

“We Poke the Body and See What Happens...”

How Do People Manage Expectations in Transformative Parties, Festivals, and Retreats?

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Abstract

Organizers of playful transformative events (e.g., subcultural gatherings, dance festivals, bodywork events, and many more) provide intense experiences to their participants, that have the potential to transform their cognitive, emotional, or bodily state temporarily or permanently. With participants attending such events with strong expectations both towards the transformative potential, as well as the general dynamics and structures of the event, organizers need to reflect on and engage with strategies for creating, managing, and calibrating these expectations. To illustrate such strategies, this paper reports on three cases of somatically and emotionally transformative events, including a queer festival, an artistic retreat, and a clubbing event for grieving individuals. Based on interviews and an ethnographic field study, we apply a dynamic model of expectation types to locate relevant organizers strategies for expectation management for playful transformative events.

Keywords

Expectation management; parties; transformative events; dynamic expectations model; transformative festivals

Entering spaces that allow us to engage with transformative somatic and emotional practices in a shared temporary community is by nature an intense experience, in cognitive, emotional, and physical ways. Examples for such hedonic, exploratory, and playful events include, but are not limited to, events like Burning

Man (Rowen, 2020), religious festivals as the Durga Puja (Shankar & Patnaik, 2025), yoga festivals (Lucia, 2023), “drug-fueled clubbing” (Florêncio, 2023), or “cuddle parties” (Mayr, 2023).

These transformative events differ in their framing: from providing space for shared experiences (e.g., raves) or participant-led organization of activities with relatively loose frames (e.g., Burning Man), to clearly framed events (e.g., ‘cuddle parties’) with an emphasis on structured, time-bound and facilitator-led workshops and activities (e.g., yoga festivals). What connects them is a shared, similar set of objectives and desires to be realized through them: they seek to build (temporary) community, and they allow people to engage *somatically* with themselves and others – they are being physically, emotionally, relationally, socially and perhaps even spiritually engaged.

Due to their transformative potential, such events require specific attention to expectation building, management, negotiation and reflection to prepare and enable pleasurable experience, both on an individual (attendee) and structural (organizers and communities) level. Whereas individually experienced transformative digital games can rely on an onboarding and learning through how they are designed (e.g., Graham, 2024), playful transformative events that combine individual and collective experience – whether larps (e.g., Bowman et al., 2024) or play parties (e.g., Harviainen & Frank, 2018) – need pre-event processes that prime the participants’ expectations the right way so that the events’ feel and mood will be the desired ones.

Within this study, we focus on the organization of transformative events in which individuals, who were potentially strangers in advance (and who might return to being so after leaving an event), engage in shared transformative practices, exploring and entering potentially intimate, momentary, conscious relationships with themselves, as well as other bodies and individuals. We here understand these playful events as spaces enabling “an experience of social connection in a group mediated through a shared engagement-prioritizing activity” (Masek & Stenros, 2024, p. 81) within a temporary or permanent subcultural community with a strong group identity, a significant feeling of belonging and shared norms and rules (Wignall, 2018, pp. 60–61).

We focus on expectation management as an organizational aspect, due to which we have adopted a service studies approach for understanding the preparation of the events, building upon the works of Christian Grönroos (1993, 2009) and Jukka Ojasalo (1999, 2001). This approach deploys existing knowledge of how events-as-services are promoted and later experienced by participants and thereby enables us to understand event marketing and management in a way that is complementary to game culture studies and event design research. Nevertheless, we also see transformative events as settings for play, often game-like. Play is contextual. As Sircart (2014) points out, its most traditional environment are games, but other con-

texts, such as playgrounds or breaks from everyday activities and habits, are likewise possible. An expectation management approach allows us to see how that play is primed for transformative events.

The research was led by the following research question:

Which organizer-led strategies are employed before and during the surveyed events to build and make sense of different expectation types before and during somatic-emotionally transformative subcultural events?

To respond to this question, we applied a multiple case study strategy, combining an ethnographic survey of transformative events and interviews with 19 attendees and organizers across 3 separate events.

We will begin with an introduction of related research and the applied framing for selected events. Following, we will introduce the study design and provide anonymized spotlights on the surveyed events. We will then report on the initial findings of this study, before providing an outlook on current limitations and future continuations of this work.

Background and guiding concepts

Our research is focused on events that engage with practices of both shared somesthetic and emotional transformation within the context of Masek and Stenros' framework for playful experiences at parties and party-like events (2024, p. 81).

First, parties are used as social tools between strangers to develop connection in a first interaction. Second, parties are ritualized events in friend groups and families to reinforce patterns of social connection. Third, parties are structural tools of societies, states, and cultures for reinforcing social connection over a larger group and during liminal changes in cultural identity. (Masek & Stenros, 2024, p. 81)

While Masek and Stenros focus on social transformative potential, this can (and will be here) extended towards the somatic and emotional transformation through engagement in shared activities such as dance, meditation, kink activities, bodywork, or collective emotional expression. Following, we will first provide an overview of existing work on event-based transformative events, and the building and management of desires and expectations.

Event-based transformative (somaesthetic and emotional) experiences

Transformative events and the navigation of those have primarily received attention in research in relation to *transformational festivals* as part of electronic music subcultures, with Burning Man and its local satellite events being typical examples (see, for example, Rowen, 2020). These events are defined as (mass) gatherings featuring performances, participatory workshops, artistic elements, and ritualistic structures; relying on active, social, and creational attendee contribution and (temporal) community building; speaking to a highly diverse audience with both matching and divergent objectives, motivations, and expectations; and explicitly aimed at evoking transformative experiences (Beaulieu-Prévost et al., 2019; Rowen 2020). Rowen further defines those events as follows:

Key to this is the the co-creation of an immersive, participant-driven reality' that produces a sense of empowerment while effacing distinctions between performers and spectators. ... Participants enter threshold spaces where the usual rules of social order don't apply, but by emerging personally transformed, they produce an effect of *communitas* and a shared reference point for emergent social structures. (Rowen 2020, p. 697)

Central to these gatherings is a subjective *experience* of transformation in relation to self, body, space, community, and normalized everyday experiences.

While most research on the concept of transformational festivals such as Burning Man is centered around large-scale events (Beaulieu-Prévost, 2019), research on transformational experiences embedded into specialized smaller-scale events implies a similar understanding (Tkaczynski et al., 2022), as found in somatic workshops (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023), body modification events (Pitts, 2003), analogue roleplaying events (Bowman et al., 2024), or yogic festivals (Lucia, 2023). The shared element of these larger- and smaller-scale events is the notion of shared presence, distinct transformative experiences, as well as their typically participatory, subcultural and/or countercultural nature, offering experiences and “learnings” perceived as lacking in mainstream society (Rodriguez, 2014). Their objective is to “radically change the experience in both an epistemic and personal way” (Chan, 2024), providing transformative “experiences where one cannot know what they are like before having them” (Chan, 2024) (*epistemic*) and/or a transformation of mental, somatic, and emotional capabilities and objectives (*personal*) (Paul, 2014; Chan, 2024).

Especially for first-time attendees, the transformative experience is an epistemic one, while personal transformation applies to all types of attendees (including facilitators). The extent and radicality of transformation achieved through transformative events/experiences is notoriously difficult to generalize (Campbell, 2025) and varies in extent, duration, period of effect, and intensity (Shusterman &

Svanæs, 2023). For instance, people with kinky desires may enter their first kinky experience with very unclear expectations, and emerge having had many expectations met, and/or barriers crossed (e.g., Carlström, 2018a, 2018b).

For the context of this work, we focus on playful events that engage primarily with the metrics for “transformative somaesthetic experience” (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023). In short, such an experience is here defined as (a) an explorative activity, (b) explicitly altering the relation to and conscious experience of the own soma (body-mind) and emotions, (c) as well as modifying the relation to the space one is in an acting upon (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023, pp. 284–285). While allowing for potentially transgressive or uncomfortable experience, it is still “a dominantly positive experience” (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023, p. 284), which is “memorably significant” (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023, p. 285). As such, “it transforms not only perception but also behavior in an intentional way, involving purposive activity. ... The transformative effects are not momentary but lasting or memorable” (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023, p. 285). These characteristics should not be understood as absolutes, but rather as individual scales characterizing the diversity of potential somaesthetic transformation in regard to extent, intensity, duration, or lasting impact (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023).

Expectations for transformative events

To frame the impact of expectations for experiencing transformative events, we first have to briefly turn towards Sandis (2025) proposition for defining transformative experiences.

Words like ‘change’ and ‘transformation’ are ambiguous, for they may refer to either (a) the event or process of changing or (b) the resulting change. The cause of the latter may form part of the former. (Sandis, 2025, p. 31)

Therefore, when we here talk about expectation building, we refer to (a) the expectations towards the engagement with transformation (‘What do I have to do/engage with to have a transformative experience?’) and (b) the expectation towards the transformed state both in regard to epistemic and personal transformation (‘How will it feel to be transformed? What will be feeling different?’). Bowman and colleagues (2024, p. 23) divide transformative role-playing games into three related but somewhat distinct categories: transformative leisure, therapeutic, and educational. Our subjects of study represent these three categories transferred to other practices than role-playing (‘Transformation for what?’), while likewise overlapping with the other two aspects introduced above (the ‘What?’ and ‘How?’ of transformation).

Before participating in a potentially transformative event, individuals might engage in cognitive modeling of an experience-to-be, building expectations towards the

experience, its frame, and effect. To do so productively, individuals build expectations based on what is familiar and/or available information, including comparable experiences by themselves or others, popular imaginaries, or media representations (Chan, 2024; Zimmerman & Ullman, 2020).

As outlined in the introduction to this study and the understanding of the events studied as services, we here draw from theories of customer expectations in service studies to further understand the different roles of expectations in attendance of transformative events.

Customer¹ expectations are not monolithic things that are easy to summarize. Ojasalo (1999, 2001) divided them into several categories (see Figure 1). *Fuzzy* expectations are those where people expect a change, but do not have a clear view of what that change should or could be. If they are not met, customers might be unsatisfied but are typically not able to pinpoint why. *Precise* expectations are their opposite, in which a customer clearly knows what they want and/or need. *Implicit* expectations are present in a situation so inherently that they become “so self-evident to customers that they do not actively or consciously even think about them” (Ojasalo, 1999, p. 96). If implicit expectations are met, they rarely get noticed, but they will almost certainly be noticed by a customer if they are not met. *Explicit* expectations, in turn, “are clear in the customers’ minds” (Ojasalo, 1999, p. 96), and

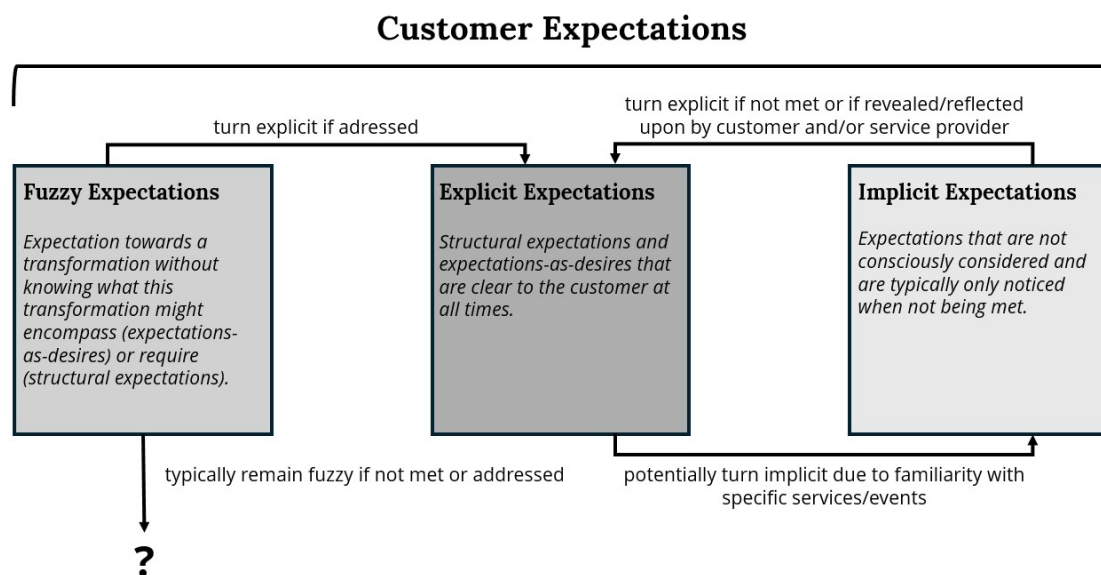


Figure 1. Edited visualization of the dynamic customer expectation model, based on the initial visualization by Ojasalo (1999).

1 When we here speak about customers in the background section, we adopt the language of Ojasalo (1999, 2001). For our specific cases, we have decided to instead use ‘attendee’ to address the differing instances of commercialization across the studied events.

the customers pay attention to whether they are met or not. They nevertheless may not be discussed openly. Finally, expectations can be either *realistic* or *unrealistic*, which means they are either possible or impossible to fulfill. If they are unrealistic, addressing them by the service provider or active reflection by the customer might make those more realistic. Customers' expectations appear in the forms of sets which can contain any and even all of the above types. Expectations are, furthermore, affected by several factors, such as past experiences, personal needs, perceived alternatives, and many situational factors (Wilson et al., 2021).

These categories of expectations apply both to structural expectations (“What will frame and enable an experience?”) and expectations-as-desires (“What do I hope/want to experience and what is necessary for that?”), with expectations-as-desires often being present as initially fuzzy. For the context of transformative events, both relate to the “prediction about the exteroception (perception of the outer world) accompanying an outcome and a prediction about the concomitant interoception (perception of the inner world)” (Villiger, 2024, p. 1096). Building and managing expectations further provides the individual with their subjective understanding of the probability of desire fulfillment. If these expectations towards transformation are not met, individuals have potentially disruptive experiences, which (sometimes but not always) may result in discomfort and/or modified transformational experiences, leading to stronger post-event reflections than an experience fully meeting expectations (Molouki et al., 2020).

Service providers can respond to existing expectations through various strategies. For example, they can try to focus fuzzy expectations into clearer and hopefully realistic ones, help reveal implicit expectations and seek to meet them (or mitigate damage once they have not been met), and to attempt to calibrate unrealistic expectations into ones that can be accomplished (Ojasalo, 2001).

Expectations can also be self-fulfilling, so that customers get the experience they expect, because their experiences are affected by their expectations, and they may make predictions of what they are likely to get. Therefore, it does not necessarily make sense to under-promise something in order to exceed expectations, but rather to make at least realistic or even inflated claims, so as to try and make them into self-fulfilling prophecies (Wilson et al., 2021). It can be a useful strategy to delight customers with something extra that is unexpected, but this can easily lead to this delight becoming part of future expectations, i.e., a new baseline expectation (Rust & Oliver, 2000). The delights have also a tendency to be something only peripheral to the basic expectations (the ‘musts’) that form the core of the experience for a customer. In relation, Villiger proposes that participants/customers (assuming expectations are build towards a potentially positive experience) should “form positive/optimistic affective expectations because your affective experiences tend to assimilate to your affective expectations; thus, positive/optimistic affective expectations tend to promote positive affective experiences” (Villiger, 2024, p. 1104). To expect a pleasurable experience from engaging in a specific activity “gives rise

to desire” (Gregory 2021, p. 120). However, there is a potential unreliability to expectations build around such events due to unfamiliarity with a transformative experience (e.g., first-time attendees) or the introduction of unpredictable factors (e.g. other individuals and their desires and expectations) (Villiger, 2024).

Events related to e.g., sex or transgressive and physically risky yet playful activities dance on a tightrope between being sufficiently risk-aware yet still playful enough, as elements such as warning signs or the presence of health or safety professionals can be “mood killers” for many participants (e.g., Haywood, 2025). What therefore needs to be established are safer spaces for play, yet without compromising too much of that playfulness for the sake of safety. These structures contribute to a “non-serious framing” (Masek, 2024) of playful engagement, in which the application of safety measures allow for a safe(r) engagement with an otherwise risky or potentially even dangerous practice.

Methodology

In the next section, we introduce the events we attended, and explain how we collected data for this study, how we analyzed it, and we elaborate on privacy issues and risk mitigation strategies.

Overview of events

For the context of this paper, we are focusing on collected data related to Ojasalo’s model of expectations (Ojasalo, 1999) and the separation of structural expectations and desires-as-expectations.

To investigate them, we participated in three events that have somatic-transformative potential for the people that attend them (see Table 1). All three cases touch upon the earlier introduced categories of potential transformation (leisure, therapeutic, educational; Bowman et al., 2024), are designed to provide spaces for episodic and personal change, and utilize a diverse range of expectation management strategies before and during the respective event.

Overview of events

Event name	Location	Attendees	Target audience	Preset activities	Facilitation	Pre-event marketing
“Queer Slowing Down Festival” (Event 1)	On-site; primarily indoors; Central Europe	~75–100	Exclusively self-identified queer individuals; international audiences	individual and group-based bodywork; kink practices; participatory learning	workshop based; primarily time-bound activities, preset within a heavily structured framework	social media; organizer’s webpage
“Artistic Retreat” (Event 2)	On-site; primarily outdoors; Northern Europe	<20	artistic practitioners and designers	participant-led workshops; time-unbound free activities (e.g. sauna, nature walks)	workshop-based; participant-led programming and framing; time-bound participant-facilitated workshops	social media; organizer’s webpage
“Clubbing While Crying” (Event 3)	On-site; indoors; Northern Europe	~75–100	grieving individuals and their friends	musical performances; dance; open and unbound engagement with artistic installations	little direct facilitation, reliance on participant-led engagement with the provided programming and space	social media; digitally published pre-event interviews with organizers and featured artists

Table 1. Overview of events.

Event 1: ‘Queer Slowing Down Festival’

Event 1 (E1) was a commercial three-day festival located in Central Europe, with an international and exclusively queer audience (~75–100 participants).

As described by an organizer to the authors, the main objective of the event is “to poke the body in many ways and see what happens”. The event was designed to create a temporary “slowed down reality” in opposition to everyday life outside the frame of the event.

Engagements consisted of intentional, intimate, and somatic practices, workshops and activities for body consciousness, “reconnection”. The workshops offered were explicitly playful (e.g., by incorporating roleplay), primarily participatory (e.g., by engaging in group meditation), and explorative (e.g., by encouraging expressions of desires and intimacy).

While the event structure and offerings put an emphasis on providing space for kink practices and sexual(ized) interaction, the event explicitly allowed participation without engaging in either.

Some of the workshops we observed made an anti-oppressive, self-actualizing understanding of education and learning explicit. Here, we witnessed references to bell hooks' (1994) concept of *engaged pedagogy*, and Paulo Freire's (1996) *pedagogy of the oppressed*. In a practical sense, this was applied through organizational attendees taking on the role of facilitators, forgoing the traditional, hierarchical teacher-student dynamics.

Event 2: 'Artistic Retreat'

Event 2 (E2) consists of a series of one-week-long summer school events located in Northern Europe. They are organized by a non-profit non-hierarchical platform, which is focused on providing alternative spaces for art and design education outside of institutional structures.

As the organizer takes an explicit stance against conceptualizations of formalized education, participant numbers are kept small (less than 20 attendees per iteration).

Each iteration of E2 is organized about a particular theme or questions, which provides a loose framework for each event. Within their events, education is described as mutual knowledge-sharing, with decentralized facilitation, and as a practice of care. Attendees enter the event with proposals for shared activities, becoming facilitators themselves. During E2, these activities included somatic practices and bodywork, game design and (live action) roleplaying games, reading and writing exercises, as well as fine arts workshops, providing an exploratory, reflective, and potentially introspective experience.

The program for each iteration is organized by all on-site participants in a shared manner, based on personal daily preferences, wishes, and expectations.

E2 is run on a nature campsite on an island, with basic infrastructure (food, electricity, internet) being provided through existing infrastructure independent from the organizing platform.

Event 3: 'Clubbing While Crying'

Event 3 (E3) is described as a club-night/party for griever(s) (~75–100 participants). It is designed to welcome grieving individuals and their friends and speaks to a primarily local audience. It was developed by the primary organizer based on conversations with artists also working on the topic of grief, as well as based on personal experiences and cathartic experiences while attending parties during periods of grief.

The event is part of an event series themed around the theme of individual and collective practices of grief, experiences of loss, and affection. Produced and initiated by an individual organizer, the events are conceptualized by them as research-based instances of “learning through experience”. The organizer invites artistic practitioners as hosts for each iteration. The events are primarily held on-site in Northern Europe.

E3 has been held at a Northern European performance art venue, featuring performances by two musical artists as well as a spatial participatory installation by a third artist. The first musical performance featured primarily soft and ambient soundscapes, with the second act providing a harsher and angry electronic set. The organizers describe the event in interviews as being aimed at creating a communal and collective space for grieving and emotional expression in the context of a party, with both grief and clubbing being emphasized as somatic experiences.

The event was accompanied by a “soft space” designed by the third artist for re-treating, with them and attendees sharing stories of grief. The event was advertised through a social media marketing campaign as well as interviews with artists and the organizer published through the venue’s social media channels.

Data Collection and analysis

As pointed out by Grönroos (1993), gathering reliable data on customer expectations is very difficult. Gathering data during an event means that actual expectations are not studied: here, the experience itself may color or even retroactively change the expectations. Studying expectations before an event may lead to inaccurate results, too: people may or may not link the upcoming experience to their earlier expectations.

Here, Grönroos (1993) suggests measuring only the experiences, not the expectations in themselves. We follow this line of thinking and therefore decided to collect a rich tapestry of qualitative data that cover both people’s pre-event expectations and influences of past and current experiences.

As such, we collected and analyzed three types of data throughout this study across three events (see Table 2):

Data	Method	Source	Analysis
Interview data	Semi-structured conversational interviews (after Brinkmann, 2020)	Organizers and attendees	Unpacking and explication (Crabtree et al., 2012)
Fieldnotes	Ethnography (Hollway et al., 2010)	Written by Author 1 and Author 2	Unpacking and explication (Crabtree et al., 2012)
Supplementary material	Provided by organizations	Organization’s marketing material, internal policy documents, reflections	Depending on the type of material: Visual ethnography (Pink, 2007), unpacking and explication

Table 2. Overview of methods for data collection and analysis.

On location, 4 workshops were observed during “Queer Slowing Down Festival” (Event 1) and 16 interviews were conducted with attendees, organizers, and facilitators. Additionally, we interviewed 2 organizers of “Artistic Retreat” (Event 2) and 1 of “Clubbing While Crying” (Event 3) remotely (total interviews: n=19). Observations and interviews were focused on preparative practices before attending the event and the engagement with organizer-led expectation-management strategies. All three authors collected data in varying constellations (see Table 3), based on potential matches between authors and participants regarding age, gender identity, professional/disciplinary background, and subculturally conforming visual appearance (Alvesson, 2011).

	Event 1	Event 2	Event 3
Author 1	✓	✓	✓
Author 2	✓		
Author 3		✓	

Table 3. Overview of data collection.

We analyzed the data in a deductive fashion, based on Ojasalo’s “dynamic model of expectations” (Ojasalo, 1999, pp. 96–97) employing a mixed-methods approach (see Table 2).

Researcher positionalities

Due to our varying personal involvement and the related influence of our backgrounds on access, understanding, and reflection of the subcultural cases surveyed, we provide a snapshot of our researcher positionalities, as a team.

We are a team of white, queer and nonbinary academics, living at the time of writing in Northern and Eastern Europe, with professional backgrounds in communication design, human-computer interaction, arts, and information studies. We all have an interest in somatically transformative experiences on a personal and professional level: we attend and organize transformative events, e.g., raves, meditation events, body modification performances, kink parties, or live-action role-playing. Here, the majority of the authorship team is part of these respective local communities and has also researched them as part of their academic work. In turn, this means that we have access to some subcultures not only due to established rapport and membership, but also through our aesthetics, and assumed societal defaults. In particular, our whiteness may have allowed us more access to and positive regard within the studied events.

Ethical considerations of data collection

We conducted a risk assessment for this study to locate potential areas of increased risk.

The events that we attended all deal with matters that are stigmatized to some degree. This heightened the need to shield participants from negative consequences due to participating in this research.

Internally, we developed a strict research protocol to mitigate these risks through limited data collection: We did not collect any audio-visual data. Data was only collected as handwritten notes, which were anonymized before digitization.

Personal data was only collected directly from participants with explicit written and verbal consent. Participants were instructed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without the need to give a reason with immediate destruction of their data. For this purpose, interviewees provided a unique identifier.

In the case of attending events (e.g., E1), participants were informed of our presence in person beforehand. We worked together with organizers to be introduced at the beginning of the event, so participants could clearly identify us. We made sure to have visual markers of being researchers, e.g., through badges with “researcher” on it, and using our full names. Organizers performed several check-ins throughout the event, and before activities, where participants were encouraged to decline us observing them. Consent for observation was signaled through colored wrist bands. During E1, we did not actively recruit or approach event attendees as participants. Instead, we opted for a model in which we would occupy a small, but visible, space during the events, in which we would hold ‘office hours’ that allowed attendees to approach us, if they were interested in taking part in the research.

All collected data was subjected to ethical proofreading (Lee, 1993). This process operates under the assumption that participants can *still* be re-identified – regardless of how thoroughly they are anonymized. Therefore, reporting needs to be truthful and genuine, but it requires extra care and checking to ensure no harm is done. For this reason, we decided not to report on attendee-participants as individuals. We will only report on them as part of a group. Additionally, all organizational participants were provided with this article before initial submission to the journal for further ethical proofreading.

Recruitment of organizations and participants

Recruitment of organizations was conducted in two ways:

1. We located potential candidates through web searches and social media and reached out to them ‘cold’.
2. We leaned on our personal networks and existing rapport with organizations (see section ‘Researcher Positionalities’).

For these communications, we prepared a dossier that outlined who we are (e.g., a group of queer academics), what we wished to research (e.g., expectations), and how (e.g., in mindful, privacy-conscious, careful ways).

We limited our recruitment to organizers of events that...

- (a) ...match the characteristics of somatically and emotionally transformative subcultural events as outlined in ‘Background and Framing’.
- (b) ...were exclusively aimed at participants aged 18 or older.
- (c) ...explicitly mentioned examples for transformative practices in their digital information and marketing material (e.g., bodywork, meditation, body modification).

Ten organizations were initially contacted, with four replying in the affirmative. Out of these, three were included due to the timeline of this research project.

Findings

Framing of our reporting

We have chosen these events based on their explicit understanding as playful spaces focusing on “engagement over external consequence, realness, or convention” (Masek & Stenros, 2021). We here follow closely the already mentioned and inten-

tionally open definition of parties as including “gatherings that could be called parties—such as liminal events including rituals, rites of passages, ceremonies, and carnivals” (Masek & Stenros, 2024, p. 77). Within this framing, we understand parties and partylike events as spaces providing a “non-serious framing [that] refers to a contextual understanding that the current situation is explicitly not about other priorities other [than] Active Behavior, Emotional Reinforcement, or Social Sharing” (Masek, 2024, p. 868) and features performative behavior, rituals, and intentional subversion/transgression of social norms and expectations (Riley et al., 2010; Sihvonen & Harviainen, 2020; Tsui, 2024; Masek & Stenros, 2025). The understanding of space is here both a conceptual and literal one: (a) it refers to the abstract space of possibilities offered by the surveyed events, as well as (b) the physical space/venue, which enables playfulness through spatial design.

Selection of cases was based on the aforementioned understanding of parties as playful spaces and the fulfillment of three primary criteria:

- (a) An emphasis of the event on somatically and emotionally transformative practices and experiences (Shusterman & Svanæs, 2023).
- (b) Actively constructing subcultural and/or countercultural qualities, addressing phenomena and experiences which are subjectively perceived as lacking in dominant discourses and everyday life or actively countering dominant values of a larger society (Williams & Hannerz, 2014).
- (c) Enabling “an experience of social connection in a group mediated through a shared engagement-prioritizing activity” (Masek & Stenros, 2024, p. 81), placing potential strangers into momentarily intimate and/or close relationships.

While the selected cases encompass highly different practices and might speak to different audiences (while overlaps between audiences were observed), they still share being primarily playful transformative spaces with similar frameworks, methods, and approaches for creating experiences and framing expectations.

Following, we report on observed strategies for expectation management. For the context of this work, we focus on organizer-led strategies and their impact and function.

Pre-event marketing as expectation management

Here, we introduce marketing for the surveyed events both as tools for the creation and management of expectations.

Organizers (E1, E2, E3) reported pre-event marketing as a primary tool used for expectation building and management, especially for the clarification of structural expectations of attendees towards the event. Marketing is here understood as the

use of communications, in the case of the surveyed events primarily digital tools, to (a) create and increase interest and (b) build explicit structural expectations towards the framework, potential experience, and limitations of an event to increase realistic expectations of attendees (Bruhn, 2023, p. 268; Grönroos 2009). To achieve this, all three events rely on active marketing practices, such as social media (E2; E3), organizers' webpages (E1; E2), or alternative formats such as published pre-event interviews with organizers and facilitators (E3), as well as a strong reliance on attendee-to-attendee word-of-mouth recommendations not actively led by the organizers (E1; E2). Word-of-mouth recommendations here are primarily functional for expectation building because these events speak to specific subcultural communities (E1) or practitioners with a specific own philosophy (E2). However, this type of recommendation and information sharing also requires potential attendees to be already integrated and networked within a specific community.

Intended target groups have been specific to varying degrees, with E1 targeting exclusively a queer audience, E2 emphasizing (but not limiting itself to) art and design practitioners, and E3 grieving individuals and their friends. The grade of specificity and exclusivity in target audiences however varies in between the events, with E2 speaking to a broad variety of practitioners within a larger field and E3 supporting and relying on attendees own understanding of grieving, while E1 applies queer identity as a strict criterion for inclusion, relying on the self-identification of potential attendees. The specificity also underlines the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations for the event (see also the section 'Other Events as Expectation and Organization Informants'), with organizers of E1 and E2 pointing out the reliance on it, instead of public marketing for broad appeal. These target groups have not only been reported in interviews but are also featured clearly and explicitly in information and marketing material for each event. As such, marketing here creates structural and explicit expectations towards the community build and present at each event, providing informative "design abstracts" for the event's structure and content (Grasmo & Stenros, 2022) or "promises" (Grönroos, 2009) as frameworks for possible expectations to the attendees (e.g., towards diversity, 'come as you are' statements, transformational outcomes).

These structural promises are especially referred to by attendees and organizers in relation to explicit expectations towards community and diversity, both built through textual and visual pre-event communication. In the case of E1, their own stock photo archive is utilized, which consists of images shot during dedicated sessions with consenting regular visitors and facilitators of the event space, with an emphasis on diverse representation. As pointed out by the organizers, the objective of this is further to provide an initial priming in relation to the atmosphere of the event, emphasizing softness, light colors and spaces, as well as diverse queer bodies (see also the section 'Spaces as Mediators and Managers of Expectations and Experiences').

As a contributing factor in pre-event communication, the visible presence of organizers and facilitators further has the potential to contribute to expectation building and motivation to attend, as observed for E1 and E3. For both events, organizers were typically visible and known in their respective local subcultural communities. If organizers or facilitators were personally known in their professional function to potential attendees, expectations were partly built upon reference to previously attended events, talks, or workshops, observed specifically for E1 and E3: “I came here because I visited previous event A by the same organizer, I expect it to be a similar experience.” However, this also leads to potential mismatches between attendee and organizer expectations, as seen for E3. Here, organizers were concerned that due to familiarity of attendees with their previous events, expectations would be for E3 to be primarily an artistic-event-as-service, rather than a potentially transformational event dependent on individual attendee-led participation.

Mitigating this but also addressing the potential uncertainty about what to expect from a clubbing event for grieving individuals, organizers and artists of E3 utilized a format not seen in any of the other two events: published pre-event interviews by the hosting venue with the organizer and participating artists. This provided both the organizers’ inspiration and perspective on what type of activities, as well as emotions and social activities could be potentially expected by attendees, while also emphasizing that the experience of the event itself is dependent on attendee-led engagement.

Spaces as mediators and managers of expectations and experiences

In this section, we address the role of expectation management and expectation subversion in relation to space (both spatial and temporal), as well as the use of space for guided experience.

For the context of transformational festivals, Rowen points out the function of these events as both conceptual, temporal, and spatial “threshold spaces” (Rowen, 2020, p. 697): they allow for the temporary suspension of societal norms and playful interactions with the self and others within a “protective frame” (Apter, 1991). With attendees entering the surveyed events with the expectation of having a potentially transformational experience, we witnessed also implicit and explicit expectations regarding the physical and atmospheric conditions of such spaces.

Here, organizers also played with *expected* tropes and aesthetics: For example, the interior design and layout of E1 was mentioned by multiple participants: The light, bright and cozy arrangement of the space – with colorful stained-glass windows, high ceilings, wood, and soft cloth – was recognized as being in stark contrast to

the stereotypical, common idea of a kink-oriented space: the dark dungeon filled with brick and leather and dominated by red and black color schemes.

The expectations towards the anticipated space and its potential unfamiliarity also have been central to pre-event communication of E2, with organizers pointing out that their main focus is the communication of camping as framing the event.

Across all surveyed events, it became clear to us that each event space's affordances require careful management and 'conducting'. Affordances here refers to the inherent invitations for engagements and interactions in spaces (Withagen et al., 2012), and how they can be facilitated. For example, a park bench in a more secluded garden area might invite people to sit and talk (E1), a campsite in nature might encourage less use of digital devices (E2), whereas the choice of energetic music and an open space might invite people to dance and engage in more embodied co-presence (E3).

Spaces were used by organizers to conduct their events in a specific rhythm, to shape the events through repetition (the expected) and unique moments (the unexpected). A key role in shaping the ebb and flow of E1 and E2 was the presence of food.

In the case of E1, afternoon coffee and cake were a firm anchoring point for each day. Organizers were keen on bridging the afternoon 'valley', in which they find attendees to be exhausted, hungry but yet still in a heightened emotional state. We encountered the act of queuing for a slice of cake as an almost meditative endeavor that lulled the whole environment in expectant, yet contemplative enjoyment. By 'mingling' outside of the structured content of the event, participants met each other in the kitchen in different ways, which allowed for cross-pollination between the smaller individual groups.

For the case of E2, repeated shared meals were utilized as gathering and reflection times, as well as for collaborative programming, and provided predictable elements framing the partly unpredictable program. Additionally, organizers here pointed out what they described as "availability and abundance" of necessities (such as food and relaxation spaces), provided so that attendees would not need to consider taking care of those elements themselves, allowing for an increased focus on activities and nature as the space.

Furthermore, a shared element for all three events for creating rhythm was the use of space and temporal frames for carefully bringing attendees in and out of the respective experience. E1 and E2 both used their arrival procedures as transitional spaces for slowing down attendees, while E3 utilized their first program point (an ambient act) as a slow sensory introduction into the space and event. For E2 here space played a significant role, as organizers described a two-kilometer path necessary to reach the transfer to the island as a transitional space and ice-breaker, during which attendees start meeting each other for potentially the first

time. As such, this walk is described as a “no-program element that becomes unofficially part of the program”, as it allows attendees to “fade in”. The same element is utilized again for the end of the event when “fading out” from the temporary reality of E2 back into everyday life. Here, E1 and E3 also apply similar strategies. On its last day, E1 utilizes several workshops for grounding and introspection, as well as a final session for wrapping up, featuring both individual and shared somatic exercises, meditation, and movement-based non-verbal expressions to slow down attendees and allow for emotional expression before, as described by one organizer, “releasing them back into the real world”. E3 utilized a less actively facilitated approach, making use of the specifics of its venue. Following the general philosophy of the organizer for their event series, E3 had a soft ending time, allowing attendees to stay in the event space after the event was over depending on their own needs, and/or move into a bar space below the club space, where attendees shared experiences before leaving the building.

These strategies contribute (a) to supporting and facilitating the experience of a temporary reality detached from everyday life (Rowen, 2020) through transitional spaces as well as (b) mitigating risks of emotional overwhelm in the beginning of an event as well as post-event ‘crashes’ as observed for other types of transformative events (Nilsen, 2015).

Organizers as expectations calibrators

Picking up from the facilitation of experience and expectation during the event in the previous section, we here take a closer look at the role of organizers for expectation management during the events.

Especially for the case of E1, and to some extent E2, we observe intentional and organizer/facilitator-led transformation and concretization of expectation types during the event. As Ojasalo describes, “fuzzy expectations may become explicit, or in fact become less fuzzy and more explicit, if they are systematically focused by the service provider” (1999, p. 96). Here, E1 and E2 provide insights into applied practices for instances of focusing fuzzy expectations and their transformation and calibration expectations through facilitator-led engagement and reflection.

In the context of E1, we observed facilitator-led transformation of fuzzy expectations towards explicit expectations through strategically timed workshops throughout the three days of the event. As noted during interviews at E1, people might attend an event without knowing exactly why they go, with workshops being pointed out as potential framing and calibration devices for these individuals. These fuzzy expectations are potentially intensified among attendees of E1 who take part in the event for the first time (Carlström, 2018a, 2018b).

These workshops were placed within the first half of the three-day event, with facilitators and organizers expressing the role of these workshops for supporting

the “dramatic curve” of the event. These workshops have been aimed at enabling a progressing deeper engagement throughout the duration of the event, as attendees gain an increased understanding of own expectations and desires, as well as of the expectations of others.

The function and structure of these workshops can be exemplified through the following case, a workshop on expressions of desired interactions, happening on the first day of the event. The dramatic curve of the event is here mirrored in the structure of the workshop, with a primarily verbal and introspective introduction, and collectively shared embodied activities, before putting the previously explored ways of communicating wishes and desires to a test in smaller constellations, before closing with a collective reflection. While having a preplanned structure, these workshops on a different scale engage a similarly participatory educational approach as evident in the participant-led programming of E2. Facilitators within the context of E1 describe workshops and activities as spaces of negotiation, getting people to know what they want, need, or expect, rather than teaching ‘hard skills’.

While most of the described elements calibrate and clarify desires-as-expectations, E1 further engages with the calibration of structural expectations through an extensive introductory session in which frames, rules, and activities are introduced and explained. While primarily reacting to structural expectations, such framing sessions also provide a response to potentially fuzzy expectations towards atmosphere, for example through the choice of language, as observed for E1 (colloquial and at times explicit). As explained by one organizer, such introductory sessions also are intended to “shatter expectations” by explicitly reminding about the need to take into consideration own limits and that there shouldn’t be an expectation to be able “to do it all”. This is primarily informed by organizers’ previous experiences of attendees’ discrepancy between necessary energy management and desires-as-expectations: Attendees arrive typically highly motivated and with desires-as-expectations to engage as much as possible with offered activities, while potentially not considering their own limits or the impact of exhaustion on post-event emotional processing, as described also for other transformational events. Additionally, not necessarily communicated explicitly to participants; to further mitigate this all events organize the level of energy in participation through bound activities and structures (described as “the dramatic curve of the event”).

Structural framing devices as found at E1 and E2 provide ways of transforming fuzzy into more explicit expectations. Examples for such devices include (a) post-it boards, consisting of short written expressions of expectations, wishes and desires and (b) organizational framing through daily and repeated calibration and check-in sessions. For (b) E1 and E2 differ. E2 provides one calibration session in the morning. The session here is used for reflections and collaborative programming, deciding and organizing the activities proposed by attendees during registration individually for each day, guided by the question ‘What would you like to learn, experience, share (today)?’. While attendees know beforehand which activities might

await them during the duration of the event, the exact nature and timing of these events is unknown to them until they decide collectively to engage with them. A second check-in session around noon is used for reflection. The participatory and attendee-led programming of E2 here can be understood as mirroring Rowen's earlier quoted notion of "'co-creation of an immersive, participant-driven reality' that produces a sense of empowerment while effacing distinctions between performers and spectators" (Rowen, 2020, p. 697). Further, the adaptability of contents can here be understood as a response to the unique group-dynamics based on the combination, matches, and potential detachments of individual expectations and desires.

However, we also observed that expectations of attendees across all events were primarily individually negotiated, both expressed in interviews with attendees and observations by organizers. Organizers might be able to lead or initiate calibration and transformation of expectations, but the outcome of these calibration methods as being located in participatory workshops is then dependent on the individual engagement of attendees. This, however, can be seen as a natural side-effect of the liberatory and emancipatory approaches evident in all three events.

Other events as expectation and organization informants

As expectations are also impacted by previous experiences, we here address how organizers and attendees relate to previous experiences at the same or similar events.

Related to pre-event marketing, organizational self-understanding, and audience perception, both organizers and attendees reported on experiences and expectations towards respective events by self-positioning in relation to other events. We witnessed two types of comparisons and relations:

(a) Inspired relationality

Inspired relationality refers to the practice of drawing from and adopting practices evident at other events (both transformational and not), as expressed by organizers both towards researchers and to a lesser extent to attendees.

(b) Delineating relationality

Delineating relationality here describes comparison to other events within or outside of the same subculture as a practice for establishing difference, and through that affect expectations (Groth, 2020), evident in responses of both organizers and attendees.

Inspired relationality has been evident across organizers and facilitators all surveyed events, with influences being noted for facilitation style, organizational struc-

tures, timing of food, spatial design, as well as practices for consent negotiation, accessibility, and accountability. Mentioned influential events ranged from seemingly unrelated and in parts entirely different events and the experience of organizing or participating in those (e.g. dance workshops and festivals, decolonial education, film festivals, clubbing under the influence), to events located within the same subcultural framework, or with similar target groups or activities. For the latter, both organizational observations (see E1–E3: “How were things done at event x? What could I learn from that as an organizer?”) as well as personal experiences (see E3: “I experienced A, how could I enable a similar experience for others at my event?”).

Delineating relationality was especially important for E1 and E2. Delineation within E3 is expressed, but in a less explicit way: within pre-event interviews and in interviews with the authors, the organizer of E3 utilized both inspired relationality, as well as delineating relationality. The latter is primarily used here to describe the creation of an alternative club space, both allowing for separation from everyday life (creating a protective framework; Rowen, 2020; Masek & Stenros, 2024), as also observed for E1 and E2. However, the delineation in E3 remains abstract and on a general level.

E1 is positioned as both an alternative to everyday life experiences by centering slowness, exploration, community, and emancipatory learning for a transformative experience, as well as an active counter-project to other spaces and events within larger kink subcultures. This delineation evident in E1 and E2 aligns with the positioning of the two events as not only subcultural, but also potentially countercultural currents in relation to the subcultures they are located in (E1), as well as in relation to the institutional systems they are critiquing (E2).

For E1, delineation was primarily reported in relation to personal experience and professional opinion of organizers regarding other kink-focused events and the framing of those as “welcoming to all”. In opposition to this, E1 is self-positioned as intentionally exclusive for queer individuals. This practice of delineation seemed to be successful especially for enabling the experience of unconditional expression of own queer identities by attendees, as multiple attendees reported on the positive experience of a queer-only space in relation to previous experiences at other event spaces, which followed a “welcoming to all” policy.

The strong relevance of delineation for E1 in comparison to lesser relevance for E2 and E3 can be explained through the differently motivated desires-as-expectations for protective spaces due to systemic marginalization (within broader society), as well as exotification or marginalization in larger subcultural structures.

Also delineating, but with a different objective and context, E2 is actively positioned as a counter-project to established institutionalized understandings of ‘learning’ in arts and design, also rooted in the desire for development of alternative practices

and less-rigid, explorative, and experimental frameworks. Delineation here has been exclusively reported in relation to normative structural conditions.

Discussion

All surveyed events engage with activities, which can be perceived as transformative in (almost) any case, but they further engage with them in a playful way: the events promise and provide spaces that allow for meaningful and transformative experiences across the three realms of transformation as outlined for example by Bowman et al. (2024, p. 23): transformative leisure (E1, E2, E3), therapeutic transformation (primarily E1 and E3), and educational transformation (primarily E1 and E2). As such, attendees for each individual event hold different combinations of expectations-as-desires, which might also vary across the same event: as an example, for an event like E3, for some attendees the desire for therapeutical transformation might be dominant, while others attend the event primarily for a leisure experience in mind.

For E1, from our perspective, the evident understanding of kink practices here aligns closely with theoretical frameworks of kink as leisure activity, “freely chosen activities that are intrinsically motivated and arousing, often resulting in positive emotions, relief from stress, and often engaged in for reasons of self-expression, adventure or relaxation” (Sprott, 2024, p. 1), rather than centering exclusively on erotic intentions. At the same time, the event, through its workshop-based structure, puts an emphasis both on the educational and a potentially therapeutical experience.

E2, while being an educational event, still primarily fulfills the definition of a leisurely retreat as a transformative exploration (still applicable here, this is primarily explored health research; see Kelly & Smith, 2016). Here the venue, experience of the natural space, camping, style of facilitation and programming, as well as the accompanying activities enable a leisure experience, as observed similarly for the adoption of ‘serious’ objectives in playful and alternative venues (Mayer, 2025).

E3 is positioned as actively utilizing the potential of clubbing for increasing social and emotional wellbeing (and as such potentially having therapeutical qualities; see also Kramer & Wittman, 2023) and its playful ritualistic nature (Goulding & Shankar, 2011) for shared and collective forms of grief (Cherblanc et al., 2025).

All three events present different focuses on aspects of Ojasalo’s model, while also extending and specifying the model for the specific context of transformative events. Organizers of all three events put great emphasis on providing clarification and clear information on fuzzy structural expectations (‘What to expect from venues, activities, frameworks?’). Additionally, E1 and E3 address fuzzy and explicit desires-as-expectations in pre-event communication, with E1 and E2 addressing

these also repeatedly during the event itself. For all three events, in line with Ojasalo's understanding, implicit expectations are not actively addressed towards participants but rather play a role in organizer's own planning and scheduling practices. Simultaneously, as shown in the reflection on expectations and space, as well as on event experiences as factors for expectation management, we witness how expectations turn implicit as "some elements of the service become ... self-evident" (Ojasalo, 1999, p. 96) to the attendee due to previous experiences. While this process has the potential to result in negative experiences as implicit expectations are not met, we also observed how the subversion of such implicit expectations might turn into a positive experience (see the section 'Spaces as Mediators and Other Events'). Here we diverge from Ojasalo's framework, which states that "revealing ... expectations increases long-term quality" (1999, p. 97). For some of the implicit expectations pointed out in the two sections mentioned above, productive expectation management does not mean that clarity is provided on each aspect of the experience, but rather that surprise and subversion can potentially also become a positive result of expectations-not-met.

Considering all three events as offers and promises to their respective audience, this research also underlines the relevance of service-oriented approaches to these culturally alternative events as instances of playful and transformative experiences. This becomes further relevant when considering these events as "engagement-focused" in relation to both activities and interpersonal engagement (Masek & Stenros, 2024): the ability to engage positively with them is dependent on the creation and calibration of expectations in attendees. While none of the surveyed transformative and playful events should be understood primarily as full-service experiences, they can be defined as conditional services, in which spaces for playful transformation are created and offered, but are ultimately dependent on the active engagement and contribution of attendees. What might happen at the event can be out of the control of organizers and their expectations, as it might be dependent on what people do, and which desires-as-expectations they are bringing in. Considering the surveyed events (and in extension other playful transformative events) as conditional services, we can understand strategies of expectation building, management, and calibration as techniques for enabling a positive transformative experience.

What can be learned from this is the role of organizers and facilitators as navigators working in between priming and non-priming, navigating fuzzy, explicit, and implicit expectations: We observed cases with heavy priming and framing (E1) for both conceptual, engagement-focused, and structural expectations before and during the event; a strong focus on structural expectations towards the space, with less priming on what to expect in regards to activities (E2); and combinations of pragmatic structural and speculative emotional elements (e.g. in pre-event marketing-interviews of E3) before the event with little active interventions for expectation calibration during the event.

While we here focused on the strategies and elements employed by organizers towards attendees for expectation management, there further are both mutual and one-directional additional layers of structural and interpersonal expectations towards contributions to a shared experience:

- (a) *Attendees ↔ Organizers*: Interpersonal expectations of attendees and organizers towards each other that are mutually influential, including organizers' expectations of how attendees will act and engage, and the expectations attendees have towards the facilitation of the event by organizers.
- (b) *Attendees ↔ Attendees*: Interpersonal expectations of attendees towards other attendees, their engagement and interaction, and their role in potentially enabling fulfillment of one's desires-as-expectations.
- (c) *Attendees → Space*: Expectations of attendees towards the spatial and temporal conditions of an event in relation to their desires ('What is provided that can help me fulfill my expectations?') and structural expectations.
- (d) *Attendees → Framework*: Expectations of attendees towards the conceptual framework of an event.

Additionally, similar to the aspect of relation to other events as a strategy for expectation management by organizers, the previous attendance of events by the same or other organizers plays a role for all three surveyed events as an instance of “priming” of experience. Attendees might want to repeat experiences they had previously in similar form (expectations-as-desires) or replace a previously negative experience with a new positive one (expectations-as-desires). Similarly, they might expect a specific structure and space for an event based on attendance of previous events, either expecting a clearly different or similar structure (structural expectations).

Limitations

For the context of this study, the personal connections between individual authors and organizational participants here have been an especially relevant factor for access and initial trust-building. Undoubtedly, our own positionalities played a major role here. Similarly, the need to collect and analyze data in a privacy-conscious fashion influenced how we could approach each organization and their respective events. Here, we encourage other researchers to build and reflect on our work, to critique it and to engage with other groups and spaces.

Future work

While we have focused on the application and impact of organizer-led measures for expectation management, in future work, we aim to further provide an attendee-focused perspective on individual agency, practices and challenges in expectation management.

We wish to explore the mechanisms of facilitation (and the expectations created through it) from the perspectives of seams (and seamlessness), especially in relation to implicit expectations towards elements “so self-evident to customers that they do not actively or even consciously think about them” (Ojasalo 1999, p. 96), only becoming visible when not met. Seams, as conceptualized by Chalmers & Galani (2004), here point to the idea of something disrupting the linear flow of an interaction: an object, activity, or “thing” that makes one “stumble” before being able to continue.

Similarly, we wish to explore how participants and facilitators alike wrestle with expectation as managing them by proxy, as second order expectations. Throughout our data, we observed participants facilitating situations for other participants that were framed with specific expectations in mind (“What do other people expect from me, as participating in this event?”).

Here, we also wish to draw attention again to our epistemological way of working and researcher positionalities. Other researchers may have arrived at very different insights, particularly due to more complicated establishing of rapport, and a more complex navigation of subcultural assumptions, and norms. Our affiliation to the event and a sense of ‘belonging’ in the space was, without a doubt, underpinned by how people read us – both as people and through signified aesthetics (e.g., a group of white, queer ‘bodymodded’ people).

Conclusion

This article reported on a study of expectation management for somatically and emotionally transformative events through three cases, including a queer festival, an artistic retreat, and a clubbing event for grieving individuals. For the context of this paper, we focused on organizer-led strategies for expectation management, building, and calibration. We analyzed our data through deductive framing, informed by Ojasalo’s (1999 & 2001) dynamic model of expectation types. We located four primary elements relevant to expectation management from an organizational perspective: pre-event marketing, conceptual and actual spaces, expectation calibration through facilitation during the event, and relations to other events.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Research ethics

This study has been conducted in accordance with the national guidelines for ethical principles of research, as outlined in *The Ethical Principles of Research with Human Participants and Ethical Review in the Human Sciences in Finland* by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity 3/2019 (<https://tenk.fi/en/advice-and-materials/guidelines-ethical-review-human-sciences>), as well as the *Finnish Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (<https://tenk.fi/en/research-integrity-ri>). Authors conducted a detailed risk assessment before the beginning of this study and shared it with potential organizational participants and attendee-participants.

Consent

This study is built on the concept of informed consent. Consent for participation in interviews during this study was collected and documented in written form. Consent for observation during ethnographic field studies was repeatedly collected through verbal and visually signaled consent. No reports are made on opinions expressed by individual participants, with the report only including group-based dynamics. To further ensure consensual reporting and safe representation, the submitted paper was reviewed by the organizational participants before submission.

Co-authorship statement

All authors contributed equally to this work. Interviews were conducted by Author 1 (E1, E2, E3), Author 2 (E1, E2), and Author 3 (E2). An ethnographic field study was conducted by Author 1 and Author 2.

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