population density, with its largest cities being Szczecin and Koszalin. Outside its urban areas, the area is characterized by farmland dotted with numerous lakes, forests and small towns. The Culinary Festival of Edible Flowers is a cyclical event held yearly in the Hortulus Spectabilis Gardens in Dobrzyca. The festival makes for a suitable case study of the impact of the food festival on rural development, as it represents a typical (by size, scope and reach) event hosted in rural areas in Northern Poland.

This festival takes place in the company's gardens (the company's daily exhibits include stalls selling plants, and the possibility of paid visits to themed gardens and themed festivals). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival was held in a limited form (fewer vendors and fewer visitors). As Hjalager and Kwiatkowski [8] observed, the rural festival has a number of functions. The festival in Dobrzyca is an example of this: it promotes the place where it is held and the company that oversees it; enables the sale of local and regional food products; connects enthusiasts of cooking and healthy food; and is at once a tourist attraction for visitors and an opportunity for entertainment and recreation for the local population. Hence, it creates an opportunity for the integration of the local community.

Before the empirical research, based on the literature review and while taking into account the specificities of the studied festival, our own questionnaire was developed. We asked what—in the opinion of the respondents—benefits for the researched rural areas stem from the organization of the food festival. The following categories of festival impact on rural areas were included: economic development (business development, income, employment); culture and tradition (return to culinary traditions, care for local heritage, local products promotion); social integration (increased integration, locals involvement, residents cooperation); character of the place (uniqueness, promotion, identity enhancement); and tourism and recreation (creating a tourist attraction, tourist influx, recreation for locals). The answers included a Likert scale.

According to their own experiences and the literature review, it was assumed that each group of stakeholders would perceive the impact of the festival differently. Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested (Figure 1):

- H1.** *Locals are interested in local development and perceive a festival's impact the most positively.*
- H2.** *Tourists are rather neutral regarding local development but perceive a festival's impact in rather positive terms, especially those categories they can benefit from.*
- H3.** *Organizers are interested in local development and perceive a festival's impact positively (but less than locals)—especially in relation to a cyclical festival (because it works to the benefit of the festival).*

H3.1. Unless the organizer is a local, an organizer perceives a festival's impact in the same way as locals (H1).

H4. Vendors are rather neutral regarding local development and perceive a festival's impact in rather neutral terms.

H4.1. Unless the vendor is a local, a vendor perceives a festival's impact in the same way as locals (H1).

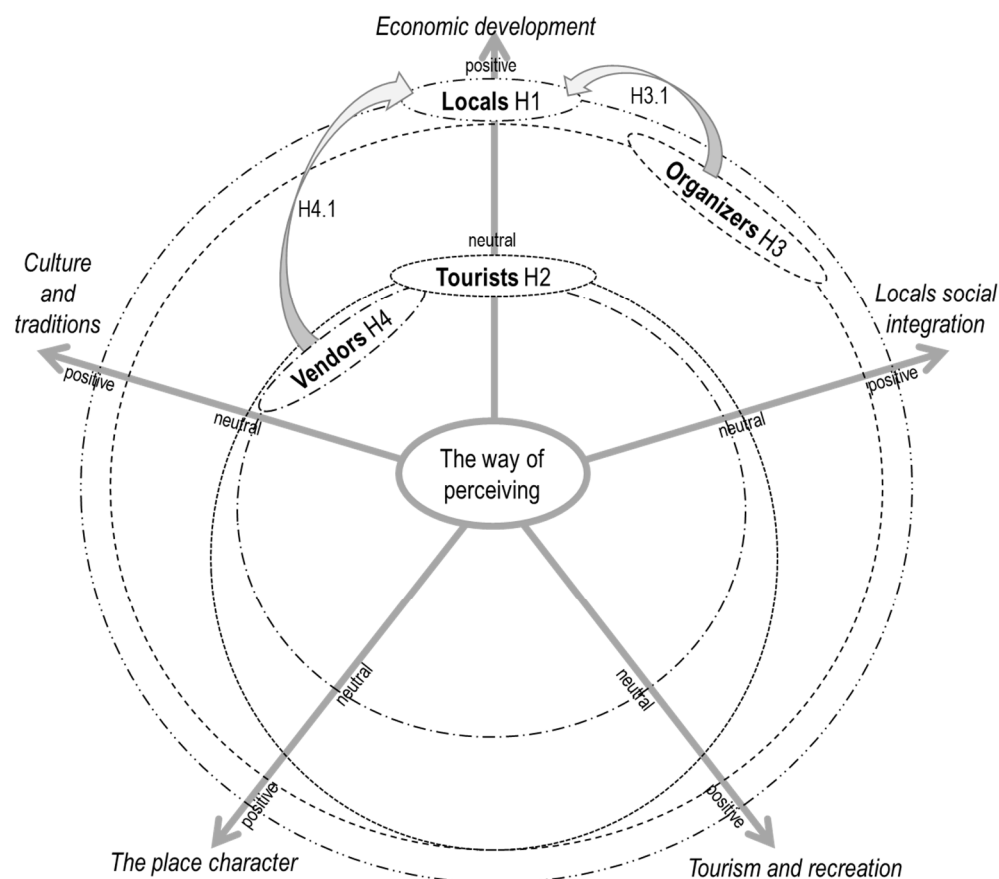


Figure 1. How particular groups of stakeholders perceive the impact of a local food festival on the development of a rural area—research hypothesis.

In terms of research methods, a distinct method was selected for each of the studied group of stakeholders. A questionnaire survey was used with the visitors; its questions were closed, and a five-point Likert scale was used to answer them. In addition to the questionnaire, the researchers talked to the participants. Questionnaires were distributed at different places and times to make the sample more representative. The questionnaire was anonymous. A total of 210 complete responses were received (Table 1). Since convenience and non-probability sampling were applied, we conducted a reliability test: Cronbach alpha (α) range: economic development (0.73); culture and tradition (0.73); social integration (0.84); character of the place (0.81); tourism and recreation (0.77). This is above the recommended threshold of 0.7 [67]. Moreover, for two groups—locals and tourists—a test of statistical differences was conducted. Partially structured interviews were conducted with the vendors. The main questions were closed with a Likert scale; however, the form of these interviews made it possible to obtain additional information. One interview lasted approximately 20–40 min. Talks were held with all the vendors at the festival, but only half answered questions about the impact of this festival (12 completed interviews). Some vendors stated that they had no knowledge about it and were not interested in discussing it; however, all the vendors were eager to talk about their activities (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the stakeholder category, research method and number of participants.

Category of Stakeholders	Visitors	Vendors	Organizers
Research method	A questionnaire survey was conducted. The questions were closed, and a five-point Likert scale was used to answer. Additionally, the researchers interviewed the visitors.	Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The main questions were closed with the Likert scale. The interviews provided additional information.	An in-depth interview was conducted.
Number of participants	210	12	1

Source: Own survey.

A single in-depth interview was conducted with the organizers. Two researchers spoke with the organizers—one conducted the conversation, and the other took notes. The interview was not recorded due to the cultural and legal conditions in Poland (Table 1).

The surveys and interviews were carried out using the paper-and-pencil interview (PAPI) method [68]. The questionnaires used for the study were personally prepared based on an analysis of the literature on the impact of culinary festivals. The researchers personally asked the questions and wrote down the responses; this made it possible to obtain detailed information and combine quantitative and qualitative research [69–71]. The research was conducted by four researchers during the two days of the festival, and only at the festival site.

Moreover, research was also planned at other local food festivals in Poland in 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these festivals were canceled or postponed. Therefore, due to the limited research sample, the results of this study remain preliminary and require further studies.

4. Research Sample

4.1. Visitors Sample

The studied group of festival visitors varied in terms of place of residence, education and age (Table 2). Among the surveyed participants in the Edible Flowers Festival in Dobrzyca, 41.14% lived nearby (locals from nearby districts). Due to the small traveling distance, these locals enjoyed what was on offer on a daily basis. The remaining 52.86% of participants lived in various places in Poland, as well as abroad. These were tourists who had to travel a greater distance to the festival site. Part of this group participated in the festival as part of their vacation leave.

In terms of education, visitors with a higher education dominated, constituting 55.24% of all respondents. The second largest group was those with a secondary education (30.48%). A smaller group of visitors had a vocational education (9.05%). Regarding the age of the respondents, the largest group was represented by visitors aged 56 and over, constituting 26.67% of all respondents. Another 19.05% were visitors aged 36–45. Visitors aged 46–55 also represented a fairly large group, constituting 18.57% of the respondents. Moreover, 17.14% were visitors aged 26–35. The remaining 10.48% were visitors aged up to 25.

Table 2. Visitors sample.

Characteristic	In %
Place of residence	
Locals	41.14
Tourists	52.86
Education	
Higher	55.24
Secondary	30.48
Vocational	9.05
Other	5.24
Age	
Up to 25 years	10.48
26–35	17.14
36–45	19.05
46–55	18.57
56 or older	26.67

Source: Own survey.

4.2. Vendors Sample

The surveyed group of vendors was diverse in terms of their duration of business activity, sales range, average number of festivals they participated in, and the distance from their place of residence to the festival site (Table 3).

Table 3. Vendors sample.

Characteristic	In %
Duration of business activity (in years)	
1–3	25.00
4–8	16.67
9–13	33.33
14 and more	25.00
Sales range	
Local	15.39
Regional	38.46
National	46.15
International	0.00
Average annual number of festivals attended	
1–8	41.67
9–13	16.67
14–18	25.00
19 and more	16.67
Distance of place of residence from the festival site (in km)	
0–50	25.00
50–130	25.00
130–210	33.33
210 and more	16.67

Source: Own survey.

Many members of this group were vendors who had maintained their business for 9 to 13 years (33.33%). A subsequent groups of vendors had maintained their activities from 1 to 3 years (25%) or 14 years and more (25%). The rest of the vendors had maintained their activities for 4 to 8 years (16.67%). In terms of sales range, the vendors most often stated that they sold their goods throughout the country (46.15%). Meanwhile, 38.46% of the

exhibitors stated that their sales range was regional. The remaining 15.39% of the vendors sold their products on the local market. None of them indicated an international scope for their products.

The vendors were also active in the field of culinary festivals, with an average of 12 festivals per year. The most numerous group of vendors took part in 1 to 8 festivals a year (41.67%). Another group of vendors (25%) attended 14 to 18 festivals a year. The remaining groups, which accounted for 16.67% each, participated in 9 to 13 or 19 or more festivals during the year.

In terms of the distance between the vendors and the festival site, 33.33% indicated that this was from 130 to 210 km. The next two groups of exhibitors, accounting for 25% each, had to travel to the festival site from within 50 km or from a distance of 50 to 130 km. The place of residence of the remaining exhibitors (16.67%) was at least 210 km away from the festival site.

The surveyed vendors had conducted their activities for an average of 9.5 years.

Notably, most of the surveyed vendors came from the local (4), regional (6) or national (2) areas; however, among the group of vendors who were not interested in answering the question about the impact of the festival, regional entrepreneurs dominated, and there were no locals among them.

4.3. Organizer Sample

The surveyed organizers of the festival are the owners of the company where the festival was held. This company has been operating in the local market since the 1990s. The company covers an area of approximately 5 hectares, with a garden shop, theme gardens, festival grounds and catering facilities. The company is constantly developing and is an important link in local entrepreneurship. It organizes several festivals throughout the year, the themes of which relate to both plants and flowers, as well as food. The company and festival site are located in a rural area, away from the area's main buildings; however, the location is known among the local population, both within the Koszalin district and in the neighboring districts of Kołobrzeg and the city of Koszalin.

5. Results

5.1. Visitors

The visitors perceived the festival's impact on the rural area more positively than the vendors (Table 4), in fact, rating all surveyed categories higher than the vendors. The largest differences were in terms of income, employment opportunities and the involvement of locals. The vendors—as entrepreneurs and active people—were more skeptical about the impact of the festival than the visitors. In addition, they were workers at the festival, while for visitors it is a form of entertainment; this could also have influenced their perception of the impact.

According to the visitors, the main benefits for the development of the rural area from the organization of the festival were the creation of an additional tourist attraction (4.43), the promotion of the place (4.41) and the influx of tourists (4.32). Moreover, the visitors often agreed with the statement that, thanks to the festival, it was possible to promote local culinary products (4.31) and develop local entrepreneurship (4.31). However, the visitors perceived the following impacts of the festival less often: income (3.81) or employment opportunities (3.91). In general, the visitors assessed the festival's potential to impact the economic development and social integration of local residents the lowest. Nevertheless, the differences between these analyzed categories were quite small.

The visitors were divided into locals and tourists in order to explore the differences, and a test of statistical differences was conducted. Between these groups, only one of the differences was significant (creating a tourist attraction). This meant that the perception of the impact of the festival was quite similar among tourists and locals.

Table 4. Visitors' perception of the impact of the local food festival on the development of the rural area.

Specification	Visitors (Total)	Locals	Tourists
Average responses *			
Economic development			
Local business development	4.31	4.32	4.29
Income	3.81	3.81	3.80
Employment opportunities	3.91	3.90	3.93
Culture and tradition			
Return to culinary traditions	4.20	4.20	4.21
Care for local heritage	4.29	4.36	4.22
Local products promotion	4.31	4.34	4.28
Social integration			
Increased integration	4.09	4.16	4.03
Locals' involvement	4.09	4.03	4.13
Residents' cooperation with common goals	4.03	4.07	3.98
Character of the place			
Uniqueness	4.29	4.29	4.29
Promotion	4.41	4.46	4.38
Identity enhancement	4.18	4.18	4.17
Tourism and recreation			
Creating a tourist attraction	4.43	4.50 ^a	4.37 ^a
Tourist influx	4.32	4.35	4.31
Recreation for locals	4.20	4.26	4.14

* 1—definitely not; 2—rather not; 3—neutral; 4—rather yes; 5—definitely yes. ^a—significant different means score. Source: Own survey.

In the opinion of the visitors who were locals, the main impacts of the festival on the rural area included creating an additional tourist attraction (4.50); promoting the place (4.46); and caring for culture, traditions and local heritage (4.36). The lowest values among this group of visitors were recorded in terms of income (3.81) and employment opportunities (3.90). In terms of the analyzed categories, these locals rated the highest impacts in relation to tourism and recreation and the lowest (although still positively) in relation to economic development.

The visitors who were tourists identified the main impacts of the festival as follows: the promotion of the place (4.38), the creation of an additional tourist attraction (4.37) and the influx of tourists (4.31). The lowest values were recorded in terms of such categories as income (3.80), employment opportunities (3.93) and the cooperation of residents in the implementation of a common goal (3.98). In general, these tourists rated the festival's impact the highest in terms of the character of the place and the lowest in terms of economic development. Contrary to the local tourists, their ratings of individual categories were usually slightly lower.

The overall rating of local visitors (4.23) slightly differed from that of tourist visitors (4.17); however, the ratings of the local population in most of the analyzed categories were slightly higher than those of the tourists. These differences, however, were not significant. The greatest differences were in terms of increasing social integration, creating an additional tourist attraction and the possibility for residents to spend their free time. These differences were due to at least three reasons: first, the subjective feelings of the respondents; second, their direct relationship with the place (or lack thereof); and third, it was easier for the locals to judge if there had truly been any changes. Tourists—who only visit occasionally—found it more difficult to make such an assessment.

The interviews with participants during the study showed that local residents were much more interested in the impact of the festival. Since they were directly related to the place, they benefited the most from the festival's influence, and they could observe its effects on a daily basis. The locals emphasized that they desired various activities to take place in their area; on the other hand, the tourists emphasized that they were quite indifferent to these benefits, as they did not have contact with the place on a daily basis.

5.2. Vendors

Regarding the main categories of the festival's impact on the rural area, the vendors indicated the promotion of the place (4.33) and the influx of tourists (4.00); however, they perceived the possibilities of the festival's influences (2.67) or employment opportunities to a much lesser extent. Overall, the category of economic development opportunities was rated the lowest. Neutral ratings dominated, but some vendors assessed this category negatively (Table 5).

Table 5. Vendors' perception of the impact of the local food festival on the development of the rural area.

Specification	Vendors (Total)	Local Vendors	Nonlocal Vendors
Average responses *			
Economic development			
Local business development	3.83	3.75	3.88
Income	2.67	2.25	2.88
Employment opportunities	3.00	3.00	3.00
Culture and tradition			
Return to culinary traditions	3.67	3.50	3.75
Care for local heritage	3.75	4.00	3.63
Local products promotion	3.92	4.25	3.75
Social integration			
Increased integration	3.67	3.50	3.75
Locals' involvement	3.42	3.25	3.50
Residents' cooperation with common goals	3.42	3.25	3.50
Character of the place			
Uniqueness	3.75	4.00	3.63
Promotion	4.33	4.75	4.13
Identity enhancement	3.75	4.00	3.63
Tourism and recreation			
Creating a tourist attraction	3.92	4.25	3.75
Tourist influx	4.00	4.50	3.75
Recreation for locals	3.58	3.50	3.63

* 1—definitely not; 2—rather not; 3—neutral; 4—rather yes; 5—definitely yes. Source: Own survey.

Among the group of exhibitors, local entrepreneurs rated income (2.25—negative) and the possibility for employment (3.00—neutral) the lowest. Overall, the category related to economic development and social integration was scored the lowest. The highest scores were awarded to the festival's impact on the promotion of the place (4.75) and the influx of tourists (4.50). The character of the place—as a whole category—received the best marks in the opinion of local vendors. The interviews showed that local exhibitors observed the improvement in the brand of the place as well as the influx of tourists, both of which are visible processes; however, it was more difficult for them to observe social integration. The impact of the festival on culture and traditions was assessed higher by exhibitors who dealt with the production and sale of local products. Local vendors saw development

opportunities in the activities of the festival (for them, it is a place to sell products). However, they recognized that this does not affect employment opportunities, (stating in the interviews that they do not need additional employees because their enterprises and farms are family-run) and does not translate into income. They also admitted that they are not involved in local development because they are focused on their own business.

Similar to local entrepreneurs, nonlocal vendors noted the promotion of the place the most (4.13). The lowest rating was for income (2.88). Overall, the category related to the character of the place was rated the best, and the category related to economic development was rated the worst. Most of the nonlocal vendors had participated in the festival more than once. They emphasized that the development of the place was visible and that its recognition was growing. However, as entrepreneurs, they remained skeptical about income because for the local area, it is primarily the local entrepreneurs who are the source of such income, not festivals.

5.3. Organizers

The organizers of the festival are local residents. Hence, their attitude toward the impact of the festival on the development of local areas turned out to be as positive as that of the local visitors. The organizers emphasized that the focal area is not only their place of work, but also the place where they live. They are very involved in local development, both in terms of economic and social effects. In their company, as well as when organizing festivals, they willingly employ local people. They often invite local vendors to their festivals. They cooperate with some of them, and not only during the festival. Therefore, in their opinion, the impact of the festival on local economic development is significant, both through the development of local entrepreneurship and its relevant influence or employment opportunities. They were aware that through their actions they contribute to caring for culture, promoting local culinary products, and reviving culinary traditions while creating new ones (e.g., edible flowers). They also rated the festival's impact on culture and traditions highly. Moreover, they cared about the social integration of residents and were themselves involved in the functioning of the local community. They cooperate with residents, engage in local matters and strive to increase social integration. They significantly influence the character of the place because they are already recognizable—not only locally—which strengthens the identity of the place. Their activities contribute to giving the place a unique character—they maintain unique thematic gardens and a maze of bushes in the area. By promoting their attractions, they also promote the place, i.e., the rural place. They were aware that they attract not only tourists (e.g., spending time at the seaside), but also local residents.

6. Discussion

Figure 2 presents the synthetic results. Based on the conducted research, the adopted assumptions were verified. The results show that locals were most interested in the impact of the festival and perceived it more positively than any other surveyed stakeholder groups (H1). According to our findings, this was due to their direct relationship with the location and the fact that they are its main beneficiaries. This is in line with previous research [52,53].

Tourists indicated a neutral relationship with the development of the rural area, emphasizing that since they visit a given place occasionally, this does not apply to them. They were aware of the impact of the festival on local development and perceived it in positive terms (H2). Our findings show that their positive attitude may not, however, be the result of a real assessment, since the time of the festival was for them a time of vacation, rest and entertainment. This is in line with the finding that satisfaction with a festival is an important factor in the perception of the festival [31,42,55–57].

The vendors showed the greatest neutrality toward the impact of the festival on the development of the rural area and a fairly neutral overall attitude (H4). They approached the festival's impact on the development of the host area from a distance [29]. As entrepreneurs, they observed the impact of the festival from the point of view of potential

business facilitation. They were realistic but not enthusiastic. Interestingly, contrary to the initial assumptions (H4.1), local vendors assessed such benefits by remaining as skeptical as exhibitors from outside the local area. This was despite their direct relationship with the place. However, as local entrepreneurs, they could observe what real changes are taking place in the local environment in connection with the event activity. Furthermore, the surveyed local vendors were generally not involved in local development; they were focused on doing business. As noted by Alves et al. [36], the more residents are involved in a local development process, the greater the benefits for the area.

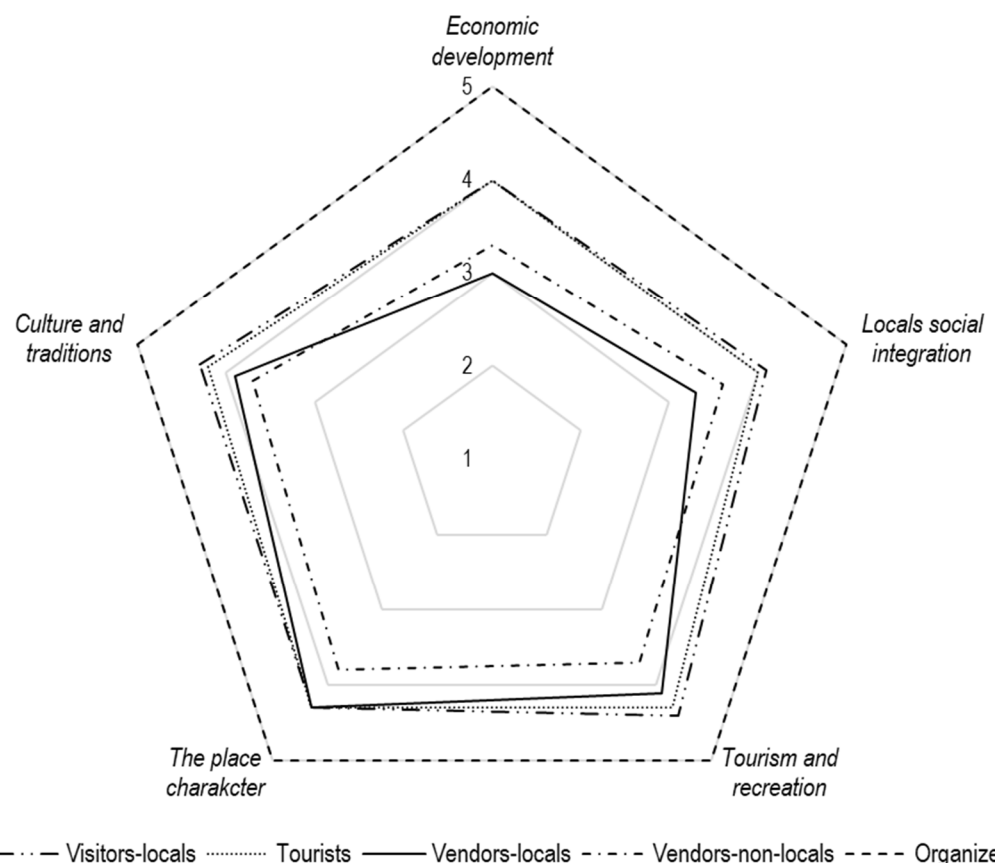


Figure 2. How particular groups of stakeholders perceive the impact of a local food festival on the development of a rural area—research results.

The organizers of the analyzed festival are residents of the local area. Their perceptions of its benefits were in line with those of the local participants in the event. They were interested in such benefits and viewed them positively (H3.1). The interview showed that the organizers cared about the development of the place, not only due to the positive perception of their events and activities, but also due to their direct relationship with the place. It is a place where they work as well as live. As residents, they are, therefore, the beneficiaries of the advantages of the place. As entrepreneurs, they were aware of the impact of the festival on the development of the local area [29,36]. However, due to the limited sample size in this research, the hypothesis concerning event organizers from outside the local area was not verified (H3).

In terms of the analyzed categories of benefits, all groups of respondents rated the nature of the place, as well as tourism and recreation, the highest. This is because these benefits are visible and can be observed during the festival; they can be described as the direct effects of the festival. However, all groups rated the benefits in terms of economic development the lowest. This is because these are indirect benefits and enterprises are their intermediary. There are also benefits that occur over time, the results of which are not immediately apparent. To answer Kwiatkowski et al.'s [14] question, visitors and

organizers of rural festivals have unrealistic illusions as to the positive impact on the rural location.

In terms of sustainable development, this research mainly focused on the social and economic levels (environmental aspects will be analyzed in subsequent studies). It should be emphasized that all the surveyed stakeholder groups were aware of the positive impact of the culinary festival on these areas of sustainable local development, which is in line with the previous research [15,20,21]. Local socio-economic development turned out to be particularly important for the local people, because they are the main beneficiaries of this development. In terms of food security, the research explored some aspects, such as promoting local products as well as keeping traditions alive. The research results confirm that the idea of food security can be promoted through cultural events, as observed by Briones Alonso et al. [6].

There are some limitations to the conducted research. First, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research plan was not fully implemented. In Poland, in 2020, many festivals were canceled or postponed, including those where this research was planned. For this reason, the research sample remained limited, making it difficult to verify the adopted hypotheses. Moreover, a limited sample is more prone to errors and makes it more difficult to draw generalizations. The study was, thus, treated as preliminary. Further research is planned after the pandemic is over. Future research directions cover the involvement of the local community in the organization of food festivals and the impact of food festivals on the development of rural areas in the opinion of non-local organizers.

Nevertheless, the study's findings have certain managerial implications. First, the positive impact of a festival translates positively into the image of the festival and the organizer. Second, the impact of a festival can also act as a catalyst for further positive changes. The following recommendations arise. First, it is worth increasing the awareness of a festival's impact on rural development, as the respondents of our survey often emphasized that they had too little knowledge of the subject to answer certain questions, which influenced their responses. Second, during festivals, it would be useful to introduce information related to their impact on local development. The research shows that not all benefits are visible to the stakeholders of the festival, including the locals most interested in them. Third, not only participants' awareness, but also their involvement in local development, is worth increasing. Greater involvement usually occurs with increased knowledge and positive perception. Referring to the rural development policy implemented in Poland, the main recommendation includes the need to broadly support festival and vendors activities. These are forms of non-agricultural activity, which are also in line with the marketing of agricultural products, as well as maintaining the local heritage of rural areas. Support should be both financial and non-financial in the form of facilitating this type of activity.

7. Conclusions

This research revealed differences in individual stakeholder groups' perception of a festival's impact on rural development. The visitors viewed this influence much more positively—both locals and tourists; the vendors were more skeptical, whether they were from the local area or not; and the organizers, as locals, had a very positive perception.

It should be emphasized that the interest in local development decreases with distance, which results from the weakening of one's relationship with a place. Moreover, the greater the involvement in local development, the more positive the perception of the impact of a festival; for example, people related to the local area showed little interest in the development of that area, often as the result of their low involvement in this development.

The more direct the impact of a festival, the more positively it is perceived; the sooner the impact can be seen, the more positively it is perceived. Tourism and recreation as well as the character of the place were highly rated because, in terms of these categories, the influence of the festival is visible almost immediately—thus, visitors and tourists are eager to come.

Generally, visitors who were vacationers perceived the festival's benefits more positively than working vendors; the greater their satisfaction with their time spent at the festival, the more positive their perception.

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