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The entrepreneurial orientation of exhibitors and vendors at food festivals

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ABSTRACT

Celebrating food has become an increasingly visible part of local and regional calendars worldwide. The rise of food festivals represents this trend. Food festivals have gained momentum for various entrepreneurs and producers, including farmers, fishermen, food manufacturers, food accessory producers, chefs, and restaurateurs. Much research is available on visitors (consumers) at food festivals, but knowledge about producers/vendors is almost absent. This study aims to bridge this research gap by reviewing and analyzing food producers' entrepreneurial intentions to participate in food festivals and the role and meaning of festival participation in their professional and individual development. The study is inspired by ideas about artisan entrepreneurship. It draws empirically on primary data from 58 in-depth interviews among vendors at three food festivals organized in Poland in the summer of 2020. The results show that food festivals offer creative ways to discover and exploit business opportunities where lifestyle and altruistic values can feasibly coexist with business goals. However, the study also reveals that some food producers/vendors are reluctant to change their product or marketing approaches or to redirect their entrepreneurial orientations based on the feedback received at the festivals and on the dilemmas they face. This study elaborates on the nature of such challenges and proposes policy recommendations to overcome them.

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1. Introduction

Public interest in food festivals has been steadily increasing over the last decades (Ellis et al., 2018; Everett, 2019; Okumus et al., 2018). Currently, the rise of food festivals represents a global trend, where people travel *'for a taste of the place to get a sense of the place'*

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(Stone et al., 2020, p. 5). Food and gastronomy experiences are considered vital tourism resources (Antón et al., 2019) that build upon renewed enthusiasm for locally grown and traditional food products (Antón et al., 2019; Sims, 2010). The elevated status of food festivals in the development of places accords with the importance of destination managers to assign an anchoring role to festivals in economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Rinaldi, 2017).

Prior research suggests that food festivals may offer creative ways to discover and exploit business opportunities for food manufacturers (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Einarssen & Mykletun, 2009; Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018). Thus, food festivals have come to play an essential role in many destinations and branding strategies that revolve around the commodification of local culinary resources (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2009). This article argues that a vital food festival landscape may hold a strong position since it is unique in its relation to the farming, fishing and horticulture of a region and to food and beverage industries and restaurants (Einarsen & Mykletun, 2009). However, knowledge about how food producers engage with festivals and the role and meaning of festival participation in food producers' development is almost absent in academic discourse. This study will contribute to the emerging but still scarce business research on food festival vendors/exhibitors, and it seeks to provide valuable evidence for food associations and actors, festival organizers, business associations, and local and regional policy agencies. The main research question concerns what drives food producers to participate in food festivals. The study investigates how vendors prioritize specific values and goals when participating in food festivals and where they see attractive entrepreneurial potential. This paper employs analytic frameworks related to the unique features of food festivals (e.g. Hall & Sharples, 2008), local food systems (Hjalager & Richards, 2003), and sectoral studies on entrepreneurial intention among food/artisan entrepreneurs (e.g. Pret & Cogan, 2019). The current research aims to bridge the research gap by reviewing and analyzing producers' participation in food festivals with a focus on the role that festivals play in their business operations, growth and changes. The article's contribution lies in analyzing entrepreneurial orientations when entrepreneurs are positioned in the festival and exposed to challenges to their business models, their personal motivations, and their directions in life. Festivals are not a daily routine but an amalgam of inspirations that may be accepted or rejected by vendors based on different underlying business and life orientations. It is new to use (presumably stressful) events to enlighten the nature of entrepreneurial orientation. A broader understanding in this regard is vital for both artisanal producers and festival organizers. The study's geographical context is Poland, a developing economy that consists heavily of small and micro-sized enterprises (Nowakowska-Grunt et al., 2018). It has an expanding basis of traditional/local food production (Barska & Wojciechowska-Solis, 2018), stimulated by increasing consumer demand for local food products and institutional support from the government.

2. Literature review

Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is a firm-level strategic orientation that captures an organization's strategy-making practices, managerial philosophies, and firm behaviors that are entrepreneurial in nature (Anderson et al., 2009). There are numerous approaches to EO (Wales, 2016). The current study uses the most traditional orientation

proposed by Miller (2011), where EO is understood as the combination of innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking activities. Innovativeness can be understood as 'openness to innovation' or engagement and constant support for novel and creative ideas to improve current business practices (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Although innovations can vary in their degree of 'radicalness' (Hage, 1980), innovativeness represents a fundamental willingness to depart from existing technologies or practices and ventures beyond the current state of the art (Kimberly, 1981). Therefore, in the present study, innovativeness is considered to be the willingness to innovate and introduce food novelties through creativity and experimentation aimed at developing new products and services as well as new processes.

Proactiveness refers to behaving where the action is undertaken before competitors (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Proactiveness pertains to processes aimed at anticipating and acting on future needs by '*seeking new opportunities which may or may not be related to the present line of operations, introduction of new products and brands ahead of competition, strategically eliminating operations which are in the mature or declining stages of life cycle*' (Venkatraman, 1989, p. 949). Finally, risk-taking reflects the inclination toward dealing with uncertainty (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). It is revealed through the strategic decision-making of executives in situations where information about the future is inadequate. Entrepreneurial firms are neither risk averting nor risk seeking; instead, they take calculated risks (Miles & Arnold, 1991).

Studies of EO in the field of tourism is scarce, and the extant literature seldom covers festival exhibitors and vendors. The study by Ansari et al. (2012) is relevant as it focuses on the need for festival organizers to envisage cultural differences among exhibitors and to constellate the festival regime and physical setup to make the most of different entrepreneurial orientations. Another inspiring study is supplied by Fadda (2020), who underlines collaborative and proactive entrepreneurship in sports tourism businesses in a confined location. She also attaches importance to lifestyle elements and intense interrelations with tourism.

First and foremost, the literature on festivals offers possibilities to view business operations from the perspective of consumers. Eating out has become one of the most popular forms of recreation. It is much more than eating to appease hunger. It is time to be out, see people, and meet people. Scholars have indicated the social dimensions connected to eating out; searching for a culinary novelty and unique taste sensations are the main reasons for the exponential growth of food festivals worldwide (López-Guzmán et al., 2017). Traditional and unique products, celebrity chefs, and face-to-face contact with producers and vendors are other reasons people are flocking to outdoor food fests (Kwiatkowski, 2018). Finally, factors such as *socialization*, *excitement*, *escape*, *learning*, and *shopping* were indicated in the event management literature as major motivational factors for festival attendance (Maeng et al., 2016).

Food festivals are more than an attraction for visitors. They may become tourism resourcesthemselves (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2016). Food festivals can bring tourists closer to locals by '*putting a place on the menu*' (Sims, 2010) and favor the local economy by creating jobs around local food products (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018). There is considerable attention in academic discourse to identify conservation and authentic brand development through food festivals. Here, the food items are regarded as culturally embedded symbols and markers of place identity (Everett, 2016; Everett &

Aitchison, 2008). In many senses, festivals may be considered real-time platforms to promote and enhance place identity to a wide range of target groups (Blichfeldt & Halkier, 2014; Kwiatkowski, 2018; Kwiatkowski et al., 2020). Other studies highlight that festivals are closely linked to the notion of a sense of place due to their roots in local produce and culinary customs (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000). Additionally, marketing-related studies deliver evidence that food festivals may provide various benefits to hosting destinations, reflecting a potentially rich source of place and opportunities for local brand promotion (Dragin Jensen & Kwiatkowski, 2019). In this vein, Mei et al. (2017) state that food allows destinations to differentiate themselves and broaden their market bases beyond the short time of the actual festival.

A review of studies on food festivals indicates that scholarly attention has been mainly focused on three groups of festival stakeholders: (1) visitors (consumers), (2) organizers, and (3) destination managers. The first group of studies encompasses the analysis of travelers' motivations to attend food festivals (Chang, 2011; Getz & Robinson, 2014), their experience and their satisfaction (López-Guzmán et al., 2017). Less frequent are studies on visitors' behavioral changes due to participation in food festivals and consumers' loyalty toward food festivals (Kim et al., 2010) or culinary destinations (Vujko et al., 2017). The organizer perspective focuses on food festival organization and promotion, paying attention to festival location, size, scope and role in the contemporary rural-urban continuum (Fisker et al., 2020; Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018). There is also considerable attention toward purely managerial aspects, such as power distribution or resource mobilization strategies (Vestrum, 2013). Furthermore, studies on innovation and volunteer contributions to festival programs are also present (Hede, 2008). Finally, a destination perspective has led to studies on the role of food festivals in wider branding destinations (Lee & Arcodia, 2011) and on community and identity formation (Sumner et al., 2010).

Despite the growing interest in food studies, there is still a lack of clarity about the entrepreneurial dimension of food festivals (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018). The perspective of producers and exhibitors is not well represented (Mosely & Mowatt, 2011). Consequently, knowledge about food producers' entrepreneurial intentions to participate in festivals is incomplete (Mosely & Mowatt, 2011; Michel, 2010; Ilbery & Maye, 2005; Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018; Kwiatkowski, 2018). Insight into the entrepreneurial aspects of festivals, including other exhibitors, vendors, stallholders, and suppliers' entrepreneurial orientation, is also scarce. However, other categories may provide basic, although indirect, evidence on possible vendors' operations, which can inform the study. In this context, inquiries regarding *artesian entrepreneurship* and *traditional rural markets* and *trade shows* are meaningful, and they offer opportunities to reflect on the business aspects of selling at food festivals.

There are two competing conceptualizations of food producers' entrepreneurial motivations to exhibit/sell at food festivals. The first portrays the group as 'opportunists' who have ambitions toward classic profit maximization and growth. The second provides a picture of an 'artisan/craftsman' who pursues lifestyle goals and a nongrowth orientation (Cooper & Artz, 1995). This binary approach posits food producers on the opposite sides of the entrepreneurial endeavor. The first group is closer to regular entrepreneurs who search for (any) business opportunities and the second is

more akin to hobbyists who express their passion to others in more targeted and nuanced ways.

However, this leaves space for a more subtle, not rigidly constructed, binary type of entrepreneurial motivation in which ‘passion’ intersects with ‘entrepreneurship’ in a mutually beneficial symbiosis. The intersection of passion and business objectives in artisan food production forms a particularly interesting avenue for academic research, as it refers to numerous life and business dilemmas that may shape producer/vendor operations and determine the willingness to adapt to change. In this context, an ongoing trade-off between homemade, purely natural products and more advanced forms of mass manufacturing seems to be central. Another may relate the interplay of authenticity and commercialization in culinary production and the remixing of products with different service dimensions.

Prior research has shown a broad portfolio of motives and priorities that may drive and shape entrepreneurship among food producers (Pret & Cogan, 2019). They most commonly refer to individuals’ willingness to achieve personal well-being by conducting meaningful jobs and crafting themselves (Paige & Littrell, 2002; Reijonen & Komppula, 2007). Other studies frequently indicate that values belong to a high level of job flexibility, hobbies, independence, and a slow-paced, quality-of-life work environment (Pret & Cogan, 2019). Finally, some studies highlight that preserving family traditions, values, habits, and customs is the primary reason for entrepreneurial activity (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013; Mathias et al., 2015; Pret & Carter, 2017). Producers may also be motivated by public-oriented objectives. The willingness to keep old traditions alive or ensure community well-being by generating sustainable tourism is the most common (García-Rosell & Mäkinen, 2013; Reijonen & Komppula, 2007).

Admittedly, food festivals may provide business entrepreneurs with opportunities for product testing and exhibition. Festivals can be platforms for initial market access. Producers can use festival space and climate to meet and learn from customers about the quality of offered products, customers’ price perception, and expectations. Festivals can also be used strategically by food producers to broaden customer bases, work on loyalty and obtain publicity through media coverage (Hansen, 2015). Moreover, some producers may follow trends and the growing popularity of this form of market access and use festivals as an opportunity to learn from competitors’ offers, as festivals provide the opportunity to ‘spy’ on competitors out in the open. However, being in the festival together may also stimulate the establishment of strategic alliances with other producers or service providers—or even competitors (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018). In some cases, festivals may create a cradle for coinnovation by making space and time for the investigation of new business opportunities. Finally, food producers may pursue altruistic or educational goals, whereas others may participate only to ‘*cut out the middleman and for the freedom that participation provides*’ (Mosely & Mowatt, 2011, p. 261).

This section shows that food festivals are potential platforms for entrepreneurial activity in which lifestyle and altruistic values can happily coexist with business goals. However, a clearer, comprehensive understanding of festivals for producers, vendors and exhibitors is still lacking, and this study contributes by taking a step toward this target.

2. Study context

Food festivals in Poland constitute a large group of events with considerable themes, sizes and other variations. To ensure some diversity, three events were selected as cases in this study: (1) the Festival of Edible Flowers in Dobrzyca, (2) the Festival of Good Taste in Poznań and (3) the Festival of Pomerania Taste in Gdańsk. As demonstrated in [Table 1](#), these festivals differ in terms of their themes, place of organization, size, reach and duration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many planned events for 2020 were canceled, but these festivals were still held.

The Festival of Edible Flowers in Dobrzyca has been organized in the small town of Dobrzyca in the Hortulus Spectabilis Gardens. In 2020, the festival took place under the slogan ‘*Floral Taste of the Orient*’. This festival presents an alternative trend in nutrition. It responds to the increasingly emerging needs resulting from the search for inspiration, recipes, and novelty elements in traditional cuisine. The festival represents a cyclical event—it takes place once a year during the weekend. The festival is staged in rural areas, which determines its local character. Due to its specific nature, the number of vendors and participants is small. Most of the vendors are regional food producers and residents of nearby towns. They typically represent a family microbusiness or add to retirement/agricultural production located in rural areas of Western Poland. The vendors offer unique and high-quality ‘homemade’ food products, of which the most popular are natural juices, marinades, jams, floral water or vinegar, tinctures and aromatic honey. Visitors can also taste different soups, cakes and desserts prepared by local producers. Meal tasting often plays a crucial role in setting an occasion for the offer introduction and a reason to establish mutual interaction between vendors and visitors.

The Festival of Good Taste in Poznań has evolved over several years into the largest culinary event in Poland, the brand of which is strengthened by the increasing number of vendors and participants every year. The festival originated from a competition for the Polish Tincture of the Year. According to *National Geographic*, this event was among the ten most popular food festivals in Poland that should be visited

Table 1. Overview of the examined festivals.

Festival	<i>Festival of Edible Flowers</i>	<i>Festival of Pomerania Taste</i>	<i>Festival of Good Taste</i>
Time	Jul. 11–12, 2020 2 days (weekend)	Jul. 25 – Aug. 16, 2020 Over 3 weeks	Aug. 13–16, 2020 4 days (incl. weekend)
Location	‘Hortulus’ Gardens in Dobrzyca	‘Ołowianka’ Island in Gdańsk	Old Market Square in Poznań
Admission	Ticketed	Open access	Open access
Thematic focus	Edible flowers, ‘Floral taste of the Orient’	Regional products of the Pomeranian region	Good taste regardless of origin
Number of vendors	Approximately 30 exhibitors, mainly from West Pomerania	Approximately 20 exhibitors from the Pomeranian region	Approximately 50 exhibitors from all over Poland
Primary types of products	Beekeeping, lavender, agricultural	Dairy products, meat products, fish products	Wide variety: combination of traditional, modern and alternative culinary trends
Context	An alternative culinary festival, surrounded by flower gardens (open to the public daily for a fee), new culinary tastes	Regional tastes presented as part of the St. Dominic’s Fair (a very traditional Polish festival), exhibitors associated with the Network ‘Culinary Heritage’, traditional tastes	A mainstream culinary festival, one of the most famous and popular in Poland, Classic flavors and culinary novelties

at least once in a lifetime. The festival is also recommended by the *Gault & Millau* Yellow Guide. The event is a platform that combines traditional, modern and alternative culinary trends. Its most important element is the Good Taste Fair.

Participants can taste and buy local products from various regions of Poland and many European countries. Exhibitors are producers, food importers, and distributors of different foodstuffs, both domestic (e.g. cheeses, smoked fish, traditional bread, cold cuts, juices, honey, tinctures, preserves, marinades) and international (e.g. Hungarian langos, Turkish baklava, Balkan burqas, Vietnamese dumplings, Italian pianos, Greek souvlaki, Mexican churros). The offer also includes meals, beer, and wines. A separate group of exhibitors involves restaurateurs offering ready-made meals. Based on local and regional products, restaurants participating in the event compose dishes and present a traditional and innovative approach to various tastes. The festival offer is further enriched with themed dinners, tastings, lectures, workshops, and culinary and herbal demonstrations.

The Festival of Pomerania Taste is an accompanying event for the Dominican Fair held in Gdańsk, which is the largest open-air commercial and cultural event in Poland and one of Europe's largest open-air commercial and cultural fairs. During the Festival of Pomerania Taste, the culinary and cultural riches of northern Poland's subregions were presented. The exhibitors are producers, importers and distributors of regional specialties, including cold cuts, fish, cheese, bread, honey, vegetables and fruit preserves. The festival organizers invite the best restaurants from the region to prepare a special signature menu. Pop-up restaurants constitute a separate group of exhibitors. The dishes cooked during the festival are based on traditional recipes passed down from generation to generation as well as local ingredients. The festival allows restaurateurs to present their talents to a broader audience, build their culinary reputations, test concepts, and attract the public and investors.

The Festival of Pomeranian Taste vendors is associated with the European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage, which confirms their commitment to promoting Pomeranian culinary heritage. Many products and dishes presented in the shows are registered on the List of Traditional Products of the Pomeranian Voivodeship kept by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, which primarily considers established recipes with at least 25 years of preparation. The event is accompanied by several cultural events as well as culinary competitions.

3. Data and methods

The study of entrepreneurial orientation is many-faceted, and this study has taken on board a number of significant elements. In particular, according to traditions in the field, it has been of critical importance to meet vendors and ask about aspects of their entrepreneurial orientation. Such aspects include innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking. What is special in this study is that contact with the entrepreneurs takes place at the festivals, not on the premises of their enterprises.

Data for this study were collected at three food festivals staged in Poland. On-site fieldwork was conducted during the 2020 iteration of each festival. This included at least two full days of participant observation at each festival, which was documented in field notes and photographs. During fieldwork, 58 structured interviews were

conducted with vendors. These were usually owners (producers), their relatives, or, less frequently, other key representatives. No incentives were provided to the respondents to participate in the interview. Only stalls that offered unique food products and services were considered. Therefore, stalls offering everyday fast-food meals and drinks as well as nonfood-related products (e.g. souvenirs, kitchen equipment) were excluded from the sample. The study, therefore, takes a producer-vendor's point of view.

During the interviews, vendors were asked to answer 24 questions that could be grouped into four broad themes: (1) entrepreneurial orientation and benefits of festival participation, (2) relationship and partnership building, (3) skills and knowledge about offered products, and (4) offerings' origins, uniqueness, and the vendor's participation role in the festival. After each formal interview, a semistructured discussion was conducted to obtain additional information, including that of a more sensitive nature.

Native Polish speakers conducted all the fieldwork, and all quotes used in the paper were translated by the authors. The fieldwork was followed up by several rounds of complementary desk research in which material was collected from (1) festival and key stakeholder websites and (2) online and offline media. In general, desk research was used, first, to verify and supplement the information obtained through fieldwork and, second, as part of a heuristic process in which empirical and theoretical work continually informed each other.

Field notes, interviews, photos, and documents were used to determine the entrepreneurs' incentives to participate in the festivals, as well as the roles of this participation in their business operations. The study employs simple descriptive statistics. No advanced econometric modeling is presented. The qualitative interview statements were transcribed and entered into a matrix used for the support of the topics related to entrepreneurial intention and motivation and used in quotes in the subsequent sections.

4. Incentives of festival participation

The interview guide included several entrepreneurial motives to be tested. [Table 2](#) shows that the respondents subscribe quite massively to most of these. Business-oriented and commercial purposes rank particularly high, but food producers' motivations to engage with festivals are also determined by a potent mixture of passion and willingness to share and talk about one's hobby.

Table 2. Incentives for vendor participation in culinary festivals, as percentages.

Specification	Irrelevant/not important	No opinion	Important/very important
Building a business/organization brand	8.6	1.7	89.7
Promoting offered products	8.6	1.7	89.7
Getting feedback on the products offered	8.6	10.3	81.0
Sales of products	10.3	6.9	82.8
Establishing new business contacts	27.6	13.7	58.6
Maintaining cooperation	36.2	15.5	48.3
Becoming familiar with the offers of other exhibitors	37.9	19.0	43.1
Sharing one's interests/passion	22.4	12.0	65.5
Disseminating the products' culture and traditions	24.1	10.3	65.5

A food festival is a form of entertainment and fun and a place for social and business meetings, but it is also, crucially, a place for sharing ideas, recipes, or tasting dishes. A large majority of vendors indicated that important goals of participating in a festival are both the possibility of sharing their passions with other people and spreading the culinary heritage of the region. Producers participate in such events because they become part of the crowd that experiences and enjoys the festival. The joyful festival atmosphere contrasts with the usual business environments. Producers can share emotions and happiness with people with similar lifestyles; they broaden their culinary horizons, confront opinions, and exchange experiences. This interaction with festival participants can inspire them to be creative and develop and discover new products and services. The empirical inquiry shows that food producers partly utilize festivals as recreational sites where they can interact with others sharing the same profession but also passion and lifestyle:

I1: *'(...) I like to be here, as this is something extraordinary to my daily routine (...).'*

I2: *'(...) being here is a great occasion to meet with my friends [i.e. other vendors], search for inspiration and sell what I have prepared for today.'*

Other participation incentives, including developing (new) business alliances with suppliers, experts, academics and DMOs, are somewhat secondary yet still present and used for venture development, innovativeness, and growth.

I3: *For many years, I have been producing traditional ice cream. One day I was approached by X.Z. with a question of whether it would be possible to make ice cream from goat milk. Today, we are trying to capture such an idea as a kind of novelty; of course, it will not replace primary production, but it will probably enrich it. Time will show what will be the demand for it.*

Food producers tend to use festivals as an opportunity to escape from monotonous routines and hard-working farm duties, considering festivals as 'celebration sites' and, in some cases, a 'modern way of harvest celebration'. However, producers are not blind to the business prospects that food festivals offer.

I4: *We have been exhibiting at the Poznań Festival of Taste since its inception. People know that we will be here; they know us, we know many of them. Many clients come every year only to meet us. Usually, they buy 3–4 jars of honey, tell us what happened in their life last year, and we tell them how the year and production were. In short, we combine business with pleasure.*

6. The importance of festival participation

The frequency of exhibitors' participation in the examined festivals is highly variable. The vendors were asked about their activity in 2019. Approximately one-third of the surveyed vendors exhibited at food festivals more than ten times in 2019. Another fifth of the vendors participated in festivals between five and ten times. The remaining group participated in a food festival only once in 2019. Participation in food festivals several times a year emphasizes the benefits of festival participation in the minds of the vendors. The semistructured interview with vendors revealed that those who participate more often in food festivals tend to have a stronger commercial orientation. Indirectly, increased participation in festivals also suggests a much larger scale of production. These entrepreneurs represent a modern form of 'trade caravans'.

15: *We exhibit at many food festivals in Poland. Tasting is crucial, as the flavor cannot be described and expressed. Therefore, we think that food festivals are beneficial to us. We sell 98% of our production at food festivals! We are here because it is illegal to sell alcohol on the internet, which is a pity. This is not vodka – it is a truly hand-made product dedicated to culinary nuts. Many people buy it as a gift.*

The average period of running a business among surveyed respondents was 15 years. Most stalls offer products that mirror local culinary traditions. The main categories of products offered are dairy products, cold cuts, honey, and tinctures. Less frequent are confectionery, pastries and herbal products. However, the portfolio of offerings may be typical for summer and can differ significantly throughout the year.

16: *We have run our business since the 1980s. We started the production of lollypops during times where everything was a deficit. Recently, we have observed a trend where people come back to simple products from the past. Older people want to show 'simplicity' to younger people, and this is our market opportunity.*

Over half of the exhibitors are associated with the network of Regional Culinary Heritage Europe. Producers willingly use the network logo, both on their stalls and product labels ([Photo 1](#)), to show the grassroots nature of their products, their unique character and certified quality. Producers argue that this kind of labeling is an important message for consumers about their products' quality, originality, and regional nature.

Typically, vendors make the products presented during festivals (89.7%), using their own crops and breeding (69.2%). Others used semifinished products and raw materials, mainly from the local market. Most of the surveyed exhibitors have a sole proprietorship in which family members help. Few exhibitors employ seasonal workers (two people on average). More than half sell their products within the country. A few sell products internationally.

Some producers have a considerable level of management of the storytelling, creative, family nature of their production. They use emotional pictures to document their work and multigeneration history ([Photo 2](#)).



Photo 1. Example of European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage logo usage.



Photo 2. Example of cogeneration image creation.

7. Impacts and benefits from festival participation

Food festivals allow the presentation and selling of manufactured products, which is a valuable source of income for producers. Revenue from selling products during the festival accounts for an average of one-third of their total yearly income. Food festivals are short-duration events and occur mostly in the spring and summer months. Therefore, producers need to organize the sale of their products outside the festival and carry out additional activities to acquire potential buyers. Most of the vendors sell their products outside the festival through brick-and-mortar stores (typically located next to the production site) and online sales. Online sales are managed either by an online shop or a fan page on *Facebook*. To market themselves, it is critically important to manifest original labeling and to hand out business cards and leaflets to festival visitors.

A high percentage of exhibitors organize additional activities of different natures, including tastings, workshops, and lectures. Through various activities, an exhibitor can display his or her product to potential buyers and obtain feedback about expectations. Then, they strive to improve the products. In-depth interviews deliver evidence that food producers consider festivals superb occasions to sell and promote products, extend consumer bases, build ‘*their own*’ brands, and learn more about the conditions of the sector. Some also use festivals to obtain knowledge about other producers.

I7: (...) personally, I never do [spy on competitors], but my husband often checks other sausage makers to learn about their prices and novelties (...); based on that, we marginally adjust our prices to competitors, but not too much, as customers, if convinced of our taste and uniqueness, are willing to pay any money to get what they like.

In addition, producers use food festivals as lifetime market research laboratories on their offerings, pricing levels, and tasting sessions. During the research observations, it was evident that tastings and conversations with customers go beyond courtesy and represent

goal-oriented business behavior, which frequently becomes a grassroots source of innovation, growth, and change in business operations.

I8: (...) many customers asked if I have and if they could try goat cheese with black cumin. For the sake of peace, I made the cheese with black cumin. Perhaps, it is the most common type of cheese with the additions (...). Such a fashion (...). Do you know that even Biedronka [the largest chain of discount shops in Poland, with 3031 shops in 2020] now offers a cheese with black cumin? (...)

As evidenced by the research results, customer opinions, observations during meetings, and participation in the festivals have inspired several business initiatives. However, such benefits are not the only objectives of participating in a food festival. Another purpose in taking part in food festivals is to establish and maintain business contacts. Goals are also achieved by celebrating culinary possibilities and interacting with people with similar interests and passions.

An important goal of producers' participation in food festivals is brand building and promotion of the offered products. This is particularly important because most of the surveyed vendors offer products that they produce themselves. Nine out of ten producers consider their products unique. The uniqueness of the products reflects a private brand that they want to build and strengthen through festival participation.

8. Innovative prospects and barriers

As evidenced by the research results, a vital goal in food festival participation is to increase sales (82.8%). Through marketing activities, exhibitors' products become ambassadors of a region's culinary heritage. Vendors participate in culinary festivals to reach business goals such as income generation and market share growth, but they also participate to realize critical social goals. Considering that most of the surveyed producers run sole proprietorships based on family resources, it is not surprising that networking was a vital goal of exhibitors' participation in the culinary festival for almost 60% of them. However, in-depth interviews showed that although vendors indicate the importance of networking, they do not fully utilize its potential. The reasons for that are rather simple: a lack of time and sometimes also a lack of trust in others. Almost 70% of the surveyed exhibitors maintain business contacts with the festival organizers. For a few, these contacts are also private. The frequency of these contacts is mostly not cyclical but limited to meetings once a year. A small percentage of exhibitors had connections once a month or more often. For over 80% of the surveyed exhibitors, participation in the festival is a chance to establish cooperation with farmers (81.0%), intermediaries (81.0%), institutions supporting development (79.3%) and the media (79.3%). More than half also cooperate with other exhibitors. Mainly, the intention is to expand the product offerings (43.3%), increase sales (23.3%) and widen the range of activities (20.0%). As the research results show, 58.6% of exhibitors maintain contact with other exhibitors outside the festival. They are mainly business contacts (97.1%). One-third of exhibitors indicated that they met with other exhibitors once a year. 23.5% made contact every six months. Moreover, once-a-month contacts were maintained by 17.7% of exhibitors, and contacts were maintained more than once a month for 17.7%. Hence, the nature of these contacts was mostly regular (52.9%), in contrast to contacts with the organizers.

As shown in [Table 3](#), the goals that exhibitors achieve by participating in culinary festivals translate into changes that they introduce into the scope of their activities. Producers' success depends on reaching the broadest possible circle of potential recipients, increasing the offered products' recognition, and improving their promotion and distribution. These are all effects of participation in festivals, as confirmed by the research results. Over 60% of the surveyed exhibitors indicate that thanks to involvement in festivals, the brand recognition they created increased, they expanded their offerings to a new sales market, and they introduced an original assortment of products. Culinary festivals attended by the previously surveyed exhibitors became a platform for 43.1% of them to establish and maintain long-term business relationships. One-fourth of the exhibitors indicated that participation in festivals was a motivation for them to improve the quality of services offered.

Similarly, one-fourth believed that participation in culinary festivals impacted the change in the policy of the offered products' pricing. However, exhibitors much more often indicated that they had not introduced significant differences in terms of product quality or price. Therefore, the products they offered, both in terms of quality and price, were found to be acceptable to the recipients, and there is no rationale for making major changes.

9. Discussion

The study attempts to bring new perspectives to the entrepreneurial orientation of vendors and participants at food festivals, when the vendors are experiencing an 'away-from-home' activity in close contact with consumers, competitors and other stakeholders. The impact of obtaining new ideas and translating them into innovative orientations from a longer perspective is critical as a point of this study.

First, the study delivers clear-cut evidence that manufacturers/vendors successfully combine passion and work. Contrary to what Cooper and Artz (1995) claim, among the interviewed food manufacturers (vendors), the nonbinary type of entrepreneurial orientation prevails. Only a few manufacturers/vendors preferred either a profit maximization or nongrowth (altruistic) orientation, and most of them had mixed motivations. Respondents successfully combine authenticity and some necessary commercialization elements that the customers appreciate. Few vendors declared that their only motivation behind taking part in food festivals was promoting specific ideas or traditions. Therefore, the empirical inquiry confirms the theoretically developed hypotheses that business opportunities are inherent in food festivals. Food producers' lifestyles and altruistic values can successfully coexist with food festivals' business goals. Thus, Shaw et al.'s (2017) statement that

Table 3. Changes in vendor operations due to festival participation.

Specification	No	No opinion	Yes
Expanding the offerings to new outlets	32.8	1.7	65.5
Expanding the range with new products	32.8	3.5	63.8
Increasing awareness of the company/products offered	37.9	1.7	60.4
Establishing cooperation with other exhibitors	53.5	3.5	43.1
Improving product quality	65.5	8.6	25.9
Aligning the prices of the products offered with the competition	69.0	6.9	24.1

the willingness to maintain and develop local social values may be the primary driver behind setting up a business. It may be even more important than the economic factor. The secondary importance of economic motives was also confirmed by numerous examples of companies set up with little or no financial resources. Earlier studies also corroborated this (e.g. Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018; Kwiatkowski, 2018).

Second, the study showed that manufacturers/vendors mostly use internal resources (both financial and human but also materials, skills, and knowledge), frequently with a high degree of independence from the socioeconomic surroundings. The majority of the interviewed food manufacturers/vendors use their internal productive capital. They make use of their own resources, knowledge, and skills as well as local traditions. Usually, they employ their family members first. Few apply for grants or take loans; their businesses are typically built with their own financial resources. This finding shed new light on commonly applied yet not often questioned assumptions about local food production's high dependence on local resources (embeddedness). The in-depth interviews showed that many of the producers are, in fact, highly independent from the specific spatial context in which they operate, and in many ways, their activities can be described as alternative or exploratory. Our findings confirm that local manufacturers are willing to share social and symbolic capital to support each other and sustain interest in authentic products. The study presented confirms the leading role of human, social, and symbolic capital in business activities, not economic capital. The study's results mentioned above remain in line with Pret and Carter's (2017) findings.

Third, the study demonstrates a tremendous role assigned by manufacturers/vendors to direct contact with end customers and minimal involvement of intermediaries in selling products at food festivals. Undoubtedly, food festivals provide the opportunity to broaden the customer base (Hansen, 2015); this was confirmed by the respondents. The manufacturers/vendors indicated the opportunity to enlarge their customers' number as one of the main motivations behind taking part in the festivals. The findings contribute to the contemporary debates in artisan entrepreneurship and the growing significance of alternative communication channels between producers and consumers (Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018).

It must be emphasized that the manufacturer-customer relationship usually lasts longer than the event itself and is manifested by so-called loyalty (Organ et al., 2015; Vesci & Botti, 2019;). That is why the respondents try to attract the largest possible number of potential customers—not only those who buy their products during festivals but also those who want to purchase them all year long.

Finally, the examined manufacturers/vendors are characterized by a low degree of cooperation with competitors, yet they do use the festivals to perform 'friendly espionage' to keep on top of the game. Interestingly, many vendors acknowledge the possibility of direct networking at festivals, yet mostly the act of networking is not put into practice. There is also a lack of network orchestrators at the culinary events, and the organizers do not, to any large extent, support such activities, although they make an effort to build a climate of trust. This result is somehow contrary to de Jong and Varley (2018), who showed that food festivals offer the opportunity to develop partnerships with diverse groups (de Jong & Varley, 2018). Manufacturers cooperate for many different reasons, not only economic. As Pret and Carter (2017) state, the reasons for their cooperation are highly differentiated, and they refer to conservation, solidarity, altruism,

and empathy. Our findings confirm that noneconomic reasons prevail. The interviewed manufacturers/vendors usually cooperate with people from their closest neighborhood (e.g. vendors from the same region) who share the same interests.

Einarsen and Mykletun (2009), as well as Blichfeldt and Halkier (2014), claim that food festivals provide food manufacturers with creative ways to discover and exploit business opportunities, but nevertheless, studies on food producers' entrepreneurial intentions to participate in food festivals and the role this participation plays in their professional and individual development are very infrequently observed in the academic literature (Mosely & Mowatt, 2011; Michel, 2010; Ilbery, & Maye, 2005; Kwiatkowski, 2018). This study contributed to closing the research gap by analyzing how food producers' intersecting priorities impact their food festival participation and how vendors prioritize specific values and goals when taking part in festivals.

Food producers benefit from festival participation. The identified motives and benefits are myriad, ranging from recreational to marketing-related motives to purely financial gains. The study demonstrates that producers' motivations interpenetrate and complement each other, creating a driving force for action. The study also revealed that producers have to face the dilemma of expanding their businesses without compromising their production's grassroots nature. The manufacturers see and understand the importance of authenticity in their output, making them somewhat reluctant to change.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews showed that many manufacturers are against mass culture commodification. Therefore, they want their products to be as authentic as those their ancestors produced. Many of them are convinced that they are fulfilling a kind of mission, which is, on the one hand, to make good-quality food and, on the other hand, to contribute to numerous social goals. Business aspects are not a top priority, yet commercial issues remain an essential factor for survival.

10. Conclusion

The motivations and dilemmas outlined above are important for understanding the entrepreneurial orientation of vendors at food festivals. The vendors are critical for the success of the festivals. Therefore, it is essential for festival organizers to understand what keeps them happy and alert in terms of developments and enhancements. Based on the study's results, the most important recommendations for festival organizations and local development bodies are as follows. From an EO perspective, the organizers want to compensate for any hampering elements for innovation, and they can, through technological and organizational measures, for example, assist vendors in being proactive. Eventually, as also suggested in the EO framework, festival organizers can consider how to reduce risks for vendors who have new or otherwise vulnerable or emerging businesses. The proposed steps should be seen as such a combined EO orientation for vendors and the festival coordinators in conjunction. The proposed recommendations were derived from the analysis, literature review, and on-site observations.

A central food festival information platform: The study results clearly show a need and significant exception among food producers to establish such a platform. Food manufacturers, vendors, suppliers, stall owners, sponsors and other stakeholders could be given a stronger and more coherent tool to seek, select, and attend festivals. A modern platform could provide complex 'all-in-one' information on a given festival (i.e. time,

location, thematic focus, cost of participation, audience size) and launch offers tailored to particular groups of manufacturers, supporting partners' and sponsors' search and contacts. Furthermore, such a platform may coordinate and enhance all aspects of promotion and advertising.

More robust bonds and cooperation between organizers, food manufacturers, vendors, suppliers, stall owners and others: The study results revealed that establishing and maintaining business relationships with organizers is significant for numerous entrepreneurs. However, not all food manufacturers, vendors, stall owners, etc., stay in touch with the organizers after the festival finishes. Contacts are usually incidental. If the organizers become more involved, they will gain faster access to the information and support exhibitors' needs. Establishing more robust bonds between entrepreneurs will provide them with unity and make their activities more effective. The organizers may attract potential vendors from special interest groups and niche areas matching a specific festival's theme. They can establish a framework for distributing resources and incentives that have been designed for an event and create a unique atmosphere. Such relationships may provide vendors with better profitability, access to a larger group of potential customers, and the opportunity to share their passion and interests with others.

Smart mobile applications: Designing dedicated and easy-to-use mobile applications for food manufacturers, vendors, suppliers, stall owners, sponsors and other stakeholders taking part in a food festival will undoubtedly make them more visible. Such applications can be highly tailored toward individual vendors' values and business profiles. First, they can strengthen multichannel communication by transferring different values, information, and product offerings to various audiences (B2B, B2C). Second, they can work as middlemen between producers and customers by creating product recommendations based on individuals' preferences and previous purchasing behaviors. Third, such an application can create an entirely new way of buying local products, which can/has to be converted into a 'distance' or online mode. Last, such applications can be used as a platform for assessing, commenting and idea sharing among producers and buyers.

Value chain collaboration with multiple stakeholders: The producers and vendors are part of complex value chains, which include both public and private actors, as well as, potentially, knowledge partners and new suppliers, among others. Collaborative and cocreative alliances can be supported and promoted to enable knowledge sharing, capacity building, collaborative learning, and ongoing problem-solving to open up prospects for participation and cocreation, mainly by small sellers/exhibitors at festivals. Such cooperation may take place by creating a multilateral platform. As part of the platform's operation, stakeholders can jointly identify their goals and possible courses of action, discuss common interests and share ideas on the future of food- and nutrition-oriented events. Moreover, they can monitor changes taking place at food festivals and support adaptation and decision-making processes to develop the culinary landscape in Poland.

The measures above are in line with most regional and entrepreneurial policies and endeavors, which often stimulate business collaboration and work for rapid digitalization. However, the challenge is to more actively reflect on the potentials of the festivals as arenas, a policy tangent that still needs to be explored.

Further studies may more comprehensively link EO with the context in which the study is undertaken to reveal some potential relationship between place and local

(food) entrepreneurship. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to extend the survey about different cases and conduct more longitudinal studies to understand how EO evolves depending on production and enterprise growth.

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