Negotiating Privileged Networks and Exclusive Mobilities: The Case for a Deaf Festival in Scotland's Festival City

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We explore the case for a Deaf festival in Edinburgh, the self-proclaimed 'world leading *Festival City'*. The formal recognition of British Sign Language in the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 is paramount to the cultural and political context. Joining English and Gaelic in Scotland's linguistic landscape, BSL legally summons cultural representation in public life. We approach the study through two distinct methodologies. Firstly, we adopt a discourse analysis of the festival policy that constructs Edinburgh's festival networks and prioritizes distinct mobilities. Secondly, we draw upon a participative debate the authors organised as part of the *Edinburgh Festival Fringe* 2019.

The paper contributes to the critical examination of festivals as sites of diversity and inclusivity, both at the point of production and consumption. In doing so, we suggest that greater representation of Deaf and disabled communities in festival networks is a pre-requisite to festivals as inclusive public spaces.

Keywords Deaf festival, Edinburgh, festival mobilities, festival discourse, participative action research, BSL (Scotland) Act 2015.

Introduction

On the 17th September 2015, the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act (hereafter the BSL Act) was passed and Scotland became the first country in the UK to legally recognise British Sign Language (BSL). In the campaigning years that led to the BSL Act, Deaf activists called for a differentiated citizenship (De Meulder 2015): one that insisted upon the status of BSL as a minority language and insinuated a cultural mandate to formally recognise the distinctiveness of Deaf culture in Scotland. The formal recognition of BSL as a language marked a seminal moment in Scottish life and implicated festivals as spaces of equal access (through provision of BSL performances) and as public celebrations of Deaf culture.

Our aim in this paper is to explore the case for a Deaf festival in Edinburgh. We consider Edinburgh's festivals as central to contemporary politics of representation where identities, encounters and mobilities are staged and 'productive connections' (Bal and Hernandez-Navarro 2011, 15) established. Viewed this way, Edinburgh's festivals offer Scotland's Deaf community a space and time from which to materialise the transitional politics summoned by the BSL Act.

We argue that Edinburgh's festivals are uniquely placed to offer a distinct space and time to creatively and critically reflect upon the BSL Act's mandate for social and cultural change. Moreover, we argue that Edinburgh's festival networks are strategically located to collaborate with local and international Deaf arts organisations and to support the development of a Deaf festival at an infrastructural level (either within the matrix of the existing eleven member festivals of *Festivals Edinburgh*, or separately). Edinburgh's capacity to integrate, mobilise and re-make cultural relations provides the prospect of a Deaf festival with a ready-made cultural arena. In this way, Edinburgh's festivals have the *potential* to secure Scotland's Deaf

community distinct mobilities; supporting the necessary social and cultural bridge into public life (Solvang and Haualand 2014).

Research into the capacity of festivals to mobilise minority identities is coming into view through the work of researchers interested in the relations between festivals, communities and social capital (Quinn and Ryan 2019; Wilks and Quinn 2016; Wilks 2011; Finkel 2010; Mykletun 2009; Derrett 2003). Similar theoretical attention comes from researchers of festivals and Pride parades as sites of activism (Browne 2007; Waitt and Stapel 2011). In addition, a gradual synergy of mobilities and critical disabilities research (Goggin 2016; Parent 2016) contributes to the understanding of diverse intersectional immobilities (physical, financial, social and educational) relevant to festivals and their claims to inclusivity.

The uneven nature of cultural participation and the risks to potentially marginalised communities is the focus of Walters and Jepson's (2019) recent edited volume. Contributing authors Sage and Flores (2019, 71) consider disability at rural events, highlighting the impact of exclusion upon communities' self-development and identity. While they highlight the availability of inclusive 'event planning guides', their most noteworthy recommendation is that inclusivity for people with disabilities should start at the event planning process rather than at the point of consumption.

This body of work provides substantial in-roads to understanding the *communitizing* potential (Sharpe, Trussell and Mair 2011) and civic function of contemporary festivals in relation to social justice, immobilities and routes to 'becoming visible' (Bal and Hernandez-Navarro 2011, 14). This attention to the social capacity of festivals identifies an important ethical dimension to festivals as routes to public life. Such an ethics of festival participation is necessarily bound up with mobilities and forms of organisation that work to either facilitate, or deny, inclusive mobilities (Jamal and Wilson 2013; Lovelock 2017). Within the context of a growing body of literature that addresses both the potential for social capital and the danger of increased social exclusion, it is timely that we take this opportunity within this Special Issue of Annals of Leisure Research, to relate the theme of 'Events, Urban Spaces and Mobility' to the mobilities and immobilities that are afforded BSL users, and the prospect of a future Deaf festival in Edinburgh.

We align our approach with the social model and diversity model of disability (Andrews 2020), but that is not to say we categorise deafness within the already multidimensional category of 'disability'. Instead, our intention is to approach the case for a Deaf festival through the construction of *barriers* to festivals. While the social model amplifies the social construction of disability, revealing the material and immaterial barriers to full social and cultural participation, the diversity model considers the unique, complex identity politics of disabled individuals. Both theoretical models identify disabled people's experience of inequalities with an ableist and discriminatory society (Olkin 2002). The diversity model is particularly useful to researchers of festivals emphasising as it does, the importance of explicit celebrations of disability pride (Olkin 2002).

We begin by outlining the distinction between D/deaf identity in relation to festivals. We then outline our methodology as it relates to our aims, presenting a discourse analysis of relevant festival policy before considering the conversations that took place during an *Edinburgh Festival Fringe* debate in 2019. Finally, we consider the interconnections and differences between policy commitments and the concerns and demands raised by the D/deaf community.

D/deaf Identity and the mandate for a Deaf festival

Since the 1970s, Deaf activist work (Ladd 2003; Murray 2008; Woodward 1988) has invoked a distinction between D/deaf to describe the separation between deaf as a condition of hearing loss and individuals that do not sign, and Deaf to refer to members of a signing community who share practices, histories and traditions. More recent research moves away from this binary to reflect upon the complexity of identities and linguistic practices caught between what is viewed as an oversimplified dichotomy (Kusters et al. 2017). Nevertheless, in the present context, we have chosen to use the capitalised emphasis to signify a culturally Deaf community and festival. This reflects our own disciplinary distance from the prevailing debates, and our effort to reflect the significance of Deaf culture to the subject of festivals. In addition, our choice adheres to the language of the *Edinburgh Festival Fringe* debate (2019) and its D/deaf participants, whose contributions inform this paper.

The D/d remains a powerful mechanism through which to highlight the conscious identification with cultural values, practices, and identity. More precisely, *D*eaf is politicized in a way that reflects the processual formation of a Deaf community: as a consciously developed alternative to the oralist and audist construction of deaf as a pathological deficit. Choosing the Deaf identity is a political and cultural celebration and disavowal of an oppressive societal context. To be Deaf is *to choose to belong* to a heritage; with a shared history and linguistic investment in Deaf futures. Solvang and Haualand (2014) argue that Deaf festivals and events are formative in the affirmation and transmission of Deaf culture. Citing examples such the Deaflympics and Deaf federation of the Deaf World Congress (WFD) the authors suggest that *belonging is made* in these Deaf temporary spaces. They argue that the mobility of Deaf space is facilitated and staged through a calendar of transnational events, which they describe as anti-reductionist and inspirational for Deaf communities.

Methods for Cultural Inclusion and Festival Mobilities

We aim to cultivate a breadth of knowledge about the potential for a Deaf festival in Edinburgh. We therefore considered it necessary to capture both the macro (top down) festival policy discourse and the micro (bottom-up) lived experience of the D/deaf community. The methodology is comprised of two approaches: firstly, a discourse analysis designed to capture the ways in which policy constitutes possibilities for D/deaf performers and audiences. Secondly, a participatory action research (PAR) approach designed to enhance the Deaf community's involvement through practical, social, explanatory and dialogic means (Chevalier and Buckles 2019).

A Discourse Analysis of the Festival City's Festival Policy

The language of festival policy constructs festivals, cities and the subjects that produce and consume them. In this way, festival policies "contain implicit (and sometimes explicit) models of society" (Shore and Wright 1997, 7). Our focus is specifically upon those discourses that construct festival leadership and approaches to inclusion. It is these two areas that produce and re-produce identities, power dynamics and festival networks thereby enabling distinct ways of considering a Deaf-led festival. We employed a discourse analysis to understand how particular festival policy agendas have been made manifest, nameable and describable (Foucault 1980). We conducted a discourse analysis of five key policy and proto-policy documents that construct distinct priorities for the city's festivals (Table 1.).

	Policy Document	Date of Publication	Author	Wider Discursive Context
1.	*Festivals and the City: The Edinburgh Festivals Strategy*	2001	The City of Edinburgh Council	Urban Task Force 1999 *Towards an Urban Renaissance*. London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Charles Landry 2000 *The Creative City, A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* Scottish Executive. 2000. *Creating our future . . . minding our past: Scotland's national cultural strategy*.
2.	*Thundering Hooves Report: Maintaining the Global Competitive*	2006	Festivals Edinburgh	DCMS (department of culture, media and sport). 2001. *Creative Industries Mapping Document*, Richard Florida 2002 *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*.
3.	*Thundering Hooves 2.0*	2015	Festivals Edinburgh	Scottish Govt. 2008 *Culture Delivers*. Scottish Govt. 2010. *Widening access to the arts and culture*. European Commission, 2013. *Special Eurobarometer 399. Cultural access and participation*. Scottish Govt., 2014. *Cultural Engagement in Scotland*. BSL (Scotland) Act 2015
4.	*Inclusive and Accessible Events: A Guide for event organisers*	2016	Visit Scotland	DCMS (Department for Culture, Media and Sport). 2016. *The Culture White Paper*. Creative Scotland, 2016. *Understanding Diversity in the Arts Survey Summary Report*
5.	*Fringe Blueprint*	2019	Edinburgh Festival Fringe	Scottish Govt. 2017. *British Sign Language National Plan 2017-2023* Scottish Govt. 2018. *A Draft Cultural Strategy for Scotland*.

Table 1. Policy documents analyzed

These particular documents were selected because they provide a historic view of the strategic construction of Edinburgh's festivals; what they *do* and *how* they should be *administered* (documents 1, 2 and 3). Importantly, in relation to the case for a Deaf festival, these policies

also reveal the development of an inclusive festival discourse that seeks to construct ideals of festival access and participation (documents 4 and 5). Two of the five documents were commissioned by *Festivals Edinburgh* and produced by BOP Consulting, a cultural consultancy that has mined the convergence of cultural and urban planning.

Themes from Festival Policies 2001 - 2019

Global markets and Anonymous Stakeholders

Festivals and the City: The Edinburgh Festivals Strategy (2001) marked the beginning of a self-reflexive festival discourse that constructed values, identities, actions and futures. It was written by cultural consultants *Graham Devlin Associates* for The City of Edinburgh Council. The wider commissioning of cultural consultants across the UK at this time announced a new domain of discursive expertise. The integration of urban and cultural infrastructures (Evans 2002) (e.g. Richard Florida, Charles Landry [*Comedia*]) saw the re-positioning of festivals as instruments for staging, commodifying, and consuming urban space (Negrier 2014; Quinn 2010; Smith 2015).

Within the first strategy, Edinburgh's festivals are viewed instrumentally in relation to their place-making capacity and quantitatively in relation to their accumulation, with a call for a full annual calendar of festival events. The first strategy document constructs Edinburgh the 'festival city' as embedded within a 'global' matrix of inter-urban 'competition' that necessitates consultants, indicators, audits and professional planning assemblages. In this way, the 2001 strategy constituted the need for elite networks of consultancies to strengthen the 'status' of Edinburgh's preeminent festival identity and provide the administrative apparatus that could enable comparisons with other cities. Throughout the document, consultancy 'expertise' is presented as the panacea to the new global 'threat' posed by competing festival cities. In so doing, the first policy document announces the strategic use of festivals (Dooghe 2015; Finkel 2009, 2010; Finkel and Platt 2020; Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011; McGillivray and Frew 2015; Quinn 2010, 2019; Richards and Palmer 2010) and situates Edinburgh within the global context of 'festivalisation' (an urban cultural planning approach to economic restructuring and inter-urban competition wherein festivals function strategically as part of an event tourism portfolio).

In 2006, recognising the strategic development of event tourism in competitor destinations, a stakeholder group of top-down cultural industry agglomerations (Currid-Halkett and Ravid 2012) comprised of government officials, arts organisations, civic institutions, tourism agencies, and festivals commissioned industry research to investigate the future of Edinburgh's Festivals. One of the outcomes of this policy process was the establishment of *Festivals Edinburgh,* whose core business was fundamental to the administrative 'tracking and tracing' integral to the infrastructure of the creative economy (Thrift 2012, 159).

In the same year, the impending *European Capital of Culture* 2008 triggered the *Scottish Arts Council* (in partnership with *Festivals Edinburgh* (formerly, *the Association of Edinburgh Festivals),* the City of Edinburgh Council, the Scottish Executive, *EventScotland* and Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian*)* to commission *AEA Consulting* to conduct a study of Edinburgh's festival culture. Its purpose was to examine the competitive position of the eleven festivals belonging to *Festivals Edinburgh* and the extent to which that position was likely to be affected by 'the burgeoning number of festivals, both in the United Kingdom and overseas, that are competing for artists, audiences and funding' (Scottish Arts Council 2006, 3). The report presents evidence of the increasing 'risks' to Edinburgh's festivals by way of a list of

UK festivals. In this context of 'competition', Edinburgh's 'stakeholders' are cast as 'living off their capital' rather than reinvesting in the programming that might underwrite a continued pre-eminence. The language of the report warns of 'complacency' and inertia on the part of potential 'investors'. The report's reliance on the language of 'risk', 'threat' and 'complacency' is used as evidence for the need for *more* administrative action by way of increased 'investment' and 'branding'. The report warns of an impending glut of festival cities and a global ranking hierarchy wherein Edinburgh could be demoted to second, or third place – 'silver', or 'bronze' rather than 'gold'. This, the report states 'represents a position that is considerably inferior to that of pre-eminence' (Festivals Edinburgh 2006, 4).

The report marks a shift to neoliberal spatial cultural policy (Swyngedouw et al. 2002) clearly surveying the festivals through the prism of the creative economy and its appetite for indicators and reflexive evaluation (Jamieson 2014). Moreover, the strategy places the value of the city's festivals within a global market and away from more local civic meanings. The global market that is imagined is complexly interwoven with a perceived lack of control over the cultural status of Edinburgh amidst the flows of inter-urban competition.

The report's recommendations include increased 'investment in cultural infrastructure' and the development of a strategic planning approach to festivals. This emphasis upon planning is presented as necessary to 'demonstrably' meet the goals of funders and other 'stakeholders'. Demonstrable planning belongs to the prevailing preoccupation with global rankings and the elevated visibility of Edinburgh's cultural policies during the early 2000s. Thrift (2012) describes such an increasing intervisibility of policy as central to the global flow of urban visions. In this expanded context, Edinburgh's festival policies were *seen* as a global rather than local *discursive product*. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, highly mobile cultural policies travelled across creative networks (Jamieson 2014) allowing members to closely observe competitors' planning strategies and 'pick up cues, signals, insights and experiences to identify moments when a creative rush takes place' (Thrift 2012, 150).

From Global Markets to Social Value

Thundering Hooves 2.0 (2015) provides the solution to the discursively constructed problem presented in the first report. Warning against complacency, the second report continues to invoke the language of 'risk' as evidence for the need for more administrative action. *Thundering Hooves* 2.0 presents a ten-year strategy aimed at securing the 'world-class status' of the city's festival identity. Amongst the thirty-eight recommendations, there is a shift towards 'communities' and 'engagement': 'festivals can collaborate to support educational aims and social justice through participation, learning and belonging' (Festivals Edinburgh 2015, 2). The strategy presents what it describes as 'new forms of leadership' based on collaboration and 'shared ambition', cementing new 'local' networks through 'partnerships' and 'task groups'.

During the period between the first and second *Thundering Hooves* publications, there were several wider policy documents that emphasised the decline in cultural participation (European Commission 2013) and need for intersectoral collaboration (Scottish Govt. 2008). In particular, *Culture Delivers* directs local authorities, community planning partnerships and other potential collaborative agencies to engage with the arts, culture and creativity as a means to "contribute towards the Government purpose and their priority outcomes" (Scottish Govt. 2008, 1).

Thundering Hooves 2.0 echoes the instrumentalisation of *Culture Delivers* (2008) and highlights the absence of diversity, equality and social cohesion in the original *Thundering Hooves Report* (2006), which *Thundering Hooves 2.0* seeks to resolve:

> 'The social value of the festivals has arguably not been fully realised and although some good work is happening there is a need to tell a more coherent story about the festivals' role in community cohesion' (31).

'Moving up the agenda' *Thundering Hooves* 2.0 (2015, 7) commits the festivals to activities designed to enhance 'diversity and equality through outreach and engagement'. This shift towards 'commitments 'that increase cultural 'participation' avoids naming the complex types of 'barriers' that limit individuals' capacity to participate in festivals as both audiences and artists.

Despite the identified need to audit, plan and measure festival success there is no attempt to account for, or measure those inequalities that may limit individuals' capacity to participate in festival activities. A strategic approach to combatting 'inequalities' in Edinburgh's festival policy discourse is first articulated through a practical guide rather than through the consultancy paradigm. It is in the Visit Scotland publication *Inclusive and Accessible Events: A Guide for event organisers* (2016) where we first identify an explicit policy approach to inclusivity. The guide constructs 'access' as a means of developing audiences. Here, 'accessibility' is dilated beyond the category of disability to refer to 'the accessible market', which is further defined as including families with young children, older people, those with temporary physical impairments (for example, crutches), people with specific dietary requirements, and many others.

Despite the expanded definition of 'access', 'barriers' are largely identified as physical. Moreover, subjects excluded by 'barriers' are limited to their status as consumers of cultural experiences. The guide makes no 'obligation' to deaf or disabled artists, or festival staff. Instead, 'reasonable adjustments' are reserved for festival audiences and the untapped market they represent:

> 'There are 11.6 million disabled people in the UK, approximately 18.5% of the total population' represented as 'an estimated annual disposable income of over £200 billion' (Visit Scotland 2016, 4)

Two years after the publication of the *Accessible Events* guide, the *Fringe* published the *Fringe Blueprint* (2018) with the aim of making the *Fringe* more 'accessible', 'affordable', 'connected' and 'relevant'. It was used symbolically by the *Fringe* as 'a statement of intent that will inform everything we do between now and our 75th anniversary in 2022' (Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2018, 3). Its eight commitments are presented as drawing from the original open-access ethos of the *Fringe*. It calls for a 'collective effort' both from the *Fringe* (expressed as 'we will') and from various stakeholders (referred to as 'you can help').

It outlines commitments to:

1. Remove barriers to entry to ensure that everyone is welcome at the Fringe and anyone can take part;
2. Develop the Fringe's international reputation as the place to discover talent;
3. Tackle the rising cost of the Fringe to ensure the festival is affordable to all;
4. Secure a new home for the Fringe to provide year-round assistance to participants and support a vibrant Fringe community;
5. Foster a lifelong passion for the arts amongst Scotland's young peoples and champion creative learning in our schools and colleges;
6. Support and develop the world's greatest street festival at the heart of the Fringe;
7. Reduce the festival's carbon footprint and champion initiatives that limit our impact on the environment;
8. Tell the remarkable story of the Fringe and build awareness of, and support for, our charitable mission all over the world (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, 2018, 1-35).

The document frames 'diversity', 'openness' and 'accessibility' in relation to the removal of 'barriers' that exclude participation, and in relation to the festival's experimental aesthetic values. Unlike previous policies *Blueprint* mines 'diversity' for its cultural appeal, marginal identity and cosmopolitanism.

'Accessibility' is expanded beyond the conventional identification of both 'disability' and 'barriers' to respond to the intense embodied experience of *Fringe* space where noise, crowds and sensory overload have been the festival's *modus operandi*. The commitment to offer 'quieter spaces, and sensory backpacks for children and adults on the autism spectrum' (Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society 2018, 27) constructs the possibility of engaging with the *Fringe* in fundamentally new sensory ways.

The Changing Discourse of Festival Policy

The first Edinburgh festival strategy reproduces the rhetoric and millennial hype of creative industries*'* discourse invoking an entrepreneurial relation between festivals and the city's competitive advantage. Edinburgh's unique festival calendar is valued for the ambience of mobility it affords the city, which in turn can be mined for its 'reputational capital' (Ackers 2008, 412). In the first of Edinburgh's formal festival strategies, its festivals are summoned to mobilize the city's inter-urban competitive advantage (Thrift 2005). Edinburgh's *claim* to an unparalleled festival identity exists within this global market where its pre-eminent status is threatened by competing festival cities.

The first strategy privileges 'stakeholders' rather than 'audiences', 'communities', or 'publics.' It invokes a network of top-down relationships galvanised by the formulation of Edinburgh's festivals as iconic assets targeted towards an 'external audience'. In pursuit of these external audiences, the beneficiaries instantiate the need for increased planning and specialist consultancy knowledge. *Festivals Edinburgh* was a product of this new demand for increased planning expertise and a pan-festival approach to administratively drawing together the intersecting mobilities of tourism, celebrity culture, media and the preforming arts.

Somewhat differently*, Thundering Hooves* 2.0 (2015) commits the city's festivals to activities designed to enhance 'diversity and equality through outreach and engagement'. 'Moving up the agenda' issues of 'inclusion' are unproblematically set amidst calls for more 'branding' and increased measures to counter inter-urban 'global competition'. Throughout the three documents, the continued emphasis upon the 'stakeholder' masks the nature of the *stake* and

presents the need for further strategy and infrastructure as self-evident. In its constitution of 'stakeholder networks', these reports do not detail how such networks might foster mobilities, or address inequalities. Nor do they pluralise different stakes in festivals that different communities of interests might have.

The two latter documents echo a wider discursive shift that emphasizes a synergy between the social and economic value of culture (DCMS 2016). Although *Inclusive and Accessible Events: A Guide for event organisers* (2016) and *Fringe Blueprint* (2018) announce 'equality' in very different ways, each construct it in relation to the development of the festival market. The VisitScotland guide is most explicit in its construction of 'the accessible market'. This dilutes the more structural forms of social and cultural exclusion, referring` instead to 'access' as special 'requirements' that enable families, old people and those with dietary restrictions to be catered for as part of their cultural experience.

In contrast, the *Fringe Blueprint* presents 'access' as the search for new talent. It mines the festival's legacy ethos that anyone can take part. The invocation of the 'marginal' symbolises the *Fringe* as a space where diversity can be consumed. The *Fringe* thrives off its reputation of openness and creative freedom and has most to lose and gain in the discursive construction of equality. Despite its scale and economic power, the *Fringe* continues to identify itself as a space of *outsiderness,* experimentation, subversion and subculture where the 'uninvited' and excluded summon the founding itinerant performers of 1947. Both *Inclusive and Accessible Events: A Guide for event organisers* (2016) and *Fringe Blueprint* (2018) provide scope for a Deaf festival in Edinburgh. The former, through the summoning of 'the accessible market' and the latter through the cultural capital of marginality.

Engaging Marginalised Audiences: Participatory Action Research

As a method of exploring and representing the views of a Deaf community we organized a debate led by a panel of D/deaf artists and chaired by a Deaf storyteller. As a method of gathering data to support the case for a Deaf Festival in Edinburgh, the debate can be understood as belonging to the tradition of participatory action research (PAR) (Knudsen and Stage 2015), which 'complicates the dichotomy between doing something to the world and investigating it' (ibid., 6). By its very nature, PAR is undertaken as an equitable partnership (Bergold 2007) that aims to redistribute control of the research to a wider community of participants (Evans and Jones 2004). This approach has been used in events research by Finkel and Sang (2016), who emphasise the value of its democratic principles and empowering potential. Within a PAR framework, the debate format provides a familiar, accessible and flexible model of deliberation (Row and Frewer 2004; Rowe, Marsh and Frewer 2004) across government, the market and civil society (O'Doherty and Einsiedel 2013).

Our PAR agenda was underpinned by a belief in the communitizing potential of festivals as 'scenes of self-activity' (Eleftheriadis 2015, 653) and based on the principles of cultural inclusion and valuing all views (O'Neill and Webster 2005). We organized the debate as part of the official *Fringe* programme and deliberately mined the *Fringe*'s reputation as an open and dialogic space wherein we could critically and publicly debate the possibility of a future Deaf festival.

The *Fringe* has a legacy of critical exchanges, aesthetic experimentation and social commentary and boasts a strapline that capitalizes on this position; 'The world's greatest platform for creative freedom'. The *Fringe* debate was therefore entangled within the questions, networks and mobilities that could sustain a Deaf festival and functioned as a

performative and collaborative space (Lury and Wakeford 2012; Staunæs and Kofoed 2015) designed to both interfere and enact the lack of a Deaf festival in Edinburgh.

We titled the *Fringe* event *Dinner Party Debates: The Case for a Deaf Festival in the Festival City.* It featured within the *Fringe Central* programme, a dedicated series of events designed to support festival networks running throughout the official *Festival Fringe* (07-31 August). To give some context to the programme themes, in 2019 it also featured a *Fringe Fair* which offered a dedicated networking space for participants and funders; *Fringe Swap Shops* where unwanted materials, props and support could be exchanged and *Fringe Festivals around the World*, which introduced festival directors to each other.

The programme description for the debate read:

> The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 and subsequent National Plan 2017-2023 (2017) lays the foundation to improve the lives of BSL users in Scotland. Culture, public life and festivals figure within this mandate. This roundtable discussion takes the format of a lively dinner party and deliberates why Edinburgh should host Scotland's first Deaf festival (Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2019)

The event was advertised on the official *Fringe* website and on social media. It was free, but ticketed. Seventy tickets were available, and all were sold through the *Fringe* Ticket Online Office. The event was communicated via a video on the *Fringe* Website in BSL. We hoped for a significant Deaf audience and organized the event to meet their communication needs. We booked four BSL interpreters and invited a panel of experts comprised mainly of Scottish Deaf artists. The only panelist not based in Scotland was a Deaf theatre director who has worked in both Scotland and England and participated in Edinburgh's festivals and international Deaf festivals. We adopted the collegiate (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995) form of participation to working *with* panelists; combining our collective skills to develop a mutual learning process. In advance of the event we worked with the chair to co-create the themes of the debate, as discussed below (Table 3).

Table 2. lists the invited panelists (research participants) of D/deaf performers, artists, arts, cultural, charity and other agency representatives, alongside management stakeholders of the *Fringe*.

Panelist T and Chair	Artist, story-teller/writer, and founder of theatre company
Panelist J	Artistic Director of theatre company
Panelist E	Artist, performer, and founder of theatre company
Panelist P	Representative from Deaf Action
Panelist S	Representative from Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society
Panelist Cl	Designer
Panelist Cr	Actor and theatre maker

Table 2. The panelists

Themes from the Dinner Party Debate: Mobilities and Immobilities

In keeping with the *Dinner Party Debate* title and participative nature of the event, the venue was set-up to resemble a dinner party, which included themed décor and props, including table

settings, flowers, and dinner plates. We opened the debate with an introduction before welcoming the panelists (see Table 2.) and the audience. We then introduced the 'rules' of the debate which were designed to support inter-lingual audience participation. Notably, the rules were designed to avoid questions being shouted from the floor. If audience members wished to pose a question, or join the debate, they were asked to raise a paper plate (one was placed on each chair) above their heads. This simply and clearly indicated a desire to join the 'dinner table' discussion. The debate's rules allowed audience members to join the panelists for a limited time, before being presented with a 'bill' by a 'waiter' which signaled a request that they return to their seat,

The venue set-up allowed all attendees clear sight of the panel, audience members, and BSL interpreters. Microphones were used to ensure BSL interpreters could be clearly heard across the venue. We organized vantage points from where we could film and photograph the panelists and BSL interpreters. We later transcribed the video along with documented notes. These notes were used as the basis of the analysis.

The debate themes were based upon the literature, festival policy and context and were concerned with notions of mobility in the festival sector and in particular access for D/deaf artists, performers and audience members; festival provision; the need and potential role of a D/deaf festival in Scotland; the implications of the BSL Act 2015; and how a D/deaf festival could be mobilized, and by whom. These broad themes were then distilled into four questions, that formed the basis for discussion (See Table 3.) and the subsequent thematic analysis. The four questions were co-designed with the chair (panelist T), a Deaf storyteller, writer, and founder of a Deaf arts company. Her role was to lead the discussion. All panelists were provided with the questions a week in advance of the debate, in preparation for the discussion.

Theme 1	Why should there be a Deaf festival in Scotland?
Theme 2	What is wrong with the current approach to BSL provision in the city's festivals?
Theme 3	Is the infrastructure and expertise of the festival city important to a deaf festival?
Theme 4	Should a deaf festival be part of the Fringe, or should it be separate?

Table 3 – Co-designed debate questions

Themes of debate and discussion

In analyzing the debate, we studied the transcribed video data and the notes taken during the event. Below, we report the key findings from the data that evolved during the debate to assist in interpreting the findings in relation to building on the themes (Boyatzis 1998).

Theme 1: Why should there be a Deaf festival in Scotland?

Theme 1 reflected upon the context of Edinburgh as a platform to stage a potential Deaf festival. Asking 'why' there should be a Deaf festival raised discussions of both D/deaf talent and the demand from D/deaf audiences. Panelist E opened the debate by stating that she thought there was an abundance of potential D/deaf participants, starting with those seated around the table. There should, she argued, be an opportunity to create D/deaf events as part of an existing festival, or indeed a new D/deaf festival in Scotland. She then highlighted the need for support

from established festivals (for example the *Fringe*). She also highlighted the abundance of creative talent and the mandate to nurture D/deaf artists, telling the audience that 'we' need to support each other, be of the highest standard, but be resilient and accept criticism.

Panelist J recalled her first performing experience at the *Fringe* in 2003 at a captioned play. She described how 'so many D/deaf people came to that and said, that was the first time in the history of the *Fringe* that they had experienced an accessible show'. She remarked that since then, while provision had grown slowly, today:

> 'D/deaf people were growing excited about the Fringe and want to be part of it because it is such an amazing festival, so why have we not? We have some brilliant people here who are amazingly talented and the world comes to Edinburgh to see this, so our work should be seen by the world' (panelist J).

Panelist E agreed, adding that she thought more should be done to support D/deaf performers. She highlighted the *Fringe* website and its lack of information about whether performances are captioned, interpreted performed by a Deaf person, or in BSL. Informal recommendations were in her opinion, the most powerful means of promoting performances, but the problem was the difficulty in finding *any* details of D/deaf performances.

At his stage, it was highlighted that the *Fringe* has reach and influence, but does not programme the work (panelist S). Although much of the debate at this point was focused on the *Fringe* specifically as a potential setting for a Deaf festival, a broader discussion emerged about a need for communication, festival networking and support structures for and between D/deaf artists and audiences, and the wider festivals environment. All panelists strongly agreed there is a sufficient demand and talent to populate a Deaf festival programme, and that Edinburgh would be a natural setting.

On recognising the wealth of D/deaf culture and history in Scotland, panelist P stated, 'Deaf culture has been part of Edinburgh's culture since the festivals began'. As the city is the 'festival city', and champions numerous festivals, why should it not claim ownership of a Deaf festival? He went on to explain that the richness of Edinburgh's Deaf and festival heritage should make 'us proud' and 'we should claim this'.

Theme 2. What's wrong with the current approach to BSL provision in the city's festivals?

Participants and panelists agreed that BSL provision is currently *not* satisfactory and this was a significant barrier to the city's festivals. The lack of a central body measuring and amalgamating BSL events made it very difficult for artists and performers to access opportunities as both audiences and performers. Panelists also agreed that 'accessibility' is inseparable from BSL provision, and importantly, dissemination of provision; communication of where *it is* and is *not* available. This, it was argued should be clearly listed in all festivals' programme and website. *Edinburgh International Festiva*l was cited as being the best festival in this regard. Panelists also commented that festivals need to distinguish the kind of provision: whether it is captioned, or BSL interpretation. Panelists then identified a need for distinct listings, or a separate programme of BSL interpreted performances, to ease the navigation of the festivals. An audience member who joined the table suggested the need for guidelines about this for performing companies. She highlighted the failure of the current approach, which places responsibility with event organisers who must ask the festivals to provide details of how to deliver BSL for their events/programmes.

Theme 3. Is the infrastructure and expertise of the festival city important to a deaf festival?

Panelist P again highlighted the long history and relationship between Deaf culture and Edinburgh. He pointed to the important heritage of *Deaf Action* (D/deaf charity) as the inaugural D/deaf charity in Edinburgh. He encouraged D/deaf artists and audiences to remember this and 'be proud of ourselves and think about what a Deaf festival would look like' (panelist P).

Panelist S, a *Fringe* representative confirmed that the infrastructure and expertise belonging to the city's festivals networks are important and that the *Fringe Society* is happy to support any plans for a future Deaf festival. She explained this support is in fact the basis of the *Fringe's* open access founding principle. She asked: 'Why not join the *Fringe* board to ensure a voice?' (panelist S). This prompted lively discussion around who would be the best person to join the *Fringe* board.

At this point, the debate opened to audience members from performing companies. Discussions developed around the need for a stronger and more distinct BSL infrastructure in the festivals' networks of expertise. In her capacity as a *Fringe Society* representative, Panelist S outlined what the *Fringe* could do to support a Deaf festival, suggesting that Deaf artists could aim to actively work with D/deaf organisations (such as *Deaf Action*, or *Deaf Scotland*). She pointed to the *Fringe* constitution, which makes it possible for anyone to become a member of the *Fringe* board by standing for election. She explained that membership of the *Fringe* board would facilitate an opportunity to work with sub-groups and champion D/deaf representation.

Panelist S suggested progress towards a Deaf festival might begin by setting-up a small-scale Deaf festival as a sub-strand of the *Fringe*, citing the 2019 programme's showcase format. Discussion followed about whether this could be supported by a dedicated physical space, a venue such as *Deaf Action*, which could function as a festival hub for D/deaf participants. This approach it was argued, could be developed in small steps to gather momentum.

Audience members from cities hosting Deaf festivals joined the conversation. An Italian audience member joined the panelists and described his home city's Deaf festival. He illustrated the importance of building inter-lingual accessibility and education into the programme, allowing non-signing artists to provide breakthrough shows for D/deaf audiences and vice-versa. Another audience member joined and described France as an example of good practice. He highlighted ways in which French Deaf festivals include creative D/deaf spaces, such as Deaf villages. He proposed that a similar format for Edinburgh could be created.

The discussion developed to talk of potential D/deaf tourism benefits; arguing that D/deaf performers would come to Edinburgh from all over the world attracting international D/deaf audiences. Framed through the lens of tourism, participants made the case that Deaf tourists as well as hearing tourists come to the city's festivals, therefore should the panelists not consider the argument for a Deaf festival in relation to the *Deaf pound*.

Theme 4: should a deaf festival be part of the Fringe, or should it be separate?

Panelist S reiterated that the *Fringe Society* is happy to support plans for a D/deaf festival, but 'cannot lead'. She suggested creating a 'BSL strand' to share across the landscape of the

Fringe, urging the panelists to action. Building on this, the panelists deliberated whether there should be one distinct venue for D/deaf performances. Panelist J questioned the risk of such a venue becoming a 'D/deaf ghetto', known as 'the deaf place' (Panelist J). Panelist T defended the need for D/deaf spaces at the festival –in particular a social space where participants could share information.

The debate came to an end without a resolution and perhaps more questions than answers. As the venue slowly emptied, participants and panelists continued their discussions around *who* should begin a planning process and *who* had the mandate to develop the case for a D/deaf festival. Final suggestions from the panel members concluded with the need for a planning board comprising a sub-group of performers, members of the council and interested parties.

Discussion: Between Policy and Participative Knowledge

Since 2001, the policy that delineates the values, networks, processes and possible futures of Edinburgh's festivals has presented a neoliberal evaluation of festivals, oriented to calculate 'impact' in terms of economic benefit to the city's 'stakeholders'. The most recent shift to constructing festivals in relation to social justice, communities, belonging, engagement and new forms of leadership is evident in both *Inclusive and Accessible Events: A Guide for event organisers* (2016) and *Fringe Blueprint* (2018). Each of which provide a discursive framework that offers scope for a Deaf festival in Edinburgh: The former, through the summoning of 'the accessible market' and the latter through the cultural capital of marginality.

Although both discourses negotiate the stigma of disability and marginality by reconfiguring 'access' in relation to consumer mobilities, only the *Fringe Blueprint* constructs 'access 'at the point of cultural production as well as consumption. However, both documents fail to engage with Deaf and disabled arts groups at the point of policy writing and therefore miss the opportunity to engage in questions of *ownership* and *responsibility*, two defining themes of the debate.

As the debate revealed, performers and audiences exist, but festival-funding, venue-booking, council infrastructure and festival leadership networks are not seen to be accessible by Deaf artists. Some of the questions raised towards the end of the debate were 'when is the next debate?'; 'who will fund the next meeting?'; 'why are the other directors not here?' and 'who will pay for interpreters if we meet with them?'. This last question goes to the core of a very practical barrier to festival networks for Deaf artists, that of the cost of BSL interpreters. There is both a shortage of BSL interpreters in Scotland and a lack of funding to support Deaf artists in the necessary meetings with hearing funders and planning networks. These structural problems sustain barriers to cultural leadership and thwart the prospect of a Deaf festival in Edinburgh.

Participants' calls for the existing festival infrastructure to accept some responsibility for developing a Deaf festival (in collaboration with D/deaf organisations and artists) was met with limited options. Only the possibility of including D/deaf events as part of a *Fringe* showcase was presented as an achievable opportunity. Although the *Fringe* supported the case for a Deaf Festival, the position was made clear, that as an open-festival the *Fringe* was distanced from any direct planning involvement. In this way, responsibility and capacity were not reconciled.

Conclusion: Mobilising a Deaf Festival

Imagining an additional festival in Edinburgh is easily done precisely because the 'festival city' sustains a complex international network of top-down cultural industry agglomerations (Currid-Halkett and Ravid 2012) strategically positioned to support a Deaf festival. Edinburgh offers the D/deaf community and the BSL Act (2015) the performative space where Deaf culture could be affirmed (Unesco 2009) and inter-lingual encounters creatively explored. Moreover, through the city's festival culture, the Scottish government could realise its pledge to bring BSL and Deaf culture more fully into Scotland's public life.

The Dinner Party Debate (2019) revealed exclusions, immobilities and perceived challenges to gaining access to resources, knowledge, networks and funding, but it also revealed the imagined mobilities of a Deaf Festival. Participants' proposed Deaf villages, inter-lingual performances and *Fringe* showcases brought to light the embryonic futures of a prospective Deaf festival. In its lack of resolution and frustrated endings, the debate also signalled the need for the new forms of leadership and collaborative partnerships promised in recent festival policy documents. Such partnerships and alliances could bring Scotland's first Deaf festival into view.

There is a need for more research into the ways in which festivals might foster mobilities beyond the policy discourse of economic impact and accessible markets. Equally, there is a need for more research into the ways in which festivals might function as 'scenes of self-activity' (Eleftheriadis 2015, 653) enacting forms of Deaf Pride, empowerment and futurity. Although a discourse analysis provides a crucial insight into the construction of festival meanings, it is in the participative ethos of a Deaf-led festival panel that Scotland's public sector must channel its energies.

The debate and the critical mass of Deaf participants symbolize the necessary new power-balance required in developing conversations about Deaf culture and a future Deaf-led festival in Edinburgh. If the recent festival policy discourse of 'access' and 'participation' is to enact change it must start at the event planning process (Sage and Flores 2019). Only then, might a future Deaf-led festival play a formative role in the construction and sustaining of Deaf identity and Deaf mobilities in Scotland.

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